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PÁTIO DA CLARIDADE WILL BE REVAMPED AND TRANSFORMED INTO A LEISURE AND TOURISM HUB WITH EMPHASIS ON CULINARY ELEMENTS

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PUN WENG KUN HOPES UPCOMING DRAGON BOAT RACES WILL HELP BOOST THE LOCAL ECONOMY

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CONGRESS ENDS WITH A SHOW OF UNITY BEHIND XI'S VISION FOR NATIONAL GREATNESS

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Chinese stocks ended yesterday with gains as the country's national legislature ended its annual meeting. The Hang Seng Index added 1.3% to 16,570.86, again led by the tech index, which surged by 2.7%. Among gainers, JD.com jumped 6.6% to 98.75 Hong Kong dollars, E-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding gained 2%, and Tencent was 3.2% higher.



Japan marked the 13th anniversary of the massive earthquake and tsunami that triggered a nuclear meltdown and left large parts of Fukushima prefecture uninhabitable yesterday with a minute of silence and memorial events, where officials pledged continued support for rebuilding. At 2:46 p.m. — the time when the earthquake struck — people across Japan stopped to observe a minute of silence. In Tokyo's central Ginza shopping district, people stopped to pray on the sidewalk as a bell rang out, marking the moment.



French president Emmanuel Macron has announced new legislation to legalize "aid in dying" that will allow adults facing end-of-life illness to take lethal medication, a first in the country. The move follows last year's report indicating that most French citizens support legalizing end-of-life options. In an interview by French newspapers La Croix and Liberation, Macron said the new bill will be restricted to adults suffering from an incurable illness who are expected to die in the "short or middle-term".

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PROPERTY WOES

Property owners are left struggling as they grapple to sell properties for cash, leading to chambers' repeated calls for gov't to drop cooling measures P3



LYNZY VALLES

OSCARS
'OPPENHEIMER' CROWNED BEST PICTURE AT AN ACADEMY AWARDS SHADOWED BY WAR



AP PHOTO

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GAMING TAXES IN FIRST TWO MONTHS AT MOP15B

Macau has collected gaming tax revenues in the first two months of 2024 of nearly MOP14.8 billion, Financial Services Bureau data reveals, a surge of 142.9% year-on-year. February tax receipts alone reached MOP7.46 billion, up 1.6% month-on-month. The long-term gains stem from Macau's new 10-year gaming concession system and a 40% effective tax on gross gaming revenue (GGR). However, a delay often exists between GGR recording and tax collection, rendering direct comparisons imperfect. Macau's bullish 2024 budget projected MOP83.61 billion in gaming tax.

CULTURAL MONUMENTS AMONG SIX NEW HERITAGE PROTECTION SITES

A draft of the fourth round of real estate assessment administrative regulations has been announced, with six new pieces of real estate assessed. These comprise two monuments, two buildings with architectural artistic value, and two building complexes. The regulations take effect from the day following their announcement and are intended to protect these immovable properties of cultural interest in Macau. Deland Leong, director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, announced in a press conference last week that these properties were carefully assessed. Their cultural significance was assessed and they underwent a public consultations process.

'CANDIDA HÖFER: EPIC GAZE' EXHIBITION EXTENDED

The photography exhibition "Candida Höfer: Epic Gaze" has been extended until May 19, after gaining popularity among residents and tourists, the Cultural Affairs Bureau announced. The exposition is Macau's first large exhibition of internationally renowned photographer Candida Höfer, who is known for her signature eye-level orthogonal views of the architectural interiors of public spaces. These are devoid of human presence and mostly depict different types of Western cultural architecture across different periods. In this exhibition, a number of two-metre-high pieces are exhibited at the Macao Museum of Art, seemingly inviting viewers into these photographic spaces and allowing them to gradually explore the details through a slow gaze.



ID PRESIDENT HOPES DRAGON BOAT RACES BOOST ECONOMY

RENATO MARQUES

The president of the Sports Bureau (ID), Pun Weng Kun, hopes that the "Dragon Boat Races", scheduled for this June, will help boost the local economy, he said yesterday at the press conference that announced this year's event.

Questioned on the topic by media, Pun said, "I believe that, this year, this event can promote further development of this sport. I also hope that the athletes [who will come to Macau to compete] can bring their families with them. Take advantage of a holiday; visit and enjoy Macau. We want to host events that attract more visitors to Macau and boost the economy," he added.

As in past editions, this year's Macao International Dragon Boat Races, the principal sponsor of which is SJM, will invite several teams from both the mainland and other countries. Pun noted that the final number of non-local teams is not yet clear, as the bureau is still in the process of extending invitations to competitors.

It is certain that last year's champions will be participating in this year's competition, by invitation from the organizers.

China Nanhai Jiujiang won both the Open Category and the Women's Category of the Macao International Invitation Standard Dragon Boat Race (500m) last year, while Kasetsart University of Thailand won the Macao University Student Invitation Standard Dragon Boat Race (500m) in the same competition.

As announced at yesterday's press conference, held at the Grand Lisboa Palace Resort, this year's event will replicate last year's format. This time, however, all the races will be held over three consecutive days, starting on Saturday Jun. 8 and closing on Monday Jun. 10, which marks Tung Ng Festival Day.

In his speech, Pun noted the relevance of the event. "It is a fusion between sports competition and Chinese traditional customs," which aims not only to "foster the growth of watersports within Macau but also celebrate China's rich heritage."

Representing SJM, managing director Daisy Ho also noted the importance of the event in "showcasing Chinese culture to a global audience," reflecting upon the two anniversaries celebrated this year: the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the 25th anniversary of the esta-

ishment of the Macau SAR.

Without explaining exactly it would, Ho also said the event is "expected to draw more international visitors to Macau."

As in other editions, the first day of competition at the Nam Van Lake is dedicated to local races in small boats and over shorter distances. In contrast, the second day continues to feature local races but in larger boats over long distances, up to 500m.

On the final day, the competition will host international races, including the Open and Women categories, as well as a race dedicated to the Universities.

REGISTRATION OF LOCAL TEAMS STARTS TOMORROW

Registrations for limited places in the local races will commence tomorrow, from March 13 until March 19.

Local races include the Macao Small Dragon Boat Race, with up to 60 teams competing in the Open Category and 24 teams in the Women's category; the Macao Government Departments Small Dragon Boat Race, including 18 teams; the Macao University Student Small Dragon Boat Race, with 12 teams competing in the Open category; and the Macao Standard Dragon Boat Race, with 36 teams

competing in the Open category and eighteen teams for Women's category.

Interested parties are required to submit team entries online (www.cmdragonboat.org.mo) between 10 a.m. March 13 and 10 p.m. March 19 so that they can obtain an online account. Through that, each team can register for their respective race categories between 10a.m. March 20 and 10 p.m. on March 26.

Registrations will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until all places are filled.

The best 12 ranked teams in the Open category and the best six ranked teams in the Women's category of the 2023 Macao Small Dragon Boat Race, as well as the top-six ranked teams in the Open category and the top-three ranked teams in Women's category of the 2023 Macao Standard Dragon Boat Race, are given priority to register for the corresponding category of the 2024 Macao International Dragon Boat Races.

Successfully registered teams should submit the relevant information, including participants' names, by 10p.m. May 2.

Application to change team members must be submitted by 10 p.m. May 10.

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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REALTY

Chambers continue to call for gov't to lift cooling measures amid sector woes

LYNZY VALLES

THE effects of the global pandemic in the city's realty sector have consumed a lot of cash flow, making it difficult for companies and small property owners to sell properties for cash and increasing the burden on internal circulation of funds, said Chong Siu Kin, president of the Macau Real Estate Chamber of Commerce.

In a symposium to discuss the impact of the fall of the real estate market in the city, Chong has called on the government to fully lift its cooldown measures, a call that realty groups have been demanding, as the market is expected to face a downward trend this year.

The realty expert has also suggested that Macau refer to Hong Kong's policies and launch policies to attract investors.

Recently, Hong Kong's government has lifted curbs on property deals after home prices fell to a seven-year low, adding to the Chinese territory's woes.

Finance minister Paul Chan recently announced the move in a speech presenting the territory's



budget, which also raised spending on tourism promotion. He said all curbs, such as extra taxes, imposed earlier to cool the property market, would be lifted with immediate effect.

What Chong also noted was that Macau follow Hong Kong's

investment residencies in a bid to revive the sector and attract the wealthy.

After eight years, Hong Kong brought an investment migration program in a bid to restore its status as a global financial hub within China's sluggish economy

and steady outflow of talent.

Under the revised Capital Investment Entrant Scheme, which will begin accepting applications from mid-2024, foreign nationals and mainland Chinese individuals who hold foreign residency status will be granted the right of

abode if they meet necessary requirements.

Echoing similar sentiments, Centaline founder Shih Wing Ching said the current implementation of the cooling off measures is still not appropriate in the present market as the sector is still facing severely low transactions, the businessman said.

Thus, the businessman believes that if the government also implements the policy similar to Hong Kong, then it can attract investments to Macau and aid in stabilizing the market. Otherwise, property prices will continue to fall, affecting ordinary citizens who hold self-occupied properties.

Recently, chambers have been warning of a grim post-pandemic property market amid the recovery in the city's tourism and gaming market.

According to the current environment, even if the government launches another land auction, there will be no bidders. If the government does not adopt improvement policies, it is expected that the price per square foot of the property market will continue to fall.

José Chui calls for better privileges for CEPA reexported goods from Macau to mainland

ANTHONY LAM

A mainland-Macau trade agreement should be updated to facilitate better reexport of goods in Macau, National Congress member José Chui suggested.

The Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement, commonly referred to as CEPA, was made between mainland China and Macau to facilitate more convenient trade and service exports between the two jurisdictions.

Chui, while speaking to local media Macao Daily News, suggested that CEPA be updated, so that goods from mainland China, lusophone countries, and even other places can enjoy better privileges when reexported in Macau.

He suggested vetting procedures be simplified, such as requirements for manufacturing and processing procedures, tax code changes, ad valorem percentages, and other hurdles. Relaxing these procedures would facilitate mutual recognition of business between Macau and Hengqin, China, he argued.

He also suggested that by appropriately lowering the age requirements for CEPA "service providers" in commercial and trade fields the threshold for Macau service providers to enter the mainland market would be lowered. The consequence of this would be that enterprises from Portuguese-speaking countries that meet the necessary conditions can enjoy econo-

mic and trade benefits when entering the Chinese market.

In terms of cross-boundary investments and the trading of securities, the congressman said that references from existing, similar schemes should be taken, so as to formulate a tailor-made scheme for investments related to Macau and Hengqin, China. His suggestion included establishing a joint venture company held by the governments of the two places to undertake the service functions related to supporting Hengqin-Macau Bond Connect transactions.

Relevant taxation incentives should also be formulated to attract capital from Hengqin, China to invest in securities products in Macau.

GOLF

ANTHONY KIM MAKES COMEBACK IN MACAU

STAFF REPORTER

ANTHONY Kim, who recently announced his comeback to professional golf as a LIV Golf Wild Card player, has joined an impressive field that includes top players from the LIV Golf League and the best players from the Asian Tour for the USD2 million International Series Macau, presented by Wynn, which will take place from March 14 to March 17.

After a hiatus of nearly 12 years, the American golfer has returned to the sport and will be competing against renowned players at the Macau Golf & Country Club.

Kim participated in consecutive LIV Golf events in Jeddah and Hong Kong in recent weeks, displaying excellent form during the final day at the Hong



Kong Golf Club, where he concluded his last round on Sunday with an impressive score of five under 65.

Regarding his performance, Kim stated, "I just kept doing what I've been working on the last two months. Obviously, being away from the game so long, it's been tough to practice and get all the things that I need to get prepared for the tournament, but I'm working on the right

things at this moment."

The 38-year-old golfer is well-acquainted with the golfing scene in the region, having participated in the Asian Tour nine times before 2011. During his previous Asian Tour appearances, he achieved four top-five finishes, including a joint third-place finish in the 2011 Singapore Open, where he fell just one shot behind the champion, Gonzalo Fernandez-Castano.

ANTHONY LAM

CRIME

WOMAN ARRESTED FOR CURRENCY EXCHANGE FRAUD

A local woman has been arrested on allegations of setting up false currency exchanges between friends, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday.

The woman, 34 and surnamed Lai, is reportedly the owner of a local beauty parlor.

It was disclosed that the woman had told at least five customers that she could help exchange Macau Pataca for Chinese Renminbi at privileged rates. Believing her, the five customers gave her a total of MOP170,000 in the hopes of getting the equivalent amount in Renminbi back.

The woman reportedly told her customers that she could manage to achieve a 1:1 exchange rate between the two currencies. The five victims were four women and one man.

In September last year, Lai told the five people that she was in need of a large amount of Pataca, and was willing to exchange her Renminbi with them for their Pataca. The five people fell for her claims and wire transferred between MOP30,000 and MOP130,000 each to Lai's account. They then



received only a partial amount of the promised Renminbi.

Lai cited mainland's daily bank transfer limit as the reason for not completing the transactions before eventually disappearing. The five victims then approached the

police for help.

Arresting Lai on March 7, the police were told that the money was spent on daily consumptions and gambling.

In another case, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) arrested

a woman for providing unlicensed medical services.

In the afternoon of March 8, the police saw the woman promoting mole removal services while holding a placard in Senado Square. It was advertised that MOP50 would

be charged for each mole removed.

The police officers then found some tools and ointments in the woman's bicycle. The police were told that these materials were bought in mainland China. The woman also made some ointments and claimed they were effective in removing freckles and treating lung diseases. The woman also told the police that she had worked in the industry in the mainland for six months.

Concerning a previously announced repeat in-flight theft, the Criminal Procedure Tribunal of the Court of First Instance has taken a male suspect into custody who allegedly repeatedly stole cash and other items from passengers on flights between November 2023 and March 2024.

He has been charged with aggravated theft.

COURTS

UM admin staff sentenced to 30 months jailtime as TSI amends sentence

RENATO MARQUES

THE Court of Second Instance (TSI) has sided with the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) and amended a "too lenient" sentence handed to a former administrative staff from the University of Macau (UM) who is accused of several crimes related to construction works.

After a trial that took place at the Court of First Instance (TJB), the former staff member was handed a prison sentence of two years and three years suspended practice. However, the MP appealed the decision on the basis that it was too lenient in light of the man's reported wrongdoings.

A bench of judges from TSI accepted the reasons argued by the MP and amended the sentence to two-and-a-half years in prison.

In the ruling, the TSI judges noted that the



person had been convicted of forging documents of special value back in 2015 but that, as a result of his unlawful practices including the passing of internal and confidential information such as tender evaluation criteria, several other works were attributed to those in-

involved in the scheme up to 2020.

He was found guilty of three counts of breaching confidentiality and abusing power, violating the duties and obligations of civil servants, causing losses to public interests or third parties, and seriously harming the reputation

of public administration authorities, the fairness of the public project bidding system, and public expectations of public servants' integrity.

Due to the nature and outcome of the crimes, the TSI upheld the appeal and awarded a harsher sentence.

LOCAL DEVELOPER REJUVENATES PÁTIO DA CLARIDADE

PÁTIO da Claridade will be revamped and transformed into a leisure and tourism hub with emphasis on culinary elements, the head of local developer Lek Hang Group has announced in a statement.

Sio Chong Meng, founder and president of the real property developer, was cited in a company statement as saying that he has plans to redevelop the aforementioned alley.

Lek Hang Group is the developer that revamped the Central Hotel and reopened it as new, boutique accommodation. Sio said that the hotel should be ready for its soft opening at the end of this month, with the government having concluded its inspections.

Comprising 48 two-story brick structures, Sio aims to transform the alley into an area with dozens of small eateries and bistros. Inns with special characters will also be introduced to the neighborhood, "to create benchmarks in the Inner Harbour district."

The executive added that the plan is to use the eateries to attract tourists to older districts, ultimately enticing them to stay in these districts.

In September 2022, draft plans for certain structures in the alley were returned by the Urban Planning Committee; no consensus was, at that time, achieved to green light the proposed development.

AL



Congress ends with a show of unity behind Xi's vision for national greatness

ELAINE KURTENBACH & KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

CHINA'S national legislature wrapped up its annual session yesterday with near-unanimous support for plans designed to carry out ruling Communist Party leader Xi Jinping's vision for the nation.

The nearly 3,000-member National People's Congress approved a revised State Council law that directs China's version of the cabinet to follow Xi's vision. The vote was 2,883 to eight, with nine abstentions. Other measures passed by similarly wide margins. The most nays were recorded for the annual report of the supreme court, which was approved by a 2,834 to 44 vote.

In brief closing remarks, Zhao Leji, the legislature's top official, urged the people to unite more closely under the Communist Party's leadership "with comrade



Chinese President Xi Jinping, top right, applauds as he leaves after the closing session of the National People's Congress held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, yesterday

Xi Jinping at its core."

As the party champions innovation and self-reliance in technology to build a modern, wealthy economy, it is leaning heavily on more overtly communist ideology

that harkens to past eras. Xi has fortified the party's role across the spectrum, from culture and education to corporate management and economic planning.

Along with following the gui-

dance of Xi Jinping Thought and other party directives, developing "new quality productive forces" — a term coined by Xi last September — emerged as a catchphrase at this year's congress.

The term suggests a prioritizing of science and technology as China confronts trade sanctions and curbs on access to advanced know-how in computer chips and other areas that the U.S. and other countries deem to be national security risks.

The Organic Law of the State Council was revised for the first time since its adoption in 1982. The revision calls for the State Council to "uphold the leadership of the Communist Party of China." It also adds the governor of China's central bank to the body.

Echoing words seen in just about every proposal, law or speech made in China these days, it spells out that China's highest governing officials must adhere to the party's guiding ideology.

During this year's congress, many provincial meetings were opened to the media for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic. **MDT/AP**

US IS CONSTANTLY ASSESSING EXPANSION OF CHIP EXPORT CONTROLS THAT CAN BOOST CHINA'S MILITARY

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

THE United States is constantly assessing the need to expand export controls to stop China from acquiring advanced computer chips and manufacturing equipment that could be used to boost its military, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said Monday.

The U.S. export controls were first launched in 2022 to counter the use of chips for military applications that include the development of hypersonic missiles and artificial intelligence.

Last year, the U.S. Commerce Department broadened the export controls, sparking protests from China's Commerce Ministry that the restrictions violated international trade rules and "seriously threaten the stability of industrial supply chains."

China said it would take "all necessary measures" to safeguard its rights and interests and urged



U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, right, talks beside Philippine Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo Pascual during a press conference at Paranaque city, Philippines, yesterday

Washington to lift the export control as soon as possible.

Asked if the U.S. was planning to further broaden the chip export controls to China, Raimondo said in a news conference in the Philippine capital Manila that it was constantly under consideration.

"We look at this every single day," Raimondo said. "Technology is changing faster than ever,

which means we have to wake up every day and ask ourselves, 'are we doing enough?'"

"My job is to protect the American people and to make sure there are no sophisticated technology, including semiconductor technology, artificial intelligence technology that we have, that China doesn't have, that they can't access it and use it to enable the Chinese military," she said.

MDT/AP

CEM NOTICE

Temporary traffic arrangements for traffic lights suspension due to distribution network maintenance

To facilitate the maintenance and improvement works of CEM's distribution network, a set of traffic lights at the junction of Avenida do Almirante Lacerda and Estrada do Repouso will be suspended from **9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on 14 March (Thursday)**. We kindly request the public's attention to this matter.

AP PHOTOS



Best Picture: Emma Thomas, left, and Christopher Nolan (also Best Director), "Oppenheimer"



Best Actress: Emma Stone, "Poor Things"



Best Actor: Cillian Murphy, "Oppenheimer"



Best Supporting Actor: Robert Downey Jr., "Oppenheimer"



Best Supporting Actress: Da'Vine Joy, "The Holdovers"

'Oppenheimer' crowned best picture at an Academy Awards shadowed by war

JAKE COYLE, LOS ANGELES

OPPENHEIMER, a solemn three-hour biopic that became an unlikely billion-dollar box-office sensation, was crowned best picture at a 96th Academy Awards that doubled as a coronation for Christopher Nolan.

After passing over arguably Hollywood's foremost big-screen auteur for years, the Oscars made up for lost time by heaping seven awards on Nolan's blockbuster biopic, including best actor for Cillian Murphy, best supporting actor for Robert Downey Jr. and best director for Nolan.

In anointing "Oppenheimer," the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences did something it hasn't done for more than a decade: hand its top prize to a widely seen, big-budget studio film. In a film industry where a cape, dinosaur or Tom Cruise has often been a requirement for such box office, "Oppenheimer" brought droves of moviegoers to theaters with a complex, fission-filled drama about J. Robert Oppenheimer and the creation of the atomic bomb.

"For better or worse, we're all living in Oppenheimer's world," said Murphy in his acceptance

speech. "I'd like to dedicate this to the peacemakers."

As a film heavy with unease for human capacity for mass destruction, "Oppenheimer" also emerged — even over its partner in cultural phenomenon, "Barbie" — as a fittingly foreboding film for times rife with cataclysm, man-made or not.

Sunday's Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles unfolded against the backdrop of wars in Gaza and Ukraine, and with a potentially momentous U.S. election on the horizon. Awards for the documentary winner, "20 Days in Mariupol," and best international film, "The Zone of Interest," brought geopolitics into the Oscar spotlight.

The most closely watched contest went to Emma Stone, who won best best actress for her performance as Bella Baxter in "Poor Things." In what was seen as the night's most nail-biting category, Stone won over Lily Gladstone of "Killers of the Flower Moon." Gladstone would have become the first Native American to win an Academy Award.

Instead, Oscar voters couldn't resist the full-bodied extremes of Stone's "Poor Things" performance. The win for Stone, her second

best actress Oscar following her 2017 win for "La La Land," confirmed the 35-year-old as arguably the preeminent big-screen actress of her generation. The list of women to win best actress two or more times is illustrious, including Katharine Hepburn, Frances McDormand, Ingrid Bergman and Bette Davis.

"Oh, boy, this is really overwhelming," said Stone, who fought back tears and a broken dress during her speech.

Sunday's broadcast had razzle-dazzle, including a sprawling song-and-dance rendition of the "Barbie" hit "I'm Just Ken" by Ryan Gosling, with an assist on guitar by Slash and a sea of Kens who swarmed the stage.

But protest and politics intruded on an election-year Academy Awards. Late during the show, host Jimmy Kimmel read a critical social media post from former president Donald Trump.

"Thank you for watching," said Kimmel. "Isn't it past your jail time?"

Nolan has had many movies in the Oscar mix before, including "Inception," "Dunkirk" and "The Dark Knight." But his win Sunday for direction is the first Academy Award for the 53-year-old

filmmaker. Addressing the crowd, Nolan noted cinema is just over a hundred years old.

"Imagine being there 100 years into painting or theater," said Nolan, who shared the best-picture award with Emma Thomas, his wife and producer. "We don't know where this incredible journey is going from here. But to know that you think that I'm a meaningful part of it means the world to me."

Downey, nominated twice before (for "Chaplin" and "Tropic Thunder"), also notched his first Oscar, crowning the illustrious second act of his up-and-down career.

"I'd like to thank my terrible childhood and the academy, in that order," said Downey, the son of filmmaker Robert Downey Sr.

"Barbie," last year's biggest box-office hit with more than \$1.4 billion in ticket sales, ultimately won just one award: best song (sorry, Ken) for Billie Eilish and Finneas' "What Was I Made For?" It's their second Oscar, two years after winning for their James Bond theme, "No Time to Die."

Protests over Israel's war in Gaza snarled traffic around the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles, slowing stars' arrival on the red carpet and turning the Oscar' at-

tention toward the ongoing conflict. Some protesters shouted "Shame!" at those trying to reach the awards.

Jonathan Glazer, the British filmmaker whose chilling Auschwitz drama "The Zone of Interest" won best international film, drew connections between the dehumanization depicted in his film and today.

"Right now, we stand here as men who refute their Jewishness and the Holocaust being hijacked by an occupation which has led to conflict for so many innocent people, whether the victims of October the 7th in Israel, or the the ongoing attack on Gaza, all the victims, this dehumanization, how do we resist?"

A year after "Navalny" won the same award, Mstyslav Chernov's "20 Days in Mariupol," a harrowing chronicle of the early days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, won best documentary. The win, a first for The Associated Press and PBS' "Frontline," came as the war in Ukraine passed the two-year mark with no signs of abating.

Chernov, the Ukrainian filmmaker and AP journalist whose hometown was bombed the day he learned of his Oscar nomination, spoke forcefully about Rus-



Best Documentary Feature Film: Raney Aronson-Rath, from left, Vasilisa Stepanenko, Mstyslav Chernov, Evgeniy Maloletka, Michelle Mizner, and Derl McCrudden, "20 Days in Mariupol"



A protestor holds a poster during a demonstration in support of Palestinians calling for a ceasefire in Gaza as the 96th Academy Awards Oscars ceremony is held nearby

'Barbie' ballad 'What Was I Made For?' makes Billie Eilish the youngest person to win two Oscars

MARIA SHERMAN,
LOS ANGELES

WHAT were Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell made for? Winning awards, apparently. The sibling duo's "Barbie" blockbuster ballad "What Was I Made For?" won the Academy Award for best original song on Sunday night.

In doing so, Eilish, 22, has become the youngest person by far to have won two career Oscars.

That beats a very old record set by Luise Rainer, who won her second best actress Oscar at 28 in 1938.

The second youngest is now Eilish's 26-year-old brother and co-writer Finneas. The pair won their first Oscar for "No Time to Die" in 2021. That year, they beat out some impressive names, including Beyoncé, Van Morrison, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Diane Warren.

Hilary Swank and Jodie Foster — a best supporting actor nominee this year — are the only others to win two before 30.

"Thank you so much to the Academy. I feel like, I just didn't think this would happen," Eilish started her speech. "I'm so grateful for

this song and for this movie and the way that it made me feel. And this goes out to everyone who was affected by the movie and how incredible it is. And I want to thank my team and my parents. I love you guys so much."

She continued, "I want to thank my best friend Zoe for playing Barbies with me growing up, and being by my side forever," and was met with laughs from the audience. "I want to thank my, like, dance teachers growing up. I want to thank my choir teachers. Miss Brigham, thanks for believing in me. Mrs. T, you didn't like me, but you were good at your job."

Eilish and Finneas beat out another "Barbie" cut, "I'm Just Ken," as performed by Ryan Gosling and written by "Barbie the Album" executive producer Mark Ronson and his creative partner Andrew Wyatt. Jon Batiste and Dan Wilson's "It Never Went Away" from "American Symphony," Warren's "The Fire Inside" from "Flamin' Hot" and Scott George's "Wahzhazhe (A Song For My People)" from "Killers of the Flower Moon" rounded out the category.

Eilish and O'Connell are no strangers to the Oscar stage. In addition to taking

home the trophy for their James Bond them "No Time to Die," they performed during the in memoriam segment in 2020.

In the months leading up to the Academy Awards, "What Was I Made For?" has raked in numerous trophies: In 2024 alone, they've won a Golden Globe for best original song and two Grammys. Not bad for a song written about an 11.5-inch-tall plastic doll.

"What Was I Made For?" debuted at No. 34 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 chart, eventually peaking at No. 14.

In the "Barbie" film, "What Was I Made For?" plays a key role — an instrumental version of the song pops up like a leitmotif, soundtracking introspective, existential moments for its protagonist. Eilish's voice isn't heard until the final scene, but at that point, the audience is well-prepared for its emotional impact.

Clearly, the duo excel at making music for movies. Before "Barbie" and Bond, three songs they wrote made it on Disney's "Turning Red" soundtrack, pulling heavily from the likes of (asterisk)NSYNC and the Backstreet Boys. **MDT/AP**

sia's invasion.

"This is the first Oscar in Ukrainian history, and I'm honored," said Chernov. "Probably I will be the first director on this stage to say I wish I'd never made this film. I wish to be able to exchange this (for) Russia never attacking Ukraine."

In the early going, Yorgos Lanthimos' Frankenstein-riff "Poor Things" ran away with three prizes for its sumptuous craft, including awards for production design, makeup and hairstyling and costume design. "Poor Things" fared second best to "Oppenheimer," with a total of four awards.

Kimmel, hosting the ABC telecast for the fourth time, opened the awards with a monologue that emphasized Hollywood as "a union town" following 2023's actor and writer strikes, drew a standing ovation for bringing out teamsters and behind-the-scenes workers — who are now entering their own labor negotiations.

The night's first award was one of its most predictable: Da'Vine Joy Randolph for best supporting actress, for her performance in Alexander Payne's "The Holdovers." An emotional Randolph was accompanied to the stage by her "Holdovers" co-star Paul Giamatti.

"For so long I've always wanted to be different," said Randolph. "And now I realize I just need to be myself."

Though Randolph's win was widely expected, an upset quickly followed. Hayao Miyazaki's "The Boy and the Heron" won for best animated feature, a surprise over the slightly favored "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse." Miyazaki, the 83-year-old Japanese anime master who came out of retirement to make "The Boy and the Heron," didn't attend the ceremony. He also didn't attend the 2003 Oscars when his "Spirited Away" won the same award.

Best original screenplay went to "Anatomy of a Fall," which, like "Barbie," was penned by a couple: director Justine Triet and Arthur Harari. "This will help me through my midlife crisis, I think," said Triet.

In adapted screenplay, where "Barbie" was nominated — and where some suspected Greta Gerwig would win after being overlooked for director — the Oscar went to Cord Jefferson, who wrote and directed his feature film debut "American Fiction." He pleaded for executives to take risks on young filmmakers like himself.

"Instead of making a

\$200 million movie, try making 20 \$10 million movies," said Jefferson, previously an award-winning TV writer.

The Oscars belonged largely to theatrical-first films. Though it came into the awards with 19 nominations, Netflix was a bit player. Its lone win came for live action short: Wes Anderson's "The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar," based on the story by Roald Dahl.

The win for "Oppenheimer" offered Hollywood a chance to celebrate despite swirling storm clouds in the film industry. Nolan's film debuted last year just as actors joined screenwriters in a prolonged strike over streaming economics and artificial intelligence. The actors' strike ended in November, but little of Hollywood's unease subsided. Streaming has proved less lucrative for most studios not named Netflix.

But "Barbenheimer" was the kind of unplanned phenomenon Hollywood needs more of. The two films could also give a lift to the Oscar telecast, which has historically benefited from having big movies in contention. The Academy Awards' largest audience ever came when James Cameron's "Titanic" swept the 1998 Oscars. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Finneas O'Connell, left, and Billie Eilish accept the award for best original song for "What Was I Made For?" from "Barbie"



Vladimir Putin, center, attends a Christmas service in Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, Jan. 8, 2000

PROPAGANDA

On Russian TV ahead of the election, there's only one program: Putin's

EMMA BURROWS, LONDON

THOUSANDS of Russians braved the cold for hours earlier this month to honor the opposition politician Alexei Navalny after his funeral. They chanted anti-war slogans and covered his gravesite with so many flowers that it disappeared from view.

It was one of the largest displays of defiance against President Vladimir Putin since he invaded Ukraine, and happened just weeks before an election he is all but assured to win. But Russians watching television saw none of it.

A leading state television channel opened with its host railing against the West and NATO. Another channel led with a segment extolling the virtues of domestically built streetcars. And there was the usual deferential coverage of Putin.

Since coming to power almost 25 years ago, Putin has eliminated nearly all independent media and opposition voices in Russia — a process he ramped up after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin's control over media is now absolute.

State television channels

cheer every battlefield victory, twist the pain of economic sanctions into positive stories, and ignore that tens of thousands of Russian soldiers have died in Ukraine.

Some Russians seek news from abroad or on social media using tools to circumvent state restrictions. But most still rely on state television, which floods them with the Kremlin's view of the world. Over time, the effect is to whittle away their desire to question it.

"Propaganda is a kind of drug and I don't mind taking it," said Victoria, 50, from Russian-occupied Crimea. She refused to give her last name because of concerns about her safety.

"If I get up in the morning and hear that things are going badly in our country, how will I feel? How will millions of people feel? ... Propaganda is needed to sustain people's spirit," she said.

PUTIN'S BROKEN PROMISES

When Putin first addressed Russians as their new president on the last day of 1999, he promised a bright path after the chaotic years that followed the Soviet Union's collapse.

"The state will stand firm

to protect freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of mass media," he said.

Yet just over a year later, he broke that promise: The Kremlin neutered its main media critic, the independent TV channel NTV, and went after the media tycoons who controlled it.

In the following decades, multiple Russian journalists, including investigative reporter Anna Politkovskaya, were killed or jailed, and the Russian parliament passed laws curbing press freedoms.

The crackdown intensified two years ago after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

New laws made it a crime to discredit the Russian military, and anyone spreading "false information" about the war faced up to 15 years in prison. Almost overnight, nearly all independent media outlets suspended operations or left the country. The Kremlin blocked access to independent media and some social media sites, and Russian courts jailed two journalists with U.S. citizenship, Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva.

"The Putin regime is based on propaganda and fear. And propaganda plays the most important role because people

live in an information bubble," said Marina Ovsyannikova, a former state television journalist who quit her job at a leading Russian state television channel in an on-air protest against the war.

THE KREMLIN MEDIA DIET

The Kremlin regularly meets with the heads of TV stations to give "special instructions on what can be said on air," said Ovsyannikova.

Every day, TV stations serve up a mix of bluster, threats and half-truths — telling viewers the West wants to destroy their country, that sanctions make them stronger and that Russia is winning the war.

The Kremlin's goal is to squeeze out any opposition so that citizens "remain inert and compliant," said Sam Greene, a director at the Center for European Policy Analysis in Washington.

The strength of the Kremlin's grip on the media means that while Navalny's death in an Arctic penal colony was major news in the West, many Russians didn't know about it.

One out of five Russians said they had not heard about his death, according to the independent Russian pollster Levada Center. Half said they only had vague knowledge of it.

The most memorable event for Russians in February, the polling found, was the Russian military's capture of the eastern Ukrainian town of Avdiivka.

By trumpeting military victories, the Kremlin is focused on creating a "happy feeling," ahead of the elections, said Jade McGlynn, an expert on Russian propaganda at King's College London.

Anti-war candidates are banned from the ballot, and there is no significant challenger to Putin. State television broadcasts dull debates between representatives of Putin's opponents.

Putin is not openly campaigning but is frequently shown touring the country — admiring remote tomato farms or visiting weapons factories.

The idea that Russia is thriving under Putin is a potent message for people who have seen their living standards fall since the war — and sanctions — began, driving up prices for food and other staples.

The war has also pushed Russia's defense industry into overdrive, and people like Victoria from Crimea have noticed.

"If they tell me that new jobs have appeared, should I be happy or sad? Is this propaganda or truth?" she asked. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1969 PAUL McCARTNEY WEDS LINDA EASTMAN



Paul McCartney has married Linda Eastman in a civil ceremony in London.

Hundreds of people gathered outside the Marylebone Register Office to catch a glimpse of the couple as they arrived with Miss Eastman's six-year-old daughter, Heather, from a previous marriage.

A dozen policemen were on hand to fend off enthusiastic teenagers, many of whom were distraught that the last remaining bachelor Beatle was tying the knot.

The couple entered the building via a side-door to the disappointment of many of the crowds.

Miss Eastman, 27, was wearing a daffodil yellow coat over a fawn dress, while 26-year-old Mr McCartney was sporting a matching yellow tie.

The ceremony was delayed because the best man, Mr McCartney's brother Mike McGear of the Scaffold pop group, arrived late.

He had been travelling from Birmingham where he had been performing the night before when his train became delayed.

After the ceremony the newly-weds were ushered through the crowds into a waiting car and driven away to their local parish church where the marriage was blessed.

The couple met two years ago when Miss Eastman, a professional photographer, was taking photographs of the Beatles in America.

Linda Eastman was born in 1941 in New York and was educated at the prestigious Scarsdale High School.

After leaving school, she trained as a photographer and throughout the 1960s has photographed many famous names, including Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, the Who, Bob Dylan and Otis Redding.

Paul McCartney was born in 1942 in Liverpool and had written his first song, I Lost My Little Girl, by the age of 14.

The Beatles were formed in 1960 and by 1963 Beatlemania had gripped the country.

The couple plan to spend their honeymoon visiting relatives in America.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Paul and Linda McCartney were married for 29 years and had one of the most successful marriages in show-business.

The couple raised four children - Heather, from her previous marriage, Stella, Mary, and James.

A year after their wedding the Beatles split up and Linda McCartney joined her husband's band Wings. A well-known vegetarian and animal rights campaigner, she went on to become a millionaire in her own right with her successful range of vegetarian meals which she launched in the 1990s.

She died of breast cancer in 1998 at the McCartney ranch in Tucson, Arizona.

Paul McCartney married former model Heather Mills in 2002 with whom he had a baby daughter in October 2003.

The couple announced they would separate in May 2006 and began divorce proceedings in July of that year.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES  **Mar. 21-Apr. 19**
 Maintain a mystery. Don't reveal all your secrets, with Venus in Pisces. Savor peaceful privacy. Imagine enticing fantasies. Plot to realize a dream.


TAURUS  **Apr. 20-May. 20**
 Social activities benefit your career. You're extra popular for the next month, with Venus in Pisces. Group activities go well. Share what you love.


GEMINI  **May. 21-Jun. 21**
 Watch for career opportunities. Take charge, with Venus in Pisces. It's easier to advance your professional agenda this month. Your status and influence rise.

CANCER  **Jun. 22-Jul. 22**
 Set objectives and plan your next adventure. Travel, explore and study over the next month, with Venus in Pisces. Discover beautiful new worlds.

LEO  **Jul. 23-Aug. 22**
 Find a sweet deal. Review family finances this month, with Venus in Pisces, and discover ways to save. Collaborate to grow shared resources.

VIRGO  **Aug. 23-Sep. 22**
 Collaborate on creative projects. Partnerships flow with greater ease, with Venus in Pisces over a month. Compromise on details. Rely on each other.

LIBRA  **Sep. 23-Oct. 22**
 Prioritize health and fitness. Physical efforts win, with Venus in Pisces. Enjoy a fun work phase. You're growing stronger. Practice looks good on you.

SCORPIO  **Oct. 23-Nov. 21**
 Get creative. You're especially lucky in love this month, with Venus in Pisces. Create works of beauty. Savor hobbies, passions and talents. Share your heart.

SAGITTARIUS  **Nov. 22-Dec. 21**
 Feather your love nest. Beautify your place, with Venus in Pisces for a month. Nurture yourself and family with domestic comforts and homemade flavors.

CAPRICORN  **Dec. 22-Jan. 19**
 Creativity surges. Write, express and share your views, with Venus in Pisces over the coming month. Words flow with ease. Illustrate, post and publish.

AQUARIUS  **Jan. 20-Feb. 18**
 Gather new income. The next month, with Venus in Pisces can get especially profitable. Discover your peak professional performance zone.

PISCES  **Feb. 19-Mar. 20**
 Advance personal passion projects. You're especially popular, with Venus in your sign for a month. Try a new style or look. Dress for success.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	0	14	fine
Changchun	-7	8	fine
Chengdu	11	17	rain
Chongqing	11	19	cloudy
Fuzhou	10	24	cloudy
Guangzhou	11	22	cloudy
Guiyang	7	21	cloudy
Haikou	15	21	rain
Hangzhou	8	18	cloudy
Harbin	-7	7	fine
Hefei	6	17	cloudy
Nanjing	9	15	cloudy
Shanghai	7	14	fine
Taipei	14	20	fine
Wuhan	5	21	fine
Hong Kong	19	20	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-9	2	cloudy
Frankfurt	4	12	cloudy
Paris	9	11	rain
London	11	12	rain
New York	7	17	windy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Support in chicanery; 5- Low-budget prefix; 10- David Copperfield's first wife; 14- Antitoxins; 15- Bolshevik leader; 16- Barely managed, with "out"; 17- ___ of Eden; 18- Armada; 19- ___ kleine Nachtmusik; 20- Crawl; 22- Slid; 24- Diana of "The Avengers"; 27- Hook's helper; 28- Freezing rain squall; 32- Bert's roomie; 35- In a funk; 36- Emollient-yielding plants; 38- Conical dwelling; 40- Blunted blade; 42- Bygone birds; 44- Pub projectile; 45- Artist Max; 47- Floating bombs; 49- Sprechen ___ Deutsch?; 50- Disputed matter; 52- College grounds; 54- Auction site; 56- Public disturbance; 57- Elected legislator; 60- Barbershop quartet member; 64- Sir Guinness; 65- Archie Bunker's wife; 68- Make angry; 69- Tent stick; 70- Fasten again; 71- Arthur Ashe's alma mater; 72- Dick Tracy's love; 73- Shuteye; 74- Scorch;

DOWN 1- Wait ___; 2- Wall Street pessimist; 3- Celtic language; 4- Spuds; 5- Pole worker; 6- Cartoon frame; 7- Change for a five; 8- Nobelist Bohr; 9- Punctual; 10- Intensified; 11- Tom Joad, e.g.; 12- Tear; 13- Fruit drink; 21- Middle Eastern bread; 23- Chipper; 25- Olympian's quest; 26- Brush a horse; 28- Palmist's words; 29- Island in the Bay of Naples; 30- Utopias; 31- Doctor; 33- "No bid," in bridge; 34- Creepy; 37- Sub detector; 39- French summers; 41- Concentrated extracts; 43- Big rig; 46- Big brass; 48- Dick and Jane's dog; 51- Diners; 53- Womb; 55- Alpine song; 57- Gin flavoring; 58- Slippery swimmers; 59- Religious ceremony or ritual; 61- Pleasing; 62- Leaf with Sanscrit writing?; 63- Bring up; 64- Suitable; 66- No-win situation; 67- Like cool cats;

Yesterday's solution

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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JOHN LEICESTER, PARIS

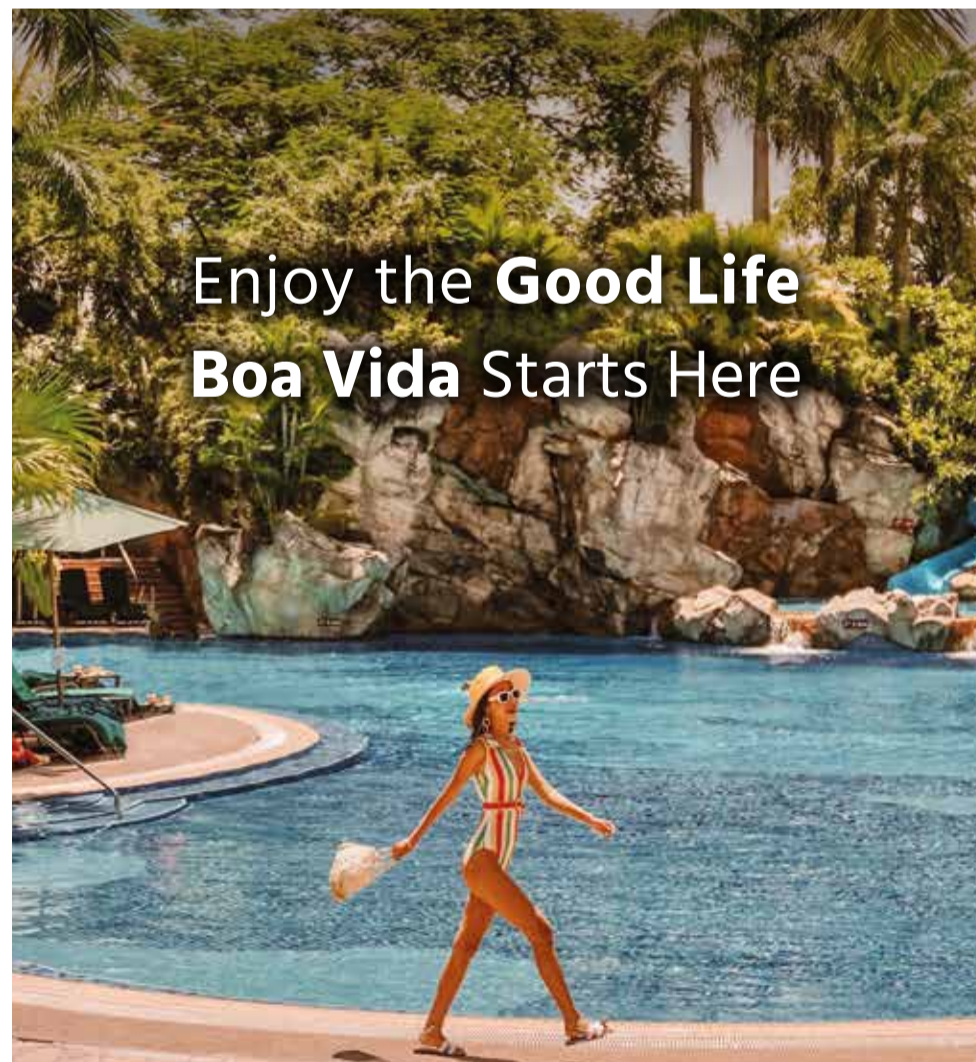
FOR the Paris Olympics, it could almost be a new sport: Score points by hunting down mosaics that a mystery artist who calls himself "Invader" has cemented to walls across France's capital, the world and even had carried aloft to the International Space Station.

Vincent Giraud, one of the artist's Parisian fans, is already an avid player. He downloaded Invader's addictive "Flash Invaders" mobile-phone game that awards points to users who find and photograph the colorful and quirky pieces of pixelated art.

Quickly hooked, Giraud has in just a year already tracked down 1,565 of them, accumulating so many points that he has rocketed into the leaderboard's top 1,000, out of more than 360,000 players.

"In a few months I found and flashed all those in Paris," says Giraud, game-name Vince-Vader. Hunting for Invader mosaics, looking up and around for them on walls, pavements, bridges and even atop the Eiffel Tower, is "another way of discovering the city."

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LIKE BANKSY, FRANCE'S MYSTERY 'INVADER' MARKS CITIES WITH ART



A mosaic by French artist Invader, top right, is seen on a street of Paris

Put simply: When Olympic visitors flock in their millions to Paris for the July 26-Aug. 11 Games, they'll

be crowding onto the turf of France's most international, invasive and intriguing contemporary street ar-

tist. It will be one invasion coming face-to-face with another.

Like Banksy, the British street artist he is sometimes likened to, Invader is elusive, fiercely protective of his anonymity and operating on the margins of illegality. He comes, glues, and disappears into the night, leaving behind his signature pixelated mosaics made mostly with small ceramic and glass tiles.

Most resemble the aliens from the Space Invaders arcade game. Others are wonderfully elaborate, such as still lives of fruit or, in New York, portraits of Lou Reed and Andy Warhol. Some reference pop culture — Spiderman, Star Wars, Bugs Bunny, Ninja Turtles, pizza and the like. Some hint at deep research, including a portrait of guitarist Django Reinhardt facing the house where he lived, south of Paris in Samois-sur-Seine.

Since the first catalogued mosaic of a blue Space Invader went up on a Paris street in 1998, numbered PA_01, Invader has colonized the world. There are now more than 4,000 of his mosaics in cities and towns on all continents except Antarctica.

London, Tokyo, Los Angeles and other cities were invaded in 1999; New York, Geneva and more in 2000; Hong Kong in 2001; Berlin,

Bangkok, Melbourne. On and on.

The 4,000th mosaic was glued to a brick wall in Potosi, 4,000 meters up in the Bolivian Andes, in 2021. The European Space Agency installed Invader's Space2 mosaic aboard the International Space Station in 2015.

"'Anytime, Anywhere' is the philosophy," he says on his website,

In Paris — by far his most invaded location — the artist's footprint is larger than ever as the Olympics loom.

A new exhibition in a disused multi-story building has one of his pixelations painted on its roof, visible via satellite on Google Maps. With a telescope, the show's visitors can also peer across the grey roofs of Paris to Invader's latest milestone: his 1,500th mosaic in the Olympic host city and its suburbs.

PA_1500 was unveiled in February on an exterior chimney of the Pompidou Center, Paris' foremost contemporary art museum. Unlike for the bulk of his works which he installs guerrilla-style without asking, Invader sought and got the museum's permission to cement the red-and-white Space Invader-type alien into place overlooking the city.

"It's a symbol. It's number 1,500. It's Paris," said

Alexandre Aumis, the iconic building's security director. "It's got to be here."

Aumis is a new convert to "Flash Invaders."

"I run a lot in Paris, so I see them everywhere," he said.

Some of those who know Invader say they're expecting him to spring more surprises for the Olympics, perhaps installing new Games-themed mosaics.

"The invasion is the 15 million people who are going to arrive in Paris for the Olympic Games. It's a lot. Obviously, there will be Invader fans among them," said Fabrice Bousteau, the editor of Beaux Arts Magazine who curated Invader's latest exhibition. "So there will be this meeting between two cultures."

"He will doubtless invade the Games in a different way. I am almost certain."

That's thrilling for "Flash Invaders" players.

Niasha Chassain has tracked down just over 50 of the mosaics in Paris and says her children love the hunt.

"It's a big celebration when we find one," she said. "It forces you to look up in the street, to look around a bit, to think about turning around, to look in places that are perhaps not so attractive and discover that there are still things to see." MDT/AP

FOOTBALL | CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Barcelona and Arsenal aim to join Europe's power teams

THE big guns are lining up in the quarterfinals of the Champions League. Defending champion Manchester City, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain have already booked their places in the last eight of European soccer's top club competition and the full lineup will be completed this week.

All four remaining last-of-16 matches are finely balanced, with no more than one goal separating any of the teams after the first legs.

Barcelona hosts Napoli today in a clash between the reigning champions of Spain and Italy respectively. They drew 1-1 in the first leg in Italy.

In the day's other game, Arsenal is 1-0 down against Porto ahead of its match at Emirates Stadium.

Tomorrow, Atletico Madrid must overturn a 1-0 deficit at home against Inter Milan, and host Borussia Dortmund and PSV Eindhoven are tied at 1-1 ahead of



Barcelona's head coach Xavi Hernandez (left) and Arsenal's manager Mikel Arteta

their game.

The quarterfinal and semifinal draws will be held on Friday at UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland.

UNCONVINCING TITLE DEFENSES

Neither Barcelona nor Napoli have made convincing defenses of their domestic league titles.

Napoli faces a fight to even

qualify for last season's Champions League as it sits seven points off fourth-place Bologna in the Italian league and is on its third coach this term after appointing Francesco Calzona last month.

Barcelona is third in the Spanish league and coach Xavi Hernández has announced his intention to leave at the end of the season after an underwhelming campaign.

ARSENAL'S AIM

Mikel Arteta's priority is likely to be the Premier League, with Arsenal locked in a three-way battle with Liverpool and Manchester City for the title. But the Champions League quarterfinals are in sight — even if his team is a goal behind to Porto.

Arsenal returned to the Champions League for the first time in seven years this season and has impressed in advancing to the round

of 16.

The Londoners looked to have secured a goalless first-leg draw at Porto until Galeno's 90th-minute goal.

That was the only defeat in a stunning run of form that has seen Arsenal win eight of its last nine games and score four or more goals in five of those matches.

INTER IMPRESSING

Last year's beaten finalist Inter Milan is powering on again this season.

Simone Inzaghi's team is cruising toward the Italian title with only one league loss this season. Marko Arnautovic's goal at Atletico in the first leg secured a 1-0 victory and was part of a 13-game winning run in all competitions.

By contrast, Atletico's form has been far from convincing with five defeats in its last eight games.

PSV HOPE

Luuk de Jong's penalty means there is nothing separating Dortmund and PSV ahead of Wednesday's second leg.

The PSV forward scored from the spot to cancel out Donyell Malen's earlier strike for Dortmund to leave the tie in the balance going back to Germany.

If the Dutch team can secure a win, it would advance to the quarterfinals for the first time since the 2006-07 season. **MDT/AP**

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大律師 ASSOCIATES:

高文軒 Adelino Correia °
羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues
馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
陶義德 António Isóo de Azeredo
白穎怡 Iclia Berenguel
冼玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves
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C&C RECEIVED THE 1ST SILVER
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IN MACAU (2023)



OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

**NEW QUALITY
PRODUCTIVE FORCES
CALL FOR MEANINGFUL
INPUT FROM POLITICAL
ADVISERS**

The second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body, concluded on Sunday in Beijing.

A resolution on a work report of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC National Committee, a resolution on a report on how the proposals from political advisers have been handled since the previous annual session, a report on the examination of new proposals, and a political resolution on the second session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee were all approved at the closing meeting of the session.

Consisting of more than 2,000 members from all walks of life, mostly experts, professionals and industrial leaders in their respective fields, the 14th CPPCC National Committee has played its part well over the past year, and made its due contribution to helping the country fulfill its socioeconomic development objectives. The country's gross domestic product grew by 5.2 percent in 2023 year-on-year, which was undoubtedly a hard-earned result given the tremendous downward pressure on the economy caused by internal and external uncertainties and risks.

China's development still faces many unpredictable factors this year. To achieve the annual economic growth target of around 5 percent will be challenging given the comparatively high base of last year.

That requires the country's political advisers to provide support for the authorities, as they work to stimulate domestic demand, foster innovation and smooth the economic cycle by demonstrating their expertise, knowledge and experience in the form of practical suggestions to aid the efforts of the policymakers and lawmakers.

The country has to vigorously shape new drivers for high-quality economic development and create new advantages; it must strive to strengthen its innovation-driven development, accelerate the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, and make great efforts to forge new competitiveness; and it must enhance the resilience and competitiveness of its industry and supply chains.

To these ends, the CPPCC National Committee members are expected to help put meat on the bones of the concept of "new quality productive forces". The development of such productive forces was introduced as one of the 10 key tasks for this year in the Government Work Report, which demands the nation strengthen its scientific and technological innovation, especially original and major scientific and technological innovations, and fight for key core technologies.

At the same time, the country has to persist in consolidating its agricultural foundation so it can firmly hold the rice bowl in its own hands, accelerate reform of its financial system, address the challenges posed by its fast aging society and negative population growth—China's population reduced 2.08 million last year and 15.4 percent of its population were aged 60 and above—and the lingering risks of local government debts that are aggravated by the contraction of the real estate sector and the impacts of the vicissitudes of geopolitical situations.

All of these are tough tests for the political advisers, who are expected to offer valuable insights and suggestions to the policymakers. The advisers need to find a proper position and clear direction for their active participation in the policymaking process, and perform their duties by better leveraging the characteristics and advantages of their respective sectors. They should conduct in-depth investigations and research in their fields of expertise so they can proactively offer recommendations and proposals to help the government successfully complete its tasks for the year and achieve its targets.

By being good advisers, helpers and partners to the ruling party, they can ensure it better meet the needs of the country and people in this challenging time.

PALESTINIANS IN GAZA BEGIN RAMADAN
WITH HUNGER WORSENING

Palestinians began fasting for Ramadan yesterday as the Muslim holy month arrived with cease-fire talks at a standstill, hunger worsening across the Gaza Strip and no end in sight to the five-month-old war between Israel and Hamas.

Prayers were held outside amid the rubble of demolished buildings late Sunday. Some people hung fairy lights and decorations in packed tent camps, and a video from a U.N.-school-turned-shelter showed children dancing and spraying foam as a man sang into a loudspeaker.

But there was little to celebrate after five months of war that has killed over 30,000 Palestinians and left much of Gaza in ruins. Families would ordinarily break the daily fast with holiday feasts, but even where food is available, there is little beyond canned goods and the prices are too high for many.

"You don't see anyone with joy in their eyes," said Sabah al-Hendi, who was shopping for food on Sunday in the southernmost city of Rafah. "Every family is sad. Every family has a martyr."

THE
BUZZ

KHALID AL-BATARFI

AL-QAIDA'S YEMEN
BRANCH SAYS LEADER
KHALID AL-BATARFI DEAD IN
UNCLEAR CIRCUMSTANCES

JON GAMBRELL, DUBAI

THE leader of Yemen's branch of al-Qaida is dead, the militant group announced late Sunday, without giving details.

Khalid al-Batarfi had a \$5 million bounty on his head from the U.S. government over leading the group, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, through years that saw him imprisoned, freed in a jailbreak, and governing forces in Yemen amid that country's grinding war.

Though believed to be weakened in recent years due to infighting and suspected U.S. drone strikes killing its leaders, the group known by the acronym AQAP has long been considered the most dangerous branch of the extremist group still operating after the killing of founder Osama bin Laden.

Al-Qaida released a video showing al-Batarfi wrapped in a white funeral shroud and al-Qaida's black-and-white flag.

Militants offered no details on the cause of his death and there was no clear sign of trauma visible on his face. Al-Batarfi was believed to be in his early 40s.

"Allah took his soul while he patiently sought his reward and stood firm, immigrated, garrisoned, and waged jihad for His sake," the militants said in the video, according to the SITE Intelligence Group.

The group made the announcement on the eve of Ramadan, the Muslim holy fasting month that Yemen will begin Monday.

In the announcement, the group said Saad bin Atef al-Awlaki would take over as its leader. The U.S. has a \$6 million bounty on him, saying al-Awlaki "has publicly called for attacks against the United States and its allies."

The Yemen branch of al-Qaida has been seen by



Khalid al-Batarfi

Washington as the terror network's most dangerous branch ever since its attempt in 2009 to bomb a commercial airliner over the United States. It claimed responsibility for the 2015 deadly attack in Paris on the French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo. But their overseas operations have waned in recent years.

"Although in decline, AQAP remains the most effective terrorist group in Yemen with intent to conduct operations in the region and beyond," a recent United Nations report on al-Qaida said.

Estimates provided to the U.N. put AQAP's total forces as numbering between 3,000 and 4,000 active fighters and passive members. The group raises money by robbing banks and money exchange shops, as well as smuggling weapons, counterfeiting currencies and ransom operations, according to the U.N.

Al-Batarfi took over as the head of the branch in February 2020. He succeeded leader Qassim al-Rimi, who was killed by a U.S. drone

strike ordered by then-President Donald Trump. Al-Rimi had claimed responsibility for the 2019 attack at the U.S. Naval Air Station Pensacola in which a Saudi aviation trainee killed three American sailors.

Under al-Batarfi, AQAP fell further under the influence of al-Qaida fighter Saif al-Adl, now believed to have led the militant group after the killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri in a U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan in 2022. That came as Yemen has been locked in a war between the Houthi rebels, who hold the capital, Sanaa, and a Saudi-led coalition backing the country's exiled government based in Aden.

"Since 2020, Saif al-Adel has been able to convince al-Batarfi of his strategic approach, focused on confronting Western states and their allies in Yemen—the Saudi-led coalition, the Aden-based government, the United Arab Emirates and its allies—rather than confronting the Iranian-backed Houthi movement," a 2023 report by the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies said. MDT/AP



Switzerland Five cross-country skiers were found dead along a high Alpine ridge after going missing over the weekend near Switzerland's famed Matterhorn. Swiss police said yesterday. Another skier remains missing. Christian Varone, commander of Valais regional police, told a news conference in Sion, Switzerland, that six skiers set out in "relatively good" conditions on Saturday but that the situation deteriorated quickly.



Sweden A group of climate activists yesterday blocked the entrance to the Swedish parliament, advocating for sweeping reforms to tackle climate disasters. Some 40 activists including Greta Thunberg held signs reading "Climate Justice Now" as they sat in front of at least two entrances to the 349-seat Riksdagen, including the main doorway. Swedish media said lawmakers used other entries into the assembly. Climate protesters have accused fossil fuel companies of deliberately slowing the global energy transition to renewables in order to make more profit.



London Kate, Princess of Wales, apologized yesterday for "confusion" caused by her editing of a family photo released by the palace—an image of Kate and her children that was intended to calm concern and speculation about the British royal's health, but had the opposite effect. Several news agencies that initially published the photo withdrew the image over concerns about digital manipulation. Issued by the couple's Kensington Palace office on Sunday to mark Mother's Day in Britain, it was the first official photo of Kate since she had abdominal surgery nearly two months ago.