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THE MACAU PROFESSIONAL GOLFERS ASSOCIATION HAS RELAUNCHED ITS ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING A HALT IN OPERATIONS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

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CHINA CUTS KEY INTEREST RATE IN LATEST MOVE TO BOOST ITS AILING PROPERTY SECTOR

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SINGAPORE AIRSHOW FEATURES AERIAL DISPLAYS AND INTERNATIONAL DEBUT OF CHINA'S C919

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Japan-Ukraine Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal (pictured) said yesterday that his country needs long-range missiles and other ammunition to end Russia's invasion, and said he expects a U.S. aid package that's stalled in Congress to come through, speaking at a news conference the day after he attended a conference in Tokyo on reconstructing Ukraine.



Ukraine Delays in weapons deliveries from Western allies to Ukraine are opening a door for Russian battlefield advances, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says, making the fight "very difficult" along parts of the front line where the Kremlin's forces captured a strategic city last weekend ahead of the war's two-year anniversary.



Indian farmers who have been protesting for a week to demand guaranteed crop prices have rejected a proposal from the government, and say they will continue their march to the capital New Delhi.

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OUT OF RICH

Business in non-tourist areas far from recovered, says lawmaker Chan Chak Mo



REAL ESTATE 2023 WAS THE WORST YEAR FOR PROPERTY MARKET IN 40 YEARS

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PEREIRA COUTINHO SUICIDE RATE LINKED TO 'STRUGGLING BUSINESS OWNERS'

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PEREIRA COUTINHO AGAINST CURRENT PROVISIONS OF TRADE UNION BILL

RENATO MARQUES

THE lawmaker and president of the Board of Directors of the Macao Public Servants Association (ATFPM), José Pereira Coutinho has expressed his disagreement with some important provisions of the bill that aims to establish a Trade Union Law in Macau.

Questioned by the media on the topic on the sidelines of the Legislative Assembly (AL) Media Spring Luncheon, the lawmaker said he was opposed to this bill, adding that it was preferable to have no Trade Union Law.

"I prefer not to have a Trade Union Law than to have a law that constrains even further the fundamental rights of the workers. I do not accept certain aspects such as the idea that the DSAL (Labour Affairs Bureau) inspectors could enter (in my case) ATFPM and scrutinize all the private files and papers from our members," he said, adding, "I prefer not to have this law and keep what we have now that is the freedom of association and of expression that we still have in Macau."

Pereira Coutinho noted that according to the provisions of the bill now at the AL waiting for further discussion, DSAL's Inspectors will have the legal right to inspect and collect information from all the formally established labor union groups to investigate, "How many members we have, from which nationalities, where they work and



LYNZY VALLES

their job posts, etc." he remarked.

"This is very dangerous and it is not what we wanted or wished for. If this system moves forward as was proposed, for sure the ATFPM will not change [its current status as an association] to become a labor union," he concluded.

Still, the lawmaker said he hopes that the government side will promote amendments to the current bill so some of these major clashing points can be corrected in time.

At the same event, lawmaker Ella Lei, linked with the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) also aired similar concerns regarding the current provisions of the Trade Union bill related to the operation of the labor union groups and their responsibilities, namely of reporting to the government

certain aspects of the operations as well as members.

Lei said that people are concerned with some of these provisions as well as the penalties the groups can incur if they fail to report. She proposed that further discussion on the chapters addressing these topics directly is needed before the bill is approved.

Pereira Coutinho and the FAOM were responsible in the past for a total of 12 proposals for the establishment of a Trade Union Law in Macau, all of which were rejected by the AL.

The current proposal, led by the government, was passed on the first reading over one year ago and, since then, has not seen further progress.

This bill does not provide for the right of the workers to go on strike

nor for collective bargaining, two of the fundamental principles of this type of law in other jurisdictions.

In the debate at the AL, the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, justified the lack of such provisions with the need for Macau to have "a Trade Union Law adapted to the local characteristics."

THE LONG WAIT FOR LAWS

The bill is one of several that were noted to have been stalled at the AL for several months without any progress being made in their analysis.

To the media, the lawmaker explained that this happens not because the lawmakers are taking too long to address the new bills and legal regimes but, instead, because

the proponent reclaims them for long periods to insert changes.

"What happens is that the government, to show that [it] is working for the population, sends bills to the AL that, after being passed at the first reading with many notes from lawmakers, are sent to a Standing Committee and there the government retrieves that version saying that [it] will present a new version but that never happens or takes a very long time to happen," the lawmaker explained, adding, "this is one of the big issues that AL has at the moment, the [Standing] Committees have in their hands a lot of bills that [it] seems that the lawmakers are taking too long to address when in reality the bills are in the hands of the government."

Pereira Coutinho also remarked that this is not the only bill that is in such a situation.

"The Trade Union Law [has] indeed [been] at the AL waiting to be discussed for several months but this is not the one waiting for the longest time. Some bills have been in discussion, inside the different Standing Committees, for over six months and we [the lawmakers] still don't know how or when the issues [found] will be solved."

The same lawmaker also noted that in this legislative year, the AL has some very important bills to discuss, namely the Trade Union law as well as the AL elections law.

Addressing the latter, Pereira Coutinho noted that this bill "turned out not to have so many extreme changes as we initially expected and that was of most concern to people," saying that he hopes that the amendments come at the right time.

Lawyers Association submitted three legal opinions to AL this legislative year

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macau Lawyers Association (AAM) has submitted, so far, three pieces of advice to the Legislative Assembly (AL) this legislative year, the president of AAM, Vong Hin Fai, said yesterday on the sidelines of AL's Media Spring Luncheon.

Questioned by the media on the topic, Vong said the

association has submitted advice related to the law production on topics related to the Tax Code and the electronization of the Notary services.

"This happened regarding the Tax Code, which is still pending the analysis of the bill and another on the electronization of the works of the notary services," Vong said, adding that, for the time, the topic of the

election law for the AL is not on the agenda.

"We did not address the AL electoral law. The AL is still addressing it. For the time being, the AAM is not preparing any advice as this matter is not on the agenda of the board of directors," he explained.

Separately, Vong said that AAM will continue the tour that started last year for the Greater Bay Area

(GBA) cities in an attempt to find partnerships and expand contacts between local lawyers and companies within the nine cities.

Vong said that in 2023 the association toured three cities, and is expecting to make the other six this year. A formal visit to Portugal is also planned for the association this year, and is likely to take place in June or July.



LYNZY VALLES

Vong Hin Fai

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Chan Chak Mo: Business in non-tourist areas far from recovery

LYNZY VALLES

DESPITE robust economic growth and recovering consumer spending, restaurants and retailers in non-touristy areas are far from recovery.

The recent 10-day Chinese New Year holiday period remains an important barometer for consumption, which has been lagging due to the country's continued property crisis and macroeconomic headwinds.

While restaurants and retailers in tourist areas have recorded a surge in sales, those in the city's community areas are not seeing signs of recovery.

Speaking to the press, lawmaker and businessman Chan Chak Mo said that strong recovery is visible in the city's most famous streets, as 38% have said revenues have increased, while 18% disagreed. The remainder implied that revenues were similar to last year.

Speaking of eateries and retail outlets in less tourist-visited places, "they are not doing so well."

Only 18% said they are doing better than last year, 30-something percent said they are worse [off] than last year," he said,

Just recently, Fong Kin Fu, the president of the Federal General Commercial Association of Macau Small and Medium Enter-



Chan Chak Mo

prises, highlighted the decline in business activity and spending in residential areas, particularly in northern Macau.

This deems potential closure of businesses, thus focus needs to be redirected towards non-tourist districts.

Meanwhile, Chan believes that there will be continuous increases in people visiting Macau, amid the government's conti-

nuous promotion in attracting tourists – anticipating that "this year's figures will be greater than last year."

However, the government has to still figure out how to help restaurants in districts not visited by tourists.

"It's not that easy and it's not something that we can [fix in a short time]," he said.

The former lawmaker and pre-

sident of the United Association of Food and Beverage Merchants of Macau has also addressed the fact that spending habits of local residents have shifted – even noting that many are opting to leave Macau during the weekend to visit the mainland, and in doing so boosting their consumption in nearby regions.

"They have the tendency every weekend to drive up to the

mainland to spend and to visit so that is a big problem for the time being for the restaurant[s]. Not just for the restaurants, but retail shops and businesses are suffering. But I'm sure the government is thinking about a lot of things to [protect the business]," he said.

Questioned by the Times on whether local SMEs are greatly benefiting from the revitalization program of the six gaming operators and the government, Chan said that one of the main benefits of this program is that tourists can lengthen their stay, and thus spend more.

However, "that would take a bit of time."

"The six gaming operators are doing a lot because they have the resources. Among themselves, they do have to compete in a good way," said Chan.

"The old district [that are part of the revitalization program], they will run down, there may not enough electricity, old façade, and [will need to be refurbished], [...] so the government coordination is very important," he added.

The government had already coordinated with the integrated resorts on how to promote tourism through community revitalization.

During the pandemic, the government deliberately carried out works in the old districts to beautify them, introducing SMEs in these districts.

"Even though the casino wants to do something, they need to go to the government, then the community, then only we can start. That's the direction we're taking, it will take a few years but we'll get there," Chan concluded.

Suicide rate also linked to struggling business owners, lawmaker claims

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKER José Pereira Coutinho claims that recent cases of suicide, which occurred in the Northern District, are related to the incapacity of small business owners to deal with accumulated debts, he told the media on the sidelines of the Legislative Assembly Media Spring Luncheon.

"What is happening at the Ruins of St. Paul's and Rua do Cunha is not what is happening in Macau at large; it is particularly in the Northern District where people and shop owners are struggling with debts and with no prospects of improvement," he said, noting he had recently spoken to the family of one person



who committed suicide after dealing with difficulties since the start of the pandemic.

"I have been constantly calling for the resumption of consumption cards and other support measures but these shop owners

told me that they now believe that not even this is worth[while] anymore. It seems like local residents have changed their consumption habits to acquire all goods and services across the border [via online platforms], which is

killing the local businesses."

Pereira Coutinho noted this to be a very serious matter that is not being addressed by the government, particularly taking into account the high banking interest rates which make it impossible for people to continue to fulfill their contracted obligations.

As the Times previously reported, Macau saw a total of 88 suicides in 2023, an increase of 10% when compared to the previous year when 80 cases were recorded.

Health authorities also noted that the incidence of such cases was particularly high in the last quarter of 2023.

The same authorities

have consistently stated that suicide may be related to mental illness, chronic or physical diseases, gambling, or financial problems but without providing any accurate data or information on the local cases. Recently, in an interview with a local Real Estate agent, the Times was also informed that there were at least two cases of people renting commercial spaces with this agent with the business owners committing suicide in the space of just a couple of weeks.

According to the agent, operating mostly in the Central District, one of the cases occurred at the end of 2023 while the second was at the beginning of this year.

DISGRACEFUL SALARY UPDATES

The same lawmaker also noted that in general and concurrently, workers' salaries are not commensurate with Macau's real inflation and with the development of the society.

"We see that the gaming industry revenues are excellent but the companies only increased their workers' salaries by 2.5%. This is outrageous. The workers have made so many sacrifices over the three years of the pandemic period and now when the revenues have recovered, they [the gaming concessionaires] do a distribution of profits among the stakeholders but when they arrive at the level of the labor force that contributed to their results and ultimately the wealth of the Macau SAR, they get some disgraceful 2.5% of salary update," he concluded.

ENROLMENT FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS FROM APR.13

In the academic year 2024/2025, there will be 51 schools admitting secondary students and 60 school units admitting primary students, according to information released by the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ). The date for the collection of a "school place reservation fee" from new students in different education stages should be no earlier than Apr. 13, the bureau noted.

MGTO PROMOTES 'TOURISM + LEARNING' IN COLLABORATION

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has collaborated with a newspaper in Hong Kong to promote local tourism. In collaboration with South China Morning Post (SCMP), the project included a familiarization visit organized by the newspaper's youth edition, Young Post. The familiarization visit allowed Hong Kong secondary school students to experience the history and culture, and learn about Macau's tourism resources, promoting the development of "tourism + learning" and the diversification of visitor groups. The collaboration included 50 secondary students from Hong Kong.

GOLF

MPGA RELAUNCHES WITH MICHAEL WONG AS NEW PRESIDENT

STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau Professional Golfers Association (MPGA) has relaunched its activities following a halt in operations due to the pandemic.

With the relaunch of activities, the association announced Hong Kong actor Michael Wong as the new president of the group.

Wong has appeared in more than 100 feature films since his career started in Hong Kong in 1985, and starred in the recent box office hit "A Guilty Conscience". He is also a single handicap golfer.

Originally formed in 2006, the MPGA is now re-launching after the global pandemic with "renewed vigor and an exciting program." The MPGA has set forth several ambitious goals to be achieved in the coming years.

In a press conference yesterday, Wong announced the association's five-year plan, including the creation of a new generation of proficient golf professionals, and introducing

and promoting golf to a wider audience.

Aside from this, the group also aims to "provide professional services to businesses and associations for golfers and stage exciting events featuring PGA Professionals and Celebrities."

Looking ahead, the MPGA also announced an extensive tuition program for students, offering them the opportunity to learn or refine their skills under the guidance of PGA golf professionals.

This year, the MPGA will stage the first annual "MPGA Ladies Day" as well as the first "MPGA Pro-Am."

By 2025, the group intends to launch the annual "MPGA Pro-Celebrity" event.

By 2026, the group also plans to certify the first MPGA Fully Qualified professional.

The MPGA "is excited to embark on this journey towards excellence and invites all golf enthusiasts, professionals, and businesses to join them in their pursuit of elevating the sport in Macau," the group stated.



Michael Wong

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REAL ESTATE GROUP: 2023 WAS THE WORST YEAR FOR MARKET IN 40 YEARS

STAFF REPORTER

THE year 2023 was the lowest point and the most difficult year for the development of the real estate market in 40 years, according to the Real Estate Joint Chamber of Commerce.

In a Chinese New Year reception yesterday, the chairman of the group, Ung Choi Kin, said that according to the group's statistics, there are nearly 700 empty shops in the Macau Peninsula, and that there have been only about 500 real estate transactions in

the past two months.

According to the chairman, if government policies remain unchanged, it is expected that the real estate market "will not have a good year."

He called on the government to study the opening of investment residence and property purchase residence, introduce investors to revitalize the real estate market, and suggested that the stamp duty be completely abolished to boost investment confidence, as cited in a TDM report.

The association also

believed that moderate diversification of the economy requires good use of land, increased population and talent support. He also suggested studying the possibility of international university students staying in Macau for employment.

Moreover, Ung also proposed that the government consider renting social housing to young people to live in, so as to save money and then buy a property; while the development targets of the private real estate market should be foreign investors, who rent or buy properties in the SAR.



AVIATION

Singapore Airshow features aerial displays and international debut of China's C919

ZEN SOO, SINGAPORE

THE Singapore Airshow – Asia's largest – kicked off yesterday with an array of aerial displays including some by China's COMAC C919 narrow-body airliner.

It's the first time Singapore has opened the event to the public since 2020, when a scaled-down version went ahead as the COVID-19 pandemic was just starting.

The biennial show comes as Asia's aviation sector is taking off following the hard years of the pandemic, when many countries in the region closed their borders to most international travel.

Subhas Menon, director general of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines, said that this year's show was "back in full swing" with over 1,000 exhibitors.

"The Singapore Airshow is a good opportunity for exhibitors to show off the direction they're going, in terms of technology like autonomous vehicles and so forth," Menon said in an interview.

He said passenger loads in the region are nearly back to pre-COVID levels, and that Asia Pacific is expected to account for 50% of the growth in air travel demand this year.

But even as the aviation sector bounces back, the industry faces a broader supply chain crunch, with parts and plane shortages and shortages of personnel, from air crews to pilots.

"Supply chain issues are definitely affecting the timely delivery of aircraft and spares, and that's one of the reasons why capacity growth



A China's COMAC C919 aircraft flies during the first day of the Singapore Airshow in Singapore

is lagging behind traffic growth," Menon said.

"We do not know when this will ease as it's related to trade tensions and geopolitical problems that are happening around the world," he said.

Yesterday, China's Tibet Airlines finalized an order for 40 C919 passenger jets and 10 ARJ21 regional jets from the Commercial Aircraft Company of China (COMAC). The two companies signed the deal on the sidelines of the airshow.

COMAC's C919 is a narrow-body airliner, similar to the Airbus A320neo and Boeing's 737 Max jets. COMAC designed many of the C919's parts but some of its key components, including its engine, are still sourced from the West.

The orders come as COMAC

attempts to position itself as a viable option for single-aisle jets, as companies like Boeing and Airbus grapple with a backlog of orders.

The company has received over 1,000 orders for its C919, according to Chinese media, although the plane is currently only certified in mainland China. Four C919s are currently operational with China Eastern Airlines.

The C919's debut at the show is the first time the jet has made a trip outside Chinese territory, though the aircraft performed a fly-past in Hong Kong in December in its first foray outside of mainland China.

The flying display — a highlight of the biennial air show — saw Singapore's air force perform an aerial display with a F-15SG fighter jet and an AH-64D Apache helicopter. COMAC's C919 and Air-

bus' widebody A350-1000 aircraft also performed fly-pasts.

The Indian air force's Sarang helicopter team showed off an array of aerial acrobatics, while the Indonesian air force's Jupiter and the Australian air force's Roulettes performed acrobatic maneuvers, including crossovers and drawing giant hearts in the sky.

The South Korean air force's Black Eagles, flying in their acrobatic aircraft T-50B, were the finale of yesterday's aerial display, performing maneuvers including the drawing of the Taegeuk — the yin-yang circle found on the South Korean flag — via the jets' smoke system.

The U.S. Air Force's B-52 Stratofortress is expected to make a fly-past on Thursday.

U.S. aircraft manufacturer Boeing will not be featuring any

passenger jets at the show. The firm is under scrutiny after a mid-flight blowout of a fuselage panel on one of its 737 Max 9 jets last month.

This year's airshow is also expected to spotlight sustainable aviation, with Airbus using a blend of sustainable aviation fuel made of feedstock from cooking oil and tallow, together with conventional jet fuel for the A350-1000 aircraft in its aerial display.

Hyundai's U.S.-based Supernal unit, which specializes in advanced mobility aircraft such as air taxis, is also an exhibitor in this year's airshow.

The event, which runs from Feb. 20 to 25, is expected to draw more than 50,000 visitors. More than 1,000 companies from over 50 countries are participating. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Albergue announces activities for moon lantern festival



As the 2024 Moon Festival approaches, CAC - Circulo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau and Albergue SCM has announced activities for the the upcoming "Ce-

lebration of the Chinese New Year Moon Lantern Festival" party.

The event will be held on Feb. 24, at 6:30 p.m. in Albergue SCM, featuring a

series of traditional Chinese New Year snacks.

The event also features a wishing well, dance performances and live music.

At the same time, the CAC has invited renowned Macau calligrapher Master Choi Chun Heng to perform a calligraphy activity and present the "Chinese Calligraphy Art Exhibition 2024" in order to promote traditional Chinese culture and celebrate the Moon Festival.

The fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar calendar is the first full moon night of the year. It marks the beginning of a new year and the revival of nature.

Sands China executives celebrate Year of the Dragon with team members



Sands China executives celebrated Chinese New Year with team members earlier this week at festivities at its properties, welcoming the Year of the Dragon together with various activities.

At each property, team members watched performances, played an interactive game with executive management, and enjoyed cash-prize lucky draws and a roast pig cutting, with pro-

perty executives distributing Chinese New Year snacks to team members.

"Sands China is very excited about the year that just passed and we are looking forward to another great year ahead," said Wilfred Wong, executive vice chairman of Sands China Ltd. "Our gratitude goes to our amazing team members for their continued dedication and commitment to the company, which they've shown in times of prosperity and in times of difficulty."

As this year marks Sands Macao's 20th anniversary, Sands China's management team members expressed gratitude to Sands Macao's opening team during the property's Chinese New Year celebration event.

ECONOMY

Central bank cuts key interest rate in latest move to boost its ailing property sector

CHINA'S central bank announced yesterday that it cut its 5-year loan prime rate while leaving its 1-year rate unchanged in the latest move to ease pressures on the ailing property market.

The 5-year rate was lowered by 0.25 basis points to 3.95% while the 1-year rate remains at 3.45%. It was the first time the 5-year rate was cut since May, and analysts said it was the largest cut on record for that rate.

Since markets reopened Monday after a weeklong Lunar New Year holiday break, state-owned banks have announced a flurry of plans for billions of dollars worth of loans to support developers struggling after a crackdown on excessive borrowing.

"On its own it will not revive new home sales. But coupled with efforts to provide increased credit support to developers, today's cut should help to reduce pressure on the property sector somewhat," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital



AP PHOTO

Economics said in a commentary.

The surprise cut to the 5-year LPR could improve affordability for buyers by lowering the mortgage rates, said Lynn Song of ING Economics.

China's economy, the world's

second largest, depends heavily on the property sector to drive growth and provide employment. Since the crackdown on what the leadership viewed as dangerous levels of borrowing in a housing bubble, dozens of developers

have defaulted on their debts and many others are struggling to recover.

But Song said the People's Bank of China has limited room to maneuver given downward pressure on the Chinese yuan at a time

when Western central banks have not yet begun cutting rates.

By cutting only one of the two main rates, the authorities were signaling their determination to use a targeted approach to supporting the economy, said Louise Loo of Oxford Economics.

"The size of today's move also reveals — in our view — a genuine concern among Beijing policymakers that the 'incremental' slow-drip of policy easing implemented thus far has had little impact," Loo said in a report.

There was a muted reaction in Chinese markets, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite index gaining 0.4% yesterday.

The 1-year rate is the benchmark for most personal and corporate loans.

Analysts noted that the problems in the property industry don't hinge mainly on interest rates but reflect longer-term problems.

Even though mortgage rates have fallen somewhat, housing sales have continued to decline, Evans-Pritchard noted.

Market watchers have said investors are eager to see stronger action by Beijing to support the housing market and markets.

Managing expectations is a big part of that, Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a report, given that the government appears more likely to stick to piecemeal measures as it prioritizes developing advanced technologies and keeping the economy stable. **MDT/AP**

DIRE STRAIT

Taiwan protests after China boards a tourist boat near Kinmen Island

CHRISTOPHER BODEEN,
TAIPEI

TAIWAN yesterday protested China's boarding of a tourist boat, as tensions rise around the Kinmen archipelago, which lies a short distance off China's coast but is controlled by Taiwan.

Taiwanese media reported the King Xia, carrying 11 crew and 23 passengers, was boarded by the Chinese coast guard for about 32 minutes on Monday. Taiwan's coast guard escorted the boat back to Kinmen, and it then continued its sight-seeing voyage.

Ocean Affairs Council head Kuan Bi-ling told journalists at the legislature yesterday that the incident "hurt the feelings of our people, created panic among the people, and was not in the interest of



AP FILE PHOTO

A Chinese Coast Guard ship is docked near a China Customs building in Xiamen

the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait," referring to the 160 kilometer-wide waterway that separates mainland China from Taiwan.

Head of cabinet Chen Chien-jen said Taiwan was seeking to lower tensions in the area, which have escalated as China increased military activities following Taiwan's election of an in-

dependence-leading leader in January.

"We hope that this matter can be resolved properly," Chen said. "We hope that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait will adopt a rational, reciprocal, and cooperative approach to maintain the security of the waters between Kinmen and (the Chinese port city of) Xiamen and allow

people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to communicate in a more healthy and orderly manner."

China is stepping up patrols in the waters off the coast of Kinmen and its associated islands, days after two Chinese fishermen drowned while being chased by the Taiwanese coast guard, which accused the boat of trespassing.

Taiwan's coast guard said a boat carrying four people was fishing about one nautical mile away from Kinmen, which Taiwan has claimed as a restricted area largely for military purposes, and capsized during a chase. The two survivors remain in Taiwan's custody.

China blamed Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party for the fishermen's deaths. It also said that there was no such thing as "restricted" waters.

A spokesperson for the Chinese coast guard said Sunday that its Fujian division will regularly monitor the waters off the southern coast of Xiamen — within view of Kinmen — to strengthen maritime law enforcement.

China's Foreign Ministry declined to answer questions on the matter, saying it was not a "diplomatic issue."

Fishermen from both 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.

In addition to piling political and military pressure on Taiwan, China is seen as seeking to bring Kinmen into its orbit, along with Taiwan-controlled island group of Matsu, which lies off the Chinese coast to the north. Taiwanese forces based in the area have fired at drones sent over from the mainland in what is seen as a hybrid civilian-military effort to sow fear and undermine support for Taiwan's government.

In the 24 hours leading up to 6:00 a.m. on Tuesday, 24 military aircraft and eight ships were detected operating around the island, Taiwan reported, adding that 11 of the planes crossed the median line in the strait. It said Taiwan scrambled jets, dispatched ships and put land-based missile defenses on alert. **MDT/AP**

NORTH KOREA-RUSSIA

Putin gave Kim a Russian-made car in a show of their special ties: Pyongyang

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin has gifted North Korean leader Kim Jong Un a Russian-made car for his personal use in a demonstration of their special relationship, North Korea's state media reported yesterday.

The report didn't say what kind of vehicle it was or how it was shipped. But observers said it could violate a U.N. resolution that bans supplying luxury items to North Korea in an attempt to pressure the country to abandon its nuclear weapons.

Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, and another North Korean official accepted the gift Sunday and she conveyed her brother's thanks to Putin, the Korean Central News Agency said. Kim Yo Jong said the gift showed the special personal relationship between the leaders, the report said.

North Korea and Russia have boosted their cooperation significantly since Kim traveled to Russia last September for a summit with Putin. During Kim's visit to Russia's main spaceport, Putin showed the North Korean leader



his personal Anrus Senat limousine and Kim sat in its backseat.

According to Russia's state-run Tass news agency, Aurus was the first Russian luxury car brand and it's been used in the motorcades of top officials including Putin since he first used an Anrus limousine during his inauguration ceremony in 2018.

Kim, 40, is known to possess many foreign-made luxury cars believed to have been smuggled into his country in breach of the U.N. resolution.

During his Russia visit, he traveled between meeting sites in a Maybach limousine that was brought with him on one of his special train carriages.

During an earlier Russia trip in 2019, Kim had two limos waiting for him at Vladivostok station — a Mercedes Maybach S600 Pullman Guard and a Mercedes Maybach S62. He also reportedly used the S600 Pullman Guard for his two summits with then-President Donald Trump in Singapore in 2018 and Vietnam in 2019. In 2018, Kim

used a black Mercedes limousine to return home after a meeting with South Korea's then-President Moon Jae-in at a shared Korean border village.

Kim's possession of such expensive foreign limousines shows the porousness of international sanctions on the North. Russia voted for the ban on supplying luxury good to North Korea, even though as a permanent Security Council member, it could have vetoed the resolution.

The expanding ties between North Korea and Russia come as they are locked in separate confrontations with the United States and its allies — North Korea for its advancing nuclear program and Russia for its protracted war with Ukraine. The U.S., South Korea and their partners accuse North Korea of sending conventional arms to Russia for its war in Ukraine, in return for high-tech Russian weapons technologies and other support.

After its foreign minister returned home following a Russian visit in January, the North's state media reported Putin expressed his willingness to visit the North at an early date. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH KOREA

Doctors walk out to protest gov't policy, causing many surgery cancellations

SOUTH Korean trainee doctors collectively walked off their jobs yesterday to escalate their protest of a government medical policy, triggering cancellations of surgeries and other medical treatments at hospitals.

The Health Ministry urged them to return to work immediately, saying they must not endanger the lives of patients to fight the government.

As of Monday night, more than half of the 13,000 trainee doctors in South Korea were confirmed to have submitted resignations en masse to protest a government push to increase the number of medical students. A total of 1,630 of them have left their work sites, according to Health Ministry records.

More trainee doctors



A trainee doctors attend a meeting at the Korea Medical Association building in Seoul, yesterday

are expected to follow suit. Under a decision made by their association last week, trainee doctors at the country's five major hospitals were supposed to walk off collectively yesterday.

At the center of the dispute is a recent government announcement that it would raise medical school admissions by 2,000 from next year. The government says it's urgent to have more

doctors to address what it calls a shortage of doctors, given the country's fast-growing population.

But the plan triggered a strong backlash from many doctors, who say the

2,000 new admissions are too many to be handled by medical schools and that resources must be used to resolve other issues first.

Most of the 13,000 trainee doctors work at 100 hospitals across South Korea, assisting senior doctors during surgeries and treating patients. If their walkouts are prolonged or joined by senior doctors, that could cause disruptions at those hospitals and in South Korea's overall medical service, observers say.

South Korea has a total of 140,000 doctors.

At Seoul's Asan Medical Center, a nurse said it's unclear how long senior doctors could solely perform surgeries and other treatments without the assistance of trainee doctors. The nurse, who requested anonymity citing the sensitivity of the issue, said that trainee doctors typically handle skin incision and disinfection during surgeries at the direction of senior doctors and manage data on hospital computers.

She said her hospital

plans to delay the planned acceptance of some cancer patients and to release inpatients early. Other Asan hospital officials said Tuesday that an unspecified number of trainee doctors didn't come to work but noted some are still working. They said the hospital is rearranging planned surgery schedules by reviewing the conditions of patients.

Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo said authorities have received 34 public complaints related to the trainee doctors' walkouts — 25 of them over the cancellation of surgeries. Other cases include hospitals refusing to treat patients and canceling planned medical treatments.

"If you leave your patients to oppose a government policy despite knowing what your collective action would cause, that can't be justified at all," Park said. "We appeal to trainee doctors to return to patients. An act of endangering the lives of patients to express your opinions is something that you must not do." **MDT/AP**

GAZA STRIP

Israel orders new evacuations in northern Gaza, where UN says one in six children are malnourished

WAFAA SHURAF
& SAMY MAGDY, RAFAH

ISRAEL ordered new evacuations from parts of Gaza City yesterday, as a study led by the U.N. children's agency found that one in six children are acutely malnourished in the isolated and largely devastated north of the territory, where the city is located.

The report finds deepening misery across the territory, where Israel's air and ground offensive, launched in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, has killed over 29,000 Palestinians, obliterated entire neighborhoods and displaced more than 80% of the population.

Israel has vowed to expand the offensive to the Gaza Strip's southernmost city of Rafah, where more than half of the territory's population of 2.3 million has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. Many have crowded into sprawling tent camps and overflowing U.N.-run shelters near the Egyptian border.

The United States, Israel's top ally, has been working with mediators Egypt and Qatar to try to broker another cease-fire and hostage release agreement. Hamas' top political leader Ismail Haniyeh was in Cairo to meet with Egyptian officials yesterday, but there was no expectation of a breakthrough.

The Israeli military meanwhile ordered the evacuation of the Zaytoun and Turkoman neighborhoods on the southern edge of Gaza City, an indication that Palestinian militants are still putting up stiff resistance in areas of northern Gaza that the Israeli military said had been largely cleared weeks ago.

Residents said there have been airstrikes and heavy ground fighting in eastern parts of Gaza City over the past two days. "The situation is very difficult," said Ayman Abu Awad, who lives in Zaytoun. "We are trapped inside our homes."

The report by the Glo-



bal Nutrition Cluster, an aid partnership led by UNICEF, says more than 90% of children under 5 in Gaza eat two or fewer food groups a day, known as severe food poverty. A similar percentage are affected by infectious diseases, with 70% experiencing diarrhea in the last two weeks.

More than 80% of homes lack clean and safe water, with the average household having one liter (quart) per person per day, according to the report released Monday.

In Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where most humanitarian aid enters, the acute malnutrition rate is 5%, compared to 15% in northern Gaza, which has been isolated by the Israeli military and largely cut off from aid for months. Before the war the rate across Gaza was less than 1%, the report said.

"The Gaza Strip is poised to witness an explosion in preventable child deaths, which would compound the already unbearable level of child deaths in Gaza," UNICEF official Ted Chaiban said in a statement.

A U.N. report in December found that Gaza's entire po-

pulation of 2.3 million Palestinians is in a food crisis, with a quarter of the population facing starvation.

Israel says it does not restrict the import of humanitarian supplies, but aid groups say delivery within Gaza has been severely hampered by Israeli road closures, ongoing fighting and the breakdown of law and order as Israeli strikes have targeted the Hamas-run police force.

The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, the main provider of aid in Gaza, said earlier this month that Israel was holding up a food shipment that could feed over a million people. Israel accused 12 employees of the agency of taking part in the Oct. 7 attack, without providing evidence. That led the United States and other major donors to freeze vital funding for the agency, even after it fired the workers and launched an independent investigation.

The war began when Hamas-led militants burst through Israel's formidable border defenses and rampaged across communities in southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians,

and taking around 250 hostages. The militants are still holding some 130 captives, around a fourth of whom are believed to be dead, after most of the rest were released in a prisoner-hostage exchange last year.

Israel responded to the attack with one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history in the tiny coastal enclave, which has been under an Israeli and Egyptian blockade since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007.

Gaza's Health Ministry said yesterday that another 103 bodies have been brought to local hospitals in the last 24 hours, bringing the total Palestinian death toll to 29,195. The ministry does not differentiate between fighters and civilians in its records, but says women and children make up two-thirds of those killed. Over 69,000 Palestinians have been wounded in the war, according to the ministry.

Israel says it has killed over 10,000 Palestinian militants but has provided no evidence for its count. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1972 NIXON MAKES HISTORIC VISIT TO CHINA



The American President Richard Nixon has arrived in China at the start of a week-long summit aimed at ending 20 years of frosty relations between the two countries.

His visit began with an unexpected audience with Chairman Mao Zedong at the leader's home. Few details have been released, but officials said the one-hour meeting involved a "serious and frank discussion".

After a modest reception at Peking airport, the president was formally welcomed at a lavish banquet held in the Great Hall of the People and hosted by Prime Minister Chou En-lai.

Mr Chou described Mr Nixon's long journey to China as a "positive move" responding to the wishes of the peoples of both countries.

He hinted at the years of tension between China and the United States - largely due to American support for nationalists in Taiwan - and credited both governments for "common efforts" to open the gate to better contacts at last.

The president responded positively. "There is no reason for us to be enemies," he said. "Neither of us seeks the territory of the other; neither of us seeks domination over the other; neither of us seeks to stretch out our hands and rule the world."

Using one of Mao's own quotations, Mr Nixon said it was time to seize the day and seize the hour "for our two peoples to rise to the heights of greatness which can build a new and better world".

There followed an elaborate round of toasts, in which the 800 guests at the banquet wandered from table to table clinking thimble-sized glasses containing Chinese firewater.

Commentators said the elaborate banquet was in marked contrast to the coolness of the president's reception at the airport.

This historic visit was engineered by the president's national security adviser, Dr Henry Kissinger, during two visits to China last year. It is part of a policy of rapprochement aimed at restoring diplomatic relations between the two sides.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The BBC carried extended news bulletins of President Nixon's ground-breaking visit to China - which included a walk along the Great Wall.

The Chinese people eagerly followed news of the visit and newspapers rapidly sold out.

The main diplomatic achievement of the visit was the Shanghai joint communiqué which declared Taiwan to be part of China.

Formal diplomatic relations were restored between the US and China in 1979 following a second communiqué which suggested a further weakening of US ties with Taiwan.

However, in the years since, Taiwan has remained a sticking point in relations. Different US administrations have chosen to maintain links with Taiwan by selling arms. President Bill Clinton attempted to persuade China to improve its human rights record by offering better trading conditions. In February 2002, President George Bush visited China to mark the 30th anniversary of Nixon's historic trip. The two countries continue to disagree over Taiwan.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Take that long overdue vacation if you can. You must deal with an emotional problem with your loved one that you have been avoiding for some time now.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

You must take care not to overexert yourself if involved in sports. Use some diplomacy to get your point across delicately. Question your mate if you must.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Travel will also be very informative. Don't take your frustrations out on loved ones. Your trendy style and unique way of doing things will entice new acquaintances.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Your need to get away could lead you into greater debt. Shopping could cost more than you bargained for. Don't let the moods of those you live with get you down.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Don't be alarmed. Do not invest in ventures that only appear to be lucrative. Dig deep, ferret out any hidden concerns before you sign your life away.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Be extra careful with your valuables; loss and theft are evident today. Take a second look; another person's philosophy may be extremely different from yours.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Be confident in your endeavors and others will believe in your efforts. Don't let your boss make you feel guilty enough to take work home with you.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

If you can't get away, make plans to do something special with friends or relatives. Don't play on your partner's emotions. You can help them with difficult projects.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Make sure that you have all the pertinent facts before taking action. Your emotions are fluctuating, so be careful not to say things you'll regret.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You may not be happy if members of your family are not pulling their weight. Take care of your personal needs. Unexpected visitors will be a welcome surprise.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Focus on your domestic scene. Get together with friends or relatives. It's doubtful anyone will try to stand in your way or cut you off at the pass today.

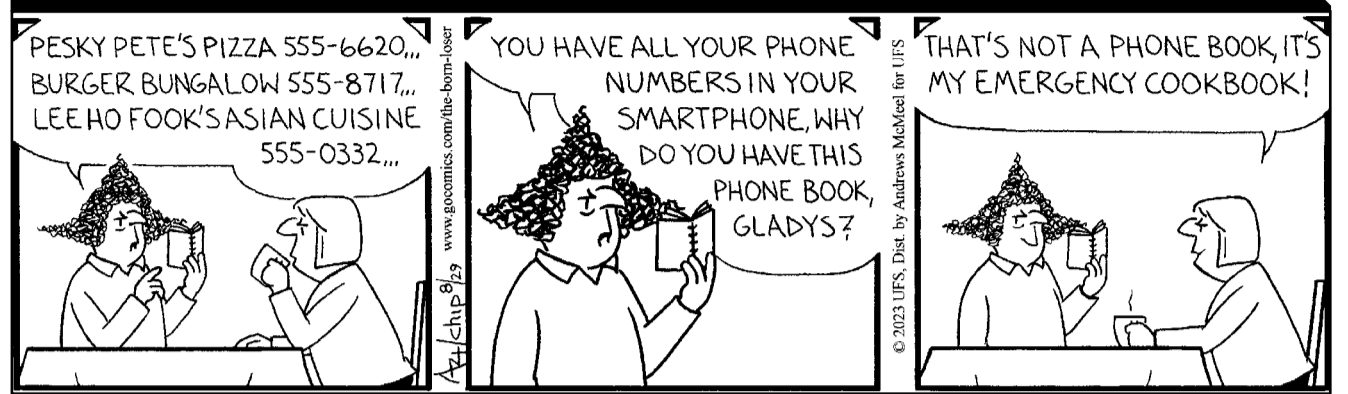


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Stomach problems could prevail if you haven't been watching your diet. Financial difficulties may be worrying you. Don't gamble unless you can afford to lose.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

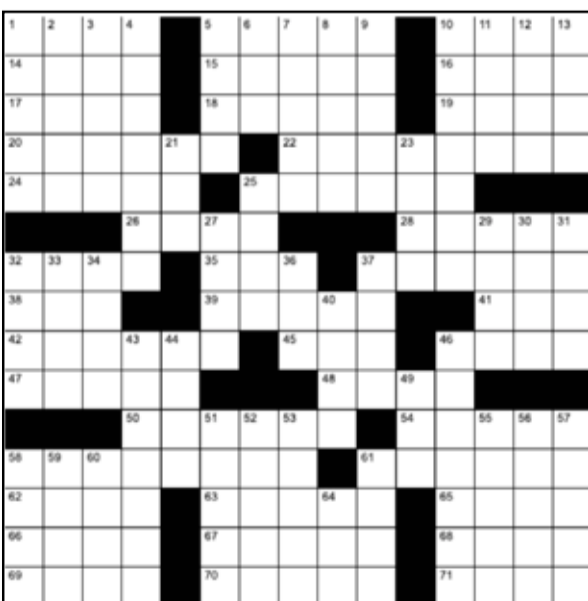
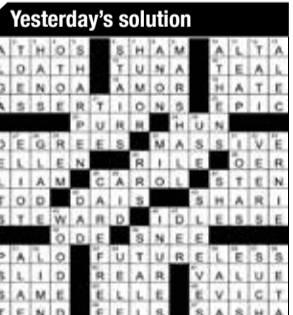
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-4	0	overcast
Changchun	-19	-8	fine
Chengdu	9	12	overcast
Chongqing	12	13	rain
Fuzhou	17	31	cloudy
Guangzhou	21	28	overcast
Guiyang	16	23	cloudy
Haikou	22	33	cloudy
Hangzhou	8	9	rain
Harbin	-20	-10	fine
Hefei	0	3	rain
Nanjing	1	5	rain
Shanghai	6	9	rain
Taipei	18	26	fine
Wuhan	0	3	rain
Hong Kong	22	24	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-7	-2	cloudy
Frankfurt	8	11	cloudy
Paris	10	10	rain
London	10	13	rain
New York	-1	5	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Prom wheels; 5- Rapsallion; 10- Incautious; 14- Irish island group; 15- Like ziti; 16- Artist Nadelman; 17- Turn over; 18- Bent out of shape; 19- Turner of "Peyton Place"; 20- Inspire love in; 22- Ocean traveler; 24- Brit's discharge; 25- Apex; 26- Widespread; 28- ___-car; 32- Celebrity; 35- Whistle-blower; 37- Termination; 38- This ___ stickup!; 39- Shaft shot from a bow; 41- White ball, in pool; 42- Place of contentment; 45- Admiration; 46- Tennis matches are divided into these; 47- Maternally related; 48- Biblical twin; 50- Characteristics; 54- Political pamphlet; 58- Do a kabob job; 61- Strong aversion; 62- Worthless person; 63- Extent; 65- Humorist Bombeck; 66- Strong wind; 67- More mature; 68- Small batteries; 69- Very, in Versailles; 70- Snooped; 71- Opulent;

DOWN 1- Tied; 2- Goddess of peace; 3- Woman in charge of a household; 4- Another; 5- Awaken; 6- Junkyard dog; 7- Humble; 8- Alma ___; 9- Fold; 10- Informal; 11- Banned apple spray; 12- Triangle ratio; 13- Listen to; 21- ___-Wan Kenobi was a character in "Star Wars"; 23- Frond plant; 25- Turn sharply; 27- German Mrs.; 29- Pleasing; 30- Hardware fastener; 31- Quite a while; 32- Prix ___; 33- Slippery ___ eel; 34- "Give that ___ cigar!"; 36- Brother's title; 37- More than one female sheep; 40- Is in the red; 43- Off and on; 44- "Jurassic Park" actress; 46- Fantastic; 49- From ___ Z; 51- Composer Copland; 52- Writer Calvino; 53- Is inclined; 55- Chilean pianist Claudio; 56- Deep sleeps; 57- Rubbish; 58- High-ranking NCO; 59- Rent-___; 60- Dominion; 61- Cattle group; 64- Command to a horse;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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Tou Un
HKD 2,980,000 1 bed 1 bath

Jade Garden
HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath

AD



Members of The Eagles (from left) Timothy B. Schmit, Don Henley, Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh pose with an autographed guitar after a news conference at the Sundance Film Festival 2013, in Park City, Utah

MUSIC

WELCOME TO THE 'HOTEL CALIFORNIA' CASE: THE TRIAL OVER HANDWRITTEN LYRICS TO AN EAGLES CLASSIC

JENNIFER PELTZ, NEW YORK

In the mid-1970s, the Eagles were working on a spooky, cryptic new song.

On a lined yellow pad, Don Henley, with input from band co-founder Glenn Frey, jotted thoughts about “a dark desert highway” and “a lovely place” with a luxurious surface and ominous undertones. And something on ice, perhaps caviar or Taittinger — or pink Champagne?

The song, “Hotel California,” became one of rock’s most indelible singles. And nearly a half-century later, those handwritten pages of lyrics-in-the-making have become the center of an unusual criminal trial set to open today.

Rare-book dealer Glenn Horowitz, former Rock & Roll Hall of Fame curator Craig Inciardi and memorabilia seller Edward Kosinski are charged with conspiring to own and try to sell manuscripts of “Hotel California” and other Eagles hits without the right to do so.

The three have pleaded not guilty, and their lawyers have said the men committed no crime with the papers, which they acquired via a writer who’d worked with the Eagles. But the Manhattan district attorney’s office says the defen-

dants connived to obscure the documents’ disputed ownership, despite knowing that Henley said the pages were stolen.

Clashes over valuable collectibles abound, but criminal trials like this are rare. Many fights are resolved in private, in lawsuits or with agreements to return the items.

“If you can avoid a prosecution by handing over the thing, most people just hand it over,” said Travis McDade, a University of Illinois law professor who studies rare document disputes.

STAR WITNESS

The case of the Eagles manuscripts is distinctive in other ways, too.

The prosecutors’ star witness is indeed that: Henley is expected to testify between Eagles tour stops. The non-jury trial could offer a peek into the band’s creative process and life in the fast lane of ‘70s stardom.

At issue are over 80 pages of draft lyrics from the blockbuster 1976 “Hotel California” album, including words to the chart-topping, Grammy-winning title cut. It features one of classic rock’s most recognizable riffs, best-known solos and most oft-quoted — arguably overquoted — li-

nes: “You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave.”

Henley has said the song is about “the dark underbelly of the American dream.”

It still was streamed over 220 million times and got 136,000 radio spins last year in the U.S. alone, according to the entertainment data company Luminate. The “Hotel California” album has sold 26 million copies nationwide over the years, bested only by an Eagles’ greatest hits disc and Michael Jackson’s “Thriller.”

The pages also include lyrics from songs including “Life in the Fast Lane” and “New Kid in Town.” Eagles manager Irving Azoff has called the documents “irreplaceable pieces of musical history.”

Horowitz, Inciardi and Kosinski are charged with conspiracy to possess stolen property and various other offenses.

They’re not charged with actually stealing documents. Nor is anyone else, but prosecutors will still have to establish that the documents were stolen. The defense maintains that’s not true.

Much turns on the Eagles’ interactions with Ed Sanders, a writer who also co-founded the 1960s counterculture rock band the Fugs. He worked in the late ‘70s

and early ‘80s on an authorized Eagles biography that was never published.

Sanders isn’t charged in the case. A phone message seeking comment was left for him.

He sold the pages to Horowitz, who then sold them to Inciardi and Kosinski.

NOT THE FIRST CASE

Horowitz has handled huge rare book and archive deals, and he’s been entangled in some ownership spats before. One involved papers linked to “Gone With the Wind” author Margaret Mitchell. It was settled.

Inciardi worked on notable exhibitions for the Cleveland-based Rock Hall of Fame. Kosinski has been a principal in Gotta Have It! Collectibles, known for auctioning celebrities’ personal possessions — so personal that Madonna unsuccessfully sued to try to stop a sale that included her latex briefs.

Henley told a grand jury he never gave the biographer the lyrics, according to court filings from Kosinski’s lawyers. But defense lawyers have signaled that they plan to probe Henley’s memory of the time.

“We believe that Mr. Henley voluntarily provided the lyrics to

Mr. Sanders,” attorney Scott Edelman said in court last week.

Sanders told Horowitz in 2005 that while working on the Eagles book, he was sent whatever papers he wanted from Henley’s home in Malibu, California, according to the indictment.

Then Kosinski’s business offered some pages at auction in 2012. Henley’s attorneys came knocking. And Horowitz, Inciardi and Sanders, in varying combinations, began battling around alternate versions of the manuscripts’ provenance, the indictment says.

In one story, Sanders found the pages discarded in a backstage dressing room. In others, he got them from a stage assistant or while amassing “a lot of material related to the Eagles from different people.” In yet another, he obtained them from Frey — an account that “would make this go away once and for all,” Horowitz suggested in 2017. Frey had died the year before.

“He merely needs gentle handling and reassurance that he’s not going to the can,” Horowitz emailed Inciardi during a 2012 exchange about getting Sanders’ “‘explanation’ shaped into a communication” to auctioneers, the indictment says.

Sanders supplied or signed off on some of the varying explanations, according to the indictment, and it’s unclear what he may have conveyed verbally. But he apparently rejected at least the dressing-room tale.

Kosinski forwarded one explanation, approved by Sanders, to Henley’s lawyer. Kosinski also assured Sotheby’s auction house that the musician had “no claim” to the documents and asked to keep potential bidders in the dark about Henley’s complaints, the indictment says.

Sotheby’s listed the “Hotel California” song lyrics in a 2016 auction but withdrew them after learning the ownership was in question. Sotheby’s isn’t charged in the case and declined to comment.

Henley bought some draft lyrics privately from Gotta Have It! for \$8,500 in 2012, when he also began filing police reports, according to court filings.

Defense lawyers claim Henley found starstruck prosecutors to take up his cause instead of pursuing a civil suit himself.

The DA’s office worked closely with Henley’s legal team, and an investigator even yearned for backstage passes for an Eagles show — until a prosecutor said the idea was “completely inappropriate,” Kosinski’s lawyers said in court papers.

Prosecutors have rebuffed questions about their motivations as “a conspiracy theory rather than a legal defense.”

Last year, they wrote in court papers, “It is the defendants, not the prosecutors, who are on trial.”

MDT/AP

FOOTBALL

After fallout in China, Messi insists politics not reason for missing game in Hong Kong

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

LIONEL Messi made another conciliatory gesture to fans in Hong Kong and mainland China this week by releasing a video on social media to explain why he didn't play in an exhibition match this month, and insisted that there were no political reasons behind his decision.

Messi disappointed fans in Hong Kong and the city's government after he remained on the bench during a match between Inter Miami and a local team on Feb. 4. Messi and Inter Miami said he had a groin injury, but the grievances have spread to mainland China after he played for 30 minutes in Tokyo against Vissel Kobe days later.

After the Tokyo game, China's state-run newspaper, the Global Times, even published an editorial highlighting a "theory" without evidence that suggested Messi's actions had "political motives" and that "external forces"



wished to embarrass Hong Kong. As criticism ramped up on Chinese social media, the sports bureau in Hangzhou canceled next month's friendly between Nigeria and World Cup champion Argentina, captained by Messi, in China for "the reasons known to all."

In a two-minute video posted on Chinese social media platform Weibo on Monday night, Messi said he wanted to set the record straight.

"I've heard people say that I didn't want to play (in Hong Kong) for political reasons and many other reasons that are totally untrue," Messi said in Spanish in a video with Chinese and English subtitles. "Had that been the case, I wouldn't have even traveled to Japan or visited China as many times as I have."

Messi said he didn't play because he had an inflamed adductor that had become worse after playing another friendly in

Saudi Arabia.

A day before the Hong Kong match, Messi said, he also tried to play in front of the fans that came to watch Inter Miami's training session.

"I did all I could," he said. "But I really couldn't play. I felt discomfort and there was a risk it'd get worse."

He said he played in Japan because his condition had improved by then.

The Argentina star said he has

had "a very close and special relationship with China."

Near the end of his video, he said he "always had and continue to have special affection for" fans in China, and said he hopes to see them again soon.

It was unclear whether Messi's latest attempt to address the PR disaster would help him return to the China market anytime soon. Apart from the game in Hangzhou, World Cup champion Argentina had also lined up another friendly against recently crowned African champion Ivory Coast in Beijing next month.

But following the recent fallout, the Beijing Football Association said the city had no plans to organize matches involving Messi.

The organizer of the Hong Kong game, Tatler Asia, earlier this month apologized to those who were disappointed by Messi's absence and offered a 50% refund to those who purchased game tickets from the official channels. **MDT/AP**

AD



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FOOTBALL

BASKETBALL

DAILY TRAININGS

OPINION

Explainer

Rod McGuirk, MDT/AP



TRIBAL BLOODSHED SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON INSTABILITY IN PAPUA N. GUINEA

A tribal clash in Papua New Guinea's remote highlands in which at least 26 people were killed has put a growing internal security problem under the microscope in the strategically vital South Pacific island nation that has garnered closer military attention from the United States and China.

The rival powers are increasingly keen to strike security pacts with the developing nation whose international significance has grown in tandem with China's increased regional influence.

Papua New Guinea is the most populous South Pacific island nation after Australia and was a colony of that near neighbor until independence in 1975. The government estimates Papua New Guinea's population at around 10 million people, although a United Nations study, based on data including satellite photographs of roof tops, estimated in 2022 it could be as high as 17 million.

It's a diverse country rich in resources including gold, nickel and natural gas with more than 800 Indigenous languages. Most of the population scrapes by as subsistence farmers.

Civil unrest in the capital Port Moresby and Lae, the nation's second most populous city, made headlines last month when at least 15 people were reportedly killed during rioting and looting in street protests over a public service pay dispute.

But tribal warfare has a long history across the country and is becoming more lethal with an influx of illegal modern firearms in the highlands and increasing use of mercenary sharpshooters.

Some villagers accuse security forces of taking bribes from tribal warlords to help defeat rivals who don't pay for protection.

The latest tribal battle occurred in gold-rich Enga province. Another hotspot for tribal violence is Hela province. Both are among resource-rich western areas of the country where tribal conflict has escalated in recent decades, said Paul Barker, executive director of the Port Moresby-based policy think tank Institute of National Affairs.

Natural resources create jealousies and conflicts around how the wealth should be distributed, who was entitled to mining royalties and which landowners deserved compensation.

Other traditional triggers for tribal conflict include accusations of sorcery following sudden deaths such as car wrecks and payback for casualties from previous tribal wars.

Joe Biden was to become the only sitting U.S. president to ever visit Papua New Guinea in May last year but cancelled at short notice. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken took Biden's place and signed a new security pact that sparked Papuan student protests over concerns that it undermined the country's sovereignty.

Chinese President Xi Jinping had visited in 2018 when Port Moresby hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' summit.

The United States and its influential ally in the region, Australia, have been rapidly building bridges with Papua New Guinea and its island neighbors in response to China signing a security pact with the Solomon Islands in 2022 that raised the prospects of a Chinese naval foothold being established in the South Pacific.

Australian and Papuan prime ministers signed a security pact in December that strengthened Australia's place as the preferred security partner in the region.

The main dividend for Papua New Guinea was the help Australia offered to address its internal security concerns by increasing the police force from 6,000 to 26,000 members and to support the court and prison systems.

But Papua New Guinea's Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko revealed last month that his government had begun early talks with China on its offer of policing assistance weeks after the street riots in Port Moresby and Lae.

Papua New Guinea had previously said the United States and Australia were its preferred security partners while China would remain an economic partner.

Capital One Financial said it will buy Discover Financial Services for \$35 billion, in a deal that would bring together two of the nation's credit card companies as well as potentially shake up the payments industry, which is largely dominated by Visa and Mastercard.

Under the terms of the all-stock transaction, Discover Financial shareholders will receive Capital One shares valued at nearly \$140. That's a significant premium to the \$110.49 that Discover shares closed at Friday.

The deal marries two of the largest credit card companies that

aren't banks first, like JPMorgan Chase and Citigroup, with the notable exception of American Express.

It also brings together two companies whose customers are largely similar: often Americans who are looking for cash back or modest travel rewards, compared to the premium credit cards dominated by AmEx, Citi and Chase.

"This marketplace that's dominated by the big players is going to shrink a little bit more now," said Matt Schulz, chief credit card analyst at LendingTree.

AP PHOTO



HIROTAKE YANO

FOUNDER OF JAPANESE DOLLAR-STORE CHAIN DAISO DIES AT 80

YURI KAGEYAMA, TOKYO

HIROTAKE Yano, who founded the retail chain Daiso known for its 100-yen shops, Japan's equivalent of the dollar store, has died. He was 80.

Yano died Feb. 12 of heart failure, Daiso Industries Co. said in a statement Monday.

Yano founded his business, based in Hiroshima, as Yano Shoten in 1972, changing the name to Daiso in 1977. The discount retailer began working with 100 yen stores in the 1980s and opened its first under the Daiso name in 1991. The company now runs more than 5,000 shops in 26 nations and regions. They raked in more than 580 billion yen (\$4 billion) in sales in the latest fiscal year.

One hundred yen is equivalent to about 67 American cents at current exchange rates.

The stores carry some 76,000 products, Daiso

says, ranging from stationery items and kitchen sponges to stuffed animals, housewares, cosmetic and hair care products, and food items such as nuts and dried fruit.

Not all items cost just 100 yen. Some are double or more that price, but all are relatively affordable.

Yano, a graduate of Tokyo's Chuo University, was both hailed and criticized as "the 100-yen man." The popularity of the shops is seen as a reflection of Japan's deflationary woes. But the model of selling just about everything at one price was a hit.

The company now runs more than 5,000 shops in 26 nations and regions

Yano argued the concept would spur consumer spending, make shopping fun, and contribute to Japan's economic growth.

He was said to be prone to self-deprecating jokes.

"I like to tell people it's fortunate to have bad luck. If you are too lucky, you tend to start losing your strengths," he told Diamond, a Japanese business magazine.

"You work harder if you see yourself as a person without luck or talent. That's who I am," he said.

Following nationwide expansion in Japan, the first Daiso abroad opened in Taiwan in 2001. A Daiso opened in South Korea later that same year.

The first Daiso in the U.S. opened in 2005, in Seattle. Now, there are Daiso shops in Hawaii and New York. Its global expansion has reached Brazil, the UAE and Australia.

Yano stepped down as president of Daiso in 2018, and as chairman a year later.

A private funeral was held for family.

A commemorative event is in the works, but details were still undecided, said Daiso.

"We deeply appreciate all your kindness to him," it said. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



United Nations Arab nations are putting to a vote a U.N. resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, knowing it will be vetoed by the United States but hoping to show broad global support for ending the Israel-Hamas war. The Security Council scheduled the vote on the resolution late last night [Macau time]. U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield says the Biden administration will veto the Arab-backed resolution because it may interfere with ongoing U.S. efforts to arrange a deal between the warring parties

AP PHOTO



Haiti A judge responsible for investigating the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse (pictured) has indicted his widow, Martine Moïse, ex-prime minister Claude Joseph and the former chief of Haiti's National Police, Léon Charles, among others, according to a report obtained yesterday [Macau time]. The indictments are expected to further destabilize Haiti as it struggles with a surge in gang violence and recovers from a spate of violent protests.

AP PHOTO



Space Astronomers have discovered what may be the brightest object in the universe, a quasar with a black hole at its heart growing so fast that it swallows the equivalent of a sun a day. The record-breaking quasar shines 500 trillion times brighter than our sun. The black hole powering this distant quasar is more than 17 billion times more immense than our sun, an Australian-led team reported in the journal Nature Astronomy. While the quasar resembles a mere dot in images, scientists envision a ferocious place.