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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY'S COMMITTEE CONCLUDED ITS ANALYSIS OF 2022 GOVERNMENT BUDGET EXECUTION BILL, AND IS READY TO VOTE

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GALAXY PARTNERS WITH LOCAL VENDORS TO LAUNCH CNY MARKET

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ASIAN SHARES RISE ON GAINS IN CHINESE MARKETS FOLLOWING POLICY MOVES

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AP PHOTO



Japan The operator of the tsunami-hit nuclear plant in Fukushima announced yesterday a delay of several more months before launching a test to remove melted fuel debris from inside one of the reactors, citing problems clearing the way for a robotic arm. The debris cleanup initially was supposed to be started by 2021, but it has been plagued with delays, underscoring the difficulty of recovering from the plant's meltdown after a magnitude 9.0 quake and tsunami in March 2011.

AP PHOTO



India The French president arrived in India yesterday, where he is expected to meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and will be the chief guest at the country's national day celebrations. Emmanuel Macron began his visit with some sightseeing in the western city of Jaipur, a popular tourist destination, where he visited a 17th-century fort and an 18th-century observatory.

AP PHOTO



Iran's former moderate President Hassan Rouhani says he has been disqualified from running for reelection to the country's influential Assembly of Experts, calling it a move to limit the people's participation in elections, official state media reported. The official IRNA news agency reported yesterday that Rouhani said in a statement that the country's election watchdog, the Guardian Council, did not place him on the short list of approved candidates for the March election to the assembly.

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DRAGGED DOWN

IC cancels abruptly show 'Made by Beauty'; producer disappointed

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TOP LEVEL CHANGES AT SANDS CHINA CHUM PROMOTED TO NEW CEO, WONG TO VICE-CHAIRMAN

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ANTHONY LAM

MADE BY BEAUTY

SARAH Sun, the producer of a Fringe show that has been cancelled at the last minute by the government, said she was “disappointed” about the decision. She has gone on to provide her side of the story.

On Wednesday, a cancellation announcement was made at 7 p.m. by the production team of the show Made by Beauty. Made by Beauty was scheduled for 9:45 p.m. that night. A second performance was also scheduled for last night.

On Tuesday, a first performance of the show went ahead as planned, with personnel – among them, higher-tier officers – from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) liberally photographing and filming the show, seemingly unaware of the fact that they were obstructing the views of other audience members, according to Sun, the show’s producer.

The show featured drag queens, or cross dressers, performing and interacting with the audience in an intimate venue. The audience was challenged about its relationship with physical attractiveness, clothing and aesthetics.

The cancellation of Made by Beauty has spread fear through

out the cultural and performance industries where there are now concerns of a possible escalation in government’s control of the arts, which may even amount to censorship.

After yesterday’s meeting of a government advisory committee, of which Director of Culture Deland Leong is vice-chair, the official was asked about the matter. During her presentation to the press of the topics covered at yesterday’s meeting, Leong said the IC would “push Macau forward to become cultural and innovative city of diversity, characteristics and energy.”

Initially, she was questioned about how the bureau would and could realize such aspirations for the city when it could not even tolerate Made by Beauty, a small production that included cross-dressing, or the non-mainstream expression of self-identity and sexual identity.

The host of the press briefing then said that the question was not related to the committee meeting, before suggesting the official take the question on notice. As the

briefing progressed, several other journalists raised questions related to the cancelled show.

Before the briefing ended, the official responded to the series of questions, accusing Made by Beauty’s production team of not willing to adjust or improve elements of the show. For this reason, said Leong, the show was abruptly cancelled.

In addition, the official said that bureau staff had discovered discrepancies between the show plans submitted to the IC and the actual show itself, based on reports from staff who attended the final dress rehearsal before the Tuesday performance.

Expressing “regret”, the official went on to assure journalists that she does not intend to oversee the cancellation of additional productions. Emphasizing the IC’s right to final decisions and interpretations of the terms, the official said that the Fringe Festival’s programs were determined through “public invitation under set charters, evaluation criteria and conditions,” adding that “all performances must be in compliance

with these conditions.” For the IC to take grant exceptions to these conditions, she said, would be unfair to other festival applicants.

The official said that, provided a show complied with those set conditions and principles, the IC was “very supportive of diverse performances.”

In response to the cultural official’s comment, besides expressing her feeling of disappointment, Sun also decided to allow audiences to decide whether the government’s decision would jeopardize the diversity of local artistic productions.

Fearlessly outspoken, the show producer even admitted that she was asked if she feared she might be blacklisted in the future. In response, she said that if such did happen then it would be “the most problematic” situation that could happen to anyone in Macau’s creative circle, as well as that circle as a whole.

Discussing the point of “discrepancies” cited by the cultural official, Sun disclosed that when her troupe applied for a space in the festival, only conceptual informa-



tion was required on the application form.

“The IC did not ask for us to

PERFORMING ARTS

Gov’t reiterates existing tactics to support local performers

ANTHONY LAM

EXISTING tactics, mainly of four themes, will continue to be employed as means to support the development of local performances, Director of Culture Deland Leong told a press briefing yesterday after a meeting of the Cultural Development Advisory Committee.

While she was presenting the topics covered at the meeting, the cultural official described the cultural industry as a crucial part in the city’s economic diversification, and said that “the government will encourage the local industry [...] through supportive measures.”

Asked by the Times to

further clarify what those “supportive measures” were, she said that there would be “a variety of perspectives.” The official pointed to the six districts that have been or will be revamped. The government will, she added, utilize the six districts to encourage local resort operators to “create more opportunities” for local performers and performances.

The six resort operators have been appointed to revamp some of the traditional districts in Macau, such as the Wynn Resorts to the Happiness Street and SJM Resorts to San Ma Lo.

Festive events will also be crucial to “encouragement” efforts. These even-

ts will see their scales expanded in the future in an attempt to foster greater impact, the official explained.

In order to update the “City of Shows” concept outlined by the Chief Executive in his latest Policy Address, the government may commission more local productions in the future, according to the cultural official.

Other than producing more shows, events and revamped traditional districts will also serve to support the development of the local performance circle, the official stated.

Despite the comments, the Cultural Affairs Bureau has recently cancelled two shows at the Macao City

Fringe Festival, which is organized by the government in contrast to independent art companies or performers in many other places. A report related to this will be published today.

Meanwhile, concerning events to be held during the Lunar New Year period, a new branded program that comes with a somewhat literary, slogan-like name in Chinese was announced yesterday at the press briefing. However, no detail as to what will be included in the program was announced.

When asked, Leong said there will be a systematic presentation of the planned celebratory events for Lunar New Year. Several of

the local cultural venues, such as museums, The House of Macao Literature, the Mandarin’s House and the Lou Kau Mansion, will turn into locations for festive cultural workshops in areas. Such workshops will include red-banner writing and postcard drawing.

Troupes from Shandong and Qinghai provinces will stage performances in Macau as well. Meanwhile, three music shows will be staged at the Ruins of St Paul’s during the period.

At the briefing, committee member Dr. Ieng Weng Fat disclosed that most of the members concurred with the proposal of promoting Lunar New Year traditions through the in-

clusion of festive foods. He also mentioned that many members were supportive of reviving the plaza commerce, or fun fair culture – Tai Tat Tei – as far as night-time businesses were concerned. Tai Tat Tei is similar to fun fair, where street food, simple games and other retail are conducted in an open space at night.

When asked if the concept would appeal to younger visitors coming to Macau, Leong said that previous festivities from places like Shanghai had been studied. In these places, she said, business operators gather to transform streets, or blocks of streets, into hang-out or clubbing locations.

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cancellation of drag queen show



submit photos," Sun said. Before coming to Macau, the show had been shown as part of the 2023

Shekou Theatre Festival in Shenzhen, China.

Sun maintains that Made by

Beauty's script, which is very much the center of this controversy, was not changed from the time the production applied to the IC to the performance on Tuesday night. This means that the show's script has been the same since it was performed in Shenzhen.

Moreover, after the full dress rehearsal and according to Sun, some IC personnel suggested that adjustments be made to the show, including "removing the dragon on a qipao because dragons should not be associated with sexuality or erotism."

Furthermore, Sun further claims that IC personnel suggested her troupe wear black-colored stockings rather than skin-colored ones, as well as fur coats to cover their general costumes. She added that the IC also requested other adjustments to the show, such as decreasing the frequency of audience interactions, as well as lowering the level of intimacy of those interactions. All this led to the Sun feeling that her show, her creativity, and her freedom of expression was in jeopardy.

She also did not understand

why the IC left the cancellation of Made by Beauty's second show until only three hours before its scheduled start time.

Suggestions were also made by IC personnel that the production's venue be changed, Sun said, because, according to the IC, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) building is "too solemn for such a performance." Ironically, it was the IC that helped the troupe to obtain the right to use the IAM in the first place, which was requested under the troupe's proposal.

Some social media users, as well as Sun, suspected that the drama started from a video that went viral online about an excerpt of Beautiful Bus, a performance connected to the cancelled show. Cross-dressers performed on a bus hired by the production team in which they explored the meaning of beauty.

The video was received negatively by the public, with social media users describing the performance as "disgusting", "sickening" and "horrible." Based on her rational speculations, Sun guessed the IC's cancellation was connected to

the public's objections.

Sun added that the IC had only requested prototype photos for Beautiful Bus, not Made by Beauty. The troupe had understood it had permission for the latter's production.

Sun revealed that a term in the contract made she signed with the IC bans any production team's attempts to re-run a Fringe show in Macau within a period of three months of the show's performance, as well as outside of Macau within one month of the show's performance.

Therefore, the production team is not allowed to restage the subsequent shows of Made by Beauty that were set to be performed but were cancelled. Sun and her team, however, proceeded to hold two performances of the production at a closed-door venue on members-only requirement, highlighting elements that did not appear in the Tuesday night performance – or, in Sun's own words, elements with "no connection" to the first performance."

Another theatrical show concerning the reasons behind cases of suicide in Macau during past years was cancelled. Its production team cited "concerns that exceed experiential and affordable levels of the team" as the reason for its cancellation.

AD

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THE LONDONER
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AL committee concludes its analysis of 2022 budget execution, ready to vote

RENATO MARQUES

THE Second Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly (AL) has concluded its analysis and discussions over the 2022 government budget execution bill, the committee president, lawmaker Chan Chak Mo, told media yesterday morning after the last committee meetings on this topic.

Chan explained that the last meeting was to review the final details and sign the committee's opinion, with the bill to be soon referred to the plenary for final voting.

"We should have a final vote on this bill in a plenary session next week," Chan said, noting that, according to committee members, the government has sufficiently explained the bill to lawmakers.

Among queries is the poor implementation rate of some provisions, which Chan said was because of the pandemic throughout 2022. The pandemic "forced the government to suspend the execution of some of its projects and reallocate resources."



The president of the committee said that the committee had particularly invited the heads of various departments and services with low rates of execution to explain themselves before the committee. These departments and services explained that, in some cases, payments related to executing and completing their projects had been delayed. In other cases, payments had already been made in early 2023; this fact contributes to an "erroneous interpretation of the 2022 figures."

Another heated topic of discussion was the return on investments made through government accounts. It was known in advance that these investments had cons-

tituted significant losses in 2022.

On this, Chan said that, according to the government's final calculation, the losses were 3.2% of the amount invested. 2022, therefore, is the second year in which government's investments have returned losses instead of profits.

The first time this occurred was in 2018. Back then, just as now, the poor performance was justified by worldwide economic crises and market instability.

According to government explanations, such performance should not have been repeated, and in 2023 – though the year is yet to be analyzed in detail – government's investments should already be returning profits.

SCL EARNINGS INCREASED 3.6% LAST QUARTER TO USD654 MILLION

YESTERDAY'S official release by Sands China Ltd (SCL) of its results of the last quarter for 2023 (Q4) show the company's earnings as increasing 3.6% quarter-on-quarter before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA). The results featured in a corporate presentation by SCL's parent company, Las Vegas Sands (LVS).

EBITDA climbed to a total of USD654 million (MOP5.27 billion) from the previously recorded USD631 million (MOP 5.08 billion) at the end of Q3.

When compared to the figure obtained at the end of 2019 (MOP6.53 billion), the results of Q4 2023 are about 19% lower; that is, showing a recovery to the pre-

-pandemic level of about 81% at the end of 2023.

During the same period, the net income of SCL was USD288 million (MOP2.32 billion); that is, achieving a 24.7% increase quarter-on-quarter. SCL's net revenue also rose by 4.1% to USD1.86 billion (MOP14.98 billion) from USD1.78 billion (MOP14.33 billion).

The Venetian was, as always, the property returning the highest revenue for SCL, achieving a net value of USD748 million (MOP 6.02 billion). It was followed by the Londoner (USD589 million, or MOP4.74 billion) and then The Parisian (USD222 million, MOP1.79 billion).

On the results,

LVS Chairman and CEO, Robert Goldstein said, "we were extremely pleased with our financial and operating results for the quarter, which reflect the ongoing improvement in the operating environment in both Macau and Singapore." He went on to add, "in Macau, the ongoing recovery across all segments continued during the [last] quarter [of 2023]. Our decades-long commitment to making investments that enhance the business and leisure appeal of Macau for tourists, as well as support its development as a world center of business and leisure for tourists, positions us [well], as [does] the ongoing, progressive recovery in travel and tourism spending." **RM**

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GAMING

Sands China appoints Grant Chum as new CEO, Wong as vice-chairman

RENATO MARQUES

THE board of directors of Sands China Ltd. (SCL) has announced several key leadership reshuffles, including the appointment of Grant Chum as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and president. Until yesterday, Chum was SCL's Chief Operating Officer (COO).

The announcement was made by notice provided to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (HKEX).

Chum will take on the posts previously held by Robert Goldstein and Wilfred Wong.

Both Goldstein and Wong continue to be involved in the company, occupying new posts as Non-Executive Director and Executive Vice-Chairman, respectively.

Other changes include the appointment of Dave Sun as Executive Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer, and Dylan Williams as Executive Vice-President, General Counsel, and Company Secretary.



Grant Chum, President and CEO, SCL

Chum, the new CEO and president of SCL, aged 48, has held the post of COO since February 21, 2020. He follows Wong in such a position.

He concurrently serves as Executive

Director, Chairman of the Capital Expenditure Committee, and as a director of various subsidiaries of the company, including Venetian Macau Ltd.

Since July 2022, he has also served

concurrently as Executive Vice-President – Asia Operations at Las Vegas Sands (LVS), with oversight over all LVS' operations in Asia, which include not only Macau but Singapore as well.

Goldstein, the current Chairman and CEO of Las Vegas Sands (LVS), SCL's parent company, since January 2021, has also served as both the Chairman of the Board and CEO of SCL, as well as Executive Director and Chairman of the Nomination Committee for the last three years.

Although he steps down as CEO, Goldstein will also continue to chair SCL's Board of Directors and Nomination Committee.

Wong started at SCL back in November 2015, serving as president and COO from that time until February 2020, at which point he passed the role of COO to Chum instead.

Wong was appointed as Executive Director of SCL on Jan. 22, 2022, for a term of three years. His term concludes Jan. 22, 2025.

According to the notice provided to HKEX, Wong is subject to retirement by rotation and re-election at the company's annual general meeting. The meeting is held at least once every three years.

According to the note, Wong will earn a salary of USD3,150,000 (MOP 25,364,502) per year as well as an annual incentive to the amount of USD1,575,000 (MOP 12,681,890). Chum will earn an annual wage of USD2,400,000 (MOP19,325,323) alongside an annual incentive of USD2,880,000 (MOP23,190,177).

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A Romantic Soirée Awaits

Impress your loved one with an intimate celebration at Café de Paris Monte-Carlo. Step into a world of romantic Belle Époque décor and indulge in a special Valentine's Day menu. From Pan-fried Foie Gras to Australian Wagyu Sirloin, our French classics will captivate your taste buds. Complete the experience with a delectable Strawberry Charlotte and creamy Vanilla Ice Cream. Make your reservation before 7th Feb 2024 and receive a personalized gift as our token of appreciation.

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HOTELS OCCUPANCY RATE SKY-ROCKETED IN 2023

Macau's five-star hotel sector was significantly up in 2023 with the average occupancy rate in December reaching 91.2%, up from 73.9% in January, post the easing of Covid-19 related travel restrictions. This improvement was just slightly below the pre-pandemic level of 93.8% in December 2019. The number of operational five-star rooms in Macau also increased to 27,800 by November, a 23.0% rise from January's 22,600, surpassing the December 2019 count of 24,600 rooms. The average room rate for five-star hotels in December 2023 was MOP1,773 (\$220), showing a significant 29.3% increase from January 2023. For the whole year, the average rate was MOP1,510, compared to MOP1,644.0 in 2019. The occupancy rate for 2023 was 85.8%, slightly below the 92.3% in 2019. The four-star hotel category also experienced growth, with December 2023 occupancy at 86.5%, up from 70.1% in January. The room inventory rose to 9,100, a 19.7% increase from January. The average room rate in December 2023 for four-star hotels was MOP999.

FINANCIAL RESERVE GROWS BY MOP8 BILLION

Macau's financial reserve increased by approximately MOP8 billion in November 2023, reaching MOP574.4 billion. This gain comes after a period of decline during the pandemic. The government had to utilize the financial reserve to cover public expenditure, but recently, the government approved its first balanced budget since the pandemic, forecasting a surplus for 2024.

MACAU RED CROSS DONATES TO RURAL CHINA

The Macau Red Cross made significant contributions to various projects in rural areas of mainland China, totaling 10.84 million yuan. Chinese media has reported. The donations supported the development of kindergartens, health stations, bridges, a primary school, an ambulance station, and a senior care center. Additionally, the organization provided emergency supplies to flood-affected areas in Hebei and earthquake-hit regions in Turkey. In Macau, the Red Cross' non-emergency ambulance service catered to over 32,000 attendances in 2023, and they installed Automated External Defibrillators at key locations across the city.

HOSPITALITY

2024 MICHELIN GUIDE CEREMONY TO BE HELD IN MACAU AGAIN

RENATO MARQUES

THE annual gala of the Michelin Guide Hong Kong & Macau will be staged once more in Macau, the company announced.

The event will take place on Mar. 14, marking the 16th edition of the annual ceremony for Hong Kong and Macau's restaurants.

Similar to last year, the Michelin ceremony will likely be hosted at both Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau, and Grand Lisboa Macau. The two hotels continue as the event's official partners.

In the statement from Michelin Guide, the company said it was following on from last year's success in choosing to again host the ceremony in Macau. The company dubbed Macau a vibrant hub of culinary culture and experiences.

The event will once more bring together the culinary elite, industry professionals, and food enthusiasts to celebrate the region's



dining scene.

One of the event's highlights is the Bib Gourmand selection, which will be announced one week before the event. This announcement will include a list of restaurants that offer both "good quality" and "good value cooking". These restaurants will not be compe-

ting for Michelin Stars, which are the higher culinary awards.

As usual, all restaurants chosen by the Guide are subject to the same, key criteria used by all Michelin inspectors around the world. This criteria is fivefold: 1) the quality of ingredients used, 2) the mastery of cooking techniques, 3)

the "harmony" of flavors, 4) the chef's expression of their personality in their cooking, and 5) the consistency of excellence over time and across the entire menu.

The restaurant's location, its décor, its service, and its available facilities are not part of the selection criteria.

Galaxy partners with local vendors to launch CNY Market



STAFF REPORTER

GALAXY Entertainment Group (GEG) will host a Chinese New Year (CNY) Market at the East Square of the Galaxy Macau resort, the company announced yesterday at the event's launch.

GEG partnered with local vendors to provide over a thousand types of New Year goods and gifts, aiming to cater to both locals and tourists alike.

Featuring over 30 vendors from Macau and

Hong Kong, the market aims to garner interest from people of all ages. Visitors can explore a variety of stalls, including a gacha toy store, wine vendors, an art stall, a flower boutique, and stalls selling kitchenware, houseware, fruits, frozen food products, and other preserved goods.

Furthermore, customers who patronize the market can enter a raffle for a chance to win prizes, coupons, and other products.

In addition, a pop-up store of Sam Sam, a popular toy brand created by designer Kenny Wong, has been set up at the Galaxy Promenade East, right beside the Tsui Wah Restaurant.

Renowned as collector's items in the mainland and around the world, Sam Sam toys are known for their unique storytelling about each character. This pop-up store, the first of its kind in Macau, offers CNY-themed Sam Sam merchandise and other exclusive goods that can only be purchased at this store.

The Galaxy CNY market will be open until Feb. 8.

UM STUDENTS LAUNCH BOOK SHOWCASING HUMAN AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF MACAU

STAFF REPORTER

YESTERDAY, a group of students from the Department of Communication at the University of Macau (UM) launched a book that constitutes their capstone graduation project. The book is titled "CityWalk in Macau."

The students sought

to challenge traditional learning approaches and mindsets. They promoted the act of strolling as an effective way to study the city of Macau. The book also draws attention to the act of walking in cities.

"City Walk in Macau" stretches 196 pages, with 20 articles divided into five sections. These in-

clude the categories: livelihood, intoxication, roots, culture, and corner.

Through interviews with ordinary citizens, experts, and scholars, as well as in-depth readings and analysis of old newspapers and historical documents, the students present articles that unveil stories about the

entertainment industry, Southeast Asian and Chinese community, culture, and Ká Hó village in Macau, all through the lens of five distinct walking trails.

Student Elory Kuang, the book's editor, said that this year's publication differs from the previous magazine format as it is

presents as a portable book. The book includes sketches of landscapes and traces of street corners, allowing readers to carry it while they explore the city.

Starting next month, the book will be distributed to different libraries in Macau. Interested individuals are welcome to borrow the book. An electronic version can also be viewed for free at its website, <https://online.fliphtml5.com/nflqs/abhx/>.

STOCK MARKET

Asian shares mostly rise, led by gains in Chinese markets following policy moves

YURI KAGEYAMA, TOKYO

ASIAN shares were mostly higher yesterday, with Chinese stocks extending gains after Beijing announced a raft of policies to support sagging markets.

Hong Kong rose 1.8% and Shanghai surged 3%. Benchmarks inched higher in Tokyo and Seoul. U.S. futures and oil prices advanced.

Late Wednesday, the Chinese central bank announced a set of rules to govern lending to property developers. Earlier, it said it would cut bank reserve requirements to put about 1 trillion yuan (\$141 billion) into the economy.

The Chinese economy has slowed, with growth forecast below 5% this year, its lowest level since 1990 excluding the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. A debt crisis in the real estate industry has compounded other longer-term problems.

Shares in Chinese property developers jumped, with China Evergrande Holdings up 5.4% and Country Garden gaining 5.9%.

The Hang Seng in Hong Kong jumped 2.0% to 16,219.04, while the Shanghai Composite index was up 2.9%, at 2,902.85.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 was little changed in afternoon trading, up about 10 points at 36,236.47.

Speculation has been growing about the Bank of Japan ending its



negative rate policy later this year, and investors are bracing for what that might mean for the nation's inflation, as well as its currency.

South Korea's Kospi edged up less than 1 point to 2,470.34 after the nation's central bank reported the economy grew at a better-than-expected quarterly rate of 0.6% in the last quarter of 2023.

Sydney's S&P/ASX 200 advanced 0.5% to 7,555.40.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 added 0.1% to 4,868.55, setting a record for a fourth straight day.

Gains for tech stocks pushed the Nasdaq composite up 0.4% to 15,481.92. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.3%, to 37,806.39.

Stocks have broadly rocketed to records recently on hopes that cooling inflation will convince the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates several times this year. Treasury yields have already come down considerably on such expectations, which can relax the pressure on the economy and financial system.

The latest signal of economic

strength arrived Wednesday morning, when a preliminary report suggested growth in output for businesses accelerated to a seven-month high. Perhaps more importantly for Fed officials, the flash report from S&P Global also said that prices charged by businesses rose at the slowest rate since May 2020.

Later yesterday, the U.S. is expected to report that its economy grew at an annual rate of around 2% in October-December, slowing from a vigorous 4.9% an-

nual growth rate in the previous quarter.

It still showcases the surprising durability of the world's largest economy, marking a sixth straight quarter of expansion at an annual pace of 2% or more. Helping fuel that growth has been steady spending by consumers, whose purchases drive more than two-thirds of the economy.

Treasury yields in the bond market erased earlier losses following the report. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.17% from 4.14% late Tuesday. The two-year Treasury yield, which moves more on expectations for the Fed, held at 4.38% after dropping as low as 4.26% shortly before the report.

Economic reports coming later in the week could further sway expectations for rate cuts this year.

Yesterday, the government will give its first estimate for how quickly the economy grew during the end of 2023. A day later, it will give the latest monthly update on the measure of inflation that the Federal Reserve prefers to use.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude added 32 cents to \$75.41 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 28 cents to \$80.32 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar edged up to 147.65 Japanese yen from 147.51 yen. The euro cost \$1.0891, up from \$1.0884. MDT/AP

TRADE

US Congressional delegation affirms bipartisan support for Taiwan

Abipartisan delegation from the United States Congress reaffirmed support for Taiwan during a visit yesterday, following the election of its new leader. The delegation's visit is the first from U.S. lawmakers to the island since the Democratic Progressive Party won a third-straight term in the Jan. 13 election.

China, America's chief competitor for global influence, claims Taiwan as its own territory and threatens to use force to bring the self-ruling island under its control. Beijing strongly condemned Lai Ching-te's election, calling him a "se-

paratist."

"The support of the United States for Taiwan is firm. It's real, and it is 100% bipartisan," U.S. Representative Mario Díaz Balart said.

Balart, a Florida Republican, was joined by California Democrat Ami Bera. "In the 21st century, there's no place for aggressive action. We have to learn to live together, to trade together, to work together, to solve problems together," Bera said.

"Just know that we are proud of the people of Taiwan. We are proud of the relationship and as strong as that relationship has always been. That is assu-

red. It will even be stronger," Balart said.

"So, we look forward to working together to continue to protect the peace, prosperity (and) the future of Taiwan. It's up to people of Taiwan," said Bera.

Lai thanked the visiting co-chairs of the U.S. Congressional Taiwan Caucus for their visit, saying that "today's Taiwan is a Taiwan of the world."

"Moving forward, I will work with [deputy leader] Hsiao Bi-khim to build upon the foundation laid by Tsai to unite the people of Taiwan, strengthen social resilience and continue to

defend the cross-strait status quo of peace and stability."

He also touched on continued military assistance from the U.S. and a proposed an agreement to avoid mutual taxation of companies.

Beijing objects to any form of official contact between the U.S. and Taiwan. In 2022, it responded to a visit by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with some of its largest military maneuvers in years, including missile launches and a simulated blockade of the island. It views visits by foreign government officials



In this photo released by her office, Taiwan's Tsai Ing-wen (center) exchange gifts with U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Fla. (left) and Rep. Ami Bera, D-Calif in Taipei, yesterday

as them recognizing the island's sovereignty.

President Joe Biden, seeking to calm that complaint, insists there's no change in America's long-

standing "One-China" policy, which recognizes Beijing as representing China but allows informal relations and defense ties with Taipei. MDT/AP



Firefighters work at the site of a building fire in Xinyu City, east China's Jiangxi Province

JIANGXI

FIRE KILLS AT LEAST 39 PEOPLE, STATE MEDIA SAYS

A fire broke out in a commercial building in China's southeastern Jiangxi province on Wednesday, killing at least 39 people and injuring nine others, state media yesterday said.

Officials for the Yushui district of Jiangxi province said that the fire broke out in the basement of a shopping area in the afternoon. In addition to rescue workers, firefighters and police, local government officials were deployed to the scene.

A preliminary investigation found that fire was caused by unauthorized welding during construction work in the basement, local official officials said.

State broadcaster CCTV later reported that rescue operations were complete and that no people remained trapped in the building, which it said housed an in-

ternet cafe in the basement and tutoring centers on upper floors.

President Xi Jinping issued a statement about the blaze, noting that it was yet another safety tragedy. He called on the government and Communist Party to "resolutely curb the frequent occurrence of various safety accidents, and ensure the safety of people's lives and property and overall social stability."

The statement included orders for the State Council's Work Safety Committee to close any gaps in safety measures.

The local government said that the cause of the fire was under investigation.

Over the weekend, a fire in central Henan province broke out in a boarding school dormitory and killed 13 children. **MDT/AP**

China says it's working to de-escalate tensions in the Red Sea that have upended global trade

CHINA, the world's biggest exporter, says it is deeply concerned about tensions in the Red Sea that have upended global trade by forcing many shippers to avoid the Suez Canal.

China has been in "close communication with all parties concerned and making positive efforts to de-escalate" the situation in which Iran-backed Houthi rebels have attacked international ships with missiles, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing this week.

"China calls for a halt to the harassment and attacks on civilian ships and urges all relevant parties to avoid fanning flames in the area and jointly ensure the safety and security of the route in the Red Sea," Wang said.

Since November, the Iranian-backed Houthis have launched at least 34 attacks on shipping through the waterways leading up to Egypt's Suez Canal, a vital route for energy and cargo coming from Asia and the Middle East onward to Europe.

The Houthis, a Shiite rebel group that has held Yemen's capital Sanaa since 2014 and been at



war with a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's exiled government since 2015, link their attacks to the Israel-Hamas war. However, the ships they've targeted increa-

singly have tenuous links to Israel — or none at all.

"We are deeply concerned about the recent escalation of the Red Sea situation. The Red Sea

PROPERTY

Gov't expands access to loans for developers to end its prolonged debt crisis

ELAINE KURTENBACH, BANGKOK

CHINA has rolled out new rules meant to expand access to commercial bank loans for property developers as Beijing doubles down on its effort to end a prolonged crisis in the real estate industry.

The policies will allow real estate companies to use bank loans pledged against commercial properties such as offices and shopping malls to repay their other loans and bonds and to cover operating expenses. They were announced late Wednesday by the People's Bank of China, the National Financial Regulatory Administration and the Finance Ministry.

Beijing has moved this week to stabilize ailing financial markets and boost the economy by freeing up



more money for lending in various ways. That includes cutting required bank reserves.

The flurry of new measures and pronouncements from senior Communist Party officials about the need to stabilize financial

markets and build confidence in the economy, the world's second largest, appears to reflect a renewed determination to get growth back on track.

Dozens of developers have defaulted on their debts after the government

cracked down on excessive borrowing in the industry several years ago. The largest, China Evergrande, is still trying to resolve more than \$300 billion in debts and a Hong Kong court is due to hold a hearing on its restructuring plans next

week.

The latest policies are not a full reversal of the effort to rein in debt and control risks in the property industry.

The new rules say the bank loans cannot be used to buy commercial housing or rental housing or to start new construction or buy land. Loans cannot exceed 70% of the appraised value of the property being used as collateral and should generally last a maximum of 10 years, with an absolute limit of 15 years.

They also order banks to fully conduct due diligence before and after loans are issued to mitigate and minimize risks.

It's unclear what impact the new rules might have on the overall crisis gripping the property market. Land sales have long been a major revenue source

for local governments that now are grappling with mounting debts. At the same time, stalled construction of new homes has hit contractors and suppliers of construction materials and home furnishings.

In a research note, UBS economists said "the pace and potential size of such loans remain uncertain as banks will likely watch the commerciality and risks of such loans." But they added that the move was a "significant step" to increase support for developers.

Sales of new homes and home prices have been falling, discouraging consumers from spending since Chinese families tend to have much of their wealth tied up in property. The industry as a whole accounts for about a quarter of business activity in China.

"For developer financing to fundamentally and sustainably improve, property sales need to stop falling and start to recover, which could require more policy efforts to stabilize the property market," the UBS report said. **MDT/AP**

Re-escalate tensions ended global trade



situation from getting out of control.”

“China is willing to work with all parties to cool down the situation and maintain security and stability in the Red Sea,” Wang said.

China exported more than \$3.5 trillion in goods in 2022, the last year for which figures were available. That was about \$1.5 trillion more than the United States, the world's No. 2 exporter.

Some of the world's largest container shipping companies and oil giant BP have been sending vessels on longer journeys around Africa that bypass the Red Sea. In response to the growing impact on global trade, the United States and a host of other nations have created a new force to protect ships.

At least 90% of the container ships that had been going through the Suez Canal are now rerouting around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope, according to Drewry, a maritime research consultancy.

The cost to ship a standard 40-foot container from China

to northern Europe has jumped from \$1,500 to \$4,000, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany. But that is still far from the \$14,000 seen during the pandemic.

The delays contributed to a 1.3% decline in world trade in December, reflecting goods stuck on ships rather than being offloaded in port.

The U.S. and its allies have been striking targets Washington has said are involved in the attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria and were threatening U.S. military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

China has maintained close ties with Iran, largely based on investment and oil imports, and last year hosted talks resulting in the restoration of Tehran's diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia.

While seeking a peace-making role in the Middle East, Beijing has shied away from committing to any particular side, diminishing its credibility in the eyes of critics.

Wang said China believed the United Nations Security Council “has never authorized any country to use force against Yemen and calls for a genuine respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Red Sea coastal countries, including Yemen.” **MDT/AP**

YUNNAN

DEATH TOLL IN LANDSLIDE RISES TO 39, WITH 5 PEOPLE STILL MISSING

THE death toll from a landslide in a remote, mountainous part of southwestern China rose to 39 yesterday, while five people remained missing, Chinese state media reported.

The disaster struck early Monday in the village of Liangshui in the northeastern part of Yunnan province.

Search and rescue operations continued amid freezing temperatures and falling snow.

More than 1,000 rescuers were working at the site with the help of excavators, drones and rescue dogs, the Ministry of Emergency Management said earlier this week. Two survivors were found Monday and were recovering at a local hospital.

State news agency Xinhua, citing a preliminary investigation by local experts, said the landslide was triggered by the collapse of a steep cliff top area, with the collapsed mass measuring around 100 meters wide, 60 meters in height and an average of 6 meters in thickness. It did not elaborate on what caused the initial collapse.

Aerial photos posted by Xinhua showed the side of a heavily terraced mountain had spilled over several village homes. More than 900 villagers were relocated.

Zhenxiang county lies about 2,250 kilometers southwest of Beijing, with altitudes ranging as high as 2,400 meters.

Rescuers struggled with snow, icy roads and freezing temperatures that were forecast to persist for the next days.

Heavy snow has been falling in many parts of China, causing transportation chaos and endangering lives.

Last week, rescuers evacuated tourists from a remote skiing area in northwestern China where dozens of avalanches triggered by heavy snow had trapped more than 1,000 people for a week. The avalanches blocked roads, stranding both tourists and residents in a village in Altay prefecture in the Xinjiang region, close to China's border with Mongolia, Russia and Kazakhstan.

On Tuesday, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake in a remote part of Xinjiang killed at least three people and caused extensive damage in freezing weather. Officials suggested the area's sparse population contributed to the “very strong” quake's low death toll.

In all, natural disasters in China left 691 people dead and missing last year, causing direct economic losses of about 345 billion yuan (\$48 billion), according to the National Commission for Disaster Reduction and the Ministry of Emergency Management. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Natural Resources implemented emergency response measures for geological disasters and sent a team of experts to the site. **MDT/AP**



is an important international trade route for goods and energy,” Wang said.

Wang also referenced the Gaza conflict, linking it to

the Red Sea tensions, saying, “The priority now is to end the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible to avoid further escalation and prevent the

HONG KONG

Top court restores activist's conviction over banned vigil on Tiananmen

HONG Kong's top court yesterday restored a prominent detained activist's conviction over a banned vigil commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, marking the latest setback for the city's democracy supporters.

Chow Hang-tung, a former leader of the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, had been sentenced to 15 months in prison in January 2022 for inciting others to take part in the vigil banned by the police on public health grounds during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.

For decades, the annual vigil organized by the alliance was the only large-scale public commemoration of the 1989 incident on Chinese soil, along Macau, and was attended by massive crowds until authorities banned it in 2020,



citing anti-pandemic measures.

In December 2022, Chow won her appeal against her conviction in a rare victory for the city's activists under Beijing's crackdown on dissidents.

At that time, a High Court judge ruled that although Chow had encouraged others to gather at a park, it was not a crime because the legality of the ban was not established. In quashing her original conviction, the judge ruled

that the police had failed to discharge their positive duty to take the initiative in considering feasible measures as conditions enabling the annual vigil to be held.

But the government appealed against the judge's decision.

Yesterday, the Court of Final Appeal restored Chow's conviction. Justice Roberto Ribeiro said in a written judgement the police's ban was “plainly a proportionate and legitimate measure.”

If the police chief “gives genuine consideration to whether the specified interests can be met by the imposition of certain conditions but reasonably decides that this cannot be achieved, he is not required... to refrain from prohibiting the assembly,” Ribeiro said.

The alliance was best known for organizing candlelight vigils in Hong Kong's Victoria Park on the anniversary of Tiananmen protests. But it voted to disband in 2021 under the shadow of the national security law.

The law criminalizes secession, subversion, and collusion with foreign forces to intervene in the city's affairs as well as terrorism. Many pro-democracy activists were silenced or jailed after its enactment in 2020. But Beijing and Hong Kong governments and many supporters hailed it for bringing back stability to the city. **MDT/AP**

ATHLETES

GLOBAL STUDY OF DOPING CASES INVOLVING MINORS POINTS TO RUSSIA, INDIA AND CHINA

A 10-year global study of positive doping tests by children and young teenagers showed most sanctions came from Russia, India, and China...

Diuretics, stimulants and anabolic steroids were the most commonly found substances in more than 1,500 positive tests involving more than 1,400 minors since 2012.

The youngest athlete tested was 8 years old and the youngest sanctioned in a doping case was a 12-year-old, WADA said in the "Operation Refuge" study.

"Operation Refuge reports in heartbreaking detail the deep trauma and isolation child athletes experience following a positive test and a doping sanction," the chair of WADA's athlete council, Ryan Pini, said in a statement.

It cited the testimony of a female minor "who recalled the extreme pressure she and other female athletes felt from the



Test kit for human urine doping testing with A and B sample bottles

male coaches to keep their weight down," the report said. "This pressure included an impossible expectation to slow down the ef-

fects of puberty because puberty would supposedly negatively impact their ability to compete."

WADA said its intelligence

and investigations unit analyzed testing data of samples collected from minors since 2012. The investigators also received 58 alerts since 2018 on a confidential hotline that implicated minors in doping.

"Analysis of those disclosures revealed that the majority had originated from Russia and India, and that the most reported sports, globally, were aquatics and athletics," the agency said.

In cases that reached a sanction, the most commonly found doping substance was the diuretic furosemide in Russia, the anabolic steroid stanozolol in India and clenbuterol in China, the report said.

In weightlifting cases, the most common substance was stanozolol, in track and field it was the endurance boosting hormone EPO and in cycling it was meldonium, WADA said. Meldonium is the heart medication most widely known for the doping case of Russian tennis star Maria Sharapova.

WADA said about 80% of

positive tests led to sanctions and others were for substances allowed for therapeutic use. Those included a stimulant for treating ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

Some evidence suggested systematic doping, including multiple minors testing positive for the same substance in samples taken on the same day.

WADA highlighted a 2012 case of four boxers in Romania testing positive for furosemide; three track and field athletes in China testing positive for stanozolol in 2021; two Belarusian skaters testing positive for furosemide in 2022; and two Kazakh weightlifters testing positive for ostarine last year.

"'Operation Refuge' places a difficult but important issue into the spotlight," said WADA director of intelligence and investigations Günter Younger. "We are working towards ensuring that the experiences of those interviewed during this operation do not continue to repeat themselves." MDT/AP

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



UNITED NATIONS

Lavrov accuses US, S.Korea and Japan of preparing for war with North Korea

EDITH M. LEDERER,
UNITED NATIONS

RUSSIA'S top diplomat accused the United States, South Korea and Japan yesterday [Macau time] of preparing for war with North Korea.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told a U.N. news conference that this new military bloc brought together by the United States is building up military activity and conducting large-scale exercises. The United States, South Korea and Japan have described their combined military drills as defensive in nature and necessary to cope with growing North Korean nuclear threats.

All of a sudden South Korea's rhetoric "became even more hostile towards Pyongyang," Lavrov said. "In Japan as well, we hear aggressive rhetoric" and it is seriously talking about setting up NATO infrastructure with U.S. assistance.

Lavrov said the objective of the military bloc is clearly stated: "They're preparing for war with the DPRK," the initials of North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The Russian minister said the United States and its Asian allies have also been talking about developing their cooperation. "It's quite wishy-washy the way they phrased it, but they said something like nuclear-related cooperation," he said.

Last week, the three countries conducted combined naval exercises involving an American air-



Russian FM Sergey Lavrov

craft carrier in their latest show of strength against nuclear-armed North Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been on a provocative run of weapons testing and threats that raised regional tensions to their highest point in years. Senior diplomats from the three allies were to meet in Seoul to discuss the worsening standoff with Pyongyang.

On the other hand, Lavrov said

Russia's relationship with North Korea is "proceeding nicely, it's developing quite actively."

"We see that the DPRK is trying to be independent, not to dance anybody's tune," he said.

Kim is one of the few world leaders openly supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine. Kim has been actively boosting the visibility of his ties with Russia in an attempt to break out of diplomatic isolation

and strengthen his footing, as he navigates a deepening nuclear standoff with Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.

When asked about Lavrov's comments, South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lim Soosuk said they reflected North Korea's "constantly false and misleading claims as it tries to shift the blame to the outside world while developing nuclear weapons and missiles under its own schedule."

He accused North Korea of further raising tensions with its weapons demonstrations this month, including missile tests and artillery test-firings near a disputed sea boundary with the South.

"Our government has consistently expressed a willingness to engage in dialogue with North Korea without any preconditions," Lim said during a briefing.

The alignment between Moscow and Pyongyang has raised international concern about alleged arms cooperation. North Korea has been accused of providing Russia with arms supplies to help prolong its warfighting in Ukraine, possibly in exchange for economic assistance and military technology.

Both countries have denied accusations by Washington and Seoul that North Korea has been shipping artillery shells, missiles and other military equipment to Russia in recent months.

Putin confirmed his willingness to visit the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, at a convenient time during his meeting with Kim

in Russia's Far East in September. Lavrov said the timing will be decided by the Kremlin.

Lavrov compared Kim's recent announcement that North Korea would not pursue a peaceful unification with the South to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statement saying there will be no Palestinian state after the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

"It's terrible when, instead of unity, we have trends which divide us," the Russian minister said. "And yet, this is a systematic process across many regions, and the main contributor to that trend are those who believe to be the masters of the universe."

Without naming the United States and former Western colonial powers, he said countries that told others how to live for half a millennium and believe they are "masters of the universe" ignore that the overwhelming majority of ex-colonies and are now independent and want to buttress their, cultural and religious identity.

These ex colonial states are "leaving the West behind," pointing to the BRICS economic bloc of developing economies that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. countries. The BRICS members have invited Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Ethiopia to join.

Lavrov said "the ex-colonial powers have to face up to the reality in today's world."

"You shouldn't just think that you're so strong just because you have the dollar," he said. **MDT/AP**

MYANMAR

Army denies generals were sentenced to death for surrendering key city to insurgents

MYANMAR'S military government is denying reports that it sentenced six army generals to death or life imprisonment for their surrender this month of a regional military command headquarters on the border with China to an alliance of ethnic armed groups.

The generals were the key officers involved in the surrender of the headquarters in Laukaing, a city in northern Shan state that

had been a major target of the Three Brotherhood Alliance comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army.

Laukaing's fall was the biggest defeat suffered by Myanmar's military government since the alliance's offensive was launched last October, underlining the pressure the military government is under as

it battles pro-democracy guerrillas and other ethnic minority armed groups.

The armed resistance began after the army used deadly force to suppress peaceful protests against its seizure of power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

Independent media had reported that the six generals were put under investigation in the capital, Naypyitaw, af-

ter Laukaing's fall to the alliance. They had been sent back to territory still under the control of the military.

The independent media sympathetic to Myanmar's anti-military resistance movement, including the online sites of Khit Thit and The Irrawaddy, reported Tuesday that three generals had been sentenced to death and three others to life imprisonment.

But the army's press of-

fice, responding Tuesday to inquiries from journalists, denied the generals had received such sentences, calling the reports untrue.

The BBC's Burmese language service on Wednesday reported that three top officers had been sentenced to death, but only one of them, Brig. Gen. Tun Tun Myint, had been on other media's lists of those condemned to death. The other two included a colonel.

The BBC said its news came from the military office in Naypyitaw, a source close to the military legal office and sources close to the generals' family members.

According to Myanmar's Defense Services Act, any person who "shamefully abandons, or delivers up any garrison, fortress, post, place, ship or guard committed to his charge" shall be punished with death.

The act also says anyone who "shamefully casts away his arms, ammunition, tools, or equipment or misbehaves in such manner as to show cowardice in the presence of the enemy" faces the same penalty. **MDT/AP**



USA

Experimental gene therapy allows kids with inherited deafness to hear

LAURA UNGAR,
SCIENCE WRITER

GENE therapy has allowed several children born with inherited deafness to hear.

A small study published this week documents significantly restored hearing in five of six kids treated in China. On Tuesday, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia announced similar improvements in an 11-year-old boy treated there. And earlier this month, Chinese researchers published a study showing much the same in two other children.

So far, the experimental therapies target only one rare condition. But scientists say similar treatments could someday help many more kids with other types of deafness caused by genes. Globally, 34 million children have deafness or hearing loss, and genes are responsible for up to 60% of cases. Hereditary deafness is the latest condition scientists are targeting with gene therapy, which is already approved to treat illnesses such as sickle cell disease and severe hemophilia.

Children with hereditary deafness often get a device called a cochlear implant that helps them hear sound.

"No treatment could reverse hearing loss ... That's why we were always trying to de-

velop a therapy," said Zheng-Yi Chen of Boston's Mass Eye and Ear, a senior author of the study published Wednesday in the journal *Lancet*. "We couldn't be more happy or excited about the results."

The team captured patients' progress in videos. One shows a baby, who previously couldn't hear at all, looking back in response to a doctor's words six weeks after treatment. Another shows a little girl 13 weeks after treatment repeating father, mother, grandmother, sister and "I love you."

All the children in the experiments have a condition that accounts for 2% to 8% of inherited deafness. It's caused by mutations in a gene responsible for an inner ear protein called otoferlin, which helps hair cells transmit sound to the brain. The one-time therapy delivers a functional copy of that gene to the inner ear during a surgical procedure. Most of the kids were treated in one ear, although one child in the two-person study was treated in both ears.

The study with six children took place at Fudan University in Shanghai, co-led by Dr. Yilai Shu, who trained in Chen's lab, which collaborated on the research. Funders include Chinese science organizations and biotech company Shanghai Refresh-gene Therapeutics.

Researchers observed the children for about six months. They don't know why the treatment didn't work in one of them. But the five others, who previously had complete deafness, can now hear a regular conversation and talk with others. Chen estimates they now hear at a level around 60% to 70% of normal. The therapy caused no major side effects.

Preliminary results from other research have been just as positive. New York's Regeneron Pharmaceuticals announced in October that a child under 2 in a study they sponsored with Decibel Therapeutics showed improvements six weeks after gene therapy. The Philadelphia hospital — one of several sites in a test sponsored by a subsidiary of Eli Lilly called Akouos — reported that their patient, Aissam Dam of Spain, heard sounds for the first time after being treated in October. Though they are muffled like he's wearing foam earplugs, he's now able to hear his father's voice and cars on the road, said Dr. John Germiller, who led the research in Philadelphia.

"It was a dramatic improvement," Germiller said. "His hearing is improved from a state of complete and profound deafness with no sound at all to the level of mild to moderate hearing loss, which you can say is a mild disabili-

ty. And that's very exciting for us and for everyone."

Columbia University's Dr. Lawrence Lustig, who is involved in the Regeneron trial, said although the children in these studies don't wind up with perfect hearing, "even a moderate hearing loss recovery in these kids is pretty astounding."

Still, he added, many questions remain, such as how long the therapies will last and whether hearing will continue to improve in the kids.

Also, some people consider gene therapy for deafness ethically problematic. Teresa Blankmeyer Burke, a deaf philosophy professor and bioethicist at Gallaudet University, said in an email that there's no consensus about the need for gene therapy targeting deafness. She also pointed out that deafness doesn't cause severe or deadly illness like, for example, sickle cell disease. She said it's important to engage with deaf community members about prioritization of gene therapy, "particularly as this is perceived by many as potentially an existential threat to the flourishing of signing Deaf communities."

Meanwhile, researchers said their work is moving forward.

"This is real proof showing gene therapy is working," Chen said. "It opens up the whole field." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1998 CLINTON DENIES AFFAIR WITH INTERN



President Clinton has strongly denied allegations that he had an affair with a 24-year-old former White House aide.

He also rejected accusations that he asked her to lie about the relationship on oath.

Mr Clinton has come under intense media pressure as rumours circulate that he conducted an 18-month affair with Monica Lewinsky in 1995.

Miss Lewinsky, who is currently in hiding, has made no public admission, although it is understood that she has admitted to the relationship on tape.

The president made his categorical denial at a White House news conference today.

With his fist clenched and his voice shaking, he said: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.

"I never told anybody to lie, not a single time, never.

"These allegations are false and I need to get back to work for the American people."

Mr Clinton left the room without answering any questions.

First lady Hillary Clinton is said to be in "fighting mood" and has vowed to stand by her husband to save his political career.

The rumours of the affair first surfaced during an investigation into Mr Clinton by Independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr.

Mr Starr is understood to be keen for Miss Lewinsky to give evidence before the grand jury about the alleged affair.

But the former aide fears she will be prosecuted for perjury if she goes public about the affair as she has already denied it under sworn testimony in a separate sexual harassment case involving Paula Jones.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

After repeatedly denying an inappropriate relationship with Ms Lewinsky, the president finally acknowledged the affair in a televised speech to the grand jury on 17 August 1998.

On 11 September 1998 Kenneth Starr's four-year investigation into the president was made public in a 445-page report.

As a direct result of the report, the House Judiciary Committee proposed four articles of impeachment against the president.

Bill Clinton became only the second president in American history to face such an indictment, but he refused to resign.

His trial began on 7 January 1999 and ended on 12 February when senators voted to acquit him of the impeachment charges of perjury and obstruction of justice.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Be prudent and don't be led down the garden path. Don't go hog wild when it comes to entertainment or you could find yourself short of funds at the end of the month.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
You may find it impossible to get the rest you require. Keep your cash in your pocket and offer them sound advice rather than your financial assistance.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
Your partner may push buttons that infuriate you. Travel may be confusing. Don't get involved in secret affairs or underhanded involvements.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Hidden matters are likely to surface. You may find that you're being used. Take time to talk things over. Travel for business or pleasure.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Go to the top if you're being harassed or held back. Your obviously unique way of doing things has caught the eye of someone in a higher position.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Trying to deal with your mate will be unproductive and possibly hurtful. Authority figures may be less than accommodating if you have done something deceitful.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Financial gains can be made. Take time to listen to the problems of family members. Be sure to take time for old friends or relatives you don't get to see that often.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You have made an accurate assessment of the situation and have come up with ideas that will save money. A female colleague may cause problems for you.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Travel will be on your mind, but you should be sure that you've got all your work up-to-date. Try to curb your bad habits, and compromise if your partner gives you an ultimatum.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Your knowledge and good sense will help more than you think. You need more space for the whole family. Things are looking good for you, so open your eyes and get to it.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Be careful not to lead someone on if you truly have no interest. If they're too demanding, reconsider this union. Don't count on others to cover up for your shortcomings.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
You will have to face each issue separately and in person. Your partner may blame you for everything. You will be able to get along well with colleagues.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

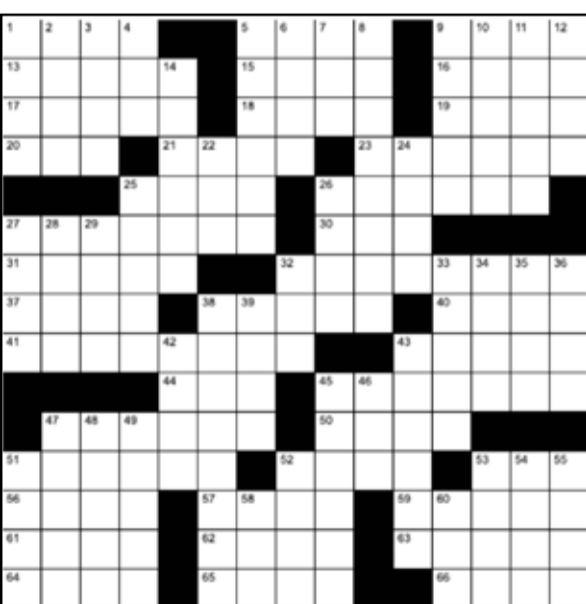
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	5	fine
Changchun	-15	-5	fine
Chengdu	0	9	cloudy
Chongqing	3	10	overcast
Fuzhou	5	15	fine
Guangzhou	5	13	overcast
Guiyang	-3	3	overcast
Haikou	10	16	rain
Hangzhou	-2	8	cloudy
Harbin	-25	-13	cloudy
Hefei	-4	6	cloudy
Nanjing	-2	6	cloudy
Shanghai	0	7	fine
Taipei	11	15	overcast
Wuhan	-1	8	cloudy
Hong Kong	14	18	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-6	-2	cloudy
Frankfurt	0	10	rain
Paris	1	12	rain
London	2	9	overcast
New York	6	7	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Ballerina's skirt; 5- Egg cell; 9- Alpo alternative; 13- "_____ by any other name..."; 15- Hindu hero; 16- Getting ___ years; 17- Actress Samantha; 18- Catch a view of; 19- Branta sandvicensis; 20- French article; 21- Anger; 23- Narcotic; 25- Neighbor of Cambodia; 26- Boring; 27- Government income; 30- It's a moray; 31- To the left, at sea; 32- Unstable; 37- Silage storage tower; 38- Bird homes; 40- To ___ (perfectly); 41- Call up, as reservists; 43- Old English coin; 44- Not in; 45- Cocktail; 47- Taoism founder; 50- Beehive State; 51- Home on the range; 52- Anna of "Nana"; 53- Thor Heyerdahl craft; 56- Shrek, e.g.; 57- Touch on; 59- Intertwine; 61- Neet rival; 62- ___ -shanter (Scottish cap); 63- Lathers; 64- Zeno's home; 65- School founded by Henry VI; 66- Canadian gas brand;

DOWN 1- Chinese weight; 2- Impulse to act; 3- Duds; 4- NATO member; 5- Ultimatum ender; 6- Urn; 7- Strike caller; 8- A city's first lady?; 9- Ancient region of Asia Minor; 10- Lend ___; 11- Like some mouthwashes; 12- Dagger of yore; 14- Wide of the mark; 22- Debtor's note; 24- Skin; 25- Vive ___; 26- Fender ding; 27- Tabula ___; 28- Long poem, such as those attributed to Homer; 29- Unit of potential difference; 32- Employ, utilise; 33- Third in a series; 34- Yours, in Tours; 35- Faculty head; 36- Abominable snowman; 38- Sicken; 39- Novel ending; 42- Ballot choice; 43- Bestows; 45- Flesh of sheep; 46- Dug in; 47- Juridical; 48- Lofty nest; 49- Musical drama; 51- Accent; 52- Japanese wrestling; 53- Narrow inlets; 54- Cairo cobras; 55- Wishing won't make ___; 58- Cricket need; 60- Grievous distress;



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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AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

DRIVE IN

IN 'THE TEACHERS' LOUNGE', ONE MIDDLE SCHOOL AS MICROCOSM OF A TROUBLED WORLD

JOCELYN NOVECK MDT/AP

WHAT happens in the teachers' lounge, anyway? When we were kids, that closed door seemed so tantalizingly forbidding, though it probably only hid some coffee-sipping, light chitchat and paper-grading.

Well, not in the brilliantly taut and absorbing "The Teachers' Lounge," in which that room — and gradually, the whole school around it — hosts an expanding web of uneasy power dynamics, mutual suspicion and misinformation, and that's just for starters. This film also explores cancel culture, institutional racism, privacy rights and even censorship and press freedom.

That's a lot for one middle school. But writer-director Ilker Çatak pulls it off, aided by excellent performances all around and two truly superb ones: Leonie Benesch as an idealistic new teacher and a heartbreaking Leo Stettinisch as her troubled stu-



Leonie Benesch in a scene from "The Teachers' Lounge" (Sony Pictures Classics)

dent. (The film, Germany's submission to the Academy Awards, has justifiably made the short list for best international feature.)

"The Teachers' Lounge" dives immediately into the controversy that will tear this modern, bustling school apart. Carla Nowak (Benesch) is called to

an uncomfortable meeting between school officials and two student representatives of her sixth-grade class.

Back in the teachers' lounge, Carla is clashing with her more aggressive colleagues. And then, in her misguided zeal to identify the real thief and exonerate her

kids, she steps right into an ethical morass.

Leaving her wallet in her coat on a chair, and setting her laptop camera to record, she soon has video evidence — just an arm, in a distinctive blouse — of someone stealing from her pocket. It only takes a moment to track down the wearer of that blouse.

Perhaps because Benesch is such an effortlessly empathetic actor, she makes Carla's decision to confront the person she suspects — and then, to hand over the video — feel logical, like something anyone might do. But her action raises issues of privacy rights, and puts her on a collision course with not only the accused school employee but that employee's child, Oskar (Stettinisch), an intelligent and sensitive boy in her class.

At every step, it seems, Carla's earnest efforts to do the right thing — by her students, and by her job — land her into ever hotter water. And then, she

must navigate an angry group of parents on parent-teacher night, an experience so harrowing it leaves her heaving on a bathroom floor, blowing into a bag.

Angry parents, suspicious colleagues — can it get worse? Yes, when Carla is interviewed by the student newspaper, an intriguing subplot raising questions of censorship. Carla, rightfully concerned about how she will be portrayed, asks to see the article in advance, and when the students (also rightfully!) defy her, the principal ends up banning distribution of the paper on campus.

As for Benesch, from whom the camera rarely departs, she has a luminous presence that carries the film.

Duncker, who in fact attended school together, are making the point that even a middle school is a microcosm of society and all its tensions and ills. Perhaps that is why their film ends without clear answers: In school, as in life, one cannot simply close a door, keep out the bad stuff, and solve everything.

"The Teacher's Lounge," a Sony Pictures Classics release, has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association "for some strong language." Running time: 98 minutes.

★★★★

AD

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Urology : Dr. Lo Kwong Yin Richard, Dr. Zhao Yun Qiao

Paediatric Surgery : Dr. Yeung Chung Kwong

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Obstetrics & Gynaecology : Dr. Fong Kuan Iu

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



From left: Chef Julien Tongourian, Chef Hideaki Matsuo, Chef Heinz Beck and Chef Sven Wassmer

TASTE OF EDESIA

Timeless Gastronomy

IRENE SAM, MDT

LAST week, MICHELIN Guide and SJM Resorts joined forces to orchestrate The MICHELIN Star Studded Dinner – Timeless Gastronomy. Nestled within The Grand Pavilion of the Grand Lisboa Palace Resort, the extraordinary event brought together four of the world's most revered chefs, culminating in an evening of unparalleled gastronomic ecstasy that transcended the boundaries of time and pushed the limits of taste.

First up, the Appetizer Platter unveiled the masterpieces crafted by each of the four esteemed chefs. Chef Julien Tongourian stepped into the spotlight with his Imperial French Caviar and King Crab in a Surprise Box, a heartfelt tribute to Chef Robuchon's culinary legacy. With his innovative flair, Tongourian harmoniously blended the succulent crab meat, fragrant herbs, and a velvety cauliflower cream, while taking the dish to new heights of opulence and grandeur with the inclusion of exquisite Oscietra caviar.

Chef Sven Wassmer presented his renowned Beetroot Rose, a mesmerizing one-biter that encapsulates Memories, surpassed mere sensory delight and ignited a lingering desire for more. Chef Hideaki Matsuo celebrated the profound Japanese connection to nature and the reverence for seasonal changes with his meticu-

lously crafted Sea Urchin, expertly paired with avocado, carrot jam, zucchini and mullet roe. Lastly, Chef Heinz Beck's Tartlet with Veal and Black Elderberry embodied his health-conscious, light and Mediterranean cooking philosophy, allowing the meat to retain its flavors and nutritional integrity while reducing its fat content.

Acclaimed chef Heinz Beck from La Pergola in Italy left gastronomes spellbound with his unique cooking style and unwavering focus on ingredient nutrition. His standout dish, Marinated Amberjack on Celeriac in Seawater and Oxidized Chocolate was a fat-free composition of flavors that tantalized the taste buds. Through a meticulous 24-hour needle marinade, the celeriac absorbed an abundance of mineral salts, enhancing both its health benefits and its palatability.

Distinguished "ryotei" expert Chef Hideaki Matsuo from Kashiwaya Osaka Seniryama in Japan mesmerized guests with his rendition of Lobster – a skillful combination of lobster stock with Kashiwaya's signature Japanese stock to create a concerto of flavours, where every sip of the soup brings in an aromatic allure.

In his masterful debut at Macau, the culinary virtuoso, Chef Sven Wassmer, recognized for his contemporary Alpine cuisine at Memories in Switzerland, flawlessly embodied the theme of "Timeless Gastronomy." Embracing the essence of his hometown, Chef Wassmer showcased

his remarkable talent by infusing luxurious and modern touches into his masterpiece, the Knöpfli Swiss Dumpling with Roasted Yeast and Truffle. With the addition of a luscious Périgord truffle purée and fresh truffle, Chef Wassmer skillfully refined the culinary heritage of his beloved Alpine kitchen, effortlessly bridging the gap between the past and the present.

Chef Tongourian's Wagyu Beef Chateaubriand and Foie Gras "Rossini" style with Vintage Port Wine and the Famous Mash Potato left guests fascinated, captivated by its impeccable flavours and exquisite presentation. Every bite was a testament to Chef Tongourian's exceptional expertise and unwavering attention to detail. The tender M8 Australian wagyu chateaubriand flawlessly combined with premium foie gras, irresistible black truffle, and a decadent port wine sauce, created a harmony of flavours that danced on the palate.

The sweet finale, The "Dome" in Ivory Chocolate Shell with a Strawberry Gourmet Symphony, showcased Chef Tongourian's unrivaled culinary expertise and limitless imagination. This astonishing opus featured an ivory chocolate shell infused with the delicate essence of Tahitian vanilla, perfectly complemented by the palatable sweetness of strawberries. Crafted with finesse and precision, this centerpiece left guests in awe of Chef Tongourian's boundless creativity and mastery of the culinary arts.



Appetizer Platter



Wagyu Beef Chateaubriand and Foie Gras "Rossini" style with Vintage Port Wine



Marinated Amberjack on Celeriac in Seawater and Oxidized Chocolate



OPINION

Explainer

Keiran Smith, MDT/AP

WHAT THE TUVALU ELECTION MEANS FOR CHINA-PACIFIC RELATIONS

It's a tiny Pacific island nation, one of the world's smallest. But on Friday, elections in Tuvalu will be watched from Beijing and Taipei to Canberra, as voters choose a 16-seat parliament and, after negotiations, a prime minister.

A big part of the international attention is linked to the increasing importance of China in the region, and Tuvalu's "diplomatic ties" to the government of Taiwan. A proposed security treaty with Australia could also hang in the balance.

All candidates in Tuvalu run as independents, with the top two vote-getters in each of the eight island electorates going to parliament.

Polls open at 8.30am (2030 GMT) on Friday and close at 4 p.m. (0400 GMT) on Friday, The Guardian newspaper reported.

When the votes are in, the new parliamentarians split into groups, with the biggest electing the prime minister and forming a new government.

The current prime minister, Kausea Natano, is running for parliament again, but he would have to go through the selection process again even if he wins his parliament race.

Finance Minister Seve Paeniu is also interested in the job after winning his parliament seat by running unopposed.

Another potential new leader is the opposition leader, and former prime minister, Enele Sopoaga.

Only 12 countries, including Tuvalu, have official diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Nauru, also in the Pacific, recently switched its support from Taiwan to China.

This puts Tuvalu at the center of intense jockeying between Taipei and Beijing.

Prime Minister Natano favors strong ties with Taiwan, and is likely to continue that support. Sopoaga also favors close ties with Taiwan. Paeniu has said he wants to review Tuvalu's ties with both Beijing and Taipei, according to The Guardian.

Sopoaga has also said he doesn't support a new treaty between Tuvalu and Australia signed in November. That treaty, which commits Australia to assist Tuvalu in response to major natural disasters, health pandemics and military aggression, has yet to be ratified amid an intense debate. The treaty gives Australia veto power over any security or defense-related agreement Tuvalu wants to make with any other country, including China.

WHERE AND WHAT IS TUVALU?

Tuvalu consists of nine coral atolls in the South Pacific Ocean. It's about halfway between Hawaii and Australia.

Tuvalu's low-lying atolls make it particularly vulnerable to global warming, and there are worries that rising sea levels and strengthening storms will make it uninhabitable. Prime Minister Kausea Natano is trying to raise the islands 4 to 5 meters above sea level through land reclamation.

It has a population of about 11,500, making it one of the smallest nations in the world.

A former British colony, it gained independence in 1978. The British monarch is still the country's head of state.

Former President Donald Trump returned to a New York courtroom yesterday to defend himself against a lawsuit seeking more than \$10 million for things he said about advice columnist E. Jean Carroll after she accused him of sexual assault.

Trump's first visit to court this week, on Monday, ended abruptly because a juror was ill. The trial was suspended until yesterday, when two jurors were "socially distanced" from the others in the jury box when they returned.

Carroll's lawyers called a single witness — Roberta Myers — who told jurors that Carroll was a "truth-teller" with her popular mon-

thly advice column while Myers was editor-in-chief of Elle magazine from 2000 to 2017.

Carroll's attorneys followed the testimony by showing jurors clips of Trump on the campaign trail saying Carroll had concocted a "made up fabricated story" about him and portions of his October 2022 deposition when Trump denied knowing who Carroll was.

One snippet shown to jurors was when Trump during his deposition misidentified Carroll as his ex-wife, Marla Maples.

If everything goes as planned, Trump could be on the witness stand today [Macau time].



In this photo released by the U.S. Navy The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS John Finn prepares to come alongside Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo ship Cesar Chavez in the East China Sea, earlier this week

CHINA ACCUSES US OF ABUSING INTERNATIONAL LAW BY SAILING IN TAIWAN STRAIT AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

CHINA accused the U.S. of abusing international law with its military maneuvers in the western Pacific, one day after an American naval destroyer sailed through the politically sensitive Taiwan Strait.

While China welcomes military-to-military communication with the United States, Defense Ministry spokesperson Wu Qian said yesterday that U.S. warplane and warship activity "on China's doorstep" is the root cause of the problems between the two military powers.

"The United States side should stop abusing international law, cease all dangerous and provocative behavior, and strictly restrain the activities of front-line troops, which is the fundamental way to avoid accidents at sea and in the air," he said at a monthly briefing.

The USS John Finn sailed Wednesday though the 160-kilometer-wide waterway that separates China from Taiwan, a self-governing island part of China's territory.

China agreed to resume

military contacts with the U.S. at a meeting last November between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping in California. In part, the argument for doing so was to be able to manage an unintentional collision or other incident that could happen as both sides hold drills and patrol the waters in regional hotspots including the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.

The U.S. defends its actions as in line with international laws that guarantee freedom of navigation.

"No member of the international community should be intimidated or coerced into giving up their rights and freedoms," the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet said in a news release on the John Finn's transit of the Strait. "The United States military flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows."

China's rise has given it the ability to project military power into the western Pacific, which brings it into conflict with the United States, long the dominant military power in the region.

The American military activity is aimed in part at deterring China from launching any attack on Taiwan

or using its strength to enforce its territorial claims in disputes with smaller neighbors such as the Philippines.

Chinese and Philippine ships clashed last year as disputes over shoals and other outcroppings in the South China Sea flared. China has blamed U.S. support, such as recent joint patrols with the Philippines, for emboldening the latter.

"On the issue of easing tensions in the South China Sea, it is very necessary for the big power concerned, namely the United States, to stop interfering and stop provoking," Wu said.

Diplomats from China and the Philippines agreed at a recent meeting in Shanghai to work toward lowering tensions in the South China Sea, but doing so won't be easy.

"It must be frankly stated that it is impossible to resolve the current South China Sea issue overnight," Wu said.

China is willing to resolve the issue through dialogue and consultation, he said, but warned that "if the Philippine side insists on taking its own course, we will surely take firm countermeasures." **MDT/AP**

Germany European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde pushed back yesterday against market expectations for quick interest rate cuts even as Europe's economy sputters and financial markets froth in hopes of cheaper credit that would boost business activity and stock prices. The bank left its benchmark rate unchanged at a record-high 4%, and Lagarde said afterward that "the consensus around the table ... was that it was premature to discuss rate cuts."



France's Constitutional Council yesterday rejected several measures in a divisive new immigration law that critics call inhumane, in a new blow to President Emmanuel Macron and his government. The council said in a statement that it threw out all or part of 32 of the law's 86 articles, saying they were contrary to the constitution. Macron and lawmakers had sought the body's assessment of the law, passed last year after a torturous debate.



Greece Several thousand university students and supporters took part in a protest in central Athens yesterday to oppose plans by Greece's conservative government to allow privately run universities. The protesters, chanting "Students, United, Will Win," filed past the main Athens University building and statues of the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates as they marched through central Athens and riot police took up positions in nearby side streets.

Rwanda A official said yesterday that the remains of 119 people believed to be victims of the 1994 genocide have been discovered in the country's south, as authorities continue to find mass graves nearly three decades after the killings. The remains of more victims continue to be found because perpetrators of the genocide tried their best to hide possibly incriminating information, Naphtal Ahishakiye, executive secretary of the genocide survivors' organization Ibuka, told The Associated Press.