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THE ANTI-CORRUPTION WATCHDOG HAS RECEIVED A TOTAL OF 678 COMPLAINTS AND REPORTS LAST YEAR, ACCORDING TO A GOVERNMENT DISPATCH

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PROJECTIONS INDICATE SWISS APPROVE CLIMATE BILL AS ALPINE NATION'S GLACIERS SUCCUMB TO WARMING

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AP PHOTO



Philippines All 120 passengers and crew members aboard a Philippine ferry that caught fire at sea yesterday were rescued safely and the fire was extinguished, the coast guard said. The M/V Esperanza Star caught fire at dawn while traveling from Siquijor province to Bohol province in the central Philippines with 65 passengers and 55 crewmembers, the coast guard said. It added that it deployed two vessels for rescue and to help put out the flames, which raged for more than five hours.

AP PHOTO



India Over 100,000 people who had sheltered from Cyclone Biparjoy in relief camps in western India have begun to return home after the storm weakened and headed toward Pakistan, officials said. In the coastal village of Jakhau, where the cyclone made landfall in India's Gujarat state last week, over 130 people had shifted back to their homes from a government-run shelter by midday Saturday.

AP PHOTO



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday his government intends to move ahead on contentious plans to change the country's judicial system after talks aimed at finding a compromise solution appeared to be crumbling. The government's plans to overhaul the judiciary plunged Israel into one of its worst domestic crises ever earlier this year. Negotiations between the government and opposition parties somewhat alleviated the crisis with attempts to find a middle ground. More on p8

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**CUSTOMS BUST 39
SMUGGLING CASES**

Customs detected 39 smuggling cases over five days from last Monday, in which more than 800 items including beauty products, medicines and old mobile phones were seized. Computer processors, about 1,585 grams of cigars, 3,200 e-cigar pods and about five liters of Chinese liquor were also seized. The 39 people involved in the case are residents of Macau, mainland and Hong Kong, and customs has filed a lawsuit in accordance with the Foreign Trade Law. Some goods were intercepted at the border, including two bottles of Chinese liquor in a snack box and a milk powder can, and more than 100 computer processors tied around the waist and calf of a person in an attempt to smuggle them out of the region.

**'THUNDER OPERATION'
EXPOSES ILLEGAL UNIT FOR
PROSTITUTION ACTIVITIES**

Three women were suspected of prostitution in the Public Security Police Force's (PSP) "Thunder Operation," exposing one unit suspected of being used for prostitution activities. The bureau investigated several karaoke and massage establishments in various districts, and stepped up the interception and investigation of suspicious persons in the Northern District. A total of 49 people were intercepted and investigated, of which three were involved in violations of laws and regulations and have been handed over to relevant departments for follow-up.

**'ROAD TO ASIAN GAMES'
E-SPORTS COMPETITION
KICKS OFF IN MACAU**

The "Road to Asian Games" electronic sports competition commenced on Friday in Macau. This ranking competition serves as a precursor to the 19th Asian Games, which will take place in Hangzhou, eastern China's Zhejiang Province. Teams from 29 countries and regions across Asia are scheduled to participate in seven events spanning 24 match days, featuring popular games such as League of Legends and DOTA 2. Notably, this tournament is the first of its kind to encompass the entirety of Asia.

**IC CALLS FOR FILM
SCRIPTWRITING
PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS**

Applications for the "Scripts in Focus – Film Scriptwriting Advanced Program" are open until July 19. According to a statement issued by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), all local filmmakers are welcome to submit shortlisted projects from Macau. Participants will receive guidance from professional directors and scriptwriters and will be awarded a prize of up to MOP90,000. This year, the program invited director Chan Wing-Sun and Wong Yee-Lam to be the instructors for projects from Macau. Chan Wing-Sun is the director and scriptwriter of Table for Six; while Wong Yee-Lam was awarded the Best New Director at the 39th Hong Kong Film Awards.

GOV'T HITS BACK AT US REPORT ON MACAU MEETING 'MINIMUM STANDARDS' FOR TRAFFICKING ELIMINATION

STAFF REPORTER

THE SAR government voiced firm opposition to the references to Macau in the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report recently published by the U.S. Department of State.

The Office of the Secretary for Security under the Macau SAR government said references to Macau in the report were full of ignorance of the laws and the independent legal system of Macau and are attempting, with "conjecture and bias", to confuse the international community and deny efforts made by the SAR to combat human trafficking over the years.

According to the US report, the local government "does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so even considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity."

For these reasons, the report relegated Macau to remain at Tier 3.

Countries and territories whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not



making significant efforts to do so are placed under Tier 3.

"The government did not adequately report proactively screening at-risk populations, such as individuals in commercial sex, for trafficking indicators; and for the fourth consecutive year, the government did not identify or provide services to any victims," the conclusion added.

The report also mentioned that the government had not convicted a trafficker since 2019 and has never identified a victim of forced labor in Macau.

Refuting this statement, the Macau government argued that it has always supported international legal provisions

and common strategies, and actively coordinated government departments and various sectors of society to prevent and combat human trafficking as well as protect victims.

Despite the severe impacts of Covid-19, work related to the combating of human trafficking has continued as usual, maintaining Macau's long-term low, or even zero, crime rate in this regard, said the office.

The US report also noted that migrant construction and domestic workers, primarily from the mainland, Indonesia, and the Philippines, may be vulnerable to forced labor in Macau.

It added that some employment agencies overcharge workers recruitment fees of approximately two to three months' salary and withhold workers' passports, potentially leading to debt-based coercion.

For years, the U.S. report has made reckless assertions about the work combatting human trafficking in Macau without fully and accurately presenting the real situation, stressed the office, adding that the SAR government deeply regretted and felt strong discontent about this behaviour.

In the statement, the office pledged that the Macau SAR government will firmly join all sectors in Macau to prevent and control human trafficking and guarantee the safety and rights and interests of local residents and non-natives alike, the office said.

It also pledged to continue actively coordinating with judiciary departments on law enforcement and stepping up international and inter-regional exchanges and cooperation to jointly discuss preventive and combating strategies, so as to eliminate human trafficking and all other forms of human exploitation.

Lost in translation: What Kou said about the issue of eligibility

Due to a possible simultaneous translation confusion from Cantonese to Portuguese during the press conference last Thursday in which the government of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) presented the public consultation document for the amendment of the election laws for the Chief Executive as well as for the Legislative Assembly (AL), we have quoted, in our previous

edition, the director of the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP), Eddie Kou, saying that "permanent residents of Macau that do not have Chinese nationality don't have the capacity of eligibility" for the AL elections.

As it has come to our attention that such a sentence was not said in the speech of director Kou (in Cantonese), we clarify that what he said was, "As Secretary [for Administration

and Justice, André] Cheong has just introduced, regarding those who did not have election rights in the previous election, [there were regulations concerning] upholding the Basic Law and pledging allegiance to the Macau SAR, there were also regulations concerning assuming office as officials or foreign lawmakers. Therefore, [being] a Macau SAR resident is an essential requirement [to run in the elections]."

However, the Times reporter who attended the event quoted correctly what was said in the Portuguese translation of Kou's words. PC

EDITOR'S NOTE: Macau Daily Times coverage of Thursday's press conference was accurate using the official translation – the only means available for a non-Chinese speaker to do his job. We don't, however, blame the translator who inadvertently became confused while simultaneously translating a live speech in the Q&A period which is, by nature, unpredictable. These translators are doing a very difficult and vital job for the community, making it possible that two completely different worlds or languages meet. However, our obligation is to restore the truth.

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Transport Bureau: New asphalt for roads effective

ANTHONY LAM

CITING the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), the Transport Bureau (DSAT) has spoken highly of the durability of the new type of asphalt used for public roads.

In reply to lawmaker Ron Lam's written inquiry, the DSAT referred to the IAM as saying that the new asphalt and new type of stones have been gradually rolled out for public road works from 2021. Therefore, the new type of materials has only been in use for a maximum of two years.

According to the data, the new type of material has a warranty of four years, "so as to constantly improve [the] durability and quality of public roads," the DSAT added. It confirmed that the materials saw "ideal effectiveness," and that the IAM would continuously monitor the reliability of the materials.

Meanwhile, Public Works Bureau (DSOP) was also quoted as saying that a new type of asphalt with high viscosity and elasticity had been used. More time is needed to access the durability of this new material.



The DSOP has retained the required warranty at two years but changes may be possible after more data is collected.

Introducing the Single Platform for Road Works Administration, the DSAT said that both the IAM and the bureau have improved coordination on the planning and execution of public road works. Both bu-

reaus are authorized to manage and review applications, while applicants can review their progress on the same platform.

Although preview plans on road works in the coming year must be presented by the end of the previous year, some road works are unpredictable, such as emergency repairs, the

DSAT said in defense of repetitive road works.

There were also cases in which pipeline diagrams differed from the actual scenes. In such cases, the DSOP explained, a special task force will be triggered to conduct on-site evaluation and immediately fine-tune the construction plan.

NEARLY 700 COMPLAINTS FILED WITH CCAC IN 2022

STAFF REPORTER

THE anti-corruption watchdog has received a total of 678 complaints and reports last year, where the bureau put a total of 274 cases on file, including 103 cases followed up by the Anti-Corruption Bureau and 171 cases followed up by the Ombudsman Bureau.

According to the 2022 Annual Report of the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC), there were 322 cases which did not meet the requirements to be placed on file and were instead archived or transferred to competent departments for follow-up.

In the area of anti-corruption, the CCAC detected an electoral bribery case involving more than 200 voters and a case of breach of secrecy involving a private company last year.

According to a statement, there was an increase in the number of cases related to illegitimate access to computer data by public servants.

As regards ombudsman actions, the CCAC received many complaints from residents over various pandemic prevention measures adopted by health departments as well as enquiries and complaints regarding matters related to compensation and allowance from personnel of public departments.

Also last year, the CCAC found that some public servants' awareness of observance of specific duties of public service personnel, such as the principle of exclusivity and the duty of recusal, seemed rather weak.

Moreover, in addition to the success in fighting for subsidy for a resident and protection of disabled people's rights, the CCAC also completed the comprehensive investigation report on serious wall tile falling at common areas of Edifício do Lago and Edifício Ip Heng, the investigation report on unlawful occupation of state owned land, the inquiry report on the intelligent terminal system for taxis and the inquiry report on cultural heritage protection work for Lok Kok Restaurant.

The CCAC has concluded several cases about delay in vetting and approval of renewals or applications of the right of abode by the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute. Following the investigations, the CCAC found that since there were one thousand cases for the authority to review and it is gradually completing the relevant vetting and approval processes and the respective reports, there is generally no situation of administrative omission.

ARTS

Artist presents works at Creative Macau, calls for environmental protection

AN Angolan-born local artist has been picking up what people consider trash at Hac-Sa Beach and turning it into artworks to remind people about protecting the environment.

Tchusca Songo, who was born in Angola in 1978 and arrived in Macau in 2006, is hosting an exhibition from now until Jul. 15 of the works she has made from materials collected at the local Macau beach. Many of these materials, according to her, were nearly brand-new. She was completely stunned by the disposal of these materials.

"In Angola, of course, we have trash. But in Macau, there is fancy trash, as you can see, all these toys are still new," Songo lamented.

She could not understand how people in Macau throw away materials that appear very new. "In Angola, you don't see this. It breaks down, you fix it several times [until it's unfixable]," she said.

She also expressed unhappiness with the expansive use of disposable items. "In Macau, there are a lot of single-use item – a lot of Taa-pao (takeaway), we use them and we throw them away. This is not good. We can use takeaway containers at home," she suggested.

"I have also seen people playing at Hac-Sa. When they finish, they pack up but leave the toys there. I remind them of the toys, and I was told that they were dirty and would get the car dirty too," she recalled.



When asked if Macau's wealthy lifestyle had worsened the wasteful situation, she declined to comment, but she wondered what kind of attitude towards resources

adults are conveying to their children.

"Hac-Sa is a place for family fun and afterwards you [dispose of all your toys]? I don't think it's good," she commented.

The artist, who works at The International School of Macau, emphasized that the exhibition is not about money. "It's about the environment," she said. **AL**

UM BUILDS E-LEARNING PLATFORM FOR PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The University of Macau (UM) has built ple8ple, an e-learning platform for Portuguese language learners to study grammar. According to a statement issued by the university, the platform integrates "grammatical knowledge with practical usage to create a real-world language environment." Funded by the Education Fund of the local government, the platform targets Chinese speakers who are learning Portuguese as a foreign language. At this stage, the platform offers 20 modules covering grammar from the A1 to B1 level defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Framework of Reference for Teaching Portuguese Abroad.

INCENTIVES RELEASED TO ENCOURAGE MORE LEGAL INSTITUTIONS TO HENGQIN

Hengqin recently issued a batch of comprehensive supportive measures for the legal service industry, offering a variety of subsidies and awards to attract domestic and foreign legal institutions. The measures will take effect since July 1, 2023, aiming to attract more high-quality legal institutions and promote the connection of legal rules with Macau and the international system. Based on the measures, qualified legal institutions from both China and abroad offering services such as notarization, judicial authentication, commercial arbitration and mediation can apply for subsidies and awards for office rental and further development. Mediation and arbitration institutions operating in the Cooperation Zone can apply for a special subsidy worth up to RMB1 million each year.

CB AND YOUTH ASSOCIATION WIN DRAGON BOAT OPEN, WOMEN'S CATEGORY

The 2023 SJM Macao International Dragon Boat Races staged both the Open Category and Women's Category of the Standard Dragon Boat Race yesterday. After several rounds of intense races, the Fire Services Bureau (CB) and the Association of Macao Youth Development won the Open Category and the Women's Category, respectively. The second day of the 2023 SJM Macao International Dragon Boat Races featured fierce races among a total of 32 teams in the Open Category. After several rounds of races, six teams from the Open Category entered the Grand Final, including Wynn, DC Systems Digital Communications Ltd., the Fire Services Bureau, SJM Golden Jubilee, SJM Prosperous and Melco.

PORTUGUESE CONSULATE TAKING MEASURES AGAINST 'EXTERNAL AGENTS' TO AVOID MISUSE AND HOARDING

RENATO MARQUES

To address the problem of long queues for the renewal of Portuguese passports, the Portuguese Consulate for Macau and Hong Kong has taken several measures to reduce inappropriate usage that comes from hoarding of the bookings by external agents, the Portuguese Consul-General, Ambassador Alexandre Leitão said in a written response to a Times inquiry.

Leitão noted that several "technical changes are being introduced in the scheduling system to reduce possible inappropriate uses," noting the so-called hoarding of bookings by external agents.

The same official noted that several of these measures have already been introduced, aiming to reinforce the response of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs services, and also stated that the measures, will, "in the short term, improve, even further, the service provided."

In the same response, Leitão clarified that contrary to what has been stated by external sources to the consulate services, "no appointments have yet been scheduled for the month of December, due to an ongoing change in procedures related to the swapping of the booking platform." Such change comes also in combination with the entry into force of a new online service named "Virtual Consulate".

To the Times, Leitão added that the launching of the first phase of the Virtual Consulate platform will allow users to access a range of consular services remotely, without the need for an appointment or travel.

Under these new arrangements and in collaboration with other government departments, the online renewal of the Citizen Card (Cartão do Cidadão) will be available firstly to those over 25 years old. Other services that will be available at the same time are the birth registration of minors aged over 1 year (with at least one Portuguese national parent) and the online birth registration and application for a citizen's card for children under 1 year of age.

HIGH DEMAND FORCES APPOINTMENT SLOTS TO BE AVAILABLE IN STAGES

According to the Portuguese Consul-General, currently, the appointment time slots are becoming available in stages to assist applicants for Citizen Cards or Passports, adding, that to face the high demand, the consulate



has already increased the number of daily slots by 30% since last March 1.

"The number of daily time slots for [this] service has increased by 30% since March 1; this is thanks to internal measures to increase productivity and the efforts of the consulate's workers," Leitão remarked, explaining that 2023 has been, so far, a year of great demand in which were recorded in just the first five months of the year (January to May) "more than double the applications registered in 2019 [pre-pandemic]."

The consul-general also noted that as it has been publically ad-

vertised by the consulate through notices on the consulate's webpage, "if it is not possible to make a short-term appointment on the system, users have the alternative, in cases that require immediate resolution, of submitting their requests through the email address info.macau@mne.pt." This method can be used for all particularly urgent situations and has handled more than 300 urgent cases in the past three months.

"This is why we maintain the guarantee [stated previously] that no Portuguese citizen who has a serious problem will fail to be attended to in a timely man-

ner," Leitão reaffirmed, adding that for all other services, including civil registration, notary procedures and visas, among others, all the appointments bookings are taking place in a more expedited period and without difficulties.

The notice published some time ago on the consulate's page, informs those who have urgent need to renew their passports to email the consulate explaining the reason for the urgency and attaching proof of the situation, such as flight reservations, for evaluation from the services, and organization of an appointment time slot suitable for each case.

PORTUGUESE COUNCIL CALLED ON THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO REINFORCE CONSULATE STAFF

THE Council of the Portuguese Communities (CCP) is said to have met with the Secretary of State for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, André Moz Caldas, when the Portuguese government official was in Macau to take part in the celebration of the "Day of Portugal."

The CCP said that during this opportunity they called on the Secretary of State to convey to the government of Portugal the need to reinforce urgently the staff at the Portuguese consulate in Macau, "so the consulate can solve the high number of pending cases related to renewal of identification and travel documents."

The CCP said that a solution is needed, "even if this solution would fall on the temporary recruitment of workers."

The CCP also reinforced their previous requests for the raising of the salaries of the con-

sulate workers that "for a long time have been unfit in relation to the cost of living of Macau."

In response, the CCP stated that Moz Caldas has promised to communicate the concerns with the different government ministries, so that a solution can be found.

The president of the Regional Council of the Portuguese Communities for Asia and Oceania, Rita Santos, was also quoted in the same statement as saying that the difficulties of the renewal of the Portuguese documents are also affecting other people, namely the elderly receiving pensions from Portugal and who need to demonstrate Proof of Life online. She said that this must be done during the month of June, and is affecting many of them as their identity cards are expired and accordingly not accepted by the system. RM

Microsoft says early June disruptions to Outlook, cloud platform, were cyberattacks

FRANK BAJAK, BOSTON

IN early June, sporadic but serious service disruptions plagued Microsoft's flagship office suite — including the Outlook email and OneDrive file-sharing apps — and cloud computing platform. A shadowy hacktivist group claimed responsibility, saying it flooded the sites with junk traffic in distributed denial-of-service attacks.

Initially reticent to name the cause, Microsoft has now disclosed that DDoS attacks by the murky upstart were indeed to blame.

But the software giant has offered few details — and did not immediately comment on how many customers were affected and whether the impact was global. A spokeswoman confirmed that the group that calls itself Anonymous Sudan was behind the attacks. It claimed responsibility on its Telegram social media channel at the time. Some security researchers believe the group to be Russian.

Microsoft's explanation in a blog post Friday evening followed a request by The Associated Press two days earlier. Slim on details, the post said the attacks "temporarily impacted availability" of some services. It said the attackers were focused on "disruption and publicity" and likely used rented cloud infrastructure and virtual private networks to bombard Microsoft servers from so-called botnets of zombie computers around the globe.

Microsoft said there was no evidence any customer data was accessed or compromised.

While DDoS attacks are main-



ly a nuisance — making websites unreachable without penetrating them — security experts say they can disrupt the work of millions if they successfully interrupt the services of a software service giant like Microsoft on which so much global commerce depends.

It's not clear if that's what happened here.

"We really have no way to measure the impact if Microsoft doesn't provide that info," said Jake Williams, a prominent cybersecurity researcher and a former National Security Agency offensive hacker. Williams said he was not aware of Outlook previously being attacked at this scale.

"We know some resources

were inaccessible for some, but not others. This often happens with DDoS of globally distributed systems," Williams added. He said Microsoft's apparent unwillingness to provide an objective measure of customer impact "probably speaks to the magnitude."

Microsoft said there was no evidence any customer data was accessed or compromised

Microsoft dubbed the attackers Storm-1359, using a designator it assigns to groups whose affiliation it has not yet estab-

lished. Cybersecurity sleuthing tends to take time — and even then can be a challenge if the adversary is skilled.

Pro-Russian hacking groups including Killnet — which the cybersecurity firm Mandiant says is Kremlin-affiliated — have

been bombarding government and other websites of Ukraine's allies with DDoS attacks. In October, some U.S. airport sites were hit. Analyst Alexander Leslie of the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future said it's unlikely Anonymous

Sudan is located as it claims in Sudan, an African country. The group works closely with Killnet and other pro-Kremlin groups to

spread pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation, he said.

Edward Amoroso, NYU professor and CEO of TAG Cyber, said the Microsoft incident highlights how DDoS attacks remain "a significant risk that we all just agree to avoid talking about. It's not controversial to call this an unsolved problem."

He said Microsoft's difficulties fending off this particular attack suggest "a single point of failure." The best defense against these attacks is to distribute a service massively, on a content distribution network for example.

Indeed, the techniques the attackers used are not old, said U.K. security researcher Kevin Beaumont. "One dates back to 2009," he said.

Serious impacts from the Microsoft 365 office suite interruptions were reported on Monday June 5, peaking at 18,000 outage and problem reports on the tracker Downtetector shortly after 11 a.m. Eastern time.

On Twitter that day, Microsoft said Outlook, Microsoft Teams, SharePoint Online and OneDrive for Business were affected.

Attacks continued through the week, with Microsoft confirming on June 9 that its Azure cloud computing platform had been affected.

On June 8, the computer security news site BleepingComputer.com reported that cloud-based OneDrive file-hosting was down globally for a time.

Microsoft said at the time that desktop OneDrive clients were not affected, BleepingComputer reported. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Sands China assembles 3,000 kits to address food insecurity



Sands China distributed food kits to the elderly at Caritas Macau's Brilho da Vida Elderly Centre last week, as part of the Sands Cares Food

Kit Build, a global volunteer initiative being held at Las Vegas Sands (LVS) properties in Macau and Singapore in June.

Sands Cares Ambassadors will assemble and distribute a total of 3,000 food kits to those in need in the community — including elderly residents, the disabled, poor families, aid recipients, and food bank recipients — at Caritas Macau's service centers from now until March 2024.

"This event is one of our most inspiring, since our team members work hand-in-hand to provide relief to people in need and because we are part of a larger effort with our sister property, Marina Bay Sands, who is making the same impact in the Singapore community," said Sands China president, Wilfred Wong.

MGM co-launches RR1 Hong Kong Culinary Masters Macau



MGM and Robb Report Hong Kong announced a line-up of award-winning chefs for the first exclusive MGM x RR1 Hong Kong Culinary Masters Macau of Asia, taking place from Au-

gust 10 to 13.

This is the first exclusive RR1 Signature Event outside of the US to be hosted in Macau. MGM x RR1 Hong Kong Culinary Masters Macau also marks the first of

many RR1 Signature Events presented by Robb Report Hong Kong in long-term partnership with MGM, according to a statement issued by the gaming operator.

Centered around the theme of "The Flavors of Tomorrow: Savoring the Future," the line-up will be led by the multi-award-winning Italian chef Massimo Bottura; Yim Jung-sik, the pioneering force behind the two-Michelin-starred Korean fine-dining restaurant, Jungsik, in both Seoul and New York City; and Shane Osborn of Hong Kong's Arcane, the first Australian chef to hold two Michelin stars.

AP PHOTO



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, shakes hands with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang, right, at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, China, yesterday

Blinken kicks off meetings in Beijing on high-stakes mission to cool soaring US-China tensions

MATTHEW LEE, BEIJING

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday kicked off two days of high-stakes diplomatic talks in Beijing aimed at trying to cool U.S.-China tensions that have set many around the world on edge.

Blinken opened his program by meeting Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang for an extended discussion to be followed by a working dinner. He'll have additional talks with Qin, as well as China's top diplomat Wang Yi and possibly President Xi Jinping, today.

Neither Blinken nor Qin made any substantive comments to reporters as they began the meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

Despite Blinken's presence in the Chinese capital, prospects for any significant breakthroughs are slim, as already strained ties have grown increasingly fraught in recent years. Animosity and re-cremations have steadily escalated over a series of disagreements that have implications for global security and stability.

Blinken is the highest-level American official to visit China since President Joe Biden took office and the first secretary of state

to make the trip in five years.

Biden and Xi agreed to Blinken's trip early at a meeting last year in Bali. It came within a day of happening in February but was delayed by the diplomatic and political tumult brought on by the discovery of what the U.S. says was a Chinese spy balloon flying across the United States that was shot down.

The list of disagreements and potential conflict points is long, ranging from trade with Taiwan to Chinese military assertiveness in the South China Sea and Russia's war in Ukraine.

Blinken will also be pressing the Chinese to release detained American citizens and to take steps to curb the production and export of fentanyl precursors that are fueling the opioid crisis in the United States.

U.S. officials have said Blinken will raise each of these points, though neither side has shown any inclination to back down on their entrenched positions.

Shortly before leaving, Blinken emphasized the importance of the U.S. and China establishing and maintaining better lines of communication. The U.S. wants to make sure "that the competition we have with China doesn't

veer into conflict" due to avoidable misunderstandings, he told reporters.

Biden and Xi had made commitments to improve communications "precisely so that we can make sure we are communicating as clearly as possible to avoid possible misunderstandings and miscommunications," Blinken said Friday.

Xi offered a hint of a possible willingness to reduce tensions, saying in a meeting with Microsoft Corp. co-founder Bill Gates on Friday that the United States and China can cooperate to "benefit our two countries."

"I believe that the foundation of Sino-U.S. relations lies in the people," Xi said to Gates. "Under the current world situation, we can carry out various activities that benefit our two countries, the people of our countries, and the entire human race."

Biden told White House reporters Saturday he was "hoping that over the next several months, I'll be meeting with Xi again and talking about legitimate differences we have, but also how ... to get along."

Chances for such a meeting could come at a Group of 20 leaders' gathering in September in

New Delhi and at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November in San Francisco that the United States is hosting.

Since the cancellation of Blinken's trip in February, there have been some high-level engagements. CIA chief William Burns traveled to China in May, while China's commerce minister traveled to the U.S. And Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan met with Wang in Vienna in May.

But those have been punctuated by bursts of angry rhetoric from both sides over the Taiwan Strait, their broader intentions in the Indo-Pacific, China's refusal to condemn Russia for its war against Ukraine, and U.S. allegations from Washington that Beijing is attempting to boost its worldwide surveillance capabilities, including in Cuba.

And, earlier this month, China's defense minister rebuffed a request from U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin for a meeting on the sidelines of a security symposium in Singapore.

Austin said Friday he was confident that he and his Chinese counterpart would meet "at some point in time, but we're not there yet."

Underscoring the difficulties, China rejected a report by a U.S. security firm, that blamed Chinese-linked hackers for attacks on hundreds of public agencies, schools and other targets around the world, as "far-fetched and unprofessional"

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson repeated accusations that Washington carries out hacking attacks and complained the cybersecurity industry rarely reports on them.

That followed a similar retort earlier in the week when China said Qin had in a phone call with Blinken urged the United States to respect "China's core concerns" such as the issue of Taiwan's self-rule, "stop interfering in China's internal affairs, and stop harming China's sovereignty, security and development interests in the name of competition."

Meanwhile, the national security advisers of the United States, Japan and the Philippines held their first joint talks Friday and agreed to strengthen their defense cooperation, in part to counter China's growing influence and ambitions.

This coincides with the Biden administration inking an agreement with Australia and Britain to provide the first with nuclear-powered submarines, with China moving rapidly to expand its diplomatic presence, especially in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific island nations, where it has opened or has plans to open at least five new embassies over the next year.

The agreement is part of an 18-month-old nuclear partnership given the acronym AUKUS — for Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

China's spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, Hua Chunying, issued a statement of cautious optimism as Blinken started his first day of meetings in Beijing.

"Hope this meeting can help steer China-U.S. relations back to what the two Presidents agreed upon in Bali," she said in a statement on Twitter.

However, two U.S. officials downplayed hopes for major progress and stressed that the trip was intended to restore a sense of calm and normalcy to high-level contacts.

"We're coming to Beijing with a realistic, confident approach and a sincere desire to manage our competition in the most responsible way possible," said Daniel Kritenbrink, the top U.S. diplomat for East Asia and the Pacific.

Kurt Campbell, the top Asia expert at the National Security Council, said "intense competition requires intense diplomacy if we're going to manage tensions. That is the only way to clear up misperceptions, to signal, to communicate, and to work together where and when our interests align." **MDT/AP**

KOREAS

North Korea opens key party meeting to tackle its struggling economy

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

WITH leader Kim Jong Un in attendance, North Korea opened a key political conference to discuss improving its struggling economy and reviewing defense strategies in the face of growing tensions with rivals, according to state media reports on Saturday.

The enlarged plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Committee came as the United States sent a nuclear-powered submarine to South Korea in the allies' latest show of force against the North, which has ramped up its testing of nuclear-capable missiles to a record pace in recent months.

During the first day of meetings on Friday, North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said, party officials reviewed the country's economic campaigns for the first half of 2023, and discussed foreign policy and defense strategies to "cope with the changed interna-

AP PHOTO



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, bottom center on stage, attends an enlarged plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Committee at the party's headquarters in Pyongyang, North Korea, Friday

tional situation."

The agency didn't specify what was discussed or mention any comments made by Kim. It said the meeting will continue for at least another day.

The arrival Friday of the USS Michigan in the South Korean port of Busan came a day after North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles into its eastern seas in response to U.S.-South Korean

live-fire drills that took place near the inter-Korean border this week.

With the deployment of the USS Michigan, the U.S. and South Korean navies are planning to conduct exercises focused on sharpening their special operation and joint combat capabilities in the allies' latest combined training to cope with growing North Korean threats.

Pyongyang has condemned the

allies' combined exercises as invasion rehearsals. North Korea has used the expanding U.S.-South Korean drills as a pretext to ramp up its own weapons demonstrations, including test-firing around 100 missiles since the start of 2022. Weapons tested by the North this year include a new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile designed to reach the U.S. mainland, and various shorter-range

weapons targeting South Korea and Japan.

Experts say Kim's aggressive weapons push has put further strain on North Korea's isolated economy, which was already damaged by decades of mismanagement, crippling U.S.-led sanctions over his nuclear weapons program, and pandemic-related border closures that reduced trade with China, its main ally and economic lifeline.

Thursday's missile firings were North Korea's first rocket activity since May 31, when a long-range rocket carrying the country's first spy satellite crashed off the Korean Peninsula's west coast.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said Friday that military search crews have salvaged what it believes is part of the crashed North Korean rocket. The debris was to be analyzed by the U.S. and South Korean militaries. The ministry released photos of the white, metal cylinder, which some experts said would have been the rocket's fuel tank. MDT/AP

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CLIMATE

Projections indicate Swiss approve climate bill as Alpine nation's glaciers succumb to warming

A majority of Swiss citizens yesterday voted in favor of a bill aimed at introducing new climate measures to sharply curb the rich Alpine nation's greenhouse gas emissions, projections indicated.

Projections by the GFS Bern Institute based on near-complete counting and released by public broadcaster SRF showed that 58.3% of voters were in favor of the bill. The margin of error was plus or minus 2 percentage points, SRF reported.

Exact results are expected later in the day.

The referendum was sparked by a campaign by scientists and environmentalists to save Switzerland's iconic glaciers, which are melting away at an alarming rate.

Campaigners initially proposed even more ambitious measures but later backed a government plan that requires Switzerland to achieve "net zero" emissions by 2050. It also sets aside more than 3 billion Swiss francs (\$3.357 billion) to help wean companies and homeowners off fossil fuels.

The nationalist Swiss Peo-



ple's Party, which demanded the popular vote, had claimed that the proposed measures would cause electricity prices to rise.

Backers of the plan argued that Switzerland will be hard-hit by global warming and is already seeing the effects of rising temperatures on its famous glaciers.

"The supporters have reason to rejoice," Urs Bieri of the GFS Bern Institute told SRF. "But by no means

everyone is in favor of the law. The argument with the costs has brought many 'no' votes."

Greenpeace Switzerland welcomed the first results of the referendum.

"This victory means that at last the goal of achieving net zero emissions will be anchored in law. That gives better security for planning ahead and allows our country to take the path toward an exit from fossil fuels,"

said Georg Klingler, an expert on climate and energy at Greenpeace Switzerland.

"The result of the vote shows that the citizens of our country are committed to the aim of limiting global warming to 1.5 Celsius in order to preserve as much as possible our glaciers, our water reserves, our agriculture and our prosperity. I am very relieved to see that the lies disseminated by the opposite camp during the campaign did not sow the seed of doubt in people," he added.

Swiss glaciers experienced record melting last year, losing more than 6% of their volume and alarming scientists who say a loss of 2% would once have been considered extreme.

Experts such as Matthias Huss, a glaciologist at the Swiss Institute for Technology in Zurich, have taken to posting dramatic snapshots of retreating glaciers and rockslides from melting permafrost on social media to highlight the changes taking place in the Alps.

"Let's act as long as we can still prevent the worst," he recently wrote on Twitter. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1975 MISSING EARL GUILTY OF MURDER



Lord Lucan murdered the 29-year-old nanny of his three young children, an inquest jury has decided.

The earl has not been seen since the night Sandra Rivett died on 7 November 1974, and the jury of three women and six men returned the verdict in his absence.

A warrant committing him for trial at the Central Criminal Court was issued by Westminster Coroner Dr Gavin Thurston immediately after the decision.

Scotland Yard detectives said they were "making active inquiries" abroad in an attempt to trace the disgraced peer - nicknamed "Lucky" because of past successes at the gambling table.

The court was told how the seventh earl of Lucan had beaten and killed Mrs Rivett with a lead pipe in the basement of their Lower Belgrave Street home and put her body in a mail sack.

Lady Lucan said he later attacked and seriously injured her when she came to investigate why the family's nanny was taking so long to make tea.

The coroner told the inquest the motive for these attacks was a "matter of conjecture".

The peer's estranged wife said in a statement she was relieved the case was over and now intended to put the matter behind her.

"I cannot say that I am pleased or displeased with the verdict - I was only concerned with establishing the facts," she said.

Detective Chief Superintendent Roy Ranson said outside court he thought it unlikely the missing earl was still alive, but told reporters it would not affect the inquiry into the murder.

"We're still looking for Lord Lucan all over the world and until these sightings run out we'll continue to follow every one up," he said.

Courtesy BBC News

ISRAEL

NETANYAHU SAYS HE'S OPPOSED TO ANY INTERIM US-IRAN DEAL ON NUCLEAR PROGRAM

TIA GOLDENBERG, TEL AVIV

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday that he opposes any interim agreement reportedly being negotiated between the U.S. and Iran over its nuclear program.

Netanyahu spoke after reports in Israeli media said understandings are being reached between Washington and Tehran that would seek to hold back Iran's nuclear program somewhat, in exchange for some sanctions relief. The reports could not be independently confirmed and the U.S. has publicly denied any such deal.

Netanyahu said Israel had informed the U.S. that "the most limited understandings, what are termed 'mini-agreements', do not - in our view - serve the goal and we are opposed to them as well."

Israeli officials believe some understandings have already been reached limiting enrichment and that some funds have already been unfrozen. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing a confidential diplomatic assessment.

The Israeli news site Walla last week reported that under the emerging understandings Iran would limit its

uranium enrichment to 60% in exchange for sanctions relief. The site also said the sides were discussing reciprocal prisoner releases.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said last week "there is no deal," adding that the reports were untrue.

In its report, Walla said Netanyahu had revealed details of the agreement at a recent parliamentary committee meeting. The U.S. and Israel share intelligence and a prime focus of the countries' interactions is Iran and its nuclear program.

Netanyahu vehemently opposed the 2015 deal be-

tween Iran and world powers brokered by the Obama administration that sought to rein in Iran's nuclear program. He was a major supporter of President Donald Trump's 2018 decision to withdraw from the deal, which left it in shambles.

Iran says its program is meant for civilian purposes. Israel considers a nuclear Iran as a major threat, citing its calls for Israel's destruction and its support for anti-Israel militant groups across the region.

Israel says it does not rule out military action to prevent Iran from making a nuclear weapon. **MDT/AP**

IN CONTEXT

Lord Lucan was the last person to be declared a murderer by an inquest jury - the procedure was outlawed by the 1977 Criminal Law Act.

The earl's version of events - as told to friend Susan Maxwell-Davis before he disappeared - was that he intervened in a struggle between an unknown assailant and his wife. Others contend he hired a hitman to kill his wife, who then murdered Mrs Rivett by mistake.

The case has never been examined in a criminal trial.

He was officially declared dead in October 1999 - possibly by suicide on the night of the murder - but his body has never been found.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Don't overload your plate. You can find out interesting information if you get a chance to talk to people you respect. Stay away from social unpleasantness.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Try to curb overindulgence today. Spend time with friends or family. You may find yourself in an opportune position if you are willing to take a bit of a risk.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Your temper may get the better of you if a colleague has tried to ruin your reputation. You may interest some of them in a service you have to offer.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Be fair, not colorful. You are best to avoid confrontations. You are best not to retaliate if members of your household are trying to pick a fight.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Do not sign your life away. Help with your aspirations is likely, and profits could follow. You may find that someone at work hasn't been trustworthy.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Think of changes to your home that will please and add to everyone's comfort. Your lover will cost you dearly if you let them. You will meet new romantic partners.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Don't be afraid to confront situations concerning loved ones in order to solve any problems that may exist. Compromise may be necessary.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 You may want to clear the air where older relatives are concerned. Problems with peers is apparent. Your intuition will be right on.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Social events will be plentiful. Get involved in volunteer work that will bring you satisfaction, not an empty wallet. Uncertainties about your personal life are probable.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Try to be reasonable. Money problems will get worse if your partner hasn't been playing by the rules. Spend some time on yourself.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Efforts made to improve yourself will turn out to your satisfaction. You may find yourself in the limelight for the wrong reasons. This will be a great night to invite friend over to visit.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Problems with large corporations or institutions are apparent. Be supportive in order to avoid confrontations. You may have the energy to clear up that mound of paperwork facing you.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	22	38	fine
Changchun	20	31	cloudy
Chengdu	18	24	overcast
Chongqing	21	25	rain
Fuzhou	22	28	rain
Guangzhou	25	31	rain
Guiyang	18	27	showers
Haikou	26	34	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	21	29	overcast
Harbin	20	32	cloudy
Hefei	22	28	overcast
Nanjing	23	30	cloudy
Shanghai	23	29	rain
Taipei	23	27	rain
Wuhan	24	25	rain
Hong Kong	26	27	thunderstorms
WORLD			
Moscow	15	29	overcast
Frankfurt	13	27	overcast
Paris	17	30	overcast
London	12	27	fine
New York	17	26	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- The wolf ___ the door; 5- Long-jawed fish; 8- Metrical foot; 12- Sight-related; 14- Go out with; 15- Fraternal org.; 16- Currency unit in Nigeria; 17- I've Got ___ in Kalamazoo; 18- Weight; 19- Rulers; 21- Put in; 23- Summer shade; 24- Month after avril; 25- Ques. response; 26- Prefer; 30- Long hard seat; 32- Bendable twig, usually of a willow tree; 33- Hidden; 37- Ill humor; 38- Bring about; 39- Narcotic; 40- She's on her toes; 42- Unit just above a yard; 43- Pen's inferior; they say; 44- Hurry; 45- Kernel; 48- That, in Tijuana; 49- Cub Scout group; 50- Way out; 52- Beautiful; 57- Airline to Tel Aviv; 58- Tree trunk; 60- "South Pacific" hero; 61- Gaming cubes; 62- Banned apple spray; 63- Stair part; 64- Words of understanding; 65- Flushed; 66- Driving aids;

DOWN 1- Actress Skye; 2- Junk e-mail; 3- Take ___ from me; 4- Make weary; 5- Jokes; 6- One ___ time; 7- Confidence; 8- Native Nigerians; 9- Sleep disorder; 10- Feel grief; 11- Outdoes; 13- 39th president of the U.S.; 14- Mend with rows of stitches; 20- Boat propeller; 22- Pleasing; 24- Brainy bunch; 26- Former Virginia senator Charles; 27- Bhutan's continent; 28- Work the soil; 29- Backs of feet; 30- Tied; 31- Where the Styx flows; 33- Africa's most populous city; 34- Trent of the Senate; 35- Piece of fencing?; 36- "Jurassic Park" actress; 38- Goalpost part; 41- Farm females; 42- Trough from which livestock eat; 44- That woman; 45- ___ say more?; 46- Citrus hybrids; 47- Vestige; 49- Go-getter; 51- Gen. Robert ___; 52- Delighted; 53- Let out; 54- River to the Seine; 55- Peter Fonda title role; 56- Sun. speeches; 59- Good ___ boy;

Friday's solution

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

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PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
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PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
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FOOTBALL

UEFA president dismisses idea of threat to European soccer from big-spending Saudis

GRAHAM DUNBAR

EUROPEAN soccer should not be afraid of a player exodus to Saudi Arabian clubs, UEFA president Aleksander eferin said Sunday, suggesting the country was making a mistake investing in stars at the end of their careers.

Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema have taken hundreds of millions of dollars to join Saudi Arabian clubs this year and similar offers were made to Lionel Messi and Luka Modri. They have combined to win every Ballon d'Or awarded since 2008 and all are aged at least 35.

More players are expected to follow after four top Saudi Arabian clubs were effectively nationalized this month when taken into majority ownership by the Public Investment Fund sovereign wealth operation chaired by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

eferin was asked by Netherlands broadcaster NOS if he was scared of a player exodus, and answered emphatically: "No, no, no."

"I think that it's mainly a mistake for Saudi Arabian football," the UEFA president said in an interview broadcast Sunday.

"Why is that a problem for them? Because they should invest in academies, they should bring coaches, and they should develop their own players."

"The system of buying the players that almost ended their career is not the system that develops football," he said. "It was a similar mistake in China when they all brought players who are at the end of their career."

Didier Drogba was the star recruit to the Chinese league in 2012 as clubs there bought Europe-based forwards like Nicolas Anelka and Frédéric Kanouté. The Chinese league and men's national team have made little progress internationally in the years since.

AP PHOTO



UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin hands the trophy to Manchester City's team captain Ilkay Gundogan after they won the Champions League final

regimes across its 55 member federations. Salary caps have often been considered in the 15 years since European soccer officials shaped "Financial Fair Play" rules to monitor clubs' income and spending.

UEFA under eferin's leadership since 2016 also has aired ideas of taking the marquee game in club soccer, the Champions League final, to a host city outside Europe.

That seemed no closer Sunday, he told NOS, and the next two finals will be in London and Munich.

"We didn't even discuss moving out of Europe let alone be concrete as in Saudi Arabia or somewhere else," eferin said. "For the future I don't give it a big chance that we go out." MDT/AP

"Tell me one player who is top, top age and who starts his career and went to play in Saudi Arabia?" eferin asked during the interview on the sidelines of the Nations League Finals mini-tournament hosted in the Netherlands.

"But it's not about money only. Players want to win top competitions. And top competition is in Europe," the UEFA leader said.

The first wave of superstars targeted by Saudi Arabia all won multiple Champions League titles in Europe. Messi won his first World Cup title with Argentina last year and is joining Inter Miami in Major League Soccer while Modri seems set to stay at Real Madrid for one more season.

"We didn't lose them," eferin said when asked if European soccer had lost top attractions. "They still play football. At the end of their career some players go somewhere to earn some money."

Saudi Arabia already has a place in the Champions League with Newcastle qualifying through a fourth-place finish in the Premier League in the club's first full season under 80% ownership by PIF.

Newcastle joins other big-spending, state-owned clubs in the 32-team lineup next season - Qatar's Paris Saint-Germain and Abu Dhabi-backed Manchester City, the new title holder. PSG chairman Nasser al-Khelaifi is a close ally of eferin as a member of UEFA's executive committee and also is chairman of Qatari broadcaster beIN Media Group, which is one of UEFA's biggest customers for TV rights.

eferin reiterated Sunday that UEFA is looking at rules to impose an overall cap on the budget for salaries and transfers for clubs that qualify to play in European competitions.

"Because we don't want that two or three clubs who have unlimited resources come to a budget of 5 billion or 10 billion," he said. "Then our competition is not interesting any more."

"Practically every club, everyone who I spoke with, agrees with that," eferin said, cautioning: "We are far from any decision, we are just thinking about it."

It is unclear how UEFA can introduce such rules within European Union laws and different tax

AD

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OPINION

The Conversation

Sabine Frühstück, University of California, Santa Barbara

WATERED-DOWN LGBTQ 'UNDERSTANDING' BILL SHOWS HOW FAR JAPAN'S PARLIAMENT IS OUT OF STEP WITH ITS SOCIETY - AND HISTORY

Japan has passed legislation aimed at "promoting the understanding" of members of the LGBTQ community—a watered-down bill that will do little to put the Asian country in line with fellow liberal democracies on the issue.

As many reports of the bill's passage on June 16, 2023, have noted, Japan lags far behind other G7 countries when it comes to the legal protection of sexual minorities.

There has been less discussion of how the limits of the new law—and the prolonged battle to get it passed—highlight how national politicians are out of step with Japanese society at large.

Despite Japan's international stereotype as a socially conservative nation—a view swayed by the political leanings of the national government—both corporate Japan and regional authorities in the country have long been out in front of parliament on the rights of LGBTQ people. Moreover, Japan's history on same-sex relationships is decidedly more mixed than many in the country's national politics, or in the West, would acknowledge.

The bill passed by both houses of Japan's parliament does little to move the needle for the rights of sexual minorities in the country. There are no additional legal protections included. And a vague stipulation in the bill that "all citizens can live with peace of mind" has been criticized by LGBTQ activists for de-prioritizing the rights of sexual minorities.

The fact that even such modest proposals faced a battle to be passed is indicative of the stubbornness of the national parliament to seriously address LGBTQ rights.

Yet outside the national parliament, the political and legal struggles for equal rights for sexual minorities have achieved a series of successes in recent years in Japan, especially at the regional and municipal levels.

In March 2019, legislation banning discrimination against sexual minorities was passed in Ibaraki prefecture. A month later, a Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly law prohibited all discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The Tokyo law also committed the city government to raising awareness of LGBTQ people and outlawed the expression of hateful anti-LGBTQ rhetoric in public.

Polling in February 2023 found that 64.3% of Japanese respondents backed laws that promoted a better understanding of sexual minorities. A similar percentage of the population also support the legal recognition of same-sex marriage.

And on the issue of same-sex marriage, it is again at the local level where strides are being made.

Several district courts have now ruled that the Japan's ban on same-sex marriage violates Article 14 of its constitution, which guarantees equality of all people before the law.

Yet the conservative Liberal Democratic Party government of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida disagrees, pointing to Article 24 of the Constitution, which states that marriage is based only on "the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife."

In the absence of a national law to overturn the ban on same-sex marriage, local authorities have turned to civil partnerships. Although these do not provide legal protection against discrimination more broadly, they do offer some benefits, including the option to apply for public housing.

More than 300 municipalities—representing around two-thirds of the population—already allow same-sex couples to enter partnership agreements which are recognized at the local level.

[Abridged]

Washington last week announced it is imposing visa restrictions for Ugandans it accuses of "undermining the democratic process" in Uganda after the enactment of an anti-gay law in the East African country.

A statement from the State Department did not name any targeted individuals.

It said the U.S. will consider other possible actions "to promote accountability for Ugandan officials and other individuals responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic process in Uganda, abusing human rights, including those of LGBTQI+ persons, or engaging in corrupt practices."

Uganda's new law, adopted last month, punishes homosexuality,

including with the death penalty in some cases. The legislation has been widely condemned by rights activists and others abroad, but it has wide support in Uganda, including among religious leaders and lawmakers.

LGBTQ rights campaigners note homosexuality already was illegal in Uganda under a colonial-era law criminalizing sexual activity "against the order of nature." The punishment for that offense is life imprisonment.

Homosexuality is criminalized in more than 30 of Africa's 54 countries. Some Africans see it as behavior imported from abroad and not a sexual orientation.

KING CHARLES TAKES PART IN HIS FIRST TROOPING THE COLOR BIRTHDAY PARADE AS MONARCH

KING Charles III rode on horseback this weekend to take part in his first Trooping the Color ceremony as U.K. monarch, inspecting hundreds of soldiers and horses in a spectacular annual military display at central London's Horse Guards Parade.

Charles, 74, the colonel in chief, received the royal salute and watched as the most prestigious regiments in the U.K. army paraded to mark his official birthday.

It was the first time in more than 30 years that a U.K. monarch has taken part in the pomp-filled ceremony on horseback.

Earlier, Charles' eldest son, Prince William, and the king's siblings, Prince Edward and Princess Anne, also rode on horseback in procession from Buckingham Palace. All the royals were dressed in red and gold tunics and tall black bearskin hats, matching the uniforms worn by many of the 1,400 soldiers taking part.

Others in the royal family, including Queen Camilla, Kate, the Princess of Wales, and her three young children, rode in horse-drawn carriages as thousands of people thronged the Mall, the grand avenue outside Buckingham Palace, to watch the pageantry.

Here are some things to know about the colorful spectacle:

BIRTHDAY PARADE

Trooping the Color is essentially a grand birthday parade to honor the reigning monarch. The annual ceremony is a tradition that dates back more than 260 years.

Huge crowds turn out each June to watch the display, which begins with a procession involving horses, musicians and hundreds of soldiers in ceremonial uniform from Buckingham Palace. The monarch then inspects their troops, including both foot guards and horse guards. Gun salutes and a crowd-pleasing military flyby



Britain's King Charles III leaves Buckingham Palace

over the palace typically round out the celebrations.

Charles' actual birthday is Nov. 14, 1948. But U.K. monarchs have traditionally celebrate two birthdays—their real one and an official one—to ensure that public celebrations can take place in warm summer weather.

Charles' late mother, Queen Elizabeth II, always held the Trooping the Color birthday parade in June, while she celebrated her actual April birthday privately with family.

"THE COLOR"

The central part of the parade features a battle flag—or the "Color"—being displayed and marched past troops and the monarch.

This is a ceremonial reenactment of the way regimental flags were once displayed for soldiers on the battlefield to provide a crucial rallying point if they became disoriented or separated from their unit.

The flags were traditionally described as "Colors" because they displayed the uniform colors and insignia worn by soldiers of different units.

A different flag is trooped each year. This year the "Color" was the King's Color of the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards.

KING ON HORSEBACK

Saturday was the first time a monarch has ridden on horseback at the event since

Elizabeth did so in 1986.

The queen rode her favorite horse, called Burmese, to 18 Trooping the Color ceremonies until the black mare retired in 1986. After that she decided to use a carriage for the event instead.

Charles also rode on horseback for the spectacle last year, when as heir to the throne he inspected the troops on behalf of his mother. Elizabeth died last September at the age of 96.

BONUS MILITARY FLYBY

The birthday parade typically reaches its climax when, at the end of the military procession, the royal family lines up on Buckingham Palace's balcony to watch a spectacular flyby.

The Royal Air Force's aerobatic team, the Red Arrows, usually wows the crowds as they fly in formation leaving plumes of red, white and blue vapor trails.

This year, the flyby was even more impressive, because a similar display on Charles' coronation day in May had to be scaled back because of bad weather. Around 70 aircraft took part Saturday, including Spitfire and Hurricane fighters from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.

Eighteen Typhoon fighter jets flying in precise formation spelt out "CR"—"Charles Rex"—in the sky as the royal family and thousands of spectators cheered. **MDT/AP**



Sudan's warring parties began a cease-fire yesterday morning after two months of fighting pushed the African nation into chaos. Residents in the capital, Khartoum, and its neighboring city of Omdurman reported "relative calm" in the first hours of the cease-fire, after fierce clashes were reported the previous day. The three-day truce came ahead of a pledging conference the U.N. and other nations will organize today to raise funds to cover Sudan's humanitarian needs.



Russia and Ukraine are suffering high numbers of military casualties as Ukraine fights to dislodge the Kremlin's forces from occupied areas in the early stages of its counteroffensive. British officials said yesterday. Russian losses are probably at their highest level since the peak of the battle for Bakhmut in March. U.K. military officials said in their regular assessment. According to British intelligence, the most intense fighting has centered on the southeastern Zaporizhzhia province, around Bakhmut and further west in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk province.



Malian voters cast ballots on a new draft constitution yesterday in a referendum that the country's coup leader says will pave the way toward holding new elections in 2024, but that critics have called a delaying tactic for him to extend his time in power. In a message broadcast on state television on the eve of the vote, Col. Assimi Goita told Malians that the proposed draft constitution "provides for a better-organized executive power, while maintaining the necessary balance with the legislative power."