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"THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' "

ANOTHER LOCAL LAWYER WRITES IN A PORTUGUESE NEWSPAPER AS HO VISITS LISBON – ÁLVARO RODRIGUES COMMENDS 'THE SUCCESS OF MACAU'S DEVELOPMENT' P6

GAMING: SANDS CHINA NOTCHES USD1B IN FIRST QUARTER REVENUE P4

SANTANDER UK BOSS SAYS RING IF YOU NEED FINANCIAL HELP P7



AP PHOTO



China-US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (pictured) will strike a conciliatory tone when she talks about U.S.-China relations today [Macau time], calling for "cooperation on the urgent global challenges of our day" while supporting economic restrictions on China to advance U.S national security interests.

Vietnam China's disputed fishing ban from May 1 until Aug. 16 in parts of the South China Sea violates Vietnam's sovereignty over its waters and special economic zone, Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Spokesman Doan Khac Viet said at a Hanoi briefing, according to Bloomberg TV.

AP PHOTO



North Macedonia The European Union's border protection agency Frontex began its official deployment in North Macedonia yesterday, extending its operations outside the bloc to a fifth country.

More on backpage



FOR REAL?!

Business sector lawmakers want more and cheaper manpower P3

LISBON VISIT PRESIDENT MARCELO, HO DISCUSS CULTURE, PORTUGUESE STATUS IN MSAR P5



P15

AP PHOTO

WAR GAMES

THE US IS ABOUT TO BLOW UP A FAKE WARSHIP IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA – BUT NAVAL RIVALRY WITH BEIJING IS VERY REAL AND GROWING

KRISTA WIEGAND
UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

As part of a joint military exercise with the Philippines, the U.S. Navy is slated to sink a mock warship on April 26, 2023, in the South China Sea.

The live-fire drill is not a response to increased tensions with China over Taiwan, both the U.S. and the Philippines have stressed. But, either way, Beijing isn't happy – responding by holding its own staged military event involving actual warships and fighter jets deployed around Taiwan, a self-governed island that Beijing claims as its own.

The tit-for-tat war games underscore a reality that U.S. presidents have increasingly had to contend with as the 21st century has drawn on. More than a century after President Theodore Roosevelt made the United States the preeminent maritime power in the Pacific, that position is under threat. China is seeking to displace it.

As a scholar of East Asian security and maritime disputes, I believe that the growing rivalry between the U.S. and China over dominance of the Pacific has the potential to define geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region for the next half-century.

Already, ongoing maritime disputes pit China against several Asian countries. For example, China regularly challenges the maritime rights of Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia in the South China Sea and Japan in the

East China Sea.

But the disputed waters are also of huge strategic importance to the U.S. It is where China is flexing its growing military might in the face of U.S. allies and partners, notably Taiwan, which the U.S. has committed to defend. If a war between China and the U.S. is going to happen, I believe the South China Sea is likely to be a major theater, with Chinese aggression toward Taiwan the spark.

THE SCRAMBLE OVER THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

For centuries, the dozens of islands, shoals, reefs, banks and rocks in the South China Sea were regarded as little more than hazards to navigation.

But with the discovery of large reserves of oil and gas in the 1970s and billions of dollars' worth of fisheries, the previously largely ignored sea has gained significant attention from the countries whose shorelines meet it.

It led to a revival of elapsed conflicting claims of "ownership" over the sea.

China currently claims legal rights to the vast majority of the South China Sea, extending well beyond the boundaries established by the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

This claim by China, designated on maps by a nine-dash line, overlaps with the maritime and territorial rights of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia.

Over the past decade, China

has consistently engaged in low-level coercive activities called "gray zone tactics."

Since 2013, China has also built up several reefs and shoals into artificial islands, building military bases with runways, radar technology and missile-launching capabilities.

In 2016, an UNCLOS Annex VII arbitration panel ruled that China's nine-dash line claims were illegal and rejected China's rights to maritime features in the legal waters of the Philippines.

But despite the ruling, China has continued to militarize its artificially built-up islands and pressure neighboring countries' military and fishing vessels. It has also denied passage to U.S. Navy ships sailing through waters in the South China Sea.

Successive U.S. administrations have aired concern over developments in the sea. In 2020, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a U.S. position on the South China Sea, rejecting China's maritime claims and its "bullying" tactics as "unlawful." His successor, Antony Blinken, in 2021 declared: "Nowhere is the rules-based maritime order under greater threat than in the South China Sea."

But why does the South China Sea matter so much to the U.S.? The answer lies in economics and power politics.

A SOURCE OF TRADE, NATURAL RESOURCES

About one-third of the world's shipping transits the South China Sea. In all, more than US\$3.4

trillion worth of products – everything from rubber ducks to cars – is transported through its waters every year.

The sea connects the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean, allowing trade from East Asian countries to flow to and from billions of people in South Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. It is also where 14% of all U.S. maritime trade passes through. It is a crucial route for outgoing U.S. goods as well as getting products to the U.S. Without it, the transport of products we use every day would slow down, and these products would cost more.

And then there are oil and gas. Around 30% of all global crude oil transits through the South China Sea. Furthermore, there is an estimated \$11 billion worth of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of proven deposits of natural gas in the sea, as well as undiscovered oil and gas.

Meanwhile, more than half of all fishing vessels in the world operate in the South China Sea.

For economic reasons alone, the U.S. and the rest of the world need open trade routes and sea lanes in the South China Sea. Preventing one country – especially a hostile China – from controlling these trade routes and resources is a crucial policy concern for Washington.

POWER POLITICS AT SEA

Although economics plays a part, China's actions in the South China Sea are part of a much broader aggressive campaign. Beijing views territorial and mari-

time control in the region through the lens of its national security. It seeks to project its power in the region and defend the Chinese mainland.

Ultimately, as acknowledged by the U.S. government, China is looking to overturn the status quo, replacing the U.S. as the superpower.

This battle for power is already taking shape in the South China Sea, with regular confrontations between U.S. naval vessels and China's maritime militia and navy.

The artificial islands in the South China Sea provide China with military capabilities far beyond the mainland alone. These outposts can be used to help counter and fight the U.S. and its allies, for example, in a war over Taiwan.

While the U.S. is not itself a claimant in the South China Sea disputes, the waters there remain a significant priority for the national security interests of Washington, too.

It is why the U.S. and its allies conduct freedom of navigation missions through the South China Sea and engage in naval exercises such as the one taking place in April 2023 with the Philippines.

With China playing by a different set of rules than the U.S. and its allies in the region, the risk of clashes at sea is very real. It could even lead to conflict between the two most powerful countries in the world today.

The next time a warship is blown up in the South China Sea, I fear that it may not be just a drill.

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Business sector lawmakers want more and cheaper manpower

RENATO MARQUES

THE lawmakers Chui Sai Peng and Wang Sai Man, jointly with the business sectors, are calling on the government to remedy labor shortages by allowing more non-resident workers (TNR).

The two lawmakers, in separate spoken inquiries delivered at the Legislative Assembly in the period before the agenda on Wednesday, said that the survival of local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) depends on cheaper labor. They called on the government to accelerate authorizations to import unskilled labor.

Chui noted that the SMEs are at a crucial point in their development and that only by being able to hire TNR will they be able to benefit from the economic recovery

that is gradually taking place as more tourists enter Macau.

The same lawmaker also called on the government to promote an extension, until 2024, of the tax and fees exemptions and reductions as well as a pause to the payment of interest on subsidies, included in the package of "Measures to support the fight against the epidemic" and worth ten billion patacas, stating that the "radical elimination [at once of] all support measures for the SMEs is harmful at a time when [SMEs] need to be recovering."

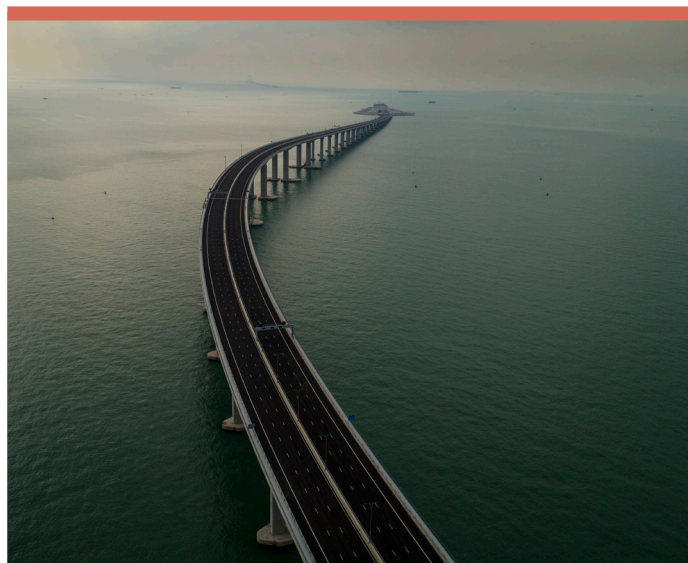
Chui also proposed the government consider creating a special "Work Card" with a duration of just one year to be renewed three months before expiration to ensure the continuing need for such manpower. The purpose would be to facilitate the hiring and dismis-



sal of these workers, who would be "temporary" and not regular TNR, so that companies could

have some time to use this affordable labor to pay their accumulated debts.

Main part of HZMB passes completion review



STAFF REPORTER

THE completed review of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge requested by Chinese authorities has been positive, with it being declared a 'quality construction,' Xinhua News Agency reported on April 19.

The structure, which is longer than 55km and was inaugurated on October 23, 2018, has set multiple world records such as the one of the 'Longest Sea Bridge', according to the Aca-

demy of World Records.

"It provides valuable lessons for the construction of cross-sea infrastructure in the future," the committee in charge of the review formed by the Ministry of Transport, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council said in a statement.

An aerial view of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, whose construction began in 2009 and was completed in 2018 for a total budget of \$20 billion - Reuters

According to Xinhua, the bridge increases people-to-people exchanges and trade in the Guang-

dong-Hong-Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), and the time required to drive from Zhuhai to the Hong-Kong International Airport has decreased to 45 minutes from 4 hours, with 65km to travel instead 200km.

By the end of 2022, the bridge's Zhuhai land port had handled over 500 billion yuan (\$72.7 billion) of imports and exports involving 230 countries and regions, official data showed.

The port's average daily clearance has been around 7,300 vehicles since April, an increase of 28% compared to the first quarter of 2023 and tripling 2019 traffic, Yangcheng Evening News reported.

NEW REGIME FOR PUBLIC PARKING APPROVED, DSAT WANTS MOTORCYCLISTS TO PAY

RENATO MARQUES

THE new Regime for Public Parking bill passed its final reading on Wednesday evening at the Legislative Assembly (AL) plenary session with all votes in favor. A few Articles with which lawmakers did not agree did not pass.

In one of those cases, lawmaker Ron Lam requested separate voting on Article 1. He consi-

dered there to be a lack of response from the government in addressing issues related to the differences between private and public car parks. The lawmaker claims that while the procedures and management style are similar, the rights of the drivers as well as pedestrians are different between public and private car parks, a situation with which he disagrees. He called on the

government to make the rules uniform.

Otherwise, the bill was passed unanimously and will come into force from August 1 this year. One of the most important changes in the bill is related to the enforcement of only electronic payment of street parking meters that will stop accepting coins, and this will come into force as early as May 1.

The measures assist the

management of the companies that have the concession of the parking meters, which will now require less staff to handle the coin collection as well as other tasks related to the handling and bank deposit of the coins.

At the AL, the director of the Transport Bureau (DSAT) Kevin Lam also said that it is commonly understood between the government and the com-

panies that manage the different car parks and street parking areas that motorcyclists often fail to pay for parking and are reluctant to park in the parking lots, instead preferring to leave their motorcycles on the streets often illegally.

Lam said DSAT is monitoring the situation and is coordinating with the authorities. The same official also noted that the price of parking meters for motorcycles has not been adjusted for over 30 years, claiming there is no reason why riders cannot park appropriately.

OUTER HARBOUR TERMINAL TO BE HALTED APR. 28

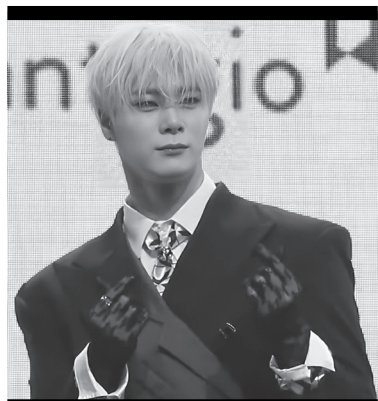
Due to the construction of the Fourth Macau-Taipa Bridge, ferry services from the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal will be halted from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Apr. 28, the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) announced yesterday, adding that the suspension is necessary for public safety. The bureau also said that ferry operators will add services at the Taipa Maritime Terminal to compensate for the missed ferries. The DSAMA referred travellers to the Macao Maritime Info app for updates.

SAI VAN BRIDGE LOWER LEVEL TO OPEN FOR TRIAL APR. 23

To better prepare members of the public and as part of the annual simulations for the typhoon season, the government will open the lower level of Sai Van Bridge to public use for a single day this coming Sunday. It will be open between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. Only light vehicles will be allowed to use the lower level of the bridge. Signs and police officers will be present to help drivers locate the entrances. The speed limit for that level is set to 40 km/hr.

WOMAN INJURED AFTER HIT BY TAXI ON AV KWONG TONG

A woman was injured and taken to hospital after being allegedly hit by a taxi outside the Altira hotel on Avenida de Kwong Tong at about 9:20 am yesterday. According to pictures posted by local media outlet Macao Daily News, the woman was on the ground in a face down position with both of her arms supporting herself away from the floor. Meanwhile, a black taxi was photographed next to her, stationary on a zebra crossing. Several pedestrians were aiding her before the ambulance arrived and took her to the hospital.



K-POP STAR PASSES AWAY DAYS BEFORE MACAU CONCERT

Singer and actor Moonbin was found dead Wednesday evening at his home in Seoul. Moonbin was scheduled to perform at a concert tomorrow at the Broadway Theater as part of the act: "2023 Moonbin & Sanhan (Astro) Fan Con: [Diffusion] in Macau." The duo had been performing their first world tour "Diffusion," which kicked off in Seoul in March. Their recent concert was in Bangkok on April 8, for which Moonbin was supposed to leave on April 7, but his departure was delayed due to a health condition.

LAND AREA SLIGHTLY INCREASES TO 33.3 SQUARE KILOMETRE

The land area of Macau has slightly increased by 0.3 square kilometre year-on-year to 33.3 square kilometre, with the addition of the land area of Zone C of the New District. The population density was 20,300 persons per square kilometre. Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) stated that as regards to air quality, all monitoring stations showed an increase in the number of "Good" air quality days in 2022. Nevertheless, in terms of "Very Bad" air quality, the ambient station in Taipa, the ambient station in Coloane, and the roadside station at Ká-Hó respectively recorded 3, 2 and 1 such days. The highest temperature in 2022 was 37.4 degrees Celsius in July, an increase of 1.6 degrees Celsius from the year prior.

NON-LOCAL DUO ARRESTED FOR CREDIT CARD ABUSE

A man and a woman from Mongolia, who may have been connected to a theft in Macau in 2019, were arrested on Apr. 16 evening on allegations of recent credit card theft and abuse, the Judiciary Police have announced. The police believe that the quinquagenarians had stolen a woman's wallet and credit cards at a casino in Cotai, before using the cards to buy clothes, shoes and cosmetics products. The woman reported the case to the police upon founding her lost cards had been used to spend MOP27,500. The duo, meanwhile, was arrested upon leaving Macau from the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal.

LUBUDS MACAU TO OPERATE THE RESTAURANT AT TAIPA HOUSES-MUSEUM

RENATO MARQUES

THE company Lubuds Macau Ltd, a subsidiary of Hong Kong's Lubuds Group, will operate a restaurant to be located at the Taipa Houses-Museum for the next four years.

The result of the tender was officially announced late last month with Lubuds the lone tenderer after the exclusion of the only two other bids. Those bids were from António Neves Coelho (former owner of António Restaurant in Taipa village) and Ho Lok Lin caterer and an executive director of the United Association of Food and Beverage Merchants of Macau, the association led by lawmaker and businessman Chan Chak Mo, and were excluded earlier in the tender process due to the lack of several documents as well as for some procedural issues.

The Lubuds group was founded, and is currently led, by Hong Kong businessman Louie Chung who, besides owning and running 10 restaurants in Hong Kong, Macau, and China,

RENATO MARQUES



is also the CEO of TONI&GUY Hong Kong Limited. In Macau, the company owns and operated Albergue 1601 restaurant in Saint Lazarus District.

The company will pay monthly rent to the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) of 68,888 patacas for a period of 48 months, according to the tender information.

The rules also state that rental payments will be waived in the first 90 days of the contract so the company can perform the necessary construction and fit-out works to adapt the space to receive patrons.

According to the rules set by a tender document at the time of the opening of the public tender (November 9, 2022), the purpose of the space located at Number 1 of the Avenida da Praia in Taipa (also known as the House for Receptions of the Taipa Houses-Museum) was to open and operate a restaurant that "promotes Portuguese culture with Macau's own characteristics and that has elements of the intangible cultural heritage of Macau, through the supply of Macanese gourmet food and drinks."

The same tender book noted that, in conjunction with the surrounding environment of the Taipa Houses-Museum, the space can also be used for sales, exhibitions, experimental activities, and workshops, among other things.

SANDS CHINA LTD. CONTINUES TO SUPPORT LOCAL SMES WITH OPEN DAY

STAFF REPORTER

THE procurement expenditure of Sands China Ltd. exceeded MOP5.9 billion, of which 89% was from Macau enterprises, and SMEs accounted for 25%, according to Grant Chum, chief operating officer of Sands China Ltd., at the 2023 Sands China Local Supplier Open Day.

Co-organized with the Macao Chamber of Commerce, the 2023

Sands China Local Supplier Open Day was held yesterday at The Venetian Macao, providing a chance to connect with Sands China procurement representatives and procurement opportunities for local SMEs. The Open Day focused on local small and micro suppliers, 'Made in Macau' companies, and Macau's young entrepreneurs.

More than 180 suppliers registered for the

open day.

Procurement booths included food and beverage, outside services and logistics, marketing and printing, technology and gaming, operating supplies and equipment, facilities and construction, and Macao-brand and made-in-Macao products.

"This open day gives us confidence," said a supplier. He stated that as SMEs, they may be too small to network with

such a big company like Sands China, however, the Open Day offers that chance.

The event also featured a Sands Procurement Academy booth, which aims to train prospective local SME suppliers with practical business knowledge and skills to help them gain experience and the capacity to collaborate with large international customers such as Sands China. On-site registration was

available.

The gaming operator pledged that it will continue to invest in Macau's development, which includes strengthening support to local SMEs, Macau Brands, 'Made in Macau' enterprises, and focus on exploring the potential of local innovative technology start-ups, said Chum.

Bank of China, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, and Banco Nacional Ultramarino also took booths at the event to showcase their financial products and services offered to SME suppliers.

GAMING

SANDS CHINA NOTCHES USD1B IN Q1 REVENUE

SANDS China notched revenue of USD1.27 billion in the three months from January through March, more than doubling that figure on a year-over-year basis, Las Vegas Sands disclosed in its earnings report.

The gaming operator recorded USD547 million in the first quarter of 2022. Its net loss was USD10

million, compared to USD336 million a year earlier.

"In Macau, we were pleased to see the ongoing recovery now underway in all gaming and non-gaming segments accelerate during the quarter. We remain deeply enthusiastic about the opportunity to continue our investments to

enhance Macau's tourism appeal to travelers from throughout the region, including to foreign visitors to Macau," said CEO Rob Goldstein in a statement.

Sands China sported a year-to-date growth of 23.5% Wednesday—one of the best showings among all large-cap gaming equities.

Still, analysts believe the Macau rebound is in its infancy, indicating there could be more upside ahead for the stock, according to media reports.

Las Vegas Sands reported positive adjusted property earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization at each of its Macau locations for the first time since 2019.

"Our decades'-long commitment to making investments that enhance the business and leisure tourism appeal of Macau and support its development as a world center of business and leisure tourism positions us exceedingly well to deliver strong growth as visitation to the market increases and the recovery in travel and tourism spending proceeds," added Goldstein in the statement.LV

HO IAT SENG IN LISBON

President discusses culture, Portuguese residents in the SAR

STAFF REPORTER

THE status of Portuguese culture and language in Macau was among the topics raised by Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa when meeting with the Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng yesterday.

News agency Lusa reported that de Sousa told reporters that "the status of those who live [in Macau], the experience of coexistence that exists, the support for teaching Portuguese in Macau, [and] the expansion of the Portuguese School of Macau," were key talking points.

He also said he would discuss the rights "agreed between the countries in 1999," when Macau was retroceded to Chinese sovereignty.

Meanwhile, Ho attended the Macao-Portugal Investment and Tourism Promotion Conference held in Lisbon, Portugal at the start of his four-day visit to that country on Wednesday, aiming to facilitate trade and tourism cooperation be-



tween the two places.

The CE and his accompanying Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government delegation arrived at Lisbon International Airport at about noon local time Wednesday, being greeted by China's Ambassador to Portugal, Zhao Bentang, and designate deputy Chief of State Protocol of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, José Carlos Arsénio.

The delegation led by Ho inclu-

des entrepreneurs from Macau, as well as government officials and business executives from the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The Entrepreneur Delegation of more than 40 delegates, comprising Macau entrepreneurs as well as the representatives from government departments and enterprises in the Co-operation Zone, paid a visit to Lisbon and Porto.

For his part, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation from the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Francisco André, told the gathering at the Promotion Conference that he was honoured to welcome the Macau delegation at the start of their visit to Europe.

He noted that Portugal and Macau had enjoyed strong ties for more than five centuries, and had maintained friendship based on mutual respect.

Macao had become a very important link between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries, and it should continue to deepen this role in future, he added.

According to André, Portugal and Macau could seek new cooperation opportunities in areas such as renewable energy, economic sustainability practices, and healthcare, in addition to tourism cooperation, particularly in terms of cultural heritage.

During the Promotion Confe-

rence, two agreements were signed: a cooperation memorandum between the Portuguese Trade and Investment Agency (AICEP) and the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute; and a commercial cooperation agreement between the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Portugal and the Macao Chamber of Commerce.

MACAU MARKETING EVENT OPENS IN LISBON

A marketing event hosted by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) was officially opened in Lisbon.

The event's major highlight, Experience Macao Unlimited – Macao Exhibition in Lisbon, will be held at the Square of Commerce, the city's landmark, from 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily until 22 April, Portugal time.

Meanwhile, the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) and the six casino concessionaires are also present, setting up various non-gaming themed zones/booths and installations for destination branding.

"By organizing this roadshow, MGTO strives to enhance exchange and cooperation between Macao and Portugal in tourism, economy and trade, culture and other realms," the MGTO explained in a statement.

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NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR REFINING AV KWONG TONG TRAFFIC

Further efforts are needed to improve traffic on Avenida de Kwong Tong in Taipa and reduce the regular accidents along the road, Kong lok Sun, director of the Islands Office of the General Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Macau (UGAMM), has recently told local media outlet Macao Daily News. For example, she suggests banning U-turns at the intersection with Rua de Bragança. Improved signage may also help drivers make early preparations, she added. She also suggested that illegal parking, or pulling over on the road, has contributed to obstruction of the normal flow of traffic.

NON-LOCAL DUO ARRESTED FOR CREDIT CARD ABUSE

A man and a woman from Mongolia, who may have been connected to a theft in Macau in 2019, were arrested on Apr. 16 evening on allegations of recent credit card theft and abuse, the Judiciary Police have announced. The police believe that the quinquagenarians had stolen a woman's wallet and credit cards at a casino in Cotai, before using the cards to buy clothes, shoes and cosmetics products. The woman reported the case to the police upon founding her lost cards had been used to spend MOP27,500. The duo, meanwhile, was arrested upon leaving Macau from the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal.

HENGQIN BORDER MACAU AREAS TRANSFERRED

The Macau Area and the Second Phase Vehicle Border-Crossing Area of the Hengqin Border Checkpoint was transferred to the Macau government for administration yesterday, pursuant to approval from the State Council of the Chinese government. After the transferal, the areas will be managed under the law of Macau. The next phase of transferal will concern the Light Rapid Transit station on Hengqin. For the time being, the connection between the University of Macau and the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone is still under construction and administration by Zhuhai.

BILL TO PREVENT SALE OF ALCOHOL TO MINORS APPROVED

The bill aiming to close a loophole in existing laws that regulate the sale of alcohol to minors has passed in its final reading at the Legislative Assembly (AL) on Wednesday evening. The bill mostly corrects an existing loophole that allowed minors to purchase alcohol in supermarkets and convenience stores, while prohibiting the purchase and consumption of these kinds of drinks at bars and restaurants. At the AL to respond to lawmakers' questions on the matter the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao leong noted the goal of reducing exposure, as much as possible, of young people to alcohol while admitting that parents and guardians also have an important role in preventing exposure while minors are at home or in private venues.

HO IAT SENG IN LISBON

LAWYER WRITES ABOUT 'THE SUCCESS' OF MACAU'S DEVELOPMENT IN DIÁRIO DE NOTÍCIAS

THE Chief Executive of Macau is currently visiting Portugal, with the aim of strengthening exchange and cooperation between Macau and Portugal, and "showcasing the success of Macau's development over the past 20 years since its transfer," writes Álvaro Rodrigues, a prominent lawyer and board member of the Macau's barristers association (AAM), in an opinion piece published yesterday in Portugal's Diário de Notícias.

He is the second local lawyer to comment on Ho's visit in a major Portuguese daily, after Sérgio de Almeida Correia, in Público, earlier this week.

Unlike Correia, a prolific and outspoken writer and commentator on Macau legal, social, and political affairs, Rodrigues has remained low-profile. Outside the court walls, he has scarcely made public comment.

Now, in DN opinion pages, Rodrigues reflects on his experience living and working in Macau and notes that while he faces challenges in his daily work as an attorney, he recognizes "the effort made by Chinese judges to write their decisions in Portuguese



Lawyer Álvaro Rodrigues

language when Portuguese lawyers are involved."

He acknowledges that the legal system in Macau is not perfect but argues against making broad generalizations about its flaws.

Rodrigues stresses the importance of maintaining a legal system based on the

rule of law, and asserts that it is essential to have independent and impartial lawyers and judges who serve the law and justice. He argues that this "is indeed the case in Macau, where there is a continuity of the legal system and a commitment to upholding the principles

of the Basic Law."

While the Chinese language may have some predominance, he views this as "a natural reflection of the evolution of society."

Rodrigues also notes that residents of Macau from foreign countries "continue to be welcomed and respected."

He said that the principles underlying the establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region are enshrined in the Basic Law, and that the transition from Portuguese to Chinese sovereignty in 1999 "was not simply a matter of changing flags."

"While there are certainly challenges and imperfections" in the legal system in Macau, Rodrigues believes that it is vital "to approach these issues with nuance and a commitment to upholding the rule of law."

Diário de Notícias, where Rodrigues published his piece yesterday, is 30%-owned by businessman-cum-politician Kevin Ho, a Macau member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress; a position that already produced two Chief Executives: Edmund Ho and Ho Iat Seng. PC

FINANCIAL SECRETARY COMMENDS MACAU AS 'STRONG PARTNER' FOR PORTUGUESE BUSINESSES

MACAU and Portugal are historically closely connected and possess a strong foundation of partnership, Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong has said during his official visit to Portugal.

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng is leading a delegation to Europe for his first official excursion. The delegation comprises Lei and Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo do Rosário.

In a business enticement event co-hosted with the Portuguese government, Lei attempted to attract Portuguese investors with the "new mode of synergic development" between Ma-

cau and Hengqin.

According to the official, the development will be based on "shared fruits nurtured with regional and international resources."

On the other hand, Francisco André, state secretary for diplomacy and cooperation of the Portuguese Foreign Ministry, expressed his elation that the Macau delegation picked his home country as the first stop in the debut foreign visit.

He described the arrival of the delegation as opening direct bridges between the business sectors of the two places. He hoped that cooperation will continue and improve, with particular emphasis on areas



such as renewable energy, blue sustainable economy and healthcare. He also invited Macau entrepreneurs to invest in Portugal.

The event was to see 11 contract-signings and 68 negotiation

sessions as well as 220 representatives from Macau, Portugal and Hengqin involved.

Lei added that the government would make full use of the opportunities offered by the Cooperation Zone in

Hengqin to optimise the business environment so that Portuguese and other overseas investors could use Macau and Hengqin as an entry point into the 1.4-billion strong Chinese consumer market. AL

BANKING

Santander UK boss says ring if you need financial help

EMMA SIMPSON & KEVIN PEACHEY, LONDON, BBC NEWS

RINGING a bank when facing financial problems as prices soar will make things better, not worse, according to the boss of Santander.

Mike Regnier, UK chief executive of the bank, said early notice of difficulties can save further pain and may not affect a customer's credit rating.

The BBC visited Santander's support centre as staff took calls from people struggling to afford nappies and milk.

Staff say some cases can leave them in tears.

"Sometimes it does bring a tear or two to your eye. People do go through difficult times," said Maxx Townend, one of the helpline operators working in Bradford.

"But you've got to be that strong point for them. If there's two people breaking down on the phone it's going to be a bit of a jumble. But if you're being that strong person, they are going to feel strong as well."

The rising cost of living has meant calls to the helpline are up 14% since last year, while the number of people accessing the support pages of its website is up nearly 50%.

Maxx Townend has been taking calls alongside colleagues

Mr Townend, 23, has been with the company for seven months, having been inspired to join after he sought help from his bank during the pandemic.



Santander UK's CEO Mike Regnier says staff are ready to help

"I've been in their shoes and I thought, I want to do it," he said.

His colleague, Keri Machen, has worked at Santander for 15 years.

"We need to show that we are human at the end of the phone," she said. "There are some stories which are incredibly difficult for them to explain, for us to hear and to know the right thing to say. But I think that as long as we take the time to really understand what they are telling us we can work together and find a way out."

During the BBC's visit [yesterday], some customers were looking for basic advice on how to reduce their spending, but many were calling in to get funds released to pay for everyday essentials.

"We know the challenges, that this is real life that people are dealing with day in, day out," Mr Regnier said.

The team is proactively contacting customers who they assess as being at risk of not being able to cover their monthly outgoings.

Research and transaction data from elsewhere in the sector has suggested that many people have avoided debt by using savings and cutting back on non-essential spending.

Two broad camps have emerged among consumers as prices and bills have soared over the winter, although everyone's financial situation is different.

Banks say that millions of people had built up a savings buffer during Covid lockdowns and have kept their jobs, which had helped

to accommodate the rising cost of living. They have also cut back on various elements of spending to help their situation.

The second group do not have that luxury and, although they may be working, could have already been in financial difficulty.

Mr Regnier, from Santander, said that he had not seen a big increase in the number of customers that are falling behind on the debts nor a big increase in the amount that people are borrowing.

For instance with mortgage payments, there are still fewer customers in arrears than there were before the pandemic.

Around 60 customers a month are referred to PayPlan, the free debt advice group funded by all the banks and the credit industry.

Among those who has received help is Zack Wilson, from Sheffield.

After losing his partner to cancer, he found his money problems spiralled. He lost freelance work, had to move house and had unexpected bills to pay.

Soaring energy and food bills were the final straw, leading to what he describes as a "sheer fear of thinking, what will happen? I've not got enough money to last".

"I didn't realise how precarious life could be," he said.

Last year he went through an Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA), a form of insolvency proceedings, He found that being able to communicate online and on WhatsApp with advisers made a huge difference.

"I'm not the kind of person who finds it easy to ask for help but I'd urge anyone to do it, don't shy away from it - bite the bullet," he said.

He is now a union rep alongside working at Sheffield City Council. He is still struggling with the money he has to live on but he can see light at the end of the tunnel.

COURTESY BBC NEWS

CORPORATE BITS

Melco participates in promotional event in Lisbon



"Experience Macao Unlimited - Macao Promotion in Lisbon" event hosted by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) - introducing Macau's entertainment and leisure experiences to locals

while attracting more overseas visitors to the city.

The event is being held at the landmark Praça do Comércio in Lisbon, Portugal from April 15 to 22.

Melco showcased its tou-

risms offerings and experiences to both locals and tourists during the event, including Morpheus hotel at City of Dreams, newly-opened Epic Tower at Studio City and Altira Spa at Altira Macau.

"Melco is honored to participate in "Experience Macao Unlimited - Macao Exhibition in Lisbon," and to work with the SAR government and the industry to promote the diverse tourism industry of Macau while showcasing the city's unique charms," chairman and CEO of Melco, Lawrence Ho, said, adding that Melco will continue to "promote the diversified development of Macau's economy."

MGM celebrates Thai fest Songkran



Earlier this month, MGM hosted the first "Celebrate Songkran in Macau" dinner in three years, which welcomed almost 200 guests from Thailand.

The celebration took place at the Vista of MGM Cotai and several representatives were present, including acting director of Macau Government Tourism Office

(MGTO) Ricky Hoi, President and Chief COO of MGM China Holdings Limited Hubert Wang and senior vice president of VIP Marketing of MGM Peter Chen.

"We believe that this Songkran celebration is a great occasion for our locals and visitors to learn and experience more about the Thai festive culture," Ricky Hoi said, adding that Thailand was a 'key tourism market [for] Macau.'

In light of Songkran being one of the most important new year events in Thailand, MGM incorporated some Thai culture elements into the celebration, including a singing performance from Thai artist and judge of The Voice Thailand, Jennifer Kim.

OPINION

China Daily

21ST Century Business Herald

ECONOMY'S INTERNAL DYNAMICS DISPLAY GREAT ENERGY

The National Bureau of Statistics released China's economic statistics for the first quarter on Tuesday. They indicate that the recovery momentum is being consolidated.

Some observers, citing the weak consumer price index and an obvious credit expansion, concluded that the economic restart should be swifter and the pro-recovery policies should be more powerful than their current levels, and some still think that it will only be a matter of time for the Chinese economy to enter deflation if the global economic recession and insufficient domestic demand are not addressed in time.

But it should be borne in mind that China is still in the early stages of the recovery. Prices and employment lag behind the overall growth rate of the economy.

China's GDP grew by 4.5 percent year-on-year, a rate faster than expected, and a glance at more data shows that what the Chinese economy is experiencing is not deflation, but just some recovery pains.

The total retail sales of consumer goods rose 5.8 percent in the first quarter from a year earlier, compared with a 2.7 percent decline in the fourth quarter last year. And investment in fixed assets in the first three months grew by 5.1 percent year-on-year, the same as the whole of last year. Investment in infrastructure and manufacturing grew by 8.8 percent and 7 percent respectively. It is particularly good to see that the contribution of consumption to economic growth reached 66.6 percent in the first quarter. All these show that demand is recovering as well.

China's economic recovery should be orderly and should not depend on the injection of credit, which might yield immediate effects but would not be good in the long run as easy money distorts the pricing mechanism and economic structure.

Another factor that must be taken into account when looking at the first quarter data is that China's manufacturing sector was still in its destocking cycle thus offsetting the growth momentum brought by the apparent recovery of the service sector. But that process is coming to its end. China's exports and imports fell 7 percent in January, rose 8 percent in February, and accelerated to 15.5 percent in March. With the global demand slowly recovering, China's manufacturing industry will gradually regain full steam.

ZERO-COVID

FOUR PROTESTERS AGAINST PANDEMIC POLICY RELEASED ON BAIL

OFFICIALS in Beijing have released four women on bail who were arrested for joining rare nationwide protests in late November against China's tough anti-coronavirus policies, an activist said.

One of the women, former book editor Cao Zhixin, had recorded a video before her detention saying, "If you're watching this, it means that I have been taken away by the police."

She and her friends Li Yuanjing, Zhai Dengrui and Li Siqi were detained in Beijing in December and accused of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," a vague charge often used against dissidents, according to Human Rights Watch.

All four were released yesterday on bail, according to a Chinese activist who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of reprisals.

Cao and a group of friends had joined a protest that was part of a burst of nationwide demonstrations against China's tough "zero COVID" policy, a rare display of direct defiance against the central government, after the deaths of 10 people in a fire in the northwestern city of Urumqi. Many questioned



whether the coronavirus restrictions had impeded rescue efforts.

The protests were the most direct challenge to the ruling Communist Party in decades.

For the first years of the pandemic, China had largely controlled the coronavirus by ordering strict lockdowns that confined people to their homes, sometimes for months. The strategy succeeded in keeping deaths low before vaccines were widely administered. But the policies were further tightened as the virus became more contagious and

harder to control.

The protest in Beijing drew people who wanted to commemorate the victims of the Urumqi fire. Some participants held up blank pieces of paper representing restrictions on free speech.

In her video, Cao said police started detaining people on Dec. 18.

"Four of our friends have already been taken away at the time of this video," she said. Police had detained Li Yuanjing, Zhai Dengrui and Li Siqi. A fourth friend, Yang Liu, was also taken but was released in

January, according to Human Rights Watch.

"We care about this society, and when our fellow countrymen die, we want to express our legitimate feelings. We are filled with sympathy for those who lost their lives," Cao said in the video.

Across the country, the protests died down amid a major police presence. The government dropped its "zero COVID" policy, and police began detaining "an unknown number of people who had attended protests in several cities," according to some reports. MDT/AP

XINHUA FOCUS

China's efforts to achieve modernization benefit world: experts

CHINA'S efforts to achieve modernization will effectively boost the world's development and offer a new model of growth for developing countries, experts said at the ongoing Understanding China conference.

The conference has brought together officials, experts, entrepreneurs, foreign envoys and representatives of international organizations and multinational companies. It aims to help people understand China's modernization and the opportunities it will bring to the world.

In a video speech, former Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo hailed China's development achievements since the beginning of reform and opening-up

as "breathtaking."

Arroyo said China has proven to be a partner in development rather than a competitor. It is also a market for developing countries, a donor and a provider of capital and technology.

She added that by recognizing the value of infrastructure and technology with strong will and long-term vision, China is setting a new growth model in the increasing complexity and acceleration of change in the entire world system.

"The world is indeed in a new era, and this new era calls for a new journey and new cooperation," she said.

David Ferguson, honorary chief English editor of Foreign Language

Press, said that the modernization of many Western countries was usually based on the exploitation of the working classes, other countries and the environment, which is an outdated model that China clearly cannot follow.

Chinese modernization, said Ferguson, is based on a set of structures, processes and actions properly suited to the modern world, which can be summarized as cooperation, consultation and consensus.

Huang Ping, director of the Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao research center under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that Chinese modernization brings about high-quality social-economic

development, which is supported by a set of social governance systems with Chinese characteristics, as well as ideas and concepts that promote cultural exchange and draw on the strengths of various perspectives.

"Chinese modernization stresses pluralism and unity in diversity," said Huang. "Building a community with a shared future for humankind involves promoting a governance system that values diversity at the global level."

Jusuf Wanandi, Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies Foundation in Jakarta, Indonesia, said an important takeaway from the 20th

National Congress of the Communist Party of China last year was the proposal of advancing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernization.

"This is highly significant, because it represents more than just a goal for China's development in the new era," said Wanandi. "It clearly points out the path that China chooses to take towards modernization and national rejuvenation."

With China now traveling on the path of Chinese modernization, Southeast Asian countries are watching closely and looking forward to cooperating with China, Wanandi added. XINHUA

TRADE

Top envoy Tai says US not seeking to 'decouple' from China

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

WASHINGTON is not seeking to decouple the American economy from China's, U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai said yesterday while on a visit to Tokyo.

Tai, who is on her fourth visit to Japan after being appointed the top U.S. trade envoy, said all members of President Joe Biden's administration have been "very clear that it is not the intention to decouple" China's economy.

U.S. trade sanctions against China are "narrowly targeted," she said.

Given its huge size and importance, unraveling the ties with China that keep the world economy running is "not a goal or achievable," Tai said in a news conference at the Foreign Correspondent's Club of Japan.

Chinese officials have often lashed out at the U.S. over trade sanctions and other restrictions on sharing of advanced technology with China, accusing Washington of trying to "contain" China and hinder its path toward greater affluence.

Tai said that regular trade work between the U.S. and China was continuing and she was "completely open to engaging with my counterparts in Beijing," though she has no immediate plans to visit China.

At the same time, the United States is seeking to strengthen and expand economic security coo-



U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai speaks at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan yesterday, in Tokyo

peration with its Asian allies and partners in response to China's growing assertiveness and its dominance in many manufacturing industries.

Security and stability of supply chains is an issue that has gained urgency after disruptions caused by the pandemic and controls imposed to try to fight outbreaks of COVID-19 resulted in shortages of computer chips and other goods.

A recent agreement on trade in critical minerals will allow electric vehicles using metals sourced or processed in Japan to qualify for tax breaks under the Inflation Reduction Act. That deal is one evidence of the U.S. commitment to "building collective resilience and security," Tai said.

"We have all experienced the

fragility of our dispersed supply chains in recent years, especially through the pandemic and Russia's brutal, unjustified attack on Ukraine. And we've become too reliant, we have discovered, on certain countries for the supply of critical minerals needed to fuel our clean energy future," Tai said.

The Biden administration has been adopting a new approach to global trade, arguing that America's traditional reliance on promoting free trade pacts failed to anticipate China's brand of capitalism and the possibility that a major power like Russia would go to war against one of its trading partners.

Tai recently gave a speech at American University, where she spoke of "friend-shoring" — bui-

lding up supply chains among allied countries and reducing dependence on geopolitical rivals such as China.

Tai pointed to a new trade partnership with Japan that she said has brought "tangible results for our workers, small businesses, and producers on both sides of the Pacific." That includes an agreement to lift limits on U.S. exports of beef to Japan and a new biofuels policy to facilitate exports of more ethanol to Japan, she said.

Tai also reviewed the status of negotiations on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, or IPEF, a new trade pact proposed by Washington.

She said a third round of negotiations on the accord was planned in two weeks' time in Singapore.

The framework has 13 members, including the U.S., that account for 40% of global gross domestic product: Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The U.S. has stepped up diplomacy across the region, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken stopping over the weekend in Vietnam, which Washington sees as a key component of its strategy for the region given the country's "traditional rivalry with its much larger neighbor China," according to observers.

Tai's Tokyo visit follows a trip to the Philippine capital, Manila, to help fortify trade relations among the three countries as they build both economic and defense ties.

During her stay in Japan Tai met with Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and discussed making supply chains more resilient and secure, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

She also met with Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yasutoshi Nishimura. The trade ministry said the two also spoke about strengthening supply chains — an issue that gained urgency amid shortages of computer chips and other goods during the pandemic. They also discussed ways to cooperate in the protection of human rights in business, the ministry said.

Japan and the United States have set up a taskforce that aims to eliminate human rights violations in international supply chains and to ban use of materials from suppliers that subject their workers to inhumane conditions.

To highlight such efforts, Tai toured an outlet of outdoor equipment and clothing retailer Patagonia in Tokyo's popular Shibuya shopping and business district. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

Bishop hopes for closer ties with Beijing diocese

HONG Kong's Roman Catholic bishop said in a historic trip to Beijing that he hopes the dioceses of the two cities will have more exchanges and cooperation, local media reported yesterday amid signs of Sino-Vatican strains.

Bishop Stephen Chow made the remarks during a Mass that was also attended by his counterpart in Beijing, Hong Kong's public broadcaster RTHK said. Chow later told reporters he was encouraged to visit other dioceses.

"I hope that this is not the last time," Chow said.

His five-day trip is the first visit to Beijing by Hong



In this image from a video shot by Hong Kong broadcaster TVB, Hong Kong Bishop Stephen Chow talks to media during his visit to Beijing

Kong's bishop in nearly three decades and came two weeks after Vatican News, the news portal of the Holy See, reported that China had unilaterally appointed a new

bishop to Shanghai.

China's ruling Communist Party closely controls organized religion, which it sees as a potential threat to its monopoly on power.

People are allowed to worship in institutions that abide by party rules. Some Christians have set up underground churches, which are considered illegal and

harassed by authorities.

The Vatican and China signed a provisional agreement over the appointment of bishops in 2018, a breakthrough on an issue that stymied diplomatic relations for decades and aggravated a split among Chinese Catholics.

The agreement on Catholic bishops has been renewed twice, most recently in October for two more years. But a feud broke out a month later over the installation of an auxiliary bishop in Jiangxi province, which the Vatican does not recognize as a diocese.

The deal has been harshly

criticized by Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen.

Another local broadcaster, i-Cable News, quoted Chow as saying his trip was mainly about exchanges between dioceses, so they did not talk much on the issue of China and the Vatican.

After the Thursday Mass, some churchgoers in Beijing told local media they welcomed more exchanges between the two dioceses.

Chow, who was named by Pope Francis as Hong Kong's bishop in 2021, began his trip Monday and joined a prayer session at a church that evening. On Wednesday, he visited the tomb of Matteo Ricci, one of the first Jesuits to live in China, who died in Beijing in 1610, RTHK reported. The visit was invited by his Beijing counterpart. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

Kishida denounces attack, vows security review before G7

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

JAPANESE Prime Minister Fumio Kishida denounced a pipe bomb attack at a campaign event he attended last weekend and pledged to review security procedures to ensure safety for dignitaries visiting the country for the Group of Seven summit he will host in May.

"No matter what the reason is, the use of violence to shut down free speech should never be tolerated," Kishida told selected media from G-7 countries yesterday at the Prime Minister's Office, as he stressed that the attack occurred during a nationwide local election campaign.

"The election, which is the foundation of democracy, should not succumb to violence. We must carry out the election until the end," he said, explaining why he has continued to deliver speeches since the attack on Saturday.

A man hurled a pipe bomb at Kishida at the fishing port of Saika-



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida speaks during an interview with foreign media members at the Prime Minister's official residence in Tokyo, yesterday

zaki in the western prefecture of Wakayama just before he was to make a campaign speech for a local candidate from his governing party. The moment the explosive fell near him, he was pushed away

by special police and evacuated unhurt before the bomb exploded.

The alleged attacker, Ryuji Kimura, 24, was wrestled to the ground and arrested on the spot.

The attack, which targeted the

prime minister less than a year after former leader Shinzo Abe's assassination, raised questions about whether any lessons had been learned from Abe's case, especially as Japan navigates key events like the ongoing elections and G-7 meetings.

"As we prepare to welcome many guests from around the world for the G-7 summit and other events, I feel it is very important to once again review our security measures so that our guests can visit Japan with a sense of safety," Kishida said.

During the May 19-21 summit in his electoral constituency of Hiroshima — the target of the world's first atomic attack — Kishida plans to appeal for nuclear disarmament, while pledging support for the rules-based international order and vowing to play a greater role as the only Asian member of the G-7 to bridge Western economies with the so-called Global South nations. He will also demand that Russia stop the war on Ukraine immediately.

"I feel our path toward achieving a world without nuclear weapons has become an increasingly difficult one," said Kishida, who has made the goal his career aim. "But that makes our cause more important than ever, and we must keep raising the flag of the ideal to achieve a nuclear-free world and reverse the ongoing trend. To do so is a responsibility Japan bears to human society as the world's only country to have suffered nuclear attacks."

He said Russia's war on Ukraine has raised fears the same could happen in Asia, and he said calls for a rules-based international order, along with the rejection of one-sided change to the status quo, could be widely accepted.

"It is extremely important for the G-7 to reaffirm the basic position, and it could help the international community to unite in case a situation like this happens in places other than Russia and Europe," he said.

Violent crimes are rare in Japan. With its strict gun control laws, the country has only a handful of gun-related crimes annually, most of them gang related. But in recent years Japanese police have worried about "lone offender" attacks with homemade guns and explosives.

Abe was assassinated with a homemade gun at a campaign event on July 8 last year, just two days before the upper house election.

MDT/AP

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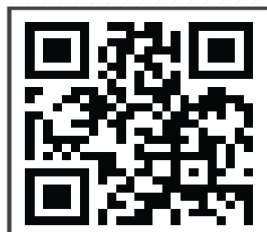
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SUDAN

Fighting in Khartoum threatens to unravel cease-fire

JACK JEFFERY & SAMY MAGDY, KHARTOUM

FIGHTERS from Sudan's rival factions battled around the main military installation in central Khartoum and other parts of the country's capital yesterday, threatening to unravel the latest attempt at a cease-fire as foreign governments looked for ways to extract their citizens trapped in the conflict.

With some parts of the Sudanese capital relatively calmer than previous days, the exodus of residents in Khartoum from their homes appeared to accelerate. "Massive numbers" of people, mostly women and children, were leaving in search of safer areas, said Atiya Abdulla Atiya, secretary of the Doctors' Syndicate.

The 24-hour cease-fire, which came into effect Wednesday evening, is the most significant attempt yet to halt violence between the military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. The rivals' fight for control of Sudan has turned the densely populated Khartoum, its neighboring city of Omdurman and other parts of the country into war zones, with millions of Sudanese caught in between.

Khartoum residents have been desperate for a respite after days of being trapped in their homes, their food and water running out. But whatever tenuous quiet has been brought to some areas by the truce risks quickly falling apart.

"Sounds of gunfire and air bombing are still heard," Atiya told The Associated Press said. "It is escalating, and the situation is deteriorating rapidly."

At least 330 people have been killed and 3,300 wounded in the fighting since it began Saturday, the U.N.'s World Health Organization said, but the toll is likely higher because many bodies lie uncollected in the streets.

A previous truce attempt on Tuesday collapsed as soon as it began, and the two antagonists in the fight — army chief Gen. Ab-



del Fattah Burhan and RSF commander Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo — have seemed determined to crush each other in their struggle for power.

Diplomatic efforts were underway to try to shore up and extend the cease-fire.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and the president of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, spoke by phone yesterday and discussed efforts to stop the fighting and return to negotiations, Egypt's presidency said. Egypt is allied to Sudan's military, while the UAE is close to the Rapid Support Forces.

The truce has not been firm enough to deliver supplies and relief to Sudan's overwhelmed hospitals, Atiya said. Hospitals in Khartoum are running dangerously low on medical supplies, often operating without power and clean water. Around 70% of hospitals near the clash sites throughout the country are out of service, the Sudanese Doctors Syndicate said. At least nine hospitals were bombed, it said.

"We are worried that Sudan's healthcare system could completely collapse. Hospitals need additional staff, they need additional supplies, and they need additional blood supplies," Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for the U.N. secretary-general, said in a briefing Wednesday.

The fighting has been disastrous for a country where the United Nations says around a third of the population — some 16 million people — are in need of humanitarian aid. The U.N. children's agency UNICEF warned that critical care has been disrupted for 50,000 severely acutely malnourished children, who need round-the-clock treatment.

Save the Children said power outages across the country have destroyed cold chain storage facilities for lifesaving vaccines, as well as the national stock of insulin and several antibiotics. Millions of children, the aid group said, are now at risk of disease and further health complications. It said 12% of the country's 22 million children are suffering from malnutrition and are vulnerable to other diseases.

Through the night and into Thursday morning, gunfire could be heard almost constantly across Khartoum. Residents reported the heaviest fighting around the main military headquarters in central Khartoum and at the nearby airport. Military warplanes struck RSF positions at the airport and in Omdurman, residents said.

The Egyptian and Sudanese militaries said that Egypt succeeded in repatriating dozens of its military personnel who had been detained by the RSF when it attacked Merowe

airport, north of the capital, early in the fighting. Egypt said its personnel were there for training and joint exercises.

Foreign governments as well geared up to evacuate

their citizens from Sudan. But with airports in Khartoum and other cities turned into battlegrounds, it remained uncertain how they would do so.

Japan's Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada yesterday ordered military aircraft sent to the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti to stand by for an evacuation of around 60 Japanese nationals, though it was not clear when one would take place. The Netherlands sent military transport craft to the Jordanian port city of Aqaba late Wednesday to be ready as well, though the Dutch Defense Ministry acknowledged that "evacuations are not possible at the moment."

The conflict has once again derailed Sudan's attempt to establish democratic rule since a popular uprising helped oust helped depose long-time autocrat Omar al-Bashir

four years ago. Burhan and Dagalo jointly carried out a coup purging civilians from a transitional government in 2021.

The explosion of violence came after weeks of growing tensions between the two generals over new international attempts to press a return to civilian government.

Both sides have a long history of human rights abuses. The RSF was born out of the Janjaweed militias, which were accused of widespread atrocities when the government deployed them to put down a rebellion in Sudan's western Darfur region in the early 2000s.

The conflict has raised fears of a spillover from the strategically located nation to its African neighbors.

Sudan's fighting has also caused up to 20,000 Sudanese to seek refuge in eastern Chad, the U.N. said yesterday. At least 320 Sudanese soldiers fled to Chad, where they were disarmed, said Daoud Yaya Brahim, Chad's defense minister. The troops were apparently fleeing from Darfur, where the RSF is the most powerful armed force. MDT/AP

AD

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AP PHOTO



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (right) greet each other after joint press conference in Kyiv, yesterday

PUTIN'S WAR

NATO HEAD DEFIANTLY SAYS UKRAINE BELONGS IN ALLIANCE ONE DAY

LORNE COOK & SAMYA KULLAB, KYIV

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg defiantly declared yesterday that Ukraine deserves to join the military alliance and pledged continuing support for the country on his first visit to Kyiv since Russia's invasion just over a year ago.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Stoltenberg, who has been instrumental in marshaling support from NATO's members, to push for even more from them, including warplanes, artillery and armored equipment.

The Kremlin has given various justifications for going to war, but repeated yesterday that preventing Ukraine from joining NATO was a key goal behind its invasion, arguing that Kyiv's membership in the alliance would pose an existential threat to Russia.

NATO leaders said in 2008 that Ukraine would join the alliance one day, and Stoltenberg has repeated that promise throughout the course of the war — though the organization has established no pathway or timetable for membership.

"Let me be clear, Ukraine's rightful place is in the Euro-Atlantic family," Stoltenberg told a press conference. "Ukraine's rightful place is in NATO."

He said he and Zelenskyy discussed a NATO support program.

"This will help you transition from Soviet-era equipment and doctrines to NATO standards and ensure full interoperability with the alliance," Stoltenberg said. "NATO stands with you today, tomorrow and for as long as it takes."

He noted yesterday's announcement by Denmark and the Netherlands that they plan to provide Ukraine with at least another 14 refurbished Leopard 2 battle tanks from early 2024. He added that he expected countries to "make new announcements of concrete military support to Ukraine" at a meeting Germany today.

The fighting in recent months has become a war of attrition, with neither side able to gain momentum. But Ukraine is expected to launch a counteroffensive in coming weeks, and it has recently received sophisticated weapons from its Western allies.

NATO has no official presence in Ukraine and provides only nonlethal support to Kyiv, but Stoltenberg has been the strong voice of the alliance throughout the war.

A procession of international leaders has made the journey to Kyiv over the last year, and the former Norwegian prime minister is one of the last major Western figures to do so.

NATO, formed to counter the Soviet Union, has long feared being dragged into a wide war with nuclear-armed Russia, but as the West has moved from hesitantly providing helmets and uniforms to tanks, warplanes and advanced missile systems, high-level visits have become routine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said yesterday that preventing Ukraine from joining NATO remains one of the goals of what Moscow calls its "special military operation." Speaking in a conference call with reporters, Peskov said that Ukraine's accession would pose a "serious, significant threat to our country, to our country's security."

Earlier this month, Finland joined the alliance, set-

ting aside decades of neutrality in a historic realignment of Europe's post-Cold War security landscape. While NATO says it poses no threat to Russia, the Nordic country's accession dealt a major political blow to Putin.

Finland's membership doubles Russia's border with the world's biggest security alliance. Neighboring Sweden is expected to join in coming months, too, possibly by the time U.S. President Joe Biden and his NATO counterparts meet in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius in July.

The alliance has focused on bolstering defenses on its own territory to dissuade Putin from attacking any member country. Under NATO's collective security guarantee, an attack on one member country is considered to be an attack on them all.

Today, Stoltenberg will attend a Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. It's the main international forum for drumming up military support for the conflict-ravaged country.

Meanwhile, the Ukraine Space Agency said that a bright flash of light in the night sky over the country the previous day was probably a meteorite entering the earth's atmosphere. Residents of the capital and several cities in Belarus saw the flash of light, which lingered for a couple of seconds, and an explosion was heard in the Kyiv region. It triggered an air raid alarm in Kyiv. MDT/AP

this day in history

1955 FLEET STREET PAPERS BACK AFTER STRIKE



National newspapers have been published for the first time in nearly a month following the end of the maintenance workers' strike.

The stoppage was called off following an agreement on Tuesday night between electricians' and engineers' unions and the Newspaper Proprietors' Association.

The 700 maintenance men, who take care of the newspaper printing machinery, had been striking for a wage increase of just over £2 a week.

The unions have not accepted the employers' latest offer but have agreed to return to work pending further negotiations, which are due to start within eight weeks.

The strike has kept newspapers based in the industry's traditional home of Fleet Street in central London off the presses for 26 days and cost the industry £3m.

One of the few national papers to be unaffected by the strike was the Guardian which is printed in Manchester.

The absence of the Fleet Street papers has affected about 23,000 people in related industries.

The lack of newspaper sports pages led to a drop in business for bookmakers.

Some said they were doing only 5% of their normal trade because gamblers could not get information on dog and horse races.

However, some sectors have benefited from the absence of national newspapers.

The head of W H Smith's station book stalls, C J Williams, said there had been a run on paperback novels and magazines.

He said: "Never was there such a rapid sale for magazines. For the cheap editions of books we had to scour London."

American papers such as the New York Times have also been flown in to stop the gap.

Public libraries have also seen an increase in loans - libraries in Hampstead in west London reported a jump of 10% in borrowing over the past month.

Big news events the Fleet Street papers have missed included Sir Winston Churchill's resignation, the Budget and the announcement of a general election.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The widespread effects and huge cost of the strike demonstrated the power the unions held over the newspaper industry.

It would not be broken for another 30 years when Rupert Murdoch - owner of the Sun and the Times - moved his papers from Fleet Street to a new hi-tech plant in Wapping.

New technology introduced at Wapping resulted in 4,000 print and maintenance workers losing their jobs.

In spite of months of vociferous picketing of the Wapping plant by unions Rupert Murdoch was able to produce and distribute his papers at a vastly reduced cost.

Mr Murdoch's success encouraged other newspapers to adopt new technology and leave Fleet Street for cheaper premises and lower labour costs in east London.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Try a barbecue or a day at the beach. Cultural activities will prove to be quite enlightening for everyone. Your ability to deal with humanitarian groups will enhance your reputation.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

You will have to help family members sort out unfortunate difficulties. You will be able to make financial gains. Family responsibilities are escalating.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You can make new friends by taking part in social events involving colleagues. Discrimination will be in order. Control your temper when dealing with your emotional partner.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You may find your nights sleepless due to bad dreams. Your charm will attract members of the opposite sex. Plan events like camping or white water rafting.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Dealing with foreigners will be most enlightening. Extravagance will be a problem. Help with your aspirations is likely, and profits could follow.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Entertainment should include your whole family. Art investment will pay big dividends in the long term. Your social activity should be conducive to finding love.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Your determination may make you a little overbearing when dealing with others. You will be able to pick up on future trends if you keep your eyes peeled for unique ideas.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Sudden changes at home will affect family members more than you anticipated. Don't promise to deliver the goods if you aren't positive that you can meet the deadline.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Most partner problems are a result of both people not living up to their promises. Help if you can, but more than likely it will be sufficient just to listen.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Be cautious while traveling; minor accidents are evident. Don't make mountains out of molehills if you want to avoid conflict. Use your creative flair.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You may not want to spend time around family or your home. Get busy on those home improvement projects that you've been procrastinating about.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You would be wise to consider attending lectures that will broaden your awareness concerning your professional direction.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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		3					7	1
		8		3				

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	12	15	overcast
Changchun	2	11	fine
Chengdu	18	23	overcast
Chongqing	22	28	rain
Fuzhou	19	24	cloudy
Guangzhou	22	28	thunderstorms
Guiyang	17	28	showers
Haikou	26	36	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	15	25	overcast
Harbin	0	11	cloudy
Hefei	15	24	cloudy
Nanjing	16	23	cloudy
Shanghai	14	21	cloudy
Taipei	18	22	cloudy
Wuhan	18	28	fine
Hong Kong	24	27	thunderstorms
WORLD			
Moscow	4	15	overcast
Frankfurt	8	18	cloudy
Paris	7	16	overcast
London	6	12	rain
New York	13	22	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Hee ____; 4- Android; 9- Diamond corners; 14- Abbr. on a toothpaste box; 15- Minneapolis suburb; 16- Inclined; 17- Device for triggering explosion; 19- Defense covering; 20- 1961 Heston role; 21- Long Island town; 23- Satirist Mort; 24- Transfer; 27- Code word for A; 30- Fanlike posterior of crayfish; 32- Work unit; 33- Receptacle for odds and ends; 37- Fragrant oil; 39- Deep down; 40- Italian innkeeper; 42- "Presumed Innocent" author; 43- Group of spectators; 44- Source of iron; 45- Sensational novel; 48- Dagger of yore; 50- Some Art Deco works; 51- Prescribed amount; 55- Islamic decree; 57- Ventured; 58- High-school freshman; 60- See-sawing; 64- Noted Civil War biography; 65- Lauder of cosmetics; 66- Sweet suffix; 67- Discombobulate; 68- Rascal; 69- Aussie outlaw Kelly;

DOWN 1- Where the Styx flows; 2- Journalist ____ Rogers St. Johns; 3- Look attentively; 4- Rip apart; 5- Room within a harem; 6- Mouthpiece of a bridle; 7- Lennon's love; 8- Import or export duty; 9- False god; 10- Heart chambers; 11- Ignorant person; 12- "Xanadu" band; 13- Orch. section; 18- Lubricate; 22- RR stop; 24- Coal-rich region; 25- Sword handle; 26- Green around the gills; 28- Piece of French bread?; 29- Go along (with); 30- Melts; 31- Rock bottom; 33- The Younger and The Elder; 34- Done to ____; 35- Triplex; 36- Boardroom bigwig; 38- It's past due; 40- Vomit; 41- Citrus drinks; 43- Take steps; 46- Fell; 47- Speaks publicly; 49- Art supporter; 51- ____ es Salaam, Tanzania; 52- The Hunter; 53- Logic; 54- Barely beat; 56- Of ____! Sing; 57- Thought-provoking; 58- Monk's title; 59- Flushed; 61- Corner key; 62- Greek vowel; 63- President pro ____;

Yesterday's solution

L	E	A	P	M	T	M	E	C	I	N	G
U	R	G	E	A	S	O	N	E	O	N	C
G	E	A	R	G	A	S	E	S	U	R	A
S	T	P	A	T	C	U	N	E	A	L	
S	A	T	I	R	I	C	C	A	S	T	
P	U	R	S	U	E	S	U	P	E	R	M
A	L	A	T	E	W	E	R	E	Y	O	Y
S	A	D	H	A	L	V	E	G	E	R	
M	I	E	N	E	R	I	E	S	P	U	R
S	T	R	I	K	I	N	G	O	R	E	L
F	O	U	R	T	H	G	A	D	I	A	S
I	N	G	A	T	E	R	R	A	I	D	L
T	I	L	T	S	W	I	N	G	N	O	T
S	T	Y	E	E	P	E	E	G	L	O	M

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- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
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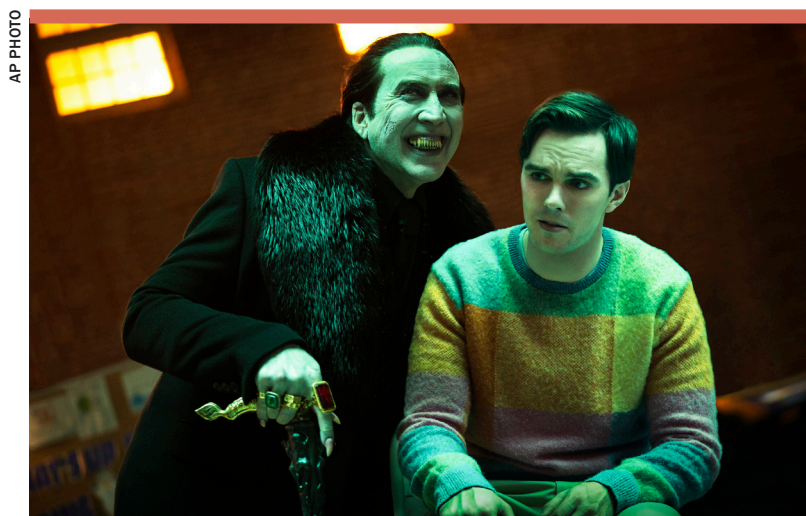
BLOOD SLOSHES AND NICOLAS CAGE FEASTS IN 'RENFIELD'

JAKE COYLE,
MDTAP FILM WRITER

RENFIELD is not Nicolas Cage's first blush with a vampire. In 1988's "Vampire's Kiss," he played a New York literary agent who thought he was an immortal bloodsucker. His bug-eyed performance was essentially the birth of the over-the-top, kabuki-inflected mythology of Cage. Years later, it would launch a thousand memes — a kind of digital version of becoming undead.

Thirty-five years later with "Renfield," Cage is finally playing the genuine article, complete with bloodthirsty fangs and a dapper velvet smoking jacket. Casting Cage, our grandest of ghouls, as Dracula is so predestined that it almost risks being too on the nose. The good news is that, no, he's perfect as Dracula. The bad news is that Cage's Dracula is only a supporting role here, making "Renfield" more of a tasty morsel than a satisfying feast.

That's no discredit to Nicholas



Nicholas Hoult (right) and Nicolas Cage in a scene from "Renfield"

Hoult, who plays Bram Stoker's devoted henchman to Dracula in Chris McKay's "Renfield," which opens in theaters Friday. The film, penned by Ryan Ridley, fashions Robert Montague Renfield less as Dracula's dotting, "yes Master" lackey than a distinctive and sensitive person — or kinda person; his supernatural powers are sustained, for some reason,

by eating bugs — in his own right. "Renfield," a fast and loose horror-comedy splattered top to bottom with blood, is about Renfield trying to break free of Dracula's fearsome sway — "a destructive relationship" as Renfield describes in a self-help group.

It's a nifty enough idea (Robert Kirkman gets a story by credit) that the filmmakers have wisely

chosen not to over complicate. Even though "Renfield" features a monster with growing desires for world domination and an alarming number of exploding human heads, the stakes are low in this Dracula spinoff. The tone is antic and blood-splattery, slotting in closer to a gory, middle-of-the-road "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" episode than, say, the wittier "What We Do in the Shadows."

Vampires have been in vogue for some time, but usually in more extrapolated interpretations with greater sympathies for vampires — elegant, sexy or childlike — as worldly outsiders. Edging closer to Dracula, himself, has been rarer, and it's probably a sign of the lesser, shlocky ambitions of "Renfield" that he still remains off to the side. But whenever Cage's Prince of Darkness is around, the movie has a bite.

Cage, returning to major studio territory after an often thrilling, sometimes befuddling decade in indie pastures, is, as always, fully prepared for the mo-

ment. The actor, long a devoted fan of F.W. Murnau's "Nosferatu," channels some of the classic interpretations of Dracula — including Bela Lugosi, over whom Cage is superimposed in an early flashback taken from 1931's "Dracula" — while animating the character with his own comic, campy rhythm. It may be worth the price of admission to see Cage's Dracula let out a brief "Wool!" while awakening to a new sense of himself as a god.

"Renfield" is enjoyable enough in a disposable sort of way. A lack of self-seriousness is a quality to be appreciated in any movie like this. And Hoult manages to be remarkably sweet while at the same time using human limbs to decapitate other victims. Some of the best scenes are of him sitting in on a support group meeting to talk through toxic relationships. (Brandon Scott Jones, who plays the group's leader, is quite good.) But "Renfield" never lets Cage really sink his teeth into the movie, leaving us still hungry for more.

"Renfield," a Universal Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for bloody violence, some gore, language throughout and some drug use. Running time: 93 minutes.



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MACAO ARTS FESTIVAL

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

TASTE OF EDESIA

XO Feast

IRENE SAM, MDT

AN unparalleled experience for art and spirits connoisseur is now taking place at MGM COTAL. With continuous efforts in bringing international and world-class experience to guests near and far, MGM and the iconic spirits brand Hennessy, interweave to present an experiential pop-up, "Hennessy X.O x Kim Jones". At the same time, Imperial Court at MGM MACAU proudly presents the exclusive 8-course "The Refined Indulgence Pairing Menu," delivering a one-of-its-kind gastronomic experience with the

iconic cognac for all gourmets and to contribute to the city's gastronomic kaleidoscope.

Chef de Cuisine Homan Tsui serves enticing Cantonese dining traditions with a modern twist, focusing on the essence of Lingnan culinary culture, which are seasonality, balanced seasoning and focus on the original flavours of ingredients. The 8-course menu with delicacies of enticing classic Lingnan culinary craftsmanship brings forth the timeless elegance of Hennessy's cognac.

Highlight on the menu includes Braised partridge porridge with bird's nest and Yunnan ham. Not only a nostalgic Cantonese dish, it is also a porridge-like soup dish commonly served for children and elderly back in the days. The hearty broth concentrates the essence of the partridge in the form of slow cook, while the texture is further enhanced by the starchiness from the yam

and the nutritious minced breast, complete with a delicate touch of bird's nest on top.

Seafood lovers will be delighted with the Steamed crab claw with glass noodles and Hua Diao rice wine. Located in the mouth of the Pearl River, Ben Wan () is a brackish water junction which makes the area rich in seafood. Chef Homan chooses fresh meat crabs from Ben Wan and only the crab claws are used for the dish. Then it is steamed with Huadiao wine to bring out the freshness and sweetness of the crab meat itself. The springy glass noodles (Chen Cun Fen) which is freshly made daily, absorbs the essence of Huadiao wine and crab juice, is the highlight of the dish. Pairing with Hennessy XO, the cognac showcases its complex bouquet of rich spices, dried figs and sweet tobacco, interacting with its hints of savory notes and sweet spices.



BOOK IT

A harrowing shipwreck and mutiny in 'The Wager'

THE Wager, a British war ship, crashed onto rocks amid stormy seas off the coast of Patagonia in 1741. Sailors on a secret wartime mission had already dealt with typhus, lice, blinding squalls, frostbite, worm-eaten biscuits, scurvy and the death of comrades since they set sail months earlier.

It would get much worse. Stranded on a cold, deserted island, shipwreck survivors scraped seaweed off

rocks to boil and eat. Some ate the dead. Crew members blamed their imperious captain for their fate and rigid naval order broke down. Mutineers abandoned their captain on the island after he fatally shot an unruly crew member in the head.

The story of the shipwreck and its aftermath features scenery-chewing characters, unexpected twists and an almost unimaginable amount of human misery. Grann,

the author of the acclaimed "Killers of the Flower Moon," tells it with style. He manages to wring maximum drama out of the events and sketch out nuanced portraits of key players on the doomed ship. Journal entries made on the voyage gave Grann a window into their thoughts and fears.

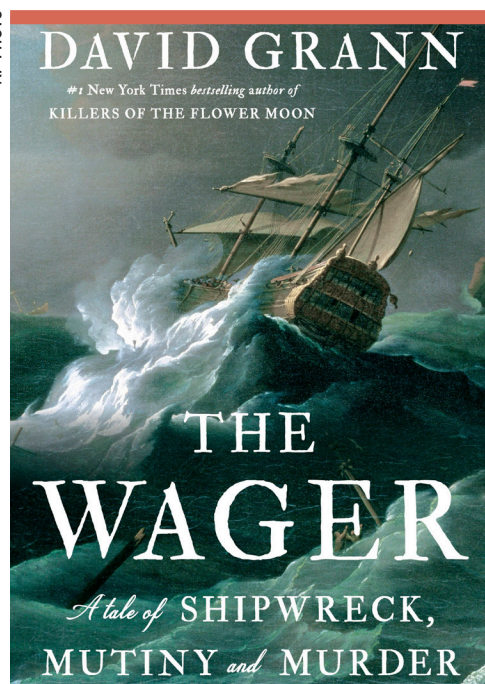
In a large part, this is the tale of two strong-willed characters on a collision course.

At the helm is David Cheap, who became the

ship's captain after a death at sea. Cheap, new to command, was an authoritarian with a relentless drive to prove his worthiness to superiors. His vainglorious manner and "stubborn defiance of all difficulties" grated on the crew, most notably gunner John Bulkeley.

Bulkeley led the group of mutineers off the island, leaving Cheap behind with a small group of loyalists. Bulkeley's party of barely-alive men landed on the coast of Brazil in January 1742. The story might have ended there, except Cheap and a two other bedraggled souls washed up on the coast of Chile six months later. **MICHAEL HILL, MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



"The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder," by David Grann (Doubleday)

OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

ROK SHOULD THINK TWICE BEFORE GOING ALL IN WITH US

Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol said in an interview with Reuters on Wednesday that the ROK may provide weapons to Ukraine, after last year ruling out the possibility of providing lethal aid to the country.

The ROK, a growing arms exporter, has a policy of not supplying weapons to countries at war. It has not provided arms to Ukraine, although it has shipped humanitarian aid and joined the US-led economic sanctions against Russia.

Despite mounting pressure from Western countries for it to supply weapons to Ukraine, the ROK, a key ally of the United States and major producer of artillery ammunition, has so far tried to avoid antagonizing Russia due to its companies operating there and Moscow's friendly ties with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The ROK has been long weighing the pros and cons of extending military aid to Ukraine.

Why did ROK President Yoon suggest a major shift in its national policy on arms exports at this time? The timing is everything. It came just days before his visit to the US next week for a summit with US President Joe Biden.

What President Yoon said on this question is not so much publicizing the ROK's policy shift as letting his US counterpart Joe Biden know that the ROK might consider providing ammunition to Ukraine if it gets something substantial in return as an outcome of the coming summit between the two leaders.

US intelligence documents which were leaked days ago indicated that Washington was spying on the ROK, which has put the ROK president in a difficult situation and made his visit to the US very delicate. It is important for Yoon to get something substantial from his meeting with his US counterpart to show to the opposition party that the eavesdropping by the US is not ill-intended and will not cause damage to bilateral relations.

However, it is important for the ROK to know where and when to toe the line in its relations with the US. To directly provide military aid to Ukraine would tell the world that the ROK does this under the pressure of the US and it has lost its foreign policy independence. That the US spies on the ROK and its other allies only proves that Washington wants leverage over them.

Considering the concessions the ROK made to Japan on the compensation of slave labor and other historical issues and the possibility of it providing direct military aid for Ukraine, it is not difficult to conclude that the ROK is ready to jump on the bandwagon of the US' geopolitical game.

This will do no good to the interests of the ROK and neither is it conducive to regional peace and development. The ROK needs to err on the side of caution in its ties with the US.

SINGAPORE TO RESUME EXECUTIONS AFTER 6-MONTH BREAK

A Singaporean man is scheduled to be hanged next week for abetting an attempt to smuggle cannabis into the island-state, in a resumption of executions after a half-year pause, activists said yesterday.

The family of Tangaraju Suppiah, 46, was notified in a letter that he would be executed next Wednesday, anti-death penalty activist Kokila Annamalai said.

Tangaraju was detained in 2014 for drug consumption and failure to report for a drug test, according to another activist, Kirsten Han. He was later linked to two drug traffickers through a phone number

used to coordinate the delivery of cannabis. The High Court found Tangaraju guilty of conspiring to traffic 1 kilogram of cannabis and sentenced him to mandatory death in 2018, Han said.

"The last execution carried out in Singapore was in October 2022. Death row prisoners, their family members and abolitionists have been holding our breath for the past six months, terrified of when the killing spree will begin again. We will fight for Tangaraju till the end," Annamalai said.

Singapore, which has harsh drug laws, executed 11 people last year for drug offenses.

THE BUZZ



A picture of a fatally-wounded pregnant woman by Evgeniy Maloletka, taken on March 9, 2022, wins WPP Photo of The Year award

AP IMAGE OF MARIUPOL HOSPITAL ATTACK WINS WORLD PRESS PHOTO

ASSOCIATED Press photographer Evgeniy Maloletka won the World Press Photo of the Year award yesterday for his harrowing image of emergency workers carrying a pregnant woman through the shattered grounds of a maternity hospital in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, in the chaotic aftermath of a Russian attack.

The Ukrainian photographer's March 9, 2022, image of the fatally wounded woman, her left hand on her bloodied lower left abdomen, drove home the horror of Russia's brutal onslaught in the eastern port city early in the war.

The 32-year-old woman, Iryna Kalinina, died of her injuries a half-hour after giving birth to the lifeless body of her baby, named Miron.

"For me, it is a moment that all the time I want to forget, but I cannot. The story will always stay with me," Maloletka said in an interview before the announcement.

"Evgeniy Maloletka captured one of the most defining images of the Russia-Ukraine war amid incredibly challenging circumstances. Without his unflinching courage, little

would be known of one of Russia's most brutal attacks. We are enormously proud of him," AP Senior Vice President and Executive Editor Julie Pace said.

Maloletka, AP video journalist Mystyslav Chernov and AP producer Vasilisa Stepanenko, who are also Ukrainian, arrived in Mariupol just as Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on Feb. 24, 2022, sparked Europe's biggest conflict since World War II. They stayed for more than two weeks, chronicling the Russian military pounding the city and hitting hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. An AP investigation found that as many as 600 people may have been killed when a Mariupol theater being used as a bomb shelter was hit on March 16 last year.

The three were the only international journalists left in the city when they finally managed a risky escape.

World Press Photo Foundation Executive Director Joumana El Zein Khoury told the AP that jury members decided quickly Maloletka's image should win the prestigious prize.

She said it was "apparent from the beginning

that it needed to win.

Maloletka said the team believed it was important to remain in Mariupol, despite the danger, "to collect the people's voices and collect their emotions and to show them all around the world."

A series of photos by Maloletka from besieged Mariupol won an array of regional and international prizes.

"I think it is really important that specifically a Ukrainian won the contest showing the atrocities against civilians by Russian forces in Ukraine," he said.

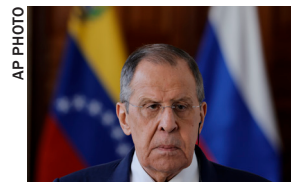
In the three other global categories announced yesterday, two-time World Press Photo winner Mads Nissen of Denmark won Photo Story of the Year for his series for Politiken and Panos Pictures, titled "The Price of Peace in Afghanistan," about daily life in Afghanistan in 2022.

Anush Babajanyan of Armenia won the Long-Term Project award for "Battered Waters" for VII Photo and National Geographic Society, and Egyptian photographer Mohamed Mahdy won the Open Format award for "Here, The Doors Don't Know Me." **MDT/AP**



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak weighed the fate of his top deputy yesterday as he reviewed a long-awaited report into allegations that he bullied civil servants. The report by an independent employment lawyer investigated eight formal complaints that Justice Secretary Dominic Raab (pictured) had been abusive toward staff during a previous stint in that office and while serving as foreign secretary and Brexit secretary.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has nominated a Cabinet minister known for inflammatory comments and for leading a grassroots campaign against African migrants to the post of consul general in New York, a high-profile job that deals with outreach to American Jews. May Golan, currently a minister without portfolio in Netanyahu's government, built her political career on staunch opposition to African migrants in Israel.



Nicaragua Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met yesterday [Macau time] with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, and the two commiserated about U.S. sanctions. The United States announced new sanctions yesterday [Macau time] against three Nicaraguan judges who stripped 222 exiled opponents of their nationality. Ortega told Lavrov that his government isn't concerned. Lavrov responded that "sanctioned people in Russia take it as a recognition of their effectiveness" in defending Russian interests.

USA American Express said its first-quarter profits fell by 13% from a year ago despite record quarterly revenue as the credit card company had to set aside more than \$1 billion for potentially bad loans. The noticeable increase in loan loss reserves reflect the uncertain direction of where the economy is heading for many of the banks. AmEx's biggest credit card competitors also set aside money to cover potentially bad loans and have talked about how consumers are now carrying higher balances and aren't paying off their cards.