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VISITOR ARRIVALS SOARED 104.7% YEAR-ON-YEAR LAST MONTH TO 2.86 MILLION, RECOVERING TO 83.5% OF THE LEVEL IN THE SAME MONTH OF 2019 P5

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AP PHOTO



Israel A long-awaited postwar plan by the prime minister shows that his government seeks open-ended control over security and civilian affairs in the Gaza Strip. That was swiftly rejected last week by Palestinian leaders and runs counter to Washington's vision for the war-ravaged enclave. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented the two-page document to his security Cabinet late Thursday for approval. Deep disagreements over Gaza's future have led to increasingly public friction between Israel and the United States, its closest ally.

AP PHOTO



Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed Western leaders to Kyiv Saturday to mark the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, as Ukrainian forces run low on ammunition and foreign aid hangs in the balance. Allies from the EU and the Group of Seven wealthy democracies rallied around Kyiv to express solidarity, with Zelenskyy joining a virtual G7 meeting Saturday and four world leaders traveling to Ukraine's war-weary capital.

AP PHOTO

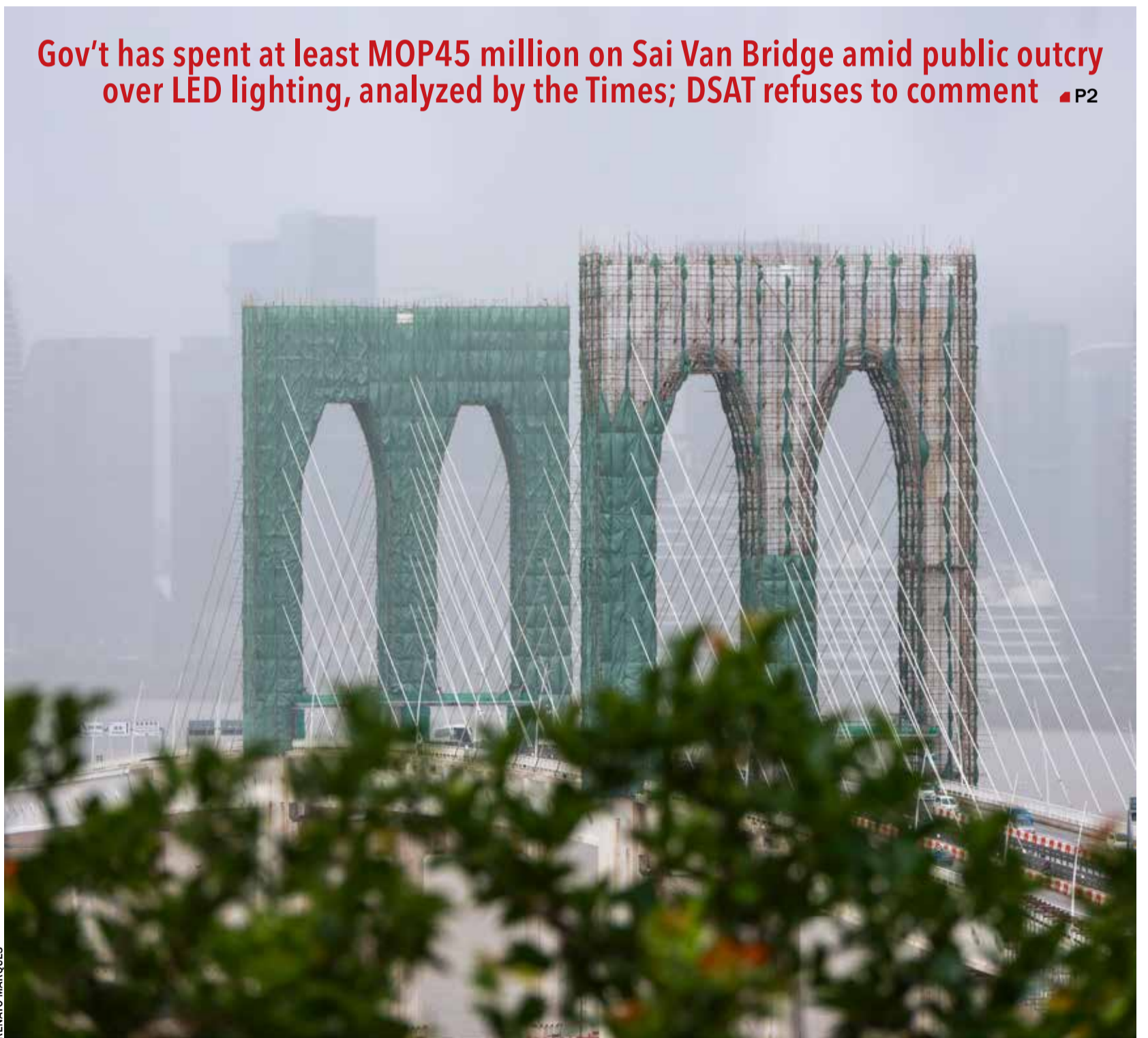


Ukraine's foreign minister last week told skeptics who believe Ukraine can't win the war with Russia that they will be proven wrong: "Ukraine will win the war." Dmytro Kuleba, speaking at the United Nations on the eve of the second anniversary of Russia's invasion, urged the world's nations to stand behind Ukraine. If they do, he said, victory will come "sooner rather than later." Russia's U.N. Ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, countered by repeating Moscow's claim that it didn't start the conflict.

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INFLATION SLIGHTLY GROWS 1%

The Composite CPI for January 2024 grew 1.01% year-on-year, according to data from Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). The increment was attributed to the increases in the charges for eating out and package tours, as well as rising tuition fees and higher prices for clothing and liquefied petroleum gas. However, the rise was partially moderated by lower airfares and reduced prices for pork and vegetables. Compared with December 2023, the Composite CPI fell 0.17% in January 2024. For the 12 months ending January 2024, the average Composite CPI grew 0.96% from the previous period, and the price indices of Education (+7.81%), Recreation & Culture (+5.31%) and Clothing & Footwear (+4.37%) climbed notably.

MACAO-HENGQIN CRAFT MARKET TO FEATURE STALLS, PERFORMANCES

The "Macao-Hengqin Craft Market" will feature over 100 stalls of cultural and creative products and gastronomy, as well as music performances by singers from Guangdong and Macau. To be held Feb. 29 to March 3 at Legend Ponto Square in Hengqin, the event will feature several music performances, creative workshops, as well as the "Young Art Exhibition" and "Artistic and Cultural talk." Earlier, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) launched an open call to invite 40 of Macau's cultural and creative brands to promote diverse, local, original products.

TIS HOLDS ROBOTICS COMPETITIONS, UNIVERSITY FAIR

The International School of Macao (TIS) has hosted events encompassing the TIS Robotics Competition, "2024 International Macau Mecha Beast Brawl," and the TIS University Fair, featuring representatives from three London universities. The TIS Robotics Competition brought together six international schools in the Greater Bay Area, with over 100 participating students. A statement said, "the competition served as a valuable platform for students to learn from one another, cultivating good sportsmanship and a positive competitive spirit." In addition, TIS also organized a TIS University Fair, which featured representatives from three prestigious schools in London: Imperial College London, King's College London, and University College London.

PUBLIC WORKS

LIGHTING COSTS UNCERTAIN FOR MOP45 MILLION SAI VAI BRIDGE RENOVATION

RENATO MARQUES

THE government has spent at least MOP45 million on the renovation of the Sai Van Bridge, documents published by the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) and seen by the Times show.

The project was initially expected to be completed in only one phase, but later a second phase, solely dedicated to the renovation of the east side of the bridge lighting system, was added.

According to DSOP documents, all the project phases were conducted in a tender-by-invitation method.

The first phase was dedicated to repairing the exterior concrete structure of the Sai Van Bridge.

It saw the expansion joints on the bridge's roadways replaced as well as repainting both sides of the towers and the bridge.

Guardhouse facilities were also created near the emergency vehicle access points of the bridge on the Macau and Taipa sides, among other undisclosed works which, according to other documents reviewed, also include part of the lighting system related to the bridge towers.

For this first phase, the DSOP invited eight companies, of which seven presented proposals ranging between MOP35,580,000 and MOP43,738,148.

Eventually, the work was awarded to the cheaper bid (MOP35,580,000) from Companhia de Construção e Engenharia EHY Limitada with an execution period of 180 working days.

To this sum was added costs related to the project, awarded to China Railway Major Bridge Reconnaissance & Design Institute Co., Ltd. (Macau Branch), for MOP1,500,000 and the Inspection works (MOP1,720,000), awarded to Bahh Consultoria Engenharia, Lda.

The second phase, related only to the renovation of the bridge's east side lighting system, was organized in a separate tender to which the DSOP invited



four companies, of which only three presented proposals.

The winning bid was the least costly of the three, and was awarded to E&E – Empresa de Instalações e Engenharia, Ltd.

This company's proposal was priced at MOP6,088,000 with a works execution time of 120 working days. The second highest bid was about MOP6.7 million, while the highest was almost MOP9 million.

DSOP documents show that inspection of the second phase works was awarded to the company Fundação Engenharia e Consultoria, Lda., although DSOP has published no documents that show how much this service cost or how the awarding was done.

LED LIGHTING THE CENTER OF TURMOIL

While the need for general maintenance of the Sai Vai Bridge was undisputed, the same was not true of the lighting system.

Tests made to this system early this month revealed to the public that the bridge now

includes a different type of lighting that can change color constantly as well as display in a high-frequency flashing.

In the past, the bridge only had a still light that was a warm yellow color in both the towers and on the sides.

The DSOP did not stipulate in the tender documents what type of lighting was to be used.

It only mentioned the need for the renovation of lighting on the bridge's East side due to the current lighting being worn out after the many years of use.

It was also not possible for the Times to ascertain the total value to be paid by the local government for the new lighting system of the bridge. Besides the MOP6,088,000 of the second phase, the other part of the costs is embedded in the other renovation jobs such as painting and replacing the expansion joints.

The Times contacted the DSOP about the specific aspects related to the lighting system but the service, headed by Lam Wai Hou, refused to explain further, responding with the link to the section of the DSOP websi-

te where some information has been published for the general public.

The DSOP also did not explain to the Times whether, when the renovation is concluded, the bridge will change its lighting form or color, or if it will continue to exhibit a similar aspect to in the past is this new system an option or possibility.

DSAT REFUSES TO COMMENT ON SAI VAI BRIDGE LIGHTING

Also contacted by the Times, the Transport Affairs Bureau (DSAT) refused to comment on whether the services had taken part in the decision on the new lighting system or if they had any concerns on the use of this system and the potential implications on driving.

The matter, aired by many citizens over social media as well as other community representatives heard previously by the Times, did not receive a response from DSAT, except for the service headed by Kelvin Lam responding only that such works were the responsibility of the DSOP.

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Barra's new traffic arrangements create chaos

RENATO MARQUES

CITIZENS unhappy with new traffic arrangements in the Barra area took to social media to criticize "unreasonable" solutions proposed by the Transport Bureau (DSAT).

They were criticizing DSAT's traffic arrangements for the Barra area that came into force last Saturday.

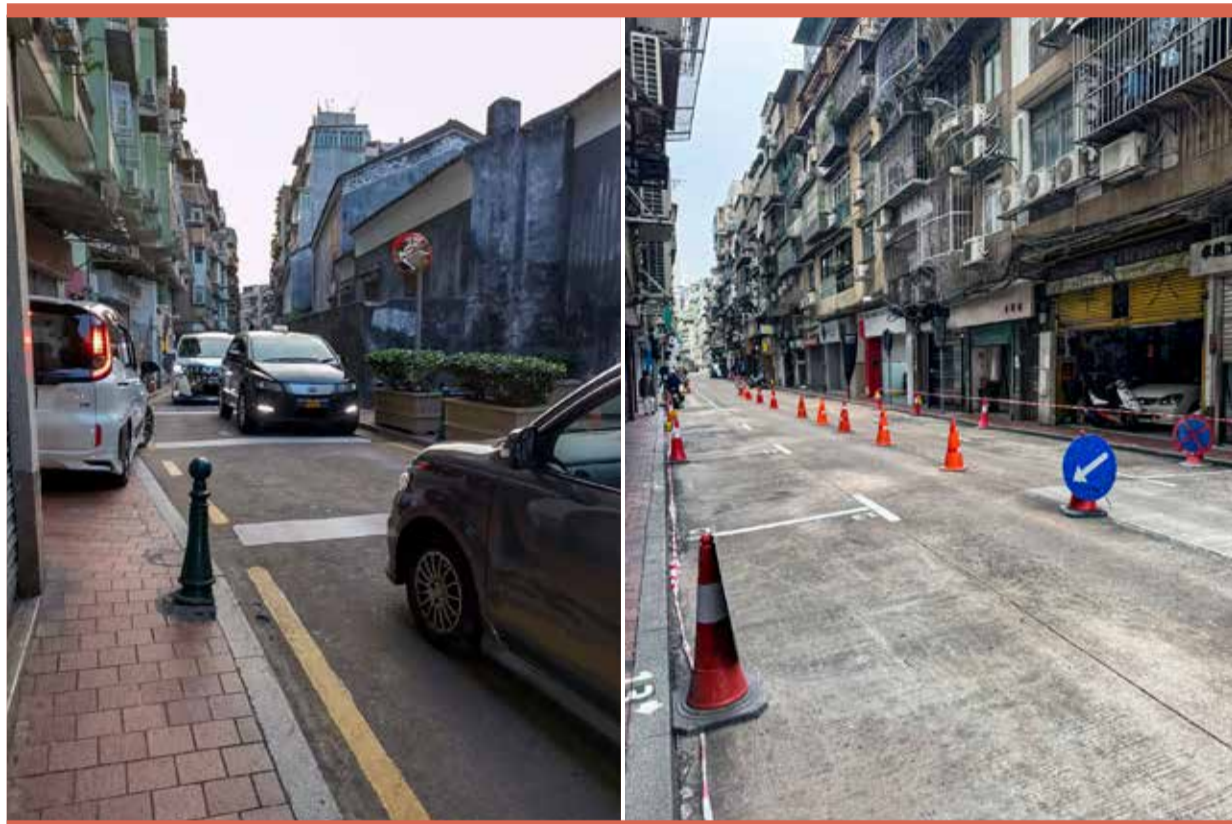
Although most of the changes, related to the second phase of the construction of the Inner Harbour rainwater pumping station, only started effectively yesterday, preparation had started earlier.

There are also concurrent works being conducted in the same area, which complicates the life of those who need to circulate through those streets even more.

One matter that raised eyebrows and online criticism was related to the arrangements at the Rua da Barra and Rua do Padre António, which included turning the already very narrow one-way street into a temporary two-way street in some sections.

The Rua da Barra has been the scene of several accidents with trucks and tourist buses in the extremely narrow area at the back of the Mandarin House. The incidents are particularly worrying as the wall is a protected heritage site.

Besides the chaotic traffic and traffic jams, netizens' concerns also turned to the possibility of accidents in the area due to lack of circulation space and inversion of



the normal traffic direction in several streets.

The arrangements also forced the public bus to detour from the area making it difficult for those living or working there to find transport for daily commutes.

Adding to the problems is the fact that these arrangements are expected to last, in some sections, for as long as four months with residents and shop owners anticipating a very bad year for living and business conditions alike.

According to a report by the public broadcaster TDM Chinese

Channel, several drivers also noted not being informed with enough time, as DSAT only revealed the traffic arrangements in a press conference on Friday afternoon.

Others claimed that, although they were aware of the arrangements, they found that onsite instructions to the drivers were in many cases, ambiguous, which made many of them hesitate and take a long time to understand the right path, a fact that contributed significantly to traffic congestion.

Other residents told the same broadcaster they are planning to

leave home today at least 30 minutes or more ahead of their normal time to avoid arriving late for their duties.

The changes regarding the new bus pick and drop-off points also promise to create problems for many, at least for the next couple of days with some residents telling TDM that there is poor information on the relocation of the bus stops.

The DSAT responded that the project is urgent and called on drivers and pedestrians to be understanding and patient with the arrangements made.

MAJOR REFURBISHMENT FOR GRAND COLOANE

Grand Coloane Resort will undergo a major refurbishment in phases, the group announced in a media event over the weekend. Without further revealing its plans, the group said the refurbishment is set to be underway and will soon announce plans. The 208-room resort reopened to the public before the end of January last year after serving as a quarantine hotel for 765 days.

GOV'T ROLLS OUT 250,000 'GIFTS' FOR VISITORS

In celebration of the SAR's 25th anniversary, the tourism bureau has, since January, been rolling out a range of special travel offers as gifts in international markets through different channels and partnering entities. The international air ticket discounts presented by several airlines constitute 49% of the 250,000 gifts. The offer of free bus and ferry tickets to Macau and the special offer on transportation in Macau for Hong Kong cruise passengers constitute 46%. A variety of special packages including distinctive travel experiences constitute 5% of the gifts.

JOE TSAI

Alibaba chairman: Macau has 'untapped potential market for sports'



STAFF REPORTER

JOE Tsai, chairman of Alibaba and owner of NBA team the Brooklyn Nets, believes Macau has untapped potential to host sports-related events.

As one of the headline speakers of the recent Greater Bay Area (GBA) International Sports Business Summit, Tsai spoke on how international sports events could bring socioeconomic value to China and more

specifically to the GBA.

It is hoped that, as part of the Macau's "1+4" development scheme, this summit can attract and foster cooperation with MICE and sport organizations.

Tsai, an avid sports enthusiast, said "I think that there is huge untapped potential market for sports related events in the China because the audience and fan base is there, the NBA alone has 300 million viewers in China."

The summit aims to promote the coordinated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the global sports industry, and to help the Greater Bay Area to connect China with Asia and other parts of the world through sports.

The summit featured

Yao Ming, chairman of the Chinese Basketball Association, Dwyane Wade, Superstar Basketball Hall of Fame member, and Li Ning, founder of Li Ning brand.

The summit, held over the weekend, brought together industry leaders in the world of sports.

YAO MING ON WHEN HIS SUCCESSOR WILL EMERGE

When asked about the potential emergence of the next Yao Ming, the former basketball legend shared his insights at the summit.

"Sometimes I feel that people should not expect another Yao Ming because I have many unique conditions," Yao Ming explained. "Not all children possess such conditions. I grew up in

a sports family, my parents were professional athletes, I was discovered at a young age, started training early, and also received some preferential resources. To some extent, this is not replicable."

"Personally, instead of expecting an irreplicable model, I prefer to find one that can be replicated," he said. "Can we expect the next Jeremy Lin? I know Jeremy Lin grew up in the United States, so can we expect to see more players like Zhao Jiwei, Guo Ailun, Liu Wei, Guo Shiqiang, and Hu Weidong appearing soon? Perhaps they have more connections with ordinary families. If there are more players like this, our basketball level, league quality, and basketball market will be even better," Yao said.

FINANCE

AMCM: NEW CREDIT PLATFORM REFUSES NO LEGIT APPLICATION

ANTHONY LAM

The automated inter-bank credit inquiry platform does not refuse applications that have all required documents, the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) has told lawmaker Ron Lam.

In one of his written inquiries, the lawmaker asked the authority about refused applications. Lam said that he has been told about such refusals.

In response, Acting President Lau Hang Kun of the AMCM assured the lawmaker that unless required documents are not submitted, the platform will not decline any applications. Lau said the inquiry platform has a list of required documents.

It became mandatory on Jan. 1 this year for banks to get their customers' credit reports upon receipt of an application or the renewal of a loan. The credit report is available through the credit inquiry platform.

The platform contains

details of a person's credit history with local banks, such as credit cards, personal loans and mortgages. It was established for the convenience of banks to understand a person's credit and their own risks.

Lau said the platform has mechanisms for follow-up, so that clients or banks can raise further queries on the issued report through the concerned banks within seven days of the issuance. As of the end of 2023, 26 such queries were recorded.

Lam said the establishment of the platform was postponed twice, and asked the AMCM for an explanation.

Lau said the platform was established on the same date the topical guideline came into effect, which was Jan. 1 last year.

However, she said the banking industry needed time to adjust their internal and computer systems to facilitate the new environment. As a result, there was a transitional period that



concluded at the end of the last year.

Disclosing that the number of inquiries has risen constantly in the past year,

Lau cited the industry for commending the platform for helping banks to better understand the credit quality of their clients.

TOURISM

INDIVIDUAL VISIT SCHEME EXPANDS TO XI'AN AND QINGDAO

STAFF REPORTER

Xi'an city and Qingdao city will be included in the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS), allowing travelers from these cities to visit Macau and Hong Kong in two weeks. The State Council granted the approval, according to the country's customs authorities Friday.

Visa issuance will commence as early as March 6.

In the case of Hong Kong, individuals can receive a maximum of two visa endorsements in a three-month period. Alternatively, they can get one endorsement per year or two endorsements annually.

For Macau, residents of Xi'an city and Qingdao city can get a visa once every three months or once annually. People from these two cities can complete the necessary paperwork in person or

electronically at designated venues if they wish to travel to the two special administrative regions.

Each traveler will be allowed to stay in Hong Kong and Macau for a maximum of seven days.

Currently, 49 mainland Chinese cities are eligible under the IVS.

Chief Executive, Ho Iat Seng, hailed the State Council's endorsement, noting the government would "work together with the local tourism industry to continuously optimize Macau's tourism resources and capacity to receive tourists, actively responding to the favorable measures provided by the Central Government."

The official also said there had been improvements regarding immigration measures, customs clearance and transportation arrangements, making it more convenient for visitors to come to Macau.



HERITAGE

IC to keep historic cannon barrel for inspection

ANTHONY LAM

An old cannon barrel found at a roadwork site in Fai Chi Kei over the weekend will be kept for further inspection by the bureau, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has said in a statement.

The IC learned of the discovery last Friday and immediately deployed officers to investigate.

They conducted 3-dimensional scans, noted the item's exact location and surveyed the surrounding area, among other activities.

The barrel measures 1.38 meters in length and the diameter of the inner outlet is 80 mm, but the barrel is missing a trunnion.

Inspection of the site revealed no further antiques, the IC said. The construction at the site has resumed.

After discovery of the barrel Friday, construction workers contacted the security forces. Officers from the Public Security Police Force (PSP) confirmed the barrel was not dangerous.

After inspecting the item, the IC officers relocated the barrel, which was covered with earth and other wrapping. However, the first attempt to move it to a truck was unsuccessful due to its weight. Construction vehicles had to be used to successfully lift the barrel.

About four years ago, on Nov. 22, 2020, another cannon barrel was discovered at a construction site in Cotai, one of the largest pieces of reclaimed land in Macau.

Due to the massive scale of the construction site, over 100 construction workers had to be evacuated. That barrel measured 1.2 meters in length and 200 mm in caliber.

On April 16 the same year, an antique cannon was discovered at a construction site in the Inner Harbour. The IC decided to permanently keep the armament due to its historic value.

RUSSIAN BUYER FOR ALVIN CHAU'S FORMER RESORT FILES TO END USD116M DEAL

STAFF REPORTER

A prospective Russian buyer of the assets previously owned by incarcerated Macau gambling kingpin Alvin Chau is attempting to cancel the USD116 million deal.

According to a recent filing with the Hong Kong exchange, LET Group Holdings Ltd. and Summit Ascent Holdings Ltd. received notice from the buyer, Dalnevostochnyj Aktiv, expressing its intention to terminate the acquisition of G1 Entertainment.

G1 Entertainment holds the gaming license for the Tigre de Cristal resort in eastern Russia, which was indirectly owned by Summit Ascent through a subsidiary in which they held a 77.5%

stake. LET Group holds a nearly 70% stake in Summit Ascent.

Both companies have stated they will seek legal advice regarding the termination notice.

Last week, Hong Kong's securities regulator issued a warning that the two companies could face delisting due to the potential sale of assets, which could leave them lacking sufficient assets. As a result, trading of the two companies has been suspended pending further investigation by the regulator.

LET Group was formerly part of Chau's gambling empire, the Suncity Group, before rebranding in 2022 under the leadership of Andrew Lo, a former Suncity executive.

STATS

January visitors recover to 83% pre-pandemic

STAFF REPORTER

VISITOR arrivals soared 104.7% year-on-year to 2.86 million in January 2024, recovering to 83.5% of the level in the same month of 2019, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

However, the figure represented a drop of 2.8% month-on-month.

As regards the source of visitors, those from mainland China jumped 107.3% year-on-year to 2.1 million in January, with those traveling under the Individual Visit Scheme (1.12 million) rising by 57.8%.

Visitors from the nine Pearl River Delta cities in the Greater Bay Area hiked by 68.6% year-on-year to 1,025,451.

Visitors from Hong Kong (546,277) and Taiwan (59,921) grew 53% and 217.6% year-on-year, res-

RENATO MARQUES



pectively. Visitor numbers from the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan in January 2024 rebounded to 82.1%, 102.3% and 69% of the corresponding levels in the same month of 2019.

International visitors totaled 199,278 in January 2024, back to 66.4% of the figure in the same month of 2019.

Regarding the Southeast Asian markets, visitors from the Philippines (34,102) exceeded the level in January 2019, rising 24.3%. Visitors from Indonesia (13,961), Thailand (13,608) and Malaysia (10,997) returned to 86.9%, 93.1% and 66.2% of the corresponding levels in January 2019.

With respect to the Nor-

theast Asian markets, visitors from the Republic of Korea (50,552) and Japan (10,646) recovered to 50.8% and 34.8% of the respective levels in the same month of 2019.

As regards long-haul markets, USA visitors (10,922) rebounded to 66.2% of the level in January 2019.

CNY

TOURISM BOARD BOASTS 79,000 FLOAT PARADE SPECTATORS

THE two float parades held during the Lunar New Year holidays attracted 79,000 spectators, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has said.

In previous years, the parade was a crucial part of the city's Lunar New Year celebrations.

This year, the government has incorporated the 25th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region as part of the theme. The Anniversary will be celebrated on Dec. 20.

The two parades occurred in ZAPE District on Feb. 12 and in Northern District on Feb. 17. The floats were on display at the Tap Seac Square until 10 p.m. yesterday.

Fireworks displays, arguably the government's most preferred celebratory element, were also held on the evenings of

Feb. 12, 16 and 24.

Each 15-minute show, set against the backdrop of festive or romantic pop songs, attracted 160,000 spectators, the MGTO said.

A WeChat game organized by the MGTO was also "well-received" by users, according to the bureau, attracting 68,000 participants to register for the chance to win prizes.

The MGTO sought feedback via online and offline surveys on each evening's events.

Surveys targeting visitors were also conducted at border checkpoints. Meanwhile, a special Lunar New Year event website was published listing all events held by different entities from Feb. 8 to Feb. 24.

The MGTO considered these efforts a representation of "Tourism+Festivities" and supporting economic recovery. **AL**

AD



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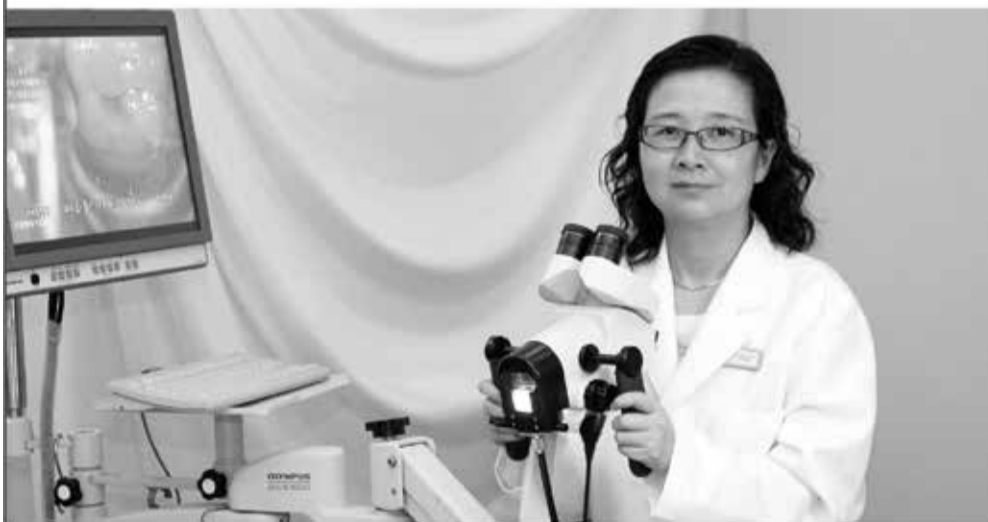
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Gov't demands the US stop any official contact with Taiwan following a congressional visit

DIDI TANG, WASHINGTON

CHINA responded sternly late last week to a U.S. congressional delegation's visit to Taiwan, demanding the U.S. stop any official contact with the self-governing island.

"China opposes any form of official interaction between the U.S. and Taiwan authorities and rejects U.S. interference in Taiwan affairs in whatever form or under whatever pretext," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said. She urged Washington to be "mindful of the extreme complexity and sensitivity" of the Taiwan issue.

Mao spoke shortly after leaders of the House Select Committee on China's Communist Party met with Taiwanese leaders on a high-profile trip aimed at showing U.S. support for the island's democratically elected government.

The congressional visit drew a stronger-than-usual response. Beijing has long protested any official interaction the U.S. and Taiwan but is particularly dissatisfied with the House select committee, which was formed in 2023.

However, the visit is unlikely



Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning

to trigger major military actions as then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit did in the summer of 2022. Beijing and Washington are seeking to stabilize their rocky relations following a November meeting between U.S. President

Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The congressional visit coincided with an announcement by the U.S. State Department of a \$75 million arms sale to Taiwan. The sale is relatively minor in size and

does not include weaponry. Instead, it covers communications and global positioning systems as well as related technology.

Mao criticized the sale as "undermining China's sovereignty and security interests and har-

ming China-U.S. relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

The U.S. is obligated under a 1979 law to provide Taiwan with sufficient military hardware and technology to deter invasion, and its arm sales to Taiwan have always drawn strong opposition from Beijing.

Taiwan is also part of the \$95 billion aid package that passed the Senate this month 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. An additional \$3.3 billion would go to build more U.S.-made submarines in support of a security partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom.

In Taiwan, Rep. Mike Gallagher, the select committee's Republican chair, and Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, its Democratic ranking member, suggested ways to speed up the delivery of military weapons to Taiwan, including joint production of some weapons that do not need intellectual property transfer, according to a report by Central News Agency, the island's main wire service.

The delegation met Taiwan's Tsai Ing-wen and also leader-elect Lai Ching-te. Lai, who won a three-way race in January and will take office in May.

"Today, we've come as Democrats and Republicans to show our bipartisan support for this partnership, which, thanks to your leadership, I think is stronger and more rock solid than ever," Gallagher said during the meeting with Tsai. **MDT/AP**

Taiwan's giant chipmaker TSMC opens first plant in Japan as part of key global expansion

YURI KAGEYAMA, TOKYO

CHIP giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. opened Saturday in an official ceremony its first semiconductor plant in Japan as part of its ongoing global expansion.

"We are deeply grateful for the seamless support provided by you at every step," TSMC Chairman Mark Liu said after thanking the Japanese government, local community and business partners, including electronic giant Sony and auto-parts maker Denso. The company's founder Morris Chang, was also present.

This comes as Japan is trying to regain its presence in the chip production industry.

The Japan Advanced



Semiconductor Manufacturing, or JASM, is set to be up and running later this year. TSMC also announced plans for a second plant in Japan earlier this month, with production expected to start in about three years.

Private sector investment totals \$20 billion for both plants. Both plants are in the Kumamoto region, sou-

thwestern Japan.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida sent a congratulatory video message, calling the plant's opening "a giant first step." He stressed Japan's friendly relations with Taiwan and the importance of cutting-edge semiconductor technology.

Japan had previously promised TSMC 476 billion yen

(\$3 billion) in government funding to encourage the semiconductor giant to invest. Kishida confirmed a second package, raising Japan's support to more than 1 trillion yen (\$7 billion).

Although TSMC is building its second plant in the U.S. and has announced a plan for its first in Europe, Japan could prove an attractive option.

Closer to Taiwan geographically, Japan is an important U.S. ally. Neighboring China claims the self-governing island as its own territory and says it must come under Beijing's control. The long-running divide is a flashpoint in U.S.-China relations.

The move is also important for Japan, which has recently earmarked about

5 trillion yen (\$33 billion) to revive its chips industry.

Four decades ago, Japan dominated in chips, headlined by Toshiba Corp. and NEC controlling half the world's production. That's declined lately to under 10%, due to competition from South Korean, U.S. and European manufacturers, as well as from TSMC.

The coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected the supply of electronic chips, stalling plants, including automakers, with Japan almost entirely dependent on chip imports. This has pushed Japan to seek chip production in pursuit of self-sufficiency.

Sony Semiconductor Solutions Corp. — wholly owned by Sony Corp. — Denso Corp. and top automaker

Toyota Motor Corp. are investing in TSMC's Japan plant, with the Taiwanese giant retaining an 86.5% ownership of JASM.

Once the two plants are up and running, they're expected to create 3,400 high-tech jobs directly, according to TSMC.

Ensuring access to an ample supply of the most advanced chips is vital with the growing popularity of electric vehicles, as well as artificial intelligence. Some analysts note Japan still leads in crucial aspects of the industry, as seen in Tokyo Electron, which manufactures the machinery used to produce chips.

Still, it's clear the Japanese government is intent on playing catchup. Tokyo is supporting various semiconductor projects nationwide, such as those involving Western Digital and Micron of the U.S., and Japanese companies like Renesas Electronics, Canon and Sumitomo. **MDT/AP**

DEFENSE

Indonesia and Australia hold talks as both nations move toward signing a security agreement

ANDI JATMIKO & NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA

INDONESIA and Australia held high-level talks in Jakarta on Friday as the neighboring countries seek to strengthen security ties by signing a defense cooperation agreement in the coming months.

Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto, who is set to become Indonesia's next leader, said that he and Australian counterpart Richard Marles discussed ways of maintaining and enhancing the good relationship between the two nations.

Subianto said that Indonesia and Australia hope to sign a "very significant" defense cooperation agreement within two or three months. No details about the agreement have been provided.

Marles described the pact as "the single deepest and most significant defense cooperation agreement" in the history of the two countries.

"It will be a very significant moment in our bilateral relationship," Marles said during a joint news conference with Subianto. "Australia and Indonesia have a shared destiny and a shared collective security and that is the basis on which we are moving forward with our own defense planning."

Subianto, 72, is a former general who has never held elective office. He emerged as the apparent



Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto, right, shakes hands with Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Richard Marles following their meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, last week

winner of the Feb. 14 presidential election. If an official count conducted over the next few weeks confirms his victory, he'll take office in October.

Marles, who is on a two-day visit to Indonesia, said in a statement before his trip that the two countries have a long history of close cooperation on maritime security and would "share an ambition to further broaden and deepen our defense relationship."

Friday's meeting came less than a week after Australian Defense Force Chief Gen. Angus Campbell met with Subianto on Tuesday. The back-to-back visi-

ts by two top Australian security officials this week has reflected the importance of Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, to Australia.

Marles congratulated Subianto on winning the Indonesian presidential election, saying the election has been watched very closely in Australia. When asked about some Australians who are considered to support separatist rebels in Indonesia's restive Papua region, Marles reiterated that Australia recognizes the territorial sovereignty of Indonesia

"There is no support for any independence movements," Marles

said, "We support the territorial sovereignty of Indonesia and that includes those provinces being part of Indonesia, no ifs, no buts, and I want to be clear about that."

Although Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation of more than 270 million people, is often presented as one of Australia's most important neighbors and strategic allies, the relationship hasn't always been smooth.

"We are destined to be close neighbors and we are determined to be a good neighbors," Subianto said. "Historically there are ups and downs, but we consider Australia as our close friend, which

always in many critical instances sided with Indonesia."

Recent disagreements include allegations of wiretapping by the Australian Signals Directorate in 2013 to monitor the private phone calls of then Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, his wife and other senior officials; Indonesia's use of capital punishment on Australian drug smugglers; and cases of people smuggling.

In 2017, Indonesia temporarily suspended military cooperation with Australia, including joint training, education, exchanges of officers and visits, over an alleged insult against the Indonesian state ideology Pancasila, a set of vague principles that mandates belief in one God and unity among Indonesia's population, and the Indonesian military at an Australian military base.

In September 2021, Indonesia filed a diplomatic protest against Australia for being slow to provide information about its activities in the AUKUS trilateral pact involving the United States and the United Kingdom, including plans for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines.

Since 2022, Australia, along with Japan and Singapore, has been a part of the annual Indonesia-U.S. joint combat exercise called Super Garuda Shield, making it the largest since the drills began in 2009.

The expanded drills are seen by China as a threat. Chinese state media have accused the U.S. of building an Indo-Pacific alliance similar to NATO to limit China's growing military and diplomatic influence in the region.

The two ministers also said that they are also discussing the issues of people smuggling and people trafficking.

"This is a shared challenge for both of our countries and that we need to be working cooperatively," Marles said. **MDT/AP**

TENSIONS

US and S. Korea fly warplanes in interception drills after N. Korea's missile tests



A South Korean Air Force F-15K fighter jet takes off from a South Korean Air Force base in Cheongju, South Korea, last week

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

SOUTH Korea and the United States flew advanced stealth fighters in a joint missile-interception drill Friday over the Korean Peninsula, South Korea's air force said, an apparent response to a spate of weapons tests this year by rival North Korea.

North Korea has conducted six rounds of missile tests so far this year, most of them reportedly involving

cruise missiles that typically fly at a low altitude to overcome opponents' missile defenses. Analysts say that in the event of a conflict, North Korea aims to use cruise missiles to strike U.S. aircraft carriers as well as U.S. military bases in Japan.

South Korea's air force said in a statement the drill on Friday involved fifth-generation stealth F-35A fighter jets from both countries and other fighter jets from

South Korea. It said the U.S. F-35As were deployed in South Korea on Wednesday from Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan.

North Korea has ramped up its weapons tests since 2022 in what experts call an attempt to increase its leverage in future diplomacy. South Korea and the U.S. have responded by expanding their military exercises and a trilateral training involving Japan.

On the sidelines of a G20

meeting in Rio De Janeiro on Thursday, the top diplomats from South Korea, the U.S. and Japan agreed to strengthen their joint response capability against North Korea's evolving nuclear threats and coordinate to block the North's financing of its nuclear program, according to South Korea's Foreign Ministry.

This year, North Korea is expected to step up its testing activities and belligerent rhetoric as both the U.S. and South Korea head into elections. North Korea is likely seeking international recognition as a nuclear state, a status that experts say the North thinks would help it receive relief from U.S.-led economic sanctions. **MDT/AP**

RUSSIA

Body of opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been handed over to his mother, aide says

EMMA BURROWS
& JOANNA KOZLOWSKA

THE body of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been handed over to his mother, a top aide to Navalny said Saturday on his social media account.

Ivan Zhdanov, the director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, made the announcement on his Telegram account and thanked "everyone" who had called on Russian authorities to return Navalny's body to his mother.

Earlier on Saturday, Yulia Navalnaya, Navalny's widow, accused President Vladimir Putin of mocking Christianity by trying to force his mother to agree to a secret funeral after his death in an Arctic penal colony.

"Thank you very much. Thanks to everyone who wrote and recorded video messages. You all did what you needed to do. Thank you. Alexei Navalny's body has been given to his mother," Zhdanov wrote.

Navalny, 47, Russia's most well-known opposition politician, unexpectedly died on Feb. 16 in an Arctic penal colony and his family has been fighting for more than a week to have his body returned to them. Prominent Russians released videos calling on authorities to release the body and Western nations have hit Russia with more sanctions as punishment for Navalny's death as well as for the second anniversary of its invasion of Ukraine.

Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, is still in Salekhard, Navalny's press secretary Kira Yarmysh said on X, formerly Twitter. Lyudmila Navalnaya has been in the Arctic region for more than a week, demanding that Russian authorities return the body of her son to her.

"The funeral is still pending," Yarmysh tweeted, questioning whether authorities will allow it to go ahead "as the family wants and as Alexei deserves."

Earlier on Saturday, Navalny's widow said in a video that Navalny's mother was being



A woman places a piece of paper with words of grief for Alexei Navalny paying the last respect to him at the Memorial to Victims of Political Repression in St. Petersburg, Russia, Saturday

"literally tortured" by authorities who had threatened to bury Navalny in the Arctic prison. They, she said, suggested to his mother that she did not have much time to make a decision because the body is decomposing, Navalnaya said.

"Give us the body of my husband," Navalnaya said earlier Saturday. "You tortured him alive, and now you keep torturing him dead. You mock the remains of the dead."

Authorities have detained scores of people as they seek to suppress any major outpouring of sympathy for Putin's fiercest foe before the presidential election he is almost certain to win. Russians on social media say officials don't want to return Navalny's body to his family, because they fear a public show of support for him.

Navalnaya accused Putin, an Orthodox Christian, of killing Navalny.

"No true Christian could ever do what Putin is now doing with the body of Alexei," she said, asking, "What will you do with his corpse? How low will you sink to mock the man you murdered?"

Saturday marked nine days since the opposition leader's death, a day when Orthodox Christians hold a memorial service.

People across Russia came out to mark the occasion and honor Navalny's memory by gathering at Orthodox churches, leaving flowers at public monuments or holding one-

-person protests.

Muscovites lined up outside the city's Christ the Savior Cathedral to pay their respects, according to photos and videos published by independent Russian news outlet SOTAvision. The video also shows Russian police stationed nearby and officers stopping several people for an ID check.

As of Saturday evening, at least 38 people had been detained in Russia for showing support for Navalny, according to the OVD-Info rights group that tracks political arrests.

They included Elena Osipova, a 78-year-old artist from St. Petersburg who stood in a street with a poster showing Navalny with angel wings, and Sergei Karabatov, 64, who came to a Moscow monument to victims of political repression with flowers and a note saying "Don't think this is the end."

Also arrested was Aida Nuriyeva, from the city of Ufa near the Ural Mountains, who publicly held up a sign saying "Putin is Navalny's murderer! I demand that the body be returned!"

Putin is often pictured at church, dunking himself in ice water to celebrate the Epiphany and visiting holy sites in Russia. He has promoted what he has called "traditional values" without which, he once said, "society degrades."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected allegations

that Putin was involved in Navalny's death, calling them "absolutely unfounded, insolent accusations about the head of the Russian state."

Musician Nadya Tolokonnikova, who became widely known after spending nearly two years in prison for taking part in a 2012 protest with her band Pussy Riot inside Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, was one of many prominent Russians who released a video in which she accused Putin of hypocrisy and asked him to release Navalny's body.

"We were imprisoned for allegedly trampling on traditional values. But no one tramples on traditional Russian values more than you, Putin, your officials and your priests who pray for all the murder that you do, year after year, day after day," said Tolokonnikova, who lives abroad. "Putin, have a conscience, give his mother the body of her son."

Lyudmila Navalnaya said Thursday that investigators allowed her to see her son's body in the morgue in the Arctic city of Salekhard. She had filed a lawsuit at a court in Salekhard contesting officials' refusal to release the body. A closed-door hearing had been scheduled for March 4.

Yarmysh, Navalny's spokesman, said that Lyudmila Navalnaya was shown a medical certificate stating that her son died of "natural causes." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1984 US TROOPS WITHDRAW FROM BEIRUT



American forces have withdrawn almost all of their troops from the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

About 1,000 US Marines left the coast beside the international airport as Shi'ite militiamen arrived in jeeps and armoured vehicles to take over.

Only 100 soldiers have been left in the city to guard American diplomatic personnel at the British Embassy on the western sea front.

US President Ronald Reagan ordered military personnel to begin pulling out of the area over a week ago following a recent upsurge in terrorist attacks.

The withdrawal ends 18 months of conflict in a country which has been torn apart by war with Israel.

Despite the withdrawal, President Reagan insisted that the US was not turning its back on Lebanon.

"Once the terrorist attacks started there was no way that we could really contribute to the original mission by staying there as a target just bunkering down and waiting for further attacks," he said.

"I don't think we have lost as yet, although I know things don't look too bright. As long as there is a chance we are not bugging out.

"We are moving to deploy into a more defensive position."

US forces were originally sent in to act as a peacekeeping force between warring Christian and Muslim factions in August 1982.

But 264 American military personnel have died since then, most of them killed during a suicide bomb attack last November.

Fighting has continued over the last week with several Israeli military aircraft bombing towns and villages held by Palestinian guerrillas high in the mountains to the east.

Further conflict has also broken out along the Beirut front line.

The US Marines were sent in 18 months ago to help the Lebanese administration but as the last troops pulled out there was no official government delegation present to see them off.

Instead, gunmen riding motorcycles watched without emotion as US military helicopters airlifted the last front line troops to warships off the Lebanese coast.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Following the withdrawal of US forces, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia personally pleaded with President Reagan not to abandon diplomatic efforts in Lebanon. A multinational alliance made up of British, French and Italian troops signed a joint resolution with the US to maintain peace in Beirut in October 1983. America eventually ended its participation in the Multinational Force at the end of March 1984. The rest of the alliance left Lebanon in April 1984. Later that year 20 people were killed after the US embassy was attacked by a suicide bomber. Beirut remained a dangerous place for US citizens to live and during the 1980s, 270 American people were killed in bombings, assassinations and kidnappings and five were abducted but later released.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Slow for sharp corners. Adapt physical routines around a change or challenge. Nurture yourself, mind, body and spirit. Take extra care of your heart.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Prioritize fun, love and romance. Distractions abound. Work responsibilities could interrupt things. Don't lose heart. Adapt with new conditions. Dark clouds have silver linings.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Share support with family around domestic changes. Provide stability, care and comfort. Ask for what you need. Grow resilient bonds for common gain.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Edit and revise your own story. Process recent changes by reframing them in an empowering way. What seems like bad news could resolve positively.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Monitor financial conditions. You can find the resources you need. Reach out to your inner circle. Provide and share support. Trade, barter and exchange.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Make a personal change. One phase ends and another begins. Let go of an old habit that no longer serves. Choose a new course.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Make time for private reflection. Slow for contemplation. Consider where you've been and what's ahead. Put things away. Prepare and plan.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Social changes affect your community. Share support for common strength and resilience. Together, you're more than the sum of your parts. Pull with friends.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

eave professional misconceptions behind. You can see what's not working. Focus on growing the part that does. Redirect your career toward your heart.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Discover another pathway. Unexpected conditions may require alternate routes, theories or destinations. Revise itineraries and schedules.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Collaborate to navigate a financial transition or challenge. Review conditions and statements. Revise budgets to suit. Support each other to adapt with new directions.

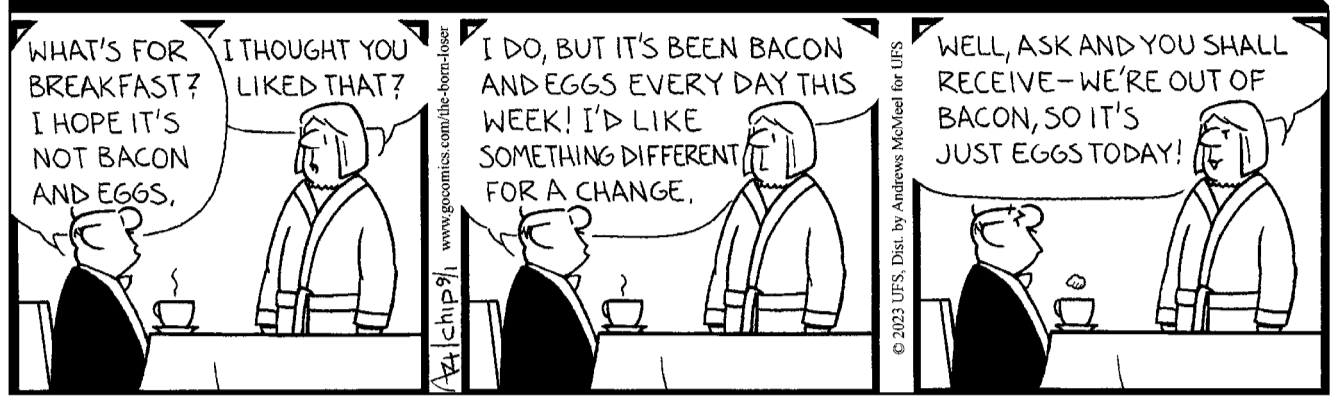


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Set aside preconceptions. Share patience and compassion with your partner to resolve unexpected circumstances. A sense of humor pays off. Rely on each other.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-3	4	cloudy
Changchun	-15	-5	fine
Chengdu	3	10	cloudy
Chongqing	6	11	cloudy
Fuzhou	9	11	rain
Guangzhou	7	18	cloudy
Guiyang	-1	3	rain
Haikou	16	22	rain
Hangzhou	0	3	rain
Harbin	-15	-5	fine
Hefei	-1	6	cloudy
Nanjing	-1	5	overcast
Shanghai	0	6	overcast
Taipei	11	14	rain
Wuhan	-2	5	rain
Hong Kong	17	20	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-4	-1	cloudy
Frankfurt	6	10	rain
Paris	6	9	rain
London	1	9	windy
New York	4	12	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Pay for; 6- ___-European; 10- Swift steed; 14- Nabisco's ___ Wafers; 15- Chinese weight; 16- Existed; 17- Implements; 18- And others; 19- Sheltered, nautically; 20- Swelling; 23- Over there; 27- Kett and James; 28- Cabinet dept.; 29- Smell in "Apocalypse Now"; 34- Throat bug; 36- Gift recipient; 37- Links org.; 40- In spite of; 43- Photo ___ (media events); 44- Irregularly notched; 45- Barbershop quartet member; 46- Break; 48- City on Norton Sound; 49- Of a pelvic bone; 53- Small sofa; 55- Intensify; 60- Roman road; 61- Foreshadowing; 62- Churns up; 67- French 101 verb; 68- E-mail command; 69- Runs without moving; 70- Goes bad; 71- Breaks off; 72- Conger catcher;

DOWN 1- Blasting material; 2- Carnival site; 3- "Evil Woman" grp.; 4- The lot; 5- Sample; 6- Tabloid tidbit; 7- ___ Dogg; 8- Unhearing; 9- ___ podrida; 10- Expect; 11- Sublease; 12- Stadium used for sports or musical events; 13- Borscht veggies; 21- Caterer's coffeepot; 22- Building material; 23- Type of question; 24- Dominant; 25- Draht; 26- Sketched; 30- Committee type; 31- Sheriff's band; 32- Pot starters; 33- Grassland; 35- Penetrate; 37- Wine grape; 38- Garden figure; 39- Come to terms; 41- Uno + due; 42- Fender ding; 47- Fast flier; 49- More frigid; 50- Numbers game; 51- Like krypton; 52- Land measures; 54- Weird; 56- It runs in the cold; 57- Revenuers, for short; 58- Tear; 59- No ifs, ___ or butts!; 63- Poem of praise; 64- Ailing; 65- Bruce ___ was a famous kung-fu movie star; 66- Georgia, once; Abbr.;

Friday's solution

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	

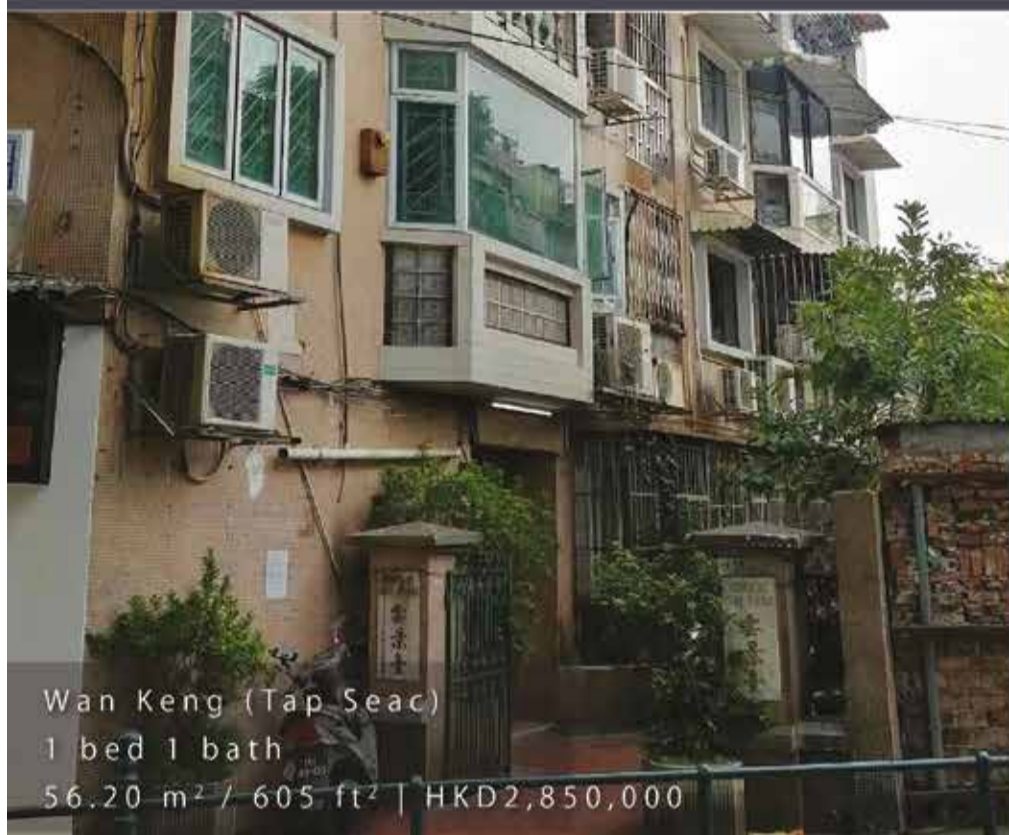
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Wan Keng (Tap Seac)
1 bed 1 bath
56.20 m² / 605 ft² | HKD2,850,000



VA FAT (Taipa Village)
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77.10 m² / 830 ft² | HKD3,980,000



Tou Un (Taipa)
1 bed 1 bath
44.12 m² / 475 ft² | HKD2,980,000



Jade Gardem (Taipa)
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379.04 m² / 4,080 ft² | HKD 11,880,000



Manhattan (Taipa)
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162.58 m² / 1,750 ft² | HKD13,000,000



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Russian Olympic Committee loses appeal against suspension by the IOC

THE Russian Olympic Committee has lost an appeal against its suspension by the International Olympic Committee.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said Friday that it had dismissed the ROC's appeal against the suspension imposed in October. The IOC objected to the ROC incorporating four sports bodies representing regions of eastern Ukraine, which it calls "a breach of the Olympic Charter".

Russia was already barred by the IOC from entering athletes for the Paris Olympics under its own flag, and the suspension doesn't stop the IOC's efforts for Russians to compete as neutral athletes without national symbols.

CAS said it found the suspension issued by the IOC executive board "did not breach the principles of legality, equality, predictability or proportionality."

The ROC said the CAS ruling, which has not yet been published in full, "practically copied out the IOC's arguments" and ignored the Russian case. The ROC can appeal to the Swiss supreme



2014 Winter Olympics, in Krasnaya Polyana, Russia

court but has not said if it plans to do so.

"This CAS ruling is yet more evidence that civil and sports discrimination directed against Russians has reached an unprecedented scale in the run-up to the Games in Paris," the ROC said in a statement.

The ROC said that CAS "confirmed that the Olympic team of Russia, Russian athletes and

officials will not take part in the Games of the XXXIII Olympiad in Paris, just as it excluded any possible cooperation by the ROC with athletes who the IOC recognizes as meeting the criteria of so-called neutrality."

The IOC said Friday it was "pleased" by the CAS ruling its suspension of the ROC was valid.

The ROC's decision to incorporate the sports bodies for the four

Ukrainian regions "constitutes a breach of the Olympic Charter because it violates the territorial integrity of the (National Olympic Committee) of Ukraine, as recognized by the International Olympic Committee in accordance with the Olympic Charter," the IOC said.

The suspension in October removed the ROC's right to receive funding from the IOC but has not

affected the many Russians who are competing in international sports as neutral athletes as they attempt to qualify for this year's Paris Olympics, as part of an IOC-backed initiative.

They would go to the Paris Games under the name of Individual Neutral Athletes, the IOC has said previously.

The IOC previously said it will bar "athletes who actively support the war" in Ukraine but it is not requiring Russian athletes to speak out against it. The IOC has said that the suspension means it would not have to consult the ROC on which athletes to select.

The ROC said in its statement Friday that the neutral athlete procedure involved "humiliating criteria" and claimed that athletes could risk breaking Russian law by agreeing to them.

A similar Individual Neutral Athlete system is in place for athletes from Russia's ally Belarus, where the National Olympic Committee is not suspended. The IOC earlier said it will consult with the Belarusian NOC about athlete selection for Paris. **MDT/AP**

AD



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FOOTBALL

BASKETBALL

DAILY TRAININGS

OPINION

China Daily

Sun Jiashan & Wang Jianan, * China Daily

SPRING FESTIVAL MOVIES CHART NEW, INSPIRING CULTURAL TRENDS

At the beginning of the Year of the Dragon, the 2024 Spring Festival film season has unexpectedly set some records after seeming devoid of blockbusters.

To begin with, the box office revenue during Spring Festival surpassed 8 billion yuan (\$1.11 billion). This year's success story is different from those of previous years which were marked by grand-theme, big-budget spectacles such as *The Battle at Lake Changjin II* in 2022 and *The Wandering Earth II* in 2023. Instead, this Spring Festival season saw medium-budget films with contemporary realistic themes dominating the market.

Jia Ling's *YOLO*, riding on the success of *Hi, Mom* during the 2021 Spring Festival season, captivated audiences, especially young and middle-aged women, with its mature comedy and resonant theme of self-discovery through weight loss. The film started attracting widespread attention even before being released thanks to robust social media discussions about it.

Five years after *Pegasus*, Han Han released *Pegasus 2*, showcasing a higher level of craftsmanship and targeting the demographic group of young and middle-aged men, which significantly contributed to its box office success. The *Boonie Bears* series continued its strong performance with its 10th installment, *Boonie Bears: Time Twist*, maintaining its appeal to children and families alike, securing its position as the highest-grossing animated film to hit the screens during Spring Festival, and pushing the series' total earnings past 7 billion yuan.

The prevailing theme of this year's movie lineup was the focus on "everyman" narratives, presenting stories that resonate with the people and showcase the joys, sorrows, and struggles of ordinary people, thus reflecting strong social values. *Article 20*, for example, tackled burning social issues, drawing upon recent trends in crime and comedy genres. It's a poignant and educational take on the spirit of socialist legality.

Both *YOLO* and *Pegasus 2*, despite their differences in terms of genres, celebrated the enduring spirit of never giving up, extending beyond sports to explore the meaning of life, thereby offering a positive worldview and values to a young audience increasingly exposed to a passive or defeatist attitude.

The record-breaking turnout not only marked a further enrichment of modern Spring Festival customs but also signifies a shift in consumer behavior — from a focus on material to cultural, entertainment, and health-oriented consumption. This transition is particularly meaningful for the film industry, as it underscores the growing significance of cinema as a central aspect of Chinese New Year celebrations.

In the past year, the entertainment sector has led the national consumption market recovery, with the film industry playing a pivotal role. The synergy between online and offline, and inside and outside cinema consumption driven by film IPs has been widely felt across society.

The record-breaking audience numbers for the 2024 Spring Festival season will not only contribute to tapping the year's entertainment market potential, it also reflects the confidence of the Chinese people in achieving new developments in the new era.

*Sun Jiashan is an associate researcher at the Central Academy of Culture and Tourism Administration; and Wang Jianan is a graduate student at the China Film Archive.

"Oppenheimer" continued to steamroll through Hollywood's awards season on Saturday, winning the top prize, for outstanding cast, along with awards for Cillian Murphy and Robert Downey Jr., at the 30th Screen Actors Guild Awards.

As the Academy Awards draw closer, Christopher Nolan's blockbuster biopic — already a winner at the Golden Globes and the BAFTAs — has increasingly looked like the run-away favorite. The SAG Awards, one of the most telling Oscar predictors, will only add to the momentum for "Oppenheimer,"

the lead Academy Awards nominee with 13 nods.

The SAG Awards were streamed live on Netflix, a first for a major Hollywood award show. That made for some significant tweaks to the age-old traditions of such ceremonies. There were no ads. Profanity was permitted. ("Don't say anything you wouldn't say in front of Oprah," said Idris Elba.) And winners were occasionally interviewed backstage by red-carpet co-host Tan France — sometimes awkwardly, sometimes charmingly.

AP PHOTO



Members of HM Coastguard Search and Rescue gather after homes were evacuated when a suspected Second World War explosive device was discovered in a garden on St Michael Avenue in Plymouth, England, last week

UK

A WORLD WAR II BOMB PROMPTED AN EVACUATION IN ENGLAND BEFORE BEING TAKEN TO SEA TO BE BLOWN UP

PAN PYLAS, LONDON

AN unexploded World War II bomb was safely transported Friday through the eerily empty streets of the southwestern English port city of Plymouth before being placed on a boat for its next and final journey to sea where it will be blown up by naval divers.

In what prompted one of the largest evacuations in the United Kingdom since the war, a military convoy carried the Nazi-era explosive from a residential backyard in the city to Plymouth's shoreline.

After a huge security operation, around 10,000 people were told they could now return home.

"We have been notified by the military that the operation has been a success and the bomb has been removed," Plymouth City Council said. "We can now start removing the cordon so people who have been evacuated can return to their homes."

Many ended up at pubs during the evacuation as residents sought out a safe shelter.

Plymouth, a famous naval port about 240 miles southwest of London, is

where the *Mayflower* set sail from in 1620 carrying Pilgrim settlers to America. The city was targeted by Germany's Luftwaffe during World War II, particularly during the Blitz in 1940 and 1941.

More than 2,500 high explosive bombs were dropped on the city during the war, with many missing their intended target and falling on residential areas. Over the course of the war, more than 1,100 civilians in the city died during the air raids.

The bomb, which was found in a residential yard on last week, was taken to the Torpoint Ferry slipway to be disposed of at sea beyond the breakwater. The bomb is believed to weigh around 500 kilograms, according to the U.K. Ministry of Defence, and will no doubt make a mighty splash once it is detonated.

The decision to move the bomb was taken after an assessment by bomb disposal experts concluded that there would be too high a risk of significant damage, including the destruction of a number of houses, if the device were detonated in the yard.

Devon and Cornwall Police Superintendent Phil Williams said moving the bomb was the "least impactful option."

The main train line into the city was closed as the convoy traveled through the cordon, while ferries were suspended and buses diverted. Schools and nurseries also closed to allow the operation to take place, while all businesses within the cordon were told to evacuate.

Giles Perritt, assistant chief executive Plymouth City Council, said that more than 1,000 staff and officers have been involved in the operation to remove the bomb safely. He thanked colleagues from the military, particularly those "at the wheel."

Since the end of the World War II, unexploded ordnance have been regularly found across the U.K. An estimated 10% of German bombs that were dropped during the war didn't go off, leaving many towns and cities in the U.K. littered with dangerous explosives.

When unexploded bombs are found, they are usually detonated on site and don't spark mass evacuations. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Belarus Polls opened yesterday in tightly controlled parliamentary and local elections that are set to cement the steely rule of the country's authoritarian leader, despite calls for a boycott from the opposition, which dismissed the balloting as a "senseless farce." President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand for nearly three decades and yesterday announced that he will run for the presidency again next year, accuses the West of trying to use the vote to undermine his government and "destabilize" the nation of 9.5 million people.

France The Eiffel Tower reopened to visitors yesterday after a six-day closure because of striking employees demanding better maintenance of the historic landmark, showing traces of rust, and salary hikes. The operator of the 330-meter tower said in a statement it reached an agreement with unions representing the workers after promising to allocate an "ambitious 380 million euro investment by 2031" for renovation work.

AP PHOTO



French President Emmanuel Macron was greeted with boos and whistles at the opening of the Paris Agricultural Fair on Saturday by angry farmers who blame him for not doing enough to support them. Macron was scheduled to visit the event, which draws crowds of visitors every year. But before the official opening, several dozen protesters forced their way through security barriers and entered the site as the president was arriving.

Colombia's government announced plans last week for a deep-water expedition to explore the mythical galleon *San José*, sunk in the 18th century in the country's northern Caribbean and believed to contain cargo valued at billions of dollars. The first phase of the scientific research into the deep waters around the shipwreck will collect information to determine which pieces are suitable and possible to extract. The wreckage is 600 meters deep in the sea.