



**PONTE 16 PREPARES FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPANSION KNOWN AS 'PHASE 3', WHICH REPRESENTS AN INVESTMENT OF OVER HKD500 MILLION**

P2

**LAWMAKER LEI CALLS FOR MORE GOV'T SUPPORT TO FURTHER JOB OPPORTUNITIES**

P4

**HEAVY SNOW HITS MAINLAND, DISRUPTING TRAFFIC AND CANCELING CLASSES**

P6



AP PHOTO



**Japan's** industry minister summoned the president of the utility that runs the Fukushima nuclear power plant to his office yesterday and chided him for a radioactive water leak at the plant earlier this month. Mishaps related to the massive amount of contaminated water at the tsunami-damaged Fukushima Daiichi plant are especially sensitive while the government tries to get support for discharging treated wastewater into the sea — a process that will take decades and has worried people inside and outside Japan.

AP PHOTO



**Afghanistan** More than \$400 million is needed for western Afghanistan to recover and rebuild after a devastating earthquake last October that killed around 2,000 people, the United Nations said yesterday. The magnitude 6.3 quake on Oct. 7, one of the most destructive in the country's recent history, flattened entire villages in Herat province and also left thousands injured and homeless. Months on, survivors are still struggling to rebuild their lives.

AP PHOTO



**India** Police fired tear gas yesterday at thousands of Indian farmers who resumed their protest march to New Delhi after talks with the government failed to end an impasse over their demands for guaranteed crop prices. The protests come at a crucial time for India, where national elections are due in the coming months and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party is widely expected to secure a third successive term in office.

More on backpage

# CRESCENDO

RENATO MARQUES



Fitch Ratings estimates a 15% growth of Macau's economy this year, supported by steady tourism recovery P2

**COPYRIGHTS ASSOCIATION CONDEMNS KARAOKE BARS' USE OF UNLICENSED MUSIC**

P4



**EVENTS**  
**FIRST GOV'T-ORGANIZED SHORT FILM FESTIVAL NEXT MONTH**

P3



GAMING

# FITCH FORECASTS FURTHER IMPROVEMENT SUPPORTED BY STEADY TOURISM RECOVERY

LYNZY VALLES

**F**itch Ratings anticipates 15% economic growth for Macau this year, with gaming tourism recovery underpinning its expectations of strong economic growth for Macau in 2024.

The institution reaffirmed Macau's 'AA' rating with a Stable Outlook in March 2023, reflecting the region's robust public and external finances and continued economic recovery including in the gaming sector.

Fitch Ratings expects Macau's gaming industry to improve in 2024, bolstered by a steady recovery in inbound tourism. This was particularly evident during the recent Chinese New Year holiday period.

The institution expects the mass-market segment to play a role in supporting this positive trend. The upswing in visitation and gaming revenue is likely to support casino operators with Macau operations to reduce their debt, according to a statement issued by the institution.

However, Fitch noted that the "upside potential in their ratings is constrained by their elevated leverage metrics, as deleveraging will take time for some of the operators, despite the improvements." Tourist numbers from mainland China to Macau surged during the 10-day Chinese New Year holiday, which was a day longer than normal.

"This influx reinforces our expectation of a recovery in Macau's gaming sector for the rest

of the year, despite the economic headwinds facing China. This resilience is in part due to a shift in Chinese consumer preferences towards service-oriented sectors, like domestic tourism and entertainment," according to the statement.

Government data shows that inbound visitor numbers for the first seven days of the holiday period increased by 2.6% compared to the same period in 2019.

During the 10-day Spring Festival, data shows that a total of 5.83 million border movements were recorded.

From these, over three million were movements related to visitors' entry and exit, with total visitor entries reaching 1.52 million.

This influx of tourists is likely to boost casinos' gross gaming revenue (GGR), with the mass-market segment already registering revenues in the fourth quarter of 2023 that exceeded 2019 levels by 4%.

"The VIP segment, however, is on a slower path to recovery and unlikely to return to pre-pandemic revenue levels in the near future. This slower rebound in the VIP segment can be attributed to recent years' regulatory tightening in China's treatment of gaming tourism and the broader economic challenges facing China," Fitch stated.

Meanwhile, the institution warned that recovery in Macau's gaming revenues could be slowed by possible policies to tighten capital outflow from the mainland.



## GGR TO REACH A FOUR-YEAR HIGH OF MOP650 MILLION DAILY

**M**ACAU'S gross gaming revenue (GGR) is expected to increase by 80% year-on-year in February, reaching MOP19 billion, according to brokerage firm JP Morgan.

This translates to a daily run-rate of MOP650 million, the highest seen in over four years.

The analysts note that the GGR for the first 18 days of February was MOP12.5 billion, indicating a 75% recovery compared to the same period in 2019. The data suggests a daily run-rate of MOP715 million over the past two weeks, surpassing JP Morgan's earlier expectations. Citigroup also estimated that the daily GGR during the Chinese New Year would be around MOP900 million, and their prediction was largely in line with the actual figures.

According to industry sources, VIP volumes increased by approximately 10% to 14% month-on-month, while mass volumes rose by about 8% to

10% month-on-month.

During the Chinese New Year Golden Week, the daily GGR was projected to exceed MOP1 billion, outperforming the previous year's October Golden Week. The recovery of Macau's mass GGR has surpassed 120% of 2019 levels.

JP Morgan expects the strong performance in February to drive mid to high single-digit quarter-on-quarter growth in estimated GGR for the first quarter of 2024. This, combined with positive fourth-quarter earnings reports from 2023, suggests that consensus revisions are likely to be positive.

This would be the highest run-rate in over four years and is projected to drive mid to high-single-digit growth in first-quarter GGR compared to the previous quarter. Citigroup maintains a more conservative estimate of approximately MOP19.5 billion for February's GGR, representing around 77% of the GGR in February 2019.

# Ponte 16 to undergo up to HKD600 million extension project

STAFF REPORTER

**P**ONTE 16 is preparing for a transformative expansion known as "Phase 3."

The Success Universe Group, a co-investor in Ponte 16, plans to invest between HKD500 million and HKD600 million into the ambitious project.

In total, the plans call for the creation of a new shopping mall, open-air plaza, and a makeover of the Sofitel Macau, according to media reports.

The proposed Phase 3 includes the creation of a comprehensive shopping mall and an open-air plaza, which has been presented to

the Macau government for approval.

Situated within Ponte 16, the Sofitel Macau will undergo significant renovations with an allocated budget of "over HKD100 million," according to executive director and deputy chairman of Success Universe, Hoffman Ma.

The group anticipa-

tes that operational revenues from Ponte 16 will play a significant role in funding the expansion.

The company will also act as a guarantor in a financial arrangement that supports the property's promoter in refinancing existing loans and covering the associated costs.

ANTHONY LAM



www.macaudailytimes.com.mo

**REACHING OUT!**

+25,000

Like us on facebook.com/mdtimes



MacauDaily 澳門每日時報  
**Times**

DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com  
ASSISTANT EDITOR Lynzy Valles  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS Alex Torrão, Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Anthony Lam, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Jorge Costa Oliveira, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Sérgio de Almeida Correia, Viviana Seguí DESIGNERS Miguel Bandeira, Rebeca Almeida | ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | NEWS AGENCIES Associated Press, MacauHub, MacaoNews, Xinhua SECRETARY Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com

OFFICE MANAGER Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com

ADDRESS Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR Telephones: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84

Advertisement advertising@macaudailytimes.com

For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd



CINEMA

# First gov't-organized short film festival to take place next month

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) revealed plans yesterday for the first-ever government-organized International Short Film festival, scheduled to take place between Mar. 23 and Mar. 30.

Despite sharing the same name, the event is unrelated to the Macao International Short Film Festival organized for the past decade by Creative Macau – Center for Creative Industries.

Sponsored by the Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG), the new short film festival aims “to create an international short film exchange and exhibition platform and to promote Macau’s film and TV shows to the world,” IC president Deland Leong said in her opening speech. She added that the festival also “aims to boost exchanges between local and international film and TV professionals, introduce a diverse range of international and Asian films to audiences and showcase the diversity and vitality of short films in the hope of inspiring and connecting global filmmakers and audiences.”

Questioned by the media about the relation between the two short film festivals, Leong clarified that they were unrelated and had different goals. “Our goal is a little bit different as we hope that through this festival, we can dynamize and facilitate exchange between the professionals of this field and give them opportunities to take their local productions to international stages.”

She gave assurances that the decision to create this new festival was not due to dissatisfaction with Creative Macau’s efforts, which she emphasized the government is pleased with.

She expressed the hope that the



MISFF organizers with 10 local filmmakers

Macao International Short Film Festival, using short films as a medium, will become a global exchange platform for film creations. She noted that the IC intends to leverage different mechanisms to assist the film and TV industry to introduce more local productions to the world.

## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE LED BY GAIA FURRER

Gaia Furrer, an Italian film producer, will lead the organizing committee and oversee festival decisions and the competition. Furrer has also been working at Venice Days (Venice Film Festival’s sidebar) as a programmer and Head of Programming since its inception.

The committee also includes Jason Anderson, the short film curator of the Toronto International Film Festival; Shen Yang, a mainland curator and film producer; and Thai actress Aokbab Chutimon.

The festival will also include the

two programmers: Hong Kong actress and singer Winnie Lau, and the experienced Asian Festivals programmer Giovanna Fulvi.

## TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY

The president of IC noted in her opening speech that the festival aims to “gradually become an exchange platform for the world’s film creations.” However, when questioned by the media, she said that the decision to make the event recurring is yet to be confirmed.

“This is just the first edition. We hope that it will continue in the future but we don’t know yet if this will happen,” she said. “Only after this edition is concluded and we evaluate the outcomes can we decide if we will continue to organize it in the future or not, and also if it will continue to be presented in March.”

For the time being, this year’s festival will have a total budget of 9.4 million patacas, which will include prize money for the winner

and runners-up of the short film competition.

## FOUR CATEGORIES

This edition will be divided into four different categories, including: Macau Shorts, New Voices from Horizon, Director in Focus, and Special Screenings.

The first two categories are considered to be the main categories in the competition. The films will be judged by cinema professionals from mainland, Southeast Asia, Portugal, other European countries and America. The IC noted that there will be awards for the Best Short Film, Best Technical Contribution, Best Director, Innovative Narrative Award, and Best Short from Macau.

The winner of the Best Short from Macau category will receive 40,000 patacas in prize money.

Within the Director in Focus category, the festival will present several shorts and feature-length films authored by the Japanese film director Shunji Iwai.

For the Special Screenings, the IC will showcase films selected for their “exceptional art, innovation or profound sociocultural understanding” to enrich the program.

The festival also includes a series of workshops from Mar. 25 to 28.

## SCREENINGS E-AWARDS CEREMONY

From Mar. 23, the short films will be screened at both the Cinematheque Passion and at Galaxy Macau Cinemas. The final closing and award presentation ceremony will take place at the Galaxy International Convention Center on Mar. 29.

Tickets for all screenings will go on sale from Mar. 10 through the Macau Ticketing network. Program details can be found at the website (www.macaoisff.com).

## GOV'T ANNOUNCES FIVE FINALIST NAMES FOR 4TH BRIDGE

The 4th Bridge connecting New Urban Zone A in Macau and Pac On in Taipa is set to receive one of five potential names: “Macao Bridge,” “New Urban Bridge,” “Kiang Hoi Bridge,” “Silver Jubilee Bridge,” or “Hou Kong Bridge.” Certain names have specific meanings, with “Kiang Hoi” meaning “mirror sea,” “Hou Kong” meaning “oyster river,” while “Silver Jubilee” commemorates the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Special Administrative Region. The selection committee has identified these five names as finalists, leaving the government to make the final choice. The proponent of the selected name will be rewarded in accordance with competition rules. The extensive naming process garnered 5,703 suggestions.

## HOTEL ROOM IN TAIPA SUSPECTED OF BEING SET ALIGHT

A hotel room in Taipa was suspected of being set on fire at around 4 p.m., police authorities reported yesterday. The police conducted an on-site investigation and found many obvious signs of fire damage in the guest room, including a cracked and damaged TV screen on the wall. The hotel estimated a loss of nearly MOP35,000 due to the incident.

## DOMESTIC HELPER ARRESTED FOR STEALING RED PACKETS

A female domestic helper in her twenties is suspected of stealing eight red packets from her employer, totaling MOP650. The employer has reported his helper to authorities following his discovery that the eight red packets he left at home were missing. The employee denied committing the crime, but the police found three packets out of the eight during investigations. She has been charged with theft.

## COMMITTEE TO DECIDE ALL MATTERS RELATED TO THE FILMS

**T**HE organizing committee of the first Macao International Short Film Festival, led by Gaia Furrer, will be in charge of all decisions and procedures regarding the films, the president of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), Deland Leong said in response to an inquiry from the Times.

Addressing questions on the criteria for film selection and any guidelines (or restrictions) on topics or themes, Leong said that the IC and government’s role was to decide the four categories included in this year’s festival. All other matters are under the purview of the organizing committee contracted by the bureau.

Leong did not address the question on the criteria or requirements leading to the selection of

the 10 local short films that will be presented in the competition for the Best Shorts from Macau.

The films in the running for the awards include “Before the Flight” by Kiwi Chan, “Bubble” by Ellen Wong, “Sea” by Johnson Chan, “Step by Step” by Chiang Kun Leong, “Till the End of the World” by Emily Chan, “The Best Gift Ever” by Hao Chit, “The Melancholy of Gods” by Lei Cheok Mei, “Unearthed Memory” by Ho Kueng Lon, “Unsettled” by Ho Cheok Pan, and “A Beautiful Journey: Documentary of Na Tcha Customs and Beliefs” by U Chi Wan.

The winners will be announced on Mar. 29 in a ceremony at the Galaxy International Convention Center. **RM**



# ELLA LEI CALLS FOR MORE GOV'T SUPPORT TO FURTHER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

STAFF REPORTER

**L**AWMAKER Ella Lei is urging the government to take further action to address employability challenges in Macau.

Speaking to the press at an event earlier this week, Lei said the government needs to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of training programs, consider the value of internships, and implement targeted initiatives aimed at both fresh graduates and middle-aged individuals.

By focusing on practical skills, industry collaborations, and reducing entry barriers, Macau could enhance the employability of its citizens and foster a more inclusive and prosperous workforce. While acknowledging the positive impact of existing initiatives, Lei underscored the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the system to ensure its overall effectiveness.

One key criticism she raised about existing initiatives is their short duration, which often lack work experience. "For example, one of these classes typically lasts around 10 hours, but participants may not gain actual practical

ANTHONY LAM



experience. I hope the government can launch more practical training programs this year, which could include the addition of an internship program. Simply providing training is not sufficient if it does not lead to tangible job placements," said Lei.

She advocates for the expansion of practical training programs that offer participants valuable

hands-on experience and internships directly connecting them with potential employers. She believes that government training and internship programs should help fresh graduates to understand the Macau employment market, development trends, and available job vacancies to enable them to make informed career decisions.

Lei suggested that fresh graduates and middle-aged job seekers could benefit from such programs by establishing partnerships with industries such as hospitality. This would allow participants to gain industry exposure and allow employers to assess their capabilities before making hiring decisions.

"Fresh graduates often face challenges due to their limited

work experience. By offering employment programs tailored to their needs and lowering barriers to entry, the government can better facilitate their transition into the workforce. Additionally, middle-aged job seekers who may encounter obstacles in obtaining employment should be given special attention. Incentives for employers to hire workers from this demographic can help bridge the gap between job seekers and available opportunities," said Lei.

Lei also highlighted the shortcomings of Macau's existing training programs in comparison to neighboring regions, which have comprehensive employment plans for middle-aged job seekers. She believes that Macau lacks specific employment plans for middle-aged job seekers, and supports the adoption of more targeted initiatives to encourage employers to hire middle-aged job seekers or people with disabilities.

"Recognizing the value and experience that middle-aged individuals bring to the workforce can help break down barriers and increase their employment opportunities," Lei concluded.

AD



**ACCURATE, TIMELY & COMPETITIVE TRANSLATIONS**

**Languages:**  
ENGLISH, CHINESE,  
PORTUGUESE, JAPANESE,  
KOREAN, SPANISH,  
FRENCH, ARABIC,  
RUSSIAN

**Services**  
TRANSLATIONS,  
PROOFREADING, COPYWRITING,  
DATA INPUT, NEWS MONITORING

**We translate +10,000 words a day**

Email: sales@ktranz.com.mo  
Tel: +853 2871 6081/2 Fax: +853 2871 6084  
Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR

COPYRIGHT

## ASSOCIATION CONDEMNS KARAOKE BARS' USE OF UNLICENSED MUSIC

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE Macau Association of Composers, Authors & Publishers (MACA) has condemned the unauthorized use of pop music works publicly broadcast and used for commercial operations without permission at karaoke bars.

In a press conference held earlier this week, the only non-profit-making, non-governmental collective management organization in Macau expressed disappointment upon discovering that Neway Karaoke Bar was using music arranged and produced by Ung Kuoc lang.

As the CEO of the association, Ung pointed out that the two Neway companies violated his intellectual property rights, and condemned all such infringements.

He calls on all music users to obtain permission before using music not within the public domain to avoid potential criminal and/or civil penalties. Ung hopes that



Ung Kuoc lang

this incident will draw the attention of relevant departments, the karaoke industry, concert organizers and venues, and all music users to the importance of abiding by applicable copyright laws.

The two Neway companies submitted applications to MACA to obtain public performance music licenses many years ago but failed to pay the relevant license fees, operating without permission for an extended period.

MACA has filed criminal

and civil proceedings with the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Subordinate Court.

Ung said that copyright laws serve as the cornerstone of protecting the rights and interests of music creators, and the legal acquisition and authorized use of musical works should be strictly observed by enterprises. He urged all karaoke operators to observe the governing laws and regulations and obtain the right to use musical works through legal means.



# TECH

## Ransomware group LockBit is disrupted by a global police operation

JILL LAWLESS & KELVIN CHAN,  
LONDON

**L**AW enforcement agencies have infiltrated and disrupted the prolific ransomware syndicate LockBit that has extracted \$120 million from thousands of victims around the world, with two people arrested, British, U.S. and European officials said yesterday [Macau time].

Britain's National Crime Agency, or NCA, said it led an international operation targeting LockBit, which provides ransomware as a service to so-called affiliates who infect victim networks with the computer-crippling malware and negotiate ransoms.

The operation resulted in the arrests of two people in Poland and Ukraine and the seizure of 200 cryptocurrency accounts, officials said at a joint news conference. The Justice Department, meanwhile, unsealed indictments against two more people, both Russian nationals.

Authorities said they gained "comprehensive access" to LockBit's systems, taking control of infrastructure and obtaining keys to help victims decrypt their data.

"We have hacked the hackers," said the NCA's director general, Graeme Biggar. "LockBit has been locked out."

Hours before the announcement, the front page of LockBit's dark-web leak site was replaced with the words "this site is now under control of law enforcement," alongside the flags of the U.K., the U.S. and several other nations.

The message said the NCA was



"working in close cooperation with the FBI and the international law enforcement task force, Operation Cronos." The ongoing operation also involves agencies from Germany, France, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, among others, including Europol, it said.

LockBit, operating since 2019, has been the most prolific ransomware syndicate two years running. The group accounted for 23% of the nearly 4,000 attacks globally last year in which ransomware gangs posted data stolen from victims to extort payment, according to the cybersecurity firm Palo Alto Networks.

LockBit has been linked to attacks on the U.K.'s Royal Mail, Britain's National Health Service, airplane manufacturer Boeing, international law firm Allen and Overy and China's biggest bank,

ICBC.

Ransomware is the costliest and most disruptive form of cybercrime, crippling local governments, court systems, hospitals and schools as well as businesses. It is difficult to combat as most gangs are based in former Soviet states and out of reach of Western justice.

The announcement brings to five the number of people the U.S. has indicted since the operation began. Three Russians were previously indicted, with two of those taken into custody, one in Canada and one in the U.S. The rest are still wanted.

Authorities said they seized servers that the gang used to organize and transfer victim data, and gained access to nearly 1,000 potential decryption tools. They obtained the Lockbit platform's source code and a trove of intelli-

gence on people the gang worked with.

The operation is "probably the most significant ransomware disruption to date," said analyst Brett Callow of the cybersecurity firm Emsisoft. While it will likely spell the end of the brand, such groups routinely re-emerge under new names. Over the long term, Callow said, this operation alone will not diminish the volume of ransomware attacks.

A rare offensive cyber-operation for the U.K. crime agency, the operation aimed to steal all of LockBit's data and then destroy its infrastructure, causing a "significant major degradation" of the cybercrime threat.

LockBit is dominated by Russian speakers and does not attack former Soviet nations. Officials suggested that LockBit could have hundreds of members but there's no evidence that a state such as Russia is behind the syndicate, Biggar said.

"These are criminals," he said, although the lack of a Russian crackdown indicates that Moscow tolerates the gang's activity.

"Today we have dealt a decisive blow not only to their operation, but also importantly, to their reputation," said Europol's deputy executive director of operations, Jean-Philippe Lecouffe.

Cybersecurity experts wondered how much detail law enforcement obtained on LockBit affiliates' negotiations with victims, including who quietly paid ransoms and how much. Influenced by specialty firms they hire to respond to attacks, victims generally resist admitting publicly that ransomware is to blame.

Officials told reporters the gang targeted 2,000 victims worldwide. Biggar said the numbers will be "significant underestimates."

Last June, U.S. federal agencies released an advisory that attributed about 1,700 ransomware attacks in the United States since 2020 to LockBit and said victims included municipal governments, county governments, public higher education and K-12 schools and emergency services.

Artur Sungatov and Ivan Kondratyev, the two indicted Russians, are accused of deploying LockBit against manufacturing companies in the U.S. and semiconductor businesses worldwide. Kondratyev allegedly used it against municipal and private targets in Oregon, Puerto Rico and New York and other victims in Singapore, Taiwan, and Lebanon, while Sungatov allegedly deployed it against manufacturing, logistics and insurance companies in Minnesota, Indiana, Puerto Rico, Wisconsin, Florida and New Mexico.

The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Sungatov and Kondratyev in what was called the first in an "ongoing collaborative effort" with the Justice Department, FBI and international partners targeting LockBit.

Technically, as of 2021, U.S. victims of ransomware extortion could be prosecuted for paying ransoms to sanctioned individuals and groups. That has not happened, however.

Law enforcement agencies have scored other recent successes against ransomware gangs, most notably the FBI's operation against the Hive syndicate. **MDT/AP**

# SME

## Many small business owners see 2024 as a 'make or break' year, survey shows

MAE ANDERSON,  
NEW YORK

**A**BOUT 40% of small business owners think 2024 will be a "make or break" year for their business, according to a survey by messaging service Slack.

After several years of dealing with the pandemic, rising inflation and a tight job market, some small businesses — 32% of respondents — aren't sure they'll

make it through 2024.

Still, others are feeling optimistic about the future. Seventy-one percent of respondents said they are optimistic about the state of their business this year. But many are still facing tough issues like a volatile economy, a polarizing election on the horizon and declining sales.

In fact, 38% of small business owners said they're more worried about their

business as they enter 2024 than they were as 2023 started. And only 26% are less worried.

Despite those concerns, almost three quarters of business owners said they're taking steps to help improve their business. About half of the respondents said they're expanding marketing efforts to bring in new customers, 45% said they're setting money aside for emergency use, and 43%

said they're exploring new technologies to increase productivity and efficiency.

"The state of small businesses in 2024 reflects a clear desire to maximize efficiency with limited resources," said Jaime DeLanghe, vice president of product management at Slack.

The survey included 2,000 small business owners — half of them in the tech or retail industries. **MDT/AP**





WEATHER

# HEAVY SNOW HITS NORTH AND CENTRAL CHINA, DISRUPTING TRAFFIC AND CANCELING CLASSES

**H**EAVY snow has blanketed northern and central China, disrupting traffic and forcing schools to cancel classes.

Flights and intercity train traffic on which much of China's commuters rely were delayed or canceled yesterday. Authorities in the provinces of Hebei, Henan and Shandong have issued warnings of travel hazards and other cold weather dangers.

Tens of thousands of workers with brooms and shovels have been deployed, assisted by snow plows in the hardest-hit regions.

The capital, Beijing, which hosted last year's Winter Olympic Games, has seen temperatures around freezing.

No fatalities from the latest cold wave have been reported. MDT/AP



## Former senior provincial political advisor under investigation

**H**U Qiang, formerly a senior political advisor in east China's Jiangxi Province, has been placed under investigation by the country's top anti-graft body for suspected severe violations of discipline rules and laws, according to an official statement released yesterday.

Hu, formerly a member of the leading Party members group and vice chairman of the Jiangxi Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, is being investigated by the Communist Party of China Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Commission of Supervision, per the statement. XINHUA

DEMOGRAPHICS

## HONG KONG SEES POPULATION INCREASE IN 2023

**T**HE Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) saw an increase in population in 2023 thanks to a net inflow of residents, official data showed this week.

The provisional estimate of the Hong Kong population was over 7.5 million at the end of 2023, an increase of 0.4% as compared with that at the end of 2022, the Census and Statistics Department of the HKSAR government said.

The population increase was mainly attributable to a net inflow of 51,700 Hong Kong residents recorded during the period, with an inflow of 40,800 one-way permit holders and a net inflow of 10,800 other Hong Kong residents, the department said.

Over the same period, a natural decrease of 21,200 was recorded, with 33,200 births and 54,400 deaths.

A government spokesperson said the population registered an increase for the second consecutive year since normalcy resumed in Hong Kong.

"Many Hong Kong residents who stayed abroad during



the epidemic have returned to Hong Kong throughout 2023. In the second half of 2023, there was still considerable in-

flow of Hong Kong permanent residents," the spokesperson said, adding that the increase is also attributable to the suc-

cessive admission of mainland and overseas persons through various schemes into Hong Kong. MDT/XINHUA



COURTS

# Chinese-Australian blogger won't appeal suspended death sentence

ROD MCGUIRK, MELBOURNE

AP PHOTO



A China-born Australian democracy blogger will not appeal his suspended death sentence imposed by a Beijing court, with his family saying yesterday a legal challenge would be detrimental to his welfare.

Yang Hengjun was found guilty of espionage following a closed trial and sentenced two weeks ago to death with a two-year reprieve. Such sentences are often commuted to life in prison after the two years.

A statement from Yang's family and close friends said they strongly supported the 58-year-old's decision to waive his right to appeal.

"There are two practical reasons why an appeal would be detrimental to Yang's welfare," the statement said.

First, there were no grounds to believe the judicial system would remedy his "unjust" sentence,

it said. And second, an appeal would only delay the possibility of Yang receiving adequate medical care after five years of "inhumane" treatment and "neglect" in custody, the statement added.

Yang's supporters urge Australia to pressure China to release him from prison on medical parole or to transfer him to Australia.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Australia objected to the sentence handed to Yang and

would continue to call for his release.

"We will continue to make representations to China ... in his interests. The Australian government will always stand up for the rights of Australian citizens," Albanese told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that the courts "handled the case in accordance with the law

and will continue to protect all the legitimate rights and interests of the person involved."

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said her government respected the "difficult decision" Yang had made to waive his appeal rights and would continue to advocate for him at every opportunity and at the highest levels.

"I acknowledge the strength that Dr. Yang's family and friends have demonstrated through this

period," Wong said.

"All Australians want to see Dr. Yang reunited with his loved ones," Wong added.

Yang, a former Chinese diplomat and state security agent who became a political commentator and writer of spy novels in Australia, was detained in January 2019 on arrival in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou on a flight from New York with his wife and teenage stepdaughter.

He was tried in Beijing 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.

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

AD



PRESENTED BY



銀河娛樂集團  
Galaxy Entertainment Group

**BRITCHAM'S  
MEDICINE BALL**  
@StarWorld Hotel

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**15<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

JEWEL IN THE CROWN:



銀河娛樂集團  
Galaxy Entertainment Group

DIAMOND CROWN:



LOD STOW'S BAKERY  
澳門安德魯餅店

SAPPHIRE CROWN:



MSS RECRUITMENT

PRINCIPAL MEDIA PARTNER:



hello jobs  
哈囉好工網及APP



Times



BRIEFS

SPRING FEST: 76 MILLION VISIT GUANGDONG

The Spring Festival saw a surge in Guangdong's tourism, with over 76 million visitors contributing to a 160.8% spike in tourism revenue compared to the previous year.



NEW CUSTOMS INITIATIVE IN HENGQIN

The Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is set to implement a new tiered customs system to streamline the flow of people and goods with Macau.



E-COMMERCE

WAREHOUSING SURGE

Guangdong's cross-border e-commerce has experienced a boom with over 1,000 overseas warehouses covering 6 million square meters.

GUANGDONG PROVINCE AIMS FOR HIGH-QUALITY GROWTH

Guangdong province has set its sights on high-quality development, with a keen focus on fostering the real economy and manufacturing through technological innovation.

GBA, THE PEOPLE MOVER: KINDRED

ANALYSIS BY LEANDA LEE\*

THE people involved in the integration of industry knowledge and the building of the four focal industries in the GBA will mostly be drawn from the pool of skilled labour currently being utilised and developed in the three regions, two of which are relatively highly globalised.

The workforce in Hong Kong draws from a globally experienced base thanks to its position as one of the world's most significant financial and trade centres. While 93% of the skilled working population of professionals, managers, and associate professionals is Hong Kong Chinese, of these strata, 6.35% are not Chinese.

GBA's Framework Agreement of 2017 outlines the support to people from Guangdong Province, Hong Kong and Macau involved in the economic and social integration of the GBA. Easier flows of factors of production such as people and goods, capital flows to encourage investment by companies, access to work forces, and ease of mobility for individuals across existing borders are all part of the plan.

For people from the two regions with long histories of global integration, international economic, educational and social participation, the "ideal place" would entail a continuing embrace of multiple cultures and an open window to the world. Macau continues to be valued for its potential to leverage on its Portuguese history - seen as a critical asset - to build economic and trade cooperation between Portuguese-speaking countries and China.

and entertainment for a global audience. Hong Kong, although still very much an international city, has softened in its position as an international trade and financial powerhouse founded on western democratic institutions, whilst integrating Chinese knowhow and social principles. While there has been some exodus of the internationally mobile elite from Hong Kong, the Top Talent Pass Scheme which was instigated to fill the brain drain post-Covid-19 has seen 9 out of 10 applicants hail from mainland China.

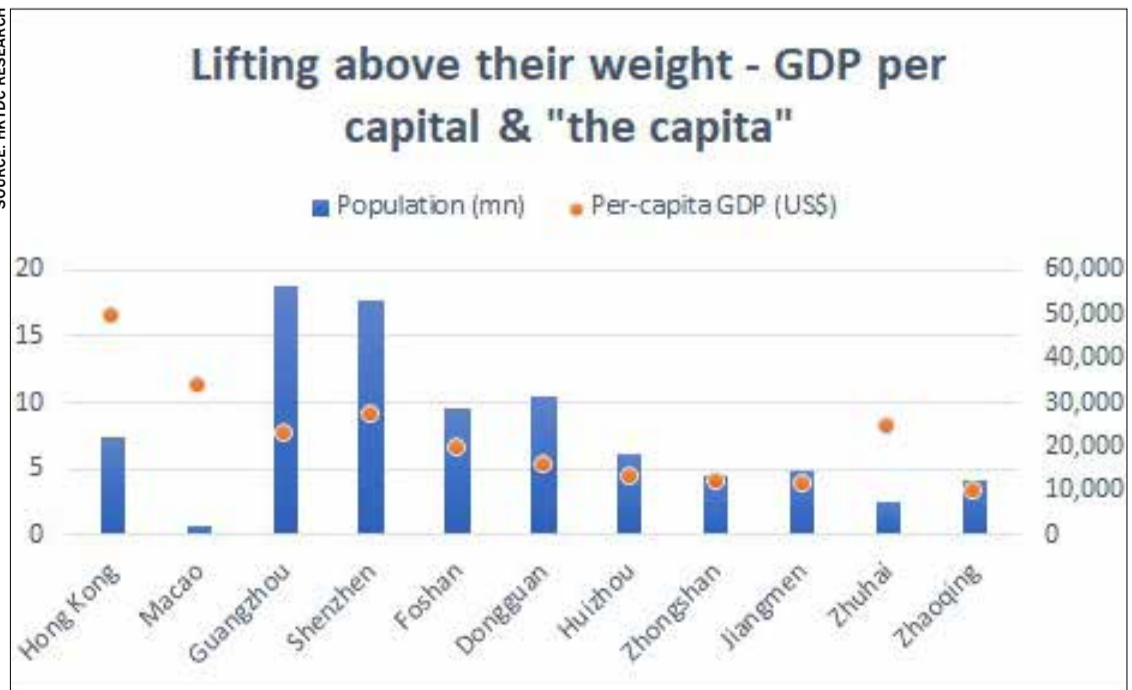
Such motivations indicate that future movement across these borders for GBA integration will not be limited to policy and economic incentives. The global mobility literature offers insight into what increases the willingness of people to relocate and what keeps them at home. Some move to explore job opportunities or enhance their career. Others move to more economically and politically developed places.



An AI-generated artistic depiction of people mobility within the GBA, emphasising...

may be enough for some, while others need to know that their lifestyle and quality of life will substantially improve. The excitement of living somewhere new and openness to experience might be outweighed by family care and educational needs of children. Tax incentives also play a role. The characteristics of our communities in Macau, Hong Kong and the Mainland and the match with professionals' needs and desires are part and parcel of the success of cross-border activity. The mismatch can be greater than expected however: the fact that Macau, Hong Kong and mainland China all share cultural and ethnic commonalities does not mean that social integration in living and work environments will be seamless.

Ethnic and cultural similarity can often obscure difference that is otherwise explicitly apparent when foreigners come together. Misunderstandings and ignorance of social norms can be excused when people look, sound and act differently. My own research revealed, however, significant unanticipated...





# COUSINS OR FOREIGN INTERLOPERS



Visualizing the seamless integration and movement of people across its 11 cities

spent together outside of the immediate work relationship all created unforeseen hurdles that required dedicated time and effort to resolve.

Other potential hurdles are the petty prejudices and otherness that continue to exist between people from Hong Kong, Macau and the Mainland. They can be heard and felt in day-to-day experience. One Macau student who kept silent about his origins in a Hong Kong university dormitory bore witness to derisive commentary about his hometown. Immigration from the mainland to Hong Kong has at times prompted focus in academic studies on cultural identity. A 2023 Pew Research Center study suggests that people in Hong Kong under the age of 35 and those more highly educated primarily identify as Hong Kongers. Other studies suggest that political discourse, cultural affiliation and market portrayals can all impact upon a sense

of who belongs where, apart from more obvious racial and national attributes.

Participation by competent people and enterprises in the GBA is a necessary part of the success of the vision. What and who grants belonging to the GBA in the initial phases, however, is multi-faceted; one of those factors is the individual's willingness to act, another is being given license by others to belong. Individuals have agency about whether they feel comfortable to be part of this broad-visioned plan, or seek to maintain homes and lives with their families in their local communities, or contribute their expertise elsewhere. The individual choice relies on a balance between social, cultural, political and economic incentives and disincentives. GBA success will hinge on a fit between communities and people.

\*Contributing Editor, Scholar



SOURCE: HKTDC RESEARCH

patented culture shock experienced by ethnic Cantonese professionals who moved to Hong Kong: They looked the part, so were expected to play the part. Constantly monitoring expectations of others and their own assumptions as to how things work were huge bur-

dens that detracted from work performance: different ways of working, different topics upon greeting, expectations of depth of understanding of historical and cultural references, what it means to build a relationship and how that's achieved, negotiation tactics, and time

## WORK IN PROGRESS NOTES ON ACADEMIC RESEARCH

### "Legal Service Development for Industrial Enterprises in the Greater Bay Area with Patent Circulation Driven by Intelligent Valuation"

Yulin Zheng, Jianxin Hu, Ying Zhu, Fukang Qu  
Science of Law Journal (2023)

Based on the research on industrial enterprises in the Greater Bay Area, this paper analyzes the patent legal risks faced by industrial enterprises in the Greater Bay Area, the market demand for legal services of patent agents and the patent transaction process, and puts forward the idea of legal services for industrial enterprises in the Greater Bay Area according to the characteristics of patent circulation driven by intelligent valuation. Driven by intelligent valuation, industrial enterprises in the Greater Bay Area will usher in brand-new development opportunities, and their legal services will expand from single intellectual property management to multiple fields such as intellectual property risk warning and dispute resolution. **FROM THE ABSTRACT**

### "The Greater Bay Area from Pearl River Delta - Formation and Integration of Urban Agglomeration"

Bingzhao Jiang, Jiawei Chen  
SHS Web of Conferences (2023)

Its objective is to explore the formation, competition and cooperation of the Greater Bay Area urban agglomeration and explore the development mode of the urban agglomeration with the opportunity of the integrated development of the Greater Bay Area. Methods: By combing and analyzing the open government affairs data of the country and cities in the Greater Bay Area, the present situation and future development trend of the Greater Bay Area are introduced by introducing the concept of a city group, and it is concluded that it has a bright future in the region. The difficult problem of city group construction is how to realize the reasonable division of labor and the rational distribution of resources. **FROM THE ABSTRACT**

## FIVE YEARS ON

# Greater Bay Area sees era of unparalleled growth

### ON THE AGENDA

**C**ELEBRATING its 5th anniversary, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is heralding an era of unparalleled growth and integration.

In 2023, the GBA's economy exceeded expectations with a reported output of over 13.6 trillion yuan (\$1.91 trillion), a figure that illustrates the region's accelerating ascent to economic prominence.

Since the inception of its development plan on February 18, 2019, the GBA has implemented over 600 targeted measures, bringing

to life a vision of high-quality, integrated development. The region's economic output in 2023 is "a testament to these efforts," as reported by Zhu Wei, deputy director of the Development and Reform Commission of Guangdong Province, cited by mainland media.

Accounting for a mere 1% of China's landmass and 5% of its population, the GBA has impressively generated 11% of the national GDP.

Financial initiatives have flourished, with new policies promoting deeper integration between the region's cities. The Overall Develop-

ment Plan for the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone, unveiled in December 2023, exemplifies these efforts, setting the stage for comprehensive financial cooperation.

The GBA's infrastructural prowess is perhaps best embodied by the bustling Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, which on February 13th saw 144,000 passengers, the highest number since its opening. This bridge not only symbolizes the region's commitment to connectivity but also its dynamic role in facilitating the day-to-day movement

of people and commerce.

The region's industrial and technological sectors are thriving, with the GBA establishing itself as a global contender in patents and innovation. Its strategic industries, including electronics, information technology, software, and pharmaceuticals, stand at the forefront of global technological competitiveness.

The GBA's expansive market is also significant, with a substantial population that bolsters its consumer base. The convenience of the integrated "one-hour living circle" has revolutionized the way residents live,



AP PHOTO

work, and engage in commerce, further evidenced by the uptick in cross-border transactions during the Spring Festival holidays.

As the GBA steps into the

next phase of its development, it continues to focus on attracting talent and fostering an environment conducive to innovation and technological advancement.



## SOUTH KOREA

# Gov't warns striking doctors to return to work or face legal action

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

**T**HE South Korean government yesterday warned thousands of striking doctors to return to work immediately or face legal action after their collective walkouts caused cancellations of surgeries and disrupted other hospital operations.

About 7,800 medical interns and residents in South Korea have walked off their jobs this week to protest the government's push to recruit more medical students.

Officials say they want to increase the nationwide medical school admissions cap by 2,000 from next year to brace for South Korea's rapidly aging population. But doctors' groups have refuted the plan, saying universities aren't ready to offer quality education to that many students. They argue the government's push to have more doctors would lead to increased public medical expenses because physicians locked in competition could perform unnecessary treatments.

The 2,000 additional admissions "is a nonsensical figure," the Korean Intern Residents Association said in a statement Tuesday. "We hope the government will rethink its plan and formulate a policy that reflects the voices of trainee doctors."

Junior doctors typically support senior doctors during surgeries



South Korean Interior and Safety Minister Lee Sang-min, center, speaks during a joint government briefing at the government complex in Seoul, yesterday

and deal with inpatients. Their joint walkouts have burdened hospital operations. The Health Ministry said yesterday that authorities have received 58 public complaints over the walkouts, mostly regarding indefinite delays of surgeries and cancellations of other medical treatments.

"A collective action holding the lives and safety of the people cannot be justified for whatever rea-

son," Interior and Safety Minister Lee Sang-min told a news conference with other top officials.

Lee said the government issued an official order for striking doctors to return to work. He said the government will sternly deal with the doctors' walkouts in line with the medical law and other regulations.

South Korea's medical law allows the government to issue

such back-to-work orders to doctors and other medical personnel when there are grave concerns about public health. If they refuse to abide by the order, they could face up to three years in prison or 30 million won (\$22,480) in fines, a punishment that would also lead to the revocation of their medical licenses, according to the law.

Justice Minister Park Sung-jae accused some doctors of seeking

to protect "their vested interests." He said that if they refuse to return to work, authorities will file legal charges against them and arrest others had led their walkouts.

Trainee doctors said the government's return-to-work order was intimidation and must be withdrawn immediately. The Korea Medical Association, which represents 140,000 doctors, said it supports the trainee doctors' walkouts but hasn't decided whether to join them.

Joo Sooho, a spokesperson for a KMA task force, accused the government of "demonizing doctors."

"We strongly condemn the government for holding the people hostage and suppressing doctors," he told reporters.

A recent survey suggested that a majority of South Koreans support the government's plan. Some critics say doctors, one of the best-paid professions in South Korea, oppose a steep increase in admissions because of worries they may lose income.

As of Tuesday night, about 8,820 out of the country's 13,000 trainee doctors have submitted resignations to their hospitals. None of the resignations had been approved, but about 7,810 of the doctors have walked off, Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo told reporters.

To deal with the trainee doctors' walkouts, the government has opened military hospitals to the public, extended the operating hours of public medical institutions and had emergency medical treatment centers stay open around the clock. But observers say if the walkouts are prolonged or joined by senior doctors, that could cause major disruptions in South Korea's overall medical service. **MDT/AP**

## AUSTRALIA

# Taekwondo instructor killed his 7-year-old student and boy's parents: Sydney police



Police investigate at a crime scene in Sydney, yesterday

**A** taekwondo instructor killed a 7-year-old student at his academy and the boy's parents before going to a Sydney hospital with stab and slash wounds on his body, police said yesterday.

Kwang Kyung Yoo, owner of the Lion's Taekwondo and Martial Arts Academy and known to his students as Master Lion, will eventually be charged with three counts of murder, Homicide Detective Superintendent Daniel Doherty said.

The crimes were discovered after the instructor admitted himself to a

hospital on Monday night suffering "stab wounds or slash wounds" to his chest, stomach and arms, Doherty said. He said the man told police he had been attacked in a supermarket carpark.

Police allege Yoo killed Min Cho, 41, and her son at his academy after a class on Monday before driving to their home, where he killed Cho's husband and the boy's father, Steven Cho, 39. Police did not officially release the victims' names, but the adults were identified in media reports.

Police discovered the bodies Tuesday and arrested

Yoo at the hospital.

Police have yet to reveal a motive. They knew all four were born in South Korea and the slain boy had been a regular taekwondo student.

"We're still establishing what other connections or ... what other relationships may have been or may not have been," Doherty said.

Unnamed police sources told media the mother and son were strangled. The father was stabbed to death. Police have yet to determine how Yoo's injuries were inflicted.

"It's not only tragic in the circumstances, but the con-

sequences were cataclysmic. We've just lost three people from one family who've had their lives taken away," Doherty added.

Yoo drove the woman's BMW sedan from the academy to the family home and then to the Sydney hospital, media reported.

He underwent surgery for his wounds and understood that he was under arrest, Doherty said.

"There was no warnings, from what we have gathered so far. It was out of the blue. It wasn't something that was forewarned or planned," Doherty said.

The maximum penalty for someone convicted of murder in New South Wales state is life imprisonment, with a standard non-parole period of 20 years for the murder of an adult and 25 years for the murder of a child. **MDT/AP**



ANALYSIS

# How the Kremlin weaponized Russian history – and has used it to justify the war in Ukraine

DASHA LITVINOVA, TALLINN

**E**ARLIER this month, when Tucker Carlson asked Vladimir Putin about his reasons for invading Ukraine two years ago, Putin gave him a lecture on Russian history. The 71-year-old Russian leader spent more than 20 minutes showering a baffled Carlson with dates and names going back to the ninth century.

Putin even gave him a folder containing what he said were copies of historical documents proving his points: that Ukrainians and Russians historically have always been one people, and that Ukraine's sovereignty is merely an illegitimate holdover from the Soviet era.

Carlson said he was "shocked" at being on the receiving end of the history lesson. But for those familiar with Putin's government, it was not surprising in the least. In Russia, history has long been a propaganda tool used to advance the Kremlin's political goals.

In an effort to rally people around their world view, Russian authorities have tried to magnify the country's past victories while glossing over the more sordid chapters of its history. They have rewritten textbooks, funded sprawling historical exhibitions and suppressed — sometimes harshly — voices that contradict their narrative.

Russian officials have also regularly bristled at Ukraine and other European countries for pulling down Soviet monuments, widely seen there as an unwanted legacy of past oppression, and even put scores of European officials on a wanted list over that in a move that made headlines this month.

"In the hands of the authorities," says Oleg Orlov, co-founder of Memorial, Russia's oldest and most prominent rights group, "history has become a hammer — or even an axe."

From the early years of his quarter-century rule, Putin has repeatedly contended that studying their history should make Russians proud. Even controversial figures, such as Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, contributed to Russia's greatness, Putin argues.

The Russian president has said that there should be one "fundamental state narrative" instead of different textbooks that contradict each other. And he has called for a "universal" history textbook that would convey that narrative. But that idea, criticized heavily by

AP PHOTO



historians, didn't gain much traction for quite a while — until Russia invaded Ukraine.

Last year, the government rolled out a series of four new "universal" history textbooks for 10th- and 11th-graders. One featured a chapter on Moscow's "special military operation" in Ukraine, blamed the West for the Cold War and described the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."

Some historians derided it as blatant propaganda. "The Soviet Union, and later Russia, is (depicted in the textbook as) always a besieged fortress, which constantly lives surrounded by enemies," says historian Nikita Sokolov.

## HISTORY PARTS

The Kremlin-friendly vision of Russian history is also dominating a chain of sprawling, state-funded "history parks" — venues that host history-themed exhibitions in 24 cities across the country. Some of those popular expositions were criticized by historians for inaccurate claims and deliberate glorification of Russian rulers and their conquests.

Central to the narrative of an

invincible Russia is the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. Marked on May 9 — Germany officially capitulated after midnight Moscow time on May 9, 1945 — the Soviet victory has become integral to Russian identity.

The Soviet Union lost an estimated 27 million people in the war, pushing German forces from Stalingrad, deep inside Russia, all the way to Berlin. The suffering and valor that went into the German defeat have been touchstones ever since, and under Putin Victory Day has become the country's primary secular holiday.

For the authorities, "Russia's history is a road from one victory to the next," sums up Orlov, whose group won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022. "And more beautiful victories lie ahead. And (the Kremlin says that) we must be proud of our history; history is a means of instilling patriotism. Of course in their view, patriotism is appreciation of the leadership — be it the leadership of the czarist Russia, the leadership of the Soviet Russia or the current leadership."

As celebrations of Victory Day over the years grew more imperious, Putin's government grew less tolerant of any questioning or criticism of the Soviet Union's

actions in that war — or generally.

In 2014, Russian cable networks dropped Dozhd, the country's sole independent TV channel, after it hosted a history program on the 1941-44 Siege of Leningrad and asked viewers to vote on whether Soviet authorities should have surrendered Leningrad to save lives. That same year, the Russian government adopted a law that made "rehabilitating Nazism" — or "spreading knowingly false information about the actions of the USSR during World War II" — a criminal offense. The first conviction on those charges was reported in 2016.

## STALIN'S REVISIONISM

Research and public debate about mass repressions by Stalin also have faced significant resistance in recent years. Historians and rights advocates cite the inevitable parallels to the current crackdown against dissent that has already landed hundreds of people behind bars.

And a queue of people waiting for their turn to read out the names of victims of Soviet repressions no longer snakes through central Moscow streets in late October. The tradition to read them aloud once a year in front of

a monument to victims of Soviet repressions — called "Returning the Names" — was started in 2007 and once attracted thousands of people. In 2020, Moscow authorities stopped authorizing it, citing COVID-19.

According to prominent history teacher Tamara Eidelman, the historical narrative the Kremlin is trying to impose on society contains several main elements: the primacy of the state, the affairs of which are always more important than individual lives; the cult of self-sacrifice and readiness to give up one's life for a greater cause; and the cult of war.

"Of course, (the latter) is never explicitly spelled out. We have always strived for peace ... We have always been attacked and merely fought back," Eidelman says.

That laid the perfect ideological groundwork for the invasion of Ukraine, she says, and points out how the "Never again!" sentiment regarding World War II for some in Russia in recent years turned into "We can do it again" — a slogan that became popular after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and as the Kremlin adopted increasingly aggressive rhetoric towards the West. **MDT/AP**





## this day in history

### 1986 FILIPINO COUP LEADERS TELL MARCOS TO GO



Two senior members of the Philippines government have taken refuge in the defence ministry building in the capital, Manila, after denouncing President Ferdinand Marcos.

Yesterday, Defence Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and chief of staff Lieutenant-General Fidel Ramos accused the president of planning to arrest leaders of the opposition.

They called on ministers and army officers to help them topple Marcos and then took over Camp Aguinaldo, the defence ministry.

Speaking from Camp Aguinaldo, Mr Enrile told the press Mrs Aquino had won the election and Marcos should step down.

"We had no plans to stage a coup d'etat. But we are going to defend ourselves from an imminent assault," Mr Enrile said.

Lt-Gen Ramos told American TV all 13 regional army commanders had pledged their support for a coup, while Marcos claimed he had control of "99% of the military".

Heavily armed troops have surrounded the building and President Marcos has said the situation is "under control".

He also accused the two men of conspiring to assassinate him and his wife, Imelda, and demanded their surrender.

In elections held on 7 February, the main opposition party, led by Corazon Aquino, and President Marcos both claimed victory.

The US has attempted to mediate by sending US special envoy Philip Habib who reports back to President Reagan later today.

Mrs Aquino, widow of Benigno Aquino assassinated on his return from exile three years ago by Marcos supporters, rejected Mr Habib's proposal last week for a power-sharing government.

Mrs Aquino has accused the president of stealing power and called for a one-day general strike next week and a boycott of businesses owned by the Marcos entourage.

The head of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, Cardinal Jaime Sin, is also demanding an uprising. [...]

"The way indicated to us now is the way of non-violent struggle for justice."

Courtesy BBC News

## UK LAWYERS FOR THE US WILL TELL COURT WHY ASSANGE SHOULD FACE SPYING CHARGES

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

**L**AWAYERS for the American government are to tell a London court today [Macau time] why they think Julian Assange should face espionage charges in the United States, in response to a last-ditch bid by his defense to stop the extradition of the WikiLeaks founder.

Assange's lawyers are asking the High Court to grant him a new appeal — his last legal roll of the dice in the long-running legal saga that has kept him in a British high-security prison for the past five years.

The 52-year-old Australian has been indicted on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse over his website's publication of classified U.S. documents almost 15 years ago. American prosecutors say Assange helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

Lawyers for the U.S. have argued in written submissions that said Assange was being prosecuted "because he is alleged to have committed serious criminal offences."

Attorney James Lewis said Assange's actions "threatened damage to the strategic and national security interests of the United States" and put individuals named in the documents — including Iraqis and Afghans who had helped U.S. forces — at risk of "serious physical harm."

To his supporters, however, Assange is a secrecy-busting journalist who exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. They argue that the prosecution is politically motivated and he won't get a fair trial in the U.S.

Assange's lawyers argued on the first day of the hearing on Tuesday that American authorities are seeking to punish Assange for WikiLeaks' "exposure of criminality on the part of the U.S. government on an unprecedented scale," including torture and killings.

Lawyer Edward Fitzgerald said Assange may "suffer a flagrant denial of justice" if he is sent to the U.S.

Assange's lawyers say he could face up to 175 years in prison if convicted, though American authorities have said the sentence is likely to be much shorter.

Assange was not in court on Tuesday because he is unwell, his lawyer said. Stella

Assange, his wife, said Julian had wanted to attend, but was "not in good condition."

Assange's family and supporters say his physical and mental health have suffered during more than a decade of legal battles, including seven years in self-exile in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and the last five years in the high-security prison on the outskirts of the British capital.

Stella Assange, who married the WikiLeaks founder in prison in 2022 — said last week that his health has deteriorated during years of confinement and "if he's extradited, he will die."

Supporters holding "Free Julian Assange" signs and chanting "there is only one decision — no extradition" held a noisy protest outside the neo-Gothic High Court building for a second day yesterday.

Assange's legal troubles began in 2010, when he was arrested in London at the request of Sweden, which wanted to question him about allegations of rape and sexual assault made by two women. In 2012, Assange jumped bail and sought refuge inside the Ecuadorian Embassy.

The relationship between Assange and his hosts eventually soured, and he was

evicted from the embassy in April 2019. British police immediately arrested and imprisoned him for breaching bail in 2012. Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in November 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

A U.K. district court judge rejected the U.S. extradition request in 2021 on the grounds that Assange was likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions. Higher courts overturned that decision after getting assurances from the U.S. about his treatment. The British government signed an extradition order in June 2022.

Meanwhile, the Australian parliament last week called for Assange to be allowed to return to his homeland.

If judges Victoria Sharp and Jeremy Johnson rule against Assange, he can ask the European Court of Human Rights to block his extradition — though supporters worry he could be put on a plane to the U.S. before that happens, because the British government has already signed an extradition order.

The two justices could deliver a verdict at the end of the hearing today [Macau time], but they're more likely to take several weeks to consider their decision. MDT/AP

## IN CONTEXT

The following day hundreds of thousands of civilians responded to calls for an uprising by surrounding troops at Camp Aguinaldo with barricades of buses, sandbags, logs and rubble.

The army put up little resistance to this "people power" and on 25 February Ferdinand Marcos and his wife were forced to flee to the United States. Marcos died in Hawaii in 1989.

Both were indicted by a US court on charges of fraud but Imelda was acquitted in 1990. In 1991 she was allowed home and ran for president but lost.

Two years later a Filipino court sentenced her to 18 years for corruption. She appealed and was acquitted. Mrs Corazon Aquino was sworn in as the country's first woman president the day the Marcoses left.

She survived six coup attempts before she stepped down in 1992 to support her former Defence Minister Fidel Ramos as the next president.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Your neighborhood is changing, and the change is all for the better. Wonderful new neighbors may have moved in, or perhaps a small gourmet take-out shop has just opened up.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Financial prosperity is just around the corner, especially with your recently acquired money-management skills. Use your new abilities to invest it soundly and wisely.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
The significant other in your life needs your support not a lecture right now. Let him or her know you're available to listen and help in any way, but don't smother your partner with kindness.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Today is the final push to complete a very big project you've likely been working on for some time now. Be sure to have a nutritious breakfast and lunch today, because you're likely to work right through dinner.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
A pleasant outing could get delayed or cancelled due to an event entirely out of your control. Rather than having a fit, you and your friends could seize the opportunity to do something completely wild and different.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
There's no question about it, you've been working hard these last few weeks. It's exhausting, to be sure, but know that the end result will make all this aggravation worthwhile.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Today, or rather tonight, is for romance and cozy intimacy. You pull out all the stops for your evening with that special someone.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
Some interesting moneymaking opportunities are likely to come your way, either today or in the near future. You're ready for steady growth in your portfolio.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
There's going to be so much to get done today that you might feel a little daunted about getting started. By midday you could even find yourself downright overwhelmed.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
No sooner do you set foot in the office this morning than you begin to get pelted from all directions with various crises and problems. It isn't a very welcome reception.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Today will be a lovely combination of harmony and passion. With things running so smoothly at work, there's no reason you can't leave the office early to prepare for a special evening with your partner.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Your efforts on the domestic front have certainly paid off. Your home is looking wonderful. Everyone who enters says so. Some unexpected visitors may stop by for a quick hello and wind up staying for dinner.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-4	2	cloudy
Changchun	-18	-6	cloudy
Chengdu	4	7	overcast
Chongqing	8	10	overcast
Fuzhou	15	16	rain
Guangzhou	13	23	rain
Guiyang	1	3	overcast
Haikou	23	33	cloudy
Hangzhou	1	3	rain
Harbin	-21	-8	fine
Hefei	-3	-1	snow
Nanjing	-1	0	snow
Shanghai	3	5	rain
Taipei	17	21	overcast
Wuhan	-2	0	snow
Hong Kong	20	24	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-1	-1	cloudy
Frankfurt	4	12	rain
Paris	5	13	rain
London	4	11	rain
New York	4	6	cloudy

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Makes it?; 5- Sniff; 10- Edible mollusk; 14- French 101 infinitive; 15- Port of Crete; 16- \_\_\_ avis; 17- Superfuse; 18- Met highlights; 19- Mogadishu-born model; 20- Feeble; 22- Gathering; 24- Crusoe's creator; 25- Thespians; 26- Single entity; 28- Bits; 32- Belonging to us; 35- Slow throw; 37- Yearly records; 38- East Lansing sch.; 39- Little; 41- Go bad; 42- Cloud of interstellar gas; 45- Univ. aides; 46- Complete collections; 47- Grenoble's river; 48- Any will do in a storm; 50- Guitarist Segovia; 54- Swollen part; 58- Ultimate; 61- Lead astray; 62- Director Riefenstahl; 63- The \_\_\_ Spoonful; 65- \_\_\_ hollers...; 66- Stiff bristle; 67- Kid leather; 68- French summers; 69- "East of Eden" brother; 70- Noted spokescow; 71- Calamitous;

DOWN 1- Lukewarm; 2- Do penance; 3- Brusque; 4- Earnest; 5- Swindle; 6- Scratch; 7- Early computer; 8- Minimal; 9- Cow catcher; 10- Incarnadine; 11- Gyro meat; 12- Asian sea; 13- Numerous; 21- Cartoon dog; 23- Green land; 25- Energy source; 27- Ingrid's "Casablanca" role; 29- Shipping deduction; 30- Bunches; 31- Concordes, e.g.; 32- Old Dodge model; 33- Manipulates; 34- Yokel; 36- Cave dweller; 37- Too; 40- Drinks (as a cat); 43- Of the seventh planet; 44- Penitential period; 46- Learned; 49- Hwy.; 51- Edible red seaweed; 52- Fauvist painter Dufy; 53- Santa's aides; 55- Civilian clothes; 56- Earth tone; 57- Baseball's Pee Wee; 58- "Born Free" lion; 59- Change direction; 60- Within (prefix); 61- Dagger; 64- A mean Amin;

**Yesterday's solution**

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



It's prime time to **BUY & RENT!**

**jml property**

CONTACT US & SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY!

hello@jmlproperty.com  
www.jmlproperty.com

f jmlmacau @jmlproperty

有關樓宇廣告法例及資訊資料請向職員查詢  
For more information on advertising laws, please speak to one of our representatives.

**Va Fat**  
HKD 3,980,000 2 bed 1 bath

**Tou Un**  
HKD 2,980,000 1 bed 1 bath

**Jade Garden**  
HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath





A permanent exhibition about the Monuments Men and Women at The National WWII Museum's Liberation Pavilion in New Orleans

HISTORY

# WWII MONUMENTS MEN WEREN'T ALL MEN. THE FEMALE MEMBERS FINALLY MOVE INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

JAMIE STENGLE, DALLAS

**A**FTER World War II, the U.S. Army's art experts set out to find and return millions of works stolen by the Nazis. Known as the Monuments Men, they included Mary Regan Quessenberry, who from her base in Berlin traveled to examine stolen works, tracked looting cases and investigated suspicious art dealers.

Decades later, Quessenberry and the other female members are getting recognition.

The Dallas-based foundation honoring the group updated its name in recent years to recognize their contributions, highlighted their work in a new exhibit at a national museum, and is set to publish for the first time in English a memoir in which one of the women describes spying on the Nazis while working at a Paris museum.

"The Monuments Men were not all men," said Anna Bottinelli, president of the Monuments Men and Women Foundation.

The Allied armies' Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section included 27 women and about 320 men during and just after WWII. The Army recently revived the concept, with the first new class of monuments officers graduating in 2022.

When battles raged during WWII, it was the men who protected works of art and architectural treasures. The women entered the picture after the war, when the fo-



Anna Bottinelli, head of the Monuments Men and Women Foundation

cus turned to restitution.

It's a pivot that the foundation also has made since Robert Edsel founded it nearly 20 years ago with a focus on the war years. Edsel made the monuments officers a household name, writing books including "The Monuments Men," which was made into a 2014 movie starring George Clooney and Matt Damon.

As the years passed, the foundation became increasingly

involved in restitution, from helping return works taken during the war to producing a pack of playing cards featuring still-missing works.

"As our mission evolved and as our work developed, then it became really natural to focus more on the postwar efforts, and as a result on the women," Bottinelli said.

A permanent exhibit on the monuments officers that is part of a new addition to the National

WWII Museum in New Orleans opened in November. The Monuments Men and Women Gallery includes a recreation of a salt mine where monuments officers found stolen art.

The exhibit also features the story of Quessenberry, who enlisted in what became the Women's Army Corps when the U.S. entered the war. After the Allied victory in Europe, she learned the Army was looking for art experts. Quessenberry, who had a master's degree in art history, jumped at the chance.

When she arrived in Berlin, she was greeted by Lt. Col. Mason Hammond, a Harvard University classics professor she knew from her studies at Radcliffe College, which later merged with Harvard.

"He opened the door ... recognized her and threw his arms around her and said, 'Mary, thank God you're here,'" Edsel said.

She returned to the U.S. as a major in 1948.

Quessenberry's friend, Ken Scott, said she described her time as a monuments officer as "the most thrilling time of her life." He said she was "gleeful" when Edsel traveled to Massachusetts to interview her a few years before her death in 2010 at the age of 94.

"She was an absolute pistol as they would say, just full of stories," Edsel said.

Making sure women got the recognition they deserved was important to Quessenberry. "She was very strong and vocal about

it," Scott said.

This fall, the foundation will publish Rose Valland's memoir. In "The Art Front," originally published in French in 1961, Valland, a French art expert who became a monuments officer, writes about secretly tracking where stolen works were shipped after the Nazis based their looting operation out of the Paris museum where she worked.

"It was thanks to her notes and all of her spying that then when the Allies entered Paris in 1944 they were then able to trace the steps of where this art had been taken and who it belonged to," Bottinelli said.

Valland, who inspired the role played by Cate Blanchett in the "The Monuments Men" movie, died at 81 in 1980.

Edsel said the last working WWII-era monuments officer was a woman. After operations wound down around 1950, Ardelia Hall carried on the mission into the early 1960s from the State Department, keeping a list of still-missing works and urging museums and art dealers to be on the lookout. A woman, Capt. Edith Standen, also had the forethought while in post-war Germany to record all of her fellow monuments officers' names, he said.

The Army's first class of the new monuments officers, called heritage and preservation officers, graduated in the summer of 2022.

Among them was Capt. Jessica Wagner, who has worked at museums across the U.S. She said being a part of the new version of the group she'd studied while getting her master's degree "feels a little bit surreal."

"You always ask yourself the question: Would I be willing to go and do that? I guess the answer is yes," Wagner said. **MDT/AP**



FOOTBALL | CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# De Jong penalty earns PSV Eindhoven draw with Dortmund in round of 16

MIKE CORDER, EINDHOVEN

PSV 1, DORTMUND 1

**L**UUK de Jong converted a penalty to cancel out a goal by his former teammate Donyell Malen as PSV Eindhoven and Borussia Dortmund drew 1-1 on yesterday [Macau time] in the first leg of their Champions League round of 16 matchup.

Malen scored against his old club in the 24th minute with a shot that appeared to deflect off the outstretched leg of defender Sergiño Dest.

Malen didn't wildly celebrate his first Champions League goal since December 2021, instead holding both hands in the air almost apologetically.

The goal was a familiar sight for the PSV fans. Malen scored 50 times in 81 appearances for the Eindhoven club from 2018-21. The crowd at PSV Stadium gave Malen a warm ovation when he was substituted late in the match.



AP PHOTO

De Jong equalized when he calmly slotted a low penalty past Alexander Meyer in the 56th minute after Mats Hummels had brought down Malik Tillman. It

took De Jong's Champions League goal tally to a PSV record nine, one more than Ruud van Nistelrooy.

Dortmund players complained bitterly that Hummels had played

the ball, but referee Srdjan Jovanovic waved away their protests.

"The referee judged that there was a penalty," said Dortmund coach Edin Terzic. "Our wish remains that he should look at the screen. He was very sure of his decision. We think it was a hard decision."

Hummels himself was less diplomatic.

"Zero percent a penalty. Zero. I slide in, I clearly play the ball, change its path and only then make minimal contact," the defender told Amazon Prime. "Tillman was laughing himself silly on the pitch, (Johan) Bakayoko was laughing himself silly, they were all grinning at me for minutes."

Dest came close to snatching a late winner when he passed Julian Ryerson on the left but Meyer, a late replacement for the injured Gregor Kobel, saved his shot.

"In the second half we had it completely under control," PSV midfielder Joey Veerman said. "In the first half we had the better chances. If you look at the match

as a whole we had better chances than Dortmund."

The second leg is in Dortmund on March 13.

"If we can win our home game, we'll get through and that's the task for now," Terzic said.

De Jong also said he was confident heading to Dortmund.

"We played well today and we can do that there, too," De Jong said.

PSV, led by former Dortmund coach Peter Bosz, finished second behind Arsenal in Group B to reach its first Champions League round-of-16 match in eight seasons. Dortmund underlined its European pedigree by topping Group F, leaving Paris Saint-Germain in second place.

Dortmund was without striker Sébastien Haller who scored the winning goal as Ivory Coast beat Nigeria 2-1 to win the Africa Cup of Nations earlier this month. Haller, who also scored the winner in the semifinal, returned from the tournament with an ankle injury. **MDT/AP**

AD

**廖國敏**  
**LIO KUOKMAN**

指揮廖國敏懷揣著遠大的志向，為他故鄉的樂團描繪出一幅宏偉的藍圖

TALENTED MAESTRO LIO KUOKMAN HAS AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR HIS HOMETOWN ORCHESTRA

現在發售  
now on sale

MACAUCLOSER

知得更多，活得更好  
KNOW MORE, LIVE BETTER

MACAUCLOSER  
生活藝術雜誌 LIVING & ARTS MAGAZINE

**BENFICA MACAU ACADEMY**  
澳門賓菲加體育學校

MACAU 澳門

FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS

MACAU 澳門

**BENFICA MACAU ACADEMY**  
澳門賓菲加體育學校

FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS



OPINION

Business Views

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



WHEN CHINA IS A VALUE TRAP AND JAPAN A GROWTH PLAY

Two recent articles from Barron's, my old home before Bloomberg Opinion, struck me for their observations on the two biggest economies in Asia. One noted that Toyota Motor Corp. was looking like a growth stock, even as the Japanese automaker stayed with its traditional business and hardly sold any electric vehicles. Toyota has risen 32% this year. The second piece, a feature published days later, was titled "China Used to Be the World's Best Growth Story. Now It's a Value Play."

Barron's summarized the market sentiments well. Bruised by China's big tech crackdown and property bust, global investors have been seeking a new home that's big and liquid enough to park their money. Naturally, they are looking east to Japan, which seems to be finally stepping out of a deflation stretching back to the 1990s. The Nikkei 225 Index is poised to return to its peak, set in December 1989.

Asset managers are forming favorable views towards Japan, while exhibiting "acute apathy on China," according to Bank of America Merrill Lynch's latest survey. About two-thirds expected a stronger Japanese economy, with a longer horizon for ending the nation's negative interest rate policy, and a measured 3.8% wage growth.

In other words, they were envisioning the perfect macro backdrop for equities — an economy that is growing but not so fast that the Bank of Japan has to tighten. As such, almost 30% surveyed saw double-digit returns over the next 12 months. Meanwhile, alarm bells were ringing on China, with a whopping 75% saying households there would save rather than spend or invest.

But I wonder how much of this enthusiasm for the Nikkei is rooted in the fundamentals, and how much is mere justification for momentum-chasing trades.

There certainly are red herrings. For instance, we found out recently that Japan slipped into a recession at the end of 2023, countering the economic growth argument. Meanwhile, a resurgence in travel over the Lunar New Year holiday brings into question fund managers' thesis that the Chinese are simply not willing to spend.

Or consider foreigners' love for Japanese banks. Is that stance sound? Investors need to do some soul-searching after Aozora Bank Ltd.'s US commercial property woes sank its shares. Japan's decade-long quantitative easing has pushed its financial institutions overseas to chase after yields and margins. Regional lenders, for instance, have become a go-to buyer in the US collateralized loan obligations market. Have foreigners done proper stress tests on Japanese banks?

It's understandable that investors are giving the Nikkei a fresh look. Money has to be deployed somewhere, and China burned them badly in recent years. However, they would do well to remember that Japan also has a long track record of disappointments — just not in the dramatic fashion that China displays. In 2013, foreigners poured in about \$155 billion, wholeheartedly embracing Abenomics. Their euphoria was gradually deflated by painfully slow wait for the BOJ to hit its perpetually unattainable 2% inflation target.

I am not being a naysayer: Japan might finally be at the end of the tunnel. But investors should revisit history and tread cautiously. China is a value trap, but that doesn't make Japan a growth story.

Courtesy Bloomberg/Shuli Ren

Japan's exports surged a stronger than expected nearly 12% in January, helped by robust demand for vehicles, auto parts and machinery.

That helped the nation's trade deficit shrink to 1.76 trillion yen (\$12 billion), or about half of what it was a year earlier.

Imports, which have been declining on-month for nearly a year, declined 9.6% from the previous year, totaling 9 trillion yen (\$60 billion). The biggest declines were for imports of oil, natural gas and iron ore, partly due to declines in prices, but also weak de-

mand.

By region, exports to North America, the rest of Asia and the Middle East rose, while imports from all regions fell.

Exports in January totaled 7.3 trillion yen (\$48 billion), marking the second straight month of growth, according to the Finance Ministry's preliminary report. Analysts had forecast growth at about 10%.

Exports to China jumped 29%, helped by strong demand for computer chip-making equipment.

AP PHOTO



BEATLES TO GET A FAB FOUR OF BIOPICS, WITH A MOVIE EACH FOR PAUL, JOHN, GEORGE AND RINGO

JAKE COYLE, NEW YORK

THE Beatles are getting the big-screen biopic treatment in not just one film, but a Fab Four of movies that will give each band member their own spotlight — all of which are to be directed by Sam Mendes.

For the first time, the Beatles, long among the stingiest rights granters, are giving full life and music rights to a movie project. Sony Pictures announced Monday a deal that may dwarf all music biopics that have come before it, with the stories of Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison and Ringo Starr spread out over a quartet of films.

The films, conceived by Mendes, are expected to roll out theatrically in innovative fashion, with the movies potentially coexisting or intersecting in theaters. Precise release plans will be announced at a later date. Sony is targeting 2027 for their release.

McCartney, Starr and the families of John Lennon and George Harrison have all signed off on the project through the band's Apple Corps. Ltd. Sony Music Publishing controls the rights to the majority of Beatles songs.

"I'm honored to be telling the story of the great

test rock band of all time, and excited to challenge the notion of what constitutes a trip to the movies," Mendes said in a statement.

Each film will be from the perspective of a Beatle.

"We intend this to be a uniquely thrilling, and epic cinematic experience: four films, told from four different perspectives which tell a single story about the most celebrated band of all time," said producer Pippa Harris. "To have The Beatles' and Apple Corps' blessing to do this is an immense privilege."

The Beatles' most famous forays into film were in their early years. Between 1964 and 1970, they appeared in five movies, including "A Hard Day's Night" (1964) and the animated "Yellow Submarine" (1968). They've, of course, been the subject of many documentaries, most recently Peter Jackson's 2021 "The Beatles: Get Back."

In 2023, the Beatles reunited with the aid of artificial intelligence in the newly released song "Now and Then." The recording was made possible by technology used by Jackson on "Get Back," and featured a music video made by the New Zealand director.

Attempts to dramatize the Beatles' story have

been more sporadic and less impactful. A 1979 biopic, made when Lennon was still alive, called "The Birth of the Beatles" was produced with Beatles original drummer Pete Best as an adviser. The 1994 indie drama "Backbeat" chronicled Lennon's relationship with Stuart Sutcliffe before the Beatles were famous. "Nowhere Boy" (2009) starred Aaron Taylor-Johnson as a teenage Lennon.

But in the last decade, music biopics have become big business. Box-office hits like "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Rocketman" and "Elvis" have sent Hollywood executives chasing the next jukebox blockbuster. Over Presidents Day weekend, "Bob Marley: One Love," produced with the Marley estate, was the No. 1 movie in theaters. A Michael Jackson biopic is in production.

"Theatrical movie events today must be culturally seismic. Sam's daring, large-scale idea is that and then some," said Tom Rothman, chair and chief executive of Sony Pictures' Motion Picture Group.

The combination of Mendes' team "with the music and the stories of four young men who changed the world, will rock audiences all over the globe," Rothman said. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis yesterday asked India to play a leading role in building international partnerships to meet the unprecedented challenges brought by the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East and changes in climate and energy security. Modi told reporters that India and Greece agreed to boost ties in the defense, pharmaceutical, space and shipping sectors as they seek to double their bilateral trade by 2030 from nearly \$2 billion in 2022-23.

US said yesterday the United Nations' top court should not issue an advisory opinion that says Israel should "immediately and unconditionally withdraw" from territories sought for a Palestinian state. Acting State Department legal adviser Richard Visek said the 15-judge panel at the International Court of Justice should not seek to resolve the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict "through an advisory opinion addressed to questions focusing on the acts of only one party."

AP PHOTO



British lawmakers are seeking reassurances about the nation's nuclear deterrent after reports that a test of the system failed dramatically last month when an unarmed missile crashed into the sea near the submarine from which it was launched. The Sun newspaper reported that the incident occurred while Defense Secretary Grant Shapps was on board the HMS Vanguard to witness the test firing of a Trident missile designed to carry nuclear warheads.

France Striking workers again closed down the Eiffel Tower yesterday, the third day running that the landmark expected to be at the heart of celebrations for the Paris Olympics has been off-limits to visitors. A message on the tower's website also warned of more possible disruptions Thursday, if strikers continue their push for salary hikes and other concessions. "We apologize for the inconvenience," it said.