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HONG KONG MOVIE STAR AARON KWOK IS PREPARING HIS RETURN TO THE GUIA CIRCUIT THIS NOVEMBER, BEING EXPECTED TO TAKE PART IN THE TCR ASIA CHALLENGE

DSAT WARNS OVER ESCALATED CONGESTIONS ON NEW TAXI LICENSES

EXPLAINER: AT FUKUSHIMA DAIICHI, DECOMMISSIONING THE NUCLEAR PLANT IS FAR MORE CHALLENGING THAN WATER RELEASE

AP PHOTO



North Korea said yesterday it will allow its citizens staying abroad to return home in line with easing pandemic situations worldwide, as the country slowly eases its draconian coronavirus restrictions. In a brief statement carried by state media, the State Emergency Epidemic Prevention Headquarters said those returning to North Korea will be put in quarantine for a week for "proper medical observation."

AP PHOTO



Japan Fish auction prices at a port south of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant were mixed amid uncertainty over how seafood consumers will respond to the release of treated and diluted radioactive wastewater into the ocean. The plant, which was damaged in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, began sending the treated water into the Pacific last week despite protests at home and in nearby countries that are adding political and diplomatic pressures to the economic worries.

AP PHOTO



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the country's role as the G20 host this year would focus on highlighting the concerns of the developing world, and has proposed the African Union to become permanent members of the forum. "We have a vision of inclusiveness and with that vision, we have invited the African Union to become permanent members of the G20," Modi said on Sunday as he addressed the Business 20 Summit in New Delhi.

More on backpage



ECONOMY
MACAU SEES A GDP UPTURN OF 117% Y-O-Y IN Q2



PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

DSAT STUDYING MORE TAXI LICENSES, BUT ESCALATED CONGESTIONS POSSIBLE

ANTHONY LAM

AMID concerns from both the public and the taxi industry, the government is working on more taxi licenses, but hinted that heavier traffic may occur.

After a regular plenary of

Transport Advisory Committee over the weekend, director for Transport Kelvin Lam told a press conference that the government is considering the possibility of issuing a new batch of taxi licenses by the end of the year.

"Any updates will be relea-

sed once available," the official said.

On whether additional taxi licenses will be issued, Lam said further evaluation on the need and availability of taxi drivers is required to determine that. Moreover, he said escalated traffic congestion will be inevitable

with more taxis on the road.

After resumption of normal travel, members of the public have been calling for more taxis, as hailing a taxi on the street is on many occasions impossible, especially during peak hours or in traditional residential areas.

Meanwhile, the industry has also called for early action from the government because 300 taxi licenses are due to expire within this year. The radio taxi company of the city has also revealed that it has been at full capacity for most of the past half-year, hinting that it has no surplus to help with the shortage in the common taxi sector.

Currently, the city has 1,602 taxis, with 300 of them being "special taxis," which are the radio taxis.

Public opinion has also criticized the services provided by the radio taxis, including but not limited to standing passengers with bookings. Lam admitted that radio taxis' services have room for improvement, adding that one area of improvement is booking acceptance within an hour. He believes that once a booking is accepted, "there is no reason for it to get cancelled so easily."

Lam also hinted that the government is considering enhancements for radio taxi services in a wider area, but said information will only be released when it "matures." Comments and suggestions from the public are also welcomed, the transport director added.

OBITUARY

FOUNDER OF JOURNALIST GROUP PASSES AWAY

A founder and former president of the Macau Journalists Association, Ng Sio Ngai, passed away at 4:20am on Aug. 25 at the government hospital, the association announced in a statement.

Born and raised in Shiqi, Zhongshan City, Ng came to Macau aged 18 before starting her nearly four-decade career as a journalist in the 1980s. The veteran journalist witnessed and recorded with her pen the signing of the Portuguese-Chinese Joint Declaration, the discussions and the promulgation of the Basic Law, as well as the how promises made to Macau have appeared after the establishment of the Special Administrative Region.

She first worked at Tai Chung Daily and later moved to Va Kio Daily as a senior reporter. She also spent long years writing social critique for Son Pou. The association described her column articles as "strong and expressive against social demerits." The association also described her as "honest and friendly."

Ng was also founder of local independent media outlet All About Macau, which has been critical on social issues. According to another announcement made by the news outlet, during her time fighting her illness, Ng did not give up her responsibility, and continued to diligently manage the outlet.

The news outlet described Ng as "both a teacher and friend who had inspired and protected" the team. "Having her in the industry has been a fortune," the news outlet added. **AL**



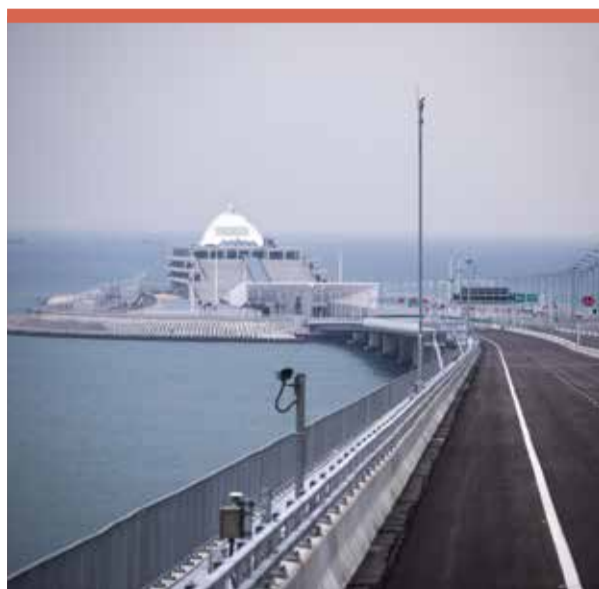
Ng Sio Ngai

HZMB private vehicle quota to increase

STAFF REPORTER

THE Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's regular quota for private cars in Hong Kong and Macau will be increased in stages, adding some 544 units to the quota. The director of Transport Affairs Bureau, Kelvin Lam Hin Sang, explained that the authorities received a total of 8,881 applications during the lottery draw this year. The quota was only 2,109.

Only 200 to 300 vehicles from Macau travel to Hong Kong every day, and the utilization rate



is not high, according to Lam.

After a regular plenary

of Transport Advisory Committee Friday, Lam said that the Hong

Kong International Airport transit bus service Macau line will shortly be put into trial operation.

Passengers from the two places can take transit buses between the Hong Kong International Airport and the Macau Port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

Lam was confident that Macau is ready for the service. A one-stop check-in service will be available once the service kicks off. For the time being, Lam's bureau has permitted 13 buses to run between Macau and

the Hong Kong airport.

He believes the operators are still undergoing some procedures in Hong Kong to launch the service.

The trial operation time in the first month is from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., with a frequency of about one per hour. After the trial operation, the service time will be adjusted to 6 a.m to midnight.

In addition, as of August 20, the average daily passenger load of buses in Macau was 610,000, which is close to pre-pandemic levels, Lam said.

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Macau salt run against radioactivity returns after 12 years

ANTHONY LAM

FOLLOWING a nearly identical saga 12 years ago, some people in Macau have rushed to purchase table salt after Japan started discharging wastewater from Fukushima's nuclear power plant.

The same rush happened 12 years ago, also related to the Great East Japanese Earthquake, which took tens of thousands of lives and caused millions of monetary losses. People in Macau started reaching for table salt everywhere after the news of damage at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima began spreading. There were rumors that salt is able to either absorb nuclear radioactivity or obstruct its effect on human bodies.

This salt run started last Thursday when the Japanese government began discharging the water from the nuclear plants. The run lasted for some days and most supermarkets in town have empty shelves of table salt, except for premium salt.

It was also reported that some supermarkets had imposed purchase limits ranging from one to five packs of salt per person.

Commenting on the situation, salt suppliers told local media that the city's salt supplies are stable. The empty shelves at supermarkets were only caused by workforce shortages and delays in restocking, they said.

A supplier said that supermarkets have limited space and usually do not have large stock in their storage. Meanwhile, su-



A notice that reads goods are sold in limited quantities per person

pliers need time to deliver stocks to supermarkets, which had thus created a window period.

The supplier called on the public to stay calm and rational, adding that this run was caused by people not understanding the origins of salt sold in the city. Salt available in Macau comes from a wide variety of origins, including but not limited to mainland China and New Zealand, so the supplier suggested people not worry.

On the other hand, Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) has also issued a statement to assure the public of the stable supply of salt in Macau.

The bureau said that the current stock is good for 39 days for the whole population.

It also recommended that

members of the public stay calm and not overstock salt. It will be constantly in touch with suppliers to guarantee the normal supply of salt, the bureau added in the statement.

The bureau has also stressed that actions would be taken to prevent speculation of salt prices at the retail level, but said that retailers have been "responding positively" towards the bureau's requests for the timely restocking of the consumable.

The Macao Customs Service, meanwhile, has devoted additional efforts to stopping banned Japanese produce and related products from entering the city, as was stated in a statement from the service. With this said, it can be understood that salt from certain areas in Japan will not be able to enter Macau.

On the other hand, in mainland China, there has also been a run on salt. Media reports note that retailers both online and offline reported a shortage in the supply of table salt.

Measures similar to those taken by Macau authorities

against speculations and profiteering are also imposed by national authorities, according to the same report. Meanwhile, state news agency Xinhua cited Chinese salt manufacturers as assuring the public of the stable supply of salt across the mainland.

MGTO: RAISING JAPAN TRAVEL ALERT POSSIBLE, IF NECESSARY

DIRECTOR of Tourism Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said over the weekend that her bureau is closely monitoring the situation in Japan and, in particular, information released by Chinese authorities, and that travel alerts concerning Japan may be raised when necessary. The local food safety bureau has banned import of produce and related products from 10 prefectures

or areas in Japan. Food souvenirs brought by tourists will also be banned. But the government has no plan to shrink the scale of its international tourist musketeer initiative but dropping Japan. The tourism director highlighted that Japan is a critical source market of Macau. Roadshows in the country are being prepared and there is no plan for suspension for the time being.

ANTHONY LAM

THE local gambling inspection agency has refrained from commenting on the speculated closure of the Macau Jockey Club (MJC), an agency spokesperson said in reply to the Times.

Last Friday, the Times published a report on the matter, citing an anonymous source. An inquiry was made to the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) to which a reply was received late in the evening on Saturday.

Besides not commenting on the matter, the spokesperson highlighted that the bureau would "continue to conduct a variety of supervisory work in

Gambling watchdog refrains from commenting on MJC saga

accordance with laws and regulations related to gambling and the concession contract concerning horse-racing."

In the past few weeks or so, comments that the MJC may cease operation have gone viral both online and offline. Some information claimed that the MJC operators, among whom lawmaker Angela Leong, have not fulfilled their promises concerning product diversification made in the concession contract.

In response, the DICJ

underlined that the Macau government extended the MJC's horse-racing concession to Aug. 31, 2042. Amendments have been made in the concession contract at the time of the extension, suggesting that changes from the old requirements do exist.

In last week's report, the anonymous insider claimed that a batch of 30 horses that was set to arrive in Macau were banned from import. They doubt whether the coming season will last beyond December this year.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

QUALIFICATION RACES END FOR LOCALS AIMING TO JOIN 70TH MACAU GP

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macau Touring Car Series (MTCS) racing season came to an end last weekend, with the drivers' final standing points to come under the purview of the Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee, which will finally select and invite the best of the short season (four races) to take part in the desired Macau Grand Prix.

This time the racing season, which aims to qualify the best racers to race at the Guia Circuit in November, took place over two weeks at the Guangdong International Circuit in Zhaoqing.

The most significant point of the season was the change of cars for the so-called Macau RoadSport category, which in the past was running small touring cars with 1.6-liter turbo engines.

In a way, the series has made a return to its glorious past, going back to run 2.0-liter naturally aspirated engine vehicles, but, this time, as a single-maker series. This means that every racer in this series, technically speaking, is at the wheel of the same car.

The choice fell on the road models sold commonly under the models Toyota GR86 and Subaru BRZ that are equipped with a 2.4-liter engine.



With the end of the border restrictions and the end of the old multiple categories – which also included the over 1,995cc cars – it was also possible to return to a filled paddock with many locals as well as Hong Kong racers joining this revived racing category.

In reality, the number of applicants so far exceeded the expectation of the Automobile General Association Macau-China (AAMC) that racers had to be divided into two classes, each representing 22 racers.

HONG KONG RACERS DOMINATE QUALIFICATION

At the end of the 4-race season, Hong Kong's Lo Pak Yu emerged champion with a total of 70 points, followed by another racer from the neighboring region, Adrian Chung, who scored a total of 55 points. Third overall in the series was another Hong Konger, Chan Tat Man, with a total of 52 points.

The best class from Macau was Leong Keng Hei, third in the B class and sixth overall with 36 (A points) and 3 (B points).

Like many others, Leong moved into this racing category this year after having raced last year in the GP at the TCR Asia Challenge with a Honda Civic Type R (FK2) TCR.

Many others undertook the natural transference from the previous RoadSport categories to this new one, including names such as Cheang Kin Sang, Rui Valente, Martin Sou, Mou Chi Fai, and many more.

As previously presented by the MGPOC, this year's two-weekend special edition of the local GP will

include two races for this type of vehicle, the common Macau RoadSport Challenge, to be held on the first weekend, and the Macau 70th Anniversary Challenge to be raced on the main weekend.

According to information that the Times could obtain about the drivers, the first 15 classified from the A class and B class will be racing on the second weekend in the Macau 70th Anniversary Challenge, while the remaining ones will be racing on the first weekend in the Macau RoadSport Challenge.

GT4 category losing momentum

THE qualifier races from the GT4 category have been held concurrently with the RoadSport category races.

In a category that listed only 18 entries, three of them ended up not taking part of any of the racing events, reducing the category to just 15, being the minimum number needed to run the series according to the sports regulations.

Ultimately, and after four races, Macau's Alex Liu driving a Mercedes AMG GT4 came up on top with a total of 40 points, equal to Lo Ka Chun in a Ginetta G55. Both racers only took part in separate racing weekends, with Liu winning the first two races and Lo winning the last two. In third place came Hong Kong's Brian Lai, driving another Ginetta G55.

The GT4 category is represented at the Macau GP



in the Greater Bay Area GT Cup, to be raced on the first weekend.

After launching in 2019 as a formal GT4 category race with a field of 27 cars, the category started to lose competitors, reducing to

21 in 2020 and 20 in 2021.

Last year, the category managed to gather a field of 28 cars by putting together two similar categories, adding some 10 GTC category cars to the mere 18 GT4 listed. **RM**

70TH GP

HK MOVIE STAR AARON KWOK ANNOUNCES RETURN TO GUIA CIRCUIT THIS YEAR

HAaron Kwok is preparing his return to the Guia Circuit this November, being expected to take part in the TCR Asia Challenge, one of the five races scheduled to take place during the first weekend of this year's event.

The announcement came over the weekend from the Shell Teamwork Lynk & Co team, which said in a statement that they had listed Hong Kong megastar Aaron Kwok as a guest driver to "participate in 2023 TCR China event in October at Zhuzhou, China, and compete in the 70th Macau Grand Prix in November."

The statement came after rumors started on social media after Kwok was seen racing in the last round of the joint Macau and Hong



Kong automobile associations touring car race in Guangdong International Circuit sporting the number 88 and the Chinese name of the renowned actor.

The last time that Kwok

raced in Macau was precisely 10 years ago during the 60th edition of the GP. He was taking part, at the time, in the Audi R8 LMS Cup race. Kwok will drive one of the team's Lynk & Co 03 TCR this time around. **RM**

Sands China spotlights local artists with Art Macao collateral exhibition at Sands Gallery

SANDS China Ltd. recently opened a collateral exhibition to provide a platform for local artists to showcase their talents at Sands Gallery, in support of Art Macao: Macao International Art Biennale 2023.

“Behind the Forms: Aesthetics of Contemporary Art – Trio Exhibition by Lei Ieng Wai, Leong Chi Mou and Lai Sio Kit” features outstanding artworks from these three talented artists.

Through their different creative techniques, they demonstrate their own understandings of various topics around Macau's economic development – spectrum, data texture, belief and value.

Dr. Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China Ltd., said, “The curator, art coordinator, artists and designer of this exhibition were all born and bred in Macao. This is a celebration of “Made in Macao” contemporary art shining on the international stage of Art Macao. Three cutting-edge artists have displayed their memories of Macao, feelings for the country, and passion for art, and have demonstrated the profound cultural heritage of Macao.”

Lok Hei, president of the Macau Artist Society, said, “We are pleased that the three local artists' exhibition is being showcased at Sands Gallery for Art Macao. As always, the Macau Artist Society has brought together local artists, especially young ones, with the aim of fostering their development. They are going to inspire more people in town to engage in spiritual pursuits that will enrich their lives.”

With a theme of ‘Forms,’ the exhibition aims to promote the appreciation of the aesthetics of contemporary art to the public.

Exhibition curator Kitman Leong remarked that the theme is an entry point for understanding the three different artists from a stylistic point of view. “We want



to let the audience know more about contemporary art through this exhibition. They use different visual art approaches to create exclusive visual forms. Other than appreciating the art, we would also like to let the audience explore the concept, value, or logic behind the forms,” said Leong.

For the curator, this exhibition aims to emphasize the nature of art, in this era when AI can drive art.

Meanwhile, commenting on their works, artist Lai said, “We are thrilled with Sands China's support for local artists in this year's edition of Art Macao by inviting us to showcase our artworks at Sands Gallery. It is truly an encouraging move.”

Lai has been paying attention

to the city and the small town where he grew up during his creative process. He says that as time is a conceptual word without substance, he seeks to describe time in a visual way through painting. The strokes of his paintings capture a state, and that state is an exact period of time that carries a sense of place.

“I actually painted some traditional-style tiles that were old, peeling or faded – a condition that has been experienced for a long time. I want to express the concept of time through this state,” he said. Lai has also hailed Sands China for providing local artists a platform for their exhibitions with “a lot of freedom.” “We were 100% able to present our works in our own way and to use our own concepts of

artwork in this exhibition. This is a great opportunity,” said the artist.

Dr. Wong said, “We established Sands Gallery to promote exchange, mutual learning and enhancement of culture and art. I am very pleased to take the opportunity presented by Art Macao, which promotes the diversity of Macao's arts to the world, to help outstanding young local artists attract the attention of international media and the art world, aiding them to step onto the international stage with this collateral exhibition.”

For artist Leong, he believes this exhibition is a valuable opportunity to promote their artworks, stating that Sands China remains a strong springboard for young artists to promote their own works and the art of Macau.

Leong's works are mainly inspired by his observations of people's consumption habits, which drove him to contemplate the relationship between art, consumption and values.

Lei's artworks, on the other hand, present a sense of virtual reality prevailing in contemporary society. The local artist tried to construct the rhythmic dynamics of this virtual dimension with an artificial spectrum and use repeated patterns to create a mood of monotony and meaninglessness.

Echoing similar sentiments with Lai and Leong, Lei expressed his gratitude to Sands China for “providing us with such a good exhibition venue. In this way, the public can get in touch with the artistic creations of Macau artists.”

In addition to Behind the Forms, Sands China is supporting Art Macao 2023 with a special exhibition titled “Meet the Magic: In celebration of Disney 100 by Philip Colbert and Jason Naylor” at The Venetian Macao, The Parisian Macao and The Londoner Macao, and also with “The Genesis of Rationality,” a commissioned work by Ung Vai Meng on display at Art Macao's Invitational Exhibition by Local Artists. Regarded as the pioneer of Macau's art industry, Ung will share his ideas on contemporary art with up-and-coming local art talent at a Sands China event in September.



Lei Ieng Wai (left), Leong Chi Mou (center) and Lai Sio Kit

CHINA TO EXTEND TAX RELIEF FOR OVERSEAS TALENT WORKING IN GBA

China will extend the preferential tax policy for overseas talent working in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to Dec. 31, 2027 to support the area's development, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) said on Friday. High-calibre overseas talent and professionals in short supply who work in the Greater Bay Area will receive subsidies from Guangdong Province and Shenzhen Municipality to offset the difference between the individual income tax on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong. The subsidies will be exempt from individual income tax, said the circular.

UM, HK INSTITUTE COLLABORATE TO OFFER CERTIFICATE ON QUANTITY SURVEYING

The Centre for Continuing Education of the University of Macau (UM) and the Chartered Institution of Civil Engineering Surveyors (CICES) (Hong Kong Region) jointly offer the Advanced Professional Diploma in Construction Commercial Management (Quantity Surveying). The course aims to enhance the professional knowledge of industry practitioners, so as to promote the development of the construction industry. The diploma course consists of 210 hours of study.

IAS SYSTEM FINDS 61 DRUG USERS IN 1H

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) has stated that in the first half of this year, the Central Registration System for Drug Abusers of Macao reported 61 drug users, an increase of more than 10% year-on-year, with one of them is a teenager under the age of 21. The top three categories of drug use were methamphetamine, ketamine and cocaine. According to the bureau, it is expected that the situation of drug abuse will increase. However, the bureau pointed out that the overall numbers of cases of drug abuse and drug use has shown a downward trend in the past five years.

MOTORSPORT

MACAU'S RISING STAR RODRIGUES SHOWING TALENT IN CHINESE F4

RENATO MARQUES

AFTER a few years without a new name in Macau's motorsport scene, Macau seems to be back on track, with its new racing talents displaying quality and skills at the Chinese F4 Championship.

A 16-year-old who goes by the name of Tiago Rodrigues has been taking the category by storm.

It is hard to imagine that just three months ago, Rodrigues was making his debut in the formula category on the Zhuhai circuit for the first race of the 2023 season.

Coming from the local Karting scene with no racing experience with formula cars, Rodrigues did not seem daunted by the new challenge and, even if he were facing more experienced racers, he quickly started to soak in as much information as possible and learn more with each lap.

Of no surprise, results started to appear right from Round 1 in Zhuhai, when Rodrigues scored three 5th position finishes and his first podium (in Race 3).

If the first weekend seemed good, the best was yet to come when the F4 paddock moved to Ningbo in late June.



After an outstanding performance, Rodrigues took three wins and one third position finish, scoring 90 points out of a maximum possible of 100 in this weekend.

Good performances continued to come over the last weekend, with Round 3 being raced at the Pingtan Ruyi Lake International Circuit.

Over the weekend, Rodrigues continued to show strong qualities, scoring four podiums and one win on Race 10 of the championship coming from eighth po-

sition in the grid.

The results have put Rodrigues on top of the drivers' championship table, with a total of 205 points now that 12 races have been held from a total of 18.

The championship moves now to Tianfu International Circuit in Chengdu for another quadruple round in October before the season finale, which will take place at the Guia Circuit in Macau with two double-header races with double points to be attributed.

The championship also counts the participation of another two local racers, Cheong Man Hei and Chui Ka Kam, who despite showing some positive results are far from the performance displayed so far by Rodrigues, being respectively 17th and 18th in the championship.

Inheriting the number 8 from former champion Andy Chang at Champ Motorsports, Rodrigues is well-positioned for an amazing rookie year.

MACAU'S economy saw an upturn in the second quarter of the year, marking the highest quarterly growth since the second quarter of 2021.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) showed that the gross domestic product (GDP), which leapt 117.5% year-on-year in the second quarter, was driven by the thriving tourism and gaming sectors.

The implicit deflator of the GDP, which measures the overall changes in prices, went up by 0.9% year-on-year in the second quarter.

Exports of services surged by 211.9% year on year, of which exports of gaming services and other tourism services soared by 463.6% and 157.5%, respectively.

Meanwhile, exports of goods declined by 32.8 percent.

For the first half of 2023, the GDP grew by 71.5 percent year-on-year in real terms, and the overall economic output of Macau returned to 71% percent of its level in the same period of 2019.

ECONOMY

GDP grows 117% in Q2



The improving economic sentiment and employment environment facilitated an increase in private consumption activities.

Government data shows that household final consumption expenditure in the domestic market rose by 9.7% year on year, and household final consumption expenditure abroad jumped by 69.2%.

As regards private investment, construction investment swelled by 86.6%, owing to a significant increase in investments by gambling enterprises.

Previously, the Monetary Authority of Macau (AMCM) stated that the SAR's economy is expected to register robust growth in the remainder of 2023.

"Macau's external demand [will] be supported

by the steady economic recovery in neighboring regions, further unleashing strong pent-up demand for tourism services," the bureau said in the report. "Rigorous promotional campaigns launched by the government and non-gaming events organized by the gaming concessionaires [will] boost the growth momentum of external demand," it added.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AT 3.3%

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) indicated that both the general unemployment rate (2.6%) and the unemployment rate of local residents (3.3%) for May - July 2023 decreased by 0.2 percentage points from the previous period (April - June). Besides, the underemployment rate dropped by 0.1 percentage point to 1.7%. The labour force living in Macau totalled 372,800 and the labour force participation rate was 67.6%. Total employment was 363,000 and the number of employed residents totalled 282,900, up by 1,600 and 300 respectively from the previous period.

Among the unemployed searching for a new job, most of them were previously engaged in the Construction sector, Hotels, Restaurants & Similar Activities and Gaming & Junket Activities. Meanwhile, the proportion of new labour market entrants seeking their first job rose by 1.3 percentage points to 8.6% of the total unemployed. LV

US-CHINA

Biden's commerce secretary is the latest Cabinet member to visit China in a bid for improved ties

WILL WEISSERT,
WASHINGTON

COMMERCE Secretary Gina Raimondo is the latest member of President Joe Biden's Cabinet to visit China as his administration tries to mend the deteriorating ties between the world's two largest economies. She promises to be "practical" without compromising the U.S. push to "responsibly" manage that economic relationship.

Raimondo plans meetings with Chinese officials and U.S. business leaders in Beijing and Shanghai in an effort to "promote a healthy competition, a competition on a level playing field, playing by the rules."

"I'm also very realistic and clear-eyed about the challenges. And the challenges are significant," she told reporters before leaving Washington yesterday (Macau time) on a trip that ends Wednesday.

The secretary said she wants to find "actionable, concrete steps where we can move forward on the commercial relationship," but she offered few details. One matter to be discussed is promoting Chinese travel and tourism to the United States, with Raimondo noting the recent easing of restrictions on large Chinese groups visiting the U.S.

Raimondo's visit, like the July trip by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, is meant to show the administration's willingness to partner with China on economic development at a time of escalating tensions on foreign policy and national security and as Washington bolsters alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia and the European Union.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a two-day stop in Beijing in June, the highest-level meetings in China in the past five



Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo

years. Blinken met with President Xi Jinping and the two agreed to stabilize U.S.-China ties, but better communications between their militaries could not be agreed upon.

There are divisions around the economy, too, particularly after the imposition of U.S. foreign investment controls that have stung numerous Chinese companies. China has accused the U.S. of "using the cover of 'risk reduction' to carry out 'decoupling and chain-breaking,'" and has increased its own trade in Asia.

The controls pertain to advanced computer chips, microelectronics, quantum information technologies and artificial intelligence. The U.S. says the effort stemmed from national security goals rather than economic interests, and that the categories covered were intentionally narrow.

The U.S. moves are meant to blunt China's ability to use American investments in its technology companies to upgrade its military, while preserving broader levels of trade that are vital to both nations. But China's Ministry of Commerce said it has "serious concern" about Biden's executive order.

Raimondo said the U.S. was not interested in "containing China's economic

development."

"We want the Chinese economy to prosper. We do not want to contain or hold back China," she said. "We do need to protect our national security, and we're going to use our export controls to the fullest extent possible to do that."

She said attempts to boost the U.S. economy by promoting manufacturing, a centerpiece of Biden's 2024 reelection campaign, "does not mean, at all, that we want to decouple from China's economy. And I plan to make that very clear in my meetings."

"The U.S. and China share a large, dynamic, growing economic relationship," Raimondo said. "And both of our countries — in fact, the entire world — need us to manage that relationship responsibly."

Raimondo added that she is seeking "to have a stable commercial relationship, and the core to that is regular communication."

"It's hard to solve problems in any relationship if you don't communicate. And lack of communication results in rising tensions and a spiral to a bad place," Raimondo said.

China's Ministry of Commerce has said Raimondo's visit came at the invitation of Minister Wang Wentao. China Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang

Wenbin said at Friday news conference, when asked about Raimondo's travels, that "China and the US are in touch about bilateral engagement and exchange."

Biden said at a recent fundraiser in Utah for his reelection campaign that China was a "ticking time bomb."

Raimondo said she spoke with Biden before leaving for China and that he asked her to convey the message that there's "benefit to communicating to reduce tensions."

"That does not mean compromise," said Raimondo, who added: "I'm not going to pull my punches, but I intend to be practical."

The commerce secretary said she spoke before her trip with top U.S. labor leaders and more than 100 industry executives who are anxious to do business with China but were "increasingly concerned" by the country's nonmarket practices, which makes competing for global business difficult.

"We all know that China has not followed through on the economic reforms that it has promised," Raimondo said. "And it's clearly continuously committed to using non-market trade and investment practices, and that forces us to defend our businesses and workers." MDT/AP

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

A French Degustation Menu at MGM curated by Daniel Calvert

KKNOWN for its fusion of international flavors with contemporary creativity, Aji offers a brand-new dining experience and regularly surprises guests with limited-time tasting menus. This time, Aji joins hands with winner of The Best Chef Top 100, the record-breaking culinary superstar Chef Daniel Calvert infused with elegance and artistry in French culinary philosophy, curated a special degustation menu of Sézanne, a two-MICHELIN-starred French restaurant which had earned second place in the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2023.



The aesthetics of French gastronomy has always been fascinating. This degustation menu features an innovative interpretation of stellar creations crafted with seasonal Japanese ingredients in a delicate French style, including the Beluga Caviar with Avocado and Sudachi, French Pigeon marinated in Yellow Wine from Jura, and Crispy Kinki Fish with Oita saffron.



The *Beluga Caviar with Avocado and Sudachi* is definitely a must-try, the caviar-topped avocado pear mousse is soaked in the bonito broth. The creaminess of the avocado and the acidity of the Japanese citrus sudachi balance the salinity of the caviar and elevate the flavors as a whole. Another highlight is the *Miyazaki Mango with Shortbread Crème Chantilly*, a surprising dessert crafted with chef's favorite Miyazaki mango, which is marinated in rum and hidden underneath the top layer of flesh is a frozen citrusy meringue, demonstrating the ultimate fusion of ingredients, aesthetics and flavors.



Don't miss out this time-limited gastronomic journey with MICHELIN starred menu at Aji from now to September 18! Seats are limited, call (853) 8806 2308 to secure yours now.

EXPLAINER

At Fukushima Daiichi, decommissioning the nuclear plant is far more challenging than water release

MARI YAMAGUCHI, FUTABA

FOR the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, managing the ever-growing volume of radioactive wastewater held in more than 1,000 tanks has been a safety risk and a burden since the meltdown in March 2011. Its release marks a milestone for the decommissioning, which is expected to take decades.

But it's just the beginning of the challenges ahead, such as the removal of the fatally radioactive melted fuel debris that remains in the three damaged reactors, a daunting task if ever accomplished.

Here's a look at what's going on with the plant's decommissioning:



WHAT HAPPENED AT FUKUSHIMA DAIICHI?

A magnitude 9.0 quake on March 11, 2011, triggered a massive tsunami that destroyed the plant's power supply and cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt and spew large amounts of radiation. Highly contaminated cooling water applied to the damaged reactors has leaked continuously into building basements and mixed with groundwater. The water is collected and treated. Then, some is recycled as cooling water for melted fuel, while the rest is held in tanks that cover much of the plant.

WHY RELEASE THE WATER?

Fukushima Daiichi has struggled to handle the contaminated water since the 2011 disaster. The government and the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, say the tanks must be removed to make way for facilities needed to decommission the plant, such as storage space for melted fuel debris and other highly contaminated waste.

WILL THE WASTEWATER RELEASE PUSH DECOMMISSIONING FORWARD?

Not right away, because the water release is slow and the

decommissioning is making little progress. TEPCO says it plans to release 31,200 tons of treated water by the end of March 2024, which would empty only 10 tanks out of 1,000 because of the continued production of wastewater at the plant.

The pace will later pick up, and about 1/3 of the tanks will be removed over the next 10 years, freeing up space for the plant's decommissioning, said TEPCO executive Junichi Matsumoto, who is in charge of the treated water release. He says the water would be released gradually over the span of 30 years, but as long as the melted fuel stays in the reactors, it requires cooling water, which creates more wastewater.

Emptied tanks also need to be scrapped for storage. Highly radioactive sludge, a byproduct of filtering at the treatment machine, also is a concern.

WHAT CHALLENGES ARE AHEAD?

About 880 tons of fatally radioactive melted nuclear fuel remain inside the reactors. Robotic probes have provided some information but the status of the melted debris remains largely unknown.

Earlier this year, a remote-

controlled underwater vehicle successfully collected a tiny sample from inside Unit 1's reactor — only a spoonful of the melted fuel debris in the three reactors. That's 10 times the amount of damaged fuel removed at the Three Mile Island cleanup following its 1979 partial core melt.

Trial removal of melted debris using a giant remote-controlled robotic arm will begin in Unit 2 later this year after a nearly two-year delay. Spent fuel removal from Unit 1 reactor's cooling pool is set to start in 2027 after a 10-year delay. Once all the spent fuel is removed, the focus will turn in 2031 to taking melted debris out of the reactors. But debris removal methods for two other reactors have not been decided.

Matsumoto says "technical difficulty involving the decommissioning is much higher" than the water release and involves higher risks of exposures by plant workers to remove spent fuel or melted fuel.

"Measures to reduce radiation exposure risks by plant workers will be increasingly difficult," Matsumoto said. "Reduction of exposure risks is the basis for achieving both Fukushima's recovery and decommissioning."

HOW BADLY WERE THE REACTORS DAMAGED?

Inside the worst-hit Unit 1, most of its reactor core melted and fell to the bottom of the primary containment chamber and possibly further into the concrete basement. A robotic probe sent inside the Unit 1 primary containment chamber found that its pedestal — the main supporting structure directly under its core — was extensively damaged.

Most of its thick concrete exterior was missing, exposing the internal steel reinforcement, and the nuclear regulators have requested TEPCO to make risk assessment.

CAN DECOMMISSIONING END BY 2051 AS PLANNED?

The government has stuck to its initial 30-to-40-year target for completing the decommissioning, without defining what that means.

An overly ambitious schedule could result in unnecessary radiation exposures for plant workers and excess environmental damage. Some experts say it would be impossible to remove all the melted fuel debris by 2051 and would take 50-100 years, if achieved at all. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1963 KING'S DREAM FOR RACIAL HARMONY



The fight for racial equality in the United States moved a step closer to victory today as Martin Luther King spoke of his dream for freedom in an address to thousands of Americans.

Reverend King was greeted with rapturous applause as he delivered his heart-felt words to a 250,000-strong crowd of civil rights protesters at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC.

He spoke of the need "to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice".

He promised that the struggle for equality would continue until "justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream".

Rev King, who has worked tirelessly for an end to racial discrimination through non-violent means, spoke repeatedly of his dream for equality.

"I have a dream," he said. "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

"I have a dream today."

"I have a dream that one day every valley shall be engulfed, every hill shall be exalted and every mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains and the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."

Dr King, who is president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) first came to prominence in 1955 when he led a 382-day bus boycott in an attempt to end segregation on city buses.

Since then he has endured numerous arrests, violent harassment and a bomb attack on his home.

But his struggle continues and it is believed today's speech will have a lasting impact on all who heard it.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Rev Martin Luther King spearheaded the campaign against segregation and racial discrimination in the United States.

But his crusade was cut dramatically short, when he was assassinated on 4 April 1968 in the southern US city of Memphis, Tennessee, aged 39.

He was shot in the neck by a rifle bullet as he stood on a balcony from where he was to lead a march of sanitation workers protesting against low wages and poor working conditions.

James Earl Ray was convicted of his murder and sentenced to 99 years in prison.

But he later retracted his confession and said he had been only a minor player in a conspiracy.

However, his appeals for a new trial were rejected and he died in prison in 1998.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Chances to express your ideas and beliefs can bring popularity as long as you're not arrogant. Don't overextend your self in order to add luxury items to your entertainment center.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Do your own thing. Don't overdo it. You need to enjoy yourself. You can make wonderful contributions to any organization that you join.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 You need to do your own thing and work on making yourself the best you can be. Look into some form of physical recreation. Today will be hectic.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 You will inspire confidence in others. Follow your gut feeling regarding your business ventures. Get involved in activities that will be fun for the whole family.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Relatives will be cordial. Be cautious of making any residential changes today. Find ways to make extra cash. Start making things or reusing rather than buying ready made.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Your accomplishments could exceed your expectations if you mix a little business with pleasure. Put your time and energy into travel, philosophy, and soul-searching.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Travel and learning should be on your agenda today. Look out for yourself today. Children or friends may try to talk you into lending them money.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Insincere gestures of friendliness may be misleading. Short trips will prove to be more fruitful than you imagined. Try to keep to yourself; work diligently on domestic chores and responsibilities.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Love can be heightened if you sit down and discuss your future plans. Don't ruffle the feathers of those you care about most. Take time to do some writing, whether it's correspondence, poetry, or journaling.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Self improvement projects should be your key concern. Confusion could result when communicating with others. Make sure that you have all the pertinent facts before taking action.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Let them know what your intentions are. Uncertainty about your relationship is prevalent. You have more energy than the rest of the people you live with anyway.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 You will find that money could slip through your fingers. You may have to explain your actions to your family. Investments are best left alone today.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

| EASY | | | | | EASY+ | | | | |
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WEATHER

| | MIN | MAX | CONDITION |
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| CHINA | | | |
| Beijing | 25 | 39 | fine |
| Changchun | 20 | 26 | rain |
| Chengdu | 26 | 36 | cloudy |
| Chongqing | 27 | 37 | cloudy |
| Fuzhou | 28 | 39 | fine |
| Guangzhou | 27 | 35 | cloudy |
| Guiyang | 20 | 30 | cloudy |
| Haikou | 26 | 35 | fine |
| Hangzhou | 25 | 37 | thunderstorms |
| Harbin | 19 | 26 | rain |
| Hefei | 22 | 35 | rain |
| Nanjing | 26 | 34 | thunderstorms |
| Shanghai | 27 | 34 | rain |
| Taipei | 26 | 32 | fine |
| Wuhan | 28 | 36 | fine |
| Hong Hong | 28 | 31 | overcast |
| WORLD | | | |
| Moscow | 12 | 21 | overcast |
| Frankfurt | 16 | 30 | overcast |
| Paris | 18 | 30 | clear |
| London | 17 | 23 | overcast |
| New York | 21 | 26 | thunderstorms |

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Web address starter; 5- ___ Crunch; 9- ___ Blanc; 13- Yorkshire river; 14- Thin as ___; 16- Nabisco cookie; 17- Gola of Israel; 18- Like soft-boiled eggs; 19- Tidy, without fault; 20- Biblical gift bearers; 21- Delivery room docs; 22- Resides; 24- Spicy stew; 26- June 6, 1944; 27- Blast from the past; 29- Small piece of lean meat; 33- Elected; 34- The majority of; 35- Undoing; 36- Stumblebum; 37- Fight, disturbance; 38- Hindu title; 39- ___ take arms against...; 41- Cereal grain; 42- Cooked in oven; 44- Foundation; 46- Sanctify; 47- 1/100 of a monetary unit; 48- Female choir voice; 49- Offhand; 52- General on Chinese menus; 53- Defense grp. since 1949; 57- Airline to Tel Aviv; 58- Exodus origin; 60- Let's just leave ___ that; 61- Old Italian money; 62- Theme; 63- Foot part; 64- Den; 65- Word in many college names; 66- Greek goddess of victory;

DOWN 1- Soccer star Mia; 2- ___ yellow ribbon...; 3- Math course; 4- Time spans; 5- King of pop; 6- Island off Venezuela; 7- Gives a bad review; 8- Diarist Anais; 9- Minter; 10- Hurler Hershtiser; 11- Oscar winner Patricia; 12- Small fry; 15- High explosive; 23- Has been; 25- Falsehood; 26- Prescribed amounts; 27- Chicago's airport; 28- Towering; 29- Nick of "Cape Fear"; 30- Elephant parts; 31- Wearies; 32- Oklahoma city; 33- Prepare food; 34- Had in mind; 37- Small satellite; 40- Like the tiny mouth of a sponge; 42- Sandwich initials; 43- Eternal; 45- Afternoon social; 46- Blemish; 48- Savory jelly; 49- Unit of an insurgency; 50- Inter ___; 51- Delhi wrap; 52- Class; 54- Longfellow's bell town; 55- Short nail; 56- Will-___-wisp; 59- Obtained;

Friday's solution

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| Fire department 28 572 222 | Water Supply - Report 2822 0088 |
| PJ (Open line) 993 | Telephone - Report 1000 |
| PJ (Picket) 28 557 775 | Electricity - Report 28 339 922 |
| PSP 28 573 333 | Macau Daily Times 28 716 081 |
| Customs 28 559 944 | |
| S. J. Hospital 28 313 731 | |
| Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333 | |
| Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300 | |
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BOXING

Low-blow call helps Usyk come back to KO Dubois and keep heavyweight titles

AFTER a controversial win to retain his heavyweight boxing titles, Oleksandr Usyk had a message for Tyson Fury.

"I'm ready tomorrow," the Ukrainian declared on Saturday when asked about a long-awaited and elusive unification fight with Fury.

This was after Usyk stopped British challenger Daniel Dubois in the ninth round. That win followed a disputed low blow which gave the Ukrainian champion time to recover.

Fighting for the first time in more than a year and cheered on by fans waving Ukrainian flags, Usyk knocked down Dubois in the eighth round. Referee Luis Pabon stopped the fight when Usyk dumped him again in the ninth with a stiff right to the jaw.

The fight was halted in the fifth round for what Pabon ruled was a low blow by Dubois which sent Usyk to the canvas, where he sat against the ropes. Replays showed



Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk

the punch hitting around Usyk's belt. It was not given as a knockdown but nor were any points deducted from Dubois, and Pabon urged Usyk: "Take your time."

The Ukrainian seemed to lack some of his usual speed after that

as Dubois continued to target the body, but he recovered to knock down Dubois twice and take the win.

Dubois said he was "cheated out of victory tonight" over the low blow call. His promoter Frank

Warren suggested there could be a rematch. Asked about the incident Usyk said, "Boxing, it's tough sport, yeah? But I'm great." He added that he respects his opponent "but it's boxing, it's not ballet."

Usyk remained unbeaten at 21-0 after his second defense of the WBA, IBF and WBO belts he took from Anthony Joshua in 2021 and held after a rematch a year later.

Dubois' win-loss record dropped to 19-2.

It was only Usyk's fifth career fight at heavyweight and his fourth in a row against British boxers.

It was essentially a home fight for Usyk in Poland, which neighbors Ukraine and has taken in many Ukrainians who left the country since Russia invaded last year. A message was shown from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who likened Usyk's strength to that of the Ukrainian people and compared Dubois to the country's friends abroad.

Usyk himself is from Crimea,

which Russia annexed in 2014. After the fight, he said he was "grateful for my country and for (the) Ukrainian army," to cheers from the 40,000 fans at the soccer stadium venue.

The win could mean a new push for a unification fight with WBC titleholder Fury, to crown the heavyweight division's first undisputed champion since 2000. Talks to stage that fight collapsed this year, prompting Usyk to take on Dubois, the WBA mandatory challenger.

Fury has a non-title boxing match with former UFC heavyweight champion Francis Ngannou in Saudi Arabia in October. Another opponent for Usyk could be unbeaten Croatian Filip Hrgovi, the IBF mandatory challenger. Usyk seemed less enthusiastic about a potential Hrgovi matchup than a fight with Fury, saying it would be a matter for his promoter and his manager and that he needed rest. "I go drink sparkling water," he said. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

China Daily

Xinhua Commentary

CHINA-AFRICA COOPERATION USHERS IN BETTER FUTURE FOLLOWING BRICS SUMMIT

China-Africa ties have been reinvigorated with a milestone dialogue event co-chaired on Thursday by the BRICS member countries of China and South Africa, which were also attending the 15th BRICS Summit here this week.

At the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue on Thursday, China unveiled a host of new initiatives and plans to help the continent with economic integration and modernization, rolling out a heartening picture for the future of the Global South.

Such measures as the Initiative on Supporting Africa's Industrialization, the Plan for China Supporting Africa's Agricultural Modernization, and the Plan for China-Africa Cooperation on Talent Development are on track to assist Africa in transforming the manufacturing sector, delivering food self-sufficiency and training high-caliber talents.

The latest pledge from China reaffirms the country's long-term commitment to promoting stability, development and prosperity of the continent and the wellbeing of the African people.

The industrial initiative stressed that through the nine programs under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, as well as cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative, China will channel more resources of assistance, investment and financing amid a push for industrialization.

The agricultural plan indicated that China will help Africa expand grain plantation and encourage Chinese companies to increase agricultural investment in Africa. It aims to help Africa achieve food self-sufficiency and independent sustainable development, promote food production in Africa, effectively boost Africa's ability to safeguard its food security, and help it reach related goals in agricultural modernization.

And the talent plan seeks to train 500 principals and high-caliber teachers of vocational colleges every year, and 10,000 technical personnel with both Chinese language and vocational skills for Africa.

All these efforts speak volumes for China's Africa policy with the principle of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith, of which China has remained a practitioner over the past 10 years.

Booming bilateral economic and trade cooperation also underpins the enduring China-Africa relations that have weathered the vicissitudes of time. China has remained Africa's largest trading partner over the past decade and the largest export destination for Africa. Official data show that bilateral trade grew 11% to USD282 billion in 2022.

The bilateral trade ties continue to enjoy steady growth despite an unbalanced world economic recovery and a sluggish global business environment. Latest data from China's customs authority showed that trade between China and Africa rose 7.4 year-on-year to 1.14 trillion yuan (about USD158.36 billion) in the first seven months of this year.

Looking ahead, China will work with Africa to enhance the synergy of their development strategies, and will continue to support Africa in speaking with one voice on international affairs to keep improving its international standing.

As was pledged, China will also work actively at the G20 summit next month to support the African Union to gain full membership in the group, and supports making special arrangements on UN Security Council reform to meet Africa's aspiration as a priority.

The two sides also share a keen aspiration for self-strengthening. China is pursuing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernization, while Africa is making all-out efforts to build a new Africa that enjoys peace, unity, prosperity and strength.

Notably, this 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg was themed on "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism." China and this year's host country South Africa, both key members of the group, are expected to play pioneering roles to help amplify the voice of the Global South for more balanced development.

3 US MARINES KILLED, 20 INJURED IN AN AIRCRAFT CRASH IN AUSTRALIA DURING A TRAINING EXERCISE

THE BUZZ

A United States Marine Corps aircraft crashed on a north Australian island yesterday, killing three Marines and injuring 20 during a multinational training exercise, officials said.

Three had been confirmed dead on Melville Island and five of the 23 on board were flown in serious condition 80 kilometers to the mainland city of Darwin for hospital treatment after the Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft crashed around 9:30 a.m. local time, a statement from the Marines said.

"Recovery efforts are ongoing," the statement said, adding the cause of the crash was under investigation.

Helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft had been deployed to return from the remote location with the rest of the injured, Northern Territory Police Commissioner Michael Murphy said.

One of the injured was undergoing surgery at the Royal Darwin Hospital, Northern Territory Chief Minister Natasha Fyles said around six hours after the crash.

"We acknowledge that this is a terrible incident," Fyles said. "The Northern Territory government stands by to offer whatever assistance is required."

UN EXPERTS: ISLAMIC STATE GROUP ALMOST DOUBLED THE TERRITORY THEY CONTROL IN MALI IN UNDER A YEAR

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ISLAMIC State extremists have almost doubled the territory they control in Mali in less than a year, and their al-Qaida-linked rivals are capitalizing on the deadlock and perceived weakness of armed groups that signed a 2015 peace agreement, United Nations experts said in a new report.

The stalled implementation of the peace deal and sustained attacks on communities have offered the IS group and al-Qaida affiliates a chance "to re-enact the 2012 scenario," they said.

That's the year when a military coup took place in the West African country and rebels in the north formed an Islamic state two months later. The extremist rebels were forced from power in the north with the help of a French-led military operation, but they moved from the arid north to more populated central Mali in 2015 and remain active.

In August 2020, Mali's president was overthrown in a coup that included an army colonel who carried out a second coup and was sworn in as president in June 2021. He developed ties to Russia's military and Russia's Wagner mercenary group whose head, Yevgeny Prigozhin, was reportedly killed in a plane crash on a flight from Moscow this week.

The 2015 peace agreement was signed by three parties: the government, a pro-government militia and a coalition of groups who seek autonomy in northern Mali.

The panel of experts said in the report circulated Friday that the impasse in implementing the agreement — especially the disarmament, demobilization and



A sign on the northern road exiting in Gao, Northern Mali, reads "welcome to the Islamic state of Gao on Jan. 30, 2013"

reintegration of combatants into society — is empowering al-Qaida-linked Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, known as JNIM, to vie for leadership in northern Mali.

Sustained violence and attacks mostly by IS fighters in the Greater Sahara have also made the signatories to the peace deal "appear to be weak and unreliable security providers" for communities targeted by the extremists, the experts said.

JNIM is taking advantage of this weakening "and is now positioning itself as the sole actor capable of protecting populations against Islamic State in the Greater Sahara," they said.

The panel said Mali's military rulers are watching the confrontation between the IS group and al-Qaida affiliate from a distance.

The experts cited some sources as saying the government believes that over time the confrontation in the north will benefit Malian authorities, but said other sources believe time favors the terrorists "whose military capacities and community penetration grow each day."

"In less than a year, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara has almost doubled its areas of control in Mali," the panel said, pointing to its control now of rural areas in eastern Menaka and large parts of the Ansongo area in northern Gao.

In June, Mali's junta ordered the U.N. peacekeeping force and its 15,000 international troops to leave after a decade of working on stemming the jihadi insurgency. The Security Council terminated the mission's mandate on June 30.

The panel said the armed groups that signed the 2015 agreement expressed concern that the peace deal could potentially fall apart without U.N. mediation, "thereby exposing the northern regions to the risk of another uprising."

The U.N. force, known as MINUSMA, "played a crucial role" in facilitating talks between the parties, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the agreement, and investigating alleged violations, the panel said.

The 104-page report painted a grim picture of other turmoil and abuses in the country. MDT/AP



Egypt. Ethiopia and Sudan resumed their years-long negotiations yesterday over the controversial dam Ethiopia is building on the Nile River's main tributary, officials said. The resumption of talks came after President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Ethiopia Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said last month that they aim to reach within four months an agreement on the operation of the \$4.6 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile. The Blue Nile meets the White Nile in Sudan's capital of Khartoum, before winding northward through Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea.



Greece More than 600 firefighters, including reinforcements from several European countries and backed by a fleet of water-dropping planes and helicopters, were battling three major wildfires in Greece yesterday, two of which have been raging for days. A massive blaze in the country's northeastern regions of Evros and Alexandroupolis, believed to have caused 20 of the 21 wildfire-related deaths in the past week in Greece, was burning for a ninth day.



Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa was re-elected for a second and final five-year term late Saturday in results announced much earlier than expected following another troubled vote in the southern African country with a history of violent and disputed elections. An opposition party spokesperson said within minutes of Mnangagwa being declared the winner that they would reject the results as "hastily assembled without proper verification."