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PHONE AND INTERNET SCAMS HAVE RESULTED IN LOSSES OF NEARLY MOP60 MILLION, WITH STUDENTS COMPRISING A LARGE PORTION OF VICTIMS

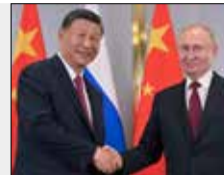
P2

TOURISM INDUSTRY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT SUMMER HOLIDAYS

P3

LEADERS OF CHINA, RUSSIA ATTEND SUMMIT OF REGIONAL SECURITY GROUPING

P9



Australia Police yesterday found the remains of a 12-year-old girl, two days after she was snatched by a crocodile while swimming in a creek in remote northern Australia. The remains were found in the river system near where the girl vanished at the Indigenous community of Palumpa, southwest of the Northern Territory capital Darwin, Police Senior Sgt. Erica Gibson said. Injuries confirmed a crocodile attack, Gibson said.

SCAFFOLDERS IN CRISIS

Bamboo scaffolding group says survival of workers and the historic profession are at risk as they claim DSSCU ordered them to vacate land

P5

AP PHOTO



Australia Pro-Palestinian protesters breached security at the Parliament House to unfurl banners from the roof yesterday as a senator quit the government over its direction on the Gaza war. The four protesters were arrested after draping the words “war crimes” and “genocide” as well as the Palestinian rallying cry “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” for more than an hour over the building’s façade known as the Great Verandah.

AP PHOTO



USA A defiant President Joe Biden vowed to keep running for reelection, rejecting growing pressure from Democrats to withdraw after a disastrous debate performance raised questions about his readiness to keep campaigning, much less win in November. But increasingly ominous signs were mounting for the president. Two Democratic lawmakers have called on Biden to exit the race while a leading ally publicly suggested how the party might choose someone else. And senior aides said they believed he might only have a matter of days to show he was up to the challenge before anxiety in the party boils over.



COTAI RESIDENTS SLAM GOV'T OVER BOTCHED ROAD RENOVATIONS

P6

IPIIM CASE JACKSON CHANG'S IMPRISONMENT EXTENDED TO EIGHT YEARS

P2

GOV'T CRACKS DOWN ON ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTION

The Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) recently demolished an unauthorized roof in Macau as part of ongoing efforts against development that occurs without requisite permits. The bureau received complaints about the roof of a downtown building. Upon inspection, they found metal structures and fences erected without proper permits. Stop-work orders and scheduled hearings were issued, with one structure voluntarily demolished by the deadline, while the other required intervention from the Interdepartmental Working Group on Demolition and Clearance who took down the second roof structure. Under the Urban Construction Legal Regime, fines for illegal builds and penalties for ignoring orders have been increased.

GOV'T BUSTS 185 ILLEGAL DRIVERS

The Labour Affairs Bureau and Public Security Police have intensified efforts to combat illegal employment, with 185 people caught working as unauthorized drivers since January 2023. The bureau stated that, as part of 1,487 operations to combat illegal work over the past 18 months, a total of 630 suspected illegal workers were identified. Of these, 185 were involved in unlawful driving activities. Regulations stipulate that mainland Chinese drivers can only engage in cross-border transportation between the mainland and Macau. Those who take on other jobs within Macau are considered illegal workers, with their employers also facing criminal liability.

HENGQIN PORT SEES OVER 10 MILLION TRAVELERS

The Hengqin checkpoint saw a total of 10.42 million travelers, marking a 44% increase during the first half of 2024 compared to the previous year. Vehicle movement also experienced an 11% rise, with 1.08 million cross-boundary trips. Approximately one quarter of passenger trips were made by residents of Hong Kong and Macau, while Macau's single-license plate vehicles accounted for 66% of the total passenger trips. The Hengqin Control Point has managed around 4.8 million passenger trips from the mainland, showing a significant 77.4% year-on-year growth. The average daily passenger flow during festivals and holidays has consistently held steady at approximately 80,000 travelers.

IPIM CASE

TSI EXTENDS JACKSON CHANG'S SENTENCE TO EIGHT YEARS

NADIA SHAW

THE Court of Second Instance (TSI) has upheld the corruption convictions of two former leaders of the Macau Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM).

The court sentenced former IPIM president Jackson Chang to eight years, from five years, in prison for multiple offenses, including passive corruption, money laundering, and inaccurate asset declarations. Chang received three years and three months in prison for each of four counts of passive corruption, two years for one count of money laundering, two years for each of two additional money laundering counts, and seven months for each of three counts of inaccurate asset declarations.

Chang was found guilty of corruption, money laundering and abuse of power by Court of First Instance in October 2020, after which he filed for a retrial.

Meanwhile, his co-defendant, former IPIM official, Ng Kuok Sao, was given a more severe punishment of 24 years



Former IPIM president Jackson Chang

behind bars, compared to the previous sentence of 23 years.

He was charged with active corruption, money laundering, document forgery, and criminal association. Ng received two-year sentences for each of four counts of active corruption, three years and three months for one count of money laundering as a co-author, and three years and three months each for two additional money laundering counts. Ng was also

convicted of one count of criminal association, with a six year and six-month sentence, and 23 counts of document forgery, with sentences of three years and three months for each forgery charge.

The TSI ruling concludes a lengthy legal battle stemming from a 2018 corruption investigation into the IPIM's operations.

Prosecutors accused Chang and Ng of colluding with a bu-

business syndicate to fraudulently facilitate unlawful scheme to unlawfully obtain residency permits in exchange for kickbacks and other illicit benefits.

After an initial trial, the case was sent back for a retrial, during which the court acquitted Chang and Ng of some charges but upheld the core corruption convictions. Both defendants appealed, but the TSI has now largely upheld the lower court's findings.

CRIME

Losses from phone and online fraud at nearly MOP60 million

PHONE and internet scams in Macau have resulted in losses of nearly MOP60 million in the first quarter of 2024, police said, with students comprising a large portion of victims.

According to police data, 96 phone fraud cases were reported between January and March, totaling over MOP59 million in losses. Fraud related to "public prosecution scams," where victims are tricked into believing they are assisting



law enforcement, accounted for 42% of cases and MOP26 million. Meanwhile, online

fraud cases numbered 188, with losses exceeding MOP24 million. Students made up 33%

of online fraud victims, with over MOP1.76 million stolen. Cheong Un Hong,

head of the Judiciary Police's (PJ) Anti-Fraud Coordination Center, noted investment scams comprised over 70% of total online fraud losses.

Students are especially susceptible to online ticket purchasing and shopping scams during summer breaks, when more time is spent digitally. The PJ has urged caution for those seeking "summer jobs" online, and recommended shopping at stores' physical locations.

In the first half, over 40,000 people were warned against fraud through lectures and workshops. Those with questions can check risks using the police department's app or report tips and calling for help. VC

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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For subscription and general issues:

general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

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

Tourism sees gradual increase, cracks down on illegal tour groups

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has reported a gradual increase in tour group numbers, though levels have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, the bureau continues efforts to curb illegal tour operators in the region.

MGTO deputy director Ricky Hoi revealed that, despite not reaching 2019 levels, the number of tour groups visiting Macau is showing a slowly increasing positive trend. This comes as the authority enforces stringent measures to combat illegal tour groups.

Hoi highlighted the MGTO's inspections at border gates and tourist sites to ensure compliance. These inspections are part of a broader campaign to crack down on illegal tour operators, with the MGTO collaborating with the Public Security Police and receiving regular industry reports.

Since last year, a total of 20 illegal tour groups have been apprehended by the MGTO. Hoi stated that relevant information on these cases has been promptly reported to the appropriate mainland departments, who are responsible for conduc-

RENATO MARQUES



ting thorough investigations and enacting the appropriate penalties.

speaking to the press yesterday, Hoi was questioned about the potential impact of casino snack distribution adjustments on tourists' interest in visiting Macau. In response, he highlighted that the number of tourists visiting Macau remains unaffected, with over 110,000 visitors recorded during the recent weekend of June 29 and 30. He further emphasized that tourists visit Macau for reasons beyond free snacks at casinos, with community tourism being a significant draw for visitors.

Furthermore, Macau recently hosted the opening ceremony of the annual conference of the

Asia Pacific Tourism Association (APTA), marking its return as the conference's host city after

2010. This year's conference has attracted more than 200 scholars, industry leaders, and individuals from various regions, all gathering in Macau to exchange ideas and insights within the tourism industry.

Held at the Galaxy International Convention, the conference "serves as a crucial platform for exchanging knowledge, discussing the latest trends, and fostering international cooperation in tourism and hospitality."

The APTA 2024 Conference features a series of discussions on critical issues facing the industry. Topics include destination management, tourism marketing, consumer behaviour, cultural and heritage management, lodging management, and tourism and hospitality education.

In particular, the conference highlights the impact of digital transformation and female empowerment, reflecting the industry's evolving landscape and the need for innovative solutions to maintain competitiveness in a global market.

MGTO UNVEILS NEW MAK MAK ATTRACTION

THE Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is launching the second phase of its "Cool Macao" project commencing next Friday, July 12.

This initiative will feature a large-scale installation of the Macau mascot, Mak Mak, and the "Stay Chill Macao Market" at the Ritz Building in Senado Square.

The "Stay Chill Macao Market" will operate every Friday to Sunday, as well as during the upcoming National Day Golden Week holiday from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. until December 1.

The market will feature approximately 18 stalls offering cultural and creative products, handicrafts, and light refreshments.

In a separate initiative, the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) announced a series of promotional campaigns to boost the community economy. The bureau is collaborating with trade associations and Mango TV to create cultural tourism programs and has introduced new travel routes from the Qingmao and Border Gate checkpoints to the northern district, promoted by mainland content creators. **NS**

TOURISM

Industry optimistic about summer holidays

RENATO MARQUES

THE local tourism industry is optimistic about the summer holiday season, the lawmaker and president of the Association of Macao Tourist Agents, Cheung Kin Chung, said in an interview with the public broadcaster TDM.

Questioned on the topic, Cheung said that the industry is optimistic that more visitors (particularly families) will come to Macau this summer to take advantage of measures launched recently by the central government.

He is also optimistic that other types of visitors, including those attending conventions and exhibitions, will grow in the coming months.

Cheung also noted that, due to the increase in hotel room rates, the industry has responded with an increase in the quality of its offerings

RENATO MARQUES



and services.

Cheung highlighted that the emphasis on quality and high-end tourism should counteract any potential impact of more affordable offerings available in Hengqin on the local industry.

In a different interview with the same public broadcaster, Paul Wong, president of the Macau Leisure and Tourism Service Innovation Association, was also hopeful for a good

result for the industry this summer.

Wong noted that the summertime has always been a peak period for visits to Macau, and expects that this year will be no different.

He also remarked that the recent tax exemption policies from the central government on goods purchased in Macau should contribute to higher spending and increased interest from mainland residents in visiting Macau.

TOURISM UNAFFECTED BY LACK OF CASINO FREEBIES

THE new restrictions imposed by gaming operators on the provision of free food and drinks had no noticeable impact on visitation to the gambling hub.

Deputy director of the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Ricky Hoi said that over 110,000 people arrived in Macau between June 29 to June 30. This figure indicates the policies restricting casinos' freebie offerings did not deter travelers, as some operators recently scaled back on complimentary snacks and non-alcoholic beverages due to flagging gaming revenues.

Hoi believes most visitors come to Macau primarily to explore the local culture, attractions, entertainment and cuisine offerings rather than seek out freebies at casinos. As the

tourism economy's main driver, Macau's casinos attract many patrons, but other elements of the destination also draw crowds.

The steady weekend arrival numbers suggest the restrictions on operators' promotions have not discouraged tourism to Macau, which remains core to the region's economic blueprint.

Last month, Macau government has reportedly directed casino operators either to restrict or stop providing complimentary snacks to their patrons, according to multiple sources.

The move comes amid concerns that the practice of offering free food and drinks is negatively impacting local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). **VC**

IAM LAUNCHES TENDER FOR PHASE TWO OF COASTAL PROMENADE

RENATO MARQUES*

THE Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has launched a public tender for the construction of the second phase of the South Shore Waterfront Green Promenade.

The project, presented in mid-January this year, includes a dozen different leisure areas and sports facilities that cater to the whole public, IAM said during the phase's project presentation.

In this second phase, the project aims to develop the coastal area from the south of the peninsula, to the west of the Governador Nobre de Carvalho Bridge, and then up to the "Gate of Understanding" (Porta do Entendimento).

According to the public tender notice published yesterday in the government's official gazette, bids should include, besides price offerings, a total construction period not longer than 240 working days.

IAM will be receiving bids from now until Aug. 7 at 5 p.m., with the ceremony of the proposal opening to be held Aug. 8 at 10 a.m.

Among the criteria that will contribute significantly towards the selected bid are the overall price (60%), the proposed project (12%), and its construction time (8%).

Other criteria such as the contractor's experience, the quality of the proposed materials, and the ability to mobilize local employment for the project are each weighted at 5%.

Earlier this year, IAM announced the project would include a leisure trail, a cycle track, a skate park, and several fitness and outdoor exercise areas, as well as multifunctional plazas and sports grounds dedicated to several activities.

"The main dynamic routes will involve a barrier-free waterfront leisure trail and cycle track extending across the whole area. The



waterfront leisure trail will be at least five meters wide," said architect Kam Fong.

"The lanes of the cycle track running in opposite directions will each be 1,300 meters long and four meters wide, and the total length of one lap will be about 2,600 meters. Part of the cycle track will be elevated to maximize use of the land in the leisure area and provide more shaded space," he said.

Kam Fong Wa, who is responsible for the preliminary design, said the whole area adopts a micro-topographical design with

undulating slopes, increasing greenery and shaded area, as well as allowing some buildings and facilities to actually be "incorporated" into the slopes, creating a visually clean and open area.

The waterfront green corridor is designed to cater to both locals and tourists, offering a diverse range of activities and facilities.

Upon completion, the green corridor has been reported as being set to connect to the transport hub in Barra, where a new Light Rapid Transit (LRT) station was recently opened. This marks the first expansion of the LRT sys-

tem onto the Macau peninsula, improving connectivity and accessibility for both residents and visitors.

This project builds on the success of the first-phase green corridor beside the Macau Science Center, which opened in April 2021. The current expansion is expected to commence construction by the end of this year, with completion aimed for late 2026.

On Aug. 8, the public will finally get to know how much the project is projected to cost; for the time being, IAM officials have refused, consistently, to detail any expect-

ed figures.

To participate in the bidding process, companies must provide a provisional deposit of MOP750,000 and a final deposit of 5% of the total project value. Additionally, a 5% deduction will be made from each partial payment received by the contractor to ensure the performance of the contract. Notably, there is no reserve price, allowing for competitive bidding.

***WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING FROM NADIA SHAW**

Electoral commission to undergo overhaul, reports say

STAFF REPORTER

THE Chief Executive's Electoral Commission is set to undergo a significant overhaul, with several members of the electoral college stepping down, according to a report by TDM.

According to sources contacted by the state-media, a number of individuals from both the Portuguese and Chinese

communities, aged over 75, will be substituted by younger individuals.

Likewise, changes are expected for individuals such as Jorge Neto Valente, Anabela Ritchie, Jorge Fão, and Edith Silva, as well as Ma Iao Hang, Lau Cheok Va, Paula Ling and David Chow from the Chinese community.

Meanwhile, a total of 348 permanent residents have registered to run in

next month's Chief Executive Election Committee members selection.

The Chief Executive of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) is elected every five years. The person who serves as the city's top official is chosen by a 400-member committee called the Chief Executive Election Committee.

If all 348 registered candidates are accepted,

the number of candidates will exceed the number of available seats by four. The final list of accepted candidates will be announced next Friday.

Current Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng's first five-year term leading the Macau government will end Dec. 19. A 67-year-old, Ho has not yet announced whether he plans to run for a second five-year term as chief executive.

According to Macau's Basic Law, the Chief Executive can only serve a maximum of two five-year terms in a row. The election to choose members of the committee that will select the next chief executive will take place on Aug. 11.

The educational and labor sectors are the only ones where the number of registered candidates exceeds the number of

available seats. 31 candidates registered for the 29 educational seats, while 61 registered for the 59 labor seats.

In the 2019 Chief Executive Election Committee election, there were 350 candidates competing for the 344 available seats. The educational and labor sectors were also the only ones with more candidates than seats.

Bamboo scaffolding industry complains to CE, claims lack of support

RENATO MARQUES

REPRESENTATIVES from the bamboo scaffolding industry delivered a letter yesterday morning to the Chief Executive (CE), complaining of a lack of support for their traditional activity.

According to the industry representatives, back in 2014, they were allowed to lease a land plot at Taipa's Zone E2 area to store bamboo materials and train professionals in this sector.

Recently, they claim to have received a notice from the Land and Urban Construction Bureau notifying them that the lease would not be renewed and ordering them to vacate the site within 60 days.

Industry representatives say there are no options for them and they need a relatively large space to store and dry the bamboo before it can be used for the scaffolding in construction projects or to build temporary venues such as those used for hos-

ting traditional celebrations.

In the letter to the CE, they call on the government to continue renting them the same land or offer some other alternative under similar conditions.

The representatives noted that, besides the livelihood of all the workers, the survival of this historic profession is also at stake.

The craft of bamboo scaffolding is one of the Chinese "sam hong" (three industries of construction works, namely plastering, woodwork, and bamboo scaffolding), and forms part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Macau.

The craft is used in the construction of buildings and the setting up of work platforms for renovations and repairs, and is an essential part of traditional construction works.

The traditional materials are tied in a grid panel with nylon strips, canvas, and nylon mesh.

Due to the flexibility of the craft, several types of bamboo scaffolding have been widely



used in Macau.

In recent years, the construction of bamboo pavilions and

art-like structures using the same techniques and materials has been revived by the studen-

ts and professors of Architecture at the University of Saint Joseph in Macau.

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TOURISM

INDUSTRY SUMMIT EYES STRENGTHENING CHINA-THAILAND COOPERATION IN TOURISM

OVER 200 business leaders from the Macau, Hong Kong and the mainland gathered in Bangkok earlier this week to share their insights on strengthening tourism exchanges and cooperation with Thai partners.

Hosted by the Global Tourism Economy Research Centre (GTERC) and organized by the China Chamber of Tourism and the China Women's Chamber of Commerce, the China-Thailand Cultural Tourism Industry Summit convened on the same day when China and Thailand established diplomatic relations in 1975, serving as a warm-up event to welcome the upcoming 50th anniversary.

Pansy Ho, vice chairperson of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce and president of the GTERC, noted during her opening speech that tourism has not only helped boost the two respective economies in a mutually beneficial way, but also brought the people of China and Thailand closer.

Jakkaphon Tangsutthitham, vice minister of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, highlighted the significant role of the Chinese market in the Thai tourism industry, hailing the mutual visa exemption agreement as a boost to realizing the ministry's target of attracting 8 million Chinese visitors this year.

Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya, deputy governor for international marketing of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, presented the latest data and trends of Chinese travelers to Thailand during the "visa-free era", adding that Thailand aims to remain a top destination for Chinese travelers.

Edison Chen, vice president of Trip.com Group, shared data and case studies collected by the leading one-stop online travel service provider while exploring the potential for further development of the cultural and tourism industries in both countries.

Other representatives from the cultural and tourism industry focused on leveraging cultural tourism for mutual prosperity and new opportunities for private sector collaboration in cultural tourism development, providing insights on strategies to enhance cultural tourism and humanistic exchanges between China and Thailand. **MDT/XINHUA**



ROAD WORKS

RESIDENTS SLAM GOV'T OVER BOTCHED ROAD RENOVATIONS IN COTAI

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU residents have taken to social media to criticize the government's handling of road work around the Cotai ecological reserve.

The newly constructed roads and traffic signals have been met with a wave

of backlash, as drivers report increased congestion and questionable decision-making by transportation authorities.

Commuters have expressed frustration over what they describe as ineffective infrastructure changes.

"The purpose of building these roads seems

unclear, as the conditions are still poor even after the repairs. The roads have been fixed, but traffic jams persist," lamented one social media user, expressing frustration with the apparent ineffectiveness of the infrastructure changes.

Several residents went further, directly accusing

the government of exacerbating traffic problems. "Facts have proven that the Transport Bureau (DSAT) is responsible for 90% of Macau's traffic jams," claimed one individual, while another bluntly asserted that the works had, "successfully turned a normal road into a road with traffic jams."

Meanwhile, in a report by TDM, one driver said, "Yes, it is easy for drivers to see the traffic signs even from a distance. It is good for us to drive safely." However, this sentiment is not widely shared on social media, where residents have been vocal in their criticism.

The addition of new traffic signals has also drawn ire, with one social media user expressing, "I honestly think adding lights is unnecessary!"

This is in contrast to the views of an interviewed driver who said, "With the traffic lights, the traffic will be fine. There used to be traffic jams when there were no traffic lights."

A poll conducted by a local resident group found that 94% of respondents supported the removal of the newly added traffic lights, further underscoring the public's dissatisfaction with the government's approach.

Meanwhile, upcoming changes include the cancellation of the roundabout section on the south side of the Estr. do Dique Oeste, as well as limited openings of various road sections in the coming weeks and months. Motorists hope the project will be completed soon to alleviate the persistent traffic woes.

COOPERATION ZONE

Macau New Neighborhood leases over 200 housing units for young talents

MACAU Urban Renewal Limited (MUR) has announced that more than 200 houses for young talents in the Macau New Neighborhood project in Hengqin are now available for rent.

The company is collaborating with various institutions, including Hengqin School Affiliated to Haojiang Middle School, the University of

Macau, and the New Neighborhood Health Station, to negotiate the leasing of these talent rooms.

According to a WeChat announcement from the MUR, the Macau New Neighborhood project has more than 200 units of supporting talent housing, concentrated in blocks 17 and 18.

The leasing is governed by the regulation that the units are "only for rent, not

for sale," and are available to those who meet specific requirements, including institutions and related talents, regardless of their household registration.

MUR stated that the leasing of talent housing is part of Hengqin's overall plan to further support the talent settlement measures in Hengqin.

The company hopes to attract more high-quality skilled personnel to move

in, driving the popularity and business vitality of the new neighborhood and creating a convenient and livable environment for people who work, study, and live in the Cooperation Zone.

The Macau New Neighborhood project is a significant step in Hengqin's efforts to attract and retain talent, which is crucial for the region's economic and social development. **VC**



URBAN PLANNING

CPU members unhappy with how gov't considers Urban Conditions Plans

RENATO MARQUES

SOME members of the Urban Planning Committee (CPU) are dissatisfied with the Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) procedures that apply to the way certain Urban Conditions Plans (PCUs) are considered. This sentiment was expressed during a CPU meeting on Wednesday afternoon.

Several committee members raised issues including the lack of information on projects under consideration and cases where landowners faced no consequences for not adhering to previous committee instructions.

The discussion ignited over the debate over a PCU for a project at Rua dos Fatiões in Macau.

Some members pointed out that while the binding opinion from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) stated that the "building façade should be preserved," as the building is located in a protected

area of the Macau Historical Center and consequently is subject to the "Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro Plan," photos of the plot attached to the file showed that the façade had not been preserved, and the former building had been completely demolished several years ago.

In response, an IC representative explained that such a requirement had been transcribed from a previous PCU for the same land plot, issued years before. However, the façade had eventually collapsed due to deterioration and a lack of maintenance, coupled with severe weather conditions.

The IC official also noted that there was no penalty for the owner as he had filed a report explaining the situation.

One member argued that it made no sense to address the need to preserve a façade or part of a building that no longer existed.

In response, the IC representa-



ative said that the agreement with the owner was that he would rebuild the façade of the building to match the original features and appearance.

Despite agreeing in principle to this solution, the committee member noted that there was a lack of detail on the appearance of the original façade in the PCU, including critical informa-

tion such as measurements or drawings.

"How can we be discussing this if we are not aware of any of these arrangements," he asked, noting that is not the first time that issue had occurred.

In closing, the president of the CPU and director of the DSSCU, Lai Weng Leong, acknowledged members' concerns and assured

them that the DSSCU would strive to improve and provide more accurate information in the future.

CPU ALLOWS WORKS ON CLASSIFIED BUILDING

The CPU also approved a PCU that allows extensive construction and renovation works at the building currently housing the Headquarters of the Delta Asia Bank, located at Calçada do Tronco Velho in Central Macau.

Committee member and head of the local Architects Association, Christine Choi, expressed surprise at the IC's lenient requirements on the permitted changes to the original building, questioning the representative on the matter.

In response, the IC said that the requirements present in the bureau's binding opinion are considered to be sufficient to ensure that the building façade, as well as the roof, are protected and retain their original characteristics.

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP

MACAU AND HONG KONG FIRMS JOIN GBA STARTUP HUB

NADIA SHAW

MACAU and Hong Kong companies are flocking to a new startup hub in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province.

As part of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) initiative to integrate the economies of southern China, the Greater Bay Area Youth Innovation & Startup Hub in Yuexiu aims to help startups and entrepreneurs from Hong Kong and Macau to establish a presence in the massive economic zone by offering free office space, policy consultations and other support services.

Since its launch in July 2021, the hub in Guangzhou's Yuexiu district has provided startup facilitation services to over 30 enterprises led by young entrepreneurs from Hong Kong and Macau, spanning sectors such as health-care, international education and cultural creativity.

The hub has also attracted top talent from prestigious institutions, including Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, MIT, the University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, to engage in educational and cultural exchanges in the GBA.

"Our hub also houses the Hong Kong and Macao Youth Home Secretariat and an Innovation and Startup Service Department. It is



equipped with facilities like personal live-streaming rooms and a shared coffee room," said Deng Jingqian, the hub's director.

He articulated his optimism that by organizing a range of high-quality cultural exchange events, they could effectively cultivate a positive global perspective and expand the international outlook of the youth in the area, thus promoting greater interaction, thorough communication, and strong integration among them.

Fu Liu, Chief economist and party member, said the guide focuses on four scenarios – leisure traveling, living, working and studying, and investment and entrepreneurship.

"We've gathered information from more than 10 departments across the region. There are introductions to our industrial and entrepreneurial policies for those who come to work and start a business," said Fu.

"There are also contents related to our tourist destinations and document processing that may interest those coming to live here or travel here," she added.

Meanwhile, Long Tianxiang, chairman of Guangzhou Difenuo Coffee Co., Ltd. who's a native of Macau, informed a media delegation that there has been a rising trend of young people from Hong Kong and Macau coming to

the mainland for internships, entrepreneurship, or employment. "Through our 'Wings Program,' we have successfully provided internship opportunities to nine interns from Hong Kong," he said.

Around 200 Hong Kong businesses attended the launch event last week, along with trade groups, youth organizations, government officials and business advisers.

The launch comes as business sentiment in the GBA has rebounded strongly in the first quarter of 2024, with the GBA Business Confidence Index jumping 11.8 points to 51.3, the first reading above 50 since the fourth quarter of 2021.

TRANSPORT

Businesses positive about Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge

NADIA SHAW

As the highly anticipated Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge opened Sunday for trial operations, businesses in Macau are optimistic about potential benefits of the new cross-sea passage.

The Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge is seen as a crucial link in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area, which generated 14 trillion yuan in economic output in 2023, equivalent to 11% of China's GDP.

The region aims to leverage its strengths and become a center for technology and inno-

vation, with infrastructural connectivity being a key focus.

"The opening of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge will reduce travel times, and boost exchanges and developments between Macau and Shenzhen," said Wong Ian Man, the Guangdong and Macau Federation of Industry and Commerce President.

Shenzhen, considered China's Silicon Valley, is home to tech and manufacturing giants such as Tencent, DJI and BYD, with many of their manufacturing plants located in the Bao'an district, the starting point of the bridge.

As Macau diversifies its eco-

nomy beyond gaming, the improved connectivity and logistics efficiency brought by the bridge are expected to create new opportunities for businesses in the city.

The new transport route boasts eight lanes designed for speeds of up to 100 km per hour.

The Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link is another large-scale transportation project in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area, following the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, which is situated approximately 31 km south of the new link.

"Its opening will reshape the road network layout of the Pearl River Estuary, significantly impacting the economic and social development of the GBA," said Lin Feiming, head of the Guangdong provincial department of transport.

As of Wednesday 3 p.m., the mega cross-sea passage in south China, had handled 305,000

vehicles, 72 hours after its official opening, data from Guangdong Transportation Group showed.

"The link has already accounted for about 25% of the daily traffic passing through the Pearl River, which promotes market integration in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA)," said Lin Feiming, head of the Guangdong provincial department of transport.

The 24-kilometer link, comprising bridges, islands, tunnels and underwater interchanges, is expected to significantly reduce travel times between the two cities from two hours to 30 minutes.

The bridge will link with major expressways on both sides, including a connection to the Guangzhou-Macau Expressway in the west, and will charge a toll fee of RMB66 per standard vehicle for the entire route.

BRIEFS

HONG KONG TO WELCOME NEW GIANT PANDAS

Hong Kong will soon receive a new pair of giant pandas as a present from the central government to commemorate the 27th anniversary of the region's establishment. The special administrative region's chief executive, John Lee Ka-chiu, made the announcement during a reception earlier this week. The pandas are expected to arrive in Hong Kong in a few months and will be housed at Ocean Park, joining the two previous gifts from the central government, Ying Ying and Le Le. Lee emphasized that this gesture demonstrates the nation's care and support for Hong Kong, especially as it coincides with the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

COLORFUL SUMMER CARNIVAL IN SHENZHEN

One of China's original theme parks, Shenzhen Splendid China Folk Village, launched its colorful summer carnival last week. The event, which will run until Sept 1, offers visitors a 66-day summer celebration through five meticulously-crafted carnivals, 12 ethnic music festivals and over 30 daily village singing and dance performances. According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, more than 37,000 cultural and tourism consumption activities will be hosted across the country during July and August. Additionally, on the occasion of the 103rd anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, the ministry will host a red culture storytelling event.

GUANGZHOU-BUDAPEST ROUTE MARKS FIRST DIRECT GBA FLIGHT TO HUNGARY

A new direct air route was established between Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong Province in south China, and Budapest in Hungary last week. The inaugural flight, CZ649, departed from Guangzhou at around 1 a.m. with more than 200 passengers on board, marking the first direct flight between the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area and Hungary. Operated by China Southern Airlines, the new air service uses a Boeing aircraft and offers flights four times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. The journey between Guangzhou and Budapest takes approximately 12 hours.

SCO

Leaders of China, Russia attend summit of regional security grouping

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday attended the summit of a security grouping created by Moscow and Beijing to counter Western alliances.

Putin and Xi joined the leaders of other countries that are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at its annual meeting in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana.

The grouping was established in 2001 by China, Russia and the four ex-Soviet Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to promote regional security and economic cooperation. It was later joined by India, Pakistan and Iran. Russia's western neighbor and ally, Belarus, joined the SCO yesterday.

Observer states and dialogue partners include Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Addressing the summit, Putin emphasized the group's focus on ensuring security of its members and said the SCO will form a dedicated center that will coordinate response to various security challenges. He added that the group's members will also endorse a special program to fight separatism and extremism.

Xi called on the SCO members to show solidarity in the face "the real challenges of intervention and polarization," according to a readout of his speech by the official Xinhua news agency.

"In the face of the real threat of the Cold War mentality, we have to safeguard the security bottom line," he added.

Besides Putin and Xi, and summit host Kazakh President Kas-



sym-Jomart Tokayev, attending Thursday's meeting are Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of Pakistan, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan, President Emomali Rakhmon of Tajikistan, President Sadyr Zhaparov of Kyrgyzstan and President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India has sent his foreign minister. Indian media reports speculated the recently reelected Modi was busy with the parliament session that began last week.

Iran is still choosing a successor to President Ebrahim Raisi, killed in a helicopter crash in

May, with a runoff election today, so acting President Mohammad Mokhbar attended the summit.

During a meeting yesterday with the Russian leader on the sidelines of the summit, Mokhbar conveyed a message to Putin from Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, saying that "deep and unchangeable" relations between the two allies will remain strong irrespective of the election. Mokhbar added that strong ties between Moscow and Tehran have changed "the power equations in the world."

Other guests of the SCO included President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and President

Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan.

Also present was U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres, who is visiting Central Asia.

For Putin, the summit offered another venue to demonstrate the failure of Western efforts to isolate Russia over its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking yesterday at the summit, Putin mentioned his statement in June that the hostilities could end if Ukraine withdraws its troops from the four regions that Moscow annexed in 2022 and abandons its bid to join NATO. Kyiv and its allies have rejected the idea.

Putin also thanked SCO mem-

bers for their proposals for a peace settlement, adding that Moscow will take them into account.

Moscow has hailed a peace plan for Ukraine offered by China last year that was rejected by both Ukraine and the West for failing to call for Russia to leave occupied parts of Ukraine.

At a meeting with Xi on Wednesday, Putin hailed the SCO as "one of the key pillars of a fair, multipolar world order," and said ties between Moscow and Beijing are "experiencing the best period in their history."

It marked their second meeting in as many months following Putin's visit to China, which underscored Beijing's political support for Moscow amid Western sanctions and China's role as a top market for Russian oil and gas. Russia also has relied on Beijing as a main source of high-tech imports to keep its military machine running.

The SCO helps China project its influence, especially across Central Asia and the Global South. Xi called for "bridges of communication" between countries last week and wants to further promote China as an alternative to the U.S. and its allies.

For host Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian nations, the meeting is a way to further their cooperation with bigger, more powerful neighbors. Kazakhstan, for instance, frequently engages with both neighboring Russia and China, while also pursuing links with the West.

Speaking in opening remarks at the summit, Tokayev hailed the SCO as "one of the most authoritative and influential international structures." **MDT/AP**

EVS

BYD inaugurates first plant in Thailand as it expands reach into Southeast Asia

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
BANGKOK

CHINESE automaker BYD inaugurated its first electric vehicle plant in Thailand yesterday, part of the company's push into Southeast Asia while it also tackles wealthier markets in the U.S. and Europe.

The factory's opening comes on the same day

that the European Union is expected to begin imposing higher tariffs on EVs made in China due to concerns over competition from the cheaper-priced imports.

In the U.S., the Biden administration also is raising tariffs on Chinese EVs to 100% from the current 25%. The U.S. currently imports very few Chinese

cars, but like the European Commission, it worries that subsidies hurt domestic companies and cost jobs.

The new factory in Rayong, south of Bangkok, was built in just 16 months and has an annual production capacity of 150,000 vehicles. It makes several BYD models and also batteries and transmissions.

Its opening on Thursday was marked with great fanfare and included the presentation of a BYD Dolphin, a compact hatchback, to a charitable foundation under the patronage of the Thai royal family.

That vehicle was the 8 millionth vehicle manufactured by BYD, the company said.

Thailand aims to have

30% of all vehicles made in the country be electric by 2030. One in every three EVs sold in Thailand is made by BYD, though most cars on the roads now are still gas or diesel powered.

BYD, which stands for "Build Your Dreams," sold 3 million vehicles last year and its exports more than tripled to 243,000. In the first half of this year, the company sold 1.6 million EVs.

It sold 30,650 EVs in Thailand last year and plans for its new factory to make the Dolphin, Atto 3, Seal and Sealion 6 EV mo-

dels.

BYD says the new factory is expected to create 10,000 jobs. Apart from Thailand and China, BYD also has or is building factories in Brazil, Hungary and Uzbekistan.

According to BYD, the Dolphin can run 490 kilometers (about 300 miles) on a single charge. During a recent auto show in Bangkok, models on display were priced at 859,999 baht (\$23,700), though reports said BYD would be offering steep discounts in Thailand on vehicles made in the new factory. **MDT/AP**

CHINA IS THE RUNAWAY LEADER IN GENERATIVE AI PATENT APPLICATIONS FOLLOWED BY THE US: UN

JAMEY KEATEN, GENEVA

CHINA has requested far more patents than any other country when it comes to generative AI, the U.N. intellectual property agency said Wednesday, with the United States a distant second.

The technology, which offers the potential to boost efficiency and speed up scientific discoveries but also raises concerns about jobs and workers, was linked to about 54,000 inventions in the decade through 2023, the World Intellectual Property Organization reported.

More than a quarter of those inventions emerged last year — a testament to the explosive growth and interest in the technology since generative AI vaulted into broad public consciousness in late 2022, WIPO said.

The new report on patents, the first of its kind, aims to track patent applications as a possible indication of trends in artificial intelligence. It focuses only on generative AI and excludes artificial intelligence more broadly, which includes technologies like facial recognition or autonomous driving.

AP PHOTO



Director General the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Daren Tang

“WIPO hopes to give everyone a better understanding of where this fast-evolving technology is being developed, and where it is headed,” WIPO Director-General Daren Tang told reporters.

Over the decade starting in 2014, over 38,200 generative AI inventions came from China. That's six times more than from the United States, which had nearly 6,300. They were trailed by South Korea with 4,155, Japan with more than 3,400 and

India with 1,350.

GenAI helps users create text, images, music, computer code and other content through the use of tools including ChatGPT from OpenAI, Google Gemini and Ernie from China's Baidu. The technology has been employed by many industries including the life sciences, manufacturing, transportation, security and telecommunications.

Some critics fear that GenAI could replace workers in some types of jobs or improperly take

human-generated content without fair or adequate compensation to the people behind it

As with other types of patent applications, WIPO officials acknowledge that the quantity of GenAI patents doesn't indicate quality. It's hard to tell so early in the technology which patents will have market value or be transformative for society.

“Let's see how the data and how the developments unfold over time,” Tang said.

The U.S. and China are often

seen as rivals in the development of artificial intelligence, but by some measures U.S. tech companies are taking the lead in making the world's most cutting-edge AI systems.

“Looking at patents just paints one part of a narrative,” said Nestor Maslej, a research manager at Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, who added that patent approval rates can vary depending on a country's laws.

“When you look at AI vibrancy, a very important question is who's releasing the best models, where are those models coming from and, at least by that metric, it seems like the United States is really far ahead,” said Maslej, who edits Stanford's annual AI Index measuring the state of the technology.

Sixty-one notable machine-learning models emerged from U.S.-based institutions in 2023, outpacing the European Union's 21 and China's 15, according to this year's AI Index. Of EU countries, France had the most, with eight.

By another measure, the U.S. also has the most so-called AI foundation models — such as OpenAI's GPT-4, Anthropic's Claude 3, Gemini and Meta's Llama, which are huge, versatile and trained on massive datasets.

The U.S. also has led China in private AI investments and the number of newly formed AI startups, while China has led in industrial robotics. **MDT/AP**

DISPUTED SEA

Philippine military chief warns his forces will fight back if assaulted again in disputed

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

PHILIPPINE forces will defend themselves with “the same level of force” if they come under assault again from China's coast guard in the disputed South China Sea, where Chinese personnel armed with machetes and spears injured Filipino navy personnel and damaged two of their boats in a chaotic faceoff last month, the Philippine military chief said yesterday.

Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. asked China to pay 60 million pesos (\$1 million) in damages for the two navy boats and return seven rifles which he said were seized by Chinese coast guard personnel during the June 17 confrontation at Second Thomas

Shoal.

Philippine officials relayed the demands, along with a strong protest, during talks with a Chinese government delegation in Manila. The Chinese delegation did not immediately respond to the demands, a Philippine official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of not being authorized to discuss the sensitive issue publicly.

The Philippine military may also ask China to pay for planned surgery on the hand of a navy officer who lost his right thumb during the clash in the shoal when it was hit by a Chinese navy vessel that rammed his boat, Brawner said.

“What we'll do is we will apply the same level of force that would allow us to defend ourselves,” Brawner

AP PHOTO



Philippine military chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr.

said when asked in a news conference what Filipino navy personnel would do in case they are involved in another confrontation with Chinese forces at the shoal. “If a knife is used, for example, our personnel will also use a knife, nothing more, under the concept of proportionality.”

“When I said that we'll fight back, I meant we won't allow ourselves to be bullied just like that, just like what happened the last

time because, of course, our adversaries had weapons,” Brawner said, without elaborating.

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, which involve China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, have long been seen as a flash point that could pit the U.S. against China if the confrontations escalate into an armed conflict. Washington has repeatedly warned that it is obligated

to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the disputed waters.

Second Thomas Shoal Philippines has emerged as a particularly dangerous area in the disputed South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety. Chinese coast guard, navy and suspected militia ships have surrounded Philippine marines aboard a grounded ship to prevent the delivery of food and other supplies to Manila's territorial outpost.

China and the Philippines accuse each other of instigating the confrontation at the shoal last month. Beijing accused the Filipinos of entering what it called Chinese territo-

rial waters despite repeated warnings, prompting its coast guard to take action. The Philippines said its navy personnel were delivering food and other supplies to the Filipino forces stationed at the territorial outpost when Chinese coast guard personnel onboard at least eight boats assaulted them.

Brawner spoke after he and other top military commanders met President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in a closed-door conference where they explained progress in counter-insurgency efforts and updated plans to defend Philippine territorial interests in the South China Sea. Marcos renewed an order to Filipino forces to take steps to de-escalate tensions in the disputed waters, Brawner said, adding that the military would continue to comply. “We want to avoid war,” Brawner said, but added that the military would never allow any foreign country to trample on the Philippines' territorial rights. **MDT/AP**



CLIMATE CHANGE

India is likely undercounting heat deaths, affecting its response to increasingly harsh heat waves

SIBI ARASU, BENGALURU

MONTHS of scorching temperatures sometimes over 50 degrees Celsius in parts of India this year — its worst heat wave in over a decade — left hundreds dead or ill. But the official number of deaths listed in government reports barely scratches the surface of the true toll and that's affecting future preparations for similar swelters, according to public health experts.

India now has a bit of respite from the intense heat, and a different set of extreme weather problems as monsoon rain lashes the northeast, but for months the extreme heat took a toll on large swaths of the country, particularly in northern India, where government officials reported at least 110 heat-related deaths.

Public health experts say the true number of heat-related deaths is likely in the thousands but because heat is often not listed as a reason on a death certificate many heat deaths don't get counted in official figures. The worry, they say, is that undercounting the deaths means the heat wave problem isn't as prioritized as it should be, and officials are missing out on ways to prepare their residents for the scorching temperatures.

All of India's warmest years on record have been in the last decade. Studies by public health experts found that up to 1,116 people have died every year between 2008 and 2019 due to heat.

Difficulties registering heat deaths

As part of his work in public health, Srinath Reddy, the founder of the Public Health Foundation of India, has advised state governments on how to factor in heat when recording deaths.

He found that as a result of "incomplete reporting, delayed reporting and misclassification of deaths," heat-related deaths are significantly undercounted around the country. Despite national guidelines for recording deaths, many doctors — especially those in overcrowded public hospitals where resources are already strained — don't follow it, he said.

"Most doctors just record the immediate cause of death and attribution to environmental triggers like heat are not recorded," Reddy said. That's because heat deaths can be classified as exertional or non-exertional: Exertional

is when a person dies due to direct exposure to high temperatures and non-exertional is when young children, older people or people with pre-existing health conditions become seriously ill or sometimes die from the heat, even if indoors.

"The heatwave is the final straw for the second category of people," said Dileep Mavalankar, former head of the Indian Institute of Public Health

"The heatwave is the final straw for the second category of people

DILEEP MAVALANKAR
FORMER HEAD OF THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN GANDHINAGAR

in Gandhinagar. "Most people dying during heat waves belong to this category but their deaths are not recorded as connected to the heat."

Mavalankar agreed the official number of heat deaths this year is an undercount. He said there were 40,000 recorded case of heat stroke, but only 110 deaths. "This is just 0.3% of the total number of heatstroke cases recorded, but usually heat deaths should be 20 to 30% of heatstroke cases," he said.

"We need to be counting deaths better," Mavalankar

said. "That is the only way we will know how severe the consequences of extreme heat are."

Planning for future heat

In his former role at the Indian Institute of Public Health in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, Mavalankar was instrumental in developing India's first-ever heat action plan for the city of Ahmedabad in 2013, three years after more than 1,300 people died there during a heat wave.

The heat plan included measures like increasing access to shaded areas for outdoor workers, converting relatively cool public buildings to temporary shelters for people without homes or access to electricity and ensuring hospitals have adequate medical supplies and staff during heat waves.

In the years that followed, Mavalankar and his team studied the impact of the heat plan by counting death tolls in subsequent hot summers. Because of a lack of data on heat deaths specifically, the team looked at deaths from all causes, which spikes during heat waves, and used the number of excess deaths to determine

how many deaths were likely caused by heat.

They estimate that the heat action plan had helped reduce the number of fatalities during heat waves by up to 40%.

Having that data, while imperfect, Mavalankar said, allowed the city to adequately prepare itself for extreme heat, and do more of what worked in the future.

But he said the lack of data elsewhere makes it difficult to replicate the results in Ahmedabad on a national level.

"Not reporting these deaths, sharing data, is like the Indian Meteorological Department not sharing weather data," he said. "We can easily do this across the country but we've not decided that we should do it."

Improving government data

The Indian government collects data on heat-related deaths through the health ministry's National Centre for Disease Control which is then shared with the National Disaster Management Agency. The agency then shares the data as a total nationwide figure for the year, but a state by state breakdown is not publicly available.

The National Crime Records Bureau also collects heat-related death data as part of their accounting of deaths due to "forces of nature" and publishes those figures.

But there are huge discrepancies. In 2020, the last year with publicly available data on heat deaths from both official sources, the crime records bureau recorded 530 deaths from heatstroke, but the disaster agency reported just four heat-related deaths.

The Associated Press contacted India's health ministry spokesperson, the NCDC and the NDMA to comment on the discrepancy but did not receive a response.

Getting better data can answer a whole host of questions about who is most vulnerable and how best to help them, said Bharghav Krishna, a public health expert and a fellow at the Sustainable Futures Collaborative thinktank, "especially with respect to identifying who is dying, where they're dying, what are they doing when they're dying."

Krishna thinks that the data currently collected, while inadequate, can at least provide some insight for policymakers and researchers and force at least some action if its shared with the right people.

But Mavalankar said the issues of data collection are more systemic, and that needs to be urgently addressed.

"We have not done a national census since 2011, not having numbers is our national weakness," he said. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



LEBANON-ISRAEL BORDER

Fires have become the most visible sign of the conflict heating up

ABBY SEWELL & MELANIE LIDMAN, CHEBAA

WITH cease-fire talks faltering in Gaza and no clear offramp for the conflict on the Lebanon-Israel border, the daily exchanges of strikes between Hezbollah and Israeli forces have sparked fires that are tearing through forests and farmland on both sides of the frontline.

The blazes — exacerbated by supply shortages and security concerns — have consumed thousands of hectares of land in southern Lebanon and northern Israel, becoming one of the most visible signs of the escalating conflict.

There is an increasingly real possibility of a full-scale war — one that would have catastrophic consequences for people on both sides of the border. Some fear the fires sparked by a larger conflict would also cause irreversible damage to the land.

Charred remains in Lebanon

In Israel, images of fires sparked by Hezbollah's rockets have driven public outrage and spurred Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, to declare last month that it is "time for all of Lebanon to burn."

Much of it was already burning.

Fires in Lebanon began in late April — earlier than the usual fire season — and have torn through the largely rural areas along the border.

The Sunni town of Che-

baa, tucked in the mountains on Lebanon's southeastern edge, has little Hezbollah presence, and the town hasn't been targeted as frequently as other border villages. But the sounds of shelling still boom regularly, and in the mountains above it, formerly oak-lined ridges are charred and bare.

In a cherry orchard on the outskirts of town, clumps of fruit hang among browned leaves after a fire sparked by an Israeli strike tore through. Firefighters and local men — some using their shirts to beat out flames — stopped the blaze from reaching houses and U.N. peacekeeper center nearby.

"Grass will come back next year, but the trees are gone," said Moussa Saab, whose family owns the orchard. "We'll have to get saplings and plant them, and you need five or seven years before you can start harvesting."

Saab refuses to leave with his wife and 8-year-old daughter. They can't afford to live elsewhere, and they fear not being able to return, as happened to his parents when they left the disputed Chebaa Farms area — captured from Syria by Israel in 1967 and claimed by Lebanon.

BURN SCARS IN ISRAEL

The slopes of Mount Meron, Israel's second-highest mountain and home to an air base, were long covered in native oak trees, a dense grove providing shelter to wild pigs, gazelles, and rare species of flowers and fauna.

Now the green slopes are interrupted by three new burn scars — the largest a few hundred square meters — remnants of a Hezbollah explosive drone shot down a few weeks ago. Park rangers worry that devastation has just begun.

"The damage this year is worse a dozen times over this year," said Shai Koren, of the northern district for Israel's Nature and Parks Authority.

Looking over the slopes of Meron, Koren said he doesn't expect this forest to survive the summer: "You can take a before and after picture."

NUMBERS AND WEAPONS

Since the war began, the Israeli military has tracked 5,450 launches toward northern Israel. According to Israeli think tank the Alma Research and Education Center, most early launches were short-range anti-tank missiles, but Hezbollah's drone usage has increased.

In Lebanon, officials and human rights groups accuse Israel of firing white phosphorus incendiary shells at residential areas, in addition to regular artillery shelling and airstrikes.

The Israeli military says it uses white phosphorus only as a smokescreen, not to target populated areas. But even in open areas, the shells can spark fast-spreading fires.

The border clashes began Oct. 8, a day after the Hamas-led incursion into southern Israel that killed around 1,200 people and sparked the war in Gaza. There, more than 37,000

have been killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Hezbollah began launching rockets into northern Israel to open what it calls a "support front" for Hamas, to pull Israeli forces away from Gaza.

Israel responded, and attacks spread across the border region. In northern Israel, 16 soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed. In Lebanon, more than 450 people — mostly fighters, but also 80-plus civilians and noncombatants — have been killed.

Exchanges have intensified since early May, when Israel launched its incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah. That coincided with the beginning of the hot, dry wildfire season.

Since May, Hezbollah strikes have resulted in 8,700 hectares (about 21,500 acres) burned in northern Israel, according to Israel's Nature and Parks Authority.

Eli Mor, of Israel's Fire and Rescue, said drones, which are much more accurate than rockets, often "come one after another, the first one with a camera and the second one will shoot."

"Every launch is a real threat," Mor added.

In southern Lebanon, about 4,000 hectares (10,000 acres) have burned due to Israeli strikes, said George Mitri, of the Land and Natural Resources program at the University of Balamand. In the two years before, he said, Lebanon's total area burned annually was 500 to 600 hectares (1,200 to 1,500 acres).

MDT/AP

this day in history

1991 INTERNATIONAL BANK CLOSED IN FRAUD SCANDAL



The Bank of England has closed down UK branches of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) over allegations of fraud.

The bank's 120,000 UK customers were stunned by the speed of the closure.

Even BCCI staff were not prepared for the largest ever intervention of this kind by the Bank of England, as deposits worth £250m were frozen.

Over the weekend liquidators from accountants Touche Ross will be entering all 25 branches to carry out detailed examinations of their finances.

The Bank of England also intends to stay open and set up a telephone hotline to help worried investors.

They are advising that the UK Deposit Protection Fund will guarantee investments up to £15,000 but investigators need to find out exactly how much is left in BCCI coffers.

London is at the centre of a global operation to investigate the activities of Luxembourg based BCCI, which is one of the biggest privately owned financial companies in the world.

Last year they were fined \$15m for laundering drug money for former President of Panama General Noriega. At the time there were calls to shut down the bank, as six of its former executives were also jailed.

Speaking today, the Governor of the Bank of England Robin Leigh-Pemberton explained: "We had no clear evidence under which we could act, under the Banking Act, until earlier this year."

There are already rumours that the bank made a huge operating loss last year and probably would have collapsed within weeks anyway.

Opposition MPs are demanding to know why action was not taken sooner but BCCI's controlling shareholder - the Abu Dhabi government - has accused the British Government of acting too quickly.

Today's closure comes in the wake of a report commissioned by the Bank of England and published by BCCI's auditors, Price Waterhouse, in June.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Touche Ross reported that BCCI had a £5.6bn deficit at the time of closure. It was the largest financial fraud in the world to that date.

The Abu Dhabi government tried to rescue the bank with a £1.8bn cash injection proposal. It later emerged that BCCI had stolen £1bn from the personal account of Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi. Up to 30 local authorities in the UK lost around £82m after investing in BCCI on the basis of approval by the Bank of England.

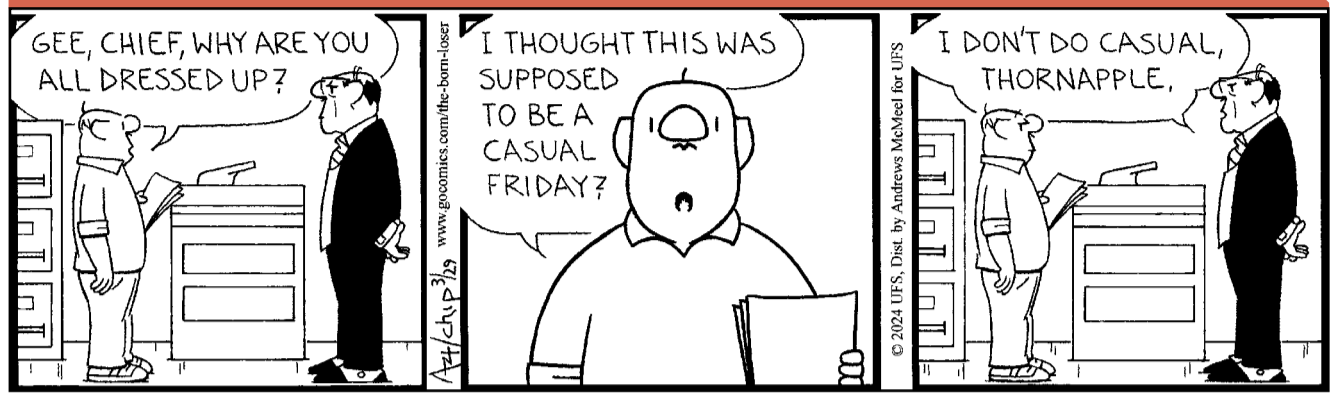
In 2001 the liquidators, Deloitte & Touche, were given unprecedented permission to sue the Bank of England for almost £1bn on behalf of 6,500 UK depositors who lost savings when BCCI collapsed. The lawsuit began in January 2004 and was the first the Bank had faced in its 300-year history. Deloitte dropped the case in November 2005 after a reserve judgement from the High Court said the case was no longer in the best interest of creditors. In March 2004 the Bank of India was ordered to pay \$82m (£45m) in compensation by a British High Court judge after investigations revealed insider knowledge of deposits were used to defraud BCCI creditors.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Enjoy domestic projects. Cook up a feast for a family gathering. Clean and decorate your home. Flowers add a colorful touch. Celebrate what you have.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Get behind a creative endeavor. Words flow with ease. Apply them to express ideas for potential solutions. Share and exchange information and resources.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Enjoy an abundant harvest. Share the bounty. Stash and conserve what you can. Take advantage of a lucky connection. You can find what you need.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 You're a star. Enjoy both public and private diversions. Wear your power suit. Express yourself. Invite others to participate in your fun idea.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Peaceful rituals soothe your spirit. Listen carefully. You're especially intuitive. Consider the results you'd love, and options for realization. Imagine, plot and plan.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Your team comes to your rescue. Discover valuable connections in your social networks. Ask for what you need. Share what you can. Collaborate.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 You can learn what you need for a professional project. Apply yourself to make the goal and discover new tricks in the process.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Curiosity draws you out. Travel and exploration beckon. Study fascinating subjects. Learn new cultural ideas, flavors and views. Expand your understanding. Investigate inspiring possibilities.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 You're on the same wavelength with your partner. Share tasks and responsibilities. Set practical goals. Pull together to get farther, faster. Invest for family growth.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Have fun together. Develop collaborative ideas, possibilities and commitments. Take advantage of a romantic situation. Remind someone special what you love about them.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Practice your moves. Physical action gets satisfying results. Prioritize health and fitness. Nurture yourself with delicious foods, rest and by reconnecting with nature.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Get playful. Practice your creative arts, talents and skills. Have fun with people, places and activities that you love. Pursue your heart's desire.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

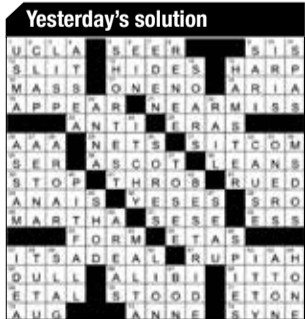
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	23	33	cloudy
Changchun	17	25	rain
Chengdu	22	32	cloudy
Chongqing	25	31	rain
Fuzhou	28	38	fine
Guangzhou	27	35	cloudy
Guiyang	21	28	cloudy
Haikou	26	34	cloudy
Hangzhou	27	38	fine
Harbin	19	25	cloudy
Hefei	25	35	cloudy
Nanjing	26	34	cloudy
Shanghai	29	36	fine
Taipei	25	33	fine
Wuhan	28	35	fine
Hong Hong	28	32	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	17	31	thunderstorms
Frankfurt	13	24	cloudy
Paris	17	26	cloudy
London	13	18	rain
New York	23	29	showers

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Stun gun; 6- Piercing places; 10- Type of D.A.; 14- Single-handedly; 15- Send out; 16- Dogg; 17- Speed contests; 18- Funny Fox; 19- Child support?; 20- Lanka; 21- "Crazy" singer Patsy; 23- What you put on snooze; 24- Mistreat; 26- Body of salt water; 27- Deprived of life; 29- Burgundy grape; 31- Great Lake; 32- Faucet stuff; 33- Itty-bitty; 36- In spite of; 40- United; 41- Like a smokestack; 42- Poet St. Vincent Millay; 43- Washer cycle; 44- Hosted; 46- "Goodnight" girl; 48- City near Kobe; 49- For (cheap); 50- One in prison for good; 52- Hockey goal part; 55- Latvian, e.g.; 56- Pessimist's word; 57- Large cat; 59- Bundle; 60- Winglike parts; 61- Greeting; 62- Passed with flying colors; 63- Jazz flutist Herbie; 64- Give it ___;

DOWN 1- Sailors; 2- Banned apple spray; 3- Debutante; 4- U-turn from WSW; 5- Free from danger; 6- Creepy; 7- Traditional prayer ending; 8- Travel on; 9- Avg.; 10- Short sock; 11- Capital city of Yemen; 12- Severe; 13- Swarm; 22- Timothy Leary stash; 23- Future oak; 25- Exploded; 26- ___-Day vitamins; 27- Lotto-like game; 28- Pressing need?; 29- Kindergarten adhesive; 30- ___-bitty; 32- ___ on first?; 33- Cameraleans; 34- Feminine suffix; 35- Old oath; 37- Of Thee ___; 38- Muscle quality; 39- Pack of cards; 43- Leased; 44- Legal add-on; 45- Stewart of home tips; 46- Sir ___ Newton was an English mathematician; 47- Esther of "Good Times"; 48- Many times; 49- Swedish pop band whose hits include "Waterloo"; 50- In ___ land; 51- ___ instant; 53- Morays; 54- Horse's gait; 56- Engine part; 58- Suffix with cloth;



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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 Va Fat HKD 3,780,000 2 bed 1 bath	 Tou Un HKD 2,980,000 1 bed 1 bath	 Jade Garden HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath
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EURO 2024 | PREVIEW

RONALDO VS. MBAPPÉ: CLASH OF GENERATIONS AS JUST BEEN GIVEN SOME EXTRA SPICE

STEVE DOUGLAS, HAMBURG

CRISTIANO Ronaldo vs. Kylian Mbappé.

A clash of soccer icons. A clash of generations.

They'll go head to head when Portugal plays France in the Euro 2024 quarterfinals tomorrow (Macau time), and this heavyweight meeting might have got just that little bit bigger.

"It is, without doubt, my last European Championship," the 39-year-old Ronaldo said after his tearful, emotionally charged performance in Portugal's penalty-shootout victory over Slovenia in the last 16.

That may have just confirmed what many were presuming anyway.

Still, there's now a definitive specter of finality to Ronaldo's long, headline-grabbing Euros adventure that could be brought to an end by Mbappé, the heir apparent to Ronaldo and Lionel Messi after their long-time dominance of the sport.

Mbappé grew up with pictures of Ronaldo on his bedroom wall.

A photo is inevitably doing the rounds on social media of what is apparently their first ever meeting, at Real Madrid's training ground at Valdebebas in 2012 when a 13-year-old Mbappé stood beside Ronaldo after a visit to the Spanish club whe-



re his sporting hero was the star player.

In 2020, Mbappé posted on Twitter, now X, that Ronaldo was his "idol."

And only a few months ago, Ronaldo reacted to Mbappé clinching a highly anticipated move to Madrid by writing on Instagram: "Excited to see you light up the Bernabeu."

That Mbappé can now end Ronaldo's European Championship career — who knows, it might even be his last ever major tournament — adds an intriguing subplot to a match that will be watched around the world.

"Let's go, let's go to war," Ronaldo said of the match against France, whom he considers as the top

contender at Euro 2024 along with Spain.

He said he was driven to tears against Slovenia not at the prospect of elimination but because his main motivation these days is "making people happy" and he had a penalty saved in extra time.

"I'm moved by all that football means — by the enthusiasm I have for the game, the enthusiasm for seeing my supporters, my family, the affection people have for me.

"It's not about leaving the world of football. What else is there for me to do or win?"

Ronaldo heads into Friday's game having failed to score in eight straight matches at major tournaments — Portugal's last four at the 2022 World Cup and its four games

at Euro 2024 — and with growing concerns about whether he deserves what appears to be a guaranteed spot in the team under Roberto Martinez.

Things haven't been straightforward for Mbappé, either, at Euro 2024.

He sustained a broken nose in France's group opener against Austria and has since been wearing a vision-limiting protective facemask during games. Mbappé has scored one goal and that was from the penalty spot against Poland — it's the only goal scored by a France player at these Euros.

"He will have to get used to it," France coach Didier Deschamps said of Mbappé and his mask, "because, to protect (his nose), he will

have to wear it for a few weeks — or even a few months."

Few would have predicted the top scorer at the last World Cup (Mbappé) and the record scorer in men's international soccer (Ronaldo) to have just one goal between them heading into the quarterfinals.

But no one will be surprised if they come alive in Hamburg, with the pressure on and the occasion so big.

Mbappé, remember, scored a hat trick in the World Cup final and has been logging Ronaldo-esque scoring numbers in the first part of his career. He's already on 48 goals for France at the age of 25, and is also on 48 goals in the Champions League from 73 appearances.

He is chasing down Ronaldo's scoring records at both international (130) and Champions League (140) level and will likely only succeed by showing the same undimmed passion and desire as the player he used to copy as a kid.

As their countries' respective captains, they'll shake hands and embrace before kickoff. You can bet they'll do the same after the match.

By that time, one of them will be on his way home.

For Mbappé, there will surely be more European Championships down the road.

For Ronaldo, this could be the end of the road. **MDT/AP**

EURO 2024 | PREVIEW

A dinner and 'super' wine helped Switzerland become a contender at. England's up next.

JAMES ELLINGWORTH, DUESSELDORF

SWITZERLAND is on the verge of making history at Euro 2024, but a few months ago it was a team under severe pressure.

A dinner and some "super" red wine in Duesseldorf — where Switzerland plays England on Sunday — helped captain Granit Xhaka and coach Murat Yakin turn things around.

The Swiss team eliminated defending champion Italy last week and is a step away from the semifinals, which would be its best-ever result at any tournament.

Just over four mon-

ths ago, however, things were very different. Switzerland had won just one of its previous seven games, and that was against tiny Andorra. During that time, Xhaka had publicly criticized the team's training sessions — and by implication Yakin — and likened the team's performance to a kick-about "in the park."

In February, Yakin



came to visit Xhaka for dinner in Duesseldorf, just up the road from where Xhaka was playing for the then-undefeated Bayer Leverkusen.

What exactly they talked about remains a secret — and so does the menu — but both men have said the dinner was an important moment in the bond between coach and captain. It may have helped that Xhaka scored his first goal for Leverkusen the next day.

"We players are happy that we have a coach who is open to hearing the players' opinions and

there have never been problems. We are men enough to talk about it," Xhaka said last month.

"Good food, super wine and I scored the next day ... I think we are both very ambitious. We both just want success for ourselves, for the team. And that is what counts. Everything else is history."

Switzerland is unbeaten in eight games since then and a win against England would surpass its two previous quarter-final appearances at major tournaments, at Euro 2020 and all the way back at the 1954 World Cup on home soil. **MDT/AP**

UPCOMING GAMES

	Date	Time	Home	Away	ODDS
Sat	Jul 6	0:00	Spain	Germany	H 2.8, D 3.25, A 2.88
		03:00	Portugal	France	H 3.6, D 3.1, A 2.5
Sun	Jul 7	0:00	England	Switzerland	H 2.3, D 3.05, A 3.94
		03:00	Netherlands	Turkey	H 1.65, D 4.2, A 6

SCOREBOARD

Round of 16	Switzerland	2	0	Italy
Round of 16	Germany	2	0	Denmark
Round of 16	England	2	1	Slovakia
Round of 16	Spain	4	1	Georgia
Round of 16	Romania	0	3	Netherlands
Round of 16	Austria	1	2	Turkey

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

NATHAN'S FAMOUS

Independence Day hot dog contest set for NYC – minus its usual muncher

CEDAR ATTANASIO, NEW YORK

THE annual Nathan's Famous Fourth of July hot dog eating contest will see a slate of competitive eaters wolf down as many franks as they can in New York City today (Macau time)— but this year, the event's biggest star will be chowing down 1,900 miles away.

Joey "Jaws" Chestnut, who won 16 out of the previous 17 contests, isn't attending the competition over a sponsorship tiff. Instead, he'll compete against soldiers at a U.S. Army base in El Paso later in the day.

That leaves the traditional Brooklyn event wide open for a new winner, with eaters from around the world competing on America's Independence Day to see how many hot dogs they can eat in 10 minutes.

Thousands of fans flock each year to the event held outside the original Nathan's location in Brooklyn's Coney Island, a beachfront destination with amusement parks and a carnivalesque summer culture. ESPN will broadcast the contest live, kicking off with the women's division at 11 a.m. ET, while the men's will begin at approximately 12:20 p.m.

Competitors are coming from over a dozen states and five continents, with prospects from Brazil, Japan, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Australia and the Czech Republic vying for the coveted title and \$10,000 prize money.

"There's going to be a new champion," Australian James Webb, who holds a world record for eating 70 doughnuts in eight minutes, said at a preview event in New York on Wednesday.

Last year Chestnut, of Indiana, chewed his way to the title by downing 62 dogs and buns in 10 minutes. The record, which he set in 2021, is 76.

Ahead of the event, ESPN said it would focus on two Americans with dedicated camera shots: Massachusetts high school teacher Geoffrey Esper, in the men's division, and Florida dental hygiene student Miki Sudo, in the women's.

Esper came second last year with 49 dogs and buns, though his personal best is 51. Sudo won her ninth title in 2023 with 39 1/2, but her best is 48 1/2, the women's world record.

"I'm going to be pushing myself," Sudo said Wednesday. Her rival Mayoi Ebihara, from Japan, said through a translator that she would eat until she passes out, with a goal of downing 50 hot dogs. **MDT/AP**



Five-time reigning champion Joey Chestnut

TASTE OF EDESIA

Teppanyaki at its finest

IRENE SAM, MDT

TEPpanyaki Shou, specializing in Omakase teppanyaki, has recently debuted at Galaxy Macau's Raffles. Led by seasoned chefs of Japanese artisan caliber, the restaurant meticulously selects top-tier fresh ingredients from around the globe, presenting a masterful culinary performance that promises diners an unforgettable taste of refined Japanese cuisine.

Originating in post-war Kobe, where the traditional culinary techniques of Japan's Kansai region merged with Western flavors. At open kitchen counters, chefs cook on iron griddles while interacting with guests, allowing diners to enjoy a bespoke gourmet experience while admiring the chefs' exceptional skills.

The core concept of teppanyaki cuisine is "Entertainment," a clever blend of food and entertainment designed to create a more engaging dining atmosphere and provide both visual and gustatory delights. The newly unveiled Teppanyaki Shou serves as a perfect stage for

professional chefs to showcase their exquisite culinary craftsmanship.

Diners seated at the large teppanyaki grill feel as if they are in the best seats of a theater, able to closely observe and interact with the chefs as they perform. The chefs first present the ingredients to the diners, patiently explaining their origins to inspire more imaginative anticipation during the waiting and tasting process. Once the ingredients are chosen, various seafood and prime cuts of beef are placed on the sizzling hot iron griddle. With deft movements, the chefs skillfully alternate between spatulas, knives, and copper domes. The high heat releases the enticing aromas of proteins and fats, heightening the appetite.

The chefs meticulously control the cooking temperature of each ingredient, sometimes flipping delicately, sometimes cutting rapidly, all with elegant flair. As the dishes are freshly served and paired with carefully selected wines, this sensory feast of sights, sounds, smells, and tastes reaches its peak.



Shaking things up

THE Upper House in Hong Kong welcomes Hope & Sesame to **Salisterra Bar** for an exclusive guest shift on Sunday, 14 July 2024. Bastian Ciocca and Andrew Ho, master mixologists and Hope & Sesame founders, will be stirring up excitement with meticulously crafted cocktails.

Tucked behind a traditional Cantonese store in the heart of old Guangzhou, Hope & Sesame opened in March 2016 as the city's first speakeasy. Known for incorporating innovative techniques like sous vide infusions and dry ice distillation, the bar has received numerous accolades, including being listed at No. 39 on Asia's 50 Best Bars 2023 and being named The Best Bar in Mainland China 2023.

At Salisterra Bar, guests can look forward to tasting some of Hope & Sesame's signature concoctions, which feature surprising elements. ANGO is an adaptation of the classic cocktail Trinidad Sour, using Angostura bitters combined with aged rum as its base.

It incorporates a balsamic vinegar reduction syrup, complemented by the refreshing acidity of lime juice and the sweet freshness of beetroot.

Fairly Complicated is full of herbaceous and botanical flavors, crafted with a base of pisco infused with green cardamom, blended with refreshing notes of apple and citrus, and enriched with the aromatic essence of Longjing tea. **IS**



OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

NO EXTERNAL ROWDIES KEY TO PEACEFUL WATERS

Historical and present complexities, as well as increasing third-party interference, determine there is no quick solution to the maritime disputes in the South China Sea. However, as the recent, sometimes violent, run-ins between Chinese and Philippine coast guard vessels near Ren'ai and Xianbin reefs indicate, the need for crisis-management is pressingly acute.

That is why, although it remains to be seen if the promises can be delivered, Tuesday's ninth meeting under the Bicameral Consultation Mechanism was timely and welcome.

As was to be expected, much of the talk featured the two parties reiterating their respective sovereignty claims and commitment to defending them, with neither side showing any room for compromise, and each blaming the other for the recent incidents.

Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong urged Manila to stop its infringements, return to the "correct track" of consultation, and work with Beijing to de-escalate tensions. Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro said the Philippines "will be relentless in protecting its interests and upholding its sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction". As such it was no surprise that both sides conceded no substantial breakthrough was made at the one-day engagement. Nor that "significant differences remain", as the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

But that in no way diminishes the meeting's importance. Both sides emerged from the meeting apparently positive about it, describing the discussions as "frank and constructive" and expressing their hopes that such interaction would be sustained and bear fruit.

Provided both sides are serious about crisis management, the meeting may thus prove to be a good starting point for a whole new round of constructive bilateral engagement, and pave the way for more productive follow-ups. Even more so as both agreed to improve communication and try confidence-building. That is essential if the two sides are to reclaim the precious common ground that has been swept away from beneath their feet by the heightened attention paid to Manila by Washington. That common ground enabled Beijing and Manila to work together to find a negotiated solution to their historical disputes, or at least keep them from ruining overall bilateral ties and derailling domestic development.

It is thus encouraging to see both sides agree to improve communications during emergencies at sea, and enhance ties between their coast guards. Even more important was the two sides' recognition "that there is a need to restore trust, rebuild confidence, and create conditions conducive to productive dialogue and interaction", as the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said. The two sides have reportedly agreed to convene an academic forum aimed at facilitating marine scientific cooperation. Considering the ongoing spats at sea, cooperation may not seem realistic in some areas. But attempts at bilateral collaboration, in fields such as maritime environmental preservation, can certainly be conducive to meaningful fence-mending. Any progress in that regard would be constructive and worth supporting.

A huge variable in the way of the two governments' endeavors for repairing bilateral relations, however, remains Manila's growing enthusiasm for outsider involvement. The security partnerships it has been establishing and consolidating with extra-regional powers, particularly the United States and Japan, are conspicuous obstacles to its claimed commitment to peacefully resolving the South China Sea disputes. The Philippine government is expected to sign a Reciprocal Access Agreement with Japan this week that is widely believed to have China as the motivation. The agreement will allow troops of the two countries to enter each other's territory for joint military exercises and strengthened defense cooperation.

If Manila is sincere about its expressed willingness to work with Beijing to maintain stability in the South China Sea, it should stop soliciting the increased presence of the militaries of extra-regional powers, and strengthen dialogue and consultation with Beijing through the Bicameral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea and other mechanisms with a view to resolving the two sides' differences and disagreements.

A 68-year-old tourist from New Zealand was struck and killed by a car during a botched robbery at an upscale mall in a popular Southern California beach city south of Los Angeles, police said.

Violence broke out Wednesday (Macau time) at Newport Beach's Fashion Island mall when two men, one with a gun, tried to rob a woman and her husband at a Barnes and Noble store, Newport Beach police Sgt. Steven Oberon said at a news conference.

The woman was dragged into the street by one of the suspects

and killed by a third man driving a white sedan, Oberon said, adding that the three men then fled in the sedan.

The woman was identified by police yesterday as Patricia McKay, 68, who was visiting from New Zealand.

Newport Beach police officers pursued the three suspects in the white sedan onto an interstate and eventually arrested the men.

Police said one of the suspects fired his gun three times during the robbery, but no one was struck.



Schoolgirl Aleshanee Westhoff shows a "Swiftkirchen" town sign in honor of musician Taylor Swift in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, earlier this week

SWIFT CRAZE

WITH TAYLOR SWIFT HEADING TO GERMANY, ONE CITY HAS TAKEN HER NAME — AT LEAST FOR A FEW WEEKS

THE Swifties are about to take over the German city formerly known as Gelsenkirchen, where American superstar Taylor Swift is set to give three Eras Tour concerts later this month.

In honor of the singer, the city has renamed itself "Swiftkirchen" — at least temporarily — to welcome the tens of thousands of fans who are expected to come for her shows on July 17, 18 and 19, German news agency dpa reported.

A yellow city sign with the new name — which translates roughly to "Swift's Church" — was unveiled Tuesday by Swift fan Aleshanee Westhoff, who suggested the name to the city's mayor and started a petition a few weeks ago. Mayor Karin Welge thanked the teenager for her "great

idea" in a letter accepting the proposal.

The Swiftie sign has been emblazoned with a pink portrait of the pop icon and is located in the city center. Several more signs "at highly frequented locations in Gelsenkirchen" will be put up in the coming days, city spokesman Markus Schwardtmann told dpa.

One of the poorest cities in Germany, Gelsenkirchen is a former coal mining town that's never recovered from the decline of its main industry. The Ruhr city is known for its soccer team, and a massive stadium that occasionally attracts international entertainers like Swift.

And there's more to come in Germany's Swiftie town.

The U.S. singer will also receive her own stone on the Gelsenkirchen

Walk of Fame, alongside local notables like soccer coach Rudi Assauer and writer Ilse Kibgis, and during her concerts, the city will host open-air parties with karaoke performances. A "Taylor Swift streetcar" is already up and running, dpa reported.

Further fan attractions are being planned but kept secret for the time being. "There will be lots of big and small surprises so that the Swifties have plenty to discover in Gelsenkirchen," Schwardtmann said.

Swift's concerts in Gelsenkirchen are sold out and will take place at the Veltins-Arena on Schalke stadium, which has space for up to 70,000 Swifties. Further Eras Tour shows are planned for Hamburg and Munich. MDT/AP



Russia The Kremlin yesterday said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Russia on July 8-9 and hold talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The visit was first announced by the Russian officials last month, but the dates have not been previously disclosed. Russia has had strong ties with India since the Cold War, and New Delhi's importance as a key trade partner for Moscow has grown since the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022.



Norway An Iranian-born Norwegian man was found guilty of terrorism yesterday in a 2022 attack on an LGBTQ+ festival in Oslo and sentenced to 30 years in prison. Two people were killed and nine were seriously wounded in the shooting at three locations, chiefly outside the London Pub, a popular gay bar, on June 25, 2022. The Oslo District Court said Zaniar Matapour (pictured), 45, fired 10 rounds with a machine gun and eight shots with a handgun into the crowd.



Ukraine A spokesperson for the military said its army has retreated from a neighborhood in the outskirts of Chasiv Yar, a strategically important town in the eastern Donetsk region which has been reduced to rubble under a months-long Russian assault. Chasiv Yar lies a short distance west Bakhmut, which was captured by Russia last year after a bitter 10-month battle. For months, Russian forces have focused on capturing Chasiv Yar, a town which occupies a strategic, elevated location.