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THE GOV'T IS COOPERATING WITH ALIBABA FOR AN INTERNSHIP PROJECT FOR YOUNGSTERS TO GO TO HANGZHOU, WITH 40 INTERNSHIP JOB POSITIONS P4

FIBA 3X3 MASTERS RETURNS BETTER THAN EVER FEATURING WORLD MASTERS TOUR P4

TO CELEBRATE ITS 23RD ANNIVERSARY, THE MACAU UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PRESENTED TWO NOBEL LAUREATES AT A MEDICAL SUMMIT P6

AP PHOTO



Philippine government yesterday identified four new military camps, including some across the sea from Taiwan, where rotating batches of American forces will be allowed to be stationed indefinitely despite strong objections from China. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s administration announced in February his approval of an expansion of the U.S. military presence to four additional Philippine military bases from the five existing sites under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the longtime treaty allies.

AP PHOTO



India A court yesterday suspended a two-year prison sentence for Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi as he appeals his criminal conviction for mocking the prime minister's surname which resulted in his expulsion from Parliament, dealing a huge blow to his Congress party ahead of general elections next year. Gandhi, a fierce critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his main challenger in the 2024 polls, was ousted after a court sentenced him to two years in prison for defamation for a comment made in a 2019 election speech.

AP PHOTO



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will pay a visit to Warsaw this week that will include talks with political leaders and a meeting with regular Ukrainians and Poles. Polish officials announced yesterday. Zelenskyy will be accompanied by his wife, Olena Zelenska, for the visit, scheduled for Wednesday. It will begin with an official meeting at the Royal Castle between Zelenskyy and his host, Polish President Andrzej Duda.

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TOURISM-LED INFLATION

Tourism boom, canceled special offers are giving residents 'a feeling of a price hike': Scholar P3



ENVIRONMENT TONS OF TRASH WASHED ASHORE ON MACAU COASTLINE



P4

CHRIS NOWOTARSKI
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

METEOROLOGISTS began warning about severe weather with the potential for tornadoes several days before storms tore across the Southeast and the Central U.S. in late March 2023. At one point, more than 28 million people were under a tornado watch. But pinpointing exactly where a tornado will touch down – like the tornadoes that hit Rolling Fork, Mississippi, on March 24, and towns in Arkansas, Illinois and multiple other states on March 31 – still relies heavily on seeing the storms developing on radar. Chris Nowotarski, an atmospheric scientist, explains why, and how forecast technology is improving.

WHY ARE TORNADES STILL SO DIFFICULT TO FORECAST?

Meteorologists have gotten a lot better at forecasting the conditions that make tornadoes more likely. But predicting exactly which thunderstorms will produce a tornado and when is harder, and that's where a lot of severe weather research is focused today.

Often, you'll have a line of thunderstorms in an environment that looks favorable for tornadoes, and one storm might produce a tornado but the others don't.

The differences between them could be due to small differences in meteorological variables that aren't resolved by our current observing networks or computer models. Even changes in the land surface conditions – fields, forested regions or urban environments – could affect whether a tornado forms. These small changes in the storm environment can have large impacts on the processes within storms that can make or break a tornado.

One of the strongest predictors of whether a thunderstorm produces a tornado relates to vertical wind shear, which is how the wind changes direction or speed with height in the atmosphere.

How wind shear interacts with rain-cooled air within storms, which we call "outflow," and how much precipitation evaporates can influence whether a tornado forms. If you've ever been in a thunderstorm, you know that right before it starts to rain, you often get a gust of cold air surging out from the storm. The characteristics of that cold air outflow are important to whether a tornado can form, because tornadoes typically form in that cooler portion of the storm.

How far in advance can you

WHY TORNADES ARE STILL HARD TO FORECAST – EVEN THOUGH STORM PREDICTIONS ARE IMPROVING

AP PHOTO



know if a tornado is likely to be large and powerful?

The vast majority of violent tornadoes form from supercells, thunderstorms with a deep rotating updraft, called a "mesocyclone." Vertical wind shear can enable the midlevels of the storm to rotate, and upward suction from this mesocyclone can intensify the rotation within the storm's outflow into a tornado.

If you have a supercell on radar and it has strong rotation above the ground, that's often a precursor to a tornado. Some research suggests that a wider mesocyclone is more likely to create a stronger, longer-lasting tornado than other storms.

Forecasters also look at the storm's environmental conditions – temperature, humidity and wind shear. Those offer more clues that a storm is likely to produce a significant tornado.

The percentage of tornadoes that trigger a warning has increased over recent decades, due to Doppler radar, improved modeling and better understanding of the storm environment. About 87% of deadly tornadoes from 2003 to

2017 had an advance warning.

The lead time for warnings has also improved. In general, it's about 10 to 15 minutes now. That's enough time to get to your basement or, if you're in a trailer park or outside, to find a safe facility. Not every storm will have that much lead time, so it's important to get to shelter fast.

WHAT ARE RESEARCHERS DISCOVERING TODAY ABOUT TORNADES THAT CAN HELP PROTECT LIVES IN THE FUTURE?

If you think back to the movie "Twister," in the early 1990s we were starting to do more field work on tornadoes. We were taking radar out in trucks and driving vehicles with roof-mounted instruments into storms. That's when we really started to appreciate what we call the storm-scale processes – the conditions inside the storm itself, how variations in temperature and humidity in outflow can influence the potential for tornadoes.

Scientists can't launch a weather balloon or send instruments into every storm, though. So,

we also use computers to model storms to understand what's happening inside. Often, we'll run several models, referred to as ensembles. For instance, if nine out of 10 models produce a tornado, we know there's a good chance the storm will produce tornadoes.

The National Severe Storms Laboratory has recently been experimenting with tornado warnings based on these models, called Warn-on-Forecast, to increase the lead time for tornado warnings.

There are a lot of other areas of research. For example, to better understand how storms form, I do a lot of idealized computer modeling. For that, I use a model with a simplified storm environment and make small changes to the environment to see how that changes the physics within the storm itself.

There are also new tools in storm chasing. There's been an explosion in the use of drones – scientists are putting sensors into unmanned aerial vehicles and flying them close to and sometimes into the storm.

The focus of tornado research has also shifted from the Great

Plains – the traditional "tornado alley" – to the Southeast.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT TORNADES IN THE SOUTHEAST?

In the Southeast there are some different influences on storms compared with the Great Plains. The Southeast has more trees and more varied terrain, and also more moisture in the atmosphere because it's close to the Gulf of Mexico. There tend to be more fatalities in the Southeast, too, because more tornadoes form at night.

We tend to see more tornadoes in the Southeast that are in lines of thunderstorms called "quasi-linear convective systems." The processes that lead to tornadoes in these storms can be different, and scientists are learning more about that.

Some research has also suggested the start of a climatological shift in tornadoes toward the Southeast. It can be difficult to disentangle an increase in storms from better technology spotting more tornadoes, though. So, more research is needed.

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ECONOMY

Commodity prices unlikely to fall: Academic

ANTHONY LAM

THE possibility of commodity prices falling soon remains vague, president Samuel Tong Kai Chung of the Macau Institute of Management said.

He said the pressure is mostly from the upstream side.

In the past three years, he recalled, many local businesses have run special promotions or offered special prices to attract customers. With tourists returning, many of them have canceled these special prices, "so that people have the feeling of a price hike," Tong said in an interview with local newspaper Macao Daily News.

On the other hand, prices have also increased at the sources, which equates to elevated costs on the retail side.

Another factor that exerts pressure on commodity prices is rents. After the resumption of normal travel, shop owners have become progressive on rental evaluations. When a lease is renewed, many business operators are faced with soaring rents.

The cycle will then return to the increase in tourist arrival figures, which inject greater confidence in businesses to increase prices.



Several lawmakers have asked the government to issue another round of consumption subsidies or an additional round of cash handouts, which will help alleviate the public's livelihood pressure amid the resumption of normal travel.

In response, the government has only reiterated that it would examine the possibility of doing so.

On this matter, Tong agreed

that residents are facing higher prices that eventually lead to greater livelihood pressure. He suggests the government closely monitor the quality of revivals and average household income to assist decisions on additional monetary subsidies.

MOP130B GGR WILL LIKELY BE ACHIEVED

With gross gambling revenue (GGR) reviving in March, Tong

has reminded the public of the importance of economic diversification.

He added that the GGR figure for the first quarter is on par with the government's estimate for this year at MOP130 billion.

The March GGR amounted to MOP12.7 billion and the first quarter to MOP34.6 billion. The first two months saw three million visitor arrivals, with 67% holding mainland travel endor-

sement and 30% holding Hong Kong ID documents.

If this indication persists, the GGR estimate for this year will likely be achieved, Tong told local newspaper Exmoo.

Despite the bright GGR figures, he reminded the public the government and the city are striving to expand their source market, hoping to attract more tourists from the non-Greater China Region. He said matching a widened offering of non-gambling products and elements with reinvigorating the GGR is more important than focusing too much on the GGR increment itself.

In addition, Tong warned a rising GGR, paired with a narrow source of tourists, is not a healthy path of development. The casino market is part of the economy the government wants to diversify, Tong explained.

Reviewing the past, he said society was overly focused on the casino industry, without seeing the entire picture. Explaining that the GGR should no longer be the only apparatus to measure economic performances, Tong suggested a set of systematic assessment apparatuses to compare government targets and the reality.

GAMING

JP Morgan: Mass GGR in Q1 hits over half of pre-Covid levels

GAMING revenues in March have indicated that mass GGR has finally hit "70 percent-plus of pre-Covid levels for the industry," according to brokerage firm JP Morgan Securities (Asia Pacific) Ltd.

Casinos last month hit their highest revenues in three years following the tourism boost as the city dropped its adherence to a zero-Covid policy.

According to the institution's estimate, "March run-rate of MOP411 million a day... should reassure investors of a clear sequential ramp in demand," wrote analysts DS Kim and Mufan Shi," as cited in a report issued by GGR Asia.

Revenues during the first quarter totaled MOP34.64 billion, a sta-



ggering increase of nearly 95% compared to the quarter prior.

The casino sector is on a comeback as revenues are hitting high, with the first three months totaling about 82.1% of last year's GGR.

Such figures have been long awaited by the sector, as casinos have bled cash for near-

ly three years, alongside the junket crackdown and license gaming law overhaul.

Last week, Moody's Investors Service Inc said in a note that Macau's GGR could reach 45% of pre-pandemic levels, while the mass-market GGR was likely to "improve to 75 percent" of pre-pandemic times. LV

MOP23.7B TO BE PUT TOWARD PUBLIC WELLBEING, TAX REDUCTION MEASURES

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU'S economic recovery is evident, and market confidence and expectations are recovering, said Lei Wai Nong, the Secretary for Economy and Finance.

Lei considers 2023 has had a good opening for the Macau economy as the restrictions on cross-border movements has been lifted.

MOP23.7 billion will be put toward a series of public wellbeing and tax reduction measures.

According to Lei, MOP1.65 billion of secondary consumption has been generated by the citywide consumption carnival co-organized by the Office of the Secretary for Economy and Finance and the Macao Chamber of Commerce.

During Lei's speech in the business community forum organized by the Macao Chinese Chamber

of Commerce, he said there was a surge in the number of incoming passengers during January and February, which is around three million, a 1.2-fold annual increase. Among them, are 880,000 Hong Kong tourists and 412,000 Taiwan tourists. The number of Hong Kong tourists has risen more than nine times.

Gambling revenue from January to March was MOP34.6 billion, a 94.4% rise compared to the same time period last year.

Chui Sai Cheong, president of the Macao Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber will devote MOP2 million to community leisure and relaxation activities from April to July, with federations of industry and commerce in three other regions and hopes the "Tourism +" mode can drive the development of other industries.

Lei said that a proactive fiscal policy will continue to be adopted to boost social confidence and expand internal demand. Integrated tourism and leisure industries should be improved to amplify the impetus for economic recovery.

Macau and Hengqin will cooperate to build the four major industries and further moderate economic diversification.

Chui referred to China's government work report and said that the Chinese government pays high attention to the development of Macau and Hong Kong, with support for economic development and livelihood wellbeing for better stability and prosperity. He suggests that the business community should seize the chance of the gate reopening to make full use of the policies and measures to benefit Macau and provide solutions.

BASKETBALL

FIBA 3X3 MASTERS RETURNS BETTER THAN EVER FEATURING WORLD MASTERS TOUR

RENATO MARQUES

THE Wynn Macau FIBA 3X3 Masters Tournament is returning to Macau this July better than ever, featuring 16 teams from different parts of the world and total prize money of USD200,000 (MOP1.62 million), the organizers announced yesterday in a press conference to launch the event that took place at Wynn Palace Hotel.

The FIBA 3X3 Masters Tournament is one of the International Basketball Federation's highest-level 3X3 events, attracting a lot of attention from the media as well as the basketball community worldwide.

This year's World Masters Tour will start at the end of this month at Utsunomiya city in Japan and will have 14 rounds worldwide in cities such as Manila (Philippines), Marseille (France), Prague (Czech Republic), Amsterdam (Netherlands) and Abu Dhabi (UAE) among others, before reaching a final stage when there will be an Asia series and then the Finals, which will take place in December this year.

On July 8 and 9, the tour will come to Macau, on the fourth stop of the world tour, finally putting it on the map of the international destinations of 3X3 basketball, after hosting in the past only regional



qualifiers of this event.

The organizers hope that through this event, spectators from different parts of the world will be interested in traveling to Macau, contributing to the development of the local sports industry as well as its synergic effects on other sectors.

As the title sponsor of the event, Wynn Resorts (Macau) president and executive director Linda Chen handed the organizers (Sports Bureau and Macau Star Entertainment) a sponsorship check for 15 million patacas at the same ceremony.

At this time, organizers do not know all the teams that will play in Macau in July but competitors will definitely include the Serbians of "Ub Huihsan NE", the "Raudondvaris Hoptrans" from Lithuania, and "Toronto" from Canada, with the remaining competitors still to be announced according to the distribution of the rosters and matches that are still to be played.

Besides Macau, in Asia, the World Masters Tour will be played in Manila and Cebu (Philippines) and Shanghai and Chengdu (China).



ENVIRONMENT

TONS OF TRASH WASHED ASHORE ON MACAU COASTLINE IN THE LAST FEW DAYS

RENATO MARQUES

THE Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) has revealed a large quantity of trash and several kinds of debris has washed ashore on Macau's coastline, namely at Fai Chi Kei, Barra, and Hac Sa Beach.

After inspection and having started to coordinate the cleaning of the areas, DSAMA is said to have collected, in the past few days, around four tons of trash and debris per day, which more than doubles the normal quantity regularly collected.

DSAMA said the large number of objects washing ashore is related to the heavy rain of the last few days, particularly in the regions upstream of the Pearl River. The rain has caused

some minor flooding and has dragged many of these objects into the sea, which are now arriving at the coastal areas of Macau.

Inspection of the sea also found many areas covered with garbage and debris, and the DSAMA expects that in the next few days more objects will be washed ashore. They are calling on residents to pay attention to the issue and avoid using the beaches before the authorities manage to clean them.

Additionally, in the areas of Barra, Inner Harbour, and Fai Chi Kei, DSAMA has also reported unusual quantities of dead fish, which has necessitated cleaning to avoid more contamination and bad smells, among other hazards.

Alibaba to issue RMB5,000 internship subsidy to Macau interns

STAFF REPORTER

THE Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) is cooperating with Alibaba for a second training and internship project for Macau young people to go to Alibaba in Hangzhou, with 40 internship job positions including marketing, business development, cross-border business cooperation and operation, user research, client support and public welfare. Applications are open and will close on April 14.

DSAL said at its press conference yesterday that the project is aimed at educating young people about how digitalization is helping enterprises improve and



transform through practice and better promote Macau's moderate economic diversification.

The project is composed of a three-week training period and a five-week internship. Topics covered in the training include the development of the digital

economy in China and Alibaba's organizational culture and business practices.

There will be a MOP5,000 subsidy per four weeks from DSAL for participants' accommodation and living expenses during their internship, as well as a

MOP4,000 transportation and travel insurance subsidy for the whole program. Alibaba will issue a RMB5,000 internship subsidy for each participant.

The internship host organization requires participants to prepare a valid health certificate issued by a Macau legal medical institution at their own expense for employment procedures.

To be eligible for the project, participants should be Macau residents who finished their higher education after September 2019 and have obtained a degree, have some work experience and fulfill the skill requirements.

GBA LIGHT VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIP TO START TODAY

MACAU'S inaugural Greater Bay Area light volleyball championship will be held Saturday and Sunday at the Sports Complex at the University of Macau.

Before the commencement of the competition, there will be a series of events celebrating the sport, which will be held from tomorrow until Friday.

The championship sees 18 teams competing for the prizes. Besides local teams, teams will also come from Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Zhaoqing. The women's category will include a team comprising athletes from both Macau and Hong Kong.

The organizer stated that

the series of events will include a referee class and a symposium on April 7, the opening ceremony of the championship on April 8, the competition and an experience camp on April 8 and 9, and the awards ceremony on April 9.

The event is organized by Chi Fong Sports Club, co-organized by the Volleyball Association of Macao, China, and supported by the several governmental entities.

Light volleyball relies on the same set of regulations as volleyball, but the ball itself is lighter but larger in size. A light volleyball weighs 120 grams and has a circumference ranging from 74 to 76 centimeters. **AL**

CRIME

PJ arrests man suspected of defrauding people MOP1.8m in fake investment scam

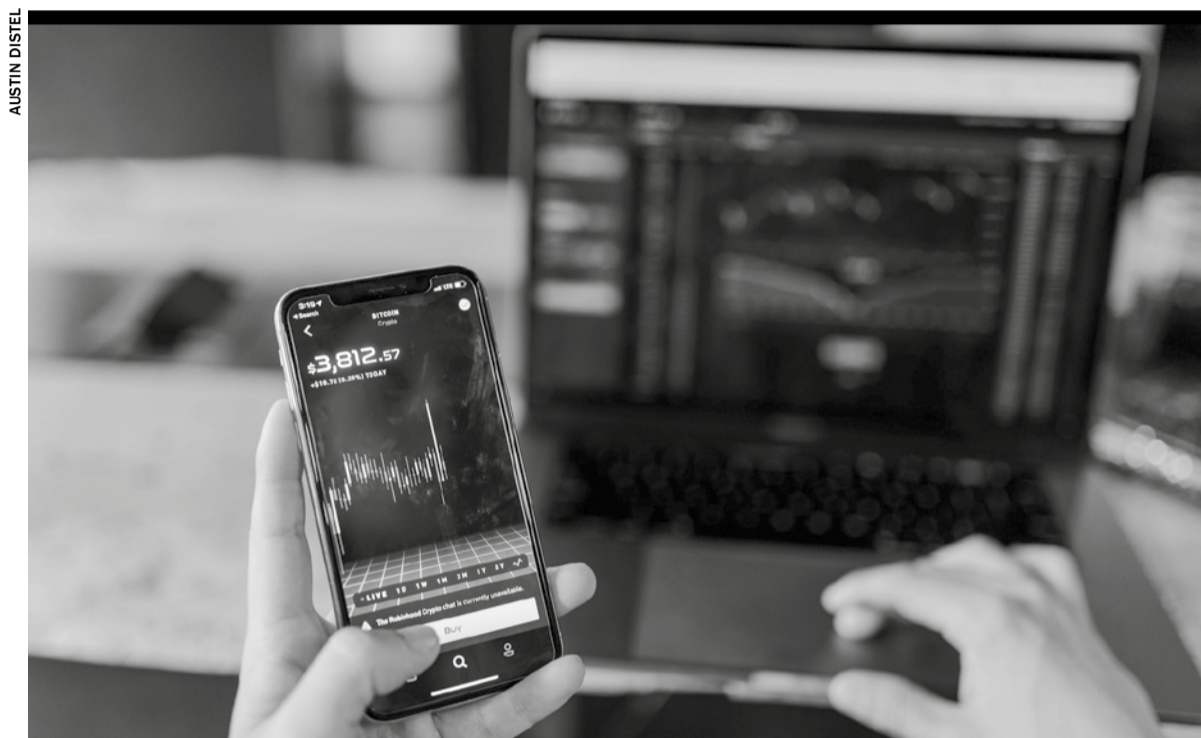
RENATO MARQUES

A 45-year-old Korean man was detained by the Judiciary Police (PJ) for an alleged investment fraud swindling the equivalent of MOP1.8 million from seven victims, the PJ announced yesterday in a special press conference.

According to the PJ, the case dates back to late 2019, when the man lured the victims through an online video posted on a video-sharing platform, in which he claimed to be able to provide interest of between 0.25% to 1% per day to investors for each USD1,000 (MOP8,086) invested in the scheme.

At that time, the alleged fraudster met with seven alleged victims, six of them from the mainland and one from Hong Kong, who, in total, claim to have lost the equivalent of MOP 1.75 million.

All these appointments with the victims were made in Macau where the man was supposed to have



AUSTIN DISTEL

opened a company and was operating the investment scheme.

Later the victims were invited to join a chat group where ins-

tructions were given to download a mobile application that would serve as an investment trading platform.

After initially having seen some profits accumulating, the victims then lost the money invested in the scheme and also lost contact with

the suspect, filing complaints with the PJ.

After an investigation, the police managed to identify the suspect and also found that the alleged company never existed, being based out of a small office rented temporarily to lure the victims into believing that it was a legitimate business.

The PJ also found that around the same time, the suspect had gambled and lost over HKD4 million in several local casinos.

On April 1, the suspect was finally intercepted when he tried to reenter Macau. He has refused to cooperate with the PJ or to give any testimony to the authorities on the case.

The police authorities suspect that there might be other people involved in the scam as the office was not rented by the suspect but by some other people, residents of the mainland thought to have assisted the suspect now in custody to commit the crimes.

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EDUCATION

MUST PRESENTS NOBEL LAUREATES AT 23RD ANNIVERSARY SUMMIT

ANTHONY LAM

To celebrate its 23rd Anniversary, the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) presented two Nobel Laureates at a medical summit that commenced yesterday afternoon.

Officially referred to as 2nd Frontiers in Medicine Summit, the academic event aims at exploring and sharing advances in translational medicine and drug development.

German biophysicist and Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine in 1991, Erwin Neher, 79, gave a lecture on the first day of the summit, discussing advances in cellular signaling and structural biology: new options for drug development and cancer research.

Today, the concluding day of the summit, will see Peter Doherty, 82, Australian immunologist and Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine in 1996, discussing over video conferencing technologies matters related to the future pandemics and the tactics that should



Erwin Neher, German biophysicist and Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine in 1991

be employed.

During the opening ceremony, vice chancellor and president Joseph Hun-wei Lee of

the university mentioned that the summit is the first featured event organized by the Medical Science Division (MSD).

"It is an important research and education entity newly established in response to the rapidly changing demand for tea-

ching, research, innovation and service," Lee said. The MSD has been restructured from the original medical units and medical sciences disciplines, and now consists of the Faculty of Medicine and its affiliated School of Pharmacy, and the Faculty of Chinese Medicine, as well as two new research centers including the AI laboratory in Medicine and Center of Regenerative Medicine, he added.

"The MSD was established with the aim of facilitating talent cultivation and social development for the enhancement of the university's global competitiveness and influence," Lee further elaborated on the new facility.

The university also aims at leveraging assistance from the MSD to develop Big Health in the country.

"I hope that this summit would facilitate the MSD to give full play to its advantages and its continuous development in teaching, scientific research and other aspects," Lee concluded.

This afternoon will also see the Hong Kong government's chief epidemic advisor during the Covid-19 pandemic, Kwok-yung Yuen, 66, microbiologist, physician and surgeon from Hong Kong, presenting his views on necessary preparations for future outbreaks.

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SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter pulls check mark from main New York Times account

TWITTER has removed the verification check mark on the main account of The New York Times, one of CEO Elon Musk's most despised news organizations.

The removal comes as many of Twitter's high-profile users are bracing for the loss of the blue check marks that helped verify their identity and distinguish them from impostors on the social media platform.

Musk, who owns Twitter, set a deadline of Saturday for verified users to buy a premium Twitter subscription or lose the checks on their profiles. The Times said in a story Thursday that it would not pay Twitter for verification of its institutional accounts.

Early Sunday, Musk tweeted that the Times' check mark would be removed. Later he posted disparaging remarks about the newspaper, which has aggressively reported on Twitter and on flaws with partially automated driving systems at Tesla, the electric car company, which he also runs.

Other Times accounts such as its business news and opinion pages still had either blue or gold check marks on Sunday, as did multiple reporters for the news organization.

"We aren't planning to pay the monthly fee for check mark status for our institutional Twitter accounts," the Times said in a statement Sunday. "We also will not reimburse reporters for Twitter Blue for personal accounts, except in rare instances where this status would be essential for reporting purposes," the newspaper said in a statement Sunday.

The Associated Press, which has said it also will not pay

AP PHOTO



for the check marks, still had them on its accounts at mid-day Sunday.

Twitter did not answer emailed questions Sunday about the removal of The New York Times check mark.

The costs of keeping the check marks ranges from \$8 a month for individual web users to a starting price of \$1,000 monthly to verify an organization, plus \$50 monthly for each affiliate or employee account. Twitter does not verify the individual accounts to ensure they are who they say they are, as was the case with the previous blue check doled out to public figures and others during the platform's pre-Musk administration.

While the cost of Twitter Blue subscriptions might

seem like nothing for Twitter's most famous commentators, celebrity users from basketball star LeBron James to Star Trek's William Shatner have balked at joining. Seinfeld actor Jason Alexander pledged to leave the platform if Musk takes his blue check away.

The White House is also passing on enrolling in premium accounts, according to a memo sent to staff. While Twitter has granted a free gray mark for President Joe Biden and members of his Cabinet, lower-level staff won't get Twitter Blue benefits unless they pay for it themselves.

"If you see impersonations that you believe violate Twitter's stated impersonation policies, alert Twitter using Twitter's public impersonation portal," said the staff

memo from White House official Rob Flaherty.

One of Musk's first product moves after taking over Twitter was to launch a service granting blue checks to anyone willing to pay \$8 a month. But it was quickly inundated by impostor accounts, including those impersonating Nintendo, pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly and Musk's businesses Tesla and SpaceX, so Twitter had to temporarily suspend the service days after its launch.

The relaunched service costs \$8 a month for web users and \$11 a month for users of its iPhone or Android apps. Subscribers are supposed to see fewer ads, be able to post longer videos and have their tweets featured more prominently. **MDT/AP**

WSJ: MCDONALD'S TO CLOSE OFFICES BRIEFLY AHEAD OF LAYOFFS

A report says McDonald's has closed its U.S. offices for a few days as the company prepares to inform employees about layoffs.

The Wall Street Journal cited an internal email from the Chicago-based fast-food giant saying U.S. corporate staff and some employees overseas should work from home while the company notifies people of their job status.

McDonald's did not immediately reply to emailed requests for comment. The report said McDonald's would inform its employees this week about staffing decisions that are part of a wide restructuring of the company announced earlier.

Though the U.S. labor market remains strong, layoffs have been mounting, mainly in the technology sector, where many companies over-hired after a pandemic boom. IBM, Microsoft, Amazon, Salesforce, Facebook parent Meta, Twitter and DoorDash have all announced layoffs in recent months.

Policymakers at the Federal Reserve have forecast the unemployment rate may rise to 4.6% by the end of this year, a sizable increase historically associated with recessions.

McDonald's has more than 150,000 employees in corporate roles. About 70% of those employees are based outside the United States.

The company reported its global sales rose nearly 11% in 2022, while sales in the U.S. climbed almost 6%. Total restaurant margins rose 5%. In its latest annual report, it cited difficulties in adequately staffing some of its outlets.

In January, McDonald's said its "Accelerating the Arches" program would focus on "deliveries, Drive Thru, digital and development."

"We're performing at a high level, but we can do even better," CEO Chris Kempczinski said in a Jan. 6 letter to employees. He said the company was divided into silos and that the approach was "outdated and self-limiting."

As the company reshapes its strategy, he said, "we will evaluate roles and staffing levels in parts of the organization and there will be difficult discussions and decisions ahead." **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Sands China hosts sharing session on NPC, CPPCC



Sands China Ltd. held a seminar about the recent sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) March 28 at The Londoner Macao for

management team members and local youth.

Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China Ltd., moderated the sharing session, and said: "We want to encourage all of our team members, including

young professionals, to have a comprehensive understanding of the nation's development path and its significant decisions."

"This will enable them to fuse into the country's overall development and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area," he added.

Entitled the Sands China Distinguished Speaker Forum Series - The Spirit of NPC and CPPCC, more than 230 people attended the sharing session, including Sands China team members and students of the company's development programmes.

Visa appoints new GM to Hong Kong, Macau operations



Digital payment operator Visa has appointed Paulina Leong as general manager of Visa Hong Kong and Macau, the company announced in a press release.

Leong has over 18 years of experience working in the payments industry and was Visa's Head of Client Relationship Management for Hong Kong and Macau.

In her new role, she will be responsible for leading Visa's business operations in

both Hong Kong and Macau although she will continue to be based in Hong Kong.

"I am excited to take on this role and lead Visa's businesses and operations in Hong Kong and Macau which are fascinating and fast-growing. I look forward to working closely with our partners, fintech, the regulator, and all stakeholders to help accelerate business growth, and enable individuals, businesses, and economies to thrive," Leong said in the same statement.



MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ON TIKTOK DEFEND APP'S REACH TO VOTERS

FARNOUSH AMIRI,
WASHINGTON

REP. Jeff Jackson of North Carolina has used it to explain the complex fight over raising the debt limit. Rep. Robert Garcia of California has used it to engage with members of the LGBTQ+ community. And Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania has used it to

give an overview of Election Day results.

As pressure against TikTok mounts in Washington, the more than two dozen members of Congress — all Democrats — who are active on the social media platform are being pushed by their colleagues to stop using it. Many defend their presence on the platform, saying they have a respon-

sibility as public officials to meet Americans where they are — and more than 150 million are on TikTok.

"I'm sensitive to the ban and recognize some of the security implications. But there is no more robust and expeditious way to reach young people in the United States of America than TikTok," Democratic Rep. Dean Phillips of

Minnesota told The Associated Press.

Yet the lawmakers active on TikTok remain a distinct minority. Most in Congress are in favor of limiting the app, forcing a sale to remove connections to China or even banning it outright. The U.S. armed forces and more than half of U.S. states have already banned the app from official devices, as

has the federal government. Similar bans have been imposed in Denmark, Canada, Great Britain and New Zealand, as well as the European Union.

Criticism of TikTok reached a new level last week as CEO Shou Zi Chew testified for more than six hours at a contentious hearing in the House. Lawmakers grilled Chew about the implications of the app for America's national security and the effect on the mental health of its users.

And the tough questions came from both sides of the aisle, as Republicans and Democrats alike pressed Chew about TikTok's content moderation practices, its ability to shield American data from Beijing and its spying on journalists.

"I've got to hand it to you," said Rep. August Pfluger, R-Texas, as members questioned Chew over data security and harmful content. "You've actually done something that in the last three to four years has not happened except for the exception of maybe (Russian President) Vladimir Putin. You have unified Republicans and Democrats."

While the hearing made plain that lawmakers view TikTok as a threat, their lack of first-hand experience with the app was apparent at times. Some made inaccurate and head-scratching comments, seemingly not understanding how TikTok connects to a home Wi-Fi router or how it moderates illicit content. MDT/AP

Japan protests China's detention of citizen, maritime action

MARI YAMAGUCHI &
HUIZHONG WU, TOKYO

JAPAN'S Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi protested in a meeting Sunday with his Chinese counterpart the detention of a Japanese national in Beijing and raised "strong concern" about China's military activity near Taiwan and around Japan.

Hayashi was on a two-day visit to 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 later Sunday.

During his talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang, Hayashi demanded an early release of an employee of the Japanese pharmaceutical company Astellas Pharma, who was detained in Beijing last month over what the Chinese Foreign Ministry described as spying

allegations. Neither side has offered further details about the man nor the allegations against him.

Hayashi told reporters he raised "serious concern" about China's activity in the East and South China seas, and stressed the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

He said he also expressed concern about Beijing's joint military activity with Russia around Japan while Moscow wages war against Ukraine.

Hayashi said he told Qin while there is a possibility of improving cooperation in economic, cultural and people exchanges, the two countries also face "many problems and serious concerns" and that "Japan-China relations are currently at an extremely important phase."

The two ministers agreed to work together in achieving "a constructive and stable relationship" as agreed between their lea-

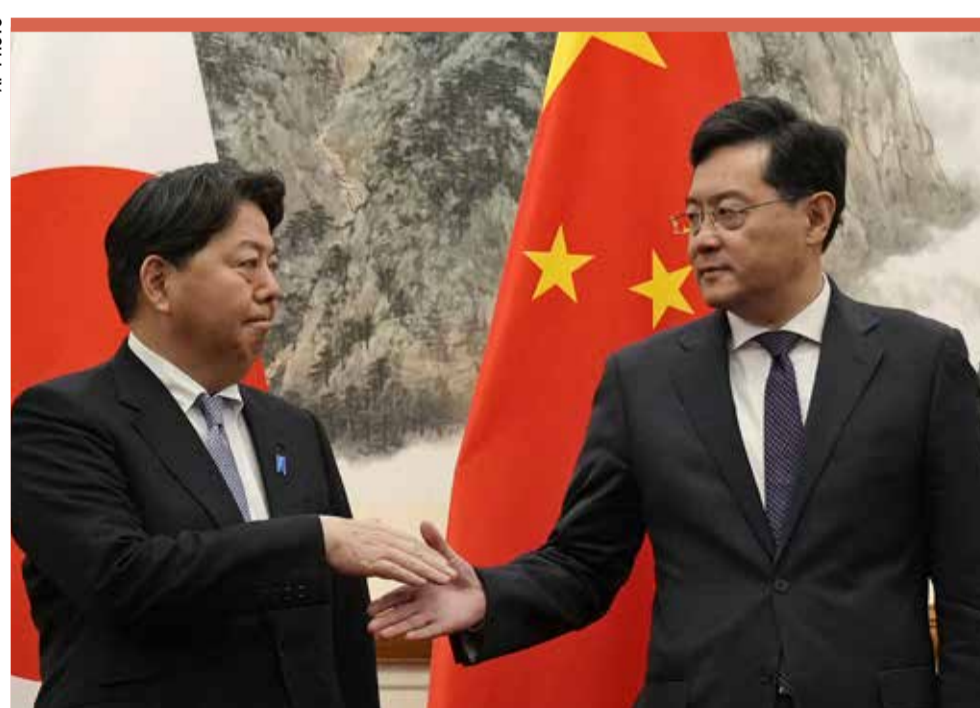
ders in November, Hayashi said.

The sides agreed to improve communication in regional security, and welcomed the establishment of a defense hotline last week and the resumption of defense talks, Hayashi said.

Hayashi said that he and Premier Li shared the importance of their bilateral economic ties, and that it was crucial that Japanese nationals and companies feel safe to operate in China.

That was the concern raised by representatives of Japanese companies during their meeting Saturday with Hayashi. They also sought transparent, predictable and fair business environment in China, said Yukiko Okano, deputy press secretary for the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

Separately, Hayashi told Wang that China's activity in the East China Sea and the recent detention are "a stumbling block for pro-



Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, left, shakes hands with his counterpart Qin Gang at the Diaoyutai State Guest House in Beijing, Sunday

moting economic and people-to-people exchanges."

Despite close economic and business ties between the two Asian powers, Tokyo and Beijing have been increasingly at odds in recent years as Japan considers China's growing

influence in the region a threat to its security and economy.

Qin meanwhile warned against Japanese involvement in issues related to Taiwan, saying Tokyo should not interfere and "undermine China's sovereignty

in any way," according to a statement from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Qin said "the Taiwan issue is at the core of China's core interests and concerns the political foundation of China-Japan relations." MDT/AP



DIRE STRAIT

Taiwan's Tsai wraps up Guatemala visit, heads to Belize

TAIWANESE leader Tsai Ing-wen and Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei on Saturday toured a hospital built with support from Taipei, reaffirming their close diplomatic ties as the self-governing island seeks to strengthen relations with its remaining allies in Central America.

It was the final day of Tsai's three-day visit to Guatemala and came shortly after Honduras announced it would break ties with Taiwan and switch its support to China, joining Nicaragua, Panama, El Salvador and Costa Rica. Belize - the next stop on Tsai's trip - is the only other Central American country to maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

Giammattei once again thanked Taiwan's leader for her government's economic support and said Guatemala's friendship with Taiwan was "unchangeable."

Sunday's visit came a day after the leaders toured the Guatemalan archaeological site of Tikal, one of the most important urban centers of the Mayan civilization.

The hospital in Chimaltengo

department built with a donation from Taiwan will serve patients from four departments in Guatemala and cost an estimated \$22 million to build. It opened in February.

Tsai said she was pleased with the construction of the hospital, which, according to her, "will be able to provide better medical care and service.

Construction of the hospital has brought controversy. Two weeks ago, the attorney general announced an investigation into allegations of a \$10 million fraud in the purchase of equipment for the hospital. Prosecutors allege former vice minister of health, Gerardo Hernández, authorized the purchase of used equipment and material. A company and the director of the hospital were allegedly in on the scheme.

The trip also is aimed to solidifying ties in Latin America.

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**

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MGM Partners with Art Basel Hong Kong to Present "Long Time No See" in Hong Kong



MGM and Art Basel Hong Kong presented the "Long Time No See" Sector Party, an art and cultural celebration hosted by **Pansy Ho, Co-Chairperson and Executive Director of MGM China Holdings Limited**, together with **Angelle Siyang-Le, Director of Art Basel Hong Kong**. The partnership kick-started one of Hong Kong's first major art and cultural occasions sponsored by MGM during the Art Basel week at the Forty-Five, a newly launched venue at The Landmark in Central with a rooftop overseeing the spectacular view of Hong Kong. The night of extravaganza saw a stellar line-up of some of the most renowned art and cultural figures, fashion icons, music and movie industry leaders such as Pharrell Williams, Li Xiaopeng, Adrian Cheng, Edwin Chuang, Eva Chow and alike.

With arts, culture, entertainment and performance at the core of the MGM brand, MGM is collaborating with Art Basel Hong Kong, one of the world's premier art shows for modern and contemporary art, to represent a natural course of this long-term strategic vision for fruitful, ongoing initiatives in the art and culture realm. With Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau sharing same cultural roots, "Long Time No See" Sector Party was a special occasion that deepened the cultural exchanges in the Greater Bay Area (GBA), and strengthened its connection to the world with over 1,000 local and international visitors from the art and culture, entertainment and performance world that attended the event.

Besides inviting high caliber VIPs of Art Basel Hong Kong to visit Macau to explore the charm of UNESCO World Heritage sites and the creative gastronomic scene, MGM has organized a group of VIP delegation from Macau with Ho Lok San, representative of the President of the Consultative Committee for Cultural Development (CCDC) and Chief of Office of Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture; Leong Vai Man, Vice President of CCDC and Director of Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC); Lo Ho Chi, committee member of CCDC and representative of Office of Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture; Cheang Kai Meng, Deputy Director of IC, well as other committee members of CCDC and management representatives of IC, to Art Basel Hong Kong. MGM hopes to give fresh impetus on the rising global art trend and create opportunities for Macau cultural leaders for dialogue and engagement with established artists and new emerging talents from around the globe.

Pansy Ho said, "MGM endeavors in bringing unique art and cultural experience fusing tradition with innovation and connecting the East with the West. We aim to engage with our global audiences through building an extensive network of arts and culture with Art Basel Hong Kong, which is an integral part of our longstanding commitment to global art and cultural development and our effort to help Macau achieve economic diversification. Our long and successful partnership with Art Basel Hong Kong will reinforce the GBA's position in promoting art and cultural exchange between the East and West."

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TENSIONS

SOUTH KOREA, US, JAPAN HOLD ANTI-NORTH KOREA SUBMARINE DRILL

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

THE South Korean, U.S. and Japanese navies began their first anti-submarine drills in six months yesterday to boost their coordination against increasing North Korean missile threats, South Korea's military said.

The two-day drills come as North Korea's recent unveiling of a type of battlefield nuclear warhead prompted worries the country may conduct its first nuclear test since 2017.

The maritime exercises in international waters off South Korea's southern island of Jeju involved the nuclear-powered USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and naval destroyers from South Korea, the U.S. and Japan, South Korea's Defense Ministry said in a statement.

The training was arranged to improve the three countries' capacities to respond to underwater security threats posed by North Korea's advancing submarine-launched ballistic missiles and other assets, the statement said. South Korean defense officials said the three countries were to detect and



The U.S. Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz departs a naval base in Busan, South Korea, Sunday

track unmanned South Korean and U.S. underwater vehicles posing as enemy submarines and other assets.

Submarine-launched missiles by North Korea are serious security threats to the United States and its allies because it's harder to spot such launches in advance. In recent years, the North has been testing sophisticated underwater-launched ballistic missiles and pushing to build bigger submarines including a nuclear-

powered one.

Last month, North Korea performed a barrage of missile tests in response to the earlier South Korea-U.S. bilateral military drills. The weapons tested included a nuclear-capable underwater drone and a submarine-launched cruise missile, which suggest North Korea is trying to diversify underwater weapons systems.

Photographs in North Korea's state media last week showed leader Kim Jong Un standing near

about 10 red-tipped warheads called "Hwasan (volcano)-31" with different serial numbers. A poster on a nearby wall listed eight kinds of short-range weapons that can carry the "Hwasan-31" warhead. The previous test flights of those weapons show they are capable of striking key targets in South Korea, including U.S. military bases there.

Some observers say the warhead's unveiling may be a prelude to a nuclear test as North Korea's last two tests in 2016 and 2017 followed the disclosures of other warheads. If it does conduct a nuclear test, it would be its seventh detonation overall and the first since September 2017.

During the warhead-related event last week, Kim also ordered officials to ramp up bomb fuel production to achieve his stated goal of expanding his country's nuclear arsenal "exponentially." On Saturday, 38 North, a North Korea-focused website, said that recent commercial satellite imagery of the North's main Yongbyon nuclear complex indicates a high level of activity, such as the continued operation of its 5-megawa-

tt reactor and new construction around the uranium enrichment plant area.

Foreign experts debate whether North Korea has functioning nuclear-armed missiles. But South Korea's defense minister, Lee Jong-Sup, recently told lawmakers that the North's technology to build miniaturized warheads to be mounted on advanced short-range missiles was believed to have made considerable progress.

North Korea could carry out new missile tests to protest the South Korea-U.S.-Japan drills because it views such training as a security threat. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called the recent South Korea-U.S. exercises "reckless military provocations" that disregarded North Korea's "patience and warning."

In remarks carried in the Defense Ministry statement, Rear Adm. Kim Inho, chief of the South Korean forces involved in the trilateral drills, said "We'll decisively respond to and neutralize any type of provocation by North Korea."

In addition to the anti-submarine drills, the three countries will practice humanitarian search-and-rescue operations, including saving people who fall into the water and treating emergency patients. It would be the three countries' first such training in seven years, the Defense Ministry statement said. **MDT/AP**

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ECONOMY

Bank survey shows Japan's businesses turning pessimistic

YURI KAGEYAMA,
TOKYO

BUSINESS sentiment among big Japanese manufacturers worsened in the first quarter of this year in the fifth straight decline, according to a central bank survey released Monday.

The headline measure in the Bank of Japan quarterly survey called "tankan" found such sentiments stood at plus 1, down from plus 7 in December. It's the worst quarterly result since December 2020.

Sentiments among major non-manufacturers rose one point to plus 20, its the fourth straight quarter of improvement.

The Japanese economy has tended to stagnate in recent years, with slow wage increases, and has recently been hit by inflationary pressures, even as some parts of the nation's economy continue to



experience deflation, the opposite trend in which prices continually decrease.

Uncertainty about global growth is weighing on the export-reliant country. The recent turmoil over the U.S. banking sector is adding to such woes, just at a time when Russia's war in Ukraine has sent energy prices soaring. Japan imports almost all its oil.

The weakening yen boosts the value of overseas earnings by exporters like Toyota and Ninten-

do, but is proving to be a challenge for rising energy costs.

For the tankan's projection of sentiments three months later, large manufacturers are expecting an improvement of 2 points at plus 3.

What the Bank of Japan might do on interest rates is being closely watched. The central bank has kept interest rates at zero or in minus territory for years to wrest Japan out of its economic doldrums. **MDT/AP**

Autopsies show 30 people died from gunfire in Peru protests

FRANKLIN BRICEÑO, LIMA

IN autopsy after autopsy, Peruvian anti-government protesters share the same cause of death: "firearm projectile."

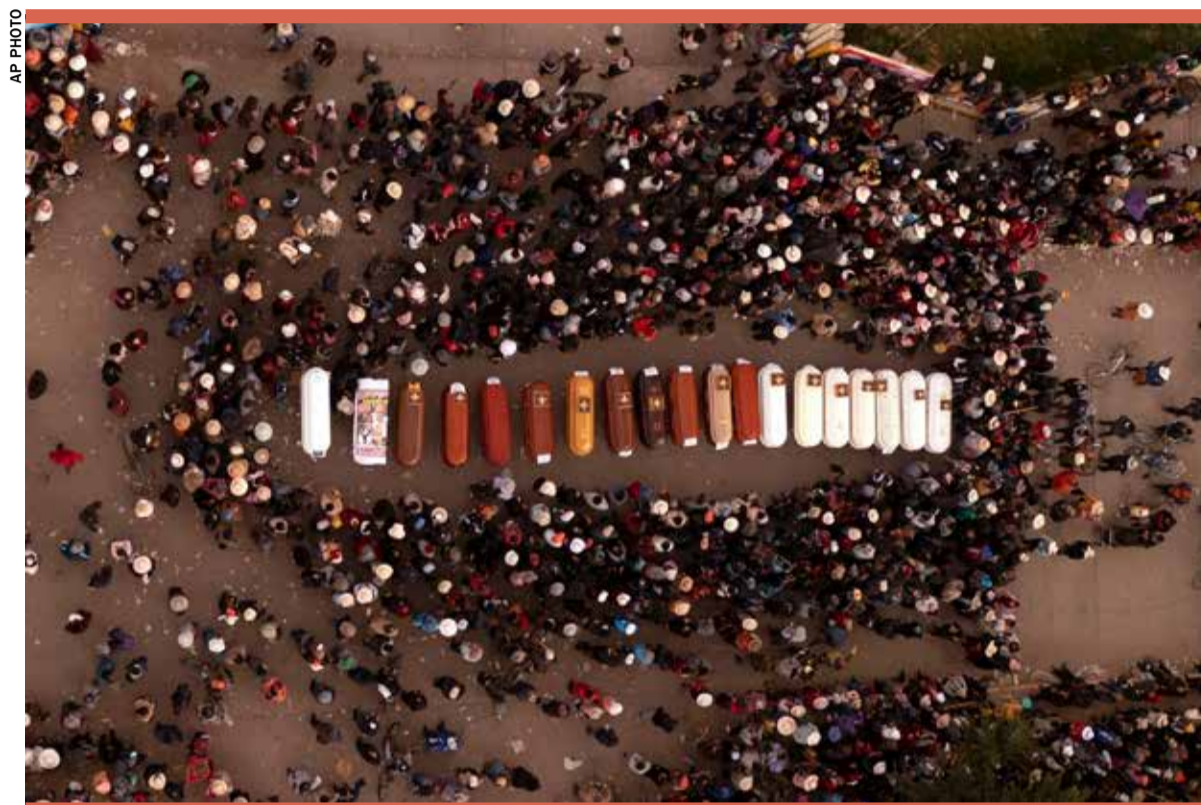
Christian Armando Mamani, a 22-year-old musician, was walking by the protest in a southern city when a bullet entered the left side of his torso and pierced both of his lungs.

The same January day, Roger Rolando Cayo, a 25-year-old protester, died when a shot ripped through his eye and destroyed his brain.

Human rights groups — including the United Nations — have called on the Peruvian government to investigate claims of excessive force used by police and soldiers during recent protests that have left 49 civilians dead, and the autopsies provide some evidence of the alleged use of lethal ammunition.

Thirty of the 32 forensic reports obtained by The Associated Press list gunfire as the cause of death. Some of the reports detail bullet calibers similar to those used by security forces in Peru, which experts believe indicates that police and soldiers violated their own operations manuals prohibiting shooting directly toward protesters unless there's a serious risk to their life.

The findings come as Peru



struggles to recover from the political crisis that hit the country late last year. In December, then-President Pedro Castillo, who was facing several corruption investigations, attempted to dissolve Congress but was instead impeached, arrested and replaced by the vice president. Demonstrations stretched out to February, mostly in southern Peru where the former leader has had more support, triggering the worst political violence the coun-

try has seen in more than two decades.

In the southern city of Juliaca, protesters clashed with police outside the airport on Jan. 9 in what would be the deadliest demonstration. Autopsies confirmed that 18 people died from gunfire that day. Among the dead were a 16-year-old student whose left lung was perforated by a 7.62 mm bullet that lodged in his abdomen and a 17-year-old university student who died from a 9

mm bullet wound.

The AP obtained a copy of a document from the federal prosecutor's office that listed the weapons used by police in Juliaca in December, including 7.62 mm AKM assault rifles and 9 mm Beretta and Sauer handguns.

In Peru, civilians are only permitted to own guns with low calibers. High-caliber guns — including the 7.62 and 5.56 mm types mentioned in the forensic reports — are exclusively for the use of

security forces.

Carmen Rosa Cardoza, a Peruvian forensic anthropologist, told the AP that the autopsies show a pattern of a "disproportionate use of force."

"In the injuries by the firearm projectiles, there's a pattern linked to human rights violations," she said, noting that most of the fatal wounds are on the head, neck, thorax and abdomen. The shooters, she said, "are targeting those regions."

Protesters are still staging roadblocks in some parts of the country and calling for the resignation of the new president, Dina Boluarte, whom they blame for the deaths of dozens of demonstrators in areas inhabited largely by Indigenous people.

The attorney general's office has launched an investigation that hasn't led to any arrests.

"These numbers turn Peru into a champion of repression, when compared to other democracies in Latin America" said Jo-Marie Burt, a Peru expert at the Washington Office on Latin America, a human rights group. "Only openly authoritarian nations like Venezuela and Nicaragua" have had more deaths during recent protests, she said.

Peruvian government officials have said they did not give police orders to shoot at protesters after massive demonstrations broke out in the south, where Castillo's removal angered people frustrated with the nation's Congress, which has contributed to the political instability by impeaching three presidents in the past six years and has become one of the nation's least trusted institutions. **MDT/AP**

Finland joins NATO, military alliance chief says

LORNE COOK

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday Finland will become the 31st member of the world's biggest military alliance today, prompting a warning from Russia that it would bolster its defenses near their joint border if NATO deploys any troops in its new member.

"This is a historic week," Stoltenberg told reporters on the eve of a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels. "From tomorrow, Finland will be a full member of the alliance." He said that he hopes Sweden will be able to join NATO in coming months.

The former Norwegian prime minister said that on Tuesday afternoon, "we will raise the Finnish flag for the



first time here at the NATO headquarters. It will be a good day for Finland's security, for Nordic security, and for NATO as a whole."

Stoltenberg said that Turkey, the last country to have ratified Finland's membership, will hand its official texts to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday. Stoltenberg

said he would then invite Finland to do the same.

Finnish President Sauli Niinistö and Defense Minister Antti Kaikkonen will attend the ceremony, along with Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto.

"It is a historic moment for us. For Finland, the most important objective at the meeting will be to emphasize

NATO's support to Ukraine as Russia continues its illegal aggression," Haavisto said in a statement. "We seek to promote stability and security throughout the Euro-Atlantic region."

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said that Moscow would respond to Finland becoming NATO's member by bolste-

ring its defenses if needed.

"We will strengthen our military potential in the west and in the northwest," Grushko said in remarks carried by the state RIA Novosti news agency. "In case of deployment of forces of other NATO members on the territory of Finland, we will take additional steps to ensure Russia's military security."

The announcement of Finland's entry comes just after Finnish voters gave a boost to conservative parties in a weekend election, depriving left-wing Prime Minister Sanna Marin of another term. Marin had championed her country's NATO accession.

Fearing that they might be targeted after Russia invaded Ukraine a year ago, the Nordic neighbors

Finland and Sweden abandoned their traditional positions of military non-alignment to seek protection under NATO's security umbrella.

All 30 allies signed Finland's and Sweden's accession protocols. Turkey and Hungary delayed the process for months but have relented on Finland. Turkey has sought guarantees and assurances from the two, notably on tackling extremism. Hungary's demands have never been explicit.

NATO must agree unanimously for new members to join. NATO officials are also keen to bring Sweden within the fold before U.S. President Joe Biden and his alliance counterparts meet in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius on July 11-12.

"Sweden is not left alone. Sweden is as close as it can come as a full-fledged member," Stoltenberg said. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



RUSSIA BLAMES UKRAINE FOR BOMB THAT KILLED MILITARY BLOGGER

RUSSIA'S top counter-terrorism body yesterday blamed Ukrainian intelligence agencies for the bombing attack that killed a well-known Russian military blogger who fervently supported Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Russian officials said Vladlen Tatarsky, 40, was killed Sunday as he was leading a discussion at a cafe on the banks of the Neva River in the historic heart of St. Petersburg. Over 30 people were wounded by the blast, and 10 of them remain in grave condition, according to the authorities.

The National Anti-Terrorist Committee, a state structure that coordinates counterterrorism operations, said that the "terrorist act" against Tatarsky was "planned by Ukrainian special services" with the involvement of people who have cooperated with an anti-corruption foundation created by jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. It noted that the arrested suspect was an "active supporter" of Navalny's group.

Shortly before the announcement, Russia's Investigative Committee, the top state criminal investigation agency, reported the arrest of Darya Tryopova, a 26-year-old St. Petersburg resident suspected of involvement in the attack. Tryopova had been previously detained

for taking part in anti-war rallies.

Investigators believe that the bomb was hidden in a bust of the blogger that the suspect had given to him as a gift just before the explosion.

According to Russian media reports, Tryopova told investigators that she was used as a carrier to deliver the explosive device, but didn't know that it was hidden in the bust.

Witnesses said that the suspect asked questions and exchanged remarks with Tatarsky during the discussion. One witness, said the woman told Tatarsky that she had made a bust of the blogger but that guards asked her to leave it at the door, suspecting it could be a bomb. They joked and laughed, and then she went to the door, grabbed the bust and presented it to Tatarsky.

A video showed Tatarsky making jokes about the bust and putting it on the table next to him just before the explosion.

Russia's Investigative Committee, the state's top criminal investigation agency, opened a probe on charges of murder.

No one publicly claimed responsibility, but military bloggers and patriotic commentators immediately blamed Ukraine for the attack and compared the bombing to last August's assassination of nationalist TV commen-

tator Darya Dugina, who was killed when a remotely controlled explosive device planted in her SUV blew up as she was driving on the outskirts of Moscow.

Russian authorities blamed Ukraine's military intelligence for Dugina's death, but Kyiv denied involvement.

Dugina's father, Alexander Dugin, a nationalist philosopher and political theorist who strongly supports the invasion of Ukraine, hailed Tatarsky as an "immortal" hero who died to save the Russian people.

Reacting to Tatarsky's death, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said late Sunday his activities "have won him the hatred of the Kyiv regime" and noted that he and other Russian military bloggers have long faced Ukrainian threats.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Russian millionaire owner of the Wagner Group military contractor spearheading Moscow's offensive in eastern Ukraine, said he owned the cafe and handed it over to a patriotic group for meetings. He said he doubts the Ukrainian authorities' involvement in the bombing, saying the attack was likely launched by a "group of radicals" unrelated to the government in Kyiv.

Since the fighting in Ukraine began Feb. 24, 2022, Ukrainian authorities have

refrained from claiming responsibility for various fires, explosions and apparent assassinations in Russia. At the same time, officials in Kyiv have jubilantly greeted such events and insisted on Ukraine's right to launch attacks in Russia.

A top Ukrainian government official cast the explosion that killed Tatarsky as part of internal turmoil.

"Spiders are eating each other in a jar," Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak wrote in English on Twitter late Sunday. "Question of when domestic terrorism would become an instrument of internal political fight was a matter of time."

Tatarsky, who had filed regular reports from Ukraine, was the pen name for Maxim Fomin, who had accumulated more than 560,000 followers on his Telegram messaging app channel.

Born in the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial heartland, Tatarsky worked as a coal miner before starting a furniture business. When he ran into financial difficulties, he robbed a bank and was sentenced to prison. He fled from custody after a Russia-backed separatist rebellion engulfed the Donbas in 2014, weeks after Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Then he joined separatist rebels and fought on the front line before turning to blogging. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1968 MARTIN LUTHER KING SHOT DEAD



The American black civil rights leader, Dr Martin Luther King, has been assassinated.

Dr King was shot dead in the southern US city of Memphis, Tennessee, where he was to lead a march of sanitation workers protesting against low wages and poor working conditions

He was shot in the neck as he stood on a hotel balcony and died in hospital soon afterwards.

Reverend Jesse Jackson was on the balcony with Dr King when the single shot rang out.

"He had just bent over. I reckon if he had been standing up he would not have been hit in the face," said Mr Jackson.

Police in Memphis were put on alert for a "well-dressed" white man who is said to have dropped an automatic rifle after the shooting and escaped in a blue car.

There were early signs of rioting in Memphis after Dr King's death and 4,000 members of the National Guard were drafted into the city.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew has been ordered to ward off disturbances.

The US President, Lyndon Johnson, has postponed a trip to Hawaii for peace talks on Vietnam.

The president said he was "shocked and saddened" by the civil rights leader's death.

"I ask every citizen to reject the blind violence that has taken Dr King who lived by non-violence," Mr Johnson said.

Bus boycott

Dr King, 39, had previously survived several attempts on his life including the bombing of his home in 1956.

The charismatic civil rights leader joined the crusade for equal rights for black people in America in the mid 1950s.

He first came to national prominence as one of the leaders of the Alabama bus boycott in 1955.

In 1963 Dr King led a massive march on Washington DC where he delivered his now famous "I have a dream" speech.

Dr King advocated the use of non-violent tactics such as sit-ins and protest marches.

In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel peace prize.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Martin Luther King's assassination led to riots in more than 100 US cities.

James Earl Ray was convicted of his murder and sentenced to 99 years in prison.

But he later retracted his confession and said he had been only a minor player in a conspiracy. However, his appeals for a new trial were rejected and he died in prison in 1998.

Ray was supported by some members of Martin Luther King's family who believed the US Government may have been involved in Dr King's death.

Their case was strengthened in December 1999 when a jury in a wrongful death case brought by the King family, decided the civil rights leader was the victim of a murder conspiracy.

However, in June 2000 after an investigation the US Justice Department said it had uncovered no reliable evidence of a conspiracy.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 You need to distance yourself from the situation for a little while first. You can come into money; however, perhaps not under the best circumstances.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Changes in your home may be disruptive and upsetting. You will have difficulties spreading yourself between your work and your home.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Go after your goals. You should include children in your activities. Friends and relatives can give you good advice.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 You can make progress professionally. Don't be too quick to judge your loved ones. Don't use the interstate as a racetrack.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Your lover will be extremely sensitive and now will not be a good time to make changes that they won't like. You can have an enjoyable time if you socialize with friends.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Acknowledge your lover's needs. Not the best day for business trips. Don't rely on others to handle the workload.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You can make positive changes in your home. You can get into weight loss programs or go out and change your image with a new look in clothing, hairstyle, and attitude.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Opportunities to make financial gains through investments look promising. Don't take sides if you wish to remain on good terms with both parties.

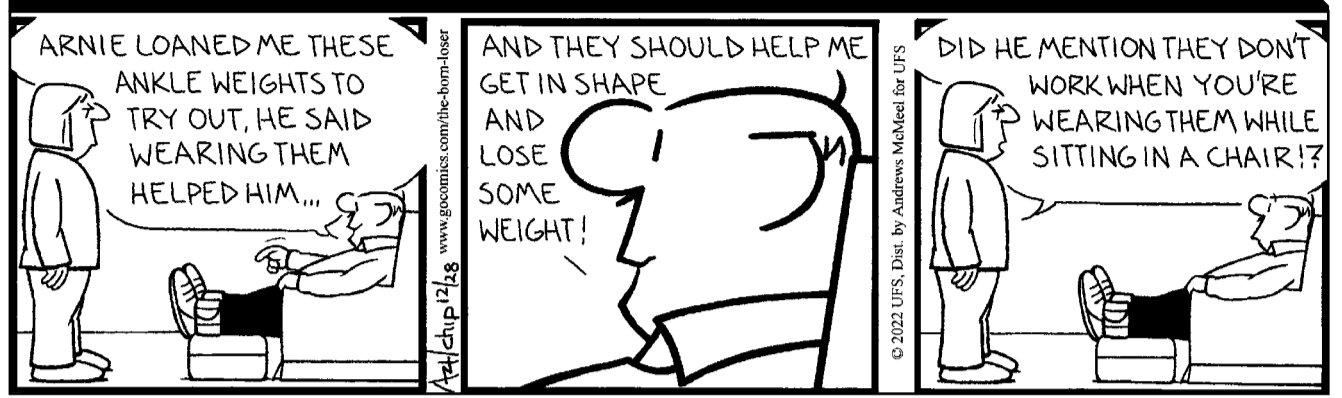
SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Don't bother getting even; they'll make themselves look bad. Listen to the advice given by those with experience. Talk to someone with experience about budgets or consolidating debts.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Take a look at the possibilities of starting a small part time business with friends or relatives. You may jump from the frying pan into the fire if you make a move today.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Look to a close friend for advice. Don't torment yourself. Disharmony in the home will be extremely stressful. You may jump from the frying pan into the fire if you make a move today.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Avoid getting trapped in internal disputes. Try to take care of the needs of those you love. You will be able to pick up on future trends if you keep your eyes peeled for unique ideas.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

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

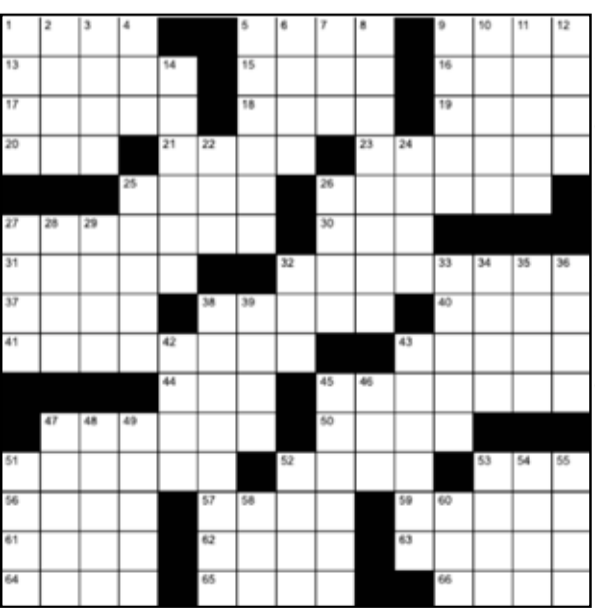
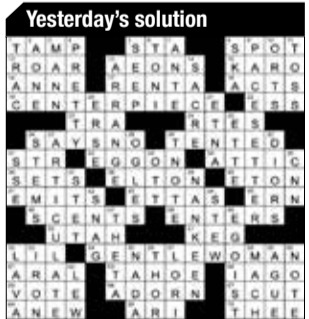
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	8	11	rain
Changchun	4	9	cloudy
Chengdu	13	22	cloudy
Chongqing	16	24	overcast
Fuzhou	16	26	overcast
Guangzhou	20	25	thunderstorms
Guiyang	12	24	cloudy
Haikou	24	33	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	14	27	rain
Harbin	3	10	fine
Hefei	11	15	rain
Nanjing	14	17	rain
Shanghai	15	18	rain
Taipei	17	24	cloudy
Wuhan	12	15	rain
Hong Hong	24	26	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	4	13	overcast
Frankfurt	-2	9	overcast
Paris	0	12	fine
London	1	13	fine
New York	12	19	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Dark purple; 5- First man; 9- Royal Indian; 13- Fish covering; 15- Utah lily; 16- Son of Aphrodite; 17- Goo-covered; 18- Boris Godunov, for one; 19- Inter ...; 20- Convert into leather; 21- Sewing case; 23- Take into custody; 25- Token taker; 26- Lacking skill; 27- Jock; 30- Frozen Wasser; 31- Pay for; 32- Ingoing; 37- Go sour; 38- Towering; 40- On the main; 41- Young bird; 43- Maker of Pong; 44- Compass pt.; 45- An individual without wealth; 47- Defeats; 50- Woe is me!; 51- "Fiddler on the Roof" setting; 52- Without value; 53- Golfer Ernie; 56- Gag reflex?; 57- Richard of "A Summer Place"; 59- Stan's pal; 61- ___ Three Lives; 62- Blueprint detail, for short; 63- Born yesterday, so to speak; 64- Extremely; 65- Scarf; 66- Thought-provoking;

DOWN 1- Attention-getting sound; 2- Bruins' home; 3- First son of Adam and Eve; 4- Shade tree; 5- Sagacious; 6- He played Ricky; 7- Turkish title; 8- Ethics; 9- Give guns again; 10- City on the Rhone; 11- Clamorous; 12- The wolf ___ the door; 14- Place for a lace; 22- Little one; 24- Subterfuge; 25- Slope; 26- 1/100 of a monetary unit; 27- Env. notation; 28- Faithful; 29- Towel word; 32- Alphabetical trio; 33- Gives a 9.8, say; 34- This ___ outrage!; 35- Roman emperor; 36- Canter, for example; 38- Languid; 39- Till bills; 42- In case; 43- Celtic paradise; 45- Hindquarter; 46- Entirely; 47- Large marine mammal; 48- Alternative; 49- Not hesitant; 51- Switchblade; 52- Scottish refusals; 53- Writer Wiesel; 54- As it happens; 55- Ooze; 58- Transcript fig.; 60- Little guy;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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 HKD 18,800/mth 4 bed 2 bath

Manhattan
 HKD 17,500/mth 3 bed 2 bath

AD

FILM

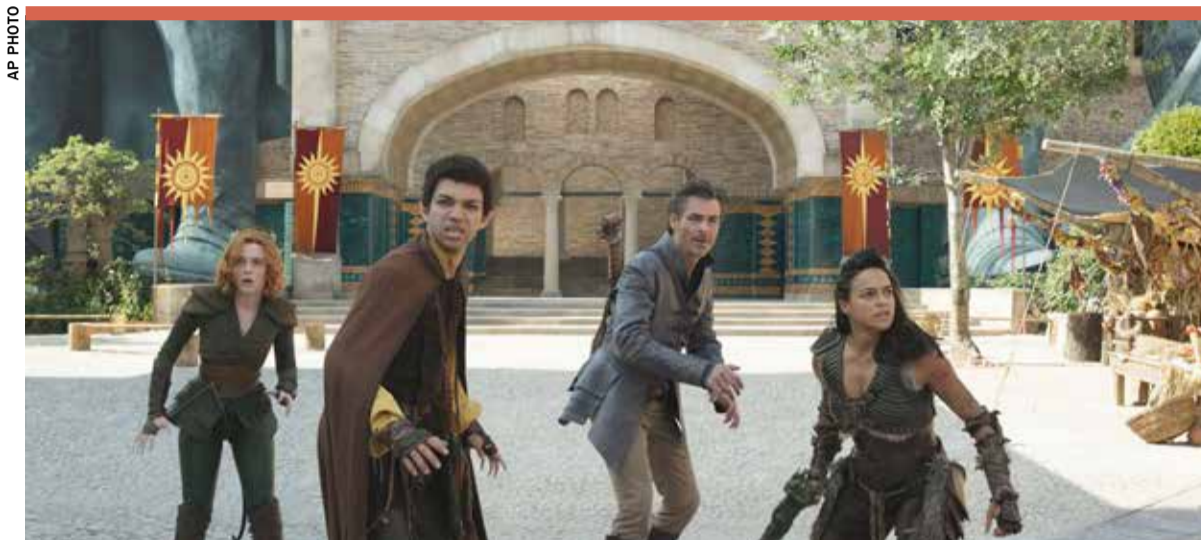
'DUNGEONS & DRAGONS' OPENS WITH \$38.5M, TAKES DOWN JOHN WICK

JAKE COYLE, NEW YORK

RIDING terrific reviews and a strong word-of-mouth, the role playing game adaptation "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves" opened with \$38.5 million in U.S. and Canadian movie theaters over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday, stealing the top box-office perch from "John Wick: Chapter 4."

The Paramount Pictures and eOne release appealed to more moviegoers than many expected a film based on a notoriously niche table top game to interest. "Game Night" directors Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley turned in a rollicking comic action-adventure, with a cast including Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez, Regé-Jean Page and Hugh Grant, that's bringing in ticket buyers less familiar with "D&D." Audiences gave "Honor Among Thieves," which launched with a raucous opening-night premiere at SXSW, an A- CinemaScore. It scored 91% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes.

"We know how good our movie is," said Chris Aronson, distribution chief for Paramount. "I know it's been said before, but I think



This image released by Paramount Pictures shows Sophia Lillis, Justice Smith, Chris Pine and Michelle Rodriguez in a scene from "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves."

opening to \$38-39 million is just the start. These kind of exits polls translate to playability."

"Dungeons & Dragons" was also a big roll of the dice. The film, co-produced and co-financed by Paramount with eOne, which is owned by Hasbro, cost \$150 million to make. With a production cost like that, "Dungeons & Dragons" will be looking for sustained sales through April and similar success overseas to potentially kickstart a new franchise. It launched internationally

with \$33 million.

"The challenge with this film is convincing everyone that this film is for you," said Aronson. "Jonathan and John, these guys are really talented and great collaborators. We're going to work more with them. Hopefully, this will be the start of a franchise."

"John Wick: Chapter 4," which launched last weekend with a franchise-best \$73.5 million, slid to second place in its second weekend with \$28.2 million. While a sizeable dip, the assassin

action film, starring Keanu Reeves, has already accrued \$122.8 million domestically and, after adding another \$35 million internationally over the weekend, \$245 million worldwide. Lionsgate has no shortage of plans for further expansion in the franchise.

Along with "John Wick: Chapter 4," "Creed III" and "Scream VI," "Dungeons & Dragons" adds to a string of well-received March releases that have surpassed box-office expectations and scored well with audiences. It's a streak

that Universal Pictures' "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" will look to continue next weekend.

"While it may not be the highest grossing March ever, this is one of the best months of March for the industry in its history, coming off of three years of a pandemic-challenged marketplace," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for data firm Comscore. "March is not the summer, but it's sure felt like the summer, with hit after hit."

Those film have helped push the 2023 box office well ahead of last year's pace, up 28.7%, according to David A. Gross, who runs Franchise Entertainment Research. Still, overall ticket sales aren't yet up to pre-pandemic levels, trailing the 2017-2019 average by 28.8%.

Games and toys are also proving to be dependable big-screen resources. "Dungeons & Dragons" will be followed this year by Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" and a new "Transformers" movie. "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" is expected to extend a rising trend for the once-derided video game adaptation.

"Dungeons & Dragons" had little competition from new releases. The Christian drama "His Only Son" debuted with \$5.3 million. A.V. Rockwell's Sundance Film Festival grand jury prize winner "A Thousand and One," about a mother (Teyana Taylor) who kidnaps her son from foster care, opened with \$1.8 million at 926 theaters for Focus Features. **MDT/AP**

MUSIC

'Son of a Sinner' Jelly Roll reigns at CMT Music Awards show

KRISTIN M. HALL, NASHVILLE, TENN

SON OF A SINNER singer Jelly Roll was the big winner at the CMT Music Awards, as the rapper-turned-country singer took home three awards on Sunday as an outsider who won over fans with his confessional songs.

The tattooed singer got emotional during the show in Austin, Texas, which aired on CBS, as he thanked the country radio industry for its acceptance and shouted out to those who felt like him.

"You can be whatever you want to be. I promise you that. I told them that I wanted to be a country singer and I



Jelly Roll performs "Need A Favor" at the CMT Music Awards on Sunday

am standing here at the CMT Awards with the male video of the year, baby," he shouted.

Earlier in the night, he brought a choir out for his prayer-themed song "Need a Favor" and got the crowd to raise their hands to the roof.

The show started off with a somber tone as country singer and co-host Kelsea Ballerini read off the names of six victims of a school shooting killed Monday in Nashville, Tennessee. She noted how she shared their pain, explaining that in 2008 she

witnessed a school shooting in her hometown high school cafeteria in Knoxville and prayed for "real action" that would protect children and families. Earlier in the evening, country artists wore black ribbons on

the red carpet to honor victims of the shooting.

But the show prioritized nostalgia overall as performances merged rock, blues and country straight from the heart of Texas, mixing in tributes and covers alongside newer artists and fan-favorite hit songs.

Country superstar and five-time Grammy winner Shania Twain was given the Equal Play Award, recognizing her for being a "visible and vocal advocate" for diverse voices in country music. Texas native and Grammy-winning rapper Megan Thee Stallion introduced Twain and the pair danced and hugged to Twain's hit, "Man, I Feel Like a Woman."

The lyrics to the song became an undercurrent to a decades-long career of advocacy, Twain said.

"I promise I will continue to champion the many outstanding country artists that are not currently played, they

are not currently streamed, toured, signed or awarded at the level they deserve," Twain said. "I believe in an all-inclusive country music."

Lainey Wilson won twice with female video of the year for "Heart Like a Truck" and collaborative video of the year for "Wait in the Truck" with HARDY.

"My heart is 'bout to beat right out my chest, I'll be honest with y'all," Wilson said after winning female video of the year, calling the hit song an anthem for surviving the "scratches, the dents and the bumps along the way."

Co-host Kane Brown took home the last award of the night with his wife, Katelyn, winning video of the year for their duet, "Thank God."

"This is all so new to me. And when we recorded this song a year ago, I never in my life would ever think this was ever going to happen," Katelyn Brown said. **MDT/AP**

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

GRAND PRIX

Track incursion by Australian GP fans sparks investigation

AUSTRALIAN Grand Prix organizers have launched an investigation to determine how a group of fans managed to break through security and get dangerously close to Formula One cars before the chaotic race that featured three red flags had ended on Sunday.

Australian Grand Prix Corp. chief executive Andrew Westacott on Monday said the incursion onto the Albert Park circuit before the checkered flag could have resulted in serious injuries.

"There's a controlled allowance of people to come onto the track after the race has concluded and after the safety car passes," Westacott told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. "Spectators had broken one of the lines, we don't know how that's occurred just yet.

"Motorsport is dangerous [...] it could have been horrific."

Only 12 of the 20 starters finished the race, with Red Bull's Max Verstappen winning his first Australian GP title after a late rolling start behind a safety car.

An event record 444,631 spectators attended the Australian GP over four days, including 131,124 on Sunday. Vision of fans climbing high on safety

AP PHOTO



Fans flood onto the track after the finish of the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park in Melbourne, Sunday

fences and squeezing through a gap in the barricades to get onto the track emerged in the aftermath of the race.

Race promoters faced the stewards on Sunday night and

admitted to a charge of failing to take adequate safety and security measures.

"All of this presented significant danger to the spectators; race officials and the drivers,"

stewards said in a statement.

The Australian Grand Prix Corp. pledged to undertake comprehensive reviews, including with Victoria state police, and report back to FIA, the

sport's world governing body, by June 30. The incident was also referred to the FIA World Motor Sports Council for further investigation to determine what penalties will apply.

"We've got a lot of CCTV and we've got a huge amount of footage we're going to have to pour through over the next couple of weeks," Westacott said. "Nobody does anything malicious at motorsport, it's an unbelievably well-behaved crowd but they, I think, had a degree of confusion. We don't know how they got into the area without the right level of authority."

Westacott described it as an "uncontrolled ingress of people" and said they breached a "very robust protocol."

He said he hoped the track incursion didn't lead to a ban on fans being allowed onto the track, in a controlled manner, after future races are completed. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**REPORT REVEALS
 US' PIQUE AT HONG
 KONG'S PROGRESS IN
 DISEMPOWERING
 ITS PROXIES**

In stating that the central authorities took new actions in the period from March 2021 through March 2022 "directly threatening US interests in Hong Kong", the US State Department got to the nub of its complaints in the 2023 Hong Kong Policy Act Report released on Friday.

Those interests, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken outlined in his statement that day were the dissent and the undermining of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people in Hong Kong that the United States promoted with its support of radical elements in the special administrative region.

In attempting to discredit the successful practice of "one country, two systems", the SAR's national security law and Hong Kong's new electoral system, the US is continuing to meddle in Hong Kong affairs, and slandering the rule of law, democracy, freedom and human rights in Hong Kong in an attempt to tarnish Hong Kong's international appeal.

To begin with, the government of the US has no grounds to evaluate "conditions" of Hong Kong, or any other part of a foreign country, not to mention hinting that other countries should dance to its tune on Hong Kong.

The US practices relating to Hong Kong are grave violations of the principles of international law and basic norms governing international relations, as a spokesperson for the Commissioner's Office of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in the SAR said.

With patriots administering Hong Kong and the introduction of a national security law in the SAR, the space for Washington to interfere in China's internal affairs has been squeezed and the juice of its sour grapes flows through the report.

Otherwise the report would not have ignored the positive changes the SAR has experienced during the period it covers, particularly the institutional causes behind the changes and their far-reaching influences.

Over that period of time and beyond, the SAR has witnessed a quick recovery from the social chaos fueled by the US, the economic stagnation resulting from this, and the US sanctions imposed on Hong Kong, as well as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Contrary to the US State Department's claims, it is the successful practice of "one country, two systems", the national security law and Hong Kong's new electoral system that have restored peace and public order in the SAR and put it back on the right track for further prosperity.

By calling these progressive moves retrogressive, the US government has made it crystal clear that the "US interests" in the SAR conflict with those of Hong Kong and Hong Kong people. As such, what the rest of the report supplies is essentially nothing but a sequence of footnotes.

What the report makes clear is why the "presence" of the US in a country deserves vigilance. As the report details in relation to Hong Kong, its presence may take the form of proxies in various fields, including, not coincidentally, the judicial, administrative, educational and communication organs that are the "pillars" of democracy, human rights and security.

What China has done is to remove the US tumors that had been growing in Hong Kong and strengthened its institutional resistance to any reappearance.

Four people were seriously hurt in an overnight fire at a hospital in Berlin, including a patient who sustained life-threatening injuries, authorities said yesterday. A man was arrested on suspicion of starting the blaze.

The fire on the third floor of the Klinikum am Urban in the German capital was extinguished early yesterday morning, the fire service said. Three patients and a nurse were seriously injured, among them a patient who got stuck in an elevator and

whose life was in danger after inhaling smoke.

Forty people were evacuated as smoke spread through the building.

Police said the blaze appears to have started when a 48-year-old man set fire to two hospital beds shortly after midnight. He also tried to set a garbage can alight in a foyer, but firefighters prevented him from doing so, they said in a statement. The suspect was arrested.



**MALAYSIA PARLIAMENT VOTES
 TO SCRAP MANDATORY
 DEATH SENTENCES**

MALAYSIA'S Parliament yesterday approved a bill that would scrap mandatory death penalties and limit capital punishment to serious crimes as part of wide-ranging reforms, bringing possible reprieves to more than 1,300 prisoners on death row.

While the death sentence remains, courts will now be given the option of imposing jail sentences of up to 40 years, Deputy Law Minister Ramkarpal Singh said. Previously, courts had no choice but to mandate hanging as punishment for a range of crimes including murder, drug trafficking, treason, kidnapping and acts of terror.

The reforms include abolishing the death penalty for some offenses that don't cause death that fall under kidnapping, terrorism and certain firearm crimes, officials said.

Singh called the reforms a significant step forward for Malaysia's criminal justice system. He said 1,318 people are on death row in the country, including 842 who have exhausted all avenues of appeals. Most cases are linked to drug trafficking. Once the bill comes into effect, prisoners will have 90 days to file a review of their sentences but not their convictions, he said.

The reforms include abolishing the death penalty for some offenses that don't cause death that fall under kidnapping, terrorism and certain firearm crimes

"A review of this sentence reflects the government's commitment to always be open to renewing and improving legislation and justice in this country," Singh said. He stressed that courts still

have the power to uphold a death penalty after reviewing a prisoner's sentence. The bill needs to be approved by the upper house and the king before becoming law.

Malaysia has a moratorium on hanging since 2018. The government also proposed last year to abolish mandatory death penalties, but the move was scuppered after Parliament was dissolved for a general election. Foreigners account for more than 500 of those on death row, according to the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network.

"Essentially, we have now narrowed down our death penalty to only three main groups of offenses: murder, drug trafficking and treason," said Dobby Chew of ADPAN. "This is a good first step forward. It brings Malaysia closer in line with international standards for those countries that retain the death penalty." **MDT/**



Germany Major oil-producing countries led by Saudi Arabia said they're cutting supplies of crude — again. This time, the decision was a surprise and is underlining worries about where the global economy might be headed. Russia is joining in by extending its own cuts for the rest of the year. In theory, less oil flowing to refineries should mean higher gasoline prices for drivers and could boost the inflation hitting the U.S. and Europe. And that may also help Russia weather Western sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine at the expense of the U.S.



Switzerland The attorney general's office says it has opened a probe into the events surrounding embattled bank Credit Suisse, which is to be taken over by rival UBS. Switzerland's government and financial regulators helped engineer the hastily arranged, \$3.25 billion agreement that was aimed in part to help calm worries about the global financial system and will leave the country with a single huge global bank.



UK Teachers in England rejected the government's latest pay offer yesterday, raising the specter of more strikes and further disruptions for parents and children as double-digit inflation sparks labor unrest across the country. News that teachers had voted to reject the offer came as U.K. passport workers kicked off a five-week strike that threatens to cause headaches for travelers ahead of the summer holiday season.