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AP PHOTO



Iran A court has slapped imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi with an additional sentence of 15 months for allegedly spreading propaganda against the Islamic Republic, her family said yesterday. According to a post on Instagram by Mohammadi's family, the new sentence was handed down on Dec. 19. It said Mohammadi had refused to attend the court sessions.

AP PHOTO



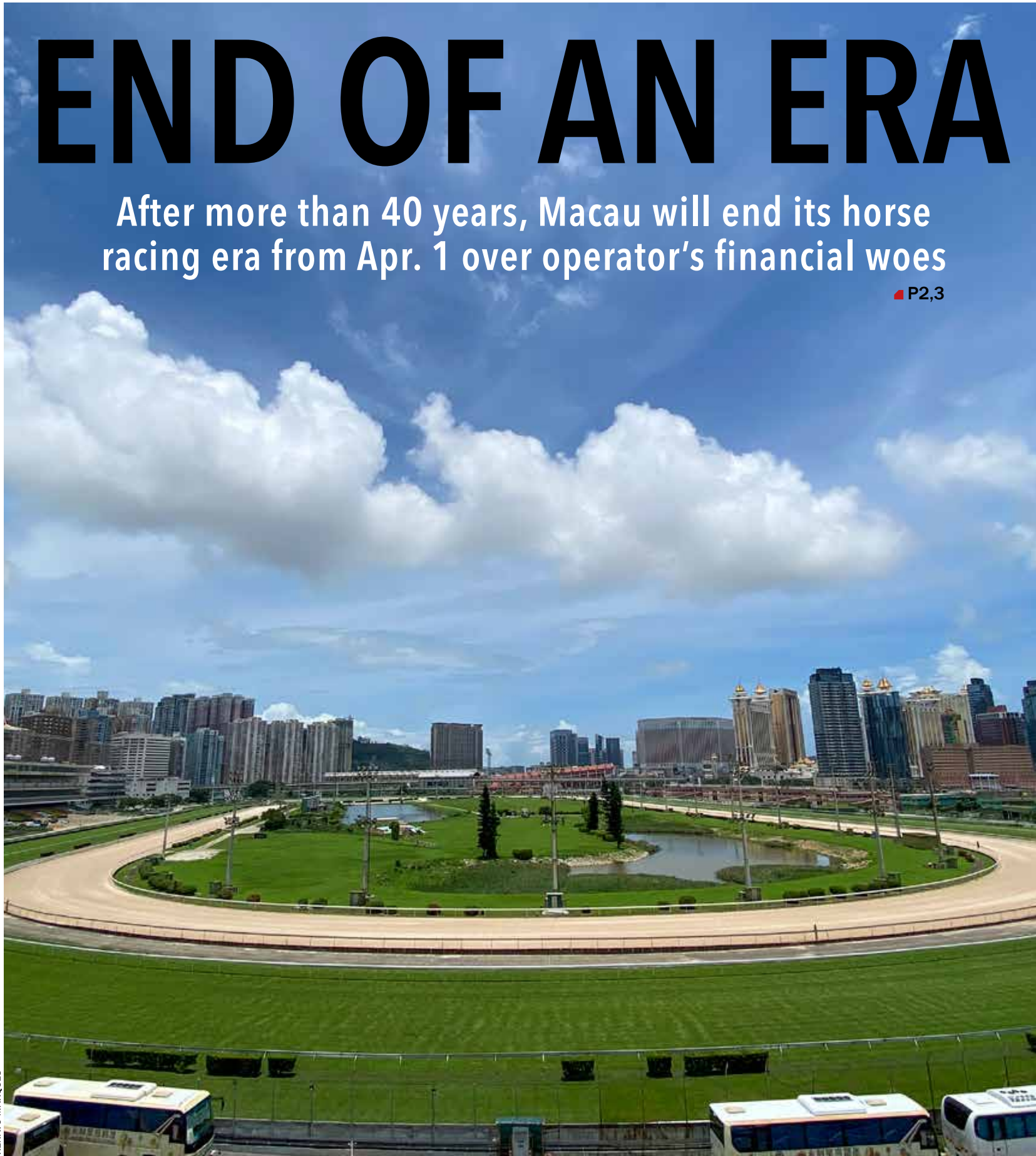
Gaza urgently needs more aid or its desperate population will suffer widespread famine and disease, the heads of three major U.N. agencies warned yesterday, as authorities in the enclave reported that the death toll in the Israel-Hamas war had surpassed 24,000. While the U.N. agency chiefs did not directly point a finger at Israel, they said aid delivery is hobbled by the opening of too few border crossings, a slow vetting process for trucks and goods going into Gaza, and continuing fighting throughout the territory.

AP PHOTO



Ukrainian air force shot down a Russian early warning and control plane that can spot targets up to 650 kilometers away and a key command center aircraft that relays information to troops on the ground in a significant blow for the Kremlin's forces, Ukraine's military chief said yesterday. The planes are fundamental tools in helping orchestrate Russian battlefield movements in Ukraine. Shooting them down, if confirmed, would be a landmark feat for Ukraine in the almost two-year war.

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GOV'T AND JOCKEY CLUB AGREE TO END HORSE RACING FROM APRIL

RENATO MARQUES

THE government has signed an agreement with the Macau Horse Racing Company Limited (Macau Jockey Club) to end its operations effective April 1, 2024, the Secretary for Administration and Justice, André Cheong, announced yesterday morning in a government press conference.

Cheong said the decision to end over four decades of horse racing activities in Macau came after the company's formal request to close, due to the lack of general interest in the activity that has resulted in the concessionaire accumulating debts.

On the line is a contract signed with the government for a monopoly operation of horse racing and consequent betting in Macau that began March 1, 2018, and would have extended until August 31, 2042.

At the press conference, Cheong said, "Earlier, the Macau Horse Racing Company presented to the government a request for the termination of the exclusive concession contract due to

their difficulties in the operation of the horse racing activities which does not meet the current needs of social development."

Cheong noted that although the Club's long history spans over 40 years, recently the activity has been progressively less attractive to both residents and tourists, a fact that led the government, "after an in-depth study, to accept the request from the MJC."

The termination of the concession contract was mutually agreed to be enforced from April 1 this year.

Until March 31, the MJC will continue to operate horse races according to the schedule, said the Secretary.

WORKERS' HANDLING AND HORSES' RELOCATION TO BE COMPLETE WITHIN 1 YEAR

Two of the major issues that the government said were discussed were the situation of the MJC workers as well as the treatment to be given to the horses.

Cheong said one of the conditions of the agreement now signed is that the company will try,

as much as possible, to transfer staff members who are local residents to other services or departments within the same company group/structure. In cases in which this is not possible, Cheong said that fair solutions according to the law and respecting the workers' labor rights should be found.

According to the director of the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), Wong Chi Hong, who also attended the press conference, there are currently at the MJC some 254 local workers as well as over 300 non-resident workers (TNR).

"We will discuss and explain to the employees what are their labor rights according to their individual situation and we will also see if the company can move the locals to other divisions under the Sociedade de Jogos de Macau (SJM)," Wong said.

Cheong added most of the workers will not be dismissed immediately after the company ceases operating as "there will certainly be a long period necessary to handle the horses' situation and so most of these work[er]s

will need to continue to perform their duties until the whole process of relocation of the horses concludes."

The Secretary also added that some people may be offered early retirement or other options to fulfill their labor rights-related compensation.

All the labor-related as well as horse transfer or relocation procedures must be concluded by March 31, 2025, so the company will also be allowed to continue to have possession of all the venues and facilities until this date.

Questioned by the media, Cheong said the horses final destination is uncertain, even where owners are local, but they will need to be relocated outside Macau as there will be no place to keep them after the facility closes.

MJC LAND TO BE PUT UNDER GOV'T LAND RESERVES

Another of the matters in discussion yesterday morning was the one related to the future of the MJC facilities.

According to information discovered by the Times the whole

land area where the MJC is located consists of over 400,000 square meters. In the late 1990s three parts of this land were set aside for the construction of the residential development "Oscar Crescent," for the construction of the "Roosevelt Macau Hotel" and another commercial and residential facility named "River Let."

According to Cheong, the deal inked yesterday notes that from April 1, 2025, all the land as well as facilities built on it will revert to the government without any compensation to the previous concessionaire.

The Secretary said that for the time being, these land resources will be added to the Macau SAR land reserves for future use, ensuring that they would not be used for gaming-related activities.

Cheong said the government is "going to do an overall plan to see how to make the best possible use of that plot of land" but that this will not be done immediately.

Questioned on the parcels that have been developed, the Secretary said, "Those projects were completed before the 2018 contract, so they aren't part of that contract, which is the document we are addressing now. They are off that contract so they are not considered as having any part of this process."

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RENATO MARQUES



Govt: 'Realistic' to accept Jockey Club closure

RENATO MARQUES

THE mutually agreed decision to end the Macau Jockey Club (MJC) contract was "realistic," the Secretary for Administration and Justice, André Cheong, said yesterday.

In a government-organized press conference to clarify the decision and explain the upcoming procedures, Cheong noted that the decision was taken after long consideration and negotiations between the government and the company.

Conversations started with an expression of the company's intention to cease operations, which was followed by a formal application for the contract termination, he said.

To the media's many questions, Cheong said the decision was not simple and that negotiations have been ongoing at least from about mid-2023, when, according to the government, the MJC first gave notice of its intentions.

Several media grilled the Secretary on why the government decided to extend the monopoly concession to the MJC in 2018, when the company was obviously struggling and unable to fulfill its legal obligations.

Cheong said, "In 2018 we had a [...] large study, [...] together with the Legislative Assembly, but the company [MJC] proposed a new project that was in line with the

government's aims and goals with projects targeting the diversification of their activities and in line with the establishment of the World Centre of Tourism and Leisure."

"But as we could see [] this didn't work and they continued in constant decline. We had to be realistic," he said.

The government also said that "for the time being the MJC has not failed with any of their legal obligations, with all the taxes and duties to the government [amounting to MOP150 million by 2018] to having been completely fulfilled," the director of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ), Adriano Ho, said.

"Since 2018 the MJC has fulfilled all its responsibilities including the taxes that they have cleared. In 2018 [by the time the contract was extended to 2042] they owed the government some MOP150 million in taxes. A sum that was agreed to be paid over three years until 2021 and by 2021 they had already paid this debt."

Ho also added that according to the contract, the next deadline for the fulfillment of some legal provisions is "later this year, so there isn't any contractual non-compliance yet," he explained.

Some media also questioned the fact that the government is not seeking compensation from the

company and decided, instead, for a termination of the contract by mutual agreement.

The Secretary blamed the 2018 contract provisions, saying this contract does not contain any provisions regarding penalties other than a suspension or, in more serious cases, the termination of the MJC's operating license.

He also claimed that other duties related to some MOP1.25 billion to be invested by the company in benefiting the facilities and diversifying the activities are difficult to calculate and it "makes no sense to force the company to increase the investment when they have already filled for the termination of the contract."

For the Secretary the decline of horse racing betting is easily explained by the decline in interest in these activities worldwide as well as with "the lack of local culture in such type of activity," he said, contrary to what happens in neighboring regions like Hong Kong.

Cheong noted that the major concerns of the government at this moment that led to the signing, yesterday, of the agreement for the termination of the contract with MJC are only two and that they are related.

The first is with the wellbeing of the workers and ensuring that their labor rights are fully fulfilled and the second, the proper relocation and treatment of the 289 horses currently within the premises.

A 'SAD DAY' OF 'DIFFICULT' DECISIONS, MJC SAYS

In a different press conference held yesterday afternoon at the MJC, the company released a statement justifying the decision to close doors due to the continuous accumulation of debts related to the decreased interest in racing activities.

Rui Cunha read the statement (in the Portuguese language) representing the board of directors, noting the sad realization and the difficulty of the decision of the company to abandon operations.

He also noted that the company will "keep the facilities operating for the use of the club members" over the period between the end of the races (March 31, 2024) and the final handing of the facilities to the government that will happen one year later.

He also thanked all collaborators, partners and horse owners for the support they have always shown and the members of the MJC for their great professionalism and dedication.

"The company will also organize timely sessions with all staff members to find those affected new job opportunities and pay the due compensation according to the Labor Law," Cunha said.

He added that in the upcoming days, the MJC will be in contact with all horse owners to assist them on the best solution for the relocation of their horses.

Before the start of the press conference, the company had informed the media that the representatives would not take any questions.

ANIMA'S CONCERNS SHIFT TO JOCKEY CLUB'S MANY CATS

LOCAL animal welfare organization Anima Macau has expressed satisfaction about the decision of the end of the Macau Jockey Club (MJC) concession and the finish of horse racing in the territory.

In an interview with the Times, the president of Anima Macau, Zoe Tang, said, "We are very happy [with this outcome] as it has been an Anima long-term fight [to have the Jockey Club closed]. It was a nonsense to keep [the] concession," she said, adding, "It was a good decision for the community and the horses. Their conditions were very bad, especially for the retired horses."

However, the closing of the MJC carries another issue related to animal welfare as Tang also explained to the Times.

"As far as we know the Macau Jockey Club

has a lot of cats [in their premises]. Anima is going to contact the person who feeds them daily to see what we can do to help in tasks such as desexing them or collecting them []."

In a previous interview with the Times, the former president and current honorary life president of the animal rights protection group, Albano Martins, had explained that at the closure of the MJC there would be a problem related to the cats.

He said the company kept cats in its stables to deal with rats which could scare the horses, causing them, in some cases, to injure themselves.

According to Tang, there would currently be some hundred cats living inside the stable facilities of the MJC, which will soon require assistance.

ANIMA SETS A NEW GOAL: TO CLOSE MACAU SLAUGHTERHOUSE

With the closing of the Canidrome first, and now the announced closing of the Jockey Club, two of the main goals of Anima, the group is turning its attention to another issue, Tang explained to the Times.

"[We hope that] the next decision [from the government] should be to shut down the slaughterhouse as it is also a nonsens[ical] activity in Macau," the president said.

The local slaughterhouse operates under the public-owned company Macau Slaughterhouse Ltd in a facility located at Ilha Verde.

According to the statistics provided by the company, 99,464 animals were slaughtered in Macau in 2023, of which 98,017 were pigs and 1,447 beef cattle.

CRIME

MAN TORCHES POLICE STATION, PROSECUTIONS OFFICE

ANTHONY LAM

A 70-year-old local man has been arrested by the Judiciary Police (PJ) on allegations of arson at the PJ as well as the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) headquarters.

The man was arrested Sunday less than 1.5 hours after his first alleged arson, which took place near the front door of the PJ headquarters at about 2:25 p.m.

According to the police, fire was seen next to a police vehicle parked on the driveway in front of its front door, caused by some burning paper previously soaked with flammable liquid. The fire was put out quickly by security guards at the PJ.

Less than an hour later, at 3:06 p.m., the police received a report about a fire at the door of the MP, which is several hundred meters away from the PJ headquarters. The report alleged the fire to be arson. Similarly, the fire was put out quickly by security guards at the MP.

The fire at the MP has darkened the rolling gate and the floor of the MP entrance, according to the po-



lice, and flammable liquid as well as some towels were also found at the site.

After the incidents, the police deployed investigative forces from several divisions and swiftly locked down their target.

They discovered that after the fire, the suspect was heading towards Border Gate, where he was

arrested with a bottle of flammable liquid.

The investigation also revealed the man had bought a liter of kerosene from a shop on Rua de Cinco do Outubro and three liters of gasoline from a gas station on Avenida de Amizade.

During interrogation, the man told police he had lost MOP800,000

to his friend in investment fraud. Although the then suspect was caught and brought to court, he was not satisfied with the judgement. After consideration, he had decided to light a fire on the past Sunday.

He also confessed to the police that he intended to also set a fire at the Second Quarter of the Pu-

blic Security Police Force (PSP), the Macao Customs headquarters and the Chief Executive Office.

The man was passed to the MP on charges of arson.

The PJ also released the details of a case yesterday concerning a 39-year-old local male insurance agent, who had allegedly surrendered his bank account to a criminal syndicate for fraud.

The total funds concerned amounted to over MOP2.8 million, of which at least MOP640,000 was wired to the bank account of the suspect.

As of yesterday, the police have detected three male and four female victims.

The case was disclosed by the report from a female suspect who, from October to December last year, wired funds to nine domestic and external bank accounts, amounting to MOP1.44 million.

After presumably making several tens of thousands in profits, the victim was asked for MOP50,000 additional payment to withdraw her profits.

In response to questioning, the suspect admitted to surrendering his bank account but denied any involvement in the fraud. He said he would get 2% of the funds as remuneration upon relocating them in person to mainland China. As of the time of arrest, he had received about MOP10,000, which was used up to repay his gambling debts.

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IN MACAU (2023)



ECONOMY

Prosperity Index to remain stable amid divided determinants

ANTHONY LAM

THE Prosperity Index is expected to range between 6.3 and 6.5 points, which is within the “stability” range, in the coming three months, the Macau Economic Association (MEA) noted in a statement yesterday.

Apart from the city’s swift recovery in the past year, the main reason for the optimism is the 75th and the 25th Anniversaries, respectively, of the establishments of the People’s Republic of China and the Macau Special Administrative Region, the group explained.

The group believes the government will mobilize with the greatest effort all resources to host a series of celebratory events, as well as attracting international tourists.

The group also cited daily



average tourist arrivals during the three days of New Year holidays at 133,000 to support its

optimism. Despite the optimism, the group said that among the 13

determinants used to calculate the index, one is overheated and eight heated, which is contrary to the weak performances of the Chinese Consumer Confidence Index and the stock prices of the six casino operators.

It added that on the international level, investors’ emotions have not yet stabilized.

International tensions are also still on the rise, with armed conflicts in several areas, leading to the price hikes for various commodities and services.

Although the market expects interest rates to be lowered within the year, the pace may not be fast, based on the latest minutes from the US Federal Reserve, the group added.

The group also estimates the local Gross Domestic Product for 2023 to return to 80% of pre-pandemic levels.

IC CALLS FOR PROPOSAL FOR INT’L PARADE

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is calling for proposals by local parade groups for the upcoming 2024 Macao International Parade, to be held March 24. The IC is now inviting all registered local associations, schools, institutes and organizations to submit proposals by Feb. 4. Themed “Love, Peace and Cultural Integration,” this year’s parade will be the first since 2019. The route will start at the Ruins of St. Paul’s and finish at Praça do Lago Sai Van.

CENTRAL PROVIDENT FUND INCOME AT 4.39%

The Social Security Fund (FSS) has announced that the interest income for the year 2023 has been credited to the government-managed sub-accounts of the non-mandatory central provident fund system. These sub-accounts have an annual interest rate of approximately 4.39%. The interest income for the government-managed sub-accounts is generated through time deposits with banks and is calculated daily. The calculation takes into account the daily balance of the account owner’s sub-account during the income calculation period and the number of interest-bearing days and the income is distributed once annually.

TPI RISES 26% IN 4Q 2023

The Tourist Price Index (TPI) for the fourth quarter of 2023 experienced a significant increase of 26.15%, according to the Information from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). This rise can be attributed to higher hotel room rates, increased prices of clothing and jewelry, and rising charges for restaurant services. Notably, the price index for accommodation saw a substantial surge of 178.67%. Moreover, the average TPI for the entire year of 2023 increased by 21.53% due to higher hotel room rates, increased prices of clothing, rising charges for restaurant services and higher prices of local food.

MICE REPS PARTICIPATE IN CEFCO 2024

MICE industry representatives attended the 19th China Expo Forum for International Co-operation (CEFCO 2024) held last week in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, to learn about market development trends with counterparts from the global MICE industry. The Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) said in a statement the government sent a delegation of 24 representatives, and aimed for the delegates to interact with convention and exhibition managers and professional event organizers in the MICE industry from around the world. They specifically learned about the post-Covid-19 development of the tourism industry in mainland China, which differs significantly from pre-pandemic conditions.

GAMING

MGM, Galaxy announce pay rise

GAMING operators MGM and Galaxy have announced a salary increment for all eligible team members, with effect from March and April, respectively.

The pay rise is deemed an appreciation for their “dedication and contribution in which 99% [of] team members will be rewarded,” according to MGM.

For MGM team members with a monthly salary of or less than MOP16,000, a standard salary adjustment of MOP600 will be awarded, while for team members earning above MOP16,000 per month, a 2.5% increment will be awarded, which represents a 2.5%-6.5% increment depending on the base salary.



Pansy Ho, chairperson and executive director of MGM China said, “MGM truly appreciates

our wholehearted team who has been unceasingly upgrading our products and services with inno-

vation, and the company is more than happy to share the fruition of our joint efforts as well as the economic recovery with our team members.”

Meanwhile, Galaxy said the pay raise will benefit approximately 98% of its team.

Team members with a monthly base salary and guaranteed tips (if applicable) of MOP16,000 or below will receive an increment of MOP600, while those earning above MOP16,000 will receive a 2.5% increase.

The announcement comes after gaming operators in the city said bonuses will be paid by the Chinese New Year, while Sands and Melco have also announced pay rises.

Last year, the Chief Executive called on gaming firms to increase workers’ salaries amid the gradual economic recovery. LV

DSEDT CONTEMPLATES ADDING OVER 50 ‘DISTINCTIVE SHOPS’

STAFF REPORTER

THE Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT) is planning to expand the number of “distinctive shops” by 56 this year, bringing the total to 268.

As part of this new initiative, the recruitment process for “Distinctive Shops” will require them

to meet the criteria of being recognized as “Certified Shops.”

Moreover, both the existing “distinctive shops” and potential candidates will need to obtain a certified shop accreditation granted by the bureau within a time-frame of six months.

According to the DSEDT, the “distinctive

shops” designation scheme, which has been in place for three years, aims to support local enterprises by encouraging innovation in their business models and fostering community economic development.

This scheme has gained significant popularity among merchants, with 212 local enterprises

currently holding the coveted title of “distinctive shops.”

By acquiring this designation, these shops have experienced a surge in popularity, with increased online presence and improved offline sales, according to the bureau.

In its recent statement, the DSEDT reiterated its commitment to assis-

ting existing “distinctive shops” in obtaining the certified shop accreditation within the first half of the year.

This commitment serves to enhance the reputation of the “Distinctive Shops” scheme and ensure consumer confidence in the high-quality standards upheld by these designated shops.

AP FILE PHOTO



Nauru representative in Taiwan Jarden Kephos (left) and other officials of Pacific Islands in 2019

DIPLOMACY

Nauru switches diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China

TAIJING WU & KEN MORITSUGU, TAIPEI

THE Pacific Island nation of Nauru said yesterday that it is switching diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, a move that reduces the dwindling number of Taiwan's diplomatic allies to 12 around the world.

A statement from the govern-

ment of Nauru said it was severing ties with Taiwan and seeking a resumption of relations with China.

China claims self-governing Taiwan as its territory and has been peeling off the island's diplomatic allies, often with promises of development aid. It's a long-running competition between the two that has swung in China's favor in recent years.

"This policy change is a significant first step in moving forward with Nauru's development," the statement said.

China said it welcomes Nauru's move to break its "so-called diplomatic ties" with Taiwan.

The decision to re-establish ties with China "once again shows that the one-China principle is where global opinion trends and where the arc of history bends," a

Foreign Ministry statement said.

Nauru said in its statement that it would move to the one-China principle, which holds that Taiwan is part of China and recognizes Beijing as the government of China. It differs from America's one-China policy, which recognizes Beijing as China's government but doesn't take a position on who rules Taiwan.

The announcement was a

blow to Taiwan as it took pride in elections held just two days ago, a show of democracy that would not be possible in China. Executive leader-elect Lai Ching-te, who will take office in May, has been described as a separatist by China. His Democratic Progressive Party supports maintaining the status quo, in which Taiwan has its own government and is not part of China.

China says Taiwan must come under its control at some point and has staged frequent military drills around the island to demonstrate its determination.

Taiwanese Deputy Foreign Minister Tien Chung-kwang accused China of purposefully timing the news to the recent election.

"China's intention is to attack the democracy and freedom that the Taiwanese people are proud of," Tien said at a news conference.

Two retired U.S. officials praised Taiwan's democratic process in meetings yesterday with leader Tsai Ing-wen and other leaders. The Biden administration asked the former officials to visit "in their private capacity" since the U.S. does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

The Nauru announcement caught Jarden Kephos, its ambassador to Taiwan, by surprise.

"There's nothing that I have to say. It was announced by my government and I was told to pack up and go," he told the AP.

Taiwan now has official ties with 11 countries and the Vatican. Seven of the nations are in Latin America and the Caribbean, three are in the Pacific Islands and one is in Africa.

MDT/AP

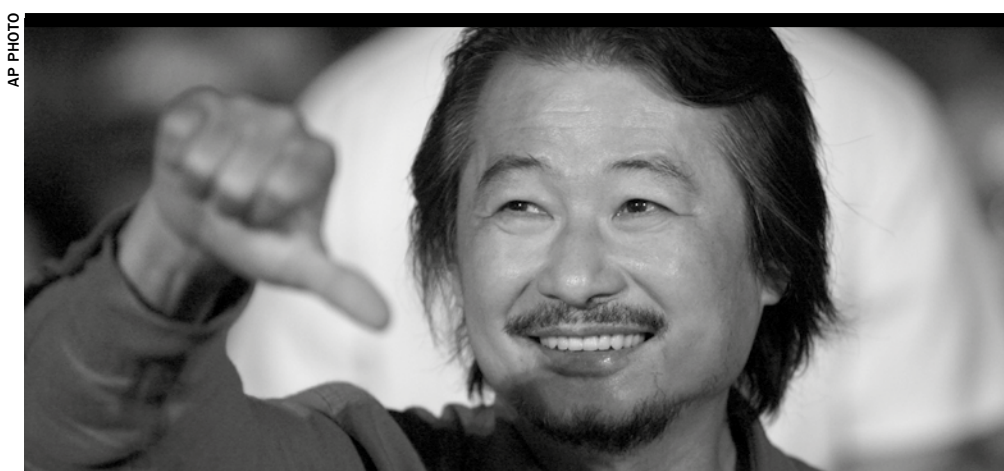
TAIWAN

Shih Ming-teh, activist who pushed for democracy, dies at 83

SHIH Ming-teh, a democracy activist who helped lead Taiwan from authoritarianism to democracy and a former chairman of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, died yesterday, his family said. He was 83.

According to a statement from his family on his official Facebook page, he was being treated at Taipei's Veterans General Hospital. No cause of death was provided.

"Our father, Shih Ming-teh, set off today [Monday] on his birthday, reuniting with his family members and



Taiwan human rights veteran Shih Ming-teh leads a march against Taiwan's then leader Chen Shui-bian during an open-ended protest in Taipei, in September 2006

the comrades-in-arms that he had fought with through thick and thin," said the family. "Whether

it's here or on the other side, he is not alone."

Shih was born in Kaohsiung, in Taiwan's

south, and became an activist at a young age. While serving a mandatory military service in

Kinmen, he was imprisoned for advocating for Taiwan's independence from China. He served 15 years in the first sentence, from 1962 to 1977, according to Taiwan's semi-official Central News Agency.

In 1980, he again went to prison, this time for 10 years for his role in the Kaohsiung Incident, today seen as one of the major moments in pushing Taiwan to eventually transition to democracy.

At the time, Taiwan was ruled by the Nationalist Party — the Kuomintang — under martial law, with no room for political dissent or political rights such as voting.

Shih, who published a magazine called Formosa promoting democratic ideals, organized a well-attended protest in

Kaohsiung in December 1979, according to historical records. Clashes between police and the protesters erupted, and several dozen protesters were arrested, including Shih, who was sentenced to life in prison.

He was later released and cleared of all charges by President Lee Teng-hui, after the island transitioned from martial law to a democratic system.

The government's reaction and the lengthy sentence brought him, as well as the democratic cause both public support in Taiwan and international attention.

Later, Shih served in the Democratic Progressive Party as a legislator and the party's chairman but he is most widely remembered for his work as a democracy activist.

MDT/AP

MALDIVES

Leader demands removal of Indian military from the archipelago by mid-March amid spat

MOHAMED SHARUHAN, MALE

MALDIVES' President Mohamed Muizzu wants the Indian military personnel stationed in his archipelago nation withdrawn by March 15, an official with his office said yesterday [Macau time].

Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim, a presidential aide, told reporters that Muizzu proposed the removal at a meeting with officials of the Indian Embassy in the Maldives and other visiting Indian officials.

The move comes a day after Muizzu returned from China, India's regional rival, and made comments critical of India.

Muizzu said his country's small size is not a license for anyone to bully the Maldives. His comments were an apparent response to social media calls in India to boycott Maldives tourism after three Maldives deputy ministers made derogatory posts on social media against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The dispute began last week when Modi posted pictures on X, formerly known as Twitter, of himself strolling on the beach and



Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu

snorkeling in Lakshadweep, an Indian archipelago that his government believes has untapped potential for tourism.

Some in the Maldives saw it as an attempt to lure tourists away from its sandy white beaches and luxury island resorts.

Muizzu suspended the deputy ministers, saying their comments did not reflect government policy. However, Muizzu on his return from China announced plans to free Maldives of its dependence on India and find alternate places for Maldivians to obtain educa-

tion and health services and import staples and medicines.

Currently, Maldivians go to hospitals in India and Sri Lanka under the government-sponsored free health program and many of the country's staple foods are imported from India.

Muizzu said Maldivians will now be able to also go to hospitals in Thailand and the United Arab Emirates and staples will be imported from Turkey. He also said medicines will be imported directly from manufacturers in Europe and the United States.

India sent the highest number of tourists to the Maldives last year with a share of 11%. But Muizzu said China used to send the most before the pandemic and steps will be taken to double that number.

India and China are competing for influence in the Maldives, which is located strategically along a key shipping route between the east and the west.

At least 75 Indian military personnel are stationed in the Maldives and Muizzu, who is considered pro-China, campaigned on a promise of removing them in the run-up to the presidential election last November. His party had waged an "India Out" campaign for months.

Muizzu had accused his election rival and predecessor of compromising national sovereignty by allowing India to have its military personnel in the Maldivian islands.

Known activities of the Indian military include operating two aircraft donated by India and assisting in the rescue of people stranded or faced with calamities at sea.

Regarding the donated aircraft, Ibrahim said: "If military personnel are here, military people will have to leave this country and it's okay if civilians ... are here to operate them, that's what's being discussed in these meetings." **MDT/AP**

AUSTRALIA

People celebrate Australian-born queen of Denmark with cocktails, picnics and 'Danish Fiesta'

A day after an Australian became queen of Denmark, her native land yesterday celebrated the unlikely fairy tale with cocktails, picnics and a "Danish Fiesta."

Mary Donaldson's journey from Tasmania to the world's first Australian-born queen has captivated both Danes and Australians. People gathered to mark the occasion across Australia, including Queen Mary's hometown of Hobart, the capital of the southern island state of Tasmania.

In Melbourne, scores gathered at Denmark House, one of Melbourne's oldest social clubs, to celebrate the coronation with a spe-



Denmark's King Frederik X kisses his wife Denmark's Queen Mary on the balcony of Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen

cial cultural event.

"It's not something that happens every day that you

have an Australian becoming queen. I don't know if it will ever happen again,"

Danish Club Vice President Lykka Borup told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Mary's husband, Crown Prince Frederik, was proclaimed king of the European nation on Sunday, two weeks after his 83-year-old mother, Queen Margrethe II, announced she would be the first Danish royal to abdicate in about 900 years.

Several landmarks in Hobart were lit up in Denmark's red and white colors, as many residents celebrated with a picnic or a high tea at Taroona Beach, near Queen Mary's childhood home.

Celebrations were also held at the Slip Inn, the Sy-

dney pub where the royal couple first met during the 2000 Olympics. The establishment announced it was hosting a "Danish Fiesta" during January, with a special "There's Something About Mary" cocktail.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese described Queen Mary's ascension as a "great day."

"She has carried herself in a way that I think just brings enormous support and pride to all Australians," he told the ABC's Radio National program yesterday.

"We're very proud that Hobart-born Mary Donaldson has become the queen of Denmark," he said.

Albanese said his gover-

ment has made a donation to a charity that works to protect the endangered Tasmanian devil.

"Mary grew up in Tasmania, and so it is fitting Australia marks this occasion with a gift to support the conservation of the Tasmanian devil," he said in a statement.

Jeremy Rockliff, premier of Mary's home state, said Tasmanians "could not be prouder" of Queen Mary, and there was "always an open invitation" for the royal couple to visit.

The Tasmanian government also said it would send a gift of a table of Huon pine, a Tasmanian timber, handmade by a local furniture maker, and make a donation to a charity that supports children's wellbeing. It's a cause that the 51-year-old Queen Mary, a mother of four, actively supported during her two decades as crown princess of Denmark. **MDT/AP**

DAVOS

Conflict, climate change and AI get top billing as leaders converge for elite meeting

JAMEY KEATEN, DAVOS

THE Earth is heating up, as is conflict in the Middle East. The world economy and Ukraine's defense against Russia are sputtering along. Artificial intelligence could upend all our lives.

The to-do list of global priorities has grown for this year's edition of the World Economic Forum's gabfest of business, political and other elites in the Alpine snows of Davos, Switzerland, which runs today through Friday.

Over 60 heads of state and government, including Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will be heading to town to hold both public appearances and closed-door talks. They'll be among more than 2,800 attendees, which also include academics, artists and international organization leaders.

The gathering is mostly high-minded ambition — think business innovation, aims for peace-making and security cooperation, or life-changing improvements in health care — and a venue for decision-makers in an array of fields and industries to connect.

It is also regularly panned by critics as an emblem of the yawning gap between rich and poor: Young Swiss Socialists staged a rally Sunday to blast the forum and brand attendees as “the richest and most powerful, who are responsible for today's wars and crises.”

“Davos is easily mocked. But in current times it is hard to get people together to talk in a room on shared global issues and the value of face-to-face conversations is very real, as the COVID-19 pandemic showed,” Bronwen Maddox, director of the Chatham House think tank, said in an e-mail.

Here's what to watch for:

MESSY MIDEAST

While Davos is generally big-picture, regional conflict can cast a long shadow — like Ukraine's war did a year ago, prompting organizers to exclude any Russian delegation.

This year, Israel's three-



Demonstrators shout slogans during a demonstration against the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland

-month war with Hamas in Gaza, and recently U.S. and British airstrikes on Houthi militants in Yemen who have fired missiles into Red Sea shipping lanes, are looming large.

Herzog, the Israeli president, whose job is more ceremonial than is Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's, will be on hand for a Davos session Thursday, and the prime ministers of Qatar, Jordan and Lebanon will also be attending.

A “humanitarian briefing on Gaza” session gets a half-hour slot Tuesday.

WHITHER AI?

A testament to how technology has taken a large and growing slice of attention in Davos, this year the theme of Artificial Intelligence “as a driving force for the economy and society” will get about 30 separate sessions.

The dizzying emergence of OpenAI's ChatGPT over a year ago and rivals since then have elevated the power, promise and portent of artificial intelligence into greater public view. OpenAI chief Sam Altman will be in Davos along with top executives from Microsoft, which helped bankroll his company's rise.

AI in education, transparency about AI, its ethics and impact on creativity are all part of the menu — and the Davos Promenade is swimming in advertisements and displays pointing to the new technology.

Forum organizers warned

last week that the threat posed by misinformation generated by AI, such as through the creation of synthetic content, is the world's greatest short-term threat.

AND WHITHER DEMOCRACIES?

Such misinformation could surge this year, and one session explores the threat of “bots and plots” on democracies.

Forum organizers say elections in countries whose populations together total 4.2 billion people will take place this year, and many will be contested. (Few doubt whether Russian President Vladimir Putin will get a new term.) It comes against the backdrop of talk about a new Cold War, the widening rift between dictatorships — or at least autocracies — and democratic countries.

Back-to-back addresses Tuesday morning by Prime Minister Li Qiang of China and Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, will highlight the contrast. President Joe Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, gives a speech later in the day.

French President Emmanuel Macron and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will speak Wednesday, as will Argentina's new president, Javier Milei, a libertarian who has already announced plans to slash the government workforce.

Davos corridors were already abuzz about whether former U.S. President Donald Trump — who made twotrips to Davos during his term — could be inaugurated again around this time next year, after November's election. Biden was once a regular at Davos, but has not attended as president.

TRYING AGAIN TO SAVE THE PLANET

Of all the lofty hopes in Davos, the perennial one of late has been the search for creative and promising ways to fight climate change.

This year is no different: Top climate scientists from around the world reported this month that average global temperatures last year obliterated the record highs — raising the urgency level.

John Kerry, who is stepping down as Biden's climate adviser, takes part in a panel discussion on a U.S.-backed initiative that aims to draw the private sector into development of low-carbon technologies.

Chatham House's Maddox said plans to transition away from fossil fuels agreed during the U.N. climate conference in Dubai last month means climate finance will face a big year in 2024.

“Davos is a powerful combination potentially, of a lot of concern about the environment, and a lot of high-powered finance present,” she said.
MDT/AP

this day in history

1979 SHAH OF IRAN FLEES INTO EXILE

The Shah of Iran has fled the country following months of increasingly violent protests against his regime.

Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi and his wife, Empress Farah, left Tehran and flew to Aswan in Egypt.

The couple's three youngest children were flown to the United States yesterday.

Official reports say the Shah has left for a “vacation” and medical treatment. In fact, he was asked to leave by the man he appointed prime minister earlier this month.

Over the past few months, there have been an increasing number of violent clashes between security forces and anti-Shah demonstrators.

Opposition to the Shah has become united behind the Muslim traditionalist movement led by Iran's main spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, from exile in France.

There have been calls for the Ayatollah's return - and news of the Shah's departure was greeted with mass celebrations across Iran.

British and United States' ex-patriates living in Iran - regarded as symbols of westernization - have been the frequent target of attacks. Thousands have left the country.

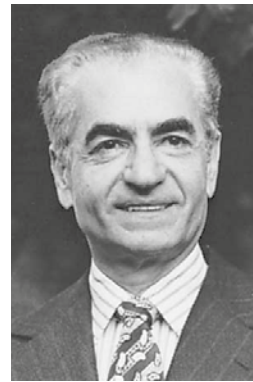
Martial law was declared in many cities on 8 September. But later that month, industrial action by thousands of Iranian workers culminated in a mass strike by employees in the oil industry.

The strike sparked riots and rallies across the country in support of the Ayatollah.

Western governments, like the US, UK and West Germany, have continued to express support for the Shah.

The Shah appointed a new military government in early November. But it failed to stem the rising tide of support for the Ayatollah.

Earlier this month he appointed a new prime minister, Dr Shapur Bahktiar. When, on 13 January, the Ayatollah declared a revolutionary Islamic council to replace what he called the “illegal government” of Iran, Dr Bahktiar persuaded the Shah it was time to leave.



Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Shah never returned to Iran. He died in exile in Egypt in 1980.

Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran on 1 February after 14 years' exile.

He threw out Dr Bahktiar's government on 11 February and, after a referendum, declared an Islamic Republic on 1 April.

Khomeini guided his country's revolutionary social, legal, and political development until his death in 1989. He presided over the country during the Iran/Iraq war, only reluctantly agreeing a ceasefire. He also issued a fatwa against author Salman Rushdie.

Two decades later, liberals ushered in a period of transformation with their election victory in 2000 over the conservative elite.

But reformist president Mohammad Khatami was at odds with hardliners, including the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and failed to make good on his promises.

He was replaced by the ultra-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2005.

President Bush declared Iran part of an “axis of evil” in 2002. Washington accused Tehran of attempting to develop nuclear weapons, although Iran says its nuclear ambitions are peaceful.

Tehran resumed its uranium conversion process in 2005, provoking a diplomatic showdown with the international community.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

<p>ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Use your quick wit to win points with friends. Sudden disruptions will cause upset and a change of routine in your home environment.</p>	<p>TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Empty promises will cause upset. Over spending or unexpected bills could set you back. You may be overreacting to a situation at hand.</p>
<p>GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 You are best to be discreet. Don't blow situations out of proportion or you could find that others will misinterpret what really happened.</p>	<p>CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Try not to overspend on friends or family. Do not ruffle feathers if possible. You need to concentrate on solving existing problems.</p>
<p>LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Your personal life will be under the gun and you may want to avoid the questions your lover is going to want to ask you. Concentrate on your career and on making money.</p>	<p>VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Don't let friends or relatives rule your life. Try to mix business with pleasure while traveling. You are best to deal with those outside your family.</p>
<p>LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Someone you live with may cause drastic alterations in your usual routine. Take that long overdue vacation if you can. You can travel for business or pleasure.</p>	<p>SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Partnerships with creative people could lead to financial gains. Physical work or exercise should be part of your schedule. Mingle with those who can help you get ahead.</p>
<p>SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Make sure that you make reservations early. Opportunities to get involved in investment groups will payoff. Make changes around your house and plan to do some entertaining.</p>	<p>CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Don't bother complaining, do the work yourself. You should be making plans to spend some time with the ones you love. Be aware that a female you work with may be trying to hold you back.</p>
<p>AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 You may be emotional if you allow your lover to take advantage of your good nature. Don't jump too quickly regarding an investment that appears to be good.</p>	<p>PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Your pursuits may end up being fruitless. Mingle with those who have similar interests, and you should be able to start something. You are best not to confide in anyone right now.</p>

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-7	4	cloudy
Changchun	-16	-1	fine
Chengdu	8	12	overcast
Chongqing	12	14	rain
Fuzhou	8	16	cloudy
Guangzhou	12	23	cloudy
Guiyang	12	16	overcast
Haikou	20	24	cloudy
Hangzhou	0	14	fine
Harbin	-25	-6	fine
Hefei	0	7	rain
Nanjing	0	9	overcast
Shanghai	4	11	overcast
Taipei	15	18	overcast
Wuhan	5	6	rain
Hong Kong	19	21	windy
WORLD			
Moscow	-7	-2	cloudy
Frankfurt	-4	2	cloudy
Paris	-2	1	cloudy
London	-1	3	cloudy
New York	-6	1	snow

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Hit with an open hand; 5- Colorful moths; 8- Cozy; 12- Land of shamrocks; 13- Bar, legally; 15- Bank takeback; 16- Caesar's wings; 17- Mikhail's wife; 18- Shakespeare's river; 19- Needed to borrow books; 22- Hydrocarbon ending; 23- Police blotter abbr; 24- Psychic; 26- Diminutive; 29- Retract; 31- ER VIP; 32- One who cries "uncle"; 34- Turn aside; 36- Bunches; 38- Fastening device; 40- Bacchanalian cry; 41- Frenzied; 43- Pitchers; 45- Adam's madam; 46- Wheel; 48- Term of holding; 50- Intend; 51- Large container; 52- Faulkner's "___ Lay Dying"; 54- Embroidery upon canvas; 61- Diplomacy; 63- Semisynthetic textile; 64- Step; 65- "A Jug of Wine..." poet; 66- Praying figure; 67- Model married to David Bowie; 68- Brazilian soccer star; 69- Compass dir.; 70- Blind as ___;

DOWN 1- Authenticating mark; 2- Taylor of "Mystic Pizza"; 3- Bedouin; 4- Study intently; 5- ___, old chapel; 6- Auricular; 7- Cubs slugger Sammy; 8- Mme., across the Pyrenees; 9- Imaginary; 10- Atop; 11- Departed; 13- Unpredictable; 14- Analyze a sentence; 20- Related by blood; 21- Word form for "ten"; 25- Licycle site; 26- Like some bears and icecaps; 27- Thrifty; 28- Conger catcher; 29- Adjust to zero; 30- Treasure ___; 31- Grand Coulee, for one; 33- Cornfield sound; 35- Driving peg; 37- Scrabble piece; 39- Keep from occurring; 42- Extended family unit; 44- Lose one's cool; 47- Diciembre follower; 49- System of social perfection; 52- On the peak of; 53- Ditto; 55- Bring home the bacon; 56- Actress Cannon; 57- The ___ Ranger rode a horse called Silver; 58- Metrical foot; 59- Final Four org.; 60- Portable shelter; 62- It's past due.

Friday's solution

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

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	

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MILAN FASHION

SIMON CRACKER'S UPCYCLED LOOKS ARE HARMONIZED WITH DYEING. K-WAY POPS COLOR

COLLEEN BARRY, MILAN

MILAN designers are reflecting on a troubled world with collections that mark a return to serious business attire, even from active wear brands, and away from frivolity.

Some scenes from the third day of previews Sunday [yesterday, Macau time] of mostly menswear collections for fall-winter 2024-25:

SIMON CRACKER NODS OFF

Italian brand Simon Cracker explores the moment before drifting off to sleep, as the best respite from a troubling world.

The nearly 14-year-old brand by designers Simone Botte and Filippo Biraghi works entirely with upcycled garments and reclaimed remnants. For this collection, the designers achieved harmony by dyeing the garments together, creating a dreamy pinkish blue of a sunset.

Colors bleed together, and become a bit blurry, as if seeing through closed eyes. The silhouette is slouchy, as if giving up after a long day. Men's tailoring defines the collection, but jackets are deconstructed with one shoulder off, a new half-collar taking its place.

Garments are dusted with a glimmering sheen, as if visited by the sandman. Big bold pearls accent the looks, representing the moon. Denim garments were hand painted by British designer Sue Cloes, known for the 1981 Culture Club designs.

The treatments gave the collection a cohesion that the designers said that many interpreted as ele-

gance — which isn't necessarily their goal. They prefer to shake things up.

"Rebellion does not necessarily come from making noise, rather maybe it comes more from quiet, from reflection," Biraghi said backstage. "There is still kindness. Kindness is the most revolutionary thing there is."

K-WAY OUTERWEAR BRAND POPS COLOR

K-Way, the Franco-Italian brand synonymous with windbreaker with a tri-colored striped zipper, is continuing its evolution from outerwear into the luxury ready-to-wear space with a new collection that pops with color.

Furry parkas, quilted jackets and layered windbreakers anchor the collection. The female silhouette is fitted and business-like, including quilted bustier over a shirt and tie with a long skirt, or a form-hugging midi dress accented by the brand's iconic zipper. The men's silhouette is more casual, quilted jacket and Bermuda set, or long pants with a midi-length matching coats. The looks came in sequential monotonous of navy, royal blue, red, ice blue and white.

"This is a moment to show the capability of the brand, and to show different ways to wear our iconic zipper and pieces," said marketing vice president Lorenzo Bogleione, whose family controls the BasicNet parent company.

K-Way is moving toward using entirely recycled materials in the next few years.

"For us it is a responsibility, not a selling point," Bogleione said. MDT/AP



TENNIS | AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Coco Gauff advances to 2nd round in bid for consecutive Grand Slam titles

SIMON CAMBERS,
MELBOURNE

WITH increased confidence in her serve thanks to some advice from Andy Roddick, Coco Gauff began her quest for back-to-back Grand Slam singles titles with a 6-3, 6-0 victory over Anna Karolína Schmiedlová at the Australian Open yesterday.

The 19-year-old American, who won her first major at the U.S. Open in September, wrapped up victory in exactly one hour.

"I was a little nervous the first set," fourth-seeded Gauff said. "I think I did well returning, then I found my serve toward the end (of the set). When I was nervous at 3-3, I told myself: 'I feel good, I look good, so just have fun'. That was able to relax me a little bit."

Gauff dropped just one point on her serve in the second set and said that former No. 1 Roddick had recently given her



AP PHOTO

some serving tips.

"It was really cool," she said. "He's a really chill guy. I met him before but never to that level. I went to Charlotte (North Carolina) for two days. It was a really good two days. I think that my serve has improved. He's probably one of the best servers in history..."

Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova didn't make it past the first round, beaten 6-1, 6-2 by Dayana Yastremska.

Seventh-seeded Vondrousova missed the Adelaide tune-up event with a hip injury and struggled on serve throughout, hitting seven double faults.

"I didn't practice because I was injured," she said. "I think that was the important thing. I lost myself at the beginning."

Australia's newest Top 10 player Alex de Minaur advanced after a truncated opening night match on Rod Laver Arena. He was leading 2016 Wimbledon finalist Milos Raonic 6-7 (6), 6-3, 2-0 when the big-serving Canadian retired from the match with injury.

Third-seeded Daniil Medvedev, the 2021 and 2022 finalist at Melbourne Park and at last year's U.S. Open, also advanced when his opponent retired from their match.

Medvedev had dropped the first set but was leading 5-7, 6-2, 6-4, 1-0 when the 22-year-old Terence Atmane quit because of cramps.

"When I was feeling tired in the third set, I looked up the other end and saw he was cramping," Medvedev said. "The conditions were fine but it has not been hot these seven days and

then it was hot today, so you get more stressed."

Stefanos Tsitsipas, who lost last year's Australian final to Novak Djokovic in three sets, advanced with a 5-7, 6-1, 6-1, 6-3 win over Zizou Bergs.

Stan Wawrinka, the 2014 Australian Open champion and three-time Grand Slam winner, was beaten 6-4, 3-6, 5-7, 6-3, 6-0 by Adrian Mannarino. That left 10-time winner Djokovic as the only Australian champion left in the men's draw.

Five-time Australian Open finalist Andy Murray lost to Tomas Martin Etcheverry 6-4, 6-2, 6-2 and said it might be the last time he contests the season's first major.

"It's a definite possibility that will be the last time I play here," said Murray, who has been ranked No. 1 and won three majors but hasn't been past the third round at a Grand Slam since returning after hip surgery. "I think probably because of how the match went." **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editors, Economic Daily

**TARIFF REDUCTIONS
 SHOW COUNTRY
 CONTINUES TO
 OPEN ITS MARKET**

Since Jan 1 of this year, China has begun implementing provisional import tax rates lower than the most-favored-nation rate on 1,010 types of goods from foreign countries, with zero tariffs on some of them. The new rates cover 143 types of agricultural and industrial products from Argentina. The South American country's media recently reported that China's move has greatly benefited Argentine dairy products, seafood, sweet corn and other items.

The overall level of tariffs is an important indicator of a country's openness to the outside. Since it joined the World Trade Organization, China has continuously lowered tariffs and expanded imports. However, in recent years, protectionism and unilateralism have intensified, and some countries have abused the concept of national security, engaging in technological blockades and trade barriers, which have caused shocks to the multilateral trading system.

Despite the globalization headwinds, China has continued to reduce tariffs and further open up its market, lowering its tariff level from 15.3 percent in 2001 to 7.3 percent in 2023. This reflects its firm stance in supporting economic globalization and its commitment to opening wider to the outside world.

China's tariff cuts have enabled the international community to better share the opportunities in the Chinese market. Taking Argentina as an example, driven by favorable trade policies such as tariff reductions, against the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, bilateral trade between China and Argentina has risen in recent years to reach \$25.5 billion in 2023. At present, China is Argentina's second-largest trading partner and largest agricultural export market. The steady development of China-Argentina trade is giving a huge boost to the Argentine economy which has encountered difficulties.

Some least developed countries have also benefited greatly from China's targeted tariff cuts. In order to help the least developed countries accelerate their development, China announced in 2021 a decision to further expand the scope of zero-tariff products to China from the least developed countries having diplomatic relations with it, applying a zero-tariff preferential rate to 98 percent of products originating from the least developed countries. Such measures well demonstrate that China's development provides opportunities for the world.

It should be noted that China's tariff cuts also fully benefit the domestic economy and people's livelihood while benefiting the international community. For example, in the adjustment of tariffs, medicines have been a key area for tax reduction, and the import tariffs on many anti-cancer drugs, drugs for some rare diseases, and related raw materials have been reduced to zero, effectively improving their accessibility and affordability for people in China. Lowered tariffs on some key raw materials have also helped domestic enterprises reduce production costs and improve the resilience of relevant industry and supply chains.

MEN WHO WERE ALLEGEDLY ABUSED BY A JAPANESE BOY BAND PRODUCER CRITICIZE COMPANY'S RESPONSE

THE BUZZ

Members of a group of men who say they were sexually abused as boys by a Japanese entertainment mogul are accusing the company behind the scandal, previously known as Johnny's, of not being sincere in dealing with the victims.

Shimon Ishimaru, who represents the victims' group, said many have not yet received compensation. The group has asked to meet with company officials, but that has not happened, he said at a news conference with three other men who said they were victims.

Ishimaru is among hundreds of men who have come forward since last year, alleging they were sexually abused as

teens by boy band producer Johnny Kitagawa. Kitagawa, who died in 2019, was never charged and remained powerful in the entertainment industry.

The company finally acknowledged Kitagawa's long-rumored abuse last year. The company's chief made a public apology in May. The Japanese government has also pushed for compensation.

The company, which has changed its name from Johnny & Associates to Smile-Up, said yesterday it has received requests for compensation from 939 people. Of those, 125 have received compensation, it said in a statement.



Tang Shuangning, then chairman of China Everbright Group and Everbright Securities Co. (2009)

**FORMER CHAIRMAN OF
 STATE-OWNED BANK
 CHINA EVERBRIGHT
 ARRESTED OVER
 SUSPECTED CORRUPTION**

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

The former chairman of state-owned Chinese bank China Everbright Group has been arrested on suspicion of embezzlement and bribery, prosecutors said in a statement yesterday, amid an intensified campaign against corruption.

The investigation into Tang Shuangning, the former party secretary and chairman of China Everbright Group has ended and the case would be "transferred to the procuratorate for review and prosecution," China's Supreme People's Procuratorate said in a statement.

Tang, 69, was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party earlier this month over violations of disciplines and laws, amid a crackdown on corruption in China's financial sector. He retired in 2017.

Other allegations against him include weakening the party's leadership over the bank, failing to prevent and defuse financial risks, "privately

reading publications with serious political problems and resisting organizational scrutiny," the party-run newspaper Global Times cited the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) and the National Supervisory Commission as saying.

Another alleged transgression: promoting his calligraphy. Tang has published several volumes of calligraphy and poems.

Chinese president Xi Jinping earlier this month pledged to intensify a crackdown on graft in the finance, energy and infrastructure sectors, part of a longstanding campaign against corruption since he came to power since 2012.

As of April 2022, 4.7 million people had been punished for corruption, according to state-owned media reports.

Tang served as vice president of the China Banking Regulatory Commission from 2003 to 2007, before his appointment as chairman of China Everbright Group. He was first investigated in July.

China Everbright is one of about a dozen commercial banks founded in China in the early 1990s. Its shares are listed on the Hong Kong and Shanghai stock exchanges. It is controlled by Central Huijin, a state-owned investment company.

Tang's successor Li Xiaopeng was also suspected of graft, expelled from the party and removed from public office.

Others who have been punished for alleged corruption include Sun Guofeng, a former Chinese central bank senior official, who was sentenced to over 16 years in prison for accepting bribes.

Sun Deshun, former president of state-owned China CITIC Bank, was sentenced to life imprisonment for accepting over \$130 million in bribes during his career.

Another finance executive, Zhang Hongli, who was a former senior executive of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, China's biggest bank, has also been investigated for graft. **MDT/AP**



Germany Farmers drove thousands of tractors into Berlin yesterday in the climax of a week of demonstrations against a plan to scrap tax breaks on the diesel they use, a protest that has tapped into wider discontent with Germany's government. Columns of tractors rolled through the capital ahead of the demonstration at the landmark Brandenburg Gate. Over the past week, farmers have blocked highway entrances and slowed traffic across Germany with their protests, intent on pushing Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government to abandon the planned cuts entirely.



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was due to face Parliament yesterday to explain why the U.K. joined the U.S. in striking Houthi targets in Yemen — and why British lawmakers did not get a say on the military action. Four Royal Air Force Typhoon jets took part in last week's U.S.-led strikes on sites used by the Iran-backed rebels, who have been attacking commercial ships in the Red Sea. The U.S. says Friday's strikes hit Houthi weapons depots, radar facilities and command centers.



Vatican Pope Francis has defended his controversial decision to let priests bless same-sex couples but admitted that "solitude is a price you have to pay" when you make difficult decisions. Francis doubled down and insisted that the "Lord blesses everyone," during a Sunday interview with an Italian talk show. But he acknowledged the remarkable opposition his decision has sparked — Africa's bishops have united in a continent-wide refusal to implement the Vatican declaration and individual bishops in Eastern Europe, Latin America and elsewhere have also voiced opposition.