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Philippines A fire killed 15 people yesterday in a small apparel factory in a Philippine residential area, where firefighters were delayed by flooding, traffic and a wrong address, a fire protection official. Most of the victims appeared to be factory workers and carpenters who were sleeping in rooms when the fire broke out yesterday morning. Some were found dead on an aisle outside the rooms and the factory owner and his child were among the dead, Chief Superintendent Nahum Tarroza of the Bureau of Fire Protection said.



AP PHOTO

North Korea said yesterday its latest missile launches simulated “scorched earth” nuclear strikes on South Korea and that it’s also been rehearsing an occupation of its rival’s territory in the event of conflict. Pyongyang has previously tested nuclear-capable missiles and described how it would use them in potential wars with South Korea and the U.S. But the North’s disclosure of detailed war plans reaffirmed its aggressive nuclear doctrine to intimidate its opponents.



AP PHOTO

Israel A Palestinian driver slammed his truck into soldiers at a busy checkpoint in the occupied West Bank yesterday, killing one of them before being shot dead, Israeli authorities said, in the latest bloodshed in a relentless cycle of violence to roil the region. The violence came a day after Israeli police shot and killed a 14-year-old Palestinian boy who stabbed a man in a Jerusalem light-rail station and after Palestinian militants detonated a bomb near a convoy of Israeli troops escorting Jewish worshippers to a holy site in the West Bank, wounding four Israeli troops.

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green common

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PLA GARRISON IN MACAU COMPLETES 24TH ROUTINE ROTATION

The Macao Garrison of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) yesterday completed its 24th rotation since it began garrisoning Macau in 1999. The garrison said its new members had been trained and undertaken relevant study to obtain knowledge about the general situation in Macau and applicable laws, such that they are now capable of fulfilling defense duties. It also said the members who were rotated had successfully completed various tasks of garrisoning Macau and safeguarded national sovereignty, security and development interests.

YANG WANMING NO LONGER DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF HK, MACAU AFFAIRS OFFICE

Yang Wanming will no longer serve as deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, according to the State Council, China's cabinet. Yang, 59, is an expert in Latin American affairs and was appointed as deputy director at Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office April 2022. He previously served as the director-general of the Latin American Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador of China to Chile, Ambassador of China to Argentina and Ambassador of China to Brazil.

GUANGDONG PROVINCE ISSUES GREEN OFFSHORE MUNICIPAL GOV'T BOND

Guangdong Province yesterday issued offshore municipal government bond in Macau, the third such issuance since 2021 and the first issuance of green municipal government bond in the SAR. The bond is offered to institutional investors with an issuance size of 2 billion yuan, with 1 billion yuan for the green bond with a tenor of three years, and 1 billion yuan for the special bond with a tenor of two years. The Monetary Authority of Macao said the move marks diversified financial cooperation between both regions.

CITY BRACES FOR TYPHOON SAOLA AS STORM MOVES TOWARDS SOUTH CHINA, SCHOOL YEAR DELAYED

RENATO MARQUES

ALTHOUGH the issuing of typhoon signal number 8 is only expected for this afternoon or evening according to the forecast of the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG), several government entities have already started to prepare for the potential strength of Typhoon Saola.

In preparation for the super typhoon impacts, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has removed all decorative items that had been installed for the mid-autumn festival later in September.

Yesterday, Air Macau and Air Asia have already started canceling some of their flights scheduled for today.

Similar measures are expected from other airlines as well as maritime transportation routes between Macau, Hong Kong, and the mainland.

At 11 p.m. last night, typhoon signal 1 was replaced by typhoon signal 3.

A 'yellow' Storm Surge Warning is also expected to be issued today with the possibility of this warning being changed to 'orange' later in the evening.

In Hong Kong, the city's leader, John Lee, said in a Facebook post that he had requested various government departments to plan ahead and urged residents to take precautionary measures.

Last night, the Hong Kong Observatory said it plans to issue a No. 8 typhoon signal between 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. today, the third-highest warning under the city's weather system.

The observatory warned of squally showers, strengthening winds and a possible storm surge in low-lying areas of the crowded financial center.

In China, state media report at least 121 passenger trains are suspending service in anticipation of the arrival of Typhoon Saola.

People in areas of southern China were warned to stay away from the coastline and several cities delayed the start of the school year.

The suspensions on key lines running from north to south as well as on regional networks



IAM disassembles mid-autumn festival decorations

began yesterday and continue through Sept. 6, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

China's National Meteorological Center said Saola was moving toward the coast at a speed of about 15 kph and was due to make landfall today in the southern province of Guangzhou with sustained winds of 119 kph and gusts of up to 220 kph.

The storm will then travel west down the coast into the Guangxi region before curving south out to sea between Saturday night and Sunday morning, gradually weakening as it goes.

The Guangdong city of Shanwei, closest to where Saola is expected to make landfall, ordered a halt to classes, transport and most economic activity until the all-clear is sounded. Other cities, including Shantou, Shanwei, Jieyang and Chaozhou, have ordered the start of the school year to be delayed until Monday. Regional airports have also suspended flights until the storm passes.

TYPHOON DELAYS SCHOOL YEAR

The SAR's Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) issued a statement calling on schools to postpone the start of the new school year, otherwise scheduled for today.

The DSEDJ said the start of the new year should instead be

deferred to September 4 (Monday) to ensure students' safety.

The bureau said the recommendation was made in collaboration with the education sector, relying on the fact that the impact on teaching will be minimal.

This measure applies to non-higher education schools in Macau.

The DSEDJ reminded all education institutions participating in the 'Continuing Education Development Plan' to adopt measures to prevent wind and water damage, recommending institutions install waterproof gates in preparation, check the safety of buildings and school facilities, relocate equipment and monitor power systems to ensure safety.

IAM ASSURES THERE IS ENOUGH FOOD AMID STORM

The IAM has increased the supply of fresh produce before Typhoon Saola hits the city.

After the announcement by the weather bureau, residents were panic buying in some local supermarkets.

In a statement, the IAM said that the volume of vegetables incoming tomorrow will be about 310 tonnes, an increase of 60 tons compared to normal days.

The bureau also said it is working with Nam Yue to for-

mulate an emergency plan, and has notified the vegetable supply center in the mainland and local wholesalers in advance to prepare sufficient quantities to increase supply.

Once the traffic is blocked due to bad weather, the cross-border transportation of fresh food will also launch contingency measures to ensure the stable supply of vegetables, meat and other agricultural products.

Saola passed just south of Taiwan on Wednesday before turning to mainland China, with the storm's outer bands hitting the island's southern cities with heavy rain and strong winds.

The typhoon also lashed the Philippines earlier this week, without any reports of casualties so far. However, in the northern part of the islands, low-lying villages were flooded and nearly 50,000 people displaced, including 35,000 villagers, who fled to government-run evacuation centers. Seaports suspended inter-island ferry services due to rough seas, and more than a hundred houses were damaged.

Meanwhile, a second storm, Haikui, is brewing near Japan's Ryukyu islands and will develop into a typhoon as it moves toward the Chinese coast, where it is expected to make landfall south of Shanghai on Sunday morning with sustained winds of 165 kph.

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Bus drivers' complain about rest, employers assure enough rest time

ANTHONY LAM

It was earlier claimed on a radio call-in show that bus drivers are only allowed five minutes for meals, despite the two local bus companies promising otherwise.

An audience member claiming to work as a bus driver called in to a show by TDM – Chinese Radio Macau and complained that there is not enough time for rest between each departure. He said this is because companies are fined by the government if buses arrive late to stops. Consequently, terminus directors will often put time pressure on drivers.

It was even claimed that on some occasions, drivers only had five-minute meal breaks because the preceding trip experienced a 25-minute traffic jam. On many occasions, drivers can only have a toilet break between two departures. It was also claimed that some drivers can only rest for 0.5 hours after working for five to six consecutive hours. The caller said he preferred if the Transport Bureau (DSAT) did not fine bus companies, which creates the knock-

-on effect of companies singling out terminus directors and terminus directors putting pressure on drivers.

In response to the claims, Lei Kai Kin, general manager at Transmac, S.A., revealed that rest time between each departure is set at 15% of the duration of the entire route. If a route takes 60 minutes, the subsequent rest time will range from eight to 10 minutes. The executive underlined that this is a firm rule. He also suggested that there are measures to cope with peak hours, such as deploying additional staff to assist with bus boarding, so drivers have more time to rest.

He insisted that the DSAT had not fined Transmac for congestion-triggered delays, nor had the bus company fined its terminus directors.

Leong Mei Ling, general manager at Transmac S.A., said that meal breaks for drivers last for at least 0.5 hours each. She also said that drivers have at least 15 minutes for rest between each departure.

Chang Cheong Hin, department head at DSAT, said that there are measures in place to ensure



bus drivers have enough rest, and pledged that any complaints will be investigated.

Lau Nga Hong, division head

at DSAT, revealed that bus companies have achieved improvements in bus waiting time over the past few years. In 2019, the

average time was about 6.9 minutes. In 2022, it shortened to about 5.7 minutes. The second quarter of this year saw 5.4 minutes.

DATA PROTECTION OFFICE: NO REPORT YET MADE OVER SAI VAN BRIDGE CAR CRASH FOOTAGE

RENATO MARQUES

At the time of reporting, no report or complaint has yet been made to the Office for Personal Data Protection (GPDP) regarding footage circulating on social media since last week, showing the moment a light vehicle on the Sai Van Bridge crashed into protection barriers, the GPDP told the Times.

The footage originated from one of the bridge's traffic monitoring cameras, operated by the Transport Bureau (DSAT), and is not permitted to be released to the public.

The GPDP said, "concerning the Sai Van Bridge car crash footage, we have not received any complaint or report of this case," noting that generally reports or complaints come later, at which time the GPDP will disclose them.

The DSAT also denied responsibility, saying the



footage "was not published by the DSAT."

Although asked, the DSAT did not provide any information on how someone could access the footage to later publish it on social media.

Asked whether the Bureau has commenced an investigation into the matter, the DSAT did not provide any answers to the Times.

The footage shows the moment the driver of a vehicle, moving in the direction from Macau to Taipa, lost control for an unknown reason and hit the waterfilled protection barriers that separate the car lanes from the motorcycle special lane.

The motorcycle lane was temporarily closed to traffic due to roadworks and so no one was hurt.

AVIATION

AIR MACAU ESTIMATES TWO YEARS TO RECOVER 2019 STAFFING LEVELS

RENATO MARQUES

Local air carrier Air Macau is struggling with the lack of crew members, especially pilots and co-pilots, the director of the company training department, Qi Yu, told government-owned media outlet TDM.

According to the figures cited in the report, the company currently employs 85 pilots and 80 co-pilots, -17.5% than in 2019. The airline is struggling to service existing pre-pandemic routes as well as expand into new routes.

According to Qi, although the company has already launched training courses for more pilots and co-pilots, it will take Air Macau up to two years to recover to the staff level of 2019.

At this first stage, the company has launched a training program for 10 new professionals, but Qi



said that the plan is to increase the number of pilots working in the company to 90, and co-pilots to 95.

The plan launched in mid-August and is now accepting applicants until the end of October. They request candidates be Macau Permanent Residents with university degrees preferentially in Science or Technology, have a

good command of written and spoken Chinese and English with a minimum TOEFL score of 71 or IELTS score of 6 or equivalent.

According to Air Macau, in the previous six recruitment and training rounds, the company recruited 41 people, 17 of which are currently working in the company. The other 24 are still undergoing training.

FUKUSHIMA BAN

OYSTERS WITH MISLABELLED ORIGIN INTERCEPTED AT AIRPORT

ANTHONY LAM

A batch of unshelled oysters from Japan has been intercepted at Macau International Airport after import inspections revealed the origins had been misattributed, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has disclosed.

After Japan started discharging processed wastewater from its nuclear power plants in Fukushima last week, the Macau government imposed a ban on Japanese produce and related products from 10 areas of the country.

Pursuant to Chief Executive Dispatch No 134/2023, enacted on Aug. 24, fresh food, food of animal origin, sea salt and seaweed from the prefectures of Fukushima, Chiba, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Gunma, Miyagi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, as well as the Tokyo Metropolis can no longer be imported into Macau.

According to the IAM, the declared origin of the batch



of oysters is from Iwate Prefecture of Japan. After inspecting the batch of produce with radioactivity meters – a new practice applicable only to produce from Japan – IAM officers discovered on the external packaging that the oysters were in fact from Miyagi Prefecture.

The IAM reminds the industry to strictly abide by the laws and regulations, be aware of the source and quality of the goods, refrain from importing food from prohibited areas, and keep records and documents of incoming goods so that authorities can trace the source and flow of

food when required.

According to the IAM, this is the first case of its kind after the enactment of the import ban. The IAM added that it would escalate its efforts in inspecting Japanese food products at import and “safeguard food safety in Macau” on the retail level.

STATS

CHINA LOGS OVER 82 MILLION ENTRY-EXIT TRIPS DURING SUMMER BREAK

CHINA logged more than 82.41 million entry-exit trips between July 1 and August 29, said immigration authorities.

Among them, 41.19 million trips were made by mainland residents, 32.47 million were made by residents in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and 5.06 million by foreigners.

China has seen a rising demand for exit and entry certificates over the past months, as it was the first summer break after the country relaxed its Covid-19 measures early this year.

During the period from July 1 to August 29, exit-entry control departments issued 3.42 million ordinary passports and 18.59 million exit-entry permits and endorsements for traveling to and from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

In response to the summer travel peak, exit-entry control departments across the country opened up more counters to process document applications, extended their service hours, and provided express or grouped services when necessary, said the National Immigration Administration.

Border inspectors optimized their services, posted more guiding signs, and added more inspection lanes, among other measures, to ensure smooth and orderly flow of traffic across the border. **MDT/XINHUA**

AD

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Supporting Entities: Various logos including the Macao Government and various organizations.

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ANTHONY LAM

EDUCATION

IFTM to boost technology in various programs

TECHNOLOGY will be more incorporated in programs offered at the local public tourism institute, the head of the institute told the press yesterday.

Having launched the Master's program in digital marketing and analytics this academic year, the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM) is ready to incorporate more technological elements into its existing programs, such as those on hospitality and tourism management, IFTM president Fanny Vong assured yesterday. She also referred to the institute offering a Master's program in smart technologies.

The institute has welcomed 600 new students across all degree levels this academic year, which is its largest number in history. Vong disclosed that programs in hospitality management and culinary management are the most popular, while those in cultural heritage management are particularly popular with mainland students.

She hinted that IFTM is facing more fierce competitions with institutions around the globe. She believes more students are considering studying outside Macau after the resumption of normalcy post-Covid.

"I think Macau students have always had the advantage of ha-

ving a lot of choices, as far as going for further studies is concerned," Vong suggested. "In the past, we had always seen students interested in trying various opportunities."

It was also revealed yesterday that certain facilities at the IFTM's

Taipa Campus have been revamped during the summer holiday.

The agreement signing ceremony also took place yesterday between the IFTM and the official TOEFL and TOEIC representative office in Hong Kong. The agreement is for the third test center in

Macau at the institute for the US English literacy test TOEFL.

Both parties have seen increasing demand for seats in the test, especially after the resumption of normalcy. TOEFL is key to the admission by many higher education institutions around the

world.

With this said, students from the IFTM and other schools within the Greater Bay Area (GBA) will be able to enjoy the additional seats at the new test centers. Vong underlined that the test has a centralized registration system, meaning that all test-takers who intend to take it in Macau will be allowed to do so, regardless of their origins.

Kevin Chan, official TOEFL & TOEIC representative in Hong Kong & Macau and president of Smart Education, said on the sidelines of the signing ceremony that he expects the new test center to attract talents from across the GBA to Macau to take the test.

The city's other sectors will therefore benefit from the new test center. Chan added that there is a lot of competition for seats for the test in Hong Kong, meaning that it would be difficult for people from Macau to register to take the test there.

A decade or so ago, people from Macau could only take the test outside of Macau – the closest place being Hong Kong – if they had relocation needs.

To cope with the new test center, preparatory courses for TOEFL have also begun to better train test-takers, Vong added. She is also confident in the teaching quality of IFTM's faculty in these courses.



35th

2023

30.09-30.10

Macao International Music Festival

Tickets for the Macao International Music Festival will be on sale through the Macao Ticketing Network outlets, telephone and online booking from **10 am on 3 September (Sunday).***

Early bird discounts up to **30%** from 3 to 10 September. Various types of discounts are available.

* Not applicable to programmes of the "Joe Hisaishi 360" series. Ticketing services at the Macao Ticketing Network outlets will be suspended if typhoon signal No. 8 or above is hoisted on 3 September, while telephone and online booking services will remain open.

Ticketing: (853) 2855 5555

www.macauficket.com

Tickets for the "Joe Hisaishi 360" series will be open for sale through registration and random draw. Interested parties must register through the system from 3pm on **3 September** to 8pm on **6 September**, and each person can register for a maximum of two tickets per programme. Each person has a chance to draw for one programme only. All registrants have an equal chance of being selected, so there is no need to rush to register.

Registration: www.macauficket.com/JoeHisaishi360

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MARKETS

INVESTORS' SHIFT TO LOW-COST FUNDS BRINGS AVERAGE FEES DOWN

STAN CHOE, NEW YORK

FUND investors are keeping more of what's theirs.

Fees for mutual funds and exchange-traded funds fell to a record low last year, according to Morningstar. Fund investors paid about \$37 in fees for every \$10,000 invested, down from \$40 in 2021. Altogether, that saved them a collective \$9.8 billion.

While that doesn't change the fact that many stock and bond funds stuck investors with losses last year, it means they at least weren't even worse. Funds take out their fees whether prices are rising or falling.

Finding a lower-cost fund isn't a guarantee of better performance, but it means a fund has a head start on higher-cost rivals when it comes to after-fee returns, which are what count.

Investors have noticed, and they're pouring into the lowest-cost funds as a result. The cheapest 20% of funds attracted \$394 billion in net new investment last year, according to Morningstar. The remainder of the funds, meanwhile, saw \$734 billion leave.

Index funds are a big reason for the lower expenses. They generally charge lower fees because they're not hiring managers looking to pick the right investments to beat the index. By simply tracking the S&P 500 or another index, they charged an average of \$12 in fees for every \$10,000 invested last year. That's down slightly from \$13 a year earlier.

But even actively managed funds are seeing pressure on fees. Investors in those funds paid an average of \$59 in fees for every \$10,000 invested, down from \$61 in 2021.

The Investment Company Institute, an industry group, has tracked a similar drop in fees through the years. It says economies of scale are also helping to drop expenses paid by individual investors, and cheap funds drawing more investment are enjoying the benefits.

When a fund attracts more investment dollars, its expenses for accounting, auditing and other services don't go up that much. That means those expenses can be spread out over more dollars, effectively lowering the costs per investor dollar for the group overall. **MDT/AP**

ECONOMY

INDIA SHOWS AN IMPRESSIVE 7.8% GROWTH IN APRIL-JUNE QUARTER

INDIA'S economy registered impressive growth of 7.8% in the first quarter of the current financial year (April-June), attributed to good performance by the agriculture and financial sectors, according to official data released yesterday.

The World Bank says India is one of the fastest-growing economies of the world and is poised to continue on this path.

India's agriculture sector recorded growth of 3.5% in three months, up from 2.4% in the April-June quarter last year, according to the data released by the government-run National Statistical Office.

The rise in financial, real estate and professional services was 12.2%, up from 8.5% in April-June last year.

However, the manufacturing sector growth decelerated to 4.7% in the first quarter of the current fiscal year, compared to 6.1% a year ago, the data suggests. India's financial year runs from April to March.

The output in mining, electricity, gas, water supply and construction also slowed in the April-June quarter.

However, the World Bank said the persisting headwinds – rising borrowing costs, tightening fi-

ancial conditions and on-going inflationary pressures – are expected to weigh on India's growth this year.

Indian media reports said the erratic monsoon, caused by the El Niño effect warming the eastern Pacific Ocean, is likely to moderate growth in the remaining three quarters of the year.

Real gross domestic product growth is likely to moderate to 6.3% in the current financial year from an estimated 6.9% in the last financial year, the World Bank said.

India's federal bank expects the country's yearly growth rate at 6.5%. **MDT/AP**

FISHING

US ENVOY VISITS FUKUSHIMA TO EAT FISH, CRITICIZE SEAFOOD BAN OVER WASTEWATER RELEASE

THE U.S. ambassador to Japan visited a city in Fukushima yesterday and had a seafood lunch with the mayor, talked to fishermen and stocked up on local produce to show they are safe after the release of treated radioactive wastewater from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea, backing Japan while criticizing China's ban on Japanese seafood "as political."

Ambassador Rahm

Emanuel ate flounder and sea bass sashimi with Soma Mayor Hidekiyo Tachiya, talked with local fishermen, and visited a grocery store where he sampled fruits and bought peaches, figs, grapes, flounder, sea bass and other produce from Fukushima prefecture.

All of his purchases will be served when his children visit him this weekend, Emanuel said in a telephone interview

from his train back to Tokyo. "We are going to all eat it."

As a father, if I thought if there is a problem, I won't serve it."

The release of the treated wastewater began last week and is expected to continue for decades. Japanese fishing groups and neighboring countries oppose it, and China immediately banned all imports of Japanese seafood in response. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Sands Resorts Macao showcases offerings in Tianjin roadshow



Sands Resorts Macao is participating in the 'Macao Week in Tianjin' mega roadshow organized by the SAR government and being held on Golden Street, Heping District, Tianjin from August

31 until September 4. In addition to participating in the roadshow and seminar, Sands Resorts Macao is co-launching the 'Macao Gastronomy Showcase: Taste of Macao' to present

Macau's famed culinary treasures.

Steve Zheng, assistant vice president of Destination Marketing, Sands China Ltd., said, "We are delighted to participate in the Macao Week in Tianjin roadshow organized by the Macau SAR government, and introduce Sands Resorts Macao's rich offerings to residents, tourists and industry representatives in Tianjin, and promote Macau's unique culinary culture with a wide range of signature dishes."

Also, as part of the festival from now until September 10, the culinary teams of Pin Yue Xuan and The Manor, are presenting six specialty dishes at the dinner buffet at The St. Regis Tianjin's Promenade.

Galaxy to hold Lantern Art Festival



Galaxy Macao, in partnership with the Macau Designers Association (MDA), announced the launch of Galaxy Lantern Art Festival, featuring immersive experiences that

"seamlessly fuse the charms of tradition with the sparks of innovation," the gaming operator said in a statement.

Between September 8 and October 31, 2023, the resort

will present a series of events and experiences designed to illuminate the Mid-Autumn Festival.

The Galaxy Lantern Art Festival will showcase a collection of digital lantern design artworks, Lantern Design competition, and the Macau Design Week 2023.

Special attractions include the First-in-Macao six-meter Supermoon and the Broadway Food & Craft Festival, alongside an array of Mid-Autumn themed food and beverage and retail offers.

From September 24 to October 8, Galaxy Macao will unveil the First-in-Macao Supermoon at the Lawn, a six-meter giant moon installation that offers 360-degree moongazing.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

US, Indonesia and five other nations hold war drills off Java coast

NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA

SOLDIERS from the U.S., Indonesia and five other nations began annual training exercises yesterday on Indonesia's main island of Java while China's increasing aggression is raising concern.

American and Indonesian soldiers have held the live-fire Super Garuda Shield drills since 2009, and Australia, Japan and Singapore joined last year. The United Kingdom and French forces are participating in this year's exercises, with a total of about 5,000 personnel.

China sees the expanded drills as a threat, accusing the U.S. of building an Indo-Pacific alliance similar to NATO to limit China's growing military and diplomatic influence in the region.

Brunei, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, South Korea, and East Timor also sent obser-



vers to the two-week exercises in Baluran, a coastal town in East Java province.

The commanding general of U.S. Army Pacific, Gen. Charles Flynn, said the 19 nations involved in the training are a powerful demonstration of multilateral solidarity to safeguard a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

"Super Garuda Shield 2023 builds on last year's tremendous suc-

cess," Flynn said in a statement released by the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta on Tuesday, "This joint, multinational training exercise displays our collective commitment and like-minded unity, allowing for a stable, secure, and more peaceful, free and open Indo-Pacific."

The statement said at least 2,100 U.S. and 1,900 Indonesian forces will enhance interoperability

capabilities through training and cultural exchanges that includes a command and control simulation, an amphibious exercise, airborne operations, an airfield seizure exercise, and a combined joint field training that culminates with a live-fire event.

The command post exercise will focus on mission planning staff tasks in a combined military setting. A field training exercise

will involve battalion-strength elements from each nation exercising war-fighting skills to enhance interoperability and combined operational capacity.

Garuda Shield was held in several places, including in waters around Natuna at the southern portion of the South China Sea, a fault line in the rivalry between the U.S. and China.

Indonesia and China enjoy generally positive ties, but Jakarta has expressed concern about what it sees as Chinese encroachment in its exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.

The edge of the exclusive economic zone overlaps with Beijing's unilaterally declared "nine-dash line" demarcating its claims in the South China Sea.

Increased activities by Chinese coast guard vessels and fishing boats in the area have unnerved Jakarta, prompting Indonesia's navy to conduct a large drill in July 2020 in waters around Natuna. **MDT/AP**

TECH

Baidu makes AI chatbot Ernie Bot publicly available

CHINESE search engine and artificial intelligence firm Baidu made its ChatGPT-equivalent language model fully available to the public yesterday, raising the company's stock price by over 3% following the announcement.

Beijing sees artificial intelligence as a key industry to rival the United States and aims to become a global leader by 2030. Chinese technology firms have also raced to unveil their generative AI models — in which algorithms allow the technology to produce and create new content — after U.S. firm OpenAI launched the widely popular ChatGPT.

Baidu said that Ernie Bot, which generates text and images in response to questions and prompts provided by users, was fully open to the general public via the official website and an app that was only available in China's app stores. By yesterday afternoon, the Ernie Bot app had topped the charts on Apple's iOS store in China for free apps.

By releasing the model pu-



blicly, Baidu will be able to collect massive real-world human feedback, according to Baidu CEO Robin Li, who said this would in turn help improve Ernie and Baidu's foundation models.

Like Europe, China has made efforts in recent months to regulate the generative AI industry.

China issued AI regulations Aug. 15 requiring companies to carry out a security review and obtain approvals before their product can be publicly launched. Beijing also requi-

res companies providing such generative AI services to comply with government requests for technology and data.

The U.S. does not currently have regulations in place.

Baidu CEO Li said he was optimistic and described the AI regulations as "more pro-innovation than regulation" in the company's earnings call earlier in August.

Two other AI companies in China, Baichuan and Zhipu AI, also launched their AI language models yesterday. **MDT/AP**

GERMANY-BORN PANDAS CELEBRATE THEIR FOURTH BIRTHDAY AHEAD OF EXPECTED TRIP TO CHINA

THE first giant pandas born in Germany celebrated their fourth birthday yesterday as the Berlin Zoo prepares to send them to China, a journey that was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pit and Paule, who also are known by the Chinese names Meng Xiang und Meng Yuan, have been a star attraction at the zoo since their birth in 2019. Yesterday, keepers presented them with an ice cake made with apples, carrots and beetroot, and a side serving of snow.

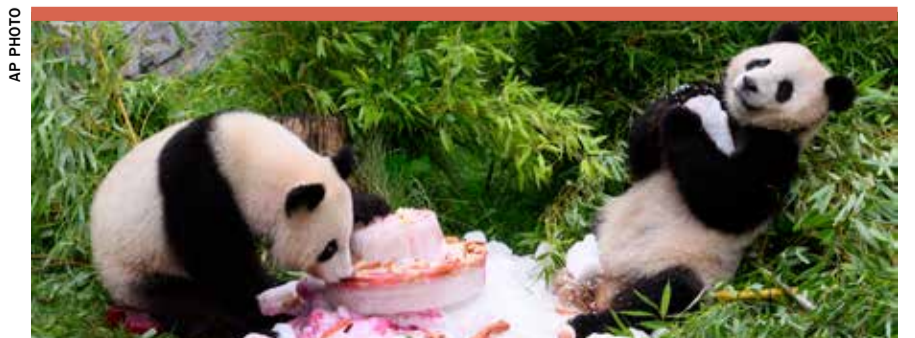
While China for decades gifted friendly nations with its unofficial mascot as part of a policy of "panda diplomacy," the country now loans pandas to zoos on commercial terms. Pit and Paule's parents, Jiao Qing and Meng Meng, arrived in Berlin in 2017.

Florian Sicks, the zoo's curator for mammals, said the young pandas belong to China and its Chengdu Panda Base, and officials hope the pair will travel there soon.

"As a rule, this happens at age 2 or 3,"

Sicks said. "Because of the pandemic, it was delayed a bit so that they are now celebrating their fourth birthday here, which we of course are very, very happy about. But at the moment, we assume that this will probably be the last birthday the two of them will celebrate here in Berlin."

Giant pandas have difficulty breeding and births are particularly welcomed. There are about 1,800 pandas living in the wild in China and a few hundred in captivity worldwide. **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO



Medics stand by the covered bodies of victims of a deadly blaze in downtown Johannesburg, yesterday

SOUTH AFRICA

Homeless horror as fire rips through rundown building, 73 died

GERALD IMRAY
& MOGOMOTSI MAGOME,
JOHANNESBURG

A nighttime fire ripped through a rundown apartment building mainly occupied by homeless people and squatters in Johannesburg, forcing some to throw babies out of third-story windows in a desperate attempt to save them and leaving at least 73 people dead yesterday, witnesses and emergency services in South Africa's biggest city said.

At least seven of the victims were children, the youngest a 1-year-old, according to an emergency services spokesperson. A South African television station reported that the number had climbed to 12 children dead, although emergency services didn't immediately confirm that.

More than 50 people were injured and emergency services officials warned that the death toll could still rise as they continued to search the scene more than 12 hours after the blaze broke out at around 1 a.m.

Dozens of bodies recovered by firefighters lay on a side road outside the apartment block, some in body bags but others covered in silver sheets or blankets after the body bags ran out.

"Over 20 years in the service, I've never come across something like this," Johannesburg Emergency Services Management spokesperson Robert Mulaudzi said.

Authorities hadn't established the cause of the fire but Mgcini Tshwaku, a local government official, said the initial evidence suggested it started with a candle. Inhabitants used candles and fires for light and to keep warm in the winter cold, he said.

Firefighters were still making their way through the remnants of shacks and other informal structures that littered the inside of the derelict five-story building in the heart of Johannesburg's central business district. Smoke seeped out of the blackened building even though the fire was out, while twisted blankets and sheets hung like ropes out of shattered windows to show how people had used them to try and escape the flames.

Some of the survivors described how they jumped out of windows to escape the blaze, but only after tossing their children to others below.

"Everything happened so fast and I only had time to throw the baby out," said Adam Taiwo, who managed to save his 1-year-old son and himself. "I also followed him after they caught him downstairs." Taiwo said he did not know where his wife, Joyce, was.

A witness who lives in a building across the road said he saw others also throw babies out of the burning building and that at least one man died when he jumped from a window on the third floor and hit the concrete sidewalk "head first."

Another witness who didn't give his name told television news channel eNCA that he lived in a building next door and heard people screaming for help and shouting "We're dying in here" when the fire started.

As the fire raged, some occupants got trapped behind locked gates at the exits and it was clear there were no proper fire escape routes, lo-

cal official Tshwaku said.

"People couldn't get out," he said, adding that some of the victims may have died after jumping out of the building.

As many as 200 people may have been living in the building, witnesses said, including in the basement, which should have been used as a parking garage. Others estimated an even higher number of occupants.

Johannesburg mayor Kabelo Gwamanda said 141 families were affected by the tragedy but could not say exactly how many people were in the building when the fire started. Many of the people inside were foreign nationals, he said. That could make identifying victims and tracing the missing hard as many were likely in South Africa illegally, other officials said, and had no South African documents.

A woman who asked not to be identified said she lived in the building and escaped the flames with her grown son and 2-year-old child. She stood outside holding the toddler for hours and said she didn't know what happened to two other children from her family.

"I just saw smoke everywhere and I just ran out with this baby only," the woman said. "I don't have any home, and I don't know what to do anymore."

In a statement, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said, "this is a great tragedy felt by families whose loved ones perished in this awful manner, and our hearts go out to every person affected by this event." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1976 [UK] WATER CRISIS DEEPENS



The first of 11,500 standpipes have been connected in Yorkshire as local reservoirs reach their lowest levels in years.

Yorkshire Water Authority (YWA) have said that current measures to save water have not been adequate and the standpipes could be in use in a fortnight's time.

About 750,000 people will be affected but the YWA have said that no home should be more than 100 yards (91.4 m) from a standpipe.

He urged people to help the old and sick in their communities by collecting their water for them.

This summer has had the longest period without rain for 80 years, and it is feared some reservoirs - already depleted by last year's dry weather - will be only 15% full by early November.

[...]

In Gwent, south-east Wales, one of the most severely affected areas, 70 companies were ordered to halve water consumption. They include coal mines and works owned by British Steel.

In mid Glamorgan, 220 schools have decided to close an hour early after a 17-hour cut-off was imposed. The Education Department is worried about health issues if children are unable to flush toilets during the cut-off period.

And in the Midlands all homes and business have been told to cut water consumption by two fifths or have rationing imposed on them by the end of the month.

The drought has also led to more fires. Today, at a meeting of the committee co-ordinating measures to tackle the crisis, the Prime Minister, James Callaghan, thanked firefighters for their recent efforts.

The committee also heard from the new "Minister of Drought", Denis Howell, who reported on his recent visit around the country and his plans to tackle the situation. [...]

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Several weather records were broken in the summer of 1976. August concluded what was then the driest 16-month period since records began in 1772. There were also two six-day periods when the temperature reached 90°F (32.2°C) each day - the first time this had been recorded in the UK. Although Denis Howell was appointed Labour's "Minister of Drought" at the end of August - just before it began raining again - water restrictions remained in place for many months. Standpipes did not reappear in Britain's streets until the drought in 1995. Water shortages returned in 2006 and in May a drought order was granted in England and Wales for the first time since 1995, banning the non-essential use of water. Under the six-month order, Sutton and East Surrey Water can ban car washing, the filling of swimming pools and watering of parks and sports grounds.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

JAKE COYLE,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

DRIVE IN

GAL GADOT TURNS SUPERSPY IN 'HEART OF STONE'

IT'S turning out to be quite a summer for superspies and supercomputers.

A month after the action feast of "Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning Part I," in which Tom Cruise faced off with an AI supervillain called "the Entity," comes a very "MI"-like international espionage thriller with an equally fancy and powerful machine.

"Heart of Stone" stars Gal Gadot as Rachel Stone, an agent for an elite and clandestine intelligence agency called the Charter. Like "Mission: Impossible," "Heart of Stone" hits glamorous global destinations (the Italian Alps, Lisbon, Senegal, Iceland) and features lengthy actions sequence including a wingsuit skydive.

Whereas "Dead Reckoning" pushed old-school filmmaking to extremes for a gripping theatrical experience, "Heart of Stone" revels in its digital wizardry, feels vaguely algorithm-y in its conception and was made for Netflix. Both films, interestingly, are products of the same production company, Skydance.

The film's opening sequence begins in a very Bond-like Alpine hotel where Gadot's Stone is part of an MI6 mission posing as an inexperienced tech, not a field agent. This allows for plenty of "She can do that?" looks when the



Gal Gadot in a scene from "Heart of Stone"

operation falls apart and Stone begins flashing Cruise-level skills while rushing off with a glowing parachute down the darkened slopes in slinky, snowy chase.

To the credit of Harper, cinematographer George Steel and production designer Charles Wood,

the action is generally fluid in "Heart of Stone." The film's handsomest design comes in Charter's secret weapon: the Heart, the so-named quantum computer with supreme hacking abilities that can process chance-of-success scenarios in real time. Its opera-

tor (Matthias Schweighöfer), like a new-age John King, contorts a room full of pixels with the wave of his hand, while guiding Charter agents from afar.

Also in the mix is Jamie Dornan's Parker, the leader of the MI6 unit that Stone is initially masque-

ading in — though his affiliations are also murky. The trouble is kicked off by a hacker of mysterious intentions played by Alia Bhatt, a Bollywood star making her Hollywood debut. Glenn Close pops in as the head of the CIA.

I'm not sure any of them get a chance to do all that much, though Bhatt is charmingly mischievous in her scenes. Not for the first time, the actor I most wish was center stage is Sophie Okonedo, who, as a Charter leader, is the most soulful presence in a not particularly soulful film.

The plot, from screenwriters Greg Rucka and Allison Schroeder, revolves around the threat of the Heart falling into the wrong hands. This means that "Heart" is spoken of so much that you have expect the Wilson sisters to turn up eventually.

But there is nothing in the impressively generic "Heart of Stone," right down that title, that is even a little bit unexpected. All the pieces here are fine but nothing is distinct from dozens of films before it. You would swear that the movie's star AI wrote it — and even gave itself first billing, too.

"Heart of Stone," a Netflix release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for sequences of violence and action, and some language. Running time: 123 minutes. ★★☆☆

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C&C RECEIVED THE 1ST SILVER
"DEIGNAN AWARD"
FOR RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IN MACAU (2023)



TASTE OF EDISIA

Mooncake go vegan

IRENE SAM, MDT

THIS year, Green Common is bringing back the signature Vegan Custard Mooncake highlighting 100% made with plant-based ingredients and made in Hong Kong. The mooncake is created with the American award-winning vegan butter, featuring a golden tender casing and custard filling mixed with plant-based milk and flaxseed powder, which offers a velvety texture.

This crowd-pleasing flavor contains 0mg cholesterol and 0g trans fat. An absolute delight, Green Common Vegan Custard Mooncake be-

comes an effortlessly healthy and perfect gift, keeping the joyous festival light yet satisfying.

Creamy vegan custard made with 100% plant-based ingredients is created with award-winning Miyoko's Kitchen vegan butter and made with plant-based ingredients that are good for health, such as plant-based milk and flaxseed powder. With no preservatives added, this mooncake indulges the crowd with the plant-based creamy classic. Just 15 seconds in the microwave to transform the mooncake into a flavor explosion! Definitely a treat for the season.



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OPINION

China Daily

Xinhua Commentary

WHY CHINA'S ECONOMY WILL PROVE WESTERN FEARMONGERS WRONG, AGAIN

China is embracing an electric vehicle (EV) boom that backs its steady recovery and leads a global zero-carbon push.

The country is by far the largest EV market in the world, home to an estimated 200 EV manufacturers. In 2022, more than 60% of global electric car sales took place there, and more than half of all EVs on the road worldwide are currently in China.

An EV boom portrays China's efforts in industrial transformation and upgrade. That is not China's only "First" in the global economic tally, there are other "No.1"s about the Chinese economy, which has managed to forge ahead and set records despite challenges.

Official data show China has overtaken Japan to be the world's biggest auto exporter, with vehicle exports soaring to 1.07 million units in the first quarter of 2023.

China surpassed the United States as the largest single market for iPhones with the most shipments in the second quarter of 2023, according to market analysis site TechInsights.

China has outperformed Greece, becoming the world's largest ship-owning country in terms of gross tonnage, according to the China Shipowners' Association.

The real picture is hardly what they painted from their one-sided, short-term lenses. Market trends and financial price moves are telling a different story to their bearish forecasts.

Financial reports show Starbucks saw a sharp recovery in China in Q3, L'Oreal sees the Chinese market as "really picking up," and luxury giant LVMH logged a strong rebound in China in the second quarter.

"Domestic tourism is broadly picking up. Car sales in China are still up this year despite a small decline in June and July. Alibaba just reported a return to strong sales growth in its second-quarter results. Yet more signs of an economy that is not imploding," The Financial Times wrote in its recent markets insights.

In fact, China's growth momentum has been there and its economic fundamentals are solid.

Yet some observers in the West are "selectively blind" to these numbers, but are "clear-eyed" about certain fluctuations. All they see is a fall in China's consumer price index (CPI) in July, the first time in more than two years, based on which they've been manufacturing a deflation fear.

Nicholas Lardy, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute, a U.S. think tank, said that it was "premature" to make a judgment of deflation based on single monthly data, while a thorough assessment of the situation also "does not support the view that China's economic growth is in a severe cyclical downturn."

Perhaps, doomsayers don't really care if the Chinese economy fares well or badly. They are bent on magnifying challenges, mongering fears and killing confidence.

But that confidence is rebuilding as China firms up its resolve for broader, higher-level opening-up.

A weaker momentum is not unique to China, but China is not letting it rot. Over the past 40 years, the Chinese economy has created a global marvel. However, this does not mean that the economy was all plain sailing these years. Rather, the development was achieved by overcoming one challenge after another.

One epitome is the growth of the Shenzhen-based BYD, which started with manufacturing mobile phone batteries, into one of the world's most advanced producers of automobile batteries through years of dedicated efforts.

And a key to understanding China's relentless economic development lies within these impressive stories.

[Abridged]

JAPAN'S DEFENSE MINISTRY REQUESTS 12% BUDGET INCREASE TO BOLSTER MILITARY'S STRIKE CAPABILITY

THE BUZZ

Japan's defense ministry is requesting a nearly 12% budget increase that includes two warships with advanced radar and long-range cruise missiles as it further fortifies the nation's military in the face of North Korean threats and Chinese military advancement.

The record 7.7 trillion yen (\$52.5 billion) request for the 2024 fiscal year marks the second year of a rapid five-year military buildup under a new security strategy Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government adopted in December. It focuses on reinforcing strike capability in a break from Japan's postwar principle of having a military only for self-defense.

Under the five-year plan, Japan plans to spend 43 trillion yen (\$315 billion) through 2027 to nearly double its annual spending to around 10 trillion yen (\$68 billion), making Japan the world's third-biggest spender after the United States and China. How to finance and justify the growing military spending is uncertain in a country with steeply declining births and increasing costs of caring for its aged population.

The budget request was approved at the defense ministry meeting yesterday and submitted to the finance ministry for negotiations.

AP PHOTO



SHINAWATRA JAILED AFTER RETURNING FROM EXILE, REQUESTS A ROYAL PARDON

JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI, BANGKOK

FORMER Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who recently returned from exile and began serving an eight-year prison term, has requested a royal pardon, a senior member of the outgoing Cabinet said yesterday. Thaksin was moved from prison to a state hospital soon after his return last week for reported ill health.

Wissanu Krea-ngam, who is acting justice minister as well as a deputy prime minister, said he has received a letter from Thaksin requesting a pardon, but declined to say how long it would take to be approved. "The process of approval entirely depends on his royal grace," he said. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, giving King Maha Vajiralongkorn the final word on pardons of convicted criminals.

Thaksin, by promoting populist policies and using the fortune he made in telecommunications to build his own political party, was elected prime minister in 2001 and easily reelected in 2005. He was ousted in a military coup in 2006 and accused of corruption, abuse of power and disrespecting the monarchy.

He returned last week after 15 years of self-imposed

exile and was immediately sent to Bangkok's main prison because of several criminal convictions he has accrued as politically motivated.

Hours after Thaksin's return, Srettha Thavisin of the Pheu Thai party won enough votes in Parliament to become prime minister, ending more than three months of uncertainty after May's general election. Pheu Thai is the latest in a string of parties affiliated with Thaksin.

To achieve a parliamentary majority, Srettha formed a coalition with pro-military parties linked to a 2014 coup that ousted a Pheu Thai government formed by Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra. Pheu Thai had vowed during the May election campaign that it would not join with any pro-military party in forming a government. It also excluded the progressive Move Forward Party, which won the most seats and votes in the polls.

It is widely believed that Thaksin returned out of hope that a new government friendly to him would reduce his sentence and that he may have made a deal with authorities, although he has said his decision had nothing to do with the Pheu Thai party's bid for power.

Srettha told reporters yesterday that he expects to submit a list of his new Cabinet ministers for royal endorsement today.

There is growing criticism that Thaksin has received special treatment compared to other inmates, including not having to get a prison-style haircut. He was also transferred to a hospital just hours after being taken to prison, a move which officials attributed to several health problems. His daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra, a key Pheu Thai member, said he is suffering from fatigue and stress, including complications from contracting the coronavirus in 2020.

Thaksin, 74, a police lieutenant colonel before becoming a businessman, is being treated in a private room at the state-run Police General Hospital, where the director said he was in serious condition with heart and lung problems.

His swift transfer has prompted calls for proof that he is genuinely sick. A group of conservative political activists went to the hospital last week demanding that it release information about his condition and treatment.

Wissanu said Thaksin's health condition could support his case for a pardon. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said yesterday his country has developed a weapon that hit a target 700 kilometers away, in an apparent reference to the previous day's strike on an airport in western Russia. Zelenskyy said on his Telegram channel the weapon was produced by Ukraine's Ministry of Strategic Industries but gave no other details.

AP PHOTO



Greek authorities further reinforced firefighting forces in the country's northeast yesterday, where a massive blaze in its 13th day has flared up once more and prompted authorities to alert area residents to be on standby for possible evacuation. More than 100 extra firefighters were deployed, bringing the total to 582, backed by a fleet of 10 planes and seven helicopters from nine European countries, Greece's fire department said. The fire that started Aug. 19 has decimated homes and vast tracts of forest in the Alexandroupolis and Evros region, near the border with Turkey. It was blamed for 20 of last week's 21 wildfire-related deaths in Greece.

AP PHOTO



Italy A speeding out-of-service train slammed into a group of workers doing nighttime track maintenance in northern Italy yesterday, killing five of them, authorities said. The crash occurred shortly after midnight at a station in Brandizzo, a town in Italy's Piedmont region. Piedmont Gov. Alberto Cirio provided the death toll and said the accident's cause was under investigation.