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AP PHOTO



Gaza Strip A far-right minister in Israel's government has criticized Joe Biden and said that having Donald Trump in power would allow more freedom to fight Hamas. The comments sparked outrage among other Israeli officials and highlighted the sensitivity of relations as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visits the region again this week. Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's national security minister, said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal that Biden was hindering Israel's war effort.

AP PHOTO



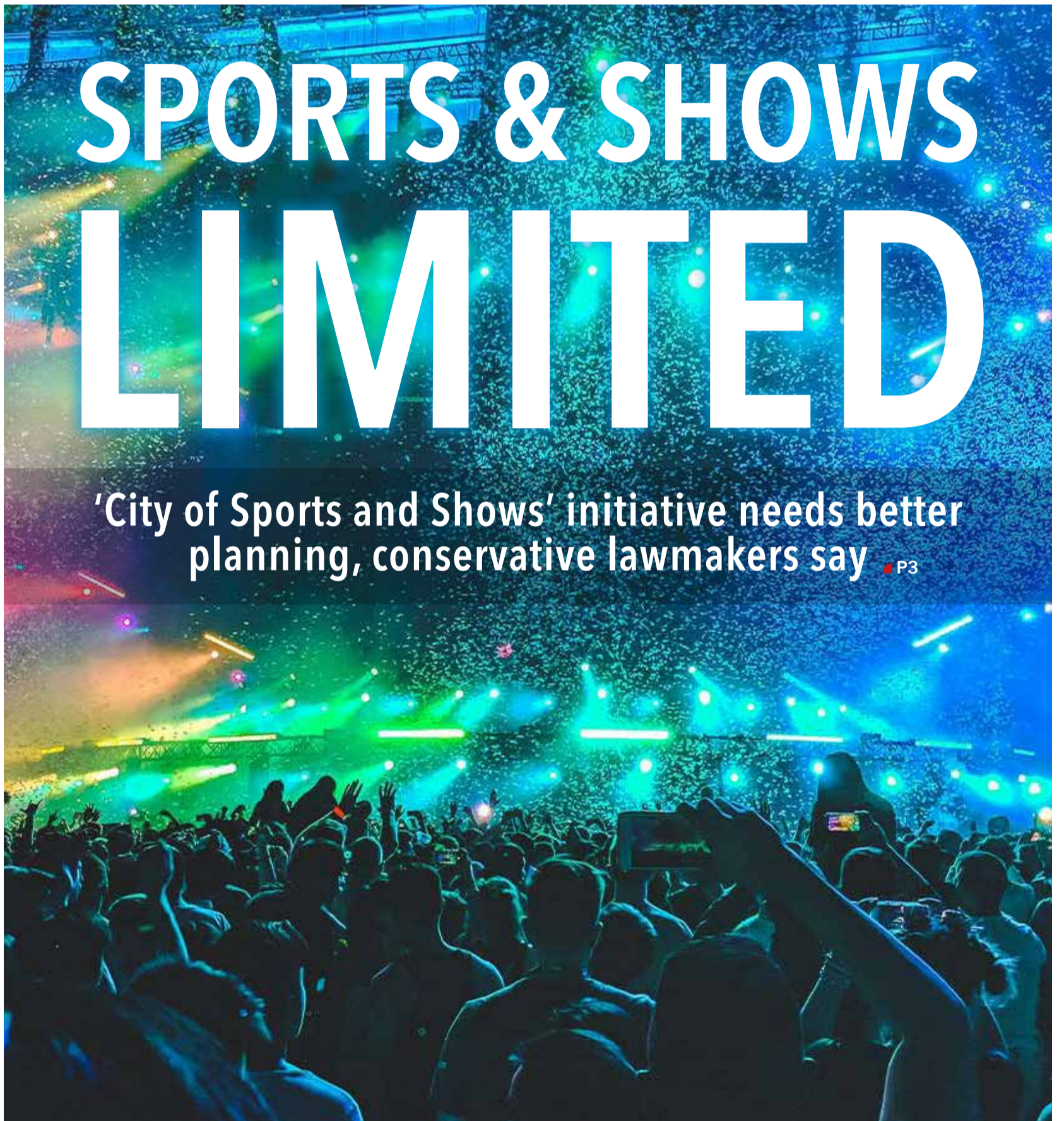
Ukrainian shelling killed at least 28 people at a bakery in the Russian-occupied city of Lysychansk, Moscow-installed officials said. At least one child was among the dead Saturday, local leader Leonid Pasechnik wrote in a statement on Telegram. A further 10 people were rescued from under the rubble by emergency services, he said. Ukrainian officials did not comment on the incident.

AP PHOTO



Ukraine's President Zelenskyy said he was weighing a possible dismissal of the country's top military officer, a prospect that has shocked the nation fighting Russia's invasion and worried Kyiv's Western allies. Asked whether he was considering the ouster of Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Zelenskyy told Italian RAI TV that he was thinking about it as part of a broader issue of setting the country's path. He said that "a reset, a new beginning is necessary."

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PROTESTS OVER THE CONSTRUCTION OF WASTE LANDFILL SOUTH OF COLOANE ARRIVE AT AL

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKER Lo Choi In has joined protests against the government's plan to build a new waste landfill in the sea off the southern coast of Coloane.

The lawmaker raised the matter in a spoken inquiry to the government in the period before the agenda of yesterday's plenary session at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

Lawmaker Lo noted that the building of landfills always poses "certain damage to the marine ecological environment and the sea areas," noting that in this case the area in question "is a habitat for Chinese white dolphins, first-class national protected animals."

Lo said society does not want to pay the high ecological costs of building this so-called "ecological island" which is merely a landfill for construction waste.

The lawmaker said the land, ocean and ecological resources are precious resources granted by the country and therefore, the government has a responsibility to



make good use of them.

She said the government needs to find a balance between development and preservation.

The lawmaker said the government claims the facility

is needed because the existing landfill is nearing full capacity.

Lo wants the government to consider other existing forms of technology to treat and dispose of the waste ins-

stead of choosing landfill.

Lo said the government should, instead, "support the development of local renewable energy companies or build crematoriums and forensic facilities, among other facilities essential to the life of the population, to promote the diversification of the economy and investment and, at the same time, increase jobs, thus solving the basic needs of society."

Last week, local environmental protection advocate Joe Chan started a petition opposing the government landfill project.

Chan predicts the landfill will damage marine life, intensify water pollution and risk the health of aquatic activities practitioners.

More importantly, he said "it will destroy the ecology of Indo-Pacific humpbacked dolphins."

Chan also criticized the government for not providing any scientific data to support the project as well as failing to provide any environmental assessments.

The landfill is planned for a location 1 km off the coast, south of Coloane.



TOURISM

HOTEL OCCUPANCY UP TO 90% FOR UPCOMING LUNAR NEW YEAR

STAFF REPORTER

TOURISM authorities are anticipating 120,000 daily visitors during the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday period, which could mean almost 1 million tourists visiting the city during the 8-day Lunar New Year period.

Hotel reports indicate a room occupancy rate between 80 to 90%.

All six gaming companies have reported "full" bookings for the upcoming holiday season, according to Lou Chi Leong, president of the Association of Macao Tourist Agents, as cited in a Macao Daily News report.

Small and medium-sized hotels are also experiencing a growing booking rate of 80 to 90% for the peak of the festive occasion, starting this weekend.

Macao will host a wide range of activities and events to celebrate the arrival of the Year of the Dragon and attract visitors to the city.

In addition to the government-led Lunar New Year campaign, which includes traditional New Year dragon dances and the Parade for Celebration of the Year of the Dragon, each casino operator has prepared a variety of celebratory events, markets and other festive activities in their respective designated zones.

Furthermore, operators have been conducting training programs for service staff to better cater to the different international guests expected to visit the city during this holiday season, with a particular focus on ensuring industry professionals gain a better understanding of Islamic culture.

Regarding room rates, industry professionals have predicted a 20 to 30% increase.

"There are over 40,000 guest rooms in Macau available, and the supply and demand dynamics are less strained compared to previous years," Lou stated.

Hoffman Ma, deputy chairman of Success Universe Group, also expressed optimism about the strong tourism momentum emerging last month.

According to Ma, a decent hotel stay could range from MOP2,000 to MOP3,000 per night, representing a slight decrease compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

AL PLENARY

LAWMAKERS FORCE POSTPONEMENT OF VOTING ON PUBLIC HOUSING SALE REGIME

RENATO MARQUES

THE Legislative Assembly (AL) has forced the government to postpone voting on the first reading of the "Regime for the transfer of autonomous units of buildings used for economic acquisition housing and intermediate housing."

After a long discussion, lawmakers concluded the government could not guarantee the new regime wou-

ld not clash with existing provisions of the Land Law.

The Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário, and several members of his team, were unable to allay the fears of several influential lawmakers such as lawyer and president of the Macau Lawyers Association, Vong Hin Fai.

Other lawmakers said they would vote down the bill on the first reading if the

government failed to provide clear guarantees that the transfer of ownership of the units from the Housing Bureau to the owners does not clash with the rule of non-alienation of state land.

Other lawmakers also questioned the need to request authorization from the central government for such procedures as it specifically involved state-owned land that the local government is authorized to use

but not to alienate.

After a long discussion but little progress, lawmaker Ho Ion Sang called on the AL president, Kou Hoi In, to vote on a proposal to postpone the debate and voting on the bill, saying the government needed more time to answer lawmakers' questions.

The plenary passed the proposal unanimously, meaning discussion of the bill will resume at a later time.

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AL PLENARY

Lawmakers: 'City of Sports and Shows' needs better planning

RENATO MARQUES

SEVERAL lawmakers have raised concerns about the recent bid to transform Macau into a city renowned for hosting sports events and performances.

Several lawmakers used the period before the agenda at yesterday's Legislative Assembly (AL) session to address opinions and comments on the topic to the government.

The lawmakers said the attempt to diversify the local economy by hosting sports and show-based events suffers from a lack of planning and was potentially rushed into without considering consequences.

The lawmakers said a lack of infrastructure inhibits Macau's ability to host events that contribute to wealth creation as well as the generation of jobs for local residents.

Addressing the lack of planning, Ella Lei used recent examples to show that, more than lacking physical structure, Macau lacks experienced event organizers.

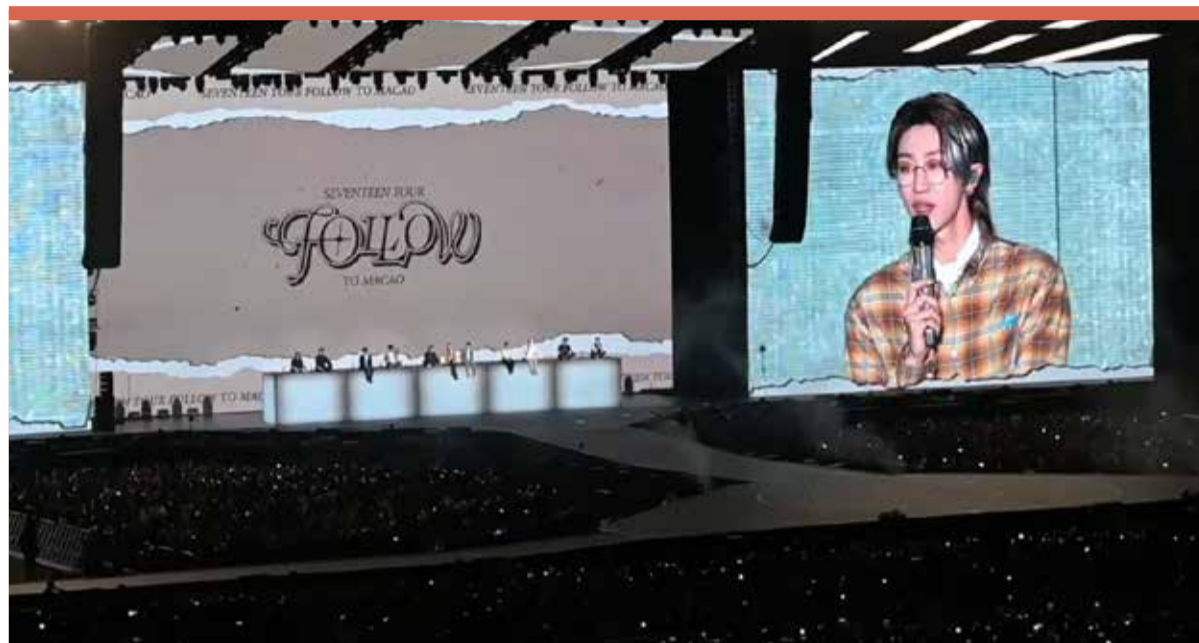
Lei mentioned the concert featuring musician Joe Hisaishi and the Macao Orchestra, organized by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, which attracted 68,000 people to sign up for the ticket draw.

"As the concert venue could only accommodate a small number of spectators, many were unable to get tickets and were disappointed," said Lei.

The lawmaker noted that although there are now many venues in Macau, some are unsuitable for large-scale events.

International-level performers have specific requirements in terms of venue capacity and, to make events profitable, there is a need to sell many tickets, all things local organizers should have considered, Lei said.

Lei also noted a lack of planning in the overlapping of events, noting that it often happens that similar events compete and create issues with traffic and crowd ma-



agement.

Lei said a calendar in which events could happen often but not all at the same time is desirable.

She also critiqued the suppression of public transport during mega-events, stating that, on the contrary, there should be more buses as well as services on the Light Rapid Transit, which should be the priority mode of transportation to be used during these events.

Lei also noted the need for more economically priced rooms in budget hotels and inns considering that the clientele of events such as concerts and sports is, in most cases, very different from those staying at the integrated resorts.

She said all these elements should have been considered long before launching into the promotion and hosting of these events.

Lawmaker Si Ka Lon agreed with the idea of turning Macau into a city of performing arts and sports, but believed there was insufficient discussion and planning.

Si noted that during the Policy Address, the government had only focused on the final goals and intended outcomes of the policy, but did not sufficiently consider how to reach its goals.

"The construction of a 'city of

shows' is an important factor for the adequate diversification of the economy; therefore, policies, complementary facilities, and the required talents are crucial for this purpose," said Si.

"At this time, we must accelerate the creation of new spaces and forms of business for cultural consumption and strive to achieve the '1+n' synergy in cultural areas, especially in the performing arts."

"We must also develop exhibitions, shows, cultural activities, films, television, and even talent training, spaces, facilities, cultural and creative brands, etc.," the lawmaker said, urging the government to act immediately.

Si noted that unlike Hong Kong, Guangzhou, or Taipei, Macau does not have an iconic venue for these kinds of events.

"In Macau, there are many venues that meet international standards and are important venues for exhibitions and cultural performances, but compared to the Hong Kong Coliseum, the Tianhe Sports Center in Guangzhou, and the Taipei Arena, Macau does not have a 'reference venue' for performing shows nor a standardized platform for ticket purchasing."

"[This] does not respond to the needs of internationalization and causes dispersion of information about the shows."

"It is expected that the government will take advantage of the shows to promote the in-depth and integrated development of cultural tourism and will carry out the coordination work related to the 'City of Shows' and the development of related infrastructure," the same lawmaker said.

Si called on the government to clarify the definition of a "City of Shows" and disclose the applicable planning and policies that support the reaching of those goals.

Another lawmaker, Che Sai Wang, was less positive about the idea of turning the city into a place of performances and sports events.

Che spoke about the need to respect residents' lives and their right to live a normal and undisturbed life, noting that the government seems to be disregarding several important areas of regulation such as the "noise law."

Che called on the government to move disruptive events away from the residential areas and find a way to strike a balance between the development of the economy and the well-being of citizens.

The same lawmaker also urged the government to improve preparatory works, such as traffic and pedestrian flow, before hosting such events to minimize the impact on people's lives.

BUS HITS MAN IN SAN MA LO

A non-resident man from mainland China was hit by a bus near Sunco Supermarket in San Ma Lo around 11:30 a.m. yesterday. The man, aged 30, suffered scratches to his right cheek and the back of his right palm. He was conscious and in a stable condition when he arrived at hospital. He was also accompanied by a colleague. The accident caused slight traffic congestion.

FLORA GARDEN NOW OPENS ALL DAY

Flora Garden is now open 24 hours a day, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has announced. But certain facilities in the garden, such as the children's playground and children's cycling field, still have specific opening hours. The bureau is seeking to improve pedestrian access to the Guia Hill pedestrian tunnel walking system and, at the same time, enable the public to make greater use of green and leisure spaces.

DSF REMINDS TAXPAYERS OF KEY DATES

The Financial Services Bureau (DSF) has reminded taxpayers that the first quarter of each year is a tax payment period, and has reiterated key dates. The end of February is the deadline for declaration of Professional Tax M3/M4, and the declaration must be made regardless of taxpayer size. Part-timers, freelancers and Professional Tax Group 2 payers without accountants must submit their M/5 declaration on or before April 2. The bureau recommends taxpayers use e-channels for booking or lodging declarations.

NON-RESIDENTS DEPOSITS RETREAT

Non-resident deposits decreased 12.4% to MOP323.7 billion in December, while residents' deposits slightly dropped 0.2% from the preceding month to MOP706.2 billion, data from the Monetary Authority of Macao shows. Public sector deposits with the banking sector fell 4.3% to MOP193.5 billion. As a result, total deposits in the banking sector dropped 4.3% from a month earlier to MOP1,223.4 billion. Also, domestic loans to the private sector fell 1.2% from a month ago to MOP538.3 billion. Analyzed by economic sector, "electricity, gas and water" and "construction and public works" grew at respective rates of 4.3% and 1.7% when compared with last quarter.

GAMING

CE WAIVES REVENUE SUPPLEMENTARY TAX FOR SIX OPS

THE Revenue Supplementary Tax levied on the six gambling concessionaires will be waived until the end of 2027, according to yesterday's Official Gazette.

The Chief Executive

Dispatch was dated Jan. 29 this year.

The gaming law gives the Chief Executive power to waive taxes.

Article 28 of the Law says that, in addition to paying the special gaming

tax, the concessionaires must also pay taxes, duties, fees and handling charges.

Nonetheless, the same article says the Chief Executive may, in the public interest, temporarily and

exceptionally exempt concessionaires from paying Revenue Supplementary Tax in whole or in part.

Despite the fact that it appears six times in the law, the term 'public interest' is not defined.

The law also says the Chief Executive can waive certain funding grants or investments by concessionaires on the grounds of public interest, especially when they are expanding foreign source markets. **AL**



GOV'T APPOINTS TWO SSM OFFICERS TO VICE DIRECTOR AT COTAI HOSPITAL

ANTHONY LAM

DR Lei Wai Seng and Dr Chou Kuok Hei, both from the Health Bureau (SSM), have been appointed deputy head or equivalent at the Cotai hospital, according to the Official Gazette.

The Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao Ieong made the appointment.

Lei formerly worked at the Accident and Emergency Department at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital and was one of the hospital's medical directors.

As the preparatory work for the Cotai hospital ac-

celerated, the doctor was promoted to the position of director of the hospital's preparatory office.

Lei holds a Bachelor in Medicine from Jinan University in Guangzhou, a Master's in public management from Peking University and a Diploma in medical leadership from The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Chou has been appointed to a position equivalent to the deputy head of the hospital.

He and Lei both studied at the same institutions for both Bachelor and Master levels as well as his Diploma, and specializes in fa-

mily medicine.

He started his career at the public hospital in 1988 and has held chief or managerial positions in the areas of tuberculosis prevention and treatment, as well as the expansion of the SSM. He is also part of Cotai hospital's preparatory team.

The two appointments will end Sep. 30, 2025.

Pursuant to the hospital's charter, there should be no more than six deputy heads or equivalent positions. They will be responsible for different aspects of work, such as medical education and research, administration and finance as well as external relations.

CRIME

Sudden smuggling spike

ANTHONY LAM

THE Macao Customs has uncovered six different attempted smugglings of plants, seafood and wines during the period Jan. 23 to Feb. 2 at two border checkpoints with Zhuhai.

All goods were uncovered at either the Border Gate checkpoint or the Hengqin checkpoint, and have been confiscated.

The Customs intercepted the six cases using two specific alarm and inspection

systems.

On Jan. 23, Customs officers discovered 150kg of lobsters in the back seat and trunk of a cross-border vehicle. The next evening, 27kg of orchids were found in the back seat of another vehicle. The next morning, 25kg of sweet potatoes and 1.3kg of orchids were discovered in the back seats of two separate vehicles.

On Jan. 30, 15L of red wines were discovered in the back seat of another vehicle. On the morning of Feb.

2, 10kg of orchids were also found in a vehicle.

There were seven other cases of attempted smuggling.

The 13 cases altogether involve 13 people from Macau, Hong Kong and mainland China aged between 34 and 76 years.

The Customs have already charged the smugglers.

Those trying to smuggle orchids into Macau will face additional charges due to the endangered status of the plant.

TRANSPORT

BUS PASSENGERS EXCEED PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS IN JANUARY

STAFF REPORTER

THE average daily bus passenger volume in January this year has exceeded 626,000, which is a slight increase of 0.5% compared with the same period in 2019.

In a recent Transport Advisory Committee meeting, Transport Bureau director Kelvin Lam noted that buses carried an average 590,000 passengers per day in 2023, with a total of 210 million passengers.

The committee said that with the upcoming Chinese New Year, authorities will pay close attention to the situation with bus companies and add special bus services based on passenger demand.

The Times has previously noted that it has been a struggle for many to hop on the bus – particularly going to and



from the center to Cotai.

Reports from readers have stated that the buses' capacity has been largely exceeded during most hours of the day and not just during peak hours, claiming that, in some cases, buses carry almost double their stated capacity.

In a previous comment to the Times, DSAT said that buses are not over capacity, but "with the gradual recovery of

Macau's tourism industry, the number of passengers on public buses continues to rise."

As for traffic accidents involving buses, there were a total of 569 traffic accidents attributable to the two buses last year, which is an increase of 25% compared with 454 cases in 2022, but a decrease of 22% compared with the 736 cases in 2019 before the Covid-19 pandemic.

ANSON WONG

FORMER GP RACER DIES AFTER HKD100M DRUG BUST

STAFF REPORTER

Arenowned Hong Kong racing driver, who frequently participated in Macau's Grand Prix, has died after his alleged involvement in a drug trafficking scheme.

Local reports indicate the deceased was Anson Wong, a 57-year-old driver with more than 20 years of racing experience.

Wong, along with three other individuals, including one woman, was under investigation in connection with a drug trafficking case amounting to HKD100 million.

On the day he died, he allegedly tried to evade arrest in Yuen Long.

Hong Kong police said he fell into a coma approximately 20 minutes after being apprehended and handcuffed in his own vehicle.

He was declared dead the following day, but the exact cause is yet to be determined. Medical



records suggest he had a preexisting heart condition.

Wong held directorial positions in eight companies, including those related to car sales.

Throughout his career, he participated in the Macau Grand Prix on 24 occasions, competing in various categories such as touring car racing and grand touring racing.

His most recent

appearance was in the 68th Macau Grand Prix in 2022.

He also actively participated in the China Touring Car Championship and the TCR China Touring Car Championship.

Hong Kong police and customs suspect he was involved in a cocaine trafficking operation, with one of the key figures being a 75-year-old woman.

Melco advances the economic prosperity of local SMEs

MELCO Resorts & Entertainment recognizes the importance of working hand in hand with its stakeholders to create lasting impact, and the Company's long-term commitment to operating globally, while thinking and acting locally by supporting local SMEs, remains strong. The inevitable disruptions to supply chains experienced by businesses around the world over the past few years have further accelerated the pace at which Melco has prioritized local procurement. Currently, sourcing from local enterprises and distributors accounts for 87% of Melco's overall purchases, of which 57% comes from Macau brands and SMEs.

In the past year, with the aim to identify and implement customized initiatives to boost procurement and revenue growth opportunities for the sustainable economic prosperity of local suppliers and SMEs – including through establishing long-term partnerships to help enhance SME competitiveness, and contribute to the sustainable prosperity and development of the business community in the Greater Bay Area, Melco has continued to develop related opportunities to foster greater partnerships and advance the capacity of local SMEs.

ROADSHOWS GENERATE MOP 9 MILLION FOR SMES

In its pledge to support economic prosperity for Macau's SMEs, Melco concluded its Heart of House Roadshow series for 2023 in December, helping 270 local SMEs and NGOs generate a total of over MOP 9 million in additional revenue throughout the year. During this time, Melco invited local SMEs and NGOs to participate in 171 Heart of House Roadshow sessions, promoting their brands and businesses while selling directly to 16,000 colleagues working at properties including City of Dreams, Studio City and Altira Macau.

Local business owner and participant of the December roadshow, Mr. Lee Kin Man, Director of Riko Zakkaya, said, "Thank you to Melco for inviting us to participate at its Heart of House Roadshow. The rent-free opportunity has helped our products reach a larger audience and enabled us to increase our revenue." Fellow participant Ms. Zhu Chu Ting, General Manager of Rositina Company Limited, added, "We really appreciate this opportuni-



ty and quality platform provided to us by Melco – it enables SMEs like ourselves to generate better market exposure and promote our products to a new audience while helping us generate added revenue."

Launched in 2016, Melco's employee-area Roadshows provide an innovative channel for local SMEs to generate revenue by selling directly to its colleagues. Rent-free retail spaces in the Heart-of-House areas of City of Dreams, Studio City and Altira Macau are provided exclusively for local SMEs and NGOs. The roadshows serve as an effective platform for increasing revenue and market exposure for Melco's SME partners.

FAOM X MELCO SHOPPING CARNIVAL

Ahead of the Chinese New Year, the first "Privileges for You" Shopping Carnival of the year was co-hosted by Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) and Melco on January 27 and 28 at FAOM Kin Fai Service Center and Li Chang Integrated Service Center. In addition to SME-run booths offering festive CNY goods and food items, daily necessities, household goods, books, toys, cosmetics, gifts and services and more, a variety of themed parent-child creative workshops, including for the making of festive fai-chun, foods and desserts, as well as red packet financial management workshops were avail-

able throughout the event.

Benefiting approximately 60 SMEs and the local community in Macau, the event is dedicated to boosting revenues for local businesses, local workers' recruitment opportunities and the overall local economy.

OUTREACH EFFORTS

Melco presented a series of targeted outreach events in 2023 to benefit 200 local SMEs and businesses.

To help build local suppliers by providing them with the latest industry information and updates, the Melco SME Academy continued to host regular capacity-building workshops and events. A series of training sessions and

workshops, offered both in-person and virtually, covered a variety of topics including human trafficking and modern slavery in the industry and supply chains, sustainability awareness for foods including seafood, cage-free eggs and meat, occupational safety and health (OSH) and Melco property introductions.

Established in 2020 and supported by Melco's in-house Learning Academy, the Melco SME Academy helps local businesses succeed by providing access to the latest industry trends and training and technical knowledge, better equipping businesses to face shifting challenges.

Specifically, a Melco property awareness session at Studio City held in October enabled Melco representatives to better understand the products and services on offer from local suppliers, while also allowing local suppliers to gather a deeper understanding of Melco's operational requirements and standards. During the event, the Melco Supply Chain team led SME representatives on a tour of Studio City Water Park, allowing SMEs a first-hand experience of the attraction's material considerations from the perspective of guests and employees. Melco's Supply Chain team then introduced the company's procurement process and standards to SME representatives and registered suitable SMEs as Melco suppliers.

Additional SME outreach events included the return of Melco's 'To the Table by SMEs' to discuss food safety and hygiene standards with local businesses, and to provide an opportunity for direct dialogue between SMEs and the Melco culinary team and F&B management executives and representatives.



YANG HENGJUN

Court gives suspended death sentence to Chinese Australian democracy blogger

KEN MORITSUGU & KEIRAN SMITH, BEIJING

A Chinese court gave a suspended death sentence to a China-born Australian democracy blogger yesterday. The Australian government, which has repeatedly raised his case over the years, said it was appalled.

Yang Hengjun was found guilty of espionage and sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said. Such sentences are often commuted to life in prison after the two years.

"The Australian Government is appalled," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement. "This is harrowing news for Dr. Yang, his family and all who have supported him."

Yang, a former Chinese diplomat and state security agent who became a political commentator and writer of spy novels in Australia, was detained on Jan. 19, 2019, when he arrived in the southern



AP FILE PHOTO

China city of Guangzhou from New York with his wife and teenage stepdaughter.

He was tried behind closed doors in May 2021. The details of his case have not been disclosed. Yang, who became an Australian citizen in 2002, has denied working as a spy for Australia or the United States.

In a letter to his sons in August last year, Yang said he hadn't experienced direct sunlight in more than four years. He told his family he feared

he would die in detention after being diagnosed with a kidney cyst, prompting supporters to demand his release for medical treatment.

Australia "will be communicating our response in the strongest terms" and will continue to press for his interests and wellbeing, including appropriate medical care, the Australian foreign minister said in her statement.

Wang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said the court had protected Yang's procedural rights and

arranged for the Australian side to attend yesterday's sentencing, likely referring to a diplomat or diplomats from the Australian Embassy.

In October last year, Australian journalist Cheng Lei was freed after more than three years in detention in China for breaking an embargo with a television broadcast on a state-run TV network.

The plights of Yang and Cheng had frequently been on the agendas of high-level meetings between the countries in recent years. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

GOVERNMENT ASKS FOR EXPLANATION AND FANS ARE ANGRY ABOUT NOT SEEING INJURED MESSI PLAY

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

HONG Kong's sports minister yesterday reiterated the government's call for an explanation from the organizer of a soccer match between Inter Miami and a local team following widespread disappointment over Lionel Messi remaining on the bench throughout the entire game.

The much-hyped exhibition match on Sunday ended with fans booing Inter Miami co-owner David Beckham and demanding refunds as Messi did not play in the game due to a hamstring strain.

The fans' reaction was a setback for Hong Kong officials who sought to boost the city's image as a hub for mega events amid a slow economic recovery and Beijing's crackdown on dissidents.

In a press briefing yesterday, Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism Kevin Yeung said the government's funding agreement with the match organizer, Tatler Asia, required Messi to play on the field for at least 45 minutes, unless there were safety or health concerns.

Yeung said the organizers had reaffirmed that Messi would be playing in the second half of the match before the start of the game. When the government noticed the second half did not proceed as planned, the government tried to follow up with the organizer but was told Messi could not play due to an injury, he said.

"We therefore immediately request them to explore other remedies such as Messi appearing in the field to interact with his fans and receiving the trophy. Unfortunately, as you all see, these did not work out," he said.

Organizers of the exhibition were awarded 16 million Hong Kong dollars (\$2 million) in funding by a government advisory committee and its tickets cost up to 4,880 Hong Kong dollars (\$624) each.

On Sunday night, the government expressed its disappointment in two statements, saying its follow-up action might involve reducing the funds allocated for the event.

Yeung said officials would make a decision on the funding issue later.

Tatler Asia on Sunday night insisted it had no information in advance that Messi or Suarez would not be playing. It also expressed its "extreme disappointment regarding Lionel Messi and Luis Suárez's non-participation."

Inter Miami will conclude its Asian tour in Japan tomorrow when it plays Vissel Kobe. **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

MARKETS

Regulator promises to protect small investors as stocks hit 5 year lows

CHINESE shares gyrated yesterday, sinking to 5-year lows, after stock market regulators sought to reassure jittery investors with a promise to crack down on stock price manipulation and "malicious short selling."

Shares in Shanghai and the smaller market in Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, swung between big losses and small gains throughout the day. The markets have languished on heavy selling of property shares that have suffered with a slump in the real estate market.

Market observers said there were signs the authorities had, as is often the case, ordered big institutional in-

vestors to step up buying of state-owned banks and other heavyweights.

The Industrial & Commercial Bank of China gained 2.3%, Bank of China was up 2.6% and the Agricultural Bank of China rose 2.2%.

But shares still mostly lost ground. The Shenzhen Component index lost 1.1% after dipping as much as 4.4%. The Shanghai Composite index shed 1% to 2,702.19, having lost 3.5% earlier.

Wilder swings were seen in the CSI 1000 index, an exchange-traded fund that fell as much as 8.7% yesterday before regaining some of the losses to close down 6.1%. The CSI 1000 is often used to track

so-called "snowball derivatives" which offer big gains but also can result in exaggerated losses.

Chinese companies have lost billions of dollars worth of market value as investors shifted away from the markets in Hong Kong and the mainland in search of better returns.

Apart from the troubles in the property market, where developers are struggling to restore their balance sheets after the government cracked down on excessive borrowing several years ago, a slowing of China's economy, the world's second largest, has also taken a toll.

Prices have continued to fall despite various confiden-

ce-boosting measures rolled out so far, including freeing up more than 1 trillion yuan (\$140 billion) for lending to developers.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission's announcement on Sunday appeared to be designed to reassure individual investors who account for more than half of trading volume.

Among other things, it said the proportion of shares subject to risks from short-selling had fallen from 10.5% in 2018 to about 3.4% now. It said so far such trades had accounted for only 27.4 million yuan (about \$3.5 million) a very small fraction of market turnover. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH KOREA

Samsung chief Lee acquitted of financial crimes related to merger

JIWON SONG & KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

A South Korean court yesterday acquitted Samsung Electronics Chairman Lee Jae-yong of financial crimes involving a contentious merger between Samsung affiliates in 2015 that tightened his grip over South Korea's biggest company.

The ruling by the Seoul Central District Court could ease the legal troubles surrounding the Samsung heir less than two years after he was pardoned of a separate conviction of bribery in a corruption scandal that helped topple a previous South Korean government.

The court said the prosecution failed to sufficiently prove the merger between Samsung C&T and Cheil Industries was unlawfully conducted with an aim to strengthen Lee's control over Samsung Electronics.

The ruling was criticized by activists, progressive politicians



Samsung Electronics Chairman Lee Jae-yong, second from left, leaves the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul, yesterday

and commentators, who questioned how Lee could be innocent of all charges when he had previously been convicted in the separate case of bribing a former president while seeking government support for the merger. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, a major civic group based

in Seoul, described the ruling as a setback for years of efforts to reform the management culture of South Korea's family-owned conglomerates and their cozy ties with the government. South Korean corporate leaders often receive relatively lenient punishments for corruption, business

irregularities and other crimes, with judges often citing concerns over the country's economy.

Prosecutors had sought a five-year jail term for Lee, who was accused of stock price manipulation and accounting fraud. It wasn't immediately clear whether they would appeal. Lee denied wrongdoing in the current case, describing the 2015 merger as "normal business activity."

Lee, 55, did not answer questions from reporters as he left the court. You Jin Kim, Lee's lawyer, praised the ruling, saying it confirmed that the merger was legal.

Lee, a third-generation corporate heir who was officially appointed chairman of Samsung Electronics in October 2022, has led the Samsung group of companies since 2014, when his late father, former chairman Lee Kun-hee, suffered a heart attack.

Lee Jae-yong served 18 months in prison after being convicted in 2017 over separate bribery charges related to the 2015 deal. He was originally sentenced to

five years in prison for offering 8.6 billion won (\$6.4 million) worth of bribes to then-President Park Geun-hye and her close confidante to win government support for the 2015 merger, which was key to strengthening his control over the Samsung business empire and solidifying the father-to-son leadership succession.

Park and her confidante were also convicted in the scandal, and enraged South Koreans staged massive protests for months demanding an end to shady ties between business and politics. The demonstrations eventually led to Park's ouster from office.

Lee was released on parole in 2021 and pardoned by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in August 2022, in moves that extended a history of leniency toward major white-collar crime in South Korea and preferential treatment for convicted tycoons.

Some shareholders had opposed the 2015 merger, saying it unfairly benefited the Lee family while hurting minority shareholders.

There was also public anger over how the national pension fund's stake in Samsung C&T, the merged entity, fell by an estimated hundreds of millions of dollars after Park pressured the National Pension Service to support the deal. MDT/AP

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



AP PHOTO



U.S. President Joe Biden speaks at a campaign event Sunday in North Las Vegas

USA

Biden warns of a 'nightmare' future for the country if Trump should win again

DARLENE SUPERVILLE AND GABE STERN, LAS VEGAS

PRESIDENT Joe Biden yesterday [Macau time] ticked through a list of reasons he says a second Donald Trump presidency would be a "nightmare" for the country as he urged Nevada Democrats to vote for him in the state's presidential primary this week and for his party at large in November.

Biden opened a campaign swing with a fundraiser where he focused on Trump's ample history of provocative statements — his description of Jan. 6 rioters as "hostages," his musing about a former top military officer deserving execution, his branding of fallen soldiers as "suckers" and "losers," his wish to be a Day One "dictator," his vow to supporters that "I am your retribution," and more.

Then it was on to a community center in a predominantly Black section of Las Vegas, where he told his crowd of several hundred that "you're the reason we'll make Donald Trump a loser again."

Biden said the stakes were huge when he took on Trump in 2020 — "what made America America, I thought, was at risk" — and they are even larger now as a likely rematch looms.

He told donors at the private home in Henderson, Nevada, that if they came to Washington, he'd show them

the White House dining room table where Trump, according to ex-aides, sat transfixed for hours in front of the TV as the rioters he'd fired up with his rhetoric stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

"We have to keep the White House," he said. "We must keep the Senate" and win back the House.

Accomplish that, he said, and "we can say we saved American democracy."

He was equally blunt in talking up his record at his subsequent rally where he implored voters to "imagine the nightmare of Donald Trump."

Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung responded in kind, saying Biden "has been a nightmare for this country in just three short years in the White House, and no amount of gaslighting will make Americans forget about all the misery and destruction he has brought."

In Tuesday's Nevada Democratic presidential primary, Biden faces only token opposition from author Marianne Williamson and a few relatively unknown challengers. He won Nevada in November 2020 by fewer than 3 percentage points. But he came to Nevada to rouse voters for the fall campaign as well.

The state known largely for its casino and hospitality industries is synonymous with split-ticket, hard-to-predict results. It has a transient,

working-class population and large Latino, Filipino and Chinese American and Black communities. Nevada has a stark rural-urban divide, with more than 88% of active registered voters — and much of its political power — in the two most populous counties, which include the Las Vegas and Reno metro areas.

In 2022, Democrats successfully defended their Senate seat and lost the governor's office. The six constitutional officers elected statewide are split evenly among Democrats and Republicans.

The narrow victory of Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto helped Democrats party keep control of the Senate for the remainder of Biden's current term.

Working in Biden's favor this year is the vast Democratic operation built by the late Sen. Harry Reid. The "Reid Machine" has for years trained operatives and retained organizers and is partially why, despite Nevada's status as a purple state, Democrats have won every presidential election here since 2008.

But early signs show Biden could have more ground to make up than in past races. Voters are largely dissatisfied with the likely Biden-Trump rematch. A New York Times/Siena poll from November put Biden's approval rating at 36% in Nevada.

"I know from my reelection, the issues that matter to Nevadans are still those kitchen table issues," Cortez

Masto said in an interview.

Biden has built his reelection campaign around the theme that Trump presents a dire threat to U.S. democracy and its founding values. The president also has championed the defense of abortion rights, recently holding his first big campaign rally, in Virginia, where the issue energized Democrats who won control of the state's House of Delegates.

Biden also promotes his handling of the economy, arguing that his policies have created millions of jobs, combated climate change and improved American competitiveness overseas. But polls suggest many voters aren't giving his administration credit.

The Democratic National Committee recently announced a six-figure ad buy in Nevada and South Carolina, where Biden won the leadoff primary Saturday. The ads are meant to boost enthusiasm among Black, Asian American and Latino voters statewide, including radio, television and digital ads in Spanish, Chinese and Tagalog, and a billboard in Las Vegas' Chinatown.

As early voting began a week ago in Nevada, Trump asserted without evidence during a campaign rally in Las Vegas that he was the victim of the Biden administration's weaponizing law enforcement against him. Trump has been indicted four times and faces 91 felonies. MDT/AP

this day in history

1952 KING GEORGE VI DIES IN HIS SLEEP



His Majesty, King George VI, has died peacefully in his sleep at Sandringham House.

The official announcement from Sandringham, given at 1045 GMT, said the King retired in his usual health, but passed away in his sleep and was found dead in bed at 0730 GMT by a servant.

He was 56, and was known to have been suffering from a worsening lung condition.

Princess Elizabeth, who is at the Royal hunting lodge in Kenya, immediately becomes Queen at the age of 25.

She has been informed of her father's death, and is preparing to return to London, but a thunderstorm has delayed the departure of her plane.

She is expected back tomorrow afternoon, when she will take the Royal Oath which will seal her accession to the throne.

The cabinet met this morning as soon as the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was informed of the news, to discuss the constitutional implications.

The House of Commons has also been suspended as a mark of respect.

Before MPs adjourned, Prime Minister Winston Churchill offered their condolences, saying, "We cannot at this moment do more than record the spontaneous expression of grief." [...]

A crowd began to gather outside Buckingham Palace during the afternoon, as diplomats from around the world arrived in official cars to write their condolences in the visitors' book.

By 2100 GMT the police had to press the growing number of mourners back from the gates and on to the pavement. Despite the bitter cold and rain, the silent, weeping crowd stayed until long after it grew dark.

The news was greeted with shock and grief throughout the world. In the United States, President Truman, in a formal statement from the White House, paid tribute to the King.

He said, "He shared to the end of his reign all the hardships and austerities which evil days imposed on the brave British people. [...]"

The body of King George is to lie in state in Westminster Hall from next Monday, 11 February, until the funeral.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The King had suffered a coronary thrombosis - a fatal blood clot to the heart - soon after falling asleep. He was also revealed to have been suffering from lung cancer.

He had always been a frail, nervous man, and had not expected to become King; but he was catapulted onto the throne by the abdication of his brother, Edward VIII.

Three years later, he was leading the country through the Second World War. His steadfastness won him the hearts of the people, most notably when he and his wife and Queen, Elizabeth (who became the Queen Mother on his death), insisted on sharing the dangers of the Battle of Britain with the people of London.

However, the stressful nature of his accession to the throne, and the particularly traumatic times through which he led the country left him physically exhausted, and are thought to have contributed to his failing health and his early death.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Your diplomatic nature will help you in straightening out unsavory situations. Try not to take others for granted. Tempers could get out of hand today.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
 You must be extremely careful not to let relatives or friends interfere in your personal life. It may not be the best day to confront employers or to present your ideas.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
 Be honest if you wish to solve the problem. Romance will be on your mind, and chances for ideal connections are in the works. Accept the inevitable and continue to do your job.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 You will be able to enlist the help of colleagues who believe in your ideas. Be cautious and use your head wisely in situations that deal with the use of machinery or vehicles.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Move forward if you want to turn your life around. Take time to deal with authority figures or government agencies. Don't let your emotions get out of hand.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 You might be overly emotional concerning situations at work. Plan to get out and do a bit of travel. Go with the flow and don't be concerned about your own job.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Plans to make physical improvements may lead to psychological changes, too. You need to take a long, hard look at yourself and your personal situation.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Travel and family gatherings should be in order. Children may be less than honest with you. Don't share your dilemma with those you work with.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Too much too fast will be the attitude surrounding your home environment. Go with the flow and don't be concerned about your own job.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 You can get your point across if you don't beat around the bush. Self-deception about relationships is a problem. Your family needs to spend some time with you, too.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 You will have to check your cash flow before you decide to indulge in hobbies or entertainment that may be beyond your budget. Try not to take others for granted.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Your talents might just be discovered. Your creative ideas will be put to good use if you dig in and do things around the house that will make your family happy.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

| | MIN | MAX | CONDITION |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| CHINA | | | |
| Beijing | -5 | 5 | cloudy |
| Changchun | -17 | -8 | cloudy |
| Chengdu | 4 | 8 | overcast |
| Chongqing | 7 | 9 | overcast |
| Fuzhou | 10 | 14 | overcast |
| Guangzhou | 13 | 19 | rain |
| Guiyang | 0 | 3 | rain |
| Haikou | 21 | 28 | cloudy |
| Hangzhou | 0 | 2 | snow |
| Harbin | -24 | -9 | fine |
| Hefei | -8 | 0 | overcast |
| Nanjing | -3 | 0 | overcast |
| Shanghai | 0 | 3 | rain |
| Taipei | 13 | 17 | rain |
| Wuhan | -2 | 0 | snow |
| Hong Kong | 18 | 20 | windy |
| WORLD | | | |
| Moscow | -13 | -4 | cloudy |
| Frankfurt | 7 | 10 | cloudy |
| Paris | 9 | 12 | cloudy |
| London | 6 | 13 | windy |
| New York | -2 | 5 | fine |

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Fluffy; 6- Web locale; 10- Be a mother to; 14- Bahamanian island; 15- Counterfeiter catcher; 16- Expel gas or odor; 17- ___ your life!; 18- Greet the day; 19- Area of 4840 square yards; 20- Shoebox letters; 21- Intoxicated; 23- Skedaddles; 24- Head cold; 26- Conger catcher; 27- Disclose; 29- Suggest; 31- Offer; 32- Gastropod mollusk; 33- Arts deg.; 36- Typical instance; 40- LAX posting; 41- Long; 42- Lawyer Dershowitz; 43- Fragrance; 44- Italian sausage; 46- Macho guys; 48- Brightest star in Cygnus; 49- Smelling ___; 50- Astonish; 52- Summer Games org.; 55- Addict; 56- Partly open; 57- Funny Anne; 59- Sicilian smoker; 60- Steak order; 61- Little bits; 62- Aborigine of Borneo; 63- Fired; 64- Concerning;

DOWN 1- Hamlet, for one; 2- It's blown among the reeds; 3- Daphnia; 4- Sgt., for one; 5- Over there; 6- Play chords; 7- Poker declaration; 8- Piece of work; 9- Hydrocarbon ending; 10- For sure?; 11- Host; 12- Broadcaster; 13- Hwys.; 22- Grog ingredient; 23- Gal's guy; 25- Actor Ian; 26- Long poem, such as those attributed to Homer; 27- Words of understanding; 28- Immediately following; 29- Prefix with red; 30- Chief; 32- Former name of Thailand; 33- Having two lips; 34- Froth; 35- Years in old Rome; 37- Funeral fires; 38- Boxer Spinks; 39- Story, often rooted in folklore; 43- Pacific Surfliner operator; 44- Oh yeah? ___ who?; 45- Hemoglobin deficiency; 46- Hurried; 47- Actress Verdugo; 48- Ventured; 49- Took to court; 50- "Iliad" warrior; 51- Female horse; 53- Algerian seaport; 54- Dramatis personae; 56- First name in Notre Dame football; 58- Awfully long time;



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

MUSIC

GRAMMYS ARE SWIFT'S WORLD ON A NIGHT WHEN WOMEN LIKE CYRUS, MITCHELL ALSO SHINE

DAVID BAUDER, MDT/AP
ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

IT'S Taylor Swift's world, and she just allows us to live in it.

After weeks where she attracted endless attention for her football star boyfriend and a mystifying right-wing campaign against her, the Grammy Awards put the focus squarely back on her art. "Midnights" earned Swift her fourth career Grammy for album of the year yesterday, an achievement no one can match.

It breaks a tie with Frank Sinatra, Paul Simon and Stevie Wonder, who each won the honor three times.

"For me, the award is the work," she said. "All I want to do is keep doing it."

And she will (more on that later). Swift was the last example of an action-packed show where women earned the biggest honors and had the majority of the most memorable performances. Miley Cyrus powerfully belted "Flowers," which won record of the year. Billie Eilish's ballad from "Barbie," "What Was I Made For?" was song of the year for her and co-writer Finneas O'Connell, her brother. Singer-songwriter Victoria Monét is best new artist.

There were so many riches that rock supergroup boygenius, with Julien Baker, Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus, won three Grammys and didn't even make it onto the CBS portion of the show.

Making the best pop vocal solo performance the televised show's first award — where all five nominees were women — was a savvy hint to what was coming.

TRACY'S TURN

Bringing the reclusive Tracy Chapman on to duet with country singer Luke Combs, who had a massive hit covering her "Fast Car" this past summer, was spine-tingling. In a pre-taped segment leading into it, Combs eloquently described what the song meant to him growing up. Clearly moved, Chapman's eyes glistened when the crowd roared as she played the 1988 song's unforgettable guitar riff. She's kept to the background as Combs brought the song to a new generation, and chose a wise place to reemerge.

SOME FLOWERS FOR MILEY

Not to diss more elaborately-staged affairs, but there was a certain power to Cyrus' performance of "Flowers." It was just her and the song, essentially. There was no question she could carry it, and she even inserted a couple of ad-libs: "I just won my first Grammy!" Her acceptance speeches were packed

AP PHOTO



Taylor Swift accepts the award for album of the year for "Midnights" during the 66th annual Grammy Awards

with personality. "I don't think I've forgotten anyone," she said, after a requisite list of thank-yous, "but I may have forgotten underwear."

JAY-Z NEVER FORGETS

In accepting the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award, Jay-Z proved he has a long memory. He recalled the times that rap artists were outspoken about not getting enough attention from the Grammys commensurate with music sales, even boycotting a show — although "they went to a hotel to watch the Grammys," he said. "It wasn't a great boycott." Jay-Z considers it an injustice that his wife, Beyoncé, has never won album of the year despite her astonishing haul of 32 Grammys. "When I get nervous," he said, "I tell the truth."

JONI'S RETURN

Joni Mitchell's return to the stage earned her a Grammy and her

performance Sunday night (yesterday, Macau time) was another emotional highlight. Surrounded by musical friends like Brandi Carlile, the 80-year-old Mitchell sat in an easy chair that resembled a throne, tapping her cane as she sang "Both Sides Now." Her voice, which she had to recover after suffering a brain aneurysm, brought a richness and perspective to the song that could only be hinted at in the original. Like Chapman, she was visibly moved by the audience's reception, betrayed by laughter after she finished.

TOUCHING TRIBUTES

Let's be honest, those "in memoriam" tributes to people who died in the past year usually signal that it's time for a bathroom break. Not so here. Stevie Wonder honored Tony Bennett on a chilling "duet" with a filmed Bennett on Wonder's "For Once in My Life,"

then sang Bennett's "The Best is Yet to Come." Annie Lennox, saluting Sinead O'Connor, sang "Nothing Compares 2 U," with two of the late songwriter Prince's accompanists. And Fantasia Barrino shook the walls with "Proud Mary" to honor Tina Turner.

HARD WORK

To the public, it sometimes seems that stars arrive suddenly, but Monét and SZA offered charming reminders of all the hard work and dreams that go into success. After disarmingly thanking "the champagne servers of tonight," Monét described the 15-year journey that took her to a best new artist award. "My roots have been growing underneath the ground for so long — and I feel like today I'm sprouting," she said. There was a brief pause before SZA accepted an award for best R&B song, since she was changing

backstage. But she was overwhelmed after recalling, with the trophy presented Lizzo, the days a decade ago when they opened shows in small clubs. She hustled offstage when the tears flowed. "I'm not an attractive crier," she said.

PROMO TIME

Yes, we understand that artists are always on the lookout to promote their work. But when Swift took time in accepting an award to announce that her new album would come out in April, and said she would share cover art on social media, it felt ... cheap. Like she was hijacking the event for her own purposes, with news she knew would overshadow much of what was happening. U2, beamed in from a concert at their Las Vegas residency, felt like they were promoting an arena instead of their own work, lost as they were in the razzle-dazzle. Two forgettable moments for two big stars.

TREVOR KNOWS

Props to Trevor Noah for his job as host. His enthusiasm for the music world can seem puppy dog-like, but it beats insult comics and ironists. Opening the show from the arena's floor, walking around to point out the stars, Noah built spirit for people there and at home alike. He got in some good lines, too, like when he noted Universal Music was removing its artists from TikTok. "How dare you rip off all the artists," he said. "Shame on you. That's Spotify's job." As Swift arrived late, he said that as she walked in the room, "the economy around these tables improve. Lionel Richie becomes Lionel Wealthy."

Unlike her glares that torpedoed Jo Koy at the Golden Globes, Swift appeared to be enjoying Noah.

AP PHOTO



From left: Joni Mitchell, host Trevor Noah, and Brandi Carlile



Miley Cyrus performs "Flowers" during the Grammy Awards

FOOTBALL

Messi's global tour with Inter Miami has been very messy and a PR nightmare

STEPHEN WADE, TOKYO

IT'S all been very messy. We're talking about Lionel Messi and Inter Miami's global tour of exhibition games where the main show has been Argentina's 2022 World Cup-winning captain.

The matches are about promotion and marketing, hoping to build a new brand by using stars like Messi and Uruguayan Luis Suarez. Instead, the tour is getting mostly bad PR, and results that have not been much better in matches that have stretched from El Salvador, through Dallas, into Saudi Arabia, and then Hong Kong on Sunday.

The next stop is Tokyo's National Stadium on Wednesday against Vissel Kobe, and a wrap-up match on Feb. 16 in Florida against Newell's Old Boys — Messi's boyhood club in Argentina, and the club that might be his final destination before retiring.

Through five games, Inter



AP PHOTO

Miami has been outscored 12-7 and won only once. And that was Sunday in Hong Kong, where a 4-1 victory over the local team was overshadowed by angry fans holding up signs demanding a refund and booing since neither Messi nor Suarez played — both out injured and aging.

Messi is 36 and Suarez is 37, and both are more and more subject to nagging injuries.

"The marketing hype in promoting the event to global fans

creates high expectations, coupled with government subsidy of the event," John Grady, a sports law professor at the University of South Carolina, told The Associated Press. "This also raises the expectations that marquee players will appear as advertised."

Even though fans know the games are for practice, and meaningless in the standings, they still choose to pay high prices and attend. As the phrase goes in Latin — caveat emptor, or "let

the buyer beware."

"As more football teams recruit elite talent with large followings, including on social media, it creates a situation where non-appearance causes fan outrage and results in a public relations headaches," Grady added.

Inter Miami coach Gerardo Martino apologized for Messi's absence after Sunday's Hong Kong match. Fans who saw practice on Saturday at least saw the Argentina captain in a kick-arou-

nd, with Miami co-owner David Beckham also on the field.

"We understand the disappointment of the fans for the absence of Leo (Messi) and Luis Suarez," Martino said. "We understand a lot of fans are very disappointed and we ask for their forgiveness. We wish we could have sent Leo and Luis on for at least a while but the risk was too big."

Messi came on for the last seven minutes in the 6-0 loss at Al-Nassr — one of the two matches in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia — as Inter Miami prepares for its MLS season opener on Feb. 22.

It's anyone's guess if Messi will play tomorrow in Japan, and if so, how much. Martino will certainly be under pressure to use him some, but Messi is sure to have the final say.

Inter Miami is to practice today on the outskirts of Tokyo with snow in the forecast. Wednesday calls for sunny skies but temperatures at game time around freezing. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

The Conversation

Jason Hawes, University of Michigan



**URBAN AGRICULTURE
 BEST PRACTICES CAN
 TRANSFORM GARDENS,
 CITY-FARMS**

Urban agriculture is expected to be an important feature of 21st century sustainability and can have many benefits for communities and cities, including providing fresh produce in neighborhoods with few other options.

Among those benefits, growing food in backyards, community gardens or urban farms can shrink the distance fruits and vegetables have to travel between producers and consumers – what’s known as the “food mile” problem.

With transportation’s greenhouse gas emissions eliminated, it’s a small leap to assume that urban agriculture is a simple climate solution.

But is urban agriculture really as climate-friendly as many people think?

Our team of researchers partnered with individual gardeners, community garden volunteers and urban farm managers at 73 sites across five countries in North America and Europe to test this assumption.

We found that urban agriculture, while it has many community benefits, isn’t always better for the climate than conventional agriculture over the life cycle, even with transportation factored in. In fact, on average, the urban agriculture sites we studied were six times more carbon intensive per serving of fruit or vegetables than conventional farming.

However, we also found several practices that stood out for how effectively they can make fruits and vegetables grown in cities more climate-friendly.

Most research on urban agriculture has focused on a single type of urban farming, often high-tech projects, such as aquaponic tanks, rooftop greenhouses or vertical farms. Electricity consumption often means the food grown in these high-tech environments has a big carbon footprint.

We looked instead at the life cycle emissions of more common low-tech urban agriculture – the kind found in urban backyards, vacant lots and urban farms.

Using old building materials for constructing farm infrastructure, such as raised beds, can cut out the climate impacts of new lumber, cement and glass, among other materials. We found that upcycling building materials could cut a site’s emissions 50% or more.

On average, our sites used compost to replace 95% of synthetic nutrients. Using food waste as compost can avoid both the methane emissions from food scraps buried in landfills and the need for synthetic fertilizers made from fossil fuels. We found that careful compost management could cut greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 40%.

Capturing rainwater or using greywater from shower drains or sinks can reduce the need for pumping water, water treatment and water distribution.

Tomatoes are a great example of crops that can cut emissions when grown with low-tech urban agriculture. Commercially, they are often grown in large-scale greenhouses that can be particularly energy-intensive. Asparagus and other produce that must be transported by airplane because they spoil quickly are another example with a large carbon footprint.

By growing these crops instead of buying them in stores, low-tech urban growers can reduce their net carbon impact.

Cities are constantly changing, and community gardens can be vulnerable to development pressures. But if urban agriculture sites can remain in place for many years, they can avoid the need for new infrastructure and keep providing other benefits to their communities.

Urban agriculture sites provide ecosystem services and social benefits, such as fresh produce, community building and education. Urban farms also create homes for bees and urban wildlife, while offering some protection from the urban heat island effect.

The practice of growing food in cities is expected to continue expanding in the coming years, and many cities are looking to it as a key tool for climate adaptation and environmental justice.

We believe that with careful site design and improved land use policy, urban farmers and gardeners can boost their benefit both to people nearby and the planet as a whole.

[Abridged]

**US PORN ACTOR WHO ADVOCATES FOR PALESTINIANS
 VISITS IRAN ON TRIP UNACKNOWLEDGED BY TEHRAN**

**THE
 BUZZ**

An American porn actor who has advocated for Palestinians online during Israel’s war on Hamas traveled to Iran and visited the former U.S. Embassy in Tehran, which was abandoned after the 1979 hostage crisis.

The visit by Whitney Wright as Iran imprisons Nobel Peace Prize laureate and women’s rights activist Narges Mohammadi sparked heated criticism of the country’s crackdown on women since the 2022 death in police custody of Mahsa Amini and the nationwide protests it sparked.

Wright filmed herself throughout Tehran despite her work in pornography exposing her in theory to criminal charges that carry the

death penalty.

Wright did not respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press. But in remarks on social media, she described the U.S. Embassy as a place she “HAD to visit.” Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard now runs it as a museum.

Iranian students backing Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini overran the compound after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Embassy staff members taken hostage were held for 444 days. A direct line can be drawn between that crisis and the tensions between Iran and the U.S. today.

“I’m sharing exhibits from a museum that are never seen,” Wright wrote on Instagram. “It’s not an endorsement of the government.”

AP PHOTO



Britain’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (right) with Northern Ireland’s First Minister Michelle O’Neill (left) and Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly as he arrives Stormont Castle in Belfast, yesterday

**IRISH AND UK LEADERS
 ARE IN BELFAST TO
 CELEBRATE THE END OF
 NORTHERN IRELAND’S
 POLITICAL DEADLOCK**

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

The leaders of the U.K. and Ireland went to Belfast yesterday to meet Northern Ireland’s newly revived government and bask in a good-news moment after two years of political crisis.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Irish counterpart Leo Varadkar were visiting the new administration at Belfast’s Stormont Castle as its ministers met for the first time. The ministers wasted no time before pressing London for more money to patch up Northern Ireland’s creaking public services.

Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly appointed a power-sharing government on Saturday after a two-year hiatus sparked when the main British unionist party walked out in February 2022.

The Democratic Unionist Party boycotted the administration to protest post-Brexit trading arrangements that it said undermined Northern Ireland’s place in the United Kingdom. The party was

coaxed into returning last week after the U.K. promised to eliminate most checks on goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the U.K.

Under power-sharing rules established as part of Northern Ireland’s peace process, the administration in Belfast must include both British unionists and Irish nationalists. The U.K. and the Republic of Ireland both have roles as guarantors of the peace.

The new administration is led by First Minister Michelle O’Neill of Sinn Fein, the party allied with the Irish Republican Army during Northern Ireland’s decades of violence known as “The Troubles.” Her appointment was historic, marking the first time an Irish nationalist, who aspires to take Northern Ireland out of the U.K. and unite it with the republic, has held the post.

In practice, nationalists and unionists will continue to govern in uneasy balance. The post of deputy first minister – held by Emma Little-Pengelly of the DUP – is officially equal to the first minister,

and neither can govern without the other.

The DUP boycott left Northern Ireland’s 1.9 million people without a functioning administration to make key decisions as the cost of living soared and backlogs strained the creaking public health system.

The U.K. government has agreed to give Northern Ireland more than 3 billion pounds (\$3.8 billion) as part of an incentive to restore the government. Already, the Belfast administration says it’s not enough.

Little-Pengelly said the ministers in Belfast would be “seeking to ensure the U.K. government provides sufficient funding in a package to fulfill its promises on public sector pay.”

Chris Heaton-Harris, the U.K.’s Northern Ireland secretary, said the package was “ample for the time being.”

“I believe the new set of ministers are completely capable of running their public finances perfectly well with the fair and generous funding package we’ve given them,” he told the BBC. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



France Parisians voted yesterday [Macau time] to muscle SUVs off the French capital’s streets by making them much more expensive to park from fall, the latest leg in a drive by Socialist Mayor Anne Hidalgo to make the host city for this year’s Olympic Games greener and friendlier for pedestrians and cyclists. More than 54% of the votes cast in the low-turnout election supported the measure to triple parking fees for large SUV drivers from out of town to 18 euros.

AP PHOTO



Chile Firefighters wrestled yesterday with massive forest fires that broke out in central Chile two days earlier, as officials extended curfews in cities most heavily affected by the blazes and said at least 112 people had been killed. The fires burned with the highest intensity around the city of Viña del Mar, where a famous botanical garden founded in 1931 was destroyed by the flames. At least 1,600 people were left without homes.

AP PHOTO



El Salvador Voters in El Salvador appeared to give Nayib Bukele a second term as president, putting him well on his way to a landslide victory in an election that for many hinged on the tradeoff of curtailed civil liberties for security in a country once terrorized by gangs. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal said yesterday [Macau time] that with ballots from 31% of polling places tallied, Bukele had 83% of the vote.