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AP PHOTO



Pakistan A magnitude 6.4 earthquake shook parts of Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan yesterday, sending panicked residents fleeing from their homes and offices and frightening people in remote villages, Pakistani officials and the U.S. Geological Survey said. The epicenter of the quake was in the Hindu Kush mountain range in Afghanistan, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department. It was the third major earthquake to strike Afghanistan in three months.

AP PHOTO



UN The head of the U.N. health agency said Wednesday holiday gatherings and the spread of the most prominent variant globally led to increased transmission of Covid-19 last month. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said nearly 10,000 deaths were reported in December, while hospital admissions during the month jumped 42% in nearly 50 countries — mostly in Europe and the Americas — that shared such trend information.

AP PHOTO



UN The US, Ukraine and six allies accused Russia yesterday of using North Korean ballistic missiles and launchers in a series of devastating aerial attacks against Ukraine, in violation of U.N. sanctions. Their joint statement, issued ahead of a Security Council meeting on Ukraine, cited the use of North Korean weapons during waves of strikes on Dec. 30, Jan. 2 and Jan. 6 and said the violations increase suffering of the Ukrainian people, "support Russia's brutal war of aggression, and undermine the global nonproliferation regime."

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KILL SCREEN

FROM BESTING TETRIS AI TO EPIC SPEEDRUNS – INSIDE GAMING’S MOST THRILLING FEATS

JAMES DAWES MACALESTER COLLEGE

AFTER 13-year-old Willis Gibson became the first human to beat the original Nintendo version of Tetris, he dedicated his special win to his father, who passed away in December 2023.

The Oklahoma teen beat the game by defeating level after level until he reached the “kill screen” – that is, the moment when the Tetris artificial intelligence taps out in exhaustion, stopping play because its designers never wrote the code to advance further. Before Gibson, the only other player to overcome the game’s AI was another AI.

For any parent who has despaired over their children sinking countless hours into video games, Gibson’s victory over the cruel geometry of Tetris stands as a bracing corrective.

Despite the stereotypes, most gamers are anything but lazy. And they’re anything but mindless.

The world’s top players can sometimes serve as reminders of the best in us, with memorable achievements that range from the heroic to the inscrutably weird.

THE PERFECT RUN

“Speedrunning” is a popular gaming subculture in which players meticulously optimize routes and exploit glitches to complete, in a matter of minutes, games that normally take hours, from the tightly constrained, run-and-gun action game Cuphead to the sprawling role-playing epic Baldur’s Gate 3.

In top-level competition,

speedrunners strive to match the time of what’s referred to as a “TAS,” or “tool-assisted speed run.” To figure out the TAS time, players use game emulators to choreograph a theoretically perfect playthrough, advancing the game one frame at a time to determine the fastest possible time.

Success requires punishing precision, flawless execution and years of training.

The major speedrunning milestones are, like Olympic races, marked by mere fractions of a second. The urge to speedrun likely sprouts from an innate human longing for perfection – and a uniquely 21st century compulsion to best the robots.

A Twitch streamer who goes by the username Niftski is currently the human who has come closest to achieving this android-like perfection. His 4-minute, 54.631-second world-record speedrun of Super Mario Bros. – achieved in September 2023 – is just 0.35 seconds shy of a flawless TAS.

Watching Niftski’s now-famous run is a dissonant experience. Goofy, retro, 8-bit Mario jumps imperturbably over goombas and koopa troopas with the iconic, cheerful “boink” sound of his hop.

Meanwhile, Niftski pants as his anxiety builds, his heart rate – tracked on screen during the livestream – peaking at 188 beats per minute.

When Mario bounces over the final big turtle at the finish line – “boink” – Niftski erupts into screams of shock and repeated cries of “Oh my God!”

He hyperventilates, struggles

for oxygen and finally sobs from exhaustion and joy.

THE LARGEST WORLD AND ITS LONGEST PIG RIDE

This list couldn’t be complete without an achievement from Minecraft, the revolutionary video game that has become the second-best-selling title in history, with over 300 million copies sold – second only to Tetris’ 520 million units.

Minecraft populates the video game libraries of grade-schoolers and has been used as an educational tool in university classrooms. Even the British Museum has held an exhibition devoted to the game.

Minecraft is known as a sandbox game, which means that gamers can create and explore their own virtual worlds, limited only by their imagination and a few simple tools and resources – like buckets and sand, or, in the case of Minecraft, pickaxes and stone.

So what can you do in the Minecraft playground?

Well, you can ride on a pig. The Guinness Book of World Records marks the farthest distance at 414 miles. Or you can collect sunflowers. The world record for that is 89 in one minute. Or you can dig a tunnel – but you’ll need to make it 100,001 blocks long to edge out the current record.

My personal favorite is a collective, ongoing effort: a sprawling, global collaboration to recreate the world on a 1:1 scale using Minecraft blocks, with blocks counting as one cubic meter.

At their best, sandbox games like Minecraft can bring people closer to the joyful and healthily

pointless play of childhood – a restorative escape from the anxious, utility-driven planning that dominates so much of adulthood.

THE GALAXY’S GREATEST COLLABORATION

The Halo 3 gaming community participated in a bloodier version of the collective effort of Minecraft players.

The game, which pits humans against an alien alliance known as the Covenant, was released in 2007 to much fanfare.

Whether they were playing the single-player campaign mode or the online multiplayer mode, gamers around the world started seeing themselves as imaginary participants in a global cause to save humanity – in what came to be known as the “Great War.”

They organized round-the-clock campaign shifts, while sharing strategies in nearly 6,000 Halo wiki articles and 21 million online discussion posts.

Halo developer Bungie started tracking total alien deaths by all players, with the 10 billion milestone reached in April 2009.

Game designer Jane McGonigal recalls with awe the community effort that went into that Great War, citing it as a transcendent example of the fundamental human desire to work together and to become a part of something bigger than the self.

Bungie maintained a collective history of the Great War in the form of “personal service records” that memorialized each player’s contributions – medals, battle statistics, campaign maps and more.

The archive beggars com-

prehension: According to Bungie, its servers handled 1.4 petabytes of data requests by players in one nine-month stretch. McGonigal notes, by way of comparison, that everything ever written by humans in all of recorded history amounts to 50 petabytes of data.

GAMIFICATION VERSUS GAMEFUL DESIGN

If you’re mystified by the behavior of these gamers, you’re not alone.

Over the past decade, researchers across a range of fields have marveled at the dedication of gamers like Gibson and Niftski, who commit themselves without complaint to what some might see as punishing, pointless and physically grueling labor.

How could this level of dedication be applied to more “productive” endeavors, they wondered, like education, taxes or exercise?

From this research, an industry centered on the “gamification” of work, life and learning emerged. It giddily promised to change people’s behaviors through the use of extrinsic motivators borrowed from the gaming community: badges, achievements, community scorekeeping.

The concept caught fire, spreading everywhere from early childhood education to the fast-food industry.

Many game designers have reacted to this trend like Robert Oppenheimer at the close of the eponymous movie – aghast that their beautiful work was used, for instance, to pressure Disneyland Resort laborers to load laundry and press linens at anxiously hectic speeds.

Arguing that the gamification trend misses entirely the magic of gaming, game designers have instead started promoting the concept of “gameful design.” Where gamification focuses on useful outcomes, gameful design focuses on fulfilling experiences.

Gameful design prioritizes intrinsic motivation over extrinsic incentives. It embraces design elements that promote social connection, creativity, a sense of autonomy – and, ultimately, the sheer joy of mastery.

When I think of Niftski’s meltdown after his record speedrun – and Gibson’s, who also began hyperventilating in shock and almost passed out – I think of my own children.

I wish for them such moments of ecstatic, prideful accomplishment in a world that sometimes seems starved of joy.

MDT/THE CONVERSATION

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LYNZY VALLES

THE newly re-vamped Central Hotel is now ready to open its doors to the public, entering a new era and likely on its way to returning to its former glory.

To be opened in the first quarter of this year, the hotel has maintained its previous architectural, cultural, and historical style and significance in its exterior, as pledged by its owner and developer, Lek Heng Property.

Located close to Senado Square, the establishment is a cultural, if somewhat notorious, Macau icon, recorded in the travel writings of James Bond author Ian Fleming.

Under previous administrations, it was widely regarded as an unsavory establishment, known more as a brothel than a guesthouse. Additionally, it had been in state of severe disrepair for decades.

The now-revamped property was first bui-

Central Hotel to enter new era in targeted Q1 opening

It in 1928 and was once the tallest building in Macau with 11 storeys. It formerly housed casinos on its fifth and seventh floors and was the first building in Macau with elevators.

Speaking to TDM, the property developer said it is hoping to join efforts with the government and stakeholders to revitalize the city's old districts.

"The ancient districts cover one third of the Macau peninsula. Despite these being somewhat dilapidated, I still believe that, almost 500 years later, with their multiple historical dimensions, they are our forgotten treasures," said Simon Sio, Lek Hang Group's president.

Concerning its hotel operations, the group said it would establish reasonable prices based

on supply and demand as well as seasonal and weekday preferences.

"We want the room prices to be lower so that we can attract the attention of more tourists, increase the hotel's occupancy rate, and bring more tourists to the old district. We also hope to increase the flow of people in the area, so that the hotel may contribute to the rejuvenation of the old district."

According to Sio, the group is currently awaiting for the Macao Government Tourism Office's final inspection of the premises.

According to the Cultural Heritage Protection Law, the Central Hotel is considered one of the architectural cornerstones among the district's existing complexes and sites.



RENATO MARQUES

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FIRST READING OF PUBLIC PROCUREMENT BILL PASSED

Lawmakers passed the initial reading of the Public Procurement Bill at the Legislative Assembly yesterday. The government proposed the bill after its review of a topical decree-law in 2021, which both improved supervision of public procurement and improved the efficiency of public administration. Secretary Lei Wai Nong said that the bill outlines several legal principles, including "transparency, openness, fair competition, and selflessness," and that it aims to ensure the appropriate disclosure of information related to procurement entities.

UM TO OFFER MSC IN BUSINESS ANALYTICS

The University of Macau (UM) will offer a Master of Science (MSc) in Business Analytics program in the 2024/25 academic year. In a statement, the university said that the program aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to make data-driven decisions in the business sector. According to UM, the MSc in Business Analytics is a two-year program where students can "delve into the fields of statistical analysis, data mining, predictive modelling, machine learning, and optimization."

AL PLENARY

LAWMAKERS CONCERNED WITH THE FUTURE OF LRT OPERATION

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKERS Ma Io Fong and Ron Lam are concerned with the future role and operational approach of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) system.

The two separately submitted spoken inquiries on these matters prior to the agenda of yesterday's plenary session of the Legislative Assembly.

Citing recent news about the LRT system and the Commission of Audit (CA) report highlighting past flaws, Lawmaker Ma noted that, according to recent government information, the lines may be operated by different companies. He believed that this could potentially create difficulties in the integration of the system, as well as decision-making.

He said that the government "must seriously consider and evaluate how will it ensure the quality and coordination of services in general," questioning when Macau would be able to autonomously operate the Light Rail services.

To ensure the system's smooth operation in the future, Ma called on the government to establish an accountability regime for contractor supervision, in line with the conclusions of the CA report.

Additionally, he urged the government to prepare a detailed plan to serve as a basis for operational contracts. These contracts consider all the lines and services of the LRT as one entity, ensuring that whichever company operates them always abides by a standardized set of ru-



les and regulations.

Included among these rules would be provisions governing correspondence between LRT and Bus transportation. Requirements concerning electronic payment methods, as well as more-detailed and accurate statistical analyses of matters concerning passengers and revenue, will also be included.

To allow for the local operation of the entire LRT, Ma called for the government to accelerate the training of local personnel to staff the system's main operational areas.

Lam echoed similar concerns about the integration of the LRT and the bus systems. He also highlighted the high price of tickets, the poor pedestrian facilities between stations, and the lack of timetabling and available information as factors that deter passengers from the LTR.

The same lawmaker noted that the current public bus service con-

tracts are due to expire in 2026. For this reason, he argued, the government should take the time to consider and enforce new contracts to negotiate and resolve the many transfers between systems.

Lam criticized poor planning in the LRT system, specifically in the Taipa Line section. The flaws identified included the lack of connections to commercial and tourism-related buildings, forcing passengers to walk around them and cross streets to reach their intended destinations.

The same lawmaker also noted that the same issue would arise with the Seac Pai Van Station currently under construction. He noted that "there is a pedestrian flyover that connects to the original pedestrian flyover of the Seac Pai Van public housing area, but these are not systematically interconnected, which does not facilitate the use of the light rail by the

residents of this area."

"Looking at the design of the current pedestrian system in the vicinity of the light rail, we can see immediately that it cannot facilitate passengers' direct arrival to their destinations," he said, further noting that a single-platform monorail model was chosen for the Hengqin Line without public consultation.

The lawmaker also claimed that officials have recently considered the possibility of extending the East Line up to Qingmao Border Post, but there is no concrete plan, timeline, or guarantee that this will happen.

Lam claimed that all these issues and the lack of clarity surrounding them do not imbue the public with confidence in the public transport system. He also noted that there is much work required of the government to clean up the system's current image.

AL PLENARY

Ella Lei calls for reinforcement of laws to combat illegal work

STAFF REPORTER

LAWMAKER Ella Lei has called on the government to review existing laws on illegal work and expand the authorized actions that local authorities can take to monitor these cases effectively.

The lawmaker called for modifications to be made to the laws and greater emphasis placed on the rules and regulations for non-resident workers. In addition, it was suggested that more stringent punishments be implemented to deter future cases.

By addressing these issues, it is hoped that Macau will be able to curb the

prevalence of illegal work and protect the rights and opportunities of both resident and non-resident workers alike.

Over the years, cases of illegal work have been detected in various sectors in Macau, particularly in construction, transport, and catering. In many of these cases, non-resident workers have been found to be performing unauthorized work.

Lei noted that due to the lack of fixed workplaces for many of these workers, the government and local authorities struggle to enforce existing laws and regulations effectively. This inability to combat the ever-increasing number of cases

has become a pressing issue.

Previously, authorities only imposed fines – around 8,800 patacas per person – on those caught engaging in illegal work.

However, according to the lawmaker, locals have questioned the seemingly ineffective measures against these workers, as well as how these workers are able to illegally perform functions outside the scope of their work visas.

For Lei, the existing laws are perceived as weak by the public. Due to the leniency of these laws, illegal workers are not deterred by the risk of what fines and sanctions they might be charged with.



ADVERTORIAL

SANDS CHINA NEWS

Dow Jones Names Sands China in DJSI World and DJSI Asia Pacific Sustainability Indices

The **Dow Jones Sustainability Indices (DJSI)** have named **Sands China Ltd.** to its **DJSI World** and **DJSI Asia Pacific** indices, marking Sands China's second consecutive year on the world index and its third on the Asia Pacific index.

Sands China is one of only two integrated resort operators named in the DJSI World for 2023, alongside parent company Las Vegas Sands Corp. (LVS); it is also the only integrated resort operator listed in the DJSI Asia Pacific.

In the broader Consumer Services category, Sands China was one of only seven companies named to DJSI World, alongside LVS, and one of only three companies named in DJSI Asia Pacific.

Sands China made significant strides in the latest DJSI assessment, achieving measurable advancements in categories such as biodiversity, food loss and waste, talent attraction and retention, occupational health and safety, and human capital development.

The Dow Jones Sustainability Indices (DJSI) launched in 1999 as the first global sustainability benchmark and track the stock performance of the world's leading companies in terms of economic, environmental and social criteria.

The DJSI World index comprises global sustainability leaders as identified by S&P Global through its annual Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA). Sands China's continued inclusion in the index demonstrates the company's ability to adapt to the major changes in methodology and public disclosure expectations made in the CSA, reflecting its focus on transparency as defined by major ESG authorities and a dedication to continuously expanding its impact.

Sands China's sustainable business practices are carried out under the People, Planet and Communities corporate social responsibility platform of Las Vegas Sands. Sands China's variety of initiatives include the Sands ECO360 global sustainability strategy; the Sands Cares corporate giving and community engagement programme; and the Sands China Academy, a team member professional development programme. Sands China has a strong track record in sustainable business performance through the economic value and social impact it has delivered – as part of its commitment to serve the Macao community and contribute to making it a better place to live and work.



SPORTS

Lawmaker Wu wants Macau to be a platform for football

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKER Wu Chou Kit wants Macau to be a “platform” for the development of sports, namely football. The lawmaker declared this yesterday in a spoken inquiry delivered prior to the Legislative Assembly's agenda.

In Wu's opinion, the special relationship that Macau has with other Portuguese-speaking nations should be leveraged to develop football in the city. Several Portuguese-speaking nations, including Brazil, Portugal, and some African nations, are considered “superpowers in football.”

The lawmaker said that Macau's historical relations to these nations favor “the recruitment of good players.”

“Therefore, we must make the best use of the platform between China and Portuguese-speaking nations and strengthen our connection with Portuguese-speaking nations. We must develop strategies to hold international sporting competitions, of both professional and amateur standards, to attract more domestic and foreign tourists to visit Hengqin and Macau. We must also develop ‘Sport +’ together with the Cooperation Zone, adding further streams of diversification to our economy

whilst also reinforcing Macau's image as a city for sports,” he reaffirmed.

For lawmakers, says Wu, preparation for the National Games in 2025 should be the impetus for the organization of large-scale international sporting events that will eventually attract more international sporting institutions, along with famous sports brands, to establish bases and organize events in Macau.

Wu believes that, through the organization of international sporting events, “Macau can achieve notoriety and influence as a non-gambling city.”

He also noted that Hengqin has the available space that Macau lacks to build large sports venues to host such events. Wu also favored the regional integration between Macau and Hengqin that infrastructure developments would bring.

The same lawmaker also wants the government to “break down the political barriers that prevent Macau's young people from participating in high-level competitions in the mainland, and organize exchange activities between young people.” These efforts should not be only occasional but sustained, so as to “expand the dimension and influence of the competitions” in the long-term.

BANKS APPROVE MORE MORTGAGE LOANS

New residential mortgage loans (RMLs) approved by Macau banks increased by 10.7% month-on-month to MOP977.92 million in November 2023, according to Monetary Authority of Macao. Of these, new RMLs to residents, representing 97.8% of the total number, grew by 10.2% to MOP956.59 million. Meanwhile, new commercial real estate loans (CRELs) decreased by 22% month-on-month to MOP896.12 million. Within this total, new CRELs to residents, or 95.4% of the total number, fell by 24.5% to MOP855.33 million. New CRELs to non-residents, however, grew to MOP40.79 million.

AIR MACAU RECRUITS 30 NEW FLIGHT ATTENDANTS IN 2023

Air Macau said it has successfully recruited local flight attendants every month since January 2023. Last year, a total of 30 people were recruited. 13 of these recruits have completed their training and have started flying, while six are currently flying already. The remaining personnel and those currently undergoing the recruitment process will be scheduled to receive training this year. From yesterday until today, Air Macau is holding a recruitment day for local flight attendants.



EDUCATION

MUST BRINGS IN OVER 200 SCHOLARS FOR SPACE AND PLANETARY SCIENCE FORUM

STAFF REPORTER

THE opening ceremony of the 2024 Macau International Forum on Space and Planetary Science, held at the Macau University of Science and Tech-

nology (MUST) yesterday, brings together experts and scholars in many fields of planetary science.

The forum, showcasing over 200 scholars from Germany, Canada, Hong Kong, Taiwan

and mainland China, will run until tomorrow, with scholars speaking on fields of space and planetary science.

According to MUST, the forum will "play a positive role in promoting academic exchanges

in space and planetary science and enhancing the integration and innovation of multidisciplinary research methods."

MUST president Joseph Lee pointed out in his speech at the opening ceremony that he believed that the holding of this forum would have a positive impact on promoting exchanges and cooperation between China and the international planetary science community. He also thought the forum would positively accelerate China's advances in deep space exploration, planetary science, and other related disciplines.

At the same time, Lee said that the forum would also "inspire and attract more young people who are full of curiosity and thirsty for knowledge, leading them to pay attention to the stars and the sea, and stimulate their strong interest and engagement in scientific research."

Chui Sai Peng, chairman of the Association for Promotion of Science & Technology of Macau, echoed Lee's sentiments. He said that through this forum, the development and application of space and planetary sciences in Macau would be further promoted. He also argued that the public's awareness and understanding of space and planetary sciences would be improved.

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TRADE

Chinese auto exports rose 64% in 2023, with strong push by EVs

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

CHINA'S auto exports surged 63.7% in 2023 while domestic sales, boosted by year-end incentives, rose 4.2%, an industry association said yesterday.

Chinese automakers have aggressively expanded exports in search of growth missing at home as China's economy slows. They have also pushed into electric vehicles as government subsidies transformed China into

the world's largest EV market, even as car sales have stagnated overall.

Auto sales in China totaled 21.9 million cars last year while exports jumped to 4.1 million, the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers reported. Domestic sales are down from a peak of about 24 million in 2017.

The surge in exports may propel China past Japan as the world's number one exporter of cars. Japan exported 3.6 million cars in the first 11 months of the year,

with a final tally expected on Jan. 31.

An explosion in sales to Russia helped drive up China's exports in 2023, as European and Japanese makers pulled back because of the war in Ukraine. China exported 840,000 vehicles to Russia in the first 11 months of last year, including trucks and buses as well as cars.

The China Passenger Car Association said earlier this week that demand in Russia and neighboring countries is slowing

and future export growth will depend on an expansion of EV sales overseas. Chinese EV makers have targeted markets in Southeast Asia, Europe and Australia, among others.

The manufacturers' association does not provide a breakdown for electric vehicles, but data released by the passenger car association showed that electric vehicles accounted for 24% of new car sales in China in 2023, up from 12% in 2021. Including hybrids, the share of

new-energy vehicles in total sales reached 36% last year.

The Tesla Model Y was the best-selling electric vehicle in China last year, with 646,800 units sold, followed by the BYD Song sedan at 428,600 units, according to the passenger car group.

The Model Y retails for 266,400 to 363,900 yuan (\$37,500 to \$51,200), according to the Tesla website, and the BYD Song for 129,800 to 159,800 yuan (\$18,300 to \$22,500).

Bill Russo, founder of the Automobility consultancy in Shanghai, said Chinese firms have democratized the electric vehicle by driving down its price. The next challenge will be to convince buyers that an EV can meet their driving needs. But the first step is to make it available at a price that will get them to consider one, Russo said.

"That's the paradigm that the Chinese have broken, that you can make an EV affordable," he said in a recent interview. "What China is doing with the EV is it's using its domestic market to generate economies of scale that it can then take internationally."

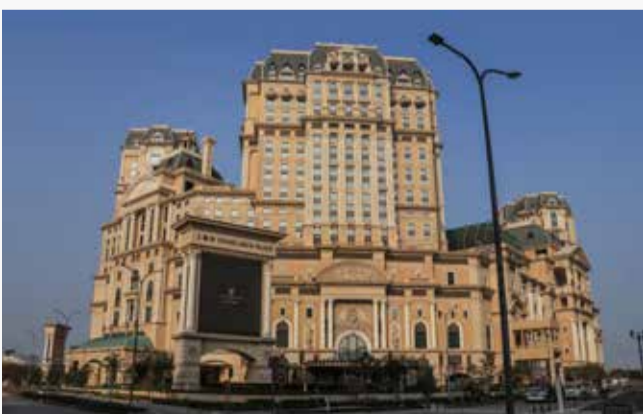
Fitch Ratings said in a report last month that it expects the share of new energy vehicles including hybrids in China's total sales to rise to 42%-45% in 2024. It also projected that exports would grow 20% to 30% this year.

The European Union, concerned about rising imports from China, opened a trade investigation last year into Chinese subsidies for electric vehicles. The investigation is ongoing.

The Chinese manufacturer's association said the total sales of all vehicles, at home and abroad and including trucks and buses, reached the 30-million-unit milestone in 2023, a 12% rise over the previous year. It forecast growth would slow to about 3% this year. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

SJM to pay one-month bonus to employees



SJM Resorts, S.A. (SJM) announced that it will distribute a special discretionary bonus equivalent to one month's salary to all eligible employees on Jan. 31, benefiting about 98% of its staff.

This comes as gaming operators have announced they will pay bonuses to their team members, with two operators, Sands China and Melco, also announcing salary increases.

Daisy Ho, managing director of SJM, stated: "With the commencement of a new 10-year gaming concession in 2023, SJM has embarked on a new chapter of continuous development and innovation.

"The company sincerely appreciates the efforts and contributions of its team members, who have capitalized upon opportunities presented in the post-pandemic recovery, leading to steady growth in our business and significant progress in non-gaming realms. These include culture, gastronomy, sports, and entertainment performances," she added.

Galaxy Macau offering festivities for Year of the Dragon



In celebration of the Year of the Dragon – a symbol of immense significance in Chinese culture – Galaxy Macau, in collaboration with StarWorld Hotel and Broadway Macau, announced a series of festive activities taking place at its

venue.

Upon entering the Crystal Lobby of Galaxy Macau, guests will be welcomed by a spectacular 30-meter-long, Chinese-style New Year mural crafted by a Chinese artist. Mounted on an LED wall,

this artwork connects the iconic edifices of Galaxy Macau, StarWorld Hotel, and Broadway Macau with the vibrant festivities of the New Year.

This Lunar New Year, a variety of reunion dinners and festive dishes will be prepared at Galaxy Macau's various restaurants.

On Feb. 8 and 9, the ballroom at Banyan Tree Macau will host a reunion dinner. This dinner will feature dishes by star chefs, crafted from a range of premium ingredients. Then, from Feb. 11 to 14, the "Rising Fortune Chinese New Year Buffet" will offer an "indulgent feast," as cited in a statement issued by Galaxy Macau.



DIRE STRAIT

TAIWAN'S ELECTION IS SHAPED BY ECONOMIC REALITIES, NOT JUST BEIJING'S THREATS TO USE FORCE

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
BANGKOK

BEIJING'S threats to use force to claim self-governed Taiwan aren't just about missiles and warships. Hard economic realities will be at play as voters head to the polls tomorrow, though the relationship is complicated.

The economy has slowed since the pandemic, with growth in 2023 estimated at only 1.4%. That partly reflects inevitable ups and downs in demand for computer chips and other exports, and a slowing of the Chinese economy. But longer-term challenges such as inequality, housing affordability and unemployment are especially vital for younger voters, but often are eclipsed by China's looming presence.

The two sides split in 1949 after a civil war and have no official relations but are linked by tens of billions of dollars in trade and investment.

Beijing has been courting Taiwan investment, while at the same time flying fighter planes and sailing warships near the island to enforce its stance that the

island must eventually unite with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Taiwan imports nearly all its energy, leaving it vulnerable to blockades.

The election's outcome could impact relations between China and the United States and also affect decisions on investment and manufacturing far into the future. The Chinese mainland and Hong Kong buy about 35% of Taiwan's exports, though their share has been falling, and account for about one-quarter of its imports.

Despite Beijing's muscle flexing, any overt military action would come at a huge cost to China itself. The Taiwan Strait plays a vital role in China's trade with the world. Bloomberg Economics calculated the potential cost to the world economy at \$10 trillion.

So far, China's moves have been piecemeal. At times it has banned imports of hundreds of Taiwan products, including grouper fish, cookies and pineapple. On Jan. 1, China ended preferential tariffs on some Taiwan exports, including chemicals, that had been part of a 2010 trade pact.

On Tuesday, the Chinese Commerce Ministry said it was considering suspending other tariff concessions on farm products, fish, machinery, auto parts and textiles from Taiwan. Taiwan's government condemned that as using trade as a "weapon" to manipulate the election.

Taiwan has imposed bans on hundreds of mainland exports, and it holds an ace card of its own: Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp. is the world's largest supplier of computer chips, providing more than 90% of leading-edge chips.

"Taiwan's dominance of chip fabrication, which constitutes a global strategic industry, gives it geopolitical influence far beyond its size, economy and population," Richard Cronin, a fellow at the Stimson Center, a Washington think tank, wrote in a recent report. "China's dependence on Taiwan to cover its chip deficit has been called its 'Silicon shield.'"

TSMC operates two plants in mainland China, in Nanjing and Songjiang, making less advanced computer chips. But it has been complying with demands from

the United States and other trading partners to restrict exports of equipment and technology for leading edge semiconductors.

Like many other Taiwan companies wary of geopolitical and trade tensions with Washington, TSMC has been shifting some production further offshore — to Japan, Germany and Arizona. Such investments also reflect moves to diversify supply chains after the COVID-19 pandemic caused massive disruptions for automakers and many other industries that depend on chips.

Taiwan's 23.5 million residents enjoy an enviable standard of living, with per-capita GDP at about \$33,000, more than double that in the Chinese mainland.

To insulate Taiwan's economy from retaliatory moves by Beijing, Tsai Ing-wen's government has been boosting trade with the rest of Asia and other regions. Taiwan also restricts investments by mainland Chinese businesses on the island, to limit what it calls "economic coercion" by Beijing.

Even when tensions have surged, Chinese authorities have largely refrained from targeting

the thousands of Taiwanese companies that operate on the mainland — in the past few decades, hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese have moved to China to work, start small businesses or set up factories, though investments in the mainland have fallen steadily for more than a decade.

In various charm offensives, Beijing has rolled out a plan for an "integrated development demonstration zone" in Fujian province, the closest to Taiwan and only 160 kilometers away. It's encouraging Taiwan companies to list on Chinese stock exchanges and has promised better conditions for Taiwanese investors and a more "relaxed" environment for travel.

But Foxconn, a Taiwan-headquartered Fortune-500 company known for making Apple iPhones that employs hundreds of thousands of people in China, felt the heat in October when tax and other Chinese officials searched its offices in several places.

That followed an announcement by Foxconn's billionaire founder Terry Gou that he was running to replace leader Tsai Ing-wen. Gou was seen as a China-friendly candidate but his candidacy could have further split opposition to Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party, which Beijing reviles. Gou later withdrew, saying it was for the sake of Taiwan's future.

The front-runner to take over from Tsai when she steps down after her maximum two terms is deputy leader and DPP candidate William Lai, the son of a coal miner. Beijing has refused to negotiate with the DPP, which maintains that Taiwan is "in effect independent" but does not need to make a formal declaration that could draw greater military, economic and diplomatic pressure from China.

China's "leaders will feel compelled to signal to the Taiwanese public that voting against Beijing's preferences carries consequences. Both military exercises and new coercive economic measures are therefore likely," Gabriel Wildau, a political risk analyst for the consultancy Teneo, said in a recent report.

Hou Yu-ih is the candidate for the Nationalists, also known as the Kuomintang or KMT. It agrees with Beijing's stance that the mainland and Taiwan are part of the same country, though under separate governments. Ko Wen-je, the candidate for another opposition group, the Taiwan People's Party, also favors building friendlier relations with China. Both have said they would try to restart trade talks with Beijing if elected.

Tsai has struck a precarious equilibrium between Beijing and Washington. With so much at stake, whatever the vote's outcome, her successor will face the same balancing act. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

KMT's top candidate promises to boost island's defense, restart talks with Beijing

SIMINA MISTREANU, TAIPEI

ONE of Taiwan's leading opposition party candidates in tomorrow's major election has promised to boost the island's defense capabilities while restarting dialogue with Beijing, which claims the island as its own.

Hou Yu-ih, the leading candidate from the opposition Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, said yesterday he wants to strengthen Taiwan's ability to protect itself to deter a potential attack from China.

As part of its military pressure, China sends warships and military jets near the island of 23 million almost daily. Taiwan's Defense Ministry has also reported Chinese balloons, which could be used for spying, flying in its vicinity over the past month.

Hou, 66, said he strongly condemned China's military provocations.

"We have to let them know they have to bear the cost of the war,"



Taiwan's Nationalist Party top candidate Hou Yu-ih during an international press conference in New Taipei, yesterday

Hou said during a news conference in New Taipei City, a municipality bordering the capital, Taipei. He was joined by his running mate, former legislator and TV commentator Jaw Shau-kong.

Hou is mayor of New Taipei, a position from which he took leave to run for leader.

Besides bolstering defense, Hou

pledged to restart dialogue with Beijing — first through cultural and civil society exchanges — as part of his so-called 3D strategy, which stands for deterrence, dialogue and de-escalation.

Most pre-election polls place Hou second after the governing Democratic Progressive Party's candidate, William Lai, poised to succeed current leader Tsai Ing-wen who is barred by law from running a third term.

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

Beijing is believed to favor Hou as an alternative to Lai, whom it has criticized as a separatist trying to provoke a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

All three candidates have said they were open to speaking to Beijing, which has refused to hold talks with Lai and Tsai. Tsai's predecessor, Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT, was the last Taiwan leader to meet with President Xi Jinping, in 2015 in Singapore.

The vast majority of Taiwanese people favor maintaining the status quo in relations with Beijing as opposed to unification. The KMT has historically endorsed unification with China but has shifted its stance in recent years.

Hou, who described himself yesterday as an atypical KMT member, promised he would not address the issue of unification during his tenure "because Taiwan's future should be decided

by the [23.5 million] people of Taiwan."

"I want to use dialogue to minimize the risks," he said.

Differences over Taiwan are a major flashpoint in U.S.-China relations. U.S. relations with the island are governed by the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which makes it American policy to ensure Taiwan has the resources to defend itself and to prevent any unilateral change of status by Beijing. MDT/AP

THE US PLANS UNOFFICIAL DELEGATION TO TAIWAN TO MEET NEW LEADER

THE Biden administration will send an unofficial delegation comprised of former senior officials to Taiwan shortly after the self-governed island holds an election for a new leader this weekend, a move that could upset Beijing in an already-fragile bilateral relationship. A senior administration official confirmed the plan yesterday [Macau time] without offering more

details but said such a face-to-face meeting was the "most effective way" to engage the new Taiwanese government and convey U.S. policy in the region.

The official, briefing reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive plans, said the administration believed the move would contribute to peace and stability in the region.

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MYANMAR

ASEAN SPECIAL ENVOY EMBARKS ON INAUGURAL MISSION

GRANT PECK, BANGKOK

A veteran Laotian diplomat recently appointed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' special envoy to Myanmar arrived this week on his first mission to the strife-torn nation, meeting with the head of the ruling military council and other top officials, state television MRTV reported.

Diplomat Alounkeo Kittikhoun faces the tough challenge of promoting the regional group's peace plan for Myanmar to quell the violence between the military government, which seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, and an armed pro-democracy resistance movement that is assisted by ethnic minority fighting forces.

Almost 2 million people have been displaced by years of fighting in Myanmar, according to the U.N., and the 10-member ASEAN regional grouping is concerned that the destabilization could have regional consequences, including generating large numbers of refugees. Neither the military government nor its pro-democracy government foes have shown any inclination to compromise.

Alounkeo's visit comes just ahead of a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers scheduled for Jan. 28-29 in Luang Prabang, the old capital of Laos. It is the turn this



Min Aung Hlaing (right) the head of ruling military council, talks with Alounkeo Kittikhoun (left) special envoy of ASEAN Chairman

year of Laos to act as chair of the bloc, which includes Myanmar.

ASEAN has been seeking to implement a five-point consensus it reached on Myanmar just a few months after the army's takeover. It called for the immediate cessation of violence, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to

Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties.

MRTV reported that Alounkeo's meetings included discussions about the implementation of the five-point consensus, the military government's efforts at providing humanitarian assistance and plans for the military's promised election. Bilateral relations and Laos' role as ASEAN chair were also discussed, it said.

Myanmar's military government initially agreed to the consensus but has since made little effort to implement it, even as the country has slipped into a situation that U.N. experts have characterized as a civil war. Its stonewalling led fellow ASEAN members to block key leaders of the military government from attending major meetings of the regional grouping.

Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, all electoral democracies, are known to have taken a strong stand against any engagement that could be perceived as favoring the Myanmar's generals' claims to be the country's legitimate leaders. Authoritarian nations such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos are less critical of the ruling generals, as is Thailand, whose military retains strong influence over security matters.

Some members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement — Signatories, Ethnic Armed Organizations, a group established nine years ago to pursue ways of ending decades of armed conflict with the military, also held a meeting with Alounkeo.

MRTV reported they also discussed the five-point consensus and humanitarian assistance. However, since none of the seven groups that attended are currently at war with the military, the relevance of their participation for peacemaking appeared to be minimal.

It was not immediately known if Alounkeo would meet with Suu Kyi, who was arrested when the military seized power. The 78-year-old Suu Kyi is now serving a 27-year prison term in Naypyitaw after being convicted in a series of politically tinged prosecutions brought by the military.

The military government has refused to allow her to meet with any previous ASEAN special envoys, who came in turn from Brunei, Cambodia and Indonesia.

Alounkeo, 72, is a former minister in Laos' prime minister's office and has also served as his country's ambassador at the United Nations. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

213 deaths caused by New Year's quake; eight happened in shelters

THE 7.6 magnitude earthquake that hit the western coastline of Japan on New Year's has killed 213 people as of yesterday. Eight of the deaths were at evacuation centers, where rescued people died from injuries and sickness.

Such deaths weren't directly caused by the quakes, fires and mudslides. They happened in alleged safety.

"The pressures and stress of living in a place you aren't used to lead to such deaths," said Shigeru Nishimori, a disaster official in Ishikawa prefecture, the hardest-hit region.

Some 26,000 people whose homes were destroyed or deemed unsafe are staying at schools and



Japanese Self Defense Force members search the collapsed houses in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, yesterday

other makeshift facilities. Even minor rain and snow can set off landslides where

the ground is loose from the more than 1,000 aftershocks that rattled the region

for more than a week. Half-collapsed homes might flatten.

Shinichi Kuriyama, director at the International Research Institute of Disaster Science, who has studied the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that hit northeastern Japan in 2011, warned that the chances for death double among populations undergoing a disaster.

He said the number of deaths in Ishikawa evacuation centers surprised him.

"I'm really shocked," he said. "Communication is key and it appears to be sorely lacking."

Kuriyama said the most vulnerable can be overlooked, missing food that's being distributed, for instance, because they are unaware or can't reach it. He added that Japanese tend to "suffer in silence," which can make things worse.

Deaths from the New Year's temblor centered on Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa have climbed daily, as res-

cue teams pull more bodies from the rubble. Of the deaths, 98 were in Suzu city, 83 in Wajima and 20 in Anamizu, with the rest in smaller numbers among four other towns. The number of missing people declined in recent days and now stands at 52.

Those injured totaled 567, and 1,830 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged, according to Ishikawa officials. More than 14,000 homes were without electricity, and nearly 59,000 homes had no running water.

A tsunami reaching as high as about 3 meters (10 feet) spewed into coastal homes after last week's biggest quake. A fire destroyed part of Wajima city. A search began Tuesday into the remains of the fire for bodies.

Authorities warned about the raised risk of infectious diseases breaking out among people crammed into shelters. **MDT/AP**

PHILIPPINES

Germany ready to help de-escalate tensions in disputed waters, its foreign minister says

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

GERMANY'S top diplomat said yesterday that China's actions in the South China Sea violate the rights of Asian coastal states like the Philippines and threaten freedom of navigation, but added that territorial disputes have to be resolved peacefully because "the world doesn't need another crisis."

Annalena Baerbock, who held talks with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and other top officials while visiting Manila, said Germany was ready to help de-escalate growing tensions and added that it was crucial to set up "mechanisms" to resolve the disputes peacefully and foster dialogue.

"There are truly rough winds blowing across the South China Sea and this is happening in the middle of one of the most dynamic economic regions of the world," she told a news conference in Manila, speaking through an interpreter.

"It is now important to set up mechanisms to solve tensions together in a peaceful way," she said without elaborating. "I think we all agree that the world doesn't

AP PHOTO



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock answers questions from reporters at a hotel in Makati-Manila, yesterday

need another crisis. There are too many crises at once."

In a symbolic gesture of Germany's support for the Philippines, Baerbock visited the coast guard headquarters in Manila

and boarded a patrol ship, where she briefly flew one of a number of surveillance drones that Germany donated to the Philippines.

Philippine coast guard officials said the drones would help the

country defend its territorial interests in the South China Sea, enforce maritime laws and undertake search and rescue missions during accidents at sea.

Chinese officials did not im-

mediately issue a reaction.

The decades-long territorial dispute escalated last year between Beijing and Manila, sparking fears it could degenerate into a major conflict that could involve the United States, a long-time treaty ally of the Philippines.

Chinese coast guard ships and accompanying vessels used military-grade laser and water cannons against Philippine coast guard and supply vessels and undertook dangerous maneuvers near disputed shoals, prompting the Philippines to file a large number of diplomatic protests against China, Philippine officials said.

China's actions in the South China Sea, which have led to minor collisions with Philippine vessels, are of concern to Germany and other European countries, Baerbock said, "because such risky maneuvers violate rights and opportunities for economic development of your own country and other littoral states."

Baerbock held the news conference with her Philippine counterpart, Enrique Manalo.

"They also put into question the freedom of navigation and international law, affecting all countries worldwide," she said, adding that China's claims "are not covered by international law."

The German foreign minister, the first to visit the Philippines in about a decade to bolster ties, cited a 2016 ruling by a United Nations-backed arbitration panel that invalidated China's extensive territorial claims on historical grounds. China refused to participate in the arbitration, dismissed its ruling as a sham and continues to defy it.

Baerbock said the arbitration ruling was "crystal clear." **MDT/AP**

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Riots in two biggest cities reportedly leave 15 dead

THE Papua New Guinea government worked to restore order yesterday after at least 15 people were reportedly killed during rioting and looting that left the country's two biggest cities in flames.

The unrest began in the capital, Port Moresby, on Wednesday after hundreds of police officers, soldiers, prison staff and public servants walked off their jobs in protest over a pay dispute.

The Papua New Guinea government attributed the pay cut to an administrative glitch.

Similar riots also caused damage in Lae, the second-biggest city in the southwestern Pacific country. The Australian Broad-

AP PHOTO



This image made from video shows the destroyed shopfront in Port Moresby yesterday

casting Corporation reported that at least 15 people died in Port Moresby and Lae.

An additional 180 defense personnel flew into Port Moresby yesterday.

Tensions in the country have risen amid high unemployment and increa-

sed living costs.

Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape said Port Moresby was "under stress and duress" but that violence had eased.

"Police were not at work yesterday in the city and people resorted to lawlessness — not all people, but in certain segments of our city," Marape said in a news conference yesterday. "(The) situation report as of this morning shows tension in the city has subsided."

Many shops and banking services were closed as business owners repaired damage.

Papua New Guinea is a diverse, developing nation of mostly subsistence farmers where some 800 languages are spoken. It is in a

strategically important part of the South Pacific. With 10 million people, it the most populous South Pacific nation after Australia, which is home to 26 million.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese appealed for calm. He said his government had not received any requests for help from its closest neighbor.

Papua New Guinea and Australia last month signed a bilateral security pact.

"Our high commission in Port Moresby are keeping a very close eye on what is occurring there, making sure Australians are looked after," Albanese told reporters.

Papua New Guinea struggles to contain escalating tribal violence and civil unrest in remote regions and has a long-term aim to increase its police numbers from 6,000 officers to 26,000. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



MIDEAST

Iran's navy seizes oil tanker in Gulf of Oman

JON GAMBRELL, DUBAI

IRAN'S navy seized an oil tanker yesterday in the Gulf of Oman that once was at the center of a major crisis between Tehran and Washington, officials said, a seizure that further escalates tensions in the Mideast waterways.

The vessel was once known as the Suez Rajan and was involved in a yearlong dispute that ultimately saw the U.S. Justice Department seize 1 million barrels of Iranian crude oil on it.

The seizure also comes after weeks of attacks by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels on shipping in the Red Sea, including their largest barrage ever of drones and missiles launched late Tuesday. That has raised the risk of possible retaliatory strikes by U.S.-led forces now patrolling the vital waterway, especially after a United Nations Security Council vote on Wednesday condemning the Houthis and as American and British officials warned of potential consequences over the attacks.

Iran's state-run television acknowledged the seizure late yesterday, hours after armed men boarded it.

"The violating oil tanker Suez Rajan ... stole Iranian oil by leading it to the Americans and delivered it to the Americans," state TV said. It said Iran's navy, rather than its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, conducted the seizure. Past tense incidents at sea have largely involved

the Guard.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which provides warnings to sailors in the Middle East, said the seizure began early in the morning in the waters between Oman and Iran in an area transited by ships coming in and out of the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all traded oil passes.

The U.K. military-run group described receiving a report from the ship's security manager of hearing "unknown voices over the phone" alongside with the ship's captain. It said further efforts to contact the ship had failed and that the men who boarded the vessel wore "black military-style uniforms with black masks."

The private security firm Ambrey said that "four to five armed persons" boarded the ship, which it identified as the oil tanker St. Nikolas. It said the men covered the surveillance cameras as they boarded.

The tanker had been off the city of Basra, Iraq, loading crude oil bound for Aliaga, Turkey, for the Turkish refinery firm Tupras. Satellite-tracking data analyzed by The Associated Press last showed the Marshall Islands-flagged tanker had turned and headed toward the port of Bandar-e Jask in Iran.

The St. Nikolas was earlier named the Suez Rajan, associated with the Greek shipping company Empire Navigation. In a statement to

the AP, Athens-based Empire Navigation acknowledged losing contact with the vessel, which has a crew of 18 Filipinos and one Greek national.

"Empire have no such knowledge of a court order or the Iranian navy having seized their vessel, and have still not been contacted by anyone," the company said.

Attention began focusing on the Suez Rajan in February 2022, when the group United Against Nuclear Iran said it suspected the tanker carried oil from Iran's Khargh Island, its main oil distribution terminal in the Persian Gulf. Satellite photos and shipping data analyzed at the time by the AP supported the allegation.

For months, the ship sat in the South China Sea off the northeast coast of Singapore before suddenly sailing for the Texas coast without explanation. The vessel discharged its cargo to another tanker in August, which released its oil in Houston as part of a Justice Department order.

In September, Empire Navigation pleaded guilty to smuggling sanctioned Iranian crude oil and agreed to pay a \$2.4 million fine over a case involving the tanker.

The U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, which patrols the Mideast, did not respond to a request for comment over the incident.

After the vessel, then-Suez Rajan, headed for America, Iran seized two tankers near the Strait of Hormuz, including one with cargo

for major U.S. oil company Chevron Corp. In July, the top commander of the Revolutionary Guard's naval arm threatened further action against anyone offloading the Suez Rajan, with state media linking the recent seizures to the cargo's fate.

Since the collapse of Iran's nuclear deal, waters around the strait have seen a series of ship seizures by Iran, as well as assaults targeting shipping that the U.S. Navy has blamed on Tehran. Iran and the Navy also have had a series of tense encounters in the waterway, though recent attention has been focused on the Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

The U.S. and its allies also have been seizing Iranian oil cargoes since 2019. That has led to a series of attacks in the Mideast attributed to the Islamic Republic, as well as ship seizures by Iranian military and paramilitary forces that threaten global shipping.

The Houthis say their attacks are aimed at halting the suffering of Palestinians in Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. However, the rebels have increasingly targeted ships with tenuous or no ties to Israel.

Meanwhile, satellite tracking data analyzed by the AP yesterday showed that an Iranian cargo vessel suspected of being a spying platform in the Red Sea had left the waterway. The data showed the Behshad had transited through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait into the Gulf of Aden.

The Behshad has been in the Red Sea since 2021 off Eritrea's Dahlak archipelago. It arrived there after Iran removed the Saviz, another suspected spy base in the Red Sea that had suffered damage in an attack that analysts attributed to Israel amid a wider shadow war of ship attacks in the region. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1991 US CONGRESS VOTES FOR WAR IN IRAQ



The United States Congress has voted to authorize the use of military force against Iraq to end its occupation of neighbouring Kuwait.

The vote seals the United Nations' 15 January deadline for the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, to order his troops out of Kuwait, or face military action.

After three days of sometimes heated debate, the House of Representatives passed the motion authorising use of force by 250 votes to 183.

The Democrat-controlled Senate vote was far closer, at 52 to 47, but was not as narrow as had been feared.

It is the first time Congress has approved military action since the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1964 at the start of the Vietnam War, and it was by no means a foregone conclusion.

At times the Senate vote was too close to call, and some were predicting the president would be forced to go to war without Congressional backing.

The House of Representatives added one condition to the motion: that all diplomatic and peaceful means of averting war should be exhausted.

It has also made it clear it will withdraw its support if the war becomes prolonged or results in heavy casualties.

President Bush welcomed the votes, saying they represented the "last best chance for peace" and sent "the clearest message to Iraq that it cannot scorn the January 15 deadline".

He said he had not yet made a final decision to launch an attack on Iraq, but warned it would be "sooner rather than later" if Saddam Hussein did not withdraw.

Senior Washington sources said the president had obtained permission from the British, Saudi Arabian and Egyptian governments to launch an attack at only a few minutes' notice.

The tough line was reinforced by the British foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, in Abu Dhabi on a trip to the Gulf.

"He [Saddam] will be forced out," he said. "We are coming to a decision on this. There is no reason for a long delay."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The last-minute diplomacy by Perez de Cuellar and others came to nothing.

Iraq continued to refuse to comply with the UN ultimatum for its troops to withdraw from Kuwait, and at 2330 GMT on 16 January 1991, Operation Desert Storm began with a devastating aerial bombardment of Baghdad.

After more than a month of intensive air attacks, the Allies began a land offensive on 24 February. One day later, the Iraqi army began retreating.

On 28 February, President George Bush declared victory. In Memoriam. Kuwait was liberated, but the Gulf War left Saddam Hussein in power.

The US and Britain launched a second war against Iraq in 2003. Saddam Hussein was overthrown and captured. He was later tried for war crimes by an Iraqi court, sentenced to death and executed. A democratically-elected government was sworn in after elections in 2005.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
You may have to explain your actions to your family. Your ability to talk circles around your colleagues will help you forge ahead in the workforce.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Travel and educational pursuits may help alleviate the stress you have been feeling. You can benefit financially if you put money or maintenance into your living quarters.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You may think gifts will win their heart, but it could add stress from lack of funds. You can make profitable investments if you purchase an art object for your home.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Don't be too quick to react. Your lack of responsibility and attention has been a key issue in your relationship. Concentrate on yourself or your work.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Try not to overspend on luxury items. Curb any jealous fits if your partner has been flirting with someone else. Go out with friends.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Don't let someone try to bully you into doing things their way. You need to spend some time reflecting on past experiences and involvements.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Opportunities for new romantic encounters will unfold through the social events you attend. New emotional connections can be made through business contacts.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You've been in a rut and you need to do something that will help you break the pattern you've fallen into. You have done all you can to sort things out a personal level.

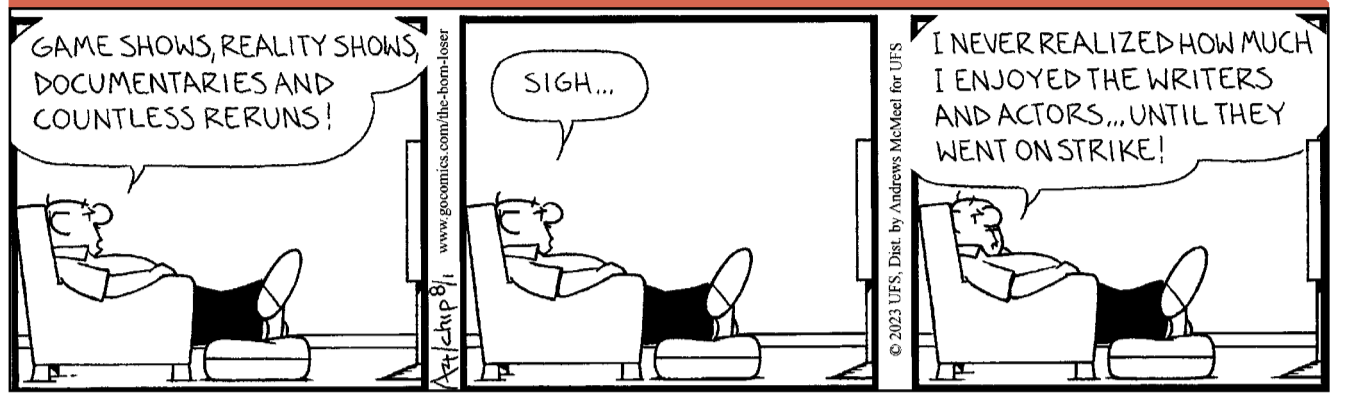
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Don't overindulge in anyway. Keep tabs on your spending. You have the ability to motivate others. You may be offered opportunities that will result in a higher earning potential.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
It's time to consider putting money into long-term investments. Be sure to pay attention to your bank account. Someone you work with could try to undermine you.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Sit tight. Things aren't as bad as they appear. You can make personal changes that will enhance your reputation and give you greater self confidence.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Emotional up and downs have caused doubts in your personal life. Social events will be rewarding. The home environment will be unpredictable today.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	6	fine
Changchun	-16	-8	fine
Chengdu	5	16	fine
Chongqing	10	16	cloudy
Fuzhou	8	21	fine
Guangzhou	12	22	cloudy
Guiyang	7	15	overcast
Haikou	20	25	cloudy
Hangzhou	0	18	fine
Harbin	-25	-15	cloudy
Hefei	-1	17	fine
Nanjing	0	16	fine
Shanghai	3	16	fine
Taipei	11	19	fine
Wuhan	1	19	fine
Hong Kong	19	21	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-20	-11	windy
Frankfurt	-2	3	cloudy
Paris	-1	3	cloudy
London	3	7	cloudy
New York	7	8	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Earth Day subj.; 5- Stern with a bow; 10- Dirty Harry's org.; 14- Burt's ex; 15- Bucolic; 16- Switch back?; 17- Folk singer Joan; 18- Cave; 19- Neighbor of Cambodia; 20- Geographical reference; 22- Melodious; 24- First name in country; 27- Sgts., e.g.; 28- Compassion; 32- Piles; 35- Ill temper; 36- Lure; 38- Sully; 40- Record; 42- "The Taming of the Shrew" setting; 44- Puts away; 45- Fend (off); 47- Covenants; 49- Actress Tyler; 50- Chosen; 52- Superficial; 54- She played Carla on "Cheers"; 56- Age unit; 57- Daggerlike weapon; 60- Boarded; 64- Full of energy; 65- Tendency; 68- ___ take arms against...; 69- Paradise lost; 70- Duck with soft down; 71- Duo; 72- Ancient Persian; 73- Like marshes; 74- Village People hit;

DOWN 1- Exile isle; 2- Cover; 3- Like Nash's lama; 4- Reptile; 5- Roth ___; 6- Sky light; 7- Collective word for intellectual pursuits; 8- Biblical brother; 9- Grip; 10- Identical; 11- German Mrs.; 12- Wading place; 13- John ___ Passos; 21- E-mail command; 23- Departs; 25- High-pitched tone; 26- Songwriters' org.; 28- Sets of equipment; 29- Fuming; 30- Sherpa's home; 31- Fountain treats; 33- Norman Vincent ___; 34- French composer Erik; 37- Disgusting; 39- Invitation request; 41- Each person; 43- End in ___ (draw); 46- Repeat; 48- Fly in the ointment; 51- Not tough; 53- Sagging; 55- Lofty nest; 57- Predict; 58- Got older; 59- It may turn; 61- Streetcar; 62- Auricular; 63- Asta's mistress; 64- Precious stone; 66- Put paper into, as a copier; 67- Endeavor;

Yesterday's solution

A	D	D	L	E		O	M	A	N	I		N	A	W		
I	A	D	E	N		S	O	N	E	S		A	R	R		
I	D	E	A	L		A	S	N	E	R		O	R	A		
I	L	K	S			A	I	M	A	T						
O	C	T	A	V	I	A	S	W	E	D	I	S	H			
R	A	I	S	E	D											
A	M	A	I	N		E	S	P	E	C	I	A	L	I	T	Y
T	E	R				T	I	T	A	L	O					
E	L	A	B	O	R	A	T	E								
A	C	A	R	E		S	H	R	I	N	K					
C	O	N	T	E	N	T										
R	A	I	S	E												
A	T	E														
S	E	C														
H	R	E														

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	
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DRIVE IN

KALUUYA BUILDS A COMPELLING NEAR-FUTURE DYSTOPIA IN 'THE KITCHEN'

LINDSEY BAHR,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

THE near-future is bleak for the working class of London in "The Kitchen," a well-executed film about a familiar kind of urban dystopian nightmare. It is, ironically, sunnier than the Los Angeles of "Blade Runner," but the mood is as dire.

In this world, the have-nots are crammed together in hellish Brutalist high-rises, a slum-like development that its residents call "The Kitchen." With frequent police raids and constant monitoring, there is the whiff of rebellion in the air. But at least for the purposes of this story, tensions have not yet boiled over into a proper revolution — the rage is manifested in smaller, petty crimes, like a smash-and-grab jewelry raid.

Our protagonist Izy (rapper Kane Robinson) has a stable job, selling "eco" and "humane" burial plans to the desperate, grieving poor. Everything is whitewashed and slick and just a little sinister there — it's called "life after life"

AP PHOTO



Hope Ikpoku Jnr (left) in a scene from "The Kitchen" (Netflix)

after all. He and his colleagues wear clinical scrubs as they sell people on the idea of turning their deceased loved ones into plants.

He also has a plan: To get out. He's saved enough money to escape The Kitchen and has finally broken through the logjam of a waitlist to get into one of the luxury apartment buildings in town. A single occupancy for a single guy. Naturally the film won't let

him go that easy, but the complication isn't just financial: A kid enters the picture.

One day at work he notices that a woman he once dated is being given a funeral on the premises. Inside, he discovers her son Benji (Jedaiah Bannerman), a teen who doesn't know who his father is. The two dance around the obvious question, and Benji ends up on Izy's doorstep in need of some-

thing — help, lodging, care — but again, these things go largely unpoken. Benji is at a sliding doors kind of moment in which the fast cash from the dangerous smash-and-grabs seems almost worth the risk. What does he have to lose anyway?

"The Kitchen" was directed by "Get Out's" Daniel Kaluuya and Kibwe Tavares, who has turned his gaze before on the intersec-

tion of architecture, race and class in "Robots of Brixton."

It is quite a pleasure to watch Izy and Benji navigate this awkward relationship, both wondering how much they should trust one another. But in this world of urban isolation it's clear, at least to us, that they need each other — no matter how much you're rooting for Izy to make it out. There are also moments of humor in this rather serious affair, including Izy's frustrating conversation with an AI customer service representative.

Like so many futuristic dystopias, "The Kitchen" is really about the present — about class divides and wealth gaps and unaffordable housing and the ways in which it's all getting worse so quickly. This is one of those films that would have been fun on the big screen with its urgent action sequences and propulsive nightclub scenes, but it's a perfect small-screen watch, too. And, hopefully, the beginning of a big directing career for Kaluuya and Tavares, who have proved that they have something worthwhile to say and the vision to make it entertaining as well.

"The Kitchen," a Netflix release streaming Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "language." Running time: 107 minutes. ★★★★★

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



BOOK IT

'SUGAR, BABY' IS A TRAIN WRECK WITH NO CONSEQUENCES THAT YOU CAN'T HELP BUT READ

AGNES Green grew up on the poor side of a town outside London in the new novel "Sugar, Baby." She's been an outsider her whole life, with her strict conservative Christian upbringing directly at odds with her desire for romance, sex and parties.

When a wealthy model teaches Agnes to use her youth and beauty to get men to give her whatever she wants, sugaring seems like an ideal ticket out.

Debut author Celine Saintclare introduces a story brimming with possibility: a sexual awakening? feminine empowerment? Parting the curtain to expose the realities of high-end sex work? an exploration of class, race and gender divides?

Not quite.

What starts as a funny, sexy, astute novel that reads like butter becomes a train wreck with no consequences. "Sugar, Baby" promises societal commentary but delivers a trivial summer sex romp. Still, it's hard not to rubberneck and watch the whole thing.

At 21, Agnes spends her days cleaning houses and her evenings trying to see her loser boyfriend. Without any aspirations, she's an easy target for Emily Canon, a model likened to Margot Robbie and one of the cleaning company's rich clients. Emily is convinced any young woman can take up sugaring, and decides to take Agnes under her wing as a pet project to test out her how-to

guide.

Sugaring may not be her end goal, but it's opening a lot more doors for Agnes than house cleaning did.

As she moves further away from her mother and the hometown she not-so-affectionately calls The Wasteland, Agnes finds herself orbiting closer to her true passion: photography. Suddenly she's surrounded by artists, models and rich people with valuable connections.

Despite this glimmer of hope, it's all downhill from here.

The book includes race, sexuality, sex work, religion and class, but doesn't actually say much about any of these topics. Agnes turns out to be a passive character whose seemingly grand realizations miss the point and avoid deeper conversations.

The acknowledgments held more intrigue, and "Sugar, Baby" left me feeling betrayed, like Saintclare told the fake version of her novel. Where are the real stakes? The highs, lows, and felt emotions? Where's the consequence, the lesson, the dynamics, depth or growth?

My mistake was going in expecting literary social commentary. But if you like a story where things just keep getting worse but none of it matters in the end because, somehow, the protagonist is fine, "Sugar, Baby" is the jackpot. **DONNA EDWARDS, MDT/AP**



"Sugar, Baby" by Celine Saintclare (Bloomsbury)



TASTE OF EDESIA

Dragon Indulgence

IRENE SAM, MDT

DRAGON is a symbol of power, honor and prosperity beloved by the Chinese for millennia—a fact that makes the Year of the Dragon extra special.

No Chinese New Year is complete without an extraordinarily sumptuous feast, and **The Ritz-Carlton**, Macau's Chinese fine dining establishment, **Lai Heen**, has the ultimate Chinese gastronomy experience. The Chinese New Year Lunch features some of the Michelin-star restaurant's greatest hits, crafted with innovative techniques and luxurious ingredients. Highlights include the Double-boiled French Francolin Soup, the Sautéed Tiger Prawn with Asparagus and Termité Mushroom, and a CNY staple—the Fried Glutinous Rice

with Air-dried Sausage, Conpoy and Taro.

Meanwhile, the Chinese New Year Dinner promises a full-out celebration underpinned by a delicious blend of traditional influence with modern sensibility. The eight-course meal is a culinary tour-de-force packed with prized delicacies, starting with a trio of appetizers such as the Crispy Crab Meat Stuffed with Crab Coral Parcel. They are followed by a string of masterfully prepared plates including the Braised Whole Abalone with Foie Gras and Morel Mushroom, the Wok-fried Prawns with Green Vegetables and Sun-dried Shrimp in XO Chili Sauce, and the Pan-seared French Quail Breast with Pearl Onion in Cognac Sauce. Finally, the Sweetened Red Bean Cream with tangerine peel, lotus seeds and lily bulbs and the Dee-

p-fried Glutinous Rice Ball bring on the tradition and nostalgia for a sweet coda.

While popular all year round, dim sum plays a particularly important role on the holiday table. This Chinese New Year, **Lai Heen** is introducing the Good Fortune Dim Sim menu, which boasts an array of delectable and auspicious morsels from the Signature Lobster Dumpling with Shrimp Mousse and the Pan-seared Fish Mousse Cake, to the Pan-fried Glutinous Rice Pudding with Red Date Purée and Ginger Juice.

For those looking for the perfect Chinese New Year gift, the Rice Pudding Treasure Box would be a great choice. The limited-edition gift box contains Traditional Glutinous Rice Pudding and XO Sauce Turnip Cake wrapped up in stunningly beautiful packaging.

OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

**SELF-REVOLUTION
ESSENTIAL FOR
CPC'S VITALITY**

For anyone curious about the governance philosophy of the Communist Party of China, the communique of the third plenum of the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection is a must read for a better understanding of the ruling party's approach to self-governance.

Running throughout the document is the requirement that concrete actions be taken to advance the purity of the Party and preserve its vitality.

The self-revolution of the Party means that the blade is turned inward, scraping the bone to remove the poison.

To this end investigation and accountability are to be rigorously pursued, for despite the success of the anti-graft campaign, there is still "the neglect of duty, willful use of power to act in a disorderly manner, alienation of power, distortion of performance, and deviation of undertakings". This necessitates Party discipline be strengthened.

The insistence on self-cleansing derives from and reflects a profound concern about the corrosive impact of corruption on the Party.

Over the years, the Party has been warned against what are known as the "four major tests" and "four dangers" it faces. The tests are those the Party faces in governance, reform and opening-up, the market economy and the external environment. The dangers are a lack of drive, incompetence, disengagement from the people, and inaction and corruption.

For the Party to overcome these tests and dangers and preserve its ruling status in the long run, the CPC leadership has come up with a slew of countermeasures, which are detailed in the latest edition of the "Regulations of the Communist Party of China on Disciplinary Actions" published in December 2023.

Navigating the document jargon of the Party may be challenging for the uninitiated, but doing so offers rewarding insights into its motivations for self-revolution, which culminates in the communique's assertion that it is only by having the courage to turn inward and purify itself that the Party can retain the support of the people, realize the goal of comprehensively building a modern socialist country, and achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

To this end, the fundamental principle is ensuring that members of the Party dare not, cannot and do not want to be corrupt. With the emphasis on "do not want". To grasp this fundamental principle, the communique stresses that a clean Party culture must be fostered so that there is no "soil and conditions for the emergence of corruption".

Thus the Party is strengthening its anti-corruption toolbox with the application of big data and other means of analysis and comparison on the understanding that "if a bribe is not investigated, the bribe is not stopped" and that new types of corruption and hidden corruption must have no place to take root.

In the end, the internal supervision of the Party is an important guarantee that the decisions made by the CPC Central Committee in pursuit of "the happiness for the Chinese people, the rejuvenation for the Chinese nation, and the common cause of the world" are smoothly implemented.

**FORMER ENGLAND COACH ERIKSSON SAYS HE
HAS CANCER AND LESS THAN A YEAR TO LIVE**

**THE
BUZZ**

Swedish soccer coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said he has cancer and might have less than a year to live.

The former England coach told Swedish Radio P1 he discovered he had cancer after collapsing suddenly. He said in February last year that he was reducing his public appearances because of health issues.

"Everyone understands that I have a disease that is not good, and everyone guesses that it is cancer and it is," Eriksson said in an interview published yesterday.

Eriksson said he has pancreatic cancer and that it is inoperable.

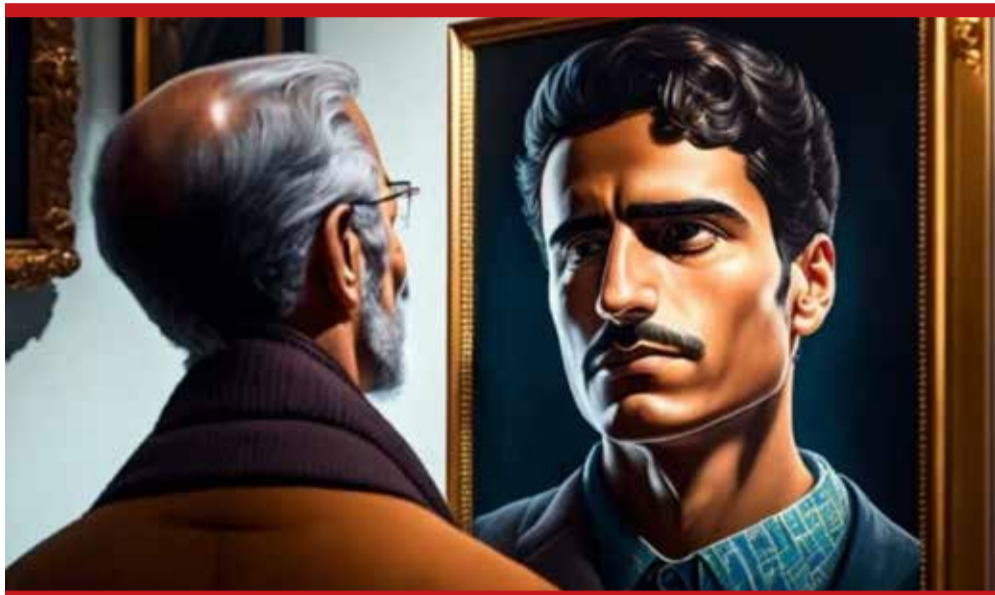
"At best I have maybe a year, at worst maybe a little less," he said. The 75-year-old said he is trying to think positively.

"I could go and think about it all the time and sit at home and be grumpy and think I'm unlucky and so on," he said. "I think that is easily done, that you end up there."

"No, look at things positively and don't wallow in adversity. Because this is, of course, the biggest setback."

Eriksson was England's first ever foreign-born coach from 2001-06 after making his name winning league titles at club level with Lazio in Italy, Benfica, and IFK Gothenburg in his native Sweden.

AP PHOTO



AP PHOTO



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy yesterday ruled out a cease-fire in his country's war with Russia, saying the Kremlin's forces would use the pause to rearm and regroup before overwhelming Kyiv's troops. "A pause on the Ukrainian battlefield will not mean a pause in the war," Zelenskyy said during a visit to Estonia. "A pause would play into (Russia's) hands," he said. "It might crush us afterward."

Greece's center-right government will soon submit legislation allowing same-sex civil marriages, despite reservations among its own lawmakers and the country's influential Orthodox Church, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said yesterday. But he stressed that the proposed law would not extend the right to future parenthood through surrogate mothers to same-sex couples — an issue that has divided Greek society. It would, however, recognize the status of existing offspring.

AP PHOTO



Vatican yesterday unveiled plans for a yearlong restoration of the monumental baldacchino, or canopy, over the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica, pledging to complete the work on Bernini's masterpiece before Pope Francis' big 2025 Jubilee. The price tag? About 700,000 euros. The restoration and conservation project marks the first comprehensive work on the 10-story tall baldacchino in 250 years.

EU Microsoft said yesterday that it is upgrading its cloud computing service to let customers store all personal data within the European Union instead of having it flow to the U.S. where national privacy laws don't exist. Cloud computing companies have been moving to localize data storage and processing amid tightening requirements in the 27-nation European Union, which has strict data privacy laws.

DAVOS REPORT

**AI-POWERED
MISINFORMATION IS
THE WORLD'S BIGGEST
SHORT-TERM THREAT**

KELVIN CHAN, LONDON

FALSE and misleading information supercharged with cutting-edge artificial intelligence that threatens to erode democracy and polarize society is the top immediate risk to the global economy, the World Economic Forum said in a report this week.

In its latest Global Risks Report, the organization also said an array of environmental risks pose the biggest threats in the longer term. The report was released ahead of the annual elite gathering of CEOs and world leaders in the Swiss ski resort town of Davos and is based on a survey of nearly 1,500 experts, industry leaders and policymakers.

The report listed misinformation and disinformation as the most severe risk over the next two years, highlighting how rapid advances in technology also are creating new problems or making existing ones worse.

The authors worry that the boom in generative AI chatbots like ChatGPT means that creating sophisticated synthetic content that can be used to manipulate groups of people won't be limited any longer to those with specialized skills.

AI is set to be a hot topic next week at the Davos meetings, which are expected to be attended by tech company bosses including OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and AI industry players like Meta's chief AI scientist, Yann LeCun.

AI-powered misinformation and disinformation is emerging as a risk just as a billions of people in a slew of countries, including large economies like the United States, Britain, Indonesia, India, Mexico, and Pakistan, are set to head to the polls this year and next, the report said.

"You can leverage AI to do deepfakes and to really impact large groups, which really drives misinformation," said Carolina Klint, a risk management leader at Marsh, whose parent company Marsh McLennan co-authored the report with Zurich Insurance Group.

"Societies could become further polarized" as people find it harder to verify facts, she said. Fake information also could be used to fuel questions about the legitimacy of elected governments, "which means that democratic processes could be eroded, and it would also drive societal polarization even further," Klint said.

The rise of AI brings a

host of other risks, she said. It can empower "malicious actors" by making it easier to carry out cyberattacks, such as by automating phishing attempts or creating advanced malware.

With AI, "you don't need to be the sharpest tool in the shed to be a malicious actor," Klint said.

It can even poison data that is scraped off the internet to train other AI systems, which is "incredibly difficult to reverse" and could result in further embedding biases into AI models, she said.

The other big global concern for respondents of the risk survey centered around climate change.

Following disinformation and misinformation, extreme weather is the second-most-pressing short-term risk.

In the long term — defined as 10 years — extreme weather was described as the No. 1 threat, followed by four other environmental-related risks: critical change to Earth systems; biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse; and natural resource shortages.

"We could be pushed past that irreversible climate change tipping point" over the next decade as the Earth's systems undergo long-term changes, Klint said. **MDT/AP**