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THE INTERMEDIATE COURT UPHELD THE CONVICTION OF A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR ACCUSED OF SEXUALLY ASSAULTING ONE OF HIS FEMALE STUDENTS

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THE TIMES FILES LAWSUIT OVER SCAM PAGES WITH MDT LOGO

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COMMUNIST PARTY CHARTS TECHNOLOGY- AND SECURITY-FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT FOR REVIVING THE ECONOMY

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AP PHOTO



Philippines The suspect in the killings of two Australians and their Filipina companion at a hotel in a popular resort city south of Manila surrendered and claimed he wanted to retaliate against the hotel for firing him, Philippine officials said yesterday. The suspect further said that he randomly barged into the victims' room last week because its window was open, authorities added. The victims, whose hands and feet were tied, were found sprawled on the floor in a street-level room at the Lake Hotel in Tagaytay city on July 10 in a heinous crime that shattered the tranquility the tourism destination.

AP PHOTO



North Korean land mines could be swept into South Korea by flooding, South Korea's military warned yesterday, after the North has recently placed tens of thousands of additional deadly explosives along the rivals' heavily fortified border. North Korea's minelaying is part of construction at the border that's been going on since April, which also includes adding anti-tank barriers and reinforcing roads. South Korea officials believe North Korea aims to boost its frontline security posture and prevent its soldiers and citizens from defecting to South Korea.

AP PHOTO



Bangladesh Authorities urged all universities to close yesterday, the day after at least six people died in violent protests over the allocation of government jobs and police raided the headquarters of the main opposition party. Dhaka University, at the center of the violence, decided to suspend classes and close its dormitories indefinitely, a university official told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to media.

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Fire bureau report highlights high percentage of ambulance calls for minor issues, urges the public to avoid unnecessary use

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THREE POLLING STATIONS FOR CE COMMISSION ELECTION

The Electoral Affairs Commission yesterday published the locations and times of the polling stations for the elections of the members of the Chief Executive Electoral Commission, scheduled for August 11. The polling stations for the three sectors in the member elections will be in the Macau Polytechnic University's Multisports Pavilion, the Luso-Chinese Technical-Professional School and the Macau Forum. Polling stations will operate 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on August 11.

WOMAN APPREHENDED WITH EUR115,000 IN CASH

A local resident was intercepted while crossing the border between Macau and mainland China carrying EUR115,000 in banknotes. The incident, now disclosed by authorities, occurred Friday at the Gongbei border post. The woman crossed the border at 6:40 a.m. through the automated channels. However, her unusual behavior caught the attention of the Customs Service. The authorities confiscated the cash and imposed a fine on the woman for neglecting to declare the money.

GUANGDONG AND MACAU PRODUCTS FAIR FROM JULY 25

The 2024 Guangdong & Macao Branded Products Fair will take place from July 25 to 28 at Cotai Expo. In celebration of the event's 16th anniversary, over 75,000 exquisite gifts have been prepared. This year, the fair will introduce three new exhibition areas focusing on smart devices and services, hotel facilities and services, and China chic, in line with the Macau Government's "1+4" strategy for economic diversification and to stay current with market trends.

MOP530,000 BID FOR AC-88-88 LICENSE PLATE

The Transport Bureau has disclosed that a vehicle owner is seeking to purchase license plate AC-88-88 for MOP530,000. The offer was made on Tuesday during an auction for unique registration vehicle license plates in the AC category. 24 special number plates received 38 bids through a confidential bidding process, with the highest bidders receiving the plates. The combined bid amount reached around MOP3.3 million.

TIMES FILES LAWSUIT OVER SCAM PAGES WITH MDT LOGO

THE Macau Daily Times has launched legal proceedings about fraudulent pages featuring the MDT logo, which used "sponsored" ads on various social media platforms to promote an alleged news article attributed to the Times.

The Times recently uncovered fraudulent posts on social media that featured a photo and story published on a fake website using the Times logo and layout.

The Times received several screenshots of the post from several readers.

Lawyer Vasco Passeira, said, "Cases like this seriously jeopardize the public's trust in the available information. This one is especially serious, because it threatens the trust that the public in general puts in the information provided by the press."

"It's not just the MDT that is being affected. It's all of us, and our right to be informed, and well informed," he added.

Earlier this month, the Times has also contacted the Judiciary Police (PJ) over the rising number of fraudulent "sponsored advertisements" across various social platforms.

This comes as in recent months, the PJ also discovered someone had paid for "sponsored advertisements" across various



social platforms (including Facebook and Instagram) and posted fake advertisements in the name of government departments or entities from the banking sector.

Scammers often use phrases such as "interest-free loans" to entice users to click links embedded in the ads, which then redirect users to an unverified website for loans.

"After the PJ uncovered the situation, not only did the bureau contact the relevant social media platforms to block the sponsored

ads, but we also issued two police circulars to remind the public to avoid being scammed."

The lawyer believes disinformation is one the most serious problems the public faces today, noting that "it will only get worse" as social media platforms can distribute fake news.

"Now, with AI bots adding to this flow, the spread of disinformation will increase by orders of magnitude," he said.

The lawyer said the public is advised to "exercise caution

when researching information on the internet; check the reliability of sources and use a good dose of skepticism if you are not familiar with them; and always cross-check the information with several sources; and exercise critical thinking."

"If you have been scammed and suffered personal damages, do not be afraid to report it to the authorities. You might be preventing other people from being deceived," the Passeira added. **MDT**

CRIME

UM professor guilty of sexually assaulting student

THE intermediate court has upheld the conviction of a university professor accused of sexually assaulting one of his female students during an on-campus party in 2022.

The 70-year-old professor, who worked at the University of Macau (UM), was initially found guilty by the Court of First Instance and sentenced to a two-year suspended sentence and a seven-month probation.

In his appeal, the pro-

fessor claimed he could not recall the details of the incident and denied any sexual harassment, citing intoxication as the reason.

However, the Court of Second Instance has rejected the professor's defense.

The court said the professor was able to have a clear, intelligent conversation shortly before the alleged assault, showing he was sober enough to control his actions and to be held

responsible for what happened.

"It indicates that he was then conscious and was not in a state where he could not be held accountable," the court said.

During the appeal, the professor raised concerns about the introduction of the teacher-student relationship into the case and criticized the student for disclosing the matter on social media, which he claimed violated the principles of

RENATO MARQUES



judicial confidentiality.

Nevertheless, the intermediate court ruled there was no evident motive for the student, who had received a recommendation letter from the professor, to make a false accusation.

The only witness

mentioned in the case was said to have not seen the incident and did not know the complainant.

Despite this, the court upheld the professor's conviction, stating the evidence presented was sufficient to support the finding of guilt. **VC**

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GAMING

CLSA: 2024 GGR projections down amid regulatory headwinds

NADIA SHAW

CLSA Ltd has revised its forecast for the SAR's gross gaming revenue (GGR) and earnings before interest, taxation, depreciation and amortization (EBITDA) for 2024 and 2025, according to a recent report.

The brokerage has lowered its GGR projections in 2024 to MOP232.7 billion, a 27% year-on-year increase, and expects 3.9% growth to MOP241.7 billion in 2025.

The revised forecast is attributed to a seasonally weak June, when Macau's GGR was MOP17.69 billion, the lowest so far this year.

The CLSA analysts also noted the impact of China's crackdown on illegal money exchange activities, which has led to increased vigilance and a moderation in the number of inbound visitors.

"We lowered calendar year 2024 and 2025 GGR by 3% and



5.3% as we tweaked our visitation and GGR/visitor assumptions, factoring in DICJ [Macau's casino regulator] reported second-quarter 2024 GGR of MOP56.4 billion, which is 1.6% lower than first quarter of 2024, as well as the

impact from increasing vigilance against illegal money exchange activity from China," wrote CLSA's analysts.

According to GGRAsia, the analysts observed that although the second-quarter GGR was

lower, stable balance sheets and sensible competition among operators should enable them to weather these short-term headwinds.

In June, Beijing initiated a fresh campaign aimed at reducing ca-

pital flight and illegal loan practices. The government's recent efforts to clamp down on unauthorized currency exchanges are also geared towards preventing Chinese tourists from surpassing the limit of mainland currency allowed to be taken across the border during each trip.

Chen Shiqu from the Chinese ministry of public security has stated that illegal "money exchange gangs" operating near casinos are supplying gamblers with a significant sum of Hong Kong dollars in cash. The Hong Kong dollar is the primary currency used in the city's casinos.

Additionally, CLSA has lowered its forecast for the gaming sector EBITDA for 2024 and 2025, due to increased promotional activity and rising payroll costs.

For 2024, CLSA expects sector-adjusted EBITDA of HKD63.3 billion, down 8% from its previous estimate. The forecast for 2025 is HKD71.7 billion, a 5.8% decrease from the previous projection.

The analysts also noted the sector's EBITDA margin will contract 1.2 percentage points to 30.3% in the second quarter of 2024.

Despite the lowered forecasts, the CLSA analysts remain optimistic about the long-term prospects of Macau's gaming sector, as it navigates the challenges of increased competition and regulatory changes.

AD

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EPM SAGA

PORTUGUESE EDUCATION MINISTRY INVESTIGATES DISMISSALS AT EPM

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Portuguese Ministry of Education's representative is currently in the region to evaluate the circumstances surrounding the termination of employment for the teachers at the Portuguese School of Macau (EPM).

This inquiry, which commenced last week, involves meetings with various parties directly involved in the case.

According to a report by Tribuna de Macau, envoy from the Inspectorate-General of Education and Science arrived last week and has already met EPM director Acácio de Brito and the president of the school's foundation's Board of Directors, Neto Valente.

The meetings lasted "several hours", but specific details were not disclosed, according to the media outlet.

The primary objective of the visiting official's presence is to determine the reasons behind the dismissal of several teachers, including four permanent residents.

In addition to meeting with the affected teachers, the envoy will also consult individuals from



the Portuguese and Macanese community, including Miguel de Senna Fernandes from the EPM Foundation and Rita Santos, president of the Regional Council of Portuguese Communities for Asia and Oceania.

Expressing their concern, the Councilors of the Portuguese Communities issued a statement asserting that the EPM should re-

tain teachers who are permanent residents and possess expertise in teaching Portuguese as a second language.

They emphasized the importance of allowing the teachers to "continue their work" and cautioned against replacing them with individuals who lack familiarity with the local context.

The statement from the Cou-

ncilors also emphasized that the teaching of Portuguese at the EPM should never be regarded as a foreign language, as a significant percentage of students studying Portuguese as a non-native language are, in fact, of Portuguese heritage. They cautioned against disregarding culturally identity-related sensitivities that may arise from such dismissals.

The dismissals have sparked criticism from parents, guardians, and the Councilors of the Portuguese Communities.

In their statement, they stressed the importance of allowing the teachers to "continue their work" and advocated against their replacement by individuals who lack familiarity with the local context.

These dismissals follow a July statement by the EPM, in which the school assured that Portuguese as a second language would remain an integral part of the curriculum.

This commitment came after reports of an internal review of the Portuguese and first cycle departments concerning language instruction for non-native students.

In response, a group of guardians had sent an open letter underscoring the significance of maintaining these classes.

"Teaching Portuguese as a non-native language requires mastery of specific practices," the Councilors said. They believe the dismissed teachers have developed this expertise over the past two decades, and it is essential not to squander their valuable contributions.

The ongoing investigation seeks to uncover the reasons behind the dismissal of permanent resident teachers who possess local expertise in teaching Portuguese.

TOURISM

Shopkeepers sharpen language skills to attract tourists

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU'S tourism industry is bouncing back, with the number of international visitors in the first half of 2024 reaching nearly 1.17 million, a 1.4-fold increase year-on-year, according to provisional data from the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

The figure is about 67% of the same period in 2019, signaling a strong recovery.

Tourism growth has been particularly noticeable in the Central District, where many tourists visited popular tourist areas in the afternoon.

A Vietnamese tourist, in Macau for the first time, expressed to being drawn to the city's blend of Chinese and Portuguese cultures, and chose to stay for four days with his family.

Similarly, a Malaysian



tourist, surnamed Wong, was back for her second visit, taking her family on a leisure trip and purchasing various Macau-themed souvenirs, according to a TDM report.

Merchants have reported a positive trend, with international tourists, primarily from Southeast Asia, showing a strong interest in cultural and creative products from Portu-

guese-speaking countries and Macau itself.

Leong, the deputy store manager of a cultural and creative product store, said these tourists have strong spending power and that the store plans to train employees to introduce products in English to attract more customers.

Another souvenir shop owner, surnamed Chan,

noted tourists from South Korea and Malaysia are particularly interested in Macau's characteristic cakes and jerky products.

He said some employees can already serve customers in English and Japanese, ensuring smooth communication. The store remains optimistic about the influx of tourists during the upcoming summer vacation.

HEALTH

PORTUGUESE DOCTOR RECRUITMENT DOWN TO TWO CANDIDATES

THE SAR's efforts to recruit Portuguese doctors to Macau have seen limited success, with only two specialists still in talks to make the move, according to the director of the Health Bureau.

Alvis Lo confirmed the recruitment drive is now focused on finalizing paperwork for two doctors who meet qualification standards.

Originally, 12 specialists from Portugal applied but only two candidates' resumes aligned with the Hospital Centre S. Januário's needs and legal prerequisites, said Lo.

Some applicants withdrew after assessing Macau's circumstances, Lo said, with personal reasons or broader considerations deterring their relocation. When asked about specific applicant withdrawals, Lo stated each had private motivations and did not provide

detailed explanations.

While recruitment fell short of its target, Lo indicated qualified candidates deemed not suitable for the current openings may still help boost Macau's healthcare workforce.

With their consent, these applicants' information was forwarded to the Macau Union Hospital for review against developing department requirements.

"We have adopted a multi-channel approach," said Lo, "as we are hoping to expand our medical team."

Four Macau residents currently working in Portugal also meet S. Januário's needs, according to Lo, and may join through a legal hiring process.

As the Portuguese doctor drive concludes with just two specialists, alternative sourcing looks to fill gaps in specialist medical staffing. VC

RENATO MARQUES



STATS

CB: Minor issues cause 50% of ambulance calls

RENATO MARQUES

MOST ambulance calls are due to minor issues, the Fire Services Bureau (CB) noted during its report yesterday on bureau services over the first half of the year.

From January to June, ambulances were deployed 23,207 times, 2,294 more than in the same period last year, an increase of about 11%.

The CB noted that in 55.1% of the cases (about 12,795), an ambulance was called for cases that did not require an ambu-

lance, including for symptoms of dizziness, abdominal pain, fever and vomiting.

The CB noted almost all the 11% increase year-on-year was for cases of light discomfort, fever and headaches.

The data caused the bureau's Chief of the Department of Stu-

dy and Planning, Lei Long Kit, to warn the population to "leave the ambulance resources for the citizens in real need."

Reiterating many similar comments, he said, "Ambulance resources are precious and limited and everyone should avoid the unnecessary use of these resources."

FIREMEN BUSIER THIS YEAR

Firemen have seen more work in the first half of the year, with growth recorded in almost all the services funded by the bureau.

The number of cases grew 12.64% to 27,654 cases, 3,103 more than in the same period last year.

Fire incidents rose 10.71% (+44 cases) to 455, but in most cases (375) the CB did not deploy a fire hose either because the fires were small or because they had been extinguished by citizens before the firemen arrived.

As in the past, 65% of all fires in Macau were related to people forgetting the turn off their stoves or cooking appliances, electrical malfunctions or short-circuits, and the burning of joss papers, candles and incense in religious rituals.

The CB said these kinds of fires are expected to rise as Macau enters the seventh month of the lunar calendar, the so-called "Ghost Month" that includes the "Hungry Ghosts Festival."

According to the folk beliefs of Buddhism and Taoism, in the seventh month of the lunar calendar, ghosts have a "one-month parole" and will roam the towns. Those who believe in the lore will make offerings to the "ghosts" that often come by burning joss papers, candles

and other items.

The only CB service that saw a fall in incidents was related to "Rescue Operations," which registered 916 cases, that is, -1.61% or 15 fewer than 2023.

FIRE HYDRANT INSPECTIONS CAUSE HIKE IN SPECIAL SERVICES

The most significant hike in CB work was for "Special Services," which the release noted increased 33.97% year-on-year.

Responding to the Times, the CB official, Lei Long Kit, said the increase was mostly due to the inspection of fire hydrants.

"In this first half of the year, we dedicated a lot of effort to prevention and have inspected a large number of fire hydrants," said Lei.

"We also inspected fire hydrants installed throughout Zone A of the new landfills. The increase is mostly due to this work, and particularly the inspections in Zone A."

44 INFRINGEMENTS OF NEW FIRE PREVENTION RULES

Since the new fire prevention law took effect, the CB has found only 44 infringements, which have resulted in 16 administrative sanctioning procedures, of which 10 have been concluded.

Most of the infringements involved unlawfully placing objects including shoe racks, motorcycles, and other objects at fire escape routes.

According to the CB's statistics, in the first half of the year, the CB conducted 7,271 inspections of 1,683 buildings, involving 17,971 building residents.

PUBLIC WORKS

MOP1.3 billion for new gov't office complex in Nape

NADIA SHAW

THE Public Works Bureau (DSOP) has opened the tender for the government office complex on Lot 12 of the Outer Harbour Reclamation Area.

The project, which covers 6,480 square meters, includes a 21-story government office building with underground parking spanning four stories.

The construction period for the superstructure has been set at 765 working days, with the project expected to be completed in rough form after completion.

There are two separate tenders for the project —



one for the pile foundation and basement work, and another for the superstructure construction.

The pile foundation and

basement work, currently being carried out by Shing Lung Construction & Engineering Company Limited, is expected to be completed

January 2025, paving the way for the superstructure construction to commence.

24 construction companies have submitted

bids for the superstructure work, which DSOP officials unsealed Tuesday.

The government has seen quotations ranging from 731 million patacas to 808 million patacas. The total cost of the project, including the pile foundation and basement work, is estimated at 1.3 billion patacas.

The planned government complex comprises a 12-story building and a 21-story building on a podium, along with four-level underground parking. The gross floor area of the complex is approximately 97,550 square meters.

In addition to this project, the government is also building another of-

fice complex in the same area, plot 25, near the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM), which is also subject to two separate tenders and is expected to cost up to 1.253 billion patacas.

The pile foundation and basement work on plot 25 is expected to be completed October this year, after which the superstructure work will commence in the fourth quarter.

The plot 25 complex will comprise a 12-story block and a 17-story block on a podium, plus a three-level underground carpark and will cover an area of 6,480 square meters, with a gross floor area of 80,800 square meters.



AP PHOTO

PARTY PLENUM

Communist Party charts technology- and security-focused development for reviving the economy

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
BANGKOK

IN a year of major elections that will determine the destinies of many countries, China's ruling Communist Party is holding closed, top-level meetings in Beijing to set strategies for reviving its slowing economy.

State media likened the meetings that end today to reforms started in the late 1970s that opened China's economy to foreign investment and private enterprise. State broadcaster CCTV said the agenda for this year's meetings is to study and endorse "all-around deepening reforms."

Nearly a half-century after the late leader Deng Xiaoping launched China's ascent as a manufacturing powerhouse, the party is doubling down on leader Xi Jinping's blueprint for technology- and national security-focused development. Economists say it's unclear if that will fix the chronic problems dragging on the economy, including a weak job market, massive local government debts and a prolonged slump in the property industry.

While those problems are mostly domestic headaches, the health of the world's second-largest economy has an impact way beyond its borders, affecting business activity, financial markets and job opportunities across the globe.

CHINA'S ECONOMY IS STILL SLOWING

On Monday, the government reported that the economy grew at a 4.7% annual pace in the last quarter, down from 5.3% in January-March. In quarterly terms, it slowed to 0.7% from 1.5%.

Property sales fell nearly 27% for the year through June from a year earlier, and retail sales increased only 2% in June, the lowest level since the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite a cash-for-clunkers program and other initiatives launched this spring to coax people to replace old cars and appliances, vehicle sales sank 6.2% from a year earlier in June while sales of appliances and electronics dropped 7.6%.

Given the vital role housing plays in household wealth, "We expect retail sales will remain weak without fundamental improvement in the property sector," Raymond Yeung and other economists at ANZ Research said in a report.

China's people are keeping a tight rein on spending, wary over job losses, the minimal social safety net, costs for education and other risks. Economists say that without fundamental reforms that allow workers to retain more of the nation's wealth, consumer demand is likely to remain subdued.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S GAME PLAN

Since taking power in 2012, Xi has sought to strengthen the party's controls over business and society, launching crackdowns on corruption, the fast-growing technology sector and excess borrowing by property developers, and promoting his vision for a Chinese-style of "high-quality" development with heavy investments in advanced technology and clean energy.

It follows a "Made in China 2025" initiative that began in 2015 and is meant to transform the country from a maker of toys, furniture and other labor-intensive products into the top producer of high-tech goods. While China still lags the U.S. in many critical areas, it has made huge strides in catching up.

Instead of heading overseas to buy fancy rice cookers and multifunctional toilet seats, Chinese can now get domestically made electric vehicles, home appliances and sophisticated sports gear. China now manufactures its own aircraft, electronics and advanced computer chips, the state-run Xinhua News Agency noted in a lengthy profile praising Xi's role as a reformer.

Xi has promised "strategic, innovative and leading reforms," Xinhua said, to "achieve new breakthroughs in important areas and key sectors."

But double-digit growth in production of electric vehicles, solar panels and many other products is adding to concerns China is flooding foreign markets with products that can't sell at home. Meanwhile, exports have surged, growing nearly 9% in June in annual terms.

The Rhodium Group estimates that China's manufacturing trade surplus increased by \$775 billion in 2019-23. The biggest impact was on advanced economies, like the United States. But smaller developing economies are also at a disadvantage, it said in a report, since "China's dominant position across so many product categories considerably limits the space for new entrants to emerge as new manufacturing powers."

TROUBLES AHEAD, TROUBLES BEHIND

Years ago, China began trying to nurture a stronger consumer economy and reduce reliance on exports and heavy investment projects that now are yielding lower and lower returns.

The crackdown on heavy borrowing by property developers like China Evergrande and Sino-Ocean Group, led to default on loans. Scores of projects went unfinished even after buyers had paid for the apartments.

The downturn in the housing market cut off a key funding source for local governments that

relied on selling land-use rights to developers, at a time of heavy spending to fight COVID-19. Beijing faces as much as \$11 trillion in local government debt, and investors are watching for moves by the central government to help resolve the problem.

Apart from leaving many in China feeling much worse off, the crisis cost millions their livelihoods, causing layoffs in many other industries as demand dwindled for cement, construction, appliances and home furnishings.

The deterioration in mood and consumer confidence is leading growing numbers of young Chinese to embrace what they call the "stingy economy," finding ways to get by on the least amount of money possible, or to just leave the country if they have the means to do so.

POLICY DILEMMAS

Any fresh reforms or initiatives resulting from the plenum are bound to be within the parameters set by Xi's vision for China's future as a world technology power led by the century-old Communist Party.

Most recent moves to support the property market have involved fine-tuning: cutting down-payment requirements and interest rates on mortgages and freeing up financing for some property projects. In some cases, local governments are being urged to buy up unsold property to rent out as affordable housing.

At the same time, favored initiatives such as a Xi's model city south of Beijing, Xiong'an, are getting extra support while projects elsewhere have languished.

The party has made improving the business environment, trying to counter a downturn in foreign investment following the shocks of severe anti-virus policies during the pandemic. But it continues expanding its hold on companies and financial institutions. Raids by authorities on offices of foreign companies, arrests of foreign business people and have left foreign businesses wary about the risks of running afoul of ever-tightening national security regulations.

Economist Li Daokui of Peking University and other economists say Beijing needs to reduce the debt burdens of local governments and increase central government spending to support growth. More substantial pensions and health insurance would free up more income for spending and generate more jobs.

Others are urging the government to pay subsidies to families, especially those with children. But such stimulus payments or other handouts are unlikely: in his calls to build "common prosperity," Xi has condemned what he called "the trap of 'welfarism' that encourages laziness." **MDT/AP**



Police gather outside the Grand Hyatt Erawan Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand, Tuesday

THAILAND

Traces of cyanide found in cups of Vietnamese and Americans found dead in hotel

JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI & NAPAT KONGSAWAD, BANGKOK

POLICE found traces of cyanide in the cups of six Vietnamese and American guests at a central Bangkok luxury hotel and one of them is believed to have poisoned the others over a bad investment, Thai authorities said yesterday.

The bodies were found Tuesday in the Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok, a landmark at a central intersection in the capital busy with malls, government buildings and public transit.

The six had last been seen alive when food was delivered to the room Monday afternoon. The staff saw one woman receive the food, and security footage showed the rest

arriving one by one shortly after. There were no other visitors, no one was seen leaving and the door was locked. A maid found them Tuesday afternoon when they failed to check out of the room.

Lt. Gen. Trairong Piwpan, chief of the Thai police force's forensic division, said there were traces of cyanide in the cups and thermoses that police found in the room.

This was later confirmed by the initial autopsy results of the six bodies that was performed at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn Hospital. Kornkiat Vongpaisarnsin, head of the forensic medicine department at Chulalongkorn University's medical school, said at a news conference that a CAT scan showed no signs of blunt force trauma on the dead, reinforcing the hypothesis that they had been poisoned.

Chulalongkorn's dean of medicine, Chanchai Sittipunt, said the team "believe the cyanide to be the answer."

"Whether they were taking sleeping pills or other stuff, we don't know, but we can know enough from the cyanide to determine (cause of death)," he said.

Bangkok police chief Lt. Gen. Thiti Sangsawang identified the dead as two Vietnamese Americans and four Vietnamese nationals, and said they were three men and three women. Their ages ranged from 37 to 56, according to Noppasin Punsawat, Bangkok deputy police chief. He said the case appeared to be personal and would not impact the safety of tourists.

A husband and wife among the dead had invested money worth about 10 million baht (\$278,000) with two of the others, suggesting that money could be a motive, said Noppasin, citing information obtained from relatives of the victims. The investment was meant to build a hospital in Japan and the group might have been meeting to settle the matter. The police say one killed the rest, but did not say which of the six is the suspect.

Bangkok police chief Lt. Gen. Thiti Sangsawang said Tuesday that four bodies were in the living room and two in the bedroom. He said two of them appeared to try to reach for the door but collapsed be-

fore they could.

Noppasin said yesterday that a seventh person whose name was part of the hotel booking was a sibling of one of the six and left Thailand on July 10. Police believe the seventh person had no involvement in the deaths.

The Vietnamese and United States embassies have been contacted over the deaths, and the American FBI was en route, Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin said.

He said the case would likely not affect a conference with Russian Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilev at the hotel later Wednesday. "This wasn't an act of terrorism or a breach in security. Everything is fine," he said.

Trairong said a mass suicide was unlikely because some of the victims had arranged future parts of their trip, such as guides and drivers. He added that the bodies being in different parts of the hotel room suggested they did not knowingly consume poison and wait for their deaths together.

U.S. State Dept. spokesman Matthew Miller in Washington offered condolences to the families of the victims. He said the U.S. is closely monitoring the situation and would communicate with local authorities.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with his Thai counterpart on Tuesday, but Miller said he thought that call happened before the deaths were reported and he didn't know if it came up in their conversation.

In 2023, Thailand was rocked by reports of a serial killer who poisoned 15 people with cyanide over a span of years. Sararat Rangsiwuthaporn, or "Am Cyanide" as she would later be called, killed at least 14 people who she owed money to and became the country's first female serial killer. One person survived. **MDT/AP**

IMF

Brighter outlook for China and India but tepid global growth

PAUL WISEMAN, WASHINGTON

THE International Monetary Fund on Tuesday upgraded its economic outlook this year for China, India and Europe while modestly lowering expectations for the United States and Japan. But it says worldwide progress against accelerating prices has been slowed

by stickier-than-expected inflation for services, from airline travel to restaurant meals.

Overall, the IMF said it still expects the world economy to grow a lackluster 3.2% this year, unchanged from its previous forecast in April and down a tick from 3.3% growth in 2023.

"Global growth remains steady," Pierre-

Olivier Gourinchas, the IMF's chief economist, told reporters.

Still, the world economy's expansion remains unimpressive by recent historical standards. From 2000 through 2019, before the pandemic upended economic activity, global growth had averaged 3.8% a year.

The IMF, a 190-nation lending organization,

works to promote economic growth and financial stability and reduce global poverty.

Gourinchas estimated that China and India would account for nearly half of global growth this year.

Partly because of a surge in Chinese exports at the start of 2024, the IMF upgraded its growth forecast for China this year to 5% from the 4.6% it had projected in April, though down from 5.2% in 2023. The IMF forecast was posted before Beijing reported Monday that the Chinese economy, the world's second-largest af-

ter the United States, had grown at a slower-than-expected 4.7% annual rate from April through June, down from 5.3% in the first three months of the year.

China's economy, which once regularly grew at a double-digit annual pace, is facing significant challenges, notably the collapse of its housing market and an aging population that is leaving the country with labor shortages. By 2029, Gourinchas wrote, China's growth will slow to 3.3%.

India's economy is now forecast to expand 7%, up from the 6.8% the IMF

had projected in April, in part because of stronger consumer spending in rural areas.

The IMF said that the "shoots of recovery materialized in Europe," which had been battered by high energy prices and other economic damage from Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Citing a rise in Europe's services businesses, IMF raised its 2024 growth forecast for the 20 countries that share the euro currency by a tenth of a percentage point from its April forecast, to 0.9%. In 2023, the eurozone grew 0.5%. **MDT/AP**

UK New government announces legislation for 'national renewal' as Parliament opens with royal pomp

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

B RITAIN'S new Labour Party government promised to calm the country's febrile politics and ease its cost-of-living crisis as it set out its plans for "national renewal" at the grand State Opening of Parliament on yesterday.

Stabilizing the U.K.'s public finances and spurring economic growth were at the center of Prime Minister Keir Starmer's legislative agenda, announced in a speech written by government officials and delivered by King Charles III.

"My government will seek a new partnership with both business and working people and help the country move on from the recent cost of living challenges by prioritizing wealth creation for all communities," the king said in a speech to hundreds of lawmakers and scarlet-robed members of the House of Lords.

Starmer campaigned on a promise to bring bold change to Britain at modest cost to taxpayers. He aims to be both pro-worker and pro-business, in favor of vast new construction projects and protective of the environment. The risk is he may end up pleasing no one.

In a written introduction to the speech, Starmer urged patience, saying change would require "determined, patient work and serious solutions" rather than easy answers and "the snake oil charm of populism."

The King's Speech is the centerpiece of the State Opening, an occasion where royal pomp meets hard-nosed politics, as the king donned a diamond-studded crown, sat on a gilded throne and announced the laws his government intends to pass in the coming year.

Labour won a landslide election victory on July 4 as voters turned on the Conservatives after years of high inflation, ethics scandals and a revolving door of prime ministers. Starmer has promised to patch up the country's aging infrastruc-



Britain's King Charles III wearing the Imperial State Crown and Britain's Queen Camilla, wearing the George IV State Diadem, attend the State Opening of Parliament, at the Houses of Parliament, in London, yesterday

ture and frayed public services, but says he won't raise personal taxes and insists change must be bound by "unbreakable fiscal rules."

Yesterday's speech included 40 bills – the Conservatives' last speech had just 21 – ranging from housebuilding to nationalizing Britain's railways and decarbonizing the nation's power supply with a publicly-owned green energy firm, Great British Energy.

The government said it would "get Britain building," setting up a National Wealth Fund and rewriting planning rules that stop new homes and infrastructure being built.

Economic measures included tighter rules governing corporations and a law to ensure all government budgets get advance independent scrutiny. That aims to avoid a repetition of the chaos sparked in 2022 by then-Prime Minister Liz Truss, whose package of uncosted tax cuts rocked the British economy and ended her brief term in office.

The government promised stronger protections for workers, with a ban on some "zero-hours" contracts and a higher minimum wage for many employees. Also announced were protections for renters against shoddy housing, sudden eviction and landlords who won't let them have a pet.

The government promised more power for local governments and better bus and railway services – keys to the "levelling up" of Britain's London-centric economy that former Conservative Prime Minister

Boris Johnson promised but largely failed to deliver.

Though Starmer eschewed large-scale nationalization of industries, the government plans to take the delay-plagued train operators into public ownership.

Trade unions and business groups gave the economic announcements a tentative welcome. Gary Smith, leader of the GMB union, called the speech a "breath of fresh air." Rain Newton-Smith, chief executive of business group the Confederation of British Industry, said it "sets out a program of big choices and bold moves needed to deliver a shift in gear for the economy."

The speech said the government "recognizes the urgency of the global climate challenge" – a change in tone from the Conservative government's emphasis on oil and gas exploration. As well as increasing renewable energy, it pledged tougher penalties for water companies that dump sewage into rivers, lakes and seas.

The speech included new measures to strengthen border security, creating a beefed-up Border Security Command with counter-terrorism powers to tackle people-smuggling gangs.

It follows Starmer's decision to scrap the Conservatives' contentious and unrealized plan to send people arriving in the U.K. across the English Channel on a one-way trip to Rwanda.

The speech also tackled an issue that has foxed previous

governments: reforming the House of Lords. The unelected upper chamber of Parliament is packed with almost 800 members – largely lifetime political appointees, with a smattering of judges, bishops and almost 100 hereditary aristocrats.

The government said it would remove the "outdated and indefensible" presence of hereditary nobles, though there was no mention of Labour's promise to set a Lords retirement age of 80.

The speech confirmed that the government wants to "reset the relationship with European partners" roiled by Britain's exit from the European Union in 2020 and said there would be no change to Britain's strong support for Ukraine.

Yesterday's address was the second such speech delivered by Charles since the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September 2022.

He traveled from Buckingham Palace to Parliament in a horse-drawn carriage – past a small group of anti-monarchy protesters with signs reading "Down with the Crown" – before donning ceremonial robes and the Imperial State Crown to deliver his speech.

For all its royal trappings, it is the King's Speech in name only. The words are written by government officials, and the monarch betrayed no flicker of emotion as he read them out.

"The king has zero agency in this," said Jill Rutter, senior research fellow at the Institute for Government think tank. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

2003 MISSING IRAQ EXPERT - BODY FOUND

A body believed to be that of government scientist Dr David Kelly has been found in woodland not far from his Oxfordshire home.

The discovery was made at 0920 BST by a member of the police team called into search for Dr Kelly after his family reported him missing last night.



Dr Kelly has been at the centre of a row between the British Government and the BBC about the use of intelligence reports in the run up to the war against Iraq.

The row centred on a report by journalist Andrew Gilligan during the Today programme on BBC Radio Four in which he said the government had "sexed-up" its dossier on Iraq to boost public support for the war.

He accused the government of inserting a claim into the dossier that Saddam Hussein was capable of deploying weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes.

On Tuesday Dr Kelly – an expert in arms control who had worked as a weapons inspector in Iraq between 1991 and 1998 – told the Foreign Affairs select committee he had spoken to Mr Gilligan but denied he was the main source for the story.

Dr Kelly left his home in Southmoor, Abingdon, at about 1500 BST on Thursday to go for a walk. His family reported him missing at 2345 BST the same day.

The government has announced an inquiry will be held, headed by law lord Lord Hutton, to investigate the circumstances surrounding Dr Kelly's death.

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was on a flight to Tokyo on the first leg of a Far East tour when he was told the body had been found.

He was said to be "very distressed" for the Kelly family.

Dr Kelly has been under intense media scrutiny since the Ministry of Defence said he had come forward to say he had had a meeting with Mr Gilligan.

The MoD said Dr Kelly had at no time been threatened with dismissal or suspension for speaking to Mr Gilligan.

A spokesman said it had been made clear to Dr Kelly that he had broken civil service rules by having unauthorised contact with a journalist, but "that was the end of it".

Downing Street said Dr Kelly had been warned his name was likely to become public because he was one of only a small number of people who could have been the source.

Dr Kelly and his wife, Janice, have three daughters, Sian, 32, and twins Rachel and Ellen, 30.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Dr Kelly's body was formally identified the following day.

He had apparently committed suicide by slitting his wrist and taking an overdose of painkillers. A knife and packet of pills were found beside his body.

The BBC confirmed Dr Kelly was the main source for Andrew Gilligan's claim that the government had "sexed-up" the dossier on the case for war. At the Hutton inquiry into his death which began on 11 August, his widow Janice said Dr Kelly had felt "totally let down and betrayed" by the Ministry of Defence.

Lord Hutton heard evidence from 74 witnesses over six weeks and viewed thousands of pages of evidence.

The report was published on 28 January 2004 and was highly critical of BBC governors for failing to investigate properly Downing Street's complaints. As a result, the BBC chairman Gavyn Davies, the corporation's Director General Greg Dyke and journalist Andrew Gilligan resigned.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Proceed with caution. Things don't go as planned. Mistakes could get expensive; make time to review plans and options. It's OK to say no.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
An unexpected expense could hit your shared accounts. Talk to your partner about it. Wait for developments. Avoid waste. Evaluate and research your options.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Misunderstandings could thwart communications with your partner. Slow to clarify. Disruption or interruption could frustrate. Keep sharp words to yourself. Stay flexible. Roll with chaos.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Discipline is required with your work, health and fitness goals. Distractions and demands flurry. Inhibit your natural generosity and guard time for yourself.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
A challenge could interrupt romantic plans. Postpone for better conditions. Save money and trouble by choosing the simplest option. Listen to all considerations.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Nurture your family and yourself. Delays could disrupt domestic projects. Pad the schedule and budget for the unforeseen. Stay flexible. Get extra rest.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Polish your presentation before sharing. Postpone important actions or communications for better conditions. Edit and revise. Consider the long-term impacts of your words.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You're in the eye of a financial storm. Handle priorities and keep a low profile. Avoid controversy or stepping on sensitivities. Pay your share.

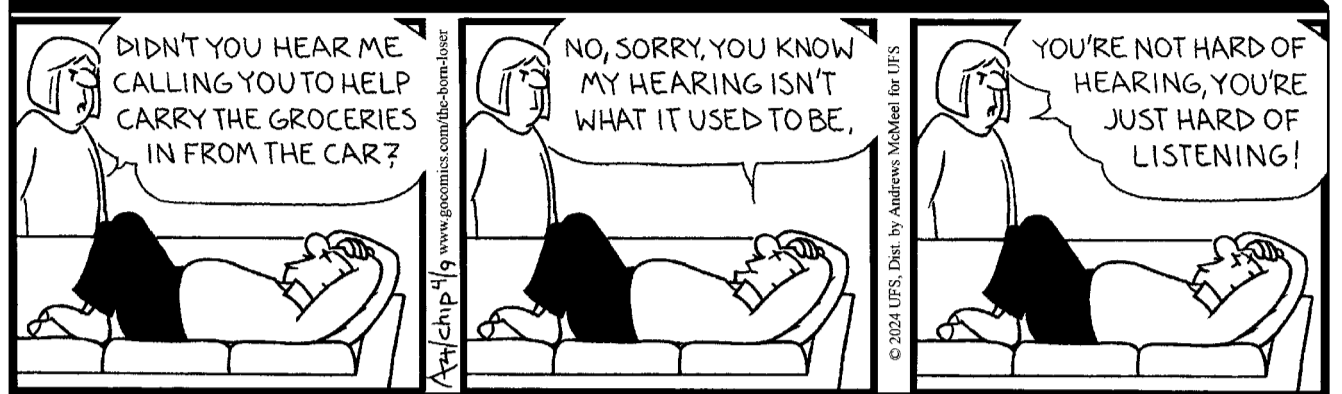
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Personal matters may not go as planned. Your concentration could be interrupted. Don't take risks or act impulsively. Slow to consider where you're going.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Lay low and take it easy. Things may not go as expected. Revise and reorganize. Reconsider options. Focus on immediate priorities and rest.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Controversy arises with group projects. Don't try new tricks now; chaos or confusion distracts. Stick to tested routines and practical objectives. Help people focus.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
A professional puzzle requires careful negotiation. Don't try to force things. Persuade gently or wait for better conditions. Contribute sweat equity. Lead by example.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

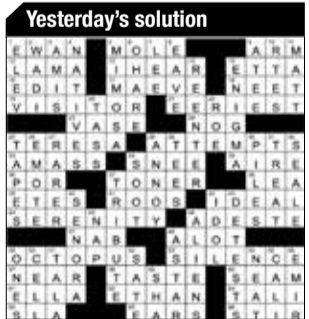
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	22	36	fine
Changchun	21	28	thunderstorms
Chengdu	23	29	rain
Chongqing	28	37	cloudy
Fuzhou	28	40	cloudy
Guangzhou	25	32	rain
Guiyang	22	29	cloudy
Haikou	26	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	27	38	fine
Harbin	20	29	thunderstorms
Hefei	27	33	cloudy
Nanjing	28	33	overcast
Shanghai	28	38	cloudy
Taipei	26	32	cloudy
Wuhan	30	34	fine
Hong Kong	28	32	thunderstorm
WORLD			
Moscow	19	29	showers
Frankfurt	17	29	cloudy
Paris	19	31	cloudy
London	16	27	cloudy
New York	20	31	showers

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Dies ___; 5- Counterfeiter catcher; 9- Letterman rival; 13- Kama ___; 15- sapiens; 16- Farm team; 17- Perjurers; 18- ___ Brockovich; 19- Stand; 20- Tolkien tree creature; 21- Trial; 23- Separates metal from ore; 25- Truck stop sight; 26- Fishing nets; 27- Snappy comebacks; 30- Explosive initials; 31- Graven images; 32- Shipwrecked person; 37- Water. Sp.; 38- To use improperly; 40- Birthday treat; 41- Having a notched edge; 43- Examine account books; 44- Bolted down; 45- Cocktail; 47- Fungus; 50- Duel tool; 51- Intolerance; 52- Envelope abbr.; 53- Approved; 56- Final notice?; 57- Winnie-the-___; 59- Summed; 61- Accent; 62- ___ avail; 63- Later, dudel; 64- Assns.; 65- Raced; 66- Not difficult;

DOWN 1- Archipelago part; 2- Destroy; 3- Rat-___; 4- Drift, make a mistake; 5- Essay; 6- Death, in France; 7- Where ___?; 8- Malarkey; 9- Actress Sophia; 10- Banishment; 11- Tree houses; 12- Addition column; 14- Late bloomers; 22- CPR pro; 24- Baseball glove; 25- Word with panel or energy; 26- RR stops; 27- Narrow inlets; 28- Advantage; 29- Travel from place to place; 32- Cow chew; 33- Sharp; 34- Dry watercourse; 35- Related by blood; 36- Himalayan legend; 38- Tries; 39- I've ___ had; 42- Sounds of pleasure; 43- Places of contest; 45- Technique; 46- Quick on the uptake; 47- Toil; 48- Frosting; 49- Quotes; 51- ___-Rooter; 52- Top-of-the-line; 53- Concert halls; 54- Lock openers; 55- WWII turning point; 58- Alley ___; 60- Gidget portrayer Sandra;



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	



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THESE PICASSOS PROMPTED A GENDER WAR AT AN AUSTRALIAN GALLERY. NOW THE CURATOR SAYS SHE PAINTED THEM

CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-M-CLAY, WELLINGTON

THEY were billed as artworks by Pablo Picasso, paintings so valuable that an Australian art museum's decision to display them in an exhibition restricted to women visitors provoked a gender discrimination lawsuit. The paintings again prompted international headlines when the gallery re-hung them in a women's restroom to sidestep a legal ruling that said men could not be barred from viewing them.

But the artworks at the center of the uproar were not really by Picasso or the other famed artists billed as their creators, it emerged this week when the curator of the women-only exhibition admitted she had painted them herself.

Kirsha Kaechele wrote on the blog of Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) on Wednesday that she was revealing herself as the works' creator after receiving questions from a reporter and the Picasso Administration in France about their authenticity.

But they had been displayed for more than three years before their provenance was questioned, she said, even though she had accidentally hung one of the fake paintings upside down.

"I imagined that a Picasso scholar, or maybe just a Picasso fan, or maybe just someone who googles things, would visit the Ladies Lounge and see that the painting was upside down and expose me on social media," Kaechele wrote. But no



Kirsha Kaechele poses with a painting in Hobart, Australia

one did.

The saga began when Kaechele created a women-only area at MONA in 2020 for visitors to "revel in the pure company of women" and as a statement on their exclusion from male-dominated spaces throughout history.

The so-called Ladies Lounge offered high tea, massages and champagne served by male butlers, and was open to anyone who identified as a woman. Outlandish and absurd title cards were displayed alongside the fake paintings, antiquities and jewelry that was

"quite obviously new and in some cases plastic," she added.

The lounge had to display "the most important artworks in the world," Kaechele wrote this week, in order for men "to

The lounge had to display 'the most important artworks in the world,' [...] in order for men 'to feel as excluded as possible'

feel as excluded as possible."

It worked. MONA — famous in Australia for its strange and subversive exhibitions and events — was ordered by the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in March to stop refusing men entry to the

Ladies Lounge after a complaint from a male gallery patron who was upset at being barred from the space during a 2023 visit.

"The participation by visitors in the process of being permitted or refused entry is part of the artwork itself," tribunal Deputy President Richard Grueber wrote in his decision, which found the exhibition was discriminatory.

Grueber ruled that the man had suffered a disadvantage, in part because the artworks in the Ladies Lounge were so valuable. Kaechele had described them to the hearing as "a carefully curated selection of paintings by the world's leading artists, including two paintings that spectacularly demonstrate Picasso's genius."

The tribunal ordered MONA to cease refusing men entry. In his ruling, Grueber also lambasted a group of women who had attended in support of Kaechele wearing matching business attire and had silently crossed and uncrossed their legs in unison throughout the hearing. One woman "was pointedly reading feminist texts," he wrote, and the group left the tribunal "in a slow march led by Ms Kaechele to the sounds of a Robert Palmer song."

Their conduct was "inappropriate, discourteous and disrespectful, and at worst contemptuous and contemptuous," Grueber added.

Rather than admit men to the exhibit, Kaechele -- who is married to the gallery's owner, David Walsh -- installed a working toilet in the space, turning it into a women's restroom in order to exploit a legal loophole to allow the refusal of men to continue.

International news outlets covered the development in May, apparently without questioning that a gallery would hang Picasso paintings in a public restroom. However, the Guardian reported Wednesday that it had asked Kaechele about the authenticity of the work, prompting her confession.

A spokesperson for MONA told The Associated Press that the gallery would not supply more detail about the letter Kaechele said she had received from the Picasso Administration. When the AP asked MONA to confirm that the statements in Kaechele's blog post, titled "Art is Not Truth: Pablo Picasso," were accurate, the spokesperson, Sara Gates-Matthews, said the post was "truthfully Kirsha's admission."

The Picasso Administration, which manages the late Spanish artist's estate, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"I'm flattered that people believed my great-grandmother summered with Picasso at her Swiss chateau where he and my grandmother were lovers when she threw a plate at him for indiscretions (of a kind) that bounced off his head and resulted in the crack you see inching through the gold ceramic plate in the Ladies Lounge," Kaechele wrote this week, referring to the title card on one painting.

"The real plate would have killed him — it was made of solid gold. Well, it would have dented his forehead because the real plate is actually a coin."

MDT/AP

Brera Modern art museum will open in Milan this fall after 52 years of delays and 39 governments

THE Brera Modern will be inaugurated in the fall 52 years and 39 Italian governments after it was first envisioned, officials announced last week.

The new museum just a few doors from Milan's Brera Painting Gallery will house more than 100 contemporary art works that belong to Brera's collection that have mostly been relegated to storage.

The project has been



plagued by numerous delays, most recently the discovery of asbestos and

problems with the conditioning system.

The new museum is

set to officially open on Dec. 7, when the eyes of the European cultural

elite are already on Milan for the annual gala premiere of La Scala's opera season.

The honor falls to the new Brera director, Angelo Crespi, who took over in February as part of moves by the far-right-led government to put Italians at the head of key cultural institutions. His predecessor, British Canadian historian James Bradburne who had pushed to finish the Mo-

dern, had completed two four-year terms and was ineligible to continue.

The Brera, established in 1809, contains masterpieces by Canova, Caravaggio, Raphael and Hayez. The new museum in the nearby Palazzo Citterio has already drawn 30,000 visitors over three weeks for a temporary exhibition. Concerts are planned in the outdoor garden this summer.

The Brera, with the addition of the Modern, is expected to reach 500,000 visitors this year, up from 466,709 last year and in continual increase from pre-pandemic highs of around 410,000. MDT/AP



Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo

PARIS 2024

Mayor dips into the Seine River to showcase its improved cleanliness before Olympic events

TOM NOUVIAN, PARIS

AFTER months of anticipation, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo took a dip in the long-polluted Seine River yesterday, fulfilling a promise

to show the river was clean enough to host open swimming competitions during the 2024 Olympics — and the opening ceremony on the river nine days away.

Clad in a wetsuit and goggles,

Hidalgo plunged into the river near the imposing-looking City Hall, her office, and the Notre Dame Cathedral. Paris 2024 chief Tony Estanguet and the top government official for the Paris region, Marc Guillaume, joined her, along

with swimmers from local swimming clubs.

“The Seine is exquisite,” said Hidalgo from the water. After emerging, she continued to rave, “The water is very, very good. A little cool, but not so bad.”

It’s part of a broader effort to showcase the river’s improved cleanliness ahead of the Summer Games which will kick off July 26 with a lavish open-air ceremony that includes an athletes’ parade on boats on the Seine. Daily water quality tests in early June indicated unsafe levels of E. coli bacteria, followed by recent improvements.

Swimming in the Seine has been banned for over a century. Since 2015, organizers have invested \$1.5 billion to prepare the Seine for the Olympics and to ensure Parisians have a cleaner river after the Games. The plan included constructing a giant underground water storage basin in central Paris, renovating sewer infrastructure, and upgrading wastewater treatment plants.

Originally planned for June, Hidalgo’s swim was postponed due to snap parliamentary elections in France. On the initial date, the hashtag “jechiedanslaSeine” (“I’m pooping in the Seine”) trended on social media as some threatened to protest the Olympics by defecating upstream.

That didn’t deter Hidalgo, who carefully entered the river Wednesday

using a ladder on an artificial pond, set up for the event. Seven security boats were deployed for the occasion.

They swam down the river for about 100 meters, switching between crawl and breaststroke.

The upper banks were crowded with curious spectators.

“I wouldn’t have missed that for anything in the world,” said Lucie Coquereau, who woke up early to get the best view of Hidalgo’s up from the Pont de Sully bridge that oversees the swimming site.

Other politicians have promised to clean up the Seine. Jacques Chirac, the former French president, made a similar pledge in 1988 when he was Paris mayor, but it was never realized.

Hidalgo followed in the footsteps of French Sports Minister Amélie Oudéa-Castéra, who swam in the Seine on Saturday wearing a full-body suit.

Concerns over the Seine’s flow and pollution levels have persisted, prompting daily water quality tests by the monitoring group Eau de Paris. Results in early June indicated unsafe levels of E. coli bacteria, followed by recent improvements.

The Seine will host several open water swimming events during the Games, including marathon swimming at the Olympic Games and the swimming legs of the Olympic and Paralympic triathlons. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

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**LEADERSHIP OF PARTY
 GUARANTEE FOR SUCCESS OF
 DEEP-WATER REFORMS THAT
 ARE NOW NEEDED**

People's Daily has documented 72 key conferences of the central reform body that President Xi Jinping has presided over since 2012. In this time, more than 600 guideline documents on deepening reforms have been issued, prompting the release and execution of over 3,000 action plans.

At the ongoing third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the Party's central decision-making body will not only review the implementation and effects of these plans, policies and measures but also chart the course for future reforms of the country. This will be set out in a milestone document the plenum is expected to issue upon its conclusion on Thursday.

It has been the relaying of the baton of reform from one generation of reformers to the next since the country began to implement its reform and opening-up policy in 1978 that has enabled the country to always keep its development on the right track.

In this process, the country has unflinchingly adhered to its own socialist path under the leadership and guidance of the Party. This has not only ensured material benefits for people's well-being, but also since 2012 produced solid progress in developing whole-process people's democracy and law-based governance across all fields of endeavor, and enhanced the country's ecological conservation.

These achievements have been possible because of the Party's own insistence on self-revolution to ensure its own cleanness and efficiency, which has enabled it to retain the confidence of the public that the country will be able to overcome any challenges it may face. So unlike some countries that experience unsettling social divisions when it comes to reforms touching the cheese of some, China has a strong social consensus on the necessity of carrying out deeper reforms.

Reform is not plain sailing. There are certainly pains and setbacks to be suffered. But the prospect of these has never hindered or deterred the Chinese people from forging ahead on the path of modernization.

With the proof of past experience, the people are confident that the Party's leadership can ensure any pains are borne for future gains. The past more than 40 years have shown that development has its laws and stages, which means before the pie is baked, it is too early to argue over how to cut it fairly.

Even those who keep a critical watchful eye on China cannot deny the Party has done a good job in eradicating extreme poverty and building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, making the most of the country's endogenous advantages and the benefits of being open and inclusive to the rest of the world. Nor that the Party has addressed many of the acute problems and challenges that emerged as a result of its rapid development, which has enabled it to maintain long-term stable governance.

By ensuring that Party members are more conscious of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms and keep in alignment with the central Party leadership, the guarantee for the success of what are now deep-water reforms has been effectively strengthened. Problems will inevitably arise in the reform, opening-up and socialist modernization endeavors but the right answers suited to the realities of China and the needs of the day are there to be found.

At their gathering in Beijing this week, the Party's central decision-makers will once again roll up their sleeves and get down to the nitty-gritty of reform work, so the country can continue to forge ahead.

Few athletes will be under as much scrutiny at the Paris Olympics as the swimmers from China.

Revelations that nearly two dozen elite Chinese swimmers tested positive for a banned substance ahead of the Tokyo Games — and were allowed to compete with no ramifications — have raised major concerns from the rest of the world about the seriousness of anti-doping efforts in a sport that has endured its share of scandals over the decades.

From the East German's systematic, state-sponsored program of

the 1970s and '80s to a previous Chinese doping ring in the 1990s to questions over one-and-done Irish star Michelle Smith at the Atlanta Olympics to positive tests among Russian swimmers, this all feels familiar to those who've been paying attention to the pool for a while.

"There are cheaters all around the world. There's no doubt in my mind," said 1984 Olympic gold medalist Rowdy Gaines, now a commentator for NBC Sports. "When it becomes systemic, that's a whole different issue."



**RELATIVES OF THOSE
 KILLED WHEN MH17
 WAS SHOT DOWN
 MARK 10 YEARS
 SINCE TRAGEDY**

ROD MCGUIRK,
 MEBOURNE

RELATIVES of passengers killed when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over Ukraine gathered with officials at Australia's Parliament House yesterday to mark the 10th anniversary of the tragedy that claimed 298 lives.

One of those relatives, Paul Guard, mostly blames the conflict raging in eastern Ukraine a decade ago for the missile attack that killed 38 Australian citizens and permanent residents including his parents, Toowoomba doctors Roger and Jill Guard.

"I don't think anyone intended to bring down a passenger plane. So in that sense, I'm heartbroken that the conflict continues," Paul Guard told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"But I think that a lot of families would really have just liked an acknowledgement that what happened was wrong and that Russia should not have been waging war," the son added.

The conflict has since escalated into a full-scale war with Russia's invasion of its smaller neighbor in February 2022.

The pro-Russia rebel-held border region from where a Soviet-era Buk surface-to-air missile was fatefully launched and the fields where much of the

debris landed after the Boeing 777 disintegrated is now territory controlled by the Russian military.

Moscow has repeatedly denied responsibility for MH17's destruction and refused to hand over two Russians and a Ukrainian convicted by a Dutch court in absentia in 2022 of murder.

Russia continues to be pursued under international law by the Netherlands through in the European Court of Human Rights and by Australia and the Netherlands jointly through the International Civil Aviation Organization Council, or ICAO, over its alleged role in bringing down MH17.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong told yesterday's service she was "appalled" that Russia had withdrawn from the ICAO proceedings in June.

"The case will continue and we will not be deterred in our commitment to hold Russia to account," Wong told the gathering that included foreign diplomats.

"Today, on behalf of the Australian government, I recommit again to our collective pursuit of truth, justice and accountability for the outrages perpetrated on 17th July, 2014," she added.

A commemoration is also planned in the Netherlands later Wednesday at a monument near

Schiphol Airport, from where MH17 left on its way to the Malaysian city of Kuala Lumpur.

Australian Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus will represent Australia at that monument, were 298 trees were planted to commemorate each victim and sunflowers like those that grew at the crash site.

He expected the Netherlands-Australia case against Russia would be back before the ICAO in October despite Moscow's withdrawal.

"We won't let this go until we've brought Russia to account," Dreyfus said.

The Netherlands was home to 196 victims. As well as Australia, victims also came from Malaysia, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, the Philippines, Canada, New Zealand, Vietnam, Israel, Italy, Romania, the United States and South Africa.

An international investigation initiated in the U.N. Security Council by the Netherlands, Malaysia and Australia concluded that the Buk missile system that destroyed MH17 belonged to the Russian 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade. The investigation concluded the missile was driven into Ukraine from a Russian military base near the city of Kursk and returned there after the plane was shot down.

MDT/AP

UK Inflation in held steady at the Bank of England's target rate of 2% in the year to June, official figures showed yesterday, in a development that could be enough for policymakers to cut borrowing costs next month. The Office for National Statistics said the largest upward contribution to the annualized inflation rate came from restaurants and hotels, with some economists attributing the increases to Taylor Swift's tour of the U.K.



USA After three days, an enigmatic portrait emerged of the 20-year-old man who came close to killing former President Donald Trump with a high-velocity bullet: He was an intelligent loner with few friends, an apparently thin social media footprint and no hints of strong political beliefs that would suggest a motive for an attempted assassination. Even after the FBI cracked into Thomas Matthew Crooks' cellphone, scoured his computer, home and car, and interviewed more than 100 people, the mystery of why he opened fire on Trump's rally Saturday.



South Africa Former President Jacob Zuma (pictured) was expected to face a disciplinary hearing with the African National Congress party yesterday, after campaigning against the organization he once led as head of a new political party in national elections in May. The hearing could lead to Zuma, 82, being expelled from the ANC, which he joined in the late 1950s when it was a liberation movement fighting against the apartheid system of white minority rule.

Europe The Italian health ministry placed 12 cities under the most severe heat warning as a wave of hot air from Africa baked southern Europe and the Balkans and sent temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius, with the worst still to come. Croatia reported the highest-ever temperatures of the Adriatic Sea, with the thermometer reaching nearly 30 degrees at the southern walled city of Dubrovnik, the country's most popular tourism spot. In Serbia, the state power company reported record consumption Tuesday due to the use of air conditioning.