



MAN ARRESTED FOR ALLEGEDLY SEXUALLY HARASSING YOUNG FEMALE STUDENT AT LOCAL UNIVERSITY WHEN THE LATTER SOUGHT HOSPITAL ASSISTANCE

P4

AL'S ELECTORAL LAW REVIEW BILL TO CONCLUDE COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS

P4

FM WANG MEETS NEW ZEALAND COUNTERPART, BEGINNING TRIP THAT INCLUDES AUSTRALIA

P6



AP PHOTO



North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters yesterday morning, its neighbors said, days after the end of the South Korean-U.S. military drills that the North views as an invasion rehearsal. The launches — North Korea's first known missile testing activities in about a month — came as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Seoul for a democracy summit.

AP PHOTO



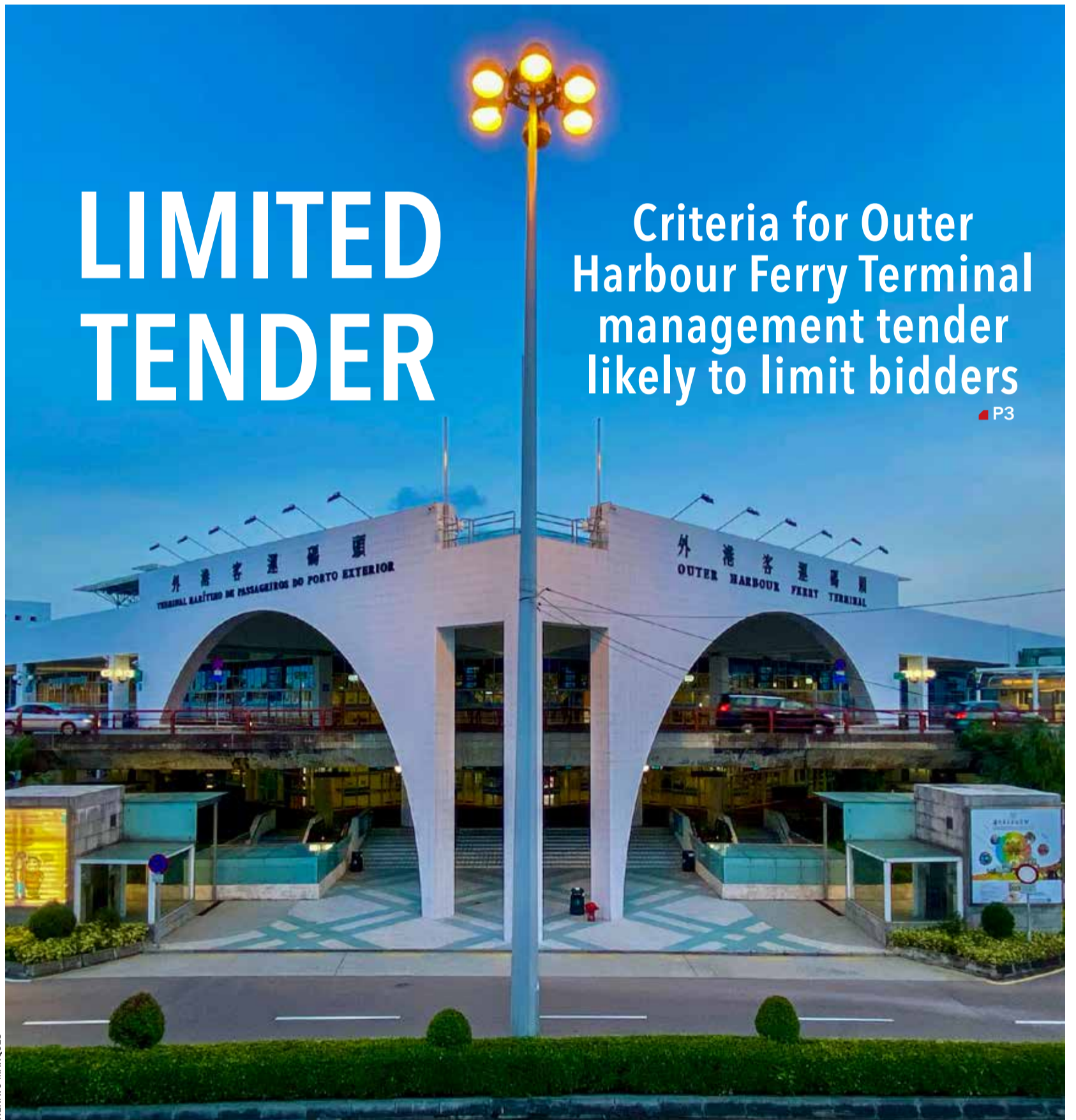
Israeli forces launched another raid on the Gaza Strip's largest hospital yesterday, saying Hamas militants had regrouped there and had fired on them from inside the compound, where Palestinian officials say tens of thousands of people have been sheltering. The U.N. food agency, meanwhile, said "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza, where over 200,000 people are believed to be experiencing catastrophic hunger.

AP PHOTO



Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he supported an idea to release opposition leader Alexei Navalny in a prisoner exchange just days before the man who was his biggest foe died. In his first comments to address Navalny's death, Putin said of the dissident's demise: "It happens. There is nothing you can do about it. It's life." The remarks were unusual in that he repeatedly referenced Navalny by his name for the first time in years. *More on p8*

More on backpage



RENATO MARQUES

LIMITED TENDER

Criteria for Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal management tender likely to limit bidders

P3

GAMING
BEIJING WARNING IN SINGAPORE 'WON'T AFFECT MACAU': ANALYSTS

P2

GAMING
MACAU PREMIUM MASS RESILIENT IN 'NORMAL' MONTH: CITI

P4

ROTARY CLUBS SEEKS CAUCASIAN BLOOD DONORS

Macau's eight Rotary Clubs will hold a blood donation day Sunday at the Nova Mall in Taipa to ensure a sufficient supply of blood reserves in the region. The Rotary Blood Donation Day, held from 2:20 p.m. to 6 p.m., aims to target individuals with a Caucasian background and donors with O-, A-, B- and AB- blood groups to join Rotarians in giving blood. On average, out of 1,000 individuals with a Caucasian background, around 150 have RhD-negative blood type whereas among individuals with a Chinese background, the proportion is only three to five out of 1,000.

SSM TO ADDRESS HEALTH CHALLENGES

The Health Bureau (SSM) plans to formulate a strategic framework for building a "healthy Macau" by addressing health challenges amid the aging global population, urban development and changes in lifestyles. In a recent plenary meeting, the bureau said it has formulated 18 items related to health risks, mental health, prevention and treatment of major infectious diseases and chronic diseases, among others.

ACCESS ROADS TO THE FOURTH BRIDGE TO BE COMPLETED BEFORE MONTH-END

The network of access roads to the fourth bridge between Macau and Taipa should be completed before the end of the month, the Public Works Bureau director, Lam Wai Hou, announced yesterday. Lam said that in addition to the four access points expected to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2024, the new bridge between Macau and Taipa will also have, in the future, a road to access the Ká Hó tunnel connecting Cotai to Coloane.

BNU CONTRIBUTED USD73 MILLION TO PORTUGUESE BANK NET INCOME IN 2023

In 2023, Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU) played a significant role in the net income of Caixa Geral de Depósito (CGD), a Portuguese public bank. According to CGD's financial report, BNU contributed approximately 5% or 67 million euros to CGD's total income of 1.2 billion euros for the year. This contribution constituted about one-third of the net income reported by CGD's international entities, amounting to 206 million euros – a figure that represents the highest value of the century thus far.



GAMING

BEIJING URGES CITIZENS IN SINGAPORE TO AVOID GAMBLING

LYNZY VALLES

The Chinese embassy in Singapore has urged Chinese citizens in the city-state to stay away from gambling, reiterating that cross-border gambling violates Chinese laws – a reminder that will most likely not be applied to Macau.

In a statement yesterday, the embassy "solemnly reminded" the majority of Chinese citizens in Singapore to enhance their legal awareness and stay away from all forms of gambling.

China has been intensifying its crack down on cross-border, off-shore and online gambling, sending similar warnings to several countries as it tries to curb these illegal activities and warnings to citizens abroad.

Macau SAR is the only place in China where gambling is allowed.

In a notice to the country, which is home to two casinos, one operated by Las Vegas Sands and the other Genting Singapore, the embassy reminded that when caught, embassies and consulates may not be able to provide consular protection for violations.

"Even if overseas casinos are legally opened, cross-border gambling by Chinese citizens is suspected of violating the laws

of our country," the embassy said.

"Cross-border gambling may also bring risks such as fraud, money laundering, kidnapping, detention, trafficking and smuggling," the Chinese embassy in Singapore added.

The Chinese government, the embassy reiterated, has always opposed any form of gambling and opposes Chinese citizens leaving the country to engage in the gambling industry.

Meanwhile, gaming industry expert and analyst Ben Lee believed that, while gambling for the mainlanders no matter where has always been deemed illegal, it does present "an interesting dilemma for the mainland authorities as to how they will apply that ruling."

"There's very little doubt that they will most likely not apply that law to Macau as the outcome would be nothing short of a disaster for the SAR," said Lee, managing partner of IGamiX Management & Consulting.

Three years ago, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Department of China stated it had established a 'blacklist' of overseas gambling tourism destinations (excluding Macau), listing some cities that have opened casinos to attract Chinese tourists and disrupt

the business order of China's tourism market.

After a year, Beijing extended its travel blacklist of overseas gambling jurisdictions, which seeks to prevent Chinese nationals from traveling to casino destinations, which are alleged to be "endangering the personal and property safety of Chinese citizens."

To the Times, Lee remarked, "It sits with our view that travelers flagged for gambling overseas are still unable to travel freely up until now and it either presages the gates being opened for more people to travel again or the crackdown continuing."

The Chinese embassies in South Korea and Sri Lanka also issued similar warnings recently.

While the blacklisted destinations have not been made public the Philippines, Myanmar, Malaysia and Vietnam are all hotspots for Chinese gamblers, which have also become home to casinos and online gambling operations aimed at Chinese nationals.

Just last month, law enforcement agencies in China and the Philippines cooperated to repatriate more than 40 Chinese nationals engaged in off-shore gambling, according to a statement from the Chinese

embassy in the Philippines.

The Chinese embassy in Singapore said the Ministry of Public Security of China opened a reporting platform for combating cross-border and online gambling, where Chinese citizens can pass on clues and suspected activity.

Legal and gaming expert Jorge Costa Oliveira from JCO Consultancy Ltd told the Times that such reminders "don't seem to apply to Macau."

The gaming consultant noted that the criminal prosecution in Wenzhou (China) of former junket mogul Alvin Chau for overseas (Philippines) operations seems to have already "assumed this kind of interpretation of Chinese law."

The Suncity case has comprehensively verified the specific harmful behaviors of the cross-border gambling criminal group such as organization and agency, gambling fund settlement, online gambling, asset management, technology and vehicle services.

Quoted by CCTV news, officials of the Intermediate People's Court of Wenzhou believed that all these activities have been suppressed throughout the entire chain, which has a landmark significance for China's lawful crackdown on cross-border gambling crimes.

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PUBLIC WORKS

Criteria for Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal management tender likely to limit bidders

RENATO MARQUES

THE stringent requirements and criteria established by the government in the public tender for the operation of the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal are likely to severely restrict the number of participants, an analysis made by the Times of the tender document has concluded.

On the line are the compulsory requirements for the potential bidders who need to be a registered company based in Macau and dedicated to the management of real estate for commercial purposes, management of ferry terminals, piers, airports or border posts.

Companies that participate in the tender also need to do so individually and not in any form of partnership or consortium with other companies.

If these requirements were not restrictive enough, the bidders will also need to present a deposit amounting to as much as MOP20 million.

Another of the requirements established in the tender published by the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) notes the bid price cannot be lower than 10% of the gross revenue of the current concession.

Bids will be accepted until April 8 (Monday) at noon at DSAMA's headquarters.

All the bids received will be opened on the following day (April 9) at 10 a.m.

Among the criteria and weight used for the evaluation of the proposals, was noted the return to the government of a share of the profits before taxes (50%), the plan for the proposed operation of the Ter-



minal (30%) and the experience of the bidder on the operation and management of this type of facility (20%).

Considering such criteria and requirements, it will be surprising if any company, other than the current operator, has a real chance of winning the tender.

2023 WAS A 'LOW YEAR' FOR THE MACAU FERRY TERMINAL

According to data from DSAMA on the operations of the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal, last year was a considerably low year for this facility which catered for a total movement of 3,044,237 passengers.

The figure is just about 35.52% of the figure registered in 2019 (8,571,690) and contrasts with the movement of 4,490,240 passengers recorded by the Taipa Maritime Terminal last year. In this case,

the almost 4.5 million passengers traveling from Taipa terminal, was about 78.83% of the number registered in 2019 (5,696,082).

Note that the figures indicated for the Taipa Ferry Terminal also include the number of departures and arrivals of passengers using the Coloane Yacht Club Pier.

In a Times analysis of the DSAMA's detailed figures, some inconsistencies were found.

For example, according to the bureau, the daily average of maritime passenger movements (arrival and departure) in 2023 was 288,131. However, if that is correct, then passenger volume would have amounted to about 8.6 million rather than the bureau's published figure of 7,534,477.

It is statistically apparent that Outer Harbour has seen a significant decline in passenger numbers since 2017, particularly between

2018 and 2019 (coinciding with the opening of the Hong Kong-Macau-Zhuhai Bridge).

While the Taipa-located terminal was in full operation during the past year, the Macau one suffered because maritime authorities imposed several service limitations and suspensions, related to the construction of the 4th bridge Macau-Taipa.

During the several days of suspension of sailings from and to the Outer Harbour, all ferry services were rerouted to the Taipa facility, also contributing to its higher results.

TENANTS AND TOURISM INDUSTRY CALL FOR REVITALIZATION

According to the president of the Travel Industry Council of Macau, Andy Wu, a revitalization is needed at the Outer Harbour.

In an interview with the Chinese channel of the public broadcaster TDM, Wu said the new operator should consider adding new business elements.

He also said that the facility includes many spaces dedicated to catering for travel agencies which are vacant as "most of this business has shifted to online," suggesting the operator adjust the size and purpose of the existing commercial spaces to increase the occupation.

Similar ideas were expressed by the member of the Tourism Development Committee, Manuel Iok Pui Ferreira, who called on the operator to adopt a more modernized approach and optimize the facility to allow tourists to buy snacks, drinks or souvenirs, on the path that leads to the gates.

Ferreira noted that the business model of the ferry terminals is lagging and cannot keep up with the pace of the current times and profile of the current visitors.

Concurrently, tenants of some of the commercial spaces of the facility are calling for cheaper rentals taking into account the reduction of movement at the terminal which has also a lot fewer ferries arriving and departing when compared to the pre-pandemic era.

According to DSAMA, only 65% of the commercial spaces of the Outer Harbour are operating (31 of 48). The majority of the spaces in operation are occupied by food and beverage establishments and retail stores.

EVENTS

Cultural scene expands as city holds first comedy festival

STAFF REPORTER

TOP comedians and filmmakers from China and abroad gathered in Macau recently for the city's first international comedy extravaganza, bringing diverse works to local audiences.

The festival, which concluded yesterday, is the first Macau International Comedy Festival that was co-organized by Chinese production firm, Mahua FunAge, and the culture communication company,

Beijing Damai, in collaboration with the Cultural Affairs Bureau.

Founders Zhang Chen and He Mi aim to provide a global stage for comedy while showcasing Macau's culture and tourism offerings to international audiences.

In addition to five plays and nine films from countries like Spain, Norway and Ukraine, the diverse program included a comedy awards show, industry forum, and flash mob performances featuring Musi-

cal Theatre hits.

acclaimed Chinese actors Wang Baoqiang, Wei Xiang, Qiao Shan and Ai Lun joined comedian Chayanop Boonprakob from Thailand at the event.

Government and culture officials said the festival uses the universally enjoyed medium of comedy to convey China's optimism to international audiences.

Representatives emphasized that comedy as a medium can be used to

help share stories showcasing China's optimism, confidence and inclusivity globally. Renowned Chinese director Zhang Yimou noted that, while comedy makes people laugh, it can also spark reflection. He shared that the art form not only induces laughter but also encourages thought on social issues and human nature.

During the weekend, there was also a series of performances at the Taipa Village, which gathered crowds.



PARLIAMENT'S ELECTORAL LAW REVIEW BILL TO CONCLUDE COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS

ANTHONY LAM

THE parliamentary committee responsible for the discussion of the Legislative Assembly electoral law review bill will submit its list of opinions in the next meeting, signaling the bill's second reading soon.

The government delivered an edited draft of the bill to the parliament in January.

Yesterday, the committee met with government officials, who explained the alterations made to facilitate the second draft.

Clause 3, Article 13 of the bill originally proposed that should any member of the Electoral Affairs Commission fail to duly conduct their work on the grounds of physical or mental challenges, the Chief Executive will announce replacements in the form of a Dispatch.

It was changed with an additional requirement proposed, which is related to criminal offenses.

The new version suggests that should any member be taken into custody or prosecuted for deliberately committing any crime subject to three years' imprisonment at maximum, they will not be permitted to take a post at the Commission.

Committee president Chan



Chak Mo, who spoke to the press after the meeting, said this aims at making the provision comply with the CE Electoral Law.

Another change fell onto the seven criteria under which the eligibility of future lists of candidates will be scrutinized.

In Item 3, Clause 4, Article 33, a Chinese character meaning "again" or "and" has been deleted.

Chan said this is to make the meaning of the item clearer. In Item 7 of the same Clause, a Chinese character has been added, transforming the sentence from "not accepting [...] due to electoral purposes" to "not permitted to

accept [...] due to."

No committee member has expressed concerns over these lexical adjustments, Chan said.

He went on to discuss suggestions from committee members. Some members asked the officials if voter registration will be added to the government One Account app. Moreover, some members asked if the deadline for voter registration can be pushed later. Under current requirement, voter registration ends on Dec. 31 preceding the year of election.

In response, the government said voter registration by One Account is technically practical

and that it will consider the suggestion. The main concern lies in cybersecurity and not technical practicality, the officials added.

On the matter of extending the registration period, Chan cited the officials as explaining that it may cause difficulties in coordination of the overall electoral procedure. Ceasing registration at the end of the year preceding an election leaves time for the Commission to publish the Electoral Registers.

This step is crucial, according to the officials, because prospective candidates will be able to get an idea who is and who is not a voter. Based on this, the registra-

tion deadline will not be adjusted at least for now.

According to Chan, the officials said the adjustment on One Account voter registration will not take place in the next election, which will happen next year. They suggested local residents can register their voting rights at e-kiosks. It was also noted that 17-year-old residents will be eligible for registration but will only be permitted to vote when they reach 18 years of age.

When asked if Macau residents without Chinese nationality will be permitted to run or vote in a parliamentary election, Chan said this has nothing to do with nationality. Provided they are Macau residents, they will be eligible to do so.

As for becoming candidates, Macau residents will also need to fulfil the requirements as proposed in Article 33.

"This is made concerning the election of the Legislative Assembly in Macau, not the National People's Congress in mainland China," Chan said, in support of his comment on the nationality matter.

A major change in this Electoral Law review is that the Commission will become a permanent entity.

CRIME

Man arrested for alleged sexual harassment

A man has been arrested for allegedly sexually harassing a young female student at a local university when the latter sought medical assistance at a hospital in Taipa, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) announced yesterday.

According to the police, the man works as a security guard at the hospital. In his 40's, he is a non-local worker from the Philippines.

The girl told police that on March 13, she went to the hospital for an injury on her arm. While speaking with the security guard, her hand was touched for several minutes. She thought the man was only being caring.

In the evening on the same day, the girl passed by the hospital and met the security guard again. She said she was invited for a chat nearby, where she was kissed on the cheek and neck by the man. She then reported the case to the police.

The man, in response, told the police that he was only trying to console the girl emotionally, al-



though admitting to having closer contacts with the girl.

In another case, a mainland man, reportedly unemployed, has been arrested for allegedly stealing cash from the till of a shop in the NAPE district. The loss amounted to MOP75,000, the Judiciary Police (PJ) disclosed yesterday.

He was arrested at a casino in Cotai, the PJ added.

Aged 40 and surnamed Sheng, the man allegedly committed the

crime on or before March 15. The staff at the shop told the police that the cash disappeared, and the police discovered – from surveillance camera footage – that the man sneaked into the shop when the staff left the shop briefly.

After allegedly committing the theft, the man roamed the city before entering the casino at 10 p.m. the same day, where the police arrested him. He told the police the cash had been lost to a casino. **AL**

GAMING

MACAU PREMIUM MASS RESILIENT IN 'NORMAL' MONTH, REPORTS CITI

STAFF REPORTER

CITIGROUP recently conducted a spot-check survey of Macau's premium mass gaming tables and found the quality of players remained steady in March, which was considered a "normal month" without extended holiday periods.

Overall, Citigroup reported the market-wide wager observed in the March survey amounted to HKD10 million (US\$1.3 million), representing a 73% increase compared to March 2023, as cited in a GGR Asia report.

The survey identified 482 premium mass players, indicating a year-on-year rise of 71%. The average wager per player for the month was HKD20,817, slightly higher than the HKD20,539 recorded in March 2023.

Analysts George Choi and Ryan Cheung noted these figures suggested the quality of players remained largely unchanged compared to the previous year.

They further emphasized the survey was conducted on a regular Friday, without any long weekends or major holidays, and the estimated wager per player held up well when compared to surveys conducted during several previous non-holiday months.

According to Citigroup, Wynn Macau Ltd, the operator of Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace, emerged as the market-share leader in the March survey, capturing 25% of the observed wager amounts.

However, the institution expressed surprise at MGM China Holdings Ltd's estimated 21% share, placing it in third position.

INSIDER Q&A

CEO of fast-growing First Watch keeps the focus on breakfast

DEE-ANN DURBIN

FIRST Watch, a restaurant chain that serves breakfast, brunch and lunch, is rising – and shining.

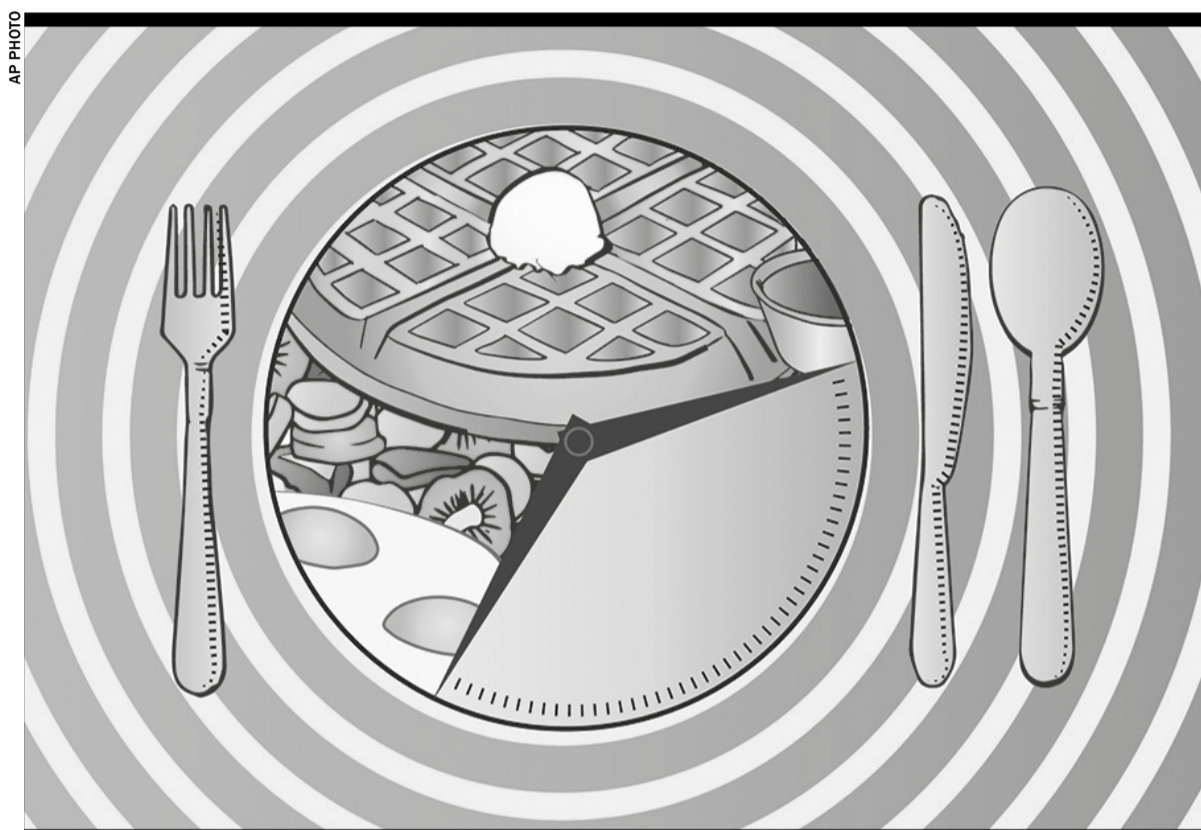
The Bradenton, Florida-based chain, known for its fresh, seasonal ingredients and made-to-order menu, is one of the fastest-growing in its category in dollar sales and unit growth, according to market research firm Technomic.

Two restaurant veterans who were tired of working late nights launched First Watch in 1983 in Pacific Grove, California.

“So many concepts are devised in a boardroom or something like that. This was the complete opposite,” CEO Chris Tomasso said. “This was a bunch of guys who really wanted to be home every afternoon so they could golf.”

The company now has more than 500 U.S. locations in 29 states. But because each eatery is designed to blend into its community instead of from a corporate model, the restaurants often feel more like neighborhood hangouts than part of a chain, Tomasso said.

Tomasso led marketing for Cracker Barrel and Hard Rock Cafe before joining First Watch in 2006. He talked to The Associated Press recently about building brands and why First Watch has no plans to expand beyond lunch. His comments have been edited for length and clarity.



AP PHOTO

- You say First Watch has retained its scrappy feel despite its growth. How do you accomplish that?

Chris Tomasso - One thing I've been saying forever to our teams is, “If we can do it in one, we can do it in 100. If we can do it in 100, we can do it in 1,000.” And the reason that's so important is because usually by the time concepts get to our size, they start to dumb down or do things differently, not realizing that the consumer will notice over time. You start outsourcing things. You say, “Well, it's too much labor to make our pancake batter from scratch.” And

we've stayed very true to that. I will tell you, there's less expensive ways to do the things that we do, but we know what's important to the consumer.

- What are some of the breakfast trends you're seeing?

Tomasso - We started to see over the last five or six years this emergence of what we call “power breakfasts.” It's so much easier for people to meet in the morning before they get to work and their day gets away from them. So that's been a big shift for us. And what used to be a shoulder period between 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.,

with remote working and hybrid working and all those things, we're starting to see all that fill up. And then, you know, the weekend brunch is just having its day, right? It's been the only segment in the restaurant industry that has shown growth in the last five years.

- Some competitors have been trying to grow sales by expanding into dinner. Does First Watch plan to ever stay open past 2:30 p.m.?

Tomasso - We love our business model, and we love the employee proposition side of

it too. It's one shift a day. We do tremendous volumes in 7.5 hours. Our teams get to have a job in the hospitality industry that doesn't have them work until all hours of the night. They make a great living. So I don't see us expanding hours at all. Also, from a consumer standpoint, doing what we do establishes us as the authority in breakfast and brunch and lunch. We're not trying to be all things to all people in any way, shape or form.

- You're a marketer. How has the work you do changed over your career? Is it getting harder to reach customers with all the distractions they face?

Tomasso - The kind of marketer I consider myself to be is an inside-out brand builder versus an advertising focus. Which is great, because when I first joined, I didn't have any money to do any advertising anyway. So it really was about evolving the concept and setting up the foundation for growth. We had three uniforms, four menus, all kinds of different things. There wasn't a lot of consistency. And so in order for us to really grow, we had to unify the brand voice. There was a lot of work done around the menu, the music, every consumer touch point in the restaurant. Now, has marketing gotten harder or easier? I think it's easier in that you can now reach a lot of people through social and digital without having to do TV and radio like you used to do. It's also easier now to control the messaging. But I also think there's challenges. If you make a misstep, it can be amplified a lot. So I think much more care and focus has to go into your messaging and your actions. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

John Catlin wins The International Series Macau



American golfer John Catlin emerged as the champion with a total score of 23-under, earning the championship trophy and a prize of USD360,000 in The International Series Macau presented by Wynn.

The USD2 million prize money event is the second stop of the Asian Tour International Series, attracting over 20 LIV golf stars, including all the champions from the 2023 International Series season. At the age of 33, Catlin

turned professional in 2013 and joined the Asian Tour in 2015. In the 2018 season, he won three Asian Tour championships and added a fourth in the 2019 season. The International Series Macau presented by Wynn marks Catlin's fifth Asian Tour championship.

Wynn president Linda Chen remarked, “For Wynn, this tournament was an important strategic step forward in showcasing our commitment to the Macau SAR Government's diversification development strategy, and we believe it has helped us in our efforts to strengthen the city's position as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.”

Sands, MPU organize exhibition of students' achievements



The Macao Polytechnic University (MPU), Sands China Ltd., and the MPU Alumni Association jointly organized an achievement exhibition for the Art Talent Development Showcase at the Lam Kan Exhibition Gallery of MPU

to display students' creative achievements.

Rector Im Sio Kei said the cooperation between MPU and Sands China over the past two decades has yielded remarkable achievements in areas such as gaming mana-

gement, innovative technology and diverse training.

“Through this university-enterprise cooperation scheme, undergraduate students and young people who aspire to develop in art and design are provided with practical experiences to understand the corporate operation environment and to evolve into multi-skilled talents,” said Im, as cited in a statement.

Meanwhile, Wilfred Wong, executive vice chairman of Sands China pledged the gaming operator will continue taking responsibility for fostering local tourism professionals and remains dedicated to promoting the integrated development of culture and tourism.

DIPLOMACY

Wang meets New Zealand counterpart, beginning trip that also includes Australia

CHINESE Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his New Zealand counterpart yesterday, as China's most senior diplomat began a tour of the country and Australia.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters greeted Wang in Wellington, New Zealand's capital.

"There have been some significant developments since we last met, not least a global pandemic that impacted both our countries," Peters said in his opening comments of their formal meeting at New Zealand's parliament house.

"Today is a valuable opportunity to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that are now before us."

Wang is the highest-ranking Chinese politician to visit the country since his own previous visit in 2017.

New Zealand has had strong economic ties with China in recent years, and was the first developed country to sign a bilateral free trade deal with Beijing in 2008.

While in Wellington, Wang will



Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi is escorted up Parliament Steps by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade North Asia divisional manager Wendy Matthews in Wellington, yesterday

also have brief meetings with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and Trade Minister Todd McClay.

"China looks forward to working with the two countries to deliver on the common unders-

tandings between the leaders, enhance strategic communication, deepen mutual trust, advance exchanges and co-operation, promote the steady and sustained growth of the China-New Zealand

and China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnerships and contribute to world peace, stability and prosperity," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said. Wang will arrive in Canberra,

Australia tomorrow to meet with counterpart Penny Wong, with dialogue between the pair expected to center on the case of detained Australian Yang Hengjun.

It will be the first time the two foreign ministers have met face to face since Yang was found guilty of espionage following a closed trial and sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve in February.

Also on the agenda will be the removal of the last-remaining trade tariffs that were imposed by China in 2020 and were widely regarded as punishment for the previous Australian government passing laws that ban covert foreign interference in domestic politics, for barring Chinese-owned telecommunications giant Huawei from rolling out Australia's 5G network due to security concerns and for calling for an independent investigation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The trade tariffs cost the local economy an estimated 20 billion Australian dollars (\$13 billion), but have since been wound back on most goods except wine, rock lobsters and some abattoirs. **MDT/AP**

STATS

Economy shows signs of improvement, but its property sector is still in the doldrums

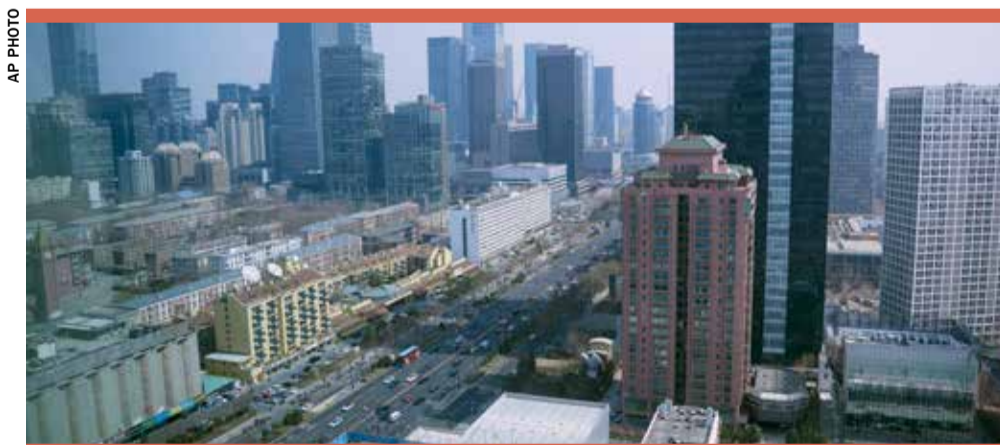
ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

CHINA'S manufacturing and investment improved in the first two months of the year, while weakness in the property sector weighed on the economy, the National Bureau of Statistics said yesterday.

The report said industrial output rose 7% from a year earlier in January-February, better than analysts had forecast. Spending on factories and equipment, known as fixed-asset investments, rose 4.2%.

The real estate sector remained sluggish, with investment in real estate falling 9% in January-February compared to the same period a year earlier.

The property market is "still in a state of adjustment and transition" but policies outlined at China's annual



legislative session earlier this month will promote "stable and healthy development," National Bureau of Statistics spokesperson Liu Aihua told reporters.

During the National People's Congress meetings, China's leaders pledged to refine property sector policies, including increasing financing to developers and building more af-

fordable housing.

The signs of strength followed various moves by authorities to boost growth. The statistics bureau said retail sales climbed 5.5% and consumer prices rose for the first time since August. The consumer price index was up 0.7% in February after months of falling prices.

"Industrial production

was a sizable beat, supported by strong exports in the month, while fixed assets investments on the other hand, were likely supported by a state-driven push early this year," said Louise Loo of Oxford Economics in a note.

She said consumer spending was "buoyed temporarily" by spending related to the Lunar New Year holi-

industry after authorities moved to curb excess borrowing by property developers.

Huang said that the correction in property construction is "still in its early stages."

Another area for concern is employment. While the official urban unemployment rate was 5.2% according to the latest data, but 14.6% of young Chinese 16-24 years old were jobless.

That's an improvement from 14.9% in December and nearly 20% in June, but still highlights persisting difficulties young Chinese face in finding jobs following the pandemic and a crackdown on technology companies that hurt investment in private businesses. The jobless figure for youths does not include students.

China usually releases economic data monthly, but data for the first two months of the year are combined to avoid distortions from the weeklong Lunar New Year holidays, when many businesses and factories are closed. **MDT/AP**

INDIA | EXPLAINER

Multi-phase election will stretch over 44 days

KRUTIKA PATHI, NEW DELHI

FROM April 19 to June 1, nearly 970 million Indians — or over 10% of the global population — are eligible to vote in general elections. The mammoth exercise is the biggest anywhere in the world and will take 44 days before results are announced on June 4.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third successive term. He will face off against a broad but flailing alliance of opposition parties that are struggling to challenge his appeal. Most surveys predict Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party will win comfortably, cementing him as one of the country's most popular and consequential leaders.

WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG?

It boils down to two key reasons: the sheer size of India, the world's most populous country, and the astonishing level of logistics needed to ensure that every

registered voter is able to cast their ballot.

Over the years, the duration of voting has wavered. It took nearly four months to complete the vote in India's first elections in 1951-1952, after it gained independence from British rule, and just four days in 1980. In 2019, voting took 39 days, and this year's election is the second longest.

With 969 million registered voters, the size of India's electorate is bigger than the combined population of the European Union.

The vote to choose 543 lawmakers to the lower house of Parliament takes place over seven phases. India's 28 states and eight federal territories will vote at different times. Each phase is one day, with the first kicking off April 19 and ending on June 1.

While some states will cast their ballots in a day, voting elsewhere may take longer. Uttar Pradesh, the largest state the size of Brazil with 200 million people, will vote on all seven days, for example.

EVERY VOTE COUNTS

The Election Commission of India, which oversees the vote, has to make sure there is a voting booth available within 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) of every voter.

"Election officials have to travel to great lengths to ensure that even a single voter can exercise their franchise," said Chakshu Roy of PRS Legislative Research, an independent think tank.

Some 15 million election officials and security staff will traverse the country's deserts and mountains — sometimes by boat, foot and even on horseback — to try to reach every voter.

It can be especially arduous. In 2019, when India last held elections, a team of polling officers trekked over 480 kilometers for four days just so a single voter in a hamlet in the remote state of Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China, could exercise their right.

Officials also traveled to a village tucked away high up in the Himalayas in 2019 to install a booth



at 15,256 feet, the highest polling station anywhere in the world.

This time too, polling stations will be installed in remote places, including one inside a wildlife sanctuary in southern Kerala state and another in a shipping container in western Gujarat state.

TIGHT SECURITY

Experts say a key reason behind the multi-phase elections in India is about security.

Tens of thousands of federal security forces, who usually guard borders for instance, are freed up and deployed alongside state police to prevent violence and transport electoral officials and voting

machines.

Deadly clashes involving supporters of rival political parties, particularly in the eastern state of West Bengal, had marred previous elections. But such violence has tapered over the years, thanks to heavy security, and voting has been relatively peaceful.

"Look at the geography of the country ... there are rivers, mountains, snow, jungles ... think of the security forces' movements. They will have to travel through the length and breadth of the country," Rajiv Kumar, the chief election commissioner, said on Saturday. "We will walk the extra mile so voters don't have to." MDT/AP

SOUTH KOREA

DEFENSE CHIEF SAYS N.KOREA SUPPLIED 7,000 CONTAINERS OF MUNITIONS TO RUSSIA

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

NORTH Korea has shipped around 7,000 containers filled with munitions and other military equipment to Russia since last year to help support its war in Ukraine, South Korea's defense minister said yesterday.

Shin Won-sik shared the assessment at a news conference hours after the South Korean and Japanese militaries said the North fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles into its eastern waters, adding to a streak of weapons displays amid growing tensions with rivals.

Since the start of 2022, North Korea has used Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a distraction to ramp up its weapons tests and has also aligned with Moscow over the conflict, as leader Kim Jong Un tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and join a united front against the United States.

U.S. and South Korean officials have accused North Korea of supplying Russia with artillery shells, missiles and other equipment in recent months to help fuel its war on Ukraine, saying that such arms transfers accelerated after a rare summit between Kim and Russian President Vladimir Putin in September.

North Korea in exchange possibly received badly needed food and economic aid and military assistance aimed at upgrading Kim's forces, according to South Korean officials and private experts. Both Moscow and Pyongyang have denied the existence of an arms deal between the countries.

During a news conference in Seoul, Shin said the South Korean military believes the North, after initially relying on ships, has been increasingly using its rail networks to send arms supplies to Russia through their land border.

In exchange for sending possibly several million

artillery shells and other supplies, North Korea has received more than 9,000 Russian containers likely filled with aid, Shin said. He raised suspicions that Russia could be providing North Korea with fuel, possibly in defiance of U.N. Security Council sanctions that tightly cap the country's imports of oil and petroleum products.

While fuel shortages likely forced North Korea to scale back winter training activities for its soldiers in recent years, South Korea's military assesses that the North expanded such drills this January and February, Shin said.

North Korea's latest missile launches came days after the end of the latest South Korean-U.S. combined military drills that the North portrays as an invasion rehearsal.

Shin said the North may dial up its testing activity before the April 10 parliamentary elections in South Korea. MDT/AP

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AP PHOTO



RUSSIA | ELECTIONS

Putin extends rule after harshest crackdown since Soviet era

EMMA BURROWS, MOSCOW

PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin sealed his control over Russia for six more years yesterday with a highly orchestrated landslide in an election that followed the harshest crackdown on the opposition and free speech since Soviet times.

While the result was never in doubt, Russians attempted to defy the inevitable outcome, heeding a call to protest Putin's repression at home and his war in Ukraine by showing up at polling stations at noon on Sunday. But from the earliest returns, it was clear Putin would extend his nearly quarter-century rule with a fifth term.

With nearly all the precincts counted yesterday, election officials said Putin had secured a record number of votes — an unsurprising development underlining the Russian leader's total control of the country's political system.

Putin has led Russia as president or prime minister since December 1999, a tenure marked by international military aggression and an increasing intolerance for dissent. At the end of his fifth term, Putin would be the longest-serving Russian leader since Catherine the Great, who ruled during the 18th century.

As early results came in, Putin hailed them as an indication of "trust" and "hope" in him — while critics saw them as another reflection of the

preordained nature of the election.

"Of course, we have lots of tasks ahead. But I want to make it clear for everyone: When we were consolidated, no one has ever managed to frighten us, to suppress our will and our self-conscience. They failed in the past and they will fail in the future," he said at a meeting with his campaign staff after polls closed.

Any public criticism of Putin or his war in Ukraine has been stifled. Independent media have been crippled. His fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

Beyond the fact that voters had virtually no choice, independent monitoring of the election was extremely limited.

Russia's Central Election Commission said yesterday that with nearly 100% of precincts counted, Putin got 87% of the vote. Central Election Commission chief Ella Pamfilova said that nearly 76 million voters cast their ballots for Putin, his highest vote tally ever.

Western leaders have denounced the election as a sham, while President Volodymyr Zelenskyy particularly criticized voting in Ukrainian areas that Russia has illegally annexed, saying "everything Russia does on the occupied territory of Ukraine is a crime."

France's Foreign Ministry said "the conditions for a free, pluralist and democratic

election were not met," while paying tribute to "the courage of many Russian citizens who peacefully show their opposition."

Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un quickly congratulated Putin, along with some Central and South American leaders and presidents of nations that have historic and close current ties to Russia, such as Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

In the tightly controlled environment, Navalny's associates urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to go to the polls at noon on Sunday — and lines outside a number of polling stations both inside Russia and at its embassies around the world appeared to swell at that time.

Among those heeding call was Yulia Navalnaya, Navalny's widow, who spent more than five hours in the line at the Russian Embassy in Berlin. She told reporters that she wrote her late husband's name on her ballot.

Asked whether she had a message for Putin, Navalnaya replied: "Please stop asking for messages from me or from somebody for Mr. Putin. There could be no negotiations and nothing with Mr. Putin, because he's a killer, he's a gangster."

A voter in Moscow, who identified himself only as Vadim, said he hoped for change, but added that "unfortunately, it's unlikely." Like others, he di-

dn't give his full name because of security concerns.

Meanwhile, supporters of Navalny streamed to his grave in Moscow, some bringing ballots with his name written on them.

Putin brushed off the effectiveness of the apparent protest and rejected Western criticism of the vote as he tried to turn the tables on the West, charging that the four criminal cases against U.S. Republican candidate Donald Trump were a use of the judiciary for political aims and describing denigrating democracy in the U.S. as a "catastrophe."

"The whole world is laughing at it," he said.

Putin referenced Navalny by name for the first time in public at the news conference, declaring that he was ready to release him in a swap for unidentified inmates in Western custody just days before the opposition leader's death.

Some people told the AP that they were happy to vote for Putin — unsurprising in a country where state TV airs a drumbeat of praise for the Russian leader and voicing any other opinion is risky.

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

Voting took place over three days at polling stations across the vast country, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine and online. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1964 'AMBITIOUS' PLANS FOR SOUTH EAST [OF ENGLAND]



Three new cities are proposed for south east England as part of the largest regional expansion plan in Britain.

A study, published today, estimates the country's population will increase by three million by the early 1980s.

The South East study is a blueprint for the south east of England, which could see an overhaul of public transport services in the area and of the road network.

The research shows that in an area to the south east of a line drawn from the Wash in Lincolnshire, to Dorset, the population will rise from between 18 million and 21 million between 1961 and 1981.

It is expected to lead to 350,000 London families needing re-housing outside the capital and could cripple services and employment if plans are not in place for the overflow.

New cities are planned near Southampton, Bletchley and Newbury and six large new expansions will be carried out at Ashford, Ipswich, Northampton, Peterborough, Swindon and Stansted.

There will also be smaller expansions in other towns across the country.

Public consultations are expected to be held before planning gets the go-ahead.

Funding has not been outlined in the study and the government insists payment and timing depends on "national priorities".

Most of the building is expected to take place in the 1970s, with smaller building in the 1980s.

A group of civil servants from several departments completed the study, which accepts as a basic assumption London's growth will be contained and the green belt preserved.

An accompanying White Paper accepts the basic objectives of the study but final decisions will not be taken until local authorities have been consulted.

Minister of Housing and Local Government Sir Keith Joseph has written to local authorities and expects preliminary reactions by May.

In an interview with the BBC he said: "This plan is to allow for the orderly planning and finding of homes and jobs."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The three "new towns" created were Milton Keynes, Havant and Basingstoke.

There were widespread fears the creation of new communities in the south east of England would destroy the green belt.

But government calculations insisted that by 1981 more than 83% of the green belt area would be open space and green areas would be preserved. At the heart of the plans was the premise the population of London would not increase because the city would not be able to cater for millions more.

Sir Keith Joseph became secretary of state for social services in 1970 until the defeat of the Conservative government in 1974.

He is best remembered as the author of the Conservative Party's "New Right" ideology which led to Thatcherism. He died in 1994.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Make progress at home, despite breakdowns. Stay patient with misunderstandings. Flexibility helps. Clean a mess. Listen and learn from mistakes.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Surprising news could change things. Keep digging for the truth. Don't react without thinking. Disagree respectfully. Keep an open mind.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Tap a lucrative opportunity. Estimate costs and expenses to refine the budget. Stay in communication, despite delays or obstacles. Prepare to move quickly.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Follow your creative impulse. Pursue a personal passion. Keep communications open. Listen more than speaking. New developments could change things.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Adapt to an unexpected transition or change. Look back for insight on the road ahead. Release preconceptions. Finish old business. Prepare for what's ahead.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Monitor news and adapt to changes. Don't believe everything you hear. Practice diplomacy, tact and nuanced messaging. Get creative. Use your persuasive charms.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Take on a creative professional challenge. Adapt with recent changes. Polish the presentation. Work out the descriptive text and design.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Enjoy the scenery. Distractions abound. Your travel, research and educational pursuits can take a surprising twist. Monitor traffic and conditions.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Take care of business. Patiently clarify misunderstandings. Unexpected news could affect your family finances. Negotiate and compromise. Get terms in writing.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Collaborate for common gain. Avoid controversy. Clarify misunderstandings right away or they grow. Avoid gambling. Keep your promises.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Prioritize your health and work. Expect delays and traffic. Miscommunications could hinder progress for a physical goal. Clear the path and watch your step.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Forgive miscommunications. Ignore rumors or gossip. Go for substance over symbolism. Prioritize love, fun and creativity. Keep your patience and humor.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	3	16	fine
Changchun	-6	5	cloudy
Chengdu	12	21	overcast
Chongqing	12	21	cloudy
Fuzhou	12	22	cloudy
Guangzhou	15	20	rain
Guiyang	9	16	cloudy
Haikou	22	24	rain
Hangzhou	6	19	fine
Harbin	-7	3	fine
Hefei	3	17	fine
Nanjing	4	17	fine
Shanghai	8	17	fine
Taipei	14	18	rain
Wuhan	4	20	fine
Hong Kong	18	21	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-6	4	cloudy
Frankfurt	4	14	cloudy
Paris	7	17	cloudy
London	10	14	cloudy
New York	5	9	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Lend ___ (listen); 6- Hanna-Barbera bear; 10- Flat sound; 14- Actress Berger; 15- Flabbergasts; 16- Romance lang.; 17- On ___-to-know basis; 18- Department store department; 19- Cape Canaveral org.; 20- Allow; 22- Pharmacist; 24- Average grade; 26- Diner; 27- Montgomery's state; 31- ___easter; 32- Popular disinfectant; 33- Eyeglasses, for short; 36- "Xanadu" grp.; 39- This can be guilty or not guilty; 40- Depart; 41- Attempt; 42- Jiffy; 43- Color anew; 44- Creepy; 45- Stumblebum; 46- Convent; 48- Assignations; 51- Song syllable; 52- Chef's measure; 54- Come out; 59- Mature male European red deer; 60- Emptiness; 62- Cream-filled cookies; 63- Ahal; 64- European erupter; 65- Android; 66- Crystal gazer; 67- Delil loaves; 68- Lathers;

DOWN 1- Quickly, quickly; 2- Hawaii's state bird; 3- Cabinet dept.; 4- Up and ___!; 5- Extreme; 6- Sweet potato; 7- Was indebted to; 8- Style; 9- Dissemination; 10- Vocalist; 11- Flight of steps; 12- Impudent; 13- Venetian blind part; 21- Pro ___ (for now); 23- Pontiac muscle cars; 25- Alleviated; 27- Swiss peaks; 28- Singer Lovett; 29- Just ___!; 30- Anaconda; 34- Salary; 35- Incident; 36- French 101 verb; 37- Den; 38- Comply with; 40- Remainder; 41- D.C. VIP; 43- Coarse file; 44- Charms; 45- Bivalve mollusk; 47- Suffix with fail; 48- Poke fun at; 49- Street show; 50- Like a chimney sweep; 52- Not that; 53- Baseball team; 55- Switch ending; 56- Musical McEntire; 57- Yucky stuff; 58- Ballpark figs.; 61- ___ Boot;

Yesterday's solution

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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	
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TRADITION

WHAT IS 'WABI-SABI' AESTHETIC ACTUALLY ABOUT? MISERABLE TEA AND LONELINESS, FOR STARTERS

PAUL S. ATKINS,
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

ON a recent visit to New York I stopped at a Japanese bookstore in Manhattan. Among the English-language books about Japan, I encountered a section of a shelf marked "WABI-SABI" and stocked with titles such as "Wabi Sabi Love," "The Wabi-Sabi Way," "Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers," and, in all lowercase, "simply imperfect: revisiting the wabi-sabi house."

What is wabi-sabi, and why does it rate its own section alongside such topics as sushi and karate?

Wabi-sabi is typically described as a traditional Japanese aesthetic: the beauty of something perfectly imperfect, in the sense of "flawed" or "unfinished." Actually, however, wabi and sabi are similar but distinct concepts, yoked together far more often outside Japan than in it. Even people who have been brought up in Japan may struggle to define wabi and sabi precisely, though each is certainly authentically Japanese and neither is

especially obscure.

As a scholar of classical Japanese language, literature and culture, I too have a professional interest in wabi and sabi and how they have come to be understood outside Japan. A cursory search of Google Books shows that the term began to appear in print in English around 1980. Perhaps this was a delayed reaction to a book by Japanese art critic Yanagi Soetsu, "The Unknown Craftsman," which was translated into English and published in 1972.

In it, in an essay titled, "The Beauty of Irregularity," Yanagi wrote about the art of the tea ceremony and its simple grace. More broadly, as the title suggests, he was captivated by a sense of beauty apart from traditional ideals of perfection, refinement and symmetry.

Behind "roughness," Yanagi wrote, "lurks a hidden beauty, to which we refer in our peculiar adjectives 'shibui,' 'wabi,' and 'sabi.'"

Shibui means austere or restrained, yet it was wabi and sabi that caught on abroad – perhaps because they rhyme.

After taking off in America and other countries, the phrase

wabi-sabi was imported back to Japan as a compound term; the mentions I found in online Japanese sources typically addressed such topics as how to explain wabi-sabi to foreigners. Wabi-sabi does not appear in standard dictionaries of the Japanese language.

MISERABLE POETRY

Wabi is a noun derived from the classical Japanese verb "wabu," related to the modern verb "wabiru" and adjective "wabishii." Wabu means to languish or be miserable.

Here is a celebrated example from a ninth-century waka poem, the brief verse of 31 syllables that forms the backbone of classical Japanese poetry. The poet, a courtier named Yukihiro, was a provincial governor who, by some accounts, was exiled to Suma Bay, a famous stretch of coastline in western Japan.

Should by chance Someone ask for me, Answer that I languish At Suma Bay, shedding brine upon the seaweed.

Suma Bay wasn't all misery for Yukihiro; according to legend, he loved and was loved by two sisters there. But his poem well captures the pain of wabi –

the misery of having been exiled from the courtly world he knew.

MISERABLE TEA

Eventually, the misery of wabi made its way into one of Japan's most iconic traditions: tea.

The custom of drinking powdered green tea, called matcha, entered Japan around 1200. Zen monks returning from China brought the powder home, using it as a medicine and a stimulant. Over time, tea spread to the rest of the population; by the middle of the 16th century, it was a mundane part of everyday life.

It was precisely then that the preparation and serving of tea was sublimated to high art, now known as "chad" or "sad," the so-called Way of Tea.

As the tea ceremony gained in popularity, powerful warlords competed in acquiring the most coveted utensils, including braziers, kettles, scoops, whisks and the bowl-like cups in which the tea was whipped and sipped. The tearoom itself might be decorated with rare works of art, such as paintings or calligraphy mounted on hanging scrolls, elaborate flower va-

ses and incense burners.

Then there emerged a group of connoisseurs and teachers of tea who championed a more severe and austere style of presentation: "wabi-cha," which literally means miserable tea. Whereas newly ascendant warriors and merchants used the tea gathering to flaunt their wealth, wabi-style tea emphasized subtlety, frugality and restraint.

It is not hard to see traces of wabi in old tearooms, with their patina of age and elegant but unobtrusive furnishings, and in the utensils themselves – in particular, the misshapen, cracked or somber-hued teabowls.

Wabi-style tea perhaps reached its pinnacle in the 16th century, when the celebrated tea master Sen no Rikyū introduced innovations still used today. These include bamboo tea scoops, black raku-style ceramic teabowls and the "crawling entrance": the 2-by-2-foot door through which attendees wriggle in order to enter the cozy, womblike tearoom.

A LOVELY LONELINESS

Like wabi, sabi is a noun: in this case, derived from the classical verb "sabu." Today, the verb "sabiru" means to rust, with its connotations of age and decay. The modern adjective "sabishii" means lonely.

Classical poems yield many examples of sabi but it really took off as an aesthetic ideal in the 17th century. Poets often tried to capture its particular kind of loneliness in the 17-syllable poetic form of haiku.

As the scholar Makoto Ueda remarked, sabi is "not the loneliness of a man who has lost his dear one, but the loneliness of the rain falling on large taro leaves at night, or the loneliness emerging out of a cicada's cry amid the white, dry rocks, or the Milky Way extending over the rough sea, or a huge river torrentially rushing in the rainy season."

Matsuo Bashō, a 17th-century master of haiku, saw sabi in this verse by his disciple Mukai Kyōrai, translated by Ueda:

Under the blossoms Two aged watchmen, With their white heads together—.

The juxtaposition of wabi-sabi as a single term is of recent, not ancient, vintage, and it does not seem to have occurred in Japan. Nonetheless, the terms originated in Japanese aesthetics: sabi out of poetry and wabi out of tea.

Combined, they appear to fill a gap in the Western vocabulary for talking about art and life – a leaning away from perfection, completion and excess, and a yearning toward leaving something undone, broken or unsaid. **MDT/AP**

BASEBALL IDOLS

Ohtani may be South Korea's most-beloved Japanese athlete

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

SHOHEI Ohtani may be South Korea's most-beloved Japanese athlete, a testament to his charm in softening any lingering animosity between the two neighbors.

Since his arrival in South Korea with his wife for the Major League Baseball opener this week against the San Diego Padres, the Los Angeles Dodgers superstar has been the focus of keen, special attention.

Many Korean fans are wearing Ohtani jerseys and rooting for him at the stadium. The Korean national team manager covets his autograph and myriad media reports and social media posts are praising him.

This is nothing new for the two-way baseball sensation, who in December signed a record \$700 million, 10-year contract to join the Dodgers. But a Japanese receiving such a treatment in South Korea is extremely unusual, because of historical grievances stemming



Los Angeles Dodgers' designated hitter Shohei Ohtani

from Japan's 1910-45 colonization of the Korean Peninsula.

"Our social atmosphere has often made it difficult for us to openly say we like Japan," said Lee Jong-Sung, a sports culture expert at Seoul's Hanyang University. "I think Ohtani would perhaps be the first Japanese athlete who we

can say we like. Maybe, some even consider him an honorary Korean citizen."

Many of Ohtani's South Korean supporters say they like him because of what they call his good manners as well as his baseball excellence.

"Ohtani has been nice to Ko-

rean fans, so I think that's why everyone likes him," Park Sungjin, a 40-year-old physician wearing an Ohtani jersey, said before the Dodgers' exhibition game with South Korea's Kiwoom Heroes on Sunday.

"We have historical issues to be settled with Japan, but whether to like Ohtani is another matter," Hwang Seon-young, another Korean Ohtani fan, said at the Gocheok Sky Dome.

Ohtani, who is lauded in Japan as "the perfect person," knows how to captivate Korean fans. Before his departure to South Korea, he posted an Instagram photo showing him making a "finger heart" gesture with a Korean national flag emoji.

After his arrival in South Korea, he told reporters that he's always respected South Korea's national teams and called South Korea "one of my favorite countries."

"The country that Ohtani likes the most is South Korea. The Japanese who South Koreans like the most is Ohtani," reads a Korean

message posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Relations between South Korea and Japan have improved significantly since last year, with the South's president, Yoon Suk Yeol, taking a major step toward addressing disputes over Japan's colonial-era mobilization of forced Korean laborers — one of the long-running sticking points in improving bilateral ties.

In 2019, a forced-labor issue triggered widespread public campaigns in South Korea to boycott Japanese goods and services.

Ties between Korea and Japan have experienced on-again, off-again fluctuations. So if anti-Japan sentiments deepen in South Korea again like in 2019, Ohtani fans may feel a challenge in publicly expressing their likings of the 29-year-old.

But despite their often-rocky political relations, South Korea and Japan are closely linked to each other culturally and economically. Many younger South Koreans don't harbor the same strong resentment against Japan as their elders, and they often view Japanese athletes as just foreign athletes.

"They view Japanese players more comfortably. They just think there is Ohtani in Japan while we have Son Heung-min," Lee, the university professor, said of a prominent Korean footballer with Tottenham Hotspur. **MDT/AP**

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IN MACAU (2023)



OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

CIA THE WELLSPRING OF DISINFORMATION

According to a Reuters report on Friday, in 2019, the Central Intelligence Agency was authorized by then US president Donald Trump to launch a clandestine campaign on Chinese social media aimed at turning public opinion in China against the Communist Party of China.

CIA spokesperson Chelsea Robinson declined to comment on the existence of the program, its goals or impacts. Kate Waters, a spokesperson for the Joe Biden administration's National Security Council, also declined to comment on the program and whether it is still active. But the report was based on several anonymous former officials "with direct knowledge of the highly classified operation". And as Reuters' interviews with "two intelligence historians" indicate, when the White House grants the CIA covert action authority, through an order known as a presidential finding, it often remains in place across administrations.

The track record of the United States using such programs to win the Cold War and pave the way for "color revolutions" around the world over the past decades gives credence to the report. And the reaction to the report, not just from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, but also some US analysts, as well as third-party observers from other countries, interviewed by Reuters, indicate they all consider the report to be true.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that the report shows "the US has spread China-related disinformation in an organized and well-planned way for a long time and it's America's important approach to wage a battle of perception against China". Wang also referred to the comment by US Republican Senator Rand Paul, who once said that the US government is the biggest propagator of disinformation, and CIA Director William Burns' recent remarks that the CIA has committed substantially more resources toward China-related intelligence collection.

The CIA founded a new China Mission Center in 2021 after the Biden administration identified China as being the No 1 challenge to the US. And the CIA, according to a report of The Wall Street Journal in December last year, is trying to boost its human spy capacities at the agency and its sister spy agencies in China as a part of a massive shift of focus from terrorism to China.

The report by Reuters indicates that the US has been not only spreading disinformation about China's ruling party, but also seeking to "foment paranoia among top leaders there" so the country expends resources "chasing intrusions" into its political network in a bid to cause larger internal strife. As one of the former officials told Reuters: "We wanted them chasing ghosts." The interviewees also said the CIA program involved action in countries where the United States and China are competing for influence, targeting public opinion in Southeast Asia, Africa and the South Pacific.

The US often accuses other countries of spreading disinformation, but as the Reuters report shows it is the US that is the true breeding ground of disinformation. The response of some China hawks to the exposure of the covert propaganda program is a telling sign of the US' shamelessness. Their only concern is that Beijing may take advantage of the report to "proselytize" in a developing world already deeply suspicious of Washington.

Beijing has no need to do that. The US is already alienating itself from the rest of the international community with its actions. Long before the Reuters report appeared, countries around the world knew the sort of nefarious activities the CIA gets up to. Many countries have firsthand experience of the chaos and suffering its troublemaking can cause. If the US side really recognizes the importance of Sino-US relations and intends to manage the risks and uncertainties in a responsible way as it has claimed, it should refrain from these say-one-thing-do-another tricks, and engage with China with reciprocal earnestness and in good faith.

Across the United States, many people are eagerly anticipating the Federal Reserve's first cut to its benchmark interest rate this year: Prospective home buyers hope for lower mortgage rates. Wall Street traders envision higher stock prices. Consumers are looking for a break on credit card debt at record-high interest rates.

Not to mention President Joe Biden, whose re-election campaign would likely benefit from an economic jolt stemming from lower borrowing rates.

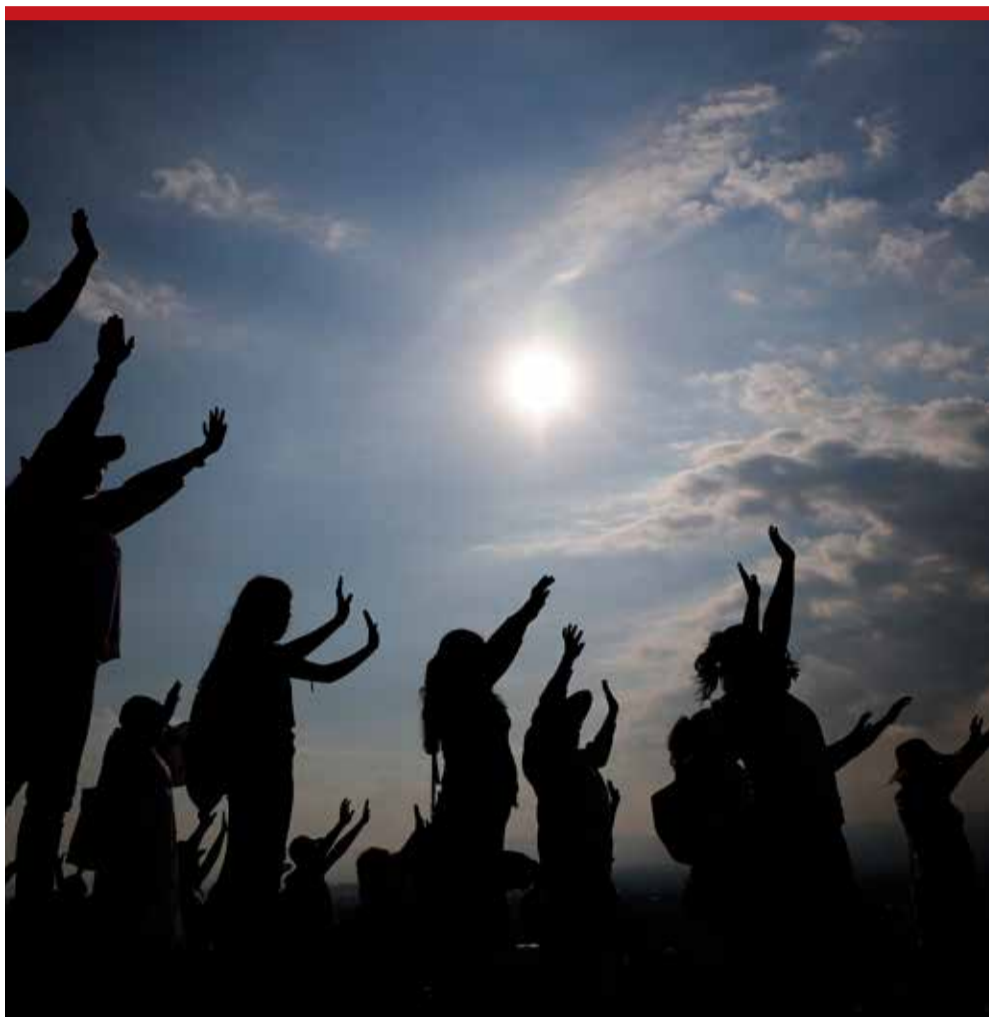
Yet Chair Jerome Powell and his fellow Fed officials are expected to play it safe when they meet this week, keeping their rate unchan-

ged for a fifth straight time and signaling that they still need further evidence that inflation is returning sustainably to their 2% target.

The Fed's cautious approach illustrates what's unusual about this round of potential rate cuts. Vincent Reinhart, chief economist at Dreyfus-Mellon and a former Fed economist, notes that the Fed typically cuts rates quickly as the economy deteriorates in an often-futile effort to prevent a recession.

But this time, the economy is still healthy. The Fed is considering rate cuts only because inflation has steadily fallen from a peak of 9.1% in June 2022.

AP PHOTO



Visitors hold their hands out to receive the sun's energy as they celebrate the Spring equinox atop the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan, Mexico (2019)

AP PHOTO



Colombian President Gustavo Petro (pictured) yesterday [Macau time] suspended a ceasefire with one of a handful of armed groups with which he hoped to negotiate peace accords, saying its fighters violated the truce by attacking an Indigenous community. The government said that starting Wednesday it would resume military operations against Estado Mayor Central, a group of fighters who broke away from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia when it signed a peace pact in 2016.

AP PHOTO



Haiti-US A charter flight carrying dozens of U.S. citizens fleeing spiraling gang violence in Haiti landed yesterday [Macau time] in Miami, U.S. State Department officials said. More than 30 U.S. citizens were on the government-chartered flight, officials said in a statement. It arrived in the Miami International Airport after the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince earlier this month urged U.S. citizens to leave "as soon as possible" as chaos grips Haiti.

Spanish police have arrested three people for the deaths last November of five migrants who were threatened with a machete and forced to jump off the boat they were traveling in with dozens of other migrants, authorities said yesterday. According to a police statement, the five died on Nov. 29 off the southern coast of Cádiz. The police said two men and a woman were arrested earlier this month but gave no further details. The people smugglers had threatened the five with a machete and forced them to jump into the Atlantic Ocean despite the strong currents and cold temperatures.

THE SPRING EQUINOX IS HERE. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

SPRING is almost here — officially, at least.

The vernal equinox arrives today, marking the start of the spring season for the Northern Hemisphere.

But what does that actually mean? Here's what to know about how we split up the year using the Earth's orbit.

WHAT IS THE EQUINOX?

As the Earth travels around the sun, it does so at an angle.

For most of the year, the Earth's axis is tilted either toward or away from the sun. That means the sun's warmth and light fall unequally on the northern and southern halves of the planet.

During the equinox, the Earth's axis and its orbit line up so that both hemispheres get an equal amount of sunlight.

The word equinox comes from two Latin words meaning equal and night. That's because on the equi-

nox, day and night last almost the same amount of time — though one may get a few extra minutes, depending on where you are on the planet.

The Northern Hemisphere's spring — or vernal — equinox can land between March 19 and 21, depending on the year. Its fall — or autumnal — equinox can land between Sept. 21 and 24.

WHAT IS THE SOLSTICE?

The solstices mark the times during the year when the Earth is at its most extreme tilt toward or away from the sun. This means the hemispheres are getting very different amounts of sunlight — and days and nights are at their most unequal.

During the Northern Hemisphere's summer solstice, the upper half of the earth is tilted in toward the sun, creating the longest day and shortest night of the year. This solstice falls

between June 20 and 22.

Meanwhile, at the winter solstice, the Northern Hemisphere is leaning away from the sun — leading to the shortest day and longest night of the year. The winter solstice falls between December 20 and 23.

METEOROLOGICAL AND ASTRONOMICAL SEASONS

These are just two different ways to carve up the year.

Meteorological seasons are defined by the weather. They break down the year into three-month seasons based on annual temperature cycles. By that calendar, spring starts on March 1, summer on June 1, fall on Sept. 1 and winter on Dec. 1.

Astronomical seasons depend on how the Earth moves around the sun.

Equinoxes mark the start of spring and autumn. Solstices kick off summer and winter. **MDT/AP**