

HOTEL OCCUPANCY RATE SHOWS A SIGNIFICANT BOOST COMPARED TO PREVIOUS YEAR, REACHING 90% IN FEBRUARY, ACCORDING TO MGTO

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LAWMAKERS CHALLENGE USE OF CPI TO DETERMINE PENSION ADJUSTMENTS

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JAPAN APPROVES PLAN TO EXPORT FIGHTER JETS IN LATEST BREAK FROM PACIFIST PRINCIPLES

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Chinese electric vehicle makers are showcasing their latest models, including a flying car, as they take on global rivals at the Bangkok International Motor Show. Companies like BYD, XPeng and Great Wall Motors are quickly growing their sales in Thailand, challenging longstanding market leaders like Toyota, Isuzu and Ford, as they expand exports across the globe.



Pakistan A suicide bomber in northwest Pakistan rammed his explosive-laden car into a vehicle yesterday, killing five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver, police said. The attack happened in Shangla, a district in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, local police chief Bakhat Zahir said. He added that the five killed were construction workers and engineers heading to the Dasu Dam, the biggest hydropower project in Pakistan, where they worked.

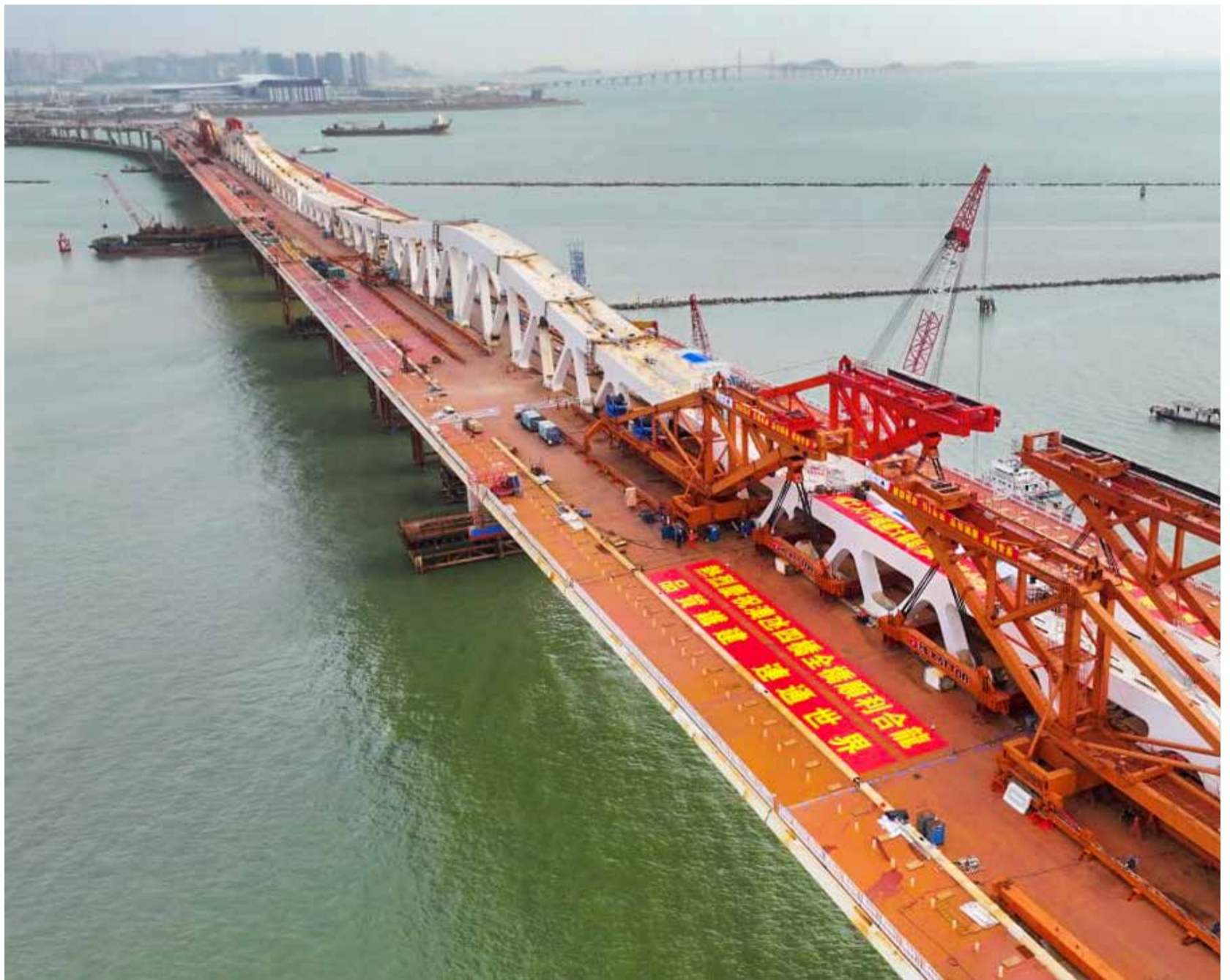


Indian police detained dozens of opposition protesters yesterday to stop them from marching to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence to demand the release of their leader and top elected official of New Delhi arrested last week in a bribery case. Nearly 300 supporters of Arvind Kejriwal gathered at India's Parliament House to begin their march. Policemen, some in riot gear, surrounded the protesters and detained some.

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MACAU BRIDGE, THE FOURTH

New harbor bridge named 'Macau Bridge', amid indifference and criticism mostly deploring authorities' lack of creativity P2



CLIMATE CHANGE
MACAU SWEATS ON RECORD-HOT MARCH DAY

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FIRST DAY OF COTAI HOSPITAL ULTRASOUND IMAGING SERVES TWO PATIENTS

The Cotai hospital opened the ultrasound imaging service for patients referred by the Health Bureau (SSM) on Monday and served two patients on the same day, according to a statement from the public-private medical facility. The same statement said that the new hospital will gradually accept patients referred by the SSM to ultrasound imaging and radiography services from March, with a view to prioritizing public medical services. Currently, the hospital will only serve such patients in the afternoon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

FORUM MACAU SHOWCASE HALL TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED FOR FOUR WEEKS

The China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform showcase hall and the Macao Ideas presentation corner, located at the basement of the Complex of Commerce and Trade Co-operation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries, will be closed for renovation for four weeks starting Mar. 28, the government announced in a statement yesterday. The government added that during the suspension period, interested parties may avail themselves of virtual tours via the respective websites of the two halls.

DSAL'S FOUR JOB SESSIONS IN APRIL TO OFFER 337 VACANCIES

In collaboration with the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) will host three job-matching sessions in April, offering 337 vacancies in total for qualified candidates. Of these, 124 will be in the supermarket retail industry, with sessions scheduled for the morning of Apr. 8. A food retail session with 190 vacancies will be held in the same afternoon. The afternoon on Apr. 9 will present 23 vacancies in the hotel industry. The first two sessions will be held at the FAOM center near Border Gate, while the last session will be held at the ballroom of Hotel Okura Macau. Registration opens from 9 a.m. on Mar. 27 to 12 p.m. on Apr. 5.

MIECF2024 SCALE EXPANDS

The Macau International Environmental Cooperation Forum and Exhibition (MIECF) has expanded in scale, increasing the area from 10,000 square meters last year to 12,000 square meters, spanning five major exhibition areas. According to the Macau Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) president Vincent U, the number of exhibitors has increased to 416, an increase of 3% from last year. The number of booths has increased to 562, an increase of 14%. The MIECF will be held for three consecutive days, starting from tomorrow.

IC ADMITS TO INSPECTING SCRIPTS AND PERFORMANCE CONTENTS FOR ARTS FESTIVAL

RENATO MARQUES

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is reviewing the scripts and performance contents for inclusion at the 34th Macao Arts Festival (FAM), the president of IC, Deland Leong, said during the Macao International Parade on Sunday.

Leong addressed media queries regarding reports suggesting that groups were required to modify their scripts or performance plans to align with criteria set by the IC.

"We evaluate the program to decide on necessary adjustments for FAM. These adjustments might include different aspects. As some groups are participating by invitation from the IC, negotiations regarding content can be conducted based on mutual respect to deliver enjoyable shows for residents," Leong said.

This comes after the recent cancellation of the performance, "Made by Beauty," during the Macao City Fringe Festival in January. Several other reports surfaced regarding alterations to some FAM shows to meet the IC standards.

One of these shows was reportedly "The Three Brothers," presented by the Portuguese art troupe My Own Name, which depicts family relationships and explores human emotions by presenting the frictions and struggles of brothers on the stage.



According to a report by Hoje Macau newspaper, part of the choreography was modified to remove a nudity scene. Choreographer Victor Hugo Pontes said that the change did not significantly affect the performance and deemed the IC's request acceptable.

The same choreographer said that the IC had explained there were concerns over "cultural differences in the acceptance of nudity by the local audience," and that the quota for nudity in the program had already been met.

According to a different report by local media outlet "All About Macau," several proposals for shows during last year's FAM event were disallowed at the last stage of evaluation, as they contained messages or

expressions that were considered not acceptable by the IC.

While Leong asserted that script and content reviews were routine, leader of the local patuá-language theatre group "Docí Papiaçám Di Macau," Miguel de Senna Fernandes, said to local public broadcaster TDM that this was the first year that IC had requested to see the scripts beforehand.

The group's founder said that for the time being, no changes have been made, but stated that he would protest if the play was censored.

Senna Fernandes said the group has never before submitted a script to the IC, adding that the play's script is a working document and so is likely to undergo last minute changes.

He also added that IC has

been a good partner in the promotion and revival of the Macanese Creole language that is part of the distinguished list of cultural artifacts on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China. However, for that partnership to work, "it is necessary that IC trusts us and trusts in what we do."

He noted that one of the fundamental characteristics of Patuá theatre plays is "impishness" and the fun and jesting manner with which the group addresses topical societal matters. He expressed the hope that the IC's content review and analysis did not result in censorship of content itself and the logic of the play, as this would pose a serious blow to the group's longstanding creative efforts across many years.

New harbor bridge named Macau Bridge

THE Public Works Bureau (DSOP) announced yesterday that the fourth bridge connecting Macau and Taipa has been officially named the "Macau Bridge" after an extensive process of public suggestion, voting and vetting.

It took the government three months and 10 days to determine the name, which most social media users re-

garded as unimpressive.

The name suggestion campaign received over 14,000 names from 5,703 local residents. The vetting committee then shortlisted of 88 names, which were further filtered down to 37 options. After public voting, five names emerged as the most popular choices: Macau Bridge, New Town Bridge, Mirror Sea Bridge,

Silver Jubilee Bridge and Hou Kong Bridge.

Members of the public took to Facebook to express their opinions on the name. One user questioned why it took so long to determine a relatively unoriginal name, in the comments on a post by public broadcaster TDM Chinese.

Another social media user

suggested the government reconsider, saying that eventual incidents on the bridge could tarnish the name of Macau.

On the Facebook page of pro-government Macao Daily News, a social media user lamented that talented individuals often leave Macau due to missed opportunities and poor decisions like this one. **AL**

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CLIMATE

City sweats on record-hot March day

LYNZY VALLES

THE city has recorded the highest temperature in March since records began in 1952, as the city sweltered through a hot day yesterday reaching 31 degrees Celsius, according to the city's observatory.

The maximum temperature was recorded at the Ka Ho, reaching 32.7 degrees Celsius.

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) attributed the weather to the weak northeast monsoon, resulting in generally sunny and cloudy conditions in Macau.

The previous highest temperature on record in March was on Mar. 19, 2008, when the city reached 29.8 degrees Celsius.

Just recently, the World Meteorological Organization warned of a high probability of 2024 becoming another record-hot year.

2023 was confirmed as the warmest calendar year on re-

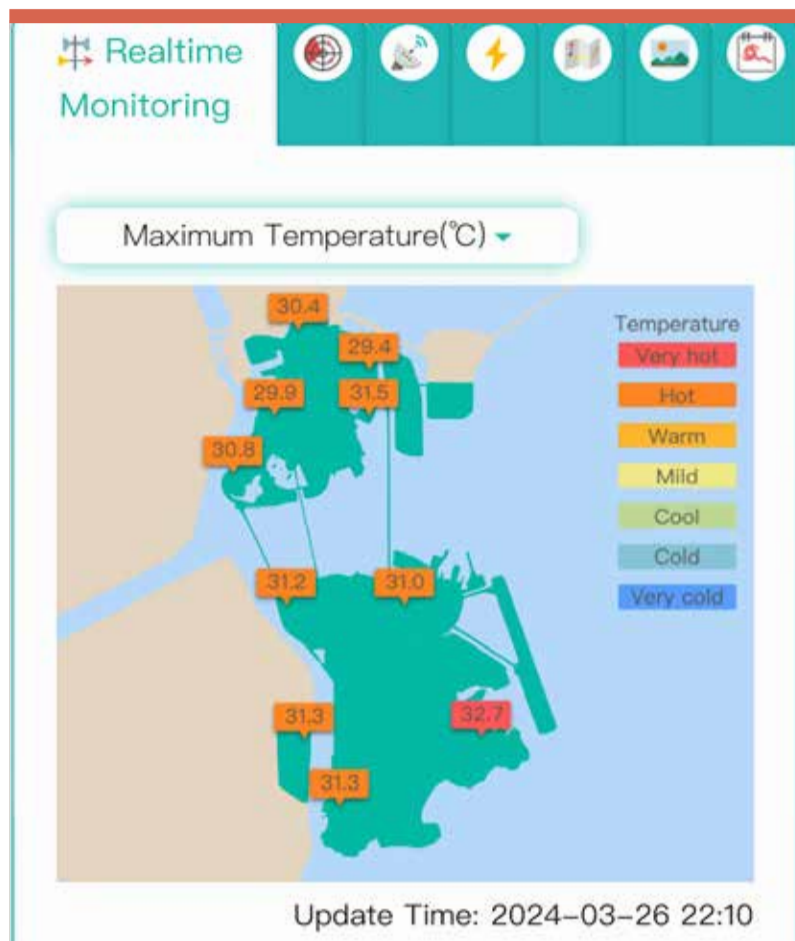
cord, with global temperature data records going back to 1850.

Omar Baddour, WMO's chief of climate monitoring, stated that according to recent data from the UN weather agency, there is a "high probability that 2024 will again break the record of 2023."

"January was the warmest January on record. So, the records are still being broken."

Meanwhile in Hong Kong, the region's temperature on Sunday reached the highest recorded level during the month of March in 140 years, according to the city's observatory.

The maximum temperature measured at the observatory was 31.5 degrees Celsius — the highest reported temperature during the month of March since records began in 1884 — while temperatures surged to above 32 degrees in the northern areas of the territory close to the mainland Chinese city of Shenzhen.



WYNN MACAU GRANTS SHARES TO OVER 150 EMPLOYEES

Wynn Macau has provided the opportunity to acquire a combined total of 6,977,787 ordinary shares valued at HKD0.001 each to 151 employees and one executive director. These shares represent approximately 0.13% of the total shares issued by Wynn Macau as of the date of this announcement. Frederic Jean-Luc Luvisutto, the COO of the company, has received 2,365,896 shares. Specific performance targets will apply to shares awarded to the Executive Director and two other selected participants. The 149 remaining selected participants will receive their shares on January 31, 2027, without any performance targets.

CHINESE ACADEMIC TO DISCUSS VIRUS-HOST INTERACTION AT UM TALK

Gao Fu, Chinese academic, will speak at the seminar at the University of Macau (UM) held at 4 p.m. today to present his insights on virus-host interactions. Gao is an academican of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), an international member of the US National Academy of Sciences, and professor in the Institute of Microbiology, Chinese Academy of Sciences. During his UM talk, Professor Gao will analyze and provide insights on the design and development of drugs and vaccines related to mechanisms of viral invasion and transmission, as well as research on drug resistance mechanisms.

SARS YOUTH TO COMPETE IN UNDERWATER ROBOTICS COMPETITION

Young people in Hong Kong and Macau will soon get a chance to showcase their talents in underwater robotics at a national competition coinciding with the 27th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China. The qualifying tournament for the International Youngster Unmanned Systems Competition (IYUSC) Smart Ocean challenge recently held a referee and coach training session in Hong Kong, signaling the commencement of a months-long preparation period. Over 60 professionals from the education and technology fields attended to learn about refereeing and coaching for the competition, which centers on marine science and technology.

AL PLENARY

Poor matching between job-seekers and available opportunities: Lei

LYNZY VALLES

SECRETARY for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong attributed youth unemployment to poor job matching between job-seekers and available positions rather than structural unemployment issues.

Data presented by Lei while speaking at an interpellation session at

the Legislative Assembly yesterday shows that about 70% of young job seekers find a job within an average of 60 days. However, the remaining portion of young people aim for clerical positions.

About 4,300 young people were unemployed in the fourth quarter of last year.

When previously ad-

ressing questions from lawmakers about the unemployment rate of Macau youth, the Chief Executive (CE), Ho Iat Seng, urged the younger generation to "try [for] any of the job offers available in the market instead of waiting for the ideal job."

The latest unemployment rate for local residents was 2.8%.

Lei yesterday noted that while the rate may further decline, there is indeed a structural unemployment problem in Macau, especially among people over 45 years old with specialized skills.

He highlighted adjustments to the junket sector in 2021, which led to around 3,900 people in the industry losing

their jobs.

Lei said that many of them have adjusted their mentality and changed careers, but there are still approximately 500 people who hope to be reinstated under their previous working conditions.

Back in April 2022, about 85% of employees were dismissed from junket operators, due to the turmoil that engulfed the sector.

This comes amid the cessation of operations by junket operator Sun-city, amid the arrest of junket mogul Alvin Chau. **LV**

TOURISM

HOTEL OCCUPANCY RATE CLOSE TO 90% IN FEBRUARY DUE TO CNY

STAFF REPORTER

THE hotel occupancy rate in Macau experienced a significant boost compared to the previous year, rising by 12.0 percentage points to reach 89.7% in February.

The average price of hotel rooms increased by 28.4%, reaching MOP1,544.90.

According to the latest data published on the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) website, the Macau Hotel Association reported that the hotel occupancy rates for five-star, four-star, and three-star hotels in February were 90.9%, 82.4%, and 92.0% respectively.

The overall average room rate surged by

28.4% compared to the previous year, reaching MOP1,544.90, as opposed to the reported figure of MOP1,203.50 in February 2023.

Among the different hotel categories, five-star hotels had an average room rate of MOP1,732.30, while four-star and three-star hotels had rates of MOP1,082.70 and

MOP1,052.70 respectively.

From January to February 2024, the average hotel occupancy rate for the period stood at 90.6%, with an average room rate of MOP1,470.70.

In February, Macau welcomed a total of 3.29 million visitors, indicating a recovery to 92.9% of the 2019 level, as reported by the latest data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

Additionally, the eight-day Spring Festival Golden Week in mainland China concluded with be-

tter-than-expected visitor figures. Macau registered nearly 1.36 million visitor arrivals during this period, with the number of visitors on the third day of Chinese New Year reaching the second-highest single-day record.

The average daily visitor arrivals during that period approximated 170,000, a significant increase compared to the previous year, almost reaching the level in 2019. The average hotel occupancy rate was above 95%, reflecting a positive trend in tourism recovery.



PUBLIC WORKS

GOV'T HAS NO SET TIMELINE FOR INNER HARBOUR REVAMP

ANTHONY LAM

THE government currently does not have a definitive timeline to overhaul the Inner Harbour district in alignment with the Master Urban Plan, director of Land and Urban Construction Lai Weng Leong said following a recent parliamentary committee meeting.

Pursuant to the Master Urban Plan, the Inner Harbour should

be transformed into a commercial and leisure promenade that integrates vigorous disaster control and prevention measures.

In response to press questions, Lai said that more time is needed to implement the Master Urban Plan within the district. Further details are being prepared to facilitate this, while the government works on other districts concurrently.

Regarding the cargo logistics capacities at the Inner Harbour,

Chu Chan Wai, department head for port management at the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA), recapped that around half of the capacities were relocated to Ka-Ho in 2022. The remainder will not be relocated in the foreseeable future, the official shared.

Relocated capacities will not return to the Inner Harbour, as relocating the containers at the harbor will impact surrounding land traffic.

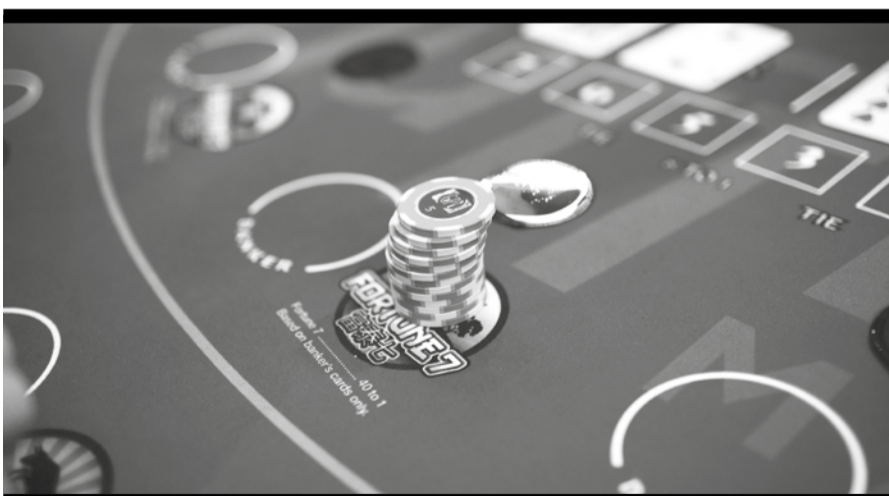
Casino's new RFDI data tracking raises privacy concerns

STAFF REPORTER

THE expanded use of radio frequency identification technology in Macao casinos may unintentionally give regulators unprecedented insight into patrons' gambling habits.

Industry analyst Ben Lee told TDM that RFID technology adopted by many operators, including Melco Resorts, Galaxy Entertainment and SJM, allows for detailed tracking of individual players that raises privacy concerns.

Through RFID chips, casinos can monitor various aspects of a patron's behavior, including their initial buy-in amount, wagering patterns across different games, and even chip tran-



sactions between individuals. While improving payment accuracy, Lee notes the Macao gaming regulator seems more focused on observation than mere operational efficiency.

Most players also remain unaware of the high level of personalized data collection and

analysis enabled by RFID technology.

With RFID coverage expanding across more casino floors in the city, regulators could potentially monitor specific patrons and uncover detailed transactional information. While the technology serves to reduce errors and chea-

ting, its capacity for privacy infringement in an increasingly surveilled environment deserves attention, according to Lee.

As RFID technology uptake expands in Macau, questions around its unanticipated regulatory oversight potential may require addressing.

GAMING

CASINOS EXPECTED TO CLOSE MARCH WITH RECEIPTS OF MOP19 BILLION

LOCAL casinos are anticipated to close this month with earnings ranging between MOP19 to 19.5 billion, Citigroup and JP Morgan said in separate statements.

According to the two financial companies, during the first three weeks of this month (until Mar. 24), the local casinos earned some MOP14.9 billion. They foresee the month closing with earnings ranging between MOP19 to MOP19.5 billion, with JP Morgan and Citi providing the respective forecasts.

These projected numbers are in line with both companies' expectations, with March anticipated to be stable.

According to Citi, the average daily gaming revenue for the past week was MOP629 million, unchanged from the previous week.

The bank also noted that local authorities anticipate over 100,000 tourists will visit Macau during the upcoming Easter and Qingming Festival season.

While adopting a conservative approach, Citi maintained its revenue forecast of MOP19.5 billion for the entire month, suggesting that with the approaching Easter holiday, daily revenues may rise to a daily average of around MOP657 million. **RM**

ITTF

TABLE TENNIS MACAO WORLD CUP HAS A BALL AS MASCOT

THE organizing committee of the upcoming ITTF World Cup Macao 2024 has decided on a mascot of a personified table tennis ball with a bat in one hand, as announced in a statement.

The tournament matches will be held at the Galaxy Arena from Apr. 15 to 21.

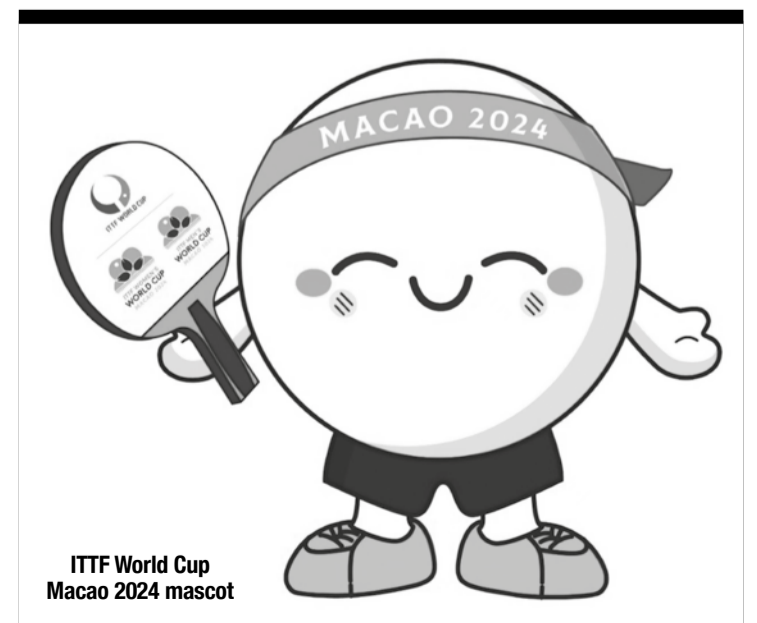
The event mascot, BOBO, is named after the Cantonese pronunciation for ball and the local term "Chai" for "little boy."

The statement explained, "With infectious enthusiasm, BOBO, a playful representation of a table tennis ball donned in player attire, embodies Macau's spirit of promoting the sport of table tennis."

The committee also unveiled the slogan and event logo yesterday.

Crafted with silhouettes of swinging rackets, the event logo forms the shape of a lotus flower, a symbol of Macau as stated in the Basic Law. The blooming lotus over the water stripes resembles the emblem of Macau.

"The event slogan, 'Charming Macao, Blooming Table Tennis,' encapsulates the distinct culture, history, and scenery of Macau," the committee said. "It also symbolizes the flourishing of table tennis in this captivating setting, capturing the attention of the world with its exceptional charm." **AL**



AL PLENARY

Lawmakers challenge use of CPI to determine pension adjustments

RENATO MARQUES

A significant number of lawmakers have expressed opinions opposing the use of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as the main mechanism for determining whether to raise pensions for the elderly in Macau.

The lawmakers expressed their opposition to the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, at the Legislative Assembly (AL) recently.

In response, the Secretary confirmed that the mechanism is attached to the CPI – that is, inflation – and that inflation must reach a threshold of a 3% increase to trigger the pension revision mechanism.

Several lawmakers disagreed with the use of the CPI, noting that this index takes into account many kinds of products and services that



are not used by the elderly. Instead, they proposed that the government establish a special 'senior citizens CPI' that can more closely reflect the rising costs of food and other necessities used by senior citizens.

Ao Ieong noted that, for the time being, the rules state that the CPI is currently the most relevant metric to underpin pension updates, re-

marking that deviating from its use would be irresponsible and contrary to existing legislation.

Nevertheless, she assured that the government would consider the suggestions and opinions of the lawmakers to explore the feasibility of implementing a specialized CPI measure tailored to senior citizens' needs.



AL PLENARY

WORKS FOR SPORTS PARK AT FORMER CANIDROME TO START IN Q2 THIS YEAR

THE construction of the new Sports Park will commence in the second quarter (Q2) of this year, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, said recently at the Legislative Assembly (AL). The government previously announced that the new park would be built on the land of the former Canidrome and Lin Fong Sports Center.

Ao Ieong provided this update in response to inquiries from lawmakers Leong Sun Iok and Ma Io Fong regarding the development of the "City of Sports and Shows," and the status of the

new sports facilities.

The Secretary said that the Sports Park project is currently undergoing analysis and is expected to start construction by the end of June.

According to the project presentation in July last year, the track and field and swimming pool will be preserved, while other facilities will be upgraded and integrated with new buildings. The plans include the incorporation of a children's library and other amenities.

The new project was presented five years, following the closure of the greyhound racing facility. **RM**

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Southern Thai Curry, Alaskan King Crab, Turmeric and Calamansi Lime

Chef Jan Ruangnukulkit Elevates Saffron's Culinary Experience with Her Creative Expertise

Enjoy Michelin-Selected Thai Cuisine in Macau

Saffron, a contemporary and sophisticated Thai restaurant, has been captivating diners worldwide since its establishment in 2011. Led by the renowned and award-winning Executive Chef Jan, Saffron offers a culinary experience like no other and was awarded "Michelin Selected Restaurant" in the Michelin Guide Hong Kong and Macau 2024. Jan's menu features a range of contemporary Thai dishes, carefully crafted with the perfect balance of spices, ingredients, herbs, and vibrant colors.

One of the highlights at Saffron is the Tasting Menu curated by Chef Jan. This seasonal selection showcases exquisite dishes such as "Wok-fried Assorted Mushrooms with Cha-om Thai Acacia", "Miang Scallops, Gooseberries, Thai Herbs and Caviar on a Betel Leaf" and "Southern Thai Curry, Alaskan King Crab, Turmeric and Calamansi Lime." Each dish is a testament to Chef Jan's culinary expertise and her commitment to delivering an unforgettable dining experience.

Situated on the 31st floor, Saffron offers not only exceptional cuisine but also breathtaking panoramic views of Cotai. Immerse yourself in the serene and elegant ambiance as you savor the true essence of Thai cuisine at Saffron, where every dish tells a delightful story of flavors and authenticity.



Wok-fried Assorted Mushrooms with Cha-om Thai Acacia



Saffron's Culinary Dream Team

Led by Chef Jan, Saffron's talented crew comprises seasoned professionals with impressive backgrounds at renowned Michelin-starred restaurants. Chef Jan, who has earned accolades like The World's 50 Best Restaurants and a Michelin Star, aims to infuse her artistic flair into Saffron's menu. With a mission to showcase the essence of Thai cuisine and create dishes that can be enjoyed daily, Chef Jan achieved this great result in less than 1 year after joining Saffron. She and her team take pride in their craft. Prepare to be amazed as this exceptional crew delivers an unforgettable dining experience, blending authentic flavors with contemporary creativity.

Chef Jan Ruangnukulkit: A Culinary Maestro

Meet Jan Ruangnukulkit, an esteemed chef whose culinary journey has been shaped by her work alongside renowned chefs. Born and raised in Thailand, Chef Jan discovered her true passion for the artistic freedom offered by Thai gastronomy. Her exceptional skills and dedication have propelled her career, leading her to become a Michelin chef at one of Bangkok's renowned Thai restaurants, ranked among "The World's 50 Best Restaurants." Chef Jan's extensive experience working with acclaimed chefs has honed her expertise and allowed her to develop a unique culinary style that showcases the rich flavors and traditions of Thai cuisine.

Now, as the Executive Chef of Saffron at Banyan Tree Macau, Chef Jan aims to elevate the restaurant's success by showcasing her unique style and presenting authentic Thai dishes. With a focus on the finest ingredients sourced from her homeland, Chef Jan's vision is to create everyday dishes that embody the essence of Thai cuisine.



Miang Scallops, Gooseberries, Thai Herbs and Caviar on a Betel Leaf



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CYBERESPIONAGE

NEW ZEALAND JOINS THE US AND THE UK IN ALLEGING IT WAS TARGETED BY CHINESE HACKERS

HACKERS allegedly linked to China launched a state-sponsored operation that targeted New Zealand's Parliament in 2021, the country's security minister said yesterday, an allegation refuted by Beijing.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian dismissed the allegations as "typical political manipulation" concocted by the U.S. and U.K., with whom it is in conflict over issues including Taiwan, the South China Sea, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and a wide range of trade disputes.

"For some time, the U.S., for geopolitical purposes, has encouraged the Five Eyes Alliance, the world's largest intelligence organization dominated by the U.S., to fabricate and disseminate all kinds of disinformation about threats posed by Chinese hackers," Lin said at a daily briefing yesterday, citing the alliance between Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K. and U.S. to collect and share sensitive information.

New Zealand's allegation comes a day after American and British au-



A statue of New Zealand politician Richard Seddon stands outside Parliament in Wellington

thorities announced a set of criminal charges and sanctions against seven hackers, all believed to be living in China, who targeted U.S. officials, journalists, corporations and pro-democracy activists, as well as the U.K.'s election watchdog.

New Zealand's bureau's National Cyber Security Centre "completed a robust technical assessment" following a compromise of the Parliamentary Counsel Office and the Parliamentary Service in 2021, and has attributed this activity to a PRC (China) state-sponsored group known as APT40,"

Judith Collins, the defense minister responsible for the Government Communications Security Bureau said in a statement.

Collins said New Zealand will not follow the U.S. and U.K. in sanctioning China because New Zealand does not have a law allowing such penalties, nor were there plans to introduce legislation.

Foreign Minister Winston Peters confirmed New Zealand's concerns had been conveyed to Chinese Ambassador Wang Xiaolong.

"Foreign interference of this nature is unacceptable, and we have urged Chi-

na to refrain from such activity in future," Peters said in a statement yesterday. "New Zealand will continue to speak out — consistently and predictably — where we see concerning behaviors like this."

Peters met with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, on March 18, and said the countries share a "significant and complex relationship."

"We cooperate with China in some areas for mutual benefit," he said. "At the same time, we have also been consistent and clear that we will speak out on issues of concern."

MDT/AP

TRADE

Beijing to challenge Biden's electric vehicle plans at the WTO

CHINA said yesterday that it has filed a complaint at the World Trade Organization over what it says are discriminatory requirements for American subsidies for electric vehicles.

Starting this year, U.S. car buyers are not eligible for tax credits of \$3,750 to \$7,500 if critical minerals or other battery components were made by Chinese, Russian, North Korean or Iranian companies. The credits are part of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, U.S. President Joe Bi-

den's signature climate legislation.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry said in a statement posted online that the U.S. formulated discriminatory subsidy policies for new energy vehicles in the name of responding to climate change.

It said the U.S. move excluded Chinese products, distorted fair competition and disrupted the global supply chain for new energy vehicles.

China is the dominant player in batteries for electric vehicles globally.



A view of the Ultium Cell factory in Warren, Ohio

Under rules that took effect Jan. 1, only 13 of the more than 50 EVs on sale in the U.S. are eligible for

the credits, down from about two dozen models that qualified in 2023.

MDT/AP



HONG KONG

LEE SAYS PRISONERS JAILED FOR NATIONAL SECURITY CRIMES UNLIKELY TO GET EARLY RELEASE

KANIS LEUNG,
HONG KONG

HONG Kong's leader said yesterday that prisoners convicted for serious national security crimes would not likely be granted early release under the tightened rules of a new national security law, signaling a hardening government stance against jailed political activists.

Chief Executive John Lee said the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance stipulates that people found guilty of endangering national security must not be granted remission unless the commissioner of correctional services believes the move would not be a national security risk. This also applies to inmates who received sentences before the new law was introduced last Saturday, Lee said.

Previously, inmates could have their prison sentences reduced by up to one-third for good conduct under the city's prison rules, provided they were serving terms longer than one month.

At a weekly press briefing, Lee urged residents not to defy the law.

"We need to make sure everyone understands that if someone was convicted of serious national security offenses, normally there would not be remission of sentence," he said.

Lee's comments came after local media, including the South China Morning Post, reported that the early release of activist Ma Chun-man, which had been scheduled for Monday, was blocked under the new national security law. The remission had been granted due to his good conduct and the blockage was the first of its kind, according to the reports, which cited unnamed sources.

The revised practice is expected to affect other activists who are jailed or undergoing trials under a similar sweeping security law imposed by Beijing four years ago to quell massive anti-government protests in 2019.

The Associated Press could not independently verify Ma's case.

Ma was serving a five-year term for inciting secession under the 2020 security law. He was convicted in 2021 for repeatedly advocating for Hong Kong's independence.

At the press briefing, Lee did not confirm Ma's case when asked about it but said the commissioner handles cases in accordance with the law. He said anyone who disagrees with the commissioner's handling of a case can seek to resolve the matter through legal means.

In an emailed response to the AP, the correctional services department refused to comment on individual cases. But it said the commissioner would consider all relevant factors, including inmates' statements, on a case-by-case basis to ensure all cases are handled fairly.

The new national security law was unanimously passed in an expedited legislative process last week, deepening worries over a further erosion of the city's freedoms. Western governments, including the United States, have criticized the legislation.

As of yesterday, authorities have not announced any arrests under the new law, which they say balances security with safeguarding rights and freedoms. They also say the legislation was needed to keep the city safe against "potential sabotage" and "undercurrents that try to create troubles." MDT/AP

JAPAN

Tokyo approves plan to export fighter jets in latest break from pacifist principles

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

JAPAN'S Cabinet yesterday approved a plan to sell future next-generation fighter jets that it's developing with Britain and Italy to other countries, in the latest move away from the country's postwar pacifist principles.

The contentious decision to allow international arms sales is expected to help secure Japan's role in the joint fighter jet project and part of a move to build up the Japanese arms industry and bolster its role in global security.

The Cabinet also endorsed a revision to Japan's arms equipment and technology transfer guidelines to allow coproduced lethal weapons to be sold to countries other than the partners.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshi-masa Hayashi said the changes are necessary given Japan's security environment, but stressed that Japan's pacifist principles remain unchanged.

"In order to achieve a fighter aircraft that meets the necessary performance and to avoid jeopardizing the defense of Japan, it is necessary to transfer finished products from Japan to countries other than partner countries," Hayashi told reporters, adding that Tokyo will follow a strict approval process for jet sales. "We have clearly demonstrated that we will continue to adhere to our basic philosophy as a peaceful na-



Britain's Defense Minister Grant Shapps (right) Italy's Defense Minister Guido Crosetto (left) and Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara

tion," he said.

Japan has long restricted arms exports under the country's pacifist constitution, but has rapidly taken steps to deregulate amid rising regional and global tensions.

The decision on jets will allow Japan to export lethal weapons it coproduces to other countries for the first time.

Japan is working with Italy and the U.K. to develop an advanced fighter jet to replace its aging fleet of American-designed F-2 fighters, and the Eurofighter Typhoons used by the U.K. and Italian militaries.

Japan, which was previously working on a homegrown design to be called the F-X, agreed in December 2022 to merge its effort with a British-Italian program called the Tempest. for deployment

in 2035. The joint project, known as the Global Combat Air Program or GCAP, is based in the U.K.

Japan hopes the new plane will offer advanced capabilities Japan needs amid growing tensions in the region, giving it a technological edge against regional rivals China and Russia.

Because of its wartime past as aggressor and the devastation that followed its defeat in World War II, Japan adopted a constitution that limits its military to self-defense. The country long maintained a strict policy to limit transfers of military equipment and technology and ban all exports of lethal weapons.

Opponents have criticized Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government for committing to the fighter jet project without provi-

ding an explanation to the public or seeking approval for the major policy change.

To address such concerns, the government is limiting exports of codeveloped lethal weapons to the jet for now, and has promised that no sales will be made for use in active wars.

The government also assured that the revised guideline for the time being only applies to the jet and that it would require Cabinet approval to do so. Potential purchasers will be also limited to the 15 countries that Japan has signed defense partnership and equipment transfer deals with.

Recent polls suggest that public opinion is divided on the plan.

In 2014, Japan began to export some nonlethal military supplies, and in a latest move last

December, it approved a change that would allow sales of 80 lethal weapons and components that it manufactures under licenses from other countries back to the licensors. The change cleared the way for Japan to sell U.S.-designed Patriot missiles to the United States, helping replace munitions that Washington is sending to Ukraine.

In its decision, the Cabinet said that the arms export ban on finished products would hinder efforts to develop the new jet, and limit Japan to a supporting role in the project. Italy and the U.K. are eager to make sales of the jet in order to defray development and manufacturing costs.

Kishida sought Cabinet approval before signing the GCAP agreement in February, but it was delayed by resistance from his junior coalition partner, the Buddhist-backed Komeito party.

The change also comes as Kishida is planning an April state visit to Washington, where he is expected to stress Japan's readiness to take on a greater role in military and defense industry partnerships.

Exports would also help boost Japan's defense industry, which historically has catered only to the country's Self Defense Force, as Kishida seeks to build up the military. Despite its effort over the past decade, the industry has still struggled to draw customers. MDT/AP

MALAYSIA

Convenience store owners charged over 'Allah' socks that angered Muslims

THE owners of a Malaysian convenience store chain and one of its suppliers were charged yesterday with offending the religious feelings of Muslims after socks printed with the word "Allah" were found for sale on its shelves.

Chai Kee Kan, founder and chairman of the KK Mart Group, the country's second-largest chain of convenience stores, and his wife Loh Siew Mui, a company director, pleaded not guilty to charges of deliberately wounding the religious feelings of Muslims. The company has blamed

its supplier for sending products the company had not agreed to stock.

Religion is a sensitive issue in Malaysia, where Muslims account for two-thirds of a population of 34 million, with large ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities. Allah is an Arabic word for God, and many Malaysian Muslims found it offensive to associate the word with feet.

"The word 'Allah' is highly esteemed in the eyes of Muslims," Minister for Religious Affairs Mohamad Na'im Mokhtar was quoted as saying by the

national Bernama news agency earlier this month. "Allah is our creator and the act of putting Allah at our feet is an insult."

Alwani Ghazali, a senior Islamic lecturer at Malaya University, told radio station BFM that it's demeaning because feet are associated with a "lowly status."

"Socks stink, do you agree? Are you happy to smell your socks after using them all day?" she said. "As a Muslim, I think it's inappropriate and (the issue) is a big deal."

The founder of the su-

pplyer that provided the socks, Xin Jian Chang, as well as his wife and daughter who are directors were also charged with abetting the offence. Xin Jian Chang has said the socks were imported from China as part of a large shipment and apologized for being careless in their inspection.

If found guilty, all five defendants face up to a year in jail, a fine or both.

KK Mart is a major 24-hour chain, with 810 stores domestically and some 5,000 employees. It also has outlets in Nepal and India. Chai has said the so-



cks were put on its shelves by Xin Jian Chang, which rented shelf space in its outlets. Only 14 pairs of "Allah" socks were found on the shelves at three KK Mart outlets, he added.

KK Mart has sued Xin Jian Chang for "sabotage" over losses and damage to the chain's reputation, reportedly claiming that it didn't agree to stock socks from the supplier. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



GAZA STRIP

Israel and Hamas dig in as international pressure builds for a cease-fire

TIA GOLDENBERG,
JERUSALEM

PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday vowed to press ahead with Israel's offensive and blasted a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a pause in the fighting, saying it had emboldened Hamas to reject a separate proposal for a cease-fire and hostage release.

As the war in Gaza grinds through a sixth month, each side has publicly insisted that its own idea of victory is in reach and rejected international efforts to stem the bloodshed.

Netanyahu has said Israel can achieve its aims of dismantling Hamas and returning scores of hostages if it expands its ground offensive to the southern city of Rafah, where over half of Gaza's population has sought refuge, many in crowded tent camps.

Hamas has said it will hold onto the hostages until Israel agrees to a more permanent cease-fire, withdraws its forces from Gaza and releases hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants. It said late Monday that it has rejected a recent proposal that fell short of those demands — which, if fulfilled, would allow it to claim an extremely costly victory.

Netanyahu said in a statement that the announcement

“proved clearly that Hamas is not interested in continuing negotiations toward a deal and served as unfortunate testimony to the damage of the Security Council decision.”

“Israel will not surrender to Hamas' delusional demands and will continue to act to achieve all the goals of the war: releasing all the hostages, destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities and ensuring that Gaza will never again be a threat to Israel.”

The war has killed over 32,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its tally but says women and children make up about two-thirds of those killed. The fighting has left much of the Gaza Strip in ruins, displaced most its residents and driven a third of its population of 2.3 million to the brink of famine.

An Israeli strike late Monday on a residential building in Rafah where three displaced families were sheltering killed at least 16 people, including nine children and four women, according to hospital records and relatives of the deceased. An Associated Press reporter saw the bodies arrive at a hospital.

On Monday, the Security Council finally managed to pass a resolution calling for a

cease-fire as the United States abstained instead of vetoing the measure, angering Israel in a major escalation of tensions between the two close allies. The resolution calls for the release of all hostages held in Gaza but did not condition the cease-fire on it.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz told Army Radio yesterday that the resolution had emboldened Hamas by signaling that international pressure would end the war without it having to make any concessions.

“The message delivered to Hamas yesterday ... is that you don't have to hurry,” Katz said.

The war began on Oct. 7, when Hamas-led militants stormed across the border and attacked communities in southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 others. It is still believed to be holding about 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others, after most of the rest were freed in November in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent several weeks trying to negotiate another cease-fire and hostage release, but those efforts appeared to have stalled.

Hamas said late Monday that Israel has not responded to its core demands of a

“comprehensive cease-fire, an (Israeli) withdrawal from the Strip, the return of displaced people and a real prisoner exchange.”

Majed al-Ansari, a spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry of Qatar, which is currently hosting the talks, told reporters that the negotiations were still ongoing, without providing details.

Hamas has previously proposed a phased process in which it would release all the remaining hostages in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the opening of its borders for aid and reconstruction, and the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants serving life sentences.

Netanyahu has vowed to resume Israel's offensive after any hostage release and keep fighting until Hamas is destroyed, saying it's the only way to prevent a repeat of the Oct. 7 attack. But he has provided few details about what would follow any such victory and has largely rejected a postwar vision outlined by the U.S.

That approach has brought him into increasingly open conflict with President Joe Biden's administration, which has expressed mounting concern over civilian casualties while supplying Israel with crucial military aid and backing Israel's aim of destroying Hamas. The U.S. had vetoed previous U.N. resolutions calling for a cease-fire.

The White House has urged Israel not to undertake a major ground operation in Rafah, warning that it could cause a humanitarian catastrophe. The administration was set to brief visiting Israeli officials on an alternative approach, but Netanyahu called off their visit in response to the U.S. abstention at the U.N. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1989 MILLIONS OF RUSSIANS GO TO THE POLLS



Millions of Russian voters have gone to the polls, with early results suggesting that a number of Communist candidates have been rejected by the electorate.

The Soviet parliamentary election was the first opportunity citizens ever had of casting their ballots for any but the official Communist Party candidates.

Election data available so far shows a net gain to unofficial candidates in the voting for 1,500 seats in the new Congress of People's Deputies.

Some Communist Party officials have failed to gain election and despite the absence as yet of many provincial results, there appears to be a swing against the party establishment.

These included five members of the central committee and one Politburo member.

President Mikhail Gorbachev has urged Russian newspaper and broadcasting editors “not to dramatise” the results, according to the official Tass news agency.

Soviet foreign ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov described the results as a “victory for glasnost and perestroika”.

Government newspaper Izvestia welcomed early results and referred to a new era of “the dictatorship of democracy”.

In a predicted landslide, Boris Yeltsin has been elected as a representative to the CPD, which was established by Mr Gorbachev.

Mr Yeltsin won in the all-Moscow constituency against the official party candidate with 89% of the vote.

The biggest majority of all in the polls was won by Telman Gdylan, a senior prosecutor who exposed a notorious corruption case in Uzbekistan in 1988, with 86.4% of the vote.

The next biggest majority in the polls went to Valentin Dikul, once a famous trapeze artist, with 72%.

Among other elected representatives are retired ice hockey champion Anatoly Firsov, who was seeking to improve health and sports facilities.

Tass described the defeat of one regional Communist party chief in Uzbekistan in Central Asia as a “vote of no confidence”.

In the Ukraine, five regional party chiefs were rejected by the voters. Among others who failed to secure their seats were the party chief in Minsk, capital of the western republic of Byelorussia.

It is reported that a Central Committee inquest is under way into the election results.

Mr Gorbachev was reported as saying that economic problems, including the budget deficit and shortages of food and consumer goods, were reasons why the authorities were criticised during the election.

One Muscovite said: “There's been nothing like this for 72 years ... and for all that time it's been nothing but blood, blood, blood.”

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The 1989 election saw many senior Communist Party officials defeated. This was seen as revolutionary at the time because internal critics of the Soviet regime were able to receive a hearing and to get themselves elected. According to the Soviet government newspaper Izvestia, turnout in most regions stood at between 80% and 85%, which was not as high as official figures for previous elections.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Prioritize your partnership and relationship over being right. Proceed with caution or risk breakage. Fact and fantasy clash. Go for clarity, simplicity and compassion.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
Your excellent work reflects you well. Slow for a tricky corner. Sometimes the best move is to rest. Don't force anything. Nurture your health.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
Follow your heart. You won't need to defer gratification forever. You can have fun without spending a fortune. Minimize fuss with movie night.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
One phase ends and another begins. Adapt with domestic changes. Make repairs or improvements. Update household systems for current circumstances. Family comes first.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Patiently navigate misunderstandings. Static, chaos and distraction abound. Listen carefully. Write, paint and share. Express yourself onto a page or screen.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Challenge assumptions. Unexpected expenses or a financial challenge could raise the stakes. Keep doing what you know works to generate positive cash flow.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Nurture yourself through a personal transition. Changes require reorientation. Pamper yourself with extra relaxation. Hidden dangers could arise.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
One door closes and another opens. Wait for professional developments. Don't get talked out of what you want. Make a shift. Plan your moves.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Collaborate with a team challenge. Ensure solid foundations before committing weight to structures. Discover what doesn't work... back to the drawing board. Review plans.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Slow to reconsider. A formidable barrier blocks the path. Find a private spot to recharge and revise plans. Shift perspectives. Follow another possibility.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Reorient your journey around new conditions. Expect delays with travel, transportation and exploration. Find beauty where you are. Shift directions for new destinations.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Patiently support each other around a shared financial challenge. Something that used to work no longer does. Adjust and adapt. Find new solutions.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

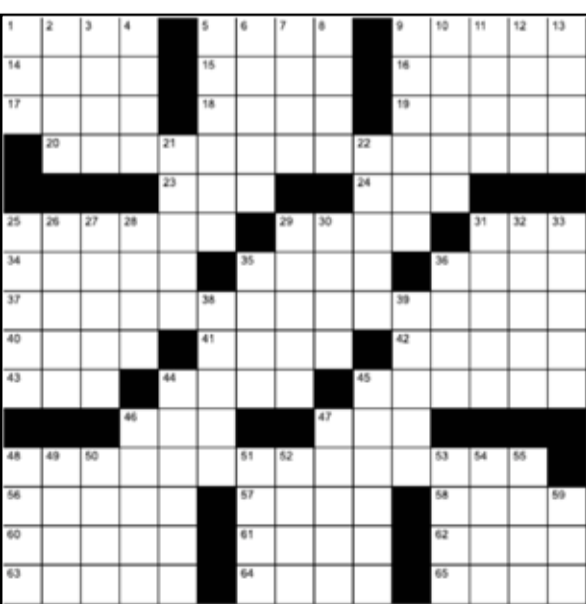
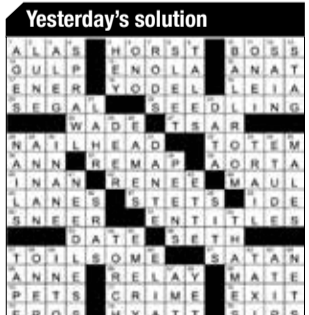
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	6	20	cloudy
Changchun	2	16	rain
Chengdu	13	20	overcast
Chongqing	17	25	overcast
Fuzhou	15	21	overcast
Guangzhou	21	28	cloudy
Guiyang	11	27	rain
Haikou	23	29	cloudy
Hangzhou	9	17	rain
Harbin	-3	13	rain
Hefei	9	14	rain
Nanjing	9	13	rain
Shanghai	9	15	rain
Taipei	16	24	overcast
Wuhan	5	15	rain
Hong Kong	23	24	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-4	8	overcast
Frankfurt	3	14	overcast
Paris	6	13	rain
London	6	12	rain
New York	8	13	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Hindu lawgiver; 5- ___ on first?; 9- Unsoiled; 14- Camaro model; 15- Dynamic intro; 16- Grocery lane; 17- Travel on water; 18- Tabula ___; 19- Peachy!; 20- Planes, trains, and automobiles, e.g.; 23- Small batteries; 24- Wedding words; 25- Yellowish color; 29- March Madness org.; 31- Spreading tree; 34- Mr. T's former group; 35- Surf sound; 36- Et ___; 37- In spite of; 40- Baseballer Slaughter; 41- Honey producers; 42- Consumed; 43- Cartoon Chihuahua; 44- Highway; 45- Mother of Calcutta; 46- Suffix with ball; 47- Seed vessel; 48- Star groups; 56- "All My Children" vixen; 57- Swiss river; 58- See socially; 60- Really bother; 61- News bit; 62- Prophetic sign; 63- Trap; 64- Communists; 65- Nerve network;

DOWN 1- Fire starter?; 2- Smell ___; 3- Pinot ___ (red wine); 4- Bruins' sch.; 5- Capital of Poland; 6- Piles; 7- Roughly; 8- Fly high; 9- Alberta's home; 10- Mislaid; 11- Lou's "La Bamba" costar; 12- Chorus voice; 13- Sign gas; 21- Model Campbell; 22- Jewelled crown worn by women; 25- Less bananas; 26- Do penance; 27- Divulge; 28- Rules; 29- Snooped (around); 30- Burmese, Manx, and Scottish fold; 31- Best of the best; 32- Queues; 33- ___ Carta; 35- Perlman of "Cheers"; 36- Hebrew month; 38- Steakhouse order; 39- ___ say more?; 44- Revolve; 45- Clan emblems; 46- Movie award; 47- Trimmed; 48- So-so grades; 49- Mediterranean port; 50- Actress Talbot; 51- Lion's den; 52- Not punctual; 53- Smell; 54- Specify; 55- Leave in, to an editor; 59- Compass point opposite WSW;



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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Va Fat
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Tou Un
HKD 2,980,000 1 bed 1 bath

Jade Garden
HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath

AD



Farmer Le Van Tam tends coffee plants at a coffee farm in Dak Lak province, Vietnam

ENVIRONMENT

HOW EU DEFORESTATION LAWS ARE REORDERING THE WORLD OF COFFEE

ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL,
BUON MA THUOT

Le Van Tam is no stranger to how the vagaries of global trade can determine the fortunes of small coffee farmers like him.

He first planted coffee in a patch of land outside Buon Ma Thuot city in Vietnam's Central Highland region in 1995. For years, his focus was on quantity, not quality. Tam used ample amounts of fertilizer and pesticides to boost his yields, and global prices determined how well he did.

Then, in 2019, he teamed up with Le Dinh Tu of Aeroco Coffee, an organic exporter to Europe and the U.S., and adopted more sustainable methods, turning his coffee plantation (field) into a sun-dappled forest. The coffee grows side-by-side with tamarind trees that add nitrogen to the soil and provide support for black pepper vines. Grass helps keep the soil moist and the mix of plants discourages pest outbreaks. The pepper also adds to Tam's income.

"The output hasn't increased, but the product's value has," he said.

In the 1990s, Tam was among thousands of Vietnamese farmers who planted more than a million hectares of coffee, mostly robusta, to take advantage of high global prices. By 2000, Vietnam had become the second-largest producer of coffee, which provides a tenth of its export income.

Vietnam is hoping that farmers

like Tam will benefit from a potential reordering of how coffee is traded due to more stringent European laws to stop deforestation.

The European Deforestation Regulation or EUDR will outlaw sales of products like coffee from December 30, 2024, if companies can't prove they are not linked with deforestation. The new rules don't just seek to reduce risks of illegal logging and its scope is wide: It will apply to cocoa, coffee, soy, palm oil, wood, rubber, and cattle. To sell those products in Europe big companies will have to provide evidence showing they come from land where forests haven't been cut since 2020. Smaller companies have till July 2025 to do so.

Deforestation is the second-biggest source of carbon emissions after fossil fuels. Europe ranked second behind China in the amount of deforestation caused by its imports in 2017, according to a 2021 World Wildlife Fund report. If implemented well, the EUDR could help reduce this, especially if the more stringent standards for tracing where products come from becomes the "new normal," Helen Bellfield a policy director at Global Canopy told The Associated Press in an interview.

IT'S NOT FAILSAFE

Companies can just sell products that don't meet the new requirements elsewhere, without reducing deforestation. Thousands of small farmers unable to

provide the potentially expensive data could be left out. Much depends on how countries and companies react to the new laws, Bellfield said. Countries must help smaller farmers by building national systems ensure their exports are traceable. Otherwise, companies may just buy from very large farms that can prove they have complied.

Already, orders for Ethiopian grown coffee have fallen. And Peru lacks the capacity to provide information needed for coffee and cocoa grown in the Peruvian Amazon.

This is on top of other challenges, which in Vietnam include worsening droughts and receding ground water levels.

"There will be winners and losers," she said.

Vietnam can't afford to lose — Europe is the largest market for its coffee, comprising 40% of its coffee exports. Six weeks after the EUDR was approved, Vietnam's agriculture ministry started working to prepare coffee growing provinces for the shift. It has since rolled out a national plan that includes a database of where crops are grown and mechanisms to make this information traceable.

The Southeast Asian nation has long promoted more sustainable farming methods, viewing laws like the EUDR as an "an inevitable change," according to an August 2023 agriculture ministry communique. The EUDR could help accelerate such a transformation,

according to agriculture minister Le Minh Hoang.

Tam and Tu, his export partner, were quick to adapt.

Even if the costs are higher, Tu said, they can get better prices for their high quality coffee

"We must choose the highest quality. Otherwise, we will always be laborers," Tu said, while sipping a cup of his favorite coffee at his company's coffee processing factory adjoining Tam's farm. This is where trucks laden with red coffee cherries, both robusta and arabica, arrive from other farms, where the pulp of the fruit removed and beans of coffee laid out on tables to dry in the sun.

Tu already has certificates from international agencies for sustainability that will enable him to deal with the EUDR. Such certificates typically address the issue of deforestation, although some tweaks may be needed, said David Hadley, program director for regulatory impacts at the non-profit group Preferred by Nature in Costa Rica.

Ensuring that Vietnam's roughly half a million small farmers, who produce about 85% of its coffee, are able to collect and provide data showing their farms did not cause deforestation remains a challenge. Some may struggle to use smartphones to collect geolocation coordinates. Small exporters need to set up systems to prevent other uncertified products from being mixed with coffee that meets EUDR requirements, said

Loan Le of International Economics Consulting.

Farmers also will need documents proving they have complied with national laws for land use, environmental protection and labor, Le said. Moreover, coffee's long value chain — from producing beans to collecting them and processing them — requires digital systems to ensure records are error-free.

THE SOUTH AMERICAN WAY

Brazil, the world's largest coffee producer, is better placed, said Bellfield of Global Canopy, since its coffee grows on plantations that far are away from forests and it has a relatively well organized supply chain. Also, Brazilian-grown coffee is most likely to meet the EUDR requirements, according to a 2024 Brazilian study, because much of it is exported to the EU, Brazil has fewer small farmers, and about a third of its coffee growing acreage already has some kind of sustainability certification.

The EUDR has acknowledged concerns for less well prepared suppliers by giving them more time and said the European government will work with impacted countries to "enable the transition" while "paying particular attention" to the needs of small holders and Indigenous communities. A review in 2028 will also look at impacts on smallholders.

"Despite this we still anticipate it being costly and difficult for small holder farming communities," she said.

In Peru, collecting information about hundreds of thousands of small farmers is difficult given the country's weak institutions and the fact that most farmers lack land titles, according to a study of EUDR impacts by the Amazon Business Alliance, a joint-initiative by USAID, Canada and the nonprofit group Conservation International.

Ethiopia, where coffee makes up about a third of total export earnings according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture report, has been slow to react. The national plan it rolled out in February 2024 fails to resolve the fundamental issue of how to gather required data from millions of small farmers and provide that information to buyers, said Gizat Worku, head of the Ethiopian Coffee Exporters Association.

"That requires a huge amount of resources," he said

Gizat, who like many Ethiopians goes by his first name, said that orders are falling due to doubts about the country's ability to comply with the EUDR. Some traders are contemplating switching to other markets, like the Middle East or China, where Ethiopian coffee is "booming," he said. But switching markets isn't easy.

"These regulations are going to have a tremendous impact," Gizat said. **MDT/AP**

FOOTBALL

Australia and Palestine win again in Asia qualifying for World Cup

AUSTRALIA thrashed Lebanon 5-0 and became the first team to advance to the final round of Asia qualifying for the 2026 World Cup yesterday.

An early goal from Kusini Yengi in Canberra sent the Socceroos on the way to a fourth successive win in Group I and ensured progress to the next stage with two matches to spare.

Palestine stayed second in the group after beating Bangladesh 1-0 and on course for a first appearance in the final round of qualifying.

With less than two minutes on the clock, the impressive Craig Goodwin crossed from the left for Yengi to score his first goal



Kusini Yengi of Australia celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal

for Australia from close range.

Australia put the game beyond Lebanon in the first three minutes of the second half. Bassel Jradi knocked in an own goal following a corner and Goodwin fired home a third.

John Iredale came off the bench to make it 4-0 midway through the se-

cond half with his first international goal, and Goodwin added his second and Australia's fifth with nine minutes remaining thanks to an Iredale assist.

"It means the world to me personally, and to the boys," Iredale said. "We set out to score more goals tonight and we're pleased we did that."

"Craig Goodwin's got an

unbelievable left foot, and having him in the squad really boosts our quality. I was really pleased to help him get his second goal."

Michel Termanini scored Palestine's winner in Dhaka four minutes into stoppage time.

Palestine has seven points, five more than Lebanon and six clear of Bangladesh.

The North Korea-Japan qualifier in Pyongyang was canceled by FIFA after Korea said it couldn't host the game.

The top two teams from each of the nine groups in the second round progress to the final round where Asia's increased automatic allocation of eight World Cup places will be on offer.

MDT/AP

EURO 2024

GERMANY TO IMPOSE SECURITY CHECKS ON ALL ITS BORDERS

GERMANY will carry out border controls at all its frontiers during soccer's European Championship in June and July, the country's top security official told local media.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser told the daily Rheinische Post in comments published yesterday that checks will be carried out at all German borders during the tournament "to be able to prevent possible violent criminals entering." She added that "this is necessary to protect this major international event as best possible."

Authorities' focus is on protection against Islamic and other extremists, hooligans and others, and securing networks against cyberattacks, she said.

Faeser's comments come shortly after the attack on a suburban Moscow concert hall that was claimed by an affiliate of the Islamic State group.

However, the decision to restore border checks

during the soccer tournament had long been expected. It has become standard practice for countries in Europe's nominally ID check-free travel zone known as the Schengen area during big sports events and major summits.

Germany already is carrying out checks on its eastern and southern borders with Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and Switzerland as a result of concerns over migration.

The European Championship starts June 14, with host Germany playing Scotland in the opening match in Munich. The final will be played in Berlin on July 14.

Italy followed France on Monday in stepping up security after the Moscow attack. Faeser's ministry said Monday that while the threat from Islamic extremists remains acute, German authorities' risk assessment hasn't changed so far as a result of the attack. MDT/AP



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OPINION

Business Views

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



HONG KONG PROPERTY TYCOONS ARE SELLING SUPER CALL OPTIONS

Do people see residential property as a utility or an investment? Hong Kong's property tycoons are racing to find out.

Consider Uptown East in Kowloon Bay, developed by Wong Sun Hing Ltd. Its latest pre-sales pitch included a so-called "super flex stage payment plan", where buyers only need to put down 5% deposit, with the rest to be paid upon completion, expected in 2025. This payment plan was not available earlier this month. Last week, Wong Sun Hing and its partner New World Development Co. sold 50 of the latest 132 units on offer in the first 30 minutes. A recent survey by Bloomberg Intelligence shows that more than half of Hong Kong's home buyers could accelerate their purchase plans over fears of price hikes.

Wong Sun Hing is essentially writing a call option to those who want upside exposures. After all, home prices have broadly dropped by 25% since their 2021 high. The average selling price of Uptown East's first batch of units was HK\$14,808 (\$1,893) per square foot, or 31% lower than an adjacent complex nearby, which went up for sale in December 2021.

This kind of transaction works for both sides. Developers are in a hurry. They need to capture this golden sales window, created by the government's complete removal of its decade-long home purchase restrictions late February. The aim is to show banks that their projects can still sell, so nervous lenders do not pull loans. Meanwhile, if the city's property market doesn't rebound in a year's time, buyers can simply walk away, and builders will be able to keep the forfeited deposits and thereby lower their cost base.

With the city's future still uncertain, Hong Kong's developers need to be aggressive. That can even mean deploying sales tactics that do not make sense from an operating cash flow perspective.

As for investors, it was a leveraged play — 20 times gearing in Uptown East's case — to test out an important market where liquidity and transparency were drained over time by the government's past policies. According to Morgan Stanley, even without counting those from the mainland, there are around 184,000 non-permanent residents in Hong Kong who can now purchase apartments without paying extra stamp duty. Among existing residents, about 408,000 have wealth above HK\$10 million and could buy a second home — with no additional tax burden — as an investment. About two-thirds of the city's households are mortgage-free. Buying a call option is thus the best way to explore this kind of blue-sky scenario.

This perhaps explains the logic behind some of the seemingly outlandish deals in recent weeks. A buyer bought all 24 units put up for sale at Henderson Land Development Co.'s Belgravia Place project for more than HK\$166 million. This pre-sales move allows investors to delay 90% of payments until delivery.

So far, primary sales this month seem to indicate a sizable chunk of investment demand. Last weekend, Wheelock Properties Ltd. sold out its entire first batch of 368 units on offer, with investors taking up one-fifth of the total. Apparently, people in Hong Kong don't quite agree with President Xi Jinping's mantra that housing is to be lived in, not speculated upon.

Ultimately, this phenomenon goes down to the city's lack of wealth management options for the middle class. Hong Kong has hundreds of thousands of mini-millionaires that private bankers ignore. As such, people are going for physical assets instead. Hong Kong's billionaire developers must be somewhat relieved. [Abridged]

Courtesy Bloomberg/Shuli Ren

CHINA HANDS DOWN TERMS OF LIFE TO 8 YEARS FOR SPORTS OFFICIALS CONVICTED OF TAKING BRIBES

THE BUZZ

The former president of the Chinese Football Association has been sentenced to life in prison amid a wide-ranging crackdown on sports corruption.

Chinese courts yesterday handed down sentences of between eight years and life in prison to officials in the Communist Party-controlled sports programs, accusing them of taking bribes and committing other financial crimes.

Chen Xuyuan, the former CFA president, received a life sentence for helping fix matches and using his various positions to commit financial crimes, state media reported.

Xinhua reported that all of Chen's personal property would be

confiscated and his illegal gains would be recovered and turned over to the state treasury.

Other high-ranking officials sentenced to prison for taking bribes included the former head of the National Athletics Association, Hong Chen, who was sentenced to 13 years, former high-ranking soccer official Chen Yongliang, who received 14 years, and Dong Zheng, former CEO of Chinese Football Association Super League Company, for eight years.

The league is largely backed by real estate firms that have become overextended and cannot deliver finished apartments or pay back their debts.

AP PHOTO



BRIGHT OUTDOOR LIGHT AT NIGHT MAY INCREASE STROKE RISK

Too much exposure to bright outdoor lights at night may increase a person's stroke risk, new research suggests.

The study involved more than 28,000 people living in a large city in China. Researchers found that people exposed to the highest levels of artificial outdoor light at night had a 43% increased risk of developing cerebrovascular disease, as compared to those with the lowest levels of exposure. Cerebrovascular disease includes stroke and other conditions affecting blood flow to the brain.

Previous studies have linked increased exposure to bright, artificial light to the development of cardiovascular disease, which are conditions related to blood flow in arteries. Researchers said their study is one of the first to explore the relationship between light at night and brain health.

"Our study suggests that higher levels of exposure to outdoor artificial light at night may be a risk factor for cerebrovascular disease," study co-author Dr. Jianbing Wang said in a news release. Wang is a researcher in the departments of public health and endocrinology of the Children's Hospital, Zhejiang University School of Medicine and the National Clinical Research

Center for Children's Health in Hangzhou, China. People, especially those living in urban areas, should consider reducing that exposure to protect themselves, he said.

The study was published Monday in the American Heart Association journal Stroke.

About 80% of the world's population lives in light-polluted environments, the study's authors said. Continuous exposure to artificial light at night can suppress production of melatonin, a hormone that promotes sleep. People with poor sleep, compared to good sleepers, are more likely to experience worse cardiovascular health over time, the researchers said.

The study involved 28,302 adults living in Ningbo, an industrial port city of more than 8.2 million people on China's east coast. Almost 60% of the participants were women, and the average age was 62. Among those excluded from the study were people with extreme levels of exposure to outdoor light at night, people previously diagnosed with cerebrovascular disease and those who developed it within a year after enrolling.

The analysis and follow-ups were conducted from 2015 to 2021. Exposure to

residential outdoor nighttime light was assessed by satellite images that mapped light pollution. Cases of stroke were confirmed by hospital medical records and death certificates.

Among the study participants, 1,278 people developed cerebrovascular disease, including 777 cases of ischemic stroke, the most common type of stroke, where a clot blocks blood flow to the brain.

The study also looked at levels of air pollution and found its possible effects to be independent from light exposure.

People exposed to the highest levels of the type of air pollution associated with the combustion of gasoline, oil, diesel fuel or wood had a 41% increased risk of developing cerebrovascular disease compared to participants with the lowest levels of exposure.

People exposed to the highest levels of air pollution caused by dust or smoke had a 50% increased risk of cerebrovascular disease compared to those exposed to the lowest levels.

And those exposed to the highest levels of nitrogen oxide from motor vehicle and power plant emissions, had a 31% higher risk of cerebrovascular disease compared to those with the lowest exposure. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Germany Train drivers and some crew for the country's main railway operator will see their working week reduced from 38 hours to 35 by 2029 without having their pay cut, but will have an option to work longer for more money, the two sides said yesterday. The arrangement is central to a deal that state-owned operator Deutsche Bahn reached Monday with the GDL union, which represents many of its drivers and some other workers, after five months of negotiations punctuated by strikes.

AP PHOTO



UK A court ruled yesterday that Julian Assange can't be extradited to the United States on espionage charges unless U.S. authorities guarantee he won't get the death penalty, giving the WikiLeaks founder a partial victory in his long legal battle over the site's publication of classified American documents. Two High Court judges said they would grant Assange a new appeal unless U.S. authorities give further assurances within three weeks about what will happen to him. The ruling means the legal saga, which has dragged on for more than a decade, will continue — and Assange will remain inside London's high-security Belmarsh Prison.

AP PHOTO



Hungary A former government insider turned oppositionist released an audio recording yesterday that he says is proof that top officials conspired to cover up corruption, the latest twist in a scandal that's shaken Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's domination of the country's politics. The country's largest protests in years erupted in early February, when it was revealed that the president had issued a pardon to a man imprisoned for covering up a string of child sexual abuse by the director of a state-run orphanage.