



A MAN AND TWO WOMEN HAVE BEEN APPREHENDED FOR DRUG DEALING AND ILLICIT SEX-RELATED ACTIVITIES, THE JUDICIARY POLICE REPORTED

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AT LEAST 20 DEAD, 27 MISSING IN FLOODS SURROUNDING BEIJING, THOUSANDS EVACUATED

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AP PHOTO



Myanmar's military-led government has reduced the prison sentences of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a clemency connected to a religious holiday in the Buddhist-majority country, state media said yesterday. Former President Win Myint also had his sentence reduced as part of the clemency granted to more than 7,000 prisoners.

AP PHOTO



Indonesia suspended live cattle import from four Australian facilities after finding 13 live cattle infected with lumpy skin disease, or LSD, officials said yesterday. LSD, a highly contagious disease found in cattle that causes blisters and reduces milk production, was found in imported live cattle from four of 60 Australian facilities allowed to export to Indonesia.

AP PHOTO



Australia's central bank yesterday left its benchmark interest rate on hold at 4.1% for a second consecutive month raising expectations that rates might have reached their peak or are close to plateauing in the current cycle. The Reserve Bank of Australia has hiked the cash rate 12 times from a record-low of 0.1% in May last year — as the board has attempted to rein in inflation — to a target range between 2% and 3%.

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In the heat of the first post-pandemic summer, casino revenues reach new high

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GAMING

CASINO REVENUES HOT POST-PANDEMIC HIGH

LYNZY VALLES

THE city's gross gaming revenue (GGR) continued to strengthen in July, returning to about 68% of pre-pandemic levels, hitting a post-pandemic high.

Data from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau shows that revenues last

month increased MOP16.7 billion, a surge of over 4,000%, albeit from a low base as casinos shut for almost two weeks in July last year.

Despite setting a post-pandemic record, July's revenue total fell well short of the MOP24.45 billion reported in July of 2019.

However, the result topped

the median analyst estimate of a 3,922% increase, and is the highest monthly taking since January 2020.

The first seven months of 2023 saw gaming operators make revenues of MOP96.80 billion, an increase of 263% year-on-year, but just 56% of the MOP173.96 billion reported across the same period in

2019 before the pandemic.

The figures suggest that the city can accumulate MOP130 billion for this year, a figure initially forecasted by the government.

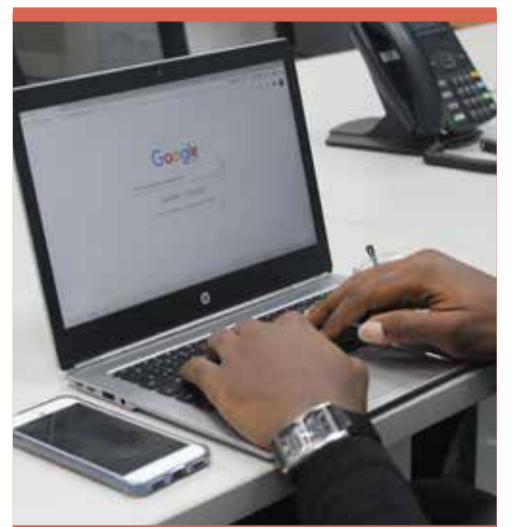
Early July, the tourism bureau stated that the hotel occupancy rate reached 89%, with hotel operators making 100% of their rooms available as issues with labor shortages are resolved.

A Bloomberg survey of estimates from six brokerages shows that gaming revenue for the full year is likely to return to 62% of the pre-Covid level.

Gambling income generated from the mass tourist market, the most important indicator of casino profits, is expected to reach almost 90% of pre-Covid levels this year, the survey indicates, as cited in a Bloomberg report.

Meanwhile, a note from JP Morgan Securities (Asia Pacific) Ltd. stated that premium mass GGR have probably recovered to "100% plus" of pre-pandemic levels.

In a note, the analysts said that the July GGR "suggests mass GGR recovered to 92 to 93% of pre-Covid levels, versus 87 to 88% in the second quarter.



LAWMAKER QUESTIONS INTERNET FREEDOM IN MACAU NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD

RENATO MARQUES

CONCERNS over access to the internet in Macau New Neighbourhood in the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin have led lawmaker Leong Hong Sai to present a spoken inquiry to the government.

In the inquiry, the directly elected lawmaker with links to the Macau General Union of Neighborhood Associations said that the Chief Executive (CE) has promised the people that if they moved to the new neighborhood across the border, they would get similar living conditions and freedoms as those they enjoy in Macau, a promise that he now says, seems difficult to fulfill.

According to the lawmaker and citing a response to an inquiry he made to the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau, the only way the residents of Macau can have access to open internet services without the restrictions enforced in the mainland is by subscribing to a mobile service that includes roaming for three areas (Macau, Hong Kong, and mainland China) and that is restricted to mobile phone networks, without the possibility of a fiberoptic service to homes under the same conditions.

"Macau residents have had a different internet and communication model for a long time, likely, an internet service similar to the one existing in Macau will not be implemented," he said, recalling that, in 2021, the CE stated that "residents of the Cooperation Zone were going to be protected in the use of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, without 'VPN' (Virtual Private Network)."

Leong also listed several mobile communication applications commonly used in Macau such as WhatsApp, LINE, SNAPCHAT, Telegram and Twitter, that would be available for the residents in Macau who decide to move to the Cooperation Zone.

GAMING

Fitch revises LVS outlook to positive on strong Macau rebound

FITCH Ratings has affirmed Las Vegas Sands 'BB+' rating and revised its outlook to positive from negative as it reflects "the strong rebound in the Macau market and outperformance in Singapore compared with pre-pandemic levels."

In a statement, Fitch said that the pace of recent growth in Macau bodes well for LVS, "which is uniquely positioned for the return of the mass market, particularly the premium mass market, given its quantity and quality of gaming positions, hotel rooms, restaurants and entertainment facilities."

Assuming trends continue, Fitch believes LVS is positioned to move back to invest-



ment grade ratings.

The rating also reflects the potential for weakness in the China economy and regulatory changes as well as an in-

creasingly competitive environment in Macau from new openings and expanded facilities, according to the report.

The rating agency also in-

ghlighted the city's visitation and gaming trends that have improved during the first half of 2023, noting that the second quarter is typically the seasonal slowest of the year, so the strong visitation levels during the recent quarter should be a positive indicator for the remainder of the year.

Meanwhile, Fitch expects consolidated free cash flow to turn positive in 2023 and continue to remain strong, as both the Singapore and Macau markets revert to pre-pandemic levels.

"This could be offset by future unannounced projects (including New York) and resumption of dividends out of Sands China," the ratings agency added. LV

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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Advertisement advertising@macaudailytimes.com
For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd



Islands Hospital: Budget and utility to residents continue to concern lawmakers

RENATO MARQUES

THE bill that will govern the operations of the new Islands Medical Complex, expected to start operating late this year, was approved in its final reading at the Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday.

The operations budget of the medical institution and eligibility criteria for local residents to access the medical services of the mega-facility built in Cotai continue to top the concerns of the lawmakers who inquired numerous times on the matter.

In response, the Secretary for

Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, continues to reaffirm the same information provided earlier, noting the three levels of medical service existing in Macau, from free health care to fully private.

Ao Ieong expressed hopes that with the entry into operation of this new unit, said to possess many medical specialty services, there will be less need for the Health Bureau and the Conde de São Januário Medical Center to forward patients to be treated for special medical conditions abroad. Still, she said that this system will continue.

Several lawmakers continue

to question the budget for the operation of the hospital as well as its relation to the fees to be charged for medical assistance.

On the topic, Ao Ieong said that there is not yet an operational budget as this will take into account many factors related to the staff and many other aspects, but that it is a matter that is being addressed by the authorities together with the entity that will be in charge of the facility – the Peking Union Medical College.

She noted that the system of public-private partnership chosen for the operation of the facility implies that the medical

center needs to have more income than expenditure to be able to accumulate profits to be used “for development purposes.” She noted that the service fees will have a “reasonable price.”

Responding to several inquiries on the topic, the Secretary said that service fees from public and private hospitals in Macau, as well as in the neighboring regions are being considered when producing the final price list of the medical center and will be announced as soon as possible.

Although the government has said over the past few years that work on the preparation and staff training for the new hospital were being done, the Secretary said yesterday that the government might not be able to recruit the approximately 400 staff initially proposed, stating that some services might be affected due to the lack of available manpower.

Nonetheless, the Secretary once again reaffirmed the role of the new facility as a training provider to local medical staff, stating that the institution will take care of the training of interns and specialists as soon as possible. The same will not happen for undergraduates, she explained, emphasizing that the medical center is a specialized hospital and not a university hospital.

NEW FINANCIAL SYSTEM LEGAL REGIME APPROVED

LEGISLATIVE Assembly (AL) lawmakers have completed their final reading of the bill that will establish some new rules regarding the operation and procedures of financial institutions.

The bill did not generate much discussion with most of the lawmakers only calling on the government to ensure that, while licensing the financial institutions, the institutions can guarantee a good and safe service to the population.

At the plenary to respond to questions from lawmakers on the topic, the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, said that the degree of efficiency of local

administration institutions can affect investors' participation in the local market. But he said that a license application for the providing of financial services involves many factors and requirements that the government needs to be cautious about. His response came on the topic of the existing bureaucracy which, in many cases, takes a long time to respond to applications, which in turn causes disinterest amongst investors.

The new regime commences Nov. 1 and will mostly affect the operation of some of the online-payment providers such as Macau Pass. **RM**

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' WAGE FALLS SLIGHTLY

The average daily wage of construction workers decreased by 0.8% quarter-to-quarter to MOP786 in the second quarter of 2023. The average daily wage of local workers (MOP995) rose by 0.6%, while that of non-resident workers (MOP696) dropped by 0.6%, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). After discounting the effect of inflation, the real wage index of construction workers (95.9) in the second quarter went down by 0.8% quarter-to-quarter, with that of local construction workers (98.6) decreasing by 0.3%.

GOV'T CALLS FOR ARTS FESTIVAL PROPOSALS

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is now inviting all registered local art and cultural associations and individuals to submit proposals for local programs and new commissions by Aug. 28 for the 34th Macao Arts Festival (MAF). The call is also open to new works (not re-run productions) that have never been performed publicly in Macau. The festival welcomes all performing genres, such as theater, Cantonese Opera, dance, children's shows and multimedia performing arts, amongst others. Priority will be given to works integrating electronic or digital technology and to those to be staged at Macao World Heritage sites.

FIRST CROSS-BORDER COMMISSIONED PRODUCTION OF DRUG FOR SALE

Recently, Far Reaching Medicated Oil, a drug which Macao-based Macau-Union Pharmaceutical Limited commissioned Hengqin-based Guangdong-Macao Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd. to manufacture, has completed production in Hengqin. This drug is to be sold in Macau. Based on the General Plan for Construction of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin issued in September 2021, TCM, food and health care products, which are approved and registered in Macau and produced in Hengqin, are allowed to use labels featuring “Supervised in Macau” or “Designed in Macau.”

ASEAN-CHINA RMB2.1B ECONOMIC COOPERATION DEALS INKED

Seven economic cooperation projects worth 12.1 billion yuan between the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and ASEAN countries were recently signed in the southern Chinese metropolis of Shenzhen. The signing was completed during the 2023 ASEAN-China Greater Bay Economic Cooperation (Qianhai) Forum that ran from July 29 to 30, which covered industrial park construction, digital economy and agricultural cooperation. The Greater Bay Area-ASEAN International Chamber of Commerce Alliance and the China-ASEAN Think Tank Partnership were established at the forum. The forum also resulted in an initiative concerning a closer Greater Bay Area-ASEAN economic partnership.

CRIME

THREE APPREHENDED FOR DRUG DEALING AND SEX WORK

ANTHONY LAM

A man and two women have been apprehended for drug dealing and conducting sex work respectively, the Judiciary Police (PJ) has disclosed.

All from the Chinese mainland, the women, 37 and 42, are sisters and have been overstaying in Macau since March 2020 and two months ago respectively, the police added. The man is 42 years of age.

The police disclosed that they were investigating a sex worker case involving illicit narcotics, in which members of a syndicate allegedly transport drugs to Macau for sale. The police later discovered the man's connection with the case.

In an afternoon over the last weekend, the man entered Macau through the Border Gate checkpoint and checked in to a hotel in the Northern district. While keeping an eye on the man, the police observed the man and the younger sister leaving the hotel. Intercepting them, the police



found three small packs of methamphetamine, 1.9 grams, as well as a methamphetamine pill. Searching their room, the police found and seized 21.72 grams of

methamphetamine and a name-sake pill. Drug handling and consumption tools were also found. Searching the ZAPE apartment the younger sister had

rented, the police found the elder sister as well as more narcotics handling and consumption tools. Later, the man admitted to

taking the drugs to Macau from mainland China to deliver to the younger sister, who purchased the drugs for MOP2,000 per pack. He also admitted to having consumed drugs in the hotel room.

The younger sister admitted to taking drugs with her sex service clients for HKD12,500 per five hours. She has provided such services five times. Only the younger sister had positive results on a drug test.

The apartment, meanwhile, was suspected of being used as an illegal hostel. The police found five other tenants, among them a Burmese man on overstay status and a mainland man allegedly conducting illegal currency exchange.

Restaurateur allegedly burgles a rooftop apartment

A mainland restaurateur allegedly burgled a rooftop apartment near the Mount Fortress and took property valued at MOP1,400. The suspect, 50, has denied committing the crime.

The PJ was notified of the burglary at 2 a.m. Sunday. The victim declared losing a backpack and some other property. Investigations showed that the burglar had entered the apartment through a window at about 1 a.m. the same day. The PJ believed the suspect was involved and arrested him in a hotel in the ZAPE district.

TOURISM

MGTO tightens links with Indonesia, Malaysia

ANTHONY LAM

THE Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has increased efforts to attract tourists from Indonesia and Malaysia, the bureau said yesterday in a statement.

In the first six months of this year, Indonesian tourists were ranked fifth on Macau's overall source market table and second on the non-Greater China table.

According to the statement, the bureau has invited Indonesian tourism industry representatives to visit Macau. Nineteen people from the industry visited Macau between July 25 and 29. The bureau has taken them to the Macau Grand Prix Museum, a sightseeing tour bus ride, familiarization tours in hotels and resorts, as well as food tasting. The Indonesian tourism industry was allowed to obtain first-hand experience of the city's Tourism+ elements, the bureau emphasized.

A matching session of 60



people was held between the Indonesian and the Macau tourism industries.

At the end of this month, the MGTO will lead a delegation to Indonesia's Jakarta to participate in the ASTINDO Travel Fair. There, the bureau will promote Macau and expects to see over 28,000 consumer-participants. It added that the fair will be a good opportunity for business matching as there will be several tourism destinations and

tourism stakeholders participating.

The bureau has also promoted Macau to Malaysian consumers and tourists, with participation in the MITM Travel Fair held in the country between July 28 and 30.

At the fair, the bureau featured a variety of tourism products, including but not limited to Greater Bay Area regional tours. There was also a promotional session reserved for Macau.

GUANGDONG, SARS ANNOUNCE BOUTIQUE REGIONAL TOURS

A cultural and tourism promotion session held recently has announced 10 itineraries of boutique regional tours covering Guangdong Province, Hong Kong and Macau.

These new itineraries were the fruits of a meeting in June connecting the tourism authorities from the three jurisdictions. The meeting, meanwhile, marked the 83rd of its kind.

The new batch of 10 regional boutique tour itineraries have a variety of goals, including cultural and historical

tours, world heritage tours, study and exchange tours, maritime silk road exploration tours, technological innovation tours, island tours, countryside tours, healthcare tours, leisure and food tours, as well as root-seeking tours.

In the technological innovation tour, for example, tourists will be taken to experience the VR product at the Ruins of St Paul's, the Macau Grand Prix Museum, the Macao Science Center, the teamLab exhibition, among other attrac-

tions.

In the next phase, the Guangdong Department of Culture and Tourism will push travel agencies to launch corresponding products for the market, so as to continue to strengthen the promotion of cultural tourism resources in the Greater Bay Area in summer, further explore the characteristics of various regions, increase the popularity of the cities, highlight the charm of the Area, as well as drive cultural tourism consumption. AL



AI Chatbots 'hallucination' problem may not be fixable

MATT O'BRIEN

SPEND enough time with ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence chatbots and it doesn't take long for them to spout falsehoods.

Described as hallucination, confabulation or just plain making things up, it's now a problem for every business, organization and high school student trying to get a generative AI system to compose documents and get work done. Some are using it on tasks with the potential for high-stakes consequences, from psychotherapy to researching and writing legal briefs.

"I don't think that there's any model today that that doesn't suffer from some hallucination," said Daniela Amodei, co-founder and president of Anthropic, maker of the chatbot Claude 2.

"They're really just sort of designed to predict the next word," Amodei said. "And so there will be some rate at which the model does that inaccurately."

Anthropic, ChatGPT-maker OpenAI and other major developers of AI systems known as large language models say they're working to make them more truthful.

How long that will take — and whether they will ever be good enough to, say, safely dole out medical advice — remains to be seen.

"This isn't fixable," said Emily Bender, a linguistics professor and director of the University of Washington's Computational Linguistics Laboratory. "It's inherent



in the mismatch between the technology and the proposed use cases."

A lot is riding on the reliability of generative AI technology. The McKinsey Global Institute projects it will add the equivalent of \$2.6 trillion to \$4.4 trillion to the global economy. Chatbots are only one part of that frenzy, which also includes technology that can generate new images, video, music and computer code. Nearly all of the tools include some language component.

Google is already pitching a news-writing AI product to news organizations, for which accuracy is paramount. The Associated Press is also exploring use of the technology as part of a partnership with OpenAI, which is paying to use part of AP's text archive to

improve its AI systems.

In partnership with India's hotel management institutes, computer scientist Ganesh Bagler has been working for years to get AI systems, including a ChatGPT precursor, to invent recipes for South Asian cuisines, such as novel versions of rice-based biryani. A single "hallucinated" ingredient could be the difference between a tasty and inedible meal.

When Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, visited India in June, the professor at the Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology Delhi had some pointed questions.

"I guess hallucinations in ChatGPT are still acceptable, but when a recipe comes out hallucinating, it becomes a serious problem," Bagler said, standing up in a crowd

at a campus auditorium to address Altman on the New Delhi stop of the U.S. tech executive's world tour.

"What's your take on it?" Bagler eventually asked.

Altman expressed optimism, if not an outright commitment.

"I think we will get the hallucination problem to a much, much better place," Altman said. "I think it will take us a year and a half, two years. Something like that. But at that point we won't still talk about these. There's a balance between creativity and perfect accuracy, and the model will need to learn when you want one or the other."

But for some experts who have studied the technology, such as University of Washington linguist Emily Bender, those improvements won't be enough.

Bender describes a language model as a system for "modeling the likelihood of different strings of word forms," given some written data it's been trained upon.

It's how spell checkers are able to detect when you've typed the wrong word. It also helps power automatic translation and transcription services, "smoothing the output to look more like typical text in the target language," Bender said. Many people rely on a version of this technology whenever they use the "autocomplete" feature when composing text messages or emails.

The latest crop of chatbots such as ChatGPT, Claude 2 or Google's Bard try to take that to the next level, by generating entire new passages of text, but Bender said they're still just repeatedly selecting the most plausible next word in a string.

When used to generate text, language models "are designed to make things up. That's all they do," Bender said. They are good at mimicking forms of writing, such as legal contracts, television scripts or sonnets.

"But since they only ever make things up, when the text they have extruded happens to be interpretable as something we deem correct, that is by chance," Bender said. "Even if they can be tuned to be right more of the time, they will still have failure modes — and likely the failures will be in the cases where it's harder for a person reading the text to notice, because they are more obscure."

Those errors are not a huge problem for the marketing firms that have been turning to Jasper AI for help writing pitches, said the company's president, Shane Orlick.

"Hallucinations are actually an added bonus," Orlick said. "We have customers all the time that tell us how it came up with ideas — how Jasper created takes on stories or angles that they would have never thought of themselves." **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Galaxy presents first immersive 'BE@RBRICK Art Exhibition'



Galaxy Entertainment Group is presenting "BE@RBRICK MACAU - World's First Immersive BE@RBRICK Art Exhibition" as part of the city's Art Macao: Macao International Art Biennale 2023.

More than 10 international and local artists and designers were invited to bring these large-scale art installations to life in GEG's property, and to create the world's first BE@RBRICK exhibition that combines elements of technology and digital art.

This Special Exhibition also includes a series of

extended events, including the "Power of Art - Contemporary Art & Fashion: A Driving Force of the Cultural Industry Development" Art Forum and a number of art workshops that aim to "facilitate arts and cultural exchange, and the development of the local arts and cultural sector," as cited in a statement issued by the gaming operator.

The exhibits of the Special Exhibition are presented in multiple contexts at various locations in Galaxy Macau, including the GalaxyArt, Pearl Lobby and Outdoor Lawn.

The exhibits include a

number of art installations by internationally renowned Japanese artist Tatsuhiko Akashi and a group of artists and designers, such as the world debut of BE@RBRICK digital art, the world's first and tallest MY FIRST BE@RBRICK BABY 10000% inflatable art installation, the BE@RBRICK art collection created by Macau artist, MCZ_Thomas and other local artists with Galaxy Macau as inspiration, as well as more than 50 BE@RBRICK art pieces from past BE@RBRICK MACAU exhibitions.

The exhibition is open to the public for free at Galaxy Macau until September 22.

RAINSTORM

At least 20 dead and 27 missing in floods surrounding Beijing, thousands evacuated



A traditional gate is seen inundated by flood waters in the Miaofengshan area on the outskirts of Beijing, yesterday

DAYS of unusually heavy rains around China's capital, Beijing, have flooded houses, torn apart roads and left at least 20 people dead and 27 missing, state media reported yesterday.

The flooding prompted authorities to close train stations and evacuate people in vulnerable areas to school gyms. Cars were washed away and piled into stacks by the rushing waters.

The level of rainfall is rarely seen in Beijing, which generally enjoys moderate, dry summers but has experienced record-breaking extended days of high temperatures this summer. Flooding in other parts of northern China that rarely see such large amounts of rain have led to scores of deaths.

Seasonal flooding hits large parts of China every summer, particularly in the semitropical south, while some northern regions this year have reported the worst

floods in 50 years.

Indicating the level of urgency, President Xi Jinping issued an order for local governments to go "all out" to rescue those trapped and minimize the loss of life and damage to property.

State media reported that 11 people died and 27 are missing in the mountains to the west of Beijing's city center. Nine other deaths were reported in Hebei province, just outside the metropolis and the source of much of its food and labor.

More than 500,000 people have been impacted by the floods, state broadcaster CCTV said, without saying how many had been moved to other locations.

In early July, at least 15 people were killed by floods in the southwestern region of Chongqing, and about 5,590 people in the far northwestern province of Liaoning had to be evacuated. In the central province of Hubei, rainstorms trapped residents in their vehicles and homes.

China's deadliest and most destructive floods in recent history were in 1998, when 4,150 people died, most of them along the Yangtze River.

In 2021, more than 300 people died in flooding in the central province of Henan. Record rainfall inundated the provincial capital of Zhengzhou on July 20 that year, turning streets into rushing rivers and flooding at least part of a subway line. **MDT/AP**

Beijing has invested \$25.4B in Pakistan over the last decade, Chinese vice premier says

MUNIR AHMED,
ISLAMABAD

CHINA has invested \$25.4 billion in Pakistan over the past decade for projects ranging from roads to power plants, China's vice premier said yesterday [Macau time], as the two countries celebrated the 10th anniversary of the so-called Belt and Road Initiative.

The initiative, also called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor program, is China's global endeavor to reconstitute the ancient Silk Road trade routes and link China to all corners of Asia.

In Pakistan, the CPEC has been billed as an opportunity to bring new prosperity to the South Asian nation. Since 2013, thousands of Chinese construction workers and engineers have been working in this impoverished Islamic nation as part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's initiative.



Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (left) greets Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, in the Prime Minister house in Islamabad

However, work on some projects has since slowed down or been briefly suspended for multiple reasons, including a 2021 mili-

tant attack in which 13 Chinese workers were killed by a suicide bomber targeting a bus carrying them in the northwest.

In his televised remarks, Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng said Pakistan's southwestern town of Gwadar was once just a fishing

town but because of the construction of a deep-water port there by China it has become a city and hub for regional connections.

He said because of the completion of several CPEC-related projects, Pakistanis were now facing fewer power outages and hoped that Pakistanis "will create a better future with their own hands" in the years to come.

His comments came days after China rolled over a \$2.4 billion loan for Pakistan in a move aimed at helping the country overcome a serious economic crisis. China recently played a key role in helping Pakistan avoid a default on a debt payment.

Loans from Beijing to Pakistan have continued pouring in since December, when the International Monetary Fund delayed the revival of a bailout for Islamabad until June,

when a breakthrough came following talks between the International Monetary Fund and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The IMF deposited the first installment of \$1.2 billion in Pakistan's central bank earlier this month.

Sharif, in the presence of the Chinese vice premier at a gathering, said he wouldn't forget the recent Chinese financial help, which came at a very crucial time. Since coming to power in April 2022, Sharif has blamed alleged corruption under former Prime Minister Imran Khan for Pakistan's economic downturn.

He said Pakistan will "emulate the Chinese model" of hard work to overcome one of the worst economic crises his country has faced in recent months. Sharif also said he wanted to see an end to relying on foreign loans.

"We have to move away from these borrowed loans and handouts, and have to stand on our feet to show to the world that our people are great, energetic, and capable of facing difficult challenges," he said. **MDT/AP**

AUSTRALIA

Prime minister stands firm against the US on Assange prosecution

ROD MCGUIRK, CANBERRA

AUSTRALIAN Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said yesterday his government stands firm against the United States over the prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, an Australian citizen fighting extradition from Britain on U.S. espionage charges.

Albanese's center-left Labor Party government has been arguing since winning the 2022 elections that the United States should end its pursuit of the 52-year-old, who has spent four years in a London prison fighting extradition.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken pushed back against the Australian position during a visit Saturday, saying Assange was accused of "very serious criminal conduct" in publishing a trove of classified U.S. documents more than a decade ago.

"I understand the concerns and views of Australians. I think it's very important that our friends here understand our concerns about this matter," Blinken told



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese

reporters.

Yesterday, Albanese said, "This has gone on for too long. Enough is enough."

He told reporters that Blinken's public comments echoed points made by President Joe Biden's administration during private discussions with Australian government officials.

"We remain very firm in our view and our representations to the American government and we will continue to do so," Albanese added.

Assange, whose freedom is widely seen as a test of Australia's leverage with the Biden administration, was discussed in annual bilateral meetings Brisbane, Aus-

tralia, last week between Blinken and Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong.

Wong told reporters Saturday that Australia wanted the charges "brought to a conclusion." Australia remains ambiguous about whether the U.S. should drop the prosecution or strike a plea deal.

Assange faces 17 charges of

espionage and one charge of computer misuse over WikiLeaks' publication of hundreds of thousands of classified diplomatic and military documents in 2010. American prosecutors allege he helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

Australia argues there is a disconnect between the U.S. treatment of Assange and Manning. Then-U.S. President Barack Obama commuted Manning's 35-year sentence to seven years, which allowed her release in 2017.

Assange has been in high-security Belmarsh Prison since he was arrested in 2019 for skipping bail during a separate legal battle. Before that, he spent seven years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault. Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in 2019 because so much time had passed.

Last week, Assange's brother, Gabriel Shipton, called for Australia to increase pressure on the United States.

"Each day the U.S. administration ignores the Australian public on Julian's freedom, it becomes clearer and clearer Australia's true standing in the alliance," Shipton said, referring to a bilateral security treaty signed in 1951. MDT/AP

JAPAN

POWERFUL TYPHOON LASHES ISLANDS, GROUNDING FLIGHTS AND CLOSING BUSINESSES

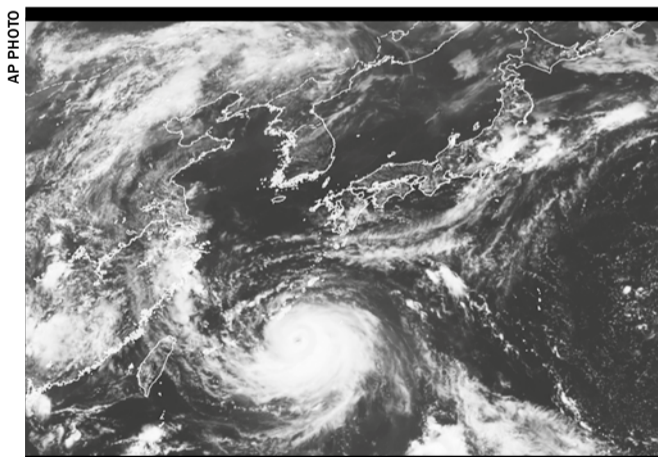
A powerful typhoon Khanun was approaching Japan's southwestern island of Okinawa yesterday, lashing the region with strong winds and high waves, and forcing transportation to halt and stores to close.

The slow-moving Khanun, which means jackfruit in Thai, was heading northwest at speeds of 20 kph yesterday morning, packing surface winds of up to 162 kph. It was at sea southeast of Okinawa's main island, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

The city office in the Okinawan prefectural capital of Naha was closed due to violent winds, while supermarket chains were also shut or operating under shorter hours.

Footage on NHK national television showed fallen trees on the street in Naha. No injuries were reported.

Hundreds of flights into



and out of the Naha airport, including a more than a dozen international flights connecting Seoul, Hong Kong, Taipei and Shanghai, were canceled, according to the airport. Public transportation on Okinawa, including buses and light rail transit systems in Naha, and ferries connecting Okinawa and nearby islands, were suspended.

The typhoon will keep moving west and away from the main Japanese archipe-

lago after passing by Okinawa, when it is expected to bring rainstorms and waves as high as 12 meters to the region, the agency said.

Up to 18 centimeters of rainfall are expected in the Okinawa region within the next 24 hours, the meteorological agency said.

Officials warned residents of violent winds and high waves, as well as flooding, and urged them to stay indoors and away from windows. MDT/AP

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Urology : Dr. Lo Kwong Yin Richard, Dr. Zhao Yun Qiao

Paediatric Surgery : Dr. Yeung Chung Kwong

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ANALYSIS

Buildup of American forces in Persian Gulf a new signal of worsening US-Iran conflict

JON GAMBRELL, DUBAI

THOUSANDS of Marines backed by advanced U.S. fighter jets and warships are slowly building up a presence in the Persian Gulf. It's a sign that while America's wars in the region may be finished, its conflict with Iran over its advancing nuclear program continues to worsen, with no solutions in sight.

The dispatch of the troop-and-aircraft-carrying USS Bataan to the Gulf, alongside stealth F-35 fighters and other warplanes, comes as America wants to focus on China and Russia.

But Washington is seeing once again that while it's easy to get into the Middle East militarily, it's difficult to ever get fully out — particularly as Iran now enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels after the collapse of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

There is no sign that diplomacy will revive the deal soon, and Iran in recent weeks has resumed harassing and seizing ships trying to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Some 20% of the world's oil passes through the narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the wider world.

For hard-liners in Tehran's theocracy, the move projects power to surrounding nations as part of a wave of assaults attributed to Iran since 2019. It also serves as a warning to the U.S. and its allies that the Islamic Republic has the means to retaliate, particularly as American sanctions result in the seizure of ships carrying Iranian crude oil. Worries over another seizure likely has left a ship allegedly carrying Iranian oil stranded off Texas as no company has yet to unload it.

For the U.S., keeping the Strait of Hormuz open to shipping remains a priority to ensure global energy prices don't spike, particularly as Russia's war on Ukraine pressures markets.



AP PHOTO

Gulf Arab nations need the waterway to get their oil to market and worry about Iran's intentions in the wider region.

Those fears have cemented the longtime American presence in the Persian Gulf. In the two decades that followed the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, there were at times two different American aircraft carriers patrolling the Gulf to provide fighter jets for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and later for the battle against the Islamic State group.

But slowly, the Pentagon began to wind down the naval presence, leaving a gap of months that brought gasps from Gulf Arab states and commentators worried about Iran. The USS Nimitz sailed out of the Strait of Hormuz in November 2020 as the last American carrier in the Persian Gulf. The last Marine expeditionary unit — an armada carrying Marines, aircraft and vehicles prepared for an amphibious assault — came through in November 2021.

Washington's worries have changed since then. Russia's war on Ukraine shifted some of the American focus back to Europe. China continues its push to control more of the South China Sea, and the U.S. Navy has responded with

increased patrols.

In recent months, the U.S. military has again begun dialing up its Mideast presence. It conducted a Strait of Hormuz patrol with the top U.S., British and French naval commanders in the region on board. In late March, A-10 Thunderbolt II warplanes arrived at Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates. The Pentagon ordered F-16 fighters, as well as the destroyer USS Thomas Hudner, to the region. Stealth F-35A Lightning II fighter jets arrived last week.

Now, America will have part of a Marine expeditionary unit in the region for the first time in nearly two years. The deployment of thousands of Marines and sailors consists of both the USS Bataan and the USS Carter Hall, a landing ship.

Those vessels left Norfolk, Virginia, on July 10 on a mission the Pentagon described as being "in response to recent attempts by Iran to threaten the free flow of commerce in the Strait of Hormuz and its surrounding waters." The Bataan passed through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea last week on its way to the Mideast.

While the U.S. military hasn't discussed precisely what it will be doing with

the increased presence in the region, the movements have gotten Iran's attention. In recent days, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian called his counterparts in both Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates to say that "we can have peace, stability and progress in the region without the presence of foreigners."

Iran's army chief, Gen. Abdollah Mousavi, said the U.S. deployment would bring only "insecurity and damage" to the region.

"For years, Americans have been in and out of the region with pipe dreams, but the security of the region will only endure with the participation of the regional nations," Mousavi said, according to Iranian state television.

Iran also made a point to again show off its Abu Mahdi cruise missile, first unveiled in 2020, which could be used to target ships at sea up to 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) away. The missile is named after Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a veteran Iraqi militant who was killed in a 2020 U.S. drone strike in Baghdad alongside Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

All that raises the risk of conflict, though previous recent buildups of U.S. forces in the region haven't resulted in open warfare. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1984 EURO COURT CONDEMNS PHONE-TAPPING



A Surrey businessman who accused the police of illegally tapping his phone is celebrating after a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights.

James Malone, a former antiques dealer from Dorking in Surrey, claims that while he was on trial for handling stolen goods in 1977, the police intercepted his telephone calls and his post.

In 1979, Mr Malone, who was acquitted on all charges, unsuccessfully tried to sue the Metropolitan Police in the High Court but the court said it had no jurisdiction in the matter.

Following a six-year campaign, Mr Malone's case was finally referred to the European Courts in May last year and a panel of 18 judges ruled today that the UK government was in breach of the European Convention.

Mr Malone was delighted by the decision although he is not convinced the practice will stop.

He said: "I am very pleased but I think that all that will happen is that the police or the government will not be caught with their trousers down again."

"Any safe-guard they bring in will just be to ensure that no-one will catch them doing it."

The British government has been told by the European Court to change its 'obscure' regulations.

Ministers had argued that post and telephone interceptions were justified in the interests of crime prevention and it was not necessary to incorporate regulations into the law.

Up to now, police have been allowed to carry out up to 400 phone-taps and 100 mail interceptions a year with authorisation from the home secretary.

There are also fears that the introduction of new electronic telephone exchanges will make the practice of phone-tapping even easier.

Campaigners have now called for new legislation which would require a judge to authorise all phone-taps.

The Home Office confirmed tonight the regulations will be revised and legislation will be introduced to take into account the European Court's judgement.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

In 1985 the government introduced the Interception of Communications Act which allowed the police and security services to tap phone lines or intercept paper mail, after obtaining a warrant from the Home Secretary (or the First Minister in Scotland), the Foreign Secretary, or the Northern Ireland Secretary.

But the boom in electronic communications made the situation extremely complex because the law failed to take into account methods of communication such as email, texting and pager messages. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (RIP) Act, which came into force in July 2000, aimed to stop criminals using the internet by giving police the power to intercept computer traffic.

But the law was criticised by civil liberties campaigners who said the 'ordinary' user's privacy was under threat.

The debate continues.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Your lack of responsibility and attention has been a key issue in your relationship. Your mate will enjoy helping out. You will want to take off and have some recreation.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Abrupt action will cause difficulties with relatives. Competitive games will be your forte. Help an older member with a problem that faces them.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You can make major decisions regarding your professional direction. Don't expect new acquaintances to be completely honest about themselves.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
You will meet new romantic partners through the company you keep. Older family members may try to make demands that are impossible for you to handle.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
It might be time to pick up the slack and do your share. Things may not be as harmonious as you would like with colleagues or employers today. Show what a dedicated person you can be.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
You could find yourself having problems with coworkers and employers. Your social activity should be conducive to finding love. Take time to make physical improvements that will enhance your appearance.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Travel and creative hobbies will be your best outlet. You can make personal changes that will enhance your appearance and bring about greater social activity.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You won't have much time for your mate today. Renovations to your domestic scene will pay high rewards. Put your thoughts into action.

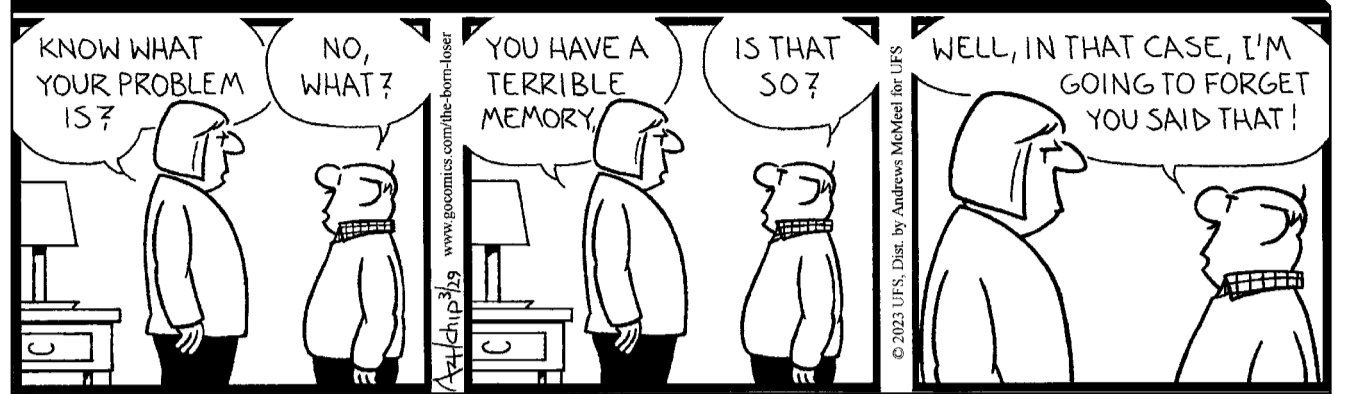
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Protect your interests legally if necessary. Make sure to arrange in advance to spend quality time together. Don't back down but don't ignite the situation.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
You're eager to learn. Make changes in your domestic scene. Try not to donate to organizations if you can hardly afford to take care of yourself.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Expect to experience a sudden reversal of fortune. Problems on the home front might be a little disconcerting. You will attract potential lovers, but be sure that they're unattached.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Try not to jump to conclusions. You can make new friends by taking part in social events involving colleagues. Don't let someone try to bully you into doing things their way.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

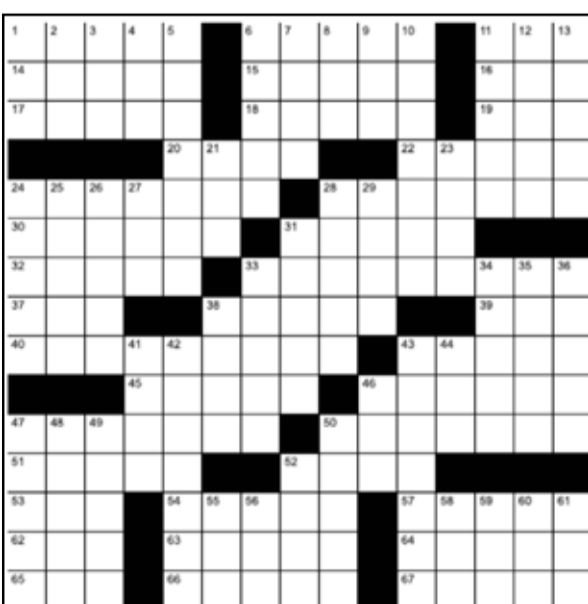
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	25	32	thunderstorms
Changchun	23	27	rain
Chengdu	23	31	showers
Chongqing	26	33	rain
Fuzhou	26	34	overcast
Guangzhou	27	34	cloudy
Guiyang	21	26	showers
Haikou	25	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	26	33	thunderstorms
Harbin	23	27	rain
Hefei	25	34	cloudy
Nanjing	25	34	cloudy
Shanghai	27	33	overcast
Taipei	26	29	rain
Wuhan	26	35	fine
Hong Kong	28	32	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	17	27	thunderstorms
Frankfurt	15	21	rain
Paris	16	23	rain
London	14	18	rain
New York	19	28	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Logic; 6- Fights; 11- Old cloth; 14- Until now; 15- Honda model; 16- Narcissist's problem; 17- Hanger-on; 18- Last letter of the Greek alphabet; 19- Actress Joanne; 20- Caucus state; 22- Purchaser; 24- Amusing; 28- Engender; 30- Incarnation; 31- Spirited horse; 32- Bottom line; 33- Pertaining to the thyroid or adrenal, e.g.; 37- They loop the Loop; 38- Holmes's creator; 39- Wan Kenobi was a character in "Star Wars"; 40- Toward Antarctica; 43- Celtic priest; 45- Shabby; 46- Home on the range; 47- Rashly; 50- See; 51- High times?; 52- Ornamental fabric; 53- Broadcast; 54- External; 57- Stiff bristles; 62- Acid; 63- Skill; 64- Trail; 65- Caustic stuff; 66- Young purrer; 67- Brown;

DOWN 1- Gal of song; 2- Language ending; 3- TV's "Science Guy"; 4- Dry, as wine; 5- In the right; 6- Frown; 7- Fine cotton; 8- Maria; 9- Semi; 10- Healed over, like a scrape; 11- Color anew; 12- Come to a consensus; 13- Melon, e.g.; 21- Dinghy thingy; 23- Official language of Pakistan; 24- Actress Phoebe; 25- Convex molding; 26- Island in the East China Sea; 27- Give rest; 28- San Marino surround; 29- Panamanian baby; 31- With cunning; 33- Small canyon; 34- Jeweler's magnifier; 35- Irish Rose; 36- Travels on; 38- Fender ding; 41- Counterfeiter catcher; 42- Cushion for kneeling; 43- Hates intensely; 44- Cartoon Chihuahua; 46- Personal quirk; 47- Total; 48- Blasting; 49- Swarm; 50- Witchlike; 52- Remaining; 55- Paranormalist Geller; 56- Rat-a-; 58- Diamond stat; 59- 19th letter of the Greek alphabet; 60- Perform; 61- Scratch (out);



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

HISTORY

THE CRIMEAN PENINSULA IS BOTH A PLAYGROUND AND A BATTLEGROUND, COVETED BY UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

DASHA LITVINOVA, TALLINN

ITS balmy beaches have been vacation spots for Russian czars and Soviet general secretaries. It has hosted history-shaking meetings of world leaders and boasts a strategic naval base. And it has been the site of ethnic persecutions, forced deportations and political repression.

Now, as Russia's war in Ukraine enters its 18th month, the Crimean Peninsula is again both a playground and a battleground, with drone attacks and bombs seeking to dislodge Moscow's hold on the territory and bring it back under Kyiv's authority, no matter how loudly the Kremlin proclaims its ownership.

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed to retake the diamond-shaped peninsula that Russia's Vladimir Putin illegally annexed in 2014.

For both presidents, backing off Crimea is hardly an option.

Moscow deployed troops and weapons there, allowing Russian forces to quickly seize large parts of southern Ukraine when the war began in 2022. Kyiv says the militarization of Crimea threatens all countries in the Black Sea region.

'CRIMEA IS OURS!'

Putin's annexation in 2014 was quick and bloodless. While Ukraine was still grappling with the aftermath of the uprising that forced pro-Moscow President Victor Yanukovich from office, men in military uniforms without insignia took control of Crimea.

They helped orchestrate a referendum on the peninsula, and pro-Kremlin authorities said the results showed an almost unanimous desire of its residents to become part of Russia.

Putin's popularity soared. His approval ratings, which had been declining, soared from 65% in January of that year to 86% in June, according to the Levada Center, an independent Russian pollster.

"Krym nash!" — or "Crimea is ours!" — became a rallying cry in Russia. But only a handful of countries, such as North Korea and Sudan, recognized the move.

Putin has called Crimea "a sacred place," and has prosecuted those who publicly argue it is part of Ukraine. Zelenskyy has repeatedly said that "Russia won't be able to steal" the peninsula.

A STRATEGIC ASSET

Crimea's unique position in the Black Sea makes it a strategically important asset for whoever con-

AP PHOTO



trols it, and Russia has spent centuries fighting for it.

Crimea was home to Turkic-speaking Tatars when the Russian empire first annexed it in the 18th century. It briefly regained independence as a Tatar republic two centuries later before becoming swallowed by the Soviet Union.

In 1944, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin deported nearly 200,000 Tatars, or about a third of Crimea's population, to Central Asia, 3,200 kilometers to the east. Stalin had accused them of collaborating with Nazi Germany — a claim widely dismissed by historians. An estimated half of them died in the next 18 months of hunger and harsh conditions.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev transferred it to Ukraine in 1954 to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the unification of Moscow and Kyiv. But that symbolic move backfired in 1991 when the USSR collapsed and the peninsula became part of newly independent Ukraine.

"For the majority of Russians, as well as for the Russian political elite, Crimea has always been perceived as given to Ukraine unfairly. Crimea has always been perceived as Russian," Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center,

told The Associated Press.

Russia kept a foot in the door, however: Its Black Sea Fleet had a base in the city of Sevastopol, and Crimea — as part of Ukraine — continued to host it.

The base was of major military value to Moscow, and that was likely a key factor for the Kremlin's decision to annex the peninsula in 2014, according to Graeme Robertson of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

"Sevastopol really matters for the Russian fleet and for access to the Mediterranean, and for Russia to be a power that's able to close the Black Sea and exercise control over Ukraine's economic viability and political viability," Robertson said in an interview. "I think that is, at the end of the day, why the annexation took place."

Repressions against the Crimean Tatars continued under Putin, despite Moscow's denials of discrimination. They strongly opposed the annexation, and an estimated 30,000 of them fled the peninsula between 2014 and 2021.

Some who stayed faced a relentless crackdown, who reject accusations of discrimination but nevertheless have banned the Tatars' main representative body and some religious groups. About

80 Tatars have been convicted in the crackdown, Amnesty International reported in 2021, and 15 activists have gone missing.

CRIMEA'S EMOTIONAL VALUE

Beyond its strategic value, Crimea has a special resonance for Russians — "an emotional and almost sort of quasi-religious kind of thing," said Sam Greene, a professor of Russian politics at King's College London.

Some of it may be based on its history.

Sevastopol was a preferred holiday destination for Nicholas II, the last Russian czar, and his family. The southern town of Yalta was the prime holiday destination during Soviet times, with many sanatoriums built in and around it. It drew worldwide attention when Stalin, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met there in 1945 to discuss the fate of Germany and Europe after World War II.

Foros, another resort town near Sevastopol, held the state dachas of Soviet leaders. President Mikhail Gorbachev was vacationing there in 1991 when hard-liners opposed to his rule put him under house arrest during a failed coup d'etat.

When Greene and Robertson conducted a survey of Russians both before and after Putin seized Crimea in 2014, they noted a change in the respondents' demeanor.

"All of a sudden, they felt that corruption was less of an issue in the country," Greene said. "And they were optimistic about the economy, both personally, in terms of their own welfare, and how the country as a whole was likely to do in the future. And their memories of the 1990s have improved."

This optimism held for four years but began deflating in 2018. Putin's popularity fell to under 70% in summer 2018, after he was re-elected and made unpopular economic moves such as raising the retirement age.

The full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022 reinstated that rallying effect to a degree, Greene says, but if the Kremlin loses Crimea or requires a significant effort to keep it, people "might come to the conclusion that Putin is not the man for the job."

Stanovaya, the political analyst, says few in Moscow believe Ukraine is capable of retaking Crimea, even with the increased attacks that include those on Putin's prized asset — the Kerch Bridge linking Crimea to Russia, which was struck in October 2022 and again last month — and other targets, such as an ammunition depot on July 22.

"It is, of course, irritating, but it is viewed as political investments directed at (Ukraine's) domestic audience and at the West," she said.

Some ordinary Russians seem unbothered as well — many still flocked to Crimea's resorts this summer.

UKRAINE'S STAKE IN CRIMEA

By the time of the 2014 Russian annexation, Crimea had been part of Ukraine for 60 years. Leonid Kravchuk, the first president of independent Ukraine, said Kyiv had invested some \$100 billion into the peninsula between 1991 and 2014.

It also has become part of Ukraine's identity as well.

Before the invasion, Zelenskyy was focused on diplomatic efforts to get Crimea back, but after Russian troops rolled across the border, Kyiv started publicly contemplating retaking the peninsula by force.

It won't be easy, as "Russia seeks to deploy the maximum number of different types of weapons there," military analyst Roman Svytan told AP, because its position between the Black Sea and the Azov Sea gives Moscow "the military key to the entire region."

From a security perspective, Ukraine needs Crimea to be fully independent and have control over activities in the Black Sea, Robertson said. **MDT/AP**

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

US slips into round of 16 after scoreless draw with Portugal

ANNE M. PETERSON,
AUCKLAND

PORTUGAL 0, USA 0

A goal post saved the United States from elimination at the Women's World Cup.

Ana Capeta nearly scored for Portugal in stoppage time but her shot hit the left post and the United States escaped with a uninspiring 0-0 draw last night that got them through — just barely — to the knockout round.

The U.S. won only one game in group play for the first time in tournament history, scoring just four goals over three games. With the scoreless draw, the United States fell to second in the group behind the Netherlands and will head to Melbourne, Australia, for a round of 16 match on Sunday.

"We should have put some in the back of the net and we didn't. We own that," Alex Morgan said. "We're not happy with the perfor-



AP PHOTO

United States' Megan Rapinoe embraces Portugal's Jessica Silva

mance we put out there. But at the same time, we're moving on."

The Americans, the most successful team ever at the World Cup

with four titles, have never been eliminated in the tournament's group stage. But they looked shaky against the Portuguese, who were

playing in their first World Cup.

"Obviously we want to play great and score a lot of goals, and we didn't do that. We know that it can be better, and has to be better, moving forward," said Megan Rapinoe, who came into the match in the second half as a substitute. "But ultimately, we're on to the next round."

The Portuguese players sobbed on the field after the final whistle after having come oh-so-close to upsetting the mighty United States. Capeta's shot about two minutes into stoppage time looked so good that her coaches started celebrating and the players on the bench jumped to their feet.

"I truly believed that the goal would be in that moment and I was starting to think, 'What can I do to help my players if we're winning 1-0?'" coach Francisco Neto said. "What I said to the girls, I was very proud. Of course, they are very sad because we have huge expectations of ourselves."

Lynn Williams, who started for

the U.S. for the first time in the tournament, had a chance on a header in the 14th minute but Portugal goalkeeper Ines Pereira smothered it. While the U.S. controlled possession and had the better chances, the team could not finish and the game was scoreless at the break.

Rose Lavelle picked up a yellow card in the 38th minute, her second of the group stage, and she won't be available for the team's round of 16 match.

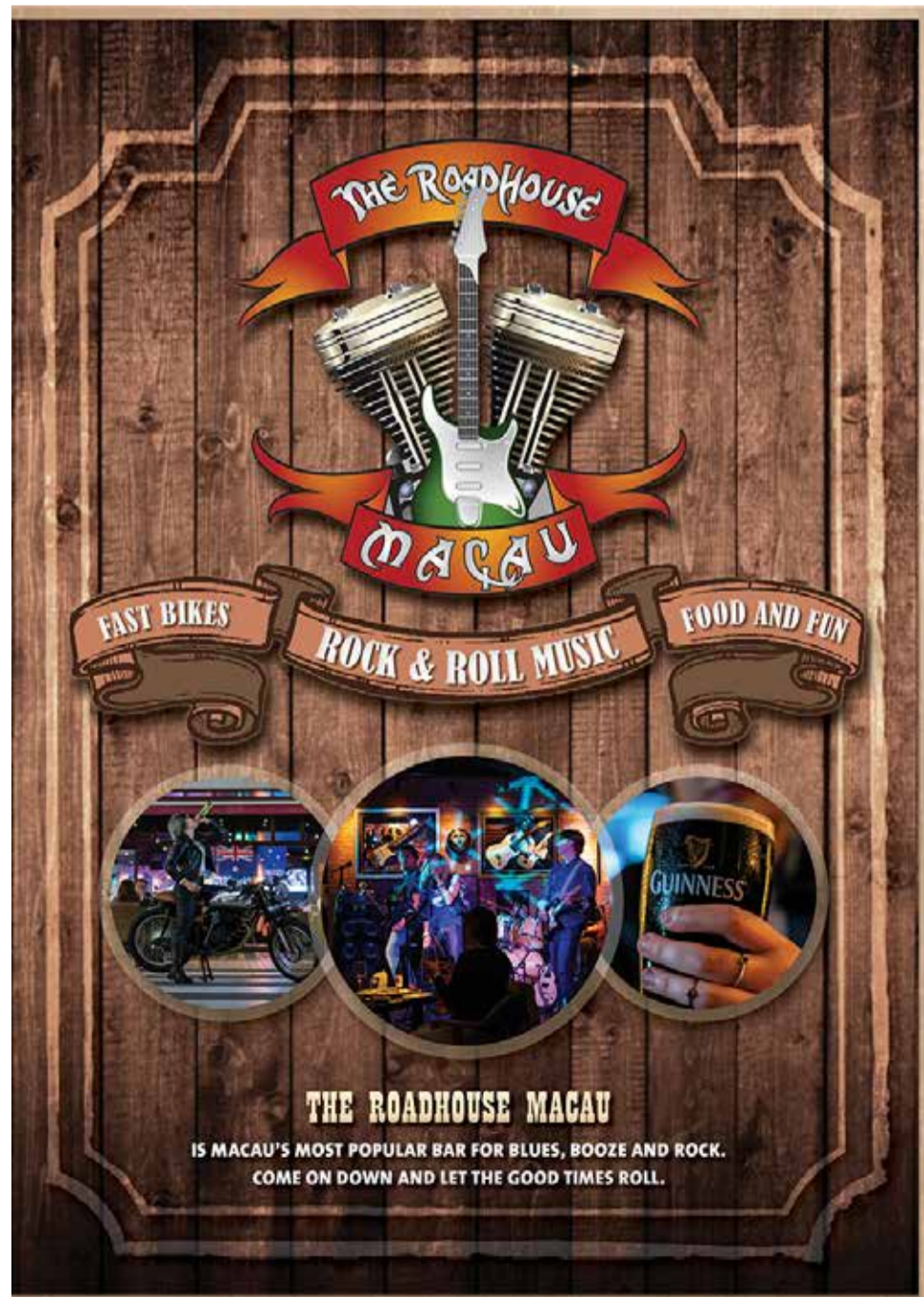
The frustration of the U.S. fans at Eden Park was evident at the break, when there were scattered boos among the crowd as the teams headed for the tunnel. Early in the second half, a fire alarm went off in the stadium but it turned out to be a malfunctioning sprinkler.

The United States had a free kick from a dangerous spot in the 57th minute, but Morgan's header popped up well over the goal. She put her hands to her face in exasperation.

"I think we just need a little bit of ruthlessness in front of the net," Lavelle said. "I think we're getting the chances, but it's that final bit of ruthlessness of just putting it away."

Rapinoe came in as a sub in the 61st minute, but the Golden Boot winner at the 2019 World Cup couldn't find that elusive goal. **MDT/AP**

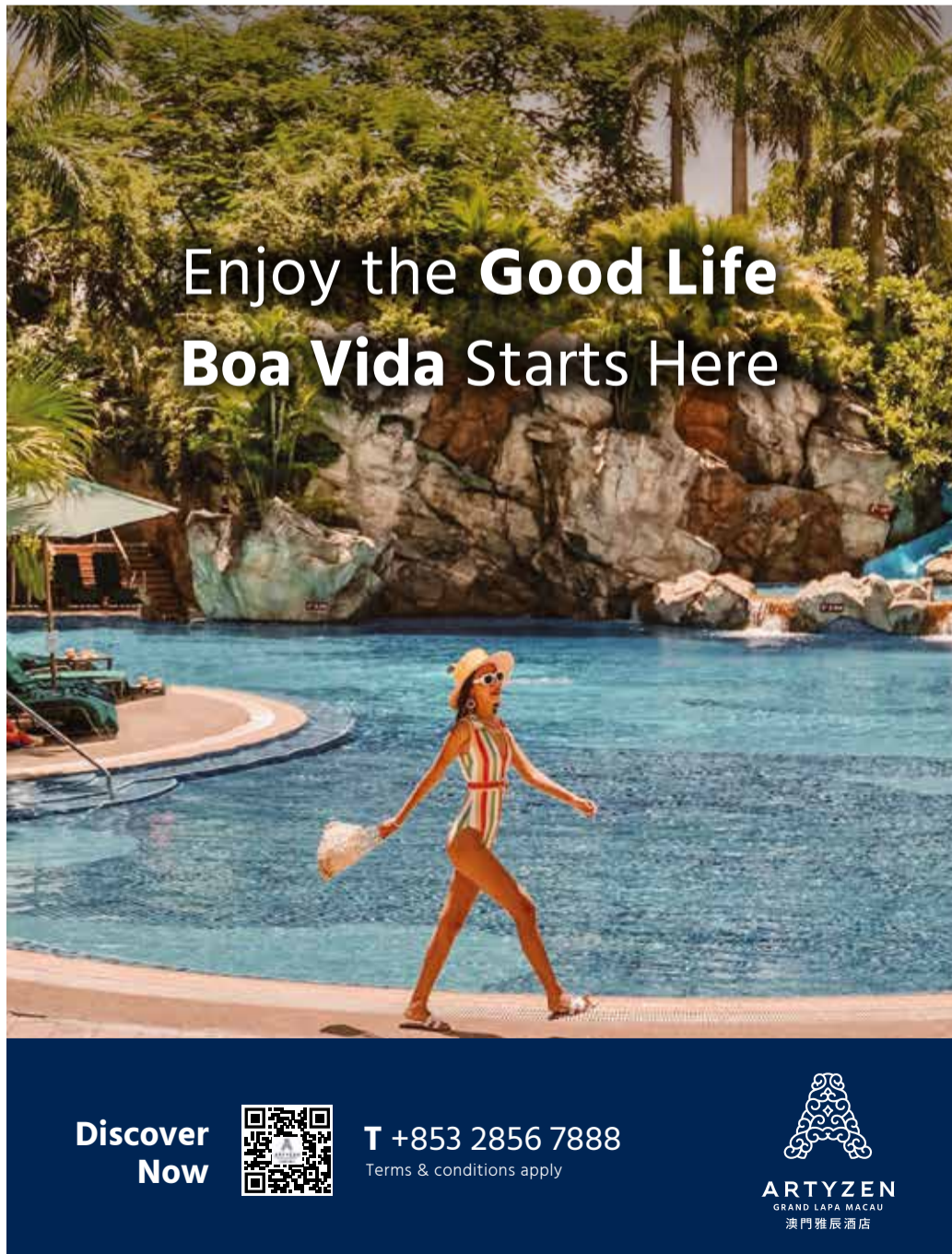
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OPINION

The Conversation

Ian Anderson, USC



SOCIAL MEDIA CAN IN FACT BE MADE BETTER, RESEARCH SHOWS

Is social media designed to reward people for acting badly?

The answer is clearly yes, given that the reward structure on social media platforms relies on popularity, as indicated by the number of responses – likes and comments – a post receives from other users. Black-box algorithms then further amplify the spread of posts that have attracted attention.

Sharing widely read content, by itself, isn't a problem. But it becomes a problem when attention-getting, controversial content is prioritized by design. Given the design of social media sites, users form habits to automatically share the most engaging information regardless of its accuracy and potential harm. Offensive statements, attacks on out groups and false news are amplified, and misinformation often spreads further and faster than the truth.

Our research shows that social media actually has the ability to create user habits to share high-quality content. After a few tweaks to the reward structure of social media platforms, users begin to share information that is accurate and fact-based.

The problem with habit-driven misinformation-sharing is significant. Facebook's own research shows that being able to share already shared content with a single click drives misinformation. Thirty-eight percent of views of text misinformation and 65% of views of photographic misinformation come from content that has been reshared twice, meaning a share of a share of a share of an original post. The biggest sources of misinformation, such as Steve Bannon's War Room, exploit social media's popularity optimization to promote controversy and misinformation beyond their immediate audience. [...]

Maintaining high levels of user engagement is crucial for the financial model of social media platforms. Attention-getting content keeps users active on the platforms. This activity provides social media companies with valuable user data for their primary revenue source: targeted advertising.

In practice, social media companies might be concerned that changing user habits could reduce users' engagement with their platforms. However, our experiments demonstrate that modifying users' rewards does not reduce overall sharing. Thus, social media companies can build habits to share accurate content without compromising their user base.

Platforms that give incentives for spreading accurate content can foster trust and maintain or potentially increase engagement with social media. In our studies, users expressed concerns about the prevalence of fake content, leading some to reduce their sharing on social platforms. An accuracy-based reward structure could help restore waning user confidence.

Our approach, using the existing rewards on social media to create incentives for accuracy, tackles misinformation spread without significantly disrupting the sites' business model. This has the additional advantage of altering rewards instead of introducing content restrictions, which are often controversial and costly in financial and human terms.

Implementing our proposed reward system for news sharing carries minimal costs and can be easily integrated into existing platforms. The key idea is to provide users with rewards in the form of social recognition when they share accurate news content. This can be achieved by introducing response buttons to indicate trust and accuracy. By incorporating social recognition for accurate content, algorithms that amplify popular content can leverage crowdsourcing to identify and amplify truthful information.

Both sides of the political aisle now agree that social media has challenges, and our data pinpoints the root of the problem: the design of social media platforms.

[Abridged]

The National Institutes of Health is beginning a handful of studies to test possible treatments for long COVID, an anxiously awaited step in U.S. efforts against the mysterious condition that afflicts millions.

The announcement yesterday [Macau time] from the NIH's \$1.15 billion RECOVER project comes amid frustration from patients who've struggled for months or even years with sometimes-disabling health problems — with no proven treatments and only a smattering of rigorous studies to test potential ones.

"This is a year or two late and smaller in scope than one would

hope but nevertheless it's a step in the right direction," said Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly of Washington University in St. Louis, who isn't involved with NIH's project but whose own research highlighted long COVID's toll.

Getting answers is critical, he added, because "there's a lot of people out there exploiting patients' vulnerability" with unproven therapies.

Scientists don't yet know what causes long COVID, the catchall term for about 200 widely varying symptoms.

Between 10% and 30% of people are estimated to have experienced some form of long COVID.

AP PHOTO



Relatives hold a photo of Coco Lee after her funeral in Hong Kong, yesterday

HONG KONG

SINGER COCO LEE MOURNED BY FANS AND FAMILY AT FUNERAL

Singer and songwriter Coco Lee was being mourned by family and friends at a private ceremony yesterday, a day after fans paid their respects at a public memorial for the Hong Kong-born entertainer who had international success.

Sobs were heard when pallbearers marched solemnly with her coffin inside the funeral hall before her cremation. Lee, who died July 5 at age 48, was known for her powerful voice and live performances.

On Monday, scores of fans dressed in black had waited outside the funeral hall in the summer heat, with some carrying flowers. The public memorial service was also attended by her relatives and friends, including singers Elva Hsiao and Jenny Tseng.

Lin Jing, a fan from Fujian province in southeast China, said she admired Lee's smile and appearance, adding: "She was really talented. She always tried to improve and she inspired women to feel independent."

Inside the funeral hall, three pink hearts made of flowers and other floral decorations were displayed below Lee's photo.

Her close friend, Hsiao, said during the ceremony that she remembered watching Lee's performances as a student and thinking of her as a perfect idol. After they became friends in the entertainment industry, Lee encouraged Hsiao when she was lost and treated her as "a little sister."

"She brightened my life with her happiness and bravery. I will keep preserving her spirit," Hsiao said in a quavering voice.

In a video for the memorial service, actors and singers from Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan recalled their memories with Lee and mourned her death.

Action star Jackie Chan said in the video that everyone was proud of her when she sang at the Oscars.

"To friends like us, Coco was a passionate and kind friend who

showed care to us. She was really a good person. That's why we are so reluctant to accept she has left us," he said.

Award-winning director Ang Lee recalled his exchanges with the late singer before the Oscars and said it was a pity she died so young. "We miss her very much. Coco, rest in peace," he said in the video.

Lee was the first Chinese singer to break into the American market, and her English song "Do You Want My Love" was a 1999 dance hit. In 2001, she sang "A Love Before Time" from Ang Lee's movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" at the Academy Awards, becoming the first Chinese American to perform at the Oscars.

Lee was also the voice of heroine Fa Mulan in the Mandarin version of Disney's "Mulan," and sang the Mandarin version of the movie's theme song "Reflection."

She was married to Bruce Rockowitz, a Canadian business executive in Hong Kong, and had two stepdaughters.

MDT/AP

Hungary The United States imposed new travel restrictions on citizens of Hungary yesterday over concerns that the identities of nearly 1 million foreigners granted Hungarian passports over nine years weren't sufficiently verified, according to the U.S. Embassy and a government official. The restrictions apply to the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, which allows passport holders from 40 countries to enter the United States for business or tourism without a visa for up to 90 days.

AP PHOTO



Russian authorities accused Kyiv yesterday of yet another attack on Moscow and its surroundings with drones, one of which hit the same building in the capital that was damaged by a drone just days ago in a similar attack. Russian officials have claimed that the intensified attacks on the capital region reflect failures in Ukraine's counteroffensive, while Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said over the weekend that "the war is gradually coming back to Russian territory."

AP PHOTO



Panama City The number of migrants crossing Panama's dangerous, jungle-clad Darien Gap swelled to almost 250,000 in the first seven months of 2023, surpassing the number that crossed in all of 2022, officials said. It is a record pace of migration through the gap, which connects South America to Central America. The surge comes despite an agreement announced in April between the United States, Colombia and Panama to offer alternatives to migration.

AP PHOTO



Niger France prepared to evacuate French and European nationals from Niger yesterday, telling them to carry no more than a small bag, after a military coup there won backing from three other West African nations ruled by mutinous soldiers. The French Foreign Ministry in Paris cited recent violence that targeted the French Embassy in Niamey, the capital, as one of the reasons for the decision.