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AP PHOTO



Philippines One person died and nearly 100 had to be rescued after a ferry in the central Philippines struck floating debris at sea and took on water Saturday, police said. The accident involving the King Sto. Nino 7, which was carrying 98 people, was the third to hit the country in just over a week, police said. All those on board were rescued, except for a female passenger who suffered a heart attack and died during the scramble for safety.

AP PHOTO



Japan A meandering storm was headed again toward southwestern Japan yesterday, prompting fresh warnings about dangerously heavy rainfall after the same area was hit several days ago. Tropical Storm Khanun, which means jackfruit in Thai, was returning to the southernmost group of islands of Okinawa moving slowly northward, packing winds of up to 30 meters per second and hovering over Okinawa through today, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.

Cambodia Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra attended a birthday party for outgoing Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in Phnom Penh, according to video posted online yesterday, a day after Thaksin said he would delay plans to return to Thailand following years of self-imposed exile. Thaksin's appearance in Cambodia came at a politically sensitive time in neighboring Thailand, as Pheu Thai, the latest in a string of parties affiliated with Thaksin, is seeking to win enough support in Parliament for one of its members to become the next prime minister almost three months after a general election in May.

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MACAU'S BROAD MONEY SUPPLY REBOUNDS IN JUNE

Macau's broad money supply rebounded by 0.5% month on month to 717.2 billion patacas in June, the monetary watchdog said. According to statistics released by the Monetary Authority of Macao, currency in circulation and demand deposits dropped 1.3% and 3.3%, respectively. Official data shows that resident deposits increased 0.6% from the preceding month to 696.8 billion patacas, while non-resident deposits rose 5.9% to 294.1 billion patacas. Meanwhile, public sector deposits in the banking sector grew 0.3% to 221.1 billion patacas.

UM HOLDS SUMMER CAMP FOR OUTSTANDING MAINLAND STUDENTS

The University of Macau (UM) Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) has hosted the Health Sciences Summer Camp for Outstanding Students of Mainland Universities 2023. The summer camp aimed to enhance students' knowledge and interest in health sciences. The summer camp featured a string of activities, including lectures by UM professors in fields such as precision oncology, stem cells and development, neuroscience, biomedical imaging, nanomaterials, and others. A total of 79 outstanding undergraduate students and professors from Zhejiang University, Jilin University, Sichuan University, and Northwestern Polytechnical University joined the summer camp.

BRIDGE CONNECTING UNIVERSITY OF MACAU AND HENGQIN PORT COMPLETED

The bridge connecting the University of Macau (UM) and Hengqin Port has passed its completion review. Located on the south side of the Lotus Bridge of Macao, with a length of about 808 meters, the bridge connects the Hengqin Port with the Hengqin Campus of the UM, connecting the campus to the Chinese mainland. The completion of the bridge creates a more convenient passage for the faculty and students of the UM to travel through Hengqin Port. In the meantime, vehicles can also travel to and from Macau's Cotai via the Lotus Bridge.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR APPROPRIATE ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

GOV'T LAUNCHES CONSULTATION ON FIVE-YEAR-PLAN AIMING TO BOOST NON-GAMING TO 60% OF GDP

RENATO MARQUES

THE government, through the Policy Research and Regional Development Bureau (DSEPR), has launched a public consultation on the first-ever five-year plan for the development of Macau's economic diversification.

The draft plan largely aims to boost the four "new industries" under Macau's "1+4" strategy for economic diversification with the objective that, in the future, dependence on the gaming industry will be reduced to some 40% of the local Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In general terms and taking into account the figures obtained pre-pandemic in 2019, the gaming industry accounted for about 51% of local GDP.

Still, it should be noted that the same industry was directly accountable, through taxes, for about 80% of the government revenues, a reason that justifies the need to increase the relevance of other industries but not at the expense of the gaming industry, which the size and volume are crucial for the government's annual budget.

The Development Plan proposal sets a path for, tourism and integrated leisure business; traditional Chinese medicine and the "Big Health" industry; modern financial services; high and new technology, the conversion and enhancement of traditional industries; and for the convention and exhibition, sports, commercial and trade industries, which comprise the "1+4" strategy.

As the government explained, the "Development Plan for Appropriate Economic Diversification of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2024-2028)" is less of a choice or a local government strategy, and more of a need for the local executive to align with China's 14th Five-Year Plan and the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area.

"Promoting appropriate economic diversification is the only path to solve the deep-rooted

RENATO MARQUES



issues and problems in Macau's economic and social development. It is an inevitable choice to ensure the long-term prosperity and stability of Macau and a must-do task both for the government and for Macau's people from all walks of life," the government remarked.

Regarding the Plan, the government also said that it "will enhance synergy between different industries – and strengthen comprehensively the capabilities of Macau's economy – by facilitating the development of new industries using a multi-pronged approach in terms of policy, human resources, and financial resources," adding that "this work will, in turn, speed up Macau's appropriate economic diversification effort, and support the city's sustainable and high-quality development."

When complete, it is intended the plan will provide guidance on social investment as well as the development of people and the future of key economic sectors.

During the public consultation period, the DSEPR will be receiving submissions from the general public as well as several key economic sectors regarding the plan.

The consultation period is just 30 days (ending on September 2) and, as usual, will also include several public sessions set to take place on August 23, August 25,

and August 26.

The consultation document is available in Chinese and Portuguese and submission may be made directly via the dedicated website (<http://www.dsepr.gov.mo/comment>); by phone (2883 9919); by fax (2882 3426); by email (comment@dsepr.gov.mo); or by post to Rua do Desporto, 185-195, Taipa, Macau.

'SIX-DAY' VISA-FREE ACCESS TO GBA TO BOOST REGIONAL COOPERATION

AS a way to deepen the integration of regional tourism and to boost the cooperation between the nine cities and the two regions that comprise the GBA, there is a proposal to optimize the "144-hour visa-free policy with the GBA cities," the government said, noting that the idea is to make use of the collaboration between Macau and Hengqin as well as other areas to develop a "multi-destination" tourism model.

Coordinated between the GBA cities, there will be a series of touristic, cultural, and sports events to which travelers would be granted "visa-free" access as part of participation in a multi-destination program. This 6-day visa-free system would be combined with the improvement of the border-crossing model to increase convenience of visa issuance measures, boosting regional exchange for tourists.

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André Cheong pledges to listen to public 'sufficiently' on Project Hac-Sa

ANTHONY LAM

PUBLIC opinions will be listened to "in a sufficient manner" before the government makes its final decisions on Project Hac-Sa, Secretary André Cheong has pledged to lawmakers.

Over the weekend, the senior official presented in front of the parliament in order to brief lawmakers on the redevelopment of Hac-Sa Beach and its neighborhood, colloquially referred to as Project Hac-Sa. The project comprises a series of architecture revolving around an adventure campsite.

He first underlined that the proposal for the adventure campsite has started off with "the [intention] to provide local youths with outdoor training facilities and local families with leisure areas." He stressed that it has always been a livelihood project. Based on this, he added, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) will sufficiently listen to the people, in particular from schools, youth organizations, students, teachers and parents. The government will confirm its choices in accordance with "mainstream opinions."

Describing the project as a magnified Lam Mau Leisure Area situation in the suburb, Cheong disclosed that the IAM wanted to build something for all ages, after seeing the popularity of the city's several children's playgrounds. He considered Hac-Sa to be the only suitable location.

When questioned about the MOP1.4-billion budget, Cheong reiterated that a third-party consultancy would be commissioned to audit and assess the expenditure of the project, so as to ensure it come within budget. He also pledged that without sacrificing the project's positioning, layout and quality, expenditure will be minimized as much as possible. He also expressed his confidence that the current budget is the maximum.

In addition, he disclosed that the government has recently touched base with certain local professional or youth organizations on the operational rights of the future campsite. These organizations have exhibited strong interest, he said.

On maintenance costs, the senior official believes that it would not be too expensive, because more durable, damp-proof and



anti-corrosion materials will be used. Moreover, the facilities will not require electricity to operate. Other parts of the campsite will rely on maintenance services similar to those at other leisure areas.

Cheong also explained that the first budget submitted to the parliament— MOP230 million –

was meant for minor construction based on current facilities. The current six-fold budget is meant for an overhaul. He expects the design to be concluded at the end of this year and construction to start next year. Hopefully, the campsite can be opened for public use in phases from 2025.

The campsite will not only be opened to local residents, Cheong said, while tourists will be welcomed. However, different tariffs may be levied on the two groups of people. In addition, he said the government was not intended to commission casino operators to handle the redevelopment.

TRANSPORT

LRT Barra extension to enter final test this month

THE extension of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) to Barra will undergo the final phase of testing this month, the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) has announced.

In a statement recently released, the DSOP disclosed that the general test for carriages and the system as well as simulations of the LRT Taipa Line will start in the middle of this month. It also underlined that the test for the transport to extend service to Barra "has entered its final stage."

It added that the test for the extension started in January this year and progressed shoulder-to-shoulder with the LRT Limited. A total of 264 non-operational hours from 96 nights were used to test the system. Meanwhile, both the system and carriages shall be updated to facilitate the future opening of the extension, the DSOP added.

The prominent adjustments that passengers will experience is that the route map shown on carriage displays will start indi-



cating Barra Station, according to the DSOP. At the same time, Lotus Checkpoint Station will be renamed as Lotus Station. Both adjustments will be enacted on

Aug. 11.

Printed signage will be updated in phases and the DSOP pledged that it will be concluded by the end of November. **AL**

COMPANY NUMBERS GROWING IN Q2, FEWER DISSOLUTIONS

RENATO MARQUES

THE number of newly incorporated companies in Macau has risen in the second quarter (Q2) of 2023, official statistics from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) show.

During Q2 a total of 1,263 new companies were incorporated, an increase of 339 year-on-year.

Leading the number of incorporations by sector were those operating in Wholesale & Retail Trade and Business Services, which totaled 455 and 295, respectively.

Concurrently, the total value of registered capital of the new companies also rose by 16.9% year-on-year to MOP376 million.

Meanwhile, companies in dissolution totaled 222 in Q2, with the value of registered capital of these companies amounting to MOP55 million.

Most of the companies – 873, or 69.1% – are of relatively

small size, with a registered capital of under MOP50,000. In total, the accumulated capital only accounts for 6% of the total.

In Q2, Macau also saw the incorporation of 30 new companies that were registered with capital of over MOP1 million. In accumulation, the 30 companies have registered capital of MOP292 million, accounting for 77.6% of the total incorporation capital in the given period.

According to DSEC information, 59.2% of the total capital comes from the mainland, and almost one-third from cities included in the Greater Bay Area.

Data analysis of the composition of the companies' shareholders shows that 774 companies were established solely by Macau shareholders, while 142 were joint ventures between shareholders from Macau and those of other countries or regions.

ENVIRONMENT

RECYCLABLES PRE-HANDLING LAND ASSIGNMENT TO HALT AS LANDFILLS ARE FULL

ANTHONY LAM

As local landfill sites have reached capacity, the land assignment for pre-handling of recyclables will be halted, a local environmental official has said.

In reply to lawmaker Ron Lam's written inquiry dated Jun. 9, acting director Ip Kuong Lam of the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPB) disclosed that the construction waste landfill site of the city is full. In light of this, the land assignment has been halted because the bureau considered it necessary to reevaluate the layout of the landfill. Ip hinted that the bureau has prioritized construction wastes.

In his written inquiry, the lawmaker cited the Policy Address 2019 as stating that a land plot measuring 15,000 square meters will be assigned for the use of pre-handling of paper, plastics and metals before they are exported. On the other hand, land measuring 30,000 square meters will also be used to build facilities for the centralized handling of kitchen wastes. It is aimed to handle



at least 50% of the city's daily kitchen waste.

The lawmaker also asked how the solid recyclables are pre-handled in compliance with tightening global measures on recyclables-handling. Ip did not respond to this question.

On the construction of other waste-handling facilities, Ip disclosed that glass bottle shattering facilities, electronic wastes pre-handling facilities, public resources recyclables pre-handling

facilities, the expansion of the Macau incinerator and an organic resources collection center have seen the commencements of their constructions or enhancements. The sorting facility for inert demolition and construction materials will soon start its simulation. He added that the government has two action plans that are in fact identical, although there is an internal version and a public version.

In his inquiry, Lam asked about

the bureau's intention to publicize the internal version of the action plans. He also asked about the construction and establishment of a series of facilities, to which Ip has responded, except for Lam's mention of a ferry dock for the export of recyclables.

Lam's last question focused on increasing, or at least maintaining, the proportion of recyclable exports amid tightening measures around the world with regards to the intake of waste from external

jurisdictions. In fact, mainland China has also tightened its restrictions on the import of external waste materials.

In response to this, Ip stressed that his bureau would continue negotiating with the mainland regarding the acceptance of certain recyclables from Macau.

RECYCLING INDUSTRY HOPES FOR SUBSTITUTE PLANS

The recycling industry hopes for substitute plans to realistically solve the problem, such as introducing reconstructed or restructured used materials to ease the burden on the landfill. Certain industry practitioners told local media outlet Macao Daily that the government should start making plans. Without reusing resources or materials, recyclables can only be exported elsewhere. Long-term commitments must be made to resolve the problem, the practitioners said. Industry practitioners also pointed out that Macau has high costs in recycling. They said that the industry has developed well because the government has not made supportive policies.

FINANCE

World's first DRO financial exchange officially operates in Macau

The Micro Connect Macao Financial Assets Exchange (MCEX) officially started operation last week in Macau, becoming the world's first Daily Revenue Obligations (DRO) financial market.

The exchange, launched by Micro Connect, an investment platform founded two years ago that now invests on over 9,300 small and micro firms in the Chinese mainland, allows investors to directly invest on the large number of mainland small and micro firms through DRO and generate diversified steady returns.

The exchange aims to channel global capital to help China's economic development while also help with Macau's industrial upgrading and economic diversification by building financial infrastructure as well as developing innova-



tive and sci-tech industries in the city.

Lei Wai Nong, secretary for economy and finance of the Macau SAR government, said that the exchange can leverage Macau's institutional advantages and open financial system to attract international capital and enable mainland small and micro firms, con-

tributing to Macau's appropriate economic diversification.

Senior officials including Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, together with nearly 600 representatives of investors, mainland small and micro firms, financial institutions and media organizations, attended the ceremony. **MDT/XINHUA**

CUT WINS TENDER AND RETURNS TO 'CINEMATHEQUE' MANAGEMENT UNTIL 2026

RENATO MARQUES

The Audio-Visual company Cut has won the public tender for the operation and management of the "Cinematheque Passion," the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has announced via their website.

The company is resuming the management of this cultural venue, having been the first organization in this role from the Cinematheque Passion's inauguration, in 2017, until 2020.

As before, the contract is valid for three years, commencing August 2023 and expiring at the end of July 2026.

This time, the IC received a total of six proposals for the space, with the winning bid coming from "Cut," offering a total amount of MOP16,942,884.

Cut's bid was the second lowest bid in the tender after a proposal



of MOP14,500,000 from Cowin Group (Macau).

The highest bid received was MOP21,500,000 from the company "Cultura de Ambição Lda."

Bidding for the tender was also the former management company "Companhia de Produção de Entretenimento e Cultura 'In', Lda," which, although having made the second highest offer (MOP20,973,400), did not win the tender.

The maximum set by IC for the bids was MOP22 million.

Among the criteria for the choice of a management company for the "Cinematheque Passion" was a detailed plan of activities, marketing, and content acquisition for the first 12 months of operations as well as a detailed resumé explaining the experience and knowledge of the operations director.

Profits at Warren Buffett's firm reach \$36b as stocks surge and its insurance holdings perform well

JOSH FUNK, OMAHA

PROFITS rebounded at Warren Buffett's conglomerate along with the value of its \$353 billion stock portfolio in the second quarter to hit \$35.9 billion, and many of Berkshire Hathaway's assorted businesses also performed well, led by strong results in its core insurance businesses, particularly Geico.

Berkshire Hathaway said Saturday that its profits surged to hit \$24,755 per Class A share. A year ago, the Omaha, Nebraska-based company recorded a loss of \$43.6 billion, or \$29,633 per Class A share, when the value of its biggest investments fell.

But Buffett has long said that those bottom-line figures can be misleading because of the big swings in the paper value of its investments from quarter to quarter when few of Berkshire's investments are actually bought or sold. Instead, Buffett recommends that investors focus on operating earnings to see how the more than 90 companies Berkshire owns are actually performing.

By that measure, Berkshire's operating earnings grew 6.6%, to \$10.043 billion, or \$6,928.40 per Class A share. That's up from \$9.417 billion, or \$6,403.61 per Class A share, a year ago.

The three analysts surveyed by FactSet Research expected Berkshire to report operating earnings of \$5,575.67 per Class A share.

AP PHOTO



Berkshire's revenue jumped to \$92.5 billion from last year's \$76.2 billion thanks largely to the addition of truck stop operator Pilot Travel Centers, which generated \$14.75 billion in revenue during the quarter. Berkshire's results were also helped by last fall's acquisition of the Alleghany insurance conglomerate.

CFRA Research analyst Cathy Seifert said Berkshire will have a hard time keeping up that level of growth without additional acquisitions, which Buffett seems reluctant to make at current prices.

"I think the question that should be or will be on investors' minds is, 'How do you sustain this level of growth when many of your underlying businesses are not putting up this level of growth?'" Seifert said.

Underwriting profits at Geico rebounded to \$514 million as it raised premiums on its auto insurance customers by an average of 16% and continued to cut back on its ubiquitous lizard ads while paying out fewer claims. A year ago, Geico reported a \$487 million pretax underwriting loss. The

number of policies Geico wrote also fell by 14%

Profits fell at Berkshire's BNSF railroad to \$1.26 billion from last year's \$1.66 billion as it carried 11% fewer shipments in the quarter, suggesting the economy continued to slow. Rising interest rates also hurt Berkshire's housing-related businesses such as manufactured home building Clayton Homes and its Berkshire Hathaway Home Services network of Realtors.

But Berkshire also benefitted from interest rates that helped

it generate more money on its cash. Berkshire is still sitting on a mountain of cash because it hasn't completed any major acquisitions or made many significant new stock investments this year. The company's cash pile grew to \$147.4 billion from the first quarter's \$130.6 billion.

"Buffett is carrying way more cash than he would be if he saw bargains all over the place," said investment manager Bill Smead, of Smead Capital Management.

Edward Jones analyst Jim Shanahan said it appeared that Berkshire was a net seller of about \$8 billion in stocks during the quarter with most of that likely being Buffett's previously disclosed decision to unload most of Berkshire's Activision Blizzard stake. The current high prices of stocks, combined with weakness in the economy and rising interest rates, might combine to keep Buffett mostly on the sidelines and unlikely to make any major deals in the near future.

"I'm kind of thinking that in this environment, we shouldn't expect to see a whole lot out of Berkshire in the second half of the year," Shanahan said.

Berkshire did repurchase \$1.4 billion of its own stock in the quarter, but the pace of its buybacks slowed considerably from the first quarter, when it bought \$4.4 billion of Berkshire shares. Buffett tries not to do many buybacks when he believes Berkshire's shares might be overpriced.

A recent change in the way Berkshire accounts for its ownership of more than 25% of Occidental Petroleum also helped boost its second quarter earnings. Berkshire said its ownership of Occidental, combined with its 26.5% stake in Kraft Heinz, added \$535 million to its bottom line. A year ago, those investments would have added only about \$182 million to Berkshire's profits.

MDT/AP

CORPORATE BITS

Women and children committee undertakes site visits to see protection efforts



The Women and Children Affairs Committee has visited several public and semi-public entities to witness talent cul-

tivation and gender efforts. According to a statement from the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), the committee

recently visited the Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) and saw the exhibits at the Communications Museum, where the committee delegation was introduced to local cybersecurity and IT talent.

Afterwards, the delegation visited CTM, where they were introduced to talent cultivation efforts and discussed topics such as smart city construction and cybersecurity concerning children.

The delegation has also visited a childcare center, which had referred suggestions from children to the government, "highlighting the compliance of children's rights of participation as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

The Parisian Macao's Le Buffet reopens



Le Buffet at The Parisian Macao has returned, giving dinner buffet guests the opportunity to immerse themselves in an evening gastronomic journey of culinary artistry from the team of talented chefs.

The buffet features jet-fresh seafood, including freshly shucked oysters and Canadian snow crab legs, plates of sashimi and sushi, followed by Boston lobster thermidor from a live station,

or roasted sea bass fillet with lobster sauce.

Meat-lovers are also in for a treat, including a range of charcuterie, the Rotisserie Carving station that offers Australian prime beef rib roasted on the bone with a choice of condiments, succulent roasted lamb cutlets with wild mushrooms and thyme jus, and elevated fried rice cooked with Wagyu beef and XO sauce.

To close, meal diners can opt for a European cheese board or opt for the wide-ranging selection of tempting desserts sure to please all, beginning with the signature Insta-worthy carousel of mini desserts that allows for the sampling of a myriad of choices.

DISPUTED SEA

Philippine military condemns Chinese coast guard's use of water cannon on its boat

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA, PHILIPPINES

THE Philippine military yesterday condemned a Chinese coast guard ship's "excessive and offensive" use of a water cannon to block a Filipino supply boat from delivering new troops, food, water and fuel to a Philippine-occupied shoal in the disputed South China Sea.

The tense confrontation on Saturday at the Second Thomas Shoal was the latest flare-up in the long-seething territorial conflicts involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei.

The disputes in the South China Sea, one of the world's busiest sea lanes, have long been regarded as an Asian flashpoint and a delicate fault line in the rivalry between the United States and China in the re-



AP PHOTO

gion. China claims ownership over virtually the entire strategic waterway despite international rulings

that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims, such as that of 2016 by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, an international body based in The Hague; China rejects that ruling.

Philippine navy personnel on board two chartered supply boats were cruising toward Second Thomas, escorted by Philippine coast guard ships, when a Chinese coast guard ship approached and used a powerful water cannon to block the Filipinos from the shoal that China also claims, according to Philippine military and coast guard officials.

The Chinese ship's action was "in wanton disregard of the safety of the people on board" the Philippine navy-chartered boat and violated international law, including the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, said the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which did not say if any of its sailors were injured.

The "excessive and offensive actions against Philippine vessels" near the shoal prevented one of the two Filipino boats from unloading supplies needed by Filipino troops guarding the shoal onboard a long-marooned Philippine navy ship, the BRP Sierra Madre, the

Philippine military said in a statement.

It called on the Chinese coast guard and China's central military commission "to act with prudence and be responsible in their actions to prevent miscalculations and accidents that will endanger people's lives."

Several countries expressed concern over the actions of the Chinese ship.

The United States immediately expressed support to the Philippines and renewed a warning that it's obliged to defend its longtime treaty ally when Filipino public vessels and forces come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

The U.S. State Department said in a statement that "firing water cannons and employing unsafe blocking maneuvers, PRC ships interfered with the Philippines' lawful exercise of high seas freedom of navigation and jeopardized the safety of the Philippine vessels and crew." It used the acronym for the People's Republic of China.

It added that such actions are the latest by the PRC in the South China Sea and are a direct threat to "regional peace and stability."

Australia expressed its

concern, describing the actions of the Chinese coast guard ship as "dangerous and destabilizing."

Japan said it supported the Philippines, adding that "the harassment and action, which infringe on lawful activities of the sea and endanger navigational safety," were "totally unacceptable."

The Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila did not immediately issue any reaction but has filed a large number of diplomatic protests over increasingly hostile actions by China in recent years. Chinese government officials did not immediately comment on the incident.

China has long demanded that the Philippines withdraw its small contingent of naval forces and tow away the actively commissioned but crumbling BRP Sierra Madre. The navy ship was deliberately marooned on the shoal in 1999 and now serves as a fragile symbol of Manila's territorial claim to the atoll.

Chinese ships had blocked and shadowed navy vessels delivering food and other supplies to the Filipino sailors on the ship in the shoal, which Chinese coast guard ships and a swarm of Chinese fishing boats — suspected to be manned by militias — have surrounded for years.

While the U.S. lays no claims to the South China Sea, it has often lashed out at China's actions and deployed its warships and fighter jets in patrols and military exercises with regional allies to uphold freedom of navigation and overflight, which it says is in America's national interest.

China has warned the U.S. to stop meddling in what it calls a purely Asian dispute and has warned of unspecified repercussions.

Additionally, Beijing has criticized a recent agreement by the Philippines and the U.S., which are longtime treaty allies, allowing American forces access to additional Filipino military camps under a 2014 defense agreement.

MDT/AP

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

NORTH KOREA

Kim Jong Un tours weapons factories and vows to boost war readiness in face of tensions

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un toured the country's key weapons factories, including those producing artillery systems and launch vehicles for nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, and pledged to speed up efforts to advance his military's arms and war readiness, state media said yesterday.

Kim's three-day inspections through Saturday came as the United States and South Korea prepared for their next round of combined military exercises planned for later this month to counter the growing North Korean threat.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest level in years as the pace of North Korea's missile tests and the joint U.S.-South Korea military drills, which Kim portrays as invasion rehearsals, have both intensified in a tit-for-tat cycle.

Some experts say Kim's tour of the weapons factories could also be related to possible military cooperation with Moscow that may involve North Korean supplies of artillery and other ammunition as Russian President Vladimir Putin reaches out to other countries for support in the war in Ukraine.

During a visit to an unspecified factory producing large-caliber artillery systems, Kim stressed the facility's "important responsibility and duty" in further boosting his military's "war preparations," North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said.

Kim praised the factory's efforts to employ "scientific and technological measures" to improve the quality of shells, reduce processing times for propellant tubes and increase manufacturing speed. He also urged the factory to move ahead with development and large-scale production of new kinds of ammunition, the KCNA said.

Kim echoed the message in vi-

sits to two other factories, calling the delivery of launcher trucks designed to transport and fire ballistic missiles "a top priority" for the military and urging for the "rapid expansion" of production of more reliable engines for cruise missiles and drones.

North Korean photos showed Kim walking past huge launcher trucks designed for intercontinental ballistic missiles which recent tests indicated they could potentially reach the U.S. mainland. Other photos showed Kim firing scoped rifles during a visit to a small arms factory where he said soldiers' firearms need to be modernized, according to KCNA.

In the face of deepening confrontations with Washington and Seoul, Kim has been trying to boost the visibility of his partnerships with Moscow and Beijing as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and insert himself into a united front against the United States.

His tour of the weapons factories comes after a giant military parade last month in North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, where Kim was joined by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and a Chinese ruling party official while rolling out his most powerful missiles designed to target South Korea and the United States.

Shoigu's presence at the July 27 parade, which came after Kim took him on a tour of a domestic arms exhibition, demonstrated North Korea's support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and added to suspicions the North was willing to supply arms to Russia to support its war efforts.

Cheong Seong Chang, an analyst at South Korea's Sejong Institute, said Kim's visits to the factories likely had a dual goal of encouraging the modernization of domestically produced weapons and examining artillery and other supplies that can possibly be exported to Russia. **MDT/AP**



Kim Jong Un tries a weapon during his three-day inspection from Aug. 3 until Aug. 5, 2023 at major munitions factories in North Korea

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"To Infinity and Beyond: The Art of Hsiao Chin" Leverages Avant-garde Concept to Reimagine Chinese Art

"To Infinity and Beyond: The Art of Hsiao Chin" ("To Infinity and Beyond" exhibition), an immersive art exhibition integrated in the "Art Macao: Macao International Art Biennale 2023", opens its door to public from now till September 23. Showcasing masterpieces of Chinese modern abstract art master Hsiao Chin, the exhibition, set inside the state-of-the-art black-box theater at MGM CO-TAI, brings forth the avant-garde concept of "ART-TECH-TAINMENT" by transcending the confines of spaces. It innovatively presents Hsiao Chin's voyage of art spanning over 60 years in the East and West, as well as his artistic vision that is full of eastern philosophical imagination and energy.



Being the largest multimedia exhibition throughout Hsiao Chin's lifetime career, the exhibition showcases 66 of Hsiao's masterpieces – most of which are on world tour in international museums, and some others, unveiled to the public for the first time, belong to the Chairman's Collection of MGM. By utilizing cutting-edge technologies, the exhibition pushes its boundaries to create a vivid array of highlights, one of which is the debut of the art film "Hsiao Chin's Universe". Audience views the 12-meter space-themed LED canvas from an elevated platform, as if they are physically immersing in the vast expanse of imaginative and energetic space. The two digital installations, "Sky Mirror" and "Infinity", mark the first cross-sector collaboration between Hsiao Chin and acclaimed Hong Kong Tech-Ink artist Victor Wong and highlight Hsiao Chin as a pioneering force in Chinese abstract art, blending traditional thoughts and contemporary experiences with his unique artistic language.

EMBRACES "ART OF LIVING" FROM MACAU AND BEYOND

"To Infinity and Beyond" represents the sublimation of the artistic journey of Hsiao and MGM together, and witnesses how both Hsiao and MGM join hands in bringing the inventive energy of Chinese art to its new height, a vision that MGM always strives to carry out. Embracing its ethos of "Art of Living", MGM is determined to promote public art and elevate the appeal of Chinese culture on the world stage – the Company is the first integrated resort operator in Macau to establish a dedicated team for arts and culture development. On top of organizing arts and culture happenings, the team also endeavor to nurture a new generation of local art enthusiasts – since its founding in 2013, the team has trained over 1,200 local youth, including university students and fresh graduates, cultivating young talent for the art field by offering them a brand-new perspective on the city's cultural tourism scene.



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Pope announces World Youth Day to return to Asia in 2027, urges young people 'not to be afraid'

NICOLE WINFIELD,
FILIPE BENTO &
JORGE JERONIMO, LISBON

POPE Francis told young people yesterday the Catholic Church needs them and urged them to follow their dreams as he wrapped up World Youth Day in Portugal with a massive open-air Mass and an announcement that the next edition would be held in Asia.

At the end of the Mass, Francis announced that the next edition would be held in Seoul, South Korea in 2027, bringing the festival back to Asia for the first time in over three decades. The continent is of huge importance to the Catholic Church, given it is young and growing there whereas the church is withering in traditionally Christian lands in Europe.

"Do not be afraid!" Francis told an estimated 1.5 million pilgrims, many of whom camped out overnight on the Lisbon field so they could be in place for the grand finale of the Catholic festival.

Francis largely stuck to script Sunday but again skipped much of his prepared homily, continuing the improvisation that has characterized his five-day trip to Portugal to preside over the Lisbon edition of World Youth Day.

Early on in his 10-year papacy, Francis would frequently go rogue and ignore his pre-planned speeches, seemingly moved by the moment to engage directly with even huge crowds of people. In more recent years, he largely stuck to script especially when visiting places where Christians are a minority or where his audiences might not appreciate his informal style.

But in Lisbon, he's been back on comfortable turf, with many people who can easily follow his native Spanish and seem to appreciate his conversational way of communicating. They also



AP PHOTO

seem to appreciate the massive turnout.

"I never thought that so many people would come," said Ana Garcia Prat, a 23-year-old Spanish pilgrim in Lisbon. "In my head, I never pictured a Mass with so many people from so many different countries."

On Sunday, Francis urged the young people to follow their dreams and not be afraid of failing, reprising a theme that St. John Paul II frequently repeated during his quarter century of World Youth Days.

"As young people, you want to change the world and it is good that you want to change the world and work for justice and peace," Francis said. "You devote all your energy and creativity to this, yet it still seems insufficient."

He insisted: "The Church and the world need you, the young, as much as the earth needs rain."

Francis gave a special shout-out to John Paul in his closing remarks, recalling that he launched the World Youth Day events in the 1980s to inspire the next generation of Catholics. It was John Paul who presided over

one of the largest-ever Youth Day gatherings, in Manila, Philippines in 1995, the last time the festival was held in Asia.

After Francis announced Seoul would host the 2027 edition, South Korean youths bearing a huge national flag jumped on the stage in glee. A half-century ago, Catholics represented about 1 percent of the population; today they represent 10 percent of the population of 50 million, and Vatican statistics show that more than 100,000 people are baptized every year.

Usually, faith festivals are held in August, the hottest month in South Korea. Even this year, there were calls to cut short a big international scout festival because of excessive heat.

Notably, Francis didn't say he would be in Seoul - he will be 90 in 2027. But he noted there will be an earlier occasion for a youth jamboree in 2025 when the Vatican hosts a Jubilee year expected to draw more than 30 million pilgrims to Rome.

Over the last few days, Francis has ditched speeches in favor of off-the-cuff conversations with young peo-

ple and substituted a formal prayer for peace in Ukraine at the Fatima shrine, long associated with exhortations of peace and conversion in Russia. The Vatican later published part of the prayer on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

Responding to questions about whether the pope's health is the reason behind his ignored speeches, the Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, said Francis is in good shape and isn't suffering any eyesight problems that might make reading his remarks difficult.

The young people seemed thrilled with all that he's been saying. They braved a searing temperature of 38 degrees C on Saturday to be in place for the vigil service to hear him.

They woke Sunday as the sun rose over the River Tagus. Many had slept on mats, cots and the bare ground to be in place for Francis' Mass, scheduled for early to avoid midday temperatures that were expected to hit 40 degrees C. Starting at dawn, a priest-DJ started spinning thumping reggae and Christian hymns from the sound system. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1987 CHILLY SWIM THAWS
COLD WAR RELATIONS



An American woman has become the first person to swim from the United States to the Soviet Union.

Lynne Cox, 30, took two hours and six minutes to cross the Bering Strait which separates the Arctic and Pacific oceans - and the two superpowers.

She swam the 2.7 miles (4.3 km) from Alaska to Siberia in a bathing suit despite warnings the temperature of the water - which is frozen for most of the year - was dangerously low at around 5°C.

Experts believe she succeeded because of a combination of determination and her own body fat which insulated her like a seal.

Ms Cox who weighs 13 stone, has about 36% body fat compared to the average for women of between 18-25%.

After completing the crossing Ms Cox said she was thrilled by the help she had received from the USSR.

"It's the best, it's more than I ever imagined - to have them open their door and let us land on their shore.

"Having that support from the Soviets and having them help us get into shore and meeting us was wonderful," she said.

The crossing was the latest in a series of endurance swims undertaken by Lynne Cox.

At the age of 14 she swam the 31-mile-wide (49 km) Catalina Channel in southern California.

In 1975 she became the first woman to swim the 14-mile (23km) Cook Straits in New Zealand in a time of just over 12 hours.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

After her arduous swim Lynne Cox became famous throughout the Soviet Union. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev praised her later that year during the signing of a nuclear weapons treaty in Washington DC. "She proved by her courage how closely to each other our people live," Mr Gorbachev said. But though she became a heroine in the Soviet Union her swim did not make that much of an impact at home - US President Ronald Reagan allegedly had no idea to whom Mr Gorbachev was referring. Lynne Cox returned to the Soviet Union in 1988 to swim across Lake Baikal.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Direct your energy wisely today. Anger will prevail if you expect help from others. Channel your energy into decorating or household chores. Try to keep an open mind.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
 It might be best to spend time fixing up your premises and making changes that will be appreciated. The emotional state of peers may cause a problem for you.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
 You can have a working relationship with children if you exercise patience and understanding of the dilemmas they face. You may meet that special person if you attend fundraising functions.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Love and romance are evident. Opportunities for travel must be carefully considered. You are going through a period of questioning.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 You could have a need to make some changes today. Your lack of interest in your partner is a problem. Try to include friends and relatives in your activities.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Maybe it's time to look into ways you can improve your health. Stay out of other people's affairs. You are best not to discuss your personal life with others.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Social gatherings will be conducive to meeting new potential mates. Hide your cards and learn to say no. You need activity.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Romantic encounters will develop through colleagues. Changes in your home are apparent, and you must be willing to bend if you don't want to find yourself alone.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Your devotion will be persuasive. Your emotions may get the better of you. You can handle situations that require contact with institutions or large corporations.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Don't let relatives stand in the way of your personal plans. Your mind may not be on the job. You may have a problem with coworkers if you try to tell them what to do.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Take a second look; another person's philosophy may be extremely different from yours. Your confidence will stabilize your position. Direct your energy into physical exertion.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 It might be time to do some of those chores at home. Consider a trial separation if you and your mate just can't come to terms.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	24	29	cloudy
Changchun	18	24	rain
Chengdu	23	32	showers
Chongqing	27	36	rain
Fuzhou	28	36	rain
Guangzhou	26	35	thunderstorms
Guiyang	21	27	showers
Haikou	26	34	cloudy
Hangzhou	25	33	thunderstorms
Harbin	18	22	rain
Hefei	25	31	thunderstorms
Nanjing	27	33	overcast
Shanghai	28	33	overcast
Taipei	27	31	cloudy
Wuhan	28	33	showers
Hong Kong	31	33	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	21	31	fine
Frankfurt	11	30	showers
Paris	13	23	overcast
London	12	2	overcast
New York	23	26	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- More than sufficient; 6- Evil is as evil ____; 10- "____ you dare!"; 14- Less common; 15- Breakfast brand; 16- Cabinet dept.; 17- Last letter of the Greek alphabet; 18- Bunches; 19- Flaky mineral; 20- WWII female enlistee; 21- Income source; 23- Disgusting; 24- Establish; 26- Roman name of Demeter; 27- Poe maiden; 29- Mindlessly stupid; 31- Mercury or Saturn; 32- Bungling; 33- Junkyard dog; 36- Make a trade?; 40- ____ favor; 41- Monarch's rule; 42- Budget rival; 43- Trunk; 44- Oppose; 46- Chip dip; 48- ____ and the Night Visitors; 49- Aquarium buildup; 50- Run up; 52- Occupational suffix; 55- Blackbird; 56- Muscle injury; 57- Shallow ornamental bowl; 59- Logical beginning?; 60- Florence's river; 61- Cheri of "Saturday Night Live"; 62- Just ____; 63- Lament; 64- Knobby;

DOWN 1- Get one's ducks in ____; 2- Baby's cry; 3- Cantor; 4- Human limb, section of a journey; 5- Rubber; 6- Passed out; 7- Eyeball; 8- Self-images; 9- Foster Brooks persona; 10- Reserved; 11- In readiness; 12- Makes out; 13- Salver; 22- Hotshot; 23- Gossipmonger; 25- It's over your head; 26- ____ Crunch; 27- Reindeer herder; 28- Monetary unit of Spain; 29- Architect Jones; 30- Dodge model; 32- Egyptian goddess of fertility; 33- Polite; 34- Israeli weapons; 35- Breather; 37- Uneven; 38- Lab fluids; 39- Whip; 43- Aztec god of rain; 44- Apt. divisions; 45- Singer Sheena; 46- Snow conveyances; 47- Give consent; 48- Biblical brother; 49- What ____ mind reader?; 50- Prefix with -drome; 51- "Give that ____ cigar!"; 53- Book before Nehemiah; 54- Complain; 56- Skye cap; 58- From ____ Z;

Friday's solution

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- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
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- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
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Paris' test for Olympic swimming in the Seine canceled due to poor water quality

SYLVIE CORBET & PATRICK HERMANSEN, PARIS

AP PHOTO



HEAVY rains in Paris have led to the cancellation yesterday of a swimming event in the River Seine that was to be a test for next year's Summer Olympics, but Games organizers say the waterway will be better prepared in 2024.

The Open Water Swimming World Cup event was canceled because "the water quality in the Seine has remained below acceptable standards for safeguarding swimmers' health," French Swimming Federation (FFN) said in a statement yesterday.

Water quality falls below acceptable standards when rains cause overflows of untreated waste into the Seine. France's capital city is spending massively on water-management projects that officials say will make pollution caused by storms less frequent.

Brigitte Legaré, sport mana-

ger at the Paris Olympics organization committee, said "unfortunately, this morning when we took the (water quality) reading that came out after 24 hours, we were still slightly above the limits. We're not very far."

World Aquatics' President

Husain al-Musallam said the organization is "disappointed... but the health of our athletes must always be our top priority."

"World Aquatics remains excited at the prospect of city-centre Olympic racing for the world's best open water swimmers next

summer. However, this weekend has demonstrated that it is absolutely imperative that robust contingency plans are put in place," he said in the statement.

The Seine is the venue for marathon swimming at the Games next summer and the swimming leg of the Olympic and Paralympic triathlon.

Paris Olympics organizers and the city's authorities said in a joint statement yesterday that "in recent weeks, water quality in the Seine has regularly reached the levels required for competitions to be held on the dedicated site, demonstrating the significant progress made."

They said water quality will be closely monitored in the coming days in the hope that triathletes can race in the Seine during a test event scheduled on August 17-20.

"By 2024, new infrastructure will be delivered to further improve rainwater treatment to improve water quality," they said.

Those public works include a giant underground reservoir in Paris that will stock excess water during storms, so it doesn't have to be spilled untreated into the river and can be treated later.

Pierre Rabadan, deputy mayor of Paris in charge of sports, said "we're in an outdoor sport subject to climatic variations, weather conditions and that brings uncertainties. We're going to deal with these uncertainties."

When new water cleanup facilities will be ready, "we'll be able to regulate even exceptional phenomena like the one we're facing today," he said.

Paris Games organizers also say the schedule for Olympic events in the river can be adjusted next year if the water quality doesn't allow them to take place on their original dates.

Their statement said the recent weather was "exceptional," with the Paris region seeing its heaviest summer rainfalls since 1965. MDT/AP

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OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

NO EASY SOLUTION TO REPAIR SINO-AUSTRALIAN TIES

The Australian Embassy in China has reportedly extended an invitation to Foreign Minister Wang Yi to visit Australia.

The expected visit would be a "return visit" following Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong's trip to Beijing last December to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic ties, during which they held the sixth round of China-Australia Foreign and Strategic Dialogue.

Like Wong's December trip to China, the reported invitation to Wang is a fresh sign of the two governments trying to thaw a relationship that had been in deep freeze over the past few years. These may not suffice to bring the relations to where they used to be, but they are worthy endeavors in both sides' interests. To what extent the two governments succeed in fence-mending, however, hinges on what lessons they have learned from the fraught relationship.

The Chinese foreign minister was correct in saying there are neither historical grudges nor fundamental conflicts of interest between China and Australia, so they have every reason to become cooperative partners who benefit each other.

Friendly, robust economic and trade relations served both countries well until they were taken hostage in the geopolitical game directed by Washington. Through two previous administrations, politicians in Canberra unilaterally sabotaged relations with China under such pretexts as a "China threat", "national security" and "virus origin probe".

At the same time, Canberra's active participation in the US-led "Indo-Pacific" strategic deployments has further deteriorated the political atmosphere for improving bilateral ties. Its roles in the Quadri-lateral Security Dialogue and the AUKUS alliance, for instance, are obvious thorns in Beijing's side.

Having benefited so much from their once thriving economic and trade exchanges, both Beijing and Canberra have felt the need to repair ties. Considering the complex non-economic factors involved, however, there may be no easy solution.

Easing trade ties may be a viable first step. But how much strategic autonomy the government in Canberra can demonstrate under pressure from its Western peers notwithstanding, the very negative public feelings and ideological biases against China the past two administrations had instigated will also be a hurdle for any substantial progress toward better China-Australia relations.

The less-than-favorable perception of China that holds sway in Australia has proven to be sticky. That is why when they met on the sidelines of the July ASEAN+1 foreign ministers' meeting in Jakarta on July 13, Wang told Wong the two countries should cultivate a friendly atmosphere in which the two peoples understand and appreciate each other.

That is something the two sides must make efforts to achieve.

HIGH SECURITY PRISON FOR EX-PAKISTANI PM IMRAN KHAN AFTER COURT SENTENCING

THE BUZZ

Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan awoke yesterday as an inmate in a high-security prison after a court handed him a three-year jail sentence for corruption, a development that could end his future in politics.

The court ruled Saturday that national cricketing hero Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in April 2022 but remains the country's leading opposition figure, had concealed assets after selling state gifts.

The prison sentence could bar him from politics under a law that

prohibits people with a criminal conviction from holding or running for public office. He could also lose the chairmanship of the party he founded, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, or PTI.

Critics say efforts to put Khan behind bars are politically motivated and have intensified ahead of elections due to be held later this year.

They argue that Khan's popularity and a large support base pose a threat to the ruling coalition and its backers in Pakistan's powerful military that has been the final arbiter of the country's politics since independence from Britain in 1947.

XINHUA



MORE PEOPLE GO MISSING AND THOUSANDS ARE EVACUATED AS CHINA IS HIT BY MORE FLOODS

RAIN continued to pelt northeastern China in the wake of Typhoon Doksuri on Saturday, as authorities reported more fatalities and missing people while evacuating thousands more.

Six people died and four went missing in the city of Shulan in Jilin province, which has seen five straight days of rainfall, according to state media.

Over 18,900 people were evacuated from the city of more than 700,000, according to the local disaster relief agency. State news agency China News Service showed images of waterlogged streets around homes and factories. The average precipitation in the city had reached 111.7 mm by Friday afternoon.

China is struggling with record-breaking rainfall in some areas while others suffer scorching summer heat and drought that threatens crops. The heavy rains - remnants of Typhoon Doksuri - have battered northern China since late July, disrupting the lives of millions. Flooding near Beijing and in neighboring Hebei province this week killed at least 22 people.

In northeastern Heilongjiang province, which is known as China's "great northern granary," rain

inundated farms and flooded streets, leading to the evacuation of thousands.

In the city of Shangzhi, heavy rainfall turned roads into rivers and inundated thousands of households.

National emergency management authorities said 25 rivers across Heilongjiang threatened to burst their banks, while disaster relief groups have been dispatched to the province.

In Heilongjiang's capital of Harbin, more than 53,000 people had to be evacuated as multiple reservoirs and rivers exceeded safety levels while some 41,600 hectares (103,000 acres) of crops were damaged.

In the city of Yushu in Jilin province, about 120 kilometers south of Harbin, flooding forced the evacuation of around 19,000 people.

Meanwhile, in Hebei province around Beijing, which saw some of the region's worst flooding in the past few weeks, authorities issued fresh alerts for rainstorms on Saturday.

Floodwaters in Zhuozhou, southwest of Beijing, started to recede Saturday, state media reported, allowing some of the 125,000 evacuated residents to return to their homes.

The death toll in the 11 million-strong city of Baoding reached 10 while another 18 people are still missing, local authorities said Saturday.

Floods damaged roads and washed away bridges in the city's Yesanpo Scenic Area, a national park known for its gorges and mountains.

Meanwhile, an earthquake in eastern China before dawn yesterday knocked down houses and injured at least 21 people, according to state media, but no deaths were reported.

The magnitude 5.5 quake occurred near the city of Dezhou, about 300 kilometers south of Beijing, the Chinese capital, at 2:33 a.m., according to the China Earthquake Networks Center. The U.S. Geological Survey put the magnitude at 5.4.

The quake caused 126 homes to collapse and 21 people were injured, government broadcaster China Central Television and other news outlets reported.

TV broadcasters showed Dezhou residents who ran outdoors after the quake sitting on sidewalks in the predawn darkness. Video on social media showed bricks that had fallen from cracked walls. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Russia promised retaliation Saturday after Ukrainian drones hit a Russian tanker in the Black Sea near Crimea last week, the second sea attack involving drones in one day. Ukraine struck a major Russian port earlier. Moscow strongly condemned what it sees as a Ukrainian "terrorist attack" on a civilian vessel in the Kerch Strait. As Kyiv's naval capabilities grow, the Black Sea is becoming an increasingly important battleground in the war.

AP PHOTO



Slovenia has faced the worst-ever natural disaster in its history, Prime Minister Robert Golob said Saturday, after devastating floods caused damage estimated at half a billion euros. Devastating floods on Thursday and Friday killed three people and destroyed roads, bridges and houses in the small Alpine country. Two thirds of the territory had been affected, Golob said.

AP PHOTO



Portugal Pope Francis told young people yesterday the Catholic Church needs them and urged them to follow their dreams as he wrapped up World Youth Day in Portugal with a massive open-air Mass and an announcement that the next edition would be held in Asia. At the end of the Mass, Francis announced that the next edition would be held in Seoul, South Korea in 2027, bringing the festival back to Asia for the first time in over three decades. More on p8