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BUILDING AT CALÇADA DO GAIO RESUMES CONSTRUCTION, GUIA LIGHTHOUSE PROTECTION GROUP PROTESTS TO UNESCO

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AVIATION INDUSTRY'S CHIEF TASK IS TO RESTORE PRE-PANDEMIC VOLUME: PUN

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THE CURRENT OPERATION OF THE LIGHT RAIL IS STABLE, PROVIDING AROUND 32,000 TRIPS PER WEEK, SECRETARY ROSÁRIO SAID

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Indonesian football players and fans reacted with tears and outrage after the country was stripped of hosting rights for the Under-20 World Cup only eight weeks before the start of the tournament amid political turmoil over Israel's participation, leaving Indonesian soccer at risk of further sanctions. The youth soccer event was expected to be a rare turn for a country that hasn't been to the World Cup since winning independence.



UAE Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the president of the United Arab Emirates, appointed his eldest son Khaled (pictured) as crown prince of Abu Dhabi yesterday [Macau time], placing him as next in line to take over as the leader of the federation. The state-run WAM news agency announced the appointment of Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan as crown prince, without providing further details.



Russia's Gazprom is increasing gas supplies to China and expects soon to reach the maximum planned level through a Siberian pipeline, its chairman said, highlighting Beijing's importance as his country's top export market in the face of Western sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine. Gazprom is negotiating with China over a possible additional supply project across neighboring Mongolia, Viktor Zubkov (pictured) said at the Boao Forum. He said the company is open to serving other Asian markets.

More on backpage

TURBULENCE

Taiwan's Tsai transcontinental trip to Latin America, via US, has all ingredients to be a bumpy one. But despite warnings of retaliation from Beijing, Premier Li tempered the rhetoric in Boao by saying, 'Chaos and conflict must not happen in Asia' P8-9



REAL ESTATE

END OF TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS HELPS REVIVE PROPERTY MARKET

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CLEAN ENERGY

ROOM-TEMPERATURE SUPERCONDUCTORS COULD REVOLUTIONIZE ELECTRONICS

MASSOUD PEDRAM,
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA

SUPERCONDUCTORS make highly efficient electronics, but the ultralow temperatures and ultrahigh pressures required to make them work are costly and difficult to implement. Room-temperature superconductors promise to change that.

The recent announcement by researchers at the University of Rochester of a new material that is a superconductor at room temperature, albeit at high pressure, is an exciting development – if proved. If the material or one like it works reliably and can be economically mass-produced, it could revolutionize electronics.

Room-temperature superconducting materials would lead to many new possibilities for practical applications, including ultra-efficient electricity grids, ultrafast and energy-efficient computer chips, and ultrapowerful magnets that can be used to levitate trains and control fusion reactors.

A superconductor is a material that conducts direct current without encountering any electrical resistance. Resistance is the property of the material that hinders the flow of electricity. Traditional superconductors must be cooled to extremely low temperatures, close to absolute zero.

In recent decades, researchers have developed so-called high-temperature superconductors, which only have to be chilled to minus-10 degrees Fahrenheit (minus-23 Celsius). Though easier to work with than traditional superconductors, high-temperature superconductors still require special thermal equipment. In addition to cold temperatures, these materials require very high pressure, 1.67 million times more than the atmospheric pressure of 14.6 pounds per square inch (1 bar).

As the name suggests, room-temperature superconductors don't need special equipment to cool them. They do need to be pressurized, but only to a level that's about 10,000 times more than atmospheric pressure. This pressure can be achieved by using strong metallic casings.



WHERE SUPERCONDUCTORS ARE USED

Superconductor electronics refers to electronic devices and circuits that use superconducting materials to achieve extremely high levels of performance and energy efficiency that are orders of magnitude better than can be achieved with state-of-the-art semiconductor devices and circuits.

The lack of electrical resistance in superconducting material means that they can support high electrical currents without any energy loss due to resistance. This efficiency makes superconductors very attractive for power transmission.

Utility provider Commonwealth Edison installed high-temperature superconducting transmission lines and showcased technologies to bring power to Chicago's north side for a one-year trial period. Compared to conventional copper wire, the upgraded superconducting wire can carry 200 times the electrical current. But the cost of maintaining the low temperatures and high pressures required for today's superconductors makes even this efficiency gain impractical in most cases.

Because the resistance of a superconductor is zero, if a current is applied to a superconducting loop, the current will persist forever unless the loop is broken. This phenomenon can be used in va-

rious applications to make large permanent magnets.

Today's magnetic resonance imaging machines use superconductor magnets to achieve the magnetic field strength of a few teslas, which is needed for accurate imaging. For comparison, the Earth's magnetic field has a strength, or flux density, of about 50 microteslas. The magnetic field produced by the superconducting magnet in a 1.5 tesla MRI machine is 30,000 times stronger than that produced by the Earth.

The scanner uses the superconducting magnet to generate a magnetic field that aligns hydrogen nuclei in a patient's body. This process combined with radio waves produces images of tissue for an MRI exam. The strength of the magnet directly affects the strength of the MRI signal. A 1.5 tesla MRI machine requires longer scan times to create clear images than a 3.0 tesla machine.

Superconducting materials expel magnetic fields from inside themselves, which makes them powerful electromagnets. These super-magnets have the potential to levitate trains. Superconducting electromagnets generate 8.3 tesla magnetic fields – more than 100,000 times the Earth's magnetic field. The electromagnets use a current of 11,080 amperes to produce the field, and a superconducting coil allows the high

currents to flow without losing any energy. The Yamanashi superconducting Maglev train in Japan levitates 4 inches (10 centimeters) above its guideway and travels at speeds up to 311 mph (500 kph).

Superconducting circuits are also a promising technology for quantum computing because they can be used as qubits. Qubits are the basic units of quantum processors, analogous to but much more powerful than transistors in classical computers. Companies such as D-Wave Systems, Google and IBM have built quantum computers that use superconducting qubits. Though superconducting circuits make good qubits, they pose some technological challenges to making quantum computers with large numbers of qubits. A key issue is the need to keep the qubits at very low temperatures, which requires the use of large cryogenic devices known as dilution refrigerators.

PROMISE OF ROOM-TEMPERATURE SUPERCONDUCTORS

Room-temperature superconductors would remove many of the challenges associated with the high cost of operating superconductor-based circuits and systems and make it easier to use them in the field.

Room-temperature supercon-

ductors would enable ultra high-speed digital interconnects for next-generation computers and low-latency broadband wireless communications. They would also enable high-resolution imaging techniques and emerging sensors for biomedical and security applications, materials and structure analyses, and deep-space radio astrophysics.

Room-temperature superconductors would mean MRIs could become much less expensive to operate because they would not require liquid helium coolant, which is expensive and in short supply. Electrical power grids would be at least 20% more power efficient than today's grids, resulting in billions of dollars saved per year, according to my estimates. Maglev trains could operate over longer distances at lower costs. Computers would run faster with orders of magnitude lower power consumption. And quantum computers could be built with many more qubits, enabling them to solve problems that are far beyond the reach of today's most powerful supercomputers.

Whether and how soon this promising future of electronics can be realized depends in part on whether the new room-temperature superconductor material can be verified – and whether it can be economically mass-produced.

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Building at Calçada do Gaio resumes construction

RENATO MARQUES

THE building at Calçada do Gaio 18-20, which has been embroiled in a long-running dispute regarding the development height, has finally resumed construction. Construction was halted for years due to claims that the project interfered with the UNESCO-classified heritage site of the Guia Lighthouse and Fortress at Guia Hilltop.

The construction has been granted a license for the conclusion of the works valid from February 9, 2023, until January 10, 2026.

In the license, it is stipulated that the building will have 20 floors (which will put the building top at a height of about 81 meters above sea level) as well as two basement floors and it has the main purpose of serving as a residential building.

The permit for the number of floors in the project means that the building will keep its current height and will not be partially demolished beyond the height of 52.5 meters above the sea-level, as advocated by the "Concern Group for the Protection of the Guia Lighthouse" (Concern Group) and allied organizations.

The height cap of 52.5 meters



RENATO MARQUES

above the sea level comes from a dispatch (83/2008) from Chief Executive Edmund Ho that stated such a restriction concerning the UNESCO's directives regarding the heritage protec-

tion of Guia Lighthouse.

As the works progress and the building owner starts to prepare the conclusion of the building which will have several changes when compared to the original

project, the Concern Group has written a new letter to UNESCO protesting, once again, the decision of the government and arguing precisely that the cap enforced in 2008 is not being honored.

In the original project, the building had a total of 36 floors and would be limited to a maximum height of 126 meters, a reason that originally led the government to embargo the construction some 15 years ago.

In their letter, the Concern Group noted that the cap was a solemn commitment in 2008 not only by the Macau government but by China's central government, adding, "Regrettably, the present Macau SAR government officials are eager to forget this and try their best to allow this building to finish at its current height."

The group is calling for UNESCO intervention to avoid irreversible damage from being caused to the visual integrity of the listed heritage property.

After 14 years embargoed, the Cultural Heritage Committee has finally given the green light to the revamped project in June last year having consequently followed the procedures to obtain the licenses that allow construction to resume at the site.

CE TO ATTEND PLENARY SESSION APR. 14

The Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng will attend a plenary session of the Legislative Assembly (AL) on April 14 to answer Legislative Assembly members' questions on government policy and social issues, the Government Information Bureau has announced in a statement. The CE regularly attends question-and-answer sessions at the AL in a bid to enhance "communication with AL members, optimise administrative transparency and update the public [on] the progress of government work." The session will start at 3 p.m. and will be broadcast live on television and radio channels of public broadcaster Teledifusão de Macau (TDM).

EXPORTS REACHED MOP1.03B IN FEBRUARY

The total merchandise export value for Macau amounted to MOP1.03 billion in February 2023, up by 2.3% year-on-year. The value of re-exports (MOP934 million) grew by 7.7%, of which re-exports of Articles for casino and Beauty, cosmetic & skincare products jumped by 262.0% and 134.5% respectively. For the first two months of the year, the total value of merchandise export decreased by 20.9% year-on-year to MOP1.93 billion, of which the value of re-exports (MOP1.74 billion) and domestic exports (MOP188 million) dropped by 17.0% and 44.9% respectively, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

FIVE TO EIGHT TROPICAL CYCLONES THIS MONSOON SEASON

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) forecasts that the monsoon season this year may start before mid-June, earlier than the average, with between five and eight tropical cyclones estimated to affect Macau. A cyclone graded at a level above violent typhoon in severity may be witnessed. The La Nina phenomenon in the equatorial Pacific is fading and may develop into an El Nino phenomenon in the summer. Considering the effects of global warming, the temperature during the rainy season (April to September) this year may be normal or higher. The accumulated precipitation will be normal, but there is a possibility of extreme heavy rainfall.

SECRETARY LEI PROMOTES HENGQIN DEVELOPMENT IN BOAO FORUM

The Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, attended the opening ceremony of the 2023 Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan yesterday. Lei met with Ni Qiang, vice governor of Hainan province, to communicate about the economic development, major industries, and construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and free trade in Hainan. Lei also visited the exhibition hall in Jiangdong's new district, Haikou. The forum will continue until today, with a theme of "an uncertain world: solidarity and cooperation for development amid challenges".

F&B

Wing Lei Palace, Sichuan Moon secure spots in Asia's 50 Best Restaurants

WYNN Macau's Wing Lei Palace has climbed up seven places to No. 39 in the ranking of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, and has been named "The Best Restaurant in Macau". The ranking was announced at a live awards ceremony in Singapore: the first full-scale live awards event in Asia since the pandemic.

Wynn Palace's Sichuan Moon re-enters the rankings at No. 43. Le Du in Bangkok has secured the coveted No. 1 spot in Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, while Sezanne in Tokyo and Bangkok's Nusara secured second and third place, respectively.

The 2023 list spans 19 cities and includes seven new entries. Singapore and Bangkok both have the highest number of entries on the list at nine restaurants each.

"There is quite a lot of change in the list," William Drew, director of content at 50 Best, said in an interview, as cited in a Bloomberg report.

"The lists have been more based on local votes over the last couple of years because of the travel restrictions — and this year it's almost a return to normal." Though, he added, "we can't pretend that this list is not affected by the pandemic and travel restrictions."



Wing Lei Palace

For Drew, it has taken some time for chefs to embrace the movement of local sourcing in Asia. However, adjustments have been made, as is evident on this year's list. "It's less about impor-

ting what might be called traditional luxury ingredients, and much more the luxury of finding the quality that is around you," he said. "That's something that will continue to develop, because

cities like Singapore and Hong Kong have traditionally imported a lot. They're doing so less now, as restaurants that are embracing more [local produce] are seeing greater success."

AVIATION INDUSTRY'S CHIEF TASK IS TO RESTORE PRE-PANDEMIC VOLUME: PUN WA KIN

RENATO MARQUES

THE most important task and challenge that the local aviation industry faces is to be able to restore, as soon as possible, flight volumes to the levels seen before the Covid-19 pandemic, the new president of the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM), Pun Wa Kin, told the media on the sidelines of his swearing-in ceremony yesterday.

The newly-inaugurated president of AACM noted that, compared to the pre-pandemic era, Macau has few international connections operating and that during the pandemic and for a long period, only flights to Singapore were operational, a fact that caused a major disruption of the systems and structures into place, namely those that support the airlines.

According to Pun, the industry has so far recovered some 50% of its capacity but this is a process that is happening gradually and not suddenly, emphasizing that "it will take some time until the aviation industry can recover completely."

Questioned by the media as to applications by airlines to explore new routes, Pun said that for

RENATO MARQUES



the time being, no applications are being filled for such a purpose, adding that all the new flights currently being added are related to routes previously approved or operating and that have been temporarily suspended.

Still, he is confident that, after the resumption of old routes is complete, new routes should come in due course.

Pun also said that one of the tasks that the industry will have in the upcoming times is to be able to establish greater cooperation with the neighboring regions and cities, namely within the Greater Bay Area so that Macau can fulfill the duty of the government policies that aim to attract more overseas tourists.

Commenting on the expecta-

tion for this year, Pun said that while the figures show already an increase in the number of passengers carried in the first quarter of this year, it is likely that these numbers will continue to increase especially during the second half of this year.

Pun's swearing-in ceremony was held yesterday at the AACM office in NAPE in the presence of

the Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário.

In his speech after the inauguration, Pun expressed gratitude for the trust and support and pledged to continue upholding the principles of "Integrity, Responsibility, Professionalism and Teamwork" to ensure the development and the safety of Macau's aviation industry.

He also said that he hopes that the Macau International Airport can continue to improve its infrastructure, optimize the travel environment and provide more diversified aviation products for Macau and the neighboring regions.

Pun graduated from the University of Kansas in the US with a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering. He later received a Master's degree in Public Administration jointly awarded by Peking University and the National School of Administration.

He joined AACM in 1998 and held, since then, several posts, the most relevant being acting director of Flight Standards and Licensing (2006) and vice president since June 2019.



ANTHONY LAM

TRANSPORT

LRT operation 'stable' at 32,000 trips per week

RENATO MARQUES

THE current operation of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) is stable and provides around 32,000 trips per week, the Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário said on the sidelines of the swearing-in ceremony of Pun Wa Kin as the new president of

the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM).

Speaking to the media, Rosário said that from those 32,000 trips per week, there is an average of about 4,000 per day during the weekdays and some 6,000 per day on the weekends, noting that the figure has been stable over the past few weeks and months.

Questioned about when the LRT can carry more passengers and be more relevant in the transportation of both residents and tourists, the Secretary remarked that this would only happen when the Seac Pai Van Line, which is currently under construction, enters into operation.

"After the Seac Pai Van

Line enters into operation it is believed that the number of passengers will gradually increase, but still it is estimated that won't reach the 30,000 trips per day as reached during the period the LRT was operating with free tickets," he noted, adding that some stations are having advertising banners installed and others to help to increase the revenue of the LRT company.

Also questioned as to whether the government has already come to a final decision on the construction, or not, of Zone D or the new urban landfills in Taipa, Rosário said that a final decision is yet to be made and will be announced in due course.

He did not have much to add regarding the project of the expansion of the airport that is being prepared, although the Secretary noted that, in this case, the Airport Company will have the responsibility of designing, building, and operating the project, with the role of the government only to submit the plan to the central government for approval.

BUSINESS

SASA TO OPEN UP TO SEVEN NEW STORES IN HK, MACAU

SASA is set to open between five and seven new stores across Hong Kong and Macau this year, after its network in the cities shrank by a third in the past three years to about 80 stores due to border closures.

Chief financial officer Danny Ho said that city also faces long-term challenges, including Chinese consumers shifting to buying more online and the rise of rival shopping hubs in Macau and on the duty-free island of Hainan, according to a report issued by The Straits Times.

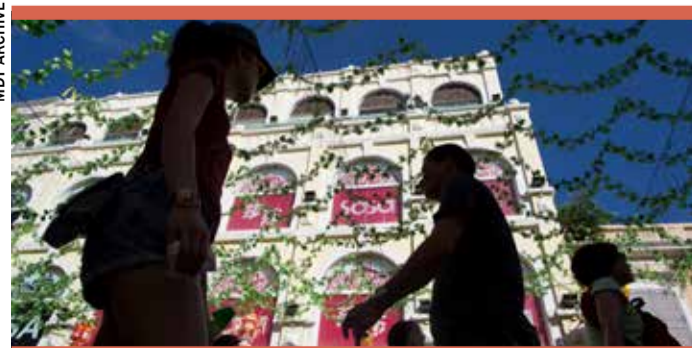
In anticipation of a slow return of tourists, Sasa has

been shifting its focus to local consumers, including selling more personal care products such as shampoo and shower gel in addition to the cosmetics and skincare products typically favoured by tourists, Ho said.

"We're making sure that we expand to other channels," Ho said. While more tourists will come back to Hong Kong, "we have quite a conservative outlook, so we are not banking on that."

Both SARs have recorded a plunge in tourist arrivals amid China's strict zero-Covid strategy, leading to low retail sales in both cities. LV

MDT ARCHIVE



CENTALINE

Travel restrictions lift helps revive property market

ANTHONY LAM

THE relaxation of travel restrictions has led to a resurgence of transactions involving both first-hand and used residential units in Macau, an executive of a regional realtor said yesterday.

John Ng, district director for Residential Department of Centaline Property, recapped residential market details during the first quarter. He said that, with travel restrictions lifted, transactions of both first-hand and used units have accelerated, with used units reviving even earlier.

During the first two months, prices for used units climbed up about 5% on average, according to his estimate. He further anticipates this year's rise in prices to compensate for the drop last year, should the rise continue.

In addition, he expects the number of transactions to reach about 900 for the entire first



quarter, with a 17% rise year-over-year. Government data showed that in January and February city saw 205 and 319 transactions.

Ng added that market atmosphere is quite heated, which could be seen in several new estates that opened in March having at-

tracted numerous buyers, who opted mostly for smaller units, such as studio flat and one-room units. The three and four-room units at Nova Grand has only been half-sold, the realtor added.

In contrast, more buyers of large units were seen in the used unit market, with "a significant rise"

in the number of such buyers. Ng also pointed out that the heat in the used unit market has boosted up the new unit market as well, encouraging developers to offer more units for sale.

Moreover, more corporate customers were looking for residential units. They were either

buying the units for investments or to use as team dormitories. The realtor revealed that in a prime residential estate in the Mong-ha district, 14 units held by a single company have recently seen rising requests from several companies. However, the realtor did not announce that deals were made.

The realtor also defended developers' move to offer promotional prices, which was not out of pessimism over the future, but to release stocks to the market to generate demands first.

On commercial and industrial units, Roy Ho, principal director of the realtor's Macau and Zhuhai offices, pointed out that in the first quarter, the city saw 53% fewer transactions in the industrial unit market year-over-year.

As for shops, the first quarter saw large-scale leases in tourism and casino districts, with 14 cases involving units of over HKD200,000 monthly rental and two cases involving HKD1 million. Ho recalled that a whole building was leased to a boutique for HKD1.5 million rental per month.

Chen Ruifan, deputy general manager of the realtor's office in Hengqin, revealed that more units would be released in the rest of this year, hinting at further prosperity ahead.

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DSAT OPEN TO REGULATING SUBSTITUTE DRIVER SERVICES

ANTHONY LAM

THE Transport Bureau (DSAT) is open to regulating substitute driver services, bureau director Lam Hin San said yesterday on the sidelines of a parliamentary meeting.

Substitute driver services involve the provision of a replacement driver to drive a private car when the owner has consumed alcoholic drinks or when they feel too fatigued to drive.

Recently, a fatal car accident took place involving a motorcycle and a car bearing the logo of a driver replacement service.

In light of this incident, the question of regulating similar services was raised. To which, Lam assured that the bureau would "humbly listen to social discussions on regulating the service and its road safety."

He then resorted to the lack of similar regulations in nearby places to hint that local regulations will only be available "at a suitable time in the future."

He also believed that there is no breach of law by the service. He believes insurance and legal responsibilities in accidents can



be clarified, adding that the driver will be held responsible for any accident.

Lam emphasized that pursuant to the Road Transport Law and the Taxi Law, substitute driver services do not constitute illegal car hiring. He cited the fact that illegal car hiring uses drivers' own vehicles, while substitute driver services use customers' vehicles.

When asked about the government's lack of preparedness for the easing of traffic near the Pearl of the Orient area, Lam blamed the Covid-19 pandemic for the

impression, which he regards as a misapprehension, of congestion having become more serious.

Near 20 years ago, when the idea of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge was first discussed, public submissions had already suggested that the government to prepare for a possible escalation of traffic congestion in the area.

On roadside parking license, the government will either temporarily extend existing contracts or open a short-term tender to cope with the new law currently being developed at the parliament.

HEALTH

GOV'T: MACAU ACHIEVES UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU has achieved the universal health coverage (UHC) target, Chou Mei Fong, head of Hac Sa Wan Health Centre, has said.

UHC, as raised by the World Health Organization (WHO), means that all people can access a full range of quality health services they need whenever and wherever they are without financial hardship.

According to Chou, the child health outpatient consultation service served 54,000 people last year, while the numbers for adult health and prenatal care were 330,000 and 21,000, respectively. The women's health outpatient consultation service has served 43,000 people and provided cervical cancer screening for over 11,000 women. She said that as the community healthcare service has expanded, the usage of special medical services and the rate of hospitalization has decreased.

With the biggest service volume among all health centers and stations, Hac Sa Wan heal-



th center has served 149,800 people in outpatient consultations last year. The number of registrations at the health center is over 158,900.

To actively respond to the goal of "health for all" in the Alma-Ata Declaration (1978), the Health Bureau established the principle that each health facility should cover 50,000 to 70,000 people, and should be accessible via a 15- to 20-minute walk. The government has undertaken substantial work on community healthcare and disease prevention during the past 30 years, said Chou.

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TECH

China e-commerce giant Alibaba outlines future strategy

TOP executives of Chinese e-commerce and financial giant Alibaba said yesterday that the company is moving toward giving up control of some of its business units in a transition toward becoming a capital operator to optimize the value of its sprawling businesses.

Alibaba CEO Daniel Zhang outlined details of a plan announced earlier this week to split Alibaba into six main groups as a prelude toward stock listings of some of its companies.

The restructuring marks a new stage in Alibaba's growth after a series of setbacks as regulators cracked down on it and other tech companies.

Alibaba, whose headquarters is in the eastern city of Hangzhou, will be "in the nature of a holding company that is the controlling shareholder of the business group companies," Zhang said in a conference call.

Alibaba's CFO, Toby Xu, said the company would continue to evaluate the strategic importance of group companies after they go public and decide whether or not to retain control. He declined to say when they might go public.

"We believe the market is the best litmus test, so each business group company can pursue independent fundraising and IPOs as and when they are ready," Xu said.

Alibaba's stock prices in Hong Kong and New York have rallied nearly 15% since the restructuring was announced Tuesday. The firm's Hong Kong-listed stock added another 2.26% yesterday.

The plan, and the recent return of Alibaba founder Jack Ma to China after months abroad appear to mark a turnaround after several hard years. Chinese regulators singled out Alibaba for scrutiny in a crackdown on technology and internet companies, putting the brakes on a planned initial public

AP FILE PHOTO



offering in 2020 of Alibaba's financial affiliate Ant Group.

Ma had kept a low profile with few public appearances since Nov. 2020, when he had publicly criticized China's regulators and financial systems during a speech in Shanghai.

Ant had been set to raise \$34.5 billion in what would have been the world's largest share offering at the time. Alibaba was later investigated and fined \$2.8 billion for breaching antitrust rules as Chinese authorities cracked down on the once-freewheeling technology industry.

"The looser connections between the business units is in line with the regulatory stance of en-

couraging competition," said an analyst's note from Moody's Investor Service.

Alibaba is to split into its Cloud Intelligence Group, Taobao Tmall Business Group, Local Services Group, Global Digital Business Group, Cainiao Smart Logistics and Digital Media and Entertainment Group. Each group apart from Taobao Tmall could potentially seek an initial public offering. Taobao Tmall will remain wholly-owned by Alibaba Group.

Among other things, the restructuring plan might allay past antitrust concerns, since as Zhang explained, each Alibaba business unit would be empowered to make its own decisions and

raise capital independently. He said that having business units operate independently should also foster innovation and growth after years of harsh COVID-19 restrictions that battered China's economy.

Alibaba's restructure — the first of its kind in the Chinese technology industry — also could serve as an example for similar companies such as online games company Tencent to follow suit. Tencent's shares rallied after Alibaba's announcement on Monday.

"We think that Alibaba's new organizational structure could be used by Chinese regulators as a template for other Chinese Big

Tech firms," said a report by CreditSights.

Francis Lun, CEO of Geo Securities in Hong Kong, said that in the short term Alibaba's move will likely allow the group to raise more capital. But it might be more difficult for the company to stay competitive in mergers and acquisitions.

"When you split into six business units, you'd just be a lightweight competing against the heavyweights such as Apple, Amazon and Alphabet," Lun said.

He pointed out that only Alibaba's e-commerce and cloud units were profitable and that in the long-term, the other units may not succeed. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Program students at Melco receive recognition in martial arts competition



The coach of the Splendors of China Passport Program's Kung Fu Class, Benny Lei, director, Business Risk, led a team of three student participants who are also children of Melco colleagues in joining the Ninth International Wu-

DeBei Traditional WuShu Competition 2022 – Online Edition.

Participating on behalf of the Melco Reach! WuShu Team, the group attained six gold medals, two silver medals and one bronze medal.

Melco Resorts & Entertainment's Splendors of China in-house program to instill national pride and patriotism through education and awareness was launched in 2016.

Melco's Kung Fu Class is part of the company's Splendors of China Passport Program. The nationalistic learning program offers "mandatory courses on Chinese culture and history, as well as elective courses on cultural aspects of understanding China, enhanced through visits to nationalistic exhibitions, Chinese culture knowledge competitions, youth talent contests and much more," according to a statement issued by the gaming operator.

Wynn to present flavors from South of Thailand



Wynn will launch 'Enticing Explorations at Wynn' in April, presenting a series of feasts through collaboration with international celebrity chefs.

Together with three award-

winning Thai guest chefs, Wynn will kick off the tasting adventure with Savor a Taste of Thailand at Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace throughout April and will introduce a series of themed

culinary events and offerings including "Six-hand Collaboration Gala Dinner", "Guest Chef Dining Series", Thai themed buffets and drinks, bringing guests authentic flavors with modern and traditional dishes from Isan all the way to the South of Thailand.

From April 6 to 30, Thai-themed buffets will be available at Café Esplanada in Wynn Macau and Fontana in Wynn Palace.

Buns & Bubbles in Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace will also present Thai-themed drinks including Thai Bubble Milk Tea with Rainbow Jelly and Lemongrass and Lychee Soda Breeze from April 1 to 30.

AP PHOTO



“To achieve greater success, chaos and conflict must not happen in Asia.”

PREMIER LI QIANG

BOAO FORUM

PREMIER LI QIANG SAYS ECONOMY IMPROVED IN MARCH

CHINA'S new No. 2 leader said yesterday its economic recovery improved in March and tried to reassure foreign companies the country is committed to opening to the world.

Premier Li Qiang spoke before an international audience of businesspeople and politicians as the

government tries to revive business and consumer confidence after anti-virus controls that isolated China were abruptly dropped in December.

The economy showed “encouraging momentum of rebounding” in January and February, Li said at the Boao Forum for Asia on

the southern island of Hainan.

“The situation in March is even better,” Li said. He said consumption and investment picked up and “market expectations improved.”

Chinese retail sales rose 3.5% over a year earlier in January and February, recovering from De-

cember's 1.8% contraction, government data showed earlier. Spending on restaurants rose 9.2%. Growth in investment in real estate and other fixed assets accelerated to 5.5% from December's 5.1%.

Li's audience included Prime Ministers Lee Hsien Loong of Sin-

gapore, Pedro Sanchez of Spain and Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia and International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva.

A former Communist Party secretary for Shanghai, Li took office earlier this month in a once-a-decade change of government that installed loyalists of Chinese leader Xi Jinping to enforce his vision of tighter political control over the economy and society.

The premier sought to counter unease about growing state dominance in the economy and tension with the United States over security, technology and trade.

“No matter how the world situation may evolve, we will stay committed to reform, opening up and innovation-driven development,” Li said. “We welcome countries around the world to share in the opportunities and benefits that come with China's development.”

Li called China a global “anchor of peace,” a statement that conflicts with the ruling Communist Party's military buildup and menacing behavior toward Taiwan, Japan and other neighbors.

The military budget, the world's second-largest after the United States, was increased this month for a 29th straight year. Xi's government has stepped up efforts to intimidate Taiwan, which Beijing claims as part of its territory, by flying fighter jets and firing missiles into the sea near the self-ruled island democracy.

“To achieve greater success, chaos and conflict must not happen in Asia,” the premier said. “Otherwise, the future of Asia would be lost.” MDT/AP

CYBERSECURITY

Chinese-sponsored hacking group highly active: report

A Chinese hacking group that “is likely state-sponsored” and has been linked previously to attacks on U.S. state government computers is still “highly active” and is focusing on a broad range of targets that may be of strategic interest to China's government and security services, a private American cybersecurity firm said in a new report yesterday.

The hacking group, which the report calls RedGolf, shares such close overlap with groups tracked by other security companies under the names APT41 and BARIUM that it is thought they are either the same or very closely affiliated, said Jon Condra, director of strategic and persistent threats for Insikt Group, the threat research division

of Massachusetts-based cybersecurity company Recorded Future.

Following up on previous reports of APT41 and BARIUM activities and monitoring the targets that were attacked, Insikt Group said it had identified a cluster of domains and infrastructure “highly likely used across multiple campaigns by RedGolf” over the past two years.

“We believe this activity is likely being conducted for intelligence purposes rather than financial gain due to the overlaps with previously reported cyberespionage campaigns,” Condra said in an emailed response to questions from The Associated Press.

China's Foreign Ministry did not respond to a request for comment on the

allegations contained in the report. In the past, Chinese authorities have consistently denied any form of state-sponsored hacking, instead saying China itself is a major target of cyberattacks.

APT41 was implicated in a 2020 U.S. Justice Department indictment that accused Chinese hackers of targeting more than 100 companies and institutions in the U.S. and abroad, including social media and video game companies, universities and telecommunications providers.

In its analysis, Insikt Group said it found evidence that RedGolf “remains highly active” in a wide range of countries and industries, “targeting aviation, automotive, education, government, media, infor-

mation technology and religious organizations.”

Insikt Group did not identify specific victims of RedGolf, but said it was able to track scanning and exploitation attempts targeting different sectors with a version of the KEYPLUG backdoor malware also used by APT41.

Insikt said it had identified several other malicious tools used by RedGolf in addition to KEYPLUG, “all of which are commonly used by many Chinese state-sponsored threat groups.”

In 2022, the cybersecurity firm Mandiant reported that APT41 was responsible for breaches of the networks of at least six U.S. state governments, also using KEYPLUG.

In that case, APT41 exploited a previously un-

known vulnerability in an off-the-shelf commercial web application used by 18 states for animal health management, according to Mandiant, which is now owned by Google. It did not identify which states' systems were compromised.

Mandiant called APT41 “a prolific cyber threat group that carries out Chinese state-sponsored espionage activity in addition to financially motivated activity potentially outside of state control.”

Cyber intelligence companies use different tracking methodologies and often name the threats they identify differently, but Condra said APT41, BARIUM and RedGolf “likely refer to the same set of threat actor or group(s)” due to similarities in their

online infrastructure, tactics, techniques and procedures.

“RedGolf is a particularly prolific Chinese state-sponsored threat actor group that has likely been active for many years against a wide range of industries globally,” he said.

“The group has shown the ability to rapidly weaponize newly reported vulnerabilities and has a history of developing and using a large range of custom malware families.”

Insikt Group concluded that the use of KEYPLUG malware through certain types of command and control servers by RedGolf and similar groups is “highly likely to continue” and recommended that clients ensure they are blocked as soon as they are detected. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Tsai Ing-wen leaves a hotel in New York

DIRE STRAIT

China renews warnings as Taiwan's Tsai stops over in US

AS Taiwan's leader began a stopover in the United States on her way to Central America, China said it was closely watching developments and would "resolutely safeguard our sovereignty and territorial integrity."

China claims Taiwan as its own territory to be brought under its control by force if necessary, and portrays the self-governing island democracy of 23 million people as the most sensitive issue in its increasingly fraught relationship with the U.S.

Yesterday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning reiterated China's furious objections to any interactions between Tsai Ing-wen and U.S. officials.

"China firmly opposes any form of official interaction between the U.S. and Taiwan," Mao told reporters at a daily briefing. "China will continue to closely follow the situation and resolutely safeguard our sovereignty and territorial integrity."

China has particularly warned that a meeting with U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy planned for April 5 in Los Angeles would bring a strong but as yet unspecified response.

In August, Beijing responded to then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan by launching missiles, deploying warships across the median line of the Taiwan Strait and simulating a blockade

of the island. China also temporarily suspended dialogue with the U.S. on climate and other major issues and restricted military-to-military communication with the Pentagon.

Tsai's visit aims to show that Taiwan still has allies, despite China's military threats and attempts to isolate it diplomatically. Most recently, the Central American state of Honduras switched relations from Taipei to Beijing, leaving Taiwan with just 13 formal diplomatic allies.

Tsai is expected to meet with the American Institute in Taiwan chair, Laura Rosenberger. AIT is the U.S. government-run nonprofit that carries out unofficial relations with Taiwan.

While the U.S. terms relations with Taiwan as unofficial, it remains the island's chief source of military hardware and cooperation. U.S. law requires Washington to treat all threats to the island as matters of "grave concern," but does not explicitly say whether the U.S. would commit troops.

Tsai arrived in New York yesterday [Macau time] and was scheduled to spend one day in the city, but few details of the trip were made public.

The U.S. typically foregoes any official meetings with senior U.S. leaders in Washington for transit stops, as is the case for Tsai's visit.

The latest spike in tensions comes months after

the passage of what the U.S. said was a Chinese spy balloon across the U.S., which heightened questions about China's intentions. China says it was a research balloon that was blown off course, but the Biden administration ordered it shot down over the east coast and canceled a planned visit by Secretary of State Antony Blinken to China in the wake of the incident.

Along with Taiwan and frictions over trade, technology and human rights, China's close ties with Russia and its refusal to criticize Moscow's invasion of Ukraine have also increased friction between Washington and Beijing.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping visited Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow last week, underscoring the warmth of the "no-limits" relationship between the two authoritarian states announced just weeks before Russia's year-old invasion.

China has provided Russia with an economic lifeline by buying up the oil-rich country's resources. U.S. officials say they've seen indications Beijing is considering selling military hardware to Moscow, although they say there is no evidence that has happened yet.

Days after Xi's visit, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told The Associated Press he hoped to meet with Xi in Kyiv. China, which has put forward a peace proposal that says

nothing about Russia withdrawing from Ukrainian territory it has seized, gave no immediate response about whether such a visit would take place.

Also yesterday, Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Tan Kefei said Xi and Putin had reached "a number of important new points of consensus" during their Moscow meetings, laying out a "blueprint for the future of relations."

"Strategic communication and practical cooperation between the two militaries have never ceased moving toward a higher level," Tan said at a monthly briefing.

While Tan repeated China's stance that its relations with Russia do not constitute a formal alliance and were not aimed at any third parties, the two have increasingly aligned their foreign policies in a challenge to the dominance of global affairs by the U.S. and other democracies.

He also pledged regular joint air and sea patrols, exercises and training as the sides work together to implement "global security initiatives (and) jointly safeguard international fairness and justice."

China has been steadily building up its 2-million-member armed forces — already the world's largest standing military — as well as latest-generation fighter jets, aircraft carriers and highly capable warships. MDT/AP

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

Enjoy Your Easter Holidays in Style

MAKE the most of your Easter long-weekend with a scrumptious and fun-filled getaway. MGM COTAI and MGM MACAU have prepared for you and your loved ones a variety of delicacies and pastries to add a festive touch to your spring holidays.

Easter special Bunny Garden and Three Chocolate cake are ready at **Anytime** and **Pastry Bar** for you to enjoy the holiday vibes. To elevate your multi-sensory enjoyment, you can spend a relaxing afternoon under soft sunlight with an exquisite Easter tea set featuring the little chick, funny bunny and more adorable mini cakes at **Rossio** located at the stunning European-inspired Grande Praça. What's more, you can enjoy an eggs-traordinary Easter weekend with your family. Kids can have a fun art jamming session at the Chocolate Egg Painting Workshop and create their very own Easter eggs at **Anytime**.



Start your Easter Sunday with a tantalizing feast, be it a French-style lunch at the elegant and chic brasserie **Aux Beaux Arts** featuring French Onion Soup, Vol-Au-Vent and more classic dishes along with free-flow options, or a specially crafted lunch featuring Baked Eggs Shakshuka, beef dishes and refreshing spring flavors at **Grill 58** situated at the open-air Spectacle with views of the property's impressive atrium. A lavish lunch buffet is also available at **Rossio & Coast**.



With a cozy and chic ambience, both **Rossio** and **Coast** are the ideal spots to satisfy your dinner cravings. The sumptuous dinner buffets feature a wide array of delectable dishes, including Portuguese and Macanese fare and seasonal seafood, and are perfect for gatherings with family and friends.



Reservation and more details

PHILIPPINES

FERRY FIRE KILLS 31 PEOPLE; AT LEAST 7 MISSING

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

A fire broke out on a ferry in the southern Philippines and raged overnight for eight hours, killing at least 31 of the approximately 250 passengers and crew, officials said yesterday.

Many of the more than 200 people who survived the blaze jumped off the MV Lady Mary Joy 3 and were rescued from the dark sea by the coast guard, navy, a nearby ferry and local fishermen, said Gov. Jim Hataman of the southern island province of Basilan. Rescuers were still searching for at least seven missing people, he said.

Hataman said the burned ferry was towed to Basilan's shoreline, where the bodies of 18 of the 31 victims were discovered in a budget section of the passenger cabin.

"These victims perished on board due to the fire," Hataman said by telephone. He said more people may have been on the ferry who were not listed on its manifest.

The ferry's skipper, however, told coast guard officials that he tried to run the burning ferry aground on the nearest shore to allow more people to survive or

AP PHOTO



be rescued, regional coast guard commander Rejard Marfe said. The fire raged for about eight hours, he said.

The ferry was traveling to Jolo town in Sulu province from the southern port city of Zamboanga when it caught fire off Basilan close to midnight, Hataman said. At least 23 passengers were injured and taken to hospitals.

"Some of the passengers were

roused from their sleep due to the commotion caused by the fire. Some jumped off the ship," Hataman said.

The steel-hulled ferry could accommodate up to 430 people and was not overcrowded, Marfe said. According to the manifest, it was carrying 205 passengers and a 35-member crew, he said. In addition, it had a security contingent consisting of four coast

guard marshals and an unspecified number of soldiers who were not listed on the manifest for their protection, Marfe said.

He said officials are investigating whether the 33-year-old ferry was seaworthy, if there were passengers not listed on the manifest, and whether the crew properly guided passengers to safety.

Sea accidents are common

in the Philippines because of frequent storms, badly maintained vessels, overcrowding, and spotty enforcement of safety regulations, especially in remote provinces.

In December 1987, the ferry Dona Paz sank after colliding with a fuel tanker, killing more than 4,300 people in the world's worst peacetime maritime disaster. **MDT/AP**

THAILAND

Authorities use helicopters to fight mountain wildfires

THAI authorities used helicopters yesterday to try to contain a fire that overnight engulfed two mountains on largely undeveloped forest land in a province northeast of the capital Bangkok.

The fire broke out Wednesday night in Nakhon Nayok province, 114 kilometers northeast of Bangkok, but firefighters could not directly tackle it because the mountains are too steep to safely climb, especially in the darkness of night, provincial Governor Bancha Chaowarin told reporters.

"Apart from the wind's direction, I also have to look after the lives and safety of those conducting the operation. After reviewing the situation, since it is at a mountaintop, we had to retreat to standby and convene over what we can do," Bancha said late Wednesday night.

At least 10 firefighting vehicles were dispatched to battle the blaze, and they

AP PHOTO



A helicopter makes a water drop on a hot spot of a forest fire in Nakhon Nayok province, northeast of Bangkok

were joined yesterday afternoon by at least two helicopters, which surveyed the situation and dumped water.

Initial efforts to contain the blaze had concentrated

on creating firebreaks.

Bancha was quoted by the newspaper Thai Rath as saying it was initially estimated the fire could be brought under control within five days, but that

he would try to do it in just three.

Other forest fires have broken out in recent days in provinces farther north as seasonal temperatures rise, a perennial problem

that contributes to dangerously high levels of air pollution.

About 700 rai of forest in Nakhon Nayok had been burned by noon yesterday as the fire continued to smolder, Bancha said.

The fire began on a high part of Khao Chaplu mountain and then spread to the adjacent Khao Laem mountain. Local media said it burned easily because much of the growth was bamboo, and high winds fanned the flames.

The mountains sit in a vast parcel of land not far from one of the country's best known nature reserves, Khao Yai National Park. Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, Thailand's version of West Point, is close to where the fire broke out and a village of about 500 residents is about 1 kilometer from the fire site, Thai Rath reported. Residents were warned to alert officials about any wild animals they saw fleeing the burning forest.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha was closely monitoring the situation and had ordered officials and the army to mobilize to stop the fire's spread, government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri said.

He added that Prayuth ordered officials to watch for anyone deliberately lighting fires to clear land for farming and other purposes, a practice that has been blamed for past fires. The cause of the fire in Nakhon Nayok was not yet clear, though some local media reports said it was set off by lightning.

Bancha was quoted by Thai Rath as saying a storm on Tuesday ignited a fire nearby that strong winds blew to the Khao Laem area.

Separate forest fires have been raging farther north, Anucha noted, including in Chiang Mai province, where water was dumped from the air Wednesday in an effort to douse the flames. **MDT/AP**

USA

Apple rolls out buy now, pay later service: What to know

CORA LEWIS, NEW YORK

APPL is getting into the buy now, pay later space with a few tweaks to the existing model — including no option to pay with a credit card. The company will roll out the product to some consumers this spring, and will begin reporting the loans to credit bureaus in the fall.

Since the start of the pandemic, the option to “buy now, pay later” has skyrocketed in popularity, especially among young and low-income consumers who may not have ready access to traditional credit.

If you shop online for clothes or furniture, sneakers or concert tickets, you’ve seen the option at checkout to break the cost into smaller installments over time. Companies like Afterpay, Affirm, Klarna, and Paypal already offer the service, typically with late fees for missed payments and the option to use a credit card or bank account to make installment payments.

Apple’s version, which is integrated with Apple Pay and facilitated by MasterCard, will require the consumer to use a debit card and a bank account to make those payments, the company said, and will not charge flat or percentage late fees. Instead, missed payments will eventually result in the consumer losing access to these kinds of loans.

HOW DOES BUY NOW, PAY LATER WORK?

Branded as “interest-free loans,” buy now, pay later services require you to download an app, link a bank account or debit or credit card, and sign up to pay in weekly or monthly installments. Some companies, such as Klarna and Afterpay, do soft credit checks, which aren’t reported to credit bureaus, before approving borrowers. This is how Apple’s product will operate as well. Most users are approved in minutes. Scheduled payments are then automatically deducted from one’s bank account or charged to one’s card.

The services generally don’t charge more than a customer would have paid up front, meaning there’s te-

chnically no interest, so long as one makes the payments on time.

But if a customer pays late, they may be subject to a flat fee or a fee calculated as a percentage of the total owed. These can run as high as \$34 plus interest. If a customer misses multiple payments, they may be shut out from using the service in the future, and the delinquency could hurt one’s credit score.

In Apple’s case, the company said there will be no late fees, either flat or as a percentage — only the possibility of missed payments reported to credit bureaus, and a loss of access to the loans. If a user wishes to defer payments, or set up a different payment plan, Apple said they can contact support. Several services allow users to defer payments in this way.

ARE MY PURCHASES PROTECTED?

In the U.S., buy now, pay later services are not currently covered by the Truth in Lending Act, which regulates credit cards and other types of loans (those paid back in more than four installments).

That means you could find it more difficult to settle disputes with merchants, return items, or get your money back in cases of fraud. Companies can offer protections, but they don’t have to. Apple’s protections are offered through Mastercard.

Lauren Saunders, associate director at the National Consumer Law Center, advises borrowers to avoid linking a credit card to buy now, pay later apps whenever possible. If you do, you lose the protections you get from using the credit card while also opening yourself up to owing interest to the card company.

“Use the credit card directly and get those protections,” she said. “Otherwise, it’s the worst of both worlds.”

Apple’s decision not to permit consumers to link a credit card to its buy now, pay later product means the consumer avoids stacking debt in this way.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER RISKS?

Because there’s no centralized reporting of buy

now, pay later purchases, those debts won’t necessarily appear on your credit profile with major credit rating agencies.

That means more companies may let you buy more items, even if you can’t afford them, because the lenders don’t know how many loans you have set up with other companies.

Payments you make on time aren’t reported to credit rating agencies, but missed payments are.

“Right now, buy now, pay later can’t generally help you build credit, but it can hurt,” said Saunders.

Elyse Hicks, consumer policy counsel at Americans for Financial Reform, a progressive nonprofit, said people may not consider seriously enough whether they’ll still be able to afford payments down the road.

“Because of inflation, people may think, ‘I’m going to have to get what I need and pay for it later in these installments,’” she said. “But are you still going to be able to afford the things you’re affording now six months from now?”

WHY DO RETAILERS OFFER BUY NOW, PAY LATER?

Retailers accept the backend fees of buy now, pay later services because the products increase cart sizes. When shoppers are given the option to pay off purchases in installments, they’re more likely to buy more goods in one go.

When Apple announced it would be creating its own buy now, pay later service, Josiah Herndon, 23, joked on Twitter about “paying off 6 carts of (things) I can’t afford with Apple, Klarna, Afterpay, PayPal Pay in 4, Shop Pay in 4, & Affirm.”

Herndon, who works in insurance in Indianapolis, said he started using the services because it was taking a long time for him to be approved for a credit card, since his age meant he didn’t have an extensive credit history. He’s since used them to pay for high-end clothes, shoes, and other luxury goods. Herndon said he lines the payment schedules up with his paychecks so he doesn’t

miss installments, and called the option “very convenient.”

WHO SHOULD USE BUY NOW, PAY LATER?

If you have the ability to make all payments on time, buy now, pay later loans are a relatively healthy, interest-free form of consumer credit.

“If (the loans) work as promised, and if people can avoid late fees and don’t have trouble managing their finances, they have a place,” said Saunders, of the National Consumer Law Center.

But if you’re looking to build your credit score, and you’re able to make payments on time, a credit card is a better choice, she said. The same goes if you want strong legal protections from fraud, and clear, centralized reporting of loans.

If you’re uncertain whether you’ll be able to make payments on time, consider

AP PHOTO



whether the fees charged by buy now, pay later companies will exceed the penalties and interest a credit card company or other lender would charge.

HOW WILL INSTABILITY AFFECT BUY NOW, PAY LATER?

As the cost of living increases, some shoppers have started breaking up payments on essentials, rather than just big-ticket items like electronics or designer clothes. A poll by Morning Consult last fall found 15% of buy now, pay later customers were using the service for routine purchases, such as groceries and gas, sounding alarm bells among financial

advisors.

Hicks points to the rising number of delinquent payments as a sign that buy now, pay later could already be contributing to unmanageable debt for consumers. A July report from the Fitch ratings agency found delinquencies on the apps increased sharply in the 12 months that ended March 31 of last year, to as high as 4.1% for Afterpay, while credit card delinquencies held relatively steady at 1.4%.

“The increasing popularity of this is going to be interesting to see over these different economic waves,” Hicks said. “The immediate fallout is what’s happening now.” MDT/AP

AD

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USA

TIKTOK PROPAGANDA LABELS FALL FLAT IN 'HUGE WIN' FOR RUSSIA

DAVID KLEPPER,
WASHINGTON

A year ago, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, TikTok started labeling accounts operated by Russian state propaganda agencies as a way to tell users they were being exposed to Kremlin disinformation.

An analysis a year later shows the policy has been applied inconsistently. It ignores dozens of accounts with millions of followers. Even when used, labels have little impact on Russia's ability to exploit TikTok's powerful algorithms as part of its effort to shape public opinion about the war.

Researchers at the Alliance for Securing Democracy, a bipartisan, transatlantic nonprofit operated by the German Marshall Fund that studies authoritarian disinformation, identified nearly 80 TikTok accounts operated by Russian state outlets like RT or Sputnik, or by individuals linked to them, including RT's editor-in-chief.

More than a third of the accounts were unlabeled, despite a labeling policy announced by TikTok a year ago. The labels, which appear in bold immediately below an account's name, read "Russia state-controlled media." Clicking on the label brings up more information, including a description that "the government has control over the account's editorial content."

The accounts have spread pro-Russian propaganda about the invasion of Ukraine as well as false and misleading claims about the U.S. and the international coalition that stands against Russia's war.

"US to hold biggest satanic gathering in history," claims one of the videos on Sputnik.Brasil, a Russian media account currently unlabeled on TikTok. Other videos posted by the account blame the U.S. for the war in Ukraine, claim the U.S. will start a nuclear war, and suggest the U.S. is working to make Brazil invade Iran.

RT Mexico, one of the most popular unlabeled accounts, has posted multiple videos playing up tension between the U.S. and Mexico over immigration and drugs.

AP PHOTO



"This is a huge win for Russian propaganda that they're able to reach such large audiences on TikTok," said Joe Bodnar, a research analyst at Alliance for Securing Democracy. "TikTok is not taking it as seriously as other platforms."

That charge comes as the video sharing platform, owned by Chinese company ByteDance, faces questions in Washington about its ties to the government as well as concerns about privacy, surveillance and harmful content.

Britain, Canada, the U.S. federal government and a growing number of American states are among the governments that have already banned TikTok on government-issued devices. Some lawmakers in the U.S. have floated the idea of a complete ban on the app unless ByteDance agreed to sell its U.S. assets to another company.

TikTok has labeled more than 120 accounts, a spokesperson for the platform told The Associated Press on Tuesday. The platform's policy covers outlets and organizations, not individuals, a loophole that allows RT's editor-in-chief to remain unlabeled.

The platform said it would label many of the other accounts identified by researchers after being contacted by the AP.

"This is an ongoing process and we'll continue to review new accounts and add labels as and when they join the platform," the company said in an emailed statement.

Other tech companies have taken a more aggressive approach to Russian disinformation. Last year, Google blocked YouTube channels operated by Russian state media within Europe. The company also has initiated "pre-bunking" programs designed to blunt the effect of disinformation. Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, also labels foreign state media and has exposed and eliminated sprawling disinformation networks tied to Russia.

Once known largely for its popularity among teens, TikTok has emerged as a leading source of information — and misinformation. More than two-thirds of American teens are on the platform, which is among the world's most popular websites.

Labels have become a common way for social media platforms to designate content from state-controlled media and alert users without removing the content. TikTok announced its labeling effort in March 2022, saying that "in response to the war in Ukraine, we're expediting the rollout of our state media policy

to bring viewers context to evaluate the content they consume on our platform."

While the labels may provide more information about an account, they aren't doing much to reduce overall engagement with Russian propaganda on TikTok, suggesting users either don't see or don't care about the labels.

RT, one of Russia's top state-controlled outlets, has more followers on TikTok than The New York Times or The Wall Street Journal, despite a label classifying RT as "Russia state-controlled media."

Another labeled TikTok account, RT en Espanol, has received more likes than other Spanish-language news outlets including Telemundo, Univision or El Pais.

TikTok's use of labeling came up during a recent congressional hearing in which TikTok's CEO was questioned about the platform's ties to China and its record on safety and privacy. In his testimony, Shou Zi Chew said TikTok's labeling policy would also extend to Chinese state media outlets.

Lawmakers were skeptical of his explanations.

"I worry that TikTok is the world's most powerful and extensive propaganda machine," U.S. Rep. Marc Veasey, D-Texas, said during last week's hearing. MDT/AP

this day in history

1966 HAROLD WILSON WINS SWEEPING VICTORY



The Labour party is on course to win the general election with a majority of about 100 seats in the House of Commons.

Prime Minister Harold Wilson has hailed the result "a great victory". It is only the second time a Labour government has been voted back into power.

Across the country, the swing from Conservative to Labour was between 3% and 4%.

Labour needed 316 seats to be assured of victory and although they have not actually yet reached that figure, the trend shows the party to be well on the way to it.

Shortly after midnight, Conservative leader Edward Heath admitted his party had lost.

Speaking in his Bexley constituency in Kent, he insisted the Tories had fought the election on the right policies.

He said: "The Labour Party has been fighting on the past. We have fought on the present and the future."

Mr Wilson went into the election battle with a manifesto entitled, Time for a Decision, making his sole purpose clear - he wanted a mandate to govern.

Labour had won the 1964 election with a majority of five seats, later reduced through by-election losses to just one seat.

The Liberals have had a night of mixed successes.

No sooner had party leader Jo Grimond hailed Michael Winstanley's victory over the Tories to gain Cheadle than he heard that Roderic Bowen had lost Cardigan - and Richard Wainwright had at long last won Colne Valley from Labour.

Now Mr Wilson has a majority in the Commons some of the pressure of government will be eased.

He is expected to bring some new faces into the Cabinet. There is already a vacancy for a Lord Privy Seal after the retirement from the Commons of Sir Frank Soskice.

The country is also facing a debt of £900m, much of which has been inherited from the Tory government and which must be paid off within four years.

Inflation is continuing to rise but Mr Wilson insists Labour's prices and incomes policy is beginning to bring it into check.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The final result confirmed Harold Wilson had a majority of 96 seats. But Labour lost popularity when it devalued the pound in November 1967, plans for trade union reform had to be shelved and France vetoed Britain's second application for membership of the European Economic Community. Although Labour enjoyed something of a revival in 1969, Mr Wilson went on to lose the 1970 election to Edward Heath's Conservatives. He was elected for a third term in government in March 1974 when the party scraped a working majority. In March 1976 he surprised everyone by announcing he was resigning, just after turning 60. He was made a peer in 1983 and died in May 1995.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Opposition is present and you should be prepared to counteract it as best you can. Don't take sides if you wish to remain on good terms with both parties.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20

Do not let lovers cost you money or take advantage of you. Don't let friends convince you that you should contribute to something you don't believe in.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21

You will be a real chatterbox today. Opportunities for travel and socializing are evident. Don't reveal any personal details. Partnerships could prove to be lucrative.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You can surprise members of your family, which in turn will bring you a pat on the back. Sudden changes could result in estrangements.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Don't trust coworkers with important or personal information. You have a real need to be vocal. You are ready to blow up and your stress level has gone into over drive.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Opportunities to travel will develop through peers. Try to be reasonable. Coworkers may not be on your side. Help those incapable of taking care of their personal affairs.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22

There's lots to be done and if you meet your deadline you'll be in your boss's good books. Social get-together will bring you in contact with intelligent new friends.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You will meet potential new mates through business. Your passionate nature may make you jealous if your mate has been too busy to take care of your needs.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Assist a relative or good friend by setting of a budget for them. The locks, stove, gas, or electric wires may not be secure. You'll feel much better when your slate is clean again.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Relatives may play an important role in your social activities. You'll have great insight. Residential moves will be favorable. You'll find it easy to charm members of the opposite sex today.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Don't let your work and your personal life interfere with each other. Try to spend time with those having similar interests. Unforeseen changes in your location are apparent.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You can make personal changes that will enhance your reputation and give you greater self confidence. You may have a problem with someone you live with if you don't include them in your gathering.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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2	4							7
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3	9			1			7	

MEDIUM

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			4	2	9		5	
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8							4	

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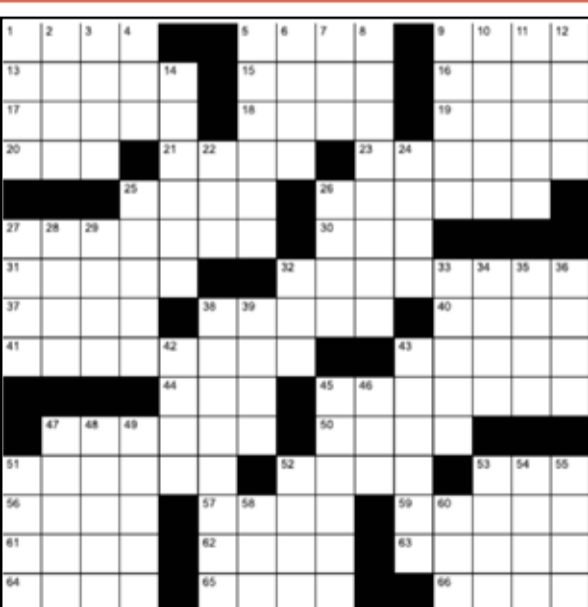
WEATHER

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

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Prefix for small; 5- Beaver creations; 9- New wine; 13- Novelist Calvino; 15- One of the Baldwins; 16- Organization to promote theater; 17- Trademark; 18- Introduction to physics?; 19- Unit of currency in Iran and Yemen; 20- Skid row woe; 21- Hamlet, e.g.; 23- Plan; 25- Story; 26- One engraving; 27- Intense; 30- Thrice, in prescriptions; 31- Dike, Eunomia and Irene; 32- Pennant; 37- Put ___ on it; 38- Urns; 40- Farm structure; 41- Banish; 43- Sporting blades; 44- Not at home; 45- Modesty; 47- High-speed skiing; 50- Getting ___ years; 51- Shove; 52- Auricular; 53- Datebook abbr.; 56- Fabled loser; 57- To Live and Die ___; 59- Loiter; 61- Scads; 62- Nair rival; 63- Club alternative; 64- Roman emperor; 65- Full of energy; 66- Flightless flock;

DOWN 1- Balmy; 2- Let's just leave ___ that; 3- Apprehends; 4- Martinique, e.g.; 5- Doomed; 6- "Hard ___!" (sailor's yell); 7- Was introduced to; 8- Disperses; 9- Ides month; 10- Put together; 11- Flight segment; 12- Baby powder; 14- Methuselah's claim to fame; 22- Pub preference; 24- Area of 4840 square yards; 25- Commerce; 26- Novel ending; 27- Burn slightly; 28- Pocket problem; 29- Seed cover; 32- Wind dir.; 33- Colorado resort; 34- Appearance; 35- Util. bill; 36- Cheerful; 38- Leaping up or over; 39- Env. notation; 42- Departs; 43- Decrees; 45- Edible tuber; 46- Verse starter?; 47- Large marine mammal; 48- Slip; 49- Because of; 51- Word of comparison; 52- Designer Cassini; 53- Streetcar; 54- Official language of Pakistan; 55- Sight organs; 58- "The Matrix" hero; 60- Copy;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

MARK KENNEDY,
MDT/AP ENTERTAINMENT
WRITER

DRIVE IN

JOHN WICK GETS EVEN MORE STYLISH IN FOURTH EPISODE

A trip to Paris should be on everyone's bucket list, even John Wick. The Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre — what better way to refresh your soul, even as you kick everyone else's bucket?

The un-retired assassin does indeed dive into the City of Lights in the inventive and thrilling "John Wick: Chapter 4" a sequel which elevates and expands the franchise. The fourth installment is more stylish, more elegant and more bonkers — kind of like Paris itself.

When we last saw Wick, he was half dead in the gutter after being shot and tumbling several stories off the Hotel Continental in New York. He was on the blacklist with a \$14 million price on his head. (Inflation has even hit this franchise: The bounty swells to \$40 million by the end of part four.)

Wick, as always played with monosyllabic and brooding intensity by Keanu Reeves, leaves his customary trail of death, but there's a shift here. So often the prey in the previous movies, Wick is on the offense in the fourth, taking his demands directly to The High Table, the group of shadowy crime lords that keep order.

This time, the Table's sadistic frontman is a dandy called the Mar-

AP PHOTO



Keanu Reeves as John Wick in a scene from "John Wick 4"

quis, played with coiled menace by Bill Skarsgård, who spouts things like: "Second chances are the refuge of men who fail." But he's a secret coward, so feel free to boo loudly.

All the touches you expect from a Wick flick are here — a cool dog, hand-to-hand combat amid glass display cases, candles and Christian iconography, galloping hor-

ses, the screech of metal swords and a new way to hurt someone, in this case, a single playing card. We visit Germany, Japan and end in France, even going to a disused

subway platform.

Returning director Chad Stahelski loves combining neon with gloom and now has the budget to rent out space in the Louvre. Of the 14 action sequences — yes, 14 — a few are truly mind-blowing.

If there was a bit of a slog through would-be assassins in "John Wick: Chapter 3 — Parabellum" — you know, shoot, stab, repeat — there is none here. One sequence on a set of outdoor stairs in Paris is almost riotously funny as knives and guns blast away, while the filmmakers add water and fire to a nightclub rave scene that puts clueless dancers next to axe-throwing murderers.

A shout-out to costume designer Paco Delgado, who has outfitted the baddie gunmen in light-colored three-piece suits and combat boots, and the executive baddies in fitted elegance with extravagant cravat-style ties. One of the film's saddest parts is saying goodbye to Lance Reddick, who played Continental Hotel concierge Charon and died on the eve of the movie's debut.

This chapter ends in death, of course. But that's also how it lives.

"John Wick: Chapter 4," a Lionsgate release that hits theaters Friday, is rated R for "pervasive strong violence and some language." Running time: 169 minutes. ★★★★★

AD

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MACAUCLOSER

IRENE SAM, MDT

TASTE OF EDESIA

Huaiyang delicacies

THE Huaiyang Garden is one of The Londoner Macao's signature restaurants curated by celebrity master chef Zhou Xiaoyan. As Chef Zhou's first restaurant in Macao, The Huaiyang Garden combines traditional heritage with contemporary aesthetics, elevating dishes to a true art form. Located in a tranquil space modelled on classic Chinese gardens, guests enjoy authentic Huaiyang delicacies offering a perfect combination of taste and presentation.

Recognised as one of the four great Chinese culinary traditions, Huaiyang cuisine originated in the lower reaches of the Yangtze and Huai Rivers about 3,000 years ago. Featuring fresh, light yet powerful flavours, consummate knife skills and precise cooking methods, it epitomises Chinese gastronomic brilliance.

Chef Zhou, with over four decades' experience, is an ambassador for Huaiyang culinary heritage and the most recognisable name associated with this time-honoured cooking style. Renowned as "The Godfather of Huaiyang Cuisine", he is credited with introducing innovations based around contemporary techniques and presentation to further refine this classic cuisine. His peerless execution has seen him earn numerous accolades throughout his career, including the title Chinese Culinary



Braised Hokkaido sea cucumber with shrimp rose



Steamed live crab and minced pork

nary Master and a gold medal at the 4th World Championship of Chinese Cuisine in 2002, widely considered the Olympics of Chinese cuisine. He has also appeared as a Chinese cookery expert on popular documentary series A Bite of China and Once Upon a Bite.

Chef Zhou said, "Macao boasts a wide array of culinary options from around the world, and both locals and visitors are well versed in fine dining. The Huaiyang Garden is bringing a unique approach to Huaiyang food tradition. Each ingredient is handled delicately, with preci-

se cutting and preparation employed to ensure perfect texture and exquisite presentation. Flavour is added where necessary to elevate dishes to new levels."

In keeping with the spirit of Huaiyang cuisine, Chef Zhou follows the rhythm of nature in seeking the best season-

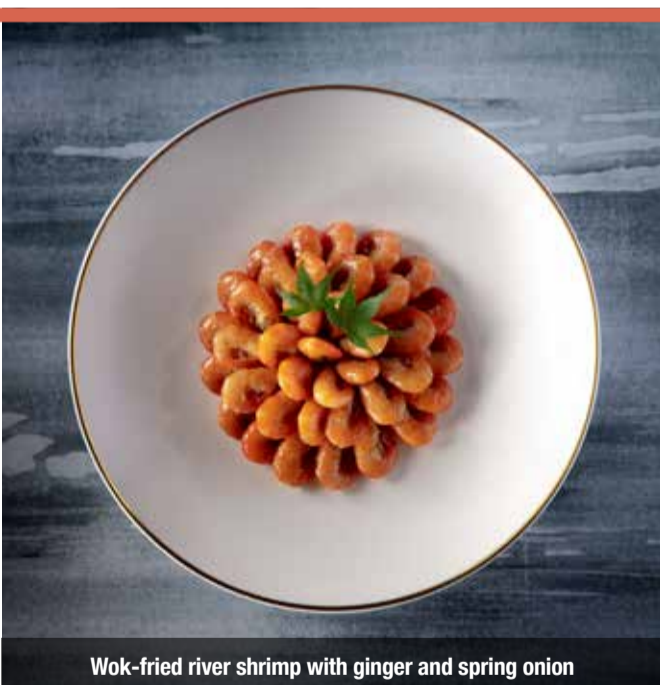
nal flavours. Each individual ingredient is maximised and perfected, before being combined to compose a symphony of harmony and delight. Shredded bean curd with crab meat and egg white in superior soup, a classic Huaiyang dish, is enhanced with the addition of black moss and red crab claw, layered egg white and the famous Yangzhou snack, chasan, to create extraordinarily complex flavours.

For steamed Hilsa herring with 20-year-old Huadiao wine, all 164 bones are skilfully removed while maintaining the shape of the fish, demonstrating meticulous preparation and virtuosic craftsmanship. Other signature dishes include braised Hokkaido sea cucumber with shrimp roe, stewed meatball with crab meat and crab roe, and braised Japanese pork belly with black truffle in soya sauce.

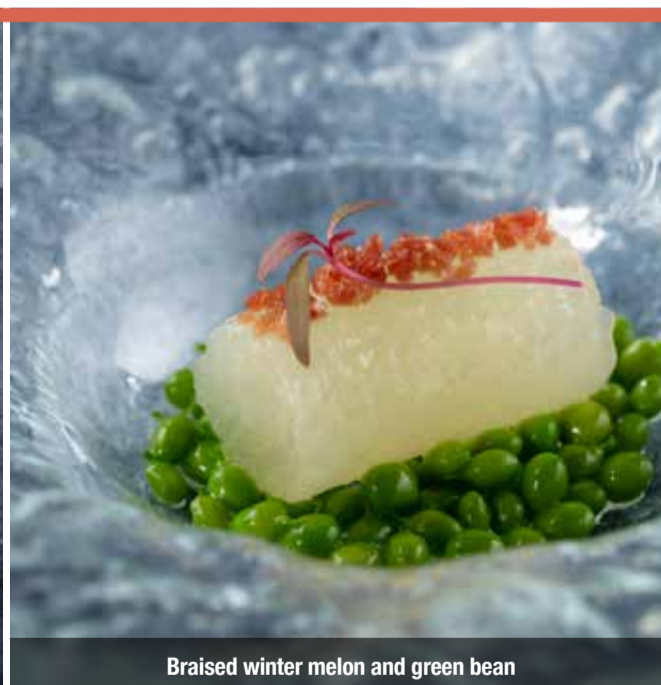
The dining experience is enriched by the restaurant's diverse beverage offerings. One of the five signature cocktails, Slender West Lake, is an ingenious mix of osmanthus-infused gin, Bénédictine, lemon and elderflower juices and floral mist, bursting with flavours and aromas and transporting diners to the legendary lakeside in Yangzhou with each sip. For a fusion twist, guests can have a glass of Yangzhou Beauty, made with Chinese baijiu, Amarguinha, lemongrass and ginger shrub, pu'er tea and angostura bitters.



Shredded bean curd with crab meat and egg white



Wok-fried river shrimp with ginger and spring onion



Braised winter melon and green bean



Steamed Hilsa herring fish with 20 years Huadiao wine



Braised Japanese pork belly with black truffle



Double-boiled bird's nest with snow pear



Stewed pork ball with crab meat and crab roe

OPINION

China Daily
Kang Bing, China Daily



CHINA TREATS BOTH CRITICISM AND PRAISE MATTER-OF-FACTLY

Paris-based international market research group Ipsos released its 2022 Sense of Happiness poll results in the middle of March, saying China tops the world happiness ranking with 91 percent of those surveyed in the country claiming they are happy.

Exhilarating as it is, neither the Chinese government nor the public seems to be celebrating the good news. Having survived numerous challenges since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, China is mature enough to treat both criticism and praise matter-of-factly.

The Chinese people know where they are and where they are heading to, and refuse to be disturbed by either laudatory or snide remarks. What's more, though several other surveys in recent years have also ranked China high on the happiness index, some polls have placed the country below the 70th place.

While not taking the poll results seriously, I still tend to believe the Chinese people are among the happiest in the world. And they have good reason to be so. Fast-paced development over the past four decades has made China the world's second-largest economy. The over 1.4 billion Chinese people have benefited from the country's development and rising incomes — more than 100 times — during the period.

While prices kept increasing in many countries in recent times because of the food and energy crises, China managed to keep the consumer price index rise to 2 percent last year — while the average disposable income of the Chinese people increased by 5 percent.

While workers in many countries went on strike in 2022 to protest against rocketing prices which made it difficult for them to pay their bills, the Chinese people increased their bank deposits to 126 trillion yuan (\$18.3 trillion). That means on average every Chinese person has more than 90,000 yuan, about twice their annual income, in bank deposits.

Of course, that does not mean all the Chinese people have fat wallets. For years, the Chinese government has been according priority to creating about 11 million jobs to ensure the similar number of students graduating from college annually find employment. As a result, China's registered unemployment rate has been below 4 percent for years while the surveyed unemployment rate hovers around 5.5 percent.

Although China's GDP growth is slowing down because of factors such as the worsening international investment and trade environment, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Western countries' sanctions against some Chinese enterprises, the lives of the common people in China have not been much affected due to the government's people-centric development policies.

In fact, despite the tax exemptions and deductions, which benefited businesses but decreased the Chinese government's financial revenue, China kept increasing spending on sectors that are closely related to people's lives and livelihoods.

The government has also increased pension for 19 years in a row — at about 5 percent annually — making retired people in urban areas probably the happiest group who enjoy their life by singing and dancing in community squares or holidaying at home or abroad.

Retired rural residents, who didn't pay for endowment insurance during their working age because such a mechanism was non-existent for rural areas when they were working, are now getting monthly pension thanks to a new insurance system introduced by governments at different levels.

Besides, hundreds of thousands of apartment buildings which are more than 20 years old can expect a face-lift under a five-year national plan which urges governments at different levels to contribute their share in the repair and renovation project. Usually, the residents don't have to pay a penny.

Forget about the poll results, be they good or bad. An old Chinese saying goes: The feet know if the shoes fit or not. The Chinese, who believe that labor creates fortune, will continue to concentrate on their national rejuvenation targets for a better and happier life. [Abridged]

RUSSIA ARRESTS WALL STREET JOURNAL REPORTER ON SPYING CHARGE

THE BUZZ

Russia's top security agency has arrested an American reporter for the Wall Street Journal on espionage charges, the first time a U.S. correspondent was put behind bars on spying accusations since the Cold War.

The Federal Security Service said Thursday that Evan Gershkovich was detained in the Ural Mountains city of Yekaterinburg while allegedly trying to obtain classified information.

The Wall Street Journal said it "vehemently denies the allegations" and is seeking Gershkovich's immediate release. "We stand in solidarity with Evan and his family," the paper said.

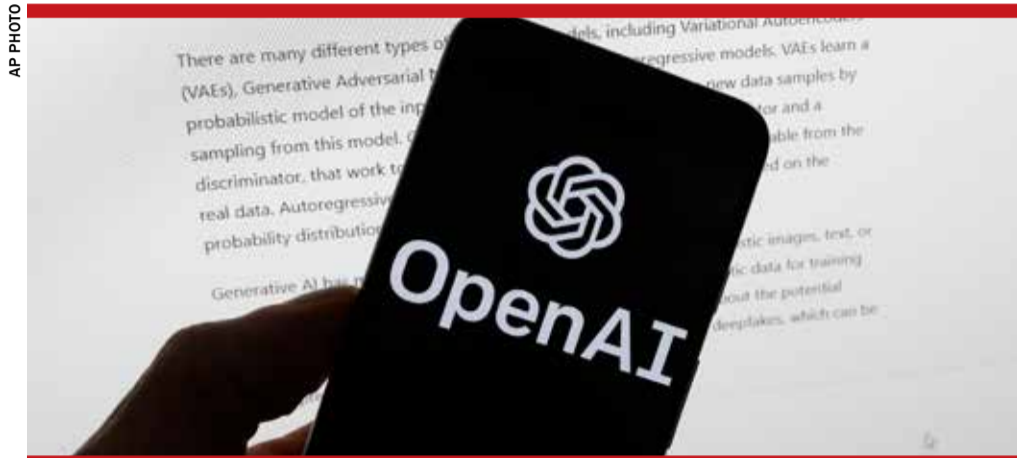
The arrest comes amid bitter tensions between the West and Moscow over its war in Ukraine.

Gershkovich is the first American reporter to be arrested on espionage charges in Russia since September 1986.

The FSB, which is the top successor agency to the Soviet-era KGB, alleged that Gershkovich "was acting on the U.S. orders to collect information about the activities of one of the enterprises of the Russian military industrial complex that constitutes a state secret."

The agency didn't say when the arrest took place. Gershkovich could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted of espionage.

His latest report from Moscow, published earlier this week, focused on the Russian economy's slowdown amid Western sanctions imposed when Russian troops invaded Ukraine last year.



AP PHOTO

EXPLAINER

MUSK, SCIENTISTS CALL FOR HALT TO AI RACE SPARKED BY CHATGPT

ARE tech companies moving too fast in rolling out powerful artificial intelligence technology that could one day outsmart humans?

That's the conclusion of a group of prominent computer scientists and other tech industry notables such as Elon Musk and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak who are calling for a 6-month pause to consider the risks.

Their petition published Wednesday is a response to San Francisco startup OpenAI's recent release of GPT-4, a more advanced successor to its widely-used AI chatbot ChatGPT that helped spark a race among tech giants Microsoft and Google to unveil similar applications.

WHAT DO THEY SAY?

The letter warns that AI systems with "human-competitive intelligence can pose profound risks to society and humanity" — from flooding the internet with disinformation and automating away jobs to more catastrophic future risks out of the realms of science fiction.

It says "recent months have seen AI labs locked in an out-of-control race to develop and deploy ever more powerful digital minds that no one — not even their creators — can understand, predict, or reliably control."

"We call on all AI labs to immediately pause for at least 6 months the training of AI systems more powerful than GPT-4," the letter says. "This pause should be public and verifiable, and include all key actors. If such a pause cannot be enacted quickly, governments should step in and institute a moratorium."

WHO SIGNED IT?

The petition was organized by the nonprofit Future of Life Institute, which says confirmed signatories include the Turing Award-winning AI pioneer Yoshua Bengio and other leading AI researchers such as Stuart Russell and Gary Marcus. Others who joined include Wozniak, former U.S. presidential candidate Andrew Yang and Rachel Bronson, president of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, a science-oriented advocacy group known for its warnings against humanity-ending nuclear war.

Musk, who runs Tesla, Twitter and SpaceX and was an OpenAI co-founder and early investor, has long expressed concerns about AI's existential risks.

WHAT'S THE RESPONSE?

OpenAI, Microsoft and Google didn't respond to requests for comment Wednesday, but the letter already has plenty of skeptics.

"A pause is a good idea,

but the letter is vague and doesn't take the regulatory problems seriously," says James Grimmelman, a Cornell University professor of digital and information law. "It is also deeply hypocritical for Elon Musk to sign on given how hard Tesla has fought against accountability for the defective AI in its self-driving cars."

IS THIS AI HYSTERIA?

While the letter raises the specter of nefarious AI far more intelligent than what actually exists, it's not "superhuman" AI that some who signed on are worried about. While impressive, a tool such as ChatGPT is simply a text generator that makes predictions about what words would answer the prompt it was given based on what it's learned from ingesting huge troves of written works.

Gary Marcus, a New York University professor emeritus who signed the letter, said in a blog post that he disagrees with others who are worried about the near-term prospect of intelligent machines so smart they can self-improve themselves beyond humanity's control. What he's more worried about is "mediocre AI" that's widely deployed, including by criminals or terrorists to trick people or spread dangerous misinformation. **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

Finland Expulsions of Russian intelligence officers and visa refusals have substantially weakened Moscow's intelligence operations in neighboring Finland in the past year, the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service said. The intelligence agency (SUPO) said in a statement that Russian intelligence has been "squeezed" in the Nordic country because of the agency's ability to compromise spy operations in 2022.



AP PHOTO

Vatican Pope Francis rested well overnight and was "progressively improving" Thursday after being hospitalized with a respiratory infection, the Vatican said. The 86-year-old pontiff, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, ate breakfast, read the newspapers and was working from his hospital room at Rome's Gemelli hospital, according to a statement from Vatican spokesman Matteo Brunetti.

Brazil Former President Jair Bolsonaro arrived back in Brazil yesterday after a three-month stay in Florida, seeking a new role on the political scene as authorities in the capital braced for the far-right populist's return. Bolsonaro left Brazil just before the end of his presidential term. In so doing, he broke with tradition by declining to hand the presidential sash to his successor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who won the October election.



AP PHOTO

Formula One After claiming his 100th podium in Saudi Arabia in confusing and controversial circumstances, Fernando Alonso is looking for a better result at Sunday's Australian Grand Prix than his two third-place finishes so far this Formula One season. Maybe even his 33rd Formula One win, and first in 10 years.