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**FESTIVE EVENTS, SUCH AS COUNTDOWN PARTIES, INTERACTIVE COMMUNITY INSTALLATIONS, LIGHTENED UP CELEBRATIONS FOR THE CITY'S NEW YEAR**

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**RELIGION: NEW MOSQUE PLANNED FOR LOCAL MUSLIM COMMUNITY**

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**CHINA EASED VISA RESTRICTIONS FOR PEOPLE VISITING FROM THE UNITED STATES FROM JAN. 1, THE COUNTRY'S LATEST EFFORT TO ATTRACT FOREIGN TRAVELERS**

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AP PHOTO



**China, Thailand** will soon implement visa-free entry for each other's citizens. Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin said yesterday. Chinese nationals will be granted visa-free entry on a permanent basis beginning March 1, Srettha said after his Cabinet's weekly meeting. Chinese visitors have been allowed visa-free entry since September last year, but the privilege was due to expire on Feb. 29.

AP PHOTO



**North Korean** leader Kim Jong Un said his military should "thoroughly annihilate" the United States and South Korea if provoked, after he vowed to boost national defense to cope with what he called an unprecedented U.S.-led confrontation. North Korea has increased its warlike rhetoric in recent months in response to an expansion of U.S.-South Korean military drills. Experts expect Kim will continue to escalate his rhetoric and weapons tests because he likely believes he can use heightened tensions to wrest U.S. concessions if former President Donald Trump wins the U.S. presidential election in November.

AP PHOTO



**Japan** A passenger plane collided with a coast guard aircraft and burst into flames on the runway of Tokyo's Haneda Airport yesterday, officials said. NHK TV reported that all occupants of Japan Airlines flight JAL-516, believed to total 379 people, got out safely before the plane was entirely engulfed in flames. The Japanese coast guard said the pilot of its plane had escaped. NHK reported that the five other crewmembers had been found dead.

# ALL-TIME HIGHS

**Record visitor numbers wrap 2023, while gaming revenues hit MOP183 billion, spurring increased investment**

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**NEW YEAR GREETINGS**

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### FIRST 2024 MACAU BABY BORN AT MIDNIGHT

The city welcomed its first baby of the year at midnight on New Year's Day. The baby, a girl, was born by caesarean delivery at the public hospital, weighing 2.75 kg. She is the first child of her parents. Nearly two hours later, a baby boy weighing 3.2 kg was born at the private Kiang Wu Hospital at 1:56 a.m. He is the second child in the family. Last year, there were 3,726 new babies in Macau, down 15% compared to the previous year.

### AMENDMENTS TO CHIEF EXECUTIVE ELECTION LAW TAKE EFFECT

Amendments to Macau's Chief Executive Election Law took effect Jan. 1, 2024, the SAR government. Under these amendments, nominees for the Macau SAR chief executive election and candidates for electing members of the chief executive electoral committee must uphold the SAR Basic Law and pledge allegiance to the SAR. They must also not be members of foreign parliaments or governments. The eligibility of nominees and candidates will be assessed by the Committee for Safeguarding National Security of Macau.

### AL TO HOLD OPEN DAY THIS SATURDAY

The Legislative Assembly is set to welcome visitors during its Open Day this Saturday, running from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Lawmakers will be available throughout the day to greet and engage with guests, who will be introduced to the parliament's history and operations. A picture exhibition along with performances from music students at the Macao Conservatory will be showcased, along with booth games for attendees to enjoy. The post office will also sell commemorative envelopes and provide commemorative postmark cancellation services at the parliament. A performance will also be held at the Nam Van Lake fountain during the Open Day. Shuttle services between the parliament and Hotel Sintra will run every 30 minutes.

# FESTIVE EVENTS HIGHLIGHT NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS IN MACAU

**FESTIVE** events, such as countdown parties, performance galas and interactive community installations, have lightened up celebrations for this New Year in Macau.

At the Sai Van Lake Square and the Taipa Houses Museum, crowds gathered on New Year's Eve for songs and performances by local and international musicians alike, cheering "Happy New Year!" as fireworks blossomed over the landmark Macau Tower at midnight.

The New Year countdown gig staged by the Jiangsu Satellite TV from the Chinese mainland, for the seventh time in Macau, again won screams and thunderous applause from fans for pop stars from China and abroad.

"To me, Macau has truly lived up to its reputation as a city of performances," said a college student surnamed Sun from southwest China's Chongqing municipality who came to Macau specifically for the shows.

During the three-day New Year holiday, tourists from home and abroad flocked into Macau for a taste of its festivity, with long queues emerging in border ports



between Macau and its neighboring mainland city of Zhuhai.

Data from the Macao Government Tourism Office showed visitor arrivals in Macau on New Year's Eve reached 175,030, a record high daily number since the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Total number of visitor arrivals in 2023 reached 2.23 million, recovering to around 70 percent of

the level in 2019.

The office said visitor arrivals in Macau kept rising in 2023 after customs clearance fully recovered, which proved Macau's attractiveness as a world tourism and leisure center.

The tourism office also joined hands with major local enterprises to present romantic and colorful light installations, mapping

performance and interactive installations, illuminating the entire city with dazzling and charming projection mapping shows and turning it into a unique large night paradise.

At the Mount Fortress garden in the city center, multiple large-scale festival installations and dazzling lighting decorations, including a flashing giant bear and a seven-meter-tall Santa Claus, captured the hearts of many, to be accompanied by romantic snowfall, colorful light shows and live music performances every night.

"I found Macau very busy and lively this holiday, with rich festive decorations and food," said a tourist with the surname of Mo from Zhuhai.

Warm weather also returned to Macau during the holiday after the cold wave hit on previous days, encouraging more locals to go out and enjoy sunshine along the city's long coastline.

"I wish for a better year ahead, not just for my family, but also for Macau and our country," said a resident surnamed Qu who was busy barbecuing on Macau's black sand beach. **MDT/XINHUA**

# Government leaders extend New Year greetings to SAR

**CHINESE** President Xi Jinping, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, and representatives of the Central Government have conveyed greetings to the Special Administrative Region (SAR) to mark the beginning of the new year.

Xi's message for the SAR revolved around the country's modernization.

"Chinese modernization must be progressed unyieldingly, with new development ideals fully followed, accurately and comprehensively," the national leader said.

He underlined the importance of accelerating new development pat-

terns, promoting high-quality development and coordinating such development with security measures.

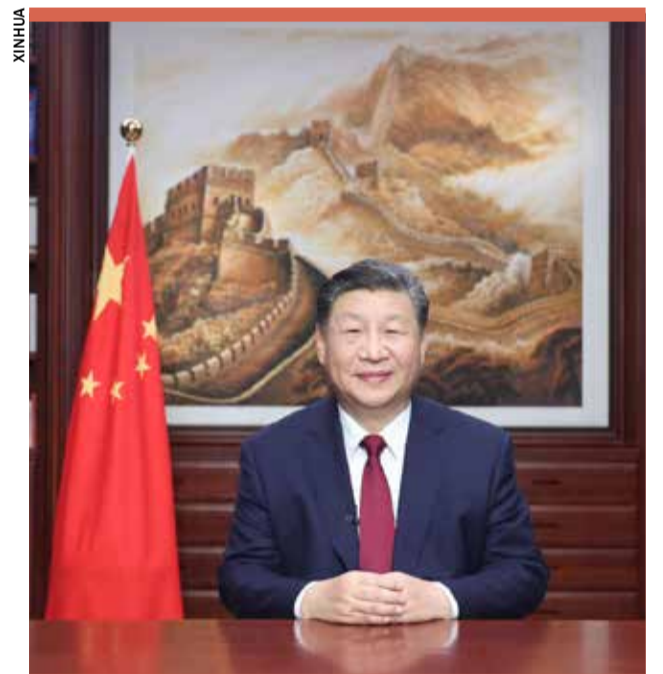
He also pledged Beijing would continue to support both Macau and Hong Kong to leverage their unique advantages and maintain long-term prosperity and stability within the national development masterplan.

Meanwhile in Macau, Ho lauded the city's strides in economic recovery, noting that significant process had been achieved in a variety of areas. He commended economic hallmarks signifying ro-

bust growth, and reiterated the government's work in bolstering national security.

Ho also discussed national policies related to Macau, including those pertaining to Hengqin and the land and maritime authority. He urged the city to follow Xi's directives and further its development and economic diversification in accordance with the government's "1+4" direction.

Zheng Xincong, director of Beijing's liaison office in Macau, highlighted both national and territorial growth in economic and other spheres, in his



New Year statement. He also recapped several legislative reviews.

Liu Xianfa, Beijing foreign affairs commissioner in Macau, was confident the Chinese advocacy and

agenda would benefit the world at large, saying China's modernization efforts would enhance global perceptions and pave the way for leading global modernization. **AL**

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TOURISM

# Record visitor numbers wrap 2023

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE 2023 year closed with a new record for single-day visitor numbers, with 175,030 visitors entering Macau on Dec. 31, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has said in a press statement.

The is the highest number of entries in a day since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Contributing to the year-end total, this figure resulted in the 2023 year closing with a provisional total of 28.23 million visitors, signifying a 71.6% recovery when compared to the 2019 year-end tally of 39.41 million visitors.

The previous single-day record occurred on Oct. 2 during the "Golden Week of the National Day," when 161,200 visitors entered the region.

The 2023 overall count averages around 77,000 visits per day, setting a new reference baseline for local tourism operators and policymakers for the current year.

In the same press statement, MGTO said visitor numbers to Macau trended upwards considering the full reopening of borders in 2023. Meanwhile, the tourism industry showed good



recovery and growth prospects, proving the Macau's attractiveness as a global tourism and leisure center while showcasing visitors' confidence in the region.

Data released previously shows Macau received almost 680,000 visitors between the holiday of the establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region (Dec. 20) and Christmas (until Dec. 26).

During the same period, hotel occupancy between Dec. 23 and 26 reached 90.8%.

The MGTO expects tourism to stabilize in 2024 and aims to improve tourist products and services as part of the development and diversification strategy, aligning with the "1 + 4" economy and emphasis on "tourism +."

## INTERNATIONAL VISITORS WITH 'STRONG' RECOVERY

Reviving foreign visitor numbers to Macau was a key government goal for 2023.

The MGTO reported a strong recovery at the end of 2023 due

to the recent influx of foreign visitors, particularly in November over two weekends of the Macau Grand Prix and other events. In December 2023, foreign visitors reached about 93% of 2019 numbers.

Citing entry figures from the last few days of last year, the MGTO said the daily average of foreign visitors exceeded 10,000 for five consecutive days between Dec. 26 and 30, with 11,258 entries on the last day, a figure close to the 2019 average of 12,104.

Nonetheless, this figure continues to be quite low when compared to mainland and Greater China visitors, who account for over 90% of total daily tourist entries.

The MGTO also said the preliminary figures demonstrate that "the recovery in the daily monthly average [of] international visitors increased from 10.1% in January to 94.4% in December 2023."

## NEW YEAR'S WEEKEND SEES ALMOST 400,000 VISITORS

**CONTINUING** the momentum seen in year-end tourism figures, the Dec. 30 to Jan. 1 (3 days) weekend saw 399,180 visitor entries, with overall border movements nearing almost 2 million individuals. However, January 1, 2024, marked a reversal in this trend, where visitor inflow significantly surpassed inflow across all visitor types.

On this day, according to data from the Public Security Police Force, only 85,615 visitors entered, while the number of departures totaled 157,053. Unsurprisingly, the Border Gate checkpoints continued to be the busiest checkpoints, followed by the Port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and the Hengqin Port.

# New Year countdown transport chaos

**S**Ocial media users have complained online that the city was in chaos as crowds rushed home after the New Year countdown.

One of the netizens said that as she was on her way to the bus stop after the end of the countdown concert in front of the Macau Tower, she saw a mass of people obstructing the road. She recalled that buses did not stop or open their doors due to the crowd, resulting in a long queue of people.

According to the user, bus company personnel suggested commuters take a bus to Barra and transfer to the LRT for Taipa. However, upon reaching the LRT station, the station had closed.

Other social media users corroborated this report, comparing Macau with neighboring Hong Kong, where mass transit systems operated throughout the night after the countdown.



Dozens waiting at Rua do Campo bus stop on New Year's Eve

Another social media user claimed that single-journey tickets for the LRT were sold out after the New Year's Eve countdown.

The LRT company was emailed for comments, but no reply was received by press time.

The social media post was accompanied by a picture of a group of people lining up behind the gates

of the system, presumably seeking information. Another line was pictured at the customer service counter.

Commuters in Macau have continually questioned the limited payment options available for the local LRT. Ho Cheong Kei, head of the company, previously hinted at business difficulties underlying this constraint. **AL**

TRANSPORT

## NPC PERMITS MACAU TO USE LAND BESIDE BORDER GATE FOR LRT

**T**HE China's highest legislative body, the National People's Congress (NPC), has officially authorized the Macau SAR to exercise jurisdiction over specific land and sea areas southeast of the Gongbei Port, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has announced.

According to Ho, the move is a significant part of Macau's integration into the overall national development.

Ho said the decision, approved by the Standing Committee of the 14th NPC in its seventh session in Beijing last week, will "inject strong impetus into Macau's long-term development, and promote its prosperity and stability."

Ho expressed his gratitude for the central authorities' support, pledging to expedite infrastructure construction, optimize the



ANTHONY LAM

socioeconomic benefits of Macau's light rail east line, and strengthen infrastructure connectivity between Macau and the mainland.

The Macau SAR government will also participate in the formulation of specialized policies and plans in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. This will allow cooperation with Guangdong and Hong Kong to be intensified, alongside ex-

panded opportunities for exchange across various sectors with provinces in the Pan-Pearl River Delta region.

The approved light rail east line is expected to connect two major land border ports between Macau and Zhuhai with Macau's populous northern district. Construction of the line started in August 2023. It is expected to be completed by 2028. **LV**

# REGIONAL REALTOR CONFIDENT IN 2024 PROPERTY MARKET

ANTHONY LAM

**F**ORECASTING interest rates to fall in 2024, a regional realtor has expressed confidence in the rise of both transactions and prices across the property market.

Profitability should be expected in the property market for office, retail, industrial building and residential spaces, contingent upon falling interest rates, regional realtor Centaline Property's Macau Office said in a statement yesterday.

Centaline forecasted a surge in the number of retail space transactions, particularly in Macau's tourism districts, given that most first-tier shops in tourism and casino districts are currently under ownership.

Rentals for these spaces have returned to 70% and 60% of pre-pandemic levels.

Moreover, shop leases in tourism districts soared last year, with many interested tenants unable to secure their preferred spots. Coupled with the anticipated lower interest rates, the realtor believes tourism districts' retail space prices will rise.

ANTHONY LAM



retail space prices will rise.

Although the Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles scheme has impacted local businesses, the realtor expects a rise in

transactions in residential districts, provided there is an additional 20% fall in prices.

In the office space sector, Centaline is also optimistic, be-

lieving an interest rate decrease will benefit business operators, who will ultimately need more office spaces.

Moreover, the loan-to-value

ratio for office spaces may reach 70% or even higher, which will also incentivize transactions. Therefore, the realtor predicted that a further drop in the prices of office spaces is unlikely in 2024. Should there be a fall in interest rates, the number of transactions may even exceed that for other property types.

Residential units will also see improving conditions in 2024, largely because a new law adjusting restrictions on property transactions became effective from New Year's Day.

The new law sets the maximum loan-to-value ratio at 70%. Further, those acquiring their second residential properties are not subject to additional stamp duty, signifying a significant easing of purchasing barriers to the market. With this, the realtor believed that the number of residential property transactions may potentially 2021 levels. Price drops in certain areas are possible but unlikely in traditional school districts.

A drop in interest rates will also potentially result in the price stabilization of industrial spaces. The realtor is also confident that prices and transactions within the mainland market will increase amid supportive measures and policies to be rolled out.

## RELIGION

# New mosque planned for local Muslim community

RENATO MARQUES

**A** new mosque is planned for construction this year, according to a report from Portuguese news agency Lusa.

According to the report, local Imam Ding Shaojie confirmed construction will commence as soon as government authorization is received. The new mosque will be erected on the same site as the existing mosque.

Specific details on the construction timeline or the expected completion date are unconfirmed as yet.

The future mosque will cover an area of around 1,250 square meters with the capacity to receive up to 600 worshippers.

In the same report, the local Muslim community leader said the small size and poor conditions of the current prayer space render it unable to meet the community's needs.

ANTHONY LAM



Ding also underscored the importance of providing the religious community with a dignified space.

"We have two major holidays, the first of which is Eid. After the fasting of Ramadan we gather here to pray. Every year it rains, but what can we do? We have to pray outside because there are always so many people. So we have two sessions,

and each session has about 1,500 participants," he said, as quoted by Lusa.

Currently, there are no official figures on the number of practicing Muslims in Macau in the absence of organized records. However, the Imam estimated that before the Covid-19 pandemic, the community size likely ranged between 5,000 to 10,000 individuals.

## TRANSPORT

# TRANSMAC FLEET TO BE 100% 'ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY' THIS YEAR

RENATO MARQUES

**P**UBLIC Bus company operator Transmac is set to reach 100% of buses powered by environmentally-friendly energy sources by the end of 2024, the company said in a statement on its official website.

According to the company, replacing older vehicles with new models over the past two years has reduced emissions 18.15% from 41,801.16 tons of carbon dioxide in 2019 to 34,214.11 tons of carbon dioxide in 2023.

Additionally, Transmac disclosed plans to introduce another 150 extended-range electric vehicles purchased at the end of 2023. These vehicles will enter service in the first quarter of this year, and supplement the 200 buses replaced in the preceding two years.

The company's objec-

RENATO MARQUES



tive is to further reduce its carbon footprint by approximately 40% compared to 2019 levels.

Simultaneously, the second bus operator TCM also reported an approximately 20% drop in carbon emissions in 2022 compared to 2019, projecting an even further reduction in carbon emissions for 2023 (estimated to be 30% of

2019 levels).

The company said this reduction is the equivalent to planting 16,000 trees.

In a statement also published on its official website, TCM noted its nitrogen oxide emissions have been reduced by up to 70%.

For 2024, the company is aiming for 95% of its fleet to be environmentally friendly.

GAMING

# 2023 GGR hits MOP183b, spurring increased investment

LYNZY VALLES

**A**FTER three tumultuous years for the casinos, the sector experienced significant upturn in 2023 following the reopening of the borders.

Macau's casino revenues hit MOP183.06 billion for the entire year of 2023, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau announced, surpassing initial government expectations earlier last year.

Gross gaming revenues (GGR) in December reached MOP18.6 billion.

The result was better than the median analyst estimate of a 402% year-on-year increase, and represents a return to 81.3% of 2019 levels.

JP Morgan analysts observed that last month's earnings marked the first



instance where earnings reached 80% of pre-Covid levels.

The 2023 earnings have

also exceeded the Chief Executive's expectations of MOP180 billion, which is MOP50 billion more than

it expected earlier last year.

However, as the revenues exceeded MOP180 billion, the six gaming con-

cessionaires are required to pledge an additional 20% in gaming investment, as stipulated in their government contracts – notwithstanding that 2023 was the only year of recovery following significant cash outflows from 2020 to 2022.

Casino operators including MGM and Melco have

previously told the press that their companies are financially able to make the additional 20% investment as stated in their respective government contracts. After securing licenses to operate in late 2022, as part of the city's biggest gaming law overhaul, the six casino operators agreed to invest MOP118.8 billion after being granted 10-year operating licenses, with the bulk of the money pledged towards investment in non-gaming projects.

In October last year, Fitch Ratings projected that full-year gaming revenue would reach almost 80% of 2019 levels.

## 2023 MONTHLY GAMING REVENUE

	2023	2022	Variance
Jan	11,580	6,344	+82.50%
Feb	10,324	7,759	+33.10%
Mar	12,738	3,672	+246.90%
Apr	14,722	2,677	+449.90%
May	15,565	3,341	+365.90%
Jun	15,207	2,477	+513.90%
Jul	16,662	398	+4082.90%
Aug	17,213	2,189	+686.40%
Sept	14,937	2,962	+404.20%
Oct	19,501	3,899	+400.20%
Nov	16,043	2,999	+435.00%
Dec	18,567	3,482	+433.3%

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IMMIGRATION

# China to ease visa requirements for US travelers in latest bid to boost tourism

**C**HINA will ease visa restrictions for people visiting from the United States, the country's latest effort to attract foreign travelers since reopening its borders earlier this year.

Starting Jan. 1, American tourists will no longer need to submit round-trip air tickets, proof of hotel reservations, itineraries or invitations to China, according to a notice posted online Friday by the Chinese Embassy in Washington.

The simplified application process is intended to "further facilitate people-to-people exchanges between China and the United States," the notice said.

The move comes as China has struggled to rejuvenate its tourism sector after three years of strict pandemic measures, which included mandatory quarantines for all arrivals. While those restrictions were lifted earlier this year, international travelers have been slow to return.

In the first half of this year, China recorded 8.4 million entries and exits by foreigners, down from 977 million for all of 2019, the last year before the pandemic, according to immigration statistics.

In another bid to boost tourism, China announced last month

that it would allow visa-free entry for citizens of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia for up to 15 days.

The one-year trial program signaled China's "high-level opening up to the outside world," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a daily briefing.

But China's efforts to entice American tourists may face other headwinds. International flights between the two countries, which are set by a bilateral agreement, remain well below pandemic levels, though they have slowly increased in recent months. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

# Activist publisher Jimmy Lai pleads not guilty to sedition and collusion charges

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

**P**ROMINENT activist and publisher Jimmy Lai yesterday pleaded not guilty to three charges of sedition and collusion with foreign countries in a landmark national security trial in Hong Kong.

Lai, 76, a media tycoon who founded the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, faces one count of conspiring to print seditious publications to incite hatred against the Chinese and Hong Kong governments, as well as two counts of collusion with foreign countries to call for sanctions and other hostile actions against China and Hong Kong.

Lai, flanked by three prison officers, formally pleaded not guilty to the charges read to him, shortly after the court rejected a last-ditch attempt by his counsel to throw out a sedition charge against him. The court began hearing opening statements from the prosecution yesterday.

Lai was arrested in 2019. He faces possible life imprisonment if convicted under the national security law. The trial is expected to last about 80 days without a jury.

Prosecutor Anthony Chau in his opening statements described Lai as a "radical political figure" and the "mastermind" behind a conspiracy. Chau also said that Lai had used his media plat-

form to advance his political agenda.

Various clips of interviews that Lai had done with foreign media outlets as well as speeches he had given at events between 2019 and 2020 were also played in court by the prosecution.

In these clips, Lai had called for support from foreign governments and urged U.S. officials as well as then-U.S. President Donald Trump to impose measures on China and Chinese officials in retaliation for imposing the national security law.

His prosecution has drawn criticism from the United States and the United Kingdom. Beijing has called those comments irresponsible, saying they went against international law and the basic norms of international relations.

The case is being closely watched by foreign governments, business professionals and legal scholars. Many view it as a trial of the city's freedoms and a test for judicial independence in the Asian financial hub.

The governments of both Hong Kong and China have hailed the law for bringing back stability to the city.

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. **MDT/AP**

AD

## CEM NOTICE

### Temporary traffic arrangements for cable laying on Rua do Teatro

Due to CEM's cable laying works, from now until 17 January, the section of Rua do Teatro from No. 5B to 9 will be closed to traffic. The section from No. 11 to 39 of Rua do Teatro will be converted to a no-exit road; vehicles heading to Rua do Teatro must go through Rua de Nossa Senhora do Amparo and Rua da Tercena.

AP PHOTO



A prison van carrying activist publisher Jimmy Lai arrives at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts, where Lai's trial takes place, in Hong Kong, yesterday



JAPAN

# Powerful earthquakes leave at least 48 dead, destroy buildings along western coast

HIRO KOMAE & YURI KAGEYAMA, WAJIMA

A series of powerful earthquakes that hit western Japan have left at least 48 people dead and damaged thousands of buildings, vehicles and boats. Officials warned that more quakes could lie ahead.

Aftershocks continued to shake Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas a day after a magnitude 7.6 temblor slammed the area on Monday afternoon.

Forty-eight people were confirmed dead in Ishikawa, officials said. Sixteen others were seriously injured, while damage to homes was so great that it could not immediately be assessed, they said.

Japanese media reports said tens of thousands of homes were destroyed. Government spokesperson Yoshimasa Hayashi said 17 people were seriously injured and gave a slightly lower death tally, while saying he was aware of the prefecture's tally.

Water, power and cell phone service were still down in some areas, and residents expressed sorrow about their destroyed

homes and uncertain futures.

"It's not just that it's a mess. The wall has collapsed, and you can see through to the next room. I don't think we can live here anymore," Miki Kobayashi, an Ishikawa resident, said as she swept around her house.

Their house was also damaged in a 2007 quake, she said.

Although casualty numbers continued to climb gradually, the prompt public warnings, relayed on broadcasts and phones, and the quick response from the general public and officials appeared to have kept at least some of the damage under control.

The rescue efforts that quickly followed from firefighters, police and the military proved a testament to how this nation has repeatedly withstood disasters, which have practically become a part of everyday life.

Toshitaka Katada, a University of Tokyo professor specializing in disasters, said the people were prepared because the area had been hit by quakes in recent years. They had evacuation plans and emergency supplies in stock.

"There is probably no people

on earth other than Japanese who are so disaster-ready," he said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

Katada warned the situation remains precarious and unpredictable. The March 2011 quake and tsunami in northeastern Japan had been preceded by other quakes.

"This is far from over," Katada said.

Predictions by scientists have repeatedly been proven wrong, such as with the 2016 quake in southwestern Kumamoto, an area previously seen as relatively quake-free. The only real projection possible is that you can't make projections, Katada added.

"Having too much confidence in the power of science is very dangerous. We are dealing with nature."

Japanese media aerial footage showed widespread damage in the hardest-hit spots, with landslides burying roads, boats tossed in the waters and a major fire that had turned an entire section of Wajima city to ashes.

Japan's military dispatched 1,000 soldiers to the disaster zones to join rescue efforts,

NORTH KOREA

## KIM VOWS TO LAUNCH THREE MORE SPY SATELLITES AND PRODUCE MORE NUCLEAR MATERIALS IN 2024

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to launch three additional military spy satellites, produce more nuclear materials and introduce attack drones in 2024, as he called for "overwhelming" war readiness to cope with U.S.-led confrontational moves, state media reported earlier this week.

Kim's comments, made during a key ruling Workers' Party meeting to set state goals for next year, suggest he'll intensify a run of weapons tests ahead of the U.S. presidential elections in November. Observers say Kim believes a boosted nuclear capability would give him another chance for high-stakes diplomacy with the U.S. to win sanctions relief if former President Donald Trump returns to the White House.

During the five-day meeting that ended Saturday, Kim said "vicious" anti-North Korea moves by the United States and its followers "have reached the extremes unprecedented in history," pushing the Korean Peninsula to the brink of a nuclear

war, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. Kim cited the expansion of U.S.-South Korean military exercises and the temporary deployment of powerful U.S. military assets such as bombers and a nuclear-armed submarine in South Korea — the steps the allies have taken in response to the North's weapons testing spree since last year.

Kim called for "the overwhelming war response capability" to deter potential enemy provocations, KCNA said.

He set forth plans to launch three more military spy satellites next year in addition to the country's first reconnaissance satellite launched in November. He underscored the need to establish "a reliable foundation" to build more nuclear weapons, an apparent reference to facilities producing fissile materials like weapons-grade plutonium and highly enriched uranium. Kim also ordered authorities to enhance submarine capabilities and develop various types of unmanned combat equipment such as armed drones. MDT/AP

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Tuesday.

"Saving lives is our priority and we are fighting a battle against time," he said. "It is critical that people trapped in homes get rescued immediately."

A quake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.6 shook the Ishikawa area as he was speaking. More quakes continued to rock the area, reaching more than 100 aftershocks over the past day.

Nuclear regulators said several nuclear plants in the region were operating normally. The 2011 quake and tsunami caused three reactors to melt and release large amounts of radiation at a nuclear plant in northeastern Japan.

News videos showed rows of collapsed houses. Some wooden structures were flattened and cars were overturned. Half-sunken ships floated in bays where tsunami waves had rolled in, leaving a muddied coastline.

On Monday, the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of

Japan's main island of Honshu, as well as for the northern island of Hokkaido.

The warning was downgraded several hours later, and all tsunami warnings were lifted as of early yesterday. Waves measuring more than one meter hit some places.

People who were evacuated from their houses huddled in auditoriums, schools and community centers. Bullet trains in the region were halted, but service was mostly restored by Tuesday afternoon. Sections of highways were closed.

Weather forecasters predicted rain, setting off worries about already crumbling buildings and infrastructure.

The region includes tourist spots famous for lacquerware and other traditional crafts, along with designated cultural heritage sites.

U.S. President Joe Biden said in a statement that his administration was "ready to provide any necessary assistance for the Japanese people."

Japan is frequently hit by earthquakes because of its location along the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



## PUTIN'S WAR

# Ballistic missiles strike Ukraine's largest cities, killing at least four and injuring over 100

ILLIA NOVIKOV  
& HANNA ARHIROVA, KYIV

**U**KRAINE'S two largest cities came under attack from Russian hypersonic ballistic missiles yesterday morning, killing at least four people and injuring almost 100, officials said, as the war approached its two-year milestone and the Kremlin's forces stepped up their winter bombardment of urban areas.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on his Telegram channel that four civilians were killed and 92 injured in the capital, Kyiv, and in northeastern Kharkiv as hypersonic Kinzhal missiles that can fly at 10 times the speed of sound slammed into city blocks.

Russia fired almost 100 missiles of various types, Zelenskyy said on X, formerly Twitter. He claimed that at least 70 missiles were shot down, almost all of them in the Kyiv area, and said Western-supplied air defense systems such as Patriots and NASAMS had saved hundreds of lives.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it had launched missile and drone strikes on military industrial facilities in and around Kyiv. Depots storing missiles and munitions supplied by Ukraine's Western allies were also targeted, it said.

"The goal of the strike has

been achieved, all the targets have been hit," it said without elaborating. It was not possible to independently verify either side's claims.

Since Sunday, Zelenskyy said, Russian forces have launched about 170 Shahed drones and "dozens of missiles of various types" in an onslaught against Ukrainian targets. Most were aimed at civilian areas, he said.

The Kh-47M2 Kinzhal is an air-launched hypersonic ballistic missile. Russian forces rarely use such expensive missiles against Ukraine due to their limited stocks.

The attacks created a desolate morning scene in the capital, with most cafes and restaurants remaining closed. Many people opted to stay indoors or seek refuge in shelters as powerful explosions shook the city from early morning.

Air raid sirens blared for nearly four hours, and the city's subway stations — which function as shelters — were crowded.

After the Ukrainian air force issued warnings about incoming hypersonic missiles, people wearing pajamas underneath their coats took sleeping bags, mats and their pets to subway stations while loud explosions echoed above the city. At one of the central stations, called Golden Gates, hundreds of people filled the spacious underground areas

while trains continued to run.

"Perhaps today was the most frightening because there were so many explosions," said resident Myroslava Shcherba.

The barrage extended Russia's escalated attacks on Ukraine that began Friday with its largest single assault on Ukraine since the war started, in which at least 41 civilians were killed.

The next day, shelling of the Russian border city of Belgorod killed more than two dozen people. Russia blamed Ukraine for the attack and has struck back repeatedly since.

The attack on Belgorod was one of the deadliest to take place on Russian soil since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine started more than 22 months ago. Russian officials said the death toll stood at 25 as of Monday, including five children.

Cities across western Russia have regularly come under drone attacks since May, although Ukrainian officials never acknowledge responsibility for strikes on Russian territory or the annexed Crimean Peninsula.

"They want to intimidate us and create uncertainty within our country. We will intensify strikes. Not a single crime against our civilian population will go unpunished," Putin said Monday, describing the barrage of Belgorod as a "terrorist act."

Russia launched about 90 Shahed-type drones across Ukraine on Monday.

Putin accused Western nations of using Ukraine to try to "put Russia in its place." While vowing retribution, he insisted Russia would only target military infrastructure in Ukraine. However, Ukraine reports civilian casualties from daily Russian attacks, which have hit apartment buildings, shopping centers and residential areas in small communities.

In other developments, Russia's Defense Ministry said one of its warplanes accidentally released munitions over the Russian village of Petropavlovka in the southwestern Voronezh region Tuesday, causing no injuries but damaging six houses. The ministry said a commission has been created to determine the cause of the accident and assess the damage. It didn't say what type of munition the warplane dropped.

In April, munitions accidentally released by a Russian warplane caused a powerful blast in the border city of Belgorod, damaging several cars and slightly injuring two people.

Air raid sirens sounded yesterday in Belgorod, which is near the border with Ukraine. Russia's Defense Ministry said air defense systems shot down four missiles fired by a Ukrainian Vilkha multiple rocket launcher. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1980 AFGHAN LEADER DEFENDS SOVIET INVASION



The new president of Afghanistan, Babrak Karmal, has made his first public appearance since the Soviet-backed coup last week.

Speaking in Kabul, Karmal told foreign journalists that Soviet troops are defending his country "against outside threats".

The former leader of the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan's (PDPA) Parcham faction went on to accuse the US of "provocation and lies".

Today, President Carter has announced further US sanctions against the USSR including a reduction of Soviet embassy staff and restricted landing rights for the Russian airline 'Aeroflot'.

Mr Carter has also imposed an embargo on grain sales to the USSR that will see US exports fall from 25 million to eight million tonnes.

The President described the Soviet incursions into Afghanistan as "an extremely serious threat to peace" and "a callous violation of international law and the United Nations charter."

He warned that, "A Soviet occupied Afghanistan threatens both Iran and Pakistan and is a stepping stone to possible control over much of the world's oil supplies."

Russian forces were airlifted into Afghanistan on Christmas day under the pretext of upholding the Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty of 1978.

By 27 December 1979 Hafizullah Amin had been executed and replaced as head of state by Karmal.

In Moscow the new Afghan foreign minister, Shah Mohammed Dost, has been in talks with his Soviet counterpart, Andrei Gromyko.

The UN Security Council is expected to meet in New York at the weekend to discuss the situation. UN secretary general, Kurt Waldheim, has returned from the hostage crisis in Iran to attend.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

This was the first Soviet military expedition beyond the Eastern bloc since 1945. It signalled an end to the period of détente in the Cold War and the SALT II treaty was shelved as the US began to re-arm. The USSR was under internal and external pressure to act. The US and 12 other members of the UN Security Council defined their actions as an invasion. Only East Germany and Afghanistan joined with the USSR in favour of their military presence. Afghanistan became a key battleground of the Cold War as both superpowers flooded the country with arms through their various clients. The Afghan war lasted until 1989, cost one million lives (out of a total population of 13 million) and produced five million Afghan refugees.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Opportunities to make financial gains will develop through your connections with other people. Instant romance could be yours if you go out with friends.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Try to be patient with their inability to accept your new beliefs. Trips will be favorable for business as well as pleasure. Discuss your objectives with peers or lovers.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
Prove your worth; concentrate on getting the job done and steer clear of office politics and gossip. You might want to spend some time by yourself in order to decide exactly how you feel.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
You'll communicate easily and develop new friendships. Unstable relationships are likely. Take your time; do not make any decisions in haste.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
A little volleyball or other outdoor sports should be on your agenda. Set a limit on the amount you're willing to spend, and be sure to stick to it.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
You can expect changes in your financial situation as well as in your status. Attend to things that you should have done yesterday. Enjoy taking courses or lecturing others.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
You must get out and mingle. You might be overly emotional when dealing with your partner. You can make reasonable bids on real estate or large items for your home.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
If you go shopping, only take what you can afford to part with. They may cost you dearly. Take care of any medical problems if they've been troubling you.

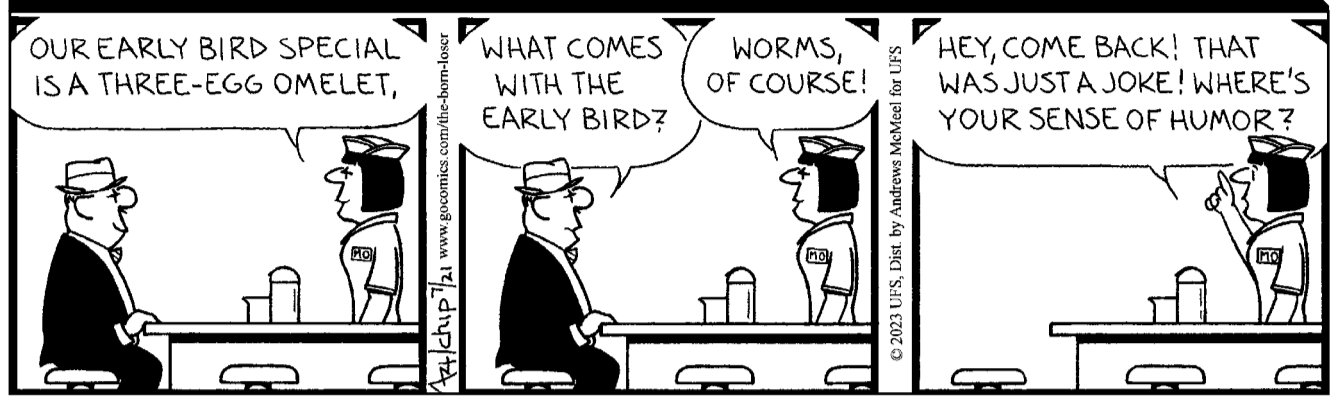
**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
You may want to take a look at the personal papers of elders in your family. You'll have problems with authority figures if you don't play by the rules.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
You may need to make a few alterations to your living arrangements. You are best to put your efforts into redecorating or inviting friends over.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Be careful; you may upset someone you live with if you don't consult with them. Don't bother trying to make someone you live with see your point of view.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Don't torment yourself. Disharmony in the home will be extremely stressful. You need to spend some time with individuals who have more experience than you.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sanson**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

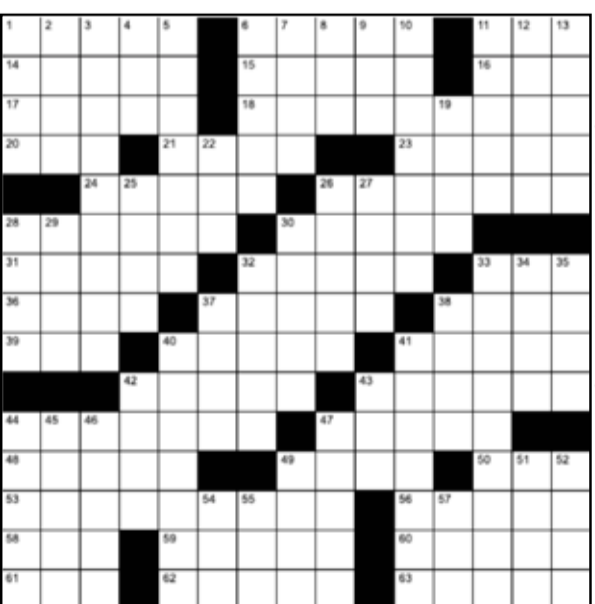
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-7	5	fine
Changchun	-13	-5	fine
Chengdu	5	15	cloudy
Chongqing	9	13	cloudy
Fuzhou	10	18	cloudy
Guangzhou	13	20	cloudy
Guiyang	6	12	overcast
Haikou	19	23	rain
Hangzhou	2	13	fine
Harbin	-21	-9	fine
Hefei	-1	11	fine
Nanjing	0	9	fine
Shanghai	4	9	fine
Taipei	15	17	rain
Wuhan	-1	12	cloudy
Hong Kong	18	22	fine
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-28	-24	cloudy
Frankfurt	9	12	rain
Paris	8	12	rain
London	7	11	overcast
New York	2	7	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Minor, in law; 6- Of first importance; 11- Not for a Scot; 14- Sports stadium; 15- Reddish dye; 16- IV sites; 17- Cry of a hen; 18- Bistro; 20- Asian holiday; 21- Icicle site; 23- In agreement; 24- Form of oxygen; 26- Aids; 28- Expired, as a subscription; 30- Off-track; 31- Spoil; 32- Alert; 33- It's not PC; 36- Scottish Gaelic; 37- Rub out or remove from memory; 38- Ill humor; 39- Religious sch.; 40- Long lock of hair; 41- Legendary Greek hero; 42- The Pentateuch; 43- Evening; 44- Austrian composer; 47- Cattle spot; 48- His and her; 49- Dress often worn by Hindu women; 50- Al Jolson's real first name; 53- Recumbent; 56- Scottish musician; 58- Lyricist Gershwin; 59- French composer Erik; 60- Blessed \_\_\_; 61- Vim; 62- \_\_\_ Amore; 63- Tears;

DOWN 1- Treaty; 2- Author \_\_\_ Stanley Gardner; 3- Germanism; 4- Co. name ender; 5- Food ordered to go; 6- Annoy; 7- Red flower; 8- Believer's suffix; 9- Actress Farrow; 10- All together; 11- Taboos; 12- \_\_\_ we all?; 13- Politico Kefauver; 19- Wife of Osiris; 22- Hill insect; 25- Sector; 26- Run up; 27- Kingly address; 28- Hwys.; 29- River in central Switzerland; 30- Covered with water; 32- Fields; 33- Deformed; 34- Tropical plant; 35- 1/100 of a monetary unit; 37- Goes astray; 38- Judge's seat; 40- Traveler; 41- Cade; 42- Follow; 43- Mediterranean isl.; 44- Divest; 45- Twice, a comforting comment; 46- Summarize; 47- Fads; 49- Irritated state; 51- Convey; 52- They may be fine; 54- Slangy refusal; 55- Give \_\_\_ rest; 57- \_\_\_ had it!;



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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VA FAT (Taipa Village)  
2 bed 1 bath  
77.10 m<sup>2</sup> / 830 ft<sup>2</sup> | HKD3,980,000



Tou Un (Taipa)  
1 bed 1 bath  
44.12 m<sup>2</sup> / 475 ft<sup>2</sup> | HKD2,980,000



Supreme Flower City (Taipa)  
4 bed 3 bath 1 car park  
191.38 m<sup>2</sup> / 2,060 ft<sup>2</sup> | HKD22,000/mth



Manhattan (Taipa)  
3 bed 2 bath  
162.58 m<sup>2</sup> / 1,750 ft<sup>2</sup> | HKD13,000,000



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**GOLF**

# PGA Tour seeks extension on commercial deal with Saudis, private investors

DOUG FERGUSON

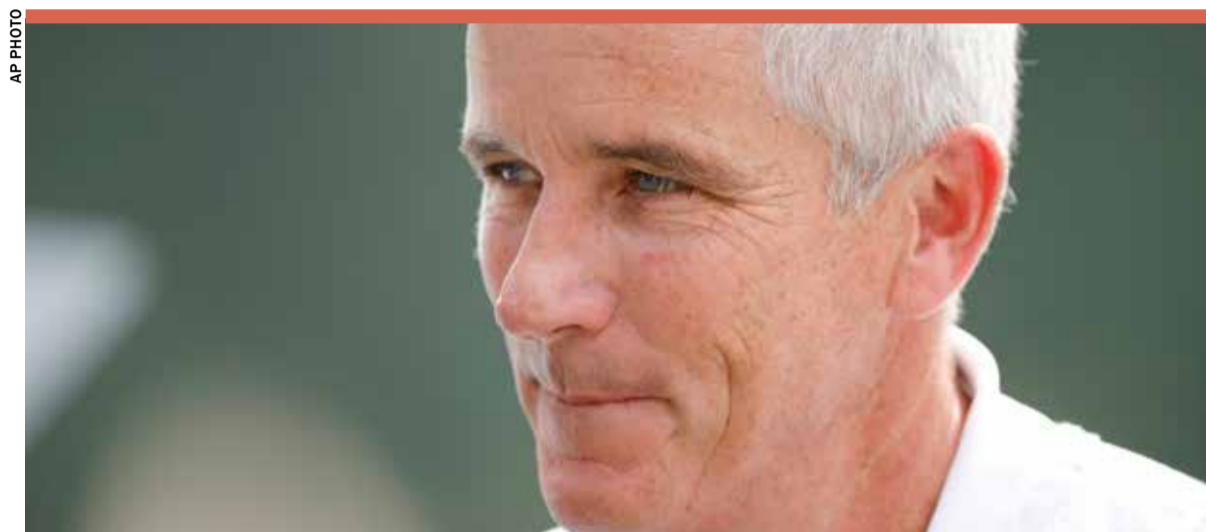
**T**HE PGA Tour believes it has made enough progress with the Saudi backers of LIV Golf to extend their negotiations into next year for a new commercial deal that would include a U.S. investment group and the European tour.

Commissioner Jay Monahan sent a memo to players earlier this week, just seven hours before the deadline to finalize the deal that was set in the June 6 framework agreement.

The PGA Tour board unanimously agreed three weeks ago to negotiate exclusively with Strategic Sports Group, a consortium of American-based professional sports teams owners led by Fenway Sports Group.

Monahan said the tour has made "meaningful progress" with SSG and provided the group with all the information it requested.

"As we move forward in our



PGA Commissioner Jay Monahan

discussions, we are focused on the finalization of terms and drafts of necessary documents," Monahan said.

Far more complicated are the negotiations with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, the financial supporters of the rival LIV Golf League which lured away Dustin Johnson and Brooks Koepka in 2022, and most

recently Masters champion Jon Rahm earlier this month.

Monahan described conversations with PIF and the European tour as "active and productive."

The framework agreement was to expire Dec. 31, though it included language that the deadline could be extended if all parties agreed. "We are working to extend our negotiations into

next year based on the progress we have made to date," Monahan said in his memo.

Monahan said the goal for 2024 was to reach agreements with SSG, PIF and the European tour to bring them in as minority co-investors in the for-profit PGA Tour Enterprises.

"These partnerships will allow us to unify, innovate and invest

in the game for the benefit of players, fans and sponsors," Monahan said.

Under the framework agreement, PIF Governor Yasir Al-Rumayyan would have a seat on the PGA Tour board. The agreement also included PGA Tour Enterprises doing an "objective, empirical-driven evaluation" of LIV and to determine if team golf can be integrated into the PGA Tour and European tour.

It also was to determine a "fair and objective" process for LIV players who might want to return to the PGA Tour or European tour, which is said to be a sticking point because of the players who turned down Saudi riches to remain on the PGA Tour.

The PGA Tour season begins Thursday at The Sentry on Maui, the first of eight "signature" events with a \$20 million purse and limited field. LIV Golf already has announced the bulk of its 2024 schedule and \$20 million purses. It starts the first week of February. **MDT/AP**

AD

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**Urology** : Dr. Lo Kwong Yin Richard, Dr. Zhao Yun Qiao

**Paediatric Surgery** : Dr. Yeung Chung Kwong

**Paediatrics** : Dr. Zhang Zhiqin

**Obstetrics & Gynaecology** : Dr. Fong Kuan Io

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OPINION

China Daily

Xinhua Commentary

CHINA-US DIPLOMATIC TIES NEED RECALIBRATION AFTER 45 YEARS

New Year's Day of Year 2024 marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of China-U.S. diplomatic relations.

Over the past years, the China-U.S. relationship has experienced ups and downs. Even though it hasn't always been smooth sailing, it has generally maintained forward momentum, benefiting both countries and the world.

Today, annual bilateral trade stands at impressive 760 billion U.S. dollars, supporting over 2.6 million jobs in the United States.

China and the United States have collaborated with each other on global issues, including counterterrorism, financial crises and climate change, making significant contributions to global well-being.

The bilateral relationship has faced notable difficulties in the past few years, with some people in the United States perceiving China as their "most serious competitor" and China's development as "the most consequential geopolitical challenge."

As the world's most critical bilateral relationship, China-U.S. relations now stand at a crucial crossroads. Whether the two nations can recalibrate this relationship is of great importance to their fundamental interests, as well as to world peace, global development and the future of humanity.

In a congratulatory message to U.S. President Joe Biden to mark the 45th anniversary of the two countries' diplomatic relations on Monday, Chinese President Xi Jinping said history has already proven and will continue to fully prove that mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation are the right way for China and the United States to get along with each other as two major countries.

That should be the direction of joint efforts made by China and the United States in the new era, Xi said.

The world remains unsettled, with an ongoing crisis in Ukraine, renewed conflicts in the Middle East and a sluggish global economic recovery. Cooperation between the two major countries is more essential than ever.

San Francisco summit between Xi and Biden in November was widely and warmly welcomed by the international community and represents a historic opportunity to realign the relationship between the two countries.

Xi pointed out that he and Biden, during their meeting in San Francisco, laid out a future-oriented "San Francisco vision," charting the course for the development of China-U.S. relations.

He called on China and the United States to earnestly implement the important common understandings and outcomes reached by the two heads of state, and take concrete actions to promote the stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-U.S. relations.

China and the United States have recently engaged in meaningful high-level exchanges, reviving nearly 20 dialogue and exchange mechanisms.

[Abridged]

Chinese President Xi Jinping said China would "surely be reunified" with Taiwan during his televised New Year's address.

"China will surely be reunified, and all Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait should be bound by a common sense of purpose," Xi said in his annual address, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

China has described Taiwan's Jan. 13 leader and parliamentary elections as a choice between war and peace.

Beijing considers the election front-runner, William Lai, who currently serves as No. 2 from the ruling Democratic People's Party, a "separatist" and has accused him and Taiwan's leader Tsai Ing-wen of trying to provoke a Chinese attack on the island.

On Saturday, Chen Binhua, spokesman for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, called Lai a "destroyer of peace" following a televised debate earlier that day in which Lai defended Taiwan's right to rule itself as a democracy.



South Korean opposition leader Lee Jae-myung on a stretcher arrives at a heliport in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday

SOUTH KOREA

OPPOSITION LEADER IS STABBED IN THE NECK BY A KNIFE-WIELDING MAN

HYUNG-JIN KIM & JIWON SONG, SEOUL

Speaking liberal opposition leader, Lee Jae-myung, was stabbed in the neck yesterday by an unidentified knife-wielding man who attempted to kill him during his visit to the southeastern city of Busan, police said.

Lee, 59, the head of the main opposition Democratic Party, was airlifted to a Seoul hospital for surgery after receiving emergency treatment in Busan. Police and emergency officials earlier said he was conscious after the attack and wasn't in critical condition, but his exact status was unknown.

The attack happened as Lee walked through a crowd of journalists and others after a tour of the proposed site of a new airport in Busan. The attacker approached Lee, saying he wanted to get his autograph, and then stabbed him in the left side of his neck with a knife, senior Busan police officer Sohn Jae-han said in a televised briefing.

Sohn said Democratic Party officials near Lee quickly subdued the attacker before police officers detained him. He said 41 police officers had been deployed to the area for

crowd control and traffic management.

TV footage showed Lee, his eyes closed, lying on the ground as a person pressed a handkerchief to his neck to stop the bleeding. A witness, Jin Jeong-hwa, told YTN television that Lee had bled a lot. Videos circulated on social media showed the suspect, wearing a paper crown reading "I'm Lee Jae-myung," being chased and tackled by several people, apparently including plainclothes police officers.

Sohn said the suspect, aged about 67, told investigators that he bought the 18-centimeter knife online. He said police are investigating the motive for the attack. Other officers said police are expected to request that the suspect be formally arrested for alleged attempted murder because he told investigators he intended to kill Lee.

Lee's Democratic Party called the incident "a terrorist attack on Lee and a serious threat to democracy." It called on police to make a through, swift investigation.

At Pusan National University Hospital in Busan, where Lee received emergency treatment, party spokesperson Kwon Chil-seung said Lee's jugular

vein was believed to have been damaged and there was concern over the large amount of bleeding. Hospital officials would not comment on Lee's condition.

President Yoon Suk Yeol expressed deep concern about Lee's health and ordered authorities to investigate the attack, saying such violence would not be tolerated, according to Yoon's office.

Lee lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by 0.7 percentage point, the narrowest margin ever recorded in a South Korean presidential election. Recent public surveys indicated Lee and his main conservative rival Han Dong-hoon, a former justice minister, are the two early favorites to succeed Yoon as president when his single five-year term ends in 2027.

Since his election defeat, Lee has been a harsh critic of Yoon's major policies. Last year, Lee held a 24-day hunger strike to protest what he called Yoon's failure to oppose Japan's release of treated radioactive wastewater from its crippled Fukushima nuclear power, his handling of the country's post-pandemic economy and his hard-line policies on North Korea. MDT/AP

Israel's Supreme Court struck down a key component of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's contentious judicial overhaul, delivering a landmark decision that could reopen the fissures in Israeli society that preceded the country's ongoing war against Hamas. The planned overhaul sparked months of mass protests, threatened to trigger a constitutional crisis between the judicial and legislative branches of government, and rattled the cohesion of Israel's powerful military.



Russia launched a record 90 Shahed-type drones across Ukraine during the early hours of the new year, and Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country would "intensify" its attacks on its neighbor. Speaking during a New Year's Day visit to a military hospital, Putin said Ukraine could expect more such strikes after shelling of the Russian border city of Belgorod that killed more than two dozen people and wounded more than 100 others.



Finland and Sweden recorded the coldest temperatures of the winter yesterday as thermometers plummeted to minus 40 degrees Celsius as a result of a cold spell prevailing in the Nordic region. In Nikkaluokta, a small village inhabited by the indigenous Sami people in northern Sweden, thermometer showed minus 41.6 degrees early yesterday, Swedish public broadcaster SVT reported.

Ethiopia took the first steps toward gaining access to the sea, signing an agreement in the capital of Addis Ababa with the breakaway Somali region of Somaliland to access the Somaliland coastline. The memorandum of understanding was signed by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali and Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi. As part of the deal, Somaliland plans to lease a 20-km stretch of land along its coastline to Ethiopia to establish a marine force base, Abdi said at the signing.