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A GROUP OF HORSE OWNERS DEMANDED A MORE REASONABLE COMPENSATION FROM THE MACAU JOCKEY CLUB, CRITICIZING THE CURRENT PROPOSED SCHEME

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Pakistan Lawmakers in the National Assembly elected yesterday Shehbaz Sharif as the country's new prime minister for the second time as allies of imprisoned former premier Imran Khan in parliament shouted in protest against his appointment, alleging rigging in last month's election. Speaker Ayaz Sadiq said Sharif secured 201 votes, defeating Omar Ayub of the Sunni Ittehad Council who got 92 votes. The winner only needs 169 votes to get majority.



Emirates A ship attacked by Yemen's Houthi rebels has sunk in the Red Sea after days of taking on water, officials said, the first vessel to be fully destroyed as part of their campaign over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The sinking of the Rubymar, which carried a cargo of fertilizer and previously leaked fuel, could cause ecological damage to the Red Sea and its coral reefs.



Emirates Negotiators taking part in a World Trade Organization meeting in the United Arab Emirates ended their summit early Saturday after failing to reach agreements on several major initiatives, the latest sign of turmoil within the global body. The WTO delayed its closing ceremony in Abu Dhabi by over a day as the 166-nation bloc struggled to reach consensus on fishing, agriculture and other issues. The only agreement of note came on extending a pause on taxes on digital media such as movies and video games. On that issue, the WTO decided to extend the pause until their next biennial meeting.

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GAMING

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IAM BUILDING TO CLOSE PUBLIC SPACES FOR MAINTENANCE

The Senado Square Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) building will close most of its public areas for maintenance and repair works. According to an IAM press statement, the works will be carried out in phases and include a building inspection, weed removal, renovation and maintenance work. The work is expected to occur between March and June this year. During this period, several facilities and public areas, including the interior garden and patio will be closed for public safety.

GOV'T PROMOTES CITY IN INDONESIA, PORTUGAL

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has again led a travel trade delegation to the ASTINDO Travel Fair in Indonesia, where it ran a Macao Pavilion to showcase Macao offerings. The bureau also joined the Portuguese Association of Travel and Tourism Agencies (APAVT) to promote Macao at the Lisbon Travel Market (BTL), which ran from Feb. 28 to March 3. The "Macao Day" included a string of activities, such as the launch of an e-learning program about Macao for Portuguese travel agents, lion dances and Chinese martial arts displays and "Happy Hour with Macanese Gastronomy."

LIGHT UP MACAO DRAWS 7.8M SPECTATORS: MGTO

Staged from last December to Feb 25, Light Up Macao 2023 has culminated with 7.78 million spectators, according to the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO). Organized in collaboration with the six integrated resort enterprises, Light up Macao 2023 presented a variety of romantic and colorful light installations, interactive installations and mapping shows on Macau Peninsula, Taipa and Coloane under the theme of the "Dazzling Wonderland." In addition, nearly 40,000 souvenirs were presented on site during the event. About 1,500 people collected all the stamps from seven districts and joined the grand lucky draw.

VOUCHER CAMPAIGN FOR E-WALLET SPENDERS

Macao authorities have launched a campaign with local chambers of commerce to promote domestic consumption in northern Macau. The campaign, supported by various government agencies, will run from March 18 to Aug. 4. The initiative has a budget of MOP24.5 million and allows users of eight local e-wallets to win vouchers by spending a minimum of MOP50 on weekdays. Participants can redeem up to three vouchers per week, and the vouchers can be valued at MOP10, MOP20, MOP50, or MOP100. Around 400 businesses have participated in the campaign, and users must spend at least three times the value of the voucher to redeem it.

ECONOMY

2023 GDP REBOUNDS TO 80% PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU'S economy expanded by 80.5% year-on-year in 2023, following the gradual resumption of local economic activity and exports of services.

Government data shows GDP returned to over 80% of the level in 2019, underpinned by exports of tourism services.

In terms of the major GDP components, private consumption expenditure and gross fixed capital formation rose 12.1% and 14.7% year-on-year respectively in 2023.

On the other hand, government final consumption expenditure dropped 6.4% owing to the conclusion of the livelihood subsidy scheme.

Exports of gaming services and other tourism services surged 343.7% and 127.9% year-on-year respectively, on



account of an uplift of 394.9% in visitors; yet exports of goods fell 28.1%.

Analysed by quarter, GDP swelled 86.4% year-on-year in real terms in the fourth quarter of 2023.

Exports of gaming services and other tourism services showed respective growth of 430.8% and 130.2% year-on-year.

Macao has endured some of the world's strictest anti-virus controls for nearly three years, and dropping border restrictions after China rolled back its "zero-Covid" strategy in January was widely expected to boost its tourism-driven economy.

After three tumultuous years, the gaming sector experienced significant upturn

in 2023, where casino revenues hit MOP183.06 billion for the entire year, surpassing initial government expectations earlier last year.

As for visitor arrivals, the 2023 year closed with 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.

To further boost the sector not just with mainland tourists, a sum of MOP235 million has been reserved to attract international visitors.

Meanwhile, Fitch Ratings predicts Macau's year on year growth to remain strong, at 15% in 2024 from 76% in 2023, off the back of sharp rebounds in gaming revenue.

FUKUSHIMA

Gov't has no plans to ease import restrictions from Japan

RENATO MARQUES

THE government has no plans to ease or remove the ban on Japanese food imports from 10 prefectures, the IAM has said in a written note cited by public broadcaster TDM.

The ban, enforced for the past six months, was in response to the news Japanese authorities would begin of-flooding wastewater from the Fukushima Nuclear Power-plant.

The international community has confirmed the release of such water was safe and would not adversely impact living beings.

Nevertheless, China has banned the import of live



and fresh food products from 10 Japanese prefectures and regions over concerns about food safety and public health, a measured also followed by Macau.

Six months, 65,000 radiation inspections, and over 1,100 laboratory analyses later, the Municipal Affairs Bu-

reau (IAM) has said there are no plans to ease restrictions because the plan to release Fukushima wastewater will continue for at least 30 years.

Continued analyses on imported products from other Japanese areas has shown normal results, according to the IAM.

The banned import of food includes live and fresh food products, food products of animal origin, sea salt, and seaweed from Japan's prefectures of Fukushima, Chiba, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Gunma, Miyagi, Niigata, Nagano, and Saitama, as well as Tokyo Metropolis.

The United Nations nuclear watchdog has vouched for the safety of the water release that began in August last year from the plant wrecked by a tsunami in 2011.

In October last year, trade ministers of the G7 countries called for the immediate repeal of bans on Japanese food.

In Macau, after a brief standstill in the first days after the ban started, importers have found suppliers outside the banned prefectures.

They supply the many local Japanese cuisine restaurants without major problems.

As IAM said at the time, the ban had no major impact locally.

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TRANSPORT

Gov't places order for LRT East line infrastructure with Mitsubishi

RENATO MARQUES

THE government has placed an order with the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) for the Automated Guideway Transit (AGT) System for the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) East Line, the company has announced.

According to the Tokyo-based company statement, the company will handle the entire AGT system, including signals, communication systems, power distribution systems, guideway work, platform screen doors, and automatic fare collection systems for the East Line, which it already does for the currently operating Taipa Line.

According to MHI, the order includes all equipment and systems for the operation of the LRT "excluding construction of station buildings and civil engineering work."

The company said the line, an extension of the existing Taipa Line, will share the "existing cars



already delivered for the Taipa Line and Barra Extension Line."

An Access Vehicle (BAV) for firefighters will be added for backup.

This new car is said to be equipped with a lithium-ion storage battery so it can be used on railways without a power supply.

This electric-powered BAV re-

places the conventional diesel-powered access vehicles and is added to ensure the safety of the East Line, which will mainly travel through an underground tunnel.

According to MHI, "This is the fifth MHI project for the Macau LRT following the Taipa Line, the Barra Extension Line, the ongoing Seac Pai Van Extension Line (two stations plus transfer station expansion, 1.6 kilometers), and Hengqin Extension Line (two station expansions, 2.2 kilometers)".

The company also said it will be working with "Top Builders Macau Co. Ltd. and Hou Chun Construction and Engineering Company Limited in the same project formation as the consortium for the latest two projects, including Seac Pai Van Extension Line and Hengqin Extension Line."

The Public Works Bureau said mid-last month the LRT East Line was priced at MOP3.6 billion.

This part of the project includes six stations and includes an extension of 7.65 kilometers between the Taipa Ferry Terminal station and the station temporarily called "ES1," which will be near the Border Gate.

After the central government recently granted the use of a land and sea area near the Border Gate, the government is said to be studying the possibility of amending the LRT East Line project to potentially reach the Qingmao Port (one additional station).

However, no concrete plans

Horse-owners demand new compensation formula from MJC

ANTHONY LAM

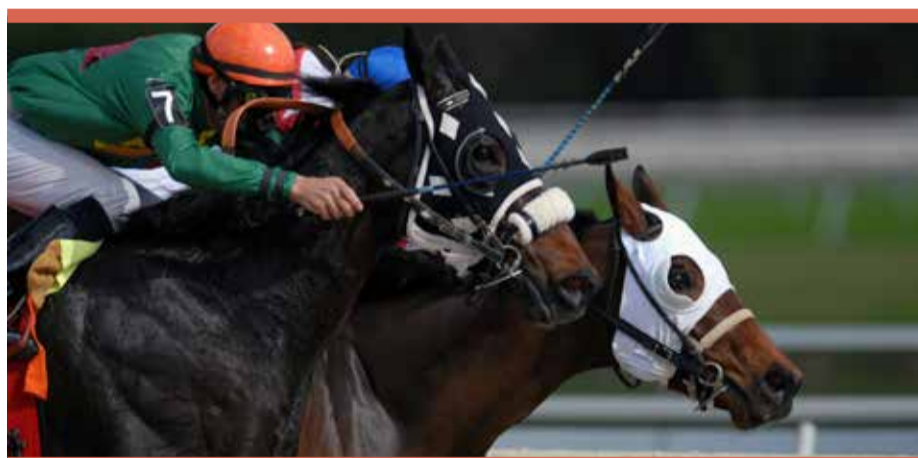
A group of horse owners has told a weekend press briefing the Macau Jockey Club (MJC) should follow a compensation scheme they have proposed.

In an earlier open letter, the group criticized the MJC's proposed compensation scheme and demanded more reasonable compensation.

The MJC is only willing to compensate the horse owners the costs of relocating their horses - MOP30,000 for each horse to mainland China or MOP200,000 to other locations.

According to local media All About Macau, when asked by the press what would be reasonable, horse owner Tam Siu Keung suggested a formula.

Assume a horse was purchased for HKD1 million, a horse aged between two to four should



be subject to full compensation of its purchase price, because "it was a brand new horse," Tam said.

A five-year-old horse, however, "has 10% depreciation," Tam said, adding that this horse should be subject to a compensation of HKD900,000. Consequently, a six-year-old horse will be subject to 80% compensation and so forth.

He further explained that normally, a horse can be imported to Macau or Hong Kong for

racing at the age of two and will be ready to race at four.

The older it gets, the more likely its ability to win will drop, he said, "which equates to a situation of depreciation."

When asked what they would do should the MJC reject their proposal, another owner, Lao Pong Seng, said they will sue the club.

Tam also said the MJC infuriated horse owners by referring to them as "blind and visionless."

He said the MJC has

198 horses currently, owned by between 100 and 150 owners.

The MJC will only need to pay at maximum HKD100 million to compensate horse owners should the latter's proposal be followed.

Reiterating that they are not against the government, the horse owners also suggested the government keep an eye on the manner in which the MJC departs from the current premises and handles the animals that currently live in the MJC.

CE ATTENDS BEIJING'S NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS

THE Chief Executive (CE), Ho Iat Seng, will today travel to Beijing for the opening ceremony of the second session of the 14th National People's Congress Tuesday, March 5.

Until CE's return Wednesday, March 6, the Secretary for Administration and Justice, André Cheong, will occupy the post.

Concurrently, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) will hold a session as part of the so-called "China's Two Sessions" that occur every year in March.

The CPPCC meeting starts today, while the NPC meeting

kicks off tomorrow. The meetings are likely to conclude March 11.

The "Two Sessions" are of great importance for those following China's policies.

The president and Secretary-General of the Chinese Communist Party, Xi Jinping, will likely discuss topics to be developed at the Third Plenum of the Party's Central Committee, analysts say.

The Central Committee traditionally approves economic reforms.

At the same time, Premier Li Qiang will deliver his first government work report on behalf of the State Council at the NPC's opening session. **RM**



GAMING

MELCO'S MARKET SHARE LOSS PROMPTS MANAGEMENT SHAKE UP

STAFF REPORTER

CASINO operator Melco Resorts & Entertainment experienced a decline in market share in Macau in 2023, which was a contributing factor in the decision to change management, according to chairman and CEO Lawrence Ho.

Ho told investors last week that the casino company "cut too deep" regarding operational overhead amid its emergence from the Covid-19 pandemic in Macau.

"Clearly we lost share in 2023," Ho said. "I guess we continued to cut too deep to the bone in terms of our operating expenditures and how we conducted our business."

In an earnings call, the executive said Melco's Macau properties carried trimmed workforces into the post-pandemic environment, noting reduced resort services hampered the company's product and prompted some visitors to take their business elsewhere - which included coveted VIPs and premium mass gamblers.

The loss was "part of the reason" for its management change.

Speaking on the departure of former chief operating officer David Sisk, Ho said Sisk "did a great job for us during Covid in terms of trying to survive."



Meanwhile, the current goal for the gaming operator "is to really

reclaim the crown in the premium mass sector."

Last week, Melco announced the shake up of its leadership with new appointments including Alidad Tash, executive vice president of analytics and gaming operations for Macau, Stefan Bollhalder as vice president of hotels and food and beverage for City of

reclaim the crown in the premium mass sector."

Dreams, Macau, and Linda Switzer as vice president of retail.

Melco shares on the Nasdaq are down nearly 49% over the past year from USD13.87 to close at USD7.12 Friday.

2023 REVENUES

The group reported total operating revenues of USD3.78 billion versus USD1.35 billion in the prior year. The increase in total operating revenues was primarily attributable to the improved performance in all gaming segments and non-gaming operations following the relaxation of Covid-19 related restrictions in Macau in January 2023 and the opening of Studio City Phase 2.

However, Melco still reported a net loss of USD277.5 million for the year.

NO IMMEDIATE PLANS FOR EXPANSION

Ho also said there are currently no immediate plans for expansion into new markets like the United Arab Emirates, as the company is still recovering from the impact of the pandemic.

Instead, Melco is exploring smaller potential projects, yet also considering larger projects like those in the UAE and Thailand in the longer term.

The CEO said exploring new markets is a lengthy process, as evidenced by their experience in pursuing a potential project in Yokohama, Japan.



GAMING

February GGR hits MOP18.49 billion

STAFF REPORTER

THE gross gaming revenue (GGR) of Macau's casinos increased 79.1% year-on-year in February, reaching MOP18.49 billion.

This figure fell slightly below projections from JP Morgan Securities and Citigroup, which predicted earnings of around MOP19 billion and MOP19.5 billion, respectively.

However, February's GGR represented a 4.4% decrease from January's figure of MOP19.34 billion, despite increased travel demand from mainland China.

Macau reported 1.4 million visitors during the eight-day Lunar New Year break, the highest since at least 2017, when daily data for peak seasons became available.

Despite the monthly decline, analysts regarded the performance during the Chinese New Year holiday period, which occurred from February 10 to 17, as robust.

JP Morgan Securities reported the daily GGR during this period likely exceeded MOP1 billion, surpassing the MOP900 million observed during the previous Golden Week in October.

The company also anticipated Macau would likely surpass the MOP1 billion mark during February's festive period, for the first time in over four years, and exceeding the MOP900-million-plus seen during the previous Golden Week.

Slowing revenue growth signals ongoing caution among Chinese consumers, as economic headwinds, falling home prices and a stock market rout prompt many to curtail spending.

In total, Macau's GGR for the first two months of 2024 amounted to nearly MOP37.82 billion, a significant 72.7% increase compared to the same period in the previous year.

COOPERATION ZONE

HENGQIN LIFTS TARIFFS FOR MOST MACAU IMPORTS

HENGQIN started Friday to allow most goods to be moved there tax-free from Macau.

Under the new mechanism, tariffs will be generally lifted for goods entering Hengqin from Macau, while goods moving from Hengqin to the Chinese mainland will now be subject to import duties, if they are not eligible for added-value tax exemption.

Similar tax exemptions also apply to luggage and parcels entering Hengqin from Macau.

Lei Wai Nong, director of the zone's executive committee, said the customs rearrangement also aims to make it easier for Macau residents to live and work in the zone.

Macau residents are now allowed to bring a reasonable amount of cooked meat, fresh vegetables and fruits into Hengqin, which is a pioneering reform in China, according to Li.



"The new policy will effectively facilitate the flow of goods, personnel, capital and information between Hengqin and Macau, and create valuable new space for Macau's new industries and business forms," said the official.

By the end of 2023, there were 11,500 Macau residents working or living in Hengqin, an annual increase of over 70%, according to the zone's statistics bureau.

Xuan Jianguo, secretary-general of the Hengqin Institute of Innovation and Development, said the customs reform will greatly boost the integration of Hengqin and Macau.

Hengqin has completed a key step toward fulfilling its two main goals, which are promoting the diversification of Macau's economy and creating a new home for Macau residents to live and work," Xuan said. MDT/XINHUA

MUSIC

HK composer defends MACA, saying royalties not public domain

ANTHONY LAM

WHILE surprised by comments in the recent copyright royalty arguments, a Hong Kong music composer said royalty collection entities are not obliged to disclose how the fees are shared with musicians.

On his own Facebook page, Hong Kong composer Ng Cheuk Yin posted a response to the current royalty argument in Macau.

Recently, the Macau Association of Composers, Authors & Publishers (MACA) has become the center of criticism that started with an alleged copyright violation case.

With social media blaming MACA for lacking financial transparency – especially about how it shares royalties with creators – Ng said it is a deal between creators and the copyright entity, “which is a topic worthy of creators’ concerns.”

He also suggested the topic has



nothing to do with the public, which “has neither the right nor the need to know.”

MACA has recently criticized two Macau outlets of Hong Kong karaoke box chain Neway for not paying royalties for songs they use

for profit-making purposes.

The topic became heated when Neway’s Chong Fok Commercial Centre outlet coincidentally ceased operations after MACA filed a copyright complaint.

The chain’s Hong Kong head-

quarters has not commented as yet.

Ng was surprised criticisms from netizens had not addressed Neway’s alleged copyright violation but, rather, MACA’s alleged persecution of the business environment.

Declaring he is unfamiliar with Macau’s environment, the composer said similar debates exist in Hong Kong.

He believes they exist because “the public and even musicians are unfamiliar with copyright topics.”

Connections between eligible copyright entities in each territory gives these entities authority over royalty collections in their particular territories, he said.

As such, MACA is entitled to collect royalties for participating copyright entities.

In addition, Ng said that in Hong Kong, a piece of music can be used without royalty 50 years after the death of its composer.

In the EU and the US, the period is 70 years. Therefore, the works of Dmitri Shostakovich, who died in 1975, are still under copyright protection.

In a press conference late last month, MACA CEO, Ung Kuoc Iang, called on all music users to obtain permission before using music not within the public domain to avoid potential criminal and/or civil penalties. Ung hopes that this incident will draw the attention of relevant departments, the karaoke industry, concert organizers and venues, and all music users to the importance of abiding by applicable copyright laws.

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EXPLAINER

What to watch for as China's major political meeting of the year gets underway

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

ONE burning issue dominates as the 2024 session of China's legislature gets underway this week: the economy.

The National People's Congress annual meeting, which opens tomorrow, is being closely watched for any signals on what the ruling Communist Party might do to reenergize an economy that is sagging under the weight of expanded government controls and the bursting of a real-estate bubble.

That is not to say that other issues won't come up. Proposals to raise the retirement age are expected to be a hot topic, the state-owned Global Times newspaper said last week. And China watchers will parse the annual defense budget and the possible introduction of a new foreign minister.

But the economy is what is on most people's minds in a country that may be at a major turning point after four decades of growth that propelled China into a position of economic and geopolitical power. For many Chinese, the failure of the post-COVID economy to rally strongly last year is shaking a long-held confidence in the future.

The congress can be a forum to propose and discuss ideas.

The reports and speeches



during the congress can give indications of the future direction of government policy. And while they tend to be in line with previous announcements, major new initiatives have been revealed at the meeting, such as the 2020 decision to enact a national security law for Hong Kong following major anti-government protests in 2019.

A TARGET FOR GROWTH

The first thing the legislature will do tomorrow is receive a lengthy "work report" from Premier Li Qiang that will review the past year and include the government's economic growth target for this year.

Many analysts expect something similar to last year's target of "around 5%," which they say

would affirm market expectations for a moderate step up in economic stimulus and measures to boost consumer and investor confidence.

Many current forecasts for China's GDP growth are below 5%, but setting a lower target would signal less support for the economy and could dampen confidence, said Jeremy Zook, the China lead analyst at Fitch Ratings, which is forecasting 4.6% growth this year.

Conversely, a higher target of about 5.5% would indicate more aggressive stimulus, said Neil Thomas, a Chinese politics fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

There will be positive messages for private companies and foreign investors, Thomas said, but he doesn't expect a fundamental change to Xi's overall strategy of

strengthening the party's control over the economy.

"Political signals ahead of the National People's Congress suggest that Xi is relatively unperturbed by China's recent market troubles and is sticking to his guns on economic policy," he said.

A NEW FOREIGN MINISTER, MAYBE

China's government ministers typically hold their posts for five years, but Qin Gang was dismissed as foreign minister last year after only a few months on the job. To this day, the government has not said what happened to him and why.

His predecessor, Wang Yi, has been brought back as foreign minister while simultaneously holding the more senior position of

the Communist Party's top official on foreign affairs.

The presumption has been that Wang's appointment was temporary until a permanent replacement could be named. Analysts say that could happen during the National People's Congress, but there's no guarantee it will.

"Wang Yi enjoys Xi's trust and currently dominates diplomatic policymaking below the Xi level, so it would not be a shock if Wang remained foreign minister for a while longer," Thomas said.

The person who has gotten the most attention as a possible successor is Liu Jianchao, a Communist Party official who is a former Foreign Ministry spokesperson and ambassador to the Philippines and Indonesia. He has made several overseas trips in recent months including to Africa, Europe, Australia and the U.S., increasing speculation that he is the leading candidate.

Other names that have been floated include Ma Zhaoxu, the executive vice foreign minister. Wu said it likely depends on whom Xi and Wang trust.

"I don't know how Wang Yi thinks about it," he said. "If Wang Yi likes somebody like Liu Jianchao or likes somebody like Ma Zhaoxu. And also Xi Jinping. So it's more about personal relations."

MDT/AP

Gov't pledges to increase opportunities for foreign companies as it seeks to boost its economy

CHINESE Vice President Han Zheng pledged last week to provide more opportunities for foreign companies in China as the government tries to restore confidence in the world's second largest economy.

Han told an audience of American business people in Beijing that the government would continue to open up more industries to foreign investment and create a market-oriented and law-based international business environment.

"China's development achievements have been made through opening up," he said at an American Chamber of Commerce in China banquet. "We will unwaveringly adhere to a



Chinese Vice President Han Zheng, right, chats with US ambassador to China Nicholas Burns

high level of opening-up to the outside world."

Chamber officials portrayed his appearance at the annual dinner as a positive

signal that the government is serious about addressing the concerns of U.S. and other foreign companies about operating uncertain-

ties and other challenges in the Chinese market.

The U.S. and China remain divided on a wide range of issues from trade and technology to the war in Ukraine, but they are at least talking again and seeking ways to manage their differences.

Both Premier Li Qiang and the commerce minister met this week with a visiting delegation led by Suzanne Clark, the head of the Washington, D.C.-based U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

"What I think the Chinese were trying to do is to reassure us that they know there are still things on the to-do list that need to get done and to reassure us

that they will get done," said the chair of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, Sean Stein, who joined the meeting with Li.

Progress has been made in some areas but not in others, Stein said before the dinner, adding, "it's been a mixed bag."

The American ambassador in China, Nicholas Burns, told the audience that several months of high-level meetings and exchanges had given a measure of badly needed stability to the U.S.-China relationship, but that difficult issues remain.

He cited manufacturing overcapacity in China, which has raised fears in the U.S. and Europe that Chi-

nese exports will flood their markets with exports; U.S. sanctions on Chinese companies that are supporting what he called "Russia's defense-industrial complex," and U.S. President Joe Biden's recently stated concern that connected vehicles from China could pose a national security threat.

Burns pushed back at Chinese accusations that the United States is seeking to decouple its economy from China's, saying his country is only trying to reduce risk by diversifying its supply chains and restricting some exports because of national security concerns.

"I must say frankly, too many here in China are suggesting that we are decoupling," he said. "But the facts will not support that argument. We are derisking, which is a necessary and fully justifiable policy."

MDT/AP

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

ADVERTORIAL



Doctors stage a rally against the government's medical policy in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday

SOUTH KOREA

Doctors hold massive anti-government rally over medical school recruitment plan

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

THOUSANDS of senior doctors rallied in Seoul yesterday to express their support for junior doctors who have been on strike for nearly two weeks over a government plan to sharply increase the number of medical school admissions.

The rally came as the government said it would begin to take steps Monday to suspend the medical licenses of nearly 9,000 medical interns and residents for defying government orders to end their walkouts, which have disrupted hospital operations.

"The government's absurd medical policy has triggered immense resistance by trainee doctors and medical students, and we doctors have become one," Park Sung-min, a senior member of the Korea Medical Association, said in a speech at the rally. "I'm asking the government: Please, stop the threats and suppression now."

Protesters chanted slogans, sang and held placards criticizing the government's plan. There were no reports of any violence at the rally.

As of Thursday night, 8,945 of the country's 13,000 medical interns and residents were confirmed to have left their worksites, according to the Health Ministry. The government has repeatedly said they would face minimum three-month license suspensions and indictments by prosecutors if they didn't return by Feb. 29.

The striking doctors are a fraction of South Korea's 140,000 doc-

tors. But they account for about 30-40% of the total doctors at some major hospitals, where they assist senior doctors during surgeries and other treatments while training. Their walkouts have subsequently caused numerous cancellations of surgeries and medical treatments at the hospitals.

Senior doctors have staged a series of rallies backing the young doctors but haven't joined the walkouts. If they also launch strikes, that would pose a major blow to South Korea's medical service.

The government wants to increase South Korea's medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 starting next year, from the current 3,058, to better deal with the country's rapidly aging population. Officials say South Korea's doctor-to-population ratio is one of the lowest among developed countries.

But many doctors have vehemently protested the plan, saying medical schools can't handle such a sharp increase in the number of students. They say the recruitment plan also does not address a chronic shortage of doctors in essential but low-paying specialties like pediatrics and emergency departments.

Doctors say adding too many new doctors would also result in an increase in public medical expenses since greater competition would lead to excess treatments. But critics say the doctors simply worry about receiving a lower income due to the rising number of doctors. **MDT/AP**

Create A Better
TOMORROW TODAY
今天開創明天



MGM Presents a Unique CNY Citywalk Experience to the Community



MGM has launched a fresh revitalization initiative "Barra Spring Fest" – in which MGM has extended its arts & culture ingenuity and network into the Barra district. In collaboration with local SMEs, artists, and performers to jointly inject contemporary, trendy, artistic and lifestyle elements, MGM would like to celebrate the concept of "Living Art in Style" with the community. This event gives fresh impetus to Navy Yard No. 1 & 2 of Barra District, by bringing in fun-filled, exclusive CNY happenings ranging from arts & culture, leisure, refreshments, shopping, and more – with a view to revitalizing Barra district into a novel social and cultural hub.

During Chinese New Year, MGM invited over a hundred families and young friends from various NGOs including S.K.H. Macau Social Services Coordination Office, Caritas Macau Family Center, Associação de Agricultores de Macau (Youth activity center), General Association of Chinese Students of Macau, and Macao New Chinese Youth Association, who enjoyed "Barra Spring Fest", special "Tales of Auspicious Dragon" Guided Art Tour with a theme centered around the revered Chinese "Dragon" culture at MGM COTAL and other thrilling community activities together with MGM's Golden Lion volunteer team.



Moreover, the event encompassed "Reminiscences of Barra: A Visual Journey" - Archives and Arts Exhibition housed at the Navy Yard No.1, which showcased the captivating photography and artworks by local artists, offering a profound insight into the distinctive history, culture, and scenic ambiance of the Barra District. MGM is delighted to present an extraordinary and unforgettable Chinese New Year CityWalk experience for all participants.

To foster educational tourism in Macau, the Barra district has also welcomed over a hundred students from "Greater Bay Area Future Community AI Technology Innovation Application Workshop" earlier, who aim to delve deeper into Macau's culture, local communities, and city revitalization for their future research endeavors. They will leverage AI technology to reimagine public spaces and communities with the target of promoting an enhanced quality of life. The Barra district served as one of this workshop's primary case studies.

In the future, there will be a plethora of diverse events hosted in the Barra district, offering the community even more exhilarating and distinctive experiences. MGM expects that a larger audience will appreciate the profound historical legacy and unique charm of Barra.



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MEXICO

Organized crime attacks on local candidates raise fears may face its bloodiest elections ever

FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ,
MEXICO CITY

AS Mexico prepares for the largest elections in its history, organized crime is once again preying on local candidates across swaths of the country where cartels dominate, raising concerns among experts that these could be Mexico's bloodiest elections ever.

Julián López, coordinator for the Citizen Movement party in the southern state of Guerrero, experienced it first hand when rifle-toting gunmen abducted him and two colleagues while they were driving on Feb. 7. The 43-year-old López was beaten, stripped of his possessions, made to kneel near a remote garbage dump and ultimately abandoned in the middle of the night.

Two mayoral hopefuls in the town of Maravatio in neighboring Michoacan state were not so fortunate. They were killed by gunmen within hours of each other Monday. One was from the governing Morena party of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the other from the conservative National Action Party. A third mayoral hopeful from that town was abducted and found dead in November.

On Feb. 10, a man running for Congress for the Morena party in the sprawling Mexico City suburb of Ecatepec was fatally shot in the street alongside his brother. He had allegedly received threats from a local union.

A month earlier, on Jan. 5, the local leader of the Institutional Revolutionary Party and candidate for mayor of Suchiate, Chiapas, was killed. The same day, in the northwestern state of Colima, a mayoral candidate of the Citizen Movement party in Armeria was shot by gunmen while in his vehicle.

López, the candidate in Guerrero, has refused to travel in armored vehicles with armed security since his abduction.

"How will it look to see a leader moving around the state of Guerrero with armed officials and in armored cars?" he



asked. "I don't think that's the way to get closer to the people or promote citizen participation."

Thousands of local candidates find themselves in a similar quandary ahead of the June 2 elections, which will occur in all 32 jurisdictions, with more than 20,000 positions up for grabs, making it Mexico's largest election, according to the National Electoral Institute.

While federal authorities offer security details to national candidates, those running for local offices – the ones that drug cartels really want to control – are completely exposed and acutely aware of the optics of running from within a security bubble.

The group Data Civica had tallied 30 attacks on political hopefuls and party officials from September – when most started pre-campaign activities – through Feb. 10. Its spokesperson, Itxaro Arteta, said they were "worried" after recording eight attacks on pre-candidates in January, more than double what they had seen before in that month since 2018.

Political scientist Manuel Pérez Aguirre coordinates the College of Mexico's Violence and Peace Seminar's research into electoral violence. Their investigation around the killings of 32 local candidates in the 2021 elections found that the lethal electoral violence is "predominantly local, because 85% of the victims were running for municipal posts."

"Local power is extremely important to organized crime," Pérez Aguirre said. "That's why they look to establish con-

trol at the municipal level."

Those local candidates have become more vulnerable under the security regime of the current president. López Obrador created the quasi-military National Guard, disbanded the federal police and what remains of local police forces can put up little resistance to heavily armed cartels.

"Local power has really been abandoned and municipal police haven't really been strengthened," Pérez Aguirre said.

López Obrador was dismissive of the concerns of growing electoral violence earlier this week following the killings in Maravatio. "The same tendency of declining crimes is going to continue, above all homicides," he said.

He said the federal government would protect candidates for president, governor and Congress, and he asked state and local governments to provide security for those running for local posts.

Guillermo Valencia, president of the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Michoacan said Saturday, "Four candidates have already resigned on me and I'm struggling to find candidates in other (races)," he said. The party's candidate for Congress in the port of Lázaro Cárdenas already asked for protection, he said.

In Maravatio where the three potential candidates from other parties were already killed, Valencia said he's trying to pact with two other opposition parties to present a common candidate.

"In Michoacan and Mexico democracy is threatened," he said.

Political risk firm Integralia Consultores published a report in February noting that some parts of the country faced higher risk of organized crime interfering in elections because of an accumulation of illegal markets, conflict among armed groups and weak rule of law.

Cartels have diversified beyond the drug trade. They extort protection payments from all sizes of businesses and even local government. They exert their will not only through political assassinations but also by financing the campaigns of candidates who will allow them to operate or even putting up their own candidates, according to Integralia's report.

Marko Cortés, national president of the National Action Party, demanded more federal security for those participating in the elections as he condemned the killing of his party's candidate in Maravatio this week.

"It can't be that they're killing candidates from different parties," he said. "No one is protecting them, there are no risk maps, there are no protocols or security mechanisms and the indifference of those governing now continues."

Because of the violence, at least two candidates from his party have dropped out of the June election race. He declined to say where out of concern for their safety.

But López, who survived his abduction, refused to back down.

"We absolutely cannot surrender, we can't give up," he said. "Those of us who believe things can get better have to continue working." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1975 COMIC GENIUS CHAPLIN IS KNIGHTED



Silent film legend Charlie Chaplin has become Sir Charles after a ceremony at Buckingham Palace. The star of such films as *The Kid* and *The Great Dictator* was knighted in the New Year's Honours List.

The ceremony took place just miles from the south London district where he spent much of his childhood.

Sir Charles was accompanied to Buckingham Palace by his fourth wife, Oona, and the two youngest of his nine children.

The slapstick legend, famed for his acrobatic routines, received his knighthood, from a wheelchair.

It was a reflection of just how late in life – at the age of 85 – his honour had finally come.

As he was pushed into the hall where the ceremony was taking place the band struck up his signature tune, the theme from his 1951 film, *Limelight*.

He sat stiffly as the Queen tapped him on each shoulder and stooped to hang the KBE insignia around his neck.

The two then chatted briefly before Sir Charles was wheeled to the front of the hall to watch the rest of the ceremony.

Speaking to reporters afterwards Sir Charles said he had been "dumbfounded" by the occasion.

He said the Queen had thanked him for what he had done and that his films had helped her a great deal.

Sir Charles' knighthood follows years of calls for him to be honoured.

In the 1940s and 1950s he was accused of "communist sympathies" and vilified in his adopted home of the United States.

In 1952 his US visa was cancelled forcing Chaplin to relocate to Switzerland.

Three years ago, in what was seen as an act of contrition, he was awarded a special Oscar by the US' Academy of Motion Pictures.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Charlie Chaplin died in 1977. In 2002 confidential Foreign Office papers from 1956 released by Britain's Public Record Office revealed the comic's knighthood had been delayed because of his perceived "communist" sympathies. Worries about his morals had also played their part – he was twice married to 16-year-olds and once lost a paternity suit. Charlie Chaplin's body was stolen from his grave and was missing for 11 weeks until recovered in May 1978. Two men were convicted of the theft and trying to extort money from the Chaplin family.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Widen your exploration despite obstacles or delays. Break free from old routines. Try new flavors and ideas. Discover new appreciation for something taken for granted.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Give each other a boost. Combine efforts to save time, resources and trouble. Simplify for more savings. Secure the ground taken. Pull together.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 A formidable barrier blocks the path. Work with someone who sees your blind spots. Stay flexible. A shared challenge can deepen your connection.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Move quickly to maintain an advantage. Practice to build strength and endurance. Draw upon hidden resources. Monitor conditions to avoid delays. Stick to stable ground.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Go for the fun option, despite an obstacle or challenge. Patiently clarify misunderstandings. Stay flexible. Discover romance and beauty where least expected. Get creative.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Domestic comforts draw you in. Cook, clean and then lounge away. Prepare something delicious. Simplify for greater peace of mind. Rest and recharge.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Words can get lost in translation. Actions could backfire. Edit carefully before sending. Don't share a creative project until it's ready. Polish, prepare and refine.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Monitor details carefully to avoid costly mistakes. You may need to move quickly. Things could seem volatile. Watch for hidden opportunities. Lucrative connections could spark.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Let your heart lead. Changes could require adaptation. Watch for hidden dangers. Ignore rumors or gossip. Nurture yourself with personal care and attention.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Escape the noise and chaos. Prepare for a dreamy project. Organize and strategize. Imagine how you'd like things to go. Put the pieces in place.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Have fun with friends. Discuss social changes, solutions and strategies for success. Strengthen connections. Share ideas, contacts and resources. Pull together for a common cause.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 You're on a roll. Don't worry about the money, or lack of it. A fascinating discovery opens new doors. Prepare to launch a dream project.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-1	8	overcast
Changchun	-12	0	fine
Chengdu	6	17	cloudy
Chongqing	9	18	cloudy
Fuzhou	8	23	cloudy
Guangzhou	10	19	overcast
Guiyang	5	24	cloudy
Haikou	15	29	cloudy
Hangzhou	4	13	rain
Harbin	-15	-2	fine
Hefei	2	13	rain
Nanjing	4	11	showers
Shanghai	4	13	rain
Taipei	13	22	cloudy
Wuhan	2	12	rain
Hong Kong	22	23	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-9	0	overcast
Frankfurt	7	12	cloudy
Paris	7	10	cloudy
London	6	11	overcast
New York	7	12	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Rocket launcher; 5- See socially; 9- Folklore fiend; 13- Slang expert Partridge; 14- Like some vbs.; 16- Virginia dance; 17- Rub the wrong way; 18- In the least; 19- Pinchy crustacean; 20- Vow; 21- Milne's "Mr. ___ Passes By"; 22- Cling; 24- Fortuneteller's start; 26- Brainstorm; 27- ___ beaver; 29- Not legally an adult; 33- Omega's opposite; 34- Twiddling one's thumbs; 35- Six feet under; 36- Sun. delivery; 37- Ancient; 38- Mao ___ -tung; 39- Oklahoma city; 41- Cut calories; 42- Fabric woven from flax yarns; 44- System of reckoning time; 46- Flat-topped hills; 47- Transmit; 48- Building block brand; 49- Federal soldier in the Civil War; 52- Male sheep who may play football for Los Angeles!; 53- Whip; 57- Revise; 58- Indian term of respect; 60- Woody Guthrie's son; 61- Letterman rival; 62- Future fungus; 63- Nipple; 64- Jump; 65- The Beatles' "Back in the ___"; 66- Icicle site;

DOWN 1- Sleuth Wolfe; 2- Oratorio highlight; 3- River deposit; 4- Held in lofty esteem; 5- Baby's napkin; 6- Shaw of swing; 7- Streetcar; 8- Slippery swimmer; 9- Group of fruit trees; 10- Richard of "Chicago"; 11- Posterior; 12- Hamburg's river; 15- Elate; 23- Gidget portrayer Sandra; 25- Mediterranean, e.g.; 26- Small bay; 27- Actress Verdugo; 28- Month of showers; 29- Milk container; 30- MetLife competitor; 31- Tenuous substances; 32- Idyllic place; 33- Wait ___!; 34- Trojan War epic; 37- Eccentricity; 40- Writing space; 42- Lower limb; 43- Quarantine; 45- Word used to precede a woman's maiden name; 46- One who belongs to a group; 48- Dens; 49- Shout; 50- Zip-___-Doo-Dah; 51- 1492 vessel; 52- Pi followers; 54- Region; 55- Pole, for one; 56- Table d'___; 59- Clerk on "The Simpsons";

Friday's solution

S	T	O	M	P	P	A	D	S	S	C	O	T
E	R	R	O	R	A	G	U	A	L	A	C	E
L	E	T	B	E	R	I	E	N	A	C	E	R
A	S	S	I	S	T	A	N	T	A	N	T	A
A	L	T	N	E	I	L	L	M	E			
D	I	D	T	A	T	A	A	O	R	T	A	S
E	R	I	C	T	E	R	N	T	E	R		
S	A	F	A	K	I	G	O	D	S	Y	I	A
R	A	N	T	S	L	A	B	R	O	T	O	R
S	C	A	R	I	A	T	E	D	I	N	A	
H	A	R	E	T	S	A	R	D	E	P	O	T

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	
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IAM 28 387 333	
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77.10 m² / 830 ft² | HKD3,880,000



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



Jade Gardem (Taipa)
4 bed 3 bath
379.04 m² / 4,080 ft² | HKD 11,880,000



Supreme Flower City (Taipa)
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BASKETBALL

LeBron reaches 40,000 points, but Jokic, Nuggets use finishing kick to beat Lakers 124-114

AP PHOTO



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) scores as Denver Nuggets forward Michael Porter Jr. (1), defends, during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Saturday

DAN GREENSPAN, LOS ANGELES

LEBRON James reached 40,000 points, but Nikola Jokic had 35 points and 10 rebounds and the Denver Nuggets made a late push to beat the Los Angeles Lakers 124-114 on Saturday night.

Aaron Gordon hit a 3-pointer with 3:49 remaining to put Denver back in front, and the Nuggets closed on a 19-6 run for their sixth straight win. Michael Porter Jr. made all 10 of his shots to finish with 25 points, Jamal Murray had 24 points and 11 assists, and Gordon ended up with 18 points.

"I don't think it matters who we're playing and what night it is, we're coming to win, and we're taking care of business the way we're supposed to," said Justin Holiday, who tied it at 108 with 4:29 remaining.

James had 26 points and nine

assists while checking off his latest milestone, but the Lakers couldn't get their third straight win. Rui Hachimura had 23 points, and Anthony Davis added 17 points and 11 rebounds as all five Los Angeles starters had at least 17 points.

James spun around Porter and drove the lane to hit a layup with 10:39 left in the second quarter to reach 40,000 points as he tries to put the career scoring record out of reach.

"Being the first player to do something, it's pretty cool in this league, just knowing the history, the greats that's come through the league and then you see some of the greats on the floor tonight, it was great to compete," James said. "But for me, the main thing, as always, is to win, and I hated that it had to happen in a defeat."

James received a standing ovation at the next timeout, while coach Darvin Ham gave him a

congratulatory pat on the chest as he came to the sideline. There was an in-arena video presentation, which was preceded and followed by James raising the ball over his head to the delight of fans, many of whom were wearing his Lakers, Cleveland Cavaliers, Miami Heat or St. Vincent-St. Mary High School jerseys.

"Man, you look at a lot of great players that have played this game, and no one was even close to 40," Davis said. "Obviously, it's a great moment, obviously it would be better if we get the win."

The two teams were essentially even through the first 44 minutes before Denver used the one-two punch of Jokic and Murray, with spacing and shot-making around them, to excel in crunch time.

"I think we got a lot of guys who feel comfortable under pressure," Porter said. "You got Nikola, the best player in the world. You know, Jamal with the ball in his hands a lot. And then you got shooters who are ready to knock down shots under pressure time, so just a lot of guys that are comfortable in those situations."

The Nuggets swept the three-game season series, leaving James to admit "they have our number."

"It's always kind of the fourth quarter, the last six minutes or the last few minutes of the game," he said. "They make plays, we don't make plays, and that can be frustrating." **MDT/AP**

AD



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OPINION

Business Views

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



HONG KONG RACES TO FIND ITS PROPERTY MARKET BOTTOM

As fiscal income from land sales evaporates, Hong Kong is removing all of its onerous property cooling measures that have been in place for over a decade. The government is making an audacious attempt to restore normalcy to a market that has come to a standstill. It's showing the world what a true financial center should be.

From now on, foreigners wishing to buy Hong Kong property no longer have to pay the extra stamp duty. Nor do wealthy people who want to own multiple homes — the death of 28-year-old socialite and model Abby Choi put the spotlight on the controversial housing policy. Meanwhile, Hong Kong's central bank eased mortgage rules and lowered loan-to-value ratios in a coordinated move with its fiscal peers.

Removal of these extra levies is clearly meant to boost demand, a no-brainer for a city that relies heavily on real estate. At its 2018 peak, land premium accounted for more than 25% of fiscal income.

More interestingly, Hong Kong is also relaxing restrictions that may lead to a flood of housing units being put up for sale. Those who have owned their homes for less than two years will no longer need to pay the so-called Special Stamp Duty if they are selling. That adds pressure to an industry already flush with new homes. A total of 91,300 flats were unsold as of the 2023 year-end, the highest for almost two decades, according to data from the Hong Kong Housing Bureau.

The Special Stamp Duty, implemented in 2010 to curb speculation, has almost worked too well. Transaction volume tumbled and has ground to a halt as the city's home prices continue to fall. But how does a prospective homebuyer know what the fair price is if an entire district has just an occasional sale here and there? It is only rational they sit on the sidelines.

As such, the removal of this levy will speed up the price discovery process. We will find out faster where the sector bottoms. A market that has no transactions might as well not exist.

To be sure, these encouraging policies don't mean Hong Kong's real estate is near its trough. On average, home prices have fallen by about 25% from their late 2021 peak. While that seems substantial, it pales in comparison to the slump after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. And some worry that another storm is brewing. We have a long way to go if the turn of the century is any guide.

Hong Kong's future is uncertain, but at least the city can promise functional capital markets that will eventually attract investors. A true financial center must not have purchase restrictions or short-selling bans. Hong Kong must keep its appeal.

Courtesy Bloomberg/Shuli Ren

Manufacturing in China contracted for a fifth consecutive month in February, according to an official survey of factory managers released last week, reflecting persistent weakness in the economy ahead of annual legislative meetings where officials are expected to boost policy support.

The official purchasing managers index, or PMI, fell to 49.1 in February from 49.2 the month before. The PMI is on a scale up to 100 where 50 marks the cutoff between expansion and contraction.

The manufacturing PMI has fallen in ten of the past eleven months, rising only in September.

February's reading comes in spite of Beijing's recent measures to shore up the economy, including reducing a lending rate that benchmarks home loans and cutting banks' reserve requirements to boost lending.

A separate survey by financial news outlet Caixin found that manufacturing PMI edged up from 50.8 to 50.9.

"We think it makes sense to average across both PMIs to gauge conditions in industry," Capital Economics' Huang Zichun said.

AP PHOTO



Bollywood actor Rani Mukherjee, center, arrives at airport to attend the pre-wedding celebrations of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant in Jamnagar, India, last week

INDIA'S RICHEST MAN IS BRINGING RIHANNA AND 1,200 GUESTS TO A PRE-WEDDING BASH FOR HIS SON

ASHOK SHARMA & AJIT SOLANKI, JAMNAGAR

It might be the biggest party this small west Indian city has ever seen. As billionaire industrialist Mukesh Ambani prepares for the wedding of his son this summer, he's expecting billionaires from around the world, heads of state, and Hollywood and Bollywood royalty to attend a three-day bash in the family's hometown, starting Friday.

The nearly 1,200-person guest list includes Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Sunder Pichai and Ivanka Trump; Indian billionaires Gautam Adani and Kumar Mangalam Birla; legendary cricketer Sachin Tendulkar; and Bollywood celebrities such as Deepika Padukone, Shah Rukh Khan and Rani Mukherjee.

They'll be entertained by pop superstar Rihanna, magician David Blaine and famous Bollywood singers.

The party is in Jamnagar,

a city of around 600,000 in a near-desert part of Gujarat state. It's the family's hometown, and the home of the main oil refinery of their business empire, Reliance Industries. There will also be traditional ceremonies in a temple complex.

Last week, the Ambani family organized a community food service for 51,000 people living in nearby villages.

Anant Ambani, 28, is set to marry long-time girlfriend Radhika Merchant in July. Merchant is the daughter of Viren Merchant, CEO of Encore Healthcare Pvt. Ltd., and entrepreneur Shaila Merchant.

The three-day pre-wedding bash provides a glimpse of the opulence expected at the wedding itself.

Guests will don jungle-themed outfits to visit an animal rescue center run by Anant Ambani. Known as "Vantara," meaning "Star Of The Forest," the 3,000 acre center houses abused, injured and endangered ani-

mals, especially elephants.

The invitation says guests will start each day with a new dress code, with mood boards and an army of hair stylists, makeup artists and Indian wear designers at their hotel to help them prepare.

Forbes lists Mukesh Ambani as the richest person in Asia. His Reliance Industries is a massive conglomerate, with \$100 billion in annual revenue and interests ranging from oil and gas to telecoms and retail.

The 66-year-old Mukesh Ambani has begun handing over leadership to his sons and daughter. Elder son Akash is now chairperson of Reliance Jio; daughter Isha oversees retail; and younger son Anant has been inducted into the new energy business.

The guest list also includes Mohammed Bin Jassim al Thani, the prime minister of Qatar; Stephen Harper, former Canadian prime minister; and the king and queen of Bhutan. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Ukraine Seven people were killed when debris from a Russian drone hit an apartment block in the southern Ukrainian port city of Odesa overnight, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said Saturday. A 3-month-old baby was among the dead. A further eight people were injured, authorities said. Odesa regional Gov. Oleh Kiper said the Shahed drone was shot down by Ukrainian air defenses, and that the falling debris hit the apartment building.

Russia A drone crashed into an apartment building in St. Petersburg Saturday morning, according to Russian state news agency RIA Novosti. Six people received medical help after the explosion rocked the building, the agency said, citing the press service of the city's health care committee. The Mash news site said that the apartment building was hit by a Ukrainian drone.

AP PHOTO



German authorities on Saturday said they were investigating after an audio recording, in which German military officers purportedly discussed support for Ukraine, including the potential use of Taurus missiles, was published in Russia. Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who was in Rome on Saturday, called it a "very serious matter" and said that German authorities were working to clarify the matter "very carefully, very intensively and very quickly."

Sudan Mass violence and gross human rights violations in South Sudan continue unabated ahead of landmark elections due to take place in December, a report by the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan has warned. Patterns of violence, violations and entrenched impunity continue to blight the lives of an extremely vulnerable population, the report said, warning that the already dire humanitarian situation in the country will deteriorate further.