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BIDEN IN VIETNAM TO BOLSTER RELATIONS SAYS VISIT NOT TO START A 'COLD WAR' WITH CHINA

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Thailand's new Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin vowed to act quickly to relieve the country's economic problems in his inaugural speech to Parliament yesterday, following four months of political uncertainty. Srettha entered politics after a career as a major real estate developer, and his government is facing high expectations and pressing demands to address a range of economic, political, social and environmental problems in its four-year term.



Japan The operator of the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant said yesterday that it has safely completed the first release of treated radioactive water from the plant into the sea and will inspect and clean the facility before starting the second round in a few weeks. The discharge, which is expected to continue for decades until the decommissioning is finished, has been strongly opposed by fishing groups and by neighboring countries.



Bangladesh French President Emmanuel Macron witnessed the signature of a deal yesterday to facilitate loans to Bangladesh aimed at infrastructure development, as well as a letter of intent to provide the South Asian country with an earth observation satellite system. This came during Macron's two-day visit to Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, where he met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to bolster bilateral relations between the two countries.

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HK ARTIST ACCUSES MACAU POLICE

Hong Kong busker Oliver Ma claims to have been mistreated by Macau police; authorities say he represents a 'threat to national security'

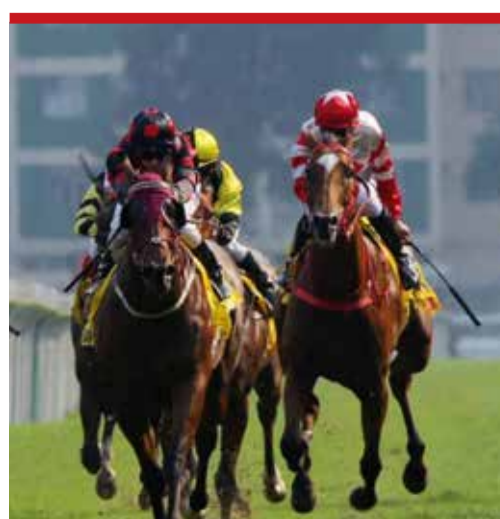
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IT'S OFFICIAL
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NEW SEASON
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CONFIRMED
RACES

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HONG KONG BUSKER ARRESTED AND DEPORTED FROM MACAU CLAIMS MISTREATMENT

RENATO MARQUES

HONG Kong busker Oliver Ma claims to have been mistreated by the local police forces, who deported and banned him from reentering Macau without justifiable reason.

On his Facebook page, Ma tells the story of what was meant to be a Sunday with his family but ended up with a 13-hour interrogation by the Macau police.

The case occurred on September 3, when the busker set up his musical performance equipment at the square in front of St Dominic's Church in the Senado Square area.

As explained in his post, as he was about to start his second song, several police officers from the Public Security Police Force (PSP) – which had a police delegation right in front of the location where Ma was singing – arrived at the scene and asked him to stop singing.

According to Ma, he immediately obeyed the order and packed up his equipment.

"The police then got my Hong Kong ID and asked me and my family to come with them 'to talk.' In my mind, they were only taking us nearby to inform us about some laws we were not familiar with. The next thing we knew, we arrived at a nearby police station where I was asked to sign a form, before being taken into their office along with all my musical equipment," Ma says. He added that eventually, his family members were released by the PSP while he remained in questioning.

Ma explained that after some time, an officer presented him with a fine of MOP600 for engaging in busking activities without a license, he said, noting that he expected the situation to end there.

However, he was then transported to "another police station," which the Times has confirmed to be the Judiciary Police (PJ).

At the PJ, he was asked to surrender his mobile phone password.

The process stretched out over many hours. Ma asked the investigators for a meal, but was refused by the officers who claimed that "they do not provide meals on Sundays."



While responding to the PJ questions, he alleged that he requested to contact his lawyer, a question that he said angered the investigator.

At some point during the questioning, the PJ investigator started asking about the time he had sung the "Glory to Hong Kong" song in Hong Kong, which resulted in his arrest, and asked whether he was planning to sing it in Macau as well.

The questioning concluded around 3 a.m. on September 4, at

which time he was informed he had been banned from reentering Macau for a year. Consequently, he was escorted back to Hong Kong through the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge.

"Out of all my past experiences of being arbitrarily arrested and detained for busking, this one has to be the most dehumanizing," Ma said. He added, "For merely singing one-two songs in the streets of Macau, I was arrested without warning and detained by the Public Security Police For-

ce for over 13 hours before being permanently kicked out. I felt as if I was treated like less than a tourist, let alone a human, and more like a terrorist."

The 24-year-old busker was detained by the police authorities of the neighboring region back in May 2021 when he was playing guitar and singing at the junction of Queen's Road Central and Theatre Lane at around 10 p.m.

Ma was then accused of organizing a prohibited group gathering, an offense under the Co-

vid-19 restriction measures at the time.

Last May, he was acquitted of the charges after the judge from the Eastern Magistrates' Court cast doubt over the reliability of a police officer's testimony.

The busker is widely known for being a pro-democracy advocate and for singing an English language rendition of the so-called "forbidden song," that was the anthem of the Hong Kong protests, during his busking performances.

POLICE FORCES CLAIM MA POSED RISKS TO NATIONAL SECURITY

IN response to Ma's post about his experience in Macau, both the PSP and the PJ have issued statements on the case.

Both police forces claimed that Ma posed a risk and was "suspected of endangering national security." The PSP added that the force had been already informed in advance of Ma's trip to Macau and the possibility of him engaging in similar behavior to what had been reported in Hong Kong.

According to PSP, Ma also entered Macau on a tourism permit that did not include

busking performances.

"The Macau Special Administrative Region welcomes everyone to travel, visit relatives, conduct commercial activities and cultural exchanges. However, the Public Security Police Force, as the department in charge of immigration affairs in the Macau Special Administrative Region, is required by law to inspect and monitor the situation of relevant individuals during their stay in Macau. Everyone should respect and abide by the laws of the region," the PSP concluded.

As for the PJ, the force claimed that Ma's post "deviated from the facts" and "seriously affected the good reputation and image of the Judiciary Police."

According to the PJ, which also cited potential risks of endangering national security, the investigation was "completely legal, reasonable and in compliance with applicable procedures. [Ma's] legitimate rights and interests were fully protected during the process."

The PJ accused Ma of "fabricating facts and making things up out of thin air," while making use of social media to slander the local police forces.

Based on these facts, the PJ immediately initiated an investigation into potential criminal liability. **RM**

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EVENTS

HUSH to celebrate wellness this year, upholding Big Health development

ANTHONY LAM

THIS year's HUSH! Beach Concerts will incorporate yoga events to promote wellness and Big Health, deputy director of Culture Cheang Kai Meng said yesterday.

Branded as HUSH! Beach Concerts x Urban Yo-ga Wellfest, the program was announced at a press conference yesterday. Yoga sessions and related events will be held on the last two days of the concerts.

On the sidelines of the press conference, Cheang explained that the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) wanted to present some new attempts to explore more diversified development.

He added that this year's event will see more international performers, although local artistes will still account for about 90% of the total lineup.

This is the first year that sport or wellness elements have been added to the musical event. Asked why yoga was selected instead of other types of sports, Cheang said the reasoning was that yoga matched well with music. "This is a new attempt, and we [are] open to different possibilities in the future," Cheang said.

On the popularity of the events, Cheang said that the nice weather would attract more people to the events. The location can host a maximum of 10,000 people, he disclosed.

Adding to this, Catarina Lio, senior vice president of brand marketing of MGM, explained that when MGM considered its works on Big Health, it considered how the overarching idea could be promoted in a way that would at-



Cheang Kai Meng

tract foreign tourists.

MGM saw how the HUSH brand and similar examples in neighboring regions proved the feasibility of integrating the concepts of wellness into music. "We approached the IC and discussed our conceptualization," Lio revealed, discussing how ideas behind the logistics of when and how to host the event came to be.

She added that the program will have events from dawn till dusk, so the synergies are expected to be powerful. In addition, there are other wellness events besides yoga that appeal to different audiences.

Instructors were chosen mostly based on their social media impact and accreditation, the MGM executive disclosed.

Held between Oct. 27 and Nov. 5, this year's program will include shows that feature GaoFunk, a talented guitarist from Beijing; SULD, a band playing metal music with traditional Inner Mongolian instruments; Ichika Nito, a well-known Japanese guitarist; Sokoninaru, a rising rock star

constantly hitting the ORICON music chart; and Amazing Show, a famous Taiwanese band, amongst others.

The "Urban Yo-ga Wellfest" will be held on Nov. 4 and 5 at Hac Sá Beach and the Hac Sá Temporary Green and Leisure Area. There will

be three thematic areas – the Zen Garden, Fit District and The Playground.

Over 40 fitness and yoga instructors from all over the world, including yoga instructor Coffee Lam from Hong Kong, fitness instructor Jordan Yeoh from Malaysia, former Australian representative at FISU World University Games Amanda Bisk, former Swedish national representative and fitness instructor Charles Fritzen, and internationally recognized yoga instructor Josh Kramer from New Zealand, will be invited to teach traditional yoga workouts and also provide instruction on innovative health and wellness skills.

Tickets are available now on MGM's ticketing website.

VICE CULTURE DIRECTOR BLAMES WEATHER FOR SLOW MUSIC FESTIVAL TICKET SALES

DEPUTY director of Culture Cheang Kai Meng yesterday attributed slow ticket sales for music festivals to unfavorable weather conditions.

On the sidelines of a cultural event, the official was asked to comment on the situation. As of yesterday, many shows at the upcoming 35th Macao International Music Festival still had between 50% to 70% of tickets available. The festival is set to open the end of the month.

In response to questions, Cheang defended the current rate of ticket sales, stating that they were "more or less" the same as previous years.

He said that poor weather had obstructed his bureau's promotional efforts within the community.

"The box office opening coincided with the bad weather," Cheang said. "In fact, currently we are seeing gradual improvement in box office sales each day."

The box office opening for the festival occurred

around the same time as Super Typhoon Saola's impact on Macau, and may be partly the reason for the absence of long queues at physical box offices. Notwithstanding this, online ticket sales are unpopular in Macau, with many events relying only on online channels for ticket sales.

Nonetheless, he pledged that his bureau would step up its efforts to promote the festival.

He also emphasized the availability of multiple ticket sale channels, including but not limited to collaborations with casinos and resorts. Group sales will also be promoted in different Greater Bay Area cities, he said.

Regarding comments that the city has been filled with events this year, which may be impacting the popularity of the festival, Cheang held a different perspective. He stated that the festival's audience is not the same as those of other events, suggesting that those who attend pop concerts may not necessarily also prefer classical music. AL

JCM SAGA

Jockey Club new season commences Sept. 29, ends speculation of operator uncertainty



STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau government has approved Macau Jockey Club's (MJC) 2023-24 season, ending speculations that the firm has failed to satisfactorily upgrade facilities as it pledged back in 2018.

On the operator's website on Friday, the calendar shows that the starting

season will commence on September 29 and will conclude August 31.

Night races will also resume from January.

However, the number of horses set to race remains unknown.

This troubling situation has emerged against a backdrop of significant challenges facing the industry, including a drama-

tic decline in the number of horses, dwindling race frequencies and financial losses.

According to reports from the Asian Racing Report, Macau's horse population has plummeted from a peak of 1,200 two decades ago to a mere 220.

This sharp reduction raises questions about the sustainability of horse ra-

cing in the region.

Late last month, an insider told the Times that the MJC has had its new season approved.

However, it remains a question as to how long the season can last, considering that 30 horses were set to arrive in Macau and commence quarantine on Jul. 26. However, it was later revealed that "no import permit was issued for the horses," the insider said.

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

SSM REPORTS OF NEW COVID CASES IN LOCAL SCHOOL

The Health Bureau (SSM) has informed that five students and one teacher from a local school have been infected with Covid-19. The patients developed upper respiratory tract symptoms such as a fever, sore throat and cough on September 8. All patients are currently in a stable condition and have no severe symptoms or other serious complications. According to SSM, the school, Colégio Diocesano De S. José, has strengthened the implementation of infection control measures such as cleaning, disinfection and maintaining indoor air circulation in accordance with established guidelines, and has strictly implemented isolation requirements for sick students and employees.

HENGQIN SEES 47 LAWYERS FROM SARS

Statistics released by Hengqin authority suggest that providing more legal services and support could be a feasible approach to attracting more law firms and lawyers from Macau to practice in the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. As of August 31 this year, Hengqin has accommodated 22 law firms with 332 lawyers, including 47 lawyers from Hong Kong and Macau. Since the establishment, the number of law firms and lawyers in the zone has increased by 100% and 49.5% respectively. Among these, the number of lawyers from Macau has increased by 65%. Hengqin has introduced 12 sets of rules to align with Macau's rules.

PSP INVESTIGATING MAN DRIVING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTION

A private car was suspected of driving in the wrong direction on Av da Amizade yesterday morning, and police authorities are currently investigating the case. The local male driver, in his 30s, was prosecuted by the Public Security Police (PSP). A video circulated online showed that a car carrying seven people was driving in the wrong direction. In response to an inquiry by the Times, the PSP stated that the incident occurred around 7 o'clock this morning. The PSP said it suspects that the driver drove in the wrong direction, changed lanes without indicating, and illegally crossed a solid line.

DECREASING APPROVALS OF RESIDENTIAL MORTGAGE LOANS

In July, new residential mortgage loans (RMLs) approved by Macau banks fell by 28.7% month-on-month to MOP1.20 billion. Of these, new RMLs to residents, representing 99.3% of the total, decreased by 28.5% to MOP1.19 billion. The monthly average of new RMLs approved between May and July 2023 was MOP1.84 billion, representing a 6.1% decline from the previous period (April to June 2023). New commercial real estate loans (CRELs) increased by 30.2% month-on-month to MOP2.31 billion.

PUBLIC WORKS

ZONE A TO SEE CONCLUSION OF FIRST BUILDING NEXT MONTH

ANTHONY LAM

THE first building to be completed in New Urban Zone A will house a series of public service facilities and is scheduled to finish construction in October.

The new building will be home to a wet market, a catering center and a public parking lot. Located on Lot B6, the building is also the first to break ground on Zone A.

The construction project was commissioned in May 2021, with construction originally set to conclude in August this year. However, it was delayed for about two months due to the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the government. The duration of delay was exactly 41 working days. The topping-out of the building was achieved in May this year.

The construction has cost Macau about MOP394 million, slightly over budget by 1.8%.

With nine floors, the building has an area of 2,700 square meters and a constructed floor area



of 32,600 square meters. With three floors allotted for a parking lot, only 270 parking spaces – for both light vehicles and motorcycles – will be available.

According to government data, 12 government housing projects are being constructed in Zone A, with five other still in the tender phase. The entrance and exit of the new bridge linking Macau and Taipa will also be located in Zone A.

Meanwhile, in Cotai, the foun-

ndation work for the former Lotus Bridge Border Checkpoint has also been completed. After relocating the checkpoint to Hengqin, the government demolished the former building and announced plans to construct a multipurpose building on the same plot.

The 8,204-square-meter land plot will support a building with 24 floors above ground and 3 floors underground. The total constructed floor area will mea-

sure 103,000 square meters.

According to the government, the main use of the building will be for offices, commercial spaces, and parking. The lower levels of the building will also function as the transit concourse for the LRT Taipa and Hengqin Lines.

The foundational work for the future building is budgeted to be MOP403 million and has a declared working duration of 307 working days.

Biannual collector art fair returns to Casa Garden

ANTHONY LAM

ORGANIZED by the Orient Foundation, a biannual collector art fair is returning for the second time this year to the gallery at the foundation's headquarters adjacent to Camões Garden.

Officially named the Highly Collectable Art Fair and coordinated by James Wong and Anyform Art Consultancy Co. Ltd., the event aims to promote the excellent work of local artists to the public and further enhance its overall influence.

Organized twice a year, the event will run for the fourth time this



September. The last edition was held in March this year. According to the organizer, it is popular among art enthusiasts

and collectors from Macau and nearby regions.

The fair will run until Sep. 17, from 10am to 7pm, except Mondays. It

will pause each day for an hour between 1pm to 2pm for lunch. Photography within the gallery is strictly prohibited.

Wong justified his insistence on holding the event twice a year by saying that he aims to establish an iconic art collection brand in Macau, achieve popularity, as well as enhance the charm of Macau as a cultural hub.

He also strives to showcase different types of artwork in each edition.

This time, a special area has been set up to display the artworks of the new generation.

This exhibition will

feature affordable works, challenging the public impression that art is pricey and inaccessible. Wong hopes to sell artwork at reasonable prices and seeks to encourage members of the public to appreciate arts and collect artworks.

Another reason for keeping the fair simple and accessible is that doing so frees up the organizers to consider the smallest details so buyers, collectors or audience have better experiences.

Ultimately, Wong would like to develop an industry and cultivate a taste for the arts in Macau.

SECURITY CHIEF SAYS POLICE CADETS EXPELLED FOR INDECENT BEHAVIOR

THE Office of the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak has said in a statement that three police cadets undergoing training at the police academy have been expelled

from the force following a display of indecent behavior.

Footage circulating on social media platforms depicts two police touching each other

inappropriately, while a third person recorded the activity with a mobile phone.

The footage was subsequently released to the public via social media,

with users being able to identify the location as well as the uniforms identifying those involved as police academy recruits.

Wong's office acknow-

ledged that the three police cadets have been expelled due to their poor conduct. It was noted that the school "has already implemented measures to strengthen education and supervision of students to ensure that all cadets demonstrate good conduct and moral values," the statement notes. **RM**

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

AP PHOTO



HEALTH

Food recalls are pretty common for things like rocks, insects and plastic

JONELALECCIA

ROCKS in Trader Joe's cookies. Insects in its broccoli-cheese soup. Pieces of plastic in Banquet frozen chicken strips.

In recent weeks, U.S. consumers have seen high-profile food recalls for an unappetizing reason: They're contaminated with foreign objects that have no place on a dinner plate. And while no one wants to bite down on stainless steel in peanut butter or bone fragments in smoked sausage, this type of contamination is one of the top reasons for food recalls in the U.S.

Food safety experts and federal agencies use the terms "extra-

neous" or "foreign" materials to describe things like metal fragments, rubber gaskets and bits of bugs that somehow make it into packaged goods.

"Extraneous materials" triggered nine recalls in 2022 of more than 477,000 pounds of food regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service — triple the number of recalls tied to food contaminated with toxic E. coli bacteria.

And the size of recalls can reach into the millions: In 2019, USDA reported 34 recalls of more than 16 million pounds of food, spurred in large part by a giant recall of nearly 12 million pounds of Tyson chicken strips tainted with pieces of metal.

Plastic pieces from frayed conveyor belts, wood shards from produce pallets, metal shavings or wire from machinery are all common. So are rocks, sticks and bugs that can make it from the field to the factory.

Some contamination may even be expected, the FDA acknowledges in a handbook.

"It is economically impractical to grow, harvest or process raw products that are totally free of non-hazardous, naturally occurring, unavoidable defects," the agency wrote.

Both the USDA and FDA ask companies to promptly notify them when food is potentially contaminated with objects that may harm consumers. The agen-

cies then determine whether recalls are necessary. Most recalls are voluntary and initiated by the companies, though the agencies can request or mandate the action.

Regulators said the Banquet issue was discovered when someone reported an oral injury after eating chicken strips. ConAgra Brands Inc., which owns Banquet, declined to comment beyond the firm's news release. Trader Joe's wouldn't elaborate on how material got into the foods that led to its recent recalls.

Detection of unwanted objects has vastly improved in the past several years, said Keith Belk, director of the Center for Meat Safety and Quality at Colorado State University. Large manufacturers use

magnets, metal detectors, X-ray devices and other technology to find unwanted materials in their products.

Still, "they're going to miss things," Belk said.

Those things have included pieces of gray nitrile glove that forced the recall of nearly 6,400 pounds of chicken tortilla soup in 2021 and pieces of copper wire that led to recall of nearly 5,800 pounds frozen beef shepherd's pie in 2022.

There are also two notorious examples from 2017: "extraneous golf ball materials" that triggered a recall of frozen hash browns and a dead bat found in bagged salad that led the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to recommend rabies treatment for two people.

In recent years, firms have become increasingly cautious and are recalling products more frequently than before, said Nathan Mirdamadi, a consultant with Commercial Food Sanitation, which advises the industry about food safety.

That may be because consumers don't like finding weird things in their food. When they do, lawsuits may follow, experts said.

"It's never good business to injure your customers," Mirdamadi added.

Actual contamination may affect only a small amount of product, but firms recall all food produced within a certain window just to be safe. And while some of the food may be able to be "re-conditioned" or treated for safety and sold again, "most of the time, it's going to landfills," Mirdamadi said.

Consumers who find foreign materials in food should notify manufacturers, experts said, but also realize that recalls are likely to stick around.

"The thing is, there's never going to be a day where there's zero risk associated with consuming a food product," Belk said. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Galaxy hosts over 10 property visits for academia



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) has welcomed more than 420 teachers and students from different universities from China, Hong Kong, Macau and other tertiary institutions from around the world. According to a statement,

over 10 property visits were organized for the attendees, each with tailored itineraries to meet students' academic and learning needs. The itineraries included visits to GEG's various leisure, entertainment and new MICE facilities,

as well as interactions and exchanges with representatives from GEG's various departments.

The purpose is to enhance cooperation with young academic talent and introduce the diverse developments of Macau's integrated resort industry through various initiatives.

Among the groups received by GEG were outstanding students from nearly 50 universities from around the world, who came to Macau to participate in the Summer Camp for Outstanding Students of UM Partner Universities 2023, along with teachers and students from Peking University who conducted exchange visits with the University of Macau.

One Central presents Picasso's artworks in gemmaux



As part of "Art Macao: Macao International Art Biennale 2023," organized by the Macao SAR Government, One Central Macau presents "Pablo Picasso: Paintings in Glass," for the first time in Macau. Sponsored by Hongkong

Land, the six artworks in this show are among fifty works, each unique and signed, that were selected by Picasso himself between 1954 and 1957. The works are among his most exemplary works to be interpreted in gemmail

(French for 'enamel gem').

This exhibition is the first in Macau to display Picasso's artworks in gemmaux. The exhibition will be presented at the Atrium of One Central Macau, with free admission until 31st October.

As part of Art Macao's theme, "The Statistics of Fortune," this show features works that are reminiscent of the stained-glass aesthetic seen in churches. However, the works are back lit light boxes engineered by a workshop led by physicist Roger Malherbe-Navarre, who worked on light diffraction in Paris in the mid 1950's. At the time, the technique was extremely innovative.

TECH

FORMER CEO OF ALIBABA QUILTS CLOUD BUSINESS IN SURPRISE MOVE DURING ITS LEADERSHIP RESHUFFLE

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

THE former CEO of Alibaba, Daniel Zhang, resigned as head of its cloud computing unit yesterday in a surprise move as the Chinese e-commerce empire wraps up a leadership reshuffle.

Alibaba said it will invest \$1 billion in a technology fund Zhang will establish to support the firm's strategies for future growth.

Zhang stepped down on the same day he gave up his roles as Alibaba's CEO and chairman.

In a filing to the Hong Kong stock exchange, Alibaba said that Eddie Wu, its new CEO, will also head its cloud unit. Wu and Alibaba's new chairman Joseph Tsai assumed their new roles by yesterday, with Alibaba saying it has "completed its leadership transition."

Alibaba expressed its



Daniel Zhang, CEO of Alibaba Group

"deepest appreciation" to Zhang for his contributions to the company over the past 16 years.

Alibaba's Hong Kong stock price was down 3.6%

Monday following the announcement.

In an internal letter dated Sunday and viewed by the AP, Tsai wrote that Zhang had "expressed his wish to

transition away from his role" as chief of the cloud business, and the Alibaba board had "respected and accepted Daniel's decision."

"Daniel will continue to contribute to Alibaba by channeling his expertise differently," Tsai wrote.

Alibaba has been restructuring itself into six business units with the aim of eventually spinning most of them off and listing them to maximize shareholder returns.

In May, the company said it aimed for its cloud unit to be listed within the next 12 months. It reaffirmed that plan on Monday.

Zhang joined Alibaba in 2007 and is known for creating the company's annual Singles Day online shopping extravaganza. In 2015, he took over from co-founder Jack Ma as Alibaba's CEO. In 2019 he succeeded Ma as chairman. **MDT/AP**

AVIATION

AIR CHINA JET EVACUATED AFTER ENGINE FIRE SENDS SMOKE INTO CABIN IN SINGAPORE, NINE PEOPLE INJURED

NINE passengers were injured after an engine fire sent smoke into the cabin of an Air China jetliner landing in Singapore, prompting an evacuation of the aircraft.

The Airbus A320 with 146 passengers and nine crew made an emergency landing about 4:15 p.m. Sunday, Changi Airport said in a statement on its Facebook page. The flight was coming from the city of Chengdu in China's Sichuan province.

Nine people had minor injuries related to smoke inhalation and abrasions during the evacuation, the statement said.

The pilot declared an emergency after reporting smoke in the forward cargo hold and a lavatory. Smoke blurred the lights in the cabin and flight attendants told people to remain calm and stay in their seats after some stood up, a passenger told Chinese media.

The fire in the left engine was extinguished after the plane landed, Chinese media said. A preliminary investigation indicated a mechanical failure in the engine was the cause, Air China said in statement posted on social media early yesterday.

The investigation was continuing. **MDT/AP**

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ESPIONAGE

British PM Sunak chides Beijing after report that a Parliament staffer is a suspected Beijing spy

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

PRIME Minister Rishi Sunak chastised China's premier yesterday [Macau time] for "unacceptable" interference in British democracy, after a newspaper reported that a researcher in Parliament was arrested earlier this year on suspicion of spying for Beijing.

Sunak said he raised the issue with Premier Li Qiang when the two met at a Group of 20 summit in India. He told British broadcasters in New Delhi that he'd expressed "my very strong concerns about any interference in our parliamentary democracy, which is obviously unacceptable."

The two men met after the Metropolitan Police force confirmed that a man in his 20s and a man in his 30s were arrested in March under the Official Secrets Act. Neither has been charged and both were

AP PHOTO



Rishi Sunak with Narendra Modi: the British PM attended the G20 summit last week

bailed until October pending further inquiries.

A Chinese Embassy statement called the allegations "completely fabricated and nothing but malicious slander." China urges "relevant parties in the U.K. to stop their anti-China political manipulation," the statement said.

The Sunday Times reported that

the younger man was a parliamentary researcher who worked with senior lawmakers from the governing Conservatives, including Alicia Kearns, who now heads the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, and her predecessor in that role, Tom Tugendhat, who is now security minister. The newspaper said the suspect held a pass that allows full

access to the Parliament buildings, issued to lawmakers, staff and journalists after security vetting.

Tensions between Britain and China have risen in recent years over accusations of economic subterfuge, human rights abuses and Beijing's crackdown on civil liberties in Hong Kong.

Britain's Conservatives are divided on how tough a line to take with Beijing and on how much access Chinese firms should have to the U.K. economy. More hawkish Tories want Beijing declared a threat, but Sunak has referred to China's growing power as a "challenge."

U.K. spy services have sounded ever-louder warnings about Beijing's covert activities. In November, the head of the MI5 domestic intelligence agency, Ken McCallum, said "the activities of the Chinese Communist Party pose the most game-changing strategic challenge to the U.K." Foreign intelligence

chief Richard Moore of MI6 said in July that China was his agency's "single most important strategic focus."

In January 2022, MI5 issued a rare public alert, saying a London-based lawyer was trying to "covertly interfere in U.K. politics" on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party. It alleged attorney Christine Lee was acting in coordination with the Chinese ruling party's United Front Work Department, an organization known to exert Chinese influence abroad.

An opposition Labour Party lawmaker, Barry Gardiner, received more than 500,000 pounds (\$685,000) from Lee between 2015 and 2020, mostly for office costs, and her son worked in Gardiner's office. Lee and the Chinese government both deny wrongdoing.

China has repeatedly criticized what it calls British interference in its internal affairs and denied meddling in the politics of foreign nations.

Sunak and Li met days after Foreign Secretary James Cleverly visited Beijing, the highest-level trip by a British politician to China for several years. Chinese President Xi Jinping did not attend the G20 meeting in India.

Sunak defended his approach of cautious engagement, saying, "There's no point carping from the sidelines — I'd rather be in there directly expressing my concerns, and that's what I did today." **MDT/AP**

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CEM NOTICE

Temporary traffic arrangements for cable threading work at Avenida do Infante D. Henrique and Avenida Doutor Mário Soares

To cooperate with CEM's cable threading work, from 11 September (Monday) to 13 September (Wednesday) from 1:30 am to 5:30 am daily, the section of Avenida do Infante D. Henrique near Praça de Ferreira do Amaral will be closed to traffic; bus routes such as 26A and N1A (to Baía Norte do Fai Chi Kei), 101X (to Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Frontier Port) and N3 (to Coloane Village) need to be diverted, and the stops along the way will remain unchanged.

To cooperate with the work progress, traffic will be limited on the section of Avenida Doutor Mário Soares near the Grand Emperor Hotel from 14 September (Thursday) to 16 September (Saturday). During this period, the section of Avenida Doutor Mário Soares near Praça da Amizade will be closed to traffic between 1:30 am and 5:30 am daily. The N2 bus route (to Baía Norte do Fai Chi Kei) needs to be diverted, and the stops along the way will remain unchanged.

For details of the temporary arrangements for bus services, please visit the websites of the two bus companies (www.tcm.com.mo and www.transmac.com.mo).

VIETNAM

Biden wraps visit by talking with business leaders and visiting a memorial to John McCain

JOSH BOAK AND
AAMER MADHANI, HANOI

PRESIDENT Joe Biden was wrapping up a visit to Vietnam yesterday, meeting with Vietnamese government officials and business leaders and spotlighting new deals and partnerships between the two countries. He'll also visit a Hanoi memorial honoring his late friend and colleague Sen. John McCain, who was held for more than five years as a prisoner during the Vietnam War.

Biden met with Prime Minister Phm Minh Chinh, who also accompanied Biden to a quick drop by at a meeting of business leaders. Biden also sat down with President Võ Vn Thng, who hosted the U.S. president for a formal state luncheon.

Biden spoke about strengthening Vietnam's semiconductor industry and his administration's commitment to an open Pacific.

"My message today is quite simple. Let's keep it up," Biden told the CEOs. "We need to develop and drive our collaboration, We need to forge new partnerships."

The prime minister also stressed the need to improve cooperation and said "the sky is the limit" for the expanding U.S.-Vietnam relationship.

"We truly wish to receive strong political commitment from the U.S. government including you, Mr. President, who has had great affection for Vietnam," the prime minister said.

Highlights of the major deals announced by the White House during Biden's first-ever visit to Vietnam include U.S.-based Boeing's \$7.5 billion deal with Vietnam Airlines to buy about 50 aircraft and Arizona-based Amkor Technology's plans for a \$1.6 billion factory in Bac Ninh Province.

The White House also said the administration would help "build Vietnamese capacity to fight regional and international transnational crime," including targeting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. China has



Vietnamese Prime Minister Phm Minh Chinh (right) meets with U.S. President Joe Biden at the Government Office in Hanoi, yesterday

been locked in long-running territorial conflicts with Vietnam, along with the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei, as Beijing claims waters in the other nations' exclusive economic zone.

Biden arrived in Vietnam on Sunday and met with Nguyn Phú Trong, general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Trong formally announced Vietnam had elevated the U.S. to its highest diplomatic status, comprehensive strategic partner. Biden said the shift demonstrated how far bilateral relations had evolved from the "bitter past" of the Vietnam War.

At the same time, Biden insisted that his roughly 24-hour visit was not about trying to start a "cold war" with China but was part of a broader effort to improve global stability by building relationships throughout Asia, including with Vietnam, at a time of tensions with Beijing.

Biden was ending the trip at the John Sidney McCain III Memorial near where, as a 31-year-old Navy lieutenant commander, his Skyhawk dive bomber was shot down by the North Vietnamese.

McCain parachuted out of the plane and landed in a lake in Hanoi, North Vietnam. He broke both arms and a leg in the fall, was dra-

gged from the water by an angry crowd, and was beaten and bayoneted.

The harrowing 1967 incident began a more than five-year ordeal that became the defining moment for the future Republican senator from Arizona and two-time presidential candidate.

After six weeks in the hospital, McCain, who had lost about one-third of his weight, was transferred to a prison cell. After a brief time with cellmates, McCain, the son and grandson of four-star admirals, began two years in solitary confinement in a 10-by-10 foot room.

At one point, McCain's captors asked if he wanted to go home, but it was a trick question. The U.S. military's code of conduct required prisoners to be released in the order they were detained. The North Vietnamese wanted to make a show of releasing McCain early as his father assumed command over the Pacific. McCain refused.

For four days after he refused release, McCain was beaten every two to three hours by 10 guards. Filled with thoughts of suicide, McCain broke and agreed to sign an anti-U.S. propaganda statement confessing to "black crimes." He later wrote: "I had learned what we all learned over there: Every man

has his breaking point. I had reached mine."

It was the last time McCain would break. He refused to sign any other statements or meet with visiting American anti-war activists. Eventually, McCain was removed from solitary confinement and mingled with other U.S. prisoners of war. He was released on March 14, 1973.

McCain returned home, retired from the Navy in 1981, moved to Arizona and launched a political career. He was elected to the House in 1982 and, in 1986, to the Senate, where he and Biden were colleagues. Despite his experience in Vietnam, McCain was a strong advocate of restoring diplomatic relations with the country that had so badly mistreated him.

He sought the Republican presidential nomination in 2000 and 2008, failing to win it both times. He died of brain cancer in 2018. Biden delivered an emotional eulogy at McCain's funeral in Arizona.

On the way back to Washington, Biden was stopping at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, to address service members, first responders and their families to mark the 22nd anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

2001 US DECLARES WAR ON TERROR



The President of the United States has described the destruction caused in New York and Washington as an act of war against all freedom-loving people.

In a statement broadcast at 1053 local time (1553 BST), George Bush vowed the US would use all its resources to avenge the worst-ever attacks on American soil.

But he warned an angry and wounded nation they would have to be patient and said any action could be a monumental struggle.

The president has also been seeking the backing of world leaders for an international campaign against terrorism.

As the estimated number of dead rose into the thousands the day after the tragedy, members of the US government began talking openly of war.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said: "It isn't going to be solved with a single counter-attack against one individual, it's going to be a long term conflict."

Expressions of support have come quickly from American allies, and also from countries not known for their sympathy with the US - the leaders of Libya and Palestine both condemned the attacks in the strongest terms.

Only Iraq has endorsed the atrocity, saying the attacks were a "lesson for all tyrants and oppressors" and the fruit of American crimes.

Tony Blair offered the unequivocal backing of the UK, echoing President Bush's words in his press conference announcing the recall of Parliament.

"I don't think there is any doubt at all that this threat is aimed at the whole democratic world," the prime minister told reporters.

"The US has been singled out... But these terrorists will regard us all as targets."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The criminal investigation quickly identified the hijackers, and linked them to al-Qaeda - the Islamic militant group set up by the Afghanistan-based Osama Bin Laden. President Bush's "War on Terror" began on 8 October 2001 with an air bombardment of Afghanistan by US and UK forces. With the help of the Northern Alliance opposition group, the Taliban leaders of the country were quickly toppled. Many alleged members of al-Qaeda were caught and flown to a US base on Cuba, but Bin Laden proved to be more elusive and the hunt for him still continues.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Lovers may prove unworthy of your affection. Use your creative talent in order to accomplish your goals. Travel may be confusing. You will be able to make financial gains.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
 Opportunities to make advancements through good business sense are apparent. Spend time by yourself to avoid any conflicts with family members.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
 Major job changes or opportunities to get ahead professionally are apparent. You will also encounter individuals who can help you further your goals.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Look closely at motives and honesty in your personal encounters. Your ability to charm others will bring added popularity.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Look closely at motives and honesty in your personal encounters. Your ability to charm others will bring added popularity.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 You may find acquaintances being deceptive. Broaden your horizons and look into programs that will teach you awareness and relaxation.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Get promises in writing or you will be disappointed. You will be drawn to individuals who can provide you with both intellectual conversation and physical passion.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Children will be of major concern if you haven't kept the lines of communication open. You have done all you can to sort things out a personal level.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 You may be tired of working for someone else. Your ability to do detailed work will dazzle those who are less creative. Your diplomacy will be of utmost importance today.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Use your creative abilities to come up with new ideas and directions. When the work is done, they may serve you for a change. Be innovative. Keep tabs on your spending.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Social activity with friends and relatives will be most successful. Try not to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Don't ignore any emotional issues that could be causing problems.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Social events will be plentiful. Rethink your motives and make the necessary changes to yourself. Look into any educational activities involving the whole family.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

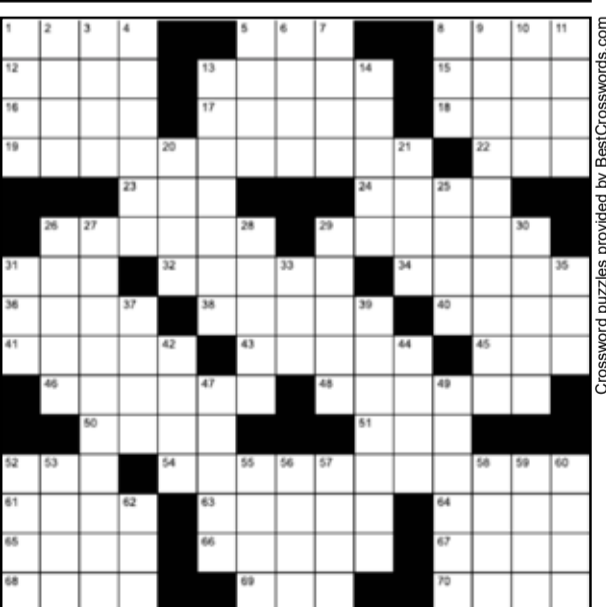
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	19	28	fine
Changchun	11	22	fine
Chengdu	18	27	overcast
Chongqing	26	27	rain
Fuzhou	24	32	cloudy
Guangzhou	25	32	showers
Guiyang	19	24	overcast
Haikou	25	31	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	23	34	thunderstorms
Harbin	10	19	cloudy
Hefei	21	24	rain
Nanjing	25	26	thunderstorms
Shanghai	25	31	rain
Taipei	24	29	cloudy
Wuhan	23	26	rain
Hong Kong	24	27	thunderstorms
WORLD			
Moscow	8	20	overcast
Frankfurt	17	29	overcast
Paris	17	21	rain
London	13	22	rain
New York	21	28	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Roseanne, once; 5- Coal scuttle; 8- Moonfish; 12- Wings; 13- 3rd letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 15- A hobgoblin; 16- Throw; 17- Potala Palace site; 18- Worthless person; 19- Dominance; 22- Boy toy; 23- Refusals; 24- Heavy book; 26- Diminutive; 29- Nullify; 31- Rockers Steely ___; 32- Embankment; 34- No longer on deck; 36- Graceful horse; 38- One in a cab, say; 40- Achy; 41- Small beginning; 43- European viper; 45- Corrida cry; 46- Pollen producer; 48- Furtive; 50- Chow ___; 51- Not to mention; 52- Chowded down; 54- Letter of recommendation; 61- Ruin; 63- Lobster state; 64- Bang-up; 65- Diner orders; 66- Jerks; 67- One of a matching pair; 68- Otherwise; 69- ACLU concerns; 70- Bridge seat;

DOWN 1- Cricket equipment; 2- Baseball family name; 3- Coarse file, angry tone of voice; 4- Take as an affront; 5- "The Farmer in the Dell" syllables; 6- "A Jug of Wine..." poet; 7- Ricky's portrayer; 8- Delivery room docs; 9- Handbag; 10- Malaria symptom; 11- Song in praise of God; 13- Glitter; 14- Starbucks order; 20- Churn; 21- Indian exercise method; 25- Floor coverings; 26- Seine spot; 27- Laws; 28- Perrier rival; 29- Food and water; 30- Ahead of time; 31- Hoover ___; 33- Hall or Byrnes; 35- Driving peg; 37- Highland hillside; 39- Christens anew; 42- Drop; 44- "All The Way To ___", song by REM; 47- Antagonist; 49- Congenitally attached; 52- French clergyman; 53- Like some orders; 55- Coal-rich region; 56- Hue; 57- Signs; 58- Hawkeye's home; 59- Black cuckoos; 60- Gave temporarily, holy period of 40 days; 62- Compass pt.;



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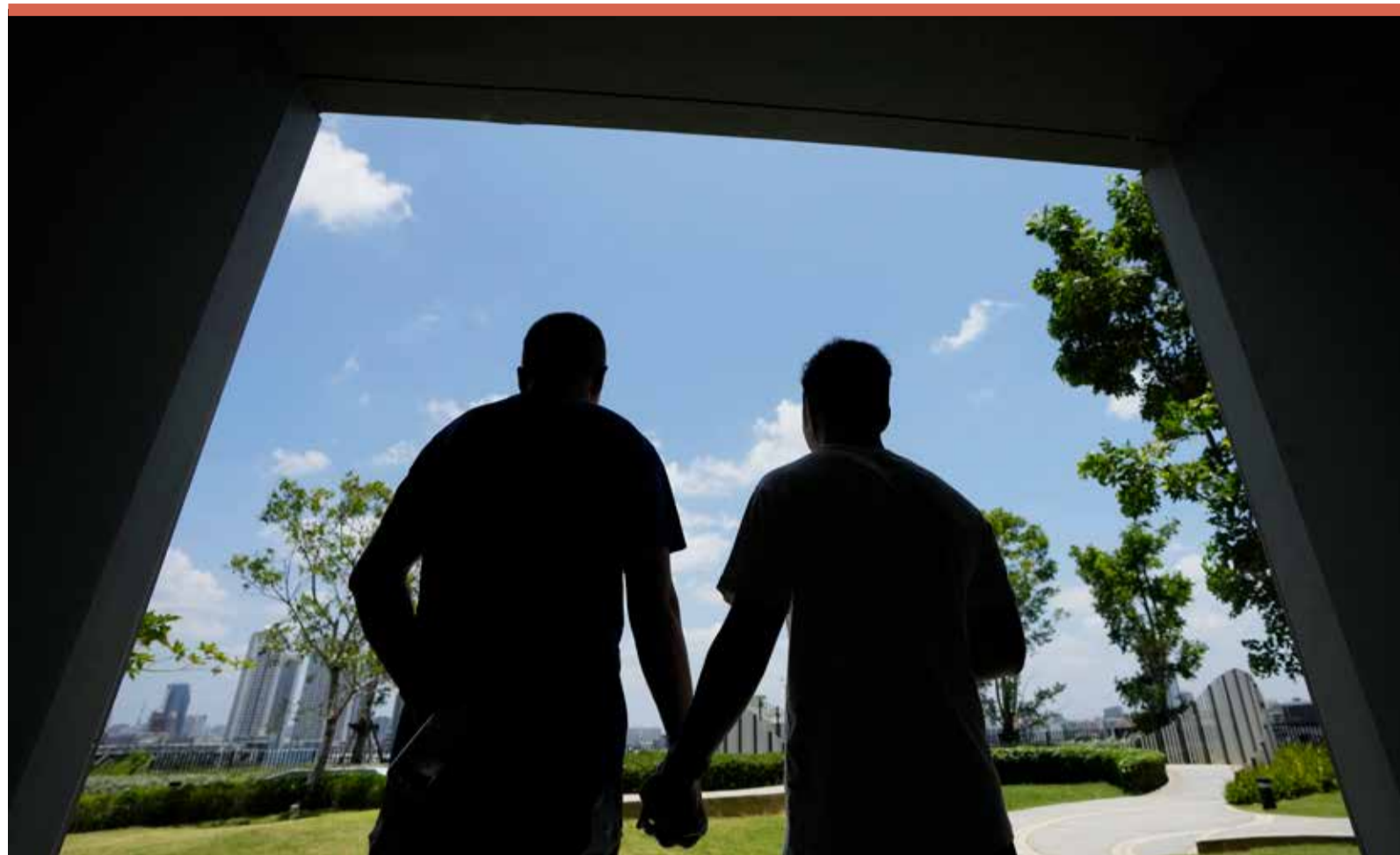
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AP PHOTO



TRAVEL

THAILAND'S LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY DRAWS TOURISTS FROM CHINA LOOKING TO BE THEMSELVES

YUCHENG TANG, BANGKOK

XINYU Wen traveled to Thailand in June, planning a two-week vacation around Bangkok's Pride parade.

Instead, the 28-year-old stayed a month and a half, as her experience at the parade gave rise to discussions and discoveries in the Thai capital's thriving LGBTQ+ community.

LGBTQ+ people from China, frequently ostracized at home, are coming to Thailand in droves, drawn by the freedom to be themselves. When Wen walked along the parade on the streets in Bangkok, "I felt like I was in a big party or a huge amusement park. We could forget all upsetting things and feel fun-filled," she said.

Bangkok is only a 5-hour flight from Beijing, and Thailand's tourism authorities actively promote its status as among the most open to LGBTQ+ people in the region.

Wen got interested in Thailand when her friend sent her a photo of rainbow-colored, Pride-themed ice cream being sold on the streets.

"I wanted to go to Thailand to take a look," she said.

Wen describes herself as queer, which she says means that her partners can be any gender and she can be any gender. At home, Wen said she regularly gets judgmental stares on the street for wearing her hair short like a

man's, and was once asked by her barber: "What happened to your life?"

But at the Bangkok Pride parade in June, Wen noticed people confidently wore what they wanted. She was excited to be able to express herself publicly and finally drop her guard. More than that, she said she was also impressed by the protest element to the event, in which people carried signs written in traditional Chinese with slogans like "China has no LGBTQ" and "Freedom is what we deserve."

"I felt a mixed feeling, touched but sad," she said.

Ahead of her trip, she read up on the situation in Thailand, finding reports that showed there is still widespread discrimination, especially in the workplace. Thailand does not recognize same-sex unions or marriages, which also means they're barred from adopting children, and other legal processes that straight couples have access to.

Wen arrived at the parade somewhat skeptical. But she ended up finding it empowering.

"Although I initially had a critical attitude toward the parade in Bangkok because discrimination against LGBTQ individuals hasn't disappeared, I still felt inspired because the neglected groups and the suppressed feelings matter here."

Thailand Tourism Authority of-

cial Apichai Chatchalermkit said in an Aug. 9 article in The Nation newspaper that LGBTQ+ tourists are considered "high-potential" as they tend to spend more and travel more frequently than other visitors.

"Using a photo of LGBTQ+ individuals in tourism advertisements is considered as offering a warm welcome without discrimination," he said.

Thailand doesn't keep figures on LGBTQ+ tourists. But through mid-August, it has counted 2.2 million Chinese tourists out of an overall 16 million.

Owen Zhu, a gay real estate agent in Bangkok who sells houses to Chinese clients, said many are also coming to stay. He es-

timated some 2/3 of his clients are LGBTQ+, many of whom buy apartments to live in part- or full-time.

"Among Chinese gay people, Thailand is called gay's heaven," he said, noting that there are many chat groups where gay men from China coordinate trips to Thailand and share information about parties and tickets to events.

Being gay is not illegal in China, though other Asian countries have strict laws around homosexuality — such as Malaysia, which announced in August that anyone in possession of an LGBTQ+-themed watch could be jailed for 3 years. But LGBTQ+ people in China face other pressures to

conform that can make the free expression of their identities difficult.

As a lesbian in her conservative province in central China, Jade Yang was talked into marrying a gay man at her parents' request so that both of them could keep up appearances.

The 28-year-old, who works in the television industry, first visited Thailand four years ago and remembers being shocked to hear people talk casually about their same-sex partners. Yang disliked lying to her cousins and friends about the marriage and moved to Thailand in February, saying she wanted to distance herself from her hometown.

Now, she said, she can date the women she likes and focus on her studies and career without worrying about how to act as a straight woman.

"I wasted a lot of time over the past three years," she said. "After coming here, I feel the world is so big for me to explore. I have also learned I should not deny the way I am so easily, and love myself better."

At the Silver Sand gay bar in Bangkok, owner Adisak Wongwaikankha said about 30% of his customers are LGBTQ+ people from China, and that number has been growing.

He operates a bar on the ground floor and a drag show on the second floor.

"Most of our Chinese customers come with excitement and curiosity," he said.

Another draw for tourists, inside and outside the LGBTQ+ community, is Thailand's loose enforcement of prostitution laws and renowned nightclub shows.

Eros Li first came to Thailand in February to check out the nightlife and the massage parlors, many of which offer sex services. The 42-year-old returned two months later, saying that, while there are some spas in China where similar sex services are on offer, they are less accessible and there is a risk of being arrested.

"The LGBTQ community in Thailand is lively and open. I received many messages on gay dating apps every day, which made me happy," Li said. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Owen Zhu (right) a gay real estate agent, and his friend, sit in gay bar Silver Sand, before its show in Bangkok

BASKETBALL

FIBA, Manila organizers reflect on World Cup's successes

TIM REYNOLDS, MANILA

NONE of the teams that medaled in the 2019 Basketball World Cup made the medal round at this year's World Cup. And only two quarterfinalists from 2019 made the quarterfinals this year.

It represents almost unprecedented turnover, and FIBA doesn't mind.

FIBA secretary general Andreas Zagklis, in his traditional end-of tournament news conference on Sunday, said basketball's governing body is seeing the impact of recent decisions to increase the size of the field to 32 teams and to have 80 teams be part of the qualification process for those spots.

"Parity is good," Zagklis said. "It's good because it means competitiveness. It is excellent if it comes together with a higher level of play all the time. What we have achieved is we have re-



ached a greater depth in the roster of countries. Nine of the 32 that came to this World Cup did not play in the previous World Cup."

The quarterfinalists in 2019: The U.S., Serbia, Argentina, France, Spain, Poland, Australia and the Czech Republic. Of those, only the U.S. and Serbia made it that deep into this year's

tournament. Spain, Argentina and France won gold, silver and bronze four years ago; Spain was ousted in the second round this year, Argentina didn't even make the tournament and France was eliminated in Round 1.

"The decision to open up to 80 teams the qualification has changed global basketball on the

men's side," Zagklis said. "There's no doubt about that. I do believe that we have seen very high-level basketball."

He also lauded the work that the three host nations — the Philippines, Indonesia and Japan — did to execute the event. Manila, Jakarta and Okinawa played host to first- and second-round games. The final rounds were played in Manila, and Sunday's gold-medal game capped a 45-year wait for the basketball-crazed nation to play host to the title contest again.

"It's pride that we were able to host," said Philippine businessman and sports backer Manuel V. Pangilinan, who was instrumental in bringing the World Cup to Manila. "It'd been quite some time since 1978, 45 years. I just thought the Philippines deserved it again."

He came up with an unusual strategy — spread the event out over three countries, because he thought FIBA would be reluctant

to award a second consecutive World Cup to an Asian country after China played host in 2019.

"So, we had to be quite creative," Pangilinan said. "We took a lead from FIFA because there was a time when Korea and Japan co-hosted the World Cup. We thought about this ... and we had the sympathetic ear of Patrick Baumann."

Baumann was FIBA's secretary general until his unexpected death in 2018. He asked Pangilinan to lay out his vision, promising to listen with an open mind. In December 2017, the tri-nation bid was formally accepted by FIBA and the World Cup was awarded.

"And the rest is history," Pangilinan said.

FIBA saw its single-game attendance record broken on Day 1 of the World Cup when the Philippines officially drew 38,115 — local officials contend the number of tickets distributed was even higher — for a game against the Dominican Republic. FIBA pointed to other successes from this tournament, such as a game involving Japan's national team being that country's most-watched television show this year, and huge rises in social media engagement and follower numbers compared to China 2019.

"What a tournament we've had," Zagklis said. **MDT/AP**

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FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS

OPINION

China Daily

Gao Wencheng, Xinhua

THIS TIME FOR AFRICA AND A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

The African Union (AU) celebrated its founding anniversary Saturday, marking its creation in 1999. This year, the joy was doubled as the AU became a new Group of 20 (G20) member on the same day.

"It's finally Africa's time," many Africans said on social media, echoing "Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)," the official song of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

It's a dreams-come-true moment for the AU, which has long strived for a more significant role in world affairs. In the AU's Agenda 2063, the continent's blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future, "Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner," is one of seven aspirations.

In the continent's march towards "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa," the AU has been Africa's most representative and crucial inter-government organization. Since its inception, it has significantly contributed to peace, stability and development in Africa and become a banner of strength through unity. The continental body has also effectively coordinated its 55 members to speak as one on the international stage, commanding more global attention.

With full membership in the G20, the AU has renewed momentum to participate vigorously in world affairs. The next time the G20 discusses major international economic issues, Africa will have a bigger say in shaping global governance and striving for more benefits for the African people.

The addition of the AU to the G20 "will increase the voice of Africa, visibility, and influence on the global stage and provide a platform to advance the common interest of our people," Kenyan President William Ruto commented.

The rise of the Global South has significantly increased the multipolarity of the international system. The AU's membership in the G20 has provided a new impetus for this process.

Given the desire for a more multipolar world, China and other partners have supported the AU in pursuing a G20 membership and its efforts to amplify African voices. China was the first country to explicitly express its support for including the AU in the G20. China supports prioritizing Africa's aspirations on the UN Security Council and urges multilateral financial institutions to increase African representation.

On many occasions, China, as the largest developing country in the world and a member of the Global South, has repeatedly called for developing countries to have a greater voice in global governance. In his recent meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Chinese Premier Li Qiang emphasized the need to reform global economic governance and increase the representation of developing countries in international financial institutions.

While celebrating the diplomatic success of the AU, J. C. Okechukwu, a Nigerian filmmaker, recalled the bitter history of Africa. At the founding of the UN in 1945, when many African countries were fighting for decolonization from the West, only four African countries were present. "How can a slave sit at the table with his masters for meals or talks?" he said on X, explaining the absence of most African countries in then-global governance.

Almost eight decades later, the AU is now a G20 permanent member, representing what Okechukwu calls "the aggressive emergence of the multipolar world today."

His observation is on point.

[Abridged]

AFGHANISTAN IS THE FASTEST-GROWING MAKER OF METHAMPHETAMINE, UN DRUG AGENCY SAYS

THE BUZZ

Afghanistan is the world's fastest-growing maker of methamphetamine, a report from the United Nations drug agency said yesterday [Macau time]. The country is also a major opium producer and heroin source, even though the Taliban declared a war on narcotics after they returned to power in August 2021.

The United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crimes, which published the report, said meth in Afghanistan is mostly made from legally available substances or extracted from the ephedra plant, which grows in the wild.

The report called Afghanistan's meth manufacturing a growing

threat to national and regional health and security because it could disrupt the synthetic drug market and fuel addiction. It said seizures of meth suspected to have come from Afghanistan have been reported from the European Union and east Africa.

Annual meth seizure totals from inside the country rose from less than 100 kilograms in 2019 to nearly 2,700 kilograms in 2021, suggesting increased production, the report said. But it couldn't give a value for the country's meth supply, the quantities being produced, nor its domestic usage, because it doesn't have the data.

AP FILE PHOTO



NORTH KOREAN TRAIN PRESUMABLY CARRYING KIM JONG UN DEPARTED FOR RUSSIA: REPORTS

A North Korean train presumably carrying North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has departed for Russia for a possible meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, South Korean media said yesterday.

Citing unidentified South Korean government sources, the Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported that the train likely left the North Korean capital of Pyongyang on Sunday evening and that a Kim-Putin meeting is possible as early today.

The Yonhap news agency and some other media published similar reports. Japan's Kyodo news agency cited Russian officials as saying that Kim was possibly heading for Russia in his personal train.

South Korea's Presidential Office and National Intelligence Service didn't immediately confirm those details.

U.S. officials released intelligence last week that North Korea and Russia were arranging a meeting between their leaders that would take place within this month as they expand their cooperation in the face of deepening confrontations with the United States.

According to U.S. officials, Putin could focus on securing more supplies of North Korean artillery and other ammunition to refill draining reserves and put further pressure on the

West to pursue negotiations amid concerns about a protracted conflict in Ukraine.

In exchange, Kim could seek badly needed energy and food aid and advanced weapons technologies, including those related to intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear-capable ballistic missile submarines and military reconnaissance satellites, analysts say.

There are concerns that potential Russian technology transfers would increase the threat posed by Kim's growing arsenal of nuclear weapons and missiles that are designed to target the United States, South Korea, and Japan.

After a complicated, hot-and-cold relationship for decades, Russia and North Korea have been drawing closer to each other since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The bond has been driven by Putin's need for war help and Kim's efforts to boost the visibility of his partnerships with traditional allies Moscow and Beijing as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and have North Korea be part of a united front against Washington.

The United States has been accusing North Korea since last year of providing Russia with arms, including artillery shells sold to the Russian mercenary group Wagner. Both Russian and North Korean officials denied such claims. But spe-

culation about the countries' military cooperation grew after Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu made a rare visit to North Korea in July, when Kim invited him to an arms exhibition and a massive military parade in the capital where he showcased ICBMs designed to target the U.S. mainland.

Following Shoigu's visit, Kim toured North Korea's weapons factories, including a facility producing artillery systems where he urged workers to speed up the development and large-scale production of new kinds of ammunition. Experts say Kim's visits to the factories likely had a dual goal of encouraging the modernization of North Korean weaponry and examining artillery and other supplies that could possibly be exported to Russia.

Some analysts say a potential meeting between Kim and Putin would be more about symbolic gains than substantial military cooperation.

Russia — which has always closely guarded its most important weapons technologies, even from key allies such as China — could be unwilling to make major technology transfers with North Korea for what is likely to be limited war supplies transported over a small rail link between the countries, they say. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Maldivians will return to the polls on Sept. 30 to vote in a runoff election between the top two candidates in the country's presidential race after neither secured more than 50% in the first round, the elections commission said. Main opposition candidate Mohamed Muiz managed a surprise lead with more than 46% of votes, while the incumbent President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who was seen as the favorite, got only 39%.

Norway A 25-year-old foreign student has been arrested in Norway on suspicion of espionage, including illegal eavesdropping through various technical devices. Norway's domestic security agency, known by its acronym PST, told Norwegian media that the man, who was arrested on Friday, was charged in court yesterday [Macau time] with espionage and intelligence operations against the Nordic country. The man, whose identity and nationality haven't been disclosed, has pleaded not guilty in initial police questioning.

AP PHOTO



Morocco People slept in the streets of Marrakech for a third straight night as soldiers and international aid teams in trucks and helicopters began to fan into remote mountain towns hit hardest by a historic earthquake. The disaster killed more than 2,100 people — a number that is expected to rise — and the United Nations estimated that 300,000 people were affected by Friday night's magnitude 6.8 quake.

Egypt's annual inflation rate hit a new record high in August, as the cash-strapped country continues to battle price hikes and a depreciating currency, the Egyptian statistics bureau said. The annual inflation rate reached 39.7% last month, up from 38.2% recorded in July, according to data released by the state-run Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics. On a monthly basis, prices grew 1.6% last month, down from a prior 1.9% rise in July.