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MACAU SHOULD IMPROVE PREVENTION, HANDLING OF SEX OFFENCES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CONCERNING MINORS: ISLANDS COMMUNITY AFFAIRS ADVISOR P4

NEW NON-LOCAL TALENTS REGIME TO START APPLICATIONS BY SEPTEMBER P3

PARDON FREES MORE THAN 2,100 MYANMAR POLITICAL PRISONERS P7



China At least nine people were killed in an explosion at a Chinese petrochemical plant and three others died in a helicopter crash during the country's May Day holiday. Rescuers recovered the bodies of the nine workers killed in the explosion Monday at the Zhonghua Group plant in an industrial zone in the city of Liaocheng, Shandong. One person remained missing and another was hospitalized with injuries, the zone's management committee said in a notice yesterday.



Taiwan A delegation of United States defense contractors and a former senior leader of the U.S. Marine Corps pledged the beginning of deeper cooperation with Taiwan yesterday. Speaking at a public forum in Taipei, retired Lt. Gen. Steven Rudder (pictured) said the U.S. wants to be part of the defense capabilities of Taiwan and improve the supply chain resilience of the island. He also emphasized how critical the island's position is for security.

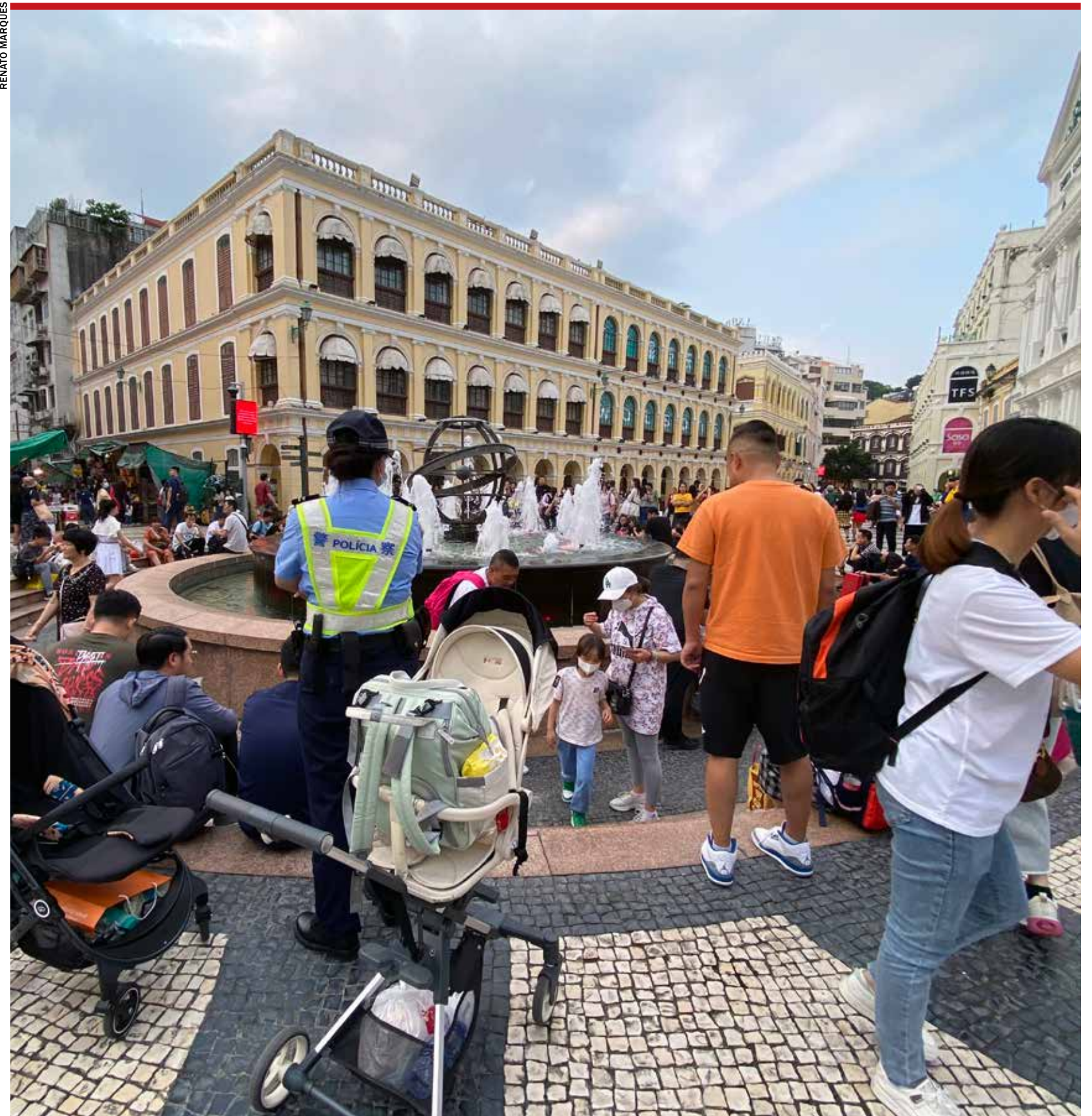


Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard seized a Panamanian-flagged oil tanker in the strategic Strait of Hormuz on Wednesday, the second-such capture by Tehran in under a week amid heightened tensions over its nuclear program. The taking of the oil tanker Niovi renewed concerns about Iran threatening maritime traffic in the strait, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all crude passes.

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NO MORE BRAWLS

Gov't calls for strengthened security following casino fight P4



TOURISM
GOLDEN MAY DAY SURPASSES EXPECTATIONS P2

CONTRACTOR PUNISHED FOR DELAY OF MACAU PRISON PROJECT

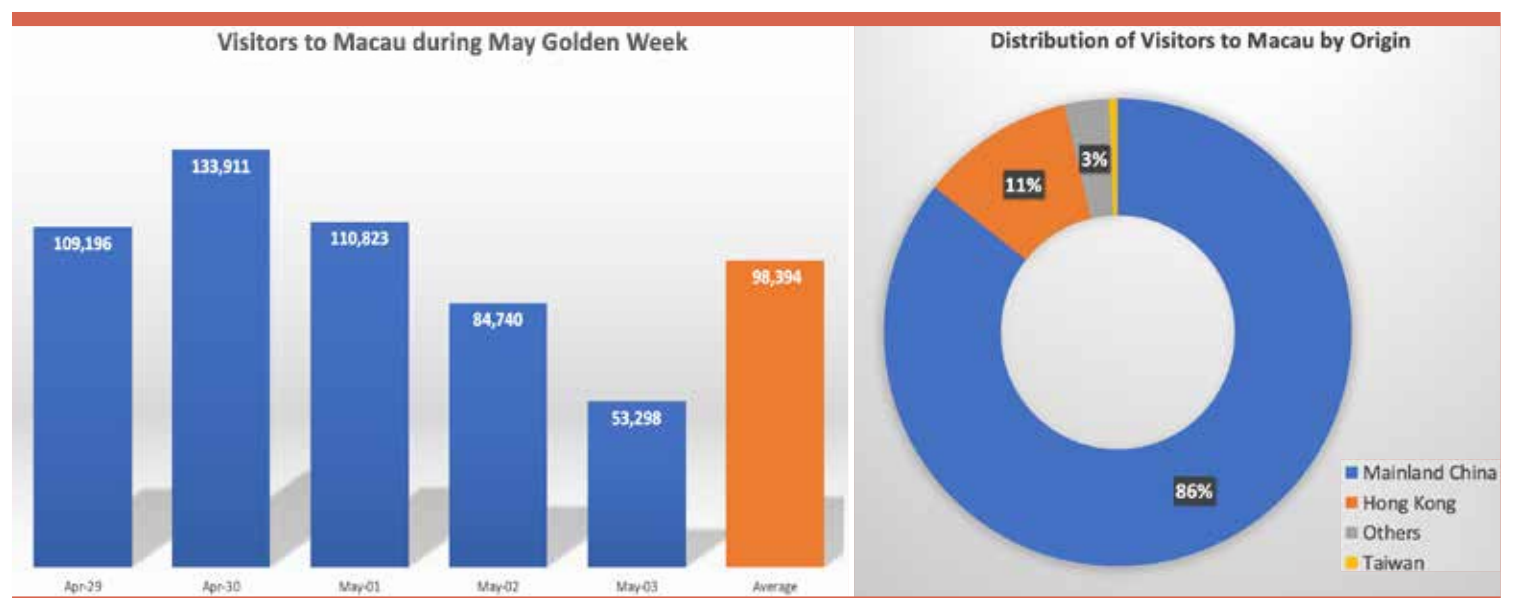
The Macau unit of Shanghai Construction Group, the contractor responsible for the phase-three project of the new prison near Ka Ho Village, is facing penalties after failing to deliver promised work on schedule, the Public Works Bureau has said. First expected to become operational by 2014, the prison project ran late because of Covid-19, among other factors, and the company was given until last month to finish phase-three but was unable to do so. "Relevant punishment will be carried out against the contractor," the authorities said in a government notice yesterday, without specifying the action that will be taken. Currently, the first and second phases of the compound were completed in 2016 and 2019 respectively, and the fourth one was begun in January. The complex is to be finished next year and will have a capacity of 2,700.

TAIPA LRT RECORDS HIGHEST DAILY PASSENGER COUNT

Since the beginning of this year and the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions for transport, the Taipa's Light Rapid Transit (LRT) has been seeing an increase in the number of passengers, reaching 3,550 in January, 4,750 in February and March, and 6,500 in April, which is the highest figure on record since the end of a free ride campaign in February 2020. The LRT has been strongly impacted by Covid-19 as it only saw between 1,100 and 2,600 in the past three years. Following this positive momentum, the operator of the LRT announced an increase in services from April 29 to May 7, with nine-minute-interval-runs between 2 p.m. and 8 p.m., instead of the current 10 to 15 minute schedule. The LRT network is expected to extend all the way to Barra later this year, and to Hengqin next year.

HK SETS UP ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF 15TH NATIONAL GAMES

Hong Kong announced the setting up of the Hong Kong organizing committee of China's 15th National Games, which will be jointly-hosted by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau in 2025. The HKSAR organizing committees for the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities (NGD) and the 9th National Special Olympic Games (NSOG) were also established. Chan Kwok-ki, chairman of the committee and chief secretary for administration of the HKSAR government the event will deepen the collaboration between Hong Kong and other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.



GOLDEN WEEK

MAY DAY HOLIDAY SURPASSES EXPECTATIONS

RENATO MARQUES

DURING the five days between April 29 and May 3 considered the "Labor Day Holidays" a total of 491,968 visitors entered Macau, a figure that surpassed the expectations of both the Macao Government Tourism Office (70,000 per day) and the Tourism Industry sector (90,000 per day).

Delivering a new single-day annual record (133,911 on April

30), the date marked the return of consistent crowds to Macau, namely on the first three days of the holiday (April 29 to May 1) which recorded an average of almost 118,000 visitors per day.

In the final figures and due to the lower visitation of the last two of the five days, the daily average stood at 98,394 visitors per day, which still surpasses all forecasts.

Most of these visitors arrived from mainland China (85.7%),

while those from the neighboring region of Hong Kong reached 10.8%.

The visitors from countries and regions of the world other than China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan accounted for 3.1% of all visitors arriving in Macau during the five days.

As on all previous occasions, the Border Gate continued to be the border post registering the largest activity in border crossings followed by the Qingmao Port.

The port from the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and the Macau Port Area at Hengqin Port followed, with both recording a similar capacity.

Although the number of tourist circulations across the city was still significant yesterday (May 3,) the Public Security Police Force had no need to enforce any crowd-control measures in the areas of added touristic interest such as the city historical center, contrary to what happened on the four previous days.

Statistics also show that from May 2 (Tuesday) there was an inversion in the direction of movement at the borders with the number of visitors leaving Macau becoming greater than those arriving.

HEALTH

HKU scholar suggests streamlined Macau healthcare services

ANTHONY LAM

IN the report for a research project commissioned by the Macau government, the former head of the medical faculty of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) has suggested streamlining Macau's healthcare services.

Gabriel Matthew Leung, former head of the HKU's Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine and incumbent Honorary Clinical Professor at the faculty's School of Public

Health, recently visited Macau and presented the findings in the Report on Public Clinical Services Plan Research at a regular meeting of the Medical Committee of Macau.

In light of medical needs arising from an aging population and various chronic diseases, Leung recommends local healthcare services be integrated from community to hospital levels, so as to improve efficiency.

Cooperation between

the future Cotai hospital and other local hospitals should also be promoted to fully utilize resources and facilities at each venue. Day care services should also be encouraged to provide appropriate and quality medical services to people in Macau.

On the respective role of each hospital, Leung's team recommends the Conde de São Januário Hospital focus on specialist medical services to achieve beneficial coordination within the pu-

blic healthcare system.

Another recommendation was that accident and emergency, as well as specialist medical, services should be provided at the future Cotai hospital.

Leung pinpointed oncology services as the key area that requires priority. Other noteworthy areas are cardiology, hematology, stroke and hemodialysis, among other areas.

On private medical services, the research team suggested the

current cooperation continue. The government should continue providing subsidies and purchasing out-source services from the private medical sector for patients with specific needs.

Commenting on the report, committee president and Health Bureau (SSM) director Alvis Lo said that it provides a direction for healthcare development in Macau in the next five to 10 years.

Questions related to workforce retention and recruitment were raised at the meeting.

The SSM pledged that the report will be made available on its website within the month after the completion of translations.

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New non-local talents regime to start applications by September

RENATO MARQUES

THE new legal regime to regulate the attribution of Macau residency to non-locals who apply based on their special qualities and skills lacking in Macau, is likely to start receiving applications as soon as September or October this year.

The news was disclosed yesterday by the president of the Third Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly (AL), Vong Hin Fai, after the last meeting of the Committee on this matter.

In the media briefing after the signing of the final opinion that will take the bill to a plenary session for final approval, Vong noted that according to the bill, the new regime enters into force by July 1 this year. Vong added that government officials have said that under the new regime, applications should kick off two or three months later, that is, between September and Oc-



tober this year.

This new regime aims to replace the former system of granting residency to people based on their qualifications and or investments in Macau, which was managed by the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) and which had some problematic aspects.

Some of the problems of the

system involved applicants waiting for several years until receiving a final reply from IPIM on the acceptance or dismissal of their applications, as well as the cases involving corruption and money laundering charges involving several IPIM members, including the former president, Jackson Chang.

He was sentenced to five

years imprisonment without probation for corruption, abuse of power and money laundering.

Currently, there are still many processes running in IPIM from the former regime, a fact that the government has acknowledged and has stated that these would not be mixed with the new regime. Several government officials have also hinted that they hope that applicants from the former regime can withdraw from it and apply within the new regime as soon as it becomes available.

The new regime is divided into three types of non-local qualified staff including high-quality qualified staff members, highly qualified staff members and advanced-level professionals.

The first group includes those with excellent skills in technical capacities who are internationally recognized for their contributions to a certain field.

The second group relates to those who possess significant professional experience as well as technical capabilities and whose areas of expertise match the needs for economic or social development of Macau, namely that are included in the key industries.

In the third group are those who possess professional experience as well as technical capabilities and who can help to increase limited local manpower in some specific fields.

Although the regime has always been considered a means of attracting professionals of worldwide recognized value, including Nobel prize winners and Olympian medalist athletes, the SCDT has previously disclosed that while the first group includes "business elites, patent-holding scientists, political elites and military elites," the second and third groups include professionals who are much more attainable, including specialist physicians, experienced barristers, pilots, electrical and mechanical engineers, land surveyors, and chemists as well as bus drivers, plumbers, decorators, crane operators, florists, bartenders [construction] and security guards.

Talents committee launches internships in the mainland for key industries

RENATO MARQUES

THE Talents Development Committee (SCDT) has launched an internship program directed at Macau youngsters to go to the mainland and experience work in key industries, the Committee has said in a press statement.

The program offers 15 non-remunerated internships to local residents currently enrolled in the third year or higher of a degree course, a master's course, or doctoral studies in Macau or aboard.

The SCDT said the internships plan is intended to promote the training of young talent in Macau's key industries which will then contribute to the promotion of the development of the "adequate diversification of the economy."

The plan is said to be co-organized by the Livelihood Affairs Bureau of the In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and will focus mostly on companies with operations within the



Greater Bay Area and Cooperation Zone.

Selected candidates will undertake a six-week internship in companies such as the Guangzhou Pharmaceutical Group and Shanghai Nio, and will cover areas such as medicine manufacturing, food engineering, scientific research management, simulation of the kinetic energy of intelligent vehicles, quality management of industrialized manufacturing, energy operation and customer

attraction, areas that are closely related to the "Big health" industry as well as high technology. Application procedures are open until May 22.

The complete program can be consulted at the SCDT website: www2.scdt.gov.mo/zh-hant/reward/teenager_plan1/regulation.

The committee noted that it is up to the host institution to decide on the professional orientation or training method of the can-

didates. Trainees who have completed the internship and fulfilled the obligations will be issued an internship certificate.

During the internship period, the Livelihood Affairs Bureau of the In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin will provide each intern with a subsidy to be mandatorily transferred to a bank account owned by the intern with a mainland bank, including, a living allowance of RMB3,000 per person and a housing allowance of RMB3,000 per person, which will be provided in installments (RMB1,000 per week).

The same entity will also provide personal accident insurance, while the Macau government will be in charge of transportation fares, fees and taxes as well as travel accident insurance for traveling between Macau and the internship location.

The remaining costs related to accommodation and food expenses are to be borne by the interns.

TRANSPORT ADVISOR: HK VEHICLES TO MAINLAND SHOULD NOT HIT MACAU HARD

ADDITIONAL vehicles from Hong Kong to mainland China under a new travel scheme should not heavily impact Macau's traffic, Government Transport Affairs advisor Wong Man Pan said.

The northbound travel scheme for Hong Kong vehicles will be enacted in July, months later than the counterpart scheme in Macau. Current announcements available state that all these vehicles must travel to mainland China through Zhuhai using the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

On concerns over the extra burden at the Macau Border Checkpoint, Wong told local media Macao Daily News he did not expect excessive pressure on Macau, as most of these vehicles would travel straight to Zhuhai.

Unless prior approval is obtained, vehicles on the northbound travel scheme will only be allowed to

enter mainland China but not Macau.

He did not believe the Zhuhai Border Checkpoint would become overcrowded with travelers and vehicles since the area is large, adding that the impression of congested traffic was caused by excess traffic on the Macau side.

In addition, during the early phase of the Hong Kong scheme, there will only be a daily quota of 300 vehicles. He expressed confidence that Zhuhai authorities would open more lanes to streamline traffic.

On the scheme in Macau, the traffic advisor suggests the government open same-day booking to fill the quota. He explained that on average days there are unused bookings in the daily quota of 2,000 vehicles. With same-day booking, these places will be utilized and thus not be wasted. **AL**

NON-RESIDENT WORKERS INCREASING

The number of non-resident workers have recovered in February and March, after reaching its lowest level since 2014 in January. According to data from the Public Security Police, the SAR had 154,658 non-resident workers by the end of March, an increase of 2,079 compared to the end of February, and a 2,780 increase compared to January. Since the onset of the pandemic, Macau has lost almost 44,700 non-residents, including at least 17,600 who were working in the hotel and restaurant industry. While the momentum seems to be better and better, the necessity of attracting more manpower, particularly qualified workers, remains the current challenge for hotels, restaurants and the SAR government.

SEA PASSENGERS RECOVER TO 60% OF 2019 VOLUME

The Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) has said passenger volumes for sea passenger routes have returned to 60% of 2019 levels. The sailing frequency will be increased to 80 per day starting this month. Tong Lok Peng, deputy director of DSAMA, said shipping service companies will adjust the waypoint and frequency depending on needs and manpower. According to Tong, there will be more than 10 closures of navigation in the coming six months. Also, the shipping company will arrange additional sailings at the Taipa Ferry Terminal to handle the flow of people.

COMMUNITY ADVISOR SUGGESTS MORE ACTION AGAINST SEX OFFENCES

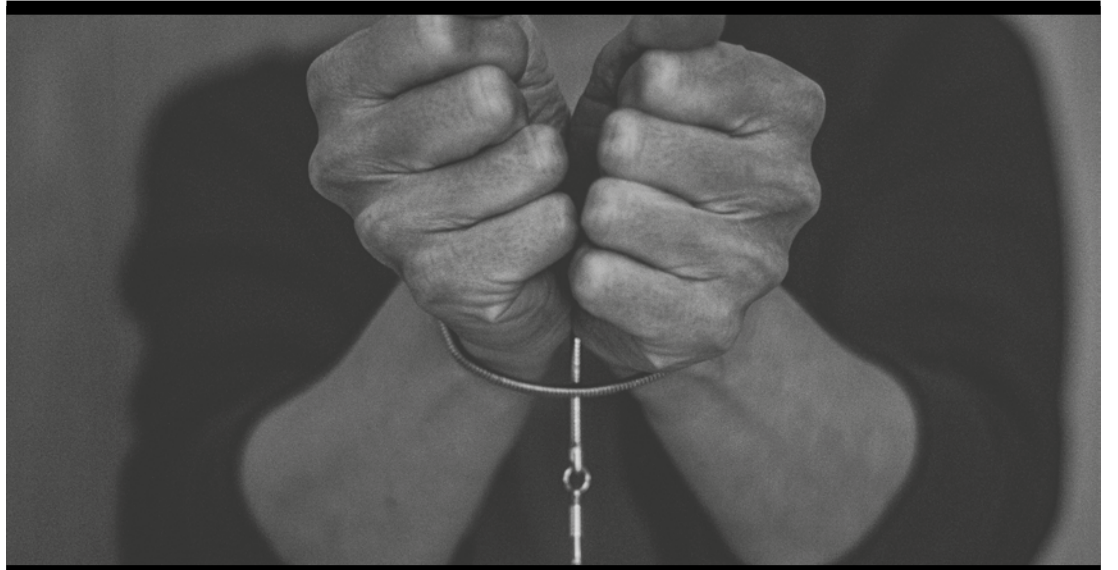
ANTHONY LAM

MACAU should improve prevention and handling of sex offences, especially those concerning minors, Flavio Sam, Islands Community Affairs advisor, said.

On April 21, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced a sex offence involving a father, 68, physically and sexually assaulting his daughter, aged six. The case was discovered by the girl's teacher at school.

According to the PJ, the teacher discovered bruises on the girl's legs, which the girl revealed were caused by her father's beating and slapping her at least 10 times. The girl further disclosed that since last year, when her mother was out at work, her father would ask her to lie down in his room and caress her through her clothes, as well as kiss her. The father reportedly would not stop even if the girl refused to do as he asked.

Against this backdrop, Sam



suggested that prevention and handling of sex offences in Macau requires improvement. He particularly mentioned the areas of pinpointing offenders and encouraging victims to report violations.

Sexual harassment, for example, is not restricted to physical touch, Sam told local media Macao Daily News. Certain verbal or non-verbal cues that contain intrusive

sexual implications will cause discomfort, anxiety or lack of respect in others. As all these could constitute sexual harassment, he thinks they are all worth highlighting.

Meanwhile, he thinks more can be done on campus. For example, he said, regular training should be provided to teachers and school staff, so that they will be equipped with the knowledge to spot

clues on a possible victim.

Sex education should also be introduced to small children to improve their sense of self-protection and encourage them to seek help from trustworthy adults when faced with sexual assault, as well as to distinguish sex offences.

Education targeting parents and caretakers should also be escalated, he said.

EVENTS

Association confident about future entertainment prospects

ANTHONY LAM

INCOME from pop concerts has returned to 2019 levels, implying a swift rebound, Che Fok Sang, executive director of Macau Federal Commercial Association of Convention & Exhibition Industry, said.

For instance, the upcoming concert series of Hong Kong pop divo Jacky Cheung which will kick-off in June, has at most 30,000 more tickets for sale than his previous concert series in Macau, which was held in 2018.

Meanwhile, despite the strong demand, Che does not expect Cheung will be able to add more shows. For one thing, his schedule is tight. For another, the venue – the Cotai Arena at the Venetian Macao, has already been booked after Cheung's shows for other events.

He understood this as a reflection of a soaring market, as he told local media Macao Daily News.

Elaborating on the situation, he disclosed that many performers and event hosts were ready to relocate their events to Macau. The first reason is that venues in Hong Kong are in high demand,



and the second is that Macau has better auxiliary facilities around its venues, such as accommodation and restaurants.

Despite the commendations, Che pointed out that additional workers are required to accommodate these extra events while retaining an acceptable service standard. Those with experience are most preferred and Hong Kong has a squad of them. However, the costs of the workforce will inevitably increase.

Discussing the potential effects

of pop concerts, Che revealed that some businesspeople were reluctant to visit Macau for business. However, they would be attracted by the stars they liked. In certain scenarios, business deals were even closed.

It was also revealed that June is normally a low season, but with Cheung's concerts, hotel bookings have also gone up to an unexpected level. Che added that as far as he knew, there will also be international stars staging shows in Macau in the second half of the year.

GOV'T CALLS FOR STRENGTHENED CASINO SECURITY FOLLOWING BRAWL

STAFF REPORTER

THE Judiciary Police (PJ), the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) and representatives of six comprehensive resort companies met to promote communication and cooperation, enhance the security work inside and outside the casinos, and strengthen the protection of the personal and property safety of residents and tourists as tourism increases.

The meeting was held at the Judiciary Police Station yesterday, with 13 representatives from the six incumbent casino operators and other companies invited to attend.

Sou Sio Keong, deputy director of PJ, said that although the recent fighting incidents in casinos was quickly dealt with according to the law, they reflected that there is room for improvement in the current security arrangements, and it is necessary to effectively improve the emergency mechanism in the venue. Therefore, the PJ will add the content of "Cope with emergencies and dealing with crises" to the "gaming crime prevention workshop" to enhance the



emergency management capabilities and communication awareness of the practitioners.

Paulo Jorge Moreira Castelo Basaloco, head of DICJ, said the bureau has taken measures to ban entry for those who participated in the recent fighting incidents in accordance with relevant laws and regulations. In addition, the bureau urges relevant companies to respond to the surge of the number of people in the casinos during holidays by strengthening on-site security, enhancing personnel training and formulating plans and preparations for emergencies.

GAMING

Long-unfinished blue Strip tower sets date for grand opening

RIO YAMAT, LAS VEGAS

A soaring blue-glass tower that has sat empty for close to two decades on the Las Vegas Strip — through the Great Recession and an unprecedented pandemic that shut down the famed tourist corridor for months — is set to open its doors to the public in December as the gambling center's latest resort and casino.

Company executives for Fontainebleau Las Vegas made the announcement yesterday [Macau time], more than a year after the company publicly set a goal to open before the end of 2023.

Chief operating officer Colleen Birch said in a statement that the long-awaited resort on the north end of the Strip represents "a rich heritage of luxury hospitality, chic elegance and unforgettable experiences."

The announcement marked the beginning of hiring efforts for a 3,700-room resort and casino that is expected to create thousands of jobs.

Named after Miami Beach's 1950s-era Fontainebleau hotel, the luxury resort is one of the tallest buildings in Nevada.



AP PHOTO

Construction on the 67-story Fontainebleau Las Vegas began in 2007 amid the U.S. real estate bubble and was expected at the time to open in October 2009, but work stopped when it went bankrupt during the Great Recession. The project stalled for years.

In the decade that followed the original project's collapse, ownership changed hands several times. In 2018,

the resort even got a new name, Drew Las Vegas, after Steven Witkoff and Miami-based investment firm New Valley bought it for \$600 million. But the rebranded project was short-lived: Construction was suspended in March 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic triggered Nevada's statewide shutdown.

A year later — and more than 15 years since the initial plans for Fontainebleau Las Vegas were unveiled — the project was reacquired by Jeffrey

Soffer, one of the original developers. At the time, Soffer estimated the property was 75% complete and said it was in "mint condition."

In a statement, Soffer celebrated the blue tower as a symbol of resilience and determination.

"The arrival of Fontainebleau Las Vegas is a monumental achievement following years of anticipation and brings full circle our vision of hosting the iconic Fontainebleau brand on the Strip," he said. MDT/AP

AVIATION

INDIAN NO-FRILLS AIR CARRIER GO FIRST FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY

NO-FRILLS Indian air carrier Go First filed for bankruptcy and suspended its flights for three days starting yesterday, causing hardships for thousands of fliers.

A statement on the carrier's website on Tuesday said the cancellations were caused by operational reasons. "A full refund will be issued to the original mode of payment shortly," the statement said.

In a message to employees on Tuesday, airline chief Kaushik Khona said Pratt & Whitney had failed to supply it with replacements for faulty aircraft engines, the Press Trust of India news agency said. Pratt & Whitney, an American aerospace manufacturer with global operations, had no immediate comment.

Khona said the carrier was doing everything possible to navigate the situation with utmost care and concern for all staff.

Go First had an average of 30,000 daily domestic flyers in March, so the disruption in flights is expected to affect about 90,000 passengers, media reports said.

Nitesh Jain, a businessman, was attempting to buy tickets for his family on another airline at a higher price.

"I booked tickets four months back to save money and now the tickets have been canceled. It's the airline's responsibility to arrange alternate flights for us."

The airline is owned by India's Wadia group. MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

CORPORATE BITS

Galaxy Macau opens paper sculpture exhibition with Chinese artist

ANTHONY LAM



The Galaxy Macau resort has recently unveiled a paper sculpture exhibition created by Chinese artist Wen Qiuwen.

The exhibition is staged across the entire property.

An explorer of new traditions,

Wen is recognized for her works that combine paper art and light sculpture, the most famous of which include "Southern Lion Girl" and "Shanghai Fish Lantern."

She often deconstructs and

re-creates traditional cultural symbols, ingeniously introducing surrealist elements to create thought-provoking scenography that offers a dreamy slice of theater and engages viewers on an emotional level.

"We believe the collaboration with renowned Chinese paper sculptor Wen Qiuwen is a perfect opportunity to bring Chinese culture to the tourist from the world and also help build Macau as World Centre of Tourism and leisure," Philip Cheng Yee Sing, director of Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG), said.

Customers will also see special summer menus at restaurants at the Galaxy Macau resort and special pricing scheme for stays to enjoy the Grand Resort Deck, the water wonderland at the resort.

Pop Superstar Leon Lai kicks off concert series in Melco Residency



On May 1, Hong Kong singer Leon Lai, known as one of the "Four heavenly kings of Can-

topop," kicked off his concert series "Leon Lai Stage on 8," at Studio City Event Center,

which will include 14 shows.

Inspired by Studio City's iconic landmark "Golden Reel," the theme and namesake of the concert series are designed based on the symbolic Figure 8 Ferris wheel.

"It's my pleasure to once again be performing at Studio City Event Center, especially as part of the effort to bring the residency concert culture to Asia for the first time," Lai said, before adding that the meaning of "8" was to "express [his] wholehearted blessing to bring good fortune to all audiences."

AP PHOTO



Philippine Coast Guard vessel BRP Malabrigo

SOUTH CHINA SEA

On board a Philippine patrol in contested, rich waters

JIM GOMEZ, AARON FAVILA & JOEAL CALUPITAN, ABOARD BRP MALABRIGO

WHEN two Philippine coast guard vessels set out to patrol the volatile South China Sea recently, they had to face more than China's growing territorial ambitions.

The patrols are a constant battle against sun, sea, stress and gnawing isolation. The Associated Press joined a recent voyage, which provided a glimpse of what it's like for members of the Philippine coast guard to work on the front lines of multiple geopolitical conflicts in one of the world's most fiercely contested seas.

The BRP Malabrigo and BRP Malapascua, Japanese-built 44-meter (144-foot) patrol ships, planned to make a circuit of disputed islands, islets and reefs claimed by the Philippines in the Spratly Islands, some occupied by Philippine garrisons and some by Chinese military installations.

China has rapidly built up its military presence in the area in recent years, pushing back other claimants like the Philippines and building artificial islands with airstrips and military garrisons. The rich fishing archipelago is believed to sit atop vast undersea deposits of oil and gas.

The Philippines dispatch regular patrols to assert their claims to the islands, spot encroachments, and resupply Fili-

pino sailors stationed on the islands. Arrayed against far larger and more powerful fleets of Chinese coast guard vessels, navy warships and seaborne militias, the Philippine coast guard says its patrol vessels often face David and Goliath confrontations, especially near Beijing's artificial island bases.

Life on patrol was a mix of hard work and claustrophobic leisure. It was often so hot that sailors got dizzy after a few minutes outside, so crewmembers spent most of the down time between their four-hour shifts in tiny, air conditioned cabins. When there was room in the mess hall, a few people might gather to watch a film or sing on the karaoke machine — a Filipino necessity. Some liked to take walks in the ship's narrow passages.

The sailors, a mix of sunburned veterans and sprightly recruits, brought cellphones brimming with personal photographs and videos and games.

The two ships visited one or two destinations a day, working without interruption day and night. The easiest stops were at places occupied by Filipino forces, where the ships sent motor launches to deliver basic supplies like water, crude oil and cigarettes. At one, thirsty sailors offered dried fish in exchange for extra drinking water.

Visits to Chinese-controlled areas were harder. At one reef, the patrol encountered more than 100 small Chinese boats, suspected of belonging to the

militia, anchored in groups. The Filipinos lowered launches and demanded the boats leave Philippine waters. The Chinese boats did not reply, or leave.

The patrol faced off with the Chinese Coast Guard at Chinese-occupied Subi Reef, and later at the Second Thomas Shoal, which is occupied by Filipino sailors on a beached, crumbling navy ship, surrounded by Chinese ships.

These encounters are tense, drawn-out affairs. Chinese coast guard and navy ships shadowed the patrol for more than an hour, and over the radio accused the Filipinos of intruding into what Beijing claims as its territorial waters and ordered them by radio to leave or face unspecified counter actions.

A radio operator, holding a paper script in the corner of the bridge, asserted Philippine sovereign rights and asked the Chinese ships to stay away and abide by international anti-collision regulations.

Meanwhile, the rest of the bridge was quiet, and intensely focused. A radar operator watched intently for tiny changes in the other ship's speed or bearing. When it approached one knot faster, the commander barked an order to alter the Malabrigo's speed in response. The encounter lasted for more than an hour.

Commander Julio Colarina III, 41, was a 24-hour fixture on the bridge of the Malabrigo, where he slept on a folding bed when off duty. He's a second-generation defender of the Philippines'

territorial interests. His father, a retired navy man, spent a year in the 1970s garrisoning Philippine-occupied Thitu Island.

As crew members rested between shifts on the bridge, the strains of classic rock hits like "Hotel California" could be heard from the mess hall. One night, a sailor celebrated her birthday in stark austerity: Colleagues put a candle on eggs and prepared sardines, fried fish and rice to mark the occasion.

Asked for a birthday wish, the 27-year-old said, "peace and good health always."

On April 23, the second to last day of the voyage, journalists witnessed a cliffhanger encoun-

ter when a Chinese coast guard ship blocked the Malapascua as it tried to steam toward the Second Thomas Shoal. The crew fell silent. The Malapascua's Capt. Rodel Hernandez said a near-collision was averted when he abruptly reversed his vessel's direction and shut off its engine to bring the vessel to a full stop.

The journalists captured the dangerous confrontation on video and cameras, sparking a new round of arguments between Manila and Beijing. The Philippines criticized China for "highly dangerous maneuvers" that it said endangered the Philippine patrol vessels and its crewmembers.

China said the Filipino vessels barged into its territorial waters laden with journalists in a "premeditated provocation designed to deliberately create a friction" intending to lay the blame on Beijing.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Reggie Lobusta, who has been deployed to the disputed region multiple times in the past, said he felt like he'd just finished yet another round in a long boxing match, with no end in sight.

"There will be far worse than what we've encountered if these problems are not addressed properly," Lobusta said.

The patrols are considered some of the most difficult assignments in the Philippine Coast Guard. The entire crew was to undergo brief sessions with psychologists in a "stress debrief" after their return to shore, Colarina said, and received half a month's salary as hazard pay.

As the Malabrigo headed home after seven days, more crewmembers than usual milled and chatted on the deck, taking selfies with cellphone cameras as the sun set in the background.

"It's our morale booster — the sunsets, sunrises, dolphins and green turtles," said Lobusta. "It will break my heart when I retire and leave this ship and my second family here one final time." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Philippine Coast Guard Seawoman First Class Alaine Maraviles catches water containers after a resupply mission at Philippine-occupied Nanshan island locally named Lawak

GRANT PECK, BANGKOK

MYANMAR

MYANMAR'S ruling military council yesterday said it was releasing more than 2,100 political prisoners as a humanitarian gesture. Thousands more remain imprisoned on charges generally involving nonviolent protests or criticism of military rule, which began when the army seized power in February 2021 from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

State-run MRTV television reported that the head of Myanmar's military council, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, had pardoned 2,153 prisoners on the most important Buddhist holy day of the year, marking the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha.

In a separate report, it said Min Aung Hlaing had commuted the death sentences of 38 prisoners to life in prison. The report provided no details about them.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, there were 112 prisoners on death row as of Tuesday who had been put there since the army takeover. The group keeps detailed tallies of arrests and casualties linked to the repression of the military government. At least four executions have been carried out since the military seized power.

The prisoner releases began yesterday, but may take a few days to be completed. The identities of those released were not immediately available, but would not include Suu Kyi, who is serving a prison term of 33 years on more than a dozen charges her supporters say were trumped up by the military.

According to an official announcement on state media, all of

Pardon frees more than 2,100 political prisoners



Released prisoners get off from a bus after they release from Insein Prison in Yangon, yesterday

the prisoners granted pardon had been convicted under a section of Myanmar's penal code that makes it a crime to spread comments that create public unrest or fear, or spread false news, and carries a penalty of up to three years in prison.

The terms of the pardon warn that if the freed detainees violate the law again, they will have to serve the remainder of their original sentences in addition to whatever term they are given for their new offense.

Two prisoners freed from Yangon's notorious Insein Prison told The Associated Press they continued to support opposition political activities.

One arrested in 2021 said the terms under which they were released meant they would be on a government watch list.

"But we know what we have to do. And we learned a lot from prison. Using that, we will continue to fight for the revolution," said the former prisoner, who asked not to be identified for safety reasons.

Mass prisoner releases are common on major holidays in Myanmar. The last release of so many political prisoners at one time occurred in July 2021, when 2,296 prisoners were freed.

In November last year, several high profile political prisoners, including an Australian academic, a

Japanese filmmaker, an ex-British diplomat and an American, were released as part of a broad prisoner amnesty that also freed many local citizens held for protesting the army takeover.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners had said Tuesday that 17,897 people taken into custody since the 2021 army takeover remained in detention.

Prisoner releases appear to be efforts by the hard-line military government to soften its image as a major human rights abuser.

Last week, former U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged Myanmar's military to take the initiative in finding a way out of the country's violent political cri-

sis, including releasing political detainees, after a surprise meeting with Min Aung Hlaing.

A statement following the meeting said Ban "supported the international community's calls for the immediate release by the Myanmar military of all arbitrarily detained prisoners, for constructive dialogue, and for utmost restraint from all parties."

The amnesty also came a day after Min Aung Hlaing met with the visiting foreign minister of China, which has provided key support to his regime since it seized power.

MRTV said Tuesday that Qin Gang held talks in the capital, Naypyitaw, with Min Aung Hlaing and other top officials and exchanged views on bilateral relations, Myanmar's political situation and conditions needed for its stability and development.

China has strategic geopolitical and economic interests in Myanmar, its southern neighbor, and is one of the few large nations that has maintained good relations with its military government, which is shunned and sanctioned by many Western nations for its takeover and brutal repression of its opponents.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the army took power. Its takeover prompted peaceful protests that security forces suppressed with bloody violence. Violence has since escalated with the rise of armed resistance around the country and major military efforts to suppress it.

As of Tuesday, 3,452 civilians had been killed by the security forces since the military takeover, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. **MDT/AP**

THAILAND

Favored candidate resumes campaign two days after giving birth

A popular candidate for prime minister of Thailand said yesterday she's eager to get back on the campaign trail, just two days after giving birth.

Speaking at a news conference at the hospital in Bangkok where she gave birth, Paetongtarn Shinawatra said her new baby boy wouldn't affect her ability to rally support for her Pheu Thai Party with just under two weeks to go before the polls.

"I believe good things come along with children," she said, sitting beside her husband, Pidok Sooksawas. "I believe that children are my secret power to work, and to lead everyday life."

The newborn, Pruthasins Sooksawas, was brought into the room in a rolling incubator and displayed briefly to the media before being moved out again.

Paetongtarn is the youngest daughter of Thaksin Shinawatra, the popular but divisive former prime minister who was ousted by a military coup in 2006. She's also the niece of Yingluck Shinawatra, whose government met a similar fate eight years later.

Thaksin, who has been in self-exile since the 2006 coup, tweeted Monday after the birth that he would like permission to come home to see his grandchildren, ending the tweet with

"See you soon." He lives abroad to escape a prison term for abuse of power, a conviction he has decried as politically motivated.

Paetongtarn played down the significance of the message, saying it was just a natural expression of a grandfather who was "very happy and excited."

Thaksin is a popular but divisive figure of Thai politics, and there has been concern that his return could be destabilizing.

"Of course, the things he said would have a political effect," she said. "However, as a family, I think there's nothing wrong to hope for that, especially when there's a good thing happening

to the family."

Paetongtarn campaigned throughout her pregnancy. She and the Pheu Thai Party have consistently topped the opinion polls as Thailand's favored prime minister candidate and next government. She took the opportunity yesterday to underline that she was 100% confident of a landslide victory.

"I'd like to ask the Thai people to remain firm, because this vote is not like any other," she said. "Thailand cannot just hope for the best anymore. Thailand needs change, and only the Pheu Thai Party is the best answer for the Thai people now."

Analysts have compli-



Paetongtarn Shinawatra, a leading Thai politician and youngest daughter of exiled former deposed Thai leader Thaksin Shinawatra, is the polls' most-favored candidate for prime minister

mented Paetongtarn on her confident public performances, though the residual popularity of her father remains a factor behind her popularity, especially among poor and working-class Thais. Thaksin, a populist billionaire, championed poor people during his years in power and reaped the benefits at election time.

Even if the Pheu Thai Party secures a big win at

the May 14 general election, there is no guarantee Paetongtarn will become prime minister. The top post is selected in a vote involving both houses of Parliament. That includes the Senate, which was appointed by the junta led by current prime minister and candidate Prayuth Chan-ocha, rather than by the public. Prayuth won all the senators' votes after the 2019 election. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (left) and Argentine President Alberto Fernandez, pose for photos at the Alvorada palace in Brasilia

BRAZIL

Argentina's Fernandez seeks dollar relief from Lula

CARLA BRIDI & DANIEL POLITI, BRASILIA

ARGENINE President Alberto Fernández and his Brazilian counterpart, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, vowed yesterday [Macau time] to keep working to come up with a mechanism that would allow them to avoid using the U.S. dollar in trade between the neighboring nations.

Argentina's economy is looking particularly fragile after a run on the peso in the financial markets caused a sharp devaluation of the local currency late last month as well as a drain of U.S. dollars from central bank reserves in part due to a devastating drought that has slashed exports.

There was lots of anticipation that the two countries would unveil a mechanism allowing Argentine firms to continue trading with Brazil without draining precious dollars from the country's reserves. Yet after a nearly four-hour meeting the two presidents made clear they were still fine tuning the details.

"The meeting was long, difficult and we will carry out many more meetings," Lula said alongside Fernández as the two left-leaning presidents spoke to the press. "I made a commitment to my friend Alberto Fernández that I will do every and any sacrifice so we can help Argentina in this difficult moment."

The proposed plan involves a line of credit to finance Brazilian companies that export to Argentina with the intention of avoiding use of the dollar, said the finance ministry's executive secretary, Gabriel Galípolo.

Finance Minister Fernando Haddad told reporters the two governments are studying possible guarantees in order for Brazil's government to provide such financing.

"They've made the decision to help make sure that Brazilian companies continue exporting to Argentina and they had asked us to do some homework, which we have already done, and have to do with the necessary guarantees," Fernández said, adding that Economy Ministry officials will be meeting with

their Brazilian counterparts next week to fine tune the details.

"Now what we have to do is find these points of agreement ... to get those credits operating that guarantee the production of Brazilian companies that export to Argentina," the Argentine president said.

Brazil is Argentina's largest trade partner and the deal could afford Argentina some breathing room at a time when it is suffering from a shortage of dollars.

Argentina struck a deal with China that allows its companies to pay for Chinese imports with yuan. Lula, for his part, hailed an agreement between Brazil and China to use the yuan in their bilateral commerce while in Shanghai last month, while also taking swipes at the dominance of the dollar in international trade and at the International Monetary Fund.

"We aren't having a discussion to help Argentina," Lula said. "We need to help Brazilians who export to Argentina and finance Brazilian exports, just like China does with Chinese products."

Lula also said he was in

talks with China to change the regulation of BRICS — the group of countries made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — to assist countries who are not part of the group, including Argentina.

Argentina's Economy Minister Sergio Massa has said his country is renegotiating aspects of its agreement signed with the IMF in 2022 to restructure some \$44 billion in debt taken on by the center-right government of Fernández's predecessor, Mauricio Macri.

"We're renegotiating the program we committed to with the IMF ... because the conditions have indeed changed," Fernández said, referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the drought. Lula said Brazil would also negotiate with the IMF on behalf of Argentina

Fernández's visit to Brazil comes weeks after he announced he will not seek reelection in the election this October. He was joined in Brasilia by Massa and Argentina's ambassador to Brazil, Daniel Scioli, both of whom are considered possible contenders for the presidency. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1979 ELECTION VICTORY FOR MARGARET THATCHER



The Conservative Party has won the general election making Margaret Thatcher Britain's first ever woman prime minister.

Mrs Thatcher arrived at Downing Street to take over from James Callaghan after her party won an overall majority of 43 seats.

On the steps of Number 10, she quoted from St Francis of Assisi: "Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope."

The Tories have won 339 seats, Labour 269, the Liberals 11, Ulster parties 12 and Nationalists four.

Former Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe, currently awaiting trial at the Old Bailey for conspiracy and incitement to murder, has lost his North Devon seat in a crushing defeat.

Reacting to Mrs Thatcher's victory he said: "I am horrified. She makes [her predecessor] Ted Heath look like a moderate."

During the election campaign, Mrs Thatcher said the Conservatives would cut income tax, reduce public expenditure, make it easier for people to buy their own homes and curb the power of the unions.

She will soon announce members of her new cabinet. William Whitelaw is likely to become Home Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe Chancellor and Sir Keith Joseph Secretary of State for Industry.

Other prominent politicians rejected by the electorate included: Liberal deputy leader John Pardo (Cornwall North); Shirley Williams (Hertford and Stevenage), formerly education secretary; shadow Scottish Secretary Sir Teddy Taylor (Glasgow Cathcart) and former arts minister Hugh Jenkins (Putney).

Labour can gain some consolation from its success in the local elections, winning several important councils from the Tories, namely Leicester, Coventry, Tameside and Sandwell.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Friend and foe agree that Lady Thatcher was one of the dominant political figures of the century. Over the following 11 years, she changed the nature not only of her own party but of others too. Such policies as the sale of council houses and the privatisation of the nationalised industries have been accepted by most political parties. Thanks in part to the relationships she developed with her ideological soul-mate US President Ronald Reagan and with the Soviet Union's President Gorbachev, the "Iron Lady" as a Moscow newspaper once called her, became a world figure.

She was popular for her strong leadership style - demonstrated during the 1982 Falklands War. Her strident Euro-scepticism led to disputes within her own party which resulted in her downfall in 1990 - and ultimately that of the Conservative Party, routed by Labour in the 1997 general election.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Talk to those in a position of power about your intentions. This will not be the day to start new business ventures or make drastic changes in your career.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

You like to stay busy and now is your chance to do just that. It might be best to work on your own; if possible, do your job out of your home today.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You can help sort out problems that friends are facing. You can make money but not through harebrained schemes or gambling. So smile!



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Children will be of major concern if you haven't kept the lines of communication open. If you can put some work into home improvements, you should.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You'll need to exercise control. Travel will result in new romantic attractions. You will be able to get your own way if you use your intellectual charm and know how.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You may jump from the frying pan into the fire if you make a move today. You'll find it easy to upgrade your environment by redecorating or changing your residence.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Children will want to help, too. Physical activity will help defuse your frustration. Secret affairs may only cause complications in your life. You will find your personal partner taxing today.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You could be your own worst enemy if you overreact to something you're told. You may want to stay in the background today. The distance may make you both appreciate each other more.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Raise your self esteem and your confidence if you want to get back into the mainstream again. Don't let domestic problems interfere with your objectives.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Emotional situations could bring out your stubborn nature. You will be entertained and intrigued by the logic foreigners possess. Your involvement with children will be most rewarding.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You'll have great insight. You need to do something energetic and different. Be prepared to lose friends or alienate loved ones due to your stubborn nature lately.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You need to take a good look at all sides of an issue before making a decision. Friends and relatives may be hard to take today.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

			2	7				
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			3			4		
	2						3	
	5				1			
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8					6			
1								

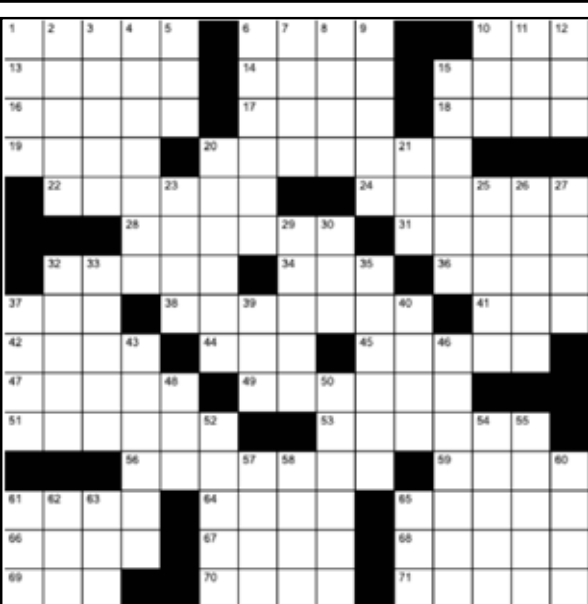
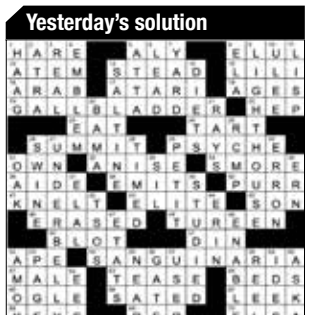
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	16	20	rain
Changchun	13	18	rain
Chengdu	18	31	rain
Chongqing	22	31	cloudy
Fuzhou	21	33	cloudy
Guangzhou	24	31	cloudy
Guiyang	18	30	cloudy
Haikou	25	36	cloudy
Hangzhou	21	32	overcast
Harbin	10	17	cloudy
Hefei	19	27	rain
Nanjing	18	26	thunderstorms
Shanghai	21	29	rain
Taipei	21	27	cloudy
Wuhan	20	25	rain
Hong Kong	23	26	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	3	15	overcast
Frankfurt	11	13	overcast
Paris	13	23	overcast
London	12	20	cloudy
New York	9	12	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Parisian pupil; 6- Electric fish; 10- Despot Amin; 13- Reef material; 14- Brown-bag stuff; 15- Order in the court; 16- Artist Rousseau; 17- So long!; 18- The Ponte Vecchio crosses it; 19- Medical suffix; 20- Word before beauty or bridge; 22- Certain fisherman; 24- Dark brownish red color; 28- Man's wig; 31- Cafe additive; 32- Purchaser; 34- B'way hit sign; 36- Jeff MacNelly comic strip; 37- Prefix with profit or fiction; 38- Tarries; 41- Stop; 42- Camp beds; 44- Maiden name indicator; 45- Part of TNT; 47- Willow; 49- Sales incentive; 51- Bad smell; 53- In and of ___; 56- Wurst; 59- Legal wrong; 61- Dangerous weapon; 64- Respiratory organ; 65- Trio; 66- Employes; 67- Against; 68- Hawaiian state birds; 69- Faultfinder; 70- ___-Ball; 71- Long lock of hair;

DOWN 1- Reflected sound; 2- Silt deposit; 3- Journalist Pyle; 4- Main school team; 5- Yalie; 6- Steep bank under a rampart; 7- Let out; 8- Hawaiian outdoor feast; 9- Tempest; 10- Like some vbs.; 11- Loud noise; 12- How was ___ know?; 15- Large marine mammal; 20- Nerve cell; 21- Small batteries; 23- Christmas; 25- Orange-brown earth pigment; 26- Home of the Black Bears; 27- Call for; 29- Rival of Helena; 30- Poetic conjunction; 32- Leg up; 33- Set free; 35- Flowery; 37- Sgts., e.g.; 39- Occupational suffix; 40- Poses; 43- Faculties; 46- Baby's ring; 48- Nipper's co.; 50- Influential person; 52- Hawaiian dances; 54- TV producer Michaels; 55- Unties; 57- Beyond help; 58- Poker payment; 60- Dick Tracy's love; 61- "The Sound of Music" extra; 62- Dos Passos trilogy; 63- Small cask; 65- Big bang cause;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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AD

ENTERTAINMENT

'SOME LIKE IT HOT' LEADS TONY AWARD NOMINATIONS WITH 13 NODSMARK KENNEDY,
NEW YORK

SOME Like It Hot," a Broadway musical adaptation of the cross-dressing movie comedy that starred Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon, waltzed away yesterday [Macau time] with a leading 13 Tony Award nominations, putting the spotlight on a show that is a sweet, full-hearted embrace of trans rights.

With songs by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman and starring Christian Borle and J. Harrison Ghee, who all got nominations, the show follows two musician friends who disguise themselves as women and join an all-girl band to flee Chicago after witnessing a mob hit. Like the movie, there are men in dresses trying to pass as women. But this time, the dress awakens something in

AP PHOTO



This image released by Polk & Co. shows the cast during a performance of "Some Like It Hot"

Ghee's character, akin to a caterpillar to a butterfly.

"The only thing we wanted to do was to be honest and we wanted to treat these characters with dignity," said Matthew López, who wrote the Tony-nominated book with Amber Ruffin and has a Tony already

for the play "The Inheritance." "Sometimes the best way to treat a character with dignity is to let them be flawed and scared and funny and brave and human. So one of the things that was really, really important to us is just to create human-scaled characters going through some

extraordinary experiences."

The musical comes at a time when trans rights are under attack and its message of self-acceptance and respect for all was echoed across Broadway, from a revival of "Parade" to a Black actor-led "Death of a Salesman" to the new play "Ain't No Mo" and new musical "Kimberly Akimbo."

"I think the pandemic put a lot of things in perspective, both in terms of improvements we needed to make in the community and also just the way that everybody's feeling about the world and about being a human," said Ben Platt, nominated for "Parade." "The art people are making has a real urgency and a real purpose."

Three shows tied with nine nominations each: "& Juliet," which reimagines "Romeo and Juliet" and adds some of the biggest pop hits of the past few decades, "New York, New York," which combined two generations of Broadway royalty in John Kander and Lin-Manuel Miranda, and "Shucked," a surprise lightweight musical comedy studded with corn puns.

Betsy Wolfe, in her eighth Broadway show, earned her first nomination in "& Juliet," playing Anne Hathaway, Shakespeare's wife. The actor had just dropped her daughter, almost 3, off at ballet class on Tuesday morning. "I hope she addresses me properly now when I see

her," she joked.

In the musical, playwright David West Read took an original story using "Romeo and Juliet" as a launch pad and mixed in hits by Swedish super-producer Max Martin, including Britney Spears' "Oops! ... I Did It Again," Katy Perry's "Roar" and Bon Jovi's "It's My Life." The musical imagines a happier ending for Juliet after a journey of self-discovery.

"It's a beautiful story about second chances, which honestly is what we're all going through right now," said Wolfe. "We've all been given a second chance after this time we've all been through. And so to have a musical that allows us all to celebrate in each individual way that we need to celebrate is really, really special and timely."

The critical musical darling "Kimberly Akimbo," with Victoria Clark playing a teen who ages four times faster than the average human, rounds out the best musical category, and earned a total of eight nominations.

Clark, who was nominated for best lead actress in a musical, hopes to add a second Tony to her trophy case, having previously won one in 2005 for "The Light in the Piazza." But more than that she hopes more attention will be paid to her show, which she calls a "little under the radar."

"It's a special event that celebrates our collective humanity," she said. "It doesn't say life is perfect. The show doesn't say there aren't going to be strange and horrible people in your life. It doesn't say life is going to be easy. But it does say life is worthwhile. And I think that is a message that we need to get out there. Life is worth living."

In the best new play category, nods were distributed to Tom Stoppard's "Leopoldstadt," which explores Jewish identity with an intergenerational story, and "Fat Ham," James Ijames' Pulitzer Prize-winning adaptation of Shakespeare's "Hamlet"

set at a Black family's barbecue in the modern South.

The rest of the category is made up of "Ain't No Mo," the short-lived but critical applauded work by playwright and actor Jordan E. Cooper, Stephen Adly Guirgis' Pulitzer Prize-winning play "Between Riverside and Crazy" and "Cost of Living," parallel stories of two caretakers and their respective patients.

"Ain't No Mo," which earned six nominations, begins with the United States government emailing every Black citizen with the offer of a free plane ticket to Africa, and each scene explores how various personalities respond to the offer.

Cooper learned he's been nominated twice — as best playwright and as lead actor — while visiting his childhood home in Texas. He and his family learned of his triumph in the living room where, as a 6-year-old, he put on his first plays.

"It is a little bitter-sweet," Cooper said. "We only got a chance to do about like 60 performances and this cast and this creative team were like some of the most talented you've ever seen. It was unfortunate that people don't get a chance to experience it because we really felt like it was something special. Audiences felt like it was something special. And it's just so beautiful to know that the work that we put in — that blood, that sweat and tears — are not in vain."

"Parade," a doomed musical love story set against the real backdrop of a murder and lynching in Georgia in pre-World War I, earned six nods, including for Platt, hoping to win a second Tony after his triumph in 2017 with "Dear Evan Hansen," and rising star and first-time nominee Micaela Diamond.

Jessica Chastain, an Oscar-winner for "The Eyes of Tammy Faye," got her first Tony nomination for a stripped down version of "A Doll's House" and Wendell Pierce, who won a Tony for producing "Clybourne Park," earned his first nomination as an actor on Broadway for a blistering revival of "Death of a Salesman."

When Pierce heard the news, he wept. **MDT/AP**

AD

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TENNIS

Zhang first Chinese man to reach Masters 1000 quarterfinals

TALES AZZONI, MADRID

ZHANG Zhizhen needed to save three match points in his win over Taylor Fritz at the Madrid Open to become the first Chinese player to reach an ATP Masters 1000 quarterfinal this week.

Zhang rallied from a set down against the eighth-seeded American to advance 3-6, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (8), winning in a final-set tiebreaker for the third straight time at the clay-court tournament in the Spanish capital. It was the first win against a top-10 opponent for the 26-year-old Zhang.

"Before the match, you know it's a very tough player. There is no weakness, so (I) just tried what I can do," Zhang said. "Then (after) losing the first set, (I was) thinking about trying to play a little bit closer match. In the end (that) I can win, that's amazing."

The 99th-ranked Zhang had

AP PHOTO



Zhang Zhizhen, of China returns the ball against Taylor Fritz, of the United States

upset No. 13 Cameron Norrie in the third round in Madrid for his biggest career win. Zhang had beaten 21st-seeded De-

nis Shapovalov in the second round. He has played seven tiebreakers in total in Madrid, winning six of them.

In 2021, Zhang became the first man representing China to earn a spot in the main draw at Wimbledon in the Open era,

which began in 1968 when professionals were admitted to Grand Slam tennis tournaments.

China's greatest success in the sport came via Li Na, who won women's singles titles at the 2011 French Open and 2014 Australian Open. She was inducted to the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2019.

In February, Wu Yibing became the first Chinese player to win an ATP Tour title, beating John Isner in the final of the Dallas Open. Wu was the first man from China in a tour final. Last year at the U.S. Open, Wu became the first Chinese man to win a Grand Slam singles match in 63 years.

Zhang will next face former No. 14 Aslan Karatsev, who upset second-seeded Daniil Medvedev in straight sets yesterday [Macau time].

"I'll tell you a secret," Zhang said. "We had a practice, I lost 6-0 with Karatsev. I'll do my best. Here everyone is a great player, huge player. They all have some very good results. (I will) try to do the best what I can do."

Zhang is projected to enter the top 50 with a win against Karatsev, which would make him the highest-ranked Chinese man in history ahead of Wu, who earlier this year was at No. 55. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

The Conversation

Yasemin Copur-Gencturk, U. Southern California

MATH TEACHERS HOLD A BIAS AGAINST GIRLS WHEN THEY THINK GENDER EQUALITY HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

Math teachers who believe women no longer face discrimination tend to be biased against girls' ability in math. This is what we found through an experiment we conducted with over 400 elementary and middle school math teachers across the United States. Our findings were published in a peer-reviewed article that appeared in April 2023 in the International Journal of STEM Education.

For the experiment, our team asked teachers to evaluate a set of student solutions to math problems. The teachers didn't know that gender- and race-specific names, such as Tanisha and Connor, had been randomly assigned to the solutions. We did this so that if they evaluated identical student work differently, it would be because of the gender- and race-specific names they saw, not the differences in student work. The idea was to see if the teachers had any unconscious biases.

After the teachers evaluated the student solutions, we asked a series of questions about their beliefs and experiences. We asked if they felt society had achieved gender equality. We asked them whether they felt anxious about doing math. We asked whether they felt students' ability in math was fixed or could be improved. We also asked teachers to think about their own experience as math students and to report how frequently they experienced feelings of unequal treatment because of their race or gender.

We then investigated if these beliefs and experiences were related to how they evaluated the math ability of students of different genders or racial groups.

Consistent with our prior work, we found that implicit bias against girls arises in ambiguous situations — in this case, when student solutions were not completely correct.

Further, for teachers who believed that U.S. society had achieved gender equality, they tended to rate a student's ability higher when they saw a male student name than when they saw a female student name for the same student work.

Teachers' unconscious gender biases in math classes have been documented repeatedly.

Our study identifies factors that underlie such biases; namely, that biases are stronger among teachers who believe that gender discrimination is not a problem in the United States. Understanding the relationship between teachers' beliefs and biases can help teacher educators create effective and targeted interventions to remove such biases from classrooms.

Our findings also shed light on potential reasons that males tend to have higher confidence in math and stick with math-intensive college majors even when they're not high performers.

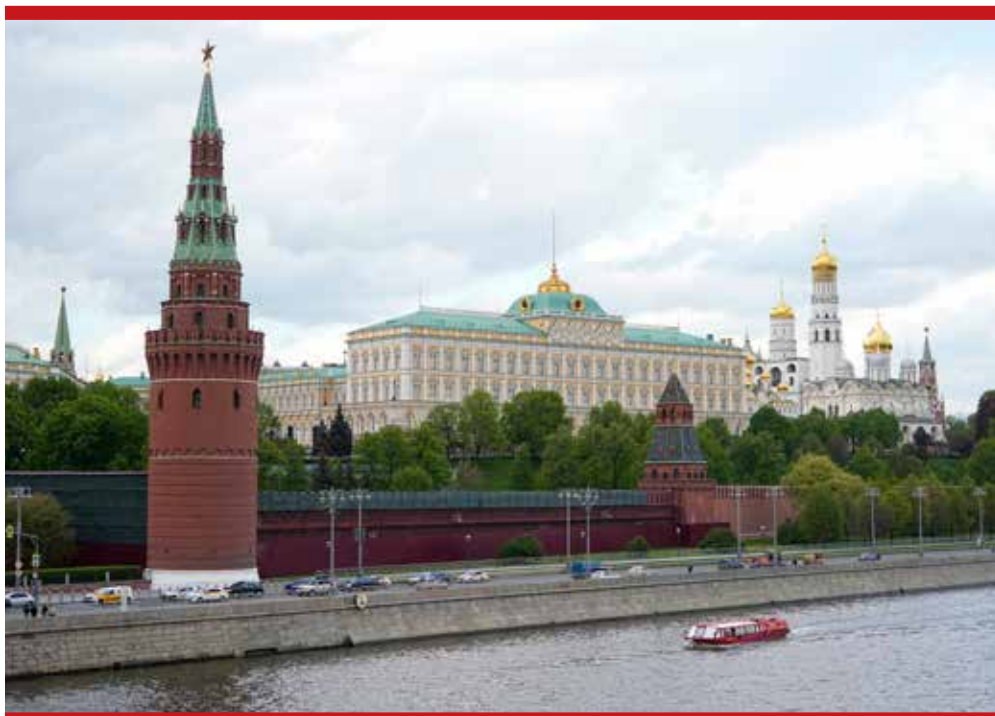
One big remaining question is how to create targeted interventions to help teachers overcome such biases. Evidence suggests that unconscious biases come into play in situations where stereotypes might emerge. Further, research suggests that these unconscious biases can be suppressed only when people are aware of them and motivated to restrain them.

Since bias may take on different forms in different fields, a one-time, one-size-fits-all anti-bias training may not have a lasting effect. We think it's worthwhile to investigate if it's more effective to provide implicit bias training programs that are specific to the areas where bias is revealed.

Economies across the Middle East and Central Asia will likely slow this year as persistently high inflation and rising interest rates bite into their post-pandemic gains, the International Monetary Fund said yesterday. The IMF's Regional Economic Outlook blamed in part rising energy costs, as well as elevated food prices, for the estimated slower growth. The report said that while oil-dependent economies of the Gulf Arab states and others in the region have reaped the benefits of elevated crude prices, other countries — such as Pakistan — have seen growth collapse after an unprecedented flooding last summer or as economic woes worsened. The regional slowdown also comes as an explosion of fighting in

Sudan between two top rival generals threatens a nation where IMF and World Bank debt relief remains on hold. Rising interest rates, used by central banks worldwide to try to stem inflation's rise, increase the costs of borrowing money. That will affect nations carrying heavier debts, the IMF warned. "This year we're seeing inflation again being the most challenging issue for most of the countries," Jihad Azour, the director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department at the IMF, told The Associated Press. The IMF forecast predicts regional growth will drop from 5.3% last year to 3.1% this year.

AP PHOTO



RUSSIA SAYS UKRAINE SENT DRONES TO HIT PUTIN; KYIV DENIES IT

Russia claimed it foiled an attack by Ukrainian drones on the Kremlin yesterday, calling it an unsuccessful assassination attempt against President Vladimir Putin and promising retaliation for what it termed a "terrorist" act. Ukraine denied any involvement, saying Moscow could use it for further escalation of the war.

Putin wasn't in the Kremlin at the time and was at his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow, his spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti.

There was no independent verification of the reported attack on the Kremlin, which Russia authorities said occurred overnight but presented no evidence to support it. Questions also arose as to why it took the Kremlin hours to report the incident and why videos of it also surfaced that late in the day.

A video posted overnight on a local Moscow news Telegram channel, shot from across the river from the Kremlin, appeared to show smoke rising over the buildings. It wasn't possible to ascertain its veracity. According to text accompanying the footage, residents of a nearby apartment building reported hearing bangs and

seeing smoke around 2:30 a.m.

The Kremlin said Russian military and security forces stopped the drones before they could strike. Nobody was hurt, it added.

The Kremlin's website said debris from the drones fell on the grounds of the Moscow landmark without damage.

Ukraine presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak denied any involvement.

"Ukraine has nothing to do with drone attacks on the Kremlin," he said. He said the claims would provide a pretext for Russia "to justify massive strikes on Ukrainian cities, on the civilian population, on infrastructure facilities" in coming days.

The Pentagon is looking into the alleged attacks, according to a U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

American intelligence officials also were looking into the Russian claims but had not yet made a determination, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the ongoing assessment.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking in Washington at a World

Press Freedom Day event, said he had seen the reports but "I can't in any way validate them. We simply don't know."

He added: "I would take anything coming out of the Kremlin with a very large shaker of salt. So let's see. We'll see what the facts are and it's really hard to comment or speculate on this without really knowing what the facts are."

The purported drone attack would be a significant escalation in the 14-month conflict, with Ukraine taking the war to the heart of Russian power.

Phillips O'Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St. Andrews, said, "It certainly wasn't an attempt to assassinate Putin, because he doesn't sleep in the roof and he probably never sleeps in the Kremlin."

He added it was too soon to prove or disprove whether it was a Russian attempt "either to make Ukraine look reckless or to buck up Russian public opinion" or if it was a Ukrainian operation to embarrass Russia.

The alleged attack immediately prompted calls in Russia from pro-Kremlin figures in Russia to carry out assassinations on senior leadership in Ukraine. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi yesterday met Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus in a bid to boost cooperation between the two allies. Tehran has been a main backer of Assad's government since an uprising turned into a full-blown war in March 2011 and has played an instrumental role in turning the tide in his favor. Iran has sent scores of military advisers and thousands of Iran-backed fighters from around the Middle East to fight on Assad's side.

AP PHOTO



Serbia A teenager opened fire at his school in Serbia's capital yesterday, killing eight children and a school guard before being arrested in the school yard, police said. Six more children and a teacher were hospitalized. A father of a student at the school in central Belgrade said the shooter entered his daughter's classroom, firing at her teacher and then her classmates as they ducked under their desks. Most students were able to flee through a back door.

AP PHOTO



US-Mexico Officials from both American countries have agreed on new immigration policies meant to deter illegal border crossings while also opening up other pathways ahead of an expected increase in migrants following the end of pandemic restrictions next week. Homeland Security adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall spent yesterday [Macau time] meeting with Mexico President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and other top officials, emerging with a five-point plan, according to statements from both nations.