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THE GAMING SECTOR IS LIKELY TO SEE A SLOWDOWN IN EBITDA GROWTH DUE TO THE MAINLAND'S CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL MONEY EXCHANGE OPERATIONS

BUSINESSMAN JORGE CHIANG ANNOUNCES CHIEF EXECUTIVE ELECTION BID

VENDORS ABANDONING PUBLIC MARKETS CLAIM INSUFFICIENT BUSINESS



China Germany will bar the use of critical components made by Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE in core parts of the country's 5G networks in two steps starting in 2026, the nation's top security official said yesterday. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said critical components from Huawei and ZTE will be barred from 5G core networks by the end of 2026, while "critical management systems" from the two manufacturers in 5G access and transport networks must be replaced by the end of 2029.

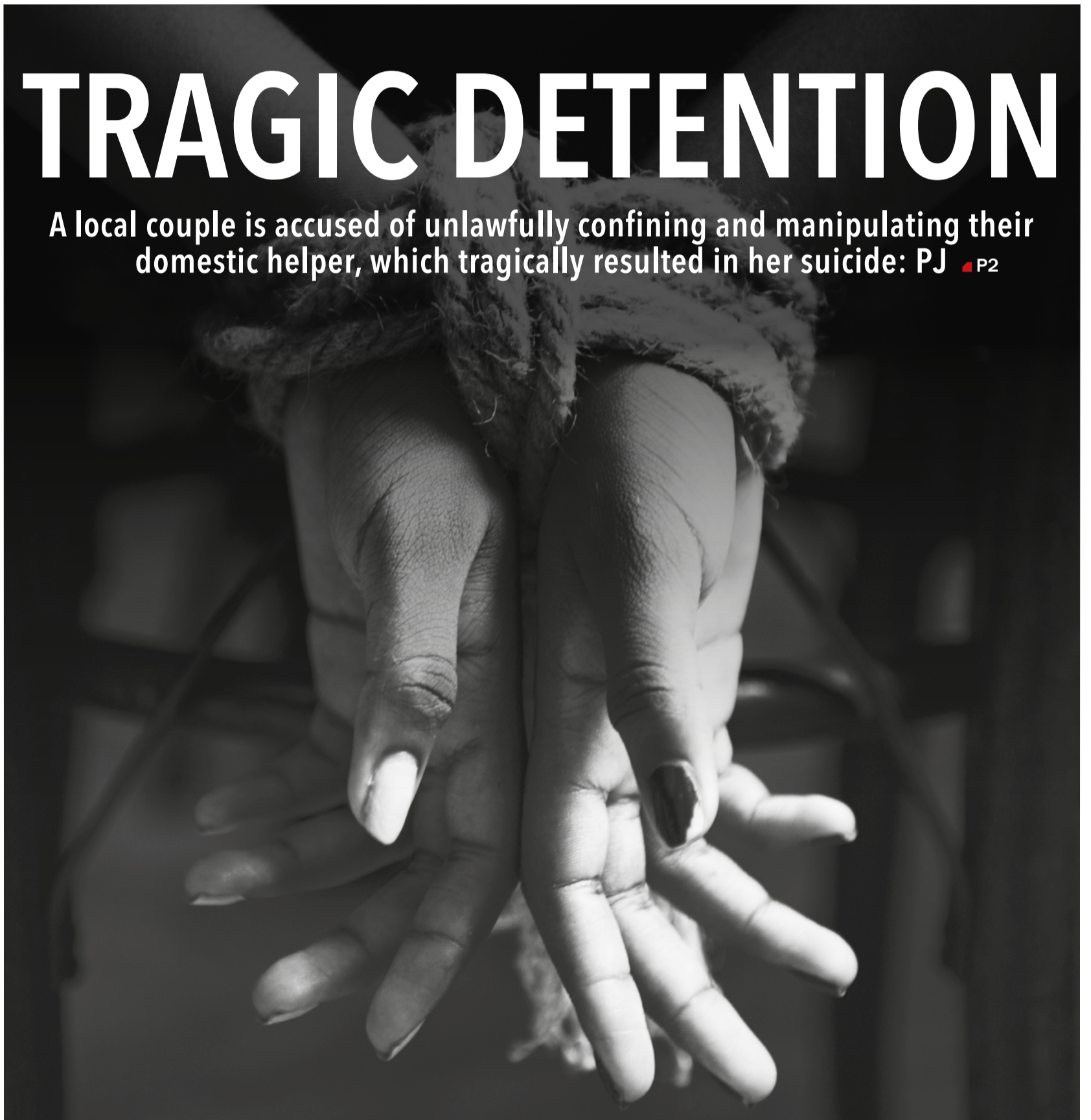


Philippines Two Australian nationals and their Filipina companion were killed in a hotel in a popular resort city south of the Philippine capital, and police were trying to identify and track down the suspects, officials said yesterday. A hotel worker found the bodies of the victims, whose hands and feet were tied, in a room at the Lake Hotel in Tagaytay city, south of Manila on Wednesday, according to a police statement. Police did not identify the victims or provide other details of what it said was a "murder incident."



Canada McGill University closed its downtown campus as Montreal police descended in large numbers to help clear a pro-Palestinian encampment that has been there for weeks. McGill president Deep Saini called the encampment at the Canadian university, one of many that had sprung up on campuses across North America since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, "a heavily fortified focal point for intimidation and violence, organized largely by individuals who are not part of our university community."

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TRAGIC DETENTION

A local couple is accused of unlawfully confining and manipulating their domestic helper, which tragically resulted in her suicide: PJ P2



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MAN ARRESTED FOR SECRETLY FILMING UNDER SKIRTS

A man suspected of secretly filming and sexually harassing a local woman was arrested. The woman was walking through Qingmao Port via a pedestrian bridge late at night towards the end of the previous month. As she was riding the escalator, she felt something hard brush against her calf. Upon turning around, she noticed the suspect holding a mobile phone with the flash activated. She immediately contacted the authorities and said she suspected she was being filmed without her consent. Police found 10 photos and two videos of women's legs secretly filmed on the suspect's mobile phone.

13 FOREIGN JOBSEEKERS FALL VICTIM TO FRAUD

A group of 13 Indonesian men and women fell victim to a fraudulent job recruitment scheme orchestrated by a mainland man. The man, identified as Chen, claimed to have access to secure employment opportunities in Macau for the victims, charging them a total of MOP124,300 in referral fees. However, Chen disappeared after receiving the money. Upon being intercepted by the police, he confessed to the fraud and admitted that the money had been lost. Chen is now facing charges of fraud.

MORTGAGE COMMERCIAL LOAN APPROVALS FALL

New residential mortgage loan approvals fell 26.3% in May while commercial real estate loans rose 133.2% according to statistics released Wednesday by Macau's Monetary Authority. Outstanding balances for both residential and commercial loans declined from the previous month. Residential mortgage loan balances fell 0.3% to MOP28.2 billion while commercial balances dropped 0.2% to MOP19.5 billion. Delinquency ratios also increased, with residential loans rising to 3.7% from 3.6% in April and commercial loans up to 4.7% from 3.4%. The changes come amid repayment of large residential loans and economic challenges in the special administrative region.

CRIME

TRAGIC CASE OF UNLAWFUL DETENTION LEADS TO DOMESTIC HELPER'S SUICIDE

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) has reported a troubling case involving the alleged unlawful detention and manipulation of a victim, resulting in her tragic death. The investigation has led to the arrest of two suspects who are now facing serious criminal charges.

According to the police investigator spokesman, the incident took place on April 29 in the Areia Preta area. The victim, a non-resident worker, was allegedly held captive and mentally tormented by two suspects. The suspects are a 34-year-old male and a 36-year-old female, who are a couple.

The investigation revealed that the suspects believed the victim, who was their domestic helper, had stolen MOP60,000 from them. They proceeded to confront the victim when she returned home, confiscating her passport and mobile phone to prevent her from leaving.

Under hours of relentless pres-



VICTORIA CHAN

sure, the victim eventually admitted to the alleged theft. The two defendants, in order to prevent the victim from leaving, kept the victim's mobile phone and passport.

The couple used a transparent tape to tie up the victim's hands and interrogated her from 5 a.m.

to 8 a.m. the next day, demanding she tell them how to solve the issue.

Tragically, the situation took a distressing turn when the victim sought refuge in the bathroom, where she resorted to self-harm by cutting her fingers and eventually, unable to withstand the

intense pressure, took her own life by jumping out of the bathroom window. The suspects, instead of immediately notifying the authorities, deliberately concealed the true nature of the incident, claiming the victim's suicide was related to the alleged theft.

"The two defendants did resort to appropriate means to call the police," the Chief Investigation Officer of the PJ stated. "Instead, they withheld the victim's passport, mobile phone, and tied up the victim's hands to prevent her from escaping. They also interrogated her for an extended time period, pushing her to suicide."

The police have arrested the two suspects and charged them with a series of serious offenses, including the unlawful detention of the victim and their involvement in her death.

In accordance with Article 238 of the Criminal Procedure Act, authorities strongly urge all individuals to refrain from taking the law into their own hands and unlawfully detaining suspects.

GAMING

Casinos brace for slowdown amid China's clampdown on illegal money exchanges

NADIA SHAW

MACAU'S gaming sector is likely to see a slowdown in EBITDA growth in June and July due to the mainland's crackdown on illegal money exchange operations in Macau, according to a recent forecast by Morgan Stanley.

China's Ministry of Public Security has launched a major campaign to target "money exchange gangs" providing large-scale cash exchange and loan sharking services to mainland Chinese gamblers in Macau. These illicit activities have been facilitating the flow of funds out of China, which authorities



view as a threat to financial stability.

The crackdown has already yielded results, with police across China reporting successful operations that have uncovered millions in illegal exchange activities and the arrest of dozens of suspects. However, analysts warn

that disrupting these unofficial currency exchange channels could potentially lead to a slowdown in mainland Chinese travel to Macau's gaming industry.

Praveen K Choudhary, Gareth Leung, and Stephen W Grambling of Morgan Stanley project that the

second quarter will see the first negative quarter-on-quarter growth in both mass gross gaming revenue (GGR) and corporate EBITDA since the post-Covid-19 reopening. Mass GGR is expected to decline 2% quarter-on-quarter, reaching 113% of 2019 levels, while corporate

EBITDA is forecast to decrease 7% quarter-on-quarter, reaching 80% of pre-pandemic levels.

The brokerage firm predicts that June and July will see a slowdown due to the money exchange crackdown, while weaker macroeconomic conditions, consumption, and retail sales in China could persist in the third quarter and further impact the Macau market.

The analysts also anticipate that the fourth-quarter results will be negatively affected by the expected visit of China's President Xi Jinping to mark the 25th anniversary of Macau's handover to China.

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Businessman Jorge Chiang announces CE election bid

NADIA SHAW

JORGE Chiang, the president of the Macau Lotus Chamber of Commerce and the Macau Society of Institutional Studies, has announced his intention to run for Macau's Chief Executive (CE) election. Chiang, a prominent businessman, is one of the first individuals to publicly express interest in becoming Macau's leader.

In a Facebook post on Wednesday, Chiang pledged to establish a responsible and clean government, governed by the rule of law, with people as the priority. Chiang's declaration of candidacy, published in simplified Chinese, emphasized the need for Macau to adapt to the challenges of the century. He said, "Faced with the challenges of a



century of major changes, Macau's old management methods are no longer suitable for the development of the times, and have even become an obstacle to future development."

Chiang's political platform includes upholding integrity and innovation, building shared prosperity, and creating a new future for Macau. However,

he faces an uphill battle in securing enough nominations from the 400-member Election Committee to officially become a candidate. All CE elections since 2004 have had only one candidate, with the incumbent CEs in 2004, 2009, and 2014 running uncontested.

The current CE, Ho Iat Seng, has not yet publicly announced his inten-

tion to run for a second term, although reports suggest he will declare his candidacy in mid-August after polls for the CE Election Committee close on August 11. The only CE election in Macau's history with more than one candidate was the inaugural poll in 1999, when Edmund Ho defeated Stanley Au with 82% of the votes.

Commission approves all 348 candidates for election committee

THE Electoral Affairs Commission for the Chief Executive Election confirmed the eligibility of all 348 individuals who applied to contest places on the Chief Executive Election Committee.

The commission will publish the candidate list for the election committee today at the Public Administration Building in Rua do Campo and on its website. The 400-member committee will subsequently elect Macau's sixth-term chief executive.

According to the Chief Executive Election Law, 344 out of 400 committee members come from four sectors covering seven sub-sectors. The First Sector generates 120 seats from industrial, commercial and financial sub-sectors. The Second Sector allocates 26 seats to culture, 29 to education, 43 to professionals and 17 to sports. The Third Sector has 59 labor seats and 50 for social services. The Fourth Sector includes Legislative Assembly representatives plus Macau delegates to China's National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

The Chief Executive poll is set for Aug. 11. For the 29 education seats, 31 applications were received. For labor's 59 seats, 61 applied. Other sub-sectors received the same number of applications as allocated seats. Barring appeals, the commission will publish the final candidate list July 14 at the Public Administration Building. VC

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VENDORS ABANDONING PUBLIC MARKETS CLAIM INSUFFICIENT BUSINESS

RENATO MARQUES

VENDORS are abandoning the municipal markets' stalls claiming insufficient business, the president of the Macau Vendors Mutual Aid Association (Associação de Auxílio Mútuo de Vendilhões de Macau), O Cheng Wong, said.

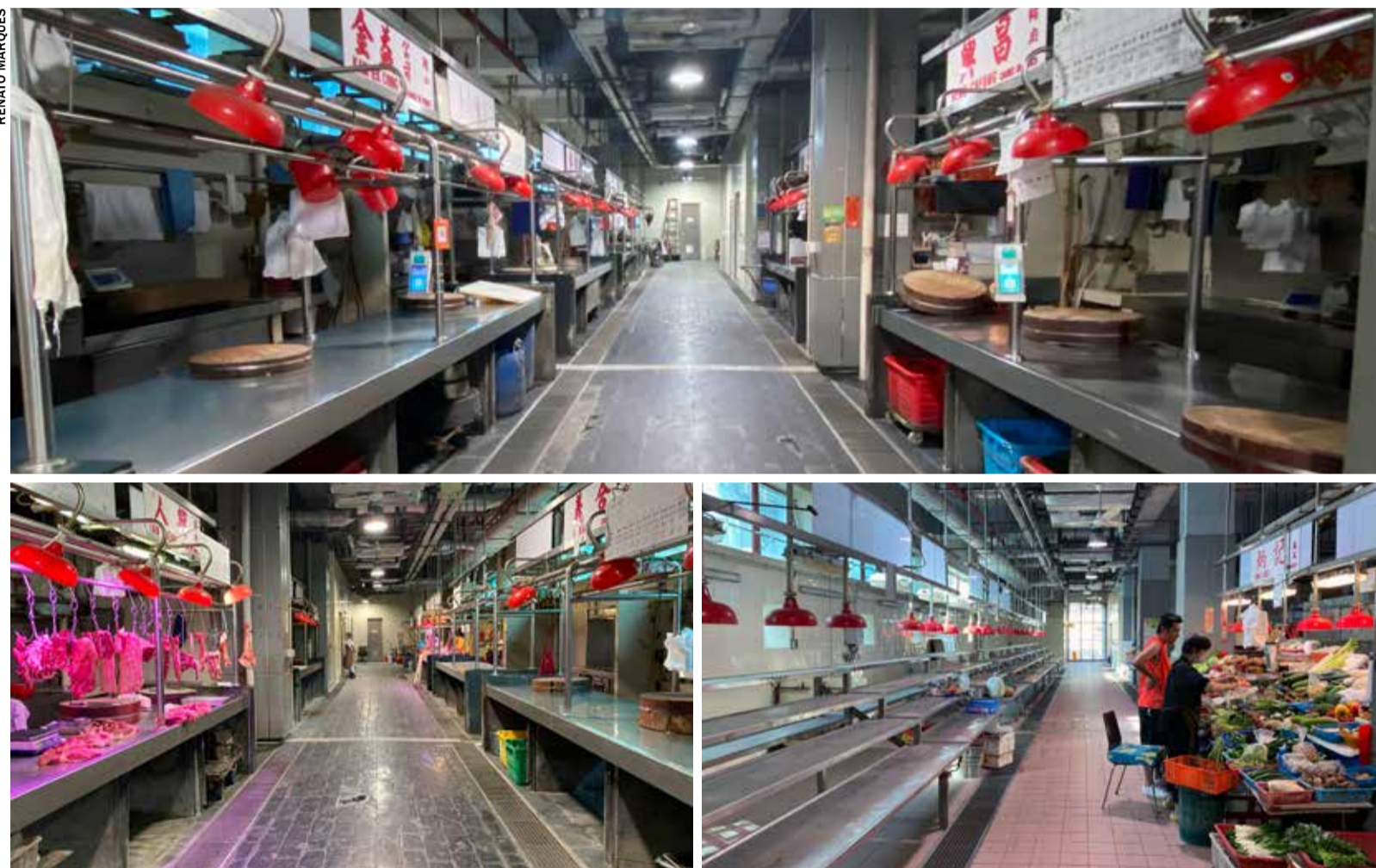
Speaking to Portuguese language newspaper Hoje Macau (HM), O said that the general trend is that vendors are exiting, although not all markets are affected. He noted that the most serious case at the moment seems to be at the Tamagnini Barbosa Municipal Market in the Northern District where about 70% of stalls are empty.

Reports of this same issue have recently arrived in the Times via several readers claiming that, in other markets such as the S. Domingos Municipal Market (in the city center), the number of empty stalls has increased.

O also observed that this problem has been seen in venues that have recently been revamped, such as the Horta da Mitra Municipal Market in the area of Rua do Campo.

"The stalls at the Horta da Mitra Municipal Market have little variety on offer and a very small area. They cannot compete with the variety of products sold in nearby supermarkets and stores. The situation is made worse by the obligation to sell only the products stipulated in the licenses," O was quoted saying to HM.

According to O, despite the improvements, there was no increase in interest from buyers as



business was low before the revamp.

In an informal talk with one of the vendors of the S. Lourenço Market, she mentioned that it is hard for the market sellers to compete with the increasing number of fruit and vegetable shops owned by bigger companies in the mainland. She also said that, since they are outside the markets and using regular commercial spaces, they also can extend their schedules and

better adjust to buyers' needs, while municipal markets close much earlier, usually around 7 p.m.

LESS STRINGENT RULES ON TYPES OF PRODUCTS ON SALE A POTENTIAL SOLUTION

To address this issue, the president of the vendors association called for the easing some of the rules governing the type of products traders may sell in the markets, a measure that he said

could boost business and prevent the drifting away of more sellers.

Increasing the business environment in the surrounding market could also increase the interest of buyers, O noted, explaining that the markets located in areas with a lot of street-style sellers and small shops fare better, giving the Red Market and the S. Lourenço Municipal Market as examples.

The same representative added that several calls have been

made to the government on this issue but the responses have always been that "they will consider the matter" or that they "are working on it."

After the reports from readers on the markets' situation, the Times contacted the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) to discover why there is low interest from vendors on the municipal markets stalls. However, even after a week, there has been no response from IAM.

CLIMATE

City braces for potential cyclone and more storms

THE director of the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG), Leong Weng Kun, has issued a cautionary statement regarding the heightened likelihood of a tropical cyclone forming in the South China Sea later this month, though the precise impact of the the potential cyclone on the city remains uncertain.

Leong, speaking at a recent TDM Forum, attributed the surge in super typhoons to the rising seawater temperatures driven by atmospheric warming in recent years, noting that the typhoon season is still in its early stages, with tropical

cyclones expected to continue posing a threat through October.

To enhance forecast accuracy and public preparedness, the bureau plans to introduce new instrument technology and issue graphic and text push notifications several days in advance.

Additionally, authorities have obtained the International Organization for Standardization's ISO 9001 certification for their tropical cyclone and storm surge warning services, signaling a commitment to providing more standardized and reliable weather forecast services.

Despite these efforts, Leong acknowledged the ongoing challenge of precisely predicting the timing and location of heavy rain events, stating that the accuracy rate has remained stable at around 70% in recent years.

Recognizing the importance of public engagement, the SMG has also worked to improve meteorological publicity and education, connecting with the community through various media platforms and hosting campus and community activities. As of June 2024, the bureau has welcomed over 2,000 visitors. VC



VICTORIA CHAN

CTS

50 applications for China visa permits processed on first day

RENATO MARQUES

THE China Travel Service (CTS) has processed approximately 50 applications for the new visa cards that will allow non-Chinese nationals who are permanent residents of Macau to travel to the mainland for an extended period of up to 90 days.

Applications started on Wednesday (July 10), and CTS claimed to have processed around 50 of those requests on the first day.

According to the same source, 55% of the applications referred to residents who are Portuguese passport holders, while 40% are from people holding Canadian passports.

The remaining 5% were from people holding different Asian passports including Malaysia, the Philippines, and other countries.



The same entity is said to have received over 500 bookings for application procedures on the first day that will be distributed over different timeslots over the next month.

The new travel permit is estimated to be applicable to approximately 19,500 individuals, which accounts for 2.7% of the total population, government data shows, as cited in

multiple reports.

In Sheung Wan, Hong Kong, the CTS office has established two specialized counters for handling applications, and the processing time for applications is anticipated to be 20 working days. According to Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu, the initiative has garnered positive feedback, as online reservations are almost fully booked.



Gov't strengthens measures to safeguard white-cheeked gibbons

STAFF REPORTER

THE Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) is collaborating with Guangzhou Zoo to protect white-cheeked gibbons.

This month, the white-cheeked gibbon from Seac Pai Van Park will be transferred to Guangzhou Zoo as part of efforts to conserve national rare wildlife.

The gibbon is currently in quarantine, with keepers closely monitoring its well-being. White-cheeked gibbons are considered first-class protected animals in China and are listed under

Appendix I of CITES.

They live in groups in the wild, feeding on leaves, buds, and fruits. The gibbon at Seac Pai Van Park, known as "Blackie," was abandoned there in 1995 and has since become a beloved member of the community.

"Blackie" has been identified as having excellent genes, making it crucial for the protection of the national white-cheeked gibbon population. The relocation plan to Guangzhou Zoo is set for this month after negotiations, health checks, and quarantine procedures.

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C&C RECEIVED THE 1ST SILVER
"DEIGNAN AWARD"
FOR RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IN MACAU (2023)



GOV'T MAINTAINS LIMIT ON GAMING PROMOTERS

The Macau government has made the decision to maintain the limit on licensed gaming promoters at 50 for the year 2025. This choice maintains the existing maximum number of approved junkets in the Macau casino sector, although less than half of the allowed quota is currently in use due to an 85% decrease in the industry over the last decade. As of June 11, Macau had a total of 22 licensed junket operators as cited in data from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ).

UM TO HOLD UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL MATCH

The University Women's Volleyball Invitational Tournament, organized by the University of Macau (UM), will be held from July 17 to July 18. The tournament will feature women's volleyball teams from UM, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lanzhou University, and the Pedagogical University of Maputo in Mozambique. According to a statement from the UM, this is the first time a volleyball team from Mozambique will play in an invitational tournament.



FINANCE

MACAU'S TOP BANKS HONORED FOR INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE

NADIA SHAW

THE Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Macau (ICBC Macau) and Bank of China, Macau (BOC Macau) have been recognized as the top banking institutions in Macau, receiving prestigious awards from World Finance.

The British magazine awarded ICBC Macau "Best Bank Banking Group" in Macau for 2024, marking the fifteenth time the bank has received this accolade since its establishment. Alongside ICBC, BOC Macau also earned the "Best Retail Bank" and "Best Commercial Bank" awards for Macau in 2024.

These achievements highlight the performance, and development of both ICBC and BOC Macau, as the banking industry navigates multiple fundamental challenges – including rising interest rates, a slowing global economy, new financial technologies, and embedded finance, as well

as ensuring cybersecurity amidst growing cyber threats.

"In this ever-changing environment, the Best Bank Awards recognize the financial institutions that offer the broadest range of services, long-term reliability, and technological innovation," said Joseph D. Giarraputo, founder and editorial director of World Finance.

In 2023, Chinese banks faced a tough year. Consumer borrowing for mortgages loans or everyday purchases were down. The government also pushed banks to give lower interest rates, with lending initiatives targeting strategic sectors. In addition to banks making less money on loans, net interest margins (NIMs) – which contracted by 22 basis points (bps) over the course of 2023, extending the decline from 2022 – put significant pressure on the sector.

According to World Finance, the situation was even worse in Macau, where it found the number of loans

that weren't being repaid surging dramatically, with nonperforming loans (NPLs) skyrocketing from the pre-pandemic level of 0.26% to 3%.

In response, ICBC Macau transformed its operations, optimized its balance sheet by reducing assets and liabilities, and generated more revenue from non-lending activities. ICBC Macau aligned its strategy with the policy objectives of the Macau government and the ICBC Group's global strategy. This involved promoting local operations and accelerating the bank's digital transformation.

"Technology, data, and talent are the most important production factors for providing enormous momentum, especially for the development and innovation of financial business," said chairman Gao Ming.

ICBC Macau was regarded by World Finance as taking "a strategic approach focused on long-term sustainability and innovation." The

bank's "basing on Macau, integrating into the Greater Bay Area, expanding in Portuguese-speaking countries and extending to the countries along the Belt and Road route" strategy continued to guide its operations in 2023.

To support its global ambitions, ICBC Macau leveraged online corporate banking services to create cross-border and cross-currency fund products. They also built a comprehensive global cash management system encompassing 104 countries/regions and 61 currencies, facilitating annual settlements exceeding MOP1 trillion.

On the other hand, ICBC Macau's fintech transformation accelerated the bank's digital reform on customer service and business channels, with its e-banking service now accounting for over 80% of its total business.

"Digitalization serves as the critical momentum of future development in the banking industry. It is also the key for ICBC (Macau) to foster innovation and stride ahead in the market," added Gao.

Similarly, BOC Macau has leveraged its extensive network and expertise to provide innovative financial solutions to both individual and corporate customers, earning recognition for its excellence in retail and commercial banking services.

Whilst BOC Macau has a longer history in Macau, dating back to just under a century, ICBC Macau, established in 2009, is the largest locally registered bank. It is also a subsidiary of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China. BOC Macau, meanwhile, is a top retail and commercial bank in the region.

Both ICBC Macau and BOC Macau continue to transform and innovate their digital products and services, meeting the evolving needs of their customers in the GBA. ICBC Macau leverages its global reach and expertise in corporate banking, while BOC Macau focuses on its strong local presence and retail banking expertise.

Photo competition on sustainable development launched

STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau Institute for Conservation and Sustainable Research and Galactic Cooperation (MICSRGC) announced the launch of the "All for 17, 17 for All – 2024 Macau SDGs Photography Activity."

The institute aimed to showcase the city's journey towards achieving the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the lens of local students.

The objectives of this activity are clear: to promote the implementation and development of the SDGs

in Macau, to encourage greater awareness of sustainability among the public, especially students, and to showcase the current sustainable development and social responsibility achievements of Macau.

By capturing these achievements through the art of photography, the competition hopes to elevate social understanding and mutual support for sustainable development.

To enter the competition, students are required to submit up to three original photographs that visually represent any of the 17 SDGs.

The images must be taken within Macau's borders and reflect the unique character of the city. Each entry must be accompanied by a short description, explaining how the photograph relates to the chosen SDG and its significance to the photographer.

The competition will run until October, and is open to all students aged 12 to 18.

Outstanding photographic works will be exhibited in the institute's themed exhibition which is proposed to be launched by the end of 2024 at various public venues in Macau.



ADVERTORIAL

SANDS CHINA NEWS

Sands China Honours Long-Serving Team Members

Over 2,700 Sands China team members are celebrating their 20-year, 15-year or 10-year company anniversaries in 2024, with Sands China honouring them recently at ceremonies at Sands Macao, The Venetian Macao, The Parisian Macao, and The Londoner Macao.

Among them were more than 1,200 founding team members who joined the company before May 18, 2004, when Sands Macao was opened. They celebrated their milestones at dedicated recognition ceremonies at Sands China properties in April and May.

They were personally recognised by Sands China Ltd. Executive Vice Chairman Dr. Wilfred Wong and Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Grant Chum at the ceremonies, where they extended Sands China's gratitude for their loyalty and continuous contributions to the development of the company.

"With Sands Macao celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, it is the perfect time to recognise our founding team members, without whom Sands Macao could not have become the instant success that it was," said Dr. Wong. "What's more, those founding team members have shown incredible loyalty and dedication in helping the company to grow into what it is today, all the while witnessing their own professional development within the company. Many of them have taken a journey from front-of-house team members to executive leadership positions today. We are incredibly proud of them and grateful for their invaluable contributions to the success of Sands China and the development of Macao into a world centre of tourism and leisure."

At the celebration for the founding team members, they were presented with a founder's card, entitling them to lifelong Sands China benefits, alongside other commemorative gifts.

By the end of 2024, over 15,000 team members will have served Sands China for 10 years or more; among them, more than 6,600 and 1,500 will have worked at the company for more than 15 and 20 years, respectively. Meanwhile, the percentage of local residents on Sands China's management team has witnessed significant growth over the years, soaring from 20 percent in 2004 to 92 percent currently. Female team members account for 46 percent of the entire management team.



URBAN PRACTICE

Public facility at Toi San wins Green Architecture award in Japan

RENATO MARQUES

DESIGNED by local architecture company "Urban Practice," the Toi San Public Toilet Project was named Pioneer Award Winner in the Green Architecture category at the 6th Japan International Pioneer Design Award (IPDA), the company announced in a press statement.

According to the same statement, the concept behind Toi San Public Toilet is inspired by the spontaneous vegetation that sprouts from small cracks in walls around Macau.

Commissioned by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), the project promotes a radical change and redesign of the existing structure in a small park in the Toi San neighborhood in the surroundings of the Border Gate.

The facades were deconstructed and reimagined as a dynamic precast concrete mosaic of 63 modular planters filled with plants and a green rooftop, providing over 100% green coverage to the building, cooling the interior

space and blending with the adjacent park.

On the project, Principal Architect at Urban Practice, Nuno Soares, said, "This was a prototype of green architecture with several innovative green strategies, from adaptive-reuse to natural cross ventilation using an innovative system of façade planters in pre-cast concrete. The result exceeded our expectations as this small pocket space became a centrality intensively used by the local community."

The Japan IDPA was established in 2018 in Tokyo to recognize internationally renowned designers and design agencies while promoting cultural exchange and cooperation.

Urban Practice stated that the company aims to create meaningful innovation by engaging in dialogue with people and places, conducting research to understand and push boundaries, designing innovative and sustainable futures, building with tradition and cutting-edge technologies, and sharing its projects for a lasting impact.

HENGQIN'S HOTEL SECTOR BOOSTED BY NEW POLICY MEASURES

ON THE AGENDA

HENGQIN has unveiled a series of new policy measures aimed at boosting its hotel industry. The initiatives come at the heels of Hengqin-Macau's multiple entry visas, which are expected to drive increased demand for the island's hotels.

The new policies, outlined in an official document published late last month, are designed to facilitate the growth of the local hotel sector. A key measure allows vacant office buildings to be converted into hotels, which provides a new avenue for development.

Hengqin's Economic Development Bureau and Urban Planning and Construction Bureau will support hotels seeking to renovate and upgrade their facilities. This assistance includes financial resources to help hotels enhance their services and attract more visitors.

Applicants can apply for hotel conversions for a minimum of eight years. The hotel operation period must not exceed the applicable land use term. If needed, extensions can be requested three months before the eight-year period ends. Alternatively, the hotel conversion can be terminated. The policies will be in effect for two years, replacing



the previous guidelines issued in April 2024.

Eligibility criteria for development has been expanded beyond vacant commercial and office properties to include completed buildings designated for commercial, business, cultural, creative, high-tech, and scientific research purposes. Vacant buildings with at least 50 rooms on continuous floors can apply for temporary hotel conversion, provided they meet safety and fire requirements.

The implementation of these measures coincides with the introduction of a Hengqin-Macau multiple entry visa for mainland Chinese tourists in group tours. Previously, these groups were li-

imited to single-entry visas. This new arrangement will allow for mainland Chinese tour groups to visit the SAR during the day and stay overnight in Hengqin where accommodation is comparatively more affordable.

Real estate experts believe the new policies could help address Hengqin's current hotel shortage, particularly the lack of mid-range budget accommodation options. With over one million square meters of vacant commercial properties with conversion potential, many developers have already started renovations.

Chen Ruifan from Centaline Property Agency echoed this sentiment, pointing out that Heng-

qin has hotel classifications on both ends of the spectrum, but lacks mid-range budget accommodation options. "One is the high-end five-star or above hotels, the other is the B&B, and there are actually no three-star and four-star hotels," she said.

The new policies are part of a broader strategy to develop Hengqin as a major tourist destination. These policies also aim to create a more flexible and long-term business environment, attracting investors and promoting hotel development in the region.

The measures are effective until April 30, 2026, providing a clear timeline for applications.
NADIA SHAW

BRIEFS

CHINESE TRANSPORTATION APP MAKES ITS DEBUT ON HKSE

A Chinese mobile transportation app has made its debut on the main board of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, marking the first stock in autonomous driving operation technology. Ontime, established by GAC Group and Tencent in 2019, with Pony.ai as a strategic shareholder, offers mobility services, technical solutions, and support for drivers and fleet operators. CEO Jiang Hua stated that the company aims to further establish its presence in the autonomous driving sector and accelerate the commercial deployment of this technology.

MUSEUM PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON QING DYNASTY ARTIST

The Guangdong Museum in Guangzhou launched an exhibition showcasing the artworks of Hua Yan from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) earlier this week. Entitled Elegance, Refinement, Style, Paintings of Hua Yan, the exhibition features over 70 pieces/sets of exquisite works, with more than 90% of them being precious cultural relics. These artworks were collected by eight units from Guangdong, Liaoning, Fujian, and Zhejiang provinces, as well as Tianjin municipality. A significant number of exhibits are being presented to the public for the first time. This exhibition marks the first systematic and concentrated display of Hua Yan's paintings in Guangdong province.

VISA EXEMPTION POLICY ENABLES INT'L TOURISTS TO DISCOVER THE WONDERS OF GUANGZHOU

12 tourists from Australia, the Netherlands, Argentina, and Russia were the first group of foreign visitors to benefit from China's 144-hour visa-free transit policy. They enjoyed a complimentary one-day city tour of Guangzhou, Guangdong province yesterday. The group departed from Terminal 2 of Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport at 8:30 a.m. and returned around 2:30 p.m. to continue their travels. As per the Guangzhou Bureau of Culture, Broadcast, Television, and Tourism, the visitors explored Huacheng Square, Canton Tower, Guangdong Museum, Guangzhou Opera House, and Guangzhou Library to admire the modern urban architectural style of Guangzhou.

FINANCE

WeBank sets up headquarters in Hong Kong for R&D activities

LYNZY VALLES

WEBANK CO., Ltd (WeBank), a world leading digital bank founded in Shenzhen, has established its technology company headquarters in Hong Kong earlier this week.

As per an announcement from the HK-SAR, WeBank intends to invest up to USD150 million and generate high-skilled technology positions within the city.

Collaboration between the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB) and Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) has been instrumental in aiding WeBank in establishing its technology company headquar-

ters in Hong Kong. The director-general of InvestHK, Alpha Lau, said, "The establishment of WeBank's operation in Hong Kong has been the result of extensive co-ordination between the FSTB and InvestHK to ensure that the company is well positioned for success upon commencing its activities in our city."

For Lau, the opening of international research and development (R&D) centers and headquarters in Hong Kong by numerous strategic enterprises indicates the city's clear advantages in facilitating globally scaled companies to realize their ambitions. Meanwhile, president

of WeBank, Li Nanqing, said, "Hong Kong has emerged as a center of excellence in global business connectivity and financial technology innovation. It offers us an ideal environment to advance our innovation and expand our international footprint. We are excited to contribute to and benefit from the city's dynamic fintech ecosystem, robust infrastructure, and strategic connectivity."

WeBank's technology company headquarters in Hong Kong will act as a hub for its research and development endeavors and offer technology solutions for global markets. Hong Kong, as a significant player, contributor, and



beneficiary in the Belt and Road Initiative, was selected by the bank due to its ambitious outlook and willingness to adopt cutting-edge technologies and cultivate a thriving fintech ecosystem, in addition to its established international financial services sector. WeBank is well known for bringing inclusive financial services to over 4.5 million micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, and nearly 400 million individuals

in mainland China.

This year, WeBank was acknowledged by the International Data Corporation as the standard for worldwide digital banking advancement, showcasing its top-tier fintech innovation in essential and advanced technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, and big data.

As at today, WeBank has filed over 3,800 patent applications.



No contaminated oil has entered market, Guangdong says

NO reserve edible oil that does not meet national food safety standards has entered the grain market or been used in food production in Guangdong province, the local food and strategic reserves authorities said.

In accordance with relevant national requirements, the province has established a three-tier local reserve system for edible vegetable oils at the provincial, municipal and county levels, according to the Food and Strategic Reserves Administration of Guangdong province.

The main types of edible vegetable oils in the local reserves across the province include soybean oil, peanut oil, blended oil and rapeseed oil, the authorities said.

After the edible oils are stored in the reserves, they must undergo acceptance testing by professional third-party quality inspection organizations, according to the authorities.

Edible oils must meet the quality criteria for storage as outlined in the grain and oil storage quality judgment rules, as well as the quality criteria specified in relevant national standards for edible vegetable oils and national food safety standards.

Only oils that pass the acceptance testing are confirmed as part of the local reserve supply, according to the authorities.

Since 2021, the random inspection rate of government reserve edible oil in the province has exceeded 30 percent of the reserve

scale, with the pass rate for food safety indicators in the randomly sampled products reaching 100 percent.

Recent reports of tankers having illegal mixtures of cargo has sparked outrage among the public and led to a plunge in share prices of edible oil companies.

China Grain Reserves Group Ltd Co (Sinograin), the country's largest grain storage and transport company, has been accused of being involved in mixed and contaminated cargo transport cases.

Also, Jinlongyu, a major domestic producer of packed edible oils affiliated with Yihai Kerry Arawana Holdings Co Ltd — a major domestic agricultural and food products processor — reportedly

mixed transport of edible oils at its plants in Wuhan, Hubei province, and Shaanxi province.

Earlier this week, China's authorities said they were investigating food safety concerns in cooking oils after an investigative report from local media revealed that tankers carrying soybean oil from a major state-owned company were also used to carry a form of coal.

The report from Beijing News, a state-backed outlet known for original reporting, found that it was an "open secret" among truck drivers that the tankers did not get cleaned in between their stints carrying edible oils and the chemicals.

Among the trucks the driver followed, the vehicles carried

products from Sinograin, a major state-owned corporation, as well as China Energy Investment Corporation, one of the national-level companies directly overseen by the government.

China's State Council said Tuesday it was forming an investigation group with officials from the Food Safety Commission, the Public Safety Bureau and other ministries. "Enterprises in violation and relevant responsible persons will be severely punished according to law," the announcement said, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

The Beijing News investigation followed one tanker from the northwestern Ningxia region, which carried a type of hydrocarbon that is converted into liquid fuel. From Ningxia, the tanker traveled to northern Tianjin and then filled up with soybean oil from Sinograin, without stopping to get clean.

The hydrocarbon products contain components that may lead to poisoning, said one expert quoted in the Beijing News story.

China Grain Reserves Group, Sinograin's formal name, said in a statement last week that it was conducting an audit after the media allegations.

The investigation also followed other trucks that emerged carrying hydrocarbons from a plant belonging to the China Energy Investment Corporation, which then went on to get edible oils from other companies after they unloaded their first cargo.

The story, published last week, has since received widespread national attention as major state-owned corporations were implicated.

In 2008, many families switched to buying imported infant formula after it was found that a brand called Sanlu contained melamine in its formula, a chemical that caused kidney damage and other harm. The tainted formula killed six babies. **MDT/AGENCIES**

China tells NATO not to create chaos in Asia and rejects label of 'enabler' of Russia's Ukraine war

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

CHINA accused NATO yesterday of seeking security at the expense of others and told the alliance not to bring the same "chaos" to Asia.

The statement by a Foreign Ministry spokesman came a day after NATO labeled China a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war against Ukraine.

"NATO hyping up China's responsibility on the

Ukraine issue is unreasonable and has sinister motives," spokesperson Lin Jian said at a daily briefing. He maintained that China has a fair and objective stance on the Ukraine issue.

China has broken with the United States and its European allies over the war in Ukraine, refusing to condemn Russia's invasion.

NATO, in a communique issued at a summit in Washington, said China has become an enabler



of the war through its "no-limits partnership" with Russia and its large-scale support for

Russia's defense industrial base.

Lin said that China's trade with Russia is le-

gitimate and reasonable and based on World Trade Organization rules.

He said that NATO's "so-called security" comes at the cost of the security of other countries. China has backed Russia's contention that NATO expansion posed a threat to Russia.

China has expressed concern about NATO's budding relationships with countries in the region. Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea sent their lea-

ders or deputies to the NATO summit this week.

"China urges NATO to ... stop interfering in China's internal politics and smearing China's image and not create chaos in the Asia-Pacific after creating turmoil in Europe," Lin said.

Chinese troops are in Belarus this week for joint drills near the border with Poland, a NATO member. The exercises are the first-ever with Belarus, an ally of Russia.

Lin described the joint training as normal military exchange and cooperation that is not directed at any particular country. **MDT/AP**

FORMER AGRICULTURE MINISTER SENTENCED TO 10 YEARS FOR CORRUPTION

TATAN SYUFLANA & NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA

INDONESIA'S anti-graft court sentenced a former agriculture minister to 10 years in prison yesterday after finding him guilty of corruption-related extortion, abuse of power and bribery involving ministry contracts with private vendors.

The case has tarnished President Joko Widodo's credibility in fighting corruption. Five other members of Widodo's Cabinet have been sentenced to prison terms in corruption cases, casting a shadow over his efforts to clean up government while his term will end in October.

The court in the capital, Jakarta, ruled that the former Cabinet minister, Syahrul Yasin Limpo, was guilty of abusing his power by enriching himself and other officials. It also ordered him to pay a 300 million rupiah (\$18,500) fine, and said he would be subject to another four months' imprisonment if he fails to pay.

"The defendant has legally and convincingly been proven guilty of corruption," presiding Judge Rianto Adam Pontoh said. "He wasn't a good example as a public official, what he has done is counter the government's efforts to fight corruption and enriched himself by corruption."

Limpo had been arrested last October by the Corruption Eradication Commission, known as the KPK. He has denied wrongdoing.

Several ministry officials tes-



Former Cabinet minister, Syahrul Yasin Limpo

tified during the trial that secretariats, directorates general and agencies within the ministry was required to give up 20% of their budgets to Limpo, as though they were indebted to him, and he threatened their jobs if they rejected his demands. Vendors and suppliers were also asked to set aside money to fulfill the then-minister's demands, the trial revealed.

Limpo used the money on luxurious cars, gifts and apartments, charter private jets, family parties and gatherings, and for religious observances and pilgrimages. Limpo also used the bribes to disburse humanitarian aid for disaster victims and to his Nasdem political party.

Prosecutors, who sought 12 years imprisonment for Limpo, said the politician accepted a total of 44.7 billion rupiah (\$2.7 million) between January 2020 and October 2023.

In their indictment, prosecutors accused Limpo of ordering his two subordinates, Kasdi Subagyo and Muhammad Hatta, to collect the illicit money. They were each sentenced to four years in prison in separate cases.

During the trial, Limpo said he was the victim of political persecution and felt that he had been slandered by his subordinates in his ministry who fears of being replaced or removed from their position.

"I never received any information about their objection to any of my orders," Limpo said, "If they think it's wrong, they should consult and discuss with me first."

Widodo campaigned in part on a pledge to run a clean government in a country that ranked 115th out of 180 nations in the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index compiled by Transparency International.

Limpo, a former South Sulawesi governor, is the second politician from the Nasdem Party to face recent prosecution. Johnny G. Plate, a former communication minister, was sentenced to 15 years in prison over

\$533 million in graft of the construction of mobile phone transmission towers in remote parts of the country.

Corruption is endemic in Indonesia and the anti-graft commission, one of the few effective institutions in the country of nearly 270 million people, is frequently under attack by lawmakers who want to reduce its powers.

The KPK has arrested around 250 members of the local parliament, as many as 133 regents and mayors as well as 18 governors, 83 members of the national parliament and 12 ministers since the institution was founded in late 2003. **MDT/AP**

SRI LANKA

A railway union strike leaves tens of thousands of commuters stranded

BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI, COLOMBO

Arailway union strike stopped most trains across Sri Lanka on Wednesday, leaving tens of thousands of passengers to brave the few dangerously overcrowded trains that kept running or be stranded at the station.

The Station Masters' Union launched the strike to demand that vacancies be filled and other administrative issues be resolved.

Hundreds of schedu-



led train journeys were canceled Wednesday due to the strike, leaving the

very few trains that ran jam-packed with passengers. Local TV stations

showed people risking their lives to get to school and work, barely hanging

on to the sides of the train while balancing on footboards made slippery by the rain.

Some of the passengers opted to simply go back home.

Anura Samantha, 43, who serves as a clerk at a retail shop in the capital, Colombo, said he decided not to go to work because of the strike.

"It's really disgusting. I waited for about one hour, but couldn't get into a train. Buses are also crowded. Now, there is no time to go to work. I will take a leave today," said Samantha who travels daily from Gampaha, a suburb town about 30 kilometers north of Colombo.

Transport Minister Bandula Gunawardena condemned the strike, saying the union laun-

ched the strike in an arbitrary manner when the government was taking steps to resolve the issues they raised.

During a similar strike in September, two passengers were killed while traveling on packed trains: One was traveling on the roof of a compartment when his head hit an overhead railway bridge, and the other succumbed to injuries after he fell from the train's footboard.

Sri Lanka's train services are substandard, with poorly maintained compartments and tracks because of years of mismanagement and a lack of proper planning. Frequent and sudden strikes have exacerbated the situation, with most trains experiencing delays. **MDT/AP**

KOREAS TENSIONS

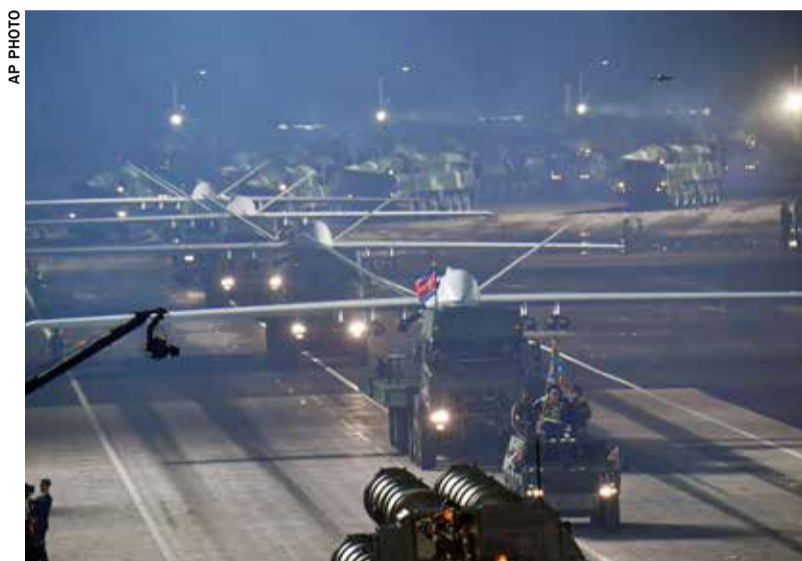
South Korea to deploy laser weapons to intercept North Korean drones

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

SOUTH Korea said yesterday it will begin deploying laser weapons systems designed to intercept North Korean drones, which have caused security concerns in the South in recent years.

South Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Administration said that it will deploy at least one anti-air laser weapons system called "Block-I" by the end of this year and more in coming years.

An agency statement said the "Block-I" system is capable of launching precision attacks on small incoming drones and multi-copters. It said the system, developed by local company Hanwha Aerospace, costs just 2,000 won (about \$1.50) per shot. "We face North Korea on our doorstep and its drones pose present threats to us, so that's why we've been aiming to build and deploy laser weapons soon to cope with them," an agency of-



icial said, requesting anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to media on the issue.

He said that other countries like the United States and Israel are ahead of South Korea in laser weapons technology, but their primary focus has been on higher-powered laser guns that can shoot down incoming ballistic missiles. South Korea also hopes

to develop such anti-missile laser weapons, which its defense procurement agency called "a game changer" in future combat environments.

The "Block-I" system is meant to hit circuit boards and other equipment in enemy drones to make them malfunction and crash on the ground. Tests of the weapons system in 2022-2023

were successful and proved its credibility, the official said.

Some experts questioned the technology.

Lee Illwoo, an expert with the Korea Defense Network in South Korea, doubts how effectively South Korea can use its laser weapons since its anti-air radar systems aren't advanced enough to detect North Korean drones well. He said the range of a laser weapon is relatively short, so high-power microwave weapons would be better when enemy drones are flown in large numbers simultaneously.

Jung Chang Wook, head of the Korea Defense Study Forum think tank in Seoul, said South Korea is likely about five years away from acquiring a functioning laser weapon that can shoot down the drones used by North Korea.

North Korea has periodically flown drones across its heavily fortified border with South Korea for several years, in what observers have called tests of South

Korean readiness. In December 2022, South Korea accused the North of sending drones across the border for the first time in five years. South Korea fired warning shots and launched fighter jets and helicopters but failed to shoot down any of the drones.

In a key political meeting in December 2023, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to introduce various types of unmanned combat equipment such as attack drones for 2024. Foreign experts say Kim likely regards drones as a cheap yet effective method to trigger security jitters and an internal divide in South Korea.

Animosities between the two Koreas, split along the world's most heavily fortified border, have deepened in recent months, with North Korea flying trash-carrying balloons toward South Korea in response to South Korean activists floating political leaflets via their own balloons. **MDT/AP**

AD

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AP PHOTO



People displaced by the ongoing fighting between Congolese forces and M23 rebels gather in a camp on the outskirts of Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, March 13, 2024

CONGO

UN experts: Up to 4,000 Rwandan troops are operating with M23 rebel group

EDITH M. LEDERER,
UNITED NATIONS

BETWEEN 3,000 and 4,000 Rwanda government forces are deployed in neighboring eastern Congo, operating alongside the M23 rebel group which has been making major advances, U.N. experts said in a report circulated earlier this week.

The experts called the estimate of Rwandan troops “conservative” and said their “systematic support and presence” supporting M23 in its territorial conquest is a sanctionable act, and their deployment is a violation of Congo’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Rwandan forces’ “de facto control and direction over M23 operations also renders Rwanda liable for the actions of M23,” the panel of experts said in the The 293-page report to the U.N. Security Council.

Eastern Congo has struggled with armed violence as more than 120 groups fight for power, land and valuable mineral resources, while others try to defend their communities. Some armed groups have been accused of mass killings.

Congo’s President Felix Tshisekedi, along with U.S. and U.N. experts, have accused Rwanda of giving military backing to M23. Rwanda denies the claim, but in February it effectively admitted that it has troops and missile systems in eastern Congo to safeguard its security, pointing to a buildup

of Congolese forces near the border.

At the root of the current crisis is the 1994 Rwanda genocide. The carnage began when a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana was shot down, killing the leader, who like most Rwandans was an ethnic Hutu. The country’s minority Tutsis were blamed, and bands of Hutu extremists began killing them with support from Rwanda’s army, police and militias.

Rwanda’s current president, Paul Kagame, a Tutsi and former opposition military commander, is widely credited with stopping the genocide which killed more than 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them. Thousands of Hutus fled Rwanda to neighboring eastern Congo.

The M23 rebels are largely Congolese ethnic Tutsis, who became prominent when their fighters seized Goma, eastern Congo’s largest city on the border with Rwanda, in November 2012.

Rwandan Ambassador Ernest Rwamucyo told the Security Council Monday that Congo and the international community have failed to ensure the protection of Congolese citizens, especially Congolese Tutsis, who he claimed “are being ethnically cleansed by armed groups.”

He reiterated that the FDLR rebel group — which he said is supported by Congo’s highest authorities and has vowed to

cause regime change in Rwanda — remains “a threat to Rwanda and the Great Lakes region.” The FDLR is comprised mainly of Hutus opposed to Tutsi influence, and reportedly includes some Hutus that participated in the Rwanda genocide.

The panel of experts said the estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Rwandan troops in Congo were deployed in three regions of eastern North Kivu — Nyiragongo, Rutshuru and Masisi — when their report was being drafted in April. It said the troops were from the military’s 2nd and 3rd divisions, citing intelligence and security sources close to M23 and the Rwandan military and confidential documents.

The experts said Rwandan military interventions and operations in the three territories “were critical to the impressive territorial expansion achieved between January and March 2024.”

The top U.N. official in Congo, special envoy Bintou Keita, told the council Monday that she was extremely concerned at the continuing rapid expansion of attacks by the M23 rebel group and its capture of several strategic locations in eastern North Kivu in the last two weeks, and the spillover into neighboring South Kivu.

She said violence has reached “alarming levels” and risks provoking a wider regional conflict.

The panel of experts also said “The rapidly escalating M23 crisis carried the risk of

triggering a wider regional conflict.”

A two-week humanitarian truce began last Friday in eastern Congo, but there has been no indication the violence has stopped.

The experts said they documented the proliferation and use of advanced military technology and equipment, mainly from Rwanda, by M23 and Rwandan forces in violation of a U.N. arms embargo. It cited short-range air defense systems, mortar shells carried by drones, and 120mm guided mortar shells which have “precision strike capability and high lethality.”

The experts said these advances altered the “conflict dynamics” including by grounding all Congolese military air assets.

In December, a new political-military movement called the Alliance Fleuve Congo, or AFC, was launched with the aim of uniting armed groups, political parties and civil society against Congo’s government. But the experts said the AFC “failed to coalesce the majority of political and armed actors against the government.”

The panel said Congolese government forces continue to use the Wazalendo group of irregular fighters in North Kivu and the FDLR “as proxies” in the fight against the M23 and Rwandan forces as well as Burundi government forces, which has exacerbated tensions between Rwanda and Burundi. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1990 YELTSIN RESIGNATION SPLITS SOVIET COMMUNISTS

The populist politician and president of the Russian parliament, Boris Yeltsin, has resigned from the Soviet Communist Party.



The resignation has also led to a declaration from the small but influential radical reform group Democratic Platform that they would also break away.

The split leaves Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev with a party in tatters.

It was thought that Mr Gorbachev had appeased the reformers by ensuring the defeat of hardline conservative Yegor Ligachev in the race for the deputy leadership yesterday.

His favoured candidate, the pro-reform Vladimir Ivashko, was elected instead.

But it was not enough. Within hours of another vote to approve new party rules which still restrict factions operating within it, Mr Yeltsin stood up to address a hushed auditorium.

“In view of my great responsibility towards the people of Russia and in connection with the move towards a multi-party system I cannot fulfil only the instructions of the party,” he said.

“As the highest elected figure in the republic, I have to bow to the will of all the people.”

He then turned and left the chamber without another word.

Some delegates shouted “Shame”, while a few clapped.

Mr Gorbachev, clearly expecting the move, was heard to say, “That ends the process logically,” before instructing delegates to withdraw Mr Yeltsin’s congress mandate.

The departure of a group of Democratic Platform delegates less than an hour later confirmed the split — the first since the Bolshevik-Menshevik divide which put Lenin in power in 1903.

Among those leaving are the popular new mayor of Leningrad, Anatoly Sobchak, and the mayor of Moscow, Gavriil Popov.

Mr Yeltsin has been a figurehead for radical reform of the party system for the last 18 months, and has been a trenchant critic of President Gorbachev for not going far enough with party reforms.

Despite that, he has remained at the centre of the Communist Party structure. His name was put forward for inclusion in the new Central Committee to be chosen this evening.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Days later, tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered beside the walls of the Kremlin to voice their opposition to the Soviet Communist Party.

In August 1991, the rivalry between reformist and conservative elements of the congress erupted in an attempted coup against Mikhail Gorbachev.

Boris Yeltsin became a national hero after he mounted a tank to rally the people against the coup.

After the formal collapse of the Soviet Union later in 1991, Boris Yeltsin, who was already president of Russia, found himself at the head of a world superpower.

His presidency was marked by rapid economic and political reform.

He took on the remnants of Soviet conservatism again in 1993, in an armed clash in which the Parliament building was shelled and 100 people died.

He went on to win the first post-Soviet presidential election in 1996, despite plummeting popularity ratings.

In the same year, he underwent major heart surgery, and there were serious concerns about the state of his health.

Amid growing criticism of his erratic behaviour, including several embarrassing gaffes on the international stage,

Yeltsin stood down from the presidency on 1 January 2000.

His chosen successor, Vladimir Putin, won the next election a few months later.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Romance, creativity and passion come easier, with Venus in Leo for a month. You're especially lucky with love, fun and games. Artistic efforts flourish.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Feather your nest. Domestic bliss inspires this month, with Venus in Leo. Infuse love into your home. Beautify spaces. Prepare something delicious. Share with family.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Trust your heart to lead. You love learning, with Venus in Leo for a month. Develop interesting creative projects. Write, express and share your story.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Gather income. The next month, with Venus in Leo, can get lucrative. Profit from putting your heart into your work. Discover your financial comfort zone.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
For the next month, with Venus in your sign, you're especially irresistible. Try a new style. Fall in love with a new passion.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Discover beauty in tranquility over the next month, with Venus in Leo. Dreams and fantasies abound. Make passionate, imaginative plans. Invent new possibilities.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Get out in public. You're especially popular, with Venus in Leo this month. Participate with community causes. Get social. You can make friends easily.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Build work with a heart connection. Develop professional passion projects over the next month, with Venus in Leo. Watch for exciting opportunities to grow.

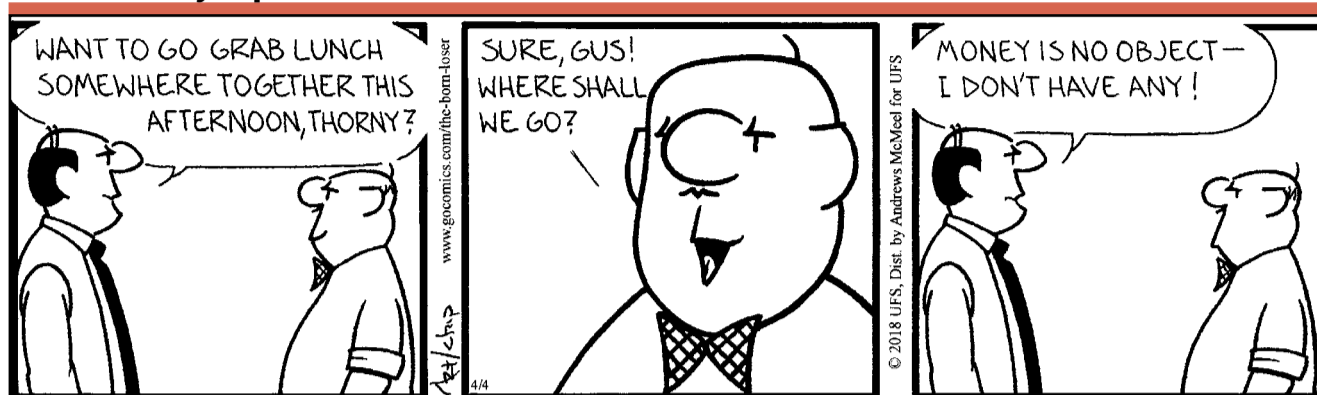
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Venture forth into new terrain. This next month, with Venus in Leo, favors travel and exploration. Study, research and investigate a subject that you love.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
It's all for love. Collaboration gets especially lucrative, with Venus in Leo. Get into a profitable groove with your partner this month. Grow shared ventures.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Strengthen and renew bonds with your sweetheart. Partnerships flow with greater ease for the next month, with Venus in Leo. Share what you love.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Get your heart pumping. Physical action gets lovely results, with Venus in Leo. Balance a busy schedule with fresh air, nature and exercise.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

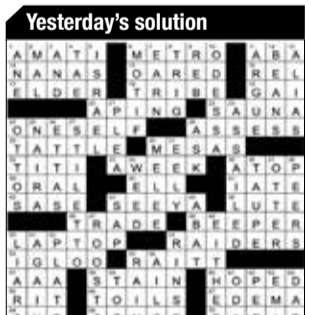
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	24	31	overcast
Changchun	19	29	fine
Chengdu	23	32	overcast
Chongqing	24	33	rain
Fuzhou	28	38	rain
Guangzhou	27	35	thunderstorms
Guiyang	22	29	cloudy
Haikou	27	35	cloudy
Hangzhou	24	33	thunderstorms
Harbin	17	26	cloudy
Hefei	22	31	rain
Nanjing	20	29	rain
Shanghai	24	29	rain
Taipei	26	33	cloudy
Wuhan	24	30	rain
Hong Kong	30	33	showers
WORLD			
Moscow	18	29	sunny
Frankfurt	14	26	showers
Paris	13	18	showers
London	12	18	cloudy
New York	23	28	showers

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Dreadlocks wearer; 6- Breaks off; 10- Bridge length; 14- Nut of an oak; 15- Cambodian currency; 16- Record with a VCR; 17- Walked back and forth; 18- Arthur Ashe's alma mater; 19- ___ Misbehavin'; 20- Part of TNT; 21- Beat back; 23- Dressed to the ___; 24- Spy; 26- Major artery; 27- Offshore sight; 29- Annie of "Designing Women"; 31- Presidential battleground state; 32- Raccoon relative; 33- Holds; 36- In spite of; 40- Simian; 41- Rubbish; 42- Coup d'___; 43- Sharp; 44- Builds; 46- Shop shaper; 48- Molars, e.g.; 49- Grimy; 50- Little; 52- "___ and hers"; 55- Do followers; 56- Like ___ of bricks; 57- Liqueur herb; 59- Teen follower; 60- Infant; 61- Spoken for; 62- "Venerable" English monk; 63- Bear in the sky; 64- Sporting blades;

DOWN 1- Engrossed; 2- Rent-___; 3- Debutante; 4- Uno + due; 5- Peace Nobelist Sakharov; 6- Blow one's top; 7- Good one!; 8- Big name in PCs; 9- Hearst kidnap grp.; 10- Flight of steps; 11- Enamel; 12- Sleep problem; 13- Trawler equipment; 22- Chang's twin; 23- Out; 25- Increase in size; 26- ___ boy!; 27- A Chaplin; 28- Breakfast chain, for short; 29- Deputised group; 30- Sworn thing; 32- Friendly talk; 33- Thumb a ride; 34- Med school subj.; 35- Cpls' superiors; 37- Like a mosquito bite; 38- Not false; 39- Insect-repelling chemical; 43- Clothes; 44- Conger; 45- Tell, as a tale; 46- Vassal; 47- Packing heat; 48- Country singer Tucker; 49- Dull; 50- Hollywood headliner; 51- Unruly crowds; 53- Fortuneteller's opening; 54- Chamber workers; Abbr.; 56- ___ Dhabi; 58- Doze;



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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AD



England's manager Gareth Southgate celebrates after winning a semifinal match between the Netherlands and England at the Euro 2024 soccer tournament in Dortmund, Germany

EURO 2024 | REVIEW

'WE ALL WANT TO BE LOVED:' ENGLAND COACH SOUTHGATE SAVORS SEMIFINAL WIN AFTER CRITICISM

JAMES ELLINGWORTH,
DORTMUND

ENGLAND 2, NETHERLANDS 1

GARETH Southgate has faced non-stop criticism as England's manager at Euro 2024. Reaching the final could rekindle a love affair with the team's supporters.

A coach once idolized by his

team's fans — and with the most consistently successful record of any England manager — had been the target of a volley of plastic cups from disgruntled fans at one game, and criticism from British TV commentators over his cautious approach.

Thursday's (Macau time) 2-1 win over the Netherlands in the Euro 2024 semifinals might change all that. Southgate's team played

a more open, attacking style for much of the game, and his decision to take off captain Harry Kane paid dividends when substitute Ollie Watkins scored a dramatic stoppage-time winner.

"We all want to be loved, right? When you're doing something for your country and you're a proud Englishman, when you don't feel that back and when all you read is criticism, it's hard. So to be able

to celebrate the second final (after Euro 2020) is very, very special," Southgate said, paying tribute to England's traveling fans.

"If I hadn't been on the grass, I'd have been watching, celebrating like they were. We are kindred spirits in many ways but of course I'm the one who has to pick a team. So to be able to give them a night like tonight, it's very special."

Southgate was once seen as so-

meone who reconnected England with its fan base, making them fall back in love with the team.

Supporters sang of Southgate being "the one" and the vest — or waistcoat — he wore at the 2018 World Cup became one of the iconic symbols of his first major tournament in charge.

But a loss on penalties to Italy at home in the Euro 2020 final seemed for some to show the limits of his cautious tactics as England tried and failed to defend an early 1-0 lead.

At Euro 2024, England's path to its semifinal game against the Netherlands featured some games that were hard to watch — England didn't have a shot on goal until deep into added time against Slovakia in the round of 16, and the 80th minute against Switzerland in the quarterfinals. Both were crucial goals that kept England's hopes alive.

Southgate's most notable experiment in Germany was one that backfired, deploying right back Trent Alexander-Arnold as a central midfielder in the opening 1-0 win over Serbia and 1-1 draw with Denmark.

England faces Spain in Sunday's final, one game away from what would be its first men's trophy since winning the 1966 World Cup on home soil.

"The only reason I took the job was to try and bring success to England as a nation and try and improve English football. To be able to take the team to its first final overseas, I'm immensely proud of that," Southgate said.

"We play the team who have been the best team in the tournament and we have a day less to prepare so it's a huge task. But we're still here and we're fighting."

MDT/AP

EURO 2024

England and Netherlands fans clash in Dortmund ahead of semifinal game

JAMES ELLINGWORTH,
DORTMUND

FIVE people were injured in clashes between fans of England and the Netherlands ahead of the Euro 2024 semifinal game between the two teams, police said.

Around 100,000 Dutch soccer fans were in Dortmund — which is close to the Dutch border — before the game for a march to the stadium, as well as large numbers of England fans. England won the game 2-1.

"We are aware of some reports and videos circulating of disorder in Dort-



mund. It appears that there have been several instances of Dutch fans attacking England fans in bars and

attempting to steal flags," the U.K. Football Policing Unit, which deals with soccer violence involving Bri-

tish fans and has officers in Germany for the tournament, said in a statement.

"We understand this has resulted in minor injuries to five people. We are also aware that in addition to the tens of thousands of Dutch fans there to enjoy the game, there are groups of risk supporters who have traveled to Dortmund from the Netherlands. Our officers are at the location supporting German

colleagues. We would advise supporters to be aware of their surroundings and seek areas where there is a German Police presence."

Local police in Dortmund said there had been confrontations between English and Dutch fans in three places, including at a bar where chairs and bottles were thrown. Police said 26 people had been detained, without specifying how many were English or Dutch, and that investigations were ongoing.

Video footage posted on social media appeared to show a small number of people in Netherlands colors throwing chairs across a seating area outside a bar as another group of people

took shelter inside.

Despite the incidents, Dortmund police said they were "largely satisfied" with a "largely peaceful pre-game phase," especially considering the number of people who traveled to the city.

It's not the first time that England fans have been involved in violent incidents at Euro 2024.

Police detained eight people following a brawl between England and Serbia fans in Gelsenkirchen ahead of a group-stage game last month. Police said Serbia fans were eating inside a restaurant when a large group of England fans tried to get in.

MDT/AP

UPCOMING GAMES

	Date	Time	Home	Away	ODDS
Mon	Jul 15	03:00	Spain	England	H2.6, D 2.9, A 3.6

ODDSCHECKER.COM

SCOREBOARD

Semi-final	Spain	2	1	France
Semi-final	Netherlands	1	2	England

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

tTUNES

'Louis in London,' a 1968 live album, captures a joyful, late-career Louis Armstrong

STEVEN WINE

At the end of his career, every note from Louis Armstrong still exuded the joy of being alive.

That's true of a live album out today titled "Louis in London," heralded in promotional material as his "last great performance." The 13-track set captures Armstrong and a strong five-piece backing combo recorded before an audience at the BBC on July 2, 1968. Armstrong's chronic health issues soon worsened, and he died in 1971.

Nearly half the material on "Louis in London" is previously unreleased, and the album provides a snapshot of Armstrong at a peak of popularity. The performance took place weeks after he reached No. 1 on the UK charts with "What a Wonderful World."

That song is included, its unabashed sentimentality in defiance of news headlines then and now. Armstrong also has the room swaying to songs from way back when, starting with a hearty reading of his longtime theme song, "When It's Sleepy Time Down South."

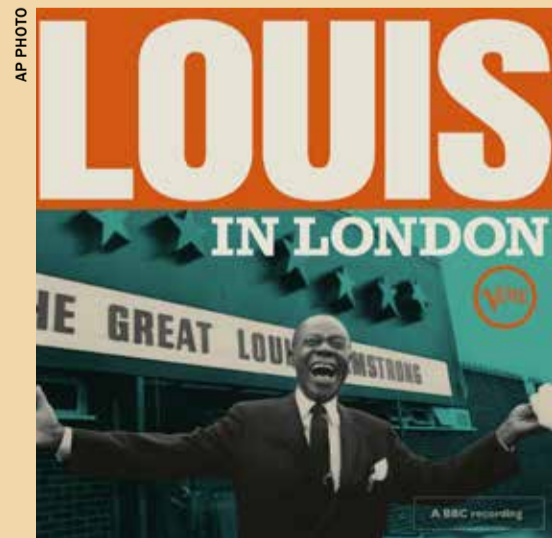
The set is primarily a vocal album dominated by Armstrong's sunny showmanship and unmistakable baritone. His voice dances through every tune, riding improvised flourishes that include wordless grunts, growls and gurgles. Even the simplest lyric benefits from his distinctive stamp: He sings "baby" like no one else.

Armstrong's trumpet plays only a supporting role, but his still-brilliant tone makes every entrance a bracing embrace. The supporting cast, both tight and loose, includes Tyree Glenn on trombone, Joe Muranyi on clarinet, Marty Napoleon on piano, Buddy Catlett on bass and Danny Barcelona on drums.

They form a parade of sizzling soloists on the two instrumental cuts, Dixieland renditions of "(Back Home Again In) Indiana" and "Ole Miss." The latter tune, by W.C. Handy, is believed to be the first composition Armstrong played in public.

Armstrong sings "Hello, Dolly!" with a zeal that gets the audience clapping on the backbeat. Other highlights include "Mack the Knife," with a swinging groove that gradually intensifies, and Hoagy Carmichael's "Rockin' Chair," a hammy vocal duet with Glenn. "One of them good old good ones," Armstrong says of the latter song.

The album closes with "When the Saints Go Marching In," and when Armstrong's last note gives the final chord a jazzy twist, it's a sound for eternity. MDT/AP



This cover image released by Verve/UMG shows "Louis in London (Live at the BBC)" by Louis Armstrong

TASTE OF EDESIA

Flavors from the silk roads

IRENE SAM, MDT

NOT long ago, MGM and Robb Report concluded the second edition of MGM x RRIHK Culinary Masters event at MGM Cotai over the period of 3 days. Over 400 guests, six internationally acclaimed chefs, and global diners came together for an epic culinary journey, a fitting culmination to Macau's June gastronomic celebrations.

The event, themed "Savor 700 Years of Silk Road Flavors: A Gastronomic Odyssey," celebrated the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, coinciding with the 700 years since the renowned Silk Road explorer Marco Polo. Macau, designated as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, provided the perfect historic backdrop, with its rich legacy of East-West trade connections, to explore the culinary significance of the ancient Silk Road routes and the latest global gastronomic trends.

This year's event boasted a star-studded lineup of celebrity chefs hailing from across the Asian, European, and Middle Eastern regions along the historic Silk Roads. The impressive roster included Garima Arora of the ac-

claimed Indian restaurant Gaa, the world's first female Indian chef to earn a two-Michelin-star; Chudaree «Tam» Debhakam of the renowned Thailand restaurant Baan Tapa, the world's first female Thai chef to win a two-Michelin-stars; Marco Galtarossa of the one-Michelin-starred Italian restaurant Villa Elena in Bergamo; Yang Dengquan, the executive sous chef who helms the one-Michelin-starred Sichuanese restaurant Five Foot Road at MGM COTAI; Sara Aqel of Dara Dining, who modernizes Mediterranean cuisine with an Italian focus in Jordan; and Florita Morais Alves, of La Famiglia Macanese restaurant, a well-respected ambassador of Macanese cuisine.

For the first time, these six diverse master chefs collaborated to present an unparalleled 12-hands gala dinner, drawing upon their respective interpretations of flavors from the historic Silk Roads. They ingeniously infused their innovative cuisine with elements that

paid tribute to the rich cultural traditions and evolution of gastronomic exchange along these storied trade routes. The result was a culinary masterpiece that delighted palates from around the world, showcasing the artistic mastery and global influence of Middle Eastern, European, and Asian cooking traditions.



Heavenly hands

THIRTY-FOUR years since what would ultimately become Resurrection Aromatique Hand Balm was first whisked together in the store room of a Melbourne hair salon, a new formulation joins the range, carrying not just the aromas of Cedar Atlas, Patchouli and Clove Bud essential oils, but also a rich heritage in hand care.

Taking its name from the Ancient Greek personification of mercy and compassion, Eleos Aromatique Hand Balm contains a nurturing combination of hydra-

ting humectants, alongside emollient butters and oils. The new balm provides exceptional replenishment for weather-weary or dry skin, yet is rapidly absorbed with a soft, matte finish.

Eleos Aromatique Hand Balm provides high saturation—in both hydration and hue. This latest addition joins Reverence and Resurrection Aromatique Hand Balms, along with their complementary hand washes, building on Aesop's legacy of bringing a touch of poetry and pleasure to everyday actions. IS



OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

NATO'S MUSKETEERING MAKES ALL LESS SECURE

The ongoing NATO Summit in Washington was initially aimed at finding ways to reassure Ukraine of the organization's enduring support and offer some hope to its battle-weary citizens that their country might prevail in its conflict with Russia. But it is US President Joe Biden's health and cognitive abilities that grabbed the attention of all sides before the start of the gathering on Tuesday.

The NATO Summit undoubtedly comes at a trying moment in the US president's bid for reelection, and the three-day meeting is also likely to become a trying test for Biden to prove he is "fine", as he claims. The gathering on the 75th anniversary of the alliance's founding involves not only the 32 leaders of the NATO member states but also others from some Asia-Pacific countries and international organizations invited to attend. That means dozens of multilateral and bilateral meetings and a lot of talking for Biden.

After his stumbling in the first televised debate with Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump two weeks ago, which has raised questions about his ability to defeat his challenger in the November election, Biden is intent on using the NATO Summit to show he is capable of not only winning that contest but also holding office for another four years.

However, all parties are holding a wait-and-see attitude toward that, even as the White House has tried its best to reassure the public of the president's health and mental capacities.

Yet several anonymous senior US officials, who say there isn't — at least not yet — a crisis of confidence over Biden's general mental state, told the media that the president displays a strong grasp of the broader issues — Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the threat posed by China — but on specific and incremental actions that countries or groups may take when it comes to these conflicts, Biden has appeared confused at times.

Even if Biden can prove he is no less vigorous and healthy, over the three days, than the 75-year-old organization that was said to be "brain dead" just three years back, the other leaders have enough reasons to care about a U-turn change in the US' NATO policy if Biden does lose the election.

European anxiety was heightened in February when Trump warned NATO allies in a campaign speech that he "would encourage" the Russians "to do whatever the hell they want" to countries that don't meet defense spending goals if he returns to the White House.

If that happens, the most pressing challenge the European NATO member states will be facing in just a few months will not be about how to support Ukraine to defeat Russia, but how to come up with the money to pay their NATO dues at a time when many European economies are flagging and there is public questioning of whether spending it that way is putting the money to best use.

The US and several other allies have said they will deliver on the \$1 billion air defense systems they have pledged to provide Ukraine at the opening of the NATO Summit on Tuesday. But how the others will follow up remains a question.

The US used its you-are-on-the-table-or-the-menu argument to coerce its allies to follow its lead not long ago when they appeared to be reluctant to be dragged into its geopolitical games. It remains to be seen how Washington will try and persuade its allies to open up their wallets this time to stake its geopolitical games of aggression.

Over the past more than three years, an increasing number of people, including in the NATO member states, have seen clearly that the Three Musketeers-like vow of all for one, one for all "collective security model for like-minded countries" that Biden has tried to resurrect from the Cold War era has brought disastrous consequences to Europe and beyond.

[Abridged]

A Chinese woman who was swept out to sea while swimming at a Japanese beach was rescued 37 hours later after drifting in a swimming ring more than 80 kilometers in the Pacific Ocean, officials said yesterday.

Japan's coast guard launched a search for the woman, identified only as a Chinese national in her 20s, after receiving a call Monday night from her friend saying she had disappeared while swimming at Shimoda, about 200 kilometers southwest of Tokyo. The woman was spotted by a cargo ship early Wednesday,

about 36 hours after she disappeared, off the southern tip of Boso Peninsula, the coast guard said.

The cargo ship asked a passing LPG tanker, the Kakuwa Maru No. 8, to help. Two of its crew members jumped into the sea and rescued the woman, officials said. She was airlifted by a coast guard helicopter to land, they said.

The woman was slightly dehydrated but was in good health and walked away after being examined at a nearby hospital, the officials said.

PUTIN'S WAR

RUSSIAN MISSILE ATTACK ON UKRAINE'S LARGEST HOSPITAL COMPLICATES TREATMENT OF KIDS WITH CANCER

HANNA ARHIROVA, KYIV, UKRAINE

National Cancer Institute in Kyiv was busier than usual after a Russian missile struck Ukraine's largest children's hospital this week, forcing the evacuation of dozens of its young patients battling cancer.

Russia's heaviest bombardment of the Ukrainian capital in four months severely damaged Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital on Monday, terrorizing families and severely impacting their children already battling life-threatening diseases.

Now, some families face a dilemma of where to continue their children's treatment.

Oksana Halak only learned about her 2-year-old son Dmytro's diagnosis — acute lymphoblastic leukemia — at the beginning of June. She immediately decided to have him treated at Okhmatdyt, "because it is one of the best hospitals in Europe."

She and Dmytro were in the hospital for his treatment when sirens blared across the city. They couldn't run to the shelter as the little boy was on an IV. "It is vitally important not to interrupt these IVs," Halak said.

After the first explosions, nurses helped move them to another room without windows, which was safer.

"We felt a powerful blast wave. We felt the room shaking and the lights went out," she recalled. "We understood that it was nearby, but we didn't think it was at Okhmatdyt."

Shortly after that, they were evacuated to the National Cancer Institute,



Oksana Halak poses for a portrait with her son Dmytro, 2, at the National Cancer Institute in Kyiv, Ukraine

and now Dmytro is one of 31 patients who, amid a difficult fight with cancer, have to adapt to a new hospital. With their arrival, the number of children being treated for cancer there has doubled.

Dmytro and the other patients were offered evacuation to hospitals abroad, and Halak wants his further treatment to be in Germany.

"We understand that with our situation, we cannot receive the help we should be getting, and we are forced to apply for evacuation abroad," she said.

Other hospitals in the city that took in children for treatment faced a similar overcrowding situation after the shutdown of Okhmatdyt, where hundreds of children were being treated at the time of the attack.

"The destroyed Okhmatdyt is the pain of the entire nation," said the director general of the National Cancer Institute, Olena Yefimenko.

In just three days, Ukrainians and private businesses raised more than \$7.3 million through the national fundraising platform UNITED24.

Work to rebuild the hospital is already underway. Okhmatdyt doctors ba-

lance their duties treating their young evacuated patients while working to get the children's hospital reopened. But even with resources and determination, that may take months.

Even so, Yuliia Vasylenko has already decided that her 11-year-old son, Denys, will remain in Kyiv for his cancer treatment.

The day of the attack the boy, diagnosed with multiple spinal cord tumors, was supposed to start chemotherapy. The strike delayed his treatment indefinitely, and Denys has to undergo additional examinations and tests, his mother said.

Denys was very scared during the strike, said his mother as she wheeled him around the National Cancer Institute in a wheelchair.

"The last days felt like an eternity," she said. Only now are they slowly recovering from the stress.

"If we go somewhere, with our diagnosis, we would have to retake all the tests from the beginning," she said, adding that this could take three to four months.

"And we don't know if we have that time," she said. MDT/AP



USA The Biden administration is awarding nearly USD2 billion in grants to help restart or expand electric vehicle manufacturing and assembly sites in eight states, including the presidential battlegrounds of Michigan, Pennsylvania and Georgia. The Energy Department will issue grants totaling USD1.7 billion to create or retain thousands of union jobs and support auto-based communities that have long driven the U.S. economy, the White House said yesterday. Besides the three battleground states, grants also will go to EV facilities in Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland and Virginia.

Yemen's Houthi rebels likely fired an Iranian-made anti-ship cruise missile at a Norwegian-flagged tanker in the Red Sea in December, an assault that now provides a public evidence-based link between the ongoing rebel campaign against shipping and Tehran, the U.S. military says. A report by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency released Wednesday linked the attack on the Strinda, which set the vessel ablaze, to Tehran, the Houthi's main backer in Yemen's nearly decadelong war.



European Union says it's accepting Apple's pledge to open up its "tap to pay" iPhone payment system to rivals as a way to resolve an antitrust case and head off a hefty fine. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm and top antitrust enforcer, said Thursday that it's accepting the commitments that Apple offered earlier this year and will make them legally binding. The Commission had accused Apple in 2022 of abusing its dominant position by limiting access to its mobile payment technology.

NASA Two astronauts who should have been back on Earth weeks ago said Wednesday that they're confident that Boeing's space capsule can return them safely, despite a string of vexing breakdowns. NASA test pilots Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams launched aboard Boeing's new Starliner capsule early last month, the first people to ride it.