



**MUSICAL CHAIRS: VONG SIN MAN AND LAI KA CHON WERE SWORN IN AS DIRECTOR AND DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE STATISTICS BUREAU**

**PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE DEMANDS CLARIFICATION ON ‘RADIO EQUIPMENT’**

**MOU TURBULENT STAY AT ROMA IS OVER**



AP PHOTO



**Japan** Airlines has named Mitsuko Tottori as its first woman president following a collision between one of its planes and a coast guard aircraft during Japanese New Year holidays that left five dead. Tottori — currently senior managing executive officer of JAL and the first woman to climb the ranks from cabin attendant to the company's new head — vowed yesterday in a press conference to stick to her commitment to aviation safety and making it a priority.

AP PHOTO



**Thailand** An explosion at a fireworks factory killed at least 23 people yesterday, according to provincial officials. The death toll was announced by authorities with Suphan Buri province, where the blast occurred in mid-afternoon. The Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation said officials were working to secure the site and help affected people. The cause of the explosion is being investigated.

AP PHOTO



**US** Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated the need for a “pathway to a Palestinian state” during a talk yesterday at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in the Swiss ski resort of Davos, saying Israel would not “get genuine security absent that.” If Israel can be brought into the fold of the Middle East, Blinken said, the region would be coming together to isolate Iran, which he called “the biggest concern in terms of security,” as well as its proxies.

More on backpage

# PRICELESS BOARDWALK

Second phase of NAPE promenade without a cost estimation P3



ARTISTIC RENDERING

## CHINA POPULATION FALLS FOR SECOND STRAIGHT YEAR

P7



AP PHOTO

### MAN ARRESTED FOR ALLEGED STRING OF THEFTS OF ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

The police disclosed that a 39-year-old man had been arrested for stealing liquor at three local supermarkets located in three different districts. His first two attempts, which were successful and were of two bottles of MOP34,500 liquor, were ultimately uncovered by the staff who reported to the police. His final attempt was thwarted on-site but he managed to flee. The police discovered the suspect targeted unlocked shelves and later narrowed down the man as a suspect. He was apprehended on Jan. 10 on the street.

### GUIA TUNNEL TO BE SUSPENDED DURING THE SMALL HOURS ON JAN 22

Due to inspection requirements, the Guia Tunnel will be suspended to traffic from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m. on Jan. 22, the Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced yesterday in a statement. In consideration of suspension, the bureau recommended that drivers should utilize the reservoir passage or other roads to travel between the Northern and the Southern districts of the Peninsula. Bus routes Nos 5 and N2 will be detoured but there is no need to alter their stops during this time. The bus operators should be consulted for further information.

### IFTM ACADEMICS WIN 'HIGHLY COMMENDED PAPER AWARD'

Dr. Irene Cheng Chu Chan and Dr. Vicky Zhaoyu Chen from the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM) have been honored with the 2023 JHTM Highly Commended Paper Award by the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management (JHTM), the institute announced in a statement. The award-winning paper studied the impact of visual elements on social media marketing in catering businesses. Based on two studies conducted in the restaurant context, the scholars explored the strategic use of different visual elements in social media marketing to trigger viewers' interest, desire, and actions. The findings revealed that photographic contents should strike a balance among visual volume, variety, and dynamism to avoid presenting overloading information to viewers.

### KONG CHI TRIAL

# DEPUTY PROSECUTOR SENTENCED TO 17 YEARS IN PRISON

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Court of Second Instance (TSI) has sentenced Kong Chi to 17 years in prison. The ruling from the collective court was pronounced this week.

Kong was charged of accepting bribes and neglecting his duties to favor others, as well as possessing assets from unknown sources.

His sentence is the accumulated result of several counts of crimes related to bribery and other illegal acts. He was, however, acquitted of accusations related to the establishment and operation of a criminal organization.

The second defendant in this case, Chao Sao Ieng, a businessperson accused of aiding and abetting Kong in his criminal activities – in particular, hiding Kong's bribery and money laundering income, as well as receiving funds in Kong's name – was also sentenced to a total of 14 years in prison.

RENATO MARQUES



The third defendant, Ng Wai Chu, the spouse of Chao who was also accused of taking part in Kong's illegal dealings, was sentenced to a total of six years in prison.

The only defendant acquitted in the trial was lawyer Kuan Hoi Lon. Kuan was accused of distributing and selling evidence, such as exhibits and testimonies, for the benefit of suspects in their defense proceedings.

Among the accusations leveled against him, Kong was said

to have benefited from MOP14 million in assets of unclear origins, which are suspected to have come from illegal activities.

Leaving the court, Kong's lawyer, Lau Io Keong, stated that he respects the ruling and will analyze it, before "a decision is made about a possible appeal."

### ART

# 22nd Fringe Festival presenting 17 programs

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE 22nd Macao City Fringe Festival opened yesterday at the former Iec Long Firecracker Factory in Taipa.

The festival aims to contribute to the development of Macau as a "City of Performing Arts."

This edition of the Fringe Festival features 17 events over 50 sessions, which will be held in historic areas, neighborhoods, leisure areas, and tourist attractions.

The opening program, "25 Feet," is an immersive performance integrating dance and interactive experiences. It will be staged at the Black Box Theatre II of the Macau Cultural Centre from January 17 to January 19, and will start at 7:45 p.m.

Another event, "Goo-



bye, See You Soon" by Lei Sam I, shares real stories of pets and owners and invites viewers to explore the boundaries of interpersonal relationships through interactive experiences. It promises an enjoyable experience for all age groups.

For music enthusiasts, the event "A City of Visible Music" will feature several local musicians traveling through the Outdoor

Plaza of Ponte 16 Macau, the Roman Amphitheatre square of Macau Fisherman's Wharf, and the Broadway Food Street in a day, presenting live concerts and a flash mob radio station.

The exhibition "Art Exhibition for All" also began yesterday, followed by the launch of a range of programs throughout the community. This upholds the concept of "All around

the city, our stages, our patrons, our artists," while introducing audiences of all age groups to a wide range of art installations.

The exhibition is on from January 17 to January 28 at the former Iec Long Firecracker Factory and the Areia Preta Urban Park, providing a platform for local art groups to showcase their creative works in large circus tents around the exhibition.

The festival also features several outreach activities. In the narrative photography exhibition "Likewise," the public can bring along their pets and listen to the touching stories behind the pet-themed photographic works.

The "Roundtable Discussion: Dancing and Living with the Body Through the Years" will invite artists from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan

to share their creative ideas, processes, and experiences of working with elderly artists.

The "At Your Doorstep" exhibition will showcase the verses and lyrics featured in "Travelling at Your Doorstep," as well as paintings and images jointly created by gardeners and residents. It is hoped that these sessions will allow visitors to immerse themselves in dulcet music and bathe their souls in urban greenery.

Tickets for the 22nd Macao City Fringe Festival are now on sale through the Macau Ticketing Network, telephone, and online booking for both local and overseas visitors at macauticket.com.

Registration for the outreach activities can be made through the "Activity applications" of the Macao One Account.

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PHASE 2

# NAPE Promenade to include a dozen different leisure and sports areas

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE second phase of the South Shore Waterfront Green Promenade will include a dozen different leisure areas and sports facilities to cater for everyone, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said yesterday afternoon during the project presentation press conference.

The project that follows on from the so-called Kun Iam Promenade will be extended, passing the Macau Tower to the "Gate of Understanding" (Porta do Entendimento) and will include a leisure trail, a cycle track, a skate park and several fitness and outdoor exercise areas, as well as multifunction plazas and sports grounds dedicated to several sports activities.

Presenting the project, a representative of the company in charge of the preliminary design (C&V Estudio de Arquitectura, Lda), Architect Kam Fong Wa, noted that the project layout was to be divided into zones, each one with different functions.

"The main dynamic routes will involve a barrier-free waterfront leisure trail and cycle track extending across the whole area. The waterfront leisure trail will be at least 5 meters wide. The lanes of the cycle track running in opposite directions will be 1,300 meters long and 4 meters wide each, and the total length of one lap will be about 2,600 meters. Part of the cycle track will be elevated to maximize the land use in the leisure area and provide more shaded space," she said, adding that the whole area design adopts a micro-topographical design with undulating slopes to increase the green and shaded areas as well as to allow some buildings and facilities to be "incorporated" in the slopes creating a visually clean and open area.

She also said that a pedal kart circuit will also be built with a layout based on the Guia Circuit. A training area and a balance bike area are also included in the area dedicated to young children.

Fountains, scenic trails, grass areas, and fitness facilities of different levels (including those adapted to the elderly and people with limited mobility) are also planned.

## RELOCATION OF FACILITIES

The IAM explained that as the project will use the land resources in the coastal area, where currently already exist some sports grounds, these will be relocated



to the Eastern side of the project, located at the side of the Governador Nobre de Carvalho Bridge.

Planned for the area closer to the Macau Tower are leisure, multifunctional plazas, and open-space areas that, according to the design company, can host concerts and other events as well as also be used for the "burning of firecrackers" during festive seasons such as the Lunar New Year.

Kam also noted that the project could also host other activities that normally happen in that area such as the "Food Festival."

She also noted that there is a plan to coordinate with the existing areas and facilities of the Macau Tower to integrate and merge the whole space. This would create a consistent experience of the whole promenade to the Gate of Understanding.

The existing sports facilities, close to the Gate of Understanding, will also be integrated into this project as will the existing toilet facilities that are to be revamped.

The project also includes three commercial places to be used for food and beverage purposes as well as another three kiosks besides areas with vending machines and toilet facilities.

The project, currently in draft, is proposed to start construction before the end of this year with the construction time to last for approximately two years (until the end of 2026).

IAM said that the construction will start from the Eastern point (close to the bridge) to allow time

for the sports grounds (currently close to Macau Tower) to be relocated.

Questioned on the topic, the Head of the Department of Public Roads and Drainage of IAM, Ho Man Him, said that there is an idea "in the future" to continue to extend this promenade passing the Gate of Understanding and link it to Barra and Inner Harbour area.

He also said that the current

project is considering linking the Barra Transports Hub to facilitate the citizens' access.

## TRANSPORT REORGANIZATION

The project involves the use of part of the land currently occupied by the public bus companies for the parking and maintenance of the buses but Ho said that the area on the line is not "significant" and that the matter will be coordinated between the IAM and the

Transport Bureau to optimize the space and land resources.

The construction of the promenade will also create a new "temporary road" connecting to Avenida Dr. Sun Yat-Sen to facilitate public access to the area.

About 80 street car parking spaces and, an undisclosed number of motorcycle parking spaces, will also be built. A new bus stop will also be created to serve the promenade.

## SECOND PHASE PROMENADE WITHOUT A COST ESTIMATION

**T**HE draft project of the second phase of the South Shore Waterfront Green Promenade to link the area west of the Governador Nobre de Carvalho Bridge to the "Gate of Understanding" (Porta do Entendimento) has been presented yesterday by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM).

In the press conference, the IAM presented in full detail the project that aims to start construction at the end of this year but did not choose to disclose any projection of the estimated cost of the project.

To the many questions from the media on the topic, Ho Man Him, Head of the Department of Public Roads and Drainage of IAM, said, "since this is only a draft project that has no floor plans for the buildings nor for the many facilities, it is not possible to provide details of any budget or general costs."

The same official also refused to compare the project with the first phase of the Promenade (linking the Macau Science Center to the Statue of Kun Iam) as, "they are very different projects in size and in facilities to be included," adding, "our idea is to present the general project to the public first and collect opinions on it so we can perfect it before it is finalized. Only after that can

we have a clear picture of how much this project will cost."

He noted that this second phase spans about 60,000 square meters while the first phase was only 17,000 m<sup>2</sup>, adding that the equipment to be installed as well as the works to be developed are also very different.

"One thing is certain, I [assure] you that we will make a good use of the public money on the construction of this project," Ho said.

Also questioned on the topic, Ho said that the project has already received input from several public services and entities but will be also discussed among the civil society through the hearing of opinion from the Community Advisory Committees as well as several associations and groups, he said, noting that this is the only form of public consultation that is expected to happen and there will be no formal public consultation as adopted in other cases.

The Head of the Department of Public Roads and Drainage of IAM also noted that the IAM will be also open to hear the opinions of the general public and will organize some public sessions where these opinions and suggestions can be aired. **RM**



RADIO WAVES

# PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE DEMANDS CLARIFICATION ON 'RADIO EQUIPMENT'

ANTHONY LAM

**T**he parliamentary committee responsible for reviewing the Bill for the Radio Communication Legal Regime demands clearer stipulations on the relevant equipment, president Vong Hin Fai disclosed yesterday.

Vong held a press briefing af-

ter committee meeting on the Bill yesterday. Yesterday's meeting covered proposals related to the accreditation and sale licensing of the equipment, Vong said.

During the briefing, Vong disclosed that some committee members suggested the government make clearer description of radio communication equip-

ment in the text of the Bill.

The main concern of committee members is the broad scope of the equipment dealt with in the Bill. For example, cellphones are among equipment that transmit and receive data using radio frequency. Therefore, committee members wanted the government to clarify if cellphones wou-

ld be included in the jurisdiction of the future law – alongside installations with higher technical standards such as radio and TV signal transmitters – or if they would be excluded and thus governed only by laws concerning cellphone services.

Moreover, as the Bill proposes that such transmitting or receiving equipment must be approved by the authorities before being sold or used, the committee is concerned with the manner in which the approval procedures will be conducted, as well as whether such equipment can be sold online. Another question raised by the committee related to the regulations on wholesalers or retailers not registered in Macau.

Vong also disclosed that the committee wondered why the Bill has no reference whatsoever to the production, research and development of such equipment, and only the sale of such equipment is covered.

With the government aiming to develop new and sophisticated technology in Macau as part of its economic diversification strategies, the committee president said the probability of Macau developing such equipment in the future could not be ruled out.

The committee also discussed the exportation of expired equipment and the moral review of license applicants and equipment operators.

HEALTH

# GOV'T BREAST CANCER PILOT SCHEME DETECTS AT-RISK GROUP OF 600 PEOPLE

**A** pilot scheme targeting breast cancer detection that commenced in October last year has identified 599 people as being at a higher risk of developing the disease, Acting Director for Health Cheng Seng Ip has disclosed.

The data was released in response to a written inquiry by lawmaker Wong Kit Cheng.

During the first two months of the scheme, 3,925 people have participated in screening. The 15.3% identified as being more at risk have undergone additional X-ray screening.

The health official pledged that additional studies would be conducted, inviting more medical entities to participate in the screening scheme, following the success of the breast cancer detection pilot.

Currently, the five-year survival rate of breast cancer patients is 88.5%, the official added, describing the figure as "relatively good."

As for lung cancer, another pilot scheme, begun in 2019, has been targeting veteran smokers and those with a family history of lung cancer. As part of the scheme, patients have undergone low-dosage computed tomography (CT) scanning free-of-charge.

Among the first 100 test-takers in this scheme, two participants were diagnosed with lung cancer. The smoking cessation outpatient department at local health centers will continue their efforts in promoting these services, the official added.

Meanwhile, 53 blood pressure and weight gauging stations are in operation at local health centers, helping residents to detect any chronic diseases they may have early.

In addition, the health official pledged that efforts in education, promotion, examination and detection will be maintained, improving general health outcomes for Macau locals. **AL**

# Gov't inaugurates new leadership to statistics bureau

ANTHONY LAM

**T**he new director and deputy director of the government's Statistics and Census Services (DSEC) were inaugurated in the presence of their superintendent yesterday morning, the bureau announced in a statement.

Vong Sin Man and Lai Ka Chon were sworn in yesterday before Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong as director and deputy director of the bureau.

Vong holds a Bachelor's degree in management from the University of East Asia, the predecessor of the University of Macau, a Master in Economics from the Jinan University in Guangzhou and a Master in Management from the National Academy of Governance cum the Peking Uni-



versity. He has worked at the DSEC, the Office of the then Secretary for Economy and Finance, the Monetary Authority of Macau and the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute.

Meanwhile, Lai holds a Bachelor in Computing from the then Macau Polytechnic Institute and a Master in Software Engineering from the University of Macau. He

had worked at the then Economic Bureau before starting his career at the current bureau in December 2010.

Describing this year as the "opening year of Macau's economic diversification," Lei demands the DSEC to "continuously improve statistical services using scientific, objective and advanced methodologies that are geared to the development

trend of the economy."

In addition, the government also announced yesterday the extension of the directorship of Director of Culture Leong Wai Man and Cultural Development Fund Executive member Chan Ka Io at the Macao Orchestra Company, Ltd. The re-appointment will be effective for a year from Jan. 24.

The future of the re-

maining director, Hoi Kin Wa, had no reference in yesterday's Official Gazette. Hoi is part of the management of the Macao Youth Symphony Orchestra Association and has strong networks in the music circle in Guangdong.

As for the new Public Assets Supervision and Management Bureau that will be established on Feb. 1, the appointment of its leadership was also announced yesterday in the Official Gazette.

Sonia Chan, Secretary for Administration and Justice between December 2014 and December 2019, was appointed the director of the new bureau. Meanwhile, she will continue working as an advisor to Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng. She holds degrees in law from two mainland universities.

Lio Chi Hon, also with legal and investigation backgrounds, was appointed the deputy director of the new bureau. During Chan's appointment as secretary, Lio was an advisor at her office.

RENATO MARQUES



FINANCE

# Micro Connect sets 'market standard' for SME

ANTHONY LAM

**R**EGIONAL investment and financing firm Micro Connect has released a new set of protocols to introduce a new market standard for micro and small business financing, the firm announced this week in a statement.

Officially referred to as the Micro Connect (Macao) Financial Assets Exchange Co., Ltd Market Accept Protocol (MCEX MAP, herein as MAP), the set of protocols aims to provide a universal and convenient set of tools to guide market participants.

According to the firm, for investors, the MAP sets a standard to value of expected cash flows and their corresponding risks of every Daily Revenue Obligation (DRO) listed on MCEX. For



micro and small businesses, meanwhile, it sets an optimal revenue-sharing ratio and contract period to secure funding from investors.

"Given the novel nature of this new market, Micro Connect had to establish these standards for investors in its initial stage of development," the firm stated. "The launch of Micro Connect Leadership Fund is the first participant in the

market, a business development team to originate investment opportunities among micro and small businesses, and an exchange team to build and operate MCEX."

To further explain the new protocols, the firm used a hypothetical scenario. "For instance, MCEX has introduced a new metric called Price-to-Net Contract Payout Ratio.

Similar to the commonly used Price-to-Earnings Ratio (P/E Ratio) in traditional finance, this metric helps investors evaluate the market value of a DRO based on its expected future cash flows."

The firm added that, since the inauguration of the local investment and exchange market last August, the number of market participants has "[continued] to grow," so that it is entering "its market operator phase of development" and will become "a disinterested operator of the market that it has set up.

"With the release of the MAP [on Tuesday], we seek to develop a vibrant ecosystem with broad participation from a diverse set of global investors, micro and small businesses, and market intermediaries," the firm said.

LABOR

# DSAL AND WYNN TO LAUNCH 'CULINARY APPRENTICE TRAINING PLAN'

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and Wynn Macau will jointly launch the "Wynn Culinary Apprentice Plan," a program that provides professional training for Macau residents interested in dedicating themselves to the culinary field but who lack the necessary experience.

Registration for the Plan is ongoing and lasts until Jan. 24, offering a total of 12 job vacancies. Six vacancies are for apprentices of Oriental cuisine and another six are for apprentices of Western cuisine.

Applicants admitted to the plan will undergo a 12-month training program. They will obtain an occupational

safety card in the hotel and catering industry.

Upon completing their studies, trainees will be promoted to the position of junior cook, establishing a foundation upon which to develop the future of their professional culinary career.

Those interested in participating in the plan can register online at the DSAL website.

Once online registrations close, more details will be announced at a seminar on Jan. 29. Interviews will take place on the same day immediately after the seminar.

Applicants are advised to be attentive and keep their phones switched on, so as to receive notifications from Wynn.

AD

## ACCURATE, TIMELY & COMPETITIVE TRANSLATIONS

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RECOVERY

# China's economy expanded 5.2% last year, hitting the government's target

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

**C**HINA'S economy for the October-December quarter grew at a quicker rate, allowing the Chinese government to hit its target of about 5% annual growth for 2023 even though trade data and the economic recovery remain uneven.

Official data released yesterday showed that the Chinese economy grew 5.2% for 2023, surpassing the target of 'about 5%' that the government had set.

The growth for 2023 is likely helped by 2022's GDP of just 3% as China's economy slowed due to COVID-19 and nationwide lockdowns during the pandemic.

China is the second-biggest economy behind the U.S. and has been a key driver of global economic growth. Its economic slowdown has sparked concern of spillover effects to other economies that count China as

AP PHOTO



a key trading partner, such as South Korea and Thailand.

For the fourth quarter, China's gross domestic product also grew at 5.2% compared to the

same time last year. On a quarterly basis, the economy rose 1% in Q4, slowing from the expansion of 1.3% in the July-September quarter.

Officials from China's National Bureau of Statistics said that measures including "strengthened macro regulation, and redoubled efforts to expand domestic demand, optimize structure, boost confidence and prevent and defuse risks" had helped improve the momentum of recovery, supply and demand.

Industrial output, which measures activity in the manufacturing, mining and utilities

sectors, rose 4.6% in 2023 compared to a year earlier, while retail sales of consumer goods grew 7.2%.

Fixed-asset investment — spending on factory equipment, construction and other infrastructure projects to drive growth — grew 3% year on year in 2023.

However, indicators point to a largely uneven recovery for China. Trade data for December, released earlier this month, showed a slight growth in exports for a second straight month as well as a slight increase in imports. Consumer prices however fell for a third consecutive

month as deflationary pressures persisted.

Julian Evans-Pritchard from Capital Economics said China's "recovery clearly remains shaky."

"And while we still anticipate some near-term boost from policy easing, this is unlikely to prevent a renewed slowdown later this year," Evans-Pritchard wrote in a note, adding that it will be "a lot more challenging" for China to achieve the same pace of expansion in 2024.

Chinese premier Li Qiang said at the World Economic Forum on Tuesday that China had achieved its economic target without resorting to "massive stimulus."

He said that China had "good and solid fundamentals in its long-term development" and despite some setbacks, the positive trend for the economy will not change.

The ruling Communist Party has in the past decade deliberately sought to shift away from a reliance on government-led investment in massive infrastructure projects to one that is driven more by consumer demand as is typical of other major economies.

Slowing growth reflects that effort to attain a more sustainable path to affluence, but the disruptions from the pandemic and a crackdown on excessive borrowing by property developers have accentuated underlying weaknesses. **MDT/AP**

AD

**LECTURE**

**MEDIA MANAGEMENT TODAY**  
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AS ADDED VALUE

**MODERADOR**  
Paulo Barbosa  
journalist

**Venue: Creative Macau**  
Center for Creative Industries  
(Cultural Centre building)

**January 20**  
Saturday  
4 pm

**ORGANIZATION**

**PARTNERS**

## CORPORATE BITS

### Aaron Kwok 'Amazing Dream Live on Stage' again at Studio City

Melco introduces the second iteration of the Melco Residency Concert Series, featuring Aaron Kwok, with the first series attracting thousands from Asia.

The 2024 series, 'Amazing Dream Live on Stage,' created exclusively for Melco, commences in March at Studio City Event Center. Kwok and his team have crafted a new production, "surpassing" last year's in terms of audio-visual experience and performance innovation, a note from Melco Resorts & Entertainment says.

David Sisk, the company's COO, remarked on the series' success, noting its contribution to introducing residency concerts in Asia. He anticipates Kwok's return and the series' impact on Asian music fans.

Kwok's collaboration with Melco has been significant, bringing residency concerts to Asia. The show features advanced lighting, stage technologies, and three-dimensional effects, creating a moving cast-



le on stage. Each concert segment offers distinct stage designs and choreography.

Kwok expressed "excitement about his return to Studio City," highlighting the series' fan reception last year. The 2024 series "promi-

ses new choreography and innovations, continuing to engage fans from all over Asia."

Melco Style members receive a 20% booking discount from January 19-23. The Melco Residency Concert Series begins on March 9, with tickets available from January 24.

DEMOGRAPHICS

# Population falls for second straight year, births drop after end of one-child policy

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

**C**HINA'S population fell by 2 million people in 2023 in its second straight annual decrease, as births dropped for the seventh straight year and deaths jumped following the end of COVID-19 restrictions, the government yesterday.

The number of deaths rose by 690,000 to 11.1 million, more than double the previous year's increase. Demographers said the rise was driven by the aging of the population and the widespread COVID-19 outbreaks that started in December 2022 and continued into February of last year.

The total population stood at 1.4 billion, the statistics bureau said. China, long the most populated country in the world, dropped into second place behind India in 2023, according to U.N. estimates.

The falling births reflect a decline in the fertility rate that is a long-term economic and societal challenge for China. Women are having fewer babies despite government incentives and the easing of its one-child policy in recent years to allow up to three children.

The lower fertility rate, together with people living longer because of better health care, means China is slowly growing older, something that could slow economic growth over time and challenge the government's finances and its ability to provide for a larger elderly population with fewer workers.

AP PHOTO



Experts expect the population decline to continue for decades, even if the fertility rate rebounds.

Demographer Zuo Xuejin, former executive vice president of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, estimated that the proportion of the population that is 65 or older could double to more than 30% by 2050.

The government issued guidelines earlier this week on developing the "silver" economy and enhancing the well-being of older people. They included expanding geriatric hospital and nursing care, encouraging the development of clothing, food and other products suitable for older people, cracking down on scams that target the elderly and making it easier to operate a TV.

The number of births fell by 540,000, or 5.6%, which was smaller than the double-digit percent drops the previous three

years. The 9 million babies born in 2023 were less than half the total in 2016. All the figures are estimates based on surveys and do not include Hong Kong and Macau. China conducts a full census every 10 years.

China, which once sought to control population growth with its one-child policy, is now facing the opposite problem. The government has sought to encourage births since gradually easing the policy over 2014 to 2016 to allow a second child and then a third child in 2021, but with little success.

Many people are delaying marriage or choosing not to have children. Even those who do often have only one child because of the high cost of educating children in cities in a highly competitive academic environment. The population of women of child-bearing age has also fallen.

Local governments are offering incentives for new children. A municipality in China's Inner Mongolia region has started offering payments of 2,000 yuan (\$280) for a second child and 5,000 yuan (\$700) for a third, as well as requiring that employers give an extra 60 and 90 days of paid maternity leave for the second and third child respectively, according to an online report by state-owned China National Radio.

President Xi Jinping told the new leadership of the All-China Women's Federation last October that it is necessary to strengthen the guidance of young people's views on marriage, parenthood and family and promote policies that support parenthood and cope with the aging of the population, according to a report on a government website.

"We must tell good stories about family customs, guide wo-

men to play a unique role in promoting the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation ... and create a new culture of family civilization," he was quoted as saying.

The working-age population, defined as those between 16 and 59 years old, fell to 61% of the total population, continuing a gradual decline. The proportion of those aged 60 and older ticked up to 21%. The official retirement age in China is 60 years old for men and 50 or 55 for women.

It is not clear how many people died from COVID-19 because of the sudden end to China's "zero-COVID" restrictions in December 2022. The government has reported about 80,000 COVID-related deaths from early December to mid-February but experts believe the total was much higher. Studies have estimated deaths could have reached 1.4 million or 1.9 million.

The drop in population is expected to be less this year, because of the waning effects of the pandemic and the fact that the year of the dragon, which begins in February, is considered an auspicious year to have children, an expert said at a forum earlier this week, according to the English-language state-owned China Daily newspaper.

But Yuan Xin, a professor at Nankai University and vice-president of the China Population Association, added that "the downward trend in China's total population is bound to be long-term and become an inherent characteristic." MDT/AP

LABOR

# China starts publishing youth jobless data again, with a new method

**C**HINA published youth unemployment data yesterday for the first time since the jobless rate hit a record high in June last year, using a new method that showed an apparent improvement.

China announced a 14.9% jobless rate for people between 16 and 24 in December, using the new method, which excludes students. The statistics bureau stopped publishing the politically sensitive figure last year, after it reached

21.3% in June.

It came as the National Bureau of Statistics announced that China's economy hit growth targets in 2023, following the end of the country's years of pandemic-era isolation.

The change in methodology came after youth unemployment surged following an economic slowdown in 2023. Regulatory crackdowns on sectors like technology and education, which typically employed a younger workfor-

ce, also made jobs harder to find.

"Calculating the unemployment rate by age group that does not include school students will more accurately reflect the employment and unemployment situation of young people entering society," the statistics bureau said in a statement, adding that students should focus on their studies instead of finding jobs.

It said that the 16 to 24-year-old population

includes some 62 million school students, over 60% of people that age.

Excluding school students from the jobless rate will allow authorities to provide youths with "more precise employment services, and formulate more effective and targeted employment policies," the bureau said.

The bureau also published an unemployment rate for 25 to 29-year-olds for the first time, to reflect the employment situation

AP PHOTO



of university graduates. That jobless rate, which also excludes students, stood at 6.1% in December.

China's overall urban unemployment rate stood at 5.1% in December, inching up slightly from 5.0% for the months of Septem-

ber through November.

China is under pressure to boost job creation and bolster employment, with official estimates that the number of university graduates will hit a record high of 11.79 million this year. MDT/AP

GBA AND FORUM MACAO

# CAPITALIZE ON THE SUPPORT FROM THE MACAU SAR AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT: BRUM

INTERVIEW

**T**HE Greater Bay Area (GBA) in China and the Portuguese Speaking Countries (PSCs) present contrasting yet intriguing economic landscapes.

The GBA, comprising cities like Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Macau and Hong Kong, is known for its robust economic growth, technological innovation, and significant contribution to China's overall GDP.

The region is a hub for high-tech industries, financial services, and has a high per capita GDP, reflecting its advanced economic development.

In contrast, the PSCs, including Brazil, Portugal, Angola, Mozambique and Timor, offer a diverse economic picture.

Brazil, the largest among them, has a strong agricultural sector, significant mineral wealth, and a developing industrial base. Portugal, a member of the European Union, boasts a high standard of living and a well-developed service sector. Angola and Mozambique, still recovering from periods of conflict, have economies primarily based on natural resources, with oil and diamonds in Angola and natural gas in Mozambique.

The disparities are evident in key economic indicators. The GBA's GDP per capita significantly surpasses that of most PSCs, indicating a higher standard of living and economic development. Additionally, the GBA's focus on technology and innovation-driven industries contrasts with the resource-based economies of some PSCs.

However, the PSCs offer immense potential, with large, young populations, emerging markets, and rich natural resources. Their economic growth, although slower compared to the GBA, has been steady, with coun-



An AI-generated artistic illustration that visually represents the connection between the Portuguese Speaking Countries and the Greater Bay Area in China. The image symbolizes the economic and cultural ties between these regions through a combination of symbolic elements

tries like Brazil and Portugal showing resilience and adaptability in the face of global economic challenges.

As the Forum Macao recently marked its 20th anniversary, we sou-

ght the opinion of a former official of the institution which aims to promote the cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries on its future role in Macau's in-

tegration with the Greater Bay Area.

A veteran economist with extensive managerial experience in government and in public and private companies, and former deputy secretary-general,

Rodrigo Brum emphasizes the economic potential of the GBA, noting its significant contribution to China's GDP.

"The economic power of the GBA is immense, representing about 12% of China's GDP in just 1% of its total area," he said in the interview.

This statistic underscores the economic density and potential of the GBA, making it an attractive destination for international business, especially for PSCs.

In his frequent public interventions, Brum reflects on the historical significance of Macau as a bridge between China and the Portuguese-speaking world: "Macau has historically been a gateway to the outside world, especially for the Lusophone countries."

This role is further amplified within the context of the GBA, where Macau's strategic location and cultural ties play a pivotal role.

Brum also discusses the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for PSCs in leveraging the GBA's potential.

He acknowledges the disparity in company sizes, noting, "the main challenge is the relatively small size

## GBA ECONOMIC STATS

City	Population (millions)	GDP (billion USD)	GDP per capita (USD)
Shenzhen	12.53	363.33	28,500
Hong Kong	7.48	361.97	48,577
Guangzhou	14.5	342.88	23,250
Foshan	7.66	149.04	19,200
Dongguan	8.34	124.19	14,850
Huizhou	4.78	61.55	12,750
Macau	0.67	54.70	82,784
Zhongshan	3.26	54.49	16,650
Zhuhai	1.77	43.73	23,850
Jiangmen	4.56	43.50	9,450
Zhaoqing	4.12	33.03	7,950

OFFICIAL DATA AS OF 2023

## PSCs ECONOMIC STATS

Country	Population (millions)	GDP (billion USD)	GDP per capita (USD)
Brazil	213.30	1,444.00	6,770
Portugal	10.30	237.00	23,010
Angola	31.80	91.00	2,863
Mozambique	30.40	14.70	483
Equatorial Guinea	1.40	10.10	7,214
Cape Verde	0.55	1.98	3,600
East Timor	1.30	1.80	1,385
Guinea-Bissau	1.90	1.40	737
Sao Tome and Principe	0.22	0.42	1,909

OFFICIAL DATA AS OF 2023

ON THE AGENDA

**D**URING the recent New Year holiday, Zeng Bin experienced a unique takeout service in the southern Chinese metropolis of Shenzhen, with his order delivered to him by an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

The entire process of placing the order and receiving two cups of tea-based beverages took only about 15 minutes, while the actual flight time amounted to less than five minutes.

The flight route used for this tea delivery is one of 23 drone delivery routes established by the internet platform Meituan in Shenzhen.

This experience offers a glimpse of the role of low-altitude logistics in urban life in Shenzhen.

According to statistics from the Shenzhen Municipal Bureau of Transportation, the city had opened 77 new UAV routes and completed over 600,000 UAV cargo transport flights in 2023.

As an important driving force of new economic momentum, the low-altitude economy is viewed by many as a key strategic emerging industry.

Shenzhen's low-altitude economy industry, leveraging research and market application advantages, has taken off in recent times,

## Drones: Low-altitude economy takes off in

injecting powerful impetus into high-quality economic development.

Over the years, Shenzhen has released several industry plans and regulations, formulating rules and operational standards for civilian UAV management, and providing strong policy and legal support for the development of its low-altitude economy.

At the end of 2023, Shenzhen issued 20 specific support measures for the low-altitude economy, including ones nurturing en-

terprises in the supply chain, encouraging technological innovation, expanding applications for low-altitude flights, and improving the industrial supporting environment.

In addition to new low-altitude services supported by drones, Shenzhen's traditional general aviation industry has consistently maintained a leading position nationwide.

During recent years, helicopter flights between Shenzhen airport and the central business district in Futian,

known as "air taxis," have been operational, with over 20,000 flights recorded in 2023.

Latest statistics show that Shenzhen is home to more than 1,500 enterprises in the low-altitude economy industry chain. DJI, an industry leader in civilian-use drones, was first established in Shenzhen and now holds a global market share of over 70 percent.

Shenzhen's soaring low-altitude economy has also helped to further facilitate logistics and the flow of peo-

ple in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

"Located in the core of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Shenzhen is economically active and has a strong market demand," said an official of the Shenzhen Municipal Bureau of Transportation. "As low-altitude infrastructure continues to improve and economies of scale expand, the market size for urban commuting is expected to significantly increase."



of companies from PSCs compared to their Chinese counterparts.”

However, he also sees this as an opportunity for PSCs to focus on niche markets within the GBA and for GBA and other Chinese companies to interact with local companies from each of the PSCs, as experts of each market.

Brum also touches upon the role of the Forum Macao in fostering this relationship.

He sees the Forum as a significant platform that has facilitated the growth of trade and investment between Macau and PSCs. In his view, the Forum has been instrumental in building these bridges but insists that “more proactive steps are needed for future growth.”

The economic diversification of Macau is another critical aspect highlighted by Brum. He suggests moving beyond the gaming industry and exploring other sectors.

“This diversification is seen as crucial for Macau to fully exploit its role within the GBA and as a liaison with PSCs,” he remarked.

Brum's vision extends to the broader strategic importance of the relationship between Macau, the GBA, and PSCs.

He asserts that “we must not miss the opportunity to capitalize on the support from the Macau SAR and central government in Beijing.”

This statement reflects his belief in the potential of this relationship to foster significant economic and cultural exchanges.

In the interview, Rodrigo Brum paints a vivid picture of the multifaceted relationship between Macau, the GBA, and Portuguese-speaking countries.

His insights emphasize the economic potential, historical significance, and strategic importance of this relationship. By acknowledging the challenges and emphasizing the opportunities, Brum provides a roadmap for leveraging this unique geopolitical and economic landscape.

His views underscore the necessity for strategic alignment, economic diversification, and proactive engagement “to maximize the benefits of this dynamic tripartite relationship.”

#### WORK IN PROGRESS

### NOTES ON ACADEMIC RESEARCH

#### “Bayspeak: Narrating China's Greater Bay Area”

Chris Meulbroek, Jamie Peck & Jun Zhang  
Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 53:1 (2023)

China's Greater Bay Area (GBA) initiative is the latest and most ambitious attempt to “regionalise” the development process in the Pearl River Delta, promising to accelerate political-economic integration via an innovation-intensive model of growth. Drawing on the techniques of critical discourse analysis, this article presents a deconstruction of the GBA's emergent spatial imaginary – “bayspeak” – and the rescaled mode of governance that it portends. By way of an interrogation of texts and contexts relating to the GBA initiative, it is suggested that the plan should be taken seriously, if not literally, in its projection of an encompassing and assimilative, if somewhat intransitive, mode of governance. An effort to constitute a mega-region “for itself,” rather than simply “in itself,” the GBA programme has opened a new space (and scale) for co-ordinated development and growth-coalition building under the auspices of the decentralised party-state. As an emergent discourse, bayspeak can be read as hyperbolic, aspirational and symbolic, but as the benign and developmentalist face of the Communist Party line in this economically important but politically stressed region, it may yet prove to be significant. **FROM THE ABSTRACT**

#### “Analyzing the impact of sustainable economic development from the policy text network: Based on the practice of China's bay area policy”

Huijie Zhou, Shangjia Yu, Pengyue Wu  
PLOS ONE (2023)

In order to break through the surface analysis of the content structure of policy texts, an in-depth discussion of the linkage between regional policy makers and objectives is helpful to analyze the formation mechanism of policy effects. Through social network analysis and multi-index analysis, this study takes the Qianwan New Area of Ningbo and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as representatives to explore the policy framework for the sustainable development of manufacturing industry in the two bay areas respectively. Through the construction of government department cooperation network, policy keyword co-occurrence network, department keyword correlation network, and the analysis of network density, network centrality, structural holes, and cohesive subgroups, it is found that the impact results show great differences, which is related to the network structure of manufacturing policy text. **FROM THE ABSTRACT**

#### EXPLAINER

### GBA IN CHINA'S

#### DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The 5-year and 10-year plans of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee outline the country's medium-term and long-term development strategies. These plans serve as comprehensive blueprints for economic, social, and technological advancement, providing a roadmap for achieving China's goals and ambitions. The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) is an integral part of these plans, aligning with the CPC's strategic vision in various ways.

#### INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The CPC's plans emphasize the importance of innovation-driven development, aiming to transition China's economy from being labor-intensive to knowledge-intensive and technology-driven. The GBA is positioned as a hub for innovation and high-tech industries. The plans call for the GBA to serve as a leading example of China's shift towards a more advanced and sophisticated economic structure. By fostering collaboration between Hong Kong, Macau, and the cities of Guangdong Province, the GBA is expected to drive innovation, research, and development, furthering China's technological capabilities.

#### FINANCIAL REFORM AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

The CPC's plans also highlight the goal of enhancing China's financial sector and promoting its integration into the global economy. The GBA is seen as a platform for financial reform, including the facilitation of cross-border investment, the development of offshore renminbi markets, and the promotion of international trade and financial services. Hong Kong, with its well-established financial infrastructure, and Macau, with its strategic location and potential for tourism and leisure, play significant roles in advancing these objectives.

#### URBANIZATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The plans stress the importance of sustainable urbanization and infrastructure development. The GBA is expected to develop modern, integrated urban clusters with efficient transportation networks, advanced communication infrastructure, and ecological sustainability. This aligns with the GBA's ambition to create interconnected cities that offer high-quality living standards and business environments, attracting talent and investment.

#### CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND INTEGRATION

Cultural exchange and integration are also emphasized in the CPC's plans. The GBA's unique composition of cities with diverse historical and cultural backgrounds provides an opportunity to enhance cultural cooperation and mutual understanding. This aligns with the broader goal of strengthening China's soft power and increasing its global influence.

#### INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND OPENNESS

The CPC's plans emphasize China's commitment to openness and collaboration with the international community. The GBA is positioned as a region that embraces internationalization, drawing on the strengths of its constituent cities to engage in global partnerships, trade, and investment. This openness is expected to boost economic growth and enhance China's position in the world economy. The 5-year and 10-year plans of the CPC Central Committee recognize the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as a crucial strategic initiative aligned with China's broader development objectives. The GBA's emphasis on innovation, economic growth, financial reform, urbanization, cultural exchange, and international collaboration reflects the CPC's vision “for a prosperous and globally influential China.” As a result, the GBA's development is deeply intertwined with the country's long-term strategic direction.

#### BRIEFS

### BAY AREAS OF SAN FRANCISCO AND CHINA WILL COME TOGETHER IN HONG KONG

Hong Kong will host the inaugural “China-California Bay-to-Bay Climate Forum” in 2024, aimed at fostering policy and research collaboration on climate issues between the San Francisco Bay Area and China's Greater Bay Area. This event, announced in the presence of California Governor Gavin Newsom and spearheaded by Professor Peng Gong of the University of Hong Kong, is seen as a significant step towards building bridges amidst strained geopolitical circumstances. The forum will serve as an annual platform to advance mutual understanding and joint efforts against climate change, leveraging the technological strengths of the two renowned bay areas, the HK SAR government said.

### HONG KONG-DONGGUAN COOPERATION ENHANCED

Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee emphasized the need for increased collaboration between Hong Kong and Dongguan, particularly in the areas of technology and innovation. This initiative aims to leverage the complementary strengths of the two cities, with Dongguan's expertise in hi-tech manufacturing and Hong Kong's role as a global connector. The close ties between these cities are further demonstrated by the presence of over 8,000 Hong Kong-based enterprises in Dongguan, HK media has reported.

### GUANGDONG TRADE HITS RECORD HIGH IN 2023

Guangdong's import and export volume hit a record RMB8.3 trillion in 2023, a 0.3% increase from the previous year, comprising 19.9% of China's total foreign trade. Growth was noted in trades with Belt and Road countries (1% increase to RMB3.04 trillion) and with Latin America and Africa (7.5% and 3.9% increases, respectively). Exports in mechanical, electrical products, and agricultural produce rose by 0.9% and 13.3%. Top exports included electric vehicles, lithium batteries, and solar cells, with a combined 33.7% increase. The province saw a record 130,000 foreign trade enterprises, 80% being private, contributing RMB5.04 trillion. GBA's foreign trade reached RMB7.95 trillion, 19% of the national total.

## China's Shenzhen



Currently, Shenzhen is accelerating the construction of infrastructure and supporting facilities for its low-altitude economy.

By 2025, Shenzhen plans

to deploy more than 600 low-altitude drone launch and landing platforms and operate over 220 urban drone routes. The city also plans to nurture more than 1,700

enterprises in the low-altitude economy industrial chain, and aims to achieve a low-altitude economy output of over 100 billion yuan. **MDT/XINHUA**



Military parade in Pyongyang to mark the 70th anniversary of the armistice in the 1950-53 Korean War, last year

**ANALYSIS**

# NORTH KOREA'S REJECTION OF THE SOUTH IS BOTH A SHOCK, AND INEVITABLE

**KIM TONG-HYUNG & JIWON SONG, SEOUL**

**E**VEN for a nation that has perfected the provocative, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's declaration that he would abandon the existential goal of reconciling with rival South Korea was a shock. But a closer look shows it's the almost inevitable culmination of years of building tension.

World powers will now be closely watching to see how one of Kim's biggest foreign policy declarations since he took power in 2011 plays out as he works to gain leverage in a region that holds both promise and danger for his small, impoverished, nuclear-armed nation.

The bombshell came at this week's rubber-stamp parliament, where Kim called for rewriting North Korea's constitution to eliminate the idea of a peaceful unification between the war-divided countries and to cement the South as an "invariable principal enemy."

It's the clearest sign yet of how far inter-Korean relations have fallen since February 2019, when Kim's nuclear diplomacy with former U.S. President Donald Trump imploded in Hanoi, Vietnam. The animosity that followed that highly public setback has been accompanied by an accelerated, and unprecedented, expansion of Kim's nuclear arsenal and by repeated threats of nuclear war against Washington and Seoul.

Kim, who during Monday's Supreme People's Assembly meeting described South Korea as "top-

-class stooges" of America, may be attempting to diminish South Korea's regional power while moving toward direct U.S.-North Korean nuclear talks.

Kim's new approach to the South comes as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and strengthen his footing regionally. He is playing off deepening U.S. tensions with Moscow and Beijing over Russia's war in Ukraine and China's assertive foreign policy.

North Korea's recent efforts to boost ties with Russia and China and join a united front against Washington in what Kim calls a "new Cold War" were highlighted by his September visit to Russia for a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

North Korea has been recalibrating its regional approach since the collapse of the 2019 Hanoi summit, said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"But now, with advanced nuclear and missile capabilities and the support of Russia and China, Kim feels confident enough to make these changes, which amount to his most consequential proclamations on external affairs since taking power in North Korea," Panda said.

North Korea no longer sees Seoul as a useful middleman to extract concessions from Washington. Instead, its rival is now seen as an obstacle to the North's efforts to carve out a more assertive presence in global affairs, said Hong Min, an analyst at South Korea's Institute for National Unification.

Pyongyang has viciously criti-

cized conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, who since taking office in 2022 has expanded military cooperation with Washington and Tokyo while seeking stronger U.S. assurances that it would swiftly and decisively use its nuclear capabilities to defend its ally in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack.

In eliminating the idea of a shared sense of statehood between the Koreans, Kim could be reinforcing North Korea's older approach of ignoring South Korea and attempting direct dealings with Washington. The old reasoning in Pyongyang, according to Hong, was that the South wasn't a direct party to the armistice that ended the bloodshed of the 1950-53 Korean War. That ceasefire was signed between the U.S.-led U.N. Command, North Korea and China, which sent troops to fight for the North.

Declaring the South as a permanent adversary, not as a potential partner for reconciliation, could also be aimed at improving the credibility of Kim's escalatory nuclear doctrine, which authorizes the military to launch preemptive nuclear attacks against adversaries if the leadership is under threat, Hong said.

An intensifying campaign to eliminate South Korean cultural influences and to reinforce the North's separate identity may be aimed at strengthening the Kim family's dynastic rule.

At the assembly, Kim ordered his country to remove past symbols of inter-Korean reconciliation, including a cross-border

railway section and a unification monument in Pyongyang he described as an "eyesore," and to "completely eliminate such concepts as 'reunification,' 'reconciliation' and 'fellow countrymen' from the national history of our republic."

"North Korea is aiming to destroy the illusions of unification, inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation that remain in the minds of its people," said Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Seoul's Kyungnam University's Institute for Far Eastern Studies.

It's the reverse of Kim's approach in 2018, when he initiated diplomacy with South Korea's former liberal President Moon Jae-in, and later used Seoul as a bridge to engage with Trump, part of an ambitious effort to leverage his nukes for badly needed economic benefits.

After the failure in Hanoi, North Korea halted all cooperation with the South, and blew up an empty inter-Korean liaison office in 2020 to display its displeasure toward Seoul.

In recent months Kim has used Russia's war on Ukraine as a distraction to dial up weapons tests to a record pace. The alignment between North Korea and Russia has raised worries about arms cooperation, in which the North apparently provides Russia with artillery shells and missiles to help prolong its warfighting capabilities, possibly in exchange for economic and military assistance.

Both Moscow and Pyongyang have denied U.S. and South Korean accusations of North Korean

arms transfers to Russia.

"Russia is in need of North Korean weapons, and that has naturally boosted the North's munitions industry and injected some vitality into its economy, and in return, North Korea (likely) receives energy, food and technology assistance," said Koh Yu-hwan, a scholar at Seoul's Dongguk University and former president of the Institute of National Unification.

Kim's long-term focus is to force Washington into accepting the idea of North Korea as a nuclear power, and he may be intent on driving up tensions in a U.S. election year with a view to eventual talks with whoever wins the November election, according to Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha University.

North Korea for years has mastered the art of manufacturing tensions with weapons demonstrations and threats before eventually offering negotiations aimed at extracting concessions.

Yoon's government also faces crucial parliamentary elections in April.

While some analysts argue that Kim may have made a strategic decision to wage war with the South, others downplay the possibility.

"The risks of an inter-Korean clash cannot be ruled out, but North Korea may choose to test South Korea's thresholds below the threshold of all-out conflict," Panda said. "Political moments in both South Korea and the United States also make this an appealing approach for Kim." **MDT/AP**

WAR GAMES

# US, South Korea and Japan conduct naval drills in a show of strength against North Korea

**T**HE United States, South Korea and Japan conducted perhaps their biggest-ever combined naval exercises in a show of strength against nuclear-armed North Korea, South Korea's military said yesterday. The three allies' senior diplomats were to meet in Seoul to discuss the worsening standoff with Pyongyang.

The training in waters off South Korea's Jeju island, which involved an American aircraft carrier, was aimed at sharpening the countries' combined deterrence and response capabilities against North Korean nuclear, missile and underwater threats, and also training for preventing illicit maritime transports of weapons of mass destruction, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. It didn't specify whether the training reflected concerns about North Korea's alleged arms transfers to Russia to help that country's war in Ukraine.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been on a provocative run of weapons testing and threats that raised regional tensions to their highest point in years.

On Monday at Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament, Kim declared that North Korea would abandon its long-standing commitment to a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of North's constitution

to eliminate the idea of a shared statehood between the war-divided countries. He said South Koreans were "top-class stooges" of America who were obsessed with confrontation, and repeated a threat that the North would annihilate the South with its nukes if provoked.

Kim's speech came a day after the North conducted its first ballistic test of 2024, which state media described as a new solid-fuel, intermediate-range missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead, reflecting its push to advance its lineup of weapons targeting U.S. military bases in Guam and Japan.

In response to the North's heightened testing activity, the United States and its Asian allies have been expanding their combined military exercises. Kim condemns the demonstrations as invasion rehearsals, and the drills increasingly feature major U.S. military assets, including aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and nuclear-capable submarines.

Kim has also been strengthening his regional footing by boosting the visibility of his ties with Russia and China — two neighbors that are also locked on confrontations with the United States — as he attempts to break out of isolation and join a united front against Washington.

North Korean Foreign

Minister Choe Son Hui traveled to Moscow, where she met Tuesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin for talks on improving bilateral relations amid growing international concern about alleged arms cooperation between the countries.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the trilateral naval drills — a three-day program that concluded yesterday — involved nine warships, including U.S. aircraft carrier Carl Vinson and Aegis destroyers from South Korea and Japan. The drills usually involve around five vessels. South Korea's military did not immediately confirm media assessments that the exercise was countries' largest trilateral naval drill.

In Seoul, South Korean nuclear envoy Kim Gunn met with Japanese counterpart Hiroyuki Namazu ahead of a trilateral meeting planned for today with U.S. President Joe Biden's deputy special representative for North Korea, Jung Pak, to coordinate their response to the North. Kim and Namazu discussed the North Korean leader's latest comments toward the South and the North's recent military actions, including Sunday's missile test and its recent artillery firings near a disputed sea boundary with the South, Seoul's Foreign Ministry said. **MDT/AP**



China's Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian speaks to media at the embassy in Canberra

AUSTRALIA

# Chinese ambassador says support of Pacific nations with policing should not alarm Canberra

**C**HINA'S ambassador to Australia, Xiao Qian, sought to reassure that China's increased involvement in the Pacific, particularly in policing efforts, should not be a cause of alarm for Australia.

Xiao, speaking at his first news conference of the year in Canberra yesterday, maintained that Australia should not harbor anxiety about China's intentions in the region.

"Pacific Islands countries is an area where China and Australia can cooperate and can contribute together instead of asking them to choose between the two," Xiao said. "What China has been doing is to help them to for their social stability, economic development and for bilateral trade relations."

Concerns of China's encroachment in the South Pacific had escalated last year when the Solomon Is-

lands signed a security pact with China, raising fears of a military buildup in the region.

"We're not seeking military strategies, we're not seeking military purposes, and there's no need for any so-called anxiety on the part of Australia," Xiao said.

Addressing Nauru's decision on Tuesday to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, Xiao said it was a sovereign choice by Nauru and would not impact Australia's relations with the small island nation.

"The relation between China and Nauru is a reflection of the overwhelming, increasing consensus in the international community that in this world, there's only one China, and Taiwan is part of China."

Regarding Australia-China relations, Xiao acknowledged that ties had stabilized after Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to Bei-

jing in November, marking the first by an Australian leader in seven years and the lifting of trade blocks imposed in 2020 on a raft of Australian exports.

He expressed China's desire 'to continue the good momentum' in further improving the relationship, while also highlighting the need for collaboration in the defense sector.

"The defense relationship between our two countries is an area really we need to put more inputs and work harder on, Xiao said. "This is an area it's so important to the mutual trust and confidence between our two countries and two peoples. If you can have trust between two militaries, you do have real trust."

Xiao added that China had lodged a diplomatic protest with Australia over its congratulations to Taiwan over the election of a new leader. **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

AP PHOTO



FRANCE

# Macron announces missiles and bombs for Ukraine, suggests he could work with Trump

SYLVIE CORBET  
& JOHN LEICESTER, PARIS

**F**RENCH President Emmanuel Macron announced plans to deliver more long-range cruise missiles as well as bombs to Ukraine and suggested that he'd find ways to work with Donald Trump in the event that he wins another presidency.

"I take the leaders that the people give me," the French leader said, adding that he is prepared to talk to "anyone" when France's interests are in play.

"I had to do this with President Trump throughout his term," Macron said. He noted that while they found common cause on some issues, they were divided on others, notably fighting climate change and taxes.

Macron's musings about Trump came at a wide-ranging news conference where he addressed an array of domestic and international issues for more than two hours.

He cautioned that regardless of who wins the White House, Europe should brace for the possibility that U.S. priorities may lie elsewhere.

"They share our values,

but it is a democracy that is also going through crisis," Macron said. He said its "first priority is itself" and that its second is China.

"So we Europeans must all be clear about this. This is also why I want a stronger Europe, that knows how to protect itself and isn't dependent on others," he said. "This is how I am preparing for the American election, regardless of its outcome."

Turning to Ukraine, Macron said he will travel there next month and finalize a security agreement with the government in Kyiv. He said a Russian victory would undermine the international rules-based order and make life "impossible" for Russia's neighbors.

"We cannot let Russia win and we must not do that," he said.

He said France plans to deliver about 40 long-range missiles and "several hundred bombs that our Ukrainian friends are waiting for." They will come on top of previous French deliveries of artillery, light tanks and other military hardware, training for Ukrainian troops, and French efforts to boost Ukrainian production and purchases of weaponry.

Much of Macron's prime-time news conference focused on domestic issues. He laid out broad plans to strengthen and better prepare France for global crises, saying the country has "all the aces to succeed."

The event was Macron's latest effort to reinvigorate his presidency after bruising domestic battles, notably about France's retirement age and how to better control immigration, and riots last year that swept hundreds of cities, towns and villages after the fatal police shooting of a teenager.

In a year when France will be in the global spotlight as host of the Summer Olympics in Paris, Macron seeks a fresh start in 2024. Last week, Macron installed a new prime minister, France's youngest ever, and new ministers. Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, 34, and Cabinet members looked on, seated together to one side, as Macron held court in the presidential Elysee Palace yesterday [Macau time].

Of his new government, Macron said he expects it to show "daring, efficiency, action." Against a blue-white-and-red background, he took deep dives into daily life

issues, from health care costs and the time children spend on screens to schooling and how to boost France's birth rate.

Macron's second term as president is beset by his lack of a majority in parliament. He faces a struggle to remain relevant and not become a lame duck. The news conference was a bid to show that he still has ambition and plans, timed in the evening to reach a broad audience. He spoke often without notes.

Macron is also eyeing his legacy. Constitutionally barred from running for a third consecutive term in 2027, Macon faces the risk of being succeeded by one of his most tenacious political opponents: far-right leader Marine Le Pen.

Beaten by Macron in the presidential run-offs of both 2017 and 2022, Le Pen and her National Rally party have grown in strength during Macron's reign.

Macron was particularly animated when talking about Le Pen's camp, calling it "the party of lies."

He argued that a far-right victory in 2027 isn't written.

"A lot of things happen in three and half years," he said. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1972 RHODESIA'S FORMER LEADER ARRESTED



Two leading white campaigners for black majority rule in Rhodesia have been arrested.

The former Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, Garfield Todd, and his daughter, Judith, were seized after violence erupted over Anglo-Rhodesian plans for independence.

No reason was given for their arrests, but Mr Todd has a ranch in Shabani, which is recognised as a hotbed of nationalist activity. Last week, police shot dead a man and nine others were injured after 400 miners rioted.

The trouble began with the arrival on 11 January of members of the Pearce Commission, appointed by the British government to test public opinion to the settlement proposals.

The plans include a massive injection of British development aid and money for education, linked to more votes for black Rhodesians. There is also provision for black majority rule in the future, but most black Rhodesians want it now.

The Pearce Commission has been holding hearings around the country to explain the proposals and listen to public opinion.

A decision to abandon the hearings in the city of Gwelo because of the violence, sparked another big demonstration which police had to break up using tear gas.

On 18 January, Prime Minister Ian Smith retaliated against the demonstrators by ordering the arrests of Mr Todd and his daughter.

Mr Todd was ousted as Southern Rhodesia's prime minister by Mr Smith's right-wing Rhodesia Front party in 1962.

He had always supported the rights of the black majority but he has now become an outspoken critic of the increasingly repressive white regime.

Mr Todd and his daughter have also played a leading role in the anti-settlement campaign organised by the African National Council.

The council has been set up by black Rhodesians to seek political settlement through negotiation.

The couple are being held in separate jails.

Mr Todd said: "It's not very pleasant after having lived in Rhodesia 31 years and having tried to serve the country, to be placed in really what is a comfortable imprisonment without trial. I'm old-fashioned.

"I don't believe in imprisonment without trial."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Garfield Todd and his daughter were held until 22 February when they were released and placed under house arrest.

The African National Council - led by Bishop Muzorewa, an African nationalist - was set up in December 1971 as a rallying group for black Rhodesians opposed to the settlement.

Ian Smith consistently refused to meet openly round a negotiating table.

He clamped down on the organisation, banning membership cards and arresting branch leaders. But it continued to press for change, calling on the United Nations to impose sanctions against Ian Smith's regime.

It was not until 1976 that Ian Smith accepted the principle of majority rule.

Rhodesia gained its legal independence under President Canaan Banana in April 1980.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

## YOUR STARS

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Don't let your health suffer because of worry. Talk to someone you trust. Be careful; your ideas are good but make sure that you're realistic and start off on solid ground.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
You may have been too nice to a friend who just wanted to take advantage of you. You are ready to blow up and your stress level has gone into over drive.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
Your need to get away could lead you into greater debt. You might want to spend some time by yourself in order to decide exactly how you feel.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
You could be emotional if you didn't take care of problems with loved ones. You will reap the benefits if you put money into upgrading your residence.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
Don't give up what you have until you can be certain just what it is you're getting. You can make profitable investments if you purchase an art object for your home.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Attempt to face key issues with lovers or problems could escalate. Disappointments regarding partners will be subject to the way you react to their personal comments.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Work hard on improving your living quarters. You may be up for some changes in your home. Do your own thing without drawing attention to it.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
You can expect changes in your financial situation as well as in your status. You can make some money if you get involved in a conservative financial prospect that is presented to you.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Be careful not to hurt someone's feelings. Keep important information to yourself. This will not be the best day to sign deals or to take care of other people's financial matters.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Career changes may not be your choice right now, but in the long run they will be to your advantage. You can't help everyone. Emotionally, things may not run so smoothly.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
You should feel a little more stable about your position; however, don't be surprised if a job offer comes your way. Having your own business is a good idea.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
You will find their philosophies worth exploring. Travel for business will not only bring you valuable information but also profits as well. Trips should be your choice.

## The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



## SUDOKU

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

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

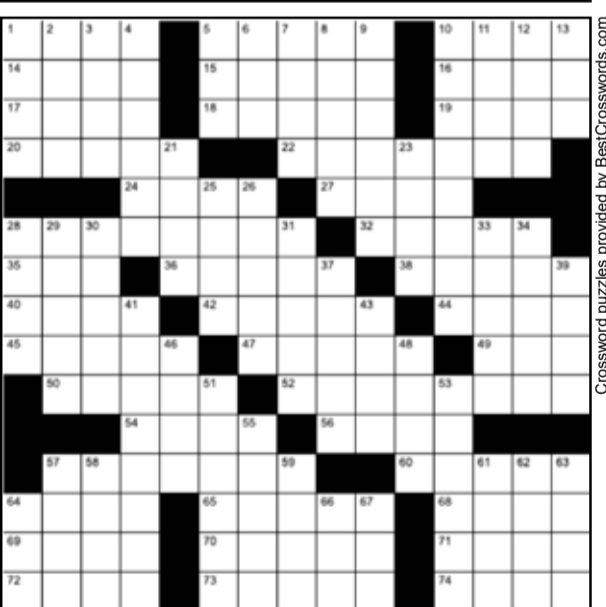
## WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-4	3	fine
Changchun	-15	-7	fine
Chengdu	7	14	overcast
Chongqing	11	13	rain
Fuzhou	12	25	fine
Guangzhou	15	25	cloudy
Guiyang	11	19	showers
Haikou	19	26	cloudy
Hangzhou	6	11	rain
Harbin	-23	-13	fine
Hefei	3	5	rain
Nanjing	6	7	rain
Shanghai	8	10	rain
Taipei	15	23	fine
Wuhan	3	5	rain
Hong Kong	21	22	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-8	-7	snow
Frankfurt	-7	1	snow
Paris	-4	2	cloudy
London	-3	3	cloudy
New York	-1	1	cloudy

## CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Boris Godunov, for one; 5- Turn over; 10- Composed; 14- Wings; 15- Hawkins of Dogpatch; 16- Olive genus; 17- Sportscaster Albert; 18- Checking out; 19- Capone foe; 20- Use a broom; 22- Angers; 24- Chemical used on trees; 27- Planetary revolution; 28- Announces formally; 32- Construct; 35- Feel bad about; 36- Gossipmonger; 38- Fiddlesticks!; 40- "Trinity" author; 42- Maker of Pong; 44- Beget; 45- It merged with Exxon; 47- City in Tuscany; 49- Vespa rider, perhaps; 50- Begin's co-Nobel; 52- Income; 54- School founded in 1440; 56- Pasternak heroine; 57- Duchy; 60- None of the above; 64- Painter of limp watches; 65- Above it all; 68- San \_\_\_\_ Italy; 69- Novelist Waugh; 70- Foot bones; 71- Alpo alternative; 72- Stink; 73- Go into; 74- Pottery material;

DOWN 1- Highland hats; 2- Deli side; 3- Bern's river; 4- Uncover; 5- Employ, utilise; 6- Remuneration; 7- Singer Adams; 8- Simpleton; 9- Extent; 10- Formal assembly; 11- Sheltered, nautically; 12- Not so much; 13- Barker and Bell; 21- Drama; 23- Over-50 org.; 25- Carpenter's measurement; 26- Leases; 28- Percussive instrument; 29- Continental cash; 30- Silk cotton; 31- Flight segment; 33- Jane Goodall subject; 34- Fortune-telling cards; 37- Staggering; 39- Marries; 41- Close friend; 43- Member of a great Peruvian people; 46- Overdue; 48- Dynamic beginning; 51- So far; 53- Medical; 55- Atari founder Bushnell; 57- Roy's "singin' pardner"; 58- Peter Fonda title role; 59- "Beetle Bailey" cartoonist Walker; 61- Get better; 62- Austen novel; 63- Cheerful; 64- \_\_\_\_ es Salaam; 66- Sugar suffix; 67- Cone maker;



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 22,000/mth 3 bed 1 CP

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AP PHOTO

## NATURE AND THE DIVINE

# WHAT ARE SACRED FORESTS?



A temple constructed by the Indigenous Toda tribe in the Nilgiris Hills of southern India

DEEPA BHARATH, KOTAGIRI

**S**ACRED forests and groves are primeval woodlands that different faith communities around the world have safeguarded for centuries as abodes of the spiritual or the divine.

Thousands of sacred forests have survived. They're the church forests in Ethiopia's highlands, hillside groves considered holy by Catholics in Italy, woodlands revered by Shinto practitioners in Japan and Indigenous people in Siberia, Australia, the Americas and India.

Sacred forests are also treasure troves of biodiversity and are often the last bastion for species of flora and fauna that have become rare or even extinct elsewhere in those regions.

Climate change, pollution and urbanization pose threats to these sacred spaces. Tended for generations by faithful caretakers, environmentalists and governments are now making a push to protect these areas as well.

## WHY ARE FORESTS SACRED?

In many parts of the world, small groves or larger forests have been preserved because the local people consider these spaces their connection to the divine.

Sacred forests share a number of commonalities. They are often in hilly areas where deities are said to reside. The trees, rivers, plants, animals, even the stones that inhabit the holy space are viewed as sacred as well. These woodlands may be sites that are linked to specific events, and sites that surround places of worship or ancestral shrines.

What can you do or not do in a sacred forest?

Many sacred forests have restrictions prohibiting activities and limiting access only to specific communities. Hunting, gathering, wood cutting, cultivation and other activities may be strictly prohibited in these spaces. In many sacred forests even breaking a twig or plucking a leaf or flower is unacceptable.

Selvi Nanji is a member of the Kurumba tribe that cares for Banagudi Shola, a sacred forest in Kota-

giri in the Nilgiris Hills of southern India. She said the worship spaces and temples in that woodland are often restricted to male members who perform the rituals and care for the shrines. Nanji, who now lives in Sweden, wrote a book titled "Devasolai," which means "sacred forest" in Kurumba.

In Banagudi forest, entering with footwear is prohibited near holy shrines. However, in some forests, people are permitted to collect fallen timber or fruit as well as honey, medicinal plants, and wood for cremation.

## HOW ARE INDIGENOUS RITUALS AND PRACTICES DIFFERENT?

In India, the Kurumbas, whose total population Nanji estimates as 2,000, are officially classified as Hindu. About 80% of India is Hindu. However, Nanji said Indigenous religious practices and rituals are different from those of Hindu traditions.

"Hindu rituals typically involve offering coconuts and bananas to the deities," she said. "But, in Indigenous traditions, we perform ri-

tuals with what is available in the forest. Resin from trees is used."

Plants are used to dress the deities instead of fabric, which is typically used in Hindu temples. In Banagudi Shola, sacred rituals are performed annually by the tribe's men to coincide with agricultural seasons. An animal, typically a goat, is sacrificed during the ritual, Nanji said. The Kurumba medicine people collect herbs, roots and tree bark from the forest, she said.

## ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SACRED FORESTS?

Yes. An example is Muttunad Mund near Kotagiri, a grassland that is sacred to the Toda tribe. Aradkuttan, an elder in the community, said this location is akin to the tribe's headquarters. The location is marked by a conical temple dedicated to the deity Moonbu, constructed with stone, cane and a special type of grass from the sacred grasslands. The annual temple ritual is a one-month affair featuring song, dance, rituals and buffalo, which are sacred to the tribe. Celebrants eat

a special meal during the festival — white rice mixed with buffalo buttermilk and butter.

M. Alwas, who heads the Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association in Kotagiri, a nonprofit that aims to help tribes in the region, said one of the main challenges is getting the younger generation involved.

"Each community has its own traditional knowledge," said Alwas, who belongs to the Toda tribe. "They have stories of why a forest or river or tree is important."

As interest in preserving faith traditions wanes, Alwas fears those stories and practices could be lost and with them, the value of these sacred spaces.

While some worry tourism would "commercialize" the forests, others like Nanji believe that ecotourism could be beneficial if done right. She said it might help outsiders understand the importance of sacred groves and boost job opportunities in the region.

"Spotlighting local food can also give traditional agriculture a much-needed shot in the arm," Nanji said. **MDT/AP**

FOOTBALL

# A trophy followed by tirades and defeats; Mourinho's turbulent stay at Roma is finished

ANDREW DAMPF, ROME

**I**T started with a big success. It descended into ugly outbursts and devastating defeats.

And now José Mourinho's turbulent tenure at Roma is finished.

Roma announced yesterday [Macau time] that the outspoken coach was leaving the club "with immediate effect" — two days after a 3-1 loss at AC Milan left the Giallorossi in ninth place in Serie A and at risk of missing the Champions League for a sixth straight season.

The club was also eliminated by Lazio in an Italian Cup derby last week.

Former Roma captain Daniele De Rossi, 40, was named as Mourinho's replacement, with a contract through to the end of the season.

Mourinho was in his third season at the club and his contract was due to expire in June. He led the Giallorossi to the UEFA Conference League title in his first



AP PHOTO

Mou... lah

season and Roma was a Europa League finalist last season.

But Mourinho was also given a series of bans for his protests and tirades against referees — which were clearly not appreciated by Roma's American owners.

Mourinho was suspended by

UEFA from four European games for verbally abusing the Europa League final referee in a stadium garage after Roma lost to Sevilla. He was also suspended for the game at Milan on Sunday due to protests.

"AS Roma can confirm that

José Mourinho and his coaching staff will leave the club with immediate effect," the club said in a statement.

"We would like to thank José on behalf of all of us at AS Roma for his passion and efforts since his arrival at the club," said owners Dan and Ryan Friedkin. "We will always have great memories of his tenure at Roma, but we believe that an immediate change is in the best interests of the club."

The 60-year-old Mourinho, who said last month that he wanted to extend his contract at Roma, could be headed to a club in Saudi Arabia or a national team position.

The Conference League title in 2022 marked Roma's first European trophy in more than six decades. It was also Mourinho's fifth European title.

Mourinho also won the 2003 UEFA Cup and 2004 Champions League with Porto; the 2010 Champions League with Inter Milan; and the 2017 Europa League with Manchester United —

making him the first manager to lead four different clubs to European titles. He also coached Chelsea and Real Madrid to numerous domestic trophies.

But Mourinho's defensive style is a struggle to watch and his expensive contract was a burden for Roma's finances. The Portuguese coach, though, played a key role in luring standout players like Paulo Dybala and Romelu Lukaku to join the Giallorossi — and a constantly soldout Stadio Olimpico for matches was attributed to his outsized personality.

De Rossi's appointment in a caretaker role won't slow speculation that the club wants to hire Antonio Conte to take over next season.

"We were aware of Daniele's unbreakable bond with the club, but his enthusiasm for accepting the position for the next few months convinced us even more of his ability to be a guide for the players, and a proud representative of the club's values," the Friedkins said. **MDT/AP**

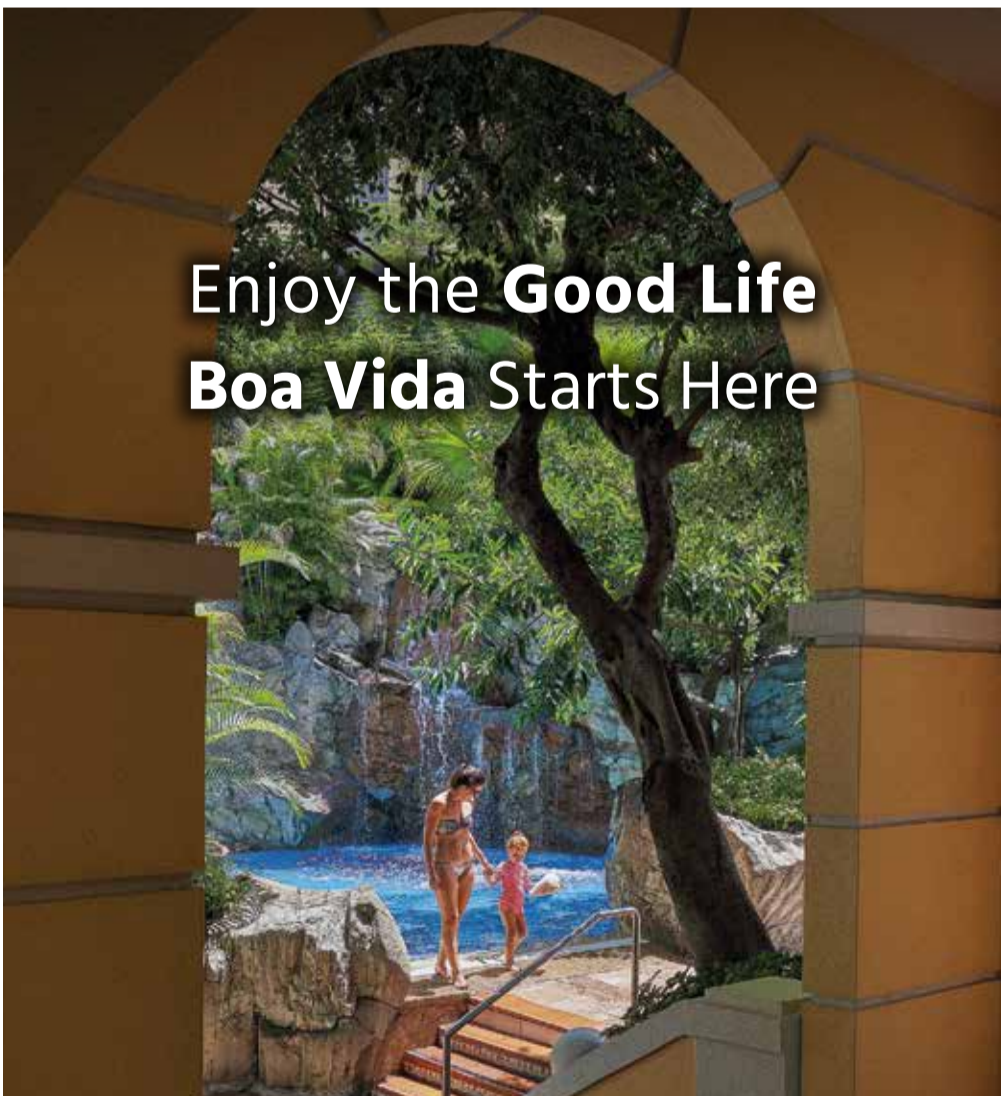
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OPINION

Multipolar World

Jorge Costa Oliveira



EXPORTS TO RUSSIA THROUGH THE BACK DOOR

Direct exports from China to Russia increased significantly after the beginning of the war in Ukraine (+64.2% since 2021, of which +46.9% in 2023). Turkey's exports followed the same path (even more so in percentage terms). The same happened with China's indirect exports to Russia, through Central Asia, which also grew significantly (probably for plausible deniability for questionable goods).

These exports facilitate Russia's shift to a war economy, providing it with civilian goods that allow Russia to stop producing them, affecting resources to the production of armaments. These increases in direct exports from China and Turkey compensate for the drop in direct Russian imports from Europe resulting from sanctions and export controls imposed by the EU.

Interestingly, although direct European exports to Russia have decreased, indirect exports have increased. Let's start with the Baltic countries, the most strenuous defenders of unconditional support to Ukraine in the war initiated by the invasion from the Russian Federation. Latvia's exports in 2022 show a significant increase to former USSR countries – doubled to Kazakhstan, and tripled to Kyrgyzstan. This trend has increased – in [Nov] 2023, Latvia's exports of machinery and electrical equipment to Kyrgyzstan had increased by 3100% (!) compared to the pre-war period. In 2022, Lithuania's exports to Kazakhstan doubled compared to the previous year, and those to Kyrgyzstan increased 9x (!). In the case of Estonia, in addition to the same trend, there is the fact that a company of the prime minister's husband continued to do business with companies in Russia.

One might think that this is due to still existing connections between Baltic and Russian companies from other times and Russian-speaking populations in the Baltic countries. However, companies from the Czech Republic and Poland – both without Russian-speaking populations – also increased their sales to Kyrgyzstan exponentially (c. 1900% since the start of the war). There are exceptions (e.g., Finland). But in the main European economy – Germany – the picture is no different. In 2022, German exports to Kyrgyzstan increased sixfold (automobiles and their components increased by 5500% (!) compared to the pre-war period), doubled to Uzbekistan, and increased by 76% to Kazakhstan (the increase is >1000 million). This trend of German companies exporting to Russia via third countries (also Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey) continued in 2023.

In 2022, Central Asia's exports to Russia increased by 30%. Uzbekistan increased its exports to Russia by >50%, Kazakhstan by 25%, and Kyrgyzstan by 250%. In 2023, this trend is expected to have intensified. And this does not account for the "underground" exports.

Direct EU exports to Russia fell by -4000 million in March 2022. But EU exports to Central Asia increased by +1000 million/month since then. As long as the EU does not put an end to this new stepping stone path of European companies into the Russian market, no one will believe in its political commitment to Ukraine.

GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS SUSPENDS 'OLDEST DOG EVER' TITLE FOR PORTUGUESE CANINE

THE BUZZ

Guinness World Records says it has suspended the title of oldest dog ever that was held by a Portuguese dog that died last year. The publication said it was reviewing the title after some veterinarians questioned his age.

Bobi, a reportedly 31-year-old guard dog, lived on a farm in the village of Conqueiros in Portugal with its owner, Leonel Costa. He was proclaimed as the world's oldest living dog and oldest dog ever last February. He was said to have been born on May 11, 1992. He died last October.

"While our review is ongoing we have decided to temporarily pau-

se both the record titles for oldest dog living and ever just until all of our findings are in place," Guinness World Records told The Associated Press by email.

Bobi was a purebred Rafeiro do Alentejo, a breed that has an average life expectancy of about 10 to 14 years.

In an emailed statement, Costa defended the title, saying Guinness World Records had spent a year checking the record claim. He said he has earned no money from the record and hasn't heard from the publication about the latest allegations.

AP PHOTO



Premier Li Qiang arrives at Dublin Airport in Dublin

PREMIER LI QIANG IS VISITING IRELAND FOR TALKS ON CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH EUROPE

SYLVIA HUI, LONDON

CHINESE Premier Li Qiang arrived in Ireland yesterday [Macau time] for talks with the Irish leader on China's relations with the European Union and other global and bilateral issues.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar will host a lunch and bilateral meeting with Li on Wednesday at Ireland's state guest house in Dublin.

"China is a very important political and economic power in the world and becoming bigger all the time in that sense. So it's important that we have good relations with China but also some questions we will need to talk about as well," Varadkar said ahead of the visit. He didn't elaborate on what "questions" he was referencing.

Li, a close confidant of Chinese President Xi Jinping, was appointed last March as the country's No. 2 leader and top economic official. A former party secretary for Shanghai, he enforced a strict

"zero-COVID" lockdown on Shanghai in 2022.

He made Europe the destination for his first trip abroad last summer, visiting Germany and France, Europe's leading economies, amid increasing concerns over Europe's economic dependence on China and tensions over Beijing's stance on the war in Ukraine.

At the time, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz rejected the idea of "decoupling" from China and instead called for "de-risking" — avoiding over-reliance on Chinese trade.

That approach was reiterated by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who said the EU cannot risk depending too heavily on trade with Beijing and needs to aim for a more "level playing field" and better access to the Chinese market.

This is the first time a senior Chinese leader has visited Ireland since Li's predecessor, late Li Ke-qiang, visited in 2015.

He arrived yesterday from the World Economic

Forum at Davos, Switzerland, where he pitched China as an investment opportunity despite its slowing economy. Li was the first senior Chinese official to attend the annual gathering since Xi took part in 2017.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said earlier that Li's visit to Switzerland and Ireland would "kick off the high-level exchanges between China and Europe in 2024."

Bilateral trade between Ireland and China has grown significantly in recent years, with China now Ireland's fourth largest trade partner and fifth largest export market.

Asia Matters, an Irish group focused on promoting business links with Asian countries, said one of the topics that could be on Wednesday's agenda is the resumption of Irish beef exports to China.

The exports were suspended in November after a case of atypical bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease, was discovered by Irish veterinary officials. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Germany Heavy snow and freezing rain hit parts of northern and central Europe yesterday, bringing transport to a halt in some Scandinavian regions and causing major disruption at airports in Frankfurt and Oslo. At Frankfurt Airport, Germany's busiest, freezing rain forced a halt to takeoffs as freezing rain persisted, German news agency dpa reported. The airport cited a danger of de-iced aircraft icing up again as they taxied toward the runway, and said it planned to halt landings as well in mid-afternoon.

Wales The Princess of Wales has been hospitalized for planned abdominal surgery and will remain at The London Clinic for up to two weeks, Kensington Palace said yesterday. The former Kate Middleton is expected to return to public duties after Easter, the palace said. "The Princess of Wales appreciates the interest this statement will generate," the palace said. "She hopes that the public will understand her desire that personal medical information remains private."

AP PHOTO



Belgium Customs seized 116 tons of cocaine in the port of Antwerp in 2023, setting a record for the second year in a row, Belgian authorities said yesterday. Demand for cocaine is growing rapidly across the EU, and governments blame the drug trade for outbreaks of violence in major port cities like Antwerp, Rotterdam in the Netherlands, and Marseille in France. The port of Antwerp has become the main gateway for Latin American cocaine cartels into the continent.

Kenya Doomsday cult leader Paul Mackenzie and 30 of his followers were presented in a Kenyan court in the coastal town of Malindi yesterday to face charges of murdering 191 children. Mackenzie and the other suspects did not enter pleas because High Court Judge Mugure Thande granted a request from prosecutors that they undergo mental assessments and return to court on Feb. 6.