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# Times

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AP PHOTO



**China** Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is pushing for closer economic ties on a visit to China that seeks to sidestep territorial disputes in the South China Sea. The countries are looking to recharge investments in bridges and other projects, along with tourism and agriculture. In comments to the head of China's legislature, Li Zhanshu, Marcos said the two countries "be able to face the challenges and the different shocks that now we are already beginning to feel and will be continue to feel in the next few years."

**Pakistan** Authorities yesterday ordered shopping malls and markets to close by 8:30 p.m. as part of a new energy conservation plan aimed at easing Pakistan's economic crisis, officials said. The move comes amid talks with the International Monetary Fund. The government expects these measures to save energy and curtail the costs of imported oil, for which Pakistan spends \$3 billion annually. In Pakistan, most of the electricity is generated by using imported oil.

AP PHOTO



**Vatican** Pope Francis praised Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's "acute and gentle thought" as he presided over a packed yesterday general audience in the Vatican, while thousands of people paid tribute to the former pope on the final day of public viewing in St. Peter's Basilica. Francis was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd in the Paul VI auditorium and shouts of "Viva il papa!" or "Long live the pope" as he arrived for his weekly catechism appointment with the faithful.

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# URBAN CONCERNS



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# PARLIAMENT'S COMMITTEE WANTS LOWER ALCOHOLIC DRINKS CONSISTENCY THRESHOLD

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE parliamentary committee in discussing the consumable alcohol bill considered the indicator level proposed by the government to be too high.

Currently, the government has proposed to classify drinks with over 1.2% alcohol by volume as alcoholic drinks.

Referring to the most common categorization, which is 0.5% by volume, the committee called on the government to lower this percentage.

After a recent meeting, president Ella Lei of the committee told the press that the government had referred to the Hong Kong indicator level as reference when the bill was drafted, according to a report by local media outlet, All About Macau.

The government pledged that it would consider the committee's suggestions but no promise was made as to whether there



will be a change.

Explaining further, Lei cited the government as saying that the indicator level for alcoholic drinks varies among jurisdictions

and usually ranges between 0.5% and 1.2%. Picking 1.2% for the bill was grounded on the trade's mode of operation. The government considers that it will be

easier for local importers to acquire alcoholic goods for sale in Macau.

Furthermore, the government was also cited as saying that 95%

of beer products being sold on the market have alcoholic levels ranging between 3% and 8.8%. Only three brands of beer products have levels lower than 1.2%.

Speaking on behalf of some committee members, Lei said lowering the indicator threshold will put more types of drinks under the umbrella of supervision and will not be difficult to administer.

Echoing the discussions at the first reading, the question on supervising food made with edible alcohol was raised again at the committee session.

In response, the government said that the main focus of the bill is to supervise drinks. Also, laws in other jurisdictions rarely concern food made with alcohol. Inspection also poses difficulties.

Alcoholic products that are made for therapeutic purposes are not covered by the proposed legislation.

MGTO

## Tourism board to further attract Hong Kong visitors

**M**ORE promotions will attract visitors from Hong Kong amid border normalization within the region, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office said yesterday.

On the sidelines of a public event, the tourism official noted that additional promotions will be employed following the resumption of ferry services between Macau and Hong Kong downtown.

No specific date for this resumption has been announced at this time.

The aforementioned promotions will be provided by ferry and shuttle bus services operators. As per current plans, promotions similar to buy-one-get-one will be offered.

The local tourism of-



ficial hopes that the promotions will commence before Lunar New Year, with details being negotiated.

On the other hand, the official disclosed that the east parking lot at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge has been reopened for the free-of-charge use by drivers from Hong Kong. She thinks that it will be an

attractive offer to visitors from Hong Kong.

With the government pushing the tourism trade to focus on the foreign source market, Senna Fernandes revealed that resources will be saved to attract tourists from outside of Greater China.

The air ticket offers will likely take the form of 'buy one, get one free' as well. **AL**

## FUTURE OF TAIPA'S FORMER TIRE PARK LAND SUBJECT TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE public will be consulted about the land plot on which the government has previously announced it would build a public leisure facility known as the "tire park", the director of the Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU), Lai Weng Leong, has said in a written response to a question from lawmaker Ron Lam.

According to Lai, the final plan for the area will be in the detailed planning of Taipa's Central District-2, a plan yet to be finalized and still to pass public consultation.

According to the Urban Master Plan 2020-2040, the Taipa Central District-2 is residential with most of the land already occupied.

The only exceptions are plots for the tire park, which have not progressed, and a



smaller land area opposite these plots, separated by the Avenida de Kwong Tung.

Lai noted that when planning the area in detail, the government will "consider using the surrounding land to create green spaces or public open spaces."

Nonetheless, Number 2 of Article 35 of the Urban Master Plan document, which refers to the plans for the area, states the government intends to "keep the land in that area for housing," said Lai. Coordination with the

different planning sections of the Taipa area will be done to "perfect the public and collective use facilities," said Lai.

In his reply to lawmaker Lam, the DSSCU director also said that, during the planning phase, and "if the conditions are found to be suitable after examination and study, the [former site of the tire park] may still be used temporarily for a different purpose [such as public space] until the long-term use of the land is decided."

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RENATO MARQUES

PUBLIC WORKS

**T**HE issuing of the urban conditions plan (PCU) for the land plot B1 of Zone A of the new landfills has raised several questions from the members of the Urban Planning Committee (CPU).

In the first plenary meeting of the committee, held yesterday afternoon, several concerns were raised by committee members regarding the planning of the area. One of the most active members was Chan Chui I, who called on the government to provide more detailed information on the project and how the school village will function in practice.

Chan was concerned with the linking of the several plots that will be part of this project, as well as traffic flow in the area for both vehicles and pedestrians.

Another of the questions raised by Chan was on the lack of planning for bicycle paths and lanes in the area. He suggested that the flyovers and underground passages could include these to allow people to commute using bicycles in this new area of the city.

The government representatives, including the Land and Urban Construction Bureau's (DSSCU) deputy director Mak Tat Io, admitted that bicycles are not part of the government's policies for city mobility. He explained that both the flyovers and the underground passages planned are for the exclusive use of pedestrians under the policy of facilitating commuting on foot, which complements the public transport policy.

Justifying the choice for the above or under streets system, Mak explained that while the flyovers aim to separate the pedestrian from the vehicular traffic on the major roads in the area, the underground passages are mostly planned to provide access to the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) stations that will be built in the same area.

Chan also questioned the lack of detail and information of the PCU regarding the use of the

# Plan for new school village in Zone A raises concerns at CPU meeting



underground space, noting that during public consultation for the general planning this point was regarded as essential.

On this matter, the director of DSSCU, Lai Weng Leong, explained that the PCU only includes the "mandatory" matters that need to be made public regarding that particular condition for

ffic due to a lack of planning for waiting areas for this purpose.

Mak noted on this matter that the government policy is to facilitate the pedestrian commute combined with public transportation such as the LRT and the buses, to avoid the need of using private vehicles to access schools and other public use venues.

## The school village should take up 13,000 students from primary and secondary school levels

a plot, noting that all the details and specifications will be part of the final project of the buildings to be constructed.

Chan and other members were concerned with the probability that parents will pick up and drop off their kids at school by car, as they currently do, which causes congestion in the tra-

To allocate large areas for the stopping of vehicles outside schools clashes with the transport policy which is already consuming considerable government resources, Mak explained.

As announced in late November last year by the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, the school village of

zone A, is a new concept aiming to integrate several school facilities, which will also share some other public resources such as sports venues and other facilities.

According to Ao Ieong, when complete, the school village should take up 13,000 students from primary and secondary school levels.

The plan includes eight schools, one teaching center, and one sports facility that would function in an integrated mode.

The concerns from the committee members come with the acknowledgment that there are already some issues in the integration of the land plots in the new area. For example, the plot B4, dedicated to public housing, started construction before the rules set by the Urban Master Plan took force, and do not include the possibility of being linked to the future LRT via underground passages, among other aspects, as the government side admitted at the meeting.

## INT'L REGATTA TO SET SAIL TODAY

A total of 35 teams will compete for the title of three championships of the 2023 MGM Macao International Regatta from today to Jan. 8. The competition comprises the Macao Cup International Regatta (Beneteau First 40.7 unified design group), the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Cup Regatta (IRC group) and the International Catamaran Invitational (Hobie 16 unified design group). 11 teams in the Macao Cup International Regatta and nine teams in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Cup Regatta will compete in the waters south of Hac Sa Beach. 15 teams participating in the International Catamaran Invitational will compete for the championship in the waters south of the Macau Channel off the Macau Science Center.

## GOV'T LAUNCHES NEW ROUND OF SUBSIDIZED RATS

The Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre announced the launch of the fourth phase of government-operated RAT kit sale scheme, beginning tomorrow and lasting two weeks. For the duration of the scheme, an eligible buyer will be entitled to purchase five RAT kits at a time. There will be no further discount, meaning each purchase will be priced at MOP20. Those eligible include Macau ID holders, non-local working pass holders and non-local students. The kits can be bought at 55 commissioned chemist shops across the city and five service points operated under the Macau Women's Federation. The scheme will end on Jan. 19.

PUBLIC WORKS

# Iao Hon Leisure area to be replaced by public housing tower

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE current leisure area of the Rua Oito do Iao Hon will soon be replaced by a 90 meter high residential tower as part of the government's public housing projects.

The urban conditions plan (PCU) for the land plots was approved yesterday during the meeting of the Urban Planning Committee (CPU).

Although the project will carry obvious consequences for the area, in-

cluding the development of a portion of land that is currently occupied by street hawkers, the plan did not raise any questions from the committee members.

According to the PCU the newly-approved bui-

lding should have a land occupancy rate of 90.7%.

An opinion from the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) which currently manages the land plots proposes to preserve the existing trees, and if this is not possible due to lack of

space, transplant them to other locations.

Also presented in the same meeting was the PCU for the land plot of the former Estoril Hotel and swimming pool, which, as has been proposed for a long time, will give way to the new central library.

This plan did not prompt any opinions from the members of the CPU either, being approved without remarks.

Under the approved plan the Estoril swimming pool will be left un-

touched.

The building height will have a maximum ceiling capped at 29.37 meters on the side facing the Tap Seac square, and the height may be raised to 71.71 meters on the side facing the Estrada da Vitória.

It was also noted that the plot includes a tree already listed in the Old and Valuable Trees List, which necessitated that the government developer present a plan for the protection of the tree to IAM before the start of construction.

SPORTS

# BLACK BEARS LOSE AGAINST SAIGON HEAT IN THE FIRST ABL MATCH

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Macau Black Bears basketball team has lost its first match of this year's ASEAN Basketball League (ABL) invitational championship.

The Bears, the only professional basketball team playing under the Macau flag were defeated by Vietnam's Saigon Heat by just eight points (84 vs 76) in a match that took place on Tuesday evening at Singapore's OCBC Arena.

Today (8 p.m. Macau time) the Bears will have their second match of the 2023 season against the current leaders of the championship, the Hong Kong Eastern Long Lions.

The Long Lions lead the championship after beating the Cooly Bangkok Tigers (94 vs 63) on Monday.

Back in the 2019-2020 league, the Bears beat the Eastern by 93 vs 79 in a match played at Hong Kong's Southern Stadium.



Following the Long Lions on the lead of this year's table are the Zamboanga Valientes from the Philippines, Saigon Heat, and the Singapore Slingers, although the Heat has already played two matches.

The ABL invitational cham-

pionship is composed of eight teams, including also Malaysia's NS Matrix, and Indonesia's Louvre Surabaya.

The Macau team has three local players on the roster and it is coached by the Canadian Charles Dubé-Brais.

EMPLOYMENT

# November events reduce unemployment rate

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE number of big events in November boosted the demand for labor in November, slightly lowering the general unemployment rate to 3.7%.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) has indicated that the unemployment rate of local residents for September-November 2022 decreased by 0.3 percentage points to 4.7% from the previous period (August-October 2022). The underemployment rate also dropped 2.2 percentage points to 4.3%.

The labor force living in Macau totaled 375,900 and the labor force participation rate was 68.9%.

Total employment decreased by 1,100 from the previous period to 361,900, due to a drop in the number of non-resident workers living in Macau.

The number of employed residents totaled 282,000, an increase of 1,100. Analysed by industry, employment in gaming and junket activities and the transport and storage sector decreased while that of wholesale trade increased.

The number of the unemployed dropped by 700 from the previous period to 14,000. Among the unemployed searching for a new job, most had previously been engaged in gaming and junket activities and in the construction sector. Meanwhile, the proportion of new labor market entrants seeking their first job fell 3 percentage points to 11.4% of the total unemployed.

The number of the underemployed decreased by 8,200 from the previous period to 16,200, with a notable drop in the number of those engaged in gaming and junket activities.

AD

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For the purposes considered convenient, it is hereby announced that, by the Agreement for the Return of the Commercial Enterprise and for Compensation of Credits entered into between Sociedade de Empreendimentos, Limitada, with registered address at Avenida Sidónio Pais, n.º 67, r/c - J, Edifício Chong Pak San Chun, registered with the Macau Commercial Registry under no. 808 (SO), owner of the restaurant called MIRAMAR (the "Commercial Enterprise") and Café Asia, Importação e Exportação, Limitada, with registered address in Macau, at Estrada de Hac-Sá, Zona Nordeste da Praia de Hac-Sá, Coloane, registered at the Macau Commercial Registry under no. 14912 (SO), the parties terminated the Commercial Enterprise Management Agreement they had entered into on 31 December 2021 in connection with the management of Miramar Restaurant, with effect from 15 December 15 2022 (the "Agreement").

In this context, it is announced to any and all interested parties, namely suppliers, employees and other potential creditors, that as of 16 December 2022, Café Asia, Importação e Exportação, Limitada is no longer managing the Commercial Enterprise, and that, in addition, any debt relating to the Miramar Restaurant contracted until 15 December 2022 is the sole responsibility of Café Asia, Importação e Exportação, Limitada, and therefore it will not be assumed by the Miramar Restaurant or by its owner Sociedade de Empreendimentos, Limitada.

Finally, it is also announced that the attorneys Liao, Lili, Oliveira Alves, António Manuel and Chu Man I, constituted by Sociedade de Empreendimentos, Limitada through power of attorney granted on 31 December 2021, in connection with the Agreement, no longer have any powers in relation to Miramar Restaurant, and as such any debt or obligation contracted by them on behalf of Miramar Restaurant will not be assumed either by Miramar Restaurant or by its owner Sociedade de Empreendimentos, Limitada.

Macau, 5 January 2023.

Sociedade de Empreendimentos, Limitada

GAMING

# JUNKET OPERATORS STEADILY DIMINISHING

**T**HE number of gaming operators in Macau continues to fall, recording a drop of 21.7% in 2022, data from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau shows.

Following the crack-down on junket operators, the number of these gaming promoters in the region fell from 46 to just 36 this January – far from the 235 licensed junkets the city had in 2013.

In January 2021, there were only 46 junket

licensees for far fewer than the approved 85 license gaming promoters.

According to reports, junkets account for 75% of Macau's VIP gaming revenue, equating to around USD3 billion each year.

Back in December 2021, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng admitted that the existence of junket operators was a "problem" for Macau. Consequently, he said that when the gambling law was amended, the

government would enforce it rigorously.

In the big gaming law overhaul that has been implemented since January 1, the gaming promoters can only work with one gaming concessionaire at a time and, even so, this contract needs to be approved by the local government, among other requirements.

With the new law, junkets were required to pay MOP1.50 million to have their licenses renewed from January 1. LV

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# MGM stages Macau debut for Chinese 'sugar king'

ANTHONY LAM

**A**RGUABLY China's pioneer in fondant sculpture art, Zhou Yi will stage his first solo exhibition at MGM Cotai, with five of about 10 pieces exclusively made for Macau.

Dubbed the "Sugar King of China," the artist first started his career in learning Chinese sculpture and dough sculpture from masters of the field, and later on stumbled upon fondant art, teaching himself the craft.

After mastering both the eastern and western art forms, he became an internationally renowned artist, with his traditional Chinese dough sculptures made in the medium of fondant art.

Fondant art gained its fame in the western world. It refers to decoration or coating on baked pastries, usually cakes, using icing made from sugar. It is usually colorful.

In contrast to fondant coating commonly found on the market,



Zhou concentrates on creating artworks that celebrate the characteristics of Chinese culture. He also aspires to showcase commoner lifestyle through his works, which usually take at least two months to make from scratch.

For example, one art piece on show at this exhibition, which Zhou identified as the most challenging of all the pieces being showcased, is a nearly two-meter-

tall sculpture fully made with colored fondant, portraying the renowned Cantonese yum cha culture, accentuated by white sugar resembling steam that transforms into clouds, alongside a lion dancing, and a Chinese porcelain roof.

The dim sum is presented with painstaking details, such as little shrimps atop each siu mai, and the orangey tone protruding from the little dumplings' skin that re-

minds viewers of the fillings.

Overall, the exhibition revolves around the concepts of auspiciousness and courtesy, which are treasured in traditional Chinese culture. The exhibition leads its audiences to explore the charm of intangible cultural heritage and Chinese culture, and at the same time tells the great Chinese story through the marvelous craftsmanship of contemporary days.

Although set around the theme of tradition, Zhou tends to instill certain new takes and perspectives into existing conventions. This is demonstrated in his work depicting the imaginary Chinese figure Chang'e, which is also on show in Macau. He has painted the eyes of Chang'e red, which irritates some viewers, who say that this is not Chinese characteristic. In fact, the artist intended to make a connection between Chang'e and the rabbit she holds in her arms. Traditionally, Chang'e is believed to have ascended to the Moon with several rabbits.

He is also a big fan of Qing-dynasty reformist Zheng Guanying, who spent some years in Macau. Therefore, he has also made a sculpture depicting Zheng.

Zhou is also a multi-accolade winner, his most renowned prize being the Best Award at Cake International 2017. He was also commissioned to make showpieces for several national mega projects, such as the Beijing Winter Olympic Games and the National Museum of China.

He also runs programs to train newcomers who are interested in the art, but learning the basics takes at least three months.

The exhibition at MGM Cotai is a resident exhibit and open to the public every day from noon to 8 p.m. Entry is free-of-charge.

AD

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TRAVEL ALERT

# EU, BEIJING HEADING FOR COLLISION OVER CHINA'S COVID CRISIS

RAF CASERT, BRUSSELS

**T**HE European Union and China yesterday [Macau time] moved closer to a political standoff over the COVID-19 crisis, with Beijing vehemently rejecting travel restrictions some EU nations have started to impose that could be expanded in coming days.

An EU offer of help, including vaccine donations, was also as good as slapped down, with Beijing insisting the situation was "under control" and medical provisions "in adequate supply," government spokesperson Mao Ning said.

And as the 27-nation bloc moved closer to imposing some sort of restrictions on travelers from China, Beijing threatened countermeasures.

"We are firmly opposed to attempts to manipulate the COVID measures for political purposes and will take countermeasures based on the principle of reciprocity," Mao said.

Still, the EU seemed bent on taking some sort of joint action to ensure incoming passengers from China would not transmit any potential new variants to the continent.

A special EU health security committee joining representatives from the EU member nations discussed potential measures, and EU spokesman Tim McPhee said that "the overwhelming majority of countries are in favor of pre-departure testing" in China.

Sweden, which holds the EU presidency, also said in a



statement that "travelers from China need to be prepared for decisions being taken at short notice."

Fearful of being caught unawares like at the outset of the global pandemic in early 2020, the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response group is now set on Wednesday to decide whether to impose EU-wide entry requirements from China.

Several member nations announced individual efforts over the past week. At the same time, the EU's European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control insisted that the situation in China didn't pose an immediate overall health threat.

"The variants circulating in China are already circulating in the EU, and as such are not challenging for the immune response" of EU citizens, it said in its latest impact study published this week. Other scientists have also said limits on travel would have little impact

on containing the disease, but they also insisted on the value of looking for potential variants not in Europe at the moment.

Over the past week, EU na-

tions reacted in a chaotic cascade of national measures to the crisis in China, disregarding an earlier commitment to act in unity before anything else.

Italy was the first EU member in requiring coronavirus tests for airline passengers coming from China, but several others have said such measures might not be the best option to protect local populations since new variants now coming from China have already been around in Europe, often for many months.

France, Spain and Italy have already announced independent measures to implement tougher COVID-19 rules for passengers arriving from China.

France's government is requiring negative tests, and is urging French citizens to avoid nonessential travel to China. France is also reintroducing mask requirements on flights from China to France.

Spain's government said it would require all air passengers coming from China to have negative tests or proof of vaccination.

The United States has announced new testing requirements for all travelers from China, joining some Asian nations that had imposed restrictions because of a surge of infections.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said that "there's no cause for retaliation" by Beijing for countries "taking prudent health measures to protect their citizens" with COVID related travel restrictions on travelers coming from China. She said restrictions were "based on public health and science." **MDT/AP**

## CHINESE RUNAWAY ON WANTED LIST IN S.KOREA AFTER FLEEING COVID ISOLATION

**P**OLICE have put a Chinese national on a wanted list as he ran away after refusing to be isolated even though he tested positive for COVID-19 upon his arrival to South Korea, The Korea Herald reported yesterday.

According to the Incheon Metropolitan Police and disease control authorities, the 41-year-old was tested under the new COVID-19 mandate applied to travelers from China on Tuesday, and was confirmed to have the virus later in the evening. He was sent to a hotel in Yeongjongdo near Incheon International Airport but fled while waiting to be assigned a room, according to authorities.

According to the Korean newspaper, the police found via security camera footage that the man had visited a supermarket 300 meters away from the hotel but have not been able to track his whereabouts since. While putting him on the waiting list, the police said it would start a probe if the disease control agency files a complaint against him for violating

COVID-19 rules.

"If arrested, he will face up to one year in prison or a fine of up to 10 million won (\$7,846)," an official said. "He will receive a departure order and will be restricted from entering Korea for certain period."

They also said that the significant percentage of COVID-19 overseas inflow came from China, citing data.

"Of the 460 confirmed cases of overseas inflow last week, 142 people - about 31 percent - was from China," said Health Minister Cho Kyu-hong yesterday.

The government has been implementing strengthened COVID controls to entrants from China since Monday, including short-term visa restrictions and testing before and after entry, to prevent the influx of confirmed patients from China, where COVID-19 has recently surged. From Saturday, arrivals from Hong Kong and Macau will also be subjected to toughened measures. **MDT/THE KOREA HERALD**

ECONOMY

# Chinese regulators approve capital expansion for Ant Group

**C**HINESE regulators have said e-commerce giant Alibaba's finance affiliate Ant Group can raise \$1.5 billion for its consumer finance unit in an important step forward after the government called off a planned IPO two years ago and ordered the firm to restructure.

The China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC) in the southwestern city of



Chongqing said in a notice dated Dec. 30 that Ant's consumer credit unit had

gained approval to increase its capital to 18.5 billion yuan (\$2.7 billion)

from 8 billion yuan (\$1.16 billion).

The approval came weeks after Beijing signaled at an economic work conference that it would support technology firms to boost economic growth and create more jobs.

Under the latest capital expansion plan, Ant would contribute 9.25 billion yuan (\$1.34 billion) for a 50% stake of its Chongqing consumer credit unit, while a separate

company controlled by the government in the eastern city of Hangzhou, where Alibaba has its headquarters, would hold 10%.

The approval comes more than a year after an earlier plan to raise 22 billion yuan (\$3.2 billion) fell through when China Cinda Asset Management — a state-owned bad loans manager — pulled out of an agreement to acquire a 20% stake in Ant's consumer finance arm.

Ant is restructuring after Chinese regulators pulled the plug on its mega-IPO just days before its market debut in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

They then tightened regulations on the financial technology industry, ordering companies like Ant to operate more like banks and follow capital requirements.

This meant Ant had to clean up violations in some of its businesses, such as credit, insurance and wealth management.

The company is awaiting approval of licenses to operate as a financial holding company and as a personal credit ratings firm.

Alibaba shares in Hong Kong jumped over 7% yesterday. The company's New York-listed shares have fallen more than 23% in the past year. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

# PM Kishida vows deeper alliance with US on defense

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

**J**APANESE Prime Minister Fumio Kishida yesterday pledged to deepen his country's alliance with the United States under Japan's new defense policy that breaks from its exclusively self-defense-only stance in the face of growing regional tensions.

Kishida, speaking in a news conference after visiting Ise Shrine in central Japan, said he will visit Washington for talks with President Joe Biden to underscore the strength of the Japan-U.S. alliance and highlight closer cooperation between the countries under Japan's new security and defense strategies adopted last month.

The U.S. visit is part of Kishida's upcoming trip to most of the Group of Seven countries beginning Monday. Japan will host this year's G-7 summit in Hiroshima. Kishida said his meeting



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida speaks during his New Year's press conference in Ise, central Japan, yesterday

with Biden will be "very important" and "more significant than showing my face as G-7 president."

"We will show to the rest of the world an even stronger Japan-U.S. alliance, which is a lynchpin of Japanese security and diplomacy," Kishida said. "We will also show our further cooperation toward achieving a 'free

and open Indo-Pacific.'"

Japan, under the new security and defense plans, is purchasing hundreds of U.S.-developed Tomahawks and other long-range cruise missiles to preempt possible attacks and also building up defenses in southwestern Japan amid growing worries of a Taiwan emergency. Japanese media said the U.S. and Japan are expected

to discuss how they would cooperate in the event of a conflict over Taiwan.

Earlier Wednesday, the White House announced that Biden will host Kishida for economic and security consultations on Jan. 13.

Biden and Kishida are expected to discuss North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, amid concerns over the potential for another nuclear test by the reclusive nation, as well as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, stability across the Taiwan Strait, climate change and economic issues, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

The two leaders last met in Bali, Indonesia, during November's Group of 20 summit.

Kishida will also visit France, Italy, Britain and Canada to meet their leaders during his Jan. 9-15 trip, according to Japan's Foreign Ministry.

Kishida yesterday also vowed to tackle Japan's dire problem of

declining births, while pushing his "new capitalism" policy that he said will generate a "virtuous cycle of growth and distribution of wealth" to achieve a steady increase in salaries that have stalled for decades.

The number of babies born in Japan last year is expected to fall to a new record below 800,000 as part of a steady decline that is seen as eroding national strength.

"We cannot wait any longer," Kishida said. "From an economic perspective, we also need to allay the concerns of those saying they cannot invest in Japan because it's shrinking from declining births."

Kishida said the government will do more to expand support for childcare and reduce gender gaps in salaries and working environments to lower barriers for women.

Japan is the world's third-biggest economy but living costs are high and wage increases have been slow. The conservative government has lagged in making society more inclusive for children, women and minorities.

So far, the government's efforts to encourage people to have more babies has had limited impact despite introducing subsidy payments for pregnancy, childbirth and child care. **MDT/AP**

PHILIPPINES

# Authorities seek to cleanse police force of drug ties

**T**HE Philippines' interior secretary announced yesterday he has asked all police generals and full colonels to submit their courtesy resignation to clean the ranks of ties to illegal drugs.

Around 300 officers are covered by the directive, which was recommended by the national police chief, who will also submit his courtesy resignation, Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. said in a news conference.

"It appears that there is a big problem in our police force. It appears there are generals and colonels involved in drugs," he said. "We need to clean our ranks. We need the trust of the people."

More than a dozen police officers were arrested or relieved from their posts and put under investigation last year for their involvement in the drug trade. Abalos cited a recent case of law enforcers selling drugs in their office. The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency was also



Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. speaks during a news conference in Quezon City yesterday

subject to raids, arrests and dismissals in recent months.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte has earned international condemnation for his lethal war on drugs, which — according to police data — left over 6,200 suspects dead. Human rights groups have cited higher death tolls and accused some police officers of fabricating evidence to make it appear that victims violently resisted arrest.

In November, Philippine National Police Chief Rodolfo Azurin Jr. said he directed law enforcers to minimize

killings of people engaged in drug activities.

Abalos said it's difficult to fight a war against illegal drugs if supposed allies could shoot your back, and the resignations aim to prevent erring officers from covering their tracks or filing trumped-up charges.

A committee will be formed to review the records of police officials to determine if they are involved in the illegal drug trade, he said, adding that those who are not involved have nothing to worry about. **MDT/AP**

MYANMAR

# ARMY LEADER TOUTS ELECTION PLAN ON INDEPENDENCE DAY

**M**YANMAR'S ruling military leader, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, detailed plans for an election later this year and called for national unity in a speech yesterday as he led a ceremony marking the 75th anniversary of independence from Britain.

He urged other nations and international organizations, as well as his country's own people, to support "the genuine, discipline-flourishing multiparty democratic system," a concept the ruling military has defined as its goal since it ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

Min Aung Hlaing also announced a pardon for 7,012 prisoners to mark the occasion, along with a partial commutation of the sentences of other inmates not convicted of serious crimes. Some political detainees were among those being released, but there was no sign that the gesture would include Suu Kyi, who



Myanmar's Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, head of the military council

has been held virtually incommunicado by the military since it seized power.

The 77-year-old Suu Kyi is serving 33 years imprisonment after being convicted of a series of politically tinged prosecutions brought by the military, including for illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies, violating coronavirus restrictions, breaching the country's official secrets act, sedition, election fraud and corruption charges. She has been

held since June in a custom-built bungalow at the main prison in the capital, Naypyitaw, kept company by three women guards but isolated from other prisoners.

Suu Kyi's supporters and independent analysts say the cases against her constitute an attempt to discredit her and legitimize the military's seizure of power while keeping her from taking part in the election that the military has said would take place by August this year. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu (center) walks escorted by a group of officers as he inspects Russian troops at an undisclosed location in Ukraine, last December

PUTIN'S WAR

# Russia says phone use allowed Ukraine to target its troops

FELIPE DANA, KYIV

**U**NAUTHORIZED use of cell phones by Russian soldiers led to a deadly Ukrainian rocket attack on the facility where they were stationed, according to the Russian military, as it raised the death toll from the weekend attack to 89.

Gen. Lt. Sergei Sevryukov said in a statement yesterday [Macau time] that phone signals allowed Kyiv's forces to "determine the coordinates of the location of military personnel" and launch a strike.

The Russian military is taking unspecified measures to "prevent similar tragic incidents in the future," Sevryukov said, and promised to punish officials responsible for the blunder.

The attack, one of the deadliest on the Kremlin's forces since the start of the war over 10 months ago, occurred one minute into the new year, according to Sevryukov.

It was the latest blow to the Kremlin's military prestige as it struggles to

progress with its invasion of its neighbor and stirred renewed criticism inside Russia of the way the war is being conducted amid a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Ukrainian forces fired six rockets from a U.S.-provided HIMARS multiple launch system at a building "in the area of Makiivka" where the soldiers were stationed. Two rockets were downed but four hit the building and detonated, prompting the collapse of the structure.

Details of the strike have trickled out in recent days.

U.K. intelligence officials said yesterday that Moscow's "unprofessional" military practices were likely partly to blame for the high casualty rate in Makiivka.

"Given the extent of the damage, there is a realistic possibility that ammunition was being stored near to troop accommodation, which detonated during the strike, creating secondary explosions," the U.K. Defense Ministry said in a Twitter post.

In the same post, the ministry said that the

building struck by Ukrainian missiles was little more than 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from the front line near Avdiivka, within "one of the most contested areas of the conflict." Both Makiivka and Avdiivka, a key target of Russia's grinding offensive in the Donetsk region, lie on the outskirts of its namesake capital.

"The Russian military has a record of unsafe ammunition storage for well before the current war, but this incident highlights how unprofessional practices contribute to Russia's high casualty rate," the update added.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin-appointed leader of the Donetsk region, one of four that Moscow illegally annexed in September, on Wednesday praised the "courage and true heroism" of the dead Russian soldiers.

Denis Pushilin said in a Telegram post that some of those killed tried to pull their comrades from the burning building.

In Samara, in southwestern Russia, locals gathered for an Orthodox service in memory of the dead.

The service was followed by a minute's silence, and flowers were laid at a Soviet-era war memorial, the state RIA Novosti agency reported. Unconfirmed reports in Russian-language media said the victims were mobilized reservists from the region.

The Russian Defense Ministry, in a rare admission of losses, initially said the strike killed 63 troops. But as emergency crews sifted through the rubble of the building, the death toll mounted. The regiment's deputy commander was among the dead.

Unconfirmed reports put the death toll much higher.

The Strategic Communications Directorate of Ukraine's armed forces claimed Sunday that around 400 mobilized Russian soldiers were killed in a vocational school building in Makiivka and about 300 more were wounded. That claim couldn't be independently verified. The Russian statement said the strike occurred "in the area of Makiivka" and didn't mention the vocational school. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1985 ISRAEL ENDS MAJOR ETHIOPIAN RESCUE MISSION

Israel has airlifted thousands of Jewish Ethiopian refugees out of Sudan, it has emerged.



Operation Moses, which has been taking place in secret since 21 November 1984, has been suspended since news of the covert airlift became public.

Press leaks have forced the Israeli Government to admit that about 8,000 Ethiopians fleeing famine-struck Ethiopia have now arrived in Israel.

The Arab world has been angered by Khartoum's decision to co-operate with Israel and allow charter planes to fly from Sudan - which does not recognise the country.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, has insisted that Operation Moses will continue.

Jewish people from Ethiopia are said to be able to trace their lineage back almost 3,000 years and may be the descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

They are a minority in Ethiopia where the major religions are Christianity and Islam.

The Jewish community has suffered discrimination, particularly in recent years under Marxist President Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam who prohibited the practice of Judaism and the teaching of Hebrew.

The operation began following reports last September that more Jewish refugees from Ethiopia were arriving in Sudan, and many were dying from malnutrition.

Some of them, who now live in Israel, claim that details of Operation Moses was leaked by Israelis who have been alarmed at the number of Jewish refugees from Ethiopia arriving in the country.

Until recently they were not given Jewish status and public opinion in Israel on the government's motives for launching Operation Moses are mixed.

Some believe its reasons are humanitarian, but others think the refugees from Ethiopia are simply the latest immigrants to settle in Israel and raise the numbers now living there.

There are now between 10,000 and 15,000 Jewish people from Ethiopia living in Israel.

Estimates suggest there is still a similar figure living in famine-hit villages in the Ethiopian province of Gondar and 1,000 in refugee camps in Sudan.

Jewish people from Ethiopia who live in Israel claim the publicity surrounding the operation has endangered the safety of refugees in Sudan.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

It is estimated that around 4,000 Jewish people from Ethiopia died making the journey by foot to Sudan.

The US completed the airlift when it launched Operation Joshua in the same year.

In 1991, Israel launched Operation Solomon and airlifted 15,000 Ethiopian Jewish people.

There are now around 80,000 Jewish people from Ethiopia living in Israel, but they have faced difficulties assimilating into society.

According to a government report in 1999, many cannot write Hebrew and the unemployment rate among the Ethiopian community in Israel is at least three times the national average.

Coming from a subsistence economy some found it hard to find work in an industrialised country. But nearly all young Ethiopian males have been assimilated into the army during national service.

An independent report has said that Jewish people from Ethiopia were "no longer viewed as a curiosity, but as a familiar part of Israel's ethnic mosaic".

In January 2004, the Israeli government announced that it would speed up the removal of 18,000 Jewish people still living in Ethiopia.

The Falasha Mura community, as they are known, say they are the last remaining Jewish community in Ethiopia and have long been persecuted for their beliefs.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES** Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Take a close look at contracts and agreements that have been offered to you. You could be disillusioned if you let relative in on your emotional thoughts.

**TAURUS** Apr. 20-May. 20  
Stretch the truth, and you may get blamed for something you didn't do. Put your efforts into physical fitness programs or competitive sports.

**GEMINI** May. 21-Jun. 21  
Travel and social activity will bring about interesting talks, not to mention contacts. You may have taken on a little too much, but you will enjoy every minute of it.

**CANCER** Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Older relatives may make unreasonable demands. Don't make any drastic changes or begin new projects today. Speak of your future goals, intentions, and commitments.

**LEO** Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
Concentrate on your career and on making money. You can help them with difficult projects. Don't overdo it. You need to enjoy yourself.

**VIRGO** Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Some of the best opportunities will crop up if you keep an open mind. You can do well on stage or behind the scenes, the choice is yours.

**LIBRA** Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Be careful not to get roped into uncertain joint financial deals. A change of attitude has probably disrupted your home environment.

**SCORPIO** Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
Opportunities for new friendships are apparent. Don't rely on others to do your work. Romance will be yours if you get out and do things in large groups.

**SAGITTARIUS** Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
You need to keep the peace and you will have to bend in order to do so. Secret affairs will only lead to heartache. Alienation may be the result of a misunderstanding.

**CAPRICORN** Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Don't be too hard on yourself. Take a second look; difficulties with appliances, water, or electricity in your home may be evident.

**AQUARIUS** Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Try to stay calm, and whatever you do, don't nag. You are best to ask questions if you aren't certain about issues that are confronting you. Partnerships may be plentiful.

**PISCES** Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Don't be too confident that coworkers are on your side. Overindulgence will mean poor health. Relatives may not be telling you the whole truth about a family situation.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

  

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-8	5	cloudy
Changchun	-15	-6	fine
Chengdu	7	13	fine
Chongqing	8	11	overcast
Fuzhou	10	19	overcast
Guangzhou	11	21	cloudy
Guiyang	2	6	overcast
Haikou	14	19	rain
Hangzhou	1	12	rain
Harbin	-19	-9	fine
Hefei	-1	11	fine
Nanjing	1	13	cloudy
Shanghai	3	12	cloudy
Taipei	14	20	rain
Wuhan	-1	12	overcast
Hong Kong	14	19	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-22	-4	snow
Frankfurt	7	11	rain
Paris	11	14	rain
London	7	13	rain
New York	7	12	cloudy

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Sphere; 5- Gal of song; 8- Top-notch; 12- Nabisco cookie; 13- Disinfectant brand; 15- Career golfers; 16- Fly in the ointment; 17- Diciembre follower; 18- Responsibility; 19- Connective; 22- Hydrocarbon suffix; 23- High-pitched; 24- Student's final; 26- Carte blanche offer; 29- Comes up; 31- Posed; 32- Heron, usually white; 34- Fungal infection of the skin or nails; 36- Poses; 38- Unconventional; 40- Arouse; 41- Fortune-telling cards; 43- Civil rights org.; 45- Aardvark morse; 46- Napkin fabric; 48- Ripe for a trial lawyer; 50- Composed; 51- Tankard filler; 52- Fulfilled; 54- Thoughtful; 61- The eyes have it; 63- Back in; 64- Antiquing agent; 65- Booty; 66- Conger catcher; 67- Ike's ex; 68- The \_\_\_ Ranger rode a horse called Silver; 69- John \_\_\_ Passos; 70- Finishes;

**DOWN** 1- Winter pear; 2- Florence's river; 3- Incline; 4- Bottleneck; 5- Match up; 6- I'd hate to break up \_\_\_; 7- Actress Singer; 8- Mil. address; 9- Decorative; 10- Person, place, or thing; 11- "\_\_\_ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto); 13- Freckle; 14- Bear; 20- Peter Fonda title role; 21- Off-ramp; 25- Garage sale sign; 26- Nymph presiding over rivers; 27- Allurement; 28- Main stem of a tree; 29- Gillette razors; 30- Paris divider; 31- Fast flier; 33- Zeta follower; 35- Illustrative craft; 37- Body of an organism; 39- Republic in South America; 42- Bath powder; 44- "\_\_\_ Rider" starred Clint Eastwood; 47- Campfire treat; 49- Rebuke; 52- Factory; 53- Switch back?; 55- Require; 56- WWII battle site; 57- Angers; 58- Not "fer"; 59- Look after; 60- Historical periods; 62- Canonized Mlle.;



**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

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



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TOURISM

# WHERE ARE THE GULF ARAB TOURISTS? ISRAEL'S HOPES FALL SHORT

ISABEL DEBRE, JERUSALEM

WHEN Israel struck an agreement with the United Arab Emirates to open diplomatic ties in 2020, it brought an electrifying sense of achievement to a country long ostracized in the Middle East.

Officials insisted that Israel's new ties with the UAE, and soon after with Bahrain, would go beyond governments and become society-wide pacts, stoking mass tourism and friendly exchanges between people long at odds.

But over two years since the breakthrough accords, the expected flood of Gulf Arab tourists to Israel has been little more than a trickle. Although more than half a million Israelis have flocked to oil-rich Abu Dhabi and skyscraper-studded Dubai, just 1,600 Emirati citizens have visited Israel since it lifted coronavirus travel restrictions last year, the Israeli Tourism Ministry told The Associated Press.

The ministry does not know how many Bahrainis have visited Israel because, it said, "the numbers are too small."

"It's still a very weird and sensitive situation," said Morsi Hija, head of the forum for Arabic-speaking tour guides in Israel. "The Emiratis feel like they've done something wrong in coming here."

The lack of Emirati and Bahraini tourists reflects Israel's long-standing image problem in the Arab world and reveals the limits of the Abraham Accords, experts say.

Even as bilateral trade between Israel and the UAE has exploded from \$11.2 million in 2019 to \$1.2



A view of the Dome of the Rock shrine at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City

billion last year, the popularity of the agreements in the UAE and Bahrain has plummeted since the deals were signed, according to a survey by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, an American think tank.

In the UAE, support fell to 25% from 47% in the last two years. In Bahrain, just 20% of the population supports the deal, down from 45% in 2020. In that time, Israel and Gaza militants fought a devastating war and violence in the occupied West Bank surged to its highest levels in years.

Israeli officials say Gulf Arab tourism to Israel is a missing piece that would move the agreements beyond security and diplomatic ties. Tourist visits from Egypt and Jordan, the first two countries to reach peace with Israel, also are virtually nonexistent.

"We need to encourage (Emiratis) to come for the first time. It's an important mission," Amir Hayek, Israeli ambassador to the UAE, told the AP. "We need to promote tourism so people will know each other and understand each other."

Israeli tourism officials flew to the UAE last month in a marketing push to spread the word that Israel is a safe and attractive destination. The ministry said it's now pitching Tel Aviv — Israel's commercial and entertainment hub — as a big draw for Emiratis.

Tour agents say that so far, betting on Jerusalem has backfired. The turmoil of the contested city has turned off Emiratis and Bahrainis, some of whom have faced backlash from Palestinians who see normalization as a betrayal of their cause. The Palesti-

nian struggle for independence from Israel enjoys broad support across the Arab world.

"There's still a lot of hesitation coming from the Arab world," said Dan Feferman, director of Sharaka, a group that promotes people-to-people exchanges between Israel and the Arab world. "They expect (Israel) to be a conflict zone, they expect to be discriminated against." After leading two trips of Bahrainis and Emiratis to Israel, Sharaka struggled to find more Gulf Arab citizens interested in visiting, he said.

When a group of Emirati and Bahraini social media influencers in 2020 visited the Al Aqsa Mosque compound, the third-holiest site in Islam, they were spat on and pelted with shoes in Jerusalem's Old City, said Hija, their tour guide.

When another group of Emirati officials visited the flashpoint site accompanied by Israeli police, they drew the ire of the grand mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, who issued a religious edict against Emiratis visiting the mosque under Israeli supervision.

Most Emiratis and Bahrainis who have visited Israel say they forgo their national dress and headscarves in order not to attract attention.

The Islamic Waqf, which administers the mosque, declined to answer questions about the number of Emirati and Bahraini visitors and their treatment at the compound.

Palestinian rage against Emiratis is not confined to the sacred esplanade. Emirati citizens visiting and studying in Israel say they face frequent death threats and online attacks.

"Not everyone can handle the pressure," said Sumaiyah Almeihiri, a 31-year-old Emirati from Dubai studying to be a nurse at the University of Haifa. "I didn't give into the threats, but fear is preventing a lot of Emiratis from going."

The fear of anti-Arab racism in Israel can also drive Gulf Arabs away. "If you bring them here and don't treat them in a sensitive way, they'll never come back and tell all their friends to stay away," Hija said.

Benjamin Netanyahu, who returned for a sixth term as prime minister last week, has pledged to strengthen agreements with Bahrain, Morocco, the UAE and Sudan. Formal ties with Sudan remain elusive in the wake of a military coup and in the absence of a parliament to ratify its U.S.-brokered normalization deal with Israel.

As a chief architect of the accords, Netanyahu also hopes to expand the circle of countries and reach a similar deal with Saudi Arabia. **MDT/AP**

## CORPORATE BITS

### Sands China announces discretionary allowance for team members



Sands China Ltd. is paying a discretionary allowance, equivalent to one month's salary, to more than 23,000 eligible full-time team members on Jan. 18,

2023 — in gratitude of team members' dedication and contributions in 2022. A total of 99% of Sands China's total employment is benefiting from either the

discretionary allowance or the company's sales incentive scheme.

In a message to team members, Dr. Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China Ltd., said: "These special times have tested us over and over; however, we have no doubt that we will continue to demonstrate the ability to thrive. [...] In great appreciation of your effort, and on behalf of the company, I am pleased to announce that all eligible team members will receive a discretionary allowance, equivalent to one month's salary, on January 18, 2023."

### Melco hosts Christmas-themed activities for the community



Melco Resorts & Entertainment continues to bring warmth and joy to the local community this Christmas through its 'Simple Acts of Kindness 2.0' volunteering initiative.

In collaboration with the company's community partners, approximately 220 Melco volunteer team members

have, in recent weeks, dedicated "over 400 hours to more than 540 children, youth and elderly beneficiaries," according to a statement issued by the gaming operator.

The varied Christmas-themed activities and events included a gingerbread man pastry-making workshop

with Mong-Ha Children and Youth Home, where beneficiaries learnt to bake festive goodies with chefs from Studio City's culinary team, and festive lamp decoration workshops hosted at Kids' City in Melco's City of Dreams with beneficiaries from Centro de Serviços Integrados de Apoio à Família — Fonte de Alegria e de Energia and Macau Autism Association.

Melco Volunteer Team continued its annual Christmas visit to Concordia School for Special Education, and the primary section students of Escola de S. Jose Ka Ho were invited to attend dedicated Christmas carnival event at Kids' City.

FOOTBALL

# Pelé buried at cemetery in Brazilian city he made famous

MAURICIO SAVARESE, SANTOS

**B**RAZIL said a final farewell to Pelé yesterday [Macau time], burying the legend who unified the bitterly divided country.

Newly inaugurated President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva paid his respects at Vila Belmiro, the stadium where Pelé played for most of his career.

Pelé died last week at age 82 and was laid to rest in Santos, the city where he became famous after moving there at age 15 to play for Santos FC. The funeral Mass was held at the team's Vila Belmiro stadium before his black casket was driven through the streets of the of Santos in a firetruck.

It was taken into the cemetery as bands played the team's official song and a Roman Catholic hymn. Before the golden-wrapped casket arrived,



The casket of late Brazilian soccer great Pele is draped in the Brazilian and Santos FC soccer club flags as his remains are transported from Vila Belmiro stadium to the cemetery during his funeral procession in Santos

attendees sang samba songs that Pelé liked.

Some Brazilian soccer legends weren't there.

"Where's Ronaldo Nazario? Where's Kaká, where's Neymar?" asked Claudionor Alves, 67, who works at a

bakery next to the stadium. "Do they think they will be remembered like Pelé will? These guys didn't want to stop

their vacations, that's the problem."

Rows of shirts with Pelé's No. 10 were placed behind one of the stadium's goals, waving in the city's summer winds. A section of the stands filled up with bouquets of flowers placed by mourners and star players — Neymar and Ronaldo among them — from around the world as loudspeakers played the song "Eu sou Pelé" ("I am Pelé") recorded by him.

Another fan and friend in line was Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Gilmar Mendes.

"It is a very sad moment, but we are now seeing the real meaning of this legendary player to our country," Mendes told journalists. "My office has shirts signed by Pelé, a picture of him as a goalkeeper, also signed by him. DVDs, photos, a big collection of him."

Pelé had undergone treatment for colon cancer since 2021. The medical center where he had been hospitalized said he died of multiple organ failure as a result of the cancer.

Pelé led Brazil to World Cup titles in 1958, 1962 and 1970 and remains one of the team's all-time leading scorers with 77 goals. Neymar tied Pelé's record during this year's World Cup in Qatar. **MDT/AP**

FOOTBALL

# RONALDO REJECTED OFFERS ELSEWHERE FOR TOP SALARY SAUDI DEAL

JAMES ROBSON, RIYADH

**C**HRISTIANO Ronaldo was presented as the superstar new signing of Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr yesterday [Macau time], with the team's president saying the Portugal great deserves to be the highest paid player on the planet.

Ronaldo said he turned down "many clubs" around the world to complete one of the most surprising transfers in the sport's history, which could reportedly earn him up to \$200 million a year.

Al Nassr president Musalli Almuammar would not confirm the exact figures in the two-and-a-half-year contract.

"He is the best player in football history so it is normal he will be the highest in terms of cost or salary," Almuammar said. "This is something that he really deserves, so the



Cristiano Ronaldo and wife Georgina Rodriguez in Riyadh

amount of money he will take, he really deserves."

Ronaldo was presented to thousands of fans at Al Nassr's Mrsool Park against a backdrop of fireworks and smoke machines.

The former Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus forward will play in the Saudi Pro League after rejecting offers from Europe, North America and beyond.

"I'm so proud to make

this big decision in my life. In Europe my work is done. I won everything and played for the most important clubs in Europe. This is a new challenge," Ronaldo said at a news conference where he only answered questions from the master of ceremonies, despite sitting in a room full of journalists.

The 37-year-old Portugal international, who has won five Ballon d'Or awards for the best player in the world and five Champions League titles, will play outside of Europe for the first time in his storied career.

"Nobody knows this, but I had many opportunities in Europe, Brazil, Australia, the U.S., even Portugal, many clubs tried to sign me. I gave my word to this club," Ronaldo added. "I want to give a different vision of this country and football. This is why I took this opportunity."

Excitement built throughout the day ahead of Ronaldo's introduction, with fans making their way to the stadium early in anticipation of his arrival. **MDT/AP**



**BENFICAMACAU ACADEMY**  
澳門賓菲加體育學校



**FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS**

**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**RECIPROCAL ARRIVAL MEASURES JUSTIFIED**

Authoritative medical experts from different countries have said that entry restrictions on travelers arriving from the Chinese mainland, or with any travel history there within seven days, are unnecessary. China firmly opposes some countries' politicization of their virus control measures for arrivals exclusively from the mainland.

These discriminatory practices are devoid of any scientific basis and do not serve their stated purpose. Instead, they seek to strengthen the image some China-bashers in Western countries are dying to create that China is the source of all troubles.

But that has not prevented China from acting responsibly as the major exporter and donor of essential medical supplies and life necessities for the rest of the world, including those countries doing nothing to control spillovers of the virus or taking the initiative to smear China with baseless charges, slander and lies.

China always distinguishes the few bad apples from the rest of the foreign peoples, and it has never stopped doing all it can to help foreign countries overcome their practical difficulties while protecting its own people from the virus.

And contrary to the claims of those trying to tar China with a malign brush, the country has been sharing relevant information and data in an open and transparent manner with the international community, including sharing the genome data of the virus from the latest COVID cases in China via the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data. Therefore, it is fully justified for the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China to say, on the one hand, that China stands ready to step up communication with the rest of the international community and work together to prevail over COVID, and on the other, that it firmly rejects using COVID measures for political purposes and "will take corresponding measures in response to varying situations based on the principle of reciprocity".

Predictably this has provoked a reaction from the China-bashing politicians, who claim it is proof of China's "double standard", referring to the fact that China has carried out stringent entry virus control measures for three years.

However, as always, their smears are selective as they intentionally omit the fact that many countries controlled their borders at that time as well. Nor did China target arrivals from any particular country or region. The measures were an integral part of the country's overall COVID policy, based on science and the actual pandemic situation. So there are fundamental differences between the politicized and discriminatory entry restriction measures arrivals from the mainland are being subjected to now and those that China previously applied.

It is these China-bashers that have been criticizing China's strict virus control policies as a grave mistake, and it is also these people that are doing the same now that the country has lifted its controls at the proper time. That is not a coincidence.

**MEGA MILLIONS JACKPOT CLIMBS TO \$940M AFTER NO WINNER**

The Mega Millions jackpot increased to an estimated \$940 million after another drawing resulted in plenty of losers but not a single grand prize winner.

The numbers drawn late yesterday [Macau time] were: 25, 29, 33, 41, 44 and gold Mega Ball 18.

The next drawing is scheduled to be held Friday night.

The new \$940 million jackpot is for a winner who chooses to be paid through an annuity over 29 years. Nearly all winners opt for a cash payout, which for Friday night's drawing would be an estimated \$483.5 million.

In yesterday's drawing, there were more than 2.9 million winning tickets of various amounts including three \$4 million tickets sold in Arizona, Mississippi and South Dakota, Mega Millions said in a statement.

The lack of a winner of an estimated \$785 million jackpot means there have been 23 straight drawings without anyone taking the top prize.

The new jackpot will remain the sixth-largest jackpot in U.S. history. The jackpot-winning drought isn't surprising given the daunting odds of one in 302.6 million of winning the top prize.

**THE BUZZ**



A classic American convertible car passes beside the United States embassy as Cuban flags fly at the Anti-Imperialist Tribune, a massive stage on the Malecon seaside promenade in Havana

**US REOPENING VISA AND CONSULAR SERVICES AT EMBASSY IN CUBA**

MEGAN JANETSKY,  
 HAVANA

The United States Embassy in Cuba is reopening visa and consular services today [Macau time], the first time it has done so since a spate of unexplained health incidents among diplomatic staff in 2017 slashed the American presence in Havana.

The Embassy confirmed this week it will begin processing immigrant visas, with a priority placed on permits to reunite Cubans with family in the U.S., and others like the diversity visa lottery.

The resumption comes amid the greatest migratory flight from Cuba in decades, which has placed pressure on the Biden administration to open more legal pathways to Cubans and start a dialogue with the Cuban government, despite a historically tense relationship.

They are anticipated to give out at least 20,000 visas a year, though it's just a drop in the bucket of the migratory tide, which is fueled by intensifying economic and political crises on the island.

In late December, U.S. authorities reported stopping Cubans 34,675 times along the Mexico

border in November, up 21% from 28,848 times in October.

Month-to-month, that number has gradually risen. Cubans are now the second-largest nationality after Mexicans appearing on the border, U.S. Customs and Border Protection data shows.

The growing migration is due to a complex array of factors, including economic, energy and political crises, as well as deep discontent among Cubans.

While the vast majority of Cuban migrants head to the U.S. via flights to Nicaragua and cross by land at the U.S. border with Mexico, thousands more have also taken a dangerous voyage by sea. They travel 90 miles to the Florida coast, often arriving in rickety, precariously constructed boats packed with migrants.

The exodus from Cuba is also compounded by rising migration to the U.S. from other countries like Haiti and Venezuela, forcing the U.S. government to grapple with a growingly complex situation on its southern border.

The renewal of visa work at the embassy comes after a series of migration talks and visits by U.S. officials to Havana in

recent months, and may also be the sign of a slow thawing between the two governments.

The small steps are far cry from relations under President Barack Obama, who eased many American Cold War-era sanctions during his time in office and made a historic visit to the island in 2016.

Visa and consular services were closed on the island in 2017 after embassy staff were afflicted in a series of health incidents, alleged sonic attacks that remain largely unexplained.

As a result, many Cubans who wanted to legally migrate to the U.S. have had to fly to places like Guyana to do so before migrating or reuniting with family.

While relations have always been tense between Cuba and the U.S., they were heightened following the embassy closure and the Trump administration's tightening of sanctions on Cuba.

Under President Joe Biden, the U.S. has eased some restrictions on things like remittances and family travel from Miami to Cuba, but has fallen short of hopes by many in Cuba that a Biden presidency would return the island to its "Obama era." **MDT/AP**



USA Republican leader Kevin McCarthy said there's no scenario in which he'll drop his bid to become House speaker despite failing to win multiple rounds of voting, a historic defeat that brought the first day of the new Congress to an abrupt, messy end. McCarthy promised to fight to the finish — encouraged by a phone call from Donald Trump — despite a highly uncertain path ahead amid opposition from the chamber's most conservative members. Needing 218 votes in the full House, McCarthy got just 203 votes in two rounds.



USA A Missouri inmate was put to death yesterday [Macau time] for a 2003 killing, in what is believed to be the first execution of a transgender woman in the U.S. Amber McLaughlin, 49 (pictured), was convicted of stalking and killing a former girlfriend, then dumping the body near the Mississippi River in St. Louis. McLaughlin's fate was sealed earlier in the day when Republican Gov. Mike Parson declined a clemency request.



USA A group of video game testers has formed Microsoft's first labor union in the U.S., which will also be the largest in the video game industry. The Communications Workers of America said yesterday [Macau time] that a majority of about 300 quality-assurance workers at Microsoft video game subsidiary ZeniMax Studios has voted to join the union.