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THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD FOR BUSINESS AIRCRAFT HANDLING HAS CONDUCTED A STAGE 3 SAFETY AUDIT FOR THE MACAU OPERATIONS OF TAG

P4

ECONOMY: RISE OF PROSPERITY INDEX IN SECOND QUARTER EXPECTED

P3

AFTER PANDEMIC, YOUNG CHINESE AGAIN WANT TO STUDY ABROAD, NOT MUCH IN THE US

P6



AP PHOTO



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un used a Russian luxury limousine gifted by President Vladimir Putin, Kim's sister said Saturday, praising the car's "special function" and the two countries' deepening bilateral ties. In February, Putin sent Kim a high-end Aurus Senat limousine, which he had shown to the North Korean leader when they met for a summit in Russia in September. Observers said the shipment violated a United Nations resolution aimed at pressuring the North to give up its nuclear weapons program by banning the supply of luxury items to North Korea.

AP PHOTO



Indian navy said this weekend that it had taken control of a bulk carrier hijacked by Somali pirates and evacuated the 17 crew members on the vessel. In a statement on X, the navy said all 35 pirates on board the Maltese-flagged MV Ruen had surrendered and the vessel was checked for illegal arms, ammunition and contraband.

AP PHOTO



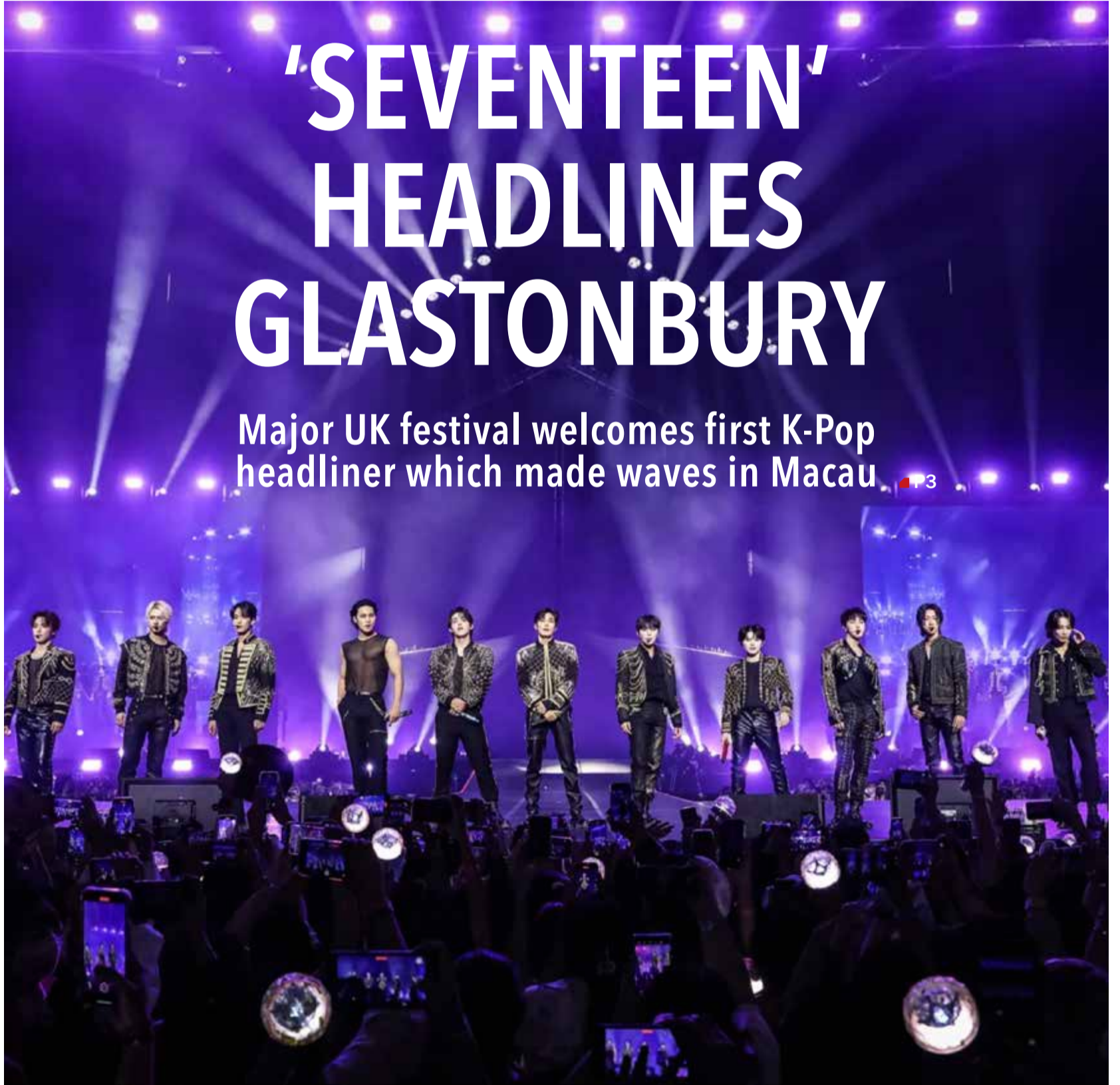
Israel Stalled talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war are expected to resume in earnest in Qatar as soon yesterday, according to Egyptian officials. The talks would mark the first time both Israeli officials and Hamas leaders join the indirect negotiations since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. International mediators had hoped to secure a six-week truce before Ramadan started earlier this week, but Hamas refused any deal that wouldn't lead to a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, a demand Israel rejected.

More on backpage

'SEVENTEEN' HEADLINES GLASTONBURY

Major UK festival welcomes first K-Pop headliner which made waves in Macau

P3



LABOR
RON SLAMS TRICKY LIGHT RAIL EMPLOYER SWAP

P3



SANDS 10K
KENYA ATHLETES DOMINATE IN RECORD-BREAKING YEAR

P2

RENATO MARQUES

10K

KENYA ATHLETES DOMINATE IN RECORD-BREAKING YEAR

AS in last year's event, the 2024 Sands China Macau International 10K run saw indisputable dominance from both male and female Kenyan athletes who completed the Macau route in record times.

David Bett, with a record-breaking time of 29 minutes and 2 seconds, took the win, shaving 14 seconds off the time of last year's Kenyan winner, Edwin Cheruiyot Soi.

Bett led an armada of six Kenyans in the first six positions, with second place being taken by Mathew Samperu, who finished second last year.

Third at the finish line was Donikati Oliva Komon.

The first non-Kenyan athlete was Tse Chun Yin from Hong Kong, finishing seventh overall with a time of 32 minutes and 27 seconds.

The best local athlete was Wang Kun in ninth position, ahead of invited Chinese athlete Ba Xian Wei.

In the female group, another record fell to Kenyan Betty Sigei, who completed the 10 kilometers in 33 minutes and



53 seconds.

As in the male group, the podium was all Kenyan, with Lucy Ndambuki and Ziporah Wanjiru Kingori finishing immediately after Sigei. In fourth was Addisalem Belay Tegegn from Ethiopia, the first of the non-Kenyan runners.

Hoi Long was, yet again, the fastest woman

from Macau, completing the course in 38 minutes and 12 seconds.

With the prize money the same as previous events, Bett and Sigei took home USD25,000 (over MOP200,000) each in both the overall wins on male and female groups as well as the special (USD10,000 = MOP80,500) prize for

breaking of the course record.

In the shorter race (5k Fun Run), victory went to Hong Lok Chi from Macau in the male group (18 minutes, 17 seconds) and Cheng Ka I, also from Macau, in the female group (21 minutes, 6 seconds).

Local athletes filled the Fun Run podium.

MACAU'S TOP RUNNER AIMS TO PREPARE WELL FOR NATIONAL GAMES

Top classified in the male group, Wang said after the run that he aims to prepare well over this year to be in the best form possible during China's National Games in 2025, of which Macau is a co-organizer.

Wang said he is planning to take a spot to run in the marathon event of these games.

ID WANTS TO EXPAND 10K IN SCALE

THE president of the Sports Bureau (ID), Pun Weng Kun, said the Bureau is interested in expanding the scale of the 10K event to allow more runners to participate. He was speaking to the Chinese channel of TDM Radio on the sidelines of the prize awarding ceremony. This year, about 9,000 runners from 45 countries and regions participated in the event, out of 10,000 registration places. With the added interest of the international

runners participating and also considering there are always several dropouts on the day of the event, Pun said that the ID is planning to potentially allocate more slots (particularly on the 10K) to international athletes to create added interest and more competitiveness. He also said there might be conditions to further increase the number of registrations for local runners.

SPORTS

17th mass sports conference held in Macau

STAFF REPORTER

THE 17th Asian Mass Sports Association Seminar (ASFAA) took place last week at the Macau Royal Hotel, focusing on promoting parent-child relationships through mass sports. Keynote speakers from various organizations, both local and international, presented at the conference.

The event aimed to commemorate 17 years of international collaboration, discussion of

the future of sports and the promotion of family bonds through sports.

In partnership with The Association for International Sport for All (TAFISA), the two-day conference covered topics such as bridging generations, enhancing parent-child relationships through mass sports and the benefits of parent-child sports for future generations.

The president of TAFISA, Wolfgang Baumann, emphasized the importance of parents in sha-

ping children's interest in sports.

"For me, parents are the number one educators for children in regards to sport for all. I can't imagine any other entity that could do better. Why? Because we all know that the six years between zero and six are extremely important to shape the habits and the interests of a child."

"School cannot do it alone. It needs active parents. Parents need to be educated. It's not only important to play

the piano or to learn any language, but also to do physical activity," he remarked.

He also noted the behavior changes and trends seen by the sports community due to COVID-19, highlighting the popularization of more individual sports over organized team sports.

"There have been changes due to the COVID-19 crisis in sport. For example, what we can observe is that individual sports activities have increased."

"In Germany, sports clubs were closed, people were looking for other opportunities. So we have a clear trend that individual sport in terms of walking, cycling, fitness training has increased. But I think this is a good development that we have the organized side of sport for groups, but also sports organized for individual."

When asked why the conference was held in Macau, Baumann expressed his love for Macau and highlighted the ci-

ty's combination of innovation and tradition in sports.

"The ASFA board selected Macau to host this event because for many reasons, Macau is just a perfect place for this congress."

"As you know, Macau is excelling and has very innovative initiatives in sport ... and Macau has this special feature of being a unified city, so to say. It's very compact and for that reason, you have only very short distances here in Macau and helps you a little bit to connect school with parents, sport clubs with sport facilities" he stated.

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SEVENTEEN

Glastonbury welcomes first K-Pop headliner which made waves in Macau



STAFF REPORTER

THIS summer, one of England's longest-running music festivals, Glastonbury, will welcome its first K-pop artist as a headliner: Seventeen. The group, which performed last January in Macau, will headline the Pyramid Stage alongside Dua Lipa, Coldplay, SZA, Shania Twain, LCD Soundsystem, and PJ Harvey, among others, Rolling Stone has reported.

In January, Seventeen premiered a new song, "The Meaning of Meeting," at a concert in Macau's Olympic Sports Center Stadium in China. The group, which released a video for the song using footage from its con-

certs in Macau, sang the song in Mandarin.

Although they have released Chinese versions of their songs before, the release of "The Meaning Meeting" marked the first time the group released an original song only in Mandarin. The single followed the October release of Seventeen's most recent album, Seventeenth Heaven, and last April's FML.

"In every language we sing in, we try to show Seventeen as we are," group member S. Coups told Rolling Stone. "And I know that people whose native language is not Korean have to work hard to understand our message. So when we record, we want to try as hard as they do when they listen to our music so we can share that together."

There were two concerts in Macau, in January featuring Korean boy band "Seventeen," which filled Taipa's streets with thousands of fans.

Residents filed several complaints protesting the high volume of the music, the traffic congestion and the construction of the stage, among other aspects while several lawmakers questioned the capacity of the government to organize such events.

JOHN CATLIN SHOOTS 59, LOWEST SCORE IN ASIAN TOUR HISTORY

John Catlin holed a 20-foot eagle putt this weekend for an 11-under 59 in the International Series Macau, becoming the first player in Asian Tour history with a sub-60 round. Catlin, a 33-year-old Californian with seven worldwide victories, became the fourth player this year to break 60 following Joaquin Niemann at LIV Golf Mayakoba, and Cristobal Del Solar and Aldrich Potgieter on consecutive days in the Astara Golf Championship in Colombia on the Korn Ferry Tour. Del Solar shot 57, matching the lowest score on tours recognized by the Official World Golf Ranking.

GONGBEI PORT EXPANDS BORDER-CROSSING CAPACITY TO 350,000 PER DAY

The Gongbei Port in Zhuhai has concluded expansion and revamping works that allow an expanded capacity of up to 350,000 border crossings per day between Macau and Zhuhai, the neighboring city authorities have announced. The revamped Port reopened last Saturday after over one year of construction and equipment renovation. The renewed Gongbei Port now has 123 border crossing channels, 90 of which are automated passages.

ID E-RENEWAL NOW AVAILABLE FOR RESIDENTS AGED OR OVER 18

E-applications for ID renewal are now available for permanent residents aged 18 years or older, the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) has announced. Applications can be lodged via Macao One Account through the "Permanent Resident Identity Card Renewal" function. Identification photos are required. The photo must have been taken within 12 months of the application. In-person collection of the ID is mandatory, and photo-taking, fingerprint collection, and height measurement (only applicable to applicants who have not reached the age of 25 on the latest issuance date of their identity card) will be conducted simultaneously.

LABOUR

Lawmaker slams tricky LRT employer swap

ANTHONY LAM

ABOUT 100 employees transferred from MTR Railway Operations (Macau) Company Limited (MTR (Macau)) to Macao LRT Corporation, Limited (MLM) due to a concession change have been deprived of their service periods, lawmaker Ron Lam has said in a statement.

The lawmaker said employees dismissed from the MTR have approached him for assistance.

In 2018, the government awarded the 80-month service contract for the LRT's Taipa Line operation and maintenance as-

sistance services to MTR (Macau).

MTR (Macau) is a wholly owned subsidiary of Hong Kong's MTR Corporation.

Earlier this year, Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo do Rosário told a parliamentary session the LRT operational concession will no longer be granted to MTR.

Operation of the local railway network will be transferred to the government-owned MLM. Consequently, this involves transfers of workforce.

The lawmaker said the government had promised to "retain" most of the MTR

(Macau)'s existing workforce and that MLM's annual report had clearly stated certain workers were to be "transferred" from the MTR to the MLM.

Nonetheless, some workers have told him both companies evaded their questions about their service periods.

These workers discovered the new contract they were being urged to sign contained provisions on probationary periods, meaning they were new employment contracts instead of transfers.

He added some workers had reportedly involuntarily signed a voluntary ter-

mination of employment and that MLM had "hired" them without acknowledging it had done so.

The lawmaker wondered whether this might be a violation of the Labour Relations Law.

He said that over 10 years ago, the government had clearly stated that there is a requirement of reasonable compensation during dismissal, should a concessionaire not have its contracts renewed. This applies to bus and urban cleaning services, he noted.

In addition, he argued that whether from the perspective of protecting

workers or that of honoring concession contracts, these "transferred" workers should either enjoy reasonable compensation or be considered transferred employees, with their service periods and existing remuneration schemes honored by the MLM.

Lam said he had sent a letter to the Chief Executive to call for his concern over the matter.

Despite being semi-private such as discounted transfer between different modes of transportation, because partnership between private and public entities is impossible, Rosário has said.

RISE IN Q2 PROSPERITY INDEX EXPECTED

THE second quarter of the year will see a slight rise in the Prosperity Index, the Macau Economic Association has forecast.

Noting the economy is usually weaker after a major festival, such as the Lunar New Year, the group believes the economy will soon regain vitality, given

this year celebrates "double anniversaries" – the silver and diamond jubilees of the Macau Special Administrative Region and the People's Republic of China, respectively.

The group believes the government will organize celebratory events that will attract more tourists and

that the return of normalcy and Hengqin's cooperation zone will also be positive factors.

These factors, along with the IMF's growth forecast of 13.9% for the city this year, suggest the Prosperity Index for the coming quarter should range between 6.5 and 6.6 points,

according to the group.

The group raised concerns Macau residents' more frequent external travel will cause further unequal revitalization between different districts in Macau.

It added that community expenditures in Macau will likely continue to fall

despite the policy of greater integration among people from mainland China, Macau and Hong Kong.

The group has suggested local business operators to seek change.

With "better than expected economic performances early this year," according to the group, the indices for January and February have been confirmed at 6.5 points. **AL**

PORTUGAL-CHINA

PORTUGUESE AMBASSADOR CONSIDERS QUESTIONING CENTRAL AUTHORITIES ON VISA-FREE SCHEME TO MAINLAND

RENATO MARQUES

The Portuguese Ambassador in Beijing, Paulo Jorge Pereira Nascimento, is considering asking central government authorities why Portugal was excluded from the extension of the visa-free scheme for the mainland.

In an interview in Beijing with Portuguese news agency Lusa, Nascimento expressed surprise at Portugal's exclusion from the new group of countries to whose nationals China is granting free visa access via a special scheme.

Initially, the scheme, launched for a one year trial period in November last year, and which took effect Dec. 1, included only six countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Malaysia) for trips related to business, tourism, family visitation or transit for no longer than 15 days.

On March 7 this year, the same authorities announced the scheme would be extended from March 14 to Nov. 30, 2024, to passport holders from Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

The Portuguese Ambassador noted that Portugal is among a restricted number of countries from Western Europe to which China did not grant the same treatment, noting the decision is "difficult to understand."

Due mostly to Macau's



Portuguese Ambassador in Beijing, Paulo Jorge Pereira Nascimento

historical roots, Portugal maintains close relations with China with a significant number of Macau residents also holding Portuguese passports.

The same diplomat told the Times in November last year that the criteria for the inclusion of countries in the visa-free scheme could only be explained by the Chinese central government authorities as they were "sovereign criteria that have not been made public."

Ambassador Nascimento added that "it is not possible for us [Portuguese diplomatic envoys in China], nor legitimate, to speculate on the reasons why some countries were chosen and not others."

In the Lusa interview, Nascimento reaffirmed China's sovereign right to decide which countries are included adding that he does not believe the Chinese authorities intended to purposely exclude Portuguese nationals to "send any message" to Portu-

guese authorities.

According to data from the latest Census survey, around 9,000 people of Portuguese nationality reside in Macau, of which about 2,200 were born in Portugal.

PORTUGAL INCLUSION SHOULD HAPPEN 'SOON'

Responding to an inquiry from the same news agency, the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the People's Republic of China, without specifying the matter, has said it is open to negotiate and cooperate with Portugal in their bilateral relations.

More hopeful is the executive president of "PorCham Greater China," a group of entrepreneurs dedicated to linking Chinese and Portuguese business interests in South China.

Acting formally as a Chamber of Commerce and a Portuguese companies' incubator in China, based in Guangzhou, the head of the organization, Pereira, told Lusa he believes it is just a matter of time until Portugal is also included in the free-visa scheme.

He said that as far as he knows, there are just some administrative procedures to be concluded for this to become a reality.

Pereira also noted that "if it becomes a reality, it [visa-free] would be a very positive measure for all the Portuguese companies and entrepreneurs."

handling, VIP and business-executive amenities, on-site customs and immigration clearance, flight planning and chartering, as well as aircraft maintenance and servicing.

Private jet travel has been significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and a substantial decrease in the number of VIP gambling junkets to Macau.

In the first 10 months of 2023, there were only 734 private charter flights in and out of Macau, which is approximately 30% of the pre-pandemic numbers during the same period in 2019.

HENGQIN PROMOTES ITS GREENING AT MACAO GREEN WEEK

The administration of the cooperation zone on Hengqin set up booths to promote its natural environment and greening at the Macao Green Week carnival held over the weekend.

At one booth, briefings were held to familiarize local residents and visitors with the outreach programs in the upcoming Hengqin Nature Festival 2024.

The programs include a tree-planting event, during which 10,000 saplings will be planted. Macau residents are encouraged to sign up for the event using their One Account channels.

According to the zone's Urban Planning and Construction Bureau, a goal of planting 100,000 saplings has been set for this year.

At other booths, information on rare wild plants and common insects in Hengqin was available. At the same time, games, handicraft workshops and education placards were used to educate the public about protecting nature and caring for the environment.

A documentary on the natural habitats of Hengqin was also played on a loop, and copies of two pictorials on Hengqin's rare plants and common insects were distributed to spectators.

Vice Director of the bureau Tam Wai Fong said some sessions during the nature festival were fully booked. The bureau is considering additional sessions to cater to the demand, especially from Macau residents.

The nature festival will include photography competitions, nature classes, ancient tree park tours, carnivals and other activities for interested members of the public. The Science Promotion and Education Center of Hengqin Erjingwan Wetland Park will be officially opened March 20 and will provide a wider choice of education channels in the future, Tam added.

In consumer rights protection, the Macao Consumer Council and the Consumer Association of the zone have signed an agreement to establish a cooperative framework on consumer rights protection in Macau and Hengqin.

Upholding the International Day for Protecting Consumers' Rights, which falls on March 15 every year, the agreement was signed as part of a series of events to celebrate the occasion.

The agreement establishes a normalized joint meeting mechanism for the zone.

Other major cooperation includes the establishment of a green channel for credible store brand-building cooperation and approval between the two places, as well as comprehensive and in-depth cooperation in cross-boundary mediation and arbitration.

It will also facilitate consumption dispute management between Macau, the zone and Lusophone countries, utilizing Macau's positioning. AL

Private jet operator passes stage 3 safety audit

STAFF REPORTER

ACCORDING to Asian Aviation, the International Standard for Business Aircraft Handling has conducted a stage 3 safety audit for the Macau operations of TAG, a Swiss aviation company.

The audit certified the facility has achieved the highest level of safety standards, in-

dicating the presence of a sustainable safety culture for both workers and customers.

This certification is particularly noteworthy because TAG Macau FBO is one of the newest facilities worldwide to attain this level of recognition, only five years after its establishment in Macau.

Rita Tam, the general manager of TAG Macau FBO, expressed her team's exci-

tement about this accomplishment. "TAG Macau FBO is one of the youngest FBO to reach this pinnacle. This achievement demonstrates our team's commitment to excellence and unwavering dedication to safety, efficiency and customer satisfaction," she said.

TAG offers various business aviation services in Macau, including passenger



AVIATION

Older Boeing plane missing panel after flight from California to southern Oregon

CLAIRE RUSH & LISA BAUMANN, PORTLAND (ORE.)

A post-flight inspection revealed a missing panel on an older Boeing 737-800 that had just arrived at its destination in southern Oregon on Friday after flying from San Francisco, officials said, the latest in a series of recent incidents involving aircraft manufactured by the company.

United Flight 433 left San Francisco at 10:20 a.m. and landed at Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport in Medford shortly before noon, according to FlightAware. The airport's director, Amber Judd, said the plane landed safely without incident and the external panel was discovered missing during a post-flight inspection. No injuries were reported.

The airport paused operations to check the runway and airfield for debris, Judd said, and none



was found.

Judd said she believed the United ground crew or pilots doing a routine inspection before the next flight were the ones who noticed the missing panel.

A United Airlines spokesperson said via email that the flight

was carrying 139 passengers and six crew members, and no emergency was declared because there was no indication of the damage during the flight.

"After the aircraft was parked at the gate, it was discovered to be missing an external panel," the

United spokesperson said. "We'll conduct a thorough examination of the plane and perform all the needed repairs before it returns to service. We'll also conduct an investigation to better understand how this damage occurred."

The Federal Aviation Administration also said it would investigate.

The missing panel was on the underside of the aircraft where the wing meets the body and just next to the landing gear, United said.

The plane made its first flight in April 1998 and was delivered to Continental Airlines in December of that year, according to the FAA. United Airlines has operated it since Nov. 30, 2011. It is a 737-824, part of the 737-800 series that was a precursor to the Max.

Boeing said, also via email, that it would defer comment to United about the carrier's fleet and operations.

In January a panel that plugged

a space left for an extra emergency door blew off a Boeing Max 9 jet in midair just minutes after an Alaska Airlines flight took off from Portland, leaving a gaping hole and forcing pilots to make an emergency landing. There were no serious injuries.

The door plug was eventually found in the backyard of a high school physics teacher in southwest Portland, along with other debris from the flight scattered nearby. The Department of Justice has launched a criminal investigation.

On March 6, fumes detected in the cabin of a Boeing 737-800 Alaska Airlines flight destined for Phoenix caused pilots to head back to the Portland airport.

The Port of Portland said passengers and crew noticed the fumes and the flight landed safely. Seven people including passengers and crew requested medical evaluations, but no one was hospitalized, officials said. **MDT/AP**

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HIGHER EDUCATION

After pandemic, young Chinese again want to study abroad, not much in the US

DIDI TANG, WASHINGTON

IN the Chinese city of Shanghai, two young women seeking an education abroad have both decided against going to the United States, a destination of choice for decades that may be losing its shine.

For Helen Dong, a 22-year-old senior studying advertising, it was the cost. "It doesn't work for me when you have to spend 2 million (yuan) (\$278,000) but find no job upon returning," she said. Dong is headed to Hong Kong this fall instead.

Costs were not a concern for Yvonne Wong, 24, now studying comparative literature and cultures in a master's program at the University of Bristol in Britain. For her, the issue was safety.

"Families in Shanghai usually don't want to send their daughters to a place where guns are not banned — that was the primary reason," Wong said. "Between the U.S. and the U.K., the U.K. is safer, and that's the biggest consideration for my parents."

With an interest in studying abroad rebounding after the pandemic, there are signs that the decades-long run that has sent an estimated 3 million Chinese students to the U.S., including many of the country's brightest, could be trending down, as geopolitical shifts redefine U.S.-China relations.

Cutting people-to-people exchanges could have a lasting impact on relations between the two countries.

"International education is a bridge," said Fanta Aw, executive director of the NAFSA Association of International Educators, based in Washington. "A long-term bridge, because the students who come today are the engineers of the future. They are the politicians of the future, they are the business entrepreneurs of the future."

"Not seeing that pipeline as strong means that we in the U.S. have to pay attention, because China-U.S. relations are very important,"

Aw said the decrease is more notable in U.S. undergraduate programs, which she attributed to a declining population in China from low birthrates, bitter U.S.-China relations, more regional choices for Chinese families and the high costs of a U.S. education.

But graduate programs have not been spared. Zheng Yi, an associate professor of mechanical and industrial engineering

AP PHOTO



at Northeastern University in Boston, has seen the number of Chinese applicants to one of the school's engineering programs shrink to single digits, compared with 20 to 30 students before the pandemic.

He said the waning interest could be partly due to China's growing patriotism that nudges students to attend Chinese institutes instead.

A NEW ERA

Andrew Chen, chief executive officer of Pittsburgh-based WholeRen Education, which has advised Chinese students in the U.S. for the past 14 years, said the downward trend is here to stay.

"This is not a periodic wave," he said. "This is a new era." The Chinese government has sidelined English education, hyped gun violence in the U.S., and portrayed the U.S. as a declining power. As a result, Chen said, Chinese families are hesitant to send their children to the U.S.

Beijing has criticized the U.S. for its unfriendly policy toward some Chinese students, citing an executive order by former President Donald Trump to keep out Chinese students who have attended Chinese schools with strong links to the Chinese military.

The Chinese foreign ministry also has protested that a number of Chinese students have been unfairly interrogated and sent home upon arrival at U.S. airports

in recent months. Spokeswoman Mao Ning recently describing the U.S. actions as "selective, discriminatory and politically motivated."

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said fewer than "one tenth of 1%" of Chinese students have been detained or denied admission. Another State Department official said Chinese students selected for U.S.-funded exchange programs have been harassed by Chinese state agents. Half of the students have been forced to withdraw, and those who participated in the programs have been faced with harassment after returning to China, the official said, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity.

The U.S.-China Education Trust acknowledged the predicament facing Chinese students. "Students from China have been criticized in the U.S. as potential spies, and in China as too influenced by the West," the organization said in a report following a survey of Chinese students in the U.S. between 1991 and 2021.

Still, many young Chinese, especially those whose parents were foreign-educated, are eager to study abroad. The China-based education service provider New Oriental said the students hope degrees from reputable foreign universities will improve their career prospects in a tough job market at home, where the unemployment rate for those 16 to 24

stood at nearly 15% in December.

But their preferences have shifted from the U.S. to the U.K., according to EIC Education, a Chinese consultancy specializing in international education. The students like the shorter study programs and the quality and affordability of a British education, as well as the feeling of safety.

Wong, the Shanghai student now studying in the U.K., said China's handling of the pandemic pushed more young people to go abroad. "After three years of tight controls during the pandemic, most people have realized the outside world is different, and they are more willing to leave," she said.

The State Department issued 86,080 F-1 student visas to Chinese students in the budget year ending in September, up nearly 40% from the year earlier. Still, the number remains below the pre-pandemic level of 105,775.

OPENING DOORS

Under communist leadership, China only opened its doors to the U.S. in the late 1970s when the two countries established formal ties. Beijing, desperate to revive its economy through Western technology, wanted to send 5,000 students to American universities; President Jimmy Carter replied that he would take 100,000.

The number of Chinese students in the U.S. picked up after Beijing in 1981 allowed Chinese

students to "self-fund" their overseas studies, rather than relying on government money. Generous scholarships from U.S. schools allowed tens of thousands of Chinese students to study here, but it wasn't until 2009 when the number of Chinese students exceeded 100,000, driven by growth in family wealth.

In the following decade, the number of Chinese students in the U.S. more than tripled to peak at 372,532 in the 2019-2020 academic year, just as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. The number slipped to 289,526 in 2022.

The Institute of International Education, which publishes annual reports on international students, has found that U.S. schools are prioritizing students from India over China, especially for graduate programs. However, it also found that 36% of schools reported increases in new Chinese students in fall 2023.

In its most recent report, the Council of Graduate Schools said U.S. universities have seen a surge in applications and enrollments from India and countries in sub-Saharan Africa since fall 2020, while those from Chinese nationals have declined.

"Increasing competition from Chinese institutions of higher learning and the growing geopolitical tension between China and the United States may be contributing to this trend," the council report said. **MDT/AP**

INDIA

Bengaluru is fast running out of water, and a long, scorching summer still looms

SIBI ARASU, BENGALURU

BHAVANI Mani Muthuvel and her family of nine have around five 20-liter buckets worth of water for the week for cooking, cleaning and household chores.

"From taking showers to using toilets and washing clothes, we are taking turns to do everything," she said. It's the only water they can afford.

A resident of Ambedkar Nagar, a low-income settlement in the shadows of the lavish headquarters of multiple global software companies in Bengaluru's Whitefield neighborhood, Muthuvel is normally reliant on piped water, sourced from groundwater. But it's drying up. She said it's the worst water crisis she has experienced in her 40 years in the neighborhood.

Bengaluru in southern India is witnessing an unusually hot February and March, and in the last few years, it has received little rainfall in part due to human-caused climate change. Water levels are running desperately low, particularly in poorer areas, resulting in sky-high costs for water and a quickly dwindling supply.

City and state government authorities are trying to get the situation under control with emergency measures such as nationalizing water tankers and putting a cap on water costs. But water experts and many residents fear the worst is still to come in April and May when the summer sun is at its strongest.

The crisis was a long time coming, said Shashank Palur, a Bengaluru-based hydrologist with the think tank Water, Environment, Land and Livelihood Labs.



"Bengaluru is one of the fastest growing cities in the world and the infrastructure for fresh water supply is not able to keep up with a growing population," he said.

Groundwater, relied on by over a third of the city's 13 million residents, is fast running out. City authorities say 6,900 of the 13,900 borewells drilled in the city have run dry despite some being drilled to depths of 1,500 feet. Those reliant on groundwater, like Muthuvel, now have to depend on water tankers that pump from nearby villages.

Palur said El Nino, a natural phenomenon that affects weather patterns worldwide, along with the city receiving less rainfall in recent years mean "recharge of groundwater levels did not happen as expected." A new piped water supply from the Cauvery River about 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the city has also not been completed, adding to the crisis, he said.

Another concern is that paved surfaces cover nearly 90% of the city, preventing rainwater from seeping down and being stored in the ground, said T.V. Rama-

chandra, research scientist at the Centre for Ecological Sciences at Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Science. The city lost nearly 70% of its green cover in the last 50 years, he said.

Ramachandra compared the city's water shortage to the "day zero" water crisis in Cape Town, South Africa, 2018, when that city came dangerously close to turning off most taps because of a drought.

The Indian government estimated in 2018 that over 40% of Bengaluru residents won't have access to drinking water by the

end of the decade. Only those that receive piped water from rivers outside Bengaluru are still getting regular supply.

"Right now, everyone is drilling borewells in buffer zones of lakes. That is not the solution," Ramachandra said.

He said the city should instead focus on replenishing the over 200 lakes spread across the city, stop new construction on lake areas, encourage rainwater harvesting and increase green cover across the city.

"Only if we do this will we solve the city's water problem," he said.

Palur added that identifying other sources and using them smartly, for example by reusing treated wastewater in the city "so that the demand for fresh water reduces," could also help.

Until then, some residents are taking serious measures. S. Prasad, who lives with his wife and two children in a housing society made up of 230 apartments, said they have begun water rationing.

"Since last week we've closed the water supply to houses for eight hours every day, starting at 10 a.m. Residents have to either store water in containers or do everything they need to in the allotted time. We are also planning on installing water meters soon," he said.

Prasad said their housing society, like many others in Bengaluru, is willing to pay high costs for water, but even then it's hard to find suppliers.

"This water shortage is not only impacting our work but also our daily life," Prasad said. "If it becomes even more dire, we'll have no choice but to leave Bengaluru temporarily." MDT/AP

JAPAN

22 artifacts looted after the Battle of Okinawa returned Tokyo

TWENTY-TWO historic artifacts that were looted following the Battle of Okinawa in World War II have been returned to Japan after a family from Massachusetts discovered them in their late father's personal items, the FBI said over the weekend.

The 22 artifacts, some of which date back to the 18th and 19th centuries, represent a significant piece of Okinawan history. They in-

clude six portraits, a hand drawn map of Okinawa from the 19th century, and various pieces of pottery and ceramics, officials said.

The Boston division of the FBI said they helped orchestrate the return of the items, which had been missing for almost 80 years to the government of Japan, Okinawa prefecture. A formal repatriation ceremony will be held in Japan at a later date.

In 2001, the Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education registered some of the artifacts with the FBI's National Stolen Art File, a database of art and cultural property that have been reported stolen to the FBI by law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

The artifacts were discovered when a family, who wishes to remain anonymous, came across what appeared to be valuable

Asian art in their late father's personal effects, according to the FBI.

Their father was a World War II veteran, but never served in the Pacific Theater. The family then checked the National Stolen Art File and discovered that at least four of the items were missing 18th century portraits that had been listed in the database.

The FBI was able to authenticate the artworks. MDT/AP



A family from Massachusetts discovered the war artifacts as they were going through their late father's personal items

RUSSIAN ELECTIONS

Crowds flock to polling stations in apparent protest

RUSSIANS crowded outside polling stations at midday yesterday on the last day of a three-day presidential election, apparently heeding an opposition call to protest against President Vladimir Putin, who is poised to extend his rule of nearly a quarter century for six more years after a relentless crack-down on dissent.

The election that began Friday has taken place in a tightly controlled environment where there are no real alternatives to Putin, no public criticism of him or his war in Ukraine. Putin's fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

Navalny's associates have urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to protest by coming to the polls at noon, a strategy endorsed by Navalny shortly before his death. Team Navalny described it as a success, releasing pictures and videos of people crowding near polling stations in cities across Russia around noon.

The 71-year-old Russian leader faces three token rivals from Kremlin-friendly parties who have refrained from any criticism of his 24-year rule or his full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago. Putin has boasted of Russian battlefield successes in the run-up to the vote, but a massive Ukrainian drone attack across Russia yesterday sent a reminder of challenges faced by Moscow.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported downing 35 Ukrainian drones overnight, including four near the Russian capital. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said there were no casualties or damage.

Russia's wartime economy has proven resilient, expanding despite bruising Western sanctions. The Russian defense industry has served as a key growth engine, working around the clock to churn out missiles, tanks and ammunition.

Voting is taking place at polling stations across the vast country's 11 time zones, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine, and online. More than 60% of eligible voters



Voters queue at a polling station in Moscow at noon local time yesterday

had cast ballots early in the day.

Dmitry Sergienko, who cast his ballot in Moscow, said he voted for Putin: "I am happy with everything and want everything to continue as it is now."

Olga Dymova, who also backed Putin, said, "I am sure that our country will only move forward towards success."

Another Moscow voter, who identified himself only by his first name, Vadim, said he hopes for change, but added that "unfortunately, it's unlikely."

Navalny's associates broadcast footage with comments by those who turned up at the polls at noon to protest Putin, their faces blurred to protect their identities.

"The action has achieved its goals," Ivan Zhdanov, the head of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said in a YouTube broadcast. "The action has shown that there is another Russia, there are people who stand against Putin."

Another Navalny ally, Leonid Volkov, said that the protest was meant to help unify and encourage those who oppose Putin.

It wasn't possible to confirm if the voters shown lining up at polling stations in videos and photos released by Navalny's associates and some Russian media had responded to the protest call, or

merely reflected strong turnout.

Huge lines also formed around noon outside Russian diplomatic missions in Berlin, Paris, Milan and other cities with large Russian communities. Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, joined the line at the Russian Embassy in Berlin as some in the crowd applauded and chanted her name.

In Tallinn, where hundreds stood in a line snaking around the city's cobbled streets leading to the Russian Embassy, 23-year-old Tatiana said she came to take part in the protest at noon. "If we have some option to protest I think it's important to utilize any opportunity," she said, only giving her first name citing personal security reasons.

Boris Nadezhdin, a liberal politician who tried to join the race on an anti-war platform but was barred from running by election officials, voiced hope that many Russians cast their ballots against Putin.

"I believe that the Russian people today have a chance to show their real attitude to what is happening by voting not for Putin, but for some other candidates or in some other way, which is exactly what I did," he said after voting in Dolgoprudny, just outside Moscow.

The OVD-Info group that monitors political arrests

said that more than 50 people were arrested in 14 cities across Russia yesterday.

Despite tight controls, several dozen cases of vandalism at polling stations were reported.

A woman was arrested in St. Petersburg after she threw a firebomb at a polling station entrance, and several others were detained across the country for throwing green antiseptic or ink into ballot boxes.

Dmitry Medvedev, a deputy head of the Russian Security Council chaired by Putin, called for toughening the punishment for those who vandalize polling stations, arguing they should face treason charges for attempting to derail the vote amid the fighting in Ukraine.

Some Russian media also posted images of spoiled ballots posted by voters, with "killer and thief" inscribed on one, and "waiting for you in The Hague" written on another, in a reference to an arrest warrant issued for Putin on war crimes charges related to his alleged responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

The Ukrainian shelling of the city of Belgorod near the border killed a 16-year-old girl yesterday and injured her father, according to the local governor, who also reported two deaths from Ukrainian attacks the previous day. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1974 VIOLENT BORDER CLASHES AT GOLAN HEIGHTS



Two Israeli soldiers have been killed and three others injured in the worst day of violence along the Golan Heights in three months.

Initial reports say Syria began shelling the northern sector of the Golan Heights, captured by Israel, at 1100 local time.

An hour later the shooting is reported to have spread southwards, ceasing for a while before there was an exchange of fire at 1630.

A statement released by the Syrian military said it had begun shelling after attempts by Israel to strengthen its hold in the central and northern sectors of the region captured during the war.

Israeli gunners reported hitting Syrian bunkers and various military positions throughout the day in retaliation for the highest casualty toll in a single day along the border.

The five hour exchange of fire came on the seventh day of border clashes along the Golan Heights.

Defence minister Moshe Dayan is expected to visit troops along the Golan Heights front tomorrow.

Israel declared a state of alert on the front two weeks ago after receiving what it described as "terrorist information" suggesting a possible Syrian offensive.

Despite an unarmed 110-man UN Truce Supervision Organisation, including Soviets and Americans, based at 19 posts along the Golan front, there has been little let up in the violence.

The clashes have placed a strain on negotiations currently taking place behind the scenes to broker a disengagement agreement between the two countries.

Senior Israeli officials are expected in Washington for talks, to be followed, it is understood, by their Syrian counterparts.

Israel first captured the Golan Heights during the 1967 war but Syria and Egypt launched an attack in October 1973 to retake them.

They made some gains before being pushed back by Israeli troops.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

There were more casualties in the days that followed including the deaths of some UN workers patrolling the area, which brought widespread condemnation.

Many rounds of shuttle diplomacy were undertaken by US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger after the 1973 war.

In May 1974 the Israel-Syria disengagement agreement was signed

This reduced Israel's positions in both the Sinai Peninsula, with Egypt, and the Golan Heights.

But in December 1981 Israel formally annexed part of the Golan Heights. The move was not recognised internationally.

There are more than 30 Jewish settlements on the heights, with about 17,000 settlers. There are some 20,000 Syrians in the area, most of them members of the Druze sect.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

| | |
|--|---|
|  ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Savor dreamy domesticity. Enjoy farmer's markets and craft stores. Savor cooking and baking, making repairs and improvements. Share flowers. Tend your garden with love. |  TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 You're especially brilliant and creative today. Another's work inspires you. Capture views and ideas onto paper or screen. Share the news. |
|  GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Have fun as you make money. Find an interesting thread in your work. Strategize for dreamy outcomes. Build on strong foundations. |  CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Consider the perfect outcome. Love energizes you to stretch for a dream. First, determine what you want. Review options. Chart your course. Take satisfying steps. |
|  LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Review your list and keep checking off tasks. Reconnect with your vision or sense of purpose. Rearrange your schedule to suit. Find clever efficiencies. |  VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Advance a passionate cause with friends. Hold meetings and gatherings to align and strategize. Coordinate efforts to take advantage of a dreamy opportunity. |
|  LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Develop your professional ideas. Creativity surges. Your muses harmonize to you. Your enthusiasm inspires others. Share from your heart. Purposeful efforts can strike gold. |  SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Your investigation is bearing fruit. Stick to solid footing. Exciting discoveries spur you to find more. Harvest the low-hanging branches before climbing higher. |
|  SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Strategize and plan your moves. You can get what you need. Stick to the truth. Avoid impulsive reactions. Collaborate to strengthen foundations for shared dreams. |  CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Negotiate and compromise. Work out a disagreement. Coordinate who does what. Simplify and clarify for best results. Romance kindles with shared conversation and accomplishments. |
|  AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Work could interfere with your fun. Follow your heart and intuition. Maintain healthy practices for strength and endurance. Reconnect with nature. Eat and rest well. |  PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Love motivates you into action. Advance a passion or creative project. Build a case for romance. Let your heart lead you. Discover rare beauty. |

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

| EASY | | | | | EASY+ | | | | | | |
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WEATHER

| | MIN | MAX | CONDITION |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| CHINA | | | |
| Beijing | 2 | 17 | fine |
| Changchun | -4 | 4 | fine |
| Chengdu | 11 | 20 | cloudy |
| Chongqing | 16 | 19 | rain |
| Fuzhou | 12 | 14 | overcast |
| Guangzhou | 20 | 26 | cloudy |
| Guiyang | 11 | 14 | overcast |
| Haikou | 24 | 30 | cloudy |
| Hangzhou | 8 | 10 | rain |
| Harbin | -8 | 2 | fine |
| Hefei | 6 | 10 | cloudy |
| Nanjing | 5 | 9 | overcast |
| Shanghai | 7 | 11 | rain |
| Taipei | 17 | 20 | rain |
| Wuhan | 8 | 10 | rain |
| Hong Kong | 19 | 23 | overcast |
| WORLD | | | |
| Moscow | 2 | 4 | cloudy |
| Frankfurt | 5 | 14 | rain |
| Paris | 7 | 16 | overcast |
| London | 9 | 15 | cloudy |
| New York | 2 | 10 | overcast |

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Bias; 6- Up and ___; 10- Fill to the gills; 14- Port near Hong Kong; 15- Hot rock; 16- Takes advantage of; 17- Stomach woe; 18- Trampled; 19- Russian refusal; 20- Mai ___ (drink); 21- Fill with joy; 23- Paradises; 24- Challenger; 26- Atty.-to-be exams; 27- Shorthand pros; 29- Busy; 31- Actress Skye; 32- Rock; 33- Call for help; 36- In spite of; 40- Links luminary Ernie; 41- A Judd; 42- What's ___ for me?; 43- European capital, in song; 44- Native Alaskans; 46- Machine for lifting heavy loads; 48- Lock of hair; 49- Beach locale; 50- "West Side Story" song; 52- Altar declaration; 55- One of the Simpsons; 56- Seized vehicle; 57- Out; 59- Put ___ on it!; 60- Too; 61- Singer Lopez; 62- Exultation; 63- Pace; 64- Director Welles;


DOWN 1- Porn; 2- In ___ land; 3- Mishaps; 4- Dundee denial; 5- Bullfighter; 6- Communion table; 7- Fruit-filled pie; 8- Bacchanalian cry; 9- Deranged; 10- Ice cream topped with syrup; 11- So far; 12- Ages between 13 and 19; 13- Ballpark figs.; 22- ___ Misérables; 23- Ruhr city; 25- Once again; 26- Moon goddess; 27- Trig ratio; 28- Implement; 29- "Who's there?" reply; 30- Denier's words; 32- Foot covering; 33- Inflammation of the nasal cavities; 34- Put a lid ___; 35- Cpls.' superiors; 37- Absurd; 38- Shipping deduction; 39- Meets one's maker; 43- Procession; 44- Former Bush spokesman Fleischer; 45- Simple shed; 46- Penetrating cold; 47- Comic O'Donnell; 48- Scout unit; 49- Smelting waste; 50- Thaw; 51- Church nook; 53- Pebbles's pet; 54- Getting ___ years; 56- ___ Safari (Haile Selassie); 58- Hockey's Bobby;

Friday's solution

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| A | N | I | T | E | M | S | L | A | C | E | S | |
| A | S | N | E | R | L | I | V | E | D | | | |
| M | A | L | L | E | T | T | W | I | N | E | | |
| T | R | I | O | C | E | A | S | E | R | E | | |
| N | O | T | W | I | T | H | I | S | T | A | N | D |
| S | W | E | D | E | A | L | T | R | E | V | I | L |
| C | R | O | O | K | P | R | O | V | O | H | O | T |
| R | H | E | T | T | P | R | O | V | O | H | O | T |
| O | A | T | H | A | I | O | U | T | E | R | O | |
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USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Emergency calls 999 | Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283 |
| Fire department 28 572 222 | Water Supply - Report 2822 0088 |
| PJ (Open line) 993 | Telephone - Report 1000 |
| PJ (Picket) 28 557 775 | Electricity - Report 28 339 922 |
| PSP 28 573 333 | Macau Daily Times 28 716 081 |
| Customs 28 559 944 | |
| S. J. Hospital 28 313 731 | |
| Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333 | |
| Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300 | |
| IAM 28 387 333 | |
| Tourism 28 333 000 | |
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Tou Un (Taipa)
1 bed 1 bath
44.12 m² / 475 ft² | HKD2,980,000



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



Supreme Flower City (Taipa)
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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

TENNIS

Alcaraz rallies after 3-hour rain delay to reach Indian Wells final

CARLOS Alcaraz defeated Jannik Sinner 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 to end the Italian's 19-match winning streak and advance to the BNP Paribas Open final on Saturday night.

Alcaraz retained his world No. 2 ranking with the victory and extended his winning streak to 11 matches at Indian Wells, where he'll play fourth-seeded Daniil Medvedev in today's title match. It's a rematch of last year's final, won by Alcaraz in straight sets.

Medvedev outlasted 17th-seeded American Tommy Paul 1-6, 7-6 (3), 6-2. Paul was up a set and 3-2 in the second-set tiebreaker when he rolled his left ankle and Medvedev took control.

Sinner led 2-1 in the first set when the match was suspended for more than three hours because of rain in the Southern California desert. Rain also affected the women's semifinals on Friday night.

AP PHOTO



Carlos Alcaraz

Sinner went on to dominate the first set before Alcaraz changed his tactics. The Spaniard

started coming to the net more and moving Sinner up and back.

"I had to change my game a little bit in the second set, that was a good thing for me, to

change my style a little bit," Alcaraz said. "I changed the return position, and that's why I gave myself a chance to put more balls in play so I could wait for my chances (to attack)."

Sinner could have knocked Alcaraz out of the second spot with a win. He had won 19 matches in a row dating to last year, including 16 straight this year.

Alcaraz earned the only break of the second set in the fourth game with a forehand drop volley winner. He faced a break point on his serve in the seventh game, but shook it off eventually served out the set.

Alcaraz broke Sinner in the third and fifth games of the third. The players were blasting the ball from both sides and attacking the net, which made for several entertaining and sharply angled volley exchanges.

Alcaraz led 40-love on his serve for his first match point when he netted a backhand. Sinner's smash dashed Alcaraz's second match point before the Spaniard closed it out with a forehand crosscourt winner.

Sinner had 38 unforced errors to 24 for Alcaraz and the Italian had 21 winners to 19 for Alcaraz.

"I was too predictable at some points," Sinner said. "I think that's the lesson for today. We will work on certain things, and hopefully I will get better." MDT/AD



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OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

SMOKESCREEN OF TRADE CAN'T HIDE TRUE TROUBLEMAKING INTENT OF VISIT

Although US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo stressed that what she led to the Philippines was a “presidential trade and investment mission on behalf of President Joe Biden”, the impression her trip has left is that she was promising mercenary money if Manila continues to do Washington’s dirty work in the South China Sea.

With details few and far between on how it will be spent, the fact that the \$1 billion the United States proposes to provide will be given through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity is a telling sign of its true intent. Washington has made no bones about the IPEF being a geopolitical tool targeting China.

Although Raimondo repeatedly stressed the \$1 billion investment “delivers on President Biden’s commitment during Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr’s May 2023 visit to Washington to work together to advance US-Philippines economic ties”, it is clear what the US expects the Philippines to deliver for the money — a major contribution to its “Indo-Pacific” strategy.

That the deal between the two is unlikely to go as smoothly as they anticipate is foreshadowed by the Philippine side raising a small request during Raimondo’s visit that Raimondo chose to prevaricate on. Her hosts asked for the Biden administration to give a green light to several shipments of garments made by a Philippine clothing company that it has held up since November last year on suspicion that the cotton was produced by what it alleges is “forced labor” in China’s Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region.

But Raimondo would only say that she “has committed to assist” the Philippines on that issue, Philippine Trade Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo told the media after raising the question in his meeting with the US commerce chief.

Even though Manila is well aware the “forced labor” in Xinjiang is another lie of Washington to smear China — the Philippine garment industry’s broad cooperation with its Chinese partners these years speaks volumes of the mutually beneficial nature of bilateral collaboration — it acts so timorously on the issue, as it is concerned that being tarred with that brush might tarnish the image of its apparel exports to the US, one of Manila’s largest export markets, as told by an anonymous Philippine official.

Raimondo’s delegation comprised US businesspeople as was to be expected for a visit by a commerce official whose purpose was reported in detail. But an incongruous presence was that of Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command Admiral John Aquilino, whose appearance in the trade and investment mission was akin to a square peg in a round hole.

Yet it has been surmised that Raimondo’s trade delegation only acted as a front for Aquilino, whose remit was to take advantage of the visit to try to weave the Philippines further into the US’ anti-China net in the region. Last month, President Biden nominated Samuel Paparo, currently the commander of the US Pacific Fleet and a tougher China hawk, to replace Aquilino as commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, a position he has only held since April 2021. It is believed that Aquilino was using his presumably last visit to the Philippines in that role to pave the way for his successor.

Aquilino met with General Romeo Brawner Jr, chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, in Quezon on Tuesday, for what an AFP spokesman said were discussions on continued cooperation between the two militaries and exchanges on the programs and activities that have been lined up so far.

Since the cooperation between the two militaries so far has been primarily on provocations targeting China, it can be anticipated that more are on the cards.

HUNDREDS IN MEXICO CITY STRETCH OUT FOR A ‘MASS NAP’ TO COMMEMORATE WORLD SLEEP DAY

THE BUZZ

Those walking through the milling streets of downtown Mexico City last week were greeted with a strange and sleepy sight.

Lolling with bright blue yoga mats, sleeping masks and travel pillows, hundreds of Mexicans laid sprawled out on the ground at the base of the city’s iconic Monument to the Revolution to take a nap. Dubbed the “mass siesta,” the event was in commemoration of World Sleep Day.

It was also meant to be a protest to push for sleep to be considered an essential part of health and wellness.

Some participants wrapped themselves in bright orange

blankets, while others prepped their phones to play soothing music as they slept.

The event was organized by the Center for Sleep and Neurosciences and the Mexican Society for the Investigation of Medicine and Sleep (SOMIMS).

As participants began to drift to sleep, organizers on stage chanted and lead participants through the meditation. They also listed off tips for helping people fall asleep, like getting plenty of natural light during the day and turning their phone off at night.

EUROPEAN UNION ANNOUNCES \$8 BILLION PACKAGE OF AID FOR EGYPT

THE European Union yesterday announced a \$8 billion aid package for cash-strapped Egypt as concerns mount that economic pressure and conflicts in neighboring countries could drive more migrants to European shores.

The deal is scheduled to be signed during a visit by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and leaders of Belgium, Italy, Austria, Cyprus and Greece, according to Egyptian officials. President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi of Egypt met separately with von der Leyen and Belgium Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, ahead of the signing ceremony Sunday afternoon.

The package includes both grants and loans over the next three years for the Arab world’s most populous country, according to the European Union Mission in Cairo.

According to a document from the EU mission in Egypt, the two sides have promoted their cooperation to the level of a “strategic and comprehensive partnership,” paving the way for expanding Egypt-EU cooperation in various economic and non-economic areas.

El-Sissi’s office said in a statement that the deal aims to achieve “a significant leap in cooperation and coordination between the two sides and to achieve common interests.”

The EU will provide assistance to Egypt’s government to fortify its borders especially with Libya, a major transit point for migrants fleeing poverty and conflicts in Africa and the Middle East, and will support the government in hosting Sudanese who have fled nearly a year of fighting between rival generals in their country.

Egypt has for decades been a refuge for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa trying to escape war or poverty. For some, Egypt is a



AP PHOTO

destination and a haven, the closest and easiest country for them to reach. For others, it is a point of transit before attempting the dangerous Mediterranean crossing to Europe.

While the Egyptian coast has not been a major launching pad for people smugglers and human traffickers sending overcrowded boats across the Mediterranean to Europe, Egypt faces migratory pressures from the region, with the added looming threat that the Israel-Hamas war will spill across its borders.

The deal would inject much-needed funds into the Egyptian economy has been which has been hit hard by years of government austerity, the coronavirus pandemic, the fallout from Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and most recently, the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Egypt reached a deal with the International Monetary Fund earlier this month to increase a bailout loan to \$8 billion, up from \$3 billion, after marathon negotiations. The deal with the IMF was combined with economic reforms that included the flotation of the Egyptian pound and a sharp raise of the main interest rate.

The EU deal follows the template of those recently signed with Tunisia and Mauritania that pledged funds in return for fortifying their borders. Both Tunisia and Mauritania were key points of departure for mi-

grants crossing the Mediterranean and a stretch of the Atlantic to Italy and Spain, respectively, and they too were criticized for alleged abuses against migrants.

The package drew criticism from international rights groups over Egypt’s human rights record. Amnesty International urged European leaders not to be complicit with human rights violations taking place in Egypt.

“EU leaders must ensure that the Egyptian authorities adopt clear benchmarks for human rights,” said Amnesty International’s head of the European institutions office, Eve Geddie. Geddie pointed to Egypt’s restrictions on media and freedom of expression and a crackdown on civil society.

Questioned about the morality of such deals earlier this week in Brussels, EU Commission spokesperson Eric Mamer acknowledged there were issues in all these countries but defended the partnerships nonetheless.

“Yes, we know the criticism related to human rights in those countries and it is obvious that this is an issue,” he told reporters.

“Does that mean we should break off all relations? Would that lead to an improvement in the situation? Or should we try to find a way to work with those countries to improve the situation on the ground both for local populations and for migrants coming to those countries?” he said. MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

Germany A union representing many train drivers and the main national railway operator have resumed negotiations in a bitter dispute over working hours and pay and are optimistic that they will achieve a result next week, the state-owned company said. The GDL union has called drivers for Deutsche Bahn out on strike repeatedly in the dispute that has dragged on for months. A walkout on Tuesday coincided with a strike by cabin crew at Lufthansa in a separate dispute, adding to disruption for travelers.



AP PHOTO

Iceland Lava from a volcanic eruption in Iceland flowed Sunday toward defenses around the town of Grindavik, which have so far held the molten rock back from the evacuated community. Scientists said the eruption appeared to be weakening and would probably peter out within hours. A volcanic system on the Reykjanes Peninsula in the country’s southwest erupted late Saturday for the fourth time in three months, sending orange jets of lava into the night sky.



AP PHOTO

Niger’s junta said Saturday the U.S. military presence in the country is no longer justified, making the announcement on state television after holding high-level talks with U.S. diplomatic and military officials this week. Niger plays a central role in the U.S. military’s operations in Africa’s Sahel region and is home to a major airbase. The U.S. is concerned about the spread of jihadist violence in the region, where local groups have pledged allegiance to al-Qaida and the Islamic State extremist groups.