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**A REVIEW OF THE LOCAL MINIMUM WAGE LEVEL SHOULD BE CONDUCTED EVERY YEAR TO BETTER MATCH ACTUAL LIVING CONDITIONS, OXFAM MACAU SAID**

P2

**MACAU-HK AIRPORT DIRECT BUS TO BE LAUNCHED SOON**

P2

**IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA, EGYPT AMONG SIX NATIONS SET TO JOIN BRICS**

P7



AP PHOTO



**North Korea** yesterday that its second attempt to launch a spy satellite failed again but vowed to make another attempt in October, demonstrating willingness to endure flops to acquire a key military asset coveted by leader Kim Jong Un. The failed launch prompted neighboring Japan to issue brief a "J-alert" ordering some residents to evacuate to safe places as the North Korean rocket flew over its southernmost islands of Okinawa to the Pacific Ocean.

AP PHOTO



**Pakistan** Rescuers have evacuated more than 100,000 people from flood-hit areas of Pakistan's eastern Punjab province in the past three weeks, officials said yesterday. The rescue operations were expanded last week when the Sutlej River started overflowing, inundating several districts. Most of the evacuations were reported in the districts of Bahawalpur and Kasur in Punjab province.

AP PHOTO



**Belarusian** authorities yesterday declared the country's oldest and most prominent human rights group an extremist organization. The move against Viasna, founded by imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, comes amid a yearslong crackdown on dissent in Belarus and exposes anyone involved in its activities to criminal prosecution.

More on backpage

# OVERCROWDED, NOT OVERLOADED?

Some bus routes in Macau are overcrowded, but DSAT says they are not 'overloaded'. Here's the question P3



HORSE RACING INSIDER

## JOCKEY CLUB MAY FAIL NEW SEASON

P4

## TASTE OF EDESIA



P11



LABOR

# OXFAM MACAU CALLS FOR YEARLY REVIEW OF MINIMUM WAGE



ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE review of the local minimum wage level should be conducted every year to better match actual living situations, an international charity organization has said in a statement.

Pointing out that a biannual review of the minimum wage will actually result in the execution of updates in the third year, Oxfam's Macau Office said that a yearly review is more appropriate.

For example, it said the current review will result in updates that will likely only be enacted Nov. 1 this year, which is three years after the enactment of the first

minimum wage policy. Retaining the biannual review mode will pose greater risks to grassroots families, it was claimed.

It also suggested the government adopt the yearly minimum wage review timeframe for property management workers, so that workers can maintain their purchasing power. Additionally, the government should allow each update to be made at the Policy Address and enacted on Jan. 1 each year.

The organization also pointed out that the current minimum wage is far behind inflation, weakening protection for laborers. It

stressed that the inflation rate for food and non-alcoholic drinks was 5.5% between Nov. 2020 and Jul. 2023.

Moreover, Oxfam pointed out that the minimum wage should not be lower than MOP38.4 to maintain acceptable standard of living for a household of two. On the assumption of daily work of eight hours for 26 days per month, monthly income will be approximately the level of the subsistence index for such a family.

Oxfam highlighted that it appreciates the government's efforts in maintaining the standard of living for the public during the past three years. Nonetheless, minimum wage is key to constantly maintaining the standard for all. Therefore, it suggests the government take a brave step to safeguard the livelihood of households.

URBAN DESIGN

# Av. Wai Long land to see multiple public facilities

**A** plot of land on Avenida Wai Long retrieved by the government will be turned into a public parking lot, a bus transit terminus, and some social facilities.

In response to lawmaker Ella Lei's written inquiry, Acting Director Sam Weng Chon of public works cited his counterparts at the Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU).

The DSSCU was cited as disclosing that the use of the land plot has been changed, with a significantly reduced number of apartments planned. Responsible bureaus will decide the requirements of basic supplementary facilities, while the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) will conduct further design on the project. The social facilities will at least meet the provisions as set out in the Planning Draft.

In her inquiry, Lei pointed out that only 1,500 square meters of social facilities were said to remain under



Lawmaker Ella Lei

the new development plan for the project. She was unhappy with this, as she believes sufficient social facilities must be available to cater to the basic needs of future residents.

She even pointed to the Seac Pai Van public housing district as evidence of her views, saying that when the first group of residents moved into the residential district, few to no social facilities were available.

Her second question focused on standards and guidelines

governing the proportion of social facilities to an overall project, because they are absent in Macau, but have been in place in Hong Kong. She wondered if the government would establish such guiding tools.

While citing the DSSCU, Sam said that the government should make overall considerations of the proportion of social facilities in each district, taking into account the population structure, development status and other indicators. **AL**

EVENTS

# MICE RESULTS IN H12023 TOPS FULL YEAR OF 2022, EXHIBITIONS LOSE MONEY

RENATO MARQUES

**I**N the first half (H1) of 2023, a total of 493 MICE events were held in Macau, according to information from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) and the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) notes.

According to figures released by IPIM, the figure topped the number of MICE events held during the whole of 2022, when 477 events were held.

The number of participants and attendees at events in H1 of this year rose by 50.8% to 710,000.

Analysis by the DSEC shows that growth in the number of MICE events is correlated with the number of meetings and conferences, which surged year-on-year from 158 last year to 463. The number of participants at this type of MICE event



also followed a similar trend, soaring by 297.9% to 70,000.

As for the number of exhibitions, it remained the same (24) year-on-year, but the number of attendees has recorded a growth of 40.7% to a total of 636,000.

Receipts and expenditures of the exhibition organizers totaled MOP57.50 million and MOP72.36 million respectively, up respectively by 238.8% and 374.1%

year-on-year. From these, the receipts and expenditures of the 23 exhibitions organized by non-government organizations totaled MOP57.50 million and MOP62.64 million, respectively.

This means that the events suffered a loss of MOP5.14 million, a value that grows to MOP10.65 million when excluding financial support from government or organizations, according to the DSEC.

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PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

# DSAT claims crowded buses are not overloaded

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Transport Bureau (DSAT) has claimed that buses with a stated capacity of 65 passengers may not be overloaded even if “the buses are circulating carrying over 100 passengers,” the Bureau said in a response to an inquiry from the Times.

According to DSAT, “As loading and unloading of passengers may occur in the course of transporting passengers on public buses, even for a public bus with a capacity of 65 passengers, the total number of passengers carried on a bus trip may exceed 100, but this is not overloading.”

The same bureau added that DSAT “attaches great importance to the safety of bus services,” calling on users to report unlawful or dangerous situations to the Bureau with “specific information, such as the license plate number of the buses, the time and location of the buses, so follow-up measures could be taken.”

In the Times inquiry, it was noted by several readers that several bus routes have been circulating with vehicles full, carrying many more passengers than their stated capacity.

According to Times readers, several bus routes, namely those in between the Peninsula and Taipa/Coloane (22, 33, 25, 26A, etc.) and the city center to Border Gate (3, 5, 10, etc.) have been circulating severely overcrowded in the past few weeks.



Reports from readers have stated that the buses' capacity has been largely exceeded during most hours of the day and not just peak hours, claiming that in some cases, the buses carry almost double their stated capacity.

In response to these reports, the Times has tested some of these routes in a normal off-peak time and realized, for instance, that the bus capacity of Route 25 from Praça Ferreira do Amaral in the direction to Taipa was at least 34% above the vehicle capacity.

This overcrowding appeared to be at the initiative of the bus operator, who was directing staff to squeeze more people inside the bus and allowing passengers to enter via the rear doors.

A Times reporter observed

a bus with a stated capacity of 65 passengers (30 seated and 35 standing) carry a total of 87 passengers between bus stop M172/14 – Praça Ferreira do Amaral (Lane E) and the bus stop T403 – Esparteiro/Regency, across the Governador Nobre de Carvalho Bridge.

Readers reported, in some cases, as many as 100 passengers on board buses at the same time, namely those en route to the Border Gate.

In reply, DSAT admitted that “With the gradual recovery of Macau's tourism industry, the number of passengers on public buses continues to rise,” adding, “According to the current bus service contracts, two bus companies may increase the frequency of bus services in response to passenger flow, and

have the flexibility to arrange special buses and dispatch different models of buses to meet the traveling needs of the public.”

DSAT also said, “In cases of overcrowding, bus captains will indicate to passengers to wait for the next bus, and at the same time, the bus company will be notified to allocate buses to pick up passengers.”

The Bureau also said it would “closely monitor the actual passenger flow of the buses and bus companies are required to flexibly adjust their schedules to meet the traveling needs of the public and tourists,” stating also that DSAT “will evaluate bus services objectively from various aspects through bus service evaluation and will monitor bus operation using technology.”

## PJ WARNS OF ‘LUCK BOX’ SCAMS

The Judiciary Police (PJ) has noticed that in neighboring regions, fraudsters impersonating online customer service representatives use courier services to send out “luck boxes” randomly. After unboxing, the victim finds a card with the message “scan QR code to obtain red packets.” Upon scanning the code, the victim would be transferred to a phishing website or a “brushing” scam group to be defrauded. As such, the police advise people to be vigilant when receiving unknown deliveries and warns them to neither scan unidentified QR codes nor supply personal information, credit card, and bank account details to unknown sites.

## SAN KIO DISTRICT TO GRADUALLY REOPEN AFTER PIPELINE WORKS

As pipeline renewal work in San Kio District gradually progresses, some blocked streets may be reopened for public use, Municipal Affairs Bureau and Transport Bureau announced in a statement yesterday. At 10am on Sunday, the section of Estrada de Coelho do Amaral between Rua da Restauração and Rua de Bras da Rosa, as well as the section of Rua de Bras da Rosa between Travessa do Bem-Estar and Estrada de Coelho do Amaral, will be reopened. Bus stops on these streets as well as bus routes through these streets will also be reopened.

## SSM VISITS CATERERS' ASSOCIATION TO PROMOTE ANTI-ALCOHOL LAW

A delegation from the Health Bureau visited The United Association of Food and Beverage Merchants of Macao this week to promote the drinking control law, and was received by President and lawmaker Chan Chak Mo and its management. The delegation reminded that the law will be enacted on Nov. 5. Pursuant to it, public places should not provide drinks containing 1.2% alcohol to minors. Certain venues will be banned from selling alcoholic drinks. Online sale of alcoholic drinks will also be subject to supervision. Meanwhile, the association expressed concerns over control related to vending machines, remote sale, etc.

## RETAIL SALES VALUE UP %64.3 IN Q2

The value of Macau's retail sales for the second quarter of 2023 totaled MOP21.58 billion up 64.3% year-on-year, the statistic department said yesterday. The latest report from the Statistics and Census Service showed that among the major retail trade activities, sales values of Chinese food products surged 406% year-on-year, while sales values of watches, clocks and jewelry, department stores and adults' clothing recorded growth of 106.8%, 105.2% and 95.6%, respectively. On the other hand, sales values of communication equipment and supermarkets decreased 25.8% and 4.1%.

# Macau-HK airport direct bus to be launched soon

**A** bus service to serve passengers between Macau and Hong Kong Airport will begin operations soon, local media reported yesterday.

In contrast to the pre-Covid mode of operations, the new service will allow passengers to obtain their boarding passes and check their bags in Macau, which is referred to as upstream check-in service by the industry, according to public broadcaster TDM – Radio Macau in Chinese.

The first phase of the service will operate between 7:30am and 7:30pm every day. Each departure will be an hour apart from each terminus station. The trip will be about 45 minutes. Each bus will take a maximum of 36 passengers.

Currently, passengers who plan to travel between the Hong Kong airport and Macau can either take the bus to Hong Kong, pass through immigration check, and take another bus to the airport, or take a fer-

ry service from Macau directly to the airport's airside.

As for pricing, each trip will be MOP/HKD280 per adult, with MOP/HKD30 discount during the first two months. At the Hong Kong airport, passengers can apply for a tax refund.

The operator hopes that service hours can be extended by Christmas, with round-the-clock operations and 15-minute departure intervals being the ultimate goal.







## JOCKEY CLUB FUTURE UNCLEAR AMID APPROVAL FOR NEW SEASON

ANTHONY LAM

**ALTHOUGH** the Macau Jockey Club (MJC) has had its new season approved, its future remains foggy, an insider told the Times.

The insider requested to retain anonymity, as they were not officially permitted to discuss the

matter with the press.

The insider started the interview by questioning "how long can this season go," considering the fact that 30 horses were set to arrive in Macau and start quarantine on Jul. 26. However, it was later revealed that "no import permit was issued for the horses," the insider said.

They estimated that this season may only have four races a month and that the season may be forced to conclude by December due to myriad causes.

The Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) has been contacted for verification of the speculated closure of the MJC. No reply has been received as of

press time.

On the other hand, the insider said that the MJC was told that its gambling license was under review. Speculations went to the MJC's failure to fulfil its pledges to diversify its products at the time of license renewal back in 2018. According to the contract, the MJC was set to develop a new com-

mercial area with restaurants, two hotel towers, two serviced apartments, a theme park, a tennis court and an equestrian school. Some of these projects should be concluded in 2024, with the rest in 2026.

Easily viewed from the LRT Olympic Station and the Macau Roosevelt hotel, the MJC court has no ongoing construction.

Should there be an abrupt closure, the insider worries that existing horses may have nowhere to go. They explained that in Singapore, owners are given a whole year to relocate their horses.

A few animal welfare and environmental protection icons have been contacted for comments, but declined making any due to the lack of information and understanding on the matter as of press time.

In 2018, there was a saga concerning the greyhounds at the former Canidrome of Macau, as it ceased operations. It was worried that the greyhounds would be abandoned without care, as adoption initiatives were not started soon after the announcement of the closure of the ground. The government had actually given its then operator – same as the MJC's current operator, lawmaker Angela Leong, a year and seven months to resolve the situation.

Ultimately, the saga only concluded after interventions from several animal welfare groups.

### SPORTS

## Basketball World Cup 2023 in Asia but with little to no attention in Macau

RENATO MARQUES

**THE** 2023 FIBA Basketball World Cup will commence today at 4 p.m. at the Philippine Arena in the city of Manila.

The choice could not be grander as the venue is known for being the world's largest indoor arena with a maximum capacity of 55,000 seats.

The 2023 FIBA Basketball World Cup will continue until September 10. The organizers of this year's FIBA's biggest tournament will be the Philippines, Japan, and Indonesia.

While the World Cup is an exciting opportunity for several countries to showcase not only their basketball skills but also their ability to organize major events, it seems to be receiving little to no attention in Macau.

When contacted by the Times, local broadcaster



TDM said there were no plans to broadcast any of the matches live on TV, not even on their dedica-

ted sports channel, leaving any potential report on the World Cup to sports news programs.

Spain is the defending champion, having won in China four years ago in a tournament where the tra-

ditionally strong US side came only seventh. Still, the Americans are the favorites this year and will not lack support from the many NBA fans in this part of the world.

The tournament includes 32 teams that have been split into eight different groups for the first round.

The top two teams from each group will make the second round, while the top eight teams after the second round advance to the quarter-finals.

Among those participating from Asia is the Philippines, playing in Group A at Manila with Angola, Italy, and the Dominican Republic. China will play in Group B, also in Manila with matches scheduled with South Sudan, Puerto Rico, and Serbia.

Most matches will be played on Filipino soil, which will host four out of the eight groups of the first round. The other four groups are split (2-2) between Okinawa, Japan, and Jakarta, Indonesia.

The final phase of the quarter-finals until the final match will be played in the Philippines, but this time at Manila's Mall of Asia Arena.

Live matches can be watched via Live Streaming at (<https://www.courtside1891.basketball/>)

### FRIDAY MATCHES – AUGUST 25, 2023

Group A	4:00 p.m.	Angola vs. Italy
Group E	4:00 p.m.	Finland vs. Australia
Group D	6:45 p.m.	Mexico vs. Montenegro
Group H	7:15 p.m.	Latvia vs. Lebanon
Group A	8:00 p.m.	Dominican Republic vs. Philippines
Group E	8:10 p.m.	Germany vs. Japan
Group D	8:30 p.m.	Egypt vs. Lithuania
Group H	9:30 p.m.	Canada vs. France



TECH

# mPay to expand e-payment coverage to over 40 countries through Alipay+

RENATO MARQUES

**L**OCAL electronic payment (e-payment) platform mPay will expand its activities beyond Macau to more than 40 countries, platform owner Macau Pass S.A. (Macau Pass) announced in a statement yesterday.

According to the statement, the local platform will join with Alipay+ to expand its coverage to more than 40 countries, something that will likely happen either by September or between October and December next year.

Among the countries newly covered by the partnership will be the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, as well as the 24 countries that compose the European Economic Area (being all European Union countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway).

Also included will be countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Qatar, Singapore, Malaysia, Sou-



th Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United States of America.

Crucially, this cross-border payment function is only applicable to mPay users that are Macau residents and who have acquired a user status on the mobile app of

JR (Junior), Intermediate-3A, and Advanced-3B levels.

According to Macau Pass, payments abroad will be completed by simply switching the Alipay+ overseas payment code on mPay when seeing the Alipay+ logo at merchants in these countries.

Regarding the expansion, the Chairman and CEO of Macau Pass, Sun Ho, said that following the changes in consumer culture as well as modern technology advancements, the demand for electronic payments, especially cross-border mobile payments, is growing rapidly.

"As one of the leading mobile payment e-wallets in Macau, mPay and Alipay+, which have launched a suite of innovative digital cross-border solutions, strive to create a smart e-wallet that allows Macau residents to travel globally. This could also solve the issues they encounter with payment while traveling overseas, thus improving travelers' payment and shopping experience."

The same official also noted that "when international payment services give consumers a fine global travel consumption experience, it [brings] more cross-border businesses and tourism growth opportunities for global merchants."

The Macau Pass CEO said that mPay "will continue to expand electronic payment, lifestyle services, and marketing technology services to develop more open and diversified intelligent payment business scenarios."

With the optimization of the entry-exit management policy of the Macau SAR government, the increase in searches for outbound flights and accommodation in overseas countries indicates that the outbound travel demand of Macau residents continues to recover in 2023, and cross-border consumption is expected to surge.

Macau Pass was acquired back in late March 2022 by AG-Tech Holdings, an affiliate of mainland tech giant Alibaba, for HKD778 million. With this move, several changes have been promoted to the e-payment platform which started to benefit from a wider range of services provided through the Alipay system.

AD

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- 御蓮宮 LOTUS PALACE
- COPA STEAKHOUSE
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AP PHOTO



The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant

NUCLEAR

# China bans seafood from Japan after the Fukushima plant begins its wastewater release

MARI YAMAGUCHI, OKUMA

**T**HE tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant began releasing its first batch of treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday — a controversial step that prompted China to ban seafood from Japan.

People inside and outside the country protested the wastewater release, with Japanese fishing groups fearing it will further damage the reputation of their seafood and groups in China and South Korea raising concerns, making it a political and diplomatic issue.

In response to the wastewater release, Chinese customs authorities banned seafood from Japan, customs authorities announced yesterday. The ban started immediately and will affect all imports of “aquatic products” including seafood, according to the notice. Authorities said they will “dynamically adjust relevant regulatory measures as appropriate to prevent the risks of nuclear-contaminated water discharge to the health and food safety of our country.”

Shortly after China’s announcement, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings President Tomoaki Kobayakawa said the utility was preparing to compensate Japanese business owners appropriately for damages suffered by export bans from

“the foreign government” over the wastewater release. He said China is Japan’s key trading partner and that he will do his utmost by providing scientific explanations of the release so that the ban will be dropped as soon as possible.

The Japanese government and TEPCO say the water must be released to make room for the plant’s decommissioning and to prevent accidental leaks. They say the treatment and dilution will make the wastewater safer than international standards and its environmental impact will be negligibly small.

Tony Hooker, director of the Center for Radiation Research, Education, Innovation at the University of Adelaide, said the water released from the Fukushima plant is safe. “It certainly is well below the World Health Organization drinking water guidelines,” he said. “It’s safe.”

“It’s a very political issue of disposing radiation into the sea,” he said. “I understand people’s concerns and that’s because we as scientists have not explained it in a very good way, and we need to do more education.”

Still, some scientists say the long-term impact of the low-dose radioactivity that remains in the water needs attention.

In a live video from a control room at the plant, TEPCO showed a staff member turn on

a seawater pump with a click of a mouse, marking the beginning of the controversial project that is expected to last for decades.

“Seawater Pump A activated,” the main operator said, confirming the release was underway. TEPCO said an additional wastewater release pump was activated 20 minutes after the first. Plant officials said everything was moving smoothly so far.

In a statement yesterday, International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said, “IAEA experts are there on the ground to serve as the eyes of the international community and ensure that the discharge is being carried out as planned consistent with IAEA safety standards.”

The United Nations agency also said it would launch a webpage to provide live data about the discharge, and repeated its assurance that the IAEA would have an on-site presence for the duration of the release.

The water release begins more than 12 years after the March 2011 nuclear meltdowns, caused by a massive earthquake and tsunami. It marks a milestone for the plant’s battle with an ever-growing radioactive water stockpile that TEPCO and the government say has hampered the daunting task of removing the fatally toxic melted debris from the reactors.

The pump activated yesterday afternoon sent the first

batch of the diluted, treated water from a mixing pool to a secondary pool 10 minutes later. It then moves through a connected undersea tunnel to go out 1 kilometer off the coast. Officials said the water moves at a walking speed and will take about 30 minutes to exit from the tunnel.

The operator checked data and the progress on a set of four monitors that show the water volume, pump conditions and any alerts.

TEPCO executive Junichi Matsumoto said the release was planned to start small in order to ensure safety.

The wastewater is collected and partly recycled as cooling water after treatment, with the rest stored in around 1,000 tanks, which are already filled to 98% of their 1.37-million-ton capacity. Those tanks, which cover much of the plant complex, must be freed up to build the new facilities needed for the decommissioning process, officials said.

Final preparation for the release began Tuesday, when just one ton of treated water was sent from a tank for dilution with 1,200 tons of seawater, and the mixture was kept in the primary pool for two days for final sampling to ensure safety, Matsumoto said. A batch of 460 tons was to be sent to the mixing pool yesterday or the actual discharge. **MDT/AP**

DIRE STRAIT

## US approves new \$500M arms sale to Taiwan as tension intensifies

MATTHEW LEE, WASHINGTON

**T**he Biden administration has approved a \$500 million arms sale to Taiwan as it ramps up military assistance to the island despite fervent objections from China.

The State Department said yesterday [Macau time] it had signed off on the sale of infrared search tracking systems along with related equipment for advanced F-16 fighter jets. The sale includes the infrared systems as well as test support and equipment, computer software and spare parts, it said.

Although the deal is modest in comparison to previous weapons sales, the move is likely to draw fierce criticism from Beijing, which regards self-governing Taiwan as a renegade province and refuses to rule out the use of force to reunify it with the mainland.

“This proposed sale serves U.S. national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient’s continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability,” the State Department said in a statement.

“The proposed sale will improve the recipient’s capability to meet current and future threats by contributing to the recipient’s abilities to defend its airspace, provide regional security, and increase interoperability with the United States through its F-16 program,” it said.

The announcement came just hours after Taiwan’s leader Tsai Ing-wen renewed a pledge to strengthen Taiwan’s self-defense as she visited a war memorial from the last time Taiwan and China battled. Tsai, visited the outlying islands of Kinmen where the conflict was fought 65 years ago, commemorated those who died.

The State Department announcement also follows an angry Chinese reaction to the transit through the United States of Taiwanese deputy leader William Lai on his way to and from an official visit in Paraguay last week.

In recent years, China has stepped up its military activity in the waters and skies around Taiwan, sending fighter jets and navy vessels near the island or to encircle it. **MDT/AP**



BRICS

# Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are among six nations set to join China and Russia in economic bloc

GERALD IMRAY &  
MOGOMOTSI MAGOME,  
JOHANNESBURG

**I**RAN and Saudi Arabia were among six countries set to join Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa in the BRICS economic bloc from next year, the bloc announced yesterday, a move that will likely throw more scrutiny on Beijing's political influence in the Persian Gulf.

The United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Egypt and Ethiopia are also set to become new members of BRICS from 2024.

BRICS was set up in 2009 as a group of emerging market economies and has become one of the leading voices for more representation of the developing world and the Global South in world affairs.

It currently represents around 40% of the world's population and more than a quarter of the world's GDP, although that is set to increase with the new members, which include three of the world's biggest oil producers in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran.

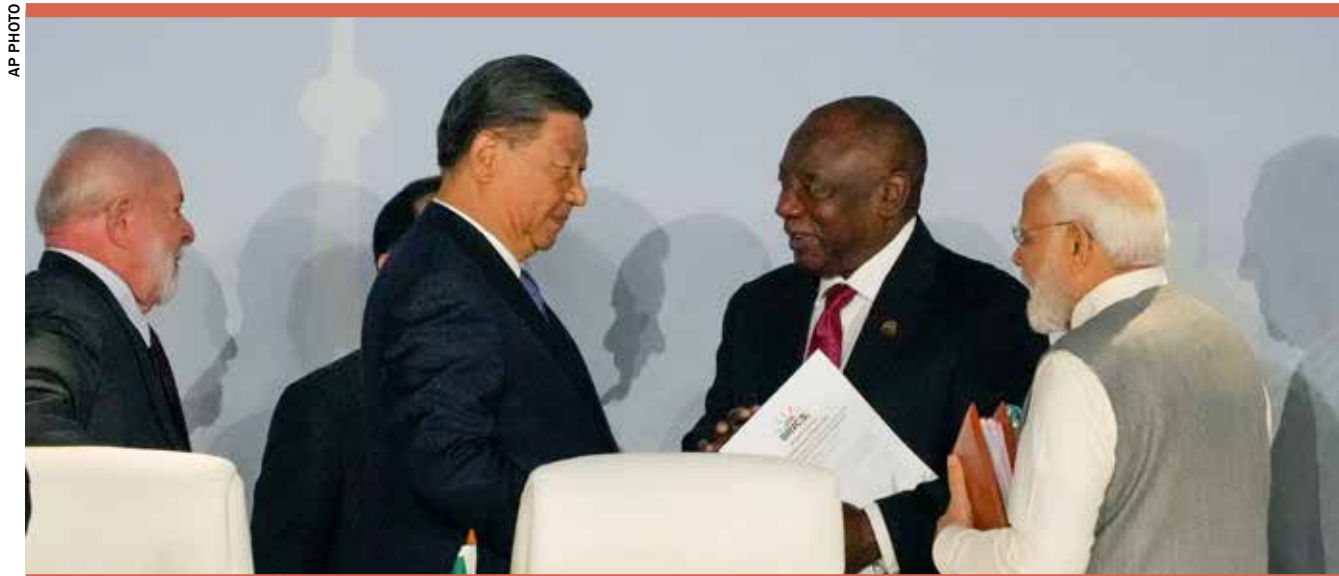
Recently, questions have been raised over if BRICS is taking an anti-West turn under the influence of China and Russia amid Beijing's deteriorating relationship with the United States and Russia's stand-off with the West over the war in Ukraine.

Mohammad Jamshidi, the political deputy of Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, called the decision to add his country "a historic move."

"A strategic victory for Iran's foreign policy," Jamshidi wrote on X, the website formerly known as Twitter. "Felicitations to the Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution and great nation of Iran."

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, whose country presently chairs BRICS, made the announcement on the six new members on the final day of the bloc's summit in the financial district of Sandton in Johannesburg.

Brazilian President Luiz



Inácio Lula da Silva, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping are attending the summit and were present alongside Ramaphosa for the announcement.

"This membership expansion is historic," Xi said. "It shows the determination of BRICS countries for unity and development."

"Over the years, China has stood in solidarity with developing countries through thick and thin."

Russian President Vladimir Putin did not travel to the summit after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for him in March for the abduction of children from Ukraine. He has participated in the summit virtually, while Russia was represented at the announcement in Johannesburg by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

While Saudi Arabia had been touted as a likely new member if the five current BRICS members reached a consensus on expansion, Iran's inclusion had been viewed as possibly politically problematic. China and Russia were pushing for expansion, but Brazil, India and South Africa, which have strong bilateral ties with the U.S., only gave their approval more recently.

The current members agreed on the final details of expansion after two days of talks in Johannesburg, although Ramaphosa said the idea had been worked on for over a year.

The BRICS leaders began their talks in Johannesburg on Tuesday night and were locked in discussions most of the day Wednesday, thrashing out the final details. BRICS is a consensus-based organization and all members have to agree on policies.

It's the second time that BRICS has decided to expand. The bloc was formed in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India and China. South Africa was added in 2010.

In an online message, United Arab Emirates leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan welcomed the BRICS announcement and said his nation would be joining an "important group."

"We look forward to a continued commitment of cooperation for the prosperity, dignity and benefit of all nations and people around the world," Sheikh Mohammed said on X.

Until recently, the inclusion of Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates together in the same economic or political organization would have been unthinkable, as tensions escalated following the collapse of Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal and a series of attacks attributed to the country since.

But as the coronavirus pandemic receded, the UAE became the first to reengage diplomatically with Iran, following missile attacks on Abu Dhabi claimed by the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels of Yemen.

In March, Saudi Arabia and Iran announced they had reached a separate détente with Chinese mediation. China has sought clo-

ser relations with all three nations, particularly Iran, from which it has imported oil since the collapse of the nuclear deal.

Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE also have maintained relations with Russia amid Moscow's war on Ukraine, much to the chagrin of Washington, which long has provided security guarantees for the major oil-producing nations.

Egypt President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi said in a statement that his country would cooperate and coordinate with the rest of the members to achieve the bloc's aims in economic cooperation, and to "raise the voice of the Global South."

The news was also a major boost for Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country and one of the fastest-growing economies on the continent, as its government works to reengage with many global partners and financial institutions after a devastating two-year conflict in the country's Tigray region ended last year.

The war caused billions of dollars of damage and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, under pressure from the U.S. and European Union, has turned to other partners like China, Russia and Gulf nations for support.

MDT/AP

AD

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RUSSIA

# A PLANE CRASH BELIEVED TO HAVE KILLED MERCENARY CHIEF PRIGOZHIN IS SEEN AS THE KREMLIN'S REVENGE

**R**USSIAN mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin and top officers of his private Wagner military company were presumed dead in a plane crash that was widely seen as an assassination, two months after they staged a mutiny that dented President Vladimir Putin's authority.

Russia's civil aviation agency said that Prigozhin and six top lieutenants were on a business jet that crashed yesterday [Macau time], soon after taking off from Moscow, with a crew of three. Rescuers found all 10 bodies, and Russian media cited sources in Prigozhin's Wagner company who confirmed his death.

Police cordoned off the field where the plane crashed a few hundred kilometers north of Moscow, as investigators studied the site. Vehicles were seen driving in to take the bodies for forensic examinations.

At Wagner's headquarters in St. Petersburg, lights were turned on in the shape of a large cross. Prigozhin's supporters brought flowers to the building in an improvised memorial.

U.S. and other Western officials long expected Putin to go after Prigozhin, despite promising to drop charges in a deal that ended the June 23-24 mutiny.

"I don't know for a fact what happened, but I'm not surprised," U.S. President Joe Biden said. "There's not much that happens in Russia that Putin's not behind."

Prigozhin supporters claimed on pro-Wagner messaging app channels that the plane was deliberately downed, including suggesting it could have been hit by an air defense missile or targeted by a bomb on board. These claims could not be independently verified. Numerous opponents and critics of Putin have been killed or gravely sickened in apparent assassination attempts.

"The downing of the plane was certainly no mere coincidence," Janis Sarts, director of NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, told Latvian te-



People carry a body bag away from the wreckage of the crashed private jet, near the village of Kuzhenkino, Tver region, and (inlet) a file photo of Yevgeny Prigozhin

levision.

The crash came the same week that Russian media reported that Gen. Sergei Surovikin, a former top commander in Ukraine who was reportedly linked to Prigozhin, was dismissed from his post as commander of Russia's air force. Surovikin hasn't been seen in public since the mutiny, when he recorded a video address urging Prigozhin's forces to pull back.

As news of the crash broke, Putin projected calm, speaking at an event commemorating the WWII Battle of Kursk and hailing the heroes of Russia's war in Ukraine. Yesterday, he addressed the BRICS summit in Johannesburg via video-link, talking about expanding cooperation among the group's members. He didn't mention the crash and the Kremlin made no comment about it.

While countless theories about the events swirled, most observers saw Prigozhin's death as possibly Putin's punishment for the most serious challenge to his authority of his 23-year rule.

Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, said on Telegram that "no matter what caused the plane crash,

everyone will see it as an act of vengeance and retribution," and "the Kremlin wouldn't really stand in the way of that."

In the revolt that started on June 23 and lasted less than 24 hours, Prigozhin's mercenaries swept through the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and captured the military headquarters there without firing a shot. They then drove within about 200 kilometers of Moscow in what Prigozhin called a "march of justice" to oust the top military leaders who demanded that the mercenaries sign contracts with the Defense Ministry. They downed several military aircraft, killing more than a dozen Russian pilots.

Putin first denounced the rebellion as "treason" and a "stab in the back" and vowed to punish its perpetrators, but hours later made a deal that saw an end to the mutiny in exchange for an amnesty for Prigozhin and his mercenaries and a permission for them to move to Belarus.

Details of the deal have remained murky, but Prigozhin has reportedly shuttled among Moscow, St. Petersburg, Belarus and Africa where his mercenaries have

continued their activities despite the rebellion. He was quickly given back truckloads of cash, gold bars and other items that police seized on the day of the rebellion, feeding speculation that the Kremlin still needed Prigozhin despite the mutiny.

Flight tracking data reviewed by The Associated Press showed a private jet that Prigozhin had used previously took off from Moscow yesterday, and its transponder signal disappeared minutes later.

Videos shared by the pro-Wagner Telegram channel Grey Zone showed a plane dropping like a stone from a large cloud of smoke, twisting wildly as it fell, one of its wings apparently missing. A freefall like that can occur when an aircraft sustains severe damage, and a frame-by-frame AP analysis of two videos was consistent with some sort of explosion mid-flight.

Prigozhin's death is unlikely to have an effect on Russia's war in Ukraine. His forces fought some of the fiercest battles over the last 18 months, but pulled back from the frontline after capturing the eastern city of Bakhmut in late May. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1997 EAST GERMAN LEADER GUILTY OF BERLIN WALL DEATHS



A court in Berlin has sentenced the former East German leader, Egon Krenz, to six-and-a-half years in prison.

Krenz, 59, was convicted of instigating a shoot-to-kill policy employed by border guards against people trying to flee East Germany.

He was convicted on four specimen charges of incitement to manslaughter relating to people who were shot dead as they tried to escape to West Germany via the Berlin Wall.

Two other former members of the East German leadership, Günther Kleiber and Günther Schabowski, were sentenced to three years in prison.

Around 1,000 people were killed trying to escape to the West after the Berlin Wall went up in 1961 - it came down in 1989.

For much of the 1980s Krenz was a key member of the National Defence Council which decided border policy.

Krenz, who always maintained that the court had no right to try him, stood impassively as he was sentenced.

After sentencing Krenz was handcuffed and taken into custody through a back door, avoiding reporters waiting at the front.

Speaking to the press after Krenz had been taken away his lawyer, Robert Unger, announced his client would appeal.

Throughout the 18-month trial he remained unrepentant, saying both victims and perpetrators had been hostages to the Cold War.

Mr Krenz succeeded his mentor, Erich Honecker, as East German leader in 1989.

In an attempt to bolster the Communist regime in the face of mass protests, he decided to open the wall on 9 November that year.

He was ousted by the party a few weeks later. East Germany and West Germany merged the following year.

Since unification hundreds of former East German border guards and officials have been convicted for shootings at the former border. The trial of Krenz and his comrades is likely to be the last high-profile trial of leaders of the former East Germany.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Egon Krenz did not go to jail immediately, pending the outcome of an appeal. Krenz argued that he could not be convicted in the newly reunited Germany because he had been living at the time under the laws of East Germany. But in 1999 a court rejected his case and he began his prison sentence in January 2000. He later appealed to the European Court of Human Rights but lost.



YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Escapist tendencies may lead to overindulgence. Try not to overspend on luxury items. The personal problems you may be having are interfering with your productivity.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

You may be fortunate while traveling. Someone you least expect may not have your best interests at heart. You may make someone else look bad.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You may get upset with peers or relatives. Stop telling others about your problems. You can offer your mate a commitment or promise that will help stabilize your personal life.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Get together with friends and do something entertaining but not too expensive. Avoid disputes with family; their complaints can't change anything anyway.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You're in a high cycle for romance. Be tactful if you see flaws in someone else's work. Your social activity should be conducive to finding love.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Resist secret affairs that could be detrimental to your reputation. Be sure to get involved with those who can introduce you to unusual forms of entertainment.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Friends and relatives may not understand your needs. You'll find it easy to charm members of the opposite sex today. Put your energy into behind the scenes activities.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Time spent with family, children, or good friends will be regenerating and positive. Coworkers may not be on your side. Don't overdo it.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You may want to get involved in some kind of creative group. Think twice before eating spicy foods; you may have problems with your stomach.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Be cautious while traveling to foreign countries. Don't let relatives get the better of you. You can meet friends who will let you know how valuable you are.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Take action. You should include children in your activities. Get more involved in group efforts at work. You will have the ability to capture the interest of others.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You are best to put your efforts into redecorating or inviting friends over. Travel will be in your best interest regardless of whether it is business or pleasure.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

		8			9
				1	2
			3		
1	5				
			8		7
3					
			7	6	
	2				8
5		9			1

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	18	29	cloudy
Changchun	16	25	cloudy
Chengdu	20	25	showers
Chongqing	24	30	rain
Fuzhou	26	33	rain
Guangzhou	26	33	thunderstorms
Guiyang	19	26	overcast
Haikou	26	35	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	24	33	cloudy
Harbin	17	25	rain
Hefei	22	33	cloudy
Nanjing	23	32	cloudy
Shanghai	26	33	cloudy
Taipei	25	30	overcast
Wuhan	25	34	fine
Hong Kong	26	29	thunderstorms

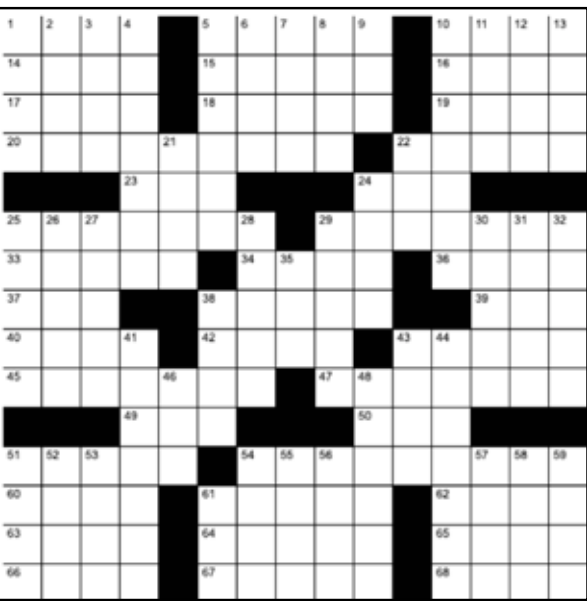
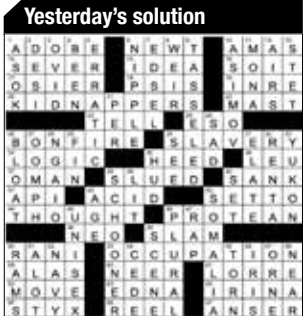
WORLD

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
Moscow	11	19	overcast
Frankfurt	17	28	thunderstorms
Paris	14	25	rain
London	12	21	overcast
New York	22	26	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Bar bills; 5- Harsh squeaky sound; 10- Realtor's sign; 14- Biblical birthright seller; 15- Main artery; 16- Buck follower; 17- Skating area; 18- Model Campbell; 19- It may turn; 20- Hard worker; 22- Large cat; 23- Alley \_\_\_\_; 24- Wind dir.; 25- Sleep; 29- Ceremonial immersion in water; 33- Wood strips; 34- Chief; 36- Village People hit; 37- 2001 biopic; 38- Small mountains; 39- Small batteries; 40- Dudley Do-Right's love; 42- Designer Cassini; 43- Pulls down; 45- Molasses; 47- Inelastic rubber; 49- Are we there \_\_\_\_?; 50- Film director Lee; 51- Reef material; 54- Relapse into bad habits; 60- All over again; 61- \_\_\_\_ Dame; 62- This \_\_\_\_ outrage!; 63- Final Four org.; 64- Proprietor; 65- Roman emperor; 66- Slippery; 67- Windy; 68- Understands;

DOWN 1- Maryland athlete, for short; 2- Bhutan's continent; 3- Judge's seat; 4- Jewish festival; 5- Awning; 6- Din; 7- Piccadilly Circus statue; 8- Look \_\_\_\_, I'm Sandra Dee; 9- Chiang \_\_\_\_-shek; 10- Satisfaction; 11- Not a dup.; 12- Rich supply; 13- Go-getter; 21- Weed whackers; 22- Medicinal amt.; 24- Lacking; 25- Perspective; 26- More healthy; 27- Functional; 28- "South Pacific" hero; 29- Hogwash; 30- \_\_\_\_ ware (Japanese porcelain); 31- Meager; 32- Billiards stroke; 35- Beer; 38- Romance novelist Victoria; 41- Purchasing option; 43- Seemingly forever; 44- Fishing; 46- Animation frame; 48- Croissant emporium, e.g.; 51- Bamboostem; 52- A single time; 53- Sincere; 54- Basin; 55- \_\_\_\_ extra cost; 56- Ship's company; 57- Of course!; 58- Move suddenly; 59- Slaughter of baseball; 61- San Francisco's \_\_\_\_ Hill;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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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
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DRIVE IN

# 'BOTTOMS' IS A GONZO GAY HIGH-SCHOOL COMEDY THAT COMES OUT ON TOP

JAKE COYLE,  
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

THE rites and rituals of the raunchy high-school comedy can be as prescribed as a class syllabus. But what makes Emma Seligman's "Bottoms" such an anarchic thrill is how much it couldn't care less.

Sure, come to "Bottoms" with your expectations of house parties and hijinks. But you'll be leaving with a field full of bloodied football players.

Seligman's film, which opens in theaters Friday, instead follows its own demented logic in a winding and surreal comedy of adolescent absurdity. The brash PJ ( Rachel Sennott ) and the more hesitant Josie ( Ayo Edebiri ) are longtime best friends who, in reaching senior year at Rock Ridge High, have either finally attained a much sought-after status ("We're finally hot," insists PJ) or bottomed out at the low end of the high-school totem pole.

"Could the ugly, untalented gays please report to the principal's office?" the principal (Wayne Péré) announces over the PA.

AP PHOTO



Ayo Edebiri (left) and Rachel Sennott in a scene from "Bottoms"

PJ and Josie, accepting that description, meekly make their way down the hall. But PJ plans to put up a fight. While Josie is more resigned to her lonely fate ("I'm not trying to sow my oats," she says), PJ is resolved to stir it up in her final year. They have no high-minded goals or even an especially coherent plan. "Bottoms" likewise aspires to be no paragon of lesbian representation or female empowerment. It would rather be sillier, more gleefully un-PC and way bloodier than your average

high-school comedy.

PJ and Josie would most of all like to make more headway with their cheerleader crushes. Josie likes Isabel (Havana Rose Liu) and PJ swoons for Brittany ( Kaia Gerber ). Neither shows even the slightest interest in PJ or Josie; Isabel is dating the football quarterback Jeff (Nicholas Galitzine ). In the history of high school comedies, football jocks have never been seen quite like this; they're outlandish, ridiculous people. They're also babies. When the

girls' car ever so slightly taps Jeff on the knee, it's taken as a near-death experience, bringing down the principal's wrath and prompting rumors (stoked by PJ) that the girls are a violent duo who killed someone in "juvie."

This might have been a little running gag for most movies, but Seligman and Sennott's script takes it as a linchpin for the rest of movie. Playing off their bad reputation, PJ launches a self-defense group — a "fight club" — for girls, hoping that Brittany

shows up, too.

This is the second movie by Seligman, whose 2020 "Shiva Baby" (also starring Sennott) was a clever and highly anxious debut about a bisexual Jewish woman attending a shiva with her family. Her follow-up is more antic and off-the-cuff but similarly allergic to falling back on the expected. "Bottoms" can feel slapdash and unmodulated. But it's always its own unhinged thing. There's one student here (Ruby Cruz, charming) planting pipe bombs. There isn't a line reading by Edebiri, currently everywhere, that doesn't have its own unique rhythm. And Sennott, a frizzy-haired ball of mayhem, is a comedy star in the making.

Not all the jokes land but they do fly. "Bottoms," a queer comedy with a chaotic beat, is here to break stuff — and that's a very good thing.

"Bottoms," an MGM release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for crude sexual content, pervasive language and some violence. Running time: 92 minutes.

★★★★★

AD

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TASTE OF EDESIA

# Seasonal delights

IRENE SAM, MDT

**W**HEY, a Michelin-starred restaurant serving modern European cuisine with Singaporean influences helmed by chef Barry Quek in Hong Kong, is thrilled to unveil its new Summer Tasting Menu that celebrates Southeast Asian cuisine with a refined twist and fresh seasonal produce sourced from local farms and suppliers, such as freshly harvested tomatoes, and cucumber from local farm ZEN Organic, kohlrabi and jackfruit from Ping Che Farms, baby shrimp sourced from Hop Lee Seafood and more. Showcasing a new array of tantalizing dishes, Chef Barry's latest menu promises a culinary journey like no other.

The summer menu com-

mences with an unforgettable bite of Eel and Culantro Puree. Tender and succulent eel from Taiwan braised with sweet soy sauce for seasoning, topped with pickled kohlrabi, whilst a bed of velvety cilantro puree adds a luscious herbaceous finish.

For main course, Chef Barry draws inspiration from Malaysian Indian culture with the creation of 10 Days Aged Barbarie Duck, Girolles, Cherries, a culinary delight served in two parts. A perfectly cooked duck breast with a crispy skin is accompanied by a luscious curry sauce, vibrant cherry puree, and an earthy girolle mushroom fricassee. The second part features an Indian pancake reminiscent of a Malaysian Murtabak stuffed with confit duck leg and chives.



## Classic with a twist

**A**S a continuance of the collaboration, the Converse x A-COLD-WALL joined forces to craft an innovative edition of the classic Chuck 70. Designer Samuel Ross aims to revolutionize the concept of design with a futuristic and functional approach, by applying a utilitarian veneer to the Chuck 70 and a collection of original apparel.

An expert in functional overlays, he has infused the signature A-COLD-WALL design aesthetic into key Converse innovation concepts — comfort, sustainability, and utility.

The collaboration with A-COLD-WALL gets back to classic with a distilled, minimalist take on the best-ever icon. The Chuck 70 undergoes a considered rework, featuring a translucent sole, metallic typographic branding, popped matte eyelets and finished with custom co-branded detailing. **IS**





OPINION

The Conversation

Toby Jenkins,  
University of South Carolina



HOW A HIP-HOP MINDSET CAN HELP TEACHERS IN A TIME OF TURMOIL

While hip-hop has created a lot of good memories, good music and good times, the culture has gifted society much more than just entertainment.

As a researcher who specializes in hip-hop culture, I know that one of hip-hop's greatest gifts is a certain mindset that focuses on freedom of thought, flexibility and truth-telling. It also includes creativity, authenticity, confidence, braggadocio, uninhibited voice and integrity as those things relate to one's community and culture.

In order for educators to overcome the challenges of what politicians are turning into an increasingly restrictive teaching environment — particularly with regard to matters of race and racism in American history — I believe the hip-hop mindset has taken on a new sense of relevance in the educational arena.

Many educators feel uncertainty over what they can and can't say in the classroom. They also want to stay true to themselves.

Just as hip-hop artists are often part of larger groups, educators can similarly build a larger community of support.

Partnering with local nonprofits and community organizations could prove important now more than ever. These organizations can host and facilitate learning experiences that might be prohibited in a classroom. Through these partnerships, students can get free, community-based programs that enable them to have freer discussions that might not be allowed within a public school in a state that restricts what educators can say.

One of the most popular strategies of creating hip-hop music is the remix — where a song's producer will create a new version of a song, sometimes by borrowing or sampling beats from other songs, changing up the pace, or even introducing new lyrics that weren't part of the original.

A classic example would be KRS-One's 1988 song "Still #1." Whereas the original version was laid back, the "Numero Uno" remix featured a sample of an upbeat Latin jazz song and even opened in Spanish.

Embracing the art of remixing might offer a viable way for educators to respond to efforts to censor what students can read in school or educators can teach in class.

Crate digging is a critical part of the remix. It is the process of sifting through old vinyl records, typically stored in old milk crates or cardboard boxes, to find a long-forgotten song to use in a remix.

Similarly, teachers can turn to the tactics and strategies employed by educators from different eras to see how they dealt with the educational exclusion and erasure of their day. After desegregation, for instance, a new struggle emerged in the 1960s and 1970s to make school lessons more culturally and racially inclusive.

Educators may find themselves facing a growing number of challenges from state legislatures as they increasingly invade their classroom spaces and curtail the kind of content they can teach in class. I believe by adopting the hip-hop mindset, educators will be better prepared to do the kind of battle required to prevail on behalf of truth-telling, authenticity, creativity and all the other habits of mind that made hip-hop the defiant and resilient culture that it has become.

[Abridged]

REGULATOR FINDS 30 SWISS BANKS SHORTCOMINGS IN MONEY-LAUNDERING CONTROLS

THE BUZZ

Switzerland's financial markets authority said yesterday that an in-depth review of more than 30 banks conducted this spring found that "a large number" failed to meet basic requirements for analyzing the risk of money laundering.

The authority, known as FINMA, said the review was prompted by repeated signs of shortcomings in money-laundering risk analysis during its regular visits to financial institutions.

The poor assessment of the banks — which were not identified by name — is significant because Switzerland ranks No. 1 worldwide in wealth management. Consulting firm Boston Consulting Group,

in its Global Wealth Report 2023 released in late June, projected that Hong Kong is poised to eclipse Switzerland as a booking center for wealth by 2025.

Switzerland has long had a reputation for banking secrecy, though some money-laundering experts say it has at least partially cleaned up its act in recent years — such as by exchanging more information to help combat tax evasion by depositors.

In essence, the authority suggested many of the banks should do more to fight money laundering, and it provided guidelines — even with a suggested table of categories — for banks to follow.

AP PHOTO



JUDGE CLEARS THE WAY FOR A CIVIL CASE TO PROCEED AGAINST ALEC BALDWIN AND 'RUST' PRODUCERS

SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN, ALBUQUERQUE (N.M.)

A New Mexico judge yesterday [Macau time] rejected a request by Alec Baldwin's attorneys to dismiss a civil lawsuit by three "Rust" crew members who allege cost-cutting endangered the cast and crew as the actor-producer skipped his own safety training.

Chief District Judge Bryan Biedscheid also declined to delay proceedings despite arguments by Baldwin's legal team that doing so would put their client at risk of self-incrimination since prosecutors have yet to decide whether to refile criminal charges against him over the fatal on-set shooting of a cinematographer.

Attorney Robert Schwartz told the judge there would be nothing to prevent prosecutors from using evidence gleaned from discovery in the civil case against Baldwin in the criminal case, if charges are refiled. As an example, he pointed to any interpretation of Baldwin's production contract and what authority he had over decision making.

Schwartz said the court is putting Baldwin in an "unfortunate position."

"No protective order

can protect him against that. It just can't happen," Schwartz said. "So what's going to happen is Mr. Baldwin is going to assert his 5th Amendment rights and the plaintiffs are not going to get any discovery in the meantime."

The judge disagreed, saying he would be mindful of Baldwin's rights.

Prosecutors have been mum about when a decision will be announced, but in asking for the civil case to be delayed, Schwartz indicated that it could some within the next few weeks.

Baldwin, a coproducer of the film, was pointing a gun at cinematographer Halyna Hutchins during a rehearsal on the film's set outside Santa Fe when the gun went off, killing her and wounding director Joel Souza.

The 2021 shooting resulted in a series of civil lawsuits centered on accusations that the defendants were lax with safety standards. The cases have including wrongful death claims filed by members of Hutchins' family. Baldwin and other defendants have disputed accusations they were lax with safety standards.

The plaintiffs in the case heard yesterday say Baldwin and the other producers cut corners, ignored

reports of multiple unscripted firearm discharges and rushed to finish the film while being understaffed. They also say they suffered mental anguish and emotional distress by witnessing the shooting.

Baldwin's attorneys argue that none of the plaintiffs were physically injured and should not be allowed to recover any damages. They contend that gun safety was the responsibility of others — not Baldwin — and that his authority as a producer was limited to making suggestions on the script and casting.

A separate settlement to resolve allegations of workplace safety violations was finalized in March by New Mexico workplace safety regulators and Rust Movie Productions. Following its review, the state issued a scathing narrative of safety failures in violation of standard industry protocols, including testimony that production managers took limited or no action to address two misfires on set before the fatal shooting.

Regulators also documented gun-safety complaints from crew members that went unheeded and said weapons specialists were not allowed to make decisions about additional safety training. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



**Israel** An avalanche of rocks tumbled down a hillside near the Dead Sea yesterday, Israeli medics said, injuring at least seven people, including children. Israel's rescue service said the victims ranged from 4 to 40 years old, including a 5-year-old boy in critical condition. A 4-year-old girl was in moderate condition and others were less seriously injured after layers of mud and rocks slammed into the desert hiking trail. It was not immediately clear what caused the rockslide.

**Turkey**'s central bank raised its key interest rate by an aggressive 7.5 percentage points yesterday, in a new sign of a return to more traditional economic policies under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The bank hiked its policy rate to 25% as it continues to backtrack from a rate-cutting course set by Erdogan, which has been blamed for inflaming a cost-of-living crisis. Many households have been left struggling to afford rent and basic goods as inflation has surged.

AP PHOTO



**British** Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was chided by Parliament's standards guardian yesterday for failing to declare his wife's financial interest in a childcare firm that stood to benefit from government policy. Standards Commissioner Daniel Greenberg said Sunak broke the code of conduct for government ministers, but said the mistake was "inadvertent" and that the prime minister should not be sanctioned for the error.

AP PHOTO



**UK** Prince Harry is expected to return to the United Kingdom next month to attend a charity awards ceremony on the eve of the first anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's death, the charity WellChild said yesterday. Harry, a long-time patron of U.K. charity WellChild, will attend its annual awards ceremony in London on Sept. 7 to mark the achievements of seriously ill young people. He is not expected to be joined by his wife Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex.