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“ THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’ ”

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THE MACAO UNION HOSPITAL ANNOUNCED THAT A TOTAL OF 4,481 APPLICATIONS WERE RECEIVED FOR THE SECOND PHASE OF RECRUITMENT

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HONG KONG SEIZES GOLD BARS WORTH HKD10M FROM MACAU DRIVER

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GLOBAL ECONOMY WILL SLOW FOR A THIRD STRAIGHT YEAR IN 2024: WORLD BANK

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AP PHOTO



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called South Korea “our principal enemy” and threatened to annihilate it if provoked, as he escalates his inflammatory rhetoric in an election year in South Korea and the U.S. The White House meanwhile said it has evidence that Russia had fired at Ukraine additional ballistic missiles provided by North Korea. The U.S., South Korea and their partners issued a statement yesterday condemning both North Korea and Russia over the missile transfer.

AP PHOTO



Japan's nuclear safety regulators have told the operator of a nuclear power plant in the area hit by a powerful New Year's Day quake to study its potential impact. The Nuclear Regulation Authority, or NRA, asked for further investigation even though initial assessments showed the Shika nuclear power plant's cooling systems and ability to contain radiation remained intact.

AP PHOTO



Pakistan's prime minister yesterday called for unified efforts to tackle global infectious diseases like Covid-19 and emergencies caused by climate change, nearly 1 1/2-year after devastating floods killed 1,700 people in his nation. Representatives from 70 countries, the World Health Organization, and other international organizations attended a two-day summit. It comes as reports show that millions of people who lost their homes in the floods were still living in tents for the second consecutive harsh winter.

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ID ISSUES

Many residents choosing to book for ID renewal in person for 'good reason' as verified by an MDT report

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RENATO MARQUES (PHOTO OF SAMPLE ID)

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AVIATION AIRPORT TRAFFIC TO INCREASE 15% THIS YEAR: CAM

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MANY RESIDENTS CHOOSING TO BOOK FOR ID RENEWAL IN PERSON FOR GOOD REASON

RENATO MARQUES

ONCE described as a major part of government efforts to make the administration more high-tech, the renewal system of the Macau Identification Cards (ID) and online booking is falling short of expectations. Many residents are seen daily lining up at the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) looking to book a slot for the handling of their IDs.

Looking for an explanation, the Times spoke to some of these residents as well as with the DSI to learn why the expansion of online services has not been working.

According to the users, people prefer attending in-person as bookings through online platform such as the Macao One Account are limited. Instead, they can easily and more quickly find a time slot to renew their documents if they get a ticket from the DSI counter.

'FULLY BOOKED' IS NOT REALLY FULL

The Times had the opportunity to test this theory with one of these residents. The Macao One Account mobile application showed all time slots as "fully booked" for several days (almost three weeks), but the person managed to get an in-person ticket for the following day.

"You see, coming here I can save up to three weeks on the time to renew my ID," the resident explained, noting that their current card would expire if they waited three weeks.

One of the DSI staff on duty at the ticket distribution counter explained that, apart from the online tickets distributed through the One Account system, there are other two kinds of ticket distribution: "daily online tickets" and "daily in-person tickets."

The same staff member handed the Times a photocopy of a notice posted at the ticket counter that asks users to either attempt to get a daily ticket online via a DSI app (by scanning the provided QR Code) or to come in person to the DSI.

Online distribution starts at 7 a.m., while in-person service starts daily at 8:30 a.m.

Questioned on the topic, the DSI further explained, in a written response to the Times, that



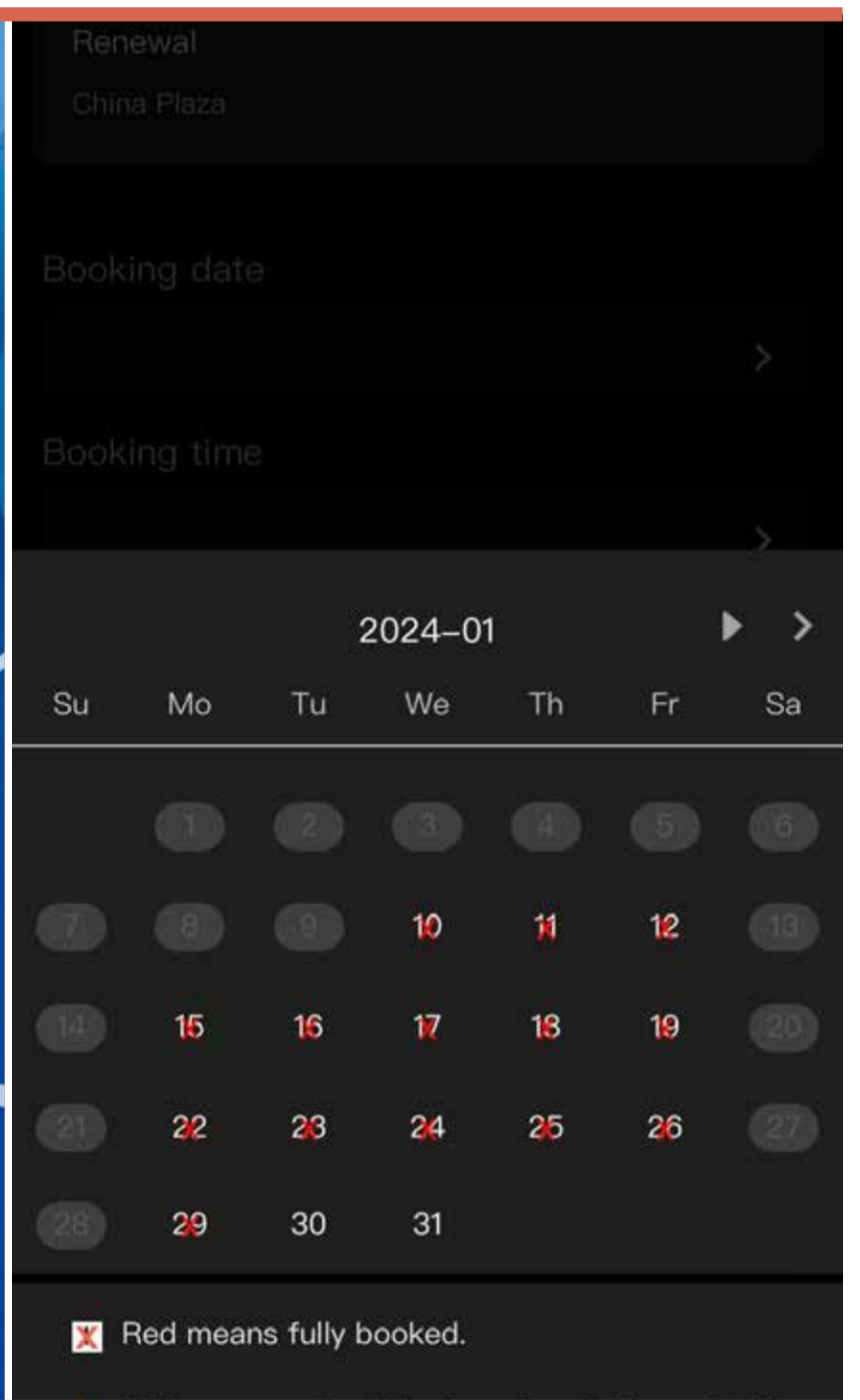
"to secure the needs of persons who are ineligible for electronic application, the Identification Services Bureau launched [the] 'secured tickets' measure starting from December 5, 2023. Based on ordinary appointment quotas, extra quotas are reserved as 'secured tickets' every day for the above-mentioned persons to use as higher priority," DSI said, adding that such tickets apply to "first-time identity card applicants, identity card renewal applicants who are under 5 years old on the latest issuance day of identity card, non-permanent resident identity card renewal, change to permanent resident status from non-permanent resident status, loss of document, and travel document applicants who are below

5 years old on the latest issuance day of identity card."

The DSI also explained that "the elderly who have reached 60 years old are covered by 'secured tickets' in all types of application[s]."

After this, and if there are still any remaining quotas of these tickets "they will be distributed to citizens via internet, kiosks and service counters on [a] working day as 'number tag of the day.'"

Questioned on whether this approach contradicts or undermines the making of the service available to citizens fairly and more easily, the DSI chose not to answer, stating instead that to facilitate the replacement of identity cards of permanent residents the DSI has launched se-



ven 24-hour Self-service Centers that allow the eligible users to go through the application formalities and collect documents at any time of the day or night.

According to the DSI, approx-

imately 90% of residents are eligible to use self-service kiosks to renew identity cards with the DSI suggesting all eligible persons prioritize electronic means while lodging applications.

OVER 2,600 NEW ID CARDS ALREADY IN CIRCULATION

THE Identification Services Bureau (DSI) has introduced, from December 15, 2023, a new version of the Macau Special Administrative Region Resident Identity Card (Macau ID). The DSI told the Times that, according to the most recent data made available from January 4, 2024, during this period approximately 2,600 residents have

already collected the new version of the Macau ID card. It added that a much higher number of applications have been logged and are currently in process. According to information previously provided by the DSI director Chao Wai leng in early December, it is estimated that in the first year, the new model will replace about 50,000 IDs.

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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TOURISM

Gov't targets three million international visitors this year

LYNZY VALLES

TOURISM authorities aim for three million international arrivals this year – a figure similar to pre-pandemic levels.

Considering the 1.46 million foreign arrivals last year, three million seems like a long shot particularly amid shortages of flights and the fact that the global aviation industry has not yet fully recovered, with some airlines still facing staff shortages.

However, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes told TDM the bureau will “actively work to attract customers and make proactive arrangements” including in relation to the absence of several international flights in the region.

The government had revealed late last year that attracting family

RENATO MARQUES



visitors will also be a core part of the city's target.

Senna Fernandes was speaking on the sidelines of the inauguration of the new Air Macau flight between Macau and Kuala Lumpur. Following the launch yesterday,

there will be eight Air Macau flights per week between the two regions.

Senna Fernandes pointed out that this year's key target market is international passengers, and plans to attract tourists through air ticket promotions, ticket discounts

and other methods will continue. In terms of air ticket discounts, the main focus is on airlines with direct flights to Macau.

Since overseas air tickets are relatively expensive, the authorities hope to use their resources to attract more international tourists. They may not necessarily offer a “buy one, get one free” deal, but they will offer discounts.

Air Macau alone is expected to launch 100,000 ticket discounts, involving a budget of about MOP100 million. The destinations are distributed on different international routes, including the newly opened direct flight to Kuala Lumpur.

She emphasized that in addition to cooperating with Air Macau, she would also cooperate with other airlines with direct flights to Macau.

Recently, the MGTO launched a free bus ticket from Hong Kong International Airport to Macau from Jan. 1.

POLICE UNVEILS FAKE DOMESTIC HELPER EMPLOYMENT

A local couple is alleged to have fraudulently hired a mainland woman as a domestic worker to enable the woman to freely enter and exit Macau. The woman was entering Macau to buy goods to eventually sell in the mainland. The Public Security Police (PSP) discovered the fraud during a random check, finding that the woman had not entered Macau for long periods of time. During the investigation, the police made findings that a woman in her twenties falsely hired her mainland friend on her boyfriend's request. They hired her using an agency and paid MOP50,000 to apply for a bluecard.

GBA ZHUHAI RAILWAY TO OPEN ZHUHAI TO HENGQIN STATION

The Zhuhai intercity railway has put in place a new timetable for a transitional period and will temporarily open the section of track from Zhuhai Station to Hengqin Station. From yesterday, Hengqin Station has added more trains traveling to and from Guangzhou South Railway Station with stops at Zhuhai Station, Zhongshan North Station, Zhongshan Station, Xiaolan Station, Shunde Station, and other stations. During the transitional period, a total of 9 trains will run daily from Guangzhou South Railway Station to Hengqin Station, all of which will have numbers starting with “C76”.

CAM: Local airport traffic to increase 15%

THE local airport has pledged to allocate resources to support the development of airlines as the government eyes a significant increase in international arrivals.

This comes as the aviation industry has not fully recovered and industries in surrounding areas are experiencing human resources shortages.

Speaking to TDM on a sideline of an inauguration of an Air Macau flight yesterday, Eric Fong, marketing director of Macau International Airport Company (CAM), said the Macau International Airport is ex-



pected to grow by at least 10% to 15% this year.

Last year, passengers tra-

veling to Macau via air totaled 5.15 million.

The current carrying

capacity of the airport can meet the demand, said Fong.

Regarding the cancellation of flights by airlines during the Christmas and New Year peak seasons, he pointed out that although there was a large flow of passengers during the relevant periods, he did not see many companies canceling flights.

This comes as Cathay Pacific canceled flights to several destinations over the Christmas and New Year period.

Fong said that the airport's flight adjustments are mostly based on the

airline's adjustment needs, including cancellation and increase of flights, which needs to be reported in advance.

However, the airport encourages airlines to avoid canceling flights. There are also preferential policies to encourage airlines to continue operations and increase flight frequency, he added.

Meanwhile, several airlines from Eastern China and Southeast Asia have already requested permission to add flights or use larger aircraft to meet passenger demand for the upcoming Chinese New Year. LV

CRIME

HONG KONG SEIZES GOLD BARS WORTH HKD10M FROM MACAU DRIVER

STAFF REPORTER

HONG Kong seized 20 gold bars weighing about 20 kilograms in total, with an estimated market value of about HKD10 million at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) Control Point.

This is the first case of gold smuggling using

cross-border private cars uncovered by Hong Kong Customs since 2020.

The accused 32-year-old male driver is from Macau and has been arrested after personnel intercepted an outgoing seven-seater vehicle at the HZMB Control Point for inspection.

Superintendent Jason

Lau Yuk-lung of Customs' syndicate crimes investigation bureau said that the officers found 20 gold bars, each weighing 1kg, hidden in a secret compartment under the center console next to the driver's seat.

Meanwhile, Inspector Wu Ming-chung of Customs' HZMB cargo divi-

sion said the car was taken for an X-ray examination after its chauffeur, a Macau identity card holder, acted suspiciously.

“After removing the opening's cover, a box containing 20 gold bars was in the secret compartment,” Lau said.

The superintendent said the bars were possi-

bly intended for mainland China, where smugglers might make a profit from price difference, as cited in media reports, adding that gold was subject to tariffs of about 50% in addition to strict import restrictions imposed by the mainland.

“The city's price of gold per kilogram is about HKD30,000 higher than

the price in mainland China,” Lau said.

“Smugglers could have evaded HKD5 million in taxes if the consignment was successfully brought across the border illegally.”

The last time the Customs detected smuggling of gold slabs by a cross-boundary private car was back in 2020.

2024 EDITION OF LOCAL REGATTA A LOT MORE INTERNATIONAL

RENATO MARQUES

THE 2024 MGM Macao International Regatta that starts today and will be held until Sunday (January 14) will be the most international of all editions so far with a high participation from crews from all over the world, organizers noted during yesterday's press conference that launched the event.

In a short intervention the Chairman of the Jury, Lorenz Walch, noted that in the main regatta, using the Beneteau First 40.7 Unified Design Group boats, each of the 11 teams listed for the competition comes from a different country. He congratulated the organizers on this and the fact that they made this event possible.

As in the past two editions, the event includes three competition categories: the Macao Cup International Regatta (Beneteau First 40.7 Unified Design Group), the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area Cup Regatta (IRC group), and the International Catamaran Invitational (Hobie 16 unified design group).

The teams participating in the Macao Cup International Regatta



and the Greater Bay Area Cup Regatta will compete at the waters south of Hac Sa Beach, while the teams participating in the International Catamaran Invitational will compete at the waters south of the Macau Channel off the Ma-

cao Science Center.

At the Macao Cup, the defending champion - Big Boys Sailing Team - will be returning to the event as will the last year's runner-up team - ExeQuite Racing.

Other previous high conten-

ders and podium finishers will also line up for this event that promises to enliven the waters around Macau for four consecutive days.

In total, 37 teams and about 300 participants from 31 coun-

tries and regions will compete in three racing events.

Organizers also noted that previous editions have contributed to the betterment of local and regional teams and participants. For this reason, they expect better competition among the participants in the GBA Cup Regatta.

This category also features 11 teams from the mainland, Hong Kong, and Macau including the 2023 Cup champion, Zhongshan Sailing Team, and last year's runner-up, Guangzhou Nansha Sailing Team. Good results are also expected from Hong Kong's BLU Team and RAMPAGE.

In the smaller boats category, 15 teams from China, Germany, Canada, New Zealand, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Macau will take part in this event. Three strong sides, including the former champions of 2023 - LC Sailing Team (China), the 2022 champion Dream Team of Wan Ning (China), and the 2020 champion and silver medalist of the 2014 Asian Games Team Yacht Racing (Thailand) will participate.

Also part of the International Catamaran Invitational Race will be the gold medalists of the 2014 Asian Games, Team Jeonbuk (Korea).

The event will be widely covered and live-streamed on several online platforms including Facebook, YouTube, and WeChat, among others.

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Macao Union Hospital receives over 4,400 applications

STAFF REPORTER

THE Macao Union Hospital announced that a total of 4,481 applications were received for the second phase of recruitment. The review committee will analyze resume scores and determine the number of people who will enter the next selection stage in accordance with the selection methods in each recruitment position announcement.

The second phase of the hospital's recruitment of a total 80 Macau residents involves 25 positions, including medical laboratory technicians, radiologists, financial accounting personnel, legal personnel, information systems, publicity, administration and billing personnel, and will be based on individual labor contracts.

The new private-public hospital, the location of which was confirmed back in 2010, provides health



management and specialist outpatient healthcare services with in-patient and oncology services to follow.

The Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng previously 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 has previously noted that in addition to the 50 employees appointed by the hospital - whose functions will relate to the management of the facility - the government has also recruited over 400 medical personnel, prioritizing local recruitment where possible.

WORLD BANK FORECAST

Global economy will slow for a third straight year in 2024

HOBbled by high interest rates, persistent inflation, slumping trade and a diminished China, the global economy will slow for a third consecutive year in 2024.

That is the picture sketched by the World Bank, which forecast yesterday [Macau time] that the world economy will expand just 2.4% this year. That would be down from 2.6% growth in 2023, 3% in 2022 and a galloping 6.2% in 2021, which reflected the robust recovery from the pandemic recession of 2020.

Heightened global tensions, arising particularly from Israel's war with Hamas and the conflict in Ukraine, pose the risk of even weaker growth. And World Bank officials express worry that deeply indebted poor countries cannot afford to make necessary investments to fight climate change and poverty.

"Near-term growth will remain weak, leaving many developing countries — especially the poorest — stuck in a trap: with paralyzing levels of debt and tenuous access to food for nearly one out of every three people," Indermit Gill, the World Bank's chief economist, said in a statement.

In recent years, the international economy has proved surprisingly resilient in the face of shock after shock: the pandemic,



Russia's invasion of Ukraine, resurgent global inflation and the burdensome interest rates that were imposed by central banks to try to bring price increases back under control. The World Bank now says the global economy grew half a percentage point faster in 2023 than it had predicted back in June and concludes that "the risk of a global recession has receded."

Leading the way in 2023 was the United States, which likely registered 2.5% growth last year — 1.4 percentage points faster than the World Bank had expected in mid-year. The World Bank, a 189-country anti-poverty agency, expects U.S. growth to decelerate to 1.6% this year as higher

interest rates weaken borrowing and spending.

The Federal Reserve has raised U.S. interest rates 11 times since March 2022. Its strenuous efforts have helped bring U.S. inflation down from the four-decade high it reached in mid-2022 to nearly the Fed's 2% target level.

Higher rates are also taming global inflation, which the World Bank foresees sinking from 5.3% last year to 3.7% in 2024 and 3.4% in 2025, though still above pre-pandemic averages.

China's economy, the world's second-largest after the United States, is expected to grow 4.5% this year and 4.3% in 2025, down sharply from 5.2% last year. **MDT/AP**

SOCIAL MEDIA

TikTok restricts tool used by researchers to assess content on its platform

TIKTOK has restricted one tool researchers use to analyze popular videos, a move that follows a barrage of criticism directed at the social media platform about content related to the Israel-Hamas war and a study that questioned whether the company was suppressing topics that don't align with the interests of the Chinese government.

TikTok's Creative Center — which is available for anyone to use but is geared towards helping brands and advertisers see what's trending on the app — no longer allows users to search for specific hashtags, including innocuous ones.

The social media company, which is owned by Beijing-based ByteDance, has also removed certain hashtags from the Creative Center that some online researchers had stored for analysis. They include topics that would be seen as controversial to the Chinese government — such as "UyghurGenocide" and "TiananmenSquare" — as well as hashtags about U.S. politics and the war in Gaza and Ukraine. The Center will now only allow searches for the top 100 hashtags by industry, the company said.

"Unfortunately, some individuals and organizations have misused the Center's search function to draw inaccurate conclusions, so we are changing some of the features to ensure it is used for its intended purpose," TikTok spokesperson Alex Haurek said in a prepared statement.

The New York Times first repor-

ted on the changes, which came to light last week in an addendum to a study published in December by the Network Contagion Research Institute at Rutgers University.

In the study, researchers with the nonprofit had compared hashtags for certain geopolitical topics on Instagram and TikTok and concluded there was a "strong possibility" TikTok content was being amplified or underrepresented based on how it aligns with the Chinese government's interests.

Haurek, the TikTok spokesperson, has disputed the report's findings, saying it uses flawed methodology and fails to take into account that hashtags are created by users, not the company. The study was also criticized in a blog posted earlier this month by the Cato Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank based in Washington.

Overall, TikTok has said blunt comparisons of hashtags is a flawed way to analyze activity on the platform. But at the same time, the company has used hashtag comparisons to defend itself against accusations that content on the app was overwhelmingly biased against Israel during its war in Gaza.

TikTok says it enables academic researchers to study content through Research API, which allows third-parties to gather data about information on the platform. Researchers seeking that data need to submit an application to TikTok and get its approval. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Kam Lai Heen offers CNY dinner menu



As the Year of the Dragon approaches, Kam Lai Heen at Artyzen Grand Lapa is offering Chinese Spring Din-

ner menus. The Chinese restaurant is in the spirit of the season with specially crafted menus, perfect for

groups of 10 to 12 guests. "Revel in the opulence of dishes like wok-fried Hokkaido Yesso Scallop, Steamed Tiger Grouper, 8-head abalone and goose webs, whole-roasted suckling pig, and much more," as cited in the hotel's statement.

The dinner menus will be available until March 31.

The hotel also offers festive cakes for Chinese New Year.

Using the symbolism of rising prosperity, the festive cakes come in delectable flavors including Glutinous Rice Cake with coconut milk with red plum sugar; and Turnip Cake, with dried shrimp, cured meat and conpony.

Louis Vuitton unveils pop up at Shoppes at Four Seasons



To celebrate Louis Vuitton Men's Creative Director Pharrell Williams first Spring-Summer 2024 collection, the maison unveiled its first Spring-Summer 2024 Men's pop-up

store in Macau in Shoppes at Four Seasons. The space will remain open to the public until the February 23.

Inspired by the theme of the collection — "The Sun",

the installation, reminiscent of the scenography of the Paris Men's show last June, invites visitors "to bask in the brilliance of human connection," as cited in a statement.

"Stepping into the transformed space, guests are enveloped in a golden aura, adorned with the iconic Damier pattern that is synonymous with Louis Vuitton," it added.

The store comprises a selection of exclusive ready to wear, leather goods, exclusive shoes and accessories from the collection which will be made available. Visitors will also have the opportunity to purchase the pop-up exclusive items during the pop-up period.

SPACE

CHINA SAYS IT WILL LAUNCH ITS NEXT LUNAR EXPLORER IN THE FIRST HALF OF THIS YEAR

CHINA'S space agency said yesterday that its latest lunar explorer had arrived at the launch site in preparation for a mission to the moon in the first half of this year.

State broadcaster CCTV posted photos on its website of the unit under wraps as it was unloaded from a large cargo airplane earlier this week and then transported by flatbed truck to the Wenchang launch site on southern China's Hainan island.

The announcement came a day after a U.S. company abandoned a lunar landing planned for Feb. 23 because of a fuel leak that started soon after takeoff on Monday.

China and the U.S. are both

pursuing plans to land astronauts on the moon in what has become a growing rivalry in space. The U.S. plans to do so in 2026, and China's target date is before 2030.

The China National Space Administration said that pre-launch tests would be carried out on its Chang'e-6 probe. The mission's goals include bringing back samples from the far side of the moon.

Another U.S. moon lander from a Houston company is due to launch next month.

Four countries — the U.S., Russia, China and India — have landed spacecraft on the moon. Only the United States has previously put astronauts on the moon.

MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



ESPIONAGE

US Navy sailor sentenced to two years in prison for accepting bribes from Chinese officer

A U.S. Navy sailor has been sentenced to just over two years in federal prison for transmitting sensitive U.S. military information to a Chinese intelligence officer.

Wenheng Zhao, who is also known as Thomas Zhao, of Monterey Park, was sentenced this week to 27 months by a federal judge in Los Angeles. He pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy and one count of receiving a bribe in violation of his official duties. He was also fined \$5,500.

His defense lawyer, Tarek Shawky, called Zhao "a dedicated serviceman with an exemplary service record before this incident."

"He was the target of a sophisticated Chinese intelligence operation, and he made the mistake of sharing controlled, unclassified information with a foreign operative," Shawky said. "He fully appreciates the severity of his actions and admitted guilt at an early stage of the proceedings."

Zhao, based at Naval Base Ventura County in Port Hueneme, north of Los

AP PHOTO



Angeles, "collected nearly \$15,000 in bribes in 14 different payments from a Chinese intelligence officer in exchange for information, photos and videos of involving Navy exercises, operations and facilities" between August 2021 through at least May 2023, prosecutors said.

He held a U.S. security government clearance and

underwent routine trainings on efforts by hostile nation states to acquire sensitive information, according to the U.S. Justice Department.

The information included plans for a large-scale U.S. military exercise in the Indo-Pacific region, which detailed the location and timing of naval force movements. The Chinese officer

told Zhao the information was needed for maritime economic research to inform investment decisions, according to court documents.

The Chinese officer offered to pay Zhao bonuses for controlled and classified information, according to prosecutors.

Zhao used encrypted communications to trans-

mit the information to the intelligence officer and destroyed the evidence to hide their relationship, prosecutors said.

"Mr. Zhao abdicated his oath to the United States and put American troops in harm's way when he accessed and handed over sensitive information to China for a payout," said Donald Alway, the assistant direc-

tor in charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office in a statement.

Zhao was one of two U.S. Navy sailors based in California who were charged last summer with providing sensitive military information to China.

The two sailors were charged with similar moves to provide sensitive intelligence to the Chinese but Zhao's defense lawyer said there was no connection between the cases.

Jinchao Wei, known as Patrick Wei, was assigned to the San Diego-based USS Essex when he was arrested last August while boarding the ship. He is accused of providing detailed information on the weapons systems and aircraft aboard the Essex and other amphibious assault ships that act as small aircraft carriers.

He could receive a life sentence if convicted. He has pleaded not guilty and that case is ongoing.

U.S. officials have for years expressed concern about the espionage threat they say the Chinese government poses, bringing criminal cases in recent years against Beijing intelligence operatives who allegedly "have stolen sensitive government and commercial information, including through illegal hacking." MDT/AP

DEFENSE

China and US military officers resume talks as agreed by Xi and Biden

TARA COPP, WASHINGTON

U.S. and Chinese military officers have resumed talks that were frozen after former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in the summer of 2022, a development U.S. officials have said is key to keeping the growing competition between the two great powers from turning into direct conflict.

During the deputy-level talks at the Pentagon, the two parties discussed setting future meetings between their military officers, including potentially scheduling a future meeting between Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and newly appointed Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun.

Austin is currently hospitalized due to complications from prostate cancer treatment. He had not been scheduled to attend yesterday's meeting [Macau time]. Dong is a former naval commander who was appointed in late December after his predecessor, Li Shangfu, was removed from office.

Li was sanctioned by the U.S. in 2018 for buying Russian weapons. After he was named the defense minister in March 2023, the U.S. did not lift the sanctions. No U.S.



In this photo proved by the Defense Department, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China, Taiwan and Mongolia Michael Chase hosts delegates from China for the annual U.S.-PRC Defense Policy Coordination Talks at the Pentagon, Tuesday

defense secretary has visited China since Jim Mattis visited in 2018.

The face-to-face meetings follow a call between Gen. CQ Brown Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his counterpart Gen. Liu Zhenli, several weeks ago, which marked the first senior military communications between the U.S. and China since August 2022.

China's delegation at the meeting was headed by Maj. Gen. Song Yanchao, deputy director of the Central Military Commission for international military coo-

peration. He met with Michael Chase, the Pentagon's deputy assistant secretary of defense for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia.

While administrative in nature, the two-day talks do allow both sides to raise policy concerns. In a readout of the meeting, the Pentagon said that Chase talked about operational safety in the Indo-Pacific and the United States' commitment to "our longstanding 'One China' policy, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act," the Pentagon said in a readout of the meeting.

"The Department will continue to engage in active discussions with PRC counterparts about future engagements between defense and military officials at multiple levels," the Pentagon said in the readout.

The agreement to resume the military talks was reached between President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping during their summit in San Francisco last November.

In a briefing with reporters prior to the meetings, a senior U.S. defense official said while

the resumption of the talks is a good sign, "we're clear-eyed" that significant differences remain between the two militaries, including the implications of China's movement toward a reunification with Taiwan, which could commit the U.S. to aid in Taiwan's defense. The official spoke to reporters on the condition of anonymity to provide details ahead of the meeting.

Pelosi's 2022 visit to Taiwan angered China because it claims the island as part of its territory and views visits by foreign government officials as recognition of the island's sovereignty. She was the highest-ranking American official to visit Taiwan in 25 years.

For the past two years, the Pentagon has faced increased difficulty contacting the Chinese military as the number of intercepts between U.S. and Chinese aircraft and ships sharply rose.

According to the Pentagon's most recent report on China's military power, Beijing "denied, canceled or ignored" military-to-military communications and meetings with the Pentagon for much of the past two years. The report warned that the lack of such talks "raises the risk of an operational incident or miscalculation spiraling into crisis or conflict." **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

Defense Ministry mistranslates an alert, erroneously saying Beijing launched a missile

TAIWAN'S Defense Ministry mistranslated an alert into English on Tuesday, saying China had launched a missile instead of a satellite and urging caution days before the island's elections.

Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary elections on Saturday that China has described as a choice between war and peace.

The bilingual alert sent to residents' mobile phones cautioned in English that there was a missile flyover. The Defense Ministry later issued a statement apologizing to the public for the faulty English translation and clarifying that China had launched a rocket carrying a satellite --



not a missile.

The ministry said the Chinese rocket flew over southern Taiwan at high altitude.

Chinese state media said the country launched a satellite called Einstein with a Long March 2C rocket from the Xichang Satellite

Launch Center in Sichuan province in southwestern China. Broadcaster CCTV said the satellite entered orbit and the launch was a

success.

The alerts went off in the middle of an international news conference by Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. He clarified it was a satellite launch, told journalists not to worry, and proceeded with the news conference.

"We need to stay responsible; we need to stay moderate in order to prevent (a) conflict from happening between Taiwan and China," he said.

Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen, who was in the southern city of Kaohsiung, urged the public not to worry, according to local media.

Beijing views Taiwan, which is about 160 kilometers off China's east coast,

as a renegade province that must come under its control.

Beijing has intensified its military pressure of the island inhabited by 23 million people in recent months, sending military vessels and aircraft near it almost daily. Beijing has also been flying balloons -- which are feared to be used for surveillance -- near the island despite Taiwan's complaints.

China has repeatedly expressed its disdain for the front-runner in Taiwan's leadership election, William Lai of the Democratic Progressive Party. Beijing has called Lai "a destroyer of peace" and a separatist, and favors the more China-friendly Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, whose presidential candidate is Hou Yu-ih.

A third candidate from the smaller Taiwan People's Party, Ko Wen-je, is also running in Saturday's election. **MDT/AP**

FOCUS PLACED BY CENTRAL GOV'T ON INTEGRATING C

ANALYSIS

CHINA will continue to rely on the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Northeast China's manufacturing area, the Yangtze River delta, and the Xiong'an New Area "to be main sources of economic growth," President Xi Jinping said in his new year speech.

Of these, the GBA, centered around the core cities of Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou and Shenzhen and the manufacturing and innovation hubs of southern coastal China, "holds the most promise," The Diplomat said this week analyzing Xi's statements.

The gross domestic product of GBA in 2023 was close to \$20 billion, which is on par with that of the Tokyo-Bay Area, and New York Metropolitan Area, while greatly exceeding the GDP of the San Francisco Bay Area.

PROMOTING INTEGRATED CONSTRUCTION Promoting the further construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and a demonstration pilot zone for socialism with Chinese characteristics in Shenzhen will be key projects for Guangdong province over the next five years, a senior government official told China Daily.

"A golden inner bay of 100 kilometers around the Pearl River estuary will be created, with more efforts being made to promote high-quality development and integration within the Greater Bay Area," said Wang Weizhong, governor of Guangdong, during an annual session of the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress last week.

Delivering a government work report to the first session of the 14th

Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, which opened in Guangzhou, the provincial capital, Wang said construction of an innovation and entrepreneurship base for Hong Kong and Macau youth will provide more convenience and opportunities for residents from the two special administrative regions to work and live in Guangdong.

"We will also promote the construction of Shenzhen as a leading demonstration zone for socialism with Chinese characteristics through reform and innovation, accelerating the construction of major innovation platforms and an economic belt in ports between Shenzhen and Hong Kong," said Wang.

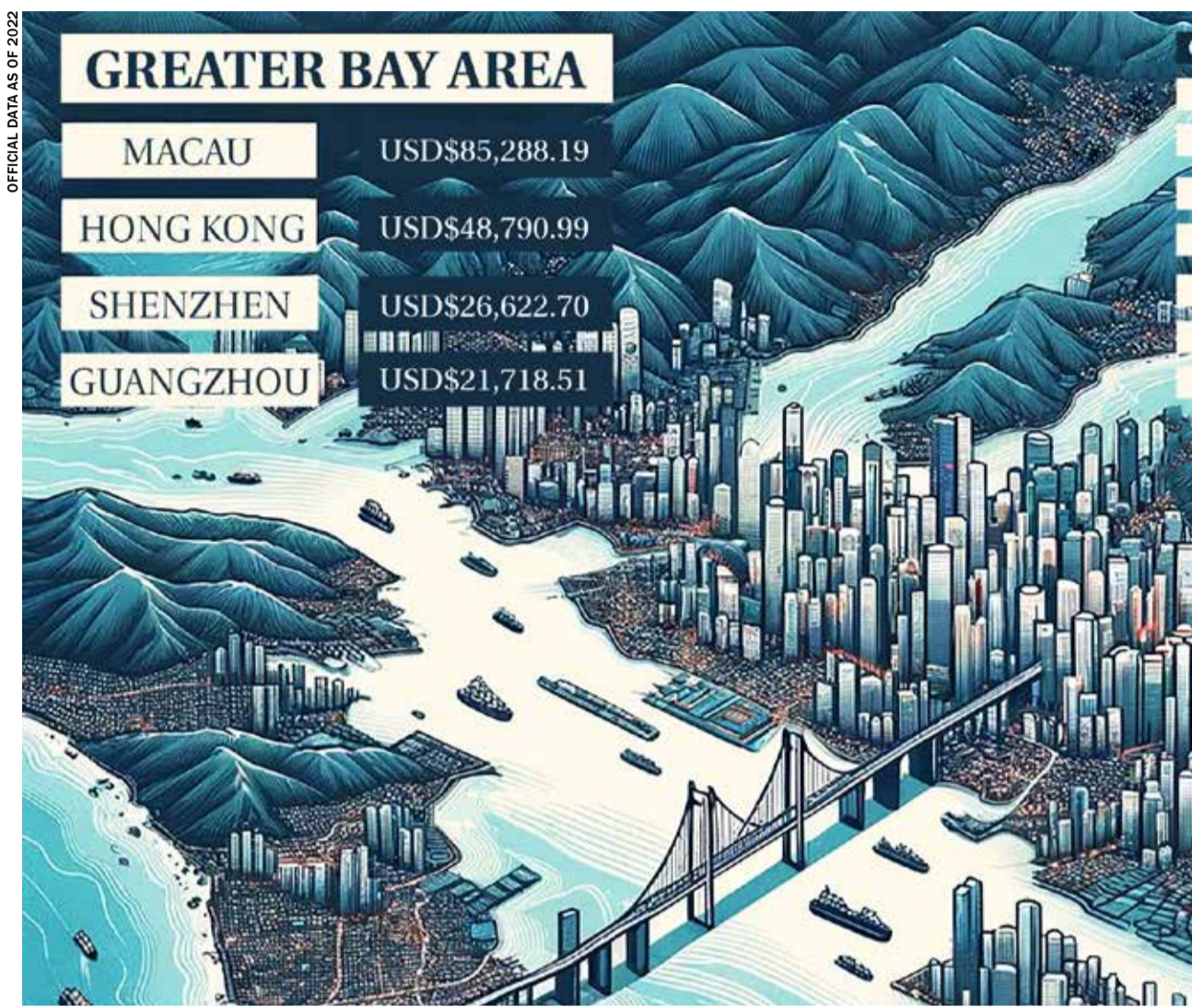
Guangdong, an economic powerhouse in South China, has set a goal of a 5% GDP growth rate in 2023, according to the government work report.

The province's fixed-asset investment is expected to increase by 8% year-on-year in 2023, with its import and export volume growing by 3%, according to the report.

Over the past five years, Guangdong has resolutely implemented major national strategies, promoting the construction of three cooperative platforms in Hengqin in Zhuhai, Qianhai in Shenzhen and Nansha in Guangzhou, according to Wang.

THE MACAU ZONE IN HENGQIN Several large infrastructure facilities including the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong High-speed Railway have been put into operation.

An overall development plan for a Guangdong-Macao in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin will be released, helping adjacent Macau to develop a more diversified economy,



AI-generated artistic illustration of GBA viewed from Macau, HK: Artificial Intelligence development applied to manufacturing and financial

according to Wang.

"Using Hengqin's proprietary core technologies to promote the development of the manufacturing industry will benefit both the diversified growth of Macau's industries and its integration into the overall national development," said Lei Zhen, chief executive officer of Zhuhai Nanometals Technology, cited by China Daily.

Sci-tech research and high-tech manufacturing in Hengqin would

help drive mutual benefits to Macau businesses and their mainland counterparts, according to Lei, also a member of the Guangdong provincial committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

"Hengqin can utilize Macau's advantages in international platforms and capital, and the mainland's advantages in policies, as well as industrial and supply chains," he said.

Nanometals Technology has reali-

zed the industrialization of proprietary core material technologies and applied them to the downstream manufacturing industry. "Core materials made in Hengqin can help upgrade the country's manufacturing development," he said.

High-tech manufacturing component in Guangdong province's GDP is "estimated to hit 12.8 trillion yuan (\$1.89 trillion) in 2022, a year-on-year increase of 2% and ranking first in

DELVING INTO DONGGUAN

A journey through culture, heritage, and gastronomy

TRAVELOG

NESTLED in the heart of China's Guangdong province, Dongguan unveils itself as a captivating blend of rich culture, historical heritage, vibrant arts, and delectable gastronomy.

This city, often overshadowed by its more renowned counterparts, is a hidden gem waiting to be explored.

Culture enthusiasts will find solace in Dongguan's deep-rooted traditions.

The Opium War Museum stands as a poignant reminder of China's tumultuous past, narrating the events that sha-

ped the nation's destiny.

For a glimpse into the region's folk art, the Keyuan Garden offers a serene oasis showcasing classical Lingnan architecture and intricate bonsai displays.

The local Hakka culture, with its distinctive earth buildings, provides a unique insight into the history and lifestyle of the Hakka people.

Stepping beyond heritage, Dongguan boasts an array of captivating touristic spots.

The vibrant Humen Bridge, connecting the east and west banks of the Pearl River, is a marvel of modern engineering. If tranquility is on

your agenda, the serene Yinxian Resort offers picturesque landscapes, bamboo groves, and soothing hot springs, perfect for relaxation.

Art aficionados will find their muse in Dongguan's burgeoning arts scene. The acclaimed Dongguan Exhibition International Centre hosts a diverse array of exhibitions and performances, showcasing local and international talents.

For a more intimate experience, the O Theatre stands as a hub for contemporary art, with its avant-garde installations and interactive displays.

No exploration of Dongguan would be complete without savoring its diverse gastronomy.

The city's street food culture is an adventure in itself, offering tantalizing treats such as skewered grilled squid, crispy fish skin, and the fa-



mous Dongguan rice noodle roll. For those seeking a more refined experience, the city's culinary landscape boasts a multitude of restaurants, presenting authentic Cantonese cuisine with an innovative twist.

In Dongguan, traditions

blend harmoniously with modernity, offering an experience that is both enlightening and entertaining.

The city's tapestry of culture, historical treasures, artistic endeavors, and mouthwatering flavors creates an unforgettable journey for

any traveler.

Whether you're strolling through ancient gardens, admiring contemporary art, or savoring the symphony of flavors, Dongguan promises to captivate your senses and leave an indelible mark on your travel memories.

GBA BENEFITS MACAU



Financial services is a key cluster of the master plan

China for the 34th consecutive year, according to the government work report.

According to China Daily, the province's economic structure has been continuously optimized over the past five years, with the added value of advanced manufacturing and high-tech manufacturing accounting for 55% and 29.5% of the industries above designated size, respectively.

Guangdong is now home to 17

Global Fortune 500 companies, with actual utilized foreign capital over the past five years exceeding 800 billion yuan, according to the government work report.

OPPS AND CHALLENGES The Greater Bay Area in China, encompassing Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and other nine cities in Guangdong province, stands as a testament to China's ambitious economic and developmental vision.

This region, boasting a combined GDP that rivals some of the world's largest economies, is a focal point of China's drive towards innovation, technological advancement, and international cooperation.

Despite these advancements, the GBA faces challenges, particularly in terms of integrating diverse legal systems and economic policies across its constituent cities.

The harmonization of regulations, especially in the realm of data protection and business operations, remains a work in progress – legal experts told MDT.

Additionally, the region must navigate the complexities of balancing rapid economic growth with sustainable development and environmental conservation.

Looking forward, the GBA's potential is immense. With plans to enhance connectivity, foster innovation, and strengthen international partnerships, the region is poised to play a crucial role in China's economic future and its integration into the global economy.

The success of the GBA will not only be a testament to China's developmental strategies but also a model for regional cooperation and economic integration worldwide, advocates say. **MDT/AGENCIES**

WORK IN PROGRESS

NOTES ON ACADEMIC STUDIES

"Power and the Imaginary: Discursive Construction of GBA as a Working Place for Hong Kong and Macau Residents and their Occupational Identity Issue"

Li, Hui

Doctoral Thesis, HK Baptist University, Hong Kong: 2023

Scholars have increasingly focused on the impact of media representation on constructing dominant ideological frameworks in the digital era. However, little research has explored how to systematically create interactive impacts between online and offline place discourses, particularly in the academic circle. Furthermore, media representation studies rarely examine the consistency of top-down designed frameworks with the discursive discourse of the "bottom", and the impact of macro-environmental change on occupational identity construction.

To address these gaps, this thesis investigates the media representation of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) initiative as both a geographical and symbolic concept. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis and a conceptual framework consisting of power and imagination theories, the thesis examines the media data of the GBA. To explore the alignment between top-down media frameworks and bottom-up discourses, as well as to understand how macro-environmental changes influence occupational identity construction, the study conducts semi-structured interviews with residents from Hong Kong and Macao, the two special administrative regions (SARs). Through these interviews, the working experiences and impressions of the participants in the Guangdong GBA are thoroughly examined.

The findings suggest that by aligning grassroots interests with those of the authorities and blending media communication with real-world actions, the Chinese government has created dominant ideological frameworks in the digital era. Unlike previous successful ideological movements, this framework emphasizes individual aspirations, while portraying the Chinese government as a facilitator in helping people achieve their goals through humane and evidence-based means. The discourse rebrands complex historical issues with current achievements and future-oriented ideas, such as "GBA as a world bay area," to legitimize regional expectations and build public confidence. Additionally, the discourses connect the initiative with urban prosperity, while creating new discourse related to regional development.

FROM THE ABSTRACT

BRIEFS

FOSHAN: CITY LAUNCHES ENERGY STORAGE UNIT

Foshan has launched the Baotang energy storage station, the largest in the Greater Bay Area, with a capacity of 300 megawatts. Covering the equivalent area of 5.5 soccer fields, it features advanced battery systems to store energy from renewable sources. The facility is expected to generate 430 million kilowatts of green electricity annually, serving 200,000 residents and reducing carbon emissions by 300,000 tons each year.

CHANNEL REDUCES JOURNEY BETWEEN ZHUHAI AND JIANGMEN

The Huangmao Cross-sea Channel, a key infrastructure project in the Greater Bay Area, is nearing completion. Once finished, it will significantly cut travel times within the region, reducing the journey between Zhuhai and Jiangmen by 30 minutes. The bridge is a two-way, six-lane expressway and is expected to open by the end of 2024.

GUANGZHOU: FIRST TRAIN OF THE YEAR TO EUROPE

The first China-Europe freight train of 2024 from the Greater Bay Area departed from Guangzhou International Port on January 1. It marks the eighth year of the service's operation, which now includes 14 routes connecting China with over 40 cities across Europe and Asia, bolstering international logistics for over 3,000 foreign trade enterprises.

Nansha should strengthen ties with Macau, Hong Kong

ON THE AGENDA

NANSHA, a district in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, is poised to become a central hub for technological innovation and advanced industries in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

This initiative is supported by a comprehensive 15-point plan unveiled by China's National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Commerce, and the State Administration for Market Regulation, official media revealed.

The plan aims to enhance Nansha's role in driving the GBA's development, transforming it into a major economic region by 2035, known for its innovation, international competitiveness, and influence.

Covering over 800 square kilo-



A panoramic view of Nansha Jiaomen River in Guangzhou, South China's Guangdong province

meters and hosting a significant port, Nansha is designated as a critical zone within the GBA. Its strategic importance is underlined by policies such as a 144-hour vi-

sa-free transit for foreigners and a visa-free cruise travel policy. These measures are part of China's broader strategy to foster high-standard international openness and

promote the GBA's high-quality development.

The guidelines emphasize Nansha's role in various sectors, including unmanned systems technology, high-end marine equipment manufacturing, and cross-border investment services. These initiatives aim to promote green, low-carbon, and high-quality development.

Experts like Charlie Zheng of Samoyed Cloud Technology Group Holdings Ltd. and Wang Peng from the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences view these policies as pivotal in attracting businesses, investment, and professional talent from within China and abroad. They believe these measures will elevate Nansha's appeal in industries such as high-end services, smart transportation, and marine equipment manufacturing, contributing to a

low-carbon economy.

The plans include attracting professional service talents from Hong Kong and Macau SARs, advancing the construction of cross-border wealth and asset management centers, and enhancing Nansha's international influence. Bai Wenxi of the China Enterprise Capital Union and Liang Haiming from the China Silk Road iValley Research Institute echo these sentiments, highlighting Nansha's "potential in bolstering the GBA's development through improved policies, infrastructure, and innovation."

However, challenges remain in areas like transportation infrastructure, urban planning, talent recruitment, and training. Bai emphasizes the need for Nansha to strengthen its ties with Macau and Hong Kong and to focus on developing high-end manufacturing, modern services, and financial sectors to create a competitive modern industrial system. **MDT/AGENCIES**

ANALYSIS

Over 50 countries and regions go to the polls i

MORE than 50 countries and regions that are home to half the planet's population are due to hold national elections in 2024, but the number of citizens exercising the right to vote is not unalloyed good news. The year looks set to test even the most robust democracies and to strengthen the hands of leaders with authoritarian leanings.

From Russia and the United Kingdom to India, El Salvador and South Africa, the presidential and legislative contests have huge implications for human rights, economies, international relations and prospects for peace in a volatile world.

In some regions, the balloting will be neither free nor fair. And in many, curbs on opposition candidates, weary electorates and the potential for manipulation and disinformation have made the fate of democracy a front-and-center campaign issue.

A possible rematch between President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump looms large in the election calendar; a Trump victory in November is perhaps the greatest global wildcard. Yet high-stakes votes before then also will gauge the "mood of dissatisfaction, impatience, uneasiness" among far-flung

electorates, said Bronwen Maddox, director of the London-based think-tank Chatham House.

VOTES WITH GLOBAL IMPACT

Taiwan's elections for leader and the 113-member legislature take place Saturday under intense pressure from China, which makes the outcome important to much of the Asia-Pacific region, as well as to the U.S.

Beijing has renewed its threat to use military force to annex the self-governing island it regards as its own territory, and described the elections as a choice between war and peace. None of the three leading candidates has indicated a desire to try China's resolve by declaring Taiwan's independence.

That said, front-runner William Lai, who is currently Taiwan's No. 2, has promised to strengthen the island's defense, and a victory by him could heighten cross-strait tensions. The opposition Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang, is more amenable to Beijing than Lai's Democratic People's Party.

Taiwan's 23 million people overwhelmingly favor maintaining the island's de facto independence through self-rule. Domestic issues such as housing and health care therefore are likely to play a deciding role in the presidential race.

LEADERS LOOK TO TIGHTEN THEIR GRIPS

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the world's longest-serving female leader, won a fourth successive term Monday in an election that opposition parties boycotted and preceded by violence. Hasina's Awami League party was re-elected on a low turnout of 40%, and the stifling of dissent risks triggering political turmoil.

India, the world's most populous country, is due to hold a general election by mid-2024 that is likely to bring Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party a third consecutive term.

To his supporters, Modi is a political outsider who has cleaned up after decades of corruption and made India an emerging global power. Critics say assaults on the press and free speech, as well as attacks on religious minorities by Hindu nationalists, have grown brazen on his watch.

Another leader seeking to retain power is El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, who has won widespread support since using emergency powers for an aggressive crackdown on ultra-violent street gangs.

A Supreme Court filled by his party's appointees cleared Bukele to run on Feb. 4 despite a constitutional ban on presidents serving

AP PHOTO



two consecutive terms. While foreign governments have criticized the suspension of some civil rights, Bukele is not expected to face serious competition.

MILESTONES — AND MORE OF THE SAME

Mexico is poised to elect its first female president on June 2 -- either former Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, a protégé of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, or a former opposition senator, Xóchitl Gálvez. The winner will govern a country with daunting drug-related

violence and an increasingly influential military.

Voters in Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest democracy, are choosing a successor to President Joko Widodo on Feb. 14. Opinion polls indicate a close race between Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto, a right-wing nationalist, and former Central Java Gov. Ganjar Pranowo, the governing party's candidate.

Subianto's running mate is outgoing leader Widodo's son, prompting speculation of a dynasty in the making. Either winner, though, would mark a continuation of the

JAPAN

Workers resumes landfill work at new US military site on Okinawa despite local opposition

JAPANESE construction workers yesterday resumed landfill work at the new site of the U.S. military base on Okinawa despite protests by the island's residents that the move tramples on their rights and raises environmental concerns.

The planned relocation site for the base, on Okinawa's eastern coast, has been at the center of a dispute between the government in Tokyo and the local authorities at a time of the island's growing strategic importance.

Okinawa is becoming key for the Japan-U.S. military alliance in the face of growing tensions with China while Japan also rapidly seeks to build up its military in the southwestern region.

Three weeks ago, the Fukuoka High Court's Naha branch ordered Okinawa



Gov. Denny Tamaki to approve the central government's modified landfill plan, and allowed the Land and Transport Ministry to order the work to resume by overriding the governor's disapproval.

On a barge brought to the location, a pair of loader machines scooped up mounds of rock and gravel and dum-

ped them into the sea as part of reclamation needed to reinforce the extremely soft seabed at the site planned for U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

Tamaki, who has appealed the order to the Supreme Court, said the court ruling was unjust and goes against the will of the residents. Under Japanese law, construc-

tion can proceed while the court decision is pending. He called the resumption of the landfill work "extremely regrettable."

Okinawa and Tokyo have long tussled over the relocation of the Futenma base. Tokyo and Washington agreed in 1996 to close the Futenma air station after the rape of a schoolgirl by

three U.S. servicemen led to a massive anti-base movement. But the closing was held up for nearly 30 years because of persistent protests and lawsuits against the relocation plan.

In 2018, Japan's central government began the reclamation work off Henoko Bay on Okinawa's eastern coast to pave the way for the relocation of the Futenma base from its populated neighborhood on the island.

The central authorities later discovered that segments of the designated reclamation site are on soft ground, and submitted a revision to the original plan with additional land improvement at an estimated cost of 930 billion yen (\$6.5 billion). But Okinawa's prefectural government rejected the revision plan and suspended the reclamation work.

Tamaki, the governor, has sought a significant reduction of the U.S. military on Okinawa, which is home to more than half of 50,000 American troops based in Japan under a bilateral security pact.

Hundreds of scholars, film directors and ordinary citizens who have advocated for Okinawans' autonomy, signed a global petition demanding the island cease to be "a de facto military colony of the United States and Japan ever since the end of the World War II."

One of the petition organizers, Satoko Norimatsu Oka who heads the Vancouver-based Peace Philosophy Center, provided a copy of the document to The Associated Press.

"We must end the discrimination and military colonization of Okinawa," said the petitioners, who include filmmaker Oliver Stone.

The petition urged President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to "cancel the construction of the new base in Henoko." **MDT/AP**

n 2024: The year will test even the most robust



consultancy Eurasia Group predicted that the upcoming European Parliament races won't produce a populist majority but "the center will lose ground compared to the last vote" in 2019.

A U.K. general election this year will pit the governing Conservatives against the center-left Labour Party, which is firmly ahead in opinion polls as it seeks to regain power after 14 years.

And in Portugal, the political crises caused the dismissal of Socialist PM António Costa and the dissolution of the parliament. An election was called by President Marcelo R. Sousa for March 10. According to most polls, the Portuguese electorate is divided at the middle between left and right, while both camps are polarized.

DEMOCRACY'S CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

Climate change, disrupted grain supplies from the Ukraine war, and increasing attention from China and Russia are among the forces reshaping Africa, the world's fastest-growing continent.

Eight West African countries have had military coups since 2020, including Niger and Gabon in 2023.

Senegal is regarded as a bastion of stability in the region. Now that President Macky Sall is stepping down, his country's Feb. 25 election

is seen as an indicator of the country's political resilience.

Supporters of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko accuse the government of trying to stop him running with a series of legal cases that have sparked deadly protests. The presidential election could "mark a return to the norms of previous years or signal a lasting shift towards more volatile politics," said Eurasia group analyst Tochi Eni-Kalu.

In South Africa, a legislative election due between May and August has a struggling economy, crippling power blackouts and an unemployment rate of nearly 32% as the political backdrop. Overcoming voter disillusionment will be a challenge for the long-dominant African National Congress.

The ANC has held the presidency and a majority in parliament since the end of the country's racist apartheid system in 1994, but the previously revered organization won less than half the vote in 2021 local elections.

If its support drops below 50%, the party will need to form a coalition to ensure that lawmakers reelect President Cyril Ramaphosa.

South Sudan, the world's youngest country, plans to hold its long-delayed first elections in December. The balloting would represent a key milestone but could be rife with danger and vulnerable to failure un-

der current conditions.

Nicholas Haysom, who heads the U.N. mission in the country, told the Security Council last month that voter registration details, a security plan and a way to resolve disputes are among the missing elements needed to ensure free elections that are "deemed credible and acceptable to South Sudanese citizens."

RUBBER-STAMP EXERCISES

There's little doubt about who will win Russia's presidential election in March. President Vladimir Putin faces only token opposition in his bid for a fifth term. His main rivals are in prison, in exile or dead, and a politician calling for peace in Ukraine was disqualified.

It's a similar story in Belarus, led by President Alexander Lukashenko. On Feb. 25, the country is expected to hold its first parliamentary election since Lukashenko's government crushed protests against the Putin ally's disputed 2020 reelection. Thousands of opponents are in prison or have fled the country.

Still, for all its problems, the democratic ideal retains widespread appeal, even for authoritarian leaders, Maddox said.

"The fact that they choose to hold elections shows that they see the value of claiming to have a free vote," she said. **MDT/AP**

corruption-tainted politics that have dominated Indonesia since the end of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998.

Pakistan's Feb. 8 parliamentary election also is being contested by well-established politicians, under the eye of the country's powerful military. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan, a popular opposition figure, is imprisoned, and election officials blocked him from running.

HAS POPULISM PEAKED?

Populism gained ground in Europe as the continent experienced

economic instability and mass migration from elsewhere. June elections for the parliament of the 27-nation European Union will be a sign of whether traditional parties can see off populist rivals, many of which are skeptical of military support for Ukraine.

Last year's national elections produced mixed signals: Slovakia elected pro-Russia populist Prime Minister Robert Fico, but voters in Poland replaced a conservative government with a coalition led by centrist Donald Tusk.

Mujtaba Rahman of political

ANUPAM NATH AND
WASBIR HUSSAIN,
THIMPHU

BHUTAN

PDP wins election in Himalayan kingdom, returns to power

THE People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the most seats in Bhutan's parliamentary elections this week and will form the new government as residents hope politicians make good on promises to fix the economic crisis in the Himalayan nation.

Latest figures from the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, a national broadcaster, showed the PDP had won 30 of the 47 National Assembly seats to return to power, and the Bhutan Tendrel Party had secured 17.

It was the country's fourth general elections since its transformation from a traditional monarchy to a parliamentary form of government in 2008.

The Election Commission of Bhutan will make its final declaration today [Macau time].

Candidates on Tuesday's ballot represented only the PDP of former Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and



Polling officials unseal an electronic voting machine to count votes after general election in Deothang

the BTP led by former civil servant Pema Chewang. A primary round of voting in November eliminated

three other parties, including the ruling center-left Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa party.

Bhutan is located between China and India, with both neighbors vying for influence in the lan-

dlocked nation of around 800,000 people.

The severe economic crisis played a major role

in campaigning. According to the World Bank, Bhutan's economy grew at a rate of 1.7% over the past five years. With unemployment a chronic problem, an exodus of young people in search of higher education and jobs abroad is undermining the country's economic potential.

In a bid to overcome the economic challenges, Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck announced in December plans for a megacity in Gelephu, a town on the border with the northeastern Indian state of Assam, that will have zero-carbon industries with foreign investment.

King Wangchuck said the city-building would be mindful of Bhutanese culture and tradition and will blend with the Himalayan ecosystem. He met with top Indian business leaders who are expected to invest in the project. Construction will take place in a specially administered zone in Bhutan that has investment-friendly laws. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



YEMEN

HOUTHIS LAUNCH THEIR LARGEST RED SEA DRONE AND MISSILE ATTACK, NO DAMAGE REPORTED

JON GAMBRELL, DUBAI

YEMEN'S Houthi rebels fired their largest-ever barrage of drones and missiles targeting shipping in the Red Sea, forcing the United States and British navies to shoot down the projectiles in a major naval engagement, authorities said yesterday. No damage was immediately reported.

The attack by the Iranian-backed Houthis came despite a planned United Nations Security Council vote today [Macau time] to potentially condemn and demand an immediate halt to the attacks by the rebels, who say their assaults are aimed at stopping Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

However, their targets increasingly have tenuous — or no — relationship with Israel and imperil a crucial trade route linking Asia and the Middle East to Europe. That raises the risk of a U.S. retaliatory strike on Yemen that could upend an uneasy cease-fire that's held in the Arab world's poorest country.

The assault happened off the Yemeni port cities of Hodeida and Mokha, according to the private intelligence firm Ambrey. In the Hodeida attack, Ambrey said ships described over radio seeing missiles and drones, with U.S.-allied warships in the area urging "vessels to proceed at maximum speed."

Off Mokha, ships saw missiles fired, a drone in the air and small vessels trailing them, Ambrey said yesterday. The British military's United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations also acknowledged the attack off Hodeida.

The U.S. military's Central Command said the "complex attack" launched by the Houthis included bomb-carrying drones, anti-ship cruise missiles and one anti-ship ballistic missile.

It said 18 drones, two cruise missiles and the anti-ship missile were downed by F-18s from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, as well as by American Arleigh Burke-class destroyers the USS Gravely, the USS Laboon and the USS Mason, as well as the United Kingdom's HMS Diamond.

"This is the 26th Houthi attack on commercial shipping lanes in the Red Sea since Nov. 19," Central Command said. "There were no injuries or damage reported."

"Vessels are advised to transit with caution and report any suspicious activity," the UKTMO added.

British Defense Secretary Grant Shapps described the assault as "the largest attack by the Iranian-backed Houthis in the Red Sea to date," saying the Diamond used Sea Viper missiles and guns to shoot down multiple drones.

"The U.K. alongside allies have previously made clear that these illegal attacks are

completely unacceptable and if continued the Houthis will bear the consequences," Shapps said in a statement. "We will take the action needed to protect innocent lives and the global economy."

The Houthis, a Shiite group that's held Yemen's capital since 2014, did not formally acknowledge launching the attacks. However, the pan-Arab satellite news network Al Jazeera quoted an anonymous Houthi military official saying their forces "targeted a ship linked to Israel in the Red Sea," without elaborating.

The Houthis say their attacks aim to end the pounding Israeli air-and-ground offensive targeting the Gaza Strip amid that country's war on Hamas. However, the links to the ships targeted in the rebel assaults have grown more tenuous as the attacks continue.

The Red Sea links the Mideast and Asia to Europe via the Suez Canal, and its narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait. That strait is only 29 kilometers (18 miles) wide at its narrowest point, limiting traffic to two channels for inbound and outbound shipments, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Nearly 10% of all oil traded at sea passes through it. An estimated \$1 trillion in goods pass through the strait annually.

A U.S. draft resolution before the U.N. Security Council, obtained late Tuesday by The Associated Press, says the

Houthi attacks impede global commerce "and undermine navigational rights and freedoms as well as regional peace and security." The resolution would demand the immediate release of the first ship the Houthis attacked, the Galaxy Leader, a Japanese-operated cargo ship with links to an Israeli company that it seized in November along with its crew.

An initial draft of the resolution would have recognized "the right of member states, in accordance with international law, to take appropriate measures to defend their merchant and naval vessels."

The final draft is weaker, eliminating any U.N. recognition of a country's right to defend its ships. Instead, it would affirm that the navigational rights and freedoms of merchant and commercial vessels must be respected, and take note "of the right of member states, in accordance with international law, to defend their vessels from attacks, including those that undermine navigational rights and freedoms."

A U.S.-led coalition of nations has been patrolling the Red Sea to try and prevent the attacks. American troops in one conflict sank Houthi vessels and killed 10 rebel fighters. There's been no broad retaliatory strike yet, despite warnings from the U.S. However, Tuesday's attack appeared to be testing what response, if any, would come from Washington. MDT/AP

this day in history

1973 FIRST OPEN UNIVERSITY DEGREES AWARDED



The first graduates from the Open University (OU) have been awarded their degrees after two years studying from home.

Out of the 1,000 students who sat the final exams, 867 were successful.

The Open University enrolled its first students in 1971 and has since grown to become the biggest university in the country with more than 40,000 students on its books.

The idea of learning from home was designed to appeal to mature students, but from next year the OU will be opening its doors to 18-year-olds as well.

OU Vice Chancellor, Dr Walter Perry, is delighted with the progress of his students - and insists the degrees which have been awarded are on a par with the best universities in the country.

He said: "I always said the one thing we must never do is have a different standard from the standard that pertains throughout Britain.

"To give a student a second-rate degree would be dreadful. It's doing damage not doing good."

For many people, the OU is offering them a second chance to study.

Dr Perry said: "The qualities of our students are often very different, in the first place they are adult, experienced in life and jobs, not just straight out of school. They have achieved their degree by the most difficult method of getting a degree yet devised by the wit of man.

"Therefore they have qualities of determination and staying power that are quite unusual and I think will come to be recognised by industry as very important qualities for employers."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Open University currently has 200,000 students on its books - some 26,000 of them are studying OU courses from outside the UK. The OU continues to offer high quality teaching. Of the 23 courses assessed by the university course watchdog, the Quality Assurance Agency, 17 were rated as "excellent". There are no entry qualifications for undergraduates - but about 70% of students successfully complete their courses. In March 2000, the OU held the UK's first online graduation ceremony. Students from as far afield as Taiwan, Finland and the United States took part. About a quarter of current students are now doing all or part of their courses online.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
You'll find it easy to deal with government agencies or large institutions. You can raise your standard of living if you pick up some freelance work on the side.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
Too much work and no play will not only result in fatigue and frustration but also loneliness, too. Older family members may try to put unreasonable demands on you.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
You may get some opposition. Personal changes will be to your benefit. Those who have been too demanding should be put in their place or out to pasture.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Opportunities for romance may develop through dealing with groups that have a purpose. Your ability to be a self starter will help get things done and motivate others.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Start making things or reusing rather than buying ready made. Make sure that you take time to remember those you love. Don't make any unreasonable promises.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Take care of your own responsibilities before you help others. You could experience unusual circumstances and meet eccentric individuals.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Someone you like may be receptive and actively seeking your company. Don't be a pest or a troublemaker today. Don't jump into investments too quickly.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Don't let others restrict you from saying how you feel about family issues. Don't think the worst if you hear something negative about your partner.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Your ability to dazzle others with your unique and innovative ideas will attract attention. It might be time to shake a leg and do a personal makeover.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
You should feel a little more stable about your position; however, don't be surprised if a job offer comes your way. Family outings will make you feel secure and happy.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Do not get involved in joint financial ventures. You can make profitable investments if you purchase an art object for your home. A female colleague may cause problems for you.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Any contributions you make to organizations will enhance your reputation and bring you offers. You can make money if you are careful not to let it trickle through your fingers.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

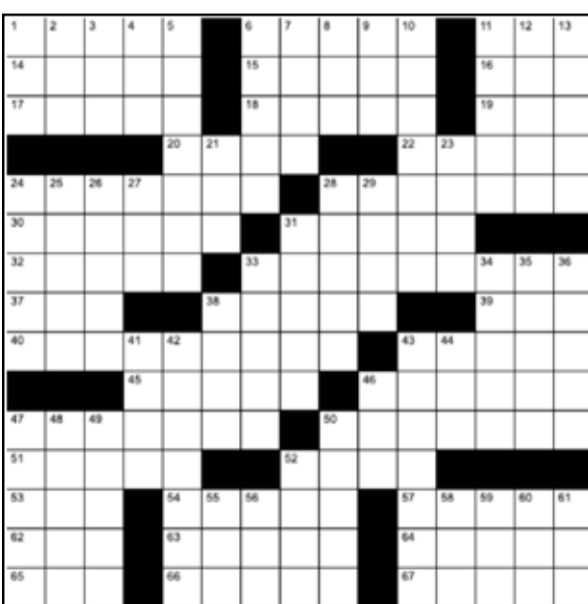
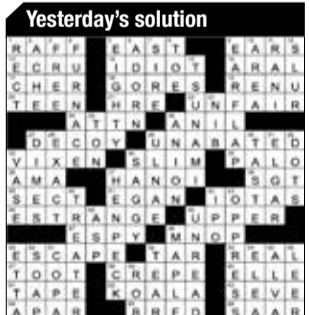
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-6	10	fine
Changchun	-11	-4	fine
Chengdu	9	14	overcast
Chongqing	9	15	cloudy
Fuzhou	9	17	fine
Guangzhou	12	21	cloudy
Guiyang	6	11	overcast
Haikou	19	25	cloudy
Hangzhou	0	13	fine
Harbin	-17	-8	snow
Hefei	-2	15	fine
Nanjing	-2	13	fine
Shanghai	0	10	fine
Taipei	10	16	fine
Wuhan	0	16	fine
Hong Kong	18	20	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-13	0	snow
Frankfurt	-2	3	fine
Paris	-2	3	fine
London	5	6	cloudy
New York	2	8	fine

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Confuse; 6- Muscat native; 11- Slangy negative; 14- Weighted down; 15- Loudness units; 16- Sheet music abbr; 17- Model; 18- Grant portrayer; 19- Man-mouse connector; 20- Kinds; 22- Draw a bead on; 24- Wife of Mark Antony; 28- Start for fish, meatballs, or massage; 30- Elevated; 31- Old; 32- At full speed; 33- Forte; 37- Thrice, in prescriptions; 38- Novelist Calvino; 39- Lac contents; 40- Ornate; 43- Perfidious; 45- Without ___ in the world; 46- Contract; 47- Satisfied; 50- Ostentatious; 51- Mikhail's wife; 52- Tiger's choice; 53- Consumed, usually food; 54- Currency unit in Nigeria; 57- Fluff, as bangs; 62- Not sweet; 63- Religion of the Muslims; 64- Academy award; 65- Charlemagne's realm; Abbr.; 66- Elected; 67- Photo finish;

DOWN 1- The Greatest; 2- June honoree; 3- HST's successor; 4- Salonga of "Miss Saigon"; 5- Animate; 6- Honshu port; 7- Rock clinging plant; 8- Abby's twin; 9- Maiden name precoder; 10- Begin, e.g.; 11- Model Campbell; 12- Rich tapestry; 13- Anger; 21- It may be flipped; 23- It's a thought; 24- Use a soapbox; 25- Humped ruminant; 26- Ornamental coronet; 27- Faulkner's "___ Lay Dying"; 28- Inscribed pillar; 29- Baylor's city; 31- Sudden outpouring; 33- Square one; 34- Russian revolutionary leader; 35- Spoil; 36- Disgusting; 38- Neighbor of Turkey; 41- Cricket equipment; 42- Like sea life; 43- Specter; 44- S.A. country; 46- ___ mo; 47- Collide; 48- Western; 49- Family tree member; 50- Picture border; 52- Nest eggs, briefly; 55- Powdery residue; 56- UN agency; 58- That, in Tijuana; 59- Perform in a play; 60- Watched the kids; 61- Before;



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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HKD 2,980,000 1 bed 1 bath

Supreme Flower City
HKD 22,000/mth 3 bed 1 CP

ETHNOGRAPHY

NATIVE HAWAIIAN SALT MAKERS COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND POLLUTION TO PROTECT A SACRED TRADITION

DEEPA BHARATH, HANAPEPE

ON a warm summer afternoon, Tina Taniguchi was on her hands and knees scraping dirt off an oblong depression in the ground. Thick brown hair peeked out from her coconut leaf hat. Splatters of mud stuck to her T-shirt and speckled her smiling face.

Taniguchi smiles a lot when she's working in her corner of the Hanapepe salt patch on the west side of Kauai — a terracotta plot of land about the size of a football field — dappled with elliptical pools of brine, crystallizing in clay beds.

"It's hard work, but for me it's also play," Taniguchi said, adding with a laugh, "I play in the mud all day."

Taniguchi's family is one of 22 who over generations have dedicated themselves to the cultural and spiritual practice of "paakai," the Hawaiian word for salt. This is one of the last remaining salt patches in Hawaii. Its sacred salt can be traded or given away, but must never be sold. Hawaiians use it in cooking, healing, rituals and as protection.

Over the past decade, this tract has been under constant threat due to development, pollution from a neighboring airfield, sand erosion from vehicle traffic and littering by visitors to the adjacent beach.

In addition, climate change threatens to obliterate the practice with rising sea levels and modified weather patterns. This year, the salt-making season lasted barely three months from July to September because of above-average rainfall. During a good year, work typically begins in May and ends in November.

Taniguchi drives about an hour to get here. For her, it's church and play rolled into one — the time she forges a spiritual connection to the land.

"This would be a religious practice of mine for sure," Taniguchi said. "My dad raised us saying that these mountains are his church, and the ocean is where you get cleansed."

THE ROOTS OF WORKING THE SALT

Malia Nobrega-Olivera's grandfather was instrumental in forming the group of salt-making families called Hui Hana Paakai. She is also an educator and activist who leads efforts to preserve this centuries-old tradition. The organization's goal, she said, is to speak with a collective voice when

AP PHOTO



communicating with the landowner, the state of Hawaii, whenever issues arise. Nobrega-Olivera said the salt patch is part of lands taken away from Native Hawaiians after the U.S.-backed overthrow of Hawaii's monarchy in 1893.

"Regardless of what a piece of paper might say, we are stewards of the area and this land is our 'kupuna' (elder)," she said.

Nobrega-Olivera looks fondly at black-and-white photos of her grandparents, uncles and aunts from about five decades ago, standing near hillocks of shimmering salt. Back then, they would give away 5-gallon buckets. Today, they hand out salt in sandwich bags. Trading salt for other items continues to this day, she said, adding that her late father once traded salt with a man who was selling piglets on Craigslist.

Born from the need to preserve fish and other meats, the process of turning sea water into salt can be slow and grueling. The season begins once rain stops and waters recede, exposing the salt beds. Ocean water travels underground and enters the wells. Each family has their own well, known as a "puna." As water enters the well, so do tiny, red brine shrimp, giving Hanapepe salt its unique sweetness, said Nobrega-Olivera.

Eventually, water from the wells is moved into the salt beds, which have been cleaned and lined with rich black clay. There, layers of salt crystals form. Typically, the top

layer, which is the whitest, is used as table salt. The middle layer, pinkish, is used in cooking while the bottom layer, with a deep red hue, is used in blessings and rituals.

After the Maui fires in August that claimed 100 lives, spiritual practitioners there specifically requested white Hanapepe salt from Nobrega-Olivera to bless and "calm" the traumatized island, particularly areas that housed makeshift morgues. The salt makers continue to send their salt to survivors who are rebuilding their lives, so they can "make their food delicious and bring some of that joy into their lives," she said.

Nobrega-Olivera believes Hanapepe salt has the power to ward off bad energy.

"When I walk into a difficult meeting, I put a salt crystal on my tongue as a reminder to watch my words."

CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

Many of the salt-making families are Christian. Nobrega-Olivera said reconciling their Christian faith with their spirituality as Native Hawaiians can be challenging, but it happens organically.

"There are some gatherings where we may honor our deities," she said. "Other occasions may call for a Christian prayer in Hawaiian or English, or both. You do what feels right for that space."

Nobrega-Olivera believes Western science and Indigenous

knowledge can combine to combat the effects of climate change and save the salt patch. The steps include building up the wells' edges so when sea levels rise, the water won't inundate the area. Another important step: preventing sand dune erosion from vehicle traffic to the beach, which causes the waves to crest and flood the patch.

"Some ask us why we can't move this practice to a different location," she said. "That's impossible because our cultural practice is particular to this land. There are elements here that make this place special for making this type of salt. You cannot find that anywhere else."

Those working on the salt patches enter with reverence. Nobrega-Olivera said menstruating women typically do not come and red clothes are avoided.

Kanani Santos said he removes his shoes before entering because he likes to "be connected to the ground." He enjoys walking there at sunset, when the brick-red patch of land appears bathed in gold and the salt crystals sparkle like magic dust.

"I say a little prayer, ask for blessings to have a good harvest, to have a quiet soul and to embrace the moment," he said.

Kurt Kualii, a chef whose family has made salt for 10 generations, choked up when speaking about this as his "kuleana," which means responsibility.

"I get moments of silence here like church," he said. "I believe in akua (god), a higher power. This is where I come to connect with that higher power, teach the children and be with family. There's good energy here."

Even when rain disrupts an entire day's work, Kualii says he knows it's "God telling us it's not time yet, to slow down." The best part of salt making is giving it all away, he said.

"Sharing is Hawaiian. This is something you make with your hands. I may not be the best at everything, but I can make Hawaiian salt."

Kane Turalde has been coming to the salt patch since he was 7. He is 68 now, a Native Hawaiian educator and canoe-racing coach. He has protested in the past to block luxury homes and other development near the salt patch, which he says would have created more traffic and pollution.

"I always come here in the spirit of akua," he said. "Before I leave home, I call my ancestors here so when I arrive, they are here."

In his family's home, Turalde's grandmother kept a bowl of salt by the door. Everyone would take a pinch and say a prayer before going out, for protection, he said.

With the resurgence of Hawaiian culture and language on the islands, Nobrega-Olivera said she now thinks about how to transmit this knowledge to younger generations. **MDT/AP**

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

TENNIS

Jessica Pegula advances to the Adelaide International quarterfinals

SECOND-seeded Jessica Pegula secured a 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 win over fellow American Bernarda Pera yesterday to advance to the quarterfinals of the Adelaide International.

Pera earned a spot in the main draw as a so-called lucky loser from qualifying and then upset former No. 2-ranked Paula Badosa in the opening round.

Pegula went 1-for-10 on break points in the first set as Pera's powerful left-handed game led to the unseeded player's early advantage. But Pegula found her rhythm in the second set, where she hit 11 winners to six unforced errors.

Pegula will next face Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, who beat fellow qualifier Katerina Siniakova 2-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Adelaide is among the last tune-up events for the Australian Open, which starts Sunday in Melbourne.



Jessica Pegula of the United States hits a return shot to Ajla Tomljanovic of Australia

Top-seeded Elena Rybakina, last year's Australian Open finalist and winner of the Brisbane International on Sunday, beat Cristina Bucsa 6-3, 7-5.

Tommy Paul, the top-seeded player in the men's draw in Adelaide, beat Australian qualifier Alex Bolt 6-3, 6-2.

SINNER STAYS HOT AT KOORYONG

Jannik Sinner skipped official lead-in tournaments for the Australian Open and preferred to play at the Kooyong Classic exhibition in Melbourne, which also features No. 8-ranked Holger Rune and Andy Murray.

Playing his first match of the season yesterday, Sinner beat Marc Polmans 6-4, 6-0.

The 22-year-old Sinner finished 2023 by beating No. 1-ranked Novak Djokovic in the round-robin stage of the ATP Finals in Turin and again a week later as he led Italy to the Davis Cup title in Malaga.

He also won late-season titles in Beijing and Vienna which included wins over No. 2 Carlos Alcaraz and third-ranked Daniil Medvedev.

Sinner's best result at the Australian Open came in 2022 with a quarterfinal appearance. His best Grand Slam singles to date was a semifinal run last year at Wimbledon.

"It was a good end of season last year and I'm starting from zero to try and get confidence from last year again," Sinner said. "It's obviously tough in the first match you play but I was happy with today."

MEHRTENS ADVANCES AT HOBART

Top-seeded Elise Mertens advanced to the quarterfinals at the Hobart International with a 6-2, 6-3 win over Anna Karolina Schmiedlová.

Mertens is attempting to win her third Hobart title. The Belgian player, who won in Hobart in 2017 and 2018, will meet Dutch veteran Arantxa Rus for a place in the semifinals.

"That would be amazing (to win the tournament again). But we're only in the quarterfinals — I need to win three more," Mertens said.

Australian Daria Saville later beat 2020 Australian Open winner Sofia Kenin 7-6 (3), 6-1 to also advance to the quarterfinals. **MDT/AP**

AD



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FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS

Spirits of Burns:
A Whisky Tasting Journey with Two Moons and Nick Groom

Date : 25th January 2024 Thursday
Venue : Artyzen Grand Lapa Vasco Bar & Lounge
Time : 19:00 – 21:00
Fee : MOP 500 members/ MOP 600 non-members (Whisky & Canapés)

Advance booking is required.
Booking: ivone@britchammacao.org or call 6331 1124 for details

Join us for a Burns Night gathering, where you can savor the captivating allure of Scotch whisky. Experience a thoughtfully curated selection of exceptional whiskies from Two Moons, expertly introduced by Frankie Leong. As we pay homage to the legendary poet Robert Burns, be captivated by the insightful words of esteemed speaker Nick Groom, who will illuminate the profound influence of Burns on Scottish culture. Come and celebrate the essence of Scotland.

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OPINION

The Conversation

Michael Naparstek,
 University of Tennessee



**WHAT TAOISM TEACHES
 ABOUT THE BODY AND
 BEING HEALTHY**

New Year's resolutions often come with a renewed investment in making our bodies healthier. Many may take to the newest diet plan or sign up for a health club membership, but it is worth taking some time to consider what actually constitutes a healthy, happy body.

Taoist visions of the body form a central part of my research. Taoism, (also spelled Daoism) an indigenous tradition of China, understands humans to be an integral part of the larger cosmos.

Rituals and bodily techniques are used to align one's individual body with surrounding social and natural environments. These concepts of the body can inform individuals on their relationship with our environment and on what it means to be healthy.

Accounts of Taoism begin sometime in the fourth century B.C.E., starting with the text "Tao Te Ching," attributed to Lao Tzu. Though scholars do not believe there was an actual person called Lao Tzu, this figure, whose name means "old master" or "old child," would become the model for bodily practice. Taoists would later develop rituals designed to mirror their body with that of Lao Tzu's as a way to align themselves with the Tao, or the source of all things.

Taoist texts described Lao Tzu's body as a kind of map for the entire cosmos, visualizing their own individual body like a smaller version of the entire cosmos, and likening the entire cosmos to a larger mirror of one's own body. Bringing one's body in alignment with the cosmos was understood to grant Taoists the ability to transform the environment around them by transforming their own bodies.

What happened in the body was understood to have an effect on the entire universe, just as the environment has an effect on one's body.

Some of the earliest examples of Taoist practices describe a series of body movements and postures to help align one's body with their environment.

Historian of Taoism, Isabelle Robinet, notes that dating back to the second century B.C.E., the physical exercises were used to help cultivate one's qi, or breath, in order to better achieve harmony with the patterns of nature, nourish one's health and increase longevity. Contemporary practices such as qigong continue to be informed by these concepts to this day.

By the eighth century C.E., Taoists would look inward for alchemical benefits. Taoist masters developed meditative and bodily practices called "neidan," or inner alchemy, to help replicate the landscape within their own body.

Rather than seeking out rare elements in the earth, inner alchemy taught how to find the power to refine one's vital essences from within one's own body.

Fully developed ritual programs instructed Taoists to undertake an inner journey within themselves. Along the way, they would visualize their old self encountering temples tucked away within lush mountain forests, discover hidden grottoes, and even find divine figures mixing elixirs of immortality.

This internal climb was believed to eventually lead one's old self to the peak located at the crown of one's head. From there, Taoists would visualize a new immortal self emerging out from atop their skull.

This concept of a body fully integrated with the cosmos informs the logic for how contemporary Taoist priests conduct rituals to benefit the broader community today.

While an audience with the purest forms of the Tao is reserved only for trained Taoist priests, notions of the Taoist body ultimately provide a way for everyone to understand one's body to be transformed both inside and out.

As the new year brings new resolutions for healthier bodies, we may gain from added perspectives on what transforming our body can mean – not just for ourselves, but for those around us.

[Abridged]

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas yesterday to seek governance reforms, part of a plan to rally the region behind a postwar vision for Gaza that includes concrete steps toward a Palestinian state. Blinken said he had secured commitments from multiple countries in the region to assist with rebuilding and governing Gaza after the war against Hamas, but only if there is "a pathway to a Palestinian state."

Hundreds of people have been killed in recent days as the Israeli offensive's focus shifts to the southern city of Khan Younis

and built-up refugee camps in the central Gaza. The entire population of 2.3 million people is also in a food crisis, with 576,000 people at catastrophic or starvation levels.

Hamas' Oct. 7 attack from Gaza into southern Israel triggered the war and killed around 1,200 people, and militants took some 250 others hostage.

Israel's air, ground and sea assault in Gaza has killed more than 23,000 people, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. The count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

**AT TRIAL, A RUSSIAN
 BILLIONAIRE BLAMES
 SOTHEBY'S FOR LOSING
 MILLIONS ON ART BY
 PICASSO, DA VINCI**

LARRY NEUMEISTER,
 NEW YORK

SOTHEBY'S defended itself at a trial against accusations that it helped defraud a Russian oligarch out of tens of millions of dollars, saying it knew nothing of wrongdoing by an art buyer who advised the billionaire on buying works by famed artists like Amedeo Modigliani and Leonardo da Vinci.

Sotheby's attorney Sara Shudofsky told a jury in an opening statement in Manhattan federal court that billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev was "trying to make an innocent party pay for what somebody else did to him."

Shudofsky said the fertilizer magnate, a savvy businessman who has run highly successful businesses, had "good reason to be angry with himself" after spending hundreds of millions of dollars to buy art masterpieces without taking "the most basic steps" to protect himself from a broker who cheated him.

"Sotheby's didn't know anything about those lies," the attorney said. "Sotheby's had no knowledge of and didn't participate in any misconduct."

She spoke after Rybolovlev's lawyer, Daniel Kornstein, insisted that a London-based Sotheby's executive was part of a group of executives who were in on an elaborate fraud.

"As a result of participating in the fraud, Sotheby's made a lot of money," Kornstein said. "Sotheby's had choices, but they chose greed."

The trial is likely to provide a window into how high-stakes transactions involving art enthusiasts worldwide develop and their importance to the operations of auction houses that rely heavily on their repu-



Dmitry Rybolovlev, president of the football club AS Monaco

tations as they match up some of the world's wealthiest investors.

Rybolovlev, 57, who bought a Palm Beach mansion from Donald Trump for about \$95 million in 2008, is expected to testify. In 2016, as Trump readied himself to become president, he called the deal "the closest I came to Russia" when he was questioned about his ties to the country.

In one order last March, Judge Jesse M. Furman urged lawyers to work toward a settlement to avert a trial that would be "expensive, risky, and potentially embarrassing to both sides."

The case stems from \$2 billion Rybolovlev spent from 2002 to 2014 to acquire a world-class art collection through purchases by two of his companies: Accent Delight International Limited and Xitrans Finance Limited.

To carry out the purchases for Rybolovlev's home in Geneva, Switzerland, he relied heavily on Yves Bouvier, an art broker who claimed he could save Rybolovlev money by handling negotiations for art in return for a 2% commission, Kornstein said.

Before long, Bouvier became such a trusted friend of the billionaire that he attended small birthday par-

ties for Rybolovlev and his daughter and joined him at soccer matches, the lawyer said.

"Bouvier turned out to be a con man" who bought works of art from Sotheby's and sometimes nearly doubled the price before he resold the art to Rybolovlev, Kornstein said.

"If you're the buyer and operating in darkness, you have no way of learning that unless the auction house knows about it and can help you out," he said.

In all, Bouvier pocketed \$164 million through his "secret markups" and another \$6.4 million by collecting his 2% commission, Kornstein said.

The lawyer told jurors to look at documents including emails that "don't lie" and would prove that auction house executives knew what was happening. He urged them to ignore what he predicted would be "fairy tales" from Sotheby's witnesses.

David Bitton and Yves Klein, Swiss lawyers for Bouvier, said in a statement yesterday [Macau time] that Bouvier "strongly objects to any allegation of fraud."

They said the allegations against Bouvier in New York have been rejected "by authorities around the world."
 MDT/AP



UN A legal battle over whether Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza amounts to genocide opens today at the United Nations' top court with preliminary hearings into South Africa's call for judges to order an immediate suspension of Israel's military actions. Israel stringently denies the genocide allegation. The case, that is likely to take years to resolve, strikes at the heart of Israel's national identity as a Jewish state created in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide in the Holocaust.



Germany A union representing many of the country's train drivers started a nearly three-day strike yesterday [Macau time] in a rancorous dispute with the country's state-owned main railway operator over working hours and pay. Train travel across the country and in many cities came to a near standstill with commuters and other travelers struggling to find alternatives involving long-distance bus or car travel or flights.



Polish police on Tuesday arrested two politicians convicted of abuse of power who had taken refuge for hours in the palace of President Andrzej Duda, in a dramatic escalation of a standoff between the new and previous governments. Duda welcomed the members of the former ruling party into the presidential palace as police went to their homes to arrest them. Polish media reported the men were arrested inside the palace. Warsaw police gave no details, saying only that the arrest was "in accordance with the court order."