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PJ ISSUED WARNING ON GROWING TRENDS INVOLVING ONLINE PART-TIME JOB SCAMS THAT RESULT IN THE THEFT OF APPLICANTS' MPAY ACCOUNTS

P4

STATS: GAMING STAFF WAGES ROSE 6.8% AT THE END OF 2023

P2

ASEAN LEADERS CALL FOR SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTES TO BE RESOLVED 'WITHOUT FORCE'

P6



AP PHOTO



Philippines Former first lady Imelda Marcos, the mother of the incumbent president and widow of an ousted dictator, has been hospitalized with pneumonia. President Marcos Jr said earlier this week that his mother, who is 94, was suffering from a slight pneumonia and was put on antibiotics by her doctors. Marcos, in a statement from Melbourne, where he is attending an Asian summit, said that his mother was “in good spirits” and has “no difficulty in breathing and is resting well.”

AP PHOTO



Sri Lanka's president said that he is seeking a loan repayment moratorium until 2028 as the debt-ridden country tries to emerge from bankruptcy. President Wickremesinghe (pictured) told Parliament the government is asking lenders to accept a plan to defer payments for five years and then pay down the debts from the beginning of 2028 through 2042. Sri Lanka declared bankruptcy in April 2022 and suspended repayments on some \$83 billion in local and foreign loans.

AP PHOTO



USA Six people were arrested in New York on charges of illegally importing goose and duck intestines from China, in some cases by hiding them under packaged rattlesnakes or mislabeling them as pet grooming products on customs forms, federal officials announced. The scheme, which also included illegal imports of duck blood and hawthorn fruit, involved transporting the restricted food items from China to California and then on to New York, where they were sold to customers, including restaurants.

More on backpage

DRAGON HEADS STRONG

China says economy got a strong start in 2024, sets sights on latest technology, upgrading factories

P5,6



AP PHOTO

GAMING SJM HOLDINGS NARROWS LOSS IN 2023

P2

RENATO MARQUES



TRAFFIC GOV'T SHOULD RETHINK PEDESTRIAN 'BLACK SPOTS'

P3

HK GROUP SLAMS DSPA FOR MISTAKEN DIAGRAMS ON DOLPHIN HABITATS

ANTHONY LAM

THE Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) has mistaken the dolphin relocation passages near Macau for the species' habitats, the Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society (HKDCS) has said on its Facebook page.

Referring to the DSPA's webpage dedicated to the proposed "ecological island," which is actually a landfill for construction wastes to be located off the southern coast of Coloane, the HKDCS said DSPA diagrams purporting to depict the area of activities of the Indo-Pacific humpbacked dolphin have actually doubled the size of the area.

The society said the webpage contains the first official reference to the dolphin's activities near Macau.

"The narrow relocation passages located on the south of Coloane and the west of the Pearl River



Estuary of the humpbacked dolphin have suddenly become very wide in the diagram," the society noted in the Facebook post. The

HKDCS said the relocation passages are different from habitats. The society cited accessible documentation to stress that, al-

though the dolphin resides within 10 km from the southern Chinese coast due to the flow of the Pearl River and the distribution of prey,

the dolphin is active within 5 km of the coast most of the time.

It said this is the case especially on the south of Macau. The relocation passages, it added, clash with the proposed location of the future landfill.

Therefore, the society criticized the DSPA for distorting facts by mistakenly identifying the relocation passages as habitats.

Despite seeing the aforementioned documentation submitted to the DSPA during the earlier public consultation, the society said, "the bureau is still declining to admit the fundamental fact that the future landfill will block the passages of the dolphin." It said the bureau suspiciously attempts to mislead public opinion with unreliable diagrams.

The diagrams are not only erroneous, the society said, but also have no referential use.

To further support its comments, the society said the dolphin had started evading the area as far as 6 km from the reclaimed area on the Hong Kong side of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge. The area of impact can be 30 times as large as the reclaimed area, the society noted.

GAMING

SJM HOLDINGS NARROWS LOSS IN 2023 AS EARNINGS TOP HKD20B

LYNZY VALLES

GAMING operator SJM Holdings Ltd. reported a loss in 2023, attributing it to the sectors recovery, after recording a full-year loss of HKD2.01 billion, from nearly HKD7.80 billion compared to the year prior.

Net gaming revenue earned was HKD20.06 billion in 2023, as compared with HKD6.01 billion for the year 2022.

In a statement, the group said that its adjusted earnings before interest taxation, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) for 2023 were nearly HKD1.73 billion – a figure that is significantly less than the negative adjusted EBITDA of approximately HKD3.10 billion in 2022.

The gaming operator acknowledged SJM had an 11.9% share of Macau's gross gaming revenue, including

14.8% of mass market table gross gaming revenue and 3.5% of VIP gross gaming revenue.

Daisy Ho, chairman of SJM Holdings Limited and managing director of SJM Resorts, S.A., said, "SJM Holdings' results for 2023 show substantial recovery in gaming and non-gaming revenues from the pandemic years."

"In addition, our operations in the fourth quarter show strong sequential growth in adjusted EBITDA as well as steady progress in the ramp-up of Grand Lisboa Palace," she added, according to a press release.

SJM's Cotai property Grand Lisboa Palace recorded an adjusted property EBITDA of negative HKD317 million, as compared with negative HKD969 million for the year 2022.

Grand Lisboa's EBITDA,

meanwhile, was at HKD1.32 billion, as compared with negative HKD758 million from the previous fiscal year.

Earlier this year, Fitch Ratings altered its outlook on SJM Holdings from "negative" to "stable", expecting the company to turn free cash flow positive in 2024 reflecting the robust recovery in visitation and gaming revenue in Macau, despite the economic downturn in China.

The institution has recalled that SJM has shifted focus away from the VIP segment at these casinos, resulting in VIP revenue at Grand Lisboa recovering to only 9% of 2019 levels and no VIP revenue generated at other self-promoted casinos.

This has led to a lower GGR contribution, but the EBITDA impact is much more limited as VIP has small margins.

STATS

GAMING STAFF WAGES ROSE 6.8% AT YEAR END 2023

RENATO MARQUES

THE wages of full-time employees of the local gaming sector rose on average last December by 6.8% year-on-year, to MOP25,290, the results of a survey on labor needs and wages for the last quarter of 2023 from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) has revealed.

These average earnings exclude all exceptional remuneration (such as tips and other benefits) and take into account full-time employees.

Among these, the average earnings of dealers (MOP20,870) rose 5.4%, with DSEC explaining this was mainly due to the low base of comparison caused by a relatively large number of employees being placed on

unpaid leave in the same month of 2022.

Concurrently, and despite the broadly announced need for workers due to the resumption of activities, at the end of last year there were fewer than 403 people employed in this sector, a slight drop of 0.8% y-o-y.

Among them, the most significant drop was registered at the dealers, which totaled 23,359, down 362 (-1.5%) year-on-year.

The DSEC also noted that in general, gaming sector job vacancies rose 387 y-o-y to 400 at the end of the fourth quarter (Q4).

Among the vacancies, 23.8% required work experience, and 84.8% required senior secondary education or lower.

Knowledge of Mandarin and English languages were requirements for, respectively, 97% and 83.5% of these job posts.

In Q4 the number of newly recruited employees topped slightly the number of those leaving, totaling, respectively 1,035 and 843.

The employee recruitment rate (2%) and the employee turnover rate (1.6%) grew 1.8 and 0.1%, respectively, and the job vacancy rate was 0.8%.

The figures indicate a slight increase in the demand for workers in the gaming sector.

As usual, the Survey on Manpower Needs and Wages of the Gaming Sector excluded those operating as junket promoters and associates.

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Gov't should rethink pedestrian 'black spots'

RENATO MARQUES

THE Central District Community Advisory Board member, António Monteiro, wants the government to rethink its approach to pedestrian traffic "black spots."

In a speech delivered yesterday at the Central District Community Advisory Board meeting, Monteiro noted the recent Chinese New Year holiday season had "proven to be a huge challenge in con-

trolling the flow of tourists and various rule violations," noting that it is advisable that authorities find an approach different from simply fining those committing infractions.

He suggested using a surveillance system on the Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro and other locations considered "black spots" for traffic offenses and accidents to deter tourists and locals committing traffic offenses and, consequently, preventing accidents.

Another area for improvement is signage at these problematic locations, the same advisor said. This would reduce vehicle speeds in certain tourist areas and help both pedestrians and vehicles by preventing pedestrian infractions and accidents.

Another aspect that needed serious reflection is the way local entities (both governmental and private) do promotions to visitors. Monteiro wants local entities to give the "correct example" of

behavior that we wish to promote.

This suggestion comes after several governmental as well as private entities, namely hotels, have been found using, to promote Macau and their services, photos and videos wherein people were posing on the streets for photos and videos and having "playful activities on the roads."

Monteiro called for a more responsible and mindful attitude from these organizations when promoting Macau in not depicting behaviors that we do not want to see replicated.

Although he called for a more pedagogical approach, he does not disagree with the fining of those who, for instance, "do not pass on pedestrian crossings and places with traffic lights," being an advocate for an increase of the penalties for such actions that show a clear disrespect for basic rules.

Addressing the government's proposed new rules on the review of the Road Traffic Law, he suggested a "points system" for traffic infractions be extended to tourists who violate the rules.

Before the implementation of such rules and to avoid public outcry, he called for the wide publication of the rules at border posts, hotels and on social media.

In general, Monteiro wanted not only locals to be responsible for the Macau's image but also tourists who can help model citizenship and respect for the city they are visiting to improve the overall "image of Macau as a true world tourism and leisure center."

LITTERING AND SPITTING TOPS CASES DURING CNY

Littering and spitting cases accounted for a great proportion of cases prosecuted during the Chinese New Year, data from the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) shows. In a Central District Social Advisory Committee, authorities believe the related cases are on a downward trend compared with the past few years, as cited in a TDM report. However, the drop is believed to be due to the intensified deployment of law enforcement personnel to various districts. Meanwhile, the IAM pledged to further optimize law enforcement work, focus on handling environmental sanitation issues in each district, and formulate inspection routes for tourist areas.

UM LAUNCHES TCM TESTING SERVICE

The University of Macau (UM) has introduced a new service for testing Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) specifically designed for manufacturers and companies based in Macau. The purpose of this initiative is to obtain additional official certifications from the China National Accreditation Service (CNAS), and it will be carried out through trial operations managed by the Macao Centre for Testing of Chinese Medicine (MCTCM). Professor Li Shaoping, the director of MCTCM, as cited in a report by media outlet Journal Tribuna de Macau, has emphasized that the establishment of this center will contribute to the growth of the Chinese medicine industry in Macau, aligning with the government's strategy to diversify the economy.

FIRST ROADSHOW OF THE YEAR IN TOKYO

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) will be conducting a three-day roadshow in Tokyo, Japan Friday to showcase Macau's latest attractions. This will be the first roadshow of the year, taking place March 8 to 10, and will feature industry stakeholders, including representatives from casino operators. Before the pandemic, Macau welcomed nearly 300,000 Japanese tourists, making Japan the city's third-largest international market. Authorities have said this initiative aims to boost visits to Macau by collaborating with Japanese airlines to offer discounted flight tickets.

TRANSPORT

New calls for better bus route arrangements

ANTHONY LAM

THE unreasonable arrangement of bus routes in Macau is a problem of utmost importance and should be handled as a priority, a new traffic concern group has said, according to several news reports.

Referred to as the Macau Public Transport Concern Group, the group has been formed by the Association of Synergies of Macau and a group of local residents concerned with the matter for a long period of time. The group of residents was represented by Dickson Lau at a recent press briefing.

At the briefing, the group cited data to reveal that the city has 93 bus routes, serving a daily average of passengers ranging from 587,000 to 762,700. It also pointed out that some

bus routes, such as Nos 21A and 26, have as many as 75 stops.

It also listed the problems with local public bus services, including circuitous and overlapping routes, crowding at bus stops and packed bus carriages.

Explaining its views on the causes of these problems, the group blamed tourists being unfamiliar with payment methods, slow boarding, bus stops serving too many routes, and the environment of the neighborhood among other reasons.

The group also referred to long queues of buses at a variety of districts over the past Lunar New Year to prove the problems were more severe during peak seasons or longer holidays.

In response to the existing problems, the group



also suggested local bus routes be separated into five categories and bus stops into three tiers.

The five categories would consist of express bus lines, main lines, essential lines, auxiliary lines and branch lines. As

such, buses will operate at higher efficiency.

As for the three tiers, bus stops could be separated into main hubs or transit stations, bay bus stops and traffic lane bus stops.

The group also recom-

mended some buses skip certain stops during hours or days with high demand, or that they should be diverted to non-core bus stops or stops that are further from older neighborhoods, such as the Taipa Village.

CRIME

REPEAT IN-FLIGHT THIEF ARRESTED ENTERING MACAU

ANTHONY LAM

A man allegedly involved in at least four in-flight thefts was arrested at the airport upon entering Macau on March 3, the Judiciary Police (PJ) has announced.

Following his arrest, the police found over JPY890,000 cash and several hundred in undisclosed currencies.

The suspect, 46, reportedly works as a laborer. The police did not disclose his nationality.

The initial case that the police believe to be connected to the man was reported to the police on April 14, 2011.

A male visitor had reported having lost HKD38,000 and RMB2,900 – enclosed separately in two envelopes – during his flight from Shanghai to Macau. The envelopes were replaced with two air-sickness bags.

On Jan. 15 this year, the police received a report on a similar theft in which a visitor reported having lost HKD11,000 and MYR9,000 on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Macau.

A local man reported over the phone on Nov. 14 last year that his luggage in the in-flight overhead compartment was tou-

ched and moved around. He said he stopped the act immediately before retrieving his luggage.

After receiving the report in November last year, the police started investigations which pointed to the suspect. The police later discovered the suspect was on the same Kuala Lumpur to Macau flight. While interrogating the suspect, another report from the same flight on March 3 was received. A passenger reported losing JPY200,000 and a pair of Bluetooth headphones.

These details led the police to connect the suspect to the latest case.

Fingerprints on the paper bags in the first case matched those of the suspect, and the police considered the suspect as having been involved in all four cases. However, the suspect declined to cooperate with the investigation.

In another case, the police arrested three men on allegations of two burglary cases. The trio was arrested at Border Gate upon entering Macau. The police said that they fled to mainland China after committing the crime.

Two men were involved in a burglary that concerned a loss of property worth MOP380,000.

This case happened on Dec. 22 last year. The resident of an apartment in Fai Chi Kei told the police that the door of the apartment had signs of being pried open when they returned home in the evening.

Investigations revealed the two people had purchased tools in the neighborhood and left Macau the same evening.

In another case that concerned a loss of property worth MOP97,000, which took place on Nov. 6 last year in an apartment in Taipa, a victim reported signs their apartment had been searched, which they noticed when they returned home in the evening. This case concerned the remaining suspect.

The man is believed to have snuck in through the impluvium. He also left Macau that same evening.

The police found gloves and screwdrivers on the men, which they believed had been used in the crimes, and could not rule out that they had re-entered Macau to commit further crimes.

The police did not disclose whether they have found clues leading them to connect the three people.



ANTHONY LAM

HK TAXI DRIVER SUSPECTED PASSING OFF MOP10 AS HKD100

A new deceptive practice targeting unsuspecting passengers has surfaced in Hong Kong after a passenger took to social media about a taxi driver who passed off a MOP10 for a HKD100.

According to the female passenger, as cited on the social media platform, Xiaohongshu, after paying for her ride, the driver allegedly cleverly included a MOP10 note, which has a similar color to the HKD100 bill, among the genuine Hong Kong currency he gave her as change. She described this incident as a "new type of scam" involving the exchange

of visually similar banknotes. The red-colored MOP10 note closely resembles the higher-valued Hong Kong banknote, making it easy to confuse them at a quick glance. However, upon closer examination, the differences in design and currency value can be discerned. The complaint quickly triggered online discussion, eliciting mixed reactions from netizens. Several comments expressed dissatisfaction with Hong Kong's taxi industry, considering cash transactions that they considered "outdated" in 2024.

PJ warns about growing online part-time job scams

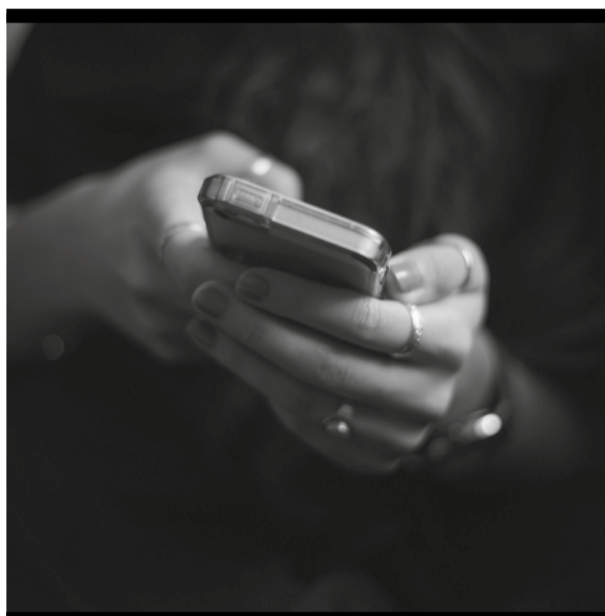
RENATO MARQUES

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) has issued a warning about growing trends involving online part-time job scams that result in the theft of applicants' MPay accounts.

In a statement, the PJ said it had received, in the past few days, several complaints from citizens who, through social media, had applied for part-time jobs.

These alleged jobs involved "buying point cards" online and, initially, those involved managed to earn small commissions. They later found, however, that the funds in their Mpay accounts had been stolen.

According to the same police force, victims had reported losses ranging from a few thousand to several tens of thousands of patacas.



The victims claimed to have found, through social media posts, advertisements for the recruitment of "purchasing assistants" that claimed that salary payments would be made the "same day."

The same ads also claimed the jobs to be "safe

and "legal" and did not call for any investment or advance payments from the recruits.

After applicants clicked on the ad, they were forwarded to a designated website to buy points cards of a certain value.

After the "job," the applicants would receive

a small amount through MPay, as a commission for the transaction and payment for the purchased items.

During the purchase of the point cards, the website would direct users to a fake MPay page that, in reality, was a phishing website where the victims are tricked into entering their username, login password, and transaction password from MPay to complete payment for the acquisition of the point cards.

These actions would allow the scammers to later access the users' MPay accounts and transfer the funds in them.

The PJ warned the public that, in general, all online job advertisements that involve "liking" pages and posts, "promoting" pages or posts and similar are usually false.

They aim to redirect victims to phishing websites that steal their personal information, including electronic payment or bank account information, causing them financial loss.

MACAU RUGBY CLUB TO HOLD FUNDRAISING TOURNAMENT

STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau Rugby Club will host a rugby tournament Saturday where all proceeds will go to a local cancer charity organization.

The third Lusofonia Touch Rugby Tournament will be held at The International School of Macao from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m with a snack and bake sale also to be held in bid to raise funds for a cancer charity organization.

"The goal is to promote rugby within the community [...] and to raise awareness for cancer. We will be donating all proceeds to a local

association who helps long term patients and their families," Carla Pires Ascensão, a member of the club, told the Times.

"Participants can expect a fun day with lots of activities, numerous varieties of Lusofonia cakes and snacks, [and] maybe buy some gifts or win prizes from the lucky draw."

In the previous tournaments the club held, the group raised approximately MOP25,000 and MOP45,000.

Also, organizers have said any donations of food should be wrapped in individual take home packaging and clearly labeled if they contain nuts.



ECONOMY

China sets sights on latest technology, upgrading factories

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
BEIJING

CHINA has plenty of room to maneuver to attain its annual target for robust economic growth of about 5% after a strong start for the year, top economic officials said yesterday, though they acknowledged it's a challenge.

China's exports rose about 10% in the first two months of the year from a year earlier, while medium- and long-term loans from banks jumped more than 30%, said China's top planning official, Zheng Shanjie, who heads the National Development and Reform Commission.

Zheng said the priority will be on "supporting scientific and technological innovation, integrated development of urban and rural regions, food security and energy security, among other areas."

"The potential construction demand in these areas is huge and the investment cycle is long. It's hard to fully meet needs using existing funding channels and there's an urgent need to increase support," he said at a news conference on the sidelines of the National People's Congress.

Premier Li Qiang announced the "around 5%" growth target for the year Tuesday at the opening of the congress, which runs for about a week and mostly just endorses policies set by top leaders of the ruling Communist Party.

China's economy, the world's second largest, grew at a 5.2%

AP PHOTO



pace in 2023, but that was from a relatively low pace since it expanded only 3% the year before, one of the lowest rates since the 1970s. Growth of around 5% would be cause for rejoicing in the U.S. and other major economies, but it's moderate for a developing economy with a huge population like China's.

Pan Gongsheng, the head of China's central bank, and the other senior economic planners speaking on the sidelines of the congress said Beijing has more policy tools it can turn to, such as reducing the reserve ratio requi-

rement, or the amount of funds banks must keep in reserves.

They emphasized Beijing's determination to put 1 trillion yuan (about \$140 billion) in special, ultra long-term bonds to productive use to upgrade industries and advance technologies in key areas such as clean energy.

The market for modernizing factory equipment amounts to about 5 trillion yuan (nearly \$700 billion), Zheng said. That compares with the \$649 billion the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden says private companies have committed to investing in

such areas as clean energy, electric vehicles and semiconductors and electronics.

Despite robust growth in China's exports in the first two months of the year, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao said global demand may remain muted given the recent trend toward protectionist measures.

Trade in goods and services rose a mere 0.2% in 2023, according to the World Trade Organization, and will increase this year but not to levels seen before the pandemic.

China's own exports fell last

year, adding to drags on the economy from weak consumer demand and a downturn in the property market, a major contributor to demand for construction, appliances and many other industries.

China plans to do more to promote exports of higher-value products and to support smaller and mid-sized companies in tapping world markets, he said.

"We are confident about consolidating the fundamentals of foreign trade and foreign investment," Wang said.

To help spur more consumer spending, an increasingly important driver for growth as China becomes wealthier, the government plans to use tax policies and other incentives to encourage families to scrap their older vehicles, replace aging appliances and redecorate their apartments, the officials said.

In other comments, the chairman of China's Securities Regulatory Commission, Wu Qing, acknowledged intervening in the financial markets at times when authorities deemed it necessary.

China's stock markets languished from late last year, though they have recovered somewhat in recent weeks following a crackdown on price manipulation and insider trading among other confidence-boosting measures.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index is still 20% below where it stood a year ago, while the Shanghai Composite index has lost 8.5% at a time when many other world markets are breaching record highs.

"Normally there should be no intervention in the markets, but at times when they sharply deviate from fundamentals, show irrational and severe volatility, an extreme lack of liquidity, market panics or a severe lack of confidence, we should act decisively to correct market failures," Wu said.

MDT/AP

CORPORATE BITS

Sands China hosts responsible gaming training tour in Hong Kong



Sands China Ltd. recently hosted a Responsible Gaming Hong Kong Training Tour, aimed at supporting the SAR government's "Seeking Help for Winning the Future" responsible gaming initiatives.

The training itinerary with 55 participating Responsible Gaming Ambassadors included an introduction to Even Centre and a site visit, familiarizing the participants with Hong Kong's responsible ga-

ming efforts.

Wilfred Wong, executive vice chairman of Sands China Ltd., said, "Sands China is committed to promoting responsible gaming and ensuring the well-being of our guests and team members. We were therefore pleased to organize the Responsible Gaming Hong Kong Training Tour for our Responsible Gaming Ambassadors, equipping them with invaluable knowledge and insights into best practices."

As part of the tour, participants had the opportunity to exchange ideas on the causes and effects of gambling disorders. They also learned about the financial and debt management strategies employed by Even Centre to assist those affected by the disorder.

Wynn hosts Chinese Wine Awards



As part of Wynn's inaugural Wynn Signature Chinese Wine Awards, wine enthusiasts and gastronomes took part in a series of exclusive wine dinners and masterclasses presented by some of the world's most

authoritative wine experts.

From March 1 to March 5, Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace welcomed an international panel of 27 esteemed judges, including seven Masters of Wine, to participate in the

first-ever awards program dedicated to premium Chinese wines.

"Poised to be the world's biggest Chinese wine competition of international standard, the winners will be announced at a much-anticipated awards ceremony at Wynn Palace on April 13," the gaming operator said in a statement.

Ms. Linda Chen, president, vice chairman of the Board and executive director of Wynn Macau, said, "not only will the awards provide an unprecedented opportunity to showcase premium Chinese wines on a global stage, and celebrate the excellence of the Chinese wine industry, but they will also reinforce Macau's position as a UNESCO-designated 'Creative City of Gastronomy.'"

TWO SESSIONS

Xi emphasizes need to develop new quality productive forces

PRESIDENT Xi Jinping highlighted this week the need to develop new quality productive forces tailored to local conditions for high-quality development, amid a new round of technological and industrial transformation.

While taking part in a deliberation with his fellow deputies from the delegation of Jiangsu province at the second session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, Xi emphasized that developing new quality productive forces does not imply neglecting or abandoning traditional industries.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, cautioned against herd behavior or speculative bubbles in developing the new quality productive forces. He also called for selective promotion of new industries, models and new driving forces based on local resources, industrial foundations and research conditions.

Xi also underscored the importance of leveraging new technologies to upgrade traditional industries, promoting the high-end, intelligent and green transformation of industries.

The country must seize opportunities to intensify innovation, nurture and strengthen emerging industries, and foster future



President Xi Jinping takes part in a deliberation with his fellow deputies from the delegation of Jiangsu province at the second session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing

industries with forward-looking planning, he said.

Xi first proposed the concept of new quality productive forces during an inspection tour in Heilongjiang province in September. With innovation leading, new quality productive forces means advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth models. It features high technology, high efficiency and high quality, and aligns with the country's new development philosophy.

The term refers to new productive forces that emerge from continuous advances in science and technology, driving strategic future and emerging industries that could introduce breakthrough te-

chnological advancements in an era of intelligent information.

During Tuesday's meeting, Xi said that Jiangsu has favorable conditions and capabilities for developing new quality productive forces. He emphasized the need for the province to focus on building a modern industrial system with advanced manufacturing as the backbone.

As one of China's economic powerhouses, Jiangsu saw its regional gross domestic product increase 5.8% year-on-year to 12.82 trillion yuan (\$1.78 trillion) in 2023, ranking second among 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, following Guangdong province.

Xi called for a deeper integration of technological and industrial innovation, consolidating the leading position of traditional industries and accelerating the creation of strategically competitive emerging industry clusters in order to make Jiangsu an important stronghold for developing new quality productive forces.

The president also emphasized the need to plan for further comprehensive deepening of major reforms to inject stronger impetus into high-quality development and propel sustained momentum for Chinese modernization.

In order to promote the high-level socialist market economy

system, efforts should be made to improve systems in terms of property rights protection, market access, fair competition and social credit, and support the growth of the private economy and private enterprises, Xi said.

It is essential to deepen reforms in the scientific and technological system and the education and talent systems, and remove obstacles to the development of new quality productive forces, he said.

Xi reiterated the necessity to continuously promote a market-based, world-class business environment governed by a sound legal framework, thereby shaping new advantages for a higher level of open economy.

He urged Jiangsu to be fully involved in the regional development strategy of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Yangtze River Delta, and to enhance coordination with other regional development strategies and build innovation, industry and supply chains with a larger scope to better leverage the radiating driving force of an economically powerful province for regional and national development.

Efforts should also be made to continue consolidating and enhancing the positive trend of economic recovery and to boost the confidence of the entire society in development, Xi said.

Yesterday, President Xi called on Chinese political advisors to build broad consensus to contribute to Chinese modernization, when he participated in a joint group meeting during the second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). **MDT/CHINA DAILY/XINHUA**

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Southeast Asian leaders call for disputes to be resolved without threats or force

AUSTRALIA'S prime minister expressed concerns yesterday over "unsafe and destabilizing behavior" in the South China Sea, citing the collision between Chinese and Philippine ships the previous day.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's remarks came as his country wrapped up a three-day summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that failed to explicitly call China out over a series of incidents in the disputed waters.

Instead, ASEAN leaders urged for disputes to be resolved through dialogue rather than threats, a day after Chinese and Philippine

coast guard vessels collided near a disputed shoal in the South China Sea and four Filipino crew members were injured in the confrontations.

Chinese and Philippines officials traded blame for the incident. The disputed area has been site of several tense skirmishes between Chinese and Philippine coast guard ships last year.

Albanese, who co-chaired the summit with Laos Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, said Tuesday's clash was concerning for Australia.

"It is dangerous and it creates risks of miscalculation, which can then lead to

escalation," he said.

Australia had backed the Philippines' push to have the ASEAN declaration adopted at the end of summit cite a 2016 arbitration ruling in The Hague, Netherlands, that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims in the South China Sea, which conflict with the claims of several ASEAN states. China did not accept the ruling.

The Melbourne Declaration, released last night, did not mention the 2016 ruling. The summit was held in the Australian city to mark 50 years since Australia became the first external ASEAN partner.

The declaration called for peaceful resolution of disputes through legal and diplomatic processes "without resorting to the threat or use of force" in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

"We encourage all countries to avoid any unilateral actions that endanger peace, security and stability in the region," it said.

Albanese said compromises had to be made to find words that ASEAN leaders at the summit could agree on.

"There is a general recognition that we need to make



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese speaks at a press conference at the conclusion of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Melbourne

sure that activity in the South China Sea alleviates any tension and doesn't add to it," Albanese said.

Deakin University Southeast Asia expert Damien Kingsbury said the declaration's failure to explicitly mention China was a nod to countries that are close to Beijing — Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar — and also to Malaysia's more concilia-

tory approach to the Chinese.

It's "a veiled criticism of China, which is about as strong as consensus would allow," Kingsbury said.

East Timorese Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão also attended the summit as an official observer after ASEAN agreed in principle to admit Asia's newest country. **MDT/AP**



NATIONAL POLICY

CPPCC TO FOCUS ON BETTER GBA INTEGRATION

ANALYSIS

THE integration of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has made significant progress, supported by various policies promoting cross-border connections.

Liu Jieyi, the spokesperson for the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), highlighted this at a press conference prior to the annual session. He emphasized that the CPPCC has consistently focused on the economic and social development of Hong Kong, Macau, and the Greater Bay Area through consultations and discussions.

According to Liu, national political advisers have offered suggestions and proposals to facilitate the integration of the Greater Bay Area market. These recommendations include improving cross-border

compliance systems for financial data, promoting digitalization across industries, and establishing mechanisms for talent sharing among different regions.

CPPCC National Committee members from Hong Kong and Macau have also conducted research visits to various locations in Guangdong province. Their focus has been on exploring cooperation and developing platforms between areas such as Hengqin, Qianhai, and Nansha.

These collective efforts have yielded positive results.

Data from Guangdong's Development and Reform Commission indicates that the Bay Area, with a population of 87 million, is projected to achieve an economic output of over 13.6 trillion yuan in 2023. This represents an increase of 1 trillion yuan compared to 2021.

The integration has been facilitated by extensive infrastructure projects linking Hong Kong with

the Pearl River estuary, as well as effective policy coordination. Notable projects include the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, which spans 55 kilometers and is the longest bridge-tunnel sea-crossing in the world. Additionally, express rail links, special cooperation zones, and significant real estate investments have contributed to the seamless flow of people, capital, logistics, and information across borders.

To further enhance the soft connections among the 11-city cluster, initiatives such as the northbound travel program for Hong Kong vehicles have been implemented. This program allows eligible Hong Kong private cars to travel between Hong Kong and Guangdong via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge without regular quotas.

Another example, is the seamless integration between Macau and the Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The island in Guangdong Province on March 1 started to allow most goods to be moved there tax-free from the neighboring Macau Special Administrative Region.

The new customs operation became effective at midnight in the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, in the city of Zhuhai. The zone covers the 106-square-km island of Hengqin that sits between Macau and the Chinese mainland.

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.

The new policy is seen as a major arrangement to enrich the practice of "One country, two sys-

tems" in Macau and boost economic diversification of the SAR, which has a land area of only 32.8 square km.

Li Weinong, 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.

By the end of 2023, there were 11,500 Macau residents working or living in Hengqin, an annual increase of over 7%, 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 Macao's economy and creating a new home for Macau residents to live and work," Xuan said.

GBA ping-pong foreshadows more regional sports events

ON THE AGENDA

WITH the first Greater Bay Area (GBA) Inter-school Table Tennis Championship opening last weekend in Macau, more regional sports events will be presented, director for Education and Youth Development Kong Chi Meng has said.

The education official said this year marks the 75th Anniversary and the 25th Anniversary of the respective establishments of the People's Republic of China and the Macau Special Administrative Region, which set the scene

for sports collaboration between the nine cities of the GBA.

He also said the nine cities will increase their sporting collaboration by not only taking turns to hold more competitions, but also in terms of educational and research-based events, such as seminars and forums, to promote sports development in the region.

Meanwhile, Leong Kin Wa, manager and coach of the Macau Inter-school Table Tennis Team, said four boy and four girl athletes from the team are competing in this cham-

pionship, according to public broadcaster TDM-Radio Macau - Chinese channel

He hopes they will perform well and take this chance to learn from other athletes.

A local athlete surnamed Chiang said that this is a good chance to learn from co-competitors, noting that during the pandemic, there were few such opportunities.

This first championship sees about 150 participants, including both team leaders and athletes, from the GBA.

The championship's

first match day saw group preliminary matches in male and female categories. The second day, saw semi-final matches for both categories.

Held concurrently with the championship is the GBA Sports Education Seminar, which featured academics from across the region to share their knowledge on the development of sports in their respective cities.

Sports is part of the Macau government's plans towards economic diversification and is also a major goal for GBA development.



MIDDLE EAST

US destroyer shoots down missile and drones launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels

JON GAMBRELL, DUBAI

A U.S. destroyer shot down drones and a missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels toward it in the Red Sea, officials said yesterday, as the Indian navy released images of it fighting a fire aboard a container ship earlier targeted by the Houthis.

The assault Tuesday apparently targeted the USS Carney, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer that has been involved in the American campaign against the rebels, who have launched attacks over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Another suspected Houthi attack on shipping was reported.

Meanwhile, Iran announced yesterday it would confiscate a \$50 million cargo of Kuwaiti crude oil for American energy firm Chevron Corp. aboard a tanker it seized nearly a year earlier. It marks the latest twist in a yearslong shadow war playing out in the Mideast's waterways even before the Houthi attacks began.

The Houthi attack on the Carney on Tuesday involved bomb-carrying drones and one anti-ship ballistic missile, the U.S. military's Central Command said.

The U.S. later launched an airstrike destroying three anti-ship missiles and three bomb-carrying drone boats, the Central Command said.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesperson, acknowledged the attack, but claimed its forces targeted two American warships, without elaborating.

The Houthis "will not stop until the aggression is stopped and the siege on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip is lifted," Saree said.

Saree did not acknowledge the later U.S. airstrikes. The Houthis have not offered any assessment of the damage they've suffered in the American-led strikes that began in January, though they have said at least 22 of their fighters have been killed.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targe-



This photograph shared by Indian navy on the X platform shows a firefighting team from an Indian navy vessel responding to a fire on a Liberian-flagged merchant ship caused due to a suspected drone/missile attack in the Gulf of Aden

ted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over the Israel-Hamas war. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo bound for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, and an aid ship later bound for Houthi-controlled territory.

Despite more than a month and a half of U.S.-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels have remained capable of launching significant attacks. They include the attack last month on a cargo ship carrying fertilizer, the Rubymar, which sank on Saturday after drifting for several days, and the downing of an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars.

The Houthis have been hailing ships over the radio in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden as well since launching their attacks. The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center reported Wednesday that a new round of similar radio messages went out to a ship, and urged crews to report any suspicious activity.

A short time later, the UKMTO reported a suspected attack in the area. Private security firm Ambrey said an explosion was reported near the vessel apparently hailed in the radio call, but there were few other details immediately known.

Meanwhile, the Indian

navy released a video of its sailors from the INS Kolkata fighting a fire aboard the MSC Sky II, which had been targeted by the Houthis in the Gulf of Aden on Monday. Smoke poured out of one container aboard the vessel, which also showed scorch marks from the impact of a Houthi missile.

The Mediterranean Shipping Co., a Switzerland-based company, said the missile struck the ship as it was traveling from Singapore to Djibouti.

"The missile caused a small fire that has been extinguished while no crew were injured," the company said.

Iran separately announced the seizure of the crude oil aboard the Advantage Sweet through an announcement carried by the judiciary's state-run Mizan news agency. At the time, Iranian commandos rappelled from a helicopter onto the vessel, which it alleged collided with another ship, without offering any evidence.

The court order for the seizure offered an entirely different reason for the confiscation. Mizan said it was part of a court order over U.S. sanctions it alleged barred the importation of a Swedish medicine used to treat patients suffering from epidermolysis bullosa, a rare

genetic condition that causes blisters all over the body and eyes. It did not reconcile the different reasons for the seizure.

The Advantage Sweet had been in the Persian Gulf in late April, but its track showed no unusual behavior as it transited through the Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of all traded oil passes. Iran has made allegations in other seizures that later fell apart as it became clear Tehran was trying to leverage the capture as a chip to negotiate with foreign nations.

Chevron, based in San Ramon, California, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ship seizures and explosions have roiled the region since 2019. The incidents began after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran drastically limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

The U.S. Navy also has blamed Iran for a series of limpet mine attacks on vessels that damaged tankers in 2019, as well as for a fatal drone attack on an Israeli-linked oil tanker that killed two European crew members in 2021. Tehran denies carrying out the attacks. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1975 KIDNAPPED HEIRESS FOUND STRANGLER



The body of Lesley Whittle, the 17-year-old heiress kidnapped from her Shropshire home 52 days ago, has been found at the bottom of a drain shaft.

Police made the discovery after a three-day intensive search of Bathpool Park at Kidsgrove in Staffordshire, where Lesley's brother Ronald Whittle had tried to meet the kidnapper some seven weeks earlier. It is thought she had been strangled.

Police investigating the disappearance of Lesley, a student left £82,000 by her father when he died five years ago, have said they are convinced she was taken by the killer known as the Black Panther because of his dark clothing.

He is already wanted in connection with murders at sub-post offices in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Worcestershire, and the wounding of a security guard at Dudley.

The Dudley shooting happened two nights after the kidnapping and a car found later abandoned in the town contained Miss Whittle's slippers and some office tape.

A white tent now marks the spot where Lesley's body was found. It is less than 200 yards (183m) from the spot where her brother was supposed to hand over the £50,000 ransom.

Questions are now being asked about why it took police so long to search the park.

Assistant Chief Constable of West Mercia, Frederick Hodges, told a news conference, "The visit made by Mr Whittle to Kidsgrove on 16 January was made with the full knowledge and under the operational control of the police. [...]"

Ronald Whittle, 31, had been waiting with his wife and mother at the family home at Highley, from where Lesley was snatched.

He told the BBC the kidnapper had left tape-recorded instructions for him to hand over the ransom money at a rendez-vous in Bathpool Park. He was to find the exact location by following the light of a flashing torch. [...]

The meeting never took place.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Donald Neilson alias the Black Panther, a jobbing builder from Bradford, was convicted of Lesley Whittle's murder and given five life sentences in June 1976.

He was caught by police who saw him acting suspiciously outside a post office near Mansfield in Nottinghamshire in December 1975. When officers tried to question him he tried to hijack the patrol car and shot one of them. The Oxford court heard how he had meticulously planned the kidnapping for three years after reading in the press about a court case over a disputed will involving the Whittle family. He was also convicted for murders following raids on four post offices in Barnsley, Harrogate, Accrington and Langley, West Midlands and for the attempted murder of two others.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Share what you're learning. Collaborate with your community. Adapt around a surprise. Many hands make light work. All for one and one for all.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Develop an interesting professional project. Put your heart into your work. Support your team to adapt with a change. Find creative and lasting solutions.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Broaden your exploration. Pursue a subject of passion where it leads. Monitor conditions before setting forth to avoid delays or breakdowns.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Together, you can solve the challenge ahead. Collaborate to adapt shared finances around a change. Lucrative possibilities develop.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Rely on each other around an unexpected turn. Collaboration and creativity flower. Romance is a distinct possibility. It could be fun. Relax and enjoy.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Prioritize your health and work. Balance intellectual exercise with physical activity. Adapt around a limitation. Savor good food and rest. Get your heart pumping.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Follow your heart. Imagine and envision. You're especially creative. Relax and have fun. Practice your arts and talents to resolve a puzzle or challenge.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Domestic beautification and improvement projects can have lasting benefits. Nurture your garden. Put your love into family comforts and surroundings.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Creative inspiration flows with ease. Plot twists require finesse and thoughtful analysis. Chart your story. Craft an engaging tale. Write, edit and publish.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Harvest the low-hanging fruit. Lucrative opportunities abound. Sell stuff you no longer need. Research purchases for best quality and value.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Assert your own agenda. Pursue a personal dream or vision. Adapt around any complications. Nurture yourself with good food and rest. Dress for success.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Rest and recuperate. Recharge with beloved favorites. Listen to birdsong and music. Consider plans, dreams and passions. Incorporate new possibilities into your schedule.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

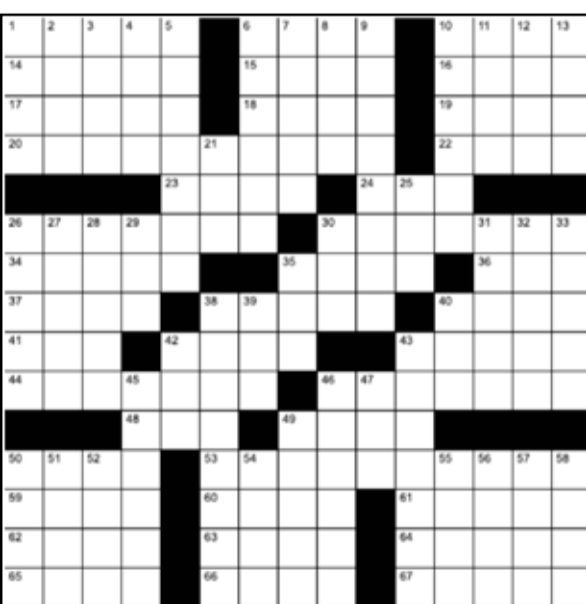
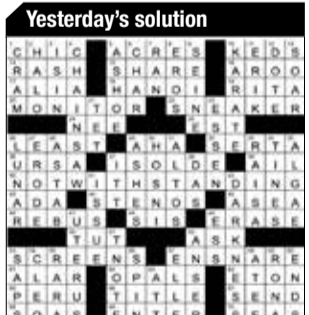
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-2	11	cloudy
Changchun	-11	1	fine
Chengdu	9	17	overcast
Chongqing	11	16	rain
Fuzhou	10	15	cloudy
Guangzhou	13	18	overcast
Guiyang	5	10	overcast
Haikou	18	19	rain
Hangzhou	1	12	fine
Harbin	-13	1	cloudy
Hefei	0	15	fine
Nanjing	1	11	cloudy
Shanghai	3	12	overcast
Taipei	12	14	rain
Wuhan	4	16	fine
Hong Kong	16	19	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-8	-1	fine
Frankfurt	0	9	cloudy
Paris	4	12	overcast
London	5	10	overcast
New York	5	12	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Pelvic bones; 6- Mil. school; 10- Tailor's line; 14- Old anesthetic; 15- Sauce brand; 16- Outer limit; 17- Bothered; 18- Q.E.D. part; 19- Film spool; 20- Hostile; 22- Concludes; 23- Ladies of Spain; Abbr.; 24- Amusement; 26- Becomes visible; 30- Weapons supply; 34- Killed; 35- ___ yellow ribbon...; 36- Guadalajara gold; 37- Galley propellers; 38- ___ Island Red; 40- Corrida cries; 41- U-turn from SSW; 42- Meander; 43- Machine for lifting heavy loads; 44- Hearing distance; 46- Abilities; 48- Not neg.; 49- Dynamic beginning; 50- Deep wound; 53- Next largest scoop after tea; 59- Gen. Robt. ___; 60- And others, briefly; 61- Jack Sprat could ___ fat; 62- Imitator; 63- Speed contest; 64- Come together; 65- "Titanic" heroine; 66- The closest one to us is the sun; 67- Rio Grande feeder;

DOWN 1- Linebacker Junior; 2- Envelope abbr.; 3- Cook; 4- The back end of something; 5- Craftsman; 6- Places of contest; 7- Parlor game; 8- I've Got ___ in Kalamazoo; 9- Like some airport shopping; 10- Tranquil; 11- Garden of ___; 12- Got on in years; 13- "Alice" diner; 21- Blow it; 25- Country bordered by Canada and Mexico; 26- In unison; 27- Primary strategy; 28- Kitchen gadget; 29- Sue Grafton's "___ for Evidence"; 30- Help; 31- Pitcher Ryan; 32- ___ we all?; 33- Misplaces; 35- Aunt Polly's nephew; 38- Cocks; 39- Magician's prop; 40- Galena or bauxite; 42- Letter after pi; 43- Photo of a raindrop on a rose petal, e.g.; 45- Globe; 46- Bank employee; 47- Exist; 49- Manila hemp plant; 50- Equipment; 51- Iams alternative; 52- Gets the picture; 54- Rat-___; 55- Window piece; 56- Ear-related; 57- Not fooled by; 58- Denials;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath

AP PHOTO



Canadian pianist Eric Guo plays Frederic Chopin's Concerto in F minor on a replica of a 1830 Pleyel piano during a concert marking the 19th century piano virtuoso and composer's 214th birthday, in Warsaw, March 1

CLASSICAL MUSIC

CHOPIN LOVERS CAN'T MEET THEIR HERO, BUT THIS PIANIST GOT TO DO THE NEXT BEST THING

MONIKA SCISLOWSKA,
WARSAW

PIANIST Eric Guo did everything but travel through time to commune with Chopin.

On March 1, the day celebrated as Frederic Chopin's birthday, the 21-year-old Canadian played one concert at the birthplace of the Romantic-era piano virtuoso and composer, on a piano built during his lifetime. Then he went into town for a second performance, during which he used a piano that once belonged to Chopin.

"You cannot get more connected to Chopin than being in his birth place," said Guo.

A student at the The Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, Guo was invited to give the special performances to mark Chopin's 214th birthday after winning the second Frederic Chopin Competition on Period Instruments. He gave a pair of recitals on the day, one at the manor house in Zelazowa Wola where Chopin was born in 1810, now a museum, and the other at the National Philharmonic in Warsaw.

"It's probably exactly the same room he was born in, so, it's, you

know, spiritual connection," Guo said. "I really feel one with Chopin."

Poland's Fryderyk Chopin Institute — which uses the Polish spelling of the composer's name — began the period instrument competition in 2018 to promote historically informed performances of Chopin's music that use 19th century pianos or modern reproductions. It's held every five years.

It's part of a wider trend toward period instruments, as experts and audiences try to figure out what the music pieces sounded like to their own composers. Some claim that changes in how instruments are designed and played nowadays have erased subtleties in the music; others just enjoy a new spin on familiar classics.

Pianos made in the 18th and 19th century were simpler, lighter and smaller than modern instruments, with narrower keys and lighter strings. The result is they play more softly than modern pianos.

"These period pianos, they all have the ability to play as soft as

possible and I think still there's something there, there is still a core inside," Guo told The Associated Press last weekend.

In a period instrument "I like the colors that it can create and the sound is, you know, out of this world," said Guo. Modern pianos, by contrast, tend to prioritize strong, powerful sound, he said.

Guo's hoping to finalize plans for concerts in China, his family's ancestral home, this fall

Contemporary grand pianos are reinforced with metal to withstand the force of much tauter and thicker strings and larger and more complex hammers mechanisms, for a sound that carries well in large concert halls, but also has a different quality.

Guo enjoys playing both. "It works both ways: the period helps the modern and vice versa."

In Warsaw, Guo performed a solo version of Chopin's Concer-

to in F Minor on a contemporary replica of an 1830 Pleyel piano made by Paul McNulty, and the Preludes on Chopin's last piano, an 1848 Pleyel. Chopin's own piano, Guo said, has a "velvet" sound and makes it possible to get the "kind of touch that Chopin would have really sought."

Chopin's music demands subtlety from both instrument and performer, Guo said. "He always emphasized that everything should be with ease and always free, and never to produce a hard sound, and never for the sake of virtuosity. Virtuosity, technique serves the music."

That's not to say the music is easy. "Chopin knew about the piano and he wrote for the piano" and a lot of his work is "just technically taxing, exhausting, he really demands a lot," Guo said.

Whether Chopin was actually born on the day he celebrated as his birthday is a matter of some dispute among his biographers. His birth certificate bears the date Feb. 22, 1810, but his family celebrated on March 1.

Chopin was considered a musical genius from an early age, and in 1830 left Warsaw for Vienna to broaden his education and his audience. He eventually settled in Paris, giving concerts, teaching the piano and composing music, some based on Polish dances like the polonaise and the mazurka. He died on Oct. 17, 1849 and was buried at the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. His heart is at the Holy Cross Church in Warsaw.

Guo said people in the tumultuous 21st century need music more than ever.

"All those wars going on, fights: music really bonds us, unites us as a humanity and society. Kind of heals us, cures all the stresses and all the challenges."

Following his competition win in Warsaw in October, Guo's schedule is busy with concerts from Japan to European countries, to the United States. He's hoping to finalize plans for concerts in China, his family's ancestral home, this fall.

"Schedules are quite packed and yes, more than before, but I'm still who I am, you know, I'm still living, surviving, and I'm human still, despite everything." MDT/AP

FOOTBALL | CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Harry Kane steers Bayern into quarterfinals with two goals in win over Lazio

BAYERN 3, LAZIO 0

HE'S done it again. Harry Kane scored twice to steer Bayern Munich into the quarterfinals of the Champions League with a 3-0 win over Lazio yesterday [Macau time].

Kane's 32nd and 33rd goals this season for Bayern ensured the Bavarian powerhouse recovered from losing the first leg of the last 16 tie 1-0 in Rome to win 3-1 on aggregate over two legs.

"A perfect night for us," said Kane, the man of the match.

The win will ease the pressure on Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel, whose premature departure at the end of the season was announced by Bayern after the team's three-game losing run — including the defeat in Rome.

Bayern's new sporting director Max Eberl said before the game that Tuchel would remain in charge afterward even if the team lost, but there had been a feeling



Bayern's Harry Kane scores his side's third goal

defeat would bring forward the coach's exit.

Bayern, which is 10 points behind Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga, was facing the prospect of just its second elimination in 12 appearances at this stage of the Champions League.

"If we had been eliminated today, it would have been more than unfortunate," Bayern president Herbert Hainer said.

Kane broke the deadlock in the 38th minute after Ciro Immobile had gone close for Lazio at the other end.

Thomas Müller headed Aleksandar Pavlovi's cross back for Raphaël Guerreiro to mis-hit it, and Kane threw himself at the ball to just head it past Ivan Provedel in the Lazio goal.

There was still time before the break for Müller to score in first-half stoppage time with a glancing header to Matthijs de Ligt's shot after a corner.

Kane sealed the result in the 66th by firing in the rebound after Leroy Sané drew a save from Provedel. It was the England captain's sixth Champions League goal this season.

The 19-year-old Pavlovi kept Bayern ticking from midfield with probing passes and measured play, while Joshua Kimmich dropped back to right back to help ease the team's injury-hit defense.

Sané had recovered enough to start after a knee problem kept him from playing in the 2-2 draw with Freiburg over the weekend.

Bayern forward Serge Gnabry entered in the last minute for his first appearance since December

as he made his comeback from a thigh injury.

Bayern's Club No. 12 fan group organized an impressive choreography before the game to show Munich's heraldic figure over a banner saying "In the name of the city."

One Italian supporter among around 100 Lazio fans who sang fascist songs in the beer hall where Adolf Hitler founded the Nazi party was arrested for giving a Hitler salute the night before.

Meanwhile, Kylian Mbappé led Paris Saint-Germain back to the Champions League quarterfinals, scoring both goals in a 2-1 win over Real Sociedad that kept alive the French club's hopes of winning the European title in its last season with the France forward.

PSG advanced 4-1 on aggregate, with Mbappé also scoring one of the goals in the 2-0 win in the first leg in Paris three weeks ago. Mbappé has already told PSG he will not stay with the club after this season. MDT/AP

AD

廖國敏
LIO KUOKMAN

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TALENTED MAESTRO LIO KUOKMAN HAS AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR HIS HOMETOWN ORCHESTRA

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OPINION

China Daily
Huizhong Wu, MDT/AP

ECONOMIC PLANS,
TAIWAN AND OTHER
THINGS OF CHINA'S
LEGISLATURE

China's Premier Li Qiang promoted an image of confidence as he announced modest economic growth goals for the world's second largest economy, at one of the country's most important political gatherings.

Li addressed a few thousand delegates of the country's legislature, the National People's Congress, which met in Beijing.

It's a time when the government reviews the work of the past year, and crucially reveals targets and goals for the coming year, especially in its approach to its economy, military budget and Chinese society.

The government's overall approach to the economy will not change, as the goals by the government for 2024 signal that they want to stabilize growth. Li announced that the GDP growth target was 5% this year — a modest target that is still going to be difficult. China is grappling with an economic slowdown and a real estate market in crisis after a crackdown on excess borrowing led to a liquidity crisis among developers.

"This year's targets are virtually the same as last year, reflecting policy stasis in Beijing as the central leadership delays any significant economic policy decisions until the Third Plenum later in the year," said Neil Thomas, a fellow on Chinese Politics at the Asia Society.

Li's report had stronger language on Taiwan.

Missing from this year's report was the word "peace." Last year, the premier had called for "advanc(ing) the process of China's peaceful reunification." This year, Li said they will "be firm in advancing the cause of China's reunification."

Overall, the language this year was tougher, said Arthur Zhin-Sheng Wang, a professor at Taiwan's Central Police University who's an expert on cross-Straits relations.

Dropping the word "peace" combined with the phrase "resolutely opposing Taiwan independence," is what signals a stronger stance, Wang said. Last year, the work report had more language about promoting the prosperity of both sides as well, while this year only had a brief nod.

On the military front, the government announced an increase of 7.2% in the military budget, the world's second-highest behind the United States at 1.6 trillion yuan (\$222 billion). China's defense budget has more than doubled since 2015, but in recent years it has dialed down the increase in defense spending as economic growth slowed.

China's rural and urban populations have long been divided by the hukou, a registration and identification system through which social benefits are allocated, such as health insurance and schools. Cities and urban areas generally have better social benefits than rural ones.

For the first time in recent years, the government's work report mentioned that it would want to make it easier for migrant workers with rural hukou registrations to be able to change their hukous to urban ones. While hukou reform has long been discussed, the mention in the government report signals that it could be higher on the agenda of the central authorities.

In spite of the slowing economy, and U.S. export controls on several tech-related industries, such as semi-conductors, Li struck a note of confidence in his report.

"The Chinese people have the courage, wisdom, to overcome any difficulties or obstacles," he said. "China's development will surely endure storms and plough through the waves, (and) the future is promising."

NIKKI HALEY OUT OF U.S. PRESIDENTIAL RACE LEAVES
TRUMP AS THE LAST MAJOR REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE

THE
BUZZ

Nikki Haley will suspend her presidential campaign today (Macau time) after being soundly defeated across the country on Super Tuesday, according to people familiar with her decision, leaving Donald Trump as the last remaining major candidate for the 2024 Republican nomination.

Three people with direct knowledge who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak publicly confirmed Haley's decision ahead of an announcement by her scheduled for Wednesday morning.

Haley is not planning to endorse Trump in her announcement, according to the people with knowledge of her plans. Instead, she is expected to encourage him to earn the support of the coalition of

moderate Republicans and independent voters who supported her. Haley, a former South Carolina governor and U.N. ambassador, was Trump's first significant rival when she jumped into the race in February 2023. She spent the final phase of her campaign aggressively warning the GOP against embracing Trump, whom she argued was too consumed by chaos and personal grievance to defeat President Joe Biden in the general election.

Haley's defeat marks a painful, if predictable, blow to those voters, donors and Republican Party officials who opposed Trump and his fiery brand of "Make America Great Again" politics.

Full story on macaudailytimes.com.mo/tag/the-buzz

AP PHOTO



SWIFT STEALS THE SHOW
AT AN ASIAN SUMMIT
AS SINGAPORE DEFENDS
EXCLUSIVE ERAS TOUR STOP

ROD MCGUIRK,
MELBOURNE

Taylor Swift stole the show at an Asian summit this week when Singapore's leader defended his tiny country's lucrative concert deal that could cause bad blood with neighboring nations.

Singapore is a key member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a 10-nation bloc known as ASEAN. Its three-day summit was expected to focus on member Myanmar's humanitarian crisis and conflicts in the South China Sea.

Instead, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was grilled on the summit's sidelines about an exclusive deal his city-state struck with Swift that prevents the singer from taking her Eras Tour to any other stop in Southeast Asia.

Swift is performing six concerts from March 2 to 9 in Singapore, and some Southeast Asian neighbors complain that the Singapore deal deprives them of the tourism boom her concerts bring to hosts. Her Eras Tour shattered records when it reportedly surpassed \$1 billion last year, and her film adaptation of the tour quickly took No. 1 at the box office and became the highest-grossing con-

cert film to date.

The Singaporean leader confirmed Tuesday that Swift was provided with "certain incentives" in exchange for making Singapore her only Southeast Asian destination on her Eras Tour. Lee defended the deal at a joint news conference with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, a self-professed Swiftie whose Spotify Wrapped list boasted Taylor Swift as his second most streamed artist of 2023. Albanese is hosting the summit in Melbourne, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Australia becoming ASEAN's first external partner.

Lee did not reveal the cost of the exclusive deal, which was paid for from a government fund established to rebuild tourism after COVID-19 disruptions. He also did not directly answer when asked if he had encountered "bad blood" among other leaders due to the deal, instead suggesting that if Singapore hadn't struck an exclusive deal, a neighboring country might have done so.

"It has turned out to be a very successful arrangement. I don't see that as being unfriendly," Lee said.

Thailand's Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, brought attention to the deal in February with a public

claim that a promoter told him the Singaporean government subsidized the concert with a condition that the artist not play anywhere else in Southeast Asia.

Srettha said that if he had known about the deal before, he was confident he would be able to pull off something similar.

But Thailand doesn't hold it against Singapore, said Prommin Lertsurdej, the Secretary-General of the Prime Minister. He told reporters in a group interview Monday that Thailand took what Singapore did as an example, and while Thailand already has some laws in place to allow such incentive packages, the government is working to remove red tape and make Thailand a more attractive venue for international events.

"We learn from each other," Prommin said, adding that he admired Singapore for being able to come up with and achieve this "good business idea."

Lee said that, while he didn't know what Australia's arrangements were, he expected it similarly made "mutually acceptable, sensible arrangements" with Swift when she performed in Melbourne and Sydney — one of which Australia's prime minister attended — before flying to Singapore. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



USA OpenAI shot back at accusations from Elon Musk that the ChatGPT maker betrayed its founding goals of benefiting humanity and chose to pursue profits, vowing to get his lawsuit thrown out. The first comments from OpenAI since the Tesla CEO sued last week have escalated the feud between the San Francisco-based artificial intelligence company and the billionaire that bankrolled its creation years ago.

AP PHOTO



British Treasury chief Jeremy Hunt headed to Parliament yesterday to announce tax cuts for millions of workers, a move his Conservative Party hopes can turn the political dial ahead of a general election in the coming year. Even though the British economy has hit one definition of recession and public finances are stretched, Hunt is under pressure from his colleagues to use his annual budget statement to cut taxes.

AP PHOTO



Bulgarian lawmakers yesterday unanimously approved the resignation of Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov (pictured) and his government, part of a power-sharing agreement by the two main political parties after elections last year. The center-right GERB party which won last April's general election and the runner-up, the reformist coalition led by "We Continue the Change", agreed that each would hold the top job for nine months at a time.

Egypt The Egyptian pound slipped sharply against the dollar yesterday after the Central Bank of Egypt raised its main interest rate and said it would allow the currency's exchange rate to be set by market forces. The measures were meant to combat inflationary waves and attract foreign investment as the country experiences a staggering shortage of foreign currency.