



OVER 20 CANDIDATES SHORTLISTED FOR CHINA'S FOURTH GENERATION OF TAIKONAUTS, INCLUDING CANDIDATES FROM MACAU, HK

P4

PATRIOTIC EDUCATION LAW TO BE PROMOTED IN HONG KONG, MACAU

P3

HONG KONG GOV'T CUTS TAXES FOR FOREIGN HOME BUYERS, STOCK TRADERS

P5



AP PHOTO



Philippines Relatives of victims of alleged war crimes committed by Myanmar's military filed a criminal complaint in the Philippines against their nation's ruling generals as they increasingly seek to hold them accountable in courts outside the country.

AP PHOTO



Australia A cruise operator that failed to cancel a voyage from Sydney that led to a major COVID-19 outbreak was ruled negligent in its duty of care to passengers in a class-action case yesterday.

AP PHOTO



Finnish investigators said they believed an anchor of a Chinese container ship was dislodged and caused the damage to the undersea Balticconnector gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia on the Baltic Sea earlier this month.

More on backpage

MACAU FORMULA

FIA to accredit Macau F3, GT Grand Prix for three years, from the upcoming 70th edition P3



COURTS

PROSECUTOR 'SURPRISED' BY CALL TO RETURN FROM UNPAID LEAVE

P2

TRANSPORT

GOV'T LAUNCHES AWAITED PUBLIC TENDER FOR 500 NEW TAXIS

P2

KONG CHI

SENIOR PROSECUTOR SURPRISED BY CALL TO RETURN FROM UNPAID LEAVE

ANTHONY LAM

SENIOR prosecutor Kong Chi disclosed for the first time that his unpaid leave was taken to accompany his mother's psychotherapy appointments, and that he had been surprised about being summoned from the holidays.

He also said that he had been residing in mainland China throughout the used portion of his leave. In addition, he said that he had tried to help his mother stabilize her mental condition, and he had no intention to flee, according to local media All About Macau.

His leave started on Feb. 7, 2022 and was set to last for two years. His last departure from Macau took place on Jan. 19, 2023.

When he was asked by the defense lawyer about the details of his unpaid leave, he said that he had been living in mainland China. In March, he said, he received a phone call and a letter from the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), summoning him to return to the MP within 48 hours. However, he did not honor the summons.

In explanation, the senior prosecutor said that he was at the time waiting for his mother's psychiatric medications. Moreover, he could not locate his Macau ID. This is why he did not return to



Macau.

Although not understanding why he was summoned by the MP, he felt embarrassed to seek help from his colleagues. Nonetheless, he said, he feared that once in Macau, he would be put under custody or prohibited from leaving Macau, and so would not be able to help his mother with

medications. Even now he questioned how he should have dealt with the situation.

On the question as to whether he fled or not, he said that if he does not return to work after the official cessation of his unpaid leave, he should then be considered as having fled.

A recent hearing revolved around

Kong's financial situation.

The prosecution pointed out that a loan Kong made to Keong Lok Peng came with a condition that Kong's brother, Kong Peng, be hired by Keong's restaurant, and queried the reason for this.

Kong said that it was for his own protection, although in the end Keong had repaid the debt

regularly.

The prosecution then questioned Kong about the large quantity of cash and jewelry in the latter's safe. Kong explained that they were his entire savings, as well as money that his mother gave him.

Then, the prosecution went on to question him about the HKD710,000 cash in the safe, which far surpassed the threshold for asset declaration. Kong said that the sum was saved to exchange currency with Choi Sao Ieng, the second defendant.

In response to the prosecution's request for evidence, Kong admitted that although he had hired lawyers, as a person under custody, there was not much that he could do. He said he had faced difficulty contacting witnesses because his phone was also held by police.

He added that before working as a prosecutor, he had worked in the legal translation office of the government and earned 485 salary points per month, in an attempt to explain the source of his assets. He hoped the court would be able to take this into account.

On his style of handling cases, Kong was asked by the defense lawyer about details and key evidence of several cases that he had archived. Kong said that he is a more relaxed type of prosecutor, meaning that without strong evidential proof, cases would not be brought to court. However, he claimed that he is also rigorous, as over 80% of the cases that were brought to court by him resulted in a conviction.

TRANSPORT

Gov't launches awaited public tender for 500 new taxis

THE SAR government has launched a public tender for ordinary eight-year taxi licenses for 500 new taxis.

The tender, slated to end Nov. 23, will allow companies to make bids for packs of 10 licenses, with each company allowed to apply for up to 50 taxis.

The minimum bid price for a company license to operate 50 taxis is set at MOP2.5 million.

The tender was initially set to reissue some 300 licenses currently due to expire, but Transport Bureau (DSAT) director Kelvin Lam

said that the number might actually amount to 500 according to the needs of locals and tourists, which the government is currently evaluating.

According to DSAT, there are currently approximately 1,900 valid taxi licenses allocated, of which about 300 will expire at the end of this year.

According to officials from the taxi sector, there are far fewer licenses currently in use than what the government estimates. This is due to several factors including drivers who have left the profession

and found another occupation during the pandemic. During the pandemic, the industry was struggling to keep taxis operating with no tourists in Macau and little demand from local residents.

It has become difficult to hail a cab due to strong demand from consistently growing tourists arrivals.

At a recent Legislative Assembly session, lawmakers agreed that the taxi service in Macau is currently insufficient and needs significant improvements to be able to meet the needs of both residents and tourists. LV



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70TH GP

FIA to accredit Macau F3, GT Grand Prix for three years

ANTHONY LAM

GLOBAL car-racing authority Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) has agreed to accredit the local F3 and GT races for the next three years, Director of Sports Pun Weng Kun said yesterday.

Pun, also the coordinator for the Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee (MGPOC), made the disclosure on the sidelines of the GP press conference yesterday afternoon. He added that the decision was based upon the FIA's trust in the Guia Circuit and the program arrangements.

Although not attending in person, FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem also made reference to the decision in a video he had recorded for the occasion.

Dutchman Richard Verschoor, winner of the race in 2019, returns to the category from the FIA F2 Championship to defend his title. Other drivers returning to F3 from F2 are promising Czech driver Roman Stank and Red Bull Juniors Zane Maloney, the first Barbadian to race in Macau, and Frenchman Isack Hadjar.

The F2 hopefuls are joined by a host of drivers from the 2023 FIA F3 Championship field, with front-runners, Ferrari Driver Academy Swede Dino Beganovic, Ita-



lian Gabriele Mini and Pau Aron, among other skillful racers.

Leading the charge of drivers looking for their first Macau GT Cup win is French Mercedes Factory driver Jules Gounon, Reigning DTM champion Sheldon van der Linde, Porsche factory stars Kevin Estre and Thomas Preining, New Zealander Earl

Bamber, Mercedes driver Daniel Juncadella and Ferrari factory ace Daniel Serra, among other stars. Ferrari will be seeking the factory's first Macau FIA GT World Cup title.

Celebrating its 70th edition, this year's event will be held in two separate weeks – from Nov. 11 to 12 and 16 to 19.

There will be five races over the first weekend, including Macau Formula 4 Race; TCR Asia Challenge; Greater Bay Area GT Cup (GT3); Greater Bay Area GT Cup (GT4); and the Macau Roadsport Challenge.

The second weekend will see an even more packed schedule, including the Formula 3 Macau

Grand Prix - FIA F3 World Cup; Macau GT Cup - FIA GT World Cup; Macau Guia Race - Kumho TCR World Tour Event of Macau; Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix - 55th Edition; Macau Touring Car Cup - China Touring Car Championship; and Macau Grand Prix 70th Anniversary Challenge.

Several supplemental events will be held alongside the main races. The Macau Grand Prix Family Carnival will be held at Tap Seac Square from Nov 4 to 5, featuring a simulated Guia Circuit and a mini racing track catering to a younger audience, who, through the activities, will be able to learn more about motorsports. The "Celebrating the 70th Macau Grand Prix - Guia Circuit Fun Run presented by Bank of China" will be held on Nov. 5. Runners on the 6.2km-long Guia Circuit will experience the track racing on foot.

The 70th Macau Grand Prix Auto Show will be held at Tap Seac Square from Nov. 10 to 12, allowing the public to witness the racing cars and motorcycles up close. In addition, to further promote racing culture, the 70th Macau Grand Prix Photography Contest will be held once again.

As well as receiving sponsorship and support from the six integrated resort operators in Macau and other businesses, the event also successfully promotes cooperation with various local and overseas organizations from different sectors. They will jointly launch a variety of products to link the GP with the promotion and development of the sports industry, and to enhance the social and economic benefits sporting events bring, the MGPOC said in a statement.

Patriotic education law to be promoted in Hong Kong, Macau

STAFF REPORTER

THE Patriotic Education Law was adopted by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, on Tuesday when it closed its latest session. The law will take effect on Jan 1.

Under the law, the nation is required to advance historical, cultural and "One country, two systems" education to enhance Hong Kong and Macau residents' patriotic spirit and their sense of identity.

Policies of national reunification and relevant education will be provided for all Chinese people, including Taiwan compatriots, to guarantee the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation and oppose separatist activities for "Taiwan independence," according to the law.

The law highlights patriotic education for youth and children, and makes stipulations regarding patriotic education for various groups of people, such as employees of government departments, enterprises and public institutions, residents of urban and rural areas, as well as compatriots from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and overseas Chinese.

Starry Lee Wai-king, a Hong Kong member of the NPC Standing Committee, expressed her full support for the law, as cited in a report by China Daily.

Lee said the law, which proposes to enhance Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan compatriots' affirmation of the nation and outstanding traditional Chinese culture, as well as strengthen their awareness of safeguarding national unity and ethnic

solidarity, points the way for Hong Kong's patriotic education and turns a new page in the city's patriotism.

She hoped every sector in Hong Kong would learn and implement the spirit of the law and create an ideal environment for promoting patriotic education in the special administrative region, according to the report.

She also mentioned that the SAR government has rolled out many policies in regard to patriotic education.

Highlighting the significance of combining classroom teaching with practice, the law also directs schools to arrange for students to visit patriotic education sites and integrate the education into campus activities.

It emphasizes the uti-



lization of cultural relics, museums, libraries and memorial halls in patriotic education, clarifying that patriotic education sites should enhance the content of their exhibitions,

attracting government departments, enterprises, social organizations and citizens to visit.

It states that patriotic education needs to be carried out on important

anniversaries and festivals through diverse ceremonies, such as raising the national flag, playing and singing the national anthem and swearing to abide by the Constitution.

VALIDITY OF CHINESE VISA FOR NON-CHINESE IN MACAU EXTENDED

The validity of Chinese visas issued in Macau for non-Chinese living or working here has been extended, the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on its website yesterday. Chinese visas for the purposes of business, tourism and family visitation, among other nonspecific purposes, will be eligible. Non-Chinese permanent residents of Macau will be eligible to apply for multiple-entry visas of a maximum validity of five years. Non-Chinese non-permanent Macau residents will be eligible for two-year (maximum) multiple-entry visas. Non-Chinese professionals will be eligible for one-year (maximum) multiple-entry visas. Non-Chinese non-professionals, including domestic workers, will be eligible for six-month (maximum) multiple-entry visas.

IFTM TO HOLD 'DISCOVERY DAY'

The Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM) will be holding the Discovery Day: Exploring Educational Excellence this Saturday. Through various activities, the event will provide an opportunity for students, parents and friends from Macau and neighboring regions to obtain the latest admission information and investigate its academic programs and culture. The event will be held at East Asia Hall Building in IFTM Taipa Campus 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., and will feature seminars in hospitality, cultural tourism and digital marketing.

CITI CUTS OCTOBER GGR FORECAST TO MOP19.25 BILLION

Citigroup slightly downgraded the city's October gross gaming revenue (GGR) to MOP19.25 billion from MOP19.5 billion. The figure is equivalent to 73% of the October 2019 level. According to City, Macau's GGR reached approximately MOP14.6 billion in the first 23 days of October. The daily run-rate for the past eight days was roughly MOP575 million, which was up by about 20% compared to that of the previous week. Investment bank JP Morgan has said earlier this week that the casino sector is slated to hit another post-pandemic high this month, buoyed by China's eight-day holiday.

SPACE

CANDIDATES FROM HONG KONG, MACAU SHORTLISTED FOR CHINA'S NEW TAIKONAUT SELECTION

MORE than 20 candidates have been shortlisted for the final selection of China's fourth generation of taikonauts, including several candidates from Hong Kong and Macau, the China Manned Space Agency announced at a press conference yesterday.

The selection process was launched in 2022, with the aim of selecting 12 to 14 reserve taikonauts. The selection will include different fields of expertise, such as spacecraft pilots, spaceflight engineers and payload specialists.

Lin Xiqiang, the agency's spokesperson, said the spacecraft pilots will be selected from aviators now serving in the armed forces. The flight engineers and payload specialists will be chosen from those in relevant industries, universities and scientific research institutions.



"For the first time, the post of payload specialist is open to candidates from Hong Kong and Macau," Lin added.

In March 2023, the first round of the new taikonaut selection was completed, with 100-plus

candidates being picked. The second round wrapped up in August, and more than 20 candidates advanced to the finals.

According to Lin, the selection work is set to wrap up before the end of this year. If they

can pass the final selection, the candidates from Hong Kong and Macau will enter the taikonaut research and training center early next year.

"Let's look forward to their good news," Lin said. XINHUA

Inward investment totaled MOP29b in 2022

STAFF REPORTER

INWARD direct investment flows in Macau totalled MOP 29.24 billion in 2022, down by 30.8% year-on-year, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

Analysed by industry, inflows of direct investment in Financial Activities, Wholesale & Retail Trade and the Gaming Sector stood at MOP 22.28 billion, MOP 4.16 billion and MOP 2.58 billion respectively. As regards immediate source of invest-

ment, capital came mainly from mainland China (MOP 20.09 billion) and the British Virgin Islands (MOP 5.68 billion).

Inward direct investment showed a loss of MOP 10.18 billion in 2022 since foreign direct investors in the Gaming Sector suffered a widened loss of MOP 35.31 billion. Meanwhile, income (including after-tax profits and interest) earned by foreign direct investors in Financial Activities and Wholesale & Retail Trade dropped by 8.7% and 32.6% year-on-year

to MOP 14.75 billion and MOP 7.57 billion respectively.

As at the end of 2022, stock of inward direct investment totalled MOP 367.31 billion, up by 5.8% year-on-year. Analysed by immediate source of investment, investment stock from mainland China (MOP 84.25 billion) and the British Virgin Islands (MOP 72.05 billion) increased by 24.8% and 5.5% respectively year-on-year, while that from Hong Kong (MOP 95.54 billion) dropped by 3.0%.



MEETING WITH FUJIAN OFFICIALS LAY 'SOLID FOUNDATION' FOR COOPERATION: CE

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng said that the high-level meeting between Fujian and Macau officials and the Fujian-Macau Cooperation Conference mechanism had laid a solid foundation for cooperation between the two places.

Over the years, the two governments had actively

participated in, and contributed to, the construction of the Belt and Road initiative, worked together to expand the markets of Portuguese-speaking countries, and continued to promote cooperation between Fujian and Macau, according to Ho.

People from Fujian account for one-quarter of

the total population of Macau, or circa 160,000 individuals. The delegation for this week's visit to Fujian included 70 Macau entrepreneurs, most of them with links to Fujian. Their hope was for further promotion of existing cooperation between the two places and creating broader prospects for fresh

cooperation.

The Secretary of the CPC Fujian Provincial Committee, Zhou Zuyi, thanked the MSAR Government for "always attaching great importance to cooperation between Fujian and Macao, and for providing high-quality and continuous support to the development of all

aspects of Fujian Province."

Secretary Zhou said that Fujian's development momentum was improving.

That included the strengthening of economic and trade exchanges with Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa and South America, as well as Fujian continuing actively to integrate into the deployment of the country's Belt and Road initiative.

PROPERTY

Hong Kong cuts taxes for foreign home buyers, stock traders to maintain global status

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

HONG Kong's leader yesterday cut taxes for some homebuyers and stock traders to boost markets as the city seeks to maintain its reputation as a global financial hub.

Chief Executive John Lee said the extra stamp duties imposed on non-resident buyers and current local homeowners looking to buy additional properties would be halved, the first easing over the past decade since property market-cooling measures were introduced.

In his annual policy address, Lee also unveiled plans to reduce the stamp duty on stock transactions to 0.1% from 0.13%, saying a vibrant stock market is vital to upholding the city's status as a financial hub. He set a goal of having the necessary legislative procedures completed by November.

After the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, Hong Kong's economy has begun to recover, fueled by growth in tourism and private consumption. The city's economy expanded 2.2% in the first half of 2023 year-on-year and is expected to grow between 4% and 5% for the full year.

However, the path to full recovery remains uneven, particularly with geopolitical tensions rising and Hong Kong's largest trading partner, mainland China, struggling to rebound quickly.



The financial hub also has seen a mass departure of residents in recent years, triggered by a crackdown on pro-democracy activists following Beijing's imposition of a tough national security law, and the now-rescinded strict COVID-19 mandates. This emigration has hurt the economy and property market.

Official data showed a 15% year-on-year drop in home prices last December and a 39% yearly decline in the volume of residential property transactions in 2022.

Lee, acknowledging the decline

in transactions and property prices over the past year amid interest rate hikes and modest economic growth in other regions, adjusted a raft of measures that manage property demand.

Under the slashed stamp duty, a foreigner buying properties in the city only would have to pay 15% of their purchase price as taxes, down from 30% currently. Current local homeowners will pay 7.5% for buying their second homes, down from 15%.

Foreign professionals working in Hong Kong on eligible visa pro-

grams are no longer required to pay extra property stamp duties arising from their non-permanent residency unless they fail to become permanent residents later.

"When they come to Hong Kong, we also encourage them to take root here," Lee said at a news conference.

But Joseph Tsang, chairman of property consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle in Hong Kong, said he expected some of Lee's property tax reductions to have limited impact on the market.

"The relaxation of cooling

measures is only a band-aid solution that is unlikely to reverse the downward trend of home prices," Tsang said in a statement.

A former security chief handpicked by Beijing to lead Hong Kong, Lee also is aiming to enact the city's own security law next year. Similar efforts were shelved in 2003 after fears about losing freedoms sparked massive protests.

Beijing has already imposed a national security law on the former British colony that returned to its rule in 1997. It criminalizes acts of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces. But the city's constitution requires Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous territory, to enact its own laws for acts such as treason, secession and subversion.

"External forces continue to meddle in Hong Kong affairs," Lee said, without elaborating.

He added the government will propose a bill to enhance cybersecurity of the critical infrastructure, such as financial institutions and telecommunications.

Other policy highlights announced by Lee included an entry program for investors and a cash bonus of 20,000 Hong Kong dollars (US\$2,556) offered to the parents of newborns.

Outside the government headquarters, members of the League of Social Democrats, one of the few remaining pro-democracy political parties, held a small demonstration yesterday morning to call for universal suffrage.

Hong Kong's leader is elected by a committee made up mostly of Beijing loyalists.

"Without democracy, there would be no livelihood," part of the demonstrators' banner read.

Most prominent pro-democracy activists have been arrested or silenced under the security law enacted in 2020. But Beijing and Hong Kong authorities hailed the law for bringing back stability to the city. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

MGM 'Macau Cruise' sets sail



The MGM "Macau Cruise" sightseeing cruise – with daily departures connecting Barra Pier and Coloane Pier – has officially set sail. The boat has over 40 sea-

ts on board, and four daily departures between Barra Pier and Coloane Pier.

The water voyage is an offering of MGM's Barra Revitalization Plan, which

harnesses integration of cultural tourism + sightseeing + transportation to bridge Barra and Coloane.

Earlier, MGM organized a dedicated Macau Cruise experiential tour for young people, children and their parents from the General Association of Chinese Students of Macau.

Under the guidance of a professional tour guide, participants embarked from the heart of Barra, exploring several heritage sites including A-Ma Temple, Moorish Barracks, and Mandarin's House. Some educational orienteering tasks were arranged to help students understand the culture and history of Barra.

Ambiente hosts art exhibition



Another Art@Ambiente exhibition is being held, showcasing the talents of local artists Jayne Lau and Jo-

sanne Lai.

Hosted by local real estate company Ambiente Properties in their Central Macau

offices, the exhibition will run until today.

In 2021, Ambiente Properties' managers Suzanne Watkinson and Alex Cheng had the idea of offering Ambiente's offices as an exhibition space for local artists to display and sell their art. "The artists have an opportunity to network, show and talk about their art, the visitors have a cosy, intimate environment in which to buy original art" according to the organizers.

Ambiente's support of Macau's local art scene has generated much positive feedback. Previously featured artists included: Denis Murrell, Leong Chi Mou, Marieta da Costa, Arlinda Frota, Heidi Ng, Filipe Soares, Giulio Acconci.

DIPLOMACY

California Governor has surprise meeting with Xi amid warm welcome in Beijing

HUIZHONG WU, BANGKOK

CALIFORNIA Gov. Gavin Newsom had a surprise meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing yesterday after being warmly welcomed by other senior officials in a display of friendliness that stands in sharp contrast to the dialogue between the United States and China in recent years.

The governor is on a weeklong tour of China, where he plans to push for climate cooperation. Newsom's trip as governor, once considered routine, is drawing attention as it comes after years of heightening tensions between the U.S. and China.

"I'm here in expectation, as you suggest, of turning the page, of renewing our friendship and reengaging (on) foundational and fundamental issues that will determine our collective faith in the future," Newsom said in brief opening remarks ahead of his meeting with Wang Yi, China's top diplomat, earlier in the day.

Though Newsom was in China to promote cooperation in curbing climate change, Chinese officials took the opportunity in welcome speeches ahead of the closed-door meetings to talk about U.S.-China relations. Wang is preparing to visit the U.S. today.

Newsom and Xi discussed ways to "accelerate our progress on climate in meaningful and substantive ways," the California governor



President Xi Jinping meets with Gavin Newsom, governor of the U.S. state of California, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, yesterday

said at a news conference, but did not mention more specifics.

They also talked about fentanyl, a synthetic drug and leading killer of young people in the U.S., and China's role in combating the transnational shipping of precursor chemicals, Newsom said.

According to China's state broadcaster CCTV, Xi told Newsom: "I hope your visit will enhance mutual understanding between the two sides and play a positive role in expanding cooperation between China and California and promoting the healthy and stable development of Sino-U.S. relations."

Xi may attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco next month and meet with U.S. President Joe Biden, although China has not formally confirmed his attendance.

Newsom is visiting Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai and the provinces of Guangdong and Jiangsu. At a speech at Hong Kong University on Monday, he promised to continue to cooperate on climate change regardless of the outcome of the next U.S. presidential election.

He said he raised human rights issues with Wang and the two also discussed Taiwan, a red-line

issue for Beijing. China claims the self-ruled island as part of its own territory.

"I expressed my support for the One-China policy ... as well as our desire not to see independence," Newsom said, referring to the official U.S. policy that recognizes the Communist Party as the ruling government of China. Officially, the U.S. does not recognize Taiwan but is its biggest unofficial ally.

Wang, the head of the Communist Party's office of foreign affairs, said he knows Newsom's trip attracted plenty of critics but that he views the trip positively.

"But I think time and facts will

certainly prove that your visit to China is in line with California people's wishes and in line with the American people's interests and the expectations of the global society."

Newsom also met yesterday with Vice President Han Zheng, who greeted him with a wide smile and called him an "old friend." Han is a past member of the Politburo Standing Committee, an elite group of leaders within the party.

"The China-U.S. relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world, and the sub-national cooperation is an indispensable part to facilitate the sound and steady growth of China-U.S. relations," Han said. "I'm sure your weeklong trip will inject positive energy to the development of the China-U.S. relationship."

The governor met as well with the head of China's National Development and Reform Commission, a Cabinet-level agency responsible for economic policies. They signed a memorandum on deepening cooperation in environmental issues.

Governors of California, which has an economy larger than most countries, have a long history of climate collaboration with China. Democrat Jerry Brown and Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger also traveled to China to swap knowledge on reducing air pollution and emissions. **MDT/AP**

MILITARY

Beijing said the US is a disruptor of peace following Pentagon report

CHINA said the United States is the "biggest disruptor of regional peace and stability" in the world in a scathing response yesterday to a Pentagon report on China's growing military buildup.

The annual report that is required by Congress is one way the Pentagon measures the military capabilities of China, which the U.S. government sees as its key threat in the Asia-Pacific region and America's primary long-term security challenge.

The statement China's

Ministry of Defense issued in response called the Pentagon report's findings false and used it in turn to hit back at the U.S.' recent actions in helping Israel and Ukraine, as well as its buildup of military installations worldwide.

"The U.S. has sent depleted uranium munitions and cluster bombs to Ukraine, sent its carrier battle groups to the Mediterranean and weapons and munitions to Israel, is this the so-called 'gospel' the 'human rights defender is bringing to the area?" said Wu Qian, the

spokesperson for China's defense ministry.

The Pentagon report builds on a warning last year that China was expanding its nuclear force rapidly, in line with a general buildup of its military. The earlier warning said Beijing was on track to nearly quadruple the number of warheads it has to 1,500 by 2035.

China's top diplomat Wang Yi will visit the United States today ahead of a possible meetup between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping in November. U.S.-China relations have dete-

riorated since 2018, initially over a trade dispute but expanding to the pandemic, China's actions in Xinjiang and over Taiwan.

China also made sure to address Taiwan in its response. The Pentagon report said China is intensifying military, diplomatic and economic pressure toward the self-ruled island.

To China, Taiwan is part of its territory and has become more overt with this claim in recent years. This claim has become one of the main points of tension between China and the U.S.



as U.S. support for Taiwan has grown. The U.S. has also sold billions of dollars in weapons to Taiwan, which the island's government has said is for self-defense and deterrence.

"We urge the U.S. to stop using any excuse, any method to strengthen U.S.-

-Taiwan military links and illegally arm Taiwan in any way," the spokesperson said.

The U.S. provides Taiwan sales under the Taiwan Relations Act, passed by Congress in 1979 to ensure the island is able to defend itself. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



The Albaneses and the Bidens at the White House

AUSTRALIA-US

Albanese state visit to feature talk of submarines and tech partnerships – and a lavish dinner

CHRIS MEGERIAN,
WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT Joe Biden is pressing forward with this week's state visit from Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, carving out time to nurture the relationship with a critical U.S. ally in the Pacific against the backdrop of escalating fighting between Israel and Hamas.

The state visit, only the fourth since Biden took office, is a reminder of how he's pursuing long-term plans to counter China's influence even as bloody conflicts in the Middle East and Europe, where the Russian invasion continues after almost two years, remain the most immediate concerns.

Senior administration officials said Biden and Albanese would be focused on innovative partnerships intended to support economic development among Pacific island nations, a key arena as the U.S. seeks the upper hand in the region. —

The U.S. and Australia plan to work together on building maritime infrastructure and laying undersea cables to strengthen internet connectivity, according to the officials, who requested anonymi-

ty to discuss details before they're announced.

There are also plans to have U.S. companies launch space missions from Australia, and Microsoft announced it would spend \$3 billion on cybersecurity, cloud computing and artificial intelligence there.

The initiatives come on top of a previously announced defense arrangement in which the U.S. is developing nuclear-powered submarines for Australia. The collaboration, which also involves the United Kingdom, is known as AUKUS, an acronym for the three countries' names.

"State visits are a big deal," said Charles Edel, a senior adviser and Australia chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "They're filled with plenty of pomp and circumstance, but they also serve as an opportunity to take stock of critical relationships and push them further forward."

Biden and Albanese are scheduled to meet in the Oval Office and then hold a press conference in the Rose Garden. The day's

events end with a state dinner in a pavilion erected on the South Lawn of the White House. On the menu will be farro and roasted beet salad, butternut squash soup and sarsaparilla-braised short ribs.

"We are now in a time when so many are facing sorrow and pain, so we made a few adjustments [to the state dinner]."

JILL BIDEN

The B-52s, a rock group, were originally scheduled to perform, but they've been replaced by military bands.

"We are now in a time when so many are facing sorrow and pain, so we made a few adjustments to the entertainment portion of the evening," first lady Jill Biden said.

The scenes of celebration will be juxtaposed with the crisis in the Middle East, where Israel has increased its bombardment of the Gaza Strip in retaliation against Hamas for its Oct. 7 attack. Hundreds of Palestinians were repor-

ted killed in a single day, and more bloodshed is expected as Israel prepares a ground invasion of the densely populated territory.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said there's "no more important time than now"

to hold the state visit to demonstrate the strength of the U.S. relationship with Australia.

The outbreak of war "doesn't stop the work that the president has continued to do, whether it's these diplomatic conversations, these important bilateral visits, or whether it's domestic issues right here in this country," she said.

Biden has previously hosted the leaders of France, South Korea and India for state visits.

This one is something of a consolation prize for Albanese after Biden scrapped his plan to visit Australia in May because of a standoff with House Republicans over the debt ceiling.

The decision forced the cancellation of a meeting of the Quad, which includes the U.S., India, Japan and Australia. A quick stopover in Papua New Guinea was

postponed as well.

Albanese touched down in the U.S. late Sunday, and he visited Arlington National Cemetery on Monday to commemorate how Americans and Australians have fought alongside each other over the years.

The Bidens welcomed Albanese and his partner, Jodie Haydon, to the White House on Tuesday evening (yesterday, Macau time) for a private dinner and to exchange gifts.

Albanese is also tending to Australia's relationship with China. He announced Sunday that he would meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping in November. He will be the first Australian prime minister to visit China in seven years, a reflection of tension between the two countries over trade and security issues.

"It's in Australia's interest to have good relations with China," Albanese told reporters.

Albanese's meeting with Xi would come just weeks before a potential meeting between Biden and Xi during a gathering of Asian leaders in San Francisco. Beijing has not yet announced whether Xi will attend the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, known as APEC.

China's top diplomat arrives in Washington later this week to meet with top U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

Congressional chaos is another complicating factor for Albanese's visit. House Republicans have been unable to settle on a new speaker — a fourth potential replacement emerged yesterday — which means it's been impossible to move legislation on Capitol Hill.

When Albanese wants to lobby for legislation, "it's even difficult for him to meet the right person to make the case," said John Lee, a Sydney-based senior fellow at the Hudson Institute.

For Australia, that means critical issues could be left in limbo. Officials in both countries are hoping to streamline rules on weapons exports to improve defense collaboration.

Biden wants \$3.4 billion to expand naval production facilities to help provide Australia with the nuclear-powered submarines. Sullivan described the proposal as "a key component to making our AUKUS agreement a success."

Australia plans to buy up to five U.S. submarines and later build its own. It's the first time in 65 years that the U.S. has shared its nuclear propulsion technology.

But Lee, who worked as a national security adviser to Australia's foreign minister in a previous government, said the two countries are straining to make progress on their plans.

"The U.S. and Australia are not on track," he said of their defense partnership. **MDT/AP**

ANALYSIS

Russia maneuvers carefully over Israel-Hamas war seeking to expand its global clout

RUSSIA has issued carefully calibrated criticism of both sides in the war between Israel and Hamas. But the conflict also is giving Moscow bold new opportunities — to advance its role as a global power broker and challenge Western efforts to isolate it over Ukraine.

While Moscow lacks leverage to mediate a settlement in the Middle East, it could try to play on some perceived credibility problems with the West's response to the crisis.

It also expects the Israel-Hamas war to distract attention from the fighting in Ukraine and erode support for Kyiv.

There are risks for Moscow, however. It could damage its relationship with Israel, which until now has kept it from sending weapons to Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has condemned the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants on towns in southern Israel. At the same time, he warned Israel against blockading the Gaza Strip, likening it to Nazi Germany's siege of Leningrad during World War II.

He has cast the war as a failure of U.S. diplomacy, charging that Washington has opted for economic "handouts" to the Palestinians and abandoned efforts to help create a Palestinian state.

Putin declared earlier this month that Moscow could play the role of mediator, thanks to its friendly ties with both Israel and the Palestinians, adding that "no one could suspect us of playing up to one party."

Despite that claim of even-handedness, a U.N. Security Council resolution that Russia submitted last week condemning violence against civilians made no mention of Hamas. It was rejected by the council.

China was among a few countries that backed the Russian draft, reflecting a shared stance by Moscow and Beijing. Chinese and



Russian Middle East envoys met last week to discuss working together to help cool the situation, noting their adherence to a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians.

While U.S. President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and other Western leaders visited Israel to show support, Putin waited for nine days before calling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, even though they previously had developed warm personal ties. Putin also discussed the war in calls with the leaders of Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the head of the Palestinian Authority.

Putin offered Netanyahu condolences to the families of Israelis killed by Hamas and emphasized "his strong rejection and condemnation of any actions that victimize the civilian population, including women and children," according to a Kremlin readout of the call. He also emphasized the need for a "peaceful settlement through political and diplomatic means," it added. Netanyahu's office said he told Putin that Israel would not stop until it had eliminated Hamas.

Unlike Putin, who carefully balanced his statements, other Russian officials were more blunt in their criticism of Israeli

strikes on Gaza.

Konstantin Kosachev, deputy speaker of the upper house of Russian parliament, said that while Hamas unleashed the war, Israel's response was "disproportionate" and "inhumane."

The Kremlin's maneuvering may reflect domestic politics, with Muslims making up about 15% of the its population. The Moscow-backed leader of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, spoke strongly in support of the Palestinians, assailing Israel for capturing their lands and establishing blockades.

Moscow's stance won quick praise from Hamas, which said it appreciates Russia's call for a cease-fire. Russia's statements also play well in the Arab world, where many have accused the U.S. and its allies of squarely supporting Israel while turning a blind eye to the rising civilian death toll in Gaza.

But this position also threatens Russia's friendly ties with Israel, which hasn't joined Western sanctions against Moscow or given weapons to Ukraine.

"There is a real threat of exacerbation of our ties with Israel in the current situation," said Andrei Kortunov, academic director of the Russian International Affairs Council.

The Times of Israel reported Tuesday an Israeli diplomat expressed "displeasure with the role Russia is playing" to Moscow's diplomatic officials, voicing hope the Kremlin will take "more balanced" positions.

Amir Weitmann, a leading member of Netanyahu's Likud party, accused Russia of supporting Hamas. Speaking on Kremlin-funded broadcaster RT, he warned that after Israel defeats Hamas, "we will make sure that Ukraine wins, we will make sure that you pay the price for what you have done."

Asked about Israeli criticism of Moscow's stance on the war, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov emphasized Russia's condemnation of terrorism and reaffirmed its push for a quick cease-fire and the need for a Palestinian state.

Amid what Israel sees as Moscow's pro-Palestinian stance, some prominent Russian voices have backed Israel.

In a sign of the split sympathies, the head of the most popular political talk show on Russian state TV, Vladimir Solovyov, fired one expert on his televised panel who alleged in an online interview that two of Moscow's top diplomats have anti-Israeli sentiments. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1994 ISRAEL AND JORDAN MAKE PEACE

Israel and Jordan have signed a peace treaty ending 46 years of war.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein of Jordan formally made peace at a ceremony in desert area of Wadi Araba on the Israeli-Jordanian border.



US President Bill Clinton was a witness to the treaty also watched by 5,000 guests and relayed to the world on TV.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was conspicuous by his absence - he had not been invited.

Jordan is now the second Arab state to establish close relations with Israel since Egypt made peace in 1979.

In an emotional speech King Hussein said: "This is peace with dignity. This is peace with commitment. This is our gift to our peoples and the generations to come."

Mr Rabin spoke of his joy at establishing peace among soldiers and friends.

He said: "It is not only our states that are making peace with each other today, not only our nations that are shaking hands in peace here in the [Wadi Araba].

"You and I, your majesty, are making peace here, our own peace, the peace of soldiers and the peace of friends."

The president praised Mr Rabin and King Hussein for their efforts to end hostilities over recent years.

In a barely veiled attack on Islamic extremists, President Clinton said opponents of peace "who cloak themselves in the rhetoric of religion and nationalism" would not succeed.

All Israelis except the extreme right-wing welcome the agreement. The Israeli Knesset (parliament) ratified it by 105 to three.

Many Palestinians, who make up 60% of Jordan's population, are angered and shocked by the peace deal which they believe fails to address their grievances.

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation has condemned the role accorded to Jordan in protecting Islamic shrines in East Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem and throughout the occupied West Bank, Palestinians held a general strike and demonstrations.

In Hebron, they burned pictures of King Hussein and there were clashes with Israeli troops in Nablus.

Hamas, which just eight days ago carried out a devastating suicide bomb in Tel Aviv killing 22 people, has accused President Clinton of double-standards and vowed to continue its campaign of violence "anywhere in the world".

Under the agreement, Israel and Jordan agreed to exchange territory and make the border conform to geographical landmarks.

The treaty opens the way for co-operation in trade, tourism, transport links, water resources and environmental protection. It also secures the Israel's longest land border.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated on 4 November 1995 by a Jewish extremist and in 1999 King Hussein of Jordan died of cancer.

Shimon Peres pushed on with Mr Rabin's efforts to make peace with the Palestinians.

But in an election in 1996 he lost to Binyamin Netanyahu who campaigned against the Rabin-Peres peace programme.

But the peace deal struck by Israel and Jordan in 1994 lives on.

In September 2002, Jordan and Israel agreed on a plan to pipe water from the Red Sea to the shrinking Dead Sea that straddles the two countries.

The project, costing \$800m, was the two nations' biggest joint venture to date.

And 18 months later, in March 2004, the two nations agreed a joint project to build a desert science centre on their shared border.

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
You may find your self a bit frazzled if you allow someone to goad you into an unsavory debate. You need more space for the whole family.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Be sure to organize events that will keep the children busy. Don't expect support from your mate. Don't allow colleagues to put unreasonable pressure on you.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You must not make unnecessary changes today. Opportunities to get together with people in powerful positions could help you get ahead.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Emotionally, things may not run so smoothly. It might be time to make a fresh start. Be careful; you may say something you'll regret later.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You will be able to borrow money in order to invest. Be discreet about your personal life or whereabouts. Be mysterious. Unstable relationships are likely.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
You would be wise to consider attending lectures that will broaden your awareness concerning your professional direction. Look before you leap.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
You may have a problem at work with a female coworker. Take care of any pressing health problems. Avoid confrontations with coworkers who aren't pulling their weight.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You will have original ideas for ways to make extra money. Friendships will be ruined if you let too many people get involved in any disputes.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Your personal life will still be experiencing difficulties and you are best to avoid the issues for the time being. Get involved in competitive sports. Friends will appreciate your attention and playful nature.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Travel and entertainment will be pleasurable. Short trips to visit others will do the whole family a world of good. You will find that you can work progressively at improving yourself today.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
You can prosper if you invest in property or mutual funds. Your intuition will be right on. Follow your feelings in matters pertaining to financial investments.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Communicate with relatives who may need advice in order to find solutions to their existing problems. You will meet new friends and enjoy a multitude of new activities.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	10	21	fine
Changchun	1	12	fine
Chengdu	16	22	rain
Chongqing	17	20	rain
Fuzhou	21	26	rain
Guangzhou	21	33	cloudy
Guiyang	15	17	overcast
Haikou	23	28	rain
Hangzhou	17	27	overcast
Harbin	2	10	fine
Hefei	13	27	cloudy
Nanjing	14	26	cloudy
Shanghai	18	25	cloudy
Taipei	22	27	cloudy
Wuhan	16	26	cloudy
Hong Hong	25	28	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-3	1	overcast
Frankfurt	9	12	rain
Paris	11	16	rain
London	8	14	cloudy
New York	16	25	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Gas burner or Sicilian volcano; 5- Kitchen gadget; 10- Thousand; prefix; 14- Run into; 15- Slip; 16- Christmas; 17- Spar; 18- Killed; 19- Tops; 20- Hitching post?; 22- Eighth sign of the zodiac; 24- Members of the Felidae family; 27- Connections; 28- Inferior position; 32- Way to cook; 35- Cellular stuff; 36- Veronica of "Hill Street Blues"; 38- Cross the goal line; 40- Take ___ from me; 42- Lover of Juliet; 44- Actor Kristofferson; 45- Concise; 47- Small branch; 49- Naval rank, briefly; 50- Lathered up; 52- No long-distance charge; 54- Sly look; 56- Golfer Aoki; 57- King Arthur's palace; 60- Stage play; 64- Timbuktu's land; 65- Playwright Pirandello; 68- Cartel; 69- Grandson of Adam; 70- Leers at; 71- Restless desire; 72- Baseball glove; 73- In what place; 74- Medicinal amount;

DOWN 1- Austen novel; 2- Bluey-green color; 3- Treehouse used by birds; 4- Set upon; 5- Ltr. addenda; 6- 100%; 7- Narrow inlets; 8- Decree; 9- Impressionist Pierre; 10- Backpack; 11- ___ Arabian Nights; 12- Carson's successor; 13- Cheer for Manolete; 21- Like some decisions; 23- Classic autos; 25- Pull apart; 26- Aegean island; 28- German sausage; 29- Pays to play; 30- Africa's most populous city; 31- Lure; 33- More tender; 34- Triple; 37- Vive ___!; 39- "___ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto); 41- Writer of Hebrew prayers; 43- Lubricates; 46- Piece of fencing?; 48- Pleased; 51- Egg yolk; 53- Prohibit; 55- Coarse; 57- Child's plea; 58- Oodles; 59- Scrabble piece; 61- Violist's clef; 62- Soft shoes; 63- Hurt; 64- 13th letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 66- Lux. neighbor; 67- British verb ending;

Yesterday's solution

Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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Coloane Village
HKD 9,950/mth 1 bed 1 bath

RUGBY WORLD CUP

The final will be supercharged by one of sport's

GERALD IMRAY

NEW Zealand and South Africa will contest this weekend's Rugby World Cup final and bring one of sport's most enduring, most intense rivalries to the ultimate stage for the first time in nearly 30 years.

It's been a once-in-a-generation occurrence for rugby and will be a rare treat for every fan, regardless of where they're from and who they normally support.

The All Blacks and the Springboks — with 102 years of games between them — have met in the Rugby World Cup final just once before, a 1995 showdown that carved out a moment that reverberated way beyond sport. South Africa, newly free from apartheid and in its first World Cup as host, won against the team it wants to beat more than any other in extra time

in front of new President Nelson Mandela.

In a way, New Zealand — with a collection of successes since and the superior team over most of the last three decades — has always been waiting for the chance to exorcise that 1995 final. This is it.

Both teams have won two Rugby World Cups after '95, but never against the other, and to understand the meaning of New Zealand vs. South Africa this weekend at Stade de France in Paris, think Brazil vs. Argentina in a soccer World Cup final. Then add lots more.

Both are locked on three world titles and playing for a record fourth. The Springboks are the defending champions and ranked No. 1 and the All Blacks the former champions and No. 2.

It can't get bigger in rugby.

"It has been part of our rugby history, the Springboks and the

All Blacks, and every time we play each other it is always a special battle," South Africa assistant coach Deon Davids said, adding he grew up listening to their games on the radio. Him and millions of others.

"It will maybe go to a different level in terms of the competition between the players," Davids said.

ALL BLACKS BACK

Both teams had to partly re-establish their reputations on the way to the final in France, more so New Zealand, which slipped to its heaviest loss ever — even worse, against South Africa — by 35-7 in a pre-tournament warmup. The All Blacks were then beaten by host France in the World Cup opener.

As a result, rugby's most celebrated team was not favored against then top-ranked Ireland in the quarterfinals, but fought backs-against-the-wall to deny the highly rated Irish 28-24 and underline the danger of ever writing off the All Blacks, no matter what the form book says.

Coach Ian Foster was a game away from losing his job a year ago, and will be replaced after the Rugby World Cup, but can deliver one



of New Zealand's most memorable triumphs bar none through all the doubts and the criticism.

"There's not a personal agenda here, this is about the All Blacks and the team," Foster said after a New Zealand with a more familiar skip in its step demolished Argentina 44-6 in the semifinals last Friday. "Things have happened to in-

dividuals and to me, but the team comes first."

STEELY SPRINGBOKS

South Africa lost to Ireland in the pool stage but still has a chance to successfully defend its Rugby World Cup title — something only New Zealand has done — after two exhausting knockout games, when

RUGBY WORLD CUP FINALS

	Date	Time	Home	Away	ODDS
Sat	Oct 28	03:00	Argentina	England	H 3.65, D 29, A 1.36
Sun	Oct 29	03:00	New Zealand	South Africa	H 1.8, D 23, A 2.3

ODDSCHECKER.COM

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LOST IN TRANSLATION

SOUTH AFRICANS DEFEND MBONAMBI OVER RACIAL SLUR ALLEGATION

SOUTH Africa's sports minister mounted a defense of Springboks player Bongsi Mbonambi this week after he was accused of directing a racial slur at an England opponent in their Rugby World Cup semifinal in France.

Mbonambi, who is Black, was accused by England's Tom Curry, who is white, and World Rugby is investigating the allegation. Mbonambi's participation in this weekend's World Cup final against New Zealand could be in doubt if he's found guilty of misconduct.

"Bongsi Mbonambi is us. We support you Bongsi," South African Sports Minister Zizi Kodwa wrote on social media.

Although the moment when Mbonambi is meant to have made the remark is unclear, Curry can be heard during the first half of the game asking referee Ben O'Keeffe what he should do if he's the target of abuse from an opponent.

"Nothing, please,"



O'Keeffe said in response. "I'll be on it."

South Africa won the game 16-15 with a very late penalty.

Mbonambi and the Springboks have not publicly commented on the allegation against him, although South Africa scrum coach Daan Human was asked about it and how it was affecting Mbonambi's preparations for the final at a World Cup news conference on Monday.

"I haven't discussed

that (with Mbonambi)," Human said. "But to be straightforward and honest with you, he is a calm guy. He is well spoken and I don't want to actually go into it because we have a World Cup final in six days' time."

Some South African media have claimed the whole episode might have been lost in translation, and that Mbonambi may have been shouting a word in South Africa's Afrikaans language that sounds like the English expletive Curry accused him of using, but means something else completely.

The Afrikaans word merely means "side" and Mbonambi was shouting it to his teammates to warn them where the ball was and where England was going to attack, the reports said.

World Rugby is under pressure to resolve the disciplinary case well in advance of the final and said it can't comment until the process has been completed. MDT/AP

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

greatest rivalries

2027 World Cup in Australia expanding to 24 teams with shorter schedule



the Springboks were twice on the verge of elimination.

South Africa beat host France 29-28 from behind, and then trailed for almost the entire match before snatching a victory from England 16-15 in the semifinals on Saturday.

The parallels between the Springboks and the All Blacks of 2023 are abundant, with Springboks coach Ja-

cques Nienaber also set to leave after the World Cup. Both captains — Sam Cane of New Zealand and Siya Kolisi of South Africa — are likely playing at their last World Cups, as are a string of big players on both sides, as if the final needed any more consequence.

Given all of the context, there may not be a game quite like it for another 30 years. **MDT/AP**

THE next Rugby World Cup in 2027 in Australia will feature more teams, an extra knockout round and a week less to play.

The late-2027 tournament will have 24 teams, the first expansion since 1999 when it went to 20 teams from the original 16.

Where the four new teams will qualify from will be determined after a review of the ongoing World Cup in France, World Rugby said yesterday [Macau time].

The 2027 dates were set for Oct. 1 to Nov. 13, the first time the tournament will start in October since 2003, when it was last staged in Australia.

A reduced four-week pool stage will feed into a new round of 16 as the whole tournament will be played over six weeks rather than the current seven.

There will be six pools of four teams; the top two in each pool will advance along with the four best third-placed teams. World Rugby promised to maintain the current turnaround between matches to uphold player welfare.

The draw, which has to be after the November test window to be fairer when most teams have played, will take place in January 2026.

It can't be in January 2027, 10 months before the tournament, because "you would put ticket sales at risk and that puts the financing of the tournament at risk," World Rugby CEO Alan Gilpin said. "Fans would be very frustrated with that outcome, of not being able to plan with any certainty with less than a year to a Rugby World Cup."

Gilpin said January 2026 was a compromise between not being too late and not too early, as it was for the ongoing Rugby World Cup in France. That draw was held nearly three years ago in December 2020. It became controversial only in the past year when big changes in the world rankings meant that by the time the tournament opened in Paris the top five teams were in one half of the draw.

Expansion was expected after the United States failed to qualify

for the World Cup in France.

The U.S. will stage the 2031 men's World Cup and is automatically qualified as the host, but World Rugby didn't want to risk the U.S. also not qualifying for 2027 and going 12 years between World Cups.

"The decision to expand Rugby World Cup 2027 to 24 teams is logical and the right thing to do," World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont said. "We must create greater relevance, opportunity and competitiveness to attract new fans and grow value."

"This incredible Rugby World Cup 2023 tournament has demonstrated the passion and potential that lies beyond the top 10 or 12 nations, if we think big and think inclusive. It is not acceptable to accept the status quo. Not acceptable to do nothing."

Rugby Australia bid for 2027 on the basis of a 20-team tournament but welcomed expansion as "a fantastic outcome," organizing committee head Rod Eddington said. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

Tech Views

Alex Webb



LOOMING

Art has had an immeasurable impact on the technology business. Steve Jobs' obsession with calligraphy helped shape modern typefaces, Star Trek inspired Jeff Bezos's work on Alexa and the volume controls in a Tesla go to 11.

Now with artificial intelligence, it's clear technology will return the favor. Creative industries are facing some of the most imminent disruptions posed by AI. How they react will inform how other industries tackle the incoming tsunami. Life, after all, imitates art.

The question of how to navigate the impending (or ongoing?) AI revolution weaved through much of the London edition of the Bloomberg Technology Summit, which took place on Tuesday.

Jared Kaplan, the chief science officer of Anthropic, led the charge. The AI company, which has raised money from both Amazon.com Inc. and Google, is positioning itself very much as the responsible AI pioneer. "We think there should be a race to the top for safer AI and more ethical AI," he said. Anthropic's pitch sounds similar to the one Apple uses for its smartphones: that it cares deeply about ethics and responsibility.

The summit's most instructive discussion might well have been between Hilary Krane, the chief legal officer of Creative Artists Agency, and Synthesia CEO Victor Riparbelli. CAA, the Hollywood super-agency, represents many of the actors, screenwriters and other creatives whose work could be alternately plagiarized, replaced or augmented by AI. Synthesia, meanwhile, makes AI avatars for corporate settings — a technology that can negate the need for actors.

"I think you have some issues on the front end in terms of what it's being trained on," Krane said, referring to AI in general. "And you have some issues on the back end," she added, citing the example of deepfakes that can use people's likenesses without their consent or the use of material found online. "Publicly available on the internet is not the same as legally available for use."

These kinds of questions are already front of mind in Hollywood, emerging as it is from a writers strike that sought a solution to many of these issues.

Riparbelli offered a question of his own: What separates inspiration from plagiarism? "If I sit with five of my friends, and we just listen to a lot of music from someone, and then we make something that is fundamentally new, I think everyone in this room would agree that's OK, right? That's not an infringement of copyright," he said. "The question is whether we view humans as being different from machines in this context."

We're a long way from finding definitive answers to these questions, but there's a good chance that the creative industries, ripe as they are for change, provide lessons for everyone else.

There's a useful lens through which to view all this. Roy Bahat, the head of Bloomberg Beta, Bloomberg LP's venture capital arm, compared the effects of AI to three sets of technology: looms, slide rules and cranes.

1. "A loom is designed to replace a person. The same way the Luddites fought against the introduction of the spinning loom."

2. A slide rule "assists a person in making a calculation. It speeds you up, allows you to be more accurate and make fewer mistakes."

3. "A crane allows a human being to do something that, but for the existence of that crane, they would not be able to do. There's no amount of time that a human can spend to lift a steel beam five stories into the air."

As companies, lawmakers and consumers alike try to work out where to draw the line in terms of what they think is acceptable for AI, this framework is a good starting point. It's just not clear to filmmakers, musicians or anyone else which of these three tools AI will be to their trades.

Courtesy Bloomberg

Environmental activists voiced disappointment yesterday at Malaysia's decision to allow Lynas Rare Earths to continue operations until March 2026, and demanded more transparency on plans by the Australian miner to extract a radioactive element from its growing waste.

The government Tuesday said it allowed Lynas to continue to import and process rare earths at its refinery in central Pahang state, reversing a decision for such activities to halt by Jan. 1. This came after Lynas proposed a method to draw out thorium, the radioactive element, from raw feedstock and from over a million tons of waste accumulated at its refinery.

Activist Wong Tack said the government should have first compelled Lynas to prove that its proposal could work by immediately removing thorium from its existing waste.

"It is extremely irresponsible of the (science) minister to extend Lynas' license and allow them to generate more waste when the existing waste has not been safely dealt with," he said.

Environmental group Friends of the Earth Malaysia said it was baffled as the government's U-turn was based merely on a preliminary laboratory study by Lynas. It called for details of the Lynas study to be made public.



Staff members gather near a billboard depicting Chinese astronauts on the past Shenzhou missions after Chinese astronauts for the upcoming Shenzhou-17 mission met with the press at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center

CHINA ANNOUNCES PLAN FOR A NEW SPACE TELESCOPE

CHINA announced plans yesterday to send a new telescope to probe deep into the universe as it prepared to launch the country's next, three-member crew for its orbiting space station.

The telescope, dubbed Xuntian, will be installed by China's Tiangong space station and will co-orbit with it, according to a statement from Lin Xiqiang, spokesperson and deputy director general of the Chinese Manned Space Agency.

No timeframe was given for the installation. State broadcaster CCTV said the telescope would enable surveys and mapping of the sky.

China has researched the movement of stars and planets for thousands of years while in modern times, it has pushed to become a leader in space exploration and science.

The announcement came on the eve of the flight by three astronauts — Tang Hongbo, Tang Shengjie and Jiang Xinlin — who will replace a crew that has been on the station for six months.

The launch is expected for late morning today.

Tang is a veteran who led a 2021 space mission for three months.

China has made majors advance in its burgeoning space power and says it plans to send a crewed mission to the moon by the end of the decade while also pursuing other ambitions in space.

The program largely comes in competition with the United States but also seeks to draw in support from nations in Europe, Southeast Asia, South America and elsewhere.

China built its own space station after it was excluded from the International Space Station, largely due to U.S. concerns over the control of the program by the People's Liberation Army, the military branch of the ruling Communist Party.

China's first manned space mission in 2003 made it the third country after the former Soviet Union and the U.S. to put a person into space using its own resources.

American spending, supply chains and capabilities are believed to give it a significant edge over China for the time being. China has broken out

in some areas, however, bringing samples back from the lunar surface for the first time in decades and landing a rover on the less explored far side of the moon.

Meanwhile, the U.S. aims to put astronauts back on the lunar surface by the end of 2025 as part of a renewed commitment to crewed missions, aided by private sector players such as SpaceX and Blue Origin.

In addition to their lunar programs, the two countries have also separately landed rovers on Mars, and China plans to follow the U.S. in landing a spacecraft on an asteroid.

The new crew of the station will also need to conduct maintenance on its solar panels that have been hit by debris flying within the solar system, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

A large amount of those particles were created by China in the destruction of one of its own satellites by a missile it fired in 2007, in what was seen as a sign of strength against its competitors in the U.S. and its allies. MDT/AP



Russia The upper house of the Russian parliament yesterday revoked the ratification of a global nuclear test ban in what Moscow has describes as a move to establish parity with the United States. The Federation Council voted to endorse a bill rescinding the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, also known as the CTBT. The bill will now be sent to President Vladimir Putin for final approval. The lower house approved the bill last week.

Internet Amazon is rolling out an independent cloud for Europe as it looks to address strict regulations that companies and those in the public sector face in the European Union. Amazon Web Services said Wednesday that its AWS European Sovereign Cloud, which will be located in and operate out of Europe, will have the same security, availability, and performance as existing AWS regions but will be separate from them. The cloud will let customers keep all metadata they create in the European Union and will have its own billing and usage metering systems.



Art On the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's First Folio, rare originals are being displayed and publishers are offering collectors editions of Shakespeare's plays, including one that sells for \$1,500. Scholars believe that between 200-300 copies still survive from the late 1623 release of "Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories & Tragedies." Presided over by two friends and former colleagues of Shakespeare, who had died in 1616, the Folio ensured that lasting texts existed for "Macbeth," "Twelfth Night" and other cornerstones of Western literature.