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AP PHOTO



**Indonesia** Torrential rains have triggered flash floods and a landslide on Indonesia's Sumatra island, killing at least 19 people and leaving seven others missing, officials said yesterday. Tons of mud, rocks and uprooted trees rolled down a mountain late Friday, reaching a river that burst its banks and tore through mountainside villages in Pesisir Selatan district of West Sumatra province, said Doni Yusrizal, who heads the local disaster management agency. *More on p7*

AP PHOTO



**India** signed a trade agreement with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland yesterday that includes a commitment of \$100 billion investment and creating 1 million direct jobs in India in the next 15 years, officials said. India on its part committed to reducing import tariffs on industrial products from the four European countries that comprise the European Free Trade Association, or EFTA.

AP PHOTO



**Gaza Strip** A U.S. Army vessel carrying equipment for building a temporary pier in Gaza was on its way to the Mediterranean yesterday, three days after U.S. President Joe Biden announced plans to increase aid deliveries by sea to the besieged enclave where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are going hungry. The new push for aid came in the final hours before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which could start as early as Sunday evening, depending on the sighting of a crescent moon.

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# ZERO TOLERANCE

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MDT ARCHIVE



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### IAM WARNS OF SAUSAGE PRODUCT WITH RUBBER PIECES

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has relayed a warning from the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that a sausage product from the American brand Johnsonville may contain pieces of rubber. IAM is paying close attention to the incident and has issued a food alert to the local food sector, requiring members of the sector to put an immediate halt to the supply and sale of the relevant product if they have it in stock. The sausage product concerned is "Johnsonville Polish Kielbasa Turkey Sausage," with an expiry date of May 17, 2024 or May 18, 2024.

### THREE WORKERS INJURED IN NEW COLOANE PRISON CONSTRUCTION

Three workers were injured and had to be transported to hospital after an accident on the construction site of the new Coloane prison. According to TDM, one of the three workers is a 53-year-old man, a non-resident worker, from mainland China, who lost consciousness in the accident and had to be evacuated. A pelvic fracture is suspected. The other two workers are from Macau and the mainland and also suffered injuries from the accident, following the unloading of a heavy item. The Labour Bureau Affairs has guaranteed support to the victims of the incident.

## SECURITY

# WONG SIO CHAK PLEDGES ZERO TOLERANCE FOR POLICE VIOLATIONS

ANTHONY LAM

**SECRETARY** for Security Wong Sio Chak has said he will not tolerate any law or disciplinary violations committed by any police officers, on the sidelines of a police institute event over the weekend.

It was earlier disclosed by the Judiciary Police (PJ) that a Public Security Police Force (PSP) officer had been arrested on allegations of a major fraud.

When asked for comment on the matter by the press, the security official emphasized that any illegal behavior by members of the security forces will not be tolerated and will be treated with great seriousness.

He also said that the requirements for the conduct of security forces personnel are very strict, and any illegal behaviors will not be tolerated. In addition to being held criminally accountable, there will also be disciplinary penalties, the official added.

In spite of the PJ's comments on the allegation, the Security official said that relevant details will be released on his blog – The Unceasing Alarm – as well at a later date.

Separately, a significant number of theft cases on buses and burglary cases in private residences have been disclosed by the PJ. When asked if this



Wong Sio Chak attends a graduation ceremony of the Security Forces Higher Institute

signals a rising trajectory and a worsening security situation, Wong emphasized that the police are on high alert for these cases. During festive periods, for example, the security forces anticipate and plan for security issues. Promotional and educational efforts are also put in place to remind the public to stay vigilant against crime and fire. As a result, the security official said, the number of such crimes has decreased in comparison to 2019.

### PSP OFFICER CHARGED FOR SCAMMING HKD500,000

A PSP officer has been charged with the crime of major fraud and is currently under investigation, the PJ has announced.

The officer, 36 and surnamed Ao Ieong, started working for the police force in 2013.

According to the PJ, in the summer of 2017, the suspect told their victim about an investment scheme concerning an education center located on Rua da Praia do Manduco. Ao Ieong reportedly claimed that one-third of the equity of the education center was then worth HKD500,000 only, with a promised seasonal dividend reaching HKD200,000.

Following Ao Ieong's repeated persuasion, the victim gave him HKD500,000 in several instalments. However, the victim never received any documentation nor dividends.

A year later, the victim was told by Ao Ieong that the edu-

cation center had ceased operations and the license holder was under arrest on allegations of fraudulently obtaining government subsidies. As such, the investment could not be refunded.

The case was later reported to the PJ by the victim.

Investigations have revealed that the owner of the education center did not know Ao Ieong nor did they commence any investment scheme. It was also discovered that Ao Ieong had withdrawn HKD100,000 in cash and bought a car with HKD300,000. The remaining funds have yet to be located.

Ao Ieong, however, denies the allegations and insists that he helped the victim invest in the education center.

# Hengqin hosts natural habitat exhibition in Macau

ANTHONY LAM

**A**N exhibition on the natural habitats and ecosystem of Hengqin, China is being held at the Macao Science Center as part of the territory's second nature festival.

Co-organized by the Urban Planning and Construction Bureau of the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and running until March 31, the exhibition

showcases pictures of the territory's ecosystem collected by a survey that concluded in 2023. A video about the survey is also screened at the venue, alongside other interactive elements.

Deputy director of the bureau, Tam Wai Fong, emphasized the close relations between Macau and Hengqin when introducing the exhibition to the Times.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Hengqin Nature Festival –

to be held from March 12 to 26 – aims to plant 10,000 trees in Hengqin as part of the initiative to ultimately plant 100,000 trees in the territory this year.

Residents in Macau will have the chance to participate in the tree-planting activity, provided that they register in advance using the Macau Government One Account app. They are also encouraged to view a biodiversity exhibition held in Hengqin, as well as par-

ticipate in a photo contest, natural workshops and antique tree tours, among other activities.

Another highlight of this year's festival is the opening of the Hengqin Erjinqwan Wetland Park Promotion and Education Center on March 20. As a base for nature education, the center will provide a variety of ecological education activities and workshops for residents of Macau and Hengqin.



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# Fitch Ratings keeps Macau's long-term credit rating at 'AA'

RENATO MARQUES

**I**N its latest assessment, Fitch Ratings announced on Friday that Macau's economy maintains its credit ratings (long-

-term foreign and local currency issuer default ratings) at "AA" with a "stable" outlook, the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) announced, citing a report from the international rating agency.

The "AA" rating is the third highest rating (after AAA and AA+) and is based on its exceptionally strong fiscal and external positions, as well as the "Macau government's adherence to pru-

dent fiscal management during economic adjustments," Fitch says.

The ratings agency also said to expect the local economic outlook to be bolstered by the steady reco-

very of the tourism sector as well as its non-gaming investments.

The "AA" category indicates a very strong fiscal position for payment of financial commitments and the capacity to resist foreseeable events in a non-vulnerable way, which makes expectations of default risk very low.

The agency had attributed the very same rating to Macau in late March last year.

As in last year's review, Fitch noted that Macau's rating cannot be much higher due to the narrow economic base, high concentration of gaming tourists from mainland China (A+/Stable), and vulnerability to policy shifts that may affect China's treatment of gaming tourism.

Fitch also forecast, in relation to gaming and tourism recovery, that Macau's growth "will remain strong at about 15% in 2024 based on our assumption that gross gaming revenue will further recover to about 79.5% of the 2019 level this year from 62.6% in 2023."

The agency also noted the sharp rebound of the local economy by 80.5% in 2023 after a 21.4% contraction in 2022, saying, "we expect the economic and gaming outlook to be bolstered by a further rise in inbound tourism and gaming operators' non-gaming investments as part of their mandate over their decade-long concession term through to 2033."

## Zone A details conserve Lighthouse views

ANTHONY LAM

**W**ORK must be done to save the views between New Urban Zone A and the Guia Lighthouse, the government has announced in the zone's detailed planning as a set of Executive Regulations.

Over the weekend, the Executive Council held a press briefing following its discussions on the matter. The Executive Regulations concern the zone's land use, including its intensity of use, as well as the establishment of public infrastructure and public facilities, resource protection and use measures, and the establishment of planning parameters and construction conditions.

The regulations have also set out the layout of urban disaster prevention facilities and routes. Protection of the views to and from the Guia Lighthouse, on the other hand, should be achieved by the means of landscape through landscape belts, viewing areas and visual corridors.

At the briefing, Director



of Land and Urban Construction Lai Weng Leong was asked whether UNESCO had issued any comments on the views related to the Lighthouse. To this, the official replied that no such comments were received.

Measuring 1.39 sq. km. in size and expected to house a population of nearly 100,000, the government has positioned it to be a livelihood area with gateway commercial activities and coastal iconic infrastructures.

Some 41% of the land on the zone has been saved for major greening, including the Urban Sports Park, the Central Green Corridor and the Coastal Green Promenade. Meanwhile, 76 plots of land will be used for urban development and constructions.

Four LRT stations have been planned for the zone, with intrazonal traffic relying mostly on other means of transport and core planning of a double-hash road network.

## SECRETARIES CHEONG AND WONG DENY SPECULATED RUN FOR CE

**A**NDRÉ Cheong and Wong Sio Chak – both senior officials – did not confirm their intentions to run in the upcoming Chief Executive election when they were asked over the weekend.

A column in a local media outlet had speculated about Secretary for Administration and Justice Cheong and Secretary for Security Wong participating in the election. The article also speculated on the odds of this duo and the Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong and Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao Ieong winning.

It is assumed that Beijing has not yet backed a candidate.

When asked by the press on Friday following an Executive Council press briefing, Cheong said that he had "never thought about" running



2019 CE elections

and reiterated that, for the moment, he needs to "focus on the work in the area of administration and justice."

The same morning, on the sidelines of the graduation ceremony of the Security Forces Higher Institute, Wong was asked the same question and he answered that the press was free to speculate. He had no comment on the column.

Similar to Cheong,

Wong said that as this year is the double-anniversary year marking the diamond and silver jubilees of the Macau SAR and China, his focus is on ensuring safety, stability and serenity across the city, implying that he has no time to prepare for elections.

Incumbent Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has said he had not decided whether he would run for another term. **AL**

### GRADUAL INCREASE OF VISITORS FROM XI'AN, QINGDAO

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is aiming for international tourists to return to about 60-70% of pre-pandemic levels in 2019, with more than two million overseas tourists this year. Speaking to the press, deputy director Cheng Wai Tong also said that following the launch of Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) for Xi'an and Qingdao residents, over the past four days, the number of Shanxi tourists to Macau increased by 1.5% as compared to March 1 to March 5, while the number of Qingdao tourists increased, compared with the same period, by 10%.

### NEARLY 90 CRUISE PASSENGERS FROM HONG KONG ON MACAU VISIT

Nearly 90 international cruise passengers from two groups came to Macau via Hong Kong yesterday. This group of international tourists comes from the United States, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Laos. The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) encourages international cruise passengers to join a group tour to Macau when docking in Hong Kong, offering subsidies. Related Macau group tour products were offered for sale at 12 international cruise companies in January.

### ARCHITECTS ASSOCIATION

# AAM PRESIDENT BELIEVES GOV'T WANTS TO USE FORMER HEADQUARTERS AS CULTURAL VENUE

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE president of the Board of Directors of the Architects Association of Macau (AAM), Christine Choi, believes that the government plans to use the venue that has served as AAM headquarters for the past 25 years as a cultural venue.

Choi's comments came last Saturday at the sidelines of the AAM Open House event, which was also the closing event of the association, in the venue located at the 2-story villa at the Avenida do Coronel Mesquita in Macau.

In an interview with the public broadcaster TDM, Choi also said that the association had already selected a new space to move into but refused to reveal the location until the place was "properly set," she said.

Although she noted with sadness that the AAM will leave the premises by the middle of this month, she thanked the government for its support in providing this venue for AAM activities over the past 25 years.

Choi said that the association leaving this venue comes as part of a government development plan that aims to revitalize and use the architectural complex (comprised of four villas) for cultural and tourism purposes.

In a different interview, the president of the Fellow Members Council, Architect Carlos Marreiros also said that the government's new project for the area will affect the AAM and all other associations



and groups that are, or were, using the other villas, noting that the other groups had also been notified to vacate the venues.

For Marreiros, it is important that the government preserves the characteristics of the project authored by the Portuguese Architect Raul Chorão Ramalho who worked in Macau in the 1960s.

Marreiros noted that the villa, formerly the residence of Macau Civil Servants, was the last of Chorão Ramalho's projects in Macau, the same architect that designed the original project of the "Escola Comercial Pedro Nolasco," which is currently a Macau Portuguese School.

Marreiros hopes that the government will use the space as an "architectural complex" and for "cultural hubs" given the importance of the building and its elements of the brutalist movement, an architectural movement that emerged in the mid-20th century and that is characterized by raw, exposed concrete structures and emphasis on functionality. The term "brutalism" is derived from the French word "béton brut," meaning "raw concrete," which reflects the movement's focus on showcasing the material in its unadorned form.

Brutalist architecture gained popularity in the 1950s and peaked in the 1960s and 1970s. It was influen-

ced by the modernist principles of Le Corbusier, particularly his use of concrete in buildings such as the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, France. Architects such as Le Corbusier, Paul Rudolph, Alison and Peter Smithson, and Marcel Breuer played significant roles in shaping the movement.

At the farewell to the venue, the AAM presented an exhibition of photography from Francisco Ricarte that depicts details and spaces of the house, titled "A Sentimental Photographic Journey," as well as a talk by Marreiros about the Architectural Legacy of Master Raul Chorão Ramalho in Macau, among others.

### REALTY

# Residential property prices dropping y-o-y, Taipa and Coloane down 7.4%

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE overall residential property price index for the three months between November 2023 and January 2024 shows a decrease of 1.1% over the previous three-month period (October-December 2023), a survey from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) indicates.

This was the seventh consecutive time that this index recorded declines.

The indices for the Ma-

cau Peninsula (231.2) and Taipa and Coloane (231.8) dropped by 0.9% and 1.6% respectively.

The same survey also found that, year-on-year, the same residential property price index fell, on average, by 5.6%, with the index of Taipa and Coloane showing a more significant drop that reached 7.4%.

Analyzed by age of building, the indices for residential units of buildings over 20 years old and for

those 5 years old or less fell by 2.1% and 0.9% respectively.

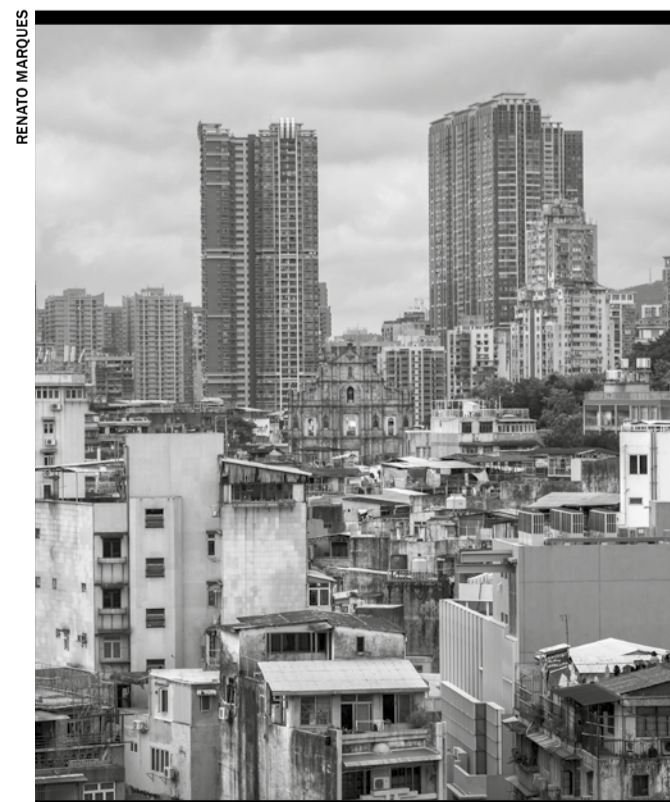
In the opposite direction was the index for housing units aged between 11 and 20 years old, which grew by 3.0%.

Concurrently, the index for pre-sale residential units (256.3) dropped by 1.7%.

Analyzed by floor area, the indices for residential units with a usable floor area of less than 50 square meters and for those with

a floor area between 50 and 74.9 square meters decreased by 2.5% and 1.8% respectively, while the index for those with a floor area of 100 square meters and more went up by 2.1%.

High-rise buildings also registered less significant decreases than low-rise ones, with the indices for residential units of buildings with seven stories or less dropping by 2.5% while for those with more than seven stories the drop was just 0.6%.



TECH

# OpenAI has 'full confidence' in CEO Sam Altman after investigation, reinstates him to board

MATT O'BRIEN  
& HALELUYA HADERO

**O**PENAI is reinstating CEO Sam Altman to its board of directors and said it has "full confidence" in his leadership after the conclusion of an outside investigation into the company's turmoil.

The ChatGPT maker tapped the law firm WilmerHale to look into what led the company to abruptly fire Altman in November, only to rehire him days later. After months of investigation, it found that Altman's ouster was a "consequence of a breakdown in the relationship and loss of trust" between him and the prior board, OpenAI said in a summary of the findings Friday. It did not release the full report.

OpenAI also announced it has added three women to its board of directors: Dr. Sue Desmond-Hellman, a former CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Nicole Seligman, a former Sony general counsel; and Instacart CEO Fidji Simo.

The actions are a way for the San Francisco-based artificial intelligence company to show investors and customers that it is trying to move past the internal conflicts that nearly destroyed it last year and made global headlines.

"I'm pleased this whole thing

AP PHOTO



OpenAI CEO Sam Altman

is over," Altman told reporters Friday, adding that he's been disheartened to see "people with an agenda" leaking information to try to harm the company or its mission and "pit us against each other." At the same time, he said he's learned from the experience and apologized for a dispute with a former board member he could have handled "with more grace and care."

In a parting shot, two board members who voted to fire Altman before getting pushed out themselves wished the new board well but said accountability is paramount when building technology "as potentially world-changing" as what OpenAI is pursuing.

"We hope the new board does its job in governing OpenAI and

holding it accountable to the mission," said a joint statement from ex-board members Helen Toner and Tasha McCauley. "As we told the investigators, deception, manipulation, and resistance to thorough oversight should be unacceptable."

For more than three months, OpenAI said little about what led its then-board of directors to fire Altman on Nov. 17. An announcement that day said Altman was "not consistently candid in his communications" in a way that hindered the board's ability to exercise its responsibilities. He also was kicked off the board, along with its chairman, Greg Brockman, who responded by quitting his job as the company's president.

Much of OpenAI's conflicts have been rooted in its unusual governance structure. Founded as a nonprofit with a mission to safely build futuristic AI that helps humanity, it is now a fast-growing big business still controlled by a nonprofit board bound to its original mission.

The investigation found the prior board acted within its discretion. But it also determined that Altman's "conduct did not mandate removal," OpenAI said. It said both Altman and Brockman remained the right leaders for the company.

"The review concluded there was a significant breakdown in trust between the prior board, and Sam and Greg," Bret Taylor, the board's chair, told reporters

Friday. "And similarly concluded that the board acted in good faith, that the board believed at the time that its actions would mitigate some of the challenges that it perceived and didn't anticipate some of the instability."

The dangers posed by increasingly powerful AI systems have long been a subject of debate among OpenAI's founders and leaders. But citing the law firm's findings, Taylor said Altman's firing "did not arise out of concerns regarding product safety or security."

Nor was it about OpenAI's finances or any statements made to investors, customers or business partners, Taylor said.

Days after his surprise ouster, Altman and his supporters — with backing from most of OpenAI's workforce and close business partner Microsoft — helped orchestrate a comeback that brought Altman and Brockman back to their executive roles and forced out board members Toner, a Georgetown University researcher; McCauley, a scientist at the RAND Corporation; and another co-founder, Ilya Sutskever. Sutskever kept his job as chief scientist and publicly expressed regret for his role in ousting Altman.

"I think Ilya loves OpenAI," Altman said Friday, saying he hopes they will keep working together but declining to answer a question about Sutskever's current position at the company.

Altman and Brockman did not regain their board seats when they rejoined the company in November. But an "initial" new board of three men was formed, led by Taylor, a former Salesforce and Facebook executive who also chaired Twitter's board before Elon Musk took over the platform. The others are former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers and Quora CEO Adam D'Angelo, the only member of the previous board to stay on. **MDT/AP**

## CORPORATE BITS

### Melco participates in 'Experience Macao' roadshow in Tokyo



Melco Resorts & Entertainment participated in the "Experience Macao" roadshow hosted in Tokyo, Japan between March 8-10 to promote Macau's diverse and exciting tourism offer-

ings. By providing exclusive travel packages and showcasing the top leisure and entertainment offerings of its flagship property City of Dreams and Studio City, Melco strives to attract

more Japanese visitors to experience its diverse tourism highlights through the roadshow, according to a statement issued by the gaming operator.

On March 6, Melco also participated in the "Macao Tourism + MICE Product Updates Seminar & Travel Mart" in Tokyo, which is a meeting with Japanese tourism industry representatives to explore potential collaborative opportunities and to help deepen their understanding of Macau.

Melco pledged to continue to support MGTO's efforts to promote Macau's as a "vibrant and safe tourism destination."

### MGM hosts familiarization trip for Korean travel reps



MGM has organized a four-day familiarization trip to Macau for Korean travel trade representatives from March 4 to 7. This marks the company's first post-pandemic tour designated for Korean

tourism professionals, including MICE agents, airline representatives and media.

Throughout the tour, the Korean delegation experienced MGM's hospitality, MICE facilities and arts and

culture offerings.

The objective of the familiarization trip is to enable Korean travel experts to enjoy Macau's kaleidoscope of "Tourism+" offerings with the aim of enticing more Korean tourists to visit Macau.

Iwan Dietschi, senior vice president of Hospitality at MGM, said "through this event, we aim to deepen travel industry relations between Korea and Macau and rely on the media to captivate more Korean tourists with Macau's 'Tourism+' allure. Moving ahead, MGM will continue to expand our international network by setting up new sales offices in Malaysia, Jakarta, Bangkok and Singapore."

KANIS LEUNG  
& ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

HONG KONG

# New national security bill includes tough penalties

**H**ONG Kong unveiled a proposed law that threatens life imprisonment for residents who “endanger national security” late last week.

It’s widely seen as the latest step in a crackdown on political opposition that began after the city saw protests in 2019.

Since then, many of the city’s leading pro-democracy activists have been arrested and others fled abroad. Dozens of civil society groups have been disbanded, and outspoken media outlets like Apple Daily and Stand News have been shut down.

Hong Kong leader John Lee has urged legislators to push the Safeguarding National Security Bill through “at full speed,” and lawmakers began debate hours after the bill was released publicly. It’s expected to pass easily, possibly in weeks, following an electoral overhaul.

The proposed law will expand the government’s power to stamp challenges to its rule, targeting espionage, disclosing state secrets, and “colluding with external forces” to commit illegal acts among others. It includes tougher penalties for people convicted of working with foreign governments or organizations to break some of its provisions.

The law would jail people who damage public infrastructure with the intent to endanger national security for 20 years — or life, if they collude with an external force to do so. In 2019, protesters occupied the airport and vandalized railway stations.

Similarly, those who commit sedition face a jail term of seven years, but colluding with an external force to carry out such acts increase that penalty to 10 years.

Last week, an appeals court upheld a conviction for sedition against a pro-democracy activist for chanting slogans and criticizing the 2020 National Security Law during a political campaign.

Its expansive definition of external forces includes foreign governments and political parties,



Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee, center

international organizations, and “any other organization in an external place that pursues political ends” — as well as companies that are influenced by such forces.

Beijing said the 2019 unrest was supported by external forces, and the city government has condemned what it called external interference during the protests.

The bill allows prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world for most of its offenses.

The European Union said the bill covers “an even wider range” of offenses than previously disclosed, including bans on external interference and significantly hardened provisions on sentencing.

“The legislation risks exacerbating the erosion of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong brought about, in particular, by the 2020 National Security Law,” it said.

However, Beijing insisted

that the bill balances maintaining security with safeguarding rights and freedoms.

It defined national security as a status in which the state’s political regime and sovereignty are relatively free from danger and threats, so are the welfare of the people and the state’s economic and social development among other “major interests.”

The legislature’s president, Andrew Leung, told reporters that the process was accelerated because the bill was necessary to safeguard national security.

“If you look at other countries, they enacted it within a day, two weeks, three weeks. [...] So why can’t Hong Kong do it in a speedy manner? You tell me,” the pro-Beijing politician said.

But the British consulate in Hong Kong urged authorities to “allow time for proper legislative scrutiny.”

During a one-month public

comment period that ended last week, 98.6% of the views received by officials showed support, and only 0.72% opposed the proposals, the government said.

The rest contained questions or opinions that did not reflect a stance on the law, it added.

But businesspeople and journalists have expressed fear that a broadly framed law could criminalize their day-to-day work, especially because the proposed definition of state secrets includes matters linked to economic, social and technological developments. The government has sought to allay concerns by adding a public interest defense under specific conditions in the proposal.

John Burns, an honorary professor of politics and public administration at the University of Hong Kong, said it remains to be seen how courts will interpret the provision that allows a public interest defense to char-

ges of disclosing state secrets.

The bill, if passed as tabled, is likely to have chilling effect on local civil society, Burns said, especially political and public policy lobby groups that have benefited from connections to overseas counterparts.

“At least initially, I expect them to be especially cautious about expanding links with similar groups overseas,” he said.

Eric Lai, a research fellow at Georgetown Center for Asian Law, said fears about the law “are now materialized.”

He called it “overbroad and vague,” particularly for offenses involving state secrets and external forces, and said it would undermine due process by allowing extended detention without charges, and by limiting the right to a lawyer.

People arrested on suspicion of national security offenses and released on bail could face “movement restriction orders” which limit the places they can go and where they can live, as well as prevent them from communicating with certain people.

Police can also apply to the court to extend detentions and prohibit suspects from consulting certain lawyers.

Authorities would also be empowered to use financial sanctions to punish people who have fled abroad, such as preventing other people from hiring them, leasing them property, starting businesses with them, or providing economic support to them.

Last year, police offered bounties of 1 million Hong Kong dollars (\$128,000) on more than a dozen activists living abroad, including former lawmakers Nathan Law and Ted Hui, whom they accuse of colluding with external forces to impose sanctions on Hong Kong and China.

Prisoners convicted of national security offenses will not be eligible for sentences reductions until authorities are confident early release would not risk national security. This would apply to all national security prisoners, even those whose sentences were imposed prior to the bill. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

# Cleaner finds two dead babies in glass bottles in a vacated apartment

**A** cleaning person found two dead baby boys in glass bottles in the living room of a vacated apartment in Hong Kong, police said Saturday. A man and a woman, believed to be the parents, have been detained.

The bottles were 30 centimeters tall and the bodies had no obvious signs of injury, Chief Inspector Au Yeung Tak of the New Territories North division told reporters. He said an autopsy would be conducted to try to determine the age

of the babies and whether they were dead at birth.

A 24-year-old man and a 22-year-old woman were detained on suspicion of illegal disposal of bodies. Au Yeung said the pair lived in the apartment and are belie-

ved to be a couple.

The landlord sent the cleaning person to the apartment Friday after the tenants moved out. Hong Kong broadcaster RTHK reported that the bodies were “soaked in liquid and kept in bottles.” **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

TENSIONS

# N. Korea conducts artillery firing drills in likely response to S. Korea-US military training

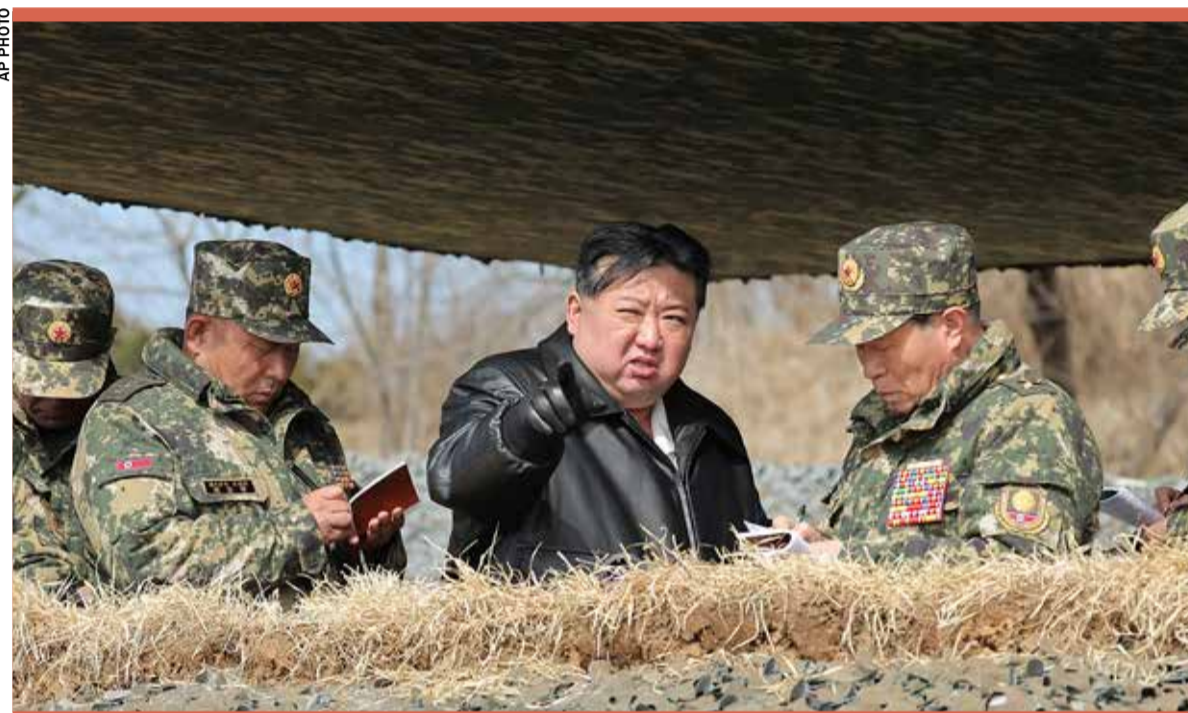
HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

**N**ORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised artillery firing drills aimed at boosting combat readiness, state media reported Friday, days after his country vowed to take corresponding military steps against the ongoing South Korean-U.S. military training that it regards as an invasion rehearsal.

Thursday's drills involved frontline artillery units, whose weapons place Seoul, the South Korean capital, in their striking range, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said.

Kim said artillery units must "take the initiative with merciless and rapid strikes at the moment of their entry into an actual war," KCNA said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said later Friday that it had detected North Korea firing ar-



tillery into the waters off its west coast the previous day. It said South Korea will make a stern and overwhelming response in the

event of provocations by North Korea.

North Korea's forward-deployed long-range artillery guns

pose a serious security threat to Seoul, a city with 10 million people which is about 40 to 50 kilometers from the border with Nor-

th Korea.

North Korea's Defense Ministry said last week it would conduct unspecified "responsible military activities" in response to the annual South Korea-U.S. military drills that began last week. Kim visited a western operational training ground last week and called for stronger war fighting capabilities.

The 11-day South Korean-U.S. drills involve a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the number conducted last year.

North Korea views South Korea-U.S. military exercises as a major security threat, calling them a preparation to launch attacks on the North. Seoul and Washington officials have said their drills are defensive in nature.

North Korea has sharply accelerated its missile testing activities since 2022 in part of efforts to develop more powerful nuclear-capable weapons targeting the U.S. mainland and South Korea. The South Korean and U.S. militaries have expanded their drills in response.

Experts say North Korea likely aims to use a modernized arsenal to win sanctions relief from the United States when diplomacy restarts. They say North Korea could increase its weapons tests and dial up warlike rhetoric this year as the United States and South Korea hold major elections. **MDT/AP**

INDONESIA

## AT LEAST 19 DEAD AND SEVEN MISSING AS LANDSLIDE AND FLASH FLOODS HIT SUMATRA ISLAND

**T**ORRENTIAL rains have triggered flash floods and a landslide on Indonesia's Sumatra island, killing at least 19 people and leaving seven others missing, officials said yesterday.

Tons of mud, rocks and uprooted trees rolled down a mountain late Friday, reaching a river that burst its banks and tore through mountainside villages in Pesisir Selatan district of West Sumatra province, said Doni Yusrizal, who heads the local disaster management agency.

Rescuers by Saturday pulled out seven bodies in the worst-hit village of Koto XI Tarusan, and recovered three others in two neighboring villages, Yusrizal said.

Rescuers retrieved six bodies in Pesisir Selatan and three more in the neighboring district of Padang Pariaman, bringing



Rescuers carry the body of a victim of a flash flood in Langgai, West Sumatra, Indonesia, yesterday

the death toll to 19, the National Disaster Management Agency said on Sunday.

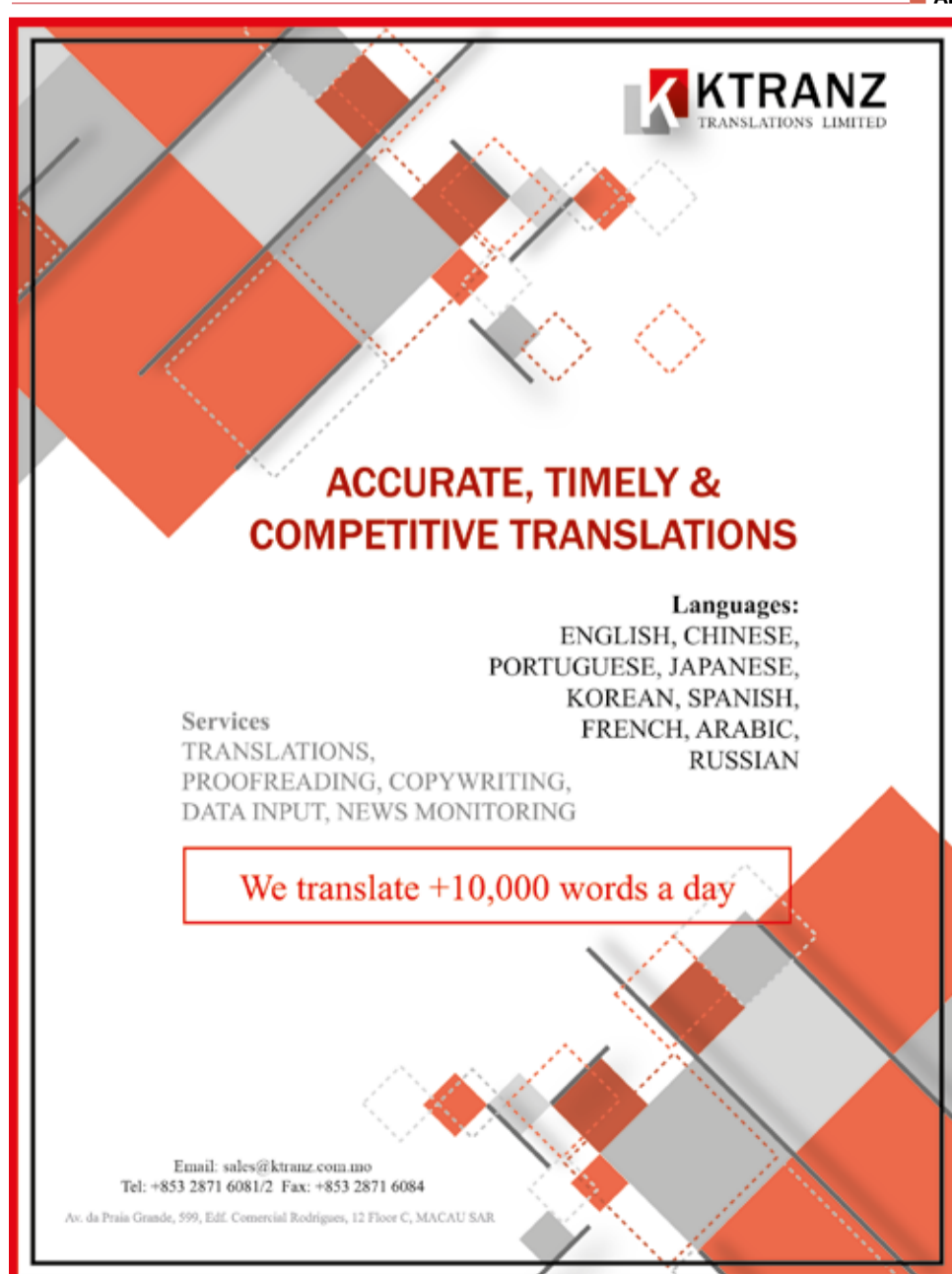
The agency in a statement said at least two villagers were injured by the flash flood and rescuers are searching for seven people who are reportedly still missing.

It said more than 80,000 people had fled to temporary government shelters after the flood and landslide buried 14 houses, while

20,000 houses were flooded up to the roof in nine districts and cities in West Sumatra province.

"Relief efforts for the dead and missing were hampered by power outages, blocked roads covered in thick mud and debris," Yusrizal said.

Heavy rains cause frequent landslides and flash floods in Indonesia, where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near floodplains. **MDT/AP**



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# UNICEF: 230 million females are circumcised globally, 30 million more than in 2016

NOHA ELHENAWY, CAIRO

**O**VER 230 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation, most of whom live in Africa, according to a report issued late last week by the United Nations children's agency.

In the last eight years, some 30 million people have undergone the procedure, in which external genitalia are partially or fully removed, UNICEF estimated in the report, which was released on International Women's Day.

The percentage of women and girls who experience female genital mutilation is declining, UNICEF said, but it warned that efforts to eradicate the practice are too slow to keep up with fast-growing populations.

"The practice of female genital mutilation is declining, but not fast enough," the report said.

The practice, incorrectly believed to control women's sexuality, can cause serious bleeding and even death. Girls are subjected to the procedure at ages ranging from infancy to adolescence. Long term, it can lead to urinary tract infections, menstrual problems, pain, decreased sexual satisfaction and childbirth complications,



AP PHOTO

as well as depression, low self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"We're also seeing a worrying trend that more girls are subjected to the practice at younger ages, many before their fifth birthday. That further reduces the window to intervene," said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell.

Some 144 million women and girls have been through female genital mutilation in Africa alone, followed by Asia and the Middle East with 80 million and 6 million respectively,

the report said. Somalia tops the list of countries where the practice, also known as female circumcision, is prevalent, with 99% of the female population between the ages of 15 and 49 having been circumcised.

Burkina Faso made the most significant progress, reducing the proportion of women between 15 and 49 who were circumcised from 80% to 30% over three decades.

The report also showed that 4 in every 10 survivors live in conflict-torn countries with high population growth rates, adding that political instabili-

ty disrupts efforts prevent the practice and provide support to victims.

"Ethiopia, Nigeria and Sudan account for the largest numbers of girls and women who have undergone female genital mutilation in conflict-affected countries," the report said.

Although the report hailed the progress made in some countries, it warned that the world is falling short of what would be needed to meet the U.N.'s goal of eradicating the practice globally by 2030.

"In some countries, progress would need to be 10 times faster than the best progress observed in history in order to reach the target by 2030," said the report.

Nimco Ali, CEO of the Five Foundation, a UK-based charity that fights female genital mutilation, said the UNICEF estimates were "shocking" and "devastating," and more funding is urgently needed to end the practice.

"We must use the last six years of this decade to finally get to grips with this abhorrent abuse of a girl's human rights and save the next generation from the horrors of FGM," the Somali-born activist, author and female genital mutilation survivor said in a press release. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1985 GORBACHEV BECOMES SOVIET LEADER

There is a new man in charge at the Kremlin - Mikhail Gorbachev has taken over following the death of Konstantin Chernenko.

Chernenko, 73, died yesterday after a long illness - but his death was only announced to the Soviet people this morning. Sombre music preceded the news on radio and television and scheduled programmes were cancelled.

The speed of naming of his successor - at 54 the youngest man to take over as general secretary of the Soviet communist party - has taken people by surprise.

In another break with tradition, Mr Gorbachev has announced arms talks with the Americans in Geneva will go ahead tomorrow.

Chernenko lasted only 13 months in the top job. He was in poor health when he was appointed and his death was caused by heart failure brought on by problems with his lungs and liver.

He is the third Soviet leader to die in just over two years. Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982 after 18 years in power. He was 75. Yuri Andropov died 18 months later aged 69.

The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher will attend Chernenko's funeral on Wednesday - but the United States President Ronald Reagan will not be going.

The BBC's Moscow correspondent, Tim Sebastian, says Mr Gorbachev's appointment marks a dramatic change in leadership in Moscow.

He says Mr Gorbachev is a dynamic figure who has moved rapidly through the Soviet hierarchy.

"There seems little doubt the Gorbachev administration will look different. More outgoing, more approachable, more concerned with its public image," he reported.

"But its aims and its approach seem likely to be familiar. Despite his lively and flexible manner, Gorbachev is still a strict, orthodox Marxist in no sense has he shown himself to be a liberal."

Mr Gorbachev's acceptance speech gave a hint of the changes to come. He spoke of his desire to freeze the deployment of weapons and reduce the international nuclear weapons stockpiles.

Mrs Thatcher has already indicated her approval at his appointment. Following his recent visit to Britain, she said: "I like Mr Gorbachev. We can do business together."



Courtesy BBC News

## PUTIN'S WAR

# Pope Francis: Ukraine should have the courage of the 'white flag,' negotiate end of war

**P**OPE Francis said in an interview that Ukraine, facing a possible defeat, should have the courage to negotiate an end to the war with Russia and not be ashamed to sit at the same table to carry out peace talks.

The pope made his appeal during an interview recorded last month with Swiss broadcaster RSI, which was partially released on Saturday.

"I think that the strongest one is the one who looks at the situation, thinks about the people and has the courage of the white flag, and negotiates,"

Francis said, adding that talks should take place with the help of international powers.

Ukraine remains firm on not engaging directly with Russia on peace talks, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said multiple times the initiative in peace negotiations must belong to the country which has been invaded.

Russia is gaining momentum on the battlefield in the war now in its third year and Ukraine is running low on ammunition. Meanwhile, some of Ukraine's allies in the West are

delicately raising the prospect of sending troops.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Brunni said Saturday that Francis picked up the "white flag" term that had been used by the interviewer. He issued a statement of clarification after the pope's "white flag" comments sparked criticism that he was siding with Russia in the conflict.

Throughout the war, Francis has tried to maintain the Vatican's traditional diplomatic neutrality, but that has often been accompanied by apparent sympathy with the

Russian rationale for invading Ukraine, such as when he noted that NATO was "barking at Russia's door" with its eastward expansion.

Francis said in the RSI interview that "the word negotiate is a courageous word."

"When you see that you are defeated, that things are not going well, you have to have the courage to negotiate," he said. "Negotiations are never a surrender."

The pope also reminded people that some countries have offered to act as mediators in the conflict. **MDT/AP**

## IN CONTEXT

Mikhail Gorbachev radically changed the course of Soviet foreign policy, signing a number of agreements with the United States on nuclear disarmament.

He introduced a policy of openness or "glasnost" and he was also the architect of "perestroika" or deep political and economic reforms. But his reforms led to severe economic hardship at home. Growing nationalist movements spearheaded by the Baltic states led him to propose a loose federation of Soviet states.

But this proved the last straw for communist hardliners. In August 1991 he survived a coup attempt - largely thanks to the support of the Russian authorities, under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin.

Yeltsin continued to attract more support which led eventually to the resignation of Gorbachev on 25 December 1991. The Soviet flag, the hammer and sickle, was lowered for the last time on 31 December.

Gorbachev is now president of the Green Cross - an organisation concerned with the clean-up of chemical and biological weapons.

His wife Raisa, the only wife of a Soviet leader to become a public figure in recent times, died of leukaemia in 1999.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
**Mar. 21-Apr. 19**  
 Insights, breakthroughs and revelations sparkle in tonight's New Moon. Dreams seem within reach. Enjoy a two-week creative, imaginative and organizational phase. Imagine possibilities.

**TAURUS**  
**Apr. 20-May. 20**  
 Connect for shared support for big results. This New Moon phase benefits team efforts. Grow through friendships, social networks and community participation.

**GEMINI**  
**May. 21-Jun. 21**  
 This New Moon illuminates professional opportunities. Develop interesting projects over the next two weeks. Pursue exciting possibilities.

**CANCER**  
**Jun. 22-Jul. 22**  
 Educational opportunities arise with this New Moon. The next two-week phase favors study, investigation and exploration. Consider new perspectives.

**LEO**  
**Jul. 23-Aug. 22**  
 Find creative ways to grow your family nest egg. A lucrative two-week phase dawns with the New Moon. Launch valuable initiatives with your partner.

**VIRGO**  
**Aug. 23-Sep. 22**  
 Collaboration comes naturally, especially over two weeks following the Pisces New Moon. You're on the same wavelength. Take your partnership to the next level.

**LIBRA**  
**Sep. 23-Oct. 22**  
 Plan physical moves in advance. This New Moon initiates two weeks benefiting your energy, work and health. Get your heart pumping. Practice makes perfect.

**SCORPIO**  
**Oct. 23-Nov. 21**  
 Enjoy yourself. Stir up some romance. The New Moon begins a two-week family, fun and passion phase. Get creative. It's all for love.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
**Nov. 22-Dec. 21**  
 Realize domestic visions with upgrades over a two-week New Moon phase. Get creative. Improve the beauty and functionality of your home. Nurture family.

**CAPRICORN**  
**Dec. 22-Jan. 19**  
 Profit through communications for two weeks. Possibilities spark in conversation with this New Moon. Creative projects flower. Express, share and connect. Write your story.

**AQUARIUS**  
**Jan. 20-Feb. 18**  
 Begin a lucrative New Moon phase. Discover fresh markets and rising prosperity. Strengthen financial foundations for growth. Rake in and preserve a healthy harvest.

**PISCES**  
**Feb. 19-Mar. 20**  
 Pursue personal dreams. Expand talents, capacities and skills over two weeks, with the New Moon in your sign. Grow and develop. Shine your light.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sanson**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
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
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-8	-1	fine
Frankfurt	0	9	cloudy
Paris	4	12	overcast
London	5	10	overcast
New York	5	12	cloudy

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Fiber obtained from a banana plant; 6- "\_\_\_\_\_ sprach Zarathustra"; 10- 27th president of the US; 14- Visible exhalation; 15- Rules; 16- In fine fettle; 17- Novelist Calvino; 18- Bread spread; 19- Minerals; 20- Watery animal fluid; 21- No long-distance charge; 23- Bell and Barker; 25- Wreath of flowers; 26- Scrutinize; 29- Sigher's word; 32- Wears well; 37- Nasser's org.; 38- Starting; 39- Person in the petroleum industry; 40- Make a trade?; 43- Series of prayers; 44- Film spool; 45- Chinese philosopher Mo-\_\_\_\_; 46- Prince Valiant's wife; 47- Andean country; 48- Wither through heat exposure; 49- Convert into leather; 51- Writing instrument; 53- Inattentive; 58- Saturn's largest moon; 62- Course list?; 63- "Chicken of the sea"; 64- Evade; 65- Lodge members; 66- Foreign dignitary; 67- \_\_\_ firma; 68- Caesar's wings; 69- Pro follower; 70- Streamlined;


DOWN 1- National competitor; 2- Soak leather in base solution; 3- On \_\_\_ with; 4- Decorative pillar; 5- Bouquet; 6- Bunches; 7- Composer Schiffrin; 8- Bulges; 9- \_\_\_ Mio; 10- Red-bearded god; 11- Swiss river; 12- Head for the hills; 13- French possessive; 22- Pertaining to a son or daughter; 24- Pert; 26- Above; 27- Christmas song; 28- "\_\_\_\_ by any other name..."; 30- \_\_\_ Lobos; 31- Ablaze; 33- Tie-score word; 34- Strike hard; 35- Shallow ornamental bowl; 36- Twisted expression?; 38- Add fizz; 39- Get the better of; 41- Budgetary excess; 42- \_\_\_ the land of the free...; 47- Soul; 48- Whine; 50- Adjust, modify; 52- Les \_\_\_-Unis; 53- Unit of an insurgency; 54- "Puppy Love" singer; 55- Subterfuge; 56- Foul mood; 57- Poet Teasdale; 59- Made tracks; 60- Yorkshire river; 61- Mont. neighbor; 62- \_\_\_ culpa;

**Friday's solution**

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

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PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731	
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300	
IAM 28 387 333	
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44.12 m<sup>2</sup> / 475 ft<sup>2</sup> | HKD2,980,000



Jade Gardem (Taipa)  
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UFC 299

# Sean O'Malley retains bantamweight belt with unanimous decision over Marlon Vera

ALANIS THAMES, MIAMI

**S**EAN O'Malley emphatically defended his bantamweight belt Saturday night, unanimously outpointing Marlon "Chito" Vera in UFC 299.

In a fight that he controlled from the opening round, O'Malley (18-1) outclassed Vera with his quickness, precision striking and footwork.

The champion threw 344 punches, landing more than 50% of them. He was the more active fighter throughout, hurting Vera (23-9-1) with shots to the body, knees to the face, and countering nearly every one of Vera's connections with one of his own.

It was O'Malley's first defense of his bantamweight title after stopping former champion Aljamain Sterling 51 seconds into the second round at UFC 292 last August.

UFC CEO Dana White called the performance a "clinic" by



Sean O'Malley celebrates after retaining his UFC bantamweight title against Marlon Vera at the UFC 299 mixed martial arts event, yesterday

O'Malley, who is fast becoming one of the biggest stars in the sport. White added that the card was the fourth-highest grossing UFC event ever, with a gate of \$14.14 million.

"He's on his way," White said

of O'Malley, who some believe has star power of Conor McGregor. "He's the biggest star ever in bantamweight history. You can say that right now."

Vera handed O'Malley the only defeat of his career nearly

four years ago by landing a leg kick that caused O'Malley's right foot to go numb in the first round of UFC 252.

O'Malley has often downplayed that loss — the kick shut down the peroneal nerve in his lower leg, causing temporary loss of feeling — and vowed to dominate in the rematch.

"That one feels good getting that one back," O'Malley said. "I'm guessing we can all agree that I'm undefeated still."

He added that he wants to fight featherweight champion Ilia Topuria next.

"Dana," he said, "Give me a jet to Spain, baby."

Immediately after the five-round fight, O'Malley sat down on the canvas after Vera hurt him late with a shot to the body — one that could have been much more significant if it was landed earlier in the match.

"I tried to stay toe to toe with him and catch him," said Vera, the Ecuadorian fighter who received a massive amount of

cheers from the fans at Kaseya Center. "At the end of the fifth round I landed a nice body that hurt him, but I ran out of time."

Former interim lightweight champion Dustin Poirier knocked out up-and-comer Benoit Saint Denis with a right hand in the second round of their lightweight match. Saint Denis had hurt Poirier with punches in the early round before the veteran dropped him with a right hook at 2:52 in the second round. The victory moved Poirier into a tie for the fourth-most wins in UFC history with 22.

Jack Della Maddalena stretched his winning streak to 17 with the biggest victory of his career. He stopped Gilbert Burns in the third round of their bout with a crushing knee to the head, moments after it appeared Burns had secured a fight-clinching takedown. Della Maddalena followed the knee with a series of elbows on the ground for a TKO victory at 3:43 in the final round of the 170-pound fight. **MDT/AP**

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**OPINION**

**China Daily**

Xinhua Commentary

**CHINESE ECONOMY  
ASCENDING, NOT PEAKING**

China's 2024 growth target of around 5 percent clearly indicates that its economic trajectory will continue to rise steadily.

The target is realistic and attainable amid the country's pivot towards a pursuit of long-term prosperity featuring quality over sheer speed. It attests to the long-term uptrend of the Chinese economy.

Over the past decade, when faced with adversities like natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, China's economy has persistently ascended to achieve its development goals, showing remarkable tenacity.

resilience is underpinned by impressive figures. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) has more than doubled from 60 trillion yuan (about 8.45 trillion U.S. dollars) in 2014 to 126 trillion yuan last year, countering the gloomy forecasts of a downturn or collapse.

Those who bemoan China's moderated pace of growth evidently miss the broader context: a fundamental shift from high speed to medium-high growth, and the significant role the country continues to play in the global economic expansion. To realize its 2024 growth target means the world's second-largest economy will contribute about 30 percent to global growth, reaffirming its position as a major engine of the global economy, experts say.

Early indicators for 2024 paint an optimistic picture. Robust capital expenditure, improved social financing, and a spike in consumer spending during the Spring Festival point to a promising start to the year, instilling confidence in the future.

China has a well-stocked monetary toolbox and there is still ample policy headroom to promote sound economic flows. It is unnecessary to whine that China has yet to roll out one-off bazooka-style stimuli packages, as the country prefers more sustained, quality-driven economic growth buoyed by a multitude of inherent drivers.

This year, the country will continue to implement a proactive fiscal policy and a prudent monetary policy. The agenda also includes planning new reforms for its fiscal and tax systems, an increase in the share of loans to private businesses, and the earmarking of 700 billion yuan from the central government budget for investment.

These measures not only aim to tackle current cyclical and structural issues but also underline a clear vision and design for long-term growth.

A standout example is China's emphasis on modernizing the industrial system and developing new quality productive forces. The country will step up the development of hydrogen power, new materials, innovative drugs and other cutting-edge sectors. Fostering future-oriented industries such as quantum technology and life sciences requires dedication and patience. They are unlikely to yield immediate results but hold the promise of being substantial drivers of long-term development.

The country's commitment to technological advancement is also evident in its spending on research and development, which reached 3.3 trillion yuan last year, up 8.1 percent from 2022, advancing its position on the global high-tech ladder and ascending the value chain.

China also relies on domestic consumption to fuel future growth. This has been supported by policies aimed at boosting household incomes and enhancing social welfare systems, thereby increasing the purchasing power of residents. The focus on domestic consumption is a strategic move that not only taps into the vast potential of the Chinese market but also reduces vulnerability to external shocks.

To further attract foreign investors, China will fully lift the restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector this year.

China's foreign trade shows an encouraging sign. The total imports and exports of goods expanded 8.7 percent year on year in the first two months of 2024, with the volume hitting a record high over the same periods in history and the exports returning to double-digit growth.

[Abridged]

**ISRAELI PRESIDENT'S PRESENCE IN NETHERLANDS' HOLOCAUST MUSEUM CAUSES CONCERN**

**THE  
BUZZ**

The Netherlands's National Holocaust Museum opened yesterday in a ceremony presided over by the Dutch king as well as Israeli President Isaac Herzog, whose presence is prompting protest because of Israel's deadly offensive against Palestinians in Gaza.

The museum in Amsterdam tells the stories of some of the 102,000 Jews who were deported from the Netherlands and murdered in Nazi camps, as well as the history of their structural persecution under German World War II occupation before the deportations began.

Three-quarters of Dutch Jews were among the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis, the largest proportion of any country in

Europe.

Dutch King Willem-Alexander and Herzog will visit a synagogue and open the museum against a backdrop of Israel's devastating attacks on Gaza that followed the deadly incursions by Hamas in southern Israel on Oct. 7. Both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli protests are planned outside the events.

A pro-Palestinian Dutch organization, The Rights Forum, called Herzog's presence "a slap in the face of the Palestinians who can only helplessly watch how Israel murders their loved ones and destroys their land."

AP PHOTO



**TOP COURT,  
PROSECUTORS REPORT  
SURGING CYBERSCAMS,  
STRESS PROTECTING  
NATIONAL SECURITY**

**ELAINE KURTENBACH,  
BEIJING**

CHINA saw large increases in arrests and cases of phone and internet scams last year, according to reports presented late last week to the National People's Congress that stressed the ruling Communist Party's determination to safeguard national security and public order.

A report issued by the Supreme People's Procuratorate said the number of cases of computer crimes including social media fraud jumped 36.2% in 2023 and involved 323,000 people.

The sharp increase likely reflects a doubling down on cross-border computer fraud that has resulted in thousands of people, some of them victims of human traffickers who forced them to work for crime rings in remote areas of Myanmar and other neighboring countries, being returned to China.

Indictments of people for telecoms fraud jumped nearly 67% to about 51,000, the report said.

Overall, arrests surged 47% to 726,000 and indictments were up 17.3% to 168,800, the report said.

China's national con-

gress is due to end its six-day session today with approvals of reports by Premier Li Qiang and others that set the party's plans for the year.

As China marks the 75th anniversary of the Oct. 1, 1949, founding of the People's Republic of China, the party is stressing its determination to fortify its control and protect national security.

Courts will "Implement the overall concept of national security and severely punish crimes that endanger national security and public safety according to the law," a report by the Supreme People's Court said.

It said authorities would persist in crackdowns on organized crime, telecoms and internet fraud, cross border gambling and graft.

The report highlighted perennial efforts to root out nepotism, bribery and other corruption, noting there were 25 cases last year involving senior-level officials. In 2023, courts handled 24,000 cases of bribery and other graft, up nearly 20%, it said.

The prosecutors' report said 346 people were indicted last year on suspicion of involvement with fraudulent IPOs, insider trading and market manipulation.

China has gradually been updating its legal system to reflect changing times. A Chinese court handled the country's first individual bankruptcy case last year, as corporate bankruptcies jumped nearly 70% from the year before.

The courts also reversed the verdicts of 42 criminal cases related to private property ownership, the supreme court's report said.

It said the number of cases related to pollution fell 11.5% last year.

In a separate report, the Standing Committee of the congress outlined a raft of plans related to the economy, saying it would establish a financial stability law, an emergency management law, a hazardous chemicals law and laws on energy and atomic energy.

Laws on money laundering, bankruptcy, unfair competition, mineral resources and cybersecurity will be revised, it said.

While the gist of the reports was typical of past years, the court's report included 20 pages of charts, graphs and illustrations apparently designed to convey its message of being tough on crime with greater clarity. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



**NATO** Large drills in the frigid fjords of northern Norway may be just war games meant to hone the fighting skills of the newly expanded 32-nation military alliance. But for troops taking part, they are very real. With drills underway now, NATO is baring its fangs in its biggest exercises since the Cold War, sending an unmistakable message to Russia that alliance members are ready to defend each other if needed.

AP PHOTO



**Spanish** Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said Saturday that he will propose that Spain's parliament recognizes a Palestinian state. "I will propose granting Spain's recognition to the Palestinian state," Sánchez said. "I do this out of moral conviction, for a just cause and because it is the only way that the two states, Israel and Palestine, can live together in peace." Sánchez added his voice to a chorus of other European leaders and government officials who have said that they could support a two-state solution in the Middle East.

AP PHOTO



**Portugal** held a general election yesterday against a backdrop of corruption scandals and economic hardship that have eroded faith in moderate mainstream parties and could push a significant number of the country's 10.8 million voters into the arms of a radical right populist party. A slew of recent corruption scandals has tarnished the two parties that have alternated in power for decades — the center-left Socialist Party and the center-right Social Democratic Party, which is running with two small allies in a coalition it calls Democratic Alliance. Those traditional parties are still expected to collect most of the votes.