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“ THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’ ”

**OXFAM IS HOLDING A PHOTO EXHIBITION TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE, THE LOCAL OFFICE OF THE CHARITY ORGANIZATION HAS ANNOUNCED**

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**Malaysia's** prime minister yesterday spoke up in defense of ties with China and complained over alleged pressure by the United States and its allies on regional nations to take sides in the West's strategic rivalries with Beijing. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's remarks came during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit in Melbourne, Australia, where Anwar is one of nine Asian leaders attending the gathering.



**Philippine** President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said yesterday that he had no choice but to defend his country's territory in the South China Sea against what he called Chinese pressure and "illegal actions" in pursuit of Beijing's own territorial claims. "It is unfortunate that despite the clarity provided by international law, provocative, unilateral and illegal actions continue to infringe upon our sovereignty, our sovereign rights and jurisdictions," Marcos told the Lowy Institute international policy think tank in Melbourne.



**India** announced plans for a new naval base off the country's south-west coast and close to Maldives, as tensions are running high between Delhi and the island nation. The Indian Navy said it plans to build a base called INS Jatayu on Minicoy, the southernmost island in the Lakshadweep archipelago. India's Lakshadweep islands lie about 130 km north of the Maldives. It said a more detailed plan will be published tomorrow.

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## TWO SESSIONS

# CHINA SEEKS WAYS TO REVIVE ECONOMY AS NPC CONVENES



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**ENVIRONMENT**  
**GOV'T PUSH FOR EVS YET TO SHOW SIGNIFICANT RESULTS**

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TWO SESSIONS

# XIA BAOLONG PROMISES TO VISIT SAR IN 2024: MACAU CPPCC MEMBER

ANTHONY LAM

CHINA'S top official concerning affairs of the Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of Macau and Hong Kong has promised to visit Macau at an appropriate time, local media has reported.

Communist Party of China Central Committee Hong Kong & Macao Work Office Director and State Council Hong Kong & Macao Affairs Office Director Xia Baolong last month inspected Hong Kong and the city's situation during the post-Covid resumption of normalcy and amid the city's discussion of its local national security legislation.

Upon the expectation that the official will conduct a similar visit to Macau, some Macau members of the Chinese People's Political

Consultative Conference (CPPCC) have been cited by local media as saying that Xia had promised to visit Macau soon.

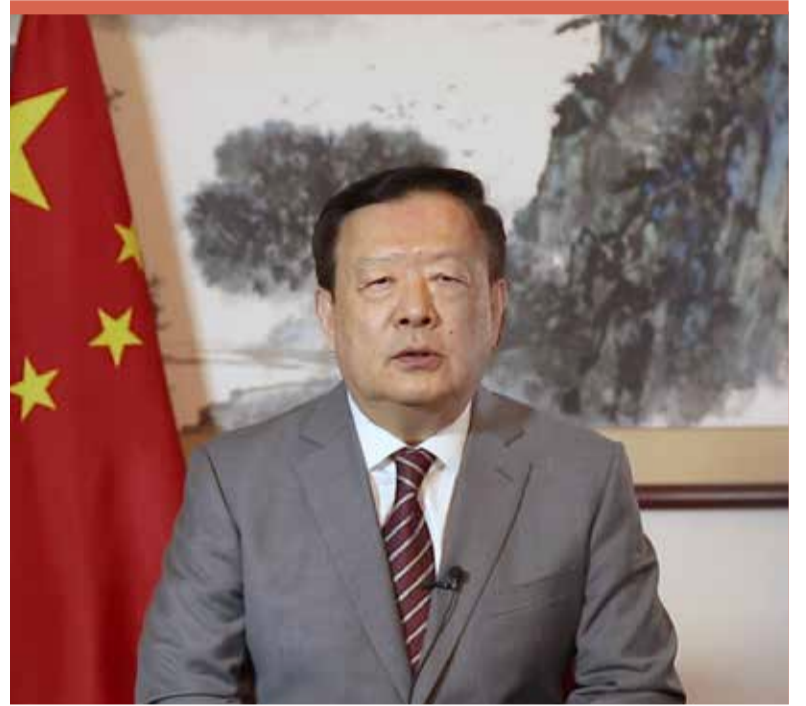
Member Mok Chi Wai cited Xia as saying that he will visit Macau "at an appropriate time" this year. Mok added that the official visited Macau last year and found the city's development "relatively satisfactory." Despite not pinpointing a precise time, Xia was cited as hoping that people in Macau will continue with their diligence.

Mok also pointed out that Xia mentioned the "border closure in Hengqin" and described the matter as "happy." He was also happy to see Macau forecasting greater opportunities. He hoped that Macau CPPCC members could work well on both sides and "help overcome challenges faced during the early phase" of development. The

official also hoped that the city can live out its unique advantages and uses – despite its small size – to realize the initial intention of Hengqin's development.

Member Fanny Vong, who is the president of the Macao Institute of Tourism Studies (IFTM), said that Xia started by sending regards from President Xi Jinping to the CPPCC members and all Macau residents. Xia described Macau as a pearl to the Central People's Government and as having a unique function to Beijing given its multiple and wide international connections.

Some members also cited Xia as saying that last year's revision of Macau's gaming law was a very important matter and would be of great help to Macau's future. He described Macau's gaming industry as relatively orderly and healthy.



Xia Baolong

TWO SESSIONS

# Macau delegates with special visa proposals on the agenda

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macau delegates to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) are aiming to discuss matters related to the creation of special visas that would allow visitors from the mainland to visit Macau.

From the series of interventions that started yesterday, the Macau delegate and director of the Health Bureau, Alvis Lo, said that he would be proposing a new type of visa, aiming to promote Macau's medical tourism.

The new Medical Tourism Visa would allow mainland residents to travel multiple times to Macau over a given period to attend medical appointments and make use of medical services at the new Islands Medical Complex.

But Lo was not the only Macau delegate with the topic of special visas on the agenda as local businessman Kevin Ho is



also aiming to see developments on a similar topic. This time, Ho aims to see also the creation of a new "Sports Visa."

As the name denotes, this new type of visa would allow the entry of mainland visitors to Macau to take part in sports-related events.

To the media at the Macau International Airport, Ho said that the creation of such a visa would help promote the development of Macau as a "Sports City."

He also expressed hopes that this idea would be a reality very soon taking into account that

Macau is one of three cities that will co-host the upcoming edition of China's National Games that will take place next year in Macau, Hong Kong, and Guangzhou.

Addressing a completely different topic, the lawmaker and principal of Pui Ching Middle School, Kou Kam Fai, also traveled to Beijing but, in this case, to speak about the development of patriotic education as well as to express ideas on the management model of local educational institutions that have established branches in Hengqin.

# MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES PREVALENT AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

STAFF REPORTER

THE Richmond Fellowship of Macau has reported an increasing number of young people seeking assistance for mental health concerns. Through their outreach program, they have also discovered previously unknown cases. Similarly, the Social Welfare Bureau has observed a rise in young individuals with emotional struggles reaching out to their service hotline for help, as cited in a TDM report.

The Richmond Fellowship of Macau offers home visits and support to individuals with mental illness. With the growing demand for their services, the organization has expressed the need



for more counselors to provide assistance.

The organization not only helps individuals directly but also extends support and advice to their families and friends, guiding them on how to best assist individuals with mental illness.

In 2023, the two help hotlines provided by the Social Welfare Bureau and Caritas received a total of 11,800 calls for assistance. This number indicated a general decrease of 10% in cases compared to the previous

year. However, the increase in the number of young individuals seeking help is viewed as a concerning trend.

Wong Kuan U, a social worker for the organization, explained, "In our program, we regularly visit the homes of individuals in need. Besides receiving calls on our hotline, we also identify hidden cases through our outreach activities. Therefore, we require additional staff as our current manpower is insufficient."

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AUTOMOBILE

# Gov't push for EVs yet to show significant results

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE local automobile sector continued to grow slightly last year, presenting an increase year-on-year of just 0.92% when compared to the year 2022, statistics from the Transport Bureau (DSAT) show.

At the end of last year, there were a total of 251,867 motorized vehicles registered in Macau, 2,286 more than at the end of 2022.

From the almost 252,000 vehicles registered in Macau, the Electric Vehicles (EVs), including those that possess petrol-powered generators for extended autonomy, represented only 3.23% of the total (8,131 vehicles), showing that the push from the government for the replacement of fossil fuel-powered vehicles for EVs is still a long way off producing significant results.

According to DSAT there are currently homologated in Macau 379 different EV car models (in-

cluding heavy-duty vehicles) from 72 different brands, and in addition another 114 models from 40 brands of motorcycles.

The brand that has the most homologations is Tesla with 44 different models and versions, followed by BMW with 28, BYD with 22, and Mercedes Benz with 21. Of the two-wheeled vehicles, the brand holding the largest number of homologations is Nibeot with 19 models and versions, followed by NIU with 14 and BlueShark and Wuyang-Honda both with 6.

More detailed statistics from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) show that from the 11,974 new vehicles registered in 2023, a large majority were made in Japan (3,673) followed by those made in mainland China (3,232) and Taiwan (2,996).

In January this year, a total of 1,324 vehicles were registered, a significantly higher number than in the same month last year (784).

In the first month of this year,

Japan continued to lead in terms of the place of origin of most of the vehicles registered in Macau (490), but mainland China (455) followed closely. This happened mostly due to an increase in the sales, early this year, of EVs (430), which in January represented some 32.48% of all new vehicles registered.

If such a trend continues during the upcoming months, 2024 will likely be the year that marks a significant change in the local automobile sector panorama.

The government is also contributing to the growth of EV numbers, owing a total of 110 EVs at the end of 2023. Among these are 71 light cars, 1 heavy vehicle, and 38 motorcycles.

## ROADS AND CARPARKS FULL

According to the same statistics published by DSAT, at the end of last year, 49,351 people in Macau owned two or more private vehicles (including cars and motorcy-



RENATO MARQUES

cles). The figure shows that a large percentage of the vehicles registered in Macau are owned by the same people.

Concurrently DSAT said that there is one person who owns a total of 112 vehicles in Macau, while another person owns as many as 87.

In a top 10 ranking organized by the bureau, it is also possible

to see that 10 different people in Macau own 35 or more vehicles. Note that this ranking only refers to individuals and not companies, entities, or institutions and only applies to private-use vehicles.

In total, the 10 people with the most vehicles under their belt own as many as 567 vehicles between them.

OXFAM

# Exhibition highlights climate change challenges

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE local office of international charity organization Oxfam is holding a photo exhibition to raise awareness of the impact of climate change, the office has announced in a statement.

Oxfam said that extreme weather conditions have become more frequent globally with a growing severity of impact on humanity and the environment. It is a significant challenge for current and future generations, the group added.

As such, the group desires to utilize this photographic exhibition to tell the stories about the way in which vulnerable groups of people have coped with climate change and consequential challenges.

Oxfam hopes that, after visiting the exhibition, the public will gain a deeper understanding of the impact of climate change across the globe, and



through their own actions, take steps to protect the environment. It also urges decision-makers to encourage the reduction of emissions and provide assistance to climate-vulnerable groups, thus promoting climate justice, the charity added.

The group joins hands with humanist photographer Qiu Bi, who has in the past year immersed herself in several remote areas in Asia and witnessed how unpredictable weather had led to crop failures

and how climate disasters devastated the homes of many people.

The exhibition will feature the livelihoods of communities in various regions, such as Liugou Village in Shaanxi Province, Wangjinzhuang Village in Hebei Province, Gyatang Grassland in Qinghai Province, and the Baitadi District of Nepal.

The exhibition is now open at Big Pie Art Space, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day from now until the end of March.

2024  
16.03

# MEDITERRANEO

An early music odyssey

## L'ARPEGGIATA

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Macau Cultural Institute

**MACAU FEATURE  
FILM GOES ON  
LOCAL RELEASE**

The debut feature film of local director Mike Ao leong, titled "I Want to be a Plastic Chair," is currently being shown in Macau cinemas until March 17. The film originally premiered at the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival in December, as reported by TDM. Ao expressed to the media his belief in the significance of showcasing high-quality, independent films from Macau to the global audience. He aims to foster international curiosity about the local film industry and demonstrate that the SAR's productions are "unique and different from ordinary commercial films." "I think we need the support of the whole industry to be able to do that," he added.

**IPIM PROMOTES  
MACAU-HENGQIN  
BUSINESS  
ENVIRONMENT**

The Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) has organized a visit for a delegation of 40 representatives from the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) big health industry to promote business opportunities in Macau and Hengqin. The representatives, including those from listed TCM enterprises, were provided with information on the business environment, investment advantages, and Macau's role as a platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries. The Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau also explained the policies for regulating the TCM industry. The visit was organized by the Guangzhou Nansha Guangdong-Macao Development Promotion Association and the Guangdong International Chamber of Commerce for the Private Sector.



**CRIME**

# CUSTOMS ARREST FOUR IN ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION CASE

**ANTHONY LAM**

**T**HE Macao Customs have uncovered a case of illegal immigration, arrested four people and confiscated a boat, the law-enforcement authority announced in a statement.

On the night of Feb. 29, through its smart monitoring system and infrared videography equipment, the Customs caught sight of a suspicious engine-operated boat over the sea off the Exterior Harbour. The Customs described the boat as having irregular paths, which led the authority to suspect illegal activities.

Deploying its officers, clippers and drones, the Customs intercepted a male illegal immigrant at the dock of the Macau Fishermen's Wharf. On the sea off the coast, the Customs discovered

three more people, including the male captain of the boat, an assistant and an illegal immigrant.

The four men are mainland residents and aged between 32 and 44 years. The two men who assisted in human smuggling activities were alleged to have committed the crime of facilitating illegal entry and exit and illegal stay.

In addition, the illegal immigrant intercepted along the coast had been banned from entering Macau and was suspected of committing the crime of entry without immigration control.

After court trial, the two men who assisted in human smuggling activities were detained for committing the crime of assisting illegal entry and exit and illegal stay. The other two men who illegally entered and exited the city were transferred to the Immigra-

tion Control Department of the Public Security Police Force (PSP) for further actions.

**TWO PEOPLE ARRESTED  
FOR ROBBERY**

In another case, the Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested two people for suspected robbery. The victim is a female student from outside of Macau. The case has been reported to the police recently. The girl claimed that she was robbed on the street by two men and lost HKD1,000 in cash.

On Feb. 28 night, the girl passed by a casino on Rua de Gonzaga Gomes on her own. Upon seeing the two suspects, she was forced into a pawn shop nearby and retrieved HKD1,000 using certain of her belongings.

Afterwards, the girl reported the case to the police.

The police reported that the case was solved in only four hours, with the arrest of the two men just after midnight on Feb. 29, in an illegal hostel. During their further investigations, the police also discovered that the two men were allegedly involved in swindling cases as well.

**15 VICTIMS OF SWINDLERS**

A young male student from outside of Macau also reportedly encountered the two men on Avenida de Wai Long in Cotai. The two men were said to have borrowed money from the boy.

The police believed that the duo intentionally departed for Macau with criminal intentions and that they were involved in swindling at least 15 victims using the same strategy. Six victims have been reached, who reported a total loss of MOP3,700.

Charges of robbery and swindling have been laid against the two people, the police added.

The police took the chance to emphasize that they have zero tolerance against similar cases that "may cause disturbances to both residents and visitors."

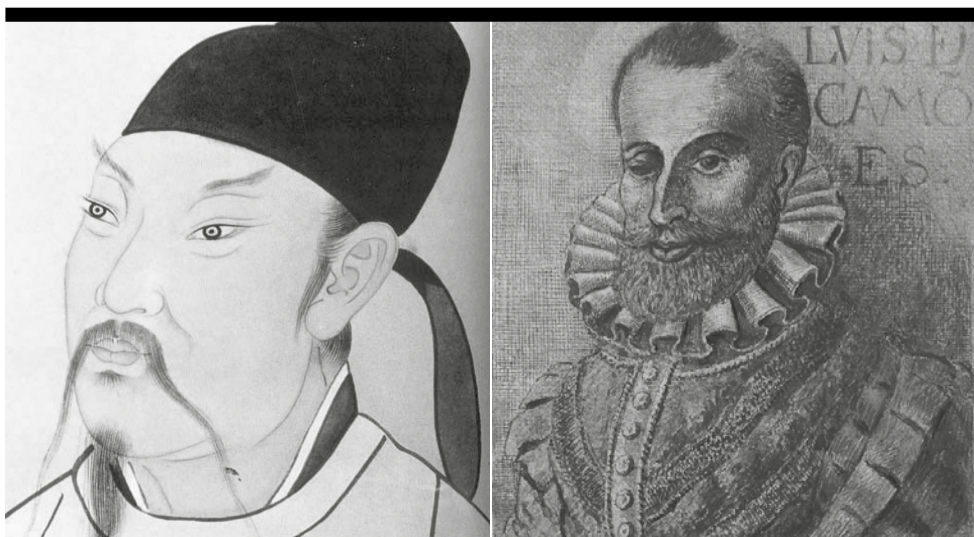
The PSP, meanwhile, have uncovered two cases of evasion of responsibilities and arrested two violators.

In one of the cases, a motorcyclist was knocked down by a tour coach that was switching lanes. The coach driver did not stop and fled the scene. Confirming the motorcyclist's complaint, the police arrested the coach driver, who was in his fifties, and pressed charges against him.

In the other case, a staff member at a local hotel reported a damaged carpark entrance gate, suspiciously damaged by a car. Investigations pointed towards an exiting vehicle whose driver did not report the crash.

The driver, in his forties, was later arrested and a charge was laid against him.

# Macau Literary Festival to celebrate poetry of Li Bai and Luís de Camões



Libai and Camões

**STAFF REPORTER**

**T**HE 13th edition of The Script Road - Macau Literary Festival will be held at Casa Garden from March 8 to 17. After being moved to the fall during the pandemic, the festival returns to its original spring schedule.

This edition will celebrate the poetry of Li Bai and Luís de Camões.

Notable guests include Chinese author Dong Xi and American novelist Chang-rae Lee. The festival will also commemorate

the 50th anniversary of the Portuguese Carnation Revolution of 1974.

The opening of The Script Road will focus on Li Bai, a renowned poet, through a photography exhibition by Xu Peiwu. Xu retraced Li Bai's footsteps and captured the landscapes that influenced the poet during his travels across China. During the first weekend of the festival, several works will be presented, including the anthology "Primavera Tardia" by San San, a highly regarded young Chinese writer.

Additionally, James Zimmerman, an American lawyer residing in China for over 25 years, will present "The Peking Express," a book that recounts the Great Railway Robbery of

1923, a significant event in Chinese history and a turning point in the country's civil war.

The 50th anniversary of the Portuguese April 25 democratic Revolution will also be commemorated during the first days of the festival. João Céu Silva will present to the Macau public his work "The General who started April 25 two months before the captains" - the never-before-told story of how General António Spínola brought down the old regime.

Various events, including book presentations, discussions, exhibitions, and performances, will take place throughout the festival. Macau cuisine, women's writing, and visual arts will be among the topics covered.

BANKING

# Former chairman of state-owned Bank of Beijing investigated for alleged corruption

**T**HE former chairman of the state-owned Bank of Beijing is under investigation for corruption, the latest in a series of graft investigations focused on the country's financial sector.

Yan Bingzhu, who led the bank since its establishment in 1996 and until he retired in 2017, is among several top officials being probed for "seriously violating discipline and the law," according to a notice published on the city of Beijing's official website on Friday.

He is the latest official to be probed for graft as part of President Xi Jinping's decade-long anti-corruption campaign that critics say has been used partly to remove his political rivals.

Yan had not appeared in public for more than six months.

Xi in January vowed to intensify the crackdown against misconduct in the finance, energy and infrastructure sectors, a move observers fear may further stifle the country's economic recovery.

Another retired financial executive, Tang Shuangning, who served as chairman of China Everbright Group, was arrested two months ago on suspicion of



embezzlement and bribery.

Others who have been targeted for alleged corruption include a former Chinese central bank senior official, Sun Guofeng, who was sentenced to over 16 years in prison for accepting bribes.

Sun Deshun, former president of state-owned China CI-

TIC Bank, was also sentenced to life imprisonment for accepting more than \$130 million in bribes during his career. Another finance executive, Zhang Hongli, a former senior executive of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the country's biggest bank, has also been investigated for graft. **MDT/AP**

TECH

## APPLE FINED NEARLY \$2 BILLION BY THE EU OVER MUSIC STREAMING COMPETITION

**T**HE European Union leveled its first antitrust penalty against Apple, fining the U.S. tech giant nearly \$2 billion for breaking the bloc's competition laws by unfairly favoring its own music streaming service over rivals.

Apple banned app developers from "fully informing iOS users about alternative and cheaper music subscription services outside of the app," said the European Commission, the 27-nation bloc's executive arm and top antitrust enforcer.

That is illegal under EU antitrust rules. Apple behaved this way for almost a decade, which meant many users paid "significantly higher prices for music streaming subscriptions," the commission said.

The 1.8 billion-euro fine follows a long-running investigation triggered by a complaint from Swedish streaming service Spotify five years ago.

The EU has led global efforts to crack down on Big Tech companies, including a series of multibillion-dollar fines for Google and charging Meta with distorting the online classified ad market. The commission also has opened a separate antitrust investigation into Apple's mobile payments service.

The commission's investigation initially centered on two concerns. One was the iPhone maker's practice of forcing app developers that are selling digital content to use its in-house payment system, which charges a

30% commission on all subscriptions.

But the EU later dropped that to focus on how Apple prevents app makers from telling their users about cheaper ways to pay for subscriptions that don't involve going through an app.

The investigation found that Apple banned streaming services from telling users about how much subscription offers cost outside of their apps, including links in their apps to pay for alternative subscriptions or even emailing users to tell them about different pricing options.

The fine comes the same week that new EU rules are set to kick in that are aimed at preventing tech companies from dominating digital markets.

The Digital Markets Act, due to take effect Thursday, imposes a set of do's and don'ts on "gatekeeper" companies including Apple, Meta, Google parent Alphabet, and TikTok parent ByteDance — under threat of hefty fines.

The DMA's provisions are designed to prevent tech giants from the sort of behavior that's at the heart of the Apple investigation. Apple has already revealed how it will comply, including allowing iPhone users in Europe to use app stores other than its own and enabling developers to offer alternative payment systems.

The commission also has opened a separate antitrust investigation into Apple's mobile payments service, and the company has promised to open up its tap-and-go mobile payment system to rivals in order to resolve it. **MDT/AP**

## CORPORATE BITS

### Wynn opens Palace Reserve Club



Wynn Palace announces the debut of its new landmark for mingling and socializing, the Palace Reserve Club.

Palace Reserve Club offers a "vibrant space and

sophisticated ambience complemented by inspiring mixology and exciting entertainment," according to a statement issued by the gaming operator.

The Palace Reserve Club

was recently unveiled with "Extravaganza of Blossoms" party, the celebratory after-party for Wynn Signature Chinese Wine Awards.

Inspired by the carefree drinking dens of the 1920s, the Palace Reserve Club has a "one-of-a-kind, dynamic, energetic atmosphere, hosting parties and events for guests to enjoy in a relaxed setting." A selection of wines, spirits, teas and gourmet food are on offer, alongside signature cocktails with an Eastern flair created by Wynn's Master Mixologist, Mariena Mercer Boarini.

Also, "Open Mic Night" allows talented guests to perform with the live band on weekends.

### 132 accommodations in Hong Kong receive high ratings: Booking.com



Through a survey conducted by Booking.com, it was revealed that more than three-quarters (80%) of respondents feel more alive than ever when they are on vacation and exploring new places.

In conjunction with the twelfth edition of the Traveller Review Awards, Booking.com is unveiling the 10 Most Welcoming Cities on Earth for 2024, accompanied by a comprehensive

guide on how to make the most of these charming destinations.

Among the winners of the Traveller Review Awards 2024, Hong Kong shines brightly as a recipient, having achieved recognition for its outstanding hospitality and service. Within the city, 132 hotels, apartments, guest houses and more earned high traveler ratings on Booking.com, placing them at the pinnacle of customer satisfaction.

The top 10 accommodations in Hong Kong that received a traveler review score of over 8 on Booking.com includes Four Points by Sheraton Hong Kong, Tung Chung, Grand Hyatt Hong Kong, Hotel ICON, Hotel Stage and K11 ARTUS, among others.



## NPC BEIJING SEEKS WAYS TO REVIVE SLOWING ECONOMY AND SALVAGE PROPERTY MARKET AS CONGRESS CONVENES

DAKE KANG & ELAINE  
KURTENBACH, BEIJING

IT'S clear that China's efforts to build confidence in its slowing economy will top the agenda of its national legislature, which convenes today in Beijing.

What remains unclear is how the ruling Communist Party can navigate toward stronger, sustained growth as China's workforce is aging, relations with Washington are fraught, and housing construction — a main driver of the economy — is in crisis.

Hopes for a strong, consumer-led recovery after severe anti-virus controls ended in late 2022 have not been fulfilled. Local governments are mired in trillions of dollars of debt and direct investment by foreign companies in China fell by about 80% last year.

As more than 5,000 leaders from across China are gathered in Beijing for the year's biggest political events, the mood on the streets and in financial markets remains glum.

That's in contrast to official messaging as the country marks 75 years from the People's Republic's founding in 1949.

"We are confident of consolidating and enhancing the recovering and growing trend of the economy," the party newspaper People's Daily wrote in a commentary Saturday.

"We are fully capable of turning pressure into a driving force, accumulating and turning advantages into victorious trends and steering the advance of the great ship of the economy while braving wind and waves," it added.

For videographer Wang Tao, the question is what the leadership will do about jobs. At 41, he's struggling to find work in a labor market where companies tend not to hire anyone over 35.

"At first I thought it was difficult only for older people like me, but later I found out that many young people ... are having a hard time finding work," Wang said. "The general employment situation is grave."

State media suggest Premier Li Qiang will forecast today a 5% growth, on par with last year's 5.2% growth.

Many economists are forecasting growth will slow to below 5%. In 2022, it dipped to 3%, the second-lowest level since at least the 1970s.

Li's annual work report today at NPC's opening session will include plans for "promoting high-quality development and advancing Chinese modernization," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Many in China are hoping that will mean more government

spending, said Logan Wright of the Rhodium Group, an independent research firm.

"Everyone will be watching for whether there is significant fiscal stimulus on offer," Wright said. But spending alone won't suffice. "The time to solve the short-term problems and prevent them from becoming long-term problems is now. So what is the plan?" Wright said.

The downturn in the property market followed a crackdown on excess borrowing by real estate developers. Dozens since have defaulted on their debts. The largest, Country Garden, faces liquidation proceedings. Another, China Evergrande, is being liquidated with more than \$300 billion in debt.

Plunging tax revenues from property sales are also weighing on the financial system. To encourage more property lending, the central bank has cut its five-year prime loan rate. Many cities have relaxed controls on property deals imposed earlier to cool price bubbles, and some 6,000 property projects have been green-lighted for lending.

"The property market has been such a significant source of China's growth and now it has gone into reverse," Wright said, though he noted there are signs the market is stabilizing. "If you

look at how China is responding to this, it is indicative of a more severe slowdown than what the official data would suggest."

The problems deepened with shocks from the pandemic, when anti-virus controls led some cities into weeklong shutdowns and factories ended up with huge backlogs. Now, instead of soaring prices, China is trying to fend off a potentially debilitating cycle of deflation, or chronically falling prices.

Exports, another main driver of growth, dropped in 2023 for the first time in seven years, even as the U.S. economy remained defied forecasts that it would fall into recession.

Despite official indications that China's yearslong anti-monopoly and data security crackdowns on technology companies have ended, entrepreneurs are jittery. Many small businesses complain they cannot collect on bills owed to them, and bankruptcies have soared.

Meanwhile, global companies have been shifting investments to countries like India and Vietnam to minimize risks from China-U.S. political tensions and the party's tighter domestic controls.

"The lack of transparency creates a lot of uncertainty," said James Zimmerman, a lawyer and former head of the American Chamber of

Commerce in Beijing. That's particularly true when it comes to issues of national security, he said, where just conducting research for due diligence can land people in jail.

Xi's talks with President Joe Biden and U.S. business leaders at a regional summit in San Francisco in September conveyed the message that "China is open for business," Zimmerman said, "but there was nothing in there in his presentation that got to specifics about what reform and what type of changes are going to happen, you know, to give people the comfort level."

These challenges come at a time of transition.

China's workforce has been shrinking for over a decade, putting pressure on an economy that still relies on labor-intensive industries. With housing prices falling and stocks prices limping along, even middle-class families are scrimping rather than spending.

"Spending power is worse than before, probably because we didn't make money during the pandemic," said Jiang Yingjie, a salesperson in Beijing.

One strategy would be to shift more national wealth into workers' pockets, says Michael Pettis, a leading expert on the Chinese economy and professor at Beijing University.

"The problem in China has been the same problem for the last 10 years ... and that is that domestic demand driven by consumption is very weak," he said. Meanwhile, excess investment in construction is yielding diminishing returns.

"So this year is really a year in which they try to figure those imbalances out. They want to raise consumption. But it's very hard to do that because that involves a major redistribution of income," Pettis said.

Worries that China may try to export its way out of its troubles are already raising alarm in the U.S. and Europe, as Chinese banks step up lending to manufacturers of electric vehicles, solar panels and many other industrial products. The issue already features highly in talks between Beijing and Washington.

"If you manufacture more and more and you don't consume it, then you need trade surpluses to absorb it," Pettis said.

Some Chinese localities are trying another approach, creating affordable housing programs that invest in unoccupied apartments. Such a move can counter growing inequality and free up more income for spending.

"I think it has to be a combination of short and longer-term measures," said Louis Kuijs, Asia-Pacific chief economist at S&P Global. "I think anything that can be done to pump momentum into the economy will be helpful."

MDT/AP

TWO SESSIONS

# China says it is eliminating annual news conference by premier

KEN MORITSUGU & ELAINE KURTENBACH, BEIJING

**C**HINA'S government said yesterday it is eliminating an annual news conference by the premier that was one of the rare times a top Chinese leader took questions from journalists.

Lou Qinjian, the spokesperson for the National People's Congress, said on the eve of the opening of the legislature's annual session that Premier Li Qiang would not hold a news conference at its conclusion, as it has every year since 1993.

The move appears to be in line with a diminishing of the premier's power, and that of the government bureaucracy generally, as the Communist Party and leader Xi Jinping centralize control of the nation's affairs, said Alfred Wu, an associate professor at the National University of Singapore.

"Because the structure now is the party leads, the premier is more like an implementer of the party's orders, so no longer so important," he said. "That's the main message."

The weeklong meeting of the congress, which opens today, is being closely watched for any indications of what steps the government will take to boost the struggling economy. Li will present an annual report at the opening that is expected to include the government's economic growth target for 2024.

Yesterday, state leaders including Xi and Li attended the opening session of a parallel advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, in the immense, red-carpeted chamber of the Great Hall of the People on one side of Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

Lou said that journalists would be given more opportunities to ask questions of government ministers and other officials, as well as of the nearly 3,000 delegates to the congress. The last time there was no premier's press conference



President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang (right) during the opening session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing, yesterday

after the congress was in 1992, state broadcaster CCTV said.

"If there are no special circumstances, the premier's press conference will not be held in the following years of this National People's Congress," he said, referring to its current five-year term that ends in 2027.

Lou, speaking on a range of issues, insisted that China remains open to foreign business and investment, rejecting concerns that have been raised about recent changes to the national security laws. He also expressed confidence that the nation could overcome any restrictions placed on its access to technology.

The spokesperson reiterated government reassurances that revisions to the espionage law are not targeting normal business, scientific and academic activity and exchanges. China opposes efforts to smear and undermine its business environment by misinterpreting the law, he said.

The revised law "improves the definition of espionage and clarifies illegal behaviors and the boundaries of legal behavior to enhance the certainty and security of foreign com-

panies and foreigners investing, working, and living in China," he said.

Foreign businesspeople say that uncertainties remain over what is and is not illegal.

Lou also said that no one can put a "stranglehold" on China when it comes to technology, citing the development of China's own GPS-like satellite navigation system.

"This example fully demonstrates that as long as we persist in being self-reliant, there are no difficulties that cannot be overcome," he said. "For any known technology ... it is only a matter of time before we develop it."

Lou declined to comment on this year's U.S. presidential election and its impact on China's relations with the United States. He did take issue with attacks by American lawmakers and their trips to Taiwan.

"Frankly speaking, ordinary Chinese people often see members of the U.S. Congress put out bills to counter China, target Chinese institutions, companies and nationals or even make provocative visits to China's Taiwan region," he said.

How much military

spending will grow is expected to be revealed at the opening of the congress today. Lou didn't comment on this year's increase, but his response suggested that it would be similar to the recent trend of more moderate growth in percentage terms than the double-digit rises that ended in 2015. Last year's hike was 7.2%.

Helena Legarda, a defense and foreign policy analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Berlin, expects a 6% to 7% increase, which she said would reflect the importance the government is placing on defense even as it wants to boost the economy.

"This would signal quite clearly that Beijing is quite concerned about its international environment and therefore prioritizing military modernization at the expense of certain other economic or social policy issues," she said.

Lou said that China has "promoted the simultaneous improvement of national defense and economic strength" in recent years while maintaining a reasonable level of spending on its military. MDT/AP

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AP PHOTO



This photo provided by the Ukrainian police, shows emergency workers on the site of a destroyed multi-store building after a Russian attack on residential neighbourhood in Odesa, Saturday

## PUTIN'S WAR

# A woman clutching an infant is found in the rubble of Ukraine building after Russian drone strike

SUSIE BLANN &  
JOANNA KOZLOWSKA, KYIV

**P**RESIDENT Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Western allies to boost Ukraine's air defenses after a Russian drone strike destroyed an apartment block in the southern port city of Odesa and killed at least 11 people. Officials yesterday [Macau time] said the bodies of a boy — and a young woman clutching an infant — were pulled from Saturday's rubble.

"The mother tried to cover the 8-month-old child with her own (body). She tried to save them. They were found in a firm embrace," said a Telegram post published on the interior ministry's official channel. Separately, the governor of the Odesa region, Oleh Kiper, said the other child was 10.

On Saturday, Ukrainian authorities said another baby was among those killed after falling debris from an Iranian-made drone hit the building — one of eight Russian drones reported by officials. Later that day, Zelenskyy said a second child aged 2 had also died.

"Delays in the delivery of weapons to Ukraine, as well as air defense to protect our people, unfortunately result in such losses," Zelenskyy wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

More people may still be trapped, the Odesa branch of

Ukraine's main emergency service said on Facebook. Kiper said rescue workers continued to comb through the site.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, regional authorities reported that a 58-year-old man died under rubble after Russian forces overnight shelled his village in the southern Kherson province. Another civilian man, 38, was killed in a Russian artillery strike in the neighboring Zaporizhzhia region, local Gov. Ivan Fedorov said.

Yesterday [Macau time], Donetsk regional Gov. Vadim Filashkin said a Russian airstrike on the eastern town of Kurakhove wounded 16 people and damaged 15 high-rise apartment blocks.

### EXPLOSIONS AT AN OIL DEPOT IN CRIMEA

In Russian-occupied Crimea, loud explosions were heard near an oil depot in the early hours Sunday, according to a local pro-Kyiv Telegram news channel. Kremlin-installed officials in the territory said a nearby stretch of highway was closed for about eight hours.

Videos shared with pro-Ukrainian channel Crimean Wind showed explosions lighting up the sky, followed by booms. The channel said they were taken by residents near Feodosia, a coastal town in northeastern Crimea. It was not immediately possible to

verify the circumstances in which the videos were shot.

An anti-Russian, Crimean Tatar-led underground group claimed that the blasts destroyed a pipeline, causing "colossal" damage.

The group, Atesh — which means "fire" in Crimean Tatar — did not directly claim responsibility for the strike and said it had learned about its consequences from informers among Russian-appointed officials. Authorities in Kyiv did not immediately acknowledge the claims.

Traffic was halted early Sunday along a four-lane Russian federal highway near Feodosia, according to an adviser to Crimea's Kremlin-installed leader. The Telegram post by Oleg Kryuchkov gave no reasons for the move.

More than eight hours later, Crimea's local transport minister reported that traffic had partially resumed. A bridge that connects Crimea to Russian territory was also closed to traffic for about two hours early Sunday.

Russia's defense ministry did not comment on the reports but claimed that 38 Ukrainian drones were intercepted overnight into Sunday over the peninsula.

### CHINA'S ENVOY HOLDS TALKS IN MOSCOW

In Moscow, China's special envoy on Ukraine held

talks this weekend with senior Russian diplomats in the first leg of a European trip that will also take him to Brussels, Poland, Germany and France, Chinese and Russian state media reported.

China's foreign ministry said Special Representative Li Hui and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin agreed that negotiations are the only way to end the fighting in Ukraine.

Li's trip, the second since May, comes as Kyiv seeks Beijing's participation in peace talks that Switzerland is trying to organize. China claims it is neutral in Russia's war on Ukraine but maintains close ties with Moscow, with frequent state visits and joint military drills.

Yesterday, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said it was time to start discussing a cease-fire between Moscow and Kyiv, claiming that "both sides have now reached the limits of the results they can achieve through war."

Speaking at a news conference, Fidan said that such a move would not mean recognizing Russia's occupation of parts of Ukraine.

"We believe that it is time to separate the issues of recognition of the occupation and sovereignty from the cease-fire issue," he said. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1953 SOVIET LEADER 'ON BRINK OF DEATH'



Rumours are circulating in Moscow that Joseph Stalin, the long-time leader of the Soviet Union, is near death.

The first official news of Mr Stalin's illness came in a statement on Wednesday.

It said the Soviet leader, who came to power in 1928, had suffered a cerebral haemorrhage on Wednesday night.

An update issued earlier today mentioned "sharp disturbances of the heart functions".

There is speculation that the 73-year-old, born Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, in the Soviet republic of Georgia, is now in the final stages of an illness he has been suffering some time.

Soviet newspapers today are clearly preparing their readers for the worst.

Their front pages carry the bulletins on Mr Stalin's health as well as sombre leading articles.

On the inside pages, feature articles praise the Soviet leader both as a man and politician.

World leaders have expressed concern for Mr Stalin's health.

A statement issued by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said his private secretary, John Colville, had yesterday called on the Soviet ambassador.

Mr Colville had passed on the prime minister's regret at the news of Mr Stalin's ill-health and asked to be kept informed of his progress, the statement said.

US President Truman also expressed sympathy for Mr Stalin.

"I am sorry just as I would be if such a thing happened to any other acquaintance of mine," Mr Truman said.

If Mr Stalin's death is confirmed, he will be most remembered for instigating political purges in which tens of thousands were killed.

He was also behind the introduction of farming collectives which led to a famine and the death of up to 10 million people.

His death is expected to provoke a power struggle within the ruling Politburo.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The death of Joseph Stalin was officially announced at just after 0100 GMT on 6 March. The statement said he had died at 2150 local time on 5 March. Hundreds of thousands of people queued to see Joseph Stalin's body lying-in-state. He was embalmed and put on display alongside the first Soviet leader, Vladimir Illyich Lenin, in his mausoleum in Red Square in Moscow. But Nikita Khrushchev, who became Soviet leader after a power struggle, led a move to denounce Stalin as a tyrant who caused millions of deaths. In 1961 Stalin's body was removed from its place in the honoured Lenin's Tomb. It was reburied near the Kremlin wall along with other minor figures from the Bolshevik Revolution.

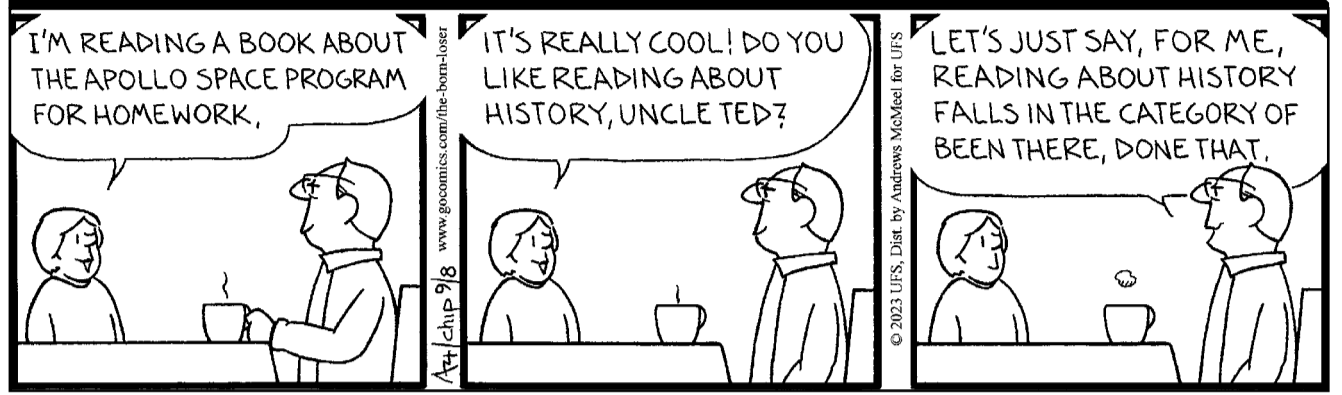


MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

 <b>ARIES</b> Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Develop a professional project to take advantage of new conditions. An opportunity is worth pursuing. Catch a lucky break by going for it.	 <b>TAURUS</b> Apr. 20-May. 20 Plan an adventure. Make long-distance connections. Take an unexpected opportunity. Do the homework. You can get what you need.
 <b>GEMINI</b> May. 21-Jun. 21 Collaboration can get especially lucrative. Work together to grab a lucky break. Imagine winning the prize. Get creative. Support each other to advance.	 <b>CANCER</b> Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Share dreams with your partner. A surprising turn of events favors you. Communicate and coordinate around changes. Support each other for spontaneous fun.
 <b>LEO</b> Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Discuss ideas. Physical action can get results beyond expectations. Reconnect with nature for extra benefits. An excellent workout feeds your heart, mind and spirit.	 <b>VIRGO</b> Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Enjoy a delightful conversation. Follow your heart where it leads. Fall into a lucky situation. Romance and fun can spark when least expected.
 <b>LIBRA</b> Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Dedicate discussion and action to advance a domestic project. Take advantage of favorable conditions. Align with family and housemates. Give praise where it's due.	 <b>SCORPIO</b> Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Monitor conditions and let others know what you discover. Dreamy opportunities abound for those in pursuit, like unexpected solutions or innovations. Share the news.
 <b>SAGITTARIUS</b> Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Make a lucrative discovery or connection. Grab a lucky break when it appears. Minimize expenses. Stash away the surplus. Accept applause graciously.	 <b>CAPRICORN</b> Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Use your persuasive charms to advance a passion project. Reap unexpected personal benefits. Win a prize or discover something wonderful.
 <b>AQUARIUS</b> Jan. 20-Feb. 18 You're especially creative, insightful and intuitive. Follow a spontaneous idea. Consider rearranging plans for a new possibility. Take advantage of an unexpected opportunity.	 <b>PISCES</b> Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Grab a chance for fun with friends. Discuss the possibilities for a collaborative project. An unscheduled opportunity is too good to miss. Play together.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

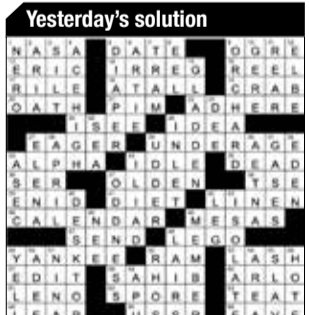
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	1	4	rain
Changchun	-12	0	cloudy
Chengdu	7	10	rain
Chongqing	11	19	cloudy
Fuzhou	13	29	cloudy
Guangzhou	15	25	overcast
Guiyang	7	17	overcast
Haikou	22	33	cloudy
Hangzhou	8	13	rain
Harbin	-12	1	fine
Hefei	7	9	rain
Nanjing	8	10	showers
Shanghai	9	13	rain
Taipei	16	28	fine
Wuhan	9	12	rain
Hong Hong	22	23	overcast
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-10	-1	cloudy
Frankfurt	5	11	rain
Paris	4	9	rain
London	1	12	overcast
New York	8	10	rain

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Choral composition; 6- "Great" dog; 10- lams alternative; 14- End of \_\_\_; 15- Clickable image; 16- Wall Street pessimist; 17- A long time; 18- Breaks bread; 19- Hard to hold; 20- Shoot for; 21- Pants; 23- Family tree word; 25- Safety device; 26- Breather; 29- Like some excuses; 32- Prepares for publication; 37- Chicken -- king; 38- Greet the judge; 39- Head cases?; 40- In spite of; 43- Each; 44- Sills solo; 45- "Fancy that!"; 46- Molars, e.g.; 47- Winter Palace ruler; 48- Throw; 49- Hook shape; 51- Be in debt; 53- Covering for an acorn; 58- Tatum or Ryan; 62- Model's stance; 63- Siouan tribe; 64- Knot again; 65- Female deer; 66- Hey!; 67- Constellation components; 68- No ifs, \_\_\_ or buts!; 69- Recognizes; 70- Curved letters;

**DOWN** 1- Poet Angelou; 2- Dedicated to the \_\_\_ Love; 3- Side; 4- Off the mark; 5- Flavor; 6- Cut calories; 7- Rent-\_\_\_; 8- Zero; 9- Follow; 10- Have \_\_\_ in one's bonnet; 11- Dirty look; 12- Chums; 13- Kid of jazz; 22- Breastbones; 24- Best of the best; 26- Charged toward; 27- Get hitched quick; 28- "Socrate" composer Erik; 30- Fire proof?; 31- Arizona sights; 33- Father; 34- English architect Jones; 35- Prongs; 36- Wise ones; 38- Wealth; 39- Capital of Egypt; 41- Rainy, say; 42- Song syllable; 47- African fly; 48- Beliefs; 50- Boutiques; 52- More unfavorable; 53- High time?; 54- Did something with; 55- Hardy girl; 56- Fail to win; 57- Permits; 59- JFK postings; 60- Suffix with concession; 61- Not as much; 62- Palm Pilot, e.g.;



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



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## POSTAL TRADE

# HOW CHINESE RETAILERS CAN OFFER AMERICANS STEEP BARGAINS ON CLOTHES AND WHY THAT COULD CHANGE

DIDI TANG, WASHINGTON

As a substitute teacher in her mid-20s, Lindsey Puls was delighted to discover the fashion world of Shein more than 10 years ago, lured in by its super-low prices — with tops selling for a few dollars, dresses under \$10, and free shipping on orders over \$29.

Puls, who has a blog called “Have Clothes, Will Travel,” joined other influencers in modeling her low-priced but trendy purchases on social media like Instagram and TikTok, contributing to a surge in popularity for Shein. The company, which was founded in China and sells clothing manufactured there, is now the top fast fashion retailer in the U.S.

“From my experience, they have pretty good designs for the price and extensive varieties,” said Puls, who lives in Shiocton, Wisconsin. “The U.S. is in this phase where ‘more is better.’ Many people want to get as much clothing as money can buy.”

How can stylish imports from the other side of the Pacific be so cheap? The answer has much to do with a trade rule known as the de minimis exception, which allows parcels valued under \$800 to enter the U.S. duty-free per person per day.

With the explosion of global online shopping, that rule is now coming under scrutiny. While America’s Gen Z shoppers may celebrate their online bargains, lawmakers from both parties are questioning whether the rule allows manufacturers to avoid tariffs aimed at protecting American companies and bypass laws barring the imports of products made by forced labor, illicit drugs or unsafe materials.

## DE MINIMIS TRADE

Last week, a group of 40 lawmakers asked Homeland Security Secretary Alexander Mayorkas to crack down on the de minimis trade, which they said also facilitates the flow of deadly drugs like fentanyl into the U.S.

Rep. Earl Blumenauer of Oregon, top Democrat on the House Ways and Means trade subcommittee, has introduced legislation to exclude non-market economies like China from the rule. A bill introduced in the Senate would make the practice reciprocal. China, for example, sets the de minimis threshold at about \$7.

“The de minimis loophole is a threat to American competitiveness, consumer safety and basic human rights,” Blumenauer said

AP PHOTO



in December.

But the de minimis rule also has powerful defenders. The National Foreign Trade Council, whose members include major shippers such as FedEx, UPS and DHL as well as online retailers like Amazon and eBay, argue that restricting its use would make purchases more expensive for American consumers and small businesses. The cost of a \$50 package would double, according to the council.

Shein, now based in Singapore, said in a statement it has made it a priority to comply with the customs and import laws of the countries where it operates, including the U.S. requirements for de minimis packages.

Introduced in 1938, the de minimis exception was intended to facilitate the flow of small packages valued at no more than \$5, the equivalent of about \$106 today. The threshold increased to \$200 in 1994 and \$800 in 2016. At the time, Sen. John Thune, a South Dakota Republican, said the bill would “empower more Americans to engage in global commerce.”

In 2023, for the first time, more than 1 billion de minimis packages came through U.S. customs, up from 134 million packages in 2015.

China is the biggest source of retail packages entering the U.S., accounting for the bulk of the

nearly 3 million small parcels that come through every day under the de minimis rule, according to Customs and Border Protection data.

“That’s approximately a 646% increase over just eight years,” said LaFonda Sutton-Burke, director of field operations for Customs and Border Protection’s Chicago field office, which oversees one of the nation’s busiest ports for de minimis parcels. Behind the surge is the explosive growth in e-commerce, she said.

A June 2023 report by the House Select Committee on China’s Communist Party found that Shein and Temu, a low-cost online retailer of clothing and household goods, alone accounted for more than 30% of all packages shipped to the U.S. daily under the de minimis exemption.

China’s exports grew only 0.6% last year, but the bright spot was cross-border e-commerce, which includes but is not limited to the de minimis packages. These online sales expanded nearly 20% in 2023 to reach 1.83 trillion yuan, or \$257 billion, nearly 8% of the country’s total exports. The U.S. is the biggest market, accounting for more than a third of Chinese goods bought online and shipped internationally in 2022, the last year for which China’s official customs data are available.

The United States does not include these direct online retail

sales in its import figures, so it is difficult to know the true dollar value of the de minimis parcels. Charles Benoit, trade counsel for the Coalition for a Prosperous America, said an estimated \$188 billion worth came into the U.S. from other countries in 2022.

A repeal of the provision could add \$20 to \$30 to each transaction, which would make it financially impossible for businesses such as Shein and Temu to sell to American consumers at the low prices they are offering now, Benoit said.

In a January meeting with Mayorkas, the National Council of Textile Organizations complained about unfair trade practices, including the de minimis rule.

“The industry has lost eight plants in three months,” the council said. “Plants that survived the Great Depression, the Great Recession and COVID aren’t surviving the economic environment due to demand destruction exacerbated by unfair trade practices.” It called for better enforcement of laws forbidding the import of goods produced by forced labor and the closing of the de minimis loophole, which it said “is facilitating millions of unchecked packages a day into our market and hurting our industry.”

Law enforcement agencies also complain about the de minimis provision, which they say has helped fuel the drug crisis.

## SIDE EFFECTS

The National Association of Police Organizations testified in December before the House Ways and Means trade subcommittee that much of the fentanyl seized last year came into the country in de minimis packages. It is unclear how much fentanyl and other illicit drugs may be slipping undetected into the country in the small packages.

On a recent Friday morning at Chicago’s O’Hare airport, small parcels that had arrived by mail from overseas were on conveyor belts going through X-ray machines for inspection. Officers occasionally stopped the belt to pick out and open a suspicious parcel. Among the items they seized were replica guns and illicit drugs.

Sutton-Burke said Customs and Border Protection uses a “layered security approach” and works with multiple partners to manage shipments, but resources have “literally remained static” in the face of explosive growth of de minimis parcels.

Investments in infrastructure and technology would be helpful, she said, as would updating U.S. rules and laws to allow the agency to obtain more information about the small parcels coming in to help customs agents identify high-risk shipments.

MDT/AP

FOOTBALL

# Bayern most at risk in Champions League as Real Madrid, Man City, PSG take leads into return games

GRAHAM DUNBAR

**T**HE four European soccer powers that lead UEFA's club rankings return to the Champions League round of 16 in midweek with Bayern Munich looking out of form and at risk of a stunning elimination.

Real Madrid, Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain all take a lead into second-leg games and all are unbeaten in 2024 in their domestic leagues.

Bayern, however, has lost three Bundesliga games since January and three of its last five in all competitions including a 1-0 defeat at Lazio in the first leg.

Bayern has reached the Champions League quarterfinals in each of the last four years and went on to win the 2020 final against a PSG team then coached by Thomas Tuchel. But the current slump has seen Bayern already announce Tu-



Munich coach Thomas Tuchel reacts after the Bundesliga soccer match between SC Freiburg and Bayern Munich

chel will leave at the end of the season after just over a year in charge.

Bayern's home game against Lazio shapes as the game most in the balance this week. Also Tuesday, PSG takes a 2-0 lead to Spain against another slumping team,

Real Sociedad.

PSG is dealing with the fallout of Kylian Mbappé's upcoming exit at the end of the season but still has a four-month unbeaten run while Real Sociedad has lost two more Spanish league games since the

first leg in Paris.

The two standout teams in the Champions League this season — and the past two title winners — play at home on Wednesday.

Madrid has a 1-0 lead over Leipzig from the first leg that was the record 14-time European champion's seventh straight win in the competition this season.

Man City also made it seven in a row beating Copenhagen 3-1 in Denmark three weeks ago.

### REST OF THE ROUND

The rest of the round of 16 is completed next week, ahead of the quarterfinal draw on March 15 at UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland.

On March 12, Arsenal hosts Porto trailing 1-0 from the first leg and Barcelona faces Napoli after a 1-1 draw in Italy.

Inter Milan takes a 1-0 lead to Atletico Madrid on March 13, when

Borussia Dortmund hosts PSV Eindhoven tied at 1-1.

### CLUB WORLD CUP

The 21 games left in this Champions League will finalize the 12-strong European challenge at the 2025 Club World Cup that FIFA is relaunching in the United States.

Borussia Dortmund or Leipzig will qualify, and it's Atletico Madrid or Barcelona, unless Real Sociedad wins this edition of the Champions League. Juventus will go if Lazio or Napoli don't progress much further in this Champions League.

FIFA has rebooted its club event as a 32-team tournament from June 15 to July 13 next year in the same format as the men's World Cup has been since 1998.

It promises tens of millions of dollars in prize money and a brand-building opportunity to play competitive games in the coveted American market.

Europe's entries are the Champions League winners from 2021 through 2024 — Chelsea, Real Madrid and Manchester City so far — plus the highest ranked teams based on all results in the competition over the same four-year period. The limit is two teams per country, unless Arsenal wins the Champions League this season.

Four entries are still open because five clubs already secured their place on ranking: Bayern Munich, PSG, Inter Milan, Benfica and Porto. **MDT/AP**

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IN MACAU (2023)



**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**POOL WISDOM TO BETTER EXPLORE CHINESE PATH TO MODERNIZATION**

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the 70th anniversary of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, and the 75th anniversary of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's political advisory body. The lawmakers and political advisers have every reason to carry on their good traditions and work style that have seen the country develop to its current stage in a bid to help it better explore the Chinese path to modernization.

As an important institutional embodiment of the practice of whole-process people's democracy, the annual gatherings of the NPC and CPPCC National Committee, or two sessions as they are commonly known, are a significant event in the political life of the country. They build platforms and channels to transform people's wishes and the country's needs into laws, regulations and workable policies. Given the tremendous resistance the country faces in sustaining its innovation-driven growth, the two sessions convened in Beijing this week are being closely watched for indications of how China will chart its course to navigate the difficulties and forge ahead against the headwinds.

In the face of the strong demands of the people and the pressing requirements to make breakthroughs in some core issues concerning national development this year, the nearly 3,000 lawmakers and more than 2,000 political advisers from all walks of life should take advantage of the opportunity of their face-to-face exchanges to better contribute their knowledge, experience, wisdom and expertise to enable the nation to make the most of what it has to better advance its modernization with Chinese characteristics.

It should be seen that, with the Chinese economy surging at 5.2 percent, hitting over 126 trillion yuan (\$17.5 trillion) last year, the country has withstood multiple pressures to achieve reasonable quantitative growth.

This year is a critical year for realizing the tasks of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). From a global perspective, the country is facing a more complex external environment, and multiple risks and challenges. That requires it to persist in seeking progress while maintaining stability and balancing different needs. From the domestic perspective, the lawmakers and political advisers should ensure that the legal and policy environments are conducive to law-based governance, so as to create a stable, transparent and predictable institutional environment. And more initiatives are needed to deepen reforms, expand opening-up and domestic demand, and effectively prevent and resolve risks in key areas.

The extent to which these objectives can be realized will have a direct bearing on how effectively people's livelihoods can be improved, how efficiently the country can balance security and development, how successful it is in stimulating innovation, and how well the country can respond to external challenges. All lawmakers and political advisers need to do their best to fulfill their duties during and beyond the two sessions to these ends. The focus of the two sessions should be on unremittingly promoting high-quality development, continuously enhancing the country's national strength, and fostering endogenous innovation. By doing so, the lawmakers and political advisers can better boost public confidence that the nation has the capability and wherewithal to realize the rejuvenation of the nation and stand the test of the times.

**UN RIGHTS CHIEF URGES END TO 'REPRESSION' OF INDEPENDENT VOICES IN RUSSIA AFTER NAVALNY'S DEATH**

**THE BUZZ**

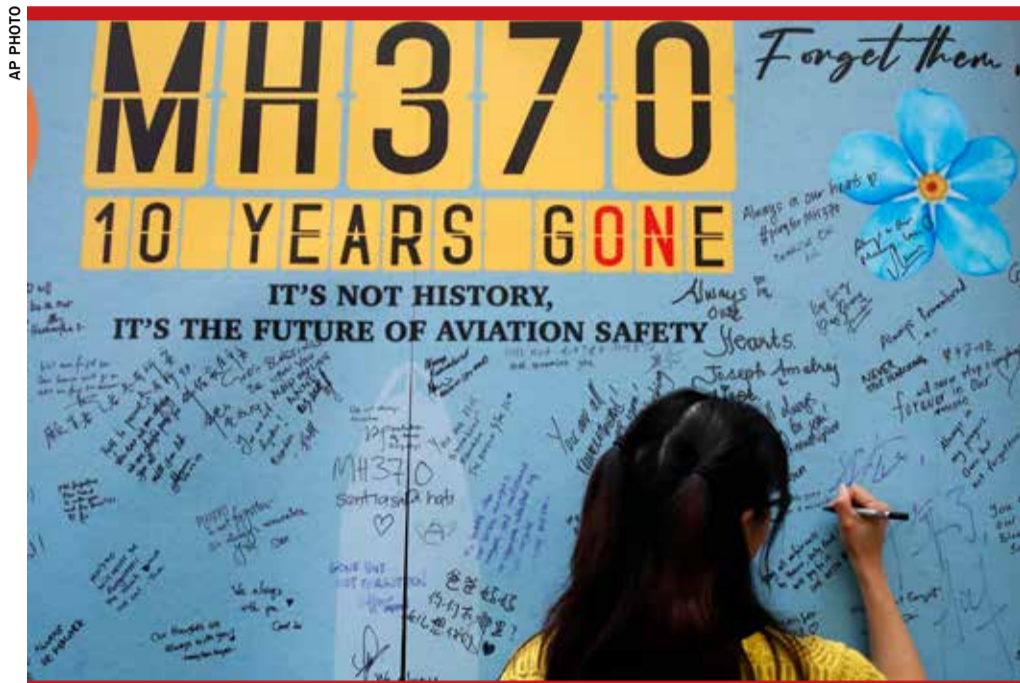
The U.N. human rights chief called yesterday for a quick end to the "repression of independent voices" in Russia and expressed concerns about the "persecution" of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died in prison last month.

Volker Türk, in a wide-ranging speech, also lamented dozens of conflicts around the world, widespread violations of human rights law that have impacted millions, and displacements caused by war, which could escalate in places like the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and Sudan.

"Rarely has humanity faced so many rapidly spiraling crises," he told the Human Rights Council.

Alluding to some countries among the dozens holding national elections this year, Türk denounced "increasing restrictions" on rights defenders, journalists and "perceived critics" in India. He urged U.S. authorities to ensure that voting is universal, alluding to discriminatory policies that restricted the right to vote for people of African descent.

In the run-up to Russia's presidential elections from March 15-17, Türk said Russian authorities "have further intensified their repression of dissenting voices" and noted how some candidates "have been prevented from running due to alleged administrative irregularities."



**MALAYSIA MAY RENEW THE SEARCH FOR MH370 A DECADE AFTER THE FLIGHT DISAPPEARED**

**M**ALAYSIAN officials said over the weekend they may renew the hunt for MH370, after a U.S. company that tried to find the plane in 2018 proposed a fresh search in the southern Indian Ocean where the Malaysia Airlines plane is believed to have crashed a decade ago.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke said he would invite Texas-based marine robotics firm Ocean Infinity to brief him on its latest "no find, no fee" proposal. The government has long said it would not support another search without new leads on the plane's location.

If the evidence is credible, he said, he will seek Cabinet's approval to sign a new contract to resume the search.

"The government is steadfast in our resolve to locate MH370," Loke told a memorial event marking the 10th anniversary of the disappearance of the jet. "We really hope the search can find the plane and provide truth to the next-of-kin."

The Boeing 777 plane vanished from radar shortly after taking off on March 8, 2014, carrying

239 people, mostly Chinese nationals, on a flight from Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Satellite data showed the plane deviated from its flight path to head over the southern Indian Ocean, where it is believed to have crashed.

An expensive multinational search failed to turn up any clues, although debris washed ashore on the east African coast and Indian Ocean islands. A private search in 2018 by Ocean Infinity also found nothing.

The tragedy sparked moves to bolster aviation safety.

V.P.R. Nathan, a member of the Voice MH370 next-of-kin group, said Ocean Infinity initially planned a search last year but it was delayed by the delivery of a new fleet. It is now on track to resume the hunt, he said.

Ocean Infinity CEO Oliver Punkett told the New Straits Times that the company had improved its technology since 2018.

"We now feel in a position to be able to return to the search for MH370," he told the English-language daily. "We've been working with many experts, some

outside of Ocean Infinity, to continue analyzing the data in the hopes of narrowing the search area down to one in which success becomes potentially achievable."

Loke declined to reveal the fee proposed by Ocean Infinity if it finds the plane, saying it is subject to negotiation. He said cost is not an issue and that he doesn't foresee any hindrances for the search.

Loke's response sparked tears of joy in some family members at the memorial, held in a mall in a Kuala Lumpur suburb.

"I'm on top of the world," said Jacquita Gomes, whose husband was a flight attendant on the plane. She said she is thankful that she may now have a chance for full closure and to say a final goodbye.

"We have been on a roller coaster for the last 10 years. ... If it is not found, I hope that it will continue with another search," she said.

Family members of passengers from Malaysia, Australia, China and India paid tribute to their loved ones during the event, lighting a candle on stage to remember them. **MDT/AP**



**Gaza Strip** A top member of Israel's wartime Cabinet is meeting with U.S. officials in Washington while talks are underway in Egypt to broker a cease-fire in Gaza before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins next week. Benny Gantz, a centrist political rival of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, traveled for talks with several senior U.S. administration officials this week.



**USA** A poll finds that a growing share of U.S. adults doubt that 81-year-old President Joe Biden has the memory and acuity for the job, turning his coming State of the Union address into something of a real-time audition for a second term. Roughly 6 in 10 say they're not very or not at all confident in Biden's mental capability to serve effectively as president, according to a new survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That's a slight increase from January 2022.



**Haiti** Authorities have ordered a nighttime curfew in an attempt to regain control of Haiti's streets after an explosion of violence during the weekend, including gunmen from gangs overrunning the country's two biggest prisons and freeing their inmates. A 72-hour state of emergency began Sunday night (yesterday, Macau time), and the government said it would set out to find the killers, kidnappers and other violent criminals that it reported escaped from prison. "The police were ordered to use all legal means at their disposal," said a statement from Finance Minister Patrick Boivert, who is serving as acting prime minister.