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AP PHOTO



China A fire broke out in dorms at a boarding school for elementary students in central Henan province, and 13 students died in the blaze, Chinese state media reported this weekend. All of the dead were third grade students, a teacher told Zonglan news. One person rescued from the scene was being treated in the hospital, CCTV, China's state broadcaster said. Local authorities said they were investigating the cause of the fire.

AP PHOTO



Japan became the fifth country in history to reach the moon when one of its spacecrafts without astronauts successfully made a soft landing on the lunar surface on Saturday. However, space officials said they needed more time to analyze whether the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, achieved its mission priority of making a pinpoint landing. They also said the craft's solar panel had failed to generate power, which could shorten its activity on the moon.

AP PHOTO



North Korea said last week it has tested a nuclear-capable underwater attack drone in response to a combined naval exercise by South Korea, the United States and Japan this week, as it continues to blame its rivals for raising tensions in the region. The test of the drone, purportedly designed to destroy naval vessels and ports, came days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared he is scrapping his country's long-standing goal of a peaceful reunification with South Korea and that his country will rewrite its constitution to define South Korea as its most hostile foreign adversary.

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

TRADE

JAPAN'S SATSUMA COUNTRY EYEING CLOSER BUSINESS TIES WITH MACAU

ANTHONY LAM

COMMENDING Macau as a key market and partner, the mayor of a city in Japan's Kagoshima Prefecture has announced the area is seeking further business opportunities with larger enterprises in Macau.

Speaking on the sidelines of a retail event held yesterday at New Yaohan that revolved around produce from Satsuma Country in Japan, Ryoji Tanaka, mayor of Satsumasendai City and chairman of the Satsuma Country Wide-Area Export Promotion Council, said that on a commercial level, his area is seeking opportunities wherein caterers in Macau will source produce from the Satsuma Country.

Satsuma Country comprises three cities in Japan: Satsumasendai, Hioki and Akune.

Having now visited Macau



three times, Tanaka said some other mayors as well as the representative of Kagoshima Pre-

fecture in Hong Kong were also in Macau for the occasion.

To explore business oppor-

tunities, the delegation visited locations in Macau, mainly for regaining familiarity with the city

after years of pandemic restrictions.

Given the nature of this visit, the mayor was asked how produce from his area stands out from other quality products from Japan.

Expressing his gratitude for the positive words used to describe Japanese products, the mayor said Kagoshima Prefecture is dubbed Japan's food storage and beef from Satsuma won the Japan Wagyu Olympics last year, highlighting its quality and surpassing that of other regions in Japan.

In addition, the mayor said the region's sweet potatoes also possess a very delicate quality and are popular. The produce is even used to make associated products, such as noodles and Shochu, which are also very popular.

A fair that features more than 40 products from the Japanese region is being held at the supermarket at New Yaohan Department Store from now until Tuesday. The range of specialty products includes processed foods, seafood, seasonings, sake, water, tea leaves and confectionery sourced from Satsuma Country.

BUSINESS

SCL awards SMEs for excellence, concludes another round of training

ANTHONY LAM

RESORT operator Sands China Ltd. (SCL) highlighted its cooperation with local SMEs with an award ceremony over the weekend as well as conducting a graduation ceremony for the 13th and 14th cohorts of its Sands Procurement Academy.

In compliance with the government's call to nurture and support local businesses, the resort operator has purchased services and products from local businesses, most of them SMEs, since its inauguration.

So far, 2,000 service or product providers have cooperated or are in cooperation with the resort operator, Dr Wilfred Wong, president of SCL, said during his speech at the event.



Officially referred to as the Sans Supplier Excellence Awards, the accolade is conferred upon vendors providing commendable

services or products. There are seven categories: small and medium-sized enterprise (SME), corporate culture and sustainability,

cost management, service excellence, project management, total quality management and innovation.

The 2023 Awards were

bestowed upon Aon Hong Kong Ltd. – Macau Branch for corporate culture and sustainability, Angel Macau Ltd. for innovation, YH Engineering Company Ltd. for cost management, Matrix Event Planning and Exhibition Ltd. for quality management, China Construction Engineering (Macau) Company Ltd. for project management, Maxtime Food (Macau) Ltd. for service excellence and Lat Lei Stationery Ltd. for SME.

Wong said the 2023 award ceremony was held in 2024 because of challenges in securing venue bookings. Elaborating, the executive said that the enterprise's own venues were fully booked by concerts and MICE events.

With 26% of its MOP8.4 billion procurement expenditure last year going to local SMEs, the resort operator also celebrated two cohorts of graduates from its procurement academy alongside the award ceremony.

Organized in collabora-

tion with the Macao Chamber of Commerce (MCC) and the Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM) since 2017, the academy trains local SMEs to meet international standards and expectations so that they be on par with SCL requirements and be able to close deals externally.

Participating local SME suppliers learn through tailor-made practical training modules, presented by lecturers with diverse expertise. The program's modules comprise six topics: quality assurance, Macau labour law fundamentals, logistics management, procurement process and system overview, supplier code of conduct, and procurement contract basics.

The ceremony saw 69 enterprises graduating from the training program. Wong thanked the MCC and the CPTTM for their support. Since 2017, the academy has trained 524 local SMEs, with 485 having graduated.

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RENATO MARQUES

PEDESTRIANS

Draft traffic law proposes mobile phone ban

A new draft bill amending the Road Traffic Law proposes, among other things, to ban pedestrians' use of mobile phones as well as other electronic equipment such as photo and video cameras while crossing the streets and roads of Macau.

The bill has been introduced at the Legislative Assembly (AL) for discussion.

Under the bill's Article 72, Number 6, pedestrians are prohibited from using mobile phones, other telecommunications devices or photo or video camera equipment when crossing the road. Offenders could be fined MOP300 (the same amount as fines imposed on those who cross roads except in designated sections and times).

The use of mobile phones and other communication devices will only be permitted in instances where users are using a hands-free system, like when driving vehicles.

Although the government did not explain the reasons for the new law, it might be to tackle the recent trend, practiced mostly by tourists but also by some locals, of photo-taking in public streets and roads.

Harsher fines (MOP900) are proposed for cases where

RENATO MARQUES



pedestrians disobey road signage that forbids pedestrian traffic in locations such as bridges, tunnels and overpasses.

NEW RULES FOR WHEELCHAIRS AND MOBILITY SCOOTERS

The new bill contains provisions affecting wheelchairs and

mobility scooters when these are used on the street or at a road crossing.

The bill prohibits people

who do not have mobility impairments from using any mobility assistance devices such as motorized wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

It provides that such equipment can only carry one person and should be operated without putting other street-users at risk.

Balance bikes, skateboards and scooters (recreational vehicles consisting of a footboard mounted on two or three wheels with a long steering handle), whether foot-propelled or electric, are prohibited from being used on public roads. Offenders could face a MOP600 fine.

HIGHER SPEEDING AND DUI FINES

The new bill also proposes to increase the penalties for several behaviors related to driving such as speeding and driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol or drugs.

The fines will be increased to a minimum of MOP1,500 for all these offences with those being considered re-offenders paying double the amounts.

Less importance seems to have been attributed to wrong-way driving which, although being a very dangerous conduct, is targeted with a minimum fine of MOP1,000.

The AL has not yet scheduled a date for the first reading of the bill.

STATS

Better business closes out 2023

RENATO MARQUES

A recent survey from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) on Business Climate found that Restaurants and Similar Establishments as well as Retail stores increased their business significantly at the end of 2023.

The report, related to November last year, noted that this business sector had reported an average increase in their receipts of 38.5% year-on-year.

Thriving way above the average were the Western Restaurants and Chinese Restaurants surging 74.7% and 52.5% respectively, while on the other hand, Japanese and Korean restaurants dropped 22.1%.

Although the figures of the Restaurants represented a very positive increase y-o-y as compared to 2022, a year in which Covid-19 restrictions were still in force, they represent a drop (-7.2%) when compared

RENATO MARQUES



red to the previous month (October 2023) when the National Day holidays helped to account for the higher month of the year for business owners.

When compared month-on-month, November

registered a decrease in receipts, with receipts of Chinese Restaurants and Western Restaurants falling 9.7% and 5.5% respectively.

The prospering seen y-on-y was even more

accentuated in the retail sector which scored in November 2023 an average rise of 45.7% y-o-y.

In this case, the DSEC said that all types of interviewed retailers registered a y-o-y increase in sales,

with particularly significant growth in the sales in the sub-sector of Watches, Clocks & Jewellery (+78.2%), Department Stores (+73.9%), Cosmetics & Sanitary Articles Retailers (+65.8%) and Leather Goods Retailers (+58.4%).

But, like the restaurateurs, shop owners saw November drop when compared to October. On average this drop was of 12%, DSEC said, with the retailers of Watches, Clocks and Jewellery and Adults' Clothing reporting a sales drop of 17.2% and 12.3% respectively.

The only sub-sector that reported growth was the one related to Motor Vehicle Retailers, posting a month-on-month hike of 30.4% in sales.

Most of those interviewed in the restaurant business (42%) also said they expected their receipts would increase with the December Christmas season, while some 14% presented an opposite forecast.

For retail trade, half of the interviewed retailers

forecasted a month-on-month sales rise in December, with the ones selling Leather Goods (80%), Department Stores (67%), and Cosmetics and Sanitary Articles Retailers (64%), being the most optimistic.

In contrast, approximately 15% of the interviewed retailers expected a month-on-month sales drop in December, leading this group were the Motor Vehicle Retailers and Supermarkets.

The sample of the Business Climate Survey on Restaurants and Similar Establishments and Retail Trade comprises 229 restaurants and 161 retailers, which accounted for 53.5% and 70.6% of the respective industry's receipts in 2019.

The Survey results were not extrapolated. As a panel sample of establishments is used in this Survey, the changes in receipts in the reference month as compared to the month of comparison serve as reference indicators of the business performance of the sectors.

ANTHONY LAM

CIVIL PROTECTION

SECURITY SECRETARY ASSURES TRAINING AGAINST EV FIRE

SAFETY devices are a must in EV charging docks and the roadmaps of cables have specific requirements, Cheong Ioc Ieng, chief of the Office of the Secretary for Security, has emphasized in response to lawmaker Lo Choi In's written inquiry.

Citing the Fire Services Bureau (CB), Cheong said that pursuant to relevant laws and regulations, electric devices should be designed and installed so they will not cause or spread fire.

Emergency switches must be installed on these devices, so that during a fire, power will be disconnected. Wires and cables should not pass through fire buffer zones or emergency stairwells, Cheong added.

Cheong also said the CB has compiled rescue guidelines based on popular EVs on the market. Regular training includes rescue procedures to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

On battery-changing facilities at public parking areas, Cheong cited two other regulations to confirm that the installation of such facilities must be subject to advanced approval from competent authorities. The CB, meanwhile, is open to technical meetings should any issues or problems arise



during the installation project, Cheong added.

Campaigns on fire safety have

regularly been run on social media platforms and conventional media, Cheong said.

In another reply to lawmaker Ron Lam's inquiry on fuel for transport use, the Consumer

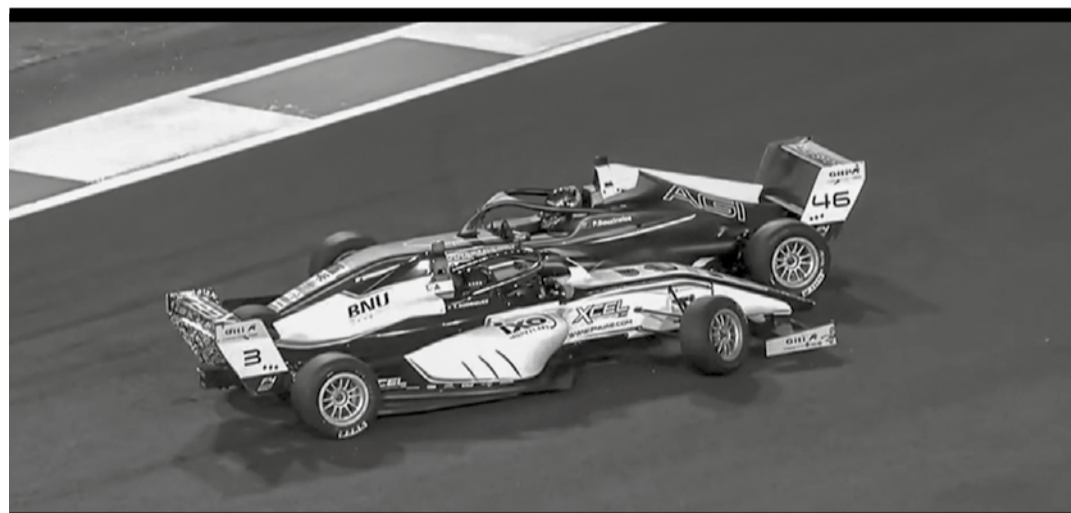
Council of Macao cited the Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) in disclosing that two landplots on New Urban Zone A had already been assigned for the use of refuelling facilities.

It was further disclosed that landplots in Zone A have been reserved for the installation or use of critical commodities such as drainage and electricity. In spite of this, the bureau could not publish a timetable for the opening of the tender for the aforementioned refueling stations in the zone.

On the initiation of a legal mechanism to investigate the structure of commodity prices – in this case, of fuel – both vertically and horizontally, the Council did not clearly state if it had triggered the mechanism.

Lam has long demanded the Council use the mechanism because it is empowered by law to do so.

Instead, the Council said that “the initiation of the mechanism is rigorous and requires comprehensive analysis on the actual conditions of each industry. When the legal premise is met, this Council will initiate the mechanism in compliance with actual situations and corresponding legal procedures, including with regard to the opinions from the Consumer Consultation Council.”



FORMULA 4

Rodrigues unlucky under Yas Marina's floodlights

RENATO MARQUES

THE second round of the Formula 4 UAE Championship, raced over the weekend, did not go as planned for local driver Tiago Rodrigues.

Race 1, held Saturday, saw Rodrigues battling his way from 14th position on the grid.

Rodrigues did not shy away from a battle with his XCEL teammate Alvis Rodella at the chicane of Yas Marina Circuit, but the two cars made contact.

The collision then involved a third car, of Jules Caranta, running on the outside of Rodella.

The contact caused damage to Rodrigues' car and forced him into the pits.

Trying to recover as much lost time as possible, including from the pit stop to change the front wing of the car, Rodrigues soon had another incident.

This involved another XCEL driver, this time Hong Kong's Liu Kai Shun, with both retiring from the race.

Leading the race, Freddie Slater took the win in Race 1 ahead of Alex Powell. Third was Nikita Bedrin.

As Race 1 results dictate the starting grid of Race 2, raced Saturday evening, Rodrigues had to start at the back of the field and again try to overtake slower racers.

During the first lap, Rodrigues was involved in yet another crash, this time with Peter Bouzinelos. The cars became entangled in the middle of the track, which led to his early retirement from the race.

Race 2 was eventually won by Emirati Keanu Al Azhari, with Kean Nakamura-Berta second. Freddie Slater managed an amazing recovery from 12th to an eventual third.

The last race of Round 2 occurred yesterday evening with Rodrigues starting on the 19th position of the grid.

The race started in the same style as the previous two, with several cars making contact and ending up stopped on the track. This prompted the exit of the Safety Car on two occasions in the first few laps.

Fortunately, this time, Rodrigues managed to steer clear of trouble and climbed a few positions to 14th. As the Safety Car returned to the pits, there were less than 8 minutes left to race (+ 1 Lap), but yet again, another series of unfortunate events prompted another Safety Car period just one lap after the restart.

The race eventually ended behind the Safety Car, with Rodrigues in 15th position, unable to fight for a better spot due to the limited racing time during Race 3. The winner at the flag was Al Azhari, followed by Slater in second, and Nakamura-Berta in third.

The championship stops now for a week as the drivers move to neighboring Dubai for Round 3 at the Dubai Autodrome during the first weekend of February.

CNY HOLIDAYS

COGNAC-MAKER CELEBRATES CHINESE NEW YEAR

ANTHONY LAM

COGNAC producer Hennessy held a dinner at the City of Dreams to welcome the imminent Year of the Dragon in the Lunar calendar and unveiled a new bottle designed by artist Yang Yongliang.

In honor of the dragon, the most symbolic and vital animal of the Chinese zodiac, Yang combined traditional drawings with striking digital art which breathe life, movement, energy and fire into a collective of metallic dragons dancing in and out of waves, the brand said.

The unique artwork has incredible attention to detail, with a three-dimensional element which brings out even the texture of the dragon's skin and teeth. Hennessy explained that each bottle features a color which embodies the aspirations of the new year; red for joy and luck and gold for prosperity.

Born in 1980 in Old Town Jiading, Shanghai, Yang has studied Chinese painting since childhood. Having graduated from Shanghai Institute of Design of the China Academy of Art, he currently lives and works in New York and Shanghai.

The decorated bottles are available in three different versions. Also available for purchase is an exquisite and rare collectable decanter in a beautiful oak giftbox.

(Readers are reminded that the legal drinking age in Macau is 18 years.)

HEAVY METAL

Tata Steel announces 2,800 jobs cut in blow to Welsh town built on steelmaking

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

INDIAN firm Tata Steel announced over the weekend it will close both blast furnaces at its plant in Port Talbot, Wales, eliminating 2,800 jobs, as part of plans to make its unprofitable U.K. operation leaner and greener.

Tata plans to switch from coal-fired blast furnaces to an electric arc furnace, which emits less carbon — and needs fewer workers — using a half-billion pound (\$634 million) investment from the British government.

The company said the switch would “reverse more than a decade of losses and transition from the legacy blast furnaces to a more sustainable, green steel business.”

“The course we are putting forward is difficult, but we believe it is the right one,” Tata Steel Chief Executive T.V. Narendran said.

The company said it expects about 2,800 jobs will be eliminated — 2,500 of them in the next 18 months, with a further 300 at longer-term risk. Both blast furnaces are due to be shut this year, with the new electric furnace installed by 2027.

The news is a major blow to Port Talbot, a town of about 35,000 people whose economy has been built on the steel industry since the early 1900s.

Unions have called for one blast furnace to remain open while the electric one is built, which



A view of Tata Steel's Port Talbot steelworks in south Wales

would have meant fewer job cuts. They say Tata rejected their proposal.

The Unite union said it would “use everything in its armory” to fight job losses, including potential strikes.

At its height in the 1960s, the Port Talbot steelworks employed around 20,000 people, before cheaper offerings from China and other countries hit production. More than 300,000 people worked in Britain's steel industry in 1971; by 2021 it was about 26,000.

The steel industry now accounts for 0.1% of the British economy and 2.4% of the country's greenhouse gas emissions, according

to research by the House of Commons Library.

Tata warned in 2022 that its U.K. operations were under threat unless it secured government funding to help it move to less carbon-intensive electric arc furnaces.

Last year the U.K. government gave Tata up to 500 million pounds (\$634 million) to make the Port Talbot steelworks greener. Tata says it is investing a further 750 million pounds (\$950 million) in the project.

The company said switching to the electric furnace, which produces steel from scrap metal, would “secure most of (the plant's) capa-

bility in terms of end products” while cutting its carbon emissions by about 85%.

The British government said the investment would “transform the site and protect thousands of jobs — both in Port Talbot and throughout the supply chain.” It said the move to electric furnaces would “secure a sustainable and competitive future for the U.K. steel sector.”

The GMB and Community unions, which both represent workers at Port Talbot, said “it's unbelievable any government would give a company 500 million pounds to throw 3,000 workers on the scrapheap.”

The announcement is the latest blow to the economy in Wales, a former industrial heartland whose mines and mills have largely shut since the 1980s.

Opposition politicians criticized Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative government, saying it failed to stand up for British industry.

Economy Minister Vaughan Gething, a member of the Labour Party-led Welsh government, said “today's news is a cause of real grief and upset as well as anger from the community here.”

“It's a devastating blow for this community — not just the steel workers who have been told about the extraordinary level of job loss, but the wider community,” he said. “It's not a community that has a significant amount of well paid employment around it to replace the scale of the job losses that have been proposed.”

Even the Green Party in Wales criticized Tata's decision, despite its environmental benefits.

“Wales knows only too well what happens when communities are abandoned by government and industries,” said its leader, Anthony Slaughter. “We saw it with the coal industry and now it is happening again with the steel industry.”

“Decarbonization of industry is vital, but communities and people's jobs must be protected,” he said. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

MICHELIN star studded dinner at Lisboa Palace



“Timeless Gastronomy,” a joint venture between MICHELIN Guide and SJM Resorts, S.A., held last Saturday evening, at Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau, was “a landmark in culinary history,” a press release from the organizers states.

This exclusive event “showcased the talents of four glo-

bally acclaimed chefs, each presenting their signature dishes.”

According to SJM, the evening began with an appetizer platter featuring Chef Julien Tongourian's Imperial French Caviar and King Crab in a Surprise Box, “a homage to Chef Robuchon.”

Chef Sven Wassmer's Bee-

trout Rose and Chef Hideaki Matsuo's Sea Urchin dish “highlighted their respective culinary heritages.”

Chef Heinz Beck “amazed” with a health-focused Tartlet with Veal and Black Elderberry. Chef Beck's Marinated Amberjack on Celeriac and Chef Matsuo's Lobster soup exemplified “culinary innovation.”

Chef Wassmer's Knöpfli Swiss Dumpling with Truffle represented his Alpine roots: “with a modern twist.” The evening culminated with Chef Tongourian's Wagyu Beef Chateaubriand and “a stunning dessert.”

This event, set in the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, Macau, celebrated time-honored culinary arts, leaving “an indelible mark on all attendees,” the statement notes.

Immersive space-themed experience opens at Wynn Palace



Wynn Resorts has unveiled “Illuminarium,” a new immersive destination at Wynn Palace in Cotai, as part of its commitment to diversifying the city's tourism offerings and celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Macau SAR.

Launched last Friday, Illuminarium honors “the signi-

ficant achievements of China's aerospace industry over the past 30 years,” a note from the company says.

Illuminarium, themed around space travel, offers “a unique, interactive experience that allows visitors to explore the universe and learn about China's aerospace milestones through

advanced technology and stunning visuals.”

Linda Chen of Wynn Macau emphasized the role of Illuminarium in enhancing local tourism and serving as an educational platform.

The launch day included a “Beauty and Knowledge of Space” sharing session with experts and a gala dinner, offering “a multi-sensory experience” in the theme of space exploration.

Open from Tuesdays to Sundays, Illuminarium has ticket options for different visitors, including discounts for residents, students, seniors, and children, as well as Wynn Insider members. This attraction “is set to contribute significantly to Macau's status” as a World Center of Tourism and Leisure, the note adds.

DIRE STRAIT

After Taiwan's election, its new envoy to the US offers assurances to Washington and Beijing

DIDI TANG, WASHINGTON

TAIWAN'S top representative in Washington has a message for both the island's Chinese adversaries and its American friends: Don't worry that Taiwan's new leader will worsen relations with Beijing and possibly draw the U.S. into a conflict.

Election winner Lai Ching-te plans to keep the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, Alexander Tah-Ray Yui told The Associated Press last week in his first interview with an international news organization since he arrived in the U.S. in December.

The Chinese government has called Lai a troublemaker "who will push Taiwan toward independence." But Yui said Lai is willing to engage with Beijing, even as the island seeks to strengthen its unofficial ties with Washington for stability in the region.

"We want the status quo. We want the way it is — neither unification, neither independence. The way it is is the way we want to live right now," said Yui, noting the stance is largely supported at home and will guide the new administration.

Yui spoke to the AP five days after Lai won the election with more than 40% of the vote in a three-way race. Lai will succeed Tsai Ing-wen when he is inaugurated in May.

His victory, which gives the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party an unprecedented third leadership term, was not welcomed by Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its own, to be taken by force if necessary.

Military action in the Taiwan Strait could draw in the United States, which is obligated under

AP PHOTO



Taiwan's top representative in Washington, Alexander Tah-Ray Yui, speaks during an interview with The Associated Press

a 1979 law to provide Taiwan with sufficient military hardware and technology.

Beijing refused to have any dialogue with Tsai because her party rejects China's claim of sovereignty over the island, and before the election had suggested to voters that they could be choosing between war and peace.

It remains unclear if Beijing will be willing to engage with Lai, who in the past described himself as a "pragmatic worker of Taiwan's independence."

Two days after Lai was elected, China wooed away Nauru, a small Pacific island nation, which has left Taiwan with only 12 countries around the world that recognize its statehood. However, China has not launched massive military exercises around the island, as it has in past times of increased tensions.

Yui said Lai intends to follow the same line as his predecessor "but also to offer an olive branch

to mainland China by saying that he's also willing to engage with mainland China."

At the same time, Taiwan will work with the U.S. to boost its defense and deepen economic and cultural ties, Yui said, calling relations with Washington "one of the most important aspects in our foreign affairs."

The United States does not have a formal relationship with Taiwan, but it has stepped up its support in the past several years, angering China, which has urged the U.S. to "exercise extreme prudence in handling Taiwan-related issues." President Xi Jinping told President Joe Biden that Taiwan is the most sensitive issue in U.S.-China relations.

Shortly after Taiwan's election, Biden told reporters that his administration does not support Taiwan's independence.

Scott Kennedy, senior adviser and trustee chair in Chinese business and economics at the Cen-

ter for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank, said he expected tensions to remain largely the same under Lai.

"Beijing will continue to develop its military capabilities and push the boundaries of military threats and economic coercion," he said. "The U.S. will continue to assist Taiwan with its defensive preparedness and push Taiwan to move more assertively on the various elements needed for effective self-defense."

But Kennedy said Beijing may also open up some channels for the two sides to convey messages and reduce misunderstanding.

Yui said it is incumbent upon both Beijing and Taipei to keep the Taiwan Strait peaceful.

"I have to stress, we're not the aggressors. We're not the ones, you know, making waves in the Taiwan Strait, making things nervous and tense," he said, alluding to Beijing's increased military ac-

tivities near the island in the past several years.

Yui said Taiwan is determined to safeguard its homeland, noting that the island is increasing its defense budget and has extended the mandatory military service from four months to one year.

He said Beijing's luring away of Nauru was an attempt "to punish the Taiwanese people for choosing the leader they wanted and will only backfire."

"They were just trying to find an appropriate time and excuse to slowly pluck all of our allies," Yui said. But, as a technological powerhouse and a democracy, Taiwan has "become a common word in the international community" and countries around the world have become more willing to engage with it, he said.

Yui, who met with Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson shortly before Taiwan's election, said he's been encouraged by the support from both the Republicans and Democrats.

"If you go to the U.S. Congress, your heart warms up because everywhere you go you meet friends," he said.

Sen. Ben Cardin, the Democratic chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called Taiwan "a key U.S. partner in the Indo-Pacific and beyond" and said he would be "working closely with the newly elected leadership of Taiwan to deepen our economic, security, and people-to-people ties."

Yui, who was born to a diplomat's family, attended high school in Panama and received both his bachelor's and master's degrees from Texas A&M University. He previously served as Taiwan's ambassador to Paraguay and as its vice foreign minister.

Before he came to Washington, Yui briefly served as Taiwan's representative to the European Union and Belgium. Yui succeeded Hsiao Bi-Khim, who left the post in November to be Lai's running mate. Hsiao, who is credited with deepening Taiwan-U.S. ties when heading the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States between 2020 and 2023, will be the next deputy leader. **MDT/AP**

DIPLOMACY

US, China officials conclude meeting on financial issues

US and Chinese officials have completed the third meeting of a working group established to cooperate on financial issues, in a step that continues the trend set by the two powers last November to ease tensions.

Officials from the U.S.

Department of the Treasury met with counterparts in the People's Bank of China to discuss issues ranging from financial stability to countering money laundering. The delegation also met with Vice Premier He Lifeng while they were in China, accord-

ing to a statement from the Treasury Department over the weekend (Macau time).

The group also indicated that Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen would return to China for a visit at some point in the future. She was previously there

in July.

In November, Yellen met with He in San Francisco. Their two-day meeting was seen as paving the way for the later meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and China's President Xi Jinping.

The two sides in No-

vember had agreed to resume cooperation on issues such as curbing fentanyl's spread, as well as military-to-military communication. While the meeting kept the relationship from getting any worse, it failed to resolve any of the major differ-

ences between the two countries.

There have been longstanding economic issues between China and the U.S. ever since former President Donald Trump launched a trade war, setting high taxes on a number of Chinese goods. **MDT/AP**

NORTH KOREA

FM stresses alignment with Russia against US and says Putin could visit at an 'early date'

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

NORTH Korea said yesterday it has agreed to further strategic and tactical cooperation with Russia to establish a "new multi-polarized international order," as the two countries work to build a united front in the face of their separate, intensifying tensions with the United States.

In describing North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui's meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow last week, the North's Foreign Ministry said Putin also reaffirmed his willingness to visit Pyongyang and said that could come at an "early date."

North Korea has been actively strengthening its ties with Russia, highlighted by leader Kim Jong Un's September visit to Russia for a summit with Putin. Kim is trying to break out of diplomatic isolation and strengthen his footing as he navigates a deepening nuclear standoff with Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.

In a separate statement yesterday, the North's Foreign Ministry condemned the U.N. Security Council for calling an emergency meeting over the country's latest ballistic test, which state media described as a new intermediate-range solid-fuel missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead. The ministry said the test-firing on Jan. 14 was among the country's regular activities to improve its defense capabilities and that it didn't pose a threat to its neighbors.

South Korea on Thursday urged the Security Council "to break the silence" over North Korea's escalating missile tests and threats. Russia and China,

AP PHOTO



North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui arrives in Moscow last week

both permanent members of the council, have blocked U.S.-led efforts to increase sanctions on North Korea over its recent weapons tests, underscoring a divide deepened over Russia's war on Ukraine.

The alignment between Pyongyang and Moscow has raised international concerns about alleged arms cooperation, in which the North provides Russia with munitions to help prolong its fighting in Ukraine, possibly in exchange for badly needed economic aid and military assistance to help upgrade Kim's forces. Both Pyongyang and Russia have denied accusations by Washington and Seoul about North Korean arms transfers to Russia.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry, in comments published by

state media, said Choe and the Russian officials in their meetings expressed a "strong will to further strengthen strategic and tactical cooperation in defending the core interests of the two countries and establishing a new multi-polarized international order."

Russia expressed "deep thanks" to North Korea for its "full support" over its war on Ukraine, the North Korean ministry said. It said Choe and the Russian officials expressed "serious concern" over the United States' expanding military cooperation with its Asian allies that they blamed for worsening tensions in the region and threatening North Korea's sovereignty and security interests.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years, after Kim in recent months

used Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a distraction to ramp up his weapons tests and military demonstrations. The United States, South Korea and Japan have responded by strengthening their combined military exercises, which Kim portrays as invasion rehearsals, and sharpening their deterrence plans built around nuclear-capable U.S. assets.

In the latest tit-for-tat, North Korea on Friday said it conducted a test of a purported nuclear-capable underwater attack drone in response to a combined naval exercise by the United States, South Korea and Japan last week, as it continued to blame its rivals for tensions in the region.

Choe's visit to Moscow came as Kim continues to use domestic political events to issue provoca-

tive threats of nuclear conflict.

At Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament last week, Kim declared that North Korea is abandoning its long-standing goal of a peaceful unification with war-divided rival South Korea and ordered the rewriting of the North's constitution to cement the South as its most hostile foreign adversary. He accused South Korea of acting as "top-class stooges" of the Americans and repeated a threat that he would use his nukes to annihilate the South if provoked.

Analysts say North Korea could be aiming to diminish South Korea's voice in the regional nuclear standoff and eventually force direct dealings with Washington as it looks to cement its status as a nuclear weapons state. **MDT/AP**

AD



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ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

Palestinian death toll in Gaza surpasses 25,000 with no end in sight to war

NAJIB JOBAIN
& SAMY MAGDY, RAFAH

THE Palestinian death toll from the war between Israel and Hamas has soared past 25,000, the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip said yesterday, while the Israeli government appeared far from achieving its goals of crushing the militant group and freeing more than 100 hostages.

The level of death, destruction and displacement from the war already is without precedent in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet Israeli officials say the fighting is likely to continue for several more months.

The slow progress and the plight of the hostages held in Gaza has divided ordinary Israelis and their leaders even as the offensive threatens to ignite a wider war involving Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that support the Palestinians.

The United States, which has provided essential diplomatic and military support for the offensive, has had limited success in persuading Israel to adopt military tactics that put civilians at less risk and to facilitate the delivery of more humanitarian aid. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also has rejected U.S. and international calls for postwar plans that would include a path to Palestinian statehood.

GAZA DEATH TOLL CLIMBS AMID BLISTERING OFFENSIVE

The war began with Hamas' surprise attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, during which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages back to Gaza.

Israel responded with a blistering three-week air campaign and then a ground invasion into northern Gaza that laid waste to entire neighborhoods. Ground operations are now focused on the southern city of Khan Younis and built-up refugee camps in central Gaza dating back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

Israel continues to carry



Palestinians surround a car that was hit by an Israeli airstrike in Rafah

out airstrikes throughout the besieged territory, including areas in the south where it told civilians to seek refuge. Many Palestinians have ignored evacuation orders, saying nowhere feels safe.

Since the war started, a total of 25,105 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, while another 62,681 have been wounded, the Health Ministry reported yesterday. The death toll included the 178 bodies brought to Gaza's hospitals since Saturday, Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qidra said. Another 300 people were wounded in the past day, he said.

The overall toll is thought to be even higher because many casualties remain buried under the rubble from Israeli strikes or in areas where medics cannot reach them, Al-Qidra said.

The Health Ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its figures but says around two-thirds of the people killed in Gaza were women and minors.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government, but its casualty figures from previous wars were largely consistent with those of U.N. agencies and even the Israeli military.

The Israeli military says it has killed around 9,000 mili-

itants, without providing evidence, and blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because it positions fighters, tunnels and other militant infrastructure in dense neighborhoods, often near homes, schools or mosques.

The military says 195 of its soldiers have been killed since the start of the Gaza offensive.

The war has displaced some 85% of Gaza's residents from their homes, with hundreds of thousands packing into U.N.-run shelters and tent camps in the southern part of the tiny coastal enclave. U.N. officials say a quarter of the population of 2.3 million is starving as only a trickle of humanitarian aid reaches them because of the fighting and Israeli restrictions.

ISRAELIS INCREASINGLY DIVIDED

Netanyahu has vowed to keep up the offensive until Israel achieves "complete victory" over Hamas and returns all the remaining hostages. But even some top Israeli officials have begun to acknowledge that those goals might be mutually exclusive.

Hamas is believed to be holding the captives in tunnels deep underground and using them as shields for its top leaders. Israel has only managed

to rescue one hostage since the war began, and Hamas says several have been killed in Israeli airstrikes or during failed rescue operations.

A member of Israel's War Cabinet, former army chief Gadi Eisenkot, said last week that the only way to free the remaining hostages was through a cease-fire. In an implicit criticism of Netanyahu, he said claims to the contrary amounted to "illusions."

Hamas has said it will not free more hostages until Israel ends its offensive. The group also is expected to make any further releases conditional on securing freedom for thousands of Palestinians imprisoned in Israel, including high-profile militants involved in attacks that killed Israelis.

Israel's government has ruled that out for now, but it faces rising pressure from families of the hostages, who are pushing for another exchange, and from Israelis frustrated by the security failures that preceded the Oct. 7 attack and by Netanyahu's handling of the war.

Thousands of people gathered in Tel Aviv over the weekend to call for new elections.

Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners are meanwhile pushing him to step up the offensive. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1990 GORBACHEV EXPLAINS CRACKDOWN IN AZERBAIJAN



President Mikhail Gorbachev has made a statement on Soviet television explaining the Soviet crackdown on civil unrest in the republic of Azerbaijan.

Two days ago Soviet troops were ordered into the republic to try and end the undeclared conflict between Muslim Azeris and Christian Armenians, and put down a separatist insurrection by Azerbaijani nationalists.

Official reports say up to 60 people died when tanks rolled into the republic's capital, Baku.

President Gorbachev, who is confronting his worst crisis since he became leader, said he had no choice but to order his troops in.

"To our deepest regret people have died," the Soviet leader said in a live 12-minute address on TV.

"Militant nationalist careerists refused to listen to the voice of reason.

"Events took a particularly tragic turn in Baku. There were growing calls for seizure of power by force."

He said that he hoped the decision to send in the army would "be understood and supported by all citizens of our country".

President Gorbachev also extended his deepest condolences to the relatives of the victims who died in the takeover.

The move comes after tension erupted recently at a nationalist rally in Soviet Transcaucasia.

In the ensuing pogroms in Baku, Armenian homes were set on fire and looted while many Armenians were killed or injured.

In the disputed Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh, roads were blocked and trains were halted.

Azerbaijan's President Elmira Kafarova said in a statement broadcast on Baku radio that her people would "never forgive" those responsible for the deaths.

Communist Party politician Boris Yeltsin also condemned the use of armed forces.

"It is a mistake to dispatch troops and suppress ethnic problems by armed force," he added.

He warned that East European socialism had become corrupted "because it was state socialism guarded by the military".

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

President Gorbachev's decision to deploy the army in Azerbaijan as a warning to separatist movements failed to have an impact in some Soviet republics. In January 1991 troops acted against pro-independence protesters in Lithuania and Latvia, killing about two dozen people.

Following a failed coup by Communist hardliners in August 1991 the USSR recognised the independence of the Baltic states, and other republics soon began moves to breakaway.

Azerbaijan's independence in 1991 lifted the lid on a simmering ethnic conflict with the mainly Armenian populated enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, which declared itself an independent republic.

Full scale war broke out in 1992 between Azerbaijani, Armenian and ethnic Armenian forces - who now control Nagorno-Karabakh.

It is estimated that between 20,000 and 30,000 people lost their lives during five years of conflict, and that more than one million fled their homes.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Real estate ventures will be to your advantage. You may want to take a look at your direction in life. Your tendency to take on too much will end in fatigue.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Include friends and family members in your redecorating plans. Don't be too quick to judge. Put some energy into getting back into shape. Listen to reason.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 If you're in the mood, go out and socialize, or get involved in sports activities. Try to avoid functions that will bring you in contact with those you find difficult to get along with.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Opportunities for new romantic encounters will unfold through the social events you attend. Romance is quite possible if you are willing to approach someone who interests you.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 You can make progress professionally. You can win points with children if you take the time to show interest in their accomplishments.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Visitors may be likely to drop by. Arguing won't help. You can come up with future trends in creative fields. Invite people home to discuss your plans for group fundraising events and outings.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You may have a problem keeping secrets. Don't divulge secret information. You may be tempted to get involved in secret affairs or love triangles.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Too much work and no play will not only result in fatigue and frustration but also loneliness, too. Get on with your life. Having your own business is a good idea.

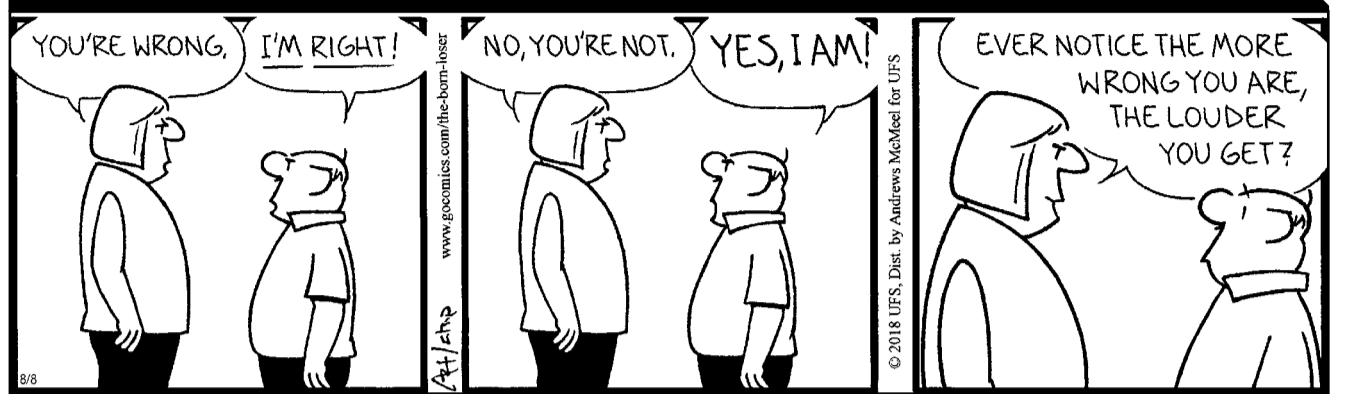
SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 You have worked hard and the payback is now. Be careful disclosing information. Financial limitations are likely if you take risks.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 You can expect the fur to fly on the home front. New relationships will surface through work related events. Avoid any hassles.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Your lover may disappoint you in such a way that estrangement will follow. Your family may be feeling neglected and unloved. You need to take a long, hard look at yourself and your personal situation.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 You will be your usual charming self and the partners you attract may be the adventurous type. Focus your efforts on your work. You should be putting in some overtime.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-11	-3	fine
Changchun	-22	-17	cloudy
Chengdu	1	7	cloudy
Chongqing	5	8	rain
Fuzhou	5	11	rain
Guangzhou	6	15	rain
Guiyang	-3	0	snow
Haikou	14	20	rain
Hangzhou	-1	4	overcast
Harbin	-23	-19	cloudy
Hefei	-3	1	overcast
Nanjing	-4	0	cloudy
Shanghai	0	1	overcast
Taipei	10	14	rain
Wuhan	-2	3	overcast
Hong Kong	9	16	windy
WORLD			
Moscow	-7	-13	overcast
Frankfurt	4	7	rain
Paris	6	12	showers
London	6	12	windy
New York	-6	3	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Young salmon; 5- Make tracks; 9- "The Sweetest Taboo" singer; 13- Pay for; 15- Melodies; 16- Zeno of ___; 17- Compadre; 18- Fishing vessel, perhaps; 19- Salzburg vista; 20- Nine-digit ID; 21- Fix hose; 23- Narrate; 25- Timbuktu's land; 26- 4th letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 27- Sarcastic; 30- Colorful card game; 31- Swarm; 32- Not merely local; 37- Not ___ many words; 38- Old; 40- Kind of wrestling; 41- Chef's measure; 43- Member of a motorcycle gang; 44- Salamander; 45- Acrimonious; 47- Begins; 50- Den of wild animals and dragons; 51- Winged child; 52- Damage, so to speak; 53- Suffix for human; 56- Alley; 57- Highly excited; 59- Painter Rousseau; 61- Elvis's middle name; 62- Moon of Jupiter; 63- Bar, legally; 64- Simone of jazz; 65- Incline; 66- Seemingly forever;

DOWN 1- School orgs.; 2- Weapons; 3- Bridle part; 4- Piece of cloth, tabloid newspaper; 5- Cloth; 6- Hero; 7- History book chapter; 8- Keep at a distance; 9- Bobby of the Black Panthers; 10- ___ once; 11- Profundity; 12- Smooth sailing; 14- So far; 22- Boxer Laila; 24- "The Time Machine" race; 25- Windows predecessor; 26- Shootout; 27- Voucher; 28- Bang-up; 29- Bear in the sky; 32- Campaigned; 33- Willow; 34- Dangerous weapon; 35- Mass utterance; 36- Australasian parrot; 38- Form of baseball; 39- Small fry; 42- Andean country; 43- Cheerful; 45- Mantra; 46- Ballet step; 47- Puppeteer Lewis; 48- Mortise insert; 49- Stadium used for sports or musical events; 51- Extended family unit; 52- Musical epilogue; 53- Fully aware of; 54- Golf club which can be numbered 1 to 9; 55- Falls off; 58- How about that!; 60- Linguistic suffix;

Friday's solution



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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Supreme Flower City
 HKD 22,000/mth 3 bed 1 CP

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Wan Keng (Tap Seac)
1 bed 1 bath
56.20 m² / 605 ft² | HKD2,850,000



VA FAT (Taipa Village)
2 bed 1 bath
77.10 m² / 830 ft² | HKD3,980,000



Tou Un (Taipa)
1 bed 1 bath
44.12 m² / 475 ft² | HKD2,980,000



Supreme Flower City (Taipa)
4 bed 3 bath 1 car park
191.38 m² / 2,060 ft² | HKD22,000/mth



Manhattan (Taipa)
3 bed 2 bath
162.58 m² / 1,750 ft² | HKD13,000,000



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FOOTBALL | AFRICA CUP

Burkina Faso rues Algeria's late goal in draw; Angola beats Mauritania

CIARÁN FAHEY, ABIDJAN

ALGERIA 2, BURKINA FASO 2

ANGOLA 3, MAURITANIA 2

BAGHDAD Bounedjah scored very late to lessen the danger of Algeria's second straight Africa Cup of Nations group-stage exit by salvaging a 2-2 draw against Burkina Faso this weekend.

Burkina Faso fans were already celebrating what they thought was their team's progress to the last 16 when Bounedjah rose high to head Adam Ounas' corner past goalkeeper Hervé Koffi in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time.

It was Bounedjah's second goal after he canceled Mohamed Konaté's first-half header by equalizing shortly after the break.

Burkina Faso substitute Bertrand Traoré scored with another penalty for "The Stallions." The Aston Villa forward, who also scored late in the 1-0 win over Mauritania,

AP PHOTO



Angola's Gilberto (right) scores his side's third goal

sent his spot kick down the center of the goal in the 71st minute.

Bounedjah's late equalizer left Burkina Faso on four points after two games, behind group leader Angola on goal difference. Gelson Dala scored twice to help Angola defeat Mauritania 3-2 in the other Group D game.

Algeria was left with two points from its opening two games, while Mauritania has zero. Only the top

two in each group are assured of progress. Algeria plays Mauritania tomorrow.

"It's a shame, but that's the competition, that's the Africa Cup," Traoré said of missing the chance to guarantee Burkina Faso's progress. "We have four points this evening. We'll rest, and then we'll go to win the third match."

Algeria had made the better start but the Burkinabé impro-

ved as their opponents' intensity dropped in the stifling heat. The temperature in Bouaké was 35 degrees C (95 F) when the game kicked off.

Konaté's goal before the break was initially flagged offside, but a VAR check found he was in line with the last defender for Abdoul Tapsoba's cross.

It set off unbridled celebrations among the many supporters who

had made the relatively short trip south-west from neighboring Burkina Faso, which reached the semifinals in the last edition.

Bounedjah pounced after the break to equalize on the rebound after Koffi saved an effort from Nabil Bentaleb.

EAGLES SHARE THE SPOILS

Tunisia held Mali to a 1-1 draw in an Eagles duel to earn its first point in Group E.

Mali forward Lassine Sinayoko fired the regular "Eagles" ahead in the 10th minute with a low shot in off the far post.

But Hamza Rafia equalized 10 minutes later for the "Carthage Eagles" when he squeezed his shot under the goalkeeper after a well-worked team move.

Mali, which defeated South Africa in its opening game, moved top of the group on four points before South Africa's game against Namibia on Sunday. Namibia enjoyed its first Africa Cup win by beating Tunisia 1-0 in their opening game. **MDT/AP**

AD



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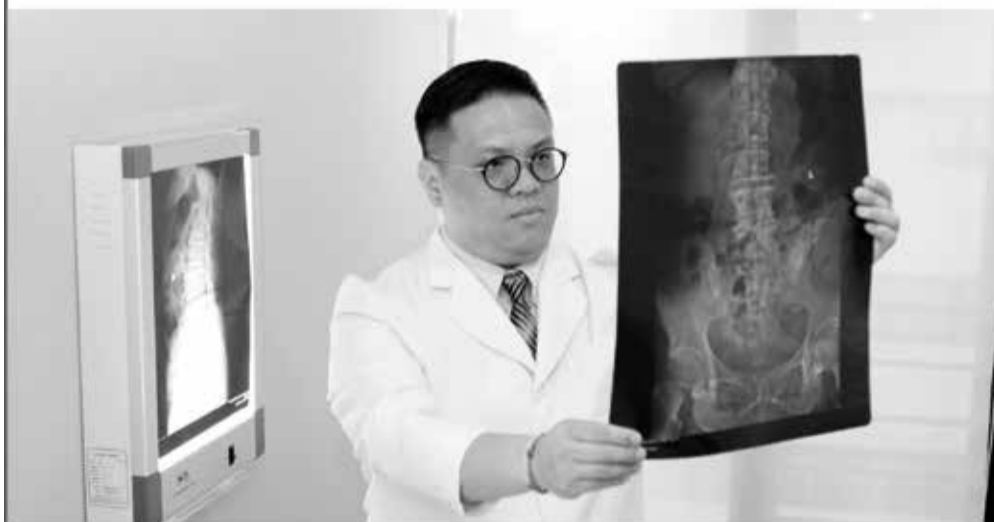
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OPINION

World Views

Foster Klug, MDT/AP



JAPAN JOINS AN ELITE CLUB BY LANDING ON THE MOON. WHAT ARE OTHERS DOING?

Japan landed a spacecraft on the moon Saturday, an attempt at the world's first "pinpoint lunar landing." The milestone puts Japan in a club previously occupied by only the United States, the Soviet Union, India and China.

A raft of countries and companies are also plotting moon missions. Success means international scientific and diplomatic accolades and potential domestic political gains. Failure means a very expensive, and public, embarrassment.

NASA plans to send astronauts to fly around the moon next year, and to land there in 2026.

Just this week, however, a U.S. company, Astrobotic Technology, said its lunar lander will soon burn up in Earth's atmosphere after a failed moonshot.

The lander, named Peregrine, developed a fuel leak that forced Astrobotic to abandon its attempt to make the first U.S. lunar landing in more than 50 years. The company suspects a stuck valve caused a tank to rupture.

NASA is working to commercialize lunar deliveries by private businesses while the U.S. government tries to get astronauts back to the moon.

For now, the United States' ability to spend large sums and marshal supply chains give it an advantage over China and other moon rivals. Private sector players such as SpaceX and Blue

Last year, India became the first country to land a spacecraft near the moon's south pole, where scientists believe that perpetually darkened craters may hold frozen water that could aid future missions.

In 2019, a software glitch caused an Indian lander to crash on its lunar descent. So the \$75 million success in August brought widespread jubilation, with people cheering in the streets and declaring India's rise as a scientific superpower.

Indian scientists said that the next step is a manned lunar mission.

China landed on the moon in 2013, and last year launched a three-person crew for its orbiting space station. It hopes to put astronauts on the moon before the end of the decade.

In 2020, a Chinese capsule returned to Earth from the moon with the first fresh lunar rock samples in more than 40 years. China's first manned space mission in 2003 made it the third country after the USSR and the United States to put a person into space.

China's space ambitions are linked to its rivalry with the United States as the world's two largest economies compete for diplomatic, political and military influence in Asia and beyond.

China built its own space station after it was excluded from the International Space Station, in part because of U.S. objections over the Chinese space program's intimate ties to the military.

China and the United States are also considering plans for permanent crewed bases on the moon. That has raised questions about competition and cooperation on the lunar surface.

Also last year, Russia's Luna-25 failed in its attempt to land in the same area of the moon that India reached.

It came 47 years after the Soviets landed on the moon, and Russian scientists blamed that long break, and the accompanying loss of space expertise, for the recent failure.

The Soviets launched the first satellite in space in 1957 and put the first human in space in 1961, but Russia's program has struggled since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union amid widespread corruption.

Russia's failures and the growing role of private companies like Elon Musk's SpaceX have cost Russia its once-sizable niche in the lucrative global space launch market.

Just as India's success was seen as evidence of its rise to great power status, Russia's failure has been portrayed by some as casting doubt on its global influence and strength.

[Abridged]

6-LEGGED SPANIEL UNDERGOES SURGERY AND ADJUSTS TO LIFE ON 4 PAWS

THE BUZZ

A spaniel born with six legs that was found abandoned in a supermarket parking lot is now like other dogs after having her extra limbs surgically removed.

Ariel, who was named for "The Little Mermaid" character because of the additional appendage with two paws on the end looked like a flipper, ran through the grass outside a veterinary hospital this weekend as she adjusted to life on



four legs.

"She is doing brilliantly," said Vicki Black, director of the Langford Vets Small Animal Referral Hospital, where she was operated on Thursday.

The dog, who had multiple birth defects, was found in the center of Pembroke, Wales, in September. Greenacres Rescue took her in and raised funds for her surgery.

AP PHOTO



E. Jean Carroll arrives at Manhattan federal court, last week

'ACCESS HOLLYWOOD' TAPE OF TRUMP WON'T BE SHOWN TO JURY AT DEFAMATION TRIAL

LARRY NEMEISTER, NEW YORK

A lawyer for a writer who says Donald Trump sexually abused her in the 1990s and then defamed her while president in 2019 said Saturday that the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape and two women who accused Trump of abuse will not be put before a New York jury considering defamation damages.

The revelation by attorney Roberta Kaplan, who represents advice columnist E. Jean Carroll, means that the Republican front-runner in this year's presidential race could testify in Manhattan federal court as today, a day before the New Hampshire primary.

The jury is considering whether Trump owes more to Carroll than the \$5 million awarded to her last spring by another jury that concluded Trump sexually abused but did not rape Carroll in the dressing room of a luxury Manhattan department store in spring 1996 and then defamed her in October 2022.

Trump attended the trial for two of its first three days, only skipping it on Thursday, when he attended the funeral of his mother-in-law in Florida.

Kaplan said yesterday [Macau time] in a letter to the judge that she would not show jurors the 2005 tape in which Trump is caught on a hot mic speaking disparagingly of women to keep the issues in the trial "focused."

For the same reason, she said she won't call two other Trump accusers as witnesses: Natasha Stoyneff and Jessica Leeds.

Both women testified at the trial that ended last May. Leeds, a former stockbroker, said Trump abruptly groped her against her will on an airline flight in the 1970s, while Stoyneff, a writer, said Trump forcibly kissed her against her will while she was interviewing him for a 2005 article.

Kaplan noted that Trump's lawyers had said he is entitled to testify concerning the "Access Hollywood" tape and the allegations of Stoyneff and Leeds, though he would not be if they were not introduced into the case by Carroll's attorneys.

The judge in the case has instructed the jury that it must accept the findings of the jury last year and thus the evidence has focused almost exclusively on what harm has been caused to

Carroll by Trump's continuous claims that he never attacked her and doesn't know her and that she is lying.

Trump, 77, has denied her claims in the last week during campaign stops, on social media and at a news conference. And he continues to assert that Carroll, 80, made false claims against him to sell the 2019 memoir in which she first revealed the allegations publicly and for political reasons.

The judge has severely limited what Trump can testify about if he takes the witness stand, and Carroll's lawyers likely decided to limit the introduction of more evidence to prevent Trump from straying into subjects such as what he maintains are many false claims against him.

However, Kaplan said she does plan to show the jury statements Trump has made since her client finished testifying in the case on Thursday.

Kaplan said Trump said he plans to repeat his claims that he never attacked Carroll and doesn't know her "a thousand times."

A lawyer for Trump did not return a request for comment on Kaplan's letter. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Syria An Israeli strike on the Syrian capital destroyed a building used by the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, killing at least five Iranians, Syrian and Iranian state media reported. The Syrian army said the building in the tightly guarded western Damascus neighborhood of Mazzeh was entirely destroyed, adding that the Israeli air force fired the missiles while flying over Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. The Israeli military did not comment.

Ukraine At least 25 people were killed yesterday by shelling at a market on the outskirts of the city of Donetsk in Russian-occupied Ukraine, local officials reported. A further 20 people were injured in the strike on the suburb of Tekstilshchik, including two children, said Denis Pushilin, head of the Russian-installed authorities in Donetsk. He said that the shells had been fired by the Ukrainian military.

AP PHOTO



Germany Tens of thousands of people protested the far right in cities across Germany on Saturday, attending events with slogans such as "Never Again is Now," "Against Hate" and "Defend Democracy." The large crowds were the latest in a series of demonstrations that have been gaining momentum in recent days. The demonstrations came in the wake of a report that right-wing extremists recently met to discuss the deportation of millions of immigrants, including some with German citizenship.

France A court convicted three police officers of "voluntary violence" towards a youth worker in a Paris suburb who suffered serious injuries to his rectum after being assaulted with a police baton during an identity check seven years ago. All three officers received suspended prison sentences. The officer who used the baton to strike Théo Luhaka was given a suspended sentence of 12 months, while the other two present on the scene got three months each.