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POLICE FINED ALMOST 300 JAYWALKERS LAST MONTH NEAR THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN RUA DO CAMPO AND RUA DE FERREIRA DO AMARAL DOWNTOWN P4

VISITOR EXPENDITURES SURPASS 2019 LEVELS: OFFICIAL STATS P5

NIKKEI STOCK INDEX BREAKS ITS 1989 RECORD, SURGES TO AN ALL-TIME HIGH P7



Afghanistan The Taliban carried out a double public execution at a stadium in southeastern Afghanistan yesterday as thousands watched the killing of two convicted men as their victims' relatives fired the gunshot. The Taliban's Supreme Court had ruled that the pair were responsible for the stabbing deaths of two victims in separate attacks, according to a court statement.



Pakistan's media regulators have blocked the social media platform X, formerly Twitter, with users across the country yesterday enduring the sixth day of sweeping disruptions, partial and complete shutdowns. There was no comment on the outage by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority and government officials have not responded to repeated queries from The Associated Press for comment.



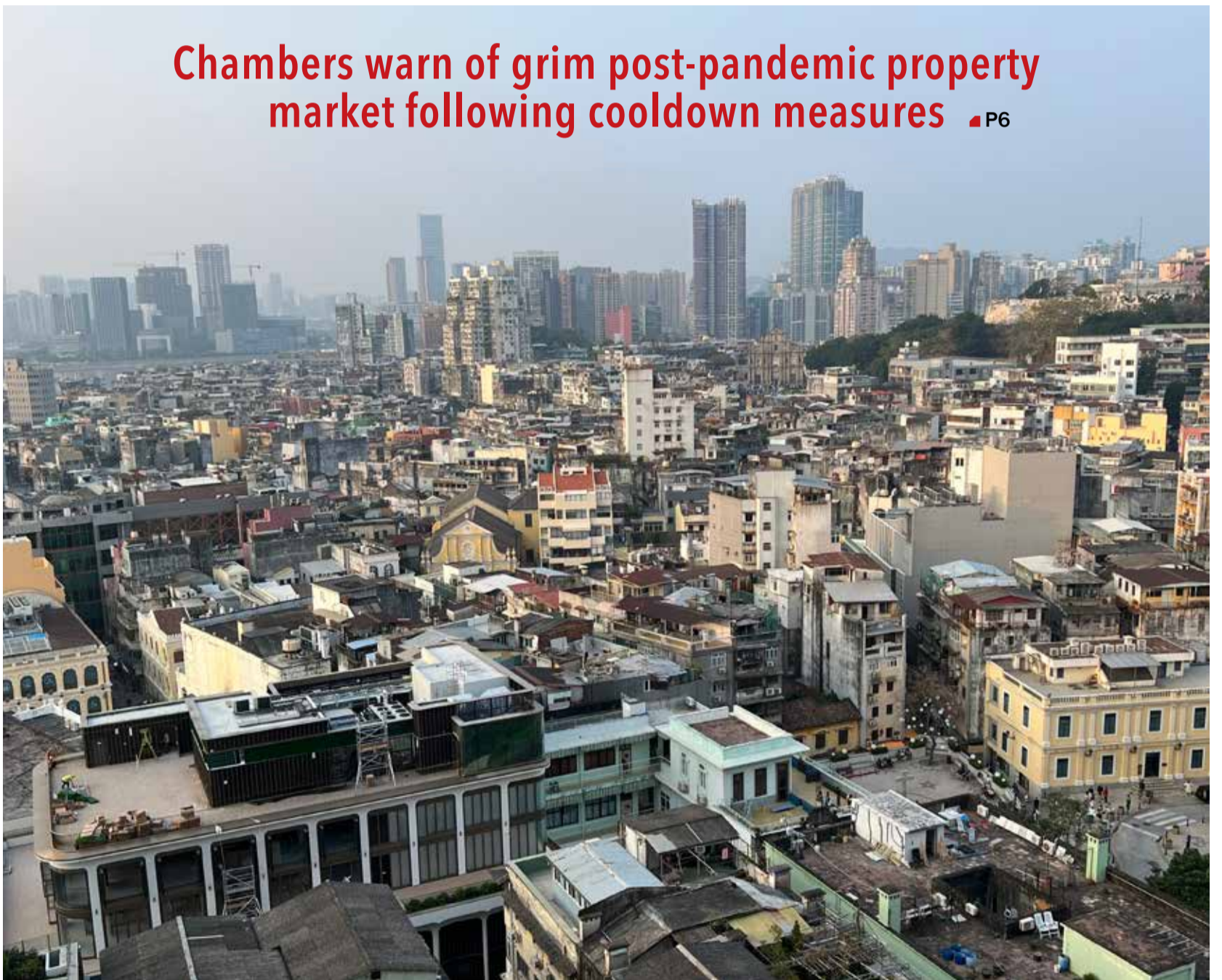
Iran An Israeli sabotage attack on an Iranian natural gas pipeline last week caused multiple explosions on the line, Iran's oil minister alleged yesterday [Macau time], further raising tensions between the regional archenemies against the backdrop of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The accusations by Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji come as Israel has been blamed for a series of attacks targeting Tehran's nuclear program.

Gulf of Aden A suspected missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels set a ship ablaze in the Gulf of Aden as Israel intercepted what appeared to be another Houthi attack near the port city of Eilat, authorities said. The attacks come as the rebels escalate their assaults over Israel's war against Hamas. The attack yesterday in the Gulf of Aden saw two missiles fired, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said.

More on backpage

NOT SO COOL

Chambers warn of grim post-pandemic property market following cooldown measures P6



HERITAGE
ARTIFACTS FOUND AT PATIO DO AMPARO NOT FROM QING DYNASTY P3



MEDIA

WEALTHIER, URBAN AMERICANS HAVE ACCESS TO MORE LOCAL NEWS – WHILE HALF OF US COUNTIES HAVE ONLY ONE OUTLET

SARAH STONBELY
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Is local news readily available in your town? Do reporters still cover your school board and other municipal meetings?

If you answered yes, you are likely wealthier than the average American, and you live in or near a metro area.

The State of Local News Project at Northwestern University documents the changing local news landscape across the country. Our latest report shows that where you live and how much money you make affect whether you live in a news desert or a news oasis. This divide is related to other factors affecting the health of our democracy, as analysis of our data by the nonprofit Rebuild Local News showed.

For more than a decade, I have worked in organizations that study and support local journalism, and I'm intimately familiar with both the challenges and the solutions for the local journalism landscape.

INEQUITY IN LOCAL NEWS

One of the most vexing problems, as our report shows, is the persistence of inequity between communities that are local journalism haves and have-nots.

The have-nots are news deserts with few, if any, journalists to do the daily newsgathering and reporting that people require to participate meaningfully in their local communities and democratic institutions.

The main challenge for news outlets in have-not communities is the migration of advertising money from the printed page – where it made up roughly 80% of news organizations' income – to the screen, where it now makes up less than 20%. This decline in ad revenue, a trend for the last decade-plus, has forced many outlets to rely on audience funding, philanthropy, cost-cutting or some combination of the three.

In communities with little disposable income to put toward news subscriptions or donations and no local philanthropies, cost-



-cutting becomes the only option. This creates a self-reinforcing spiral of lower quality and declining readership and, ultimately, closure.

In 2023, the country lost more than 130 print newspapers, which continue to be the newsrooms most likely to produce original local content that other outlets circulate.

Since 2005, the U.S. has lost almost 2,900 papers.

New digital outlets are not being created fast enough to fill that huge void. The number of digital outlets has held steady at roughly 550 in recent years, with about 20 new outlets opening each year – and roughly the same number closing.

All told, 1,558 of the nation's 3,143 counties have only one news outlet, while 203 are news deserts with zero, meaning there are likely thousands of communities that simply do not have access to local news.

For example, both Texas and Tennessee had four counties lose their only remaining newspaper last year. All eight papers were independently owned.

WHAT IT TAKES TO THRIVE

Wealthier communities do better sustaining local news organizations.

Our data shows that counties with an average household income over US\$80,000 can support a robust local journalism ecosystem – meaning 10 or more outlets. Those with an average household income of \$54,000 or less are more likely to be news deserts. By the same token, the percentage of the population below the poverty line in news deserts averages more than 16%, versus 12% in counties with robust markets. This finding aligns with other research, including a previous study I did of local news in New Jersey.

In addition to household income, population density correlates to the number of outlets serving a local community. In our data, counties with 10 or more outlets are overwhelmingly urban or dense suburbia, while news deserts are usually rural – though news deserts also occur in low-income pockets of metro areas. Densely populated communities tend to include higher-income households and have network effects that come from the ability of businesses to reach a larger number of people in a relatively small footprint.

This phenomenon leads to the third factor related to number of outlets in a county: gross domestic product per capita. In any

town, city or country, the GDP represents the amount of money netted from sales of services and merchandise, divided by population. For the news oases in our study, the average GDP per capita is \$75,140. For the news deserts, it is just \$8,964. This difference reflects the retail and services base, and the number of businesses that could buy advertising in their local news outlet, or create jobs that would allow residents to donate to one.

An example that highlights the importance of this factor is the newspaper Moab Sun News, which is thriving in the rural rocky highlands of Utah, thanks in part to a robust tourism industry and retail base. Though it serves a relatively small permanent population of 5,321, the Moab Sun News has built a sustainable business model through strong advertising revenue, a user-friendly website that welcomes subscriptions and donations, and creative collaborations with other community organizations in town.

The final factor that contributes to a community being a journalism have or have-not is access to high-quality broadband. Emerging metrics show that this near-necessity of contemporary life is not yet reliably available to rural Americans.

WHAT'S WORKING

Despite these seemingly intractable problems, solutions to local journalism inequality are becoming clearer.

One is collaboration. For example, in Colorado, the national nonprofit news outlet The Daily Yonder has hired a reporter based in a rural community to write stories about life there and share them out with both local and national organizations.

Another is philanthropy. The new Press Forward initiative has begun local chapters across the country, with at least one planning to serve rural communities. Organizations like the National Trust for Local News have been buying outlets that would likely otherwise be sold to hedge funds, and turning them into nonprofits that will continue to serve their communities.

Public policy should also play a role. At the state level, policies to support local news have seen success in New Jersey, California and elsewhere, and more bills are working their way through state legislatures. People seem to be realizing that having quality local news is just as vital as having public education and access to health care. With any luck, every community will have the opportunity to be a journalism "have."
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For subscription and general issues:

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HERITAGE

Archeological materials found at Patio do Amparo not from Qing Dynasty

RENATO MARQUES

A Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) study on archeological materials found at a land plot at Patio do Amparo, in the surroundings of the Ruins of St Paul's, are unrelated to what was initially suspected to be the main structure of an ancient Chinese imperial customs house dating to the Qing Dynasty.

The conclusions of the study were presented earlier this week at the plenary meeting of the Cultural Heritage Council.

The IC said the ancient building, known as Kwan Pou Hang Toi, should have been in that area, according to old records.

But after in-depth analysis, including the excavation and research of materials and structures found at the site, it was concluded the structures at Zones 5 and 7 of the Patio do Amparo were, most probably, related to a residence for officials' families.

This was part of a later ex-



tension to the imperial customs house, located behind the main building. It was this building over which the IC formed a particular

interest.

According to the president of the IC, Deland Leong, only porcelain and objects of personal use

dating from different times were found at the site.

While these items hold no "special value," she said they

would still be sent to local museums for exhibition.

The IC also said that after the conclusion of work at the site, the land will be returned to its owner.

The land has been in the possession of the IC since April 2021 when, at a meeting of the Urban Planning Committee (CPU), the IC called for the suspension of the issuance of an urban conditions plan for the plot in question.

The bureau suspected then that this site could be home to valuable remains of an ancient structure.

This theory was first aired by a member of the CPU, architect André Lui, who presented a map dated circa 1838 indicating that the ancient building, Kwan Pou Hang Toi, had occupied at least part of the land.

Leong also said that after 1849, the date when the imperial customs house should have closed, the land plot's purpose was altered several times and it has since been used for different purposes up to the present day.

CRIME

Macau resident caught smuggling 370kg of live lobsters to mainland

RENATO MARQUES

CUSTOMS authorities intercepted a Macau resident trying to smuggle some 370kg of live lobsters into mainland China, the Customs Service (SA) has reported.

The resident, a 29-year-old man, was intercepted at the Macau Port Area at Hengqin Port, driving a double-plated vehicle.

According to the SA, the incident occurred Tuesday evening (Feb. 20) after the police spotted the vehicle transporting something "covered" in its front passenger seat. The vehicle was also visibly loaded in its rear cargo area, as well as in its rear seats.

Further inspection of the whole vehicle, using special X-ray cargo equipment, showed that there were a lot of suspicious items hidden in the trunk, as well as in



several compartments of the vehicle.

After a thorough search, the inspectors seized 386 live lobsters, with the entire contraband weighing approximately 370kg.

The SA also reported that the same offending resident was last year

involved in a different criminal case of "illegal sailing activities." The offender, who had committed this act near the border post, was at the time suspected of trying to enter the mainland illegally by boat.

This is at least the fourth time this mon-

th that authorities have foiled attempts to smuggle live lobsters into the mainland via several border posts, including the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the Border Gate.

Just a week ago, authorities intercepted another resident transporting over 80kg of live lobsters.

About two weeks ago, a third resident was intercepted at an industrial building in the Northern District trying to smuggle 110kg of the same product.

A late January report noted the seizure of 150kg of live lobsters from the back seat and trunk of a cross-border vehicle.

According to a reference made by the authorities in one of the cases, the total value of live lobster product seized in the last month amounts to about 350,000 patacas.

GBA

NANSHA BRIDGE COLLAPSE KILLS AT LEAST FIVE

THE collapse of a section of the Lixinsha Bridge in Nansha, Guangzhou, after the bridge was hit by a cargo ship, has killed at least five people and injured a few more.

According to several media reports, the incident occurred at about 5:30 a.m. yesterday when a cargo ship, sailing under the bridge, struck one of its pillars.

Consequently, one of the sections of the bridge deck fell, sending at least five vehicles crossing the bridge plummeting, either into the water or onto the ship's deck.

Sources at the site claimed two vehicles fell directly into the water while the other three fell onto the ship.

One of those vehicles was a bus but, according to offi-

cial sources, it was traveling without passengers and only with the driver. That driver has been confirmed as one of the deceased.

Information from the Guangzhou Maritime Department, cited by official media, updated the death toll to five later in the evening after the finding of three bodies. These people had initially been classified as disappeared.

The same sources also stated Chinese authorities had detained the ship's captain for questioning.

A crew member from the ship was also reportedly injured in the incident. At the time of printing, it has been impossible to confirm his physical condition. **RM**



PRAIA GRANDE TO SEE NEW BUILDING WITH APARTMENTS, SHOPS

The Praia Grande Bay Urbanization Plan will see a new building with apartments, shops and parking areas. Situated in Lot 7 of Zone C, near the Legislative Assembly, the building will have 13 floors, with an expected 345 apartments. The property will have a maximum height of 46.7 meters. Work will conclude by Aug. 21, 2016, as stated in a Hoje Macau report, which cites a statement to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange by the company China Star Entertainment. The group is owned by businessman and film director Charles Heung.

126 SUSPECTED ILLEGAL WORKERS FOUND LAST MONTH

The Public Security Police Force (PSP) and the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) apprehended 126 people in January on suspicion of working illegally in Macau. The finding comes after the two departments conducted cooperative operations against illegal workers, inspecting 401 different locations. These included construction sites, private buildings and commercial and industrial establishments. In December 2023, the DSAL and PSP conducted 175 inspections, leading to the discovery of 64 people suspected of being illegal workers. Recently, the PSP noted that the significant growth in the number of suspected cases of illegal work is mostly due to a sudden surge in the demand for labor to perform services in the food and beverage industry.

CRIME

PSP FINES 300 JAYWALKERS AT RUA DO CAMPO INTERSECTION IN JANUARY

RENATO MARQUES

THE Public Security Police Force (PSP) has said it issued fines to almost 300 jaywalkers last month near the intersection between Rua do Campo and the Rua de Ferreira do Amaral in Central Macau.

The location is currently considered one of Macau's jaywalking "black spots," and has been a high incident location for traffic accidents as a consequence of jaywalking.

The PSP figure was raised at the latest Traffic Advisory Committee meeting, as the topic of the jaywalking at this particular location was one of the main discussion points of the meeting's agenda.

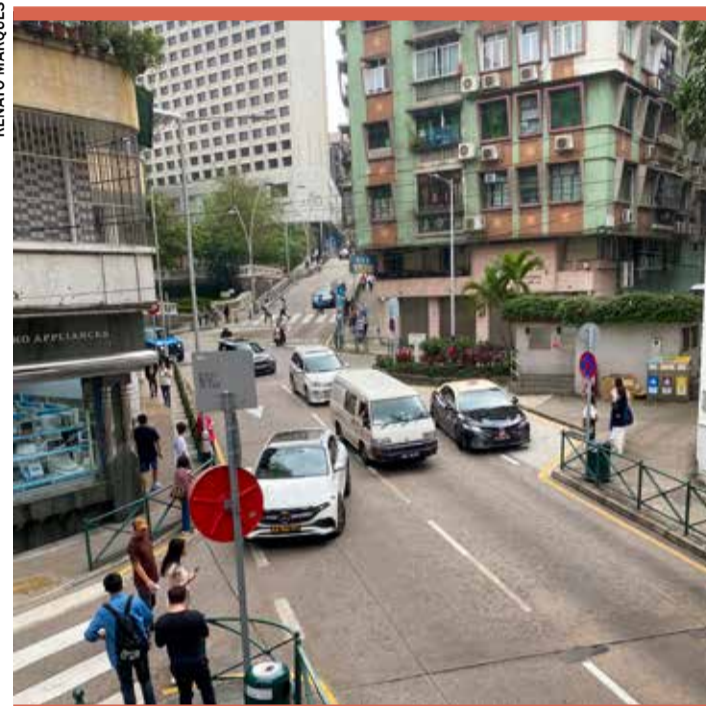
The PSP figure is likely to increase considerably as, during the Spring Festival holidays, the Times saw the PSP inter-

cepting and fining jaywalkers at this spot daily.

The same force noted that 34 traffic accidents were recorded last year at the same road section, and that another four have already been noted in January this year.

The area – although it has, for many years, enjoyed a pedestrian flyover that was only recently renovated to include lifts on both sides – is continuously misused by pedestrians, namely those who want to make use of the loading and unloading area on its corner to hail a taxi.

Tourists are often seen not using the flyover while crossing this street. These tourists largely cross in groups. As the road section has a blind turn, the incoming drivers from the Rua de Ferreira do Amaral cannot see jaywalkers while they cross the street.



Members of the same committee raised the possibility of adding traffic lights and warning signs in the area,

or enforcing other methods, to prevent pedestrians from crossing the street in an unsafe manner.

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STATS

Visitor expenditures surpass 2019 levels

LYNZY VALLES

TOTAL visitor spending, excluding gaming expenses, surged to MOP71.25 billion in 2023, surpassing pre-pandemic levels by 11.2%.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows the record-breaking figure also represents an increase of 292.2% year-on-year, attributable to a substantial 394.9% rise in the number of visitor arrivals, albeit from a low base as borders only reopened in January 2023.

Total spending of overnight visitors (MOP60.18 billion) and same-day visitors (MOP11.07 billion) soared by 303.5% and 240.6% year-on-year, respectively.

Per-capita visitor spending was MOP2,525 in 2023, up 55.3% compared to 2019.

Yet, the figure showed a year-on-year decrease of 20.8%, which was due to a relatively high base of comparison in 2022 that resulted from mainland visitors shopping in Macau during the quarantine-free travel arrangements between Macau and mainland China, as



well as their demand for mid-to-high-end consumer products.

Meanwhile, the per-capita spending of overnight visitors (MOP4,230) and same-day visitors (MOP791) fell by 29.6% and 21.7% year-on-year, respectively, in 2023.

Per-capita visitor spending on shopping (MOP1,219) and food & beverages (MOP478) dropped 42.3% and 2.1% year-on-year, res-

pectively, whereas spending on accommodation (MOP647) and transport (MOP101) grew 50.9% and 36.6%, respectively.

Per-capita spending of visitors from mainland China (MOP3,055), Hong Kong (MOP1,160) and Taiwan (MOP2,141) showed growth of 66.6%, 21.6% and 55.5%, respectively, as against 2019.

In addition, per-capita spen-

ding of visitors from the Republic of Korea (MOP3,634), Thailand (MOP3,363), Singapore (MOP2,658), Malaysia (MOP2,343) and Japan (MOP2,123) recorded varying increases compared to 2019.

The 2023 year closed with a new record for single-day visitor numbers, with 175,030 visitors entering Macau on Dec. 31.

The is the highest number of entries in a day since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Contributing to the year-end total, this figure resulted in the 2023 year closing with a provisional total of 28.23 million visitors, signifying a 71.6% recovery when compared to the 2019 year-end tally of 39.41 million visitors.

The 2023 overall count averages around 77,000 visits per day, setting a new reference baseline for local tourism operators and policymakers for the current year.

The tourism industry showed good recovery and growth prospects, proving the Macau's attractiveness as a global tourism and leisure center while showcasing visitors' confidence in the region.

Just recently, Alipay operator Ant Group said in a statement that transactions of overseas Chinese tourists from Feb. 9 to Feb 12 were 7% higher than for the same holiday period in 2019.

Data from the group shows the number of outbound spending transactions by Alipay users during the 2024 Spring Festival was already 107% of the level in the same period in 2019.

AD



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PROPERTY

CHAMBERS WARN OF GRIM POST-PANDEMIC PROPERTY MARKET

LYNZY VALLES

REAL estate associations have continued to stress that the property market in the SAR has not improved, even after the pandemic, amid robust growth in the city's tourism and gaming market.

Last year, the transaction volume dropped another 3%, compared to 2022.

For the Macao General Association of Real Estate, led by president Chong Sio Kin, the real estate market situation is grim. The association noted the biggest obstacle at present are stamp duty restrictions.

Late last year, the government announced its decision to partially lift from Jan. 1 this year the then-enacted cooldown measures, such as the 5% additional stamp duty on the purchase of second residential properties. The government has also unified the cap of the 70% loan-to-value ratio for residential properties.

However, at the same time, the cancellation of the mortgage scheme for first-time young homebuyers has put pressure on residential units with transaction



RENATO MARQUES

prices of MOP8 million or below, as the reduced loan-to-value ratio has affected their affordability.

Earlier this week, the Real Estate Joint Chamber of Commerce called on the government to study the opening of residency for investment and property purchases, and to introduce investors to revitalize the real estate market.

Echoing similar sentiments, Chong said Macau could follow

Hong Kong's scheme of giving residency to people who invest HKD30 million into the city as it steps up efforts to revive its status as a financial center and bolster revenue.

The move is expected to bring in HKD120 billion for Hong Kong annually.

"If the government does not open up to 'investment immigration', it will not be able to make the

market [better]," he said.

However, he also said there are still concerns about such an investment scheme, as residents may feel that if more people obtain a resident identity card then more people will enjoy the benefits of Macau and increase the financial burden upon the government.

But he stressed the government can set restrictions for futu-

re investment immigrants, including the need to pay taxes, and that only up to a certain level can certain benefits be enjoyed.

Meanwhile, Peter Lok from the Macau Real Estate Development Association has also agreed that the industry is very pessimistic about the property market this year.

The association has recommended the government fully ease measures for housing, calling the property cooling measures "out of step" amidst an ongoing shift in attitudes.

Lok agreed that currently only the "investment immigration" policy can attract talent and money.

According to the current environment, even if the government launches another land auction, there will be no bidders. If the government does not adopt improvement policies, it is expected that the price per square foot of the property market will continue to fall.

Realtor JLL earlier noted that it does not foresee a strong inclination towards a boost in the market, even if the government lifts all its cooldown measures.

Therefore, the group further suggested relaxing investment thresholds for Macau's property market in the surrounding areas, so as to stabilize the healthy development of that market and promote integration with the Greater Bay Area development pattern.

TOURISM

Calls for permanent pedestrian zone in Taipa Village

TAIPA Village has welcomed a record number of visitors over the Lunar New Year period, driven in part by government measures that included implementing a nine-day pedestrian zone in the area.

In a statement, Taipa Village Destination Limited, which has been pioneering the regeneration of the area for two decades, said that during the Lunar New Year holiday the average daily visitation to Taipa Village was estimated at more than 50,000 individuals – a figure almost double pre-pandemic levels, and one that outperforms Macau's overall visitor growth.

However, the group, so that authorities can improve traffic safety for both residents and tourists, called for the pedestrian zone to become a permanent feature.



With visitation levels to Taipa Village at all-time highs and likely to grow, even outside of holiday periods, "the area's main traffic artery, Rua Correia da Silva, is no longer suitable for operating as a traffic route, due to its dangerous narrowness and pavements that are unable to accommodate the increasingly-

heavy footfall in the area," the group said.

As footfall in the area is destined to keep rising, the group has called on authorities to "implement permanent pedestrian measures in the area, as so many other heritage-inspired locations across the world have done to great effect." LV

36% F&B RETAILERS EXPECT DECREASE IN REVENUES DESPITE ECONOMIC REBOUND

A total of 36% of interviewed restaurants and similar establishments are expecting their receipts to decrease month-on-month, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). In contrast, about 22% of the interviewed establishments predicted that their receipts would increase month-on-month in January.

DSEC data indicated that business climate improved markedly in 2023 compared to 2022, with receipts of the interviewed restaurants and similar establishments and retailers showing year-on-year increases in each month throughout the year. Both industries saw comparatively large growth in receipts in June and July, which was attributed to a low base of comparison in 2022.

Despite robust economic growth and recove-



ring consumer spending, restaurants and retailers in non-tourist areas are far from full recovery.

Lawmaker and businessman Chan Chak Mo recently said that government must still determine how to best help restaurants in districts less frequently visited by tourists.

Meanwhile, with respect to retail trade, 35% of interviewed retailers expect a month-on-month

sales decline in January, with over half of the Motor Vehicle Retailers (64%) and Cosmetics & Sanitary Articles Retailers (55%) forecasting a decrease in sales. By contrast, around 30% of the interviewed retailers anticipated a month-on-month sales increase in January. The corresponding proportions for supermarkets and leather goods retailers were 44% and 40% respectively. LV

MARKETS

Japan's Nikkei stock index breaks its 1989 record, surges to an all-time high

JAPAN'S benchmark Nikkei 225 index surged yesterday past the record it set in 1989 before its financial bubble burst, ushering in an era of faltering growth.

The index closed yesterday at 39,098.68, up 2.2%. It had been hovering for weeks near 34-year highs. Its previous record was 38,915.87, set on Dec. 29, 1989.

That was more than a generation ago at the height of Japan's post-war boom.

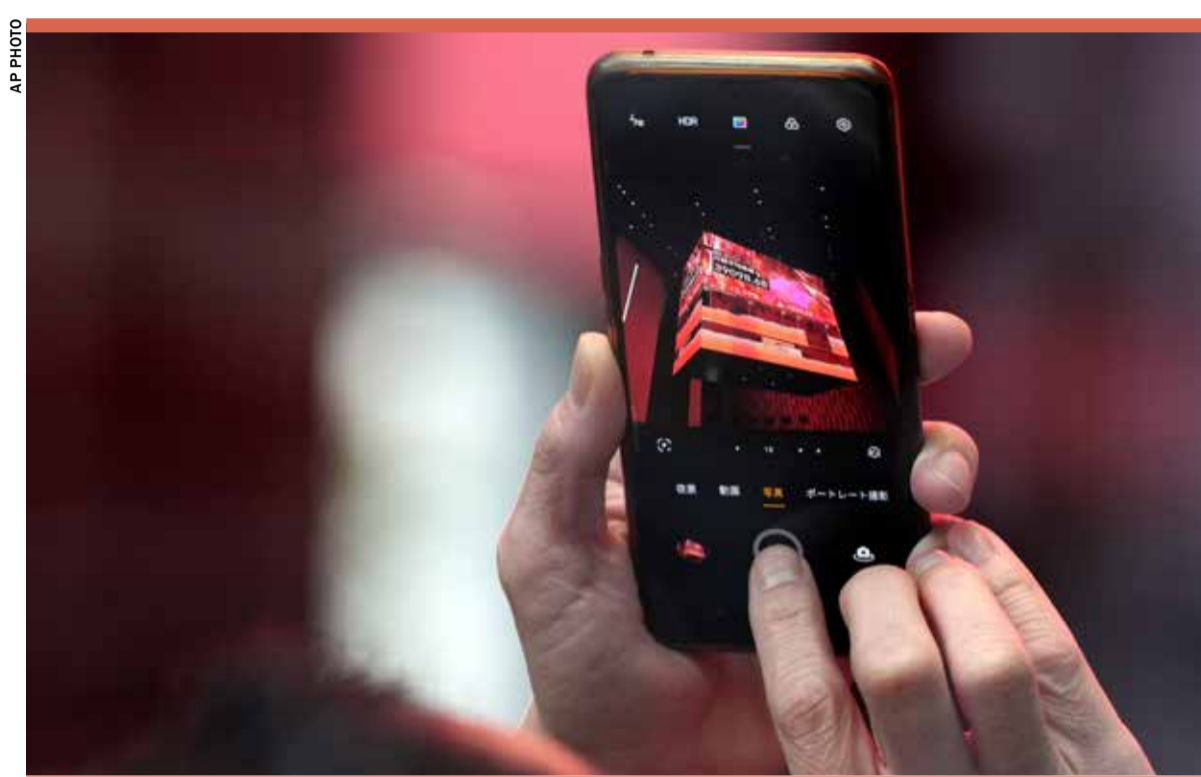
After the peak, as banks wrote off some 100 trillion yen in bad debts, shares meandered well below the record for many years — dipping below 8,200 in 2011 after the triple disasters of a massive earthquake and tsunamis and meltdowns at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan.

But the market has logged sharp gains in recent months, helped by strong interest from foreign investors who account for the majority of trading volume on the Tokyo exchange.

Unlike in the United States, where shares have been topping records on hopes the Federal Reserve will begin cutting high interest rates once it decides inflation is truly under control, in Japan the benchmark rate has remained at minus 0.1% for over a decade.

News that the economy slipped into recession in late 2023 has raised hopes that the Bank of Japan will stick to the easy money policies it has been using to try to spur inflation and push growth higher.

Plenty of the money the central



bank has pumped into the economy has found its way into the stock market. And many global investors have been shifting their portfolios away from China as its economy slows and tensions flare between Washington and Beijing.

Share prices in Tokyo have risen 15% in the past three months and about 44% in the past year. In Shanghai, prices have fallen more than 11% from a year ago, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index is down about 22%.

Record gains in corporate earnings for Japanese companies and improved corporate governance have enhanced the appeal of shares in Japanese companies, analysts say.

"As Japanese companies show

signs of change I think investors are taking a closer look," Hiromi Yamaji, group CEO of the Japan Exchange Group, said in an online briefing Wednesday sponsored by The Financial Times.

He noted that while many older Japanese are reluctant to invest in shares after the trauma of losing their savings when the bubble burst in the early 1990s, younger investors are less wary.

"The generation is changing," Yamaji said.

A change to the Nippon Individual Savings Account program — accounts that offer tax-free gains — that took effect in January also has lured investors eager to tap higher returns into shares, although analysts say much of that money

has gone into foreign markets.

Still, even a sliver of the 1.05 quadrillion yen (nearly \$7 trillion) in savings held by Japanese families has a big impact.

Also, the Government Pension Investment Fund, one of the world's biggest institutional investors, has been ramping up its investments in stocks, helping to push prices higher.

Foreign investors, who account for more than two-thirds of trading activity in Japan, have plunged in, seeking bargains to be had given the yen's weakness against the U.S. dollar, which is trading at about 150 yen compared with about 140 yen a year ago.

In January, international investors bought 125.2 trillion yen

of Japanese stocks, double a year earlier, according to the Tokyo Stock Exchange. As is true in the United States, some of the biggest winners have been technology companies like Renesas, SoftBank and Tokyo Electron.

So far, experts say Japan's shares are not overpriced.

The price-to-earnings ratio for the Tokyo market is about 16, compared with 23 for the S&P 500, 24 for India's Sensex, and 8 for Shanghai. In 2023, investors in Tokyo shares earned a return of more than 28%, according to the Nikkei's website.

Meanwhile, another entirely different scenario has been playing out in China, where the markets have never fully recovered from a meltdown in 2015 that wiped out trillions in value. The Shanghai Composite index is down nearly 10% from a year earlier and almost 5% from three months ago.

The smaller market in Shenzhen has fallen by about 25% in the past year, while on Hong Kong's exchange, the world's fifth largest, the Hang Seng index is down about 20%.

Markets in both Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland have been chilled by the tensions between Beijing and Washington that oblige companies to think ever more carefully about where to invest.

Recent comments by former President Donald Trump about raising tariffs on imports of Chinese products to 60% or even higher also have rattled Chinese markets, adding to the gloom. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

MGM brings first 'Together with Ekin Cheng' music show of 2024



Adding to a celebratory Easter weekend, MGM will team up with Ekin Cheng, the multi-talented star of film, television and music, to exclusively present the "Together with Ekin Cheng" Music Show at MGM for one night.

On March 30, the event will mark Ekin Cheng's first concert of 2024 at the MGM Theater.

Ekin Cheng has achieved remarkable success in the music industry. His iconic songs include "Young & Dangerous," "Why you, not me?," "The Storm Riders," and "The Legend of Speed." These songs have not only been widely loved by fans and listeners but have also become collectively nostalgic for a generation.

Japanese contemporary art exhibition opens at Sands Gallery



Macau's first Japanese art extravaganza in 2024, the "Japanese Contemporary Art Exhibition," is on display at Sands Gallery until March 30. The exhibition features over 90 artworks by six contemporary Japanese artists.

The exhibition is being pre-

sented as part of the 2024 Macau Japan Spring Festival.

The Macau exhibition features a two-month-long, multi-event festival, punctuated by performances, culinary experiences and art immersions at Sands China properties.

The "Japanese Contemporary Art Exhibition" showcases six of gallery UG's exclusive artists, themselves some of the finest in Japanese contemporary art: Kunihiko Nohara, Takaoki Tajima, Hiroya Yoshikawa, Nami Okada, Keitoku Toizumi and Ryosuke Kawahira.

"This new exhibition is part of Sands China's ongoing commitment to the diversification of art and culture in Macau, and provides a platform for promoting extensive exchange and cooperation among local and international art talent as we help strengthen Macau's international image of multiculturalism and inclusiveness," said Wilfred Wong, executive vice-chairman of Sands China Ltd.

CONSERVATION

BEIJING PLANS TO SEND SAN DIEGO ZOO MORE PANDAS, REINTRODUCING 'PANDA DIPLOMACY'

JULIE WATSON, SAN DIEGO

CHINA plans to send a new pair of giant pandas to the San Diego Zoo, renewing its longstanding gesture of friendship toward the United States after a recalling nearly all the iconic bears on loan to U.S. zoos as relations soured between the two nations.

The China Wildlife Conservation Association recently signed cooperation agreements with zoos in San Diego and Madrid, the Spanish capital, and is in talks with zoos Washington, D.C. and Vienna, China's government-run Xinhua News Agency said yesterday, describing the deals as a new round of collaboration on panda conservation.

San Diego Zoo officials told The Associated Press that if all permits and other requirements are approved, two bears, a male and a female, are expected to arrive as early as the end of summer, about five years after the zoo sent its last pandas back to China.

"We're very excited and hopeful," said Megan Owen of the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance and vice president of Wildlife Conservation Science. "They've expressed a tremendous amount of enthusiasm to re-initiate panda cooperation starting with the San Diego Zoo."

Zoos typically pay a fee of \$1 million a year for two pandas, with the money earmarked for China's conservation efforts, according to a 2022 report by America's Congressional Research Service.

In November, Chinese President Xi Jinping raised hopes his country would start sending pandas to the U.S. again after he and President Joe Biden convened in Northern California for their first face-to-face meeting in a year and pledged to try to reduce tensions.

China is considering a pair that includes a female descendent of Bai Yun and Gao Gao, two of the zoo's former residents, said Owen, an expert in panda behavior who has worked in San Diego and China.

Bai Yun, who was born in captivity in China, lived at the zoo for more than 20 years and gave birth to six cubs there. She and her son were the zoo's last pandas and returned to China in 2019.

Gao Gao was born in the wild in China and lived at the San Diego Zoo from 2003 to 2018 before being sent back.

Decades of conservation efforts in the wild and study in captivity saved the giant panda species from extinction, increasing its population from fewer than 1,000 at one time to more than 1,800 in the wild and captivity.

AP PHOTO



The black-and-white bears have long been the symbol of the U.S.-China friendship since Beijing gifted a pair of pandas to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., in 1972, ahead of the normalization of bilateral relations. China later loaned pandas to zoos to help breed cubs and boost the population.

The U.S., Spain and Austria were the first countries to work with China on panda conservation, and 28 pandas have been born in those countries, the Xinhua report said. The latest collaboration will include research on disease prevention and habitat protection, and contribute to China's national panda park construction, it said.

"We look forward to further expanding the research outcomes on the conservation of endangered species such as giant pandas, and promoting mutual understanding and friendship among peoples through the new round of international cooperation," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said in Beijing.

Demands for the return of giant pandas, known as China's "national treasure," grew among

the Chinese public as unproven allegations that U.S. zoos mistreated the pandas flooded Chinese social media.

Fears over the future of so-called panda diplomacy escalated last year when zoos in Memphis, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., returned their pandas to China, leaving only four pandas in the United States, all at the zoo in Atlanta. That loan agreement expires later this year.

Zoos typically pay a fee of \$1 million a year for two pandas, with the money earmarked for China's conservation efforts

Many loan agreements were for 10 years and often were extended well beyond. But negotiations last year to extend the agreements with U.S. zoos or send more pandas did not produce results. China watchers speculated that Beijing was "gradually pulling its pandas from Western nations due to deteriorating diplomatic relations" with the U.S. and other

countries.

Then on Nov. 15, 2023, a week after the National Zoo's pandas departed for China, Xi spoke at a dinner in downtown San Francisco with American business executives and signaled that more pandas might be sent. He said he learned the San Diego Zoo and people in California "very much look forward to welcoming pandas back."

"I was told that many American people, especially children, were really reluctant to say goodbye to the pandas and went to the zoo to see them off," Xi said.

The San Diego Zoo continued to work with their Chinese counterparts even after it no longer had any pandas.

Owen said China is particularly interested in exchanging information on the zoo's successful breeding of pandas in captivity. Giant pandas are difficult to breed in part because the female's reproductive window is extremely narrow, lasting only 48 to 72 hours each year.

Bai Yun's first cub, Hua Mei, was also the first panda born through artificial insemination to survive into adulthood outside of

China, and would go on to produce 12 cubs on her own after she was sent to China.

Bai Yun, meanwhile, remained at the zoo where she gave birth to two more females and three males. With cameras in her den, researchers monitored her, contributing to the understanding of maternal care behavior, Owen said.

"We have a lot of institutional knowledge and capacity from our last cooperative agreement, which we will be able to parlay into this next chapter, as well as training the next generation of panda conservationists," she said.

Chinese experts would travel with the bears and spend months in San Diego, Owen said.

She said the return of the bears is not only good for San Diego but the giant panda's recovery as a species.

"We do talk about panda diplomacy all the time," Owen said. "Diplomacy is a critical part of conservation in any number of contexts. If we can't learn to work together, you know, in sometimes difficult situations or situations that are completely out of the control of conservationists, then we're not going to succeed." MDT/AP

DIRE STRAIT

US Congress members praise Taiwan in a visit that's certain to draw China's scrutiny

KEVIN FREKING & SIMINA
MISTREANU, TAIPEI

A group of United States Congress members met with Taiwan's leader yesterday in a show of support that's certain to draw scrutiny from China, which opposes such visits and sees them as a challenge to its sovereignty over the island.

A visit by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan two years ago resulted in China dispatching warships and military aircraft to all sides of the self-governing island democracy, and firing ballistic missiles into the waters nearby.

In a meeting with Tsai Ing-wen, Rep. Mike Gallagher, the Republican chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, highlighted the bipartisan support for the U.S.-Taiwan partnership, which he described as "stronger and more rock-solid than ever now."

The U.S., like most countries, doesn't formally recognize Taiwan as a country but maintains robust informal relations with the island and is bound by its own laws to provide it with the weapons it needs to defend itself.

Gallagher thanked Tsai, who is nearing the end of her second and last term in office, for her leadership in Taiwan and for distinguishing herself "as a leader within the free world."

Tsai thanked the U.S. for continuing to help Taiwan strengthen

its self-defense capabilities.

"Together we are safeguarding freedom and democracy and maintaining regional peace," she said, adding that she hoped to see more exchanges between the U.S. and Taiwan in a range of domains.

The delegation, led by Gallagher, R-Wis., and Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill., was expected to be in Taiwan for three days as part of a larger visit to the Indo-Pacific region. Other members include Reps. John Moolenaar, R-Mich.; Dusty Johnson, R-S.D.; and Seth Moulton, D-Mass.

Consisting of some of Congress' staunchest critics of China, the bipartisan delegation was to meet with other senior Taiwanese officials and members of civil society to discuss U.S.-Taiwan relations, regional security and trade, among other issues of mutual interest.

Krishnamoorthi said Taiwan is one of the United States' "closest friends" and a role model for democracy, after Lai Ching-te emerged victorious as Taiwan's new leader and vowed to safeguard the island's de facto independence from China and further align it with other democracies.

"It's one of the most robust, most vibrant, one of the most exciting democracies in the world," Krishnamoorthi said. "And this year, when half of the world's population will be going to the polls to vote, you provided a role model for how elections should be conducted, and for that we salute you

AP PHOTO



Chairman Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Wis., heads the delegation visiting Taiwan

on this peaceful transfer of power, and you are an exemplar of democracy."

Krishnamoorthi is the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party's ranking Democrat. The committee was formed in 2023 and has held numerous hearings focused on human rights, trade, cyber intrusions and other issues central to the rising tensions between the two superpowers.

Earlier in February, the Com-

merce Department announced that for the first time in more than two decades, Mexico surpassed China as the leading source of goods imported by the United States. In 2023, then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy hosted Taiwan's leader in a rare high-level meeting on U.S. soil.

The shows of support for Taiwan reflect the growing willingness by many in Congress to confront China on a range of issues as economic relations between the

two nations deteriorate.

Taiwan was also part of the \$95-billion aid package that passed the Senate on Feb. 13, but has stalled in the House. That package, which focused on Ukraine and Israel, included \$1.9 billion to replenish U.S. weapons provided to Taiwan. Another \$3.3 billion would go to build more U.S.-made submarines in support of a security partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom. **MDT/AP**

TECH

Chinese police probe unauthorized and highly unusual online dump of documents

AP PHOTO



The interior of the I-Soon office, also known as Anxun in Mandarin, is seen after office hours in Chengdu

CHINESE police are investigating an unauthorized and highly unusual online dump of documents from a private security contractor linked to the nation's top policing agency and other parts of its government — a trove that catalogs apparent hacking activity and tools to spy on both Chinese and foreigners.

Among the apparent targets of tools provided by the impacted company, I-Soon: ethnicities and dissidents in parts of

China that have seen significant anti-government protests.

The dump of scores of documents late last week and subsequent investigation were confirmed by two employees of I-Soon, known as Anxun in Mandarin, which has ties to the powerful Ministry of Public Security. The dump, which analysts consider highly significant even if it does not reveal any especially novel or potent tools, includes hundreds of pages of contracts,

marketing presentations, product manuals, and client and employee lists.

The documents show apparent I-Soon hacking of networks across Central and Southeast Asia, as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The hacking tools are used by Chinese agents to unmask users of social media platforms outside China such as X, formerly known as Twitter, break into email and hide the online activity of overseas agents. Also described are devices disguised as

power strips and batteries that can be used to compromise Wi-Fi networks.

I-Soon and Chinese police are investigating how the files were leaked, the two I-Soon employees told The Associated Press.

One of the employees said I-Soon held a meeting Wednesday about the leak and were told it wouldn't affect business too much and to "continue working as normal." The AP is not naming the employees — who did provide their surnames, per common Chinese practice — out of concern about possible retribution.

The source of the leak is not known. The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. **MDT/AP**

INDIA

Delhi seeks to boost rooftop solar, especially for its remote areas

SIBI ARASU, BENGALURU

JUST a few years ago, someone who wanted to install a rooftop solar connection in India faced getting multiple approvals, finding a reliable company to install the panels and spending heavily before seeing the first surge of clean energy.

But that's changing. The government has streamlined the approvals process, made it easier for people to claim subsidies and pushed mountains of cash — including \$9 billion announced this month — to encourage faster adoption of technology that's seen as critical for India to reach its clean-energy goals.

"We had to get 45 signatures to set up a small rooftop solar connection in 2021," said Shreya Mishra, CEO of Mumbai-based Solar Square, one of India's largest rooftop solar companies. "Today it's almost instantaneous."

For this sun-soaked country, growth in rooftop solar can't come soon enough. India last year became the world's most populous nation, with 1.4 billion people and a hunger for energy that is rising fast.

Yet India, one of the world's biggest emitters of planet-warming gases, is also highly vulnerable to climate change. Its people are affected by deadly floods, extreme rainfall, extreme heat, prolonged droughts and cyclones with increasing frequency. A study earlier this year found that nine out of India's 28 states will be among the



Workers of Solar Square place a panel on the rooftop of a residence in Gurugram on the outskirts of New Delhi

world's hardest-hit regions due to climate change by midcentury.

India has grown its clean power rapidly in recent years and has the fourth-most installed renewable power, trailing only China, the U.S. and Brazil. It had 180 gigawatts as of December, enough to power about 18 million homes, with nearly half from solar.

But most of that solar power comes from numerous football-field-sized solar farms. Less than 15% comes from rooftop arrays, and India has so far managed to set up only 11 gigawatts of rooftop solar. That's far less than the 40 gigawatts it hoped to have by 2022.

Energy experts say rooftop solar is essential to bring power to remote areas, where it can be installed cheaply where it's needed and avoid the cost of transmitting the energy over long distances.

India's latest push was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who said the \$9 billion would provide "free electricity" for up to 10 million homes.

Neeraj Kuldeep of the New Delhi-based think tank, Council on Energy, Environment and Water, has tracked rooftop solar for nearly a decade. A report from CEEW last year found that only 50% of Indians are likely aware of rooftop solar as an energy solution and

most of those who were aware thought it was too expensive. The report released last November recommended subsidies for consumers who can benefit from small rooftop solar arrays but can't afford them.

Kuldeep said consumer awareness about rooftop solar is one key to driving growth. Others are efficient governments at both the federal and state level, and finding the right "fit" for a particular user's power needs.

Experts say another is getting buy-in from state-owned electricity companies who sometimes see rooftop solar as a threat to their profits.

Kuldeep said that's short-sighted. The companies can often actually make more money if they help install rooftop solar in a low-consumption home, he said. That's because they cut their transmission and distribution costs to carry power to a house with a subsidized bill that already earns them little profit.

Installations have also risen since the government launched a national rooftop solar portal in 2022 that consumers can use to claim and steer government subsidies directly to their bank account, say experts and rooftop solar companies.

Mysun, a rooftop solar company based in New Delhi, offers potential buyers a "solar calculator" on its website where they can enter their location and current electricity costs to see what kind of savings they could expect. CEO

Gagan Vermani said it's about simplifying the process for potential customers.

"We need to start thinking of (rooftop solar) with consumer needs in mind rather than thinking of it as building solar infrastructure," he said.

Those who are already hooked up with panels on their roofs tout the benefits of cheaper electricity and greater agency over their own power.

"It is a little expensive but it's totally worth it," said Ruchika Chahana, who lives in the affluent Greater Kailash neighborhood in New Delhi. Chahana installed rooftop solar in her home nine months ago at a cost of nearly \$5,000. She said her summer electricity bills have fallen to about \$50 a month, from \$200, and her family feels great about "doing something to save the planet."

In Bengaluru, Satish Mallya saw rooftop solar as essential both to save money and avert carbon emissions. He took the lead in installing 65 kilowatts of solar atop the 120-unit apartment complex he lives in, and the building's electricity costs have dropped \$700 a month.

That 2020 installation was "challenging" because of bureaucratic hurdles, said Mallya, who serves as vice president of a citywide group that represents apartment dwellers and owners. He's helped many others set up their own rooftop solar connections in the years since, and says the process has gotten easier.

Mishra, of Solar Square, said she's seeing a big increase in interest in a technology that she calls "a key part of India's energy future."

"As an Indian and an entrepreneur, I'm extremely proud of seeing this getting built up," she said. "I think building energy infrastructure is the greatest nation-building thing we can do." **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

Feds accuse alleged Japanese crime boss of conspiring to traffic nuclear material

A leader of a Japan-based crime syndicate conspired to traffic uranium and plutonium from Myanmar in the belief that Iran would use it to make nuclear weapons, U.S. prosecutors alleged yesterday [Macau time].

Takeshi Ebisawa, 60, and his confederates showed samples of nuclear materials that had been transported from Myanmar to Thailand to an undercover Drug Enforcement Administration agent posing as

a narcotics and weapons trafficker who had access to an Iranian general, according to federal officials. The nuclear material was seized and samples were later found to contain uranium and weapons-grade plutonium.

"As alleged, the defendants in this case trafficked in drugs, weapons, and nuclear material — going so far as to offer uranium and weapons-grade plutonium fully expecting that Iran would use it for nu-

clear weapons," DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said in a statement. "This is an extraordinary example of the depravity of drug traffickers who operate with total disregard for human life."

The nuclear material came from an unidentified leader of an "ethnic insurgent group" in Myanmar who had been mining uranium in the country, according to prosecutors. Ebisawa had proposed that the leader

sell uranium through him in order to fund a weapons purchase from the general, court documents allege.

According to prosecutors, the insurgent leader provided samples, which a U.S. federal lab found contained uranium, thorium and plutonium, and that the "isotope composition of the plutonium" was weapons-grade, meaning enough of it would be suitable for use in a nuclear weapon.

Ebisawa, who prosecutors allege is a leader of a Japan-based international crime syndicate, was among four people who were arrested in April 2022 in Manhattan during a DEA sting operation. He has been jailed awaiting trial and is among two defendants named in a superseding indictment. Ebisawa is charged with the international trafficking of nuclear materials, conspiracy to commit that crime, and several other

counts.

An email seeking comment was sent to Ebisawa's attorney, Evan Loren Lipton.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said Ebisawa "brazenly" trafficked the material from Myanmar to other countries.

"He allegedly did so while believing that the material was going to be used in the development of a nuclear weapons program, and the weapons-grade plutonium he trafficked, if produced in sufficient quantities, could have been used for that purpose," Williams said in the news release.

The defendants are scheduled to be arraigned today (Macau time) in federal court in Manhattan. **MDT/AP**

SCIENCE

Silent brain changes precede Alzheimer's; new clues about which come first

LAURAN NEERGAARD,
WASHINGTON

ALZHEIMER'S quietly ravages the brain long before symptoms appear and now scientists have new clues about the dominolike sequence of those changes — a potential window to one day intervene.

A large study in China tracked middle-aged and older adults for 20 years, using regular brain scans, spinal taps and other tests.

Compared to those who remained cognitively healthy, people who eventually developed the mind-robbing disease had higher levels of an Alzheimer's-linked protein in their spinal fluid 18 years prior to diagnosis, researchers reported yesterday [Macau time]. Then every few years afterward, the study detected another so-called biomarker of brewing trouble.

Scientists don't know exactly how Alzheimer's forms. One early hallmark is that sticky protein cal-



A closeup of a human brain affected by Alzheimer's disease, is displayed at the Museum of Neuroanatomy at the University at Buffalo in Buffalo, N.Y.

led beta-amyloid, which over time builds up into brain-clogging plaques. Amyloid alone isn't enough to damage memory — plenty of healthy people's brains harbor a lot of plaque. An abnormal tau protein that forms neuron-killing tangles is one of several co-conspirators.

The new research, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, offers a timeline for how those abnormalities pile up.

The study's importance "can-

not be overstated," said Dr. Richard Mayeux, an Alzheimer's specialist at Columbia University who wasn't involved in the research.

"Knowledge of the timing of these physiological events is critical" for testing new ways of treating and maybe eventually even preventing Alzheimer's, he wrote in an accompanying editorial.

The findings have no practical implications yet.

More than 6 million Ameri-

cans, and millions more worldwide, have Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia. There's no cure. But last year a drug named Leqembi became the first approved with clear evidence that it could slow the worsening of early Alzheimer's — albeit for a few months.

It works by clearing away some of that gunky amyloid protein. The approach also is being tested to see if it's possible to delay Alzheimer's onset if high-risk people are treated before symptoms appear. Still other drugs are being developed to target tau.

Tracking silent brain changes is key for such research. Scientists already knew that in rare, inherited forms of Alzheimer's that strike younger people, a toxic form of amyloid starts accumulating about two decades ahead of symptoms and at some point later tau kicks in.

The new findings show the order in which such biomarker changes occurred with more common old-age Alzheimer's.

Researchers with Beijing's Innovation Center for Neurological Disorders compared 648 people eventually diagnosed with Alzheimer's and an equal number who remained healthy. The amyloid finding in future Alzheimer's patients was the first, 18 years or 14 years prior to diagnosis depending on the test used.

Differences in tau were detected next, followed by a marker of trouble in how neurons communicate. A few years after that, differences in brain shrinkage and cognitive test scores between the two groups became apparent, the study found.

"The more we know about viable Alzheimer's treatment targets and when to address them, the better and faster we will be able to develop new therapies and preventions," said Claire Sexton, the Alzheimer's Association's senior director of scientific programs. She noted that blood tests are coming soon that promise to also help by making it easier to track amyloid and tau. **MDT/AP**

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HOW'S AN EX-FBI INFORMANT CHARGED WITH LYING ABOUT BIDENS ALLEGEDLY LINKED TO RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE?

LINDSAY WHITEHURST,
WASHINGTON

THE explosive allegations at the center of an impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden were false, federal prosecutors said, and came from an ex-FBI informant who said he was in touch with Russian intelligence.

The informant, Alexander Smirnov, is "actively peddling new lies that could impact U.S. elections," federal prosecutors said yesterday [Macau time], as they appealed to a judge to keep him behind bars ahead of trial on charges alleging he lied to the FBI about a phony multimillion-dollar bribery scheme involving the Bidens and the Ukrainian energy company Burisma.

Defense attorneys have not directly addressed prosecutors' claims about Russian intelligence contacts but said they look forward to defending him at trial. Republicans in Congress have distanced themselves from Smirnov's claims and resisted calls to end the impeachment inquiry.

Here's a look at what's known about Smirnov, the case against him and fears about potential effects on U.S. elections:

WHO IS ALEXANDER SMIRNOV?

Smirnov had been an informant since 2010, growing close to an FBI handler he spoke to "nearly every day," prosecutors said in court documents. He met with Burisma executives starting in the spring of 2017 because the company was interested in buying an American company and making an initial public offering on a US stock exchange, according to court documents.

Prosecutors say he has access to more than \$6 million, with some money held in the name of his longtime partner. His recent reports to his handler included the guest lists from parties on mega yachts with Russian oligarchs, prosecutors said.

He holds dual Israeli-US citizenship and lived in Israel for more than a decade, later moving to Los Angeles and fi-



Former FBI informant Alexander Smirnov (center) leaves the courthouse in Las Vegas, Tuesday

nally Las Vegas in 2022, prosecutors said.

WHAT IS HE ACCUSED OF?

Smirnov has been charged with falsely reporting that Burisma executives paid Hunter and Joe Biden \$5 million each around 2015 after hiring Hunter Biden to sit on its board and "protect us" from an investigation by the then-Ukrainian prosecutor general. The charges were filed by the Justice Department special counsel who has separately filed gun and tax charges against Hunter Biden.

No evidence has emerged that Joe Biden acted corruptly or accepted bribes in his current role or previous office as vice president.

Smirnov, meanwhile, had only routine business dealings with Burisma, and they did not start until 2017 after the prosecutor general was gone and when Joe Biden was unable to influence U.S. policy since he was out of office, prosecutors said.

Smirnov "expressed bias" against Joe Biden before he made the bribery allegations in June 2020, years after they supposedly occurred, prosecutors said. An FBI field office investigated the allegations and recommended the case be closed in August 2020, according to charging documents.

WHAT TIES TO RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE?

Prosecutors laid out in court documents "extensive

and extremely recent," contact Smirnov said he had with people aligned with Russian intelligence.

Smirnov had told his FBI handler that he had been in touch with "multiple" other foreign intelligence services, including officials linked to Russian intelligence, according to court documents.

As recently as December, court documents state he was relaying details about meetings with Russian officials, one of whom said the country's intelligence services had intercepted calls from prominent Americans that "the Russian government may use as 'kompromat' in the 2024 election, depending on who the candidates will be," using a word for compromising material.

That echoed a previous bogus story from months before when he pushed his handler to investigate whether Hunter Biden had been recorded in a Ukrainian hotel, prosecutors said. The president's son has never traveled to Ukraine, according to court documents.

"What this shows is that the misinformation he is spreading is not confined to 2020. He is actively peddling new lies that could impact U.S. elections after meeting with Russian intelligence officials in November," prosecutors wrote in court documents.

WHAT ARE REPUBLICANS SAYING?

Smirnov's claims have been central to the Republi-

can effort in Congress to investigate the president and his family and helped spark what is now a House impeachment inquiry into Biden.

They became a flashpoint in Congress in July as Republicans demanded the FBI release the unredacted form, a so-called FD-1023, documenting the unverified allegations. Republican Rep. James Comer of Kentucky had subpoenaed the form as Republicans deepened their probe ahead of the 2024 presidential election. Republicans acknowledged they couldn't confirm if the allegations were true but said they were significant in their investigation of Hunter Biden.

The allegations of Russian contact with the source of those allegations should be a death knell for the impeachment inquiry, said Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland. "It appears like the whole thing is not only obviously false and fraudulent but a product of Russian disinformation and propaganda," he said.

Republicans, on the other hand, have downplayed the importance of Smirnov's allegations. Judiciary Committee Chairman Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, pointed to Smirnov's long track record as an FBI source but said the impeachment inquiry goes beyond his allegations. The case against him "doesn't change the fundamental facts" at issue in the impeachment probe, he said. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1981 REBEL ARMY SEIZES CONTROL IN SPAIN

Spain is in a state of political confusion after an attempted right-wing coup.

This evening about 200 soldiers and members of the paramilitary Civil Guard stormed the lower house of the Spanish Parliament, the Cortes, firing automatic weapons and shouting orders.



They took hostage about 350 MPs debating a new government.

The group - led by Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejero Molina, an officer of the Civil Guard - told all those present to lie down.

Lt Col Tejero then called on the King to make an announcement.

All streets around the building have been sealed off.

The coup plot originated in Valencia, in eastern Spain, under the command of Lieutenant General Jaime Milan del Bosch.

A supporter of the late dictator General Franco, the former commander of the elite Brunete Armoured Division near Madrid was recently transferred because of his opposition to the new political order and was suspected of plotting against it.

The general has declared a state of emergency and ordered tanks onto the streets of Valencia.

In Madrid the rebel army took over the radio and TV stations for 90 minutes. They dispersed when riot police arrived on the scene.

The King meanwhile has called on the civil service to take on the role of parliament based at Zarzuela Palace.

The joint chiefs-of-staff issued a communiqué saying all measures had been taken to put down the rebellion and restore order.

Despite these reassurances Spaniards are now wondering how long their five-year democracy can last.

Although Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy has been fairly smooth - until now - there have been rumblings of discontent among the right.

A few weeks ago Spain's first democratically elected prime minister Adolfo Suarez resigned.

It is believed he was under pressure by the right wing of his Democratic Centre Union party and the armed forces about concessions made to separatists in Catalonia and the Basque regions.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Early the following day, King Juan Carlos appeared on national TV to tell the people he had ordered the armed forces to take all necessary measures to put down the coup.

The rebel forces and their leaders surrendered and released their captives 22 hours after the siege of the Cortes had started.

The revolt was further damaged by the coup generals' failure to drum up support from other army units around the country.

One more plot was foiled when a group of colonels was discovered planning to seize power on the eve of the October 1982 general election.

The Spanish government was involved in a long-running campaign against the violence of the Basque separatist group Eta.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Today, you will understand the importance of money and how unnecessarily spending it can negatively affect your future. Relatives might become a reason of argument with your spouse today.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
A wonderful day to do things that would make you feel good about yourself. Those who are married may have to spend a lot of money on the education of their children today.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Do not waste your energy in unnecessary thinking impossible rather use it in a right direction. Money gains will not be to your expectations.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Your low vitality will act like chronic poison in the system. It is better to keep yourself engage in some creative work and keep on motivating to fight the disease.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You should do something to live upto family's expectations. Today, you can learn the skill of accumulating and saving money and put it to the right use.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Not a very good day for expectant mothers. You need to be more careful while walking. You should look twice at investment schemes that are presented to you today.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Your childlike nature will surface and you will be in a playful mood. Investment in stocks and mutual funds recommended for long-term gains.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Some people might feel that you are too old to learn something new-but that is far from the truth- you will easily learn new things because of your sharp and active mind.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Evening with friends will be pleasant but take care as excessive eating could upset your next morning. As you have spent a lot in the past, you may have to face the consequences in your present.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Today, you will love to spend your day away from all the relatives to a peaceful place. You need to keep your concentration and work relentlessly to achieve the success.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Enjoy a peaceful and quiet day with family members if people approach you with problems, ignore them and don't let this bother your mind.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Health remains good. All the money you had invested in the past to make your future prosperous will reap fruitful results today.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	3	fine
Changchun	-18	-4	fine
Chengdu	3	5	overcast
Chongqing	5	7	overcast
Fuzhou	11	15	overcast
Guangzhou	12	18	rain
Guiyang	0	1	rain
Haikou	23	29	rain
Hangzhou	0	3	rain
Harbin	-19	-6	fine
Hefei	-3	0	snow
Nanjing	-2	1	rain
Shanghai	1	6	rain
Taipei	14	16	rain
Wuhan	-2	0	snow
Hong Hong	19	22	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	1	3	cloudy
Frankfurt	2	8	overcast
Paris	3	9	windy
London	1	9	cloudy
New York	1	9	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Gone; 6- Bingo call; 10- Sports figure; 14- Angry; 15- Uncouth; 16- Blows away; 17- Up ___ (trapped); 18- Bryce Canyon site; 19- Actress Thompson; 20- Japanese computer giant; 21- Hipbone; 23- Moore's TV boss; 24- "Barnaby Jones" star; 26- Sediment; 27- Biblical dancing girl; 29- Jagged parts; 31- Astronaut Shepard; 32- Take care of; 33- Bearded beast; 36- At the same time; 40- Understanding; 41- Accumulate; 42- Method; 43- Twice, a comforting comment; 44- Gets up; 46- Sausalito's county; 48- Band together; 49- Brit's discharge; 50- Leash; 52- Norse goddess; 55- Red Muppet; 56- Caucus state; 57- Sex researcher Hite; 59- Bound; 60- Came down to earth; 61- It comes from the heart; 62- Part of an eye or camera; 63- Allot; 64- Broader;

DOWN 1- Skater Michelle; 2- Commedia dell' ___; 3- Ceramics; 4- Salt Lake City player; 5- Belief in one God; 6- European brown bear; 7- Ballet skirt; 8- Yellow cheese coated with red wax; 9- OT. book; 10- Talks back to; 11- Nasal tone; 12- Dreaded mosquito; 13- Former Russian ruler; 22- Bruce ___ was a famous kung-fu movie star; 23- Inert elemental gas; 25- Beethoven's birthplace; 26- Info; 27- Large bag; 28- ___ vera; 29- Inward feeling; 30- Profits; 32- River to the Moselle; 33- Person who tends geese; 34- Unclothed; 35- Manipulates; 37- Indian form of address; 38- Revenuers, for short; 39- Utter; 43- Soldiers; 44- Santa ___; 45- Saw for cutting wood with the grain; 46- Fight, disturbance; 47- Capital of Jordan; 48- Component of organic fertilizer; 49- Big name in PCs; 50- Only; 51- Make fun of; 53- Art Deco designer; 54- The Tower of Pisa does this; 56- Descartes's conclusion; 58- ___ polloi;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

ON "This Is Me...Now," Jennifer Lopez's first solo album in a decade, the singer takes back her rightful place on the throne of pop music.

In 2002, Jennifer Lopez dropped "This Is Me... Then," her third studio album that married her glossy-eyed romanticism with R&B-pop rhythms. She also announced an engagement to the actor Ben Affleck, who she met while filming the movie "Gigli" in 2001. The pair broke up a few years later.

Fast forward 20 years and "Bennifer" — as they were dubbed by the '00s press — has returned, and so has her sublime pop. In 2022, they married, and now in 2024, the "This Is Me" series continues — articulating nostalgia and a loving feeling she knows best. It is the soundtrack to a new J.Lo Renaissance — one where she got her happy ending and has made the art to let listeners into her dreamy love story.

The opening track, "This Is Me... Now," is quintessential J.Lo, with romantic instrumentation of flutes and harps. "Had a lot to learn, had a lot to grow, had to find my way," sings Lopez on a track reminiscent of a track

TUNES

JENNIFER LOPEZ RETURNS TO HER POP MUSIC THRONE WITH NEW ALBUM

that might've been on her 2002 R&B dance-pop album — with a new, refined wisdom.

It proceeds "To Be Yours," an energetic love song — sentimental but never saccharine — perfect for a serenade or the dance floor atop hip-hop beats.

The album releases Friday, the same day as a film by the same name: "This Is Me... Now: A Love Story."

"Can't Get Enough," an early single that doubled as a tease for the movie, was released with a music video that depicts the singer getting married several times, as she has in real life. In that way, the visual communicates that she's ready to open the door to her life and show it all — the good and the ugly — all the while sweetly singing "I'm still in love with you, boy," a gender-flipped take on Alton Ellis' 1967 reggae classic "I'm Still in Love with You," which her song samples.

As for that relationship transparency: "Dear Ben pt. II" is a sequel to the slow-burn "Dear Ben" from the 2002 album. The second installment is a more dynamic take on the same relationship. "When I think you'll let me down, you lift my hopes," she sings about finding love with Affleck again, two decades later.

At the end of the album is the R&B anthem "Greatest Love Story Never Told" — a bow on the album's full package — Lopez's breathy vocals sway above an acoustic guitar, piano and strings. "It's destiny how we found each other twice in one lifetime," she sings both for her audience and for her husband.

"This Is Me... Now" is for the Jennifer Lopez loyalists who patiently awaited her return, Bennifer fans, and those who believe in true love — no matter what shape it takes, or how long. **MARTINA REBECCA INCHINGOLO, MDT/AP**



"This Is Me... Now" by Jennifer Lopez (BMG)

AD

律師事務所



C&C
LAWYERS & NOTARIES
SINCE 1996



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



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Pamper and Glow

FOR those in the know, W Macau is not only the most stylish hotel in town, but also the premier destination for prioritizing wellness and luxury. With its wellness offerings **AWAY Spa, FIT and WET** at its core, in addition to an exclusive partnership with Valentino Beauty in Macau, the hotel offers a restorative haven for those seeking a focused, yet luxurious, wellness journey. Whether you're taking a break from the daily grind, looking for a chance to recharge and refocus, or simply want some much-needed time for self-care, W Macau – Studio City has thoughtfully crafted a selection of wellness programs that provide opulent restoration and rejuvenation. After unwinding at AWAY Spa, some packages also bring guests access to WET, Sauna and Steam rooms, extending the feeling of escape and leaving guests refreshed.

"At AWAY Spa, FIT and WET, we aim to ensure that

all our guests have the freedom to explore, let loose and be themselves," says Adrian Chan, General Manager, W Macau – Studio City. "Breaking the norms of traditional luxury wellness programs that focus on remedial and corrections, we look to enhance and enrich through our bold, liberating and real offerings."

W Macau – Studio City's AWAY Spa transforms the traditional notion of a spa into something more interesting, engaging, and fun. The reception area is designed with a bar counter that encourages conversations and engagement among guests in the theatre-inspired setting underneath a glittering chandelier. With comfort and privacy, guests will feel refreshed and revitalised after any of the outstanding treatments that deliver results in a unique atmosphere. The detox massage particularly is a must try for muscle relaxation and increase circulation IS



TASTE OF EDESIA

Celebrating Art Basel

IRENE SAM, MDT

ART Basel Hong Kong is fast approaching, scheduled to take place from March 28 to 30. To celebrate, LPM Restaurant & Bar in Hong Kong has created a range of art-inspired refreshments, as well as a selection of unique dishes to help art enthusiasts unwind after a long day visiting the various galleries' exhibitions.

LPM Restaurant & Bar's experiential cocktail menu 'Recipes for our Friends', crafted by the acclaimed LPM Global Bar Manager Tibor Krascenics, pays tribute to the French artist, writer, and bon vivant, Jean Cocteau. The menu infuses cocktails with history and the captivating

and whimsical artwork of Cocteau. Guests are invited to embark on a nostalgic journey to a bygone era, whilst rediscovering the talent of one of the most iconic artists of the 20th century.

The menu includes a selection of refreshing cocktails, including the 1889 Americano. This delicate aperitif pays tribute to Jean Cocteau's birth year. It combines French Suze liqueur, popularized in 1889, with vermouth infused with lightly toasted pineapple, Cocteau's favourite fruit, and is garnished with a lemon balm leaf.

Room 22 is inspired by the room where Cocteau often stayed at the renowned Hotel Welcome in Southeast France. It was there that Cocteau socialized with influential figures like

Charlie Chaplin, Coco Chanel, Kiki de Montparnasse, and Louis-François Cartier during the vibrant 1920s. The cocktail, served with a shared absinthe fountain, sparked Cocteau's inspiration for his novel «Les Enfants Terribles» in 1929.

In addition to the cocktails, Head Chef Maurizio Pace has curated a selection of distinctive dishes. They include Courgette Flowers Tempura with Cherry Tomato Sauce, King Crab and Tomato Tart, Langoustine Risotto with Mushrooms, and Roasted Quail, each made using the freshest ingredients to highlight the French-Mediterranean flavours. There is also the delightful Lemon Tart with Italian Meringue to end your meal on a sweet note.

OPINION

China Daily

Zhao Manfeng, China Daily

TIKTOK SHOULDN'T BE A SCAPEGOAT OF US POLITICAL GAME

US President Joe Biden's recent appearance on TikTok as part of an outreach to young voters ahead of the November election has, expectably, sparked a controversy given his administration's previous hardline stance against the short-video platform citing security concerns. In fact they even banned it on federal devices. The reason: TikTok is owned by the Chinese private company ByteDance.

It's no surprise that TikTok has become a focal point in the verbal sparring among US politicians leading up to the November election. Yet, TikTok is simply a widely used social media platform accessible in over 150 nations. It has no intention of compromising the security of other countries. If popularity is deemed a threat, then US technology and popular culture would pose significant threats to the global community.

Therefore, it is preposterous for both Republicans and Democrats to mock Biden's decision to involve TikTok. For a considerable time, a primary concern among lawmakers and other government officials has been the potential for TikTok to share data on US users with the Chinese government or for the Chinese government to compel the platform to manipulate the content shown to users based in the United States. According to US reasoning, anyone using US computers, phones, or software would encounter similar risks of exposure to US intelligence.

In March last year, when skeptical US lawmakers grilled TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew over national security concerns, Chew's responses were often cut short as members of Congress asked for "yes" or "no" responses. Last month, in a tense congressional testimony over online safety for children, US Senator Tom Cotton repeatedly asked Singaporean TikTok CEO Chew whether he is or has ever been a member of or affiliated to the Communist Party of China, even though Chew reminded Cotton multiple times that he is Singaporean.

TikTok has informed Congress that the short video app is now used by 170 million Americans, up from 150 million a year earlier. This increasing number only underscores its popularity among the American populace, particularly the younger generation. In a nation that proclaims to prioritize freedom, the government and Congress should honor users' freedom to choose the app, rather than engaging in a witch hunt.

The US politicians' failure to present clear, compelling evidence of TikTok's security risks further underscores the potential for hypocrisy. If the app genuinely posed a significant threat, it would be contradictory of Biden's campaign team to encourage its use. Some oppose Biden's decision, also possibly driven by political motivations rather than genuine security concerns.

TikTok shouldn't be a scapegoat of US political game. The controversy only suggests that the bipartisan nature of politics in the US exists primarily to oppose each other, prioritizing politics and the goal of undermining the other side while disregarding facts and focusing solely on immediate interests. They should therefore focus on the more important issues affecting the lives of people in the country and the world, and leave the app, which is just a source of entertainment for the youth, alone.

BOEING OUSTS HEAD OF 737 JETLINER PROGRAM WEEKS AFTER PANEL BLOWOUT ON A FLIGHT OVER OREGON

THE BUZZ

Boeing said that the head of its 737 jetliner program is leaving the company in an executive shake-up weeks after a door panel blew out on a flight over Oregon, renewing questions about safety at the company.

Boeing announced that Ed Clark, who had been with the company for nearly 18 years and led the 737 program since early 2021, was leaving immediately.

Clark oversaw the factory in Renton, Washington, where final assembly took place on the Alaska Airlines 737 Max 9 involved in last month's accident. Federal investigators said bolts needed to help keep a panel

called a door plug in place were missing after repair work on the plane.

Katie Ringgold, a vice president in charge of delivering 737s to airlines, will succeed Clark as vice president and general manager of the 737 program and the Renton factory, according to an email to employees from Stan Deal, the CEO of Boeing's commercial airplanes division.

The moves are part of the company's "enhanced focus on ensuring that every airplane we deliver meets or exceeds all quality and safety requirements," Deal said in his email to staff. "Our customers demand, and deserve, nothing less."

AP PHOTO



A whale, confirmed dead by field investigation, floats in Osaka Bay in Sakai city, earlier this month

STRAY WHALE DIED IN OSAKA BAY, RAISING QUESTIONS ABOUT CAUSE AND COST OF DISPOSAL

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

A whale as long as a train car that died after straying into a port in Osaka last month is set to be buried until it naturally becomes a skeletal specimen for a local museum.

It's the third year in a row that whales have become stranded in the area, raising questions about the reasons why and the cost of handling the incidents.

The animal is believed to be a male sperm whale, about 12 meters long and weighing an estimated 20 tons, and was earlier spotted in the Sakai Semboku Port in mid-January.

It had since been spotted in a number of locations in Osaka Bay, until Sunday, when a boat captain reported to the coast guard that the whale was not breathing. Prefectural officials and experts took a boat out to check on the whale and confirmed its death on Monday, presumably due to starvation.

Osaka officials have decided to bury the dead whale at a section of a nearby industrial waste disposal complex after cetacean experts carried out an autopsy, collecting samples to determine the

cause of the whale's death, prefectural environmental department official Toshihiro Yamawaki said.

Television footage showed the dead whale being carefully lifted by a crane and transported to the burial site, where it will stay underground for a few years until it becomes naturally skeletonized. Officials will then dig it up and donate it to the local natural museum.

The cause of the stranding is unknown.

Yamawaki said whales have been sighted on and off not only in Osaka Bay but across Japan, noting experts' view that whales generally follow the movement of the warm Kuroshio tide. Those that somehow miscalculated the distance and went too close to the coast may become stranded, scientists think.

On average, more than 300 whale strandings have been reported across Japan annually, though the number fluctuates every year. In 2020, more than 370 strandings were reported, while the number decreased to 116 last year, according to the National Museum of Nature and Science's whale stranding site.

The Osaka case involved a single animal as with in most other strandings, though sometimes several whales have been seen stranded on nearby coasts.

Experts have cited a number of possible causes for the stranding, including tidal fluctuations, diseases and climate change, but they are still under investigation.

Some experts noted the structure of Osaka Bay, which has many narrow passages, may make it difficult for stray whales to go back to the sea.

As soon as the whale was spotted, prefectural officials had started discussing what to do in case it died in the bay. They learned their lesson the hard way last year, when another stranded sperm whale, Yodo-chan, died only four days after it showed up and began to decompose, at a cost to the public purse of more than 80 million yen (\$533,000), triggering criticism.

The cost of the offshore burial was nearly 10 times the amount spent in 2021 on another stray whale that was buried on land.

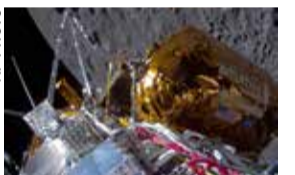
"The cost will be much lower this time," Osaka Gov. Hirofumi Yoshimura reassured residents. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



USA President Joe Biden signed an executive order and created a federal rule aimed at better securing the nation's ports from potential cyberattacks. The administration is outlining a set of cybersecurity regulations that port operators must comply with across the country, not unlike standardized safety regulations that seek to prevent injury or damage to people and infrastructure.

AP PHOTO



Space A private U.S. lunar lander reached the moon and eased into a low orbit yesterday [Macau time], a day before it will attempt an even greater feat — landing on the gray, dusty surface. A smooth touchdown would put the U.S. back in business on the moon for the first time since NASA astronauts closed out the Apollo program in 1972. The company, if successful, also would become the first private outfit to ace a moon landing.

AP PHOTO



Albania's Parliament approved a deal for the country to hold thousands of asylum seekers for Italy in a vote yesterday, despite protests from opposition lawmakers and human rights groups. Under the five-year deal, Albania would shelter up to 3,000 migrants rescued from international waters at any one time. With asylum requests expected to take around a month to process, the number of asylum-seekers sent to Albania could reach up to 36,000 in a year.

Football Cristiano Ronaldo's Al-Nassr moved into the quarterfinals of the Asian Champions League with a 3-0 aggregate win over Al-Fayha in an all Saudi Arabian matchup. Ronaldo scored the only goal in the first leg and then found the net in the return match in Riyadh with four minutes remaining of the second leg. Otavio had opened the scoring to ensure that Al-Nassr progressed.