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MACAU electronics

THE ANDAZ MACAU WILL OPEN ITS DOORS TO THE PUBLIC ON SEPTEMBER 15, JUST AHEAD OF THE NATIONAL DAY ‘GOLDEN WEEK’

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LAWMAKER CALLS ON GOV'T TO ALLOW COLOANE RESIDENTS TO RECEIVE MEDICAL CARE AT ISLANDS HOSPITAL

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CHINA EXPANDS THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES FOR TRAVEL

▲ P7



AP PHOTO



South Korea Tropical Storm Khanun was pouring intense rain on South Korea yesterday, turning roads into chocolate-colored rivers and leaving at least one person dead as it advanced north toward major urban centers near Seoul. More than a foot of rain fell in eastern and southern areas after the storm made landfall on the mainland in the morning. More than 16,000 people, mostly in southern regions, were evacuated from their homes.

AP PHOTO



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered his military to sharpen its war plans and signed off on expanding combat operations of frontline units, state media said yesterday, as the United States and South Korea prepare for a large-scale combined military exercise. Condemning the allies' expanding drills as invasion rehearsals, Kim has used them as a pretext to further accelerate his weapons demonstrations, which have included the testing-firings of more than 100 missiles since the start of 2022.

AP PHOTO

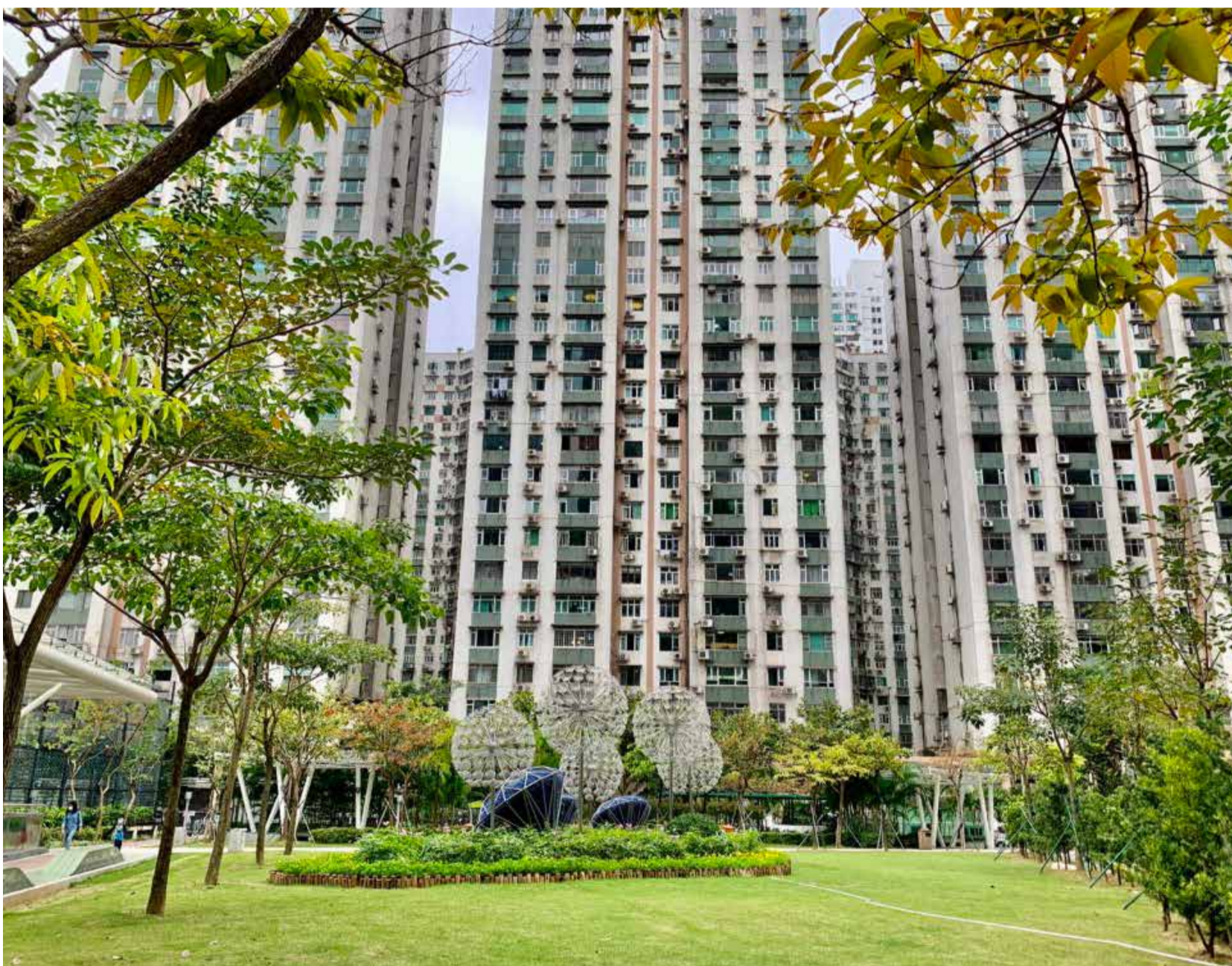


Russian air defense systems yesterday shot down two drones heading toward Moscow for a second straight day. The reported attack disrupted flights at two international airports as Ukraine appeared to step up its assault on Russian soil. One drone was downed in the Kaluga region southwest of Moscow and another near a major Moscow ring road, according to Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin and the Russian Defense Ministry, which blamed the attack on Ukraine.

More on backpage

NOT 'TOO PRICEY'

The new plots in Taipa being auctioned for residential development will sell a bit below market prices, Centaline told the Times ▲ P3



GAMING

WYNN'S REVENUE SURGES ALONG WITH TENANT RETAIL SALES

▲ P4



RENATO MARQUES

ZHENG ANTING CALLS ON GOV'T TO ALLOW COLOANE RESIDENTS TO RECEIVE MEDICAL CARE AT ISLANDS HOSPITAL

LAWMAKER Zheng Anting has called on the government to consider the needs of the residents of Coloane, namely the elderly, by allowing them to use the new Islands Hospital. The hospital is expected to commence operations late this year as a common public hospital.

Zheng's call was made at the Legislative Assembly in a spoken inquiry delivered before the plenary session earlier this week.

The lawmakers noted that, in recent years, several public and private housing developments have been built in Coloane, which resulted in a population explosion in that area.

Zheng, citing statistical data, said that in a period of 10 years, between 2011 and 2021, the number of residents of Coloane increased by 754%, reaching 36,384, a fact that puts even more pressure on the healthcare facilities of that area, which were already struggling.

Citing complaints mostly from residents of the Seac Pai Van public housing estate, Zheng said that the medical services provided by the Healthcare Center of Seac Pai Van are limited and that many

of the residents need additional services that can only be provided at the public hospital, which is very far from residents and where transportation is inconvenient.

Zheng said that is not only their hope, but a promise from previous governments that the construction of the Islands hospital had the purpose to provide, among others, better specialty and emergency health care to the residents of Coloane and Taipa, a promise that seems to have been forgotten, as the government is changing the purpose of the long overdue medical unit to a commercial purpose, according to the lawmaker.

The lawmaker suggests the government create a special "green lane" for the residents of Coloane to be able to access medical care at the facility just like in the public hospital without need of a reference from the Health Bureau.



Medical room at Islands Hospital

CRIME

POLICE PROSECUTE JAY-DRIVER WHO PUSHES SCOOTER TO OPPOSITE LANE

THE Public Security Police Force (PSP) announced yesterday that charges have been pressed against a driver who forced a moving scooter to the opposite lane on Avenida de Amizade.

The news first broke out on a social media group. A user posted dashboard camera footage that depicted a greenish tour coach with license plate numbered MY-65-XX moving along Avenida de Amizade. It was moving in the direction from Oceanus to Bai Yun Garden.

At the spot across the Grand Prix control tower, the coach changed lanes from the right to the left, in the attempt to overtake a scooter in front of it. When it returned to the right lane, the driver almost slammed the coach against the motorcyclist, forcing the mo-



torcyclist to swing to the right side and move to the next lane for traffic moving in the opposite direction.

The video showed that the two vehicles were only a foot or so apart at their closest point.

The motorcyclist mana-

ged to return to safety before a vehicle in the opposite direction crashed into them.

The police has called on all drivers to abide by local road laws and regulations to ensure their own safety and that of others. **AL**

CRIME

TRADE UNION REPORTS SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT THEFT TO POLICE

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) has announced that a local trade union reported a suspected social media identity theft, in which a lucky draw was run without the union's consent.

The police disclosed that on Aug. 7, a local trade union notified them of the matter. The union told the police that one of its social media pages had been stolen or replaced by an impostor page. The impostor page announced that on Aug. 1, details of a lucky draw would be released.

The post has generated many replies, which is the way to enter the lucky draw. The impostor page later picked "winners" from the list of commenters, and asked them to follow a link to a website, which presented the same



information about the same lucky draw.

The union approached the police to report the case. It suspected that its page had been stolen and its website on the page's information page replaced by an address to an unknown but fraudulent website.

No suspect has been

identified, but the case was referred to the investigation division of the police.

Separately, four days ago Wynn Resorts Macau, S.A made an announcement on its social media claiming that a page impersonating the resort operator had been discovered. **AL**

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REAL ESTATE

Realtor does not expect land auction price to be 'too high'

ANTHONY LAM

THE plots of land to be auctioned by the government are not expected to sell for high amounts, an executive from a regional realty agency told the Times yesterday.

On Wednesday, the government announced that two plots of land, identified as BT8 and BT9a, would be put up for public semi-blind auctions. Bidding will end at 12 noon on Sep. 26, and all bids will be revealed to the public on Sep. 27, at 10am for BT8 and at 3 p.m. for BT9a.

In an exclusive interview, John Ng, principal regional sales director at Centaline Macau Enterprise Limited, said that despite all the good messages represented by the news about a land auction after 15 years, he did not expect the closing price of the auction to be high. The two land plots – diagonally across Nova Mall in Taipa – come with starting prices of MOP1.136 billion and MOP777 million.

Ng did some calculations and concluded that the per-square-foot price is about MOP3,000. Judging from the current pricing of residential apartments in Taipa, he believed the closing price is unlikely to be higher than MOP6,000 per square foot. However, he pointed out that land auction is not a



simple procedure and will involve many processes, so the price may fluctuate.

Another critical factor having impact on the price is the presence of external bidders. This auction is open to external bidders, and Ng thought that bidders from Hong Kong and mainland China might be interested, because to external bidders, land auction is a more transparent manner of land assignment.

On the other hand, he finds the auction a very positive message from the government that it strives to ensure supply of housing to the people. Recalling the past years, there has not been enough supply of real properties in Taipa. Although there has been some private transaction of land ownership or development rights, it was not an official auction, he emphasized. Moreover, the two land plots are located in the emer-

ging center of Taipa, with a lifestyle shopping mall a block away, so it will provide support to the real property market. As a result, he sees this as a very strong message from the government.

When asked about the segmenting of the future development, Ng expects it to be high-end residential projects, with the mode of land acquisition and general price levels in Taipa being influential.

RENATO MARQUES

THE Andaz Macau has announced it will open its doors to the public on September 15 this year, ahead of the "golden week" of the National Day.

The hotel is the world's largest Andaz property yet and is a partnership between Galaxy Macau and Hyatt, featuring over 700 rooms and suites.

Being part of Galaxy's Cotai development in Cotai – Phase 3, the Andaz is located in the same development area as the recently opened Galaxy International Convention Center and the Galaxy Arena, the bid of the Galaxy Entertainment Group for the MICE sector as well as non-gaming entertainment sector.

The development is marketed as a convenient offer for MICE guests as well as other guests "pursuing a modern lifestyle."

Andaz Macau Hotel to open doors on Sept. 15



Besides the more than 700 rooms and suites, the new hotel also features a

dedicated check-in lounge catering to large MICE groups as well as a Lounge

and a Bar.

The food and beverage offering will be complete

with the Andaz Kitchen which, according to the media release, will offer a selection of Chinese, Portuguese, and Western culinary dishes.

Hotel facilities will also include an indoor heated pool and a fitness center.

One of the features highlighted by the new brand is the relationship that will hopefully be established between the new hotel and the surrounding area, namely the Old Taipa village, in the pursuit of a "real Macau" experience.

The Andaz Macau is one of nine hotels considered under construction late last month that will, combined, increase total hotel capacity to 3,732 rooms.

According to the same data released by the Land and Urban Construction Bureau, an additional eight developments are currently at the project stage, with 1,308 rooms proposed.

CE TO TAKE QUESTIONS FROM PARLIAMENT TODAY

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng will sit in a parliamentary plenary meeting at 3 p.m. this afternoon to answer questions raised by lawmakers. The questions are usually not released to the public in advance. The government said in a statement that, through similar sessions, it hopes to improve communications with lawmakers and public awareness of the work of the government. The session will be broadcast online and offline by public broadcaster TDM, as well as on the parliament's, the government's and the Chief Executive Office's website, in addition to the YouTube channels of the latter two.

LATEST ROUND OF SUBSIDIZED TRAINING TO TAKE APPLICATIONS AUG. 14-18

The 33rd round of the government subsidized training shall open for applications from Aug. 14 to 18. The plan was begun in 2020 amid an economic downturn, in the hopes of encouraging people to acquire new knowledge and skills, while obtaining a subsidy from the government. Skill improvement-oriented training will equate to a maximum MOP5,000 subsidy to participating employees and freelancers, while career-oriented training to a maximum of MOP6,656 will be for participants who are unemployed or have recently graduated from university.

CCAC ORGANIZES LOCAL YOUTH FOR INTERNAL EXPERIENCE

The Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) has invited a group of local youth aged between 12 and 35 years to a docent visit to its Taipa Community Office. The event was conducted in two parts, with the first part being a seminar conducted by CCAC officers about anti-corruption laws and information, as well as an introduction to law-enforcement tools. There was also a venue tour in which visitors could witness an identification parade. The second part comprised an investigation of a mock case through AR technology to aid visitors' understanding.

GAMING

WYNN MACAU SEES REVENUE SURGE ALONG WITH 'VERY HEALTHY' TENANT RETAIL SALES

LYNZY VALLES

WYNN Macau has generated revenues exceeding analysts' expectations as Macau undergoes a robust recovery.

In the second quarter, the gaming operator generated USD246 million of EBITDAR, which is 72% of pre-Covid levels.

"Hold was a bit of a mixed bag in the quarter as we held high in our VIP business, but that was more than offset by low hold on the mass table side. We saw strength across the property with several components of the business above 2019 levels," said Craig Billings, Chief Executive Officer of Wynn Resorts, in an earnings call with analysts.

Billings noted that mass table drop increased 4% versus Q2 2019, despite the fact that "portions of Wynn Macau's casino were closed for renovation during the quarter."

"The quality of our product and service, the relaunch of our loyalty program, and our very robust non-gaming events calendar, all helped drive 14.2% market share in the quarter, consistent with our share as we exited 2019."

Meanwhile, on the non-gaming side, its tenant retail sales have surged up to 47%



relative to Q2 2019, which the company considered to be "incredibly strong."

According to the gaming operator, the strength has continued into Q3 with mass drops per day in July exceeding what the group experienced in each month in Q2 and reaching 120% of daily mass

drop in 2019.

"In July, we also continue to experience robust hotel occupancy and very healthy tenant retail sales," said Billings.

Billings told analysts that customers had shorter stays at the hotel but have stayed more frequently and spent more money.

Billings attributes the trend to recovery from Covid-19, when customers were more likely to come for longer periods if they committed to traveling.

Further, the CEO revealed that construction is now underway on Wynn Al Marjan Island, Wynn's planned integrated resort in the UAE, with secant walls and soil compaction complete and over 40% of the required hotel piles in the ground.

WYNN ADDS PAUL LIU TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Wynn Resorts has announced the appointment of experienced executive Paul Liu to its board of directors.

"Liu's track record and perspective on creating guest experiences in the luxury and hospitality fields, as well as his unique understanding of business talent in the Asia Pacific market, will be a significant contribution to the company," a Wynn Resorts spokesman said, as cited in reports. "He will offer an important perspective to the Wynn board of directors."

Serving as an independent director, Liu has experience in entertainment, hospitality and financial services across China and the Asia-Pacific region.



INSURANCE

MANULIFE Q2 SALES SET RECORD HIGH AS HK, MACAU DEMAND INCREASES

RENATO MARQUES

THE insurance sales over the second quarter of this year from Manulife Hong Kong and Macau have set a record high, the company reported.

According to the release, the Q2 annualized premium equivalent (APE) sales were HKD2.1 billion, which represents a twofold increase compared to the same period last year.

The company added that the APE sales to domestic customers continue to reflect the ongoing consumer demand for savings, health, and protection products.

During Q2, increased momentum from mainland visitors drove APE sales across distribution channels, notably broker and bancassurance, contributing to a record percentage of mainland visitors' sales to Manulife Hong Kong and Macau's total APE sales.

Among the new products launched during the quarter in analysis were the FlexiFortune Annuity Plan and regular-premium versions of Prestige Saver and Prestige Preserver, which were said to have had a greater acceptance among those in this market segment.

The New Business Value (NBV) also increased by 31% year-on-year to HKD1.1 billion, driven by greater sales volumes partially offset by changes in product mix.

The company noted that the results obtained in Q2 "made a significant contribution to Manulife's strong APE sales growth in Asia and momentum across the region."

"Our sales for the second quarter of 2023 have exceeded the pre-pandemic records set in 2019. We are encouraged by the momentum we are driving across our Hong Kong and Macau business and the future earnings we expect that these sales will generate," Patrick Graham, CEO of Manulife Hong Kong and Macau said, adding, "with a firm commitment to growth, we plan to continue to expand our distribution network and customer service facilities meaningfully by the end of this year, while also fully supporting the establishment of after-sales insurance service centers in mainland Greater Bay Area cities."

THE second phase of the expansion of the Hengqin Port border crossing is ready to enter its trial period, which will begin at the end of this month, the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak said yesterday.

The Secretary was speaking to the media on the sidelines of a committee meeting at the Legislative Assembly where the new law that will regulate gun possession, use, and other related items is being discussed in detail.

According to Wong, phase 2 of the expansion of the Port has been in testing since early June and will now enter the final testing phase with a trial period in real conditions.

The Secretary noted that after this last test, the

GBA

Hengqin Port phase 2 to begin trial this month

Port's new border crossing system would be fully implemented, but that this would not happen immediately, as authorities must first guarantee the smooth and stable operation of the system.

Wong also noted that the access bridge connecting the University of Macau to Hengqin Port construction has been completed, but still needs to undergo some rectification works. He hopes both projects can begin operation simultaneously. RM



HOSPITALITY

Las Vegas food service workers demanding better pay set to rally on the Strip

RIO YAMAT, LAS VEGAS

FOOD service workers at a Las Vegas Strip arena demanding higher pay and better benefits are set to rally today [Macau time] beneath the glittery lights of the famed tourist corridor amid ongoing negotiations for a union contract.

The Culinary Workers Union, a political powerhouse in Nevada, said in a statement ahead of the rally that servers, dishwashers, cooks and bartenders who work at T-Mobile Arena have been locked in contract negotiations for nearly a year with their employer, Levy Premium Food Service. The workers say they want a fair contract that will ensure "one job is enough to provide for their families."

The union represents 60,000 hospitality workers in Las Vegas and Reno, including 200 Levy employees who work at the arena, the home stadium of the Vegas Golden Knights.

The rally is scheduled to be held near the arena, and thousands are expected to participate. It comes two weeks after members voted 97% in favor of authorizing a strike if a contract isn't reached soon and is the union's second gathering on the Strip in recent months highlighting the ongoing negotiations with Levy, which provides food and drink services to arenas, convention centers and other venues nationwide.

In a statement, Levy said it was discouraged by the union's decision to rally after several months of negotiations.

"We remain committed to working diligently with the Union to reach a fair agreement that shows our team members how much we value them," the statement said, "and we look forward to returning to the bargaining table soon."

MGM Resorts International, which operates T-Mobile Arena, did not immediately respond to a

request for comment.

Lucia Orozco has worked as a cook at the arena since it opened in 2016. She described herself and her husband, a hospitality worker at a nearby Strip casino, as hard workers who don't spend outside of their means. Yet they live paycheck to paycheck and don't have money saved to retire anytime soon.

"I worry about it because I'm very close to retirement," the 56-year-old said. "I don't have too much time left."

Orozco, who was among the block of union members who voted to authorize a strike, said she wasn't surprised by the results of the vote.

"Everybody's tired of not making enough," she said.

A date for a strike has not been set, but the union said its members have taken major steps toward walking off the job, including making picket signs and signing up for shifts on the picket line.



AP PHOTO

The possible strike looms ahead of the Golden Knights' first preseason home hockey game Sept. 27 against the Los Angeles Kings and the team's season opener at home Oct. 10 against the Seattle Kraken. If the union strikes, it would happen against the backdrop of thousands of hospitality workers in Southern California, also demanding higher pay and improved benefits, walking off the job last month. The union there described it as

the largest strike in its history.

Other union members who work on the Strip and in downtown Las Vegas are expected to participate in Thursday's rally (today, Macau time). In June, hundreds of members dressed in red assembled on the Strip to bring attention to the contract negotiations with Levy, filling entire walkways as they waved signs that read "ONE JOB SHOULD BE ENOUGH" at cars driving by. **MDT/AP**

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TECH WAR

CHINA ACCUSES US OF TRYING TO BLOCK ITS DEVELOPMENT, DEMANDS TECHNOLOGY CURBS BE REPEALED

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINA accused Washington yesterday of trying to block its development after President Joe Biden stepped up a feud over technology and security by tightening controls on U.S. investments that might help Beijing develop its military.

The Foreign Ministry accused the Biden administration of pursuing "technology hegemony" and demanded Washington "immediately revoke its erroneous decision." It warned that the latest restrictions in a spreading conflict over Beijing's industrial development would hurt global supply chains.

An order signed by Biden earlier targets advanced computer chips, micro electronics, quantum information technologies and artificial intelligence. The order says it wants to limit U.S. investment in industries that "might help develop the ruling Communist Party's military wing."



The order adds to restrictions that limit Chinese access to U.S. processor chips used in smartphones, artificial intelligence and other technology on security grounds. Dozens of Chinese companies that Washington says are linked to military modernization are barred from American financial markets.

Washington's "true purpose is to deprive China of its development rights and maintain its own

hegemony," the Foreign Ministry said.

China will "resolutely safeguard its own rights and interests," the Ministry of Commerce said in a separate statement, but it gave no indication of possible retaliation. Beijing has made similar comments after previous U.S. trade restrictions but usually takes no action.

As it imposes restrictions, the Biden administration is trying to

revive U.S.-Chinese relations that are at their lowest level in decades due to disputes over security, human rights, technology, Taiwan and Beijing's treatment of Hong Kong.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited Beijing in July and said communication would increase but announced no agreements on disputes. Chinese leaders have demanded the United States change its policies on Taiwan and other issues but have given no indication they might change trade and other policies that irk Washington and China's Asian neighbors.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping's government has announced only small steps to retaliate for Western tech restrictions, "possibly to avoid disrupting a multibillion-dollar campaign to create its own processor chip, artificial intelligence and other technology industries," observers contend.

Chinese rules that took effect Aug. 1 require exporters of gallium and germanium, two metals used

in computer chips and solar cells, to obtain government licenses. The announcement rattled Japanese and South Korean electronics manufacturers.

The conflict has prompted fears of "decoupling," or the world splitting into separate industrial markets with conflicting standards that mean electronics, auto and other products and components from one couldn't be used in the other. That might hamper innovation and economic growth.

Yellen and other U.S. officials say they don't want "decoupling" but are pursuing "de-risking." They say that includes developing additional sources of raw materials, industrial components and consumer goods to avoid disruptions like those during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Commerce accused Washington of "using the cover of 'risk reduction' to carry out 'decoupling and chain-breaking.'"

At the same time, Xi's government, citing strategic risks, has pressed Chinese industries to use domestic suppliers whenever possible, even when that raises costs. Xi has called for China to become a self-reliant "technology power."

U.S. officials said the new limits were tailored not to disrupt China's economy but would complement export controls on advanced computer chips. MDT/AP

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Chinese tourists tour Pung Tao Gong Chinese Temple in Chiang Mai province, northern Thailand

CHINA has increased the number of countries that its big-spending tourists can visit by more than 70 following the lifting of its last COVID-19 travel restrictions.

The decision comes as international flights to and from the country gradually return to their pre-pandemic levels.

China implemented strict lockdowns and draconian travel controls within the country and closed its borders almost entirely after the virus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Those restrictions began to be lifted late last year, but the government has been hesitant to resume issuing passports and allowing in foreign tourists, as well as giving its citizens the ability to travel abroad.

The expanded options for travel began yesterday.

"The government agencies in charge will provide businesses in the tourism sector with the necessary guidance for the implementation," the Foreign Ministry said. "At this moment, we would like to remind all outbound tourists to

TOURISM

China expands the number of countries for travel by its big-spending tourists

be well-prepared before each journey, stay safe and healthy and show civility as they travel, enjoy the trip and have a safe journey home."

Chinese tourists, who generally travel in groups organized by agencies, are known for spending lavishly on hotels, tours, souvenirs and designer brands. Pre-pandemic, they traveled in larger numbers and spent more as a whole than any other nationality, accounting for \$255 billion in revenue in 2019, according to business consultancy McKinsey & Company.

Thailand, Japan, Australia and EU countries such as Germany have been among the biggest beneficiaries of the Chinese tourist spending, given the relative ease of obtaining visas and the availability of flights.

Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihiko Isozaki yesterday said Japan and China agreed to revitalize exchanges of people between the two countries when their leaders held talks in November.

"The Japanese government also plans to promote active exchanges of people

between the two sides," Isozaki said.

Though it is unclear how quickly activities by Chinese tour companies will restart, a resumption means Chinese group tourists will return to Japan for the first time in more than three years and will be a major boost for Japanese inbound tourism.

Chinese travelers to Japan totaled about 9.6 million or about 30% of the 31.8 million total foreign tourists in 2019 before the coronavirus pandemic, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

POLICE ARREST 10 PEOPLE ACCUSED OF SUPPORTING OVERSEAS ACTIVISTS

HONG Kong police yesterday arrested 10 people on suspicion of endangering national security through their alleged involvement with a now-defunct fund that aimed to help people arrested in 2019 pro-democracy protests, escalating a crackdown on dissidents in the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

The four men and six women are suspected of conspiring to collude with the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund to receive overseas donations and provide financial support to people who fled Hong Kong or organizations that called for sanctions against the city, police said.

A police statement did not identify the suspects or those alleged to be supported by them.

The arrests further intensified the Hong Kong government's crackdown on dissidents after the 2019 protests. More than 260 people have been arrested under a Beijing-imposed national security law, including many of the city's leading pro-democracy activists.

Last year, the fund's former trustees including Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen, singer Denise Ho and former pro-democracy lawmaker Margaret Ng were arrested under the tough law. Zen's arrest at that time sent shockwaves through the Catholic community.

While they have not yet been charged with national security-related charges, they were fined in a separate case in November for failing to register the fund, which ceased operation in 2021.

Police have stepped up their campaign to target eight overseas-based Hong Kong activists, including former pro-democracy lawmakers Nathan Law, Ted Hui and Dennis Kwok.

They accuse the eight of violating the national security law and have offered rewards of 1 million Hong Kong dollars (\$127,600) for information leading to each of their arrests.

The bounties are the first under the law, and the authorities' move drew criticism from Western governments. Families of some of the activists have since been questioned by police.

Authorities also arrested former members of Demosisto — a now-defunct political party co-founded by Law — on suspicion of supporting overseas activists who allegedly endangered national security.

Police said yesterday they searched the homes and offices of the newly arrested suspects and seized documents and electronic communication devices. The suspects were accused of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces to endanger national security and inciting riot, police said.

"The police operation is ongoing and the possibility of further arrests is not ruled out," the statement said.

The security law has prosecuted and silenced many since its enactment in 2020. But the government and pro-Beijing camp have praised it for bringing back stability to the region.

The 2019 protests were sparked by a since-withdrawn bill that would have allowed criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China. **MDT/AP**

DIRE STRAIT

Beijing sends ships and fighter jets toward Taiwan in new show of force

CHINA sent navy ships and a large group of fighter jets toward Taiwan, continuing its military pressure on the island, Taiwan said yesterday.

Taiwan's ministry said the Chinese People's Liberation Army

sent 33 warplanes and 6 navy vessels between 6 a.m. Wednesday to 6 a.m. Thursday. The J-10 and J-16 fighter jets flew across the midline and to the southwest of Taiwan.

The ministry said in an earlier statement Wednesday

that Taiwan's military tracked five of the ships as they sailed in coordination with the flights of the fighter jets.

The ministry said it used land-based missile systems to track the aircraft, 10 of which crossed the

midline of the Taiwan Strait, an unofficial boundary that had been considered a buffer between the island and mainland.

In response to escalating Chinese military pressure, Taiwan has been buying weapons and fighter jets

to shore up its defenses. In July, the U.S. announced a \$345 million package of sales to Taiwan that will include portable air defense systems, intelligence and surveillance capabilities, firearms and missiles. **MDT/AP**

AUDREY MCAVOY, WAILUKU

HAWAII

THOUSANDS of Hawaii residents raced to escape homes on Maui as blazes swept across the island, destroying parts of a centuries-old town and killing at least 36 people in one of the deadliest U.S. wildfires in recent years.

The fire took the island by surprise, leaving behind burned-out cars on once busy streets and smoking piles of rubble where historic buildings had stood in Lahaina Town, which dates to the 1700s and has long been a favorite destination for tourists. Crews battled blazes in several places on the island, and the flames forced some adults and children to flee into the ocean.

At least 36 people have died, according to a statement from Maui County yesterday [Macau time] that said no other details were available on the deaths. Officials said earlier that 271 structures were damaged or destroyed and dozens of people injured.

Lahaina residents Kamuela Kawaakoa and Iulia Yasso described a harrowing escape under smoke-filled skies Tuesday afternoon. The couple and their 6-year-old son got back to their apartment after a quick dash to the supermarket for water, and only had time to grab a change of clothes and run as the bushes around them caught fire.

"We barely made it out," Kawaakoa said at an evacuation shelter yesterday, still unsure if anything was left of their apartment.

As the family fled, a senior center across the road erupted in flames. They called 911, but didn't know if the people got out. Fire alarms blared. As they drove away, downed utility poles and fleeing cars slowed their progress.

Kawaakoa, 34, grew up in the apartment building, called Lahaina Surf, where his dad and grandmother also lived.

"It was so hard to sit there and just watch my town burn to ashes and not be able to do anything," Kawaakoa said. "I was helpless."

Tourists were advised to stay away, and about 11,000 visitors flew out of Maui yesterday, with at least another 1,500 expected to leave Thursday, according to Ed Sniffen, state transportation director. Officials prepared the Hawaii Convention Center in Honolulu to take in the thousands who have been displaced.

Wildfires burn through historic town on Maui, kill at least 36 people



Fire and smoke filling the sky from wildfires on the intersection at Hokiokio Place and Lahaina Bypass in Maui

The fires were whipped by strong winds from Hurricane Dora passing far to the south. It's the latest in a series of disasters caused by extreme weather around the globe this summer. Experts say climate change is increasing the likelihood of such events.

As winds eased somewhat on Maui, some flights resumed, allowing pilots to view the full scope of the devastation. Aerial video from Lahaina showed dozens of homes and businesses razed, including on Front Street, where tourists once gathered to shop and dine. Smoking heaps of rubble lay piled high next to the waterfront, boats in the harbor were scorched, and gray smoke hovered over the leafless skeletons of charred trees.

"It's horrifying. I've flown here 52 years and I've never seen anything come close to that," said Richard Olsten, a helicopter pilot for a tour company. "We had tears in our eyes."

About 14,500 customers in Maui were without power early yesterday. With cell service and phone lines down in some areas, many people were struggling to check in with friends and family members living near the wildfires. Some were posting messages on social media.

Tiare Lawrence was frantically trying to reach her siblings who live near where a gas station exploded in Lahaina.

"There's no service, so we can't get ahold of anyone," she said from the Maui community of Pukalani.

Maj. Gen. Kenneth Hara, from the Hawaii State Department of Defense, told reporters that officials were working to get communications restored, to distribute water, and possibly adding law enforcement personnel. He said National Guard helicopters had dropped 150,000 gallons of water on the Maui fires.

The Coast Guard said it rescued 14 people who jumped into the water to escape flames and smoke, including two children.

Among those injured were three people with critical burns who were flown to Oahu, officials said.

Richard Bissen Jr., the mayor of Maui County, said at a news conference that officials hadn't yet begun investigating the immediate cause of the fires, but officials did point to the combination of dry conditions, low humidity and high winds.

Mauro Farinelli, of Lahaina, said the winds had started blowing hard on Tuesday, and then somehow a fire had started up on a hillside.

"It just ripped through everything with amazing speed," he said, adding it was "like a blowtorch."

The winds were so strong they blew his garage door off its hinges and trapped his car in the garage, Farinelli said. So a friend drove him, along with his wife, Judit,

and dog, Susi, to an evacuation shelter. He had no idea what had happened to their home.

"We're hoping for the best," he said, "but we're pretty sure it's gone."

President Joe Biden ordered all available federal assets to help with the response. He said the Hawaii National Guard had mobilized helicopters to help with fire suppression as well as search and rescue efforts.

"Our prayers are with those who have seen their homes, businesses and communities destroyed," Biden said in a statement.

Former President Barack Obama, who was born in Hawaii, said on social media that it's tough to see some of the images coming out of a place that is so special to many.

Wildfires also burned on Hawaii's Big Island, Mayor Mitch Roth said, although there had been no reports of injuries or destroyed homes there.

Acting Gov. Sylvia Luke issued an emergency proclamation on behalf of Gov. Josh Green, who was traveling, and urged tourists to stay away.

"This is not a safe place to be," she said.

Fires in Hawaii are unlike many of those burning in the U.S. West. They tend to break out in large grasslands on the dry sides of the islands and are generally much smaller than mainland fires. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

2000 AIR RAGE PAIR JAILED



Two men have been jailed for causing a "bar room brawl" on board a holiday jet bound for Jamaica.

Patrick Connors was sentenced to a year in prison and Francis Coyle has been sentenced to three months for offences relating to the incident in January 1999.

The men were part of a group of 12 travelling on an Airtours flight to Montego Bay but the plane had to be diverted to the US after a fight erupted.

During the trial, the jury heard how the group were "boisterous" and continued ordering drinks, including vodka and champagne, until cabin staff refused to serve anymore.

Jurors were told that the group became increasingly rowdy and that Connors clashed with a Jamaican passenger.

The man, who was not questioned by police, told Connors to "shut those women up" and threw two drinks over him.

The court heard how Connors and Coyle then tried to fight the Jamaican and had to be restrained by cabin crew.

The altercation caused some of the 300 passengers to cry and scream at the group to sit down, jurors were told.

Sentencing the men on Friday, Judge Austin Issard-Davies told the pair: "It is bad enough to have to contend with loud, boorish or drunken behaviour in streets, bars or railway trains.

"In the cramped confines of a crowded aircraft it is infinitely worse." Six months of Connors' sentence and six weeks of Coyle's sentence were suspended.

Three women - Elizabeth O'Driscoll, Angela O'Driscoll and Josephine Cooper - were earlier acquitted of charges of being drunk on board the same flight.

Relatives of the men were adamant they had done nothing wrong.

Speaking after the verdicts, Francis Coyle's sister said he was not a violent man.

"He's known as the 'gentle giant'. He wouldn't harm anybody, let alone petrify anybody," she said.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The case was the latest in a series of so-called "air rage" incidents.

By the time Connors and Coyle were imprisoned several people had already been jailed by British courts for offences on aircraft.

In 1998 British Airways reported a 400% rise in air rage incidents globally over the previous three years.

In response the government passed additional legislation to strengthen laws already in place to deal with disruptive passengers.

The new measures were designed to target offences such as smoking, drunkenness and anti-social behaviour and carried penalties of up to two years in prison or a £2,000 fine.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

<p>ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19</p> <p>You can learn from those who have had similar experiences. Don't make a move; your confusion has caused this dilemma and you are best to back away and reassess the situation.</p>	<p>TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20</p> <p>Visit friends who have not been well. The danger of minor accidents will increase with the turmoil. Try to be fair in your dealings with acquaintances.</p>
<p>GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21</p> <p>Unexpected romantic connections can be made if you go out with friends or take a pleasure trip. Work on legitimate financial deals that may enable you to bring in some extra cash.</p>	<p>CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22</p> <p>Your lack of responsibility and attention has been a key issue in your relationship. You may have been trying to do too much, leaving yourself exhausted and open to colds and infections.</p>
<p>LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22</p> <p>You can enjoy short trips. New romantic partners may attend a function that puts you in the limelight. You may meet that special person if you attend fundraising functions.</p>	<p>VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22</p> <p>You can spend a passionate evening with someone you cherish if you make your plans early. You can find solutions if you are willing to communicate. You must not allow them to force you to rush.</p>
<p>LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22</p> <p>You need a job with more responsibility and a higher wage. Erratic behavior at home may be hard to handle. Travel will be exciting.</p>	<p>SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21</p> <p>You can write beautiful love letters today. You could be tempted to overspend on unnecessary items. Feeling under the weather may be a result of overindulgence.</p>
<p>SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21</p> <p>Past partners may try to come back into your life. If you can, make phone calls instead of going out. Don't let someone try to bully you into doing things their way.</p>	<p>CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19</p> <p>Take the whole family and make it an enjoyable outing. Try to be reasonable. Your ability to deal with others will help you in getting the support you need.</p>
<p>AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18</p> <p>Personal changes will be to your benefit. Daydreaming will be your downfall. Expect temper tantrums on the home front if you haven't been letting someone have their way.</p>	<p>PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20</p> <p>Travel for business or pleasure will be enlightening. Look closely at motives and honesty in your personal encounters. Invite friends in for a visit.</p>

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	23	31	cloudy
Changchun	20	30	showers
Chengdu	24	31	showers
Chongqing	30	35	cloudy
Fuzhou	25	31	rain
Guangzhou	26	32	rain
Guiyang	21	29	showers
Haikou	27	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	25	34	cloudy
Harbin	21	27	rain
Hefei	24	35	cloudy
Nanjing	25	34	cloudy
Shanghai	24	35	fine
Taipei	26	29	rain
Wuhan	25	36	fine
Hong Kong	26	28	thunderstorms
WORLD			
Moscow	21	28	cloudy
Frankfurt	18	29	overcast
Paris	20	29	overcast
London	15	26	cloudy
New York	21	30	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1-Pilgrimage to Mecca; 5- OPEC member; 9- Like a minx; 13- What mind reader?; 14- Flat-topped hills; 16- Switch back?; 17- Waterfall; 18- Omega's opposite; 19- Defeat decisively; 20- Biblical birthright seller; 21- U.S. soldiers; 22- Hesitates; 24- Novelist Waugh; 26- Lubricates; 27- Trims; 29- Temporary inactivity; 33- Color anew; 34- Secluded spot; 35- Ill-mannered one; 36- From Z; 37- Little bits; 38- Song syllable; 39- Balkan native; 41- Flood survivor; 42- Bulge; 44- Minister; 46- Squalid; 47- Remain; 48- Cheerful; 49- Mr. and Mr.; 52- Religious sch.; 53- Strike with foot; 57- Jai ___; 58- Sum; 60- Ashtabula's lake; 61- Actress Harper; 62- Clear the boards; 63- Fill completely; 64- Dry run; 65- Work without ___; 66- High schooler;


DOWN 1- In fine fettle; 2- French friends; 3- Actress Merrill; 4- First month; 5- Mental pictures; 6- Piece of history; 7- Serpents; 8- Slang denial; 9- Scrutiny; 10- Greek god of love; 11- Libertine; 12- Small children; 15- Modern humans; 23- Rita Hayworth's Khan; 25- Shelter; 26- Belief involving sorcery; 27- Tire (out); 28- Love deeply; 29- Hitching post?; 30- Eminent; 31- Like Shirley Temple's hair; 32- Catchall abbr.; 33- Coarse file; 45- Geom. point; 46- Young salmon; 48- Mock, annoy; 49- Damon of "Good Will Hunting"; 50- Gen. Robert ___; 51- Lip; 52- Ollie's partner; 54- Dies ___; 55- Quote; 56- Sharp; 59- ... ___ mouse?;

Yesterday's solution

A	T	E	M	P	A	R	A	N	U	R	A	L
J	A	R	E	U	N	C	L	E	N	E	N	E
O	T	I	C	S	A	H	I	S	L	A	T	E
M	A	C	H	I	S	M	O	S	O	R	E	R
A	S	Y	E	P	A	S	E	A				
O	M	A	N	I	P	R	A	E	D	I	A	L
C	A	B	I	N	C	E	D	A	R	C	R	O
C	R	O	C	J	A	C	O	B	R	E	O	S
U	L	U	S	O	N	A	R	S	H	A	N	E
R	O	T	A	T	I	O	N	L	E	X	I	S
G	E	N	E	C	T	A	O					
A	S	K	E	W	H	U	N	T	S	M	A	N
A	T	A	N	O	R	A	T	E				
H	E	R	D	M	A	T	E	R	A	C	E	S
S	T	O	A	S	N	E	R	T	A	C	T	

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

DRIVE IN

HORROR FLICK IS A HAND-SOME HIGH-FIVE FOR TWIN AUSTRALIAN FILMMAKERS

MARK KENNEDY, MDT/AP
ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

YOU'VE got to hand it to the Philippou brothers. They've taken an old horror cliché — a severed hand — and made something worth, well, applauding.

“Talk to Me,” which hits theaters this Friday, is a stylish, well-crafted piece of filmmaking that marks the auspicious arrival of twin Australian filmmakers Michael and Danny Philippou.

Directed by the brothers from a script by Danny Philippou and Bill Hinzman, “Talk to Me” is modern and yet ancient, with just enough jump-cuts and zombies and dread, but not too much. It also downshifts out of madness in the final third to explore loss and guilt just when most films would ramp up the running-from-scary-guys part.

Our focus here are a pack of teens in Australia. Teens Down Under are pretty much the same as they are everywhere — snarky, peer-pressure-y and clique-y. But in addition to stealing their parents' booze and smoking, these

AP PHOTO



Sophie Wilde in a scene from “Talk to Me”

guys have a porcelain hand that is a doorway to hell.

Curiously, these teens don't sit around and play beer pong or spin-the-bottle. They take turns holding the hand and inviting whatever bug-eyed, damp and foul demon to enter their body. (For not too long, though: 90 seconds sounds good before someone needs to cut the connection.) The kids film it all on their phones

and post it on social media. (Who should get royalties isn't clear.)

OK, let's talk about this hand, which initially just looks like one of those mannequin pieces you find in upscale jewelry stores to show off expensive rings. It's got loads of graffiti but looks pleasant enough. Underneath the porcelain we're told, might be the severed hand of a medium or a satanist. Don't ask a lot of questions about how some

teens in suburban Australia got it. Talk to the hand.

What's surprising is the joy it brings to our weird group. Being possessed in this movie is a rush — an unconventional idea in the horror genre — even though the demon who briefly controls you can do embarrassing things, like make out with a dog. The script seems to be playing with notions of recreational drugs as much as horror here.

The heroine of this tale is played by Sophie Wilde and it's her vehicle to stardom, too. It's a role that asks her to be sad, exuberant, frightened, deadly, possessed, lusty, mournful and vengeful. She is all those things and more. She's one to watch.

Her Mia is grieving the anniversary of her mother's suspicious death and a demon that may or may not be mom shows up during their little game. That leads the plot in the second half to go supernatural and where holes in the logic tend to stretch.

But there's no doubt the Philippou brothers have possessed us. Born and raised on YouTube — they cut their filmmaking teeth building RackaRacka (take that, fancy film schools) — they've crashed the party with a great debut. Welcome them warmly, just don't shake their hands.

“Talk to Me,” an A24 release, is rated R for “strong, bloody violent content, some sexual material and language throughout.”

Running time: 95 minutes.

★★★★★

AD

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TASTE OF EDESIA

Best of both worlds

IRENE SAM, MDT

IN the heat of summer, Four Seasons Hotel Macao presents a unique and sumptuous afternoon tea set at **Xiao Ting**, collaborating with Helena Rubinstein, a premium skincare brand synonymous with heritage, luxury, and cutting-edge innovation.

Designed with bite-sized delicacies placed on a black and white chessboard, the afternoon tea set features two of the most iconic colours that exude timeless luxury and classic elegance, aspects that align with the spirit of both brands.

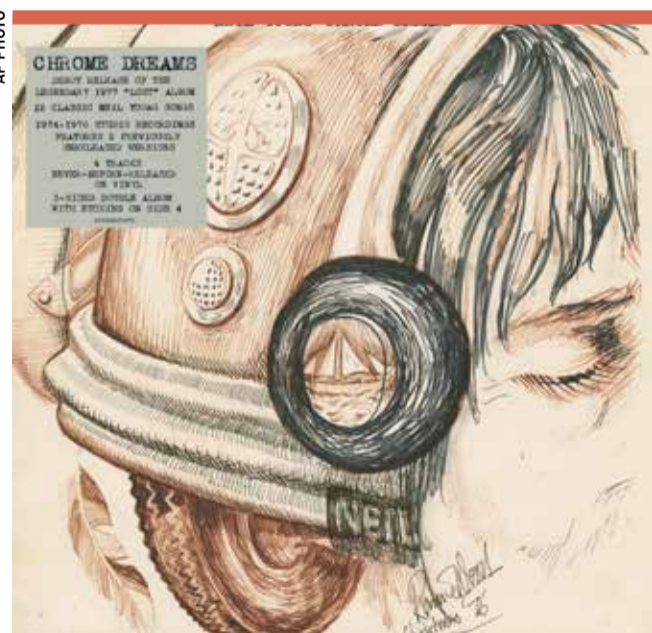
Pioneer in the hotel industry, Four Seasons is known for its distinct, personalised and innovative services delivered through impeccable attention to detail, while Helena Rubinstein's avant-garde know-how of utilising advanced scientific expertise in its commitment to personalised beauty is admired around the world.

Exuding to the ideals and aesthetics of both brands, the afternoon tea set is luxurious and exquisite. Highlights include Avruga Caviar and Eggplant Blinis, which pairs the tender, mild, and earthy sweetness of smoked eggplant

with the explosive umami characteristics of caviar, contrasted with blinis that layer various textures for a perfect combination. Inspired by Southeast Asian flavours, Crab Cake Pâte à Choux with Coconut Lime mixes the citrus and aromatic wonders of coconut lime and lemongrass with savoury delight of crab meat and paste. A masterpiece to behold, Yuzu Meringue Pâte Sablée refreshes the palate like a summer breeze, juxtaposing the seductive acidity of yuzu curd at its heart with a veil of subtly sweet meringue on the surface.



AP PHOTO



"Chrome Dreams," Neil Young (Reprise Records)

tTUNES

Neil Young caught in his 1970s prime with yet another 'lost' album

Young, 77, has been delving into his vast archive in recent years to release live albums and studio recordings that were previously slated for release, but for one reason or another never got out.

The long-bootlegged collection of 12 songs, all recorded between 1974 and 1976 and first compiled for a release in 1977, gained legendary status as it sat in the vault. Young even managed to release a titular sequel, "Chrome Dreams II" in 2007, before he got around

to putting out the original.

It's impossible 46 years later to know how "Chrome Dreams" would have altered the Neil Young career narrative had it been released when planned. Certainly, "Chrome Dreams" is a stunning collection, highlighted by beloved Young songs "Powderfinger," "Pocahontas" and "Like a Hurricane."

In fact, all of the songs on the album have already been released in one version or another, just not in this 1977 sequence.

There are variations here being heard for the first time, but for diehard fans hoping to hear radically different versions of the songs they've long been familiar with, "Chrome Dreams" doesn't offer much.

"Pocahontas" is the same version that was released in 1979 on "Rust Never Sleeps," just minus the overdubs. "Like a Hurricane" is the same version released in 1977 on "American Stars 'n Bars." The version of "Powderfinger" on "Chrome Dreams" is the

original, which was previously released in 2017. Young first released another version of the song in 1979 on "Rust Never Sleeps."

Two other tracks, "Sedan Delivery" and "Hold Back the Tears," have lyrics not included in the later released versions.

While there's not a lot that's new, "Chrome Dreams" succeeds in bringing together yet another tantalizing lost "what if" release from Young's vast catalog. **SCOTT BAUER, MDT/AP**

NEIL Young is captured in his mid-1970s prime with "Chrome Dreams," yet another "lost" — or "unre-

leased" — album officially seeing the light of day as Young originally envisioned nearly half a century ago.

OPINION

World Views

Lauran Neergaard,
 MDT/AP Medical Writer



COVID-19 TOOK A TOLL ON HEART HEALTH: HOW TO HELP?

Well into the pandemic's fourth year, how profound a toll COVID-19 has taken on heart health is only starting to emerge.

"We are seeing effects on the heart and the vascular system that really outnumber, unfortunately, effects on other organ systems," said Dr. Susan Cheng, a cardiologist at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

For up to a year after a case of COVID-19, people may be at increased risk of developing a new heart-related problem, anything from blood clots and irregular heartbeats to a heart attack -- even if they initially seem to recover just fine.

Among the unknowns: Who's most likely to experience these aftereffects? Are they reversible -- or a warning sign of more heart disease later in life?

Heart disease has long been the top killer in the U.S. and the world. But in the U.S., heart-related death rates had fallen to record lows in 2019, just before the pandemic struck.

COVID-19 erased a decade of that progress.

Heart attack-caused deaths rose during every virus surge. Worse, young people aren't supposed to have heart attacks but Cheng's research documented a nearly 30% increase in heart attack deaths among 25- to 44-year-olds in the pandemic's first two years.

An ominous sign the trouble may continue: High blood pressure is one of the biggest risks for heart disease and "people's blood pressure has actually measurably gone up over the course of the pandemic," she said.

Some of these patients have what's known as long COVID, the catchall term for dozens of symptoms that often include fatigue and brain fog. The National Institutes of Health is beginning small studies of a few possible treatments for certain long COVID symptoms, including a heartbeat problem.

But Cheng said patients and doctors alike need to know that sometimes, cardiovascular trouble is the first or main symptom of damage the coronavirus left behind.

Blood flow jumps when people move around and subsides during rest. But some long COVID patients don't get enough of a drop during rest because the fight-or-flight system that controls stress reactions stays activated.

Some also have trouble with the lining of their small blood vessels not dilating and constricting properly to move blood through, she added.

How big is the post-COVID heart risk?

To find out, Washington University's Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly analyzed medical records from a massive Veterans Administration database. People who'd survived COVID-19 early in the pandemic were more likely to experience abnormal heartbeats, blood clots, chest pain and palpitations, even heart attacks and strokes up to a year later compared to the uninfected.

Based on those findings, Al-Aly estimated 4 of every 100 people need care for some kind of heart-related symptom in the year after recovering from COVID-19.

Per person, that's a small risk. But he said the pandemic's sheer enormity means it added up to millions left with at least some cardiovascular symptom. While a reinfection might still cause trouble, Al-Aly's now studying whether that overall risk dropped thanks to vaccination and milder coronavirus strains.

More recent research confirms the need to better understand and address these cardiac aftershocks.

An analysis this spring of a large U.S. insurance database found long COVID patients were about twice as likely to seek care for cardiovascular problems including blood clots, abnormal heartbeats or stroke in the year after infection, compared to similar patients who'd avoided COVID-19.

[Abridged]

DAM IN NORWAY PARTIALLY BURSTS AFTER DAYS OF HEAVY RAIN, FLOODING AND EVACUATIONS

THE BUZZ

A dam in southern Norway partially burst following days of heavy rain that triggered landslides and flooding in the mountainous region and forced downstream communities to evacuate, officials said.

Authorities initially considered blowing up part of the dam at the Braskereidfoss hydroelectric power plant on the Glåma, Norway's longest and most voluminous river.

The idea was to prevent communities downstream from being inundated by using a limited, controlled blast to release pressure on the dam.

But that proposal was scrapped after water later broke through the structure, police spokesman Fredrik Thomson told reporters.

"The damage from a possible explosion of the concrete plant would be so great that it would serve no purpose," Thompson said.

Now officials are hopeful that they will see a gradual, even leveling of the water, Thompson said.

Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre warned that flooding would continue to be a threat as excess water flows downstream.

"This is by no means over," he said. "It could be the highest water level in 50 years or more."

MAN SOUGHT IN ALLEGED MISUSE OF \$30M INTENDED FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN CHINA

FEDERAL prosecutors are seeking a man charged in the misuse of more than \$30 million donated by religious groups and individuals for Christian ministry in China, including an Ohio-based group receiving donations from Amish and Mennonite communities.

Jason Gerald Shenk, 45, formerly of Dublin, Georgia, is charged in a recently unsealed federal indictment in Georgia with wire fraud, money laundering and failure to file a report of a foreign bank account.

Prosecutors said Shenk got more than \$30 million from faith-based charities and individual donors, primarily from religious communities in Ohio and North Carolina, promising to use the money to produce and distribute Bibles and other Christian literature in China.

Instead, prosecutors allege, he used a lot of it for his own purposes, such as payments to the company running his family farm, buying diamonds and precious metals, buying life insurance policies in various people's names, online sports gambling, among other things.

Shenk remains at large, and Paschal said yesterday [Macau time] he is believed to be out of the country. Court documents don't list an attorney representing him.

The indictment states Shenk obtained about \$22 million from one charitable group and its donors and about \$10 million from another, along with donations from individuals. The scheme began as early as April 2010 and ran until July 2019, with Shenk renouncing U.S. citizenship in 2016 to evade financial reporting requirements, prosecutors said.

Christian Aid Ministries, which says it works with "Amish, Mennonite, and other conservative



This image provided by the Department of Justice shows Jason Gerald Shenk, 45, formerly of Dublin, Ga.

Anabaptist groups and individuals to minister to physical and spiritual needs around the world," has acknowledged having been one of the victims but hasn't said how much money was involved.

The Berlin, Ohio-based group told donors that such misconduct "would be a shock" if proven to be true, given "the long-term, trusted relationship we had with this contact, including many face-to-face meetings." Christian Aid Ministries said it "ceased to use this contact" shortly after it was made aware of the investigation in April 2019.

The group said it recognizes its work in restricted countries put them at risk of exploitation given it was more difficult to verify their work. But the group said "the opportunity to reach people who had very limited access to Bibles and Christian literature was

worth the risk."

"God knows the factual details of this situation and will ultimately judge the matter correctly, regardless of the outcome of the investigation," Christian Aid Ministries said. "If these funds were indeed misused as alleged, we sincerely apologize that this took place. Our heartfelt desire has been and continues to be that your funds be used to advance Christ's everlasting kingdom."

Barry Paschal, spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office in Georgia's southern district, said other individual donors have come forward since word of the case broke and that officials hope more will do so. Individual donors were primarily Amish and Mennonite, and officials have been reaching out to those communities through publications that serve them, he said. MDT/AP

USA Inflation likely rose in July for the first time in 12 months, driven higher by more expensive gasoline and suggesting that the fight against rising prices may prove bumpier in the months ahead. The inflation report the government will issue today is expected to show that consumer prices increased 3.3% from 12 months earlier. That would mark an uptick from a 3% year-over-year increase in June -- the lowest such figure in more than two years.



USA Robbie Robertson, The Band's lead guitarist and songwriter who in such classics as "The Weight" and "Up on Cripple Creek" mined American music and folklore and helped reshape contemporary rock, died Wednesday at 80. Robertson died surrounded by family in Los Angeles "after a long illness," publicist Ray Costa said in a statement.



Ecuador An Ecuadorian presidential candidate known for speaking up against cartels and corruption was shot and killed yesterday [Macau time] at a political rally in the capital, amid a startling wave of gang-driven violence in the South American country. President Guillermo Lasso confirmed the assassination of Fernando Villavicencio (pictured) and suggested organized crime was behind his slaying, less than two weeks before the Aug. 20 presidential election.



Niger West African heads of state began meeting Thursday on next steps after Niger's military junta defied their deadline to reinstate the nation's deposed president, but analysts say the bloc known as ECOWAS may be running out of options as support fades for a military intervention. Nine of the 11 heads of state expected to attend resumed crucial talks at the ECOWAS summit in neighboring Nigeria.