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A NON-RESIDENT MALE, 60, HAS BEEN DETAINED UNDER SUSPICION OF UNLAWFULLY ENTERING A HOTEL ROOM AND STEALING MONEY FROM OCCUPANTS WHILE THEY SLEEP

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TALENTS: MACAU RECEIVES OVER 1,100 APPLICATIONS IN LESS THAN A YEAR

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MA YING-JEOU URGES TAIWAN'S NEXT LEADER TO CONSIDER XI'S 'DIPLOMATIC GESTURE'

▲ P6



Australia Police say a man has been arrested after reportedly stabbing a bishop and churchgoers in Sydney. There are no life-threatening injuries reported. It occurred during a televised service yesterday evening, police said. A video on social media shows a man dressed in black approaching a cleric identified as the bishop at Christ the Good Shepherd in suburban Wakely and appearing to stab him repeatedly in the head and upper body. More on p7



Indonesia A search and rescue team found 18 people killed by landslides on Indonesia's Sulawesi island and are still looking for two missing, officials said yesterday. Rescuers found about 14 bodies in Makale village on Sunday afternoon and four in South Makale, said Mexianus Bekabel, the chief of Makassar Search and Rescue. "We are still looking for two more victims, a Disaster Management Agency said.



Gaza Strip The Israeli military renewed warnings yesterday for Palestinians in Gaza not to return to the embattled territory's north, a day after Gaza hospital officials said five people were killed as throngs of displaced residents tried to reach their homes in the war-torn area. Northern Gaza was an early target of Israel's war against Hamas and vast parts of it have been flattened, forcing much of the area's population to flee south.

UPBEAT FORECAST

Macau GDP is expected to reach MOP92 billion in first quarter, reflecting a significant year-on-year increase of 19%, the economic association has forecast ▲ P4

ONE ACCOUNT

ID RENEWAL: SIMPLIFICATION IS NOT THAT SIMPLE

PUBLIC HOUSING

GOV'T INCREASES UNITS FOR SENIOR RESIDENTS

BIG BANG MEMBER DAESUNG TO PERFORM IN MACAU IN JUNE

Big Bang member Daesung will be embarking on a solo tour in Asia and Macau is among the stops. Kang Dae-sung, or Daesung, as well as D-Lite (his Japanese stage name), is a member of the group Big Bang. They debuted in 2006 and have since become one of the most influential K-pop groups, helping spread the Korean Wave internationally. His concert in Macau is scheduled for June 29 with the venue yet to be confirmed. Daesung will also visit Taipei and Bangkok as part of his tour.

NEW BUS PAYMENT OPTIONS FOR TOURISTS

Tourists will have more electronic payment options for riding Macau buses from April 25. The Transport Bureau (DSAT) has coordinated with local authorities and bus companies to accept Alipay, Alipay Hong Kong and UnionPay Cloud QuickPass on non-local UnionPay cards. Riders can pay their fare by scanning a QR "Ride Code" displayed on buses. The flat fare is MOP6 per trip using these new methods. Discounts for transfers or multi-rides do not apply. Currently, over 93% of bus riders pay electronically using established local methods like Macau Pass and UnionPay.

GBA GUANGDONG BRIDGE COLLAPSE PROMPTS SEARCH AND RESCUE

Two people were killed, one is missing, and another was injured when a bridge under construction collapsed in Xinhui district of Jiangmen city, Guangdong province, a statement released by the local Xinhui district government has said. The statement released yesterday said the injured person was sent to the hospital for treatment. The search and rescue of the missing worker is still ongoing as of noon yesterday. The missing person, surnamed Xu, 56, comes from Changsha in central China's Hunan province. Jiangmen and Xinhui have set up special task forces to help with search and rescue work, conduct accident investigations, and remove hidden dangers, the statement said.

SIMPLIFICATION IS NOT THAT SIMPLE: RENEW THE MACAU ID ONLINE OR OFFLINE?

RENATO MARQUES

AS well as launching the new Macau ID card (BIR) late last year, the government has announced a series of measures aimed at simplifying both citizens' access to public services and the renewal of the BIR of eligible permanent residents.

One such measure, presented late last week, is a series of service centers open 24 hours a day and that use self-service kiosks to process the document renewal.

Using this method, residents can also pick up the new document at kiosks installed for that purpose.

In mid-March this year, the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) launched an online service for renewing permanent resident IDs through the government services application, Macao One Account.

At the time, the government said that the purpose was to allow residents to renew their documents during a "single visit" to the public services counter and, in theory, make the process easier.

EXPERIENCE IN PERSON

According to the experience of some readers of the Times, the process via the Macao One Account is initially simple but prospective users should note that some complications may arise in the later stages of the process.

Residents should note that they need a recent photo (fewer than 12 months' old) to upload to their Macao One Account before starting the process. This photo cannot be self-uploaded from your files but



instead needs to be done by an authorized photography store from a list provided by the government. The photo must then be linked to the app account via a QR code.

If that part of the process is completed, the next steps are simple and include the confirmation of personal data.

At the end of this process, and after the electronic payment is successful, the app generates a request and an electronic receipt. This stage is seamless and simple.

Complications begin once the new card is ready and the user receives an SMS with the receipt code for the pick-up.

At this point, the resident cannot simply pick up the new card at the self-pick-up kiosks that operate around the clock but, instead, they need to go through a normal, manned counter in operation only during government services working hours.

After providing the code, the resident must wait to be called to the

counter, hand over the previous card to be disabled, and finally receive the new card.

At this stage, the process is still not yet over as residents need to then go through another counter/booth to have a photo taken, followed by fingerprint collection and then, finally, the process is complete.

According to users' experience, this process takes at least 20 to 30 minutes.

DSI EXPLAINS

In response to an inquiry from the Times, the DSI clarified that, for residents who choose to apply for a renewals of their ID cards through the Macao One Account app, this lengthy process is necessary. In a photo contact, the Bureau explained that, as it is not possible to collect fingerprints and take a new photo of the citizen via the app, this must be done at the time of the collection of the new card.

The DSI also explained that this

does not happen in the instance that residents choose to renew their IDs via the self-service kiosks installed at the DSI headquarters as well as several locations across the Peninsula and islands since the procedure of collecting the user photo and fingerprints is performed by the automated kiosk at that first visit.

The Bureau also recommended that, in cases of difficulties in scheduling a visit to the counters during working hours, citizens should opt for the application for the renewal of their IDs via the government's 24-hour Self-Service Service Centers located at DSI headquarters at China Plaza building, Areia Preta's MSAR Service Center, Avenida de Sidónio Pais (across Flora Garden), Fai Chi Kei Public Housing - Fai Tat Building, Taipa's MSAR Service Center at Rua de Coimbra, Lago Building 24-hour Self-Service Service Center, and Seac Pai Van 24-hour Self-Service Service Center in Coloane.

CRIME

Man steals cash from a hotel room

STAFF REPORTER

A non-resident male, aged 60, has been taken into custody under suspicion of unlawfully entering a hotel room and stealing money from

sleeping occupants.

As per the Public Security Police, a hotel guest in downtown Macau woke Sunday morning to discover that RMB1,700 was missing from his trouser pocket.

The incident was reported to the authorities, who identified the alleged perpetrator by reviewing CCTV footage. It was determined that the suspect was not a registered guest at the hotel.

The suspect from the mainland gained access to the hotel premises at 7 p.m. on the same day and attempted to enter multiple guests' rooms before successfully opening the door to the

eventual victim's room. The suspect remained in the room for approximately five minutes, according to the police.

Several hours later, law enforcement apprehended the man who was still wearing the same clothes. The suspect confessed to the crime, attributing his actions to having lost all his money at a casino.

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PUBLIC HOUSING

Gov't increases units for senior residents, including discounts

STAFF REPORTER

THE SAR government has responded to the pressing need for housing for the elderlies by significantly increasing the number of accommodation units available in the first phase of government apartments.

The expansion has seen a remarkable surge of over 1,500 units, up from the initial 759, to meet the growing demand for suitable housing for the older adult population.

The expansion aims "to better accommodate the growing needs of our aging population," Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) Hon Wai said. Macau's aging population has swelled in recent decades creating a "pressing need" for suitable accommodation for older adults, he added.

Qualifying applicants selecting a unit and signing an occupancy agreement by the designated deadline from the IAS will



receive a 20% discount on usage fees for the first three years. Most of the initial applicants have been approved, according to Hon.

Occupants will move into the first 759 units in the fourth quarter, with the remaining reci-

ipients gradually placed through 2025.

While some older adults worried about being left out of the first group, Hon insisted "all qualified applicants will ultimately be housed" as the program rollout continues.

They are equipped with comprehensive living facilities, ensuring a comfortable and convenient living environment. Shops on the first floor's commercial space have been bid out, including a large restaurant in preparation. Underground retail is

planned for a supermarket with future bidding. An accessible sky corridor will directly connect the complex to the ground-floor eatery.

To enhance the quality of life for older adults and encourage community engagement, the apartments will include a clubhouse featuring amenities such as a Cantonese opera room, karaoke room, fitness room and reading room.

The complex will also have a platform garden equipped with outdoor sports equipment, a sports room with table tennis and billiards facilities, and a multi-functional room. Additionally, various cultural, recreational and sports activities will be organized, along with emergency support, social care and departmental services.

A health center for the elderlies run by the Health Bureau will focus on education, consultations, exercise and nutrition counseling to promote preventative health habits. A geriatrics team from the local hospital will offer on-site services and a hotline for residential health needs.

The official also called the expanded housing program a "touchstone" for prioritizing senior needs across Macau. It aims to provide a model for inclusive, aging-friendly development, he added.

Citizens complain to CCAC over unreasonable housing prices in 2019

STAFF REPORTER

ANOTHER two citizens have submitted letters to the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC), alleging that the housing prices per square foot in 2019 were unreasonably high with an increase of over 70% compared to the previous period.

They assert the legislation violated housing laws and are urging the CCAC to investigate.

One person, surnamed Zhang, and another citizen both applied for mortgage housing in 2019, and they have individually lodged complaints with the corruption watchdog.

Zhang argues that the government's announcement of the 2019 mortgage housing prices came too late, resulting in the calculation of an income limit for applicants at MOP19,270, which she considers unreasonable. She is requesting a CCAC investigation to safeguard the rights and interests of applicants.

In a separate incident, some residents who applied for the 2019 affordable housing competition sent a similar letter to CCAC recently.

They believe the MOP3,300 per square meter price is unreasonable

and does not account for purchasers' ability to pay. In that letter, signatories expressed hope CCAC would investigate potential mismanagement by the government administration.

The price hikes for affordable housing have already prompted Macau lawmaker Ron Lam to deliver a petition on the issue to Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng. Lam represented a group of affordable housing buyers unhappy with increased costs.

The latest complaint questions whether the more than 70% price rise from the prior period violates housing laws. Zhang is requesting CCAC scrutinize the matter to safeguard applicants' rights and interests.

The corruption watchdog has not yet responded to the allegations or commented on potential next steps. However, as citizens voice their concerns over alleged violations of housing laws and potential mismanagement, the calls for investigations are intensifying.

The government and relevant authorities will face increasing pressure to address these grievances and take appropriate action to restore public confidence in the housing sector.

TALENT ACQUISITION SCHEME

MACAU RECEIVES OVER 1,100 APPLICATIONS IN LESS THAN A YEAR

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL authorities have received 1,137 valid applications for the new Talent Acquisition programs launched in the second half of last year, the Talents Development Committee (CDQQ) Secretary-General, Chao Chong Hang, announced during a meeting of the Committee last Friday.

According to Chao, applications have arrived from different countries and regions between when the program started and April 8.

The Secretary-General also noted that among the candidates are leaders from top industries, such as members of the science and engineering academies of the world's main economies, managers



and founders of large national and foreign companies, as well as professionals from higher education institutions, and the main industries in Macau.

Of those 1,137, 282 have been shortlisted for recruitment, including 21 people considered under the Elite staff category, 65 highly qualified professionals, and 196 skilled professionals.

When considering the candidates' households, the program extends to 429 people, including 238 chil-

dren and 191 spouses, of which 124 possess the academic qualification of a master's degree or higher. Chao also noted that, as the assessment process progresses, it is expected there will be a gradual increase in the number of people accepted under the 2023 annual plan.

The same official said that, after the assessment concludes and the approvals are issued, data of all professionals accepted under the scheme will be published.

Currently, the applications are being analyzed in accordance with the regulations and guidelines and the needs of the different industries. After this, the new recruitment phase will launch.

The CDQQ will, in its evaluation, consider the professionals that can fill current labor shortages in Macau.

A new phase of the scheme is expected to be launched in the second quarter (April to June) of this year.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

STAFF REPORTER

ECONOMY TO RECOVER 19% YEAR-ON-YEAR IN Q1: ASSOCIATION

THE Macau Economic Association has announced its predictions for Macau's first-quarter economic performance, indicating a promising recovery for the region. According to the association's forecast, the gross domestic product (GDP) for the first quarter is expected to reach approximately MOP92 billion, reflecting a significant year-on-year increase of approximately 19%.

This surge in GDP signifies a recovery of approximately 82.8% compared to the same period in 2019.

In addition to the positive GDP growth, the gambling industry in Macau has also exhibited encouraging progress. The first-quarter gambling revenue totaled an impressive MOP57.3 billion, successfully achieving 26.5% of the full-year target of MOP216 billion.

The association has deemed this progress as being in line with expectations.

However, the report warned that challenges remain. While

tourists have been returning to Macau in large numbers, local consumption has declined as some small businesses closed under economic pressures. High interest rates have also burdened companies with capital turnover and debt repayment, pushing up non-performing loan ratios in the banking system.

The association pointed to an unbalanced recovery so far with strong tourism but sluggish domestic spending.

It said external conditions also pose risks as inflation rages in the U.S. and global economic uncertainty grows. Looking ahead, the group forecast Macau's economy in the current quarter could fluctuate between "stable" and "slightly overheated" based on present trends.

Nevertheless, the economic



association remains optimistic about Macau's economic prospects. They affirm that the country's active promo-

tion of new productive forces will benefit Macau's economy. Based on the current development trajectory, it is expected

that the economic boom in the second quarter will fluctuate between "stable" and slightly "overheated."

GAMING

Citigroup forecast gaming revenue to 'look resilient' in April

STAFF REPORTER

BUSINESS trends in the Macau gaming sector appear to be resilient in April, according to a recent memo from Citigroup.

"We won't be surprised if Macau's gross gaming revenue (GGR) is going to be generated by less premium-mass players this month, given the timing of the Labor Day holidays this year," wrote analysts George Choi and Ryan Cheung following the institution's latest spot-check survey of Macau premium mass gaming tables, as cited in a GGRAsia report.

Citigroup has forecast Macau's GGR to reach MOP18.50 billion in April, a 26% increase compared to the same period last year, but a 5% decrease from March's figure of MOP19.50 billion.

Citigroup conducted a survey of Macau's premium mass gaming tables, which revealed a



5% year-on-year decline in wager by player. However, this decline was offset by a significant increase in player count, resulting in a 53% year-on-year increase in total wager observed.

The survey identified 568 premium-mass players and observed 18 "whales" (players with bets of HKD100,000 per hand or more), compared to 14 whales in the previous year's survey. Whales were observed at five of the six casino operators, with SJM Holdings Ltd being the exception.

"Wager by player in April 2024 fell slightly

by 5% to HKD19,467, but this is likely due to the 60% year-on-year higher player count, which likely means that there are relatively more casual premium players versus April 2023," said Choi and Cheung.

The analysts from Citigroup noted that the upcoming Labor Day holidays are likely to attract more players, and some individuals may choose to save their Macau visas for that period. Overall, despite some fluctuations in wager amounts, the gaming sector in Macau is expected to remain resilient in April, the institution said.

NATIONAL SECURITY EXHIBITION OPENS AS CONCEPT MARKS 10 YEARS

STAFF REPORTER

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng opened the "National Security Education Exhibition for All" yesterday with a speech marking 10 years since China introduced its overall national security concept.

The exhibition, organized by the Macau government and the Liaison Office, aims to help residents better understand the security concept and its importance. Over 380 government officials and members of the public attended the morning ceremony at the Macau Forum.

In his remarks, Ho said the concept has enriched discussion around security and guided Macau's improvement of national security systems over the past decade. It emphasizes coordinating security and development.

Under its guidance, Ho

said Macau has strengthened coordination between sectors to defend the country's security and maintain prosperity and stability. The territory has also integrated more into China's development.

Zheng Xincong, director of the Liaison Office, said the concept has reshaped China's security leadership, legal framework and policies, effectively protecting sovereignty. In his speech, Zheng outlined priorities including strengthening legal mechanisms, implementing "patriots governing Macau" and boosting the economy.

After the ceremony, officials presented awards for essay and video contests on cybersecurity. Approximately 260 pictures and videos in the exhibition showcase achievements under the concept in security, development and Macau's implementation of 'One country, two systems.'

The exhibition will continue until May 15 to mark both the concept's 10th anniversary and China's National Security Education Day. It aims to help residents understand and support security through development and their responsibilities.

As Macau commemorates the 10th anniversary of the overall national security concept, the "National Security Education Exhibition for All" provides an opportunity for residents to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept's significance, the government said.

By focusing on the achievements of the past decade and reaffirming the commitment to safeguarding national security, Macau said it aims to foster a sense of patriotism and responsibility among its citizens while contributing to a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.



TRADE

Germany's Scholz calls for fair competition and warns against dumping during China visit

GERMAN Chancellor Olaf Scholz called for fair competition in trade relations with China while warning about dumping and overproduction as he spoke to students in Shanghai yesterday.

Scholz is visiting China against the background of looming EU tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles and other trade-related tensions. The two countries are also split over how to handle Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The one thing that must always be clear is that competition must be fair," Scholz told students at Tongji University in Shanghai, according to German news agency dpa.

"Of course we would like our companies to have no restrictions, but conversely we behave exactly how we are demanding here," he said, adding there must be no dumping or overproduction.

The European Union is mulling tariffs to protect its producers against cheaper Chinese electrical vehicle imports, which some fear will flood the European market.

The head of Germany's auto industry association, the VDA, expressed opposition to such tariffs ahead of Scholz's visit. Hildegard Müller told the Welt am Sonntag newspaper in comments published Saturday

AP PHOTO



the tariffs would not help the European and German auto industries and instead "could quickly have a negative effect in a trade conflict."

"Current business with China secures a large number of jobs here in Germany," Müller said.

Scholz made comparisons to reservations years ago when Japanese and Korean automakers entered the German market.

"There was great agitation

in the newspapers: 'Now the Japanese cars will come and clean up' — nonsense," he told the Tongji University students. He said there are German cars in China that were made with Chinese manufacturers, and at some point there would also be Chinese cars in Germany and Europe.

Scholz began his three-day China trip on Sunday in the industrial hub of Chongqing, where he and his delegation of ministers and business exe-

cutive visited a partially German-funded company and other sites in the vast city, which is a production base for China's auto and other industries.

He is set to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang today in Beijing before returning to Berlin later in the day.

Scholz is expected to question Xi about China's support for Russia's economy two years into Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Prior to his arrival, the

German leader posted on social platform X that he had discussed the "massive" Russian air attacks on civilian energy infrastructure with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday, and declared that Berlin would "stand unbreakably by Ukraine's side."

China has refused to criticize Russia's aggression. Beijing maintains trade relations with Moscow, and the two nations carry out joint military drills. A U.S. intelligence report last week found China has increased equipment sales to Russia to help in its war effort against Ukraine.

Berlin is also worried about "a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan."

Scholz told students in Shanghai that borders "must not be moved by force."

"We should not be afraid of our neighbors," he said, emphasizing the importance of international institutions such as the World Trade Organization.

Despite the political and trade frictions, China was Germany's top trading partner for the eighth straight year in 2023, with 254.1 billion euros (\$271 billion) in goods and services exchanged between the sides, slightly more than what Germany traded with the U.S. but a 15.5% contraction from the year before.

This is Scholz's second trip to China since he became chancellor in late 2021. His previous visit was in November 2022 and essentially was a one-day trip because of the strict COVID restrictions still in place at the time.

It is his first visit since the German government last year presented its China strategy, which met with criticism from Beijing. Premier Li and a delegation of senior officials visited Berlin in June. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

MGM celebrates Thai New Year festival



MGM Cotai recently hosted over 220 guests from Thailand for an "Amazing Songkran in Macau" dinner to celebrate the traditional Thai New Year festival of Songkran.

The dinner, held at Vista of

MGM Cotai, surpassed previous Songkran celebrations in scale, according to a statement issued by the gaming operator.

"MGM's invitation to Thai tourists on the celebration

of Songkran Festival in Macau is part of our strategic plan to tap into the Thai market and strengthen friendships between Macau and Thailand," said Frederica Fok, senior vice president of global marketing for MGM.

Fok also revealed that in June, the company is going to join hands with the government in the upcoming roadshow in Bangkok and will also launch a series of promotion activities in Thailand.

The celebration featured traditional Thai boat noodles and Sino-Thai fusion dishes prepared by MGM, as well as festive Thai decorations, lucky draws, and a performance by Thai R&B singer Lydia Sarunrat Deane.

Melco executives attend national security exhibition opening



Senior leaders from Melco Resorts & Entertainment attended the opening of Macau's annual National Security Education Exhibition, which coincides with National Security Education Day.

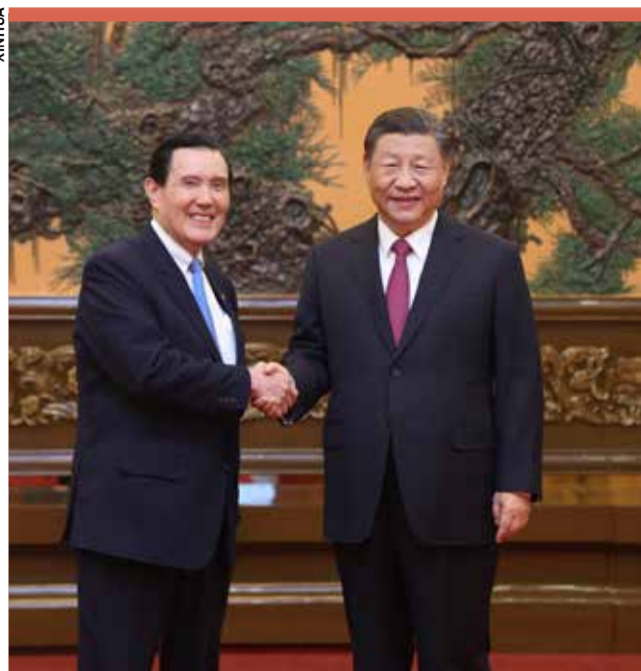
Between 2019 to 2023, nearly 2,300 Melco em-

ployees participated in the exhibition in person or online to better understand national security issues, the gaming operator said in a statement. The visits complement Melco's "Splendors of China" program that promotes national pride and pa-

triotism through education.

At the opening event, the SAR government and Liaison Office presented awards for a creative essay and video competition themed "My Notion of National Cyber Security." Melco dealer Juan Zhou received an award for her outstanding secondary education category essay, selected from 22,000 submissions.

Launched in 2016, "Splendors of China" comprises mandatory courses, electives, exhibitions and community events promoting "Loving the Country, Loving Macau" through education on Chinese culture, history and modernization. Over 10,000 Melco employees annually complete the associated "Splendors of China Passport Program."



TAIWAN

Ma Ying-jeou urges island's next leader to respond 'pragmatically' to Xi's diplomatic gesture

FORMER Taiwanese leader Ma Ying-jeou urged Taiwan's leader-elect to pragmatically respond to the diplomatic gesture made by President Xi Jinping and to recognize the one-China principle, South China Morning Post reported yesterday.

During a meeting in Beijing, last week, Ma highlighted the need for the forthcoming Taiwanese leader, William Lai Ching-te, to appreciate Xi's approach and avoid advocating for independence. Lai, a member of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, secured the top job in January and is set to assume office soon.

"The people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are all Chinese. There is no dispute that cannot be resolved, there is no problem that cannot be discussed, and no force can separate us," Xi told Ma at the meeting held last Wednesday.

In a social media statement yesterday, Ma advocated for adherence to the "Republic of China's Constitution," which endorses the one-China policy, emphasizing that both sides of the Taiwan Strait are not distinct nations. This constitution was instituted in

1947 by the Kuomintang following their relocation to Taiwan after their defeat in the Chinese civil war by the Communist forces.

Tsai Ing-wen, the current leader from the DPP, has consistently rejected the one-China policies throughout her tenure, which began in 2016. She maintains that Taiwan is sovereign. Her term will conclude on May 20, and her successor, Lai, has already faced criticism from Beijing, labeling him as a provocateur and staunch separatist.

Beijing views Taiwan as a part of its territory, potentially reclaiming it even through force. While most international actors, including the United States, do not formally recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state, they oppose any forceful annexation.

Ma's post yesterday further implored Lai to commit to not pursuing Taiwanese independence and to re-engage with Beijing under the 1992 consensus, which ambiguously acknowledges one China but allows for differing interpretations by each side. This framework aims to "facilitate dignified and equitable exchanges between the two entities."

DIPLOMACY

Solomon Islands' elections could impact China's influence in the South Pacific

ROD MCGUIRK,
MELBOURNE

THE country in which China has gained most influence in the South Pacific, Solomon Islands, goes to the polls tomorrow in an election that could shape the region's future.

Current Prime Minister Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, who switched the Solomons' allegiance from Taiwan to Beijing and ignited fears of China gaining a naval foothold in the South Pacific, is seeking an unprecedented second consecutive term at the government's helm.

Even if Sogavare fails, observers suspect China will be backing more than one pro-Beijing candidate in the murky contest for the Solomons' top job in an effort to cement Beijing's growing influence.

There are also fears the electoral process could again ignite violence in a restive nation riven with inter-island and ethnic tensions, a perceived lack of sharing of resources, widespread poverty and high youth unemployment.

HOW DO ELECTIONS IN SOLOMONS WORK?

Voters from among 700,000 people spread over the more than 900 islands that comprise the Solomon Islands will elect 50 lawmakers from 334 candidates. Only 21 candidates are women and none of them is currently in office. The only two women in the current parliament won't contest the election.

The 50 newly elected lawmakers then decide which of them will become prime minister. No political party ever wins the 26-seat majority needed to form a government in a system derived from the former British colonial masters' Westminster system.

The eve of the election is known as Devil's Night when



Voters board the already overcrowded Fair Glory ferry in Honiara

candidates and their campaign teams are notorious for resorting to underhand means to skew results in their favor such as by buying votes. That can take the form of paying voters' transport costs to get home to electoral districts where they're registered to vote, offers of cash for the promise of a vote or paying influential local leaders to voice support.

Ballots are supposed to be cast in secret but there is apparently enough doubt about the integrity of the system to sustain the practice of vote buying and discourage voters from renegeing on their promises to vote for the candidates who paid them.

After the election, lawmakers form camps around hotels in the capital Honiara where horse trading takes place to persuade a majority to back various candidates for prime minister. Ministerial posts are offered as inducements. Foreign business figures from the mining, logging, retail and tourism industries also take part in negotiations, fueling concerns lawmakers might put personal gain ahead of constituents' interests.

Sogavare was sworn in three weeks after the 2019 election date.

WHO IS THE INCUMBENT PRIME MINISTER?

Sogavare has been made prime minister four times and hopes to become the

first prime minister to gain a second consecutive term in the Solomons' 12th parliament since independence in 1978.

The 69-year-old karate blackbelt has been variously described as intelligent, self-serving, a nationalist and mercurial.

The former bureaucrat first came to power in 2000 when he replaced Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu who had been kidnapped by a rebel militia and resigned from office in exchange for his freedom. Sogavare remained in power for 17 months before he was replaced in the 2001 election.

Riots following the 2006 election, which were fueled by allegations of Chinese interference and resentment against Chinese business people, led to Prime Minister Snyder Rini's resignation after a week in office and Sogavare's second 18-month stint as government leader.

Sogavare's third stint started at the 2014 election but he was ousted by lawmakers three years later with a no-confidence vote.

BACKGROUND TO THE 2024 ELECTION

Sogavare's rule since the 2019 election has been his longest stretch in power and his five-year administration has been transformative.

He swung the Solomons from Taiwan to Beijing in 2019, five months after taking power and shocked

the United States and its allies by signing a security pact with Beijing in 2022.

While the agreed upon document has not been made public, a leaked draft would involve China in maintaining civic order through the deployment of "armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement and armed forces."

Sogavare delayed the election, which was due last year, through an act of parliament because he argued the country couldn't afford to hold the poll and host the regional Pacific Games in the same year.

His critics called he called he move a power grab. Sogavare accused Australia of "an assault on our parliamentary democracy" for offering to carry the cost of the election so that it could go ahead as scheduled in 2023.

He may also have China to thank for his continued leadership, with Australian Broadcasting Corp. reporting that Chinese interests "provided more than \$3 million to bribe lawmakers" to support Sogavare against a no-confidence motion in parliament in 2021. Sogavare's government denied the report.

Sogavare's latest term has also been marred by COVID-19 and rioting that led to the return of Australian peacekeepers in 2001.

Sogavare's election sparked riots in Honiara in early 2019 over legal questions hanging over his eligibility to become prime minister. More severe riots resulted in arson and looting in Honiara in November 2021 after his leadership survived the no-confidence motion.

In later 2021, Sogavare invited Australian police to help restore order under a 2017 bilateral security treaty that provides a legal basis for the deployment of Australia police, troops and associated civilians in the event of a major security challenge. **MDT/AP**

AUSTRALIA

Police probe why man who stabbed six people to death targeted women

ROD MCGUIRK, MELBOURNE

AUSTRALIAN police are examining why a lone assailant who stabbed six people to death in a busy Sydney shopping mall and injured more than a dozen others targeted women while avoiding men, a police commissioner said yesterday. The killer's father blamed his son's frustration at not having a girlfriend.

Police shot and killed the homeless assailant, Joel Cauchi, during his knife attack in the Westfield Bondi Junction mall on Saturday near world-famous Bondi Beach.

Police have ruled out terrorism and said the 40-year-old had a history of mental illness.

New South Wales state Police Commissioner Karen Webb said detectives would question Cauchi's family in a bid to determine his motive. CCTV footage from the mall showed Cauchi targeted women with the 30 centimeter knife.

"The videos speak for themselves, don't they? And that's certainly a line of inquiry for us," Webb said.

"It's obvious to me, it's obvious to detectives that that seems to be an area of interest: that the offender had focused on women and avoided the men," Webb added.

The attacker's father, Andrew



Karen Webb, Police Commissioner of New South Wales state speaks to media at Bondi Junction in Sydney

Cauchi, said he knew why his son, who suffered from schizophrenia, had targeted women.

"Because he wanted a girlfriend and he's got no social skills and he was frustrated out of his brain," the visibly distraught 76-year-old told reporters outside his home in Toowoomba in Queensland state, an 870-kilometer drive across the New South Wales border from Sydney.

"He's my son, and I'm loving a monster. To you, he's a monster. To me, he was a very sick boy. Believe me, he was a very sick boy," the father added.

The only male killed was Fa-

raz Tahir, a Pakistani refugee who worked at the mall as a security guard. Tahir had not been armed.

Webb said most of the 12 victims who survived their wounds were also women.

The evidence will be provided to a coroner to report on the circumstances of the deaths.

Webb expected the coroner would also address the question of whether security guards at the mall, which is one of Australia's largest, should be armed.

The families of two victims based overseas had been advised of their deaths, police said. Those victims are Tahir, 30, from Pakistan, and Yixuan Cheng,

27, from China. Also killed were Jade Young, 47; Dawn Singleton, 25; Pikria Darchia, 55; and Ashlee Good, 38.

Eight victims who survived their injuries remained in hospitals yesterday, including Good's 9-month-old daughter. The baby's condition improved overnight Sunday from critical to serious, health authorities said.

The conditions of the other seven ranged from critical to stable.

Andrew Cauchi said his son had a "fascination with knives." The father took five U.S. military combat knives from his son while they were both living in the Toowoomba family home

last year for fear they would be used for violence.

The father said his son had become angry and called police, accusing the father of theft. The knives were given to a friend for safekeeping.

"I told the police my son had schizophrenia and I'm worried for myself," Andrew Cauchi said.

"I said to my mate, 'Why do I feel I'm going to be killed in my own house by my own son with a U.S. combat knife?'" he added.

The killer's mother, Michele Cauchi, said his rampage was the "absolute worst nightmare" of any parent of a mentally ill child.

Flags on government buildings around Australia flew at half-staff yesterday as a day of national mourning was declared to honor the victims. A black ribbon appeared on the sails of the Sydney Opera House yesterday night as part of a light display.

Police had given control of the seven-story crime scene back to the mall operators on Sunday night, but a decision has yet to be announced on when it will reopen for business.

The police officer who has been credited with saving many lives by shooting Cauchi dead, Insp. Amy Scott, will be interviewed by detectives today. **MDT/AP**

SINGAPORE

PM Lee to step down on May 15 and hand power to his deputy

SINGAPORE Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday that he will step down on May 15 after two decades at the helm, and hand power to his deputy Lawrence Wong.

Lee, 72, will formally advise the city-state's president to appoint Wong, who is currently deputy prime minister and finance minister, to succeed him, his office said in a brief statement. Wong, who has the unanimous support of lawmakers in the long-ruling People's Action Party, will be sworn in at

the national palace later the same day, it said.

Lee has served as prime minister and head of the PAP since August 2004.

Lee announced last November that he would retire this year and has already named Wong as his designated successor. Lee originally planned to step down before turning 70, but those plans were shelved because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"For any country, a leadership transition is a significant moment. Lawrence and the 4G

(fourth-generation) team have worked hard to gain the people's trust, notably during the pandemic," Lee said in a Facebook post yesterday. "I ask all Singaporeans to give Lawrence and his team your full support, and work with them to create a brighter future for Singapore."

Lee has said there is no reason to delay the political transition and that passing the baton to Wong before national elections due next year will allow the 51-year-old politician to win his

own mandate and take the country forward.

Wong came to prominence while helping to coordinate Singapore's fight against COVID-19. He will be the city-state's fourth leader since its independence in 1965.

PAP, one of the world's longest-serving parties, retained its super majority with 83 out of 93 parliamentary seats in 2020 general elections. But that was its worst performance after losing some seats and support slipped.

Lee is the eldest son



Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

of Lee Kuan Yew, who became Singapore's first prime minister and built the resource-poor city-state into one of the world's richest nations during 31 years in office.

But Singapore has also been criticized for its tight government control, media censorship and use of oppressive laws and civil lawsuits against dissidents. **MDT/AP**

MIDDLE EAST | ANALYSIS

The shadow war between Iran and Israel has been exposed, what happens next?

KAREEM CHEHAYEB, BEIRUT

IRAN'S unprecedented attack on Israel early Sunday marked a change in approach for Tehran, which had relied on proxies across the Middle East since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October. All eyes are now on whether Israel chooses to take further military action, while Washington seeks diplomatic measures instead to ease regional tensions.

Iran says the attack was in response to an airstrike widely blamed on Israel that destroyed what Iran says were consular offices in Syria and killed two generals with its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard earlier this month.

Israel said almost all the over 300 drones and missiles launched overnight by Iran were shot down by its anti-missile defense system, backed by the U.S. and Britain. The sole reported casualty was a wounded girl in southern Israel, and a missile struck an Israeli airbase, causing light damage.

Still, the chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guard called the operation successful.

Iran has managed to strike a balance between retaliating publicly for the strike in Damascus and avoiding provoking further Israeli military action at least initially, which could lead to a much wider conflict, said Mona Yacoubian, vice president of the Middle East and North Africa center at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

"Both (Iran and Israel) are able at this point to claim victory and step down off the precipice, particularly since there were no Israeli civilians killed," Yacoubian said.

The world was still waiting, however, for the result of an Israeli War Cabinet meeting on Sunday. Israeli hard-liners have pushed for a response, but others have suggested restraint,



saying Israel should focus on strengthening budding ties with Arab partners.

"We will build a regional coalition and collect the price from Iran, in the way and at the time that suits us," said Benny Gantz, a member of the War Cabinet.

Analysts say Iran sent a message that it would be willing to escalate and change its rules of engagement in its shadow war with Israel.

"It's a warning shot, saying that if Israel breaks the rules, there are consequences," said Magnus Ranstorp, strategic adviser at the Swedish Defense University.

Iran's attack has further stoked fears of the war in Gaza causing regional havoc.

But Iran maintains that it does not seek all-out war across the region. Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said in a post on X, formerly Twitter, that Iran has "no intention of continuing defensive operations" at this point unless it is attacked.

Iran stressed that it targeted Israeli facilities in-

volved in the Damascus attack, not civilians or "economic areas."

After Israel began its offensive in Gaza against Hamas, Iran-backed groups were involved militarily while Tehran sat on the sidelines. Lebanon's Hezbollah group fired rockets into northern Israel. Yemen's Houthi rebels attacked Western ships on the Red Sea. An umbrella group of Iran-backed Iraqi militias attacked U.S. military positions in Iraq and Syria.

Now, Tehran is "willing to up the ante" without relying on proxies, said the director of the Carnegie Middle East Center, Maha Yahya.

Still, Iran only went so far.

"They gave enough warning that this was coming, and I think they knew that they (the drones and missiles) would be brought down before they reached Israeli territory," Yahya said.

She also noted that the recent mounting pressure on Israel over its conduct in Gaza has now shifted to deescalating regional ten-

sions instead.

Yacoubian says Washington has a critical role to play in avoiding further escalations.

Israel taking further military action does not seem popular among its allies including the United States, said Eldad Shavit, who heads the Israel-U.S. Research Program at Israeli think tank the Institute for National Security Studies.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby told NBC that President Joe Biden does not want an escalation in the regional conflict or a "wider war" with Iran, and is "working on the diplomatic side of this personally."

Urgent meetings of the G7 — the informal gathering of industrialized countries that includes the United States, United Kingdom, and France — and the U.N. Security Council were being yesterday. G7 meeting participants in a statement unanimously condemned Iran's attack, saying "we stand ready to take further measures now and in response to further destabilizing initiatives."

MDT/AP

this day in history

1987 MP ON GAY SEX CHARGES



Conservative MP Harvey Proctor has appeared in court charged with indecency.

Mr Proctor, who represents Billericay in Essex, said nothing to waiting journalists at Bow Street Magistrates' Court in central London.

In court, the MP was accused of committing three acts of gross indecency with one male and one act of gross indecency with another — both teenagers.

All the offences are alleged to have taken place between June and August last year.

Bachelor Mr Proctor, 40, was remanded on bail until next month after his lawyer, Sir David Napley, asked the court for more time to prepare his case.

"There are various other inquiries to be made and various evidence I am anxious to obtain," Sir David said.

The Billericay MP has denied all the allegations against him.

Lurid allegations surrounding Mr Proctor's sex life surfaced last September when allegations appeared in a Sunday newspaper claiming he had organised gay spanking sessions with boys in his London flat.

Since he was charged eight days ago members of Mr Proctor's constituency party have been demanding a meeting to discuss his future as their MP.

He has already survived two attempts to oust him over the allegations.

Mr Proctor also sits on the executive of the right-wing Monday Club and has expressed controversial views on immigration.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Harvey Proctor resigned as MP for Billericay shortly before his trial in May 1987.

He pleaded guilty and was fined a total of £1,450.

The following year, with financial backing from former colleagues, including Michael Heseltine and Jeffrey Archer, he opened two shops selling luxury shirts.

In 1992 Mr Proctor and Neil Hamilton, then a government minister, were assaulted by two men on a "gay bashing expedition". Mr Hamilton's nose was broken in the attack in Mr Proctor's shop in Richmond-on-Thames.

In 2000 Harvey Proctor's stores were forced into liquidation after legal action by Customs and Excise over an unpaid VAT bill.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Get into a practical domestic phase. Conserve resources. Speculate on color and style. Old assumptions get challenged. Clean and organize. Elbow grease pays off.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Stick to the facts. Avoid elaborations to the story. Take a big picture view. Coordinate efforts with your team. Network for a good cause.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Focus on making money. Harmony requires effort. Secrets can get revealed. Review accounts to repair leaks like unused subscriptions. Profit with disciplined work.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Confidence plus self-discipline equals victory. Measure what you've gained. A formidable barrier blocks the path. Work with someone who sees your blind spot.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Take it easy. Avoid confrontation, controversy or expense. Consider a spiritual view on current circumstances. Wait for better conditions to advance. Rest and recharge.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Collaborate with friends. Teamwork scores a win. Avoid conflict or controversy. Clean messes. Recognize work done in the past. Advance a shared dream.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Professional challenges have your focus. The truth gets revealed. Discover a mess and clean it. Provide leadership and care. Work quickly and efficiently.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 An investigation reveals hidden messes and garbage swept under the rug. Aim for practical objectives. Avoid risk or upset. Disciplined work advances a dream.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Coordinate to get the bills paid. Prioritize practicalities with family finances. Extra expenses require adaptation. Share the load and the fruit of your labor.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Collaborate for mutual support and ease. Provide a stabilizing influence. Focus on basic practicalities. Stay respectful. It's time, not money, your sweetheart wants.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Exercise clears your head. Get into a groove you can maintain. Listen to your coach and make adjustments. A steady pace wins the race.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Relax and let controversy pass you by. Focus on what's important: family, friends and love. Let go of a misconception. Keep an open mind.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

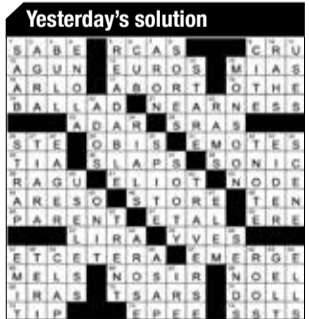
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	10	26	fine
Changchun	6	16	cloudy
Chengdu	17	28	rain
Chongqing	21	28	rain
Fuzhou	21	28	rain
Guangzhou	23	31	thunderstorms
Guiyang	20	26	showers
Haikou	25	36	cloudy
Hangzhou	18	23	rain
Harbin	7	18	cloudy
Hefei	16	24	rain
Nanjing	17	23	showers
Shanghai	16	23	overcast
Taipei	22	29	rain
Wuhan	19	23	rain
Hong Kong	24	28	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	7	13	cloudy
Frankfurt	5	10	rain
Paris	5	14	cloudy
London	4	13	cloudy
New York	11	22	sunny

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Bounce back; 5- Ardent; 9- Mogul capital until 1658; 13- Give guns again; 15- Achy; 16- Mai ___; 17- French farewell; 18- Thailand, once; 19- Guns; 20- Sun, speech; 21- Saxophone part; 23- Beaten egg dish; 25- Poems, often used to praise someone or something; 26- Most cunning; 27- Benumbs; 30- Illuminated; 31- Step inside; 32- Shipwrecked person; 37- Plugging away; 38- Archie Bunker's wife; 40- Shipping deduction; 41- Unsymmetrical; 43- Gold coin; 44- Prefix meaning "beneath"; 45- Capital of Kenya; 47- Souvenirs; 50- Bring home the bacon; 51- Middy nap; 52- Almost unobtainable; 53- Oh, give ___ home...; 56- Franklin D.'s mother; 57- Yonder thing; 59- High-fives; 61- Hissy fit; 62- Husband of a countess; 63- Belief; 64- Canonized Fr. women; 65- June 6, 1944; 66- Draft status;

DOWN 1- Historic periods; 2- Yield; 3- "Aquarius" musical; 4- Prospector's find; 5- Evaluate; 6- Emptiness; 7- George Gershwin's brother; 8- Tear down; 9- ___ Grows in Brooklyn; 10- Some Celts; 11- Metal pin; 12- Type of D.A.; 14- Unlawful killing; 22- Poet's dusk; 24- Baseball glove; 25- "Waiting for Lefty" playwright; 26- Narrow strip of wood; 27- Distribute cards; 28- Within (prefix); 29- Take ___ from me...; 32- Spain's El ___; 33- Take ___ for the worse; 34- Texas city; 35- Member of a largely Middle Eastern people; 36- Abominable Snowman; 38- Learned; 39- Ball girls; 42- ___ soup yet?; 43- Most urgent; 45- Tidily; 46- Swiss river; 47- Laughing; 48- Uncanny; 49- Atty.-to-be exams; 51- Flat sound; 52- ___ avis; 53- Jazz flutist Herbie; 54- Sporting blade; 55- Nick and Nora's pet; 58- Owned; 60- Zodiac sign;



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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AD

FOOTBALL

BAYERN FACES UNCERTAIN FUTURE AFTER LOSING THE BUNDESLIGA TITLE

JAMES ELLINGWORTH,
DUESSELDORF

THREE of Bayern Munich's senior figures did something Sunday that no one at the club had done since 2012.

They congratulated another team on winning the Bundesliga.

President Herbert Hainer, CEO Jan-Christian Dreesen and sporting director Max Eberl each offered praise for new champion Bayer Leverkusen and coach Xabi Alonso — who Bayern had been keen to sign — and each vowed Bayern would fight to reclaim the trophy it held for 11 long years.

“The goal for FC Bayern now is: the trophy must come back to Munich!” Hainer wrote.

The question is how.

Bayern didn't just lose the Bundesliga title to Leverkusen, it lost it by 16 points with five games to go. Bayern wrapped up the crown that early only three times in its 11-year reign. That means a comprehensive

AP PHOTO



rebuild is looming.

Bayern's 2023-24 season isn't over yet, and coach Thomas Tuchel could yet salvage some pride in the Champions League before he leaves. It's not impossible that Wednesday's quarterfinal second leg against Arsenal, poised at 2-2, could be Bayern's next step to the June 1 final and a first trophy for Harry Kane.

Despite the jibes on social me-

dia about how the England captain managed to join Germany's perennial champion team and still not win a league title, Kane has been a resounding success in Munich with 39 goals in the Bundesliga and Champions League.

A year ago, Bayern's need for a striker was clear when the team held onto the Bundesliga on goal difference as a strong Borussia

Dortmund challenge crumbled.

Tuchel, though, argued Bayern needed a defensive midfielder as well, and was concerned that the central pairing of Leon Goretzka and Joshua Kimmich were both too keen to make impactful attacking runs, leaving a gap. After wrapping up the Kane deal in August for over \$100 million, Bayern switched focus to Fulham defensive mid-

fielder Joao Palhinha and even got him to Munich for a medical before the deal broke down.

With Eberl heading into his first transfer window in overall charge of Bayern's sporting approach, he will have to decide how to fix the problem Tuchel identified a year ago, and how much to allow the club's new coach — whoever that may be — to shape the team.

Eberl may also need to replace left back Alphonso Davies, whose contract is due to expire at the end of next season amid reported interest from Real Madrid. He's one of seven starters from Bayern's 2020 Champions League final win who are still at the club and whose places in the lineup — with the exception of goalkeeper Manuel Neuer — no longer seem quite as secure.

What will be harder to replace is Bayern's aura of invincibility. For years, would-be challengers — especially Dortmund — tended to fall apart in big games against Bayern. Some years, the Bundesliga title seemed decided almost before the season began. Then Leverkusen showed Bayern can be beaten, and other teams like Dortmund followed suit.

Bayern needs a new coach, perhaps some new players, and its old image back. **MDT/AP**

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IN MACAU (2023)



OLYMPICS

Performers at flame-lighting ceremony feel a pull of the ancient past

No one knows what music in ancient Greece sounded like or how dancers once moved.

Every two years, a new interpretation of the ancient performance gets a global audience. It takes place in southern Greece at a site many still consider sacred: the birthplace of the Olympic Games.

Forty-eight performers, chosen in part for their resemblance to youths in antiquity as seen in statues and other surviving artwork, will take part today in the flame-lighting ceremony for the Paris Olympics.

Details of the 30-minute performance are fine-tuned — and kept secret — right up until a public rehearsal yesterday.

The Associated Press got rare access to rehearsals that took place during weekends, mostly at an Olympic indoor cycling track in Athens.

As riders whiz around them on the banked cycling oval, the all-volunteer Olympic performers snatch poses from ancient vases. Sequences are repeated and re-repeated



AP PHOTO

under the direction of the hyper-focused head choreographer Artemis Ignatiou.

“In ancient times there was no Olympic flame ceremony,” Ignatiou said during a recent practice session.

Ceremonies take place at Olympia every two years for the Winter and Summer Games, with the sun's rays focused on the inside of a parabolic mirror to produce the Olympic flame and start the torch relay to the host city.

Women dressed as priestesses

are at the heart of the ceremony, first held for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Leading the group is an actress who performs the role of high priestess and makes a dramatic appeal to Apollo, the ancient god of the sun, for assistance moments before the torch is lit.

Over the decades, new ingredients have been progressively added: music, choreography, new colors for the costumes, male performers known as “kouroi” and subtle style inclusions to give a nod to the culture of the Olympic host nation.

Adding complexity also has introduced controversy, inevitably amplified by social media. Criticism this year has centered on the dresses and tunics to be worn by the performers, styled to resemble ancient Greek columns. Faultfinders have called it a rude departure from the ceremony's customary elegance.

Organizers hope the attire will create a more positive impression when witnessed at the ruins of ancient Olympia.

Counting out the sequences, Ignatiou controls the music with taps

on her cell phone while keeping track of the male dancers at the velodrome working on a stop motion-like routine and women who glide past them like a slowly uncoiling spring.

Ignatiou has been involved with the ceremony for 36 years, as priestess, high priestess, assistant and then head choreographer since 2008. She takes in the criticism with composure.

She's still moved to tears when describing the flame lighting, but defers to her dancers to describe their experience of the five-month participation at practices.

Most in their early twenties, the performers are selected from dance and drama academies with an eye on maintaining an athletic look and classic Greek aesthetic, the women with hair pulled back in neat double-braids.

The flame-lighting ceremony will start at 0830 GMT Tuesday. A separate flame-handover ceremony to the Paris 2024 organizing committee will be held in Athens on April 26. **MDT/AP**

AD

廖國敏
LIO KUOKMAN

指揮廖國敏懷揣著遠大的志向，為他故鄉的樂團描繪出一幅宏偉的藍圖

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FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS

OPINION

China Daily

Li Yang, China Daily

CHINESE ECONOMY WILL CONTINUE TO DEFY ITS UNINTENTIONED CRITICS

Nicholas R. Lardy, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, published an article on the website of Foreign Affairs last week titled "China Is Still Rising-Don't Underestimate the World's Second-Biggest Economy", arguing that the US academics' recent view of China already peaking as an economic power underestimates the resilience of its economy.

Lardy said in the article that although China faces several headwinds, the country overcame even greater challenges when it started on the path of economic reform in the late 1970s. China's economy is likely to expand at twice the rate of the United States in the years ahead. Although there are different views on the Chinese economy's expected growth rate in the years to come, Lardy is not alone in his view.

It is natural that there are different views on the same economy. Yet it is notable that many of the proponents of the "China peaking" theory are also those that painstakingly peddled the "China collapse" theory before.

The Chinese economy has not collapsed as predicted by them, nor has it peaked as they claim now. More political than objective, they are always ready to see and exaggerate the downside.

For instance, be it the low birth rate and aging society or the real estate bubble and local debts, these are not problems exclusive to China. They are the type of challenges any economy will face after its socio-economic development reaches a certain phase.

The reduction of foreign direct investment and the withdrawal of capital from the emerging market economies are global trends caused by the US Federal Reserve's interest rate adjustment, which is a technical means of the US to reap the world's recovery dividends. Rather than a sign of the "decline" of the Chinese economy, the reduction of foreign investment and capital reflect the inherent bias of the dollar-centered world financial system and its negative effects on the world economy.

The Chinese economy still has a solid foundation, strong connections with the world market, remarkable resilience and enormous potential.

The country's relentless pursuit of high-quality development featuring innovation, sustainability, inclusiveness and fairness is the answer to the challenges. That it has taken the initiative to leave the comfort zone and bid farewell to the old high-speed growth model based on high inputs, low labor costs and heavy pollution, testifies to the nation's resolve to press ahead with its modernization.

It is through effectively finding the solutions to problems that the Chinese economy has so impressively expanded in scale and improved in quality over the years. China welcomes and encourages all insightful and objective analyses on its economy. Chinese policymakers will not shy away from the problems.

SECURITY COUNCIL HOLDS EMERGENCY MEETING ON IRAN ATTACK, NO ACTION TAKEN

THE BUZZ

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting yesterday [Macau time] to discuss Iran's attack on Israel. The meeting ended without any action by the council.

"Now is the time to defuse and de-escalate," U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said. "Now is the time for maximum restraint."

Israeli Ambassador Gilad Erdan told the council: "Last night, the world witnessed an unprecedented escalation that serves as the clearest proof for what happens when warnings aren't heeded. Israel is not the boy who cried wolf."

Iranian Ambassador Saeid Iravani said: "Iran's operation was entirely in

the exercise of Iran's inherent right to self-defense. This concluded action was necessary and proportionate.

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood said after the meeting ended, "There has to be a Security Council response to what happened last night."

The Israeli military says children can return to school after lifting a series of restrictions on public activities that were imposed ahead of Sunday's Iranian missile strike.

The military's Home Front command late Saturday canceled school and limited the size of public gatherings as a safety precaution ahead of the missile attack.

AP PHOTO



Fashion model Alexandrah poses with a computer showing an AI generated image of her, in London

FASHION

AI-GENERATED MODELS COULD BRING MORE DIVERSITY TO THE INDUSTRY – OR LESS

CLAIRE SAVAGE, CHICAGO

LONDON-based model Alexandrah has a twin, but not in the way you'd expect: Her counterpart is made of pixels instead of flesh and blood.

The virtual twin was generated by artificial intelligence and has already appeared as a stand-in for the real-life Alexandrah in a photo shoot. Alexandrah, who goes by her first name professionally, in turn receives credit and compensation whenever the AI version of herself gets used — just like a human model.

Alexandrah says she and her alter-ego mirror each other "even down to the baby hairs." And it is yet another example of how AI is transforming creative industries — and the way humans may or may not be compensated.

Proponents say the growing use of AI in fashion modeling showcases diversity in all shapes and sizes, allowing consumers to make more tailored purchase decisions that in turn reduces fashion waste from product returns. And digital modeling saves money for companies and creates opportunities for people who want to work with the technology.

But critics raise concerns that digital models may push human models — and other professionals like makeup artists and photographers — out of a job. Unsuspecting consumers could also be fooled into thinking AI models are real, and companies could claim credit for fulfilling diversity commitments without employing actual humans.

"Fashion is exclusive, with limited opportunities for people of color to break in," said Sara Ziff, a former fashion model and founder of the Model Alliance, a nonprofit aiming to advance workers' rights in the fashion industry. "I think the use of AI to distort racial representation and marginalize actual models of color reveals this troubling gap between the industry's declared intentions and their real actions."

In March 2023, iconic denim brand Levi Strauss & Co. announced that it would be testing AI-generated models produced by Amsterdam-based company Lalaland.ai to add a wider range of body types and underrepresented demographics on its website. But after receiving widespread backlash, Levi clarified that it was not pulling back on its plans for live photo shoots, the use of live models or its

commitment to working with diverse models.

"We do not see this (AI) pilot as a means to advance diversity or as a substitute for the real action that must be taken to deliver on our diversity, equity and inclusion goals and it should not have been portrayed as such," Levi said in its statement at the time.

The company last month said that it has no plans to scale the AI program.

The Associated Press reached out to several other retailers to ask whether they use AI fashion models. Target, Kohl's and fast-fashion giant Shein declined to comment; Temu did not respond to a request for comment.

Meanwhile, spokespeople for Nieman Marcus, H&M, Walmart and Macy's said their respective companies do not use AI models, although Walmart clarified that "suppliers may have a different approach to photography they provide for their products but we don't have that information."

Nonetheless, companies that generate AI models are finding a demand for the technology, including Lalaland.ai, which was co-founded by Michael Musandu after he was feeling frustrated by the absence of clothing models who looked like him. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



USA In a singular moment for American history, the hush money trial of former President Donald Trump begins today [Macau time] with jury selection. It's the first criminal trial of a former commander in chief and the first of Trump's four indictments to go to trial. Because Trump is the presumptive nominee for this year's Republican ticket, the trial will also produce the head-spinning split-screen of a presidential candidate spending his days in court.

AP PHOTO



USA Gene Herrick, a retired Associated Press photographer who covered the Korean War and is known for his iconic images of Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks and the trial of the killers of Emmett Till in the early years of the Civil Rights Movement, died Friday. He was 97.

AP PHOTO



Poland Thousands of opponents of abortion marched in Warsaw to protest recent steps by the new government to liberalize the predominantly Catholic nation's strict laws and allow termination of pregnancy until the 12th week. Many participants in the downtown march were pushing prams with children, while others were carrying white-and-red national flags or posters representing a fetus in the womb.

AP PHOTO



Sudan has been torn by war for a year now, ever since simmering tensions between its military and the notorious paramilitary Rapid Support Forces exploded into street clashes in Khartoum in mid-April 2023. The conflict has been overshadowed by the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza Strip. The U.N. humanitarian campaign needs some \$2.7 billion this year to get food, health care and other supplies to 24 million people in Sudan — nearly half its population of 51 million.