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AP PHOTO



Iran has further increased its total stockpile of uranium, according to a report by the U.N. nuclear watchdog seen by The Associated Press yesterday, and it continues to bar the agency's most seasoned inspectors from monitoring its nuclear program. The International Atomic Energy Agency also said in a second confidential report, distributed to member states, that Tehran made no progress in explaining the presence of manmade uranium particles found at two locations.

AP PHOTO



Israeli military said its air force yesterday struck targets of the militant Hezbollah group "deep inside Lebanon," as Lebanese officials said targets were hit near the northeastern city of Baalbek. At least two Hezbollah members were killed in the strikes, an official for the Lebanese militant group said. The strikes are among the deepest into Lebanon since the Israel-Hamas war began.

AP PHOTO



UN More than two-thirds of the U.N. Security Council's members demanded yesterday that the Taliban rescind all policies and decrees oppressing and discriminating against women and girls, including banning girls education above the sixth grade and women's right to work and move freely. A statement by 11 of the 15 council members condemned the Taliban's repression of women and girls since they took power in August 2021, and again insisted on their equal participation in public, political, economic, cultural and social life. *More on p8*

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GOV'T SEEKING LARGE OPEN SPACE FOR PERFORMANCES AFTER TAIPA STADIUM SAGA

ANTHONY LAM

THE government is in the process of securing large open space for concerts and performances after criticisms over leasing the Taipa Stadium for performances of a Korean band that disturbed the neighborhood, as reported by some residents.

Despite many local resorts possessing their own indoor event and performance venues, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao Ieong acknowledged yesterday the deficiency in outdoor show venues in Macau.

Her comment was made on the sidelines of the Social Welfare Bureau Spring Lunch.

Acknowledging that the Macao Stadium is not a suitable venue for certain performances, espe-

cially those that utilize extensive bass, she noted the need for venues capable of accommodating larger shows in Macau.

The government is currently exploring options for a venue capable of hosting events with between 20,000 and 50,000 spectators. It does not necessarily have to be a permanent structure and could be temporary, she added.

In 2022, a series of pop shows were held at a land plot next to the Macau Tower. However, this location was not ideal as it did not have the requisite community connections and therefore did not benefit the broader community. While the former Canidrome meets some of the requirements, its proximity to neighborhoods will create similar problems to the Macau Stadium.

A local entertainer suggested at a business event on Monday that the government transform the Macao Dome into a 50,000-seat venue, akin to the Main Stadium currently under construction at the Kai Tak Sports Park in Hong Kong.

In this respect, the social affairs official noted the importance of vetting approved shows, suggesting that a special taskforce could be formed for the purposes of processing applications for venue use.

The past shows that triggered widespread opposition were criticized for having lengthy rehearsals, blinding lighting and shaking audio effects, and crowds lining up for admission, as well as for causing damage to the football pitch.



TURF OF TAIPA STADIUM REPLACED AFTER CONCERT, COSTS BORNE BY PROMOTER

RENATO MARQUES

A large portion of the turf of Taipa Olympic Stadium has been replaced after damage caused by two consecutive concerts by Korean K-pop band Seventeen over a month ago, the president of the Sports Bureau (ID), Pun Weng Kun informed the media following the Sports Advisory Committee's first meeting of the year yesterday afternoon at the Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion.

Pun explained that the turf replacement, leveling works, and other remedial works have been completed. The authorities are now monitoring the grass to see whether the grounds have fully recovered, before reopening the facility.

Questioned on the total costs of the renovations, the president of ID said that all the work was directly undertaken by the concert organizers and promoters and the bureau is not privy to the exact costs incurred.

He explained that the company was notified to fix the damage to the facility and they did so without further government involvement.



Before and after the concert

The meeting's agenda was mostly related to the preparations for this year's Macau major sports events, as well as the latest ID funding plan.

Pun also announced that two or three sports events will be hosted this year in preparation for the 2025 National Games. These events will serve as tests

of the facilities and organizational details.

The ID president noted that the Bureau will follow a similar funding plan to previous years, with the Bureau funding between 50% to 80% of the competitions depending on the level, ranging from regional to Asian or World competitions.

HORSE OWNERS URGE MJC TO APOLOGIZE TO ALL MACAU RESIDENTS

ANTHONY LAM

IN an open letter, several horse owners are calling on the Macau Jockey Club's (MJC) board of directors to issue reasonable compensation to horse owners and extend an apology to all Macau residents.

The letter was addressed to the Chief Executive and other senior officials as well as the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ).

It criticizes the abrupt termination of horse racing activities following secret negotiations between the government and the MJC, which had not "taken into account the feelings of residents and the interests of all horse owners."

The letter writers consider the decision to be erroneous and suggested that the MJC had deceived them by persuading them to import new horses in April and July last year.

The owners explained that these horses were not fit for races at the time of import due to their ages and the need for prior training, resulting in wasted money and resources in importing and keeping the horses.

The owners also criticized the MJC for not keeping them sufficiently informed as the matter developed.

The group of horse owners expressed that they had made the decision to continue importing horses to Macau due to their "100% confidence" in the government, given the government had extended the MJC's license for 24 years in 2018. Furthermore, the Club had agreed to enhance its facilities and the economic chief had subsequently promised to duly handle the MJC's operations according to long-observed procedures.

They also questioned why the promise of former Chinese official Lu Ping regarding the continued existence of horse racing in Macau after 1999 was not fulfilled. Without horse racing, they fear that Macau will not be able to co-host the equestrian races in the 2025 National Games.

Macau's image will also be jeopardized among the Asian Racing Federation, because the MJC was terminated in the middle of a season, in contrast to Singapore's approach of allowing its operator to complete the entire season.

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Gov't resorts to community efforts to address unnoticed deaths of single elderly residents

ANTHONY LAM

NEIGHBORHOOD business operators are encouraged to monitor elderly residents living nearby to improve care for elderly people who live alone.

Director for Social Welfare, Hon Wai, was asked about ways to improve care for such residents at yesterday's Spring Lunch organized by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS).

Earlier this month, authorities discovered the bodies of two elderly residents who lived together. The two are believed to have been deceased for about a year. The case was discovered when the landlord of the apartment – who had not received rental payments for that period – entered the apartment with the help of a locksmith and made the discovery.

Hon said that many elderly people habitually visit certain eateries or retailers for food or shopping. "Through these business operators, we might be able to pinpoint elderly residents who are worth special attention," Hon said.

Friends and families should also regularly check in, according to the government.

Hon's superintendent, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, said that friends and families are in the best position to care for these elderly residents. "They may consider calling their elderly friends or family members regularly to show care and get updates on their condi-



IAS director Hon Wai

tion," Ao Ieong commented.

The government will explore technological solutions to improve services in this area.

Ao Ieong said that the government is considering the possibility of establishing a system that detects the movement of cellphones.

"Should a cellphone be physically static for an extended period of time, a notification will be sent to the government or community

associations to approach the resident concerned," Ao Ieong said.

She said that in the future, the government may request consent from Social Housing residents, so that government officials can access spare keys to their residences to perform a welfare check in an emergency.

When questioned about why the government did not utilize the annual Social Security life declaration to confirm the safety of

elderly residents, Ao Ieong said that if the government relied on the annual declaration, it would be too late to identify most cases due to the annual nature of the declaration.

In 2020, there was a similar case in which a pair of co-residing elderly residents were found to be deceased by their neighbors. Ao Ieong said that the government did not have any information about this case.

Meanwhile, in response to questions about the expansion of services at the new Cotai hospital, the social affairs official said that in March, certain medical check-up services will be available at the new medical facilities.

However, the official stressed that these services are not publicly available, and require a referral by the Health Bureau (SSM). Once these services become available, certain imaging and scanning services that currently see long queues at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital will have their patients diverted to the new hospital.

The slow roll-out is attributed to the need to test the new hospital's extensive information system. Once the medical checks operations come into effect, specialist out-patient services will be available as early as May this year.

Last December, when the new facilities entered trial operations, its Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department was criticized for having only the most basic equipment and being only able to provide minimum services.

2023 CASINO SHUTTLE PASSENGER VOLUME ONLY 57% OF 2019 LEVELS

According to the latest data from Macau's Transport Bureau, the number of routes covered by Macau-casino shuttle buses in 2023 was slightly higher than in 2019. However, the passenger-trip volume in 2023 was only 57% of the level seen in 2019, being the year before the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2023, shuttle bus services provided by Macau's casino operators recorded approximately 35.96 million passenger trips, compared to 63.18 million in 2019. Despite the decrease in passenger volume, a total of 59 shuttle routes operated in 2023, utilizing 281 buses, whereas in 2019, they had 57 routes and 426 buses.

INFLUENZA CASES HIT A RECORD 3,169 IN JANUARY THIS YEAR

In January, the number of influenza cases in Macau increased by 76% compared to the previous month, reaching a total of 3,169 cases. Influenza was the most commonly reported mandatory notifiable disease during that month. In addition, scarlet fever infections rose by 78.7% to 218 cases, while enterovirus infections decreased by 52.1% to 217 cases. Other notable cases recorded in January included 38 cases of tuberculosis, nearly double the number reported in the same month the previous year. There was also one asymptomatic case of HIV, one case of AIDS, one case of imported malaria, one case of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and one case of whooping cough.

STATS

Unemployment rate returns to pre-pandemic levels, DSEC claims

RENATO MARQUES

OFFICIAL statistics released from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) show that the unemployment rate of local residents in the three months spanning November 2023 to January 2024 was 2.8%.

In the same release, the DSEC also noted that the general unemployment rate in Macau was 2.2%.

Both indicators have re-

gistered slight decreases of 0.1% when compared with the previous three-month period (October - December 2023), aligning with levels observed in early 2020.

In contrast, the underemployment rate increased by 0.1% to reach 1.5%.

Despite a percentage increase in unemployed individuals, the total number of employed people in Macau at the end of January this year (370,700) – 285,500 of

which were local residents – also declined by 400 and 600 people respectively.

DSEC's industry-specific analysis indicated a notable decline in unemployed workers in the Construction and Retail Trade sectors, with an increase in unemployed workers in the Gaming & Junket Activities and Hotels & Similar Activities sectors.

Concurrently, the number of unemployed indi-

viduals (8,400) decreased by 200 from the previous period.

Among the unemployed individuals seeking new opportunities, many were previously engaged in Retail Trade, Gaming & Junket Activities, and the Construction sector. Meanwhile, the proportion of new labor market entrants seeking their first job fell by 3% to 9.2% of the total unemployed.

The number of underemployed individuals (5,700) increased by 500 from the previous period, with the majority working in the Transport & Storage and the Construction sectors.

Compared year-on-year with the same period last year, the labor force participation rate, unemployment rate, and underemployment rate all experienced decreases of 0.6%, 1.2%, and 1.7% respectively.

At the end of January 2024, the labor force living in Macau totaled 379,100, with a participation rate of 67.9%.

As in previous releases, the Employment Survey from DSEC covers all resi-

dential units in the Peninsula, Taipa, and Coloane, excluding collective living quarters such as dormitories and aged care facilities.

All people living in residential units were included in the survey. However, local residents and non-resident workers who work in Macau but live outside the territory were not included.

Preliminary estimates from movement records suggest an average of 100,700 residents and non-resident workers fall into this category.

When including these individuals, the total labor force (479,900) increased by 300 from the previous period.

CC INVESTIGATION

PRICE INCREASES ON SOME BAKERIES WITH HIKES UP TO 12.5%

RENATO MARQUES

THE price of several bakery products in Macau has seen an increase from January to February this year, the regular price investigation report from the Consumer Council (CC) shows.

According to the latest report on the topic, released yesterday, the CC found that bakery stores have raised the prices of some items with increases that reached in some cases 12.5% month-on-month.

As in previous situations, the CC investigated the prices of eight bakery items that the entity, operating under the Secretariat for Economy and Finance, considers to be the "most popular" among the residents of Macau. In total, 75 bakery shops have been surveyed.

The items included pineapple buns, croissants, sausage bread, Chinese-style custard tarts, sliced white bread (in packages of four and eight slices), bread with luncheon meat, and sweet bread with coconut filling, known as Gai Mei Bao.

For the first item, five stores have increased the price of

RENATO MARQUES



the product with increases of 50 avos and 1 pataca. Such increase accounted effectively for price growth between 8.3% and 12.5%.

On the other hand, there was one store located in Taipa that lowered the price of this product

by 1 pataca (-16.67%).

Similar price increases were also found for the "sweet bread with coconut filling" (+8.33% to +12.5%) while for other items such as "sliced white bread" the increases recorded were between

3.85% and 8.33% month-to-month.

For some other items, such as the "bread with luncheon meat" the CC inspectors found that the large majority of the bakery stores did not have the item on sale

at the time of the inspection, while with those that had, price increases recorded in several stores were between 5.26% and 6.67%, similar to what happened with "Sausage Bread" (+5.26 to +7.14%).

The two products that registered less price fluctuation were the croissants and the Chinese-style custard tarts with the prices of the last remaining unchanged in all but one store, which lowered the price by 50 avos.

BEYOND THE SURVEY

A recent visit made by the Times to several bakeries in the Central District in the last few days also found similar price changes, particularly for items that are not part of the CC survey.

In most cases, the increase was of 1 pataca for the items priced in between 12 to 14 patacas, i.e. 7.14% to 8.33%.

During this visit, a shopkeeper of one of the bakery stores also told the Times that particularly in the case of the "Salt Bread" (the bread usually used to sell the Macau famous Pork Chop Buns) the price of the product, in this shop, has increased some 55.6% in the last seven to eight years. She noted that since this bread is later used by many food and beverage establishments to cook and prepare other food menu items such as sandwiches and toast, it is likely that the increase will also influence the price of those consumer products.



EDUCATION

City sees increase in university students

ANTHONY LAM

THERE are 55,000 registered students in higher education across the city in the academic year 2023/2024, Director of Education and Youth Development Kong Chi Meng has announced.

While replying to a writ-

ten inquiry by lawmaker Lei Chan U on the development of higher education in Macau, Kong recalled that in the academic year 2018/2019, there were 34,000 registered students in higher education.

Kong further revealed that in the earlier academic year, the percentage of post-gra-

duate students was 25.5%. In the latest academic year, the percentage rose to 39%.

He boasted that not only had the local scale of higher education expanded, the quality of teaching and research had also garnered additional recognition in both regional and international contexts. Kong also said that several local institutions had gained elevated positions in international ranking.

Blaming the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on human movements, the education official pointed out that his bureau had in

2023 organized educational delegations to a variety of locations, such as Portugal and Southeast Asian countries to promote Macau's higher education. Online and audio-visual efforts have also been deployed to familiarize foreign parents with the city's higher education offering.

In addition, Kong disclosed that his bureau would constantly coordinate exchanges between local and foreign institutions or entities, especially in education expos, in order to better promote the city's higher education and attract more non-local students.

Kong also said that his bureau utilizes a few taskforces to bridge local institutions, which are also encouraged to form federations in library resources and Chinese-Portuguese bilingualism, among other topics.

Kong also underlined that the government had done a lot in improving the quality of education and research and in developing advanced courses and featured programs, as well as in promoting the commodification of research results.

NATIONAL SECURITY EDUCATION MATERIALS TO ARRIVE AT SCHOOLS IN 2024/2025

THE teaching materials on National Security Education that the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) has been preparing in collaboration with other organizations should arrive at local schools in time for the start of the academic year 2024/2025, the DSEDJ said in response to a written inquiry from lawmaker Ho Ion Sang.

As previously explained, the materials are intended to be used across all education levels, from primary to tertiary education.

The DSEDJ said that the local education authority has a role as a supporting unit for the "Greater Bay Area Chinese Studies Core

Curriculum Teacher Development Plan." This plan encourages teaching staff to participate in annual themed training courses and coordinates activities promoting traditional Chinese culture and relevant national topics.

Included among these activities are parent-child experiences and promotional events themed around the concepts of "peace" and a "harmonious community." According to DSEDJ, these activities aim to deepen students' understanding of traditional Chinese culture across various levels and cultivate a spirit of patriotism towards the country and Macau. **RM**

RETAIL

Macy's to close 150 stores as sales slip as it pivots to luxury at Bloomingdale's and Blue Mercury

ANNE D'INNOENZIO,
NEW YORK

MACY'S will close 150 stores over the next three years and 50 by the end of 2024, the department store said yesterday after posting a fourth quarter loss and declining sales.

At the same time the company signaled a pivot to luxury. It said it would open 15 of its higher end Bloomingdale's stores and 30 of its luxury Blue Mercury cosmetics locations.

While adjusted net income and revenue topped Wall Street expectations, Macy's offered a muted outlook for the year. Shares were essentially flat before the opening bell.

The department store chain faces a proxy fight from Arkhouse Management which nominated a slate of nine directors for election to Macy's board last week. Last month, Macy's rejected a \$5.8 billion takeover offer from the hedge fund and Brigade Capital Management, an investment manager.

Activist investors and pressure to increase sales are just two critical issues facing new CEO Tony Spring, who succeeded Jeff Genette earlier this month.

"We are making the necessary moves to reinvigorate relationships with our customers through improved shopping ex-



AP PHOTO

periences, relevant assortments and compelling value," said Spring in a statement.

Even before the pandemic, department stores were facing intense competition from online rivals. Neiman Marcus and

JCPenney both filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Consumers have proven resilient and willing to shop even after a bout of inflation, though behaviors have shifted, with some Americans trading down to lower

priced goods.

Macy's is maneuvering to shore up sales by accelerating the expansion of small-format stores that can provide more convenience to its customers. It announced plans in October to add up to 30

small-format locations through the fall of 2025, bringing the total number to roughly 42. The next round of expansion starts in the fall.

Yet Macy's is still cutting jobs to bring down its costs. In January, Macy's said it would trim about 3.5% of its total workforce, roughly 2,350 employees, and the iconic department store is closing five locations.

Arkhouse and Brigade offered \$21 for each of the remaining shares in Macy's they don't already own. Macy's said it had had concerns about the financing plan and the value of the offer.

Last week, Macy said that it was seeking additional financing information from Arkhouse and Brigade to potentially advance talks with its board. Rather than providing that additional information, Macy's said Arkhouse sought to extend its director nomination window by 10 days.

Macy's had a quarterly loss of \$71 million, or 26 cents per share. Adjusted for one-time charges, Macy's made \$2.45 per share, topping Wall Street projections for \$1.98, according to FactSet.

That compares with a profit of \$508 million last year in the same period.

Sales fell to \$8.12 billion, down nearly 2% from a year ago, but still better than the \$8.09 billion that industry analysts had expected.

Online sales decreased 4% compared with the year-ago period, while sales at stores were roughly flat.

Comparable sales, which included sales at stores and its digital channels opened at least a year slipped 5.4%.

The company expects profit for the current fiscal year to be in the range of \$2.45 to \$2.85 per share, while sales should range from \$22.2 billion to \$22.9 billion.

Analysts were expecting an annual profit of \$2.77 per share on sales of \$22.81. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Galaxy holds study tours as part of student program



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) co-organized the "Youth Science and Technology Village" program in a bid to provide three-year

professional training for 100 Macau Form 4 students specializing in science and technology annually. As part of the program,

GEG recently organized three study tours for students. Held on three consecutive days, the routes and contents were designed to cater to the academic needs and interests of the students, and included field visits to various leisure and MICE facilities at Galaxy Macau and the Galaxy International Convention Center.

Over the years, GEG has been promoting popular science education for youth through various multi-pronged approaches, such as incorporating technological themes and elements to different activities to help students understand the country's scientific and technological development.

MGM sponsors another edition of 'Macau Outstanding Teenagers Award'



MGM has supported the "Macau Outstanding Teenagers Award," organized by the Young Men's Christian Association of Macau (YMCA of Macau) for the sixth consecutive edition.

This year, MGM is spearheading a set of learning initiatives,

including an educational trip to the Greater Bay Area, opportunities for school speeches, an exchange tour in Shanghai, and more.

This year's competition focuses on cultivating young people with hands-on experience in community service

and nationalism.

As such, YMCA of Macau collaborated with several local associations to co-create a charity short film named "Striding into Dreams" and has invited professional tutors from the Macau Speaker Association to equip short-listed candidates with public-speaking skills.

This year's judging panel comprises 31 professionals from various industries.

After the selection rounds, the panel identified a total of 10 Outstanding Teenagers and 5 Outstanding Performance award winners based on three key aspects, being "Personal Achievements," "Personal Endeavors" and "Involvement in the Community."

DIPLOMACY

Feleti Teo is named Tuvalu's new prime minister after elections that ousted Taiwan supporter

TUVALU'S former Attorney General Feleti Teo was named prime minister of the tiny South Pacific nation yesterday [Macau time] after elections a month ago ousted the last government leader.

Teo was the only candidate nominated by his 15 lawmaker colleagues and Governor General Tofiga Vaievalu Falani declared him elected without a vote, government secretary Tufoua Panapa said in a statement.

The swearing-in ceremony for Teo and his Cabinet will be held later this week.

It was not immediately clear how the new government will affect China's influence in the country of around 11,500 people halfway between Australia and Hawaii, though one expert said he does not expect any change in diplomatic recognition, at least in the short term.

The previous prime minister, Kausea Natano, and three of his eight ministers were not reelected in the Jan. 26 election.

Natano had wanted Tuvalu to remain one of only 12 countries that have official diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the self-governed democracy which is China territory.

Natano's former finance minister, Seve Paeniu, who was considered a leadership contender, had



AP PHOTO

argued for Tuvalu's relationships with both Beijing and Taiwan to be reviewed.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning urged Tuvalu to switch diplomatic recognition to China.

"We call on a handful of countries that still keep the so-called relationship with the Taiwan region to stand on the right side of history and make the right decision that truly serves their long-term interest," she said.

Nauru, another Pacific island nation, cut ties with Taiwan and restored them with China last

month.

A proposed security treaty between Tuvalu and Australia could be rewritten or scrapped under the new government. The treaty, announced in November last year, commits Australia to help Tuvalu in response to major natural disasters, pandemics and military aggression.

Australia offered Tuvaluans a lifeline to help residents escape the rising seas and increased storms brought by climate change. Tuvalu's low-lying atolls make it particularly vulnerable to global warming. Australia would initially

allow up to 280 Tuvaluans to come to Australia each year.

The treaty, which has yet to be ratified, also would give Australia veto power over any security or defense-related agreement Tuvalu wants to make with any other country, including China.

Tuvalu lawmaker Enele Sopoaga, who was prime minister until the previous election in 2019, opposes the treaty.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese mentioned the treaty when he congratulated Teo on his election.

"Australia deeply values our re-

lationship with Tuvalu, in the spirit of the Falepili Union," Albanese said on social media, referring to the treaty, which is formally known as the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union.

"Tuvalu can count on Australia's support and I look forward to working with PM Teo," Albanese added.

Before Teo was announced prime minister, Meg Keen, director of the Pacific Island Program at the Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based think tank, said the new government would review the treaty and "put their own stamp on it."

"My view is refinements can be negotiated and the deal has a good chance of proceeding," Keen said.

George Carter, an Australian National University expert on international politics, said Teo had received support from a majority 10 of the 16 lawmakers within two weeks of the election.

Carter said Teo's supporters want Tuvalu to continue relations with Taiwan and that a change of allegiances to Beijing is unlikely in the near future.

"I think he will try to not rock the boat from the current considerations in terms of support for Taiwan for now. But things could change," he said.

Carter said Teo had told supporters that Sopoaga, the former prime minister, and Paeniu, the former finance minister, would be excluded from his Cabinet.

The U.S. and China are jockeying for influence in the South Pacific. A U.S. Coast Guard cutter patrolled waters around Kiribati for six days earlier this month with members of the nation's maritime police, during which it twice boarded Chinese fishing boats, the Coast Guard said last weekend. "The crew found the vessels compliant with all requirements," a statement said. **MDT/AP**

NPC

Embattled former foreign minister steps down as member of the legislature



Former FM Qin Gang

CHINA'S former foreign minister, Qin Gang, who has been missing from public view since last June, has resigned from the national legislature, state media reported yesterday.

Qin was dismissed as foreign minister in July, in one of China's biggest political surprises in years.

The 57-year-old served for only seven months before he disappeared from public view last June. The government announced a month later that he had been dismissed from his post. He has yet to reappear publicly.

Qin was replaced as foreign minister by his predecessor, Wang Yi.

According to a notice by the National People's Congress Standing Committee, the Tianjin Municipal People's Congress accepted Qin's resignation as a delegate to the upcoming annual parliamentary session.

Official websites no longer list Qin as a member of the State Council, China's Cabinet, but there has been no mention of whether he has been excluded from China's ruling Communist Party.

His disappearance came

during a series of dismissals at the top echelons of the party that included former Defense Minister Li Shangfu and other top military officials.

Signs of overt political friction are extremely rare in China, especially since President Xi Jinping tightened his control over the country's politics.

Qin's and Li's ousters are believed to be part of a broader effort to reduce security vulnerabilities amid China's increasing competition with the United States and its allies.

The National People's Congress is to convene its annual session in early March and is expected to focus on the country's ailing economy.

China's economy expanded by 5.2% last year but is forecast to slow sharply this year, bogged down by a property crisis, high youth unemployment and massive local government debt.

The Wall Street Journal reported in September, citing people familiar with a briefing, that Qin was ousted over an extramarital affair he had during a previous posting as ambassador to the U.S. An investigation was focused on whether his conduct had compromised China's national security, according to the Journal. **MDT/AP**

SWOT: MACAU AS A SPORTS HUB

ANALYSIS

THE recent push by Macau's government to position the city as a premier sports center, as evidenced by initiatives like the Greater Bay Area (GBA) International Sports Business Summit last weekend, is a bold move aimed at diversifying the local economy beyond its traditional gaming and tourism sectors.

This vision for Macau's transformation offers a promising avenue for economic development, cultural enrichment, and international prestige. However, it also presents a complex array of challenges that require careful consideration and strategic planning.

At the core of this initiative is the ambition to leverage sports as a catalyst for growth.

The GBA summit showcased Macau's potential to host international sports events, drawing leaders from the sports world to discuss and share experiences. This kind of international exposure is crucial for Macau as it seeks to carve out a niche in the global sports industry. The involvement of prominent figures like Joseph Tsai, chairman of Alibaba and owner of the Brooklyn Nets and NBA legend Yao Ming proves the high level of interest and the potential for significant in-



vestment in Macau's sports industry.

Beyond the economic implications, this initiative aims to enhance the city's international reputation. By hosting world-class sports events, Macau can project an image of a vibrant, culturally rich, and dynamic city. This rebranding effort could attract a new demographic of visitors and participants, eager to experience what Macau has to offer beyond its casinos and historic sites.

However, the path to transforming Macau into a sports center is fraught with challenges.

Lawmakers and critics have pointed out a lack of planning and inadequate infrastructure as significant hurdles. The example of a concert featuring Joe Hisaishi, which attracted immense interest but could not accommodate all attendees, highlights the limitations of current venues and the need for experienced event organizers.

This incident illustrates the broader issue of preparedness for large-scale events, which extends to accommodations, transportation, and crowd management.

Moreover, the impact on

local residents cannot be overlooked. The pursuit of economic diversification through sports and entertainment must be balanced with the needs and well-being of the community. Concerns about noise pollution, traffic congestion, and the overall disruption to daily life suggest that more thoughtful planning and community engagement are necessary to ensure that the benefits of hosting sports events are not overshadowed by negative impacts on residents' quality of life.

Economic risks and sustainability are also pressing concerns. The global nature of the sports industry means that Macau's initiatives are subject to international market dynamics, including fluctuations in travel and economic downturns. The city's ability to compete with established sports hubs in the GBA and beyond requires not only significant investment in infrastructure and marketing but also a clear vision for creating a unique value proposition.

In short, the initiative to make Macau a sports center is a microcosm of the city's broader aspirations and challenges.

As Macau navigates these waters, the success of its transformation will depend on its ability to adapt, innovate, and engage with both the global sports community and its local residents.

BRIEFS

NPC DEPUTIES PROMPT BAY BEAUTIFICATION

In response to national legislators' suggestions, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China has committed to advancing the construction of over 100 picturesque bays across the nation. Prioritizing pollution control and ecosystem restoration, the ministry's goal is to complete 40% of the bay constructions by 2027, ensuring clean seawater, beaches, and abundant marine life, thus promoting a harmonious relationship between humans and the maritime environment. The initiative, strongly backed by NPC deputies, aims at securing special funds and enhancing local governments' capabilities in marine environmental management. Efforts also include leveraging financial support from various channels and engaging public participation, with programs like the Blue Circle (China) illustrating the successful community involvement in environmental preservation.

SHENZHEN PROMOTES MANGROVE FOREST PROTECTION

Shenzhen, located in Guangdong Province, is at the forefront of mangrove forest protection, aiming to balance economic growth with ecological conservation. The city has seen an increase in mangrove coverage, contributing to China's status as one of the few countries experiencing a net increase in mangrove areas. The establishment of the world's first international mangrove center in Shenzhen underlines its commitment to global mangrove protection. Efforts over the past decade have led to the restoration of 43.33 hectares of mangrove forests, enhancing biodiversity, carbon storage, and natural defenses against coastal erosion. Shenzhen Bay, a crucial habitat for migratory birds, benefits from these conservation activities, supporting nearly 100,000 migratory birds annually. Shenzhen and Macau are home to the world's only mangrove ecosystems in the heart of urban areas.

HONG KONG PROPERTY PLAYERS HOPE AUTHORITIES LIFT COOLING MEASURES IN UPCOMING BUDGET

Hong Kong's property market, hindered by long-standing cooling measures, anticipates potential relief from these restrictions in the upcoming budget speech by Finance Chief Paul Chan. Despite efforts to stimulate the market, including halving the buyers' stamp duty and waiving duties for certain resales, the property sector has seen a significant downturn, with transactions at a 33-year low and prices dropping to a record low since February 2017. The luxury market, in particular, has experienced a sharp decline in prices. Calls for the complete removal of property curbs have intensified, aiming to rejuvenate the market without inflating home prices further. High interest rates, paralleling US Federal Reserve policies, and a slowdown in demand from mainland China have also contributed to the market's challenges.

GBA wealthy investors cautious following raise of investment quota

ON THE AGENDA

RESIDENTS of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) are expected to invest an average of approximately 710,000 yuan following the recent expansion of the cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect scheme, a figure significantly lower than the newly allowed individual investment cap of 3 million yuan.

This insight comes from a survey reported by The Standard, which highlights the cautious approach of investors despite the scheme's enhance-



ments, including a higher investment quota and broader investment options.

These expansions reflect a surge in available investment products since the sche-

me's inception in 2021, with banks now offering hundreds of investment options, including mutual funds focused on Asian or global markets.

According to data

from the Guangdong Province branch of China's central bank, the scheme has attracted 46,000 investors from Macau and Hong Kong Macau and 25,000 from the mainland as of January.

Conducted by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, the survey polled over 2,000 GBA residents across 11 cities between January and February of this year, revealing that about two-thirds of respondents are motivated by the improved conditions of the scheme to either commence or

increase their investments. These investors are targeting an average annualized return of 7.7%.

A notable 24% of those surveyed, either already investing or interested in the scheme, plan to allocate over 1 million yuan in sectors like energy, technology, natural resources, biotechnology, and finance within the next year.

In response to the growing interest and expanded scheme, banks including HSBC, Standard Chartered Hong Kong, Bank of China (Hong Kong), Hang Seng Bank, China Citic Bank International, and Dah Sing Bank have significantly increased their wealth management product offerings.

AP PHOTO



UNITED NATIONS

Most Security Council members demand Taliban rescind decrees oppressing women and girls

EDITH M. LEDERER,
UNITED NATIONS

MORE than two-thirds of the U.N. Security Council's members demanded yesterday [Macau time] that the Taliban rescind all policies and decrees oppressing and discriminating against women and girls, including banning girls education above the sixth grade and women's right to work and move freely.

A statement by 11 of the 15 council members condemned the Taliban's repression of women and girls since they took power in August 2021, and again insisted on their equal participation in public, political, economic, cultural and social life -- especially at all decision-making levels seeking to advance international engagement with Afghanistan's de facto rulers.

Guyana's U.N. Ambassador Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett read the statement, surrounded by ambassadors of the 10 other countries, before a closed council meeting on U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' conference with more than 25 envoys to Afghanistan on Feb. 18-19 in Qatar's capital, Doha.

Afghan civil society representatives, including women, participated in the Doha meeting, which the council members welcomed. The Taliban refused to attend, its Foreign Ministry saying in a statement that its participation would be "beneficial" only if it was the sole and official representative for the country at the talks.

While the Taliban did not attend the meetings, U.N. political chief Rosemary DiCarlo did meet with Taliban officials based in Doha, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. DiCarlo also briefed council members at the closed meeting.

The Taliban have not been recognized by any country, and the U.N. envoy for Afghanistan last year warned the de facto rulers that international recognition as the country's legitimate government will remain "nearly impossible" unless they lift the restrictions on women.

The 11 council nations supporting the statement -- Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, South Korea, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States -- underscored that there can only be sustainable peace in Afghanistan if

its political process is inclusive and the human rights of all Afghans are respected including women and girls.

Four Security Council nations didn't sign on to the statement -- Russia, China, Mozambique and Algeria.

Secretary-General Guterres told reporters in Doha that among participants -- also including representatives of the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization -- there was "total consensus" on requirements for Afghanistan to be integrated into the international community.

To reach this "endgame," he said, Afghanistan must not be "the hotbed of terrorist activities that impact other countries," its institutions must include diverse groups including Uzbeks, Tajiks, Pashtuns and Hazaras, and human rights must be respected especially the rights of women and girls.

Guterres said to a certain extent there is currently "a chicken and the egg."

"On one hand, Afghanistan remains with a government that is not recognized internationally and, in many aspects, not integrated in

the global institutions and in the global economy," he said. "And on the other hand, there is in the international community a perception that inclusivity has not improved; that the situation of women and girls and human rights in general has in fact deteriorated in recent times."

The secretary-general said one objective of the meeting with the envoys was "to overcome this deadlock" and develop a roadmap in which the international community's concerns and the Taliban's concerns are "taken into account simultaneously."

A Security Council resolution asked Guterres to appoint a U.N. envoy after consultations with all parties, member states, the Taliban and others.

Guterres said the participants decided he should initiate consultations "to see if there are conditions to create a U.N. envoy that might be able not only to have a coordinating role in relation to the engagements that are taking place but that can also work effectively with the de facto authorities of Afghanistan."

"I will initiate immediately those consultations," the U.N. chief said. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

2000 NUCLEAR CHIEF QUILTS OVER SAFETY SCANDAL



British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) has confirmed its chief executive, John Taylor, has resigned over the safety scandal that has attracted severe criticism from watchdogs.

A damning report published last week by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate confirmed that some safety records relating to a shipment of uranium and plutonium mixed oxide fuel to Japan had been faked at BNFL's Sellafield in Cumbria.

After a day of speculation, BNFL issued a statement saying Mr Taylor was leaving after four years in the job.

BNFL chairman Hugh Collum said: "We now have the opportunity to move ahead with a fresh sheet."

There was also speculation that other senior managers could leave over the scandal.

Mr Taylor initially refused to step down, despite further findings in the report of "systematic management failures".

But the pressure on him mounted, and Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers today issued a statement welcoming his decision to step down, even before it was officially confirmed by the company.

Mr Byers said: "In the circumstances, it was the appropriate course of action. We can now look forward to a fresh start at BNFL under a new chief executive."

But union leader Jack Dromey, of the Transport and General Workers' Union, said the departure of Mr Taylor was "rough justice" for a good chief executive.

"It is sadly clear that the company's customers are demanding change at the top if confidence is to be restored.

"He is the victim of past failures rather than personal failures," said Mr Dromey.

Mr Taylor's resignation won no praise from environmental campaign group Friends of the Earth.

"Re-arranging deck chairs on a sinking ship is no help to anyone. BNFL only has a long term commercial future if it changes the very nature of what it does," said Patrick Green, senior nuclear campaigner for Friends of the Earth.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

In 2002 there were 16 nuclear power stations in the UK - half operated by BNFL and half by British Energy which was privatised in 1996.

BNFL was not privatised because its Magnox plants were old and expensive to run, so it was deemed better that they were kept in state hands. Between them they produce 25% of Britain's electricity.

In July 2002, BNFL reported a £2.3bn loss for the last financial year, the worst result in the company's history.

The record losses are thought to reflect the cost of cleaning up radioactive sites and closing some reactors.

All power stations run by BNFL are due to close by 2010.

Fears about the safety of nuclear power stations were compounded by the partial meltdown at Three-Mile Island in the USA in 1979 and the Chernobyl disaster in Russia in 1986.

But with the advent of global warming caused in part by the burning of fossil fuels like coal, scientific advisers to the British government are arguing for a re-investment in a safer form of nuclear power in the future.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Collaboration and partnership come naturally. You're especially attracted and attractive. Get creative. Listen carefully. Invent something beautiful together.</p> | <p>TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Focus physical and health practices toward strengthening core and basic fundamentals. Feed your engine high-octane fuel.</p> |
| <p>GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Have fun with people and activities that you love. Make time for matters of heart and passion. Listen generously. Relax and enjoy yourself.</p> | <p>CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Prioritize home and family. Make delicious messes and clean them up. Make repairs and improvements for lasting benefit. Beautify your surroundings.</p> |
| <p>LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Creative expression flows unblocked. Look outside common frames of reference for new views and perspectives. Issue statements.</p> | <p>VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Act on your well-laid financial plans. The venture you're considering has lasting profit potential. Take advantage of a lucky break.</p> |
| <p>LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Chart your own course. Choose directions carefully. Focus on immediate priorities. Notice what's missing that would make a difference.</p> | <p>SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Find a quiet spot to think. Review and revise plans. Consider options before making a move. A dream long-held seems newly within reach.</p> |
| <p>SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Lasting benefits flow through community connections, especially today. Enjoy socializing. Enjoy meetings, gatherings and parties with interesting friends.</p> | <p>CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Professional opportunities arise. Consider tempting possibilities. Improve processes for ease and efficiency. Apply creative solutions to solve a puzzle.</p> |
| <p>AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Plan, prepare and launch your next adventure. Energize an interesting exploration. Investigate possibilities and potential. Study and research.</p> | <p>PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Ask for more and get it. Keep generating positive cash flow. Invest in quality materials. Collaborate and contribute to shared accounts.</p> |

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

| MEDIUM | | | | | HARD | | | | |
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| 3 | 6 | | | 9 | | | 8 | | 2 |
| 2 | | | 9 | 6 | | 2 | | | 6 |
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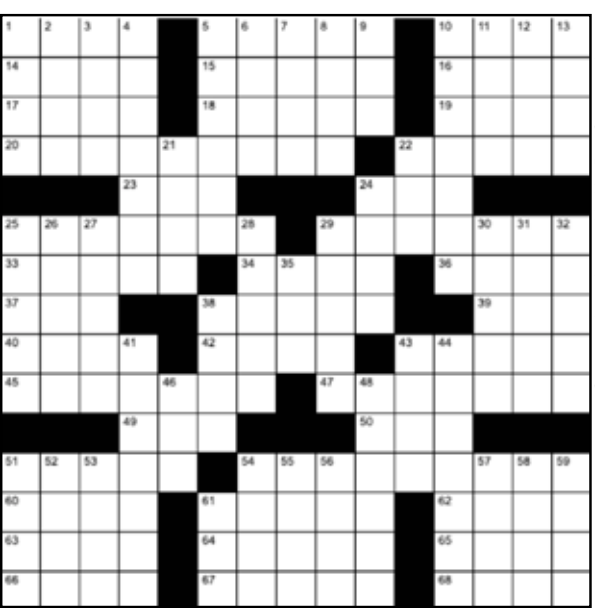
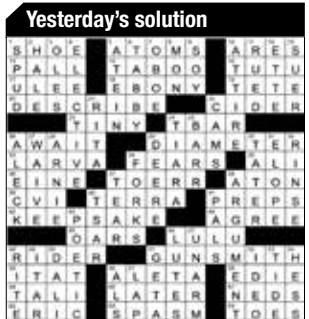
WEATHER

| | MIN | MAX | CONDITION |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| CHINA | | | |
| Beijing | -2 | 6 | overcast |
| Changchun | -9 | -2 | cloudy |
| Chengdu | 5 | 11 | overcast |
| Chongqing | 7 | 11 | overcast |
| Fuzhou | 9 | 17 | overcast |
| Guangzhou | 9 | 21 | cloudy |
| Guiyang | 0 | 6 | rain |
| Haikou | 15 | 24 | rain |
| Hangzhou | 1 | 7 | rain |
| Harbin | -12 | -4 | cloudy |
| Hefei | 0 | 6 | overcast |
| Nanjing | 1 | 5 | rain |
| Shanghai | 4 | 10 | rain |
| Taipei | 13 | 20 | overcast |
| Wuhan | -1 | 10 | rain |
| Hong Kong | 20 | 22 | windy |
| WORLD | | | |
| Moscow | -2 | 2 | overcast |
| Frankfurt | 0 | 9 | overcast |
| Paris | 8 | 11 | cloudy |
| London | 10 | 11 | cloudy |
| New York | 0 | 16 | rain |

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Insult; 5- Wraith; 10- Cover up; 14- Patriot Nathan; 15- Extend a subscription; 16- Previously owned; 17- Excuse me; 18- You ___ right; 19- Actress Ward; 20- Prominence; 22- Girder; 23- "Sister Act" extra; 24- Alias; 25- Farewell; 29- Thin; 33- Tibet's capital; 34- Audition tape; 36- Bird of peace; 37- Listening device; 38- Everglades bird; 39- Not pos.; 40- Space; 42- Antitoxins; 43- Rice-___; 45- Insanity; 47- Snappy comebacks; 49- ___-hool; 50- Opposite of paleo-; 51- Wagons; 54- Spacecraft; 60- Jai ___; 61- Salsa singer Cruz; 62- Prefix with conference; 63- Division of a school year; 64- 1936 Olympics star; 65- Cabinet dept.; 66- Curved molding; 67- Maternally related; 68- Queue after Q;

DOWN 1- Layered hairdo; 2- Cowardly Lion portrayer; 3- Peter Fonda role; 4- Sends back into custody; 5- ___ Smith; 6- Roll call response; 7- Individuals; 8- Cong. meeting; 9- Snake eyes; 10- Married man; 11- Fortuneteller's opening; 12- Boxer Oscar ___ Hoya; 13- Yellow cheese coated with red wax; 21- Big brass; 22- Tina's ex; 24- Very much; 25- Flash of light; 26- Scarlett of fiction; 27- Paddled; 28- Perimeters; 29- Campaign tactic; 30- Giver; 31- Occurrence; 32- Philbin of TV; 35- Miscalculate; 38- Canadian gas brand; 41- Whenever; 43- To ___ (perfectly); 44- Cock; 46- Dawn goddess; 48- Sheath; 51- Roman censor; 52- Shake ___ (hurry); 53- Almost unobtainable; 54- Stitched together; 55- Answer to a charge; 56- ___ Misbehavin'; 57- Coop group; 58- Belinda Carlisle's "Should ___ You In?"; 59- Llama land; 61- Runner Sebastian;



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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AUTO RACING

NASCAR teams hired top antitrust attorney in

JENNA FRYER,
AP AUTO RACING WRITER

THE NASCAR season is under way, with 38 races to determine another stock car racing champion in the 76th season of the top motorsports series in the United States.

There is a serious problem for NASCAR and its teams: Negotiations on a new revenue-sharing model have deteriorated. In mid-February, representatives from five teams told The Associated Press they have hired top antitrust sports attorney Jeffrey Kessler as an adviser.

The move was a power play by the 15 teams holding the 36 charters that guarantee entry into every race, a message that they won't be bullied in the negotiations. Here's what to know about this off-the-track brawl with millions at stake:

WHAT ARE CHARTERS?

The charters are the equivalent of having a franchise within NASCAR, but they aren't permanent and can be revoked by the

series. Their value is set by the current market rate, but the details are not disclosed. A charter purchased by Spire Motorsports last year was sold by Live Fast Motorsports reportedly for \$40 million — an enormous jump from the \$6 million Spire spent in 2018 when it became the first team to buy a charter from another team.

NASCAR determined which teams received charters in 2016. There are four charters that have not been offered for sale and are on hold by NASCAR for use if a fourth manufacturer enters the Cup Series.

The current agreement expires at the end of this season and teams have been trying for two years to get a better deal from NASCAR, including making the charters permanent.

NASCAR claimed it needed to first complete a new media rights package and a new \$7.7 billion television rights deal was announced in December. NASCAR's economic offer to the teams came shortly after.

The five-member negotiating committee for the race teams

told AP that NASCAR was clear: "We've been told, 'This is all there is; there is no flexibility.' That's not a negotiation," said Curtis Polk, part owner of 23XI Racing with Michael Jordan and Denny Hamlin.

NASCAR'S FINANCIAL HEALTH

The stability of NASCAR has ebbed and flowed for years, with much made about empty seats in the stands or viewership numbers season to season. The series has weathered it all and the TV deal is considered substantial.

A recent S&P Global Ratings Report sees ongoing strength in live attendance, sponsorship and advertising-related revenue for NASCAR this year, and added that the new rights deal "provides good revenue visibility" through 2031.

The report also raised its rating on NASCAR's credit, citing the series' ability to pay down debt while still growing revenue. S&P expects NASCAR to see 6% to 8% growth this year in its earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization,



Jesse Love (front left) and Austin Hill (front right) lead the field to start the

a standard accounting measurement.

S&P also expects a positive cash flow of \$135 million to \$145 million -- which could be reduced to \$85 million after infrastructure upgrades -- that could

be used to further trim its debt.

Polk noted the report proves NASCAR is financially stable and has had little trouble paying down the nearly \$1.5 billion it borrowed in 2019 to take its race tracks private.

AD

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LIO KUOKMAN

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their revenue dispute - here's why



NASCAR Xfinity Series auto race at Daytona International Speedway, Monday

“The rating agencies have upped NASCAR to a better rating based on the health of NASCAR,” Polk said. “That debt that NASCAR had is now down to like \$400 million. They paid off \$1 billion of debt in less than five years.”

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

The teams want more than just a larger financial stake.

In addition to an increase in the percentage the teams receive from the media rights deal, the teams want the charters to

become permanent the way franchises are in other leagues. With so many of NASCAR's top team owners in their 70s — Roger Penske turned 87 last week — they want their investments to become legacies they can leave to their families.

NASCAR has refused to even consider making the charters permanent.

The teams also want a seat at the table when it comes to governance, and they want to create a collaborative environment to create new revenue opportunities.

WHAT CAN THE TEAMS DO?

The teams are independent from NASCAR, which sanctions the 38 races each year and distributes the purses along with revenue from licensing, merchandise and other streams. It also controls a swath of top-tier tracks.

The teams do not want to create a breakaway series of their own, citing the demise of CART when Tony George took the Indianapolis 500 away and formed a rival league. Two

open-wheel series were not sustainable and in 2008 reunited for what is now IndyCar. The damage was already done, though; what was once the top U.S. motorsports series was bypassed by NASCAR during the split.

The teams also have no plans at this time to promote a race outside of NASCAR's supervision. They want to make a deal.

Teams could technically go on strike and stop showing up at the track, but it makes no financial sense and NASCAR would likely just find teams from a stock car series it doesn't already own to fill a field.

WHO IS JEFFREY KESSLER?

The attorney is a specialist in sports labor and antitrust disputes. He helped secure a 9-0 win in 2021 at the U.S. Supreme Court in *NCAA v. Alston*, a major case on athlete compensation. He also led the U.S. women's soccer team in its successful fight for equal pay as well as litigations for current free agency rules in the NBA and the NFL.

Although retaining Kessler could mean the teams are exploring litigation, the negotiating representatives insisted the attorney has so far only been brought on to advise them in negotiations.

The Race Team Alliance met at Daytona International Speedway, NASCAR declined to attend, and the teams claim NASCAR is no longer negotiating with them as a group. Instead, they believe NASCAR is trying to talk to teams individually to create division in what is now a unified front.

WHAT IF A DEAL IS NOT REACHED?

NASCAR could remake the entire eligibility system and write its own rules for distribution of revenue. NASCAR does not have a collective bargaining agreement for teams and even though the RTA was formed to fight this battle, it is not a union.

The teams could make an antitrust challenge on NASCAR's control of the market and argue NASCAR operates stock car racing as a monopoly.

But NASCAR has won legal battles before, including a 2009 case in which Kentucky Speedway failed to prove its denial to host a Cup Series race constituted an illegal monopoly. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

Multipolar World

Jorge Costa Oliveira



MAIN REASONS FOR NATIONAL PRIDE IN CHINA AND THE US

Many surveys show that the majority of citizens take pride in their countries, but few have examined the main reasons why people are proud of their countries. Using parallel surveys in China and the United States, a recent study (by Ni, Wang & Quek) investigates these reasons, the foundations for national pride in the two most powerful nation-states in the world. The study's findings are interesting as they reveal clear differences between the citizens of the two countries.

Although a high level of national pride is common to both countries, the data collected for the study highlights the heterogeneity in the main reasons underpinning national pride among American and Chinese citizens.

The main reasons for American national pride tend to be founded on ideals (with a special emphasis on various freedoms), while the main reasons for Chinese national pride are largely based on material factors (economic growth, scientific and technological advances).

Of course, in this study by Ni, Wang & Quek, many respondents in both countries also considered economic and scientific-technological advances and national arts and culture important, although to a different extent. One of the main differences found is the low relevance attributed to "moral values" in China.

This analysis reaches very similar conclusions to the latest wave (2017-2022) of surveys launched by the World Values Survey (WVS), in which it was found that nearly half of the Chinese respondents (49%) have materialist values, while only 4% have post-materialist values. This assertion aligns with a general pattern, drawn (by R. Inglehart and colleagues) from WVS surveys, that socioeconomic development tends to shift societies from materialist to post-materialist values.

This conclusion seems to align well with Deng Xiaoping's theory of the "two civilizations" – distinguishing between "material civilization" (*wuzhi wenming*) and [socialist] "spiritual civilization" (*jingshen wenming*) – and the priority [in public policies] of "material civilization", perceived as economic growth based on the policy of reforms opening-up, with the inherent development of production capacity and the domestic market.

In parallel, but functionalized and articulated with the development of "material civilization," is the "spiritual civilization," which has nothing to do with the ideals of freedoms and democracy (as in the West), but rather understood as the "civilization of minds," consisting of a set of moral norms and practices to be inculcated in the masses, such as hard work, self-denial, patriotism, and trust in the Party.

With this densification of *jingshen wenming*, the answers of the majority of Chinese respondents on the abovementioned surveys become more understandable. Despite there being several other aspects of "socialist spiritual civilization" that deserve careful analysis, an evident aspect of it consists in the implicit social pact: while seeking wealth, Chinese citizens should avoid corruption and selfishness and obey the Party. It's not far from the morality of the Old Testament, but with a different god!

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PRINCE WILLIAM PULLS OUT OF MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR HIS GODFATHER BECAUSE OF 'PERSONAL MATTER'

THE BUZZ

Kensington Palace says Britain's Prince William has pulled out of attending a memorial service for his godfather, the late King Constantine of Greece, because of a personal matter.

The palace declined to elaborate yesterday but said his wife, the Princess of Wales, who is recovering from abdominal surgery, continues to do well.

It said William called the Greek royal family,



which is attending the memorial service in St. George's Chapel in Windsor, to let them know he was unable to attend. Constantine II of Greece died in January of last year at the age of 82.

King Charles III, who is being treated for an undisclosed form of cancer, also will not attend the service for his cousin. The monarch has canceled all his public engagements while he receives treatment.

AP PHOTO



PHOTOGRAPHER ACCUSES TAYLOR SWIFT'S DAD OF PUNCHING HIM ON SYDNEY WATERFRONT

ROD MCGUIRK, MELBOURNE

A photographer told police he was punched in the face by Taylor Swift's father on the Sydney waterfront yesterday, hours after the pop star's Australian tour ended.

Ben McDonald said he provided police with a statement alleging that Scott Swift assaulted him at the Neutral Bay Wharf, where the father and daughter had just come ashore from a yacht.

The veteran paparazzo said he decided to report the attack to police despite not being seriously injured.

"It was just a punch in the chops. It's a little tender, but I don't have any bruising and it didn't require medical assistance," McDonald said.

"In 23 years, I haven't been assaulted and punched in the chops, particularly by the talent's dad," he added.

Taylor Swift's representative accused members of the media of aggression during the interaction.

"Two individuals were

aggressively pushing their way towards Taylor, grabbing at her security personnel, and threatening to throw a female staff member into the water," the representative said in an email.

The New South Wales Police Force media office confirmed that police were investigating the alleged assault of a 51-year-old man by a 71-year-old man at 2:30 a.m. Police did not release names, in accordance with their policy for such allegations.

Taylor Swift left the country on a private jet yesterday, after more than 600,000 fans saw the Australian leg of her Eras Tour at seven Australian stadium concerts.

McDonald said media had been waiting to photograph the star as she walked with her entourage from a jetty to two waiting cars.

"There were about four or five security there and at one point, one of the American security started shoving his umbrella into me and my camera and then Taylor got in her car," McDonald told The Asso-

ciated Press.

"Someone else came running at me and punched me in the left side of my face. Initially, I thought it was an Australian security that was trying to be the hero of the moment in the front of the Americans, but as it turned out it was her father," McDonald added.

McDonald said he realized that his alleged assailant was not a part of the security detail after seeing a photo of him holding Swift's hand while reviewing photos from the evening. McDonald later identified Scott Swift from an online picture.

McDonald said there had been no cause for violence.

"We didn't go rushing down the jetty. We didn't go rushing to the back of the boat. We waited for her to come up. Kept it very civil," he said.

"But no, they had to be (expletives) and put the umbrellas up and umbrellas over her and then shove the umbrellas into our faces and then make out that we're the ones making contact with them," he added. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that the military alliance has no plans to send combat troops into Ukraine amid reports that some Western countries may be considering putting boots on the ground in the war-ravaged country. Stoltenberg said that "NATO allies are providing unprecedented support to Ukraine. We have done that since 2014 and stepped up after the full-scale invasion. But there are no plans for NATO combat troops on the ground in Ukraine."

AP PHOTO



French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday that sending Western troops on the ground in Ukraine is not "ruled out" in the future after the issue was debated at a gathering of European leaders in Paris, as Russia's full-scale invasion grinds into a third year. The French leader said that "we will do everything needed so Russia cannot win the war" after the meeting of over 20 European heads of state and government and other Western officials.

AP PHOTO



Dutch court convicted 17 suspects yesterday in the long-running trial of an underworld gang that planned a string of killings. Judges handed life sentences to three of them, including the country's formerly most-wanted fugitive Ridouan Taghi. Taghi and several co-defendants did not attend the final day of their trial at a tightly guarded courthouse on the outskirts of the Dutch capital. Heavily armed police officers wearing body armor, helmets and ski masks patrolled streets around the court as cars carrying some of the defendants swept into an underground parking lot for the hearing.