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Thailand Human rights groups and opposition politicians are criticizing the government for forcibly repatriating three men who were reportedly members of an anti-government resistance movement in military-ruled Myanmar. The Bangkok-based People's Empowerment Foundation said the action violated universal human rights principles and Thailand's own policy because the men were likely to be in danger as a result of their activities fighting against Myanmar's government.



Afghanistan The United Nations said it is reviewing its presence in Afghanistan after the Taliban barred Afghan women from working for the world organization — a veiled suggestion the U.N. could move to suspend its mission and operations in the embattled country. Last week, the Taliban rulers took a step further in restrictive measures they have imposed on women and said that Afghan women employed with the U.N. mission could no longer report for work. The U.N. said it cannot accept the decision.



UAE U.S. spies caught Russian intelligence officers boasting that they had convinced the oil-rich United Arab Emirates "to work together against US and UK intelligence agencies," according to a purported American document posted online as part of a major U.S. intelligence breach. U.S. officials declined to comment on the document, which bore known top-secret markings and was viewed by The Associated Press. The Emirati government dismissed any accusation that the UAE had deepened ties with Russian intelligence as "categorically false."

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Easter holiday visitors equal CNY arrivals, around half a million P3

HK FERRY COMEBACK

Ferry sailings to increase by May as Hong Kong tourist numbers are on the rise P3



CULTURE

A NEW FEMININITY IS STARTING TO EMERGE IN CHINA



Models wearing outfits that reflect traditional Chinese culture walk the runway during China's International Fashion Week

QINGYUE SUN
DREXEL UNIVERSITY

OVER the course of the last century, Western beauty ideals – thinness, light skin, large breasts, large eyes, a small nose and high cheekbones – have seeped into countries and cultures around the world.

But cracks are starting to emerge in these hegemonic beauty standards.

In my work as a social media scholar, I started to notice significant changes in beauty standards on Chinese social media over the past few years.

China's economic success has enabled it to emerge as a major player in the global beauty market, and the country's own beauty industry is starting to redefine the concept of feminine beauty.

FROM 'IRON WOMEN' TO WESTERN IDEALIZATION

Around the world, the beauty industry has long been, as feminist scholar Meeta Jha writes, a site of "ongoing struggles for economic development and mobility, modernity, social prestige, and power."

As early as the 1920s, Chinese calendar posters began featuring Westernized women as symbols of "Shanghai modernity."

However, after the Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949, Mao Zedong rejected Western beauty ideals as "bourgeois vanity." His regime aimed

to eliminate gender differences by promoting a more masculine-looking female image, such as "iron women" who drove tractors and operated welding machines.

But this started to shift in the 1980s after China's Open Door Policy went into effect.

During this period, the "Mein Jingji," or Chinese beauty economy, emerged. Completely subverting the previous communist beauty ideology, it legitimized beauty consumption through capitalist enterprises.

This shift led to an obsession with mimicking Western features, such as whiter skin, higher-bridged noses and double eyelids, which is also known as "Asian blepharoplasty," a surgical procedure that produces a crease in the eyelid, resulting in a larger, more symmetrical eye shape.

SPLIT FEMININITY

In recent years, however, a unique beauty culture has emerged on Chinese social media. To me, the different iterations represent the tensions and contradictions of various cultural forces.

One look that's become immensely popular is what I call "split femininity." I use the word "split" because this look oscillates between hypersexuality and infantilization.

In split femininity, qualities such as purity and innocence coexist with sultry, erotic imagery. There's even a Chinese term for this seeming contradiction – "chun yu," or "purity and desire."

Another related term, "ke tian ke yan," metaphorically links beauty to tastes, such as sweetness and saltiness.

Together, these terms – and their accompanying looks – imply a flexible femininity that can switch between dominant and submissive, sexy and cute.

Split femininity is often customized for particular occasions, such as dates. Another popular makeup style under the split femininity umbrella is called "xian nv luo lei," which translates into "the fairy wept, and the man knelt." This particular look seeks to capture and celebrate feminine vulnerability. Many of its promoters say it's the best look for women who are arguing with men.

In essence, split femininity fuses a form of passive femininity that's redolent of China's traditional patriarchal values with the commodification of female sexuality.

GLOBALIZED FEMININITY

Another beauty trend, "globalized femininity," centers on transnational, cross-cultural beauty themes.

Chinese beauty influencers pull from the looks of international celebrities, historical periods and popular media coverage to craft diverse forms of femininity that span cultural boundaries.

For example, Thai beauty norms often showcase bold eyebrows and warm skin tones, whereas Western beauty ideals ge-

nerally emphasize a sexualized, provocative look with dramatic facial contours. Chinese beauty bloggers will combine these various influences to craft new models of femininity.

Korean culture has also influenced many beauty trends that are currently in vogue, with K-pop female idols serving as a significant source of inspiration. Jennie Kim, a member of the K-pop group Blackpink, has become known for her edgy streetwear, coupled with a soft and feminine facial appearance. Her unique style has inspired the emergence of the "baby fierce" look.

The rise of globalized femininity might appear to indicate a shift away from Western-centric beauty ideals. But it is important to recognize that many of these global sources of inspiration have already been Westernized or are a product of Western beauty assimilation.

In China, the trend of globalized femininity can simply be seen as a re-imagination of established Westernized beauty standards adapted to a Chinese context.

NATIONALIST FEMININITY

Nationalist femininity, referred to as "China beauty," has also become increasingly popular on Chinese social media.

This form of femininity appeals to national pride by integrating Chinese aesthetics and modernity through inspiration

from traditional Chinese culture, tropes and imagery. Classic Chinese myths such as "A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to The Phoenix" and Chinese literature like the novel "Journey to the West" inspire extravagant looks imbued with symbolism.

One illustration of the fusion of traditional and modern beauty practices is the adoption of the Peking Opera's makeup techniques, which are characterized by ceramic white skin, red lips and finely arched eyebrows.

Nationalist beauty trends have become a means for China's homegrown brands to expand their market share and reverse the negative connotations of "Made in China."

While Western capitalism and consumerism have long driven the global beauty industry, the evolution of Chinese beauty culture is not simply a history of assimilation or suppression.

Instead, it is a complex process that involves compromise, integration and resistance against the dominance of Western beauty ideals. The emergence of nationalist femininity, the popularity of split femininity and the trend of globalized femininity are all manifestations of this dynamic nature.

As contemporary Chinese beauty culture encompasses a blending of traditional Chinese culture, modern aesthetics and global influences, it promises to create a unique identity that is distinctively Chinese. MDT/THE CONVERSATION

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Easter holiday visitors equal CNY arrivals

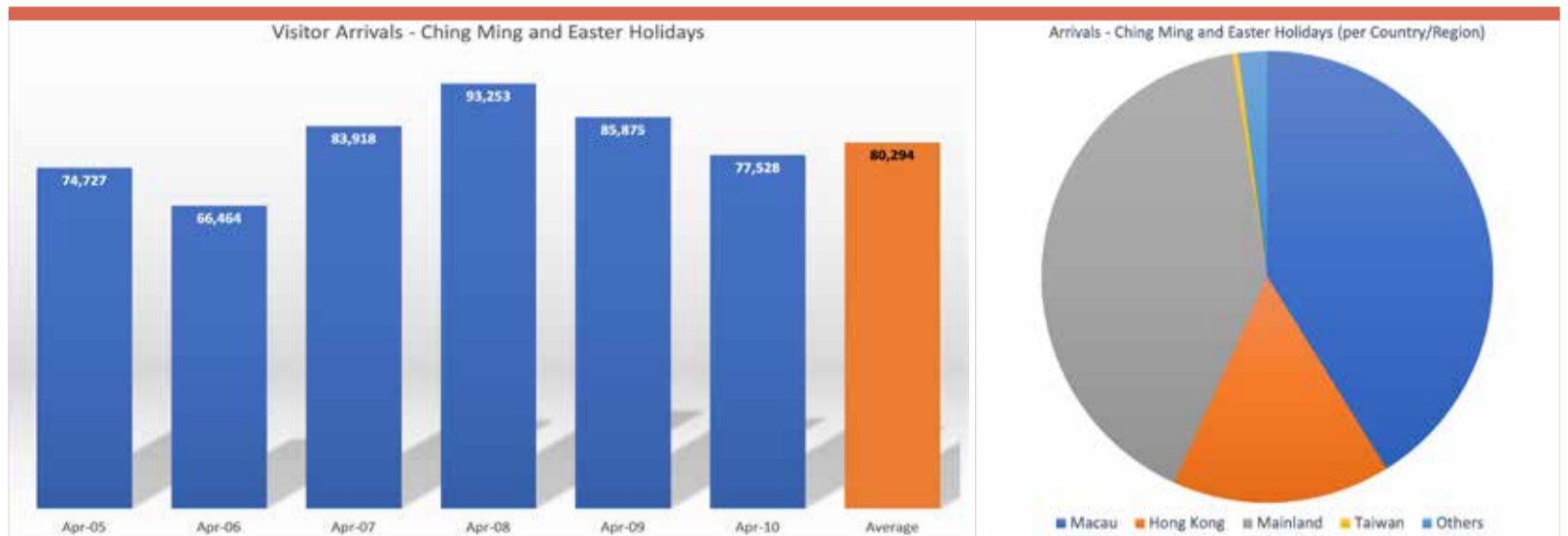
RENATO MARQUES

THE number of visitors to Macau during the Ching Ming Festival and Easter holidays reached a total of 481,765, figures released by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) show.

The figures take into account the period between April 5 (the Ching Ming holiday) and April 10 (Monday after the Easter Day).

According to the official release, the number of visitors, which has reached almost half a million, is almost equal to that obtained earlier this year during the first seven days of the Lunar New Year, known as "CNY Golden Week," when a total of 484,505 tourists entered Macau.

Taking into account that the Easter holiday period is one day shorter than CNY, the figures show an increase in the daily average of tourists arriving in Macau, which stood at 80,294, that is, 16% higher than the average registered during CNY (69,215 visitors per day).



The day on which the largest number of tourist arrivals was recorded was on April 8 (Saturday), with a total of 93,253.

A lot of movement was also recorded among locals, as well as other non-residents, with the total number of border movements over the six days reaching 2,978,770, of which 1,215,759 (40.81%) were related to the arrivals and departures of Macau re-

sidents.

Topping the number of arrivals were visitors from the mainland (616,531), followed by Hong Kong (236,958).

Also noted was a very slight increase in the number of arrivals of visitors from other countries and regions outside greater China, which totaled 31,301 (2.07%).

Unsurprisingly, the major entry port continued to be the Bor-

der Gate with 758,781 (50.12%) crossings, followed by the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Port 279,161 (18.44%) and Qingmao 218,133 (14.41%).

The ferry terminals of Outer Harbour and Taipa only made up 5.94% of visitor arrivals (89,994), mostly due to the few ferries in operation and current scheduling, which is still very far from the operating levels seen during pre-

-pandemic times.

For the first quarter of the year, Macau recorded nearly five million visitor arrivals, a third of which are from the neighboring region, Hong Kong.

Official data shows that Macau registered over 4.96 million visitor arrivals in the first quarter of 2023, which include about 1.51 million Hong Kong visitors, a nearly 10-fold surge year-on-year.

TRANSPORTATION

FERRY SAILINGS TO INCREASE BY MAY AS HK TOURIST NUMBERS RISE

TURBOJET is slated to increase its ferry sailings by May due to growing demand, as seen during the Easter holidays.

Alfred Ng, director of the Macao Services Division of Shun Tak China Travel Ship Management, said that the company aims to operate every 15 minutes from the Taipa Terminal, and every 30 minutes from the Inner Harbour, as cited in a report by Macao Daily.

Ng also said that the number of ferries operating has now recovered to half of pre-pandemic levels.

Chu Chan Wai, director of the port management department at the Marine and Water Bureau, said that during the past four-day Easter holiday, the average daily passenger volume on the Hong Kong and Macau maritime passenger routes was 26,000 to 27,000 passengers.

During the peak period, on the 7th of this month for example, the number of passengers was 28,000 people, the highest since the resumption of ferry sailings on January 8 this year.

Chu recalled that in 2019, the daily passenger volume



of Hong Kong-Macau passenger routes was 33,000, while the current average daily passenger volume of Hong Kong-Macau routes is 13,000 to 14,000 passengers.

Meanwhile, a total of 145,657 ferry and bus rides were enjoyed with a special offer initiative, including over 100,000 ferry tickets and more than 45,000 bus tickets redeemed by Hong Kong tourists under the government's buy-one-get-one free promotion.

In the first quarter of this year, the Macao Go-

vernment Tourism Office (MGTO) rolled out "Macao Treat," offering Hong Kong residents a free return trip to the SAR. Another advance special offer will ensue in the second phase from April to June, not just for Hong Kong residents but also for visitors from Taiwan region and international markets. Provisional figures indicate that Macau registered over 4.96 million visitor arrivals in the first quarter of 2023, including about 1.51 million Hong Kong visitors, a nearly tenfold surge year-on-year. LV

GOV'T PLEDGES TO STRENGTHEN INSPECTIONS FOLLOWING ALLEGED JEWELRY STORE TRAP

AUTHORITIES have pledged to strengthen joint inspections and improve supervision so as to protect the image of Macau as a "tourist city and protect the rights and interests of tourists" following a complaint that a group of tourists from mainland China was allegedly held at a jewelry store in Macau for two hours and forced to shop.

According to media reports, a group from the mainland complained earlier this month about being "trapped" in a jewelry store and prevented from leaving the shop for at least two hours.

The tourists posted videos about the incident upon returning to the mainland.

As cited in a report by Macao Daily News, a Chinese tourist named Bian said that a local tour guide accompanied them and that they were prevented from leaving by two security guards.

Bian was part of a low-cost tour that involved tours to Macau, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai for the



price of RMB2,880, departing from Zhengzhou Airport in Henan.

"They didn't tell us to do mandatory shopping, but they wouldn't let us out. I bought two necklaces there for over 3,000 renminbi and asked to leave, but they still refused," she said.

During the weekend, a statement from the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) stated that the flow of people at various entry and exit ports and tourist attractions increased during the Easter holi-

day. Therefore, along with the Public Security Force and the Labour Affairs Bureau they pledged to launch joint inspections, conduct spot checks on tour groups, and monitor the working conditions of tourism practitioners.

The MGTO said it would also cooperate with the Consumer Council to conduct inspections on the shopping spots of tour groups "to maintain the order of the tourism industry and protect the rights and interests of tourists." LV

TRANSPORT BUREAU POSITIVE FUTURE ZONE A LINKS WILL RESOLVE CURRENT JAMS

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) has reassured a lawmaker that three links that are still being built and will lead to the New Urban Zone A will help to ease the current congestion near Pearl of the Orient.

The comment was made in response to lawmaker Ron Lam's inquiry dated February 17.

Currently, Zone A only has a link with the main Peninsula, for which both the entrance and exit are located at the Pearl of the Orient Roundabout.

As the zone is a mid-point to and from the border checkpoint to Hong Kong and Zhuhai, traffic usually becomes heavy during peak hours and holiday seasons.

Citing the Public Works Bureau (DSOP), the DSAT acting director, Lei Veng Hong, guaranteed that Bridge A2, which will connect the zone with the north of the Main Reservoir, is having foundations laid.

Meanwhile, Bridge A3, which will connect the zone with the south of the Main Reservoir, as well as Bridge AB, which will connect the zone with the south of the Peninsula, are "seeing their design



phase commence," the transport official added.

In addition, Lei pledged that the fourth Macau-Taipa bridge, which is expected to open in 2024, will help divert traffic to and from Zone A and the Hong Kong-

Zhuhai-Macau Bridge.

Lei reiterated that no Light Rapid Transit station will be built serving the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, backing up his superintendent, the Secretary for Transport and Public Works.

However, an additional footbridge will be built to connect the border checkpoint with Zone A "to realize high accessibility and convenient transfer."

On social media platforms, members of the public have criti-

cized the DSAT for failing to take what they see as the past three years of standstill as an opportunity to refine the road network on and near Zone A, including but not limited to building more roads entering and exiting the zone. **AL**

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY PRICES RECORD SLIGHT INCREASE

Macau's overall residential property price index in the period from December 2022 to February 2023 increased slightly by 0.2% over the previous period from November 2022 to January 2023 to 245.7. The latest report from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) showed that the indices for the Macau Peninsula as well as Taipa and Coloane rose by 0.1% and 0.7% from the previous three-month period to 244.1 and 252.1 respectively. The index for existing residential units went up by 0.4% from the previous period to 263.8, with the indices for those in the Peninsula and in Taipa and Coloane rising 0.3% and 0.7% to 254.0 and 303.0 respectively.

MGTO TO PROMOTE MACAU IN LISBON

Macau's local tourism authority will bring "Experience Macao Unlimited - Macao Promotion in Lisbon" to Portugal from April 15 to 22, in tandem with the Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng's visit to the region. The event represents the SAR's first in-person tourism promotion in Europe after the pandemic. Organized by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the "Experience Macao Unlimited - Macao Promotion in Lisbon" event will feature video mapping that showcases the city's diverse offerings as a destination through light artistry.

CRIME

PJ detains suspects over fraud involving fake gold jewelry, watch

RENATO MARQUES

Two men from the mainland have been arrested on suspicion of fraud involving pawning fake gold jewelry and a watch at local pawnshops, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday morning during a special press conference.

According to the PJ, the two men are suspected of having committed the crimes on at least 10 different occasions since the start of 2022, with the force calculating the total amount defrauded as around HKD155,000.

The trades were all carried out in pawnshops around the Dynasty area in NAPE District.

The case started to unfold in October last year when one of the pawnshops reported having found a watch sus-



pected to be counterfeit among their non-retrieved items.

Upon investigation, the PJ found that the watch was indeed a fake and, at the same time,

they managed to identify the two suspects that had left some items at the store, including the watch.

While attempting to reenter Macau last Sun-

day (April 9), the two men were detained and interrogated.

During police questioning, the suspects said they had been hired by a group to perform

the activity in Macau.

They said that the deal involved pawning the items for at least two or three times the value of the counterfeit products and returning to the mainland with the cash and the pawnshop ticket. For each successful pawning, they would receive RMB3,000 in compensation.

Following the investigation, the PJ said that, according to the findings, the criminal syndicate in charge of the crimes would resell the pawn tickets at a low price to other people on the mainland, claiming that they were original and valuable products.

The PJ noted that, in reality, the pawnshops involved did not sustain significant losses as most of the items had been retrieved from the shops by other people, who became the real victims in this case.

The PJ explained that the pawnshops were only used as an intermediary to generate credibility in the eyes of the final buyers that the products were real and valuable.

Hengqin issues preferential personal tax policies for high-end talent

STAFF REPORTER

THE Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin yesterday issued regulations allowing high-end and urgently-needed talent to enjoy preferential tax policies, detailing application conditions, talent standards and processing procedures.

According to the regulations, three types of talent can enjoy preferential personal income tax policies in the zone: high-end talent at the top level of a certain field or profession who has made outstanding contributions and is recognized as such by society; high-end talent earning more than 500,000 RMB in a tax year in the zone; and urgently-needed talent who meet the requirements of titles, academic or professional qualifications.

Engaging in the industries listed in the Encou-



raged Industry Catalogue in the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is one of the prerequisites for talent to enjoy preferential personal income tax policies.

The catalogue, released on April 3, highlights sci-tech research and development, high-end manufacturing, Chinese medicine and other Macau brand industries, culture, tourism, exhibitions and trade, modern finance and more.

The zone will formulate standards for talent by taking into consideration the experience of winning major awards in China or globally, serving in important international organizations or top academic institutions, and so on.

The regulations also restrict the payment of social security by individuals and the substantive operation of enterprises.

Eligible talent are expected to work in the zone

and pay basic pension insurance and other social insurance continuously for more than six months in a tax year.

An employment contract, employment agreement, service contract or other relevant document with an enterprise or institution operating substantially in the zone for more than one year is required.

For foreign talent who are unable to pay social insurance and domestic talent who have exceeded the statutory retirement age, there is no mandatory requirement for social insurance payments.

Instead, documents proving the employment relationship, such as labor contracts or employment agreements with enterprises or institutions operating substantially in the zone, are required, as cited in a statement issued by the Hengqin authorities.

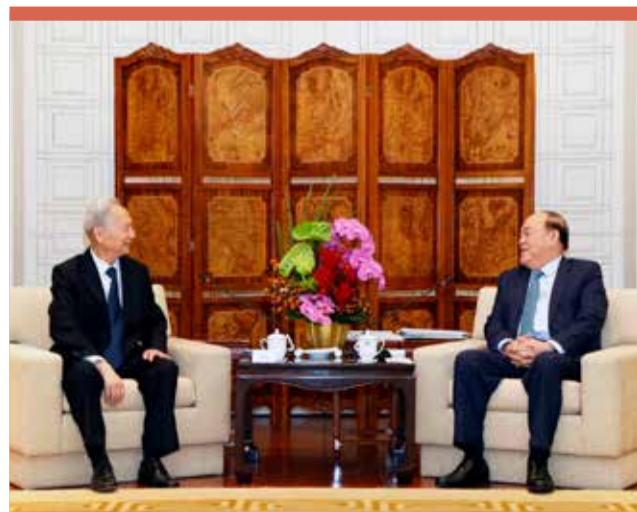
The regulations consist of 12 articles and came into effect yesterday.

Macau needs to hire more non-locals to develop new AI technologies, CE admits

RENATO MARQUES

MACAU needs to find ways to attract more qualified non-local staff to support the development of new technologies relating to transportation, translation, and security systems, the Chief Executive (CE) Ho Iat Seng said on Monday in a meeting with the honorary president of the Institute of Artificial Intelligence of Tsinghua University, Zhang Bo.

"In the future, Macau still needs to attract more qualified staff from the mainland and from abroad to support the development [of new technologies]," Ho said, while referring to several projects that



have been launched by local university institutions.

"Currently, at the University of Macau, the Polytechnic University of Macau, and the Macao University of Science and Te-

chnology, autonomous buses, translation platforms, and security systems have been launched, which reflects [the fact that] higher education institutions play a pivotal role in the grow-

th of artificial intelligence technology," the CE mentioned, noting the need for more qualified non-local staff.

The CE also reaffirmed that there will be a space dedicated to Artificial Intelligence (AI) projects in the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, pointing out that such projects should be directed there.

In turn, and while making a brief presentation on current trends in new technologies as well as the success of the industrialization operating model, Zhang pointed out that Macau needs its own research and development team to explore artificial intelligence, calling on the government to recruit qualified staff from the mainland and from abroad to research and develop artificial intelligence techniques suitable for the development of local industry, and to achieve the goal of linking industry, university, and research.

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

Rejuvenate with All-Natural Beauty Ritual Kobido

NATURAL beauty is making a comeback. The rise of non-invasive skincare treatments has become one of the biggest beauty trends. For those who want to stay young naturally and achieve a state of wellness from the inside out, the Japanese traditional Kobido massage is definitely the one to opt for.



Known for its natural rejuvenating power, the ancestral beauty ritual is a traditional holistic art featuring harmonious mix of kneading, pinching, rolling and a set of precise hand gestures. By facilitating microcirculation in your face, neck and shoulder by hand massage, Kobido restores skin elasticity and collagen to give a natural lifting effect that you will notice an improved contours after the treatment. It also reduces wrinkles and puffiness, brightens skin tone and relieves stress.



Now you can enjoy the authentic Kobido lifting ritual in Macau at **TRIA**, the award-winning spa at MGM with a five-star rating in the Forbes Travel Guide and SpaChina awards for consecutive years. The 60-minute massage by an expertly-trained therapist will give you a feeling of total relaxation from the face to neck and shoulders, and leave your skin revitalized and glowing. To enhance the treatment outcomes, organic beauty products from professional Italian skincare brand are used throughout the massage.



The limited-time treatment is only available until the end of May, so make sure you don't miss out. For enquiry and reservation, please call **Tria** at MGM MACAU (853) 8802 3838 or MGM COTAI (853) 8806 2733, or email to triaspa@mgm.mo

ANTHONY LAM

HEALTH

CHCSJ PLANS TO INTRODUCE PARKINSON'S SURGERY SERVICES

SURGICAL services targeting Parkinson's Disease patients may be available in Macau in the future as the public hospital works on their introduction.

Acting Chief Physician of the Neurosurgery Department of the public Conde de São Januário Hospital, Ho Hin Chao, revealed that the hospital is training medical staff in the area.

Surgery for the disease is known as Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS), which is a medical technique involving implanting a stimulator into certain parts of the brain. The stimulator delivers electrical impulses to these brain parts to help slow down the deterioration of the disease on patients.

The disease, however, is incurable.

Ho revealed that the hospital is organizing a team of related medical staff to receive training in Hong Kong for the future service.

After the service is rolled out, there will be three doctors specifically specializing in the procedure. Ho said that counterparts within the Greater Bay Area have been contacted for support in preparation for the service.

Discussing future eligibility for the service, Ho said that the cost for the surgery will be high, so cost efficiency is part of the consideration, adding that patients will need to undergo a systematic

RENATO MARQUES



evaluation to verify their eligibility.

On whether the surgery will be free-of-charge to eligible patients, the Health Bureau (SSM) will have the final discretion, Ho expects.

Meanwhile, Hoi Chu Peng, acting chief physician of the Neuro-

logy Department of the hospital, estimates that the city has at least 1,300 patients with Parkinson's Disease, based on data from neighboring regions.

He expects the number of patients will continue to rise as the

city marches towards an aging society. The four neurologists at the hospital received about 1,000 patients last year. Further training will be promoted and he believes the scale of the department will be able to handle future needs.

Explaining the disease, Hoi said that it is the second-most commonly seen neurodegenerative disease.

Patients usually retain normal brain cognitive function during the early onset stage, but experience impaired movement and lose the ability to move. Patients have resting tremors, muscle stiffness and slow movement during the early stage. At later stages, patients experience symptoms such as imbalance, unsteady gait and experience frequent falls.

Non-movement symptoms include anxiety and depression, hyposmia, sleep disturbance, and orthostatic hypotension.

Medications appear effective during early stages – usually for about four to five years – with weakened effects during later stages.

Currently, the cause of the disease is unclear, so no certain ways of prevention have been determined. However, citing scientific studies, Hoi suggests exercising, balanced diets and healthy lifestyles are some of the ways to lower the risk.

HENGQIN SECONDARY SCHOOL SCHEDULED TO OPEN IN 2025

Hengqin Ziqi Experimental Middle School recently held a ground-breaking ceremony, marking its entering into the construction phase of the building. It is expected to be completed and ready for use in 2025. The school will have 36 classrooms which can accommodate 1,800 students. Adjacent to the Macau New Neighborhood Project, the school covers an area of more than 47,000 square meters. Authorities stated that after the school is completed, Capital Normal University will take over the running of the school, and strive to build it into a window school and benchmark school in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area.

ZHUHAI-MACAU PORT TRAFFIC SEES 80% INCREASE

The Zhuhai General Frontier Inspection Station has recorded an average daily traffic volume of 19,000 vehicles since the beginning of the month for the Gongbei, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, and Hengqin ports. The figure represents an increase of 78.4% compared to last year, and an increase of 13% over the same period last month. Vehicles from both SARs recorded about 5,000 vehicle trips. Zhuhai authorities stated that they will continue to strengthen the monitoring of passenger flows and vehicle flows as well as deploy police resources accordingly.



Gov't closely monitoring post-holiday flu conditions

ANTHONY LAM

THE trajectory of influenza infections is being closely monitored in case of a relapse after the Easter break, a medical director of the public hospital has recently said.

Commenting on the current outbreak of flu, emergency room doctor and medical director at the public Conde

de São Januário Hospital, Lei Wai Seng, told the press that, as per past experience, a flu outbreak usually lasts for a month.

This current outbreak, he said, was initially detected in the Accident and Emergency Department in early April. Most patients who sought medical assistance at the department were children. The case

figures peaked at 1,050 patients per day, 60% more than on a normal day.

During the Easter break, the figure remained steady at circa 900 patients per day.

Chan Man Si, an official from the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, revealed that a rise in flu infections was observed from the ninth week of this year, with

110 cases of chain infections recorded during the 13th.

Explaining the intense flu outbreak this year, Lei said that there were no outbreaks in previous years, weakening the response from people's immune system to flu viruses. Based on that, he said that the Health Bureau had expected this year's flu outbreaks would be more severe, adding that the eased mask recommendations had also facilitated the quicker spread of flu.

Lei revealed that the number of elderly flu patients hospitalized has increased, due to the fact that they are more prone to medical complications, such as bacterial infections and pneumonia, following the contraction of flu viruses.

In a previous severe flu case concerning a six-year-old girl, Lei revealed that the girl has been moved from the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) to a normal ward, following improvement in her condition. She suffered from inflammation in the brain after contracting the flu.

An elderly patient with severe chronic diseases were admitted to the ICU and is on a respirator.

The doctor reiterated the recommendation for people to receive their flu vaccines.

GAMING

Post-Covid woe: Atlantic City casino earns fell 4.6% in '22

WAYNE PARRY,
ATLANTIC CITY

THREE years after the coronavirus pandemic erupted, Atlantic City's casinos are collectively struggling to get back to where they were before COVID-19 in terms of profitability.

Figures released yesterday [Macau time] by the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement show that the city's nine casinos collectively had a gross operating profit of \$731.2 million in 2022. That was down 4.6% from the \$766.8 million profit they made in 2021.

And only four had an operating profit that was higher than what they reported in 2019, the last full year before the pandemic broke out.

Gross operating profit reflects earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and other expenses, and is a widely-accepted measure of profitability in the Atlantic City casino industry.

Mark Giannantonio, president of Resorts Casino and the Casino Association of New Jersey, said inflationary pressures took a toll on the casinos' finances last year.

"You have revenue that's not growing fast enough,



and couple that with expenses in some categories that are up 20 to 25% or more, and you can see how quickly this can erode profits," he said.

In the third quarter of last year, a new union contract that paid many casino and hotel workers including housekeepers, drink servers and public area cleaners large raises took effect, averting a threatened strike.

But Giannantonio said the pressure on earnings was not solely due to higher labor costs.

Only two of the nine casinos had higher operating profits in 2022 than in 2021: Hard Rock earned over \$128 million, up nearly 20% over the previous year, and Ocean earned \$96.2

million, up 5.5%.

Bally's shrunk its operating loss dramatically last year, losing \$1.8 million compared to \$13.1 million a year earlier.

Borgata had an operating profit of \$140.2 million, down 19.4%; Caesars earned \$60.4 million, down 2.7%; Golden Nugget was down a fraction at \$30.6 million; Harrah's earned \$89.3 million, down over 10%; Resorts earned \$21 million, down nearly 24%; and Tropicana earned nearly \$110 million, down 7.6%.

Among internet-only entities, Caesars Interactive Entertainment NJ earned \$32.7 million, nearly doubling its earnings from a year earlier, and Resorts Digital, the online arm of Re-

sorts Casino, earned \$15.4 million, up 2.8%.

Compared to pre-pandemic 2019, only four casinos earned more in 2022: Hard Rock, Ocean, Resorts and Tropicana, although Harrah's came close to breaking even on this comparison.

In terms of hotel room costs, Ocean had the highest average price per night in 2022 at \$265.75. Resorts had the lowest average price at \$126.34.

Hard Rock had the highest occupancy rate at 88.6%, while Bally's, Harrah's, Resorts and Tropicana were all around 68%. For the nine casinos collectively, the occupancy rate in 2022 was 73.4%, up nearly 6% from a year earlier. **MDT/AP**



BANKING

Swiss lawmakers pick apart Credit Suisse woes ahead of deal

SWITZERLAND'S parliament is opening a special session yesterday to scrutinize the state-imposed takeover of Swiss bank Credit Suisse by rival UBS — and possibly considering strengthening the legal arsenal to better guard against financial blowups.

The debate could run up to three days, with expectations that lawmakers will voice — and need to iron out — disagreements over the 3 billion Swiss franc (\$3.25 billion) fusion of the country's top two banks, a thunderclap for a country that prides itself on finesse and acumen in finance.

Swiss authorities stepped in as shares of Credit Suisse and other banks plunged last month after the failure of two U.S. banks sparked concerns about other potentially

shaky institutions in the global financial system. Credit Suisse is among 30 financial institutions known as globally systemically important banks, and authorities worried about the fallout if it were to fail.

Lawmakers were expected to raise concerns about thousands of expected job cuts, discuss possible strengthening of banking laws and accountability for long-troubled Credit Suisse, and look at state-backed guarantees of over \$100 billion aimed both at holding the bank together until the merger is completed and buttressing UBS against possible losses as it combines with its rival.

They also were likely to consider what it will mean that Switzerland is set to have one giant bank. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Melco unveils indoor waterpark, Epic Tower



Melco Resorts & Entertainment Limited has opened its unparalleled indoor water park and its own-branded hotel, Epic Tower, at Studio City Phase 2.

Lawrence Ho, chairman

and CEO of Melco, commented: "With our new 10-year gaming concession, Melco's commitment and belief in Macau's long-term future remains unwavering." "The opening of the in-

door waterpark and Epic Tower marks the start of a new chapter for Studio City, which is also an important milestone in Macau's diversification objective and a demonstration of Melco's confidence and belief in the long-standing potential of Macau," he added.

Designed by renowned international architecture firm Zaha Hadid Architects, the USD1.2 billion Studio City Phase 2 will feature two luxury hotel towers — Epic Tower and W Macau, the Macau's all-new, all-weather, all-year-round water park, and state-of-the-art space for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions.

Wynn collaborates with Black Pearl Restaurant Guide



Wynn recently collaborated with the Black Pearl Restaurant Guide as official venue partner in Macau to host the first in a series of "Seeking Mountain and Sea to Rediscover the Flavours of China"

events set to take place all across China in partnership with cognac brand, Hennessy. The journey brings together China's best chefs from the "Black Pearl Chef Club". Two award-winning chefs

of the Black Pearl Restaurant Guide — executive chef Tam Kwok Fung of Wing Lei Palace in Macau, recipient of the "2023 Black Pearl Restaurant Guide Chef of the Year" award as well as chef Xu Jingye of 102 House Shanghai who received the "2023 Black Pearl Restaurant Guide Young Chef" honor — combined their culinary minds to host the launch event.

Recently, the chefs partnered to create two "Seeking Mountain and Sea to Rediscover the Flavours of China" four-hand collaborative gala dinners — one in Shanghai and another at Wynn Palace in Macau.

AP PHOTO



TRADE

AUSTRALIA SUSPENDS WTO CASE AGAINST CHINA ON BARLEY TARIFFS

ROD MCGUIRK, CANBERRA

AUSTRALIA suspended a complaint to the World Trade Organization in a bid to reopen the Chinese market to Australian barley for the first time in three years in the new government's latest step toward repairing relations with Beijing.

China effectively closed its doors to Australian barley in May 2020 by imposing an 80% tariff after the previous Australian govern-

ment angered Beijing by calling for an independent inquiry into the origins of and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The previous conservative government responded by challenging the tariff in the Geneva-based trade body.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Penny Wong said her center-left Labor Party government, which was elected in May, had reached an agreement with China that "creates a pathway for the resolution of the dispute over Australian

barley."

China had agreed to review its duties on the grain over three or four months, she said, and Australia will temporarily suspend the WTO dispute during that review period.

"Obviously, if the duty is not lifted at the end of the review period, we'll resume our dispute in the WTO," Wong said.

The Chinese Embassy in Australia did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Wong said the Chinese review offered a "significantly shorter time frame" to resolve the dispute than the WTO offered.

Official and unofficial trade barriers are costing Australian exporters an estimated \$14 billion a year in products including beef, seafood and wood. Trade Minister Don Farrell said Australia hoped the review would become a template for resolving other trade disputes with China, particularly over wine. While barley growers

have found other markets, Australian wine producers have struggled to find alternative buyers after China imposed trade barriers in late 2020.

Australia has denied China's claims that it was subsidizing wine to export it at artificially low prices.

Grain Producers Australia, which represents barley exporters, welcomed the new agreement.

"This process to reach a resolution would be significantly shorter than if the WTO process continued," Grain Producers Australian chair Barry Large said in a statement.

"We welcome the Labor government's constructive dialogue and positive progress towards stabilizing the relationship with China, and creating this process and opportunity to recommence the barley trade," Large said.

In February, Australian and Chinese trade ministers held their first bilateral meeting since 2019, showing signs of improved relations since the previous government was voted out after nine years in power.

During the online exchange, Farrell accepted his Chinese counterpart Wang Wentao's invitation to visit China. A date has yet to be set.

In December, Wong became the first Australian foreign minister to visit China in four years. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese raised his concerns about trade in November when he took part in the first formal bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping by an Australian government leader since 2016.

China recently lifted trade restrictions on Australian coal that were first imposed in late 2020. **MDT/AP**

TIBET

Dalai Lama apologizes after video shows him kissing boy

TIBETAN spiritual leader the Dalai Lama apologized this week after a video showing him kissing a child on the lips triggered criticism.

A statement posted on his official website said the 87-year-old leader regretted the incident and wished to "apologize to the boy and his family, as well as his many friends across the world, for the hurt his words may have caused."

The incident occurred at a public gathering in February at the Tsuglagkhang temple in Dharamsala, where the exiled leader lives. He was taking questions from the audience when the boy asked if he could hug him.

The Dalai Lama invited the boy up toward the pla-

form he was seated on. In the video, he gestured to his cheek, after which the child kissed him before giving him a hug.

The Dalai Lama then asked the boy to kiss him on the lips and stuck out his tongue. "And suck my tongue," the Dalai Lama can be heard saying as the boy sticks out his own tongue and leans in, prompting laughter from the audience.

The footage triggered a backlash online with social media users condemning his behavior as inappropriate and disturbing.

SNAP, the national advocacy group for victims of clergy abuse, said they were "horrified" by the Dalai Lama's actions. "Our primary concern is with the

innocent boy who was the subject of this disgusting request by a revered spiritual figure," the group said in a statement.

Sticking out one's tongue was often used as a greeting according to ancient Tibetan culture, but is not commonly seen anymore.

"His Holiness often teases people he meets in an innocent and playful way, even in public and before cameras," the statement from the Dalai Lama read.

The Dalai Lama has made the hillside town of Dharamsala his headquarters since fleeing from Tibet after a failed uprising against Chinese rule in 1959. India considers Tibet to be part of China, though it hosts Tibetan exiles. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

ANALYSIS

China military 'ready to fight' after drills near Taiwan

CHINA'S military declared this week it is "ready to fight" after completing three days of large-scale combat exercises around Taiwan that simulated sealing off the island in response to the Taiwanese leader's trip to the U.S. last week.

The "combat readiness patrols" named Joint Sword were meant as a warning to self-governing Taiwan, which China claims as its own, China's military said earlier.

"The theater's troops are ready to fight at all times and can fight at any time to resolutely smash any form of 'Taiwan independence' and foreign interference attempts," it said.

The exercises were similar to ones conducted by China last August, when it launched missile strikes on targets in the seas around Taiwan in retaliation for then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, but have been smaller and less disruptive.

Military experts say the exercises serve both as intimidation and as an opportunity for Chinese troops to practice sealing off Taiwan by blocking sea and air traffic, an important strategic option the Chinese military might pursue in the event it uses military force to take Taiwan.

The Chinese actions follow Tsai Ing-wen's delicate mission to shore up Taiwan's dwindling diplomatic alliances in Central America and boost its U.S. support, a trip capped with a sensitive meeting with U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California. A U.S. congressional delegation also met with Tsai over the weekend in Taiwan after she returned.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby reiterated the position of President Joe Biden's administration that Tsai's transit through the U.S. and the congressional visit to Taiwan were not out of the norm. Tsai transited through the United States six times between 2016 and 2019.

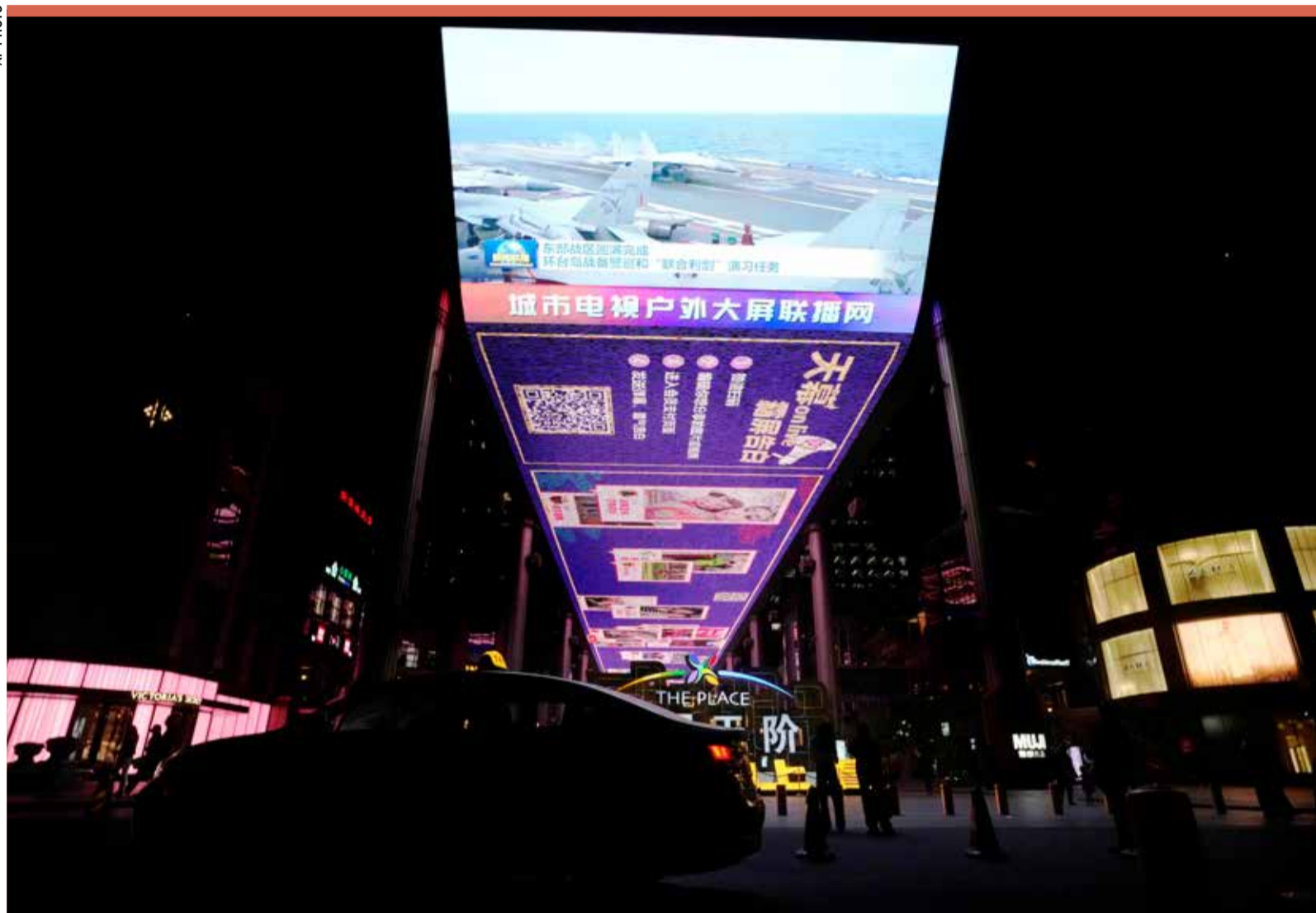
"There was no reason to react in any way militarily," he said. "There's no reason for tensions across the Taiwan Strait to devolve into any kind of conflict."

China responded immediately to the McCarthy meeting by imposing a travel ban and financial sanctions against those associated with Tsai's U.S. trip and with increased military activity through the weekend.

"China wants to use any increase of diplomatic interactions between the U.S. and Taiwan as an excuse to train its military," said Kuo Yu-jen, a defense studies expert and director of the Institute for National Policy Research in Taiwan.

Beijing says contact between foreign officials and the island's democratic government encourages Taiwanese who want formal

AP PHOTO



The evening news broadcast shows Chinese fighter jets on an aircraft carrier with the Chinese subtitles "Eastern Battle District successfully concludes the patrol exercise around the Taiwan island and Joint Sword exercise" on an outdoor screen in Beijing

independence, a step China's ruling Communist Party says would lead to war. The sides split in 1949 after a civil war, and the Communist Party says the island is obliged to rejoin the mainland, by force if necessary.

After Pelosi visited Taiwan, China conducted missile strikes on targets in the seas around Taiwan, while also sending warships and war planes over the median line of the Taiwan Strait. It also fired missiles over the island itself which landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone, in a significant escalation.

The live-fire exercises disrupted flights and shipping in one of the busiest shipping lanes for global trade. This time, shipping and maritime traffic have largely continued as normal, Kuo said.

The exercises this time have focused more on air strength, with Taiwan reporting more than 200 flights by Chinese warplanes in the past three days. Chinese state broadcaster CCTV, citing the People's Liberation Army, said the exercises are "simulating the joint sealing off" of Taiwan as well as "waves of simulated strikes" at important targets on the island.

On Monday, the PLA said its Shandong aircraft carrier was

taking part in the exercises encircling Taiwan for the first time. It showed a video of a fighter jet taking off the deck of the ship in a post on Weibo, the social media platform.

The appearance of the Shandong aircraft carrier in the Pacific Ocean suggests that it could be used to prevent foreign militaries from coming to help Taiwan, said Han Gan-ming, a research fellow at the government-backed Institute for National Defense and Security Research.

"In the future if there's a similar military maneuver, then Taiwan will have to face it alone," Han said.

Between 6 a.m. Sunday and 6 a.m. Monday, a total of 70 planes were detected and half crossed the median of the Taiwan Strait, an unofficial boundary once tacitly accepted by both sides, according to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense. Among the planes that crossed the median were eight J-16 fighter jets, four J-1 fighters, eight Su-30 fighters and reconnaissance planes. Taiwan also tracked J-15 fighter jets, which are paired with the Shandong aircraft carrier.

By Monday evening, Taiwan's defense ministry reported ano-

ther 91 flights by bombers, as well as multiple fighter jets, early warning aircraft and military transport planes.

That followed a full day between Friday and Saturday in which eight warships and 71 planes were detected near Taiwan, according to the island's Defense Ministry. It said in a statement that it was approaching the situation from the perspective of "not escalating conflict, and not causing disputes."

Taiwan said it monitored the Chinese moves through its land-based missile systems, as well as from its own navy vessels.

China's military pressure on Taiwan has intensified in recent years with planes or ships sent toward the island on a near-daily basis, with the numbers rising in reaction to sensitive activities. The military activity has increased a notch since Pelosi's visit, with Chinese PLA fighter jets regularly flying over the middle boundary line. Experts say "PLA navy vessels regularly navigate the waters off Taiwan's northeastern coast."

Meanwhile, to the south in the South China Sea, the U.S. 7th Fleet said its missile destroyer USS Milius sailed by Mischief Reef in a freedom of navigation operation.

China has built an artificial island on the sea feature to stake its claim to the disputed territory.

China said the U.S. "illegally trespassed" into waters near the reef without the permission of the Chinese government, according to a statement from the Chinese military's southern command.

Outside of the military maneuvers, Kuo said he was worried about the announcements from Fujian's Maritime Safety Administration from last week, when it said it would conduct "on-site inspections" of cargo ships and working vessels in the Taiwan Strait as part of a patrol exercise.

"First they'll target ships traveling between the Strait, then they will target any international ship," he said. "Gradually this will become the de facto new status quo."

One of the U.S. representatives who attended the meeting with Tsai last week said Saturday the U.S. must take seriously the threat China poses to Taiwan.

Republican Mike Gallagher, chairman of the U.S. House Select Committee on China, told The Associated Press that he plans to lead his committee in working to shore up the island government's defenses, encouraging Congress to expedite military aid to Taiwan. MDT/AP

SOUTH CHINA SEA

US, PHILIPPINES HOLD LARGEST WAR DRILLS NEAR DISPUTED WATERS

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

AMERICAN and Filipino forces yesterday launched their largest combat exercises in decades to be highlighted by a ship-sinking rocket barrage in waters across the disputed South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, where Washington has repeatedly warned China over its increasingly aggressive actions.

The annual drills by the long-time treaty allies called Balikatan — Tagalog for “shoulder-to-shoulder” — will run up to April 28 and involve more than 17,600 military personnel. It will be the latest display of American firepower in Asia, as the Biden administration strengthens an arc of alliances to better counter China, including in a possible confrontation over Taiwan, an island democracy that Beijing claims as its own.

That dovetails with efforts by the Philippines under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to defend its territorial interests in the South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety, by boosting joint military exercises with the U.S. and allowing rotating batches of American forces to stay in additional Philippine military camps under a 2014 defense pact.

“The relationships that we have, that we build into these exercises, will make us faster to respond to conflict, crisis, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief,” U.S. Marine Maj. Gen. Eric Austin said.

About 12,200 U.S. military per-

AP PHOTO



U.S. Marine Corps Major General Eric Austin (right) and Philippine Army Major General Marvin Licudin

sonnel, 5,400 Filipino forces and 111 Australian counterparts are taking part in the exercises, the largest since Balikatan started three decades ago. The drills will showcase U.S. warships, fighter jets as well as Patriot missiles, HIMARS rocket launchers and anti-tank Javelins, according to U.S. and Philippine military officials.

In a live-fire drill the allies will stage for the first time, U.S. and Fi-

lipino forces will sink a target ship in the Philippine territorial waters off the western province of Zamboanga on April 26, in a coordinated inland and coastal artillery bombardment and airstrike, Col. Michael Logico, a Philippine spokesman for Balikatan, told reporters.

“We have to fire at a target that is closer to what we would expect in an actual threat, which is an intrusion coming from an adversary

by sea,” Logico told reporters. “We are demonstrating that we are combat ready.”

Asked if Marcos raised any concern that Beijing may be antagonized by the rocket-firing near the busy waterway that China considers its territory, Logico said that did not come up when he briefed the president about the event. Marcos wants to witness the live-fire drill, he said.

In western Palawan province, which faces the South China Sea, the exercises will involve retaking an island captured by enemy forces, Logico said.

Philippine military officials said the maneuvers were aimed at bolstering the country’s coastal defense and disaster-response capabilities and were not aimed at any country.

Such field scenarios will “test the allies’ capabilities in combined arms live-fire, information and intelligence sharing, communications between maneuver units, logistics operations, amphibious operations,” the U.S. Embassy in Manila said.

In a sign of deepening defense cooperation, the Philippine foreign and defense secretaries will meet their American counterparts in Washington yesterday to discuss the American military presence and proposed joint naval patrols, officials said.

Washington and Beijing have been on a collision course over the long-seething territorial disputes involving China, the Philippines and four other governments, and Beijing’s goal of annexing Taiwan, by force if necessary.

China last week warned against the intensifying U.S. military deployment to the region. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said in a regular news briefing in Beijing that it “would only lead to more tensions and less peace and stability in the region.”

The Balikatan exercises opened in the Philippines a day after China concluded three days of combat drills that simulated sealing off Taiwan, following Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen’s meeting with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last week in California that infuriated Beijing. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH KOREA

Seoul to conduct first launch of commercial-grade satellite

SOUTH Korea plans to conduct its first launch of a commercial-grade satellite aboard a domestically built rocket next month as part of its space development program, officials said yesterday.

South Korea’s officials say its homegrown Nuri space launch vehicle has no military purposes. But some experts say the development of such rockets would eventually help the country acquire technologies needed to build bigger missiles and launch reconnaissance satellites amid animosities with rival North Korea.

In June last year, South Korea conducted its first sa-

tellite launch using the Nuri rocket. That launch involved what South Korean officials called a “performance verification” satellite mainly designed to examine the capacity of the rocket while next month’s event is meant to put a commercial-grade satellite into orbit for the first time.

The Science Ministry said the rocket will blast off from the country’s space launch center on a southern island on May 24. A ministry statement said it had set a backup launch date from May 25-31, in case of possible schedule changes due to weather.

The rocket will carry one main satellite called “Next

Generation Small Satellite 2” and seven other smaller cube-shaped satellites. The main satellite is tasked with verifying imaging radar technology and observing cosmic radiation in near-Earth orbit, the statement said.

Authorities have completed the assembly of the rocket’s first and second stages and are conducting final environmental tests of the eight satellites that are to be placed on the rocket’s third stage.

Last year’s launch was the Nuri rocket’s second liftoff. In its first launch in 2021, the rocket’s dummy payload reached the desired altitude but failed to enter orbit. After next month’s

launch, South Korea plans three more Nuri rocket launches, officials said.

“The third launch of Nuri is of great significance as it is the first attempt to launch a commercial-grade satellite and the first time a private company will jointly manufacture the homegrown Nuri rocket,” Oh Tae-seok, the first vice science minister, was quoted as saying in the ministry statement.

South Korea, the world’s 10th largest economy, is a major producer of semiconductors, automobiles and smartphones. But its space development program lags behind that of its neighbors China, India and

AP PHOTO



In this photo provided by the Korea Aerospace Research Institute, the Nuri rocket, the first domestically produced space rocket, lifts off from a launch pad at the Naro Space Center in Goheung, South Korea, on June 21, 2022

Japan. Since the early 1990s, South Korea has sent a series of satellites into space,

but all of them involved foreign rocket technology or launch sites. **MDT/AP**

NETHERLANDS

Macron visits Netherlands after Taiwan comments make waves

PETER DEJONG
& MIKE CORDER, AMSTERDAM

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron is set to deliver a speech outlining his vision for the future of Europe during a two-day state visit to the Netherlands that began yesterday.

The afternoon speech at a theater in The Hague comes after Macron raised eyebrows with comments on Taiwan after his recent visit to China.

"The question we need to answer, as Europeans, is the following: Is it in our interest to accelerate (a crisis) on Taiwan? No," Macron was quoted as saying in an interview published Sunday in French newspaper Les Echos and by Politico Europe.

"The worst thing would be to think that we Europeans must become followers on this topic and take our cue from the U.S. agenda and a Chinese overreaction."

The remarks raised questions about whether Macron's views are

AP PHOTO



French President Emmanuel Macron (left) and Dutch King Willem-Alexander listen to national anthems outside the royal palace on Dam square in Amsterdam, yesterday

in line with the European Union's position and whether the bloc of 27 is able to become the "third superpower" that Macron says he hopes to build within "a few years."

The interview was Friday, before China launched large-scale

combat exercises around Taiwan that simulated sealing off the island in response to the Taiwanese leader's trip to the U.S. last week. Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Beijing last week for talks and urged Chinese leader Xi

Jinping to "bring Russia to its senses" over its war in Ukraine.

He emphasized the concept of "strategic autonomy" for Europe which he has promoted for years. He warned of what he called the "trap" that would lead to the bloc "getting caught up in

crises that are not ours."

China and Taiwan split in 1949 after a civil war, and the government in Beijing says the island is obliged to rejoin the mainland, by force if necessary.

Macron's trip to Amsterdam and The Hague is the first state visit by a French leader since Jacques Chirac 23 years ago and underscores the close links between the Netherlands and France and the two leaders.

After arriving in Amsterdam, Macron and Dutch King Willem-Alexander inspected a guard of honor on the square outside the capital's royal palace as a military band played and the French and Dutch flags fluttered in a brisk breeze.

Macron was set to lay a wreath at the national monument near the palace in the historic heart of the city. He later travels to The Hague for a meeting with leaders of both houses of the Dutch parliament before delivering his speech.

In the evening, Macron and his wife Brigitte, return to Amsterdam for a banquet hosted by Willem-Alexander.

Today, Macron itinerary includes visiting a science park in Amsterdam, talks with Prime Minister Mark Rutte and viewing a blockbuster exhibition of paintings by Dutch Master Johannes Vermeer at the Rijksmuseum. **MDT/AP**


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EXPLAINER

WHEN EXACTLY WILL INDIA SURPASS CHINA AS MOST POPULOUS?

INDIA will surpass China's population this month. Or maybe in July. Or, perhaps it's happened already?

Demographers are unsure exactly when India will take the title as the most populous nation in the world because they're relying on estimates to make their best guess. But they know it's going to happen soon, if it hasn't occurred by now.

China has had the most people in the world since at least 1950, the year United Nations population data began. Both China and India have more than 1.4 billion people, and combined they make up more than a third of the world's 8 billion people.

"Actually, there is no way we can know exactly when India will surpass China," said Bruno Schoumaker, a demographer at Université catholique de Louvain in Belgium. "There is some uncertainty, not only about India's population, but also China's population."

STILL, WHEN IS IT HAPPENING?

Mathematical calculations from a range of surveys, as well as birth and death records, project that India will overtake China sometime in the middle of April. But demographers warn that it should be taken with a grain of salt since the numbers are fuzzy and could be revised.

"It's a crude approxima-

tion, a best guess," said Patrick Gerland, chief of the population estimates and projections section at the U.N. in New York.

Not long ago, India wasn't expected to become most populous until later this decade. But the timing has been sped up by a drop in China's fertility rate, with families having fewer children.

HOW IS IT CALCULATED?

Demographers at the U.N. Population Division make estimates based on projections from a wide variety of data sources to get what they believe are the most up-to-date demographic numbers. The last update to the data used for these calculations for both India and China was July 2022, said Sara Hertog, a U.N. population affairs officer in New York.

The demographers then use a statistical technique to infer when India's population has surpassed that of China, according to Stuart Gietel-Basten, a professor at Khalifa University of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi.

"The reality, of course, is that these estimates are just that," Gietel-Basten said. "But at least they are based on a relatively solid and consistent methodology."

WHERE DO THE NUMBERS COME FROM?

The foundations of both

nations' numbers are censuses, or head counts, conducted every decade.

China's last census was in 2020. Demographers used birth and death records, along with other administrative data, to calculate how the population has grown since then.

India's last census was in 2011. Its scheduled 2021 census was postponed by COVID-19. Without an actual door-to-door count for more than a decade, sample surveys have filled in the gaps to help demographers and India itself understand its population, said Alok Vajpeyi of the New Delhi-based non-government organization, Population Foundation of India.

Among the most important is the Sample Registration System, India's large-scale demographic survey that gathers data on such things as births, deaths, fertility and more.

Andrea Wojnar, the United Nations Population Fund's representative for India, said the agency is confident in the survey's numbers "because it uses a very robust methodology."

WHY IS INDIA MOVING AHEAD?

China has an aging population with stagnant growth even after the government seven years ago retreated from a one-child policy, and just two years ago said couples could have three children.

India has a much younger population, a higher fertility rate and a decrease in infant mortality over the last three decades.

India has more babies born each year than in any other country, while China has joined many European countries in having more deaths each year than births, said Dudley Poston, Jr., an emeritus professor of sociology at Texas A&M University.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

There's more than bragging rights at stake over which nation is the world's most populous — there are social and economic consequences. In India, that means a growing labor force and growth that sparks economic activity. In China, that means fewer working-age adults able to support an aging population.

Once a country hits a low fertility level, it's often hard to recover population growth, even with changes in government policy to encourage more births, said Toshiko Kaneda, technical director of demographic research at the Population Reference Bureau in Washington.

"Psychologically, it will be tough for China, especially given the rivalry in other areas between the two countries," Gietel-Basten said. "It is a big moment in human history as the baton is passed to India." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1957 BRITAIN AGREES TO SINGAPORE SELF-RULE



The British government is to allow the island colony of Singapore to govern itself under a new constitution agreed in London.

The Singapore Constitutional Conference ended today after four weeks of talks when Chief Minister of Singapore Lim Yew Hock and Alan Lennox-Boyd, secretary of state for the Colonies, signed an agreement.

The constitution comes into effect some time after 1 January 1958 when the colony will become known as the State of Singapore.

Britain will remain in charge of external affairs and defence.

There was, however, one major pre-condition that the Singapore delegation would not agree to - that "persons known to have been engaged in subversive activity" would be barred from standing for the Legislative Assembly.

This demand is aimed at excluding extremist left-wing activists in the People's Action Party (PAP), some of whom have been detained for inciting anti-British riots last year.

At the signing ceremony at Lancaster House, Mr Lim rejected this demand as "a departure from normal democratic practice" but agreed to put it before the Legislative Assembly.

Under self-government, the office of Governor will be abolished and replaced with a Malayan-born representative of the Queen known as the Yang di-Pertuan Negara.

An internal security council preventing subversion is to be set up under the chairmanship of the UK Commissioner charged with safeguarding British affairs in the territory.

Last April, David Marshall, first Chief Minister of Singapore, led a delegation to London to ask for internal self-government with the aim of achieving independence or "merdeka" in Malay.

The talks failed, and as a result Mr Marshall resigned as Chief Minister last June. He was succeeded by Lim Yew Hock.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

A few days later former Chief Minister David Marshall resigned from the governing Labour Front in protest at the agreement which he felt did not go far enough. He called it "a pock-marked beauty shrouded in chloroform".

The Constitutional Agreement was finally signed in London on 28 May 1958 and self-government achieved after Singapore held general elections in 1959.

The first government of the State of Singapore was sworn in on 5 June with Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister.

It joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 and became totally independent in 1965, nearly 20 years after it was made a British crown colony. The People's Action Party (PAP) has been the dominant political force since independence.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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Stay calm and focus on things that will help you understand the situation better. You are best to concentrate on your professional endeavors.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
You may divulge private information without realizing it today. Older family members may try to make demands that are impossible for you to handle.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Find ways to make extra cash. Start making things or reusing rather than buying ready made. You may be confused regarding your love life.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Today will be rather hectic on the domestic scene. Avoid friction with your mate. Added knowledge will give you the edge when dealing with peers.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Your fight for those less fortunate is not likely to end in sweet victory. You can make excellent career moves if you are open to the opportunities that exist.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
A little volleyball or other outdoor sports should be on your agenda. You may think gifts will win their heart, but it could add stress from lack of funds.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Tell them to get out of the mess they are in and then you'll consider getting together with them. You need a change and you need to earn more cash.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Someone close to you may need help. Arguments may flare up in your home. Don't take advantage of your expense account. Financial affairs do not look too favorable today.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Your ability to take hold of a situation will surely bring you popularity and leadership. You will be overly sensitive when dealing with your personal life.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Drastic changes regarding your personal attitude are evident. Losses are likely if you have left your financial affairs in other people's hands.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Let your lover know what your personal intentions are. Keep your mind on your work and stay away from situations that could ruin your reputation.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Your personal life will be under the gun and you may want to avoid the questions your lover is going to want to ask you. Put your efforts into job advancement.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	5	22	fine
Changchun	0	11	fine
Chengdu	16	28	rain
Chongqing	20	29	cloudy
Fuzhou	19	21	rain
Guangzhou	20	28	cloudy
Guiyang	15	21	showers
Haikou	23	31	cloudy
Hangzhou	14	18	overcast
Harbin	0	10	fine
Hefei	10	22	cloudy
Nanjing	11	21	cloudy
Shanghai	13	19	fine
Taipei	17	24	cloudy
Wuhan	15	24	fine
Hong Hong	20	23	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	6	17	overcast
Frankfurt	4	13	rain
Paris	7	13	rain
London	6	11	rain
New York	16	27	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Mild oath; 5- Distributed cards; 10- Sheltered, nautically; 14- Actress Downey; 15- Knight's suit; 16- Extremely; 17- The doctor ___; 18- New Brunswick neighbor; 19- Facilitate; 20- Latin American dance; 22- Knotty; 24- Greek goddess of the dawn; 25- Meat-grading org.; 26- Disable; 30- Derby prize; 35- Guadalajara gold; 36- Verse starter?; 37- Papal garment; 38- Ardent; 41- Earthworm; 43- City in Tuscany; 44- Casino cube; 45- ___ glance; 46- Outer coat of a seed; 47- Encourage; 50- Cat's nail; 53- Nutritional fig.; 54- Zebra-like; 58- Confused; 62- Not of the cloth; 63- Prepares for publication; 66- Pasternak heroine; 67- Peak; 68- Loose outer garment; 69- Islamic chieftain; 70- Joburg settler; 71- Hair rinse; 72- Fender ding;

DOWN 1- Actor Stoltz; 2- Gee whiz!; 3- What ___ mind reader?; 4- Moved rhythmically; 5- Capital of Syria; 6- Baseball stat; 7- What ___ bid?; 8- Years; 9- Tendency; 10- Affirm solemnly; 11- Sharon of "Boston Public"; 12- Limerick language; 13- Gazed at; 21- ___ polloi; 23- Biblical brother; 25- News letters; 26- Raise; 27- Golfer with an army; 28- Short letters; 29- "Wheel of Fortune" buy; 31- Galena, e.g.; 32- Dish of raw vegetables; 33- Best of a group; 34- Family car; 39- Med. specialty; 40- Civil rights org.; 41- Goal, intention; 42- State in the central United States; 44- Condensed moisture; 48- Strange; 49- Served soup; 51- Hanger-on; 52- Confuse; 54- Hunk; 55- ___ Bell; 56- Hoar; 57- Bakery worker; 59- Gammy; 60- Ireland; 61- Move suddenly; 64- Electrically charged atom; 65- Process leather;



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Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
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Chelsea's Frank Lampard



Real Madrid's Carlo Ancelotti

FOOTBALL | CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Focus on coaches as Madrid hosts Chelsea in quarters

TALES AZZONI, MADRID

Thursday, 03:00
Real Madrid v Chelsea
H 1.76, D 3.9, A 5.25

ODDSCHECKER.COM

THE latest encounter between Real Madrid and Chelsea in the Champions League will put a spotlight on their coaches.

Chelsea will travel for today's [Thursday, 03:00] first leg in Madrid with Frank Lampard trying to win for the first time since being named interim coach.

Madrid will play still surrounded by doubts about Carlo Ancelotti's future amid rumors of him taking over Brazil's national team.

The outcome could potentially help Lampard reclaim a permanent job with the English club, or influence Ancelotti's decision on whether to accept the Brazil job.

Chelsea appointed Lampard to replace Graham Potter and lost its first game with him in charge in the Premier League over the weekend. The club en-

ters the match at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on a four-match winless run. It has won only two of its last 11 matches in the Premier League, where it sits in 11th place.

"We have an opportunity against a fantastic team and we just have to attempt to make the most of the opportunity — go there with confidence and go there with a belief, because otherwise you don't turn up," said Lampard, the former Chelsea midfielder great who also coached the team from 2019-21.

Ancelotti and Madrid are coming off a 3-2 home loss to Villarreal that all-but-ended the team's hopes of winning the Spanish league, leaving it 13 points behind leader Barcelona with 10 matches remaining. Its focus now is on the Champions League and the Copa del Rey final against Osasuna in May.

Ancelotti has said he wants to remain with Madrid until the end of his contract next year, but acknowledged that he was flattered to know about Brazil's interest in him. Brazil's national team has an

interim coach since after the World Cup and wants a replacement to be announced soon.

The last two Champions League winners, Madrid and Chelsea have gotten used to facing each other in the knockout stages of the competition recently.

Madrid got the best of Chelsea in the quarterfinals last season on its way to a record-extending 14th European title. Chelsea overcame Madrid in the semi-finals in the previous year to eventually secure its second Champions League trophy.

Chelsea eliminated Madrid 3-1 on aggregate amid the coronavirus pandemic in 2020-21, while Madrid last year advanced with a 5-4 total score following extra time in a thrilling second leg at the Bernabeu.

Madrid is looking to make it to the semi-finals for the 11th time in 13 seasons, while Chelsea has appeared in the last four only once since 2013-14.

Madrid has won six of its eight Champions League games this season, with a loss at Leipzig and a draw at

Shakhtar Donetsk in the group stage. Chelsea has five victories, one

draw and two defeats — to Dinamo Zagreb in the group stage and to Borussia Dortmund in the first leg of the round of 16. The draw came against Salzburg in the group stage.

Ancelotti will have nearly all of his players available for the first leg, with the exception of left back Ferland Mendy.

Mason Mount and N'Golo Kante didn't play in Chelsea's last game in the Premier League but returned to training on Monday and should be available for the trip to the Spanish capital.

The winner of the series will face Manchester City or Bayern Munich in the semifinals. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

MIDDLE EAST DETENTE SHOWS DIALOGUE, NOT WAR, ONLY WAY TO RESOLVE DISPUTES

With Riyadh and Teheran announcing in Beijing on Thursday the official re-establishment of their diplomatic relations, there are hopes that a permanent cease-fire can be agreed to put an end to the Yemen conflict, a de facto proxy war between the two Middle East giants that has been fought for nine years.

It is good to hear that Saudi and Omani delegations arrived in Yemen's capital Sana'a over the weekend to negotiate a permanent cease-fire deal with Houthi officials, which aims to end hostilities and rebuild efforts and a timeline for foreign forces to exit the country. If the talks go well, reportedly, an agreement is expected to be announced before the Eid al-Fitr holiday, which begins on April 20.

This means that thanks to China's pro-peace efforts and mediation, with the reconciliation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the positive role Oman has been playing in the process as well as the United Nations' support, the stage has been set to end the conflict in Yemen.

As a matter of fact, ending the war in Yemen has always been in China's consideration in its mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. As Geng Shuang, deputy permanent representative of the Chinese mission to the United Nations, pointed out on March 15, dialogue and negotiation are the only realistic way out of the Yemen issue, and China hopes that the resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran will create favorable conditions for the improvement of the situation in Yemen.

Before the arrival of the delegations, the two sides have already shown their respective goodwill to each other. The Saudi coalition lifted eight years of restrictions on imports through Houthi-controlled ports, and almost at the same time, the Houthi forces announced that they would unilaterally halt missile and drone strikes against Saudi Arabia and all offensive operations on the battlefield, pledging that if Saudi Arabia promised to lift its blockade of Yemen and halt its air campaign, it will permanently cease fire.

It is fair to say that by turning swords into ploughshares in Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the world with a population of nearly 30 million, about 80 percent of whom are dependent on humanitarian aid because of the war, the Beijing-brokered resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran is serving as a starting point for a series of positive chain reactions in the Middle East.

All these have happened after the United States' "strategic withdrawal" from the region where for too long it had thought it could waywardly play countries off against one another and speculate on the mess. And it was during its "stay" that the regional conflicts and issues worsened and were made seemingly insoluble, except by war.

The series of positive changes the region has experienced and has enough reason to expect in the foreseeable future show to the world that the right way to solve disputes should always be dialogue, not war.

UKRAINE, RUSSIA SEND HOME AROUND 200 TROOPS IN PRISONER SWAP

THE BUZZ

More than 200 Russian and Ukrainian soldiers have returned home in a prisoner swap, the warring countries said yesterday [Macau time].

Russia's Defense Ministry said 106 Russian soldiers were released from Ukrainian custody as part of an agreement with Ukraine.

Andriy Yermak, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff, said that Russia freed 100 Ukrainian prisoners.

Neither announcement mentioned whether any intermediaries were involved in the agreement.

Some of the Ukrainian soldiers have severe injuries and illnesses, Yermak said in a statement published on Telegram.

He added that the latest of the sporadic prisoner swaps in the war that started in February 2022 was "not an easy one." He did not elaborate.

Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War alleged that almost half of the 80 men and 20 women soldiers who returned home "have serious injuries, illnesses or have been tortured." It presented no evidence for its claims.

According to Ukrainian news reports, one of the women prisoners is Valeriia Karpilenko, a border guard who had helped defend Mariupol's Azovstal steel plant.



Dr. Otto Frank holds the Golden Pan award, given for the sale of one million copies of the famous paperback, "The Diary of Anne Frank"

ILLUSTRATED ANNE FRANK BOOK REMOVED BY FLORIDA SCHOOL

MIKE SCHNEIDER, ORLANDO

A high school along Florida's Atlantic Coast has removed a graphic novel based on the diary of Anne Frank after a leader of a conservative advocacy group challenged it, claiming it minimized the Holocaust.

"Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation" was removed from a library at Vero Beach High School after a leader of Moms for Liberty in Indian River County raised an objection. The school's principal agreed with the objection, and the book was removed last month.

The book at one point shows the protagonist walking in a park, enchanted by female nude statues, and later proposing to a friend that they show each other their breasts.

Under the school district's policy, the principal makes the decision on a challenged book. If someone disagrees with a decision to keep the disputed book on the shelves, it can be appealed to a districtwide committee. The Anne Frank graphic novel had been checked out twice before it was removed, Cristen Maddux, a spokeswoman for the School District of In-

dian River County, said yesterday [Macau time].

Vero Beach is located 105 miles southeast of Orlando.

Other books about Anne Frank and copies of the published diary she wrote chronicling her time hiding from the Nazis with her family and other Jews in German-occupied Amsterdam remain in the school systems' libraries. The Jewish teenager's diary was published in 1947, several years after she died in a concentration camp, and it has become a classic read by tens of millions of people around the world.

By law, Florida schools are required to teach about the Holocaust, and nothing has changed in that respect, Maddux said.

"The feedback that the Holocaust is being removed from the curriculum and students aren't knowledgeable about what happened, that is not the case at all," Maddux said. "It's just a challenged book and the principal removed it."

Besides the Anne Frank graphic novel, Moms for Liberty in Indian River County objected to three books in the "Assassination Classroom" series, and they also were removed.

Moms for Liberty leader Jennifer Pippin said the Anne Frank graphic novel

violated state standards to teach the Holocaust accurately.

"Even her version featured the editing out of the entries about sex," Pippin said, referring to the original diary. "Even the publisher of the book calls it a 'biography,' meaning, it writes its own interpretive spin. It's not the actual work. It quotes the work, but it's not the diary in full. It chooses to offer a different view on the subject."

Published in 2018, the graphic novel was adapted from Anne Frank's diary by Ari Folman, and David Polonsky provided the illustrations. Folman's parents are Holocaust survivors.

When contacted by email, the book's publisher, Pantheon Graphic Library, forwarded the inquiry to Yves Kugelmann, a board member of a foundation set up by Anne Frank's father, Otto, devoted to distributing Anne Frank's diary and other matters. Kugelmann didn't immediately respond to questions.

The American Library Association reported last month that there were more than 1,200 demands to censor library books last year in the U.S., the highest number since the association began tracking more than 20 years ago. **MDT/AP**

Oman's second-largest bank is pursuing a potential merger with its smaller rival, potentially creating a lender with just under \$20 billion in assets, according to regulatory filings made yesterday. The filings on the Muscat Stock Exchange show Bank Dhofar's interest in its smaller rival, Ahli Bank. Bank Dhofar has over \$11 billion in assets, while Ahli has under \$8 billion. Ahli said it would study Bank Dhofar's offer. Bahrain's Ahli United Bank owns over a third of Oman's Ahli Bank.



USA The national emergency to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic ended yesterday [Macau time] as President Joe Biden signed a bipartisan congressional resolution to bring it to a close after three years — weeks before it was set to expire alongside a separate public health emergency. Some of the emergency measures have already been successfully wound-down, while others are still being phased out.



USA Al Jaffee (pictured), Mad magazine's award-winning cartoonist and ageless wise guy who delighted millions of kids with the sneaky fun of the Fold-In and the snark of "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions," has died. He was 102. Jaffee died Monday in Manhattan from multiple organ failure, according to his granddaughter, Fani Thomson. He had retired at the age of 99.

UK King Charles III plans to take a shortcut and smoother ride to Westminster Abbey for his coronation, trimming the procession route his mother took in 1953 as he aims for a more modest event that will include some modern touches. The lower-key ceremony May 6 will still be steeped in ancient traditions and adorned with royal regalia from the Crown Jewels, but will also feature its own bespoke emoji, reflecting the first British crowning of the social media era. Queen Elizabeth II's was the first coronation televised 70 years ago.