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**GROSS GAMING REVENUE FROM MACAU OPERATORS LAST MONTH ALIGNED WITH FORECASTS OF ALL BROKERAGES AT MOP19.5 BILLION**

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**MACAU BUSINESSES STRUGGLE WITHOUT LOCAL CUSTOMER BASE**

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**MACAU HORSE RACING ENDS AFTER 40 YEARS**

P6



**South Korea** A crowd of people, some weeping, gathered at a rain-soaked amusement park in South Korea to bid farewell to a beloved giant panda before her departure to China yesterday. Fu Bao has been a major attraction at the Everland theme park near Seoul since she was born there in 2020 to pandas Ai Bao and Le Bao, who came from China in 2016 on a 15-year lease program.

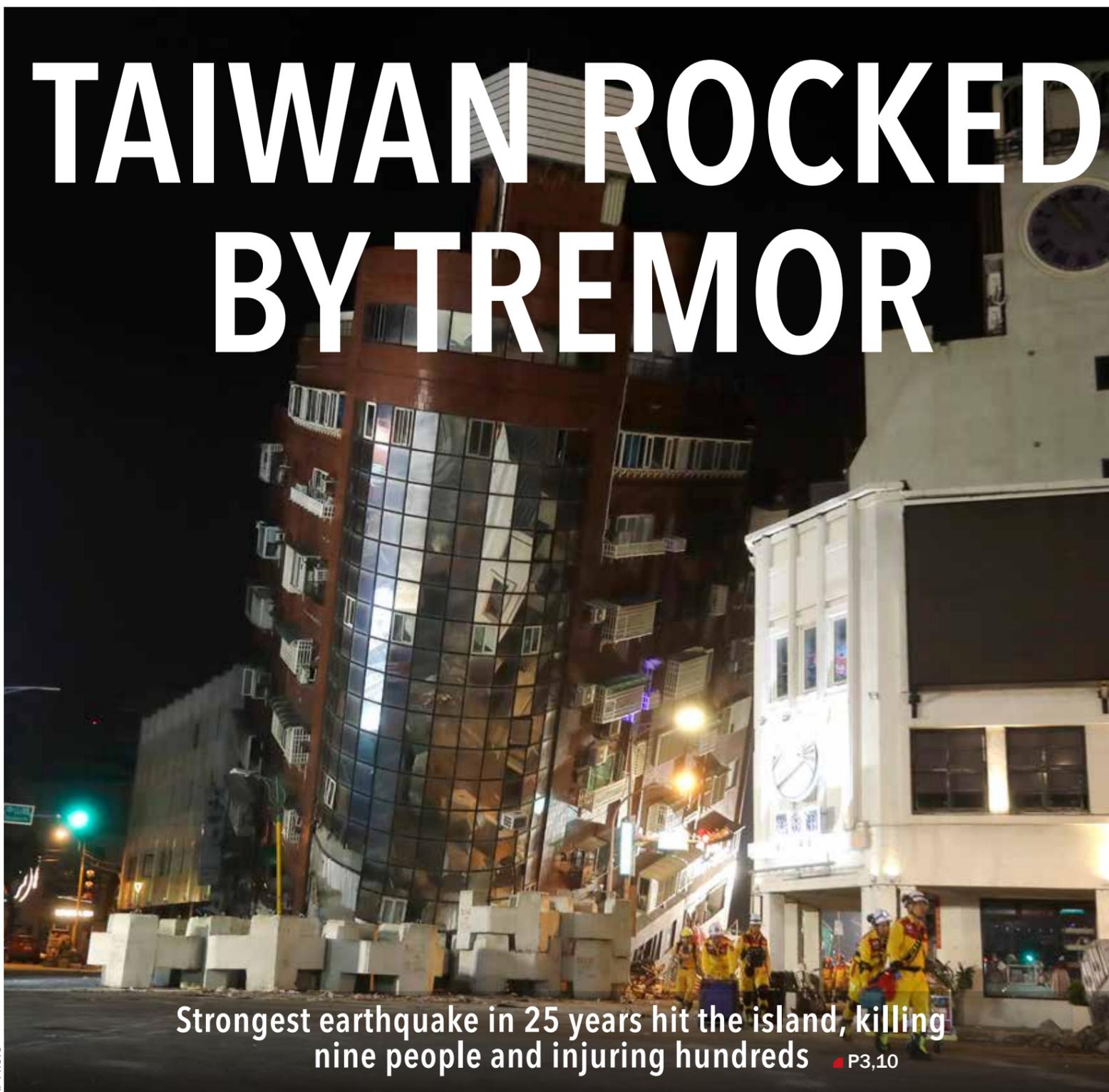


**Ukraine** yesterday lowered the military conscription age from 27 to 25 in an effort to replenish its depleted ranks after more than two years of war following Russia's full-scale invasion. The new mobilization law came into force a day after Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed it. Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, passed it last year. It was not immediately clear why Zelenskyy took so long to sign the measure into law.

**UNITED NATIONS** Supporters of the Palestinians' request for full membership in the United Nations asked the U.N. Security Council to revive their application for admission submitted in 2011. But the United States is again almost certain to block it. The supporters' letter to the council president included the names of 140 countries that have recognized a Palestinian state, including members of the 22-nation Arab Group at the United Nations, the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the 120-member Nonaligned Movement.

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# TAIWAN ROCKED BY TREMOR



**Strongest earthquake in 25 years hit the island, killing nine people and injuring hundreds**

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**TOURISM**  
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TASTE OF EDESIA



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### PJ ISSUES WARNING ON SMS PHISHING FRAUD

The Judiciary Police (PJ) has recently received 33 reports of SMS phishing fraud. Of these, 28 involved scammers impersonating UnionPay Mobile QuickPass and Mannings. Six cases reported losses totaling approximately MOP92,000. In some instances, banks were alerted and halted payments. The police said the victims were all Macau residents, and six of them lost between MOP1,600 to MOP 40,000 each.

### IFTM REBRANDED AS MACAO UNIVERSITY OF TOURISM

The Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM) has changed its name to the Macao University of Tourism, effective April 1. This comes following government discussions confirming the institute's software and infrastructure meet the criteria for university status. Meanwhile, the upcoming academic year will see the launch of new programs including the Bachelor of Science in International Business and Innovative Communication, the revamped Bachelor of Science in Marketing and Brand Management; two Masters programs in Events Management; and a Doctor of Business Administration program.

### TRADE UNION BILL TO BE VOTED ON IN AL THIS MONTH

The Second Standing Committee has concluded discussions on the trade union bill, aiming to submit it to the Legislative Assembly for detailed review and voting this month. The bill will regulate the formation and registration of trade unions and trade union federations, and clarify that the purpose of trade unions must be to safeguard and promote the labor rights and interests of employees. The committee noted that there are 459 existing employee associations in Macau, and the bill will take effect on March 31 next year.

### LRT PASSENGERS DECREASE

The Light Rapid Transit carried an average of 12,000 passengers per day in March this year (2024), a monthly decrease of 4,700 passengers. From January to March this year, the average daily passenger volume of the LRT exceeded 10,000. In February, it recorded 16,700 passengers, the second-highest number since its first month of operation.

# EASTER HOLIDAYS ATTRACT FEWER VISITORS THAN EXPECTED

RENATO MARQUES

**T**he Easter holidays season saw fewer visitors than expected to Macau, according to figures from the Public Security Police Force (PSP) Immigration Department.

A total of 476,027 visitors entered Macau in the first five days of the Easter Holiday (March 29 to April 2).

This amounts to a daily average of 95,205, almost 5,000 below the forecast from the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) director, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, who earlier last week had predicted a daily average of at least 100,000.

The peak of the visitor arrivals was reached on the second day (March 30) when some 122,235 visitors crossed the border into Macau.

Nonetheless, this year's results represent an increase of 17.76% year-on-year when compared with the first five days of the same season last year (404,237).

According to Senna Fernandes, hotel occupancy in Macau was about 88% during these first five days, a figure also noted by the president of the Travel Industry Council of Macau, Andy Wu.

The MGTO director also noted the growth in international visitation, which reached some 7,200 in the first four days, an 80% increase year-on-year.

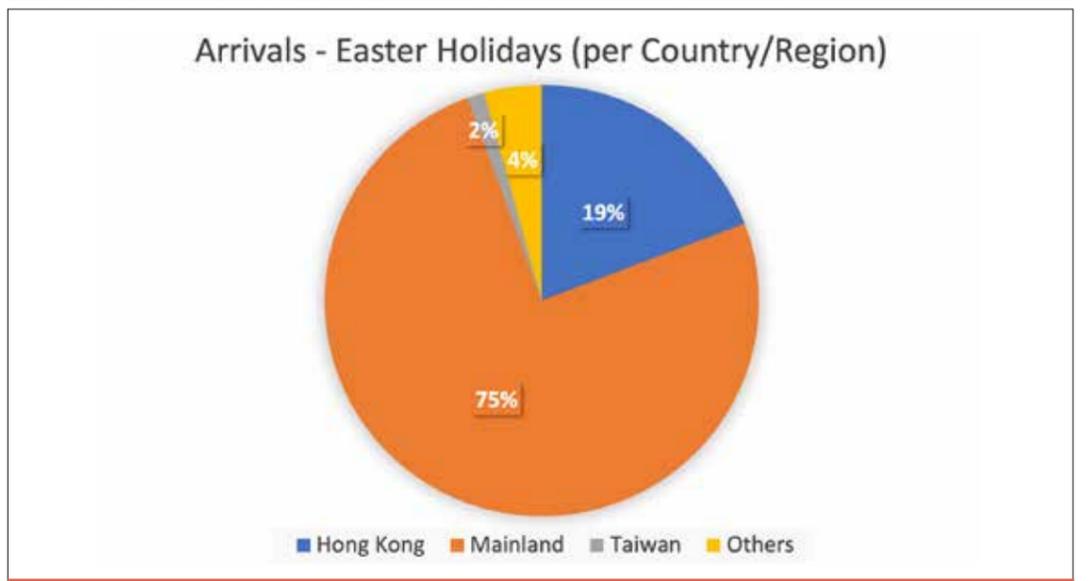
As expected, most of those arriving in Macau (75%) came from the mainland, with Hong Kong coming second at 19%.

Foreigner visitors represented 4%, while those arriving from Taiwan were around 2%.

According to the latest figures available at the time of the report, it is estimated the daily average for the first six days of the Easter Holidays and Ching Ming Festival should have dropped to around 91,000.

### NO FORECAST YET FOR MAY DAY

Although visitor arrivals were below expectations during the first five days, Senna Fernandes has maintained a forecast of 100,000 per day on average for the upcoming Ching Ming



Festival for the upcoming three days (April 4-6). The festival starts today and continues over the weekend.

She refrained from making a concrete prediction for next month's May Day Golden Week (May 1 to May 5), but noted it is expected to exceed the Easter and Ching Ming Holidays.

### GROWTH IN VISITORS FROM NEWLY ADDED IVS CITIES

The number of visitors to Macau from the cities of Qingdao and Xi'an, recently added to the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) to Hong Kong and Macau, has been growing steadily, the MGTO director said.

Citing data from February this year, Senna Fernandes said visitors from Xi'an totaled about 36,000, while those from

Qingdao reached 18,000.

According to MGTO calculations, the figures account for a growth of 14% and 40% year-on-year respectively when compared with pre-pandemic (2019).

She expected visitors from these two cities would continue to grow, as the local tourism authority has been targeting promotion particularly oriented for these two market sources.

### AIRPORT REPORTS 80.4% MORE PASSENGERS OVER EASTER

During the first four days of the Easter Holiday, the Macau International Airport (MIA) has reportedly handled 88,978 passengers, an increase of 80.38% when compared year-on-year with the same period last year,

the MIA Company has said.

According to the statement, the number of aircraft movements (arrivals and departures) has also increased by 44.62% to 658 this year.

When compared to pre-pandemic times (2019) the number of passengers has recovered by 74%, while aircraft movements have recovered 76%.

The MIA added that during this year, the company will continue to develop medium and long-haul routes while actively cooperating with airlines to develop connecting flights.

One of the services the local airport wants to start is the so-called "one ticket to the final destination" and baggage check to facilitate travel connections to Europe and the United States (among others) from Macau.

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TAIWAN EARTHQUAKE

# Gov't activates emergency mechanism for Macau students

LYNZY VALLES

**A**N earthquake measuring 7.2 magnitude struck off Taiwan's eastern coast during rush hour yesterday morning, sending tremors felt in the capital Taipei as well as in southern Japan, eastern China and the Philippines.

Yesterday morning, the Meteorological and Geophysics Bureau (SMG) claimed the coast of Macau "could be hit by a tsunami, with a low impact."

The earthquake, which occurred at 7:58 a.m., initially prompted tsunami warnings in Taiwan, southern Japan and the Philippines, with waves less than half a meter high observed along some coasts.

Later, all tsunami warnings in the region were lifted.

SMG reported the earthquake was recorded with an epicenter located around 838 kilometers



east-northeast of Macau.

The Hong Kong observatory said more than 100 residents reported feeling the tremors for several seconds.

Meanwhile, the local government has activated an emer-

gency mechanism and contacted Macau students studying in Hualien following the earthquake - the strongest in a quarter-century.

According to the Education and Youth Development Bureau

(DSEDJ), local students residing on the island said they are safe and do not need help at the moment.

DSEDJ data shows 20 Macau students studying in universities in Hualien County, the epicenter of the quake.

The DSEDJ said it has contacted associations that serve Macau students in Taiwan to assess the current situation.

Speaking to TDM, director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said authorities have not received any calls for assistance.

In Taipei, tiles fell from older buildings as the earthquake shook the city, and schools evacuated their students to sports fields, equipping them with yellow safety helmets.

Government statistics revealed nine people were killed, 1,011 were injured and 77 stranded.

## HOTEL CENTRAL NAMED BOUTIQUE HOTEL OF THE YEAR

The revamped Hotel Central has been selected as the "Designer's Boutique Hotel of the Year" at the 19th China Tourism and Culture Starlight Awards, according to Lek Hang Group developer Sio Chong Meng. At nearly 100 years old, the structure near Senado Square is the only heritage hotel in Macau to receive the accolade. Meng described renovating the historic property as a "labor of love," restoring design elements from the hotel's past in its 114 rooms, each themed to represent specific decades from the 1920s to 1950s.

## MACAU TOPS CHINA LEISURE DESTINATION FOR 5TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR

For the fifth year in a row, Macau has been honored with the title of the best city in China for leisure travel at the TTG China Travel Awards. Six Macau hotels also received awards, including Sands Resorts Macau, which was named best resort in China for the seventh time. The awards ceremony was recently held in Shanghai, the first since 2018 due to the pandemic. Established in 2008, the TTG China Travel Awards recognize excellence in travel across Greater China.

AD

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# Macau businesses struggle without local customer base: association

STAFF REPORTER

**B**USINESSES in Macau's residential neighborhoods sat quietly over the recent Easter holiday, illustrating that more Macau local residents are choosing to spend their money across the border in mainland China, while visitors remain exclusively in the city's tourist areas.

Business owners in Macau's Northern District acknowledged that proximity to China means residents "can go outside [of Macau] to spend at practically no cost," according to Ma Kin Cheong, director-general of the Industry and Commerce Association of Macau Northern District.

Some restaurants and residents in the Northern District said the Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles program has also contributed to the decline in local spending. This program has made it more convenient for residents to drive to the mainland, further reducing the incentive to spend locally.

While the Macau government has launched initiatives to boost tourism in residential areas, installing attractions in the Northern District and collaborating with casinos to revitalize places like Barra, these measures have yet to significantly impact the tourism situation and merchants



are saying it is not enough.

Leong Ka Ion, deputy director-general of the Macao Catering Industry Association, told TDM that rising rent costs combined with diminishing customer numbers are putting intense pressure on businesses outside tourist areas.

He described the recent surge in closures as "more serious than during the pandemic" and estimated that 30-40% of restaurants his association contacted are contemplating shutting down.

Leong voiced alarm over the growing wave of closures, attributing the weakening of the local market partly to residents departing Macau to visit, shop, and dine across the border in Guangdong instead.

"We hope the government can push forward more promotional measures allowing small and

medium businesses to continue operating easily, in addition to encouraging local residents to stay in Macau and spend," Leong said.

Residents in the Northern Macau District also noted the quiet streets over Easter.

"There are very few people in the Northern Macau District and the Hac Sa Wan is quiet and deserted," one resident said, as cited in the report. "Have you noticed that many shops have closed down? I have seen many."

Merchants also described weak business over the weekends.

"Saturdays and Sundays are a bit worse because people can now drive to the mainland and go out for a day or two. Monday to Friday is much better for busi-

ness," one merchant said.

Another merchant said "most of our customers are locals, and there are very few outsiders visiting."

They added that "during the holidays, everyone goes to mainland China, and it becomes very challenging. We also have to deal with rent increases and employee salaries."

In contrast, stores in Macau's casino and tourist districts reported decent Easter business.

"Business was very positive," said Stephen Anderson, owner of Cathedral Café, noting a "diverse crowd—which is always good to see."

This stark difference underscored the vulnerabilities of retailers dependent on local patrons.

As residents travel to Guangdong instead of spending in their own communities, neighborhood businesses suffer.

Therefore, district business groups are urging government support, as the local market weakens and closures rise sharply.

## HONG KONG BUSINESSES SUFFER AS EASTER TRAVEL BYPASSES LOCAL ECONOMY

**I**N the neighboring region Hong Kong, local businesses are also suffering heavy financial losses from the recent Easter holiday exodus.

Over 1.5 million Hong Kong residents left the city during the four-day break, resulting in an over 30% drop in revenue for restaurants compared to last year's Easter holiday.

Simon Wong, head of a catering industry association, warned that if the trend of residents choosing to spend holidays in mainland China continues, it could seriously damage confidence in Hong Kong's commerce and trade. Industries beyond dining were similarly impacted. Retail shops and popular tourist destinations like Sai Kung

saw far fewer patrons, as locals opted to travel overseas or to visit mainland China instead of supporting the local economy.

One Sai Kung restaurant owner described the holiday period as the worst they have seen in decades due to the lack of domestic customers, as cited in media reports.

They appealed to authorities to not neglect Hong Kong businesses in pursuit of ambitious plans to develop the Greater Bay Area, stressing the region's prosperity depends on retaining local consumer bases.

If mass travel outflows persist during holiday periods, Wong fears hundreds more Hong Kong businesses could be forced to close.

STATS

## MPay reports 200% growth in payment volume by local users in Japan in Q1

RENATO MARQUES

**M**PAY'S cross-border payment service, launched by Macau Pass in August 2023, has recorded significant growth in transactions in Japan during the first quarter (Q1) of this year, the company has said.

In Q1, MPay's transaction volume and number of transactions in Japan increased by over 200% when compared to the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2023.

The company attributed the growth to stronger support for the digital economy and cross-border payments.



Macau Pass has noted that Japan was one of the first countries where MPay launched cross-border payment services through Alipay+.

Japan is also a popular travel destination for local residents, particularly at the end of the

Q1 with the influx of the so-called "Cherry Blossom Tourists."

Currently, individuals from Macau can use MPay to shop at participating stores in Japan, settle transactions in MOP, and enjoy favorable exchange rates.

The company has

expanded its coverage to over fifty countries overseas, allowing the MPay wallet within the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong SAR to be used globally for transactions.

Ant International has also announced its cross-border mobile payment solution, Alipay+, has connected two million merchants in Japan, enabling businesses of all sizes to seamlessly cater to global visitors using their home country e-wallets.

Alipay+ supports 16 e-wallets and bank applications in Japan, including MPay (Ma-

cau), Alipay (Chinese mainland), AlipayHK (Hong Kong), South Korea's Kakao Pay, Naver Pay, and Toss, Singapore's OCBC Digital, Changi Pay, and EZ-Link, Malaysia's Touch 'n Go eWallet and Public Bank Berhad's MyPB, the Philippines' GCash and HelloMoney, Thailand's TrueMoney, Mongolia's Hipay, and Italy's Tina-ba.

Transactions by 'cherry blossom tourists' using Alipay+ partner electronic payment platforms in Japan constitute 10% of the total expenditure by inbound tourists.

## AIR MACAU EXPANDS LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS WITH NEW WIDE-BODY AIRCRAFT

Air Macau has welcomed its first wide-body aircraft this year, an A330-300 leased from Air China that arrived from Hangzhou. The carrier aims to introduce a second wide-body jet mid-year as it develops long-haul routes to Europe and the Middle East. The expansion comes after Air Macau announced plans in January to introduce two wide-body aircraft in support of Macau's aviation sector. Currently, 26 airlines serve Macau International Airport, linking the city to 23 mainland Chinese cities, three Taiwanese destinations and 17 international ports.

## MACAU LEGEND EXTENDS SALE DEADLINE FOR LAOS CASINO

Macau Legend has announced a sale extension of its casino resort business in Laos, Savan Legend, pushing it back to April 15. While no specific reason was provided for the latest delay, the decision follows previous postponements. First scheduled for resolution in February, it was postponed to March 31. Savan Legend was initially planned to be sold for USD39 million.

## GAMING RESULTS IN MARCH MEET EXPECTATIONS

RENATO MARQUES

**R**EVENUES from local casinos last month have aligned precisely with forecasts by several consulting, financial and investment institutions.

According to an official release by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ), gross revenues for March totaled MOP19.503 billion, marking the highest month this year thus far, surpassing January's figures (MOP19.337 billion).

March's revenue represented a 53.1% increase year-on-year, compared to 2023 when casinos earned MOP12.738 billion.

Several financial institutions had previously forecasted March Gross Gaming Revenue (GGR) to fall between MOP19 billion and MOP19.5 billion, a figure confirmed by the official records.

According to public broadcaster TDM, gaming analyst and managing partner at IGamiX, Ben Lee, has said the March figure was in line with the most optimistic forecasts from local market experts.

Lee said it is unlikely March's gross gaming revenue of MOP 19.5 billion will be surpassed before the end of this year.

The expert did not believe local casinos would see monthly GGR results returning to 2019 highs, when monthly revenue was consistently above MOP20 billion, "primarily because we no longer have the VIP segment."

According to projections cited by Lee from local experts, the local market should be worth somewhere between MOP18.5 billion and MOP19.5 billion this year.

He said current results are already at the upper end of projections but noted signs of stability in the market.



## MACAU HORSE RACING ENDS AFTER 40 YEARS

**E**MOTIONS ran high as attendees bade farewell to Macau's iconic horse racing track, with many expressing sadness over its permanent closure.

After more than 40 years, Macau's hippodrome hosted its final races Saturday, bringing an end to the sport in the city renowned for its massive casinos.

In January, the city's government announced the termination of its contract with the Macau Jockey Club (MJC), effective April. The

decision came at the request of the Macau Horse Race Company, citing operational challenges as a reason for the closure.

On Saturday, gamblers congregated in the half-full stands and placed their final bets. Some tourists also visited the track.

Mai Wan-zun, a student from mainland China in Macau, said she wanted to experience a taste of the atmosphere.

"We could come to see horse racing here in Macau,

but not in mainland China," she said.

Helena Chong, a Macau resident, decided to visit the race course for her first and last time to see what it was all about.

"It's a pity to see the end of all this gambling and entertainment," she said.

Horse racing in the former Portuguese colony has faced economic challenges in recent years and has struggled to recover from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Financial records reflect declining profits, with revenues falling from USD64 million in 2017 to just USD24 million in 2022.

The MJC's budget shortfalls are part of why the government no longer considers horse racing viable.

In November, the group initiated a 30% reduction in horse betting prize money due to low turnover.

The closure, led by the late Stanley Ho's fourth wife, Angela Leong, leaves numerous racehorse owners, jockeys, and stable staff facing an uncertain future as they lose their livelihoods. Concerns over the welfare of racehorses and the livelihoods of those in the industry have prompted calls for improved compensation plans from the MJC.

The government has mandated the removal of 289 horses stabled at the club by March 2025, urging owners to make necessary arrangements for their animals.

Options include transferring ownership to the MJC, with the club assuming responsibility for associated expenses.

In neighboring Hong Kong, horse-racing remains popular and profitable. Its jockey club runs various gambling activities and is the city's major contributor to charitable endeavors. **LV/AP**

### GAMING

## Melco narrows losses in 2023, announces line up of non-gaming offers

LYNZY VALLES

**M**ELCO International recorded net revenues of HKD29.53 billion, an increase of 179.5% compared to HK\$10.57 billion recorded in the corresponding period of 2022.

Data from the group shows Melco has narrowed its losses to HKD3.49 billion, compared with a loss for the year of HKD9.99 billion in 2022.

Melco considers the 2023 year to be significant to its "journey of post-pandemic recovery and expansion."

This is attributed to the increase in revenues, improved performance in all gaming segments and non-gaming operations following the earlier-than-



-expected relaxation of Covid-19-related restrictions in Macau in January 2023, and the opening of the City of Dreams Mediterranean and Studio City Phase 2.

In addition, the group launched residency concerts at Studio City in 2023.

Lawrence Ho, group chairman and CEO of Melco International, said, "In

Macau, our major market that has demonstrated continued growth potential and resilience."

"We are encouraged by the strong rebound in visi-

tation in 2023. In particular, during this year's Chinese New Year holiday, it reached levels comparable to those in 2019, signifying a strong start to the year."

Meanwhile, Ho has also announced a line-up of non-gaming offers, including the second season of the residency concert series at Studio City, which began in March this year.

"Construction began on the Cineplex at Studio City Phase 2, and the highly acclaimed show, 'The House of Dancing Water,' is expected to return towards the end of 2024," he added.

Late last year, Melco announced it was looking to open the House of Dancing Water for a relaunch late in the fourth quarter of 2024.

Back in 2020, the gaming

operator announced the House of Dancing Water show at the City of Dreams Cotai property would be suspended amid the pandemic, to be redesigned by creator Franco Dragone.

However, towards the end of the year, the City of Dreams said the pandemic had had a major impact on the entertainment industry. Thus, given the travel restrictions, the hiatus of the show would be extended longer than anticipated.

Plans are also underway to renovate The Countdown hotel, introducing a new high-end luxury hotel for premium mass customers. The MICE space and guest rooms at Grand Hyatt Macau will also be upgraded.

In July 2023, the group launched the inaugural integrated resort in Europe, City of Dreams Mediterranean. However, Ho acknowledged the ongoing regional military conflicts are having a negative impact on tourism flows.

GAMING

# The Tropicana Las Vegas, a mob-era casino, closes after 67 years

RIO YAMAT, LAS VEGAS

**I**N the 1971 film "Diamonds are Forever," James Bond stays in a swanky suite at the Tropicana Las Vegas.

"I hear that the Hotel Tropicana is quite comfortable," Agent 007 says.

It was the Tropicana's heyday, a frequent haunt of the legendary Rat Pack, while its past under the mob cemented its place in Vegas lore.

But after welcoming guests for 67 years, the Las Vegas Strip's third-oldest casino shut its doors for good on Tuesday (yesterday, Macau time). Employees crowded the main entrance, cheering and crying, while tourists and locals watched the historic moment from behind a yellow gate. A tissue box made its way through the crowd.

Then, just before 1 p.m., security guards began locking up the Tropicana. The thick chains clinked as they were wrapped around the casino's gold door handles.

Demolition is slated for October to make room for a \$1.5 billion Major League Baseball stadium — part of the city's latest rebrand as a hub for sports entertainment.

Charlie Granado, a bartender at the Tropicana, said it's a bitter-sweet ending for the place he has called a second home for 38 years.

"It's time. It's ran its course," Granado said. "It makes me sad. But on the other hand, it's a happy ending."

The population of Clark Coun-



ty had just surpassed 100,000 when the Tropicana opened on a Strip surrounded by vast, open desert. It cost \$15 million to build three stories with 300 rooms split into two wings.

Black and white photographs from that time give a view into what it was like inside the walls of the Tropicana at its height, playing host to A-list stars — from Elizabeth Taylor and Debbie Reynolds to Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. Mel Tormé and Eddie Fisher performed at the Tropicana.

Decades later, New Jersey resident Joe Zappulla was among the final hotel guests to check out at the Tropicana before the locks went on the doors. He spent \$600 for a room and fulfilled a Vegas

fantasy: lying on top of a craps table on a casino floor.

"When else can I do this in Vegas?" he said.

Zappulla grew up hearing glamorous tales from his parents, who honeymooned in Las Vegas in 1961 and visited often, about their run-ins with the Rat Pack during the Tropicana's heyday. It's a version of Sin City that his parents loved.

"Old Vegas, it's going," Zappulla said with tears sliding down his cheeks. "So I'm really clinging to a little piece of that."

In a city known for reinvention, the Tropicana itself underwent major changes as Las Vegas evolved. Two hotel towers were added in later years. In 1979, the casino's now-beloved \$1 million green-

-and-amber stained glass ceiling was installed above the casino floor.

Barbara Boggess was 26 when she started working at the Tropicana in the late 1970s as a linen room attendant.

Now 72, Boggess has seen the Tropicana through its many iterations. There was the 1980s rebrand as "the Island of Las Vegas," with a swim-up blackjack table at the pool, and the South Beach-themed renovation completed in 2011.

Today, only the low-rise hotel room wings remain of the original Tropicana structure. Yet the casino still conjures up vintage Vegas nostalgia.

"When you first walk in, you see the stained glass and the low

ceilings," JT Seumala, a Las Vegas resident staying at the casino in March, said. "It does feel like you step back in time for a moment."

Seumala and his husband roamed the sprawling property during their visit, turning down random hallways and taking pictures of the purple-and-orange carpet, the wallpaper and the ceiling. They tried their luck at blackjack and roulette and made conversation with a cocktail server who had worked there for 25 years. They saved a few red \$5 poker chips to remember the mob-era casino.

Behind the scenes of the casino's opening decades ago, the Tropicana had ties to organized crime, largely through reputed mobster Frank Costello.

Costello was shot in the head in New York weeks after the Tropicana's debut. He survived, but the investigation led police to a piece of paper in his coat pocket with the Tropicana's exact earnings figure and mention of "money to be skimmed" for Costello's associates, according to The Mob Museum.

By the 1970s, federal authorities investigating mobsters in Kansas City charged more than a dozen operatives with conspiring to skim \$2 million in gambling revenue from Las Vegas casinos, including the Tropicana. Charges connected to the Tropicana alone resulted in five convictions.

But there were many years of mob-free success at the Tropicana. It was home to the city's longest running show, "Folies Bergere." The topless revue, imported from Paris, had a nearly 50-year run and helped make the feathered showgirl one of the most recognizable Las Vegas icons.

Today, the casino once surrounded by wide-open desert intersects with a major street named for it at the south end of the Strip, dwarfed by towering megaresorts that Las Vegas is now known for. **MDT/AP**

## CORPORATE BITS

### MGM and Art Basel Hong Kong unveil 'MGM Discoveries Art Prize'



MGM and Art Basel Hong Kong have joined forces to announce the launch of the "MGM Discoveries Art Prize" in 2025, aiming to support emerging artists

and foster new talent. In addition, MGM has invited Macau's cultural leaders and representatives to join an exclusive tour of the "Discoveries"

sector and a separate cocktail reception hosted by MGM, providing them with a "chance to appreciate artworks from renowned and emerging artists worldwide to bring new perspectives and vitality into Macau's arts scene," according to the gaming operator.

The cocktail reception was recently held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, where Cristina Kuok, senior vice president of Arts and Culture of MGM, said, "We hope to leverage this partnership with Art Basel Hong Kong to jointly propel global emerging talent forward in their careers and aspirations."

### Galaxy invites NPC, CPPC delegates to share spirit of 'Two Sessions'



As this year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR), Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) hosted the

"Sharing Session of the NPC and CPPCC – GEG National Education Series" for the fifth consecutive year with the support of the Macao Chamber of Commerce (MCC) and the Chinese Cultural Exchange Association (CCEA).

Held at the Galaxy Auditorium of the Galaxy International Convention Center, the event invited Chui Sai Peng, deputy to the National People's Congress (NPC) and chairman of CCEA; Ma Chi Ngai, member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and president of Board of the directors of MCC; and Francis Lui, member of the National Committee of the CPPCC and vice chairman of GEG, to share the spirit of the "Two Sessions" and profound insights with approximately 600 GEG executives, representatives of CCEA and the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) that attended in-person or online from different regions.

## ON THE AGENDA

**A**N increasing number of Hong Kong's elderly are choosing to retire in mainland China's retirement homes, attracted by improved transportation options, more affordable and superior living conditions, and evolving government policies, as reported by Bloomberg last week.

Hong Kong is experiencing a severe lack of elderly accommodation, with a waiting list of 16,000 for subsidized residential care services and waiting periods extending up to 16 months.

In the next few months, the Hong Kong government is set to allow seniors to use medical expense vouchers in seven healthcare facilities within the Greater Bay Area, encompassing nine Guangdong cities. Additionally, a policy extension now enables Hong Kong's elderly to receive subsidized services at a Shenzhen hospital. This policy adjustment aims to support Hong Kong, known for one of the highest life expectancies globally, as it navigates the challenges of an aging population. Projections indicate that by 2046, over a third of the population will be 65 or older.

Public data reveals that for a 180-square-foot room with park views and an ensuite bathroom, residents pay roughly 5,100 yuan (\$708) monthly, nearly a quarter of what it would cost in Hong Kong. The facility boasts amenities like a gym, a vegetable garden, and even goats and cats for residents to interact with. Additionally, the staff's ability to speak Cantonese, a rarity in mainland China due to Mandarin's dominance, is a noted advantage.

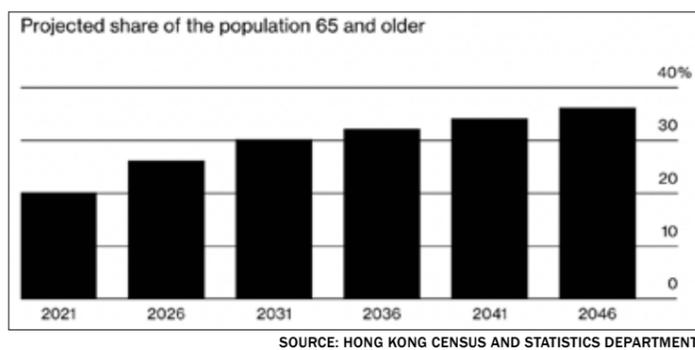
The resumption of high-speed

# GBA BECOMING A PREFERRED RETIREMENT DESTINATION FOR ELDERLY

HELPING HAND



Helping Hand's elderly care home in Zhaoqing



rail service post-pandemic has halved travel times to just two hours, facilitating easier visits with loved ones.

"Initially, it was either unknown or deemed too distant and daunting," remarks Sandy Macalister, CEO of Helping Hand, a non-profit organization serving Hong Kong's seniors. Concerns included the

potential loss of a spot on Hong Kong's subsidized housing waiting list for those considering a trial stay. "Now, the government recognizes the benefits," Macalister observes.

China Taiping Insurance Group reports that its senior living facility in Guangzhou welcomed its first resident from Hong Kong in January. Accord-

ing to the report, the company has since crafted insurance policies catering to the needs of Hong Kong's elderly eyeing retirement in the Greater Bay Area.

Helping Hand has seen a doubling in inquiries since 2022, with aspirations for the Zhaoqing facility to host 110 residents by December, up from 95. Tours and overnight trials at Guangdong's nursing homes have become popular recreational activities for Hong Kong's seniors, offering day trips at no cost and overnight stays for approximately HK\$300 (\$38). "A majority of our participants are relatively young, in their early 60s," states Leung Che Cheung, president of the group. "They are keen to explore their options," he explained to Bloomberg.

## GBA posts nearly USD2 trillion in economic output in 2023

## INDICATORS &amp; TRENDS

**T**HE total economic output of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) exceeded 14 trillion yuan (about USD1.97 trillion) in 2023, achieving one ninth of China's total with less than 0.6% of the national territorial area, local authorities have revealed.

Zhu Wei, executive deputy director of the GBA office in Guangdong, said the total economic output of the GBA was 10.8

trillion yuan in 2018, and the past five years witnessed an increase of 3.2 trillion yuan.

Meanwhile, the GBA has seen an improved scientific and technological innovation capacity, transportation network, more facilitating platforms and a better business environment, Zhu said.

Maggie Xiaoqing Fu, a professor at the University of Macau, said China's economic landscape is displaying a stable and diversified trend, with positive prospects for the

around 5% GDP growth target announced during the "two sessions."

The ongoing supply-side structural reforms are pivotal in optimizing the economic structure, the professor in finance and business economics said, adding that an increasing proportion of service and high-tech industries can inject new momentum into economic growth.

She said in an interview at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 that China has the advantage of concen-



trating efforts to accomplish major tasks. "It can not only adjust across cycles but also counter-cyclically regulate its economy."

Fu also explained how the "new quality productive forces," a new concept in China's development, is poised to accelerate growth across the region.

"By harnessing new technologies, industries, and formats, the Chinese economy can accelerate industrial upgrading, enhance innovation capabilities, and promote regional economic integration," she said, noting that it will also create a more open, inclusive, and beneficial economic pattern in the Asian region.

## WORK IN PROGRESS

## NOTES ON ACADEMIC STUDIES

### A Survey Analysis: The Current Real Estate Marketing Situation in the China Greater Bay Area in the Context of the COVID-19 Epidemic

Juan Kong, Ema Izati Zull Kepili  
Real Estate Management  
and Valuation (2023)

Real estate in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (also known as the Greater Bay Area, GBA) - a good representation of China's advanced and developed urban agglomeration - has received considerable attention from the international community in recent years. However, the real estate market has been under extraordinary stress due to the expansion of COVID-19 in China, the strain on people's livelihoods brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, and the Chinese government's series of epidemic preventive initiatives. This study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, making use of interviews and questionnaires as instruments. It examined China's GBA real estate market as the pandemic looms. The primary goals are to demonstrate the current state of the GBA's real estate industry, pinpoint the factors holding back its growth, and estimate when the market might finally experience a breakthrough. Our findings suggested that the impact of COVID-19 on the GBA real estate sector in China is evident, but that it still has a bright future despite the negative externalities. This is because the city has a large population, high purchasing power, and is close to some of the most developed areas in southern China. This study establishes a baseline for studying the impact of China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative on the GBA real estate market in the future. It also provides valuable resources for China's GBA's real estate industry. **FROM THE ABSTRACT**

### Intervention and Prevention of Dementia in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) of China

Brendan Weekes,  
M. T. Carthery-Goulart  
American journal of Alzheimer's  
disease and other dementias

Reserve and resilience are recognized as essential for effective intervention and prevention of dementia. However, it is not known if these factors also protect against risk for dementia in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) of Mainland China. Studies of risk factors across regions of China provide an evidence base for future research in the GBA. However, population-based studies are rare and do not account for the cultural differences in levels of education, income, literacy and modifiable lifestyle factors. Critically, extant studies do not allow for differences in languages spoken across the region, which will bias results and potentially minimize true prevalence. Based on the conclusions reported in this Special Collection, research in the GBA should focus on resilience and reserve using preserved native language communication skills. **FROM THE ABSTRACT**

ZEKE MILLER & DIDI TANG,  
WASHINGTON

**P**RESIDENT Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed Taiwan, artificial intelligence and security issues yesterday [Macau time] in a call meant to demonstrate a return to regular leader-to-leader dialogue between the two powers.

The call, described by the White House as “candid and constructive,” was the leaders’ first conversation since their November summit in California produced renewed ties between the two nations’ militaries and a promise of enhanced cooperation on stemming the flow of deadly fentanyl and its precursors.

Xi told Biden that the two countries should adhere to the bottom line of “no clash, no confrontation” as one of the principles for this year.

“We should prioritize stability, not provoke troubles, not cross lines but maintain the overall stability of China-U.S. relations,” Xi said, according to China Central Television, the state broadcaster.

The roughly 105 minute call kicks off several weeks of high-level engagements between the two countries, with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen set to travel to China today and Secretary of State Antony Blinken to follow in the weeks ahead.

Biden has pressed for sustained interactions at all levels of government, believing it is key to keeping competition between the two massive economies and nuclear-armed powers from escalating to direct conflict. While in-person summits take place perhaps once a year, officials said, both Washington and Beijing recognize the value of more frequent engagements between the leaders.

The two leaders discussed Taiwan ahead of next month’s inauguration of Lai Ching-te, the island’s next leader, who has vowed to safeguard its de-facto independence from China and further align it with other democracies. Biden reaffirmed the United States’ longstanding “One China” policy and reiterated that the U.S. opposes any coercive means to bring Taiwan under Beijing’s control. China considers Taiwan a domestic matter and has vigorously protested U.S. support for the island.

Taiwan remains the “first red line not to be crossed,” Xi told Biden, and emphasized that Beijing will not tolerate separatist activities by Taiwan’s independence forces as well as “exterior indulgence and support,” which alluded to Washington’s support for the island.

Biden also raised concerns about China’s operations in the South China Sea, including efforts last month to impede the Philippines, which the U.S. is treaty-

XINHUA FILE PHOTO



OVER THE PHONE

# Xi and Biden discuss Taiwan, AI and fentanyl

-obligated to defend, from resupplying its forces on the disputed Second Thomas Shoal.

Next week, Biden will host Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House for a joint summit where China’s influence in the region was set to be top of the agenda.

Biden, in the call with Xi, pressed China to do more to meet its commitments to halt the flow of illegal narcotics and to schedule additional precursor chemicals to prevent their export. The pledge was made at the leaders’ summit held in Woodside, California, last year on the margins of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting.

At the November summit, Biden and Xi also agreed that their governments would hold formal talks on the promises and risks of advanced artificial intelligence, which are set to take place in the coming weeks. The pair touched on the issue over the call just two weeks after China and the U.S. joined more than 120 other nations in backing a resolution at the United Nations calling for global safeguards around the emerging technology.

Biden, in the call, reinforced warnings to Xi against interfering

in the 2024 elections in the U.S. as well as against continued malicious cyberattacks against critical American infrastructure.

He also raised concerns about human rights in China, including Hong Kong’s new national security law and its treatment of minority groups, and he raised the plight of Americans detained in or barred from leaving China.

“Taiwan [remains] the first red line not to be crossed.”

XI JINPING  
PRESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The Democratic president also pressed China over its defense relationship with Russia, which is seeking to rebuild its industrial base as it presses forward with its invasion of Ukraine. And he called on Beijing to wield its influence over North Korea to rein in the isolated and erratic nuclear power.

As the leaders of the world’s two largest economies, Biden also raised concerns with Xi over China’s “unfair economic practices,” National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said, and reasserted that the U.S. would take steps to preserve its security and economic interests, including by continuing to limit the transfer of some

advanced technology to China.

Xi complained that the U.S. has taken more measures to suppress China’s economy, trade and technology in the past several months and that the list of sanctioned Chinese companies has become ever longer, which is “not de-risking but creating risks,” according to the broadcaster.

Yun Sun, director of the China program at Stimson Center, said the call “does reflect the mutual desire to keep the relationship stable” while the men reiterated their longstanding positions on issues of concern.

The call came ahead of Yellen’s visit to Guangzhou and Beijing for a week of bilateral meetings on the subject with finance leaders from the world’s second largest economy — including Vice Premier He Lifeng, Chinese Central Bank Gov. Pan Gongsheng, former Vice Premier Liu He, American businesses and local leaders.

An advisory for the upcoming trip states that Yellen “will advocate for American workers and businesses to ensure they are treated fairly, including by pressing Chinese counterparts on unfair trade practices.”

It follows Xi’s meeting in Beijing with U.S. business leaders last week, when he emphasized the

mutually beneficial economic ties between the two countries and urged people-to-people exchange to maintain the relationship.

Xi told the Americans that the two countries have stayed communicative and “made progress” on issues such as trade, anti-narcotics and climate change since he met with Biden in November. Last week’s high-profile meeting was seen as Beijing’s effort to stabilize bilateral relations.

Kirby said Biden “reiterated our concerns about the ownership of TikTok” to Xi during their call.

As chair of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., which reviews foreign ownership of firms in the U.S., Yellen has ample leeway to determine how the company could remain operating in the U.S.

Meanwhile, China’s leaders have set a goal of 5% economic growth this year despite a slowdown exacerbated by troubles in the property sector and the lingering effects of strict anti-virus measures during the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted travel, logistics, manufacturing and other industries.

China is the dominant player in batteries for electric vehicles and has a rapidly expanding auto industry that could challenge the world’s established carmakers as it goes global.

The U.S. last year outlined plans to limit EV buyers from claiming tax credits if they purchase cars containing battery materials from China and other countries that are considered hostile to the United States. Separately, the Department of Commerce launched an investigation into the potential national security risks posed by Chinese car exports to the U.S. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

# STRONGEST EARTHQUAKE IN 25 YEARS KILLS 9 PEOPLE AND TRAPS 70 WORKERS

JOHNSON LAI &  
CHRISTOPHER BODEEN,  
TAIPEI

**T**HE strongest earthquake in a quarter-century rocked Taiwan during the morning rush hour yesterday, killing nine people, trapping dozens in quarries and sending some residents scrambling out the windows of damaged buildings. A tsunami warning was triggered but later lifted.

The quake, which also injured hundreds, was centered off the coast of rural, mountainous Hualien County, where some buildings leaned at severe angles, their ground floors crushed. Just over 150 kilometers (93 miles) away in the capital of Taipei, tiles fell from older buildings, and schools evacuated their students to sports fields, equipping them with yellow safety helmets. Some children covered themselves with textbooks to guard against falling objects as aftershocks continued.

Television images showed neighbors and rescue workers lifting residents, including a toddler, through windows and onto the street, after doors fused shut in the shaking. All appeared mobile, in shock but without serious injuries.

Taiwan is regularly jolted by quakes and its population is among the best prepared for them, but authorities said they had expected a relatively mild earthquake and accordingly did not send out alerts. The eventual temblor was strong enough to scare even people who are used to such shaking.

"I've grown accustomed to (earthquakes). But today was the first time I was scared to tears by an earthquake," said Hsien-hsuen Keng, a resident who lives in a fifth-floor apartment in Taipei. "I was awakened by the earthquake. I had never felt such intense shaking before."

AP PHOTO



In this image taken from a video footage run by TVBS, a partially collapsed building is seen in Hualien

Nine people died in the quake, which struck just before 8 a.m., according to Taiwan's national fire agency. The local United Daily News reported that three were hikers killed in rockslides in Taroko National Park, which is in Hualien, and that a van driver died in the same area when boulders hit the vehicle.

Another 934 people were injured. Meanwhile, authorities said they had lost contact with 50 people in minibuses in the national park after the quake downed phone networks.

In addition, 64 people were trapped in one rock quarry, and six in another, the fire agency said.

The quake and aftershocks also caused 24 landslides and damage to 35 roads, bridges and tunnels.

Taiwan's earthquake monitoring agency said the quake was 7.2 magnitude while the U.S. Geological Survey put it at 7.4. It struck about 18 kilometers off of Hua-

lien, on Taiwan's east coast, and was about 35 kilometers deep. Multiple aftershocks followed.

The national legislature, a converted school built before World War II, and sections of the main airport in Taoyuan, just south of Taipei, also saw minor damage.

Traffic along the east coast was at a virtual standstill after the earthquake, with landslides and falling debris hitting tunnels and highways. Train service was suspended across the island of 23 million people, with some tracks twisted by the stress of the quake, as was subway service in Taipei, where sections of a newly constructed elevated line split apart but did not collapse.

The initial panic after the earthquake quickly faded on the island, which prepares for such events with drills at schools and notices issued via public media and mobile phone. Stephen Gao, a seismologist and professor at

Missouri University of Science and Technology, said Taiwan's readiness is among the most advanced in the world, also featuring strict building codes and a world-class seismological network.

By noon, the metro station in the busy northern Taipei suburb of Beitou was again buzzing with people commuting to jobs and people arriving to visit the hot springs or travel the mountain paths at the base of an extinct volcano.

The earthquake was felt in Shanghai and several provinces along China's southeastern coast, according to Chinese media. China and Taiwan are about 160 kilometers apart.

The Japan Meteorological Agency said a tsunami of 30 centimeters was detected on the coast of Yonaguni island about 15 minutes after the quake struck. Smaller waves were measured in Ishigaki and Miyako islands. All

alerts in the region had been lifted by yesterday afternoon.

Taiwan lies along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," the line of seismic faults encircling the Pacific Ocean where most of the world's earthquakes occur.

Hualien was last struck by a deadly quake in 2018 that killed 17 people and brought down a historic hotel. Taiwan's worst quake in recent years struck on Sept. 21, 1999, with a magnitude of 7.7, causing 2,400 deaths, injuring around 100,000 and destroying thousands of buildings.

The economic fallout from the quake has yet to be calculated, but Taiwan is the leading manufacturer of the world's most sophisticated computer chips and other high-technology items that are highly sensitive to seismic events. Parts of the electricity grid were shut down, possibly leading to disruptions in the supply chain and financial losses. **MDT/AP**

JIANGXI

# Violent storms kill seven people in eastern China

**V**IOLENT rain and hailstorms have killed seven people in eastern China's Jiangxi province this week, including three people who fell from their apartments in a high-rise building.

Dozens of homes were severely damaged by the

storms, which started Sunday, and more than 800 people have been resettled, state broadcaster CCTV said yesterday, citing a Jiangxi government emergency agency.

Four people died on Sunday in Nanchang, the provincial capital. It

wasn't clear from the report when or where the other three died, but another violent storm on Tuesday left people trapped in a collapsed house in the same city. Eleven people were hospitalized, according to an earlier CCTV report.

The first storm blew out floor-to-ceiling windows in a Nanchang apartment building, killing three in the middle of the night. A grandmother and her 11-year-old grandson fell to their deaths from the 20th floor, as did a 60-year-old woman from

the 11th floor, according to Chinese media reports.

Authorities are investigating how the three people fell. Media reports suggested they may have been blown out by extremely strong winds. A resident on the 20th floor of the building told online

outlet Jimu News that her family had to hold on to avoid being blown away, and that they were so frightened that they stayed up all night.

The storms also damaged 5,700 hectares of crops in Jiangxi province, CCTV said. **MDT/AP**



NORTH KOREA

# Kim tested a new hypersonic intermediate-range missile

KIM TONG-HYUNG,  
SEOUL

**N**ORTH Korea said yesterday it had tested a new hypersonic intermediate-range missile powered with solid propellants, extending a run of weapons tests that's deepening a nuclear standoff with neighbors and the United States.

With the supposed success of the demonstration, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared his country had acquired the ability to build solid-fuel, nuclear-capable missiles of all ranges as he pursues an arsenal that can credibly threaten rivals in Asia and the United States.

But the South Korean military said the North is exaggerating the success of the test and its overall missile prowess.

The report by North Korean state media came a day after the South Korean and Japanese militaries detected a missile launched from near the North's capital toward its eastern sea.

State media said the test was supervised by Kim, who described the Hwasong-16B missile as a key piece of his nuclear deterrent he vowed to further build up to counter

his "enemies," a reference to the United States, South Korea and Japan.

In recent years, North Korea has been developing more missiles with built-in solid propellants. Such weapons are easier to move and hide, and can be launched quicker than liquid-propellant missiles, which need to be fueled before launch and cannot stay fueled for long periods of time.

North Korea tested a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile for the first time last year, adding to its arsenal of long-range weapons targeting the U.S. mainland. The country also has an extensive lineup of short-range and mid-range solid-fuel missiles that can be fired from land vehicles, ships and submarines and are potentially capable of hitting targets throughout South Korea and Japan. In recent months, the North demonstrated some of these missiles in drills it described as simulated nuclear strikes.

Since 2021, it's also been testing hypersonic weapons designed to fly at more than five times the speed of sound. If perfected, such systems could potentially pose a challenge to regional missile defense systems because of their speed and

maneuverability. However, it's unclear whether these missiles are consistently flying at the speeds the North claims.

North Korean official media KCNA claimed that during the Tuesday test, the missile's hypersonic glide warhead reached a peak altitude of 101 kilometers (62 miles) and flew about 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) after separating from the launch rocket, and performed various maneuvers before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff yesterday maintained its assessment that the missile flew about 600 kilometers and accused North Korea of exaggerating the missile's flight performance, although acknowledging that the North's technologies were improving. The previous day, Japan reported a similar flight distance, although its Defense Ministry reported a maximum height close to that claimed by the North.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said it remains unclear whether the North has perfected the technologies to ensure that the warheads of its hypersonic solid-fuel missiles and intercontinental ballistic

missiles survive the harsh conditions of atmospheric re-entry.

"Hypersonic missiles are weapons systems that are still being developed

by advanced nations (the United States, China and Russia etc.) and they require highly difficult technologies," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a text message to reporters. "It's difficult to predict when they will be deployed operationally, but it's expected to take a considerable amount of time."

The North also tested a purported hypersonic intermediate-range ballistic missile in January, years after it flight-tested liquid-fuel IRBMs. Experts say such weapons if perfected is potentially capable of reaching remote U.S. targets in the Pacific.

"North Korea's development of hypersonic IRBMs targets Guam, which hosts U.S. military bases, and even Alaska," said Chang Young-keun, a missile expert at South Korea's Research Institute for National Strategy.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said the missile tested on Tuesday was likely different from the system tested in January, which state media didn't name but was likely the Hwasong-16A. **MDT/AP**

AD

## CEM NOTICE

### Temporary traffic arrangements for traffic lights suspension due to maintenance of electrical facilities

To cooperate with CEM's power facility maintenance work, a set of traffic lights at the junction of Avenida de Vale das Borboletas and Alameda da Harmonia at Coloane will be suspended from **9:30 am to 4:30 pm on 8 April (Monday)**. Please be aware of the arrangements.

GAZA STRIP

# Family and friends recall dedication of World Central Kitchen killed

**I**SRAELI airstrikes that killed seven aid workers in Gaza reverberated around the world this week, as friends and relatives mourned the losses of those who were delivering food to besieged Palestinians with the charity World Central Kitchen.

Killed were three British nationals, an Australian, a Polish national, an American-Canadian dual citizen and a Palestinian. Some had traveled the world, participating in aid efforts in the aftermath of wars, earthquakes and wildfires.

Here's some information on those who have been identified.

## SAIF

Saif Issam Abu Taha, 27, had worked for World Central Kitchen as a driver and translator since the beginning of the year, relatives said.

His brothers described him as a dedicated young man eager to help fellow Palestinians.

He'd also been a successful businessman who conducted trade with Ukraine, Egypt, China and others, brother Abdul Razzaq Abu Taha said. His work made him known on the Israeli side, his brother added, which helped in coordination and approval to assist the World Central Kitchen team in unloading the ship.

Saif had hoped to get married. "My mother was looking for a wife for him," Abdul Razzaq Abu Taha said. "He was supposed to get married if the war didn't happen."

Saif and other workers were excited about unloading the food aid, desperately needed in Gaza. The last time Saif and his brother spoke, he said, they'd finished the job and he was heading home.

After hearing about the airstrikes, Abdul Razzaq Abu Taha said he tried to call to see whether Saif was OK.

After many attempts, he said, a stranger answered and told him, "I found this phone about 200 meters away from the car. All of the people inside are killed."

## ZOMI

Friends and family remembered Lalzawmi "Zomi" Frankcom, 43, as a brave, sel-



fless woman whose care for others drew her across the globe. For the last five years, she'd worked for Washington-based World Central Kitchen, taking her to the U.S., Thailand and her native Australia.

"We mourn this fine Australian who has a record of helping out her fellow citizens, whether it be internationally or whether it be through the support that she gave during the bushfires that occurred during that Black Summer," Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "She is someone who clearly was concerned about her fellow humanity."

In a statement, relatives described Frankcom as an "outstanding human being" who was "killed doing the work she loves delivering food to the people of Gaza."

She was born in Melbourne and earned a bachelor's from the Swinburne University of Technology. For eight years, she worked for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, the nation's largest bank.

Frankcom's social media highlighted visits to help those in need in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Romania and Haiti.

World Central Kitchen colleague Dora Weekley, who met Frankcom responding to Hurricane Dorian in the Baha-

mas in 2019, described Frankcom as "larger than life."

She recalled when Frankcom was invited to walk a Hollywood red carpet, for a documentary about World Central Kitchen that was nominated for an Emmy.

"I remember getting a picture of her in a dress, saying, 'Hold onto this forever,'" Weekley told ABC. "Because usually I'm in sweats and runners, and I'm in Pakistan or Afghanistan or, you know, she could be anywhere, and never with her hair done or makeup done."

"She worked all hours, she gave everything, and she believed in helping people who were less fortunate."

## DAMIAN

Damian Soból, 36, was known as a cheerful, friendly and resourceful manager who quickly rose in World Central Kitchen's ranks.

Hailing from the southeastern Polish city of Przemyl and studying hospitality there, Soból had been on aid missions in Ukraine, Morocco, Turkey and, for the past six months, Gaza.

"He was a really extraordinary guy," said Marta Wilczynska, of the Free Place Foundation, which cooperates with World Central Ki-

tchen. "We were very proud of him."

Wilczynska met Soból on the Polish side of the border with Ukraine, a few days after Russia's February 2022 invasion. He spoke English well and was a translator, and as a skilled manager, he could organize work in any condition, she said.

"Always smiling, always so helpful, he loved this job. I felt I had a brother in him," Wilczynska said.

Free Place Foundation President Mikołaj Rykowski said Soból was "the man for every task — he could overcome every difficulty."

Posting on Facebook, Przemyl Mayor Wojciech Bakun said of Soból's death that there are "no words to describe how people who knew this fantastic young man feel now."

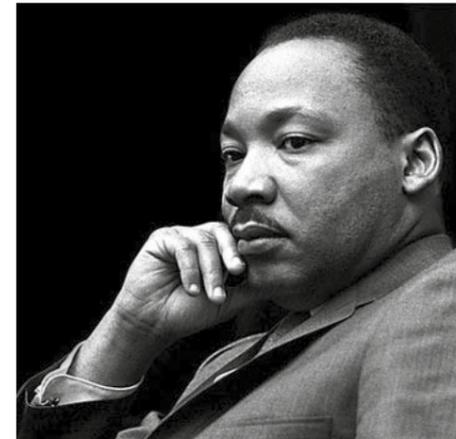
## CHAPMAN, HENDERSON AND KIRBY

The three British victims were military veterans providing security for the World Central Kitchen aid mission.

British media reported that John Chapman, 57, and James Kirby, 47, were former Royal Marines, while 33-year-old James Henderson, known as Jim, was a British Army veteran. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1968 MARTIN LUTHER KING SHOT DEAD



The American black civil rights leader, Dr Martin Luther King, has been assassinated.

Dr King was shot dead in the southern US city of Memphis, Tennessee, where he was to lead a march of sanitation workers protesting against low wages and poor working conditions.

He was shot in the neck as he stood on a hotel balcony and died in hospital soon afterwards.

Reverend Jesse Jackson was on the balcony with Dr King when the single shot rang out.

"He had just bent over. I reckon if he had been standing up he would not have been hit in the face," said Mr Jackson.

Police in Memphis were put on alert for a "well-dressed" white man who is said to have dropped an automatic rifle after the shooting and escaped in a blue car.

There were early signs of rioting in Memphis after Dr King's death and 4,000 members of the National Guard were drafted into the city.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew has been ordered to ward off disturbances.

The US President, Lyndon Johnson, has postponed a trip to Hawaii for peace talks on Vietnam.

The president said he was "shocked and saddened" by the civil rights leader's death.

"I ask every citizen to reject the blind violence that has taken Dr King who lived by non-violence," Mr Johnson said.

Dr King, 39, had previously survived several attempts on his life including the bombing of his home in 1956.

The charismatic civil rights leader joined the crusade for equal rights for black people in America in the mid 1950s.

He first came to national prominence as one of the leaders of the Alabama bus boycott in 1955.

In 1963 Dr King led a massive march on Washington DC where he delivered his now famous "I have a dream" speech.

Dr King advocated the use of non-violent tactics such as sit-ins and protest marches.

In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel peace prize.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Martin Luther King's assassination led to riots in more than 100 US cities.

James Earl Ray was convicted of his murder and sentenced to 99 years in prison.

But he later retracted his confession and said he had been only a minor player in a conspiracy. However, his appeals for a new trial were rejected and he died in prison in 1998.

Ray was supported by some members of Martin Luther King's family who believed the US Government may have been involved in Dr King's death. Their case was strengthened in December 1999 when a jury in a wrongful death case brought by the King family, decided the civil rights leader was the victim of a murder conspiracy.

However, in June 2000 after an investigation the US Justice Department said it had uncovered no reliable evidence of a conspiracy.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

## YOUR STARS

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Attend meetings and parties. Share what you're learning. Connect with friends for discoveries, news and revelations. Interesting possibilities spark in conversation. Walk and talk.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Consider long-term career goals. Discuss potential objectives. Watch for hidden opportunities. Make interesting connections. Learn from someone with practical experience.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
Widen your horizons. Expand your exploration for long-term impact. Adapt around changes or obstacles with flexible agility. Follow your heart, dreams and possibilities.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Collaborate for lucrative opportunities. Find the silver lining under clouds. Changes reveal new possibilities. Take advantage of conditions for lasting benefit.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
A push now can go the distance. Communicate your love with deeds. Someone would like to share your load. Articulate and develop shared dreams.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Get your heart pumping. Physical action gets lasting results. Expand beyond previous limitations. You're growing stronger. Practice to build ease, energy and endurance.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Relax and focus on love. Develop a passion, interest or obsession. Consider future potential. Make a fascinating connection. Follow your heart and have fun.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
Imagine and invent possibilities for home and family. Make repairs. Research options. Choose domestic upgrades for quality and durability. Find solutions for lasting benefit.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Share encouragement, news and resources. Write, record and publish your work. Make valuable and lasting connections. Use your persuasive skills for positive benefits.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Haste makes waste. Lucrative opportunities are worth developing thoughtfully. Completion fosters creativity. Take advantage of a beneficial development.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
A personal dream appears within reach. Recent changes reveal new potential. Dress for success. Polish your presentation and portfolio. Make a delicious pitch.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Tap into inspiration. Find it among the trees, under a flower, in the wind. Savor meditative rituals like gardening, wandering and invention. Imagine and dream.

## The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



## SUDOKU

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

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

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

## WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	9	18	cloudy
Changchun	-1	11	fine
Chengdu	10	24	overcast
Chongqing	18	23	rain
Fuzhou	18	20	rain
Guangzhou	24	28	rain
Guiyang	13	18	showers
Haikou	25	36	cloudy
Hangzhou	13	17	rain
Harbin	-3	10	fine
Hefei	11	17	overcast
Nanjing	11	17	overcast
Shanghai	12	16	overcast
Taipei	21	28	rain
Wuhan	13	15	rain
Hong Kong	26	28	rain
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-2	7	rain
Frankfurt	9	14	rain
Paris	13	19	rain
London	12	16	rain
New York	4	11	rain

## 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;



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- 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
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DRIVE IN

# ALICE ROHRWACHER'S TOMBAROLI TALE IS PURE MAGIC

JAKE COYLE,  
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

WHEN we talk about “movie magic,” the first thing that comes to mind is often something like the bikes achieving liftoff in “E.T.” But it applies no less to Alice Rohrwacher’s wondrous “La Chimera,” a grubbily transcendent folk tale of a film that finds its enchantment buried in the ground.

“Were you dreaming?” a train conductor asks the sleeping Arthur (Josh O’Connor), a distant, temperamental Brit in Italy with little more to his name than the rumpled cream-colored linen suit he wears. The answer is yes. Radiant memories of Arthur’s dead lover, Benjamina, haunt his dreams and propel him on a strange quest into the underground tombs of Tuscany.

A melancholy spell seems to hang over Arthur, who has a mystical gift for finding ancient relics. It’s the early 1980s. Arthur is returning home from a stint in jail for grave robbing. His homecoming is received like a hero’s



AP PHOTO  
Josh O’Connor (center) in a scene from “La Chimera” (Neon)

return by the scruffy, carnivalesque band of tombaroli — tomb raiders who plunder Etruscan artifacts — who look on Arthur more like a prince than a destitute thief. They call him “maestro.”

With remarkable precision, Arthur is able to point to where to dig. In one scene, he takes a small, bended branch as an instrument for his dowsing. “La Chimera,” itself, seems to emerge almost the same way — an earthy,

spellbinding buried treasure with a sublime drawing power.

The precise moment I fell totally in love with “La Chimera” — and this is very much a movie to love — is an early montage in which Arthur and his fellow scavengers scamper across the countryside, hiding in fields from bumbling police, while a folk song about the tombarolo Englishman is sung. “La Chimera,” the third in a loose trilogy for

Rohrwacher following “The Wonders” and “Happy as Lazzaro,” is the fullest realization yet of her cinema of “magical neo-realism.”

Arthur and company make cash by selling their unearthed Etruscan wares. But he’s driven less by money than a compulsion to reach the dead, to reach Benjamina. How deep will he dig? Will the darkness of the underworld envelop him?

Arthur also makes occasional

visits to the mother of Benjamina, Flora (a typically magnificent Isabella Rossellini), who, like him, has not yet accepted the death of her daughter. She receives him courteously and deferentially, with an old-world snicker that she only lets men smoke in the house.

At her crumbling villa, Arthur meets Italia (Carol Duarte, fabulous), a singing student who, Flora says, is tone deaf.

Past and present mingle in mysterious ways in “La Chimera.” The greatest Etruscan discovery — a glorious subterranean chamber — is made on a beach with a factory just down the shoreline. But the even more remarkable excavation of the film is of Arthur’s grieving soul.

Like so many things in “La Chimera,” O’Connor’s performance is entrancing and confounding. How can a movie be so nimbly poised between past and present, you can’t help but wonder. The stuff of fairy tales — of a kind of storytelling magic — is what Rohrwacher, herself, wants to unearth. “Were you dreaming?” Good question.

“La Chimera,” a Neon release, is not rated by the Motion Picture Association. In Italian with English subtitles. Running time: 133 minutes.



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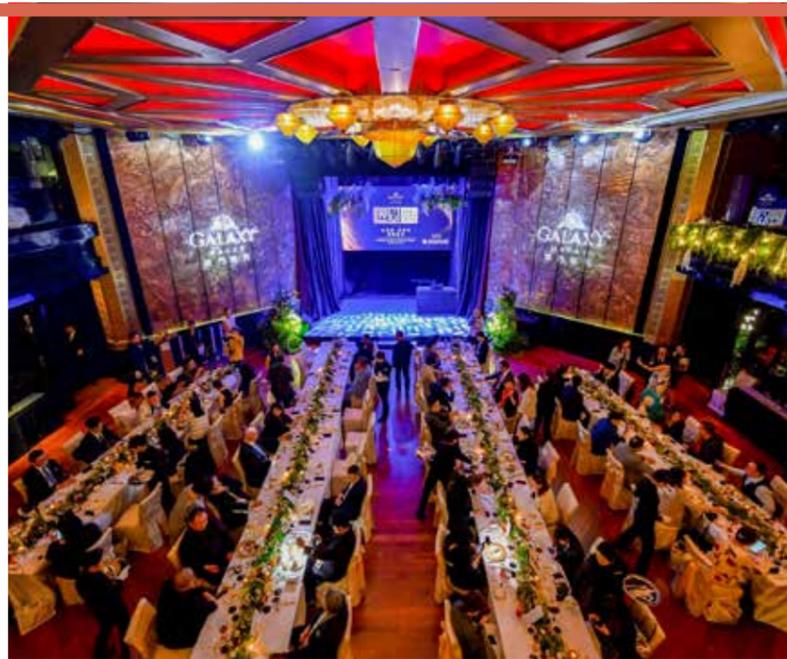
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C&C RECEIVED THE 1ST SILVER  
“DEIGNAN AWARD”  
FOR RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
IN MACAU (2023)





### TASTE OF EDESIA

# Artisans of Flavours

IRENE SAM, MDT

**N**OT long ago, Galaxy Macau presented the second season of its culinary campaign, Artisans of Flavour. Centered around the theme of Authentic Flavours from the Heart, the campaign brought together the award-winning restaurants and artisan chefs of Galaxy Macau, using authentic ingredients and exquisite culinary skills to meticulously recreate and elevate the authentic flavours of classic Chinese cuisines such as Northern, Hunan and Sichuan, as well as Cantonese Cuisine, unique Macanese cuisine, and authentic international cuisines such as Japanese, Thai, and Italian.

This allowed food enthusiasts from around the world to savour authentic flavours and immerse in the dining environment, while deeply experiencing the inheritance and innovation of culinary culture, and gracious hospitality. A well-attended launch banquet took place at **CHINA ROUGE** in Galaxy Macau.

Association heads, government official and senior executives from Galaxy Macau joined dozens of media representatives and renowned media and food critics from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau to celebrate highlights from the first season of Galaxy Macau Artisans of Flavour and witness the unveiling of the second season.

The venue was adorned with a refreshing woodland-themed decor, evoking a dreamy atmosphere reminiscent of The Wizard of Oz. Tables were adorned with enticing herbal ingredients from various countries and regions such as Italian Amalfi lemons, baby purple cauliflower, Thai kaffir lime and lemongrass, enhancing the ambiance with their fragrant aroma and tangible textures. The culinary delights crafted by the master chef

team using these classic ingredients also allowed guests to immerse themselves in Galaxy Macau's relentless pursuit of original and authentic gourmet experiences.

This year, Galaxy Macau launches a series of gastronomic promotions, welcoming the opening of several distinctive restaurants, and presenting a meticulously curated video series to complement these initiatives. These videos will invite gastronomes from different regions and countries who will share the authentic charm of their respective cuisines from a professional and unique perspective.

They will highlight the genuine flavours showcased at Galaxy Macau and the master chefs' pursuit of ultimate craftsmanship, allowing diners to not only enjoy authentic hometown flavours but also experience the emotional connections and cultural significance embedded within.

The inaugural video features Dong Jianmin, a renowned food critic and host of CCTV's culinary program, who hails from Beijing and focuses on Northern Chinese cuisines. Dong will explore various Northern restaurants at Galaxy Macau, including Blossom Palaces, Bei Shan Lou, and The Noodle Kitchen, delving into aspects such as ingredient selection, cooking techniques, interior design inspiration, ambiance, team dynamics, and service standards.

Through this exploration, he unveils the recreation and innovation of authentic Northern flavours within Galaxy Macau, as well as the profound nostalgia and enduring local sentiments behind their timeless and exquisite taste.

This first chapter has been released on the official website and social media platforms of Galaxy Macau. Each restaurant will also introduce classic or seasonal Northern dishes to delight the taste buds of food enthusiasts during

this refreshing spring season. The well-known Blossom Palaces will showcase the beloved Northern flavour of Fruitwood Roast Duck with its specialist on Beijing and Huaiyang cuisine. The well-selected "Beijing Four-Strain Duck" undergoes a series of meticulous and complex processes before entering the oven.

During the roasting process, seasonal fruitwood is used as fuel to impart a delightful aroma to the duck. Subsequently, a skillful chef employs special technique originating from the imperial court, to ensure the duck is evenly heated and excess fat is rendered out. The freshly baked roast duck emerges plump, full-bodied, and enticingly fragrant. Each bite of its crispy skin and tender meat is a memorable experience. While Bei Shan Lou, which focuses on Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang and Shandong flavours, will offer seasonal nourishing dishes.

Inheriting the essence of cuisine from Northern China, the chef curates a seasonal menu, highlighting spring ingredients sought-after for their taste and health benefits, such as Chinese Toon and Spring Bamboo Shoots. Using traditional Northern culinary methods, he presents the authentic taste that has been enjoyed for decades, or even centuries, by the people of the region. Culinary experts from Shanxi, the hometown of noodles, The Noodle Kitchen stand ready to impress your taste buds with authentic flavour of North and South China. They will offer Qingdao King Prawn, Quinoa Noodle Soup and Poached Pork, Crab Meat, Shrimp Dumplings. Quinoa contributes to the springy texture of the healthy noodles that swim in an umami-packed prawn broth. These handmade parcels with juicy fillings are enhanced by the spicy aroma of Sichuan chilies and peppers.

**OPINION**

**Business Views**

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



**SPRING BREAK IS MORE OF A BUZZ WITH 'MALATANG'**

Powered by social media, young people in China are traveling to the far corners of the country, places that those a decade or two older had missed.

The latest sensation is Tianshui, a small city of 3 million in Gansu province. Tucked away in northwest China, Tianshui has been forgotten since the Qin Dynasty more than 2,000 years ago. Visitors to Gansu would only go to Dunhuang, home to the caves that contain thousands of ancient Buddha statues.

But in recent weeks, social media viewership about Tianshui reached billions. China's Gen-Z are coming for its malatang, a style of cooking that boils skewers in a spicy broth. This street food can be found everywhere in China, but what distinguishes Tianshui's is a locally-grown peppercorn that numbs and tingles the tongue and gives some a slight buzz, as well as its price point.

A satisfying meal costs only about 20 yuan (\$2.8) each, while an overnight stay is around 170 yuan. Young people are thus happily waiting in line for hours in front of malatang joints, live broadcasting and socializing.

Just like Harbin, this kind of viral attention is a godsend for a city that suffers from fiscal difficulties and decades-long emigration. Last year, general government revenue fell 20% from its 2021 high. Meanwhile, land sales have practically disappeared as China's property downturn enters its third year.

To keep the precious youngsters coming, officials have enthusiastically embraced the so-called "nanny-style tourism," welcoming visitors at the local airport and railway station with free shuttle buses to malatang joints. Street food providers cranky with tourists disturbing their sleepy, slow-paced routine have been scolded by the police, because just like their malatang, bad customer service videos can go viral quickly, too.

This consumer trend is a continuation of what we observed during the Lunar New Year holiday. Young people are the driving force, sending domestic tourist traffic to record highs. But because of their tight budget and bleak job prospects, spending per capita is still below the pre-pandemic levels.

Unlike those born in the 1970s and 1980s, who hit the most famous domestic sites and then went overseas as soon as their income grew, younger Chinese are getting to know their country better. They're going to forgotten corners where infrastructure is lacking and people are poor. But does that mean they might turn inward and be more prone to brainwashing if they don't have the budget to travel world?

So far, there's little to worry about. We are witnessing a generation that has its own trend and way of thinking. After all, it was China's youth who spearheaded the global "lie-flat" movement. They find no shame in living at home after college, proudly calling themselves "professional children." They have rejected their parents' slavish addiction to European luxury brands and are embracing small local designers and wearing "gross outfits" at work.

In the first week of its release, there was a huge spike in online piracy of Netflix Inc.'s 3-Body Problem, given that the streaming service is not officially available in China. A heated online debate ensued about the opening gruesome Cultural Revolution scene. "Whoever gives me milk is my mom" — a Red Guard's criticism of Albert Einstein when she was thrashing a scholar for teaching the physicist's theory of relativity — is now a favorite catchphrase that resonates with many. Confronted with weak economic future, they disagree with the 1960s youngster's revolutionary ideology.

In China, a sharp economic slowdown and a deflationary mindset are creating space for a new counterculture. Kids these days are leaning out and unearthing hidden gems. What they come up with is worth watching. [Abridged]

Courtesy Bloomberg/Shuli Ren

**INFLATION HAS SLID AGAIN IN EUROPE. WHAT THAT MEANS FOR INTEREST RATES**

THE BUZZ

The inflation that has squeezed European shoppers fell more than expected in March to 2.4%, as cost spikes in the grocery aisle eased and overall price rises headed down in the two biggest economies, Germany and France.

The annual figure for the 20 countries that use the euro currency came in below the 2.5% predicted by financial markets and brings the European Central Bank ever closer to its inflation goal of 2%.

But analysts say the decline from 2.6% in February, though welcome, would likely not be enough to move up the ECB's first interest rate cut.

The bank meets April 11 but the first reduction in borrowing costs is not expected until June despite an economy that's failing to grow, several analysts said.

Food inflation fell to 2.7% from 3.9%, and energy prices dropped by 1.8%, according to numbers released yesterday from Eurostat, the European Union's statistics agency. Meanwhile, core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, eased to 2.9% from 3.1% in February.

AP PHOTO



Prime Minister Luis Montenegro delivers a speech after being sworn in by Portuguese President Marcelo Rebel de Sousa at the Ajuda palace in Lisbon

**PORTUGAL'S NEW MINORITY GOVERNMENT AIMS TO OUTMANEUVER POPULIST RIVALS**

BARRY HATTON, LISBON

PORTUGAL'S new center-right minority government took office yesterday [Macau time], days after its first test in parliament exposed both the pitfalls and the opportunities it faces following a radical right populist party's sudden surge in support in a recent general election.

Only one of the 17 ministers sworn in at a ceremony in Lisbon's 19th-century Ajuda National Palace has previous top-level government experience. Even Prime Minister Luis Montenegro, who promised a Cabinet made up of specialists from outside the usual political circles, has never sat in government before.

Some key members of the Cabinet have spent time in Brussels and are familiar with the European Union's corridors of power. They include Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel and Defense Minister Nuno Melo, who were European lawmakers from 2009. Portugal, a country of 10.3 million people, is receiving more than 22 billion euros (\$23.6 billion) through 2026 from the EU to fuel growth and enable economic reforms.

Finance Minister Joaquim Miranda Sarmiento, a Lisbon university professor, is likely to have a prominent

role as the new administration seeks to keep a lid on what in the past has been ruinous government overspending. He wants fiscal policies to help drive investment and saving.

Montenegro, the new prime minister, vowed to deliver on his election promises of lower taxes, higher salaries and pensions, and improved public services by making the economy more competitive and the government more efficient.

The government will lower corporate tax from 21% to 15% over the next three years, he said in a speech.

An alliance led by the Socialist Democratic Party clinched a narrow win in last month's election, capturing 80 seats in the 230-seat National Assembly, Portugal's parliament.

The center-left Socialist Party, which for decades has alternated in power with the Social Democrats, collected 78 seats.

A new ingredient is adding to the political unpredictability around the minority government's prospects: the Chega (Enough) populist party picked up 50 parliamentary seats, up from just 12 in a 2022 election, on a promise to disrupt what it calls the establishment's politics-as-usual.

Consequently, the election of parliament's speaker

last week brought an unprecedented problem — and an unprecedented solution.

The Chega party made good on its promise to upset the old way of doing things, standing in the way of the incoming government's candidate for speaker and delivering an embarrassing defeat for Montenegro, the new prime minister and leader of the Socialist Party.

Chega leader Andre Ventura wants the Social Democrats to join his party in a right-of-center parliamentary alliance. That would create an overall majority and place Chega at the heart of power. But Montenegro is so far saying no to that.

Instead, Montenegro left Chega out in the cold by striking a deal with the Socialists, his party's traditional rival, for a speaker named by each party to serve two-year terms.

It's the kind of deal Montenegro may be forced to do again over the next four years.

On Montenegro's immediate to-do list is dousing some political fires. He has vowed to quickly address shortcomings in public health care, especially long waiting lists for treatment, and a housing crisis, as well as resolve simmering disputes with police and teachers over pay and work conditions. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



**Haiti** More than 53,000 people have fled Haiti's capital in less than three weeks, the vast majority to escape unrelenting gang violence, according to a United Nations report released yesterday [Macau time]. More than 60% are headed to Haiti's rural southern region, which worries U.N. officials. The southern region already hosts more than 116,000 Haitians who previously left Port-au-Prince, according to the report by the U.N.'s International Organization for Migration.

**USA** In a scathing indictment of Microsoft corporate security and transparency, a Biden administration-appointed review board issued a report yesterday [Macau time] saying "a cascade of errors" by the tech giant let allegedly Chinese cyber operators break into email accounts of senior U.S. officials including Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. The Cyber Safety Review Board, created in 2021 by executive order, describes shoddy cybersecurity practices, a lax corporate culture and a lack of sincerity about the company's knowledge of the targeted breach, which affected multiple U.S. agencies that deal with China.

AP PHOTO



**Literature** Maryse Condé, an acclaimed French-language novelist from Guadeloupe who in novels, stories, plays and memoirs imagined and redefined the personal and historical past from 17th century New England to contemporary Europe, has died at age 90. Condé, winner in 2018 of an "alternate" Nobel Prize, died Monday night at a hospital in Apt, outside Marseille.

**HOLIDAY TIMES**

Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Monday April 8. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times.