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**TOTAL SPENDING BY VISITORS
(EXCLUDING GAMING) SURGED
576.7% YEAR-ON-YEAR TO MOP19.60
BILLION IN THIRD QUARTER**

P3

**ASSOCIATION EXPECTS MACAU
ECONOMY TO REMAIN STABLE
NEXT THREE MONTHS**

P3

**F3 WORLD CUP:
MINI SHOWS
POTENTIAL SNATCHING
PROVISIONAL POLE**

P4



China A fire erupted in a coal mining company building in a northern Chinese city yesterday, killing 26 people and injuring at least 38, Chinese state media reported. Rescue personnel evacuated dozens of people from the building, according to state media. The building belongs to Yongju Coal Company and is in Lvliang city in northern Shanxi province, a major coal-producing region.



India Rescuers supplied food and medicine to 40 construction workers yesterday as officials prepared to start drilling through the rubble to reach the men who have been trapped since a portion of the tunnel they were working on collapsed over the weekend. Rescuers planned to insert wide steel pipes to create a passage to free the workers trapped since early Sunday in the mountainous Uttarakhand state. A drilling machine was assembled after three Indian air force transport aircraft flew its parts in from New Delhi.



Dubai Long-haul carrier Emirates said yesterday it will purchase 15 additional Airbus A350-900s worth \$6 billion after a spat between the airline and the European manufacturer went unusually public during this week's Dubai Air Show. The Emirates' order, far smaller than initially expected, came after the airline and its sister carrier FlyDubai purchased \$6.3 billion worth of aircraft from Boeing Co. at the start of the weeklong show, which comes as international travel has rebounded following the coronavirus pandemic.

More on backpage




OPEN LINE


Biden, Xi met for hours and agreed to 'pick up the phone' for any urgent concerns P8-9

**MOODY'S
MELCO, SJM'S FINANCIAL
LEVERAGE TO IMPROVE**

P3



**WORLD CUPS
ARE BACK**



SUPPLEMENT

GOV'T TO STUDY FEASIBILITY OF DIGITAL CURRENCY

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has told parliament that the government would conduct studies and consultations on the feasibility of digital currency. Relatively satisfied with the spread of mobile payment across the city, the official stated his position that digital payment would be a key area for the future. He commended the currency issuance law for providing a solid legal foundation for digital currency, and argued that the lack of any legal base will lead to chaos similar to the cryptocurrency saga in Hong Kong. While promising that the banking industry will be consulted, Ho underlined that security will be prioritized to give confidence to the broad range of funds.

MACAU STAFF OF JAPANESE FAST FASHION BRAND TO GET 10% PAY RISE

Fast fashion brand from Japan, UNIQLO, announced in a statement yesterday that its staff in Macau will see a salary rise up to 10% on average. The increment retroactively took effect from October and involves frontline retail staff. Following the increment, the pay band for new hires will see the highest rise of 16%. Intakes through the UNIQLO Management Candidate scheme will have a starting salary of MOP23,500. From September, employees who previously had to work a full fiscal year to qualify for a discretionary bonus will now be eligible to receive the first bonus after working with the company a minimum of three months.

PJ REMINDS PUBLIC NOT TO SCALP GP TICKETS OR TRANSFER ACCESS PASSES

Tickets for the Macau Grand Prix should not be scalped, the Judiciary Police (PJ) reminded the public yesterday in a statement. Complimentary tickets should not be resold, nor access passes transferred. The police underlined that such acts are criminal offences, adding that tickets should be purchased through official channels so as to impede attempted scalping. Unofficial sales should be reported to the police as soon as possible. Earlier this week, posts were seen on social media attempting to sell a race access pass.

IPIM LEADS MACAU DELEGATION TO INT'L CONGRESS ON MICE

The Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) recently organized a delegation of six people, comprising some MICE industry practitioners from Macau, to Bangkok for the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) annual conference. The conference aims to improve the connections between the industries in the two jurisdictions. The delegation has met with Waikin Wong, Asia-Pacific director of the ICCA. Meetings were also held to introduce more accreditation programs to Macau so as to improve local workforce capacity. IPIM also took the opportunity to promote Macau's MICE facilities.

DESPITE HIGH FREQUENCY, CYBERATTACKS CAUSE MINIMAL DAMAGE IN 2023

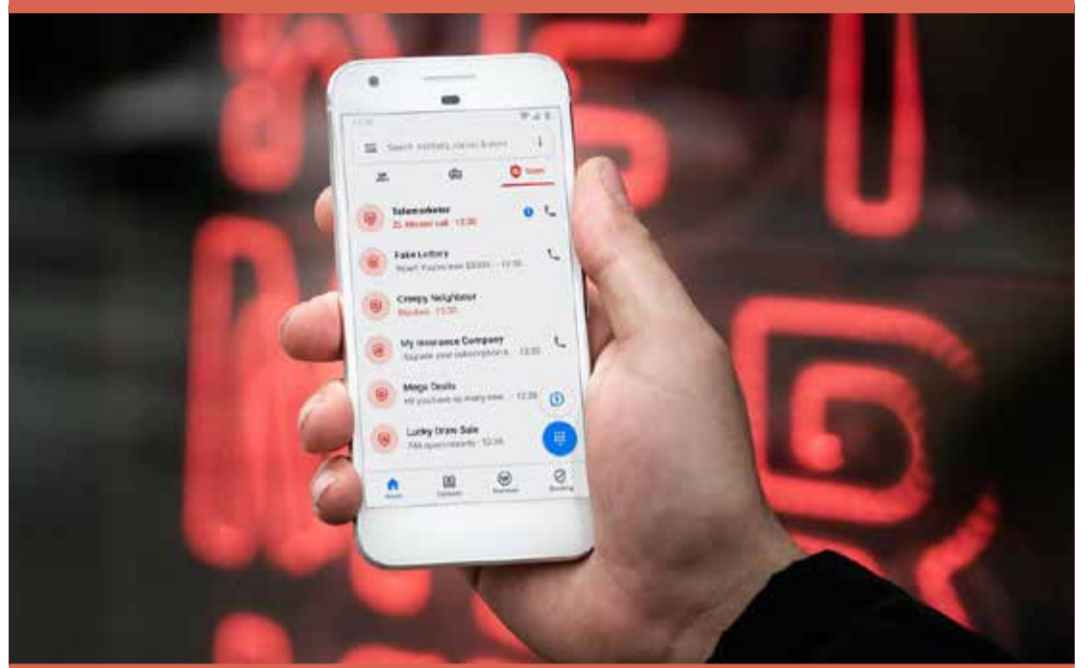
ANTHONY LAM

THE cyberattacks faced by public entities this year have been limited in effect, although high in frequency, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has disclosed.

While responding to a topical question from lawmaker Ngan Iek Hang, Ho explained that infrastructure mandated by law to be protected against cyberattacks are well protected. The Cybersecurity Committee that has been in operations for a number of years, he added, oversees the cybersecurity levels of major entities, such as banks and casinos. He highlighted that the local team of cybersecurity personnel is large.

With all major entities under the scrutiny of the Committee, Ho said that the government would study the possibility of providing instructions or training to SMEs or even personal networks.

Ho pointed to a previous cyberattack that affected the



Radio Taxi Company. It was suspected that hackers had intruded and played videos criticizing Chinese President Xi Jinping on the seat-back TVs on local radio taxis. By mentioning this case, the official attempted to highlight the pervasiveness of hackers, adding that great attention should be

given to them.

"Cyberattacks are wars without smoke," Ho said.

To lawmaker Zheng Anting's question on AI, Ho reiterated that key labs had been established following national guidelines and market needs. These labs have done a lot of work in this area. The educa-

tion sector, meanwhile, has also started focusing on the area.

He also described AI fraudulence as "terrifying," adding that the Secretariat for Security is studying possible measures against it, while hoping universities can offer courses in these areas.

ARNALDO SANTOS

Director of Housing died at age 63

DIRECTOR of Housing Bureau (IH) Arnaldo Ernesto dos Santos passed away yesterday morning at age 63, local media has reported.

It was also reported that the official passed away at the private Kiang Wu Hospital. The cause was undisclosed. The official's last public appearance was at the Economic Housing Application Press Conference held on Sep. 26.

Santos held a Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the Technical University of Lisbon. He had also

finished coursework in the Master's degree in entrepreneurial science from the University of Macau (UM).

Before assuming the position of director of housing in 2016, he had worked at TDM and held mid-level managerial positions. Having freelanced between 1990 and 2004, and lectured on part-time basis at the UM between 1990 and 1996, he was appointed to posts at various public service bodies or public committees, representing the interests of the government.

Prior to serving the IH, he had been appointed as a member on an advisory committee and an administrative committee of the now-defunct Energy Industry Development Office.

He also held positions at various organizations, such as the Holy House of Mercy, at which he was a member of the board of trustees. President of the board, António José de Freitas, told local media outlet Macao Daily News that he was saddened by the news. **AL**



Arnaldo Santos

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Group expects economy to remain stable next three months

ANTHONY LAM

THE end of the year will bring an even higher number of events, which will bring additional energy into the economy – expected to be stable – the Macau Economic Association (MEA) has commented.

The group expected that the Prosperity Index will remain at stable in the coming three months, with a forecast score of 6.2.

Citing the IMF's forecast that Macau will be the world's leader in economic growth, the group hopes that Macau's economy will be even better than the IMF forecast. The IMF has forecast that Macau will have a 74.4% economic growth year-on-year. This figure is the highest since 2002, when the IMF first made forecasts on Macau.

The past two months had index scores meeting expectations, but



the indicators performed rather differently, the group said. In October, for example, despite gross gambling revenue (GGR) having performed well, activities had increased and tourist figures satisfactory, stock prices of the six local casinos and the Chinese Consumer Confidence Index were still low.

As such, the index scores for

September and October were 6.0 and 6.2, which fit expectations, the group said.

Factors that may influence the pace of recovery include the high interest rate, the group said, adding that it is still unclear whether the rate will rise even further and how long the rate will remain high.

The high rate has driven the lo-

cal non-performing loan ratio to 2.43% overall and 3.14% for non-residents.

Change in consumer spending, meanwhile, will also impact the prospects of local SMEs, which also requires monitoring.

In a report issued earlier this year by the Monetary Authority of Macau (AMCM), coupled with a low-base effect of comparison, Macau's economy is expected to register robust growth in the remainder of 2023.

The bureau noted that Macau's external demand will be supported by the steady economic recovery in neighbouring regions, "further unleashing strong pent-up demand for tourism services."

"Rigorous promotional campaigns launched by the government and non-gaming events organised by the gaming concessionaires [will] boost the growth momentum of external demand," it added.

GAMING

Moody's expects Melco, SJM's financial leverage to improve in 12 months

MOODY'S Investors Service has changed the outlook on Melco Resorts Finance Limited and SJM Holdings to stable from negative as it expects the groups' financial leverage to improve over the next year.

The outlook change to stable from negative reflects Moody's expect-

tation that "SJM's financial leverage will improve significantly in the next 12-18 months, driven by a robust recovery of the gaming market in Macau, as well as the ramp-up of the company's new property," said Gloria Tsuen, a Moody's vice president and Senior Credit officer.

Speaking on Melco's

improvement, the institution also expects the group "will start generating free cash flow [which] will help materially reduce their debt and leverage over the next 12-18 months."

In a statement, Moody estimates the city's mass-segment GGR to return this year to about

85% of the level in 2019 and fully recover in 2024, driven by premium mass customers.

The assumption is underpinned by strong pent-up demand that will more than offset the effect of a likely softening of the Chinese economy.

Meanwhile, Moody's believe that the VIP seg-

ment GGR will also likely return to 32%-36% of the level in 2019 in 2023-24, as direct VIPs replace part of the business lost to the junket crackdown in recent years.

Gaming operators faced deteriorated financial positions after revenues fell significantly amid the Covid-19 pandemic, yet revenues have recovered strongly since China's reopening in early January this year.

Mass and VIP segments recovered to 93% and 38% in the third quarter this year and the same period in 2019, respectively. **LV**

STATS

Q3 VISITOR SPENDING ABOVE PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

TOTAL spending by visitors (excluding gaming expenses) surged 576.7% year-on-year to MOP19.60 billion in the third quarter (Q3) of 2023, representing an increase of 28.9% compared to the same quarter of 2019.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows that last quarter's figure surged by 576.7% year-on-year, attributable to a substantial rise of 821.3% in the number of visitor arrivals – though from a low base



as the city was under a partial lockdown due to the pandemic.

In the first three quarters of 2023, total spending by visitors amounted

to MOP52.06 billion, an uplift of 290.3% year-on-year and an increase of 8.8% compared to the corresponding period in 2019.

Per-capita spending by visitors was MOP2,612 in the first nine months, representing a fall of 14.5% year-on-year but a rise of 64.9% as against the same period in 2019.

Per-capita spending by visitors from mainland China went down by 14.8% year-on-year to MOP2,711, with spending

by those travelling under the Individual Visit Scheme (MOP2,812) falling by 54.2%.

In China, Capital Economics' gauge of business activity showed growth slowing in July-September, though there were signs of improvement mainly driven by consumer spending.

Visitors spent primarily on shopping (44.3% of total) in the third quarter, followed by accommodation (29.3%) and food & beverages (20.1%). **LV**

FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES AT MOP221B

The preliminary estimate of the SAR's foreign exchange reserves sits at MOP221.1 billion at the end of October 2023, the Monetary Authority of Macao announced. The reserves increased 0.4% from the revised value of MOP220.1 billion for the previous month. Macau's foreign exchange reserves at end-October 2023 represented 11 times the currency in circulation or 89.3% of pataca M2 at end-September 2023. Also, the pataca increased against the currencies of Macau's major trading partners on a monthly basis but dropped on an annual basis.

MACAU SHOPPING FESTIVAL TO KICK OFF DEC. 1

The Macau Shopping Festival will be held for a month from December 1 and will continue its partnership with Trip.com Group and Ctrip Global Shopping, joining forces with shopping centers, duty-free outlets, and financial institutions to amplify its promotional efforts in mainland China. The campaign will specifically target all travelers visiting Macau through Trip.com, according to organizers. The total value of discounts and benefits this year has increased to over MOP28 million.

MASDAW TO ORGANIZE FUNDRAISING EVENT DEC. 3

Macau Association for Stray Dogs and Animal Welfare (MASDAW) will organize an annual charity fundraising event on Dec.3 to cover expenses of the 121 dogs that are in the association's care. Held at the animal shelter, the event "will have more than 100 prizes offered by sponsors, many of whom have been supporting the association since 2014," the announcement said. "Our annual charity lucky draw is our main source of income that helps us to meet the huge expenses we have every month," it added. The association is struggling with financial concerns as income from donations far from meets expenses.

F3 WORLD CUP

MINÌ SHOWS POTENTIAL SNATCHING PROVISIONAL POLE

RENATO MARQUES

THE Italian Gabriele Minì (SJM Theodore Prema Racing Team) has shown his potential on the first day of track action on Guia Circuit snatching the provisional pole for the FIA F3 World Cup.

Since early morning during Free Practice 1 (FP1) Minì started to display his skills and although being his first year in Macau he wasted no time posting 2m06.354s with which he led the pack on FP1.

Minì continued his dominance later in the afternoon during Qualifying 1 (Q1) improving his best lap time to 2m05.521s assuming the position of favorite for Sunday's main race.

The Italian was immediately followed by the Brit Luke Browning (Hitech Pulse-Eight) who came second to Minì in both FP1 and Q1 sessions yesterday.

Browning, also a newbie to Macau, clocked his best lap around Guia in 2m06.018s, almost half a second slower than Minì.



Completing the top 3 was another SJM Theodore Prema Racing Team driver, Dino Beganovic, who after finishing FP1 in 6th position, improved his time significantly during Q1, ending up with a personal best of 2m06.131s.

Immediately after Beganovic were Dennis Hauger (MP Motorsport), and another two Hitech Pulse-Eight racers, Alex Dunne and Isack Hadjar.

Previous winners in Macau, Dan Ticktum (2017 and 2018) and Richard Verschoor (2019) placed 10th and 11th respectively, not having been able to ca-

pitalize, so far, on their theoretical advantage.

At the end of Q1, although he took the provisional pole, Minì said he was surprised by the outcome as he felt that his tires were wearing, adding also that the red flags that interrupted Q1 on three occasions also made it difficult to pick the right timing to time-attack.

The session was briefly halted after seven minutes when Sebastián Montoya crashed at Lisboa. The Colombian's car suffered front left-corner damage and the Campos Racing driver could not rejoin the session.

Ugo Ugochukwu caused the second red flag when he overshoot braking for Lisboa and ran down the escape road where his Trident Motorsport-run car became stranded for some time before he was eventually able to continue.

The third red flag occurred when Zane Maloney stopped on track after earlier contact with the barriers.

When the action finally resumed, Browning was set to come out on top but in a last-gasp effort, Minì managed to find the best lap so far and topped the timesheets.

F3 drivers will be back on track today for FP2 from 9:30 a.m., followed by a Q2 session at 3:05 p.m.

AD

CEM NOTICE

Temporary traffic arrangements for cable laying on Pátio da Sé

Due to the cable laying works carried out by Companhia de Electricidade de Macau - CEM, S.A. (CEM), Rua da Sé and Pátio da Sé will be changed to no exit roads from **21 November (Tuesday) to 2 December (Saturday)**. Vehicles heading to Pátio da Sé can take Largo da Sé. In addition, some of the meter parking spaces on Pátio da Sé and Largo da Sé will be temporarily suspended.



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RENATO MARQUES

GT WORLD CUP

CAIROLI SURPRISES ON DAY 1 BY TOPPING TIMESHEETS

THE Italian Matteo Cairoli at the wheel of a Porsche 911 GT3R (Absolute Racing) has surprised the competition by topping the timesheets at the end of Day 1 of the FIA GT World Cup.

Cairoli, who started the day on Free Practice 1 (FP1) in third, managed to improve on the last session of the day (FP2) achieving a best time around Guia Circuit in 2m15.532s.

Placing second best was the former Macau winner, Raffaele Marciello who took his Mercedes-AMG GT3 (Team Landgraf) to a lap clocked in 2m15.565s, just a whisker away from Cairoli's best.

Closing the top 3 was the Spaniard Daniel Juncadella in another Mercedes-AMG GT3 (Craft-Bamboo Racing) with a best of 2m15.570s.

The competition in this race was so fierce that there was only 0.038s between the first and third place and the first 11 competitors were all running on the same second (2m15s).

Also in the top 5 were two Brazilians, Daniel Serra in a Ferrari 296 GT3 (Harmony Racing) followed by another Macau former winner, Augusto Farfus in a BMW M4 GT3 (ROWE Racing).

As for the usual suspects that have had numerous duels around Guia Circuit over the years, Maro Engel (Mercedes-AMG GT3) and Edoardo Mortara (Audi R8 LMS Evo 2) continued to fight their way to the top side-by-side but, so far, this battle was for seventh place, with Mortara taking the upper hand with 2m15.787s.

Although Cairoli took the lead at the end of the first day of competition on the GT World Cup, the highlight of the day goes to Marciello who showed a fantastic pace topping the FP1 and only losing the top spot in FP2 on the last lap of the session.

After the FPs, today, things will go to the wire with one single and decisive 30-minute Qualifying session to take place at 2:05 p.m.

Whoever tops this session will have the advantage of starting at the front for the 12-lap Qualification Race that will take place tomorrow also at 2:05 p.m.

RENATO MARQUES



MOTORCYCLE GP

Hickman leads on the first day

RENATO MARQUES

IN the 55th edition of the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix, the event started as expected with the Brit Peter Hickman (BMW M1000RR) placing the best lap of the Free Practice (FP) session yesterday.

Hickman clocked a 2m28.389s, enough to lead the pack, a time that, nonetheless, was a slower pace compared to 2019, when the same Hickman clocked a 2m28.007s at the end of Day 1.

Taking into account the evolution suffered by the motorcycles, this could mean that the

best is yet to come and most of the riders have taken the opportunity of the only FP session for the motorcycles to acquaint themselves with Guia turns after (for most) three years of absence.

If Hickman's dominance was already expected, the partial surprise of the day goes to the Brit Davey Todd (BMW M1000RR) who took second best behind Hickman and ahead of last year's winner Erno Kostamo (BMW S1000RR) with a lap time of 2m29.653s, with an almost 1.3s gap from Hickman.

Kostamo clocked his best lap in 2m29.939s which again, is a

faster time than last year's FP but still very far from his best lap last year when he rode around Guia in 2m27.493s.

Today, motorcycles and riders enter the decisive stage of the race with the Qualifying sessions that will decide the grid positioning for tomorrow's race.

As usual, motorcycles will be the first out on track at 8:00 a.m. for the Q1, returning later in the day to close the program with the Q2, scheduled for 4:10 p.m.

The winner of the 55th Macau Motorcycle GP will be decided in a 12-lap race to start at 8:40 a.m. on Saturday.

MICHELISZ TOPS FP2 SESSION AHEAD OF QUALIFYING TODAY

HUNGARIAN Norbert Michelisz (Hyundai Elantra N TCR) topped yesterday's timesheets of the Macau Guia Race – TCR World Tour lapping in 2m29.048s.

Michelisz takes the lead in the attempt to score the points that would grant him the championship title.

Macau is the last round of the TCR World Tour with the trio at the top including Rob Huff (Audi RS3 LMS TCR), Yann Ehrlacher (Lynk & Co 03 FL TCR), and Michelisz being separated only by a very thin margin (3 to 4 points).

Currently, first (149.47 points), Huff did not manage better than

13th out of the 14 racers that finished the Free Practice 2 session yesterday with a best lap of 2m43.259s, very far from his normal performance and skill level.

Earlier in the day (FP1) he had achieved the fourth best time of the session with a 2m29.421s but still almost half a second from the leading time.

The second best in the FP2 was Mikel Azcona (Hyundai Elantra N TCR) and third was Ehrlacher.

The championship decision starts today at 12:45 p.m. when racers and machinery will be out on track for the Qualifying. **RM**



AVIATION

Cambodia inaugurates Chinese-funded airport serving tourist destination Angkor Wat

SOPHENG CHEANG
& HENG SINITH, SIEM REAP

CAMBODIA on Thursday inaugurated its newest and biggest airport, a Chinese-financed project meant to serve as an upgraded gateway to the country's major tourist attraction, the centuries-old Angkor Wat temple complex in the northwestern province of Siem Reap.

The Siem Reap-Angkor International Airport is located on 700 hectares of land about 40 kilometers east of Angkor Wat and boasts a 3,600-meter-long runway. It can handle 7 million passengers a year, with plans to augment it to handle 12 million passengers annually from 2040.

The airport began operations Oct. 16, with the first flight to land coming from neighboring Thailand. The old airport it replaces was about 5 kilometers from the famous tourist site.

Thursday's inauguration was



Tourists line up for check-in before departure at International Airport in Siem Reap province, Cambodia as it opened yesterday

presided over by Prime Minister Hun Manet, Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia Wang Wentian, the governor of China's Yunnan province, Wang Yubo, and other officials.

Speaking at the ceremony, Hun Manet said the old airport was located too close to the Angkor

temples and it was feared that vibrations from passing flights were damaging their foundations.

Tourism is one of the main pillars supporting Cambodia's economy. According to the Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia received some 3.5 million international tourists

in the first eight months of 2023, while for the whole of 2019 — the last year before the coronavirus pandemic — it received some 6.6 million foreign visitors.

"Hopefully, 2024 will be the year of the beginning of the advance and rebirth of the tourism sector in our Siem Reap province," Hun Manet said.

China is Cambodia's most important ally and benefactor, with strong influence in its economy, shown by numerous Chinese-funded projects, hotels and casinos in the capital, Phnom Penh, and elsewhere around the country. China's state banks have financed airports, roads and other infrastructure built with Chinese loans. More than 40% of Cambodia's \$10 billion in foreign debt is owed to China.

The new airport, built at a cost of about \$1.1 billion, was financed by Angkor International Airport (Cambodia) Co., Ltd., an affiliate of China's Yunnan Investment Holdings Ltd, under a 55-year build-

-operate-transfer deal.

Yunnan governor Wang Yubo, speaking for the Chinese government, said the airport's launch showed the deep friendship between the people of the two countries, while promoting bilateral economic ties.

The project is part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the ambitious program that involves Chinese companies building transportation, energy and other infrastructure overseas funded by Chinese development bank loans. Its goal is to grow trade and the economy by improving China's connections with the rest of the world in a 21st-century version of the Silk Road trading routes from China to the Middle East and onto Europe.

Another Chinese-funded airport is being constructed at a cost of \$1.5 billion to serve the capital. The new Phnom Penh international airport, formally known as the Techo International Airport, is set on 2,600 hectares and scheduled for completion in 2024. MDT/AP

AD

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Taiwan's participation at APEC forum offers a rare chance to break China's bonds

CHRISTOPHER BODEEN,
TAIPEI

TAIWAN will take part in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in San Francisco this week, a rare opportunity for the self-governing island democracy of 23 million people and its high-tech economy to break the diplomatic embargo on it imposed by Beijing.

Taiwan's chief delegate will be a civilian rather than a government figure or head of state, under an unwritten rule that satisfies China's contention that members of the organization participate as economic entities rather than state players.

For the seventh time, Taiwan will be represented by Morris Chang, the 92-year-old founder of the world-leading Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company. Chang is known as the godfather of the industry that has put Taiwan in the top ranks of high-tech manufacturing and personal electronic devices.

Taiwan has participated in APEC since 1991 under the name Chinese Taipei. It began taking part just two years after the group's inception and the same year that China and the semi-autonomous Chinese city of Hong Kong joined.

Taiwan has relied on retired ministers — and, in Chang's case, industry leaders — who are well connected with the government but do not carry the burden of formal office, which could spark a protest from China. But that doesn't mean Taiwan's government won't be represented. Minister of Finance Chuang Tsui-yun will attend a meeting presided over by U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who recently visited Beijing, and two other ministers will attend meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday.

A Japanese colony until the end of World War II, Taiwan split from mainland China amid a civil war in 1949. China continues to claim the island as its territory, to be annexed by force if necessary, a threat it plays out on a near-daily basis by sending ships and warplanes into areas around the island.

These acts of political intimidation have the potential to wear down the operational resiliency of the island's military equipment and personnel. Taiwan has just a fraction of the air, sea, and missile power of China's People's Liberation Army, not to mention its ground forces, and relies heavily on young men doing their mandatory national service to fill its ranks.

However, Taiwan in recent years has invested heavily in upgraded arms purchases from the U.S., along with boosting its own defense industry, most notably building submarines that could undermine the Chinese naval threat. That has come partly in response to Chinese displays of force such as sailing aircraft carriers through the economically crucial Taiwan Strait and sending aircraft and drones to circle the island.

While the U.S. has no military treaty with Taiwan, it is obligated under federal law to ensure the island can defend itself and to treat all threats to the island as matters of "grave concern." That, along with Washington's string of alliances from Japan to South Korea and the Philippines, and its refusal to recognize China's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea, make the Taiwan Strait a potential powder keg should Chinese leader Xi Jinping seek to make good on his determination to unite what he views as China's historical territory and cement his political legacy. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



'THAT'S PROGRESS'

Biden, Xi met for hours and 'pick up the phone' for any

AAMER MADHANI,
COLLEEN LONG & DIDI TANG,
WOODSIDE (CALIF.)

U.S. President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping emerged yesterday [Macau time] from their first face-to-face meeting in a year vowing to stabilize their fraught relationship and showcasing modest agreements to combat illegal fentanyl and re-establish military communications. But there were still deep differences on economic competition and global security threats.

The most assuring takeaway from the meeting for Biden was that if either man had a concern, "we should pick up the phone and call one another and we'll take the call. That's important progress," he said in a news conference following the talks.

Another positive sign: Xi signaled later on that China would send the U.S. new pandas, just a week after three from the Smithsonian National Zoo were returned to China much to the dismay of Americans. There are only four left in the United States — at the Atlanta Zoo, and their loan agreement expires next year.

The two leaders spent four hours together at a bucolic Northern California estate — in meetings, a working lunch and a garden stroll — intent on showing the world that while they are global economic competitors they're not locked in a winner-take-all faceoff.

"Planet Earth is big enough for the two countries to succeed," Xi told Biden.

The U.S. president told Xi: "I think it's paramount that you and I understand each other clearly, leader-to-leader, with no misconceptions or miscommunications. We have to ensure competition does not veer into conflict."

Their meeting, on the sidelines of the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference, has far-reaching implications for a world grappling with economic cross currents, conflicts in the Middle East and Europe, tensions in Taiwan and more.

They reached expected agreements to curb illicit fentanyl production and to reopen military ties, Biden said. Many of the chemicals used to make synthetic fentanyl come from China to cartels that traffic the powerful narcotic into the U.S., which is facing an overdose crisis.

Top military leaders will resume talks, Biden said, an increasingly important move particularly as unsafe or unprofessional incidents between the two nations' ships and aircraft have spiked.

Ultimately, the agreements rely on trust between the two leaders.

"I know the man I know his modus operandi," Biden said of Xi. "We have disagreements but he's been straight."

TAIWAN IN THE MIDDLE

The two leaders had a significant back and forth over Taiwan, with Biden chiding China over its massive military build-up around Taiwan and Xi telling Biden he had no plans to invade the island, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to detail the private talks.

Biden, the official said, declared the U.S. was committed to continuing to help Taiwan defend itself and maintain deterrence against a potential Chinese attack, and also called on China to avoid "meddling" in the island's elections next year. The official described the Taiwan portion of the talks as "clear-headed" and "not heated."

Biden also called on Xi to use his influence with Iran to make clear

AP FILE PHOTO



Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company founder Morris Chang



agreed to urgent concerns

that Tehran, and its proxies, should not take steps that would lead to an expansion of the Israel-Hamas war. Foreign Minister Wang Yi has assured the U.S. that the Chinese have communicated concerns to Iran on the matter. But the official said the U.S. has not been able to ascertain how seriously the Iranians are taking concerns raised by Beijing.

According to a statement released by China Central Television, the state broadcaster, Xi was most focused on Taiwan and the U.S. sanctions and restrictions against Chinese products and businesses.

Xi urged the U.S. to support China's peaceful unification with the self-governed island, calling Taiwan "the most important and most sensitive issue" in the bilateral relations. He also raised Beijing's concerns over export controls, investment screenings, and sanctions imposed by the U.S., which he said "have severely harmed China's legitimate interests."

He said, "We hope the U.S. side can seriously treat China's concerns and take actions to remove unilateral sanctions and provide a fair, just, non-discriminatory environment for Chinese businesses."

Xi said he and Biden also agreed to establish dialogues on artificial

intelligence and stressed the urgency for the two countries to cope with the climate crisis, the state broadcaster reported.

Both leaders acknowledged the importance of their relationship and the need for better coordination. But their differences shone through: Xi indicated he wants be-

ter cooperation — but on China's terms. And he sought to project strength to his domestic audience in the face of U.S. policies restricting imports from China and limiting technology transfers to Beijing.

Biden, meanwhile, will also spend time this week in California working to highlight new alliances in the Indo Pacific and efforts to boost trade with other regional leaders.

They sought to build back to a stable baseline after already tense relations took a nosedive following the U.S. downing of a Chinese spy balloon that had traversed the continental U.S., and amid differences over the self-ruled island of Taiwan, China's hacking of a Biden official's emails and other matters.

For Biden, the meeting was a chance for the president to do what he believes he does best: in-person diplomacy.

"As always, there's no substitute for face-to-face discussions," he told Xi. With his characteristic optimism, Biden sketched a vision of leaders who manage competition "responsibly," adding, "that's what the United States wants and what we intend to do."

Xi, for his part, was gloomy about the state of the post-pandemic global economy. China's economy remains in the doldrums, with prices falling due to slack demand from consumers and businesses.

"The global economy is recovering, but its momentum remains sluggish," Xi said. "Industrial and supply chains are still under the threat of interruption and protectionism is rising. All these are grave problems."

RAVIOLI, CHICKEN AND CHIT-CHAT

Biden and Xi held their talks at Filoli Estate, a country house and museum about 25 miles south of San Francisco. The event was carefully staged, Biden first to arrive at the grand estate.

After a handshake and smiles, the presidents and their respective aides on trade, the economy, natio-

nal security and regional diplomacy gathered across from one another at a single long table, the culmination of negotiations between the two leaders' top aides over the past several months. It was Biden and Xi's first conversation of any kind since they met last November in Bali.

Next came a working lunch with inner-circle members from both administrations. They ate ravioli, chicken and broccolini, with almond meringue cake and praline buttercream for dessert.

Before they parted, the two strolled the property along a red brick path through impressive topiary and knotted gothic trees. Asked by reporters how the meeting went, the president said "well" and flashed a thumbs up.

There were light moments between the two leaders who have logged much time together over the last decade.

Biden asked Xi to extend his early birthday wishes to Xi's wife, who will be celebrating next week. Xi thanked the president for reminding him. The Chinese leader said that he's been so busy working he had forgotten the big day was nearing.

The relationship between China and the U.S. has never been smooth, Xi said. Still, it has kept moving forward. "For two large countries like China and the United States, turning their back on each other is not an option," he said.

More pointedly, Xi also suggested it was not up to the U.S. to dictate how the Chinese manage their affairs, saying, "It is unrealistic for one side to remodel the other, and conflict and confrontation has unbearable consequences for both sides."

DISCUSSION ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

Robert Moritz, global chairman for the consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, said business leaders are hoping for signs of more cooperation and a firmer commitment to free trade be-

tween the world's two largest economies following the Biden-Xi talks.

"What we are looking for is a de-escalation and a bringing of the temperature down," Moritz said during a CEO summit being held in conjunction with the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum that has brought together leaders from 21 member economies.

"Discussion isn't good enough, it's the execution on getting things done" that will matter, he said.

The Biden-Xi meeting and broader summit events attracted protests around San Francisco, but the demonstrations were kept at distance. A large crowd loudly condemning Xi marched from the Chinese Consulate toward the summit venue at the Moscone Center nearly two miles away. Speakers implored the Biden administration to stand up to Xi and China's human rights record.

Later in the day, Xi addressed American business executives at a \$2,000-per-plate dinner, a rare opportunity for U.S. business leaders seeking clarification on Beijing's expanding security rules that may choke foreign investment.

"We are in an era of challenges and changes," he said, according to an English language translation. "It is also an era of hope. The world needs China and the United States to work together for a better future."

But, "China has no intention to challenge the United States or unseat it," he said. "Likewise, the United States should not bet against China, or interfere in China's internal affairs."

Xi also told the room that he had learned that many American people, especially children, were "really reluctant" to say goodbye to the pandas.

"Pandas have long been envoys of friendship between the Chinese and American people," he said. "We are ready to continue our cooperation with the United States on panda conservation." **MDT/AP**



"We have disagreements but he's been straight."

JOE BIDEN



"Planet Earth is big enough for the two countries to succeed."

XI JINPING

AP PHOTO

MYANMAR

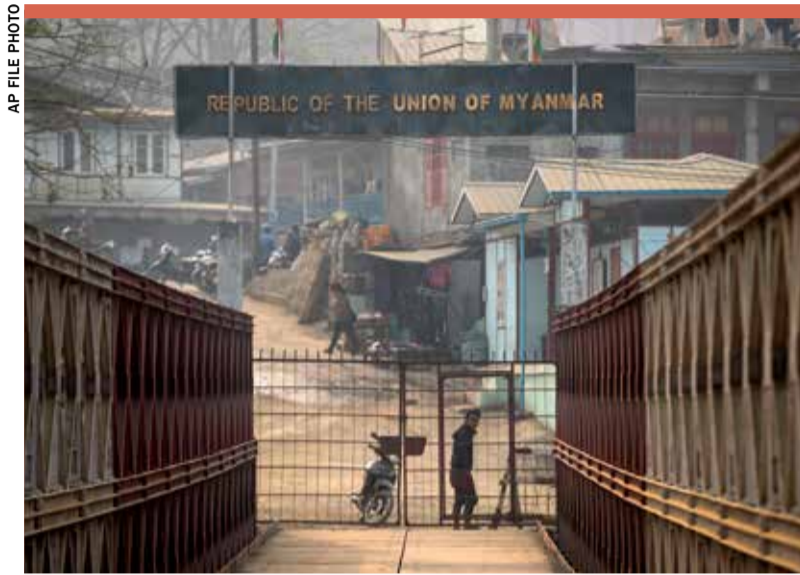
REFUGEES WHO FLED TO INDIA AFTER LATEST FIGHTING RETURNING HOME, OFFICIALS SAY

WASBIR HUSSAIN, GUWAHATI

MORE than half of the estimated 5,000 refugees who had fled the heavy fighting in Myanmar's western Chin state and had entered northeastern India have begun returning home, Indian officials said yesterday.

Sunday and Monday saw heavy fighting between the rebels and the Myanmar military in the Chin state across the border from Zokhawthar, a village of around 600 households, in India's Mizoram state. The military junta lost control of some areas after rebels, largely belonging to the Chin National Front, seized two military posts.

"Since Wednesday, we have not heard sounds of airstrikes or gunfire across the border. We presume the situation across Mizoram border in Myanmar is returning to normal, leading to most of the 5,000 refugees returning back," James Lalrinchhana, the Deputy Commissioner of Champhai district in Mizoram, told The Associated Press.



A Myanmar looks towards the Indian side at the India-Myanmar border in Mizoram, India

The fighting also forced 40 troops from the Myanmar army to cross over and take shelter in India.

The troops crossed to India on Monday, and the Indian Air Force airlifted them back to Myanmar the next day, according to an Indian defense official who requested anonymity because he wasn't authorized to

speak publicly.

India shares a 1,643-kilometer border with Myanmar, and is home to thousands of refugees from Myanmar in different states.

The Arakan Army, one of the many ethnic insurgent groups active in Myanmar, along with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the

Ta'ang National Liberation Army, launched a coordinated offensive on Oct. 27 in northern Shan state in northeastern Myanmar along the border with China.

The groups called themselves the "Three Brotherhood Alliance."

The alliance has claimed widespread victories and Myanmar's military government has acknowledged losing control of three towns, including a major border crossing for trade with China.

The attacks took place despite a yearlong cease-fire with Myanmar's military government, which the Arakan Army called off Tuesday.

The Arakan Army is the well-trained and well-armed military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority movement seeking autonomy from the central government.

Rakhine is also known by its older name of Arakan. It's the site of a brutal army counterinsurgency operation in 2017 that drove about 740,000 minority Rohingya Muslims to seek safety

across the border in Bangladesh.

Anti-junta rebels across Myanmar appear to have been emboldened to target symbols of the junta-led government in Myanmar, experts say.

"Forces like the CNF were obviously monitoring the situation in the northern Shan state bordering China where the rebels were attacking the government soldiers. Rebels in the western Chin state, bordering India, also intensified their offensive," said Arunav Goswami, a researcher with the Guwahati-based Centre for Development and Peace Studies.

The offensive in the northern part of Shan state was already seen as a significant challenge for the army, which has struggled to contain a nationwide uprising by the members of Peoples' Defense Force. The pro-democracy resistance organization was formed after the army seized power from Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in February 2021. It also set up loose alliances with several of the ethnic armed groups. MDT/AP

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



AUSTRALIA

Parliament passes laws to handle migrant convicts who can't be held indefinitely or deported

ROD MCGUIRK, CANBERRA

MIGRANTS with criminal records face up to five years in prison for breaching their visa conditions under emergency legislation passed by the Australian Parliament yesterday.

The new legislation was in response to a High Court ruling that foreigners can't be detained indefinitely as an alternative to deportation.

The government said it has released 84 people — most of whom have convictions for crimes including murder and rape — since the court ruled last week that indefinite detention of migrants is unconstitutional.

The decision reversed a High Court ruling from 2004 that had allowed stateless people to be held in migrant centers for any length of time in cases where there were no prospects of deporting them from Australia.

The decision also undercuts Australia's harsh policies toward asylum-seekers who arrive by boat and criminals who are deported despite long years living in Australia. Boats carrying smuggled people have virtually



Australian Minister for Immigration Andrew Giles presents the emergency Migration Amendment Bill in the House of Representatives at Parliament House in Canberra

stopped arriving in the decade since Australia banished their passengers to remote Pacific island detention camps.

The legislation requires the freed migrants to wear electronic tracking bracelets and comply with curfews. Failure to comply with those visa conditions could be a criminal offense punishable

by up to five years in prison.

Human rights lawyers argued that the measures could be challenged in court as punitive and excessive.

"Any new conditions must meet some basic tests. They must be necessary, they must be reasonable, proportionate, they must not be punitive or deprive peo-

ple unnecessarily of their liberty," said David Manne, a lawyer who represents several of the released migrants.

"We shouldn't readily be handing to the government extraordinary powers to impose severe restrictions on our lives without proper scrutiny. It's hard to see how there has been proper scru-

tiny given how urgently this has all been introduced," Manne added.

The minor Greens party opposed what they described as "anti-refugee laws."

"These are draconian laws that provide the minister with powers never before seen in Australia and the Greens will not be supporting them," Greens immigration spokesperson Sen. Nick McKim said.

Immigration Minister Andrew Giles said further legislation would be considered once the High Court's seven judges publish the reasoning for their decision.

All the released migrants previously had their visas canceled or had been refused visas because of their criminal records or other evidence of poor character. They were ordered into indefinite detention because they had no reasonable prospects of being deported to a country that would accept them.

They include Afghans, a nationality that Australia has stopped deporting since the Taliban seized power in their homeland. They also include Iranians, because Iran will only repatriate its citizens who return voluntarily.

The test case was brought by a member of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority, identified in court as NZYQ, who was convicted of raping a 10-year-old boy in Sydney in 2015 and sentenced to five years in prison. A people smuggler brought NZYQ to Australia by boat in 2012 and he raped the child four months after he was released from an initial period of migrant detention. He was put in indefinite detention after prison. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

Exports grow better than expected as auto shipments climb

YURI KAGEYAMA, TOKYO

JAPAN reported yesterday that its exports increased by 1.6% in October from a year earlier, as auto and ship shipments rose.

Government data showed exports to the rest of Asia fell, while exports to the U.S. and Europe surged.

Japanese imports fell 12.5% to 9.8 trillion yen (\$64 billion), mainly due to lower costs for oil, gas and coal. Shipments of computer parts and cereal also were lower, while steel imports surged.

With exports at 9.15 trillion yen (\$60.5 billion) The trade deficit for October shrank by 70% a year earlier to 662.5 billion yen (\$4.4 billion).



October marked the second straight month of export growth, but the climb slowed from 4.3% in September. That could be bad news for the world's third largest economy, which

heavily depends on export manufacturing to drive growth.

Economists polled by data provider FactSet had expected exports to rise by 1.5%.

"Exports helped drive stronger growth in the first half of this year, but now that the export recovery has run its course, the prospects for a fresh boost to growth appear remote,"

Stefan Angrick, economist at Moody's Analytics, said in a report.

Japan's economy contracted at a 2.1% annual pace in July-September as consumption and investment weakened.

Although Japan's trade deficit has narrowed in the past year, rising prices for some commodities mean the decline will slow in the months ahead, he said.

Japan recorded a trade deficit, which is not seasonally adjusted, of 662 billion yen (\$4.4 billion), down 70% from the 2.2 trillion yen deficit in October 2022.

Separately, core machinery data for September showed a 1.4% increase, beating expectations, according to Cabinet Office

data yesterday.

One bit of recent positive news has been the return of tourists, which are counted as exports, after travel and other social restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic lifted.

Incoming tourists in October, at more than 2.5 million people, surpassed a record hit four years ago, before COVID-19 struck, the Japan National Tourism Organization reported this week.

The growth in travelers from the U.S., Southeast Asia and Mexico was pronounced. The recovery in tourists from China was still not at pre-COVID levels, signaling tourism money could grow further in coming months. **MDT/AP**

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

Wider offensive possible in Gaza's south, where hundreds of thousands have fled

NAJIB JOBAIN, GAZA STRIP

ISRAELI forces dropped leaflets warning Palestinians to flee parts of southern Gaza, residents said yesterday, signaling a possible expansion of their offensive to areas where hundreds of thousands of people who heeded earlier evacuation orders are crowded into U.N.-run shelters and family homes.

Meanwhile, soldiers continued searching Shifa Hospital in the north, in a raid that began early Wednesday. They displayed guns they say were found hidden in one building, but have yet to release any evidence of the central Hamas command center that Israel has said is concealed beneath the complex. Hamas and staff at the hospital, Gaza's largest, deny the allegations.

Broadening operations to the south — where Israel already carries out daily air raids — threatens to worsen an already severe humanitarian crisis in the besieged territory. Over 1.5 million people have been internally displaced in Gaza, with most having fled to the south, where food, water and electricity are increasingly scarce.

It's not clear where else they could go, as Egypt refuses to allow a mass transfer onto its soil.

The war, now in its sixth week, was triggered by a wide-ranging Hamas attack into southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which the militants killed over 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and captured some 240 men, women and children. Israel responded with a weeklong air campaign and a ground invasion of northern Gaza, vowing to remove Hamas from power and crush its military capabilities.

More than 11,200 Palestinians have been killed, two-thirds of them women and minors, according to Palestinian health authorities. Another 2,700 have been reported missing, with most believed to be buried under the rubble. The official count does not differentiate between civilian and militant deaths, and Israel says it has killed thousands of militants.



AP PHOTO

The war has inflamed tensions elsewhere. Yesterday, gunmen shot and wounded four people at a checkpoint on the main road linking Jerusalem to Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The three attackers were killed, according to police, who said the assailants had assault rifles, handguns and hatchets, and were preparing a large-scale attack in Jerusalem.

SOME GUNS, BUT NO TUNNELS

Israeli troops stormed into Gaza's largest hospital Wednesday, searching for traces of Hamas inside and beneath the facility, where newborns and hundreds of other patients have suffered for days without electricity and other basic necessities.

Troops searched the underground levels of the hospital yesterday and detained technicians responsible for running its equipment, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said in a statement.

The military said its soldiers were accompanied by medical teams bringing in incubators and other supplies.

After encircling Shifa for days, Israel faces pressure to prove its claim that Hamas used the patients, staff and civilians sheltering there to provide cover for its fighters. The allegation — which the U.S. has said it has intelligence to support — is part of Israel's broader accusation that Ha-

mas uses Palestinians as human shields.

The military released video from inside Shifa showing three duffel bags it said it found hidden around an MRI lab, each containing an assault rifle, grenades and Hamas uniforms, as well as a closet that contained a number of assault rifles without ammunition clips. The Associated Press could not independently verify the Israeli claims that the weapons were found inside the hospital.

Hamas and Gaza health officials deny militants operate in Shifa — a hospital that employs some 1,500 people and has more than 500 beds. Palestinians and rights groups accuse Israel of recklessly endangering civilians.

Munir al-Boursh, a senior official with Gaza's Health Ministry inside the hospital, said troops ransacked the basement and other buildings, and questioned and scanned the faces of patients, staff and people sheltering in the facility.

Israeli forces battled militants outside the hospital for days, but there were no reports of militants firing from inside Shifa, or of any fighting within the hospital after Israeli troops entered.

The Health Ministry said 40 patients, including three babies, have died since Shifa's emergency generator ran out of fuel Saturday. There was no word on the condition of ano-

ther 36 babies, who the ministry said earlier were at risk of dying.

LOOKING SOUTH

The leaflets, dropped in areas east of the southern town of Khan Younis, warned civilians to evacuate and said anyone in the vicinity of militants or their positions "is putting his life in danger." Similar leaflets were dropped over northern Gaza for weeks ahead of the ground invasion.

Two reporters who live east of Khan Younis confirmed seeing the leaflets. Others shared images of the leaflets on social media. The military declined to comment.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Wednesday the ground operation will eventually "include both the north and south. We will strike Hamas wherever it is."

Even as Israel signals a wider offensive, it has yet to put forth a long-term plan, aside from saying it will maintain security control over Gaza indefinitely.

The U.S. has urged Israel not to reoccupy the territory, from which it withdrew soldiers and settlers in 2005, and supports the eventual creation of a Palestinian state including Gaza and the occupied West Bank — also the long-held aspiration of the Palestinians.

Israel's government was staunchly opposed to Palestinian statehood even before the war. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1989 POLICE CRUSH PRAGUE PROTEST RALLY



Riot police in Czechoslovakia have arrested hundreds of people taking part in a protest march.

More than 15,000 people, mostly students, took part in the demonstration, the biggest show of public dissent for two decades.

They called for the resignation of their country's communist government, led by Milos Jakes.

Scores of people were injured, several seriously, as the police forcibly broke up the rally.

Witnesses said the police used clubs to beat marchers and sprayed tear gas indiscriminately.

It comes in the wake of a wave of reform sweeping through other former Soviet bloc states.

In particular, the fall of the Berlin Wall last week in neighbouring East Germany and the disintegration of its hard-line communist regime has heightened expectations of possible change here.

The demonstration began at Charles University, just south of the city's centre.

It started off as an officially-sanctioned march to commemorate Czech student martyr Jan Opletal, who died at the hands of the country's Nazi occupiers 50 years ago.

The fact permission for the march was given at all reflects a growing recognition on the part of the country's communist leaders of the need for change.

It was only the second time a non-government rally had been allowed in Czechoslovakia since the crushing of Alexander Dubcek's reformist government by the Soviet Union 21 years ago.

Mr Dubcek, who has since lived in relative obscurity, was refused permission to travel to Prague to take part in the rally.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The following day rumours began to circulate that a 20-year-old student, Martin Smid, had been beaten to death by riot police during the demonstration.

These reports were hotly disputed by the government but nevertheless thousands of people once again took to the streets on 19 November in protest at the killing.

Throughout November peaceful mass demonstrations and strikes gained momentum.

On 22 November Alexander Dubcek addressed 200,000 people gathered in Prague's Wenceslas Square.

Eventually the Communist party leadership resigned and, in December 1989, was replaced by a government composed mainly of non-communists.

The overthrow of Czechoslovakia's communist regime became known as the "Velvet Revolution".

In 1993 the country split peacefully into two nations - the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You can anger others quickly today. Avoid overspending on items for your home. You can elaborate on your creative ideas and get involved in groups that relate to the arts.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Take time to reevaluate your motives regarding friendships. You can make new friends who could turn into intimate connections if you join clubs or take creative courses.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Take the time to close deals that have been up in the air. You can expect to have some problems with skin, bones, or teeth if you haven't taken proper care of them.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Have a heart-to-heart talk with family and find out what the problems are. Don't blow situations out of proportion. Don't be too quick to let friends and relatives know what you're up to.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Don't be too hard on yourself. Try to get others to stand behind your good judgment. Talk to the party involved and make sure that they are informed as to what actually happened.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Pleasure trips will be most enjoyable if you take them with that special person in your life. You will be quite excitable today. Get domestic chores out of the way early.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Think twice before eating spicy foods; you may have problems with your stomach. Be sure not to reveal private information to the wrong individuals.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Travel could include delays and other minor problems. You will do well in social settings, and new and interesting individuals may spark a romantic curiosity.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Short trips may be tiring but rewarding. Mishaps due to preoccupation will be upsetting. Don't rely on others to handle the workload.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You need more time to think this whole situation through. Weigh the pros and cons and make a decision that will change the conditions you've been living under.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Try not to hang out with coworkers if you wish to avoid problems later. If you're in the mood, go out and socialize, or get involved in sports activities.

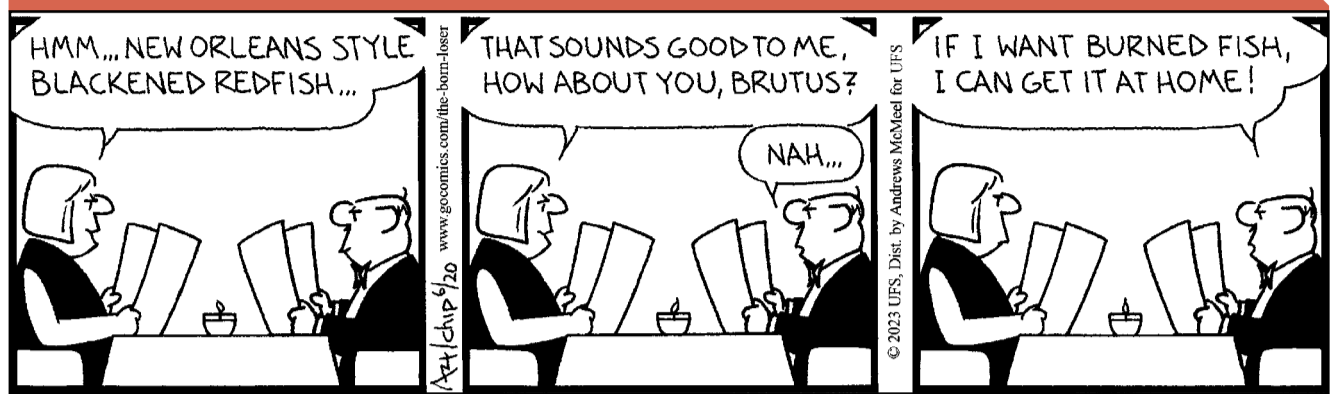


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Put your efforts into making changes to your domestic scene. If you want to make your mark, try to get involved in projects that will bring you some glory.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

		1	9				8
		7	3			9	6
	8	4		2			1
7			1			2	
	3	4	9	2	7		
6	8					4	
6	7	1		9			
3	8		6	7			
1		2		4			

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

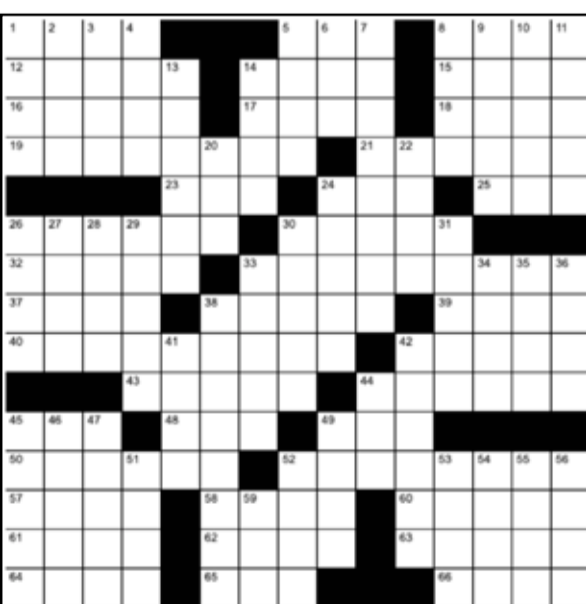
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-1	10	fine
Changchun	-11	-3	snow
Chengdu	5	17	overcast
Chongqing	9	16	fine
Fuzhou	10	18	cloudy
Guangzhou	11	21	fine
Guiyang	2	17	cloudy
Haikou	16	20	cloudy
Hangzhou	5	16	fine
Harbin	-10	-1	snow
Hefei	4	15	fine
Nanjing	4	13	fine
Shanghai	6	13	fine
Taipei	15	17	overcast
Wuhan	2	17	fine
Hong Kong	17	23	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-8	-2	overcast
Frankfurt	3	7	overcast
Paris	7	12	overcast
London	7	11	overcast
New York	13	19	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Beaver creations; 5- Basque separatist organisation; 8- In the sack; 12- Tony's cousins; 14- Mild oath; 15- Actress Olin; 16- Untamed; 17- Malaria symptom; 18- Hue; 19- Dance of the Andalusian Gypsies; 21- Group; 23- ___ bin ein Berliner; 24- Mushroom morsel; 25- Frozen Wasser; 26- Deep blue; 30- Layers; 32- Bloodsucking worm; 33- Logo; 37- Let ___; 38- Spring up; 39- Zeno of ___; 40- Institute; 42- Lucid; 43- Plant tissue; 44- Holy city?; 45- H. Rider Haggard novel; 48- ___ the season...; 49- June honoree; 50- Eye membrane; 52- Antiquated; 57- Florence's river; 58- Pleasing; 60- Grassy plain; 61- Den; 62- Camp beds; 63- Pulls down; 64- Consider; 65- Bambi's aunt; 66- Wet septet;

DOWN 1- Tip, as a hat; 2- Son of Adam and Eve; 3- Paul Sorvino's daughter; 4- Thin stratum; 5- Breakfast brand; 6- Kind of cross; 7- Capital of South Australia; 8- Neighbor of Sask.; 9- Light grayish brown; 10- Affectation of sophisticates; 11- Palm fruits; 13- Sled; 14- A head; 20- Sgt., for one; 22- Blunted blade; 24- Conflict; 26- Rival of Bjorn; 27- Pulls in; 28- It's owed; 29- Mountaineer's tool; 30- Rainbow maker; 31- Sniff; 33- Attempts; 34- "Hard ___" (sailor's yell); 35- Went through, as the paper; 36- Syrup brand; 38- Treaty; 41- Unit of computer memory; 42- Pamper; 44- Rat-a-___; 45- Burn with water; 46- Dike, Eunomia and Irene; 47- Journalist Pyle; 49- Membership fees; 51- Standard; 52- Twice tetra-; 53- Sigher's word; 54- Shipping deduction; 55- Sicilian resort; 56- Crash wherever convenient; 59- Euripides drama;



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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Va Fat
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Nam Long (Old Taipa)
HKD 10,200/mth 1 2 beds 1 bath

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

AD

DRIVE IN

TAIKA WAITITI'S 'NEXT GOAL WINS' IS A SWEET, FROTHY DIVERSION BUT NO KNEE SLIDE

MARK KENNEDY, MDT/AP
ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

IN "Next Goal Wins," a soccer coach comes from far away to lead a hapless group of athletes. He's a fish-out-of-water type, ill-suited for the job, but rises to the occasion and everyone feels good at the end. Wait, you're thinking, that's the plot of "Ted Lasso." Well, only kind of.

Writer-director Taika Waititi — the manic, slightly unhinged mind behind "Thor: Love and Thunder" and "Jojo Rabbit" — offers a sports movie that's not, of course, a sports movie and the opposite of whatever Jason Sudeikis was doing on his TV series.

"Next Goal Wins" — "inspired by true events" — stars Michael Fassbender as a bitter Dutch-American soccer coach assigned to help the struggling American Samoa national team qualify for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. The team is an international laughing stock and still stinging from having been on the wrong side of the worst loss in international soccer history — a 31-0 thrashing by Australia in 2001.

Waititi and co-writer Iain Morris based their movie on a 2014 British documentary of the same name and you can instantly tell why Waititi gravitated toward the story. It has a clash of civilizations, explores overcoming loss and it has a beautiful lesson about em-



Kaimana (foreground left) and Hilo Pelesasa (right) in a scene from "Next Goal Wins" (Searchlight Pictures)

bracing those who are different.

In Waititi's hands, it becomes a sloppy, quirky, pop culture-studded frothy comedy that gently apes other underdog sports movies but doesn't offer much but a mildly funny respite from reality. It makes "Bend it like Beckham" seem really deep.

Waititi himself — he couldn't resist stepping into his own film — frames the movie in the first minutes by playing a priest on American Samoa who promises this will not be a tale of woe but "a tale of woa!" (Shakespeare isn't

laughing).

Fassbender here is the opposite of Lasso — he's broken inside, angry outside, egotistical and unyielding, a coach fired from his last three teams and given a career lifeline no one else wants. He has no home-spun wisdom to offer, just routine high school bullying. "Something's not right about that guy," says one islander. "Well," comes the response. "He is white."

The coach will eventually be redeemed by American Samoa itself, by the nobility of its people

and the goodness of their souls, with the movie getting dangerously close to worn out movie cliché territory.

The script had an opportunity to really examine the demand of winning at all costs versus the rewards of merely having fun and having a passion for sports but abandons any lessons in a flurry of team-building montages.

This being a Waititi movie, there's a scattershot of pop culture references — "Karate Kid," "Taken," "The Matrix," "Any Given Sunday" and even Frank Sinatra ("You're

riding high in April, shot down in May"). At times, these seem more like the director's idiosyncrasies than plot advancers.

The script also takes a weird sort of glee mocking the islanders, who are portrayed sometimes as playing dress-up. One sits at a desk with a keyboard and another makes siren noises with his mouth in a police car because of faulty equipment.

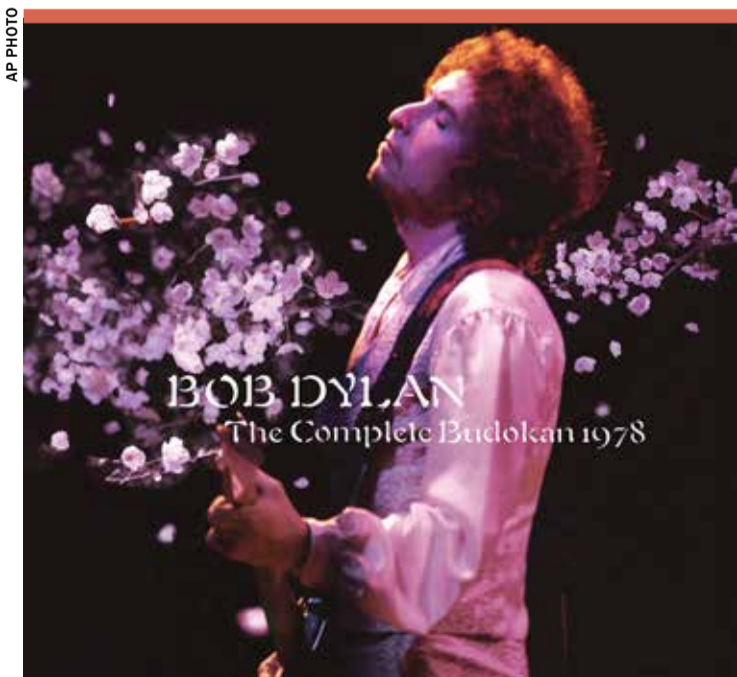
"Next Goal Wins" is most winning in the way it handles the team's star player, Jaiyah Saelua, who became the first nonbinary player to compete in a men's FIFA qualifier. Played with real tenderness and joy by nonbinary actor Kaimana, the way the team and coach relate to Saelua is genuine and touching.

There are other really nice turns by Oscar Kightley, Will Arnett and Elisabeth Moss, but it's Fassbender who must do the bulk of the lifting here. His accent is spotty and he may initially not have been on the top of everyone's list for the part but he sticks the landing, to mix sports metaphors. "Next Goal Wins" isn't a tale of "woe" or "woah!" but "meh."

"Next Goal Wins," a Searchlight Pictures release that's in theaters Friday, is rated PG-13 for "some strong language and crude material." Running time: 103 minutes. ★★☆☆

ITUNES

Bob Dylan's 'The Complete Budokan 1978' box set is a welcomed release, flute and all



"The Complete Budokan 1978" by Bob Dylan (Sony Legacy Recordings)

BOB Dylan with flute and saxophone isn't for everyone.

But that's what you get with "The Complete Budokan 1978," a deluxe box set presenting two live shows at Tokyo's Nippon Budokan Hall, from a tour that has been derided in some corners as "Dylan going Vegas."

The extravagantly packaged four-disc set expands upon the 1979 "Bob Dylan at Budokan" live record that caught Dylan in Japan on just the second week of his 1978 world tour that would run for 10 months.

The tour started after the widely acclaimed

Rolling Thunder guerilla tours across the United States in 1975 and 1976, and just before Dylan's conversion to Christianity in 1979.

In fact, Dylan has pointed to a fan throwing a small silver cross on stage in November 1978 as helping to spur his conversion. But that's a story for another time, and one that was explored deeply in the "Trouble No More" box set released in 2017.

"The Complete Budokan 1978" includes full concerts from Feb. 28 and March 1, 1978 with Dylan breaking out dramatically reworked versions of his well-known songs

complete with backing singers, violin, flute and saxophone. Even today, 45 years later, the arrangements are striking for how far afield they are from the recorded versions.

A chipper, violin-heavy instrumental version of "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" opens both concerts and sets the mood.

On "Mr. Tambourine Man," Dylan speeds up the tempo with the flute front and center. And on "I Threw it All Away," the backing singers are given a prominent role as Dylan tinkers with the lyrics. If you ever wanted to hear "All Along the Watch-

tower" with flute, now is your chance.

It can be jarring for those not already well-versed with the original 1979 live release. But for Dylan fans who have eschewed this period of his career, there are hidden gems here worth uncovering.

"The Man in Me," in just its sixth time played live and with new lyrics, is beautifully delivered, complete with a saxophone solo. "One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later)," from 1966's "Blonde on Blonde" also shines under a dramatic reworking, with the backing singers and sax giving the song new dimensions.

The packaging is top notch, with an expansive 12-by-12 inch photo book, liner notes and a box of memorabilia that includes two posters, replicated tour program, tickets and flyers. SCOTT BAUER, MDT/AP



TASTE OF EDESIA

Christmas in style

IRENE SAM, MDT

THE holiday season is almost here and a short vacation to Taipei is believed to be on the bucket list of many. Taipei is considered a vibrant, contemporary and energetic city, renowned for its traditional heritage combined with a modern, forward thinking nature. With emphasis on a wonderful array of cuisines, a definitive local culture and warm hospitality, the city offers a delightful experience to any visitor.

For those who has a taste for luxury, **Mandarin Oriental**, Taipei, is indeed one of the best choices for a stay. With iconic architecture reflecting European styles, the exquisitely designed hotel is ideally located in the heart of the city on Dunhua North Road, Taipei's main

boulevard renowned for its vast canopy of trees. All rooms and suites are equipped with the latest technology, luxurious marble bathrooms and walk-in closets, offering the ultimate in comfort and indulgence.

The restaurants and bars at Mandarin Oriental, Taipei showcase innovative concepts and superlative cuisine in stylish and sophisticated settings. Designed by international design master Tony Chi, the contemporary Café Un Deux Trois, offers a selection of international favourites in buffet style. Ya Ge, the one-Michelin-Starred Chinese restaurant provides a beautiful setting to enjoy excellent cuisine with personalised service and a range of private rooms for entertaining.

Bencotto, the Italian restaurant serves authentic cuisine from a team of Italian

chefs in a lively, atmospheric setting with a large open kitchen. This Christmas, the restaurant offers lunch and dinner set menu, with delicacies including lightly cured Hamachi, Pan seared Hokkaido scallops, traditional Sardinian ravioli, slow-braised Australian Wagyu beef cheek and steamed French toothfish to name a few.

Guests can also enjoy the ultimate in fine patisserie, cakes and pralines at The Mandarin Cake Shop. An array of Christmas delights that are specially created by Executive Pastry Chef Kevin Chiu and his pastry team, from the signature Galette des Rois, the Christmas classics including Christmas Stollen, Christmas Brioche Wreath, Chestnut Cream Cake, and much more.

The stylish M.O. Bar serves an extensive range of cocktails and Champagnes. To ring in the new year, the bar will be hosting a themed countdown party, offering a free flow of signature cocktails, red and white wine as well as an exciting live Jazz performance.



OPINION

Business Views

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



XI THE GURUJI AND HIS BAFLED DEVOTEES

China's President Xi Jinping has tried hard explaining his governing philosophy to his comrades. His musings on everything from the economy to space missions are required reading within the sprawling bureaucracy. Politicians, civil servants, and state-owned enterprise employees must attend regular study sessions on Xi Jinping Thought, read his books, and submit papers on what they've learned.

There's now evidence, however, that spending hours each week poring over Xi's sayings has not brought his underlings any mental clarity. The autocratic government, which in the past had acted decisively and transformed China into an economic powerhouse, has lost its operational efficiency.

China's failed attempt to rescue its housing sector, which accounts for about 20% of gross domestic product, is a prime example. In more than half of tier-2 and tier-3 cities, existing home prices have fallen at least 15% from their peak. As developers start a new wave of corporate defaults, construction of about 20 million pre-sold homes is being delayed, according to Nomura Holdings Inc.'s estimates.

The late-July Politburo meeting, attended by Xi and his top aides, opened the door to large-scale policy measures. Xi's mantra that "housing is to be lived in, not speculated on," which had been consistently mentioned in the Politburo statements since 2019, was left out. Rather, the read-out urged a timely response to address "great changes" in the real estate market.

What ensued was a lack of policy follow-throughs. In mid-August, when the People's Bank of China cut its one-year lending rate, it opted not to extend easing to the five-year loan prime rate, the benchmark used to price mortgages. Local authorities did not remove home-buying restrictions either, unsure how far Beijing wanted them to go. "No first-tier city wanted to take the political risk," noted Gavekal Dragonomics' analyst Rosealea Yao.

The tipping point came on Aug. 30, when Guangzhou became the first tier-one city to loosen financing for home buyers. While that provided cover for others to follow suit, it was too late. Alarmed by unfinished homes and slumping prices, consumers turned their back on real estate. By September, 30% considered gold as the best investment option; property got only 7% of the vote, according to a CLSA survey.

Home sales worsened in October. By now, short of an audacious large-scale quantitative easing, it is unclear if Beijing has any tools left to rescue the housing decline.

As far as Xi might be concerned, he delivered his message. By removing his housing mantra in July, he essentially told his underlings to go ahead and ease. So why didn't they implement his instructions in a timely manner? Everyone in the bureaucracy knows how important property is to the economy. Over 70% of Chinese households are homeowners, while municipalities at one point collected one-third of their income via land sales.

One explanation is fear. No one wants to draw the spiritual leader's ire. Xi's anti-corruption crusade is regaining traction this year, poised to possibly ensnare a record number of senior cadres. Officials were investigated for many offenses, from making irrational investments to issuing too much municipal debt.

By comparison, devoting many work hours studying Xi Thought is not only politically correct, but a great excuse to "lie flat." After all, governing by doing nothing is an ancient Taoist wisdom. Xi, who regularly quotes sages of the past, would surely approve?

Courtesy Bloomberg

A Russian court yesterday convicted an artist and musician for replacing supermarket price tags with antiwar slogans and sentenced her to seven years in prison, Russian media reported.

Sasha Skochilenko was arrested in her native St. Petersburg in April 2022 on charges of spreading false information about the military.

Her arrest took place about a month after authorities adopted a law effectively criminalizing any public expression about the war in Ukraine that deviates from the Kremlin's official line. The legislation has been used in a widespread crackdown on opposition politicians, human rights activists and ordinary Russians critical of the Kremlin,

with many receiving lengthy prison terms.

The 33-year-old has been held in pre-trial detention for nearly 19 months. She has struggled due to several health problems, including a congenital heart defect, bipolar disorder and celiac disease, requiring a gluten-free diet, her lawyers and her partner argued.

Almost daily court hearings in recent months put additional pressure on Skochilenko.

Russia's most prominent human rights group and 2022 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Memorial, has declared Skochilenko a political prisoner.

AP PHOTO



Giant panda Xiao Qi Ji plays at his enclosure at the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington

MORE PANDAS WILL BE COMING TO THE US, XI SIGNALS

CHINESE President Xi Jinping signaled that China will send new pandas to the United States, calling them "envoys of friendship between the Chinese and American peoples."

"We are ready to continue our cooperation with the United States on panda conservation, and do our best to meet the wishes of the Californians so as to deepen the friendly ties between our two peoples," Xi said during a dinner speech with business leaders.

The gesture came at the end of a day in which Xi and President Joe Biden held their first face to face meeting in a year and pledged to try to reduce tensions. Xi did not share additional details on when or where pandas might be provided but appeared to suggest the next pair of pandas are most likely to come to California, probably San Diego.

The bears have long been the symbol of the U.S.-China friendship since Beijing gifted a pair of pandas to the National Zoo in Washington in 1972, ahead of the normalization of bilateral relations. Later, Beijing loaned the pandas to other U.S. zoos, with proceeds going back to panda conservation programs.

The National Zoo's three giant pandas, Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and their cub Xiao Qi Ji, eight days ago began their long trip to China. After their departure, only four pandas are left in the United States, in the Atlanta Zoo.

"I was told that many American people, especially children, were really reluctant to say goodbye to the pandas, and went to the zoo to see them off," Xi said in his speech. He added that he learned the San Diego Zoo and people in California "very much look forward to welcoming pandas back."

Xi is in California to attend a summit of Indo-Pacific leaders and for his meeting with Biden. He made no mention of the pandas during his public remarks earlier in the day as he met with Biden.

When bilateral relations began to sour in the past few years, members of the Chinese public started to demand the return of giant pandas. Unproven allegations that U.S. zoos mistreated the pandas, known as China's "national treasure," flooded China's social media.

But relations showed signs of stabilization as Xi traveled to San Francisco to meet with Biden. The two men met for about four hours Wednesday at the picturesque Filoli Historic House & Garden, where they agreed to cooperate on anti-narcotics, resume high-level military communications and expand people-to-people exchanges.

The National Zoo's exchange agreement with the China Wildlife Conservation Association had been set to expire in early December and negotiations to renew or extend the deal did not produce results.

The San Diego Zoo returned its pandas in 2019, and the last bear at the Memphis, Tennessee, zoo went home earlier this year. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Turkish Parliament's foreign affairs committee convened yesterday to debate Sweden's bid to join NATO, drawing the previously non-aligned country closer to membership in the Western military alliance. Once green-lighted by the committee, Sweden's accession protocol will need to be ratified by Parliament's general assembly for the last stage of the legislative process in Turkey.

German police raided 54 locations across the country yesterday in an investigation of a Hamburg-based organization suspected of promoting the Iranian leadership's ideology and possibly supporting activities of Hezbollah in Germany, the government said. The Interior Ministry said the Islamic Center Hamburg, or IZH, has long been under observation by Germany's domestic intelligence agency. It said the activities of the group are aimed at spreading the "revolutionary concept" of Iran's supreme leader.

Britain's medicines regulator has authorized the world's first gene therapy treatment for sickle cell disease, in a move that could offer relief to thousands of people with the crippling disease in the U.K. In a statement yesterday, the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency said it approved Casgevy, the first medicine licensed using the gene editing tool CRISPR, which won its makers a Nobel prize in 2020.

AP PHOTO



Spain's acting Socialist prime minister, Pedro Sánchez (pictured), has been chosen by a majority of legislators to form a new government in a parliamentary vote yesterday. Sánchez was backed by 179 lawmakers in the 350-seat lower house of parliament. Only right-wing opposition deputies voted against him.