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THE LONG-AWAITED RETURN OF THE FIA FORMULA 3 WORLD CUP AND GT WORLD CUP WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE MACAU GRAND PRIX THIS YEAR: ID

MORGAN STANLEY FORECASTS GGR TO APPROACH 90% OF PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

CRIME: SUSPECT OF A MURDER CASE UNEARTHED AT A HOTEL IN COTAI WAS ARRESTED IN CHAOZHOU, GUANGDONG PROVINCE OVER THE WEEKEND



Japan A strong, shallow earthquake hit central Japan last week, killing at least one person and injuring more than 20 others and disrupting plans for holidaymakers. The magnitude 6.2 quake struck Ishikawa prefecture on the west coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, the U.S. Geological Survey said. The Japan Meteorological Agency measured the quake at 6.5 and said it was centered at a depth of about 12 kilometers. More than 50 aftershocks strong enough to be felt have been recorded since, including one at 5.8 magnitude.



Sudan Qatar flew a relief flight into Sudan carrying some 40 tons of food and left with 150 evacuees this weekend as fighting continued between two generals vying for power in the African nation. The Qatari Emiri Air Force C-17 Globemaster touched down in Port Sudan, some 670 kilometers northeast of Sudan's violence-torn capital of Khartoum. The port city has been spared in the fighting and has become one of the few safe transit points out of the country, whether by air or by ships crossing the Red Sea heading to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

United Nations sought to reassure the Afghan people yet again that it won't abandon them, though it left in question how it was going to deliver desperately needed aid following the Taliban ban on Afghan women working for the world organization. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called the ban an unacceptable violation of the Afghan women's human rights. The U.N. announced on April 11 that the head of its political mission in Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, would carry out an "operational review" of its activities in the country until May 5.

More on backpage

LONG LIVE THE KING!

KING CHARLES III OFFICIALLY CROWNED IN HISTORIC EVENT



GUIA LIGHTHOUSE GREENLIGHT FOR PERIPHERAL TALL BUILDINGS RETAINED

XINHUA



P3

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

COMMUNITY ADVISORS AGAINST COIN-LESS PARKING METERS



ANTHONY LAM

THE ban on paying for roadside parking with physical legal tender may violate drivers' rights, António Monteiro, Central District Community Service Advisor, said recently at the May meeting of the advisory committee. He pointed out that the decision to ban payment by physical legal tender had been made without public consultation, considering the change's massive impact on drivers.

At the meeting, he cited comments from the public about the new policy being inconvenient and at odds with the public will. It is the right of drivers in general including non-locals driving in Macau to be able to

pay with any form of legal tender, he said.

He added that had there been a public consultation, the public would still have had an opportunity to have their voices heard.

He further questioned whether a driver with cash but no electronic payment means would see their payment denied. He also worried that one day, the government would shut down all cash payment facilities, forcing people to use electronic payment methods only.

During discussions on the law prohibiting roadside parking fees by physical legal tender, the government admitted that the change was made

for its own convenience and that of commissioned service operators.

The reason provided by the government was that sourcing parking meters capable of accepting physical and electronic payment had become increasingly difficult.

Opinions from the public, on the other hand, questioned whether the government would consider introducing more payment facilities, such as accepting a wider range of credit or debit cards. Currently, only the local tap-and-go platform Macau Pass and China's UnionPay are accepted.

Another advisor, Tai Ka Peng, criticized the government for not fully considering the factor of convenience for the general public on this topic. She added that malfunctioning parking meters are common, criticizing the government's comment that more malfunctions would occur with payment by coins.

GAMING

Morgan Stanley forecasts GGR to approach 90% of pre-pandemic levels

MORGAN Stanley has again raised its forecast for the city's gaming industry as the sector has been painting a rosy picture, following nearly three years of bleeding cash every day.

The banking group expects a 2023 mass GGR of USD19.9 billion (88% of 2019) and 2024 mass GGR of USD25.7 billion. In a note, analysts Praveen K Choudhary, Gareth Leung, and Stephen W Grambling said that the gaming sector is seeing a strong recovery. The sector recorded MOP14.7 billion in revenue for 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 previous month.

Also, the institution has raised its estimates for Sands



China and MGM China, two of the big six which have announced their first quarter earnings.

Venetian Macau was the main revenue driver for Sands China, bringing in USD446 million in casino revenue and USD558 million in net revenue. Their first quarter earnings rose 132.1% year-on-year to nearly USD1.28 billion.

By comparison, MGM China 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.

"We increased Sands 2023 EBITDA [estimate] by 23% to reflect its better-than-expected first-quarter 2023 results, higher mass market-share assumptions, and higher industry estimates," said the Morgan Stanley team.

For MGM, it has estimated that the gaming operator would see an EBITDA increase of 23% to HKD 5.96 billion. LV

GRAND PRIX

ID CONFIRMS F3, GT WORLD CUP RACE FOR 70TH GP EDITION

THE long-awaited return of the FIA Formula 3 World Cup and GT World Cup will take place at the Macau Grand Prix this year, following the suspension of these races for several years due to Covid-19 border restrictions.

Sports Bureau (ID) president Pun Weng Kun confirmed to the press that only a few race details are left to be confirmed.

The 70th Macau Grand Prix will run for two weekends from November 11 to 12, and November 16 to 19, and details on its

races are due to be finalized this summer.

Meanwhile, the Association of Macau Racers Federation is disappointed with the Macao Foundation's suspension of subsidies for local drivers to compete abroad.

As cited in a report by TDM, the association believes that the number of local drivers participating in the Grand Prix will be reduced by 60%.

The chairman of the association, Lei Kit Ming, revealed that he had received a notification from the ID about the de-

cision, and expressed disappointment in the decision to remove opportunities for local drivers to participate in motorsports competitions.

The chairman said that the decision to suspend funding for drivers going abroad to compete will affect some 20 local drivers.

The ID said in reply that it "hoped to continue to support local drivers to participate in the annual Macau Grand Prix under certain conditions, and this year's plan is being studied," as cited in the report. LV



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Greenlight for Guia Lighthouse peripheral tall buildings retained

ANTHONY LAM

THE government has decided to continue to allow two buildings over 50 meters in height to be built within the buffer zone of the Guia Lighthouse, despite UNESCO's opinion on the detrimental impacts these developments will have on the views around the lighthouse.

The lighthouse is part of a collection of structures that were collectively designated on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005.

It was announced over the weekend that the height clearance on the land plot adjacent to the east side of the Public Prosecutions Office building would be lowered from 32 meters above sea level to 28 meters.

Meanwhile, Land Plot 133, located right adjacent to the Santa Rosa de Lima Secondary School campus, will see its clearance lowered from 90 meters above sea level overall to 90 meters on the south end and 60 on the north. Land Plot 134, eastward of Land Plot 133, will be lowered from 90 meters to 60 meters.

Several local groups, such as

COURTESY SULLU SOU



the Concern Group for the Protection of the Guia Lighthouse and the New Macau Association, have been demanding that the government scrap the construction projects in the area in their entirety to better protect the views and the lighthouse itself.

Negotiations have started as early as in 2007 when the group

first raised its concerns to UNESCO. In 2021, UNESCO issued a resolution on the matter.

Resolution WHC/21/44, COM/7B states that, "Macau shall undertake a detailed urban design and conservation planning study on Avenida Doutor Rodrigo Rodrigues, taking into account existing site conditions, legal and planning

constraints, Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) requirements, and consider the possibility for a reduction in the current maximum building permit height and suspension of approval of new construction until the results of this study are formally adopted."

The local government accordingly commissioned a team to com-

mence such a study.

The study team highlighted that the study was aimed at "better protecting and interpreting the outstanding universal value of the lighthouse (OUV), and further highlighting the urban characteristics of Macau as a city of hills and seas."

The team further pointed out that Land Plot 134 is situated on the northern tip of the main visual corridor of the city. "Its current 90-meter clearance has a stronger visual impact. After model simulation, in order to improve the urban characteristics of the city of hills and seas, the overall height is limited to 60 meters above sea level," the team noted.

However, concerns over whether the lighthouse will be completely blocked, when viewed from the Kun Iam Ecumenical Centre in ZAPE, after the building is constructed in compliance with the new height clearances are still present, according to a report by local media All About Macau.

When questioned why the height clearances differ significantly between the three closely located land plots, the study team pointed to overall considerations of strengthening the visual connections between Outer Harbour and Guia Hill, in addition to the overall urban scenery.

Construction on the concerned land plots will be suspended until UNESCO approves the study results, according to Cultural Affairs Bureau president Leong Wai Man.



WEATHER

Max precipitation logged at 38.6 mm

THE city recorded a maximum rainfall level of 38.6 mm as a precautionary rainstorm signal was issued for two hours yesterday.

The figure was recorded by the at the East Asian Games precipitation station, located near the Taipa end of

Sai Van Bridge.

On the Macau Peninsula, meanwhile, the highest rainfall level was recorded at 23 mm by the Sun Yat-sen Municipal Park station.

The wet weather commenced around noontime yesterday, when the Me-

teorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) issued a special alert, warning about heavy rainfall within the next two hours.

Clouds started to form, darkening the sky which should have been light blue on a sunny early summer noon.

Around 12:30 p.m., it began to drizzle, resulting in motorcyclists experiencing wet helmets and the need for a raincoat. At nearly 1pm, the rain started to intensify.

The artificial satellite image on the SMG app showed that at 1:06 p.m., Macau was covered by a long stretch of clouds, spanning the breadth of the Guangdong province and reaching northward of the province's capital city of Guangzhou.

This prompted the SMG to issue the Yellow Rainstorm warning signal at about 1 p.m., which lasted until 3 p.m. A thunderstorm warning was also issued around the same time, but lasted much longer until 7 p.m.

The meteorological challenges have caused certain outdoor events to be suspended. **AL**

STATS

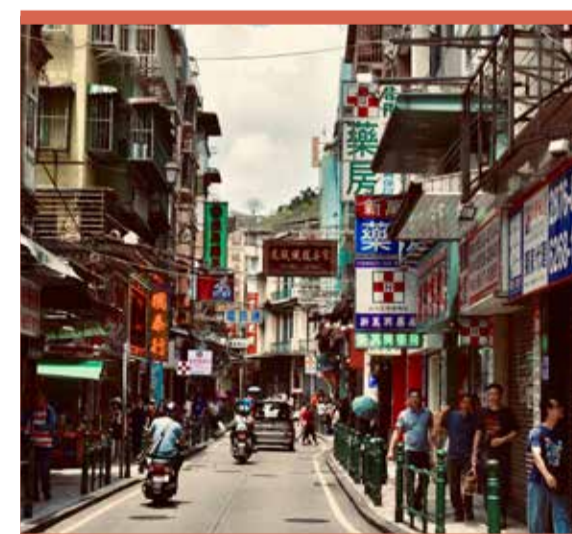
CITY SEES NEARLY 1,300 NEW FIRMS IN Q1

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU is seeing a rise in the incorporation of new companies, with the first quarter recording a total of 1,284 new companies – an increase of 189 year-on-year.

Number of new companies operating in the wholesale & retail trade and business services sectors totaled 515 and 354 respectively, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows.

The total value of registered capital of new companies was MOP495 million in the first quarter, which represented a fall of 96.3% year-on-year due to the incorporation of a new company with a relatively large amount of capital in financial activities in the same



quarter last year. The decrease would have been 3.9% had that company been excluded from the comparison.

However, companies in dissolution totaled 222 in the first quarter, and the value of registered capital of these companies amounted to MOP257 million.

Regarding the ori-

gin of capital of the newly incorporated companies, Macau and Hong Kong contributed MOP156 million (31.5%) and MOP125 million (25.3%) respectively. Capital from mainland China totaled MOP85 million, with MOP34 million and MOP14 million coming from Guangdong and Zhejiang respectively.

SECTIONS OF UNIVERSITY OF MACAU-HENGQIN PORT BRIDGE JOINED

The sections of the bridge between the University of Macau and Hengqin port are connected recently, making the project's scheduled completion in the second half of this year possible. This bridge is one of the key projects of the "Second Five-Year Plan" of the SAR and one of the key projects in the general plan for the construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. Located on the south side of the Lotus Bridge with a length of 807.5 meters, the bridge connects the Lotus Bridge with the Hengqin Campus of the University of Macau.

RESIDENTS' DEPOSITS INCREASE SLIGHTLY

Residents' deposits increased 1.6% from the preceding month to MOP706.0 billion, while non-resident deposits rose 3.4% to MOP299.2 billion, data from the Monetary Authority of Macao shows. Public sector deposits with the banking sector decreased 0.8% to MOP228.1 billion. As a result, total deposits in the banking sector grew 1.6% from a month earlier to MOP1,233.3 billion. Currency in circulation dropped 1.2%.

IAM DROPS BOOKING REQUIREMENTS FOR SEAC PAI VAN GARDENS

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has dropped booking requirements for those wanting to visit the Ecological Trail Garden of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants and South China Medicinal Plants Garden and the Wetland in Seac Pai Van from today. The bureau said it will implement appropriate crowd control measures based on the actual visitor flow and safety needs at the venues.

SSM TO CONTINUALLY MONITOR VIRUS INFECTION

The current number of Covid-19 infections in Macau has remained steady at an average of more than 20 cases per day, according to the Health Bureau. The bureau, amid the World Health Organization's declaration that Covid-19 is over as a global health emergency, expects that a second wave of small-scale rebound infections will happen this month. The government said it will continue to monitor the number of people infected with the virus.

LABOR RIGHTS ADVOCATE REPORTEDLY STALKED AFTER GIVING NOTIFICATION OF MAY 1 PROTEST

ANTHONY LAM

A local workers' rights advocate claimed that he had been stalked after giving notification of a May 1 protest, and felt persecuted.

Last week, on the sidelines of an association event, Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak disclosed that notification of the protest had been received by the police. However, Wong stated that "the organizer has withdrawn the notification before the first meeting."

In accordance with Macau laws, protest organizers must notify authorities of their events, but technically, the government has no right to veto their plans.

In the past three years, the police have banned protests and a recyclable collection campaign due to "health concerns," although incumbent Health Bureau director Alvis Lo was permitted to stage a singing event at the Ruins of St Paul's on May 4, 2021.

When questioned by the press whether the protest's cancellation spells less freedom in Macau, Wong underlined that the rights are protected by laws and "the government could not force people to stage protests."

Over the weekend, workers' rights icon Wong Wai Man emerged on the scene and stated that he was the organizer of the cancelled protest.

Dubbed "Captain Macau" by



the local Cantonese-speaking community, Wong is a workers' rights advocate who has already been active for well over a decade. He is specifically concerned with rights for construction bar-benders.

As of press time, a record of his association was not found on the Government Printing Office's website. The name that he used to refer to his association is Macau Construction Bar-benders' Trade Union.

Wong disclosed that after declaring his intention to stage a protest, he "suffered phenomenal pressure." He also expressed his

regrets for "letting grassroots residents down."

He said that he was "both monitored and stalked" after submitting the notification of the protest on Apr. 10. He blamed the police for these oppressive tactics.

In the same evening, he received a call that accused his association headquarters of involvement with Falun Gong, a group identified by Beijing as a religious cult. According to him, he immediately headed back to the headquarters in Areia Preta from Coloane and found four people playing mah-jong.

Police officers on the site,

meanwhile, asked him for his personal details, to fill out an entry permission form and sign some documents.

"In the next few days, there were up to eight plainclothes police officers on the peripheral of Kin Wa Building, every day and every night," he said. Kin Wa Building is where his association headquarters are located.

"They followed me wherever I went," Wong stated. "On Apr. 15, I was also tailed by another car while driving around a roundabout."

The following three days, he said, he turned his cellphone off and did not go out. Afterwards, he added, the police started contacting him via WeChat, persuading him not to stage the protest.

"I was told that my protest would be hijacked by another agenda," he said. In the end, he decided to withdraw his notification.

After Wong's interview, the Office of Wong Sio Chak issued a statement, underlining its "concerns" with the matter. The Judiciary Police have also been mobilized to commence an investigation into the accusations, the office added.

Wong appeared over the weekend to present a letter to the Transport Bureau (DSAT) regarding repetitive road works and poor road network design on the periphery of the Pearl of the Orient roundabout.

CRIME

Cotai hotel murder suspect apprehended in mainland China

THE suspect of a murder case unearthed at a hotel in Cotai on May 4 was arrested in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province the same evening by mainland police, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced over the weekend.

After the discovery of the alleged murder and the suspect's departure for mainland China, the PJ immediately notified their mainland counterparts.

The suspect is a 44-year old mainland resident named Li who entered Macau on Apr. 13 and subsequently overstayed his



permit. The PJ disclosed that he is alleged to have committed crimes of aggravated murder and robbery.

The 27-year-old victim,

meanwhile, entered the city on Apr. 28 and participated in an illegal currency exchange. He stayed in the same hotel room as the suspect, whom he had

known for a fortnight.

In response to interrogations by the mainland police, the suspected admitted to hitting the victim on the head with

a tumbler. However, the suspect declined to give further details.

The local police stated that post-mortem analysis identified a two centimeter crack on the victim's skull, numerous wounds on the head, neck, back and arms, bruises on the lips and throat, as well as signs of strangulation. These indications led the police to believe the victim had died from suffocation.

It was also disclosed that the victim entered the hotel room at 11 p.m. on May 3 and the suspect at 2 a.m. on May 4. At about 4 a.m., the suspect left the room with a suitcase and a bag of possessions. He left Macau at 6 a.m. the same day through the Qingmao Border Checkpoint after paying the fine for overstaying his entry permit in Macau. AL

TOURISM

May Golden Week hotel occupancy reaches new high amid robust recovery

THE SAR witnessed robust tourism recovery during the just-concluded five-day May Day holiday in the mainland, receiving around 300 travel groups and nearly 500,000 visitors.

The Macao Government Tourism Office said on Friday that a total of around 493,000 visitors entered Macau during the holiday from Saturday to Wednesday, including 376,000 from the mainland and 89,000 from the Hong Kong SAR.

The number of visitors rose more than 262% from the May Day holiday of last year and recovered to about 62% of the level in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic, the office said.

The average hotel occupancy rate during the holiday reached 85%, up 26.5 percentage points from the same period of last year. The hotel occupancy rate on Sunday, the day before May 1, shot up to 93.2%, a new record high this year.

Not only were famous tourist spots such as the landmark Ruins of St. Paul's and A-Ma Temple packed with tourists, but niche tourism destinations and streets also welcomed visitors, injecting vigor into community economy.

The Macau Grand Prix Museum, a popular attraction to children, received nearly 3,000 visitors during the holiday, an increase of 86% from a year ago.

An employee at a store selling local specialties told Xinhua that they had been working overtime every day during the holiday.



"However, the payment tripled and we had something to look forward to in the future," he said.

Chan Ka Leong, director general of the General Union of Neighborhood Associations of Macao, said the number of visitors during the holiday exceeded general expectations, voicing confidence that Macau's tourism sector can help boost other sectors to generate more financial income.

Macao were fully prepared for the holiday tourist surge. Starting Monday, two of the major land ports linking the SAR with its neighboring Zhuhai city in the mainland lifted the ban on multi-entries and exits for travelers on a single day.

The office also rolled out a series of events for this month, including the month-long 33rd

Macao Arts Festival and a sports carnival on the beach. Authorities from several government de-

partments carried out joint patrols during the holiday to curb illegal business operations.

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the SAR government tourism office, said they will learn from the experiences of this holiday to be better prepared for the summer holiday, a usual travel peak period for students, and the holiday for the National Day on Oct. 1.

Ng Iong Wai, president of the Macao Tour Guide Promotion Association, said Macau should continue tapping its cultural potential to help tourists feel its cultural charm.

Li Xi, executive associate dean of the Faculty of International Tourism and Management of the City University of Macau, said tourism recovery is bound to boost relevant industries and help advance Macau's appropriate economic diversification. **MDT/XINHUA**

ZHUHAI SEES TOURISM BOOM DURING FIVE-DAY HOLIDAY

ZHUHAI received 2.1 million visitors, achieved total tourism revenue of 1.27 billion yuan, and saw a surge in public transportation passenger volume during the May Day holiday, which ran from April 29 to May 3, according to statistics released by the Zhuhai Culture, Radio, Television, Tourism & Sports and Zhuhai Transport Bureau.

Zhuhai's aviation passenger throughput during the holiday registered at 192,504 people, an increase of 422.31% year-on-year. Meanwhile, its highway passenger volume rose by 166.04%, sitting at 67,900, and its water transportation sector saw a passenger

throughput of 183,850, indicating an increase of 242.98%

China Southern Airlines dispatched A330 wide-body aircrafts to conduct flights from Zhuhai (Jinwan) Airport to Beijing Daxing International Airport, in order to improve visitor's traveling experience.

Intervals between flights from Zhuhai to popular destinations such as Changsha, in Hunan Province, were shortened and more staff members were scheduled to provide considerate services for passengers.

CORPORATE BITS

MGM collaborates with local association to launch family education program



MGM collaborates with the Women's General Association of Macau to launch the "Connect with Love - Family Education Program," making

MGM the first integrated tourism and leisure enterprise in Macau to enter a partnership with the association in the interest of

advancing family education. The program is three-year community initiative in which the two parties will "leverage their complementary resources to implement a three-pronged approach."

This includes a joint establishment of Macau's first one-stop experiential zone dedicated to family education, a family education promoter scheme, and family education series of products.

Kenneth Feng, president and Chief Strategic and Financial Officer of MGM, said, "This year, we are delighted to ink a partnership with the Women's Association that enables family education and its intrinsic virtues to grow beyond MGM and permeate into the Macau community."

SJM hosts activities for seniors



SJM Resorts recently invited a group of seniors from Centro de Dia "Chong Pak

Chi Ká" of the Macau Federation of Trade Unions to a leisurely afternoon of gas-

tronic and cultural experiences at Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau.

The group started their day with a tour of the diverse facilities at the resort, including a stopover at "Blossoms at Grand Lisboa Palace - A Group Exhibition by Macau's Emerging Artists."

The exhibition features a collection of locally commissioned artworks on display through a collaboration between SJM and the Macau Youth Art Association.

SJM pledged that it will continue to work closely with different local associations "to conceive programs that drive inclusiveness in society."

OPINION

The Conversation

Mahad Darar, Colorado State University

CAN CHINA BROKER PEACE IN YEMEN - AND FURTHER BEIJING'S MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY IN THE PROCESS?

After nearly a decade of grinding conflict, Yemen looks to be inching toward a peace deal.

Talks between the Houthi movement controlling much of the country's north and Saudi Arabia, the regional power backing an anti-Houthi coalition in the war, are ongoing and being encouraged by international observers.

On May 1, 2023, the U.S. announced that it had sent Special Envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking to the Persian Gulf to "advance ongoing efforts to secure a new agreement and launch a comprehensive peace process."

But the U.S. has far less of a role in steering negotiations than Washington's great global rival: China. The recent breakthrough in Yemen has been undergirded by a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, facilitated by Beijing in March 2023.

It remains to be seen whether the Saudi-Iran breakthrough might contribute to a lasting peace in Yemen.

But given the role that the rivalry between the regional powers has had in fueling the fighting, international observers have expressed optimism.

The disintegration of Yemen began with the collapse of its central government in 2011 after the Arab Spring uprising. In 2014, the Houthi group, a Shiite militia backed by Iran, took control of the capital, Sanaa, and forced transitional President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi to flee to Aden. Hadi's government struggled to establish itself in Aden and eventually relocated to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where he resigned in 2022.

Viewing the Houthis as an Iranian proxy, Saudi Arabia intervened in the Yemeni conflict, backing those loyal to Hadi and bombarding Houthi areas from the air. These Saudi-led attacks contributed to a massive humanitarian crisis. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of at least 377,000 Yemenis, the United Nations projected in 2021, many through indirect causes such as starvation and disease. It has also led to widespread displacement of civilian populations and the breakdown of infrastructure.

The country remains fragmented, with militias controlling separate territories and no functional central government.

So where does China come in? Beijing has no formal diplomatic, economic or political ties with any of the numerous militias that currently govern parts of the country. But before 2014, China had a healthy trading and economic relationship with Yemen. According to the World Bank, in 2013 China was Yemen's second-largest trading partner after Saudi Arabia.

Since 2014, trade between China and Yemen persisted, albeit in a mostly informal manner. Data from the international trade-tracking Observatory

of Economic Complexity indicates that China imported US\$411 million worth of products, mainly crude oil but also copper, from Yemen in 2021. What remains unclear is which rebel factions have received revenue through the trade.

Meanwhile, China has maintained formal diplomatic and economic ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates — each of which back militias involved in Yemen's war. In fact, China has been intensifying its economic and political connections with all three regional powers.

In recent years, Chinese leader Xi Jinping has visited both the UAE and Saudi Arabia to underscore Beijing's growing role as a partner in the region. Xi also recently hosted Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi during a state visit to China.

This expanding relationship with key players in the Yemeni conflict puts China in a unique position as a potential peace broker.

The UAE can influence Yemeni factions it has provided military and financial support to, including the "Security Belt" forces affiliated with the transitional government. However, the Emiratis' goals may differ from those seeking a unified, independent Yemen. Since the conflict broke out, the UAE has displayed a tendency to undermine Yemen's territorial integrity through, for example, taking control of some Yemeni islands, such as Socotra.

Similarly, Iran may be reluctant to accept any peace agreement that would diminish its influence in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia, of the three, stands to gain the most from peace in Yemen. Cessation of conflict would likely halt Houthi attacks on the kingdom, save the Saudis money and resources dedicated to the Yemeni war, and potentially restore an international reputation tarnished by alleged war crimes in the conflict.

To broker peace in Yemen, China would presumably need to concentrate efforts on working with the Saudis.

The Chinese-backed rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran could be a first step to this end.

It could be that China is seeking to be seen as a global peacemaker as part of a strategy that has been referred to as "diplomatic whitewashing" — that is, making friends overseas and playing the "nice guy" to distract from China's treatment of its Uyghur minority at home and Xi's increasingly confrontational posture on Taiwan and the South China Sea.

But it also fits a wider geopolitical trend. The counterbalance to China's growing role in the Middle East is the declining influence of the United States in the region. [Abridged]

DIPLOMACY

AFTER ATTACKS ON CHINESE, PAKISTAN PLEDGES MORE SECURITY

MUNIRAHMED, ISLAMABAD

THE Pakistani president assured Beijing's top diplomat that his country will boost security for all Chinese nationals working on multi-billion dollar projects in cash-strapped Pakistan.

China has been demanding more security from Pakistan for its nationals residing and working in the Islamic country since 2021, when a suicide bomber killed nine Chinese and four Pakistanis in an attack in Pakistan's volatile northwest.

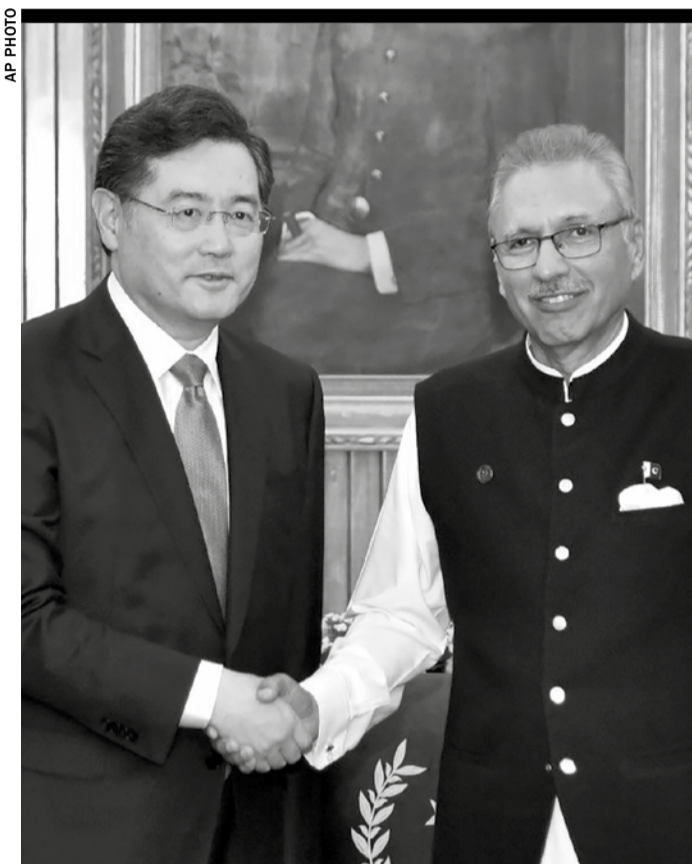
More recently, a Chinese national working on the Dasu Dam, a Chinese-funded hydropower project and the biggest of its kind in Pakistan, was arrested on blasphemy charges after an angry mob accused him of insulting Islam when he criticized a coworker for taking too much time to pray during working hours.

Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws carry the death penalty, and sometimes even a mere suggestion of blasphemy is enough to entice mobs to violence or lynching. The Chinese man was subsequently released under a court order but it remained unclear if he would face trial or be deported home.

President Arif Alvi pledged more security for Chinese workers during a meeting over the weekend [Macau time] with visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang. The two spoke ahead of a mini-summit on Saturday in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, during which Pakistan's foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, will host Qin and also Afghanistan's Taliban-appointed foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi.

Muttaqi also arrived in Islamabad on Friday ahead of the three-way meeting the next day. The gathering is also seen as an outreach to the Taliban by Pakistan, which has acted as a mediator with Afghanistan's new rulers, and also China, which is eager to expand its influence in the region.

The Taliban have been shunned by most of the international community for the harsh and restrictive measures they have imposed



Visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang (left) meets with Pakistani President Arif Alvi in Islamabad

since they seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021, when U.S. and NATO troops were in the final weeks of their pullout from the country after 20 years of war, particularly banning girls from education beyond the sixth grade and barring women from most jobs and public life.

In Pakistan, Beijing is bankrolling the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, or CPEC — a sprawling package that includes a multitude of mega projects such as road construction, power plants and agriculture. The package is a lifeline for Pakistan's cash-strapped government, currently facing one of the worst economic crises amid stalled talks on a bailout with the International Monetary Fund.

CPEC, also known as the One Road Project, is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, a global endeavor aimed at reconstituting the Silk Road and linking China to all corners of Asia.

Alvi and Qin "reaffirmed their resolve to work together to promote regional peace and prosperity as well as jointly cope with external challenges." Alvi told the Chinese diplomat that Pakistan-China relations were "rooted in mutual trust" and understanding.

The Chinese minister was quoted in the statement as saying their nations were "all-weather friends" whose friendship "was as solid as a rock."

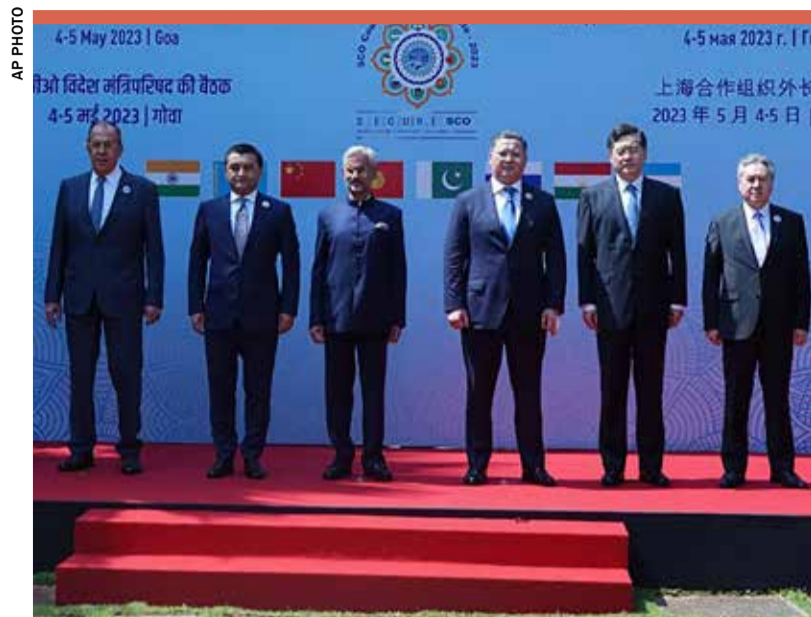
This is the second time that Muttaqi, the Taliban official, is visiting Pakistan since the Taliban takeover. Pakistan has lately expressed concern over a surge in attacks across the country by the Pakistani Taliban — an independent militant group that is allied with and sheltered by the Afghan Taliban.

Islamabad has demanded from the Taliban in Kabul that they do more to rein in anti-Pakistani groups such as the Pakistani Taliban — also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP — which have stepped up attacks on Pakistani security forces in recent months.

Muttaqi is also expected to discuss the issue of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan as well as the two nations' border issues. In February, the two sides shut the main Afghan-Pakistan border crossing at Torkham, stranding people and thousands of trucks carrying food and essential items.

After a Pakistani delegation travelled to Kabul for talks on the crisis, the border was reopened after a week. MDT/AP

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



From left: Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Uzbekistani Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar, Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Murat Nurtleu, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang and Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Minister Jeenbek Kulubaev pose for a group photograph prior to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in Goa

DIPLOMACY

Group led by China, Russia criticizes global institutions

KRUTIKA PATHI, PANAJI

FOREIGN ministers from a group of nations led by China and Russia criticized over the weekend the ability of world institutions to resolve geopolitical problems, including the coronavirus pandemic, and said their organization should do more to address such challenges.

Indian Foreign Minister Subramanyam Jaishankar said in remarks at a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that the crises have disrupted global supply chains and have hit developing nations the hardest.

They have “exposed a credibility and trust deficit in the ability of global institutions to manage challenges in a timely and efficient manner,” he said, adding that alternative organizations like the SCO can help address such challenges.

“With more than 40% of the world’s population within the SCO, our collective decisions will surely have a global impact,” he said.

Russia and China founded the SCO in 2001 as a counterweight to U.S. alliances across East Asia to the Indian Ocean. The group includes the four Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which

Russia considers its backyard. In 2017, India and Pakistan became members, and Iran and Belarus are set to join later this year.

Russia and China have sought to reduce the dominance of what they see as U.S. and Western-led global institutions and alliances, and China accuses Washington of attempting to contain its economic and military rise.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang told the foreign ministers that “the world is faced with multiple crises and challenges featuring a resurgence of the Cold War mentality, headwinds of unilateral protectionism, as well as rising hegemonism and power politics,” China’s official Xinhua News Agency reported.

“SCO members should support each other in safeguarding sovereignty, security and development interests, and oppose external forces interfering in regional issues,” he said.

At a briefing after the meeting, Jaishankar dismissed questions about whether the SCO is anti-Western, saying, “how people perceive it is something I cannot answer for.” Instead, he stressed India’s “multidirectional foreign policy” and said “it’s not always possible that all our partners get along with other partners.”
MDT/AP

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MGM and Industrial Association of Macau Collaborate to Launch “MGM Macau Premium Product Promotion Program”



In view of further promoting Macau brands, MGM and the Industrial Association of Macau launched the “MGM Macau Premium Product Promotion Program”. By strategically tapping into MGM’s competitive edges, the Program will adopt an overarching approach – including increasing purchases, upgrading business, utilizing the impact of social media influencers and more – to maximize exposures for “M-Mark”, Macau

brand and Made-in-Macau products, in a bid to elevate the competitiveness of SMEs and build-up reputation of homegrown brands. The pivotal objective is to encourage the Macau’s industrial transformation and enhancement, with an aim to achieve Macau’s economic diversification.

At the inauguration ceremony of the Program, MGM inked a purchase agreement of over MOP 1 million with Long Tin Group (Long Tin), a decades-old local brand specialized in Cantonese barbecue and preserved meat, as a pragmatic gesture to fulfill the Company’s commitment of increasing “M-Mark” related SME purchase. MGM and Long Tin will develop a lineup of new crossover products of preserved meat and sausage, available for sale at MGM’s retail locations. The two parties will also apply “M-Mark” for these products to add more “M-Mark” products to the market.



With MGM’s continuous support towards the “M-Mark” scheme co-organized by Industrial Association of Macau and Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Center (CPTTM), the Company has previously encouraged and helped its suppliers to achieve “M-Mark” certification. Considering that the majority of “M-Mark” applicants are SMEs from the food industry, MGM signed an agreement of cooperation with CPTTM to co-organize the “MGM Food Hygiene and Safety Management Course”. Participants will receive the internationally recognized HACCP training certificate upon completion of the program and passed its examination, which are fully funded by MGM.

On top of increasing purchase amount and introducing food safety management program, MGM, the Industrial Association of Macau and CPTTM have started a new round of visits to the local SMEs, in view of encouraging them to apply for

“M-Mark”. The Program will also roll out a series of strategic promotions, one of them being the promotion of “MinM Plaza”, a retail and exhibition center for high-quality “Made-in-Macau” products setup by the Industrial Association of Macau to the mainland Market. MGM will give out a MOP100 vouchers of “MinM Plaza” along every hotel package booking made through MGM’s official Wechat shop, C-trip and Meituan within a limited period, which will attract more visitors and increase cashflow for “MinM Plaza”. MGM also plans to organize roadshows at the back-of-house areas of its properties with “MinM Plaza” to promote “M-Mark” products to over 10,000 team members.

Increasing online exposure is also another key focus of the Program. MGM has funded and produced a series of short videos, titled “Macau’s Hustle and Bustle”, to promote “M-Mark”, Macau brands and “Made-in-Macau” products in “MinM Plaza”. The series was premiered during the event and will also be uploaded onto MGM’s official RED account and other online platforms to attract visitors. At the same time, MGM will continuously invite a total of 30 KOLs to promote “MinM Plaza” through social media postings and livestreaming.



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LONG LIVE THE KING!

King Charles III crowned with regal pomp,

DANICA KIRKA
& JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

KING Charles III was crowned Saturday at Westminster Abbey, in a ceremony steeped in ancient ritual and brimming with bling at a time when the monarchy is striving to remain relevant in a fractured modern Britain.

At a coronation with displays of royal power straight out of the Middle Ages, Charles was given an orb, a sword and scepter and had the solid gold, bejeweled St. Edward's Crown placed atop his head as he sat upon a 700-year-old oak chair.

In front of world leaders, foreign royals, dignitaries and a smattering of stars, the monarch declared, "I come not to be served but to serve," and was presented as Britain's "undoubted king."

Inside the medieval abbey, trumpets sounded, and the congregation of more than 2,000 shouted "God save the king!" Outside, thousands of troops, hundreds of thousands of spectators and scores of protesters converged.

It was the culmination of a seven-decade journey for the king from heir to monarch.

To the royal family and government, the occasion — code-named Operation Golden Orb — was a display of heritage, tradition and spectacle unmatched around the world.



To the crowds gathered under rainy skies — thousands of whom had camped overnight — it was a chance to be part of a historic event.

Julie Newman, a 77-year-old visitor from Canada, said the royal procession had been "absolutely fabulous. Couldn't ask for anything better."

"But we're ready to go back home and watch it all on the television," she added.

But to millions more, the day was greeted with a shrug, the awe and reverence the ceremony was designed to evoke largely gone.

And to a few, it was reason to protest. Hundreds who want to see Britain become a republic gathered to holler "Not my king." They see the monarchy as an institution that stands for privilege and inequality, in a country of deepening poverty and fraying social ties. A handful were arrested.

As the day began, the abbey buzzed with excitement and was abloom with fragrant flowers and colorful hats. Notables streamed in: U.S. first lady Jill Biden, first lady Olena Zelenska of Ukraine, French President Emmanuel Macron, eight current and former British prime

ministers, judges in wigs, soldiers with gleaming medals, and celebrities including Judi Dench, Emma Thompson and Lionel Richie.

During the traditional Anglican service slightly tweaked for modern times, Charles, clad in crimson and cream velvet and ermine-trimmed robes, swore on a Bible that he is a "true Protestant."

But a preface was added to the coronation oath to say the Anglican church "will seek to foster an environment where people of all faiths and beliefs may live freely." It was the first ceremony to include representatives of the Buddhist, Hindu,

Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh faiths, as well as the first in which female clergy took part.

Charles was anointed with oil from the Mount of Olives in the Holy Land — a part of the ceremony so sacred it was concealed behind screens — before being presented with the Sovereign's Orb and other regalia.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby then placed the crown on Charles' head, while he sat in the Coronation Chair — once gilded, now worn and etched with graffiti. Underneath the seat was a sacred slab known as the Stone of Scone, on which ancient Scottish kings were crowned.

For 1,000 years and more, such grandiose ceremonies have confirmed the right of British kings to rule. Charles was the 40th sovereign to be enthroned in the abbey — and, at 74, the oldest.

These days, the king no longer has executive or political power, and the service is purely ceremonial since Charles automatically became king upon death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September.

The king does remain the U.K.'s head of state and a symbol of national identity — and Charles will have to work to bring together a multicultural nation and shore up support for the monarchy at a time when it is waning, especially

PRINCES

Harry an odd man out at father's coronation spectacle

BRIAN MELLEY, LONDON

IN the fairy-tale ending to the ancient pageantry in which King Charles III was crowned monarch, he stepped into a gilded horse-drawn carriage with his queen and rode off to his palace.

Following closely behind was Prince William, his eldest son and heir, along with his family, including 9-year-old Prince George who is second in line to the throne.

The king's youngest son was nowhere to be seen. On his father's biggest day, Prince Harry arrived at Westminster Abbey alone and he left alone. The disgruntled Duke of Sussex was assigned to sit two rows behind his brother.

His isolation was likely the result of him quitting his royal duties and, thus, no longer ranking as a senior



Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and Prince Andrew leave Westminster Abbey

family member — as well as alienating himself from his father and brother by airing grievances and telling palace secrets in his explosive best-selling memoir, "Spare."

If anyone was hoping the coronation would help break the ice between Harry and his brother, who were once so close, they are sure

to have been disappointed. The siblings were not seen speaking or even acknowledging each other during the ceremony.

After months of speculation about whether he would attend, it was announced about three weeks ago that Harry would come alone, leaving behind his wife, Me-

ghan, and their two young children at their Southern California home.

Harry and Meghan, who is biracial, left royal life and moved to the U.S. in 2020 after complaining about intense scrutiny and racist attitudes from the British press.

In a six-part Netflix series, they lobbed other criticisms at the royal family, alleging racial bias. In January, Harry dropped his bombshell book dishing family dirt along with intimate details about losing his virginity behind a pub at 17, taking drugs and killing enemies in Afghanistan.

The book was particularly unflattering toward his stepmother, Camilla, who was once blamed for wrecking his father's marriage to his mother, the late Princess Diana. He accused Camilla of leaking private conversations to the media to reha-

bilitate her own image after marrying Charles.

Buckingham Palace had announced before the coronation that Harry and the king's brother, Prince Andrew, would not have any role in the service.

Andrew, the Duke of York, relinquished royal duties after revelations about his friendship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. He was later stripped of his honorary military titles and patronages and settled a lawsuit with a woman who said she was forced to have sex with him when she was a teenager.

William played a prominent role, kneeling at his father's feet, pledging his loyalty and then kissing him on the cheek. George served as page boy, helping to carry the train of his grandfather's robes.

Harry entered the caver-

nous church in a black custom Dior three-piece suit with coattails. An honorary cross hung around his neck and military medals were pinned to the left side of his chest. He nodded, waved and spoke a few words to clergy and several guests already seated.

He proceeded along behind his cousin, Princess Eugenie and her husband, Jack Brooksbank, who followed her father, Andrew. They all sat in the same row.

During the two-hour spectacle, keen attention was focused on Harry by the media and royal watchers. He appeared to join the congregation in one of many refrains of "God save the king" during the pomp- and music-filled ceremony.

Some British tabloids even consulted professional lip-readers to interpret what Harry was saying.

cheers and shrugs

among younger people.

While most Britons view the monarchy on a spectrum ranging from apathy to mild interest, some are fervently opposed to it. The anti-monarchy group Republic said several of its members, including its chief executive, were arrested as they arrived at a protest in central London.

Police, who'd warned they would have a "low tolerance" for people seeking to disrupt the day, said they made 52 arrests. Human Rights Watch said arrests of peaceful protesters were "something you would expect to see in Moscow, not London."

The multimillion-pound cost of the all the pomp — the exact figure unknown — also rankled some amid a cost-of-living crisis that has meant many Britons are struggling to pay energy bills and buy food.

Charles has sought to lead a smaller, less expensive royal machine for the 21st century, and his was a shorter, smaller affair than his mother's coronation.

The notoriously feuding royal family put on its own show of unity. Prince William, who is next in line to be king, his wife, Kate, and their three children were all in attendance. Towards the end of the ceremony, William knelt before his father and pledged loyalty to the king — before kissing him on the cheek.

Then Archbishop Welby invited everyone in the abbey to swear "true allegiance" to the monarch. He said

people watching on television could pay homage, too — though that part of the ceremony was toned down after some criticized it as a tone-deaf effort to demand a public oath of allegiance for Charles.

William's younger brother Prince Harry, who has publicly sparred with the family, arrived alone. His wife Meghan and their children remained at home in California, where the couple has lived since quitting as working royals in 2020.

As Charles and the key royals joined a magnificent military procession after the ceremony, Harry stood waiting outside the abbey until a car arrived to drive him away.

Large crowds cheered as Charles and Queen Camilla, who was also crowned, rode in the Gold State Carriage from the abbey to Buckingham Palace, accompanied by a procession of 4,000 troops and military bands playing jaunty tunes. From the palace balcony, the king and queen waved to a sea of people who cheered and shouted "God Save the king!"

For many other Britons, the day's events drew mild curiosity, at best.

Cherie Duffy, who was visiting London from Anglesey, Wales, on a trip planned before the coronation date was set, watched the ceremony on TV — but only because someone else turned it on.

"There's a general not-bothered-ness," she said about how she and her friends felt. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Former prime minister David Cameron and his wife Samantha (left), Britain's Home Secretary Suella Braverman and Katy Perry

HATS

FROM CHARLES TO DERBY, DAY FOR FANCY HATS TO RULE

If ever there was a banner day for hats — wild and colorful hats — it was Saturday, the dual spectacle of King Charles III's coronation and the celebration that is the Kentucky Derby.

Katy Perry donned a wide lilac hat to go with her matching bespoke jacket and skirt by Vivienne Westwood, her chin up as she peered under its flat, tilted brim while she searched for her seat at Westminster Abbey (yes, there were memes).

And there was Princess Anne, the king's sister, in a two-pointed military topper with tall red feathers that blocked Prince Harry's view from the third row (more memes ensued). Sorry, Harry, she was

chosen as Gold Stick in Waiting and holds a variety of military titles.

It's tradition, of course, to wear hats to coronations and other formal royal affairs, but the thousands who gathered on the streets to celebrate went all out with head gear, from fake golden crowns to novelty deeley bobbars (those springy headband things) and hats of all kinds with motifs featuring the British flag.

Speaking of hats of all kinds, the Kentucky Derby is arguably the world's most famous horse race. It's also a chance for racegoers to strut their fashion stuff.

Seersucker suits, floral dresses and bright colors abound,

but racegoers famously elevate their style to another level with their grand collections of hats and fascinators.

Men tend to favor fedoras or bowlers, while women sport designs featuring feathers and flowers in every shape, color and size. Bigger is often better when it comes to Derby hats.

The event has appointed an official milliner, or hatmaker, every year since 2018. But in a sign of their growing importance at the Kentucky Derby, it named three milliners for the 2023 event: Christine Moore, Jenny Pfanestiel and The Hat Girls.

The tradition of wearing hats to the Derby began with its first running in 1875. **MDT/AP**

The Daily Mirror revealed that it appeared he said, "hello," "morning" and "nice to see you" when he entered the church.

Harry has vowed to make media reform part of his mission in life. He has filed several lawsuits against the publishers of British tabloids for a phone-hacking scandal dating back more than a decade.

His trial against the publisher of the Mirror begins Wednesday in the High Court. Harry is expected to testify in June.

After the carriages departed from the church, Harry was seen waiting for a car. He was later seen at Heathrow Airport. His son, Archie, turned 4 on Saturday and it was said he was headed back for his birthday.

A short while later, King Charles III and Queen Camilla stepped out onto the balcony of Buckingham Palace to wave to the crowd gathered below. They were joined by William, his wife, Kate, three children and other senior royals. **MDT/AP**

FIRST LADIES

JILL BIDEN: CHARLES' CORONATION WAS 'JUST AMAZING TO SEE'

FIRST lady Jill Biden, who represented the United States at Saturday's coronation of Britain's King Charles III, said there was "such beauty in the pageantry of the ceremony" and it was "just amazing to see."

"You can't imagine that moment where you actually see the crown being placed on the head of the king and then on the head of the queen," she said during a telephone interview with The Associated Press after the ceremony in London. "It's really surreal to see and experience that moment."

Charles' wife, Camilla, also was crowned queen during Britain's first coronation in 70 years. His mother, Queen Elizabeth II, died last September after a seven-decade reign.

An American president has never attended a British coronation and President



US First Lady Jill Biden arrives at Westminster Abbey

Joe Biden asked the first lady to represent the U.S. in his place. The White House said Jill Biden's appearance marked the first time that a U.S. first lady was present

for a British coronation.

She brought one of her granddaughters, Finnegan Biden, 24, on the trip.

"It's my honor to represent the people of the Uni-

ted States and I wanted to be here," Jill Biden said.

"We thought that was something that was so British," she said of their tea time. "It was something we really wanted to do together."

She said sitting and watching the ceremony led her to think about the importance of traditions.

At the coronation, Jill Biden sat beside Olena Zelenska, the first lady of Ukraine. Jill Biden said they talked about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and that Zelenska thanked her again for the support from the United States.

Jill Biden said she paid close attention to Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby's message that people everywhere seek hope and joy.

"And I thought that was such strong message because I think that is true,"

she said. "And it's true for all people everywhere, but I think it was important at this moment that the clergy brought that in to this moment in history."

The first lady attended a Buckingham Palace reception Friday that was hosted by Charles. She said Charles recounted to her his most recent telephone conversation with President Biden and asked her to "give my best to your husband."

She said she and Princess Kate chatted as mothers about the lengths to which they go to keep their children quiet in church, feeding them pieces of candy and such.

"She said she didn't know if her son could sit still for two hours and we just had a good laugh over it," Jill Biden said. "It's just something, I think, that's common to a lot of us." **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

NUCLEAR WATCHDOG'S WORRIES GROW OVER UKRAINE PLANT SAFETY

DAVID RISING, KYIV

THE head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog is expressing growing anxiety about the safety of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, after the governor of the Russia-occupied area ordered the evacuation of a town where most plant staff live amid ongoing attacks in the area.

The plant is near the front lines of fighting in the war, and Ukrainian authorities on yesterday said that a 72-year-old woman was killed and three others were wounded when Russian forces fired more than 30 shells at Nikopol, a Ukrainian-held town neighboring the plant.

Ukraine has also been regularly attacking the Russian side of the lines.

"The general situation in the area near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is becoming increa-



A Russian serviceman guards in an area of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station in territory under Russian military control, southeastern Ukraine, last week

singly unpredictable and potentially dangerous," International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Grossi said in a warning that came Saturday

before the latest report of attacks.

"I'm extremely concerned about the very real nuclear safety and security risks facing the

plant."

Grossi's comments were prompted by an announcement Friday by Yevgeny Balitsky, the Russia-installed governor of the partially-occupied Zaporizhzhia province, that he had ordered the evacuation of civilians from 18 settlements in the area, including Enerhodar, which is located next to the power plant, which is Europe's largest.

The settlements affected are about 50 to 70 kilometers (30 to 40 miles) from the front line of fighting between Ukraine and Russia, and Balitsky said that Ukraine had intensified attacks on the area in the past several days.

Analysts have for months pointed to the southern Zaporizhzhia region as one of the possible targets of Ukraine's expected spring counter-offensive, speculating that Kyiv's forces might try to choke off Russia's "land corridor" to the Crimean Peninsula and split Russian forces in two by pressing on to the Azov Sea coast.

Some of the fiercest ongoing fighting is in the eastern city of Bakhmut, where Ukrainian forces are still clinging to a position on the western outskirts despite Russia trying to take the city for more than nine months.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said yesterday that Moscow's forces had captured two more districts in the city's west and northwest, but provided no further details.

Ukraine's Special Operations Forces on Saturday accused Russia of using phosphorous in the city and on Sunday released a new video showing the telltale white fire from such munitions.

International law prohibits the use of white phosphorus or other incendiary weapons — munitions designed to set fire to objects or cause burn injuries — in areas where there could be concentrations of civilians, though it can also be used for illumination or to create smoke screens.

It wasn't possible to independently verify where the video was shot or when, but chemical weapons expert Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a former British army colonel, said it was clearly white phosphorous.

"This is being fired directly at Ukraine positions and this would be a war crime," he said.

"I expect because the Russians have failed to take Bakhmut conventionally, they are now using unconventional tactics to burn the Ukrainian soldiers to death or to get

them to flee."

Russian forces haven't commented on the claim, but have rejected previous accusations from Ukraine that they had used phosphorous munitions.

In the south, the exiled Ukrainian mayor of the Russia-occupied coastal city of Mariupol said in a Telegram post yesterday that there was evidence that Moscow's forces had intensified their transfer of tracked vehicles through the city and into the front-line Zaporizhzhia region.

Petro Andryushchenko claimed that more and more vehicles were being spotted crossing the city "every day."

He posted a short video showing heavy trucks transporting armored vehicles along an expressway, without specifying where or when it was taken.

In Enerhodar, the town near the nuclear plant, the Ukrainian General Staff said yesterday that the evacuation announced Friday had already begun.

According to an update posted on Facebook, the General Staff said the first residents evacuated were those who took Russian citizenship following the capture of the town by Moscow early in the war.

They were being taken to the Russia-occupied Azov Sea coast, about 200 kilometers (120 miles) to the southeast.

Grossi said that operating staff of the nuclear power plant, whose six reactors are currently all in shutdown mode, hadn't been evacuated as of Saturday but that most live in Enerhodar and the situation has contributed to "increasingly tense, stressful and challenging conditions for personnel and their families."

He added that IAEA experts at the nuclear site "are continuing to hear shelling on a regular basis."

"We must act now to prevent the threat of a severe nuclear accident and its associated consequence for the population and the environment," Grossi said. "This major nuclear facility must be protected. I will continue to press for a commitment by all sides to achieve this vital objective." MDT/AP

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Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, right, and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol attend a welcoming ceremony at the presidential office in Seoul, yesterday

S. Korean, Japanese meet again to improve ties

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

THE leaders of South Korea and Japan met Sunday for their second summit in less than two months, as they push to mend long-running historical grievances and boost ties in the face of North Korea's nuclear program and other regional challenges.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida arrived in South Korea earlier Sunday for a two-day visit, which reciprocates a mid-March trip to Tokyo by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol. It was the first exchange of visits between the leaders of the Asian neighbors in 12 years.

South Korean media attention on the summit is focused on whether Kishida will make a more direct apology over Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula. Such comments by Kishida would likely help Yoon win greater support for his push to build stronger ties with Japan and ease domestic criticism that he's preemptively made concessions to Tokyo without receiving corresponding steps in return.

"It took 12 years to restore 'the shuttle diplomacy' but our exchange of visits took less than two months," Yoon said at the start of the meeting. "I think this confirms that South Korean-Japan relations, which have started

fresh, are moving forward with a speed."

Yoon said cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo is essential considering "the current grave international political situation and the global polycrisis." He didn't elaborate, but has previously cited North Korea's advancing nuclear program, the intensifying U.S.-China strategic rivalry and global supply chain problems as reasons for greater cooperation with Japan.

Kishida said he and Yoon plan to exchange views to further develop bilateral relations. Kishida said that "a series of dialogues has dynamically started moving" since his summit with Yoon in March, during which he said the two leaders "wiped out somewhat shrunk mood to strengthen our dialogue and cooperation."

South Korean and Japanese officials said their leaders would discuss North Korea's nuclear program, South Korean-Japanese economic security and overall relations, and other unspecified international issues.

Ahead of his summit with Yoon, Kishida and his wife, Yuko Kishida, visited the national cemetery in Seoul, where they burned incense and paid a silent tribute before a memorial. Buried or honored in the cemetery are mostly Korean War dead, but include Korean independence

fighters during the period of Japanese rule. Kishida was the first Japanese leader to visit the place in 12 years.

In their March summit, Yoon and Kishida agreed to resume leadership-level visits and other talks. In recent weeks, the two countries have also withdrawn the economic retaliatory steps they had earlier taken against each other in previous years when their history row rekindled.

The most recent sticking point in their ties was 2018 court rulings in South Korea that ordered two Japanese companies to financially compensate some of their aging former Korean employees for colonial-era forced labor. The verdicts angered Japan, which has argued that all compensation issues were already settled when the two countries normalized ties in 1965.

In an escalation of tensions, the two countries later downgraded each other's trade status, while Seoul also threatened to spike a military intelligence-sharing pact. Some activists and residents in South Korea staged campaigns to boycott Japanese products, as well.

The strained South Korea-Japan ties complicated U.S. efforts to build a stronger regional alliance to better cope with rising Chinese influence and North Korean nuclear threats.

In March, however, Yoon's

conservative government took a major step toward mending the ties by announcing it would use local funds to compensate the forced labor victims without demanding contributions from Japanese companies. Later in March, Yoon traveled to Tokyo to meet with Kishida.

Yoon's push drew strong backlash from some of the forced labor victims and his liberal rivals at home, who have demanded direct compensation from the Japanese companies.

In late April, Yoon made a state visit to the United States and agreed with President Joe Biden to reinforce deterrence capabilities against North Korea's nuclear threats. During a joint news conference, Biden thanked Yoon "for your political courage and personal commitment to diplomacy with Japan."

"White House officials have expressed some frustration with the tepid response from Tokyo on the forced labor compensation deal and hope that Kishida will use an upcoming visit to South Korea in early May to do more," Victor Cha, senior vice president for Asia and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote in an analysis published last week.

Yoon, Biden and Kishida are expected to hold a trilateral meeting later this month on the sidelines of the Group of Seven mee-

tings in Hiroshima to discuss North Korea, and Russia's war on Ukraine. Yoon was invited as one of eight outreach nations.

After his March summit with Yoon, Kishida said he upholds the positions of previous Japanese governments including one carried in the landmark 1998 joint declaration by Tokyo and Seoul on improving ties, but didn't make a new apology. In the 1998 declaration, then-Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi said that "I feel acute remorse and offer an apology from my heart" over the colonial rule.

Japanese governments have expressed remorse or apologies over the colonial period numerous times. But some Japanese officials and politicians have occasionally made comments that have been accused of whitewashing Tokyo's wartime aggressions, prompting Seoul to urge Tokyo to make new, more sincere apologies.

Asked whether he would discuss the forced labor victims with Yoon, Kishida said in his pre-departure comments: "We will frankly exchange our views on this."

Seoul and Tokyo have a slew of other sensitive historical and territorial disputes, mostly related to the Japanese colonization. In a reminder of the delicate nature of their ties, diplomats between the two countries last week spat over a South Korean lawmaker's visit to disputed islets located in the waters between the two countries. Earlier, Seoul protested Kishida's offering of religious offerings to a Tokyo shrine that it views as a symbol of Japan's wartime aggression. **MDT/AP**

INDONESIA WORKS TO RESCUE 20 TRAFFICKING VICTIMS IN MYANMAR

NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA

INDONESIAN officials said Friday they were working to rescue dozens of their nationals who were trafficked to Myanmar to work as cyber scammers, amid an increase in human trafficking cases in Southeast Asia.

At least 20 Indonesian job seekers are trapped in Myawaddy township, the site of an armed conflict between Myanmar's military and ethnic Karen rebels, said Judha Nugraha, an official in Indonesia's Foreign Affairs Ministry. Myawaddy is in eastern Kayin state along the Thai border.

According to Nugraha, fake recruiters offered the victims high-paying jobs in Thailand but instead trafficked them to Myawaddy, about 567 kilometers (352 miles) south of Naypyidaw, the capital, to perform cyber scams for crypto websites or apps.

The Indonesian Migrant Worker Union, a nonprofit group, said some victims were tortured when they failed to reach certain targets and forced to pay more than \$10,000 in travel



Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi speaks during a news conference in Jakarta, Indonesia, last week

costs. Authorities said the victims were likely trafficked to Myanmar by illegal means since no records can be found of their arrival in Myanmar's immigration system.

"The challenges on the ground are indeed high as authorities in Myanmar face difficulties entering Myawaddy since rebels have taken over the region," Nugraha said.

Indonesian officials are working with authorities in Naypyidaw, Myawaddy and

Thailand, and have asked for assistance from other organizations to help get the victims out of the area safely, he said.

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told a news conference on Friday that the government has worked on 1,841 human trafficking cases in the past three years where victims are Indonesians who were duped into online scams.

That number includes 1,138 Indonesians who were repatriated from Cambodia

last year, Marsudi said.

"From this number, you can see the magnitude of human trafficking related to online scams whose victims are ASEAN citizens," she said, adding that victims from several nations are involved in the latest case.

Marsudi said the government is also working to help Indonesian victims of online scams in Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and the Philippines.

She said the Indonesian Embassy in Manila said Friday that Philippine authorities have rescued more than 1,000 trafficking victims from 10 countries, including 143 Indonesians, who will be repatriated to their countries of origin.

"As the chair of ASEAN this year, Indonesia is trying to raise this issue at the 42nd ASEAN Summit," Marsudi said.

ASEAN includes Brunei, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippine, Singapore and Thailand. Indonesia will host the bloc's leaders' meeting in May 10-11 in Labuan Bajo on Flores island. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1984 MOSCOW PULLS OUT OF US OLYMPICS



Twelve weeks before the opening ceremony of the Los Angeles Olympic Games, the USSR has announced it is boycotting them. It is expected most of the Eastern Bloc will follow suit.

The announcement, which was made on Russian TV this afternoon, blamed the commercialisation of the games and a lack of security measures, which amounted to a violation of the Olympic charter.

The Soviet Union accused the United States of using the games "for political purposes" and "stirring up anti-Soviet propaganda" and of having a "cavalier attitude to security of Russian athletes".

In 1980 the USA and more than 60 other countries boycotted the Moscow Olympics in protest at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The Russians' withdrawal will devalue the Los Angeles Games far more than the US boycott as it seems certain that top-class athletes from the Eastern Bloc will also be prevented from taking part.

The White House denounced the move calling it a "blatant political act".

John Hughes, a State Department spokesman, said the USA had "gone the extra mile" to ensure adequate security measures were in place.

He took the opportunity to attack the USSR for its "barbarous behaviour" in Afghanistan and its persecution of Russian dissidents such as Dr Andrei Sakharov living in forced exile in the Russian town of Gorky.

Moscow has still not officially told the IOC of its boycott but there is little hope that the decision will be reversed.

Courtesy BBC News

INDIA

Troops kill two rebels in Kashmir in ongoing operations

INDIAN soldiers killed two suspected militants in ongoing counterinsurgency operations in Kashmir on Saturday, officials said, a day after rebels fighting against Indian rule killed five soldiers in the disputed Himalayan region.

Joint army, paramilitary and police teams "spotted and pinned down" the militants before killing one of them in a forested area in the southern Rajouri sector, an Indian army statement said. It said soldiers recovered an automatic rifle and some ammunition and grenades and noted another militant was "likely to be injured."

There was no independent confirmation of the incident.

Separately on Saturday, government forces killed another militant in a gun battle in western Kunzer area, police said.

On Friday, rebels triggered



an explosive device during an encounter with the Indian army, killing five soldiers, the military said. That fighting erupted after soldiers tracked a group of militants involved in an ambush of an army vehicle on April 20 that killed five Indian soldiers in the same

region, according to the army.

The violence comes as Indian authorities are on high alert in Kashmir and have stepped up security in the already highly militarized region ahead of a meeting of officials from the Group of 20 leading industrialized and developing

nations on promoting tourism in the region later this month.

It will be the first significant international event hosted in Kashmir after India stripped Kashmir of its semiautonomy and took direct control of the territory amid a monthslong security and communications lockdown in 2019. Kashmir has been on edge as authorities also put in place a slew of new laws that critics and many Kashmiris fear could change the region's demographics.

Rebel groups have been fighting since 1989 for Kashmir's independence from India or its merger with neighboring Pakistan.

Most Muslim Kashmiris support the rebel goal of uniting the territory, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent country.

New Delhi insists the Kashmir militancy is Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Pakistan denies the charge, and most Kashmiris consider it a legitimate freedom struggle.

Tens of thousands of civilians, rebels and government forces have been killed in the conflict. **MDT/AP**

IN CONTEXT

With the exception of Romania, the entire Eastern bloc and Cuba joined the boycott - 14 countries in all.

Although a record 140 nations did turn up - including China which had not taken part since 1932 - the level of competition was somewhat lopsided with the absence of so many world-class athletes.

As a result the USA won a record 83 gold medals.

The Los Angeles Summer Games were highly commercialised - they were the first privately financed games ever and made a profit of \$225m thanks to corporate sponsorship and extensive use of unpaid volunteers. Forty-three companies were licensed to sell "official" Olympic products. Los Angeles launched a bid to host the Olympic Games for a record third time in 2012 but the US Olympic Committee chose New York as its candidate.

LA will however host the 2006 athletics world cup.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Communicate with relatives who may need advice in order to find solutions to their existing problems. Stick to doing things that will make you a better person both physically and mentally.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Do not let them blow situations out of proportion. Purchases will be well worth it and they will last a long time. Don't let relatives make demands of you.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Your stubbornness coupled with your mate's jealousy don't make for a favorable time. Most partner problems are a result of both people not living up to their promises.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Romance is quite possible if you are willing to approach someone who interests you. Partnerships may be strained if one of you has been erratic and hard to deal with.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Someone may try to damage your reputation. Avoid arguments with relatives who might be conservative and outdated. Help children complete projects they're having difficulty with.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

However, you may not attract the kind of interest you had in mind. Put your emotional energy into passion not anxiety. Recognition will be yours if you meet your deadline.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Your high energy and discipline will enable you to complete any seemingly insurmountable tasks. Let your boss know your goals.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You are able to make changes in your home that will be favorable to all involved. Do not lend money to friends, or contribute more than necessary to groups unworthy of your cash.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You will tend to overeat today. Your colorful conversation may attract new mates. You are best to move quickly and to get in good with the boss.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You need to put some trust in others. Be on your best behavior. Deep discussions may only lead to friction. Be quiet about your intentions or ideas that might bring added cash.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You will learn a great deal from people with different cultural backgrounds. Overindulgent people will cause disruptions in your life. One-sided relationships are likely.

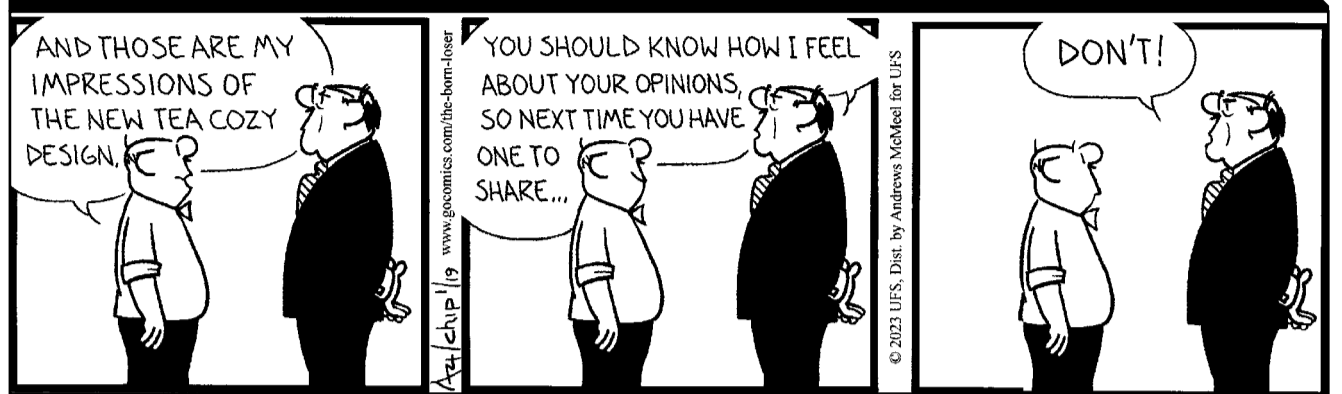


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Someone left a real mess for you to sift through. Organize your day to avoid any setbacks that might ignite temper flare-ups. Don't overspend or give too freely to others.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

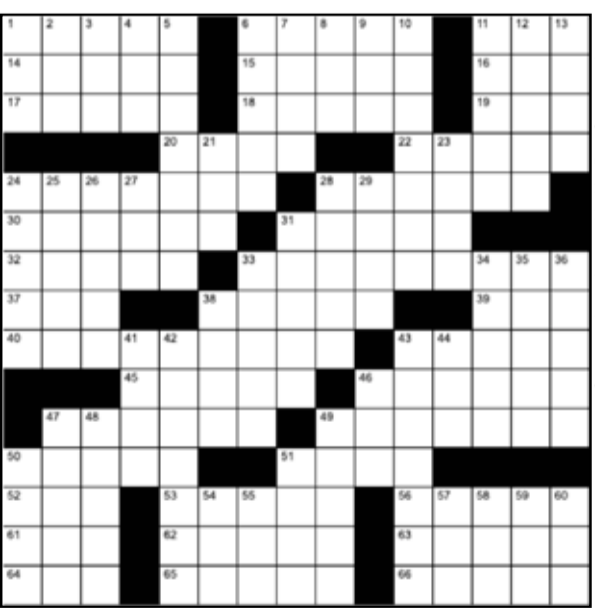
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	11	27	fine
Changchun	7	22	fine
Chengdu	14	18	overcast
Chongqing	19	23	overcast
Fuzhou	19	21	rain
Guangzhou	20	28	cloudy
Guiyang	11	18	overcast
Haikou	24	29	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	16	21	cloudy
Harbin	9	19	cloudy
Hefei	13	22	fine
Nanjing	12	21	cloudy
Shanghai	14	21	cloudy
Taipei	18	20	rain
Wuhan	14	25	cloudy
Hong Kong	23	26	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	2	12	overcast
Frankfurt	12	19	rain
Paris	14	22	fog
London	12	15	showers
New York	13	25	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Watering holes; 6- According to; 11- Prince Valiant's son; 14- Pomme or manzana; 15- Sudden outpouring; 16- Adversary; 17- Eucalyptus eater; 18- Four-door; 19- Judge in 1995 news; 20- That was close!; 22- Biblical brother; 24- Ogle; 28- One who belongs to a group; 30- Spice; 31- Chairman's hammer; 32- Continuously; 33- Candor; 37- Mens ____ (criminal intent); 38- Run up; 39- Feel unwell; 40- Institute; 43- Mikhail's wife; 45- The Merciful; 46- Individual; 47- On the line; 49- Shafted weapon; 50- Flu symptoms; 51- Island dance; 52- Latin 101 word; 53- Woody inhabitants of forests!; 56- Lake in the Sierra Nevada; 61- Cock and bull; 62- Viscounts' superiors; 63- Each partner; 64- Compass pt.; 65- Like marshes; 66- Caterpillar rival;

DOWN 1- Cask wood; 2- Mil. address; 3- Health club; 4- Building add-on; 5- Kelp; 6- It's a plus; 7- Gush forth; 8- Cushion; 9- Greek vowel; 10- Christens anew; 11- Burning; 12- Chopper topper; 13- Dodge model; 21- Old crone; 23- Qualified; 24- Night noise; 25- Melodies; 26- Bothered; 27- LBJ's successor; 28- Cattail's locale; 29- Nights before; 31- Grind together; 33- Eskimo boat; 34- Worker's reward; 35- Shield; 36- Gnu cousin; 38- ____ well...; 41- Swiss river; 42- Air bubble; 43- Associated; 44- Short trader?; 46- Close friend; 47- Summits; 48- That group; 49- Impudent girl; 50- Contented sighs; 51- Detained; 54- ____ Dawn Chong; 55- Poetic preposition; 57- ____ Maria; 58- Tee follower; 59- Bobby on the ice; 60- Needle hole;



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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1,663 ft² | HKD11,800/mth



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2,530 ft² | HKD17,900/mth



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Canelo beats Ryder by unanimous decision in return to Mexico

CARLOS RODRIGUEZ

CANELO Alvarez returned home and remained the undisputed super middleweight champion Saturday night, beating John Ryder by unanimous decision before more than 50,000 fans in his first fight in Mexico since 2011.

Alvarez bloodied the British challenger's nose and knocked him down, cruising to the victory by scores of 120-107 on one card and 118-109 on the other two to improve to 59-2-2.

"I hit him too much in the head and he did not go down," Canelo said at ring side after the fight. "I've always said it, when they fight me, they give their 100%, it gets complicated because they usually give me the fight of their lives".

Ryder said that he suffered what is probably a broken nose in the second round and that played a major role in having his four-bout winning streak stopped and is 32-6.

"He's probably past his best,

AP PHOTO



he could not get me out there, he wanted to stop me and could not do it," Ryder said at a press conference. "It could have been a little different without the problem to my nose, it took me a few rounds

to get adjusted."

It was Canelo's first fight since he had surgery on his left wrist last March. Before the fight, he said the injury slowed him down in his previous four fights, including his

loss to Russian light heavyweight champion Dmitry Bivol a year ago.

"In the first rounds I was not confident, but then I started punching strong with it, and that gives me motivation going forward," added the Mexican.

After getting a hard-fought victory over Ryder, Canelo has his eyes set on a rematch against Bivol in September and plans to fight him at 175 pounds.

"I don't want to make any excuses from what happened the last time, it's pointless, but this time my preparation will be different because now (that he's injury free) I can do a different preparation to do all of the things that needs to be done."

In a fight that was touted as the "King is Coming Home", the sold-out crowd at Akron stadium in Guadalajara, just 25 miles away from Juanacatlan, the small town where Canelo grew up, screamed deliriously during the whole fight.

"It was different, I've fought in stadiums before, but tonight was very different, the vibe of the

crowd was awesome, I'm very thankful," added Alvarez.

Amongst his family and friends, Canelo had his 94-year-old grandmother, Enedina, who watched him fight for the first time in his career.

"She gets really nervous, she does not even watch my fights on TV, it was hard convincing her to come, but she said that she wanted to do it for me, and it was very special," added Canelo.

Alvarez and Ryder started a slow-paced fight in the first two rounds, but Canelo connected with a straight right and Ryder started bleeding from the nose after the third round.

The Mexican kept pressing the action in the fourth round, landing body shots, and then sent Ryder to the mat with a right hook to the chin.

Ryder made Canelo uncomfortable in the fifth and landed a few shots on the face of the Mexican, but Alvarez landed another right in the ninth. Ryder stumbled, but rallied and answered with a shot that shook the Mexican.

Ryder, with a bloodied face, closed the fight well in the last two rounds, but was not enough to get the upset.

In the undercard, Julio Cesar "Rey" Martinez (19-2) knocked out Ronal Batista (15-2) to retain the WBC flyweight title. **MDT/AP**

AD

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FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS

OPINION

China Daily
 Kang Bing, China Daily



STRICTER REGULATIONS NEEDED TO REIN IN TRAVEL AGENCIES

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued a new document in mid-April, stressing that stricter measures will be taken to further regulate China's tourism industry. While showing the central authority's determination to combat malpractice, the document also indicates that the domestic tourism market is becoming more disorderly.

After being largely confined for three years to the cities and towns they were working and/or living in because of the strict pandemic prevention and control measures, Chinese people's passion for travel is unprecedentedly high this year, leading to the boom in tourism, both domestic and outbound.

However, accompanying the good news about the tourism market's quick recovery are stories about how some tour guides, annoyed by their guests for refusing to buy "enough" goods from selected stores from which they get commission, misbehaved with the tourists and threatened to throw them out of the bus they were traveling in.

There are also video clips posted online showing tourists being confined to a shop and not being allowed to get out unless they spend a certain amount to buy jade, pearls and other luxury items.

I myself had such an experience several years ago when I joined a tourist group to Anhui province. The tour guide tried to force me to go shopping. I refused. He seemed ready to punch me when I showed him my journalist ID card. He did not bother me anymore.

But, unlike my case, not all tourist-tour-guide disputes are settled peacefully. In most cases, the tourists, mostly elderly people, have to obey the "order" of tour guides to buy the products advocated by them even if the tourists don't really need them. Those who refuse quite often end up being illegally detained in some place for hours, or are evicted from tourist bus late in the day, mid-way to their hotel.

Of all the ills plaguing the tourism sector, bully guides and fraudulent travel agencies are among the top concerns of travel planners.

The rapid growth of the tourism industry and its growing importance for many local economies have given rise to many travel agencies. In fact, the sector has kept growing. There are more than 43,000 such agencies in the country, and with competition among them becoming tougher by the day, some of them resort to fraudulent practices such as offering low prices for travel packages which apparently can't even meet the cost or help make up the gap by forcing tourists to part with extra money on several occasions.

The nightmare starts when one joins a tour group run by not-so-honest travel agencies. The service is poor, promises are not met, and tourists are forced to spend big amounts on shopping.

No wonder people in the know-how, before joining a tour group, ask which travel agencies are reliable, and whether they will demand extra charges, and compel the tourists to go shopping.

For years, tourism and culture department officials have been blaming unreasonably low prices as a main reason for the poor service and have issued documents banning such vicious competition. But facts show such competitions have not been effectively curbed.

The solution lies not in whether we should have more such regulations but in effectively implementing the existing regulations.

A travel agency's operations usually include attracting potential tourists to avail of their services. Since most travel agencies attract tourists through advertisements and social media posts, it should not be difficult for the tourism department officials and market supervisors to check such ads, determine whether their prices are unreasonably low and immediately stop such agencies from doing business.

We are proud of China's strong governance capability. So we believe that an early-stage closer inspection of the 40,000-plus travel agencies with the help of modern technologies is not only practical but also a good bargain to restore order in the tourism market. [Abridged]

After attending the coronation of King Charles III in London, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva denounced the lack of concerted efforts to free WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has spent four years in Britain's Belmarsh Prison.

"It is an embarrassment that a journalist who denounced trickery by one state against another is arrested, condemned to die in jail and we do nothing to free him. It's a crazy thing," Lula told reporters. "We talk about freedom of expression; the guy is in prison because he denounced wrongdoing. And the press doesn't do anything in defense

of this journalist. I can't understand it."

Lula offered the remarks in response to a question about Assange, who is a native Australian. He said he had forgotten to discuss the matter with U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, but that he would write to him upon returning to Brazil.

Assange has been fighting extradition to the United States, and Lula's comments come at a moment that he has shown little reluctance to voice his differences of opinion with Washington regarding geopolitical matters.



AP PHOTO

Ukraine's air force claimed to have downed a Russian hypersonic missile over Kyiv using newly acquired American Patriot defense systems, the first known time the country has been able to intercept one of Moscow's most modern missiles. Air Force commander Mykola Oleshchuk said in a Telegram post that the Kinzhal-type ballistic missile had been intercepted in an overnight attack on the Ukrainian capital earlier in the week. It was also the first time Ukraine is known to have used the Patriot defense systems.



AP PHOTO

Russia A court last week ordered pretrial detention for a theater director and a playwright facing charges of justifying terrorism, the latest move in a relentless crackdown on dissent in Russia that spiked to unprecedented levels since the start of the war in Ukraine. The Zamoskvoretsky District Court in Moscow jailed Zhenya Berkovich (pictured), a prominent independent theater director, and Svetlana Petriychuk, a playwright, for two months pending investigation and trial. The two were detained in the Russian capital because of the play Petriychuk wrote and Berkovich staged, "Finist, the Brave Falcon." Police also raided the apartments of Berkovich's parents and grandmother in St. Petersburg.



AP PHOTO

Brazil After attending the coronation of King Charles III in London, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva denounced the lack of concerted efforts to free WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has spent four years in Britain's Belmarsh Prison. "It is an embarrassment that a journalist who denounced trickery by one state against another is arrested, condemned to die in jail and we do nothing to free him. It's a crazy thing," Lula told reporters. "We talk about freedom of expression; the guy is in prison because he denounced wrongdoing. And the press doesn't do anything in defense of this journalist. I can't understand it."

WHO: COVID EMERGENCY IS OVER. SO WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

MARIA CHENG

THE World Health Organization downgraded its assessment of the coronavirus pandemic last week, saying it no longer qualifies as a global emergency. The action reverses a declaration that was first made on January 30, 2020, when the disease had not even been named Covid-19.

WHY END THE GLOBAL HEALTH EMERGENCY?

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the pandemic has been "on a downward trend for more than a year, with population immunity increasing from vaccination and infection." That, he said, has allowed most countries "to return to life as we knew it before Covid-19," meaning that the worst part of the pandemic is over.

Tedros said that for the past year, WHO and its emergency committee experts have been analyzing Covid-19 data to decide when the time would be right to lower its level of alarm. On Thursday, the experts recommended to Tedros that Covid-19 no longer qualifies as a global emergency and the WHO chief said he accepted that advice.

WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS?

For the average person, nothing. The classification of a health threat as a global emergency is meant to warn political authorities that there is an "extraordinary" event that could constitute a health threat to other countries and requires a coordinated response to contain it. WHO's emergency declarations are typically used as an international SOS for countries who need help. They can also spur countries to introduce special measures to combat disease or release extra funds.

Many countries, including Britain, France, Germany and the U.S., have long dropped many of their pandemic-era restrictions. The U.S. is ending its public health emergency next Thursday.

IS COVID-19 STILL A PANDEMIC?

Yes. Although WHO chief Tedros said the coronavirus emergency was over, he warned that the virus is here to stay and that thousands of people continue to die every week. "The risk remains of new variants emerging that cause new surges in cases

and deaths," Tedros said. "What this news means is that it's time for countries to transition from emergency mode to managing Covid-19 alongside other infectious diseases."

In April, there were nearly 3 million cases and more than 17,000 deaths reported, including spikes in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, the United Nations agency noted.

SO WHEN WILL THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC END?

It's unclear. WHO emergency chief Dr. Michael Ryan said the coronavirus is still a public health threat and that its continued evolution could yet cause future problems. "It took decades...for the pandemic virus of 1918 to disappear," he said, referring to the Spanish flu that is thought to have killed at least 40 million people.

"Pandemics only truly end when the next pandemic begins," he said. Ryan said that while Covid-19 will continue to spread among people for a very long time, it is doing so at a much lower level of threat that does not require the extraordinary measures taken to try to curb the virus' spread. MDT/AP