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CTM

DISTRICT COMMUNITY BOARD MEMBER CALLED FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO TAXI SERVICES, ESPECIALLY ENABLING EASIER ACCESS FOR NON-CHINESE SPEAKERS

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CHINA'S INFLATION DATA SHOW ECONOMY IN DOLDRUMS DESPITE A SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT IN TRADE

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AP PHOTO



Afghanistan A powerful 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck western Afghanistan yesterday, just over a week after strong quakes and aftershocks killed thousands of people and flattened entire villages in the same region. The U.S. Geological Survey said the latest quake's epicenter was about 34 kilometers outside Herat, the provincial capital, and eight kilometers below the surface.

AP PHOTO



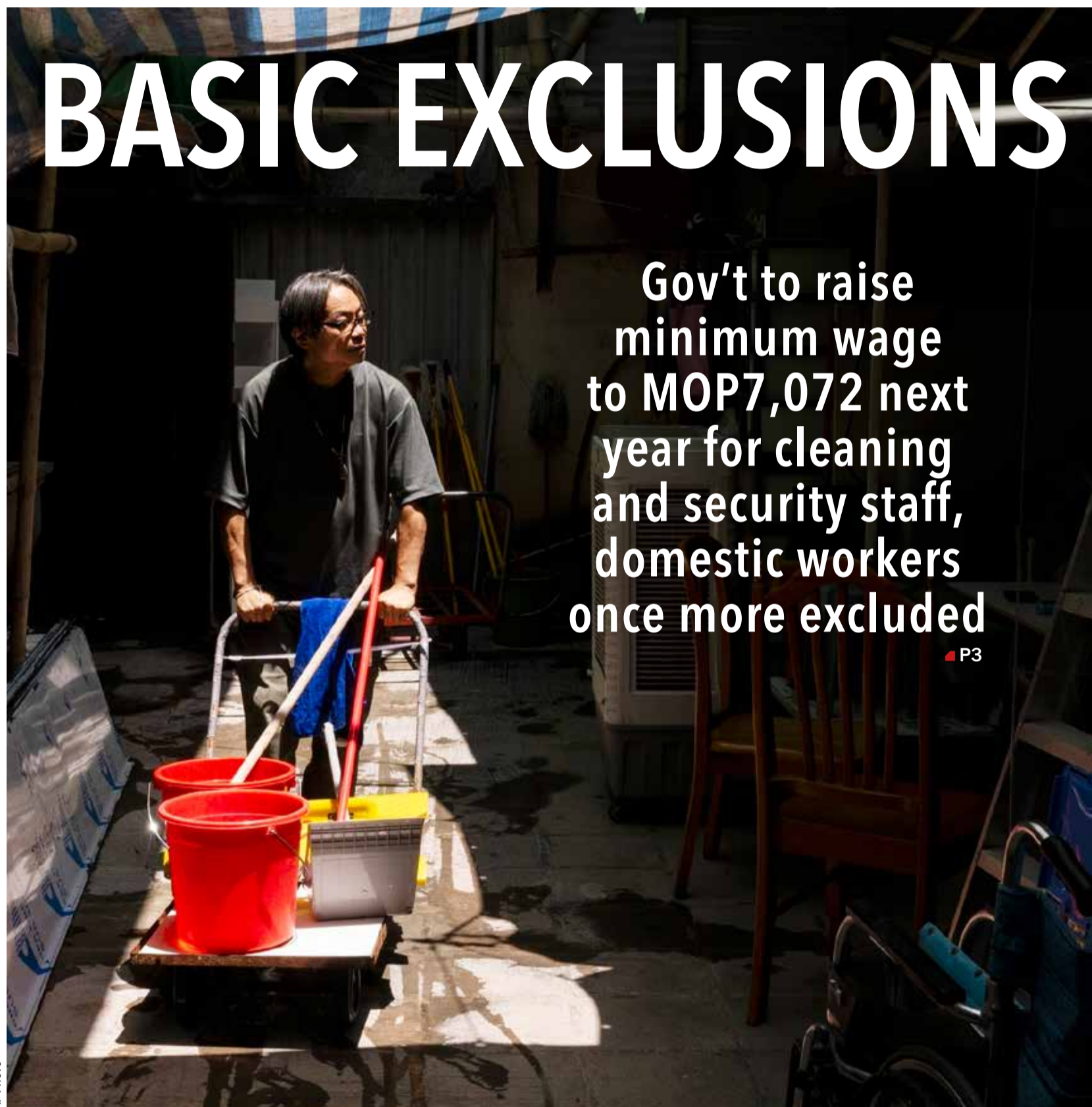
New Zealand Conservative former businessman Christopher Luxon (pictured) will be New Zealand's next prime minister after winning a decisive election victory Saturday. People voted for change after six years of a liberal government led for most of that time by Jacinda Ardern. The exact makeup of Luxon's government is still to be determined as ballots continued to be counted.

AP PHOTO



Iran's foreign minister on Saturday called on Israel to stop its attacks on Gaza, warning that the war might expand to other parts of the Middle East if Hezbollah joins the battle, and that would make Israel suffer "a huge earthquake." Hossein Amirabdollahian told reporters in Beirut that Lebanon's Hezbollah group has taken all the scenarios of a war into consideration and Israel should stop its attacks on Gaza as soon as possible.

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BASIC EXCLUSIONS

Gov't to raise minimum wage to MOP7,072 next year for cleaning and security staff, domestic workers once more excluded

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**Q3 GDP TO SOAR
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The series of festive events in the last three months of the year will improve optimism: MEA

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**AUSTRALIAN GOLFER
MIN WOO LEE WINS IN
USD1M MACAO OPEN**

Australian golfer Min Woo Lee won the USD1 million Macao Open yesterday, shooting a final-round 63 to secure a two-shot victory over Thailand's Poom Saksanin in a record-breaking win. Reflecting on his achievements, he said, "I played wonderful, really flawless golf for a lot of the holes. There were only a few holes that I could really look back on critically, but I'm really proud of the way I handled myself." He ended the week with a score of 30-under par, carding only two bogeys across an excellent four rounds. Before the Asian Tour tournament, Lee was ranked number 47 in the world.

**TOURIST PRICE INDEX
UP 22% IN Q3**

The Macau SAR's Tourist Price Index (TPI) for the third quarter increased 22.22% year-on-year to 141.16, according to the latest report from the Statistics and Census Service. The report showed that the quarterly increase was mainly attributable to higher hotel room rates, rising costs for restaurant services and higher jewelry prices. The price index of accommodation soared 180% year-on-year. Price indices of entertainment and cultural activities, and clothing and footwear increased 17.01% and 4.9% respectively. Higher hotel room rates pushed up the price index of accommodation by 14.87% quarter-to-quarter.

**SAR DELEGATION TO
PARTICIPATE IN 3RD BELT
AND ROAD FORUM FOR
INT'L COOPERATION**

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng will lead a high-level delegation to participate in the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which will be held in Beijing from Tuesday to Wednesday. The SAR government said yesterday that the delegation comprises senior local officials, including Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong, and Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Ao Ieong U. In addition, the delegation also includes representatives of the industrial and business sectors, returned overseas Chinese, young people, as well as the industries of finance, science and technology, conventions and exhibitions, and tourism.

COURTS

**SENIOR PROSECUTOR DENIES 89
ALLEGATIONS AS HEARING COMMENCES**

ANTHONY LAM

AT his first hearing, Assistant Prosecutor General Kong Chi has denied 89 bribery and criminal syndicate charges against him, while questioning the legitimacy of the allegations.

Kong is alleged to have formed a criminal syndicate with Choi Sao Ieng, Ng Wai Chu and lawyer Kuan Hoi Lon.

It is alleged the four were distributing and selling evidence such as exhibits and testimonies, as intelligence for suspects to use in the defense proceedings. Kong is also accused of misfeasance and improper access of materials, among other charges.

Through these illegal means, he was also said to have helped suspects or stakeholders be acquitted or obtain reduced sentences, according to a report by local media All About Macau.

Reading the indictment, Tong Hio Fong, presiding judge for the case and president of Court of Second Instance, said that Kong, as the ringleader of the criminal syndicate, had interfered with and tampered with evidence, obstructing the course of justice. He had also helped suspects obtain acquittals and failed to declare his assets twice. It was said that MOP14 million's worth of his assets were of unclear origins.

Kong allegedly viewed judicial documents – regardless of the handling prosecutors of the cases – to help bribe payers with judicial defense. Choi and Ng, meanwhile, are accused of facilitating deals with suspects, case stakeholders or bribe payers. It was said that these cases would be referred to Kuan, who would become their defense lawyer.

According to the indictment, Kong and Choi first met in 2000. Choi and Ng are spouses and Kuan is Choi's friend. Kuan became involved in 2015, the indictment said.

It was said that suspects would seek help from Choi, who would later pass their names to Kong for follow-up and Kuan for an appointment. Kong also allegedly sought to identify suitable suspects so that Choi could follow-up.



Kong is accused of making deals to archive cases handled by him, completely neglecting the evidence from the police and the Public Prosecutions Office (MP). For cases not handled by him, Kong would look for loopholes and provide legal advice.

In response to these allegations, the senior prosecutor, who is currently on unpaid leave, denied that he had sold investigative elements to anybody. He added that he had not been interrogated by either the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) or the MP since his arrest.

He also thanked Choi for testifying on his behalf that he had not taken bribes during CCAC interrogations, adding that Choi was the only person who could prove him innocent. The senior prosecutor also denied the allegations of archiving cases without following procedure as well as manipulating and interfering with judicial procedures. He pledged that he had made judgments based on sound legal reasoning and that he would elaborate on these.

The indictment disclosed that 13 of 30 cases involving Kong were archived by himself.

Kong said many financial records collected by the CCAC

were used as retrospectively introduced evidence based on time and figures coinciding.

MOP5.8 million was logged in Kong's computer for the purpose of investing in a Hunan-Macao mutual benefit fund. Three other entries were explained by Kong as relating to the fee for the preparation of the Macau Hunan Native Association and the renovation fee paid to Ng.

He then pointed to the critical factors of consent and sufficient members to deny the allegation of forming a criminal syndicate. He claimed he had not been familiar with Ng and Kuan. He said that he did not even have Kuan's cellphone number or WeChat contact and that he had no contact whatsoever with Kuan. Therefore, he believed the criminal syndicate allegation should not be pressed against Ng and Kuan.

The alleged consent between Choi and Kuan can be explained by their friendship and partnership in starting an office, Kong said, adding that Choi would also approach Kuan for legal advice.

In addition, Kong said he had never been to Kuan's law firm, and not until he received the indictment did he know that Kuan and Choi were business

partners. He had always thought Choi was Kuan's legal executive.

While requesting the judge to carefully consider all contested points in the case, he pointed to a witness surnamed Wong and attempted to question Wong's credibility. He said he and Wong had first met 11 years ago due to a case. He had suggested that Wong seek assistance from the CCAC as Wong was unhappy with the way the case had been handled at the time. He said he gave Wong his business card and had dinner with Wong.

However, Wong secretly recorded their conversations during the dinner and filed a complaint with the CCAC. As such, Kong also asked the court to consider the legitimacy and reliability of the recording.

The indictment noted that Kong had received MOP10,000 from Wong to retrieve an item under custody that was worth MOP100,000.

The indictment also said Kong had failed in declaring assets twice. In 2022, Kong declared his assets to be worth about MOP20 million, in contrast to the proclaimed actual worth of MOP40 million. Of this amount, about MOP14 million had unclear origins, while MOP5 million were alleged to be illegal.

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RENATO MARQUES

LABOR

THE local government announced on Friday that it will raise Macau's minimum wage to MOP7,072 in 2024, an increase of MOP416 from the current MOP6,656.

The announcement was made during a press conference after the Executive Council (ExCo) presented an amendment to the Law 5/2020.

The bill that proposes the amendment to the current value to MOP7,072 per month (equivalent to MOP1,632 per week, MOP272 per day, or MOP34 per hour) will now be sent to the Legislative Assembly for discussion and approval.

The law requires that minimum wage be reviewed every two years after the new law comes into force.

The ExCo said the decision was made after "general consideration of the macroeconomy and the evolution of the labor market in Macau."

Also considered was how the law's implementation would impact workers, employers and the economic revival of Macau. The opinions of repre-

Gov't to raise minimum wage to MOP7,072 next year

sentatives of both sides were heard at the Standing Committee for the Coordination of Social Affairs.

The government claims the decision is a "balanced one" and considers factors such as the employers' business environment, the guarantee of workers' rights and interests, and the ability of consumers to accept this change.

It proposes that this change be enforced from January 1, 2024.

The amendment also does not consider any changes to the professions that are covered by the statutory minimum wage in Macau, which includes only the local cleaning and security staff working in residential buildings.

NO CHANGES FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

The government said do-

mestic workers are not to be included in the minimum wage law as they have a "special regime," in response to questions on the topic.

Replying to a media inquiry on the topic at the press conference, the director of the Labour Affairs Bureau, Wong Chi Hong, said domestic workers have a different regime and a different minimum wage ceiling of MOP3,500.

He also noted that domestic workers also benefit from food and lodging at their employer's house or receive equivalent compensation.

According to Wong, the average domestic worker's salary is currently between MOP3,500 and MOP5,000 per month, but he did not rule out a potential review of the minimum requirement, which is currently set at MOP3,500.



TRANSPORTATION

Taxi service quality and 'ride-hailing' debated

RENATO MARQUES

LAST week's Central District Community Advisory Board meeting debated the quality of the Macau's taxi services and the need for a "ride-hailing service."

Member António Monteiro raised the topic during the monthly advisory council meeting, calling for significant improvements to taxi services, especially enabling easier access for those who do not speak Chinese.

Noting it is unacceptable that after many years of discussion on the same problem, there are no real proposals to change the system. Monteiro said that with Macau's desire to attract more foreign visitors, the problem only continues to grow, and is likely to severely damage Macau's reputation as a tourism destination.

He suggested that taxi services develop a "single and efficient application where you can book a taxi in real-time (with real-time identification of where the



taxi is and when it arrives at the passenger's destination)," as is already the case in many countries, including China.

He said this application should be in Chinese, English and Portuguese to facilitate its use by tourists or residents, adding that this would particularly benefit the development of tourism in the old neighborhoods.

Another suggestion includes the differentiation

among taxis (by color) to indicate those that can provide a service to a broader audience (namely tourists).

According to Monteiro, this would need to be complemented with proper driver training to understand at least basic English, such as names of locations, hotels, and restaurants.

Also contributing to the disruptive nature of the service is the fact that taxis often stop to pick up and drop

off passengers at unofficial locations. This contributes to a lack of understanding about where to hail a taxi and it creates traffic jams and road-related disputes.

The situation is even more problematic during typhoons, with taxi drivers ignoring the law, requesting higher fares and breaching other laws such as refusing transportation or selecting passengers according to the destination.

The same topic has been raised on several occasions and more recently by several scholars and researchers as well as experts from the tourism sector.

However, none of the recommendations seem to have been heard by Transport Bureau officials who plan to release a tender for up to 500 soon-to-expire taxi licenses under same conditions as existing licenses.

The ride-hailing service for taxis has been systematically rejected by the industry, with leaders of the taxi drivers' associations claiming that, contrary to public opinion, the service is unnecessary. The same groups have been historically against the issuance of more taxi licenses by the government, claiming it would directly impact taxi drivers' income.

FORUM 20

EVENTS TO BE HELD TO MARK 20TH FOUNDING ANNIVERSARY OF FORUM MACAO

A series of events will be held this month to mark the 20th founding anniversary of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (PSCs) (Macao), also known as Forum Macao.

The events include a high-level symposium, an exhibition, a trade fair and a culture week for China and the PSCs, the secretariat of the forum said last week at a press conference.

The symposium, to be convened on Oct. 20, will discuss how Macau's advantages, scientific and technological innovations, and modern finance can effectively help with economic development in China and the PSCs.

The exhibition, scheduled on Oct. 20-Dec. 20, will review the development of the forum during the past two decades, and introduce its contributions to the exchanges and cooperation between China and the PSCs.

The secretariat also said it will set up a pavilion to showcase the unique images of China and PSCs at the trade fair to be held from Oct. 19 to 22.

The 15th culture week between China and PSCs aims to present the cultural charms of China and PSCs with performances, gourmet food, handicrafts, and workshops, the secretariat added. **MDT/XINHUA**

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ECONOMY

Group expects Q3 GDP to soar 130% y-o-y

ANTHONY LAM

CONSIDERING the extraordinarily weak gross domestic product (GDP) performance in the third quarter of last year, the figure for the third quarter this year may rise 130%, the Macau Economic Association (MEA) said yesterday in a statement.

The pandemic heavily affected last year's performance in the third quarter due to lockdowns that lowered economic performance. The city has revived "relatively satisfactorily" after the lifting of disease control measures, said the MEA.

The group said the cumulative growth rate for this year's first three quarters is expected to reach about 90% year-over-year. The current economic performance is about 75% of that in 2019, the MEA said.

The series of festive events in the last three months of the year, which traditionally generate economic vibrancy and vitality, will improve optimism. Therefore, the group has estimated the prosperity index for the last four months will gradually rise to 6.2 points.

The group said that though the city's economy is recovering more quickly, there are internal and external factors that might affect growth.

Internally, local tourist areas have been highly reinvigorated, but traditional residential districts are struggling. Many small and family-owned businesses have



experienced even tougher conditions than in the past three years.

Although the group believes that recently-announced government and casino old district revitalization projects will help struggling small businesses, these businesses should upgrade and modernize their operations.

Recently, Fitch Ratings said it anticipates growth of up to 65% in Macau's economy this year, driven by sustained recovery in the gaming and tourism sector.

The ratings institution projects economic growth will remain robust at 17% in 2024, with full-year gaming revenue recovering further to almost 80% of its 2019 level.

The August and September

indices have been confirmed as 6.2 and 5.9, according to MEA. The weaker September score is attributed to fewer tourists and Typhoon Signal No. 9 being raised at the beginning of the month, which suspended casino operations.

Macau's casino gaming revenue growth slowed in September, falling to a five-month low as revenues fell slightly to MOP14.9 billion.

Data from the Gaming Inspection, and Coordination Bureau shows gross gaming revenue soared 404.2% year-on-year, albeit from a low base. The numbers fell 13% from the previous month. Revenues were 68% of 2019 pre-Covid levels.

NEW LIBRARY'S BUDGET, CONCLUSION DATE UNCLEAR, SAYS DIRECTOR OF CULTURE

ANTHONY LAM

THE director of Culture, Leong Wai Man, has disclosed that the budget and expected delivery date for the future Central Library is still unclear, given design work is still underway, local media has reported.

Leong was asked at the post-event press conference of a recent Cultural Heritage Committee plenary about details on the future Central Library.

Leong's bureau had commissioned three international architecture firms to submit drafts for the future structure. The tender was ultimately awarded to the Dutch architecture firm, Mecanoo.

She said the budget will only be available after confirming the majority of the design.

However, in March 2021, when the tender was released, the bureau set the budget at MOP500 million and pledged to finish construction in late 2024 or early 2025, according to media outlet All About Macau.

She said this was only a very preliminary estimate, "probably made alongside confirming the

location of the new library." The progress of the project has changed the former timeline, but updates will be announced in due course.

Currently, the bureau is focused on inspecting the mural on the former Hotel Estoril building, relocating the shrine next to the building, and conserving a tree next to the shrine, she added.

On the mounting of decorations for the pedestrianized Rua de Felicidade, commonly known in English as Happiness Street, using expansion anchor bolts that punctured the over-a-century-old architecture there, Leong said both her bureau and the casino operator had considered using independent poles. However, she said that would have covered the façades of the architecture and narrow available spaces.

She said the bolts will not be removed but saved for future use.

It was disclosed that committee members were largely supportive of the old district revitalization projects recently announced, with some suggesting that histories and stories of these districts be highlighted and carried forward.



CORPORATE BITS

Sands Resorts Macao participates in tourism roadshow in Malaysia



Sands Resorts Macao participated in the 'Experience Macao Unlimited' Mega Roadshow, which took place from October 12-15 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The resort highlighted its Michelin-starred and award-winning restaurants, accommodation, duty-free

shopping, MICE facilities, and leisure and entertainment options.

Organized by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the four-day event shined a spotlight on Macau's diverse 'tourism+' initiatives.

Steve Zheng, assistant vice president of Destination Marketing, Sands China Ltd., said, "It is exciting to introduce Sands Resorts Macao's diverse offerings to residents, tourists and business delegates in Malaysia. Through various avenues, we aim to raise Macau's profile as a leading travel destination and continue to do all we can to support MGTO's varied initiatives to diversify visitor source markets."

Jessie J, Corinne Bailey Rae to headline Macao International Pop Music Festa



The Macao International Pop Music Festa, KoolTai Macao Music Fes. 2023, is taking place at The Venetian Macao on Nov. 11 and 12. The event presents a line-up from England, Japan,

Thailand, Malaysia, Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

The event is not only the first international music festival held by Chessman, but is also the first mega

music festival officially launched and produced by a Macau-based local production team.

The day 1 headlining band is Suede. It will be the first time the Brit-pop band has performed live in Macau. The other headlining act is internationally renowned bossa nova musician, Lisa Ono.

Pop features heavily on the second day, led by British pop singer Jessie J and Grammy-winning R&B performer Corinne Bailey Rae. Others on the line-up include singer-songwriter Joanna Wang from Taiwan, and Malaysian singer-songwriter Zee Avi, who is also the winner of a Golden Horse Award for Best Original Film Song.

Inflation data show economy in doldrums despite a slight improvement in trade

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

CHINA'S economy remains in the doldrums, data released Friday showed, with prices falling due to slack demand from consumers and businesses.

Consumer prices remained flat in September compared with a year earlier, the National Bureau of Statistics said, while wholesale prices fell 2.5%. Exports and imports also fell last month as demand fell in overseas markets.

The faltering recovery of the world's second largest economy from the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic is dragging on regional and global growth, though economists have said the worst might have passed. Trade ticked up slightly from the month before and manufacturing is showing signs of improvement.

Earlier this week, the International Monetary Fund cut growth forecasts for China, predicting economic growth of 5% this year and 4.2% in 2024, down slightly from its forecasts in July.

The IMF attributed its downward revision to weaker consumer confidence, subdued global demand and a crisis in the property sector that has made a big dent in business activity.

China is due to report econo-



mic growth data on Oct. 18 and economists are forecasting the economy grew at a 4.4% annual pace in July-September, down from 6.3% in the previous quarter.

Friday's data showed food prices dropped 3.2% in September, with the price of pork sliding 22% from a year earlier, a steeper decrease than the 17.9% drop in August.

Core inflation, which excludes food and energy prices, rose 0.8% from a year earlier, the statistics bureau said, similar to a 0.8% rise

in August.

The recovery in domestic consumer demand has been much weaker than hoped for, and excess competition has provoked price wars in some sectors.

"September's inflation data remind us that despite some firming in activity indicators recently, China's economic recovery remains challenged," Robert Carnell of ING Economics said in a report.

It forecast that consumer inflation will be at 0.5% for all of 2023 and only rise to 1% in 2024.

China's producer price index — which measures prices factories charge wholesalers — has fallen for a full year, though last month it contracted more slowly than in August.

Still, China's manufacturing sector is showing some signs of improvement. A survey of factory managers showed activity returning to growth. The official purchasing managers' index for September rose to 50.2 from 49.7 in August, the first time it had topped 50 in six months. A reading above

50 indicates an increase from the previous month.

Car sales in China rose 4.7% in September from a year earlier, the China Passenger Car Association reported earlier this week. Passenger vehicle sales totaled 2.04 million units. The growth came ahead of the China's long Mid-Autumn and National Day holidays in October. It's typically a bumper time for car dealers as people buy vehicles ahead of the week-long national holidays.

And the real estate sector is muddling through the troubles brought on by a crackdown on heavy borrowing by developers that has hamstrung many home builders.

"The housing market appears to have stabilized recently thanks to the latest round of property easing measures, which could drive a modest recovery in home sales and mortgage demand in the coming months," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a commentary Friday.

China's global trade remained muted in September, with both exports and imports falling from the same time a year earlier.

Imports and exports both slid 6.2% from a year earlier, although the economy declined at a slower rate compared to August after a slew of measures were released to support the economy. **MDT/AP**

EU warns China that European public could turn more protectionist if trade deficit isn't reduced

THE European Union's top foreign policy official warned Friday that public sentiment in Europe could turn more protectionist if the region's trade deficit with China is not reduced.

Josep Borrell, the EU high representative for foreign affairs, called for improved access for European companies that want to export to or invest in China. He said that political leaders in Europe could face pressure from voters to disengage from the world's second-largest economy.

"And we don't want to disengage and much less, much less, to decouple from China," Borrell said in a speech at Peking University, one of China's top schools.

The EU trade deficit with China topped \$17 billion in



EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell delivers a speech at Peking University in Beijing, Friday

September, bringing the total for the first nine months of the year to \$170 billion, according to Chinese trade figures released Friday.

Chinese Foreign Minis-

ter Wang Yi acknowledged the European Union's concerns after talks with Borrell later Friday.

"China attaches importance to the economic and

trade concerns of the European side and is willing to further deepen reform and opening up and provide a more favorable environment for EU enterprises to operate in China," he said at a joint news conference with his European counterpart.

Wang said the Chinese side had also expressed concern about a recently launched EU investigation into subsidies for the Chinese electric vehicle industry. "We urge the EU to avoid protectionist behavior and be prudent in the use of trade remedy measures," he said.

Borrell is the latest EU official to visit China as the two sides lay the groundwork for a leaders summit later this year. Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson is in Beijing this week and

Economy and Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis came last month.

The EU and China need to rebuild trust so that they can jointly tackle common challenges including climate change, global health and the indebtedness of developing nations, Borrell said.

"We believe that despite our considerable differences, that should not be underestimated, there is a lot of scope, a lot of room for us to work together," he said.

China is trying to reduce tensions over trade and other issues with the EU and the United States, both important export markets. A U.S. Senate delegation visited China earlier this week, following a series of visits by top administration officials as the two coun-

tries try to arrange a meeting between Presidents Xi Jinping and Joe Biden in November.

Borrell urged China to step up humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, suggesting it launch a high-profile cultural initiative because of the destruction of historical and cultural heritage in the war.

"We are not asking China to adopt the same standpoint as the European Union," he said, acknowledging that China has political constraints. "But we consider it essential that China makes a major effort to convince the people of Ukraine that China is not Russia's ally in this war."

He also said that although the EU has ties with Taiwan, it does not recognize the self-governing island as an independent country. He added that the EU opposes the use of coercion and provocation, and that the tensions between Taiwan and China must be resolved through dialogue, not force. **MDT/AP**

Australia looks for new ways to lift Indigenous living standards after referendum loss

ROD MCGUIRK, CANBERRA

AUSTRALIA will look for new ways to lift Indigenous living standards after voters soundly rejected a proposal to create a new advocacy committee, the deputy prime minister said yesterday.

Every state and mainland territory apart from Australian Capital Territory voted against a proposal to enshrine in the constitution an Indigenous Voice to Parliament to advocate on behalf of the nation's most disadvantaged ethnic minority.

Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles said his government remained committed to improving Indigenous welfare to close the eight-year gap in average life expectancies between Indigenous Australians and the wider community.

"In terms of exactly what the precise steps forward are from here is a matter that we need to take some time to work through and I think people can understand that," Marles told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"Coming out of this referendum there is a greater call for action on closing the gap," Marles added.

Indigenous Voice campaigners were flying Aboriginal flags at half-staff across Australia on Sunday as a mark of their disappointment.

Proponents had hoped that the

AP PHOTO



Voice's advice would lead to better government service delivery and improved outcomes for Indigenous people.

Accounting for only 3.8% of the population, Indigenous Australians have a suicide rate twice that of the national average, are more likely to be incarcerated than other Australians and suffer from diseases in the remote Outback that have been eradicated from other wealthy countries.

Latest counting on Sunday

found more than 60% of voters had opposed the Voice. There was majority support for the Voice in Outback polling booths in the Northern Territory. That part of the country has Australia's highest proportion of Aboriginal residents and the result suggests the Voice was popular among Indigenous Australians.

Many Voice supporters accused opposition lawmakers of spreading misinformation and disinformation about the Voice.

Marcia Langton, an Indigenous academic who helped draft the Voice proposal, said opposition leader Peter Dutton through his "no" campaign had "cemented racism into the body politic."

"The nation has been poisoned. There is no fix for this terrible outcome," Langton wrote in The Saturday Paper.

Dutton accused Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of dividing Australians by holding the referendum.

"This is the referendum that Australia did not need to have. The proposal and the process should have been designed to unite Australians, not to divide us," Dutton said.

Albanese blamed Dutton's campaigning against the measure for the failure. No referendum has ever succeeded without support of the major parties.

"When you do the hard things, when you aim high, sometimes you fall short," Albanese said after conceding defeat.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney, who is Aboriginal, told Indigenous people that the recent months of referendum campaign had been "tough."

"But be proud of who you are. Be proud of your identity," a tearful Burney said after conceding the referendum had been rejected.

"Be proud of the 65,000 years of history and culture that you are a part of. And your rightful place in this country. We will carry on and we'll move forward and we will thrive," she added.

It is the second time that Australians have rejected a referendum that would have included recognition of Indigenous people in the constitution.

When a referendum was last held in 1999, Australians rejected adding a preamble to the constitution — an introduction that carried only symbolic and no legal significance — acknowledging that Indigenous Australians had inhabited the country "since time immemorial" and were "honored for their ancient and continuing cultures."

Australians have now rejected 37 referendums since the constitution took effect 122 years ago. Only eight have succeeded and none since 1977. **MDT/AP**

KIM TONG-HYUNG,
SEOUL

SOUTH Korea on Friday said it had expressed its concerns to China after assessing that it recently returned a "large number" of North Koreans, including escapees, back to their homeland.

Koo Byongsam, spokesperson of South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said Seoul did not have information on the exact number of North Koreans repatriated from northeast China or how many of them were "escapees, medical patients or criminals."

His comments followed several media reports based on activist sources that alleged China recently returned hundreds of escapees

S. Korea says it expressed concern to China for sending N. Korean escapees back home

back to North Korea where they would face the risk of persecution and harsh treatment.

"It appears to be true that a large number of North Koreans were repatriated to North Korea from China's three northeastern provinces," Koo said. "(Our) government's position is that there should be no circumstances in which North Koreans living abroad would be forcibly repatriated back home against their will."

Koo said Seoul "sternly raised the issue with the Chinese side" but did not specify how it communi-

ated its concerns.

Human rights activists had warned that Chinese repatriations of North Korean escapees could increase as North Korea slowly reopens its borders after a prolonged COVID-19 shutdown. Some activist groups believe that the number of North Koreans detained as "illegal immigrants" in China could exceed 2,000.

When asked about the alleged repatriations of North Koreans on Thursday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin did not confirm the reports but said Beijing has been "properly" handling

North Koreans who illegally entered the country based on "relevant domestic laws, international law and humanitarian principles."

Citing an activist account, the Human Rights Watch in a report on Thursday alleged that China this week used several vehicle convoys to forcibly return more than 500 people who had escaped North Korea. The group said most of the returnees were women and expressed concerns that they were at "grave risk" of being detained in forced labor camps, and potentially face torture and other violence. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



In first call with Palestinian president Abbas, Biden discusses support for humanitarian aid to Gaza

MATTHEW LEE &
LOLITA C. BALDOR, RIYADH

PRESIDENT Joe Biden on Saturday spoke with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, urging the leaders to allow humanitarian aid to the region and affirmed his support for efforts to protect civilians.

The weekend calls in Washington came ahead of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's announcement that the U.S. was moving up a second carrier strike group in support of Israel. Secretary of State Antony Blinken intensified diplomatic outreach across the Middle East and beyond to rally an international response to prevent the Israel-Hamas war from expanding.

The broad U.S. efforts reflect the international concern about the number of civilians at risk and the potential ramifications of a prolonged war as Israel told Gaza residents to move south and Hamas urged people to remain in their homes. The Biden administration has not publicly urged Israel to restrain its response after the Hamas attack a week ago, but has emphasized the country's commitment to following the rules of war.

Addressing a Human Rights Campaign dinner Saturday in Washington, Biden linked the humanitarian crisis in Gaza to different versions of hate that he said must be stopped.

"A week ago we saw hate manifest another way in the worst massacre of the Jewish people since the Holocaust," Biden said, citing the 1,300 lives lost in Israel as well as "children, grandparents alike kidnapped, held hostage by Hamas."

"The humanitarian crisis in Gaza — innocent Palestinian families and the vast majority that have nothing to do with Hamas — they're being used as human shields," he said. "We have to reject hate in every form."

Blinken met with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan in Riyadh before stopping in the United



Arab Emirates as he sought ways to help civilians trapped in between the fighting and to address the growing humanitarian crisis.

He also called his Chinese counterpart as Palestinians struggled to flee from areas of Gaza targeted by the Israeli military before an expected land offensive.

Austin as well on Saturday spoke with Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, stressing the importance of safeguarding civilians. Austin offered updates on U.S. efforts to boost air defense capabilities and munitions for Israeli forces that he noted were aimed at stemming escalation of war, according to a readout of the call.

Austin said the Biden administration was sending the additional carrier strike group to the Eastern Mediterranean. The Eisenhower will join the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group, which is already sailing near Israel, to bolster U.S. presence there with a host of destroyers, fighter aircraft and cruisers.

In a statement announcing the deployment, Austin said sending the second carrier was "part of our effort to deter hostile actions against Israel or any efforts toward widening this war following Hamas's attack on Israel."

While Biden has spoken to Netanyahu multiple times

since the Hamas attack, Saturday's call was his first to Abbas, who runs the Palestinian Authority which controls the West Bank. According to a readout of the call, Abbas briefed the president on efforts to bring aid to Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza.

Biden reiterated to Abbas that "Hamas does not stand for the Palestinian people's right to dignity and self-determination," according to the readout.

Biden spoke with Netanyahu to "reiterate unwavering U.S. support for Israel," according to the readout. He briefed the Israeli leader on regional efforts to ensure civilian access to food, water and medical care.

The number of U.S. citizens killed rose to 29, U.S. officials said Saturday, and 15 were unaccounted for, as well as one lawful permanent resident.

Blinken, in his visits with Saudi and UAE leaders, also cited the need for humanitarian assistance and safe passage from those who wish to leave Gaza as he spoke to Arab audiences from their home turf, where his hosts put that issue at the top of their concerns.

An Israeli ground assault would worsen the plight of civilians in Gaza who are without power, fresh water or access to aid. Egyptian offi-

cial said the southern Rafah crossing would open later Saturday for the first time in days to allow foreigners out. Israel has advised all Palestinian civilians to flee south to avoid Israel's continued offensive against Hamas militants in Gaza City.

Blinken also called Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to seek his country's help in preventing the war from spreading, asking Beijing to use whatever influence it has in the Mideast. Blinken's spokesman declined to characterize Wang's response but said the U.S. believes it and China have a shared interest in the region's stability.

In Riyadh, Blinken and Prince Faisal stressed the importance of minimizing the harm to civilians as Israel prepared for an anticipated incursion against Hamas a week after the militant group's unprecedented attack against Israel.

"As Israel pursues its legitimate right, to defending its people and to trying to ensure that this never happens again, it is vitally important that all of us look out for civilians, and we're working together to do exactly that," Blinken said.

"None of us want to see suffering by civilians on any side, whether it's in Israel, whether it's in Gaza, whether it's anywhere else," Blinken said.

The Saudi minister said the kingdom was committed to the protection of civilians.

"It's a disturbing situation," he said. "It's a very difficult situation. And, as you know, the primary sufferer of this situation are civilians, and civilian populations on both sides are being affected and it's important, I think, that we all condemn the targeting of civilians in any form at any time by anyone."

A U.S. official said Saturday that Washington did not ask Israel to slow or hold off on the evacuation plan. The official said the discussions with Israeli leaders did stress the importance of taking into account the safety of civilians as Israel's military moved to enforce the evacuation demand. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1996 HANDGUNS TO BE BANNED IN THE UK



The British Government has announced plans to outlaw almost all handguns following the shocking massacre at Dunblane in Scotland.

On 13 March Thomas Hamilton walked into the gym at Dunblane primary school and killed 16 young children and their teacher. He also injured 13 other children and three teachers. Hamilton, a former scout master, then shot himself.

Today's announcement follows publication of Lord Cullen's inquiry into the massacre which concluded Hamilton's horrific attack could not have been predicted.

But it made 23 recommendations to tighten rules on gun ownership and monitor those who work with children.

The proposal to ban all handguns - except .22-caliber target pistols - would leave Britain with some of the toughest laws on private possession of guns.

Home Secretary Michael Howard told a packed House of Commons he would make sure the measures were passed as quickly as possible through parliament.

But the move has angered both those for and against private gun ownership.

The Snowdrop Campaign, set up by victims' families after Dunblane, wants to see a total ban on handguns and called the plan an "unacceptable compromise".

The opposition Labour Party welcomed the report and the government's swift reaction to it but urged ministers to bring about a complete ban.

Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw said politicians should have acted in a similar vein nine years ago after the Hungerford massacre.

Former Tory cabinet minister David Mellor also felt the proposals did not go far enough.

He asked: "Isn't it time to conclude that, literally and metaphorically, the game is up for handguns now?"

But gun club owners warned thousands of jobs would be in jeopardy if the proposal became law.

Speaking to the Daily Mirror newspaper, Ross Armstrong, owner of Medway Shooting Club in Kent said: "People are killed by drunk drivers but no-one demands a ban on cars. Further restrictions suit no-one."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Conservative Government's proposals became law in February 1997.

When Labour came to power three months later they brought in an amendment banning all handguns. This became law in November 1997. The Snowdrop Campaign was ended in the same year.

The Gun Control Network set up a few months after Dunblane as the UK's first gun control organisation continues to campaign for - among other things - a national gun register.

Nearly 43,000 firearms and more than a million rounds of ammunition were handed in to police stations across the UK.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Entertainment should include your whole family. Pleasure trips will bring you into contact with new and interesting people. You will gain a lot if you listen.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Empty promises are evident. Make sure any presentation you have is ready. Secret affairs may be brought out in the open.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Try to visit a country that excites you. Only offer to do the things you have time for. Luxury items will cost you more than you can truly afford. Education may be the answer.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Attend to things that you should have done yesterday. Observations will be far more productive. Finish those changes you've been talking about making to your residence.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Your emotional reaction will be dependent upon your partner's responsiveness. You need to challenge yourself. You can make money if you put your mind to it.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 You need some help today. You may find a rare antique today. You will drive your emotional partner crazy today. You will meet some interesting people if you attend promotional functions.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Don't let situations get out of control. Business or pleasure trips will be knowledgeable as well as highly successful. Try to avoid serious discussions with loved ones.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 You could be your own worst enemy if you overreact to something you're told. Chronic health problems are likely to surface if you are keeping your problems locked up inside.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Difficulties with female members of your family may result in estrangement's. Don't push your opinions on others today or you may find yourself in the doghouse.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Your fight for those less fortunate is not likely to end in sweet victory. Be sure to question any detail that you feel could leave you in a precarious position at a later date.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Your diplomatic nature will help you in straightening out unsavory situations. Get the red tape and the unwanted paperwork out of the way.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 You will be your usual charming self and the partners you attract may be the adventurous type. You need adventure and excitement in your life.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

MEDIUM					HARD				
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				8	1				

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	7	20	fine
Changchun	1	13	fine
Chengdu	16	22	rain
Chongqing	17	27	cloudy
Fuzhou	19	27	cloudy
Guangzhou	20	30	cloudy
Guiyang	10	24	fine
Haikou	24	26	rain
Hangzhou	14	25	fine
Harbin	2	11	fine
Hefei	12	27	fine
Nanjing	14	25	fine
Shanghai	16	24	fine
Taipei	21	25	overcast
Wuhan	13	28	cloudy
Hong Kong	23	28	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	2	8	rain
Frankfurt	3	13	overcast
Paris	6	15	overcast
London	9	13	cloudy
New York	11	17	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Rat; 5- Palindromic title; 10- Dramatis personae; 14- Arrive; 15- Mindlessly stupid; 16- Kinds; 17- Mutual fund fee; 18- Copy; 19- Prez's backup; 20- Square; 22- Building; 24- Bear up there; 27- Earth Day subj.; 28- Wading bird; 32- Due (to); 35- Eternity; 36- Carta; 38- Retreats; 40- Not "fer"; 42- Toss; 44- Dodge model; 45- Bottom line; 47- Stationery brand; 49- Twice LIII; 50- Mead subject; 52- Small parrot; 54- Monetary unit of Spain; 56- Dress often worn by Hindu women; 57- Not friendly; 60- Don't match; 64- Clinton cabinet member Federico; 65- Femme fatale; 68- Hawaiian outdoor feast; 69- Search; 70- Patti LuPone role; 71- Catchall abbr.; 72- Run in neutral; 73- Like a fleabag; 74- "David Copperfield" wife;

DOWN 1- Legal rights org.; 2- Animated character; 3- Eastern nanny; 4- Lack of variety; 5- Mingle; 6- "Wheel of Fortune" buy; 7- Challenge to complete a task; 8- Battery terminal; 9- Republic in S North America; 10- Citizen; 11- Novelist Waugh; 12- Ball; 13- Medicinal amt.; 21- Schoolmarmish; 23- Chicken, e.g.; 25- Lose one's cool; 26- A&M student; 28- Noteworthy achievement; 29- Company emblems; 30- Writer Loos; 31- Scheduled; 33- Family tree member; 34- Orchard; 37- Take the role of; 39- Agitated state; 41- Junior, to Senior; 43- Israeli round dance; 46- Ill-mannered one; 48- Bust maker; 51- Comes to mind; 53- Deprived of life; 55- Martini garnish; 57- Take note of; 58- Like Nash's lama; 59- Cleveland's lake; 61- Mercury or Saturn; 62- Coal-rich region; 63- Hawaiian native dance; 64- Trident-shaped letter; 66- Airport abbr.; 67- Negative vote;

Friday's solution

A	R	M	S		N	I	D	O	S	T		Q	A	T	E
S	O	I	T		A	P	O	L	O		E	G	O	S	
A	M	A	T		T	O	T	D	E		H	A	I	M	
F	R	I	N	G	E	S		B	R	A	I	L	L	E	
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A	R	M	O	R	D	E	C	R	I	N	S	E			
L	E	A	F		P	E	L	L	E	T		A	I	D	
P	R	O	F	E	S	S	I	O	N	A	L	I	Z	E	
H	A	R	X	I	K	A	N	G		O	V	E	N		
A	N	I	S	E	S	S	E		B	L	E	S	S		
M	U	L	A	T	T	O		D	I	G	I	T	A	L	
A	R	E	S		R	E	T	A	G		P	A	L	E	
M	I	S	O		A	N	A	M	E		O	I	L	S	
A	S	S	N		S	O	B	E	R		P	L	A	T	

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AD

RUGBY WORLD CUP

ARGENTINA REACHES SEMIFINALS AFTER COMING BACK TWICE TO BEAT WALES

WALES 17, ARGENTINA 29

AP PHOTO



ARGENTINA'S rugby team doesn't have a totemic figure like Lionel Messi to bind it like the national soccer team did when it was winning the soccer World Cup less than a year ago.

What the rugby Pumas do have is a collective doggedness that lies dormant too often but erupts when it is least expected.

That Pumas passion propelled them into the Rugby World Cup semifinals on Saturday when they were 12 minutes away from losing to Wales.

They came from behind twice to win 29-17 in a raucous Stade Velodrome, where the Pumas' campaign started with a baffling loss to 14-man England.

"We know it is not going to be perfect; life is not perfect," Pumas captain Julian Montoya said. "It's how you embrace the moment and fight for each other.

"Two more weeks with this team (in the knockout stage). I don't want this to end ever. We

need to be better, to be clinical in a lot of things. I know I can be more demanding but I am very proud of this team."

They are going to Paris for the first time in the tournament for their first semifinal since 2015 next Friday against three-time champion New Zealand, which knocked out top-ranked Ireland 28-24 later Saturday.

Wales built its campaign around defense and being conditioned to

play for 80 minutes. But just when it needed to hold on for a little longer, it conceded two game-ending tries to Pumas replacements Joel Sclavi and Nicolas Sanchez.

In between those scores, Wales could have won the match in the 74th minute when zippy wing Louis Rees-Zammit was diving into the left corner but Matias Moroni, who was substituted into the game after half an hour, pulled off a quarterfinal-saving tackle.

"The (fight) comes from our personality and the way that we train," Montoya said.

Wales was 10-0 up after 21 minutes thanks to a try by retiring flyhalf Dan Biggar, who converted and added a penalty.

The Pumas trailed only 10-6 at the interval, during which Wales hooker Ryan Elias was dropped.

Argentina's surge ahead to 12-10 came from Boffelli's third and fourth penalties, the last of which

was a stunner from 55 meters out. They led for the first time in the 49th.

Wales retook the lead in the 57th out of nothing when replacement scrumhalf Tomos Williams dummied off an unguarded ruck and flew away. Biggar's extras made it 17-12.

The physicality of Argentina's forwards led by Facundo Isa forced Wales to replace backs Liam Williams and Nick Tompkins and they held out two lineout mauls but not a third from which new prop Sclavi scored. Boffelli's conversion put them in front 19-17 with 11 minutes to go.

A Rio Dyer break with Tomos Williams in support gave Rees-Zammit his chance to win the match for Wales in the 77th, but Moroni came from nowhere to tackle him into touch. Moroni was one of nine Pumas survivors from the 2015 quarterfinal win over Ireland.

Sanchez then intercepted opposite Sam Costelow and scooted 50 meters to secure victory with three minutes to go. MDT/AP

AD

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RUGBY WORLD CUP

All Blacks give defensive masterclass to knock out Ireland

IRELAND 24, NEW ZEALAND 28

NEW Zealand was thought to have showed too much razzle-dazzle and met not enough resistance to seriously trouble top-ranked Ireland going into their Rugby World Cup quarterfinal yesterday [Macau time].

The All Blacks racked up a ridiculous 36 tries and 240 points in swatting aside Italy, Uruguay and Namibia to finish the pool stage.

Who knew the focus should have been on the defense, which conceded only two tries and 20 points across those three matches.

Often overlooked for their defensive prowess, the All Blacks reminded the other title contenders with a masterclass to upset the Irish 28-24 and knock them out in a second straight quarterfinal.

"Sometimes the sweetest victories," New Zealand coach



Ireland's James Lowe is tackled by New Zealand's Beauden Barrett and Will Jordan (left)

Ian Foster said, "are when your opponents play really well and test you to the limit."

New Zealand opened with 30 phases of slick handling and breakdown protection and zoomed to 13-0.

Ireland was flustered at times but kept coming, and the pressure forced All Blacks Aaron Smith and Codie Taylor to the sin-bin.

"I kind of didn't notice (they were gone)," All Blacks No. 8

Ardie Savea said. "We had to dig deep into our blackness."

In the 20 minutes Smith and Taylor were absent, Ireland earned 14 points but gave up a crucial three. That was in the 69th minute, when Jordie Barrett was pulled off the ball by Conor Murray and sent the penalty flying between the posts to put New Zealand up 28-24, forcing Ireland to score a try to win.

Moments later, Barrett went down in lore when Ireland motored a lineout Maul toward the tryline and drove Ronan Kelleher over. The Irish appeared to finally have their go-ahead score but Barrett trapped the 110-kilogram replacement hooker with his stomach and thighs and prevented him from scoring.

The All Blacks were immense in defense, notably captain Sam Cane, who was once derided by Irish opposite Peter O'Mahony as a poor man's Richie McCaw. Cane led his team with 21 tackles and two turnovers. Scott

Barrett had 18 tackles, Savea 17 and a turnover, and 2015 veteran Brodie Retallick 16. A dozen All Blacks were in double figures for tackles.

The Irish had one more crack at them with three minutes to go.

Jimmy O'Brien fielded an up-and-under 70 meters out. Six phases later, Ireland was in All Blacks territory. The Irish were rolling. Passes, flicks, heads down into contact, and blowing All Blacks off rucks. One pass was dropped but Bundee Aki recovered the ball. Ireland was grinding its way upfield but after 20 phases, players were starting to walk.

After 22 phases, the clock went into red.

After 25 phases, Ireland was at the New Zealand 22.

Savea thought he trapped Kelleher for a turnover penalty but Ireland recycled yet again and Aaron Smith implored Savea to get back up and stop complaining to the touchline official.

After 37 phases and more than five minutes with the ball, Ireland was 10 meters from the tryline when Kelleher was trapped by grey-bearded Sam Whitelock, the most capped player in World Cup history, and Ireland finally lost possession and the quarterfinal was New Zealand's. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

The Conversation

Iain Boyd, University of Colorado Boulder



ISRAEL'S AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM WORKS WELL - HERE'S HOW HAMAS GOT AROUND IT

Because of its unique national security challenges, Israel has a long history of developing highly effective, state-of-the-art defense technologies and capabilities. A prime example of Israeli military strength is the Iron Dome air defense system, which has been widely touted as the world's best defense against missiles and rockets.

However, on Oct. 7, 2023, Israel was caught off guard by a very large-scale missile attack by the Gaza-based Palestinian militant group Hamas. The group fired several thousand missiles at a number of targets across Israel, according to reports. While exact details are not available, it is clear that a significant number of the Hamas missiles penetrated the Israeli defenses, inflicting extensive damage and casualties.

An air defense system consists of three key components.

First, there are radars to detect, identify and track incoming missiles. The range of these radars varies. Iron Dome's radar is effective over distances of 2.5 to 43.5 miles (4 to 70 km), according to its manufacturer Raytheon.

The second major element of an air defense system is the battle control center. This component determines the appropriate way to engage a confirmed threat. It uses the continually updating radar information to determine the optimal response in terms of from where to fire interceptor missiles and how many to launch against an incoming missile.

The third major component is the interceptor missile itself. For Iron Dome, it is a supersonic missile with heat-seeking sensors. These sensors provide in-flight updates to the interceptor, allowing it to steer toward and close in on the threat. The interceptor uses a proximity fuse activated by a small radar to explode close to the incoming missile so that it does not have to hit it directly to disable it.

Israel has at least 10 Iron Dome batteries in operation, each containing 60 to 80 interceptor missiles. Each of those missiles costs about US\$60,000. In previous attacks involving smaller numbers of missiles and rockets, Iron Dome was 90% effective against a range of threats.

So, why was the system less effective against the recent Hamas attacks?

It is a simple question of numbers. Hamas fired several thousand missiles, and Israel had less than a thousand interceptors in the field ready to counter them. Even if Iron Dome was 100% effective against the incoming threats, the very large number of the Hamas missiles meant some were going to get through.

The Hamas attacks illustrate very clearly that even the best air defense systems can be overwhelmed if they are overmatched by the number of threats they have to counter.

The Israeli missile defense has been built up over many years, with high levels of financial investment. How could Hamas afford to overwhelm it? Again, it all comes down to numbers. The missiles fired by Hamas cost about \$600 each, and so they are about 100 times less expensive than the Iron Dome interceptors. The total cost to Israel of firing all of its interceptors is around \$48 million. If Hamas fired 5,000 missiles, the cost would be only \$3 million.

Thus, in a carefully planned and executed strategy, Hamas accumulated over time a large number of relatively inexpensive missiles that it knew would overwhelm the Iron Dome defensive capabilities. Unfortunately for Israel, the Hamas attack represents a very clear example of military asymmetry: a low-cost, less-capable approach was able to defeat a more expensive, high-technology system.

[Abridged]

AN EMPLOYEE AT THE ISRAELI EMBASSY IN CHINA HAS BEEN STABBED. A FOREIGN SUSPECT IS DETAINED

THE BUZZ

A 50-year-old Israeli man who works at the Israeli Embassy in Beijing was stabbed Friday in front of a supermarket, Chinese police and the Israeli government said. Beijing police said they had arrested a suspect, a 53-year-old foreign man. They described the victim as a family member of an Israeli diplomat. No motive was given for the attack, and it was unclear if it was connected to the war between Israel and the militant group Hamas.

"The employee was transferred to hospital and he is in a stable

condition," an Israeli government statement said, without giving additional details.

A video posted on social media showed a man with a knife grappling with another man on the ground and stabbing him several times, leaving a trail of blood stains on the sidewalk.

People working in the area said they heard the victim shouting as police cars and an ambulance arrived. A police cordon was set up and the blood later washed away.



SCHOOL ATTACK

FRANCE IS DEPLOYING 7,000 TROOPS AFTER A DEADLY STABBING BY A SUSPECTED ISLAMIC RADICAL

JEFFREY SCHAEFFER & ANGELA CHARLTON, ARRAS

FRANCE will mobilize up to 7,000 soldiers to increase security around the country after a teacher was fatally stabbed and three other people wounded in a school attack by a former student suspected of Islamic radicalization, the president's office said Saturday.

Some schoolchildren, parents and personnel returned to the Gambetta-Carnot school in the northern city of Arras as it reopened Saturday morning to reconnect and seek support, after the attack Friday that rattled France in a context of global tensions over the Israel-Hamas war.

Counterterrorism authorities are investigating the stabbing, and the suspected assailant and several others are in custody, prosecutors said. The suspect had been under recent surveillance by intelligence services for radicalization. Court documents viewed by The Associated Press show he is from the Ingushetia region in Russia's Caucasus Mountains, which neighbors Chechnya. Authorities had initially identified him as Chechen.

The French government heightened the national threat alert, and President Emmanuel Macron ordered up to 7,000 soldiers deployed by Monday night and until further notice to bolster security and vigilan-

ce around France, his office said. The "attack emergency" threat posture allows the government to temporarily mobilize the military to protect public places among other measures.

The attacker's exact motive remains unclear, and he is reportedly refusing to speak to investigators.

At the school Saturday morning, police stood guard as adults and children arrived. Classes were canceled, but the school reopened for those who wanted to come together or seek support. One mother said she came with her 17-year-old daughter in a show of defiance against extremism, and to overcome the fear of returning to a site where children were locked down for hours after the stabbing.

Another mother came to seek guidance from counselors about how to support her two sons, who witnessed the attack in their schoolyard.

"As adults, we are managing with difficulty to take a step back, but for them, they're children," said Emily Noge, arriving at the school with her sons and partner. "They initially thought it was an exercise, so keeping things separate, to say that we've passed from an exercise to something dramatic, is very tricky for them."

"It's always the same moments that come back: The schoolyard, the chairs to protect themselves, the stabbings, the whys. 'Why us? Why Arras? Why the

teachers? They were good teachers. They were there to protect us," she said.

For many in France, the attack echoed the killing of another teacher, Samuel Paty, almost exactly three years ago near his Paris area school. He was beheaded by a radicalized Chechen later killed by police.

The suspect in this week's attack had been under surveillance since the summer on suspicion of Islamic radicalization, French intelligence services told AP. He was detained Thursday for questioning based on the monitoring of his phone calls in recent days, but investigators found no sign that he was preparing an attack, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said.

French intelligence suggested a link between the war in the Middle East and the suspect's decision to attack, the minister said. He said authorities have detained 12 people near schools or places of worship since the Hamas attack on Israel, some of whom were armed and were preparing to act. France has heightened security at hundreds of Jewish sites around the country this week.

The prosecutor said the alleged assailant was a former student there and reportedly shouted "Allahu akbar," or "God is great," during the attack. Prosecutors are considering charges of terrorism-related murder and attempted murder against the suspect. **MDT/AP**



Ukrainian officials reported intense combat as Russian forces relentlessly assaulted the eastern Ukrainian city of Avdiivka for a fifth consecutive day Saturday. City leader Vitalii Barabash reported that Moscow was deploying additional forces to encircle the strategically important city in the eastern Donetsk region, situated just north of the Russian-held regional capital, also called Donetsk.

Poland is holding a high-stakes election that has energized many voters, with the ruling conservative nationalist party pitted against opposition groups that accuse it of eroding the foundations of the democratic system. The ruling party, Law and Justice, has a devoted base of supporters in the Central European nation of 38 million who appreciate its defense of Catholic traditions and its social spending on pensioners and families with children. The payments have given relief to poor people.

Italy The mayor of Venice ordered an immediate stop to electric buses operated by La Linea company after a bus crashed in the Italian city, injuring 15 people. This is the company's second accident following the fiery Oct. 3 collision that killed 21 people. The bus crashed Saturday evening into a building in Mestre, a Venice borough. The injured were not in serious condition, Mayor Luigi Brugnaro said in a statement.



Guatemala In what authorities described as a national security incident, hackers affiliated with the activist group Anonymous disabled multiple government webpages Saturday. The attacks were in support of demonstrations led by Indigenous organizations in the Central American country. For almost two weeks, demonstrators have been calling for the resignation of Guatemalan Attorney General Consuelo Porras.