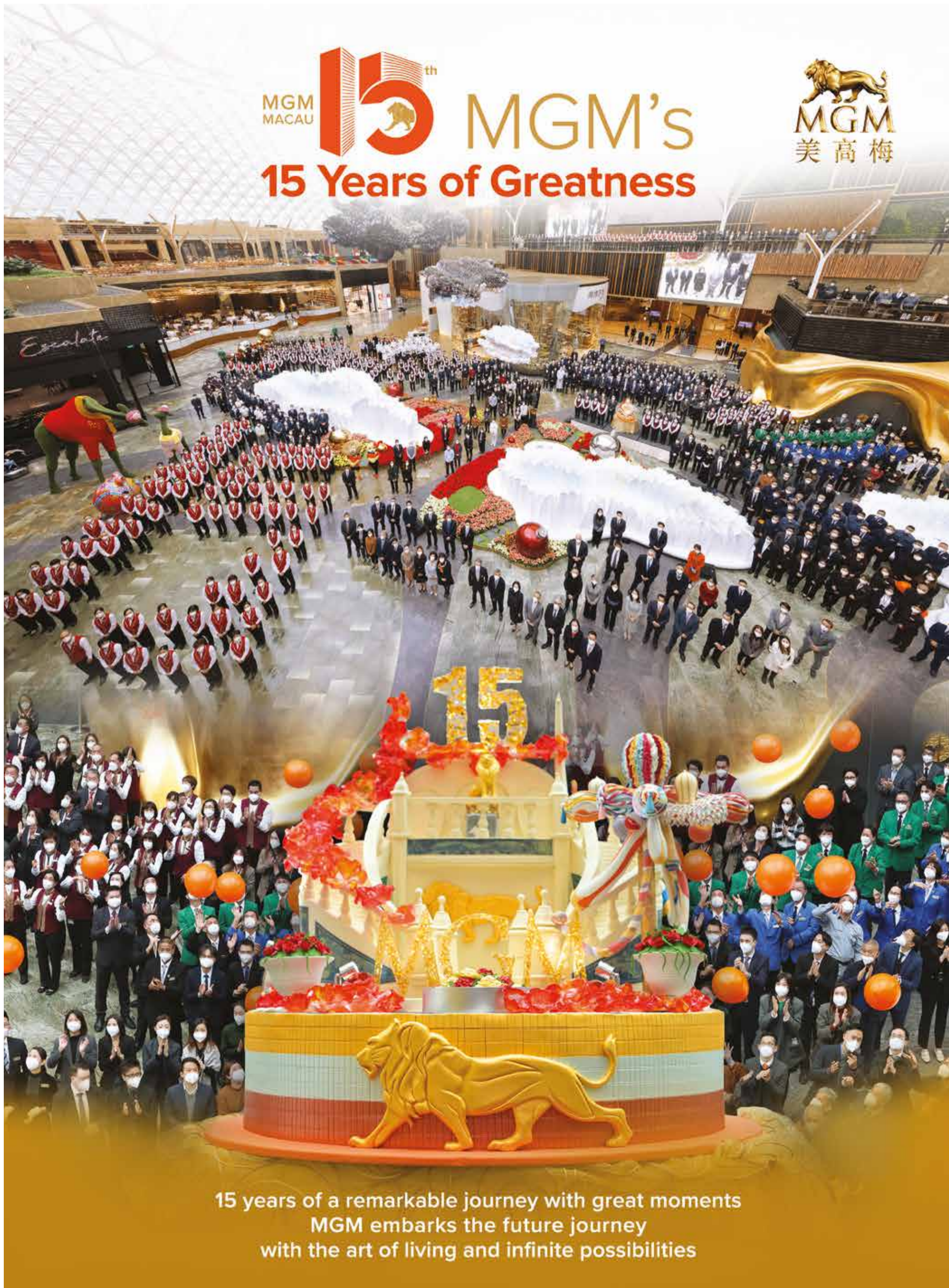


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AIR MACAU HAS ANNOUNCED PLANS TO RESUME SOME INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS BEFORE CHRISTMAS, CHINESE MEDIA REPORTS P6

END OF ZERO: HOME QUARANTINE FOR ARRIVALS; 11 COVID-RELATED DEATHS P4

AFTER TESTING POSITIVE AND BEING REFUSED ACCOMMODATION BY SEVERAL HOTELS, A LOCAL VIDEO PRODUCER EVENTUALLY SECURED A ROOM P6

AP PHOTO



North Korea fired a pair of ballistic missiles yesterday toward its eastern waters, its first weapons test in a month and coming two days after it claimed to have performed a key test needed to build a more mobile, powerful intercontinental ballistic missile designed to strike the U.S. mainland. South Korea's military detected the launch of two North Korean ballistic missiles from its northwest Tongchangri area. The missiles flew across the country toward its eastern waters, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

AP PHOTO



Iranian authorities arrested one of the country's most renowned actresses yesterday [Macau time] on charges of spreading falsehoods about nationwide protests that grip the country, state media said. The report by IRNA said Taraneh Alidoosti (pictured), star of the Oscar-winning movie "The Salesman," was detained a week after she made a post on Instagram expressing solidarity with the first man recently executed for crimes allegedly committed during the protests.

AP PHOTO



Israel said it deported a Palestinian lawyer and activist to France yesterday, claiming he has ties to a banned militant group, despite objections from the French government. The expulsion of Salah Hammouri underscored the fragile status of Palestinians in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, where most hold revocable residency rights but are not Israeli citizens. It also set up a possible diplomatic spat with France, which had repeatedly appealed to Israel not to carry out the expulsion.

More on backpage

MERRY GO-ROUND

The six concessionaires made a pledge to diversify Macau's economy by allocating 90% of an overall USD15 billion investment for non-gaming ventures in next decade P5

AP PHOTO



AFTER PENALTIES SHOOTOUT ARGENTINA WINS FINAL OF CHAMPIONS P15

COVID-RELATED DEATHS CLIMB TO 11; CITY IMPLEMENTS HOME QUARANTINE

STAFF REPORTERS

MACAU announced yesterday the death of two more people infected with Covid-19, bringing the total number of deaths thus far to 11. Most deaths were elderly people who suffered from serious illnesses and were unvaccinated.

The two deaths were of women, a 36-year-old and an 86-year-old, who suffered from various illnesses and had not been vaccinated. They died Saturday, according to the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre.

Health authorities have appealed again for people to get vaccinated and receive booster shots, saying the Covid-19 vaccine can "effectively reduce the risk of infection, serious illness and death".

This week the Government announced the end of its 'zero-Covid' policy, in force for almost three years, estimating that 80% of the city may become infected.



In Macau, 11 deaths and more than 1,400 cases have been recorded since March 11, 2020.

On Friday and as in China, the authorities indicated they will no longer report asymptomatic cases.

The Government has also begun distributing free anti-pandemic kits, with antipyretics to reduce fever, Traditional Chinese Medicine medicines, rapid antigen tests and KN95 masks.

HOME QUARANTINE FOR OVERSEAS ARRIVALS

The hotel quarantine for overseas arrivals to Macau was replaced with a five-day home quarantine from midnight Saturday, health authorities last week.

According to the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre, starting Saturday, arrivals from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas will undergo five days

of home quarantine and will first be assigned red codes for the first three days (day of arrival counts as Day 0).

Upon boarding a Macau-bound aircraft/vessel/vehicle, a proof of negative nucleic acid test (NAT) for Covid-19 within 48 hours after the date of sampling must be presented and an adequate number of Covid-19 rapid antigen test (RAT) kits must be prepared for

everyone; however, it is not necessary to book a medical observation hotel in Macau or pay for nucleic acid testing in advance.

They must do a NAT on the third day, but first must also take a self-administered (RAT) at home and upload the result. If their RAT results are negative, their health codes will turn yellow and will remain so after their NATs returns negative. Failing to do the NAT will turn their health codes red, the statement read.

Over the last two days, they must perform daily RATs. If the results on both days are negative, their health codes will turn green, which means they can leave their home. However, for the following three days, despite having green health codes, they are barred from entering mainland China.

Arrivals who are without a home in Macau will still need to complete Covid-19 quarantine in a hotel.

This is the latest move from the government as it drifts away from a zero-Covid policy. The announcement also came as the city begins relaxing its measures by allowing people with mild symptoms to stay home rather than be sent to a quarantine center.

A new Covid-19 clinic in Coloane

ANTHONY LAM

A new Covid-19 outpatient clinic will be opened for Coloane residents, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre has announced.

The new clinic will open today and is located at the former Coloane Luso-Chinese School.

It will provide more options for residents living in Taipa and Coloane, the Centre said.

Following the Coloane clinic's opening, the city will have eight such clinics, which the Centre refers to as Community Covid-19 Outpatient Clinics.

The other seven clinics are the Polyclinic of the Macau Medical and Health Federation in ZAPE, the Leisure Area in Rua da Pérola Oriental, the Navy Yard near A-Ma Temple, Jardim Areia Preta (near Areia Preta Health Centre), the former Macau Yat Yuen



Canidrome Station A, Station B, the Macao Stadium Roundabout and the Sam Ka Village in Taipa.

A new special bus line, C06, has also commenced to cater for residents living in Taipa and Coloane.

C06 bus runs from Avenida de Ip Heng to the community outpatient clinic at the Macao Stadium Roundabout. After the community outpatient clinic at the former Escola Lusó-Chinesa de Coloane

begins operation today, bus stops en route will be adjusted for the convenience of residents.

The time for collection of the Covid-19 health packs has been extended to today at 13 collection points.

Most of the collection points will be opened till midnight tonight, except for Kiang Wu Hospital (to 6 p.m.), the Mong-ha Multisport Pavilion and the MUST Arena (to 8 p.m.) and the Workers' Stadium

(to 10 p.m.).

The Centre has reminded eligible users to have booking and health codes ready upon arrival for presentation to security guards and to have IDs ready for counter staff to collect their packs.

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) will limit visits to elderly homes and rehabilitation facilities from today, citing Covid-19 as the reason.

"Considering that the

winter solstice, Christmas and New Year are approaching, the family members of the residential care homes will be more concerned about the residents, and the demand for visits is strong," the IAS noted in a statement.

After consulting the Health Bureau, the IAS has decided the following measures will take effect from today "to balance the needs of the family members and the requirements of Covid-19 prevention."

Each resident at these facilities can only take visitors once per day. Each visit will be conducted with a limit of two people for a maximum of 30 minutes.

Prior application is required for visits. Applications must be submitted 24 hours before the intended time of visit. No visitation arrangement will be granted if no reply is received from the concerned facilities. Visitation must be conducted as per the scheduled time.

To enter the concerned facilities, visitors must present a negative rapid

antigen test (RAT) result returned within two hours before the visit, as per the time recorded on the Macau Health Code app. Visitors must also comply with other Covid-19 control measures.

Visits must be conducted in the visiting area of the residential building with good ventilation. For individual residents who have been bedridden for a long time, unable to move or who are experiencing other special conditions, the nursing home may enact special arrangements for visitors to conduct visits at bedside. Nonetheless, wearing appropriate personal protective equipment, if conditions permit, will be encouraged in such cases.

Visitors and residents are required to wear masks at all times and keep a distance of a meter as much as possible. Visitors must wear N95, KN95 or FFP2 masks. During the visit, visitors and residents are not allowed to engage in activities requiring mask removal, such as eating and drinking.

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GAMING DIVERSIFICATION

Concessionaires to invest \$15 billion in bold projects in upcoming decade

ANTHONY LAM

THE six casino operators agreed last week to invest a total of MOP118.8 billion (\$15 billion) after being granted 10-year operating licenses, with the bulk of the money pledged to non-gaming projects.

Macau has been keen to diversify away from gambling into tourism and leisure for decades, but with poor results.

Last month, the government confirmed that the six incumbents all won concession renewals, beating back a bid from a newcomer firm linked to Malaysian gaming and resorts giant World Resorts Genting.

The casino firms promised to spend 108.7 billion patacas -- more than 90 percent of their total investment - on "exploring overseas customer markets and developing non-gaming projects", the government said Friday.

Such projects would cover the convention and exhibition business, entertainment and performances, sports events, culture and art, health care, and themed amusement.

MGM: HIGH-END EXHIBITION AREA, 'URBAN OASIS' LANDMARK

MGM Grand Paradise achieved the highest ranking in the tender review process, according to the government Official Gazette.

At a joint press conference over the weekend, the company, represented by executive director Pansy Ho and president, chief strategic and financial officer Kenneth Feng, pledged it would help build Macau into a very attractive destination both in terms of affordability and quality.

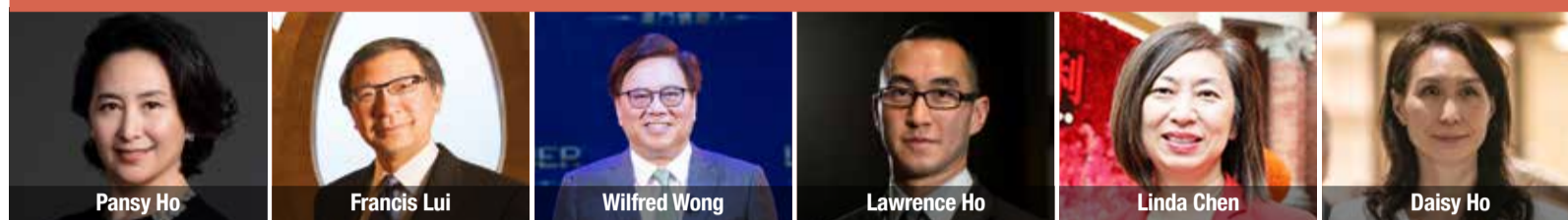
The executives pledged the company would double the size of its marketing team and increase its overseas sales offices to 30. It will hold events across Asia and the Middle East to entice tourists to Macau.

It will also establish a resident show, several original "leisure and entertainment" products and research local and cultural characteristics to attract a clientele of a wider age range.

Sustainable elements, conventions and exhibitions will also be part of the company's plan, the executives added.

GALAXY: 'FIRST-AND-ONLY' HIGH-TECH AMUSEMENT PARK

The Galaxy Entertainment Group's executive director, Francis Lui, and senior vice president of



corporate communications Bud-dy Lam told the same press conference that the company's new meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition (MICE) facility, the Galaxy International Convention Centre (GICC), will soon open.

The company plans to build a "hi-tech theme park" with a 61,000 square meters floor area. The executives also said the GICC will be home to a 16,000-seat multi-purpose arena.

The building of a 4,000-seat auditorium capable of hosting music galas and esteemed musicians and performers will be accelerated. Another 650-seat auditorium suitable for classical music, musicals and opera will also be opened alongside the GICC.

Furthermore, the executives have pledged to open three overseas sales offices in Singapore, Thailand and South Korea. Tour packages are also planned for six target source markets.

Having sponsored the local marathon and the FIVB World Tour for many years, investments will be made to nurture local athletes, the executives added.

SANDS CHINA: NEW MICE FACILITY, THEMED GARDEN

President Wilfred Wong and executive director Dave Sun at Sands China Ltd. said the company will focus on its strength - MICE - embodied in a planned new 18,000 square meter MICE hub beside the current CotaiExpo. The expansion will help the company drive global firms to host annual congresses or summits in Macau.

The lawn on the south side of The Londoner Macao, dubbed by the company as Le Jardin, will be transformed to a 50,000-square-meter "international-tier" theme garden, which will be home to "an iconic greenhouse."

The Cotai Arena will also be upgraded to host a wider array of events. Internationally acclaimed chefs and restaurants will be invited to Sands properties to further widen the local dining atlas.

Marketing drives will be held in the Marina Bay Sands in Singapore to attract target audiences to Macau.

MELCO: MEDICAL CLINIC, BRING BACK HOUSE OF DANCING WATER

Lawrence Ho's Melco Resorts (Macau) Ltd. has previously announced the opening of the city's first all-year indoor water theme park and a similar summer-only outdoor facility at the Macau Studio City Phase 2 this year.

Also at Phase 2 will be 9,670 square meters of floor space for dining and 16 entertainment projects. The city's first W Hotel, which will take a contemporary approach to five-star accommodation, will also be located at Phase 2 and is expected to open this year, according to Melco's earlier announcement.

The company plans to build a multi-house cinema at Phase 2, which will house six regular cinemas, an IMAX cinema and five VIP cinemas. The silver screens are expected in 2024, said Ho and David Sisk, Melco's chief operating officer, Macau.

Ho added 2024 will also see the opening of a medical imaging center and a skateboarding park at the Studio City.

The Studio City will reportedly roll out Asia's first concert series comprising 90 resident shows. The House of Dancing Water show will also return with adjustments. The company will also begin collaborating mainland TV stations to promote local culture.

WYNN: NEW THEATRE, AMUSEMENT CENTER, SCULPTURE GARDEN

Linda Chen, executive director and Craig Jeffrey Fullalove, chief financial and administrative officer at Wynn Resorts Macau, told the press conference the company would explore the possibility of VIP and charter flights to deliver tourists to Macau.

They pledged a new theater would be built to support world-class entertainment and performances. A food court with international food offerings will also be built to attract food enthusiasts.

An event center, dubbed the Wynn Gala and Activity Center, will also be established to attract MICE organizers and seekers. Entertainment and art venues will be built to cater to visitors of various tastes.

These plans had, in fact, been revealed as part of its Crystal Pavilion project some years ago.

SJM: REVAMP OF PROPERTIES, REVITALIZE FLOATING CASINO

SJM Resorts, S.A. will rely on its strong local background by revamping both the Lisboa and the Grand

Lisboa Hotels, according to Daisy Ho, executive director and Benjamin Toh, chief financial and developmental operations officer.

Both hotels will be renovated by 2028.

It also planned to transform the Inner Harbour promenade to an "amphibian" dining street, which will see the revamped Palace floating casino on one of the two ends. The now docked pontoon will no longer see live gambling but dining, retail and casino culture elements. SJM's plan includes two other thematic museums.

In terms of sports, SJM will focus on developing football, tennis and golf. World-class choreographers will be invited to stage resident shows in Macau. Over 15 restaurants are also in the SJM's plans.

Before the same press conference, Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong, who is also the president of the gaming concession bidding committee, said profit and loss is a normal scenario in the business circle.

He stressed the six concessionaires had made pledges as per their abilities, outlook and financial statuses, which he sees as the representation of their confidence in the future of tourism in Macau.

Aligning with the senior official's comments, executives from the six concessionaires assured that some of the promised projects can commence as soon as "border normalization is realized."

PLEGGED INVESTMENTS IN THE COMING DECADE

Concessionaire	Overall investments (MOP)	Non-gaming investments (MOP)
MGM	16.7 billion	15 billion
Galaxy	28.4 billion	27.5 billion
Venetian	30 billion	27.8 billion
Melco	11.8 billion	10 billion
Wynn	17.73 billion	16.5 billion
SJM	14.03 billion	12 billion

CHIEF EXECUTIVE REMINDS CONCESSIONAIRES OF NEW LAW

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng has met with representatives from the six gambling concessionaires amid the signing contracts with the government and reminded them about the new law.

Ho first congratulated the gaming concession awardees. He also thanked them for making their best efforts in response to the new public tender process for gaming concessions, and for supporting the Go-

vernment's requirements for ensuring local employment, exploring overseas customer markets, and developing non-gaming projects.

He then reminded the concessionaires to prepare for operations from January 1, in accordance with the revised gaming laws and regulations and the new concession contracts, to ensure the lawful and healthy development of Macau's gaming industry.

Ho added he hoped the concessionaires would truly honor their contracts and commence their investment plans accordingly. In particular, he hoped the operators could help in contributing to Macau's overall development, and deliver on their corporate social responsibilities regarding protection of local employment and promotion of the upward mobility of local workers. **AL**

ORANGE ALERT ISSUED AS COLD WEATHER EXPECTED

The Meteorological and Geophysics Bureau (SMG) has issued an orange low temperature warning as it expects Macau will still be affected by the strong winter monsoon today. Yesterday, the bureau said the lowest temperature since the beginning of winter this year was recorded yesterday morning at 9.2 C. It is expected a winter monsoon will continue to affect Macau's weather. Members of the public are urged to pay attention to weather changes.

BAY AREA LEGAL CONFERENCE HELD

The fourth Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Legal Departments Joint Conference was held online in Hong Kong yesterday. The Hong Kong government said in a statement that the meeting achieved "good progress in areas including mediation, arbitration and the support for Hong Kong and Macau lawyers practicing in the GBA's nine mainland cities." It also featured an in-depth exchange among the legal departments of the three places. On arbitration, the three parties explored matters related to the establishment of a panel of recommended GBA arbitrators and discussed the qualification process, management of the panel and the review mechanism, with "the common goal of promoting the complementary strengths of arbitration resources and the harmonization of arbitration mechanisms in the three places."

PALACE MUSEUM'S SPRING FESTIVAL COLLECTIONS OF QING DYNASTY EXHIBITED

An exhibition of artifacts associated with Spring Festival traditions and ceremonies of the Qing royal family from the Palace Museum's collections has opened in the SAR for the first time. Named "Auspicious Beginning: Spring Festival Traditions in the Forbidden City," the exhibition features over 100 valuable items of utensils, paintings, clothing and musical instruments to display traditional Spring Festival rituals including worship, family reunions, tea feasts, and recreational activities such as ice-skating games, fireworks and Chinese operas. Leong Wai Man, director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, said she hoped the audience can deepen its knowledge and understanding of traditional Chinese culture. The exhibition will last until Mar. 5.



LOCAL COVID-19 POSITIVE YOUTUBER SECURES HOTEL ROOM, AMID DIFFICULTIES

ANTHONY LAM

A local video producer has secured a hotel room at the Fisherman's Wharf after testing positive for Covid-19 and after being refused accommodation by several other hotels.

Following several attempts with several hotels whose names the video producer did not reveal, the YouTuber "Pan", secured a room at the Harbourview Hotel for his isolation.

He has reminded viewers that they should check with the hotels before making a booking for isolation purposes.

He also jokingly suggested local hotels, who are willing to

accommodate guests who test positive for SARS-CoV-2, run thematic marketing promotions to attract guests in need.

The practice is encouraged, or at least accepted, by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre, after it had started permitting people who test positive for SARS-CoV-2 to isolate at home.

The Centre has suggested staying at a hotel isolating at home is not feasible.

The YouTuber tested positive on the same day home isolation was permitted.

Pan said he could "feel the virus incubating inside his body." His mind was still clear

as of video recording time, he added. He jokingly boasted he had added to the total tally of Covid-19 positive cases.

He had successfully made a booking with a hotel but was later declined. The phone conversation he had with the unnamed hotel revealed the hotel would only accept guests with green health codes.

Pan said it was the government who had suggested hotel isolation, to which the hotel operator made no further comment. The operator only reiterated the requirement for a green health code.

He then tried several other hotels. One hotel operator said

it had no experience in taking positive guests and would refrain from accommodating him.

He eventually got a positive reply from the Harbourview Hotel. The recorded phone conversation showed the hotel did not differentiate between the three health codes, and said they would take any guest willing to pay.

"All hotels can accommodate guests with any health code colour," the hotel operator added.

After securing a booking with the hotel, Pan left home for the "staycation" by taxi. Before boarding the taxi, he asked whether the driver would mind taking a SARS-CoV-2 positive without symptoms.

The driver replied that by working in the taxi industry, "there cannot be much worry."

At check-in, Pan was assured his health code would not be inspected, meaning he would be accommodated despite his positive result.

Air Macau to resume int'l flights by Christmas

LOCAL flag carrier Air Macau has announced plans to resume some international flights in the coming months, local media reports.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of a corporate event, Chen Hong, general manager at the airline company, said the company plans to resume flights to Bangkok and Osaka before Christmas, according to public broadcaster TDM.

Further resumption is expected in January next year, concerning flights to Kaohsiung and Seoul.

The next month should see resumption of flights to Da Nang, Singapore and Manila, the airline executive added.

The move is designed to make travel more convenient and help the local tourism industry revive.

Chen expects the frequency of mainland flights will resume to 50% of 2019 by the end of this year, while hoping that after spring next year, international flights will resume to 90% of pre-Covid time.

Weekly new bookings

have nearly tripled since November, the airline executive revealed. Considering the current situation, he is satisfied with the booking frequency.

He expected the coming holiday season of Christmas, New Year and Lunar New Year will be extremely helpful in reviving the local tourism industry.

More flights and new routes will be added to the mainland service next year, in an attempt to return to the pre-Covid level, Chen added. AL





Delicious Festive Season in Style

'Tis the time to be merry as the holiday season brings an endless bout of fun parties, plenty of mulled wines, and gourmet feasts to indulge in across the city. In light of the impending holiday season, it is time to start planning for festive celebrations at both MGM properties with an array of lavish delicacies to cater for every year-end celebration in style.

Situated at the festively dressed Grande Praça of MGM MACAU, the French brasserie **Aux Beaux Arts**, best known for its classic and sophisticated French delicacies, serves a 5-course dinner set on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and a remarkable 6-course dinner on New Year's Eve. Guests can also opt for special brunches on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. A lavish festive celebration has just started. **Grill 58** at MGM COTAI is serving a Teppanyaki omakase menu on Christmas and New Year's Eve. This menu features the finest seasonal ingredients with a highlight of premium caviar and Japanese Matsutake. It also offers festive prix-fixe grill dinner menus on both Christmas Eve as well as a celebratory brunch on Christmas Day.

The holiday meal is more than just a time to eat. It's also an opportunity to get together with the people you love

and celebrate all the blessings of the year. Christmas lunch and dinner buffets at **Coast** at MGM COTAI and **Rossio** at MGM MACAU offer a broad variety of delicacies from around the globe, from fresh-out-the-oven festive roasts, and traditional Christmas desserts to fresh seafood, which is perfect for any gathering.

Don't forget to reserve a bit of space for sweet tooth cravings. **Pastry Bar** at MGM MACAU and **Anytime** at MGM COTAI brings a selection of festive desserts and savories, alongside a vivid series of Christmas-themed desserts, Swiss traditional Cheese Fondue, Coco Bomb, and more. These desserts are all meticulously crafted with seasonal ingredients and flavors to sweeten up the holidays.

To boost holiday cheer and fun, kids may unleash their creativity at the Gingerbread Cookie Decorating Workshop at **Anytime** on December 24, 25 and January 1. Together, parents and kids can decorate gingerbread with colorful candy toppings, creating their very own edible masterpiece while also sharing some precious time with each other.

Savor the ultimate festive feasting this season. Get your table now! For enquiries and reservations, please visit www.mgm.mo or call (853) 8802 3888.



PANDEMIC

Covid-linked deaths appear after virus controls

DAKE KANG, BEIJING

OUTSIDE a funeral home in eastern Beijing, dozens of people were bundled up in parkas and hats against the freezing temperatures this weekend as workers in full protective suits wheeled out coffins one by one.

When an employee with a clipboard shouted the name of the dead, a relative trundled up to the coffin to examine the body. One of the relatives told The Associated Press their loved one had been infected with COVID-19.

Deaths linked to the coronavirus are appearing in Beijing after weeks of China reporting no fatalities, even as the country is seeing a surge of cases.

That surge comes as the government last week dramatically eased some of the world's strictest COVID-19 containment measures. On Wednesday, the government said it would stop reporting asymptomatic COVID-19 cases since they've become impossible to track with mass testing no longer required.

That halt in reporting made it unclear how fast the virus is spreading. Social media posts, business

AP PHOTO



closures and other anecdotal evidence suggest huge numbers of infections.

It's also unclear how many people are dying from the virus. An AP reporter who visited the Dongjiao Funeral home was told by relatives that at least two people cremated there had died after testing positive.

Health authorities had designated Dongjiao and one other funeral home to cremate those who die after testing positive, according to a relative of one of the dead. The woman said her elderly relative had fallen ill in early December, tested positive, and died Friday morning in an emergency ward.

She said there were lots of people in the emergency ward who had tested positive for COVID-19, adding that there weren't enough nurses to take care of them. The woman did not want to be identified for fear of retribution.

Over about an hour, an AP reporter saw about a dozen bodies

wheeled from the Dongjiao funeral home.

About a half-dozen people inside described how another victim had struggled to breathe that morning before dying, and the death certificate listed "pneumonia" as the cause of death, even after a positive test for COVID-19, one of those people said. The people interviewed did not want to be identified for fear of retribution.

Three employees of shops in the complex that houses the funeral home said there had been a marked increase in the number of people going there in recent days. One estimated about 150 bodies were being cremated daily, up from what is normally a few dozen a day.

One employee attributed it to the coronavirus, although another said there are usually more deaths with the arrival of winter. The employees did not want to be identified for fear of retribution.

China has not reported a death from COVID-19 since Dec. 4.

China's official death toll remains low, with just 5,235 deaths — compared with 1.1 million in the United States. However, public health experts caution that such statistics can't be directly

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eased

compared.

Chinese health authorities count only those who died directly from COVID-19, excluding those whose underlying conditions were worsened by the virus. In many other countries, guidelines stipulate that any death where the coronavirus is a factor or contributor is counted as a COVID-19-related death.

Experts say this has been the longstanding practice in China, but questions have been raised at times about whether officials have sought to minimize the figures.

Also on Friday, China's Cabinet ordered rural areas to prepare for the return of migrant workers this holiday season in hopes of preventing a big surge in COVID-19 cases in communities with limited medical resources.

Returnees must wear masks and avoid contact with elderly people, and village committees must monitor their movements, the guidelines said, but didn't mention the possibility

of isolation or quarantines.

There are fears of a surge in cases around China's winter holidays, when tens of millions take to trains, buses and planes for what may be their only trip home all year.

The upcoming Lunar New Year falls on Jan. 22, but migrants generally begin heading home two weeks or more in advance. Some Chinese universities say they will allow students to finish the semester from home to help spread out the travel rush and reduce the potential for a bigger outbreak.

Medical resources in smaller cities and rural communities, which are home to about 500 million of China's 1.4 billion people, lag far behind those of large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. Rural medical infrastructure includes 17,000 county-level hospitals — many of which lack even a single ICU bed — 35,000 township health centers and 599,000 village clinics.

China has been pushing to increase the number of fever clinics in rural areas to treat those with COVID-19 symptoms. Currently, about 19,400 such clinics or consulting rooms operate in communities and townships around the country, state

media reported Friday.

By March 2023, about 90% of health centers at the township level will have fever clinics, Nie Chunlei, head of primary health at the National Health Commission, said Thursday.

"This will effectively enhance the capability of primary-level health care institutions to receive patients with fever," said Nie, who also urged stockpiling of medicines and antigen test kits, many of which have become scarce even in big cities.

The lifting of some travel regulations has spurred both relief and anxiety over the level of COVID-19 preparedness.

Health experts have said China will face a peak of infections in the next month or two and is trying to persuade reluctant seniors and others at risk to get vaccinated.

The changes follow growing frustration with the "zero-COVID" policy blamed for hindering the economy and creating massive social stress. The easing began in November, and accelerated after Beijing and several other cities saw unprecedented protests over the restrictions.

It's unclear what promp-

ted the government's shift in policy. Experts cite economic pressure, public discontent, and the difficulties of containing the extremely infectious omicron variant as factors.

China wasn't fully prepared for opening up from a public health standpoint, and the decision was driven mainly by economic and social factors, said Zeng Guang, a health expert formerly affiliated with China's Center for Disease Control, speaking at a conference organized by the state-run Global Times newspaper.

Under the relaxed rules, obligatory testing is no longer required and people with mild symptoms are permitted to recover at home rather than go to a quarantine center. Meanwhile, the semi-autonomous gambling enclave of Macau scrapped its mandatory hotel quarantine for arrivals from Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas yesterday, the government said.

However, travelers must spend five days in home isolation and undergo testing, and are barred from entering mainland China until the 10th day upon arrival. Both Macau and Hong Kong have scrapped most anti-COVID-19 measures. **MDT/AP**

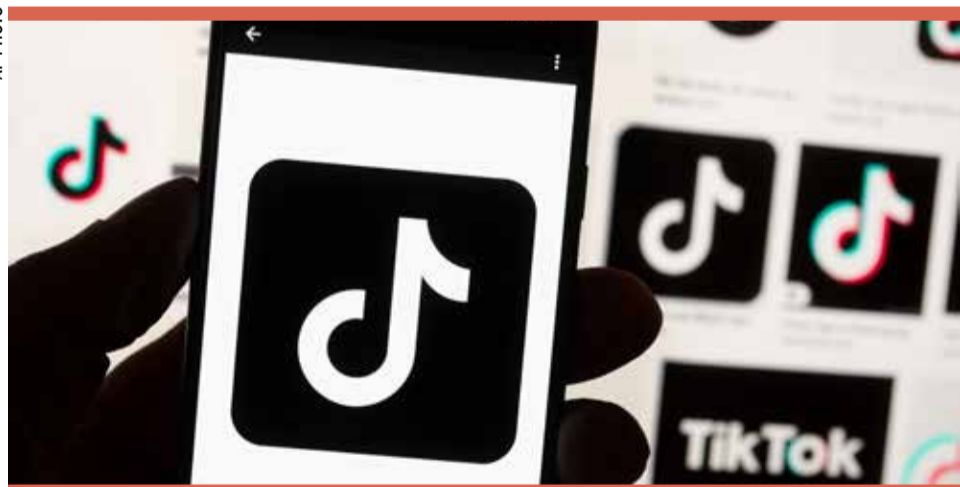
SOCIAL MEDIA

US governor bans TikTok, WeChat from state computers

VIRGINIA Gov. Glenn Youngkin banned the use of several Chinese-owned apps, including TikTok and WeChat, on state government devices and wireless networks over the weekend, calling them a threat to national security.

Youngkin's executive order covers apps developed by ByteDance and Tencent. Businesses who contract with Virginia must also prohibit their use on state-owned devices or IT infrastructure.

"TikTok and WeChat data are a channel to the Chinese Communist Party, and their continued presence represents a threat to national security, the intelligence community, and the personal privacy of every single American," Youngkin, a Republican, said in a statement. "We are taking this step today to secure state government devices and wireless networks from the threat of



infiltration and ensure that we safeguard the data and cybersecurity of state government."

Youngkin joins at least 14 other governors who have taken such an action, amid calls for Congress to also ban the use of the programs on federal government devices.

The executive order drew praise from one of Virginia's Democratic U.S. senators, Mark Warner, who chairs the Senate Se-

lect Committee on Intelligence.

"TikTok has the stamp of approval of the Chinese Communist Party and it poses a serious national security threat due to its data collection practices and its ability to reach and manipulate Americans. I hope to see more states take action to keep our government technology out of the CCP's reach," Warner, a former governor, said in a statement.

TikTok spokesperson Jamal Brown said in an emailed statement that it was "disappointing that states and some federal officials are promoting falsehoods to ban the platform instead of advancing sound policies to promote U.S. national security interests."

"Millions of Americans rely on TikTok to grow their small businesses, reach new audiences, and make their livelihoods," Brown said. **MDT/AP**

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

Winter Nourishing Feast at MGM

This year, Chinese restaurants at both MGM MACAU and MGM COTAI will bring you an array of winter-nourishing delights to ring in the holidays with you and combat the chill. Indulge in an abundance of warming dishes that whet appetites and nourish the soul.



Be warm and cozy with the top highlights for this winter by Yang Dengquan, Chef de Cuisine of Five Foot Road. Chef Yang has prepared seasonal cuts of lamb and beef to be paired with a lineup of Highland Park whiskies of 12, 18, and 21 Years, which has been crowned "The Best Spirit in the World". This rare sample of Chengdu's rich flavor paired with Sichuan delicacies will give you a taste of the city and delicious flavors from around the world.

As winter rapidly approaches, it is the perfect time to warm your body inside and out with different kinds of Chinese nourishing delicacies. Imperial Court has carefully selected a variety of nutritious ingredients to infuse with Hua Diao rice wine to curate the taste of Lingnan. On the other hand, Chún serves an array of winter flavors featuring yellow eel, goat, and more for everyone's palate. Nothing offers more satisfaction than hotpot on an icy winter day. Hao Guo serves the classic must-have Nourishing Lamb Belly Hot Pot to nourish your vitality, which is the perfect dish for you and your family to gather together during the Winter Solstice. To ensure you are warm from within this winter, Square Eight has incorporated heartwarming flavors into congee, ginseng, and red dates.



Gather with your family and let the warmth of nourishing delights fill you from the inside out this winter. For enquiries and reservations, please visit www.mgm.mo or call (853) 8806 8888.



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DETAILS



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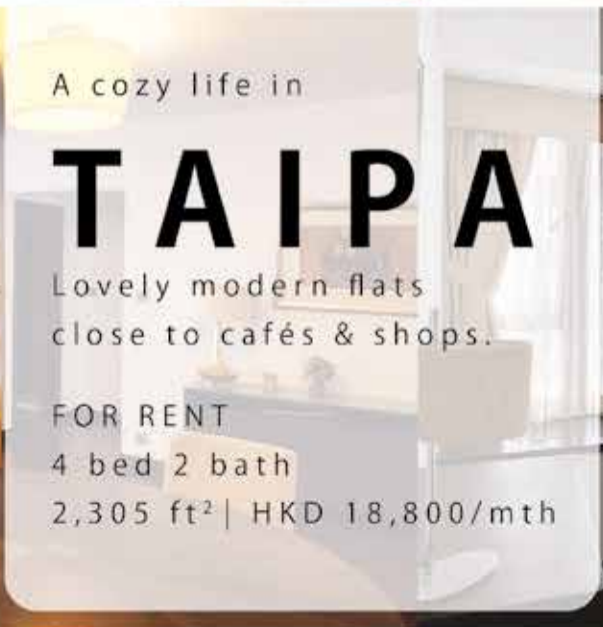
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AP PHOTO



JAPAN

As regional threats rise, Tokyo eases defense-only strategy

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

IN a major break from its strictly self-defense-only postwar principle, Japan adopted a national security strategy last week declaring plans to possess preemptive strike capability and cruise missiles within years to give itself more offensive footing against threats from neighboring China and North Korea.

With China, North Korea and Russia directly to its west and north, Japan “faces the severest and most complicated national security environment since the end of the war,” the strategy said, referring to World War II. It named China as “the biggest strategic challenge” — before North Korea and Russia — to Japan’s effort toward ensuring the peace, safety and stability for itself and the international society.

Possession of the strike-back capability is “indispensable” as deterrence to discourage enemy attacks, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a news conference, calling it “a major change to Japan’s postwar security policy.”

“When threats become reality, can the Self-Defense Force fully protect our country? Frankly speaking, the current (SDF capability) is insufficient,” Kishida said.

Under the strategy, Japan’s defense spending through 2027 will increase to about 2% of Japan’s GDP to total some 43 trillion yen

(\$320 billion), 1.6-times that of the current five-year total.

Kishida said the new target sets the NATO standard for defense spending, a budget increase that has been his policy priority since taking office in October 2021.

Because of its wartime past as an aggressor and national devastation after its defeat, Japan’s postwar policy prioritized the economic growth while keeping its security light by relying on American troops stationed in Japan under their bilateral security agreement. Japan’s defense buildup has long been considered a sensitive issue at home and in the region, especially for Asian victims of Japanese wartime atrocities.

But experts say China’s growing influence, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and fear of Taiwan emergency prompted many Japanese to support increased capability and spending.

“Taiwan emergency and Japan emergency are inseparable,” said Ken Jimbo, a defense expert at Keio University, noting that Japan’s westernmost island of Yonaguni is only 110 kilometers away from Taiwan.

Rapid advancement of missiles have become “realistic threats” in the region, making interception by existing missile defense sys-

tems more difficult, the strategy said. North Korea fired more than 30 ballistic missiles this year, including one that flew over Japan. China fired five ballistic missiles into waters near Japanese southern islands including Okinawa.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin reiterated accusations Japan was “ignoring facts, deviating from its commitment to China-Japan relations and the common understandings between the two countries, and groundlessly discrediting China.”

“**Hyping up the so-called China threat to find an excuse for its military build-up is doomed to fail.**”

WANG WENBIN
CHINA’S FOREIGN MINISTRY

“Hyping up the so-called China threat to find an excuse for its military build-up is doomed to fail,” Wang said at a daily news briefing.

South Korea said that Japan must consult with Seoul to receive consent before taking any action that gravely affects Seoul’s national interests, such as an exercise of its rights to counterstrike capability targeting the Korean Peninsula.

The South Korean Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it’s

“desirable” for Japan to implement the security policy to contribute to regional peace and stability.

Counterstrike capability noted in Japan’s new strategy — approved alongside two defense strategy documents by Kishida’s Cabinet — won’t be implemented until at least 2026 when deployment of the powerful long-range Tomahawk missile, favored by the U.S. and U.K. navies, begins.

This puts an end to Japan’s 1956 government policy that shelved counterstrike capability and only recognized the idea as a constitutional last-ditch defense.

“Starting from the fundamental strengthening of the defense power, we must be firmly prepared for the worst case scenario,” the new strategy said.

Japan plans to spend 5 trillion yen (\$37 billion) to deploy foreign-developed standoff missiles as early as 2026, including Lockheed Martin’s Tomahawk and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile, while Japan’s Mitsubishi Heavy Industry develops a surface-to-ship guided missile. To quickly respond to possible attacks, Japan will also deploy several standoff missile units at undisclosed locations.

Japanese defense officials said they are still negotiating Tomahawk purchase details.

After elevating its defense cooperation with Australia to semi-ally levels in recent years, Japan hopes to practice the new capability in joint exercises hosted by Australia and including U.S. militaries as well.

U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in a statement said Japan’s new strategy “sets forth the vision of Prime Minister Kishida and the Japanese people for a broad and strong community of partners and allies in the region.”

“Japan’s goal to significantly increase defense investments will also strengthen and modernize the U.S.-Japan alliance,” he added.

Japan says its exclusive self-defense policy is unchanged, but “long-range cruise missiles represent a threshold capability that will fundamentally change Japan’s approach to deterrence,” said Christopher Johnstone, a senior advisor and Japan chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said.

“An effective Japanese counterstrike capability would set the stage for a far deeper level of command-and-control integration with the United States than exists today,” he added.

Japan says it will keep its pacifist principle of high standards for arms equipment and technology transfer. But some easing is planned to allow currently restricted exports of offensive equipment and components, including those of next-generation fighter jet Japan is jointly developing with the U.K. and Italy, as a way to strengthen the country’s defense equipment industry.

Japan’s government has renamed what is known as preemptive strike to “counterstrike capability,” apparently to emphasize that it’s for self-defense. Despite a nuanced wording of the strategy, the main threat is China, for which Japan has had to prepare “by using North Korea’s threat as a cover” said Tomohisa Takei, a retired admiral of Japan’s navy.

The government says its use is constitutional if in response to signs of an imminent enemy attack. But it is extremely difficult to do and Japan needs to advance its cybersecurity and fully rely on the U.S. intelligence to be able to detect early signs of an enemy missile launch preparation, experts say, in order to effectively abort the attack without risking blame for making a first strike. It will require a deeper Japan-U.S. alliance to develop the capability, Johnstone said.

Experts, including former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, said the definition of the enemy’s intention to attack is unclear and preemptive strikes could be considered as first strikes.

Last month, Japan and the United States held a major joint military exercise in southern Japan to step up the allies’ readiness. **MDT/AP**

USA

Journalist suspensions widen rift between Twitter and media

ELN Musk's abrupt suspension of several journalists who cover Twitter widens a growing rift between the social media site and media organizations that have used the platform to build their audiences.

Individual reporters with The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, Voice of America and other news agencies saw their accounts go dark Thursday.

Musk tweeted this weekend that the company would lift the suspensions following the results of a public poll on the site. The poll showed 58.7% of respondents favored a move to immediately unsuspend accounts over 41.3% who said the suspensions should be lifted in seven days.

The company has not explained why the accounts were taken down. But Musk took to Twitter on Thursday night to accuse journalists of sharing private information about his whereabouts, which he described as "basically assassination coordinates." He provided no evidence for that claim.

Many advertisers abandoned Twitter over content moderation questions after Musk acquired it in October, and he now risks a rupture with media organizations, which are among the most active on the platform.

Most of the accounts were back Saturday. One exception was Business Insider's Linette Lopez, who was suspended after the other journalists, also with no explanation, she told The Associated Press.

Lopez published a series of articles between 2018 and 2021 highlighting what she called dangerous Tesla manufacturing shortcomings.

Shortly before being suspended, she said she had posted court-related documents to Twitter that included a 2018 Musk email address. That address is not current, Lopez said, because "he changes his email every few weeks."

On Tuesday, she posted a 2019 story about Tesla troubles, commenting, "Now, just like then, most of @elonmusk's wounds are self-inflicted."

The same day, she cited re-



Elon Musk shuts down inconvenient voices

ports that Musk was renegeing on severance for laid-off Twitter employees, threatening workers who talk to the media and refusing to make rent payments. Lopez described his actions as "classic Elon-going-for-broke behavior."

Steve Herman, a national correspondent for Voice of America, told The Associated Press that his suspended Twitter account still hadn't been fully restored as of yesterday [Macau time] because of his refusal to delete three tweets that the company flagged for purportedly sharing Musk's whereabouts. Although Herman's Twitter timeline is now visible to most users, he said he can't see it himself nor can he post anything new until he removes the tweets that the company contends violate its revised terms of service.

"I am in a new level of purgatory," Herman said. "I do not believe anything I have tweeted violated any reasonable standard of any social media platform."

Alarm over the suspensions extended beyond media circles to the United Nations, which was reconsidering its involvement in Twitter.

The move sets "a dangerous precedent at a time when journalists all over the world are facing censorship, physical threats and even worse," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

The reporters' suspensions followed Musk's decision Wednesday to perma-

nently ban an account that automatically tracked the flights of his private jet using publicly available data. That also led Twitter to change its rules for all users to prohibit the sharing of another person's current location without their consent.

Several of the reporters suspended Thursday night had been writing about the new policy and Musk's rationale for imposing it, which involved his allegations about a stalking incident he said affected his family Tuesday night in Los Angeles.

The official Twitter account for Mastodon, a decentralized alternative social network where many Twitter users are fleeing, was also banned. The reason was unclear, though it had tweeted about the jet-tracking account. Twitter also began preventing users from posting links to Mastodon accounts, in some cases flagging them as potential malware.

"This is of course a bald-faced lie," cybersecurity journalist Brian Krebs posted.

Explaining the reporter bans, Musk tweeted, "Same doxxing rules apply to 'journalists' as to everyone else."

He later added: "Criticizing me all day long is totally fine, but doxxing my real-time location and endangering my family is not."

"Doxxing" refers to disclosing someone's identity, address, phone number or other personal details that

violate their privacy and could bring harm.

The Washington Post's executive editor, Sally Buzbee, said technology reporter Drew Harwell "was banished without warning, process or explanation" following the publication of accurate reporting about Musk.

CNN said in a statement that "the impulsive and unjustified suspension of a number of reporters, including CNN's Donie O'Sullivan, is concerning but not surprising."

"Twitter's increasing instability and volatility should be of incredible concern for everyone who uses Twitter," the statement added.

Another suspended journalist, Matt Binder of the technology news outlet Mashable, said he was banned Thursday night immediately after sharing a screenshot that O'Sullivan had posted before his own suspension.

The screenshot showed a statement from the Los Angeles Police Department sent earlier Thursday to multiple media outlets, including the AP, about how it was in touch with Musk's representatives about the alleged stalking incident.

Binder said he did not share any location data or any links to the jet-tracking account or other location-tracking accounts.

"I have been highly critical of Musk but never broke any of Twitter's listed policies," Binder said in an email. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1984 BRITAIN SIGNS OVER HONG KONG TO CHINA



The British colony of Hong Kong is to be returned to China in 1997 after an historic agreement was signed in Peking today.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher signed the Joint Sino-British Declaration with her Chinese counterpart Zhao Ziyang.

It formally seals the future of Hong Kong, transferring it from a British colony of six million people to communist China in 13 years.

The agreement, which will end 155 years of British rule in the colony, also launches a new era in trade and diplomacy between the two countries.

Chinese president Deng Xiaoping, who pursued the recovery of Hong Kong, greeted Mrs Thatcher.

The champagne ceremony took place at the Great Hall of the People before delegates who helped draw up the agreement, including 101 guests from Hong Kong.

Mrs Thatcher said: "The circumstances are unique. The agreement is unique."

"It is right that we should feel a sense of history, of pride and of confidence in the future."

The declaration outlines Hong Kong will be "restored" to the People's Republic of China with effect from July 1 1997 and will apply for fifty years.

It will be known as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR).

Britain has agreed to return Hong Kong after guarantees it will "enjoy a high degree of autonomy, except in foreign and defence affairs".

And China's principle of "one country, two systems" allows Hong Kong to have a capitalist economy and enjoy existing rights and freedoms.

The Prime Minister later revealed the negotiation process had been rocky.

When Mrs Thatcher last visited Peking in 1982 the atmosphere was hostile as an agreement could not be reached.

Talks restarted in July 1983 and today's agreement, which was finalised only ten days before the 30 September deadline, is being hailed as a diplomatic coup.

Mrs Thatcher will visit Hong Kong tomorrow during her whistle-stop world tour.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

A bloody crackdown by troops on protests in the Chinese capital, Beijing, in June 1989, soured relations between Britain and China. The British Government, fearing for the colony's future, responded by granting British passports to 50,000 Hong Kong heads of families, building a new international airport, and introducing a Bill of Rights.

Chris Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong introduced democratic reforms in 1992 which the Chinese Government opposed.

A series of diplomatic meetings between the two governments in 1995 and 1996 improved relations.

On 1 July 1997 a spectacular ceremony in Hong Kong celebrated a new era in its political life as it transferred to Chinese control.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Close deals that have been up in the air and move on to new ones that appear to be profitable. Favors will be offered readily. Get busy trying to make more money.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Someone may be trying to take advantage of you. You need more space for the whole family. Direct your energy wisely.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Try not to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. You may have more to do with children today; keep an open mind. Don't let opposition from those envious of your talents daunt your progress.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 You can make money through real estate or by using your head when it comes to personal investments. You should regain some of your self esteem if you get involved in organizational functions.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Look into alternatives that would better suit both your needs. Don't overdo it. You need to enjoy yourself. Your energetic personality will make you the center of attention at social gatherings.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Correspondence may not clear up issues. Make plans that will take you to exotic destinations. Romance may be better than you ever thought possible.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Your energetic personality will make you the center of attention at social gatherings. You can enhance your reputation if you treat family and friends with respect and dignity.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Your partner may blame you for everything. Take care of chores that have been hanging over your head. You're ready to take action and take over.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Your charm will attract someone special. You need a change and you need to earn more cash. You will find travel and lectures most stimulating.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Sudden romance could end just as quickly. Concentrate on home improvement. Small details will make a difference. Investments may be misrepresented today.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Socializing or travel will lead to partnerships. Caustic language may cause you to want to get out of the house. Travel opportunities look positive, but be cautious while driving.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Minor fevers or infections will develop if you're over-stressed. You're ready to take action and take over. A series of misunderstandings may be at fault.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-10	2	fine
Changchun	-21	-12	fine
Chengdu	1	10	cloudy
Chongqing	4	12	cloudy
Fuzhou	4	14	cloudy
Guangzhou	4	14	fine
Guiyang	1	13	fine
Haikou	11	17	cloudy
Hangzhou	-2	9	cloudy
Harbin	-26	-14	fine
Hefei	-4	11	fine
Nanjing	-2	9	cloudy
Shanghai	-1	8	fine
Taipei	7	16	overcast
Wuhan	-6	12	fine
Hong Kong	15	17	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-8	-1	snow
Frankfurt	1	3	snow
Paris	11	12	rain
London	10	13	showers
New York	-1	5	fine

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Appliance brand; 6- Writer Rand; 9- Observes Ramadan; 14- Nasal cavity; 15- 19th letter of the Greek alphabet; 16- Siouan speakers; 17- Carry; 19- Gathers; 20- Western Hemisphere org.; 21- No ifs, ____; 22- Fathers; 23- Learning; 25- Psychics claim to have a sixth one; 26- They do not possess; 29- Run into; 31- Phases; 32- Occasionally; 36- Math course; 37- ____ standstill; 38- Has a bug; 40- Whenever; 43- Poem of 14 lines; 45- Fibrous; 46- Like a professor's jacket; 47- Communion plate; 50- Connections; 51- Christmas song; 52- Point after deuce; 54- Inlet; 57- Staggering; 58- Tarrying; 61- Artist Rousseau; 62- Limb of a felled tree; 63- Ditto; 64- Approaches; 65- It may come after you; 66- Jargon;


DOWN 1- About; 2- Paul Sorvino's daughter; 3- Collections of anecdotes; 4- "The Sound of Music" extra; 5- Donkey; 6- Compensate; 7- American football measure; 8- Kernels; 9- Norse god; 10- Had dinner at home; 11- Flies high; 12- Native American tent; 13- Flat sound; 18- Components; 23- Having long gams; 24- Any person; 25- What the sun does in the west; 26- DDE's predecessor; 27- Gillette brand; 28- Futile; 29- British buddy; 30- Greek H; 33- Horse locks; 34- Mozart's "____ kleine Nachtmusik"; 35- Go downhill fast?; 37- Roadie's load; 39- Eye infection, pig house; 41- Lattice; 42- Euripides drama; 43- Sharp pain; 44- Carry a balance; 47- European capital, in song; 48- Stadium used for sports or musical events; 49- Start of a saying on forgiveness; 50- Hint; 51- "All the Way" lyricist Sammy; 52- ____ breve; 53- Designer Christian; 54- Comic Rudner; 55- A party to; 56- Highly excited; 59- Printer's measures; 60- Fam. member;

Friday's solution


H	A	S	T	R	A	A	B	C	I	A
I	G	L	O	O	A	T	R	A	B	A
S	A	I	N	T	F	R	A	T	I	B
S	I	D	S	D	A	Y	B	O	O	K
N	E	T	H	E	R	R	A	I	S	I
O	A	F	I	S	H	S	N	A	R	E
A	S	P	I	E	D	E	R	I	T	O
I	B	M	R	A	I	L	W	A	Y	O
F	A	I	L	T	O	V	E	N	E	S
A	T	T	I	C	N	E	E	D	L	E
T	E	E	T	E	R	S	O	L	A	C
T	O	U	R	I	S	M	W	A	I	L
N	O	E	L	L	E	D	A	P	E	R
Y	O	R	E	L	L	Y	T	E	L	E
E	P	A								

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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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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

AD



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AP PHOTO



RUNNER UP

MOROCCO'S MIRACULOUS RUN ENDS IN DEFEAT WITH CROACIA

LUIS ANDRES HENAO,
AL RAYYAN

CROATIA 2, MOROCCO 1

MOROCCO'S miraculous World Cup run is over, and it ended with another loss.

After making history by becoming the first African team to reach the World Cup semifinals, Morocco lost to Croatia 2-1 on Saturday in the match for third place at Khalifa International Stadium.

"Of course we're disappointed, but when we wake up tomorrow we will realize how much we have achieved," Morocco coach Walid Regragui said. "Some of my players weren't 100% fit but they gave everything to the end. I am very proud."

He has a reason to be. Morocco's showing in Qatar provided the most surprising story of the World Cup. The Atlas Lions were also the first Arab nation to go so far in the tournament, sparking an outpouring of pride among Arab countries during an event being held in the Middle East for the first time. Celebrations spread from Gaza

City to Cairo. In Doha, the Moroccan community felt at home.

"We're very proud that all these Moroccans are behind us and it gives us great strength to go into the games," Morocco midfielder Ilias Chair said. "The fan support was unbelievable. If you look at the games, it felt like we were playing in Casablanca."

Regragui said he wouldn't change a thing about this year's World Cup.

"We had 0.01% of winning this World Cup at the outset. We managed to get through to the last four," the coach said. "We played against some of the footballing powerhouses of the world."

"We're now one of the top four teams in the world and if you had told me that before the World Cup and that Morocco would be No. 4 in the world, I would have accepted that straight away."

The triumphant run will also have a positive impact for generations of children in Morocco, Regragui said.

"Football makes people dream and children

in particular. In Morocco and Africa, we have kept those dreams alive. It means more than a victory at the World Cup," the coach said. "As for the impact on our country, we have set the bar high and the expectations from our supporters will be high. We have made a fantastic achievement but we want to do that again. It will always be tough for an African country to reach the semifinals but what we want now is to get through the group stage every time and one day we will win the World Cup."

Morocco topped a group that included Croatia, which reached the 2018 final, and second-ranked Belgium. The team then progressed past favorites Spain and Portugal in the knockout stages before losing to defending champion France 2-0 in one of its best performances.

"It's a proud moment, a dream come true. I couldn't be prouder than this," Chair said. "A little bit disappointed, obviously, because we deserved more as a team, but also a very proud moment because we wrote history." MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



A FINAL OF CHAMPIONS

Messi wins World Cup, Argentina beats France on penalties

STEVE DOUGLAS, LUSAIL

**ARGENTINA 3, FRANCE 3
(PENALTIES 4-2)**

LIONEL Messi's once-in-a-generation career is complete. The Argentina superstar is finally a World Cup champion.

Messi scored two goals and then another in a shootout as Argentina beat France 4-2 on penalties early today [Macau time] to claim a third World Cup title despite Kylian Mbappé scoring the first hat trick in a final in 56 years.

Now there's no debate. Messi is definitively in the pantheon of soccer's greatest ever players, alongside Pelé — a record three-time World Cup champion from Brazil — and Diego Maradona, the late Argentina great with whom Messi was so often compared.

Messi achieved what Maradona did in 1986 and dominated a World Cup for Argentina. The torch will one day pass to Mbappé, whose late goals lit up one of the most dramatic finals in the tournament's 92-year history and made him the first scorer of a hat trick in a final since 1966, but not just yet.

"Let's go, Argentina!" Messi roared into a microphone on the field in the post-match celebrations.

Messi put Argentina ahead from the penalty spot and played a part in Angel Di Maria's goal that made it 2-0 after 36 minutes.

Mbappé scored two goals in a 97-second span to take the game to extra time, and then Messi tapped in his second goal in the 109th minute. But there was still time for another penalty from Mbappé to take the thrilling game to a shootout.

Gonzalo Montiel scored the clinching penalty kick after Kingsley Coman had an attempt saved by Argentina goalkeeper Emi Martínez and Aurelien Tchouameni missed for France.

Europe's run of four straight World Cup winners came to an end. The last South American champion was Brazil, and that was also in Asia — when Japan and South Korea hosted the tournament in 2002.

Argentina won its previous World Cup titles in 1978 and 1986. In Qatar, the country backed up its victory from last year's Copa America, its first major trophy since 1993. It's quite the climax to

Messi's international career, which might not yet be over at the age of 35 because he is playing as well as ever.

It was quite the finale, too, for a unique World Cup — the first to be played in the Middle East and the Arab world.

For FIFA and the Qatari organizers, a final between two major soccer nations and the world's two best players represented a perfect way to cap a tournament laced in controversy ever since the scandal-shrouded vote in 2010 to give the event to a tiny

Arab emirate.

The years-long scrutiny since has focused on the switch of dates from the traditional June-July period to November-December, strong criticism of how migrant workers have been treated, and then unease about taking soccer's biggest event to a nation where homosexual acts are illegal.

Yesterday, there was one narrative at play for most people: Could Messi do it?

He could, despite the 23-year-old Mbappé — Messi's teammate at Paris Saint-Germain — doing all he could to emulate Pelé by winning his first two World Cups. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**GRAVITATIONAL PULL
 FROM DEMAND BOOST**

Now that the strict pandemic prevention and control restrictions have been dramatically eased, both domestic and international projections indicate the Chinese economy will embrace a strong momentum of recovery and growth next year once the epidemic situation stabilizes.

To provide a long-term tonic for its future vitality, a guideline on further expanding domestic demand and fostering a sound domestic demand system was released on Wednesday.

According to the document issued by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, which is a blueprint for promoting long-term high-quality growth in the face of downward pressure and international headwinds, the aim is for the world's second-largest economy to raise the scale of consumption and investment to a new level so that it can fully establish a sound domestic demand system by 2035.

This will basically entail completing agricultural modernization, informatization, new industrialization and urbanization; improving people's livelihoods; boosting the underpinning role of reform in propelling the development of domestic demand and enhancing China's advantages in terms of engaging in global economic cooperation and competition.

To accomplish these tasks, efforts are to be made to facilitate consumption and accelerate the upgrading of consumption, optimize the investment structure and expand the scope of investment, and promote the coordinated development of urban and rural areas in order to release the potential of domestic demand.

The country will also boost investment and continue to deepen reform and opening-up to strengthen the growth momentum of domestic demand.

The new raft of measures, which emphasize the fundamental role of consumption and the key role of investment, will help mitigate the adverse impacts of the pandemic on the economy and lay the groundwork for post-pandemic economic recovery and long-term high-quality growth.

In this regard, international cooperation and foreign investments will play a bigger role as China continues to open-up its market and foster a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized, thus creating new opportunities for the whole world.

The domestic market is closely connected with the external markets and it has become the world's second-largest commodity consumption market. With the domestic market more obviously leading the national economic cycle, the potential of that market will continue to grow and releasing that potential will as the document says create a "gravitational field" making the domestic and international markets better connected.

An active choice to give full play to the advantages of the country's super-large market, expanding domestic demand will further enhance the future resilience of the country's economic development.

Coal use across the world is set to reach a new record this year amid persistently high demand for the heavily polluting fossil fuel, the International Energy Agency said this weekend.

The Paris-based agency said in a new report that while coal use grew by only 1.2% in 2022, the increase pushed it to all-time high of more than 8 billion metric tons, beating the previous record set in 2013.

"The world's coal consumption will remain at similar levels in the following years in the absence of stronger efforts to accelerate the transition to clean energy," the agency said, noting that "robust demand"

in emerging Asian economies would offset declining use in mature markets.

"This means coal will continue to be the global energy system's largest single source of carbon dioxide emissions by far," the IAE said.

The use of coal and other fossil fuels needs to be cut drastically to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius this century. Experts say the ambitious target will be hard to meet given that average temperatures worldwide have already risen by 1.2 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times.

AP PHOTO



**PENTAGON HAS RECEIVED
 'SEVERAL HUNDREDS' OF
 NEW UFO REPORTS**

TARA COPP,
 WASHINGTON

A new Pentagon office set up to track reports of unidentified flying objects has received "several hundreds" of new reports, but no evidence so far of alien life, the agency's leadership told reporters this weekend.

The All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) was set up in July and is responsible for not only tracking unidentified objects in the sky, but also underwater or in space — or potentially an object that has the ability to move from one domain to the next.

The office was established following more than a year of attention on unidentified flying objects that military pilots have observed but have sometimes been reluctant to report due to fear of stigma.

In June 2021 the Office of the Director of National Intelligence reported that between 2004 and 2021, there were 144 such encounters, 80 of which were captured on multiple sensors.

Since then, "we've had lots more reporting," said anomaly office director Sean Kirkpatrick. When asked to quantify the amount, Kirkpatrick said "several hundreds."

An updated report from the Director of National Intelligence that will provide specific figures on new reports received since 2021 is expected by the end of the year, the officials said.

The office was set up not only to examine the question of whether there's extraterrestrial life, but also because of the security risk posed by so many encounters with unknown flying objects by military installations or military aircraft.

This May, Congress held its first hearing in more than half a century on the topic, with multiple members expressing concern that whether or not the objects are alien or potentially new, unknown technology being flown by China, Russia or another potential adversary, the unknown creates a security risk.

So far, "we have not seen anything, and we're still very early on, that would lead us to believe that any of the objects that we have seen are of alien origin," said Ronald Moultrie, under secretary of defense for intelligence and security. "Any unauthorized system in our airspace we deem as a threat to safety."

The office is also working on ways to improve its ability to identify unknown objects, such as

by recalibrating sensors that may be focused just on known adversary aircraft or drone signatures, Moultrie said.

One reason for the hundreds of additional reports coming in may be the outreach the department has done to destigmatize reporting potential encounters. Each service has also established its own reporting processes, Kirkpatrick said.

Beyond unidentifiable objects, there's a lot of new technology — such as future stealth bombers and stealth fighters, drones and hypersonic missiles being fielded by both the U.S. and China — that could be mistaken for a UFO. Kirkpatrick said the new office has been coordinating with the Pentagon and the U.S. intelligence community to get the signatures of U.S. technology in order to rule out those aircraft or drones.

"We are setting up very clear mechanisms with our blue programs, both our DOD and IC programs, to deconflict any observations that come in with blue activities, and ensure that we weed those out and identify those fairly early on," Kirkpatrick said, referring to the "blue" U.S. aircraft programs in operation by the Pentagon or intelligence agencies. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Tunisia Tunisians voted this weekend to elect a new parliament, to the backdrop of a soaring cost-of-living crisis and concerns of democracy backsliding in the North African country — the cradle of Arab Spring protests a decade ago. Opposition parties — including the Salvation Front coalition that the popular Ennahda party is part of — boycotted the polls because they say the vote is part of President Kais Saied's efforts to consolidate power. The decision to boycott will likely lead to the next legislature being subservient to the president, whom critics accuse of authoritarian drift.

AP PHOTO



Mexico The deadliest year in at least three decades for Mexican journalists and media workers is nearing a close, with 15 slayings — a perilous situation underlined by a brazen near-miss attack this week on one of the country's most prominent journalists. Two gunmen astride a motorcycle shot up radio and television journalist Ciró Gómez Leyva's armored vehicle 200 yards from his home last week. The journalist described the attack and posted photos of his vehicle to social media.

AP PHOTO



Italy Art restorers in Venice are conducting an ambitious monitoring project to analyze and intervene early on precious artworks and elaborate ornamentation at a landmark Venetian palace that was at the heart of political life in the powerful maritime Republic of Venice. The project at the Doge's Palace began in June and will last roughly 14 months as restorers examine every centimeter of the surfaces of the Palazzo Ducale which contains some of the world's most magnificent artworks, including paintings by Tintoretto and Titian.