



**EIGHT WAX STATUES CRAFTED BY MADAME TUSSAUDS' TEAM IN HONG KONG WILL BE ON DISPLAY AT THE MACAO GRAND PRIX MUSEUM FROM THE END OF MARCH**

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**THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RELATED BORDER RESTRICTIONS CAUSED A SHARP DECREASE IN CRIMES REPORTED OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS**

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AP PHOTO



**China** BGI Group, one of the world's biggest genetics analysis companies, said yesterday it never would be involved in human rights abuses after the U.S. government said there was a danger some of its units might contribute to Chinese surveillance. Three BGI units were among Chinese companies added to an "entity list" last week that limits access to U.S. technology on security or human rights grounds.

AP PHOTO



**Indonesian** rescuers and firefighters yesterday searched for three people who were still missing after a large fire spread from a fuel storage depot in the capital and killed at least 19 people. The Plumpang fuel storage station, operated by state-run oil and gas company Pertamina, is near a densely populated area in the Tanah Merah neighborhood in North Jakarta. It supplies 25% of Indonesia's fuel needs.

AP PHOTO

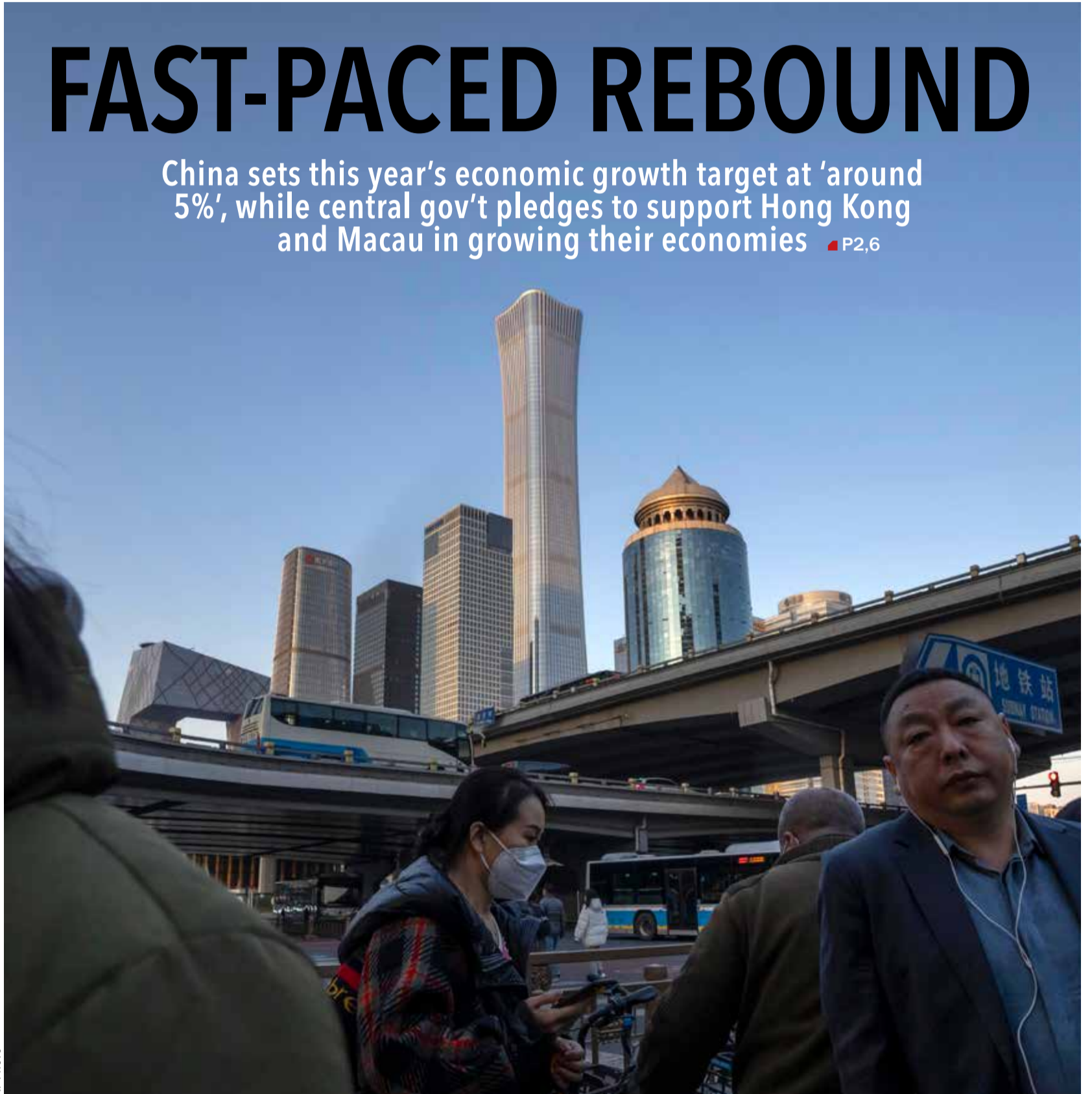


**India** Hundreds of women in two north Indian towns celebrated Holi, the Hindu festival of colors, by playfully hitting men with wooden sticks in response to their teasing as part of a ritual. After two years of subdued revelry due to COVID-19, the Holi celebrations that began last week recreated the legend of the Hindu god Krishna spraying his consort Radha and her friends with red, yellow, green and saffron colors. The women were from Nandgaon, the hometown of Krishna, and the men were from Barsana, the legendary hometown of Radha.

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# FAST-PACED REBOUND

China sets this year's economic growth target at 'around 5%', while central gov't pledges to support Hong Kong and Macau in growing their economies P2,6



AP PHOTO

## ECONOMY

### MACAU'S GDP DIPS 27% IN 2022

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## MDT REPORT

### FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS THRIVING

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**USE OF CURRENT CONSUMPTION SUBSIDY ENDS JUNE 30**

The government reminds eligible residents the current round of consumption subsidy, valued at MOP8,000, will end on June 30. Those who have signed up for the last round will be eligible for this round. Those who opted for mobile payment methods have had the amount credited to their accounts. In contrast, those who opted for the Macau Pass consumption card should get a top up at any of the over 170 tap-and-recharge kiosks on or before April 28. For these people, card balances must be lower than MOP10 to be eligible for a top-up. Failure to do so before the deadline will result in total loss of the subsidy.

**IAM ORDERS TO RECALL A DRIED APRICOT PRODUCT**

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement that through regular inspections, it has detected in a dried apricot product a type of sweetener that is not allowed to be used in that type of food. It has ordered retailers to suspend and recall the product. The concerned brand of apricot product is Hazarbey and is produced in Turkey. The batch number concerned is 440076595/1-51-14, had a manufacturing date of 01.06.2022 and an expiry date of 01.09.2023. A picture released by the IAM showed that the importing agency is a company is Shenzhen.

**CE SITS IN NPC MEETING**

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng yesterday sat in the First Meeting of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing. According to a statement from the government, he listened to and learned from the government work report addressed by Premier Li Keqiang. Ho emphasized that it is the inaugural year of the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), adding that this year's "Two Sessions" will have exceptional meaning to national development in the new era and the implementation of 'One country, two systems.' He also thanked the national government's support of Macau.

**EVENTS**

**GOV'T EXPECTS 14,000 MICE VIEWERS TO VISIT CITY IN MARCH, APRIL**

ANTHONY LAM

**A**NNUAL meetings and academic forums to be held in Macau over the next two months will attract over 14,000 participants from outside of Macau, the local MICE bureau has estimated.

In a recent statement, the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) has revealed there will be several MICE events held in Macau in March and April. As per its estimation, over 14,000 visitors will come to Macau for these events.

It highlighted that a large enterprise has recently held its annual meeting in Macau. The event attracted nearly 2,000 business travelers from various provinces and municipalities in mainland China.

The IPIM revealed that as well as participating in the annual meeting, these travelers also toured the city and experienced facilities in resorts, such as digital art installations, picnic and indoor high jumps.

They also visited local tourist attractions such as museums, temples and influencer-highlighted small shops.

The bureau-level entity em-



phasized that the organizer of the annual meeting praised the city's ability to host large scale MICE events, for it has international-standard hardware, helpful staff and the flexibility to handle ad hoc situations.

The IPIM added that MICE and complementary facilities being located at the same resorts in Macau incentivize MICE organizers to pick Macau as their destination.

The IPIM also announced over the weekend that Macau had se-

cured the organizing rights for the 2024 edition of the Asia-Pacific Conference of The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI) Asia-Pacific Conference.

The last time Macau organized the event was in 2008.

The news was confirmed at this year's event. This year's UFI Asia-Pacific Conference was held March 2 and 3 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It is expected the event will be held around the same time next year.

During the event, acting pre-

sident U U Sang of the IPIM met with Dato' Sri Dr. Abdul Khani Bin Daud, CEO of the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), Michael Duck, UFI president and Kai Hattendorf, UFI managing director and CEO shared Macau's MICE intelligence.

The IPIM described the news as elating. "We believe that with the appeal of UFI, one of the most representative associations in the exhibition industry, exhibition managers and professional exhibition organizers from all over the world will be attracted to Macau to participate in the event," the IPIM said.

"This will not only help enhance Macau's international status and influence as well as expand the space for international cooperation, but also promote Macau's various industries and promote the strategy of moderately diversified development of Macau's economy," the IPIM added.

The bidding process started before 2019 and the winner was confirmed in that year for the organizing rights for the year-2020 events. Due to the effects related to Covid-19 that year, the event was postponed to 2024, with Macau winning the bid again.

**TWO SESSIONS**

**Progress made in work related to HK, Macau, Taiwan: Report**

**C**HINA has made fresh progress in work related to its Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan over the past five years, according to a government work report submitted to the national legislature for deliberation yesterday.

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has been formulated and put into effect, and the principle that Hong Kong and Macau should be ad-



ministered by patriots has been applied in these two regions, the report noted.

"We have ensured that

Hong Kong has entered a new stage in which it has restored order and is set to thrive," said the report.

"The central government has promoted the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and supported Hong Kong and Macau in developing their economies, improving living standards, responding to Covid-19 and maintaining stability, it said.

The report added that efforts have also been made to resolutely fight separatism and interference, and to further promote the peaceful de-

velopment of cross-strait relations.

Meanwhile, the Chinese central government will support Hong Kong and Macau in growing their economies and improving people's lives, and maintain long-term prosperity and stability in the two regions, according to a government work report.

It said the central government will remain committed to law-based governance in Hong Kong and Macau, and ensure that constitutional order in the two regions is upheld as stipulated in China's Constitution and the basic laws of the two regions, and that Hong Kong and Macau are administered by patriots. **MDT/XINHUA**

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# Financial institutions thriving in Macau, eight new additions in 2022

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE number of financial institutions that receive approval to operate in the local market has been growing significantly. In 2022 eight new such entities commenced operation in Macau, the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) has revealed in a written reply to a Times inquiry.

According to detailed information also provided by AMCM, among the eight new financial operators are a branch of a bank incorporated overseas, two insurance companies, two financial leasing companies, a cash remittance company, an investment fund management company and a financial asset trading company.

When compared year-on-year with the previous period, 2022 saw a spike of 400% in the number of new entities, and there were only two new financial institutions authorized to operate in Macau including a bank incorporated in Macau and a branch of a bank incorporated overseas, the AMCM also noted.

Among the new financial services being promoted by the new companies are life insurance and other savings investment products.

As the Times reported earlier this year, according to a report from the Swiss Re Institute on "World insurance: inflation risks front and center," Macau was reported as having good potential for life insurance promotion products as the life insurance



penetration rate (in 2021) was just of 6.4%, which represented slightly over one-third of the one in the neighboring region of Hong Kong's (17.3%).

This fact is of interest to companies that have already a large experience in the Hong Kong market.

Likewise, earlier this year, and as the Times also reported, the Hong Kong arm of the multinational insurance company headquartered in London – Prudential

plc (Prudential) – announced that following approval by the local authorities, it would establish a branch of its Hong Kong business in Macau.

The company announced that in the first phase, it would offer life and health insurance solutions, including multi-currency options to meet different customers' needs such as savings packages as well as healthcare and protection.

Adding on the conclusion of the report from Swiss Re Institute,

the Managing Director, Strategic Business Group, of Prudential, Lilian Ng, said at the time that while there has been rapid economic development in Macau in the past few years, the insurance penetration remained low despite the city's fast-ageing population creating potential demand.

Figures from the AMCM also noted that life insurance premiums in Macau have already registered a growth of 26% year-on-year (in 2021) to MOP 33 billion

also driven by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the new Islands Medical Complex, to be operated in a public-private partnership system, is set to start operations at the end of this year and, as it has been announced, potentially many of its services will fall under a private hospital management system for which, the acquisition of health insurance is the most viable solution to avoid facing hefty medical bills.

## DAH SING BANK AND SUN LIFE BANCASSURANCE DEAL DOES NOT APPLY TO MACAU

In late January this year, Hong Kong's Dah Sing Bank announced a 15-year exclusive bancassurance partnership in Hong Kong with Canadian Sun Life Financial Inc. aiming to make available a series of insurance and financial services packages from the Canadian insurer to Hong Kong.

Such a package will not extend to Macau, at least not for the time being, a fact confirmed to the Times by a spokesperson from local Banco Comercial de Macau, S.A. (BCM) a subsidiary company of Dah Sing Banking Group Ltd.

Under the Bancassurance Partnership, Sun Life will be the exclusive provider of life insurance solutions to Dah Sing Bank's 570,000 retail banking customers on savings and protection products. The partnership combines Sun Life's suite of life and health insurance solutions. It is forecasted that Sun Life products will be available by July 2023.

# MGTO, Madame Tussauds jointly presents wax statues at GP Museum

ANTHONY LAM

**E**IGHT wax statues crafted by Madame Tussauds' team in Hong Kong will be on display at the Macao Grand Prix Museum from the end of March, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has announced in a statement.

Stressing the importance of this commission, the MGTO said it is the first time the renowned wax museum institution, which originated in the UK, has worked on a project jointly with the Macau government.



The wax statues will resemble eight different racers and will incorpo-

rate existing cars and motorcycles. To preserve the element of surprise, the

MGTO has so far only revealed the identities of four of the racers, namely

John Macdonald, Ron Haslam, Ayrton Senna da Silva and Sebastian Vettel.

To further attract public attention, at the end of February the public was invited to guess the identities of the wax figures.

The identities of the remaining four racers will be unveiled alongside the wax statues at the end of this month. The MGTO emphasized that an unveiling ceremony will be held.

Commenting on the project, the MGTO said it "strategically harnesses the Macau Grand Prix's unique glamour in destination marketing as part of its commitment to integrate "tourism + sports" and other sectors."

Meanwhile, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) formed a delegation consisting of local handcrafters to the

Guangzhou Zili Market, an art fair in Guangzhou's Shamian Street, Liwan District.

Introducing the trip, the IC noted that local practitioners who registered for last year's Tap Siac Craft Market were invited to participate in the hope of promoting the cultural and creative products with Macau characteristics in the Greater Bay Area market, enhancing the popularity of Macau's cultural and creative brands, and thus facilitating cultural and creative development and exchanges in the Greater Bay Area.

About 40 local handcrafters have participated in the two-week event, which the IC described as "a well-known fashion bazaar which is well-received by the youth."

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



GAMING

# STUDIO CITY'S PHASE 2 TO OPEN IN Q2, OP SEEING REBOUND

LYNZY VALLES

**T**HE construction of Studio City Phase 2 is complete, the gaming operator has announced.

The first stage of opening is targeted for the second quarter, which will include one of the hotel towers along with the indoor water

park, which is expected to be "the largest of its kind in Asia."

The remainder of Phase 2 is currently expected to open in the third quarter.

Meanwhile, Melco Resorts & Entertainment Limited reported heavy losses in its total operating revenues of USD1.35 billion versus

USD2.01 billion in the prior year.

The decrease in total operating revenues was primarily attributable to travel restrictions in Macau and mainland China related to Covid-19 during the year as well as the government-mandated temporary closure of casinos in Macau in July, which led to softer perfor-

mance in the rolling chip and mass market table games segments as well as lower non-gaming revenues.

The operating loss for 2022 was USD743.1 million, compared with an operating loss of USD577.5 million for 2021, the group said in a statement.

However, despite a plunge in 2022 revenues, the group remains optimistic as recovery has been underway since the start of the year, following the easing of border restrictions.

In its earnings call with analysts, chairman and CEO of the gaming operator Lawrence Ho said,

"The performance of our Macau properties in 2023 has so far been highly encouraging. During the peak days of Chinese New Year this year, we saw EBITDA reach USD6 million a day, and the GGR exceeded what we recorded during Chinese New Year in 2019," said Ho.


Melco's volume post Chinese New Year is holding up well, and its daily average mass volume in February has been in line with January.

Macau's gross gaming revenue surged to MOP10.32 billion in February, which is up 33.1% year-on-year, according to data released by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ).

"I think if you look at February, February had 10% less days than January. And the figures that DICJ and Macau government released today were effectively from February, and January was flat," said Ho.

"And considering that Chinese New Year, the entire Chinese New Year period, was really in January this year. So when you consider those factors, February was an amazing month," he added.

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ECONOMY

# GDP plunges 27% in 2022

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE economy of Macau declined by 26.8% year-on-year in real terms in 2022, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) showed.

In 2022, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) amounted to MOP177.3 billion and per-capita GDP was MOP261,459.

Last year, tourism and local economic activity were hindered by the border control and local lockdown measures that were imposed in response to the multiple coronavirus outbreaks in the neighbouring regions as well as the large-scale infections in the local community in June.

Domestic demand fell by 9.3% year-on-year; private consumption expenditure dropped by 8.9% and government final consumption expenditure edged down by 0.1%.

Gross fixed capital formation showed a year-on-year decrease of 18.9%, which resulted from redu-



ced investment in private construction.

With respect to external demand, exports of gaming services and other tourism services slid by 52.7% and 29.6% year-on-year respectively, dragged down by a 26.0% drop in the number of visitor arrivals; as a result, exports of services contracted by 32.1%. Besides, exports of goods dipped by 18.1%.

The city's contracted by 23.4% year-on-year in real terms in the fourth quarter of 2022. External demand remained sluggish. Owing to a 31.5% fall in the number of visitor arrivals, exports of services dropped by 27.1% year-on-year, of which exports of gaming services and exports of other tourism services declined by 46.6% and 30.5% respectively.

STATS

# Crime could increase again this year after drop in 2022, Security Chief says

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Covid-19 pandemic and related border restrictions that kept Macau from the world caused a sharp decrease in crimes reported over the last three years and, particularly, in 2022 when the total number of crimes reported dropped some 13.9%, the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, said during a press conference last Friday to present the final report on criminality in Macau in 2022.

For Wong, the data shows Macau remains a secure and safe city.

When compared to the total number of crimes and without accounting for the different categories, the total number of crimes reported has been dropping since 2019 (pre-pandemic) except for 2021, when it went up by 13.1%.

Despite this, during the pandemic and when border restrictions were in force, the crime figures were lower than in 2019 when it reached 14,178 in total.

In 2022, during which more

RENATO MARQUES



border restrictions came into effect, the total number of reported crimes stood at 9,799. This number is just 30.9% lower than in 2019 before the pandemic, and a number which may fall further when we take into account the fact stated countless times over the years by the Secretariat for Security that attributed the majority of the criminal actions to visitors to Macau.

The crime data analysis states precisely that due to the pandemic "in between 2020 and 2022,

there was a significant decrease in the number of reported crimes compared to 2019's pre-pandemic levels," which was "due to the implementation of Covid-19-related restrictions, which had had an impact on the number of visitors to Macau and the city's economic activities."

2022 saw a year with less violent crime reported to the police (153 cases), a drop of 102 cases when compared to 2021 (-40%) and 90 cases in 2020 (-37%).

According to the police authorities report, the most serious types of violent crime, which include kidnapping, murder and aggravated assault, "continued to be either non-existent or extremely rare in Macau," they said.

Growing are the crimes related to the internet, "in particular theft of personal data."

Wong said security authorities would step up efforts regarding inspection work and combat cybercrime as well as continue to

carry out crime prevention campaigns in the local community.

The Secretary also expressed fears that with the resumption of economic activities and the influx of tourists, crime could once again rise, saying that the "return to normal" poses additional challenges to Macau's security.

## 41.6% DROP IN GAMING-RELATED CRIMES

Gaming-related crimes in 2022 totaled 371 instances, a 41.6% decrease from 2021. Again, this was mostly due to the drastic reduction in the number of visitors to Macau, namely those involved in gambling-related activities such as loan-sharking or illegal currency exchange, among others.

In gaming-related crimes recorded in 2022, most cases were related to scams, "the majority of them linked to illicit money exchange activities," followed by the crime of disobedience related to unlawful entry of banned persons into casino venues and unlawful appropriation.

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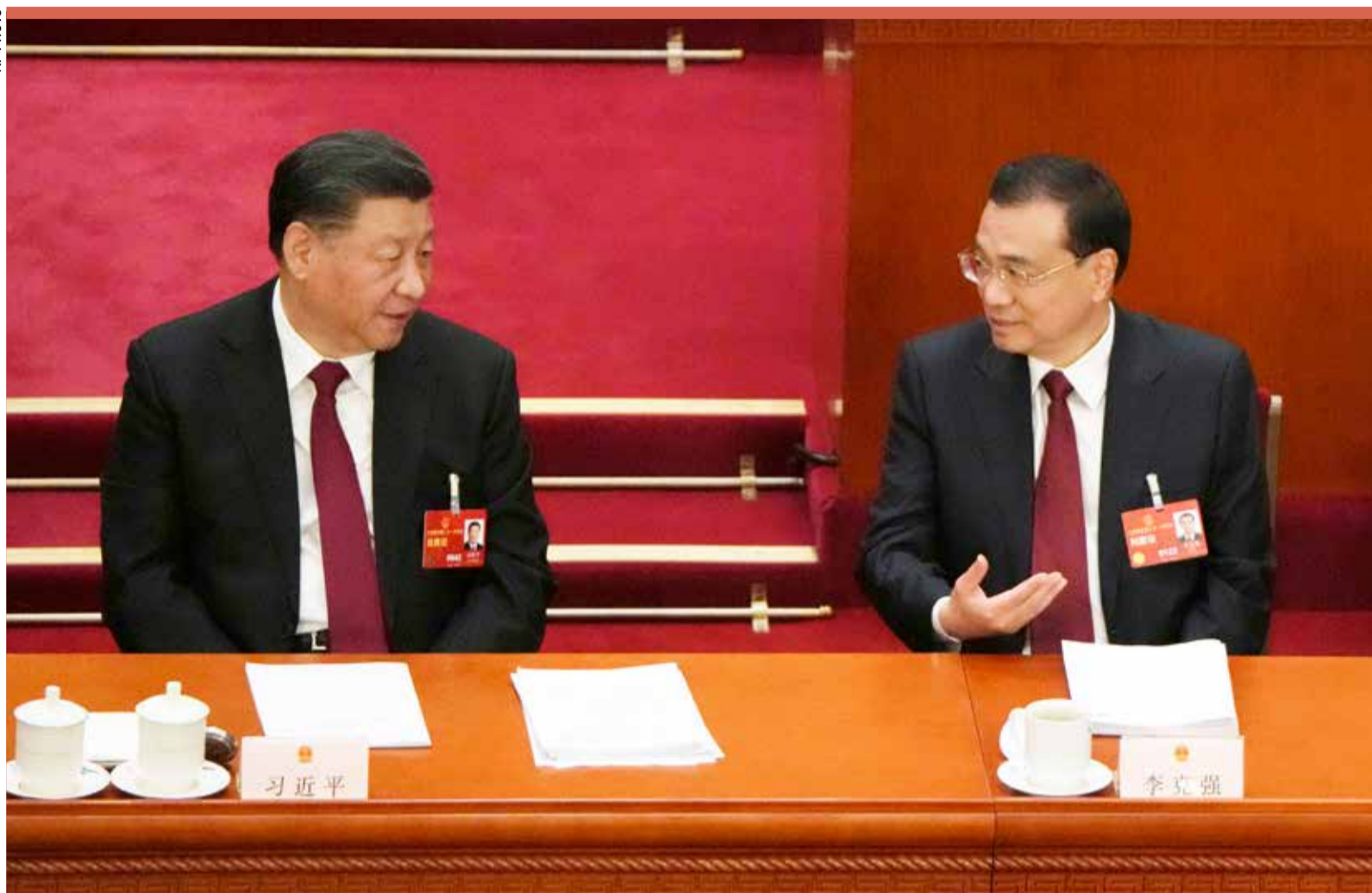
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## TWO SESSIONS

## CHINA SETS THIS YEAR'S ECONOMIC GROWTH TARGET AT 'AROUND 5%'

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINA'S government announced plans for a consumer-led revival of the struggling economy as its legislature opened a session yesterday that will tighten President Xi Jinping's control over business and society.

Premier Li Keqiang, the top economic official, set this year's growth target at "around 5%" following the end of anti-virus controls. Last year's growth in the world's second-largest economy fell to 3%, the second-weakest level since at least the 1970s.

"We should give priority to the recovery and expansion of consumption," Li said in a speech on government plans before the ceremonial National People's Congress in the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

The full meeting of the 2,977 members of the NPC is the year's highest-profile event but its work is limited to endorsing decisions made by the ruling Communist Party and showcasing official initiatives.

This month, the NPC is due to endorse the appointment of a government of Xi loyalists including a new premier after the 69-year-old president expanded his status as China's most powerful figure in decades by awarding himself a third five-year term as party general secretary in October, possibly preparing to become leader for life. Li, an

advocate of free enterprise, was forced out as the No. 2 party leader in October.

Xi's new leadership team will face challenges ranging from weak global demand for exports and lingering U.S. tariff hikes in a feud over technology and security to curbs on access to Western processor chips due to security fears.

Separately, the Ministry of Finance announced a 7.2% budget increase for the ruling party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army, to 1.55 trillion yuan (\$224 billion), the 29th straight annual increase. China's military spending is the world's second highest after the United States. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute says the two countries together account for half of global military outlays.

Li's report called for boosting consumer spending by increasing household incomes but gave no details in his unusually brief, 53-minute speech. It was less than half the length of work reports in some previous years.

The premier called for "building up our country's strength and self-reliance in science and technology," an area in which Beijing's state-led efforts to create competitors in electric cars, clean energy, telecoms and other fields have strained relations with Washington and other trading partners. They complain China steals or pressures foreign

companies to hand over technology and improperly subsidizes and shields its fledgling competitors in violation of its market-opening commitments.

Xi earlier singled out encouraging jittery consumers and entrepreneurs to spend and invest as a priority at the ruling party's economic planning meeting in December.

Beijing needs to "fully release consumption potential," Xi said, according to a text released last month.

Since taking power in 2012, Xi has promoted an even more dominant role for the ruling party. He has called for the party to return to its "original mission" as China's economic, social and cultural leader and carry out the "rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation."

Xi's government has tightened control over e-commerce and other tech companies with anti-monopoly and data security crackdowns that wiped billions of dollars off their stock market value.

Beijing is pressing them to pay for social welfare and official initiatives to develop processor chips and other technology. That has prompted warnings economic growth will suffer.

Li's report yesterday reinforced the importance of state industry. It promised to support entrepreneurs who generate jobs and wealth but also said the go-

vernment will "enhance the core competitiveness" of state-owned companies that dominate industries from banking and energy to telecoms and steel.

Li also called for "resolute steps" to oppose formal independence for Taiwan, the self-ruled island democracy claimed by Beijing as part of its territory. He called for "peaceful reunification" between China and Taiwan, which split in 1949 after a civil war, but announced no initiatives.

Taiwan never has been part of the People's Republic of China, but Beijing says it is obligated to unite with the mainland, by force if necessary. Xi's government has stepped up efforts to intimidate the island by flying fighter jets and bombers nearby and firing missiles into the ocean.

Chinese economic growth has struggled since mid-2021, when tighter controls on debt that Beijing worries is dangerously high triggered a slump in the vast real estate industry, which supports millions of jobs. Smaller developers were forced into bankruptcy and some defaulted on bonds, causing alarm in global financial markets.

Longer term, the workforce has been shrinking for a decade, putting pressure on plans to increase China's wealth and global influence.

Consumer spending is gradually recovering, but the In-

ternational Monetary Fund and some private sector forecasters expect economic growth this year as low as 4.4%, well below the official target.

A measure of factory activity rose to a nine-year high in February. Other measures of activity including the number of subway passengers and express deliveries rose.

A central bank official said Friday real estate activity is recovering and lending for construction and home purchases is rising.

A recovery based on consumer spending is likely to be more gradual than one driven by government stimulus or a boom in real estate investment. But Chinese leaders are trying to avoid reigniting a rise in debt and want to nurture self-sustaining growth based on consumption instead of exports and investment.

The official in line to become premier is Li Qiang, a former party secretary of Shanghai who is close to Xi but has no government experience at the national level. Li Qiang was named No. 2 party leader in October.

That reflects Xi's emphasis on promoting officials with whom he has personal history and bypassing party tradition that leadership candidates need experience as Cabinet ministers or in other national-level posts.

If achieved, the official growth target would be an improvement over last year but down sharply from 2021's 8.1%.

Last year's slump had global repercussions, depressing Chinese sales of autos and consumer goods and demand for oil, food and other imports. Even after the end of anti-virus curbs, auto sales fell by double digits in January and retail sales contracted.

Entrepreneurs and foreign companies have been rattled by tighter political controls.

Foreign business groups said last year global companies were shifting investment plans away from China because travel curbs blocked executives from visiting the country.

Li, the premier, tried to reassure foreign investors by promising to open Chinese markets wider and repeating official pledges of equal treatment with domestic enterprises.

"China is sure to provide even greater business opportunities for foreign companies," he said.

The party has indicated its tech crackdown is winding down but has given no sign it is backing off a campaign to tighten political control over the industry.

Entrepreneurs were shaken anew in mid-February when a star banker, Bao Fan, who was involved in some of the biggest tech deals, disappeared. His company announced last week Bao was "cooperating in an investigation" but gave no details. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



HONG KONG

# Police stop activists from joining women's march

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

**A** Hong Kong pro-democracy group yesterday said the national security police stopped activists from joining a highly-anticipated protest that was canceled last minute by the organizer.

The League of Social Democrats said police questioned four of its members on Friday and warned them not to participate in the march that was planned by the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association.

"The League of Social Democrats is very angry about being threatened and hindered by the national security police over joining a legal protest. But it has decided to be absent under such pressure," the group said.

Police said in an email response to The Associated Press that when they take any action, they handle it "in accordance to the actual situation and the law."

The planned event would have been the first major civil rights protest in three years approved by police and the first after the lifting of major COVID-19 restrictions, including

the mask mandate.

On Saturday night, the women's association announced in a Facebook post that it had regrettably decided to call off the march that planned to call for labor and women's rights, and gender equality, without specifying why. It did not immediately respond to a call seeking comment.

Half an hour later, Acting Senior Superintendent Dennis Cheng said in a news briefing that the organizer notified them they would cancel the march after weighing the pros and cons.

Cheng said that some violent groups wanted to join the protest and warned the public against taking part. He did not identify the groups. The police letter of approval for the protest was then ruled invalid and authorities warned that anyone who attempts to assemble yesterday would be considered to be joining an unauthorized rally.

In Beijing, meanwhile, Premier Li Keqiang said that China had made fresh progress in work related to Hong Kong and exercised overall jurisdiction over the southern city. **MDT/AP**

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## MGM Theater Presented "The Rebirth of Dance in China: Performance & Exchange Series"



MGM Theater presented "The Rebirth of Dance in China" 2023 Performance & Exchange Series: When Dance Meets Digital Art – "Non-numerical Series: Contrast" by TAO Dance Theater" in February. The performance marks a collaboration between TAO Dance Theater, with its performance named as one of the World's 10 Best Dance Shows by Time Out New York; renowned experi-

mental musician Xiao He; and the team of Leong Lampo, Professor of the Centre for Arts and Design at the University of Macau (UM). The three parties interweaved multiple art mediums, powered by cutting-edge audio and visual technologies of MGM Theater, to jointly create a brilliant feast of digital art and dance.

### Brings Top-notch Contemporary Dance Performance to Macau

Pansy Ho, Co-chairperson and Executive Director of MGM China Holdings Limited, said, "Through the advanced technologies of MGM Theater, we aspire to co-forge new space for interdisciplinary arts. This time, we are pleased that the series of 'The Rebirth of Dance in China' can be staged again at MGM Theater, ushering in TAO Dance Theater's maiden dance performance integrated with digital art. The show not only breathes new life into national style of dancing, but also rejuvenates Chinese culture and art, and helps enhance the standard of performing arts in Macau."



TAO Dance Theater is China's prestigious contemporary dance troupe. It is also the first dance group in China to be invited to perform at the Lincoln Center Art Festival in the United States, Edinburgh International Art Festival in the United Kingdom, Sydney Opera House in Australia and Theatre de la Villie in France. It employs a simple creative concept and body aesthetics to create its unique "Circular Movement System".

The performance attracted nearly 1,000 audiences, and it was live-streamed on various social media platforms, allowing audiences worldwide to enjoy such a magnificent dance performance. After, the show founder and art director of TAO Dance Theater Tao Ye, together with Xiao He, Leong Lampo, as well as Luo Bin, Executive Vice President of CDA, shared their creative and collaborative concept of the show with the audiences.

### Nurtures Next Generation Dancing Talents

The show invited teachers and students of the Centre for Arts and Design of UM to create captivating digital images displayed on the world's largest permanent indoor ultra-HD LED screen at the MGM Theater. On the other hand, MGM also organized a master class, where instructors of TAO Dance Theater demonstrated their unique dancing techniques and exchanged with 90 students and professional dancers hailing from dance schools in Macao. Its objective was to enhance dancing standards and cultural identity through the exchanges between local and mainland dancers.



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# Crisis over suspected Iran schoolgirl poisonings escalates

JON GAMBRELL, DUBAI

A crisis over suspected poisonings targeting Iranian schoolgirls escalated Sunday as authorities acknowledged over 50 schools were struck in a wave of possible cases. The poisonings have spread further fear among parents as Tehran has faced months of unrest.

It remains unclear who or what is responsible since the alleged poisonings began in November in the Shiite holy city of Qom. Reports now suggest schools across 21 of Iran's 30 provinces have seen suspected cases, with girls' schools the site of nearly all the incidents.

The attacks have raised fears that other girls could be poisoned apparently just for going to school. Education for girls has never been challenged in the over 40 years since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iran has been calling on the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan to have girls and women return to school.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi on Saturday said without elaborating that investigators had recovered "suspicious samples" in the course of their investigations into the incidents, according to the state-run IRNA news agency. He called for calm among the public, while also accusing the "enemy's media terrorism" of inciting more panic over the alleged poisonings.

However, it wasn't until the poisonings received international media attention that hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi announced an investigation into the incidents on Wednesday.

Vahidi said at least 52 schools had been affected by suspected poisonings. Iranian media reports have put the number of schools at over 60. At least one boy's school reportedly has been affected.

Videos of upset parents and schoolgirls in emergency rooms with IVs in their arms have flooded social media. Making sense of the crisis remains challenging, given that nearly 100 journalists have been detained by Iran since the start of protests in September over the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini.



She had been detained by the country's morality police and later died.

The security force crackdown on those protests has seen at least 530 people killed and 19,700 others detained, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran.

Attacks on women have happened in the past in Iran, most recently with a wave of acid attacks in 2014 around Isfahan, at the time believed to have been carried out by hard-liners targeting women for how they dressed.

Speculation in Iran's tightly controlled state media has focused on the possibility of exile groups or foreign powers being behind the poisonings. That was also repeatedly alleged during the recent protests without evidence. In recent days, Germany's foreign minister, a White House official and others have called on Iran to do more to protect schoolgirls — a concern Iran's Foreign Ministry has dismissed as "crocodile tears."

However, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom noted that Iran has "continued to tolerate attacks against women and girls for months" amid the recent protests.

"These poisonings are occurring in an environment where Iranian officials have impunity for the harassment, assault, rape, torture and

execution of women peacefully asserting their freedom of religion or belief," Sharon Kleinbaum of the commission said in a statement.

Suspicion in Iran has fallen on possible hard-liners for carrying out the suspected poisonings. Iranian journalists, including Jamileh Kadivar, a prominent former reformist lawmaker at Tehran's Ettelaat newspaper, have cited a supposed communique from a group calling itself Fidayeen Velayat that purportedly said that girls' education "is considered forbidden" and threatened to "spread the poisoning of girls throughout Iran" if girls' schools remain open.

Iranian officials have not acknowledged any group called Fidayeen Velayat, which roughly translates to English as "Devotees of the Guardianship." However, Kadivar's mention of the threat in print comes as she remains influential within Iranian politics and has ties to its theocratic ruling class. The head of the Ettelaat newspaper also is appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Kadivar wrote Saturday that another possibility is "mass hysteria." There have been previous cases of this over the last decades, most recently in Afghanistan from 2009 through 2012. Then, the World Health Organization

wrote about so-called "mass psychogenic illnesses" affecting hundreds of girls in schools across the country.

"Reports of stench smells preceding the appearance of symptoms have given credit to the theory of mass poisoning," the WHO wrote at the time. "However, investigations into the causes of these outbreaks have yielded no such evidence so far."

Iran has not acknowledged asking the world health body for assistance in its investigation. The WHO did not immediately respond to a request for comment Sunday.

However, Kadivar also noted that hard-liners in Iranian governments in the past carried out so-called "chain murders" of activists and others in the 1990s. She also referenced the killings by Islamic vigilantes in 2002 in the city of Kerman that saw one victim stoned to death and others tied up and thrown into a swimming pool, where they drowned. She described those vigilantes as being members of the Basij, an all-volunteer force in Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

"The common denominator of all of them is their extreme thinking, intellectual stagnation and rigid religious view that allowed them to have committed such violent actions," Kadivar wrote. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1987 HUNDREDS TRAPPED AS CAR FERRY CAPSIZES



Forty-nine people have been confirmed dead - and dozens are missing - after a car ferry capsized just outside the Belgian port of Zeebrugge.

Rescuers say more than 400 people have been brought out of the ship alive. Many have been taken to hospitals in Bruges and Blankenburg suffering from cuts and bruises, hypothermia and shock.

Divers are still searching the upturned hull of the Herald of Free Enterprise for air pockets in which passengers may have survived. But hope is fading of finding anyone alive.

The tragedy happened just before 1900 GMT as the Townsend Thoresen ferry left Zeebrugge bound for Dover with 650 passengers on board, many of them Sun readers who had taken advantage of the newspaper's offer on a cut-price day trip to the Continent.

No time to send SOS  
It is not clear how the disaster happened. Survivors say the boat went over in seconds and began filling rapidly with water. There was no time to send an SOS.

The only way out for many was to smash windows and clamber onto the side of the ship and wait to be lifted off.

Rescue helicopters, including two RAF Sea Kings, were at the scene within minutes. Dutch and Belgian boats in the area were also diverted to help in the rescue operation.

Maureen and Frank Bennett, from Crawley in Sussex, had been on a day trip to Belgium with their daughter and her boyfriend to celebrate their wedding anniversary.

From her hospital bed, Mrs Bennett said: "It was so cold...all we wanted to do was just get out. It was so frightening, it really was."

She was being filmed by a BBC camera crew when a member of the hospital staff brought her the news her daughter had been found and was safe and well. She burst into tears and said, "She's alive, she's alive. Thank God."

The Queen has sent a message of sympathy. The Duke and Duchess of York have gone to Belgium on her behalf.

The Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, has flown to Zeebrugge. She paid this tribute to the emergency services: "It has been a night of great courage and a night of great professionalism and of concern on the part of all the rescue services."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The final death toll was 193. The disaster had unfolded in just 90 seconds, in calm conditions and shallow water, only 100 yards (91m) from the shore.

The turnaround time for loading and unloading at Zeebrugge was longer than at most other ports because there was only room for access to a single ramp onto the car deck. Water had to be pumped into the ballast tanks to lower the level of the ferry. It appears the ferry then left port with her bow doors open and the extra ballast still in her tanks. Water began flowing onto the car deck and the vessel quickly became unstable.

A formal investigation blamed company management for failing to give clear instructions about safety procedures.

Passenger details now have to be recorded before a ship sails so the harbour authorities know who is on board.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
 Don't be shy; if you want to spend more time with a special person, make a commitment. Stand up and propose your ideas, and you'll be surprised how many people will follow you.

**TAURUS**  
 Apr. 20-May. 20  
 Any renovation or decorating to your home should include the whole family. Children may be demanding, and entertainment could cost a lot more than you can really afford.

**GEMINI**  
 May. 21-Jun. 21  
 You will be able to pick up on future trends if you keep your eyes peeled for unique ideas. If you join intellectual or cultural groups, you should meet individuals who stimulate you.

**CANCER**  
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
 Be careful what you say. Don't gamble unless you can afford to lose. A female colleague may cause problems for you. Limitations with females could lead to unfortunate circumstances.

**LEO**  
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
 If you're willing to cut loose you will find yourself in the midst of an exciting encounter. You may find that getting together with colleagues after hours will be worthwhile.

**VIRGO**  
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
 Deception will play an important factor in relationships. Do not expect too much from others. Things are looking up. Conflicts over joint finances are likely.

**LIBRA**  
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
 Avoid friction with your mate. Do not ruffle feathers if possible. Spend time getting to know each other. You need to get out if you want to meet potential partners.

**SCORPIO**  
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
 Your domestic scene could continue to be in an uproar today. They won't get away with it. You could find yourself left with someone's dirty laundry.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
 Make sure that you have all the pertinent facts before taking action. You should look into making some physical changes, such as new hair color or toning up your body.

**CAPRICORN**  
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
 Business trips might prove unproductive. Residential moves will be in your best interest. Romantic relationships could be under pressure.

**AQUARIUS**  
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
 You may not want to spend time around family or your home. Avoid conflicts with in-laws or other family members. Advancement can be yours if you put your efforts into work related matters.

**PISCES**  
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
 Your compassion will be appreciated more than you can imagine. Don't push your opinions on others today or you may find yourself in the doghouse.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

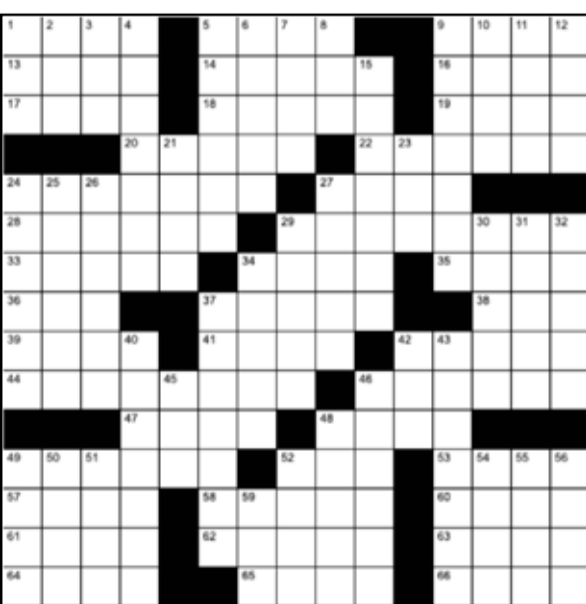
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	2	17	cloudy
Changchun	2	10	cloudy
Chengdu	14	20	cloudy
Chongqing	12	16	rain
Fuzhou	9	23	fine
Guangzhou	11	26	fine
Guiyang	11	16	showers
Haikou	15	24	cloudy
Hangzhou	7	23	fine
Harbin	-4	9	cloudy
Hefei	5	26	cloudy
Nanjing	8	24	fine
Shanghai	9	22	fine
Taipei	12	18	fine
Wuhan	7	24	fine
Hong Kong	15	19	fine
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-7	-1	snow
Frankfurt	2	7	rain
Paris	3	8	cloudy
London	2	9	rain
New York	3	12	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Stringed instrument; 5- Camp beds; 9- Enlarge, as a hole; 13- News bit; 14- In the future; 16- It parallels a radius; 17- Linebacker Junior; 18- Vessel; 19- "Peter Pan" pooch; 20- Pick up; 22- Mad confusion; 24- Extraordinary occurrence; 27- \_\_\_ avil; 28- Motown's Franklin; 29- By means of this; 33- Lover of Juliet; 34- Israeli round dance; 35- "A Doll's House" heroine; 36- \_\_\_ Cone; 37- Incense gum; 38- \_\_\_-Mart; 39- Shelter for honeybees; 41- Facilitate; 42- Skirt; 44- Make sour; 46- Kitchen utensil; 47- Breather; 48- Lead; 49- Sharon's land; 52- Join a poker game; 53- No ifs, \_\_\_; 57- Nair rival; 58- Clear the boards; 60- Tidy, without fault; 61- Royal Indian; 62- Sub system; 63- Actress Merrill; 64- Apple variety; 65- Electric fish; 66- Some are pale;

DOWN 1- Fleur-de-\_\_\_; 2- Shoshone language member; 3- Green or black, e.g.; 4- Imitate; 5- Occult doctrine; 6- Chicago's airport; 7- Small gull; 8- Lose firmness; 9- Dilapidated; 10- Airline to Tel Aviv; 11- Editor Wintour; 12- Polite address; 15- Prophetess of Israel; 21- Parrot; 23- Hydrocarbon suffix; 24- Actress Mason; 25- Sardonic; 26- Take off; 27- \_\_\_ Haute; 29- Stallion, e.g.; 30- Herbert Hoover, for one; 31- Commerce; 32- More healthy; 34- Hilton competitor; 37- Rubella; 40- Unpredictable; 42- Clean air org.; 43- Porch; 45- Spelling contest; 46- Furry swimmers; 48- Agave fiber; 49- Cross inscription; 50- Thin stratum; 51- Actress Sofer; 52- All there; 54- Singer Sedaka; 55- Hamlet, e.g.; 56- RR stops; 59- \_\_\_ v. Wade;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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- 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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1,746 ft<sup>2</sup> | HKD10,500,000



ONE GRANTAI  
3 bed 3 bath  
2,158 ft<sup>2</sup> | HKD15,000/mth



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# Olympic ticket sales for Paris Games get off to rocky start

NICOLAS GARRIGA  
& BARBARA SURK, PARIS

**O**RGANIZERS of next year's Paris Olympics promised relatively modest prices and egalitarian access to events, thanks to an online system meant to revolutionize ticket sales and bring the masses to stadiums and arenas for as little as \$26.

As the month-long opening round of sales winds down, however, many "lucky" winners chosen to shop for the first 3 million tickets (out of 10 million total) are feeling frustrated, angry and cheated.

Their only option during the 48-hour purchasing window was paying at least 200 euros (\$212) per ticket for the few remaining events on offer. And because the new ticketing system requires buying packages for multiple sports, overall costs for many buyers ran into thousands of dollars.

By the time English teacher Amélie Beney and her 9-year-old son won the lottery last week to log in to the Olympic ticket office, affordable tickets for many events were gone, and all but one of their preferred sports — BMX, water polo and soccer — was sold out.

There were tickets for a soccer match at 50 euros (\$53) but Beney would also have to buy at least two tickets for two additional events. Available tickets included basketball or handball at 150 euros (\$160), swimming at 230 euros (\$244) and a whopping 690 euros (\$732) for a qualifying event in track and field.

"Who can afford tickets at that price?" Beney asked. "I can't."



AP PHOTO

Beney was disappointed and said her son's enthusiasm for attending their home Olympics on his 10th birthday vanished as they logged off without buying anything.

"I really wanted to have tickets for the Olympics. I wanted my son to live that unique experience ... in our city," Beney said. "I became disillusioned (with the ticket system) and the prices. This is just insane."

To buy tickets in the first round, your name had to be drawn from a lottery. Since Feb. 13, the lucky winners have been notified by email of their 48-hour window to buy between three and up to 30 tickets in at least three different events, out of 32 available. The first round of ticketing ends

March 15.

Organizers say they are aware of the high demand and acknowledge that not everyone who wants to attend the Paris Olympics will manage to get a ticket, and fewer still will be able to get tickets at a bargain price.

"We know that people are going to be disappointed, and we know that we don't have tickets for everybody," Michael Aloisio, the deputy general manager of the Paris Olympics, said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But we also know that we have more selling phases opening soon with more tickets."

Ticket sales are a substantial part of revenue — one third, according to Aloisio — that Paris organizers need to pay for the

Olympics.

"The challenge for us was not to have this target compromise our goal to make these Games accessible," Aloisio said.

The announcement last year that there will be 1 million tickets at 24 euros (\$26) and more than 4 million for less than 50 euros (\$53) was received with enthusiasm from fans in France and around the world. However, those tickets were scooped up during the first few days of the lottery, leaving those "lucky" to be drawn later with high prices and few events to choose from.

Aloisio said only 10% of all 10 million tickets cost more than 200 euros (\$212).

"It's these tickets that allow for other tickets to be more accessib-

le and balance it all out," he said.

Robin Allison Davis, a 38-year-old American and a self-declared "Olympics super fan," said she wasn't expecting to find a bargain when it was her turn to hunt for tickets in her favorite sports — gymnastics, swimming and track and field.

She was willing to pay 260 euros (\$276) per ticket to watch two hours of a gymnastics qualifying event but then got frustrated when the online ticketing office appeared to have turned into a virtual casino.

"I knew it will be expensive, but why is the system that promised to give me freedom and choice to form my own Olympic package tricking me into buying expensive tickets in sports I don't want to see if I want to get expensive tickets for an event I really want to see," Davis said. "The ticket pack thing is a racket."

Davis has lived in Paris for six-and-a-half years and works as a freelance journalist. She did not buy any tickets during the first round, saying that she will try her luck again in the second draw in May and splurge on individual tickets.

Aloisio, the organizing committee official, defended the ticket package system and said the Paris organizers aimed to arouse curiosity for other sports during the Olympics.

"These packages are a way to get people interested and buy tickets for a water polo semifinal, hockey or 7-a-side rugby, sports for which there may have been less demand," Aloisio said.

In all, 10 million tickets for the Olympics and 3.4 million for the Paralympics will be made available on the online platform. Individual tickets will become available in the second round, which starts on May 11. Registration for that draw starts March 15.

The third phase is expected to start at the end of the year, when all remaining tickets will be put on sale. **MDT/AP**

## BOXING

# Jon Jones returns to win UFC heavyweight title in first round

MARK ANDERSON,  
LAS VEGAS

**J**ON Jones ended a three-year sabbatical from the UFC, moved up to its highest weight class and then left no doubt Saturday night about his place in the sport's history.

Already widely considered the greatest UFC fighter, the 35-year-old Jones took Cyril Gane to the mat just a little more than a minute into the first round and won with a guillotine choke at

2:04 in UFC 285.

"I'm so excited," Jones said. "I've been working for this for a long time. A people thought I wasn't coming back. I've been faithful to my goal, faithful to my mission."

As short as the fight was, Jones made sure to take his time entering the octagon, playing up to the sold-out crowd of 19,471. UFC President Dana White said the gate was \$12.5 million, the highest for a heavyweight match and the fourth-highest ever.

This was Jones' first fight in three years and his first in the heavyweight division. The former light heavyweight champion said it was important to cement in his own mind that he deserved the honor as the greatest ever.

With another GOAT, Tom Brady, sitting nearby, Jones did just that. Brady flew in the day of the fight from Florida and spent time with Jones' brother, Las Vegas Raiders defensive end Chandler Jones. **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO  
Jon Jones, center, celebrates after defeating Cyril Gane in a UFC 285 mixed martial arts heavyweight title bout, Saturday

**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**DEFENSE BUDGET INCREASE RESTRAINED DESPITE COMPLEX SECURITY CHALLENGES**

In stark contrast to many major countries around the world that have hiked their defense spending by a big margin in recent years, China's defense budget will grow by 7.2 percent in 2023, only 0.1 of a percentage point up from that of last year.

The budget, as per a draft budget report submitted to the ongoing session of China's top legislature on Sunday, is an unmistakable signal to the outside world that China has no intention to enter an arms race or flex its military muscles, as some Western countries are doing.

The United States' military expenditure is three to four times that of China's. The US National Defense Authorization Act signed in December 2022 authorized \$858 billion in spending for the Pentagon for fiscal year 2023, an 11.7 percent year-on-year hike. Last month, Japan adopted a record 6.8 trillion yen (\$51 billion) defense budget for the coming fiscal year, up 26 percent from the previous year. Both the US and Japan have sought to strengthen their military capabilities under the pretext of China's growing influence in the region.

As such, China's modest and comparatively small pace in increasing its annual defense budget is clear proof that China's military spending is defensive in nature. This is the eighth consecutive year that China has maintained single-digit growth, which belies the scaremongering about China's so-called military buildup and the hyping of a "China threat".

Experts say the defense budget is reasonable due to the country's need to modernize its military and it shows restraint as it could have increased it more. Considering that China is facing an increasingly complicated and challenging security environment, this year's defense budget provides a timely barometer for others to gauge China's strategic composure.

Admittedly, China is facing mounting strategic pressure unseen for years as the US now views it as a rival and seeks to confront it on almost all fronts. In fact, if put in China's shoes, it is certain that countries such as the US and Japan would not maintain the strategic composure that China is demonstrating.

With the US and its allies not only stoking geopolitical tensions over Taiwan and the South China Sea but also trying to draw the flames of the Ukraine crisis to the Asia-Pacific region, China maintaining an appropriate and steady increase in its defense spending to keep its military modernization on course is both necessary to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity and development interests and crucial for fending off security risks and challenges.

Beijing has repeatedly stressed that China will never seek hegemony, expansion or sphere of influence and that the modernization of its military is for defensive purposes and to enable it to be a positive force that can help safeguard regional stability and world peace.

**HONG KONG COURT CONVICTS ACTIVISTS BEHIND TIANANMEN VIGIL**

**THE BUZZ**

Three Hong Kong activists from a now-defunct group that organized annual vigils commemorating China's 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests were convicted on Saturday for failing to provide authorities with information on the group in accordance with a national security law.

Leaders of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China Chow Hang-tung, Tang Ngok-kwan and Tsui Hon-kwong were arrested in 2021.

The alliance was best known for organizing candlelight vigils in Hong Kong every June 4.

Before the group voted to disband, police had sought details about its

operations and finances in connection with alleged links to democracy groups overseas in August 2021, accusing it of being a foreign agent.

But the group refused to cooperate, arguing police were arbitrarily labeling pro-democracy organizations as foreign agents. It added the police did not have a right to ask for its information because it was not a foreign agent and the authorities did not provide sufficient justification.

Under the security law's implementation rules, the police chief can request a range of information from a foreign agent. Failure to comply with the request could result in six months in jail and a fine of 100,000 Hong Kong dollars if convicted.

AP PHOTO



**ENTERTAINMENT**

**YEAR AFTER THE SLAP, CHRIS ROCK PUNCHES BACK IN NEW SPECIAL**

A year after Will Smith Asmacked him on the Academy Awards stage, Chris Rock finally gave his rebuttal in a forceful stand-up special, streamed live on Netflix, in which the comedian bragged that he "took that hit like Pacquiao."

The 58-year-old comedian on Saturday night performed his first stand-up special since last year's Oscars in a much-awaited sequel that had all the hype — and more — of a Manny Pacquiao prizefight. "Chris Rock: Selective Outrage," streamed live from the Hippodrome Theatre in Baltimore, marked Netflix's first foray into live streaming. But it was also a long-awaited comedy counterpunch to Academy Awards infamy.

Rock, performing in all white and with a Prince medallion around his neck, immediately touched on last year's Oscars while riffing on "wokeness," hypersensitivity and what he called "selective outrage."

"You never know who might get triggered," said Rock. "Anybody who says words hurt hasn't been punched in the face."

But Rock then launched into a series of wide-ranging topics examining contemporary issues, including virtue signaling, high-priced yoga pants, the Duchess of Sussex, the Kardashians, abortion rights, the Capi-

tol riot and what he called America's biggest addiction: Attention.

"We used to want love, now we just want likes," said Rock.

Rock, who also riffed on how he'd respond if his father transitioned to a woman (he would support him, Rock said), made clear "Selective Outrage" was not going to be just a Will Smith show. Only occasionally did Rock's material dovetail with the 2022 Oscars, like it did when Rock joked about the oddity of Snoop Dogg becoming such a venerated pitch man for advertisers.

"I'm not dissing Snoop," said Rock. "The last thing I need is another mad rapper."

But an hour into his set, Rock closed the special with a torrent of material about the notorious Academy Awards moment.

"You all know what happened to me, getting smacked by Suge Smith. Everybody knows," Rock said. "It still hurts. I got 'Summertime' ringing in my ears."

While Smith has apologized and repeatedly spoken about the incident since last March, Rock has avoided all the usual platforms where celebrities often go to air their feelings. He never sat down with Oprah Winfrey, and turned away the many media outlets that would

have loved to land an exclusive in-depth interview.

"I'm a not a victim, baby," said Rock. "You will never see me on Oprah or Gayle crying. You will never see it. Never going to happen."

But Rock did use his encounter with Smith to shape and enliven his second stand-up special for Netflix. Some of his best material was on their physical differences.

"We are not the same size. This guy does movies with his shirt off," said Rock. "You will never see me do a movie with my shirt off. If I'm in a movie getting open-heart surgery, I got on a sweater."

"He played Muhammed Ali," added Rock. "I played Pookie in 'New Jack City.'"

Ultimately, Rock suggested he was just caught in the crossfire in Smith's relationship with his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith. It was a joke that Rock told about Pinkett Smith that prompted Smith to stride on stage and strike Rock. The comedian on Saturday referenced Pinkett Smith's earlier confessions of having an "entanglement" with another man while married.

"I did not have any entanglements," said Rock. "She hurt him way more than he hurt me."

"I love Will Smith," added Rock. "Now I watch 'Emancipation' just to see him get whooped." **MDT/AP**

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**Bangladesh** A massive fire raced through a crammed refugee camp for Rohingya Muslims in southern Bangladesh yesterday, leaving thousands homeless, a fire official and the United Nations said. No casualties were reported immediately at Balukhali camp in Cox's Bazar district, said Emdadul Haque, a fire service official.

**Iran** The head of the U.N.'s nuclear agency said that Iran pledged to restore cameras and other monitoring equipment at its nuclear sites and to allow more inspections at a facility where particles of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade were recently detected. But a joint statement issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency and Iran's nuclear body only gave vague assurances that Tehran would address longstanding complaints about the access it gives the watchdog's inspectors to its disputed nuclear program.

AP PHOTO



**Israel** Tens of thousands of Israelis demonstrated against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's contentious plan to overhaul the country's legal system, as the government pressed on with the proposed changes despite the mass opposition. The plans were proposed in January, weeks after Netanyahu's ultranationalist coalition, the most far-right government in the country's history, was sworn in. The overhauls have increasingly divided the Israeli community and given momentum to weekly protests every Saturday.

**Tunisia** Thousands of people marched through Tunisia's capital this weekend, decrying an expanding crackdown on opposition voices and a proposed lifting of subsidies for food and other goods. The march organized by Tunisia's powerful central trade union was the latest challenge to Tunisian President Kais Saied, whose leadership of the North African nation is prompting growing international concern.