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**BEIJING DOUBLES DOWN ON MOVES TO MEND ITS ECONOMY AND FEND OFF A FINANCIAL CRISIS**

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AP PHOTO



**Iran** said yesterday it successfully launched three satellites into space with a rocket that had multiple failures in the past, the latest for a program that the West says improves Tehran's ballistic missiles. The launch comes as heightened tensions grip the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, sparking fears of a regional conflict.

AP PHOTO



**US, Iraq** held a first session of formal talks this in Baghdad aimed at winding down the mission of a U.S.-led military coalition formed to fight the Islamic State group in Iraq. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said in a statement that he had sponsored "the commencement of the first round of bilateral dialogue between Iraq and the United States of America to end the mission of the Coalition in Iraq."

AP PHOTO



**Ukraine** Employees from a Ukrainian arms firm conspired with defense ministry officials to embezzle almost \$40 million earmarked to buy 100,000 mortar shells for the war with Russia, Ukraine's security service reported. The SBU said late Saturday that five people have been charged, with one person detained while trying to cross the Ukrainian border. If found guilty, they face up to 12 years in prison.

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### 35 OUT OF 600 RESIDENCY APPLICATIONS APPROVED

The Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) approved only 35 new temporary residency applications in 2023 out of 604 new applications, according to data provided by the office. 60% of approved applications are from the Education sector, and 17% from the Financial Services industry. Three applications from the Health and Social Welfare industry, two from Hotel and Dining and one from the Entertainment and Gaming sector were also approved. Last year, the IPIM handled 1015 temporary residency applications for "Investors, Managerial Personnel and Professionals with Special Qualifications". Among them, there were 386 renewal applications, and 25 applications for residency extensions from family dependents.

### INFLATION RATE AT 0.94% IN 2023

The inflation rate for 2023 was 0.94%, down 0.10 percentage points from 1.04% in 2022, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) showed. The Composite CPI for December grew by 1.42% year-on-year. The year-on-year growth in the average Composite CPI for 2023 stemmed from higher charges for eating out and package tours, increases in tuition fees and wages of domestic helpers, as well as dearer prices for clothing and gasoline. However, the growth was partially moderated by lower rentals for dwellings and reduced airfares.

### GOV'T EXPECTS ARRIVALS FROM ISLAMIC COUNTRIES TO INCREASE

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) and Macao travel trade delegation recently participated in a Halal related exhibition held in Hong Kong. According to the MGTO, the exhibition was aimed at enhancing knowledge and industry connections to expand the food and other offerings to cater for Islamic visitors from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and other destinations, as part of the work to attract more international visitors. The government expects visitor arrivals from Islamic majority countries to increase as Macau's international direct air links gradually expand. Last year, Indonesia and Malaysia ranked sixth and eighth place on Macau's top 10 visitor arrivals.

### CRIME

## ANOTHER LEAKAGE FIXING SCAM BUSTED

ANTHONY LAM

**T**WO men have been arrested for allegedly orchestrating fraudulent water leakage repair work to steal money, the Judiciary Police (PJ) has announced.

It was the second case after a similar case was uncovered on Jan. 17. In the previous case, two suspects were arrested.

The two people, surnamed Wang, 35 and Chen, 46, are both mainland residents and self-reported as workers.

During dusk hours on Jan. 24, police inspectors came across the two people transporting several barrels of liquid and sets of injectors using a trolley. Reminded of similar tools seized in water leakage repairing frauds, the inspectors followed and monitored them.

At 2 p.m. on the following day, inspectors saw the two enter a building in Taipa and left after a little more than an hour. The inspectors questioned the two, who admitted to having just conducted water leakage repair work.

The client told the police that



the service was bought through social media. The two quoted several to 10 thousand for the job but eventually the price rose to MOP31,000. When the client refused to pay, the two workers asked the client to contact their employers instead.

The client directly filed a report

with the police during the investigation.

The police later discovered that two other clients lost MOP38,000 to the duo. Meanwhile, the police were later told by professionals that the materials used were of low-quality and should be worth only a few hundred Chinese yuan.

### SUSPECT ACCUSED OF THREATENING TO KILL WIFE

In another case, a mainland man, 32, has been arrested by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) accused of threatening others and possessing prohibited weapons.

Self-reported as a businessperson, the suspect was accused of threatening to kill his wife, who is also from mainland China and is working in Macau as a waitress. The wife is in her thirties.

It was disclosed by the police that the husband had been harassing the wife through cell-phone messages. The case was reported to the police in the afternoon on Jan. 20 by the wife, saying that she was threatened by the husband who claimed that she would die if he visited Macau.

During further investigations, the police were told that the harassments had been happening for some time already. The cause was believed to be related to romantic issues.

At 7 p.m. on the same day, the police intercepted the suspect in the NAPE District and found him in possession of a folding knife measuring 16 cm long in total with a 7 cm-long blade. The suspect denies threatening his wife, according to the police.

### CONCERT

## Gov't says stadium tenant responsible for fixing pitch

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE concert organizer who rented the Macao Stadium is responsible for returning the grass pitch to its previous conditions, the Sports Bureau (ID) has said.

About a week ago, several entertainment companies used the Olympic Sport Stadium for two evening concerts of Korean boy band Seventeen's "Follow" tour, which was the final stop of the tour.

Besides "disturbing noisy and worrying quakes" reported by re-

sidents near the stadium during rehearsals and concerts, photos depicting a pitch of mushy turf and damaged grass went viral on social media. Comments subsequently questioned the situation.

In response to public criticisms, the ID assured in a statement that the venue tenants are responsible for repairing any stadium facilities damaged by or during the concerts. All costs will be borne by the tenants, it further assured.

All reconditioning work is expected to conclude by the end of Fe-

bruary, the ID said.

Other main users of the stadium have not been affected as prior arrangements were made, the ID emphasized, and all tenants are reminded of the importance of facility protections.

Following the concerts over a week ago, residents filed several complaints protesting the high volume of the music, the traffic congestion and the construction of the stage, among other aspects.

The most chaotic moments occurred after the concerts.

Fans exited the Sta-



dium in such numbers that they exceeded the capacity of the surrounding streets and roads.

Public transport also struggled to cope with the spike in demand.

However, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong has last week said that concerts carry an important economic benefit in the attraction of tourists.

She noted that while such events bring clear benefits, there is room to improve aspects such as traffic control, crowd flow, event size and performance schedules.

She hopes a balance can be found to minimize the events' impacts on residents' lives while attracting tourists to Macau, which is a government goal.

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# Ecology lobbyist opposes landfill off Coloane coast

ANTHONY LAM

A petition has been started by local environmental protection advocate Joe Chan against the government's proposal to put a landfill off the southern coast of Coloane.

The proposal was raised by the government as the existing landfills for construction waste have become full.

In the description of the online petition, the advocate predicts the landfill will damage marine

life, intensify water pollution, and risk the health of aquatic activities practitioners. More importantly, it will destroy the ecology of Indo-Pacific humpbacked dolphins, he said. The dolphin is a national Tier-1 key protected animal.

Chan also criticized the government for not having provided any scientific data to support the "unique necessity" of the project, and no environmental assessments were produced. The public consultation period is only over 50 days, which he believes is too short for

such an important issue.

Apart from opposing the project, he also suggests expanding the marine conservatory in that area.

When questioned by the press on the sidelines of an environmental event, Director for Environmental Protection Tam Wai Man said the landfill is needed because of constant development.

He was cited by local media All About Macau as saying that should Macau wants continuous development, land used for construction

waste will be inevitable. He made assurances that the landfill will eventually become an ecological island and will not have any commercial or industrial development.

Tam also said that, despite Macau being authorized to oversee 85 sqm. of marine territories, not all can be used for landfill because space is needed for water transport channels, among other uses.

With the landfill planned for a location 1 km off the coast south of Coloane, Tam argued that there is a dolphin conservation reserve 8 km from the proposal landfill, hinting that he believed the dolphins will stay there.

Further, he cited previous assessments as proof that the main habitat of the dolphin is near the southern tip of the runway of the local airport.

He added that environmental and other assessments are underway.

In response to Tam's comment, social media page Wildlife Diary of Macau criticized that fact that the only publicly available data on the dolphin's main habitat is scarcely available in the evaluation conducted for the expansion project of the airport. Some data was even concealed.

Citing a local marine official who wondered if dolphins would reside in a human-designated area in the sea, the page questioned why two officials from the same government hold conflicting views on the same topic.

The page added that the dolphins should have freedom instead of being confined to a human-designated district.

## ANTI-ALLERGY MEDICINE RECALLED

Betamin Tablets 100's, a type of anti-allergy medicine produced by Meyer Pharmaceuticals Ltd. HK., with batch number 102206-1, has been recalled by the manufacturer due to a failed regular stability test. The medicine is a blend of steroid and antihistamine often used for nasal allergies, sinusitis, and conjunctivitis symptoms. The local government has notified community pharmacies to suspend the sale of the affected batch and for the importer to recall them. Residents who possess a unit of the affected batch should contact the point of sale where they have obtained the medicine for advice.

## OUTER HARBOUR CHANNELS TO BE SUSPENDED

In order to make way for the construction of the fourth Macau-Taipa bridge as well as ensure the safety of all, ferry services at the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal will be halted from 8 p.m., Jan. 31 to noon, Feb. 1. According to the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA), ferry services preceding or following the suspension may be cancelled or adjusted according to the situation. Those who have purchased ferry tickets at the Terminal should contact service providers for details on further arrangements.

## OPERATION RIGHTS OF TWO NEW LRT LINES ASSIGNED TO NAMESAKE COMPANY

The government has assigned the rights of operation of the Seac Pai Van and Hengqin lines of the LRT to the LRT Company, a completely government-owned company, the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) has announced. The price is MOP6.8 million for nine months, from Jan. 1 to Sep. 30 this year. The government did not explain why the commencement date was retrospective or why the tender will only last for nine months. However, the tender for the current operation rights of the LRT Taipa line will conclude at end-2024. Hong Kong's MTR Corp is operating the Taipa Line.

CNY

# Airline ramps up flights for Hong Kong, Macau as China braces for travel rush

LYNZY VALLES

FLAG carrier Air China has ramped up its route capacity and services during the Jan. 26 to March 5 travel rush for Spring Festival.

The national carrier plans to operate 67,691 domestic flights during that period, with a daily average of 1,693, representing a 32% increase over 2019 and a 40.6% surge compared to 2023, as cited in a China Daily report.

Capacity has also been enhanced for Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, as well as Southeast Asia, with a year-on-year increase of 650% for routes such as Beijing-Phuket and Wuhan-Macau.

In the international and

regional markets, a total of 111 routes are planned, averaging 187 flights per day.

Last week, the Macau International Airport (MIA) management announced that during the upcoming Lunar New Year period, the airport is set to witness 13 special charter flights, including seven to mainland Chinese destinations, three to Taipei, and three to Bangkok, Cam Ranh and Phnom Penh.

Moreover, it expects passenger volume and flight movements to increase by more than 20% year-over-year in 2024.

The Macao Government Tourism Office has projected that Macau would see a daily average of 120,000 visitors in the city during the



Chinese New Year holidays that start on Feb. 10.

China officially ushered in its largest annual population migration on Friday, 15 days ahead of the Spring Festival, or the Lunar New Year, with record-breaking

journey numbers expected.

An estimated nine billion passenger trips are likely to be made during the 2024 travel rush period, according to the country's transport ministry.

Of the total, 7.2 billion trips or about 80% will be made by self-driving, while 1.8 billion trips will be made via railways, highways, waterways, and civil aviation, the ministry said.

LABOR STATS

# 2023 UNEMPLOYMENT RATE SLIGHTLY DOWN AMID RECOVERY

LYNZY VALLES

**T**HE general unemployment rate and the unemployment rate of local residents in 2023 decreased by 1.0 and 1.4 percentage points year-on-year to 2.7% and 3.4% respectively, following the gradual resumption of social and economic activities.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows that median monthly employment earnings of the employed population and the employed residents were MOP17,500 and MOP20,000 respectively, up by MOP2,500 and MOP1,000 year-on-year.

The city's economy has gradually recovered in 2023 following the reopening of borders in January, after being closed for nearly three years due to the pandemic.

The strict Covid-19 rules had staggered economic growth, causing an increase in the unemployment rate.

Lawmakers have increasingly called on the government – amid the pandemic – to create more



jobs in suitable industries to hire local residents, highlighting the need to improve the success rate of job-matching sessions and re-

viewing the Labour Relations Law to improve policies on payments in arrears.

Amid the recovery, in the four-

th quarter of 2023, the general unemployment rate (2.3%) and the unemployment rate of local residents (2.9%) dropped by 0.1

and 0.2 percentage points respectively from the third quarter.

Data shows that total employment rose by 1,800 quarter-on-quarter while the number of employed residents decreased by 700.

Analyzed by industry, employment in Hotels, Restaurants & Similar Activities (49,000) and the Education sector (20,900) both increased by 2,100, while employment in Gaming & Junket Activities (67,400) fell by 3,600.

Median monthly employment earnings of the employed went down by MOP400 quarter-on-quarter to MOP17,600, while earnings of the employed residents stayed the same at MOP20,000.

Fitch Ratings has anticipated growth of up to 65% in Macau's economy in 2023, driven by sustained recovery in the gaming and tourism sector.

Also, Macau has the highest growth rate projection for 2023 and 2024 among advanced economies listed by the IMF World Economic Outlook (WEO).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) report said Macau was expected to grow 74.4% last year and at a slower rate of 27.2% in 2024, with the leading growth rate among advanced economies in Asia including Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong.

AD

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TECH

# Microsoft Teams outage blocks access, limits features for some users

DAVID HAMILTON

**M**ICROSOFT Teams experienced an outage on Friday that blocked access for some and led to what Microsoft calls “multiple issues” for many users.

The issue began around 11 a.m. EST and grew rapidly in scope, according to outage tracker DownDetector. Users complained of an inability to access the service, delays in sending and receiving messages, and issues displaying graphics.

Microsoft said in messages on X, the social network formerly known as Twitter, that it identified “a networking issue impacting a portion of the Teams service” and had moved some services to backup systems. At roughly 1:30 p.m. EST, the company reported that the backup transition was complete for Europe, Africa and the Middle East and that its tracking systems were showing improvements.

The company said backup switchovers for North and South America were ongoing. Outage reports on DownDetector fell to almost half their peak level as of 3 p.m. EST but subsequently leveled off, indicating continued issues.

Teams is a messaging and video-conferencing app with over 320 million monthly average users as of September 2023.

X users based in the U.S. continued to complain about Teams service issues, with several sarcastically thanking Microsoft for fixing the problem quickly in regions where the workday is already



over. In a subsequent tweet, Microsoft acknowledged that its backup switchover “did not provide immediate relief to all end users in North and South America regions” but said its other attempts at mitigation aimed to “reduce customer impact as quickly as possible.”

Microsoft’s public tweets on the subject have pointed to additional detail available in a document posted in an administrative dashboard for Microsoft 365 software. When asked about that document, a Microsoft spokesperson at the public relations firm WE Communications said the company’s X posts were the only information it would share on the subject.

But Microsoft offered a somewhat bleaker outlook to its customers in that document, which was obtained by The Associated Press. The document detailed roughly a dozen different issues

caused by the outage, including inability to log into the service, missing or delayed messages, and inability to access or view images, video, audio recordings and other media. In an update at 4:26 p.m. EST, the company said its efforts to route around problems had led to issues with backend parts of its system that effectively “throttled” data traffic.

At 5:02 p.m. EST, Microsoft also acknowledged that “many customers remain impacted by this issue” but said the company is seeing “a reduction in errors and an increase in (service) availability.” The company has also said was working to address specific failures of Teams functions in parallel with its broader network efforts.

According to DownDetector, reported issues with Teams continued to decline and were close to normal levels as of 7:45 p.m. EST. **MDT/AP**

## WORLD'S LARGEST CRUISE SHIP HAS 20 DECKS, 7 POOLS AND WOULD COVER ALMOST 4 CITY BLOCKS

**T**HE world's largest cruise ship — the size of almost four city blocks — is set to begin its maiden voyage Saturday as it leaves from the Port of Miami.

Royal Caribbean's Icon of the Seas runs nearly 1,200 feet from bow to stern.

The ship, which is leaving South Florida for its first seven-day island-hopping voyage through the tropics, was officially christened Tuesday with help from soccer legend Lionel Messi and his Inter Miami teammates.

“Icon of the Seas is the culmination of more than 50 years of dreaming, innovating and living our mission — to deliver the world's best vacation experiences responsibly,” Royal Caribbean Group President and CEO Jason Liberty said earlier this week. “She is the ultimate multigenerational family vacation, forever changing the status quo in family travel and fulfilling vacation dreams for all ages on board.”

The ship sets sail as Royal Caribbean's cruises are having a moment online. Since

December, the company's 9-month “Ultimate World Cruise” has captivated — and confused — a following of avid watchers on social media.

Millions are following the journey through the eyes of the passengers, as they live and post their lives aboard a vessel they'll be on for nearly a year. If it sounds like a reality show, that's exactly what some watchers have turned it into.

When the Icon of the Seas was first revealed in October 2022, the ship spurred the single largest booking day and the highest volume booking week in Royal Caribbean's then 53-year history, according to the cruise line.

The Icon of the Seas is divided into eight neighborhoods across 20 decks. The ship includes six waterslides, seven swimming pools, an ice skating rink, a theater and more than 40 restaurants, bars and lounges. The ship can carry up to 7,600 passengers at maximum capacity, along with 2,350 crew members. **MDT/AP**

## CORPORATE BITS

### Melco awarded five diamonds from Black Pearl Restaurant Guide



Melco Resorts & Entertainment has been awarded a total of five diamonds from Black Pearl Restaurant Guide 2024.

The honor goes to Melco's French fine dining restaurant, Alain Ducasse at Morpheus, alongside the com-

pany's signature Chinese restaurants Jade Dragon and Yi.

Alain Ducasse at Morpheus has, this year, been honored with one diamond in its Black Pearl Restaurant Guide debut.

Cantonese fine-dining res-

taurant Jade Dragon at City of Dreams attained three diamonds, marking its fifth consecutive year of achieving the guide's coveted distinction and maintaining its status as Macau's one and only three diamond Chinese restaurant.

Meanwhile, contemporary Chinese restaurant Yi at Morpheus, City of Dreams was honored with one diamond, marking its fifth year of achieving this accolade.

David Sisk, Melco's COO of Macau Resorts, said, “We are proud to have one more of our signature restaurants joining the prestigious Guide this year, as a reflection of our continuous efforts in enhancing the overall dining experience for guests.”

### Wynn restaurants rank on Black Pearl Restaurant Guide



Two signature restaurants at Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace Cotai ranked on the 2024 Black Pearl Restaurant Guide.

The Chinese restaurant Golden Flower at Wynn Ma-

cau and SW Steakhouse at Wynn Palace both received the “One-Diamond Restaurant” awards.

Golden Flower, the Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star Restaurant at Wynn Ma-

cau, is helmed by Executive Chef Henry Zhang, who prepares official Chinese cuisine in a modern way. Steeped in history and rich in cultural heritage, each one of his dishes beautifully complement the elegant ambience of Golden Flower. SW Steakhouse at Wynn Palace — Macau's classic American steakhouse and Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star Restaurant — was awarded the One-Diamond honor from the Black Pearl Restaurant Guide for a third consecutive year.

Published by Meituan, the Black Pearl Restaurant Guide is a leading e-commerce platform for dining in China.

# Beijing doubles down on moves to mend its economy and fend off a financial crisis

ELAINE KURTENBACH,  
BANGKOK

**C**HINA'S leaders launched a barrage of new policies last week to prop up languishing financial markets and rekindle growth in the world's second-largest economy.

The moves to support lending and spending with billions of dollars of fresh cash gathered pace when the central bank cut bank reserve requirements and issued new rules to encourage banks to lend more to property companies.

A collapse in China's real estate market has been one of the key factors hindering the country's recovery from the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. What's at stake: stable financial markets and a major driver of global economic growth.

## HOW IS THE CHINESE ECONOMY DOING?

The Chinese economy grew at a 5.2% annual pace in 2023, exceeding the government's target, and many indicators including factory output and retail sales show signs of improvement. But most economists are forecasting a slowdown this year and next that will drag on global growth. Meanwhile, Chinese stock markets have swooned since late 2023, deepening losses that amount to trillions of dollars over the past several years. A real estate downturn, job losses and other trials of the COVID-19 pandemic have left consumers



cautious about spending. That threatens to become what some economists say could be a deflationary spiral as prices for housing and other goods fall, discouraging investment that would create jobs and spur a stronger recovery.

## WHY ARE CHINA'S LEADERS ACTING NOW?

The weakening economy and crackdowns on the technology industry, along with disruptions during the pandemic and trade tensions with the United States, have left foreign investors wary about the business outlook in China. Premier Li Qiang chaired a meeting of the State Council, or Cabinet, this week where he said more has to be done to "stabilize the market and boost confidence."

Last week, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, he sought to sell investment in China as "not a risk, but an opportunity."

A vital priority is ensuring growth is fast enough to generate ample jobs for young workers as they leave school. The rate of unemployment among young Chinese surged in 2023 to a record of over 21%. It's fallen since to about 15% but still remains perilously high, adding to the urgency to get growth back on track.

## WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING?

The central bank will cut the ratio of reserves it holds on behalf of banks by 0.5 percentage points as of Feb. 5. People's Bank of Chi-

na Gov. Pan Gongsheng said that would free up an extra 1 trillion yuan (\$140 billion) in funds. The PBOC also reduced the interest rate banks charge each other and issued new rules meant to expand access to commercial bank loans for property developers. Until the year's end, real estate companies will be allowed to use bank loans pledged against commercial properties such as offices and shopping malls to repay their other loans and bonds. Earlier, regulators cut mortgage rates and lifted curbs on property buying. After share prices tumbled, state-owned institutional investors reportedly were ordered to buy shares.

## WHY IS THE PROPERTY CRISIS SUCH A BIG PROBLEM?

Dozens of developers defaulted on their debts after the government cracked down on excessive borrowing in the industry several years ago. The largest, China Evergrande, is still trying to resolve more than \$300 billion in debts and a Hong Kong court is due to hold a hearing on its restructuring plans next week.

It's unclear what impact the new policies might have on the overall crisis gripping the property market. Land sales have long been a major revenue source for local governments that also are now heavily in debt. At the same time, stalled construction of new homes has hit contractors and suppliers of construction materials and home furnishings. That has wiped out untold numbers of jobs,

rippling through the economy. Sales of new homes and home prices have been falling, discouraging consumers from spending since Chinese families tend to have much of their wealth tied up in property. The industry as a whole accounts for more than a quarter of business activity in China.

## HOW WILL THE MEASURES TAKEN SO FAR AFFECT ORDINARY FOLKS?

As China's rapid rise as an economic superpower loses momentum, foreign investors and consumers are watching for signs that Beijing has a clear game plan for navigating the economy through an era of slower growth.

The moves to put more money into the economy and encourage bank lending might not go far enough, many analysts said. The cut in required bank reserves frees up more credit, but "it doesn't tackle the root issue; hence you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a report. Economists tend to concur that longer-term reforms, such as creating a better social safety net to enable families to spend rather than stashing their rainy day savings in banks, are needed to sustain strong growth. Too much of the nation's wealth still goes into construction of infrastructure such as roads and railways, and uncertainty over policies has discouraged investment in small, private businesses that create the most jobs. **MDT/AP**

## DIRE STRAIT

# Beijing steps up military pressure on Taiwan after the US and China announce talks



This combination of photos shows U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, left, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi

**C**HINA sent more than 30 warplanes and a group of navy ships toward Taiwan, the island's defense ministry said Saturday.

The military pressure comes on the heels of an announcement that senior American and Chinese representatives were expected to meet in the Thai capital as the two countries seek to cool tensions.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army sent 33 aircraft, including SU-30 fighters, and six navy vessels around Taiwan, between 6 a.m. Friday to 6 a.m. Saturday. Of these, 13 warplanes

crossed the midline of the Taiwan Strait — an unofficial boundary that's considered a buffer between the island and mainland. Taiwan has monitored the situation and employed its own forces in response to the activities.

Taiwan said six Chinese balloons either flew over the island or through airspace just north of it days after the self-governing island elected Lai Ching-te as the new leader. Lai's Democratic Progressive Party largely campaigned on self-determination, social justice and a rejection of China's

threats.

United States National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi were both in Bangkok for talks, though it wasn't clear when the meeting would take place or if it already had.

U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping met on the sidelines of a summit in November in an effort to patch up frayed relations due to quarrels over a range of economic and geopolitical issues. U.S. National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said the planned

meeting in Bangkok continues the commitment Biden and Xi made "to maintain strategic communication and responsibly manage the relationship."

During talks, Foreign Minister Wang would make clear China's position on Taiwan and on U.S.-China relations, and discuss international and regional concerns, ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Friday.

An immediate international concern to both countries is tensions in the Red Sea that have upended global trade by forcing many shippers to avoid the Suez Canal. Beijing said it has been making positive efforts to de-escalate the situation in which Iran-backed Houthi rebels have fired missiles at international ships. **MDT/AP**

KOREAS

# South says North fired several cruise missiles, adding to provocative weapons tests

**S**OUTH Korea's military said yesterday that North Korea fired several cruise missiles that flew over waters near a major military shipyard on the country's eastern coast, extending a streak in weapons tests that are worsening tensions with the United States, South Korea and Japan.

The launches followed a separate round of North Korean cruise missile tests last week and a Jan. 14 test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate-range ballistic missile. Those tests reflect North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's efforts to expand his arsenal of weapons designed to overwhelm missile defenses in South Korea and Japan and remote U.S. targets in the Pacific, including Guam.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said they detected the missiles over waters near the North Korean port of Sinpo, where the North has a major shipyard build-



A TV screen shows a file image of North Korea's missile launch during a news program at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday

ing key naval vessels, including missile-firing submarines.

The South's military didn't immediately provide specific launch details, including the number of

missiles fired, how far they flew and whether they were launched from land or naval assets.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have increased in recent

months as Kim continues to accelerate his weapons development and issue provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the U.S. and its Asian allies.

The U.S., South Korea and Japan in response have been expanding their combined military exercises, which Kim portrays as invasion rehearsals, and sharpening their deterrence strategies built around nuclear-capable U.S. assets.

North Korea said its launches last week involved a new cruise missile called Pulhwasal-3-31 and described the test as part of regular efforts to develop its military. The North described that missile as "strategic," implying a possible intent to arm it with nuclear weapons.

North Korea's cruise missiles supplement the country's huge lineup of ballistic missiles, including intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to reach the U.S. mainland.

While North Korean cruise missile activities aren't directly banned under U.N. sanctions, experts say those weapons potentially pose a serious threat to South Korea and Japan. They are designed fly like small airplanes and fly along landscapes where they could be harder to detect by radar.

Since 2021, North Korea has conducted at least 10 rounds of tests of what it described as long-range cruise missiles fired from both land and sea. The country claims its weapons are nuclear-capable and their range is up to 2,000 kilometers, a distance that would include U.S. military bases in Japan. MDT/AP

SOUTH KOREA

## POLICE INVESTIGATING 14-YEAR-OLD BOY AS SUSPECT OF ATTACK ON LAWMAKER

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

**A**N assailant who repeatedly struck a South Korean lawmaker with a rock as she tried to resist was a 14-year-old boy who was sent to a mental health facility Friday, Seoul police said as they continue to investigate the attack.

The attack late last week on Bae Hyunjin, a member of the conservative ruling party, came just weeks after a man stabbed opposition leader Lee Jae-myung in the neck, and it raised further concerns about the toxic discourse around the country's intensely polarized politics.

Bae was treated for cuts. Doctors said she avoided serious injury.

Police investigators who interviewed the middle-schooler suspect in the presence of his parents sent him to a hospital early



People Power Party lawmaker Bae Hyunjin

Friday where they plan to continue investigating him, said Cheon Young-gil, an official at Seoul's Gangnam district police station.

South Korea's laws allow for emergency admissions in which a person suspected of mental illness can be hospitalized for a maximum three days, based on consent of doctors and police, if there is concern the person could inflict harm on other people or themselves.

Cheon refused to discuss the health details of the suspect, who was detained

at the scene following the attack Thursday afternoon at a building in southern Seoul. South Korean media, citing anonymous acquaintances of the boy, reported that he had been receiving treatment for depression.

"The emergency admission was based on consideration of the suspect's age and his health condition," Cheon said, without elaborating. He said the police could seek to extend the boy's admission at the hospital after the initial three days if his parents agree. MDT/AP

**AD**

**Site visit to the Macau e-waste collection and recycling center**

Date: Saturday, 3rd February 2024  
Venue: Macau e-waste collection and recycling center (218, Largo De Pac On, Taipa)  
Time: 11:00am - 12:00pm  
Fee: Free of Charge (20 guests max)

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

Join us to witness the transformation of old home appliances like refrigerators, air conditioners, washing machines, TVs, and computers into valuable resources. Learn about environmental benefits of recycling, raising awareness about the significance of responsible electronic waste management. Reserve your spot now for an eye-opening visit to the Macau e-waste center. Together, let's create a greener and low carbon Macao.

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ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

# UN chief calls on countries to resume funding Gaza aid agency after allegations of militant ties

NAJIB JOBAIN  
& WAFAA SHURAF, RAFAH

**T**HE secretary-general of the United Nations yesterday called on countries to continue funding the main agency providing aid in Gaza after several of its employees were accused of taking part in the Hamas attack on Israel that ignited the war four months ago.

The dispute engulfing the biggest provider of vital aid to Palestinians came as U.S. officials said negotiators were closing in on a cease-fire agreement. The emerging deal would bring a two-month halt to the deadliest-ever Israeli-Palestinian violence, which has stoked instability across the Middle East.

Antonio Guterres warned that the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, would be forced to scale back aid to more than 2 million Palestinians as soon as February. The coastal enclave is in the grip of a severe humanitarian crisis, with a quarter of the population facing starvation.

"The abhorrent alleged acts of these staff members must have consequences," Guterres said in a statement.

"But the tens of thousands of men and women who work for UNRWA, many in some of the most dangerous situations for humanitarian workers, should not be penalized. The dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met," he added.

He said that of the 12 employees accused of taking part in the attack, nine had been immediately terminated, one was confirmed dead and "the identity of the two others is being clarified." He said all would be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution.

UNRWA has 13,000 staffers in Gaza, nearly all of them Palestinians. It provides basic services, from medical care to education, for Palestinians families who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation — a majority of Gaza's population. It has expanded operations during the war,



Palestinians look at their neighbour's damaged house following an Israeli strike in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, Saturday

running shelters housing hundreds of thousands of newly displaced people.

More than 2 million of the territory's 2.3 million people depend on it for "sheer survival," including food and shelter, UNRWA director Philippe Lazzarini said, warning this lifeline can "collapse any time now."

The United States, which is the largest donor to the agency, immediately suspended funding over the weekend, followed by several other countries, including Britain, Germany and Italy.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of Gaza and displaced nearly 85% of the territory's people. The Hamas attack in southern Israel killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and about 250 hostages were taken.

## PROGRESS IN CEASE-FIRE TALKS

Two senior Biden administration officials said U.S. negotiators were making progress on a potential agreement under which Israel would pause military operations against Hamas for two months in exchange for the release of more than 100 hostages.

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive negotiations, said that emerging terms of the ye-

t-to-be sealed deal would play out over two phases, with the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released by Hamas in a first 30-day phase. The emerging deal also calls for Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

More than 100 hostages, mainly women and children, were released in November in exchange for a weeklong cease-fire and the release of 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

CIA Director Bill Burns is expected to discuss the contours of the emerging agreement when he meets Sunday in France with David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel for talks centered on the hostage negotiations.

Despite the apparent progress, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated in a televised news conference late Saturday that the war would continue until "complete victory," including crushing Hamas.

## ISRAEL UNDER SCRUTINY AFTER UN COURT RULING

The dispute over UNRWA came as the International Court of Justice ruled Friday that Israel must do its utmost to limit death and destruction in its Gaza offensive.

The top United Nations court has asked Israel for a compliance report in a month, placing added scrutiny on Israel's military. The court's binding ruling stopped short of ordering a cease-fire, but its orders were in part a rebuke of Israel's conduct in its nearly 4-month war against Gaza's Hamas rulers.

The case brought by South Africa to the U.N. court alleged Israel is committing genocide, which Israel vehemently denies. A final ruling is expected to take years.

The court also ordered Israel to urgently get aid to Gaza. The amount of aid entering the territory remains well below the daily average of 500 trucks before the war, and U.N. agencies say distribution within Gaza has been severely hampered by the fighting and delays at Israeli checkpoints.

Israel holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties, saying the militants embed themselves in the local population. Israel says its air and ground offensive in Gaza has killed more than 9,000 militants.

The offensive caused vast destruction in northern Gaza, where Israel says it has largely dismantled Hamas. The fighting is now focused on the southern city of Khan Younis and a cluster of built-up refugee camps in central Gaza dating back to 1948. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1976 EXPLOSIONS ROCK LONDON'S WEST END



A series of bombs have exploded in the West End of London during the night - one person, believed to be a taxi driver, has been hurt.

Twelve devices went off - four of them were outside employment agencies and another was found in Selfridge's department store in Oxford Street.

A 13th device was discovered later in an HMV record store.

Police say the bombs were small, between about 3-5lb (1.2-2kg). Several of them started small fires.

They say it is too soon to say who planted the bombs, but anti-terrorist officers are investigating.

Officers say the bombs were probably planted during the day and timed to go off at night.

The taxi driver was injured in an explosion at the junction of Foubert's Place and Kingly Street. A boilerman is also reported to have been trapped in the basement of a shop in Duke Street after a bomb exploded. He was rescued by police.

The reception manager of the Miranda Club heard a bomb go off in Kingly Street.

John Jenkins, said: "There was a loud bang and a lot of smoke in the street. I was told a bomb had gone off in a letter box."

Another witness told the BBC: "We heard a very loud explosion and some old lady screamed her head off over the back there. That was all we heard, we tumbled out of bed and came down to see what it was all about."

Officers cleared the area as soon as the explosions began.

Much of Oxford Street has remained closed for most of the day while searches continue for more devices.

The bombings are a surprise - the first in central London for more than a year.

In November 1975 a bomb planted by the IRA exploded in a restaurant killing two people and injuring more than 20.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The IRA later admitted it had planted the bombs that went off in the West End.

The 1970s marked the bloodiest years of the Troubles and this was the latest in a series of attacks on the British mainland.

A ceasefire in 1975 and a major security clamp-down led the IRA to re-organise itself into a number of underground cells.

The West End attack was almost certainly carried out by one of these groups.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**



**ARIES**

**Mar. 21-Apr. 19**

Reciprocate by offering helpful hints. You must take care not to overexert yourself if involved in sports. Your depressed mood has been hard to shake.



**TAURUS**

**Apr. 20-May. 20**

Don't allow colleagues to stand in your way. Only offer to do the things you have time for. Luxury items will cost you more than you can truly afford.



**GEMINI**

**May. 21-Jun. 21**

Older relatives may be a burden. Be innovative. Sooner or later your partner will have had enough. You need to focus on yourself, not on others.



**CANCER**

**Jun. 22-Jul. 22**

Don't let someone talk you into parting with your cash unless you can truly see the benefits of doing so. You will have a great day if you just say what you feel.



**LEO**

**Jul. 23-Aug. 22**

You should be promoting your ideas. You are best to get out of the house today. Remember; talk to them, not at them. Travel will be to your advantage.



**VIRGO**

**Aug. 23-Sep. 22**

You will back yourself into a corner if you are baited and your stubbornness will only make matters worse. Your outgoing nature might work against you today.



**LIBRA**

**Sep. 23-Oct. 22**

Things will be emotional with your mate. Involvement in groups will be favorable and lead to valuable information. Try not to judge too quickly.



**SCORPIO**

**Oct. 23-Nov. 21**

You can make money if you work on personal investments. Be ready to explain your actions. Your tendency to take on too much will end in fatigue.



**SAGITTARIUS**

**Nov. 22-Dec. 21**

Avoid lovers who already have a relationship, even if it is a bad one. You will have problems with coworkers if you are too extreme about doing things perfectly.



**CAPRICORN**

**Dec. 22-Jan. 19**

Don't jump as quickly as you usually do. Your ability to visualize will help you convince others of the possibilities. Don't let others bait you into arguments.



**AQUARIUS**

**Jan. 20-Feb. 18**

Lend an ear to children; it can make a difference. Self-improvement projects will payoff in more ways than one. Opportunities for new romantic encounters will unfold through the social events you attend.



**PISCES**

**Feb. 19-Mar. 20**

Involve yourself in group endeavors. Don't get depressed, get busy. You can accomplish a lot if you're willing to put in a little extra time.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sanson**



**SUDOKU**

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

  

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-7	4	fine
Changchun	-17	-8	fine
Chengdu	4	9	overcast
Chongqing	7	10	overcast
Fuzhou	9	17	overcast
Guangzhou	8	14	rain
Guiyang	2	9	overcast
Haikou	15	20	rain
Hangzhou	1	12	overcast
Harbin	-21	-11	fine
Hefei	-2	11	overcast
Nanjing	0	11	overcast
Shanghai	3	12	overcast
Taipei	13	19	overcast
Wuhan	0	10	fine
Hong Kong	15	17	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-12	-4	cloudy
Frankfurt	-2	7	cloudy
Paris	6	12	cloudy
London	9	13	clear
New York	-1	6	windy

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Scottish musician; 6- Old Dodge model; 10- Put \_\_\_ on (limit); 14- Expiate; 15- Sharp; 16- Small yeast cake; 17- Role for Valerie; 18- Contact, e.g.; 19- Membership fees; 20- Disown; 22- Negates; 23- Course; 24- Fetter; 26- Invoice abbr.; 29- Wanting; 31- Manipulate; 32- Caviar; 33- Heavy book; 34- Predaceous insect; 38- Beige; 40- Horned viper; 42- Air-filled rubber hoop, become fatigued; 43- "I, Robot" author; 46- Ticks off; 49- Chaney; 50- ASCAP rival; 51- Salamander; 52- Denouement; 53- 1981 Neil Diamond hit; 57- Lab fluids; 59- Sublease; 60- Neglect; 65- Audacity; 66- Ballerina's skirt; 67- Stopwatch-holder; 68- Hurler Hershiser; 69- Banned apple spray; 70- Doppelganger; 71- "Peter Pan" dog; 72- Novel ending; 73- Biblical king;

DOWN 1- Young salmon; 2- Spillane's "\_\_\_ Jury"; 3- Lowdown; 4- Eventually become; 5- Adjust again; 6- State of USA; 7- Bump into; 8- Hawaiian state birds; 9- Social connections; 10- Drawing away; 11- Make watertight; 12- Clear as \_\_\_; 13- Out; 21- Langston Hughes poem; 22- American space agency; 25- Run smoothly; 26- Neck of the woods; 27- Soft shoes; 28- Actress Hatcher; 30- Pine sap; 35- Mah-jongg piece; 36- Golf club which can be numbered 1 to 9; 37- Dispatch; 39- Portable weather protection; 41- Force per unit area; 44- Pass over; 45- Singer Damone; 47- Large jug or pitcher; 48- Strain; 53- About 1% of the atmosphere; 54- Funny Anne; 55- Actress Barkin; 56- Mature; 58- Quick and nimble; 61- Let's just leave \_\_\_ that; 62- Cupid; 63- City in Western Nevada; 64- Historic Scott; 66- \_\_\_-Bo;

**Friday's solution**



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



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



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



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**BASKETBALL**

# James outduels Curry with a triple-double as Lakers take double-OT thriller

JANIE MCCAULEY,  
SAN FRANCISCO

**B**ACK and forth they went, one-upping the other, two of the greatest to ever play each believing he could will his team to win. Stepback 3s, fadeaway jumpers, drives and dishes. Two overtimes.

LeBron James vs. Stephen Curry. At their finest.

And at the very end, James made a pair of free throws with 1.2 seconds left to cap his triple-double of 36 points, career-high 20 rebounds and 12 assists, outdueling Curry as the Los Angeles Lakers held off the Golden State Warriors 145-144 on Saturday night.

"It's something I'll be able to talk about with my grandkids, talk about me being able to compete with one of the greatest players to ever play the game," James said. "So hopefully I can be cool with my grandkids at that point, for sure."

Curry danced through the



paint for a layup that sent the game to overtime. He knocked down a 3-pointer high over Anthony Davis in the second overtime for a lead.

James scored the first points of a second extra session and found D'Angelo Russell the next time down for a 3.

"Every year we get to do this,

the back-and-forth battles, all the Finals runs, to the playoffs last year, after the horn sounded tonight there was a little laugh of we can't like imagine a scenario where a game like tonight happens, his year, what, 21, and my year 15," Curry said. "All the other guys in the league who have been doing it 15-plus years, KD (Kevin

Durant), CP (Chris Paul), it's insane.

"You look forward to the battles, but you also appreciate the mutual respect of what it takes to keep doing what you're doing at this level because only a few people know how hard it is. I'm happy to be in that group."

Lakers coach Darvin Ham had to stay focused as he sat close-up to witness the greatness.

"Oh, man," he exhaled afterward.

"Just trying to control myself first and foremost as a basketball fan," he said. "They should be real happy in New York, this was a hell of a basketball game, a high-level basketball game. Two legends going back and forth, two great organizations. It was fun to be a part of. It's just one of those wins where it showed our character. Our group is really coming together."

Curry hit a go-ahead 3-pointer with 4.7 seconds left in the second OT and sunk the one over Davis with 1:22 to go on the way to 46

points with a season-high nine 3s.

Russell connected from deep with 53 seconds left in the second OT and also hit another earlier in the period after also making two 3-pointers late in regulation on the way to 28 points.

James scored 12 points in the two OT periods and recorded his third triple-double of the season and 110th of his career. Davis added 29 points and 13 rebounds.

Klay Thompson hit a tying 3 with 5.9 seconds remaining in the initial overtime and another late in the second extra period before fouling out with 1:14 left in Golden State's first double-OT game since a 143-141 victory against Atlanta on Jan. 2, 2023.

Davis returned after an injury scare in the third. He made a pair of free throws with 29 seconds to go in regulation, then missed the first of two with 14.7 seconds left — giving Golden State the ball down 118-116. Curry drove through the paint for a tying layup with just under 6 seconds left to force overtime. **MDT/AP**



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**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**REALITY CHECK FOR  
 DPP AUTHORITIES ON  
 TAIWAN**

As Taiwan braces for a third term of pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party authorities, so too will it face the political reality of a shrinking “diplomatic” recognition.

Lai Ching-te, who just won the island’s local leadership election to become its next leader, has made no secret of his “Taiwan independence” stance. As deputy leader of the island’s current authorities headed by Tsai Ing-wen, Lai openly said he was a “pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence”.

As Tsai’s successor, Lai has pledged to preserve the “status quo” across the Taiwan Strait. But he at once showcased that persistent attempt to expand the island’s so-called international space. For all the hope he would become more pragmatic on cross-Strait ties post-inauguration, there is little doubt he hopes to take advantage of the international “community of democracies” to seek a “diplomatic breakthrough” in pursuit of his cause.

But as the “diplomatic” setback surrounding the loss of Nauru indicates, that path forward may prove bumpy and cost the island dearly. Should Lai and his DPP colleagues ignore the lessons from Nauru and refuse to change course, worse might be on its way. Barely two days after Lai celebrated his election win, on Jan 15, the government of Nauru declared it would cut off “diplomatic relations” with Taipei. The second day, the country’s parliament passed the resolution to restore full diplomatic relations with Beijing.

On Wednesday, the foreign ministers of China and Nauru signed a joint communique on restoring diplomatic relationship. Ambassadorial level diplomatic ties were restored the very same day, with the Chinese Foreign Ministry counting Nauru as the 183rd country establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing.

“China and Nauru restoring diplomatic relations again demonstrated to the world that adhering to the one-China principle is an irresistible trend of history,” Foreign Minister Wang Yi said. “No matter how conditions on the island change ... the international consensus supporting China to preserve its national sovereignty and territorial integrity will not change, the historical process of Taiwan’s inevitable return, and China’s inevitable reunification will not change.”

Wang also called for the “extremely small number of countries”, 12 now without Nauru, to follow Nauru’s example. “Diplomatic relations” with Taiwan are not only against those nations’ interests as well as UN Resolution 2758, but constitute damage to Chinese national sovereignty, and therefore “will be corrected sooner or later”, he said.

The DPP-led Taiwan’s international partnerships are set to dwindle still further in number. Reuters quoted Tuvalu’s finance minister as saying his country would review “diplomatic relationship” with Taiwan after its upcoming national election.

Rather than expanding the space for Taiwan’s presence on the international stage, the DPP has merely put the spotlight on its efforts to undermine the postwar order and international law and add another eruptive factor to an already volatile world.

**NAZI DEATH CAMP SURVIVORS MARK 79TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
 AUSCHWITZ LIBERATION ON HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY**

**THE  
 BUZZ**

A group of survivors of Nazi death camps marked the 79th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp during World War II in a modest ceremony Saturday in southern Poland.

About 20 survivors from various camps set up by Nazi Germany around Europe laid wreaths and flowers and lit candles at the Death Wall in Auschwitz, where the Nazis executed thousands of inmates, mostly Polish resistance members and others.

Later the group, along with state officials and other participants, gathered for a ceremony by a brick women’s barrack at Birke-

nau that has recently undergone conservation. Next, they prayed and lit candles at the monument in Birkenau, near the crematoria ruins. They were memorializing around 1.1 million camp victims, mostly Jews. The memorial site and museum are located near the city of Oswiecim.

Observances were also held in many other countries Saturday. Nearly 6 million European Jews were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust — the mass murder of Jews and other groups before and during World War II.

AP PHOTO



**ELECTIONS**

**FINNS GO TO THE  
 POLLS TO ELECT A  
 NEW PRESIDENT AT AN  
 UNPRECEDENTED TIME FOR  
 THE NATO NEWCOMER**

**VOTERS** in Finland elected a new president yesterday at an unprecedented time for the Nordic nation that is now a NATO member with its eastern border with Russia closed — two things almost unthinkable a few years ago.

Polls across the country opened at 9 a.m. (0700 GMT) and closed at 8 p.m. (1800 GMT).

Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy, particularly when dealing with countries outside the European Union like the United States, Russia and China.

Some 4.5 million citizens are eligible to vote for Finland’s new head of state from an array of nine candidates — six men and three women. They are picking a successor to hugely popular President Sauli Niinistö, whose second six-year term expires in March. He is not eligi-

ble for re-election.

No candidate is expected get more than 50% of the vote in yesterday’s first round of voting, pushing the race into a runoff in February.

Recent polls suggest that former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb, 55, and ex-Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, 65, are the leading contenders.

Stubb, who represents the conservative National Coalition Party and headed the Finnish government in 2014-2015, and veteran politician Haavisto, an ex-United Nations diplomat running for the post for the third time, are each estimated to garner 23%-27% of the votes.

Finland’s new head of state will start a six-year term in March in a markedly different geopolitical and security situation in Europe than did incumbent Niinistö after the 2018 election.

Abandoning decades of military non-alignment in the wake of Russia’s

invasion of Ukraine, Finland became NATO’s 31st member in April, much to the annoyance of President Vladimir Putin of Russia, which shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with the Nordic nation.

NATO membership, which has made Finland the Western military alliance’s front-line country toward Russia, and the war raging in Ukraine a mere 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) away from Finland’s border have boosted the president’s status as a security policy leader.

Advance vote results will be confirmed soon after polls close and initial results from Sunday’s voting are expected by around midnight (2200 GMT). The first round results will be officially confirmed on Tuesday.

The likely second round of voting between the two candidates with the most votes is set for Feb. 11. **MDT/AP**

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**Germany’s** train drivers’ union is ending its six-day strike early and is back in talks with the country’s national railway operator, German news agency dpa reported. The strike by the GDL union on passenger trains, which has brought the country to a near standstill since early Wednesday, will end Monday morning at 2 a.m. (0100 GMT), instead of 6 p.m. (1700 GMT) as originally announced. The freight transport strike will end on Sunday evening at 6 p.m. (1700 GMT).

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**Turkey** Two masked assailants attacked a church in Istanbul during Sunday services, killing one person, Turkish officials said. According to a statement posted on X by Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, the armed assailants attacked the Santa Maria Church in the Sariyer district at 11:40 a.m. local time. He did not specify what kind of weapons were used or whether anyone else was wounded. Yerlikaya condemned the attack and said authorities are working on capturing the assailants. An investigation has been opened.

**France** Two climate activists hurled soup yesterday at the glass protecting the Mona Lisa at the Louvre Museum in Paris and shouted slogans advocating for a sustainable food system. This came amid protests by French farmers against several issues, including low wages. In a video posted on social media, two women with the words “FOOD RIPOSTE” written on their t-shirts could be seen passing under a security barrier to get closer to the painting.

**Mexico’s** government has acknowledged that at least two well-known Mayan ruin sites are unreachable by visitors because of a toxic mix of cartel violence and land disputes. But two tourist guides in the southern state of Chiapas, near the border with Guatemala, say two other sites that the government claims are still open to visitors can only be reached by passing through drug gang checkpoints.