



APPLICATION PROCEDURES FOR DRIVING LICENSE MUTUAL RECOGNITION WITH MAINLAND CHINA WILL BE AVAILABLE PRIOR TO THE OFFICIAL COMMENCEMENT DATE – MAY 16, GOV'T SAYS

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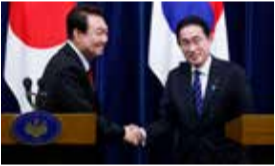


AP PHOTO



Hong Kong's leader yesterday stepped up a campaign to shut down further democratic challenges by unveiling plans to eliminate most directly elected seats on local district councils, the last major political representative bodies chosen by the public. Chief Executive John Lee said the proposed overhaul will reduce the proportion of directly elected seats in the municipal-level organization to about 20% — from some 90% currently.

AP PHOTO



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he is arranging a trip to South Korea for talks with President Yoon Suk Yeol in return for his March visit to Tokyo, aiming to further strengthen their ties before the upcoming Group of Seven summit. Speaking to reporters yesterday in Ghana as part of his multi-nation trip to Africa and Singapore, Kishida said he hopes to visit May 7-8 and exchange views with Yoon on ways to speed up the bolstering of bilateral ties and discuss regional and global issues.

AP PHOTO



Ukraine Russia launched its second large salvo of missiles at Ukraine in recent days, damaging buildings, killing two people and wounding 40 in the eastern city of Pavlohrad but failing to hit Kyiv, officials said. Air raid sirens began blaring across the capital about 3:45 a.m., followed by explosions as Ukrainian defense systems intercepted missiles. Eighteen cruise missiles were fired and 15 of them were intercepted, Kyiv said.

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V-RECOVERY IN CHIPS

Casino sector gains momentum, hitting new high in April P4



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GOLDEN WEEK VISITOR FIGURES DROP ON FOURTH DAY, STILL ABOVE FORECAST

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SARS RESIDENTS TO FACE TIGHTENED RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS IN TAIWAN

The Mainland Affairs Council in Taiwan is considering a legal amendment to tighten permanent residency requirements for Hong Kong and Macau residents. A government official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the changes would extend the minimum period Hong Kong residents must stay in Taiwan to become eligible to apply for permanent residency, from one year to at least four years, as cited in a report issued by The Standard. According to the official, national security agencies are concerned that China might try to infiltrate Taiwan through Hong Kong, as cited in the report.

PLA GARRISON OPENS BARRACKS TO PUBLIC

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Garrison stationed in the SAR opened barracks on Taipa Island to the public on the weekend. This was the 17th time that the barracks had been opened to the public since 2005, helping with communication between the garrison and local residents. After a national flag-raising ceremony in the morning, soldiers of the garrison staged military exercises, including combat and anti-terrorist operations, as well as theatrical performances. The event will last until Monday.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' WAGE RECORDS SLIGHT DECREASE

The average daily wage of construction workers decreased by 0.8% quarter-to-quarter to MOP792 in the first quarter of 2023. The average daily wage of local workers (MOP989) rose by 1.5%, while that of non-resident workers (MOP700) dropped by 3%, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) showed. After discounting the effects of inflation, the real wage index of construction workers (96.7) in the first quarter grew by 0.5% quarter-to-quarter, with that of local construction workers (98.9) increasing by 0.7%.

GOLDEN WEEK

FOREIGN TRAVELERS FIND MACAU 'A GOOD DESTINATION TO HAVE SOME HOLIDAYS'

STAFF REPORTER

FOREIGN tourists who are currently visiting Macau during the Golden Week have expressed their satisfaction in the city's offerings.

Amid the Golden Week, over 430,000 tourists have visited Macau, most of them from the mainland.

Some foreigners answered the call and visited the city, including 39-year-old tourist Marc who comes every year to visit his friends. "During the May Golden Week, they have holidays, so it's easier for me to see them," the tourist, who decline to provide his last name, explained.

"There are many events and so many people during this period. It makes the trip great because there is always something to do, new places to visit, events to attend," he said. Marc has been visiting Macau for seven years and is still inspired by the place. "As a journalist, it also gives me story ideas. Macau is definitely a good place for it," he added.

"Macau is really a unique place in the world and a good destination to holiday," said Kerwin, a 21-year-old tourist from Australia.



lia. "This is really different from where I live and there are so many things to do. It's really interesting to be here, visit museums and see the Ruins of Saint Paul's for example."

Recently, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) publicized its desire to attract more international tourists and to diversify its tourism market.

The government has launched its "buy-one-get-one-free campaign" to lure tourists to visit the city. The "See you in Macao" campaign was launched last month by

the international one-stop travel service provider Trip.com in co-ordination with MGTO, highlighting Macau as a destination of choice for leisure and business and offering numerous advantages to international tourists.

"I heard that governments wanted to attract more foreign tourists," Marc said, "but I'm not sure those efforts have been successful because I mainly see tourists who come from the mainland. I think there were more international tourists before the pandemic."

For her part, Kerwin was not

aware of MGTO's goal. "I didn't know that the government wanted to attract more foreigners; I suppose I have not seen one yet. I mostly just came here because I have been wanting to for a few years."

The Golden Week has attracted many visitors, but perhaps not of the kind expected by the MGTO. Still, Marc remains confident, saying, "I really recommend those who have never been to Macau to try, because this blend of Chinese and Portuguese, and others, is fascinating."

PUBLIC WORKS

Second phase of flood prevention works at Inner Harbour to commence

RENATO MARQUES

THE second phase of the construction of box culverts to prevent and reduce flooding in the Inner Harbour area will commence Thursday (May 4), the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) and the Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced in a press statement.

In this second phase

of the project, which is mainly aimed at reducing flooding caused by excessive rainwater, the box culvert drainage system that links to the lift station will pump water into the Inner Harbour channel. It will be installed at the southern section of the Rua do Almirante Sérgio.

Due to the works, traffic arrangements are being made in that area, including

halting traffic in the Rua do Dr. Lourenço Pereira Marques and re-routing it through the former bus stop area of the Riviera building.

Additionally, the traffic separator in the Rua do Almirante Sérgio has been removed and traffic lanes have been narrowed to allow traffic to continue to circulate in two lanes in the South to North direc-

tion and one lane in the opposite direction in the area of construction.

In the same statement, DSAT asked citizens to note the traffic arrangements and, if possible, avoid the area under construction.

Concurrently and related to the same works, roadworks will commence at the Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Sai Van, with tra-

ffic changes to be implemented from 10 a.m. on the section of Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Sai Van located next to the entrance and exit of the Sai Van Bridge on the Barra side.

As previously announced by DSOP, this will be the second of three phases. The last phase will include the construction of a lift station – this time for wastewater – at the leisure area between the Rua do Dr. Lourenço Pereira Marques and Rua das Lorchas, as well as another box culvert for both rainwater and wastewater at the crossroad between the Rua das Lorchas and the Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro.

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GOLDEN WEEK

Visitor figures drop on the fourth day, still above forecast

RENATO MARQUES

THE number of tourists entering Macau during the so-called Labor Day Holidays, which comprise five days between April 29 and May 3, started to drop on the fourth day after three days of well over 100,000, official statistics show.

On Tuesday, which is the fourth day out of the five-day holiday period, the number of entries registered at the lowest since the May 1 holidays started, with only 81,878 visitors until 9 p.m.

In the previous days, the daily figure was well above 100,000, breaking a yearly record in two consecutive days.

On the third day (May 1) the number of entries reached some 110,823. The current record for the year occurred on April 30, with 133,911 visitor entries.

In total, a total of 435,808 tourists arrived in Macau in the first four days, a figure that represents an average of 108,952 per day, well above the 70,000 per day figure forecasted by the Macao Government Tourism Office or even the 90,000 per day estimate predicted by the tourism industry.

Taking into account the cur-



rent figures, it is unlikely that the five-day holiday period – already coined the “Labor Day Golden Week” – will deliver final numbers below the half-a-million entries mark.

Despite the significant drop in the number of visitors from the third to fourth day, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) continued to enforce crowd control measures in the surroundings of the Ruins of Saint Paul's and the city's historical center.

According to the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, the high influx of tourists did not at

all compromise the safety of the city and population.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of a public event on Monday (May 1), Wong said that traffic at border crossing checkpoints had flowed in a smooth and orderly manner without any issues.

The Secretary also noted that on Sunday (April 30), an aggregate of more than 570,000 movements inbound and outbound were recorded at the borders, representing the highest daily number since the Covid-19 pandemic.

While the Border Gate checkpoint received the greater share of visitors, the nearby Qingmao Port had played an important role in diverting visitor traffic, the security chief noted, adding that the police had increased their patrolling at popular tourist attractions, and had been enforcing crowd-control management in those areas in a way that proved to be effective.

Wong also spoke of the efforts used to prevent cross-border parallel trading, although he did not disclose the outcomes of operations during this period.

HEALTH

SSM adjusts Covid-19 vaccination recommendations in line with WHO

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL health authorities have amended the guidelines on Covid-19 vaccination, which commenced May 1.

Under the newly updated guidelines, the Health Bureau (SSM) adjusted the risk classification for certain people according to their age group and also recommended that those considered high-risk receive an additional dose of the bivalent Omicron variant vaccine, following the recommendation of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Vaccination recommendations have also changed for pregnant



women.

Under the new guidelines, people aged between six months and 17 years old who are not

classified as high-risk are recommended to receive 3 doses of a vaccine against Covid-19.

For people aged be-

tween 18 months and 59 years old who are not classified high-risk, 3 doses of the vaccine is also recommended, noting that those who have completed three or four doses of the vaccine but who have not received the bivalent vaccine can be inoculated with an additional dose of the bivalent mRNA vaccine six months after receiving their last dose.

Those with risk factors and aged between 12 and 59 years, as well as all those aged 60 years or older no matter the risk level, should receive four doses of the vaccine. Even those who have already completed four doses should receive a

dose of the bivalent vaccine six months after the last dose, if none of the doses were of the bivalent vaccine.

Pregnant women who have completed 16 weeks of gestation may receive, according to their age, an additional dose of the bivalent mRNA vaccine six months after administration of the last dose.

The SSM said that high-risk groups are more likely to develop serious illnesses and complications after infection with the new coronavirus, including the elderly, pregnant women, people with chronic illnesses, and frontline health professionals, among others.

The SSM also said that even those who have already contracted the virus should follow these recommendations and receive doses of the vaccination three months after their last positive nucleic acid or rapid antigen test.

CRIME

EIGHT GAMBLERS BANNED FROM MACAU AFTER CASINO FIGHT

ANTHONY LAM

EIGHT mainland gamblers have been banned from entering Macau following a gang-fight in a mass-market casino area in Cotai, the local head of security confirmed over the weekend.

On the sidelines of a Labor Day event, Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak recapped the Judiciary Police's (PJ) earlier explanation that authorities were “handling the matter in accordance with the law.”

However, as of yesterday, the charges against the violators had not been announced.

Nonetheless, the head of security underlined that the incident “severely impacts Macau's image.”

First, images and videos depicting the incident were posted to social media by witnesses. The visual materials went viral, which Wong described as “having long-lasting impacts.”

Accordingly, Wong has recommended the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) bar these people from entering casinos and ordered the Public Security Police Force (PSP) to ban the perpetrators from Macau.

The visual materials depicted two groups of people fighting in a casino. Witnesses gathered to watch the fight. It is believed the fight concerned a gambler who was mocked for losing in consecutive Baccarat games, which led other gamblers wagering against his moves.

Wong further explained that while the enforcement of safety in the casino is the immediate responsibility of security guards, this escalates to the PSP and the PJ. “Cooperation and coordination are essential,” the security chief highlighted.

The PSP logged 14 taxi violations from Apr. 29 to May 1. Among these, one concerned an instance of overcharging, one refusal to hire, one needless detour, one price negotiation, and the remaining ten were cases of disordered hire at a taxi stand.

Four other cases concerned service quality and were thus transferred to the Transport Bureau (DSAT).

The PSP also recorded three cases of unlicensed hires.



GAMING

CASINO SECTOR GAINS MOMENTUM, HITTING NEW HIGH IN APRIL

LYNZY VALLES

THE casino sector continues to gain traction in recovery in April, recording MOP14.7 billion in revenue in April, the highest monthly taking since January 2020.

The figure also represents a surge of 449.9% year-on-year, partly driven by the pent-up demand of Chinese tourists after the country's reopening. Last month's recovery represents a 15.6% increase compared to the prior month.

April 2022 was Macau's worst month in terms of gaming income since September 2020, when the region was reeling from its most significant coronavirus outbreak of the entire pandemic.

With the boost in recovery, casinos have raked in MOP49.36 billion in the first four months of the year, already surpassing the total gross gaming revenue in 2022. If such results continue, the sector will achieve the government's estimate of MOP130 billion for this year.

However, while the casinos' recovery has been boosted by a revival in domestic tourism, growth could flatten in the second half of the year.

This will be after China adds more international flights and



the pent-up travel demand will normalize, according to Credit Suisse analysts including Kenneth Fong.

Analysts at CBRE Equity Research meanwhile forecast that the growth will remain through May until the end of the year.

Given the holidays in both April and May, analysts John DeCree and Max Marsh pointed out that the city's casino sector has benefited, adding that May is starting off strong.

MOP10B IN GAMING TAX

The Macau government collected some MOP10.11 billion in gaming taxes in the first quarter of the year.

Data from the Financial Services Bureau shows that the quarter's earnings were an increase of 15.8% year-on-year.

The city's GGR in the first quarter stood at MOP34.64 billion, of which 40% goes to the government.



SECRETARY WONG: PROTEST NOT THE ONLY REPRESENTATION OF A FREE MACAU

ANTHONY LAM

EQUATING the existence of a May 1 protest to a free Macau is "illogical," Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak said on the sidelines of an event over the weekend.

He was questioned if the absence of a protest on May 1 would impact Macau's image as a free city.

He answered by referring to the "vitality" of the city, pointing out that the existence of political protests is irrelevant to evaluating the city's vitality. "Vitality in the economy, in the people and in mentality is a crucial element in society's constant development," Wong commented.

Last week, Radio Macau's Chinese Channel reported that the Public Security Police Force (PSP) had received a declaration that a protest would take place on May 1. However, the initiator later withdrew the declaration.

Wong disclosed that the declaration had been withdrawn prior to the first official meeting with the PSP. Procedurally, upon receiving a

declaration for protest, the PSP is to meet with the declarant to discuss arrangements such as the expected scale, among other elements.

In Macau, protests are declared and technically the authorities have no legal ability to prevent them.

"It is unquestionable that the right to protest is protected by the Basic Law," Wong underlined.

He added that residents have the right to organize marches or protests. "The government has no right to prevent residents from protesting," he said. "If you want to stage a protest, declare one. It is as simple as this."

When asked if the police are less busy this year because there was no protest, Wong questioned what the journalist was implying.

Wong emphasized that the police are often busy "because they are responsible for ensuring the orderly development and prosperity of society."

He added that under the circumstances of social development, the police will ensure smooth progress of "legal" protests.

GAMING

MGM records MOP5b in revenue in Q1 as sector recovers

MGM China has outperformed the casino market as the industry recovers. The group recorded a revenue increase of 131.2% year-on-year to HKD4.8 billion for the first quarter, reaching 84% compared to the first quarter of 2019.

The group reported an adjusted EBITDA of HKD1.4 billion, a significant improvement from the HKD46 million reported in the same period last year, reaching 87% of first quarter results from 2019.

"We saw market share reach a historical high of 15.4% during that period, compared to 13.3% a year ago and 9.4% in the first quarter 2019," the

group said in a statement.

Under the gaming concession contract that became effective from January 1, 2023, the group may operate a total of 750 gaming tables, compared with 552 gaming tables previously, representing a 36% increase.

All the tables were licensed as of the end of the first quarter. The gaming operator will open them and increase productivity as demand returns and they complete further refurbishments on the gaming floors.

Kenneth Feng, president, Strategic & Chief Financial Officer of MGM China said, "Our remarkable performance in Macau is a direct result of the

meticulous preparation and well-executed plan put together by our team who ensured that we were ready to capture market share and drive results upon market reopening."

"We think that the market will continue to recover as more and more gaming customers and leisure travelers make their first post-pandemic trip to Macau. Another source of recovery is the concerted efforts by concessionaires to attract overseas players," he added.

Macau's casino sector has gained traction last month, hitting the highest revenue since January 2020, with MOP14.7 billion. LV

TRANSPORT

GOV'T TO ANNOUNCE PROCEDURES FOR DRIVING LICENSE MUTUAL RECOGNITION

APPPLICATION procedures for driving license mutual recognition with mainland China will be available prior to the official commencement date - May 16 - director Lam Hin San of the Transport Bureau (DSAT) has recently announced.

To get a driving license recognized by the authorities in mainland China, a Macau driver may need to provide health certificates and a certified Macau license, among other documents. The age threshold and ceiling will follow mainland regulations.

Lam emphasized that the measure is about convenience; therefore, the application procedures will also be convenient. He disclosed that all locality- or higher-level public security authorities will be authorized to handle such applications. How-

ever, he said he would not rule out the existence of daily caps on applications.

When mainland authorities announce their requirements, the DSAT will consider if a press conference is necessary for the announcement in Macau.

Speaking about the Macau vehicles travelling to the mainland scheme, Lam said that for now there will be no change to the daily quota of 2,000 cars per day. The results of the scheme during the May 1 holidays will be used to evaluate future protocols for the scheme in relation to applications for time slots.

As a similar scheme will be enacted in Hong Kong in July, Lam expects further pressure will be levied on the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge. AL

AUTOMAKERS

Chinese electric vehicle brands expand to global markets

JOE MCDONALD & YURI KAGEYAMA, YOKOHAMA

OSAMU Furukawa has driven lots of Japanese cars for his business converting classic gasoline-powered models to electric. But his favorite ride is an import: A battery-powered SUV from China's BYD Auto.

BYD Auto is part of a wave of Chinese electric car exporters that are starting to compete with Western and Japanese brands in their home markets. They bring fast-developing technology and low prices that Tesla Inc.'s chief financial officer says "are scary."

Furukawa said he ordered an ATTO 3 when it went on sale Jan. 31, for its user-friendly features and appealing price of 4.4 million yen (\$33,000) — or about one-quarter less than a Tesla.

"It's perfect," Furukawa said in his office in Yokohama, southwest of Tokyo.

Other ambitious Chinese EV exporters include NIO, Geely Group's Zeekr and Ora, a unit of SUV maker Great Wall Motors.

Some compete on price. Others emphasize performance and features, putting pressure on Western and Japanese premium brands.

NIO Inc., which has persuaded buyers in China to pay Tesla-level sticker prices of up to 555,000 yuan (\$80,000), says its latest SUV goes on sale this year in Europe. The ES6 boasts voice-activated controls and a range of 610 kilometers (380 miles) on a charge.

"We are very confident the ES6 will compete in this premium SUV market," NIO's founder and CEO, William Li, said in an interview at the Shanghai auto show.

Sales of battery-powered vehicles and gasoline-electric hybrids in China almost doubled last year to 6.9 million vehicles, or half the global total.

That was supported by multibillion-dollar subsidies from the ruling Communist Party, which is trying to make China a creator of clean energy and other technologies. That rattles U.S. and European leaders who see China as a strategic and industrial



Osamu Furukawa stands next to his new BYD ATTO 3 electric car, that's parked besides a Volkswagen converted into an EV, in Yokohama, yesterday

competitor.

Chinese brands are "serious competition," according to David Leah, an analyst for GlobalData.

They have "more competitive battery technology" and can "achieve greater economies of scale," Leah said in an email.

BYD Auto, owned by battery maker BYD Co., edged ahead of Tesla in total 2022 sales at 1.9 million vehicles. Half were gasoline-electric hybrids, while Tesla's fleet is pure electric.

"We have a lot of respect for the car companies in China," Tesla CEO Elon Musk said in a Jan. 25 conference call with financial analysts. "They work the hardest and they work the smartest."

Chinese brands are developing EVs to compete without subsidies as Beijing shifts the burden to the industry by requiring them to earn credits for selling electrics. Prices start as low as 100,000 yuan (\$14,500) for a compact SUV with a 400-kilometer (250-mile) range on one charge.

"The Chinese are scary," Tesla CFO Zachary Kirkhorn said on the analyst call.

Chinese EV brands mix research and design centers in the United States and Europe with factories in China.

Geely's Zeekr plans to launch an all-electric sedan and an SUV this year in the Netherlands and Sweden. Its mini-United Nations of Chinese and European designers is in Gothenberg, Sweden, adjacent to Volvo Cars, another Geely brand, while

its factories are in China.

"Our ambition is to be a key player in electrified mobility in Europe within this decade," said Zeekr CEO Spiros Fotinos, a Toyota and Lexus veteran. With a "clear global ambition," he said, "we're looking at the opportunities and right timing for other markets."

CEO Carlos Tavares of Stellantis, the parent company of Chrysler, Peugeot and FIAT, warned in January that Europe needs a strategy to compete with China's lower prices. European-made electrics cost 40% more than Chinese models, according to Tavares.

"It's a very bleak scenario," Tavares told German magazine *Automobilwoche*. "But it doesn't have to go that way."

BYD Auto's exports quadrupled last year to 55,916 sedans, SUVs and hatchbacks. Most went to India, Thailand, Brazil and other developing markets. BYD announced a 1,000-vehicle sale last year to Mexico's VEMO for the biggest EV taxi fleet outside China.

State-owned BAIC, headquartered in Beijing, said a dealer in Jordan ordered 1,000 units of its compact EU5 sedan in January. The company said it plans to launch two to three more electric vehicles in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Europe.

What about the United States, the biggest, richest market?

Chinese EV brands are skittish about a sprawling

country that demands big investments in dealerships and charging networks, especially while Washington and Beijing are feuding over security, technology and human rights.

"This is not an easy task,"

said NIO's Li. "Our products and services need to be prepared."

BYD Auto has been in the U.S. market for a decade selling battery-powered transit buses assembled at a factory northeast of Los Angeles. It is "still in the process" of deciding whether to sell SUVs and sedans to Americans, the company said in a written response to questions.

Political tensions "make it difficult for a Chinese company to launch, EV or otherwise," in the United States, Leah said.

In Europe, Great Wall's Ora sells its 03 model starting at 140,000 yuan (\$20,000). Ora tries to stand out among dozens of fledgling brands by marketing its cars as being designed for women, their body sizes and daily needs.

"This is a second or third car for a household. It can be used by a wife or daughter

to commute to work, to go out with friends or to go shopping," said Ora's deputy general manager, Tan Jian.

In Europe, BYD Auto has partnerships with dealership chains in Britain, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. The company says it also has delivered cars in Belgium, Denmark and Austria. It has a deal with European rental company SIXT that BYD says will lead to sales of up to 100,000 vehicles over the next six years.

In Japan, BYD Auto plans to have 100 showrooms by the end of 2025. Its Dolphin hatchback and Seal sedan are due to hit the Japanese market this year. The company says it also has exported some 4,000 ATTO 3s to Australia.

Furukawa's OZ Co. converts Volkswagen Beetles and other classic models by replacing gasoline engines with batteries and electric motors. Furukawa said he drives his ATTO 3 every day and has gone as far as Osaka, 400 kilometers (250 miles) away.

BYD Auto's Yokohama showroom, which opened Feb. 2, is surrounded by dealerships for established brands including Toyota, Nissan, BMW, Volkswagen and Chevrolet. **MDT/AP**

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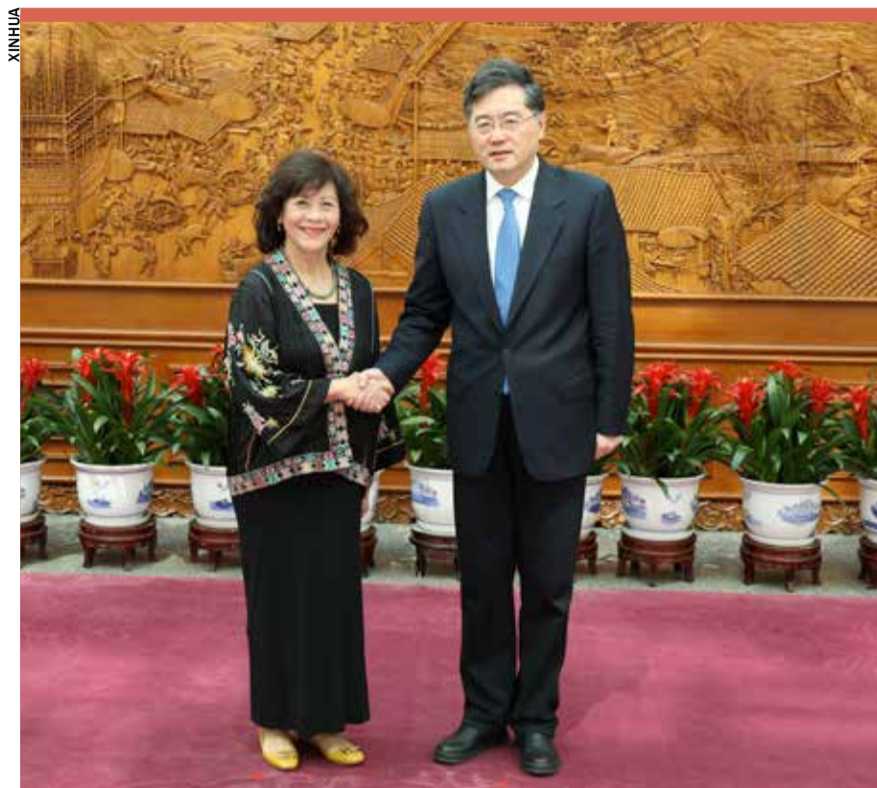
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Foreign Minister Qin Gang meets with Noeleen Heyzer, special envoy of the secretary-general of the United Nations for Myanmar, in Beijing

drug trade.

During his visit, Foreign Minister Qin Gang said local Communist Party and government departments, the People's Liberation Army, police and civilian bodies should join in "strengthening the border defense system."

Qin called for improvements in "maintaining distinct and stable borders, and severely cracking down on cross-border criminal activities."

"It is necessary to coordinate border management, border trade development, and bilateral relations," he was quoted as saying in a ministry news release.

Fighting between Myanmar's military and ethnic armed groups has also occasionally flared along the border, sending refugees and sometimes mortar fire into China.

China has sought to maintain contacts with all sides, although it has been criticized for expressing unequivocal support for the junta after it said it would back Myanmar "no matter how the situation changes."

Myanmar has been wracked by violence since the army's overthrow of the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The takeover was met with massive public opposition, which security forces quashed with deadly force, in turn triggering widespread armed resistance.

Despite the security challenges, China has sought to encourage legal trade between the sides and recently reopened border crossings after closing them for more than 1,000 days as part of strict COVID-19 control measures.

During his visit to the Wandong-Ruili crossing point, Qin promoted the concept of a China-Myanmar economic corridor to aid business and other development on both sides, the Foreign Ministry said. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

TSAI HOPES TO DEEPEN US SECURITY EXCHANGES

TAIWAN'S head of government Tsai Ing-wen told visiting ex-U.S. national security adviser John Bolton this week that her country is willing to deepen cooperation with the U.S. and "other like-minded partners" to safeguard peace, as the self-governed island faces increasing military threats from China.

Tsai also expressed hopes to Bolton, a potential Republican presidential candidate in 2024, for more military and security exchanges and economic cooperation between the two sides, her office said in a statement.

Bolton began his weeklong visit to Taiwan last Wednesday and has called for deeper interaction between the two sides' national security teams. His visit reflects the importan-

ce of the democratic island as an issue in the U.S. presidential election amid heightened tensions between Washington and Beijing.

Later Monday, Tsai said at a separate event that China's military exercises have affected the stability and peace of the Indo-Pacific region.

"But we will stay calm and firmly safeguard peace across the Taiwan Strait," she said.

The U.S. remains Taiwan's closest military and political ally despite the lack of formal diplomatic ties between them. U.S. law requires Washington to treat all threats to the island as matters of "grave concern," though it remains ambiguous over whether American forces would be dispatched to help defend it. **MDT/AP**

DIPLOMACY

Qin makes rare visit to Myanmar border

CHINA'S foreign minister Qin Gang called for stability and a crackdown on cross-border criminal activity along the country's border with Myanmar, during an unusual visit to the volatile region yesterday.

The 2,129-kilometer border runs through densely forested mountains and has long been notorious for drug smuggling into China from

the "Golden Triangle" region where the borders of Laos, Myanmar and Thailand meet.

The United Nations says the production of opium in Myanmar has flourished since the military seized power in 2021, with the cultivation of poppies up by a third in the past year as eradication efforts have dropped off and the faltering economy has led more people toward the

PANDEMIC

Chinese who reported on Covid possibly released after three years

CHINESE authorities were, apparently preparing on Labor Day to release a man who disappeared three years ago after publicizing videos of overcrowded hospitals and bodies during the COVID-19 outbreak, a relative and another person familiar with his case said.

Fang Bin and other members of the public who were dubbed citizen journalists posted details of the pandemic in early 2020 on the internet and social media, embarrassing Chinese officials who faced criticism for failing to control the outbreak.

The last video Fang, a



Visitors gather near a portrait of Sun Yat-sen, who is widely regarded as the founding father of modern China, at Tiananmen Square during the May Day holiday

seller of traditional Chinese clothing, posted on Twitter was of a piece of paper reading, "All citizens resist, hand power back to the people."

Fang's case is part of Beijing's crackdown on criticism of China's early handling of the pandemic, as the ruling Communist Party seeks to control the narrati-

ve of the country.

He was scheduled to be released over the long weekend, according to two people who did not want to be identified for fear of retribution. One of them said Fang was sentenced to three years in prison for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," a vague charge traditionally used against political dissidents.

The Associated Press could not independently confirm his release and could not confirm the details with the authorities.

Two offices of Wuhan's public security bureau did not provide a phone num-



ber of their information office or answer any questions. Phone calls to a court that reportedly sentenced Fang rang unanswered on Sunday afternoon.

A woman from another court that had reportedly handled Fang's appeal said she was not authorized to answer questions.

In early 2020, the initial COVID outbreak devastated the city of Wuhan, home to 11 million residents, in central China's Hubei province. Under a 76-day lockdown, its streets were deserted for months, apart from ambulances and security personnel.

At that time, a small number of citizen-reporters tried to tell their stories and those of others with smart phones and social media accounts, defying the Communist Party's monopoly on information.

Although their move-

ment was small, the scale was unprecedented in any previous major disease outbreak or disaster in China.

But the information they posed soon got them into trouble. Fang and another citizen journalist, Chen Qiushi, disappeared in February.

Chen in September 2021 resurfaced on his friend's live video feed on YouTube, saying he had suffered from depression. But he did not provide details about his disappearance.

Another citizen journalist, Zhang Zhan, who also had reported on the early stage of the outbreak, was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of picking fights and provoking trouble in December 2020. About eight months later, her lawyer said she was in ill health after staging a long-running hunger strike. **MDT/AP**

US-PHILIPPINES

Two nations 'ironclad' partners amid China tension: Biden

AAMER MADHANI & JIM GOMEZ, WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT Joe Biden reiterated U.S. commitment to the Philippines' security and noted the "deep friendship" of the two nations as he hosted Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for White House talks yesterday [Macau time] as concerns grow about the Chinese navy's harassment of Philippine vessels in the South China Sea.

Marcos' visit to Washington comes after the U.S. and the Philippines last week completed their largest war drills ever and as the two countries' air forces will hold their first joint fighter jet training in the Philippines since 1990. The Philippines this year agreed to give the U.S. access to four more bases on the islands as the U.S. looks to deter China's increasingly aggressive actions toward Taiwan and in the disputed South China Sea.

Meanwhile, China has angered the Philippines by repeatedly harassing its navy and coast guard patrols and chasing away fishermen in waters that are close to Philippine shores but that Beijing claims as its own.

But as Biden sat down with Marcos, the U.S. president went out of his way to note the progress in the U.S.-Philippine relationship—one that has had ups and downs over the years and was in a difficult place when Marcos took office less than a year ago.

"We are facing new challenges and I couldn't think of a better partner to have than you," Biden told Marcos at the start of their Oval Office meeting. "The United States also remains ironclad in our commitment to the defense of the Philippines, including in the South China Sea, and we will continue to support the Philippines military modernization."



Shake on it: Joe Biden (right) and Ferdinand Marcos Jr. at the White House in Washington

Marcos said the relationship was essential as Philippines and the Pacific finds itself in "possibly the most complicated geopolitical situation in the world right now."

The Oval Office meeting is the latest high-level diplomacy with Pacific leaders by Biden as his administration contends with increased military and economic assertiveness by China and worries about North Korea's nuclear program. Marcos' official visit to Washington is the first by a Philippine president in more than 10 years.

The U.S. president last week hosted South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol for a state visit during which the two leaders introduced new steps aimed at deterring North Korea from launching an attack on its neighbors. Biden is scheduled to travel to Japan and Australia in May.

Following the meeting, the White House announced the transfer of three C-130 aircraft and two coastal patrol vessels to the Philippines. The two countries also said they adopted defense guidelines aimed at deepening cooperation and interoperability between the two nations' militaries across land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace.

The administration also said it is launching a new trade mission focused on increasing American investment in the Philippines' innovation economy, new educational programming and more.

Increased Chinese pressure on vessels in the South China Sea has added another dimension to the visit. On April 23, journalists from The Associated Press and other outlets were aboard the Philippine coast guard's BRP Malapascua near Second Thomas Shoal when a Chinese coast guard ship blocked the Philippine patrol vessel steaming into the disputed shoal. The Philippines has filed more than 200 diplomatic protests against China since last year, at least 77 since Marcos took office in June.

U.S. and Taiwanese officials have also been unnerved by recent critical comments by China's ambassador to the Philippines, Huang Xilian, over the Philippines granting the U.S. military increased access to bases.

Huang at an April forum reportedly said the Philippines should oppose Taiwan's independence "if you care genuinely about the 150,000 OFWs" in Taiwan, using the acronym for overseas Filipino workers.

China claims the self-ruled island as its own. The Philippines, like the U.S., has a "One China" policy that recognizes Beijing as the government of China but allows informal relations with Taiwan. Marcos has not explicitly said that his country would assist the United States in any armed contingency in Taiwan.

The officials described

Huang's comments as one of many recent provocative actions by the Chinese to put pressure on the Philippines.

One official said that Marcos still desires to work closely with both Washington and Beijing but that he "finds himself in a situation" in which "the steps that China is taking are deeply concerning."

Close U.S.-Philippines relations were not a given when Marcos took office. The son and namesake of the late Philippines strongman had seemed intent on following the path of his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, who pursued closer ties with China.

Marcos noted that he last visited the White House when his father was in power.

Biden and Marcos met in September during the U.N. General Assembly, where the U.S. president acknowledged the two countries' sometimes "rocky" past.

During their private meeting at the UN, Biden, a Democrat, stressed to Marcos his desire to improve relations and asked Marcos how the administration could "fulfill your dreams and hopes" to do that, a senior administration official told the Associated Press.

Marcos is also slated to visit the Pentagon, meet Cabinet members and business leaders and make remarks at a Washington think tank during his visit. MDT/AP

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

Bubble Up the Exclusive GourMay

FRENCH GourMay is back with the best kind of French bubbles! Looking for the best way to celebrate the annual food and wine festival in style? Aux Beaux Arts in MGM MACAU, a chic brasserie-style French restaurant reviving an elegant and intimate atmosphere reminiscent of 1930s, is hosting a series of tasting events in May featuring a wide array of French sparkling wines, perfect for enthusiasts of fine glasses of fizz.



Make the most of your weekend with The Bubble Up Topsy Party on May 20. With over 20 different handpicked French sparkling wine labels to try, you will explore the unique character of each from various perspectives with a sommelier-guided tasting, and enjoy delectable canapés perfectly paired with French bubbles. Take advantage of the early bird discount before May 12 to secure your seats.

For a more indulgent experience, Aux Beaux Arts has specially curated the Bubble Up Pairing Menu, available only in May. Each exquisite French specialty is complemented with a different sparkling wine, creating a perfect harmony. The menu includes Amberjack Carpaccio, French Blue Mussels, and Sous Vide Wagyu Beef Cheek, all are elevated by the meticulous pairing with top-notch French bubbles or champagne.



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For reservations and inquiries, please call (853) 8802 2319.



MAY DAY

World's workers rally, France sees pension anger

PEOPLE squeezed by inflation and demanding economic justice took to streets across Asia, Europe and the Americas Monday to mark May Day, in an outpouring of worker discontent not seen since before the worldwide COVID-19 lockdowns.

French police charged at radical protesters and troublemakers smashing bank and shop windows and setting fires as unions pushed the president to scrap a higher retirement age. South Koreans pleaded for higher wages as did others around Latin America. Spanish lawyers demanded the right to take days off. Migrant domestic workers in Lebanon marched in a country plunged into economic crisis.

While May Day is marked worldwide as a celebration of labor rights, this year's rallies tapped into broader frustrations. Climate activists spray-painted a museum in Paris, and protesters in Germany demonstrated against violence targeting women and LGBTQ+ people.

Celebrations were forced indoors in Pakistan, tinged with political tensions as in Turkey, as both countries face high-stakes elections. Russia's war in Ukraine overshadowed scaled-back events in Moscow, where Communist-led May Day celebrations were once massive affairs.

Across the globe, this year's May Day events unleashed pent-up frustration after three years of COVID-19 restrictions.

Across France, some 800,000 people marched, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said. They mobilized against President Emmanuel Macron's recent move to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64. Organizers see pension reform as a threat to hard-fought worker rights, while Macron argues it's economically necessary as the population ages.

While marchers were largely peaceful, violence by radicals, an ever-present reality at French marches, marred the message, notably in Paris. A Paris police officer was seriously injured by a Molotov cocktail, among 108 officers injured around France, Darmanin said. It wasn't



known how many protesters were potentially injured. Clashes also marked protests in Lyon and Nantes.

"Violence is increasingly strong in a society that is radicalizing," the interior minister said on BFM-TV news station, blaming the ultra-left. He said some 2,000 radicals were at the Paris march.

Tear gas hung over the end point of the Paris march, Place de la Nation, where a huge black cloud lofted high above the trees after radicals set two fuel cans afire outside a building renovation site, police said.

In Northern Macedonia's capital Skopje, thousands of trade union members protested a recent government decision granting ministers a 78% raise. The minimum monthly wage in one of Europe's poorest countries, is 320 euros (\$350), while the hike will put ministers' wages at around 2,300 euros (\$2,530). "We are here, not only (to mark) Labor Day, but also to warn that if there is no social justice, there will be no social peace either," said union leader Jakim Nedelkovski.

In Turkey, police prevented demonstrators from reaching Istanbul's main square, Taksim, and detained around a dozen of them, independent television station Sozcu reported.

The square has symbolic importance for Turkey's trade unions after unknown gunmen opened fire on a May Day celebration at Taksim in 1977, causing a stampede that killed dozens.

Sri Lanka's opposition political parties and trade unions held workers' day

rallies protesting austerity measures and economic reforms linked to a bailout agreement with the International Monetary Fund. Protesters demanded the government halt moves to privatize state-owned and semi-government businesses.

In South Korea, tens of thousands of people attended rallies in its biggest May Day gatherings since the pandemic began in early 2020.

"The price of everything has increased except for our wages. Increase our minimum wages!" an activist at a Seoul rally shouted at the podium.

In Tokyo, thousands of labor union members, opposition lawmakers and academics demanded wage increases to offset the impact of rising costs as they recover from damage from the pandemic. They criticized Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's plan to double the defense budget, saying the money should be spent on welfare, social security and improving people's daily lives.

In Indonesia, demonstrators demanded the government repeal a job creation law they argue would only benefit business.

In Taiwan, thousands of workers protested what they call the inadequacies of the self-ruled island's labor policies, putting pressure on the ruling party before the 2024 election.

Protests in Germany kicked off with a "Take Back the Night" rally organized by feminist and queer groups on the eve of May Day to protest against violence directed at women

and LGBTQ+ people.

More than 70 marches were held across Spain, and powerful unions warned of "social conflict" if low salaries compared to the EU average don't rise in line with inflation. The illustrious College of Lawyers of Madrid urged reforms of historic laws that require them to be on call 365 days of the year, regardless of the death of family members or medical emergencies.

Italy's far-right premier, Giorgia Meloni, made a point of working on Monday — as her Cabinet passed measures on Labor Day that it contends demonstrates concern for workers. But opposition lawmakers and union leaders said the measures do nothing to increase salaries or combat the widespread practice of hiring workers on temporary contracts.

In war-ravaged Ukraine, May Day is associated with Soviet-era celebrations when the country was ruled from Moscow — an era that many want forgotten.

"It is good that we don't celebrate this holiday like it was done during the Bolshevik times. It was something truly awful," said Anatolii Borsiuik, a 77-year-old in Kyiv.

In Venezuela, which has suffered rampant inflation for years, thousands of workers demonstrated to demand a minimum wage increase at a time when the majority cannot meet basic needs despite their last increase 14 months ago. "Decent wages and pensions now!" protesters chanted in the capital, Caracas.

In Bolivia, leftist President Luis Arce led a Labor Day march in La Paz with a major union and announced a 5% increase in the minimum wage. Arce said his government "is strong because the unions are strong."

In Brazil, the focus was not only on traditional labor unions but on parttime workers and those in the informal sector, with the government of new leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announcing a work group on proposals to regulate that sector after the president recently described those workers as "almost like slaves." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1951 KING GEORGE OPENS FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN



King George VI has inaugurated the Festival of Britain and opened the Royal Festival Hall on London's South Bank.

The festival has been organised to mark the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851. It is intended to demonstrate Britain's contribution to civilisation, past, present, and future, in the arts, in science and technology, and in industrial design.

After a special service attended by the King, Queen Elizabeth, Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret and other senior members of the royal family, King George declared the festival open in a broadcast from the steps of St Paul's Cathedral.

Cheering and flag-waving crowds lined the route taken by the King and Queen to St Paul's from Buckingham Palace.

At Temple Bar the procession stopped for a traditional ceremony in which the King was offered the Pearl Sword of the City.

The Lord Mayor of London, who enjoys precedence "of every subject" within the boundaries of the City of London, surrendered his sword, thus indicating the precedence of the Sovereign. The King then returned the sword and the Lord Mayor led the procession on to St Paul's.

A 41-gun salute was fired at the Tower of London and Hyde Park.

Later in the afternoon, the King and Queen attended a service of dedication led by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the Royal Festival Hall.

Designed by Sir Robert Matthew, Leslie Martin and Sir Hubert Bennett, it was built specially for the occasion on the south bank of the River Thames.

Battersea Park has been transformed into the Festival Gardens, laid out as a pleasure garden with a tree walk, fountains and a grotto.

Exhibitions of art and design are being held all over the country and 2,000 camp fires will be lit to-night across Britain.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

After the devastation and resulting austerity of the war years, the Festival of Britain aimed to raise the nation's spirits whilst promoting the very best in British art, design and industry. Some criticised the event as a waste of public money but the South Bank exhibitions attracted 8.5 million visitors in five months. The Millennium Dome built some 50 years later pulled in 6.5 million in the 12 months of its controversial existence.

Of the various buildings constructed on the South Bank site such as Skylon and the Dome of Discovery, only the Royal Festival Hall remains. But other arts venues have sprung up around it, namely the National Film Theatre (1952) and the Royal National Theatre (1963), Hayward modern art gallery (1968).

A year after the festival opened, King George died and was succeeded by his eldest daughter Elizabeth.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

<p>ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19</p> <p>Social get-together will bring you in contact with intelligent new friends. You may have to take a short trip to visit someone who hasn't been well.</p>	<p>TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20</p> <p>You can make changes that will enhance your appearance. Be diplomatic but stem. Real estate investments could be to your advantage.</p>
<p>GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21</p> <p>Empty promises will cause upset. Don't be too eager to spend what's left over; more unexpected expenses are evident. Don't expect anyone else to pay your bills for you.</p>	<p>CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22</p> <p>If you take on too much, you will find yourself in martyrdom. You may win favors if you present your ideas and include your family.</p>
<p>LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22</p> <p>Travel should be on your mind. Be careful not to reveal private information. You will get out of shape easily if you don't keep on top of things.</p>	<p>VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22</p> <p>Balance is required if you want stability. Cultural activities open your eyes to new ways of doing things. You may want to talk to your boss about your future goals.</p>
<p>LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22</p> <p>Make sure to arrange in advance to spend quality time together. Emotional situations could bring out your stubborn nature. Too much talk might lead to hassles.</p>	<p>SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21</p> <p>You may have problems with skin, bones, or teeth if you haven't been taking proper care of yourself. Use your head and do things to your liking.</p>
<p>SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21</p> <p>Your sensitive nature will allow others to read you well. You need to look into new philosophies. Much knowledge can be obtained through the experiences you have.</p>	<p>CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19</p> <p>Get involved in worthwhile endeavors and meet new friends. Delays are evident. Travel should be on your agenda. Look into ways that you can make extra cash.</p>
<p>AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18</p> <p>Listening can be more valuable than being a chatterbox. Travel could be in order. The danger of minor accidents will increase with the turmoil.</p>	<p>PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20</p> <p>You will have excellent ideas and you should be able to help your partner get ahead. Make arrangements to spend quality time together.</p>

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	16	27	cloudy
Changchun	14	25	fine
Chengdu	17	28	cloudy
Chongqing	20	29	fine
Fuzhou	18	31	cloudy
Guangzhou	22	30	cloudy
Guiyang	17	29	fine
Haikou	24	34	cloudy
Hangzhou	17	29	rain
Harbin	15	24	thunderstorms
Hefei	18	23	rain
Nanjing	20	25	rain
Shanghai	18	24	rain
Taipei	21	27	cloudy
Wuhan	19	29	rain
Hong Kong	26	28	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	4	13	rain
Frankfurt	6	18	overcast
Paris	11	21	fine
London	9	16	overcast
New York	8	13	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Fabled loser; 5- Rita Hayworth's Khan; 8- Hebrew month; 12- Up and ___!; 13- Place; 15- Taylor of "Mystic Pizza"; 16- Graceful horse; 17- Maker of Pong; 18- Aeons; 19- Sac in which bile is stored; 22- Like cool cats; 23- Use, consume; 24- Sharp to the taste; 26- Apex; 29- Human mind; 31- Have a title; 32- Licorice-like flavoring; 34- Campfire treat; 36- Adjutant; 38- Gives off; 40- Run smoothly; 41- Prepared to pray; 43- Best of a group; 45- Mama's boy; 46- Rubbed out; 48- Large soup dish; 50- Rorschach's "spill"; 51- Loud noise; 52- Primate with a short tail or no tail; 54- Bloodroot; 61- Boy or man; 63- Fluff, as bangs; 64- Places to sleep; 65- Eyeball; 66- Satisfied; 67- Vichyssoise ingredient; 68- Lock openers; 69- ___ diem; 70- Designer Schiaparelli;

DOWN 1- Dutch name of The Hague; 2- Gillette brand; 3- Sincere; 4- Symbol; 5- Kofi ___ Annan; 6- Be in front; 7- American football measure; 8- Guido's high note; 9- Tower for the guidance of mariners; 10- Peter Fonda title role; 11- Speech issue; 13- Brie base; 14- Eats to a plan; 20- Crimson Tide, for short; 21- Beams; 25- Dudley Do-Right's org.; 26- Pigs; 27- Lower abdomen; 28- Measured with a watch; 29- Minor, in law; 30- ___ the side of caution; 31- Cask wood; 33- Part of RSVP; 35- Ocean flier; 37- Airline to Tel Aviv; 39- Learned; 42- General ___ chicken; 44- The Emerald Isle; 47- Les ___-Unis; 49- Allow; 52- One way to run; 53- Leaf of a book; 55- Type of tide; 56- Movable barrier; 57- Manipulator; 58- Winder for holding flexible material; 59- Bad day for Caesar; 60- ___ silly question...; 62- Some MIT grads;

Monday's solution

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

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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AD

AP PHOTO



An exterior view of the San Jose de Gracia Catholic Church, built in 1760, in Las Trampas, New Mexico

HERITAGE

DUST TO DUST? NEW MEXICANS FIGHT TO SAVE OLD ADOBE CHURCHES

GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO,
CORDOVA (NEW MEXICO)

EVER since missionaries started building churches out of mud 400 years ago in what was the isolated frontier of the Spanish empire, tiny mountain communities like Cordova relied on their own resources to keep the faith going.

Thousands of miles from religious and lay seats of power, everything from priests to sculptors to paint pigments was hard to come by. Villagers instituted lay church caretakers called “mayordomos,” and filled chapels with elaborate altarpieces made of local wood.

Today, threatened by depopulation, dwindling congregations and fading traditions, some of their descendants are fighting to save these historic adobe structures from literally crumbling back to the earth they were built with.

“Our ancestors put blood and sweat in this place for us to have Jesus present,” said Angelo Sandoval on a spring day inside the 1830s church of St. Anthony, where he serves as mayordomo. “We’re not just a church, we’re not just a religion – we have roots.”

These churches anchor a uniquely New Mexican way of life for their communities, many of which no longer have schools or stores, and struggle with chronic poverty and addiction. But it’s becoming increasingly difficult to find the necessary resources to preserve the estimated 500 Catho-

lic mission churches, especially since most are used for only a few services each year.

“When the faithful generation is gone, are they going to be a museum or serve their purpose?” said the Rev. Rob Yaksich, pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows in Las Vegas, New Mexico, which oversees 23 rural churches. “This old, deep-rooted Spanish Catholicism is experiencing serious disruption.”

In the hamlet of Ledoux, Fidel Trujillo is mayordomo of the pink-stuccoed San José church, which he keeps spotless even though few Masses are celebrated here regularly.

“Our ‘antepasados’ (ancestors) did a tremendous job in handing over the faith, and it’s our job now,” Trujillo said in the characteristic mix of Spanish and English that most speak in this region. “I much prefer coming to these ‘capillas’ (chapels). It’s a compass that guides where your heart really belongs.”

Each mission church is devoted to a particular saint. When New Mexico’s largest wildfire last spring charred forests less than 100 yards from San José church, and Trujillo was displaced for a month, he took the statue of St. Joseph with him.

“Four hundred years ago, life was very difficult in this part of the world,” explained Felix López, a master “santero” – the artists who sculpt, paint and conserve saint figures in New Mexico’s unique devotional style. “People needed these ‘santos.’ They were a source

of comfort and refuge.”

In intervening centuries, most were stolen, sold or damaged, according to Bernadette Lucero, director, curator and archivist for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

But how much these expressive sculptures and paintings still matter to local communities is evident where they survive in original form, as they do at the mission churches in Cordova, Truchas and Las Trampas on the road from Santa Fe to Taos.

“Saints are the spiritual go-to, they can be highly powerful,” said Victor Goler, a master santero who just completed conserving the altarpieces, or “reredos,” in Las Trampas’ mid-18th century church. “It’s important for the community to have a connection.”

On a recent Sunday at Truchas’ 1760s Holy Rosary church, López pointed out the rich decorative details that centuries of smoke and grime had hidden until he meticulously removed them with the absorbent inside of sourdough bread.

“I’m a devout Catholic, and I do this as meditation, as a form of prayer,” said López, who’s been a santero for five decades and whose family hails from this village perched on a ridge at 7,000 feet (2,100 meters).

Down the valley in Cordova, santero Jerry Sandoval also says a prayer to each saint before starting to sculpt their image. He then paints them with natural pigments and varnishes them with the

sap of piñon, the stocky pine tree that dots the countryside.

He also helped conserve the centuries-old reredos at the local church, where many children come back for traditional Christmas and Easter prayers – giving hope that younger generations will learn to be attached to their church.

“They see all this,” Jerry Sandoval said in front of the richly decorated altarpieces from St. Anthony church. “Lots of people call it tradition, but we call it faith.”

For the Rev. Sebastian Lee, who as administrator of the popular Santuario de Chimayó complex a few miles away also oversees these mission churches, fostering local attachment is a daunting challenge as congregations shrink even faster since the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I want missions to be whe-

re people can taste culture and religiosity. They’re very healing, you’re soaked with people’s faith,” Lee said. “I wonder how to help them, because sooner or later one mission is not going to have enough people.”

The archdiocese’s Catholic Foundation provides small grants, and several organizations have been founded to help conservation efforts.

Frank Graziano hopes his non-profit Nuevo Mexico Profundo, which supported the Cordova conservation, can obtain the necessary permit from the archdiocese to restore the 1840s church of San Geronimo. Deep cracks break apart its adobe walls and bug nests buzz in a gaping hole by one of the windows.

The surrounding village is almost entirely depopulated, making it unlikely that the community will step in for the necessary upkeep. Exposed to rain and snow, adobe needs a fresh replastering of dirt, sand and straw every couple of years lest it dissolve.

That makes local buy-in and some kind of ongoing activity, even just funerals, fundamental to long-term preservation, said Jake Barrow, program director at Cornerstones, which has worked on more than 300 churches and other structures.

But with fewer priests and fewer faithful, taking some rural missions off the church’s roster might be inevitable, said the Rev. Andy Pavlak, who serves on the archdiocese’s commission for the preservation of historic churches.

“We have two choices: Either return to the community, or back to the earth they came from. We can’t save them all,” said Pavlak, who for nearly a decade ministered to 10 historic churches in Socorro County.

Running his hand over the smooth adobe walls he restored at the 1880s Santo Niño de Atocha chapel in Monte Aplanado, a hamlet nestled in a high mountain valley, Leo Paul Pacheco argued that the answer might hinge on the faith of future generations of lay people like him.

“They still have access to the same dirt,” Pacheco said as the adobe walls’ sand particles and straw sparkled in the sun. “They will provide.” **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Angelo Sandoval, mayordomo or lay church caretaker, accompanied by his uncle, santero Jerry Sandoval, speaks while sitting inside St. Anthony's Catholic church, in Cordova, New Mexico

BOXING

Canelo Álvarez returning home to Guadalajara to fight Ryder

CARLOS RODRIGUEZ,
MEXICO CITY

FIGHTING in his native Guadalajara for the first time in 12 years has presented some different challenges for Saúl Álvarez, like finding out just how many tickets he needs to accommodate family and friends.

"Canelo" Álvarez is one of the best boxers in the world and he will return home on Saturday to face British rival John Ryder at the Akron Stadium in the western Mexican city. He hasn't fought in Guadalajara since June 2011, when he defeated British fighter Ryan Rhodes.

Back then, Álvarez's career was on the rise. In March of that year, he won his first world title, the World Boxing Council welterweight belt.

Now he comes home as a more mature boxer who has already won world titles in four different weights classes and was the uni-



Saul "Canelo" Alvarez jumps rope during a training session at a gym in Guadalajara, last month

fied champion at three of those.

That's why it shouldn't be surprising that the bout at the Akron Stadium sold out in a matter of hours, leaving "Canelo" with the prospect of both preparing himself for the fight and attending to his family's ticket requests.

"It's crazy. It's a difficult part, let me tell you, because everyone

wants to go. They're all from here (Guadalajara)," the 32-year-old Álvarez said in an interview with The Associated Press. "It's complicated, but you try to do everything you can and have as many as you can."

Álvarez has three brothers, all of them were fighters, and a sister. In addition to the ticket re-

quests, Álvarez has had to adjust to Guadalajara's altitude of 1,566 meters above sea level as opposed to San Diego, California, where he usually prepares for other fights at an altitude of only 19 meters.

"It has been different especially because of the altitude because we had to adapt to the routine in Guadalajara, but so far everything is going very well as always you have to try to do everything 100% despite the circumstances," Álvarez said.

One unknown ahead of Saturday's fight is how well Álvarez will respond to the surgery on his left wrist that he underwent after closing the trilogy against Gennady Golovkin last September.

"I feel very good, the preparation has been excellent, and I am now ready to train at 100%. That makes me more motivated to train hard in Guadalajara," Álvarez said.

Leading up to the fight, Álvarez has also had to deal with criticism because he chose to fight at home,

including a strong jibe from former world champion Juan Manuel Márquez, who considers Ryder a "regular fighter, from medium level to below."

The 35-year-old Ryder holds the interim World Boxing Organization super middleweight belt, which he won in November by beating Zach Parker.

After the Ryder fight, Álvarez will have a decision to make for his next fight, probably set for September. Many fans and commentators, including Márquez, want him to fight David Benavidez, but Álvarez will probably go for a rematch against Dmitry Bivol.

Although his career polarizes opinions in his country despite his achievements, Álvarez is revered by the majority in Guadalajara.

"The phenomenon of Canelo Álvarez is incredible. I had never seen anything like it, someone who has so many detractors when all he does is getting victory after victory," said Mauricio Sulaiman, the WBC president.

Álvarez was born in Guadalajara but grew up from the age of 5 in Juanacatlán, Jalisco, a rural town that is located about 40 kilometers from the stadium where the fight will take place. Inspired by his brothers, he began fighting at the age of 13 and made his professional debut at 15. **MDT/AP**

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**C&C RECEIVED THE 1ST SILVER
"DEIGNAN AWARD"
FOR RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IN MACAU (2023)**



OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**G7 CAN FACILITATE
 PEACE TALKS BY
 LIFTING SANCTIONS**

Some recent developments concerning the West's response to the Ukraine conflict indicate simmering and widening divisions inside what appears to be a unanimous Western stance over the crisis.

According to reports, the European Union and Japan have pushed back against a United States' proposal for G7 countries to ban all exports to Russia. The proposal aims to replace the current sector-by-sector sanctions regime against Russia with a complete export ban with just a few exemptions.

Washington apparently hopes the new proposal will be adopted by the G7 leaders in their upcoming summit in Hiroshima, Japan, [this] month, so as to effectively plug the loopholes in the current sanctions regime and tighten the economic shackles on Russia even tighter.

In another development, the US news website Politico reported on Monday that the Joe Biden administration is quietly preparing for the possibility of re-engaging with China with a view to soliciting Russian President Vladimir Putin to the negotiating table if Ukraine's spring counteroffensive falls short of expectations. The phone talk between the Chinese and Ukrainian leaders on Wednesday has raised hopes that the necessary conditions can be created for a cease-fire at an early date, and Washington giving its support would consolidate those hopes.

All this shows that after more than one year's all-out support to Ukraine and ever-increasing pressure on Russia, the US and its allies are facing uncertainties on the battlefield and feeling the backlash of their sanctions regime against Russia. Right now, Russia and Ukraine appear to have reached a deadlock in the fighting and allowing the crisis to evolve into a lasting one seems more and more unsustainable to all parties involved.

Sanctions have never worked in resolving regional conflicts. A crisis of the magnitude of the one in Ukraine will not be swayed by the US-led sanctions either. Not to mention that while failing to force Russia to yield, Western sanctions are doing more harm than good to the world economy and the global supply chains.

Western countries have imposed sanctions on Russia in the hope of choking its energy export channels and destroying its economy. But those sanctions have backfired, hurt US allies and triggered a worldwide energy crisis. The sanctions have also disrupted trade and aggravated inflation, leaving several economies teetering on the brink of recession.

More and more members of the world community, China included, have aired their proposals for a cease-fire and an end to the Ukraine conflict. After over one year's ceaseless efforts to intensify the hostilities through escalating sanctions and providing weapons and military assistance to Ukraine, Western countries should awaken to the fact that a political settlement is needed more than ever, not more sanctions.

The G7 leaders should view the Ukraine crisis from a long-term and global perspective rather than through an ideological lens tainted with bloc confrontation and a Cold War mentality. They should act in a responsible way at their upcoming G7 summit and call for peace rather than further fanning the flames of the conflict.

**CAMPAIGNERS CALL FOR FOSSIL FUEL
 DEADLINE, MORE CLIMATE AID**

**THE
 BUZZ**

Environmental campaigners urged climate envoys from dozens of nations gathering yesterday in Berlin to discuss a global deadline for phasing out fossil fuels and ways of increasing aid to poor countries hit by global warming.

About 40 countries, including the United States, China, India and Brazil, are attending the Petersberg Climate Dialogue being held in the German capital. The two-day meeting is a key negotiating step in the run-up to this year's international climate conference in Dubai, known as COP28.

Campaign groups are concerned that countries such as the U.S.,

COP28 host United Arab Emirates and the European Union back the idea of carbon capture as a means of allowing oil and gas extraction to continue or even expand. Scientists say technologies for removing planet-warming carbon dioxide from the atmosphere aren't proven at scale and could require huge investments at the expense of cheaper alternatives such as solar and wind power.

"They are trying their best to prolong the use of fossil fuels, especially by focusing on (...) carbon capture and storage, which is deeply worrying for us," said Harjeet Singh, head of global political strategy at Climate Action Network International.

AP PHOTO



Geoffrey Hinton (foreground)

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
 'GODFATHER' WARNS OF ITS
 'POTENTIAL DANGERS' AS HE
 QUILTS GOOGLE: REPORTS**

GEOFFREY Hinton, a pioneer in artificial intelligence (AI), has resigned from his job at Google, warning about the potential dangers of AI.

Hinton, who is widely considered the "godfather" of AI, stated in a New York Times article that he regrets his work and believes that chatbots have the potential to overtake human intelligence.

In an interview with the BBC, Hinton elaborated on his concerns about chatbots, stating that while they are not currently more intelligent than humans, they soon could be.

"Right now, what we're seeing is things like GPT-4 eclipse a person in the amount of general knowledge it has and it eclipses them by a long way.

In terms of reasoning, it's not as good, but it does already do simple reasoning. And given the rate of progress, we expect things to get better quite fast. So we need to worry about that."

Hinton also expressed concern about the potential misuse of AI by "bad actors." He gave the

example of a hypothetical scenario in which Russian President Vladimir Putin gives robots the ability to create their own sub-goals, which could lead to the creation of sub-goals like "I need to get more power".

Hinton stated that this scenario is a "kind of worst-case scenario, kind of a nightmare scenario".

Hinton stressed that he did not want to criticize Google and that the company had been "very responsible."

In a statement, Google's chief scientist Jeff Dean said, "We remain committed to a responsible approach to AI. We're continually learning to understand emerging risks while also innovating boldly."

Hinton's research on deep learning and neural networks has paved the way for current AI systems like ChatGPT, BBC reported.

However, the British-Canadian cognitive psychologist and computer scientist warned that the type of intelligence being developed by AI is very different from human in-

telligence. "We're biological systems and these are digital systems.

The big difference is that with digital systems, you have many copies of the same set of weights, the same model of the world. And all these copies can learn separately but share their knowledge instantly.

"It's as if you had 10,000 people and whenever one person learnt something, everybody automatically knew it. And that's how these chatbots can know so much more than any one person."

Hinton acknowledged that his age had played into his decision to retire, stating, "I'm 75, so it's time to retire." However, he also stated that he believes it is important for young people to take up the mantle and continue to develop AI in a responsible way.

Hinton's resignation from Google highlights the growing concerns about the potential dangers of AI. His warning about the possible misuse of AI by "bad actors" is a reminder that the development of AI must be done responsibly and with caution. **PC**

AP PHOTO



Europe's painful inflation inched higher last month, extending the squeeze on households and keeping pressure on the European Central Bank to unleash another large interest rate increase. Consumer prices in the 20 countries using the euro currency jumped 7% in April from a year earlier, just down from the annual rate of 6.9% in March, the European Union statistics agency Eurostat said yesterday.

AP PHOTO



UK Rabbi Nicky Liss (pictured) won't be watching King Charles III's coronation. He'll be doing something he considers more important: praying for the monarch on the Jewish sabbath. On Saturday, he will join rabbis across Britain in reading a prayer in English and Hebrew that gives thanks for the new king in the name of the "one God who created us all."

AP PHOTO



USA An interstate highway in Illinois reopened yesterday after a windstorm that kicked up clouds of blinding dust from farm fields and led to crashes that killed at least six people and injured dozens more, police said. More than 70 vehicles, including dozens of commercial vehicles and passenger cars, were involved in crashes late Monday morning along a 2-mile stretch of Interstate 55 in Montgomery County, 75 miles north of St. Louis.

AP PHOTO



USA Television and movie writers declared yesterday [Macau time] they will launch a strike for the first time in 15 years, as Hollywood girded for a walkout with potentially widespread ramifications in a fight over fair pay in the streaming era. The Writers Guild of America said that its 11,500 unionized screenwriters will head to the picket lines today.