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AP PHOTO



Hong Kong Four passenger buses and a truck collided near a road tunnel last week and 87 people were injured, including children. The accident occurred near a tunnel entrance on Tseung Kwan O Road in Lam Tin, a residential area in Kowloon. A taxi carried out a "careless lane change" and the other vehicles could not stop in time, causing the collision. Lam Tin fire station commander Shen Chuen said his team had to help some 240 people leave the vehicles and the operation was challenging because there were so many children and elderly passengers.

Iran-backed fighters were on alert in eastern Syria on Saturday, a day after U.S. forces launched retaliatory airstrikes on sites in the war-torn country, opposition activists said. The airstrikes came after a suspected Iran-made drone killed a U.S. contractor and wounded six other Americans last week. The situation was calm following a day in which rockets were fired at bases housing U.S. troops in eastern Syria. The rockets came after U.S. airstrikes on three different areas in Syria's eastern province of Deir el-Zour, which borders Iraq, opposition activists said.

AP PHOTO



Russian President Vladimir Putin announced plans to station tactical nuclear weapons in neighboring Belarus, a warning to the West as it steps up military support for Ukraine. Putin said the move was triggered by Britain's decision this past week to provide Ukraine with armor-piercing rounds containing depleted uranium. Tactical nuclear weapons are intended for use on the battlefield and have a short range and a low yield compared with much more powerful nuclear warheads fitted to long-range missiles.

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CAN THE GOVERNMENT BAN AN APP?

If the federal government comes to the conclusion that TikTok should be banned, is it even possible to ban it for all of its 150 million existing users? Any such ban would likely start with blocking the distribution of the app through Apple's and Google's app stores.

A more drastic method would be to force Apple and Google to change their phones to prevent TikTok from running. While I'm not a lawyer, I think this effort would fail due to legal challenges, which include First Amendment concerns.

There are also questions about how effective a ban would be even if it were possible. By some estimates, the Chinese government has already collected personal information on at least 80% of the U.S. population via various means.

ARE YOU AT RISK?

So as an average user, should you worry? Again, it is unclear what data ByteDance is collecting and if it can harm an individual. I believe the most significant risks are to people in power, whether it is political power or within a company.

The aspect of TikTok I find most concerning is the algorithm that decides what videos users see and how it can affect vulnerable groups, particularly young people. Independent of a ban, families should have conversations about TikTok and other social media platforms and how they can be detrimental to mental health.

SHOULD THE US BAN TIKTOK? CAN IT?

THE RISKS THE APP POSES AND THE CHALLENGES TO BLOCKING IT

DOUG JACOBSON IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

TIKTOK CEO Shou Zi Chew testified before the House Energy and Commerce Committee on March 23, 2023, amid a chorus of calls from members of Congress for the federal government to ban the Chinese-owned video social media app and reports that the Biden administration is pushing for the company's sale.

The federal government, along with many state and foreign governments and some companies, has banned TikTok on work-provided phones. This type of ban can be effective for protecting data related to government work.

But a full ban of the app is another matter, which raises a number of questions: What data privacy risk does TikTok pose? What could the Chinese government do with data collected by the app? Is its content recommendation algorithm dangerous? And is it even possible to ban an app?

VACUUMING UP DATA

As a cybersecurity researcher, I've noted that every few years a new mobile app that becomes popular raises issues of security, privacy and data access.

Apps collect data for several reasons. Sometimes the data is used to improve the app for users. However, most apps collect data that the companies use in part to fund their operations. This revenue typically comes from targeting users with ads based on the data they collect.

So what makes TikTok different from the likes of Pokemon-GO, Facebook or even your phone itself? TikTok's privacy policy, which few people read, is a good place to start. Overall, the company is not particularly transparent about its practices. The document is too long to list here all the data it collects, which should be a warning.

There are a few items of interest in TikTok's privacy policy besides the information you give them when you create an account - name, age, username, password, language, email, phone number, social media account information and profile image - that are concerning. This information includes location data, data from your clipboard, contact information, website tracking, plus all data you post and messages you send

through the app. The company claims that current versions of the app do not collect GPS information from U.S. users. There has been speculation that TikTok is collecting other information, but that is hard to prove.

If most apps collect data, why is the U.S. government worried about TikTok? First, they worry about the Chinese government accessing data from its 150 million users in the U.S. There is also a concern about the algorithms used by TikTok to show content.

DATA IN THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S HANDS

If the data does end up in the hands of the Chinese government, the question is how could it use the data to its benefit. The government could share it with other companies in China to help them profit, which is no different than U.S. companies sharing marketing data. The Chinese government is known for playing the long game, and data is power, so if it is collecting data, it could take years to learn how it benefits China.

One potential threat is the Chinese government using the data to spy on people, particularly people who have access to valuable information. The Justice Department is

investigating TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, for using the app to monitor U.S. journalists. The Chinese government has an extensive history of hacking U.S. government agencies and corporations, and much of that hacking has been facilitated by social engineering - the practice of using data about people to trick them into revealing more information.

The second issue that the U.S. government has raised is algorithm bias or algorithm manipulation. TikTok and most social media apps have algorithms designed to learn a user's interests and then try to adjust the content so the user will continue to use the app. TikTok has not shared its algorithm, so it's not clear how the app chooses a user's content.

The algorithm could be biased in a way that influences a population to believe certain things. There are numerous allegations that TikTok's algorithm is biased and can reinforce negative thoughts among younger users, and be used to affect public opinion. It could be that the algorithm's manipulative behavior is unintentional, but there is concern that the Chinese government has been using or could use the algorithm to influence people.

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MICRO CONNECT

City's financial assets exchange platform soft-launched

ANTHONY LAM

THE Micro Connect Financial Assets Exchange platform (MCEX), which offers relevant services to the city, was launched over the weekend in Macau.

The Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng approved the platform on Dec. 5 last year.

Micro Connect is a company founded and chaired by former Hong Kong Stock Exchange chief executive Charles Li Xiaojia.

As per the statement on obtaining the local government's approval, the company noted "the new Micro Connect Exchange will operate on a blockchain-enabled technology platform and is ready to deliver innovation to the capital markets in China and beyond."

At the launch ceremony, the company said the platform aims to use digital methods to connect international capital with Chinese small and micro enterprises and to construct a more inclusive and impactful brand-new financial market.

Chan Sau San, chairman of the board of the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM), said in his speech, "It is hoped that after the trial operation of MCEX, the business model will be gradually straightened out and a solid risk prevention me-

chanism will be established."

He added that with the aforementioned outcome accomplished, opportunities will be fully seized, based on the location advantage of the "intersection" of Macau's dual circulation, and international funds will be introduced to help China's micro and small businesses and the real economy, and contribute to Macau's economic diversification.

China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) currently sees a 60% reliance on consumption, mostly involving small businesses. There are over 70 million small shops across China. On average, each year six million of these shops shut down, in contrast to 10 million new businesses, which equates to new capital needs ranging between RMB1.2 and 1.3 billion.

The company pledged "MCEX will bring about an unprecedented economically inclusive and socially impactful financial market that supports grassroots entrepreneurship, increases job opportunities and helps achieve 'common prosperity'."

Li said MCEX will help small businesses across China to finance their quick expansion, which is traditionally impossible considering the enormous costs and charges. It was suggested that if these businesses achieve financial sturdiness, China's economy

will grow stronger.

Li said the platform is the world's first financial market dedicated to China's micro economy through an innovative new asset class and revenue sharing product, the DRO (Daily Revenue Obligations). By leveraging China's leading digital economy, the DRO will reshape the global financial landscape.

Micro Connect Founder and CEO Gary Zhang announced several products for Micro Connect and MCEX, namely the launch of DROs, the world's first exchange-traded revenue sharing product; the launch of the Micro Connect Leadership Fund and the launch of the Micro Connect Daily Cash Index (MDCI) and Micro Connect Composite Index.

Giving information about the DRO and the other products to be launched, the CEO pledged that the establishment of MCEX means financing via financial exchanges is no longer exclusive to a few large corporates, but is now a convenient choice for millions of micro and small businesses.

He also pledged to turn Macau into a new international financial center in the digital age.

Through the new financial market platform, MCEX, Micro Connect hopes to provide China's micro and small businesses with adequate and sustainable finan-

cing while allowing global investors to enjoy quality returns by tapping into their daily and transparent cash flows.

MCEX will create an ocean of opportunities for global capital while providing a significant boost to China's grassroots economy.

MCEX will also help to form the foundations of Macau's financial infrastructure and further develop its innovation and technology industry. With this industrial upgrade and economic diversification, Macau will become a multi-level financial services center and a focal point in the Greater Bay Area.

Although the company is an exchange platform itself, it may eventually seek public listing on stock exchanges, Li told a post-ceremony press conference.

On supervising DROs, Li said the Chinese Franchise Law has authorities. DRO is an agreement on investment of revenue sharing, he further explained, and has no public participation, meaning that it neither has debt nor stocks.

The launch ceremony also saw the listing of the first batch of Micro Connect's DROs, which are three stores in mainland China funded by the MCEX platform, as well as a gong-striking ceremony officiated by Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng and several other guests.

EIGHT WAX FIGURES OF GP RACERS UNVEILED TODAY

Wax figures portraying eight racers who have competed on the Guia Circuit will be unveiled today at the Macao Grand Prix Museum. The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) and the Hong Kong branch of the Britain-derived Madame Tussauds museum conducted the project. The MGTO announced that racers Michael Rutter and Robert Huff – whose figures are part of the project – will be in town today for the ceremony. Wax figures also exist for John Macdonald, Ron Haslam, Edoardo Mortara, Ayrton Senna da Silva, Lewis Hamilton and Sebastian Vettel.

CE MEETS ICBC HEADS

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has received a delegation from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) at the Government Headquarters. Ho thanked the bank for supporting Macau, especially during the past three years of Covid-19 restrictions. Ho expressed hopes that the ICBC will continue supporting Macau's efforts to become a modern financial hub. ICBC Chairperson Chen Siqing thanked Ho and the government for their support for the bank and said it has, and will continue to, support the city's development in accordance with the government's direction.

WORLDSKILLS ACCREDITS CPTTM EXECUTIVE

The WorldSkills Competition has conferred a certificate of commendation on Director-General Victoria Kuan of the Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Center (CPTTM). It highlighted her contribution and service to the competition, recognizing her for promoting the competition. She is the first person from Macau to receive the accreditation. Kuan has worked on the competition for the past two decades and has risen gradually from deputy expert-general to expert-general. She is now the technical director of the fashion techniques category, her main focus in the competition.

SINO-LUSOPHONE COOPERATION

MENDIA EXPECTS HO'S VISIT TO LISBON COULD STOP THE 'EXODUS'

ENTREPRENEURS have told Lusa News Agency that the exodus of Lusophone citizens from China during the Covid-19 pandemic could delay the strengthening of economic ties between the two sides during the Chinese economy's recovery.

In Macau, there has been an aggravation of the trend of "Portuguese leaving" during the pandemic, without being "replaced by new Portuguese," said the Secretary-General of the Luso-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bernardo Mendia.

"That is a great difficulty for a [Portuguese] entrepreneur interested in setting up a company in Macau: finding talent available to manage their interests," lamented Mendia, cited by Lusa.

The entrepreneur hopes that during the visit of the leader of the Macau government, Ho Iat Seng, to Portugal from April 18 to 22, there will be a "joint effort" to "bet more on the use of the Portuguese language and the attraction of Portuguese-speaking talent."



Henry Osvald



Bernardo Mendia

Mendia advocated for the creation of "specific programs of benefits and advantages that attract more Portuguese to Macau, to urgently reinforce, in number and qualification, the Portuguese community" in the Chinese region.

Reversing the Lusophone exodus trend, which "puts the singularity of Macau at risk,"

would also serve to "strengthen the very project" of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macau), he added.

Forum Macau, which was created in 2003 by Beijing authorities, includes Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau,

Mozambique, Portugal, Sao Tome and Principe, Timor-Leste, and since April 2021, Equatorial Guinea.

Across the border to the mainland, the scenario among Brazilian expats is similar.

The president of the Brazil-China Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Service, and Innovation (BraCham), estima-

tes that between 30% to 40% of the "200 and some" Brazilian entrepreneurs have left due to restrictions imposed by Beijing to control Covid-19.

"For family reasons, they ended up leaving China and returning to Brazil," explained Henry Osvald, an entrepreneur based in Guangzhou, since 2004.


Between 15% to 20% of Brazilian companies in China have closed, and in the case of another "20% to 30%," the owner preferred to continue operations from Brazil, said the leader of BraCham.

Since mid-December, China has abandoned the "zero Covid" policy, which for almost three years imposed restrictions on entry into the territory, opting for mass-testing, risk-zone confinement, and quarantine.

But Henry Osvald predicts that "very few" Brazilian entrepreneurs who lived in China before the pandemic will return, partly because the cost of living in large Chinese cities "is quite high compared to Brazil."

According to Henry Osvald, cited by Lusa News Agency, "The Chinese economy needs Brazil as much as Brazil needs China," emphasizing the importance of maintaining and strengthening economic ties between the two countries. PC

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SPORTS

WTT MACAO UNVEILS PLAYERS LINE-UP WITH 11 FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVES

RENATO MARQUES

THE World Table Tennis (WTT) Champions Macao 2023 organization has unveiled its final players' line-up.

Among the big names of international table tennis, the organizers have secured the presence of the most wanted player, Ma Long from China, who joins Fan Zhendong, Wang Chuqin, Liang Jingkun, Sun Yingsha, Chen Meng, Wang Manyu and Wang Yidi.

The largest representation of foreign players will be from Japan, which is bringing to Macau five players: Tomokazu Harimoto, Yukiya Uda, Mima Ito, Hina Hayata, and Kasumi Ishikawa.

Swedish player Truls Møregårdh and Hugo Calderano from Brazil will also join the tournament as will Timo Boll, Dang Qiu, and Dimitrij Ovtcharov, all representing Germany.



The last of the foreign players will be Quadri Aruna from Nigeria, with two representatives from Hong Kong (Doo Hoi Kem and Wong Chun-ting) completing the full line-up.

Galaxy Entertainment Group is presenting the WTT Champions Macao 2023, which will be held at Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion from April 17 to 23 with a men's and a women's singles title to be won.

Organizers have said

event tickets are selling fast, with those for the semi-finals and finals on April 22 and 23, respectively, having sold out on the first day they went on sale.

Tickets are still available for the first stage of the tournament from April 17 to April 21. They are on sale via MacauTicket.com, by telephone, at Kong Seng outlets in Macau and Hong Kong, via mobile applications Ctrip Travel or Trip.com and Damai.cn website.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

HOMESTEAD INTERNATIONAL

Macau-connected deli on trial for fraud in Newark

A South Jersey deli with connections to Macau, valued at \$100 million, is at the center of a bizarre tale of fraud that prosecutors say has been unfolding for at least seven years, The Star-Ledger has reported.

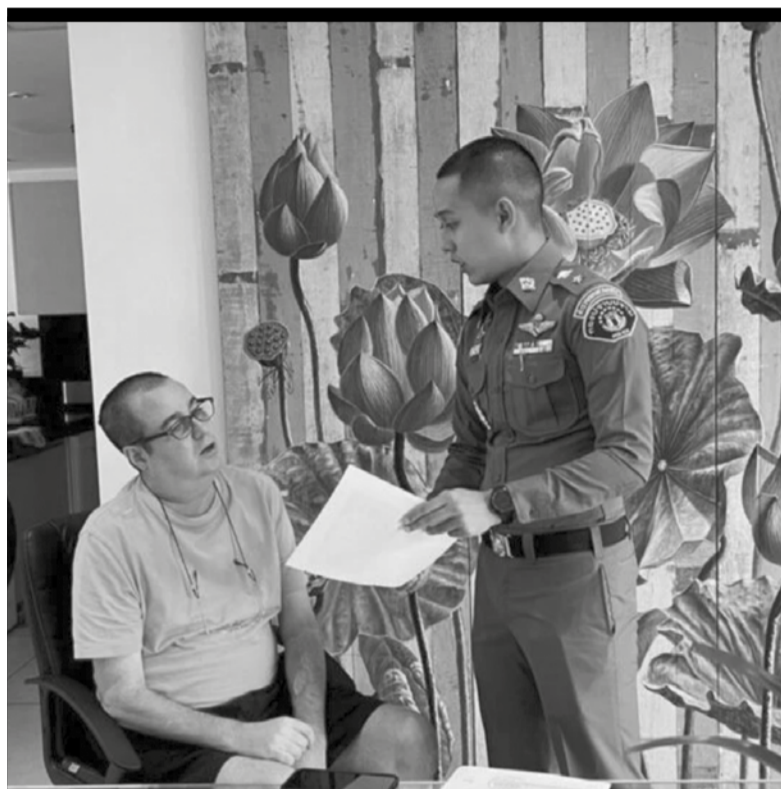
Peter Coker Jr., the man responsible for a massive international stock manipulation scheme involving the deli, created four foreign shell corporations based in Macau, allegedly to hide his ownership interest and his position as a majority shareholder in the deli.

U.S. prosecutors claim Coker also discussed the need to transfer shares into other companies' names to avoid appearing too "close."

Coker, who was extradited from Thailand this month to face charges, is seeking bail, but prosecutors argue he poses a flight risk since he renounced his U.S. citizenship more than a decade ago. At a hearing in Newark, prosecutors informed a federal judge that Coker has minimal ties to the United States and therefore has every reason to flee.

As reported by the local daily, Coker's attorney has requested he be released on conditions of strict home confinement, GPS location monitoring, and a \$1.5 million bond secured by five

THE BANGKOK POST



A Thai police officer questions Peter Coker, Jr. (left) following his arrest

properties in North Carolina. However, the hearing was put on hold after it was discovered

there was a detainer on Coker from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement since he is

now a non-citizen.

The federal indictment, which was unsealed in October, charged Coker, along with his father, Peter Coker Sr., 80, of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and James Patten, 63, of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, with a conspiracy to commit securities fraud using the little-known New Jersey deli as a vehicle. The charges arose from the public filings related to Hometown Deli in Paulsboro in Gloucester County, about nine miles southwest of Philadelphia.

The small sandwich shop reported less than \$40,000 in annual revenue from selling cheesesteaks and Italian subs. Yet its parent company, Homestead International, which owned nothing but the deli, was valued at over \$100 million, according to public reports.

The charges allege the scheme was not just a "pump-and-dump" operation, a common scam involving false and misleading positive statements that

target unsuspecting investors, but rather, a complex instance of fraud geared toward a reverse merger.

In a reverse merger, an existing public "shell company," which is a public reporting company with few or no operations, acquires a private operating company, usually one that is seeking access to funding in the U.S. capital markets.

Typically, the shareholders of the private operating company exchange their shares for a large majority of the shares of the public company. The private operating company's shareholders gain a controlling interest in the voting power and outstanding shares of stock of the public shell company.

Prosecutors argue the whole enterprise was not about merely dumping overinflated shares back onto the market, but rather, was designed to facilitate a reverse merger.

According to The Star-Ledger, the story took on added mystery after it was disclosed the deli was owned by Paul Morina, the principal, and a famed wrestling coach at Paulsboro High School, who on paper became the CEO of Homestead International, which bought out the deli. Morina was abruptly forced out in May 2021. The trial continues. PC

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Notice
Funding Scheme for Innovation and Technology Promotion 2023

I. Objectives
To align with the Macao SAR Government's policies of science and technology development, this scheme is devised in order to encourage young researchers to engage in scientific and technological research, enhance the research and innovation capabilities of junior researchers and also the technological innovation capability of Macao, so as to promote the effect and contribution of scientific and technological innovation to social development.

II. Applying Entities

1. Local higher education institutions supervised by the Macao SAR Government;
2. Laboratories or other entities engaged in scientific R&D in the Macao SAR;
3. Non-profit organizations (NPOs) registered in the Macao SAR.

III. Application and Funding Amount
Applications for less than or equal to MOP500,000. (five hundred thousand patacas)

IV. Project Duration
The duration of each project is from one year to two years.

V. Application Period
27th March, 2023 to 28th April, 2023

VI. Applying Method
Please apply through FDCT's online funding application system. (website: www.fdct.gov.mo)
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VII. Assessment Criteria
The assessment is performed according to the Financial Aid Grant Regulation, approved as per the Chief Executive's Dispatch No. 64/2021.

Key considerations will be given to the followings:

- (1) The capability of implementing the project of the applying entity;
- (2) Project feasibility and work plan;
- (3) Budget justification;
- (4) Expected R&D results;
- (5) The effect of the project in promoting the R&D ability of participating researchers

President of FDCT Administrative Committee,
Chan Wan Hei
2023/03/24

HEALTH

MASK RECOMMENDATION MAY FURTHER RELAX DURING SUMMER

ANTHONY LAM

SECRETARY for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao Ieong has said mask-wearing may be further eased during summer should no extreme outbreak occur beforehand.

Her comment was made on the sidelines of an academic event over the weekend.

For the time being, masking is only required on buses, as well as in daycare, rehabilitation and medical facilities. The official said masking may be scrapped at these facilities during summer if there is no massive outbreak in May or June.

Campuses and government medical venues are relatively prepared for a cyclical outbreak of Covid-19. The Public Health Specialist Building is expected to open between May and June, meaning more medical resources will be available to cope with any future Covid-19 outbreaks. She said the city can overcome outbreaks smaller than that in last December.



Elsie Ao Ieong

NEW KIANG WU NURSING COLLEGE CAMPUS OFFICIALLY OPENS

Last Saturday, the new campus of the century-old Kiang Wu Nursing College was officially opened. The institution held an open day to celebrate both the opening and its centenary.

During his speech, Chairperson of the School Council Lau Veng Seng said the campus, which is 2.3-fold the size of the old campus, will help foster enhanced

education and learning as well as providing a modernized teaching environment. The new campus also houses an objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) center and the city's first life journey experience pavilion.

Before its opening, the campus underwent a series of reviews and obtained relevant accreditations, Lau revealed.

"The college has always adhered to the mission of

educating people, and has continued to reform and innovate in the fields of nursing, the elderly and health, so as to cultivate more high-caliber nurses for the country and the city," Lau added.

During her speech, Ao Ieong commended the college for cultivating cohort after cohort of nursing professionals possessing virtue and ability, and who are determined to continue the College's nursing mission of the past century.



LABOR

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE DROPS SLIGHTLY AS 600 FIND JOBS, 12,200 STILL WAITING

IN the three months from December 2022 to February, the unemployment rate registered a slight decrease, the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) has noted in a press statement.

According to the statement, the general unemployment rate dropped 0.1% to 3.3% at the end of February, while the unemployment rate of local residents dipped 0.2% to 4.1% when compared with the previous three-month period (November 2022 - January).

The number of unemployed people dropped by 600 from the previous period to 12,200.

Most of the unemployed searching for a new job were previously engaged in gaming and junket activities and the construction sector.

Meanwhile, the proportion of new labor market entrants seeking their first job decreased 1.5% to 9.3% of all the unemployed.

Dropping more than the unemployment rate was the underemployment rate, which, according to DSEC, dropped 0.5% to 2.7% in the same period.

The total number of underemployed people in Macau fell by 2,000 from the previous period to 9,900, with a notable drop in the number of those engaged in gaming and junket activities.

At the end of February,

the labor force living in Macau was 372,100 people, with a labor force participation rate of 68.3%. This figure also dropped 1,100 from the previous period to 359,900 due to a drop in the number of non-resident workers.

There were 282,200 employed residents, an increase of 200.

The unemployment rate decrease was mostly due to the creation of new jobs in the education sector, the DSEC said, noting that at the same time, the wholesale trade and gaming and junket activities continue to lose some of the workforce.

The employment survey covered all residential units in the Peninsula, Taipa, and Coloane, excluding collective living quarters such as dormitories and care homes for the elderly.

Non-resident workers working in Macau but living outside the territory were also excluded from the survey.

According to preliminary estimates from the movement records, an average of about 84,600 Macau residents and non-resident workers worked in Macau but lived outside the territory during the reference period; when including these individuals, the total labor force rises to 456,800, a decrease of 600 from the previous period. **RM**

ECONOMY

Consumer prices up 1.02% in February

RENATO MARQUES

THE average Composite Consumer Price Index (CPI) has grown in February by 1.02% in comparison with the last 12 months, a statistics release from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) has indicated.

According to the same release, the price indices' rise is mostly attributable to household furnishings and services (+10.78%), education (+5.73%) and transport (+5.39%), which showed notable growth.

The average CPI-A and CPI-B also noted increases of 0.70% and 1.45%, respectively, over the same period.

The CPI-A and CPI-B relate to about 50% and 30% of households with an average monthly expenditure of MOP12,000-MOP35,999 and MOP36,000-MOP62,999 respectively; the Composite CPI



RENATO MARQUES

relates to all the households.

The release shows the most significant part of the rise year-on-year is related to the first two months of 2023, when the average Composite CPI rose by 0.77% year-on-year, while average CPI-A and CPI-B went up, respectively, by 0.52% and 1.09%.

The increment in the CPI indices was attributed to

higher prices for eating out and electricity, higher wages of domestic helpers, increased tuition fees and rising prices for gasoline.

The rise was partially offset by lower housing rentals and falling airfares. Among the various sections of goods and services, price indices for education (+9.98%) and household furnishings and services (+6.52%) year-on-

-year, grew more, while the indices for housing and fuels and communication dropped 1.7% and 1.57%, respectively.

Compared with January, the Composite CPI rose 0.09% in February, an increase mostly related to the higher prices of alcoholic beverages and the rising costs of medical insurance premiums, DSEC explained.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Gap grows between TikTok users, lawmakers on potential ban

HALELUYA HADERO,
NEW YORK

ON the one side are dozens of lawmakers on Capitol Hill issuing dire warnings about security breaches and possible Chinese surveillance.

On the other are some 150 million TikTok users in the U.S. who just want to be able to keep making and watching short, fun videos offering makeup tutorials and cooking lessons, among other things.

The disconnect illustrates the uphill battle that lawmakers from both sides of the aisle face in trying to convince the public that China could use TikTok as a weapon against the American people. But many users on the platform are more concerned about the possibility of the government taking away their favorite app.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said during a nearly six-hour congressional hearing Thursday that the platform has never turned over user data to the Chinese government, and wouldn't do so if asked.

Nevertheless, lawmakers, the FBI and officials at other agencies continue to raise alarms that Chinese law compels Chinese companies like TikTok's parent company ByteDance to fork over data to the government for whatever purposes it deems to involve national security. There's also concern Beijing might try to push pro-China narratives or misinformation through the platform.

"I want to say this to all the teenagers out there, and TikTok in-



Supporters of TikTok hold signs during a rally to defend the app, last week at the Capitol in Washington

fluencers who think we're just old and out of touch and don't know what we're talking about, trying to take your favorite app," said Republican Rep. Dan Crenshaw during the hearing. "You may not care that your data is being accessed now, but you will be one day."

Many TikTok users reacted to the hearing by posting videos critical of lawmakers who grilled Chew and frequently cut him off from speaking. Some called a potential TikTok ban, as some lawmakers and the Biden administration has reportedly threatened, the "biggest scam" of the year. And others blamed the surge of scrutiny on the platform on another tech rival, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

But few expressed fear of possible Chinese surveillance or security breaches that lawmakers conti-

nue to amplify as they look to rein in TikTok.

Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., whose district is in the heart of Silicon Valley, said he is mindful of the value that platforms like TikTok provide to young people as an outlet for creative expression and building community. "But there's absolutely no reason that an American technology company can't do that," said Khanna, the top Democrat on the cyber subcommittee on House Armed Service. "America has the most innovative technology companies in the world."

He added that Congress should move forward with a proposal that would force platform's sale to an American company for continued access for its millions of users while "ensuring that the platform isn't subject to Chinese propaganda or

compromises people's privacy."

According to a survey by the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of Americans aged 13 to 17 use TikTok, and 16% of all teens say they use it almost constantly. It's because of TikTok's large user base that Lindsay Gorman, a former tech adviser for the Biden administration who now works as a senior fellow for emerging technologies at the German Marshall Fund, says the Biden administration will likely pursue every option short of a ban first. That would include the option for the app's Chinese owners to divest, which the Biden administration is reportedly demanding from TikTok if it wants to avoid a nationwide ban.

TikTok itself has been trying to leverage its popularity. On Wednesday, it sent dozens of influencers to Congress to lobby against a

ban. It has also ramped up a broader public relations campaign, plastering ads all over Washington that tout its promises of securing users' data and privacy and creating a safe platform for its young users.

Some popular TikTokers who speak out against a ban are concerned — and angered — about how it might impact their personal lives. Many earn income from their videos and have inked brand partnerships to market products to their audiences — another stream of revenue that could be wiped away if the platform disappears. They would also lose the social capital that comes from having a large following on the trend-setting app.

Demetrius Fields, a standup comedian who amassed 2.8 million followers on TikTok from posting comedy sketches, said he spent a long time building his career and followership on the platform. He has one active deal with the fast fashion retailer Fashion Nova, which allows him to earn an income along with the videos he posts on TikTok.

If the app is taken away, he said building an audience on another platform would be challenging for him due to the competition to grab user attention.

"The financial implications for me would be pretty terrible," Fields said. "I would probably have to go back to working a desk job."

Sarah Pikhit, an 18-year-old student at Penn State University, said she used to use TikTok a lot, but started cutting back when she realized how much time she spent scrolling through videos on the app. She still uses it, but mostly to post her own content, which she says she can do on other platforms. She said she wouldn't care if TikTok gets banned — but her friends would.

"They like the excessive scrolling," Pikhit said. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

JW Marriott to offer Easter menus



JW Marriott Hotel Macau has announced special Easter menus at their dining establishments, Urban Kitchen and The Lounge.

Urban Kitchen will be hosting an Easter Celebrations

Dinner Buffet from April 7 to 9. The buffet features international flavors and Easter favorites such as Smoked Salmon Egg Benedict, Pineapple Glazed Ham, and Greek-style Stuf-

fed Lamb Roast. In addition, a variety of Easter-themed sweet treats will be available, including Orange Bunny, Easter Egg Strawberry Chocolate, and Easter Bunny Carrot Cake with Cheese Frosting, the hotel has said in a press release.

The buffet is priced at MOP658 per adult and MOP330 per child. The Lounge will be serving up an Easter Savory Set for afternoon tea from April 4 to 10, with a selection of cold cuts and cheeses, signature savory items, and a trio of desserts. The set is priced at MOP468 with two glasses of non-alcoholic drinks or MOP628 with two glasses of Moët and Chandon Brut Imperial.

Five local micro films premiere at The Londoner



Five micro movies produced by local filmmakers premiered at The Londoner Macao yesterday as part of the 2022 New Art Studies in Filming – Micro Movie Support Program.

The program was organized by the Creative Industries Promotion Association of St. Lazarus Church District and

sponsored by Sands China Ltd (SCL).

The initiative aims to enhance the skills of local film and television creative professionals, and support the development of filmmaking talent in the city.

22 teams submitted applications for movie production, with five teams selected and

funded to produce their micro movies based on their concepts.

The completed movies unveiled at yesterday's premiere were "D'oro Bistro," "Travel in Place," "Unlock," "The List," and "Hang Up."

The program's president, Patrick Wong Sio Chon, expressed his gratitude to Sands China for their support in making the premiere a success.

Wilfred Wong, president of SCL, said "the program's sponsorship demonstrates the company's commitment to nurturing local filmmakers in line with the Macau SAR government's policy of moderate economic diversification and the 'tourism + art' initiative."

DIPLOMACY

BRAZIL'S LULA CANCELS TRIP TO CHINA BECAUSE OF PNEUMONIA

BRAZIL'S President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has canceled his trip to China after contracting pneumonia, the presidential palace said yesterday [Macau time].

Lula, 77, was admitted to a hospital in the capital of Brasilia with flu-like symptoms and was diagnosed with "bacterial and viral bronchopneumonia due to influenza A," the palace said in a statement, quoting a medical note signed by Dr. Ana Helena Germoglio.

The leftist leader's health was reassessed on Saturday and, despite improvement, he was advised to "postpone the trip to China until the cycle of viral transmission ends," the medical note said. His press office later confirmed that the trip had been canceled.

Chinese authorities have been informed, "with the reiteration of the desire to schedule the visit on a new date," the palace said.

Lula had been expected to leave for China on a multi-day visit on Friday or Saturday, but the trip was pushed back on Friday.

A delegation composed of ministers, senators, lawmakers and hundreds of businessmen - including more than 100 from the agricultural sector - had been set to accompany Lula during his first state visit to Brazil's biggest trade partner since taking office in January.



AP PHOTO

The trip's cancellation is "bad news" for the government as the visit was "an opportunity for Lula to reconnect with business elites, especially in the agribusiness, who have been very much pro-Bolsonaro," said Oliver Stuenkel, a political scientist from the Getulio Vargas Foundation think tank.

The Brazilian president and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping

were scheduled to meet tomorrow. Trade, investment and climate change were on the agenda and 20 bilateral agreements had been expected to be signed, according to a statement Thursday from the presidential palace.

Lula, who rarely postpones or cancels trips due to health reasons, traveled to Argentina in January and the U.S. in February, marking a departure from Brazil's

foreign policy under former far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who showed little interest in international affairs or travel abroad.

The cancellation "will raise questions about to what extent Lula can sustain the very intense diplomatic activism" seen in the first three months of his presidency, Stuenkel said.

Pedro Brites, an international relations expert at the Getulio

Vargas Foundation, said the postponement of the trip was a lost opportunity to switch the focus to more positive issues for the government "after a turbulent week."

On Wednesday, federal police cracked down on a gang accused of plotting assassinations and kidnappings of public officials including Sen. Sergio Moro, who was the lead judge in the Carwash trials which led to the arrest of prominent politicians including Lula.

The then-former president spent over a year in jail before his conviction was annulled. In 2019, Moro became Bolsonaro's Justice Minister.

The leftist leader on Thursday suggested the police operation was a setup by Moro, prompting fierce criticism by opposition politicians and discomfort among allies.

Rescheduling Lula's visit to China will be a challenge due to the very crowded agendas of both leaders, said Stuenkel, but he predicted Lula "will really try to make this happen during the first half of the year" due to the high domestic and international importance of the trip.

Lula had been intending to normalize and strengthen ties with China after a rocky period of tensions under former far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro.

Commercial ties continued but political relations with China soured during Bolsonaro's term -- a particular low point came when Bolsonaro's son Eduardo blamed the COVID-19 pandemic on the Chinese Communist Party in March 2020. MDT/AP

WAR IN UKRAINE

New Zealand tells Beijing its concern on lethal aid to Russia

NEW Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta has expressed concern to China over any provision of lethal aid to support Russia in its war against Ukraine during a meeting with her Chinese counterpart.

Her press office on Saturday detailed Mahuta's cautionary remarks in Beijing, days after Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded his trip to Moscow, a warm affair in which Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin praised each other and spoke of a profound friendship.

Mahuta's four-day trip, which began Wednesday, was the first made by a New Zealand foreign minister to Beijing since 2018 but it came at an awkward time as Xi visited Moscow the same week to give Putin

a diplomatic boost after the International Criminal Court said it wants to put him on trial for alleged war crimes.

On the Ukraine war, Mahuta reiterated her government's condemnation of Moscow's "illegal invasion" to her counterpart Qin Gang.

She also told Qin's predecessor Wang Yi, now the Chinese Communist Party's most senior foreign policy official, that peace and prosperity are the expectations of all parties, according to China's official news agency Xinhua. New Zealand supports political settlement of disputes through dialogue, she was quoted saying in the report.

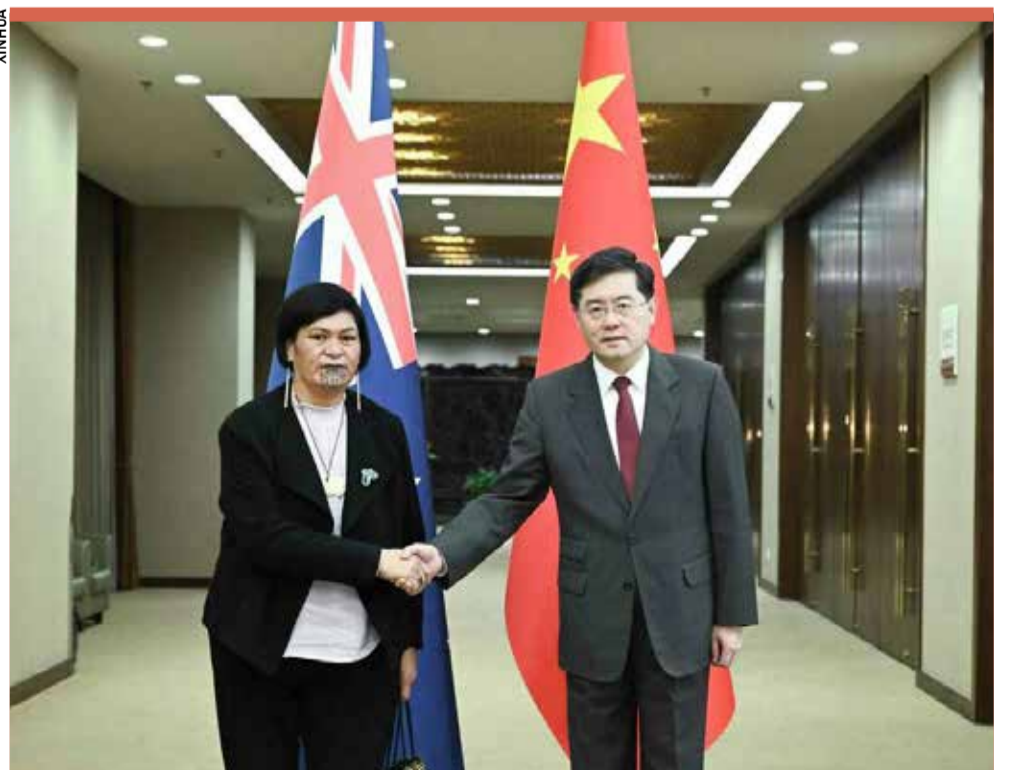
Wang said the pressing task is to achieve a ceasefire and resume peace talks,

and that China would continue to play a constructive role to promote a political settlement, the agency added.

During the meeting with Qin, Mahuta also raised concerns over the human rights situation in Xinjiang, the erosion of freedoms in Hong Kong, disputes in the South China Sea and increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait, her press office said.

The ministers discussed the possibility of New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins visiting China this year, the office added.

China is New Zealand's largest trading partner and New Zealand exporters rely on China to buy milk products and other agricultural goods. MDT/AP



Foreign Minister Qin Gang (right) meets with visiting New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta in Beijing

DIPLOMACY

Honduras establishes ties with China after Taiwan break

HONDURAS established diplomatic ties with China yesterday after breaking off relations with Taiwan, which is increasingly isolated and now recognized by only 13 sovereign states, including Vatican City.

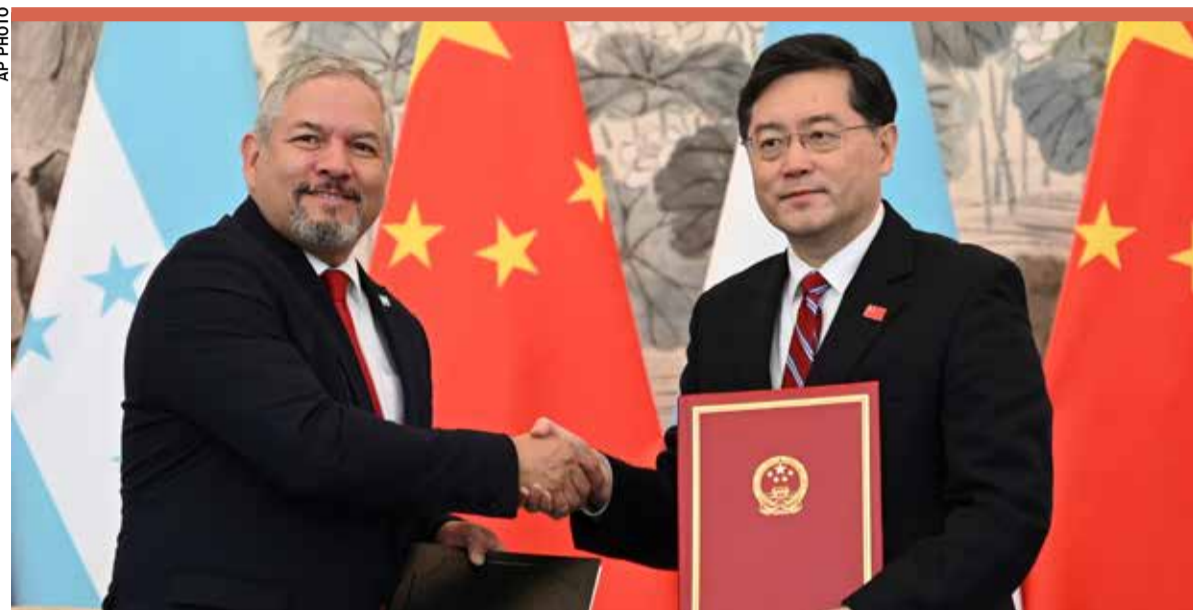
Foreign ministers from China and Honduras signed a joint communique in Beijing — a decision the Chinese Foreign Ministry hailed as “the right choice.”

The diplomatic victory for China comes as tensions rise between Beijing and the United States, including over China's increasing assertiveness toward self-ruled Taiwan, and signals growing Chinese influence in Latin America. The new China-Honduras relationship was announced after the Honduran and Taiwanese governments made separate announcements that they were severing ties.

China and Taiwan have been locked in a battle for diplomatic recognition since they split amid civil war in 1949, with Beijing spending billions to win recognition for its “one China” policy.

China claims Taiwan is part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, and refuses most contacts with countries that maintain formal ties with the island democracy.

The Honduran Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Twitter



Honduras FM Eduardo Reina Garcia (left) and Chinese FM Qin Gang shake hands following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, at a ceremony in the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing

that its government recognizes “only one China in the world” and that Beijing “is the only legitimate government that represents all of China.”

It added that “Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory, and as of today, the Honduran government has informed Taiwan of the severance of diplomatic relations, pledging not to have any official relationship or contact with Taiwan.”

Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu told a news conference yesterday that Taiwan had ended its relations with Honduras to “safeguard its sovereignty and dignity.”

Wu said that Honduran President Xiomara Castro and her team always had a “fantasy” about China and had raised the issue of switching ties before the presidential election in Honduras in 2021.

“The Castro government dismissed our nation's longstanding assistance and relations and carried out talks to form diplomatic ties with China. Our government feels pained and regretful,” he said.

Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen said her government would not “engage in a meaningless contest of dollar diplomacy with

China.”

Her office spokesperson Olivia Lin said in a statement that relations between the sides had lasted for more than 80 years.

Analysts have warned over the implications of the newly formed ties between China and Honduras. Political analyst Graco Pérez in Honduras said Beijing's narrative would highlight the benefits, including investment and job creation, “but that is all going to be illusory.”

Pérez noted that some other countries have established such relations, but “it didn't turn out to be what had been offered.”

For decades China has funneled billions of dollars into investment and infrastructure projects across Latin America. That investment has translated to rising power for China and a growing number of allies.

In Honduras, it has come in the form of construction of a hydroelectric dam project in central Honduras built by the Chinese company SINOHYDRO with about \$300 million in Chinese government financing.

Honduras is the ninth diplomatically that Taipei has lost to Beijing since pro-independence Tsai Ing-wen first took office in May 2016.

Taiwan still has ties with Belize, Paraguay and Guatemala in Latin America, and Vatican City. Most of its remaining partners are island nations in the Caribbean and South Pacific, along with Eswatini in southern Africa.

Tsai is set to begin a 10-day trip on Wednesday with visits to Guatemala and Belize. Her delegation will also stop in New York and Los Angeles. Taiwan's Vice Foreign Minister Alexander Yui earlier said the purpose of Tsai's trip is to highlight the island's friendship with the two Latin American countries.

Wu said he did not have any evidence that the timing of the announcement was related to Tsai's trip but noted “China seems to be doing this intentionally.”

Taiwan retains informal ties with more than 100 other countries, most importantly the United States. The U.S. doesn't have diplomatic relations with Taiwan but has maintained that Taipei is an important partner in the Indo-Pacific. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

People hold first protest in years under strict rules

DOZENS of people yesterday joined Hong Kong's first authorized protest since the lifting of major COVID-19 restrictions under unprecedentedly strict rules, including wearing a numbered badge around their necks.

The rules set out by the police, who cited security reasons, came as the financial hub was promoting its return to normalcy after years of anti-virus controls and political turmoil.

During the pandemic, protests were rare due to COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, many activists have been silenced or jailed after Beijing imposed a national security law following massive protests in 2019. Critics say the city's



freedom of assembly that was promised Hong Kong when it returned to China from Britain in 1997 has been eroded.

Yesterday's demonstra-

tion against the proposed reclamation and construction of rubbish-processing facilities was the first police-approved march of its kind after the city scrapped

its mask mandate and social distancing limits.

But organizers had to comply with police requirements such as taking measures to ensure the

number of participants would not exceed the expected turnout of 100 people and asking for proof of a “reasonable excuse” from protesters who wore masks during the event.

About 80 people expressed their opposition to the plans in Tseung Kwan O, a residential and industrial area, the organizer said. They had to walk in a cordoned-off moving line in the rain amid heavy police presence.

Theresa Wang described the new restrictions as “a bit weird” but said they were still acceptable because the city was adjusting to “the new Hong Kong.”

“I'm not happy but we have to accept it. We have to accept what is deemed

legal now,” the 70-year-old retiree said, adding that she hoped the protest would be a sign the government is more open to discussion.

Protester Jack Wong said he would prefer not to wear the badge printed with a number. Police said earlier the requirement aims to prevent lawbreakers from joining the march.

“But if it is a requirement, what can I say? I prefer not to comment further. You know what I mean,” he said.

In granting its approval, police also requested that organizers ensure there would not be any acts that might endanger national security, including displaying anything seditious. **MDT/AP**



Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi

INDIA

GANDHI ACCUSES MODI OF FAVORING ADANI GROUP

ASHOK SHARMA, NEW DELHI

INDIA'S top opposition leader Rahul Gandhi this weekend launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said he was being targeted because he has raised serious questions about Modi's relationship with the Indian business conglomerate

Adani Group.

Gandhi said the objective of his expulsion from Parliament on Friday was to prevent him from speaking in the legislature about his allegation of an infusion of an unaccounted \$3 billion into shell companies owned by the Adani Group, headed by Gautam Adani.

"Some of these defense com-

panies are working in drone and missile development and ordnance production. Why is the defense ministry not asking questions," he said.

Gandhi was expelled from Parliament a day after a court convicted him of defamation and sentenced him to two years in prison for mocking the surname Modi in

an election speech.

The actions against Gandhi, the great-grandson of India's first prime minister, were widely condemned by opponents of Modi as the latest assaults against democracy and free speech by a ruling government seeking to crush dissent. Removing Gandhi from politics delivered a major blow to the opposition party he led ahead of next year's national elections.

Gandhi said he was not bothered about losing his seat in Parliament. "My job is to defend the institutions of the country and the voice of people," he added.

A court in the western Indian city of Surat also sentenced him to two years in prison on Thursday. But he won't go to jail immediately as the court granted bail for 30 days to file an appeal against the verdict.

The court convicted Gandhi for a 2019 speech in which he asked, "Why do all thieves have Modi as their surname?" Gandhi then referred to three well-known and unrelated Modis in the speech: a fugitive Indian diamond tycoon, a cricket executive banned from the Indian Premier League tournament and the prime minister.

On Saturday, Gandhi didn't indicate how soon his legal team will approach an appeals court seeking to overturn his conviction so he could save his seat in Parliament.

He accused Modi of helping the Adani Group to get contracts in India, Sri Lanka, and Australia.

He also alleged that a Chinese national was involved in investments in Adani's shell companies.

"Why nobody is asking the question who this Chinese national is," he said. "Nobody knows where this money has come from. Adani couldn't generate this money."

Gandhi has demanded a parliamentary committee probe following a report by Hindenburg Research, the U.S. financial research firm, accusing the Adani Group of stock price manipulation and fraud running into billions of dollars. The Adani Group has denied any wrongdoing and the Modi government has not accepted a call for a parliamentary investigation.

Soon after Gandhi's news conference, Ravi Shankar Prasad, a top leader of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, rejected Gandhi's accusations and said his disqualification from Parliament had nothing to do with the Adani Group controversy.

Since Modi became prime minister in 2014, Adani's net worth has shot up nearly 2,000% to \$125 billion, according to Bloomberg's Billionaire Index. He surpassed Amazon boss Jeff Bezos to briefly become the world's second richest man in September after a surge in the value of his seven listed entities.

Adani's businesses have won multibillion-dollar contracts to build ports, highways and power plants. The industrialist's ambitions include developing drones and ammunition, key to the government's goal of boosting military-related exports to \$5 billion while slashing costs for expensive imports. **MDT/AP**

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban want control of more diplomatic missions

THE Taliban government is trying to take charge of more Afghan embassies abroad, a spokesman said this weekend, amid their continued international isolation because of restrictions on women and girls.

The Taliban initially promised a more moderate rule after their takeover in August 2021, but instead imposed sweeping bans and other measures curtailing basic freedoms.

The U.N. and foreign governments have fiercely condemned the restrictions on female education and employment, and the international community remains wary of officially recognizing the Taliban, although some countries retain an active diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, including Pakistan, Turkey, Qatar, and China.

"The Islamic Emirate has



sent diplomats to at least 14 countries and efforts are underway to take charge of other diplomatic missions abroad," the government's main spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a video. "Diplomats of the former government are continuing their activities in coordination with the

Foreign Ministry."

The administration has sent its diplomats to Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Russia, China, Kazakhstan and other Arab and African countries, according to Mujahid. He gave no further details.

In February, authorities handed over control of Afghanistan's embassy

in Tehran to envoys of the Taliban government. It was previously staffed by envoys from the former U.S.-backed Afghan government.

The deputy spokesman for the government, Bilal Karimi, was unable to immediately provide figures on how many Afghan diplomatic missions are active overseas or how many the administration has taken charge of since August 2021.

"There are many embassies abroad. The Islamic Emirate wants to have diplomatic relations with all countries and move forward with good interactions," he told The Associated Press. "It is our hope that embassies will be opened in all countries as soon as official relations begin with the Islamic Emirate."

The Foreign Ministry

spokesman did not respond to the AP's questions on embassies.

In January, the highest-ranking woman at the United Nations, Amina Mohammed, said the Taliban want international recognition and Afghanistan's U.N. seat, which is currently held by the former government led by Ashraf Ghani.

"Recognition is one leverage that we have and we should hold on to," she said, after meeting Taliban ministers in Kabul and Kandahar to try to reverse their crackdowns on women and girls.

They have banned girls from middle school, high school and university and banned women from most fields of employment, including at nongovernmental groups. Women have also been ordered to wear head-to-toe clothing in

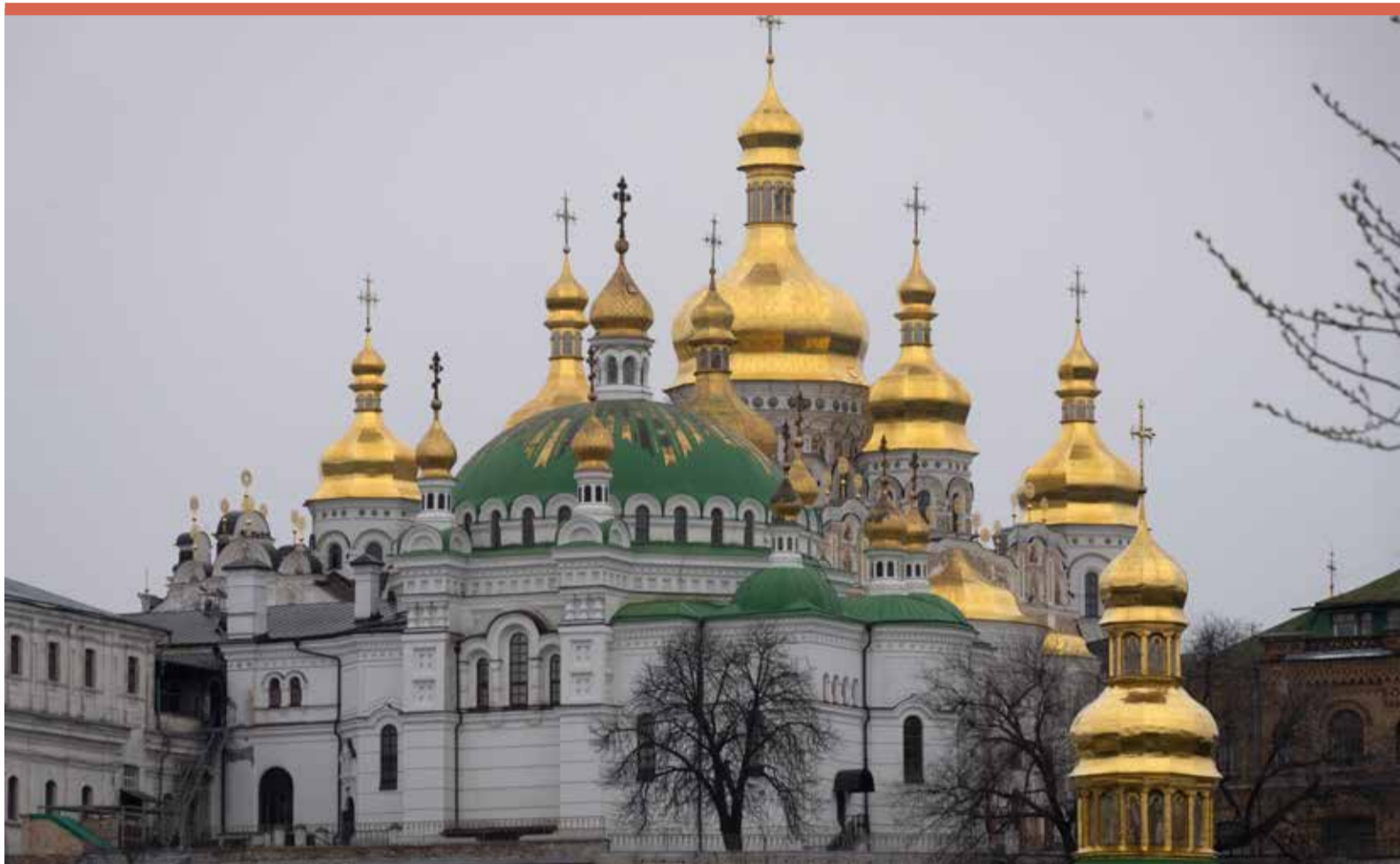
public and are barred from parks and gyms.

Schools reopened for the new academic year last week without teenage girls, more than 18 months after the ban on secondary education came into effect.

Universities reopened after the winter break in early March without their female students, and the ban on NGO work is still in place, although some aid agencies have partially resumed their activities through exemptions.

Jan Egeland, the secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said Friday that more than three months have passed since the "intolerable ban" on female aid workers in Afghanistan. "We have made some local progress, allowing women's return to work, but still await national permits." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



The Monastery of the Caves, also known as Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, one of the holiest sites of Eastern Orthodox Christians, in Kyiv

UKRAINE

Tensions on the rise at revered Kyiv monastery complex

HANNA ARHIROVA, KYIV

THE courtyards of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra have been busy with more than just the usual worshippers, going to and from its churches in the sprawling monastic complex that is Ukraine's most revered Orthodox site.

Also busy Friday were people in civilian clothes, loading cars with plasma televisions, furniture and other items from the buildings — helping the resident monks remove belongings of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, or UOC, before a threatened government eviction on March 29.

There also were police officers checking the cars to make sure no one was removing items that belong to the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra preserve, which oversees the complex.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is reverberating here in a struggle for control of the Lavra, known in English as the Monastery of the Caves. The complex contains church, monastic and museum buildings; its oldest parts date back to the dawn of Christianity here a millennium ago.

The dispute is part of a wider religious conflict playing out in parallel with the war.

The government of Ukraine has already been cracking

down on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church over its historic ties to the Russian Orthodox Church, whose leader, Patriarch Kirill, has supported Russian President Vladimir Putin in the invasion of Ukraine.

The parliament is considering a "draft law on making it impossible to operate in Ukraine religious organizations affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation" — which could impact the UOC, depending on how it's interpreted.

The UOC has insisted that it's loyal to Ukraine, has denounced the Russian invasion from the start and has even declared its independence from Moscow.

But Ukrainian security agencies have claimed that some in the Ukrainian church have maintained close ties with Moscow. They've raided numerous holy sites of the church and later posted photos of rubles, Russian passports and leaflets with messages from the Moscow patriarch as proof that some church officials have been loyal to Russia.

The raids started after a Nov. 12 service at the Pechersk Lavra complex, where a Ukrainian Orthodox priest was filmed talking about the "awakening" of Russia.

The Ukrainian government has said the Lavra, including a UOC seminary and offices, is a hub of

"Russian world" propaganda — an ideology touting Moscow's political and spiritual hegemony over neighboring Slavic lands such as Ukraine.

The government also has sanctioned the Lavra's abbot for alleged pro-Moscow activities. It already allowed the rival Orthodox Church of Ukraine, or OCU, to use one of the Lavra's churches for a Christmas service.

But now it's ordering the Ukrainian Orthodox Church out of the premises entirely.

The stakes are high. The complex has been called the "pearl of Ukraine" and the "Vatican" of Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

The site is owned by the government, and the agency overseeing the property notified the UOC earlier this month that as of March 29, it was terminating the lease allowing the free use of religious buildings on the property. The government claims that the monks violated their lease by making alterations to the historic site and other technical infractions.

"There are many new buildings there, and this is a UNESCO site, which do not have relevant documents and permits. The legality of such new buildings also raises legitimate questions," Ukraine's minister of culture, Oleksandr Tkachenko, said on Ukrainian television. "The state must manage

what belongs to it."

The monks of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church dispute this, saying these claims are a pretext, and they refuse to leave.

Still, they're moving out what possessions they can in preparation for a possible forcible eviction.

"We understand that we will not be given the opportunity to function properly and therefore we need to remove certain things and prevent their destruction," said Metropolitan Clement, the head of the UOC press office.

Earlier, the monks said they won't leave Lavra under any circumstances.

Metropolitan Clement, in an interview with The Associated Press, said lawyers for the UOC appealed to the Ministry of Culture to provide documents explaining its reasons for breaking the agreement.

However, according to Clement, the ministry informed them that such documents won't be provided, because they have been marked for official use, as if they are classified.

The government's eviction order doesn't explicitly say the monastery could be turned over to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

But that church's leader, Metropolitan Epiphany, issued a statement directed at the Lavra

monks, indicating knowledge of changes to come.

The eviction won't put an end to monastery worship and ministry at the complex, he said.

Metropolitan Epiphany said services will continue and be conducted in their ancient Slavic language along with modern Ukrainian.

"The current affairs of the monastery will be managed by those who know the traditions and life of the monastery ... and who have not tarnished themselves with devotion to the 'Russian world,'" the metropolitan said.

Epiphany claimed that the UOC is a "tool of hybrid aggression against Ukraine."

Ukraine's Ministry of Culture sought to offer similar assurances that Lavra's monastic life would continue.

The Kremlin, however, cites the termination of the UOC's lease as further proof that Russia's actions over the past year in Ukraine are justified — claiming that Russia is defending a beleaguered Orthodox population.

Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church who backed Moscow's invasion last year, has asked Pope Francis and other religious leaders to intervene in the Lavra controversy.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been ultimately loyal to the Moscow patriarch since the 17th century, though it has had broad autonomy and has strongly denounced the Russian invasion.

The independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine received formal recognition in 2019 from the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, who has the top position of honor in Orthodoxy but not the universal power of a pope. Kirill hasn't recognized the OCU as legitimate.

The UOC itself declared full independence from Moscow last year. But the OCU and its supporters say that the UOC retains strong ties and sympathies to Moscow.

The changes in the works at the Lavra received mixed reactions from frequent visitors who were at the complex on Friday.

For Oleksandr, 32, who refused to be identified with his last name, it was upsetting. He said that the UOC is clearly connected to Russia, but he personally hadn't heard any church propaganda, and he plans to attend UOC services elsewhere.

But the changes were welcomed by Oksana Naumenko, who has been working for years in the academy located in the Lavra complex. She said it fulfilled one of her lifelong dreams of having the singing and prayer at Lavra happen in the Ukrainian language.

"It is very large-scale and global event in our history. It is possible that not everyone realizes this," she said. "But perhaps our children will know at what price our religion and language are being acquired." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



MIDEAST

Daylight savings dispute leaves Lebanon with two time zones

ABBY SEWELL, BEIRUT

THE Lebanese government's last-minute decision to delay the start of daylight savings time by a month until the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan resulted in mass confusion yesterday.

With some institutions implementing the change while others refused, many Lebanese have found themselves in the position of juggling work and school schedules in different time zones — in a country that is just 88 kilometers at its widest point.

In some cases, the debate took on a sectarian nature, with many Christian politicians and institutions, including the small nation's largest church, the Maronite Church, rejecting the move.

The small Mediterranean country normally sets its clocks forward an hour on the last Sunday in March, which aligns with most European countries.

However, on Thursday Lebanon's government announced a decision by caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati to push the start of daylight savings to April 21.

No reason was given for the decision, but a video of a meeting between Mikati and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri leaked to local media showed Berri asking Mikati to postpone the implementation of daylight savings time to allow Muslims to break their Ramadan fast an hour earlier.

Mikati responds that he had made a similar proposal but goes on to say that implementing the change would be difficult as it would cause problems in airline flight schedules, to which Berri interjects, "What flights?"

After the postponement of daylight savings was announced, Lebanon's state airline, Middle East Airlines, said the departure times of all flights scheduled to leave from the Beirut airport between Sunday and April 21 would be advanced by an hour.

The country's two cellular telephone networks sent messages to people asking them to change the settings of their clocks to manual instead of automatic in order for the time not to change at midnight, although in many cases the time advanced anyway.

While public institutions, in theory, are bound

by the government's decision, many private institutions, including TV stations, schools and businesses, announced that they would ignore the decision and move to daylight savings on Sunday as previously scheduled.

Soha Yazbek, a professor at the American University of Beirut, is among many parents who have found themselves and their children now bound to different schedules.

"So now I drop my kids to school at 8 am but arrive to my work 42 km away at 7:30 am and then I leave work at 5 pm but I arrive home an hour later at 7 pm!" Yazbek wrote on Twitter, adding for the benefit of her non-Lebanese friends, "I have not gone mad, I just live in Wonderland."

Haruka Naito, a Japanese non-governmental organization worker living in Beirut, discovered she has to be in two places at the same time on Monday morning.

"I had an 8 a.m. appointment and a 9 a.m. class, which will now happen at the same time," she said. The 8 a.m. appointment for her residency paperwork is with a government agency following the official time,

while her 9 a.m. Arabic class is with an institute that is expected to make the switch to daylight savings.

The schism has led to jokes about "Muslim time" and "Christian time," while different internet search engines came up with different results early Sunday morning when queried about the current time in Lebanon.

While in many cases, the schism broke down along sectarian lines, some Muslims also objected to the change and pointed out that fasting is supposed to begin at dawn and end at sunset regardless of time zone.

Many saw the issue as a distraction from the country's larger economic and political problems.

Lebanon is in the midst of the worst financial crisis in its modern history. Three quarters of the population lives in poverty and IMF officials recently warned the country could be headed for hyperinflation if no action is taken. Lebanon has been without a president since the term of President Michel Aoun ended in late October as the parliament has failed to elect a replacement since. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1989 MILLIONS OF RUSSIANS GO TO THE POLLS



Millions of Russian voters have gone to the polls, with early results suggesting that a number of Communist candidates have been rejected by the electorate.

The Soviet parliamentary election was the first opportunity citizens ever had of casting their ballots for any but the official Communist Party candidates.

Election data available so far shows a net gain to unofficial candidates in the voting for 1,500 seats in the new Congress of People's Deputies.

Some Communist Party officials have failed to gain election and despite the absence as yet of many provincial results, there appears to be a swing against the party establishment.

These included five members of the central committee and one Politburo member.

President Mikhail Gorbachev has urged Russian newspaper and broadcasting editors "not to dramatise" the results, according to the official Tass news agency.

Soviet foreign ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov described the results as a "victory for glasnost and perestroika".

Government newspaper Izvestia welcomed early results and referred to a new era of "the dictatorship of democracy".

In a predicted landslide, Boris Yeltsin has been elected as a representative to the CPD, which was established by Mr Gorbachev.

Mr Yeltsin won in the all-Moscow constituency against the official party candidate with 89% of the vote.

The biggest majority of all in the polls was won by Telman Gdlyan, a senior prosecutor who exposed a notorious corruption case in Uzbekistan in 1988, with 86.4% of the vote.

The next biggest majority in the polls went to Valentin Dikul, once a famous trapeze artist, with 72%.

Among other elected representatives are retired ice hockey champion Anatoly Firsov, who was seeking to improve health and sports facilities.

Tass described the defeat of one regional Communist party chief in Uzbekistan in Central Asia as a "vote of no confidence".

In the Ukraine, five regional party chiefs were rejected by the voters. Among others who failed to secure their seats were the party chief in Minsk, capital of the western republic of Byelorussia.

It is reported that a Central Committee inquest is under way into the election results.

Mr Gorbachev was reported as saying that economic problems, including the budget deficit and shortages of food and consumer goods, were reasons why the authorities were criticised during the election.

One Muscovite said: "There's been nothing like this for 72 years ... and for all that time it's been nothing but blood, blood, blood."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The 1989 election saw many senior Communist Party officials defeated.

This was seen as revolutionary at the time because internal critics of the Soviet regime were able to receive a hearing and to get themselves elected.

According to the Soviet government newspaper Izvestia, turnout in most regions stood at between 80% and 85%, which was not as high as official figures for previous elections.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Investments concerning your residence will be profitable. Opportunities for travel must be carefully considered. Look into intellectual and physical games that will test your abilities.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Deception may cause disputes you can do without. Talk to your mate about a vacation and discuss the expectations of your relationship. Try to spend time with those having similar interests.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Find out exactly what's expected of you and you'll be surprised to find out how capable you are. Leave your checkbook and credit cards at home. You may find acquaintances being deceptive.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Money problems will get worse. Your questions will help you ferret out secret information. You will be extremely sentimental, and if pushed by others you may hold a lasting grudge.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Uncertainties regarding relatives will make situations uncomfortable if you attend a family function. Spend some quality time with your lover. Your creative talent will prove to be lucrative if put to proper use.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Try not to take others for granted. Tempers could get out of hand today. Try to satisfy both of your needs. You will learn a great deal from the foreigners you meet.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You need to be sure that you aren't in your present relationship because it is convenient. Accomplishment is yours if you direct yourself accordingly. Opportunities to get ahead are evident.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Stick to your own projects and by the end of the day you'll shine. You might get behind if you spend too much time debating senseless issues. You will find the perfect outfit if you shop today.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Don't be a pest or a troublemaker today. Make changes that will enhance your appearance. Strength will come from your ability to overtake just about any one.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Accomplishment is yours if you direct yourself accordingly. Your ability to come up with original ideas will bring recognition from superiors. Limitations at work might set you back.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 You will impress others with your initiative and ability to accomplish while on short business trips. Don't be afraid to speak in defense of others. Get involved in groups.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 You must deal with an emotional problem with your loved one that you have been avoiding for some time now. You may find yourself interested in more than one person.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	3	20	fine
Changchun	-4	11	fine
Chengdu	10	17	rain
Chongqing	13	16	overcast
Fuzhou	10	17	rain
Guangzhou	14	20	rain
Guiyang	7	12	overcast
Haikou	21	25	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	7	15	overcast
Harbin	-5	12	fine
Hefei	5	19	overcast
Nanjing	5	17	cloudy
Shanghai	7	16	cloudy
Taipei	14	17	rain
Wuhan	6	17	cloudy
Hong Kong	18	22	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	1	9	rain
Frankfurt	0	8	overcast
Paris	1	11	overcast
London	4	10	overcast
New York	5	13	rain

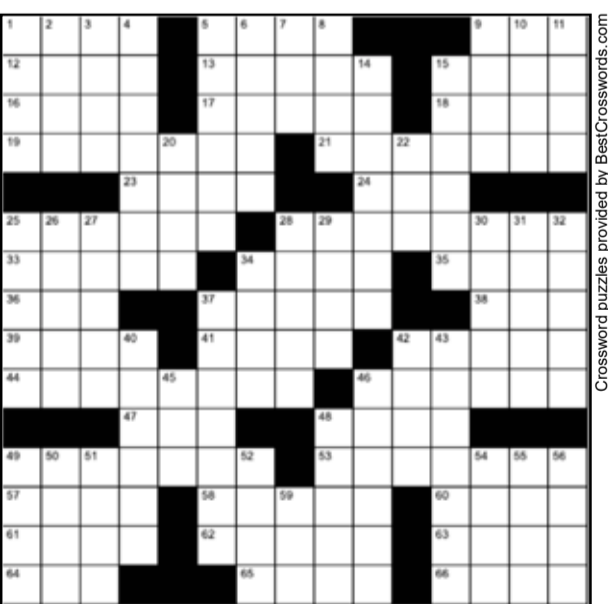
CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Psychic; 5- Purple fruit; 9- School of the future?; 12- Verge; 13- Fads; 15- Quarter, e.g.; 16- Went through, as the paper; 17- Pale; 18- Scandinavian capital city; 19- On end; 21- Large, striped female feline; 23- Ersatz butter; 24- Spending limit; 25- Turmoil; 28- Republic in S Asia; 33- Food and water; 34- Bundle; 35- Monetary unit of Greece; 36- Lao-; 37- Diamond flaw?; 38- gratias (thanks to God); 39- never work; 41- Gorge; 42- Reduces speed; 44- Concentrated extracts; 46- Evening party; 47- Beverage commonly drunk in England; 48- Dollop; 49- Group within a group; 53- Goes back on; 57- Concerning; 58- Boredom; 60- Back; 61- Hebrew month; 62- Checking out; 63- Quechua speaker; 64- Pop's partner; 65- Literary collection; Abbr.; 66- Contented sighs;

DOWN 1- Withered; 2- Garden spot; 3- Mild oath; 4- Conifer native to California; 5- Entreaty; 6- Cow catcher; 7- Exclamation of disgust; 8- Bump into; 9- Wine choice; 10- Lubricates; 11- Nephew of Abel; 14- Giggle; 15- Stiff; 20- poor Yorick; 22- Moo goo pan; 25- Free; 26- Nuisances; 27- Stagers; 28- Components; 29- Cosmetic additive; 30- English royal house; 31- having fun yet?; 32- Snare; 34- Highland hillside; 37- One on the run; 40- Mailed communique; 42- Before long; 43- Republic in W Africa; 45- Marshal at Waterloo; 46- Sled; 48- Hog sound; 49- Former name of Thailand; 50- Go back, in a way; 51- "Dracula" author Stoker; 52- "Orinoco Flow" singer; 54- Actress Rowlands; 55- Individually; 56- Ladies of Sp.; 59- Diarist Anais;

Friday's solution

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



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PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731	
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300	
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FOOTBALL

Macau loses friendly to Singapore after almost four-year hiatus

RENATO MARQUES

MACAU 0, SINGAPORE 1

AFTER an almost four-year hiatus, the national Macau football team has returned to the field for an International "A" friendly match against Singapore, which the city-state won by 1-0.

The Macau Football Association (MFA) has said the match is part of the local team's preparation for the 2026 World Cup Asian first-round qualifiers.

The last time the Macau team played an official match was June 19, 2019, against Sri Lanka, winning the match 1-0 with a goal by defender Filipe Duarte.

Then came the theatrical coup many in Macau would remember.

The MFA decided against travel to Sri Lanka for the se-



cond leg of the elimination round, claiming a lack of safety in the country after a terror attack that claimed the lives of 250 people one month earlier on April 21, 2019.

The non-consensual decision not only eliminated Macau from the competition, adding a defeat due to absence from the Sri Lankan match, but also caused several other shockwaves for the team which eventually diminished with the Covid-19 outbreak that stopped all activity.

Still, later that year, the MFA signed a new coach for

the local team; Luso-Angolan Lázaro Oliveira.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 situation, Lázaro Oliveira returned to Portugal in March 2020, only returning to Macau to resume team preparations in mid-December last year after local authorities ended border restrictions and quarantine on arrival.

Oliveira said he is still adjusting to the local and very different reality in which all players are amateurs and there is little time available to train and practice.

To the same news agency,

the coach expressed wishes that more friendly matches could be organized to give the team enough preparation before facing the first match of the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup in mid-October this year.

As for players, the coach is now contacting several Macau residents currently abroad hoping to enlist them for the important upcoming matches.

Macau currently occupies the 182nd position in FIFA ranking while Singapore is a few places above at 160th place.

FOOTBALL

NEW ZEALAND BEATS CHINA 2-1 IN FRIENDLY MATCH

New Zealand broke a lengthy scoring drought and won for the first time in more than a year yesterday when it beat China 2-1 in a home football friendly.

The first match between the teams was drawn 0-0 and New Zealand had gone 581 minutes without a goal when Matthew Garbett ran onto a chipped pass from captain Joe Bell, chested the ball down and struck it home with his left boot.

New Zealand had taken a 1-0 lead in the 43rd minute with an own goal by China center back Zhu Chenjie.

Marco Rojas had curled the ball towards the back post where New Zealand

defender Michael Baxall was up hunting for the header. But Chenjie went high and managed only to head the ball into the bottom corner of the net.

China rallied late with a goal to Ba Dun in stoppage time but too late to change the outcome.

New Zealand had its first win over China in more than 30 years and a triumph for Denmark-based Bell as captain and Danny Bazeley as interim coach.

"I think we were all aware we needed to score more goals," Bell said. "There were two today, should have been three maybe."

"I think it was good and we're a team which is adaptable against all formations." **MDT/AP**

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FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS

OPINION

The Conversation

Ryan Herzog, Gonzaga University



FEDERAL RESERVE'S 'SOFT LANDING' GOAL HAS BECOME BUMPIER

U.S. Federal Reserve policymakers have targeted a "soft landing" for the U.S. economy since beginning their effort a year ago to tame runaway inflation by hiking interest rates. That is, they believed they could do so without sending the U.S. into recession.

But the Fed's decision to raise rates by a quarter point on March 22, 2023, and modestly lift its projection for how much higher they will go in 2024 does little to ease the growing concerns about the health of regional banks.

As an economist who studies the macroeconomy, I believe this makes the soft landing scenario less likely.

The Fed's latest moves suggest policymakers don't expect the banking sector stress to spill over into the broader economy.

Had it believed so, it probably would have paused its rate hikes entirely.

Chair Jerome Powell, in a press conference following the announcement, assured the public that the banking system is strong, sound, resilient and has ample capital.

But the hike, paired with the acknowledgment of banking sector uncertainty, acts against those very assurances by creating additional stress. It will shrink lenders' profit margins as the cost of funding continues to rise and tighter credit conditions force banks to dial back on lending.

This will be felt most by smaller regional banks and the communities they serve. Regional banks are a valuable source of credit for small businesses and mortgage lenders. As credit conditions tighten, it is becoming more likely the Fed may have been too aggressive in raising rates over the past year.

And while the Fed has said it stands at the ready to provide liquidity to banks, that won't stop depositors from moving their money into safer institutions offering higher returns – which increases the risk of further bank runs, similar to those that felled Silicon Valley Bank.

Recession risks rising

In congressional testimony also on March 22, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the U.S. has no plans to provide "blanket insurance" for all deposits regardless of size – the current limit is US\$250,000 – after earlier reports suggested that it might do just that.

Markets reacted badly to this news, coming at about the same time as the Fed decision.

Investors such as Bill Ackman worried this will lead to an acceleration of deposits fleeing regional banks.

In the end, I believe the rate hike will cause more harm in the banking sector than the Fed anticipates. And this reduces the likelihood of a soft landing – and increases the odds of recession.

France announced it is banning the "recreational" use of TikTok, Twitter, Instagram and other apps on government employees' phones because of concern about insufficient data security measures.

The move follows similar restrictions on TikTok in democratic countries amid fears about the popular video-sharing app's Chinese connections. But the French decision also encompassed other platforms widely used by government officials, lawmakers and President Emmanuel Macron himself.

The French Minister for Transformation and Public Administration, Stanislas Guerini, said in a statement that "recreational" apps aren't secure enough to be used in state administrative services and "could present a risk for the protection of data."

The ban will be monitored by France's cybersecurity agency. The statement did not specify which apps are banned but noted that the decision came after other governments took measures targeting TikTok.

Guerini's office said in a message to The Associated Press that the ban also will include Twitter, Instagram, Netflix, gaming apps like Candy Crush and dating apps.

Exceptions will be allowed. If an official wants to use a banned app for professional purposes, like public communication, they can request permission to do so.

Case in point: Guerini posted the announcement of the ban on Twitter.

PLANETS ON PARADE: FIVE WILL BE LINED UP IN NIGHT SKY THIS WEEK

MADDIE BURAKOFF, SCIENCE WRITER

KEEP an eye to the sky this week for a chance to see a planetary hangout.

Five planets — Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Uranus and Mars — will line up near the moon.

WHERE AND WHEN CAN YOU SEE THEM?

The best day to catch the whole group is Tuesday. You'll want to look to the western horizon right after sunset, said NASA astronomer Bill Cooke.

The planets will stretch from the horizon line to around halfway up the night sky. But don't be late: Mercury and Jupiter will quickly dip below the horizon around half an hour after sunset.

The five-planet spread can be seen from anywhere on Earth, as long as you have clear skies and a view of the west.

"That's the beauty of these planetary alignments. It doesn't take much," Cooke said.



DO I NEED BINOCULARS?

Maybe. Jupiter, Venus and Mars will all be pretty easy to see since they shine brightly, Cooke said. Venus will be one of the brightest things in the sky, and Mars will be hanging out near the moon with a reddish glow. Mercury and Uranus could be trickier to spot, since they will be dimmer. You'll probably need to grab a pair of binoculars.

If you're a "planet collector," it's a rare chance to spot Uranus, which

usually isn't visible, Cooke said. Look out for its green glow just above Venus.

DOES THIS HAPPEN OFTEN?

Different numbers and groups of planets line up in the sky from time to time. There was a five-planet lineup last summer and there's another one in June, with a slightly different makeup.

This kind of alignment happens when the planets' orbits line them up on one side of the sun from Earth's perspective, Cooke said. MDT/AP



Germany An increased number of travelers boarded trains and planes yesterday, a day before a major one-day strike that aims to bring the country's transportation system to a standstill. But even advance travel was met with disruption in some places as Munich airport already shut down because of the impending strike today, and technical problems affecting German airline Lufthansa in Frankfurt led to flight delays and cancellations at the country's biggest airport.



Israel A good governance group yesterday asked the country's Supreme Court to punish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for allegedly violating a conflict of interest agreement meant to prevent him from dealing with the country's judiciary while he is on trial for corruption. The request by the Movement for Quality Government in Israel intensifies a brewing showdown between Netanyahu's government and the judiciary, which it is trying to overhaul in a contentious plan that has sparked widespread opposition. Tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets, military and business leaders have spoken out against it and leading allies of Israel have voiced concerns.

Venezuela's attorney general said that 21 people, including senior officials in the government of President Nicolás Maduro and business leaders, have been arrested in connection with a corruption scheme involving international oil sales. Prosecutor Tarek William Saab said the alleged scheme involved selling Venezuelan oil through the country's cryptocurrency oversight agency in parallel to the state-run Petróleos de Venezuela SA.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein



Cyborgs, anyone? Models present creations from Chinese fashion studio D. Martina Queen during a show at China Fashion Week in Beijing, yesterday.