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**LEADERS OF THE MACAO CHINESE CIVIL SERVANTS ASSOCIATION CALL FOR A 3.3% PAY RAISE THIS YEAR AMID RISING COSTS OF LIVING**

▲ P2

**MACAU ARRANGING FLIGHT CHECK-IN FOR HZMB INCOMING PASSENGERS**

▲ P3

**HIGH TIMES IN THAILAND: NEW WEED LAWS DRAW TOURISTS FROM ACROSS ASIA**

▲ P10



AP PHOTO



**North Korean** leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further bolster his country's nuclear fighting capabilities as he supervised the second test flight of a new, powerful intercontinental ballistic missile designed to strike the mainland United States. Kim's statement suggested North Korea would ramp up weapons testing activities to expand its arsenal in response to recent U.S. steps to enhance its security commitment to ally South Korea.

AP PHOTO



**India** Schools and colleges were closed after record monsoon rains led to massive waterlogging, road caves-in, collapsed homes and gridlocked traffic in large parts of northern India this week, killing more than 100 people, officials said. At least 88 people died and more than 100 were injured in the worst hit-mountainous Himachal Pradesh state where cars, buses, bridges and houses were swept away by swirling flood waters, a state government statement said. The region is nearly 500 kilometers north of New Delhi.

AP PHOTO



**Russia** A general in charge of forces fighting in southern Ukraine has been relieved of his duties after speaking out about the problems faced by his troops in a move that reflected new fissures in the Russian military command following a brief rebellion by mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin. Maj. Gen. Ivan Popov, said that the military leadership was angered by his frank talk about the challenges faced by his forces, particularly the shortage of radars tracking enemy artillery, which resulted in massive Russian casualties.

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# LOST IN TOURISM

**Trip.com: No marketing strategy behind mainland hotels appearing amongst Macau searches** ▲ P4



WORLD PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY

**‘OFTEN CHALLENGING’ TO BRING EXHIBITIONS TO CHINA: FOUNDATION**

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TASTE OF EDESIA

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

# CHINESE CIVIL SERVANTS CALL FOR 3.3% PAY RAISE

ANTHONY LAM

Leaders of the Macao Chinese Civil Servants Association told local media that civil servants ought to see 3.3% pay raise this year amid rising costs of living.

Macao civil servants' salary is calculated by points that depend on their career levels. Each salary point equate to MOP91 at current level.

Cheong Kuok In, president of the association, cited inflation as the reason for the pay increment demand. He added that civil servants experienced frozen salary level in the past three years amid drop in public income.

However, he said, inflation has exerted growing pressure on civil servants. Despite this, local civil servants have tirelessly served the city in the past three years against diseases and hiatus.

He admitted that the government had repeatedly praised local civil servants for the services,



“but those were only verbal compliments.”

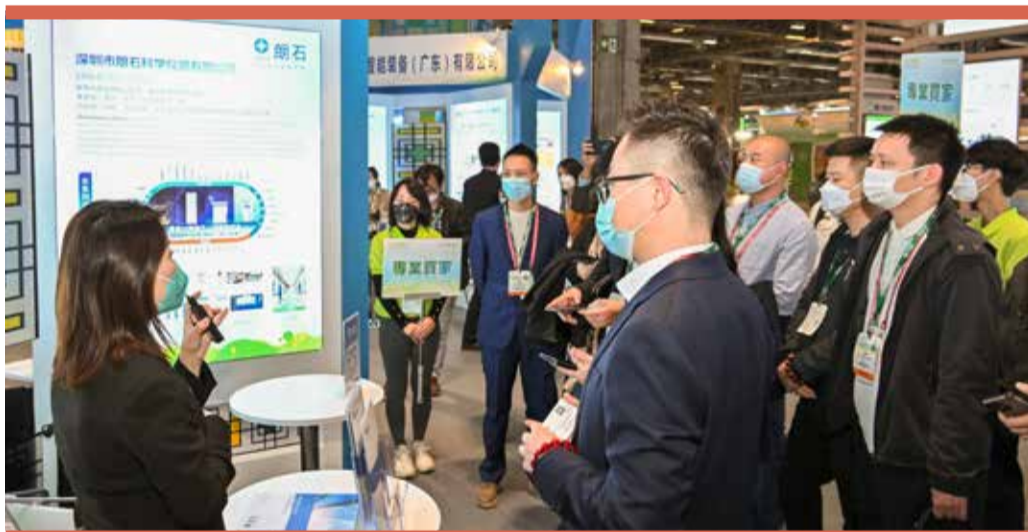
In the past three years, a significant portion of the local work-

force have not only faced frozen pay, but some of them have also received pay cuts or even lost their jobs due to a deteriorating

economy.

In an earlier statement, lawmaker Lei Chan U said that despite a recovering economy,

the salary levels of the local workforce have not matched. Starting salary levels have not seen a recovery, Lei added.



MIECF

## Annual eco-protection expo to be extended this year

ANTHONY LAM

An expo in Macau on environmental protection topics that is traditionally three days in duration will have an additional day this year, the organizer announced in a statement yesterday.

From Aug. 17 to 20, the

Macao International Environmental Cooperation Forum and Exhibition (MIECF) will return to the Venetian Macao's CotaiExpo.

According to the statement, it is hoped that the extension will facilitate more matching, discussion and negotiation, as well as attracting exhibitors and

visitors to extend their stays in Macau, “to actualize the MICE+Tourism tactic” of tourism promotion.

Tourism+ has in the past year or so become a key strategy of the Macau government in drawing visitors to Macau through non-tourist events, such as meetings and exhibitions.

This year's event will revolve around the theme of “building an ecological civilization through innovative initiatives.” Highlights include the continuation of professional exhibitions on carbon neutrality; forum discussions; matching sessions and public visitations to promote a diversified development strategy, four major industries in Macau, the joint development of Macau and Hengqin, as well as professionalization of eco-friendly industries.

The first of these events was held in 2008. The brand secured accreditation from The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI).

The event is organized by the Macau government, with support from the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission, the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology, the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the Chinese Ministry of Ecology and Environment. It is co-organized by the governments across the Pearl River Delta.

## DEATH OF PSP OFFICER PROMPTS LAWMAKER TO CALL FOR CIVIL SERVANTS' HEALTH CARE

FOLLOWING the death of a police officer from the Public Security Police Force (PSP) after feeling unwell during a 1.8 km run, lawmaker José Pereira Coutinho has once again called for the improvement of the health care system for Macau civil servants.

The matter has already been addressed at the Legislative Assembly recently with the lawmakers linked with the Macau Civil Servants Association (ATFPM) calling for an improvement of the Civil Servants Medical Center, which

he claims is an obsolete service due to the non-allocation of enough resources to pay support on time to public workers.

Pereira Coutinho added that the pandemic also led to many civil servants stopping or delaying their medical check-ups.

In mid-April, Che Sai Wang called on the government to enforce a regular and standardized medical examination for all civil servants to protect their health and, consequently, the services they provide the public, he said in a written inquiry. RM

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



# Macau arranging flight check-in for HZMB incoming passengers

ANTHONY LAM

A flight check-in service center is being arranged for the Macau immigration building at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge

(HZMB) for flights serving the Macau airport, the government disclosed.

In a reply to lawmaker Ella Lei's written inquiry, director Susana Wong of Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) cited Civil Aviation

Authority (AACM) as making the disclosure.

The AACM said that the move is expected to attract more people to using Macau International Airport for travel, further integrating Macau into the development of the

Greater Bay Area.

Such facility was actually available back in 2019, the AACM recapped, but was suspended following fallen demand due to frozen interactions within the region amid Covid-19. Negotiations

are being conducted between the government and relevant operators, the AACM added.

On the connectivity between land, sea and air transport, Wong pledged that her bureau would exercise sufficient coordination in this respect. She also mentioned the long-lost project of transforming part of the Taipa Ferry Terminal into the budget terminal of the airport, saying that DSAMA will have a role in the project, as well as in the construction of the Fourth Macau-Taipa Bridge.

Wong also cited the Transport Bureau (DSAT) as saying that connecting transport and transport stands will be improved.

The lawmaker has also asked about the future of the two ferry terminals for services to Hong Kong.

To this, Wong described both terminals as "important piers," because they provide varied travel options and complement one another. Should a terminal experience problems, the other facility can help, Wong said.

Meanwhile, Wong also disagreed with the lawmaker's opinion that people are less interested in travelling between Macau and Hong Kong by ferry. She said that as of end-May, the number of ferry services has more than doubled compared to that at the time of resumption of service. Wong added that ferry operators will adjust to growing demand during summer.

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### NUDE PEDESTRIAN FINED BY POLICE

A Burmese person was caught on camera by social media users walking naked along Avenida de Horte e Costa on Wednesday evening. Following the viral video, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) disclosed that a related report was received at about 8:45 p.m. the same evening. Police officers intercepted the man, aged in his forties, on Estrada de Coelho do Amaral. He admitted to having consumed alcoholic beverages and taking his shirt off, but could not remember how he came to be roaming the streets without any clothing. He was then fined by the police pursuant to the General Regulations Governing Public Places.

### TPI IN Q2 RISES BY 19%

The Tourist Price Index (TPI) for the second quarter of 2023 rose by 19.47% year-on-year to 137.24, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). The increase is mainly attributable to rising hotel room rates and higher prices of local food products. Among the various sections of goods and services, the price index of Accommodation soared by 150.74% year-on-year, and the indices of Entertainment & Cultural Activities (+17.06%) and Clothing & Footwear (+7.07%) also increased. The average TPI for the last four quarters ended the second quarter of 2023 rose by 9.14% from the previous period.

### FIVE PROSECUTED FOR VIOLATING TAKEAWAY REGULATIONS

As of June 30, prosecutions have been initiated against five takeaway establishments for violations of the registration system. The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) reminds the sector that takeaway establishments must have a registration certificate before opening for business. As of June 30 this year, there were a total of 3,776 takeaway establishments with valid registration certificates.

### IFTM HOSTS WORKSHOP FOR TOURISM OFFICIALS

The Global Centre for Tourism Education and Training of the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM) recently hosted a training workshop for the tourism officials from the Portuguese-speaking countries, as part of an initiative by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO). Themed "Capacity Building for Sustainable Tourism Planning, Food & Beverage and Events," Galaxy Entertainment Group also arranged representatives from its MICE Department to introduce to the participants the newly-developed and current MICE industry.

# TRIP.COM CLAIMS OFFER OF HOTELS ACROSS THE BORDER IS NOT A MARKETING STRATEGY

RENATO MARQUES

SOME travelers to Macau have been surprised by offers made by the online booking platform Trip.com after searching for accommodation in Macau. In a direct email from the company, the operator was offering the travelers many options located across the border, either in Hengqin or Gongbei areas in the neighboring city of Zhuhai.

In response to a Times inquiry, Chen Si, Global Public Relations for Trip.com Group explained via phone that these emails are automatically generated and take into account different factors. She explained that there is no marketing strategy behind the offering of hotels in the mainland instead of in Macau, noting that the results might come from user data, related to the time and popularity of searches, searches from others users, among others factors.

Questioned by the Times whether price played a role, as

the hotels on offer presented prices about 60 to 70% below the average prices in Macau, Chen said that such a factor might play a role but reaffirmed that offers are always the result of multiple factors attempting to cater to the needs of the users.

Still, in the information that the Times had access from several readers, as well as a personal experience from a Times reporter who tested the system, the majority of offers are for hotels located in the neighboring city of Zhuhai, a fact that might confuse particularly non-Chinese tourists attempting to book.

In searches performed by the Times, there were several hotels in Zhuhai featured on the first page of "Most Popular" choices for hotels in Macau, appearing side-by-side with hotel units located in Macau.

The Times also noticed that most of the hotel units appearing in Macau are referenced in the Trip.com web platform as "Near Gongbei Port [Border Gate],"

a fact that might explain why they were being offered to those searching for hotels in Macau, although the company did not claim this.

### MGTO: MACAU SEARCHES ONLY DELIVER MACAU HOTELS OPTIONS

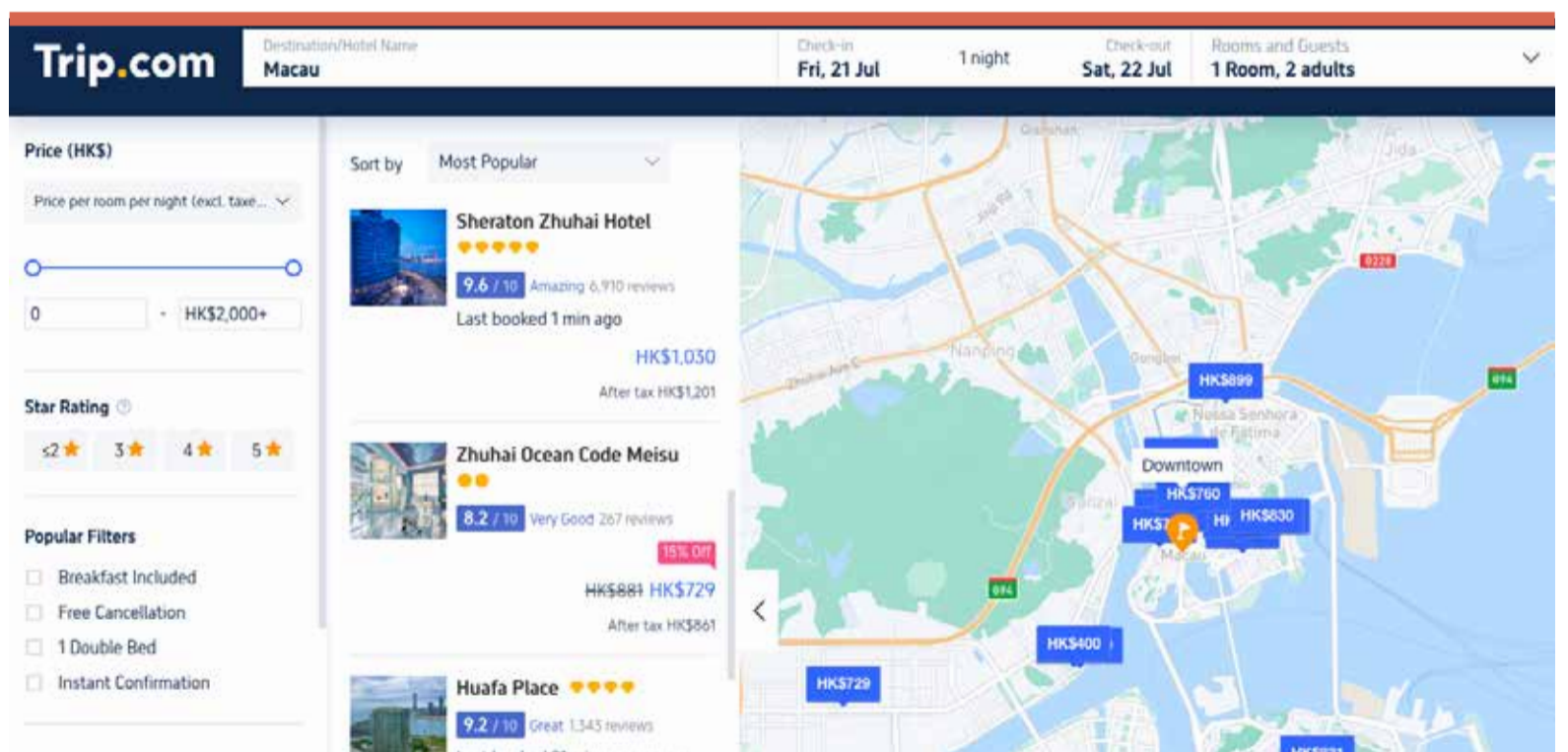
When questioned on the same matter, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has said in a written reply to the Times that "if a user searches for Macau hotels on the OTA platform (e.g Trip.com), only Macau hotel information will appear," although as mentioned previously, several searches done by the Times on different occasions over the past few days have proven this information to be not completely accurate as, if the users opt for a search taking into account the "most popular" hotels (the default option), several hotels located in Zhuhai do appear also in a direct search.

Questioned on the partnership that MGTO has announced

on several occasions to maintain with the Trip.com platform to promote Macau as a destination, the same office said to be cooperating with several Online Travel Agencies (OTA), noting that such "cooperation is not an exclusive partnership."

"For some users who have not made a reservation after searching, the platform may push promotional emails or onsite advertisements according to certain algorithms, and the pushed content varies according to the user's browsing preferences and the platform's promotional content," MGTO concluded, adding that "the platform mentioned [Trip.com] provides an option for the user to not receive promotional emails."

To understand the opinion of the local hospitality industry, the Times contacted at least two tourism and hospitality local associations. As of press time, the Times had not received any comments from representatives of any of those sector groups.



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RENATO MARQUES

WORLD PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY

**T**O bring and host the annual exhibition of the World Press Photography (WPP) Foundation to China is a task that the representatives from the organization find challenging, Martha Echevarria, exhibitions manager and curator from the WPP Foundation told the Times.

Confronted with the lack of exhibitions on Chinese soil in the calendar of the renowned 2023 press photography awards worldwide, Echevarria said, "It is often challenging to bring the exhibition to China but we are trying our best to find local organizers who are interested in putting up the show and helping us bring our winning stories to more people."

The representative from awards and exhibitions organizers also told the Times that an exhibition in the neighboring region of Hong Kong was "just confirmed," possibly to take place in November this year.

As for other locations for the exhibition to be on display in the mainland, Echevarria noted that WPP has a new partner "who will try to organize the exhibition in Chengdu (in August), and potentially Guangzhou and/or Shanghai later in the year."

On this year's official calendar previously released, the only exhibition located in this part of the

world is to be hosted in Taiwan's capital city, Taipei, from October 21 to November 19 at Studio94.

Macau is once again out of the calendar for this year's exhibition after several years of consecutive hosting by the "Casa de Portugal" Association (CPM).

Hosted for the last time back in 2020, the WPP Exhibition at Casa Garden was closed mid-way into the scheduled period, with the CPM stating at the time that the exhibition closure was due to "management reasons".

Since then, the exhibition, that has been hosted in Macau since 2008, has not made a return although the same WPP official has noted the interest of the organization in bringing once again the exhibition to the territory in case there are "interested venues in Macau."

To the Times, the president of the CPM, Amélia António, said in a previous conversation on the topic that the difficulties in bringing the exhibition to Macau were "mostly" related to budgeting as hosting would have the annual cost of

about MOP200,000.



After the early closure of the Macau exhibition, there was an attempt from the Institute for Jour-

nalism and Society at Hong Kong Baptist University to host the same 2020 exhibition in Hong Kong this March 2021 but just three days be-

fore the event's launching date the organizing committee canceled the event, citing Covid-19 safety concerns.

## MACAU-PORTUGAL EDUCATION AGREEMENT TO FACILITATE CLOSER TIES

**A**n agreement signed between Macau and Portugal will help facilitate greater cooperation between the regions, the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) said in a statement.

On Jul. 12, the bureau signed the agreement with the Coordinating Council of Higher Polytechnic Institutes in Portugal, a day after Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao Ieong met with a delegation from the entity.

Earlier this year, Ao Ieong visited Portugal to seek cooperation in the areas of medicine and healthcare, as well as education and culture.

The DSEDJ noted that the agreement aims at constructing a framework for strategic partnership.

According to the bureau, the implementation of the agreement will result in constant communications and mutual education data sharing between the Portuguese council and itself. This will help provide more



appropriate and multifaceted information to Macau students who want to pursue further education in the European country, the education bureau highlighted.

Meanwhile, the agreement will also foster cooperation and exchange between Macau's higher education institutions and their counterparts under the Council. This will help elevate the internationalization level of Macau's higher education, the DSEDJ underlined, adding that more opportunities will also be made possible to local

students. According to the bureau, it has been diligent in cultivating people with talent in Portuguese for Macau, through apparatus such as organizing relevant activities and competitions, supporting higher education students in Macau and Portugal to organize their own events, as well as assisting local students' overseas education in Portugal. In the past decade or so, the Macau government has identified the cultivation of Portuguese talent in Macau as a key policy. **AL**

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



TECH

# GOOGLE ROLLS OUT AI CHATBOT BARD TO EUROPE AND ADDS MORE LANGUAGES

GOOGLE said yesterday that it's rolling out its AI-powered chatbot Bard across Europe and in Brazil, expanding its availability to hundreds of millions more users.

The company also said

it's adding more features to Bard as it scrambles to keep up with rival Microsoft — which uses OpenAI's popular ChatGPT service in its Bing search engine — in the race to develop pivotal artificial

intelligence for commercial use.

Google launched Bard in February, but its planned rollout last month in the European Union was delayed as regulators checked whether the service

complied with the 27-nation bloc's strict privacy rules.

The company said it has "proactively engaged with experts, policymakers and privacy regulators."

The Irish Data Protection Commission, Google's main EU privacy watchdog, said it sent the internet search giant a detailed list of questions seeking more information.

As a result, Google hit pause and "made a number of changes" ahead of Thursday's European launch, "in particular increased transparency and changes to controls for users," the watchdog said.

Google detailed the improvements in a blog post, which said Bard can now be used in more than 40 languages, including Arabic, Chinese, German, Hindi and Spanish.

Users can also tailor the tone and style of Bard's replies and ask it to read out responses, which Google said is "helpful if you want to hear the correct pronunciation of a word or listen to a poem or script." MDT/AP

AVIATION

# DELTA PUTS UP RECORD QUARTERLY NUMBERS AS TRAVEL SURGES

Delta Air Lines reported unprecedented quarterly profit and revenue yesterday and raised its expectations for a year after travelers took to the skies in huge numbers, defying some forecasts of a pullback in spending.

Revenue soared almost 13% to \$15.58 billion, a surprising jump even for a carrier that has outperformed consistently, and shares rose almost 3% before the opening bell.

"Robust demand is continuing into the September quarter where we expect total

revenue to be similar to the June quarter, up 11 percent to 14 percent compared to the September quarter 2022 on capacity that is 16 percent higher," said said Glen Hauens-tein, Delta's president, in a written statement.

Delta's second-quarter profit was \$1.83 billion, or \$2.84 per share. Earnings per share adjusted for one-time costs or benefits was \$2.68, far exceeding the \$2.42 that Wall Street was looking for, according to a survey by Zacks Investment Research. MDT/AP



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AP PHOTO



TRAVEL

# Tourists are packing European hotspots, boosted by Americans

COLLEEN BARRY, VENICE

**T**OURISTS are waiting more than two hours to visit the Acropolis in Athens. Taxi lines at Rome's main train station are running just as long. And so many visitors are concentrating around St. Mark's Square in Venice that crowds get backed up crossing bridges — even on weekdays.

After three years of pandemic limitations, tourism is expected to exceed 2019 records in some of Europe's most popular destinations this summer, from Barcelona and Rome, Athens and Venice to the scenic islands of Santorini in Greece, Capri in Italy and Mallorca in Spain.

While European tourists edged the industry toward recovery last year, the upswing this summer is led largely by Americans, boosted by a strong dollar and in some cases pandemic savings. Many arrive motivated by "revenge tourism" — so eager to explore again that they're undaunted by higher airfares and hotel costs.

Lauren Gonzalez, 25, landed in Rome this week with four high school and college friends for a 16-day romp through the Italian capital, Florence and the seaside after three years of U.S. vacations. They aren't concerned about the high prices and the crowds.

"We kind of saved up, and we know this is a trip that is meaningful," said Gonzalez, who works at a marketing agency. "We are all in our mid-20s. It's a (moment of) change in our lives. ... This is something special. The crowds don't deter us. We live in Florida. We have all been to Disney World in the heat. We are all good."

Americans appear equally unperturbed by recent riots in Paris and other French cities. There was a small drop in flight bookings, but it was mainly for domestic travel.

"Some of my friends said, 'It's a little crazy there right now,' but we thought summer is really a good time for us to go, so we'll just take precautions," Joanne Titus, a 38-year-old from Maryland, said while strolling the iconic Champs-Élysées shopping boulevard.

The return of mass tourism is a boon to hotels and restaurants, which suffered under COVID-19 restrictions. But there is a downside, too, as pledges to rethink tourism to make it more sustainable have largely gone unheeded.

"The pandemic should have taught us a lesson," said Alessandra Priante, director of the regional department for Europe at the U.N. World Tourism Organization.

Instead, she said, the mindset "is about recuperating the cash. Everything is about revenue,

about the here and now."

"We have to see what is going to happen in two or three years' time because the prices at the moment are unsustainable," she said.

The mayor of Florence is stopping new short-term apartment rentals from proliferating in the historic center, which is protected as a UNESCO heritage site, as mayors of Italy's other art cities call for a nationwide law to manage the sector.

Elsewhere, the anti-mass tourism movements that were active before the pandemic have not reappeared, but the battle lines are still being drawn: graffiti misdirected tourists in Barcelona away from — instead of toward — the Gaudi-designed Park Guell.

Despite predictable pockets of overtourism, travel to and within Europe overall is still down 10% from 2019, according to the World Tourism Organization. That is partly due to fewer people visiting countries close to the war in Ukraine, including Lithuania, Finland, Moldova and Poland.

In addition, Chinese visitors have not fully returned, with flights from China and other Asia-Pacific countries down 45% from 2019, according to travel data company ForwardKeys.

Tourism-dependent Greece expects 30 million visitors this year, still shy of 2019's 34 million

record. Still, the number of flights are up so far, and tourist hotspots are taking the brunt.

The Culture Ministry will introduce a new ticketing system for the Acropolis this month, providing hourly slots for visitors to even out crowds. But no remedy is being discussed for the parking line of cruise ships on the islands of Mykonos and Santorini on busy mornings.

Spain's tourism minister, Héctor Gómez, called it "a historic summer for tourism," with 8.2 million tourists arriving in May alone, breaking records for a second straight month. Still, some hotel groups say reservations slowed in the first weeks of summer, owing to the steep rise in prices for flights and rooms.

Costs are growing as flights from the U.S. to Europe are up 2% from 2019 levels, according to ForwardKeys.

"The rising appetite for long-haul travel from America is the continued result of the 'revenge travel' boom caused by the pandemic lockdowns," said Tim Hentschel, CEO of HotelPlanner, a booking site. "Big cities within these popular European countries are certainly going to be busy during the summer."

Americans have pushed arrivals in Italian bucket-list destinations like Rome, Florence, Venice

and Capri above pre-pandemic levels, according to Italy's hotel association, Federalberghi.

They bring a lot of pent-up buying power: U.S. tourists in Italy spent 74% more in tax-free indulgences in the first three months of the year, compared with same period of 2019.

"Then there is the rest of Italy that lives from Italian and European tourism, and at the moment, it is still under 2019 levels," Federalberghi president Bernabo Bocca said.

He expects it will take another year for an across-the-board recovery. An economic slowdown discouraged German arrivals, while Italians "are less prone to spending this year," he said.

And wallets will be stretched. Lodging costs in Florence rose 53% over last year, while Venice saw a 25% increase and Rome a 21% hike, according to the Italian consumer group Codacons.

Even gelato will cost a premium 21% over last year, due to higher sugar and milk prices.

Perhaps nothing has encouraged the rise in tourism in key spots more than a surge in short-term apartment rentals. With hotel room numbers constant, Bocca of Federalberghi blames the surge for the huge crowds in Rome, inflating taxi lines and crowding crosswalks so that city buses cannot continue their routes.

In Rome and Florence, "walking down the street, out of every building door, emerges a tourist with a suitcase," he said.

While Florence's mayor is limiting the number of short-term rentals in the historic center to 8,000, no action has been taken in Venice. The canal-lined city counts 49,432 residents in its historic center and 49,272 tourist beds, nearly half of those being apartments available for short-term rental.

Inconveniences are "daily," said Giacomo Salerno, a researcher at Venice's Ca' Foscari University focusing on tourism.

It difficult to walk down streets clogged with visitors or take public water buses "saturated with tourists with their suitcases," he said.

Students cannot find affordable housing because owners prefer to cash in with vacation rentals. The dwindling number of residents means a dearth of services, including a lack of family doctors largely due to the high cost of living, driven up by tourist demand.

Venice has delayed plans to charge day-trippers a tax to enter the city, meant to curb arrivals. But activists like Salerno say that will do little to resolve the issue of a declining population and encroaching tourists, instead cementing Venice's fate as "an amusement park."

"It would be like saying the only use for the city is touristic," Salerno said. **MDT/AP**

ECONOMY

# EXPORTS SLUMPED 12.4% IN JUNE FROM A YEAR EARLIER AS GLOBAL DEMAND WEAKENED

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

**C**HINA'S exports tumbled 12.4% in June from a year earlier as demand weakened after central banks raised interest rates to curb inflation even as Chinese leaders struggled to keep a post-COVID recovery from faltering.

Customs data released yesterday showed imports slid 6.8% to \$214.7 billion. Exports edged up slightly from the month before, totaling \$285.3 billion. The trade surplus was \$70.6 billion, rising from \$65.8 billion in May.

Trade weakness adds to downward pressure on the world's second-largest economy. Global consumer demand has weakened after the Federal Reserve and central banks in Europe and Asia raised interest rates to bring inflation down from near multi-decade highs by reining in business and consumer activity.

In January-June, China's total trade including imports and exports fell nearly 5% from a year earlier. Exports slipped 3.2% and imports declined 6.7% as prices of commodities like oil fell and demand inside China also faltered.



Exports to the United States tumbled 23.7% from a year earlier to \$42.7 billion, a six-month low, while imports of American goods sank 4.1% to \$14 billion. China's politically volatile trade surplus with the United States narrowed by 30.6% to \$28.7 billion.

Trade also has been dampened by tension with Washington and restrictions on access to U.S. processor chips and other technology

in a feud with Beijing over security and Chinese industrial policy. Chinese factories assemble most of the world's smartphones and other electronics.

"With the global downturn in goods demand continuing to weigh on exports, we think exports will decline further for now before bottoming out toward the end of

the year," Zichun Huang of Capital Economics said in a commentary. "But the good news is that the worst of the decline in foreign demand is probably already behind us."

Imports from Russia were up 15.7% to \$11.3 billion. China has been buying more Russian oil and gas to take advantage of price cuts. That has helped shore up the Kremlin's cash flow after the United

States, Europe and Japan cut off most purchases to punish Moscow for President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Beijing can buy Russian oil and gas without triggering Western sanctions. China has also become Russia's biggest export market and an important source of manufactured goods. Exports to Russia surged 90.9% in June from the year before to \$9.5 billion.

The ruling Communist Party set this year's official economic growth target at "around 5%," up from last year's 3% expansion, which was the second-weakest since the 1970s. Some economists raised their growth forecasts to closer to 6% following unexpectedly strong trade figures in March.

In April, the government announced steps to support struggling exporters, including by making more trade finance available and encouraging cross-border e-commerce.

A five-month campaign launched late April also is meant to increase trade by improving logistics and cutting costs for exporters in 17 cities including Beijing and Shanghai. **MDT/AP**

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# China and ASEAN agree to try to conclude nonaggression pact on sea feud in 3 years

NINIEK KARMINI &  
JIM GOMEZ, JAKARTA

**C**HINA and Southeast Asian nations agreed yesterday to try and conclude within three years a long-delayed nonaggression pact aimed at preventing the frequent territorial spats in the busy South China Sea from turning into a major armed conflict.

China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed yesterday during a meeting between the 10-nation bloc's foreign ministers and China's top diplomat Wang Yi in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta to guidelines to complete their code of conduct negotiations before fall 2026, a Southeast Asian diplomat involved in the meetings told The Associated Press.

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity due to a lack of authority to discuss the issue publicly ahead of the official announcement of the agreement.

China and four of ASEAN's member states — Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam — along with Taiwan have been locked in a decades-long territorial standoff in the disputed waterway, a key passageway for global trade that is believed to be sitting atop vast undersea deposits of oil and gas.

The contested territory has long been feared as an Asian



Foreign policy chief Wang Yi speaks during the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference, yesterday

flashpoint and has become a sensitive front in the U.S.-China rivalry in the region.

A joint working group by China and ASEAN "should endeavor to conclude the negotiation of an effective and substantive code of conduct, in accordance with international law, including the

1982 U.N. Convention of the Law of the Sea, within a 3-year timeline or earlier," according to the guidelines, a copy of which was seen by the AP.

The guidelines called for more meetings between the two sides and the start of negotiations for the most contentious issues, in-

cluding whether the regional code should be legally enforceable and its geographical scope.

Washington lays no territorial claims in the South China Sea but has said that freedom of navigation and overflight and the peaceful resolution of the disputes were in the United States' national

interest. It has challenged China's expansive territorial claims in the region and Beijing has angrily reacted by warning the U.S. to stop meddling in what it calls a purely Asian dispute.

China and ASEAN signed a nonbinding 2002 accord that called on rival claimant nations to avoid aggressive actions that could spark armed conflicts, including the occupation of barren islets and reefs, but violations have persisted.

About 10 years ago, China turned seven disputed reefs into what have become missile-protected chain of islands in the Spratlys, the most hotly contested part of the South China Sea, sparking alarm from rival claimant states and the U.S. and its allies. With tensions rising, ASEAN and China had agreed to negotiate for a code of conduct. But the talks were delayed for years, including during the height of the coronavirus pandemic, and because of major differences between China and rival claimant states.

Chinese negotiators have proposed that the code of conduct restrict the presence and activities of foreign forces in the disputed waters. Southeast Asian diplomats have said that U.S. allies involved in the talks were opposed given their stance that Washington serves a crucial role as a counterweight to Beijing in the region. **MDT/AP**

# Germany presents long-awaited strategy on China as a rival and partner

**T**HE German government yesterday presented a long-awaited strategy for relations with China that points to a "systemic rivalry" with the Asian power and a need to reduce risks of economic dependency, but highlights Berlin's desire to work with Beijing on global challenges such as climate change.

The 64-page document approved by Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Cabinet builds on Germany's first national security strategy, issued a month ago, which didn't go into detail on foreign policy. Scholz's three-party coalition had pledged when it took office in late 2021 to draw up



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz attends the cabinet meeting of the German government at the chancellery in Berlin, Germany, yesterday

a "comprehensive China strategy."

Germany has Europe's

biggest economy and is the 27-nation European Union's most populous

member. It is keen to maintain good ties with China, its biggest trading

partner in recent years, despite wariness over Beijing's growing assertiveness and refusal to criticize the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In its strategy, the government said it is committed to ensuring that economic cooperation with China "becomes fairer, more sustainable and more reciprocal." It noted that "whereas China's dependencies on Europe are constantly declining, Germany's dependencies on China have taken on greater significance in recent years."

"It is not our intention to impede China's economic progress and development," it said. "At the same time, de-risking is urgently needed. However, we are not pursuing a decoupling of our economies." The message echoes that delivered in May by the Group of Seven leading industrial

powers, including Germany.

The new strategy made clear that Germany won't be deterred from doing business with self-governed Taiwan, which Beijing considers a breakaway province. "Germany has close and good relations with Taiwan in many areas and wants to expand them," it said.

"The status quo of the Taiwan Strait may only be changed by peaceful means and mutual consent," it said. "Military escalation would also affect German and European interests."

The strategy was released a few weeks after Scholz and about half his Cabinet hosted a delegation led by new Chinese Premier Li Qiang, whose visit to Berlin was his first foreign trip since becoming China's No. 2 official in March. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



## HIGH TIMES IN THAILAND

# New weed laws draw tourists from across Asia

YUCHENG TANG, BANGKOK

A Japanese tourist reaches into a baggie of cannabis he's just bought in a central Bangkok weed shop, pulling out a gram of buds to chop down in a small black grinder, before rolling them neatly into a joint.

Only the slight spillage onto the smoking lounge's table — and his cough as he lights up and inhales deeply — betray the fact that until two weeks ago, he'd never tried marijuana.

Most Asian nations have strict drug laws with harsh penalties, and Thailand's de facto legalization of marijuana last year has brought a wave of tourists from the region like the visitor from Japan, intrigued by the lure of the forbidden leaf.

"I was curious about how I would feel after smoking," said the 42-year-old tourist who spoke on condition that his name not be used, for fear his experimentation in Bangkok could lead to legal issues at home.

"I wonder why Japan bans it?" he pondered. "I wanted to try it."

Even as more countries arou-

nd the world legalize marijuana, Thailand has been the outlier in Asia, where several countries still have the death penalty for some cannabis offenses. Singapore has already executed two people this year for trafficking marijuana and its Central Narcotics Bureau has announced plans to randomly test people returning from Thailand.

Japan does not have the death penalty for drug offenses, but has warned that its laws on cannabis use may apply to its nationals even when they are abroad.

China's embassy in Thailand has warned that if Chinese tourists consume marijuana abroad and are "detected upon returning to China, it is considered equivalent to using drugs domestically. As a result, you will be subject to corresponding legal penalties." It issues similar warnings for travel to other countries where marijuana is readily available, such as the United States, Canada and the Netherlands.

On a recent flight from the Chinese city of Shanghai, passengers were cautioned not to "accidentally" try marijuana in Bangkok, with an announcement that in Thailand "some food and

drink can include cannabis, so please pay attention to the leaf logo on the package of food."

Neither Chinese nor Singaporean authorities would detail how frequently they test citizens returning from countries where marijuana has been decriminalized, responding to queries from the AP simply by reiterating their

## China's embassy in Thailand has warned that if Chinese tourists consume marijuana abroad and are 'detected upon returning to China, it is considered equivalent to using drugs domestically'

previously announced policies.

It's no wonder that weed dispensaries in Bangkok say that customers from Singapore and China are among the most cautious, asking questions about how long traces of the drug remain in the system and whether there are detox products.

But many remain undeterred, and Thailand's cannabis indus-

try has grown at lightning speed, with weed dispensaries now almost as common as the ubiquitous convenience stores in some parts of the capital. Through February, nearly 6,000 licenses for cannabis-related businesses have been approved, including more than 1,600 in Bangkok alone, according to official figures.

There are no government figures on how many tourists come specifically to smoke marijuana, but Kueakarun Thongwilai, the manager of a weed shop in central Bangkok, estimates at least 70%-80% of his customers are foreigners, primarily from Asian countries like Japan, Malaysia, China and Philippines, and some from Europe.

Some want to try edible cannabis products, but Thongwilai said he tries to steer them toward smoking.

"Edibles take more time to take effect, and during that time people may eat more and more, leading to an excessive experience for beginners," he said.

Not all are new to the drug, said Thongwilai, remembering a Malaysian customer who snuck away from a meal with his wife and daughter at a nearby restaurant. The man said he smoked marijuana secretly at home, but had heard the Thai product was better quality and wanted to try it.

"He bought the cheapest weed in our shop and tried it in a mall, and then he came back and bought more," Thongwilai recalled.

Not far from Thongwilai's shop at Dutch Passion, a newly opened retail branch of a Netherlands seed distributor that has been in business for more than three decades, about half the customers are also first-time users, said Theo Geene, a Dutch shareholder in the business.

Cannabis has been available in coffee shops in the Netherlands since the 1970s, and Geene said he has used his experience to train his staff how to serve those unfamiliar with the drug.

"For beginners, it's not good to use a bong," he said. "It's too much for them. We don't want anyone to pass out here."

Most customers refused to talk about their experiences, with the Japanese tourist in Geene's shop the only one who agreed to — and only on the condition his name not be used.

Most of the shop's Asian customers are similarly discreet, choosing to smoke their purchases inside rather than on the streets like many Westerners do, which is common but a violation of Thai regulations, Geene said.

"They are more cautious and afraid," he said. "They don't want to be seen when they smoke weed."

Before he embarked on his trip to Thailand, the 42-year-old Japanese tourist said he researched extensively online and determined that while customs might randomly check bags and luggage for marijuana being smuggled into Japan, there was no testing going on in line with government policy.

Since his first puff two weeks ago, he said he's been smoking every day, visiting different shops, comparing prices and trying different strains.

Dispensary staffers taught him how to grind buds and roll a joint and he's been having fun perfecting the technique.

"I practice it every day," he said, looking down at the joint he was rolling and repeating the word "practice" twice before bursting into laughter. **MDT/AP**

# EU rejects Myanmar's diplomatic role and says it still doesn't recognize generals

EDNA TARIGAN &  
JIM GOMEZ, JAKARTA

**T**HE European Union's top diplomat yesterday expressed opposition to Myanmar's upcoming role as the overseer of relations between the 27-nation bloc and Southeast Asian nations and reasserted its non-recognition of the strife-torn country's military government.

The comments marked the latest diplomatic fallout from the Myanmar army's forcible seizure of power from Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government on Feb. 1, 2021 that plunged the country into deadly chaos.

Josep Borrell, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs, raised the concern in a meeting with foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. The 10-nation ASEAN includes Myanmar and Indonesia, which leads the regional group this year.

"We face a challenge related to the potential of Myanmar assuming the role of ASEAN coordinator for relations with the European Union," Borrell told his ASEAN counterparts at the start of their meeting.

"We don't recognize the military junta and perhaps you will find a solution to overcome this issue," he said.

There was no immediate reaction from the foreign ministers but a Southeast Asian diplomat attending the meetings told The Associated Press that the concern raised by the EU was being discussed within ASEAN to prevent any disruptions in the ro-

AP PHOTO



European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell speaks during ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference, yesterday

bust trade and geopolitical relations between the two regional blocs.

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to discuss the issue publicly.

The EU, the United States and other Western governments have imposed sanctions on Myanmar's military government and demanded an immediate end to violence and the release of Suu Kyi and other political detainees.

ASEAN assigns a member state to oversee trade, political and security relations with each world power it has ties with, including the EU, for three years. The Philippines currently coordinates ASEAN-EU relations and is scheduled to be succeeded by

Myanmar next year.

Among the options being considered by the ASEAN ministers was to assign Laos, which will hold the regional group's rotational chairmanship next year, to coordinate ties with the EU, the diplomat said.

ASEAN also does not recognize Myanmar's military government and has barred military-appointed representatives from attending the group's top-level meetings, including those being hosted this week by Indonesia.

More than 3,750 civilians, including pro-democracy activists, have been killed by security forces and nearly 24,000 arrested since the military takeover, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a rights group that keeps tallies

of arrests and casualties.

ASEAN officials barred the military government from attending its ministerial meetings and summits of heads of state after Myanmar's generals refused to meaningfully comply with a five-point emergency plan that called for an immediate end to the violence and the start of talks among contending parties that could be brokered by the group's special envoy.

Myanmar's leaders have not given ASEAN's special envoy access to Suu Kyi but Thailand's foreign minister, Don Pramudwinai, told his counterparts in the bloc and the media that he met with Suu Kyi on Sunday and that she conveyed her openness to engage in talks to resolve the crisis gripping her nation.

The Thai minister is the only government official outside of Myanmar known to have met Myanmar's democracy icon since she was detained with other officials after the army forcibly took power in 2021. He told his ASEAN counterparts Wednesday that Suu Kyi was in good health when he met with her for more than an hour.

"She encourages dialogue," he told reporters in Jakarta when asked what message Suu Kyi conveyed to him. "Obviously we're trying to find a way to settle with Myanmar."

It's too early to tell if the access to Suu Kyi granted by Myanmar's military government would lead to further talks between her camp and the ruling generals. **MDT/AP**

## IMF deposits much-awaited \$1.2b with Pakistan's central bank under bailout

MUNIR AHMED,  
ISLAMABAD

**P**AKISTAN'S finance minister yesterday said the International Monetary Fund deposited a much-awaited first installment of \$1.2 billion with the country's central bank under a recently signed bailout aimed at enabling the impoverished Islamic nation to avoid defaulting on its debt repayments.

Minister Ishaq Dar in te-

levied remarks said the remaining \$1.8 billion would be received from the IMF over the next nine months. The funds will bolster the country's foreign exchange reserves, which shrank to less than \$4 billion in recent months, raising fears of a default.

The country's foreign exchange reserves are likely to rise to \$14 billion this week, Dar said.

The latest development came a day after the IMF

said its executive board had approved an agreement to release a \$3 billion loan to support Pakistan's economic stabilization program.

Wednesday's announcement came less than two weeks after Pakistan and the IMF agreed to the plan following meetings with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Dar and other officials.

On Wednesday, IMF head Kristalina Georgie-

va said in a statement that "Pakistan's economy was hit hard by significant shocks last year, notably the spillovers from the severe impacts of floods, the large volatility in commodity prices, and the tightening of external and domestic financing conditions."

She said the \$3 billion bailout, if "implemented faithfully" by Pakistan, will give it an opportunity to regain macroeconomic stability and address imba-

lances through consistent policy implementation.

The IMF bailout for Pakistan had been on hold since December because of the country's lack of compliance with a 2019 agreement signed between the IMF and former Prime Minister Imran Khan. A breakthrough in talks came last month when Sharif met with IMF head Georgieva in Paris at the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact to discuss the revival of the \$6 billion bailout that was to expire on June 30.

Sharif's direct interaction with the IMF resulted in the signing of a new nine-month deal.

Since coming into power in April 2022 by ousting Khan through a no-confidence vote in parliament, Sharif has been trying to overcome the economic crisis. Pakistan's economy witnessed a major shock last summer when devastating floods killed 1,739 people and caused \$30 billion in damage.

Currently, rivers swollen by monsoon rains have inundated dozens of villages in Pakistan's eastern Punjab province, displacing 1,500 people. Nearly 90 people have died in weather-related incidents since June 25 when the monsoon rains began. **MDT/AP**

UK

# Tens of thousands of doctors start 'longest' strike in health system's history

PAN PYLAS, LONDON

**B** RITAIN'S state-funded health care service is facing what is being described as its longest-ever strike as tens of thousands of doctors in England launched a five-day walkout over pay yesterday.

So-called junior doctors, those who are at the early stages of their careers in the National Health Service in the years after medical school, started their latest strike at 7 a.m., with many of them making their case for a 35% pay rise in picket lines outside hospitals across England.

The British Medical Association, the doctors' union, has asked for a 35% pay rise to bring junior doctors' pay back to 2008 levels once inflation is taken into account. Meanwhile, the workload of England's 75,000 or so junior doctors has swelled as patient waiting lists for treatment are at record highs in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Today marks the start of the longest single walkout by doctors in the NHS's history, but this is still not a record that needs to go into the history books," said BMA leaders Dr Robert Laurenson and Dr Vivek Trivedi.

They urged the British government, which oversees



health policy in England, to drop its "nonsensical precondition" of not negotiating while strikes are in progress.

The government, which is facing an array of strikes by public workers across many sectors, is standing firm to its position that it won't negotiate while the strikes are taking place.

"This five-day walkout by junior doctors will have an impact on thousands of patients, put patient safety at risk and hamper efforts to cut NHS waiting lists," said Health Secretary Steve Barclay. "A pay demand of 35% or more is unreasonable and risks fuelling inflation, which makes everyone poorer."

Britain, like other countries, is grappling with high inflation for the first time in years. Price rises were first stoked by supply chain

issues resulting from the pandemic and then by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which sent energy and food prices soaring. Though inflation has come down slightly from its peak to 8.7%, it remains far above the 2% level the Bank of England is tasked to target.

The doctors' strike will cause huge disruption for the already embattled NHS, with operations and consultations postponed or even cancelled.

Dr Simon Steddon, chief medical officer at Guy's and St Thomas's hospital trust in south London, urged both sides to get back to the negotiating table amid concerns over the impact on patients.

He said that 55,000 appointments and nearly 6,000 planned procedures

have already been cancelled or rescheduled at the hospitals he oversees as a result of previous strikes.

"Thousands more will need to be cancelled over the next couple of weeks adding to the significant delay, inconvenience and the inherent risk of further delay to diagnosis and treatment," he added.

The doctors taking the strike action say they know the impact of their walkout on the health service, but insist that they have been left with no alternative.

"This isn't a celebration, this is years of declining pay, declining conditions, frustration, and this is what has culminated as a result," Alex Gibbs, a striking 31-year-old doctor said outside University College Hospital in north London. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1989 PARIS IN 200-YEAR-OLD REVOLUTIONARY FERVOUR



About 500 people have been involved in scuffles in the Place de la Bastille in Paris.

Hundreds of thousands of revellers took to the streets of the French capital last night to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille.

Most people enjoyed the carnival atmosphere in the city but a group of trouble-makers fought amongst themselves, harassed foreign TV crews and threw stones at the police as they tried to restore order.

Last night was the official opening of the concert hall, Opera Bastille, which has been built on the site of the Bastille prison - where the French Revolution began in 1789.

Party until dawn  
Celebrations carried on into the small hours of this morning in the biggest street party since France was liberated after World War II.

There was traffic chaos as people danced in the streets, wearing the red, white and blue of the revolutionary tricolour and letting off fireworks.

As well as the traditional military march down the Champs Elysees this morning, the bicentennial anniversary has been marked by a spectacular parade of dancers, musicians and floats from around the world this evening.

Heads of state from 40 countries and a global television audience of 500m watched the procession - devised and organised by Jean-Paul Goude - down the Champs Elysees to the Place de la Concorde.

Costing £8m, the Marseillaise procession was based on the theme of the rights of Man and world music. It culminated in a powerful rendition of the French national anthem - the Marseillaise - by opera singer Jessye Norman.

Some world leaders were in the city for the G7 World Economic Summit opened by President Mitterand at the Louvre pyramid in the afternoon.

Courtesy BBC News

DIPLOMACY

# Presidents of South Korea and Poland hold talks on security, war in Ukraine

**T**HE South Korean president began a visit to Poland for two days of talks and meetings on global security, the war in neighboring Ukraine, and developing bilateral business and defense ties.

President Yoon Suk Yeol was greeted Thursday by his Polish counterpart, Andrzej Duda,

at the Presidential Palace, where they proceeded into talks. Yoon was also to meet with Poland's right-wing Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and speakers of both chambers of parliament.

Duda has described it as a "very important visit" by a "very prominent guest."

Yoon came to Warsaw after attending a NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he sought to deepen ties with the military alliance amid global security threats including Russia's war on Ukraine and North Korea's illicit nuclear program.

Poland is in the process of buying some

\$17 billion worth of advanced military equipment from South Korea. The purchase is meant to upgrade Poland's defense potential and fill in for the older equipment that Poland has offered to Ukraine, like the Soviet-made MiG-29 fighter jets.

Among the purcha-

sed equipment, some of which has already arrived in Poland, are Korea's K9 howitzers, K2 tanks, Chunmoo missile launchers and FA-50 training and fighter jets.

Poland buys more from South Korea than it exports there, leaving a trade imbalance in Seoul's favor. **MDT/AP**

## IN CONTEXT

The Bastille was constructed as a royal fortress in the 14th Century. It symbolised untouchable royal power and extravagance to an impoverished populace. Encouraged by local politicians and radical new philosophies, Parisians targeted the two royal strongholds in the city in uprisings beginning on 12 July 1789. They seized guns from the barracks at Les Invalides and stormed the Bastille to release the prisoners there and execute their jailers. The events of 14 July were limited but they symbolised the beginning of a break from the traditional order. Ten years of bloody revolution followed which included a radical new constitution and the execution of King Louis XVI and his self-indulgent wife Marie Antoinette.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

## YOUR STARS

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
You may have been trying to do too much, leaving yourself exhausted and open to colds and infections. You may need to make a few alterations to your living arrangements.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Be prepared to take advantage of your good fortune. You will get out of shape easily if you don't keep on top of things. Plan to visit friends or relatives.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
Sudden good fortune will help you cover your debts. Don't reveal anything about your personal life to those who may use such information against you.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Visitors may be likely to drop by. Stress coupled with diet will add to stomach problems. Difficulties at an emotional level may be likely.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
Changes in your home environment are likely. You may find that your plans will cost a little more than you had expected. Organizations may cost you more than you can afford.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Partnerships will be favorable and contracts can be signed. Don't avoid situations that may deteriorate; try to mend them. You will have splendid suggestions for fund raising events.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Be supportive in order to avoid confrontations. Try a barbecue or a day at the beach. Try not to be too lavish with your lover. Read some books on self awareness.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
Try to include the one you love in your plans today. Jealous attitudes may lead you astray. Put your time and energy into home improvement.

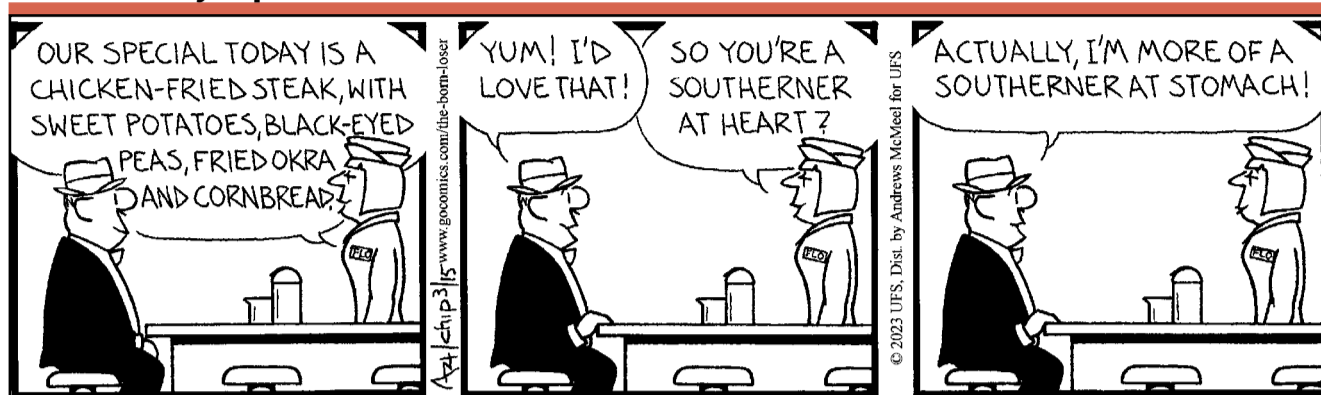
**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Find a quiet spot where you can work diligently and stay out of the way. You have your own family to consider as well. Go after your professional goals.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Get some sound advice and help setting up a workable budget. Don't fall for damaging rumors, and refuse to get involved in gossip.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Being unappreciated by your boss could make it hard to do your work effectively. You'll be able to break bad habits if you put your mind to it.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Home improvement projects will go well if you delegate work to all your family members. You need to spend less time daydreaming and more time accomplishing.

## The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



## SUDOKU

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

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

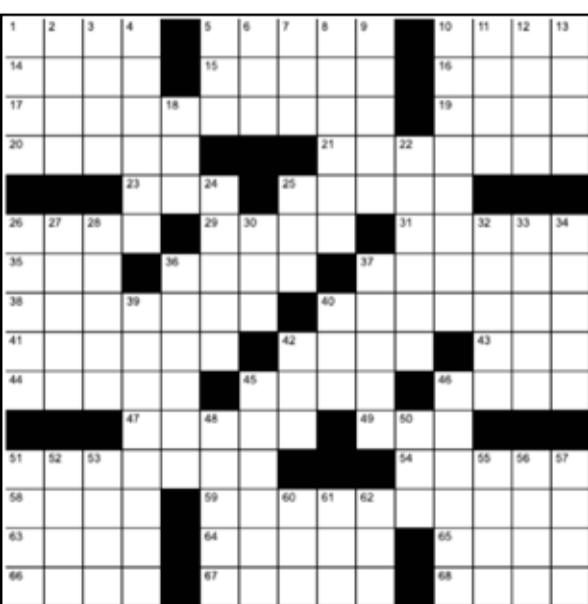
## WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	22	35	fine
Changchun	21	25	rain
Chengdu	20	30	cloudy
Chongqing	24	32	overcast
Fuzhou	26	38	cloudy
Guangzhou	26	36	fine
Guiyang	23	26	cloudy
Haikou	27	35	cloudy
Hangzhou	28	38	fine
Harbin	20	24	rain
Hefei	26	33	thunderstorms
Nanjing	28	33	thunderstorms
Shanghai	28	38	cloudy
Taipei	25	33	overcast
Wuhan	26	34	cloudy
Hong Kong	27	31	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	14	20	cloudy
Frankfurt	16	29	cloudy
Paris	20	32	cloudy
London	16	21	rain
New York	23	29	thunderstorms

## CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Editor Wintour; 5- Prince Valiant's wife; 10- Untidy condition; 14- Stuff; 15- Prohibit; 16- Fighting; 17- Superfluous; 19- Designer Gerreich; 20- Condition; 21- Taller and thinner; 23- Lyric poem; 25- Prescribed amounts; 26- Fully aware of; 29- Bouillabaisse, e.g.; 31- Dark area; 35- Sun. talk; 36- School founded in 1440; 37- Entreaty; 38- Learner; 40- Explorer; 41- Decrees; 42- Crunch; 43- Al Jolson's real first name; 44- Blender brand; 45- Bring down; 46- God of war; 47- Organization; 49- Campaigned; 51- Polite; 54- Street urchin; 58- With the bow, in music; 59- Resemblance; 63- Grow; 64- Govt. security; 65- Canadian tribe; 66- Thin stratum; 67- Anew; 68- Mature male European red deer.

DOWN 1- Matures; 2- Immediately following; 3- The \_\_\_ Valley is a Californian wineland; 4- Playground retort; 5- Say further; 6- Actress Thompson; 7- Kind of tide; 8- Fat used to make candles; 9- Neighborhoods; 10- Person who shoots well; 11- Sewing case; 12- Team; 13- Be up and about; 18- Homer's neighbor; 22- Nerve cell; 24- Adlai's running mate; 25- Lair; 26- Bony prefix; 27- Geeky guys; 28- Quality; 30- Foot digit; 32- One way to play; 33- Actress Witherspoon; 34- Hand woven wall hanging; 36- Dinner course; 37- Scottish musician; 39- Freezing rain squall; 40- La \_\_\_, Bolivia; 42- Bottle lid; 45- "The \_\_\_ Class" (O'Toole); 46- Revolt-leader, old-style; 48- Outer coat of a seed; 50- Ottoman official; 51- Jokes; 52- Bald eagle's relative; 53- Final Four org.; 55- Paul Sorvino's daughter; 56- Anatomical passage; 57- Russian no.; 60- Extinct bird, once found in New Zealand; 61- Lord, is \_\_\_?; 62- Author Deighton;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

## USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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AD

DRIVE IN

# MUSICAL THEATER MEETS MOCKUMENTARY IN 'THEATER CAMP'

JAKE COYLE,  
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

**A**MONG the low-hanging fruits of satire, sleepaway theater camps would dangle about as low as social-media influencers and Def Leppard cover bands.

But "Theater Camp," a new comedy by Molly Gordon and Nick Lieberman, energetically wades into the kind of mockumentary territory Christopher Guest would approve of. The spirit of "Best in Show" and "Waiting for Guffman" is often present, for better and worse, in Gordon and Lieberman's film, which first debuted at Sundance earlier this year.

But theirs is a much more earnest, loving lampoon, made by a group of friends with obvious affection for musical theater. Gordon and Lieberman co-wrote the script with Ben Platt and Noah Galvin, expanding their 2020 18-minute short. The result is something too tame for rich parody, but knowing enough to be kind of sweet. "Theater Camp," at least, has the song and dance part down pat.

The upstate New York camp of AdirondACTS has been pluckily kept running for years by its founder, Joan (Amy Sedaris). She's intended to be the main character of a documentary on the camp. But in the opening moments of the film, while Joan and manager Rita (Caroline Aaron) are out re-



Molly Gordon (left) and Ben Platt in a scene from "Theater Camp."

cruiting campers, she's knocked into a coma by strobe lights in a middle school production of "Bye Bye Birdie."

It's a funny enough gag but a crushing blow to the film. Taking Amy Sedaris off screen in a mockumentary that might have starred her is like killing Fred Astaire off in the first number. You just don't do it. So who are our characters instead? Joan's son, Troy (Jimmy Tatro), comes in to

run the camp. He's pretty much their worst nightmare: a social media-promoting finance bro who always avoided his mother's camp because, he says, he was busy doing "dope (expletive)" instead.

When Troy opens a new summer season, plenty of eyerolls follow — especially from Amos (Platt), the head of drama, and his close friend and collaborator Rebecca-Diane (Gordon). They

nevertheless forge ahead with the summer's programs, including "The Crucible Jr.," an "immersive" "Cats" and their original piece, "Joan, Still."

Life at the camp gets underway while the threat of foreclosure lurks and a more well-to-do rival camp looks to take over. The inside jokes fly fast and frequent. There's a group of finger-snapping "Fosse kids," a designated "Meryl Day," bedtime stories where the

villain is non-union and exaggerated stakes on stage. "Joan, Still" is said to be such an ambitious work of theater that Amos promises its child cast: "This will break you."

All of this clever but too expected to be especially funny. The movie, the directorial debut for Gordon and Lieberman, loosely bounces between a large cast of characters, who know their parts well — maybe too well. They include the dancing instructor Clive (Nathan Lee Graham), the costume designer Gigi (Owen Thiele) and Galvin's tech director with secret dreams of performing. One notable standout is "The Bear" breakout Ayo Edebiri as a local hire who lied on her resume; her scenes have a lively unpredictability.

But if "Theater Camp" struggles to find its footing, "Joan, Still" leads it to a surprisingly terrific finale. By then, Tatro has turned his one-note caricature into an endearing ally. And the kids — all of them legit performers who are mostly relegated to the background for much of the film — take center stage. "Theater Camp" might have worked better with a "Meatballs"-style structure, focusing on a camper and a counselor. But it knows how to put on a show. With songs written by the screenwriters and Mark Sonnenblick, "Theater Camp" in the end hits just the right note between satire and sincere.

**"Theater Camp," a Searchlight Pictures release, is rated PG-13 by the MPA for "for some strong language and suggestive/drug references." Running time: 93 minutes.** ★★★★★

tTUNES

# On 'Playa Saturno,' Rauw Alejandro's futuristic reggaeton reaches new heights

MARIA SHERMAN

**P**UERTO Rican musician Rauw Alejandro has always had his eye on the future — taking familiar genres and contorting them into something novel.

At the beginning of his career, that meant R&B-informed reggaeton when the rest of the industry leaned into "popetón," a tried-and-true pop formula. Alejandro takes dem bow, the four-on-the-floor, three-beat percussive pattern that lays the foundation for many Urbano Latino genres (that's the "boom-chk-boom-chk" to the untrained ear), and manages to stretch the sound into



"Playa Saturno" by Rauw Alejandro. (Sony Music Latin/Duars Entertainment)

new, experimental heights. And maybe to the furthest corners of the galaxy, as his extraterrestrial concept album suggests. Released as a surprise

spinoff to his 2022 album "Saturno," Alejandro's fourth full-length, "Playa Saturno," is an idyllic soundtrack for a beach party in outer space, a collection of songs that demonstrate Alejandro's keen ear and respect for those performers who laid the path for his success.

The Queen of Reggaeton, Ivy Queen, appears on "Celebrando"; the pair harmonize on the song's ascendant bridge. Spanish popstar Miguel Bosé appears on the retro-reggaeton "Si Te Pegas"; Mexican singer Junior H brings his corridos tumbados to "Picardía." Puerto Rican duos Jowell y Randy and

Ñego y Dálmata also make an appearance, on "Ponte Nasty" and "No Me La Moleste" respectively, bringing classic Boricua reggaeton to Alejandro's modern audience.

In fact, much of "Playa Saturno" hits like a musical history lesson across the Caribbean: It's heard in the steel drums of "No Me Sorprende" and the vocal melodies in "Hoy Aquí," made contemporary by a retro-futuristic, synth-heavy production style.

A spinoff album is a tricky thing. There's an expectation that these songs could be a collection of sub-tier tracks that didn't make the original relea-

se, but that is not the case here. "Playa Saturno" is an alternative storyline in a larger musical universe. If there is a misstep, it's in the similarity between "Hoy Aquí" and "Lejos Del Cielo" from "Saturno," but coincidences can be expected when working in the same sonic template.

The successes of "Playa Saturno" far outweigh those moments: Particularly "Baby Hello," the electro-pop lead single in collaboration with Argentine producer Bizarrap, known for his viral BZRP Music Sessions on YouTube. It's innovative pop music, a late song of the summer contender for those looking to party among the stars. If space is the final frontier, Alejandro's album serves as a reminder that there's a lot more to discover — and the boundlessness of his music is a reflection of that fact. **MDT/AP**

TASTE OF EDESIA

# Exhilarating journey

IRENE SAM, MDT

Dedicated to enlivening the gastronomic landscape, MGM invited Chef Peter Kasamvilas of Koji-delic in Thailand to present his innovative Nordic-Japanese cuisine at a pop-up in **MGM Cotai**. Chef Peter Kasamvilas studied in Hong Kong and Canada prior to receiving professional culinary education from Le Cordon Bleu. Born and raised in Bangkok, the 21-year-old Chef Peter Kasamvilas made an appearance on the competitive cooking reality television series MasterChef Thailand Season 4, where his professional career began. At age of 19, Chef Kasamvilas was the youngest contestant and eventually became one of the finalists.

Last year, Chef Kasamvilas established Koji-delic in Bangkok - a contemporary Nordic-Japanese inspired "food lab" that focuses on locality and sustainability with a Nordic approach, where up to 90% of ingredients are sourced in

Thailand. The name Koji comes after a fungus used for various culinary purposes such as sake, miso, soy sauce, mirin, and more. Known as the "magic mold", koji is responsible for breaking down starches and proteins into sugars and amino acids in fermentation, which the process best describes Koji-delic's vision of altering local ingredients into lively and intriguing dining experience.

The ingredient-focus 8-course menu served in the three-day event at MGM Cotai is curated to pay tribute to both innovative Nordic-Japanese cuisine as well as Asian culinary culture. One of the dishes best reflects his culinary practice is the Giant Trevally, a fish tartare dish featuring a fresh catch from Phuket. Fished with the "ikejime" method invented by Japanese fisherman, it gives the fish a delicate, firm texture and clean taste. Chef Kasamvilas accentuates such taste of freshness with pickled apple, kombu cream, and dill oil to make it an exhilarating start of the tasting journey.



AD

## ACCURATE, TIMELY & COMPETITIVE TRANSLATIONS

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KOREAN, SPANISH,  
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**OPINION**

**The Conversation**

Tara Sonenshine, Tufts University

**UKRAINE IS THE HOT TOPIC AT THE NATO SUMMIT - THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK IS ALL IN THE DETAILS HAPPENING BEHIND THE SCENES**

A summit is literally the highest point on the mountain. In diplomatic terms, summits like the NATO meeting, held on July 11 and 12, 2023, in Vilnius, Lithuania, mark important gatherings of world leaders.

The question of Sweden's and Ukraine's joining NATO, which is a political and military alliance of 31 countries from Europe and North America, was a central topic heading into this year's summit. While Sweden is now set to join the alliance, there is no firm timeline for when countries will determine whether Ukraine is admitted.

Having worked on and attended summits as a diplomat in both the Clinton and Obama administrations, I know how much energy goes into planning the public and private diplomatic moments of these events.

NATO is convening this meeting as part of its regular work on major military and political concerns among its member countries. But make no mistake – the United States sees itself as pivotal in this summit.

For President Joe Biden, the meeting is a test of his personal commitment to help Ukraine win the battle against Russia. The U.S. has been leading a coalition of countries helping Ukraine with military and humanitarian aid. Biden has promised that the U.S. will help Ukraine “as long as it takes.”

History of summits

Political leaders perfected the art of modern diplomacy in routine face-to-face summits during the darkest days of the Cold War.

Winston Churchill, at the time the U.K. prime minister, helped form the concept of a political “summit” in 1950, when he suggested a “parley at the summit.” That meant that the U.K., United States and the Soviet Union should sit down and figure out who had which sphere of influence after World War II ended.

But the history of summits stretches further back in time.

Another British politician, Lloyd George, first pushed for in-person political meetings in the early 1900s, stating, “If you want to settle a thing, you see your opponent and talk it over with him. The last thing to do is write him a letter.”

And it was the Greeks who first elevated the idea of leaders talking to leaders and debating issues as a form of building trust.

Since the Cold War, summits have taken many different shapes and sizes, ranging from regional to international meetings.

While some of these meetings result in few tangible outcomes, others have helped pave the way for key policy changes, including nuclear arms reductions in the 1980s and a treaty to limit the rise in global temperatures in 2015.

From an American perspective, summits are key moments when leadership is on display.

U.S. presidents have hosted summits on everything from democracy to trade since the Cold War. And NATO summits have taken place almost every year since the alliance's founding in 1949.

But there is a particular level of pressure and anticipation surrounding this meeting, with an active war in Europe caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Backstage details

These mega-events require massive planning. Member countries can volunteer to host the summits, and the offers are evaluated and decided upon by the political branch of NATO.

From the logistical advance teams that prepare the groundwork for presidential travel to the protocol officers ensuring that handshakes or hugs are timed for photography, every detail matters both publicly and privately at these sorts of affairs.

[Abridged]

**BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT MARKS 10 YEARS OF ACTIVISM AND RENEWS ITS CALL TO DEFUND THE POLICE** **THE BUZZ**

The Black Lives Matter movement hits a milestone on Thursday, marking 10 years since its 2013 founding in response to the acquittal of the man who fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin.

Gunned down in a Florida gated community where his father lived in 2012, Martin was one of the earliest symbols of a movement that now wields influence in politics, law enforcement and broader conversations about racial progress in and outside the U.S.

BLM activists and organizations plan to mark a decade of the

movement with in-person and virtual events. Calls to action include a renewed push to defund police departments and reinvest in Black communities that have suffered disproportionately from police brutality, unequal treatment in criminal justice systems and mass incarceration.

In the wake of Supreme Court decisions that stymied relief from student loan debt held disproportionately by Black borrowers and banned affirmative action in higher education, the need for BLM's existence couldn't be more clear, said prominent movement activist Melina Abdullah.

AP PHOTO



Gay rights activists hold a banner reading “Homophobia - the religion of bullies” during their action in protest at homophobia, on Red Square in Moscow, Russia, in 2013

**RUSSIA**

**LAWMAKERS MOVE TO FURTHER RESTRICT TRANSGENDER RIGHTS IN A NEW LEGISLATION**

**DASHA LITVINOVA, TALLINN**

Russian lawmakers yesterday approved a toughened version of a bill that outlaws gender transitioning procedures, with added clauses that annul marriages in which one person has “changed gender” and bar transgender people from becoming foster or adoptive parents.

The bill received swift, unanimous approval of Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, in its key second reading, and lawmakers scheduled the third and final reading for Friday. There is little doubt that the bill, a crippling blow to Russia's oppressed LGBTQ+ community, will be adopted amid the Kremlin's crusade to protect what it views as the country's “traditional values.”

The bill bans any “medical interventions aimed at changing the sex of a person,” as well as changing one's gender in official documents and public records.

New clauses added to the bill also amend Russia's Family Code by listing gender

change as a reason to annul a marriage and adding those “who had changed gender” to a list of people who can't become foster or adoptive parents.

Lawmakers portray the measure as protecting Russia from “the Western anti-family ideology,” with some describing gender transitioning as “pure satanism.”

It has rattled the country's transgender community and has drawn criticism not only from LGBTQ+ rights advocates but from the medical community as well.

Lyubov Vinogradova, executive director of Russia's Independent Psychiatric Association, called the bill “misanthropic” in an interview with The Associated Press. Gender transitioning procedures “shouldn't be banned entirely, because there are people for whom it is the only way to ... to exist normally and find peace with themselves,” Vinogradova said.

The crackdown on LGBTQ+ people started a decade ago, when President Vladimir Putin first proclaimed a focus on “traditional family values,” a move

ardently supported — and fueled, to a certain extent — by the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 2013, the Kremlin adopted the first legislation restricting LGBTQ+ rights, known as the “gay propaganda” law that banned any public endorsement of “nontraditional sexual relations” among minors. In 2020, Putin pushed through a constitutional reform that outlawed same-sex marriage.

But the authorities ramped up their rhetoric about protecting the country from what it called the West's “degrading” influence after sending troops into Ukraine last year, in what rights advocates saw as an attempt to legitimize the war.

Lawmakers moved last year to ban “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” among adults. That initiative was quickly rubber-stamped, and by December 2022, any positive or even neutral representation of LGBTQ+ people in movies, literature or media was outlawed.

The bill to severely restrict trans rights came a few months after that. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



France's parliament yesterday approved a multi-billion-euro boost to military spending through the rest of this decade, spurred by Russia's war in Ukraine and fast-growing global threats. President Emmanuel Macron pushed for the bigger budget, which would spend 413 billion euros, the most significant spending hike in half a century. The money would modernize France's nuclear arsenal, augment intelligence spending and develop more remote-controlled weapons.

AP PHOTO



Germany Climate activists blocked flights at two airports yesterday in protest against the most polluting form of transportation, and to demand tougher government action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The group Last Generation said several of its members entered the grounds of Hamburg Airport around 6 a.m. and glued themselves to the runway on the first day of the school vacation in the north German city.

AP PHOTO



Italy Commuters and tourists alike were stranded by a major train strike across Italy on a sweltering day, with cancellations affecting even high-speed lines that are usually guaranteed during Italy's frequent work stoppages. Transport Minister Matteo Salvini signed a decree ordering the two-day strike be cut in half, but even that truncated stoppage forced the cancellation of service up and down the peninsula on a weekday, at the height of Italy's booming high tourist season.