



MACAU ID HOLDERS WILL BE ABLE TO UNDERTAKE BORDER CROSSINGS USING A QR CODE IN THE FUTURE, A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE HAS ANNOUNCED

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VONG HIN FAI PLEDGES CO-EXISTENCE OF MAINLAND AND PORTUGUESE INTERACTIONS

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HK CHIEF SAYS CHINA'S SENTENCING OF US CITIZEN EXPOSES NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS

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AP PHOTO



China-Japan The Japanese and Chinese defense ministers inaugurated their long-awaited hotline yesterday as a step to build trust and improve communication. Japan's Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada and his Chinese counterpart, Li Shangfu (pictured), talked for about 20 minutes through the hotline for the first time since it was established on March 31, the Japanese Defense Ministry said. Both ministers welcomed “the maritime and aerial communication mechanism,” which includes the hotline.

China South Korea midfielder Son Jun-ho has been detained in the northeastern Chinese province of Liaoning on suspicion of accepting a bribe. China's Foreign Ministry said yesterday. Spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Son was placed in custody “recently” and was under investigation. The South Korean consulate in the provincial capital of Shenyang had been informed of Son's detention and allowed access to the player as required by international treaty.

AP PHOTO



China An advocacy group that also served as a safe space for the LGBTQ community in Beijing became the latest organization to close under a crackdown by Chinese government. “We very regretfully announce, due to forces beyond our control, the Beijing LGBT Center will stop operating today,” read a notice posted on the center's official WeChat account Monday night.

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FILLING THE GAP

LYNZY VALLES



Philippine Consul General Porfirio Mayo, Jr. says some 10,000 foreign workers are needed to fill human resources' gap in hospitality, in an exclusive interview with the Times

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LYNZY VALLES

THE Philippine Consulate General in Macau has moved out of its former premises, its home for the past 15 years, and is now occupying an office that is 80% larger than the old premises in a bid to provide better quality services to the Filipino people.

Macau is home to some 25,000 non-resident Filipinos, the second largest number of migrant workers in the city, next to the mainland.

Having arranged a total of 33 repatriation flights while coming out of the pandemic and returning home over 6,000 Filipino nationals, the Consulate, which employs 25 staff, is now focusing on looking out for the needs of the community.

In an interview with the Times, Consul General Porfirio Mayo, Jr. spoke of the resilience of the Filipino people in Macau – particularly those who survived living through the pandemic.

In a city where a significant number of Filipino domestic workers live in the absence of a minimum wage law, Mayo said that they have ridden out the storm. The Consulate is now focused on implementing a standard employment contract for such workers, where there is a specified minimum wage for those working in domestic services, which cannot be lower than what domestic workers are receiving in Hong Kong.

Since October 2021, the Hong Kong government has maintained a minimum wage of HKD4,630 per month.

Mayo, who was the Consul General of the Philippine Consulate in Ottawa, Canada prior coming to Macau, has been a diplomat since 1986, having served in Athens, Hong Kong, Stockholm and Norway.

Meanwhile, the official also disclosed that the hotel sector is hoping to recruit 10,000 workers from the Philippines as it suffers a severe shortage of labor.

Macau Daily Times (MDT) – Consul, you were appointed to lead the Consulate in 2021 during the pandemic. With several restrictions in place, and several hundreds of Filipinos being let go, it was a challenging period for everyone in general. Tell us about the transitioning period at a time when a significant number of Filipinos were calling for flights and financial assistance.

Porfirio Mayo Jr. (PM) – It was personally challenging for me and my team. I arrived here with a fresh team of people who were replacing

Q&A PORFIRIO MAYO, JR.
PHILIPPINE CONSUL GENERAL IN MACAU

Consulate moves office, focuses on



staff who were due to be recalled to the home office. They were stuck here for [a few years] before a replacement could come because of the pandemic. As far as our workers here are concerned, it was more challenging for them because a lot of them were losing their jobs. Employers were letting go of their trusted workers here because of hard times during the pandemic.

A major challenge was the absence of direct flights particularly when coming into Macau and going out of Macau. [...] When I arrived, there was a lull of six months where we didn't have any flights. When I was in quarantine, I requested my team here to immediately commence the flights, even if we had to charter a special flight. We had thousands of people lining up, waiting for flights back home.

When I was released from quarantine in June, we commenced the 22nd special flight after a lull of six months.

We managed to organize 12 ad-

ditional flights, with the 33rd special flight departing in September. All in all, we brought home over 6,000 Filipino nationals back home.

"I think they are looking for 10,000 [workers] to fill in the gaps [in the hotel industry]"

PORFIRIO MAYO, JR.
PHILIPPINE CONSUL GENERAL IN MACAU

MDT – And in terms of assistance to distressed workers?

PM – The number [of recipients] would have stood in the thousands, particularly during the period when the government allowed employers to impose a no-pay leave. Those were hard times: when the "6.18" outbreak hit Macau. During the two-month period from June to August, people were lining up in our old office seeking financial assistance for the misfortunes that befell them.

MDT – Post-pandemic, with several hurdles that the community has overcome, and with this new office of the Consulate being 80% larger than the former one, what else is new?

PM – We continued to provide services when we were in transition while relocating, but we had to suspend some of them. Now we're back to our full potential. In addition to that, we are resuming our quarterly meetings with the leaders of the Filipino community. The next one will be this coming Sunday.

MDT – What are the main concerns of these Filipino associations?

PM – We always set an agenda. We speak about timely developments in Macau – in particular, new regulations from the Philippines that would affect them coming home. We have timely discussions with them. For this forthcoming meeting with Filipino leaders, we will be discussing our programs for June as we celebrate the 125th Proclamation of the Philippine Independence – that's a milestone. Aside from that,

we will start meetings with a simple blessing of the new office.

MDT – What will the event comprise and where will it be held?

PM – We will have a celebration this time. A diplomatic reception will be held with government officials of Macau and the consular core accredited to the Macau and Hong Kong government. We are making arrangements with Clube Militar.

MDT – With Filipinos comprising the second largest population of non-residents here in Macau, is the Consulate in any talks with the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) or other offices on how to better safeguard workers?

PM – We are always in touch with the relevant offices here in Macau. For example, our labor section is in close communication with DSAL as far as the rights and benefits of our workers are concerned. We hold a yearly seminar on the labor and immigration law of Macau. We are also closely coordinating with Macau immigration department on individual cases that are concerned.

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community's new needs



gest time to set a minimum wage because we have that in Hong Kong. But I think the Macau government is in a difficult situation. In my meetings with senior officials of the host government, they were emphasizing the difficulties that prevent them from being selective. If they were to implement a minimum wage, they would also have to discuss this with other communities of non-Chinese workers here. That's the position that they had taken. Because of that, we made some adjustments.

Instead of depending on a negotiated minimum wage agreement with the host government, we focused on having a standard employment contract for our own workers, where we could specify the minimum wage for those working in domestic services. So, it cannot be lower than what our workers are receiving in Hong Kong.

In terms of benefits such as insurance and airfare, those are non-negotiables as far as our standardized employment contract is concerned.

MDT – These applies to those going through the right channels?

PM – Yes. But sadly, there are newcomers coming in via tourist visas, who are trying their luck to find opportunities to work here as directly hired employees. But of course, the regulation in Macau has changed since November 2021, where tourists are no longer allowed to be employed directly. They

have to go back to their home country to arrange their [working visas in these circumstances].

MDT – Can you say that is better option?

PM – It is. Those coming through the right channels will be well protected by the contract. These are contracts that are verified through the Philippine government's labor office, and will ensure that they are being paid the right amount. That includes, of course, insurance, guaranteed protection of return airfare and stipends.

MDT – The hotel sector is suffering from a severe shortage of staff as they had to let go thousands of workers during the outbreak. The Philippines has an employment agency, Ikon, that has been actively recruiting for local hotels. Are you aware of how many we can expect to come in?

PM – They [Ikon] are working double time, bringing in Filipino workers for the industry. That's the specific target: hotel workers. They mentioned a number in the high thousands, and I think they are looking for 10,000 to fill in the gaps. But sadly, the contract approvals are taking time.

MDT – In relation to post-pandemic hurdles, what has been the most challenging?

PM – I don't see any hard issue be-

cause the community is very cooperative with the programs and supportive of them. And it's also working both ways. We are looking out for the needs of the community. As much as possible, I attend all their invitations to the events they are organizing. It's a matter of building trust and goodwill between the Consulate and the community.

MDT – Going back to the minimum wage, migrants' associations in the city have long been calling for such a policy, even meeting with DSAL officials to express their concerns. What is the Consulate's stand on this?

PM – The local government hasn't budged an inch. That is why we came up with the standardized contract that will apply if workers go through the right channels, because that we can control. There are the things we cannot control [...] so we find ways to go around these hurdles. We want quality employers [for our nationals]; that's what we're after.

MDT – What is the average number of people seeking for assistance in each day?

PM – In the labor section, it does not go below 100. I think it's more realistic to say 200, but on Sundays that would easily be double. And with other forms of consular assistance, I think we're seeing some 30 to 40 people.

QR code border crossing will be possible in the future

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU ID holders will be able to undertake border crossings using a QR code generated as an auxiliary to the identification card in the future, a parliamentary committee has announced.

The First Standing Committee of the parliament is currently debating the bill for the Macau SAR Resident ID Card Legal System.

President of the committee Ella Lei told a press conference after a recent meeting that future Macau identification holders may generate a QR code on the government One Account app as a replacement for physical identification cards to facilitate border crossings.

The QR code can be used for both automatic and manual channels, with the exception of juxtaposed control points such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge.

Lei disclosed that the digital identifier for the identification card has already been designed. The government is largely ready to roll out the service, although it is still undergoing testing.

The committee was further informed that the test results to date reveal that border clearances using QR codes are slightly faster than traditional border clearance methods.

It is proposed in the Bill that each phone can only be used for one identifier. The committee expressed concerns over parents accompanying their children for border crossing. The government made assurances that each adult will be allowed to generate QR codes for their children for border crossings.

Lei said that the committee was assured that physical identification will prevail even with the digital identifier, which consists of the bearer's name, identification number, sex, date of birth, validity period, picture and identification type, among other information.

It was also recommended that no entity should decline the physical identification card and residents should carry their physical card with them at all times.

Certain factors, such as constantly changing time and relocating identification number, will be introduced to the identifier for verification purposes.



UM SCHOLAR PUBLISHES NEW BOOK ON MACAU TRANSFORMATION

A scholar has published a new book on Macau, which explores the city's recent transformation into the world's most lucrative site for casino gaming and the city's formative role in China's own metamorphosis into the largest consumer society on the planet. Tim Simpson, associate professor in the Department of Communication of the University of Macau (UM) Faculty of Social Sciences, has published a new book, "Betting on Macau: Casino Capitalism and China's Consumer Revolution" with the University of Minnesota Press. According to a statement issued by the UM, the book allows readers to understand Macau's "recent re-emergence on the global stage as a continuation of the city's early economic function."

LOCAL STUDENTS MAINTAIN READING ABILITY

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 International Report showed that Macau Primary Four students achieved reading performance scores similar to 2016 levels, and their reading abilities have been developing steadily. According to a statement from the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), over 5,000 Primary Four students from 58 schools in Macau participated in the PIRLS in 2021. The PIRLS is conducted every five years.

HK STUDENTS VISIT MACAU ON EDUCATION TOUR

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), Metro Radio Hong-Kong and Metro Education have joined forces to host the "Explore Macao Student Experience" program, which resulted in around 60 high school students and teachers from 10 Hong-Kong schools visiting Macau on May 13-14. According to a statement issued by the MGTO, the program taught participants how to create promotional videos about Macau on social media to publicize educational tours in Macau and encourage more Hong Kong schools to organize similar activities that combine tourism and learning.



EVENTS

FIREWORKS CONTEST TO RETURN IN SEPTEMBER

ANTHONY LAM

THE annual International Fireworks Display Contest will return in September after three years of suspension, head of the local tourism board confirmed yesterday.

Maria Helena de Senna Fer-

nandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), revealed on the sidelines of a tourism event that the contest – one of the major annual showcases – will return with an international line-up.

In the past three years, with Covid-19 restrictions, it was virtually

impossible for teams to visit Macau for the contest.

Senna Fernandes disclosed that so far, invitations have been extended to 10 teams, including Portugal, Japan and mainland China. For the time being, the tourism official expects there will be five show nights spanning September

and October.

Traditionally, show nights fall on Saturdays as well as Oct. 1 (a Sunday), which is the National Day of the People's Republic of China.

Senna Fernandes made a special note on the absence of a fireworks show in the evening of the Mid-autumn Festival. She explained that because the Festival and the National Day will be close together this year, the bureau decided to skip the festival evening and stage a show on National Day.

Meanwhile, at the same event, deputy director Cheng Wai Tong of the MGTO disclosed that earlier he had visited three islands in Zhuhai, being Wailingding Island, Guishan Island and Dongao Island, all of which are relatively well-established in tourism.

Among them, Guishan Island already has sufficient boundary-crossing facilities. It also has ferry services running to and from Hong Kong. If similar services between Guishan Island and Macau can be established, island-hopping travel opportunities can be explored.

The tourism industry of Macau has expressed interest in offering related services. For the time being, further work with relevant departments in Zhuhai is needed to develop these routes, Cheng added.

Vong Hin Fai pledges co-existence of mainland and Portuguese interactions

ANTHONY LAM

VONG Hin Fai, the new head of the lawyers' association, has provided assurance that interactions with both Portuguese and mainland legal circles will co-exist.

Vong assumed presidency of the executive council of the Macau Lawyers Association on Jan. 1 this year. His predecessor, veteran lawyer Jorge Neto Valente, has

held the position for the past 20 years.

In contrast to the numerous occasions where Valente has spoken out against the government, Vong is a lawmaker from the indirect election constituency, regularly perceived by the public as pro-establishment.

Considering that the city still enjoys a dual official language system, when questioned by the press on whether the im-

portance of Portuguese lawyers will decline in the future, the new head disagreed, according to report by local media outlet Macao Daily News.

"Whether the position is held by a Portuguese, a Lusophone or a Chinese person, equality between the Chinese and the Portuguese languages will be ensured," Vong said.

In addition, he said that the association is currently engaged in dia-

logue with both the Portuguese world and the mainland.

He added that certain association members plan to visit Beijing and hope to meet with the national lawyers' association or other relevant entities. "Both Chinese and Portuguese lawyers hope to simultaneously consolidate their professions in Macau and explore new businesses during their visits," said Vong.

Vong also disclosed that the ratio between Portuguese and Chinese lawyers has remained virtually unchanged, at 45% to 55%. Hinting that Portuguese lawyers have not faced challenges, the new association head pointed out that many Chinese lawyers had changed paths to work in government or private entities.

He disclosed that a new hire had expanded the team at the association to 14 people. The new hire focuses on investigations for the Lawyers' High Committee. The association website will also be updated accordingly.

ARTS

SANDS GALLERY HOLDS CERAMIC WORKS EXHIBITION

STAFF REPORTER

THE Fang Lijun Ceramic Works Exhibition began yesterday at Sands Gallery and will be open to the public daily, with free admission until June 24. The exhibition features about 60 works of art from Fang Lijun, an internationally sought-after artist, and one of the four

giants of Chinese contemporary art.

Themed "Bone of the Bone, Flesh of the Flesh", the exhibition will showcase skin-like ceramics, reflecting the essence of ceramics: delicate and fragile.

"We want to make Sands Gallery a high-standard artistic exchange and showcasing platform

to stimulate the passion of local artists by introducing Fang's artworks," said Grant Chum, chief operating officer and executive director of Sands China, in the opening ceremony for the exhibition held yesterday at Four Seasons.

"This is the first ceramic works exhibition of Fang in Macau," said Luo

Yi, curator of this exhibition. She would like to extend her new understanding and perspective of art and the world through this exhibition.

"It is admirable that Sands Gallery supports such a cutting-edge, experimental type of work and exhibits it to a global audience," Luo said.

Fang explores the no-

tion that flesh and bones are the origin of life and looks at their connection to creation in this exhibition, which is inspired by the legend of God constructing Eve with one of Adam's ribs.

The exhibition opens from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily on the sixth floor of the Grand Suites at Four Seasons.

PATRICK WHITTLE,
PORTLAND (MAINE)

A staple seafood species caught by East Coast fishers for centuries is experiencing overfishing, and regulators have cut catch quotas by more than 80% to prevent the fish's population from collapse.

Haddock are one of the most popular Atlantic fish, and a favorite for fish and chips and other New England seafood dishes.

But fewer haddock will be caught in New England this year after regulators cut fishing quotas. A recent scientific assessment found that the Gulf of Maine haddock stock declined unexpectedly, and that meant the catch quotas for the fish were unsustainably high, federal fishing managers said.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration added the Gulf of Maine haddock stock to its overfishing list last month. The New England Fishery Management Council, a regulatory board, has lowered catch limits of the fish in an attempt to halt the overfishing, said agency spokesperson Allison Ferreira.

However, numerous fishers said the assessment doesn't match what they're seeing on the water, where haddock appear to them to be plentiful. And the warning from the federal government arrives as more New England fishers rely on haddock than in previous decades because of the collapse of other seafood species, such as Atlantic cod.

"We seem to find plenty, but they can't," said Terry Alexander, a Maine-based fisher who targets haddock and other species. "It's a disaster is what it is. A total, complete disaster."

The fishery management council mandated the 84% reduction in catch quotas for the current fishing year, which started May 1.

AP PHOTO



NET NEGATIVE

Haddock, a staple Atlantic fish, is in decline off New England

The change applies to fishers who harvest haddock from the Gulf of Maine, a body of water off Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine. Fishers also harvest from Georges Bank, a fishing ground to the east where quotas were also reduced for this year, including adjoining areas overseen by Canadian officials who issued their own major cuts.

Americans are still likely to find haddock available despite the cuts because most of it is imported, according to federal data from 2021. Some countries that export haddock are also cutting

quotas this year. But recent announcements of cuts by major exporters like Norway have been much lower than in the Gulf of Maine, and they represent a much larger share of global fish stocks.

Declining fish stocks threaten economies, food security and cultures around the world. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization says more than a third of global fish stocks are overfished, and the rate of unsustainable fishing is rising. However, seafood species' health varies significantly from region to

region. Some, such as American lobster, have grown in catch volume in recent decades.

The U.S. catch of haddock has fluctuated over the past century. In the early 1950s, over 150 million pounds were caught each year. Overfishing caused catches to plummet below a million pounds per year in the mid-1990s, and rebuilding efforts followed. Over the past few years, catches have ranged from 12 million to 23 million pounds.

Haddock are caught by the same fishers who target other bottom-dwelling groundfish

species such as cod, pollock and flounders. They are harvested at a much higher volume than any of those fish.

The fish are one of few profitable species on the East Coast said Ben Martens, executive director of the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association. He says losing the ability to catch them is a big hardship for the industry.

"I don't think this stock is in trouble, and I think fishermen are in trouble because of that," Martens said. "With this significant cut that is coming, that's a major gut punch." **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Sands China launches new program to expand non-gaming offerings



Sands China continues to expand its non-gaming experiences, launching the new Sands Performing Arts Program. The program aims to highlight performing arts in Macau, including national

and overseas performing art projects.

The program will feature a series of performances in multiple genres such as music, dance, and Cantonese opera among others.

It will include the Peony Pavilion, a performance for the China Theatre Plum Blossom Award competition, as well as the Floral Princess 65th Anniversary Macao 2023, which features a renowned Cantonese opera repertoire.

"Over the past two decades, Sands China has been deeply rooted in Macau, consistently supporting the growth of non-gaming offerings such as local arts and culture," president of Sands China, Wilfred Wong, said.

"This will not only enrich the non-gaming experiences of residents and visitors, but also strengthen our commitment to the city's cultural and artistic growth," Wong added.

Slogan contest launched to promote Taipa Village



Taipa Village Destination is unveiled the "Taipa Village Slogan Challenge," an inclusive contest engaging the whole community in showcasing the essence of Taipa Village as Macau's non-ga-

ming destination.

This initiative aims to "highlight the village's rich heritage, culinary offerings and vibrant lifestyle attractions, inviting visitors from home and abroad to fully

immerse themselves in the timeless charm that defines Taipa Village," according to a statement issued by the organizer. The contest will run until June 15.

The four-week campaign seeks to "inspire the general public to unleash their innovative spirit by crafting captivating slogans that embody the three pillars of the Taipa Village experience: heritage, cuisine and lifestyle."

Participants will win cash prizes and dining rewards worth a total of more than MOP 30,000, with a grand prize of MOP 10,000 awarded to the winner.

HONG KONG

Lee says China's sentencing of US citizen exposes national security threats

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

THE life sentence imposed by China on a 78-year-old U.S. citizen, who was also a Hong Kong permanent resident, on spying charges shows the city should "stay vigilant" to security risks, its leader said yesterday.

Chief Executive John Lee answered none of the lingering questions about why John Shing-Wan Leung was prosecuted. The sentence was announced Monday but neither the Hong Kong government nor the court in the eastern Chinese city of Suzhou that tried Leung have released details of the charges.

"This incident showed us that national security risks could be hidden in society. That's why we repeatedly stressed that, although Hong Kong's situation appears to be largely stabilized, we can't let down our guard over national security risks and have to stay vigilant," Lee said.

The government said mainland Chinese authorities had informed Hong Kong of his arrest in 2021. Hong Kong's government was prepared to provide assistance to anyone arrested by mainland authorities upon request but had not yet received any in Leung's case, authorities said.

Lee, a former police officer and ex-head of security in the city, was effectively appointed to lead



HKSAR Chief Executive John Lee

Hong Kong last year after running unopposed in a collegial election. In his previous posts, he oversaw a campaign that crushed the pro-democracy camp.

In an echo of party propaganda, Lee referred to the 2019 pro-democracy protests that triggered the crackdown as "black violence" and Hong Kong's version of "color revolution," a phrase used by China and Russia to describe political movements seeking to

overturn authoritarian regimes. Lee said the protest movement was an alarm bell that reminds the city to keep monitoring such risks.

Leung's sentencing threatens to further exacerbate already strained ties between Beijing and Washington.

Leung was detained April 15, 2021, by the local bureau of China's counterintelligence agency in Suzhou, according to a statement

posted by the city's intermediate court on its social media site. His detention came after China had closed its borders and imposed tight domestic travel restrictions and lockdowns affecting tens of millions to fight the spread of COVID-19.

Such investigations and trials are held behind closed doors and little information is generally released.

The harsh sentence given Leung was especially notable because of his previous affiliations with pro-Communist Party organizations, including one seeking overseas support for Beijing's goal of unification with self-governing Taiwan.

Relations between Washington and Beijing are at their lowest in decades amid disputes over trade, technology, human rights and China's increasingly aggressive territorial claims toward Taiwan, the South China Sea and elsewhere.

High-level government exchanges between the sides have been placed on hold and U.S. companies are delaying major investments amid mixed messaging from Beijing. Many Chinese firms, most notably telecoms giant Huawei, have been effectively shut out of the U.S. market due to legal bans and high tariffs.

While the Suzhou court offered no indication of a link between Leung's case and overall China-

-U.S. relations, spying charges in China often appear highly selective and evidence backing them up is held in secret. The party's rigid control over courts, civil society and the media effectively blocks efforts to gain further information or mount legal appeals.

The U.S. Embassy in Beijing said Monday it was aware of Leung's case, but could not comment further due to privacy concerns. "The Department of State has no greater priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens overseas," the embassy said.

It wasn't clear who represented Leung at his trial and his family has not commented on the sentence. Friends and former colleagues declined The Associated Press' requests for comment.

Long pretrial detentions are not unusual in China and prosecutors have broad powers to hold people charged in national security cases, regardless of their citizenship status.

Two Chinese-Australians, Cheng Lei, who formerly worked for China's state broadcaster, and writer Yang Jun, have been held since 2020 and 2019 respectively, without word on their sentencing.

Government suspicion is particularly focused on Chinese-born foreign citizens and people from Taiwan and Hong Kong, especially if they have political contacts or work in academia or publishing. **MDT/AP**

ECONOMY

Recovery faces pressure after April activity weak, youth unemployment rises



CHINESE leaders face pressure to shore up a slowing economic recovery and generate jobs after consumer spending and other activity in April were weaker than expected and a survey found 1 in 5 young workers in cities was unemployed.

Retail sales accelerated following the end of anti-virus restrictions in December but were below forecasts, official data showed yesterday. Factory output edged down compared with March.

Chinese economic activity has improved whi-

le the U.S. and European economies are cooling after interest rate hikes to extinguish inflation. But consumers, uneasy about possible job losses, are returning to shops and restaurants less quickly than expected.

"The pace of recovery has slowed sharply," said Larry Hu and Yuxiao Zhang of Macquarie in a report.

Growth in retail sales accelerated to 18.4% over last year's depressed level in April, but that was below private sector expectations of up to 35%.

Factory output rose 5.6% over a year ago but was off 0.5 percentage points from March. Investment in factories, real estate and other fixed assets rose 4.7% in the first four months of 2023 but slowed from the first quarter's 5.4% growth rate.

"The recovery of demand is still insufficient," said Fu Linghui, spokesperson for the National Bureau of Statistics.

"External demand has weakened" and exporters face a "complex and severe" environment, Li said at a news conference.

Surveys found 20.4% of potential urban workers aged 16 to 24 are unemployed and the figure was rising, according to Li.

That was a record, according to private sector economists.

"Stabilizing and expanding employment of young people will require continued hard work," Li said.

Economic growth accelerated to 4.5% over a year earlier in the three months ending in March from the previous quarter's 2.9%. Growth will have to accelerate in coming quarters to hit the ruling Communist Party's annual target of "around 5%."

"The bulk of China's rebound is now behind us," Capital Economics said in a report. "The challenging global picture will prevent much pick-up in Chinese exports." **MDT/AP**

MYANMAR

Powerful cyclone floods homes, cuts communications; at least 6 dead, 700 injured

JULHAS ALAM, DHAKA

RESCUERS evacuated about 1,000 people trapped by seawater 3.6 meters deep along western Myanmar's coast after a powerful cyclone injured hundreds and cut off communications. Six deaths were reported, but the true impact was not yet clear in one of Asia's least developed countries.

Strong winds injured more than 700 of about 20,000 people who were sheltering in sturdier buildings on the highlands of Sittwe township, such as monasteries, pagodas and schools, according to a leader of the Rakhine Youths Philanthropic Association in Sittwe. He asked not to be named due to fear of reprisals from the authorities in the military-run country.

Seawater raced into more than 10 low-lying wards near the shore as Cyclone Mocha made landfall in Rakhine state Sunday afternoon, he said. Residents moved to roofs and higher floors, while the wind and storm surge prevented immediate rescue.

"After 4 p.m. yesterday, the storm weakened a bit, but the water did not fall back. Most of them sat on the roof and at the high places of their houses the whole night. The wind blew all night," the rescue group leader said.

Water was still about 1.5 meters high in flooded areas later Monday, but rescues were being made as the wind calmed and the sun rose in the sky. He asked civil society organizations and authorities to send aid and help evacuate residents.

AP PHOTO



This photo provided by Myanmar Military True News Information Team on Monday, shows flooded areas caused by Cyclone Mocha near old temple in Bagan

Six deaths were reported by Myanmar media and rescue groups. Several injuries were reported in neighboring Bangladesh, which was spared the predicted direct hit.

Mocha made landfall near Sittwe township with winds blowing up to 209 kilometers per hour, Myanmar's Meteorological Department said. By midday Monday, it had weakened to a tropical depression, according to the India Meteorological Department.

The State Administration Council issued disaster declarations

for 17 townships in Rakhine state.

High winds crumpled cell phone towers, but in videos collected by local media before communications were lost, deep water raced through streets and wind blew off roofs.

Myanmar's military information office said the storm had damaged houses and electrical transformers in Sittwe, Kyaukpadaung, and Gwa townships. It said roofs were torn off buildings on the Coco Islands, about 425 kilometers (264 miles) southwest of the country's largest city, Yangon.

Volunteers previously said shelters in Sittwe did not have enough food after more people arrived there seeking help.

Mocha largely spared the Bangladeshi city of Cox's Bazar, which initially had been in the storm's predicted path. Authorities had evacuated hundreds of thousands of people before the cyclone veered east.

A Bangladesh government official, Enamur Rahman, said the damage was still being assessed, but that about 2,000 homes had been destroyed and 10,000 others

were damaged on Saint Martin's Island and Teknaf in Cox's Bazar district.

He said no deaths were reported.

About a dozen people were injured on Saint Martin's Island, the Prothom Alo newspaper reported.

U.N. agencies and aid workers in Bangladesh had prepositioned tons of dry food and dozens of ambulances in the refugee camps that house more than 1 million Rohingya Muslims who fled persecution in Myanmar.

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar with a storm surge that devastated populated areas around the Irrawaddy River delta. At least 138,000 people died and tens of thousands of homes and other buildings were washed away.

Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune city, said cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are becoming more intense more quickly, in part because of climate change.

Climate scientists say cyclones can now retain their energy for many days. Cyclone Amphan in eastern India in 2020 continued to travel over land as a strong cyclone and caused extensive devastation.

"As long as oceans are warm and winds are favorable, cyclones will retain their intensity for a longer period," Koll said.

Tropical cyclones, which are called hurricanes or typhoons in other regions, are among the world's most devastating natural disasters when they hit densely populated coastal areas. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH KOREA

Trudeau arrives in Seoul to discuss trade, North challenge

KIM TONG-HYUNG,
SEOUL

CANADIAN Prime Minister Justin Trudeau arrived in South Korea yesterday for a meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at which they are expected to discuss expansion of trade and challenges posed by North Korea.

Trudeau, the first Canadian leader to visit South Korea in nine years, will meet with Yoon today, hours

after he delivers a speech at the National Assembly in Seoul.

Yoon's office said they will discuss North Korea's dismal human rights record and cooperation over security and "critical minerals." It was apparently referring to Canadian materials used by South Korean companies to manufacture electric car batteries or semiconductors, which are major products in South Korea's export-driven economy.

Yesterday, South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin and Minister for Trade Ahn Duk-geun met with Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly and Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry François-Philippe Champagne to discuss economic security, Park's ministry said.

Yoon has been trying to increase international pressure on North Korea, which has been expanding its arsenal of nuclear-capable missiles, and strengthening

Seoul's voice in supply chain issues. He has also met this year with U.S. President Joe Biden and twice with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Yoon and Trudeau will travel later this week to Japan to attend the summit of the Group of Seven industrialized nations, where North Korea's nuclear threat is expected to be a key agenda item along with Russia's war with Ukraine and China's increasingly assertive foreign policy. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau waves upon his arrival at the Seoul airport in Seongnam, yesterday

PUTIN'S WAR

South African general in Moscow days after country accused of sending weapons to Russia

GERALD IMRAY &
MOGOMOTSI MAGOME,
CAPE TOWN

Russia's top army general and his South African counterpart discussed "military cooperation" while meeting yesterday [Macau time] in Moscow, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

The announcement came hours after South African President Cyril Ramaphosa denied accusations by the United States that his country was siding with Russia in the war in Ukraine and had sent weapons to help it.

Gen. Oleg Salyukov, the commander of Russia's ground forces, met the chief of South Africa's army, Lt. Gen. Lawrence Mbatha, at Russia's general command headquarters in Moscow, the Russian ministry said.

"The sides discussed issues of military cooperation and the implementation of projects geared to enhance the combat readiness of the two countries' armies," the ministry said in a statement. "The meeting between the military commanders yielded agreements on the further expansion of cooperation between the land forces in various areas."

The Defense Ministry said a South African delegation would visit a number of Russian army "educational and training facilities."

The South African army said the trip was planned well in advance of the U.S. ambassador to South Africa alleging last week that the country had provided weapons to Russia when a ship under U.S. sanctions made a secret stop at a South African naval base in December.

The South African government has denied the Russian cargo ship's stop involved an official sale of



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks to South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa during a plenary session at the Russia-Africa summit in Sochi (2019)

weapons, although it has not categorically ruled out an arms transaction took place.

Ramaphosa has said an investigation was underway to determine if anyone loaded weapons onto the Russian-flagged Lady R cargo ship at the Simon's Town naval base near Cape Town.

Ramaphosa used his weekly message to the nation to reaffirm South Africa's non-aligned stance with regard to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The president's statement was seen as a response to U.S. Ambassador to South Africa Reuben Brigety, who questioned South Africa's neutrality in the Ukraine war while making the allegations about a weapons shipment.

Brigety was subsequently summoned to a meeting with South Africa's foreign minister.

"We do not accept that our non-aligned position favors Russia above other countries," Ramaphosa wrote in his weekly message. "Nor do we accept that it should imperil our relations with other countries."

Ramaphosa added: "We have been firm on this point: South Africa

has not been, and will not be, drawn into a contest between global powers."

He also hinted that Russian President Vladimir Putin would visit South Africa for a meeting of leaders of the BRICS economic bloc in August. The Kremlin has not confirmed that Putin plans to attend the BRICS summit.

Such a trip would entangle South Africa in another diplomatic mess because the country is a signatory to the treaty that created the International Criminal Court, which issued an arrest warrant for Putin in March for alleged war crimes involving the abductions of children from Ukraine.

Since the indictment, Putin has traveled rarely, and only to countries that are close allies of Russia. Countries that are parties to the treaty would be obliged to arrest the Russian leader.

While Russia and South Africa both described yesterday's meeting of the countries' top army generals as part of a normal bilateral trip, it's bound to increase scrutiny of Africa's most developed economy, which is seen as an influential nation in the developing world.

South Africa is the only African nation in the BRICS bloc, which also includes Brazil, Russia, India and China.

Aside from the weapons allegations, South Africa also hosted Russian and Chinese warships and took part in naval exercises off its east coast in February that coincided with the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Brigety, the American ambassador, said last week that U.S. officials have "respect for South Africa's policy of neutrality and non-alignment in international affairs" but had "noted a series of issues which suggest that in practice the government of South Africa is in fact not non-aligned."

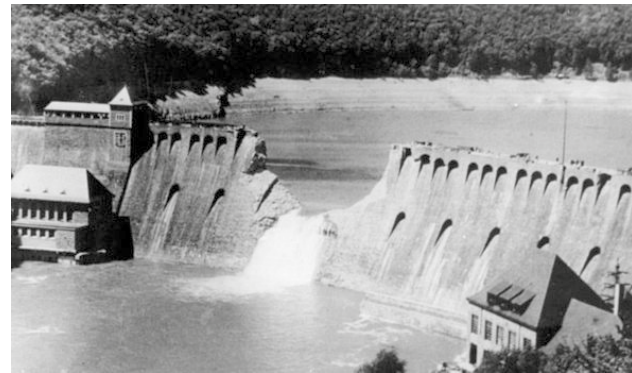
The Associated Press independently verified that the Lady R cargo ship stopped at the South African naval base for at least three days in December, as Brigety claimed. A review of records by the AP also shows that the Lady R is tied to a company that was sanctioned by the U.S. for transporting weapons for the Russian government and aiding its war effort in Ukraine.

MDT/AP

this day in history



1943 RAF RAID SMASHES GERMAN DAMS



An audacious RAF bombing raid into the industrial heartland of Germany last night has wrecked three dams serving the Ruhr valley.

The attack disrupted water and electricity supplies in a key area for the manufacture of Germany's war munitions.

The Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair, called the raid "a trenchant blow for victory". The mission, known as Operation Chastise, has been planned for months.

The crews were specially selected for the job, and have been training in absolute secrecy.

The bombs themselves were invented specifically for the task by the aircraft engineer Dr Barnes Wallis, the designer of the Wellington bomber.

They were barrel-shaped, and used the principle of a "ducks and drakes" stone bouncing on the water to bypass the defences around the dams.

The Lancaster bombers flown by 617 Squadron were extensively modified, and the crews trained to fly at less than 100ft (30.48m) above the water, the height required to drop the bombs successfully.

The mission began yesterday evening, under the command of Wing Commander Guy Gibson.

The targets were three huge water barrage dams - two on the rivers Möhne and Sorpe, and a third on the River Eder.

The Möhne and Sorpe dams control about 70% of the water supplied to the Ruhr basin, and were built to prevent water shortages during the summer.

Wing Commander Gibson led the attack on the Möhne dam personally.

A flight lieutenant who watched what happened at the Möhne dam described the scene:

"The wing commander's load was placed just right and a spout of water went up 300 feet (91.44m) into the air," he said.

"A second Lancaster attacked with equal accuracy, and there was still no sign of a breach.

"Then I went in and we caused a huge explosion up against the dam. It was not until another load had been dropped that the dam at last broke.

"I saw the first jet very clear in the moonlight. I should say that the breach was about 50 yards (45.72m) wide."

The Eder dam - the largest in Europe - was also breached in two places.

Reconnaissance flights showed flood waters sweeping through the Ruhr valley, damaging factories, houses and power stations.

The power station at the Möhne dam has been swept away, rivers are in full flood, and railway and road bridges have disappeared.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The mission became popularly known as the Dambusters raid, and was immortalised in a 1954 war film.

It was one of the most famous air operations of World War II.

Casualties for the raid were high.

Eight of the original 19 Lancaster bombers were damaged or shot down, and of the 133 aircrew, 53 were killed and three captured.

On the ground, too, almost 1,300 people were killed, including 749 Ukrainian prisoners of war based in a camp just below the Eder dam. [...]

The spectacular, daring nature of the raid was a significant boost to British morale.

But militarily, it was a failure. [...]

The aircrew, however, became famous as war heroes, and the leader of the raid, Wing Commander Guy Gibson, was awarded the Victoria Cross.

He died less than 18 months later, shot down at the age of 26 in September 1944.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Do not trust others with important information. Don't make a move; your confusion has caused this dilemma and you are best to back away and reassess the situation.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Try not to allow your partner to lead you astray or upset your routine. You have been stagnating for some time now and you need a change of pace.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Consider a conservative investment that will stay solid when everything else goes sour. Don't make financial contributions in order to impress others.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You can meet new friends who will let you know just how valuable you are. You will learn a great deal from people with different cultural backgrounds.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

A little overtime may help you reduce the workload. You'll find you're detail oriented today. Coworkers may not be on your side.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Your energetic nature and ability to initiate projects will add to your popularity. Don't let your mate talk you into going somewhere you'd rather not go.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Minor accidents could occur if you don't take precautions. Seminars will provide you with knowledge and amusement. Someone may not be thinking of your best interests.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Acceptance will be necessary. Try to stay calm and do the best you can. You will be a bit of a spendthrift today. Direct your energy into physical entertainment.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Temper will mount if you are too pushy at work. Your emotional partner will push the right buttons today. Try to find another time to present work or ideas today.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You can make changes to your domestic scene that will benefit all who reside there. You can expect opposition from family as well as colleagues.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Do not ruffle feathers if possible. Accept the inevitable. Don't let others bait you into arguments. Don't let your mate talk you into going somewhere you'd rather not go.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Your flair for dramatic appeal will unleash itself at social functions. Take whatever time you can to get to know each other all over again. Lovers may not be truthful.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	20	28	cloudy
Changchun	10	19	cloudy
Chengdu	19	33	overcast
Chongqing	20	32	fine
Fuzhou	21	31	rain
Guangzhou	22	28	thunderstorms
Guiyang	17	27	cloudy
Haikou	25	34	cloudy
Hangzhou	22	28	rain
Harbin	6	21	cloudy
Hefei	19	25	rain
Nanjing	22	25	rain
Shanghai	20	22	rain
Taipei	21	27	cloudy
Wuhan	19	28	cloudy
Hong Kong	26	29	thunderstorms

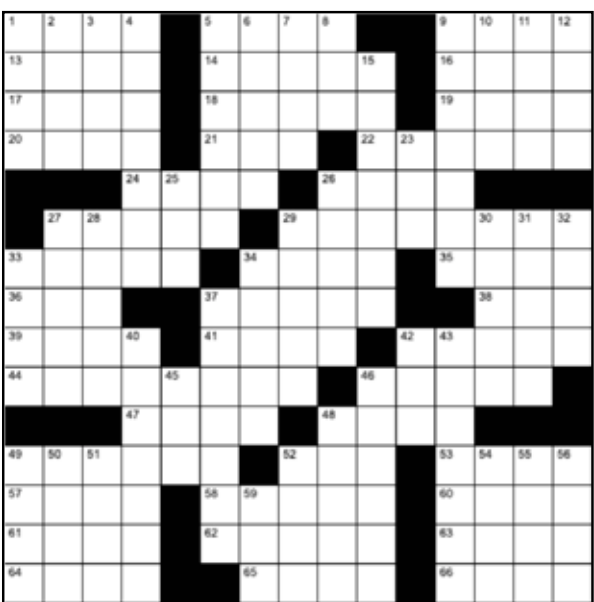
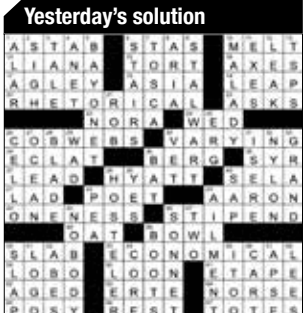
WORLD

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
Moscow	12	24	overcast
Frankfurt	5	17	cloudy
Paris	7	18	overcast
London	9	18	overcast
New York	8	19	fine

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Mil. addresses; 5- Wyo. neighbor; 9- London gallery; 13- Burt's ex; 14- Role model; 16- Some TVs; 17- On the ocean; 18- Slack-jawed; 19- Donations to the poor; 20- Ersatz; 21- 100 yrs.; 22- Allege; 24- Islamic ruler; 26- Fighting; 27- Boatwain; 29- Sailing vessel; 33- Managed; 34- Poker pot starter; 35- Harangue; 36- Boiling; 37- Elevator stop; 38- Suffix with meteor; 39- Pinza of "South Pacific"; 41- Smell or fragrance; 42- Roof overhangs; 44- Recollected; 46- Effluent system; 47- Bridle strap; 48- Scrabble piece; 49- First name in aviation; 52- Fannie ____; 53- Actress Ward; 57- Farm structure; 58- Toothed wheels; 60- Foreboding; 61- Novelist Waugh; 62- Prufrock's creator; 63- Pit; 64- Mont. neighbor; 65- Numbers to crunch; 66- Coup d' ____.

DOWN 1- Melodramatic cry; 2- Ritzy; 3- Fit for service; 4- Like some cats; 5- Nicotinic acid; 6- Trimming tool; 7- Pinto or lima; 8- Knock vigorously; 9- Farm vehicle; 10- Legal rights org.; 11- Highland hats; 12- "____ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto); 15- Skin of animal; 23- AFL partner; 25- Mire; 26- Bogie, e.g.; 27- Alcoholic drink; 28- Pertaining to the eye; 29- Headband; 30- Green; 31- Computer key; 32- Hwys.; 33- "Believe" singer; 34- Pilgrim John; 37- Leafage; 40- Pivot for a paddle; 42- Serpentine swimmer; 43- Inspiring amazement; 45- Circle of flowers; 46- Midday nap; 48- Fortune-telling cards; 49- Slippery ____ eel; 50- Temperate; 51- Zeno's home; 52- Mother of Hermes; 54- Send forth; 55- Actress Olin; 56- Work without ____; 59- Antiquity, old-style.



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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Hellene Garden
HKD 17,900/mth 4 bed 2 bath

AP PHOTO



A group of Arab refugees walks along a road from Jerusalem to Lebanon, carrying their children and belongings with them on Nov. 9, 1948

HISTORY

ON ITS 75TH BIRTHDAY, ISRAEL STILL CAN'T AGREE ON WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A JEWISH STATE AND A DEMOCRACY

ERAN KAPLAN,
SAN FRANCISCO STATE
UNIVERSITY

AS Israel celebrates the 75th anniversary of its founding, and nearly a century and a half after the first Zionists came to Palestine from Europe, the core tension behind the country's establishment – whether a Jewish state could be a democratic state, whether Zionism could accommodate pluralism – is more obvious than ever.

Israel today is a military powerhouse and one of 38 members of the influential Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, formed in 1961 to promote cooperation among democratic, free-market-oriented governments.

Such strength and economic viability would be unfamiliar to the Jews whose identity was forged in the European diaspora. There, Judaism and its practitioners shunned political and military power. They saw themselves as a minority facing discrimination, persecution and violence. Power was the domain of gentiles.

Jews, often separated from the non-Jewish world, focused instead on developing social institutions to help the poor and weak, not asserting their will as a political community.

This attitude toward the state and politics began to change for Europe's Jews in the aftermath of the French Revolution, when the majority of Jews lived in Europe, especially central and Eastern Europe. As some of the traditional legal and political barriers that kept Jews outside of mainstream society began to crumble, Jews began

to integrate into broader society and culture.

Expert analysis of the birth of the state of Israel and the plight of the Palestinian people. This process also brought about, for some Jews, new attitudes toward their Jewish identity.

Many no longer defined themselves as members of a religious community. As many other groups had begun to do in Europe, they saw themselves as belonging to a national community. For some, nationalism also offered a way out of the predicament that Jews faced in Europe: hatred and discrimination, which came to be known as antisemitism.

This nationalism was called Zionism. And the thinking went that if the Jews are a nation, then they should have their own nation-state, preferably in Palestine, the Jews' ancestral homeland. There they could assume control of their historical destiny, not to be at the mercy of non-Jewish nations and rulers.

Zionism sought to solve a particular Jewish problem, gathering Jews dispersed around the world, ending the unique Jewish historical experience of centuries of life under the rule of often hostile governments, and universalizing the Jewish experience by creating a Jewish state and society like all other nations. It was the "natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State," said Israel's declaration of independence.

But just how universal would a Jewish state be? Could such a nation be both Jewish and democratic?

That is the central question

that, more than a century later, has yet to be answered clearly and affirmatively.

RECONCILING UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR

Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian Jew acknowledged as the father of modern Zionism, considered this tension in his 1902 utopian novel "Altneuland," or "The Old New Land." Herzl tried to envision what a future Jewish society in Palestine would look like.

One of the novel's key plot lines involves a political campaign pitting a xenophobic rabbi who preaches the Jewish character of the community against a secular candidate who advocates inclusivity and cooperation between Jews and Arabs in this imagined Jewish society.

Herzl's choice: the pluralist candidate prevailed.

But throughout the history of the Zionist movement and the state of Israel, what Herzl described has been a core source of tension. This duality was on full display in Israel's declaration of independence, in many ways the quintessential manifestation of political Zionism.

On the one hand, the document offers a version of Jewish history that emphasizes the uniqueness of the Jewish experience and offers historical justification for the creation of a safe haven for the Jews.

After establishing the attachment of the Jews to their ancestral homeland, the authors of the declaration address the Holocaust, writing that, "the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe ... was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the pro-

blem" of Jewish "homelessness" by "re-establishing" the Jewish state, which would "open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew."

At the same time, the document pledges that the state of Israel would be faithful to the U.N. charter, protecting the rights of all minorities: "The State ... will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex."

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, suggested that once the country was created, Zionism would wither away. The nation, as a Jewish state with laws that protect minorities, would resolve the contradictions inherent in Zionist ideology.

But as long as the majority of Israelis felt a sense of existential threat – both from neighboring Arab states and dire economic conditions – Zionism continued to provide a unifying ideological umbrella to most Israelis.

AFTER 1967, A TRANSFORMATION

In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel conquered the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria, the country emerged as a regional military and economic power.

It was a time of significant social, political and economic change.

A growing number of Israelis – especially those from the more secular, upper classes – began to question the country's particularism, which conceived of the

country as a shelter for Jews that would protect them from external threats. For these upwardly mobile Israelis, known as the post-Zionists, the founding myths of a vulnerable young state no longer seemed relevant.

They wanted Israel to become a fully normal part of the American-led global order. They believed the country should integrate into the region by resolving the conflict between Jews and Arabs. And they wanted to participate in the global economic market as the country transitioned from a state-run economy to the free market.

At the same time, religious Jews and poorer Israelis, mostly descended from Jewish communities of the Arab Middle East and North Africa, resisted this cosmopolitan liberal shift. They held tightly to their Jewish identity, rejecting what they saw as compromises driven by alien ideals like democracy and pluralism. To this group, known as neo-Zionists, the ideal was a Jewish state as protection from the rapid changes engulfing the country.

PALESTINIAN QUESTION DISAPPEARS

From the 1970s through 2000, much of the post-or-neo-Zionist divide was over the occupation of the West Bank, where 3 million Palestinians live. Could there be peace between Israelis and Palestinians?

Post-Zionists wanted peace, seeking a two-state solution that would see a Palestinian state next to Israel. Neo-Zionists rejected any territorial compromise with the Palestinians.

In the 21st century, in the aftermath of the peace process collapse and the second intifada, or Palestinian uprising, the Palestinian issue has virtually disappeared from Israel's political landscape.

Instead, the country's attention has returned to the old divisions between those advocating policies that would enhance the Jewish character of the country and those who champion universal policies more favorable to excluded minorities.

The Israeli government that came into power in late 2022 represents the nationalistic, particular camp most forcefully. Its main agenda has been a plan to diminish and restrict the Israeli Supreme Court's powers. To the ruling coalition, the court has been a hindrance in pursuing policies advancing the country's Jewish nature.

This so-called reform has driven hundreds of thousands of protesters to the streets. Their demand is a simple one: democracy.

Israel may no longer be a fledgling state – but it has yet to overcome the basic contradiction that has defined it from the very beginning: Can it be Jewish and democratic?

MDT/THE CONVERSATION

MMA

Star Power Punch: PFL lands former UFC heavyweight champ Ngannou

DAN GELSTON

FRANCIS Ngannou's reign as one of the top heavyweights in MMA will continue in the Professional Fighters League following the former champion's contentious split with UFC.

Ngannou was still UFC heavyweight champion when contract talks collapsed once the African fighter said his demands for health insurance and personal sponsorships were rejected. UFC President Dana White stripped Ngannou of the belt in January.

The 36-year-old Ngannou will fight exclusively for PFL in its pay-per-view super fight division. Ngannou, who defeated Stipe Miocic in 2021 to win the UFC crown, also will serve as chairman and equity owner in PFL Africa.

Terms of the deal were not announced.

"I believe in the PFL's 'fighter first' culture and global vision including developing the sport in Africa," Ngannou said yesterday



Francis Ngannou (right): punch power

in a statement. "With that, I am also proud to announce that I will serve as Chairman of PFL Africa which will be the leading MMA organization on the continent providing great African fighters the opportunity to compete on a global platform."

PFL CEO Peter Murray told The

Associated Press that Ngannou's first scheduled fight will be in early 2024.

Murray said talks with Ngannou began when "he was no longer encumbered" and the fighter was expected to play a pivotal role in the company's planned global expansion. Ngannou also wants

to box and the PFL will not stand in his way.

"We're supportive of Francis taking on boxing," Murray said.

Ngannou (17-3) also will serve in a leadership role on the PFL global advisory board, making him the first active fighter to serve on the board and represent fighters' interests.

While the PFL has a unique MMA competition format that includes a regular season, a postseason and a championship event, Ngannou will only fight in a planned PPV division that includes other stars such as Kayla Harrison and Jake Paul.

"This is a new model and it's a transformational deal," Murray said. "This is not just an athlete signing. This is a strategic partnership. Francis has all the capabilities not only as an elite MMA fighter but as a businessperson and we're excited to be in business with him."

Ngannou had dropped a teaser video on social media that he planned to make a big announcement on May 16. He rebounded from

consecutive losses in UFC to win six straight bouts, that included the championship fight and one successful title defense. Ngannou hasn't fought since he defeated Cyril Gane by unanimous decision at UFC 270 in January 2022.

His relationship with UFC frayed to the point that White vowed Ngannou would "never be in the UFC again."

"I never say never, but I'll give you a never on that one. We tried," White said.

Ngannou negotiated with ONE Championship but those talks flamed out shortly before the Singapore-based league made its United States debut last week in Denver.

"Francis had a number of options and we were determined to get something done," Ngannou said.

PFL has made a splash by signing outside stars before, with fighters such as Paul and Olympic gold medal boxer Claressa Shields. The PFL also last week signed French fighter and former kickboxing world champion Cédric Doumbé. But none of the signings packed a punch quite like Ngannou.

"This is the No. 1 signing that this company in MMA has ever made," Murray said. "It's perfectly timed. We're now focused on our next phase of growth and launching our pay-per-view business and expanding internationally with regional leagues." **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

World Views

Grant Peck & Hrvoje Hranjski, MDT/AP

WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR THAILAND?

Thailand's opposition racked up a stunning majority of the 500 seats at stake in the race for the House of Representatives, dealing a major blow to the establishment parties and the former general who has led the Southeast Asian country since seizing power in a 2014 coup.

The results of Sunday's general election are a strong repudiation of the country's conservatives and reflect the disenchantment in particular of young voters who want to limit the influence of the military in politics and reform the monarchy.

But the exact shape of the new government is less clear as post-election coalition talks and behind-the-scene negotiations take center stage.

With almost all votes counted Monday, the Move Forward Party emerged as the big winner. It captured a projected 151 seats in the lower House by winning over 24% of the popular vote for 400 constituency seats, and more than 36% of the 100 seats allocated by proportional representation.

Tailing a close second is the main opposition Pheu Thai Party, whose combined seat total is projected at 141.

The party of incumbent Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a former army general who came to power in the 2014 coup, held the fifth spot in the constituency vote and third in the party-preference tally, for a projected total of 36 seats.

Voter turnout was about 75% of the 52 million registered voters.

Who becomes the next prime minister will depend on a vote set for July that includes all the House lawmakers plus the 250-seat military-appointed Senate, whose members share the establishment's conservative policies. The winner must attain at least 376 of their combined 750 seats.

Opposition parties have criticized the process as undemocratic. It's a legacy of the 2014 coup and a new constitution drafted in its aftermath that was meant to ensure that the military and the state bureaucracy, the main upholders of the royal order, continue to hold sway.

Analysts have pointed out that a lot can still happen before the Election Commission even declares the results valid, a process that can take up to 75 days and will almost certainly include legal challenges.

In the past, the commission and the courts have used their authority to disqualify opposition parties.

Move Forward leader Pita Limjaroenrat tweeted that he is ready to bring about change as the country's 30th prime minister.

"Whether you agree or disagree with me, I will be your prime minister. Whether you have voted for me or not, I will serve you," he wrote.

Although he energized younger voters with his progressive agenda, the 42-year-old businessman has alarmed conservatives with calls for reform of the monarchy, the institution that has been traditionally treated as sacrosanct.

In 2019, the Constitutional Court ousted his colleague from Parliament on charges of violating the election law and dissolved the Future Forward party, which then changed its name and leadership to become Move Forward.

It had been supporting amending the draconian law that punishes defaming the monarchy, which according to critics has been used to as a tool to quash political dissent and imprison pro-democracy student activists.

Student-led protests beginning in 2020 openly criticized the monarchy, previously a taboo subject, leading to vigorous prosecutions under the law. They were also dismayed by the dissolution of the Future Forward party, which they believed was an unfair use of state power.

CHINA SAYS READY TO 'SMASH' TAIWAN SELF-RULE AS US PREPARES MAJOR ARMS PACKAGE, SENDS ADVISERS

THE BUZZ

China is prepared to "resolutely smash any form of Taiwan independence," its military said last night, as the U.S. reportedly prepares to accelerate the sale of defensive weapons and other military assistance to the self-governing island democracy.

A recent increase in exchanges between the U.S. and Taiwanese militaries is an "extremely wrong and dangerous move," Defense Ministry spokesperson Col. Tan Kefei said in a statement and video posted online.

China's People's Liberation Army "continues to strengthen military training and preparations and will resolutely smash any form of Taiwanese independence secession along with attempts at outside interferen-

ce, and will resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Tan said, in a reference to Taiwan's closest ally, the United States.

China claims the island of 23 million people as its own territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary.

With the world's largest navy, latest-generation fighter jets and a huge arsenal of ballistic missiles, China has been upping its threats by sending planes and warships into waters and airspace around Taiwan. With more than two million members, the PLA also ranks as the world's largest standing military, although transporting even a portion of the force in the event of an invasion is considered a huge logistical challenge.

AP PHOTO



RUSSIA LAUNCHES 'EXCEPTIONAL' AIR ATTACK ON KYIV, AS EUROPE, CHINA LOOK TO EXERT INFLUENCE

SAMYA KULLAB, KYIV

UKRAINIAN air defenses thwarted an intense Russian air attack on Kyiv early yesterday, shooting down all 18 missiles aimed at the capital, officials said.

Loud explosions boomed over Kyiv as the nighttime attack combined Russian missiles launched from the air, sea and land in an apparent attempt to overwhelm Ukraine's air defenses. No casualties were reported as Western-supplied weapons helped fend off the assault.

The barrage came as European leaders sought new ways to punish Russia for the war and a Chinese envoy sought traction for Beijing's peace proposal.

Russia's latest attack on Kyiv was "exceptional in its density — the maximum number of attacking missiles in the shortest period of time," said Serhii Popko, the head of the Kyiv military administration.

Valentyna Myronets, a 64-year-old Kyiv resident, said she felt "pain, fear, nervousness, restlessness" amid the assaults. "God, we are waiting for victory and when all this is over," she said.

U.K. Ambassador Melinda Simmons tweeted that the barrage was "pretty intense."

"Bangs and shaking walls are not an easy night," she wrote.

It was the eighth time this month that Russian air raids had targeted the capital, a clear escalation after weeks of lull and ahead of a much-anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive. It also came as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy concluded a whirlwind European tour to greet Ukraine's key wartime allies, which spurred an additional tranche of pledged military aid.

Six "Kinzhal" aero-ballistic missiles were launched from MiG-31K aircraft, nine cruise missiles from ships in the Black Sea and three land-based S-400 cruise missiles targeted the capital, air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat said in a statement on Telegram.

After the first onslaught, Russia also launched Iranian-made Shahed attack drones and conducted aerial reconnaissance, Ihnat said.

Debris fell across several districts in the capital, starting fires, but no losses were reported, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Sophisticated air defense systems provided by Ukraine's Western allies, including American-made Patriot missiles, have helped spare Kyiv from the kind of destruction witnessed elsewhere in the country as Russian forces press on with their tactic of long-range bombardment.

A Russian defense official said that yesterday's attack

destroyed a Patriot missile battery in Kyiv. Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said the system was destroyed by a "Kinzhal."

He didn't provide evidence, and the statement couldn't be independently verified.

The bolstered air defenses have deterred Russian aircraft from going deep into Ukraine and helped shape the course of the war, military experts say.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov cheered the display of defensive prowess, calling it in a tweet "another unbelievable success."

The barrage came as European leaders were due to attend a rare summit of the 46-nation Council of Europe, the continent's main human rights body.

The two-day meeting in Iceland seeks to set up a way of logging damage in Ukraine caused by the Kremlin's forces so compensation claims can be lodged against Moscow.

Meanwhile, a Chinese envoy is preparing to visit Ukraine and Russia in coming days as Beijing presses the peace plan it released in February.

Li Hui, a former ambassador to Moscow, also will visit Poland, France and Germany, according to the Chinese foreign ministry. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Sri Lanka's crisis-hit economy is expected to resume growing in 2024 after contracting 3% this year, an International Monetary Fund official said. Krishna Srinivasan, the IMF's director for Asia and Pacific, said expected economic growth of 1.5% next year hinges critically on the economic reform program Sri Lanka has agreed to undertake, including challenging reforms in five identified areas.

Indonesia Executions worldwide increased by 53% in 2022 from a year earlier, with a significant rise in Iran and Saudi Arabia, Amnesty International said in an annual report yesterday that also criticized Indonesia as having one of the highest numbers of new death sentences in Asia. Amnesty said 70% of the executions in the Middle East and North Africa were carried out in Iran, where their numbers rose by 83% from 314 in 2021 to 576 in 2022. The number of executions in Saudi Arabia tripled from 65 in 2021 to 196 in 2022.

UK Volodymyr Zelenskyy set off across Europe with a long shopping list. Ukraine's president will head home with much of what he wanted — though not the Western fighter jets he seeks to defend against Russian air attacks. European leaders promised Zelenskyy an arsenal of missiles, tanks and drones during a whirlwind three-day visit to Italy, the Vatican, Germany, France and the U.K. that sought to replenish Ukraine's depleted weapons supplies ahead of a long-anticipated spring offensive.

AP PHOTO



UK Writer Salman Rushdie (pictured) has made a public speech, nine months after being stabbed and seriously injured onstage, warning that freedom of expression in the West is under its most severe threat in his lifetime. Rushdie delivered a video message to the British Book Awards, where he was awarded the Freedom to Publish award. Organizers said the honor "acknowledges the determination of authors, publishers and booksellers who take a stand against intolerance, despite the ongoing threats they face."