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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE HO IAT SENG REPORTED HIS YEAR OF WORK TO PRESIDENT XI JINPING IN THE COUNTRY’S CAPITAL CITY AND PASSED WITH HIGH MARKS**

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**SURVEY FINDS PUBLIC LESS SATISFIED WITH DSAT THAN BUS OPERATORS**

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**LANDMARK NATIONAL SECURITY TRIAL OPENS IN HK FOR ACTIVIST PUBLISHER JIMMY LAI**

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AP PHOTO



**Thailand** Fifteen suspected drug smugglers were killed and about 2 million methamphetamine tablets seized near the Myanmar border after a shootout with Thai soldiers, Thai officials said. The clash, which occurred Saturday night, came after the local army received a tip that there would be smuggling activity near the border in Chiang Rai province, said Phanurat Lukboon, acting secretary-general of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board. *More on p7*

AP PHOTO



**Australia** More than 300 people were rescued overnight from floodwaters in northeast Australia, with dozens of residents clinging to roofs, officials said yesterday. Cairns Airport was closed yesterday due to flooding and authorities were concerned that the city of 160,000 people will lose drinking water.

AP PHOTO



**Iraq** Baghdad’s streets were nearly empty yesterday, the main day of polling in the country’s first provincial elections in a decade, which are boycotted by an influential political bloc and marred by scattered violence and allegations of irregularities. The vote to select new provincial council members, who in turn will appoint governors, is widely seen as a bellwether for the parliamentary election due to take place in 2025.

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# LEAVING THE BUILDING

**Architects association forced to relocate its office in coming months**

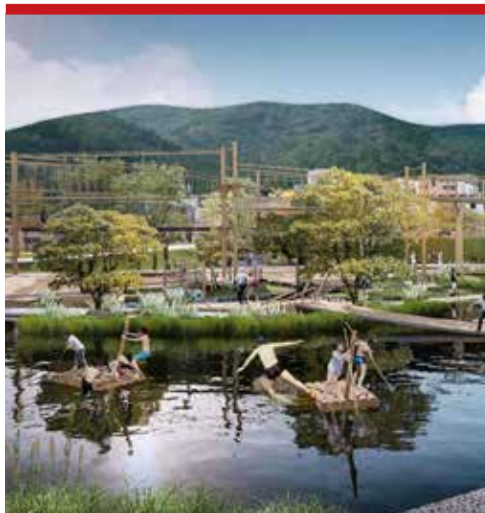


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ANTHONY LAM

# HO REPORTS YEAR'S WORK TO XI

**C**HIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng reported his year of work to President Xi Jinping yesterday in the country's capital city.

In addition, the head of the local government has also presented the latest development and conditions of the city to his superintendent.

According to Xinhua News Agency, Xi said that over the past year, Ho has led the government to perform its duties conscientiously and pragmatically, successfully completed the revision of the Macau National Security Law, advanced the revision of the Chief Executive Election Law and the Legislative Council Election Law in an orderly manner, and strengthened the supervision of the gambling industry.

In addition, Ho was also praised for compiling the first development plan for economic

diversification, while pushing forward the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The local head of the government was also complimented for expanding external cooperation and exchange, bringing a steep recovery to the city's economy, maintaining harmony and stability in society.

"The Central People's Government fully recognizes the work of the Chief Executive and the government," the Macau government noted in a statement.

"Xi emphasized that in the new era and new journey, we are comprehensively promoting the construction of a strong country and the great cause of national rejuvenation with Chinese-style modernization," the statement read.

AP FILE PHOTO



GBA

# Forum on industrial integration opens in Macau

**A** forum on finance, science, technology, innovation and industrial integration in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area opened yesterday in the city.

Organized by the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area Entrepreneurs Union, the forum pooled together government and business representatives as well as experts and scholars in the three regions to offer their advice to the industrial integration and development of the Greater Bay Area.

Ho Iat Seng, chief executive of the Macau SAR, said in a video speech that the forum can further help the industrial world build a platform for sharing experiences and exploring frontier technologies, so as to inject new vitality into the scientific and technological industrial consolidation in the Greater Bay Area.

Ho welcomed entrepreneurs in the Greater Bay



Area to invest in Macau and the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, neighboring Zhuhai City.

Hong Kong SAR Chief Executive John Lee said in a video that finance, innovation, science and technology are all development priorities for Hong Kong and Macau, which boast limitless potential in promoting cooperation between the two SARs and the integration of Hong Kong into overall national development.

Zhang Xin, vice governor of Guangdong, said the

province would continue supporting the union to better leverage its platform advantages to promote the integrated development of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau.

The union's members include representatives of major chambers of commerce and enterprises in the three regions, covering traditional industries, high technology, high-end service industry as well as management of businesses with different sources of funding from Hong Kong, other countries and the mainland. **XINHUA**

EMPLOYMENT

# AMID RISING WILLINGNESS TO WORK AT GBA, LESS FAMILIARITY WITH POLICIES

**A**LTHOUGH more people are willing to work on the mainland side of the GBA, many people are still unfamiliar with the area's policies, a survey has revealed.

Conducted in July by email and social media questionnaires as well as street interviews by the Macau Management Association (MMA), the survey collected 1,050 valid responses from 552 men and 498 women. Nearly 70% were aged between 22 and 40 years. Over 94% had at least secondary education level.

Compared with last year's result, the survey showed that more people expressed willingness to work on the mainland side of the GBA, but the number of respondents reported who were not clear about developmental policies in the area also rose year-over-year.

In response to the situation, the association suggests the government,



research entities and local associations escalate promotions on relevant policies.

Respondents were less worried about their employment year-over-year, but the wish to change jobs has also shrunk. Last year, with less shoppers and classes suspended, many topical employees have changed jobs. This year, on the contrary, the hotel and casino industries have regained the vigor of job shift.

The association's suggestions in response to the overall findings include recommending employees

construct effective interpersonal networks so as to exchange knowledge and views on market intelligence and policies. They should also embrace their new roles and responsibilities, as well as possessing high adaptability, in order to face an ever-changing market. Work culture and work-life balance should be considered as far as job change is concerned.

To employers, the association suggests they offer sufficient opportunities for career development and life education, in addition to vocational development options in all directions. **AL**

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AAM

# Architects' headquarters might soon change location

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE headquarters of the Architects Association of Macau (AAM), currently at the 2-storey Villa at the Avenida do Coronel Mesquita in Macau, might soon relocate, the Times learned from a source.

Contacted by the Times on this topic, the president of the AAM, Architect Christine Choi said that "there is currently no official announcement to be made on this matter," leaving to a later time any announcement related to the potential move.

According to the information collected by the Times, the government, which owns the land as well as the building, may be interested in reclaiming it for an undisclosed purpose.

The same sources indicated that the government officially informed the association of its intentions in around October this year, giving the association a period of six months to prepare for the move.

The Architects' Association headquarters has been located



at this premises for over 25 years, since November 1998, which, according to the AAM official website, has been provided free of charge by the government for the use of the AAM.

A review made by the Times of the government official records on the building and land shows that the whole quarters

includes six different plots from the numbers 2B to 2I (AAM headquarters is located at 2F). These plots were registered under the Macau territory property back in 1995 in a dispatch published on the Official Gazette on April 20, 1995 by the Office of the Assistant-secretary for Transport and Public Works José Manuel

Machado.

Under the current statutes, the AAM has existed since January 1988 although it has its origins in an earlier organization, the Macau Association of Architects in Private Practice, which is eight years older.

The quarters where the AAM headquarters is located is comprised of several villas with the numbers 2B to 2E, including older constructions with houses in a Portuguese colonial style. These seem to be currently unoccupied and show some signs of decay and abandonment.

The second part of the quarters (2F to 2I) is occupied by more modern constructions that are, apparently, all in current use.

Although the area has recently drawn attention from the government and particularly from the Cultural Affairs Bureau which has presented and developed several revitalization projects for other villas located in the same street, there is no information or disclosure from the government on any intentions for these particular quarters.

## COTAI HOSPITAL PARKING LOT TO OPEN TODAY

The 1,070-space public parking lot at the Cotai hospital will open at 10 a.m. today. The parking will accommodate both cars and motorcycles. Parking services are charged at MOP8/hour between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. as well as MOP4/hour between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. for cars and MOP3 and MOP1.5 per daytime and nighttime hours for motorcycles. Payments can be made by cash, Macau Pass, Mpay and Contactless UnionPay. Managed by the Transport Bureau, the parking lot is subject to all current parking lot rules and regulations announced by the government. The hospital itself will only soft open later this month.

## ELSIE AO IEONG COMMENDS NEW HOSPITAL AS BAR RAISER

Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao leong believes that the new hospital in Cotai will help improve the quality of medical services in the city, based on the fact that it will be the largest medical facility by area in Macau, as well as the fact that it will possess state-of-the-art equipment and professional teams. The secretary also believes that the queue for public medical services will be shortened with the new hospital. She also described the new facility as the fruits of One Country Two Systems and national support.

## HOTEL INDUSTRY EXPECTS 90% OCCUPANCY DURING CHRISTMAS

Lawmaker and president of Macau Hoteliers & Innkeepers Association, Cheung Kin Chung, told local media that he expects the local hotel occupancy rate to reach 90% during the coming festive season. He announced that the city has recently seen more affordable accommodation options. When intertwined with the series of events to be held during the period, tourists would likely stay longer in Macau, he predicted. He said that the workforce scarcity in the industry had "basically" been resolved. Currently, the city has 137 hotels that offer about 45,000 rooms, he added.

WELFARE

# Six people found shelter at IAS winter facility, two are HK residents

RENATO MARQUES

**A** total of six people have found shelter, so far, at the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) Winter Shelter, IAS said in response to a Times inquiry.

According to the bureau, the six people who have used the shelter since the opening of the facility (last Saturday) were two residents of Hong Kong and four residents of Macau.

The venue that operates at the "Vui Ieng Service Centre" of the Macao Caritas, at Ilha Verde, is open temporarily and available overnight from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. the next day while very cold temperatures persist, IAS noted. The opening of the venue for this purpose is prompted by the issuing



of the "yellow" warning for low temperature by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG).

The IAS further said in the reply to the Times that the six people who resorted to the shelter were all males aged between 40 and 80 years old.

Besides accommodation services for those in need, the facility also provides meals and showers, IAS said.

It is not clear in the response issued by the IAS if the people seeking help have used the services on other occasions, or if this is their first time using the shelter. The IAS also did not clarify the main reasons for these people seeking help at the shelter or what kind of other services they might be seeking. It is also unclear as to whether these people are homeless or temporarily unhoused, or

people with homes but who are living in poor conditions.

The yellow warning of low temperatures was effective during the

weekend (December 16 and 17) recording a minimum of 9.1°C for the early hours of Sunday.

According to the SMG forecast, temperatures will rise slightly over the upcoming days dropping again to around 9°C from December 23 (Saturday) with the humidity levels (generally high in Macau) also dropping to as low as 30% around Sunday (December 24).

**Plan for granting financial support for the scrapping of obsolete motorcycles and their replacement by new electric motorcycles**

Enthusiastic response, second phase

Implementing the National Dual Carbon Goals

The financial support and waived fees total a maximum of **MOP8,800**

1 First application period: **2023/6/1 - 2024/5/31**  
Target Recipients of the financial support: **Owners of obsolete motorcycles registered on or before December 31, 2010**

2 Second application period: **2024/6/1 - 2025/5/31**  
Target Recipients of the financial support: **Owners of obsolete motorcycles registered between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2013**

www.dspa.gov.mo 2476-2626



INFRASTRUCTURE

# AL COMMITTEE ENQUIRES ABOUT HAC-SA ADVENTURE PARK BUDGET

ANTHONY LAM

**L**AWMAKERS were concerned with the lowering of the estimate for the pricing of the future Hac-Sa Adventure Park, a parliamentary committee disclosed yesterday.

The parliament's Committee for the Follow-up of Public Financial Affairs, presided over by lawmaker Wong Kit Cheng, revealed that the price estimate for the project had dropped by MOP27.6 million to MOP180 million in the third quarter of this year from the amount in the first.

Committee members were concerned with the reasons behind the decrease, in addition to the project's future budget and execution. Requests have been made to the government for further explanation, Wong added.

On the other hand, Wong also said that the approved budget for the third quarter of this year had risen for MOP440 million quarter-over-quarter. Budget execution rate, meanwhile, has risen by 19.7%.

In addition, the committee president has pointed out that



11 projects in the government's Investment and Development Expenditure Plan (PIDDA) had increased pricing, when comparing the third quarter with the first. Besides, 77 projects saw unchanged price tags while 77 have smaller price tags.

Among all these projects, 21 saw price tags over MOP100 million after price adjustments, with four having come without explanations. As a result, the com-

mittee has requested the government to explain.

The four projects concerned the LRT East Line, the Public Prosecutions Office at the base court in Nam Van, the Amizade Bridge and the AI government housing project on New Urban Zone A.

Another parliamentary committee has concluded its discussion on the Bill concerning motor vehicle registrations. The Bill will then be delivered to the plenary

for discussions before voting.

The Bill mainly focused on the digitization of the registration process.

The main contents include the introduction of electronic submission of registration requests; the integration of registration services and improved coordination through interdepartmental mechanisms; the empowerment of registration staff to perform registration actions stipulated

in the Bill under the supervision and leadership of the registrar; the processing of the ownership registration certificate of vehicles; as well as the improvement of the current car registration system, in areas such as increasing the contents to be registered, paperless registration and enhanced identification of stakeholders.

When asked by the committee about the scope of authority of digitized registrations, government representatives underlined that initial registration of ownership, transfer of ownership, and nullification of registration, as well as change of addresses of ownership will be conducted digitally after the passing of the Bill.

The Bill has also proposed that vehicle registration and initial ownership registration would be better incorporated by digitization and simplification. The proposed means of operations is that vehicle registration be conducted at the Transport Bureau. Once approved, the data will be transferred to the Public Registration Office. Payments for connected fees can be settled online. When the application goes through, a digital registration document will be issued by the Public Registration Office.

In response to the complete digitization of initial ownership registration, committee members expressed their support.

AD



澳門特別行政區政府  
GOVERNO DA REGIÃO ADMINISTRATIVA ESPECIAL DE MACAU  
公共建設局  
DIRECÇÃO DOS SERVIÇOS DE OBRAS PÚBLICAS

## 澳氹第四條跨海大橋徵名活動 章程

目的：透過是次活動向澳門居民徵集澳氹第四條跨海大橋的名稱建議，供特區政府為大橋命名時作為參考

主辦單位：澳門特別行政區政府公共建設局

參加者資格：

1. 澳門特別行政區居民（持永久或非永久居民身份證）；
2. 需年滿18周歲或以上。

徵名要求：

1. 每名參加者只可提交一份建議，每份建議內最多可以有三個名稱；
2. 附有以澳門特別行政區官方語言書寫的每一名稱創意說明簡述。

徵名方式：

1. 僅採網上徵名，符合資格人士在徵名期間可以於公共建設局網頁www.dsop.gov.mo的徵名活動專頁中，透過一戶通帳號登入及填寫電子表單。
2. 每人只限參與一次，並且不接受更改已填寫的資料。

徵名時間：2023年12月16日~ 2024年1月15日

名稱決選方式：

1. 由特區政府邀請社團代表及專業人士組成評選委員會，並對本次活動收集到的建議名稱進行投票評選，評選5個參考名稱；
2. 由特區政府於5個參考名稱中，決選1個最終名稱。

獎勵：本次活動中，建議最終名稱之參加者，除可獲得主辦單位發出之徵名證書外，將以抽籤形式獲得以下獎項（如參加者少於獎項名額，則按實際情況設獎）：

頭獎1名：MOP 10,000.00獎金及紀念品各一份。

貳獎1名：MOP 8,000.00獎金及紀念品各一份。

參獎1名：MOP 6,000.00獎金及紀念品各一份。

參加獎50名：紀念品一份。

### 其他條款及細則

- 為公平起見，評選委員、公共建設局員工及其直系親屬不得參加本次徵名活動。
- 所提交的建議名稱及創意說明必須為原創，參加者應確認其擁有的知識產權，如有違規，主辦單位保留取消其參加或獲獎資格之權利。
- 就參加本次活動所有提交的建議名稱及創意說明，其一切知識產權/版權，需無條件地轉移給主辦單位，主辦單位有權透過任何途徑使用，包括以不同媒介公開，不另給予額外報酬。
- 特區政府之決定為最後決定。
- 主辦單位如發現參加者不符合規定時，有權取消其參加資格。
- 本章程如有未盡之處，得由主辦單位加以修改及解釋。
- 凡參加者即視為同意並遵守本章程規定事項。
- 本活動所收集的所有個人資料將按《個人資料保護法》處理，並只作本次活動用途。
- 評選結果及頒獎時間、地點將於稍後另行公佈。
- 如有疑問，請於辦公時間內致電公共建設局28713726查詢。

## TRANSPORTATION

# SURVEY FINDS PUBLIC LESS SATISFIED WITH DSAT THAN BUS OPERATORS

**A** survey has revealed that members of the public are more satisfied with the two bus operators than the Transport Bureau (DSAT).

Conducted by the Kai Fong Association between November and December this year, the survey collected 650 valid questionnaire responses out of 800 distributed. It targeted members of the public older than 18 years and students under this age.

From the pool of valid respondents, 35.54% take buses from one to five times a week, 19.69% six to 10 times and 14.15% zero times.

The average scores of satisfaction for bus operators TCM and Transmac were 6.38 and 6.56, while the score for the DSAT was 5.94. Despite the low score for the DSAT, the bus app developed by the bureau garnered an average score of satisfaction reaching 7 points. Respondents were least satisfied with waiting



time, which only scored 5.76 points on average.

Nearly 67% of respondents pointed towards departure frequencies as the area that urgently needs improvement.

The association has also questioned those not using bus services as to their usual mode of transport. An overwhelming 78.26% had their own vehicles, while 34.78% relied on walking. Less than 5% reported taking taxis regularly while the rest

relied on other modes of transport.

The three most popular reasons behind respondents' not using bus services are not being able to get on buses during peak hours, bus trips taking too long and there being too many stops en-route.

Besides adding departures, the associations suggested the government foster enhancements on bus-LRT transits and improve seating arrangements on buses. **AL**





# Celebrate Christmas with SJM's Winter Wonders

**S**JM Resorts, S.A. ("SJM") is launching a series of festive events this season, as part of a broader effort to align with the government's initiative to promote tourism across the Macau community and stimulate the local economy.

In full support of the government's call to boost non-gaming endeavors, SJM has spared no effort in contributing to bring this vision to life.

This December marks the 24th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region. SJM has actively participated in numerous government events and has organised multiple activities with the aim of creating a distinctive synergy to further enhance Macau's image as a must-visit destination city.

## ILLUMINATING THE CITY WITH DAZZLING LIGHT DISPLAYS

In celebration of Macao Government Tourism Office's "Light Up Macao" event this winter, SJM is illuminating the Central District of Macau, from Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro to Ponte 16 Resort, along the city's inner harbour, with a series of spectacular "Blooming Splendor" light installations from now until

February 25, 2024.

The Central District, a popular tourism spot surrounded by World Heritage sites, is the historical heart of Macau's economic prosperity and is home to the collective memories of Macau residents.

In line with this year's theme of "The Dazzling Wonderland," SJM uses flowers to portray Macau's unique blend of Chinese and Western cultures. Vibrant colors are used to transform the Central District of Macau into a "Blooming Splendor."

The brightly lit areas include: Ponte No. 16 and Ponte 16 Resort, Rua de Cinco de Outubro, Kam Pek Community Centre, Cathedral Square and Travessa de São Domingos. The "Blooming Splendor" will lead visitors and residents on an explorative journey through the city during the festive seasons.

## ENRICHING CULTURAL AND TOURISM EXPERIENCES

As a company deeply rooted in Macau, SJM has been steadfast in its efforts to enrich the cultural and tourism experiences in Macau.

This December, SJM joins forces with the Cultural Affairs

Bureau to hold the "One Cultural Base Winter Programme." By fully supporting this festive event, SJM aims to showcase Macau's diverse vibrancy and cultural depth.

Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro will be decorated with artistic lighting installations, skillfully infusing the area with Macau's modern elements. These vibrant lights and shadows will brighten up the Central District, filling it with vitality.

On December 31, SJM will present the "Star-Studded Ballet Gala—Macao Orchestra New Year Concert 2024," at Macao Cultural Centre and bid farewell to 2023 with a night of enchanting music.

The concert will be conducted by Lio Kuokman, Macao Orchestra's Music Director and Principal Conductor. Joining him on stage will be the talented cellist and celebrity singer, Nana Ou Yang. She will grace the audiences with her performance of excerpts from Tchaikovsky's ballet, "The Nutcracker," along with other programmes featuring the Hong Kong Ballet. On the same evening, SJM will present a magnificent fireworks display at the top of the Macau Tower, ushering in the New Year and illuminating

the night sky of Macau with a dazzling spectacle.

## CHRISTMAS MARKET FEATURING LOCAL SMES

The "SJM Christmas Market" has also kicked off, highlighting Macau's diverse "Tourism+" offerings and the allure of community tourism, solidifying Macau's reputation as a "World Centre of Tourism and Leisure."

Spanning over a period of 10 days, SJM join hands with several local small and medium-sized enterprises, contributing significantly to economic development and employment.

This bustling market will showcase an eclectic mix of art and cultural products, local crafts, and festive delicacies.

Taking place at the Ponte 16 Outdoor Plaza, the market opens from 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. on December 9, 10, 16, 17, 23 to 26, as well as 30 and 31.

Visitors can look forward to captivating singing and dance performances, adding to the market's lively atmosphere.

## BRINGING JOYFUL EXPERIENCES THIS CHRISTMAS

Bringing friends and families together in the true spirit of the season, SJM is pleased to present a range of luxurious hotel stays, delectable Christmas delicacies, indulgent spa experiences, special retail offers, live performances, and holiday art experiences for families.

Grand Lisboa Palace Resorts Macau ("Grand Lisboa Palace"),

Grand Lisboa Hotel ("Grand Lisboa") and Jai Alai Oceanus are adorned with dazzling Christmas décor for picture perfect moments, while their restaurants are awaiting with an exceptional selection of festive offers!

From December 20 to January 7, 2024, guests who take the SJM shuttle bus or dine at designated SJM restaurants can instantly participate in the "Lisboa Destinations Surprises" by receiving a special tear-off card for a chance to win exciting prizes, including iPhones, luxurious accommodations, dining privileges, transportation services, special souvenirs and much more.

From December 18 to January 1, 2024, Grand Lisboa Palace is launching the "Joyous Shopping Rewards" campaign. Shoppers who spend MOP3,000 or above at the mall are eligible to unlock a trove of incredible rewards, starting from dining and shopping vouchers to a luxurious night stay at Grand Lisboa Palace and vouchers worth MOP4,400.

In addition to the beautiful, shimmering lights of Jardim Secreto, guests can immerse themselves in a series of "Grand Lisboa Palace Live Performances" throughout the resort, set to captivate hearts until the year's end. Adding a creative twist to the festivities, the "GLP Art Workshops" invite guests to express their holiday spirit by decorating Christmas photo frames, wreaths, and trees – crafting memories to cherish.



Celebrate Christmas and bid 2023 a grand farewell with a sumptuous feast at Don Alfonso 1890 in Palazzo Versace Macau



Savour the extraordinary flavours of traditional Portuguese feast at Mesa by José Avillez in THE KARL LAGERFELD MACAU



Enjoy a range of festive delicacies and treat your taste buds at Grand Lisboa with loved ones



HONG KONG

# Landmark national security trial opens in court for prominent activist publisher Lai

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

A landmark national security trial opened yesterday in Hong Kong for prominent activist and publisher Jimmy Lai, who faces a possible life sentence if convicted under the security law enforced in 2020 to crush dissidents.

Lai, 76, was arrested in August 2020 during a crackdown on the city's pro-democracy movement under the national security law enacted following huge protests four years ago. He was charged with colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security and conspiring with others to put out seditious publications.

The closely watched case — tied to the now-shuttered pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily that Lai founded — is widely seen as a trial of press freedom and a test for judicial independence in the Asian financial hub.

Lai's trial is Hong Kong's first on charges of collusion with foreign forces. It also targets three companies related to Apple Daily.

Lai smiled and waved at his supporters after he walked into the courtroom. Some members of the public waved at Lai to show their support. Hong Kong's Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen, a vocal democracy advocate in the city, and representatives from foreign consulates were among the attendees.

Ahead of the opening statements, Lai's lawyer Robert Pang, facing the prosecution in court,



Policemen stand guard as they keep a watchful eye on people gathered in a cordoned off area as a vehicle believed to be carrying Jimmy Lai arrives at West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts, yesterday

said the sedition charge his client was facing didn't follow the due course of law.

Pang argued the law required the prosecution of sedition charges to begin within six months after an alleged offense was committed, saying the prosecutors failed to do it within that time frame in Lai's case.

Three judges, approved by the government, are overseeing the proceedings. The trial is expected to last about 80 days.

Last year, six former Apple Daily executives entered guilty pleas to collusion charges, admitting to the court they conspired with Lai to call for sanctions or other hostile activities against Hong Kong or

China. They were convicted and await sentencing behind bars.

Some of the former executives, alongside two others who also pleaded guilty to collusion charges, were expected to testify as witnesses for the prosecution of Lai.

Outside the court building, there was a heavy police presence. Dozens of residents queued up to attend the hearing hours before its start.

Jolly Chung, 29, was among the first in the line, saying she would try to get in to observe the proceedings whenever she could.

"As a Hong Konger, I want to witness this, even though I know he will lose," she said.

Andy Sung, in his 40s, said he came to witness history. "Choosing to come here is a small practice of some sort of resistance," he said.

Pro-democracy activist Alexandra Wong, popularly known as "Grandma Wong," was blocked from approaching the court building by the police.

"Support Jimmy Lai, support the Apple Daily, support the truth," she chanted.

Lai's trial was originally scheduled to start last December but was postponed while the Hong Kong government appealed to Beijing to effectively block his attempt to hire a British defense lawyer. City authorities subsequently barred

the lawyer, Timothy Owen, from representing Lai, saying it would likely pose national security risks.

Last week, Lai's son Sebastien met with Britain's foreign secretary, David Cameron, to lobby for Britain's help in freeing his father, who holds British citizenship.

Cameron said in a statement that the security law is a "clear breach" of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and its continued use shows China has broken its international commitments.

Cameron said he was particularly concerned by the "politically motivated prosecution" of Lai. He urged Chinese officials to repeal the security law and release Lai.

The chairpersons of the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China said in a statement that the trial is a "political prosecution plain and simple and another sad example of the Hong Kong government's increasingly repressive policies." They also called for Lai's release and urged authorities to drop the charges against him.

Hong Kong, once seen as a bastion of media freedom in Asia, ranked 140th out of 180 countries and territories in Reporters Without Borders' latest World Press Freedom Index. The group said the city had seen an "unprecedented setback" since 2020 when the security law was imposed.

The governments of both Hong Kong and China have hailed the law for bringing back stability to the city, as did some sectors of the public. MDT/AP

DIRE STRAIT

# Taiwan reports two Chinese balloons near its territory

TWO Chinese balloons flew north of Taiwan, the island's Defense Ministry said yesterday, as China increases pressure on the self-ruled territory it claims as its own ahead of major elections in January.

The balloons crossed the sensitive Taiwan Strait separating the island from the mainland and were detected about 110 nautical miles (204 kilometers) northwest of the northern port city of Keelung on Sunday, the ministry said.

It was the second time this month Taiwan re-

ported a Chinese balloon near its territory, after one crossed southwest of Keelung on Dec. 7.

China's potential for using weather balloons to spy on other governments came into focus earlier this year, when the United States shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon over the Atlantic Ocean, drawing China's ire.

Taiwan's ministry did not say whether it suspected the balloon could have been used for spying.

China's Foreign Ministry did not immedi-

tely comment.

Beijing has increased pressure on Taiwan by sending military aircraft and warships near the island almost daily.

Taipei is preparing for their leader's election on Jan. 13. The front-runner, current No. 2, William Lai of the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party, has been criticized by Beijing as a "separatist."

Lai has said he wants to maintain peace and the status quo in relations with China.

Taiwan split from Chi-



na amid civil war in 1949, but Beijing continues to regard the island of 23

million with its high-tech economy as Chinese territory and has been steadily

upping its threat to achieve that goal by military force if necessary. MDT/AP



**NORTH KOREA**

# Military conducts first long-range missile test in months, likely firing a solid-fueled weapon

HYUNG-JIN KIM &  
MARI YAMAGUCHI, SEOUL

**N**ORTH Korea yesterday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, likely launching a developmental, more agile weapon, as it vows strong responses against U.S. and South Korean moves to boost their nuclear deterrence plans.

The South Korean government described the missile tested as a solid-fueled weapon, a likely reference to the North's road-mobile Hwasong-18 ICBM whose built-in solid propellants make its launch more difficult for adversaries to detect than liquid-fueled weapons. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un previously called the Hwasong-18 the most powerful weapon of his nuclear forces.

South Korea's military said the North Korean missile flew about 1,000 kilometers before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. It said the missile was launched on an elevated angle, an apparent attempt to avoid neighboring countries. Japanese lawmaker Masahisa Sato, citing Japan's Defense Ministry, said the missile rose as high as 6,000 kilometers.

The reported flight details matched those of North Korea's second test of the Hwasong-18 missile in July. The North first test-fired the missile in April.

Since 2017, North Korea has carried out a slew of ICBM tests



in a bid to acquire the ability to launch nuclear strikes on the U.S. mainland. But all of its previous ICBM tests before April's Hwasong-18 launch involved liquid-propellant ICBMs, which need to be fueled before launch and cannot stay fueled for long periods of time.

In a trilateral call, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his South Korean and Japanese counterparts condemned the North Korean launch, which the White House said was "a flagrant" violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by the North. It said the three advisers also underscored the importance of sharing data and coordinating res-

ponses amid growing cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol ordered officials to maintain a solid South Korean-U.S. joint defense posture and respond "swiftly and overwhelmingly" to any North Korean provocations against South Korean territory. In a televised statement, senior South Korean military officer Lee Seung O separately warned that North Korea will be solely responsible for all the consequences that could occur due to its provocations.

The North's ICBM test was its second weapons firing in less than a day. On Sunday night, the North launched a short-range ballistic missile, also into the water off its east coast, according to the South

Korean, Japanese and U.S. governments.

South Korea's military said the short-range missile flew about 570 kilometers (354 miles), a range that observers say is far enough to reach all key sites in South Korea, including U.S. military installations, if weapons are launched near the border with the South.

The U.S. military said the launch highlighted "the destabilizing impact of (North Korea's) illicit weapons program."

Observers said the North's back-to-back launches were likely a protest against moves by South Korea and the United States to bolster their joint nuclear deterrence capabilities in the face of North Korea's evolving nuclear

threats.

Senior U.S. and South Korean officials met in Washington on Friday for their second Nuclear Consultative Group meeting. They agreed to update their nuclear deterrence and contingency strategies and incorporate nuclear operation scenarios in their combined military exercises next summer, according to Seoul officials.

The consultative body is responsible for sharing information on nuclear and strategic weapons operation plans and joint operations, though the U.S. will retain operational control of its nuclear weapons. U.S. officials said the group's establishment and other steps to solidify U.S. security commitment were meant to ease South Korean worries about North Korean provocations while keeping Seoul from pursuing its own nuclear program.

The "U.S. side reiterated that any nuclear attack by (North Korea) against (South Korea) will be met with a swift, overwhelming, and decisive response," said a joint statement issued after Friday's meeting.

On Sunday, North Korea's Defense Ministry slammed its rivals' move to include nuclear operation scenarios in their joint drills, describing it as an open threat to potentially use nuclear weapons against the North.

"The armed forces of (North Korea) will thoroughly neutralize the U.S. and its vassal forces' attempt to ignite a nuclear war," the North Korean statement said. "Any attempt by the hostile forces to use armed force against (North Korea) will face a preemptive and deadly counteraction."

Since last year, North Korea has performed about 100 ballistic missile tests as part of its efforts to enlarge its arsenal of nuclear-capable weapons targeting the U.S. and its allies. Experts say North Korea would eventually aim to use its weapons arsenal to wrest greater U.S. concessions. **MDT/AP**

**THAILAND**

# 15 suspected drug smugglers killed in clash with Thai soldiers

**FIFTEEN** suspected drug smugglers were killed and about 2 million methamphetamine tablets seized in northern Thailand near the Myanmar border after a shootout with Thai soldiers, Thai officials said.

The clash, which occurred Saturday night, came after the local army received a tip that there would be smuggling activity near

the border in Chiang Rai province, said Phanurat Lukboon, acting secretary-general of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board.

Officers found a group of about 20 people carrying backpacks in the area, Phanurat said on Sunday. After the officers identified themselves and asked to inspect the bags, the group began shooting at them, he added.

The clash lasted around 15 minutes and the Thai officers were all safe, Phanurat said while on a visit to the site where the incident occurred. He thanked the officers for their help in "preventing these awful things from entering our country and destroying our youth."

Seventeen backpacks made from fertilizer sacks were found with the

suspected smugglers and more than 2 million methamphetamine pills were inside the bags, officials said.

No arrests were made and officials were still working to identify the 15 people killed in the clash and the origin of the drugs, according to the Office of the Narcotics Control Board.

On Wednesday, Thai-

land announced it had seized 50 million methamphetamine tablets in the western province of Kan-cha-naburi, also near the Myanmar border. It was said to be a record haul of the drug in the country.

Myanmar has historically been Southeast Asia's main drug production area in part because of lax security measures in border areas where minority ethnic groups have long been fighting for greater autonomy. Some of the powerful ethnic armed groups there have been heavily involved in narcotics production for decades.

A 2021 military takeover in Myanmar that unseated

the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi triggered armed resistance nationwide, further destabilizing the country and contributing to an increase in its drug production.

Last week, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime said in its "Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2023" that Myanmar has topped Afghanistan to become the world's biggest opium producer.

The U.N. drug agency's June 2023 report on synthetic drugs in East and Southeast Asia warned that the huge trade in methamphetamine and other illegal drugs shows no signs of slowing down. **MDT/AP**



ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

# US defense secretary expected to press for a more targeted approach in Gaza

TARA COPP, TEL AVIV

**U**.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was expected to press Israel to wind down major combat operations in Gaza on a visit today [Macau time], in the latest test of whether the U.S. can leverage its unwavering support for the offensive to blunt its devastating impact on Palestinian civilians.

France, the U.K. and Germany — some of Israel's closest allies — joined global calls for a cease-fire over the weekend, and Israeli protesters have demanded the government relaunch talks with Hamas on releasing more hostages after three were mistakenly killed by Israeli troops while waving a white flag.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted that Israel will keep fighting until it removes Hamas from power, crushes its still-formidable military capabilities and returns the dozens of hostages still held by the group after its Oct. 7 attack, which ignited the war.

The U.S. has vetoed calls for a cease-fire at the U.N. and rushed munitions to its close ally while pressing it to take greater steps to avoid harming civilians. More than 100 people were killed in strikes on residential buildings in northern Gaza on Sunday, a Health Ministry official in the Hamas-run territory said. The 10-week-old war has killed over 18,700 Palestinians and transformed much of the north into a moonscape.

Some 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes, with most packing into U.N.-run shelters and tent camps in the southern part of the besieged territory.

Austin and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. CQ Brown, who arrived in Tel Aviv yesterday, are expected to press Israeli leaders to transition to a new phase of the war after weeks of heavy bombardment and a ground offensive. American officials have called for targeted operations aimed at killing Hamas leaders, destroying tunnels and rescuing hostages.



Under U.S. pressure, Israel provided more precise evacuation instructions as troops moved into the southern city of Khan Younis earlier this month, though Palestinians say nowhere in Gaza is safe as Israel continues to carry out strikes in all parts of the territory.

Israel reopened its main cargo crossing with Gaza to allow more aid in — also after a request from the U.S. But the amount is still less than half of prewar imports, even as needs have soared and fighting hinders delivery in many areas.

## UNPRECEDENTED DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

The war began with an unprecedented surprise attack by Hamas that overwhelmed Israel's border defenses. Thousands of militants rampaged across southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 240 men, women and children.

Hamas and other militants are still holding an estimated 129 captives after most of the rest were freed in return for Israel's release of 240 Palestinian prisoners during a truce last month. Hamas has said no more hostages will be released until the war ends.

More than 18,700 Palestinians have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory, which has said most are women and minors, and that thousands more are buried under the rubble. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths.

Israel's military says 126 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza offensive. It says it has killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence.

Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas, saying it uses them as human shields when it operates in dense, residential areas. But the military rarely comments on individual strikes.

At least 110 people were killed in Israel's bombardment of residential buildings in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza on Sunday, Munnir al-Boursh, a senior Health Ministry official, told Al-Jazeera television.

The area has seen heavy fighting in recent days. "No one can retrieve the martyrs or take the wounded to hospitals," said Amal Radwan, who is staying at a U.N. shelter in Jabaliya.

The military meanwhile released pictures of what it said was around \$1.3 million in Israeli currency found in the home of a senior Hamas operative in the camp.

## ISRAEL RAIDS HOSPITAL

Heavy fighting around Gaza's hospitals has forced most of them to shut down. Israel accuses militants of sheltering in health facilities and has provided evidence in some cases. Health officials deny the allegations and say the army has recklessly endangered civilians.

The World Health Organization said it was "appalled

by an Israeli raid on northern Gaza's Kamal Adwan Hospital over the last several days. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said late Sunday that at least eight patients had died, including a 9-year-old, and that several had fled on foot because ambulances could not reach the facility.

The military said troops operating in and around the hospital had detained dozens of suspected militants, some of whom had taken part in the Oct. 7 attack, and had seized "numerous" weapons. It said the hospital had been used as a command center by Hamas, without providing evidence.

A similar standoff unfolded last month at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City — the territory's largest — where hundreds of patients and tens of thousands of displaced people were stranded for days with little food, water or medical supplies. Israel said Hamas concealed a major command center inside the hospital, and revealed what appeared to be a militant hideout beneath the facility before withdrawing days later.

The WHO, which is working to restore services at Shifa and was able to visit on Friday, described its emergency department as a "bloodbath," with hundreds of wounded patients, some being sutured on the floor with little or no pain medicine. It said tens of thousands of people are sheltering in the medical compound despite severe shortages of food and water. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1984 BRITAIN SIGNS OVER HONG KONG TO CHINA



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

A bloody crackdown by troops on protests in the Chinese capital, Beijing, in June 1989, soured relations between Britain and China.

The British Government, fearing for the colony's future, responded by granting British passports to 50,000 Hong Kong heads of families, building a new international airport, and introducing a Bill of Rights.

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

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

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



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES** Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
 You will meet new romantic partners through the company you keep. Too much talk might lead to hassles. Your health may suffer if you don't control your present situation.

**TAURUS** Apr. 20-May. 20  
 Any financial limitations will probably have to be dealt with on your own. The existing problems must be dealt with one way or another.

**GEMINI** May. 21-Jun. 21  
 Overindulgence could cause problems for you with your loved ones. Don't spend too much in order to impress others. Invite friends or relatives into your home.

**CANCER** Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
 It might be time for you to take a quantum leap from one career to another. Organize your house and be sure to include the whole family in the projects you have set out to do.

**LEO** Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
 You can anger others quickly today. Avoid overspending on items for your home. Travel will be favorable. Put all your energy into moneymaking ventures.

**VIRGO** Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
 Relax and enjoy what you've accomplished when you're finished. Take time to deal with authority figures or government agencies.

**LIBRA** Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
 You would be wise to socialize with as many people as possible. People who try to persuade you to do things their way will annoy you. You need to do more things that you enjoy.

**SCORPIO** Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
 Finish projects that have been hanging over your head. Insincere gestures of friendliness are likely to occur. Your home environment appears to be a little shaky.

**SAGITTARIUS** Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
 You will be emotional about money matters. Try to mix business with pleasure while traveling. Get busy. Let them know what your intentions are.

**CAPRICORN** Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
 Get proper medical attention and confront your situation decisively. Your fight for those less fortunate is not likely to end in sweet victory.

**AQUARIUS** Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
 Someone close to you will get upset easily if you are insensitive to their needs. Spend time with friends and relatives. Travel for pleasure. Do not let others exhaust you financially.

**PISCES** Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
 Go on business trips if at all possible. Don't overextend yourself in the process. You can change your living arrangements. Travel will enhance romance and adventure.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

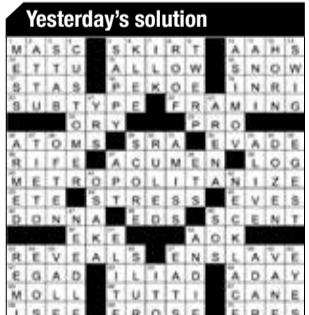
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-13	-4	fine
Changchun	-21	-16	fine
Chengdu	0	10	fine
Chongqing	4	9	cloudy
Fuzhou	7	17	overcast
Guangzhou	8	14	overcast
Guiyang	-2	3	overcast
Haikou	17	21	rain
Hangzhou	0	3	rain
Harbin	-26	-19	fine
Hefei	-3	2	fine
Nanjing	-2	3	overcast
Shanghai	3	7	rain
Taipei	16	19	rain
Wuhan	-2	5	fine
Hong Hong	14	22	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	2	3	snow
Frankfurt	4	4	cloudy
Paris	6	9	rain
London	6	13	rain
New York	-1	7	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Race parts; 5- Bucket; 9- Daybreak; 13- Actor Stoltz; 14- Golfer with an army; 16- Repeat; 17- \_\_\_ expert, but...; 18- Name; 19- French summers; 20- Coal-rich region; 21- Stutz contemporary; 22- Plunder; 24- Wading place; 26- Dull; 27- Pungent bulb; 29- District; 33- Pry; 34- Afternoon affairs; 35- "Strange" introduction; 36- Georgia, once; Abbr.; 37- It's a steal; 38- Long, long time; 39- Actress Harper; 41- "Java" trumpeter; 42- Brought on; 44- Soft-shell clams; 46- Wash cycle; 47- Dweeb; 48- Places to sleep; 49- Conflict; 52- Overhead trains; 53- Goad; 57- Olive genus; 58- \_\_\_ Beautiful Doll; 60- Actual; 61- Fall faller; 62- Untamed; 63- Consumes; 64- Mal de \_\_\_; 65- Riga resident; 66- "Peter Pan" pirate;

**DOWN** 1- Hula hoops?; 2- Writer Bombeck; 3- Actress Gershon; 4- Eighth sign of the zodiac; 5- Regular customer; 6- Shakespearean sprite; 7- Fascinated by; 8- Dogpatch adjective; 9- Burial at sea; 10- Broadway opening; 11- At what time; 12- Centrepiece of the human face; 15- Most strange; 23- Onetime Jeep mfr.; 25- Alley-\_\_\_; 26- Beer choice; 27- Beginning; 28- Scandinavian; 29- Nobles; 30- Food and water; 31- Benjamin; 32- Up \_\_\_ good; 33- Fast fliers; 34- Bronze medalist's place; 37- Of that; 40- Capital of New Mexico; 42- Container cover; 43- Guarantees; 45- Singer Torme; 46- Outcome; 48- Swell up; 49- Metal fastener; 50- Away from the wind; 51- Milk source; 52- Bronte heroine; 54- Enlarge, as a hole; 55- Fence opening; 56- Otherwise; 59- Norse goddess;



**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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## MIGRATIONS

# THE JUNGLE BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND PANAMA BECOMES A HIGHWAY FOR MIGRANTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN,  
MEXICO CITY

ONCE nearly impenetrable for migrants heading north from Latin America, the jungle between Colombia and Panama this year became a speedy but still treacherous highway for hundreds of thousands of people from around the world.

Driven by economic crises, government repression and violence, migrants from China to Haiti decided to risk three days of deep mud, rushing rivers and bandits. Enterprising locals offered guides and porters, set up campsites and sold supplies to migrants, using color-coded wristbands to track who had paid for what.

Enabled by social media and Colombian organized crime, more than 506,000 migrants — nearly two-thirds Venezuelans — had crossed the Darien jungle by mid-December, double the 248,000 who set a record the previous year. Before last year, the record was barely 30,000 in 2016.

Dana Graber Ladek, the Mexico chief for the United Nations International Organization for Migration, said migration flows through the region this year were “historic numbers that we have never seen.”

It wasn't only in Latin America.

The number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean or the Atlantic on small boats to reach Europe this year has surged. More than 250,000 irregular arrivals were registered in 2023, according to the European Commission.

A significant increase from recent years, the number remains well below levels seen in the 2015 refugee crisis, when more than 1 million people landed in Europe, most fleeing wars in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. Still, the rise has fed anti-migrant sentiment and laid the groundwork for tougher legislation.

Earlier this month, the British government announced tough new immigration rules aimed at reducing the number of people able to move to the U.K. each year by hundreds of thousands. Authorized immigration to the U.K. set a record in 2022 with nearly 750,000.

A week later, French opposition lawmakers rejected an immigration bill from President Emmanuel Macron without even debating it. It had been intended to make it easier for France to expel foreigners considered undesirable. Far-right politicians alleged the bill would have increased the

AP PHOTO



number of migrants coming to the country, while migrant advocates said it threatened the rights of asylum-seekers.

In Washington, the debate has shifted from efforts early in the year to open new legal pathways largely toward measures to keep migrants out as Republicans try to take advantage of the Biden administration's push for more aid to Ukraine to tighten the U.S. southern border.

The U.S. started the year opening limited spaces to Venezuelans — as well as Cubans, Nicaraguans and Haitians — in January to enter legally for two years with a sponsor, while expelling those who didn't qualify to Mexico. Their numbers dropped somewhat for a time before climbing again with renewed vigor.

Venezuelan Alexander Mercado had only been back in his country for a month after losing his job in Peru before he and his partner decided to set off for the United States with their infant son.

Venezuela's minimum wage was the equivalent of about \$4 a month then, while 2.2 pounds (a kilogram) of beef was about \$5, said Angelis Flores, his 28-year-old wife.

“Imagine how someone with a salary of \$4 a month survives,” she said.

Mercado, 27, and Flores were already on their way when in September the U.S. announced it was granting temporary legal status to more than 470,000 Venezuelans already in the country. Weeks later, the Biden administration said it was resuming deportation

flights to the South American nation.

Mercado and Flores hiked the well-trod trail through the jungle, managing to push through in three days. Flores and their son, in particular, got very sick. She believes they were infected by the contaminated water they drank along the way.

“There was a body in the middle of river and the ‘zamuros’, those black birds, were eating it and picking it apart ... all of that was running in the river,” she said.

For Mercado and Flores, the journey accelerated once they left the jungle. In October, Panama and Costa Rica announced a deal to speed migrants across their countries. Panama bused migrants to a center in Costa Rica where they were held until they could buy a bus ticket to Nicaragua.

Nicaragua also seemed to opt for speeding migrants through its territory. Mercado said they crossed on buses in a day.

After discovering that Nicaragua had lax visa requirements, Cubans and Haitians poured into Nicaragua on charter flights, purchasing roundtrip tickets they never intended. Citizens of African nations made circuitous series of connecting flights through Africa, Europe and Latin America to arrive in Managua to start travelling overland toward the United States, avoiding the Darien.

In Honduras, Mercado and Flores were given a pass from authorities allowing them five days to transit the country.

Adam Isacson, an analyst tracking migration at the Washington Office on Latin America,

said that Panama, Costa Rica and Honduras grant migrants legal status while they're transiting the countries, which have limited resources, and by letting migrants pass legally the countries make them less vulnerable to extortion from authorities and smugglers.

Then there are Guatemala and Mexico, which Isacson called the “we're-going-to-make-a-show-of-blocking-you countries” attempting to score points with the U.S. government.

For many that has meant spending money to hire smugglers to cross Guatemala and Mexico, or exposing themselves to repeated extortion attempts.

Mercado didn't hire a smuggler and paid the price. It was “very difficult to get through Guatemala,” he said. “The police kept taking money.”

But that was just a taste of what was to come.

Standing outside a Mexico City shelter with their son on a recent afternoon, Flores recounted all of the countries they had traversed.

“But they don't rob you as much, extort you as much, send you back like when you arrive here to Mexico,” she said. “Here the real nightmare starts, because as soon as you enter they start taking a lot of your money.”

Mexico's immigration system was thrown into chaos on March 27, when migrants held in a detention center in the border city Juarez, across from El Paso, Texas, set mattresses on fire inside their cell in apparent protest. The highly flammable foam mattresses filled the cell with thick smoke in an instant. Guards did not open

the cell and 40 migrants died.

The immigration agency's director was among several officials charged with crimes ranging from negligence to homicide. The agency closed 33 of its smaller detention centers while it conducted a review.

Unable to detain many migrants, Mexico instead circulated them around the country, using brief, repeat detentions, each an opportunity for extortion, said Gretchen Kuhner, director of IMUMI, a nongovernmental legal services organization. Advocates called it the “politica de desgaste” or wearing down policy.

Mercado and Flores made it all the way to Matamoros, across the border from Brownsville, Texas, where they were detained, held for a night in an immigration facility in the border city Reynosa and then flown the next morning 650 miles south to Villahermosa.

There they were released, but without their cell phones, shoelaces and money. Mercado had to wait for his brother to send \$100 so they could start trying to make their way back to Mexico City through an indirect route that required them to travel by truck, motorbike and even horse.

In late November, they had just made it back to Mexico City again. This time Mercado was unequivocal: They would not leave Mexico City until the U.S. government gave them an appointment to request asylum at a border port of entry.

“It is really hard to make it back here again,” he said. “If they manage to send me back again I don't know what I would do.” MDT/AP



GRAND PRIX

# Macau to repeat hosting of TCR World Tour Finale in 2024

**T**HE local Grand Prix will once again next year stage the final round of the TCR World Tour, the organizers announced with the official publishing of the complete racing calendar for 2024.

Macau will see another crowning of the championship winner as it did this year, when the event was also part of the 70th edition of the Macau Grand Prix.

In 2024 the championship will be comprised of nine rounds starting in Vallelunga, Italy in April and finishing in Macau in mid-November with stops in Marrakech, Morocco (May), USA (June), Uruguay (August), Zhuzhou, China (September), and two Australia rounds in early November in Sydney and Mount Panorama, New South Wales.

A round to take place in July is also scheduled to take place in



Brazil although the circuit for the event is not yet confirmed.

Last month, in the first edition of this new format TCR competition, the Hungarian Norbert Michelisz was crowned champion of the 2023 edition.

The 2024 edition will also be the first to be included officially as an FIA motorsport series following a one-year hiatus, in which the event, although scrutinized under FIA regulations was not a FIA official event. **RM**



FOOTBALL

## FEYENOORD MEETS ROMA IN PLAYOFFS FOR EUROPA LEAGUE

**F**EYENOORD and Roma will meet in the playoffs to enter the Europa League's round of 16 in a repeat of their title match in the UEFA Conference League in 2022.

Roma won that match 1-0 in Tirana to give Jose Mourinho another European trophy.

The draw yesterday pitted the teams who finished second in their Europa League groups with the clubs who were third in the Champions League groups.

AC Milan stayed alive in European competition by beating Newcastle in its final Champions League group game and

was rewarded with a two-legged match against Rennes. Milan is a seven-time European champion but has never won the second-tier Europa League or its predecessor, the UEFA Cup.

Other highlights included Shakhtar Donetsk being drawn against Marseille and Benfica, another former European champion, taking on Toulouse.

The playoff round begins with the first legs on Feb. 15, with the return matches on Feb. 22. The eight winners will then take on the Europa League's group winners. **MDT/AP**

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





**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
Editorial, China Daily

**REFORM AND  
OPENING-UP STILL KEY  
TO DEVELOPMENT**

This year marked the 45th anniversary of China launching its reform and opening-up policy. The country has made great achievements over the past 45 years because of the vigor and creativity unleashed by reform and opening-up.

The fast economic growth of the country over the past 45 years as a result of reform and opening-up has shown that China's development cannot be separated from that of the rest of the world. The country has benefited tremendously from making full use of foreign capital, technology and management experience, and at the same time actively encouraged Chinese enterprises and funds to go global and participate in international markets and competition.

Thanks to these efforts, China is now deeply integrated into the international industry and supply chains and has become an important force in promoting economic globalization.

The focus of reform has shifted to building high-standard openness and a high-level socialist market system and the focus of the country's industrial development has now shifted to advanced manufacturing, modern service industries and high-tech industries.

Today, the nation faces new opportunities and challenges to deepen reform and opening-up.

To begin with, adhering to people-centered development, achieving common prosperity for all people and resolving the contradictions of unbalanced and inadequate development have become prominent challenges.

The new scientific and technological revolution that has just unfolded and the United States' China-containment strategy, particularly in the high-tech fields, should spur the nation to seek self-reliance in science and technology and make the most of the new technology revolution to overcome these challenges.

At the same time, realizing harmonious coexistence between mankind and nature poses higher requirements for the country's industrialization. The country needs to focus more on development of green industries, intelligent technology and the digital economy, as well as green finance, green trade, and green investment.

Implementing its new development concept and new development paradigm can help the country effectively resolve these challenges.

In particular, China needs to deepen supply-side structural reforms and expand domestic demand for coordinated development to promote the economy to achieve effective qualitative improvement and reasonable quantitative growth.

In the process, China needs to continuously increase the proportion of consumer spending in GDP and increase the proportion of middle-income people in the total population. In addition, it must pay great attention to the smooth interplay between domestic and international circulation and cultivate new comparative economic advantages as well as technology breakthroughs and institutional reforms, so as to ensure the close connection between the Chinese economy and the world economy.

Reform and opening-up will continue to be the enduring guarantee for the country's high-quality development in the foreseeable future.

**ORIGINAL AC/DC DRUMMER COLIN BURGESS DIES AT 77.  
THE AUSTRALIAN HELPED FORM THE GROUP IN 1973**

**THE  
BUZZ**

Australian drummer Colin Burgess, an original member of the hard rock band AC/DC in the early 1970s, has died, the band confirmed on its social media accounts. He was 77.

"Very sad to hear of the passing of Colin Burgess," says an unsigned post on the band's official Facebook page late Friday. "He was our first drummer and a very respected musician. Happy memories, rock in peace Colin."

No cause of death was given.

Burgess was recruited in November 1973 to help form AC/DC

with Malcolm Young on rhythm guitar and his brother Angus on lead guitar, lead vocalist Dave Evans and bassist Larry Van Kriedt.

The band fired Burgess in February 1974, accusing him of being drunk on stage, and he later said someone had spiked his drink. He was followed by a succession of drummers and filled in for one for a few months in 1975.

Before AC/DC, Burgess played with the Australian rock group The Masters Apprentices, which was inducted into the Australian Recording Industry Association Hall of Fame in 1998.



**SOCIAL MEDIA  
INFLUENCERS 'SEEK  
TREASURE' IN MACAU**

**XINHUA REPORTER**

**A**T the Macau Grand Prix Museum, Patrick Koellmer, a German man well-known on Chinese social media, immersed himself in the VR experience of motorcycle racing.

He exclaimed, "it's so exciting! We Germans love car racing. This museum reminds me of the BMW Museum in Munich."

Koellmer and several other social media influencers are taking part in an event organized by media groups on the Chinese mainland. They will visit six major cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area and experience the region's vitality and innovative charm. They have spent a weekend in Macau.

Having lived in China for over a decade, Koellmer graduated from Xiamen University in southeast China's Fujian Province and now works in Zhuhai, a city in south China's Guangdong Province that borders Macau. He loves

sharing Chinese food, scenery and culture on social media.

"I've been to Macau before, but I didn't know the car racing culture here is so rich," he said, promising to share his interesting experiences on the internet.

Xiong Suwan, whose social media account focuses on food and culture in Hong Kong, said she was most impressed by the famous tourist sights of Macau such as the Ruins of St. Paul's and local delicacies.

"It's very easy to get to Macau or Zhuhai from Hong Kong," said Xiong, who moved to Hong Kong after getting married five years ago.

"Some of my family in Hong Kong have never visited Zhuhai. I took them there a while ago. They had real experience of the conveniences of living in the Greater Bay Area," Xiong said.

Wang Yun-ting, an internet celebrity from Taiwan who now lives in Shanghai, said she was amazed by the convenient transport be-

tween Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau.

Wang plans to recommend to her followers a weekend trip to Hong Kong and Macau to experience the charms of the two cities, particularly the nightlife in Macau.

"Saturday in Hong Kong and Sunday in Macau, then you can return home for work on Monday," she said.

Karyna Kovalevska, a Ukrainian who married a Chinese man in 2021 and came to live in China, described Macau as a "developed city with many beautiful buildings and friendly people."

Now working together with her husband as e-commerce streamers selling fruit, Karyna said she looked forward to this trip to the Greater Bay Area and hoped to make more friends here.

"I hope my followers on the internet, particularly foreigners, can learn more about this area through my videos and better understand China's development," she added. **XINHUA**



**Russia** Delegates from the ruling party unanimously backed President Vladimir Putin's bid for reelection at a party conference in Moscow on Sunday, state agencies reported, just a day after the Kremlin leader's supporters formally nominated him to run in the 2024 presidential election as an independent. A little-known Russian presidential hopeful who calls for peace in Ukraine also inched closer towards formally registering as a candidate.

**German** farmers gathered in Berlin yesterday to protest against planned cuts to tax breaks for diesel used in agriculture, part of a deal reached by the government to plug a hole in the country's budget. Leaders of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's three-party coalition last week agreed on measures to fill a 17 billion-euro hole in next year's budget, saying they would achieve that by reducing climate-damaging subsidies and slightly reducing some ministries' spending, among other measures.



**Germany** The Berlin Zoo has sent the first giant pandas born in Germany to China, dispatching the 4-year-olds on a journey that was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pit and Paule, who also are known by the Chinese names Meng Xiang and Meng Yuan, departed from Berlin on Saturday aboard an Air China cargo jet and have now arrived at their new home, the Chengdu Panda Base, the zoo said yesterday.

**Serbia** An early official vote count of Serbia's weekend election yesterday confirmed victory for the ruling populist party in a parliamentary vote in the Balkan country, but political tensions rose over reported irregularities in the capital, Belgrade. An opposition group said it was robbed of victory in the local election in Belgrade, would not recognize the results and would demand a rerun of the ballot.