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CONSUMER SPENDING IN NORTHERN DISTRICT SEES UPTURN IN REVENUES, FOLLOWING THE LAUNCH OF CONSUMPTION PROGRAM AMID BUSINESS CHALLENGES P5

FIRE DEPARTMENT SEES INCREASE IN EMERGENCY DISPATCH IN Q1 P3

CHINESE SMART EV MAKER EXPANDS INTO HONG KONG AND MACAU P4



AP PHOTO



Hong Kong A fire in a large, mostly residential building in Hong Kong yesterday morning killed at least five people and left another 36 injured. Some 250 residents were rescued from the New Lucky House in Hong Kong's Jordan neighborhood and the fire was extinguished. The fire services department said that the fire began on the first and second floors of the 16-story building, where a gym and licensed guest rooms were located.

AP PHOTO



Israel U.S. President Joe Biden called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza a mistake and called for his government to flood the beleaguered territory with aid, ramping up pressure on Israel to reach a cease-fire and widening a rift between the two staunch allies. Palestinians in Gaza marked a muted start to the Eid al-Fitr holiday, with parents visiting the graves of sons and daughters killed in the war.

AP PHOTO



Turkey and Israel announced trade barriers on each other as relations deteriorated further amid the war in Gaza. Turkey, a staunch critic of Israel's military actions in the territory, announced that it was restricting exports of 54 types of products to Israel with immediate effect. They include aluminum, steel, construction products, jet fuel and chemical fertilizers. In response, Israel said it was preparing a ban on products from Turkey.

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XINHUA



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RENATO MARQUES

THIS year's 12th Macao International Travel (Industry) Expo (MITE) will be the largest edition of the event to date, featuring 1,346 exhibition and sales stalls, organizers said yesterday during a press conference, which unveiled details of the event that will take place from April 26 to 28.

According to the same organizers, this year's MITE will be "expanded in scale and create a greater wealth of business opportunities with seven major highlights."

The fact that the expo is back to its original date in late April was also noted by the director of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, after the postponement of the event last year to summer time.

Senna Fernandes noted this solution was implemented last year to accommodate the event. From now on, however, the event will always occur in April, allowing exhibitors to seize sales opportunities before the summer vacation, whilst also increasing participation by avoiding scheduling clashes with other similar, global events.

Due to the expansion of international exhibitors, which is said to create a stronger synergy in the industry, the exhibition occupies a larger area than normal, incorporating three, rather than two, exhibition halls – A, B and C – of the Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo.

Another of the novelties of the event is the format, "One exhibition, two places," which establishes a link between the larger-scaled event in Macau and another event that will occur concurrently in Hengqin, the 2024 Camping Fair, which is dedicated to camping.

As part of the organizing team, the deputy director of the Economic Development Bureau of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Huang Zhongjian, noted in his speech that tourism in Hengqin has been recovering fast since last year, having received 12 million tourists in 2023. This is an increase of 25%, compared to the pre-pandemic figures of 2019. Huang added that, currently, Hengqin's revenue from tourism has also risen 12%.

The same official noted that even though Macau is a mature destination and focuses on luxury markets comprising five-star hotels and resorts, Hengqin



MITE

UPCOMING TRAVEL EXPO TO BE THE LARGEST EDITION YET

has a strong, complementary focus on nature and ecology, providing the space needed for relaxation and family time.

Huang highlighted that, this year, "the United Nations General Assembly emphasized that sustainable and resilient tourism mainly provides economic benefits, such as through foreign currency exchange, tax revenue, and employment." He added that, in 2023, "tourism contributed about USD3.3 trillion to the global economy."

He also remarked that, in 2019, before the pandemic, the total number of tourists who visited the Greater Bay Area was close to 400 million, and the tourism revenue of Hong Kong and Macau alone exceeded HKD500 billion. He emphasized that "tourism has a strong and prosperous position in economic development."

In this regard, the president of the Macau Travel Agency Association, Alex Lao, noted the participation in this year's event by

representatives from more than 50 countries and regions, as well as those in the tourism industry from several mainland provinces and cities. Lao said MITE would continue to cooperate with the country's various tourism policies to benefit Macau.

Under the theme of "Meet at MITE: Discovery, Networking, Interaction!" the event, which celebrates the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Macau SAR, has an area dedicated to gastronomy that will also include a wine cellar.

A pavilion featuring new tech-

nologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI), will present a snapshot of the tourism industry's development over the past 25 years, as well as a vision for the future.

Other highlights are the "1+4 Pavilion" and the "New Media Matrix."

The first aims to present novelties on the government's strategic development of Macau and its four key industries: health and wellness, modern financial services, innovative technology, conferences and exhibitions, commerce and trade as well as

culture and sports.

The second will be used for exhibitors to present their products and services widely across multiple social media channels through the invitation of online influencers who will conduct livestream selling and promotion.

The topic of patriotism and national education will be also presented at the event with a themed pavilion dedicated to cultural museums and educational tourism, the aim of which is to attract the educational travel market.

At this pavilion, cultural museums and institutions, such as the Palace Museum, the National Museum of China, and other patriotic education bases, will be invited to participate in the exhibition, to deepen the concerted development of tourism and education.

MITE TO COST MOP33M. GOV'T TO BEAR MORE THAN HALF

THE 2024 MITE event has a budget of MOP33 million. The MGTO is covering more than half the cost (MOP17.87 million), Senna Fernandes said in response to an inquiry from the media. She noted this year's budget is 6% higher than last year's and that, in addition to the MGTO, MITE's event partners will also provide financial assistance.

When questioned on the potential easing of visa requirements to facilitate links between Macau and Hengqin, Deputy Director Huang said that it depends upon national policies. He noted that developments in this area would soon occur, noting that, last month, a delegation of central authorities toured the area, recording observations and drafting solutions.

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DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR Lynzy Valles
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS Alex Torrão, Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Anthony Lam, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Jorge Costa Oliveira, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Sérgio de Almeida Correia, Viviana Seguí **DESIGNER** Rebeca Almeida | **ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS** JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | **NEWS AGENCIES** Associated Press, MacauHub, MacaoNews, Xinhua **SECRETARY** Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

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ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com
OFFICE MANAGER Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com
ADDRESS Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR **Telephones:** +853 287 160 81/2 **Fax:** +853 287 160 84
Advertisement advertising@macaudailytimes.com
For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

STATS

Fire department sees increase in emergency dispatch in Q1

STAFF REPORTER

AS Macau enters the anticipated high typhoon season, the government is taking steps to enhance preparations and ensure the safety of its residents, the Fire Services Bureau (CB) said yesterday.

These efforts come as the bureau reports an increase in emergency dispatch cases during the first quarter of 2024. Between January and March, 14,098 cases were recorded, with 254 attributed to fire calls, marking a 5.83% year-on-year increase.

In a press conference, the bureau said that by collaborating with the Unitary Police Service, the bureau has been actively engaging with multiple neighborhood associations since February to disseminate information on disaster prevention and preparedness.



Civil protection operation meetings have also been conducted to foster community engagement and encourage participation in upcoming drills, emphasizing the collective effort required to avert and mitigate disasters in Macau.

In addition, the CB will actively participate in the civil protection

drill called "Crystal Fish 2024" scheduled for April 27 this year.

The bureau's main objectives during the drill include implementing the Storm Surge Evacuation plan, conducting targeted fire service drills, and providing assistance to other public services.

In anticipation of the high typhoon season, the bureau has urged residents to proactively prepare for typhoons. Inspecting the safety of windows, signboards, canopies, and other installations is highly recommended as a precautionary measure.

To complement these preparations, the CB has launched extensive publicity campaigns, including fire safety lectures, evacuation drills, and ambulance aid basics briefing sessions for teachers and students.

Between January and March 2024, a total of 148 campaigns were organized, reaching 1,174 participants through the distribution of 14,333 fire safety leaflets, posters and guidelines. Fire extinguishing practical sessions were conducted for 185 participants, while 16 evacuation drills and emergency exercises involved 1,964 participants.

Also, during the first quarter of 2024, personnel conducted 2,698 visits to 268 buildings, resulting in administrative penalty procedures for five recalcitrant offenders.

Controlling hazardous substances is also a priority, said the CB, with 4,803 visits made to various establishments, leading to the initiation of administrative penalty procedures for four cases to ensure compliance with the "Legal Regime for Control of Hazardous Substances."



MACAU TRADE INSTITUTE DIRECTOR TAKES OFFICE

Leong Wa Fong was yesterday appointed new executive director of the Macau Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM). In his remarks, Leong thanked the government for its trust and his colleagues for their support. He pledged to advance Macau's economic diversification plan and maximize opportunities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area. Leong aims to strengthen industries and demonstrate Macau's business strengths. IPIM president Vincent U said the group works hard on tasks while optimizing services and management. It will expand cooperation between Macau and Hengqin island through new initiatives in investment, trade shows and China-Portuguese relations.

MACAU BANS POULTRY IMPORTS FROM BIRD FLU AREAS

Macau will not approve imports of poultry meat and products from areas affected by avian influenza outbreaks. The city council is concerned about cases of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian flu in Ionia County, Michigan, and Parmer County, Texas, USA. The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) monitors fresh food imports through inspections and will continue strict quarantine measures. Products must declare origin and pass inspections with health certificates proving the area is epidemic-free. Without those documents, shipments will not meet approval under current laws. The bureau also tracks animal product imports based on World Organization for Animal Health announcements. Local importers have been notified and the bureau will monitor incidents to tightly control poultry entering Macau.

UTM RANKS IN TOP 1% FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH GLOBALLY

The University of Tourism Macau (UTM) has been included in the top 1% of published papers in social science worldwide according to the latest Essential Science Indicators statistics. The statistics released by Clarivate analyze over 10 million records in more than 12,000 journals to identify top-performing universities and institutions in specific research fields. UTM said it ranked among leading institutions for social science research quality and output.

STAFF REPORTER

THE Chinese government is contemplating the establishment of a new visa category designed for Chinese tour groups, allowing for multiple entries between Macau and Hengqin within a specified timeframe.

The new visa is intended to simplify the accommodation process for tour group visitors who want to explore Macau but stay at hotels in Hengqin, according to Huang Zhongjian, deputy director of the Economic Development Bureau of Hengqin.

In the most recent development, the official revealed yesterday that ministries from the Central Government conducted an investigation in Hengqin in March. Based on the initial findings, Hengqin is actively devising plans as ne-

Chinese gov't mulls new visa category for Macau-Hengqin



cessary.

The official indicated the final decision will be imminently announced by the Central Government.

He also stressed the significance of considering the perspectives of the Macau industry when implementing the policy.

He outlined various specific aspects

to consider, such as ensuring customs clearance facilities, evaluating hotel market demand in Macau and Zhuhai, understanding tourists' preferences, and making essential preparations in customs and immigration.

The proposal was put forward by the Macau government earlier this year with the goal of prolon-

ging tourists' stays in Macau, particularly in light of high hotel expenses.

According to statistical data, the number of visitors arriving in tour groups surged by 1,569% year-on-year to 278,000 in the first two months of this year. In February alone, Macau welcomed 144,000 tour group visitors.

PROPOSED BILL TO STRENGTHEN REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO ILLEGAL MAHJONG ACTIVITIES

LAWMAKER Chan Chak Mo said that a proposed bill will penalize individuals who operate mahjong for profit without government authorization with imprisonment for up to one year or fines for 240 days.

Those found participating in mahjong activities may be fined between MOP1,500 and MOP20,000.

Renting out a unit on an hourly basis for mahjong games would be considered operating for profit without legal approval.

According to the proposed bill, individuals involved in or facilitating unauthorized online games of chance, regardless of the location of the equipment, may face imprisonment ranging from one to eight years. Additionally, the bill includes a provision for a prison sentence of one to five years for those seeking financial gain by providing funds or resources for gambling activities.

Also, the provisions around chip alteration in Macau's new law on illegal gaming are still being examined closely by the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly as legislators raise questions about them.

TOBACCO CONTROL LAW

SSM CRACKS DOWN ON OVER 1,000 VIOLATIONS IN FIRST QUARTER

STAFF REPORTER

THE Health Bureau (SSM) prosecuted 1,115 cases of tobacco control law violations during inspections of 68,469 establishments in the first three months of the year, the bureau has reported.

SSM law enforcement officers conducted an average of 752 inspections per day in the first quarter, according to an SSM statement.

The inspections found 1,066 cases of illegal smoking, 37 cases involving e-cigarettes brought into or out of the country, and eight cases that did not comply with tobacco sales regulations.

There were also three cases of tobacco products sold without stipulated labels and one case where less than 20 cigarettes were sold in an individual package.

Restaurants saw the most violations with 148 cases, representing 13.3% of the total.

Airports had 128 cases, or 11.5%,



while entertainment venues accounted for 125 violations, or 11.2%.

The Health Bureau and Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau conducted 142 casino inspections across Macau, finding 125 illegal smoking cases.

While there were no alcohol law prosecution cases in the first quarter, 2,808 establishments received 2,830 improvement instructions. Those instructions included 1,070 warnings about alcoholic beverage advertising, 431 zoning signs, and 1,116 labels ad-

ressing alcohol concentration.

The Health Bureau's Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office hotline received 469 calls during the period, with 309 inquiries, 155 complaints and 41 opinions.

Officials identified 108 illegal smoking "black spots" after evaluating complaints in March. Additional inspections at those locations uncovered 156 violations.

Law enforcement also increased game console center and internet cafe checks.

XPENG Motors expands into Hong Kong and Macau

STAFF REPORTER

XPENG Motors, a Chinese smart electric vehicle (EV) company, has announced a partnership with Sime Darby Motors in Hong Kong to expand its presence in the market. The partnership will involve branded showrooms, after-sales support, and guidance for consumers throughout the buying process.

The company plans to introduce its focus models, including the G6 SUV and X9 flagship seven-seater MPV, to the Hong Kong market mid-May. In addition to Hong Kong, XPENG is also set to enter the Macau market with partner Xin Kang Heng Holding Ltd.

XPENG is a global smart electric vehicle company founded in 2014 in Guan-

gzhou, China, developing clean, intuitive and creative mobility solutions. With R&D facilities, XPENG brings vehicles with electrical efficiency and on-road performance to markets around the globe.

"Today is a major milestone in XPENG Motors' overseas strategy. With our brand's advanced smart electric vehicle and leading technology, we are committed to providing car owners with smarter travel solutions, as well as an environmentally friendly driving experience," said Brian Gu, vice-chairman and president of XPENG.

"Coupled with Sime Darby Motors' years of sales experience in the Hong Kong automotive market, we are excited to bring the premium XPENG experience to Hong Kong," he said.

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Chamber: Northern District firms see revenue upturns amid consumption promos

STAFF REPORTER

CONSUMER consumption in the Northern District has seen an upturn in revenue following the launch of the government's consumption program for the district amid challenges faced by business firms in the area.

Speaking at the TDM radio phone show, Fong Kin Fu, director of the Federal General Commercial Association of Macau Small and Medium Enterprise, highlighted the growing popularity of going to the district and the changing spending habits of tourists.

The government's consumption carnival has been beneficial for Northern District merchants, with approximately 1,000 participants by the third week. The rewards are primarily used for catering consumption.

The association then hopes for the introduction of more promotion routes and strategies, building on the success of the government's campaign.

Last month, the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) has announced that it is launching a "Consumption Carnival" from March 18 in Macau's Northern District, aiming to boost consumption in that part of the city.

The carnival will run for 20 weeks until August 4.

Recently, chambers have no-



ted that rising rent costs combined with diminishing customer numbers are putting intense pressure on businesses outside tourist areas.

During the most recent holiday, the Easter holiday, businesses in Macau's residential neighborhoods sat quietly over the recent Easter holiday, illustrating that more Macau local residents are choosing to spend their money across the border in mainland China, while visitors remain exclusively in the city's tourist areas.

While the Macau government

has launched initiatives to boost tourism in residential areas, installing attractions in the Northern District and collaborating with casinos to revitalize places like Barra, these measures have yet to significantly impact the tourism situation and merchants are saying it is not enough.

Meanwhile, citizens from Macau have been venturing to cities within the Greater Bay Area for consumption, particularly during extended holidays and weekends.

A listener of the radio show reported that while they support

local consumption, the prices are high and the quality may not be as good as in the mainland.

They cite how the prices of many small and medium-sized enterprises in Macau are more than double the price of the same products than in the mainland, but the quality of the products is not as good as others.

"I would like to support local consumption, especially in Taipei, but the prices have increased and the portion is so small that it makes me a little disgusted," said one radio phone-in caller.

THREE WOMEN HOSPITALIZED AFTER SUSPECTED DRUG OVERDOSES

Three local women were hospitalized early yesterday morning following suspected drug overdoses, police said. Reports of dizzy women came in between 1 a.m. and 7 a.m. from homes on Av. do Conselheiro Borja and R. Sul do Patane, according to authorities. Police officers and firefighters responded to find the women, aged 18 to 36, in need of medical assistance. Two showed signs of excessive sleeping pill consumption while another was suspected of an overdose of psychiatric medication, officials said. All three were transported to Conde S. Januario for treatment. The specific drugs and causes remain under investigation, police noted.

42ND MACAU YOUNG MUSICIANS COMPETITION REGISTRATION OPENS

Registration for the 42nd Macau Young Musicians Competition, organized by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), opens April 26 and closes May 6, according to organizers. Eligible Macau residents can register online for Chinese or Western instruments categories or vocal categories using their "Macau One Account" username and password on the competition website. Some changes have been made to this edition, including dividing the "Chinese Instrumental Ensemble" category into "Guzheng Ensemble" and "Chinese Instrumental Ensemble."

GBA

New cross-border hospital scheme extended

STAFF REPORTER

THE Hong Kong government is launching a pilot cross-border ambulance transfer service to move patients from mainland China and Macau hospitals for treatment in Hong Kong.

In a change from the original plan, the service will now extend medical care to non-residents in Hong Kong, as cited in a South China Morning Post report.

Lo Chung-mau, the health secretary, was speaking as the pilot scheme prepared to launch, probably by the end



of the month or early May.

Lo said the present arrangements were "far from satisfactory" because they raised

concerns about safety and quality of patient care.

The new scheme aims to provide medical services

that may be unavailable in neighboring cities.

It is expected to start in the next few weeks and will

run for a year. The University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital and Conde de São Januario in Macau will be the first hospitals to send patients to Hong Kong.

"The direct cross-border ambulance arrangement would not only be limited to Hongkongers," he said after an antechamber exchange session with members of the Legislative Council.

"We should consider the requirements of anyone with medical needs, even those who are not Hong Kong residents."

Lo said some patients in

Macau have already been referred to Hong Kong healthcare centers for medical services.

"Hong Kong has quality medical services – if we have the capacity in certain areas, we will help neighboring cities and their residents," he pledged.

"I don't see the need for ruling out this possibility."

The criteria for transferring patients include clinical conditions requiring cross-border treatment, no additional risks to patients, and ineligibility for other types of cross-border transport.

The government is working to ensure the legality of vehicles, medical personnel, equipment, and medicines used in the transfer process.

HEALTH

COMPANY THAT MADE MILLIONS OF DEFECTIVE SLEEP APNEA MACHINES ORDERED TO OVERHAUL MANUFACTURING

MATTHEW PERRONE,
WASHINGTON

THE company responsible for a global recall of sleep apnea machines will be barred from resuming production at U.S. facilities until it meets a number of safety requirements, under a long-awaited settlement announced yesterday [Macau time] by federal officials.

Philips will be required to overhaul its manufacturing and quality control systems and hire independent experts to vet the changes, according to a court order announced by the U.S. Department of Justice. The company must also continue to replace, repair or provide refunds to all U.S. customers who got the defective devices, the department said.

The action is a major step toward resolving one of the biggest medical device recalls in history, which has dragged on for nearly three years.

Most of the devices recalled are continuous positive airway pressure, or CPAP, machines. They force air through a mask to keep mouth and nasal passageways open during sleep. Left untreated, sleep apnea can lead to dangerous drowsiness and increased risk of heart attack.

Philips has recalled more than 5 million of the machines since 2021 because their internal foam can break down over time, leading users to inhale tiny particles and fumes while they sleep. Efforts to repair or replace the machines have been plagued by

AP PHOTO



Jeffrey Reed, who experienced persistent sinus infections and two bouts of pneumonia while using a Philips CPAP machine

delays that have frustrated regulators and patients in the U.S. and other countries.

Lawyers for the federal government alleged that the company failed to comply with good manufacturing practices needed to ensure device safety. The company did not admit to the allegations, according to the court filing.

"This office, the FDA and our partner agencies are committed to holding manufacturers accountable when they violate the law and put the public at risk," U.S. Attorney Eric Olshan said in a statement.

Under the legal agreement, Philips must hire independent

auditors to create a plan for fixing its manufacturing problems and for monitoring problems with the sleep devices. The plan must then be approved by the Food and Drug Administration. The experts must also certify that new foam selected by the company meets FDA safety standards.

Jeffrey Reed, of Marysville, Ohio, experienced persistent sinus infections and two bouts of pneumonia during the seven years he used a Philips machine.

"I worry about my long-term health," Reed said. "I used this machine for years and no matter what money I might get out of this, what's going to happen?"

Reed received a newer Philips

device after returning his old machine, but he doesn't like to use it, preferring a competitor's device.

"I don't trust the company," Reed said. "I don't want to use it."

Reed is one of more than 750 people who have filed personal injury lawsuits against the company over the devices. Those cases have been consolidated in a federal court in Pennsylvania.

Similar lawsuits are pending in Canada, Australia, Israel and Chile, according to the company.

The Dutch manufacturer announced in January it had reached a tentative agreement with the FDA and the Department of Justice. But U.S. regulators wouldn't confirm the deal at the time

because it had not yet been reviewed by a federal judge.

A company spokesman said Tuesday the agreement provides "a roadmap of defined actions, milestones, and deliverables to meet relevant regulatory requirements," in an emailed statement. He noted that Philips will still be able to export some machines for sale outside the U.S.

The FDA's website warns patients that the risks of ingesting the sound-dampening foam could include headache, asthma, allergic reactions and more serious problems.

An FDA inspection of Philips' Pennsylvania offices in the fall of 2021 uncovered a spate of red flags, including emails suggesting the company was warned of the problem with its foam six years before the recall.

Between 2016 and early 2021, FDA found 14 instances where Philips was made aware of the issue or was analyzing the problem. "No further design change, corrective action or field correction was conducted," the FDA inspectors repeatedly noted.

In 2022, the FDA took the rare step of ordering Philips to step up its outreach to customers about the recall including "clearer information about the health risks of its products." At the time, the agency estimated only about half the people in the U.S. with affected machines knew they had been recalled.

Customers trying to obtain refunds or new or refurbished devices from the company have reported long delays. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

MGM donates HKD3 million to revitalize historic sites in Jiangxi



MGM has donated HKD3 million to restore seven historical buildings within Shankou town in Xiushui County, Jiangxi Province, supporting rural revitalization efforts.

The donation through the Macau SAR Government

and the Liaison Office aims to reinvigorate Shankou as a tourist destination that showcases local histories and cultures.

An agreement signed in March will see the restoration focus on sites like Hongwei

Market, Shankou Chamber of Commerce, and traditional shops.

The funds will cover interior design, materials, and exterior refurbishment to further uplift the historical and cultural allure of Shankou, recognized as a provincial and national historical town.

"This time, we draw on our industry strength, helping the local government transform Shankou's red tourism resources and traditional culture into an appealing tourist destination. By lending our practical support, we strive to deepen the cooperation in cultural tourism between Jiangxi Province and Macau," said Pansy Ho, chairman and executive director of MGM China.

Mobile book houses launched at Melco Properties



The Macau Federation of Trade Unions (MFTU) and Melco Resorts & Entertainment collaboratively launched the Melco Colleagues' Book House initiative, marking the first time a mo-

bile book house has been established within an integrated resort.

MFTU president Ho Sut Heng said the book houses aim to promote reading habits.

"With Melco having more than 16,000 employees, we believe that through this cooperation, more employees in Macau will participate in reading activities and form a habit of reading," said Ho.

Meanwhile, Melco chairman and CEO Lawrence Ho said in his speech that Melco is pleased to be the first integrated resort operator in Macau to jointly organize a mobile book house with the MFTU "to meet colleagues' needs for self-improvement and national education."

The book houses located at Melco properties offer various books on literature, history and the development of China.

Xi meets former Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou on pro-unification visit

CHINESE President Xi Jinping met with former Taiwanese leader Ma Ying-jeou in Beijing yesterday in a bid to promote unification between the sides that separated amid civil war in 1949.

Ma left office almost two decades ago and was largely excluded from the opposition Nationalist Party's failed campaign to retake the post in January, a concession to the electorate's strong opposition to political unification with China and politicians seen as willing to compromise Taiwan's security.

He follows a long line of politicians from the Nationalists, also known as the KMT, who have been invited to China by its one-party government and given VIP treatment on visits around the country.

China claims Taiwan as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary. Beijing sends navy ships and warplanes around the island on a daily basis in hopes of wearing down Taiwan's defenses and intimidating the population.

"The people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are all Chinese. There is no dispute



Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, meets with KMT's Ma Ying-jeou in Beijing

that cannot be resolved, there is no problem that cannot be discussed, and no force can separate us," Xi told Ma.

"Differences in systems cannot change the fact that both sides of the Taiwan Straits belong to the same country and nation," he added.

Ma responded that a new war between the sides would be "an unbearable burden for the Chinese nation."

"The Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait will definitely have enough wisdom to handle cross-Strait disputes peacefully and avoid conflicts," Ma said.

Independence leaning new leader Lai Ching-te of the

Democratic Progressive Party won the January election handily and his deputy Bi-khim Hsiao has been visiting nations friendly to Taiwan in Europe and elsewhere ahead of taking office.

Ma's 11-day trip, ostensibly at the head of a student delegation, underlines continued interactions in education, business and culture despite Beijing's threat to use military force against the self-governing island democracy to achieve unification.

Toward the end of his second term in 2015, Ma held a historic meeting with Xi in Singapore, which has close contacts with both sides. The meeting — the first be-

tween the leaders of China and Taiwan in more than half a century — produced few tangible outcomes, and Ma's Nationalist Party lost the following election to Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP.

Lai Ching-te, currently Tsai's deputy, is despised by Beijing for his opposition to unification. The Nationalists recovered a narrow majority in the legislature but their influence on foreign policy and other national issues remains limited.

Taiwan has been boosting military relations with allies such as the U.S. and Japan while maintaining close economic ties with the Chinese mainland. **MDT/AP**

CHINA RANKS SECOND FOR NEW UNICORNS IN 2023

LED mainly by artificial intelligence, semiconductors and new energy, China developed 56 new unicorns in 2023, following the United States' 70 such firms, according to a global unicorn index released this week, according to China Daily.

The world has minted one unicorn — privately held startups with valuations of \$1 billion or more — every two days over the past year to take the total of known unicorns in the world to a new record, according to the index, which was released by the Hurun

Research Institute in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province.

Since 2019, the number of unicorns has tripled from 494 to 1,453. They are based in 53 countries and 291 cities, ushering in an explosion of new technologies to the market, according to the index.

The index was released during the Guangzhou Annual Investment Conference held earlier this week. The conference, which focused on promoting the city's business and investment environment, attracted more than 1,000 government officials and bu-

siness representatives from 18 countries and regions.

Additionally, a large number of domestic and foreign investment projects were signed during the conference.

In the city's Huadu district, 45 new investment projects worth 75 billion yuan (\$10.37 billion) were inked, involving industries such as low-altitude economy, modern logistics, vehicles, intelligent manufacturing, new energy and digital economy.

Of the projects, 10 are involved in the low-altitude economy,



An aerial view of Canton Tower in Guangzhou

as Huadu, in the northern part of Guangzhou, has been promoting strategic and geographical positions in emerging industries.

Guangzhou, along with Hefei of Anhui province, Hangzhou of Zhejiang province as well as Jiangsu province's Suzhou and Nanjing, have become the

fastest-growing cities in China in terms of new unicorns.

Guangzhou has 24 unicorns — almost equal to that of Israel or Canada. In the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the number of unicorns now stands at 70, according to the Hurun report.

FISCAL OUTLOOK

China says economy 'stable,' rejects Fitch Ratings downgrade

CHINA'S Finance Ministry denounced a report by Fitch Ratings that kept its sovereign debt rated at A+ but downgraded its outlook to negative, saying yesterday that China's deficit is at a moderate and reasonable level and risks are under control.

Risks to China's public finances are rising, Fitch said, as Beijing works to resolve mounting local and regional government debts and to shift away from heavy reliance on its troubled property industry to drive economic growth.

But while slower growth is adding to the challenges of coping with heavy borrowing, Fitch said it kept China's A+ rating due to its "large and diversified economy," its vital role in global trade and its huge foreign exchange reserves.

The Finance Ministry said it was a "pity" that Fitch had downgraded its sovereign debt and faulted its methods, saying it had failed to take into account Beijing's moves toward "appropriately intensifying, improving quality and efficiency" of its government spending.

"In the long run, maintaining a moderate deficit and making good use of precious debt funds will help expand domestic demand, support economic growth, and ultimately help maintain good sovereign credit," the ministry said.

"Overall, our country's local government debt resolution work is progressing in an orderly manner and risks are generally controllable," it said.

Fitch's report noted that China's general government deficit was forecast to rise this year to 7.1% of its GDP, up from 5.8% in 2023. The median for countries with an "A" rating is 3.0%, it said. China's average deficit to GDP ratio averaged 3.1% in 2015-2019 but jumped to 8.6% in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tax relief measures and weaker property investments, which are usually a main source of local tax revenue, have eroded the government's capacity to collect tax revenues to offset higher spending, the report said.

Fitch forecasts that China's economy will expand at a 4.5% annual rate this year, down from 5.2% last year, due to the downturn in the property sector and lackluster consumer spending, though it said higher government spending is likely to help make up for some of that weakness.

While the government has moved to support some property developers struggling to repay their debts after a crackdown on excessive borrowing, analysts have warned that the financial troubles are now rippling across construction companies and other industries linked to real estate.

Another ratings agency, Moody's, downgraded China's credit rating outlook in December, ING economists noted in a report yesterday.

Fitch's move reflects the dilemma all policymakers face, it said.

"Failing to restore growth and confidence would weaken the GDP side of the debt to GDP equation, and could have an equally harmful impact on long-term debt sustainability," it said. **MDT/AP**

BRIEFS

GUANGZHOU'S FORMULA 1 ASPIRATION

Guangzhou is set to make a significant leap in the motorsports arena with the unveiling of plans for a new Formula 1 racetrack. Destined to become the second F1 circuit in China, following Shanghai's lead, this Guangzhou track aims to cater to the high-speed thrills of F1 racing. The announcement is part of Guangdong Province's ambitious 2024 construction project, with the racetrack featuring as a jewel in a comprehensive racing sports park. Although the construction timeline remains under wraps, the project's ambitious 20 billion yuan budget underlines its scale and potential impact on the city's international sporting stature. This move is not just about sports; it's a strategic play towards enhancing Guangzhou's global image and economic

RECORD-BREAKING TRAFFIC AT THE DELTA BRIDGE

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the world's longest bridge-and-tunnel sea crossing, has recently set new records for daily vehicle traffic. Surging to unprecedented levels, the bridge saw over 1 million passengers and 170,000 vehicles in a span of ten days, underscoring its vital role in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area's connectivity. This increase in traffic, particularly from Hong Kong and Macau, signifies the bridge's growing importance in facilitating economic opportunities and fostering closer ties within the region. Families from these areas were the driving force behind the surge in traffic.



CHINA'S TOURISM SPENDING SURGE

Chinese tourists have surpassed pre-pandemic levels of holiday spending. Over recent Qing Ming three-day break, travelers spent 54 billion yuan across 119 million trips, showcasing a growing confidence in domestic travel and expenditure. That works out to some 453 yuan per trip, up 1.1% from 2019. Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Citigroup Inc. said this marks the first time that per-trip holiday spending has topped pre-pandemic levels. As China navigates post-pandemic recovery, the increase in service expenditure points towards a robust resurgence in household consumption, offering a glimpse of optimism for the nation's financial future, the analysts said.



HONG KONG SHOPPERS FLOCKING NORTH

REPORTING BY ZHANG
TIANYUAN & ZHOU MO

BIANCA Lau travels from Hong Kong to Shenzhen in neighboring Guangdong province every two weeks, which she says has become a "fixed schedule" in her life.

She normally goes with two friends, has lunch at a restaurant in downtown Futian district, buys some food and daily necessities from a supermarket, and enjoys a leisurely afternoon tea before heading back to Hong Kong in the evening.

"I don't feel that I am traveling to another city. It only takes about an hour to get to Shenzhen," said Lau, who lives in Sha Tin, in Hong Kong's New Territories. A rich variety of products, reasonable prices and a different shopping experience are the biggest draws for the 36-year-old legal worker to "head north".

"Better cross-boundary transport and payment have also made the trip more pleasant," she said.

Since the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland early last year, there has been a growing number of Hong Kong residents flocking to Shenzhen to dine, shop and enjoy the entertainment on offer. According to Hong Kong's Immigration Department, the city's residents made more than 53 million trips to the Chinese mainland last year.

VALUE FOR MONEY

The ongoing wave reflects how integration between Hong Kong and Shenzhen is gathering pace, boosted by policy support and improved infrastructure. The appreciation of the Hong Kong dollar against the renminbi over the

past year has also boosted Hong Kong residents' spending power on the mainland.

"Many Hong Kong residents hadn't been to the Chinese mainland for years due to the pandemic. So now they are flocking to Shenzhen for 'revenge shopping' to make up for the time lost," said Chong Tai-leung, associate professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Department of Economics.

"It's no longer confined to just one or two people going to Shenzhen each weekend. Whole families are going there together. This structural shift will continue to gain momentum," he said.

Travel has become easy and convenient as the cross-border transportation network has improved greatly in recent years, with the "one-hour living circle" taking shape in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles program, which came into effect last July, also enables eligible Hong Kong private cars to travel to Guangdong via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. Official statistics show that as of March 9, more than 500,000 cross-border trips had been made. The figure for February alone reached over 100,000.

Businesses in Shenzhen are adjusting their strategies and stepping up marketing campaigns to seize the opportunities arising from the influx of Hong Kong residents.

"The most significant trend is that the proportion of catering outlets — especially those in the Chinese specialty cuisine and new-style tea drinks subsectors — in a mall's tenant mix, has increased significantly to meet the growing dining demand from



Customers take photos while dining at the night market in Yantian, S

Hong Kong consumers," said Zhang Xiaoduan, deputy dean of Cushman & Wakefield Research Institute.

"This is particularly noticeable in midrange malls near the checkpoints and transit hubs, such as Link CentralWalk and Wongtee Plaza (Futian district)."

The expansion of direct warehouse shopping and grocery chains like Sam's Club, Hema and Costco in Shenzhen has also accelerated, partly to better satisfy the "buy-in-bulk" needs of Hong Kong consumers who travel north to shop every one or two weeks, Zhang said.

Chen Wenhui, retail head of advisory and transaction services at CBRE Southern China, said Hong Kong consumers mainly get information on the Shenzhen retail market from social media platforms like Xiaohongshu.

"The consumption boom has enabled Shenzhen merchants to understand the consumption characteristics of Hong Kong residents, which will boost the confidence of mainland brands in

opening up new stores in the SAR," said Chen.

The closer interaction between the two cities, both online and offline, also allows Hong Kong consumers to gain a deeper understanding of the mainland's economic and cultural environment, helping Hong Kong better integrate into the country's overall development, he added.

TRENDY TRAVEL

According to a survey conducted in February by the Hong Kong Research Association, 25 percent of respondents said they spent on average 1,000 yuan (\$141) or more every day when they visited the Chinese mainland in the past year.

While 33 percent said they would reduce spending in Hong Kong as a result, 34 percent said they would not, said the survey, which was based on interviews with 1,007 city residents aged 18 or above.

A Hong Kong media professional surnamed Mok said he spends two or three days in Shenzhen every month for

CULINARY DIPLOMACY

The internet is obsessed with what Janet Yellen eats in China

TRAVELOG

EVER since she ate Emushrooms that can have psychedelic effects in Beijing last July, Janet Yellen has united Americans and Chinese in wanting to know what she will eat next.

And now that the U.S. Treasury secretary was back in China this week, having stopped in Guangzhou and

Beijing, many people are less interested in her travels to rebuild relations between the world's two biggest economies, and more fascinated with what she'll eat next and where.

The use of her chopsticks at a restaurant in Guangzhou has been a particular observation.

A social media account run by Chinese state me-

dia posted a catchy video of Yellen on her first night in China, eating with the U.S. ambassador and other officials at Tao Tao Ju, a Guangzhou restaurant that dates to 1880.

The post, one of the most viewed on the Weibo microblog app the next morning, praised Yellen for holding chopsticks well but added, "as a U.S. official, Yellen

needs to know more about China than just food. Only by knowing more about China can we set right the American view of the world, of China, of China-U.S. relations."

And during a meeting last Sunday with Dean of Peking University, Huang Yiping, he joked that China has been watching the news of her arrival as well as her dining, to

ORTH FOR BARGAINS, FUN AND FOOD



Shenzhen, Guangdong province

social gatherings and to enjoy gaming.

"I went there for indoor go-karting with a friend at a shopping mall in Longgang district last week," Mok said.

"It cost 256 yuan for unlimited access for the whole day to all the facilities in the sprawling play area, including go-cart racing, bowling and ice-skating. In Hong Kong, a similar go-kart experience would cost about HK\$210 (\$26.80) for only eight minutes."

While "heading north" for shopping and recreation has become trendy, the reverse is also happening, official statistics show. Mainland visitors accounted for nearly 80 percent of Hong Kong's inbound tourists last year, according to data from the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

Of around 34 million visitors to the city in 2023, approximately 26.5 million were from the mainland.

On the business side, more than 40 catering enterprises from the Chinese mainland had completed or were having trademark registration

processed in Hong Kong last year.

Industry insiders and experts said that Hong Kong should introduce more favorable travel measures, upgrade its tourist attractions and develop its cultural identity to woo more mainland tourists.

Hong Kong, famed as a shopping paradise, has lived off its past for a long time, said Edward Lau Kwokfan, a member of Hong Kong's Legislative Council.

The city should rethink how to consolidate its policy, position and resources advantages, and explore setting up more tourist hot spots to offer different experiences to visitors, he said.

MAINLAND TOURISTS

During this year's two sessions — the annual meetings of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, the country's top political advisory body — improving Hong Kong's tourism industry featured in discussions.

National legislators and political advisers from Hong Kong focused on how to attract more mainland tourists to the city with some calling for an increase in the duty-free shopping limit and an expansion of multiple-entry visas for mainland visitors.

The duty-free shopping limit for mainland tourists visiting Hong Kong currently stands at 5,000 yuan.

Henry Tang Ying-yen, a member of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC National Committee, said he hoped the cap could be raised to 30,000 yuan, saying this would boost the Hong Kong tourism industry and drive growth in other sectors including catering, hospita-

lity and retail.

The multiple-entry visa program for Shenzhen residents should also be restored and extended to other cities in the Greater Bay Area, he said.

Dennis Lam Shun-chiu, a Hong Kong deputy to the NPC, urged greater efforts be made to stimulate spending in Hong Kong by mainland residents.

Shopping expenditure of mainland visitors to Hong Kong hit a record HK\$89.5 billion in the first half of 2014. However, it dropped to HK\$24.5 billion in the same period of 2023, down over 70 percent.

Lam believes that extending the operating hours of Shenzhen-Hong Kong checkpoints and improving customs clearance efficiency will provide more convenience for travelers and increase their willingness to visit Hong Kong.

The operating hours of Futian and Luohu checkpoints could be extended to midnight, and to 3 am on weekends and holidays, he said. Lam also suggested that Shenzhen Bay and Liantang checkpoints operate 24 hours a day, and for this arrangement to be gradually expanded to other checkpoints. At the moment, Huanggang checkpoint is the only land crossing between Shenzhen and Hong Kong that is open 24 hours a day.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Allan Zeman, dubbed the "King of Lan Kwai Fong" — the city's famed nightlife district — said Hong Kong needs to nurture a unique cultural identity to draw tourists. Mainland visitors are no longer as enthralled by Hong Kong shopping malls as they were in the past, Zeman said. "Any type of shopping mall we see in Hong Kong can also

be seen in every city on the mainland," he said.

Zeman said Lan Kwai Fong's success had been partly driven by the influx of young mainland tourists keen to "experience something different", be it flipping through English-language menus and viewing the "exotic" cuisine or trying to pronounce the names of cocktails. "Mainland tourists spent much more before the pandemic," he added.

Hong Kong tourism could benefit from organizing more "world-class "night bazaars, he said.

"Inspired by the likes of Singapore and Taiwan, let's ensure we do it with the utmost excellence. Our goal should be to create an impactful experience, setting it apart from ordinary markets," Zeman said.

Restaurants should offer customers more alfresco dining options, he said, adding this is a crucial element that contributes to a city's cultural atmosphere.

From a global perspective, collaboration with other cities in the GBA is essential for Hong Kong to develop into an international tourism hub, by giving full play to the comparative strengths of each metropolis in the 11-city cluster.

The city's acting secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Raistlin Lau, said the Hong Kong Tourism Board will continue to strengthen cooperation with Macao and other GBA cities to participate in overseas promotions.

It will also collaborate to "develop and promote multi-destination themed itineraries and tourism products that cater for the different interests and preferences of visitors with a view to attracting more overseas visitors to Hong Kong", he added. **MDT/CHINA DAILY**

WORK IN PROGRESS

NOTES ON ACADEMIC RESEARCH

China's auto industry: regimes of production and industrial policy in the age of electric cars

Dan Wu and Wei Zhao

International Journal of Automotive Technology and Management (2023)

This article discusses China's industrial and labour policy for the automotive industry facing the transition to the era of new energy vehicles. A conceptual framework on the regimes of production is employed to analyse the present transformation of industry structures in production models and labour markets. The growth of private-capitalist regimes of high-performance, low wages, and high profit incentives for workers is identified, which can be described as the 'Foxconnisation' of the industry, and it is at the expense of the corporate-bureaucratic regimes prevalent among the leading Sino-foreign joint ventures. As production networks become vertically disintegrated, some non-traditional industrial players are highlighted in the discussion of some recent developments in the industry during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The profound transformation in the regimes of production brought about social contradictions related to the production process, and new challenges and implications for workplace policies. The empirical study of this article confirms the necessity of trade union strategies inside China from an international perspective in order to ensure social standards and a more sustainable green transformation of the industry. **FROM THE ABSTRACT**

Internationalization of higher education research in the Greater Bay Area of China: Building capacities, alleviating asymmetries

Anatoly V. Oleksiyenko, Jie Liu, Christy Ngan
Higher Education Quarterly (2024)

Internationalization is known to enhance university capacities in cross-border learning and encourage institutional transformations for improved quality of scholarship and education. Studies on internationalization of research and teaching are, however, under-problematised with regard to asymmetries that pervade different collaborating systems and cultures. This paper addresses this gap by elucidating asymmetries in the Greater Bay Area of China (GBA), which is dealing with differences in legacies and experiences of internationalization in university research and teaching. At a time when the governments in the three constituent jurisdictions of GBA—Guangdong Province, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), and Macao SAR—encourage universities to collaborate across jurisdictional borders, this study applies a bibliographic analysis to shed light on asymmetries and mitigation strategies in internationalization of research and teaching. **FROM THE ABSTRACT**

which Yellen interjected: "My chopstick skills!"

In the U.S., Yellen also often stops for fast food and at local eateries during domestic trips ahead of events to promote Biden administration policies like the Democrats' Inflation Reduction Act and the infrastructure law, and becomes the news.

A stop last November at In-N-Out burger in San Francisco before heading to the airport to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting also

became a viral moment.

In China, her very first viral moment happened when she unknowingly ate mushrooms than can become psychedelic when cooked improperly at a Yunnan restaurant called Yi Zuo Yi Wang during her first trip as Treasury secretary last July. Mushroom-gate went viral across the internet and the restaurant has since dedicated a part of its menu to Yellen's visit, where diners can order what she ate.

She told CNN at the time, "There was a delicious

mushroom dish. I was not aware that these mushrooms had hallucinogenic properties. I learned that later."

In China for a second time this week, Yellen is hoping to make headway on the issue of what she calls Chinese overproduction of solar products, electric vehicles and lithium-ion batteries that she warns threaten global economic stability if left unchecked.

And this time around in Beijing, Yellen ate at Lao Chuan Ban, a popular Sichuan restaurant. She also



had lunch with Beijing Mayor Yin Yong at the Beijing International Hotel.

On Monday evening, her

last night in China, Yellen visited Jing-A Brewing Co. in Beijing — co-founded by an American — where she or-

dered a Flying Fist IPA, a beer made with American hops.

She took a sip and called it "excellent." **MDT/AP**

SOUTH KOREA

EXIT POLLS SUGGEST BIG WIN BY LIBERAL OPPOSITION PARTIES IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

INITIAL exit polls suggested South Korea's liberal opposition parties are expected to win a landslide victory in yesterday's parliamentary election.

The joint exit polls by South Korea's three major TV stations – KBS, MBC and SBS – show the main opposition Democratic Party and its satellite party were forecast to win combined 183-197 seats in the 300-member National Assembly.

The polls suggested the ruling People Power Party and its satellite party were projected to win 85-100 seats.

The predictions, if confirmed, would deal a massive blow to conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol and make him a lame duck for his remaining three years in office.

In the months ahead of the election, the conservatives supporting Yoon and their liberal rivals exchanged toxic rhetoric and mudslinging. Regardless of the results, Yoon will stay in power, but if his People Power Party fails to regain a parliamentary majority it could set back Yoon's agenda and further intensify conservative-liberal fighting.

Since taking office in 2022 for a single five-year term, Yoon, a former top prosecutor, has been grappling with low approval ratings and a liberal opposition-controlled parliament that has limited his major policy platforms.



Voters wearing traditional attire pose for a photo as they vote for the parliamentary election at a polling station in Nonsan yesterday

Pre-election surveys indicate that the liberal opposition parties are well placed to maintain or boost their control of the single-chamber, 300-member National Assembly. But observers said that there's room for an upset as many districts were being closely fought and many moderate voters would make last-minute choices.

"What would matter to the People Power Party is whether it can become the biggest party or the second biggest party," said Choi Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership. "If his party loses the election, Yoon will find it difficult to move forward even a single step

on state affairs."

Of the 300 seats, 254 will be elected through direct votes in local districts, and the other 46 to the parties according to their proportion of the vote. Election observers say candidates in about 50 to 55 local districts are in neck-and-neck races.

Polling stations opened at 6 a.m. and will close at 6 p.m. As of 2 p.m. (0500 GMT), about 25 million people, or 56% of South Korea's 44 million eligible voters, had cast ballots, according to the National Election Commission. That figure includes about 14 million people who cast ballots during two days of early voting last week, the hi-

ghest turnout of its kind in the history of South Korean parliamentary elections.

South Korea's conservative-liberal division deepened during the 2022 presidential election, during which Yoon and his main rival Lee Jae-myung spent months demonizing each other. Yoon eventually beat Lee by the narrowest margin ever for a Korean presidential candidate.

Lee, now the chairman of the opposition Democratic Party, is a harsh critic of Yoon's policies and is eyeing another presidential bid. He faces an array of corruption investigations that he argues are politically motivated and pushed

by Yoon's government.

There was a brief soul-searching about South Korea's divisive politics after Lee was stabbed in the neck in January by a man who, according to police, tried to kill Lee to prevent him from becoming president. But as the parliamentary election approached, the rival parties began churning out abusive rhetoric and crude insults against each other.

Ruling party leader Han Dong-hoon called Lee "a criminal" and labeled his past comments as "trash." Lee's party spokesperson described Han's mouth as a "trash bin." Han accused Lee of using a sexist remark against a female ruling party candidate.

During one of his final campaign events on Tuesday, Han argued that giving too many seats to Lee's Democratic Party will throw South Korea into political turmoil. "Tomorrow's 12 hours will determine whether the Republic of Korea will plunge into shocking chaos and despair or overcome a crisis," Han said, using South Korea's official name.

Speaking ahead of his corruption trial at a Seoul court, Lee urged voters to punish the Yoon government, which he said has used prosecutors to suppress opponents. "I earnestly ask you to hand out your judgement on a government that betrays and goes against the people," Lee said.

Chung Jin-young, a former dean of the Graduate School of Pan-Pacific International Studies at Kyung Hee University, predicted that the opposition parties could win a combined 150-180 seats.

"That would cause a political deadlock for the Republic of Korea for the next three years, as both the ruling and opposition parties can't pursue things unilaterally and won't likely make terms with each other," Chung said. **MDT/AP**

INDONESIA

Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr, festivities marred by war in Gaza

MUSLIMS around the world celebrated the Eid al-Fitr holiday yesterday, marking the end of the Islamic holy month with family reunions, new clothes and sweet treats.

But the celebrations were overshadowed by the worsening humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and Israel's expected offensive in the city of Rafah despite efforts from its Western allies to halt the fighting after six months of war.

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, nearly three-quar-



Muslim men perform an Eid al-Fitr prayer marking the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan on a street in Jakarta, yesterday

ters of the population were traveling for the annual homecoming known locally as "mudik" that is always welcomed with excitement.

"Mudik is not just an annual ritual or tradition for us," said civil servant Ridho Alfian, who lives in the Jakarta area and was traveling to Lampung province

at the southern tip of Sumatra island. "This is a right moment to reconnect, like recharging energy that has been drained almost a year away from home."

Before the Eid al-Fitr holiday, markets teemed with shoppers buying clothes, shoes, cookies and sweets. People poured out of major cities to return to villages to celebrate the holiday with their loved ones. Flights were overbooked and anxious relatives weighed down with boxes of gifts formed long lines at bus and train stations for the journey.

For Arini Dewi, Eid al-Fitr is a day of victory from economic difficulties during Ramadan. "I'm happy in celebrating Eid holiday despite the surge of food prices," said the mother of two.

Former Vice President Jusuf Kalla was among Jakarta residents offering prayers at the Al Azhar mosque yard. "Let's celebrate Eid al-Fitr as a day

of victory from many difficulties... of course there are many social problems during fasting month of Ramadan, but we can overcome it with faith and piety," Kalla said.

On the eve of Eid al-Fitr, Jakarta residents set off firecrackers on streets that were mostly empty after city residents traveled home.

Yesterday morning, Muslims joined communal prayers shoulder-to-shoulder on the streets and inside mosques. Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia, was flooded with devotees offering morning prayers.

Preachers in their sermons called on people to pray for Muslims in Gaza who were suffering after six months of war. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN-US

Biden to honor Kishida, reflect on Japanese growing clout on international stage

AAMER MADHANI AND
ZEKE MILLER, WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT Joe Biden is set to host Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida for talks on the delicate security situation in the Pacific and a glitzy state dinner, honoring a leader who has proven to be one of Biden's strongest allies in the face of a string of international crises.

Kishida's official visit completes the administration's feting of the leaders of the Quad, the informal partnership between the U.S., Japan, Australia and India that the White House has focused on elevating since Biden took office. As Biden administration officials put it, they saved the most pivotal relationship for last.

The visit will mark the realization of Japan's transformation from regional player to that of global influencer — with senior Biden administration officials noting appreciatively there is little the U.S. does across the globe that Tokyo doesn't support. They pointed to Japan's eagerness to take a leading role in trying to bolster Ukraine against Russia's invasion or the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Biden and Kishida are also kindred spirits as politicians, both confronting difficult political headwinds on the home front while trying to navigate increasingly complicated problems on the global stage. Like Biden, Kishida has been dogged by low approval ratings for much of his tenure.

Biden's reelection effort has been shadowed by an American electorate anxious about inflation, unease among some Democrats over his handling of the Israel-Hamas war, and concerns about whether at 81 he's too old to serve another four years.

Kishida, meanwhile, is dealing with a Japanese economy that slipped to the world's fourth-largest after it contracted in the last quarter of 2023 and fell behind Germany. Polls in Japan show that support for Kishida, who was elected in 2021, has plunged as he deals with a political funds corruption scandal within his ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

"For President Biden, this is, of course, a chance to hi-

AP PHOTO



ghlight and cement progress in the relationship, the most important bilateral alliance in the Indo-Pacific. It's a chance to sustain urgency and momentum in this relationship," said Christopher Johnstone, a former national security official in the Biden administration who is now the Japan Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "For Kishida, it's a chance to showcase his ties to the U.S., to prop up support at home."

There are differences between the leaders. The visit comes after Biden announced last month that he opposes the planned sale of Pittsburgh-based U.S. Steel to Nippon Steel of Japan, exposing a marked rift in the partnership at the very moment the two leaders aim to reinforce it. Biden argued in announcing his opposition that the U.S. needs to "maintain strong American steel companies powered by American steelworkers."

Biden welcomed Kishida with a pomp-filled arrival ceremony on the White House South Lawn. The leaders will hold Oval Office talks and a joint press conference before the formal dinner, which will

include a post-meal performance by singer-songwriter Paul Simon, a favorite of both Kishida and first lady Jill Biden.

The Bidens hosted Kishida and his wife for dinner yesterday [Macau time], taking the couple for a dinner at Black-Salt, a seafood restaurant in a tony neighborhood in the nation's capital.

The couples also exchanged gifts. The Bidens presented Kishida with a three-legged table handmade by a Japanese American-owned company in Pennsylvania. The president also gave Kishida a custom-framed lithograph and a two-volume LP set autographed by Billy Joel. Jill Biden gave Yuko Kishida a soccer ball signed by the U.S. women's national team and the Japanese women's national team.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the leaders will announce plans to upgrade U.S.-Japan military relations, with both sides looking to tighten cooperation amid concerns about North Korea's nuclear program and China's increasing military assertiveness in the Pacific.

Kishida and Biden are also expected to confirm Japan's participation in NASA's Artemis moon program as well as its contribution of a moon rover developed by Toyota Motor Corp. and the inclusion of a Japanese astronaut in the mission. The rover, which comes at a roughly \$2 billion cost, would be the most expensive contribution to the mission by a non-U.S. partner to date.

The leaders are also expected to announce cyber initiatives and new educational partnerships, and Kishida is expected to take part in planting a cherry blossom tree on the National Mall, an administration official said.

Biden has heaped praise on Japan for its significant increase in defense spending and has tightened cooperation on economic and security matters throughout Kishida's tenure.

Japan was quick to step up in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, join the U.S. and other Western allies in mounting aggressive sanctions on Moscow, and Japanese automakers Mazda, Toyota and Nissan announced their withdrawal from Russia.

Tokyo has been one of the largest donors to Kyiv since Russia's invasion, and Japan has surged its defense spending amid concern about China's military assertiveness.

As part of its increased defense, Japan agreed to acquire U.S.-made Tomahawks and other long-range cruise missiles that can hit targets in China or North Korea under a more offensive security strategy. Japan, Britain and Italy also began a collaboration on a next-generation jet fighter project.

The stepping up of Japan on the global stage is viewed within the administration as a "fundamental validation of President Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy," according to a senior administration official who previewed the visit for reporters.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House, added that the visit will help the White House demonstrate that Japan, long seen as an important regional alliance, has morphed into "if not our most important global alliance, then among the most important." MDT/AP

TRANSGENDER INCLUSION?

World's major religions take varying stances on policies toward trans people

THE Vatican has issued a new document rejecting the concept of changing one's biological sex – a setback for transgender people who had hoped Pope Francis might be setting the stage for a more welcoming approach from the Catholic Church.

Around the world, major religions have diverse approaches to gender identity, and the inclusion or exclusion of transgender people. Some examples:

CHRISTIANITY

The Catholic Church's disapproving stance toward gender transition is shared by some other denominations. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention – the largest Protestant denomination in the United States – adopted a resolution in 2014 stating that "God's design was the creation of two distinct and complementary sexes, male and female." It asserts that gender identity "is determined by biological sex, not by one's self-perception"

However, numerous mainline Protestant denominations welcome trans people as members and as clergy. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America elected an openly transgender man as a bishop in 2021.

ISLAM

In Islam, there isn't a single central religious authority and policies can vary in different regions.

Abbas Shouman, secretary-general of Al-Azhar's Council of Senior Scholars in Cairo, said that "for us, ... sex conversion is completely rejected."

"It is God who has determined the ... sex of the fetus and intervening to change that is a change of God's creation, which is completely rejected," Shouman added.

In Iran, the Shiite theocracy's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a religious decree, or fatwa, decades ago, opening the way for official support for gender transition surgery.

HINDUISM

In Hindu society in South Asia, while traditional roles were and are still prescribed



for men and women, people of non-binary gender expression have been recognized for millennia and played important roles in holy texts. Third gender people have been revered throughout South Asian history with many rising to significant positions of power under Hindu and Muslim rulers. One survey in 2014 estimated that around 3 million third gender people live in India alone.

Sanskrit, the ancient language of Hindu scriptures, has the vocabulary to describe three genders – masculine, feminine and gender-neutral.

The most common group of third gender people in India are known as the "hijras." While some choose to undergo gender reassignment surgery, others are born intersex. Most consider themselves neither male or female.

Some Hindus believe third gender people have special powers and the ability to bless or curse, which has led to stereotyping causing the community to be feared and marginalized. Many live in poverty without proper access to healthcare, housing and employment.

In 2014, India, Nepal and Bangladesh, which is a Muslim-majority country, officially recognized third gender people as citizens deserving of equal rights. The Supreme Court of India stated that "it is the right of every human being to choose their gender," and that recognition of the group "is not a social or medical issue, but a human rights issue."

BUDDHISM

Buddhism has traditionally adhered to binary gender roles, particularly in its monastic traditions where men and women are segregated and assigned specific roles.

These beliefs remain strong in the Theravada tradition, as seen in the attempt of the Thai Sangha Council, the governing Buddhist body in Thailand, to ban ordinations of transgender people. More recently, the Theravada tradition has somewhat eased restrictions against gender nonconforming people by ordaining them in their sex recorded at birth.

However, the Mahayana, and Vajrayana schools of Buddhism have allowed more exceptions while the Jodo Shinshu sect has been even more inclusive in ordaining transgender monks both in Japan and North America. In Tibetan Buddhism, Tashi Choedup, an openly queer monk, was ordained after their teacher refrained from asking about their gender identity as prescribed by Buddhist doctrine. Many Buddhist denominations, particularly in the West, are intentionally inclusive of transgender people in their sanghas or gatherings.

JUDAISM

Reform Judaism is accepting of transgender people and allows for the ordination of trans rabbis. According to

David J. Meyer, who served for many years as a rabbi in Marblehead, Massachusetts, Jewish traditional wisdom allowed possibilities of gender identity and expression that differed from those typically associated with the sex assigned at birth.

"Our mystical texts, the Kabbalah, address the notion of transitioning from one gender to another," he wrote on a Reform-affiliated website.

It's different, for the most part, in Orthodox Judaism. "Most transgender people will find Orthodox communities extremely difficult to navigate," says the Human Rights Campaign, a major U.S. LGBTQ-rights advocacy group.

"Transgender people are further constrained by Orthodox Judaism's emphasis on binary gender and strict separation between men and women," the HRC says. "For example, a transgender person who has not medically transitioned poses a challenge for a rabbi who must decide whether that person will sit with men or women during worship."

Rabbi Avi Shafran, spokesman for the Orthodox Jewish organization Agudath Israel of America, wrote a blog post last year after appearing on an Israeli television panel to discuss transgender-related issues.

"There can be no denying that there are people who are deeply conflicted about their gender identities. They deserve to be safe from harm and, facing challenges the rest of us don't, deserve empathy and compassion," Shafran wrote. "But the Torah and its extension, halacha, or Jewish religious law, are unequivocal about the fact that being born in a male body requires living the life of a man, and being born female entails living as a woman."

"In Judaism, each gender has its particular life-role to play," he added. "The bodies God gave us are indications of what we are and what we are not, and of how He wants us to live our lives." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1957 BRITAIN AGREES TO SINGAPORE SELF-RULE



The British government is to allow the island colony of Singapore to govern itself under a new constitution agreed in London.

The Singapore Constitutional Conference ended today after four weeks of talks when Chief Minister of Singapore Lim Yew Hock and Alan Lennox-Boyd, secretary of state for the Colonies, signed an agreement.

The constitution comes into effect some time after 1 January 1958 when the colony will become known as the State of Singapore.

Britain will remain in charge of external affairs and defence.

There was, however, one major pre-condition that the Singapore delegation would not agree to – that "persons known to have been engaged in subversive activity" would be barred from standing for the Legislative Assembly.

This demand is aimed at excluding extremist left-wing activists in the People's Action Party (PAP), some of whom have been detained for inciting anti-British riots last year.

At the signing ceremony at Lancaster House, Mr Lim rejected this demand as "a departure from normal democratic practice" but agreed to put it before the Legislative Assembly.

Under self-government, the office of Governor will be abolished and replaced with a Malayan-born representative of the Queen known as the Yang di-Pertuan Negara.

An internal security council preventing subversion is to be set up under the chairmanship of the UK Commissioner charged with safeguarding British affairs in the territory.

Last April, David Marshall, first Chief Minister of Singapore, led a delegation to London to ask for internal self-government with the aim of achieving independence or "merdeka" in Malay.

The talks failed, and as a result Mr Marshall resigned as Chief Minister last June. He was succeeded by Lim Yew Hock.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

A few days later former Chief Minister David Marshall resigned from the governing Labour Front in protest at the agreement which he felt did not go far enough. He called it "a pock-marked beauty shrouded in chloroform".

The Constitutional Agreement was finally signed in London on 28 May 1958 and self-government achieved after Singapore held general elections in 1959.

The first government of the State of Singapore was sworn in on 5 June with Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister.

It joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 and became totally independent in 1965, nearly 20 years after it was made a British crown colony. The People's Action Party (PAP) has been the dominant political force since independence.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

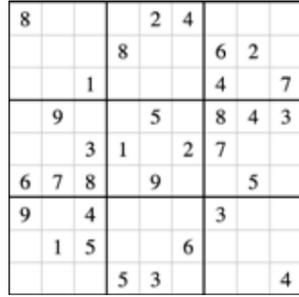
YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Negotiate a lucrative deal. Profitable opportunities develop through communication and social networking. Prepare and research behind the scenes.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 You're gaining influence. Take charge for the results you want. Dress for success. Share what's possible and how to participate. Make it happen.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Put extra effort into planning and organization to adapt with recent changes. Avoid noise or crowds. Find a peaceful spot to consider possibilities.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Contribute to a common cause. Coordinate communications and generate positive action. Inspire others to rise by example. Listen with empathy. Lend a helping hand.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Professional opportunities are ripening. Let prospects develop naturally. Maintain your responsibilities. Don't worry about the future.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Explore options. Monitor conditions to expand boundaries. Get involved in a fascinating conversation. Expand your networks and connections. You're learning fast.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Collaborate for shared gain. Share thoughts, priorities and dreams. Together, you can resolve a financial challenge. Fortune benefits your joint venture. Listen and learn.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Strategize with your partner. Deepen your connection with shared experiences and fun. Romance is possible. Communication plus action equals unbeatable.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Focus on health and fitness objectives. Surrender excess baggage. Practice builds strength. Nurture yourself with what your body needs now. Prepare for high performance.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Have fun with your inner circle. Balance business with pleasure. Luck follows disciplined action, especially regarding love and romance. Express what's in your heart.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Domestic modifications have your focus. Fortune follows commitment, especially with renovation projects. Make sure family is on board. Research, plan and then choose.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Trust your own good sense and tap into brilliance. Express creative ideas and possibilities. Challenge the generally held opinion to discover hidden solutions.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY 	EASY+ 
MEDIUM 	HARD 

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	7	23	fine
Changchun	8	20	fine
Chengdu	14	25	rain
Chongqing	18	26	fine
Fuzhou	15	26	cloudy
Guangzhou	20	27	cloudy
Guiyang	12	24	showers
Haikou	23	30	rain
Hangzhou	13	25	cloudy
Harbin	5	17	cloudy
Hefei	12	24	cloudy
Nanjing	13	24	cloudy
Shanghai	14	23	overcast
Taipei	19	28	cloudy
Wuhan	16	23	rain
Hong Kong	23	26	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	7	19	cloudy
Frankfurt	7	18	cloudy
Paris	11	18	cloudy
London	11	18	clear
New York	13	18	showers

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Gyro meat; 5- North American buffalo; 10- Apprehends; 14- Construction beam; 15- Maker of Photoshop; 16- Folklore fiend; 17- Actress Ward; 18- Put back into service; 19- Shake hands with; 20- Signal that danger is over; 22- Singer McLachlan; 23- Grey, tea type; 24- Big bash; 26- Refine; 29- Flowering; 33- Native American tent; 34- Hag; 35- Louis Quatorze, e.g.; 36- Work without ___; 37- Antipasto morsel; 38- Hari; 39- British verb ending; 40- Make ___ for oneself; 41- Devoured; 42- Temerity; 44- Excrete from the body; 45- Take ___ from me; 46- Mustachioed artist; 48- Merits; 51- Former monetary unit of Austria; 55- Poker variety; 56- More frigid; 58- New Rochelle college; 59- Family portrait?; 60- On top of the standings; 61- Elvis ___ Presley; 62- Difficult; 63- Spicy sauce; 64- Cape Canaveral org.;

DOWN 1- One of the Simpsons; 2- Cain's brother; 3- Teen hangout; 4- Wrist band; 5- Less covered; 6- Perfect; 7- Tart; 8- Delivery room docs; 9- Miss-named?; 10- Polite refusal; 11- Teen follower; 12- La ___ Tar Pits; 13- Clockmaker Thomas; 21- Tardy; 22- Gin flavor; 24- Covering for the hand; 25- Top-drawer; 26- Flight of steps; 27- Bright bunch; 28- Sporting blades; 29- Fedora features; 30- Angry; 31- Short letters; 32- Huge; 34- Necklace fastener; 37- That's ___ haven't heard; 38- Sorcerer; 40- Hill dwellers; 41- Snake-like fishes; 43- Left-___ compliment; insult; 46- Attire; 47- Artery that feeds the trunk; 48- O.T. book; 49- Gillette razor; 50- Repentant one; 51- Female child; 52- Israeli dance; 53- Slaughter of baseball; 54- Grandma; 56- Contingencies; 57- Spy org.;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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Jade Garden
HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath

HEALTH

THE SURPRISING WAYS YOUR SIBLINGS AND YOUR HEALTH MAY BE LINKED

MICHAEL MERSCHEL,
AMERICAN HEART
ASSOCIATION NEWS

ANYBODY who has worn a hand-me-down, shared a bathroom or survived a long car trip with a brother or a sister knows that siblings can affect your life in nearly every way possible.

Researchers, however, are just starting to unspool the ways those relationships affect health.

"It's kind of an underdeveloped area," said Dr. Susan B. Sisson, a professor of nutritional sciences at University of Oklahoma Health Sciences in Oklahoma City who has studied sibling-health connections. But research is hinting at the power of siblings – or their absence.

Evidence suggests that siblings have "a pretty strong influence" on health behaviors related to obesity, physical activity, nutrition and more, Sisson said.

The research can be challenging. For starters, "families are pretty complex," Sisson said. Siblings can be connected by birth, adoption or stepparents.

"It's really tough to make any kind of blanket statement about sibling relationships and influence, because there's just so many factors that need to be considered," said Dr. Keith Vakafatu Osai, an assistant professor of child and family studies at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah.

But Osai, whose own research has looked at how siblings affect one another's decisions to play youth sports, said there's no denying the powerful role siblings have in shaping one another.

"We typically say that this is the most enduring relationship, out of all relationships," he said. "We're with our parents when we're born – but our siblings are typically there," too. Spouses and significant others may come and go, but siblings are still there. "And then our parents pass away," he said, "but our siblings are still there."

Here are some of the links researchers have found between siblings and various health factors.

HOW WE EAT

Sisson was co-author on a study, published in 2019 in the *Journal of Nutrition Education*

AP PHOTO



and Behavior, that compared the habits of 43 children with siblings with 27 only children. It showed that young children with siblings ate healthier diets than children with no siblings.

"Some of that's probably just a proxy of busy parents," she said. It might be easier for parents to afford fast food with one child than with several, for example. And families that have multiple children tend to have more family meals, she said, which have been linked to healthier eating.

Indeed, children with more siblings have healthier diets and watch less television, according to a study published in *Social Science and Medicine* in 2017, which found that every additional sibling correlated with a decline of 2.6 percentage points in the likelihood of obesity in early adolescence. Other analyses also have associated having siblings with lower levels of obesity than in people with no siblings.

But that's not always the case. A study that looked at 326 families with two adolescent siblings linked sibling conflict with an increased risk of being overweight as an adolescent. In that study, published in 2014 in *Family Relations*, the correlation was highest in brother-brother and older brother-you-

nger sister relationships and lowest in sister-sister relationships.

HOW WE MOVE

Children with siblings have higher levels of physical activity than only children, Sisson said. An analysis of previous research that she helped write suggested that children who had more siblings were more active.

A separate study of 161 children at a preschool in Portugal, published in *Children* in 2021, found that children in homes with siblings tended to have higher motor skills than children without siblings.

A sibling can be "a built-in playmate," Sisson said. A parent might be more willing to send a child outside to play if they have an older brother or sister to keep an eye on them, she suggested, or children might be more likely to be allowed to walk home if they can do so as a pair rather than alone.

Genes, of course, play a big role in fitness as well as obesity, she said. "But genetics doesn't necessarily influence whether or not you have somebody to kick the ball back to you."

And then there's chores. "When there's more people in the household, there's more work to be done in the hou-

sehold," Sisson said, and it's more likely the parents will delegate that work.

Osai's own research into youth sports has found that siblings who have warm relationships with older siblings tend to follow their interest in sports. He knows this from his personal life, too.

"My siblings really helped to shape the way that I engaged with sport and physical activity," said Osai. He's the youngest of eight – four boys and four girls, the oldest of whom was 17 when he was born.

His brothers were his first unofficial coaches, he said. In the street, in the backyard, at parks and in church gyms, "they were the first ones to teach me how to catch a ball, how to shoot a ball." When a sister with a son who played youth football saw that Osai was eager to join, she brought the idea up with their parents, then drove him to practices and cheered him on. He ended up playing all the way through junior college.

THE RISKS WE TAKE

Siblings influence our choices related to delinquency and risky behaviors, such as smoking and drugs and alcohol use, Osai said. Siblings who are similar in terms of age or biological sex feel more socially connected or report

warmer relationships, and are more likely to follow an older sibling who engages in risky behavior, he said.

MENTAL HEALTH

Research suggests siblings can affect us for better or for worse.

A study published in December in the *Journal of Family Issues* that looked at the data of about 9,400 eighth graders in China and about 9,100 from the U.S. linked more siblings with poorer mental health.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development, which has been tracking two groups of men since 1939, linked poorer relationships with siblings before age 20 to the risk of major depression in adulthood.

On the other hand, a study of Latina women in Southern California, published in *Evolution, Medicine, and Public Health* in 2021, said that having sisters and more frequent communication with siblings was associated with fewer depressive symptoms during pregnancy.

And a study published in the *Journal of Family Psychology* in 2019 found that among older adults, a warm relationship with siblings was associated with lower levels of loneliness.

Given all the potential ways siblings can influence health, what should someone do? Sisson suggested that for parents, just being aware of the role that siblings and families play is important.

She encourages parents to "do what you can when you can to promote shared family meals, healthy eating, healthful choices of food, limited screen time and more movement." Parents of only children might want to be extra conscious of family mealtimes or creating opportunities for active play.

Given the potential lifelong influence of a sibling, Osai said, nurturing sibling relationships is important.

"It is an intimate relationship," he said. Siblings can be allies who share secrets, and they also can cause a lot of hurt. So "leaving room for forgiveness" and taking an interest in one another's activities can pay off over time, he said.

Osai acknowledges that sibling relationships can be filled with conflict, rivalry and jealousy. But he recognizes the support he received from his siblings and how it contributed to the success he has had both in and out of athletics.

"Sibling relationships can be tough at times," he said. "But these relationships – they can be so warm and so beneficial in a variety of ways."

MDT/AP

FOOTBALL | CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Arsenal rescues draw with Bayern after Kane scores against old rival

MATTIAS KAREN, LONDON

ARSENAL 2, BAYERN 2

HARRY Kane got his customary goal against Arsenal on his return to north London, but Bayern Munich couldn't leave with the win this time.

Leandro Trossard's second-half equalizer rescued a 2-2 draw for Arsenal against Bayern in the first leg of the Champions League quarter-finals yesterday [Macau time] after Kane had scored against his old rival yet again.

Trossard rolled in a low shot in the 76th minute to cancel out Kane's first-half penalty and leave the teams evenly balanced ahead of next week's second leg.

"It was a tough game. Of course we are never happy when we don't win," said Kane, who now has a competition-high seven goals in the Cham-

AP PHOTO



Bayern's Harry Kane celebrates after he scored his side's second goal

pions League this season and 15 against Arsenal in his career.

The hosts had taken a 12th-minute lead through Bukayo Saka and dominated the early stages until former Arsenal player Serge Gnabry made it 1-1 in the 18th following a mistake by defender Gabriel.

Kane then put Bayern ahead from the penalty spot in the 25th, but two of Arsenal's substitutes combined for the equalizer as Gabriel Jesus teed up Trossard in the area.

"We started so well. We could have scored two or three goals after taking the lead," Trossard said. "You can see

what kind of quality Bayern Munich have to hurt us."

The last time these two teams played, Bayern routed Arsenal 10-2 on aggregate after two 5-1 wins in the round of 16 in 2017. There was, however, a sense that things would be very different this time as Arsenal is top of the Premier

League while Bayern is having its worst Bundesliga season in more than a decade and has ceded the title race to Bayer Leverkusen.

But Kane, who scored a record 14 goals in north London derbies between Tottenham and Arsenal before joining the German powerhouse this season, made sure Bayern returns to Germany with at least a slight advantage for the second leg at home next Wednesday.

Kingsley Coman nearly scored a 90th-minute winner for Bayern, but his flick-on from close range hit the post, while Saka had a penalty appeal turned down in the fifth minute of stoppage time.

In the other quarterfinal, Real Madrid and Manchester City drew 3-3 in Spain.

Bayern got the draw despite playing without any away fans in the stadium because of a UEFA sanction against the club, which meant Arsenal was able to fill all 60,000 seats with home supporters.

And that crowd was raucous after a strong start for Arsenal.

The game went ahead as scheduled despite an alleged Islamic State terror threat against Champions League matches this week, and there were no incidents at the Emirates before or during the game. **MDT/AP**

AD



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OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES SHOULD UPHOLD THEIR CONSENSUS ON UNITY OF PURPOSE

As was recognized and reaffirmed by all the participants at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Meeting in San Francisco in November, a shared commitment to inclusiveness has been fundamental to Asia-Pacific's dynamic development, which has seen it become the powerhouse for the global economy.

If the enormous potential and tremendous dynamism across the region are to be fully unleashed, it is crucial, as the gathered leaders stated in their joint declaration, that fidelity to unity of purpose be upheld. It is disheartening therefore, if not alarming, that for some countries their pledges to the common undertaking of inclusive development are proving to be nothing more than lip service.

Instead of upholding inclusivity and peace in the region, Australia, Japan and the United States, along with the US' loyal extra-regional follower, the United Kingdom, seem intent on stoking confrontation in the region and disrupting regional peace and stability to serve their own narrow interests.

This was made clear on Monday, when the defense chiefs of the US, the UK and Australia announced their plan to include Japan in their controversial trilateral security alliance. In a joint statement they released on Monday, the three AUKUS allies announced that they are considering bringing Japan into their grouping to participate in so-called Pillar II projects.

While the first pillar of AUKUS aims to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines, as well as deepen cooperation on a range of other advanced defense technologies, the second pillar, peddled by US officials recently, has a clear strategic intention to involve more countries in the security pact, with a focus on delivering advanced capabilities and sharing technologies across a range of areas including quantum computing, artificial intelligence and cyber technologies.

Japan, widely deemed to be the most important US ally in the Asia-Pacific region and harboring the ill-intention of reviving its militarist past, has been an enthusiastic embracer of the US' divisive "Indo-Pacific" strategy, frequently making provocative moves or remarks over the maritime disputes in the East and South China seas. Like the US, its meddling in these issues has become a destabilizing factor in the region. It is irresponsible of the AUKUS countries to send a wrong message by endorsing Japan's militarist and troublemaking ambitions.

Since its establishment in September 2021, the AUKUS alliance has drawn wide criticism within the international community, with many countries in Asia voicing strong opposition to it promoting nuclear proliferation in the region and fanning bloc confrontation with its exclusive clique building.

In the short time since it was formed, the trilateral alliance has already undermined the denuclearization efforts in the region. Now it seems intent on sabotaging the APEC consensus and mission.

Driven by its stubbornly persistent Cold War zero-sum mentality, the US is encouraging other countries in the region to break faith with the APEC goals by fabricating false narratives. This imperils the very fabric of regional peace and stability.

Last week, US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell laid bare the destabilizing nature of AUKUS by telling a Washington-based think tank that AUKUS' submarine capabilities "have enormous implications in a variety of scenarios, including in cross-Straits circumstances".

That the Taiwan question is strictly an internal affair of China is obviously immaterial to the US. As such, the world should exercise high vigilance toward the US' designs for an enlarged AUKUS, which, in heralding an Asia-Pacific NATO, presage catastrophe for all. Countries should join hands to try and get the misguided genie of AUKUS back in the bottle before it does any irredeemable mischief in the region.

PANAMA PAPERS TRIAL STARTS: 27 PEOPLE CHARGED IN WORLDWIDE MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

THE BUZZ

The trial of 27 people charged in connection with the worldwide "Panama Papers" money laundering started this week in a Panamanian criminal court.

Those on trial include the owners of the Mossack-Fonseca law firm that was at the heart of the 2016 massive document leak.

The Panama Papers include a collection of 11 million secret financial documents that illustrate how some of the world's richest people hide their money.

The repercussions of the leaks have been far-ranging, prompting

the resignation of the prime minister of Iceland and bringing scrutiny to the leaders of Argentina and Ukraine, Chinese politicians and Russian President Vladimir Putin, among others.

The often-delayed trial opened earlier this week, with lawyers Juergen Mossack, Ramón Fonseca and other former representatives, lawyers or ex-employees of the firm facing money laundering charges.

Mossack was present in the courtroom, and said "I am not guilty of such acts."

AP PHOTO



LAS VEGAS

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL'S BEATLES-THEMED SHOW WILL END AFTER AN 18-YEAR RUN

RIO YAMAT, LAS VEGAS

THE final curtain will come down this summer on Cirque du Soleil's long-running show "The Beatles LOVE," a cultural icon on the Las Vegas Strip that brought band members Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr back together for public appearances throughout its 18-year run.

Cirque announced yesterday [Macau time] that the show housed at the Mirage will end on July 7, part of the iconic hotel-casino's major renovation plan to rebrand itself into the Hard Rock Las Vegas.

Stéphane Lefebvre, CEO of the Cirque du Soleil Entertainment Group, said in a statement that more than 11.5 million people have seen the show — an energetic portrayal of the Fab Four's history and music with aerial stunts and whimsical dance numbers on a colorful, 360-degree stage.

"We are grateful to the creators, cast, crew and all involved in bringing this show to life," Lefebvre said, "and we know The Beatles LOVE will live on long after the final bow."

In a separate statement, Joe Lupo, president of the Mirage, thanked the Cirque performers and crew members working behind the scenes "who played a part in entertaining guests and bridged generations" for nearly two decades.

The production premiered in the summer of 2006, with red carpet appearances by both McCartney and Starr, as well as Yoko Ono and Olivia Harrison, wife of the late Beatle George Harrison. They reunited a year later to celebrate the show's first anniversary.

According to Cirque, the show was born out of the friendship between its founder Guy Laliberté and Harrison, the Beatles' lead guitarist who died in 2001. John Lennon was killed in 1980.

The show is set to a specialized soundtrack that earned Cirque two Grammy Awards in 2008, a first for the entertainment company. Cirque said the Beatles' original producer, George Martin, and his son produced and mixed the 26-song soundscape, pulling from 130 songs from the Beatles' powerhouse music catalog and archives.

The current cast includes 11 original members from the show's inception, according to Cirque. More than 11,000 costume pieces are worn on show night, including 250 pairs of shoes and 225 wigs. Audiences throughout the show's run, Cirque said, have been showered with 13.5 tons of confetti during the final act, which closes with the Beatles' 1967 hit "All You Need is Love."

"Beatles Love" is one of six Cirque productions on the Las Vegas Strip. Tickets for the final shows in July will go on sale in the coming weeks. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Israel's foreign minister threatened yesterday that his country's forces would strike Iran directly if the Islamic Republic launched an attack from its territory against Israel, as tensions between the rival powers flare following the killings of Iranian generals in a blast at the Iranian consulate in Syria. "If Iran attacks from its territory, Israel will respond and attack in Iran," Israel Katz said in a post on X in both Farsi and Hebrew.

AP PHOTO



Italy Amanda Knox was back on trial for slander yesterday for wrongly accusing a Congolese man of murdering her roommate while the young women were exchange students in Italy. Knox herself was convicted of the slaying before being exonerated in a case that grabbed the global spotlight. Knox was a 20-year-old student with rudimentary Italian who had recently arrived in Perugia, when she endured a long night of questioning in the murder of Meredith Kercher.

AP PHOTO



Music Beyoncé has made history once again. Her latest album, the epic "Act II: Cowboy Carter", hit No. 1 on the Billboard country albums chart, making her the first Black woman to top the chart since its 1964 inception. The album also topped the all-genres Billboard 200, marking her eighth No. 1 album. "Cowboy Carter" totaled 407,000 equivalent album units, a combination of pure album sales and on-demand streams, earned in the U.S. in its first week.