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HO IAT SENG WILL ATTEND THE 2023 PPRD REGIONAL COOPERATION CHIEF EXECUTIVE JOINT MEETING IN GUIZHOU PROVINCE TODAY

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HONG KONG CUTS DIRECTLY ELECTED COUNCIL SEATS

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FOR THE THIRD DAY IN A ROW, THE EARTH'S AVERAGE TEMPERATURE REMAINED AT A RECORD HIGH

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AP PHOTO



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen arrived in Beijing yesterday for meetings with Chinese leaders as part of efforts to revive relations that are strained by disputes about security, technology and other matters. Yellen planned to focus on stabilizing the global economy and challenging Chinese support of Russia during its invasion of Ukraine. Treasury officials in Washington told reporters ahead of the trip.

AP PHOTO



Russia fired cruise missiles yesterday at a western Ukraine city far from the front line of the war, killing at least four people in an apartment building in what officials said was the heaviest attack on civilian areas of Lviv since the Kremlin's forces invaded Ukraine last year. The nighttime attack destroyed the roof and the top two floors of a residential building, injuring 34 people. Emergency crews with search dogs went through the rubble.

AP PHOTO



Russian mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin is in St. Petersburg and his Wagner troops have remained at the camps where they had stayed before a short-lived mutiny against Moscow, the president of Belarus said yesterday. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko helped broker a deal for Prigozhin to end his rebellion on June 24 in exchange for amnesty and security guarantees for himself and his soldiers and permission to move to Belarus.

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BLACK MARKET

Law amendments to tackle illegal currency exchange activities underway: Wong Sio Chak

ALVIN CHAU'S PROPERTIES AMOUNTING TO MOP600M TO BE AUCTIONED OFF

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POLICE ENCOURAGE ALLEGED SEX CRIME VICTIM TO MAKE REPORT

The Judiciary Police (PJ) has called on the victim of an alleged sex crime to make a report, as they became aware of the allegation after a social media post. The police have immediately commenced an investigation, but called on the victim or any informant to contact them. The police emphasized that any crime should be reported immediately. Pursuant to the Penal Code, sexual offences perpetrated against minors carry a sentence of up to 10 years in prison.

GUIA LIGHTHOUSE TO OPEN ON JULY WEEKENDS

To celebrate Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) Day, which is observed on Jul. 18, the bureau will open the Guia Lighthouse to the public on weekends in July. This will allow people to better understand the work of marine professionals. On Saturdays and Sundays throughout July, members of the public will have the chance to view the 360-degree panorama of the city from the lighthouse. Marine verbal and light signals that have been in use in Macau will also be shown. Visitors will understand more about the lighthouse from signs.

ID, PASSPORT APPLICATION TIME TO BE EXTENDED

The Identification Services Bureau (DSI) has announced that applications for ID card and travel documents may be submitted for an extended seven days a week. Between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. every day, up to 1,000 applications for ID, passport or Hong Kong Travel Permit (first or renewed) will be accepted. Bookings must be made online on the DSI website or via the government One Account app; walk-ins have been temporarily suspended. The DSI has also pledged more self-service kiosks to cope with the escalated demand.

AMCM PREPARING LAW AMENDMENT TO TACKLE ILLEGAL CURRENCY EXCHANGE ACTIVITIES: WONG SIO CHAK

RENATO MARQUES

THE Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) is preparing amendments to the laws regulating financial and monetary activities in Macau to address the problem of illegal currency exchange activities, the Office of the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak said in a reply to a written inquiry from lawmaker Ella Lei.

These activities, which usually take place at casinos or their surrounding areas, started to be popular in Macau in 2017 when local ATMs were installed with a facial recognition system to prevent mainland users from withdrawing money from accounts that were not theirs. The system would also record the mainland identification card the user had used to withdraw money in Macau.

As most mainland gamblers did not want their withdrawals registered, the activity gave rise to currency exchange "freelance agents" who offered better rates than currency exchange shops.

This activity allowed several types of scams and other crimes, and several violent crimes involving murder in Macau in the past few years. This led authorities to establish a joint taskforce between the AMCM and the Judiciary Police to crack down on entities involved in both criminal offenses and illegal financial activities.

Now, as announced by security authorities, AMCM has stated, as a result of the inquiry, that "the government is reformulating the Legal Regime of the Financial System to strengthen penalties for illegal financial activities."

Doing a review of recent data, the same officials disclosed that "to prevent and curb illegal activities such as illegal currency exchange, from January to April 2023, the Public Security Police Force has carried out a total of 186 operations against the activity in the surroundings of the casinos. In the first quarter of 2023, the police intercepted a total of 3,655 people suspected of performing this activity, which is an



increase of 78.4% from the 2,049 intercepted in the same period last year."

Attributed to the return of visitors and gamblers post-pandemic, it was also said that the hike has prompted authorities to resume being alert to the problem.

"Concurrently, in response to the fact that illegal currency ex-

change activities have continued to be active in casinos or surrounding areas in recent years, and cases of fraud, robbery, and even murder have occurred from time to time, the Judiciary Police (PJ) has paid close attention to this issue and held a meeting with representatives of the AMCM on May 30, 2023. At the meeting,

the PJ reported the current situation of these activities inside and outside the casinos as well as its adverse impact on public security. In future, the two parties will continue to work together to increase surveillance over the activity to reduce its living space," the Office of the Secretary for Security concluded.

POLICE DISCOVER 18 ILLEGALS AND 4,713 OVERSTAYERS IN THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS

THE police have discovered 18 illegal immigrants and 4,713 other people overstaying in Macau after the expiration of their tourist visas, the Office of the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, revealed in a reply to an inquiry from lawmaker Ella Lei.

These figures pertain to the period between January and April of this year and are a result of police operations that tackle these cases, such as daily police patrols, police operations, community police liaison mechanisms, and hotel police liaison mechanisms, among others.

In the same written response, the Office of Wong noted that, regarding the cracking down on illegal accommodation, the Public Security Police Force (PSP)

conducts crime prevention operations on-site and on social media platforms. They collect intelligence through different channels that lead to onsite operations, usually in collaboration with the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

"From January to April 2023, the PSP conducted 19 operations to crack down on illegal hotels, involving a total of 47 establishments, of which 12 were already confirmed to be illegal by the Tourism authorities." Eight more were added in the period to May 21.

In total, 52 units were inspected, with 19 of them being sealed on suspicion they were being used as illegal accommodation. The MGTO is initiating procedures against those who violate the law. **RM**

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DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR Lynzy Valles
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS Alex Torrão, Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Anthony Lam, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Jorge Costa Oliveira, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Sérgio de Almeida Correia, Viviana Seguí **DESIGNERS** Miguel Bandeira, Rebeca Almeida | **ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS** JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | **NEWS AGENCIES** Associated Press, MacauHub, MacaoNews, Xinhua **SECRETARY** Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

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ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuis kowie@macaudailytimes.com
OFFICE MANAGER Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com
ADDRESS Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR **Telephones:** +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84
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For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

CE to visit Guizhou for Pan-Pearl River Delta meeting

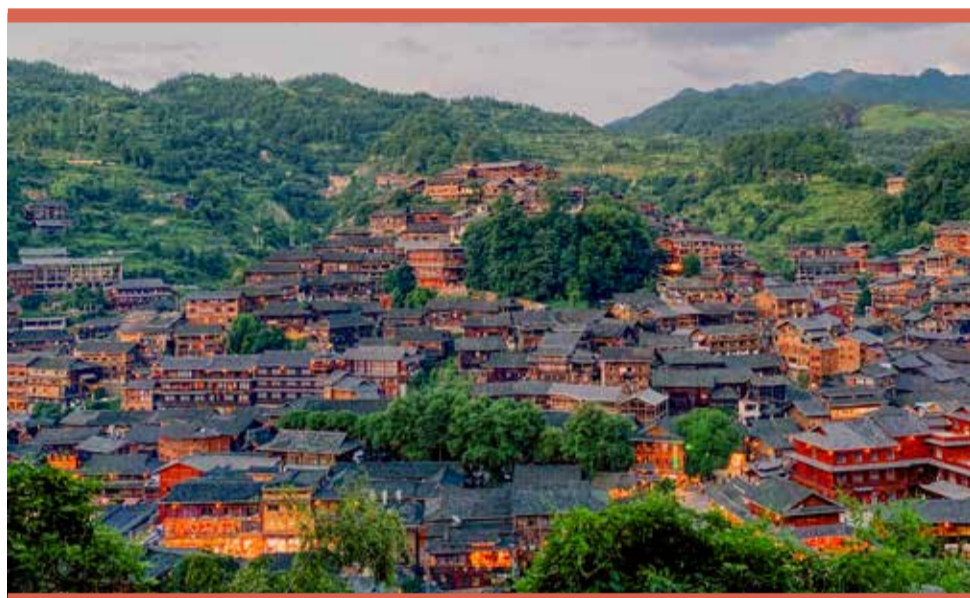
RENATO MARQUES

THE Chief Executive (CE), Ho Iat Seng, is leading a Macau delegation to the city of Guiyang, in Guizhou Province.

The local government delegation will attend the 2023 Pan-Pearl River Delta (PPRD) Regional Cooperation Chief Executive Joint Meeting to be held today, the Government Information Bureau announced in a press statement.

While in Guizhou, the CE will attend meetings with all the leaders from the PPRD Region that are attending the Joint Meeting. Also taking part is the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong.

As usual, while the CE is out of Macau, the Secretary for Administration and Justice, André Cheong, will assume his duties, serving as Acting Chief Executive.



The city of Guiyang is located on the east of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, and the north bank of the Nanming River.

Guiyang has a diversified economy, traditionally a center for aluminum production, phosphate mining, and optical instrument manufacturing. Following reforms, the ma-

majority of the city's economic output is in the services sector.

Since 2015, there have been targeted investments in big data and it has quickly emerged as a local innovation hub.

Currently, the city is one of the top 500 science cities in the world by scientific research output, as tra-

cked by the Nature Index. The city is also home to Guizhou University, a national research university that was under Project 211 (a Chinese government endeavor aimed at strengthening about 100 institutions of higher education and key disciplinary areas as a national priority for the 21st century).

15 TYPES OF QUALIFIED LOCAL MEDICAL PERSONNEL ALLOWED TO PRACTICE IN HENGQIN

STARTING from August 1, 15 types of medical personnel from Macau that have engaged in relevant practice for over two years can register and apply for a practice certificate to work in medical institutions in the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, according to the latest information session on Hengqin's regulation on medical personnel.

Meanwhile, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practitioners from Macau who have practised clinical work for more than five years can also apply to establish TCM clinics in the zone.

Medical institutions in Hengqin are also urged to improve their regulations on the management and employment of Macau medical personnel. Ma-

cau medical personnel must practice within the registered service category, location and time limit.

Recently, at its 11th meeting for the current term, the Medical Committee has discussed arrangements for Macau medical professionals to practice in Hengqin.

Alvis Lo, committee president and director of the Health Bureau (SSM), has said administrative regulations concerning medical and pharmacy staff would be promulgated on Aug. 1.

Current regulations allow 15 types of local medical staff to practice in Hengqin after two years of licensed services in Macau and after Hengqin authorities have registered and licensed them. **MDT/NEWSGD**

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CRIME

Two suspects caught again for same theft

ANTHONY LAM

A duo of suspected thieves awaiting court procedures have been recaptured for the same crime for which they were initially apprehended, local media reported, citing the Public Security Police Force (PSP).

The suspects are a man and a woman from Mongolia, surnamed Sharav, 57, and Togtokh, 53. Both claim they are unemployed. They have a temporary residence permit.

Caught on Jun. 30 at an illegal accommodation on Rua de Évora in Taipa, the two suspects confessed to being involved in a theft at a shop on Rua dos Clérigos in Taipa.

On Jun. 29, the police received a report about the theft of a handbag that was priced at HKD14,400. Preliminary investigations revealed that a man stole the bag with the

assistance of a woman.

When apprehended, the man claimed that he had discarded the bag. However, the police found HKD5,000 cash on each of the pair and concluded that the money was obtained from selling the bag.

Following interrogations, the police discovered that the two were involved in a theft that took place in April but had provided different details. The duo claimed they had provided false details to the police by mistake, and insisted that they were providing their correct details this time.

The false information led to them being charged with the crime of false declaration as well as theft.

In the meantime, the police found another man renting the accommodation for HKD3,000 a month. The accommodation has been sealed.



MUNICIPAL CHIEF HAS 'NOTHING TO ADD' ON TREE CUTTING SAGA

ANTHONY LAM

No further comment has been made by the city's municipal chief after he was questioned about the elimination of trees in the Fai Chi Kei district.

José Tavares, president of the Municipal Affairs Bureau's (IAM) executive arm, has recently referred to a previous statement issued by the bureau to avoid answering questions from the press.

Tavares reiterated that

all comments were noted in the statement, while rushing towards the elevator following a recent municipal affairs advisors' meeting, local media outlet All About Macau reported.

In the past week, it was discovered that 18 trees on Rua do Comandante João Belo in Fai Chi Kei had been cut down by the IAM, surprising residents in the district.

Lawmaker Ron Lam demanded an explanation for the elimination of these trees in his latest written inquiry, querying why there was no prior notification, as well as whether retention or relocation of the trees had been considered. Indirectly-elected Lam Lon Wai, meanwhile, reminded the government to lessen the impact on trees from public construction projects.

In the previous statement, the IAM did not mention the health condition of these 18 trees.

At the same time, local residents took to social media platforms to express their opposition, if not fury, with the decision

to cut down the trees, according to All About Macau.

A social media user said that they witnessed the planting of the tree 28 years ago. "I feel very helpless [with the situation]," the social media user was cited as saying.

Another user joked about the situation, saying that "the trees have survived [typhoons] Hagupit, Hato [and] Mangkhut, but not the government." That user was also not happy with the IAM immediately covering the soil with concrete. "The sites look like pyramids," the user said.

Some other social media users wondered why the government decided to take down these trees when they were already so established. "It will take decades to regrow these trees," a user said.

Another user worried that, without these trees, the street may be more prone to damage in the upcoming typhoon season. The IAM was also criticized for resorting to cutting trees when they are ill, and for the frequent lack of prior notice.

In its previous statement, the IAM explained that the trees were eliminated to make way for the widening of Rua do Comandante João Belo, in order to cope with the construction of the pumping station nearby.

The IAM pledged that the area will be transformed into a leisure promenade of 2,166 square meters.

In the three-paragraph Chinese-language statement, the IAM mentioned the leisure promenade in two separate paragraphs, when the debate took off from the cutting down of the trees.

According to the bureau, the 18 eliminated trees were deteriorating and were increasingly becoming more bent after several strong typhoons in recent years.

The bureau also blamed infection as the culprit that led to the necessary elimination of some of the 18 trees.

Two *Sterculia lanceolata* trees that are relatively healthy have been relocated to a place near the Border Gate, the IAM noted.



AD

Clarification Announcement

With regard to the press release titled "China CITIC Bank International and FWD Hong Kong to Establish First Bancassurance Partnership in Macau", which was published on 22 May 2023, after discussion with China CITIC Bank International, FWD Macau hereby issues this clarification statement. It is hereby confirmed that the entity involved in the mentioned bancassurance partnership is FWD Macau, not FWD Hong Kong. Therefore, the accurate title and relevant content of the press release should read as follows: "China CITIC Bank International and FWD Macau to Establish First Bancassurance Partnership in Macau". We sincerely apologise for any confusion that might have been caused to the public.

FWD Macau
Macau, 7 July 2023

Alvin Chau's properties amounting to MOP600 million to be auctioned off

FORMER junket mogul Alvin Chau has been ordered to sell off 36 real estate properties he owns, which total to some MOP600 million in value, as cited in information released by the Court of First Instance (TJB).

Chau has been sentenced to 18 years in prison for illegal gambling, running a triad and major fraud in January.

According to the information from the court, the 36 real estate properties are located on Estrada Coronel Nicolau de Mesquita and Beco da Perola in Taipa and the majority are carparks.

Aside from commercial sites, the properties will be up for auction on September 12.

The 31 parking spaces range from MOP1.13 million to MOP1.18 million, while the commercial spaces range from MOP55.52 million to MOP176.75 million.

Meanwhile, in a recent judgment, Judge Chan Kuong Seng has upheld the validity of the three pieces of evidences that was presented against Chau during his trial.

Chau appealed over the admissibility of evidence during the trial, which includes excerpts from a taped phone call, as well as the practice of reading out interrogation transcripts in court when the suspects were absent.

The former Suncity boss now has to pay over MOP15,000 in penalties to the court.

Chau was charged with 289 crimes, of which 229 concern operating illicit gambling in authorized venues. The court convicted him of 103 of the 229 allegations in January.

Chau was found guilty of 59 other charges and was cleared of the charge related to money laundering.

The court ordered the defendants to compensate the Macau government and five of the six casino operators, who are co-plaintiffs in the civil case.

The defendants were required to pay HKD6.52 billion to the government, HKD349 million to MGM, HKD770 million to Wynn, HKD290 million to Venetian, HKD550 million to Galaxy and HKD178 million to SJM. LV

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KELVIN CHAN

SOCIAL MEDIA

META TAKES AIM AT TWITTER WITH THE LAUNCH OF RIVAL APP THREADS

META unveiled an app to rival Twitter yesterday (Macau time), appearing to target users looking for an alternative to the social media platform owned — and frequently changed — by Elon Musk.

Called Threads, the new offering is billed as a text-based version of Meta's photo-sharing app Instagram that the company says provides "a new, separate space for real-time updates and public conversations."

The app went live just after midnight Wednesday in the U.K. in Apple and Google Android app stores in more than 100 countries including the U.S., Britain, Australia, Canada and Japan. Early celebrity users include chef Gordon Ramsay, the pop star Shakira and Mark Hoyle, better known as the YouTuber LadBaby.

Users get a Twitter-like microblogging experience, according to screenshots provided to media, suggesting that Meta Platforms has been gearing up to directly challenge the platform after Musk's tumultuous ownership has resulted in a series of unpopular changes that have turned off users and advertisers.

There are buttons to like, repost, reply to or quote a "thread," and counters showing the number of likes and replies that a post has received.

"Our vision is that Threads will be a new app more focused on text and dialogue, modeled after what Instagram has done for photo and video," the company said.

Posts are limited to 500 characters, which is more than Twitter's 280-character threshold, and can include links, photos and videos up to five minutes long.



AP PHOTO

Instagram users will be able to log in with their existing usernames and follow the same accounts on the new app. New users will have to set up an Instagram account.

Meta emphasized measures to keep users safe, including enforcing Instagram's community guidelines and providing tools to control who can mention or reply to users.

Meta's new offering, however, has raised data privacy concerns.

Threads could collect a wide range of personal information, including health, financial, contacts, browsing and search history, location data, purchases

and "sensitive info," according to its data privacy disclosure on the App Store.

Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey pointed it out in a snarky tweet saying, "All your Threads are belong to us" that included a screenshot of the disclosure. Musk replied "yeah."

One place Threads won't be rolled out is in the European Union, which has strict data privacy rules.

Meta has informed Ireland's Data Privacy Commission that it has no plans yet to launch Threads in the 27-nation bloc, commission spokesman Graham Doyle said. The Irish watchdog is

Meta's main privacy regulator for the EU because the company's regional headquarters is based in Dublin.

While Meta had teased Threads with a listing on Apple's U.K. App Store earlier this week, it could not be found in the French, German or Dutch versions. The company is working on rolling the app out to more countries but cites regulatory uncertainty for its decision to hold off on a European launch.

Analysts said its success is far from guaranteed, citing Meta's track record of starting standalone apps that were later shut down.

Also in question is whether it's

the right move for Meta, which has announced tens of thousands of layoffs over the past year amid a tech industry slowdown.

CEO Mark Zuckerberg also has been focusing on the metaverse, investing tens of billions of dollars in the virtual reality concept.

Meta risks "spreading itself too thin," said Mike Proulx, a research director at Forrester, a global market research company. "Meta is banking on a moment in time amidst peak Twitter frustration. However, this window of opportunity is already flooded with Twitter alternatives including Bluesky, Mastodon, Spill, Post.News and Hive, which are all competing for Twitter's market share."

Even so, Threads could be a fresh headache for Musk, who acquired Twitter last year for \$44 billion.

He's made a series of changes that have triggered backlash, the latest being daily limits on the number of tweets people can view to try to stop unauthorized scraping of potentially valuable data. He also is now requiring paid verification for users to access the online dashboard TweetDeck.

Musk's rivalry with Zuckerberg could end up spilling over into real life. In an online exchange the two tech billionaires seemingly agreed to a cage match face-off, though it's unclear if they will actually make it to the ring. **MDT/AP**

Chinese mining company opens a giant lithium processing plant in Zimbabwe

FARAI MUTSAKA,
HARARE

A Chinese mining company formally opened a \$300 million lithium processing plant Wednesday in Zimbabwe, which has one of the world's largest reserves of the metal as demand surges globally because of its use in electric car batteries.

Zimbabwe has the largest lithium reserves in Africa and has in recent years drawn investors in battery minerals from Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, although China is the dominant player.



AP PHOTO

People are seen on the grounds of Prospect Lithium Zimbabwe's processing plant in Goromonzi, Wednesday

The plant opened by Chinese company Zhejiang Prospect Lithium Zimbabwe, an arm of Chinese company Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt, has a capacity to process 4.5 million metric tons of hard rock lithium concentrate for export

per year, Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa said.

Mnangagwa was present for the official opening of the sprawling plant in Goromonzi, about 80 kilometers (50 miles) southeast of Zimbabwe's capital, Harare.

"Lithium is the mineral of the present and the future ... and value addition will position our country as an emerging and competitive player in the global lithium value chain," Mnangagwa said. He urged the company to "beef" up expertise that would help Zimbabwe and other southern

African countries "eventually" manufacture lithium batteries and other components locally.

Lithium is a key component for electric vehicle batteries. To cash in on demand, Zimbabwe last year banned the export of raw lithium ore. In doing so, it joined countries like Indonesia and Chile that are trying to maximize their return on deposits of lithium, cobalt and nickel by requiring miners to invest locally in refining and processing before they can export.

Prospect Lithium Zimbabwe deputy general manager Trevor Barnard said that the firm aims to start by processing 450,000 tons of concentrate every year. The concentrate will be further processed into battery-grade lithium outside Zimbabwe. **MDT/AP**

ADVERTORIAL

SANDS CHINA NEWS

Sands Cares Ambassadors and Fuhong Distribute Gift Packs for Children's Day

In celebration of International Children's Day on June 1, Sands China partnered with Fuhong Society of Macau to assemble and deliver gift packs to providers of children's services in Macao.

Ahead of the global holiday, Sands Cares Ambassadors visited Fuhong's Long Cheng Centre, Hong Ieng Centre, and Ieng Lok Centre May 9 to show love and care to children in need. In addition, Sands China distributed more than 2,500 International Children's Day gift packs to 63 providers of children's services via Fuhong.

The gifts in each pack were made by Fuhong members as part of the organisation's Gift Pack Community Sharing Programme, which provides job opportunities to people with disabilities. Gifts made by participants through this programme are presented to different local groups to share festive joy with community members.

In May, Sands China donated MOP 259,750 to Fuhong to support the Gift Pack Community Sharing Programme, which Sands China has supported since 2006, providing persons with disabilities working opportunities through purchasing their services.

Each of the International Children's Day gift packs contained stationery, snacks, toys, and a variety of daily supplies inside a hand-made drawstring bag, which the Ambassadors and service users from Fuhong made together.

Jennifer Chau, director of Fuhong Society of Macau, said: "Our gratitude goes to Sands China for its continued support to our services since 2006 – purchasing gift packs made by our members with disabilities and delivering them to families in need. This programme is profoundly meaningful as it helps support disadvantaged families. On the other hand, it increases work opportunities for members with disabilities – enhancing their confidence during work and increasing their sense of achievement, which in turn can help them dive into society with their own efforts."

Initiatives like Sands China's collaborations with Fuhong Society of Macau are central to the company's commitment toward social causes and community involvement. Sands China's community work is part of Sands Cares, the global corporate citizenship programme of parent company Las Vegas Sands Corp.



AUTOMOBILE

Strong demand drives US new vehicle sales higher in the first half of the year

DEMAND for new SUVs, trucks and cars in the U.S. picked up steam in the second quarter, but the stronger sales kept prices high for consumers.

Auto sales rose a healthy 16.8% from April through June to just over 4.1 million, fueled by pent-up demand from nearly two years of short supplies due to factories that were hobbled by the global computer chip shortage.

For much of the year, average prices pulled back a bit and automakers raised discounts a little. But in June, those trends began to stall out, said Ivan Drury, director of insights for Edmunds.com.

Consumers paid an average of \$45,978 per vehicle in June, according to J.D. Power estimates. That's flat from June of last year, but almost \$1,400 less than in December of 2022 when prices peaked.

Inventory on dealer lots was expected to be just over 1.2 million vehicles in June, about the same as most of this year, J.D. Power said. Because of increased demand, supplies aren't growing.

Electric vehicle sales continued to rise during the first half of the year to more than 557,000 vehicles, or 7.2% of all new vehicle sales. In all of last year, consumers bought just over 807,000 EVs, or 5.8% of new vehicle sales.

With prices flat and average new-vehicle interest rates of around 7% expected to stay

elevated through at least the summer, Drury says those in the market for a new car should hold off buying if they can. If they can't, they should figure out if they need as many bells and whistles.

"Any of those upgrades are likely going to cost you far more than you might expect," he said.

General Motors led all automakers in second-quarter sales with almost 690,000, a 19% increase over a year ago. Toyota, which had been in second place, posted sales of 569,000, up 7%. Ford will release sales on Thursday.

Stellantis sales rose 6% for the quarter, while Nissan sales jumped 33%, and Honda's leaped 45% over poor numbers from a year ago due to parts shortages. Hyundai and Kia sales each rose 15% from a year ago. Subaru sales were up 22%.

For the first half of the year, auto sales rose 12% over 2022 to 7.7 million, still below pre-pandemic levels.

Tesla again was by far the leader in electric vehicle sales at nearly 337,000 in the U.S. from January through June, according to estimates from Motorintelligence.com.

General Motors was a distant second with about 34,000 EVs sold, mainly the Chevrolet Bolt and Bolt Electric Utility Vehicle. Korean automaker Hyundai made big gains, selling more than 22,000 EVs. MDT/AP

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

VISIT BY SOLOMON ISLANDS LEADER TO BEIJING UNDERSCORES RISING CHINA-US RIVALRY IN SOUTH PACIFIC

SOLOMON Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare will visit China next week, highlighting the accelerating contest between Beijing and Washington for influence in the South Pacific.

Sogavare will visit from Sunday to Saturday, meeting top officials in Beijing and traveling to Jiangsu and Guangdong provinces, among China's most developed, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing yesterday.

His visit will "inject new momentum" into relations and "deepen mutual political trust, expand pragmatic cooperation and strengthen people-to-people exchanges," Wang said.

"Since the establishment of diplomatic relations be-



tween China and the Solomon Islands, our relations have developed rapidly and achieved fruitful results, benefiting the people of both countries and promoting re-

gional peace and stable development," Wang said.

Sogavare's switching of diplomatic relations from Taiwan to China and signing of a secretive security agree-

ment that could see Chinese forces stationed in the island nation set off alarm bells in Washington as well as in neighboring Australia and New Zealand.

However, China's attempts to forge closer partnerships with other island nations in the region have largely fallen flat, and Sogavare has since assured Australia that he would not "endanger his country" by allowing China to establish a naval base in the South Pacific.

The administration of President Joe Biden is proceeding with plans to re-open a U.S. Embassy in the Solomon Islands in an effort to counter China's influence.

The U.S. has sent several high-level delegations to the region, and in late September, Biden convened a summit of Pacific Island leaders to unveil a new strategy for the area that included pressing issues such as climate change, maritime security and protecting the area from overfishing.

Biden pledged that the U.S. would provide \$810 million in new aid for Pacific Island nations over the next decade, including \$130 million to address the effects of climate change. **MDT/AP**

239 PEOPLE DIED FROM COVID-19 IN JUNE IN A SIGNIFICANT UPTICK

CHINA reported yesterday that 239 people died from COVID-19 in June in a significant uptick months after it lifted most containment measures.

The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention had reported 164 deaths in May and none at all in April and March.

China started employing a "zero-COVID" containment strategy in early 2020 and credits the strict lockdowns, quarantines, border closures and compulsory mass testing with significantly saving lives.

But the measures were lifted suddenly in December with little preparation, leading to a final surge in which about 60,000 people died, according to the official toll. Deaths this year peaked in January and February, hitting a high of 4,273 on Jan. 4, but then declined gradually to zero on Feb. 23, according to the Chinese CDC.

Chinese health officials didn't say whether they expect the trend to continue or if they would recommend for preventative measures to be restored. **MDT/AP**

AD

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Hong Kong changes law to slash directly elected council seats

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

HONG Kong lawmakers yesterday passed an amendment to a law to eliminate most directly elected seats on local district councils, the last major political representative bodies chosen by the public.

The changes include slashing the proportion of directly elected seats in the municipal-level organization being from some 90% currently to just about 20% — even lower than the level when these bodies were first set up in the 1980s, when Hong Kong was ruled by Britain.

The rest of the 470 seats will be filled by members appointed by the chief executive, rural committee chairpersons and others elected by local committees that are packed with pro-establishment figures.

All incoming councilors will be vetted by a committee to ensure “patriots” are administering Hong Kong. A performance monitoring mechanism will be introduced for “sanctioning misconduct” of councilors.

In 2021, Hong Kong amended its electoral laws for its legislature, drastically reducing the public's ability to vote and increasing the number of pro-Beijing lawmakers making decisions for the city.

Analysts said the latest amendments would marginalize public

AP PHOTO



participation in the city's affairs, warning that the government could further lose popular support.

In the past, elections for city district council seats typically drew little international attention as the councilors mainly handled municipal matters, such as organizing construction projects and ensuring that public facilities are in order.

But the councils took on impor-

tance after the city's pro-democracy camp won a landslide victory in the last poll at the height of the anti-government protests in 2019. The camp then hailed its strong gains in the race as a “victory” for the Hong Kong people.

Many pro-democracy district councilors resigned in 2021 after authorities introduced an oath-taking requiring them to pledge allegiance to the city.

Their mass resignations followed media reports that councilors may have to repay their wages if they are later disqualified from office, which the government had not confirmed or denied at the time.

Critics regarded the requirement as part of a broader crackdown on the pro-democracy movement after the enactment of the sweeping national security

law in 2020.

The resignations and other disqualifications had left about one-third of the 479 councilors still working, the government said.

The bill passed yesterday unanimously by the city's legislature, as most legislators are largely pro-Beijing. Many lawmakers, including Regina Ip, voiced their disapproval over the performances of some pro-democracy councilors elected in 2019.

“The councils became increasingly radical and turned into a very big resistance that obstructs the government's work and many measures that aim to improve people's livelihood,” said Ip, a leading member of the Executive Council, Hong Kong's Cabinet.

But John Burns, an honorary professor of politics and public administration at the University of Hong Kong, said the drastic cut in the number of directly elected seats would undermine a legal and legitimate way for the people to communicate with authority.

“Hong Kong has never been a democracy,” he said. “The changes do, however, roll back political participation, which could further undermine Hong Kong people's support for the government.”

Kenneth Chan, professor at Hong Kong Baptist University's government and international studies department, said the overhaul aimed to install pro-government representatives through heavily controlled methods.

“The district councils are expected to degenerate into echo chambers for the administration, and will no longer serve as a key platform for democratic reforms at the grassroots level,” Chan said. **MDT/AP**

Russian navy ships visit Shanghai as sides reaffirm military ties amid Ukraine conflict

A pair of Russia navy ships are visiting China as the countries reaffirm their military ties amid Russia's war in Ukraine.

The Cold War-era frigates Gromkiy and Otlichnyy arrived in the financial hub of Shanghai, China's largest city and biggest port, on Wednesday for a seven-day visit.

Following the port call, the ships will conduct joint drills with their Chinese counterparts focusing on ship-to-ship communications, maneuvering in formation and maritime search and rescue, state television's military channel reported yesterday.

The visit follows a meeting Monday in Beijing

AP FILE PHOTO



The Varyag missile cruiser of Russia's Pacific Fleet sails off for joint naval drill planned by Russia and China, 2022

between China's defense minister and the head of Russia's navy, the first formal military talks between the friendly neighbors since a short-lived mutiny by the Russian

mercenary group Wagner. China has reassured Russia of its continued support since the uprising, and Minister of National Defense Li Shangfu told Russian Adm. Nikolai Yev-

menov that China hoped for increased exchanges, joint exercises and other forms of cooperation to help defense ties “reach a new level,” the Chinese Defense Ministry said.

“The Chinese and Russian navies have close exchanges and frequent interactions,” the ministry quoted Li as saying. “It is hoped that the two sides will strengthen communication at all levels, regularly organize joint training, joint patrols and joint war games.”

China operates the world's largest navy by number of hulls and vastly outstrips Russia's navy in both size and technical ability. The countries' fleets have held a series of exercises and joint maneuvers since Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, as have their air forces.

In February, Russia and China joined with the South African navy for drills off

the African coast in what the South African opposition said was tantamount to an endorsement of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The military cooperation embodies the Chinese and Russian governments' informal alliance. They also align their foreign policies and positions at the United Nations, where Beijing has consistently provided diplomatic cover for Moscow.

While saying it is neutral in the Ukraine war, China has stood solidly beside Russia, accusing the U.S. and NATO of provoking Moscow and of fueling the bloodshed by helping arm Ukraine.

Despite that, China has repeatedly said it would not provide arms to either side in the conflict and would pay close attention to the export of “dual-use” items that could be adapted for military purposes. **MDT/AP**

MARI YAMAGUCHI,
FUTABA

JAPAN

THE head of the U.N. atomic agency toured Japan's tsunami-wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant on Wednesday and said he is satisfied with still-contentious plans to release treated radioactive wastewater into the Pacific Ocean.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Mariano Grossi observed where the treated water will be sent through a pipeline to a coastal facility, where it will be highly diluted with seawater and receive a final test sampling. It will then be released 1 kilometer offshore through an under-sea tunnel.

"I was satisfied with what I saw," Grossi said after his tour of equipment at the plant for the planned discharge, which Japan hopes to begin this summer. "I don't see any pending issues."

The wastewater release still faces opposition in and outside Japan.

Earlier Wednesday, Grossi met with local mayors and fishing association leaders and stres-

sed that the IAEA will be present throughout the water discharge, which is expected to last decades, to ensure safety and address residents' concerns. He said he inaugurated a permanent IAEA office at the plant, showing its long-term commitment.

The water discharge is not "some strange plan that has been devised only to be applied here, and sold to you," Grossi said at the meeting in Iwaki, about 40 kilometers south of the plant. He said the method is certified by the IAEA and is followed around the world.

The IAEA, in its final report on the Fukushima plan released Tuesday, concluded that the treated wastewater, which will still contain a small amount



Rafael Mariano Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, center

of radioactivity, will be safer than international standards and its environmental and health impact would be negligible.

Local fishing organizations have rejected the plan because they worry their reputation will be damaged even if their catch isn't contaminated. It is also opposed by groups in South Korea, China and some Pacific Island nations due to safety concerns and political reasons.

Fukushima's fisheries association adopted a resolution on June 30 reaffirming its rejection of the plan.

The fishery association chief, Tetsu Nozaki, urged government officials at Wednesday's meeting "to remember that the treated water plan was pushed forward despite our opposition."

Grossi is expected to also visit South Korea, New Zealand and the Cook Islands to ease concerns there. He said his intention is to explain what the IAEA, not Japan, is doing to ensure there is no problem.

In an effort to address concerns about fish and the marine environment, Grossi and Tomoaki Kobayakawa, president of the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, signed an agreement on a joint project to determine whether they are impacted by tritium, the only radionuclide officials say cannot

be removed from the wastewater by treatment.

In South Korea, officials said in a briefing Wednesday that it's highly unlikely that the released water will have dangerous levels of contamination. They said South Korea plans to tightly screen seafood imported from Japan and that there is no immediate plan to lift the country's import ban on seafood from the Fukushima region.

Park Ku-yeon, first vice minister of South Korea's Office for Government Policy Coordination, said Seoul plans to comment on the IAEA findings when it issues the results of the country's own investigation into the potential effects of the water release, which he said will come soon.

China doubled down on its objections to the release in a statement late Tuesday, saying the IAEA report failed to reflect all views and accusing Japan of treating the Pacific Ocean as a sewer.

"We once again urge the Japanese side to stop its ocean discharge plan, and earnestly dispose of the nuclear-contaminated water in a science-based, safe and transparent manner. If Japan insists on going ahead with the plan, it will have to bear all the consequences ari-

sing from this," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

Grossi said Wednesday he is aware of the Chinese position and takes any concern seriously. "China is a very important partner of the IAEA and we are in close contact," he said.

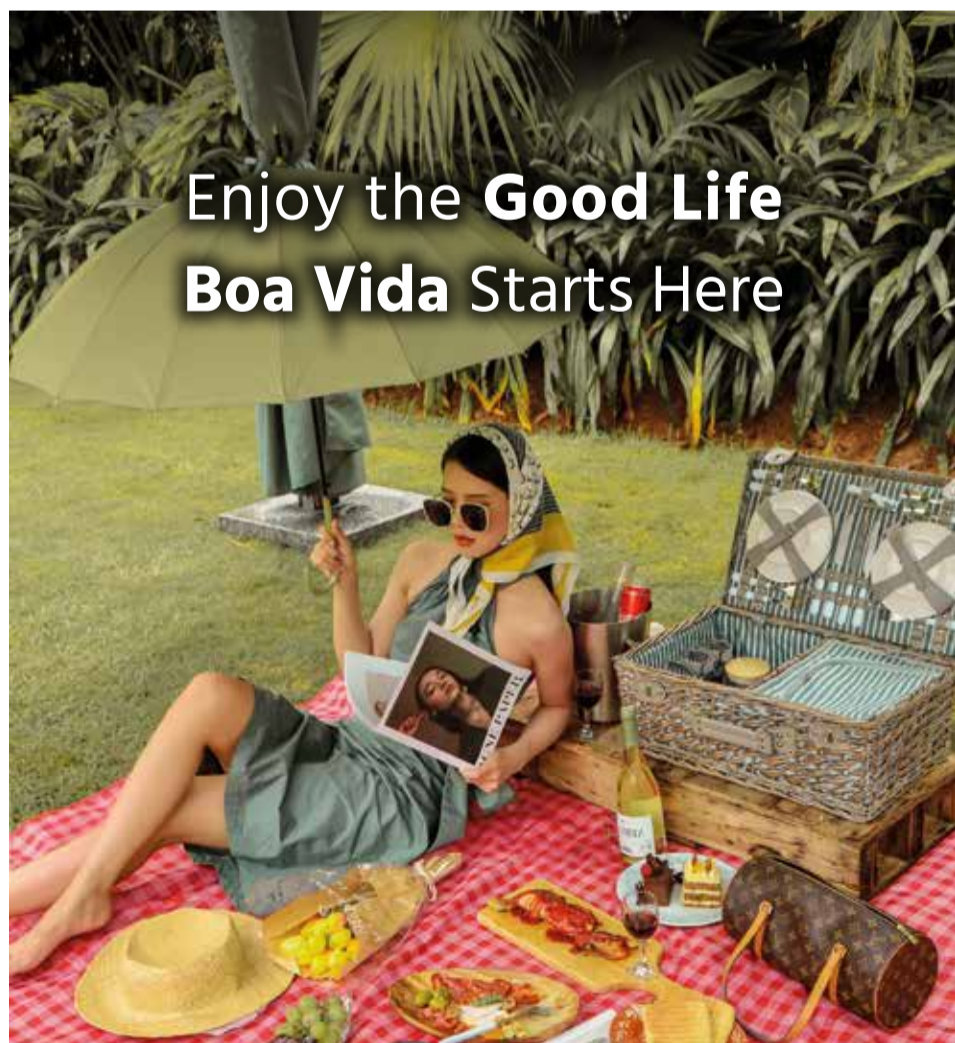
A massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, destroyed the Fukushima Daiichi plant's cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt and contaminating their cooling water, which has leaked continuously. The water is collected, treated and stored in about 1,000 tanks, which will reach their capacity in early 2024.

The government and TEPCO, the plant operator, say the water must be removed to prevent any accidental leaks and make room for the plant's decommissioning.

Japanese regulators finished their final safety inspection last week, and TEPCO is expected to receive a permit within days to release the water.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, after meeting with Grossi, said Japan will continue to provide "detailed explanations based on scientific evidence with a high degree of transparency both domestically and internationally." **MDT/AP**

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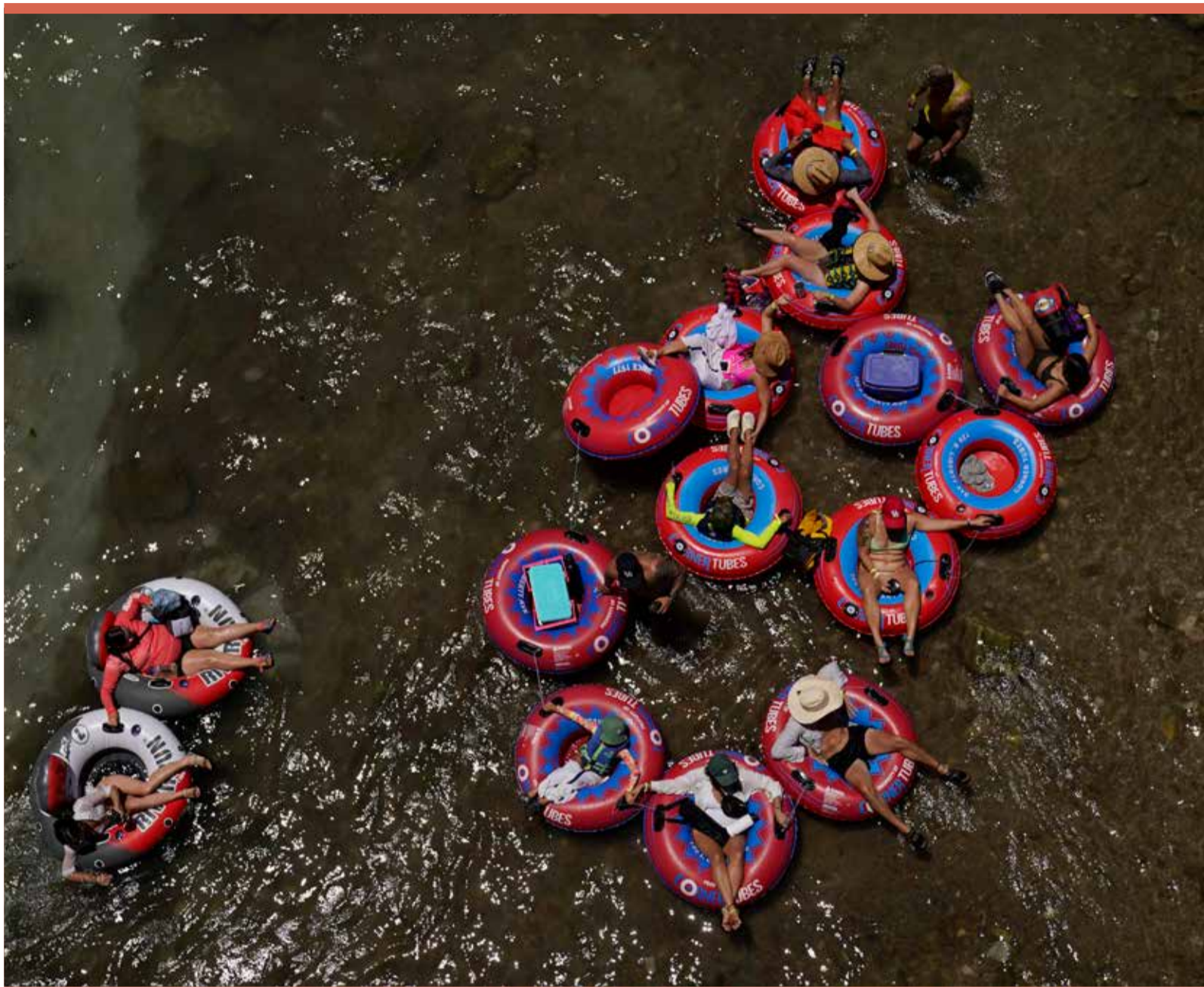


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AP PHOTO



For the third day in a row, the Earth's average temperature remained at a record high

SETH BORENSTEIN & MELINA WALLING

EARTH'S average temperature remained at a record high Wednesday, after two days in which the planet reached unofficial records. It's the latest marker in a series of climate-change-driven extremes.

The average global temperature was 17.18 Celsius, according to the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer, a tool that uses satellite data and computer simulations to measure the world's condition. That matched a record set Tuesday of 17.18 Celsius, and came after a previous record of 17.01 Celsius was set Monday.

Scientists have warned for months that 2023 could see record heat as human-caused climate change, driven largely by the burning of fossil fuels like coal, natural gas and oil, warmed the atmosphere. They also noted that La Nina, the natural cooling

of the ocean that had acted as a counter to that warming, was giving way to El Nino, the reverse phenomenon marked by warming oceans. The North Atlantic has seen record warmth this year.

"A record like this is another piece of evidence for the now massively supported proposition that global warming is pushing us into a hotter future," said Stanford University climate scientist Chris Field, who was not part of the calculations.

University of Maine climate scientist Sean Birkle, creator of the Climate Reanalyzer, said the daily figures are unofficial but a useful snapshot of what's happening in a warming world.

While the figures are not an

official government record, "this is showing us an indication of where we are right now," said National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief scientist Sarah Kapnick. And NOAA indicated it will take the figures into consideration for its official record calculations.

Even though the dataset used for the unofficial record goes back only to 1979, [...] the world is likely seeing the hottest day in 'several hundred years that we've experienced'

Even though the dataset used for the unofficial record goes back only to 1979, Kapnick said that given other data, the world is likely seeing the hottest day in "several hundred years that we've experienced."

Scientists generally use much longer measurements — months, years, decades — to track the Earth's warming. But the daily highs are an indication that climate change is reaching uncharted territory.

Some parts of the world saw extraordinary heat waves.

High-temperature records were surpassed this week in Quebec and Peru. Beijing reported nine straight days last week when the temperature exceeded

35 degrees Celsius, and ordered a stop to all outdoor work Wednesday as more high temperatures were forecast to pass 40 degrees Celsius.

That included communities that aren't used to feeling such

heat. In North Grenville, Ontario, the city turned ice hockey rinks into cooling centers as temperatures Wednesday hit 32 degrees Celsius, with humidity making it making it feel like 38 degrees.

"I feel like we live in a tropical country right now," city spokeswoman Jill Sturdy said. "It just kind of hits you. The air is so thick."

On Wednesday, 38 million Americans were under some kind of heat alert, Kapnick said.

Cities across the U.S. from Medford, Oregon to Tampa, Florida have been hovering at all-time highs, said Zack Taylor, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

But according to data from the Climate Reanalyzer, many of the largest temperature anomalies this week was seen over the world's oceans, especially the Antarctic Ocean.

"Temperatures have been unusual over the ocean and especially around the Antarctic this week, because wind fronts over the Southern Ocean are strong pushing warm air deeper south," said Raghu Murtugudde, professor of atmospheric, oceanic and earth system science at the University of Maryland and visiting faculty at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay.

Murtugudde said that ocean heat is also going deeper. He said, "Oceans take up 93% of additional heat we are generating because of increasing greenhouse gases and they are now a huge reservoir of heat."

Some places experienced unusually cold weather for the time of year, including southeast Australia and much of India.

With many places seeing temperatures near 38 degrees Celsius, an average temperature record of 17.18 Celsius might not seem very hot. But Tuesday's global high was nearly a full degree Celsius higher than the 1979-2000 average, which already topped the 20th- and 19th-century averages.

Alan Harris, director of emergency management for Seminole County, Florida, said the county has already surpassed last year for the number of days they've activated their extreme weather plan — something that happens when the heat index hits 108 degrees Fahrenheit or greater.

"It's just been kind of brutally hot for the last week, and now it looks like potentially for two weeks," Harris said.

In the U.S., heat advisories include portions of western Oregon, inland far northern California, central New Mexico, Texas, Florida and the coastal Carolinas, according to the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center. Excessive heat warnings are continuing across southern Arizona and California. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



UN RECORDS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF 'GRAVE VIOLATIONS' AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICTS

EDITH M. LEDERER,
UNITED NATIONS

CHILDREN experienced the highest number of "grave violations" in conflicts verified by the United Nations in 2022, with the conflicts between Israeli and Palestinians and in Congo and Somalia putting the most youngsters in peril, the U.N. children's agency said yesterday (Macau time).

UNICEF also expressed particular concern about their plight in Haiti, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine, where Russia has been put on the U.N. blacklist.

"Grave violations" include the recruitment and use of children by combatants, killings and injuries, sexual violence, abductions, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

Omar Abdi, UNICEF's deputy executive director, told the U.N. Security Council the more than 27,000 grave violations, up from 24,000 the previous year, are the highest number verified by the U.N. since its monitoring reports began in 2005. The number of conflict situations "of concern" was also the highest — at 26.

Since the report, Abdi said, a serious conflict has erupted in Sudan where over 1 million children have been displaced by violent conflict

and the U.N. has received reports that hundreds have been killed and injured. He also said UNICEF expects an increase in Palestinian children affected due to recent escalations in violence.

Government and parties to conflicts are not fulfilling their commitments to protect children, and "meaningful and unambiguous action" is needed, the UNICEF official said.

In his yearly report to the council late last month, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres put Russian forces on the U.N.'s annual blacklist of countries that violate children's rights in conflict for killing boys and girls and attacking schools and hospitals in Ukraine.

But the U.N. chief did not put Israel on the blacklist for grave violations against 1,139 Palestinian children, including 54 killings last year — as supporters had hoped — saying the U.N. welcomed its "identification of practical measures including those proposed by the U.N." to protect children.

The U.N. special envoy for children in armed conflict, Virginia Gamba, told the council that the 27,180 grave violations in 2022 were carried out against 18,890 children and included 8,620 who were killed or injured, 7,622 who were recruited or used by governments or armed groups in

conflicts, 3,985 who were abducted, 1,165, almost all of them girls, who were raped, forced into marriage or sexual slavery or sexually assaulted.

The United Nations also verified attacks on 1,163 schools and 647 hospitals, a 112% increase from 2021, she said.

While armed groups were responsible for 50% of grave violations, Gamba underscored that governments were the main perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children and of attacks on schools and hospitals.

Gamba said, for example, last year three girls were gang raped in South Sudan "during five days of terror," many boys were killed by an explosive device at a school in Afghanistan, a 14-year-old girl in Myanmar was abducted and burned alive, and an airstrike in Ukraine left a girl with amputated limbs.

"We must do more to prevent and protect our children from the ravages of armed conflict," she said.

U.S. deputy ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis said the report makes clear that the world's nations "have not done nearly enough to protect children from the impacts of conflicts." He said the United States is "keen" to see this issue "elevated, enhanced, and better integrated into all the work of

the Security Council."

DeLaurentis accused Russia of committing crimes against humanity in Ukraine, including against children, pointing to the many youngsters deported to Russia and forcibly separated from their families. And "Russia's forces continue to attack areas where children are clearly present, including schools, hospitals and residential buildings," he said.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia accused Western media companies of cynically selecting the protection of children "for a dirty information campaign in order to slander the Russian Federation."

He accused Guterres of making "a political decision" to put Russian forces on the U.N. blacklist and not Ukrainian armed forces, insisting there is "no factual basis" to label Russia a violator of children's rights.

Nebenzia accused the Ukrainian military of killing and injuring children in Russian-occupied areas of Luhansk and Donetsk in the country's east since 2014 and said Moscow's complaints about Ukraine's actions have been ignored by the U.N. and others. He said Russia has established a parliamentary commission to investigate alleged crimes against children by the Ukraine. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

2005 BOMB ATTACKS ON LONDON



A series of bomb attacks on London's transport network has killed more than 30 people and injured about 700 others.

Three explosions on the Underground left 35 dead and two died in a blast on a double-decker bus.

The first three bombs went off at 0850 on underground trains just outside Liverpool Street and Edgware Road stations, and on another travelling between King's Cross and Russell Square.

The final explosion was around an hour later on a number 30 double-decker bus in Tavistock Square, not far from King's Cross.

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said the bombings had "the hallmarks of an al-Qaeda-related attack".

Prime Minister Tony Blair promised the "most intense police and security service action to make sure we bring those responsible to justice".

Mr Blair, who flew back to London from the G8 summit in Gleneagles, condemned the terrorists and paid tribute to the stoicism and resilience of the people of London.

"They are trying to use the slaughter of innocent people to cow us, to frighten us out of doing the things that we want to do," he said in a televised statement from Downing Street.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

In total 52 people lost their lives in the London bombings, 700 people were injured.

The attacks were carried out by four suicide bombers.

The presumed ringleader, Mohammed Siddique Khan, had recently visited Pakistan and was later found to have made a video message in which he claimed British foreign policy was oppressing Muslims.

Al-Qaeda issued a videotaped statement in September claiming it was behind the London bombings.

On July 21 there were four more attempted bombings in London. None of the devices exploded.

On 22 July 2005, police shot dead a man, Jean Charles de Menezes, they mistook for one of the bombers.

Five men were later arrested and are due to face trial in September 2006.

A decision is still awaited on whether any charges will be brought over the de Menezes shooting.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Lend an ear to children; it can make a difference. Your high energy, original ideas, and excellent memory will aid your accomplishments. Promote your ideas now.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
You must take care of health problems that have been lingering. Children may be demanding, and entertainment could cost a lot more than you can really afford.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Residential moves will be hectic and may be unsatisfactory. You can make money if you concentrate on producing services or goods that will make domestic chores easier.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Opportunities will come through behind the scenes activities. Include the whole family or those you love. You may want to take another look at the investment you are about to make.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
If you join intellectual or cultural groups, you should meet individuals who stimulate you. Plans to make physical improvements may lead to psychological changes, too.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Be confident in your endeavors and others will believe in your efforts. Opposition is present and you should be prepared to counteract it as best you can.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Don't get depressed, get busy. You can accomplish a lot if you're willing to put in a little extra time. Don't do something silly just to get back at your mate.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You may find acquaintances being deceptive. You may be out of sorts if you have been extravagant or have let children or friends take advantage of you financially.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Don't share your dilemma with those you work with. You must not make unnecessary changes today. Residential moves look hectic and sudden changes in your life are likely.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Set a limit, or you'll wind up on a tight budget. You will find the perfect outfit if you shop today. Don't let situations get out of control.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Your boss won't be too thrilled if you leave things unfinished. Spend a quiet day with the one you love. You need to do more research before you make your final decision.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
You will have an interest in foreigners and their cultures. Don't make excuses. Do not let the reactions of others get you going.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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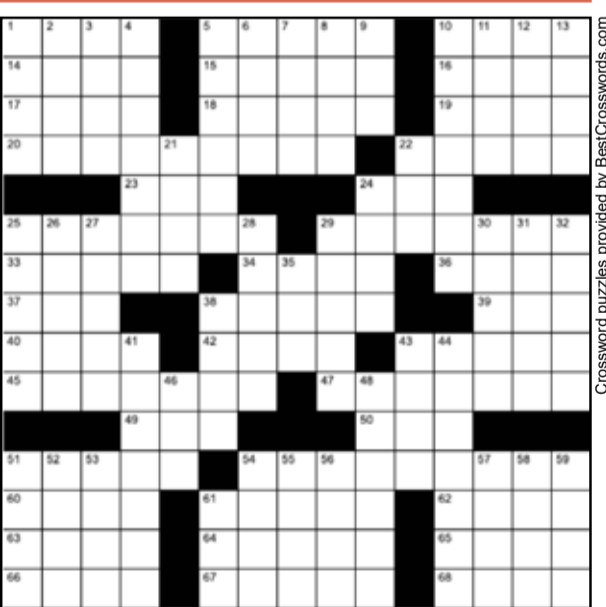
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	24	36	cloudy
Changchun	20	29	thunderstorms
Chengdu	23	33	cloudy
Chongqing	27	35	cloudy
Fuzhou	27	38	cloudy
Guangzhou	27	35	cloudy
Guiyang	23	30	showers
Haikou	27	36	cloudy
Hangzhou	28	36	fine
Harbin	18	28	thunderstorms
Hefei	26	32	rain
Nanjing	29	32	rain
Shanghai	27	35	rain
Taipei	26	33	overcast
Wuhan	29	33	rain
Hong Kong	28	31	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	18	27	thunderstorms
Frankfurt	17	31	fine
Paris	20	33	fine
London	19	28	fine
New York	23	29	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- In your dreams!; 5- Frighten; 10- Colorado resort; 14- Timber wolf; 15- Pertaining to birth; 16- Differently; 17- South African river; 18- Maker of Pong; 19- Journalist Jacob; 20- Upstart; 22- Spoil; 23- "You've got mail" co.; 24- Bunch; 25- Gluttonous; 29- Metallic element of the platinum family; 33- Broadcasted; 34- Mayberry mopet; 36- Diarist Frank; 37- ___-de-France; 38- Steak order; 39- Rx watchdog; 40- Frat party purchases; 42- Large wading bird; 43- Everglades bird; 45- Insistence; 47- Tidal river; 49- Peeve; 50- Pallid; 51- Public square; 54- Cherub pisches?; 60- Hokkaido native; 61- Sniff; 62- What's ___ you?; 63- The back end of something; 64- Art supporter; 65- Libertine; 66- Ferrara family; 67- Orgs.; 68- Seemingly forever;

DOWN 1- Thomas Edison's middle name; 2- Go sky-high; 3- Girder type; 4- Leafage; 5- Slowpokes; 6- Members of the Felidae family; 7- Rat-___; 8- Hard to find; 9- Biblical high priest; 10- Porch; 11- Et ___ (and other men); 12- The doctor ___; 13- For fear that; 21- Empty; 22- Also; 24- Of ___ I Sing; 25- Japanese three-line verse; 26- Fuel transport; 27- Shorthand pioneer; 28- Pastime; 29- Washer cycle; 30- Prefix with red; 31- Below; 32- Full of substance; 35- Luau serving; 38- Check mark; 41- Convulsion; 43- Catchall abbr.; 44- Artillery shot; 46- Heston's org.; 48- Bulges; 51- Trim; 52- Untruths, tells falsehoods; 53- Med school subj.; 54- Latin lesson word; 55- Capone foe; 56- Small secluded valley; 57- Langston Hughes poem; 58- Astound; 59- Weed whackers; 61- Lunar plain;



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- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
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- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
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AD



Bleecker Street shows Daryl McCormack in a scene from "The Lesson."

DRIVE IN

'THE LESSON' PROVIDES A SPICY LITERARY THRILLER

LINDSEY BAHR,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

THE egos are as vast and thorny as the gardens on the lush estate of a prominent author in "The Lesson," an entertaining and erudite chamber piece about a master, a tutor and a family after loss.

This is a story that, in different hands, could have easily

turned maudlin or melodramatic, but director Alice Troughton, writer Alex MacKeith and composer Isobel Waller-Bridge opted instead for wry lightness within the construct of a slow-burn thriller. It's as though "The Lesson," and everyone involved, is winking at the audience through the serious material that lingers, intentionally, on the fine line between preten-

tious and provocative.

Daryl McCormack, of "Good Luck to You, Leo Grande" and "Bad Sisters," plays Liam Sommers, an aspiring writer who has accepted a job tutoring the son of world-famous author J.M. Sinclair (Richard E. Grant), who also happens to be his literary idol. But the film begins with Liam on a fancy stage, being interviewed about his no-

vel about a fading patriarch and a grief-stricken family that the moderator calls one of the most striking debuts of the year. The movie is a memory prompted by that very standard interview question: What was your inspiration?

Anyone in the business of asking artists questions about inspiration knows, on a certain level, that at best you're only getting a very brief version of one person's highly sanitized truth. At worst it's just a plausible sounding fabrication, safely constructed in the rearview mirror. J.M. Sinclair, in the YouTube interviews that Liam watches on repeat, coyly speaks about how all great writers steal but he's not one, you imagine, who would publicly own any thievery. He is as precious about the singularity of his works and his talent as, in his words, the average writers who attempt originality and "fail universally" and the good writers who have the "sense to borrow." But it all helps to plant the seed that you're about to watch a literary heist unfold, though perhaps not the one you might expect.

The Sinclair family is the picture of upper-class posturing, with a household staff and a feigned formality fitting of someone who is always in control of the narrative, even at the dinner table in the company of only his son, Bertie (Stephen McMillan), and wife, Hélène (Julie Delpy). When he queues up Rachmaninoff as their dining music and Bertie protests, he challenges his son to give him three good reasons why — a snobbish test that only shuts down the conversation. It's also quite the introduction to an author whom Liam has worshipped. Never meet your

idols, etc, etc.

Liam is ostensibly there to help Bertie, a quiet and tortured Chalamet-type, prepare for entrance exams to study English literature at Oxford. But he has his own motives too — he's writing a thesis about Sinclair and at work on his own book. Why would a family that insists on a nondisclosure agreement and utmost discretion hire someone with such a glaring conflict of interest? Well, that's just one of the many mysteries for the audience to navigate in this maze of secrets, shame and scandals, including the somewhat recent suicide of the eldest Sinclair boy who was, it's suggested, a more promising writer than Bertie.

McCormack, Grant and Delpy are a deliriously captivating group to watch. Grant, so adept at comedy, is prickly and terrifying as this intellectual tyrant who is unafraid to crush anyone in his path with casual cruelty, as when he asks Liam for help because he's "not a real writer." And McCormack once again excels at playing a shrewd, underestimated outsider. Liam has a few Tom Ripley talents up his sleeve that he uses to his advantage at key moments.

As Liam says of Sinclair's newest book, the third act in the film feels like a bit of a jarring departure from the fun escalating tension of the first two acts. But "The Lesson" is worth a watch as a tightly crafted film made by and for adults unafraid of some rhododendron metaphors and casual Tchaikovsky talk.

"The Lesson," a Bleecker Street release in theaters Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "language and some sexual content." Running time 104 minutes.



BOOK IT

'The Art Thief' is an astonishing story that capitalizes on our love of true crime

KRYSTA FAURIA

THE Art Thief: A True Story of Love, Crime, and a Dangerous Obsession" by Michael Finkel (Alfred A. Knopf)

What is it about stories of transgression that keep us wanting more of them? Tales of heists, con artists and even murders permeate all corners of society, from Dostoevsky to "Tiger King."

It is this insatiable thirst for accounts of crime — and if based on real events, all the better

— that journalist Michael Finkel exploits in "The Art Thief: A True Story of Love, Crime and a Dangerous Obsession."

It recounts the astonishing saga of Stéphane Breitwieser, the notorious art thief who stole hundreds of pieces of art between 1994 and 2001, mostly from museums throughout Europe — a collection which was estimated to be worth around \$2 billion.

The level of detail Finkel is able to provide, thanks to extensive re-

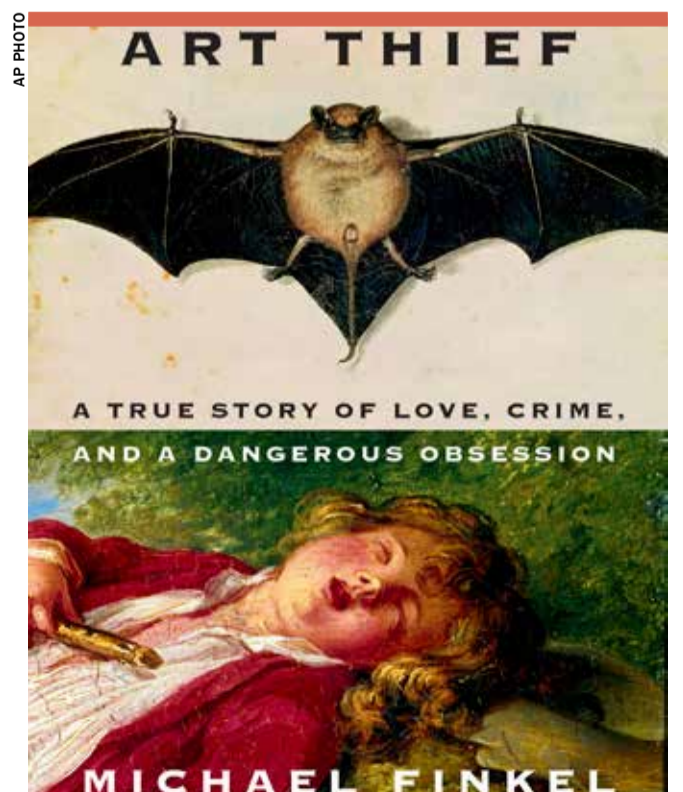
porting and hours of interviews with Breitwieser himself, is uncomfortably gripping, as if the reader is watching these events unfold and working as an accomplice to the French robber's crimes.

"The Art Thief" is the kind of book that is worth finishing if its subject matter gets one's attention in the first place, given that the story only gets more scandalous and appalling as it progresses.

Given how much and how often he stole, it is

inevitable that recounting so many details of these heists would dull one's senses to each otherwise astonishing feat. Though it can sometimes feel like Finkel is belaboring his point, perhaps that is the author's intention, a way of underscoring the extent of both Breitwieser's skill and addiction.

Although the definition of a page-turner, this book will also likely force the reader to consider why details of this kind are so exhilarating to us in the first place. MDT/AP



"The Art Thief: A True Story of Love, Crime, and a Dangerous Obsession" by Michael Finkel

tTUNES

KIM PETRAS MAKES FLIRTY EURODANCE-POP IN MAJOR-LABEL DEBUT

MARIA SHERMAN

BBETTER late than never, and surely worth the wait: Fifteen years after launching her music career, the German singer Kim Petras has released a glossy, full-length major-label debut, filled with Eurodance and trance-informed pop music.

Not to say that the delay was her fault, or that she hasn't been hard at work. This year, Petras became the first openly trans artists to win in a major category at the Grammy Awards for her playfully sacrilegious collaboration with Sam Smith, "Unholy," in the best pop duo/group performance category. The same song, re-released as a bonus track on "Feed the Beast," went No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, making her the first trans artist ever occupy the top spot.

So why the postponement? In 2021, after signing to major label Republic Records, Petras recorded a debut LP titled "Problematique" — but it was scrapped, and ultimately, leaked. In the interim, she reimagined herself a student of Eurodance and '90s house music. The lead single "Alone," featuring a punchy verse from rapper Nicki Minaj, is the exemplar: She samples the 1999 Alice DeeJay hit "Better Off Alone," appealing to Y2K cultural nostalgia for vocal trance and neon nightlife.

Throughout "Feed the Beast", Petras demonstrates a deep understanding of the many nuances of hi-hat-heavy, club-ready anthems. Even the slow burn "Thousand Pieces" is recorded over a trap beat, a far cry from, say, the industrial-noise-pop of "brrr." As Petras

sings on "uhoh," "Everything I drop is a banger."

At the center of "Feed the Beast" are two sex-positive synth-pop stompers: "Sex Talk" and "Hit It From The Back," tracks that strike like an R-rated take on Katy Perry's "Teenage Dream" era — up-tempo pop tunes meant to earworm their way into the listener's heart and transgress in equal measure.

The influence of Perry appears again on the campy "Coconuts," a summery ode to her chest. That's likely because much of "Feed the Beast" was produced by Dr. Luke, as was the case with "Teenage Dream."

It is worth noting that Luke's longstanding legal battle with singer Kesha over allegations of rape and, in turn, allegations of defamation finally settled in court last week following nearly a decade of lawsuits and countersuits. According to Vulture, in 2022, Petras tweeted in response to a fan asking her to "stop defending dr luke" by writing, "I have nothing to say or be ashamed of at all." She deleted the tweets.

Beyond those complications, and for all the fun and flirtiness of "Feed the Beast," there is a subtle restraint. Electric songs ripe for the dance floor burn bright and fast — a sprint, not a marathon — and lack the kind of edge listeners have come to expect from Petras. Where are the explicit, breathy harmonies of 2022's "Slut Pop" EP? The Madonna-worship of "Broken" from 2021's "Do Me"? Her entertaining hedonism persists, to be sure, but how long will it resonate?

Across 14 original tracks, Kim Petras' beast has been fed — and hopefully soon, it will be unleashed. MDT/AP



TASTE OF EDISIA

Time for cocktail

IRENE SAM, MDT

MICHELIN-STARRED Italian dining destination **8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana** at Galaxy Macau is joining hands with one of the world's most exclusive cocktail bars for a unique crossover that's sure to excite mixology connoisseurs this summer. Galaxy Macau will welcome Benjamin Fabio Cavagna, Bar Manager of Milan's famed 1930 Cocktail Bar, to the much-loved one-Michelin-starred restaurant on July 14 and 15 for two nights of world-class mixology served up from **8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana's** opulent bar.

Since opening in 2013, 1930 Cocktail Bar has established itself as Milan's finest—and most difficult to access—cocktail bar. The speakeasy-style bar's address is a closely guarded secret known only to a select few, and those hoping to gain entry must first befriend someone from the inner circle of owners Flavio Angiolillo and Marco Russo to discover the location and secure a highly sought-after reservation. This mysterious allure, combined with exceptional, one-of-a-kind cocktails, has seen 1930 named on the coveted 'The World 50 Best Bars' list for the past four years, ranking 44th in 2019, 25th in 2020, 20th in 2021, and

35th in 2022.

Guests who are lucky enough to book a slot for this rare crossover at one-Michelin-star rating for eight consecutive years and 2023 Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star Restaurant **8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana** will have the chance to sample some of 1930 Cocktail Bar's most creative cocktails, including "The Merchant of Venice", "Fusettone", "Rhubarmoni", just to name a few.

The man behind these delicious concoctions, Benjamin Fabio Cavagna was born in the northern Italian city of Brescia, and developed a passion for whisky and spirits while studying philosophy in Milan. After meeting Russo and Angiolillo in 2014, he joined their Family Group, ultimately becoming Bar Manager of 1930, where he has experimented with new tastes and techniques to create a succession of truly original tipples.

AP PHOTO



"Feed the Beast" by Kim Petras. (Republic Records/Amigo Records)

OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

MESSAGE SENT AND RECEIVED, HOPEFULLY UNDERSTOOD

China's announcement that it will impose controls on exports of some gallium and germanium products from Aug 1 has sparked consternation.

The metals are key materials for high-speed computer chips and electric vehicles, as well as for the defense and renewable energy sectors.

About 40 percent of the world's germanium, a metal even rarer than gold, is in China, which accounts for over 67 percent of the global supply. The US possesses about 45 percent on its territories, but due to pollution concerns and strategic considerations, it produces little and exports even less. China has the largest resources of gallium, known as the "backbone of the electronics industry", and it produces about 95 percent of the global supply.

The control on exports of eight gallium and six germanium products mean the authorities will reject export applications if they are to be employed for military use or purposes that may undermine China's national security and interests.

While Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said such control on exports is a common international practice, and clarified that it does not target any specific country, the timing of the Ministry of Commerce's announcement is telling.

The announcement came just ahead of US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's visit to Beijing, which begins on Thursday, with the timing widely interpreted as sending a message to the Joe Biden administration, which has been attacking China's chip sector with export restrictions and putting pressure on other countries to follow suit, that Beijing has the means to fight back.

The move is Beijing's second response to the United States' continued weaponizing of export restrictions to target the country's high-tech sector, and its co-opting and coercing of other countries to join its offensive. In May, it introduced a ban on some key domestic industries from purchasing products and services from US memory chipmaker Micron.

Peter Arkell, chairman of the Global Mining Association of China, was reported as saying that Beijing's latest move "has hit the American trade restrictions where it hurts".

Gallium and germanium are just two of the metals that China is the dominant producer of and which are important for a range of tech products, and Arkell said "it is a fantasy to suggest that another country can replace China in the short or even medium term".

Those challenging China's decision should challenge the US, Japan and the Netherlands on their chip or equipment export controls targeting China.

It is they that should be blamed for necessitating such an action by Beijing, which is just defending the country's interests in the face of their concerted tech attack.

Employers in Beijing were ordered yesterday by the government to stop outdoor work after scorching summer heat in the Chinese capital was forecast to reach 40 degrees centigrade.

Government departments were ordered to ensure the elderly and ill could stay cool after the city of 22 million people issued a "red alert," the highest level of a warning system for extreme temperatures.

The government reported on Monday that Beijing recorded 10 days of temperatures above 35 C, the longest streak of its kind

since 1961.

"Relevant departments and units shall take emergency measures for heatstroke prevention and cooling," said a city government notice. It told employers to "stop outdoor operations."

People are enduring torrid temperatures across much of the globe. The Earth's average temperature remained at a record high Wednesday, after two days in which the planet reached unofficial records. It's the latest marker in a series of climate-change-driven extremes.



In this image from video released by the U.S. Air Force, a Russian SU-35 flies near a U.S. Air Force MQ-9 Reaper drone, yesterday (Macau time)

AP PHOTO

AP PHOTO



NATO Senior officials from Sweden and Turkey will gather at NATO headquarters to examine Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's objections to the Nordic country joining the military alliance and to see what more, if anything, can be done to break the deadlock. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg will lead the meeting, which will involve the countries' foreign ministers, intelligence chiefs and national security advisers. Top officials from Finland, which joined NATO in April after itself addressing Turkish concerns, will also take part.

AP PHOTO



Canada's government said it would stop advertising on Facebook and Instagram, in response to Meta's decision to block access to news content on their social platforms as part of a temporary test. Heritage Minister Pablo Rodriguez announced Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government's decision at a news conference. Canada's move is the latest episode in a dispute that started after Trudeau's administration proposed a bill that would require technology companies to pay publishers for linking to or otherwise repurposing their content online.

AP PHOTO



South Africa At least 16 people, including three children, were killed by a leak of a toxic nitrate gas being used by illegal miners to process gold in a settlement of closely packed metal shacks, police and local officials said. Emergency services initially announced that as many as 24 people might be dead in the Angelo settlement in Boksburg, a city on the eastern outskirts of Johannesburg.

US RELEASES VIDEO OF RUSSIAN FIGHTER JETS HARRASSING AMERICAN DRONES OVER SYRIA

LOLITA C. BALDOR, WASHINGTON

Russian fighter jets flew dangerously close to several U.S. drone aircraft over Syria yesterday (Macau time), setting off flares and forcing the MQ-9 Reapers to take evasive maneuvers, the Air Force said.

U.S. Air Forces Central released a video of the encounter, showing a Russian SU-35 fighter closing in on a Reaper, and later showed a number of the so-called parachute flares moving into the drone's flight path. The flares are attached to parachutes.

Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkeiwich, commander of 9th Air Force in the Middle East, said three of the U.S. drones were operating over Syria after 10:30 a.m. lo-

cal time, on a mission against the Islamic State group which was not detailed, when three of the Russian aircraft "began harassing the drones."

In a statement, Grynkeiwich said one of the Russian pilots moved their aircraft in front of a drone and engaged the SU-35's afterburner, which greatly increases its speed and air pressure. The jet blast from the afterburner can potentially damage the Reaper's electronics, and Grynkeiwich said it reduced the drone operator's ability to safely operate the aircraft.

"Russian military aircraft engaged in unsafe and unprofessional behavior while interacting with U.S. aircraft in Syria," he said, adding that the actions threaten the safety of the U.S. and

Russian forces. "We urge Russian forces in Syria to cease this reckless behavior and adhere to the standards of behavior expected of a professional air force so we can resume our focus on the enduring defeat of ISIS."

Army Gen. Erik Kurilla, head of U.S. Central Command, said in a statement that Russia's violation of ongoing efforts to clear the airspace over Syria "increases the risk of escalation or miscalculation."

About 900 U.S. forces are deployed to Syria to work with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces battling the Islamic State militants there. No other details about the drone operation were provided, and it's not clear where over Syria the incidents took place. MDT/AP