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MAINLAND DRIVERS USING VEHICLES IN MACAU WERE INVOLVED IN 100 TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS SINCE THE START OF THE MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF DRIVING LICENSES PROGRAM P2

HONG KONG CUSTOMS ARRESTS SEVEN IN A USD1.8 BILLION MONEY LAUNDERING CASE P4

TOP DIPLOMATS FROM US, CHINA HOLD 'CONSTRUCTIVE' TALKS ON ISSUES DIVIDING THEM P6



AP PHOTO



Japan's flagship H3 rocket reached orbit and released two small observation satellites in a key second test following a failed debut launch last year, buoying hope for the country in the global space race. The H3 rocket blasted off from the Tanegashima Space Center on time Saturday morning. The rocket successfully reached orbit at an altitude of about 670 kilometers and released two satellites.

AP PHOTO



Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the Southeast Asian nation's most controversial politician for more than two decades, was released on parole yesterday from a Bangkok hospital where he spent six months serving time for corruption-related offenses. The telecoms billionaire was toppled in a 2006 coup but voluntarily returned from self-exile to Thailand in August last year and reported to prison to begin serving an eight-year sentence.

AP PHOTO



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned allies that an "artificial deficit" of arms for his country risks giving Russia breathing space, highlighting the need for artillery and long-range weapons after his military chief said he was withdrawing troops from the eastern city of Avdiivka. Zelenskyy spoke to the Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of security and foreign policy officials. Ukraine is back on the defensive against Russia in the nearly 2-year-old war, hindered by low ammunition supplies and a shortage of personnel.

More on backpage

DIRTY MONEY

Criminal gangs associated with junket ops have moved from Macau to poorly regulated countries in Southeast Asia; shifts to online operations: Report P2



RENATO MARQUES

HOLY MOLY
CNY FIGURES BEAT 2019 BY A WHISKER, HOTEL OCCUPANCY AT 95%



P3

GAMING

GANGS SHIFT FROM MACAU CASINOS TO POORLY REGULATED COUNTRIES: REPORT

STAFF REPORTER

CASINO criminals have moved from Macau to other parts of Asia, according to a report issued by The Weekend Australian.

The report has noted that gangs are setting up “scam centers”, in compounds in less regulated areas of Southeast Asia including Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and The Philippines to defraud unsuspecting people in higher income countries such as Australia and Singapore.

In an interview with the newspaper, executives from the Australian office of global risk and security company Kroll, who have been studying the regional shift in the industry over the past few years, warn that while the criminal gangs which were associated with junket operators can no longer use casinos, they are still using online betting sites to launder money, helping to transfer money from drug smuggling back to Asia, as cited in the report.

This comes as China has deepened its crackdown on junket operators catering to its weal-



thiest gamblers.

In 2021, dubbed “Junket King,” Alvin Chau of Suncity was arrested in a sweeping crackdown. Another arrest was made in just less than two months as authorities arrested Levo Chan of Tak Chun Group, Macau’s second-largest junket operator.

This year, Macau has again seen a reduction of licensed junkets after figures from the go-

vernment show the number of gaming promoters has been slashed to 18.

The figure represents 50% of 2023’s numbers, according to information from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ).

The latest reduction comes after the government enforced the largest gaming law overhaul in Macau’s history, as well as the

junkets law, which states that junkets can no longer engage in revenue share arrangements with concessionaires.

Meanwhile, Wood said that casino gangs “which were active in Macau have been forced out with the arrests of some key players.”

“They have moved to new areas including The Philippines, and less regulated areas including spe-

cial economic zones in Myanmar where they can operate in an unimpeded way,” said Wood, as cited in the report.

“As a result of enforcement and regulatory activities in Macau (including the arrest of key players in junket such as Alvin Chau), and the restrictions in accessing physical casinos as a result of Covid, junket operators – which previously provided a significant channel for money laundering in Australia, Southeast and North Asia – have moved their operations to poorly regulated countries and regions in the Mekong and moved operations online,” she said.

“Criminal networks closely associated with junkets have also diversified into other activities including cyberfraud,” the expert added.

A report issued by the UN estimates that online gambling market in the Asia-Pacific region is the fastest growing in the world, adding that over USD145 billion in cross-border illegal capital outflows from China were facilitated through offshore gambling websites and casinos in 2020.

TRANSPORT

LRT EAST LINE TRAIN SYSTEM CONTRACT AWARDED TO THREE COMPANIES

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU authorities have awarded a contract worth MOP3.657 billion to Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Top Builders, and Hou Chon Consortium to operate the system for the East Line of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT).

The contract ends May 31, 2029 and construction on the 7.7-kilometer East Line began in October last year and is expected to be completed by March 2028. The East Line will add 21 stations and 24 kilometers

of track, connecting the Border Gate, the New Urban Zones and Taipa.

Macau will acquire a small area of land and sea southeast of the Border Gate for the construction. Additionally, the Seac Pai Van Line and Hengqin Line, with lengths of 1.6 and 2.4 kilometers respectively, are also being added to the LRT network and will be completed this year.

The construction of the LRT link has cost at least MOP12 billion, according to the Secretary for Transport and Public Works.

The Macau government sought approval from the central government to acquire a 3,700-square-meter plot of land for the construction of the Border Gate train station.

Additionally, a West Line running from Barra Station to the Border Gate is also proposed, with the government currently conducting feasibility research. According to the Transport Bureau’s current master plan, the construction of such a line would add an extra 6 kilometers of line to the network.

STATS

100 ACCIDENTS INVOLVING MAINLAND DRIVERS IN NINE MONTHS

RENATO MARQUES

THE Public Security Police Force (PSP) has said that mainland drivers using vehicles in Macau have been involved in 101 traffic accidents since the start of the program of the mutual recognition of driving licenses between Macau and the mainland.

Of these, the police found seven people illegally utilizing the recognition system to work as drivers in Macau.

The figures are only for 2023 and are a part of the Force’s annual report, which

also noted an increase in traffic accidents of 21% year-on-year with 2022.

In total, the PSP recorded 13,563 traffic accidents last year.

The same authorities said that, to date, 1,820 license recognition processes have been completed, allowing mainland-issued driving licenses to be used to legally drive vehicles in Macau.

This process is only valid for private use and does not authorize people with recognized licenses under this system to apply for professional driving jobs.

The agreement that regulates the mutual recognition of driving licenses also allows mainland drivers to automatically drive vehicles in Macau for a maximum of 14 days without the need to register with the authorities.

Before this agreement started last year, mainland drivers living in Macau could not drive vehicles in Macau without having to pass through the normal process to get a Macau driving license, including submitting to an examination in both theory and practical tests.

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SPRING FESTIVAL GOLDEN WEEK

2024 CNY arrivals beat 2019 by a whisker, hotel occupancy at 95%

RENATO MARQUES

THE first seven days of this year's Spring Festival Golden Week saw a rise in visitors to Macau of 2.55% to 1,232,569 visitors, 30,657 more than 2019, according to Public Security Police Force (PSP) official figures cited by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

Nevertheless, 2019 had the most visitors in a single day, with 226,326 on the third day of the new year. By contrast, this year was 8,785 short with only 217,541 visitors.

This year's higher visitor count occurred on the first three days of the Lunar New Year, with entries always significantly higher than in 2019, as the Times reported late last week.

THE CALENDAR FACTOR

One possible reason for this year's higher visitor numbers was that, in 2019, the first day of the Lunar New Year was a Monday (Feb. 4), while this year it was a Saturday (Feb. 10) coinciding with a weekend, which always brings more visitors to Macau.

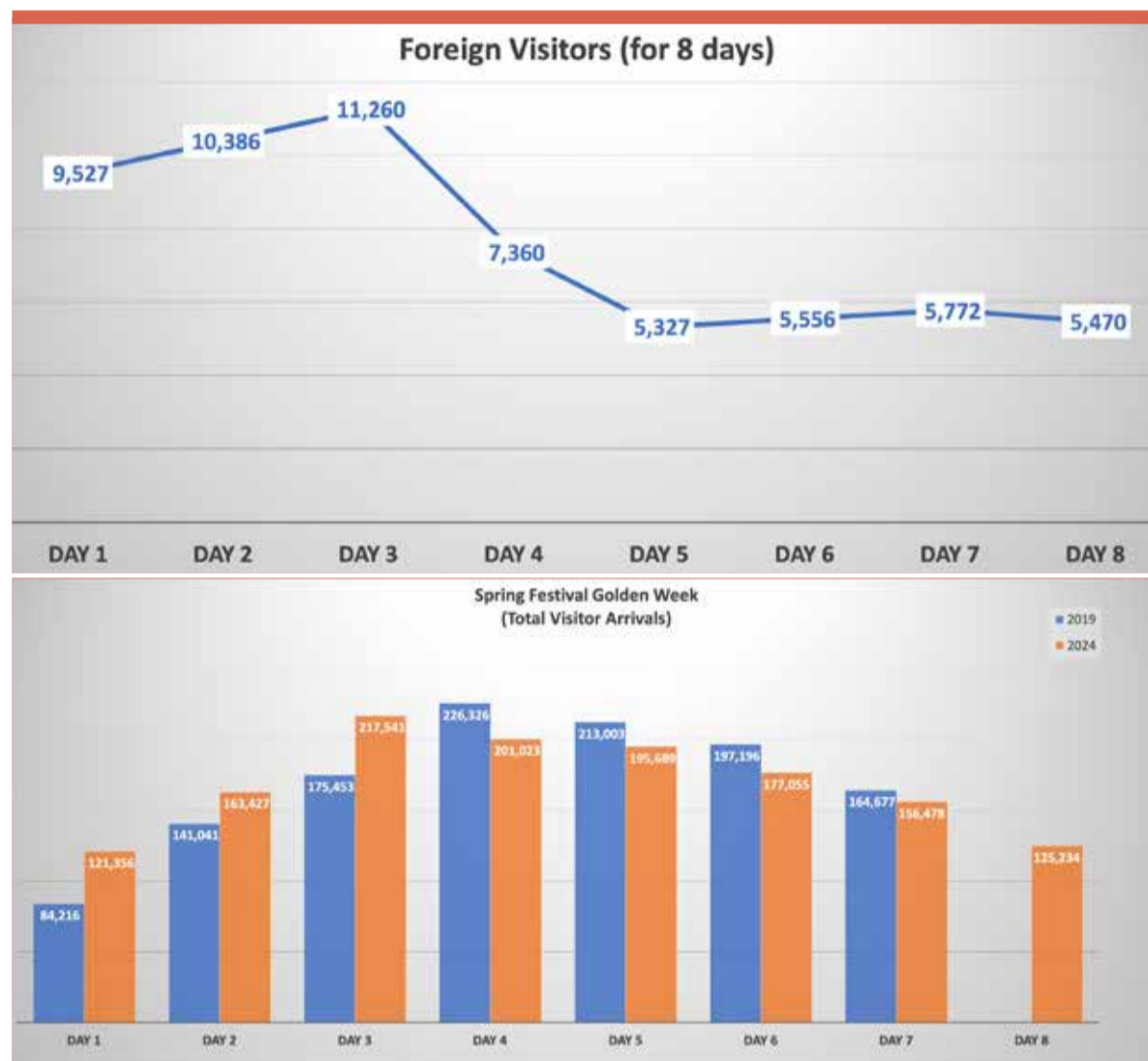
Also, during 2019's "Golden Week," there was only one weekend at the end of the week.

But this year, the new year began on a weekend, which was followed by a public holiday in Macau on the Monday and the neighboring region, namely Hong Kong.

The MGTO calculated this year's Golden Week as eight days rather than the usual seven.

This means Macau's daily visitor average has, in reality, dropped from the 176,081 (at the end of the seventh day) to 169,725 on the eighth day, Saturday, Feb. 17.

The results on the number of visitors were not as high as in the



previous days with 125,234 visitors crossing the local border, a figure like any regular weekend so far in 2024.

Nevertheless, over the eight days of festive season, Macau received 1.36 million visitors.

MARKET SOURCES REMAINED STEADY

As expected, visitors from mainland China topped the list of market sources by a large margin with the results after eight days showing that 76.2% of all visitors entering Macau came from the mainland.

Compared to the results obtained

after the first five days, the ratio of mainland visitors only grew marginally by 0.1% from the previous 76.1%. In total, 1,034,503 visitors arrived from the mainland.

As for mainland China, Hong Kong visitor numbers remained steady but, in this case, noting a slightly higher increase, from 18.4% at the end of the fifth day, to 18.7% at the end of the week.

In total, 253,453 visitors from the neighboring region entered Macau during the festive season.

While both the mainland and Hong Kong grew their representation in the market sources, the number of foreign visitors fell, the group the local government has declared it wants most to attract.

PSP analysis shows all other foreign nationals, including those from Taiwan, fell 0.4% at the end of the week when compared to the first five days, reaching only 5.1% of the market share, i.e., the equivalent to 69,847 visitors.

Together, the two larger market sources (mainland China and Hong Kong) accounted for some 94.86% of the total visitors.

FOREIGN VISITORS SLIGHTLY DOWN FROM THE TREND

A closer analysis of the PSP's daily figures, released before verification and cross-information,

exponential rise in visitor numbers in the first three days, which also happens for foreigners, then a slight fall that continues until the eighth day.

There is a major drop in foreign visitation from the third to the fourth day (11,260 to 7,360) followed by a further drop to 5,327 on the fifth day (the lowest result of the period).

From then, the figures began to recover slightly on the sixth and seventh days (5,772) before dropping again on the last day (5,470).

This trend also occurred, although in a slightly different manner, with the figure of the visitors from Taiwan dropping significantly on the fourth day, recovering slightly on the next and dropping to a minimum on the sixth of the eight days and starting to recover on the last two days.

HOTEL OCCUPANCY DURING CNY AT 95%

The average hotel occupancy rate reached 95% overall and peaked at nearly 98% on the fourth day of the Chinese New Year.

According to figures from industry operators, local hotel establishments saw an average occupancy rate of 95.2% during the Spring Festival Golden Week, a year-on-year increase of nearly 10 percentage points.

The hotel occupancy rate peaked at 97.9% on the fourth day of Chinese New Year (Feb. 13).

The average room rate of Macau's hotel establishments (including hotels, apartment hotels and economical accommodation establishments) was around MOP1,922 during the Golden Week, a year-over-year growth of 23.4%.

CHINA SEES OVER 13M ENTRY-EXIT TRIPS DURING CNY

CHINA saw around 13.52 million inbound and outbound trips during the eight-day Spring Festival holiday that ended Saturday, marking a 2.8-fold increase from the same holiday period last year, according to the National Immigration Administration.

Border inspection agencies across China handled a daily average of about 1.69 million inbound and outbound trips during the period, the administration said.

The total entry-exit trips during the holiday returned to 90% of the level

in 2019, according to the administration.

Border inspection agencies checked 459,000 vehicles, including ships, trains, and automobiles, representing a 1.6-fold increase from that of the same period in 2023.

Seaports, land ports and airports across the country witnessed stable and orderly customs clearance, with cross-border trips through land ports in Guangdong Province, Hong Kong and Macau accounting for 73.1% of the total, the administration said.



ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLE PURCHASE SUBSIDY SET FOR JUNE

The Environmental Protection Bureau is taking steps to promote the use of new energy vehicles and expand the infrastructure for electric vehicles. Raymond Tam, the bureau's director, has announced plans to increase the number of charging stations in public car parks and launch a new subsidy program for the purchase of electric motorcycles in June. The current application period for the subsidy program to replace old motorcycles with new electric ones is already underway. Additionally, the bureau has installed 14 battery-swapping cabinets in seven public car parks and 600 charging stations for electric motorcycles in 49 public car parks.

APARTMENTS' RENT DOWN 3%: DSEC

The average rent per square metre of usable area for residential units in Macau was MOP131 in 2023, down by 3.0% year-on-year, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). When compared to 2019, the figure represented a fall of 19.6%, which showed that the coronavirus pandemic had a rather large impact on residential rents. Among the districts with a relatively high number of lease declarations, the average rents for residential units in Areia Preta & Iao Hon (MOP123), ZAPE (MOP111) and Baixa da Taipa (MOP131) decreased by 5.4%, 4.3% and 3.7% year-on-year respectively, whereas the average rent for those in NATAP (MOP154) increased by 1.3%.

RODRIGUES WITH A HUMBLE FINISH ON UAE F4, SLATER CROWNED

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL teen racer Tiago Rodrigues has completed his participation in the 2024 UAE Formula 4 (F4) Championship.

The reigning champion from the Chinese F4 Championship in 2023, Rodrigues embraced this humbling project to battle some of the world's best drivers in this category in an opportunity to learn and evolve as a racer.

After five rounds in 15 races, Rodrigues ended his participation in the UAE F4 with 4 points scored through an eighth place overall in Race 1 of Round 3 of the season.

British racer Freddie Slater was crowned champion after the last race of the season, scoring 172 points, just 4 points more than first runner-up Kean Nakamura-Berta.

In third place overall was the Emirati, Keanu Al Azhari, with 164 points from 15 races.

The final championship result was only decided on the last race, contested yesterday



evening (Macau time) at the Dubai Autodrome.

Slater, finishing third behind Nakamura-Berta scored enough points to grant the title in a race won by local racer Rashid Al Dhaheri.

Qualifying 15th for Race 1 and 14th for Race 3, Rodrigues did not capitalize on the grid positions with a lot of contact

and "pushing" occurring in the middle of the pack, causing him to lose several positions in most races of the weekend.

Rodrigues' best result was in Race 1 (raced Saturday) where he managed to keep to 15th position from the starting grid to the checkered flag.

The championship inclu-

ded 40 contenders, although not all completed all rounds.

Occurring at the start of the year, the UAE F4 is seen as a great opportunity for topnotch racers from Europe and other parts of the world to start the season at a time when regular championships, namely in Europe, are still stopped for the winter break.

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GBA

HONG KONG CUSTOMS ARRESTS 7 IN A USD1.8B MONEY LAUNDERING CASE LINKED TO TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

HONG Kong customs officials have arrested seven people linked to the territory's largest ever money laundering case, involving about 14 billion Hong Kong dollars (\$1.8 billion) some of it linked to a scam case in India.

The seven local residents, aged between 23 and 74, were part of a large-scale transnational syndicate that used various shell companies and bank accounts to transfer large sums from overseas to the city under the guise of running international trading businesses, customs officials said Friday.

One account once received as much as 100 million Hong Kong dollars (\$12.8 million) on a single day, they said.

Ip Tung-ching, the head of customs financial investigation bureau,

said 2.9 billion Hong Kong dollars (\$371 million) of the total was suspected to be linked to a scam case involving a mobile application in India. But she did not say which application it was.

Some of those arrested were non-Chinese residents of Hong Kong, she said without giving details.

Authorities believe the syndicate received remittances from India in name of exporting electronic devices, diamonds, gems and precious metals, Ip said. Proceeds were then transferred to bank accounts in Hong Kong for money laundering.

"These acts of money laundering provide protective umbrellas for criminals," she said.

Law enforcement in Hong Kong, India and elsewhere cooperated in carrying out the operation, enabling its success,

Ip said.

Yu Yiu-wing, the bureau's divisional commander, said officers exchanged intelligence with Indian authorities and found some of the money came from two jewelry companies that Indian authorities said were connected to the scam.

A 34-year-old Hong Kong resident arrested in late January is suspected to be the syndicate's mastermind, she said.

Officials have confiscated electronic devices, documents, and over 8,000 carats of suspected synthetic gem stones apparently meant for export to India.

The investigation was continuing.

The previous record money laundering case involved about 6 billion Hong Kong dollars (\$767 million) and arrests of nine people in January 2023. **MDT/AP**

GAMING

A record-breaking January for New Jersey gambling, even as in-person casino winnings fall

WAYNE PARRY, ATLANTIC CITY

FOUR major gambling revenue records were smashed in New Jersey in January as 2024 got off to a rousing start for everything except the thing casinos care about most: the amount of money won from in-person gamblers.

Internet gambling revenue, sports betting revenue, the total amount of money wagered on sports, and total casino-sports betting-internet revenue all set new records in January, according to figures released Friday by the state Division of Gaming Enforcement.

The total amount won by Atlantic City's nine casinos, the three horse tracks that take sports bets, and their online partners was more than \$559 million, up 28% from a year earlier.

Much of that was powered by a historic month of internet gambling (\$183 million, up nearly 20% from a year ago) and sports betting (nearly \$171 million, up more than 136%).

However, those revenue streams must be shared with third-party providers, including tech platforms and sports books, and that money is not solely for the casinos to keep. That is why the casinos consider their core business to be money won from in-person gamblers.

Harsher winter weather in January 2024 contributed to in-



-person casino winnings that were lower than January 2023, when the weather was milder, said Jane Bokunewicz, director of the Lloyd Levenson Institute at Stockton University, which studies the Atlantic City casino market.

"It's likely brick-and-mortar activity was diverted to online channels, boosting the internet gaming and online sports betting totals," she said.

The in-person total continues to decline, still lagging the levels seen before the COVID19 pandemic began in early 2020. In January, in-person casino winnings were just over \$205 million, down 3.1% from a year earlier.

Collectively, that was higher than the total won from in-person gamblers in January 2019.

But it was due mainly to the strong performance of Atlantic City's three newest casinos: the

Borgata, Hard Rock and Ocean, which were the only three to win more from in-person gamblers in January than they did four years earlier. That means two-thirds of Atlantic City's nine casinos are still not winning as much in-person money as they did before the pandemic hit.

"The success of online gaming and sports wagering continues to provide competitive advantage to operators even during Atlantic

City's traditional off-season," said James Plousis, chairman of the New Jersey Casino Control Commission.

New Jersey's casinos and tracks took \$1.71 billion worth of sports bets in January, smashing the previous record of \$1.62 billion set in November.

The Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, near New York City, won \$113 million on sports bets, up 137% from a year ago. Monmouth Park in Oceanport, near the Jersey Shore, won nearly \$2.4 million, up 8.5%, while Freehold Raceway lost over \$1 million on sports bets compared to a \$1.6 million win a year earlier.

In terms of combined in-person, internet and sports betting revenue, the Borgata took in \$107.6 million, up 1.6%. Golden Nugget won \$63.5 million, up over 23%; Hard Rock won \$51.5 million, up 19%; Ocean won \$39.1 million, up more than 13%, and Tropicana won \$26.1 million, up 4.5%.

Bally's won \$18.9 million, up 15.3%; Harrah's won \$16.5 million, down 17.5%; Caesars won \$15.1 million, down 7.6%; and Resorts won \$10.8 million, down less than 1%.

Resorts Digital, the casino's online arm, won \$89.5 million, up over 69%, and Caesars Interactive NJ, another internet-only entity, won \$5.7 million, down over 30%.

When just in-person winnings are counted, Borgata won \$57.6 million, down 1.2%; Hard Rock won \$37.3 million, up 3.9%; Ocean won just over \$33 million, up 8.3%; Harrah's won \$15.9 million, down nearly 21%; Caesars won \$15.5 million, down nearly 8%; and Tropicana won \$13.3 million, down over 18%.

Golden Nugget won \$11.2 million from in-person gamblers, up 2.3%; Resorts won \$10.9 million, down 1.4%; and Bally's won \$10 million, down nearly 13%. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Manulife HK, Macau reports strong growth in 2023



Manulife Hong Kong and Macau has reported strong growth in annualized premium equivalent (APE) sales, core earnings, new business value (NBV) and new business contractual service

margin (CSM) for the fourth quarter and full year of 2023.

Fourth quarter and full year APE sales increased by 55% and 58% to HKD1.7 billion and HKD7.1 billion, respectively, compared to the same

periods in 2022.

The growth in APE sales in both periods reflected strong growth in its agency, broker and bancassurance channels, primarily driven by a return of demand from mainland Chinese visitor (MCV) customers following the reopening of the border between Hong Kong and mainland China.

"We remain committed to advancing our health and protection offerings to both domestic and MCV customers, and we are proud to have expanded our partnership with quality health providers," said Patrick Graham, CEO of Manulife Hong Kong and Macau.

Melco's gastronomic series to commence 2024 events in March



The "Melco Style Presents: The Black Pearl Diamond Restaurants Gastronomic Series," which successfully launched four of the 10 four-hands themed banquets in 2023, will continue to roll out

the remaining six collaboration dinners starting this March and running through this year.

The fifth through seventh installments of the Gastronomic Series will be repre-

sented respectively by "Yi of City of Dreams x Xujiacai from Chengdu", "Bi Ying of Studio City x Huaiyangfu from Beijing", and "Aurora of Altira Macau x Amico BJ also from Beijing".

Next will be "Chapter 6: Huaiyang Diamond Feast" on April 20 and 21 to be held at Studio City's Bi Ying restaurant.

Bi Ying's chef Yuk Lam will join forces with chef Wang Changrong, winner of the Chinese Chef Honor Award and the title of Chinese Cooking Master, from 2023 Black Pearl one diamond Huaiyangfu in Beijing to craft an elegant six-course menu characterized by the spring scenery of Jiangnan and old Yangzhou.

DIPLOMACY

Top diplomats from US, China hold 'constructive' talks on issues dividing them

MATTHEW LEE, MUNICH

TOP diplomats from the U.S. and China on Friday held a "candid and constructive" discussion on issues vexing their strained relations over Taiwan, the situation in the South China Sea, Russia's war against Ukraine and synthetic opioids, the State Department said.

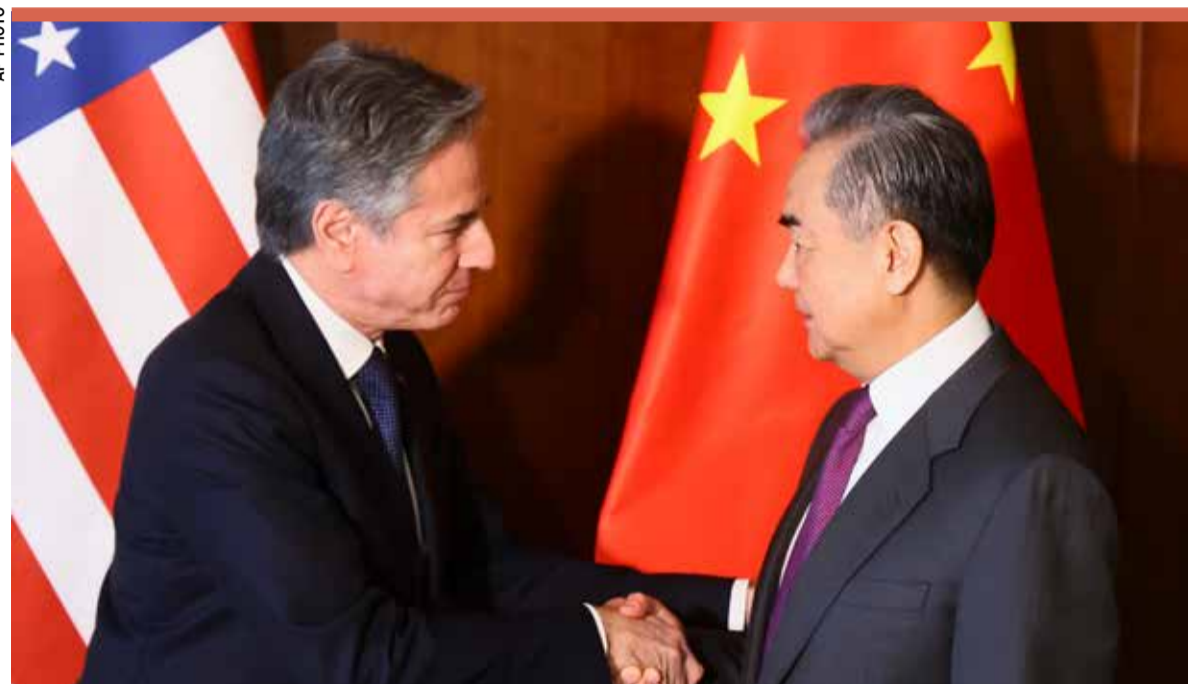
The meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference marked the latest and highest-level meeting between the two sides since U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks late last year in California.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Blinken emphasized the importance of maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait as well as expanding on nascent counternarcotics efforts. Blinken also raised concerns about China's support for Russia's defense industrial base that Washington sees as helping Moscow's military operations against Ukraine.

"The two sides had a candid and constructive discussion on a range of bilateral, regional and global issues as part of ongoing efforts to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage competition in the relationship," Miller said.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Wang called on the U.S. to remove sanctions against Chinese companies and individuals.

Wang emphasized that Washington's policy of "de-risking" economically from Beijing "has beco-



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi shake hands during their meeting at the Munich Security Conference, in Munich, Germany, last week

me 'de-Sinicizing,' 'building a tall fence' and 'de-coupling from China'" and "will come back to bite the U.S. itself," according to a Ministry readout Saturday morning.

He also called on the U.S. to stop searches of Chinese nationals. Recently, Chinese state media published reports of Chinese citizens being searched at the U.S. border.

In one prominent case, a group of students led by their professor, Xie Tao from Beijing Foreign Studies University, were interrogated for three hours upon arriving at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, according to Xinhua. Xie is the dean of the School of International Relations and Diplomacy at the University.

Wang affirmed that cooperation to combat the spread of fen-

tanyl was going "positively" and would continue, as well as the agreement to keep military-to-military communications. Both sides also discussed the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and the war in Ukraine.

Blinken "reiterated that the United States will stand up for our interests and values and those of our allies and partners," Miller said, adding that the current situations in the Middle East and with North Korea had also been topics of conversation.

"Both sides recognized the importance of maintaining open lines of communication between the United States and (China) across a range of strategic issues, including consultations and high-level meetings in key areas in the coming months," he said.

MDT/AP

WANG YI SAYS TRYING TO CUT HIS COUNTRY OUT OF TRADE WOULD BE A HISTORIC MISTAKE

CHINA'S foreign minister told a gathering of international security policy officials Saturday that trying to shut China out of trade in the name of avoiding dependency would be a historic mistake.

Wang Yi spoke at the Munich Security Conference. Host Germany wants to avoid over-reliance on trade with an increasingly assertive China and diversify its supply of key goods in an approach it calls "de-risking." That's in line with the approach of other industrial powers in the Group of Seven, which has stressed that it doesn't seek to harm China or thwart its development.

Beijing has criticized the strategy. "Today ... more people have come to realize that

the absence of cooperation is the biggest risk," Wang said through an interpreter. "Those who attempt to shut China out in the name of de-risking will make a historical mistake."

"The world economy is like a big ocean that cannot be cut into isolated lakes," he added. "The trend toward economic globalization cannot be reversed. We need to work together to make globalization more universally beneficial and inclusive."

Wang also renewed China's pushback against allegations of forced labor in the western Xinjiang region.

He complained of "fabricated information from different parties" and asserted that the aim is "to stop the development of China." MDT/AP

CNY

At start of Lunar Year of the Dragon, China seeks to assert its own interpretation of cultural icon



AT the start of the Lunar Year of the Dragon, China is seeking to assert its own interpretation of the cultural icon that dates back centuries in both Eastern and Western cultures.

The Lunar New Year holiday that began on Feb. 10 is celebrated in countries across Asia and among communities abroad, although China continues to

insist that it be called Chinese New Year.

Each year is named after an animal in the Chinese zodiac, with this year being that of the dragon. Chinese state media this year have pushed for the use of "loong," a version of the anglicization of "dragon," as part of an effort to emphasize the distinction between the traditional Chinese view of the mythological

creature as a symbol of good fortune and the Western view of it as a fire-breathing harbinger of danger and adventure.

"In traditional Chinese culture, the loong symbolizes strength, auspiciousness and extraordinary abilities, embodying wishes for favorable weather, peace and well-being," the official Xinhua News Agency said last week.

"According to experts, loong-themed cultural relics from various periods in China convey the innovative, inclusive, cohesive and striving spirit of the Chinese nation," Xinhua said.

References to dragons are found throughout the world and there is no obvious indication that they originated in China.

Though previously embraced as a national symbol, the dragon was banished after the Communist Party under Mao Zedong seized power in 1949, replacing it with the hammer and sickle and the five stars on the national flag. MDT/AP

INDONESIA

Activists protest ex-general's win in presidential election and allege massive fraud

ANDI JATMIKO & NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA

PROTESTERS marched in Indonesia's capital on Friday demanding the election authority stop Prabowo Subianto from taking office as the next president and claiming widespread electoral fraud.

Subianto, a former general linked to past human rights abuses, has claimed victory in the presidential election last week after unofficial tallies showed him taking over 58% of the vote in a three-way race.

Subianto's win is not yet official as the official results could take up to a month to be tabulated. His two rivals, former governors Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo, refused to concede and alleged massive fraud in the election.

Authorities blocked streets leading to the heavily guarded General Election Commission building, which was barricaded with razor wire. Dozens of demonstrators held banners and signs that slammed President Joko Widodo for supporting Subianto, who picked Widodo's son as his running mate.



A protester shouts slogans during a rally against alleged fraud in the presidential election outside the General Election Commission's office in Jakarta, Indonesia, last week

"We demand justice, we demand a fair vote count," Siti Aisyah, one of the protesters, said. "Don't let cheating win, they will ruin democracy in our country again."

The campaign teams of both Baswedan and Pranowo said they would provide evidence for their claims of cheating.

"There are strong indications that violations occurred in a struc-

tured, systematic and massive way in the presidential election," said Hamdan Zoelva, a former Constitutional Court chief judge who is part of Baswedan's team.

Hasto Kristiyanto, the secre-

tary-general of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, which nominated Pranowo, said that election irregularities were enforced from the top down, starting with Widodo's son Gibran Rakabuming Raka's candidacy for vice-president. The Constitutional Court had to make an exception to the minimum age requirement of 40 for Raka to run.

The current chief justice, who is Widodo's brother-in-law, was later removed by an ethics panel for failing to recuse himself and for making last-minute changes to the election candidacy requirements.

Widodo dismissed fraud allegations and any manipulation of the judiciary or favoring a particular pair of candidates, saying the election process was watched by many people, including representatives of the candidates, the election supervisory agency and security personnel.

"Layered supervision like this would eliminate the possible fraud," Widodo told reporters on late last week, "Don't scream fraud. We have mechanism to solve the fraud, if you have evidence, take it to the Election Supervisory Agency, if you have evidence, challenge it to the Constitutional Court."

Subianto had refused to accept the result of the 2019 election that pitted him against Widodo for a second time, leading to violence that left seven dead in Jakarta. In the past two elections, Indonesia's Constitutional Court had rejected Subianto bids to overturn Widodo's victory and dismissed his claims of widespread fraud as groundless. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH KOREA

Doctors rally against government plans to increase the number of medical students

JIWON SONG, SEOUL

HUNDREDS of South Korean doctors rallied in the capital, Seoul, and other cities on Thursday against a government plan to boost the number of medical students.

Doctors' groups say increasing the number of medical students by 2,000 starting in 2025 is too steep. They want officials to instead use available resources to raise medical fees they say are set too low.

Authorities say South Korea needs more doctors. It's among the lowest numbers of doctors relative to the size of the population among developed



Doctors stage a rally against the government's medical policy near the presidential office in Seoul, South Korea, late last week

countries despite growing demands for medical services fueled by a fast-aging society.

South Korea also has one of the world's lowest birth rates and has been grappling with shortages

of doctors in some key professions, including obstetrics and pediatrics, and in rural regions outside the

greater capital area.

South Korea's quota of medical students has stood at 3,058 since 2006. Doctors have successfully resisted several government attempts to increase the number of students in past years, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While doctors' groups have threatened strikes, the Health Ministry has downplayed the possibility of huge walkouts that would disrupt medical services.

Hundreds of doctors marched amid rain in streets in front of Seoul's presidential office, holding banners and signs that read "We oppose with our lives an increase in medical students without con-

sent of the medical sector." Similar protests were held nationwide.

"If the government wants doctors to work for the crucial sectors like obstetrics or pediatrics, they should build legal safety net and increase medical fee first so that the doctors in those sectors wouldn't feel pressured to be sued over accidents or be burdened by heavy workloads," said Joo Sooho, former president of Korea Medical Association.

While the government plans to meet with doctors' groups to address their concerns, it has no intentions to adjust the scale and timing of the medical student increase, Second Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo said during a briefing late last week.

In an editorial published Thursday, the Korea JoongAng Daily newspaper said a strike by doctors would attract little public support. **MDT/AP**

Nerve agents, poison and window falls. Kremlin foes have been attacked or killed over the years

DASHA LITVINOVA &
EMMA BURROWS, TALLINN

THE attacks range from the exotic — poisoned by drinking polonium-laced tea or touching a deadly nerve agent — to the more mundane of getting shot at close range. Some take a fatal plunge from an open window.

Over the years, Kremlin political critics, turncoat spies and investigative journalists have been killed or assaulted in a variety of ways.

On Friday, Russian authorities said President Vladimir Putin's key political challenger, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison colony. The details of what happened are unknown; Navalny's team says it has no official confirmation of his death and Russian authorities say they are establishing why he died. His allies previously accused Russian officials of trying to poison him with a nerve agent in 2020.

Assassination attempts against foes of Putin have been common during his nearly quarter century in power. Those close to the victims and the few survivors have blamed Russian authorities, but the Kremlin has routinely denied involvement.

There also have been reports of prominent Russian executives dying under mysterious circumstances, including falling from windows, although whether they were deliberate killings or suicides is sometimes difficult to determine.

Some prominent cases of documented killings or attempted killings:

POLITICAL OPPONENTS

In August 2020, Navalny fell ill on a flight from Siberia to Moscow. The plane landed in the city of Omsk, where Navalny was hospitalized in a coma. Two days later, he was airlifted to Berlin, where he recovered.

His allies almost immediately said he was poisoned, but Russian officials denied it. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden confirmed Navalny was poisoned by a Soviet-era nerve agent known as Novichok, which he reported had been applied to his underwear.



A portrait of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and flowers are pictured as people gather near to Russian embassy to France

Navalny returned to Russia and was convicted last August of extremism and sentenced to 19 years in prison. It was his third conviction with a prison sentence in two years. He said the charges were politically motivated.

On Friday, Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service said Navalny felt unwell after a walk and lost consciousness. An ambulance arrived, but he could not be revived. The service said his cause of death was "being established."

In 2018, Pyotr Verzilov, a founder of the protest group Pussy Riot, fell severely ill and also was flown to Berlin, where doctors said poisoning was "highly plausible." He eventually recovered. Earlier that year, Verzilov embarrassed the Kremlin by running onto the field during soccer's World Cup final in Moscow with three other activists to protest police brutality. His allies said he could have been targeted because of his activism.

Prominent opposition figure Vladimir Kara-Murza survived what he believes were attempts to poison him in 2015 and 2017. He nearly died from kidney failure in the first instance and suspects poisoning but no cause was determined. He was hospitalized with a similar illness in 2017 and put into a medically induced coma. His wife said doctors confirmed he was poisoned.

Kara-Murza survived, and his lawyer says police have refused to investigate. Last year, he was convicted of treason and sentenced to 25 years in prison. In January he was moved to a prison in Siberia and placed in solitary confinement over an alleged minor infraction.

The highest profile killing of a political opponent in recent years was that of Boris Nemtsov. Once deputy prime minister under Boris Yeltsin, Nemtsov was a popular politician and harsh critic of Putin. On a cold February night in 2015, he was gunned down by assailants on a bridge adjacent to the Kremlin as he walked with his girlfriend in a death that shocked the country.

Five men from the Russian region of Chechnya were convicted for his killing, with the gunman receiving up to 20 years. But Nemtsov's allies said that was an attempt to shift blame from the government.

FORMER INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVES

In 2006, Russian defector Alexander Litvinenko, a former agent for the KGB and its post-Soviet successor agency, the FSB, became violently ill in London after drinking tea laced with radioactive polonium-210. He died three weeks later.

Litvinenko had been investigating the shooting death of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya as well as the Russian intelligence service's alleged links to organized crime. Before dying, Litvinenko told journalists the FSB was still operating a poisons laboratory dating from the Soviet era.

A British inquiry found that Russian agents had killed Litvinenko, probably with Putin's approval, but the Kremlin de-

nied any involvement.

Another former Russian intelligence officer, Sergei Skripal, was poisoned in Britain in 2018. He and his adult daughter Yulia fell ill in the city of Salisbury and spent weeks in critical condition. They survived, but the attack later claimed the life of a British woman and left a man and a police officer seriously ill.

Authorities said they both were poisoned with the military grade nerve agent Novichok. Britain blamed Russian intelligence, but Moscow denied any role. Putin called Skripal, a double agent for Britain during his espionage career, a "scumbag" of no interest to the Kremlin because he was tried in Russia and exchanged in a spy swap in 2010.

JOURNALISTS

Numerous journalists critical of authorities in Russia have been killed or suffered mysterious deaths, which their colleagues in some cases blamed on someone in the political hierarchy. In other cases, the reported reluctance by authorities to investigate raised suspicions.

Politkovskaya, the journalist for the newspaper Novaya Gazeta whose death Litvinenko was investigating, was shot and killed in the elevator of her Moscow apartment building on Oct. 7, 2006 — Putin's birthday. She had won international acclaim for her reporting on human rights abuses in Chechnya. The gunman, from Chechnya, was convicted of the killing and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Four other Chechens were given shorter prison terms for their involvement in the murder.

Yuri Shchekochikhin, another Novaya Gazeta reporter, died of a sudden and violent illness in 2003. Shchekochikhin was investigating corrupt business deals and the possible role of Russian security services in the 1999 apartment house bombings blamed on Chechen insurgents. His colleagues insisted that he was poisoned and accused the authorities of deliberately hindering the investigation. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1997 CHINA'S REFORMIST DENG XIAOPING DIES

China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping has died at the age of 92.

He had been suffering from failing health for several years and was last seen in public three years ago.

The country's official news agency said his death was the result of advanced stages of Parkinson's Disease complicated by a lung infection and that he had failed to respond to emergency treatment.

Although he was officially retired, no important decision affecting China was made without Deng Xiaoping's approval.

He was known internationally as the leader who crushed the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 but also as the man credited with opening up China to economic reform.

Chinese radio's shortwave English language service praised his "outstanding" leadership as a "great Marxist and the true architect of China's socialist reforms and modernisation".

A funeral committee has been announced, to be headed by Jiang Zemin, which regional experts say makes him the most likely candidate to gain the leadership.

Meanwhile Tiananmen Square the symbolic heart of China and the communist party is reported to be peaceful, with no sign of extra security.

The BBC's Beijing Correspondent Humphrey Hawksley said that given Deng Xiaoping's stated disregard for the "cult of the personality" it was unlikely there would be any grand state funerals.

Humphrey Hawksley said: "Deng wished to hand over rule to a collective leadership of modern thinking technocrats and not a god-king that China has traditionally been accustomed to."

International reaction to the news has been complimentary about the dead dictator and his contribution to the world economy.

US Secretary of State Madeline Albright said he was "an historic figure" and that the US would continue to pursue a "multi-faceted relationship with China", based on issues of trade, the environment and human rights.

The UK's Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind expressed his hope economic and political reforms would gather speed, not only for China but to protect Hong Kong's future.

The British colony is due to be handed back to the Chinese in June and the Chinese leadership has already said it intends to dismantle a recently-implemented democratic system.

But Hong Kong Democratic Party Chairman, Martin Lee, says if the Chinese leadership tries to control Hong Kong "freedoms will be eroded".

"The rule of law will be whittled down. And that cannot be good because Hong Kong's freedoms are a foundation for a bright future," he said.



Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

When Deng took power in 1978 he announced a new era of reform.

He dismantled collective farming and allowed private enterprise including special free market zones. Politically, Deng had a reputation as a hardliner, and repeatedly ordered crackdowns on dissidents.

He drew global condemnation when he used the army to crush student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in June 1989.

China is a military superpower, the world's most populous country, and has a vast economy experiencing both growth and diversification.

But political freedom remains heavily suppressed, and even the Chinese Communist Party's guarantee of liberal freedoms in Hong Kong is becoming questionable.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Your nerves are frazzled. Travel may be confusing. Be prepared to step into the limelight if you wish to promote your ambitions.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Be careful not to lead someone on if you truly have no interest. Verbal abuse may lead to walkouts; don't make any rash statements you may regret later.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 This could be a difficult day to deal with coworkers. Opportunities will come through behind the scenes activities. Romance will develop through work.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 You can get phenomenal returns if you present your ideas to those who can back your interests. Enlist the aid of family members and consider the feelings of your mate.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Your emotions are soaring and if you don't get your way, look out world. Call a good friend. This will not be the best day to make changes or renovations to your residence.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 You will impress others with your initiative and ability to accomplish while on short business trips. Don't expect anything for nothing and you won't be disappointed.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Partnerships may be strained if one of you has been erratic and hard to deal with. Expect your workload to be heavy. Let them know what your intentions are.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Someone you live with will get angry if you are neglecting your duties. You will have an inaccurate assessment of your status in society.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Do not sign your life away. Self improvement projects should be your key concern. Refuse to get involved in idle chatter; it will only make you look bad.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Rest and relaxation may be required; minor health problems will prevail if you don't watch your diet. Your energetic nature and ability to initiate projects will add to your popularity.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Don't argue with family. Involvement in groups will be favorable. Business partnerships will prove lucrative. You're on to something tangible and need to act fast.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Luck is with you. Don't put your professional reputation on the line. Take time to do something nice for yourself. You can enhance your reputation by making contributions to worthwhile causes.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	3	6	cloudy
Changchun	-10	-6	cloudy
Chengdu	6	19	fine
Chongqing	10	21	cloudy
Fuzhou	15	28	overcast
Guangzhou	19	27	overcast
Guiyang	12	25	fine
Haikou	21	32	cloudy
Hangzhou	12	25	rain
Harbin	-13	-9	cloudy
Hefei	12	14	rain
Nanjing	14	16	rain
Shanghai	14	21	rain
Taipei	17	25	overcast
Wuhan	11	13	rain
Hong Kong	21	24	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-13	-6	overcast
Frankfurt	6	12	rain
Paris	7	12	cloudy
London	6	12	rain
New York	-2	4	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Flightless bird; 5- High points; 10- Just ___; 14- ___ instant; 15- Valuable collection; 16- Type of Maserati; 17- "Star Wars" princess; 18- Part of a military uniform; 19- Sharp bristle; 20- Profits; 21- Precision; 23- Freddy Krueger's street; 25- Besides; 26- Cooking skillet; 31- Tumbles; 35- Common ID; 36- Throat bug; 38- "Endymion" poet; 40- Hullahaloo; 42- Stitched; 44- Hautboy; 45- Old Nick; 47- Truth ___; 49- Small island; 50- Under siege; 52- Reduce; 54- Dada pioneer; 56- Half of D; 57- Female head of a family; 62- Charisma, atmosphere; 66- Opulent; 67- King of Troy; 68- Chicago paper, for short; 69- Words of comprehension; 70- Climbing vine; 71- Biblical twin; 72- Phaseolus fruit; 73- City on the Ruhr; 74- Preservative;

DOWN 1- Furnace; 2- Arrow poison; 3- Hold off; 4- Momentarily; 5- Tries; 6- Essence; 7- ___ Lisa; 8- Throw out; 9- Zone; 10- Calais cleric; 11- In order (to); 12- Stumbles; 13- Taxi; 22- Small recess; 24- ___ Miserables; 26- Flat sound; 27- Take ___ at (try); 28- Come together; 29- Greek god of war; 30- More recent; 32- Author Tolstoy; 33- Father of Leah and Rachel; 34- Unemotional; 37- Dijon dad; 39- Clockmaker Thomas; 41- Dorm overseers, for short; 43- Inhabitant of the Netherlands; 46- Become closer to; 48- Richie's dad, to the Fonz; 51- Three-bagger; 53- Thrills; 55- Seine spot; 57- Inspiration; 58- Away from port; 59- In that case; 60- Narrow inlets; 61- Flog; 63- Bear in the air; 64- Iranian coin; 65- Adjoin; 66- Ad ___;



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PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731	
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300	
IAM 28 387 333	
Tourism 28 333 000	
Airport 59 888 88	



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Jade Gardem (Taipa)
4 bed 3 bath
379.04 m² / 4,080 ft² | HKD 11,880,000



Manhattan (Taipa)
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WORLD AQUATICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

US swimmer Curzan and China's Pan win their 4th golds at the worlds

STANDOUT swimmers Claire Curzan of the United States and Pan Zhanle of China won their fourth gold medals at the world championships on Saturday.

Curzan was in control all the way through the 200-meter backstroke final as she won by 1.26 seconds from 17-year-old Australian Jaelyn Barclay. Curzan completed her set of backstroke gold medals after earlier winning the 50 and 100, plus the 4x100 mixed medley relay.

"I'm honestly just really happy to be done," she said. "I'm just happy with how I was able to swim and excited for what this means for the future."

Anastasiya Shkur dai, a Belarusian competing as a neutral athlete, won the bronze.

Pan and China won the 4x100 mixed freestyle relay, which isn't on the Olympic program, ahead of Australia and the U.S. There was another strong lead-off swim from Pan, who earlier in the championships swam the fastest



Claire Curzan of the United States

100 meters in history during the 4x100 men's freestyle relay. It was his third gold medal of the worlds in relays.

Ukraine's Vladyslav Bukhov

produced the surprise of the night in the 50 freestyle when he upset last year's winner Cameron McEvoy to triumph.

Bukhov started slowly but ti-

med his final reach for the wall perfectly to win in 21.44 seconds, beating McEvoy by .01. Ben Proud of Britain won the bronze.

Australia's McEvoy swam 21.13 seconds in the heats, .21 off the world record set by Cesar Cielo in 2009, but was slower in the semifinals and final. Ahead of the Olympics in Paris, "I would have liked to have gone a little bit better in the final but I've got to be happy with the three (swims) in total," McEvoy said.

Katie Ledecky's streak of world titles in the 800 free ended when Simona Quadarella of Italy took the gold — though Ledecky wasn't at the meet. Quadarella was neck and neck with Germany's Isabel Gose but beat her to touch the wall by .09 seconds. Erika Fairweather of New Zealand was third.

Quadarella won double gold in the long-distance events after her earlier victory in the 1,500.

Ledecky, who won the event six times in a row, is one of the many top swimmers skipping the

worlds to focus on building to the Paris Olympics.

Portugal's Diogo Matos Ribeiro won the 100 butterfly to add to his gold medal from the 50 fly earlier in the championships. The silver went to Austria's Simon Bucher and bronze to Poland's Jakub Majerski. World champion Maxime Grousset and Olympic gold medalist Caeleb Dressel were absent.

Sarah Sjöström of Sweden won the 50 butterfly, a non-Olympic event, for the sixth time in a row at the worlds, ahead of France's Melanie Henique and Egypt's Farida Osman.

WATER POLO

Croatia beat Italy in a shootout for the men's water polo gold medal after an 11-11 tie in regulation for its first world title since 2017.

Italy was on course to win until Croatia's Rino Buric scored with five seconds remaining to force the shootout.

Spain beat France 14-10 for the bronze. **MDT/AP**

廖國敏
LIO KUOKMAN

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

ELECTIONEERING TARIFF TALK BELIES THE REALITY

There has been plenty of hoopla about the effectiveness of tariffs when it comes to correcting what in the eyes of US policymakers is unfair trade imbalances. Particularly so when it comes to trade ties with China, which they now take as the United States' foremost competitor, which must be contained at any cost.

The previous Donald Trump administration initiated a trade war against China, imposing 25 percent additional tariffs on Chinese imports worth \$300 billion in 2018. Having inherited those tariffs, the Joe Biden administration has chosen to keep them intact.

This is because, in US Trade Representative Katherine Tai's words, the US saw "strategic value" in keeping the tariffs in place to reinvigorate US manufacturing. The Biden White House has bragged about previously outsourced manufacturing flowing back to the US, inflation being tamed, and more jobs having been created.

Trump, who is now the Republican front-runner for the party's presidential nomination for the coming presidential election in November, recently promised to impose a flat tariff rate of 60 percent on all Chinese imports and to increase by 10 percent the tariffs on all other imports if elected.

But neither US consumers, nor manufacturers, support the tariffs. Despite Tai's claim that the tariffs have boosted US domestic manufacturing, US Bureau of Labor data show their contribution to job creation was less than impressive last year.

Jay Timmons, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, for one, has seen how those tariffs have worked against US manufacturers. "Before any elected official or appointed officials starts talking about how good tariffs are, they need to look at the results of how these tariffs have been applied to some manufacturers here in America, and how that's actually cost jobs for American manufacturing workers," he said.

Instead of serving the purpose of spurring US manufacturing, the tariffs have driven up manufacturing costs and consumer prices, he said. He wanted them removed because they "created a system where a drill coming in from China that was fully assembled, is less expensive than a drill that's assembled here, because of the component parts that are being tariffed coming in".

"This is not just a shot you get to take without ... getting return fire," he said. His solution is simple and aligns well with economic common sense — negotiating a "rules-based enforceable free trade agreement".

China has repeatedly urged the US to promote the sound and steady growth of China-US economic and trade ties, stressing they are mutually beneficial and win-win in nature, and serve the fundamental interests of both countries and peoples.

With the two parties vying to show they will be tough on China, which is now de rigueur on the campaign trail, trade and tariffs are likely to be increasingly in the spotlight in the run-up to the US presidential election. But it is to be hoped that the positive signals that emerged from the recent meeting of the two countries' respective Economic Working Group can be maintained in their next meeting penciled in for April despite all the rhetorical jockeying for the election limelight.

If the US does ramp up the tariffs, the outcome, as Timmons observed, will only be a vicious tit-for-tat exchange of fire.

CHINA'S COAST GUARD TO RAMP UP PATROLS NEAR TAIWAN'S KINMEN ARCHIPELAGO AFTER TWO FISHERMEN DIE

THE BUZZ

China is stepping up patrols in the waters off the coast of Taiwan's Kinmen archipelago, days after two of its fishermen drowned while being chased by the Taiwanese coast guard, which accused the boat of trespassing.

The Chinese coast guard's Fujian division will regularly monitor the waters off the southern coast of the city of Xiamen — a few kilometers from Kinmen — to strengthen maritime law enforcement, said the coast guard's spokesman, Gan Yu, in a statement yesterday. Fishermen from Taiwan and China regularly sail that stretch of

water which has seen a rise in tensions as the number of Chinese vessels — including sand dredgers and fishing boats — have notably increased in the area.

Kinmen residents have complained of both the noise and sound pollution from the vessels, as well as losses to their livelihood in fishing.

The fishermen's deaths are unusual despite the level of Chinese activity in the waters near Kinmen, which is closer to China than it is to Taiwan's main island.

AP PHOTO



Independent member of parliament Andrew Wilkie, left, and Julian Assange's brother Gabriel Shipton

AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENT WANTS WIKILEAKS FOUNDER JULIAN ASSANGE BACK HOME, NOT SENT TO US

ROD MCGUIRK, MELBOURNE

AUSTRALIAN Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said late last week he hoped for an amicable end to the prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange after lawmakers ramped up pressure on the United States and Britain by passing a motion calling for the Australian citizen to be allowed to return to his home country.

Albanese told Parliament that the days before London's High Court hears Assange's appeal next week against extradition to the United States on espionage charges were a "critical period."

"I hope this can be resolved. I hope it can be resolved amicably. It's not up to Australia to interfere in the legal processes of other countries, but it is appropriate for us to put our very strong view that those countries need to take into account the need for this to be concluded," Albanese said.

"Regardless of where people stand, this thing cannot just go on and on and on indefinitely," Albanese added.

Assange's wife told a news conference in London that the upcoming hearing is a matter of life and death

as her husband's health continues to deteriorate in prison and she fears he will die behind bars.

"His life is at risk every single day he stays in prison," Stella Assange said. "If he's extradited, he will die."

Assange faces a two-day hearing starting Tuesday in the High Court over whether he should be granted a full appeal to challenge his extradition. If he loses at that stage, he will have exhausted all judicial remedies in England and his supporters fear he could be swiftly sent to the U.S. before he could appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

Albanese congratulated independent lawmaker Andrew Wilkie for moving a motion in support of Assange in the House of Representatives on Wednesday ahead of the appeal.

Albanese was among the 86 lawmakers who voted for the motion that called on the United States and Britain to bring the "matter to a close so that Mr. Assange can return home to his family in Australia."

The motion was opposed by 42 lawmakers including most of the main opposition party that unsuccessfully proposed amendments.

Leaders of both the government and the oppo-

sition have publicly stated that the United States' pursuit of the 52-year-old had dragged on for too long.

Assange has been in London's high-security Belmarsh Prison since he was arrested in 2019 for skipping bail during a separate legal battle. Before that, he spent seven years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault. Sweden dropped the rape investigation in 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

Assange's brother Gabriel Shipton last week welcomed the lawmakers' vote, adding that his notorious sibling could potentially be extradited to the United States next week.

"That means all the ties to his family, his lifeline that are keeping him alive inside that prison will be cut off and he'll be lost into a horrific prison system in the United States," Shipton told reporters at Parliament House.

"This show of support from the Parliament is at a crucial time and now gives the government a real mandate to advocate very, very strongly for a political solution to bring Julian Assange home," Shipton added. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



UN's highest court opens historic hearings today into the legality of Israel's 57-year occupation of lands sought for a Palestinian state, plunging the 15 international judges back into the heart of the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Six days of hearings are scheduled at the International Court of Justice, during which an unprecedented number of countries will participate, as Israel continues its devastating assault on Gaza.

AP PHOTO



French President Emmanuel Macron says recognizing a Palestinian state is not a "taboo" for France, as international frustration grows with Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories. France and the EU have long supported a two-state solution in the Mideast, but as part of a negotiated settlement. With talks long stalled and Israel's offensive against Hamas in Gaza deepening, some European countries are voicing support for recognizing a Palestinian state sooner.

AP PHOTO



Nigerians are facing one of the West African nation's worst economic crises in years triggered by surging inflation, the result of monetary policies that have pushed the currency to an all-time low against the dollar. The situation has provoked anger and protests across the country. The latest government statistics released last week showed the inflation rate in January rose to 29.9%, its highest since 1996. Nigeria's currency, the naira, plummeted to 1,524 to \$1, reflecting a 230% loss of value in the last year.