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**Japan** Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi protested in a meeting yesterday with his Chinese counterpart the detention of a Japanese national in Beijing and raised “strong concern” about China’s escalating military activity near Taiwan and around Japan. Hayashi is on a two-day visit in China, becoming Japan’s first diplomat to make the trip in more than three years as frictions grow between the countries. He also met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and top diplomat Wang Yi.



**Japan** Evacuation orders were lifted in small sections of a town just southwest of the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant, in time for the area’s popular cherry blossom season, and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida joined a ceremony to mark the reopening. The area of about 4 square kilometers where entry restrictions were lifted is part of Tomioka town, most of which had already been reopened since an earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 triggered triple meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

**Afghanistan** A women-run radio station in Afghanistan’s northeast has been shut down for playing music during the holy month of Ramadan, a Taliban official said. Sadai Banowan, which means women’s voice in Dari, is Afghanistan’s only women-run station and started 10 years ago. It has eight staff, six of them female. Moezuddin Ahmadi, the director for Information and Culture in Badakhshan province, said the station violated the “laws and regulations of the Islamic Emirate” several times.

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# TRUMP'S INDICTMENT STRETCHES US LEGAL SYSTEM IN NEW WAYS – A FORMER PROSECUTOR EXPLAINS FOUR KEY POINTS TO UNDERSTAND

JEFFREY BELLIN

WILLIAM &amp; MARY LAW SCHOOL

WHEN former President Donald Trump turns himself over to authorities in New York on Tuesday, April 4, 2023, and is arraigned, the charges on which a Manhattan grand jury indicted him will likely be made public.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg obtained the indictment on March 30, 2023, following a grand jury vote, but the exact charges against Trump remain sealed. Multiple media sources are reporting the indictment alleges the former president committed business fraud.

I am a former prosecutor and law professor who studies the criminal justice system. While the complexities of Trump's case will continue to unfold, The Conversation asked me to break down the complex legal situation. Here are four key points to understand about the prosecution and what will likely come next.

## 1. FALSIFIED BUSINESS RECORDS ARE THE KEY ISSUE

From what we understand of the investigation, the charges against Trump appear to stem from a US\$130,000 payment in 2016 by Trump's then-lawyer, Michael Cohen, to an adult film star, Stormy Daniels. In return, Daniels promised not to tell the media about her alleged affair with Trump.

Media reports suggest that there could be about 30 counts against Trump, and at least some of those counts will be felonies.

Just the fact that there are so many counts does not mean that there are many different criminal events or kinds of crimes alleged. Prosecutors often charge similar, repeated conduct – for example, multiple drug sales – as separate counts. In this case, the multiple counts may refer to a series of business records that record the same or similar transactions. Or the charges may, indeed, span multiple alleged criminal events.

Media reports indicate that Bragg does not appear to be alleging that Trump's payment to Daniels was itself illegal.



Instead, Trump will likely be charged with "falsifying business records" for trying to hide the payment by lying about its nature in the records of the Trump Organization, his company.

Creating a false business record with the intent to defraud is a Class A misdemeanor offense in New York. But the offense can become a low-level Class E felony if Bragg can prove that Trump created false business records for the purpose of facilitating a second crime.

It is not yet clear what the second crime will be – or even that a second crime is being alleged – but possibilities include federal or state campaign finance violations or tax evasion.

## 2. BRAGG WILL HAVE TO PROVE TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT, FRAUDULENT INTENT

If there is a trial, the prosecution will have to put together a series of pieces to secure a conviction on each of the charges facing Trump.

First, the prosecution would have to prove that the Daniels payment was recorded by Trump officials as something clearly inaccurate. It is not enough to show that the payment was re-

corded ambiguously – like "miscellaneous" or even "legal services." The business records at issue must be unequivocally "false."

Second, it is not necessary that Trump himself created false records. The prosecution would just have to prove that Trump was the direct cause of the false entry – meaning someone followed his specific directions.

Third, the prosecution would have to prove that Trump created the false record for a fraudulent purpose and, to prove a felony, with the specific purpose of committing – or covering up – another crime.

This is important because there could be other potentially plausible reasons the defense might offer, including that Trump sought to avoid embarrassment to his family or himself. Another option is indifference, that Trump gave little thought to how the transaction was recorded. That's why the details of the allegedly false records, and Trump's degree of involvement in their creation, will be central questions at trial.

Finally, for the felony offense, the prosecution would also have to prove that there was another crime that was either committed or covered up by using this false business record.

## 4. THE JUDICIAL PROCESS WILL BE A MESSY AFFAIR

Most low-level felony and misdemeanor cases are resolved before trial, especially when there is no obvious victim. Typically, the prosecution will offer a plea deal, perhaps including a term of probation, or even propose a diversion program with community service, for example, which will lead to a dismissal of the charges.

It will be interesting to see if Bragg makes an offer along those lines. Even if he does, defendants must typically admit guilt to take advantage of these arrangements, and Trump may refuse for political, personal or legal reasons to admit guilt.

So it's likely the case will go to trial, a process that will be messy for many reasons – most importantly, the jury.

When choosing a jury in a criminal case, the trial judge is supposed to screen out potential jurors who are biased in favor of, or against, the defendant. That's normally easy because the jurors have usually never heard of the defendant.

But most potential jurors will have opinions about Trump and many will need to be excused from jury service because of a lack of objectivity.

In a trial with this much media attention, there will also be people who have strong feelings about Trump and want to be on the jury. Some of them may hide their biases. That's a problem by itself.

Then, once the trial starts, the media attention will shine a spotlight on the selected jurors. If it becomes clear that the jurors lied or failed to disclose information in jury selection, that could be grounds for removing them from the jury in the middle of the trial. If enough jurors are removed, the case will end in a mistrial, sending everyone back to square one.

So, while there is a lot about this prosecution that isn't yet clear to the general public, one thing is clear – this will be a case with unprecedented attention and complexity. **MDT/THE CONVERSATION**

## 3. IT'S THE MOST COMPLEX STRAIGHTFORWARD CASE IN HISTORY

While everyone will be watching to see if this case is handled like other cases, differences are inevitable. For example, the New York Police Department and court officers will need to coordinate the arrest process with Trump's Secret Service agents.

Further complications will arise if there is any prospect of incarceration. Based on what we know now, there is little prospect that Trump will be jailed pending trial for this allegation of a nonviolent crime. And even if he is ultimately convicted, it's still unlikely he'll be locked up, based on the nature of the charges and his lack of a prior criminal record. That said, judges have broad discretion in determining sentences.

That is only a small window into the logistical challenges that await the Manhattan district attorney's office and the New York courts. If this were any other defendant, this would be a relatively straightforward case, the kind that make up the hundreds of cases in a typical prosecutor's caseload.

However, Trump is not any other defendant. That means this is likely to be the most complex straightforward case in American history.

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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COURT

# 18 defendants convicted in DSSOPT Case, Li and Carion with sentences over 20 years

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Court of First Instance (TJB) has delivered its decision on the case known as the "Land, Public Works, and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) Case." It has sentenced 18 of 21 defendants for several crimes related to corruption, money laundering and participating in a secret society.

The sentences were handed down Friday (March 31), with the judges of TJB handing the heftier prison sentences to former DSSOPT director Li Canfeng and businessman Sio Tak Hong with 24 years' imprisonment.

Li, the first defendant in the case, is guilty of participating in a "secret society," as well as 12 counts of "passive corruption for an unlawful act"; 10 counts (aggravated) of "money laundering"; one count of "document forgery"; and four counts related to providing inaccurate information on his Declaration of Assets and Interests.

Besides the crime of participating in a "secret society," Sio was



Li Canfeng (left) and Jaime Carion

also found guilty of two counts of "active corruption"; eight counts of the (aggravated) crime of "money laundering" and four counts of "document forgery".

Similarly, the other former DSSOPT director, Jaime Carion, was sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment on one count of participa-

ting in a "secret society" to commit the crimes, as well as five counts of "passive corruption for an unlawful act"; and six counts (aggravated) of "money laundering."

Also sentenced to 20 years imprisonment was businessmen Si Tit Sang. Besides the crime of participation in a "secret socie-

ty," Sang was also found guilty of seven counts of the (aggravated) crime of "money laundering" and four counts of "document forgery."

Businessmen Kuan Vai Lam and Ng Lap Seng were sentenced to 18 and 15 years of imprisonment, respectively, for different counts of similar crimes.

Besides these, Li's cohabiting partner, Li Han, was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment. Carion's wife (Lei Wai Cheng), stepdaughter (Kuong Wan Si), and son-in-law (Man Lai Chung) were also sentenced to 12, 15, and 15 and a half years in prison, respectively.

Ng's son was part of the group sentenced for participating in a "secret society" (15 defendants in total) with Ng's son (Ng Kei Nin) sentenced to eight and a half years.

Only three of the 21 defendants were acquitted, including Ng's wife and goddaughter, whom the prosecution had accused of participating in a "secret society" and also of money laundering, the same happening for a cousin of Li.

A ruling is still expected about how to treat Li's assets, considered to be proceeds of the crimes committed.

In the ruling, the judges decided to leave the decision on such matters for a later opportunity "to avoid delaying the decision regarding the defendants in the criminal case."

## 29 civil servants appointed to Hengqin

**T**HE Chief Executive has appointed 29 local civil servants to positions in the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, according to the Official Gazette.

Their salary levels will be on par with the head of office position at the Offices of Secretaries, as well as bureau director and deputy director, depending on the positions they assume in Hengqin.

In addition, they will receive a special subsidy for the relocation, with the amount calculated according to their positions.

Su Kun, advisor to the Secretary for Economy and Finance, and Ng Chi Kin from the Legal Affairs Bureau, were designated deputy directors of the Executive Committee of the Zone. They will receive 300 salary points of subsidy, which equates to MOP27,300 per month at current values.

Cao Jinfeng from the Ma-



cau Foundation, Carmen Maria Chung from the Legal Affairs Bureau, Lei Chi Wai António from the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute and Cheong Kok Kei from the Government Headquarters Affairs Office have been appointed bureau directors in Hengqin, handling responsibilities in administration, legal affairs, economic development, as well as

urban planning and construction.

They will be paid at bureau director level in Macau, in addition to 250 salary points in subsidy.

It is noteworthy that former Transport Bureau head Wong Wan – considered a controversial figure by the public – was appointed deputy director for urban planning and construction. **AL**

GAMING

## CASINOS RECORD BEST MONTH IN THREE YEARS

LYNZY VALLES

**T**HE city's casinos have recorded the best month in three years as gaming revenues surge 247% and Macau sees an influx of tourists following promotions in the neighboring regions.

Data from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau shows gross gaming revenue in March has reached 12.7 billion patacas, topping the median analyst estimate of a 205% year-on-year increase, with the highest monthly takings since January 2020.

Although the figure was still approximately half of pre-pandemic levels, last month's figures increased 23% month-to-month.

Between 2020 to 2022, casino operators lost USD1.6 billion as a result of the city's adherence to China's zero-Covid policy that prevented entry by tourists.



Tourist arrivals are currently on the increase.

Last month, on March 22, the city saw its highest count of tourist arrivals in three years at 96,011, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) announced in a statement.

The first 22 days of March, meanwhile, achieved an average count of 65,000 per day, which was 13.4% more than the daily average in February.

Casino operators are pledging to invest billions in non-gaming elements, as required by the new gaming law that came into effect this year.

However, the Fitch Ratings expects this to be slow, amid the operators' moves in launching non-gaming offerings.

"We expect the diversification into non-gaming industries to remain slow. Human capital constraints and skill gaps pose a key challenge for Macau to substantially reduce its high dependence on the gaming industry," said the institution in a report earlier.

Also, junket operators will remain "sensitive to tight regulatory scrutiny in both Macau and mainland China."



### CROSS-BORDER VEHICLE TRAFFIC HIKES 76% IN FEBRUARY

The city's cross-border vehicle traffic in February increased by 75.7% year-on-year to 493,587 trips, the statistical service has reported. The latest report from the Statistics and Census Service showed the gross weight of port containerized cargo rose 25.3% year-on-year to 12,740 tons last month. Arriving and departing commercial flights totaled 1,976 trips in February, a significant rise of 50.7% year-on-year. The report showed traffic accidents last month increased 19.8% year-on-year to 986, with 332 people injured.

### HK GOV'T EXPECTS 138K DAILY HKZMB PASSENGERS THIS FESTIVE PERIOD

The Immigration Department of the Hong Kong government has estimated around 9.03 million passengers will pass through Hong Kong's sea, land and air control points during the upcoming Qingming and Easter festive period on April 1-10. Among them, about 83.5 percent, or around 7.54 million passengers, will pass through land control points, the Immigration Department has said. Also, passenger traffic at the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge control point will also be heavy, with a daily average of about 147,000 and 138,000 passengers, respectively.

### CITY SEEING RISE OF TNRS

Non-resident workers in Macau totaled 152,577 in February, a slight increase compared to the previous month, as the city is facing a worker shortage following the lifting of border restrictions. According to data from the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), the city saw 699 more blue card holders last month. Workers from mainland China totaled 106,191, followed by those from the Philippines, recording 24,137, and 7,639 from Vietnam. Earlier this month, the government admitted the hotel sector is understaffed amid the current tourism advertising campaign aiming to boost tourist arrivals in the city.

# PUBLIC POOLS KEEP ANTI-COVID MEASURES DUE TO 'CHANGE OF HABITS'

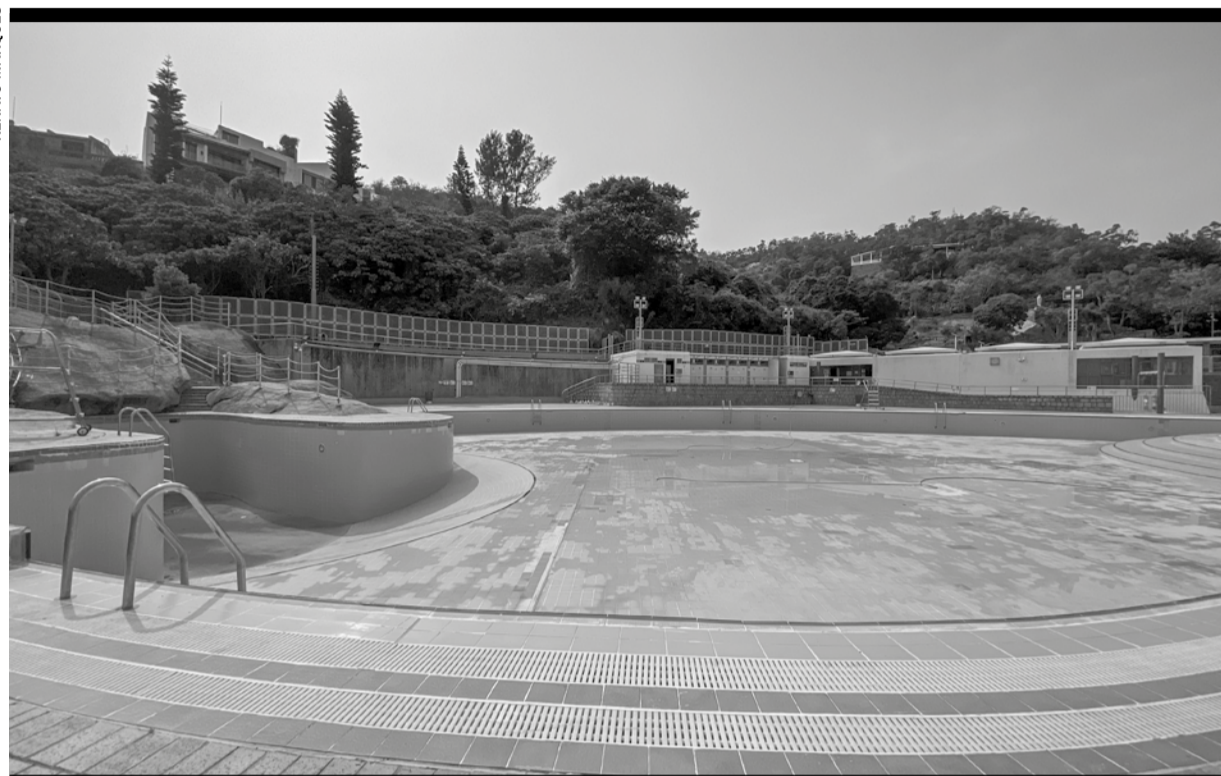
RENATO MARQUES

**S**ports Bureau (ID) public swimming pools will retain some Covid-19 pandemic measures, such as having three sessions daily separated by one-hour breaks, the ID has confirmed in a written reply to a Times' inquiry.

The bureau justified the decision by alleging users are used to the new system.

"The Sports Bureau has adjusted the opening hours and session arrangements based on the original opening mode since July 24, 2020. Now, the pools are divided into up to three sessions per day, allowing citizens to have more time slots for swimming activities to choose from. As the above-mentioned measures have been in place for a period of time, and taking into account factors such as the current usage habits of citizens and management measures of swimming pools, the present opening mode is maintained at this stage," the ID said.

In the past, public swimming pools had two sessions daily with a single break around lunchtime. During the break, staff performed cleaning and maintenance tasks and users could stay inside the



venues provided they stayed away from the water.

With the enforcement of the three time slots and the deep cleaning and disinfection tasks, justified at the time as Covid-19 prevention measures, the ID also forced users to leave venues at the end of each time slot, irrespective of their arrival time. To use the ve-

venue after the break, users needed a new ticket.

The system, enforced in the summer of 2020, is still causing much confusion and even conflict between users and swimming pool staff, the Times observed. Some swimmers are forced to leave the venue minutes after entering, being unaware of the one-hour

breaktime system (twice a day) that forces them from the venue.

The ID also justified continuing the system "to provide more opportunities for the public to use the swimming pool facilities."

Under this system, the Estoril swimming pool reopened last Saturday, with the remaining pools reopening on May 1.

## Final inspections of Londoner Arena in the pipeline as company eyes entertainment boost

ANTHONY LAM

**S**ANDS China Ltd. (SCL) revealed that Hong Kong pop divo Jacky Cheung will debut his new concert tour at the Venetian Macao on June 9.

Wilfred Wong, president and executive director of SCL, released the news at the private luncheon held by the British Chamber of Commerce in Macao, minutes before the official press conference of the concert tour at the Parisian Macao.

Wong took the concert tour as an example highlighting SCL's efforts in resuming normal operations in Macau, as well as in diversifying tourism options and the local economy.

The executive added that it will very likely be the first time a world star is debuting a world tour at the Cotai Arena in Macau.

On the other hand, Wong also disclosed that a



new arena, the 6,000-seat Londoner Arena, has already been constructed. Final inspections are in the pipeline and it is expected to be opened soon.

With several shows already staged after the lifting of travel restrictions, Wong emphasized that the company is trying to return to the show frequency before the Covid-19 pandemic,

which was one major show per week.

Although more shows are to be staged at SCL properties, there is a problem with the availability of hotel rooms, Wong pointed out.

Despite the city having overtaken London as having the most densely-situated five-star hotels, the city still does not have enough rooms to accom-

modate show and MICE-attendees. Wong said that Las Vegas has 150,000 rooms and Singapore 60,000, in contrast to 40,000 in Macau.

Macau's lack of rooms will not be able to accommodate large-scale events that attract tens of thousands of spectators, but cooperation with Hengqin will be able to resolve that, Wong assured.

Questions regarding workforce capacity was also raised at the event, in response to which Wong highlighted that the main target is to raise frequency of non-gambling events, such as shows and MICE.

Shortages of workforce may occur, he admitted, but "we can provide training to people so as to cultivate them, so that they will be able to take up positions in these events," Wong assured, emphasizing his confidence in the market.

On how to avoid competitors "stealing" SCL's developmental ideas, Wong stressed that SCL is always open to inter-corporate cooperation. For example, he said, certain concessionaires may find inviting certain attractive performers too unaffordable, in which case SCL would be happy to run collaborative campaigns in order to bring them to Macau.



# Tourism board vetting eligibility for foreign group tour subsidy

ANTHONY LAM

**E**LIGIBILITY for overseas group tour subsidies is being reviewed now that applications for such subsidies have closed, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), revealed yesterday on the sidelines of a tourism event at the airport.

The bureau has announced subsidies for group tours from outside of Hong Kong and mainland China.

In addition, a new subsidy scheme targeting overseas entrants through Hong Kong will start after Easter and run until June 30.

As of last week, the hotel booking rate reached about 50% for the upcoming Easter period, Senna Fernandes revealed, but she expects it to rise further.

Responding to comments about the city's soaring room prices, she said new hotels would be opening in the next few months. With expanded supply, she expects room prices to fall slightly.

She said no breaches related to operating "low-price group



tours" had been detected to date. The only violations the MGTO has spotted have involved "transgressing tour guides," but she emphasized the bureau would keep an eye on the possible existence of "low-price tour groups."

The transgressing tour guide problem has been communicated to tourism authorities on the mainland, she added.

On the problem of tourists from group tours waiting for meals outside restaurants in Areia Preta or Fai Chi Kei, Senna Fernandes said that provided the relevant restaurants have valid licenses, they will

be allowed to take group tour guests for meal services.

She added that overnight stays are a prerequisite for a group tour to be eligible for MGTO subsidies. They must also pre-submit itineraries to the MGTO for vetting. To prevent violations by those not attempting to obtain subsidies, the MGTO director pledged tighter monitoring would be conducted.

She said the workforce is insufficient in the tourism industry. The MGTO will collaborate with the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) to train more workers.



## IC HEAD DEFENDS INAUTHENTIC VR RECONSTRUCTION OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE virtual reality (VR) reconstruction of the Ruins of St Paul's is not a history project, so a degree of inauthenticity is inevitable, president Leong Wai Man of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has said.

She asked the public for their understanding.

After the public launch of the product, members of the public – especially the cultural elite – criticized the results as inauthentic compared to the real cathedral.

Leong said the MOP800,000 reconstruction is not a history project but a cultural tourism project, so "100% authenticity is impossible."

MOP800,000 is the price tag for the consultation services provided by local historian Ieng Weng Fat. There was no bidding process and the project was directly designated to Ieng, according to a report by local media outlet All About Macau.

Leong added that before the product's release, "we expected that full authenticity of the cathedral 400 years ago might not be achieved."

She said the project is the first of

its kind in Macau.

"It is quite a challenge to reconstruct the long history of the cathedral," she said. "We hope members of the public – especially academics and experts in the field – will help us refine the project after its official release."

Restating the marketing nature of the project, Leong said that, as its main aim is to offer audiences interesting visual and mental experiences, "some details have been adjusted."

On the question of the inefficient use of public funds, judging solely on the basis of this project, Leong exclaimed the "work is not easy."

"The project is tourism-oriented. We only strove to present data that we have in a three-dimensional manner," the cultural official said.

She said the bureau is open to comments and suggestions on the project.

Award-winning film director Martin Scorsese made a digital exterior replica of the then cathedral in his year-2016 work *Silence* about 17th-century Jesuit missionaries in Asia.

# New airline starts Macau-Nha Trang operations

**A** new service operated by Bamboo Airways from Vietnam started operations yesterday, with an inauguration ceremony held at the Macau International Airport.

The Macau MTP Travel Agency Limited initiated the regular charter service with an agreement signed on Jan. 15 this year.

At the inauguration ceremony, Sou Hoi, managing director of the travel agency, said the flight was the first post-pandemic service between China and Vietnam.

He believes the inauguration of the



flights, as well as expected improvements on visa requirements, will encourage people from Macau to visit Vietnam. Meanwhile, Vietnamese people will also be enticed to visit Macau.

The flight took a Macau tourism industry delegation to Nha Trang, to experience

the destination as well as conduct an exchange with their counterparts in Vietnam. Efforts will be made to attract tourists from Vietnam.

From its inauguration yesterday until early November, the flight will see services on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

Times for Nha Trang-Macau and Macau-Nha Trang flights are 11:45 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to 5:40 p.m.

Bamboo Airways, Vietnam's second private airline company, made its maiden flight in Jan. 2019. Its first international flight was between Da Nang and Taiwan Taoyuan. **AL**

# GOV'T MEETS WITH HK TOUR OPERATORS AIMING TO ATTRACT JAPANESE VISITORS

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has invited the Hong Kong Japanese Tour Operators Association and the Society of the Golden Keys of Hong Kong to visit Macau, seeking opportunities to attract visitors from Japan, the MGTO has said in a press statement.

A delegation comprising about 70 members toured Macau and visited several tourist attractions, hotels and tourism facilities.

The MGTO said "the Office seeks to garner the associations' support in drawing Japanese and international visitors for twin-destination travel to Hong Kong and Macau, in turn diversifying source markets."

The Hong Kong Japanese Tour Operators Association is composed of several travel agencies that are members of the larger organization, which caters mainly to Japa-

nese visitors by coordinating their trip logistics such as transportation, lodging, dining and sightseeing in mainland cities, Hong Kong and Macau.

The Society of the Golden Keys of Hong Kong mainly consists of concierge professionals assisting travelers at luxury and business hotels in Hong Kong.

The MGTO arranged a familiarization visit for this group on March 28 and 29 for them to gain a full picture of Macau's latest tourism information and products for their future recommendations to international visitors while visiting Hong Kong.

The idea is to resume the system enforced in the past, taking advantage of the proximity and connectivity between the two regions to combine trips and tours, bringing more international visitors to Macau, who arrive mostly in Hong Kong.



AD



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#### Postgraduate's Degree Programmes (Ref. PT-001-DP-2023)

- Advanced Topics in Digital Content Creation<sup>#</sup>
- Data Analytics and Visualization<sup>#</sup>
- Digital Marketing<sup>#</sup>
- Luxury Retail in the Digital World
- Seminar in Emerging Technologies<sup>#</sup>
- Smart Marketing<sup>#</sup>
- Technical Visit<sup>#</sup>

#### Bachelor's Degree Programmes (Ref. PT-002-DP-2023)

- Business Analytics for Hospitality and Tourism\*
- Conservation Technique<sup>#</sup>
- Consumer Behaviour\*
- Cultural and Creative Industry<sup>#</sup>
- Digital Marketing\*
- Documentation of Cultural Heritage<sup>#</sup>
- E-Tailing\*
- Heritage Charters and Legislations<sup>#</sup>
- Human Resources Management \*
- Macao History\*
- Public Relations\*
- Service Quality Management\*
- Sports Event Management\*
- Studies on Greater Bay Area (GBA) \*
- Sustainability in Hospitality and Tourism\*
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#### Requirements:

- Applicant must possess at least a master's degree for teaching Bachelor's Degree Programmes, or a doctorate's degree for teaching Postgraduate's Degree Programmes.
- Holder of Macao ID card is preferred but not a must.

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#### Application:

- Please refer to the details and submit ALL application materials mentioned on IFTM website.

#### Application closes on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2023 (Macao time)

- Apply via IFTM website: <https://apps.iftm.edu.mo/arms/>
- Please note that ALL application materials must be received by the closing date (Macao time).
- Personal data provided will be kept confidential and used for recruitment purpose only.
- Applicants who do not hear from us within 3 months may consider their applications unsuccessful.
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#### Remarks:

- All interviews will be conducted in English and/or Chinese.
- More details on the related teaching subjects can be found on: <https://www.iftm.edu.mo/visitors/job-vacancies/academic-positions/part-time-instructors-of-degree-programmes>.

<sup>#</sup> English-speaking ability is a must for teaching the subjects.

\* Subjects are delivered in either English or Chinese, so bilingual ability is preferred.



# JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR CLEARER PROTECTIONS FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE Macau Journalists' Association demands the government better safeguard freedom of speech in its submission to the parliament on two bills being considered.

The two bills are the Amendment Bill to the Law on Safeguarding National Security and the Bill on Safeguarding National Secrets.

The submission pointed out that the proposed amendments include a new offence – overthrowing or undermining the root system established by the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, which is Article 3.1 of the Bill.

The group cited the government as explaining previously that "the root system" refers to the framework pursuant to Article 1 and Chapter 3 of the Chinese Constitution, which the group finds to be an overhaul of Article 4 in the Bill. Article 4 concerns sedition and the incitement of sedition.

Therefore, the group questions the grounds on which "incitement to undermine the root system established by the Constitution of the People's Republic of China" is found and the elements for the proposed offence.

Additionally, it demands the government clarify if the proposed provision will be applicable to scenarios such as expressing different political opinions, discus-

sing the possible development of Macau's political system and criticizing policies or officials.

Moreover, they claim that the differentiation between criticism and sedition is unclear, meaning that there are grey areas that may confuse the public.

On the Bill on state secrets, the group first and foremost pointed out that the current version was mostly derived from the counterpart law of mainland China, with a "vast" number of new concepts and therefore "more difficult to grasp."

In particular, the group pointed out, Article 9 of the Bill lists eight categories of classifiable information with broad scope. Under this, even non-governmental activities related to economic and social development may be considered state secrets.

For journalists who collect a large amount of information on a daily basis, the group explained, the ambiguity of definitions is "a bottomless abyss", creating potential legal risks and pressures that will limit their sources of information and may result in self-censorship, which will eventually jeopardize the public's access to information.

As for what constitutes "endangering national security or interests once [state secrets are] leaked," this critical concept has not been clarified by the authorities and is prone to subjective understanding. Future

suspects may find it difficult to defend themselves.

The group concedes that, in most circumstances, members of the public do not need to know the actual content of state secrets, but stresses that they need a clear definition.

It also considers the proposed Article 9.1, which suggests that secrets in major political decisions be considered state secrets, contradictory to the fact that major decisions deserve scrutiny by the public and the press in particular. The group thus questions "whether news materials reported today will be considered classified tomorrow."

With the Bill proposing classifying certain materials related to the economic and social development of Macau, the association pointed out that lawmakers should do their best to eradicate grey areas because the provision itself is "confusing."

What is even more concerning, the association added, is that, in addition to tangible documents or carriers that must be marked as "confidential" according to the Bill, any officially recognized fact or action can be considered a state secret, "regardless of its carrier or form" (Article 2.2), which gives room to limitless legal interpretations.

The association suggests that matters that are required by local laws and regulations to be disclosed should not be classified as state secrets.



TECH

# Italy temporarily blocks ChatGPT over privacy concerns

FRANCES D'EMILIO  
& MATT O'BRIEN, ROME

ITALY is temporarily blocking the artificial intelligence software ChatGPT in the wake of a data breach as it investigates a possible violation of stringent European Union data protection rules, the government's privacy watchdog said Friday.

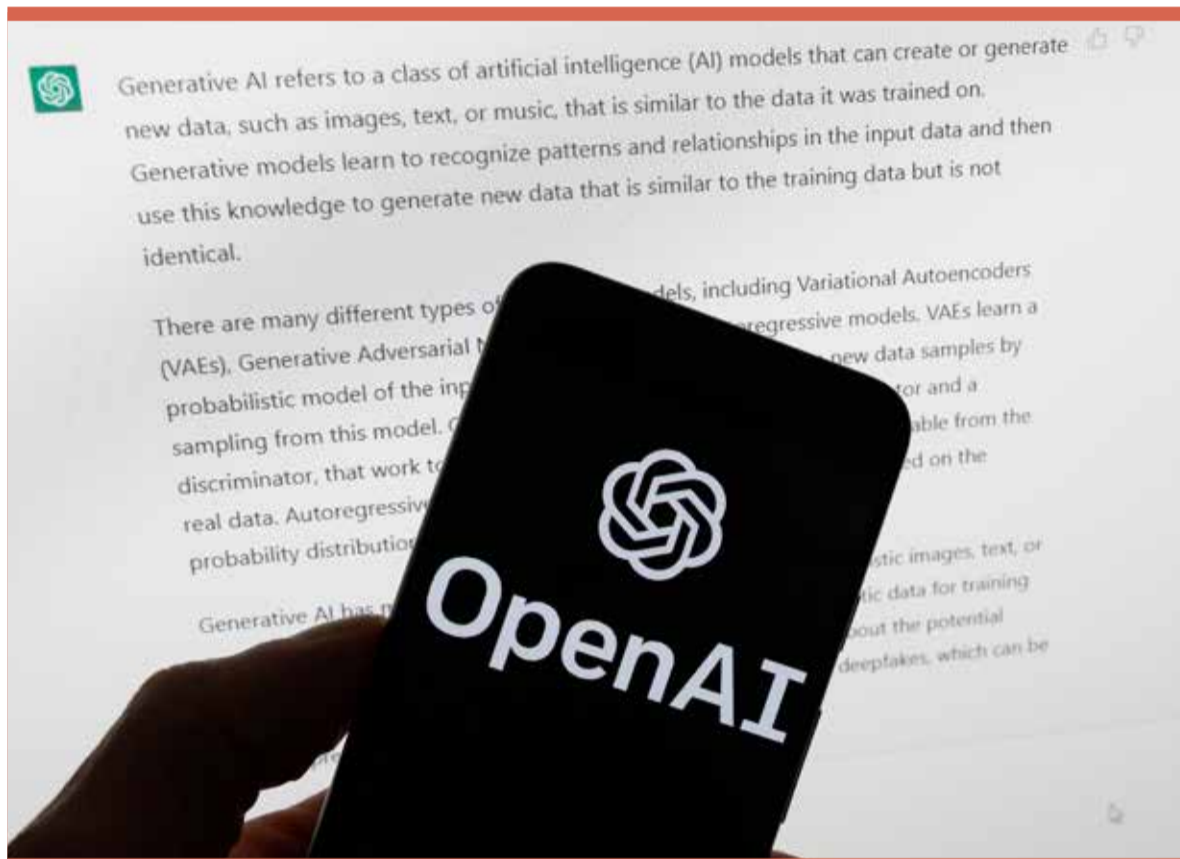
The Italian Data Protection Authority said it was taking provisional action "until ChatGPT respects privacy," including temporarily limiting the company from processing Italian users' data.

U.S.-based OpenAI, which developed the chatbot, said late Friday night it has disabled ChatGPT for Italian users at the government's request. The company said it believes its practices comply with European privacy laws and hopes to make ChatGPT available again soon.

While some public schools and universities around the world have blocked ChatGPT from their local networks over student plagiarism concerns, Italy's action is "the first nation-scale restriction of a mainstream AI platform by a democracy," said Alp Toker, director of the advocacy group NetBlocks, which monitors internet access worldwide.

The restriction affects the web version of ChatGPT, popularly used as a writing assistant, but is unlikely to affect software applications from companies that already have licenses with OpenAI to use the same technology driving the chatbot, such as Microsoft's Bing search engine.

AP PHOTO



The AI systems that power such chatbots, known as large language models, are able to mimic human writing styles based on the huge trove of digital books and online writings they have ingested.

The Italian watchdog said OpenAI must report within 20 days what measures it has taken to ensure the privacy of users' data or face a fine of up to either 20 million euros (nearly \$22 million) or 4% of annual global revenue.

The agency's statement cites the EU's General Data Protection Regulation and pointed to a recent data breach involving Cha-

tGPT "users' conversations" and information about subscriber payments.

OpenAI earlier announced that it had to take ChatGPT offline on March 20 to fix a bug that allowed some people to see the titles, or subject lines, of other users' chat history.

"Our investigation has also found that 1.2% of ChatGPT Plus users might have had personal data revealed to another user," the company had said. "We believe the number of users whose data was actually revealed to someone else is extremely low and we have contacted those who mi-

ght be impacted."

Italy's privacy watchdog, known as the Garante, also questioned whether OpenAI had legal justification for its "massive collection and processing of personal data" used to train the platform's algorithms. And it said ChatGPT can sometimes generate — and store — false information about individuals.

Finally, it noted there's no system to verify users' ages, exposing children to responses "absolutely inappropriate to their age and awareness."

OpenAI said in response that it works "to reduce personal data in

training our AI systems like ChatGPT because we want our AI to learn about the world, not about private individuals."

"We also believe that AI regulation is necessary — so we look forward to working closely with the Garante and educating them on how our systems are built and used," the company said.

The Italian watchdog's move comes as concerns grow about the artificial intelligence boom. A group of scientists and tech industry leaders published a letter Wednesday calling for companies such as OpenAI to pause the development of more powerful AI models until the fall to give time for society to weigh the risks.

The president of Italy's privacy watchdog agency told Italian state TV Friday evening he was one of those who signed the appeal. Pasquale Stanzone said he did so because "it's not clear what aims are being pursued" ultimately by those developing AI.

If AI should "impinge" on a person's "self-determination" then "this is very dangerous," Stanzone said. He also described the absence of filters for users younger than 13 as "rather grave."

San Francisco-based OpenAI's CEO, Sam Altman, announced this week that he's embarking on a six-continent trip in May to talk about the technology with users and developers. That includes a stop planned for Brussels, where European Union lawmakers have been negotiating sweeping new rules to limit high-risk AI tools, as well as visits to Madrid, Munich, London and Paris.

European consumer group BEUC called Thursday for EU authorities and the bloc's 27 member nations to investigate ChatGPT and similar AI chatbots. BEUC said it could be years before the EU's AI legislation takes effect, so authorities need to act faster to protect consumers from possible risks. **MDT/AP**

## CORPORATE BITS

### Artyzen Grand Lapa celebrates partnership with Amagao Gallery



Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau and Amagao Gallery have partnered to celebrate the first anniversary of Amagao Gallery with the opening of the "First Anniversary of Amagao Gallery: YEAR ONE Exhibition."

The exhibition showcases a collection of art pieces from 27 Macau artists, including painting, sculpture, porcelain, mixed media and more, and provides a platform to spotlight and showcase the local art scene.

To commemorate the one-year milestone of Amagao Gallery and the hotel's continued mission to promote arts and culture, Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau and Amagao Gallery invited the local community to get inspired at this art exhibition.

Rutger Verschuren, Area vice president, Macau Operations for Artyzen Hospitality Group and general manager of Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau, remarked, "Our collaboration with the Amagao Gallery Exhibition expresses our shared commitment to the promotion of arts and culture in Macau, as well as our mutual passion for supporting international and Macau artists."

### Studio City indoor water park to open Apr. 6



Phase 2 of Studio City Macau, designed by internationally-renowned architectural firm Zaha Hadid Architects, will open in phases. This latest expansion project of the integrated resort

will see the opening of the "Studio City Indoor Water Park" on April 6.

Studio City Water Park covers approximately 26,000 square meters, connecting both indoor and outdoor

areas.

The indoor water park features seven purpose-built state-of-the-art water slides, including Macau's first water coaster, "Lightspeed Shuttle", which is equipped with specially-designed nozzles to propel the raft and its occupants upward against the pull of gravity leading to the raft sliding through a sequence of drops, uphill turns and dark sections.

In addition to the existing outdoor water park, the indoor park also features the first-ever indoor surfing simulator in Macau, which requires a certain level of skill to control one's position and balance on the wave.



## 全面準確、堅定不移貫徹《澳門基本法》，奮力開創“一國兩制”實踐新局面

Implementação plena com precisão e firmeza da Lei Básica de Macau e empenho na criação de uma nova conjuntura para a implementação do princípio «um país, dois sistemas»



澳門特別行政區政府  
Governo da Região Administrativa Especial de Macau

2023年3月31日  
31 de Março de 2023



# Basic Law guarantees steady, sustained development of SAR's 'One country, two systems'

**T**HE Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) on Friday held a conference and a symposium to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of the Basic Law of the Macau SAR, a milestone in the historical process of the “One country, two systems” cause.

The Basic Law of the Macau SAR, together with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, forms the constitutional foundation for the Macau SAR. The Macau SAR government and different circles of life have persisted in building Macau's governance system and capabilities under the framework of national governance.

They have also resolutely safeguarded national sovereignty, security and development interests, implemented the principle of “patriots administering Macau,” made substantial progress in Macau's economic development, people's livelihood and social stability, and promoted the steady and sustained development of “one country, two systems” practices with Macau characteristics.

### PATRIOTS ADMINISTERING MACAU

“The Basic Law of the Macau SAR was the outcome of legalizing and institutionalizing the ‘one country, two systems’ principle,” said Tong Io Cheng, member of the Committee for the Basic Law of the Macau SAR under the Stan-

ding Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's top legislature.

Since Macau's return, the Macau SAR has fully respected and safeguarded the central authorities' overall jurisdiction over Macau and correctly exercised the power of administering Macau with a high degree of autonomy, which serves as key to the success of “one country, two systems” practices in Macau.

In 2016, the Macau SAR amended its law on election of the Legislative Assembly, stipulating that candidates must not hold political posts in foreign countries and that they must uphold the Macau SAR Basic Law and pledged allegiance to the Macau SAR.

During the election of the seventh Legislative Assembly of Macau in 2021, 21 candidates were disqualified for having not upheld the Macau SAR Basic Law, or not pledging allegiance to the Macau SAR.

### SAFEGUARDING NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY, SECURITY, DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS

“National security is the basic premise of the existence and development of the country. It is also a vital foundation for Macau to maintain long-term prosperity and stability,” said Wang Yu, member of the Committee for the Basic Law of the Macau SAR

under the NPC Standing Committee.

The Macau SAR government and various circles of life have always put safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests as a top priority, added Wang.

## Over the years, the central authorities have facilitated the establishment of closer economic and trade relations between the mainland and Macau

Since 2009, the Macau SAR has completed legislation on safeguarding national security as stipulated by Article 23 of the Macau SAR Basic Law and supporting laws. Macau is now progressing with amendment of the legislation on national security to further improve the legal system for safeguarding national security.

Since 2018, the Macau SAR government has also organized exhibitions each year to help increase Macau residents' awareness of national security.

### GOVERNING MACAU IN ACCORDANCE WITH LAW

Since Macau's return to the motherland, the SAR has enacted

or amended 363 laws and 792 regulations, providing a strong legal guarantee for the development of various causes.

Currently, a legal system with the Constitution and the Basic Law as the core and five major codes as the mainstay has been formed in Macau, guaranteeing residents' basic rights such as the right to elect and be elected, freedom, and access to social welfare.

Macau has made notable progress in various social causes since 1999, continuously increasing its social welfare level. The average life expectancy of male and female residents reached 81.3 and 87.1 years respectively.

### INTEGRATION INTO OVERALL NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

“The Basic Law provides a solid legal guarantee for Macau's economic development and improvement of people's livelihood,” said Ip Kuai Peng, vice rector of the City University of Macau.

Guaranteed and guided by the Constitution and the Basic Law, the central authorities' favorable policies continuously assisted Macau to integrate into the overall national development and achieve leaping economic and social development, Ip said.

Over the years, the central authorities have facilitated the es-

tablishment of closer economic and trade relations between the mainland and Macau, offered new space for the development of Macau's higher education, promoted exchanges and trade in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area, and supported Macau's appropriate economic diversification by building the Guangdong-Macau in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin, Macau's neighboring Zhuhai city.

In 2022, Macau revised its gaming laws.

From 1999 to 2021, Macau's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 3.5 percent annually in real terms on average. Meanwhile, per capita GDP grew from 15,000 U.S. dollars to 44,000 dollars. Foreign exchange reserves increased from 2.86 billion dollars to 26.66 billion dollars.

### POPULARIZATION OF LAWS

The Macau SAR has also been dedicated to popularizing the Constitution and the Basic Law, with official and non-official groups focusing on publicizing the laws to students and the general public.

Founded in 2001, the Macau Basic Law Promotion Association is a major organization devoted to publicizing the Constitution and the Basic Law. Since 2012, the association has organized nine training sessions to Macau's young people.

“Education on the Constitution and the Basic Law has become core of Macau's patriotic education system,” said Liu Chak Wan, president of the association.

Macau should continue learning and using the Basic Law to fully tap the advantages of the “one country, two systems” principle, find out deep-rooted problems in Macau's socio-economic development, and enrich practices of “one country, two systems,” added Liu. XINHUA



# COMMEMORATIVE EXHIBITION OF BASIC LAW OPENS WITH 350 PHOTOGRAPHS

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE commemorative exhibition of the 30th anniversary of the enactment of the Basic Law of Macau, organized by the Legal Affairs Bureau, the Municipal Affairs Bureau and the Education and Youth Development Bureau, opened yesterday and will run for two consecutive months.

Unlike traditional photographic exhibitions, this exhibition uses interactive multimedia. It presents visitors with more than 350 photographs recording the significant changes that have taken place in Macau over the last 180 years. It includes historical photographs of important moments, such as the Sino-Portuguese negotiations, the signing of the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration and the enactment and implementation of the Macau Basic Law.

In addition to offering guided tours at the exhibition site, the organizing body has also orga-



nized visits by teachers and students from various primary and secondary schools to "deepen young people's knowledge of the Basic Law and to increase their sense of national identity," according to a statement issued by the government.

The exhibition will continue from today until June 2 for two consecutive months, at the Science Center. There will be guided tours on Mondays, Tues-

days, Wednesdays and Fridays.

In addition to the exhibition at the Science Centre, itinerant community exhibitions will also be launched in the middle of this month, visiting community areas of Macau, Taipa and Coloane to raise awareness and publicize the Basic Law. On Sundays, the Macau Lawyers Association will provide legal consultation services to residents attending the traveling exhibitions.



## CPC MEMBER CALLS FOR EFFORTS TO SAFEGUARD NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

**L**i Hongzhong, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and vice chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, attended the SAR's conference to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of the Basic Law of Macau.

Li said over the 30 years after the promulgation of the Basic Law of Macau, particularly since its implementation on Dec. 20, 1999, the Basic Law has formed the constitutional foundation for the Macau SAR together with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, defined the

constitutional order of Macau, and provided all-round legal guarantee for the development of various causes in Macau.

Well implementing the Basic Law of the Macau SAR is significant to writing new chapters for "One country, two systems" practices in Macau, Li said, adding that efforts must be made to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests, practically implement the central authorities' overall jurisdiction, firmly implement the principle of "patriots administering Macau," and continue stepping up promotions of the Constitution and the Basic Law of the Macau SAR. **XINHUA**

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**文件日期** Collection Date: 4月3日至5月5日 / 3<sup>rd</sup> April - 5<sup>th</sup> May

**繪畫主題** Theme: 可持續嘉年華 / Sustainable Carnival

**比賽對象** Category: 8至14歲 / Ages 8-14

**比賽獎項** Awards:

- 現金獎 \$3500 / \$3500 Cash Award (Sponsored by CESL Asia Social Investment Fund)
- 現金獎 \$2000 / \$2000 Cash Award (Sponsored by Banco Comercial de Macau, S.A.)
- 現金獎 \$1000 / \$1000 Cash Award (Sponsored by Banco Nacional Ultramarino)
- 現金獎 \$800 / \$800 Cash Award (Sponsored by Baker Tilly Macao Certified Public Accountants)
- 麥當勞美食券 \$100 (共35名) / \$100 McDonald's Food Coupon x 35 (Sponsored by McDonald's Macau)
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TECH

# CHINA CAN'T GET US DATA UNDER PLAN: TIKTOK ATTORNEY

HALELUYA HADERO,  
SAULSALITO (CALIF.)

**U**NDER intense scrutiny from Washington that could lead to a potential ban, the top attorney for TikTok and its Chinese parent company ByteDance defended the social media platform's plan to safeguard U.S. user data from China.

"The basic approach that we're following is to make it physically impossible for any government, including the Chinese government, to get access to U.S. user data," said general counsel Erich Andersen during a wide-ranging interview with The Associated Press at a cybersecurity conference in Sausalito, California, over the weekend sponsored by the Hewlett Foundation and Aspen Digital and featuring top government officials, tech executives and journalists.

ByteDance will continue to develop its new app called Lemon8, Andersen said.

"We're obviously going to do our best with the Lemon8 app to comply with U.S. law and to make sure we do the right thing here," Andersen said, referring to the new social app developed by ByteDance that resembles Instagram and Pinterest. "But I think we got a long way to go with that application — it's pretty much a startup phase."

ByteDance's most known app, TikTok, is under intense scrutiny over concerns it could hand over



user data to pro-Beijing interests and misinformation on its behalf. Lemon8 was introduced across app stores in Japan in April 2020 and has been rolled out in more countries since then. It's available for download in the U.S. and could face similar scrutiny to TikTok.

Leaders at the FBI, CIA and officials at other government agencies have warned that ByteDance "could be forced to give user data — such as browsing history, IP addresses and biometric identifiers — to Beijing under a 2017 law that compels companies to cooperate with the government for matters involving China's national security."

To assuage concerns from U.S. officials, TikTok has been emphasizing a \$1.5 billion proposal, called Project Texas, to store all U.S. user data on servers owned and

maintained by the software giant Oracle. Under the plan, access to U.S. data would be managed by U.S. employees through a separate entity called TikTok U.S. Data Security, which is run independently of ByteDance and monitored by outside observers.

Some lawmakers have said that's not enough. But despite skepticism about the project, TikTok says it is moving forward anyway.

"We're investing in a system where people don't have to believe the Chinese government and they don't have to believe us," Andersen said.

He also wondered if the skepticism was being driven by something else.

"Where are we falling short here?" he said. "At some point you get beyond the cybersecurity risk assessment, etcetera, and you get

to 'We don't like your nationality.'"

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew has said the company started deleting all historic U.S. user data from non-Oracle servers this month and expects that process to be completed this year.

TikTok maintains it has never been requested to turn over any kind of data and won't do so if asked. But whether those promises, or Project Texas, will allow it to stay operating in the U.S. remains to be seen.

The U.S., as well as Britain, the European Union and others, have banned TikTok on government devices. And the Biden administration is reportedly threatening a U.S. ban on the app unless its Chinese owners divest their stakes in the company.

Andersen said a ban would be "basically giving up".

"Banning a platform like Tik-

Tok is a defeat, it's a statement that we aren't creative enough to find another way," he said.

China has said it would oppose a possible sale. In 2020, the country had also come out in fierce opposition to executive orders by then President Donald Trump that sought to ban TikTok and the messaging app WeChat.

"They were clear about their point of view back in 2020 time-frame when we faced an existential challenge from executive orders under the Trump administration," Andersen said.

Courts blocked Trump's efforts, and President Joe Biden rescinded Trump's orders after taking office. The company has since been in talks about privacy concerns with the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, a multi-agency panel that sits under the Treasury department.

Meanwhile, lawmakers on Capitol Hill have been pushing bills that would effectively ban TikTok or give the administration more authority to do so. One bill by U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley was blocked this week by Sen. Rand Paul, the only Republican who has come out in opposition to a TikTok ban. A small number of progressive lawmakers have also said they would oppose a ban, and argued the U.S. should implement a national privacy law to curtail the problem.

Andersen said TikTok would support broad-based privacy legislation.

"Our view is that we would really welcome broad-based legislation that applies broadly and evenly," he said. "What we don't like, frankly, is legislation that is sort of targeted at one company." MDT/AP

DIRE STRAIT

# Leaders of Taiwan, Guatemala visit Mayan pyramid

**T**AIWANESE leader Tsai Ing-wen and the Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei toured the archaeological site of Tikal this weekend during a trip by Tsai that aims to shore up the self-governing island's ties with its remaining allies in Central America.

The Taiwanese leader will visit Guatemala and Belize, the island's only two remaining allies in Central America, where Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama and Costa Rica have all switched their support to China. Honduras broke relations with Taipei a week ago.

Under a blazing sun, Tsai and Guatemalan Foreign Minister Mario Búcaro, representing Giamma-



Tsai Ing-wen (center left) and Guatemala's President Alejandro Giammattei, walk to a staging area during their visit to the Mayan site Tikal, in Peten

ttei -- who suffers from multiple sclerosis -- climbed one of the Mayans' most important pyramids: Temple II, also called Tem-

ple of the Masks.

With incense, a Mayan invocation ceremony, a Mayan ball game and an exchange of gifts, Tsai and

Giammattei talked as they enjoyed the central square of Tikal archaeological park.

The day before, in a joint message, the leaders spoke

of unity, solidarity and the values shared by Guatemala and Taiwan.

Tsai thanked Guatemala's government for its support, calling it an ally and partner. She has framed the trip as a chance to show Taiwan's commitment to democratic values globally.

Today, Tsai is scheduled to visit a hospital in the western department of Chimaltenango that was built with the help of a Taiwanese donation.

Before arriving in Guatemala, the Taiwanese president visited the United States. She will culminate her visit to Central America with a stop in Belize, before returning to the U.S.

The trip also is aimed to solidifying ties in Latin

America as China invest in the region and pressures its countries to break off relations with the self-governed island.

Between 2005 and 2020, the Chinese have invested more than \$130 billion in Latin America, according to the United States Institute of Peace. Trade between China and the region has also shot up, and is expected to reach more than \$700 billion by 2035.

Taiwan now has no more than 13 official diplomatic partners. More than half of those are small countries in Latin America and the Caribbean: Belize, Guatemala, Paraguay, Haiti, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. MDT/AP



RELIGION

# Members of exiled Chinese church detained in Thailand

TIAN MACLEOD JI  
& DAVID RISING, BANGKOK

**M**ORE than 60 self-exiled members of a Chinese Christian church who were detained in Thailand paid fines for overstaying their visas but remained in police custody Saturday uncertain about their legal status amid fears they would be deported against their will to their home country, where they face possible persecution.

The 63 members of the Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church were taken to court Friday in the resort city of Pattaya after being detained a day earlier by Thai immigration authorities. The 32 members of the group considered to be adults were charged with overstaying their visas, said Col. Tawee Kutthalaeng, chief of the Pattaya-area Nong Prue police station. Two American citizens who were with the group and briefly held had not been placed under arrest, he said.

After being fined, the church members had expected to be released to be able to return to where they had been staying in the area, said Deana Brown, one of two American supporters who accompanied them. Brown said she has been working to resettle the church members in Tyler, Texas,



where her organization is based.

However, they were put on two buses which first took them to the Pattaya office of the immigration police and then drove them to Bangkok for what a police officer told The Associated Press was normal processing of their case.

The drive under police escort from Pattaya to Bangkok, which would normally take about two hours, instead took closer to five because the passengers

forced the buses to stop en route and disembarked by the roadside, saying they feared they were being driven to Bangkok's international airport to be repatriated.

Only after receiving reassurances by phone did the Chinese church members continue their journey, arriving early Saturday morning at a police facility known as the Police Club in northern Bangkok that has space for large numbers of detainees. The main Immigration Detention

Center in the middle of Bangkok, where some detainees have been stuck for years, is notoriously overcrowded.

Members of the Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church, also called the Mayflower Church, came to Thailand in 2022 seeking asylum. They are trying to get to the U.S., but the current status of their applications is not clear. Most members of the church are young, married, middle-class couples, with their children making up about half the group.

They fled China in 2019 alleging that they were being persecuted by government security forces, initially settling on South Korea's Jeju Island. They left South Korea for Thailand after meetings with local and U.S. officials made it clear that prospects for refuge there were dim.

Brown, CEO of the Texas-based Freedom Seekers International, an organization whose mission statement says it seeks to rescue "the most severely persecuted Christians in hostile and restrictive countries," said that when the group looked into renewing their visas, they were told of a new requirement that any Chinese citizen renewing a visa in Thailand must report to the Chinese Embassy first. Their visas expired several months ago. The press section at the Chinese

Embassy in Bangkok did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

The U.S. Embassy said it had no immediate comment on the case.

Upon their 2022 arrival in Thailand, church members told reporters that they had been stalked, harassed and received threatening calls and messages even while they were in South Korea. They said relatives in China had been summoned, interrogated and intimidated.

At that time, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the matter was "not a diplomatic question" and declined to comment further.

In China, Christians are legally allowed to worship only in churches affiliated with Communist Party-controlled religious groups, but for decades the authorities largely tolerated independent, unregistered "house churches." They have tens of millions of worshippers, possibly outnumbering those in the official groups.

In recent years, however, house churches "have come under heavy pressure, with many prominent ones shut down," activists say.

China is one of 15 nations that the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom in its annual report last year recommended be designated as "countries of particular concern" for repression of religious groups.

It said the ruling Chinese Communist Party's policies require religious groups to support its rule and its political objectives, including allegedly "by altering their religious teachings to conform to the party's ideology and policy." **MDT/AP**

GUO WENGUI

# Chinese businessman seeks bail in \$1 billion fraud case

**L**AWYERS for a wealthy self-exiled Chinese businessman who developed ties to Trump administration figures including Steve Bannon are seeking bail for him two weeks after his arrest, saying other defendants accused of massive frauds like Bernard Madoff and Sam Bankman-Fried were freed on bail.

The lawyers submitted papers in Manhattan federal court, saying Guo Wengui is entitled to bail just as other wealthy defendants have been given the chance to post bail in the past. They also challenged claims by prosecutors that he is a risk to flee, saying he would not leave his wife of 38 years and his daughter as all three seek asylum.

Madoff was free for several months in late 2008 and



In this courtroom sketch, Guo Wengui (seated center) and his attorney Tamara Giwa (left) appear in federal court in New York, last month

early 2009 before he was jailed after he pleaded guilty in a multibillion-dollar fraud. He was later sentenced to 150 years in prison and died behind bars.

Bankman-Fried, 31, was arrested in the Bahamas in December in what a prosecutor called one of biggest frauds in American history. He agreed to return to the

United States, where he was freed with GPS monitoring on a \$250 million personal recognizance bond after pleading not guilty to charges that he oversaw a massive cryptocurrency fraud.

Guo's lawyers proposed a \$25 million bail package, including \$5 million in cash or property, along with location monitoring and

home detention at a Connecticut residence where his wife resides. They also said Guo would be subjected to 24-hour surveillance by a security company with at least one guard on the premises at all times.

A spokesperson for prosecutors declined comment last week.

Prosecutors filed a detention letter at the time of Guo's arrest, saying he was a serious flight risk and a danger to the public because his crimes, which they said resulted in robbing thousands of individuals of money, were "ongoing and continually evolving." They said he was likely to flee because of his wealth, strong proof of guilt and ties abroad.

Guo, 54, was arrested on various charges, inclu-

ding wire, securities and bank fraud on March 15 in what was described as a \$1 billion fraud. He agreed to be detained at the time, but a lawyer indicated bail would later be sought.

Guo's lawyers wrote that since immigrating to the United States in 2015, Guo traveled abroad only three times and not once since 2017.

Prosecutors said the charges stemmed from a complex scheme in which Guo and others lied to hundreds of thousands of online followers before misappropriating hundreds of millions of dollars.

At the time of Guo's arrest, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said Guo had lived lavishly off the proceeds of his crimes, including by purchasing a 50,000-squa-

re-foot mansion, a \$3.5 million Ferrari, two \$36,000 mattresses and a \$37 million luxury yacht.

Guo was once believed to be among the richest people in China. He left in 2014 during an anti-corruption crackdown led by President Xi Jinping that ensnared people close to Guo, including a top intelligence official. Chinese authorities have accused Guo of rape, kidnapping, bribery and other offenses.

Guo has long argued that the allegations against him in China "were false."

It was on Guo's 150-foot yacht that Bannon was once arrested on federal charges. Just before he left office, then-President Donald Trump made the case against Bannon dissolve with a pardon. **MDT/AP**



ANALYSIS

# War-crimes warrant for Putin could complicate Ukraine peace

MIKE CORDER, THE HAGUE

**A**N international arrest warrant for President Vladimir Putin raises the prospect of the man whose country invaded Ukraine facing justice, but it complicates efforts to end that war in peace talks.

Both justice and peace appear to be only remote possibilities today, and the conflicting relationship between the two is a quandary at the heart of a March 17 decision by the International Criminal Court to seek the Russian leader's arrest.

Judges in The Hague found "reasonable grounds to believe" that Putin and his commissioner for children's rights were responsible for war crimes, specifically the unlawful deportation and unlawful transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia.

As unlikely as Putin sitting in a Hague courtroom seems now, other leaders have faced justice in international courts.

Former Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic, a driving force behind the Balkan wars of the 1990s, went on trial for war crimes, including genocide, at a United Nations tribunal in The Hague after he lost power. He died in his cell in 2006 before a verdict could be reached.

Serbia, which wants European Union membership but has maintained close ties to Russia, is one of the countries that has criticized the ICC's action. The warrants "will have bad political consequences" and create "a great reluctance to talk about peace (and) about truce" in Ukraine, populist Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said.

Others see consequences for Putin, and for anyone judged guilty of war crimes, as the primary desired outcome of international action.

"There will be no escape for the perpetrator and his henchmen," European Union leader Ursula von der Leyen said Friday in a speech to mark the one-year anniversary of the liberation of Bucha, the Ukraine town that saw some of the worst atrocities in the war. "War criminals will be held accountable



for their deeds."

Hungary did not join the other 26 EU members in signing a resolution in support of the ICC warrant for Putin. The government's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyas, said Hungarian authorities would not arrest Putin if he were to enter the country.

He called the warrants "not the most fortunate because they lead toward escalation and not toward peace."

Putin appears to have a strong grip on power, and some analysts suspect the the warrant hanging over him could provide an incentive to prolong the fighting.

"The arrest warrant for Putin might undermine efforts to reach a peace deal in Ukraine," Daniel Krmaric, an associate professor of political science at Northwestern University, said in emailed comments to The Associated Press.

One potential way of easing the way to peace talks could be for the United Nations Security Council to call on the International Criminal Court to suspend the Ukraine investigation for a

year, which is allowed under Article 16 of the Rome Statute treaty that created the court.

But that appears unlikely, said Krmaric, whose book "The Justice Dilemma," deals with the tension between seeking justice and pursuing a negotiated end to conflicts.

## Some analysts suspect the the warrant hanging over him [Putin] could provide an incentive to prolong the fighting

"The Western democracies would have to worry about public opinion costs if they made the morally questionable decision to trade justice for peace in such an explicit fashion," he said, adding that Ukraine also is unlikely to support such a move.

Russia immediately rejected the warrants. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow doesn't recognize the ICC and considers its decisions "legally void." And Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council, which is chaired by Putin, suggested

the ICC headquarters on the Netherlands' coastline could become a target for a Russian missile strike.

Alexander Baunov, an analyst with the Carnegie Endowment, observed in a commentary that the arrest warrant for Putin amounted to "an invitation to the Russian elite to abandon Putin" that could erode his support.

While welcoming the warrants for Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, rights groups also urged the international community not to forget the pursuit of justice in other conflicts.

"The ICC warrant for Putin reflects an evolving and multifaceted justice effort that is needed elsewhere in the world," Human Rights Watch associate international justice director Balkees Jarrah said in a statement. "Similar justice initiatives are needed elsewhere to ensure that the rights of victims globally — whether in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, or Palestine — are respected." MDT/AP

## this day in history

### 1995 MPs MOVE TO OUTLAW HUNTING



A bill which would ban hunting with hounds in England and Wales has become the first such proposal to get a second reading in parliament.

The private member's bill, introduced by Labour MP John McFall, would outlaw fox and stag-hunting and hare-coursing.

There was cheering in the House of Commons chamber and the public gallery as it was passed by 253 votes to nil after its first reading.

But the bill is still unlikely to become law as its opponents in the Conservative ranks decided not to vote against it in the early stages.

However, when it comes up for discussion in committee they are expected to use delaying tactics so it runs out of parliamentary time.

A spokesman for the British Field Sports Society said the bill stood no prospect of reaching the statute book unless the "anti-country sports" elements were dropped.

But the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA), one of the bill's main backers, insisted the end was in sight for blood sports.

A statement issued by the RSPCA said: "This is a historic first step towards a better deal for Britain's wild animals.

"It is just a matter of time before wild mammals get full protection in the law."

But without the help of the government the bill is unlikely to get enough parliamentary time to get on to the statute books.

The governing Conservatives, traditionally the party backed by the hunting lobby, could not afford to be seen to support such a bill.

However, any future Labour government is expected to allow a free vote on the issue.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

John McFall's bill was rejected by the House of Lords.

In 1998 the new Labour government failed to back another anti-hunting bill by one of its MPs in spite of its election pledge to "ensure greater protection for wildlife".

However, the following year Prime Minister Tony Blair made a surprise announcement that he planned to make fox-hunting illegal.

In a free vote to gauge opinion in March 2002 MPs overwhelmingly backed a complete ban on hunting with dogs, rejecting two other compromise options.

In the Queen's Speech in November 2002 the government announced its intention to bring forward a bill after consultation with all sides in the debate.

In Scotland hunting with hounds was banned in February 2002.

At Westminster the hunting bill continued to ping-pong between Commons and Lords until it was finally passed and became law on 18 February 2005.

The new law bans hunting with dogs but it is still legal to use dogs to chase a scent trail. If a real fox is cornered, no more than two dogs can be used to flush it out and the animal must then be shot.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
**Mar. 21-Apr. 19**  
 Financial limitations will not be as adverse as they appear. Instant romance could be yours if you go out with friends. Take advantage of moneymaking ventures.

**TAURUS**  
**Apr. 20-May. 20**  
 You can make money if you get involved in real estate deals. Listen to the advice given by those with experience. You may find yourself interested in more than one person.

**GEMINI**  
**May. 21-Jun. 21**  
 Sudden romantic encounters are quite likely, but discretion will be a must. You may want to plan physical activities that will help burn off some of their excess energy.

**CANCER**  
**Jun. 22-Jul. 22**  
 A new you could help your attitude. Minor accidents may occur if you don't concentrate on what you're doing. This could be a serious relationship.

**LEO**  
**Jul. 23-Aug. 22**  
 Don't fall into the trap. Look to a close friend for advice. You are in a high energy, get it all done, mood and you'll have little patience with those who are slacking off.

**VIRGO**  
**Aug. 23-Sep. 22**  
 You need some help today. Travel will stimulate your need to experience exciting new things. You should be able to get a lot done.

**LIBRA**  
**Sep. 23-Oct. 22**  
 Don't be angry, but be on your guard. Be sure that you lay your cards on the table. Focus, and concentrate on yourself and your future.

**SCORPIO**  
**Oct. 23-Nov. 21**  
 They won't pay you back and you'll be upset. Based on your excitement, serious-minded individuals will be more than interested in backing your ideas.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
**Nov. 22-Dec. 21**  
 Your family may not be pleased with your decisions. Try not to lend or borrow money or belongings today. Your charm will attract members of the opposite sex.

**CAPRICORN**  
**Dec. 22-Jan. 19**  
 Drastic financial losses may be likely if you lend money. You may not be that popular at home but you should be able to shine at social gatherings.

**AQUARIUS**  
**Jan. 20-Feb. 18**  
 Romance appears. Leave your checkbook and credit cards at home. Rewards, gifts, or money from investments or taxes can be expected.

**PISCES**  
**Feb. 19-Mar. 20**  
 Others may want to steal your thunder when they realize your ideas are pretty solid. The distance may make you both appreciate each other more.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sanson**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	13	18	overcast
Changchun	10	19	cloudy
Chengdu	15	20	overcast
Chongqing	17	25	overcast
Fuzhou	14	24	cloudy
Guangzhou	20	24	showers
Guiyang	18	28	cloudy
Haikou	24	31	cloudy
Hangzhou	10	23	overcast
Harbin	10	15	fine
Hefei	12	19	rain
Nanjing	14	18	rain
Shanghai	12	20	cloudy
Taipei	17	22	fine
Wuhan	17	23	rain
Hong Kong	22	23	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	6	14	snow
Frankfurt	-2	8	overcast
Paris	1	13	overcast
London	1	12	overcast
New York	10	15	overcast

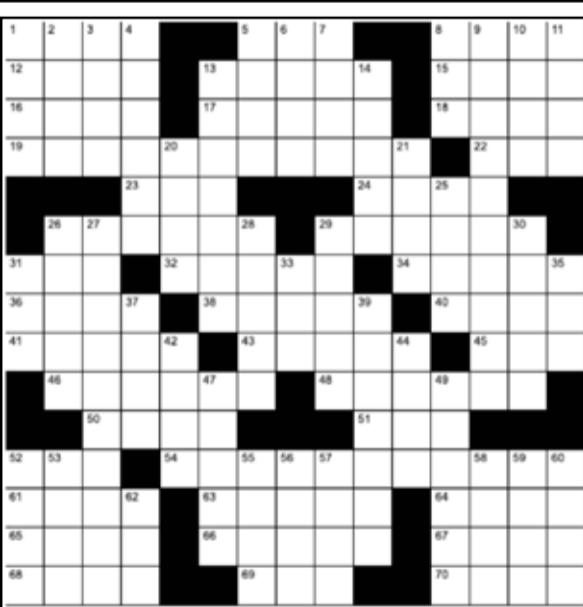
**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Compact by pounding; 5- RR stop; 8- Predicament; 12- Laugh loudly; 13- Ages; 15- Corn syrup brand; 16- Diarist Frank; 17- Oscar de la \_\_\_\_; 18- Plays are divided up into these; 19- Ornamental table feature; 22- Pothook shape; 23- \_\_\_\_-la-la; 24- Hwy.; 26- Declines; 29- Shaped like the Big Top; 31- Orch. section; 32- Incite; 34- Top story; 36- Goes down; 38- John of England; 40- Kind of collar; 41- Gives off; 43- Kett and James; 45- Directional suffix; 46- Perfumes; 48- Goes in; 50- Beehive State; 51- Small cask; 52- Abner's adjective; 54- Lady; 61- Shrinking sea; 63- Lake in the Sierra Nevada; 64- Othello villain; 65- Ballot choice; 66- Festoon; 67- Rabbit's tail; 68- All over; 69- Jackie's second; 70- Of \_\_\_\_ I Sing;

DOWN 1- \_\_\_\_ II (razor brand); 2- Super; 3- Jazz flutist Herbie; 4- Attractive; 5- Ooze; 6- Author Morrison; 7- Poker stake; 8- Jamaican popular music; 9- Leader; 10- Scraps; 11- Chuck; 13- Place in order; 14- \_\_\_\_ bleu; 20- Gaelic language of Ireland or Scotland; 21- Sicilian volcano; 25- Kitchen addition; 26- Stalks; 27- Presented fluently; 28- Leers at; 29- Govt. security; 30- Some designer dresses; 31- Wind dir.; 33- Polo Grounds hero; 35- MSNBC rival; 37- Keep it, to an editor; 39- Durable yellow fabric; 42- Hang-up; 44- Bouillabaisse, e.g.; 47- Iota preceder; 49- Altruist's opposite; 52- Molten rock; 53- Tiger's choice; 55- Zip; 56- Red-bearded god; 57- Actress Singer; 58- Speed ratio; 59- Malaria symptom; 60- Brief letter, paper money; 62- Kareem, once;

**Friday's solution**

MINI	DAMS	MUST
ITALO	ALEC	ANTA
ABEL	METAR	IAL
OTE	DANE	TACTIC
TAL	ET	CHER
CHARGED	STER	
MORAE	STREAMER	
ALID	YAREB	SILLO
RELEGATE	EPERS	
WEDELN	ONIN	YVE
THRUST	OTIC	TVE
HARE	INLA	TARRY
ALOT	NEET	SPADE
NERO	GOGO	EMUS



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- 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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TENNIS

# Wimbledon drops ban on Russians, lets them play as neutrals

KEN MAGUIRE, LONDON

**R**USSIAN and Belarusian players will be able to compete at Wimbledon as neutral athletes after the All England Club on Friday reversed its ban from last year.

The players must sign declarations of neutrality and comply with "appropriate conditions," including not expressing support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"This was an incredibly difficult decision, not taken lightly or without a great deal of consideration for those who will be impacted," All England Club chairman Ian Hewitt said in a statement.

The players cannot receive funding from the Russian or Belarusian states, including sponsorship from companies operated or controlled by the states.

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus and Russian players Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev are among the players who can return.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba condemned the reversal as "immoral."

"Has Russia ceased its aggression or atrocities? No, it's just that Wimbledon decided to accommodate two accomplices in crime. I call on the UK government to deny visas to their players," Kuleba wrote on Twitter.

Other tennis tournaments have allowed Russian and Belarusian players to compete as neutral athletes — their nationalities are not listed in the brackets, official



Russia's Daniil Medvedev plays a return to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz during the men's singles fourth round match on day eight of the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London, July 2021

results or graphics on TV broadcasts of matches. But, as in some other team sports, Russia and Belarus were not permitted to participate in the Billie Jean King Cup or Davis Cup by the International Tennis Federation.

"We also consider alignment between the Grand Slams to be increasingly important in the current tennis environment," the All England Club said.

The same conditions will apply for Lawn Tennis Association tournaments used by players as grass-court warmups for the sport's oldest Grand Slam tournament.

The women's and men's professional tennis tours last year

imposed heavy fines on the LTA and threatened to pull its tournaments. The effect of being expelled from the tours, the LTA said, "would be very damaging and far reaching for the game in our country."

The ATP and WTA had also responded to last year's ban by not awarding ranking points for Wimbledon — an unprecedented move against the prestigious event.

"There was a strong and very disappointing reaction from some governing bodies in tennis to the position taken by the All England Club and the LTA last year with consequences which, if

continued, would be damaging to the interests of players, fans, The Championships and British tennis," the club said.

This year's Wimbledon tournament will start on July 3. The women's final is scheduled for July 15 and the men's final on July 16.

"It's a beautiful tournament, beautiful Grand Slam. I'm really happy that I'm going to be able to play there this year," Medvedev said Friday after he won his semifinal match at the Miami Open over fellow Russian Karen Khachanov. "I don't know what the crowd reaction is going to be, I cannot control it, but I will be happy to play there in front of all the

people. Hopefully on big courts. Hopefully have some big, amazing matches."

Also speaking in Miami Gardens, Florida, two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova said Russia and Belarusian players should continue to be banned from both Wimbledon and the Olympics.

"For sure I'm just more worried about the Ukrainian people and players. I appreciate that Wimbledon had a tough time last year not giving the (ranking) points, that Belarusians and Russians didn't play. And I think they shouldn't be allowed, actually," Kvitova said. "I'm just still a bit on the Ukrainian side of this."

Martina Navratilova, who won a record nine Wimbledon singles titles, said she supported the change. She wrote on Twitter, "as I said last year, this was a bad decision and I am glad it was reversed."

The All England Club said the conditions were developed through talks with the British government, the LTA and "international stakeholder bodies in tennis."

The club's statement described "personal player declarations" but didn't provide details. The LTA said the players and support staff "will be required to sign neutrality declarations" similar to those used in other sports.

In a joint statement, the ATP and WTA said they were satisfied with the outcome.

"It has taken a collaborative effort across the sport to arrive at a workable solution, which protects the fairness of the game," the tours said. "This remains an extremely difficult situation, and we would like to thank Wimbledon and the LTA for their efforts in reaching this outcome, while reiterating our unequivocal condemnation of Russia's war on Ukraine."

MDT/AP

BASEBALL

# MLB opening day has 14 clock violations, stolen base spike

JAY COHEN, CHICAGO

**M**ARCUS Stroman is getting used to Major League Baseball's new pitch clock. And it's no small deal for the Chicago Cubs right-hander.

"It's tough," he said. "It's a big adjustment."

Stroman committed baseball's first regular-season pitch-clock violation Thursday in the third inning of the Cubs' 4-0 victory over Milwaukee on opening day. It was the first of 14 violations in 15 games on a day the average game time shrunk 26 minutes to 2 hours, 45 minutes.

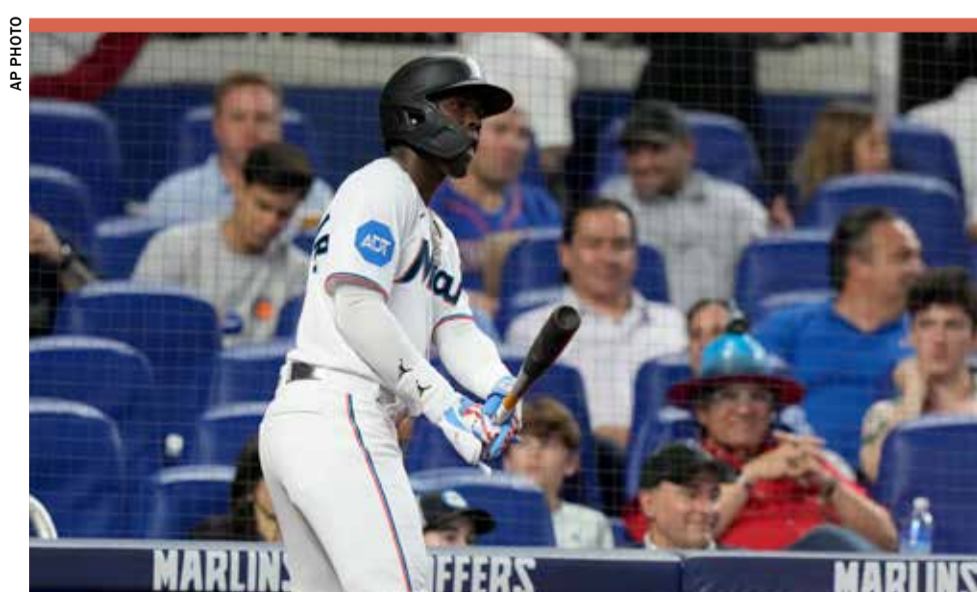
Meanwhile, stolen base attempts per game more than doubled from last opening day, an indication that efforts to spur the running game may be working. Runners were 21 of 23 on steal attempts Thursday, compared to 5 of 9 in seven games on the first day of the 2022 season.

Five pitch timer violations were by batters, eight by pitchers and one by a catcher as all MLB teams opened on the same day for the first time since 1968.

Stroman clocked an unwelcome spot in the record books while facing Christian Yelich. He took

a long look at rookie Brice Turang leading off second base with no outs at Wrigley Field, and then just as he turned his attention back to Yelich, plate umpire Ron Kulpa called the violation. Kulpa pointed to his wrist in announcing the call, and the automatic ball made it a 2-2 count against Yelich. Stroman didn't argue.

"You've got to be looking at the clock. You're trying to worry about the pitch. You're trying to worry about the guys on base. You're trying to worry about your grip," Stroman said. "There's so many things going on now." MDT/AP



Miami Marlins' Jazz Chisholm Jr. prepares to bat as the pitch clock runs during an opening day baseball game against the New York Mets, March 30



**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**OPENING-UP HELPS CHINA WITHSTAND PRESSURE**

That nearly 100 leaders and senior officials from around the world and the heads of 11 regional and international bodies have gathered in Boao, Hainan province, for the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023, which opened on Thursday, shows the great expectations the world has pinned on China stoking the global economic recovery this year.

As Premier Li Qiang stressed in his opening address, the Chinese economy showed “encouraging momentum of rebounding” in January and February, and the situation in March looks “even better”, as consumption and investment have picked up and “market expectations have improved”.

Thanks to the optimization of the COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control policies and the effective pro-growth and pro-business policies of the government, China's retail sales rose 3.5 percent in January and February over the same period last year, recovering from the 1.8 percent contraction in December, and the growth in investment in real estate and other fixed assets accelerated to 5.5 percent from 5.1 percent in December, a sign that the rebuilding of confidence is accelerating.

The rebound of the world's second-largest economy will undoubtedly inject tremendous vitality into regional economic growth and beyond. In her meeting with Li on Wednesday, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said China is expected to contribute more than one-third of world economic growth this year, which will provide important opportunities for other countries.

Notably, contrary to the debt-trap smearing of China by the United States, she highlighted China's important contribution to maintaining stability by helping developing countries avoid a debt crisis.

Warning that chaos and conflict must not happen in Asia, otherwise its future “would be lost”, Li urged all countries to join hands with China to maintain regional stability at a time when some external forces are trying to turn the region into an arena for geopolitical rivalry.

Calling China an “anchor of peace”, Li said that no matter how the world situation may evolve, the country remains committed to reform, opening-up and innovation-driven development, and countries around the world are welcome to share the fruits of its development.

Those remarks by the new premier of China, who has spent most of his time on fact-finding inspections around the country since he took office earlier this month, should offer reassurance that China will not withdraw into a shell in the face of the US' campaign of pressure.

For China, a community with a shared future has never been just empty talk, and trust, solidarity and cooperation have never been just cliches. This year marks a critical turning point for the world economy and a valuable window of time for countries to think beyond their own concerns, and refocus on global challenges. The Boao forum provides a platform for meaningful exchanges in that regard.

**REBOUNDED POPE FRANCIS MARKS PALM SUNDAY IN VATICAN SQUARE**

**THE BUZZ**

Bundled in a long, white coat and battling a hoarse voice, Pope Francis presided over Mass in St. Peter's Square before tens of thousands of faithful on Palm Sunday, a day after he left a Rome hospital where he was treated for bronchitis.

The sun broke through the clouds during the Mass, one of the longest services on the Church's calendar, as Francis, red vestments placed over his coat, sat in a chair under a canopy erected in the square.



He took his place there after standing and clutching a braided palm branch in a popemobile that drove at the tail end of a long, solemn procession of cardinals, other prelates and rank-and-file Catholics. Participants carried palm fronds or olive tree branches.

Francis, 86, received antibiotics administered intravenously during his three-day stay. He last previous appearance in St. Peter's Square saw him conduct his his regular Wednesday public audience.

**JAPAN UNVEILS PROPOSAL TO PROMOTE MARRIAGE, RAISE BIRTHRATE**

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

A Japanese Cabinet minister in charge of tackling the country's declining birthrate unveiled a draft proposal Friday aimed at reversing the downtrend, including increased subsidies for childrearing and education and a salary increase for younger workers to incentivize marrying and having kids.

Japan's population of more than 125 million has been declining for 15 years and is projected to fall to 86.7 million by 2060. A shrinking and aging population has huge implications for the economy and for national security as the country fortifies its military to counter China's increasingly assertive territorial ambitions.

Children's Policies Minister Masanobu Ogura said the next few years are possibly “a last chance” for Japan to reverse its declining births. If the number of births keeps falling at the rate since the beginning of 2000, the young population will shrink at twice the current pace in the 2030s, he said.

Many younger Japanese have balked at marrying or having families, discouraged by bleak job prospects, corporate cultures incompatible with having both parents — but especially women — work, and the lack of public tolerance for small children.

To address the problems, Ogura's plan proposes increased financial assistance, including more government subsidies for childrearing, more generous student loans for higher education and greater access to childcare services. It also aims to change the cultural mindset toward more gender equality both at work and at home. The proposal also includes increased government assistance to companies to encourage more of male staff to take paternity leave, which has



Newly appointed Minister of State for Measures for Declining Birthrate Masanobu Ogura arrives at the prime minister's office on Aug. 10, 2022, in Tokyo.

been a point of contention for working fathers fearing retaliation.

“While diverse views about marriage, childbirth and childrearing should be respected, we want to make a society where young generations can marry, have and raise children as they wish,” Ogura said. “The basic direction of our measures to tackle low births is to reverse the trend of declining births by supporting individuals' pursuit of happiness.”

He said he submitted the proposal to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida for further consideration. It will be part of a bigger policy package that Kishida's government will compile in June.

In 2022, Japan had 799,728 newborns, a record low, falling below 800,000 for the first time since surveys began in 1899. Many couples are hesitating to add to their families because of rising costs.

Japan is the world's third biggest economy but living costs are high, wage increases have been slow and about 40% of Japanese are part-time or contract

workers. Critics say the government has lagged in making society more inclusive for children, women and minorities.

Under the conservative governing party, which supports traditional family values and gender roles, women who are unmarried or without children tend to be less respected, and marriage is a prerequisite for having children.

Ogura's proposal did not mention its estimated cost.

So far, government efforts to encourage people to have more babies have had a limited impact despite subsidies for pregnancies, births and childcare.

In a country that ranks among the worst globally in gender equality, the situation hampers women's pursuit of careers after marriage or after having children.

The majority of Japanese between the ages of 18 and 34 say they hope to marry at some point but plan to have fewer than two children. A growing percentage say they have no intention of getting married, according to data cited in the proposal. **MDT/AP**

**India** For the second year in a row, India's government has ordered the nation's coal-fired power plants to run at full power. But this year's order is even more sweeping than last year's — all coal and oil-fired generators will be maxed out for the entire summer, from April through June. Analysts say it will dramatically increase India's already high greenhouse gas emissions.

**Ukraine** A top official yesterday outlined a series of steps the government in Kyiv would take after the country reclaims control of Crimea, including dismantling the strategic bridge that links the seized Black Sea peninsula to Russia. Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, published the plan as Ukraine's military prepares for a spring counteroffensive in hopes of making new, decisive gains after more than 13 months of war to end Russia's full-scale invasion.



**US** Vice President Kamala Harris this weekend traveled down a dirt road to tour a farm outside Zambia's capital that's using new techniques and technology to boost its vegetable crop as she highlighted ways to secure food supplies in an age of global warming. Rising prices stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been damaging to poor countries, and global warming is expected to bring more challenges in the coming years.



**Mozambique** Weeks after massive Cyclone Freddy hit Mozambique for a second time, the still-flooded country is facing a spiraling cholera outbreak that threatens to add to the devastation. There were over 19,000 confirmed cases of cholera across eight of Mozambique's provinces as of March 27, according to U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, a figure which had almost doubled in a week. Freddy was likely the longest-lived cyclone ever, lasting over five weeks and hitting Mozambique twice. The tropical storm killed 165 people in Mozambique, 17 in Madagascar and 676 in Malawi.