



A DELEGATION OF LOCAL BUSINESSPEOPLE IS IN PORTUGAL AIMING TO ESTABLISH COLLABORATIONS IN BIG HEALTH, INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY AND TRADING P2

ACCOMMODATION PRICE ROSE 125% IN Q1 P2

DOZENS KILLED AS ARMY, RIVALS BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF SUDAN P12



AP PHOTO



Indonesia Separatist gunmen attacked Indonesian army troops who were deployed to rescue a New Zealand pilot taken hostage by the rebels in Indonesia's restive Papua province, leaving at least six dead and about 30 missing, officials said yesterday. Initial information from army reports said there were about 36 soldiers at a post in the hilly district of Nduga, when attackers from the West Papua Liberation Army, the armed wing of the Free Papua Movement, opened fire.

AP PHOTO



South Korea's military says it fired warning shots to repel a North Korean patrol vessel that temporarily crossed the countries' disputed western sea boundary while chasing a Chinese fishing boat. The North Korean patrol boat crossed the so-called Northern Limit Line at around 11 a.m. Saturday while pursuing the Chinese boat in waters near South Korea's Baekryeong island but immediately retreated after a South Korean naval vessel fired warning shots, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said yesterday.

AP PHOTO



Dubai A fire swept through an apartment building in an older neighborhood of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, killing at least 16 people and injuring another nine, authorities said yesterday. The blaze Saturday in the Al Murar area of Dubai's historic Deira neighborhood struck an apartment believed to have been shared by multiple individuals, a common practice for laborers who power the economy in this city-state known more for its towering skyscrapers. But the tight quarters, often subdivided by makeshift barriers of plywood, drywall or shower curtains, can become a major risk in fires.

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ON THE AGENDA



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STATS ACCOMMODATION PRICE ROSE 125% IN Q1

RENATO MARQUES

THE price of accommodation for hotels and inns in Macau has more than doubled in the first quarter of 2023 (Q1), information from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows.

According to the official statistics release pertaining to the Tourist Price Index (TPI), the price of accommodation has risen exponentially by 124.89% year-on-year.

Other items such as entertainment and cultural activities (+15.68%) and transport and communications (+8.11%) also registered increases but were less significant.

In general, the TPI for Q1 has grown 18.16% year-on-year to 138.20, a growth also attributed to higher airfares, DSEC said.

In comparison with the fourth quarter (Q4) of last year, the TPI for the Q1 of 2023 rose 15.87% with the price indices

of accommodation and entertainment and cultural activities leading the increase again by rising 126.39% and 16.50%, respectively.

The DSEC also said that the dearer prices of fireworks and firecrackers used during the Lunar New Year was contributing to the increase of the index for entertainment and cultural activities.

On the other hand, the price index of clothing and footwear dropped 3.56%, which was mostly attributable to the seasonal sales of winter clothing.

The average TPI has been registering a constant increase for the last four quarters, including during Q1 2023, with most indices registering increases between 4 and 21%.

The TPI reflects the price change of goods and services purchased by visitors. Sections of TPI goods and services are selected according to the con-



sumption pattern of visitors, namely food, alcoholic beverages and tobacco; clothing and

footwear; accommodation; restaurant services; transport and communications; medicine and

personal goods; entertainment and cultural activities; and miscellaneous goods.

LOCAL BUSINESSPEOPLE TOUR PORTUGAL SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES IN BIG HEALTH, TRADE, AND HI-TECH

RENATO MARQUES

A delegation of local businesspeople is currently touring Portugal by invitation of the Macau Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) aiming to establish collaborations and business opportunities in strategic areas such as big health, innovative technology, trading, and others, the IPIM has said in a press statement.

The delegation, which includes over 40 businesspeople from Macau, has been touring Lisbon and Porto since yesterday and will do so until April 24 with visits scheduled to 13 local entities and companies.

During the visit, the delegation will participate in the "Macau-Portugal Investment and Tourism Promotion Seminar", co-organized by AICEP Portugal Global, Turismo de Portugal I.P., IPIM, and the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), which will address the presence of trade, investment and tourism



environment, as well as the industrial layout and political advantages of Macau and Hengqin.

The Seminar will feature several exchange sessions and business-matching sessions in which the IPIM hopes that favorable conditions for both sides will be created.

According to IPIM, the idea of attracting more Portuguese investors to settle in Macau and invest in Hengqin is on the table, as well as allowing local companies to "go beyond borders."

Additionally, MGTO is hosting the "Feeling Macau without Limits - Promoting Macau in

Lisbon" event that is taking place at Lisbon's downtown central square (Praça do Comércio) to present more about Macau and its advantages, namely from a tourism and entertainment perspective.

Concurrently, and at the same venue, a series of local representatives from the pharmaceutical industry, finance, technology, conventions and exhibitions, commerce, tourism, transport, construction, e-commerce, logistics and professional services, among others, have set up booths to promote their companies and products.

PLENARY SESSION

CASH HANDOUT ISSUANCE TO RETURN TO NORMAL SCHEDULE IN JULY

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng assured the parliament that this year's cash handout to citizens would not be delayed.

Several lawmakers asked about the rise in commodity prices.

Directly elected lawmaker Nick Lei Leong Wong asked whether Ho would issue another round of consumption subsidy and issue the cash handout early.

To these questions, the head of the government said the funds had been reserved in the budget. Moreover, the Executive Council recently discussed the topical Executive Regulations, triggering the Financial Services Bureau to

commence its work on the issuance.

The cash, meanwhile, will only be available in July, as in pre-Covid times.

As for consumption subsidy, after noting the end date of this round's subsidy is in June, Ho only said that the pandemic had stabilized, hinting that there would be no more consumption subsidy.

On alleged profiteering in commodity sales, Ho demanded evidence from lawmakers, adding that Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong would then send inspectors for investigations. "Evidence is critical," Ho said. **AL**



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For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd



PLENARY SESSION

CE: 20% of volume to recover for Hong Kong visitor numbers

ANTHONY LAM

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng has told the parliament that, to return to pre-Covid levels, the city must recover 20% of its previous volume of Hong Kong visitors.

Last Friday, the head of the government took questions from lawmakers, including several about the development of tourism.

April 5 was the first time since 1999 that the proportion of Hong Kong arrivals surpassed that from mainland China.

Ho said the number of Hong Kong arrivals between Jan. 13 and March 31 this year reached 1.51 million, 80% of same period in 2019.

"It means that we still have 20% to recover," Ho said.

The special benefits issued to Hong Kong visitors may be halted in the future. The policy refers to special enticements and the belief that, at the end of the day, market operations should return to pre-Covid levels.

The effort to attract more Hong Kong tourists has not yet been fully implemented because the two ferry companies are operating on restricted capacities due to an insufficient workforce.

Ho believes that when ferry services return to normal levels, Macau will see more Hong Kong visitors.

On attracting foreign visitors, Ho said Macau's weakness is that it only has regional flights. However, marketing efforts have been initiated to promote Macau at the Hong Kong International Airport.

Buy-one-get-one-free promotions for air tickets will also be rolled out to attract foreign visitors to Macau via Hong Kong. Media familiarization tours will also be held involving press from Korea, Thailand and Malaysia.

He added that in the past three years of Covid-19 restrictions many aviation industry workers have departed from their original positions. As with the ferry services, this has prevented airlines from opening new routes.

Responding to a question from appointed lawmaker Cheung Kin Chung about local hotel capacities, Ho said the city needs more hotel accommodation options, a problem which had long been observed by members of the public and less wealthy travelers.

Nonetheless, it is the first time a head of the Macau government

has pointed out that no tourists should be discriminated against, be they wealthy or unwealthy. In the past two decades, the city's tourism industry has focused mostly on big spenders.

Ho said tourists in group tours usually do not want expensive top-notch accommodation, as with some individual tourists. Although the city has many luxury hotels, it lacks mid-range accommodation.

April 5 was the first time since 1999 that the proportion of Hong Kong arrivals surpassed that from mainland China

In addition, mainland governmental delegations are bound by mainland laws to stay in non-casino accommodation. Ho said there are only a handful of such hotels of "acceptable quality" for them to choose from.

He then suggested that hoteliers upgrade these mid-range, non-casino hotels to cater to group tours.

CE APOLOGIZES FOR APR. 5 ZONE A TRAFFIC STANDSTILL

Lawmaker Chan Chak Mo asked Ho about regular traffic jams at the connection bridge between New Urban Zone A and the main peninsula, particularly the massive traffic congestion on April 5 during the Ching Ming or "Tomb-sweeping" Festival.

Ho attributed the reason to the previously approved Macau Vehicles to Mainland scheme, drivers' misplacement of vehicle identification chips and construction procedures.

He also commended his team's effort in "frequent application" that saw the scheme approved "ahead of time."

"There was no reason we put [the scheme] on hold when it was approved," he defended.

Against this backdrop, roads in Zone A appear insufficient in number, he said.

He suggested drivers bound for mainland China on the scheme position their vehicle identification chips correctly to facilitate smoother immigration clearance.

For example, he pointed out, should the chip be positioned to overlap the mainland highway

autopay chip, immigration clearance will be obstructed, as the Macao Customs sensors cannot distinguish between the two chips.

Moreover, slot pre-booking may be introduced to avoid peak periods.

Construction procedures have also led to severe traffic problems, Ho added. Many Zone A roads are still in the pipeline because underground pipe networks are being constructed.

Repeating earlier replies to lawmakers from the Transport Bureau, he said that future road networks – with the earliest date for new road opening set for next year – would help resolve prevalent congestion.

Ho made no comment on public criticism over the government's lack of preparation in the past few years for the increase of traffic in the area.

CIVIL SERVANT PAY RAISE NEXT YEAR TO BE STUDIED

Replying to questions from allies Pereira Coutinho and Che Sai Wang on salary increments for civil servants, Ho said the government was considering the feasibility. He said a balance must be struck between the adaptability of a recovering economy and rising commodity prices.

Ho said the government had always been open to raising salaries for civil servants, adding that it was not done because lawmakers expressed their demands.

He rejected Che's suggestion to issue an extra month of salary to civil servants who had helped during the June 18 outbreak. After attributing the success to all people in Macau, he pointed to the law as not accommodating the additional salary payment.

On general salary levels, he believes with the economy recovering, the working population will see higher incomes.

LOWERING UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN MIND

Ho has pledged to be "attentive to the changes in the employment market" as the city's unemployment rate stands at 4.1%.

Although the figure represents an improvement compared to last year's (May-July 2022) 5.4%, a record high since 2008, according to the available data disclosed by the government, lawmakers have been calling for the government to attend to the numbers of currently unemployed local residents.

In the plenary session, Ho pledged that his government would be attentive to changes in the market and that in due time it would launch various support services, showing its commitment to helping the local population, as well as alleviating the pressure of the human resources problem and reducing the unemployment rate.

BUS DRIVER INJURED AFTER SCUFFLE WITH PASSENGER

A bus driver from the Sociedade de Transportes Colectivos de Macau (TCM) has reportedly been injured by a passenger after a scuffle that took place inside the bus and while he was driving, several media sources have reported. The passenger boarded the route 10 bus at Avenida Infante D. Henrique in central Macau and an argument broke out with the driver, allegedly over the bus fare. The argument escalated and eventually the driver had to stop the bus near the Hotel Lisboa bus stop (two stops later), at which time the argument become physical. The passenger allegedly pushed the driver to the ground, resulting in his injury. He was taken to the public hospital for treatment.

IC CALLS FOR SHENZHEN FAIR PARTICIPANTS

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will arrange for Macau's cultural and creative industries to participate in the 19th China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair (ICIF) in June. Cultural and creative organisations or companies in Macau can apply to join the exhibition or attend the product promotion sessions at the same venue, as cited in a statement issued by the IC. The organisers will select 10 applicants for the exhibition and product promotion sessions, with confirmation from IC, based on the number of designs, originality, creativity and uniqueness of their products.

WTT CHAMPIONS KICKS OFF TODAY

WTT Champions Macao 2023 will be held at Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion from today until April 23. The tournament features 32 male and 32 female players playing in men's singles and women's singles. Chinese national team players such as Fan Zhendong, Ma Long, Wang Chuqin, Sun Yingsha, Chen Meng and Wang Manyu arrived in the city yesterday to prepare for the upcoming matches. In the men's singles, Wang Chuqin will start his title defense against Andrej Gacina, while World No.1 Fan Zhendong will look to overcome Patrick Franziska in the first round. In the women's singles, World No.1 and defending champion Sun Yingsha will start this year's campaign against Hana Matelová from Czechia.



GAMING

MGM RESORTS WINS JAPAN'S FIRST CASINO LICENSE

MGM Resorts International has been granted a license to operate the first casino in Japan, and is further expanding its international portfolio by way of Japan and Osaka.

Japan's government on Friday approved a controversial plan to open the country's first casino in the city of Osaka as it seeks to lure more foreign tourists.

The resort will be operated by Osaka IR KK, established by the

Japanese subsidiary of U.S. casino operator MGM Resorts International, Japan's Orix Corp. financial services group, and a number of regional investors.

The casino resort is to include conference facilities, an exhibition hall, a hotel and a theater and is expected to open as early as autumn 2029, four years after Osaka hosts a World Expo.

"It is expected to contribute to the local economy and the econo-

mic growth of all of Japan after the Osaka-Kansai Expo and become a tourism hub for transmitting the charms of Japan," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said at a meeting of the government's IR, or integrated resort, promotion panel.

The panel said the plan meets the government's requirements, including financial stability, contribution to the local economy and consideration of anti-addiction measures. It was formally appro-

ved by Land, Infrastructure and Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito.

The planned 1.08 trillion yen (\$8 billion) project, submitted last year, will be located on an artificial island and is projected to have 20 million visitors and 520 billion yen (\$3.9 billion) in revenue annually. Most of the revenue is expected to come from the casino.

Osaka is close to other attractions such as Universal Studios Japan and the tourist destination of Kyoto. But experts say its business could shrink in the future in a country with a rapidly aging and declining population.

Past attempts to build casinos have failed, often because of strong public opposition to gambling, even though state-run wagering on horse and boat racing is extremely popular. The Nikkei business newspaper said it recently surveyed Osaka residents and found that their opinions were divided, with 45% in favor of the casino plan and 38% against it.

Back in 2020, some gaming operators in Macau who submitted their proposals for operating IRs in Japan's different cities backed out at the race at close intervals.

The original application period for local governments in Japan, together with their chosen IR partners, to submit joint proposals to the national government was set as January 4 to July 31, 2021. However, in December 2020, Japan's government announced that the application period would be pushed back nine months to October 1, 2021 to April 28, 2022, due to the hindrance of the Covid-19 pandemic. Owing to the adverse impact of the coronavirus, the government eyed opening the first integrated resort in the late 2020s. **MDT/AP**

Association for Guia Circuit's development seeks gov't departments' support for activities

STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau Guia Circuit Promotion and Development Association (APDCGM) has been paying courtesy visits to the main government departments that are influential in the continuing efforts for the protection and promotion of the Guia Circuit.

The association, which aims, ultimately, for the inclusion of the circuit as a heritage site recognized and listed by UNESCO, has been visiting several departments recently, seeking opportunities for collaboration and support from the government entities for their activity plan.

The Times learned that the association will this

year promote a series of activities also taking into account the celebration of the milestone of the 70th anniversary of the Macau Grand Prix.

A cycling activity, as well as a motorcycle tour event, are currently among those initiatives under preparation, as is the seventh edition of the collective art exhibition titled "The Guia Circuit as UNESCO World Heritage Site," which the Times also learned this year will take place during the Grand Prix event and, tentatively, in a larger venue than in previous years.

To discuss precisely many of these aspects and details, a delegation of the APDCGM led by the president José Luis Estorninho



met late last week with the president of the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), José Tavares.

This meeting also marked the first official visit of APDCGM's newly

elected bodies after elections in early March.

The new APDCGM officials, as well as the president of the board of directors, Estorninho, join with Ricardo Igreja, the

president of the General Assembly, and Humberto Rodrigues as the president of the Fiscal Council, and will be in office for a period of three years, until February 2026.

ANTHONY LAM



ECONOMY

Q2 GDP expected to nearly double y-o-y

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU'S Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the second quarter of this year is expected to rise by 90% year-over-year, the Macau Economic Association (MEA)

has noted in a statement.

The MEA studies local economic data and issues the index for the city each month. The rise has been caused mainly by the low base from last year, in which Macau was most affected, out of the last three years, by the Covid-19 pandemic.

During its evaluation, the group made the aforementioned estimate. Moreover, it expects the first quarter's GDP to rise by at least 30% year-over-year.

Despite such estimated prospects, the group noted the figure will be at most 60% of the average of the years from 2017 to 2019.

Looking into the future, the MEA has high expectations, citing the momentum in developing non-gambling elements in local resorts, which will eventually help strengthen Macau's attractiveness and competitiveness.

The city's poor loan figures and ratio slightly fell in February, the group also noted.

On the other hand, the Chinese Consumer Confidence Index has reached an 11-month high, indirectly boosting Macau tourism and casino spending.

Against this backdrop, the city should return to "stability" in terms of the Prosperity Index, with prevalent economic data.

Following the index's rise by 0.5 index points from January to February, the MEA expects the index to further rise by 0.4 index points to 4.5 in March. The increase is expected to continue to 5.1 in June.

Once crossing the threshold of 5.0, the index will be considered within the "stability" spectrum.

There are less advantageous facts, however. The regional geopolitical situation, OPEC's shrinking productivity, high inflation and interest rates will pose foreseeable risks to economic recovery and financial stability.

FOREX RESERVES DROP TO MOP215B BY MARCH

The preliminary estimate of Macau's foreign exchange reserves amounted to 215.1 billion patacas (about 26.6 billion U.S. dollars) at the end of March. The latest statistics from the Monetary Authority of Macao showed that the reserves decreased 0.8% from the revised value of 216.9 billion patacas for the previous month. The foreign exchange reserves as of the end of March represented 10 times the currency in circulation, or 84.1% of the pataca broad money supply (M2) at the end of February.

SENIOR CPC OFFICIAL MEETS MACAU MEDIA DELEGATION

Li Shulei, a senior official of the Communist Party of China (CPC), met with a media delegation from the SAR late last week. Li, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, briefed the delegation on the guiding principles of the 20th CPC National Congress. He also reviewed the historic achievements made in the cause of the Party and the country since the 18th CPC National Congress. Li called on Macau's press circles to continue to hold high the banner of loving both the motherland and Macau, foster greater patriotism and a strengthened sense of national identity.

AD

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

GBA BEIJING STRIKES CAUTIONARY TONE ON PROTESTS IN HONG KONG

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

CHINA'S senior official overseeing Hong Kong's affairs said Saturday that protests are not the only way for people to express their views, weeks after the city's strict protest rules sparked controversy while signaling Beijing's vision for the financial hub.

Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, said the anti-government movement sparked by an extradition bill in 2019 is a scar that will not fade away and he warned against a repeat of such chaos.

Xia's remarks at a ceremony on China's National Security Education Day indicated Beijing's views on the city, which is promoting its return to normalcy following strict pandemic-related restrictions and political turmoil over the past three years.

In late March, Hong Kong saw its first authorized protest against a government policy since the lifting of major pandemic restrictions under unprecedentedly strict rules, with demonstrators made to wear numbered badges around their necks.



Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, speaks during the National Security Education Day opening ceremony in Hong Kong, Saturday

"Demonstrations are not the only way to express one's interests and demands," Xia said Saturday, noting that there is no contradiction between safeguarding national security and expressing one's views.

Past experiences have shown that causes centered on environmental protection and livelihood issues can be easily hijacked, he said.

"People's good will can be easily exploited and manipulated

by others with ulterior motives," he said. "Demands on livelihood issues can even be distorted into political issues and that eventually trigger social confrontation."

He said a confrontational society has no future, calling on Hong Kong to build a climate for rational communication.

"I hope Hong Kong can host exhibitions, develop innovation and technology, strive for economic development, have horse races, dances, stock activities, and earn some money every day," he said.

Xia also described the 2019 protests as Hong Kong's version of a "color revolution" and said the city cannot allow its district councils to be controlled by anti-China and "destabilizing" forces.

The city's district councilors largely handle municipal matters such as organizing construction projects and ensuring that public facilities are in order. **MDT/AP**

SAR HOLDS EXHIBITION ON NATIONAL SECURITY

AN exhibition on national security education was unveiled Saturday in the region, aiming to help local residents better understand new achievements in building and developing the national security system. Jointly hosted by the SAR government and the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macao SAR, the one-month exhibition displays over 350 photographs and multiple video footages showcasing increased modernization of the national security sys-

tem and capabilities during the past decade. Director of the liaison office Zheng Xincong remarked that it is imperative to continuously "improve the Macao SAR's system and capabilities to safeguard national security, advance the steady and sustained development of the 'One country, two systems' cause with Macao characteristics, further improve supporting legislation and enforcement mechanism, and leverage the unique cultural advantages of Macao."

AD

britcham 英國商會
British Chamber of Commerce in Macao

britcham 'When Macao was British: The Occupation of 1808'

Nathan Kwan is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Macau. He studies the history of international maritime activity in the Pearl River Delta during the Qing dynasty in China. Nathan graduated from the University of Texas, Austin, and obtained his Masters degree at Harvard University, then pursued his PhD in a joint program between King's College London and the University of Hong Kong.

British ships and sailors began arriving at Macao in the summer of 1808 under the pretext of protecting the Portuguese presence there from the threat from Napoleonic France. The landing and garrisoning of British soldiers in Macao represented the first time British forces had occupied territory in China. The British incursion upset the balance between the Portuguese and Chinese authorities in the city. This talk will re-examine this pivotal moment in Macao's history when parts of the city fell under British control.

Date : 19th April 2023 (Wednesday)
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AP PHOTO



ENERGY

Europe's most powerful nuclear reactor kicks off in Finland

JARI TANNER, HELSINKI

FINLAND'S much-delayed and costly new nuclear reactor, Europe's most powerful by production capacity, has completed a test phase lasting over a year and started regular output, boosting the

Nordic country's electricity self-sufficiency significantly.

The Olkiluoto 3 reactor, which has 1,600-megawatt capacity, was connected into the Finnish national power grid in March 2022 and kicked off regular production on Sunday. Operator Teollisuuden Voima, or TVO, tweeted that

"Olkiluoto 3 is now ready" after a delay of 14 years from the original plan.

It will help Finland to achieve its carbon neutrality targets and increase energy security at a time when European countries have cut oil, gas and other power supplies from Russia, Finland's neighbor.

"The production of Olkiluoto 3 stabilizes the price of electricity and plays an important role in the Finnish green transition," said TVO President and CEO Jarmo Tanhua in a statement. The company added that "the electricity production volume of Europe's largest nuclear power plant unit is

a significant addition to clean, domestic production."

Construction of Olkiluoto 3 began in 2005 and was to be completed four years later. However, the project was plagued by several technological problems that led to lawsuits. The last time a new nuclear reactor was commissioned in Finland was over 40 years ago.

The Olkiluoto 3 is western Europe's first new reactor in more than 15 years. It is the first new-generation EPR, or European Pressurized Reactor, plant to have gone online in Europe. It was developed in a joint venture between France's Areva and Germany's Siemens.

Primarily due to safety concerns, nuclear power remains a controversial issue in Europe. The launch of the Finnish reactor coincides with Germany's move to shut down its last remaining three nuclear plants on Saturday.

Experts have put Olkiluoto 3's final price tag at some 11 billion euros (\$12 billion) — almost three times what was initially estimated. Finland now has five nuclear reactors in two power plants located on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Combined, they cover more than 40% of the nation's electricity demand.

The conservative National Coalition Party, or NCP, which won Finland's April 2 general election, wants to increase the share of energy that the country of 5.5 million gets from nuclear power still further.

NCP leader Petteri Orpo, Finland's likely new prime minister, said during the election campaign that the new Cabinet should make nuclear power "the cornerstone of the government's energy policy." **MDT/AP**

Saudi prince gives 4% Aramco stake to public investment firm

JON GAMBRELL, DUBAI

SAUDI Arabia's crown prince announced yesterday the transfer of a 4% stake of the oil giant Saudi Aramco to a subsidiary of the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, further boosting its coffers as the kingdom tries to expand its economy beyond oil.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's decision, announced by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, sends the stake to the Saudi Arabian Investment Co., known as Sanabil Investments. Sanabil is under the sovereign wealth fund known as the Public Investment Fund.

"The transfer will also solidify PIF's strong financial position and credit rating," the statement about the deal said. It gave no possible investment targets for either

AP PHOTO



Sanabil or the PIF

Saudi Aramco, formally known as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co., acknowledged the shares going to Sanabil. It

said the Saudi government remains the oil firm's biggest shareholder, with over 90% of its stock.

"This is a private trans-

fer between the state and Sanabil, and the company is not a party to the transfer and did not enter into any agreements or pay or receive

any proceeds from the transfer," Aramco said in a stock market filing.

In February 2022, another 4% of Aramco had been transferred to the PIF. Just 1.73% of the company, a narrow sliver, is traded on Saudi Arabia's Tadawul stock market since the company's 2019 initial public offering.

Aramco has a market value of \$1.94 trillion, making it the world's third most-valuable firm, behind just Apple and Microsoft respectively. That makes the 4% worth in theory some \$77.6 billion.

Aramco stock traded slightly up on the Tadawul to \$8.82 a share Sunday.

Aramco reported earning a \$161 billion profit last year, claiming the highest-ever recorded by a publicly listed company. That came off the

back of energy prices rising after Russia launched its war on Ukraine in February 2022, with sanctions limiting the sale of Moscow's oil and natural gas in Western markets. Benchmark Brent crude now trades above \$86 a barrel, further fueling global inflation worries.

Meanwhile, activists criticized the profits amid global concerns about the burning of fossil fuels accelerating climate change.

Saudi Arabia's vast oil resources, located close to the surface of its desert expanse, make it one of the world's least expensive places to produce crude. The crown prince hopes to use the oil wealth to pivot the kingdom off oil sales, like with his planned \$500 billion futuristic desert city called Neom and other projects. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



ECONOMY

AUTO SHOW HIGHLIGHTS INTENSE ELECTRIC CAR COMPETITION

JOE MCDONALD, SHANGHAI

GLOBAL and Chinese automakers plan to unveil more than a dozen new electric SUVs, sedans and muscle cars this week at the Shanghai auto show, their first full-scale sales event in four years in a market that has become a workshop for developing electrics, self-driving cars and other technology.

Automakers are competing to roll out faster, more luxurious, more feature-drenched electric vehicles in the technology's biggest, most crowded market. The ruling Communist Party has invested billions of dollars in subsidies to buy an early lead in an emerging industry. Established global brands face intense competition from Chinese rivals.

For the first time since 2019, executives are flying in from the United States, Europe and Japan for the world's biggest auto show after anti-virus curbs that blocked most travel into China were lifted in December. Auto shows in the industry's biggest market went ahead during the pandemic, but on a smaller scale. Global brands were represented by employees of their China operations.

Drivers in the world's biggest auto market bought 5.4 million pure-electric vehicles last year, or about two-thirds of the global total of 8 million, plus 1.5 million gasoline-electric hybrids. That was more than one-quarter of total auto sales of 23.6 million. This

year's EV sales are forecast to rise another 30%.

"Consumers lost interest in gasoline cars. That is the biggest challenge for foreign brands to compete in China," said industry analyst John Zeng of LMC Automotive. "They are going to have to show their best EV products."

Beijing is winding down government support and shifting the burden to automakers by requiring them to earn credits for EV sales. Manufacturers are pouring billions of dollars into developing models that can compete on price and features without subsidies. Many are forming partnerships to share soaring costs.

Auto Shanghai 2023 fills the cavernous Shanghai exhibition center, a 1.5 million-square-meter (16 million-square-foot) subcontinent of a building that is among the world's biggest.

Volkswagen AG, the country's top-selling brand, says it plans to display 28 models, half of them electrified. VW says it will debut its ID.7 limousine, which promises a 700-kilometer (435-mile) range on one charge.

China's BYD Auto, which competes with Tesla Inc. for the title of world's biggest-selling electric automaker, says it will display for the first time its U9 supercar from its luxury Yangwang brand. The automaker says the U9, with a 1 million yuan (\$145,000) sticker price, can accelerate from zero to 100 kph (60 mph) in two neck-snapping seconds.

China's auto sales peaked in 2017 at 24.7 million but collapsed in 2020 to 20.2 million after dealerships closed as part of efforts to contain COVID-19. They are recovering but are yet to return to the pre-pandemic level.

The ruling party's support for EV development is part of plans to gain wealth and global influence by transforming China into a creator of profitable technologies.

That campaign has strained relations with Washington and other trading partners, which are cutting off access to advanced processor chips used by makers of smartphones, electric cars and other high-tech products. China's own foundries can supply low-end chips used in many cars but not processors for artificial intelligence and other advanced functions.

Sales of gasoline-electric hybrids and pure-electric vehicles rose 26.2% over a year ago in the first three months of 2023 to 1.6 million, according to the China Association of Auto Manufacturers. Sales of pure electrics rose 14.4% to 1.2 million while hybrids increased 75.1% to 433,000.

Tesla and some other brands cut prices by 5% to 15% starting in January after sales growth slowed, though to still-robust levels compared with the slack U.S. and European markets. That prompted warnings the squeeze on an industry with dozens of fledgling brands might force smaller au-

tomakers into mergers or out of business.

China also is, along with the United States, a leader in development of self-driving taxis and trucks.

Baidu Inc., best known as a search engine operator, is the most prominent among developers that also include Pony.ai. Geely Group, owner of Volvo Cars, Lotus and Polestar, has announced plans for satellite-linked autonomous vehicles. Network equipment maker Huawei Technologies Ltd. is working on self-driving mining and industrial vehicles.

Baidu and Pony.ai received China's first licenses to offer autonomous ride-hailing services in Beijing with a safety driver aboard to take over in the event of an emergency in 2022. That came 18 months after Alphabet Inc.'s Waymo started driverless ride-hailing service in Phoenix, Arizona.

"We see very strong support from the government," said Jason Low of Canalis.

At the auto show, Chinese brand Aito plans to display its new M5 SUV with autonomous technology developed in an alliance with Huawei Technologies Ltd. The telecom equipment maker is expanding into the auto and other industries after U.S. sanctions imposed in a feud with Beijing over technology crushed Huawei's smartphone business.

China's market is so huge that even brands whose strongest

selling point is roaring, gasoline-powered engines are embracing electrics.

BMW AG says its whole vehicle lineup at Auto Shanghai will be electrified. The German sport luxury brand says it will unveil two new models, the i7 M70L and XM Red Label, and show its M760Le in China for the first time.

Italy's Maserati, a Stellantis unit known for using high-performance Ferrari engines, plans to unveil its first electric SUV and says its electric sports car will get an Asia premiere.

Chinese luxury EV brand NIO Inc., which competes with Tesla at the premium end of the market, plans to display its latest SUV, the ES6. It promises a 610-kilometer (380-mile) range on one charge.

Mercedes Benz plans to unveil an electric SUV under its luxury Maybach brand and two SUVs. The company also has EV joint ventures with BYD Auto and Geely Group.

Toyota says it plans to unveil two new models in its bZ line of zero-emissions vehicles. Nissan plans to display its Max-Out electric convertible concept car. Honda is debuting a new prototype for its China-focused e:N electric brand.

Despite such investments, Western and Japanese brands need to be more aggressive about EV development to keep up with China's rapid evolution, said LMC's Zeng. He said many take too long to create models abroad without Chinese input.

"The model they bring to China lags behind Chinese models by three or four years in driving range and equipment," Zeng said. "They have to learn to design and test cars in China for China." MDT/AP

ANALYSIS

EU leaders beat a path to Xi's door seeking Beijing's help

LORNE COOK, BRUSSELS

IN the weeks since Chinese leader Xi Jinping won a third five-year term as president, setting him on course to remain in power for life, leaders and diplomats from around the world have beaten a path to his door. None more so than those from Europe.

French President Emmanuel Macron made a high-profile state visit to Beijing last week accompanied by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, just days after Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

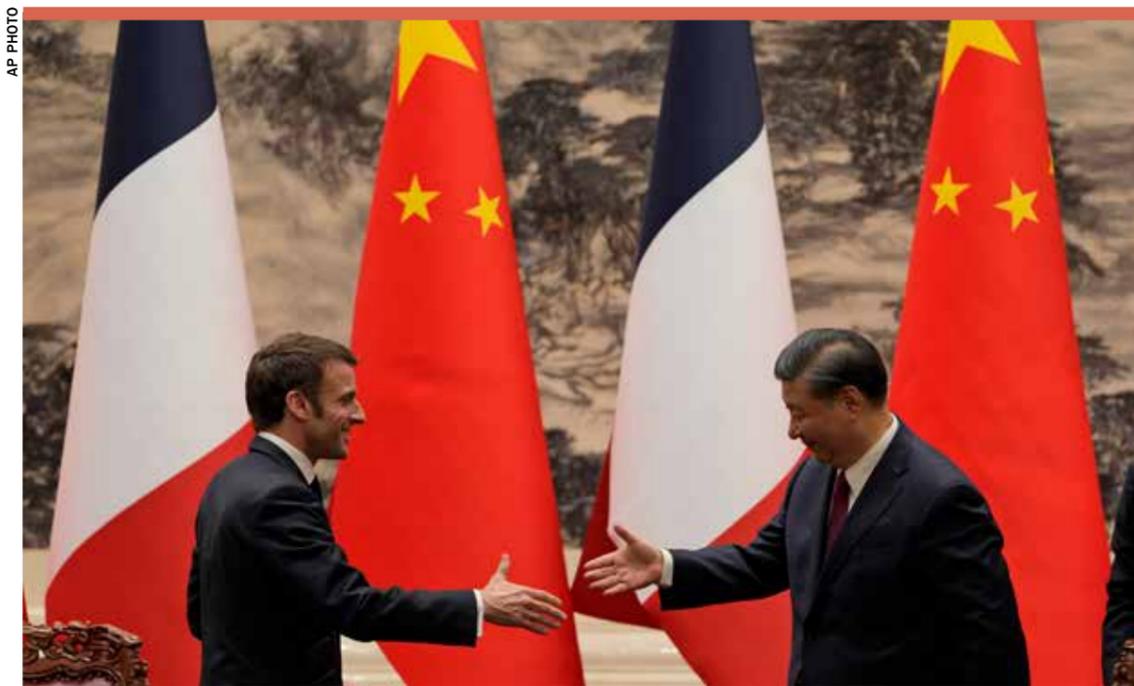
German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock arrived in the northeast port city of Tianjin on Thursday, following a visit by Chancellor Olaf Scholz in November. The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, would have been in China this week, too, but he tested positive for COVID-19.

For the 27-nation trading bloc, the reasons to head to China are clear.

As an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Xi could play a pivotal role in helping to end the war in Ukraine. The conflict has dragged on for over a year, driven up energy prices and inflicted more damage on economies struggling to rebound from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Europeans want Xi's help. They want him to talk to Ukraine's president as well as Russia's, but they don't see him as the key mediator. China's proposed peace plan for Ukraine is mostly a list of its previously known positions and is unacceptable, EU officials say.

The EU also fears that Xi might supply weapons to Russia.



French President Emmanuel Macron shakes hands with President Xi Jinping after meeting the press at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, earlier this month

They've been particularly disturbed by Putin's plans to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. That announcement came just days after Xi and Putin met to cement their "no-limits friendship."

Baerbock said the war is "top of my agenda." Praising Beijing for easing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, she said that "its influence vis à vis Russia will have consequences for the whole of Europe and for our relationship with China."

At the same time, the EU is deeply concerned about a military escalation in the Taiwan Strait. China launched war games just after Macron left. But unlike the U.S., with its military and strategic interest in Taiwan, the Europeans mostly see the island in economic and pro-democracy terms.

So the visits are meant to reassure Xi of respect for Beijing's con-

trol over all of Chinese territory and to urge calm. They also highlight the challenge the U.S. faces as it tries to build a coalition of countries to ramp up pressure on Beijing over its expansionist policies.

"The key is that we have every interest, both in Europe and in China, to maintain the status quo," a senior EU official said Wednesday, briefing reporters on plans for Borrell's sensitive trip on condition that he not be named. "It has worked well for all sides for decades."

Beyond the geopolitics lies business. The EU and China did more than 2.3 billion euros' (\$2.5 billion) worth of trade every day last year, and the Europeans don't want to endanger that. However, the EU's trade deficit has more than tripled over the past decade, and it wants to level the business playing field.

It's also desperate to limit its imports of critical resources from China, like rare earth minerals or hi-tech components, after painfully weaning itself off its biggest, and most unreliable, gas supplier, Russia.

Over the past two decades, the Chinese government has often used its economic heft "to pry France, Germany and other allies away from the U.S. on issues ranging from military security and trade to human rights and Taiwan," observers in the West say.

Beijing has called repeatedly for a "multi-polar world," a reference to Chinese frustration with U.S. dominance of global affairs and the ruling Communist Party's ambition to see the country become an international leader.

"There has been a serious deviation in U.S. understanding and positioning about China, treat-

ing China as the primary opponent and the biggest geopolitical challenge," the Chinese foreign minister, Qin Gang, told reporters last month.

"China-Europe relations are not targeted, dependent, or subject to third parties," he said.

Macron's visit appeared to illustrate that Qin's view isn't just wishful thinking. As tensions rise between Beijing and Washington, the French leader said, it is important for Europe to retain its "strategic autonomy."

"Being a friend doesn't mean that you have to be a vassal," Macron said last week, repeating a remark from his trip that alarmed some European partners. "Just because we're allies, it doesn't mean (that) we no longer have the right to think for ourselves."

Such comments could strain ties with the U.S. and have also exposed divisions within the EU.

Without mentioning Macron, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki warned that some in Europe were too slow to heed the "wake-up call" on China.

"You could see this over the past couple of weeks as some European leaders went to Beijing," Morawiecki said, adding: "I do not quite understand the idea of strategic autonomy, if it means de-facto shooting into our own knee."

For its part, the White House has sought to downplay Macron's talk of Europe as "an independent pole in a multi-polar world."

It thinks European skepticism toward Beijing is growing. U.S. officials note a recent Dutch decision to restrict China's access to advanced computer chip components or Scholz publicly prodding Xi not to deliver weapons to Russia.

Despite the differences of national emphasis, the EU's strategy on China remains much as it was enshrined in 2019 — that the Asian giant is "a partner, a competitor and systemic rival." The aim of the recent visits fit that mold: to secure Xi's commitment to peace, keep trade flowing fairly and reduce Europe's reliance on China for critical resources. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

Flights out of Taipei delayed after China launches satellite

FLIGHTS out of northern Taiwan were delayed yesterday after China launched a rocket carrying a satellite that dropped debris into waters north of the capital Taipei.

While the satellite launch had no obvious military purpose, it comes after China held large-scale military drills in response to Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen's transit visit to the

United States earlier this month, during which she met U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California.

Tensions remain high and China sent warplanes flying toward Taiwan more than 200 times last weekend, while its navy ships circled the self-ruled island it claims as Chinese territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry issued a statement on public media, saying it had monitored the 9:36 a.m. launch from the Jiuquan base in northwestern China. While some rocket parts had landed within Taiwan's air defense identification zone, they posed no threat to "our nation's territory," the statement said.

China had declared a 27-minute halt to flights

over a section of the East China Sea, considerably shorter than the no-fly period over parts of three days it had originally announced. Taiwan said it strongly protested the notice and was able to get China to reduce the flight ban time to the brief period yesterday morning.

Still, the flight ban caused disruptions for travelers headed to Japan from

Taipei's Songshan Airport.

Lee Yang-ming, a 54-year-old working in the medical industry, said he had lost an afternoon of sightseeing in Tokyo after his departure time was put back by two hours.

"We had our schedule all planned," Lee said. "That's ruined one day of our visit."

Recent Chinese exercises around Taiwan have been seen as a display of

its ability not only to attack the island, but to cut off air and sea transit routes in the area that is among the most vital to trade and travel in the world.

That has brought strong condemnations from the U.S., Taiwan's chief ally, and warnings from other nations of the calamitous effect a Taiwan Strait conflict would have on the entire world. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

Explosive thrown at PM Kishida at campaign event; one hurt

MARI YAMAGUCHI, WAKAYAMA

JAPANESE Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was evacuated unharmed this weekend after someone threw an explosive device in his direction while he was campaigning at a fishing port in western Japan, officials said. Police wrestled a suspect to the ground as screaming bystanders scrambled to get away and smoke filled the air.

One police officer was slightly hurt and Kishida continued campaigning Saturday, but the chaotic scene was reminiscent of the assassination nine months ago of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which also came on a campaign tour and continues to reverberate in Japanese politics. Kishida was visiting Saikazaki port in Wakayama prefecture to support his ruling party's candidate in a local election, and the explosion occurred just before he was to begin his speech.

A young man believed to be a suspect was arrested Saturday at the scene after he allegedly threw "the suspicious object," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters. Matsuno refused to comment on the suspect's motive and background, saying police are still investigating.

TV footage shows Kishida standing with his back to the crowd. His security detail suddenly points to the ground near him, and the prime minister whips around, looking alarmed.



A man believed to be a suspect, center on the ground, is caught by police after he allegedly threw "the suspicious object," as Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Saikazaki port for an election campaign event in Wakayama, western Japan Saturday

The camera quickly turns to the crowd just as several people, including uniformed and plain-clothes police officers, converge on a young man wearing a white surgical mask and holding what appears to be another device, a long silver tube.

As they collapse on top of the man, working to remove the tube from his hands, a large explosion is heard near where Kishida had been standing. The crowd scatters in panic as police roughly drag the man away.

It wasn't immediately clear what the explosive device was or how many the suspect had, but some reports said it was a smoke or pipe bomb, possibly with a delayed fuse.

No injuries among the crowd were reported in the incident, which came on the eve of a major international forum in Japan. Kishida was not hurt and continued his campaign speeches later Saturday, Matsuno said. One police officer was slightly injured.

The investigation at the scene continued late into the night. Japanese media reports said the suspect refused to talk to police until his lawyer arrived.

Kishida did not mention the explosion and returned to the Tokyo region in the evening after campaigning in Chiba for another candidate.

"Elections are the core of democracy, and we should never tolerate threats or obstruction by

violence," Matsuno said.

He said he instructed national police to ensure their utmost effort for the protection of dignitaries who are visiting Japan in the period leading up to the Group of Seven summit in May.

Abe's assassination, which shocked a nation that prides itself on public safety and extremely tight gun controls, came as he delivered a campaign speech in the western city of Nara. Amid a national outcry, police have tightened their protective measures following a subsequent investigation that found holes in Abe's security.

Security has been also ramped up in Japan as senior diplomats from some of the world's most

powerful democracies arrive for the G-7 foreign minister meetings. Kishida will host a May 19-21 G-7 leaders' summit in his hometown of Hiroshima.

One witness Saturday told NHK television that she was standing in the crowd when she saw something come flying from behind. After a sudden loud noise, she fled with her children. Another witness said people were screaming and that he saw someone being apprehended right before the explosion occurred.

Saturday's attack comes ahead of nationwide local elections, including several by-elections for vacated parliamentary seats, with voting scheduled for April 23.

In Abe's assassination, the former prime minister was shot with a homemade gun during a campaign speech. The suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, has been charged with murder and several other crimes, including violating the gun control law.

He told investigators that he killed Abe, one of Japan's most influential and divisive politicians, because of the former prime minister's apparent links to a religious group that he hated. In statements and in social media postings attributed to him, Yamagami said he developed a grudge because his mother had made massive donations to the Unification Church that bankrupted his family and ruined his life.

Abe's assassination led to the resignation of top local and national police chiefs and a tightening of security guidelines for political leaders and other prominent people.

Kishida's government was hoping to focus world attention this weekend on the hot spring resort town of Karuizawa, where senior diplomats will gather for the so-called Group of Seven foreign ministers' meeting. **MDT/AP**

50 YEARS AFTER THE WAR

US, Vietnam pledge to boost ties as Blinken visits Hanoi

FIFTY years after the last U.S. combat troops left South Vietnam, Secretary of State Antony Blinken looked to strengthen America's ties with its old foes in Hanoi as it seeks to counter China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.

Blinken and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh pledged to boost relations to new levels as they met just two weeks after the 50th anniversary of the U.S. troop withdrawal that marked the end of America's direct military involvement in Vietnam.

And it came as Blinken broke ground on a sprawling new \$1.2 billion



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) and Vietnam's Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son meet at the Government Guest House in Hanoi

U.S. embassy compound in the Vietnamese capital, a project the Biden administration hopes will demonstrate its commitment to further improving

ties less than 30 years after diplomatic relations were restored in 1995.

Despite concerns over Vietnam's human rights record, Washington sees Hanoi as a key component of its strategy for the region and has sought to leverage Vietnam's traditional rivalry with its much larger neighbor China to expand U.S. influence in the region.

"We think this is an auspicious time to elevate our existing partnership," Blinken told reporters after meetings with Chinh, Vietnam's foreign minister and Communist Party chief.

"This has been a very

comprehensive and effective relationship and going forward we will continue to deepen relations," Chinh said. "We highly appreciate the role and responsibility of the U.S. towards the Asia Pacific, or, in a larger scheme, the Indo-Pacific."

He added that Vietnam's communist government is keen to "further elevate our bilateral ties to a new height."

Along with a number of China's smaller neighbors, Vietnam has maritime and territorial disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea. The U.S. has responded by offering diplomatic support and bolstering

military cooperation with the Philippines and the self-ruled island of Taiwan, which China claims as a renegade province.

Blinken noted that the U.S. is currently finalizing the transfer to Vietnam of a third Coast Guard cutter, which will complement existing maritime security cooperation that has seen Washington give Hanoi 24 patrol boats since 2016 along with other equipment and training.

"All of these elements bolster Vietnamese capacity to contribute to maritime peace and stability in the South China Sea," he said. **MDT/AP**

CLIMATE

G7 vows to step up moves to renewable energy, zero carbon

ELAINE KURTENBACH

ENERGY and environment ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations vowed Sunday to work to hasten the shift toward cleaner, renewable energy, but set no timetable for phasing out coal-fired power plants as they wrapped up two days of talks in the northern Japanese city of Sapporo.

The officials issued a 36-page communique laying out their commitments ahead of a G-7 summit in Hiroshima in May.

Japan won endorsements from fellow G-7 countries for its own national strategy emphasizing so-called clean coal, hydrogen and nuclear energy to help ensure its energy security.

"Recognizing the current global energy crisis and economic disruptions, we reaffirm our commitment to accelerating the clean energy transition to net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 at the latest," the communique says.

The leaders reiterated the need to urgently reduce carbon emissions and achieve a "predominantly decarbonized power sector" by 2035.

"We call on and will work with other countries to end new unabated coal-fired power generation projects globally as soon as possible to accelerate the clean energy transition in a just manner," the document says.

The stipulation that countries rely on "predominantly" clean energy by 2035 leaves room for continuation of fossil-fuel fired power. But the ministers agreed to prioritize steps toward phasing out "unabated" coal power generation — plants that do not employ mechanisms to capture



G-7 ministers on climate, energy and environment pose for a photo during its photo session in Sapporo, northern Japan, Saturday

emissions and prevent them from escaping into the atmosphere.

U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said the meetings were "really constructive."

"I think the unity for the goal that was expressed of phasing out unabated fossil fuels is a very important statement," Kerry said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The call to action comes as China and other developing countries step up demands for more help in phasing out fossil fuels and stabilizing energy prices and supplies amid disruptions from Russia's war on Ukraine.

The issue of setting a timeline for phasing out coal-fired power plants is a longstanding sticking point. Japan relies on coal for nearly one-third of its power generation and is also promoting the use of so-called clean coal, using technology to capture carbon emissions, to produce hydro-

gen — which produces only water when used as fuel.

The G-7 nations account for 40% of the world's economic activity and a quarter of global carbon emissions. Their actions are critical, but so is their support for less wealthy nations often suffering the worst effects of climate change while having the fewest resources for mitigating such impacts.

Emissions in advanced economies are falling, though historically they have been higher — the United States alone accounts for about a quarter of historic global carbon emissions — while emerging markets and developing economies now account for more than two-thirds of global carbon emissions.

The president-designate for the next United Nations climate talks, the COP28, who was also attending the talks in Sapporo, issued a statement urging G-7 nations to increase financial support

for developing countries' transitions to clean energy.

Sultan Al Jaber urged fellow leaders to help deliver a "new deal" on climate finance to boost efforts to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and help protect biodiversity, especially in developing nations.

"We must make a fairer deal for the Global South," he said. "Not enough is getting to the people and places that need it most."

He said developed countries must follow through on a \$100 billion pledge they made at the 2009 COP15 meeting. The next talks are to be held in Dubai in late November.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva issued a joint statement saying "We remain very concerned that funding provided by developed countries continues to fall short of the commitment of \$100 billion per year."

Lula met with Xi in Beijing on

Friday.

Economic development is the first defense against climate change, Bhupender Yadav, India's environment minister, said in a tweet.

"The global goal of reaching net zero by 2050 needs enhanced emission decoupling by developed nations," Yadav said, to allow the space for countries like India to develop their economies, the best defense against the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and pollution."

The document crafted in Sapporo included significant amounts of nuance to allow for differences between the G-7 energy strategies, climate advocates said.

"They put out bold language on the urgency of addressing the climate crisis but the real test is what are they saying to the rest of the world about their commitments to scale up ambitions," Alden Meyer, a senior associate at E3G, a climate change think tank, said in a Twitter spaces session just after the communique was released.

But while other G-7 countries prevented Japan from expanding loopholes to allow wider use of fossil fuels, the commitments "fall short of the clarion call to action that was needed," Meyer said.

While the G-7 energy and environment ministers were wrapping up their meetings in Sapporo, farther south in the mountain city of Karuizawa G-7 foreign ministers were grappling with other shared concerns including regional security and the war in Ukraine.

The war has complicated efforts to switch to renewable energy by disrupting trade in oil and gas and pushing prices sharply higher. And it has to end for many reasons.

"It's insane and tragic," Kerry said, but phasing out carbon emissions can and must continue.

"I think energy security is being exaggerated in some cases," Kerry said, pointing to Germany's progress in embracing renewable energy. **MDT/AP**

NATO member Finland breaks ground on Russia border fence

KOSTYA MANENKOV & SERGEI GRITS, IMATRA

THE construction of barbed-wired fence along Finland's long border with Russia - primarily meant to curb illegal migration - has broken ground near the southeastern town of Imatra less than two weeks after the Nordic country joined NATO as the 31st member of the military alliance.

The Finnish Border Guard on Friday showcased the building of the initial

three kilometer stretch of the fence to be erected in Pelkola near a crossing point off Imatra, a quiet lakeside town of some 25,000 people.

Finland's 1,340 kilometer border with Russia is the longest of any European Union member.

Construction of the border fence is an initiative by the border guard that was approved by Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government amid wide political support last year. The main purpose of the three-meter high

steel fence with a barbed-wire extension on top is to prevent illegal immigration from Russia and give reaction time to authorities, Finnish border officials say.

In 2015-2016, Moscow attempted to influence Finland by organizing large numbers of asylum-seekers to northern Finnish crossing points in the Arctic Lapland region. Russian authorities were seen deliberately ushering thousands of asylum-seekers - mostly from Iraq, Afghanistan and

other Middle East nations - to those border crossing points.

The move was seen as a show of muscle by Moscow. The issue was settled when Finnish President Sauli Niinistö held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The flow of migrants stopped shortly thereafter.

This is a scenario that Finland - a nation 5.5 million people that officially became a NATO member on April 4 - wants to prevent from repeating itself. **MDT/AP**



Finland's border guards walk at construction site of the border barrier fence between Finland and Russia near Pelkola border crossing point in Imatra, south-eastern Finland

Dozens killed as army, rivals battle for control of Sudan

JACK JEFFERY &
SAMY MAGDY, KHARTOUM

THE Sudanese military and a powerful paramilitary group battled for control of the chaos-stricken nation for a second day Sunday, signaling they were unwilling to end hostilities despite mounting diplomatic pressure to cease fire.

Heavy fighting involving armored vehicles, truck-mounted machine guns and war planes raged Sunday in the capital of Khartoum, the adjoining city of Omdurman and in flashpoints across the country. The rival forces are believed to have tens of thousands of fighters each in the capital alone.

A doctors' group said that at least 56 civilians were killed and that it believed there were dozens of additional deaths among the rival forces. The Sudan Doctors' Syndicate said close to 600 people were wounded, including civilians and fighters.

The clashes capped months of heightened tensions between the military and its partner-turned-rival, the Rapid Support Forces. Those tensions had delayed a deal with political parties to get the country back to its short-lived transition to democracy, which was derailed by an October 2021 military coup.

In Khartoum and Omdurman, fighting was reported around the military headquarters, Khartoum International Airport and state television headquarters. A senior military official said RSF fighters clashed with troops at military headquarters early Sunday and that a fire broke out at a facility for ground troops.

"The battles have not stopped," said prominent rights advocate Tahani Abass who lives near the military headquarters. "They are shooting against each other in the streets. It's an all-out war in residential areas."

Abass said her family spent the night huddling on the ground floor of their home. "No one was able to sleep and the kids were crying and screaming with every explosion," she said. Sounds of gunfire were heard while she was speaking to The Associated Press.

The military and the RSF

AP PHOTO



Smoke is seen rising in Khartoum, Sudan, Saturday

both claimed to be in control of strategic locations in Khartoum and elsewhere in the county. Their claims couldn't be independently verified.

Both sides signaled late Saturday that they were unwilling to negotiate.

The military, headed by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, called for dismantling the RSF, which it labeled a "rebellious militia." The head of the RSF, Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, told the satellite news network Al Arabyia that he ruled out negotiations. Dagalo called on Burhan to surrender.

Meanwhile, diplomatic pressure appeared to be mounting.

Top diplomats, including the U.S. Secretary of State, the U.N. secretary-general, the EU foreign policy chief, the head of the Arab League and the head of the African Union Commission urged the sides to stop fighting. Members of the U.N. Security Council, at odds over other crises around the world, called for an immediate end of the hostilities and a return to dialogue.

Arab states with stakes in Sudan — Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — made similar appeals.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he consulted with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

"We agreed it was essential for the parties to immediately end hostilities without pre-condition," he said in a statement early Sunday.

The rival forces were fighting in several locations across Sudan, including the western Darfur region where tens of thousands of people live in camps for displaced people after years of genocidal civil war.

In the province of North Darfur, dozens were killed and wounded since Saturday at a camp for displaced people, said Adam Regal, a spokesman for a Darfur charity.

In Nyala, the capital of South Darfur province, the two sides fought for control of the city's airport, said a military official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief media.

The official said fighting also spread to the eastern region, including the provinces of Kassala and al-Qadarif on the borders with Ethiopia and Eritrea. He said battles centered around RSF and army bases.

The Sudan Doctors' Syndicate appealed to international humanitarian and medical organizations to support medical facilities in the country. The group also called on the international community to press both sides to ensure safe passage for ambulances and medical personnel.

The recent tensions stem from disagreement over how the RSF, headed by Dagalo, should be integrated into the armed forces and what authority should oversee the process. The merger is a key condition of Sudan's unsigned transition agreement with political groups.

Pro-democracy activists have blamed Burhan and Dagalo for abuses against protesters across the county over the past four years, including the deadly break-up of a protest camp outside the military's headquarters in Khartoum in June 2019 that killed over 120 protesters. Many groups have repeatedly called for holding them accountable. The RSF has long been accused of atrocities linked to the Darfur conflict.

Sudan, a country at the crossroads of the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, is known for its history of military coups and civil conflicts since it gained independence in 1950s.

The country has borders with six African nations and a strategic coastline on the Red Sea. A decade-old civil conflict resulted in the secession of South Sudan in 2011.

The clashes will increase hardship in Sudan, where the U.N. says some 16 million people — or one-third of the population — already depend on humanitarian assistance. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1999 DOZENS HURT IN LONDON BOMB BLAST



An explosion outside a busy supermarket in Brixton, south London, has injured at least 45 people.

At least four of the casualties - including a one-year-old boy with a nail lodged in his brain - are said to be seriously hurt and are being kept in hospital overnight.

A market trader, George Jones, was handed the bag containing the nail bomb shortly before it went off.

Mr Jones said: "I unzipped it and opened it wide and I could see what it was - it was a square device with Sellotape and nails."

Mr Jones used his mobile phone to call the police and tried to move the bag away from shoppers but the device went off.

"I was blown across the road and a couple of nails lodged in my leg," Mr Jones said.

Local resident Jools Thomas described the scene after the blast.

"A friend of mine who is a nurse tried to help patch up the worst."

"There was a bloke with a nail stuck in his head and another with a nail in his lung," he said.

Home Secretary Jack Straw has condemned the incident as "an outrageous and mindless act".

Scotland Yard said there was no warning given before the blast at 1730BST outside an Iceland supermarket.

A police helicopter and explosives officers were called to the scene, which remains sealed off as forensic experts trawl the site for clues.

Though no motive has been established police said the incident is not believed to be related to Northern Ireland paramilitary groups.

However, Brixton-based black activist Lee Jasper said he suspected the bomb may have been the work of a racially-motivated far-right group.

Brixton has a high concentration of ethnic minority residents and is known as a centre of black culture in London.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

A week after the Brixton blast another bomb went off in Brick Lane in London's East End - an area with a high Asian population.

Seven people were slightly injured.

But on 30 April a nail bomb placed in a central London pub with a large number of gay customers killed three people, one of them a pregnant woman.

Sixty-five people were injured, 17 of them seriously - two victims had legs amputated.

The explosions proved to be the work of right-wing extremist David Copeland, 22, who was captured shortly after the pub bombing.

In June 2000 he was found guilty of murder and jailed for life.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 You can persuade even the toughest opponents to think your way. Be aware that you might be at fault as well. Your outgoing nature will win hearts.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Make changes to your home that will be pleasing to everyone involved. Don't be too quick to judge those you live with. Make sure that you have all the pertinent information before any reprisals or making any moves.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Turn your present relationship around or start a new one. Remember that no one can walk through your door if there's someone standing in the doorway.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Don't be too quick to sign documents. You may jump from the frying pan into the fire if you make a move today. You will find that social activities will lead you into passionate meetings.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 New romantic relationships will develop through group activity related to sports events. Put your energy into self-improvement programs that promise to make you into a better you.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Lack of funds may add stress to your already uncertain situation. There could be disappointment regarding investments. Don't make large purchases unless you have discussed your choices with your mate.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You are best to concentrate on your professional endeavors. Hassles with in-laws could put a damper on your day. Try not to hurt your partner's feelings.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 You've been hurt before and could be again if you don't play hard to get. You would be wise to socialize with as many people as possible.

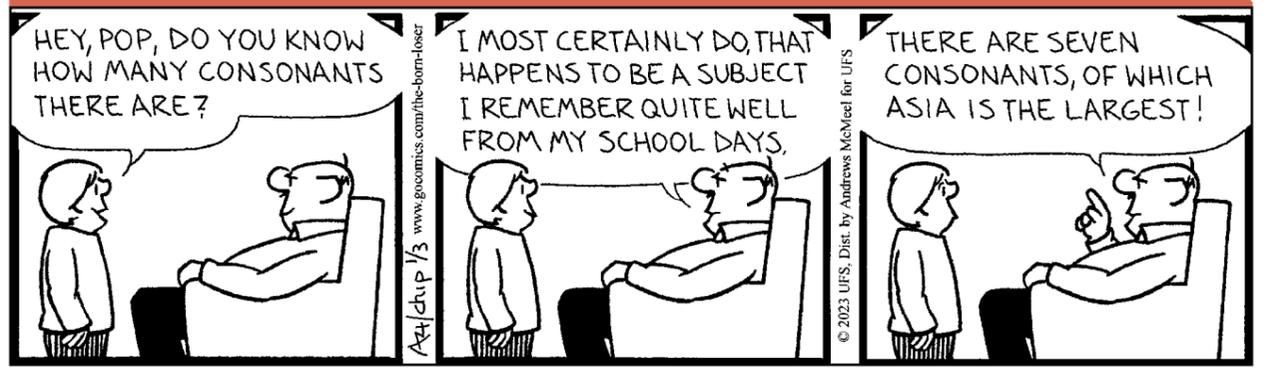
SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 You should be able to get a lot done. Don't put all your cash in one place. Verbal abuse could lead to carelessness. You may have the opportunity to get involved in some interesting conversations.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Avoid any petty ego confrontations; they could lead to estrangement if you aren't careful. Do not get involved in joint financial ventures.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Too much talk might lead to hassles. You will be attracted to unusual forms of entertainment and foreign cultures. Visit friends or relatives you rarely see.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 If you can, try to work out of your home today. You should get involved with activities that can be enjoyed by both young and old alike. You will be overly sensitive today.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

| EASY | | | | | EASY+ | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|---|---|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 3 | 1 | 9 | | 3 | | 9 | 4 | 8 | 1 | | | |
| | 1 | | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | | | 3 | 9 | | |
| 4 | | | | 2 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 9 | | 7 | | 4 | |
| 7 | | 4 | 5 | | 5 | | | | 6 | 2 | | | |
| | 6 | 3 | | 7 | 9 | 5 | | | 5 | 7 | 2 | | |
| | | | | 9 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 3 | | | | 8 | |
| 6 | 8 | 7 | 9 | | 4 | | 8 | | 5 | | 3 | | |
| | | 9 | | 2 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 2 | | | 1 | 5 | |
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| MEDIUM | | | | | HARD | | | | | | | |
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| 7 | | | | | 3 | 5 | 7 | | | | | |
| 8 | | 3 | 5 | | | 2 | 6 | 4 | | | | |
| 7 | | 6 | | | | | | | | 8 | 7 | |
| | 1 | | | 3 | 9 | 4 | | | | | | |
| | | | 1 | 6 | 5 | | | | | | | |

WEATHER

| | MIN | MAX | CONDITION |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| CHINA | | | |
| Beijing | 10 | 22 | cloudy |
| Changchun | 1 | 16 | cloudy |
| Chengdu | 19 | 32 | overcast |
| Chongqing | 23 | 34 | cloudy |
| Fuzhou | 20 | 32 | cloudy |
| Guangzhou | 20 | 31 | cloudy |
| Guiyang | 18 | 26 | cloudy |
| Haikou | 23 | 32 | cloudy |
| Hangzhou | 15 | 31 | cloudy |
| Harbin | -1 | 17 | fine |
| Hefei | 17 | 31 | overcast |
| Nanjing | 16 | 33 | fine |
| Shanghai | 16 | 27 | fine |
| Taipei | 19 | 26 | fine |
| Wuhan | 19 | 32 | cloudy |
| Hong Kong | 24 | 26 | cloudy |
| WORLD | | | |
| Moscow | 6 | 15 | cloudy |
| Frankfurt | 6 | 14 | overcast |
| Paris | 7 | 16 | fog |
| London | 6 | 17 | overcast |
| New York | 11 | 21 | showers |

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Paris divider; 6- Locks up; 10- And ___ bed; 14- Grant portrayer; 15- Leaf with Sanscrit writing?; 16- Neck of the woods; 17- Scope; 18- Scottish loch, home to a monster!; 19- Curved; 20- Twosome; 21- Serious wrongdoing; 23- ___ Perot; 24- Terra ___; 26- Knock off; 27- Threat finale; 29- Fertile soils; 31- Burt's ex; 32- Fluff, as bangs; 33- Timecard abbr.; 36- Failure to understand; 40- Dundee denial; 41- Trooper maker; 42- "Dancing Queen" group; 43- Lost; 44- Maintenance; 46- Adjust to zero; 48- Bendable twig, usually of a willow tree; 49- Rock bottom; 50- Colorado resort; 52- Japanese drama; 55- Egg cell; 56- Feng ___; 57- Appliance brand; 59- Art ___; 60- Mountain lake; 61- Emblem; 62- Hgt.; 63- To ___ (perfectly); 64- At right angles to a ship's length;

Friday's solution

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R | O | N | E | U | L | N | A | N | C | O | | | |
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| N | A | R | C | I | G | L | O | O | T | R | O | | |
| C | H | I | A | N | T | I | G | E | N | I | N | E | |
| P | O | E | T | D | O | N | | | | | | | |
| A | S | P | E | N | S | S | C | O | R | C | H | E | R |
| M | E | L | E | E | S | T | O | W | E | Y | E | R | |
| T | I | T | E | L | E | A | R | N | | | | | |
| G | O | A | D | O | G | R | E | A | P | R | E | S | |
| O | N | T | H | E | D | O | T | A | B | R | A | D | |
| F | E | M | A | N | G | | | | | | | | |
| P | A | L | M | | | | | | | | | | |
| I | L | L | A | | | | | | | | | | |
| G | E | N | | | | | | | | | | | |

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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

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More than 100 arrested as activists delay Grand National

THE Grand National, one of the world's most famous horse races, was delayed Saturday after animal rights activists scaled fences around the perimeter of Aintree racecourse and got onto the track.

A total of 118 people were arrested on suspicion of criminal damage and public nuisance offenses in a bid to disrupt the race, Merseyside Police said.

Many activists from an estimated group of 300 climbed the high fences around the racecourse just outside Liverpool and got onto the track a few minutes before the race was scheduled to start. Some affixed themselves to the race fences using glue and lock-on devices, according to the Animal Rising organization, before being taken away by police and security officials.

Police and security officials were seen stopping other activists by shaking the perimeter fences to prevent them being climbed. Local residents were seen helping security keep activists away from the course

AP PHOTO



Members of the police detain protesters as activists tried to block the start of the Grand National horse race at Aintree Racecourse Liverpool, England, Saturday

The race was delayed as a result and the 39 competing horses were kept in the parade ring. It was originally scheduled to begin at 5:15 p.m. local time (1615 GMT) and ended up starting around 15 minutes later.

The day started with three people arrested in connection with a plan by the activists to disrupt the race. All three were arrested on "suspicion of cons-

piracy to cause public nuisance," police said. Their names were not disclosed.

"We respect the right to peaceful protest and expression of views," Merseyside Police said, "but criminal behavior and disorder will not be tolerated and will be dealt with robustly."

Animal Rising had called on protesters to gather outside the racecourse to demand an end

to "animal cruelty for entertainment." The group tweeted a video that it said shows one of its spokespeople being arrested at the protest.

Police said they have been working with race organizers ahead of and during the Grand National Festival, which started Thursday.

Animal Rising activist Alex Lockwood this week told British

radio station talkSPORT that they planned to disrupt the Grand National, arguing that standing outside and handing out fliers "never stopped anything."

Further inflaming matters was the news that two horses — Dark Raven and Hill Sixteen — died in races at Aintree on Saturday. Hill Sixteen was in the field for the Grand National and died after sustaining an "unrecoverable injury," organizers said.

On Thursday, another horse — Envoye Special — suffered a fatal injury in the Foxhunters' Chase, which is run over the fences used for the Grand National.

"This horrific 'sport' continues to take lives right in front of our eyes. It's time to BAN this horrific industry," Animal Rising wrote Saturday.

The Grand National is among the biggest occasions on the British sporting calendar and is regarded as one of the most dangerous horse races in the world because of the size of the fences.

Changes were made in 2012 to make the course safer, including softening some of the fences, after two horses died in the Grand National that year and in 2011.

There have been four fatalities from 356 runners in the nine Grand Nationals since. Four horses died at the Aintree festival last year, including two who were injured in the Grand National. **MDT/AP**

AD



FOOTBALL

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OPINION

China Daily

Douglas de Castro, China Daily*



BRI AND BRAZIL'S CONTRIBUTION TO A MORE INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva kicked off his official visit to China on Wednesday, accompanied by a large delegation of businesspeople, state governors, congress members and ministers, demonstrating a shift in the conduct of Brazilian foreign policy. One agenda item is Brazil's possible adhesion to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The BRI promotes economic development and regional integration through increased trade and investment, cultural exchanges and people-to-people exchanges. Not limited to a geographic region, the initiative has attracted participation from more than 100 countries and international organizations, including some countries in Latin America.

Since its inception, the BRI has undergone several adjustments, which in my view, were natural given the magnitude and complexity of the projects and the variety of countries and jurisdictions involved. Much of the criticism in the early years was centered on the lack of labor and environmental standards in major infrastructure works in the participating countries, which has been resolved over the years and helped in the adjustments of the legal systems of the countries receiving the investments.

The Brazilian president's trip and the possibility of joining the BRI raise the question of why a country like Brazil should join China in this endeavor. Quantitative elements are associated with the relationship between the two countries, which would be enough to sustain Brazil's accession politically. Here, we introduce an ideational element: the BRI is a decolonization project, an alternative to the neoliberal development model, which has made the world insecure and unjust.

The neoliberal development model, based on the Bretton Woods Institutions, deepened the existing economic and social gap between the countries of the North and the South.

Thus, the creation of the BRI and the possible accession of Brazil are ways of contesting this development model that favors developed countries and maintains the gap between them and developing countries. Moreover, unlike the neoliberal model premised on the continued expansion and accumulation of capital, the BRI is based on the vector of humanity's common or shared destiny, which implies an inclusive approach to the conduct of Chinese foreign policy.

This inclusion is in line with the national objectives of China, which, for example, has eradicated poverty in a few decades and is in an accelerated march toward an energy transition to renewable sources.

In an article I published with a colleague from the University of São Paulo, we point out that the economic relationship between Brazil and China follows a pattern of interest coupling. That is, there is a convergence of interests in both countries' economic sectors.

We understand that this coupling of interests may become more robust with Brazil's adherence to the BRI. Therefore, we share the opinion with Karen Vasquez, who understands that the partnership between Brazil and China can produce "joint added value," which would greatly benefit Brazil.

In this way, the closeness between China and Brazil, in addition to contributing significantly to the two countries in fulfilling their ideals and objectives, balances the balance of power in the international system, which is very dependent on the policies and interests of developed countries, especially the United States. As the title of the article suggests, this movement within the scope of the BRI (and the recent Global Development Initiative proposed by China at the United Nations) and the adhesion of Brazil contribute, in practice, to a reduction of disguised colonialism in international institutions and provide a more outstanding balance and better distribution of benefits and responsibilities in the international system. Moreover, relationships in the international system must be based not on zero-sum games but on win-win interactions that can bring better responses to world crises. [Abridged]

* The author is a professor of International Law, School of Law, Lanzhou University

ARCHEOLOGISTS IN ITALY UNEARTH ANCIENT DOLPHIN STATUETTE

Excavations in southern Italy have unearthed terracotta bull heads and a figurine of the Greek god Eros riding a dolphin, shining new light on the religious life and rituals of an ancient city, culture ministry officials said Saturday.

It's the first trove of artifacts identified from a sanctuary in the ancient Greek city of Paestum, which dates from the 5th century B.C. Paestum, famed for its three massive Doric-columned temples, is near the archaeological site of Pompeii, but farther down

the Almalfi coast.

The small temple was first identified in 2019 along the ancient city walls but excavations were halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Italian Culture Ministry said in a statement.

Excavations yielded several small terracotta figurines in the first months of resuming work, the Ministry said. Archeologists found seven bull heads found around a temple altar as if placed there on the ground in a form of devotion.

THE BUZZ



Paulina Najnudel poses for a portrait at the Caballito and Villa Crespo, a recreational day center for retirees, in Buenos Aires, Argentina

FOOD OR MEDICINE? INFLATION SQUEEZING RETIREES IN ARGENTINA

DEBORÁ REY, BUENOS AIRES

WITH trembling hands, the bingo players at a Buenos Aires retirement center put the buttons they use as markers on their cards. Small containers hold their betting money, coins and crumpled low-denomination bills that every day seem able to buy less.

The twice-weekly game brings some enthusiasm to the eyes of the retirees playing it in the recreational center serving Caballito and Villa Crespo, middle-class neighborhoods of Argentina's capital. The men and women participating are all over 80 years old and find themselves in a situation they would have considered unthinkable before they retired.

"This center has middle-class people in it. We are deprived of many of the things we used to do," said Betty Santucci, 85, who runs the place. She added quietly: "I did something I'd never done in my life: I asked for free medicine ... nothing else can be done."

Monthly inflation was 7.7% in March, up from 6.5% in the same month in 2022, Argentina's National Institute of Statistics and Censuses announced Friday. Analysts project annual

inflation — the measure used commonly internationally — will come in at 110% in 2023, one of the highest rates in the world.

"The numbers we see today represent the worst moment of the impact of the war (in Ukraine) on international prices and the worst drought in history in the country," tweeted government spokesperson, Gabriela Cerrutti. "We know, it hurts us, it occupies us, how it affects daily life and each family."

The impact has been particularly devastating on Argentina's retirees, 85% of whom receive a state pension averaging 58,500 pesos a month, the equivalent of \$265. That barely covers a third of their expenses for food, medicine and rent.

"I can't even pay the rent, my daily expenses, services, and I have to eat. I have two children who bring me a 'little package' (of money)," Paulina Najnudel, 85, said as she played bingo. "But it makes me, not ashamed, but sad because we have worked so many years."

Argentina had one of the most advanced pension systems in South America, with retirement pensions increasing according to a mobility formula calculated by wages and taxes collected. Between January 2022 and March 2023, pen-

sions rose 72.5%. But in the same period prices rose more than 100%.

Now, after years of high inflation, Argentina's minimum pension measured in U.S. dollars is one of the lowest in the region, just above Venezuela, according to a study by the Argentine consulting firm Focus Market.

"The minimum pension is not even enough for the basics," said Ana Falcone at the retirement center.

Mercedes Villafañe, 80, described the crisis during a game. "When we retirees go shopping, we don't buy food by the kilo. We buy it by the item: one onion, one potato. We never have enough to make it to a kilogram."

"At the moment, there is no hope," she said.

To make up for some of the loss of purchasing power caused by inflation, the government of President Alberto Fernández ordered a monthly addition of 15,000 pesos (\$67) to retirees who had low salaries as workers. But experts say it is not enough.

The Ombudsman for Senior Citizens reported at the beginning of April that the basic needs of rent, medicine and food for one person was 202,064 pesos a month, or \$914 dollars, a 33% increase from six months ago. **MDT/AP**



Israeli demonstrations against the government's plan to overhaul the judiciary continued on Saturday, despite Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to pause the contentious proposals. Tens of thousands of people participated in the main protest held in the central city of Tel Aviv, while smaller demonstrations took place across the country. Protest organizers, who have held these weekly protests for over three months, aim to maintain momentum and increase pressure on Netanyahu and his government until the proposed changes are scrapped.



Poland's government said that it has decided to temporarily prohibit grain and other food imports from Ukraine as it seeks to soothe the rising anger of Polish farmers, who say they are losing huge amounts of money to a glut of Ukrainian grain on the market. Ruling party leader Jarosław Kaczyński said at a party convention in eastern Poland that the Polish countryside is facing a "moment of crisis," and that while Poland supports Ukraine, it was forced to act to protect its farmers.



Ukraine More than 100 Ukrainian prisoners of war have been released as part of a major Easter exchange with Russia, a top official said yesterday, as Orthodox Ukrainians marked the holiday for a second time since Moscow unleashed its brutal full-scale war last February. While celebrations were subdued due to security risks, with a curfew barring the faithful from customary all-night services, Ukrainian authorities and ordinary people shared messages of hope, linking the story of Jesus' resurrection to their longing for peace and a Ukrainian victory.