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MACAU AUTHORITIES ARE SEEKING AN ETHICAL SOLUTION FOR THREE CEREMONIAL HORSES CURRENTLY HOUSED AT THE MACAU JOCKEY CLUB

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China's military said yesterday that it had conducted air and sea patrols and that all activities that "disrupt the South China Sea" are under control, an apparent response to naval exercises by the U.S. and its allies. The defense chiefs of the United States, Japan, Australia and the Philippines announced Saturday that they would hold joint exercises in the sea to safeguard the rule of law and uphold the right to sail through and fly over the waters. More on p6



Malaysia's imprisoned former Prime Minister Najib Razak (pictured) is seeking to serve the rest of his prison term under house arrest, two months after his sentence in a corruption case was reduced by half. His surprise application filed last week said he had "clear information" that then-king Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah issued an order during the Jan. 29 pardon's board meeting, which cut his 12-year jail sentence by half and sharply reduced a fine, allowing him to finish his sentence under house arrest.



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed former Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop on Friday as his special envoy for Myanmar, a post that has been vacant for 10 months as the country's conflict escalated into the worst violence since the military takeover in 2021. Bishop will replace Noeleen Heyzer, a former U.N. undersecretary-general for Singapore who left after 20 months at the end of her contract in June 2023. In a grim assessment to the U.N. General Assembly before leaving, Heyzer said the impact of the military takeover has been "devastating," with violence continuing "at an alarming scale."

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PORPOISE CARCASS IN CHEOC VAN RAISES TRANSPARENCY CONCERNS, SAYS GROUP

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TRANSLATION SYSTEM PLAN UNDERWAY FOR INT'L VISITORS

Due to the increasing number of international tourists visiting Macau and considering that local tour guides may not be able to speak every language fluently, the government has plans to build a translation system. Speaking to TDM, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) director, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, has said the ideas are still in the preliminary stage, and it is unknown whether they are "feasible." She also said the construction work is not easy, especially with the need to find appropriate equipment, translation software and to conduct testing. Only when the results are satisfactory and suitable could such a system be launched.

PARKING LOT AT CHEONG MENG GARDEN CAUGHT FIRE

A private car was involved in the fire at the Cheong Meng Garden's parking lot, affecting two private cars and two motorcycles nearby. According to the Fire Services Bureau, the fire severely affected the parking lot and walls. Some objects in the parking lot were also blackened by heat. The cause of the incident is suspected to be mechanical and caused by hardware failure. 110 residents were evacuated.

MACAU PREPARES FOR ABOVE-AVERAGE TYPHOON SEASON

Macau officials are bracing for what is predicted to be an above-average typhoon season with four to seven storms forecast to impact the region, according to the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau. The bureau considers a season with that number of cyclones to be "normal". However, last year, five typhoons affected Macau with three reaching Signal No. 8 intensity or higher. That is higher than the average of 1.4 strong storms. With warmer global temperatures fueling stronger storms, Macau authorities will prioritize public safety as they did last year when operations were suspended during Typhoon Saola.

PORPOISE CARCASS IN CHEOC VAN RAISES TRANSPARENCY CONCERNS

STAFF REPORTER

A local ecological group has slammed the government for failing to publicize the report of the dead finless porpoise found in Cheoc Van.

In a statement, the Chief of Macau Ecology said it believes the "public would have been kept in the dark again, and the porpoise would have died without anyone knowing."

On March 31, a deceased finless porpoise was found stranded on Cheoc Van Beach.

Images of the dead porpoise, believed to be an adult female measuring around 1.6 meters, were posted on Chief of Macau Ecology's social media account after one of its members discovered the carcass.

"Around 50% of its skin had deteriorated due to exposure to sunlight and waves. Its tongue and genitals had also decayed



and were exposed. The sight of the lifeless porpoise being battered by relentless waves was heart-wrenching."

Though the porpoise is a nationally protected species, the Marine and Water Bureau did not make an announcement despite cleaning up the remains, according to the group.

"Initially we thought it was a baby white dolphin due to its small size and dark coloration," said the association. "But upon closer inspection, we saw it was

actually a finless porpoise, already in an advanced state of decay."

Authorities arrived an hour after the discovery and removed the body, but did not disclose the incident publicly. The group questioned why details were not released after nearly a week and whether other stranding cases may be concealed.

Finless porpoises are listed as vulnerable by the IUCN and about 200 reside in local waters. Their deaths provide insights

into conservation issues, yet the last reported white dolphin stranding was in 2021 without follow-up investigations.

"Is it coincidence no deaths were reported in three years amid busy construction? Or are cases being downplayed?" asked Chief of Macau Ecology.

While Hong Kong openly shares cetacean data, Macau authorities have cremated carcasses without autopsy and withheld reports.

This opacity does not address ecological concerns in heavily trafficked waters or demonstrate commitment to transparency as marine protections tighten globally, according to the group.

The porpoise's death is a reminder of the unseen lives in local seas and the need for authorities to bolster oversight and information sharing on rare marine wildlife under their protection, the group added.

RENATO MARQUES

VISITOR arrivals during the first three days of the Ching Ming Festival (April 4-6) have surpassed the local tourism authorities' expectations, with the daily average reaching 118,934, data from the Public Security Police Force (PSP) has shown.

According to the forecast from the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the daily average was expected to be around 100,000 visitors, a figure surpassed by almost 19%.

The first day (a public holiday) registered a higher influx of visitors, with 136,363 entering Macau.

Considering the figures recorded over the Easter Holidays, the whole 10-day period, which includes both holidays (March 29 to April 7), should have delivered close to one million visitors over the 10-day period, which would be a result very close to the

TOURISM

Visitors up slightly during the Ching Ming Festival

MGTO's forecast.

Until 9 p.m. yesterday, the total figure of visitor arrivals to Macau over the whole period was 977,970, with a daily average of 97,797.

There was a significant decline in visitor numbers after the second day of the Ching Ming Festival, with a sharp drop being registered from the second day (April 5 - 135,661) to the third day (April 6 - 84,779).

Although tourism authorities have not yet released final figures on hotel occupancy, the sector said that it should be around 90% over these 10 days.

HZMB SEES RECORD-BREAKING TRAFFIC

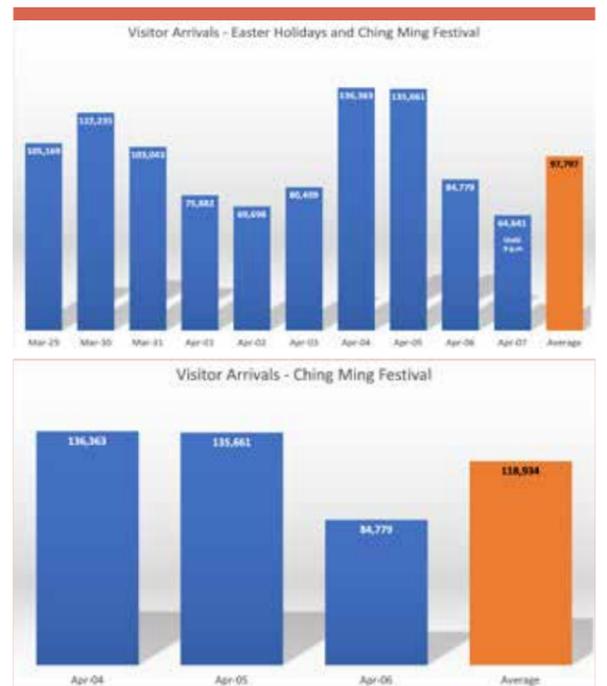
The Zhuhai port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-

-Macao Bridge (HZMB) handled 19,570 vehicles on Saturday, achieving a new peak in daily vehicle traffic for the third time in seven days, official data showed.

From March 28 to April 6, over 1 million passengers and 170,000 vehicles, both inbound and outbound, passed through the port, as reported by the Zhuhai border inspection station of the bridge, the world's longest bridge-and-tunnel sea crossing.

During the period, the total number of Hong Kong and Macau tourists exceeded 740,000, and Hong Kong and Macau vehicles accounted for nearly 110,000, according to the inspection station.

Families from Hong Kong and Macau have



become the main force, accounting for about 68% of the total passenger flow, an increase of 25

percentage points over the same period last year, said the inspection station said.

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ECONOMY

Macau tops Asia's list of fastest growing economies in 2024

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU has topped the list of Asia's fastest growing economies in 2024, with a booming real GDP growth rate of 27.2% and a GDP per capita growth rate of 29.16%.

The SAR ranked first in a report from the finance website, Insider Monkey, on the 20 Fastest Growing Economies in Asia in 2024.

The report noted global growth is more resilient than expected, with inflation declining steadily.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) report expected the global economy to grow at the previous year's rate of 3.1% in 2024 as well.

Previously, the IMF had said the local economy is "robust," as the institution forecasted economic growth of 13.9% this year, as well as a return to pre-pandemic levels in 2025.

Along with the gaming sector's "stellar performance," the economic recovery has also been bolstered by the mass tourism segment, while non-gaming services exports also expanded strongly.

In the latest 20 Fastest Growing Economies in Asia in 2024 report, global growth is anticipated to increase modestly by 0.1% to reach 3.2% in 2025.

Along with the global trend of strong economic recovery, the growth expectations for Asia have been raised.

Asia's economic growth for the year is now projected at 4.5%, against the previous expectation of 4.2%.

The outlet noted the main contributing factors behind the upward revisions are the emerging economy of India, which is

demonstrating a strong domestic demand, and China's higher spending on disaster reconstruction and resilience projects.

Following Macau was India, with real GDP growth of 6.3% and a GDP per capita growth rate of 9%.

Cambodia joined the top 3 fastest growing economies in Asia in 2024 with a real GDP growing at 6.1%, whereas it has a GDP per capita growth rate of 6.34%.

Bangladesh ranked fourth, while the Philippines came fifth.

China, meanwhile, ranked 17th on the list, being the largest

Asian country covering the entire East Asian region. The country has a real GDP growth rate of 4.2% and a GDP per capita growth rate of 4.9%.

The report noted China's higher spending on disaster reconstruction and resilience projects as the main contributing factors behind the upward revisions.

However, some potential challenges facing the Asian economy include China's deteriorating property sector, the financial volatility of some highly indebted economies, a long and inefficient supply chain, and the threat of higher shipping costs.

Last month at the annual session of the National People's Congress, Premier Li Qiang announced China aims to achieve 5% economic growth this year, acknowledging it will be a challenging goal in difficult times.

In his address to the annual session of the National People's Congress, Li outlined plans to boost spending on developing advanced technology, fortifying China's military and supporting the economy, among many other longstanding goals.

China's economy grew at a 5.2% pace last year, but that was on top of a 3% annual growth rate in 2022, when millions of people were locked down for weeks and some businesses were ordered to close as the country endured disruptions from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite such turmoil, the IMF has previously noted China's economy could recover faster than expected if the government makes additional property and structural reforms to boost consumer confidence.

WEALTHIEST INDIVIDUALS

Macau billionaires prominent in latest Forbes list

STAFF REPORTER

FORBES last week unveiled its latest list of the world's wealthiest individuals, with few notable names tied to Macau's gaming industry retaining their spots.

Lui Che Woo, founder and chairman of Galaxy Entertainment Group, came in at number 180 on the list, with a reported net worth of USD11.2 billion.

Pansy Ho, chair of both MGM China and Shun Tak Holdings, secured the 835th spot with \$3.8 billion.

Another familiar Macau figure, Angela Leong, director of SJM and widow of casino magnate Stanley Ho, ranked 1,380th overall with



Lui Che Woo



Pansy Ho



Angela Leong

an estimated \$2.4 billion fortune.

Miriam Adelson, widow of late Las Vegas Sands founder Sheldon Adelson, also retained her standing among the international

gaming elite. The Adelson family played a pivotal role in Macau's rise as the gambling capital of Asia and their \$32 billion net worth placed them at 53 on the Forbes list.

Meanwhile, Lawrence Ho, son of late casino legend Stanley Ho, was not on the list with a notable drop-off this year after appearing Hong Kong's 50 Richest list for a decade.

Ho reaped a small gain from Vietnam's electric vehicle maker Vinfast's merger with his SPAC unit Black Spade in a \$23 billion listing on Nasdaq last year.

But that was not enough to make up for the steep drop in the value of his biggest asset. Shares of casino giant Melco International Development roughly halved in the past 12 months amid a broader industry sell-off, according to the Forbes report.

China, which includes Macau and Hong Kong, retains its position as the world's second wealthiest region.

However, the number of Chinese billionaires declined from 562 last year to

473 in the latest report.

This decrease suggests weaker economic conditions may be impacting the amassing of massive fortunes, though Macau-linked names remained atop China's billionaire ranks and globally.

The presence of Macau-linked entrepreneurs in this year's rankings underscores how the special administrative region remains integral to the expansion of individual and family fortunes in Asia's casino hub.

As the world's wealthiest individuals collectively grew \$2 trillion richer according to Forbes, Macau's tycoons maintained their multi-billion-dollar status.

ARTS FESTIVAL ADDS PERFORMANCES AND DISCOUNT OFFERS

The 34th Macao Arts Festival (MAF) has added two more performances to its program with one additional performance of both the "Grand Opening: Jungle Book Reimagined" by Akram Khan and of the circus theatre production "Duck Pond" by Circa. Additionally, MAF has also launched a special 30% discount on tickets named "Wondrous Encounters Flash Sale Offer" for specific programs. This offer, which started April 7 and ends April 19, applies to those who purchase tickets to any performance of the "Grand Opening: Jungle Book Reimagined," the Sino-Portuguese Concert, the circus theatre production "Duck Pond" and the contemporary ballet "Sleeping Beauty." The MAF will run from May 3 to June 7.

JOB MATCHING EVENT TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISABLED JOB SEEKERS

People with disabilities in Macau will have more opportunities to find employment with a new initiative called "Happy to see, Willing to Hire," launched by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL). A key part of the program is a matching session on June 5 that will facilitate direct interviews between local companies and job candidates who register with proof of their Macau ID and disability. The bureau has said the event also gives employers a chance to directly understand applicants' abilities better.

ETHICAL SOLUTION NEEDED FOR MACAU JOCKEY CLUB HORSES

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU authorities are seeking an ethical solution for three ceremonial horses currently housed at the Macau Jockey Club.

The horses' welfare came under scrutiny last week as social media calls grew to relocate or retire the animals.

Municipal Affairs Bureau officials confirmed last week veterinarians had examined the three horses.

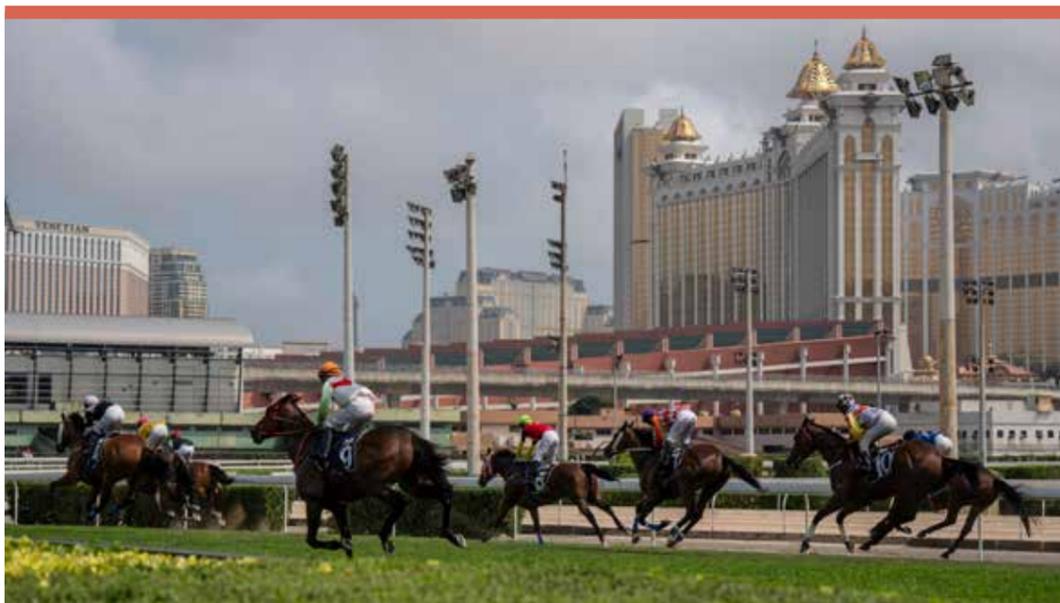
The veterinary evaluation declared all three animals to be in good health.

This medical assessment came after a former club employee delivered a petition requesting the horses be relocated to Coloane Island for long-term care and retirement.

Meanwhile, the Macau Jockey Club said the horses are not destined for euthanasia as some social media posts had suggested.

A club spokesperson said the intention is to rehome the animals abroad, though further details on the planned relocation were not provided, as cited in a

AP PHOTO



TDM report.

With differing narratives emerging from social media versus the racing club and government authorities, the fate of the horses remains unclear.

Municipal and club officials indicated they are working cooperatively to find a resolution that prioritizes the horses' welfare in a humane and

ethical manner.

An agreement on next steps is expected once all stakeholders have had a chance to properly evaluate the situation and consider options for providing the animals with a suitable quality of life into retirement.

After more than 40 years, Macau's hippodrome hosted its final races March 30, bringing

an end to the sport in the city renowned for its massive casinos.

In January, the city's government announced the termination of its contract with the Macau Jockey Club, effective April. The decision came at the request of the Macau Horse Race Company, citing operational challenges as a reason for the closure.

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Red Market to reopen in June after revamp

RENATO MARQUES

THE Almirante Lacerda Municipal Market, better known as the "Red Market," is expected to reopen in June this year, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has said.

According to the IAM, the full market revamp, which took two full years, is almost complete. The IAM is expecting the new facility to be ready to start receiving vendors in late May.

IAM also noted that as the works have been generally completed, the facility is now going through a testing stage to ensure everything is operational.

Although it has undergone a major revamp, the market's appearance is very similar to the original and retains most aspects such as corridors, stall locations, and even decoration according to the original plan.

Among the major differences is the inclusion of



lifts and other equipment that enables ease of use by those with mobility issues.

A total of 127 stalls from the original Red Market will return to the market, including 12 vegetable stalls, 76 fish and seafood stalls, 17 pork stalls, two beef stalls, eight chilled product stalls, seven grocery stalls, four tofu and bean sprout stalls and one frozen meat stall.

IAM has completed

drawing lots for the allocation of stalls for the vendors and held briefings about the relocation.

In the upcoming days, stall vendors will be able to perform on-site inspections and measurements to plan the layout of the stalls and prepare for the relocation as soon as possible.

IAM expects to reopen the market early June.



PSP locks ambulance for illegal parking and unpaid road tax

RENATO MARQUES

AN image of the ambulance owned by the Macau Football Association (MFA) parked yesterday on a street in Macau, with one of its wheels locked by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) traffic enforcement officers, has sparked heated debate on social media.

The vehicle was parked near the Macau Baptist College at Areia Preta District in a roadside parking space.

The PSP told the Times a traffic law enforcement officer found the vehicle "at about 11 a.m., in an alleged 'illegal parking'

situation as specified in the [Macau] 'Road Traffic Act' on Rua Central da Areia Preta."

The PSP said that, besides the alleged illegal parking, the vehicle owner had not paid the 2024 Road Tax, which was due April 2.

In consequence, the PSP said, "[the force] has locked it and notified the Transport Bureau to follow up on the case."

According to information from passers-by spoken to by the Times, there was no indication the ambulance was on duty at that location.

The Times has tried to contact the MFA for further explanation but, at the time of press, it had not received a response.

CREDIT BILL

Chief Executive gains power to terminate casino credit in new bill

STAFF REPORTER

LAWMAKERS have added a provision on the "termination of the qualification of the concessionaire to engage in gaming credit activities," in the final version of the new law on gaming credit.

The new law grants the Chief Executive power to terminate a concessionaire's eligibility to issue credit to gamblers if it is deemed of significant public interest, according to the Second

Standing Committee.

However, the law does not define what would constitute a significant public interest or warrant termination. It does stipulate that only concessionaires can directly offer gaming credit.

The final version allows junket operators, who had previously extended credit on casinos' behalf, to still conduct credit activities through an agency contract with a concessionaire.

Under the contracts, money loaned or collected

would need to belong to the concessionaire.

Approval from the Secretary for Economy and Finance is also required for any agency agreements between junkets and concessionaires related to gaming credit. The new law establishes an interim period for existing credit arrangements to continue operating under prior rules.

Regulation of the massive credit operations in Macau's gaming industry was the aim of the legislative amendment.

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Yellen says US-China relationship on 'more stable footing' but more can be done to improve ties

FATIMA HUSSEIN &
KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen sent a message of mutual cooperation at a meeting yesterday with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, highlighting the improvement in relations since her visit to China last year while recognizing that major differences remain.

After focusing on trade and economic issues for the first two days of her visit, Yellen turned to the broader U.S.-China relationship in the meeting with Li, one of China's top leaders.

"While we have more to do, I believe that, over the past year, we have put our bilateral relationship on more stable footing," she said in the ornate Fujian room of the Great Hall of the People on the west side of Tiananmen Square.

Yellen, who is regarded favorably in China, is the first Cabinet member to visit since Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping met in California in November in a carefully orchestrated meeting to set the troubled relationship between their countries on a better course.

Li, in remarks before the media before their meeting, said the high media interest in Yellen's visit "shows the high expectation they have ... and also the expectation and hope to grow" the U.S.-China relationship.

China's emergence as an economic and military power has



U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, left, meets Chinese Premier Li Qiang at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, yesterday

created a rivalry with the long dominant United States.

The U.S. has restricted China's access to advanced semiconductors and other technology, saying it could be used for military purposes. China, still a middle-income country, accuses the U.S. of trying to constrain its economic development.

At their meeting, Li told Yellen that China hopes the U.S. won't politicize economic and trade issues or overstretch the definition of national security, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Yellen came to China with trade practices that put American companies and workers at an unfair competitive disadvantage at the top of her agenda.

Chinese government subsidies and other policy support have encouraged solar panel and EV makers in China to invest in factories, building far more production capacity than the domestic market can absorb.

While that has driven down prices for consumers, Western governments fear that that capacity will flood their markets with low-priced exports, threatening American and European jobs.

But Li argued that the development of the green energy industry in China would make an important contribution to combating climate change, the Xinhua report said.

The U.S. and China on Saturday agreed to hold "intensive ex-

changes" on more balanced economic growth, according to a U.S. statement issued after Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng held extended meetings over two days in the southern city of Guangzhou.

They also agreed to start exchanges on combating money laundering. It was not immediately clear when and where the talks would take place.

"As the world's two largest economies, we have a duty to our own countries and to the world to responsibly manage our complex relationship and to cooperate and show leadership on addressing pressing global challenges," Yellen said.

Relations were at a low point

when she visited in July in the early stages of efforts to improve ties.

China had cut off talks on a range of issues in anger over a visit by then U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022. Tensions were further inflamed by a Chinese balloon that traversed America in early 2023 before being shot down by a U.S. fighter jet.

In that context, Yellen's visit is an attempt to build on a fragile stability that has been established.

The end of her trip will overlap with a visit by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov today and tomorrow that was announced by China's Foreign Ministry on Sunday.

China's sharp rise in trade with the Kremlin has increased since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. While China does not provide weapons to Russia, the U.S. has expressed concern about China's sale of items to Russia that can have military as well as civilian uses.

During a press conference Saturday, Yellen addressed the U.S. relationship with China on the subject of Russia.

"We think there's more to do, but I do see it as an area where we've agreed to cooperate and we've already seen some meaningful progress," she said. "They understand how serious an issue this is to us."

Yellen also met yesterday with Beijing Mayor Yin Yong and told him that "local governments play a critical (economic) role, from boosting consumption to addressing overinvestment," adding that Beijing is particularly important in China.

"I believe that to understand China's economy and its economic future, engagement with local government is essential," Yellen said.

Later Sunday, Yellen met with students and faculty at Peking University. **MDT/AP**

CHINA'S military said yesterday that it had conducted air and sea patrols and that all activities that "disrupt the South China Sea" are under control, an apparent response to naval exercises by the U.S. and its allies.

The defense chiefs of the United States, Japan, Australia and the Philippines announced Saturday that they would hold joint exercises in the sea to safeguard the rule of law and uphold the right to sail through and fly over the waters.

China has long-simmering territorial disputes with a number of Southeast Asian nations

SEA DISPUTE

China says it patrolled the South China Sea in an apparent response to US naval drills with allies

in the South China Sea, a major shipping route. Skirmishes with the Philippines in particular have flared up since last year.

The U.S. has conducted joint patrols with the Philippines in a show of support. China says the U.S. is inflaming tensions by meddling in the disputes.

A brief statement from the Chinese mili-

tary's Southern Theater Command said it had organized patrols and that "all military activities that disrupt the South China Sea and create hotspots are under control."

The statement did not mention the United States or the joint exercises.

Likewise, the U.S. and its allies did not mention China in their statement, but the four countries reaffirmed their stance

that a 2016 international arbitration ruling — which invalidated China's expansive claims in the South China Sea — was final and legally binding.

The growing tensions in the disputed waters are expected to be high on the agenda when U.S. President Joe Biden hosts his Japanese and Philippine counterparts in a summit at the White House this week. **MDT/AP**



ASEAN finance leaders end meetings in Laos, pointing to challenges from geopolitics, volatile prices

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
LUANG PRABANG

SOUTHEAST Asian economies are gaining ground as tourism and exports recover from the shocks of the pandemic, but geopolitical tensions and volatile commodity prices still pose serious risks, regional financial leaders said last week.

Laos' Finance Minister Santiphab Phomvihane read out a joint statement following meetings among finance ministers at a hotel in the Laotian city of Luang Prabang, a UNESCO heritage site, but he made no other remarks and took no questions.

Estimates for economic growth in members of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations vary but are generally near a robust 5% for 2024.

"Nevertheless, there are still challenges due to adverse financial spillovers from geopolitical tensions, volatility in global commodity prices," Phomvihane said, also pointing to climate change, aging populations and rapid development of digitalization as key factors for the region.

He did not elaborate, but the repercussions of the war in Ukraine and tensions between Washington and Beijing are



Farmers burn crop waste from a field outside the Lao UNESCO heritage site of Luang Prabang, Saturday

among the geopolitical risks that have impacted trade and global commodity prices in recent years, trickling down to the smaller ASEAN economies that depend heavily on trade with China.

ASEAN members also include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. East-Timor is seeking to join.

As ASEAN's most economically challenged economy, excluding its strife-torn neighbor Myanmar, Laos has time to prepare for the aging of its youthful population of about 7.5 million. Some of its neighbors are growing old before they be-

come affluent. The government reckons it is in a demographic sweet spot with a couple of decades to prepare. But it faces a raft of other troubles, with massive foreign debt, a weakening currency and inflation running at about 25%.

In terms of U.S. dollars Laos' economy is shrinking due to the devaluation of its currency, the kip. However, in local currency terms it grew at a 3.7% rate last year and is forecast to expand at a 4% rate in 2024.

"Things are normalizing," said Winfried F. Wicklein, director general for Southeast Asia for the Asian Development Bank.

But the country is deemed

to be in debt distress, with payment obligations exceeding \$1 billion a year and total borrowing amounting to about 125% of its economy, with half owed to China.

Chinese financial institutions are believed to have rescheduled payments for about \$2 billion in those debts since 2020, helping Laos to avoid an outright default and relieving some pressure on the economy.

"Large chunks of debt repayments owed to China are being pushed into the future with little transparency around the interest and repayment process for this," said Keith Barney, a professor at Australia National University's Crawford School of Public Policy and who has been researching Laos for more than 20 years.

"The Lao economy is facing serious problems and it's hard to see an immediately apparent exit route," he said. "Laos's debt problems are narrowing its future pathways for economic growth in different ways."

Still, Laos has acknowledged the seriousness of its debt quandary, allowing the public release of a report by the International Monetary Fund last year that minced no words in outlining urgent actions it said were needed to repair the country's finances, Wicklein noted.

"They realize they have a

problem and are open to help. They are inviting you to the kitchen and it means a lot," he said.

On the sidelines of the ASEAN meetings this week, Laos signed agreements on launching cross-border payments using QR codes, among other incremental steps aimed at integrating its finances and economy into those of its bigger and richer neighbors.

There were no big statements on climate-related issues as the officials met surrounded by forests obscured by thick smoke from hill fires and burning of fields and waste, a seasonal problem that Laos shares with its ASEAN neighbors.

But such meetings allow top financial officials to collaborate in sharing lessons they have learned as they plot strategies on curbing carbon emissions.

"It's a long way to go, but everybody is committed to the same direction," Wicklein said.

Wicklein pointed to a 600 megawatt monsoon wind power project that will allow Laos to export electricity to neighboring Vietnam as an example of increasing investments in the energy sector beyond Laos' huge hydroelectric power sector.

"These megadeals have a demonstrable effect," he said.

MDT/AP

Japanese leader visits new chip factory, stressing ties with Taiwan and support for key technology

YURI KAGEYAMA, TOKYO

JAPANESE Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited a new semiconductor plant for which his government has pledged more than 1 trillion yen (\$7 billion) of support to secure a steady supply of chips on Saturday.

"I believe this project will have positive ripple effects throughout Japan. It is key for not only the semiconductor industry but also a wide range of businesses such as electric vehicles and electronics," he said while touring the facility.

The new plant on the southwestern island of Kyushu, majority owned by the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., is the Taiwanese semiconductor giant's first in Japan.

Kishida also expressed sympathy to Taiwan following an earthquake that left at least 12 people dead.

Japanese companies like Sony, Denso and Toyota are investing in the TSMC subsidiary that opened the plant in February, although the Taiwanese giant retained an 86.5% stake in the Japan Advanced Semi-

conductor Manufacturing Company. The project underlines Japan's hopes to regain its presence in the computer chips industry.

Four decades ago, Japan dominated in chips, with Toshiba and NEC controlling half the world's production. That's declined to under 10%, amid competition from South Korean, U.S. and European manufacturers, as well as TSMC.

Japan has recently earmarked about 5 trillion yen (\$33 billion) to revive its chips industry, seeking to become less dependent on imports in the wake of pan-

demic-era shortages that affected auto production and other industries for months.

Ensuring an ample supply of the most advanced chips is vital with the growing popularity of electric vehicles, as well as artificial intelligence.

Private sector investment totals \$20 billion for the plants in the Kumamoto region, southwestern Japan. The second plant is set to be up and running in three years. The two plants are expected to create 3,400 high-tech jobs directly, according to TSMC.



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, center, is briefed as he visits a plant of the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. in Kikuyo town, Kumamoto prefecture, southern Japan, Saturday

The plant is a bright spot for Kishida, whose popularity has plummeted amid

a corruption scandal in his ruling Liberal Democratic Party. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Rwandan President Paul Kagame, left and his wife, first lady Jeannette Kagame prepare to light a memorial flame, during a ceremony to mark the 30th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, held at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, in Kigali, Rwanda, yesterday

Rwandans commemorate 30 years since the genocide whose legacy still scars the small country

RODNEY MUHUMUZA & IGNATIUS SSUUNA, KIGALI

RWANDANS are commemorating 30 years since the genocide in which an estimated 800,000 people were killed by government-backed extremists, shattering the small East African country that continues to grapple with the horrific legacy of the massacres.

Rwanda has shown strong economic growth in the years since, but scars remain and there are questions about whether genuine reconciliation has been achieved under the long rule of President Paul Kagame, whose rebel movement stopped the genocide and seized power.

Kagame, who is praised by many for bringing relative stability but vilified by others for his intolerance of dissent, led somber commemoration events yesterday in the capital, Kigali. Foreign visitors include a delegation led by Bill Clinton, the U.S. president during the genocide, and Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

Kagame will light a flame of remembrance and lay a wreath at a memorial site holding the remains of 250,000 genocide victims in Kigali.

The killings were ignited when a plane carrying then-President Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was shot down over Kigali. The Tutsis were blamed for downing the plane and killing the president. and

became targets in massacres led by Hutu extremists that lasted over 100 days in 1994. Some moderate Hutus who tried to protect members of the Tutsi minority were also killed.

Rwandan authorities have long blamed the international community for ignoring warnings about the killings, and some Western leaders have expressed regret.

Clinton, after leaving office, cited the Rwandan genocide as a failure of his administration. French President Emmanuel Macron, in a prerecorded video ahead of the yesterday's ceremonies, said on Thursday that France and its allies could have stopped the genocide but lacked the will to do so. Macron's declaration came three years after he acknowledged the "overwhelming responsibility" of France — Rwanda's closest European ally in 1994 — for failing to stop Rwanda's slide into the slaughter.

Rwanda's ethnic composition remains largely unchanged since 1994, with a Hutu majority. The Tutsis account for 14% and the Twa just 1% of Rwanda's 14 million people. Kagame's Tutsi-dominated government has outlawed any form of organization along ethnic lines, as part of efforts to build a uniform Rwandan identity.

National ID cards no longer identify citizens by ethnic group, and authorities imposed a tough penal code to prosecute those suspected of

denying the genocide or the "ideology" behind it. Some observers say the law has been used to silence critics who question the government's policies.

Rights groups have accused Kagame's soldiers of carrying out some killings during and after the genocide in apparent revenge, but Rwandan authorities see the allegations as an attempt to rewrite history. Kagame has previously said that his forces showed restraint in the face of genocide.

Kagame is expected to give a speech and a night vigil will be held later on Sunday as part of a week of remembrance activities.

Naphtal Ahishakiye, the head of Ibuka, a prominent group of survivors, told The Associated Press that keeping the memory of the genocide alive helps fight the mentality that allowed neighbors to turn on each other, killing even children. Mass graves are still being discovered across Rwanda 30 years later, a reminder of the scale of the killings.

"It's a time to learn what happened, why it happened, what are the consequences of genocide to us as genocide survivors, to our country, and to the international community," said Ahishakiye.

He said his country has come a long way since the 1990s, when only survivors and government officials participated in commemoration events. "But today even those

who are family members of perpetrators come to participate."

Kagame, who grew up a refugee in neighboring Uganda, has been Rwanda's de facto ruler, first as vice president from 1994 to 2000, then as acting president. He was voted into office in 2003 and has since been reelected multiple times. A candidate for elections set for July, he won the last election with nearly 99% of the vote.

Rights activists and others say the authoritarian Kagame has created a climate of fear that discourages open and free discussion of national issues. Critics have accused the government of forcing opponents to flee, jailing or making them disappear while some are killed under mysterious circumstances. Kagame's most serious political rivals are his Tutsi ex-comrades now living in exile.

Though mostly peaceful, Rwanda also has had troubled relations with its neighbors.

Recently, tensions have flared with Congo, with the two countries' leaders accusing one another of supporting armed groups. Relations have been tense with Burundi as well over allegations that Kigali is backing a rebel group attacking Burundi. And relations with Uganda are yet to fully normalize after a period of tensions stemming from Rwandan allegations that Uganda was backing rebels opposed to Kagame. MDT/AP

this day in history

1994 ROCK MUSICIAN KURT COBAIN 'SHOOTS HIMSELF'



The lead-singer of American grunge rock band Nirvana, Kurt Cobain, has been found dead in his Seattle home.

The 27-year-old rock star had a single gunshot wound to the head. A gun and suicide note were found nearby.

It appeared he had been dead for at least 34 hours when his body was discovered by an electrician who was carrying out repairs at the musician's house. Mr Cobain's mother, Wendy O'Connor, said she had not heard from him for six days.

The troubled singer, whose band achieved global fame with the release of its album Nevermind in 1991, survived a drug and alcohol-induced coma in Rome last month.

A statement from Nirvana's management company, Gold Mountain Entertainment, said: "We are deeply saddened by the loss of such a talented artist, close friend, loving husband and father."

Mr Cobain was married to the lead singer of the band Hole, Courtney Love. The couple had a daughter, Frances Bean, 18 months ago.

The three-piece group from Aberdeen in Washington State, were due to arrive in Britain next week on the next leg of their European tour.

Nirvana are widely acknowledged to be the leading pioneers of the Seattle-based grunge movement, combining a violent rock sound with lyrics expressing vulnerability and anguish.

Eight million copies of their hit Smells Like Teen Spirit have been sold worldwide. The band's latest album, In Utero, released last year, was also a great success.

But American music journalist Jeff Gilbert said Mr Cobain had been depressed by bass player Chris Novoselic's recent announcement that he wanted to leave the band.

Nirvana's frontman joins a long litany of rock stars - including Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Janis Joplin - who have died young.

Ms O'Connor told reporters after her son went missing she had warned him about suffering a similar fate.

"I told him not to join that stupid club," she said.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The coroner found that Kurt Cobain had died on 5 April.

The star quickly became a rock icon and martyr to the disaffected. Nevermind was later described as one of the most influential albums ever made.

His widow Courtney Love sold the rights to her dead husband's journals eight years after his death and they were published in November 2002.

The volumes revealed the singer's battles with illness, depression and heroin addiction. He also described how he had bought the gun he used to commit suicide two years before his death.

A greatest hits album including the previously unreleased track, You Know You're Right, was released in October 2002.

Ms Love was arrested for drug possession and disorderly conduct in October 2003.

The incident led to her losing custody of her 11-year-old daughter, Frances Bean.

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F1

Verstappen bounces back with dominant win at Japanese Grand Prix

STEPHEN WADE, SUZUKA

MAX Verstappen's record-breaking dominance in Formula 1 resumed yesterday with his victory in the Japanese Grand Prix, leading almost the entire race on a sunny day in central Japan.

His abrupt breakdown two weeks ago in Melbourne, Australia, looks like a blip in his total command over F1. He was out on the fourth lap when he rear brakes caught fire.

Nothing like that this time.

Verstappen basically led from start to finish except for falling back briefly after a pit stop. He was followed across the finish line by Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez — 12.5 seconds behind — and Carlos Sainz of Ferrari. Sainz was 20 seconds off the pace.

The three-time defending F1 champion is again this season's points leader and now has won 22 of the last 26 races dating from the start of the 2023 season. Only



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of the Netherlands, left, leads Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc of Monaco, right, during the Japanese Formula One Grand Prix at the Suzuka Circuit in Suzuka, central Japan, yesterday

two other drivers have won in that span — Red Bull teammate Perez and Sainz, the winner in Australia two weeks ago.

"That was a very lovely race," Verstappen said on the team radio just after crossing the line.

A red flag went up just seconds into the tightly packed first lap when Alex Albon and Daniel Ricciardo clipped each other on

the second turn and sent both crashing out of the race.

"The critical bit was the start to stay ahead and after that the car just got better and better," Verstappen said later. "It couldn't have been any better."

Both drivers walked away, apparently without serious injuries. The restart was delayed 30 minutes to get the cars off the tra-

ck and clear debris.

Verstappen pushed his season points total to 77 and is 13 clear of Perez with 64. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc follows with 59 with Sainz on 55.

The next race is in two weeks at the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai. F1 has not run a race there since 2019 with four races called off because of the CO-

VID-19 pandemic.

"It's going to be quite hectic," Verstappen said. "We've haven't been there in a while — only one practice session to get into it again. So I think it will be quite interesting."

The race was run under sunny skies in the midst of the cherry blossom season across the Japanese archipelago. The Suzuka track was built by Honda, which powers Red Bull, and is still run by the Japanese car builder. It's set southwest of Nagoya, Japan's fourth largest city, in a center of heavy industry.

Verstappen, 26, put down rumors early this week that he might leave Red Bull, maybe for Mercedes.

"From my side, I'm very happy where I am. And, yeah, we want to keep it that way." He even hinted at an early retirement.

"I have a contract with Red Bull until '28," he said. "After that, I first want to see if I actually even want to continue. That's for me the most important." MDT/AP

AD

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OPINION

China Daily

Xinhua Commentary

REMOVING BARRIERS GOOD FOR US, CHINA

When U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen dined at one of the oldest Cantonese restaurants Taotaoju after landing up in Guangzhou Thursday, the U.S. side demanded that the privacy screens be moved so that they could enjoy cuisine together with local diners sitting around.

Such a "remove-the-barrier" request, a gesture of openness that allows Yellen and her entourage to have a direct engagement with the Chinese people, was also a graceful pose for the camera. However, don't forget that there are formidable barriers hindering interactions between China and the United States, which wait to be dismantled for the good of the two nations as well as the rest of the world.

The specter of protectionism has been haunting Washington. Multiple America's top decision-makers, both Republicans and Democrats, have been in the grip of the you-win-I-lose Cold War mentality when looking at China-U.S. relations. In their eyes, China's progress equals America's setbacks.

Fabricating the so-called "China threat" narrative, Washington has erected all kinds of barriers between the world's top two economies, ranging from trade tariffs, high-tech embargoes, as well as visa restrictions for Chinese academics and students, among others.

For starters, tariffs on Chinese imports have caused higher prices of related items, and contributed to rising inflation that afflicts the U.S. economy in recent years. Over the past four years, grocery prices have jumped by 25 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Washington's attempts to decouple the American economy from that of China, though Yellen denied on Friday, have also, in effect, come to naught.

Bilateral trade did decrease last year, and the U.S. trade deficit with China fell to its lowest in over a decade. However, the rising exports from countries like Vietnam and Mexico to the United States consisted of considerable inputs sourced from China.

According to the McKinsey Global Institute report published in January, even as China's share of U.S. manufactured imports declined from 2017 to 2020, its share of the value added in goods consumed in the United States actually rose.

In the meantime, China's development, not least in technological innovation, has kept up its momentum even in the face of America's all-round crack-down. Last year, Huawei, China's telecommunications company, surprised the world by launching a smartphone with new chips despite years of chip sanctions by Washington. Also, China's pursuit of high-quality development is boosting its advanced manufacturing industries.

During a recent interview with CNBC, former U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, who attended this year's Boao Forum for Asia last month in China's island province of Hainan, recalled his visit to an unmanned factory in China, describing it as "the most advanced manufacturing facility" he has ever seen in his life.

He said that innovation, not sanction, should be the right way for the United States to out-compete China.

As Washington has grown increasingly agitated over China's booming green industries, electric vehicles (EVs) and solar panels in particular, the straw it clutches at is rehashing the old "overcapacity" rhetoric and threatening to impose higher tariffs. In fact, levies on some Chinese imports are already so high that one could hardly see a Chinese-made electric car running in the U.S. streets.

Suppressing China's EV-related industries won't help America grow its own. Only cooperation can. Some Chinese and American companies are giving it a try. According to media reports, U.S. automaker Ford and China's CATL, a leading EV battery maker, are considering building a battery plant in the U.S. state of Michigan or Virginia. The two sides should create more conditions for the plan to materialize.

[Abridged]

DUTCH POLICE DETAINED ACTIVIST GRETA THUNBERG AT A CLIMATE DEMONSTRATION IN THE HAGUE

THE BUZZ

Climate activist Greta Thunberg was among dozens of people detained during the weekend by police in The Hague as they removed protesters who were partially blocking a road in the Dutch city.

Thunberg was seen flashing a victory sign as she sat in a bus used by police to take detained demonstrators from the scene of a protest against Dutch subsidies and tax breaks to companies linked to fossil fuel industries.

The Extinction Rebellion campaign group said before the de-

monstration that the activists would block a main highway into The Hague, but a heavy police presence, including officers on horseback, initially prevented the activists from getting onto the road.

A small group of people managed to sit down on another road and were detained after ignoring police orders to leave.

Extinction Rebellion activists have blocked the highway that runs past the temporary home of the Dutch parliament more than 30 times to protest the subsidies.



AP PHOTO

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

TOP UN COURT WILL HOLD HEARINGS IN A CASE ACCUSING GERMANY OF FACILITATING GAZA CONFLICT

MIKE CORDER, THE HAGUE

Preliminary hearings open today at the United Nations' top court in a case that seeks an end of German military and other aid to Israel, based on claims that Berlin is "facilitating" acts of genocide and breaches of international law in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Israel strongly denies its military campaign amounts to breaches of the Genocide Convention.

While the case brought by Nicaragua centers on Germany, it indirectly takes aim at Israel's military campaign in Gaza following the deadly Oct. 7 attacks when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people. More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry. Its toll doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants, but it has said women and children make up the majority of the dead.

"We are calm and we will set out our legal position in court," German Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sebastian Fischer said ahead of the hearings.

"We reject Nicaragua's accusations," Fischer told reporters in Berlin on Friday.

"Germany has breached neither the genocide convention nor international humanitarian law, and we will set this out in detail before the International Court of Justice."

Nicaragua has asked the court to hand down preliminary orders known as provisional measures, including that Germany "immediately suspend its aid to Israel, in particular its military assistance including military equipment in so far as this aid may be used in the violation of the Genocide Convention" and international law.

The court will likely take weeks to deliver its preliminary decision and Nicaragua's case will likely drag on for years.

Today's hearing at the world court comes amid growing calls for allies to stop supplying arms to Israel as its six-month campaign continues to lay waste to Gaza.

The offensive has displaced the vast majority of Gaza's population. Food is scarce, the U.N. says famine is approaching and few Palestinians have been able to leave the besieged territory.

"The case next week in The Hague will likely further galvanize opposition to any support for Israel," said Mary Ellen O'Connell,

a professor of law and international peace studies at the University of Notre Dame.

On Friday, the U.N.'s top human rights body called on countries to stop selling or shipping weapons to Israel. The United States and Germany opposed the resolution.

Also, hundreds of British jurists, including three retired Supreme Court judges, have called on their government to suspend arms sales to Israel after three U.K. citizens were among seven aid workers from the charity World Central Kitchen killed in Israeli strikes. Israel said the attack on the aid workers was a mistake caused by "misidentification."

Germany has for decades been a staunch supporter of Israel. Days after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, Chancellor Olaf Scholz explained why: "Our own history, our responsibility arising from the Holocaust, makes it a perpetual task for us to stand up for the security of the state of Israel," he told lawmakers.

Berlin, however, has gradually shifted its tone as civilian casualties in Gaza have soared, becoming increasingly critical of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and spoken out against a ground offensive in Rafah. MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

Indonesian Cabinet members testified last week that no rules were violated in the distribution of government aid during the recent election campaign, despite claims by the two losing presidential candidates that it was used for the benefit of the election winner. Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto won the election with 58.6% of the votes, or more than 96 million ballots, more than twice the amount received by each of the two runner-ups in the three-way race, according to the General Election Commission.



AP PHOTO

Russia's government declared the situation in flood-hit areas in the Orenburg region a federal emergency yesterday, with preparations for possible flooding underway in three other regions, state media reported. The floods, caused by rising water levels in the Ural River, forced over 4,000 people, including 885 children, to evacuate in the Orenburg region, the regional government said. State news agency Tass said that a further 2,000 homes were flooded, bringing the total to nearly 6,300 in the region.



AP PHOTO

Israel A top Iranian military adviser yesterday warned Israel that none of its embassies were safe following a strike in Damascus last week blamed on Israel that killed 12 people, including two elite Iranian generals. Israel has been preparing for an Iranian response to the strike without directly acknowledging its involvement. The remarks by Gen. Rahim Safavi signaled that the attack on a diplomatic mission could be met with a similar response.