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AP PHOTO



Thailand's Parliament was dissolved yesterday by a government decree, setting the stage for a May general election, which has the potential to lessen the military's influence in politics. The dissolution, just a few days before the end of the four-year term of the House of Representatives, was initiated by Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha (pictured), who is seeking a fresh mandate in the vote provisionally set for May 7.

AP PHOTO



New Zealand's Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta (pictured) will visit her counterpart Qin Gang in Beijing this week in the first trip by a New Zealand minister to China in four years. The visit comes at the same time as President Xi Jinping's planned visit to Moscow this week to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said New Zealand's position on Russia remained unchanged.

AP PHOTO



Australia's Defense Minister Richard Marles (pictured) says his country has made no promises to the United States that Australia would support its ally in any future conflict over Taiwan in exchange for American nuclear-powered submarines. Joe Biden and the leaders of Australia and the United Kingdom announced in San Diego last week that Australia would purchase nuclear-powered attack submarines from the U.S. to modernize its fleet amid growing concern about China's influence in the Indo-Pacific.

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The government allotted MOP470 million for subsidies on topical projects this year; 214 projects received grants totaling MOP353 million in 2022

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WITH A
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FDCT BUDGET FOR 2023 SET AT MOP470M

ANTHONY LAM

FOR this year, the Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) has allotted MOP470 million for subsidies on topical projects, Chan Wan Hei, the fund's Executive Committee president, disclosed yesterday.

Elaborating on this, the chief manager of the fund said this amount included the sum for the State Key Laboratories, which equated to MOP100 million.

The fund held a press conference to review its past work and foresee its future work. Also present were Cheang Kun Wai and Ip Kuai Lam, both Executive Committee members.

The budget for last year was similar. With a total amount of MOP353 million granted to 214 projects, the president admitted that there was surplus. He added that with reduced income from the last three years, the government has done a lot to ensure the fund's financial stability.

A new mechanism will be put into action, Chan disclosed. He added that the mechanism was considered, formulated and put into place last year. The reason behind the delay of actual implementation is that the government enacted a set of Executive Regulations governing the use of public funds and subsidies. Although the



new mechanism has nearly completed its formulation stage, quite a number of changes were to be made to cope with the Executive Regulations.

The new mechanism will separate enterprise applicants from university applicants. The reason for the separation, according to Chan, is to better utilize public funds and issue more targeted grants.

Project plans from enterprises will be evaluated in terms of the technicality, feasibility, economic and social efficacy, as well as the possibility for industry-campus-research collaborations.

Those from universities, meanwhile, will be vetted upon their innovativeness, academic values, research methods and prospects of practicality.

The mechanism, before its

changes pursuant to the new Executive Regulations, has been used to evaluate certain existing projects, Chan added. Reviewing these projects, Cheang mentioned several projects as examples.

Nanofoam is a new type of building material and has been used in the fourth Macau-Taipa bridge following the grant issued by the FDCT. Furthermore, digital detection systems were developed with

grants from the fund to spot printing defects. The technology is critical in important documents, such as bank notes and tax declaration forms, because any defect will trigger serious problems.

The technology was used to spot defects on tax declaration forms in Macau, Cheang further disclosed.

Another hot topic at the press conference was colloquially referred to as "problems from enterprises," which is another new scheme from the FDCT. This scheme is open for enterprises who have science or technology ideas in their development plans requiring exploration or realization from research entities.

On the question about being vigilant against fraud or conspiracy, Chan said there are details that make conspiring for grants less enticing. For example, applicants are required to prove their financial capacity as part of the vetting process. Besides, area experts will be invited to review applications, potentially eliminating projects that have low scientific or technological values.

The scheme is expected to start accepting applications in the third quarter of this year.

The FDCT will also strive to establish subsidy schemes for major topical projects within this year, Chan added.

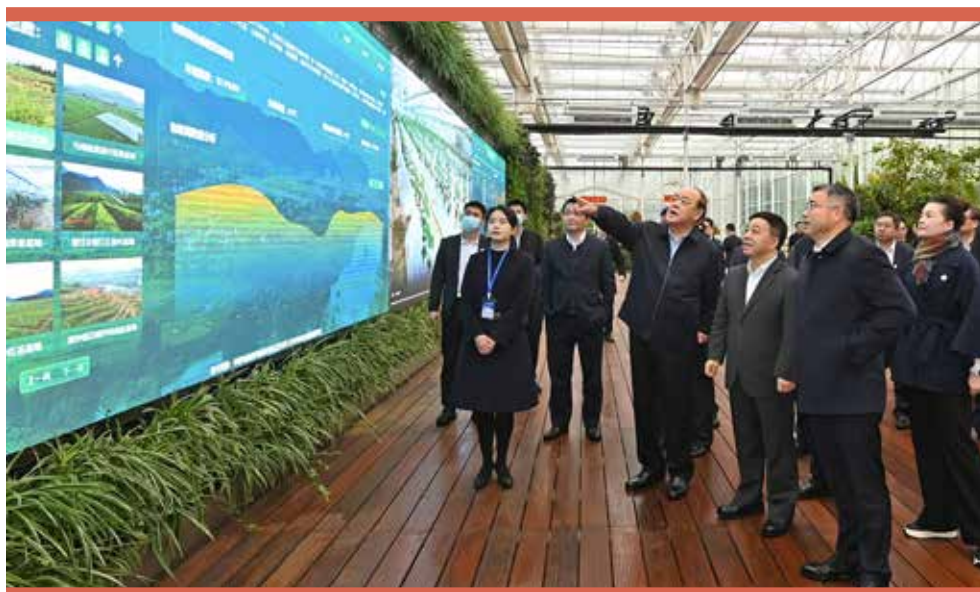
CE introduces '1+4' strategy to Jiangxi counterparts

ANTHONY LAM

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng was on an official visit to Jiangxi Province over the weekend, where he introduced Macau's "1+4" development strategy, among other topics, to his counterparts.

The tour also saw the participation of Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong as well as several officials from the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR).

The CE was received by Secretary of the Jiangxi Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and Director



of the Standing Committee of the Jiangxi Provincial People's Congress, Yin Hong; as well as Deputy Secretary of the CPC Jian-

gxi Provincial Committee and Governor of Jiangxi Province, Ye Jianchun.

At the meeting, Ho briefed his Jiangxi counter-

parts on the latest developments within the MSAR, such as the "1+4" strategy in support of appropriate economic diversification.

He attributed Macau's status quo to the strong leadership of, and support from, the central authorities.

Macau and Jiangxi have fresh opportunities for cooperation in matters relating to tourism, science and technology, as well as traditional Chinese medicine, said Ho. The CE also expressed his gratitude for Jiangxi's supply to Macau of quality agricultural products.

In response, Yin said Jiangxi and Macau had developed close ties, with frequent economic and trade exchanges. He added Jiangxi would welcome Macau enterprises' participation in the pro-

vince's development.

Macau's unique advantages as a platform between China and Lusophone countries would help more Jiangxi enterprises in going global, Yin further explained. He looked forward to the two sides expanding cooperation in various areas.

Director Zheng Xincong of the Liaison Office said the Liaison Office would continue to support Macau in giving full play to its unique advantages, adding that he believed Macau and Jiangxi would embrace deeper and wider cooperation in high technology, traditional Chinese medicine and tourism.

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SPORTS

WTT returns next month with a seven-day-long program

RENATO MARQUES

THE World Table Tennis (WTT) Champions tournament is returning to Macau next month with a lengthened program spanning seven days. The idea is to attract table tennis fans from around the world to prolong their stay in Macau, the president of Sports Bureau (ID), Pun Weng Kun, said yesterday at the press conference that unveiled the event.

"The program for the event this year will be extended to span seven days, giving more spectators an opportunity to watch exciting matches in person, and attracting table tennis fans from around the world to prolong their stay in Macau," Pun said, adding as at other opportunities, that this also aims to produce economic synergic effects with other industries.

As in previous years, the tournament will take place at the Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion, inviting a wide range of players "from different parts of the world," Pun also remarked.

This year, the WTT Champions Macao 2023 presented by Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) will take place from April 17 to 23.



At the same press conference, GEG's director Philip Cheng noted the relationship established since the start, now reaching three consecutive years in the sponsorship of this event, which GEG hopes can also further promote Macau's cross-sectoral integration of "tourism + sports," according to the central government guidelines for Macau development.

The competition will feature 64 competitors divided into two categories: men's singles and women's singles. The 32 players in each category will come from the "world's class elite players,"

organizers said, advancing names such as Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha from the Chinese national team, who will compete to defend their titles.

Tickets for the event go on sale today from 10 a.m. with a standard ticket for the first matches (April 17 to 21) to cost MOP300, while the same ticket for the semi-finals and finals (on April 22 and 23) will cost MOP500.

Additionally, there will be some VIP courtside tickets available with those for the first stages costing MOP500/each, a price that increases to MOP1,000

for the final days.

A 10% discount will be granted to those acquiring four standard tickets for the same session on the same match day, while a 50% discount will be granted to those holders of Macau Student Cards and Macau Residents over 65 years old. These discounts only apply to the purchase of standard tickets for weekdays (April 17 to 21) and are limited to one ticket per person.

More details on the event and ticketing are available at the dedicated website (wttmacao.sport.gov.mo).

UM TO HOLD CAREER, INTERNSHIP FAIR

The University of Macau (UM) will hold the UM Career and Internship Fair 2023 on March 23 to March 24, hosting 110 companies and organizations from various industries which will set up recruitment booths. According to the university, the institutions will "provide more than 3,000 job opportunities" to graduating students seeking job opportunities and assist second and third year students in finding summer internships. In addition, the fair offers online career guidance and information on companies and organizations, as well as recruitment talks, workshops and career advice services.

IC OPENS NEW BUSKING POINTS

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will offer new performance sites (busking points) at the Old Iec Long Firecracker Factory site and Macau Science Centre Square from March 24 in addition to the five existing venues. Buskers involved in performing arts, visual arts and creative crafts are welcome, and the Busking Point at the site can only be used by one group of buskers at a time, while the one in Macau Science Centre Square can accommodate three groups at the same time. Registrations can be made at the site. As of February, more than 1,200 local and art aficionados have already applied for Busker Cards.

HK'S FOREIGN CONSULAR CORPS START GBA TOUR

A delegation of foreign consular corps and business communities in Hong Kong started a tour of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) Sunday to seek business and investment opportunities. The delegation comprises over 100 representatives, including consuls-general and business leaders, who will visit the southern Chinese cities of Shenzhen, Dongguan, Guangzhou and Zhuhai from Sunday to Thursday. As travel between the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau has fully resumed, the development of the GBA is on a fast track, Commissioner of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in the HKSAR Liu Guangyuan said.

POLICE CRACK DOWN ON ILLEGAL HOTELS FOR PROSTITUTION

The Public Security Police Force has cracked down on two illegal hotels involved in prostitution in Iao Hon and arrested a 59-year-old local unemployed man suspected of running a prostitution business. The police took in 10 female prostitutes for investigation. Someone admitted to having gained MOP18,000 by providing a place for prostitution since last December and helping to look out and provide food. The police discovered three mainland women with travel documents in the suspect's rented dwelling unit, aged 23 to 40, who admitted to renting the unit for prostitution at a daily rent of MOP450. Seven other female prostitutes were found in another illegal hotel. The police have already asked the tourism bureau to seal up the involved units.

GOLF

Macao Open to return 'better than ever'

THE Macao Open is slated to return to Macau at the Macau Golf and Country Club on Oct. 12 to 14, an addition to the city's line-up of sports events, as it returns "bigger and better than ever" for its 20th edition.

The Asian Tour and IMG has announced that gaming operator SJM Resorts, S.A is the new title sponsor for one of the tournaments on the Asian Tour, and is confirmed as the title sponsor for the next three editions of the SJM Macao Open.

Featuring on the schedule for the first time since 2017, when the tournament was won by India's Gaganjeet Bhullar, this year's

144-player field will compete for a prize fund of USD1million.

The Macau Golf and Country Club has staged every edition of the event with a roster of stars competing over the years, including major winners Ernie Els, Nick Faldo, Darren Clarke, John Daly, Padraig Harrington, Vijay Singh and Nick Price, as well as prolific international winners including Miguel-Angel Jimenez, Branden Grace, Ian Poulter and Thongchai Jaidee. Past winners have included Lee Westwood, Colin Montgomerie and China's own Liang Wen-chong and two-time winner Zhang Lian-Wei.

Cho Minn Thant, CEO and commissioner of



the Asian Tour said, "We are delighted to welcome back this important Asian Tour event to our schedule and are very grateful for the support of the Sports Bureau of Macao, SJM, the Macao Golf Association and our

partners IMG for their work in reinstating this tournament. Historically it has been a very popular event amongst our players and I know this will be very welcome news for all."

Pun Weng Kun, pre-

sident of Sports Bureau, added, "Bringing back this long-running golf tournament to Macau has been an important priority and we are very happy to be able to support the return of this international event." LV

NEW DIRECTORS OF DSI INAUGURATED

Chao Wai Ieng and Chan Un Lai took an oath to assume the position of director and deputy director of the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) yesterday. The inauguration ceremony was hosted by the Secretary for Administration and Justice, Cheong Weng Chon. In the ceremony, Chao Wai Ieng and Chan Un Lai mentioned that they would do their utmost to unite DSI colleagues and strive together to execute every task in the area of identification. Also, they will pledged retain DSI's service spirit of "people-orientation, integrity and equity, honesty and courtesy, efficiency and premium quality" after taking up the position.

DSAL PREPARES FOR NEXT ROUND OF INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) is preparing for the next round of the "Creating Better Job Perspectives for 2022" internship program, which is scheduled for June. Lei Kai Keng, head of the Employment Department at DSAL, said the past three rounds of this program involved 1,351 young people, 503 of whom were successfully employed and 10% promoted. DSAL has promoted five programs for Macau young people to do internships in mainland companies, including Internet technology, cross-border electricity, modern finance and exports, said Lei.



PJ DENIES EXISTENCE OF HUFFING CASES IN MACAU

ANTHONY LAM

In response to online claims, the Judiciary Police (PJ) has issued a press release to deny inhalant abuse cases had been found in Macau.

A post has gone viral on several social media platforms, including but not limited to WeChat and Douyin – the parent version of Tik Tok – claiming gangs of foreigners were abusing inhalants and intoxicating

people in Macau.

The social media post came with a picture depicting a man with a mask hanging loosely on his right ear, and a woman holding a girl, as well as several other children of various ages.

The caption stated: Beware of foreign huffing gang! This man and the children ask people around for money. They were spotted in San Ma Lo and the Three Lampposts. Do not talk with them. Annie's friend has fallen victim, gone to withdraw money, given them the money and even told them the ATM password.

In light of the social media post, the PJ noted in the statement that so far, no such report has been received by the PJ. Other government departments have also inspected the posts and found the claim unfounded.

"As such, the PJ reminds the public to verify messages before they share them over the internet or social media platforms, so as not to cause unnecessary speculation or panic," the PJ wrote.

Despite the myth buster, the PJ reminded members of the public to be vigilant of unknown people around them. They also reminded the public to be cautious of accepting information from others too readily and to be careful accepting an unknown person's identity claims, to avoid falling into criminal traps.

"Should any suspicion of crime arise, the PJ should be notified by phone at 993," the PJ added.

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HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

CROSS-STRAIT

FORMER Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou will visit China next week in what a spokesman called a bid to ease tensions between the self-ruled island and the mainland.

Ma led over a period of warm ties with Beijing, but left office under a cloud after a trade deal with the mainland failed to win approval amid the island's largest protests since the 1990s. Although the Ma is visiting in a private capacity, his stature as a former leader gives the trip political overtones.

Ma's proposed visit comes as China's People Liberation Army sends fighter jets toward Taiwan on a near daily basis, and as official communications between the two governments have broken off. China's government claims Taiwan is part of its territory, but Taiwan's governing Democratic Progressive Party says "it's already a sovereign state that is not part of China."

Ma, a member of the opposition Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), will lead a delegation of academics and students as well as his former office staffers from March 27 to April 7, his office said.

The office of Taiwan's leader Tsai Ing-wen said Ma had notified her of his plans yesterday.

Ma will visit Nanjing, Wuhan and Changsha, as well as other cities, Hsiao Hsu-tsen, the director of the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation on Monday, told a news conference in Taipei.

Hsiao also announced that Ma would bring college students from Taiwan to meet with colleagues from Shanghai's Fudan University and Changsha's Hunan University.

"He strongly believes, as both sides of the (Taiwan) Strait have

entered this frozen situation in recent years, allowing young people to have an exchange will help reduce tensions," Hsiao said. "I think no matter how many weapons we buy, it's not as good as having young people from both sides understand each other, and deepen their exchange."

Ma will not go to Beijing, Hsiao said. The trip is also a chance for him to honor his ancestors, he added, ahead of Tomb Sweeping Day on April 5. During the festival, which is celebrated in Taiwan and China,

among other countries, families pay a visit to ancestral graves to remember the deceased and to maintain the burial grounds.

Ma's trip was also confirmed by China's Taiwan Affairs Office.

Any results are likely to be symbolic, and will mostly benefit China, said Hoo Tiang Boon, a professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore who studies Chinese foreign policy. "Then they can then show they are not against Taiwan, they are not against the Taiwanese people," he said. "It's the DPP and what they deem as sepa-

ratists causing provocations in cross-strait relations."

Hoo added that he didn't think it was likely the trip would influence Taiwan's elections next year.

Other experts agreed that it was unlikely to resolve any major issues, but it could still prove helpful.

Ma's visit follows Andrew Hsia, vice chairman of the Kuomintang, who went on a 10-day tour of China in February and met with the head of the Taiwan Affairs Office.

Members of the Kuomintang

regularly have exchanges with China. Taipei Mayor Chiang Wang-an, who belongs to the Kuomintang, had hosted Shanghai city officials in February as well, and discussed exchanges in culture, sports and tourism.

"He's not really representing the government to go and negotiate, I think he just wants to transmit the idea of peaceful exchange," said Kao-cheng Wang, a professor at the Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies at Tamkang University in Taiwan, referring to Ma's plan to bring students. "This will be helpful to cross-strait relations and future development."

During Ma's terms in office, Taiwan and China increased contacts. Ma negotiated a trade pact with Beijing in 2010 and Chinese tourists flocked to Taiwan.

But as both sides opened their borders to each other, concerns grew that Taiwan was falling inescapably into Beijing's orbit, eventually leading to protests over a proposed trade deal with Beijing in 2014. The protests, known as the Sunflower Movement, sparked a rally that drew more than 200,000 people and a 24-day occupation of Taiwan's parliament by students.

Ma met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Singapore in 2015, while he was still in office. The meeting was the first between the leaders of the two sides since Taiwan split from mainland China in 1949 during the Chinese civil war.

In 2016, the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party won national elections and Beijing cut off contact with Taiwan's government, citing Tsai's refusal to officially endorse the idea that Taiwan and China are one country. **MDT/AP**



President Xi Jinping (right) and Ma Ying-jeou shake hands at the Shangri-la Hotel in Nov. 2015, in Singapore

CRIME

Gunmen kill nine Chinese at mine in Central African Republic

GUNMEN stormed a Chinese-operated gold mining site that had recently been launched in Central African Republic, killing nine Chinese nationals and wounding two others yesterday [Macau time], authorities said.

However, the rebel coalition initially blamed by some for the attack put out a statement later in the day. Without providing evidence, it accused Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group of being behind the violence.

The attack came just days after gunmen kidnapped three Chinese nationals in the country's west near the border with Cameroon, prompting President Faustin Archange Touadera to plan a trip to China in a bid to reassure investors.

The assault on the Chimbolo gold mine began around 5 a.m. Sunday [local time] when the gunmen overpowered the site's guards and opened fire, said Abel Matipata, mayor of the nearby town of Bambari, located 25 kilometers away.

The mining site's launch had taken place just days earlier, he added.

The bodies of the victims were brought to the capital, Bangui, yesterday (Macau time). Local authorities said they were pursuing the assailants, but declined further comment. Residents said that the violence was the latest incident undermining confidence in security forces.

"The government is having difficulty proving its ability to protect Central Africans and foreigners li-

ving in the country," said Ange Morel Gbatangue, a resident of Bambari.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but suspicion fell on the Coalition of Patriots for Change, or CPC, which is active in the area and regularly launches attacks on the country's armed forces. The alliance of rebel groups is aligned with former President Francois Bozize.

Anselme Bangué, who supports the current president's administration, called the attack on Chinese busi-

nessmen an act of "indescrivable cowardice."

"The CPC has not only slowed down the country's economic momentum, but is now attacking the foundation of development. This is unacceptable," Bangué said.

However, CPC military spokesman Mamadou Kouara said those allegations were false. He claimed without evidence that Russian mercenaries had planned the attack "with the goal of scaring Chinese who have been present long before the Russians settled in this part of the country."

The shadowy Russian mercenary group was hired by Touadera to provide security and military training, but has been accused by U.N. observers of committing human rights abuses including massacres.

Central African Republic remains one of the poorest countries in the world despite its vast mineral wealth of gold and diamonds among others. A myriad of rebel groups has operated with impunity across the embattled country over the past decade, thwarting mining exploration by foreign companies.

Many of those now operating in the country are Chinese-run and have faced security challenges. In 2020, two Chinese nationals died when local residents led an uprising against a Chinese-operated mine in Sosso Nakombo. And in 2018, three Chinese citizens were killed by angry community members after a local leader died in a boating accident while accompanying Chinese miners to a site. **MDT/AP**



MARKETS

Asian stocks sink after Credit Suisse takeover

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

ASIAN stock markets sank yesterday after Swiss authorities arranged the takeover of troubled Credit Suisse amid fears of a global banking crisis ahead of a Federal Reserve meeting to decide on more possible interest rate hikes.

Hong Kong's main index slid 2.7%. Shanghai, Tokyo and Sydney also declined. Wall Street futures were off 1%. Oil prices plunged more than \$2 per barrel while major European stock markets opened in red.

Swiss authorities yesterday [Macau time] announced UBS would acquire its smaller rival as regulators try to ease fears about banks following the collapse of two U.S. lenders. Central banks announced coordinated efforts to stabilize lenders, including a facility to borrow U.S. dollars if necessary.

Switzerland's share benchmark was down 1.8% mid-day, while Credit Suisse's shares plunged 63% and rival UBS, which is acquiring it, sank 14%.

Investors worry banks are cracking under the strain of unexpectedly fast, large rate hikes over the past year to cool economic activity and inflation. Prices of bonds and other assets on their books fell, fueling unease about the industry's financial health.

"Investors are waiting to see where the dust settles on the banking saga before making any bold moves," said Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management in a report.

On Wall Street, the future for the benchmark S&P 500 index was off 1%. That for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 1.2%.

On Friday, the S&P 500 lost 1.1%. The Dow fell 1.2% and the Nasdaq composite lost 0.7%.

In Asia, the Hang Seng in Hong Kong lost 2.7% to 18,879.20 after being down 3.3% at one point. The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo shed 1.4% to 26,945.67.

The Shanghai Composite Index lost 0.5% to 3,234.91 after the Chinese central bank on Friday freed up more money for lending by reducing the amount of their deposits commercial lenders are required to hold in reserve.

The Kospi in Seoul retreated 0.7% to 2,379.20 and Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 lost 1.4% to 6,898.50.

India's Sensex lost 1.3% to 57,241.45. New Zealand and Southeast Asian markets also declined.

The Swiss government said UBS will acquire Credit Suisse for almost \$3.25 billion after a plan for the troubled lender to borrow as much as \$54 billion from Switzerland's central bank failed to reassure investors and customers.

U.S. regulators have also tried to calm fears over threats to banking systems. The Federal Reserve said cash-short banks had borrowed about \$300 billion in the week up to Thursday.

Separately, New York Community Bank agreed to buy part of failed Signature Bank in a \$2.7 billion deal, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. said Sunday. The FDIC said \$60 billion in Signature Bank's loans will remain in receivership and are expected to be sold off in time.

Investors worry about other lenders with shaky finances. Credit Suisse is among 30 institutions known as globally systemically important banks.

Traders expect last week's turmoil to push the Fed to limit a rate hike at this week's meeting to 0.25 percentage points. That would be the same as the previous increase and half the margin traders expected earlier.

A survey released Friday by the University of Michigan showed inflation expectations among American consumers are falling. That matters to the Fed, which has said such expectations can feed into virtuous and vicious cycles.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude plunged \$2.45 to \$64.29 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract fell \$1.61 on Friday to \$66.74. Brent crude, the price basis for international oil, lost \$2.67 to \$70.30 per barrel in London. It retreated \$1.73 the previous session to \$72.97.

The dollar declined to 130.70 yen from Friday's 131.67 yen. The euro retreated to \$1.0647 from \$1.0681. **MDT/AP**

ESPIONAGE

Former US pilot could have been lured to Australia: Lawyer

A former United States military pilot accused of training Chinese aviators could have been lured from China to Australia as part of a U.S. plan to extradite him to his homeland, his lawyer said yesterday.

In a 2016 indictment from the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., unsealed late 2022, prosecutors say Daniel Duggan conspired with others to provide training to Chinese military pilots in 2010 and 2012, and possibly at other times, without applying for an appropriate license.

Prosecutors say Duggan received about nine payments totalling around 88,000 Australian dollars (\$61,000) and international



In this image made from video, Dennis Miralis, lawyer for former U.S. military pilot Daniel Duggan, speaks to the media outside the court in Sydney last January

travel from another conspirator for what was sometimes described as "personal development training."

Boston-born Duggan, 54, has been in custody in Australia since October and appeared in a Sydney court

yesterday by video link from a prison cell for a brief hearing about a U.S. application to extradite him.

His lawyer, Dennis Miralis, told reporters outside the court that Duggan returned from China in 2022 to work in Australia after he received an Australian security clearance for an aviation license. A few days after his arrival, the clearance granted by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the nation's main domestic spy agency, was removed, Miralis said.

"It's striking to us that a sequence of events like that could occur," Miralis said. "We are exploring at this stage whether he was lured back to Australia by the U.S., where the U.S. knew he would be in a jurisdiction where he would

be capable of being extradited back."

Duggan served in the U.S. Marines for 12 years before immigrating to Australia in 2002. In January 2012, he gained Australian citizenship, choosing to give up his U.S. citizenship in the process.

The indictment says Duggan traveled to the U.S., China and South Africa, and provided some training to Chinese pilots in South Africa.

Duggan has denied the allegations, saying they were political posturing by the United States, which unfairly singled him out.

His next court appearance is set for May 1. **MDT/AP**

UKRAINE

Putin makes surprise trip to occupied Mariupol

KARL RITTER, KYIV

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin visited the occupied port city of Mariupol, his first trip to Ukrainian territory that Moscow illegally annexed in September and a show of defiance after the International Criminal Court issued a warrant for his arrest on war crimes charges.

Putin arrived in Mariupol over the weekend after visiting Crimea, southwest of Mariupol, to mark the ninth anniversary of the Black Sea peninsula's annexation from Ukraine, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday. He was shown chatting with Mariupol residents and visiting an art school and a children's center in Sevastopol, Crimea.

Mariupol became a worldwide symbol of resistance after outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian forces held out in a steel mill there for nearly three months before Moscow finally took control of it in May. Much of the city was pounded to rubble by Russian shelling.

Putin has not commented on the arrest warrant, which deepened his international isolation despite the unlikelihood of him facing trial anytime soon. The Kremlin, which does not recognize the authority of the ICC, has rejected its move as "legally null and void."

The surprise trip also came ahead of a planned visit to Moscow by Chinese President Xi Jinping this week, expected to provide a major diplomatic boost to Putin in his confrontation with the West.

In an essay published yesterday in the People's Daily, the newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee, Putin said: "We are grateful for the balanced line (of China) in connection with the events taking place in Ukraine, for understanding their background and true causes. We welcome China's willingness to play a constructive role in resolving the crisis."

China in February released a position paper calling for an end to fighting in Ukraine and for upholding all countries' sovereignty



In this photo taken from video released by Russian TV Pool on Sunday, Vladimir Putin talks with local residents during his visit to Mariupol

and territorial integrity. It did not address how to resolve Russia's illegal claim to have annexed four regions of Ukraine.

Putin arrived in Mariupol by helicopter and then drove himself around the city's "memorial sites," concert hall and coastline, Russian news reports said. The state Rossiya 24 channel on Sunday showed Putin chatting with locals outside what looked like a newly built residential complex, and being shown around one of the apartments.

Following his trip to Mariupol, Putin met with Russian military leaders and troops at a command post in Rostov-on-Don, a southern Russian city some 180 kilometers (about 112 miles) farther east, and conferred with Gen. Valery Gerasimov, who is in charge of the Russian military operations in Ukraine. Peskov said.

Peskov said the trip had been unannounced, and that Putin intended to "inspect the work of the (command) post in its ordinary mode of operation."

Speaking to the state RIA-Novosti agency, Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin made clear that Russia was in Mariupol to stay. He said the government hoped to finish the reconstruction of its blasted downtown by the end of the year.

"People have started to return. When they saw that reconstruction is underway, people started actively re-

turning," Khusnullin told RIA.

Mykhailo Podolyak, chief of staff for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, heaped scorn on Putin's trip to Mariupol.

"The criminal is always drawn to the crime scene," he said. "While the countries of the civilized world are announcing the arrest of the 'war director' in the event of crossing the border, the organizer of the murders of thousands of Mariupol families came to admire the ruins of the city and mass graves."

When Moscow fully captured the city in May, an estimated 100,000 people remained, out of a prewar population of 450,000. Many were trapped without food, water, heat or electricity. Relentless bombardment left rows of shattered or hollowed-out buildings.

Mariupol's plight first came into international focus with a Russian airstrike on a maternity hospital on March 9, 2022, less than two weeks after the invasion of Ukraine began. A week later, about 300 people were reported killed in the bombing of a theater being used as the city's largest bomb shelter. Evidence obtained by The Associated Press suggested the real death toll could be closer to 600.

A small group of Ukrainian fighters held out for 83 days in the sprawling Azovstal steel works in eastern Mariupol before surrendering, their dogged defense

tying down Russian forces and coming to symbolize Ukrainian tenacity in the face of Moscow's aggression.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, a move that most of the world denounced as illegal, and moved in September to officially claim four regions in Ukraine's south and east as Russian territory, following referendums that Kyiv and the West described as a sham.

The ICC on Friday accused Putin of bearing personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine. U.N. investigators also said there was evidence for the forced transfer of "hundreds" of Ukrainian children to Russia. According to Ukrainian government figures, over 16,000 children have been deported to Russian-controlled territories or Russia itself, many of them from Mariupol.

While the ICC's move was welcomed by Kyiv, the chances of Putin facing trial are slim because Moscow does not recognize the court's jurisdiction or extradite its nationals.

Ukrainian officials reported Sunday that at least three civilians had been killed and 19 wounded by Russian shelling in the previous 24 hours. The deaths were in the eastern Donetsk region, amid fierce battles for control of the city of Bakhmut, according to Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko on Ukrainian TV. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1963 TRAIN DRIVES ITSELF



The first automatic train on the London underground could be hurtling into stations in three weeks, the government has revealed.

The trains, which operate without a driver, are currently undergoing a series of trials commissioned by the Ministry of Transport before passengers are allowed on board.

But the public has the chance to glimpse the trains today, which have cost £60,000 to test, as they are demonstrated in South Ealing, west London, by the London Transport Board.

If these final tests are successful the trains could be fully operational over a section of the district line from 8 April.

The trains work by picking up signals from coded electrical impulses from the rails which give them the intelligence to start, accelerate, coast or slow down automatically.

An operator will still be on-duty aboard the train in the motorman's cabin to survey opening and closing doors and to take charge of the train if any of the electrics fail during a journey.

Safety is maintained through a signalling system, also run on impulses from the rails, designed to halt the train if it overruns.

This system eliminates the need for fixed visual signals although some may be retained for emergency.

There are three routes which will first run the new system including the test train route operating as part of the normal service between Stamford Brook and Ravenscourt Park in west London, from 8 April, subject to Ministry of Transport approval.

From next year a fully operational route will be run between Hainault and Woodford on the Central Line along with automatic trains on the new Victoria line when it opens in 1968.

London Transport has revealed it may take between 20 to 30 years before automatic trains are introduced throughout the whole of the network.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Automatic trains were first tested on the London underground in 1962 between Stamford Brook and Ravenscourt Park after years of planning. The Victoria Line became the first underground line in the world to be fully equipped for automatic train operation after it was opened in stages between 1968 and 1971. It was not just the drivers who had technological replacements but a range of workers from ticket sellers to train time announcers. In 1983 the dot matrix train destination indicator was introduced on platforms allowing passengers to see at a glance a selection of trains, with various routes arriving at stations. And in 1987 new self-service ticket machines were introduced throughout the network - cutting back queuing times at kiosks. In 2003 Transport for London introduced smartcards for commuters in the capital. The new Oyster cards are contactless - meaning they do not need to be inserted into a machine and can simply be placed on top of a reader.

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You will be able to dazzle others with your obvious charm and your outgoing nature. You may find it necessary to confront a situation that has gotten out of hand.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20

Pleasure trips will be most enjoyable if you take them with that special person in your life. You can pick up valuable information if you listen to those with more experience.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21

Real estate investments will be extremely profitable in the long run. Time to deal with institutional environments, government agencies, and matters of a private nature today.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You can meet friends who will let you know how valuable you are. Put your energy into home renovations. Family responsibilities are escalating.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Don't be too eager to buy things for those who really don't deserve it. You can make new connections if you play your cards right. Put aside any decisions concerning your position at work.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Your boss won't be too thrilled if you leave things unfinished. You must strive to get the most important projects completed properly, rather than doling everything in a half baked way.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Romantic opportunities will be plentiful if you get out and mingle. Leave your checkbook and credit cards at home. You will be able to make favorable changes in your living quarters.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Don't take sides if you wish to remain on good terms with both parties. Keep busy and let them fume while you're not around. Those you care about may oppose your ideas.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Try to think things through. You may not get your facts correct today; double-check before making any statements. Dinner, theater, or a comedy club may be just the place.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Your interest in helping others may take you back to school. Your health may suffer if you don't control your present situation. You're on to something tangible and need to act fast.

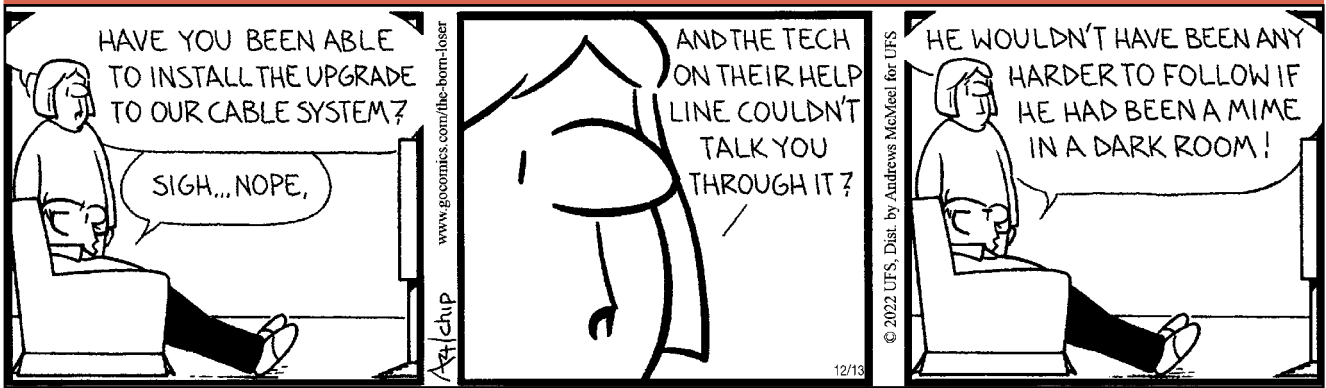
AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Pamper yourself; the self esteem it brings you will be most gratifying. Lovers will be demanding. You are best to sign your partner up for activities that will be tiring.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Do your job and don't ask for favors. Partnerships could prove to be lucrative. You can make extra cash by moonlighting. You may be emotional and quick to judge others.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	7	19	overcast
Changchun	5	16	cloudy
Chengdu	12	22	cloudy
Chongqing	13	23	cloudy
Fuzhou	14	30	overcast
Guangzhou	21	28	cloudy
Guiyang	7	24	cloudy
Haikou	21	33	cloudy
Hangzhou	11	21	rain
Harbin	3	15	fine
Hefei	11	16	rain
Nanjing	10	16	rain
Shanghai	11	17	rain
Taipei	16	24	overcast
Wuhan	9	14	rain
Hong Kong	23	24	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	2	7	overcast
Frankfurt	7	13	rain
Paris	9	16	cloudy
London	10	14	rain
New York	5	16	fine

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Use a prie-dieu; 6- Biblical brother; 11- Actress Thompson; 14- Aggregate of qualities that make good character; 15- Flat surface; 16- Rainbow shape; 17- Gogol's "___ Bulba"; 18- Fiddlesticks!; 19- Author Fleming; 20- Structure for storing grain; 22- Scandinavian; 24- Printing in two colors; 28- African fly; 30- Missing; 31- Cowboy's tool; 32- Lion sounds; 33- Adviser; 37- Antlered animal; 38- Golf clubs; 39- Chemical ending; 40- Declaration; 43- Many times; 45- Gillette razors; 46- Try to shred; 47- Prize; 49- Goals; 50- Lucid; 51- God of war; 52- Tack on; 53- Din; 56- Bottom line; 61- Witness; 62- "Steal This Book" author Hoffman; 63- Paradises; 64- Flub; 65- Some beans; 66- Coup ____.

DOWN 1- Crazy ____; 2- Heston's org.; 3- Always; 4- Zeta follower; 5- Teachings; 6- Pomme or manzana; 7- "____ sprach Zarathustra"; 8- Fan sound; 9- ____ roll; 10- Novelty; 11- Dens; 12- Clear the boards; 13- Skin disorder; 21- CD earnings; 23- Oklahoma Native; 24- Challenges; 25- Metal fastener; 26- City near Kobe; 27- Thrice, in prescriptions; 28- Mock; 29- IRS IDs; 31- Birds on Canadian coins; 33- Fatty part of milk; 34- Brit's bottle measure; 35- ____ a time (singly); 36- Leases; 38- Hungary's Nagy; 41- Ciao!; 42- Endless; 43- Unit of magnetic intensity; 44- Cigarette; 46- ____-Bo; 47- Born before, senior churchman; 48- Passover meal; 49- Woody inhabitants of forests!; 50- Portfolio; 51- Bhutan's continent; 54- Japanese sash; 55- Big Blue; 57- Lyric poem; 58- Hanoi holiday; 59- "SNL" alum Gasteyer; 60- D-Day craft;

Yesterday's solution

A	F	O	R	S	T	E	L	A	S	A	B
B	O	R	A	T	O	W	E	R	U	S	S
B	A	E	Z	O	N	A	I	R	M	I	S
E	L	L	O	P	E	N	T	E	C	O	S
M	A	R	S	H	A	L	L	E	R		
A	D	A	G	A	I	N					
V	L	N	A	T	C	L	A	T			
L	I	G	H	T							
N	E	S	E	T							
H											
V	A	S	S	A	L	A	G	E			
F	A	L	L								
E	S	A									
B	E	R	G								
T	A	S	T								
T	I	E	R								

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999

Fire department 28 572 222

PJ (Open line) 993

PJ (Picket) 28 557 775

PSP 28 573 333

Customs 28 559 944

S. J. Hospital 28 313 731

Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333

Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300

IAM 28 387 333

Tourism 28 333 000

Airport 59 888 88


Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283

Water Supply – Report 2822 0088

Telephone – Report 1000

Electricity – Report 28 339 922

Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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KARL RITTER, KYIV

TRADE

RUSSIA, UKRAINE EXTEND GRAIN DEAL TO AID WORLD'S POOR

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 over the weekend.

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.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov tweeted that the deal would remain in effect for the longer, four-month period. But Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Russian news agency Tass that Moscow "agreed to extend the deal for 60 days."

"Any claim that it's prolonged for more than 60 days is either wishful thinking or deliberate manipulation," Russia's deputy ambassador to the U.N., Dmitry Polyansky, said.

Ukraine and Russia are both major global suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and other affordable food products that developing nations depend on. Two ships carrying more than 96,000 metric tons of corn left Ukrainian ports last weekend bound for China and Tunisia, according to U.N. data.

This is the second renewal of the agreement that Ukraine and Russia signed with the United Nations and Turkey last July to allow food shipments from three Black Sea ports following a halt to shipping after Russia invaded its neighbor over a year ago on Feb. 24, 2022.

Russia has complained that a separate agreement with the United Nations to overcome obsta-

AP PHOTO



cles to shipments of its fertilizers that was part of the July package has not produced results.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia told the U.N. Security Council on Friday that the United Nations has to recognize it has "no leverage to exempt Russian agricultural export operations from Western sanctions," and therefore Russia would only extend the deal until May 18.

"If Brussels, Washington and London are genuinely interested to continue the export of food from Ukraine through the maritime humanitarian corridor, then they have two months to exempt from their sanctions the entire chain of operations which accompany the Russian agricultural sector," Nebenzia said. "Otherwise, we fail to understand how the package concept of the secretary-

-general of the United Nations will work through these simple agreements."

The International Rescue Committee expressed disappointment that the deal is only for 60 days, stressing that countries in East Africa in particular will be entering the lean grain season at the time of its expiration in May, including Somalia which receives over 90% of its grain from Ukraine and is beset by unprecedented drought and on the verge of famine.

Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesman for U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said in a statement that 25 million metric tonnes (about 28 millions tons) of grain and foodstuffs had moved to 45 countries under the initiative, helping to bring down global food prices and stabilizing markets.

"We remain strongly committed to both agreements, and we urge all sides to redouble their efforts to implement them fully," Dujarric said.

The war in Ukraine sent food prices surging to record highs last year and helped contribute to a global food crisis also tied to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate factors like drought.

The disruption in shipments of grain needed for staples of diets in places like Egypt, Lebanon and Nigeria exacerbated economic challenges and helped push millions more people into poverty or food insecurity. People in developing countries spend more of their money on basics like food.

The crisis left an estimated 345 million people facing food insecurity, according to the U.N.'s

World Food Program.

Food prices have fallen for 11 straight months. But food was already expensive before the war because of droughts from the Americas to the Middle East — most devastating in the Horn of Africa, with thousands dying in Somalia. Poorer nations that depend on imported food priced in dollars are spending more as their currencies weaken.

The agreements also faced setbacks since it was brokered by the U.N. and Turkey: Russia pulled out briefly in November before rejoining and extending the deal. In the past few months, inspections meant to ensure ships only carry grain and not weapons have slowed down significantly.

That has helped lead to backlogs in vessels waiting in the waters of Turkey and a recent drop in the amount of grain getting out of Ukraine.

Ukrainian and some U.S. officials have blamed Russia for the slowdowns, which the country denies.

While fertilizers have been stuck, Russia has exported huge amounts of wheat after a record crop. Figures from financial data provider Refinitiv showed that Russian wheat exports more than doubled to 3.8 million tons in January from the same month a year ago, before the invasion.

Russian wheat shipments were at or near record highs in November, December and January, increasing 24% over the same three months a year earlier, according to Refinitiv. It estimated Russia would export 44 million tons of wheat in 2022-2023. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Melco Style presents 'Leon Lai's Stage on 8'



The Melco Residency Concert Series will present a three-year residency entertainment program, with 90 performances, featuring a star-studded line up of the biggest names in the Chi-

nese music world. The second series at Studio City is now being promoted. Pop icon Leon Lai announced yesterday his debut Melco Residency Concert Series 'Leon Lai's Stage On 8' at

Studio City Event Center starting from May 1 with a season of 14 performances. David Sisk, chief operating officer — Macau Resorts, Melco Resorts and Entertainment said, "We are very much looking forward to welcoming pop icon Leon Lai for his first residency concert series with his bespoke "Leon Lai's Stage on 8 Concert" for all Melco Style members, tourists and local residents," adding that Melco has been supporting the government's diversified "Tourism+" development strategy by creating experiences that "further elevate Macau's leading position on the world tourism map."

MGM and MUST jointly organize culinary demonstration workshop



In celebration of the 23rd anniversary of the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST), MGM once again joined hands with

the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management of the university to organize a culinary demonstration workshop, as the kick-off

event of the "Chef Series" — Culinary Demonstration Workshop".

Coming to the fifth edition of the collaboration, Chef Ricardo de Oliveira, Chef de Cuisine of Rossio, MGM Macau, was invited to showcase his expertise in Portuguese cuisine to the bachelor's and master's students of the university.

Guest speaker of this year's culinary demonstration workshop, Portuguese chef Ricardo de Oliveira, has 28 years of experience in the global culinary industry. During the workshop, Chef Oliveira showcased a series of Portuguese culinary techniques and his experience working at London, Paris and several cities in Portugal and Macau to nearly 50 students.

FOOTBALL

Dozens in Indonesia protest Israel's presence at U-20 Cup

ANDI JATMIKO, JAKARTA

DOZENS of conservative Muslims marched Jakarta yesterday to protest Israel's first-ever participation in the FIFA World Cup Under-20 in Indonesia.

The world's most populous Muslim-majority nation is hosting the U-20 World Cup from May 20 to June 11 in Indonesia's six major cities. A total of 24 countries from five continents are participating, including Israel, after a two-year delay because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the host country, Indonesia is automatically qualified for the tournament.

Although Indonesia does not have formal diplomatic relations with Israel and is a strong supporter of the Palestinians, officials say the government will not prevent Israel from taking part in the tournament.

Waving white flags bearing the Islamic declaration of faith along with Indonesian and Palestinian



flags, more than 100 demonstrators filled a major thoroughfare in downtown Jakarta. They halted traffic, chanting "Allahu Akbar" and "Get out Israel from U-20 World Cup."

Authorities blocked streets leading to the Presidential Palace.

The protest was organized by

a conservative Muslim alliance that held mass demonstrations in 2016 against Jakarta's ethnic Chinese Christian governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, that led to him being imprisoned for blasphemy.

Several moderate Muslim groups in the country also have joined in calls for the Israeli

players to be denied a place in the tournament. They included Indonesia's second largest Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, which counts more than 60 million members, Medical Emergency Rescue Committee, widely known as Mer-C, and the Indonesian Ulema Council, the country's highest Islamic body.

"Israel's long history of oppression against the Palestinian people motivates us to strongly reject Israel's presence in any form in Indonesia," said Nur Aida, a protester.

Countries qualify for the U-20 World Cup based on performances in their respective U-20 or U-19 continental competitions.

Last year, England won the title while the three other semi-finalists, Israel, France and Italy, and play-off winner Slovakia, all joined them in qualifying for Indonesia 2023. For runners-up Israel, this will be their first-ever appearance at a FIFA U-20 World Cup.

Indonesia's Foreign Affairs Mi-

nistry spokesperson Teuku Faizasyah said it is FIFA that decides on the participation of all teams and the rules of the game at the U-20.

"Despite Indonesia's position as the U-20 host, our country's consistent stance on Palestine will not waver, not even a little," Faizasyah told a news briefing.

Early this month, Youth and Sports Minister Zainudin Amali said the government will guarantee the safety of all teams.

Gaining the right to host the U-20 World Cup was a major milestone in Indonesia's soccer development, raising hopes that a successful tournament would turn around long-standing problems that have blighted the sport in the country of 277 million people.

Last October, 135 people died at a league game between host Arema FC of East Java's Malang city and Persebaya Surabaya when police fired tear gas inside the stadium, setting off a panicked run for the exits.

A court this month acquitted two police officials of a charge of negligence leading to the deaths, and sentenced up to 18 months in prison a third official as well as the organizing committee chair for Arema FC and the club's security chief. The verdict drew outcries from rights activists and families of the victims. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily

Zhao Manfeng, China Daily

SECURITY OVER
SALARY: WHY DO FRESH
GRADUATES WANT
CIVIL SERVICE JOBS?

The preference for job security over salary has been a common phenomenon among fresh graduates in China, especially for those civil service positions that are considered 'iron bowl' jobs. The topic has once again gone viral as China just released its institution reform plan, with bureaucracy streamlining being a part.

It's not like government officials in China are paid a bomb, but fresh graduates feel secure there in the face of mounting uncertainties such as rising living costs and possible layoffs in private jobs.

Not surprisingly, more than 1.52 million people sat for China's annual civil service recruitment examination this year, although, according to the National Civil Service Administration, only one in 41 are likely to be recruited.

While job security is undoubtedly an essential consideration when selecting a career, such preference could also lead to a talent drain from the private sector, thus hindering the spirit of innovation and competitiveness of the economy.

To cope with this, the government and private sector should work together to create an environment that encourages risk-taking and innovation while providing adequate job security. By doing so, individuals can pursue their career aspirations while contributing to the growth and development of the economy.

According to a government reshuffle plan recently passed to streamline the bureaucracy, Beijing is cutting the number of positions in central government departments by 5 percent.

The government should also prioritize promoting innovation in all sectors of the economy. This can be achieved by funding research and development, encouraging entrepreneurship, and creating a favorable environment for innovation.

Second, the education system should be tailored to develop the skills required for the needs of high-quality development and innovation. There should be a greater emphasis on teaching creative thinking, problem-solving, and other innovation-related skills.

Third, career counseling should be emphasized on and provided to young people, highlighting the potential rewards of taking more innovative career paths and broadening their horizon for career opportunities.

Last but not least, the government should provide necessary financial support to private businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to help them weather economic downturns, which would enable businesses to retain employees during tough times. In addition, laws should be in place to prohibit age discrimination at the workplace and prevent sudden layoffs.

To conclude, promoting innovation across all sectors of the economy, developing innovation-related skills through education, providing career counseling to young people, and providing financial support to businesses during tough times are essential steps for achieving high-quality development and innovation, and only this way can individuals pursue their career aspirations while contributing to the growth and development of the economy.

'SHAZAM! FURY OF THE GODS'
STUMBLES WITH \$30.5 MILLION DEBUT

"Shazam! Fury of the Gods" felt the fury of the marketplace in its theatrical debut this weekend. The New Line Cinema and Warner Bros. superhero movie opened to a disappointing \$30.5 million from 4,071 theaters, according to studio estimates Sunday.

The "Shazam!" sequel fell short of its modest expectations (\$35 million) as well as the first film in the series (\$53.5 million in April 2019), and earned a place on the very low end of modern DC comics movie launches, between "Birds of Prey" (\$33 million in February 2020) and "The Suicide Squad"

(\$26.2 million in August 2021), both of which were R-rated.

Directed by David F. Sandberg, "Shazam! Fury of the Gods" brought back Zachary Levi, Asher Angel, Jack Dylan Grazer, Adam Brody and Djimon Hounsou, and added Helen Mirren, Rachel Zegler and Lucy Liu. Critics, many of whom found the first film charming, were largely underwhelmed by this outing. It currently holds a 53% Rotten Tomatoes critic score.

Audiences were more positive about the sequel, giving it a B+ CinemaScore overall. Younger crowds were even more favorable.

THE
BUZZ

AP PHOTO



People walk through floodwaters after heavy rainfall in Hadeja, Nigeria, Sept. 2022

NATIONS APPROVE KEY
UN SCIENCE REPORT
ON CLIMATE CHANGE

FRANK JORDANS,
BERLIN

GOVERNMENTS gave their blessing yesterday [Macau time] to a major new U.N. report on climate change, after approval was 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 on Friday at the end of a weeklong meeting in the Swiss town of Interlaken.

The closing gavel was repeatedly pushed back as officials from big nations such as China, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, the United States and the European Union haggled through the weekend over the wording of key phrases in the text.

The report by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change caps a series that digests vast amounts of research on global warming compiled since the Paris climate accord was agreed in 2015.

A summary of the report was approved Sunday but agreement on the main text dragged on for several more hours, with some observers fearing it might need to be postponed.

The U.N. published the report at a news conference last night.

The unusual process of having countries sign off on a scientific report is intended to ensure that governments accept its findings as authoritative advice on which to base their actions.

At the start of the meeting, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres called on delegates to provide "cold, hard facts" to drive home the message that there's little time left for the world to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared with preindustrial times.

While average global temperatures have already increased by 1.1 Celsius since the 19th century, Guterres insisted that the 1.5-degree target limit remains possible "with rapid and deep emissions reductions across all sectors

of the global economy."

Observers said the IPCC meetings have increasingly become politicized as the stakes for curbing global warming increase, mirroring the annual U.N. climate talks that usually take place at the end of the year.

Among the thorniest issues at the current meeting were how to define which nations count as vulnerable developing countries, making them eligible for cash from a "loss and damage" fund agreed on at the last U.N. climate talks in Egypt. Delegates have also battled over figures stating how much greenhouse gas emissions need to be cut by over the coming years, and how to include artificial or natural carbon removal efforts in the equations.

As the country that has released the biggest amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere since industrialization, the United States has pushed back strongly against the notion of historic responsibility for climate change. MDT/AP

Australia Police yesterday charged the first Australian veteran for an alleged murder in Afghanistan three years after a war crime investigation found that 19 Australian special forces soldiers could face charges for illegal conduct during the conflict. A 41-year-old man was arrested in New South Wales state and charged by police with the war crime of murder, an Australian Federal Police statement said.

AP PHOTO



Afghanistan The supreme leader of the Taliban has issued a decree against nepotism, barring officials in Afghanistan's Taliban administration from hiring relatives in government positions. The shadowy leader, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, also ordered all Taliban officials to sack their sons and other relatives who are already working in their administration. The decree was posted last weekend on the Taliban government's Twitter account.

EU ministers are meeting to try to finalize a plan to supply Ukraine with sorely needed artillery shells, replenish their own national stocks and ramp up Europe's defense industry, as Russia continues to focus its attacks on the industrial east of the war-ravaged country. The 27-nation bloc's foreign and defense ministers will discuss the plan at a joint session in Brussels. The EU's aim is to provide Ukraine with 1 million 155-millimeter artillery shells this year.

AP PHOTO



Ecuador Grief hung in the air a day after a powerful temblor rocked this city, toppling homes and buildings along the coast and as far off as the Ecuadorian highlands and even parts of Peru. Rubble covered some streets of Machala. Neighbors held simple funerals to bury the dead. The quake, which the U.S. Geological Survey reported at magnitude 6.8, killed at least 15 people and injured more than 445 others. 14 died in Ecuador, and one in Peru.