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"THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' "

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THE LOCAL TOURISM BUREAU HAS PLANNED AN ARRAY OF MAJOR EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES TO TAKE PLACE IN THE LATTER HALF OF 2023

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CRISIS-HIT SRI LANKA MAY ALLOW INDIAN RUPEE TO BE USED IN LOCAL TRANSACTIONS

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North Korea fired several cruise missiles toward its western sea Saturday. South Korea's military said, marking the second launch event this week, apparently in protest of the docking of a nuclear-armed U.S. submarine in South Korea. While adding to its barrage of missile launches in recent months, North Korea remained publicly silent for a fifth day on the fate of an American soldier who bolted into the North across the heavily armed Korean border this week.



India's Thousands of people, mostly women, held a massive sit-in in India's violence-wracked northeastern state of Manipur on Saturday to demand the immediate arrest of anyone who took part in the harrowing May assault of two women who were paraded around naked and molested by a mob in an attack that was caught on video. The leaders of religious and women's groups addressed the nearly 15,000 protesters, who also called for the firing of Biren Singh, the top elected official in the state where more than 130 people have been killed since violence between two dominant ethnic groups erupted in early May.



Russia came under pressure at the United Nations Security Council last week from its ally China and developing countries as well as Western nations to avert a global food crisis and quickly revive Ukrainian grain shipments. Moscow was also criticized by the U.N. and council members for attacking Ukrainian ports after pulling out of the year-old grain deal and destroying port infrastructure — a violation of international humanitarian law banning attacks on civilian infrastructure.

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MINIMUM WAGE ADJUSTMENT MANAGEMENT SIDE HOPES FOR 'MINIMAL IMPACT'

P2

MANAGEMENT SIDE HOPES FOR 'MINIMAL IMPACT' AMID DISCUSSION ON MINIMUM WAGE ADJUSTMENTS

ANTHONY LAM

AS the review on minimum wage commences, the management side of the debate is hoping for "the smallest burden and impact," despite "unprecedented support" for the government.

Over the weekend, the Standing Committee for Social Coordination held a meeting to discuss this issue.

At the meeting, Wong Chi Hong, director of the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), disclosed that the government is considering increasing the minimum wage from the current amount of MOP32 per hour to an amount between MOP34 and MOP36. When questioned by the press, he said that there is no deadline for the review. Nonetheless, he emphasized that the bureau would strive to conclude the work "as soon as possible."

Wong Kuok Seng, deputy executive director of Macao Chamber of Commerce and the management representative at the committee, emphasized the hardship of employers, amid expressing this hope.

He stressed that in the past three years, a number of businesses had to "survive on loans, although they stayed grateful to the government." He also blamed the "change of consumption habits" for the hardship. "Recently, many residents have been inclined to spend outside Macau during weekends and holidays," Wong said, adding that businesses in residential areas have not benefitted much from the economic recovery.

The businessman said there will be ripple effects from the minimum wage adjustment that will push other salaries and operational costs up. Inflation will also intensify, he added. "This will weaken competitiveness of our tourism, service and manufacturing industries," Wong said.

The businessman reiterated that whatever the amount will eventually be, the business sector will support the government's decision.



Meanwhile, Fong Ka Fai, a labor representative on the committee as vice president of the city's main trade union – Macao Federation of Trade Unions – welcomed the government's proposal to review the minimal wage.

Fong hopes that after reviewing the minimum wage, "laborers will have improved protection." Echoing the management side, Fong said that the labor side will accept whatever amount will be passed at the end.

As the government proposes a possible range for the minimum wage, Fong was asked if the labor side will accept the updated amount at the lower end of the range, to which the trade unionist answered in the affirmative.

Pursuant to the law, minimum wage should be reviewed every two years. However, this review was only triggered three years after the previous implementation, which was also the

system's first implementation. Fong hopes that future review can be more frequent, and is calling for a dedicated committee to be established to provide better support.

Explaining this review, DSAL's Wong disclosed that this review was commenced late last year, with the bureau reviewing data from Nov 1, 2020 to Oct. 31, 2022.

WOMAN INJURED BY FALLING METAL BAR

AT around 11 a.m. yesterday, a Vietnamese woman was injured in the NAPE district when she was struck by a metal bar that had fallen from a height, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) disclosed.

The victim is a migrant worker aged 52 years. She was conscious when taken to the public hospital and was later diagnosed with skull fractures.

The incident involved the Judiciary Police (PJ), the Fire Services Bureau (CB) and the PSP. It happened on Rua de Nagasaki.

Police officers approached a resident in the building where the incident took place. The resident confessed that they were changing their clothes hanger and accidentally dropped the metal bar from the apartment.

The police emphasized that investigations are still on-going.

In Macau, perpetrators who cause objects to fall from a height are subject to a MOP600 fine when they cause no injury or fatality, pursuant to the General Regulations Governing Public Places.

Should injury or fatality occur, police will intervene and commence an investigation. Violators may also be subject to civil or criminal penalties.

Two months ago, a woman was arrested twice on allegations of dropping objects from a height over two days. That incident did not cause any injury. **AL**

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

RABIES IN COLOANE

Dear Editor,

This letter is to call your attention to the issue of the exploding population of wild dogs and the packs now roaming the hills in Coloane.

Whilst this problem may be seen as a growing inconvenience, it is a time bomb with the potential to affect the entire economy of Macau. If a single case of Rabies found its way into the canine population, not only would the government have a major health disaster on its hands, but it's quite possible that all domes-

ticated dogs would also have to be destroyed.

The wild dogs currently roam and breed freely on the hills of Coloane, and walking a domestic dog on the trail is now a dangerous activity. I have twice been attacked by packs of dogs whilst walking my own small dog, and was lucky enough to be able to fend off the attack. However, there will come a time when a child or less physically able adult will be injured in such an attack, it's only a question of when.

The problem is spiraling out of

control, and in other areas of potential health threats the government continues to take the safety of its citizens very seriously. Why the threat of potential Rabies outbreak and its consequences for Macau has not been addressed remains a mystery, but nevertheless I ask that it be weighed up and acted upon by the authorities before we have a major health issue on our hands again.

Thank you.

A concerned citizen

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Times

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PROJECT HAC-SA

Petition on suspending Hac-Sa Kun lam statue surpasses 8,000 signatures

ANTHONY LAM

AN online petition calling for the withdrawal of construction at Hac-Sa Reservoir has collected over 8,600 signatures in three days.

Initiated by the Association of Synergy of Macao, the petition was on-going as of press time yesterday. Addressed directly to the Chief Executive, the petition demands suspension of the proposed inauguration of a Kun lam statue at the reservoir, retention of the barbecue stoves and grass skiing range there, as well as an explanation of the budget that soared from the initially proposed MOP230 million to MOP1.6 billion. The statue itself will cost MOP42 million.

Comparing the cost of the project with regular government social spending, the government has allocated less than MOP1 billion for fire services, public health and hygiene, as well as meteorological and geophysical services respectively, according to the Public Budget for 2023. Meanwhile, about MOP6.19 billion has been allotted for medical services. The city's civil protection system that helps protect against natural hazards has MOP36 million allocated to ensure people's safety this year.

The petition initiator, whose management involved lawmaker



Ron Lam, has been questioning the direct designation of the Kun lam statue project to a company in Guangzhou as early as in April. Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong, in response to press questions at the Jul.18 press conference announcing the project, emphasized that the statue is designed and will be sculpted

by a "nationally accredited master sculptor," which in his opinion explained the mode of tender assignment and the price tag.

The association also questioned why there was no advance public announcement on the ground-breaking or the commencement of construction. It cited members of the public as saying that half of

the grass skiing range had been damaged.

In response to the Times on the question about advance warnings, Cheong suggested that running public consultation on each municipal project would be unrealistic.

Members of the public also wondered how the statue is related to a collection of youth facilities.

Lawmaker José Pereira Coutinho also raised questions regarding the project, mainly in the areas of public funds disposal and advanced public consultations, if any.

On Jul. 21, local Macao Daily News reported that charity organization Fuhong Society of Macao supported the proposed inauguration of Kun lam statue at Hac-Sa Reservoir. The unnamed leader of the organization identified the future statue as "a new tourists' attraction that will lead cultural tourism and multilateral development."

Kai Fong Association-affiliated lawmaker Leong Hong Sai has suggested the government reconsider the relationship between the future facilities and the statue, and make delicate explanations, according to a report by local Shimin Daily published on Jul. 20. He added that some Kun lam believers hoped the government would not only inaugurate a statue there, but also build religious facilities to support the statue.

Speaking to the same publication, municipal affairs advisor Chan Pou Sam has applauded the project's "general perspective" and the government's dropping "isolated planning style," as reported on Jul. 19.

Three Kai Fong Association lawmakers, Ho Ion Sang, Ngan Iek Hang and Leong suddenly made a stand yesterday. In a statement, they cited members of the public as "expressing worries over the inauguration of a Kun lam statue and the enhancement of facilities at the reservoir." They added that the project should be reconsidered to preserve natural harmony.

Women's Federation's Wong Kit Cheng and Stanley Ma, both lawmakers, also cited public concerns to support their calls for the government to reconsider the project. They suggest the government suspend the current construction at the reservoir to "listen to more people."

Four trade unionist lawmakers have also suggested the government reconsider the project.

COMPOSITE CPI SLIGHTLY UP IN JUNE

The composite consumer price index (CPI) grew 0.8% year-on-year to 104.69 in June, according to the SAR statistics department. The latest report from the Statistics and Census Service said the increase was attributed to higher charges for eating out, rising tuition fees and wages of domestic helpers, as well as increases in hotel room rates and clothing prices. However, the rise was partially offset by lower rentals for dwellings and reduced airfares. In comparison with May, the composite CPI rose 0.11 percent in June. For the 12 months ending June 2023, the average composite CPI rose 0.93 percent from the previous period.

THUNDERBOLT OPERATION CATCHES EIGHT ILLEGAL CURRENCY EXCHANGE CASES

The anti-crime patrol of the Judiciary Police (PJ) has intercepted nine men and women from the mainland, 8 of whom were suspected of illegal currency exchange, and one who has overstayed. They have been referred to the Public Security Police for investigation. The PJ dispatched 25 criminal investigators Friday to inspect casinos in various districts and intercepted 149 people during the operation.

55 PEOPLE APPROVED FOR ASSISTIVE DEVICES FUNDING

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) has stated that 55 people have been granted funding since the implementation of the program aiming to support the purchase of assistive devices for the disabled. Hearing-impaired accounted for approximately 60% of the grants. More than 80 assistive devices were subsidized, mainly hearing aids and electric wheelchairs. According to the bureau, they will consider future development of the program based on the needs of locals.

SOCIETY DOES NOT BUY IN OVERHAUL OF HAC-SA

SOcial commentators and social media users have spoken up against the project at Hac-Sa, local media have reported.

Overhauling a natural area of such scale with extensive use of concrete may negatively impact nature and ecology, urban planner Lam Iek Chit has told local media outlet Macao Daily News.

His worries are based on the breadth and depth of the project, as he predicts that the ground at Hac-Sa will be dug deep to facilitate the project, as he believes high-rise will not be permitted in the neighborhood.

Meanwhile, he could not ascertain the scale of the architectures to be built at Hac-Sa. Expecting adventure facilities to not be too expensive, he compared public projects with similar price tag – the new Central Library designs for Nam Van and for Tap Seac – and worries that the scale of the Hac-Sa architectures will be enormous. Lam then cited the Master Urban Plan to explain his confusion. The plan – which is a law – states that Hac-Sa should be reserved for roads, plantations or parks. He wonders whether building massive structures there is prohibited under this provision.

He also was not convinced of the link between the planned MOP42-million Kun lam statue and youth

activities.

Holding similar views is lawmaker Ron Lam, who criticized the government for spending public funds without restraint, according to local newspaper Shimin Daily. He also suspected the government was using the Hac-Sa youth campsite project as a strawman for the Kun lam statue.

He raised that, during the policy question sessions at the end of last year, the government reiterated that the seven hectares of land at Hac-Sa would be used for a youth campsite. Back then, no news was released that the land area concerned would be expanded and changes made. It was only revealed by hikers who asked the lawmaker what was happening.

Then, the lawmaker questioned why the government had decided to eliminate the barbecue area and grass skiing range at Hac-Sa Reservoir – popular among the public on holidays – without public consultation.

The lawmaker demanded that the government suspend the Kun lam statue project and make further explanations to the public.

Some took to social media to complain about the project, questioning the need for three major Kun lam statues in the 33.3-square-kilometer Macau. **AL**

BOXING

PACQUIAO TO FIGHT MUAY THAI LEGEND IN USD25M BOUT IN MACAU



Two boxing legends will fight in an epic showdown in Macau as Thai promoters present “The Match of Legends: Manny Pacquiao vs Buakaw Banchamek” to be held in January next year.

The announcement was made late last week in a press conference. The match between the two legends will be fought under international boxing rules, approved by the World Boxing Council (WBC), and the winner will be awarded a ‘WBC Legend Belt’.

Pacquiao is a multiple world boxing champion who retired with a 62-8-2 record after winning 12 major titles in eight weight classes.

Buakaw has a stunning record of 240 wins; 73 of them by knockouts.

Promotor Vinij Lertratanachai revealed that the match will comprise six rounds of boxing, each round lasting three minutes, with two minute breaks in-between.

The fighters will compete at 154lbs (70kg), which is the equivalent of super welterweight in boxing, and junior middleweight in Muay Thai.

“We are privileged to have Manny ‘Pacman’ Pacquiao and Buakaw Banchamek for this momentous event. It is an opportunity of a lifetime that you won’t want to miss,” said Vinji Lertratanachai,

CEO of Fresh Air Festival, Co, who arranged this event.

Pacquiao, 44, last fought in August 2021, in a unanimous-decision loss to Yordenis Ugas. Buakaw, 41, last fought in May 2023, drawing with Rukita Anpo at Rizin 42 in Japan.

In an Instagram post, Pacquiao said, “Thank you with great respect to Vinij Lertratanachai, Fresh Air Festival. Thank you also to Buakaw Banchamek and his team. Special thank you to LOL International. Thank you to all the fans and all the media for coming out and showing your support. This is going to be an amazing fight.”

Pacquiao was in Macau for the Manny Pacquiao vs. Brandon Ríos match, billed as ‘The Clash in Cotai’ in November 2013, where he won in a unanimous decision, also winning the vacant WBO International Welterweight championship. LV

CRIME

CCAC unveils customs chief defrauded gov't over MOP130,000

STAFF REPORTER

The Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) has discovered a chief of customs station at a checkpoint allegedly colluding with his subordinates to fabricate attendance records in order to defraud the government supplementary remuneration amounting to over MOP130,000.

According to a CCAC statement, in 2022, the bureau received a report alleging that the chief of the customs station at a checkpoint copied his attendance card secretly and instructed his co-workers to punch in and out on his behalf.

Following the investigation and review of evidence, it was discovered that the chief and a few customs officers at the station had secretly made copies of work passes and were colluding with each other.

The one who first arrived at the customs station used the copies to punch in on behalf of those who had not yet arrived.

They also used the copies to punch out on behalf



of those who had already left the station to create false attendance records in the electronic attendance system of the Macao Customs Service, which would then show that they arrived and left on time.

Afterwards, the individuals, inspectors and reviewing officials even produced and submitted to relevant departments the attendance registration information, which contained their false attendance records. This concealed behaviour of relevant individuals who arrived late or left early for work, and ensured their salaries weren't affected.

During the period when the offences were allegedly committed, they successfully defrauded the government over supplementary remuneration amounting to over MOP130,000.

The case involved a customs superintendent, a customs inspector, a customs sub-inspector, a customs principal officer and three customs officers.

The seven individuals allegedly committed the offences of forgery committed by public servant, computer forgery and fraud involving a high value. The case has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office for handling.

TOURISM BUREAU TO BOOST EVENTS IN LATTER HALF OF 2023

STAFF REPORTER

The local tourism bureau has planned an array of major events and activities to take place in the latter half of 2023, officials announced in the first Plenary Meeting of the Tourism Development Committee (CDT).

Apart from the restart of the Macao International Fireworks Display Contest, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) will also organize the 10th Global Tourism Economy Forum and Light up Macao, among other events. Three subsidy programs for 2024 will be unveiled to foster community tourism development, MGTO said.

In terms of destination marketing, MGTO will continue to participate in major regional and international travel fairs, while gearing up to organize mega roadshows in Singapore and Malaysia for international marketing.

Meanwhile, Secretary for Economy and Finance and Committee Chairperson Lei Wai Nong expressed hope that the government will keep “[collaborating] with the tourism sector in innovative ways to bring new progress in



different tasks and inject impetus into tourism and economic development, drawing more visitors from around the world to Macau for travel and spending.”

During the meeting, director of the Economic Development Bureau of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, António Lei, introduced the three-year action plan for the advanced development of the cultural and tourism industries in the In-Depth Cooperation Zone. Implementation rate of goals at 86%

MGTO made public the progress of implementation of the Macau

Tourism Industry Development Master Plan in 2022, which shows that 76 out of 77 action plans have commenced with relevant tasks in progress.

Target goals are achieved for 66 action plans. The implementation rate is 86%, up by 4 percentage points from 2021, according to the bureau.

Delivered in 2017, the Master Plan formulated clear development directions and action plans in seven major areas, committed to actualizing integration across different sectors such as “tourism + e-commerce,” “tourism + sports,” “tourism + MICE” as well as culture and creativity.

TECH

Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft and other tech firms agree to AI safeguards set by the White House

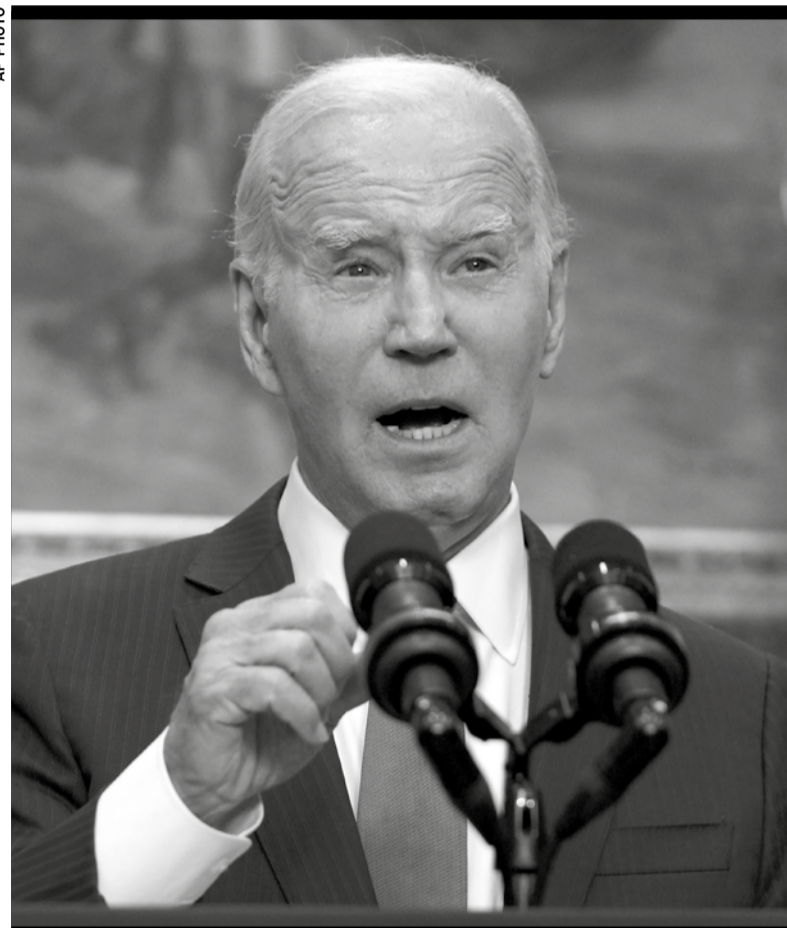
MATT O'BRIEN & ZEKE MILLER, WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT Joe Biden said Friday that new commitments by Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft and other companies that are leading the development of artificial intelligence technology to meet a set of AI safeguards brokered by his White House are an important step toward managing the "enormous" promise and risks posed by the technology.

Biden announced that his administration has secured voluntary commitments from seven U.S. companies meant to ensure that their AI products are safe before they release them. Some of the commitments call for third-party oversight of the workings of the next generation of AI systems, though they don't detail who will audit the technology or hold the companies accountable.

"We must be clear eyed and vigilant about the threats emerging technologies can pose," Biden said, adding that the companies have a "fundamental obligation" to ensure their products are safe.

"Social media has shown us the harm that powerful technology can do without the right safeguards in place," Biden added. "These commitments are a promising step, but we have a lot more work to do together."



A surge of commercial investment in generative AI tools that can write convincingly human-like text and churn out new images and other media has brought public fascination as well as concern about their ability to trick people and spread disinformation, among other dangers.

The four tech giants, along with ChatGPT-maker OpenAI

and startups Anthropic and Inflection, have committed to security testing "carried out in part by independent experts" to guard against major risks, such as to biosecurity and cybersecurity, the White House said in a statement.

That testing will also examine the potential for societal harms, such as bias and discrimination,

and more theoretical dangers about advanced AI systems that could gain control of physical systems or "self-replicate" by making copies of themselves.

The companies have also committed to methods for reporting vulnerabilities to their systems and to using digital watermarking to help distinguish between real and AI-generated images or audio known as deep-fakes.

Executives from the seven companies met behind closed doors with Biden and other officials Friday as they pledged to follow the standards.

"He was very firm and clear" that he wanted the companies to continue to be innovative, but at the same time "felt that this needed a lot of attention," Inflection CEO Mustafa Suleyman said in an interview after the White House gathering.

"It's a big deal to bring all the labs together, all the companies," said Suleyman, whose Palo Alto, California-based startup is the youngest and smallest of the firms. "This is supercompetitive and we wouldn't come together under other circumstances."

The companies will also publicly report flaws and risks in their technology, including effects on fairness and bias, according to the pledge.

The voluntary commitments are meant to be an immediate

way of addressing risks ahead of a longer-term push to get Congress to pass laws regulating the technology.

Some advocates for AI regulations said Biden's move is a start but more needs to be done to hold the companies and their products accountable.

"A closed-door deliberation with corporate actors resulting in voluntary safeguards isn't enough," said Amba Kak, executive director of the AI Now Institute. "We need a much more wide-ranging public deliberation, and that's going to bring up issues that companies almost certainly won't voluntarily commit to because it would lead to substantively different results, ones that may more directly impact their business models."

While voluntary, agreeing to submit to "red team" tests that poke at their AI systems is not an easy promise, said Suleyman.

"The commitment we've made to have red-teamers basically try to break our models, identify weaknesses and then share those methods with the other large language model developers is a pretty significant commitment," Suleyman said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has said he will introduce legislation to regulate AI and is working closely with the Biden administration "and our bipartisan colleagues" to build upon the pledges made Friday.

A number of technology executives have called for regulation, and several attended an earlier White House summit in May.

Microsoft President Brad Smith said in a blog post Friday that his company is making some commitments that go beyond the White House pledge, including support for regulation that would create a "licensing regime for highly capable models." **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Galaxy launches U-LEAD internship platform



Marking its 4th consecutive year of support for the Internship Career Experience Program organized by the Labor Affairs Bureau (DSAL) of the SAR government, this year Galaxy En-

tertainment Group (GRG) launched the U-LEAD Graduate Internship Program that incorporates new MICE opportunities on the basis of providing a broader internship platform for local high

potentials.

GEG also arranged MICE facilities' guided tours for nearly 50 lecturers and students of the "Vocational Training Program with Subsidy - 12th Edition of MICE Assistant Training Course" that was jointly organized by DSAL and the School of Liberal Arts of Macau University of Science and Technology, according to a statement issued by the gaming operator.

Recently, GEG organized U-LEAD Open Day and Career Day for fresh graduates from local tertiary education institutions to enhance their interests and knowledge of the MICE industry.

Nova Mall collaborates with local artist to present art installations



In the theme of igniting happiness through vibrant arts and creativities, Nova Mall is collaborating with

local artist, Nono Leong, to present the Dopamine Garden. Located in the Atrium, the

Dopamine Garden features colorful dopamine-themed art installations and photo spots.

Paul Lee, general manager of NOVA Mall, said "this summer, Nova Mall creates a series of Dopamine Garden workshops for every customer to immerse oneself in the world of joyful arts. These workshops inspire customers especially children to unleash their creativity and imagination to produce unique vibrant artworks."

Until August 3, Nova Mall is also launching Dopamine Shopping Privileges, giving out various Dopamine Garden Workshop Experiences and shopping vouchers.

US navy secretary says Australian multination military exercise demonstrates unity to China

ROD MCGUIRK, CANBERRA

U.S. Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said Friday that the major multination military training exercise launched in Australia sends a message to China that America's allies are cooperating to defend their security and democratic values.

Talisman Sabre began in 2005 as a biennial joint exercise between the United States and Australia but has expanded this year to 13 nations and more than 30,000 military personnel.

Del Toro and his Australian counterpart, Richard Marles, welcomed ever-closer bilateral military ties as they launched the exercise at a Sydney naval base.

Del Toro said land, sea and air military platforms are becoming increasingly complicated and allies need to exercise together to be able to operate as a single task force.

"The most important message that China can take from this exercise and anything that our allies and partners do together is that we are extremely tied by the core values that exist among our many nations together," Del Toro told reporters.



"We are prepared to actually operate together in defense of our national security interests and in defense of the core values that we all share," he added.

Marles said more than 800 military vehicles will cross a single mobile wharf to be deployed at the Queensland state coastal town of Bowen during the two-

week exercise.

"It's going to be the most significant logistics exercise that we will see between Australia and the United States in Australia since the Second World War," Marles said.

"All of this is actually building muscle memory between our two countries' defense forces, is build-

ing comfort and familiarity and obviously not just between Australia and the United States but the other 11 countries that will be participating," Marles added.

Del Toro and Marles were upbeat about progress on the so-called AUKUS deal under which the United States and Britain will provide Australia with a fleet of

submarines powered by U.S. nuclear technology.

The closer military relationship will be underscored on Saturday when USS Canberra is commissioned in Sydney. The Independence-variant littoral combat ship, built by Australian manufacturer Austal, will become the first U.S. warship to be commissioned in a foreign port.

The original USS Canberra was a cruiser launched in 1943 named after the Australian cruiser HMAS Canberra that was torpedoed by the Japanese in 1942 with a loss of 193 lives while supporting U.S. Marines landings on the Solomon Islands. The Australian warship was named for the Australian capital.

The Solomons are again a security concern for the United States and its allies over recent security agreements the South Pacific nation has signed with Beijing.

Chinese spy ships have been shadowing Talisman Sabre exercises since 2017.

Australian Army Lt. Gen. Greg Bilton said a Chinese spy ship had been contacted in the Coral Sea off Australia's northeast coast on Thursday and was expected to move into the exercise area.

"They've done this for a number of years. We're well prepared for it," Bilton said.

Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Britain, Canada and Germany are taking part in this year's exercise that ends on Aug. 4. The Philippines, Singapore and Thailand are attending the exercise as observers. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

Court to decide whether to ban broadcast and distribution of protest song



Police officers stand guard outside the High Court ahead of the hearing for an injunction to ban the 2019 protest song "Glory to Hong Kong" in Hong Kong, Friday

KANIS LEUNG,
HONG KONG

AHong Kong court will hand down a closely-watched decision over whether to ban the broadcast and distribution of "Glory to Hong Kong," a protest song after the government asked it to do so in the name of national security.

The song was written during the 2019 protests and its lyrics call for democracy and liberty. But it has been mistakenly played at several international sporting events instead of China's national anthem, "March of the Volunteers." The decision is expected next Friday.

Critics worry a ban will further shrink the city's freedom of expression.

Last month, the government sought an injunction to target anyone who uses the song to advocate for the separation of Hong Kong from China. It also wanted to prohibit actions that use the song to incite others to commit secession and to insult the national anthem, including such acts carried out online.

During a hearing Friday, Judge Anthony Chan heard arguments surrounding the potential ban, including the utility of the order, before reserving his judgement until next week.

Benjamin Yu, a lawyer who represented the go-

vernment, highlighted the national security risks the song could trigger and suggested an order in favor of the government would make a material difference.

He pointed to the effectiveness of the injunction orders handed down to prevent protesters to disrupt the operations of the airport and railway network at the height of the 2019 movement.

But lawyer Abraham Chan, who provided arguments to assist the court but not representing anyone in the case, said the national security law already existed, questioning why a civil order would work more effectively. Imposing the ban could be poten-

tially counter-productive, he added.

The Hong Kong Journalists Association last week said the government agreed not to cover any lawful journalistic activities in relation to the song under its proposed ban after accepting the association's suggestion.

The Hong Kong government has tried to push Google to display China's national anthem as the top result in searches for the city's anthem — instead of the song — but to no avail.

Google told the government to present a court order proving the song violated local laws before it could be removed, according to Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry Sun Dong. The government therefore decided to deal with the matter by legal means, he said in an interview with a local broadcaster. Google did not immediately reply to a request for comment. **MDT/AP**

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka may allow Indian rupee to be used in local transactions

BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI,
COLOMBO

SRI Lanka is considering the possibility of allowing the use of the Indian rupee for local transactions, as the island nation struggles to build its depleted foreign reserves and to emerge from last year's unprecedented economic crisis.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said Saturday the move to allow the use of its giant neighbor's currency would enable "tourists and other people from India to directly use Indian rupees here" without going through the hassle of multiple currency conversions.

Sri Lanka imports plenty of items from India — its largest trading partner — including food, pharmaceuticals, construction materials, automobiles, fertilizers and chemicals. Trade between the two nations stood at \$5.45 billion in 2021, according to official figures.

Sabry said accepting the Indian rupee would work as an advantage for Sri Lanka as the trade imbalance between the two countries is in favor of India.

"We need more Indian currency, so more Indian people coming here and spending Indian currency is good for us," Sabry told reporters a day after visiting India with Sri Lankan president Ranil Wickremesinghe.

During the visit, India and Sri Lanka signed a series of energy, development and trade agreements, signalling growing economic ties between the neighboring countries.

Relations between the two countries surged last year when Sri Lanka was mired in its worst economic crisis in modern history, triggered by a severe foreign currency crunch that saw essential items run out and citizens queue for fuel for days. It also suspended its repayment of foreign debt last year.

India provided critical financial and humanitarian assistance worth over \$4 billion to its neighbor, including food, medicine and fuel.

India was also the first creditor to extend a letter of support towards Sri Lanka's debt restructuring efforts that helped kickstart support from the IMF, which approved a \$3 billion bailout package in March.

AP PHOTO



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomes Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe before their delegation level meeting in New Delhi, India, Friday

the Indian Ocean has long attracted attention from regional rivals India and China. For years, free-flowing loans and infrastructure investments from Beijing helped it gain an upper hand against New Delhi in the quest for influence.

Sri Lanka's total debt has exceeded \$83 billion, of which \$41.5 billion is foreign and \$42.1 billion is domestic. Sri Lanka has now started the process of restructuring its debt.

Sri Lanka's strategic location in

the Indian Ocean has long attracted attention from regional rivals India and China. For years, free-flowing loans and infrastructure investments from Beijing helped it gain an upper hand against New Delhi in the quest for influence.

But the country's economic collapse gave New Delhi an opportunity to swing the pendulum back in its favor, especially as China delayed its support for debt restructuring, experts say. China owns about 10% of Sri Lanka's foreign debt. **MDT/AP**

CAMBODIA

HUN SEN SET TO WIN BY LANDSLIDE IN ELECTIONS WITH OPPOSITION SUPPRESSED AND CRITICS PURGED

SOPHENG CHEANG
& DAVID RISING,
PHNOM PENH

LONGTIME Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen cast his ballot 10 minutes after polls opened at 7 a.m. yesterday, in an election in which his party is all but assured a landslide victory thanks to the effective suppression and intimidation of any real opposition that critics say has made a farce of democracy in the Southeast Asian nation.

The European Union, United States and other Western countries refused to send observers, saying the election lacked the conditions to be considered free and fair. That left international officials from Russia, China and Guinea-Bissau to watch as Hun Sen voted at a polling station in his home district outside of the capital, Phnom Penh.

The longest-serving

AP PHOTO



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, right, of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) shows off his inked finger, standing next to his wife Bun Rany, left, yesterday

leader in Asia, Hun Sen has steadily consolidated power with his strong-arm tactics over the last 38 years. But, at age 70, he has suggested he will hand off the premiership during the upcoming five-year term to his oldest son, Hun Manet, perhaps as early as the first month after the elections.

Hun Manet, 45, has a bachelor's degree from the U.S. Military Academy

at West Point as well as a master's from NYU and a Ph.D. from Bristol University in Britain. He is currently chief of Cambodia's army.

Despite his Western education, however, observers don't expect any immediate shifts in policy from that of his father, who has steadily drawn Cambodia closer to China in recent years. **MDT/AP**

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PUTIN'S WAR

Latest Russian strike on Ukraine's Odesa leaves 1 dead, many hurt and a cathedral badly damaged

HANNA ARHIROVA, ODESA

RUSSIA struck the Ukrainian Black Sea city of Odesa again yesterday, local officials said, keeping up a barrage of attacks that has damaged critical port infrastructure in southern Ukraine in the past week. At least one person was killed and 22 others wounded in the attack in the early hours.

Regional Governor Oleh Kiper said that four children were among those wounded in the blasts, which severely damaged the historic Transfiguration Cathedral, a landmark Orthodox cathedral in the city.

Russia has been launching persistent attacks on Odesa, a key hub for exporting grain, since Moscow canceled a landmark grain deal on Monday amid Kyiv's grinding efforts to retake its occupied territories.

Kiper noted that six residential buildings, including apartment buildings, were destroyed by the strikes.

In one such case in downtown Odesa, some people became trapped in their apartments as a result of the damage caused by the attack, which left rubble strewn in the street and partly blocking the road, and damage to power lines.

Svitlana Molcharova, 85, was rescued by emergency



AP PHOTO

service workers. But after she received first medical aid, she refused to leave her destroyed apartment.

"I will stay here," she said to the emergency service worker who advised her to leave.

"I woke up when the ceiling started to fall on me. I rushed into the corridor," said Ivan Kovalenko, 19, another resident of the building. He came to Odesa having fled the city of Mykolaiv in search of a safer place to live after his house was destroyed.

"That's how I lost my home in Mykolaiv, and here, I lost my rented apartment."

In his home, the ceiling partially collapsed, the balcony came off the side of the building, and all the windows were blown out.

The Transfiguration Cathedral, one of the most important and largest Orthodox Cathedrals in Odesa, was se-

verely damaged.

"The destruction is enormous, half of the cathedral is now roofless," said Archdeacon Andrii Palchuk, as cathedral workers brought documents and valuable items out of the severely building, the floor of which was inundated with water used by firefighters to extinguish the fire.

Palchuk said the damage was caused by a direct hit from a Russian missile that penetrated the building down to the basement and caused significant damage. Two people who were inside at the time of the strike were wounded.

"But with God's help, we will restore it," he said, bursting into tears.

Odesa's historic center was designated an endangered World Heritage Site by the United Nations' cultural agency, UNESCO, earlier this year, despite Russian

opposition.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday that Russian forces had attacked sites in Odesa, "where terrorist acts against the Russian Federation were being prepared."

The ministry said in a statement that the strikes were carried out with sea- and air-based long-range high-precision weapons, and that there are "foreign mercenaries" at the targeted sites.

In a later statement, the ministry denied that its attacks had struck the Transfiguration Cathedral, claiming that the destruction of the cathedral was likely due to "the fall of a Ukrainian anti-aircraft guided missile."

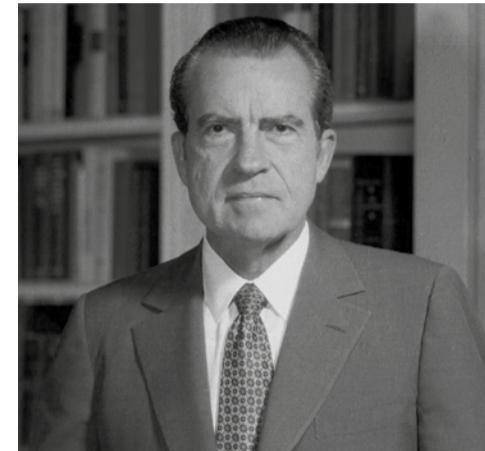
Earlier Russian attacks this week crippled significant parts of export facilities in Odesa and nearby Chornomorsk and destroyed 60,000 tons of grain, according to Ukraine's Agriculture Ministry.

The attacks come days after President Vladimir Putin pulled Russia out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, a wartime deal that enabled Ukraine's exports to reach many countries facing the threat of hunger.

Putin vowed to retaliate against Kyiv for an attack Monday on the crucial Kerch Bridge linking Russia with the Crimean Peninsula, which the Kremlin illegally annexed in 2014. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1974 NIXON 'MUST HAND OVER WATERGATE TAPES'



The United States Supreme Court has ordered President Nixon to surrender tape recordings of White House conversations about the Watergate affair.

Giving the judgement to a packed and hushed courtroom, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger said the court rejected Mr Nixon's claims of executive privilege.

Instead, he said they "must yield to the demonstrated, specific need for evidence in a pending criminal trial".

The president said he was "disappointed" by the decision, but would comply with the ruling.

The White House has already released edited transcripts of the tapes, which cover 64 conversations made between June 1972 and April of this year.

But President Nixon has until now refused to comply with a court order awarded to Leon Jaworski, the special prosecutor in the Watergate investigation, requiring him to produce the tapes themselves.

Mr Jaworski alleges the tapes implicate the president himself in covering up a break-in at the Watergate hotel headquarters of the Democratic National Committee during the election campaign in 1972.

The burglars were caught rifling through confidential papers and bugging the office of President Nixon's political opponents.

The tapes will now be available for use as evidence in the trial of some of the president's closest aides, due to take place in September.

It is likely to take several weeks to produce transcripts of the tapes, so they will not be available in time to be used during the House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee debate on impeachment, which began this evening.

However, the timing of the Supreme Court decision just hours before the debate began, as well as the fact that all eight judges voted unanimously, is likely to have a strong influence on the impeachment process.

If the committee decides to recommend impeaching the president, the matter goes to the full House for debate.

If the House agrees, President Nixon could face an impeachment trial before the Senate - the first such trial in over a century.

Courtesy BBC News

ISRAEL

NETANYAHU RECOVERS FROM A HEART PROCEDURE WHILE HIS JUDICIAL OVERHAUL PLAN MOVES FORWARD

TIA GOLDENBERG, TEL AVIV

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was recovering in a hospital yesterday after an emergency heart procedure while opposition to his government's contentious judicial overhaul plan reached a fever pitch and unrest gripped the country.

Netanyahu's doctors said yesterday the heart pacemaker implantation went smoothly and that Ne-

tanyahu, 73, felt fine. According to his office, he was expected to be discharged later in the day. But tensions were surging as lawmakers began a marathon debate over the first major piece of the overhaul, ahead of a vote in parliament enshrining it into law on Monday.

Mass protests were set to continue. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets across Israel on Saturday night, while thousands

marched into Jerusalem and camped out near the Knesset, or parliament, ahead of Monday's vote.

Netanyahu's sudden hospitalization added another dizzying twist to an already dramatic series of events that are certain to shape Israel's future. It comes as the longest-serving Israeli leader faces the gravest challenge of his leadership and the country's worst domestic crisis which has shaken the economy,

forged cracks in the country's military and tested the delicate social fabric that holds the polarized country together.

Lawmakers began their debate despite the hospitalization. In a fiery speech launching the session, Simcha Rothman, a main driver of the overhaul, denounced the courts, saying they damaged Israel's democratic fundamentals by arbitrarily striking down government decisions. **MDT/AP**

IN CONTEXT

When the tapes were finally released, more than 18 minutes of a crucial meeting were found to be missing.

The official explanation was that the president's secretary had accidentally erased it by pressing the wrong foot-pedal while answering the phone.

On 27 July, the House Judiciary Committee voted to recommend that the president be impeached and removed from office.

But before the House debate on his impeachment could begin, President Nixon resigned.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 This will not be the day to lend money to friends or family. You may have difficulties finishing projects you start. You'll communicate easily and develop new friendships.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
 Organize all the responsibilities that have to be attended to and make sure everyone knows what to do. You may find it necessary to confront a situation that has gotten out of hand.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
 You can't lose today unless you get involved in gossip or overwork to the point of exhaustion. You may find it impossible to get the rest you require.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 You may have been too agreeable to someone who just wanted to use you. You can take advantage of opportunities if you are quick to make a move.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 You can make professional decisions today that will affect your position. You will be in the mood to socialize. You can't always have your own way.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Real estate should be lucrative for you. Uncertainties about your living arrangements may be unnerving. Do not let in-laws upset you.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You could lose a good friend because of it. Residential moves are evident. Relationships will become stronger. You can get a lot done if you get your hands on the right equipment.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Be aware that a female you work with may be trying to hold you back. Think hard before going into business with friends or family. You have a lot to offer.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Mingle with those who can further your goals. Your relationship appears to be stressed out and depleted. Speak of your future goals, intentions, and commitments.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Luck is with you. You can easily impress others with your generous nature. Cultural activities open your eyes to new ways of doing things.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Minor accidents could occur if you don't take precautions. Partnerships may be plentiful. Travel will also be very informative.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Unexpected changes in friendships could occur. One sided attractions are likely. You can't lose today unless you get involved in gossip or overwork to the point of exhaustion.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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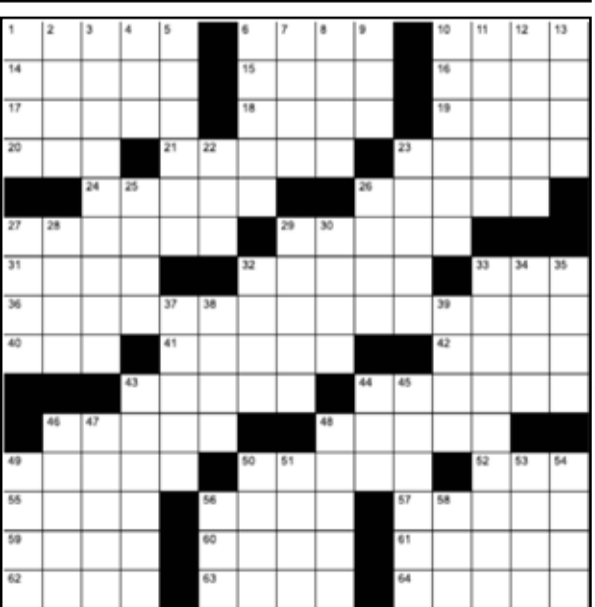
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	24	33	rain
Changchun	20	27	cloudy
Chengdu	24	28	rain
Chongqing	27	36	rain
Fuzhou	26	33	cloudy
Guangzhou	26	36	fine
Guiyang	21	29	cloudy
Haikou	26	31	cloudy
Hangzhou	25	32	thunderstorms
Harbin	19	24	thunderstorms
Hefei	25	34	cloudy
Nanjing	26	34	cloudy
Shanghai	26	33	rain
Taipei	26	31	overcast
Wuhan	26	36	fine
Hong Kong	29	32	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	12	21	showers
Frankfurt	14	25	rain
Paris	14	24	rain
London	12	19	rain
New York	21	30	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Aristotle's A; 6- Jolts; 10- Poet Teasdale; 14- Newbies; 15- Inter ___; 16- Dutch cheese; 17- First letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 18- Off-the-wall; 19- Harangue; 20- Yr's end; 21- Seeped; 23- Repairs; 24- Ahead of time; 26- Big house; 27- Washed lightly; 29- Old; 31- Savvy about; 32- Braid; 33- Short mo.; 36- Make a trade?; 40- Alway; 41- Trials; 42- Goes astray; 43- ___ Amore; 44- Attacks; 46- Body of salt water; 48- Rupture; 49- Luster; 50- Strong string; 52- Yo!; 55- Tombstone lawman; 56- Weed whackers; 57- Category; 59- Corner; 60- Black-and-white cookie; 61- Rigid; 62- Freelancer's encl.; 63- ___ Crunch; 64- Passover meal;

DOWN 1- Somewhat; 2- Singer Lovett; 3- Cantor; 4- Short flight; 5- On solid ground; 6- Fancy; 7- Winglike parts; 8- Peel; 9- For example; 10- Tranquil; 11- Hersey's bell town; 12- Abbreviated time off; 13- Tsp. and tbsp.; 22- Ancient; 23- Mediterranean island; 25- Starting from; 26- Chief; 27- Thick cord; 28- As to; 29- Narrow openings; 30- New Mexico art colony; 32- Hey, over here!; 33- Directly; 34- Book before Nehemiah; 35- Of the highest quality; 37- One of the Allens; 38- Actor Conner; 39- Permits; 43- Home on the range; 44- Sky light; 45- Builds; 46- Butler's love; 47- Roman name of Demeter; 48- North American buffalo; 49- Hardens; 50- When said three times, a 1970 war movie; 51- Read 'em and ___!; 53- "___ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto); 54- Belgian river; 56- Ad follower; 58- Shelter;



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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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

13-year-old Aussie skaters win gold medals at the X Games, and a 10-year-old Canadian claims silver

GREG BEACHAM, VENTURA

A pair of 13-year-old Australian skateboarding prodigies won their first gold medals at the X Games on Saturday, and a 10-year-old Canadian became the youngest medalist in the action sports event's history.

Chloe Covell won the women's street competition a few hours before Arisa Trew claimed the women's vert title at the coastal Ventura County Fairgrounds. Trew had to land the first 720 by a woman in X Games competition to hold off 10-year-old Reese Nelson, who claimed silver to become the youngest medalist in the X Games' 29 years of history.

Covell became the youngest winner in the X Games' street skating discipline by beating a strong field including Olympic gold medalist Momiji Nishiya of Japan and Brazilian star Leticia Bufoni.



Arisa Trew

Covell already won a bronze medal in Chiba, Japan, and a silver medal in California last year in the X Games, becoming the youngest

skater with two podium finishes in the competition's history.

After another year of growth and improvement, she won gold

in Ventura with an impressive final run that included a heel flip down a flight of stairs and a 50-50 kickflip.

Both Covell and Trew are from Australia's Gold Coast region.

Nelson, who is from Calgary, captured the attention of Tony Hawk when she skated in an event with the world's most famous vert skater earlier this summer in Salt Lake City. Hawk, who is on the X Games' broadcast team, has since become a mentor and supporter of Nelson.

Trew also appeared in that event in Utah, where she landed the first 720 in competition by a woman. With women's vert skating now back in the X Games after a 13-year hiatus, Trew repeated the feat in California to win gold.

Brazilian skater Gui Khury is still the youngest gold medalist in X Games history after winning the men's best vert trick competition at 12 years old in 2021.

Covell started skating at 6 years old after seeing American star Nyjah Huston while she watched the X Games on television with her father, Luke, a former professional rugby player. She has shot to the top of the sport in the past two years, putting her in prime position to earn a spot in the Paris Olympics next year.

Japan's Liz Akama won silver in women's street in Ventura, and Nishiya took bronze after falling early in her final run.

U.S. Olympian Jagger Eaton won the men's street competition at the X Games. MDT/AP

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Paediatrics : Dr. Zhang Zhiqin

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Plastic & Aesthetic Surgery : Dr. Lam U Lin

Orthopaedic Surgery & Sports Medicine : Dr. Lam Kun Kuan

ENT : Dr. Cheng Zheng Ang

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General Medicine : Dr. Ng Kam Hong, Dr. Lam Weng Chio

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**AS 52 YEARS AGO,
 VISION AND ACTION
 REQUIRED FOR
 BREAKTHROUGH
 IN ICE-LOCKED
 RELATIONS**

Meeting with former United States secretary of state Henry Kissinger in Beijing on Thursday, Chinese President Xi Jinping said that 52 years ago when the world was at a critical juncture, Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai, US President Richard Nixon and Kissinger himself, had made the right decision to initiate the normalization of China-US ties.

It was a momentous and courageous decision that has not only benefited the two countries but also changed the world. Looking back on the more than half a century of meaningful, reciprocal interaction between the two countries since then, China and the US should draw inspiration from that breaking of the ice.

Kissinger has visited China more than 100 times over the past 52 years, and is widely perceived in China to be an old friend of the Chinese people who has made historic contributions to the development of Sino-US relations. The Joe Biden administration should take a leaf out of his book.

Kissinger's informal visit coincides with an official visit to Beijing by Biden's top climate envoy John Kerry. Kerry is the third senior Biden administration official to travel to China in a month following US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. Such an intensive series of high-profile visits are indicative of the two sides' mutual desire for contacts and communication.

Yet, given the current fragile nature of China-US relations, contacts and communication are not enough on their own to bolster ties. Although Washington has supposedly changed its approach from "decoupling" to "de-risking," it continues to suppress China on many fronts, including economic and geopolitical.

Prior to Kerry's visit, the White House was reportedly planning further restrictions on US investments in China. And the US has never ceased making provocative moves to pressure Beijing on its core interests, such as the Taiwan question. As such, no matter how many envoys Washington sends to Beijing, unless it changes its ways, there can be no substantial or sustained upturn in relations.

The US should cast aside the delusion that it can exert strategic and economic pressure on China at will while counting on China's cooperation on issues of Washington's choosing. To arrest the deterioration in their relations, both sides need to make concrete efforts to build trust and translate goodwill into deeds.

China and the United States are once more at a crossroad, and both sides must once again make a choice, Xi told Kissinger. The choices they make will be of profound significance, not only for the two countries, but for the world.

THE 1975 CANCELS ITS SHOWS IN JAKARTA AND TAIPEI AFTER BAND'S SAME-SEX KISS CONTROVERSY

THE BUZZ

British pop rock band The 1975 announced yesterday it was canceling its shows in Jakarta and Taipei after the Malaysian government cut short a music festival in the wake of the band's lead singer slamming the country's anti-gay laws and kissing a male bandmate during their performance.

The 1975 was scheduled to have a performance at We The Fest, Indonesia's annual summer music festival, in Jakarta last night, part of their 2023 Asia tour.

"The 1975 regret to announce that their forthcoming shows in Jakarta and Taipei will no longer be going ahead as planned," the

group said in a statement posted on We The Fest's social media platforms yesterday.

They added that the decision was not made lightly "but unfortunately due to the current circumstances, it is impossible to proceed with the current shows."

Matt Healey, the lead vocal of The 1975, used profanity in his speech criticizing the government's stance against homosexuality, before kissing bass player Ross MacDonald. Footage of the incident was posted on social media and sparked a backlash in predominantly Muslim Malaysia.



AP PHOTO

DENMARK

PROTESTERS TRY TO STORM BAGHDAD'S GREEN ZONE OVER THE BURNING OF QURAN AND IRAQI FLAG

ALI JABAR & JARI TANNER, BAGHDAD

Tensions flared again in Iraq on Saturday over a series of recent protests in Europe involving the desecration of the Quran, Islam's holy book, which sparked a debate over the balance between freedom of speech and religious sensitivities.

Hundreds of protesters attempted to storm Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone that houses foreign embassies and the seat of Iraq's government early on Saturday, following reports that an ultranationalist group burned a copy of the Quran in front of the Iraqi Embassy in the Danish capital, Copenhagen, the previous day.

The protest came two days after people angered by the planned burning of the Islamic holy book in Sweden stormed the Swedish Embassy in Baghdad.

Security forces on Saturday pushed back the protesters, who blocked the Jumhuriya bridge leading to the Green Zone, preventing them from reaching the Danish Embassy.

Elsewhere in Iraq, pro-

testers burned three caravans belonging to a demining project run by the Danish Refugee Council in the city of Basra in the south, local police said in a statement. The fire was extinguished by civil defense responders, and there were "no human casualties, only material losses," the statement said.

The council confirmed in an emailed statement to The Associated Press that its premises in Basra "came under armed attack" early Saturday.

"We deplore this attack — aid workers should never be a target of violence," Lulu Thapa, the Danish Refugee Council's executive director for the Middle East, said.

Iraq's prime minister has cut diplomatic ties with Sweden in protest over the desecration of the Quran in that country.

An Iraqi asylum-seeker who burned a copy of the Quran during a demonstration last month in Stockholm had threatened to do the same thing again on Thursday but ultimately stopped short of setting fire to the book.

The man — an Iraqi of

Christian origin living in Stockholm, now a self-described atheist — did, however, kick and step on it, and did the same with an Iraqi flag and a photo of influential Iraqi Shiite cleric and political leader Muqtada al-Sadr and of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The right to hold public demonstrations is protected by the constitution in Sweden, and blasphemy laws were abandoned in the 1970s. Police generally give permission based on whether they believe a public gathering can be held without major disruptions or safety risks.

On Friday afternoon, thousands protested peacefully in Iraq and other Muslim-majority countries.

In Iran, the powerful Revolutionary Guard's chief, Gen. Hossein Salami, said that "we do not allow those who insult the Quran to be safe", the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported Saturday.

Muslims "will decree a severe punishment for the perpetrators of these crimes," he continued.

MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

Greece Some 19,000 people have been evacuated from the Greek island of Rhodes as wildfires continued burning for a sixth day on three fronts, Greek authorities said yesterday. The Ministry of Climate Change and Civil Protection said it was "the largest evacuation from a wildfire in the country." Local police said that 16,000 were evacuated by land and 3,000 by sea.



AP PHOTO

Spain Voters went to the polls yesterday in a general election that could make the country the latest European Union member to swing to the political right. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called the early election after his Spanish Socialist Workers Party and its far-left partner, Unidas Podemos, took a severe beating in local and regional elections in May. Sánchez has been premier since 2018.

Canada Four people are missing after intense thunderstorms dumped record amounts of rain across a wide swath of Canada's Atlantic-coast province of Nova Scotia over the past two days, causing flash flooding, road washouts and power outages. The floods submerged multiple vehicles, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police spokeswoman Cindy Bayers said two such incidents in West Hants north of Halifax have left two adults and two children unaccounted for as of Saturday morning.

Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signed a decree last week tightening restrictions on civilian access to guns in Brazil, in a move aimed at reversing the pro-firearms policies of his right-wing predecessor Jair Bolsonaro. The decree reduces the number of guns civilians can possess for personal safety from four to two, reduces the allowed ammunition for each gun from 200 rounds to 50 and requires documentation proving the need to hold the weapons.