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**THE OPENING OF THE  
MACAO UNION HOSPITAL MARKS A  
SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN LOCAL  
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**CHINA STARTED  
ERECTING TEMPORARY  
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AP PHOTO



**North Korean** leader Kim Jong Un said his country has a policy of not hesitating to launch a nuclear strike on its rivals if provoked, as he praised troops involved in its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, state media reported yesterday. Since adopting an escalatory nuclear doctrine last year, Kim has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons preemptively. But many foreign experts say North Korea has yet to obtain functioning nuclear missiles and is also unlikely to use its nukes first.

AP PHOTO



**Indonesian** authorities detected at least five boats packed tight with refugees approaching shores of Aceh province, officials said yesterday. The boats are the latest in a surge of vessels that have arrived in Aceh, most carrying Rohingya refugees from southern Bangladesh, where the persecuted Muslim minority fled in 2017 following attacks by the military in their homeland of Myanmar.

AP PHOTO



**Indonesia** Three trafficked Sumatran orangutans were sent back from Thailand to Indonesia yesterday as part of a joint effort between the countries to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. Nobita and Shizuka, both 7 years old, and Brian, 5 years old, had been living at a wildlife sanctuary in the western Thai province of Ratchaburi. After the repatriation, there are no more trafficked orangutans currently under the care of Thai authorities, officials said.

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# BEYOND LIMITS

Annual gaming revenues are set to surpass MOP180 billion this year

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HANDOVER JUBILEE

MACAU TO SEE ‘GRAND BUT SIMPLE’ CELEBRATIONS

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GAMING

# HO IAT SENG EXPECTS THIS YEAR'S GGR TO SURPASS MOP180 BILLION

ANTHONY LAM

THE city's gross gaming revenue (GGR) is expected to surpass MOP180 billion, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said on the sidelines of a celebratory event.

After attending the celebration for the 24th Anniversary of

the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR), the head of the government was asked about the GGR figure.

In last year's budget the government predicted this year's GGR would be MOP130 billion. The first 11 months of the year has seen MOP160 billion. He

then said he expected the figure to cross the MOP180 billion threshold at the end of the year.

The Macau government's contracts with the six gaming concessionaires stipulated that an additional 20% of its pledge in the non-gaming investment will be required if gaming reve-

nues recover to MOP180 billion this year.

Following winning licenses to operate late last year, and under the city's biggest gaming law overhaul, the six casino operators agreed to invest a total of MOP118.8 billion after being granted 10-year operating licen-

ses, with the bulk of the money pledged to non-gaming projects.

About a month ago, after Ho had given his Policy Address for the coming year, he told a press conference he did not expect this year's GGR to reach MOP180 billion.

On economic recovery, Ho said revivals have been uneven, with some districts having recovered better than others. The more reinvigorated districts are tourism districts.

Noting that the current economic performance is only 70% of that in 2019, he hoped that recovery will be more evenly distributed in the coming year, saying that an additional 30% of recovery is needed.

Ho also said tourists from the western hemisphere only accounted for about 10% of the total tourist arrivals, and attributed the main cause to the lack of international direct flights to Macau. Adding that there are quite a number of visitors from Southeast and Northeast Asia, Ho said the ratio of mainland to non-mainland visitors is 65% to 35%.

Responding to questions about non-resident workers, Ho only said the government would strive to keep the number of these workers at the pre-Covid level.

ECONOMY

# Ho calls for further diversification efforts

ANTHONY LAM

HIGHLIGHTING satisfactory economic data from this year, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng called for all walks of life to help with diversification during his speech at the celebratory event.

"The MSAR Government would join with all sectors of society, seize the historic opportunities brought by national development, continue to promote the successful implementation of the principle 'One country, two systems' with Macau characteristics, strive for new achievements to welcome the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 25th anniversary of the MSAR, and make greater



contributions to the country's development," the government cited its head as

saying in a statement, adding that it would "meticulously plan and organize" a

series of events for the Silver Jubilee.

Recapping his team's

work in the past year, Ho said the government "had conscientiously worked to implement the national strategies outlined in the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and the important instructions of President Xi Jinping," adding that "[with] the guidance and strong support from the Central Government, the [local] government had united the collective efforts of people from all walks of life [to work on several areas]."

In addition, Ho said that since its return to the motherland 24 years ago, Macau had been working hand in hand with the rest of the country, to pursue shared development and prosperity, resulting in a remarkable chapter of successful implementation of the principle 'One country, two systems' with Macau characteristics.

Meanwhile, on the side-

lines of the event, the head of the government also emphasized that next year's development of the city will be in absolute compliance with the resolutions made at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

"The government will continue to adhere to the guidelines from the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and align with the country's high-quality development and modernisation process, to advance effectively the overall policy direction for 2024 and carry out various other tasks," Ho was cited as saying in a government statement.

In addition, Ho expressed confidence in meeting the first-phase benchmarks in 2024 as specified in the Master Plan of the Development of the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

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ANTHONY LAM

HANDOVER ANNIVERSARY

# Macau to see 'grand but simple' silver jubilee

As the SAR will mark its 25th Anniversary next year, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said that the government will comply with the principle of celebrating in a "grand but simple" fashion.

Emphasizing that next year's celebratory events are still being planned, Ho promised these events will not be "extravagant nor wasteful."

Ho was speaking on the sidelines of the reception to mark the 24th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland on Wednesday

He said the government would not spend a lot of money because it is still financially constrained. The budget will be compiled based on the scale of the events for the 20th Anniversary.

It is too early to discuss whether national leaders will visit Macau for the occasion, Ho said, adding this is not something the local government can control. However, he hopes national leaders will visit Macau.

Following his refusal to comment on the matter at the Policy Address press conference, he again declined to say if he will run in the coming Chief Executive Election. He said announcements will be forthcoming when he has made a decision.

XINHUA



Macau on Wednesday held a flag-raising ceremony and a reception to mark the 24th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland.

Ho recalled how in the past

year Macau had improved its legal systems and enforcement mechanisms on safeguarding national security, stepped up administration over the gaming industry in accordance with the law, com-

pleted Macau's first comprehensive and systematic development plan on appropriate economic diversification, and made new achievements in advancing building of the Guangdong-Macao

In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, neighboring Zhuhai city.

In the coming year, Ho said the SAR government will firmly safeguard national security and social stability, and speed up the implementation of major tasks and projects listed in the economic diversification plan to build Macau into a world tourism and leisure center and develop its priority industries of big health, modern finance, high technology, exhibition and convention, as well as culture and sports.

Efforts will also be made to speed up the building of the in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin, promote high-quality economic development, fully leverage Macau's advantages to better integrate into overall national development, Ho said.

Over 1,000 guests attended the reception, including Ho Hau Wah, vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Zheng Xincong, director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macau SAR, and Liu Xianfa, commissioner of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Macau SAR.

Before the reception, around 520 government officials and other guests attended the flag-raising ceremony.

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THE LONDONER MACAO



# DRIVERS COMPLAIN OF LONG SHROFF QUEUES AT HZMB PARKING AFTER LONG HOLIDAYS

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE dearth of varied payment options has caused long queues at the shroff at the west carpark of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB), drivers have complained on social media platforms.

A post was made yesterday by a Facebook user in a group about traffic. In the post, the user – presumably also a driver – complained about the lack of payment options at the parking lot.

Built to hold a maximum of 3,089 cars and 2,054 motorcycles, the parking lot only accepts Macau Pass and cash. The user, with a picture, pointed out that there was a long queue of people trying to settle their parking bills.

Had people not had

either means of payment, the user said, they would have to walk all the way back to the border checkpoint building to use an ATM. Those who held physical tickets, meanwhile, must settle their fees at the shroff counter. The option of driving to the exit and paying at the gate was not available, according to the user.

The user said the officer at the shroff counter remained polite despite the long queue.

A inquiry was emailed yesterday to the Transport Bureau (DSAT) on the matter. In particular, the email asked about the parking lot management company's position despite the government incentivizing digital payments.

No reply has been received as of press time.



# IC: MACAO CONSERVATORY EMPLOYS SMALL NUMBER OF NON-LOCAL INSTRUCTORS

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has denied reports the Macao Conservatory has more non-local dance instructors than local instructors.

Earlier this week, the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) called on the public conservatory to address concerns about the long-term employment of blue card holders at its dance school.

This comes after the watchdog received a report from an individual about the dance school's recruitment practices.

According to the CCAC, the report alleges the school employs a significant number of dance teachers from mainland China on long-term con-

tracts.

Speaking on the sidelines of the handover anniversary, Leong Wai Man said that when the school was established, there was a shortage of teachers in relevant majors in Macau.

After more than 10 years of training, there are now enough professionals.

Accordingly, in the last two years, the number of non-local instructors has been gradually reduced.

Currently, of the 10 professional dance teachers, three are non-local.

The CCAC has called on the bureau to use a "correct interpretation and application of the legal framework governing the entry and exit of employees from outside Macau."

AD

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HEALTH

# Macao Union Hospital a new milestone in local healthcare service, CE says

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Chief Executive (CE), Ho Iat Seng, has said the opening of the Macao Union Hospital marks a significant milestone in local healthcare service, as well as in the cooperation between Macau and the mainland in this area, the Government Information Bureau announced in a statement.

Ho's comments came during his speech at the facility's inauguration ceremony on Dec. 20 (Wednesday) where a trial of the facility has begun.

The Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital, to be known as Macao Union Hospital, will provide several types of medical services, as noted by Ho who remarked that as a public medical institution, the priority was to provide high-quality healthcare, and further options for medical services, to local residents.

Ho also noted that the new fa-

cility would also enhance Macau's capacity to provide critical-care and specialist medical services, improving the health and well-being of residents.

Additionally, the facility will also be developed into an internationally influential first-class medical center, based in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The new medical complex should also draw upon the expertise and technologies available via the top-class medical team of Peking Union Medical College Hospital, helping to provide training opportunities for local medical professionals.

In his speech, the CE noted the role attributed by president Xi Jinping to Macau in its future development and the step forward this facility represents towards the implementation of Macau's project of developing and economically diversifying its economy through the Big Health industry.

Starting in September 2024, the hospital will gradually provi-



de medical services to the public in areas such as medical imaging, medical cosmetology and specialized outpatient services.

Wu Wenming, the head of the Macau center of hospital, said

the center has introduced medical teams and management skills from hospital to provide more diversified medical services.

Lei Wai Seng, director of the preparatory office for the Macau cen-

ter, said the hospital's recruitment priority is local medical workers while attracting experts from the Union Hospital and other top hospitals in the mainland as well as from around the world.

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## VISITOR ARRIVALS DOWN 6% IN NOVEMBER

Visitor arrivals soared by 604.9% year-on-year to 2.58 million in November; however, the figure represented a drop of 6.3% month-on-month, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) indicated. As regards source of visitors, the number of visitors from mainland China jumped by 452.9% year-on-year to 1.77 million, with those traveling under the Individual Visit Scheme (875,036) surging by 648.6%. Visitors from Hong Kong (558,249) and Taiwan (55,144) rocketed by 1,347.7% and 890.2% year-on-year respectively. In the first eleven months of 2023, the number of visitor arrivals increased by 375.8% year-on-year to 25.27 million.

## INFLATION UP 1.16%

The Composite CPI for November (105.05) grew by 1.16% year-on-year, according to Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). The increment was attributed to increases in costs associated with eating out, rising tuition fees, as well as increases in prices of clothing and liquefied petroleum gas. For the 12 months ending in November, the average Composite CPI grew by 0.88% from the previous period, and the price indices of Education (+8.67%) and Recreation & Culture (+4.06%) showed notable growth.

## UM TO OFFER MASTERS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

The University of Macau (UM) will offer the Master of Social Sciences (MSocSc) in its Clinical Psychology program in the 2024/2025 academic year, to train professionals in clinical psychology. Applications for the program are now open until Feb.29, 2024, the UM has announced. The MSocSc in Clinical Psychology program is a three-year full-time program requiring 60 credits. The program comprises 45 credits of compulsory coursework, 9 credits of clinical practicum (1,002 hours in total), and six credits dedicated to a master's thesis.

## TEMPERATURE TO DROP TO 6 DEGREES CELSIUS

The Meteorological Bureau has issued an orange low temperature warning, and the weather in Macau is expected to be very cold today and tomorrow, with temperatures dropping to 6 degrees Celsius. According to the Meteorological and Geophysics Bureau (SMG), minimum temperature will drop to 6 degrees Celsius or below on the winter solstice tomorrow. A winter monsoon is affecting the weather in Macau, hence the weather will be cold and extremely dry in the next few days, with temperatures up to 16 degrees. After Christmas, the temperature will rise slightly, with temperatures ranging from 11 degrees to 19 degrees.

RENATO MARQUES



## ANIMAL WELFARE

# JOCKEY CLUB AN 'INSULT TO OUR INTELLIGENCE', ANIMA PRESIDENT SAYS

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Macau Jockey Club has lost its purpose and reason for existence, the president of the animal rights protection group Anima Macau, Zoe Tang, told the Times in an exclusive interview.

The animal welfare protection activist also believes the persistence of horse racing is due to other interests with which successive governments have been colluding.

"Anima hopes the government will terminate this contract with the [Macau] Jockey Club because it does not make any sense, especially at this stage of Macau's life."

In 2018 and despite the Jockey Club's non-compliance, the government extended its concession contract without a public tender for another 24.5 years. Since 1978, the Jockey Club has held nine concessions in that area [in Taipa].

Importantly, during these nine contractual renewals or amendments, almost all focused on financial aspects. There were three dispatches from the Secretary for Transports and Public Works that detached from the concession three land parcels for interests close to the concessionaire.

"This happened first in De-

cember 1997, and then again in March 1998, and finally a third time in April 1998," Tang explained, noting that is clear through the revision of the accounts of the Jockey Club that the activity is not sustainable anymore and only other interests are supporting it.

"What did [this company] generate during the last concession? A debt, that is said to be about MOP150 million. This was a debt directly to the government related to unpaid financial obligations but they were authorized to continue and to generate an overall debt of MOP1.3 billion, accumulated losses of MOP4.1 billion, and a negative net situation of MOP1.1 billion, all rounded figures," she remarked.

"The Jockey Club's revenues plummeted from MOP517 million in 2017 to MOP504 million in 2018 and, at the end of 2022, were only MOP193 million! The Jockey Club is an insult to our intelligence!" she concluded.

For many years Anima has been calling for the Jockey Club's closure as has been done to the Canidrome for similar reasons.

## REDUCED DONATIONS CAUSE BUDGET ISSUES

The president of the association, which has operated for two decades, has told the Ti-

mes the significant reduction in donations from the gaming concessionaires is causing problems for Anima's annual budget, short MOP1.5 million short for this year.

"As our budget for 2023 is MOP8.5 million, we still need to find approximately 1.5 million for this year. We have been unable to pay some food suppliers, veterinary clinics, and even some of our staff wages for two months. Macau Foundation has continued to support Anima with MOP5 million for this year, and Galaxy Entertainment Group Limited (GEG Charitable Foundation), Sands China Ltd (Macau), Melco Resorts & Entertainment Limited (Macau) & MGM China Holdings Limited (Macau) have donated MOP80,000 (each) as well," Tang explained.

"From 2021, the casino [-related] donations to Anima have dropped from [MOP]400,000 or 300,000 [depending on the company] to MOP80,000 each. We understand that the economy in Macau has experienced a decline in the past few years, and it hasn't been easy for all industries. We hope that the economy will improve in the future and that this will also lead to an increase in do-

nations."

With fewer resources, Tang said the institution focuses on the more severe and pressing cases of animals at risk, injured and sick.

"We have around 400 dogs now living at the Dogs' Shelter and about 300 cats at Cats' Paradise. These numbers have remained unchanged for a long time, as following an adoption, another animal in need is rescued."

"We also regularly take the initiative to rescue cats or dogs captured by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) or abandoned by their owners at the Municipal Kennel."

"Most of the stray animals Anima rescues are in critical health conditions and must be immediately sent to private clinics for treatment. After hospitalization, when the situation becomes stable, Anima welcomes the animal into its shelters to continue the treatment."

"Additionally, we are also following up with over 500 dogs and cats living in the streets or construction sites under our 'Special Protection Program' that supports them through food, sterilization surgeries and medicine," the Anima Macau president concluded.



RENATO MARQUES



TRANSPORT

# Commuting by bus or LRT: Pros and cons

RENATO MARQUES

**W**ITH the recent launch of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) Barra Station earlier this month, commuters between the Peninsula and the Islands have gained another travel option.

However, the question remains: Is the LRT faster or more convenient compared to traditional bus rides?

The Times embarked on an exercise to test a potential route. However, it is important to note that commuters have varying needs and preferences and must determine their commuting options according to such needs.

The idea was to test the connection between the Central district (specifically, Rua do Campo's Public Administration Building) and a residential and commercial area in Taipa (the Jockey Club area).

To ensure a fair comparison of the systems without the influence of traffic or other time-sensitive aspects, we opted for off-peak times and a random weekday for both trips.

## TRIP A (MACAU – TAIPA)

The journey started as soon as we arrived at the Rua do Campo, Public Administration Building bus stop and ended as soon as we exited the bus on the opposite side on the return.

On the way to Taipa, we took the bus Route 25B. For the return journey, we took the LRT from Jockey Club to Barra Station and transferred to bus Route 5 to Rua do Campo.

According to the Transport Bureau (DSAT) travel planner mobile application, both trips should have been completed in approximately the same amount of time.

The total Trip A (Macau – Taipa) took us 32 minutes, including 6 minutes of waiting at the bus stop and another 6 minutes walking between the last bus stop and the designated location.

Using the MPay electronic payment method, the trip cost 3 patacas.

## TRIP B (TAIPA – MACAU)

Starting the return trip at the same point where Trip A had finished, Trip B was revealed to be both more costly (6 patacas in total using the Macau

Pass) and significantly more time-consuming, taking 46 minutes in total.

Two aspects were particularly crucial to the total trip duration. The first is related to the walking time, as even if the first walking stint (to reach the LRT platform) was shorter, there was significant walking time upon arrival at Barra Station to the bus stop at the Barra Transport Hub. This was also because the signage was somewhat unclear and unintuitive, forcing commuters to walk several stops to confirm that they were on the right path.

In total, the walking and transfer time took some 10 minutes. But, more importantly, the reason underpinning the extended time for the return trip was due to the bus trip.

According to the DSAT travel planner app, this should have taken 10 minutes between the Barra Transport Hub to Rua do Campo/Travessa dos Anjos bus stop, but in reality took some 23 minutes due to slow progress in the Inner Harbour area and normal traffic at the Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro.

The separate charging

systems for the two systems (LRT vs buses) also increased the total cost as it failed to account for the fact that users were transferring from one system to another to complete a single journey.

## VERDICT

While the Barra Station offers some advantages and can provide an expedited way to travel to and from Taipa, particularly in times of heavy road traffic, there are still major flaws in the LTR system.

More specifically, these issues reside in the dependence on the link to the public bus system that does not always work as expected and is very vulnerable to road traffic conditions.

On the other hand, commutes on the LRT are more comfortable than buses, providing more space to users (at least for now).

If your destination and your wallet allow you to reach the Barra Transport Hub without using the bus routes that operate through the Inner Harbour area, this trip could potentially be completed in the same time or less than using the LRT.

ADVERTORIAL

# GREAT TIMES

## Spectacular Celebration at MGM

Indulge in an unforgettable New Year's Eve experience amidst a breathtaking ambiance. The Spectacle at MGM COTAI, an indoor art garden boasting the largest free-span gridshell glazed roof and impressive artworks, has been adorned with dazzling festive lights to provide an unparalleled countdown experience at its alfresco dining spots.



Let the celebrations begin with a lavish feast with your loved ones at Anytime. From now until Dec 26, a delicate live carving station next to the entrance also offers Iberico Pata Negra 24 months Ham, House Smoked Whole Salmon Fillet, and Raclette Cheese & Ham, along with winter-limited Cheese or Milk Chocolate Fondue offered until Feb 29, 2024. On New Year's Eve, delight in an array of exquisite specialties, including fresh seasonal oysters or premium caviar, charcuterie and cheese platter, and more, accompanied by a bottle of handpicked French champagne. The New Year's Eve Ultimate Decadence promises to satisfy your palate with hearty delicacies.



The festive vibe continues at Grill 58, where you elevate your celebration with the New Year's Eve Dinner Set, Festive Omakase Set Dinner. The former Chef's Selection includes Aged Tuna Sashimi and M7 Futari Beef Duo, while the latter presents sumptuous items such as A5 wagyu beef and golden caviar to create luxurious dishes. For the countdown party package, revel in a bottle of tittle and snacks of your choice, including Tuna Tartar Toasts, Wagyu Beef Sliders, and more, plus complimentary access to the Countdown Party at Bar 58. Joining the is an enticing lineup of international musicians, including jazz and bossa nova singer Jandira Silva and DJ Lores, who will turn up the excitement with live music performances.



Cheers to the New Year with delectable delights, captivating live music and a spectacular view of the night sky through the panoramic glass roof. Call (853) 8806 2338 to secure your reservation.



AP PHOTO



## READY, SET, TRAVEL: THE HOLIDAY RUSH TO THE AIRPORTS AND HIGHWAYS IS UNDERWAY

DAVID KOENIG

IT'S beginning to look a lot like a hectic holiday travel season, but it might go relatively smoothly if the weather cooperates.

Travel over Christmas and New Year's tends to spread out over many days, so the peaks in the U.S. are likely to be lower than they were during the Thanksgiving holiday. That is making airlines and federal officials optimistic.

But the debacle at Southwest Airlines over Christmas last year should guard against overconfidence. Just this week, the Transportation Department announced a settlement in which Southwest will pay \$140 million for that meltdown, which stranded more than 2 million travelers.

So far this year, airlines have canceled 1.2% of U.S. flights, down nearly half from 2.1% over the same period last year. Cancellations were well below 1% during Thanksgiving, according to FlightAware.

"I don't want to jinx us, but so far 2023 has seen the lowest cancellation rate in the last five years," Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said Tuesday. He added, however, that winter weather "will certainly be a challenge in the next few weeks."

Canceled flights surged last year, as airlines were caught short-staffed when travel rebounded

from the pandemic more quickly than expected. Since then, U.S. airlines have hired thousands of pilots, flight attendants and other workers, and the cancellation rate has come down.

After struggling with cancellations and other disruptions last year, European travel has also been smoother this year and more people are expected travel over Christmas and New Year's, said Mike Arnot, spokesman for Cirium, an aviation analytics company. Still, about 3% of flights within Europe have been canceled in so far in December, and nearly 30% have been delayed, according to Cirium.

Cirium projected that the number of seats flown within Europe will rise 10% between Dec. 22 and Jan. 2 compared to the similar period in 2023.

Strong winds and rain from a storm named Pia was expected disrupt travel in the Netherlands and U.K. on Thursday. Amsterdam Airport Schiphol airport warned a "significant number of flights will be delayed or canceled on Thursday." On Wednesday night, about a third of arriving and departing flights were delayed Schiphol on Wednesday, according to FlightAware. Just 1% of departing flights and 2% of arrival flights were canceled.

Some train routes were suspended in Scotland on Thursday due

to Pia, and slowdowns were expected elsewhere in the U.K. but the storm was so far not disrupting air travel.

Globally, air travel has still not fully recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic. About 8.6 billion people are projected to travel through the world's airports in 2023, according to Airports Council International, a Montreal-based trade group for airports. That's about 94% of the passenger volume in 2019, before the pandemic hit.

In one piece of good news: The volcanic eruptions in southwestern Iceland are not disrupting flights, despite the area's proximity to the country's main Keflavik Airport. Experts the location and features of the eruptions on Reykjanes Peninsula make it different from the 2010 eruption of a different Icelandic volcano, the Eyjafjallajökull, which sent giant clouds of ash over Europe and caused massive disruptions to international aviation.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration says it is creating more air-traffic routes, especially along the East Coast, to help keep planes moving over the holidays.

Over the past year, airlines have blamed many of their delays on a shortage of FAA air traffic controllers that slows down traffic. The agency, which pressured airlines to reduce flights in the New York City area this summer and

fall because of FAA understaffing, says it has been hiring and now has 10,700 certified controllers.

"There are different views on what the number should be, but it needs to be a lot higher," new FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker said Tuesday.

AAA is forecasting that 115 million people will go 50 miles or more from home between Saturday and New Year's Day. That is a 2% increase over the auto club's forecast last year, although it would fall short of the record set in 2019.

Most of those people will drive, and they will save a bit on gasoline, compared with last Christmas. The nationwide average Wednesday was \$3.08 a gallon, down 23 cents from a month ago and 6 cents from this time last year, according to AAA.

The busiest days on the road will be Saturday and next Thursday, Dec. 28, according to transportation data provider INRIX.

The Transportation Security Administration expects that the busiest days for air travel will be Thursday, Friday and New Year's Day. TSA expects to screen more than 2.5 million travelers each of those days — that's still far short of the record 2.9 million that agents screened on the Sunday after Thanksgiving.

Flying is already surpassing pre-pandemic levels. The TSA has screened 12.3% more travelers

than it had by this time last year and 1.4% more than in 2019. December is running about 6% above the same month last year.

Canceled flights surged last year, as airlines were caught short-staffed when travel rebounded from the pandemic more quickly than expected. Since then, airlines have hired thousands of pilots, flight attendants and other workers, and the cancellation rate has come down.

The low rate of cancellations over Thanksgiving is leading to hope that flying over Christmas and New Year's will be tolerable.

But even if cancellations remain low, flights will be packed, testing the patience of travelers and creating competition for space in overhead bins to store carry-on bags.

"Airline gate agents are getting demerits when planes are late, so they are gate-checking far more bags to keep flights on time," said Pauline Frommer co-president of Frommers Travel Guides.

Frommer advises putting a smart tag in any bag that gets checked so you'll know where it is, even if the airline doesn't.

Whether flying or driving, travelers should be keeping an eye on the weather forecast.

AccuWeather forecasters say rain storms could hit California, the Pacific Northwest and the southern Plains states including Texas later this week, but things look brighter for population centers — and key airports — in the Northeast.

"Last year was a really rough travel holiday," said AccuWeather's Paul Pastelok. "This year it looks like milder conditions. There isn't much snow and ice on the horizon yet." MDT/AP



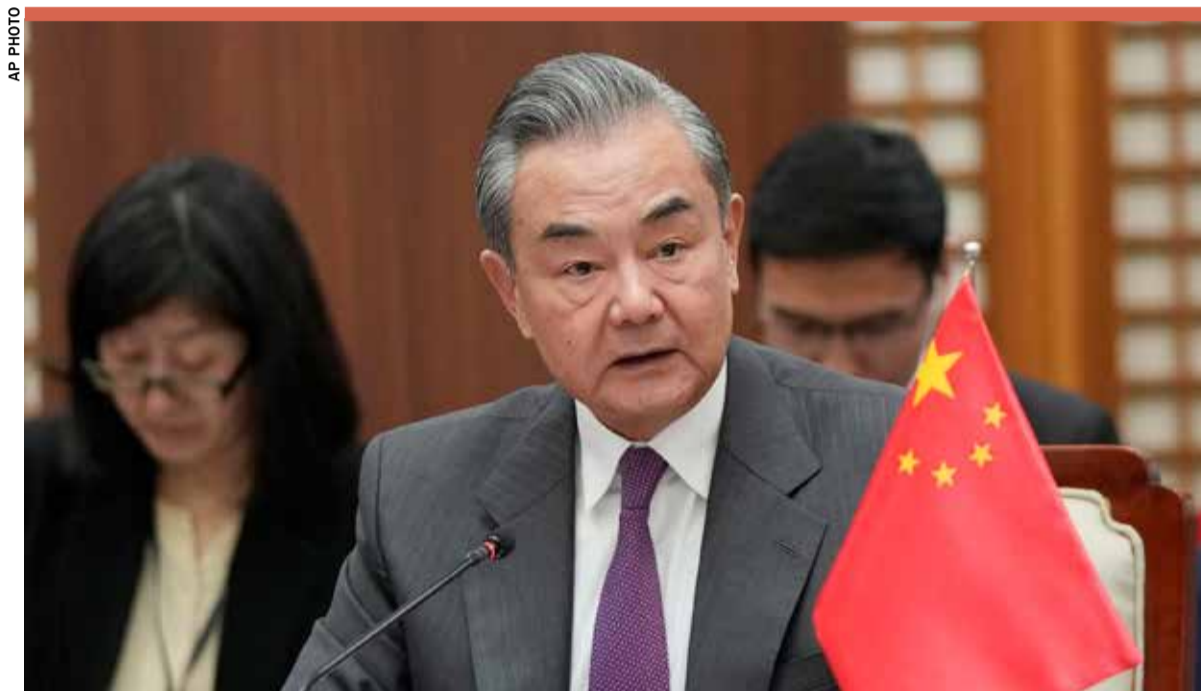
SEA DISPUTE

# Gov't vows to keep up military pressure on the Philippines as territorial dispute grows tenser

**C**HINA'S Foreign Minister Wang Yi says the country will maintain military pressure on the Philippines amid a dispute over sovereignty in the South China Sea that could involve U.S. forces defending their treaty partner.

In a phone conversation Wednesday with his Philippine counterpart, Enrique A. Manalo, Wang "warned that if the Philippine side misjudges the situation, goes its own way, or even colludes with ill-intentioned external forces to continue to stir up troubles, China will defend its rights in accordance with law and respond resolutely," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Wang's comments follow China's mobilization of its coast guard and maritime militia to block Philippine supply missions to support its soldiers and fishermen. China claims sovereignty over virtually the entire South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping, putting it at odds with the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei, who all maintain claims over islands, reefs and undersea resources in the region.



Foreign Minister Wang Yi

In particularly sharp comments, Wang was quoted as accusing the Philippines of having "changed its policy stance so far, reneged on the promises it has made, provoked troubles at sea, and undermined China's legitimate and lawful rights."

"Noting that the bilateral relationship now stands at a cross-

roads, with its future yet to be decided, Wang said the Philippine side must act with caution," Xinhua reported yesterday.

"Instead of continuing in the wrong direction, the Philippine side should return to the right path as soon as possible, with properly handling and managing the current maritime situation as

a top priority," Wang was quoted as saying. Wang gave no details on what agreements Manila had allegedly abandoned.

Manalo's office described the conversation as a "frank and candid exchange," saying the sides had reached a "clearer understanding of our respective positions on a number of issues."

Territorial disputes have grown tenser as China seeks to cement its territorial claims in defiance of the U.S. and its allies, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and close partner Taiwan, which China claims as a breakaway province and threatens to annex by military force.

The head of the Philippine military was with his forces aboard a supply boat when it was blasted with a water cannon, surrounded and bumped by Chinese coast guard ships earlier this month in the disputed South China Sea.

China, meanwhile, accused the United States of encouraging the Philippines, its treaty ally, to provoke China for its own purposes, though it provided no direct evidence.

Along with using water cannons, Philippines officials said that Chinese coast guard ships used a military-grade laser that caused Filipino crew members temporary blindness and engaged in dangerous blocking and shadowing maneuvers that caused minor collisions.

Washington is bound by a 1951 treaty to help defend the Philippines from attack. That pledge has grown stronger with the election of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who recently said that the situation in the South China Sea "has become more dire" as China expands its presence.

China has showed interest in atolls and shoals that are "closer and closer" to the coast of the Philippines, with the nearest atoll about 60 nautical miles away, Marcos said during a visit to the U.S. state of Hawaii last month. **MDT/AP**

# China has started erecting temporary housing units after an earthquake destroyed 14,000 homes

**H**UNDREDS of temporary one-room housing units were being set up yesterday in northwest China for survivors of an earthquake that destroyed more than 14,000 homes and killed at least 135 people, according to state media reports.

Twelve people remained missing in an area hit by mudslides that inundated two villages, the reports said. Search teams were using excavators to dig out a thick sea of mud that covered roads and encased and blocked entry to buildings.

State broadcaster CCTV showed footage of cranes lifting white, box-like housing units and lining them up in an open field in Meipo, a village in Gansu pro-

vince. About 260 had been erected, and the total in the village was expected to reach 500 across nine sites by Friday morning.

The arrival of the prefabricated units was a sign that many of the more than 87,000 people resettled after the Monday night earthquake may be homeless for some time. Many have been enduring temperatures well below freezing in flimsier tent-like units with blue plastic sheeting on the outside and a quilted cotton lining inside.

An assessment of the houses in a village visited by The AP on Wednesday found that 90% weren't safe to live in, experts told CCTV in an online report. Some of the homes in Yangwa village appear OK, but

they have structural damage that make them unsafe, the experts said. For those that can be repaired, the work may have to wait until next year, because the soil is frozen.

The death toll included 113 people in Gansu and another 22 people in neighboring Qinghai province. Nearly 1,000 were reported injured. The magnitude 6.2 quake struck in a mountainous region on the Gansu side of the boundary between the two provinces and about 1,300 kilometers southwest of Beijing, the Chinese capital.

Funerals have been held for the dead, some following the Muslim traditions of much of the population in the affected area.

The mud rose as high as

3 meters in two villages in Qinghai province, leaving only the rooftops of some buildings showing.

Experts quoted by CGTN, the Chinese state broadcaster's international arm, said the earthquake liquefied underground sediment in the area, where the water table is relatively high. At some point, the muddy sediment burst through the surface and flowed down a usually dry ditch into the villages.

Most of China's earthquakes strike in the western part of the country, including Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, as well as the Xinjiang region and Tibet. The latest quake was the deadliest one in the country in nine years. **MDT/AP**





FORCED LABOR

# SOUTH KOREAN COURT ORDERS 2 JAPANESE COMPANIES TO COMPENSATE WARTIME KOREAN WORKERS

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

**S**OUTH Korea's top court ordered two Japanese companies to financially compensate more of their wartime Korean workers for forced labor, as it sided yesterday with its contentious 2018 verdicts that caused a huge setback in relations between the two countries.

But observers say yesterday's ruling won't likely hurt bilateral ties much since Seoul and Tokyo, now governed by different leaders, are pushing hard to bolster their partnerships in the face of shared challenges like North Korea's evolving nuclear threats and China's increasing assertiveness.

The Supreme Court ruled that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries must provide between 100 million and 150 million won (\$76,700 and \$115,000) in compensation to each of four plaintiffs — bereaved families of its former employees who were forced to work for the company during Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.



Family members of forced labor victims during the Japan's colonial period, arrive at the Supreme Court in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday

The court also said Nippon Steel Corp. must give 100 million won (about \$76,700) to each of seven Korean plaintiffs for similar colonial-era forced labor.

In two separate verdicts in 2018, the top South Korean court ordered Mitsubishi and Nippon Steel to compensate a total of 15 other Korean employees for forced labor. That irked Japan, which has insisted all compensation issues were already settled by a 1965 bilateral

treaty that normalized their diplomatic relations. But the 2018 South Korean court rulings said the treaty cannot prevent individual rights to seek compensations for forced labor because Japanese companies' use of such laborers were "acts of illegality against humanity" that were linked to Tokyo's illegal colonial occupation and its war of aggression.

In yesterday's ruling, the South Korean Supreme Court cited that

argument in one of the 2018 verdicts, saying it paved the way for "a judicial remedy for forced labor victims within Republic of Korea." Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi called the ruling "absolutely unacceptable" as it clearly violated the 1965 treaty.

The wrangling touched off by the 2018 rulings led to the two countries downgrading each other's trade status, and Seoul's previous liberal government threatening to spike a military intelligence-sharing pact. Their strained ties complicated efforts by the United States to build a stronger trilateral cooperation to counter challenges posed by North Korea and China.

The Seoul-Tokyo relations, however, began thawing after South Korea's current conservative president, Yoon Suk Yeol, announced in March that his country would use a local corporate fund to compensate the forced labor victims without demanding Japanese contributions. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida later expressed

sympathy for the suffering of Korean forced laborers during a Seoul visit. The two countries revived high-level talks and withdrew economic retaliatory steps against each other.

Eleven of the 15 former forced laborers or their families involved in the 2018 rulings had accepted compensation under Seoul's third-party reimbursement plan, but the remaining four still refuse to accept it, according to their support group.

"I believe the South Korean government will continue its utmost effort in order to gain the understanding of the plaintiffs," Hayashi said.

Choi Eunmi, a Japan expert at South Korea's Asan Institute Policy Institute in Seoul, said Thursday's ruling "won't likely cause big troubles in Korea-Japan relationships" as South Korea has already determined how to handle such verdicts with the establishment of the domestic compensation fund.

Choi said that, because some forced labor victims refuse to accept compensation under the third-party reimbursement system, the South Korean fund hasn't completely resolved the issue. But she said an attempt by a future South Korean government to spike the system would undermine South Korea's credibility in Japan and deteriorate bilateral ties severely. **MDT/AP**

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





# UN says up to 300,000 Sudanese fled their homes after a notorious group seized their safe haven

SAMY MAGDY, CAIRO

**F**IGHTING between Sudan's military and a notorious paramilitary group forced up to 300,000 people to flee their homes in a province that had been a safe haven for families displaced by the devastating conflict in the northeastern African country, the U.N. said yesterday.

The fighting erupted in the city of Wad Medani, the provincial capital of Jazeera province, after the Rapid Support Forces attacked the city earlier this month. The RSF said that it took over Wad Medani earlier this week, and the military said that its troops withdrew from the city, and an investigation was opened.

Sudan's war began in mid-April after months of tensions between military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan and RSF commander Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo. Both generals led a military coup in October 2021 that derailed Sudan's short-lived transition to democracy following a popular



AP PHOTO

uprising that forced the removal of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

The U.N. agency International Organization for Migration said that between 250,000 and 300,000

people fled the province — many reportedly on foot — to safer areas in the provinces of al-Qadarif, Sinnar and the White Nile. Some sheltered in camps for displaced people and many sought shelter

in local communities, it said.

Jazeera, Sudan's breadbasket, was home to about 6 million Sudanese. Since the war, about 500,000 displaced fled to the province, mostly from the capital, Khartoum, which has been the center of fighting, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Medani, which is about 100 kilometers southeast of Khartoum, had hosted more than 86,000 of the displaced, OCHA said.

The World Food Program announced Wednesday that it has temporarily halted food assistance in some parts of Jazeera, in what it described a "major setback" to humanitarian efforts in the province.

The U.N. food agency said that it had provided assistance to 800,000 people in the province, including many families that fled the fighting in Khartoum.

The conflict in Sudan has wrecked the country and killed up to 9,000 people as of October, according to the United Nations. However, activists and doctors' groups

say the real toll is far higher.

More than 7 million people were forced out of their homes, including more than 1.5 million who have sought refuge in neighboring countries, according to the U.N. figures.

The fighting in Wad Medani forced many aid groups, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, to evacuate its staff from the city, which was a center of the humanitarian operations in the country.

The RSF takeover prompted fears among Wad Medani residents that they would carry out atrocities in their city as they did in the capital, Khartoum, and the western region of Darfur. The U.N. and rights groups have accused the RSF of atrocities in Darfur, which was the scene of a genocidal campaign in the early 2000s.

The RSF grew out of the state-backed Arab militias known as Janjaweed, which were accused of widespread killings, rapes and other atrocities in the Darfur conflict.

Ahmed Tag el-Sir, a father of three, fled along with his family to the neighboring province of al-Qadarif after the RSF rampaged through their village of al-Sharfa Barakar north of Wad Medani.

"They shelled the village and took over residents' homes, like they did in Darfur," the man said from a relative's house where he shelters along with two other families. "We fled out of fear of being killed or our women being raped by the Janjaweed." MDT/AP

## SPORTS

# EU court: FIFA and UEFA defy competition law by blocking Super League

SAMUEL PETREQUIJN, BRUSSELS

**U**EF A and FIFA defied European Union competition law by blocking plans for the breakaway soccer Super League, the EU's top court ruled yesterday.

The case was heard last year at the Court of Justice after Super League failed at launch in April 2021. UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin called the club leaders "snakes" and "liars."

The company formed by 12 rebel clubs — now led by only Real Madrid and Barcelona after Juventus withdrew this year — started legal action to protect its position and the court was asked to rule on points of EU law by a Madrid tribunal.

"We have won the ri-



AP PHOTO

President of UEFA Aleksander Ceferin

ght to compete. The UEFA monopoly is over. Football is free. Clubs are now free from the threat of sanctions and free to determine their own futures," said Bernd Reichart, the CEO of A22 Sports Management, the Madrid-based company promoting Super League.

The clubs accused UEFA of breaching European law by allegedly abusing its

market dominance of soccer competitions.

"The FIFA and UEFA rules making any new inter-club football project subject to their prior approval, such as the Super League, and prohibiting clubs and players from playing in those competitions, are unlawful," the court said. "There is no framework for the FIFA and UEFA rules ensuring

that they are transparent, objective, non-discriminatory and proportionate."

The court acknowledged FIFA and UEFA were abusing a dominant position and their rules on approval, control and sanctions "must be held to be unjustified restrictions on the freedom to provide services."

The ruling will boost Super League promoters' hopes of reviving their project, although the court said it "does not mean that a competition such as the Super League project must necessarily be approved."

"The court, having been asked generally about the FIFA and UEFA rules, does not rule on that specific project in its judgment."

UEFA said it addressed last year "a historical shortfall within UEFA's pre-authorization framework"

and pledged to continue defending the central role of governing bodies in the European sports model.

"UEFA is confident in the robustness of its new rules, and specifically that they comply with all relevant European laws and regulations," it said.

Two years after the original idea collapsed, Super League promoters presented in February a new proposal for a multi-division competition involving up to 80 European soccer teams and operating outside of UEFA's authority.

English clubs are still unlikely to join such a revived plan. The Premier League's international appeal and financial power has only grown in the past two years, and a U.K. government bill announced last month by King Charles proposed

powers to block English teams from trying to join a breakaway league.

In a document explaining the new Football Governance Bill, the government said Super League was "fundamentally uncompetitive" and "threatened to undermine the footballing pyramid against the wishes of fans."

The Spanish League reacted to Thursday's verdict, repeating "that the Super League is a selfish and elitist model. Anything that is not fully open, with direct access only through the domestic leagues, season by season, is a closed format."

In its ruling, the court also noted that rules giving FIFA and UEFA exclusive control over the commercial exploitation of the media rights related to their competitions are "such as to be harmful to European football clubs, all companies operating in media markets and, ultimately, consumers and television viewers, by preventing them from enjoying new and potentially innovative or interesting competitions." MDT/AP



ARGENTINA

# PRESIDENT MILEI ANNOUNCES ECONOMY DEREGULATION AS THOUSANDS PROTEST AGAINST AUSTERITY

DÉBORA REY & ALMUDENA CALATRAVA, BUENOS AIRES

**P**RESIDENT Javier Milei announced sweeping initiatives Wednesday to transform Argentina's struggling economy, including easing government regulation and allowing privatization of state-run industries as a way to boost exports and investment.

The right-wing libertarian announced the moves for South America's second biggest economy just hours after thousands of Argentines took to the streets of the capital to protest against austerity and deregulation actions taken last week by Milei.

The demonstrations went off relatively peacefully, after a government warning against blocking streets.

Around the start of the protest, which drew thousands of marchers, police briefly scuffled with some demonstrators and two men were arrested. But the event concluded without widespread street blockages that have been frequent in past years.

Undeterred by the protest, Milei afterward announced the measures in a televised address to the nation.

"The goal is start on the road to rebuilding our country, return freedom and autonomy to individuals and start to transform the enormous amount of regulations that have blocked, stalled and stopped economic growth in our country," Milei said.

The approximately 300 changes would earmark many government companies for privatization, and loosen protections for renters, employees and shoppers.

After the announcement, people in some neighborhoods of Buenos Aires banged pots to show their disapproval. "Cacerolazos" — noisy anti-government protests in which people bang casserole pots — have been symbolic in Argentina in recent years when people want to express their anger.

Milei's administration had said it will allow protests, but threatened to cut off public aid payments to anyone who blocks thoroughfares. Marchers were also forbidden to



Protesters march against new economic shock measures in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday

carry sticks, cover their faces or bring children to the protest.

Marchers set out toward Buenos Aires' iconic Plaza de Mayo, the scene of protests dating back to the country's 1970s dictatorship. Police struggled to keep demonstrators from taking over the entire boulevard, and in the end many kept to the sidewalks and filled about half the plaza.

Eduardo Belliboni, one of the march's organizers, said demonstrators faced "an enormous repressive apparatus." Belliboni's left-wing Polo Obrero group has a long history of leading street blockages.

Toward the end of the demonstration, organizers called on the country's trade unions to declare a general strike.

On Wednesday's was Milei's first test of how his administration would respond to demonstrations against economic shock measures, which he says are needed to address Argentina's severe crisis.

The steps include a 50% devaluation of the Argentine peso, cuts to energy and transportation subsidies, and the closure of some government ministries. They come amid

soaring inflation and rising poverty.

Protesters "can demonstrate as many times as they want. They can go to the squares .. but the streets are not going to be closed," Milei's security minister, Patricia Bullrich, told local media.

## The approximately 300 changes would earmark many government companies for privatization, and loosen protections for renters, employees and shoppers

Bullrich announced a new "protocol" to maintain public order that allows federal forces to clear people blocking streets without a judicial order and authorizes the police to identify — through video or digital means — people protesting and obstructing public thoroughfares. It can bill them for the cost of mobilizing security forces.

Some groups say the protocol goes too far and criminalizes the right to protest.

Argentine labor, social and human rights groups on Tuesday signed a petition asking the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to intercede

against the new public order procedures. The document says the security protocol is "incompatible with the rights to free assembly and association, freedom of expression and social protest" recognized by Argentina's constitution.

On Monday, the government announced that people who block streets could be removed from the public assistance benefit lists if they are on one.

In Argentina, some people receive social support directly from the government, but others

get support through social organizations with direct links to federal offices. Milei's administration says many of these groups use this as a way to force people to go out to protests in exchange for support

A recent poll by the University of Buenos Aires' Observatory of Applied Social Psychology said 65% of those surveyed agree with banning street blockages.

Milei, a 53-year-old economist who rose to fame on television with profanity-laden tirades against what he called the political caste, became president with the support of Argentines disillusioned with the economic crisis. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1958 EASY VICTORY FOR DE GAULLE



General Charles de Gaulle has been elected President of France with an overwhelming majority.

At 1715 this afternoon President Rene Coty telephoned his congratulations to General de Gaulle at his country home at Colombey-les-Deux Eglises.

At 2300 the unofficial results were announced. General de Gaulle had polled 77.5% for metropolitan France, 81.45% for overseas departments and 97.04% for the States of the French Community.

Under the new constitution it means he becomes the first leader of the Fifth Republic with US-style presidential powers.

It is a remarkable comeback for a man who led the victory parade into Paris in 1944 but resigned in a disagreement over the constitution for the Fourth Republic and in 1953 announced his retirement from politics.

With France facing a huge economic crisis and a looming civil war in Algeria, he was recalled as prime minister six months ago.

He was given wide powers to draw up a new constitution, establishing a more powerful presidency, which was given the overwhelming endorsement of the public in September's referendum.

Today is the first time the electoral college, as laid down by the new constitution, has voted.

It includes members of parliament, members of county and municipal councils, mayors of all villages and the members of local assemblies from overseas territories.

The biggest challenge facing the General is Algeria. Tonight he has made public the contents of a letter he has written to the new delegate-general of the government in Algeria.

In it he speaks of pacifying, administering and transforming Algeria, but he avoids potentially contentious words like integration.

He also says there will be a clampdown on policing in Algeria following claims officers have been using repressive measures.

General de Gaulle will formally take over as president on 8 January.

His first task will be the appointment of a new prime minister. Michael Debre is believed to be the most likely choice.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

General de Gaulle ended the Algeria War of Independence through the Evian Agreements though he was lucky to survive several assassination attempts in the process.

He sought to inspire and unite the French public with a patriotic and independent foreign policy in which he aspired for French leadership in Europe. He insisted on the development of a nuclear deterrent which at the time was considered essential for superpower status.

He was re-elected in 1965 but left severely shaken by the student revolt of May 1968.

On 28 April 1969 he resigned after his proposed changes to the constitution were rejected by the electorate.

General de Gaulle retired to his country retreat at Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises, in north-east France, to write his memoirs. He died from a heart attack on 9 November 1970.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

## YOUR STARS

**ARIES** Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Look for professional guidance if it will help unite the family. Make alternate plans just in case you need to make a career shift. You will be able to get to the bottom of things today.

**TAURUS** Apr. 20-May. 20  
In-laws or older individuals may give you a bit of a hard time today. Find out if they have other commitments. Generosity will put you in the poorhouse.

**GEMINI** May. 21-Jun. 21  
You could have a change of heart if an old flame waltzes back into your life. Channel your energy into projects that will enhance your home.

**CANCER** Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
You are best not to discuss your personal life with others. You are best not to nag or criticize. You will have some wonderful ideas that should bring you extra money.

**LEO** Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
You have to take hold of your life and make some crucial decisions. You will be too quick to point your finger at your mate. You could be disillusioned if you let relative in on your emotional thoughts.

**VIRGO** Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Jealousy may get in the way of a good relationship. Relatives may be less than easy to deal with. You will meet some interesting people if you attend promotional functions.

**LIBRA** Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Your energetic personality will make you the center of attention at social gatherings. You can discuss your findings behind closed doors with your boss. You are best to avoid confrontations.

**SCORPIO** Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
They will teach you far more than you expect. You can help them more than they can help you. Romantic opportunities will flourish through travel or communication.

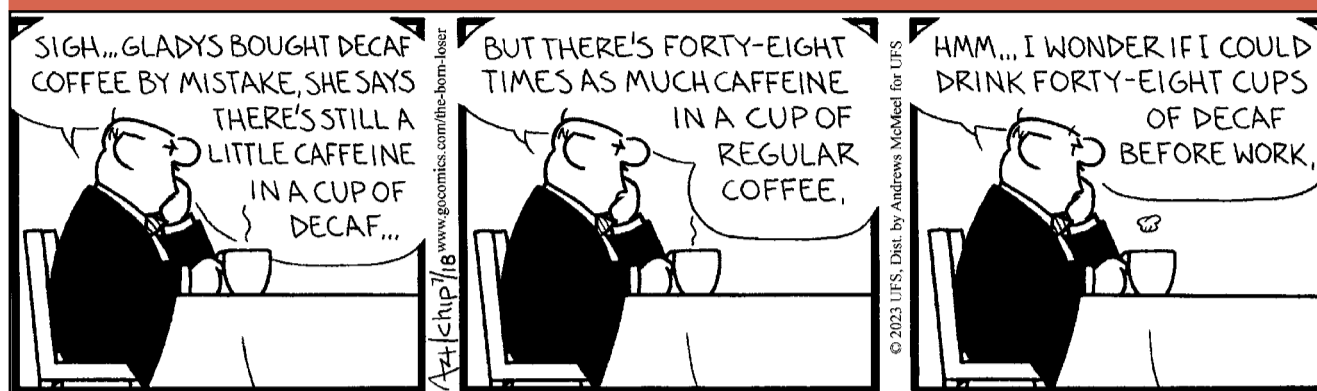
**SAGITTARIUS** Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
This may not be the time to lend or borrow. You will do well with clients today. You may jump from the frying pan into the fire if you make a move today.

**CAPRICORN** Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Romance could develop through social activities or short trips. Don't be too critical. Your sensitivity toward those you love will capture their hearts.

**AQUARIUS** Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
You haven't been watching your spending habits and you may have been neglecting your duties. Invest wisely. Your personal life could have you tied up in knots.

**PISCES** Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Travel and entertaining conversation will be informative and uplifting. You can make changes to your living quarters, but not everyone will be pleased with your efforts.

## The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



## SUDOKU

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

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

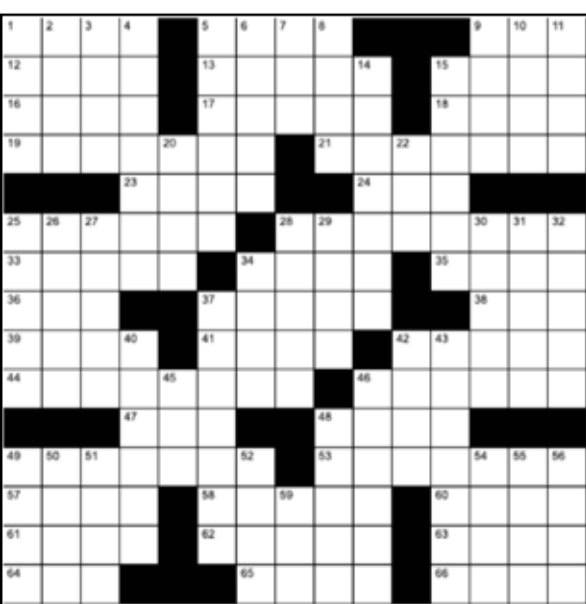
## WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-4	-2	fine
Changchun	-16	-13	fine
Chengdu	8	8	overcast
Chongqing	14	12	cloudy
Fuzhou	14	10	fine
Guangzhou	15	12	fine
Guiyang	7	2	overcast
Haikou	21	14	overcast
Hangzhou	6	3	fine
Harbin	-21	-17	cloudy
Hefei	4	0	cloudy
Nanjing	7	0	cloudy
Shanghai	10	1	fine
Taipei	19	14	rain
Wuhan	4	3	cloudy
Hong Kong	11	16	overcast
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-1	-1	windy
Frankfurt	8	8	rain
Paris	8	12	rain
London	9	11	windy
New York	0	4	overcast

## CROSSWORDS

**ACROSS 1-** Round object, often used to store computer data; 5- Cheerio!; 9- 1959 Kingston Trio hit; 12- Creamy-beige color; 13- Cotton thread used for hosiery; 15- Public disturbance; 16- Go sky-high; 17- According to; 18- Poop; 19- Infuse; 21- Skull; 23- Spiny houseplant; 24- Donkey; 25- Zealot; 28- Paternal; 33- D. ebumum, a tropical tree; 34- Mongolian desert; 35- Mon \_\_\_; 36- Skye cap; 37- Early computer; 38- Biblical beast boat; 39- Son of Isaac and Rebekah; 41- Final, ultimate; 42- Ditto; 44- Dire warning; 46- Realm; 47- Small cask; 48- Coarse file, angry tone of voice; 49- Caliph from Baghdad; 53- Spoken; 57- Tolerate; 58- Finnish name of Finland; 60- \_\_\_ avis; 61- Java neighbor; 62- Mortise insert; 63- Finito; 64- Hydrocarbon ending; 65- Puppeteer Tony; 66- Bridle part;

**DOWN 1-** Lucie's father; 2- Clickable image; 3- Ladies of Sp.; 4- Drape; 5- Aztec god of rain; 6- Grocery lane; 7- Medicinal amt.; 8- Novelist Waugh; 9- Prefix for small; 10- Beancurd; 11- Molecular component; 14- Unpredictable; 15- Washed lightly; 20- Now \_\_\_ me down...; 22- Powdery residue; 25- Unit just above a yard; 26- Put down; 27- Bedouin; 28- Force upon; 29- Blind as \_\_\_; 30- Lasso; 31- Vive \_\_\_!; 32- Klondike territory; 34- Growl; 37- Sad poet; 40- Naked-faced Amazon monkey; 42- The majority of; 43- High ruler; 45- French article; 46- Going out with; 48- Gossip; 49- French cleric; 50- Pinto or lima; 51- Bundle; 52- Membership fees; 54- Pan's opposite; 55- ... saw Elba; 56- Mend with rows of stitches; 59- \_\_\_ roll;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

## 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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AD



DRIVE IN

# A TRANSFORMED ZAC EFRON GIVES HIS ALL IN TRAGIC, TRUE-LIFE WRESTLING TALE 'IRON CLAW'

JOCELYN NOVECK, MDT/AP  
ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

IT doesn't take long to understand the level of commitment Zac Efron brings to "The Iron Claw" as Texas wrestling brother Kevin Von Erich. Just one look at the taut mass of muscle and sinew he's become for the role will do the trick.

It's also clear from the get-go how invested writer-director Sean Durkin was in telling the true-life tale of the Von Erich family wrestling dynasty, which — shockingly, to those of us unfamiliar with the story — suffered a set of tragic losses almost too staggering to imagine. It's hardly a spoiler alert to say that Kevin, by 35, was the only surviving brother of an original six. (He is now 66). Indeed, so devastating is the story that Durkin felt the need to excise brother Chris, one of three lost to suicide, from this retelling entirely.

Durkin has said he was a committed wrestling fan from his childhood in England, where he scoured magazines to learn more about the exploits of the Von Erichs, who made their name in the colorful, high-flying, entertainment-heavy wrestling world of the '70s and early '80s. And from that affection stems perhaps both the strength and weakness of "The Iron Claw." It's a film that tells its stunning tale with heart and conviction, yet seems somehow reticent about pointing a truly critical finger at either the brutality of a sport that broke this family, or the man who seemed to give his sons no choice in the matter: family patriarch Fritz Von Erich.



Zac Efron, right, in a scene from "The Iron Claw."

It is with Fritz that we begin. In a 1950s-era prologue rendered in black-and-white, the eventual patriarch and promoter (an excellent Holt McCallany) is in the ring himself, displaying his famed "Iron Claw" maneuver: a punishing two-handed grip on a doomed opponent's skull, crushing it like a vice.

Waiting in the parking lot is Fritz's wife, Doris (Maura Tierney) and their young kids. Doris is shocked that Fritz has acquired a spiffy new car to attach to their trailer, something they can't afford, but he tells her it's all part of the persona he's building: You need to be the toughest and the strongest, and then nothing will be able to hurt you.

Flash forward to 1979, and Fritz has passed the dream of becoming heavyweight champion onto his remaining sons. (One of

them has died at a young age in a terrible accident.) Kevin is doing his best to be the son who gets there first. Among his exploits in the ring, Kevin climbs up on top of the ropes to attack from the air, leaping onto an opponent. These fight scenes are vivid and exciting, although if you're like me, eventually you'll be shouting at the screen, begging for it all to stop, lest one more son get hurt.

But at the kitchen table, there's never talk of stopping. Fritz tells Kevin, David and Mike that they all need to work harder to win that coveted championship belt. Mike, the youngest, is interested in music, but Fritz doesn't care. Privately, Kevin seeks out his mother and asks her to intervene on Mike's behalf. But Doris relies only on her faith; this wrestling business is between the men, she says. (It

is horrifying to watch her, powerless, as the sadness multiplies.)

Who will achieve Dad's dream first? Will it be David, who's a great talker and taunter in the ring? Or Kevin, who possesses great physical strength but is awkward and unable to master the art of self-promotion? Suddenly, brother Kerry, a discus thrower with Olympic hopes, enters the scene. When President Jimmy Carter declares the United States won't be sending a team to Moscow in 1980, Fritz decrees that Kerry (Jeremy Allen White) will join his brothers in the ring.

There are a few lovely scenes of the brothers bonding, playing football, doing what brothers do. But the pace of the film, with its wrestling sequences and successive tragedies, doesn't allow for much relationship development. An exception is Kevin's re-

lationship with Pam (a lovely and soulful Lily James), who woos the shy Kevin and eventually marries him, their wedding a brief joyful moment (with an infectious family line-dancing scene).

But tragedy is not far off. For those unfamiliar with the Von Erich tale, we won't reveal more plot here, other than to say that loss does not soften Fritz. At one funeral, he orders his grieving sons to remove their sunglasses, then forbids them to cry.

Efron, with his rock-hard physique and '70s mullet, turns in some of the most affecting work of his career. White, too, is excellent if more inscrutable as Kerry, initially the golden boy until his own brush with disaster sends him into a downward spiral. Harris Dickinson as David and a heartbreaking Stanley Simons as Mike round out the strong ensemble. But the film does not spend a lot of time on the emotional tissue that connects the brothers, who seem more bound by loyalty and mutual hardship than anything else.

The film's emotional ending brings well-earned tears, thanks to Efron's delicate portrayal. But when we're informed by means of an epilogue that the Von Erich family in 2009 was admitted to the WWE Hall of Fame, it's hard not to consider a question that the film doesn't seem to be attacking head-on: Was any of this worth it?

"The Iron Claw," an A24 release, has been Rated R by the Motion Picture Association "for language, suicide, some sexuality and drug use. Running time: 130 minutes.



FILM

# After 'Barbie' success, Mattel to make American Doll live-action movie

"BARBIE" may soon be joined by another Mattel doll on the big screen. The toy company is developing a live-action film based on its American Girl doll line, Mattel announced earlier this week.

"American Girl" will be produced by Mattel Films, Paramount Pictures and Temple Hill Entertainment, the production company of "Twilight" and "The Fault in Our Stars." Attached to write the script and produce is

Lindsey Anderson Beer, the writer of this year's "Pet Cemetery: Bloodlines."

The project adds to the already teeming pipeline of movies in development for Mattel Films. Following its blockbuster first release, "Barbie," Mattel Films is prepping some 14 live-action films, including movies based on Hot Wheels, Magic 8 Ball, Polly Pocket, Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots and UNO.

"Saturday Night Live" has

already spoofed the idea of an American Girl doll movie. In April, the NBC sketch comedy show aired a parody trailer with Ana de Armas in which a handful of American Girl dolls from disparate eras of history are brought into modern day but keep dying of cholera.

"Come for the fun," the trailer announces. "Stay for the overburdened preteens wearing four layers of petti-coats and pantaloons."

Mattel in 2019 partnered

with MGM on an "American Girl" movie but those plans fizzled. Since first launched in 1986, more than 32 million American Girl dolls have been sold.

"They are historically accurate toys and accessories that feature elaborate and immersive backstories uniquely suited to bring to screen," Beer said in a statement. "I am so excited to tell a story that tackles the issues of girlhood in a real and compelling way." MDT/AP





TASTE OF EDESIA

# Stylish celebration

IRENE SAM, MDT

**2**024 is just days away. For those who are still thinking of where to go for countdown, **W Macau at Studio City** presents intriguing designs, elevated dining and beverage offerings, and unrivaled guest experience this New Year's Eve on December 31. The hotel will host the 'W Macau - Studio City Makes Your 2023 NYE List' event, a series of exciting immersive experiences.

Firstly, one can indulge in an abundant array of cuisines at Hawker Hawker, featuring international and local comfort foods and a sumptuous selection of festive flavors.

For something more special, at DIVA, guests can enjoy a specially-curated 8-course contemporary Cantonese dinner set menu by Chef Yap.

For a more exclusive experience, private dining rooms are also available with an elevated set menu and includes two bottles of Champagne.

For music lovers, why not immerse in an electrifying night at Living Room? A night with Murphy, W Macau - Studio City's resident Music Curator, and guest DJ Cross Cutz, an international DJ, turntablist & remixer from France who performs around the globe, for a live performance starting at 10PM to late.

Finally countdown to the New Year with stunning views of the city's skyline at Blind Tiger on the 40F, while enjoying a live performance by Murphy, Music Curator and guest DJ Aggness, an Italian DJ with 10 years of experience spinning her tunes around Europe and US. It's going to be a night to be remembered.



BOOK IT

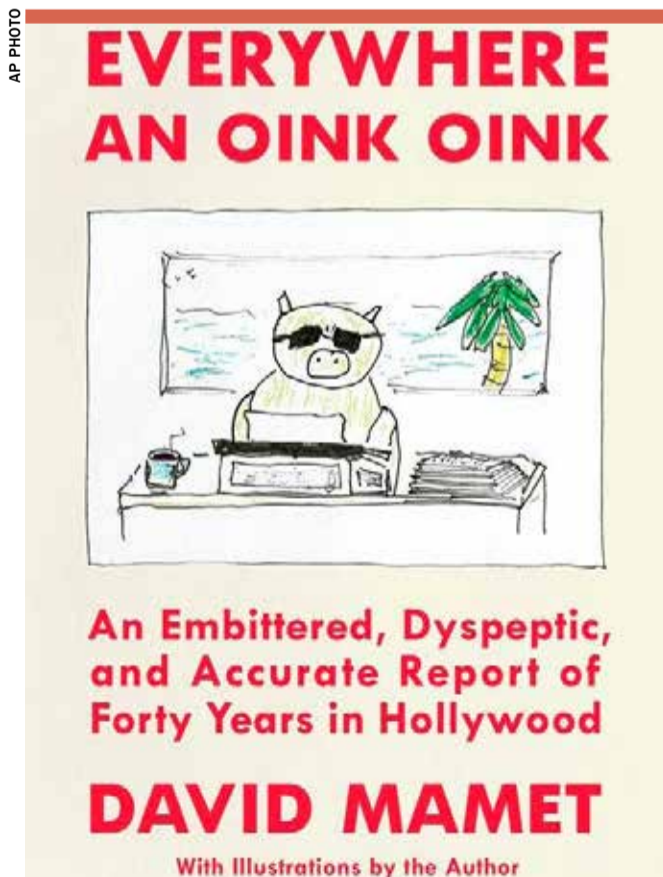
# David Mamet screams at clouds in new collection of grievances about Hollywood

**JUST** in time for Christmas, when you need a gift for that weird old uncle who is upset that everyone gets a trophy in youth soccer, comes a new David Mamet book.

"Everywhere an Oink Oink: An Embittered, Dyspeptic and Accurate Report of Forty Years in Hollywood" is a collection of observations, stories and aphorisms about Hollywood from one of America's foremost writers and, these days, provocateurs. It is virtually unreadable.

This is a book that resembles the idled rantings from a feverish, unsolicited email stuck in your spam folder. There are weird capitalizations, uneasy conclusions and the rat-a-tat of non-sequiturs all held together by bad faith. It's illustrated by Mamet's own cartoons, which echo a middle schooler's sense of humor and maturity.

He clearly hates film pro-



ducers — "Village Idiots" is the nicest of adjectives — but he hates PC culture more. He lambasts "Diver-

sity Porn," arguing that the logical extension of color-conscious casting is an Asian woman playing Harry

Truman. He thinks modern culture has made frightened sheep of men.

"Today in Los Angeles the teenage girls walk about virtually naked, and the males, rather than getting a pass for ogling the good clean fun, are terrified of even inadvertent gawking." He won a Pulitzer Prize once. Now he's basically endorsing wet T-shirt contests.

Throughout is the stringent waft of misogyny. In one cartoon, Mamet asks "Who was the most fetching female in film history" over a drawing of Lassie. He includes jokes like this: "Ann-Margret is the only girl in Hollywood who still has her hyphen." Again, this is a man who name-checks Herodotus and Kipling.

In one section, he tries to belittle entire topics of critical thought like a proto-incel. "Inequity, Gender Politics, Feminism, and like doctrines are like modern

art: a first glance is sufficient. There's no information to be gained from an in-depth study."

Mamet is the acclaimed author of theater classics such as "Glengarry Glen Ross," "American Buffalo" and "Race," all works struggling to find relevance in the modern age. His Hollywood input includes scripts for "The Untouchables," "Heist," "Wag the Dog" and "The Edge," glorious all.

Sections in the book unusually begin with a tart statement, like "Trivia is gossip without malice" or "People flourish in hierarchy," and then meander to some backstage trivia about Hollywood's Golden Age before ending with something outrageous and unconnected, often with Nazis. Hitler appears on Page 8 and never really leaves.

To be fair, there are intriguing parts, like when he

discusses the nuts and bolts of screenwriting: "The dialogue is of as little concern to a skilled screenwriter as the paint is to the mechanic." And run-ins with Billy Wilder, Don Ameche, Sue Mengers and Bob Evans are fun.

But "Everywhere an Oink Oink" is a vanity project: He loves re-settling scores, boasts about being fired from jobs or thrown out of places — he got tossed from a Williams Sonoma for going in the wrong door and, when confronted, replied "It's alright, I'm an Illegal Immigrant."

At one point, Mamet's editor is compelled to dismiss in a footnote one of the writer's so-called facts: "A complete fabrication." But the wrong thing remains there. All over, Mamet repeats himself, another gripe for a book that feels unedited. One may loath his individual conclusions, but to get them twice makes the author even smaller, petty and unhinged.

"Either they or I are marching to the beat of a Different Drummer. In which event either one or many of us must be out of step," he writes.

Yes, indeed. MDT/AP



**OPINION**

**The Conversation**

Chip Colwell, University of Colorado Denver

**WHAT'S THE POINT OF GIVING GIFTS? AN ANTHROPOLOGIST EXPLAINS THIS ANCIENT PART OF BEING HUMAN**

Have you planned out your holiday gift giving yet? If you're anything like me, you might be waiting until the last minute. But whether every single present is already wrapped and ready, or you'll hit the shops on Christmas Eve, giving gifts is a curious but central part of being human.

While researching my new book, "So Much Stuff," on how humanity has come to depend on tools and technology over the last 3 million years, I became fascinated by the purpose of giving things away. Why would people simply hand over something precious or valuable when they could use it themselves?

To me as an anthropologist, this is an especially powerful question because giving gifts likely has ancient roots. And gifts can be found in every known culture around the world.

So, what explains the power of the present?

Undoubtedly, gifts serve lots of purposes. Some psychologists have observed a "warm glow" – an intrinsic delight – that's associated with giving presents. Theologians have noted how gifting is a way to express moral values, such as love, kindness and gratitude, in Catholicism, Buddhism and Islam. And philosophers ranging from Seneca to Friedrich Nietzsche regarded gifting as the best demonstration of selflessness. It's little wonder that gifts are a central part of Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and other winter holidays – and that some people may even be tempted to regard Black Friday, the opening of the year-end shopping season, as a holiday in itself.

But of all the explanations for why people give gifts, the one I find most convincing was offered in 1925 by a French anthropologist named Marcel Mauss.

**Giving, receiving, reciprocating**

Like many anthropologists, Mauss was puzzled by societies in which gifts were extravagantly given away.

For example, along the northwest coast of Canada and the United States, Indigenous peoples conduct potlatch ceremonies. In these dayslong feasts, hosts give away immense amounts of property. Consider a famous potlatch in 1921, held by a clan leader of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation in Canada who gave community members 400 sacks of flour, heaps of blankets, sewing machines, furniture, canoes, gas-powered boats and even pool tables.

In a now-famous essay titled "The Gift," originally published almost a century ago, Mauss sees potlatches as an extreme form of gifting. Yet, he suggests this behavior is totally recognizable in most every human society: We give things away even when keeping them for ourselves would seem to make much more economic and evolutionary sense.

Mauss observed that gifts create three separate but inextricably related actions. Gifts are given, received and reciprocated.

The first act of giving establishes the virtues of the gift giver. They express their generosity, kindness and honor.

The act of receiving the gift, in turn, shows a person's willingness to be honored. This is a way for the receiver to show their own generosity, that they are willing to accept what was offered to them.

The third component of gift giving is reciprocity, returning in kind what was first given. Essentially, the person who received the gift is now expected – implicitly or explicitly – to give a gift back to the original giver.

But then, of course, once the first person gets something back, they must return yet another gift to the person who received the original gift. In this way, gifting becomes an endless loop of giving and receiving, giving and receiving.

This last step – reciprocity – is what makes gifts unique. Unlike buying something at a store, in which the exchange ends when money is traded for goods, giving gifts builds and sustains relationships. This relationship between the gift giver and receiver is bound up with morality. Gifting is an expression of fairness because each present is generally of equal or greater value than what was last given. And gifting is an expression of respect because it shows a willingness to honor the other person.

[Abridged]

An accident in a coal mine in China's northeastern Heilongjiang province left 12 people dead and 13 injured, state broadcaster CCTV reported yesterday.

The coal workers were in a mining cart underground that ran off the tracks, according to state media reports.

The accident occurred Wednesday afternoon in Jixi city in Heilongjiang province at the Kunyuan mine and was reported by Chinese media yesterday.

China has been working to improve mine safety to com-

bat accidents, which happen with some frequency. Last Thursday, three people died in an accident in China's coal-producing province Shanxi. A coal mine explosion killed 11 people in Shanxi in August, and a coal mine fire in southern China's Guizhou province killed 16 people in September.

Last month, a major fire at a coal mining company building in Shanxi killed 26 people and injured dozens of others, but the blaze was not in the mine itself.

AP PHOTO



**YOUNG KENYAN BALLET DANCERS STAGE EARLY CHRISTMAS PERFORMANCE FOR THEIR COMMUNITY**

**BRIAN INGANGA, NAIROBI**

AS the sun sets on the narrow streets of Africa's largest informal settlement, children hurry to change from daily clothes to pointe shoes and other ballet gear.

Fifteen-year-old Brenda Branice is among the dancers and can't hide her joy. It's time for the Christmas performance in Kibera, one of the busiest neighborhoods of Kenya's capital, Nairobi.

Instead of a stage, there is dust-covered plastic sheeting in an open field. The

holidays have come early for residents as more than 100 local ballet students perform. They have been practicing every day after school.

"I am happy to be a ballerina," Branice said. "I am also happy to entertain my friends."

Eyeshadow sparkles. A girl's braided hair swings. Some dancers go barefoot.

The mother of another ballerina, Monica Aoko, smiles as she watches the performance. Hundreds of residents, young and old, have come to the annual holiday event.

"This dance has given

me a Christmas mood. Now I know Christmas is here," Aoko said. She said she's impressed knowing that when her daughter steps outside their home, she's engaged in something meaningful.

The ballet project is run by Project Elimu, a community-driven nonprofit that offers after-school arts education and a safe space to children in Kibera.

"Dance has the ability of triggering resilience, creativity and also calmness in you as an individual," said founder Michael Wamaya. "I want to use dance for emotional well-being of children here in Kibera." **MDT/AP**

**Australia** will send 11 military personnel to support a U.S.-led mission to protect cargo shipping in the Red Sea, but it won't send a warship or plane, the defense minister said yesterday. Defense Minister Richard Marles said that Australia's military needs to keep focused on the Pacific region. The United States announced this week that several nations are creating a force to protect commercial shipping from attacks by drones and ballistic missiles.

AP PHOTO



**India** Dozens of opposition lawmakers suspended from Parliament by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government for obstructing proceedings held a street protest yesterday accusing the government of throttling democracy in the country. They briefly marched outside the Parliament building in New Delhi behind a huge "Save Democracy" banner and carried placards reading "Democracy is in danger." The suspensions came as legislators were due to debate a contentious criminal reform bill.

AP PHOTO



**UN** is seeking to verify reports that Afghanistan's Taliban rulers are allowing girls of all ages to study at Islamic religious schools that are traditionally boys-only, the U.N.'s top official in the country said. U.N. special envoy Roza Otunbayeva told the U.N. Security Council and elaborated to reporters afterward that the United Nations is receiving "more and more anecdotal evidence" that girls can study at the schools, known as madrassas.

**THE DECISIVE MOMENT**

AP Photo/Michael Probst



Frohe Weihnachten! An inflatable Santa Claus decorates a vendor's Christmas tree market on a field near Frankfurt, Germany

**HOLIDAY TIMES**

Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Thursday December 28. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times.