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AP PHOTO



China Data from a Japanese auto industry association show that China overtook Japan as the world's largest vehicle exporter last year. The Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association reported Japan exported 4.42 million vehicles in 2023. In comparison, China exported 4.91 million vehicles last year. That was nearly 58% more than the year before.

AP PHOTO



EU Convoys with hundreds of angry farmers driving heavy-duty tractors created chaos outside the European Union's headquarters yesterday, demanding leaders at an EU summit provide relief from rising prices and bureaucracy. Farmers pelted police in the Belgian capital with firecrackers, eggs and beer bottles through thick smoke from burning bales of hay, and security forces used water cannons to douse fires.

AP PHOTO



EU The leaders of the 27 European Union countries sealed a deal yesterday to provide Ukraine with a new 50-billion-euro support package for its war-ravaged economy despite weeks of threats from Hungary to veto the move. European Council President Charles Michel announced the agreement that was reached in the first hour of a summit he was chairing in Brussels.

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INTERNET

TEENS ON SOCIAL MEDIA NEED BOTH PROTECTION AND PRIVACY – AI COULD HELP GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

AFSANEH RAZI DREXEL UNIVERSITY

META announced on Jan. 9, 2024, that it will protect teen users by blocking them from viewing content on Instagram and Facebook that the company deems to be harmful, including content related to suicide and eating disorders. The move comes as federal and state governments have increased pressure on social media companies to provide safety measures for teens.

At the same time, teens turn to their peers on social media for support that they can't get elsewhere. Efforts to protect teens could inadvertently make it harder for them to also get help.

Congress has held numerous hearings in recent years about social media and the risks to young people. The CEOs of Meta, X – formerly known as Twitter – TikTok, Snap and Discord are scheduled to testify before the

Senate Judiciary Committee on Jan. 31, 2024, about their efforts to protect minors from sexual exploitation.

The tech companies “finally are being forced to acknowledge their failures when it comes to protecting kids,” according to a statement in advance of the hearing from the committee’s chair and ranking member, Senators Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), respectively.

I’m a researcher who studies online safety. My colleagues and I have been studying teen social media interactions and the effectiveness of platforms’ efforts to protect users. Research shows that while teens do face danger on social media, they also find peer support, particularly via direct messaging. We have identified a set of steps that social media platforms could take to protect users while also protecting their privacy and autonomy online.

WHAT KIDS ARE FACING

The prevalence of risks for teens on social media is well established. These risks range from harassment and bullying to poor mental health and sexual exploitation. Investigations have shown that companies such as Meta have known that their platforms exacerbate mental health issues, helping make youth mental health one of the U.S. Surgeon General’s priorities.

Much of adolescent online safety research is from self-reported data such as surveys. There’s a need for more investigation of young people’s real-world private interactions and their perspectives on online risks. To address this need, my colleagues and I collected a large dataset of young people’s Instagram activity, including more than 7 million direct messages. We asked young people to annotate their own conversations and identify the messages that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Using this dataset, we found

that direct interactions can be crucial for young people seeking support on issues ranging from daily life to mental health concerns. Our finding suggests that these channels were used by young people to discuss their public interactions in more depth. Based on mutual trust in the settings, teens felt safe asking for help.

Research suggests that privacy of online discourse plays an important role in the online safety of young people, and at the same time a considerable amount of harmful interactions on these platforms comes in the form of private messages. Unsafe messages flagged by users in our dataset included harassment, sexual messages, sexual solicitation, nudity, pornography, hate speech and sale or promotion of illegal activities.

However, it has become more difficult for platforms to use automated technology to detect and prevent online risks for teens because the platforms have been pressured

to protect user privacy. For example, Meta has implemented end-to-end encryption for all messages on its platforms to ensure message content is secure and only accessible by participants in conversations.

Also, the steps Meta has taken to block suicide and eating disorder content keep that content from public posts and search even if a teen’s friend has posted it. This means that the teen who shared that content would be left alone without their friends’ and peers’ support. In addition, Meta’s content strategy doesn’t address the unsafe interactions in private conversations teens have online.

STRIKING A BALANCE

The challenge, then, is to protect younger users without invading their privacy. To that end, we conducted a study to find out how we can use the minimum data to detect unsafe messages. We wanted to understand how various features or metadata of risky conversations such as length of the conversation, average response time and the relationships of the participants in the conversation can contribute to machine learning programs detecting these risks. For example, previous research has shown that risky conversations tend to be short and one-sided, as when strangers make unwanted advances.

We found that our machine learning program was able to identify unsafe conversations 87% of the time using only metadata for the conversations. However, analyzing the text, images and videos of the conversations is the most effective approach to identify the type and severity of the risk.

These results highlight the significance of metadata for distinguishing unsafe conversations and could be used as a guideline for platforms to design artificial intelligence risk identification. The platforms could use high-level features such as metadata to block harmful content without scanning that content and thereby violating users’ privacy. For example, a persistent harasser who a young person wants to avoid would produce metadata – repeated, short, one-sided communications between unconnected users – that an AI system could use to block the harasser.

Ideally, young people and their care givers would be given the option by design to be able to turn on encryption, risk detection or both so they can decide on trade-offs between privacy and safety for themselves. MDT/THE CONVERSATION

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Airport expects regular wide-body aircraft from March

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU'S airport will likely see regular flights of wide-body aircraft from March, according to the airport's management.

Eric Fong, marketing director of the Macau International Airport Company, the local airport's management entity, made the revelation at a press event yesterday to announce this year's outlook for the airport.

In commercial aviation, a wide-body aircraft has more than one aisle in its fuselage, like the Boeing 777 and the Airbus A350.

Last November, at his Policy Address press conference, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said the government had met Air Macau, the city's flag-carrier, and agreed the airline would acquire wide-body aircraft.

The government's demand



was made to lure longer-haul flights to Macau.

Aviation enthusiasts believed that it would be an A330 aircraft

leased or transferred by Air China, the local flag-carrier's parent company.

It is also believed the airline

will undertake Middle Eastern destinations, such as Doha or Dubai, the Times has learned.

Echoing the head of the government, Fong said Air Macau plans to roll out wide-body aircraft services in March.

The airport will announce additional incentives to boost longer-haul flights to and from Macau, or to attract more passengers on each flight.

While discussing new operators at the airport, Fong said China Southern Airlines and AirAsia Cambodia will enter the Macau market.

As per current plans, the former offers a daily flight to Istanbul, Turkey, and Moscow, Russia, from Macau (and return) with a transit stop in Beijing's Daxing International Airport.

The latter will operate a daily flight between Phnom Penh and Macau.

South Korea's flag-carrier,

Korean Air, has plans to serve the Seoul-Macau route with wide-body aircraft.

The airport will handle 271 additional flights to regional destinations in the first quarter of this year, said Fong.

He also said the additional flights will cover 11 destinations, such as Seoul, Hanoi, Bangkok and Shanghai.

The additional flights have been added to accommodate the possible increase of passenger numbers during the Lunar New Year period, he said. Moreover, he expects the number of flights handled by the airport to gradually increase this year.

Currently, there are 26 airline companies operating at the airport, offering flights to 43 destinations. On the segmentation of origins, there are 46% mainland residents, 16% Taiwan and 38% from other territories, and he said that the segmentation is like that in 2019.

On ground transfer, the marketing executive disclosed plans on transferring passengers from the Inner Harbour Ferry Terminal to and from the local airport "to provide greater convenience for incomers from Guangxi West."



Patriotism important to SAR's future

ANTHONY LAM

BOTH the Chief Executive, Ho Iat Seng, and Beijing's highest representative in Macau, Zheng Xincong, yesterday emphasized the importance of patriotism and national security to the city's development.

The Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macao SAR held a reception as an early celebration of Chinese New Year yesterday afternoon. Zheng, director of the Office, and Ho were among the officiating guests.

The government will "firmly safeguard national security and developmental interests, and do our utmost to protect Macau's social stability and long-term peace and security," Ho said, during his speech.

He noted the "motherland is the strong backing Macau needs to maintain long-term prosperity and stability. The achievements of the Macau SAR are inseparable from the strong leadership and support of the central government."

He said Macau should "better integrate into the overall development of the country and seize opportunities to promote new developments in various undertakings."

The head of the government also said the government would encourage the people to "give full play to Macau's advantages from its unique position and system."

"We deeply understand that only by always insisting on walking with the country and seizing the historical

opportunities brought by the country's development can we achieve long-term prosperity and stability in Macau," Ho said.

During his speech, Zheng described national security as the foundation for stability.

"The high-quality revision and implementation of Macau's National Security Law has further consolidated the consensus among the people about the causality between national security and stability," he said.

"To achieve new development, we must firmly safeguard national security. Safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests is the highest principle of the 'one country, two systems' policy and the fundamental prerequisite for maintaining long-term peace and stability in Macau," Zheng added.

"Without national security, there will be no stable development environment and a beautiful homeland for people to live and work in in peace and contentment."

Zheng said that last year, the city received 28 million tourists and the city's athletes won 13 medals in two major sport events: the FISU World University Games and the Asian Games.

STATS

NON-RESIDENT WORKERS REACH OVER 176,000 IN 2023

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU recorded 176,661 non-resident workers by the end of December 2023, which was 90% of the December 2019 figure, before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Non-resident workers are commonly known as blue card holders.

Figures from the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) indicate the city gained 21,749 migrant workers last year.

The number of blue card holders from mainland China (121,031) – the largest migrant community – almost matched the December 2019 figure (122,354).

Filipinos continue to be



the largest non-Chinese non-resident workers, representing 85% of pre-pandemic levels.

Vietnamese constitute the second-largest foreign group, with 7,790 blue card holders, about half the late 2019 figure. DSAL also recorded 6,124 Indonesians.

Because Macau's post-pandemic economic recovery experienced a labor shortage during the first half of last year, particularly in the hospitality sector, the hotel and restaurant industries (49,387) and construction (30,209) attracted the most migrant workers to the city.

WE CORRECT

In the Macau Daily Times main article yesterday, Feb 1, about the resumption of import of poultry meat to Macau markets, we clarify that it is fresh poultry that will return to the markets from today, and not live pou-

ltry as initially indicated in the article. The correction was promptly made on our online edition yesterday. For this unfortunate but honest error, we sincerely apologize to IAM and our readers.

HOUSING

IH ANNOUNCES RESIDENTIAL PRICES IN ZONE A

STAFF REPORTER

THE sale price of the 3,017 residential units in Zone A made available for the 2019 Economic Housing Scheme application round will be set at around MOP35,600, the Housing Bureau (IH) has announced.

The bureau has announced that average prices for Zone A public housing units range from MOP26,100 to MOP35,600 per square meter.

Residential units under the 2019 Economic Housing Scheme application round are about MOP35,600.

From 2021 and 2023, 10,669 Zone A residential units were offered for sale, with the average price per square meter being around MOP26,100.

The 2023 application process commenced late September last year, however the IH extended the application period by three months due to a lack of prospective buyers.

As of Feb. 1, according to IH



data, 4,322 applications have been received for this round, accounting for only 80 percent of the units offered for sale.

Under the new 2020 rules, owners of the housing on sale are prohibited from selling their flats on the private market.

They can only resell their uni-

ts to the government as purchased at the original rate.

Multiple policy changes occurred before the introduction of these rules. The period for which sale is banned once stood at six years but was later extended to 16 years, a strategy adopted to prevent housing speculation.



SURVEY SHOWS 77% APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS

STAFF REPORTER

A survey has shown 77% of respondents agreed that continuing government-planned education courses is beneficial for the Macau economy's diversification.

A local grassroots association commissioned the Macau University of Science and Technology to conduct a survey, which collected responses from over a thousand local young people aged 15 to 35.

The survey also revealed 75% of young people have participated in various training and skills development courses.

The results indicate most res-

pondents have taken advantage of government support for courses such as driving, language and business management.

Furthermore, the survey found 42% of participants agreed training could enhance their job skills, while 38% expressed a desire to learn new skills and change careers.

The main reasons cited for not attending courses or training were lack of time and tuition fees.

As a result, there have been calls for the government to better plan and support these courses, making them more appealing to the younger generation.

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GAMING

January GGR beats analysts' projections as revenues surge 67%

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU'S casino revenues surged 67% year-on-year in January to MOP19.3 billion, beating analysts' estimates as the sector continues its recovery ahead of the Chinese New Year.

Data from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau yesterday showed the January result beat the median analyst estimate of a 63.3% year-on-year increase, and has returned to 78% of the pre-pandemic levels.

Morgan Stanley has forecast MOP18.8 billion and the market's general forecast MOP18.9 billion, the Morgan Stanley report said.

The daily average GGR stands at MOP624 million, beating the market's expectation of an average daily GGR of MOP626 million for the whole year.

Morgan Stanley said the Ja-



nuary 2024 GGR has recovered to about 78% of the same period in 2019, representing a further improvement from the re-

covery of 75% in 4Q23, as cited in reports.

Morgan Stanley has also forecast that the February GGR can

reach MOP20 billion, and that the average daily GGR will reach MOP691 million, up 4% month-on-month, with an expectation of strong takings during the Lunar New Year

Hotel occupancy is like 2019 levels, and concerts during the holiday could boost tourism, according to Morgan Stanley.

A Bloomberg survey of eight brokerages shows the city's gaming revenue is expected to return to 78% of pre-Covid levels this year, with mass-market takings set to beat 2019's level by 14%.

Meanwhile, a recent Fitch report shows mass market baccarat has almost fully recovered to 2019 levels, particularly in the premium mass segment, which is Wynn's target market.

Mass market baccarat reached 91% of the full year 2019 levels, although fourth quarter of 2023 levels exceeded the same period in 2019 levels.

'FADO NIGHTS' FROM MARCH

The "Fado Nights" concerts will be held on the weekends from March 1 to 24 at the Dom Pedro V Theatre, featuring 12 traditional fado performances. Portuguese fado singers Tiago Correia and Bárbara Santos were invited to perform solo and duet. These artists will perform light instrumental music themes on the Portuguese guitar, violin, saxophone, piano, Yangqin (a traditional Chinese instrument), and more.

UM LAUNCHES MA IN TEACHING ENGLISH

The University of Macau will launch a Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program in the 2024/2025 academic year. The program will provide advanced training and learning opportunities for both pre-service and in-service English teachers in Macau and the Greater Bay Area. According to a statement, the program "is practice-oriented: instead of a traditional research thesis, students are required to submit a project report that demonstrates their teaching practice and reflection abilities to fulfil the graduation criteria."

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RUINS OF ST. PAUL'S CLOSED SATURDAY

The forecourt and staircase of the former Mater Dei Church at the Ruins of St. Paul's will close temporarily Saturday. The closure begins at 4:30 p.m. ahead of the 2024 "Happy Chinese New Year" launching ceremony and the "Happy Chinese New Year, Macao Full Spring" concert to be held that evening. The Museum of Sacred Art and Crypt and the exhibition "Visiting the Ruins of St. Paul's in Space and Time - Exhibition of Virtual Reality" at the Ruins of St. Paul's will also be suspended from 4 p.m.

'SECOND-TIER' CHANNELS IN COOPERATION ZONE START TESTING

Several "second-tier" channels in the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, including Hengqin Bridge, Hengqin Tunnel and Shenjing Passage, were scheduled to start comprehensive operational testing from yesterday, according to a notice issued by the Economic Development Bureau of the Cooperation Zone. Currently, there are seven customs surveillance zones in five "second-tier" channels. According to regulations, when travelers (excluding non-resident travelers) carry goods with a value of no more than RMB8,000 and enter the Chinese mainland via the "second-tier" channels from the zone, their goods will be released duty-free by Customs.

ID TO ALLOW PRIVATE TEACHING AT DOM BOSCO SWIMMING POOL

CERTAIN time slots at the Dom Bosco Swimming Pool will be offered to the public for private swimming classes with approved applications, the Sports Bureau (ID) announced yesterday in a statement.

Applications will be accepted for the two time slots from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. - each lasting for an hour - on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. The bureau will incorporate the time slots into terms, with each term running for two months.

March and April will be the first term, May and June will be the second, and so on.

All local residents over age 18 who are certified to teach swimming will be eligible to apply as instructors.

They must submit identity documents and certification details with their application, which will be accepted from the first day of each even month.

During the first 10 days of each application period, applicants may apply for a maximum of four slots, and each applicant may only book a maximum of six slots each term.



Fees of MOP60 per hour will be charged for an applicant and a student, while MOP75 will be charged per hour for an

applicant and two students. To aid entry, successful applicants will need to present their ID card or digital identi-

ty on their One Account app at the door. Wristbands will be issued and must be worn at all times during use. **AL**

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IN MACAU (2023)



TECH

30 journalists, lawyers and activists hacked with Pegasus in Jordan, forensic probe finds

FRANK BAJAK,
TECHNOLOGY WRITER

ISRAELI-made Pegasus spyware was used in Jordan to hack the cellphones of at least 30 people, including journalists, lawyers, human rights and political activists, the digital rights group Access Now said yesterday.

The hacking with spyware made by Israel's NSO Group occurred from early 2020 until last November, Access Now said in its report. It did not accuse Jordan's government of the hacking.

One of the targets was Human Rights Watch's deputy director for the region, Adam Coogle, who said in an interview that it was difficult to imagine who other than Jordan's government would be interested in hacking those who were targeted.

The Jordanian government had no immediate comment the report.

In a 2022 report detailing a much smaller group of Pegasus victims in Jordan, digital sleuths at the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab identified two operators of the spyware it said may have been agents of the Jordanian government. A year earlier, Axios reported on negotiations between Jordan's government and NSO Group.

"We believe this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the use of Pegasus spyware in Jordan, and that the true number of victims is likely much higher," Access Now said. Its Middle East and

AP PHOTO



North Africa director, Marwa Fatafta, said at least 30 of 35 known targeted individuals were successfully hacked.

Citizen Lab confirmed all but five of the infections, with 21 victims asking to remain anonymous, citing the risk of reprisal. The rest were identified by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International's Security Lab, and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project.

NSO Group says it only sells to vetted intelligence and law enforcement agencies — and only for use against terrorists and serious criminals. But cybersecurity researchers who have tracked the spyware's use in 45 countries have documented dozens of cases of politically motivated abuse

of the spyware — from Mexico and Thailand to Poland and Saudi Arabia.

An NSO Group spokesperson said the company would not confirm or deny its clients' identities. NSO Group says it vets customers and investigates any report its spyware has been abused.

The U.S. government was unpersuaded and blacklisted the NSO Group in November 2021, when iPhone maker Apple Inc. sued it, calling its employees "amoral 21st century mercenaries who have created highly sophisticated cyber-surveillance machinery that invites routine and flagrant abuse."

Those targeted in Jordan include Human Rights Watch's senior researcher for Jordan and Syria,

Hiba Zayadin. Both she and Coogle had received threat notifications from Apple on Aug. 29 that state-sponsored attackers had attempted to compromise their iPhones.

Coogle's local, personal iPhone was successfully hacked in October 2022, he said, just two weeks after the human rights group published a report documenting the persecution and harassment of citizens organizing peaceful political dissent.

After that, Coogle activated "Lockdown Mode," on the iPhone, which Apple recommends for iPhone users at high risk.

Human Rights Watch said in a statement yesterday that it had contacted NSO Group about the attacks and specifically asked it

to investigate the hack of Coogle's device "but has received no substantive response to these inquiries."

Jordanian human rights lawyer Hala Ahed — known for defending women's and workers rights and prisoners of conscience — was also targeted at least twice by Pegasus, successfully in March 2021 then unsuccessfully in February 2023, Access Now said.

About half of those found to have been targeted by Pegasus in Jordan — 16 in all — were journalists or media workers, the report said.

One veteran Palestinian-American journalist and columnist, Dauod Kuttab, was hacked with Pegasus three times between February 2022 and September 2023.

Along the way, he said, he's learned important lessons about not clicking on links in messages purporting to be from legitimate contacts, which is how one of the Pegasus hacks snared him.

Kuttab refused to speculate about who might have targeted him.

"I always assume that somebody is listening to my conversations," he said, as getting surveilled "comes with the territory" when you are journalist in the Middle East. But Kuttab does worry about his sources being compromised by hacks — and the violation of his privacy.

"Regardless of who did it, it's not right to intervene into my personal, family privacy and my professional privacy." **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

AWAY Spa at W Macau announces February offerings



As Chinese New Year unfolds, W Macau – Studio City has announced New Year and Valentine's Day offerings at its Away Spa.

The AWAY Spa's 'Rejuvenating Journey' package

offers a "luxurious touch" inspired by Chinese wellness philosophies through a 60-minute bamboo massage and a 30-minute jade stone facial to restore balance and relieve stress.

From Feb. 1 to 29, AWAY Spa will offer a 'Love Season's Rituals' package for couples, which includes a 60-minute body massage for two.

"At AWAY Spa, FIT and WET, we aim to ensure that all our guests have the freedom to explore, let loose and be themselves," said Adrian Chan, general manager, W Macau – Studio City.

"Breaking the norms of traditional luxury wellness programs that focus on remedies and corrections, we look to enhance and enrich through our bold, liberating and real offerings," added Chan.

Volunteers from Sands China celebrate Chinese New Year



Around 200 Sands China volunteers, including Sands Cares Ambassadors, company executives, and other employees, continued a 15-year tradition of serving the elderly for

Chinese New Year, with a visit to Seac Pai Van public housing in Coloane yesterday.

While there, the volunteers shared the warmth of the festive season

with around 150 elderly residents, all of whom are users of the Peng On Tung Tele-Assistance program organized by the General Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Macau (UGAMM).

The volunteers brought along cleaning supplies for their visit to clean and tidy up the homes of the elderly to welcome the year of the dragon.

Sands China has supported the Peng On Tung Tele-Assistance program since 2010 and has donated MOP3.03 million to date, helping it deliver value-added services for nearly 16,800 elderly people.

ECONOMIC WATCH

CHINESE MAINLAND, HONG KONG MOVE TO PROMOTE FINANCIAL COOPERATION, CONNECTIVITY

FANG DONG, XINHUA

CHINA'S central bank and the financial authority of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region have jointly rolled out new measures to strengthen financial cooperation, which is expected to promote the country's financial opening up and consolidate Hong Kong's role as an international financial center.

The six measures unveiled focus on market connectivity improvement and cross-border capital facilitation between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong.

Firstly, bonds under the Bond Connect program, which include the renminbi (RMB) treasury bonds and financial bonds issued by policy banks, will be allowed as the eligible collateral for the RMB liquidity arrangement of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), according to the People's Bank of China (PBOC) and the HKMA.

Allowing overseas institutions to use high-quality bonds held under Bond Connect as collateral for open market operations in Hong Kong will further enhance the attractiveness of China's bond market, said John Thang, head of financial markets at Standard Chartered Hong Kong, Taiwan and GBA.

As RMB bonds have high investment and hedging value and



MDT ARCHIVE

stable return, foreign investors have attached great importance to RMB bonds in asset allocation, Thang said.

Secondly, foreign investors are able to more deeply participate in domestic bond repurchase business, which experts believe will help investors better manage liquidity and control capital costs, marking a step forward in the

bond market opening.

By the end of 2023, a total of 1,124 overseas institutions from more than 70 countries and regions had entered the Chinese bond market, holding 3.72 trillion yuan (\$523.58 billion) of bonds.

Thirdly, detailed rules that were published to improve the Cross-border Wealth Management Connect Scheme in the

Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) will also be enhanced.

Launched in 2021, the scheme allows residents of Hong Kong, Macao and nine cities in Guangdong Province to invest directly across the boundary of the designated wealth management products. By the end of 2023, 67 banks and 69,000 investors in

the GBA had joined the scheme, with cross-boundary remittances amounting to 12.8 billion yuan.

The new rules include securities brokerages in the scheme, raise the individual quota from 1 million yuan to 3 million yuan, and add RMB deposit products of mainland banks. It will be more convenient for GBA residents to participate in the scheme, with diversified investment channels and more wealth management products.

Fourth, Hong Kong and Macao residents will enjoy favorable policies on home purchase payments in other GBA cities to better meet their housing demand.

Fifth, the Shenzhen-Hong Kong credit investigation cooperation will be expanded to facilitate cross-border financing.

Sixth, the digital RMB pilot will be deepened to better serve Hong Kong and mainland residents and enterprises.

The PBOC and the HKMA will explore digital RMB cooperation in multiple specific areas, including individual small cross-border remittances, payment bar codes in Hong Kong, e-commerce, and tuition payment.

Analysts believe the new measures show China's commitment to opening up and will promote mainland-Hong Kong financial cooperation and connectivity, as well as consolidate and improve Hong Kong's role as an international financial center.

Xuan Changneng, vice governor of the PBOC, said the central bank will work closely with Hong Kong financial authorities to expand cooperation and promote the further development of Hong Kong as an international financial center. **MDT/XINHUA**

AS the Spring Festival approaches, many people can't wait to rush back home for a family reunion. A man from Lu'an city in East China's Anhui province took a novel way - flying a small fixed-wing aircraft - to take his 7-year-old daughter back to their hometown village, Jimu News reported.

The man, surnamed Wang, works as a flight instructor and provides flight license training, so he frequently travels by plane, according to the report. In previous years, he also flew back home.

The aircraft is a two-seater, with luggage placed in the rear of the cabin. This flight from Lu'an to his hometown, Lixin village, took about 50 minutes, saving over two hours compared to driving, which usually takes around three hours. And there is a flight camp near

CNY

Man takes daughter in a small plane to hometown for Spring Festival

his hometown where he could land.

"Before the flight, I need to report the takeoff time to the Civil Aviation Administration of China and other relevant authorities, confirm that the flight path is clear, and then I can take off," Wang was quoted as saying. "Since Lu'an to Lixin is a fixed route, reporting a few hours in advance is sufficient," he added.

Some netizens expressed concern about the safety of flying a small aircraft with a child. Wang said he has been flying with his daughter since she was in kindergarten. And this particular flight

was quite smooth, and the child even took a nap during the journey.

"In terms of laws and regulations, the minimum age for obtaining a pilot's license is 17, but there are no age restrictions for flying experience. Therefore, children can ride in small aircraft as long as their physical condition allows," Wang added.

After Wang posted the video on social media, many netizens expressed envy, with some saying, "My childhood dream was to pilot a helicopter back to the countryside," and "Flying back home by plane means no traffic jams."

CHINA DAILY



A video screenshot shows Wang and his daughter flying a small fixed-wing aircraft back to their hometown

TAIWAN

Member of pro-unification Nationalists elected speaker in a prize for China

CHRISTOPHER BODEEN,
TAIPEI

HAN Kuo-yu of Taiwan's pro-unification Nationalists was elected speaker of the island's legislature yesterday, a sort of a prize for mainland China.

The Nationalists, also known as the Kuomintang or KMT, won 52 of the legislature's 113 seats in a Jan. 13 election. The Democratic Progressive Party won 51, a decline from the 63 seats it held in the last legislature. The remainder went to two independents and the recently formed Taiwan People's Party.

Han secured the speaker position without an absolute majority but won the support of the two independents for a total of 54 votes. The eight Taiwan People's Party legislators, all of whom hold at-large seats, abstained from voting in the second round.

Lai Ching-te was elected leader on Jan. 13, giving the independence-leaning DPP a third consecutive four-year term in office. The Chinese government loathes Lai and has refused most contact with Taiwan's government since his



Speaker of Legislative Yuan: Han Kuo-yu of Kuomintang

predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, won a first term in 2016.

But Beijing has been in regular contact with the Nationalists, who ruled Taiwan with an iron fist for nearly four decades after fleeing to the island in 1949 as the Communists swept to power in main-

land China.

China threatens to attack Taiwan if it declares formal independence or delays too long in meeting demands for unification under Beijing's control. The overwhelming majority of Taiwanese favor maintaining the

island's de-facto independent status despite China's attempts at military, diplomatic and economic coercion.

China has managed to reduce the number of Taiwan's formal diplomatic allies to just 12, mainly through the use of economic in-

ducements, while upping its military threats. Taiwan's military said China sent 33 warplanes and six naval ships into waters and aerospace near the island. Among the warplanes, 14 cross the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan air defense identification zone, the authorities said.

Han, 66, is a somewhat controversial character seen by some as a right-wing populist. He lost to Tsai 57% to 38%, shortly after which he lost his job as mayor of the major southern port city of Kaohsiung in a recall election. However, he remains popular within the Nationalists, which put him on the top of its list of at-large candidates.

China had no direct comment on Han's election, although the spokesperson for the Cabinet's Taiwan Affairs Office, called on the U.S. — Taiwan's most important, though unofficial ally — to "refrain from sending wrong signals to Taiwan independence separatist forces."

"Apart from being part of China, Taiwan has no other status under international law," spokesperson Chen Binhua yesterday said at a news conference. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

Court convicts four of rioting over storming of the legislature in 2019 protests

A Hong Kong court convicted four people yesterday for rioting over the storming of the city's legislative council building at the height of the anti-government protests more than four years ago.

The break-in on July 1 in 2019 — the 22nd anniversary of the territory's return to China — was one of the most chaotic episodes of the massive protests sparked by a now-withdrawn extradition bill.

Hundreds of protesters swarmed into the legislature that night, defacing pictures and smashing furniture. Some spray-painted slogans in the chamber and painted over the territory's emblem on a wall before vacating the site as riot police cleared surrounding streets with tear gas and then moved inside. The legislature eventually spent about 36



Actor Gregory Wong, one of the six defendants who pleaded not guilty

million Hong Kong dollars (\$4.6 million) on repairing the damages, the court heard earlier.

Six defendants, including actor Gregory Wong and two reporters, Wong

Ka-ho and Ma Kai-chung, pleaded not guilty in 2023 to rioting.

Yesterday, judge Li Chi-ho found four of the six defendants, including Gregory Wong, guilty of rioting.

Wong Ka-ho and Ma were acquitted of the rioting charge but were convicted for unlawful entry into the legislature.

Li said in his written judgment that there was a directive to ask all people to leave. "I can't see how the defense can distort the meaning of the word and exclude journalists from 'everyone,'" he said.

He added it was a "wrong idea" for Wong Ka-ho to think that reporters can stay there to document the developments.

During the trial, Gregory Wong said he was at the scene to deliver chargers to a reporter. But the judge challenged his arguments, saying he had hugged a protester before leaving the chamber as an expression of support.

"His intention of entering the legislature is ob-

vious, it is to join this riot," he said.

Earlier, the court heard that defendant Lam Kam-kwan, who was convicted of rioting and a separate charge of criminal damage yesterday, had been detained in mainland China in August 2019 and had been forced to write a repentance letter.

Lam said some Hong Kong police officers later met him and told him that if he would not admit his wrongdoing, he then could not return to the city. The officers denied they had threatened Lam.

Li said in his judgement the accusations against the police "were all lies."

Eight others, including activists Ventus Lau, Owen Chow and former student leader Althea Suen, were also charged for rioting in the same case and previously

entered a guilty plea.

All 14 defendants will have a chance to mitigate and ask for a more lenient sentence, which will be handed down in March.

The 2019 protests were sparked by a proposed extradition law that would have allowed Hong Kong criminal suspects to be sent to the mainland for trial. The government withdrew the bill, but the protesters widened their demands to include direct elections for the city's leaders and police accountability.

The social movement was the biggest challenge against the Hong Kong government since the city's handover in 1997 and triggered the authorities to impose a national security law in 2020 to quell it. Following the introduction of the security law, many of the city's leading activists were arrested, silenced or forced into self-exile.

More than 10,200 people were arrested in connection to the protests for various crimes, such as rioting and participating in an unauthorized assembly. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Construction site the dam is seen near Mekong river in Luang Prabang

LAOS

Fears grow that dam across Mekong River could harm World Heritage site of Luang Prabang

DAVID RISING, LUANG PRABANG

LANDLOCKED Laos doesn't have the famous beaches of its neighbors to attract tourists, but instead relies on the pristine beauty of its mountains and rivers and historical sites to bring in visitors.

The crown jewel is Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where legend has it that Buddha once rested during his travels. It brings all the elements together, with its mix of historic Laotian and French colonial architecture on a peninsula at the confluence of the Mekong and the Nam Khan rivers.

But a multibillion-dollar dam project underway 25 kilometers (15 miles) upstream has prompted concerns that it could result in the city losing its UNESCO status,

and broader questions about what the government's ambitious plans to build multiple dams across the Mekong will do to the river, the lifeblood of Southeast Asia.

"When the Luang Prabang Dam is complete, and it's already well under construction, the river is going to trickle into a dead body of water," said Brian Eyler, director of the Washington-based Stimson Center's Southeast Asia Program and its Energy, Water and Sustainability Program.

"The people going to Luang Prabang as tourists to see the mighty Mekong and see how the Lao people interact with the river, all those interactions are going to be gone — all the fishing, meaningful local boating and commerce done by locals on relatively small boats will end."

The dam is also being built near

an active fault line, and though studies of the design conclude it could withstand an earthquake, local residents are worried.

For Som Phone, a 38-year-old tour boat operator and lifelong Luang Prabang resident, memories of the 2018 collapse of another dam in Laos that killed dozens and displaced thousands, blamed on shoddy construction, are still fresh.

"Many people died," he said.

NOT (YET) ENDANGERED-LISTED

Luang Prabang is not yet on UNESCO's list of endangered World Heritage sites, but the Paris-based agency has outlined a series of concerns, including the protection of historic buildings and the effect of the dam project on protected wetlands and the city's riverbanks, and is awaiting a report back from Laos.

"Previous studies carried out by the authorities have not yet established whether or not the project could have a negative impact," UNESCO said in an emailed response to questions from The Associated Press.

The issue is to be discussed by UNESCO in July during its meetings in New Delhi, but in the meantime, the construction continues.

The site is a hive of activity, with backhoes tearing shovelfuls of deep red soil from the hills along the river, which are then dumped along with loads of stone into the Mekong to form a foundation.

The dam site is within view of the Pak Ou caves, home to hundreds of Buddha statues and a popular side trip for tourists visiting Luang Prabang.

Once completed, the project is expected to displace more than 500

families and impact 20 villages.

Luang Prabang's World Heritage Office referred queries on the status of its response to UNESCO to the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, which referred questions to the Foreign Ministry.

The Foreign Ministry refused to comment on the telephone and did not respond to the emailed questions it requested.

Nestled among the mountains of northern Laos, Luang Prabang was the capital from the 14th to the 16th century before it was moved to Vientiane.

Its historic center has numerous Buddhist temples, a former royal palace, buildings from the French colonial era and a mountaintop shrine built around what is said to be Buddha's footprint. Several picturesque waterfalls are within a short drive from the city.

A bustling night market boasts stalls selling traditional Lao handicrafts, locally made whisky, as well as trinkets made from fragments of some of the millions of American bombs dropped on the country during the Vietnam conflict in a campaign to try to disrupt communist supply lines. At a vibrant morning market, vendors sell brightly colored peppers, spices, fish and more exotic foods.

Many visitors arrive on small river cruise boats, or by train on a new high-speed rail system, built with funding from China as part of

AUSTRALIA

New Zealand says it will contemplate sharing military tech with US, Britain

NEW Zealand said yesterday it will contemplate sharing advanced military technologies with the United States and Britain as it pursues closer defense ties with Australia amid worries over an increasingly assertive China.

The defense and foreign ministers of Australia and New Zealand met in Melbourne to discuss deepening security ties between the neighboring nations. It was their first joint meeting since New Zealand's right-leaning coalition government took office last year.

Australia announced it will send officials to New Zealand this year to discuss the three-way defense partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

China, the United States and others are wrangling for influence in the strategically crucial Pacific.

The U.S. and Britain have agreed to provide Australia with a fleet of submarines powered by U.S. nuclear technology.

New Zealand has banned nuclear-powered ships from using its ports since 1984. However, it is pondering whether to become involved in a commitment between Australia, Britain and the United States to develop and share advanced military capabilities, including artificial intelligence, electronic warfare and hypersonic technology.

Meanwhile, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong expressed concern about allegations that several employees of the main U.N. aid agency in the war-battered Gaza Strip participated in the deadly Hamas attack on Israel four months ago. But she hinted at a possible resumption of the agency's funding from Australia in the "absence of any alternatives".

At least 10 countries, including Australia, have suspended funding to Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, known as UNRWA, over the allegations. **MDT/AP**



This image made from video shows Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles (left) and New Zealand Defence Minister Judith Collins attending a press conference in Melbourne, yesterday

Oak Ou cave is seen near Mekong river in Luang Prabang

its Belt and Road project, which connects Vientiane with the Chinese city of Kunming.

It was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995 for its "unique, remarkably well-preserved townscape" combined with its "natural spaces located in the heart of the city and along the riverbanks and wetlands."

NINE PROJECTS ACROSS MEKONG

The Luang Prabang dam is one of nine that Laos plans across the Mekong. Two others already exist, and Laos has also constructed dozens of dams on Mekong tributaries, moving at a rapid pace over about the last 12 years as part of an ambitious government plan to make the country the "battery of Southeast Asia" by supplying its neighbors with electricity.

Laos has relied heavily on foreign funding, primarily from China and Thailand, for the construction, part of the reason it now owes a crippling debt to China that it is struggling to repay.

"When we think about the Laos' 'battery of Southeast Asia,' program, that was really Laos flinging its doors wide open to foreign investors to come in and build dams," said Eyler, who also co-leads the

Stimson Center's Mekong Dam Monitor program.

Approval of dam projects moves quickly, often without thorough consideration of their impact, and the electricity is largely exported to Laos' neighbors like Thailand, he added.

"This dam won't generate a lot of power for Laos, it's going to power new shopping malls in Bangkok," Eyler said of the Luang Prabang project. "So there's a mismatch of those who are negatively affected and those who are beneficiaries."

The first mainstream dam was the Xayaburi dam, just downstream from Luang Prabang, which began operating in 2019 and has already affected the city, said Philip Hirsch, a professor emeritus of human geography at Sydney University.

"It's already become a lake-side town rather than a river-side town ... due to the effects of the Xayaburi dam downstream," he said.

Plans are to allow a constant flow of water through the new Luang Prabang dam, as a so-called run-of-the-river dam, but the waters will be further starved of sediment, affecting traditional fishing and farming of the banks.

In a report commissioned

by Laotian authorities, British consultancy CBA concluded that "key issues relating to catastrophic flooding due to dam failure and changes to water levels on the Mekong have been addressed," but seismologists and others remain concerned about it being built near an active fault line.

"When you have a reservoir 78 kilometers long and you've raised the water level about 40 meters, you'd just have a wall of water and given how low-lying some of the parts of Luang Prabang are along the river, it'd be devastating," Hirsch said.

INDEPENDENT SUPERVISION

The Mekong River Commission, an organization formed for cooperation on issues regarding the river by the countries through which it flows — Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam — said its technical review of the project showed ground movement in recent earthquakes was "significantly below the design limit" of the dam.

In a written response to questions from the AP, it noted that Laos' government has established an independent panel to monitor the issue of dam safety.

The Mekong River supports

the largest inland fishery in the world, and the river commission also examined the dam's potential impact on hydrology, sediment, water quality, fish and other issues.

It concluded that the dam, when taken into consideration with others already built or planned by Laos, could cause harm downstream in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, confirming concerns those countries have voiced.

"In isolation, the potential transboundary harmful effects due to the Luang Prabang hydropower project may not be substantial," the river commission said. "But on top of the other existing and planned development it may have considerable impact on the other riparian states."

For tourist Barbara Curti who came to Luang Prabang to see "the real people, the real life" of Laos, a new dam could significantly impact the appeal of the city as a destination.

"For me, it's a problem, the construction of the dam, because they would change too much of the life and the real character of the city," said the 46-year-old Italian, sitting on the banks of the Mekong with a friend.

"In my opinion, we have to preserve the traditions." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



In this image taken from video, Indiana Rep. Jim Lucas, R-Seymour, flashes a holstered gun to students visiting the statehouse to talk to lawmakers about gun control, in Indianapolis

USA

Video shows Indiana lawmaker showing holstered pistol to students for gun control

ISABELLA VOLMERT,
INDIANAPOLIS

A video taken by a high school student shows an Indiana lawmaker flash a gun to students who were visiting the statehouse to talk to legislators about gun control.

A student from Burriss Laboratory School in Muncie told The Associated Press that she and four other students were at the state Capitol on Tuesday to participate in a day of advocacy with Students Demand Action, an arm of Everytown for Gun Safety. Alana Trissel, 17, said state Rep. Jim Lucas asked the students what brought them to the Capitol and began to defend gun rights.

Lucas, a Republican from Seymour, and the group then conversed outside the elevator and one of the students filmed the interaction, as was first reported by the Statehouse File, a student journalism news site at Franklin College in Franklin, Indiana.

In the video, Lucas told the students that people have to protect themselves and referenced failures of law enforcement to prevent mass casualties during school shootings in Parkland, Florida, and Uvalde, Texas,

In discussing places where firearms are banned, Lucas

said people aren't "truly free" unless they can defend themselves. A student off camera asked Lucas if he means carrying a firearm. Just over six minutes into the 10-minute video, Lucas said, "I'm carrying right now," and holds open his suit jacket exposing a holstered handgun. It was not immediately clear what kind of gun Lucas was carrying.

"Nothing about someone carrying a gun makes me feel safe," a student said off camera after Lucas lifted his jacket.

The Associated Press could not immediately reach Lucas and left messages with his press secretary and at his Facebook page. Phone numbers in public records listed with his name were not connected.

In public Facebook posts on Tuesday night and yesterday [Macau time], Lucas didn't describe his actions. He said the conversation "was respectful, but it was clearly facts, reason and logic vs. plain emotion."

"I fear for, and pity those that are being indoctrinated to fear that which is their best means of self-defense," he added in a post, in which he also linked to news articles about the Parkland and Uvalde killings in the comments section. "People are also being indoctrinated to depend on government for their 'safety,'

even when shown that government has clearly ruled that government doesn't have the duty to protect us."

Trissel said that the conversation took a "turn for the worst" after he showed the weapon. When asked by a student why he feels the need to carry a gun, Lucas said "to be able to defend myself."

Trissel disputed Lucas' claim that the group's argument was based on emotion, and she said she felt talked over.

"Since a state legislator had shown a weapon, I felt all the more powerless," she said. "I felt scared. I felt alone. I was timid and almost petrified with fear."

Indiana lawmakers and their staff are allowed to carry handguns in the Capitol and on complex grounds. A bill introduced this year would extend that right to some statewide elected officials and their staff.

The video shows Lucas telling the students to go to a gun range and learn how to shoot, before Trissel interrupts him and asks if he has lost anyone to gun violence. Lucas said he has defended his family twice with a firearm and did not elaborate.

Lucas eventually begins to walk away and asked, "Anybody else have any rational con-

cerns they'd like to address?" When the conversation began again, he walked away.

Trissel said after speaking to Lucas and other state representatives about gun control, she left the Capitol feeling unheard.

Lucas was in the news last summer when he pleaded guilty to misdemeanor drunken driving charges after police said he crashed his pickup truck through an interstate highway guardrail and drove away. Lucas, who was first elected to the Legislature in 2012, was allowed to keep his position; state law only prohibits those with felony convictions from holding elected office.

Lucas is a prominent supporter of loosening gun laws and sponsored a bill last year that established a state-funded handgun training program for teachers.

According to a report from The Republic of Columbus, Indiana, Lucas told students at an event in 2020 that gun control laws won't prevent mass killings at schools and that he was carrying at the moment. He then asked if that scares anyone in the audience, the report says.

He has faced controversy several times in the past for what critics called racist social media posts. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1979 Sid Vicious DIES FROM DRUGS OVERDOSE



Sex Pistols' bass player Sid Vicious has died of a heroin overdose in New York.

His mother, Anne Beverley, found him dead in bed with his sleeping girlfriend in an apartment in Greenwich Village this morning.

There had been a party in the flat to celebrate Mr Vicious' release on \$50,000 bail yesterday pending his trial for the murder of his former girlfriend, Nancy Spungen, last October.

The precise details of his death are unknown but party guests say Sid Vicious - real name John Simon Ritchie - took some heroin at midnight.

His mother, once a registered addict, said: "He knew the smack was pure and strong and took a lot less than usual."

Shortly after taking the drug Mr Vicious, 21, collapsed, went into seizure and displayed the symptoms of overdose.

He revived 40 minutes later and went to bed with his girlfriend, Michelle Robinson, at about 0300 local time.

The first police officer on the scene later in the morning was Robert Zink who discovered "a syringe, a spoon and what is probably residue near the body."

The troubled punk musician - renowned for his violent behaviour - had been on a detoxification, methadone programme in prison, but he had developed a £40 a day habit since meeting Miss Spungen last year.

It was the second time Virgin Records - the Sex Pistols' label - had to bail out Sid Vicious.

He was re-arrested after his initial bail for assaulting Patti Smith's brother, Todd, in a New York disco and had just served another 55 days in prison.

A spokesman for Virgin boss Richard Branson said: "In retrospect he was obviously far safer in jail where the temptations that ultimately killed him were not present."

Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McClaren - who was planning a comeback for the band - also blames the person who gave him the heroin at the party.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The autopsy confirmed Sid Vicious died from an accumulation of fluid on the lungs, characteristic of heroin abuse.

Anne Beverley and Malcolm McClaren were involved in a wrangle over where Vicious should be buried.

Mr McClaren thought he should be buried in London, his home town, but Vicious' wish was to be buried with Nancy Spungen in Philadelphia.

Ms Beverley scattered her son's ashes in the Jewish graveyard where Ms Spungen had been interred, without seeking the family's permission.

The Sex Pistols re-formed for their 20th anniversary in 1996 with original bassist Glen Matlock taking the place of Sid Vicious.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Spend a quiet day with the one you love. You will be able to pick up on future trends if you keep your eyes peeled for unique ideas. Overindulgence may be a problem.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Try to get every one involved; it will help bring you closer together. Stick to your own projects and by the end of the day you'll shine.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You may find that your generosity has been taken for granted. You are best to look into investments that will grow in value over an extended period of time.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
If you haven't already, don't be afraid to start your own small business on the side. You will enjoy socializing and unusual forms of entertainment.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Talk to someone you trust in order to see the whole picture. You may want to put everyone to work on a project that will keep them all too busy to complain.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Be careful that you aren't saddled with the responsibilities of others. Travel and communications will not run as smoothly as you had hoped.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Get involved in fitness programs that will bring you in contact with new friends. Take time to do some writing, whether it's correspondence, poetry, or keeping a journal.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You will be misinterpreted if you get involved in other people's problems. Enjoy a quiet dinner for two and discuss some of the plans you have for the future.

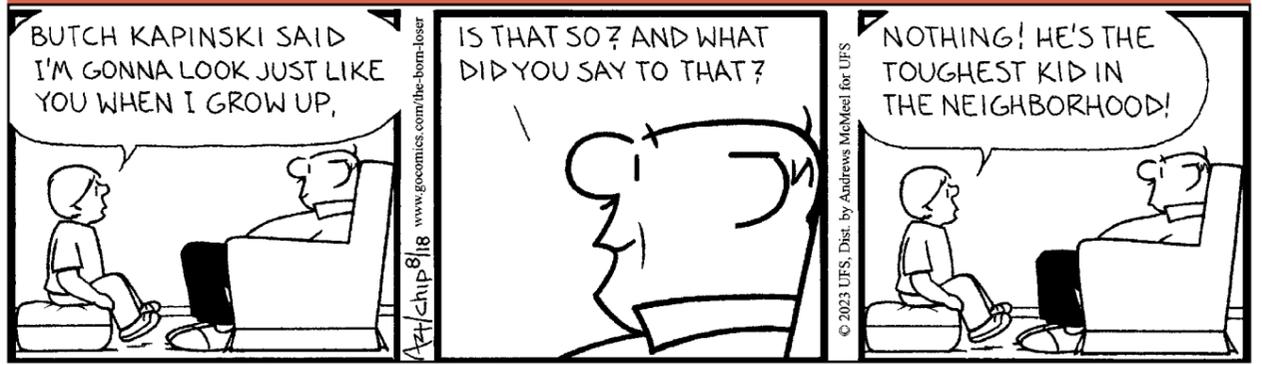
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Changes regarding family members will set you off. Opportunities to meet new lovers will evolve through your interaction with groups or fundraising functions.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Changes regarding family members will set you off. Opportunities to meet new lovers will evolve through your interaction with groups or fundraising functions.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Ask a close friend for advice. Mingle with those who can help you get ahead. Try to keep a low profile. Go after your goals and don't be afraid to ask for assistance.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
After all, they may have valuable information to pass on. Those you live with may be experiencing problems. You can expect opposition from family as well as colleagues.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY					EASY+				
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WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-7	1	cloudy
Changchun	-22	-9	fine
Chengdu	5	9	rain
Chongqing	8	12	overcast
Fuzhou	12	14	overcast
Guangzhou	18	25	cloudy
Guiyang	5	15	showers
Haikou	20	29	cloudy
Hangzhou	3	7	rain
Harbin	-25	-13	fine
Hefei	-2	-1	snow
Nanjing	0	2	rain
Shanghai	5	8	rain
Taipei	17	20	overcast
Wuhan	0	1	rain
Hong Kong	20	23	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-7	0	windy
Frankfurt	2	8	cloudy
Paris	1	10	cloudy
London	7	13	cloudy
New York	1	6	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Magna ___; 6- Humorous; 11- Photographer Goldin; 14- Render weaponless; 15- Disconcert; 16- Al Jolson's real first name; 17- One of the Allens; 18- Bellini opera; 19- Sweet suffix; 20- Catchall abbr.; 22- Gets under control; 24- Scrutiny; 28- Turnout; 30- Soap ingredient; 31- In search of; 32- Motor truck in Britain; 33- Hollow-horned ruminants; 37- Therapists' org.; 38- Adlai's running mate; 39- Holiday start; 40- An interpretation; 43- Spasm; 45- Kofi of the U.N.; 46- Crafty; 47- Greenish brown fruit of China; 49- Windpipe; 50- Cleave; 51- Composition in verse; 52- Architect I.M.; 53- Dole out; 56- Street machine; 61- Pot used to contain the ashes of a dead person; 62- Name; 63- Rest atop; 64- Cereal grass; 65- ___ salts; 66- Borders;

DOWN 1- Prompt; 2- Pantry pest; 3- Fan sound; 4- ___-la-la; 5- Pardon; 6- Artificial waterway; 7- Ancient Greek coin; 8- Damage; 9- Belief; 10- Article of personal property; 11- Model Campbell; 12- It's a plus; 13- Scottish refusals; 21- ___-Bo; 23- Bushy hairdo; 24- Like some bears and icecaps; 25- Run away with a lover; 26- Aired again; 27- Nasser's org.; 28- Many times; 29- Salt Lake City hoopsters; 31- Composer Bruckner; 33- Continental identity of a Chinese person; 34- Roost; 35- Elicit; 36- Later, dude!; 38- Sicilian volcano; 41- Hamlet, for one; 42- Unappreciative one; 43- Tread underfoot; 44- Sot's sound; 46- It's past due; 47- Wary; 48- Sheeplike; 49- Clan symbol; 50- Boot attachment; 51- Game played on horseback; 54- Guff; 55- Mil. officers; 57- Helping hand; 58- ___ out (relax); 59- Fair-hiring abbr.; 60- Hosp. staffers;

Yesterday's solution

Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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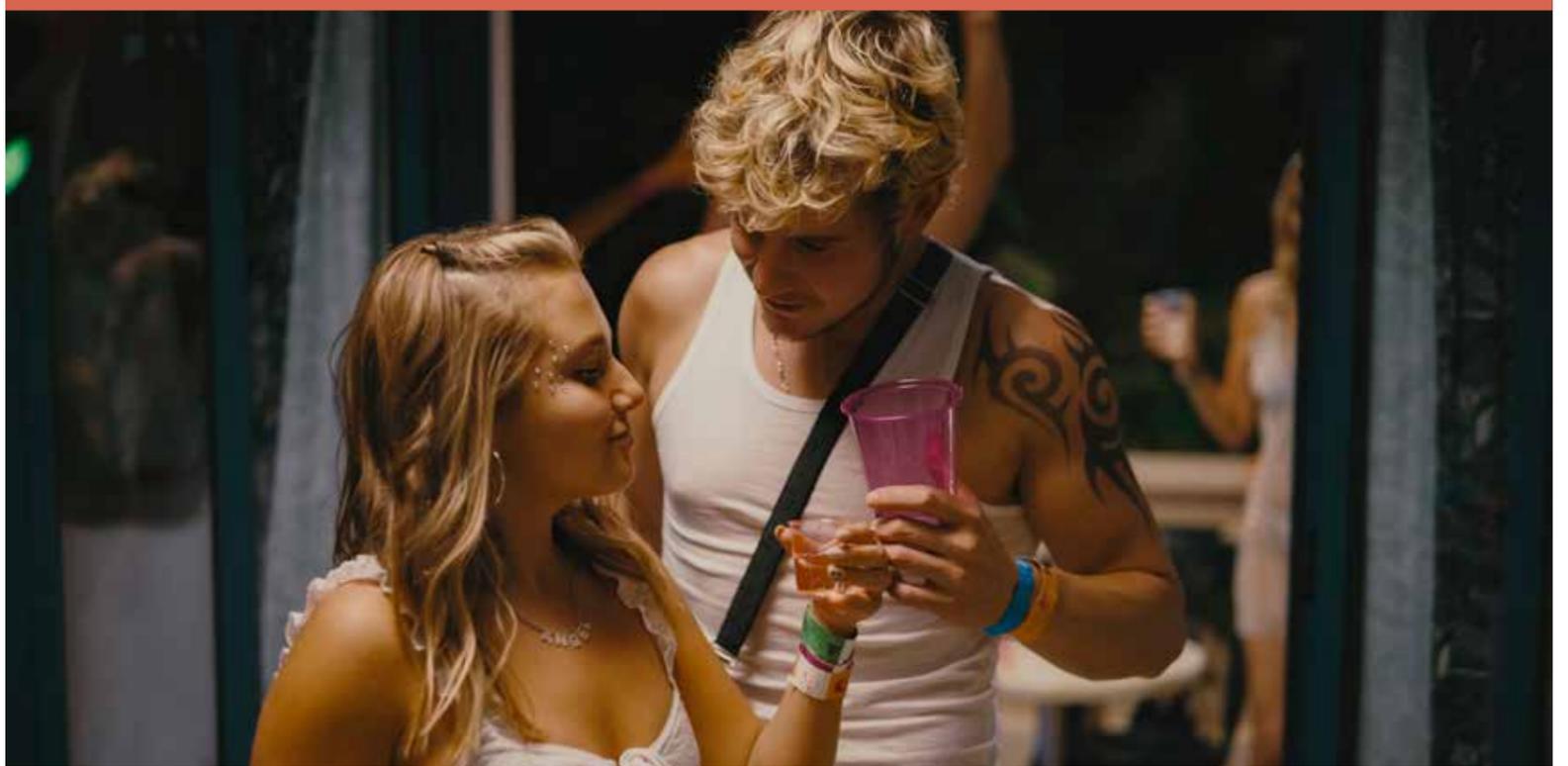
LINDSEY BAHR,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

AP PHOTO

FOR women of a certain age who grew up being told that if they wore the wrong thing, drank a little too much, or gave the wrong signals that they were “asking for it,” it might seem like the youths of today have it good, or at least quite a bit better. Consent seems to matter. Clothing coverage does not. Victims are listened to, sometimes at least.

And yet for all the freedom and exhibitionism and sexual liberation that might be projected on social media, teens are still teens and people are still people and things still happen, casually and in quietly catastrophic grey areas. These are truths that are conveyed powerfully in “How to Have Sex,” a stylish, assured and moving debut from writer-director Molly Manning Walker that opens in North American theaters on Friday.

“How to Have Sex” is not didactic, however, which is what makes it so effective. It’s just a story about a girl, Tara (Mia



Mia McKenna-Bruce (left) and Shaun Thomas in a scene from “How To Have Sex” (Mubi)

DRIVE IN

IN ‘HOW TO HAVE SEX,’ THE PARTY SUDDENLY STOPS BEING FUN

McKenna-Bruce) and her two friends, Em (Enva Lewis) and Skye (Lara Peake) on holiday at a

party resort in Greece. They’re looking to drink and dance, wear neon bustiers and bathing sui-

ts and complicated mesh coverups and meet some guys. Ideally some “fit” ones. And it starts out so fun, like a more innocent and realistic “Spring Breakers.”

Parties on screen rarely feel as fun as they’re supposed to — the joy often looks a little forced. But Walker somehow makes you feel like you’re actually there and kind of loving it, regardless of whether you were the “MTV Beach House” or “Love Island” type, even as a voyeuristic exercise. Much of that energy comes from the three friends, immediately believable as such, charismatic and adorable as they squeal about a very unremarkable hotel room being “luxury.”

Some guys enter the picture soon too, just one balcony over (“Romeo, Romeo where is you?” one character coos). Badger (Shaun Thomas), the guy who catcalls Tara, is probably not many girls’ idea of a Romeo at least on first sight. His hair is badly bleached — a kind of ‘90s boyband look. He’s got a neck tattoo with a red pout and “Hot Legends” scrawled underneath it. This is not boyfriend material or even hookup material, right?

And yet there’s an immediately sweet chemis-

try between him and Tara, who are both posturing as too-cool party people down for any number of humiliating public spectacles, but probably would just rather spend a night in on the couch with each other. In any event, a flirt-ship is born, but other pressures of youthful wildness abound.

Tara, we come to find, is a virgin. This is something Skye makes her feel self-conscious about while also trying to push her to get rid of on the trip. This rite-of-passage has fueled any number of teen comedies over the years, often from the horny boys’ point of view. But the lightheartedness, even in the not-rapey ones, can deny and diminish a reality that its not such a simple thing for either gender.

“How to Have Sex” is partly a movie about trust, knowing who to trust and how to trust yourself but also how to regain that after something traumatic like sexual assault. Badger’s friend Paddy (Samuel Bottomley) does not seem all that different from him, but his vibe is oh so subtly off. Who can discern that at 16 with people you’ve just met? Skye, similarly, seems like she has Tara’s best interests in mind, but this is also

a friendship that she’s too naïve to know is not a healthy one.

There is a hard turning point when things stop being fun in “How to Have Sex,” when one morning Tara is missing from both hotel rooms. Some are concerned. Some are not. One person thinks its funny. She comes back and her night is recreated for the audience, but Tara is changed — a shell of the vibrant person she was just a few hours prior unsure of what she’s feeling, if it’s valid and if anyone would care.

Walker often lets the camera linger on McKenna-Bruce’s face and eyes that convey all the things she can’t find the words for. It is a shattering performance and made all the more devastating because it’s so subtle, without big tears or smashing of mirrors or anything theatrical. Tara just slinks away into a depressive state that barely anyone notices. Her vacation, and life, has turned into a nightmare; Everyone else is still having fun.

“How to Have Sex,” a MUBI release in select North American theaters Friday, has not been rated by the Motion Picture Association. Running time: 90 minutes.



AD

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TASTE OF EDESIA

Exploring umami

IRENE SAM, MDT

THIS Lunar New Year marks the launch of **Zi Yat Heen's** new signature dishes for celebration at **Four Seasons Hotel Macao**. The exciting array of dishes starts with a Poached fresh wild star garoupa fillet in shallot oil and crushed Pata Negra. The culinary team specially selected wild star garoupa for its tender and smooth texture. A richly green shallot oil is poured at a high temperature on the lightly cooked fish fillet to preserve its delicate texture and taste. The result is an umami wonder sprinkled with crushed Pata Negra, which further engages the senses for an unforgettable experience.

Crispy fish maw stuffed with crab meat and shrimp mousse in abalone sauce showcases the kitchen's savoir-faire in handling precious ingredients and meti-

culous cooking techniques. Fish maw tubes are stuffed with Vietnamese tiger prawns and fresh crab meat blended with water chestnuts and Pata Negra. Covered with abalone sauce and garnished with minced sour ginger, it is crispy on the outside and refreshing inside, fully retaining the original shrimp and fish maw flavours.

Inspired by a popular dish in Macau food stalls named "Lobster and Chicken Pot," Braised whole lobster, chicken fillet, and Matsutake mushroom in ground bean sauce launches at a time when Yunnan mushrooms are in season. Local lobster and yellow chicken are sautéed with ground bean sauce, amplifying the aroma of mushrooms and adding flavour to the protein.

Knowing that gourmets in Guangdong prefer spicy dishes that are not overwhelmingly hot, the culinary team prepares a fra-

grant and lightly spiced homemade sauce for Sichuan-style marinated Kuruma prawns with green bean sheets and red spot prawns. Sichuan-style marinated Kuruma prawns are one of the guests' favourite appetisers. Taking it to the next level, sashimi-grade red spot shrimp is added. With three ingredients and different tastes combined, both umami characteristics and textures are emphasised.

Taking aged tangerine's health benefits into action, Zi Yat Heen presents Stir-fried Kagoshima A5 Wagyu beef cubes with crispy chestnut and aged tangerine sauce. The marbled beef is accompanied by seasonal local chestnuts that are crunchy on the outside and soft inside, with a special sauce made with 8-year-aged tangerine to aid digestion and promote wellness.

While respecting the gastronomical culture and tradition of Canton, the culinary team at Zi Yat Heen strives to innovate and surprise guest's discerning palates with diverse choices and exciting new menus throughout the year, incorporating fresh seasonal ingredients and novel ideas to create dishes that are unique yet authentic.

tTUNES

Giorgi Mikadze Trio builds engaging musical bridge linking jazz to Eastern Europe

THE Giorgi Mikadze Trio's new jazz album ends with a bit of studio conversation before Mikadze finally says, "Let's start," as if the group is just getting going.

The album title implies the same, and "Face to Face: Georgian Songbook Vol. 1" will leave listeners wanting more. The set is distinctive, thanks to the performances and source material, which includes pieces by seven composers from the country of Georgia. Most of the music was originally written for film, animation and theatrical soundtracks.

Mikadze is a Georgia native who studied in the United States, and "Face to Face" is his first record leading a traditional piano jazz trio. He's joined by two Frenchmen, bassist François Moutin and drummer Raphaël Pannier, and together they build musical bridges that span borders, presenting a vibrant, dynamic set full of personality across a range of moods.

Especially charming are interpretations of Giya Kancheli's "A Magic Egg" and Shota Milorava's "Same Garden," both compositions from 1970s animated films. "A Magic Egg" builds whimsically on a simple recurring figure, while "Same Garden" evokes Broadway, with Pannier's propulsive percussion leading Mikadze into exhilarating improvisational

explorations.

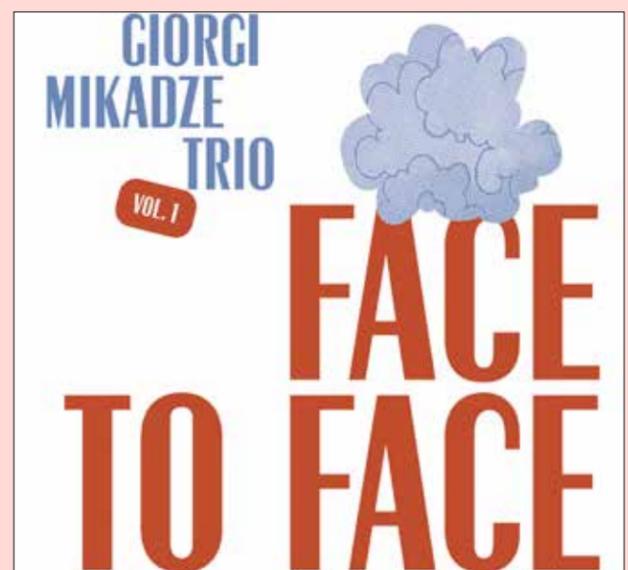
Pannier is a wonder of nuance and invention. His rhythms lap against the melody on Sul Khan Tsintsadze's "Dolls Are Laughing," giving the tune's 6/8 rhythm and Latin influences. On "Wind Takes It Anyway," a pop song by Rusudan Sebiskveradze, the drums and piano engage in entertaining interplay, with melodic percussion skittering against the shimmering tune.

The trio transforms a simple melody on Jansug Kakhidze's ballad "The Moon Over Mtatsminda," creating swirls of sound and swells of emotion. Equally lovely is a plaintive rendition of Nodar Gabunia's "To Nodar," constructed using virtually no beat but thick chords.

Three compositions by Mikadze fit well with the covers. "Nana" sways through stops and starts, and an elusive pulse and spinning syncopation distinguish "Satchidao," Mikadze's reinterpretation of a tune sung during wrestling matches.

"After the Tale" has classical strains, and following an opening piano solo, the dialogue between instruments gradually becomes more animated and morphs into a marvelous maelstrom.

For Mikadze and his trio, "Face to Face" is a terrific start. **STEVEN WINE, MDT/AP**



"Face to Face" by Giorgi Mikadze Trio (PeeWee!)

OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**WASHINGTON'S
 DISINFORMATION-
 FUELED CRACKDOWN
 ON CHINESE
 COMPANIES
 CONTINUES UNABATED**

The United States' Department of Homeland Security recently executed a search warrant at the Ohio-based US subsidiary of Qingdao Sunsong, a Chinese automobile parts manufacturer that a congressional committee has accused of trade fraud.

DHS agents searched the premises of Harco Manufacturing Group, which Sunsong acquired in 2015, on Jan 18, in what they said is an "ongoing investigation". The move came after two members of the House Select Committee on China wrote a letter in September to the DHS accusing the Chinese company of moving some of its production to Thailand in order to evade US tariffs. In the letter, Mike Gallagher and Darin LaHood called Sunsong's activities a "case of blatant trade fraud that is having a catastrophic impact on American manufacturers". It shows that the US continues to resort to disinformation to justify its crackdown on Chinese companies.

The two China hawks are by no means demonstrating the crime-busting abilities of fictional detective Sherlock Holmes. Rather, the two Republicans brought the charges against the Chinese company simply after reviewing its public disclosures. It must be quite extraordinary in the history of business crimes for a company to publicly state that it has used transshipment as a means of evading import tariffs of 25 percent, as they accuse Sunsong of doing.

As such an act seriously violates US law and "undermines American economic and national security", as the two lawmakers said, it is hard to imagine why, if the allegation was founded on facts, more than three months have passed before the DHS has finally taken any action.

Sunsong has been targeted simply because it holds a leading position in the global auto aftermarket. The shaky ground on which the case has been built points to the difficult business environment Chinese enterprises are facing in the US as a result of some in the US seeking to politicize and weaponize trade issues between the two countries, which has disrupted normal bilateral economic and trade relations. Ford Motor, for example, recently announced that it had paused its partnership with battery company CATL, after the chairs of three House committees demanded it turn over documents related to its relationship with the Chinese company.

The spreading of disinformation and using it to suppress Chinese companies have become a common practice in the US, which has not only affected the normal operations of the Chinese enterprises, but also undermined the confidence of Chinese businesses in investing in the US.

Washington should stop harassing Chinese companies and provide them with a safe, transparent and fair business environment in compliance with international practice and in accordance with the commitments it has made to China.

**SECRET US SPYING PROGRAM TARGETED TOP
 VENEZUELAN OFFICIALS, FLOUTING INTERNATIONAL LAW**

**THE
 BUZZ**

A secret memo obtained by The Associated Press details a yearslong covert operation by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration that sent undercover operatives into Venezuela to surreptitiously record and build drug-trafficking cases against the country's leadership — a plan the U.S. acknowledged from the start was arguably a violation of international law.

"It is necessary to conduct this operation unilaterally and without notifying Venezuelan officials," reads the 15-page 2018 memo expanding "Operation Money Badger," an investigation that authorities say targeted dozens of people, including Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

While there's no clear mechanism to hold the United States account-

table legally, the revelation threatens to roil already fraught relations with Maduro's socialist government and could deepen resentment of the U.S. across Latin America over perceived meddling.

It also offers a rare window into the lengths the DEA was willing to go to fight the drug war in a country that banned U.S. drug agents nearly two decades ago.

Some of Maduro's closest allies were ensnared in the investigation, including Alex Saab, the businessman recently freed in a prisoner swap for 10 Americans and a fugitive defense contractor. But until now, it was not clear that U.S. probes targeting Venezuela involved legally questionable tactics.

Full story at macaudailytimes.com.mo/tag/the-buzz

AP PHOTO



SOCIAL MEDIA

**ZUCKERBERG TESTIFIES IN
 HEATED SENATE HEARING
 ON CHILD EXPLOITATION**

SEXUAL predators. Addictive features. Suicide and eating disorders. Unrealistic beauty standards. Bullying. These are just some of the issues young people are dealing with on social media — and children's advocates and lawmakers say companies are not doing enough to protect them.

Yesterday [Macau time], the CEOs of Meta, TikTok, X and other social media companies went before the Senate Judiciary Committee to testify at a time when lawmakers and parents are growing increasingly concerned about the effects of social media on young people's lives.

The hearing began with recorded testimony from kids and parents who said they or their children were exploited on social media. Throughout the hourslong event, parents who lost children to suicide silently held up pictures of their dead kids.

"They're responsible for many of the dangers our children face online," Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, who chairs the committee, said in opening remarks. "Their design choices, their failures to adequately invest in trust and safety, their constant pursuit of engagement and profit over basic safety have all put our kids and grandkids at risk."

In a heated question and answer session with Mark Zuckerberg, Republican

Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley asked the Meta CEO if he has personally compensated any of the victims and their families for what they have been through.

"I don't think so," Zuckerberg replied.

"There's families of victims here," Hawley said. "Would you like to apologize to them?"

Zuckerberg stood, turned away from his microphone and the senators, and directly addressed the parents in the gallery.

"I'm sorry for everything you have all been through. No one should go through the things that your families have suffered," he said, adding that Meta continues to invest and work on "industrywide efforts" to protect children.

But time and time again, children's advocates and parents have stressed that none of the companies are doing enough.

One of the parents who attended the hearing was Neveen Radwan, whose teenage daughter got sucked in to a "black hole of dangerous content" on TikTok and Instagram after she started looking at videos on healthy eating and exercise at the onset of the COVID lockdowns. She developed anorexia within a few months and nearly died, Radwan recalled.

"Nothing that was said today was different than what we expected," Radwan said. "It was a lot of promi-

ses and a lot of, quite honestly, a lot of talk without them really saying anything. The apology that he made, while it was appreciated, it was a little bit too little, too late, of course."

But Radwan, whose daughter is now 19 and in college, said she felt a "significant shift" in the energy as she sat through the hearing, listening to the senators grill the social media CEOs in tense exchanges.

"The energy in the room was, very, very palpable. Just by our presence there, I think it was very noticeable how our presence was affecting the senators," she said.

Hawley continued to press Zuckerberg, asking if he'd take personal responsibility for the harms his company has caused. Zuckerberg stayed on message and repeated that Meta's job is to "build industry-leading tools" and empower parents.

"To make money," Hawley cut in.

South Carolina Sen. Lindsay Graham, the top Republican on the Judiciary panel, echoed Durbin's sentiments and said he's prepared to work with Democrats to solve the issue.

"After years of working on this issue with you and others, I've come to conclude the following: Social media companies as they're currently designed and operate are dangerous products," Graham said. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Germany Security workers at most of the country's major airports walked off the job yesterday in a one-day strike to step up pressure in a pay dispute, prompting widespread flight cancellations. The ver.di union, which announced the walkout on Tuesday afternoon, called on workers to strike at 11 airports: Frankfurt, Berlin, Cologne, Duesseldorf, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Leipzig, Hannover, Dresden, Bremen and Erfurt. Airports in Bavaria — including Munich, the country's second-busiest — were not affected.

AP PHOTO



Norway Residents awoke to scenes of havoc and homes without power yesterday following the country's most powerful storm in more than three decades. Hurricane-force winds hit parts of the Scandinavian country, with gusts of up to 180 kilometers per hour. Near Laerdal, a small, picturesque town northeast of Bergen, Norway's second-largest city, a bus with 14 passengers was blown off a road, though no injuries were reported, police said. Some areas were flooded, and airlines and ferry operators temporarily suspended service.

AP PHOTO



Football Cristiano Ronaldo will miss the chance of a much anticipated reunion with Lionel Messi because of an injury, Al-Nassr coach Luis Castro said Wednesday. Ronaldo is recovering from a reported calf injury and will not be fit in time to play in the exhibition match between Al-Nassr and Inter Miami in Riyadh.