



WEDNESDAY
23 Aug 2023

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North Korea told Japan yesterday it plans to launch a satellite in the coming days, possibly a second try to put a military spy satellite into orbit three months after its first effort failed, Japanese officials said. In late May, a North Korean rocket carrying a spy satellite plunged into the sea soon after liftoff, posing a setback to leader Kim Jong Un's push to establish a space-based surveillance system to better monitor the U.S. and South Korea. North Korea had vowed to make a second attempt after studying what went wrong with the first launch.



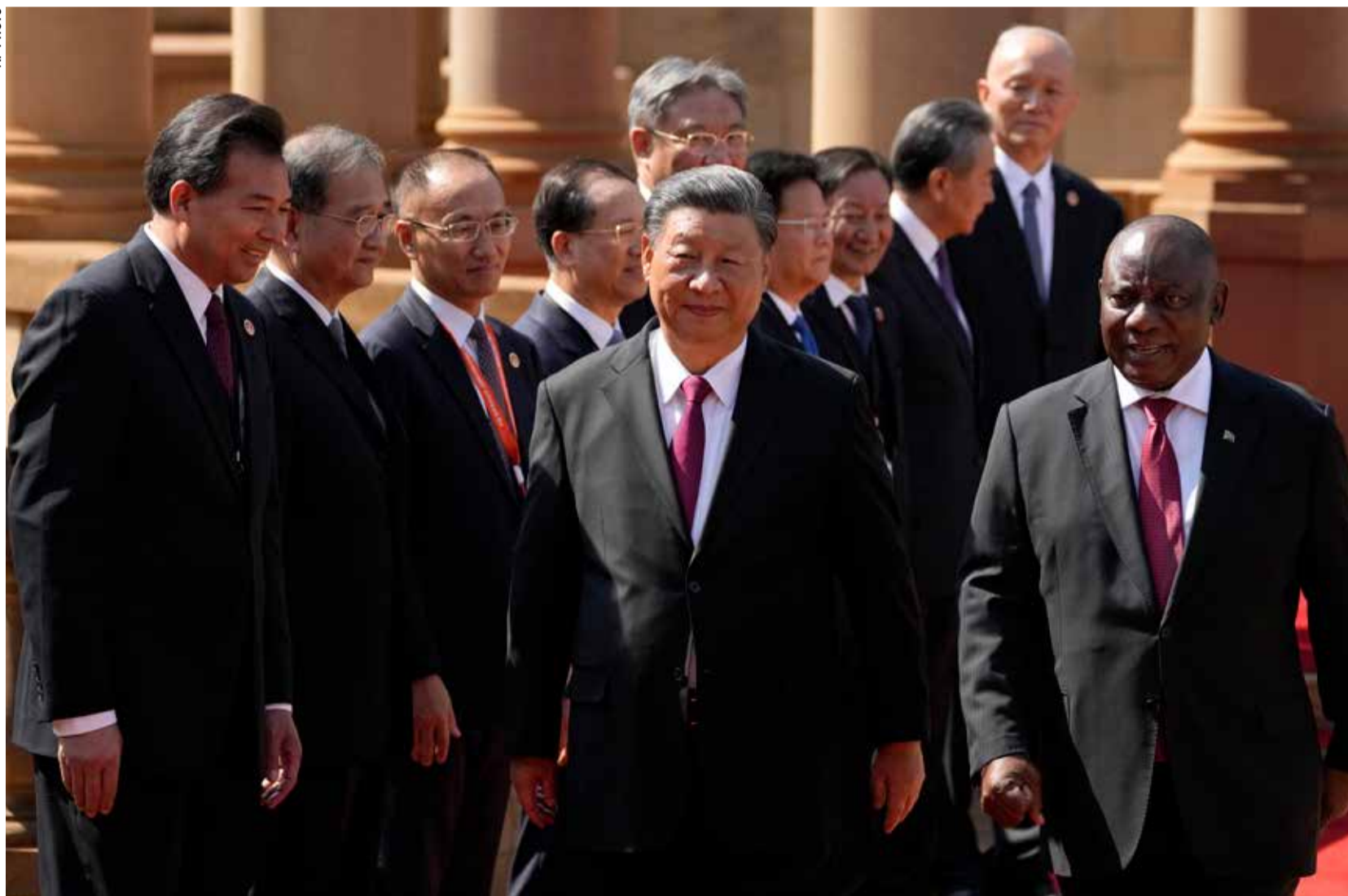
Thailand A Cabinet minister is threatening to try to shut down Facebook in the country, saying the social media platform does not do enough to screen the advertisements it runs, leaving people vulnerable to costly scams. Chaiwut Thanakamanusorn, Thailand's minister of Digital Economy and Society, said in a statement that he is ready to go to criminal court by the end of the month arguing for Facebook to be shut down in Thailand.



Israeli security forces stormed into a town in the north of the West Bank yesterday, leading to fighting that killed a 17-year-old Palestinian, according to Palestinian health officials, the latest violence to grip the occupied territory. Israel also released the results of a military investigation into the death of a soldier killed during its major raid into the Jenin refugee camp last month, concluding that the soldier was killed by a bullet fired by Israeli forces.

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COURTS

GUILTY UNLESS PROVEN INNOCENT: TENANT TO COMPENSATE LANDLORDS

RENATO MARQUES

THE judges of the Court of Second Instance (TSI) have amended a ruling from the Court of First Instance (TJB) regarding the payment of compensation by a tenant to his landlords because of fire damage caused to the housing unit.

In the first instance, the TJB had decided the tenant did

not have to pay compensation to the apartment owners as it had not been proven that the fire was caused by the tenant's misconduct.

Dissatisfied with the decision, the four owners appealed to the TSI. Upon review, the TSI ordered the tenant to pay compensation of MOP82,497.71 to the landlords. Interest at a pre-determined rate was added to the compensation amount

from the date of the delivery of the decision.

The judges of the TSI said, "Under the provisions of Articles 1025 and 1026 of the Civil Code, in the event of loss or deterioration of the thing [the apartment], it is presumed that the tenant is at fault and assumes the responsibility of compensate [the owner] unless he can prove that the loss or deterioration is due to nor-

mal use or not attributable to him."

As such, the judges of TSI considered that it was the tenant who bore the burden of proving that the fire could not be attributed to him to avoid the obligation to pay compensation to the landlords, rather than the opposite, as the TJB previously ruled.

The compensation calculated by the TSI took into account the cost of repairing the damage caused by the fire (MOP544,343) as well as the loss of monthly rent from the apartment for an eight-month period during which the repairs were conducted (equivalent to MOP64,890). The total compensation amount excludes any amount of compensation received by the owners from their insurance company, being the equivalent of MOP505,105.29.

The same court denied a second request for compensation from the owners, who made a claim for an additional MOP1 million from the tenant in respect of emotional harm that they claimed based on "profound shock, trauma, deep suffering and deep sadness, despair, constant stress, insomnia, constant irritation and anxiety."

The TSI said that compensation for non-pecuniary damage arises from serious damage which was not proven on the facts presented.

THREE CROSS-BOUNDARY DRIVERS CHARGED FOR ALLEGED SMUGGLING

THREE cross-boundary drivers have been arrested for allegedly smuggling battery and food products at the Border Gate and the Hengqin checkpoints, the Macao Customs Service has disclosed.

During a four-day period from Aug. 17 to 20, the customs authority discovered three cases of alleged smuggling at the border checkpoints, seizing 37.84 kg of processed food, 340 kg of frozen beef, and 700 used batteries.

Charges have been pressed against the three drivers, and termination of their vehicles' cross-boundary registration statuses has also been initiated.

All the three drivers said they had no cargo to declare but were later found to have hidden the cargo in compartments within their vehicles. The customs authority specifically highlighted that poor storage of batteries can lead to fires and present a threat to public safety. Meanwhile, transporting undeclared foods into Macau can pose food safety risks to the city.

In another case, a man has fallen victim to an illegal currency exchange and scam. On Aug. 18, the victim wanted to exchange RMB1.14 million for HKD1.2 million to use for gambling. He contacted an operator, who is currently at large, for the service. One suspect, a 33-year-old woman surnamed Zhang, confirmed that the victim had sufficient funds and asked another suspect, a 27-year-old man surnamed Wei, to pass eight wads of HKD cash to the victim. Meanwhile, the victim transferred the RMB equivalent to a designated account to close the deal.

While counting his money, the victim discovered marks printed on the notes indicating that the money was so-called 'paper money' used for training. He reached out to casino security guards for assistance. The Judiciary Police found another 799 similar paper notes on the two suspects, who denied knowing the nature of the counterfeit cash, adding that they were instructed to conduct the transaction in exchange for RMB500 for each person. The 'paper money' was brought into Macau from the Chinese mainland. **AL**

UK Foreign Secretary to visit Hong Kong this month: The Telegraph

STAFF REPORTER

JAMES Cleverly will press Beijing to lift sanctions on British members of parliament during an imminent trip to China, when he will become the first foreign secretary to visit the country in half a decade, The Daily Telegraph reported yesterday.

In 2021, Beijing sanctioned five Conservative MPs known to be critical of China including Sir Iain Duncan Smith, a former party leader, and Tom Tugendhat, the Security Minister, along with two peers.

According to the Telegraph, it meant parliamentarians were banned from entering



China, Hong Kong and Macau, while Chinese citizens were banned from doing business with them, creating a

host of complications.

The trip has reportedly been scheduled for later this month, though the dates have

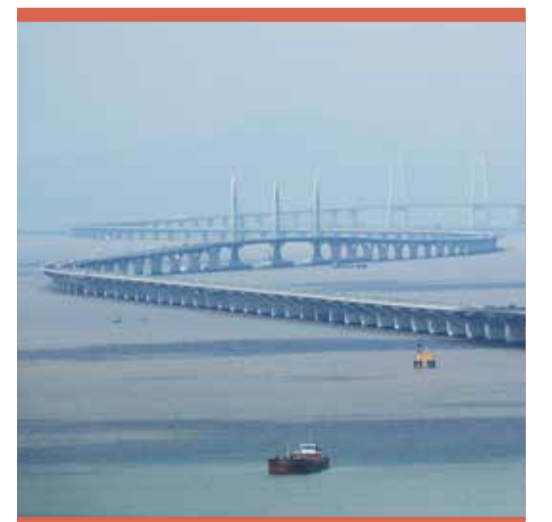
not yet been publicly confirmed.

Cleverly has repeatedly raised the sanctions in past meetings with Chinese officials.

During his visit, the Foreign Secretary is also expected to discuss the situation in Hong Kong and in Xinjiang.

Cleverly will also likely broach areas of potential cooperation, such as how the UK and China can work together to tackle climate change and secure global economic stability.

Not since Jeremy Hunt visited China in 2018 has a UK foreign secretary gone on an official trip to the country, the report said.



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

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LIN FONG

ID to reduce 'Sports for All' swim classes

RENATO MARQUES

THE president of the Sports Bureau (ID), Pun Weng Kun, has announced that the bureau is adjusting the swimming pool facility operations of the Lin Fong Sports Center (Canidrome) to allow the facilities to be used by younger swimmers, he said on the sidelines of a press conferen-

ce yesterday.

According to the president of ID, the changes take effect from October and will reduce the number of classes run under the 'Sports for All' system, which has been very popular among older adults.

In a press statement, the ID also explained that the 'Sports for All' swim classes have been running for over 20 years in the facility, and have been enjoyed by

some 72,000 participants over the last decade.

Many participants (5,200) were recurrent attendees, with some participating in the classes for over a decade.

The ID believes these participants should have enough experience to be able to swim on their own without the need for organized classes.

For Pun, the priority is now to

allow the younger generation to start engaging in this sport and potentially discover new talented athletes.

Pun said the ID aims to establish alternative classes for the elderly population, potentially at off-peak times or at other swimming pool facilities in the Peninsula.

Asked by the media again about subsidies the ID provides to local full-time athletes, Pun said they are provided with an allowance of more than MOP10,000.

Pun noted that in some cases, the athletes have been training outside Macau, and reaffirmed that the conditions for professional athletes in Macau are better than those in comparison to other countries and regions.

Few cultural and sports-related project applications from the Big Six

RENATO MARQUES

THE number of cultural and sports-related projects submitted so far by the six gaming operators (Big Six) to the government under the mechanism established earlier this year does not seem to match the hopes of the officials, the president of the Sports Bureau (ID), Pun Weng Kun, suggested yesterday.

According to the president of the ID, the

number of projects submitted by the Big Six is fewer than ten.

Besides the low figure relative to government expectations, Pun also admitted that not all the projects submitted have enough significance to attract foreign visitors, as per the original objective.

Pun said different types of activities and possibilities being considered but that companies should always give paramount con-

sideration to the impact of those activities in Macau as a whole, along with the company's future sustainable development and image.

The president of the ID also said that although many aspects are still under discussion, at this stage the government's inclination is to hold most of the activities next year, and that they will be evaluated on their ability to attract more foreign tourists through large-scale activities.



Pun Weng Kun, President of the Sports Bureau

AUGUST PROPERTY TAX SHOULD BE PAID BY END OF MONTH

Property tax payments to be settled in August should be paid by the end of this month, the Financial Services Bureau has reminded the public in a statement. Failure to comply with the payment deadline will result in interest charges and late fees. Moreover, the bureau has encouraged taxpayers to use digital channels such as the government One Account app. Taxpayers can scan the QR code on their payslips to access the payment platform.

HEALTH BUREAU PROMOTES ALCOHOL CONTROL

A Health Bureau delegation has visited a local anti-smoking organization to promote alcohol control laws, which will be enacted on Nov. 5. Pursuant to the law, public places are prohibited from providing beverages containing 1.2% alcohol by volume to minors. Certain venues will be banned from selling alcoholic drinks. Online sales of alcoholic drinks will also be subject to regulation under this law. The organization expressed its support for the law, and provided comments and suggestions to the bureau on controlling the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages. The bureau added that it would meet with more organizations to promote the law.

MPU WELCOMES 2,200 NEW STUDENTS, ENCOURAGES PATRIOTISM

Macao Polytechnic University held the opening ceremony of the 2023/2024 academic year and the first MPU lecture on Aug. 21. The ceremony and lecture inaugurate a new study journey with 2,200 new students of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programs from home and abroad. The university held a flag-raising ceremony and played the national anthem at the opening ceremony. Rector Im Sio Kei expressed his wish for the freshmen to inherit a spirit of love for the motherland and for Macau, be pioneers of a new era, and contribute wisdom and strength to the country and Macau.

ANTHONY LAM

TRAFFIC planning and coastline arrangements on New Urban Zone A are among the main concerns of an urban planner and a lawmaker, local media has reported.

The government recently announced that the application to reclaim the waterway between Zone A and the main peninsula was not approved by Beijing. The original plan was to reclaim the waterway for use as a greening area, releasing some land plots for other uses.

However, the government emphasized that the LRT project will not be affected by the mainland's decision not to approve the application, "because they are two different things," Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo do Rosário said.

In response to the current situation, urban planner Chan Chio I (as cited in local media outlet Macao Daily News) suggested the government develop another plan on the coastline of the mega reclamation to introduce more space for marine leisure activities and recalculate the transport support for Zone A without it being connected by land to the main peninsula.

On the other hand, she said four of the five footbridges planned for connecting Zone A to the

TRAFFIC, COASTLINE AMONG MAIN ZONE A CONCERNS



main peninsula originally had points of access at the now-disapproved reclamation. She suggested the government reconsider these plans so as to lower future residents' reliance on private vehicles.

She further suggested widening Avenida de Amizade to allow

for more traffic between the Northern and the Outer Harbour districts, adding that having only four bridges connecting Zone A with the main peninsula would be insufficient.

The urban planner also suggested the government connect public residential estates with

footbridges to lower reliance on motor vehicles between locations in Zone A, which is a connection point for the Macau Light Rapid Transit system and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge.

The government should present its plans thoroughly to the public regarding the traffic arrangement at Zone A, she added.

Meanwhile, trade unionist lawmaker Ella Lei told the same media outlet that the government should expedite its preparation of the formation of Zone A, especially since traffic to and from the zone has reached bottlenecks for long periods.

The government has been criticized for its lack of preparation with regard to traffic through Zone A, which is a non-avoidable midpoint between the main peninsula and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge. During peak times, long motor traffic queues trying to enter or leave the zone are common. The zone currently has only a single connection with the main peninsula.

Lei also wondered if four bridges connecting the main peninsula with the zone are enough, considering that in the future, students and staff commuting to and from school and work will cause congestion. She suggested the government build more footbridges so that people can move in and out of the zone on foot.

In addition, without the now-disapproved reclamation, it is uncertain whether the zone has enough greenery and leisure areas for future residents. Lei said there will be large volumes of people living on the land, but not enough leisure areas per capita.

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SOCIAL MEDIA

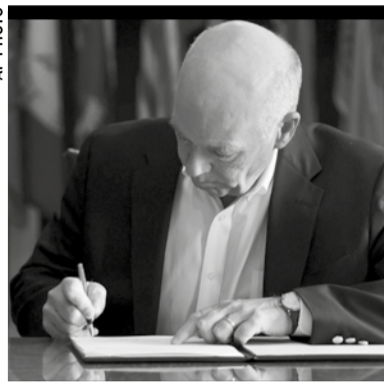
Montana asks judge to allow TikTok ban to take effect

MONTANA is asking a federal judge to allow its law banning new downloads of the video-sharing app TikTok to take effect in January while a challenge filed by the company and five content creators is decided by the courts.

The state filed its response Friday to the plaintiffs' motion in July that asked U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy to temporarily prevent the law from being implemented until the courts can rule on whether it amounts to an unconstitutional violation of free speech rights.

Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen had the bill drafted over concerns — shared by the FBI and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken — that the app, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, could be used to allow the Chinese government to access information on U.S. citizens or push pro-Beijing misinformation that could influence the public. TikTok has said none of this has ever happened.

The federal government and



Montana Governor Greg Gianforte

more than half the U.S. states, including Montana, have banned TikTok from being used on government-owned devices.

"The federal government has already determined that China is a foreign adversary. And the concerns with TikTok are well documented at both the state and federal level," the brief said. The Montana law, "therefore, furthers the public interest because it protects the public from the harms inseparable from TikTok's operation."

Disallowing Montana's regulation

of TikTok would be like preventing the state from banning a cancer-causing radio "merely because that radio also transmitted protected speech," the brief argues.

There are other applications people can use to express themselves and communicate with others, the state argues. The plaintiffs have said their greatest social media following is on TikTok.

TikTok has safeguards to moderate content and protect minors, and would not share information with China, the company has argued. But critics have pointed to China's 2017 national intelligence law that compels companies to cooperate with the country's governments for state intelligence work.

Montana's law would prohibit downloads of TikTok in the state and would fine any "entity" — an app store or TikTok — \$10,000 per day for each time someone "is offered the ability" to access the social media platform or download the app. The penalties would not apply to users.

MDT/AP

INTELLIGENCE

CHINA FINES US RESEARCH FIRM \$1.5 MILLION IN CRACKDOWN ON INFORMATION-GATHERING

AN American research firm has been fined \$1.5 million by China's government in a crackdown on information-gathering that has rattled foreign investors.

Mintz Group was one of a series of foreign consultants that were raided starting in April after Chinese leader Xi Jinping's government announced expanded anti-spying rules that left companies unsure what they were allowed to do.

Mintz Group illegally engaged in "foreign-related statistical investigation activities without obtaining approval," the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics said in a notice dated July 14 on its website. It gave no details of the violation but said Mintz Group was fined 10.7 million yuan (\$1.5 million).

Mintz Group does background checks on employees and business partners and

gathers other information for corporate clients.

Xi's government has tightened the ruling Communist Party's control over the economy and society, including by launching data security crackdowns and expanding restrictions on what information can be moved abroad.

That has shaken foreign companies at a time when Xi's government is trying to revive investor interest in China as part of efforts to reverse a deepening economic slump.

Mintz Group said in April its Beijing office was raided by police and five employees detained. Bain & Co. said its staff in Shanghai were questioned by police. State media said in May offices of Capvision were raided by the foreign intelligence agency in Beijing, Shanghai and at least two other cities. MDT/AP

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CAM reserves the right to reject any Proposal in whole or in part without stating any reason.

HONG KONG

Court upholds minimum sentences for breaching security law

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

A jailed university student who pleaded guilty to inciting secession in Hong Kong lost his bid to reduce his five-year sentence in a court ruling yesterday that is expected to set the bar for other cases brought under the national security law.

Lui Sai-yu pleaded guilty in April 2022 and admitted that content on a Telegram channel he administered incited others to separate Hong Kong from China or alter the legal status of the city unlawfully.

But his timely guilty plea did not get him a one-third reduction in the length of his imprisonment — like in many other cases under Hong Kong's common law system — because the security law imposed minimum jail terms for serious offenses.

Lui is one of the some 260 people who were arrested under the security law as Beijing tried to crush dissidents following the massive protests in 2019. The top court's ruling on his appeal may guide sentencings in other national security cases, including for the city's most prominent democracy leaders who also pleaded guilty.

The judges unanimously dismissed Lui's appeal and ruled that



In this image made from a video, a police van which is believed to be carrying Lui Sai-yu, a jailed university student, arrives at Hong Kong's Final Court of Appeal, yesterday

the minimum penalty of five years is mandatory for those committing serious offenses in relation to secession as stipulated by the security law.

They said in a written judgment that the appellant had sought to argue the three conditions capable of triggering the mitigating benefits in Article 33 of the security law were not exhaustive.

One condition under that ar-

article is that offenders voluntarily stopped committing the offense or voluntarily and effectively forestalled its consequence during the process. The other two conditions are that offenders surrender themselves and give a truthful account of the crime; and that offenders report on offenses committed by other persons with their accounts verified to be true or providing material information

that assists in solving other case.

The judges ruled the three conditions specified in Article 33 are exhaustive and the article does not accommodate guilty pleas.

In sentencing him last year, a judge at a lower court originally planned to jail Lui for 44 months after giving him a one-third sentence reduction due to his guilty plea. But she amended the sentence after the prosecution

argued the crime Lui committed was of serious nature and therefore the minimum penalty should be five years.

Lui appealed the decision but lost.

Lui was not a prominent pro-democracy activist. He was the fourth person jailed under the sweeping security law. He was studying civil engineering when he was first arrested in September 2020.

According to a previous judgment, his Telegram channel carried messages containing slogans often chanted by protesters in the 2019 movement that roiled the city for months.

The protests waned with the arrests and exiles of democracy activists, the COVID-19 pandemic and the security law.

Observers expect yesterday's judgment to guide other cases, including the future sentencing for 31 of the 47 activists who pleaded guilty to the subversion charges for their alleged involvement in an unofficial primary election in 2020. Those activists included former student leader Joshua Wong.

Critics say the freedoms promised when Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997 have greatly declined after the enactment of the law. But the Hong Kong government praised it for restoring stability. **MDT/AP**

AVIATION

North Korean plane takes off from Beijing in a sign Pyongyang is opening borders

A North Korean commercial flight has taken off from Beijing in a sign that Pyongyang is opening its borders again after almost three years of severe COVID-19 restrictions.

The Russian-made Air Koryo Tupelev Tu-204 jet with capacity for 210 passengers reportedly landed in the Chinese capital yesterday morning and was filmed taking off shortly after 1:30 p.m. local time (0530 GMT).

China has "approved the regular flight plan of North Korean Air Koryo Pyongyang-Beijing-Pyongyang and other passenger routes in accordance with the procedures," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang



Wenbin said.

"The specific flight is subject to the arrangement of the airline in accordance with the approval of the Chinese competent authority," Wang said.

China is North Korea's closest diplomatic ally and a key source of food and fuel aid for an economy beset by natural disasters and mismanagement.

Little is known about

conditions inside the country due to the ruling Workers Party's complete control over information and its exclusion of most foreign diplomats, United Nations organizations and overseas

media.

The flight follows a meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and the leaders of Japan and South Korea, who agreed last week to expand security and economic ties at a historic summit at Camp David just outside Washington.

Biden maintained, as have U.S., South Korean and Japanese officials, that the summit "was not about China" but was focused on broader security issues.

Yet, the leaders in their joint summit concluding statement noted China's action in the South China Sea and said they "strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the

waters of the Indo-Pacific."

Biden said the nations would establish a communications hotline to discuss responses to threats. He announced the agreements, including what the leaders termed the "Camp David Principles," at the close of his talks with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Yoon noted in particular the threat posed by North Korea, saying the three leaders had agreed to improve "our joint response capabilities to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, which have become sophisticated more than ever."

Isolated diplomatically and highly food insecure, North Korea has persevered in its campaign of missile and nuclear threats that seek to glorify the regime of Kim Jong Un, the third generation of the family-run totalitarian state. **MDT/AP**

CAMBODIA

Parliament approves longtime leader's son as PM in generational change

DAVID RISING & SOPHENG CHEANG, PHNOM PENH

THE son of longtime autocratic Cambodian leader Hun Sen was sworn in Tuesday as the country's new prime minister, part of a generational change in top positions in the Southeast Asian nation.

Hun Manet, 45, won his first seat in the National Assembly in July elections and takes over from his father, who had been Asia's longest serving leader with nearly four decades in power, after serving as Cambodia's army chief.

He was approved by lawmakers unanimously in Parliament before being sworn in by the king and two Buddhist monks later in the day.

Even though he heads a government in which new faces make up about three-quarters of the Cabinet, most are the children of or are otherwise related to those they are replacing, and experts caution against expecting broad changes in the country where human rights have been under attack and dissent suppressed.

"There is not a big difference between the generations in political outlook, including in terms of how open or how competitive politics should be," said Astrid Norén-Nilsson, a Cambodia expert at Sweden's Lund University.

"The generational transition is designed to keep the power of the political-cum-business elite intact and perpetuate neopatrimonial arrangements," she added.

In his acceptance speech to the National Assembly, Cambo-



Hun Manet, army chief, designate prime minister and son of Prime Minister Hun Sen, attends an assembly session in the National Assembly's hall in Phnom Penh, yesterday

dia's lower house of Parliament, Hun Manet said the examples set by his father and the outgoing ministers would be "permanent fixtures within our consciences and consciousness," and thanked them for their confidence "entrusting us with this fateful mission to serve our nation."

In a widely anticipated move, Hun Sen announced that Hun Manet, his oldest son, would succeed him as prime minister shortly after his Cambodian People's Party won a landslide victory in July elections criticized by Western governments and rights

groups as neither free nor fair because the main credible opposition party was barred from participating.

His Cabinet includes Tea Seiha, who will be replacing his father, Tea Banh, as minister of National Defense, and Sar Sokha, who is replacing his father, Sar Kheng, as minister of the Interior. Both are also to serve as deputy prime ministers.

"Hun Manet's succession as prime minister of Cambodia is a two-penny farce that would be amusing if a country's fate was not at stake," said Sam Rainsy,

a co-founder of the dissolved opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party who has been in self-imposed exile since 2016 to avoid prison for a defamation conviction along with a slew of other legal charges brought by the government.

"Lack of legitimacy is the automatic result of elections without risk," Sam Rainsy said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Hun Sen has progressively tightened his grip on power during his 38 years in office while also ushering in a free-market economy that raised the standards of living of many Cambodians.

At the same time, the gap between the rich and poor greatly widened under his leadership, deforestation spread at an alarming rate, and there was widespread land grabbing by his Cambodian allies and foreign investors.

He has also moved Cambodia politically steadily closer to China, which is currently involved in broadly expanding Cambodia's Ream Naval Base, which Washington worries could give Beijing a strategically important military outpost on the Gulf of Thailand.

Even though he has relinquished the prime minister's job, Hun Sen, 71, is expected to retain a large amount of control as his party's president and president of the Senate.

Hun Sen started his political life as a middle-ranking commander in the radical communist Khmer Rouge, which was blamed for the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians from starvation, illness and killings in the 1970s, before de-

fecting to Vietnam.

When Vietnam ousted the Khmer Rouge from power in 1979, Hun Sen quickly became a senior member of the new Cambodian government installed by Vietnam and eventually helped bring an end to three decades of civil war.

By contrast, Hun Manet, like many of the incoming ministers, comes from a life of privilege and was educated in the West. He has a bachelor's degree from the United States Military Academy West Point, a master's degree from New York University and a doctorate from Bristol University in Britain, all in economics.

While the new government might not make drastic changes in policy, it is likely to set a different tone of political discourse, Norén-Nilsson said.

"This generation wants to relate differently to society at large than their parents' generation of revolutionary fighters," she said. "They want to be associated with positive political messages and to move away from and, if possible, even eliminate the sense of menace and threat of violence over time."

As a start, Hun Manet in his speech outlined a wide range of goals for the next five years, including ensuring peace and stability and promoting economic growth, as well as strengthening social services and education.

He said the new government was also committed to promoting gender equality, sustainably managing natural resources, promoting climate resilient and low-carbon public investment and ensuring environmental sustainability. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

Fukushima nuclear plant will start releasing treated radioactive water to sea as early as tomorrow

JAPAN will start releasing treated and diluted radioactive wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean as early as Thursday — a controversial step that the government says is essential for the decades of work needed to shut down the facility that had reactor meltdowns 12 years ago.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida gave the final go-

-ahead Tuesday at a meeting of Cabinet ministers involved in the plan and instructed the operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, to be ready to start the coastal release Thursday if weather and sea conditions permit.

Kishida said at the meeting that the release of the water is essential for the progress of the plant decommissioning and Fukushima

prefecture's recovery from the March 11, 2011, disaster.

He said the government has done everything for now to ensure the plant's safety, protect the reputation of Japan's fishing industry and clearly explain the scientific basis to gain understanding in and outside the country. He pledged that the government will continue those efforts until the end of the release and decommissio-

ning, which will take decades.

"The government will take responsibility until the disposal of ALPS-treated water is completed, even if it takes several decades," Kishida said.

A massive earthquake and tsunami destroyed the Fukushima Daiichi plant's cooling systems, causing three of its reactors to melt and contaminating their

cooling water. The water, now amounted to 1.34 million tons, is collected, filtered and stored in about 1,000 tanks, which fill much of the plant's grounds and will reach their capacity in early 2024.

The release of the treated wastewater has faced strong opposition from Japanese fishing organizations, which worry about further damage to the reputation of their

seafood as they struggle to recover from the nuclear disaster. Groups in South Korea and China have also raised concerns, turning it into a political and diplomatic issue.

The government and TEPCO say the water must be removed to make room for the plant's decommissioning and to prevent accidental leaks from the tanks. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH AFRICA

Russia's Putin stays away over arrest warrant as leaders of emerging economies meet

GERALD IMRAY
& MOGOMOTSI MAGOME,
JOHANNESBURG

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin will be notably absent when Chinese President Xi Jinping and other leaders from the BRICS group of emerging economies start a three-day summit in South Africa yesterday.

The bloc, consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, is holding its first in-person meeting since before the COVID-19 pandemic, but Putin will participate via video call after his travel to South Africa was complicated by an International Criminal Court arrest warrant issued for him in March over the abduction of children from Ukraine.

Xi, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa will attend in person as the bloc — home to 40% of the world's population and responsible for more than 30% of global economic output — mulls a possible expansion.

That will top the agenda at today's main summit meeting in Johannesburg's financial district of Sandton. More than 20 nations have applied to join the bloc, according to South African officials, including Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

The five BRICS countries will have to agree on the criteria for new members before any countries are admitted, but a bigger BRICS is seen as a policy favored by China and Russia as a kind of coalition amid their deteriorating relations with the West.

The BRICS group was formed in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India and China. South Africa was added in 2010.

South African Minister of Trade and Industry Ebrahim Patel officially opened the summit, welcoming about 1,200 delegates from the five BRICS nations but also from dozens of other developing countries. More than 40 heads of state are expected at the three-day meeting, ac-



President Xi Jinping observes a guard of honour during a state visit at Union Building in Pretoria, yesterday

ording to Ramaphosa.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has stressed that Putin will fully participate despite appearing virtually and will make a speech. Russia will also be represented in person by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres also is expected to attend.

There will be discussions on a wide range of topics, with general calls for more cooperation in areas such as agriculture, mining, energy, education, climate change, currency policy and trade — all under a growing overall sentiment in the developing world that it is not being served by what it sees as Western-led institutions like the U.N., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Ramaphosa held a bilateral meeting with Xi yesterday said he was seeking "Chinese support for South Africa and Africa's call for the reform of global governance institutions, notably the United Nations Security Council."

Africa and South America have no permanent representation on the Security Council despite being home to nearly 2 billion people.

BRICS officials have pushed back at characteriza-

tions that the bloc is taking an anti-West turn under the influence of China and Russia, saying it is rather looking out for the interests of the Global South.

But the BRICS stance is at odds with the United States and its Western allies on a number of issues, not least over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The European Union called on Xi, Lula, Modi and Ramaphosa to use this week's gathering to condemn Russia and Putin for the war in Ukraine, but, according to observers, that's unlikely to happen.

If anything, BRICS has been a forum for Russia to express its anti-Western rhetoric, with Lavrov using a BRICS foreign ministers meeting in June to lambast the West for its "hegemony" and using "financial blackmail" to serve its "selfish interests."

Not officially on the agenda but likely an issue for closed-door negotiations will be food security, with the developing world especially eager to use its BRICS ties with Russia to seek more grain shipments out of both Russia and Ukraine.

Ramaphosa led a mission of African leaders to Russia and Ukraine in June, meeting Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to

press for more grain exports to Africa, with little result.

There's added urgency after Russia halted a deal allowing Ukraine to export through the Black Sea last month, exacerbating hunger and pushing food prices ever higher in the Global South. Putin later announced free Russian grain shipments to six African nations and might offer more shipments this week, some analysts say, as a means of gaining favor among the dozens of developing world nations represented at the BRICS summit.

The summit officially began with a business forum on Tuesday morning, and Xi, Lula, Modi and Ramaphosa were expected to arrive at the Sandton Convention Centre for the first meeting of the leaders in the afternoon. They will also hold a retreat Tuesday evening at the luxury Summer Place estate in Johannesburg's plush Hyde Park suburb.

Xi, who has gradually resumed foreign travel after the lifting of his country's strict COVID-19 restrictions, met with Ramaphosa for a state visit in the South African capital, Pretoria. He was then set to travel 60 kilometers through South Africa's most important economic province of Gauteng to the summit in Johannesburg. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1991 GORBACHEV PUNISHES COUP PLOTTERS

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has begun his purge of cabinet members and officials involved in the failed coup four days ago.

Two of the three ministers who signed the committee's takeover decree, defence minister Dmitri Yazov and KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, have been arrested.

The third, interior minister Boris Pugo, committed suicide to avoid arrest.

Mr Gorbachev also sacked his prime minister, Valentin Pavlov, and foreign minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh. Dozens of other party officials and senior army officers resigned or were dismissed.

During an address to the Russian Parliament, the leader said his "entire government" should resign for failing to oppose the takeover.

But Mr Gorbachev was unable to prevent his political rival, Russia's president Boris Yeltsin, capitalising on support he gained from opposing the coup and suspending the Russian Communist Party.

The exchanges between the Russian President and Soviet leader in parliament appeared to indicate that the balance of power in post-coup Moscow is rapidly shifting away from Mr Gorbachev.

Mr Yeltsin forced him to read out a list of those who had supported the takeover, taken from notes of the cabinet meeting on the morning of the coup.

When Mr Gorbachev had finished reading the notes, the president said: "Now, on a lighter note, I will sign this decree suspending the Russian Communist Party."

Mr Gorbachev pleaded with him not to sign the document, telling parliament he would never agree to something that infringed the interests of "millions of workers and peasants".

"You can't say that the whole Communist party supported the conspirators - if we do things like this it will be a witch hunt," he added.

But Mr Yeltsin responded by saying he was not banning the party, merely suspending it "prior to investigation of its involvement in the coup" - and signed the document to loud applause.

Mr Gorbachev praised the Russian Parliament and Mr Yeltsin for their role in defeating the coup, but was frequently heckled during his speech.

During his description of what happened during the takeover attempt one member of the parliament shouted: "We all know that. Talk about the reasons."



Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Soviet Union collapsed four months later and Mr Gorbachev resigned on 25 December 1991. Russia, Ukraine and Belarus formed the Commonwealth of Independent States, an alliance which was eventually joined by all the former Soviet republics except the Baltic states. In 1992, Russia took the former USSR's seat at the United Nations. Mr Yeltsin's path to democracy was far from smooth. In 1993 he suspended parliament and called for new elections after a series of disagreements with his MPs. When they barricaded themselves into the parliament building, he was forced to order the army in to recapture it. Mr Yeltsin resigned in 2000 and was replaced by Vladimir Putin. The 1991 coup plotters were pardoned in 1994.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Don't hold back. Don't overreact if your partner has a poor attitude. Be careful; you may say something you'll regret later.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Your ability to do detailed work will dazzle those who are less creative. Involvement in groups will be favorable and lead to valuable information.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Good friends will give you honest answers. Health problems may prevail if you haven't been getting enough rest. Some of that extra energy you have stored up might just be put to good use.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Emotional situations could bring out your stubborn nature. You may find yourself interested in more than one person. You can find solutions if you are willing to communicate.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
A passionate party for two might be just the remedy. You will do best to entertain those you wish to close deals with. Don't let your emotions interfere with moneymaking deals.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Don't count on correspondence to clear up major problems. Don't share your dilemma with those you work with. Take care of any medical problems if they've been troubling you.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Travel will lead you in new directions. However, you must not neglect your family. Your ability to deal with others will help you in getting the support you need.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Your trendy style and unique way of doing things will entice new acquaintances. Sudden romantic encounters are quite likely, but discretion will be a must.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Stretch the truth, and you may get blamed for something you didn't do. Don't overspend to impress someone who interests you. Make those phone calls and pay your bills.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Don't reveal anything about your personal life that could be used adversely. Direct your energy into physical exertion. Minor accidents could cause trauma and major setbacks.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Be discreet and don't reveal any personal information. Don't overreact if your partner has a poor attitude. You can make career changes that may put you in a much higher earning bracket.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Your boss may be pushy. Get together with friends and do something entertaining but not too expensive. You can make some favorable changes to your looks.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

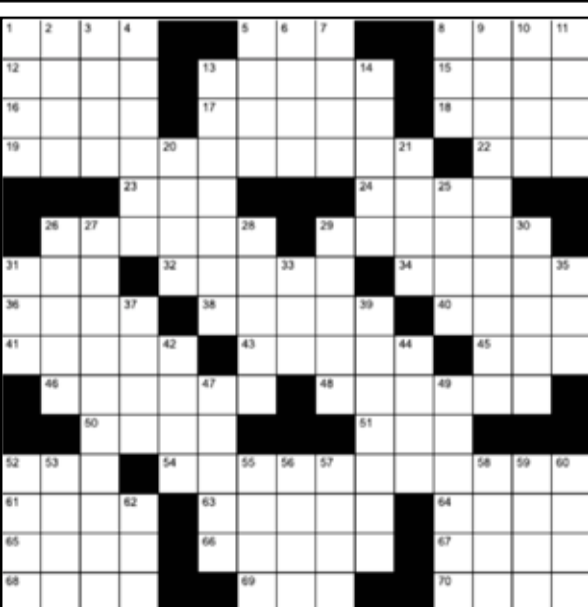
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	20	31	cloudy
Changchun	16	27	cloudy
Chengdu	23	29	showers
Chongqing	27	35	cloudy
Fuzhou	26	34	rain
Guangzhou	25	34	thunderstorms
Guiyang	20	27	showers
Haikou	25	33	rain
Hangzhou	24	29	rain
Harbin	16	25	fine
Hefei	22	35	fine
Nanjing	23	33	cloudy
Shanghai	26	29	rain
Taipei	25	30	rain
Wuhan	24	35	fine
Hong Kong	28	32	thunderstorms
WORLD			
Moscow	12	18	rain
Frankfurt	16	29	fine
Paris	21	32	cloudy
London	17	26	overcast
New York	19	26	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Pass over; 5- Purse; 8- Met highlight; 12- Small yeast cake; 13- Taboos; 15- Blackbird; 16- Hurler Hershiser; 17- Small antelope; 18- Oklahoma Native; 19- Embody in an outward form; 22- Monsters; 23- Paris possessive; 24- Long poem, such as those attributed to Homer; 26- Establishes; 29- Exhausts; 31- Actress Alicia; 32- Absorbent cloth; 34- China's Zhou; 36- Ceremony; 38- Nuisances; 40- Piece of work; 41- Dull surface; 43- Eagle's home; 45- Common article; 46- Loud uproar; 48- Rhododendron kin; 50- "East of Eden" director Kazan; 51- NL West team, on scoreboards; 52- Do something; 54- Pathfinder; 61- Pasternak heroine; 63- Swashbuckler Flynn; 64- Nota; 65- Word that can precede hygiene, tradition and agreement; 66- "Cheers" waitress; 67- Old Fords; 68- Cookbook arnts.; 69- Shelter; 70- 3:00;

DOWN 1- It's blown among the reeds; 2- German economist and socialist; 3- Yeah, right; 4- "Honor Thy Father" author; 5- Aboriginal rite site; 6- Indigo; 7- Mongolian desert; 8- Latin 101 word; 9- Covered with a network; 10- Golf club which can be numbered 1 to 9; 11- A Baldwin brother; 13- Without interruption; 14- Dimensions; 20- Four-sided fig; 21- Blunted blade; 25- "She Lovely?"; 26- Early computer; 27- Ricketty vehicle; 28- Vow; 29- Extremely; 30- Turkish bigwig; 31- Human limb; 33- Nationality suffix; 35- Presidential nickname; 37- Bibliography abbr.; 39- Fairly large; 42- Radiate; 44- British nobleman; 47- Paddled; 49- Legally responsible; 52- Tons; 53- Bugs, clunkers, and rides, e.g.; 55- Seed cover; 56- Dies; 57- The Ranger rode a horse called Silver; 58- Sixth Greek letter; 59- Extremities; 60- Take a breather; 62- Capp and Capone;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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HKD 22,000/mth 4 bed 3 bath

AD

AP PHOTO



Filipino boys play basketball in floodwaters from a swollen creek at a coastal village in Malabon, north of Manila

IN THE BASKETBALL-CRAZED PHILIPPINES, THE WORLD CUP WILL BE A SHINING MOMENT

TIM REYNOLDS, MANILA

CONSIDERING that about 110 million people live in the Philippines, it's not feasible to expect that they all would be basketball fans.

"But it's close," said Tim Cone, the country's top professional coach.

And that might not be an understatement, either.

Basketball's World Cup starts on Friday, spread out over three nations — the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia. It'll be centered in Manila, where the medal rounds will be held in early September, where the favored U.S. team will play all its games in the event and where fans have been waiting for years for this chance at seeing some of the game's biggest names competing in their city.

"It's so for big players to come here, unlike China. Everyone comes there," said Inigo Herrera, 25, who works in sales for his family's Manila business. "For us, it's like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If this is your first time in the Philippines and you go around, you will see kids playing basketball everywhere. Everywhere."

The Americans arrived on Tuesday morning (Monday night EDT) in Manila. They were greeted by local and tournament officials at the airport, had fans on motorcycles waving at the motorcade as their buses drove away, and were greeted at their hotel by more fans.

Herrera was among those

who stood in the lobby for just a glimpse of the Americans.

"I have goosebumps right now," another of Herrera's friends, RJ Tan, said as he held an Anthony Edwards jersey. And yes, he did have goosebumps, even several minutes after the Americans walked past him to get to the elevators leading to their rooms after about 10 hours of flying from Abu Dhabi.

The home nation — which has declared Friday a national holiday of sorts, closing schools and some businesses to mark the occasion — is in the World Cup and has its sights on history. While there is little chance of a magical run by the Philippines to win the tournament, there is an effort to get at least 32,617 fans to the Philippines' first game in the tournament and break the World Cup attendance record set at Toronto in 1994 when the U.S. rolled past Russia in the gold-medal game.

"I had the good fortune of visiting Manila in 1996," USA Basketball men's national team managing director Grant Hill said. "The love for the game there is absolutely incredible."

FIBA secretary general Andreas Zagklis was asked last week about the excitement level that the Philippines has shown for the World Cup.

His response: "You have not seen anything yet."

PASSION FOR THE SPORT

Basketball is a passion in the Philippines. There are about 25,000 indoor courts in the

country, countless outdoor courts — they're everywhere, with rims even fashioned out of barbed wire in some places. Data collected by the NBA shows that the league's online store can send deliveries to 215 cities and provinces in the Philippines; there isn't one place on that list where the league hasn't had someone buy a jersey or some other official merchandise.

"It is the No. 1 sport in the country and you can't definitively say that about basketball in the United States or anywhere else," said Miami Heat coach Erik Spoelstra, an assistant coach on the U.S. team this summer and a national hero in the Philippines — his mother is Filipina. "There's such great passion for the sport. I've flown into Manila with my staff and some of my friends, and on the ride from the airport, anywhere you look you can see groups of kids playing on a makeshift basket on a telephone pole, on the side of a building, in 3 feet of rainwater.

"It's a powerful visual of seeing what you would think would be extreme poverty, which it is, and the juxtaposition of seeing great joyfulness of people coming together and playing basketball in a way that doesn't exist anywhere else."

Legend says that American teachers brought basketball to the Philippines for the first time around the turn of the 20th century, and it immediately took off. Unlike other parts of Asia, where baseball or soccer can reign su-

preme, basketball stands alone in the Philippines. Its only real challenger in recent years has been boxing, simply because of Manny Pacquiao — who won 12 world championships in eight weight divisions. Pacquiao's popularity is such that he even served 12 years in politics in his homeland.

But the basketball bug even found him: The 5-foot-5 Pacquiao has played and coached in the Philippines Basketball Association, the nation's top pro league.

"People are raised on basketball from the age of 2 and 3 years old," said Cone, whose teams have won more than two dozen league titles in the Philippines. "All they do is play one sport and it's played throughout the year. We have three seasons: rainy season, wet season and basketball season, and we play basketball through it all. That's the passion. We always say we have three things in the Philippines: sport, basketball and politics."

TENEMENT COURT

Unlike politics, basketball seems to be the thing that everyone can agree on. The NBA has been airing games there for nearly a half-century, and staged one of its first ever international exhibition games in the Philippines — sending the then-Washington Bullets over to play a team of Philippine All-Stars.

If New York's heartbeat of outdoor basketball is Rucker Park,

then Manila's is Tenement Court — located in the courtyard between several tenement buildings. That spot, with a court painted in the World Cup colors and with the logo, was where podcaster and former NBA TV personality Leigh Ellis picked for a pickup game a few days ago. Ellis is touring the world, throwing out invites on social media and telling fans to join him for games as pursues a mission to play pickup in all corners of the globe and spin it into a docuseries.

Manila did not disappoint.

"Because from my experiences of traveling across several continents and countries playing pickup, I've encountered people everywhere who love and cherish basketball," Ellis said. "But in the Philippines, I could have been convinced that the game was invented there, or that they at least had some sort of ownership of it. Such was their passion for the sport."

There are 32 teams in the World Cup; half will play their first- and second-round games in Manila, while eight teams will play first in Jakarta and eight others will open in Okinawa. For the final week of the tournament, all the title contenders will be in Manila and the gold-medal game happens there Sept. 10.

It will be a moment of national pride, regardless of who wins.

"I cannot begin to explain how big a moment this will be for the country," Cone said. "The whole country." **MDT/AP**

ATHLETICS

Already breaking Bolt's youth records, teen sprinter Erriyon Knighton on fast track to success

FROM cars to race times, 19-year-old sprinter Erriyon Knighton has an appreciation for all things fast.

He's combining his two passions to provide extra fuel: Should Knighton achieve Olympic glory, he's treating himself to a black McLaren supercar. One thing he can't speed away from are the inevitable comparisons to retired Jamaican sensation Usain Bolt, which Knighton only welcomes as he gears up for the world championships.

Because really, slow and steady is more Knighton's speed in his evolution as a sprinter. He feels patience will get him to the summit as he chases American teammate Noah Lyles, the two-time defending world 200-meter champion and recently crowned 100-meter title-winner.

AP PHOTO



Erriyon Knighton, of the United States

"We're not in a rush to be great," Knighton said in an interview with The Associated Press in the lead-up to the first round of the 200 today. "I mean, greatness doesn't

come overnight. Knowing this, we're just taking everything step-by-step."

His step-by-step blueprint has led to faster 200-meter times than

even Bolt was running at this age. Knighton, a former football player turned full-time sprinter from Florida, has the top 11 fastest times ever in the 200 by a sprinter under-20, including 19.49 seconds in April 2022. For comparison, Bolt's top time at roughly a similar age was 19.93. Bolt only got faster through the years, lowering the world record to its current mark of 19.19 at the 2009 worlds in Berlin.

It's a time that Knighton — along with Lyles and everyone else — has eyes on.

"It's only a matter of time" before the record falls, said Knighton, who's never met Bolt. "And if I don't do it, somebody's going to do it."

Especially with Lyles pushing him. They have one of track's burgeoning rivalries, which features a contrast in styles. Lyles is flashy, while Knighton is more reserved.

"I like (the rivalry) because I know every time we step on the track," Knighton said, "we're going to bring the best out of each other."

Lyles led an American podium sweep in the men's 200 at last year's worlds in Oregon, with Kenny Bednarek taking silver and Knighton bringing home bronze. It was such a blazing-fast race that Lyles broke Michael Johnson's long-standing American record with a time of 19.31 seconds.

Let the record reflect: Lyles respects Knighton. But he doesn't fear the youngster who turns 20 in January.

"I see him as a kid. But he's also a rival," said the 26-year-old Lyles, who has finished in front of Knighton in seven of their nine races in the 200. "As soon as you enter the track world and as soon as you say that you want to be a professional, you're a professional. I'm going to treat you as a professional."

This summer, Knighton has worked his way into what he's described as the best racing shape of his young sprinting life. He's sharpening his skills under the direction of Mike Holloway, the successful coach at the University of Florida whose son, Grant Holloway, won his third straight world title in the 110-meter hurdles Monday.

One thing Knighton's learned above all else — don't look left or right when racing. Just concentrate on his own lane. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

World Views

Gerald Imray, MDT/AP



WHY WAS PUTIN ASKED TO STAY AWAY OF BRICS SUMMIT?

Vladimir Putin will be the odd one out when leaders from the BRICS economic bloc of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa meet in Johannesburg this week.

While all the others are set to attend the meetings in person, Putin will dial in on a video call.

The reason? An International Criminal Court arrest warrant issued for the Russian president put summit host South Africa in a sticky situation and ultimately resulted in Putin staying at home.

All the leaders from the BRICS countries traditionally attend its summits, and Chinese Premier Xi Jinping is making a rare trip overseas to be at the bloc's first in-person summit since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

But Putin's indictment by the International Criminal Court in March charging him with war crimes over the removal of children from Ukraine left South Africa with a significant diplomatic conundrum.

South Africa and Russia share strong ties and have an historically close relationship, but South Africa is also a signatory to the international court's treaty. That meant it would be obliged to arrest Putin on the ICC warrant if he set foot on South African soil.

South Africa lobbied for months ahead of the summit to persuade Putin to stay at home so it could avoid the problem, South African officials say. South African Deputy President Paul Mashatile said last month that Putin was determined to come before an agreement for him to participate virtually was finally announced.

"It's almost like you invite your friend to your house, and then arrest them," Mashatile said at the time. "That's why for us his not coming is the best solution. The Russians are not happy, though. They want him to come."

The Kremlin didn't say if Putin had been intending to travel to South Africa, but stressed he would still play a key role in the main summit meeting [today] and address the delegates on a video link.

The main discussion will be over expanding the five-nation bloc.

China and Russia are in favor of a bigger BRICS and are seen to be pushing for that. Nearly two dozen countries have applied to become new members, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Argentina, Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and United Arab Emirates.

But BRICS is a consensus-based organization, and all five members must agree on the principle of expansion and the criteria for new members before it can decide on who gets to join.

Brazil, India and South Africa are seen as less keen on expansion, fearing their voices might get diluted, but the bloc is moving ahead and the five leaders are expected to review proposals on the criteria for expansion.

If the policy is given the go-ahead, a bigger BRICS might be seen as an opportunity for China and Russia to extend their influence.

The possible BRICS expansion is seen by some as part of China and Russia's effort to challenge the Group of 7 major industrial nations and other Western international institutions.

The bloc insists its focus is not against the West but in looking out for the developing world's interests.

South Africa, the current chair of BRICS, says that doesn't mean the bloc is taking an anti-West turn under the influence of China and Russia amid increased West-East geopolitical tensions.

[Abridged]

FORMER THAI LEADER THAKSIN GOES TO JAIL AS POLITICAL PARTY LINKED TO HIM WINS VOTE TO TAKE POWER

THE BUZZ

Thailand's divisive former prime minister made a dramatic return home yesterday to face an eight-year prison term, just as a party linked to him won a vote in Parliament to lead to the country — the latest turn in nation's tumultuous politics.

The move by Thaksin Shinawatra indicates he is hoping that a friendly government will be able to cut short his sentence, although he has said his decision to come back had nothing to do with the Pheu Thai party's bid for power.

Thaksin's return after 15 years in self-imposed exile was an emotional moment for supporters of the 74-year-old billionaire, who won

the loyalty of millions with populist policies that directed attention and funding to the country's largely rural, impoverished north before being removed in a coup.

His reemergence recalls the years of pitched battles — both figurative and sometimes literal — between his "red shirt" supporters and "yellow shirt" opponents who champion conservative, royalist values.

Hundreds of people gathered outside of the airport early in the morning, donning red clothes and holding signs with welcoming messages, then raised a raucous cheer when Thaksin appeared at the terminal's door.

THE FIRST TWO CHILDREN ARE RESCUED FROM A CABLE CAR DANGLING HUNDREDS OF FEET IN THE AIR IN PAKISTAN

RIAZ KHAN, PESHAWAR

An official says military commandos have rescued two children stuck in a cable car dangling hundreds of meters above the ground in a remote part of Pakistan.

Military commandos launched a helicopter operation to free the trapped occupants — six children and two adults — yesterday, said Bilal Faizi, spokesman for the emergency services.

He said the first two children have been rescued and the operation is still underway.

Army commandos could be seen on local TV trying to lower themselves on ropes from the choppers toward the cable car. An expert warned the rescue was incredibly delicate because the wind created by the helicopters' blades could further weaken cables holding the car aloft.

Relatives of those trapped prayed while anxiously watching the operation unfold. The rescue has also transfixed Pakistanis across the country who crowded around televisions in offices, shops, restaurants and hospitals.

According to Pakistani TV stations, some of those trapped were in contact with their families by cell phone, while authorities said the two adults were consoling the children, who were between the ages of 11 and 15.

One of the cables snapped while the eight people were crossing a river canyon in Battagram district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The children had been on their way to school, and villagers frequently use cable cars to get around Pakistan's mountainous regions. But the cars are



In this image taken from video, a cable car carrying six children and two adults dangles hundreds of meters above the ground in the remote Battagram district

often poorly maintained and every year people die or are injured while traveling in them.

Helicopters were sent to attempt to pluck the people from the cable car — but only after the group spent six hours precariously suspended 350 meters above ground, according to Taimoor Khan, a spokesman for the disaster management authority.

Pakistan's caretaker prime minister, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, wrote on X that he ordered authorities "to urgently ensure safe rescue and evacuation of the 8 people."

"I have also directed the authorities to conduct safety inspections of all such private chairlifts and ensure that they are safe to operate and use,"

he said on the platform formerly known as Twitter.

Several helicopters hovered above the scene, and ambulances gathered on the ground.

Tipu Sultan, a retired army brigadier and defense expert, warned that the helicopters themselves could make the situation worse but that the commandos would be well aware of that risk. Khan added that the pilots were flying "carefully."

"Let us pray that those trapped in the cable car are safely rescued," Sultan said.

In 2017, 10 people were killed when a cable car fell into a ravine hundreds of meters (feet) deep in the popular mountain resort of Murree after its cable broke. MDT/AP



Canadian firefighters prevented wildfires from destroying more structures in a scenic region of British Columbia and stepped up their defense of a territorial capital threatened by flames, authorities said Monday as the prospect of rain raised hopes for the effort to contain the blazes. Fire Chief Jason Brolund said fire crews made more progress in the West Kelowna area known as a summer destination for families. He reported no new property losses in the previous 24 hours and said the biggest challenge now is the region's poor air quality.



Ecuadorians voted against drilling for oil in a protected area of the Amazon, an important decision that will require the state oil company to end its operations in a region that's home to isolated tribes and is a hotspot of biodiversity. With over 90% of the ballots counted by early Monday, around six in 10 Ecuadorians rejected the oil exploration in Block 43, situated within Yasuni National Park. The referendum took place along with the presidential election, which will be decided in a runoff between leftist candidate Luisa González and right-wing contender Daniel Noboa.



Niger The African Union yesterday suspended Niger from all of its institutions and activities "until the effective restoration of constitutional order" following last month's coup. The council of the 55-nation bloc made the decision after mutinous soldiers overthrew Niger's democratically elected president last month and quickly entrenched themselves in power, rebuffing most dialogue efforts. President Mohamed Bazoum, his wife and son have been kept under house arrest in the capital, Niamey.