



THE ANNUAL SUMMIT FOR PATA - PACIFIC ASIA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN MACAU THIS WEEK FOR THREE CONSECUTIVE DAYS

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WELFARE BUREAU TO ASSIST DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES IN MOP20 MILLION BUDGET

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SMALL, WELL-BUILT CHINESE EV SEAGULL POSES A BIG THREAT TO USA AUTO INDUSTRY

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AP PHOTO



Australia A light plane with three people aboard landed safely without landing gear yesterday after circling an Australian airport for almost three hours to burn off fuel. The pilot, Peter Schott, and his passengers, a 60-year-old man and a 65-year-old woman, walked unaided from the twin-turboprop Beechcraft Super King Air after landing at Newcastle Airport north of Sydney, the police said. Schott "made a textbook wheels-up landing," police told reporters at the airport.

AP PHOTO



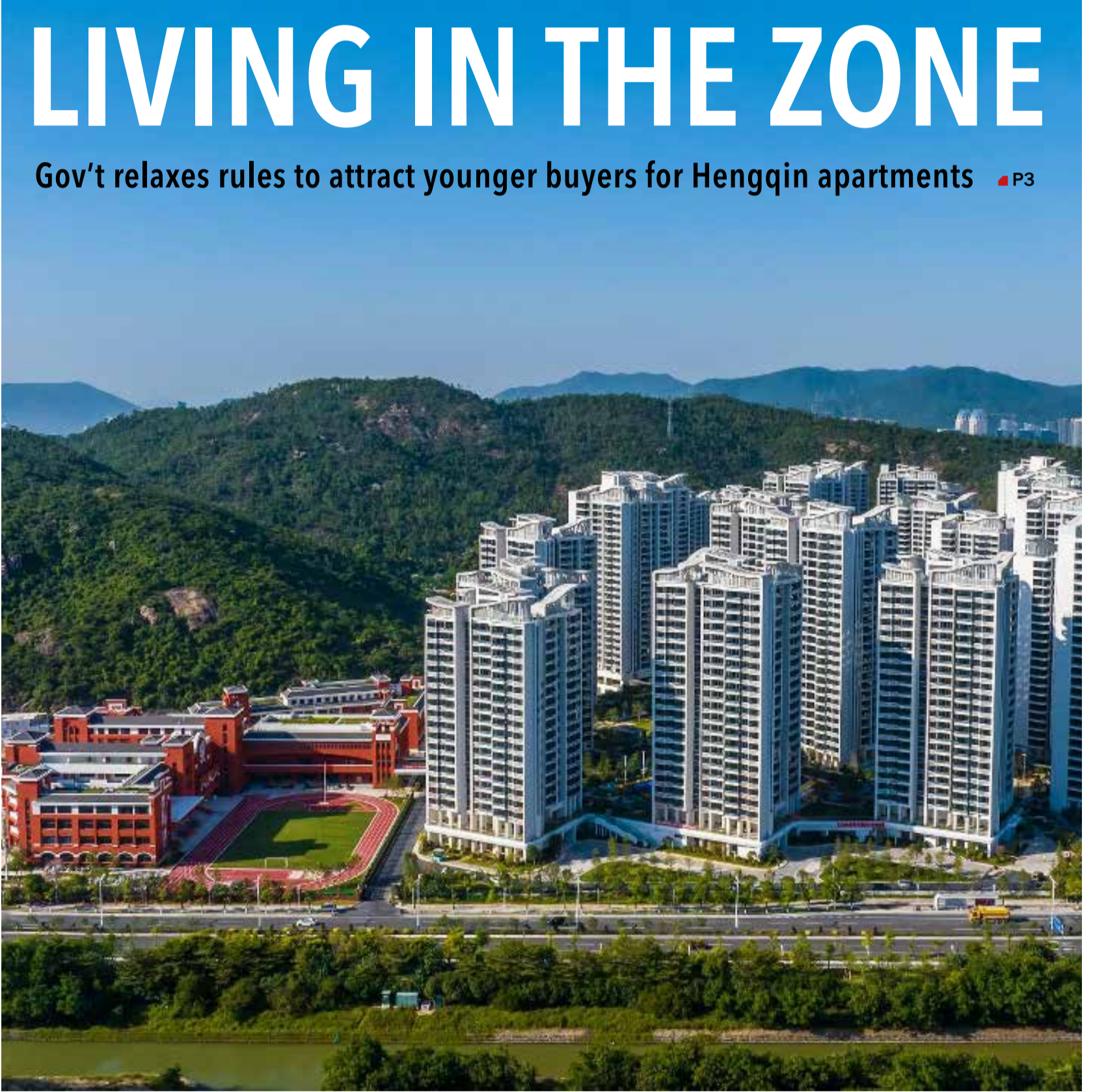
Israel's leaders commemorated Memorial Day yesterday, a usually somber holiday that this year was almost entirely absorbed by the ongoing war in Gaza. At 11:00 A.M., sirens announced two minutes of silence, and a formation of four fighter planes then flew over Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. At a ceremony, PM Netanyahu vowed once again to defeat Hamas. More than 300,000 Palestinians fled Rafah over the weekend.

AP PHOTO



Germany's domestic intelligence agency was justified in putting the far-right Alternative for Germany under observation for suspected extremism, a court ruled, rejecting an appeal from the opposition party. The administrative court in Muenster ruled in favor of the BfV intelligence agency, upholding a 2022 decision by a lower court in Cologne. The decision means the agency can continue to observe the party. The court found that there was a sufficient legal basis for the designation.

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VOCATIONAL TRAINING COURSES ON THE RISE

A total of 1,915 vocational training courses were conducted in 2023, with the participation of 97,672 trainees. This indicates a notable increase of 25.1% compared to the previous period. Furthermore, 66 different institutions organized these training courses, seven more than in 2022. According to the report from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC), the total staff employed in these institutions by the end of last year was 1,834 individuals. Among them, 1,084 were either full-time or part-time teaching staff. Out of the total courses conducted, 891 were specifically designed for companies and institutions, attracting a significant number of 47,048 trainees.

AL COMMITTEE WARY ON DISCONTINUATION OF INSPECTION OF TRAVEL AGENCIES

The Second Standing Committee has expressed its apprehension regarding the discontinuation of inspections of travel agencies prior to the issuance of licenses, as stipulated in the new law governing the operations of travel agencies and tourist guides. Yesterday, the committee's president, Chan Chak Mo, said it was seeking clarification on when inspections would be conducted on establishments that await travel agency approval. Chan said the proposed law provides for fines of between 50,000 and 70,000 patacas per day for travel agencies that charge prices below the market.

HK OPENS QUOTA APPLICATIONS OF HZMB

Hong Kong's Transport Department today opened applications for 1,000 regular quotas for Hong Kong cross-boundary non-commercial private cars using the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) to Macau. On June 30, the 1,000 quotas allocated from July 2021 will expire. Of these, 500 are for company applicants and the rest are for individual applicants. The quotas are valid for no more than three years until June 30, 2027. Those successfully allocated a quota are expected to be able to travel via the HZMB to and from Hong Kong and Macau from July 1 at the earliest.

MACAU CASINO SHARES RISE AS CHINA EXPANDS TRAVEL VISA SCHEME

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU casino operators' shares surged yesterday after China announced an expansion of its individual travel visa scheme to include eight additional mainland cities, a move that is expected to drive more high-end and mid-market visitors to the gambling hub.

Wynn Macau's Hong Kong-listed shares rose 5% to HKD8.39, MGM China's shares gained 3.4% to HKD15.08, and SJM Holdings' shares climbed 5.2% to HKD3.05.

In a statement, China's National Immigration Administration said residents in eight mainland cities including provincial capital cities of Taiyuan, Hohhot, Harbin, Lhasa, Lanzhou, Xining, Yinchuan and Urumqi, can now apply for individual visit scheme (IVS) or group travel endorsement to visit Hong Kong or Macau.

The new measures start May 27.

The expansion of the IVS is expected to boost visits of mid-market and higher-end travelers to Macau, according to Vitaly



Umansky, a senior analyst at Seaport Research Partners.

However, he noted that increased air capacity from those eight cities to Hong Kong, Guangdong, Zhuhai, and Macau airports would be crucial to have a material impact on visits.

Echoing the same sentiment, a UBS report highlighted the positive impact of this policy on Ma-

cau, as it is expected to increase the number of mainland tourists visiting the region.

This move also demonstrates the Central Government's ongoing support for the growth of Macau's tourism sector.

However, due to the limited number of direct flights from the new applicant cities to Hong Kong and Macau, which make

up only 1% of all IVS-eligible cities, the overall contribution to Macau's tourism industry may be limited.

PSP READY FOR PASSENGER MOVEMENT SURGE

Deputy chief of the Immigration Department of the Public Security Police, Ho Chu Wa, has said that from January to April this year the total number of entries and exits at various ports was approximately 69 million, with a daily average of about 570,000, a year-on-year increase of 34.5%.

During the period, the total number of inbound passengers exceeded 11 million, with a daily average of approximately 95,000. This is a year-on-year increase of 58.6%, and 83% of 2019 levels, according to a TDM report.

He said there are currently 560 self-service gates, 330 manual passages, and 61 lanes in each port.

Therefore, amid the expected increase of movement at the city's ports, he is confident that it can cope with the continued increase in passenger customs clearance.

TOURISM

MGTO claims the goal of two million foreign visitors will be achieved

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is confident Macau will reach its goal of two million international visitors this year, MGTO deputy director Cheng Wai Tong told the media on the sidelines of the opening ceremony of the Carnival of Macau International Museum Day 2024 at the Garden of the Mount Fortress.

Questioned on the topic, Cheng said: "So far, we are fulfilling our expectations. We trust that we will fulfill the whole year goal of two



Cheng Wai Tong

million [international visitors]," he said, noting that the roadshows and other promotions hosted by the MGTO feature across several loca-

tions in Asia, all of which count towards the goal.

Cheng also noted that the focus in the first half of 2024 was solely on the short-haul market, na-

mely across southeast and northeast Asian markets such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea. He said

more promotions will soon be unveiled targeting other markets.

In a recent meeting, at the end of last month, the MGTO met members of the Portuguese Association of Travel and Tourism Agencies (APAVT) to discuss cooperation opportunities aiming at the expansion of tourist sources for Macau in international markets, namely with Portugal.

At the same meeting, the local tourism authority also agreed to a collaboration with APAVT to promote Macau at the 2024 International Tourism Fair (FITUR) in Spain, eyeing not only the Spanish market but also a few other European markets as well as Ibero-America markets in which FITUR is a well-known and referential platform.

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Gov't relaxes rules to attract younger buyers for Hengqin apartments

RENATO MARQUES

THE government will relax the eligibility requirements at Macau New Neighborhood (MNN) in Hengqin.

Effective from May 13, Macau residents aged 18 or above can acquire a residential unit in MNN, the Macau Urban Renewal Limited (MUR) announced in a statement.

The MUR – a private company wholly owned by the Macau government – has said the change in rules comes “in response to changes in the economic environment, with new property market policies implemented in Macau and Hong Kong after listening to opinions across all sectors.”

The company is said to have requested amendments to the Execu-

tive Committee of the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperative Zone in Hengqin, asking for improvements on the eligibility requirements. This request was approved May 6.

The MNN went on sale in late November last year when some 800 units, of 4,000, were made available. According to the latest figures released by the MUR, some 1,000 units have been sold in the MNN to date.

Although these sales attracted many people at the first stage, late in the year, several reports noted the housing units at the MNN were becoming less interesting for potential buyers after they realized the units were only being financed at about 80% of their total value.

In a report by the news outlet Macao Daily in December last year, many buyers were quoted claiming

they had decided to purchase housing units in the MNN on the assumption that they would be maximally financed (90%).

Against their expectations, they were later told they would only receive 80% financing, and that only specific groups would receive 90%. In some circumstances, purchasers were ultimately granted only 70% of financing by the banks involved due to age-related concerns.

At the same time, the Bank of China (Macau) claimed to have approved over 100 mortgage applications out of approximately 300 requests for the locally financed MNN.

With the lowering of the requirements for the acquisition of the units, particularly for younger age residents, the MUR hopes to attract new and younger buyers to its development.

CE CALLS FOR BUDGET PROPOSALS TO PREPARE LAG2025

THE Chief Executive (CE), Ho Iat Seng, has published the guidelines and schedule for the submission of 2025 budget proposals from all public services and departments in the government's official gazette.

According to the publication, the aim is to prepare the policy address, including the government's annual budget, for the year 2025 (LAG2025).

The guidelines note that all government departments and services need to submit their budget proposals to the Financial Services Bureau (DSF), as well as any justifications and activity plans, by July 1 at the latest. After analysis and studies related to the forecast revenues, the DSF will respond to each applicant department and service, informing them of their final budget allocations so that they may prepare final documentation, which the CE shall receive before October 7.

The CE dispatch also notes that all the expenses related to staff (namely, wages) should be calculated based on current salaries, since there has been no news of potential adjustments to

civil servant salaries in 2025.

The dispatch requires, since this year is Ho's last term as CE, that all departments and services carefully announce their budget statements, according to both their basic needs and the fulfillment of those commitments they have already undertaken, especially if they extend beyond the present CE term.

Although the date for the election of the CE for a sixth term has not been scheduled yet, it will likely occur before the end of the year, around the time that the LAG2025 needs to be prepared for the Legislative Assembly

So far and for the first four terms of the CE in Macau, both the former CEs Edmund Ho and Chui Sai On have taken two terms each, totaling 10-year cycles apiece at the helm of the local government.

So far, Ho Iat Seng has not yet expressed his intention to run for a second term, and no one else has announced intentions to run for the post. Either way, the LAG2025 will be the first of a new CE term and will be presented by the new Macau CE. **RM**

LYNZY VALLES

BEIJING'S top official for Hong Kong and Macau Affairs, Xia Baolong, has visited the city's fourth Taipa-Macau bridge, Macau Bridge, as part of his week-long inspection trip in the SAR.

Head of the Central Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office and the director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, Xia arrived in Macau yesterday afternoon at the Macau International Airport.

Along with Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, the official was briefed on the bridge's overview, design, and role in easing traffic congestion in Macau and facilitating the development of new area

HKMAO

Xia Baolong inspects new bridge, meets with key leaders

in the future, as cited in a statement issued by the Government Information Bureau.

Yesterday, Xia also met with the key leaders of the executive, legislative, and judicial institutions of the SAR.

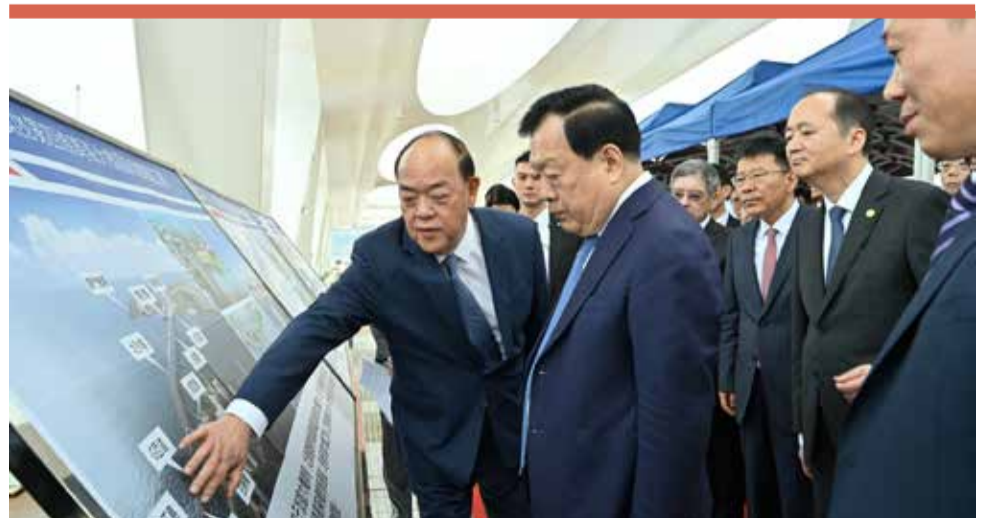
According to the statement, he conveyed President Xi Jinping's “greetings to Macau compatriots” and also conveyed the central authorities' affirmation of the MSAR's approach to governance.

Xia returned to the re-

gion after a year, following his four-day inspection tour back in May.

“Director Xia's presence fully demonstrated President Xi's and the central authorities' high regard and strong support for the MSAR,” the local government said in a statement.

The official also visited Hong Kong in February this year, meeting people in various sectors including those in the finance, business and legal professions.



Director Xia Baolong visits the Macau Bridge construction site

PATA SUMMIT FOCUS ON YOUTH, NEW TRENDS

RENATO MARQUES

THE annual summit for the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) will be underway in Macau from tomorrow for three consecutive days.

According to the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the summit will gather over 400 tourism industry delegates from 30 countries and regions.

The summit's program starts Wednesday and includes a wide range of activities, such as PATA's Board Meeting and Chapter Congress meetings.

The summit's main highlight is its international conference, which starts right after the opening ceremony, scheduled for Thursday afternoon.

Under the theme of "Reimagining Tourism," the conference will present a two-day program featuring over 20 sessions and more than 40 speakers from Macau, as well as many countries and regions across the world.

The conference also includes two-panel discussions, "Marketing and Branding in Asia Pacific Tourism" and "Future-Proo-



PATA delegates carry out inspection visit to event venue and meeting facilities

ving Travel and Tourism Policies," moderated by BBC News and featuring tourism heads from several destinations, including MGTO director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, who will join the first panel. The Economist Impact will also present an overview of the global

economic landscape and its implications for the tourism sector for the next two years.

The top sessions for the second day of the conference include a "Conversation with Pansy Ho," with PATA Chair Peter Semone interviewing the Executive Chairman and Managing

Director of Shun Tak Holdings Limited.

Euromonitor International will present "Key Travel and Tourism Trends to Watch," while PATA will unveil a report on human capital development.

Other sessions will focus on topics ranging from hotel and air

travel trends to travel technology and artificial intelligence, gastronomy tourism, educational tourism, nighttime economy, and tourism synergies to diversify the economy, among others.

Other events will also be held in tandem with the summit, such as the PATA Youth Symposium, which gathers future tourism professionals from abroad and the Greater Bay Area (GBA), and the PATA - World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF) China Dialogue, both scheduled for Thursday morning.

Among the speakers are Semone, WTCF executive director Chen Bo, representatives from Beijing, Qingdao, Hainan, and other tourism bureaus, as well as tourism operators and academics from the mainland.

The discussion topics include the latest policies and measures for inbound tourism and digital payment for visitors, as well as the development of cross-regional travel in the GBA.

This is the first major PATA event in Macau since the pandemic, and it aims to highlight the role of Macau as a world center for tourism and leisure.

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



HOWARD TONG

CRIME

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) has received reports from 10 scam victims totaling over MOP4.5 million.

Most of these scams occurred online, with victims' losses ranging from several thousands to over two million patacas all at once.

Notable cases include one where a local fell victim to a part time scam that required her to help submit fake reviews onto websites to earn money, the PJ said in a press conference.

The victim was instructed to deposit MOP400,000 into an account and perform various tasks related to searching hotels and websites. She completed more than 30 of these tasks and wanted to quit, but the scammers told her she could receive MOP15,000 as compensation if she paid MOP146,000 first. Realizing something was wrong, the victim refused and notified the police of her losses.

Another case the PJ reported involved a local man receiving a phone call from someone claiming to be a law enforcement officer in Shanghai. Since the male victim didn't speak Mandarin, he handed the phone to his family. The caller requested a FaceTime call for a virtual interview and appeared to be wearing a uniform resembling a law enforcement officer. Convinced of the caller's identity, the family provided personal and bank account information, including passwords. Later, they discovered suspicious transactions from their bank accounts and reported a loss of HKD96,000 and HKD97,000 respectively.

The biggest case reported was a victim who lost RMB4.01 million.

The victim reported he wanted to use the funds for foreign exchange and received a call from what he believed to be mainland police officials. Ac-

Ten people lose over MOP4.7 million to scams



ording to the victim, the caller asked why the victim had such a large amount of money in his accounts and was being suspected of fraud. The caller claimed that for the victim to prove his funds were not fraudulent, he had to transfer a total of RMB4.01 million to a designated multi-currency account to prove his innocence. Only after talking to his family members did the victim realize he had fallen victim of a scam.

The PJ stresses that knowing personal details does not mean the caller is a real officer. They urged residents to verify suspicious situations with police and practice extreme vigilance and

caution to avoid these scams which are becoming more and more common.

MAN ARRESTED FOR DAMAGING SEVERAL CARS

In a separate case, authorities have received a report of multiple vehicles being damaged, according to a spokesperson from the Public Security Police (PSP).

In a press conference, the PSP said the suspect, a 19-year-old man and former Hong Kong-Macau traffic police officer, broke into several cars in a carpark.

On the morning of May 12, at 10 a.m., the police received a report from a victim of an uni-

identified person in a parked car's passenger seat. The police arrived at the scene and found that the car's headlights on, and a man was seen moving around in the passenger seat.

While the suspect did not steal any items from the vehicle, police found that his mobile phone contained multiple photos of the interior of several other cars in the carpark. Upon identifying the owners of the cars and notifying them, some of the victims found broken car door locks. However, the suspect was adamant the car doors were all unlocked at the time, and he simply opened the door to enter the vehicles.

FDCT TO UPDATE FUNDING REGULATIONS AND INCENTIVE PLANS

HOWARD TONG

THE Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) will reformulate its funding regulations and the Science and Technology Award Plan according to public financial funding system provisions and abolish the current funding regulations for science and technology.

The changes were announced in a recent Executive Council press conference, which concluded discussions on the draft administrative regulations and which will take effect June 1.

Current regulations for science and technology funding will end.

Transitional regulations will be implemented for applications submitted before the new regulations take effect.

Xie Yongqiang, chairman of the Science and Technology Development Fund Administrative Committee, has said the updated funding regulations and award schemes will be introduced shortly to ensure a smooth transition.

He said ongoing funding projects and the science and technology award plan will be unaffected.

The new regulations largely resemble existing ones in general scope and content.

The science and technology award plan will also remain unaffected, with the relevant awards scheduled for launch and implementation in 2022.

The SAR government's objective is to establish a public financial subsidy system that adheres to standardized levels.

STAFF REPORTER

STARTING in May, the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) will distribute the first special assistance grant of this year's Social Inclusion Program to 4,905 single-parent, disabled and chronically ill families in the city.

The total expenditure is expected to be approximately 20.32 million patacas, providing much-needed relief to these disadvantaged households.

The special assistance is part of the "Social Integration Program Regula-

tions" scheme and aims to alleviate the living pressures faced by qualifying families. In addition to the special assistance, the IAS will also distribute regular assistance to 1,308 households in May, with the three categories of disadvantaged families receiving the funds through automatic transfer or cash distribution starting from May 16.

The "Social Integration Plan" allows the Macau SAR government to distribute one-time special assistance payments in May and October this year to three categories

IAS to assist disadvantaged families in MOP20 million budget

of disadvantaged families who are receiving regular assistance, or whose income is not higher than a certain multiple of the minimum subsistence index. The amount of the special assistance varies based on the family size, ranging from 2,650 patacas for a single-person household to 10,100 patacas for families with eight or more members.



ANALYSIS

Small, well-built Chinese EV called the Seagull poses a big threat to the US auto industry

TOM KRISHER & KEN MORITSUGU, LIVONIA (MICH.)

A tiny, low-priced electric car called the Seagull has American automakers and politicians trembling. The car, launched last year by Chinese automaker BYD, sells for around \$12,000 in China, but drives well and is put together with craftsmanship that rivals U.S. electric vehicles that cost three times as much. A shorter-range version costs under \$10,000.

Tariffs on imported Chinese vehicles will keep the Seagull out of America for now, and it likely would sell for more than 12 grand if imported.

But the rapid emergence of low-priced EVs from China could shake up the global auto industry in ways not seen since Japanese makers arrived during the oil crises of the 1970s. BYD, which stands for "Build Your Dreams," could be a nightmare for the U.S. auto industry. "Any car company that's not paying attention to them as a competitor is going to be lost when they hit their market," said Sam Fiorani, a vice president at AutoForecast Solutions near Philadelphia. "BYD's entry into the U.S. market isn't an if. It's a when."

U.S. politicians and manufacturers already see Chinese EVs as a serious threat. The Biden administration today is expected to announce 100% tariffs on electric vehicles imported from China, saying they pose a threat to U.S. jobs and national security.

The Alliance for American Ma-



The Seagull electric vehicle from Chinese automaker BYD is displayed at a showroom in Beijing

ufacturing says in a paper that government subsidized Chinese EVs "could end up being an extinction-level event for the U.S. auto sector."

Earlier this year, Tesla CEO Elon Musk said Chinese EVs are so good that without trade barriers, "they will pretty much demolish most other car companies in the world."

Outside of China, EVs are often pricey, aimed at higher-income buyers. But Chinese brands offer affordable options for the masses — just as many governments are encouraging a shift away from gasoline vehicles to fight climate change.

Inside a huge garage near Detroit, a company called Caresoft

Global tore apart and reassembled a bright green Seagull that its China office purchased and shipped to the U.S.

Company President Terry Woychowski, a former chief engineer on General Motors' pickup trucks, said the car is a "clarion call" for the U.S. industry, which is years behind China in designing low-cost EVs.

After the teardown, Woychowski said he was left wondering if U.S. automakers can adjust. "Things will have to change in some radical ways in order to be able to compete," he said.

There's no single miracle that explains how BYD can manufacture the Seagull for so little. Instead, Woychowski said the entire car,

which can go 252 miles (405 kilometers) per charge, is "an exercise in efficiency."

Higher U.S. labor costs are a part of the equation. BYD also can keep costs down because of its battery-making expertise — largely lithium iron phosphate chemistry used in consumer products. The batteries cost less but have lower range than most current lithium-ion batteries.

Americans are still learning to make cheaper batteries, Woychowski said.

BYD also makes many of its own parts, including electric motors, dashboards, and bodies, using its huge scale — 3 million vehicles sold worldwide last year

— for cost savings.

It designs vehicles with cost and efficiency in mind, he said. For instance, the Seagull has only one windshield wiper, eliminating one motor and one arm, saving on weight, cost and labor to install.

U.S. automakers don't often design vehicles this way and incur excess engineering costs, Woychowski said.

The efficiency means weight savings that add up, allowing the Seagull to travel farther per charge on a smaller battery.

So Detroit needs to quickly re-learn a lot of design and engineering to keep up while shedding practices from a century of building vehicles, Woychowski said.

The Seagull still has a quality feel. Doors close solidly. The gray synthetic leather seats have stitching that matches the body color, a feature usually found in more expensive cars. The Seagull tested by Caresoft has six air bags and electronic stability control.

A brief drive through some connected parking lots by a reporter showed that it runs quietly and handles curves and bumps as well as more costly EVs

While acceleration isn't head-snapping like other EVs, the Seagull is peppy and would have no problems entering a freeway.

BYD would have to modify its cars to meet U.S. safety standards, which are more stringent than in China. Woychowski says Caresoft hasn't done crash tests, but he estimated that would add \$2,000 to the cost.

BYD sells the Seagull, also called the Dolphin Mini, in four Latin American countries for about \$21,000. The higher price includes transportation and reflects higher profits possible in less cutthroat markets than China.

BYD told the AP last year it is "still in the process" of deciding whether to sell autos in the U.S. It is weighing factory sites in Mexico for the Mexican market.

The company isn't selling cars in the U.S. largely due to 27.5% tariffs on the sale price of Chinese vehicles when they arrive. **MDT/AP**

ZHANG ZHAN

Status of Chinese citizen journalist who reported on COVID unknown

THE whereabouts of a Chinese citizen journalist who served four years in prison for reporting on the early days of the pandemic in Wuhan and was expected to be released yesterday are unknown, raising concern from activists.

Zhang Zhan, who had been sentenced to four years in prison on charges

of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," a vaguely defined charge often used in political cases, has finished serving her sentence at Shanghai's Women Prison.

Ren Quanniu, a former lawyer who previously represented Zhang, said he could not reach her father and expressed concern that Zhang would be released

only to be put under another form of control by police.

Yesterday was the last day of her four-year sentence, confirmed Ren and Jane Wang, another overseas activist who launched the Free Zhang Zhan campaign in the U.K.

Zhang was among a handful of citizen journalists who traveled to the central

Chinese city of Wuhan after the government put it under total lockdown in February 2020, in the early days of the pandemic. She walked around the city to document public life as fears grew about the then-mysterious coronavirus.

Other citizen journalists have also spent time in jail for documenting the early

days of the pandemic, including Fang Bin, who published videos of overcrowded hospitals and bodies during the outbreak. Fang was sentenced to three years in prison and released last April.

Chen Qiushi, another citizen journalist, disappeared in February 2020 while filming in Wuhan. Chen in September 2021 resurfaced on a friend's live video feed on YouTube, saying he had suffered from depression but did not provide details about his disappearance.

During her prison stay, Zhang staged a hunger strike and was hospitalized at one

point in 2021.

Zhang's family has faced police pressure during her stay in prison, and her parents have declined interview requests from media. Her family at times could only speak to their daughter by phone at the prison.

Shen Yanqiu, who had planned to go with Zhang's family to receive her at the prison, declined to speak to The Associated Press.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Wang Wenbin declined to comment on the case when asked yesterday, saying "I'm not aware of the situation." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



PHILIPPINES

Sleepy far-flung towns will host US forces returning to country

JIM GOMEZ &
AARON FAVILA, SANTA ANA

THE far-flung coastal town of Santa Ana in the northeastern tip of the Philippine mainland has long been known by tourists mostly for its beaches, waterfalls, fireflies and a few casinos.

But that's changing after the laid-back town of about 35,000 people, which still has no traffic light, became strategically important to America.

The United States and the Philippines, which are longtime treaty allies, have identified Santa Ana in northern Cagayan province as one of nine mostly rural areas where rotating batches of American forces could encamp indefinitely and store their weapons and equipment on local military bases under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement.

Thousands of U.S. forces withdrew from two huge Navy and Air Force bases in the Philippines in the early 1990s at the end of the Cold War, ending nearly a century of American military presence in the country. In recent years, Washington has been reinforcing an arc of military alliances in Asia to counter an increasingly assertive China,

which it now regards as its greatest security challenge.

That dovetails with Philippine efforts to bolster its external defenses after an alarming spate of territorial hostilities with Beijing in the South China Sea that started last year. The high seas confrontations have injured several Filipino navy personnel, damaged their boats and strained diplomatic ties.

The remote town of Santa Ana is caught in the geo-political rivalry between Washington and Beijing because of its strategic location. It lies across a sea border from Taiwan.

Some villagers in Santa Ana have expressed apprehension over the prospect of living near U.S. forces. Their governor, Manuel Mamba, has vehemently opposed the looming U.S. military presence, saying it would turn Cagayan into a military target of China.

Other villagers say the Philippines needs the Americans as a crucial counterweight to China, which they say has been using its military might to threaten Manila's territorial interests in the South China Sea.

"There's no choice. If you compare the number of our forces with that of China, they have much, much more," Romeo Asuncion, a planning and

economic development officer in Santa Ana, told The Associated Press. "If the Americans are here, they would protect us whatever happens."

There's also the prospect of economic benefits and aid from the U.S. military presence.

"If they donate a school that will be good," Asuncion said.

Rowena Castillo, a consultant to the town's mayor, expressed hope the wider attention on Santa Ana would boost tourism. She recently handed out brochures promoting the town's beach resorts, waterfalls, a historic lighthouse, a crocodile-shaped island and an area that teems with fireflies.

Some villagers acknowledged that even without the U.S. forces, the town would likely be affected in any major-power military showdown due to Santa Ana's relative proximity to Taiwan.

Authorities and village leaders recently met at the initiative of the local military to discuss contingency plans, including the possibility of setting up emergency shelters for refugees, in case tensions between China and Taiwan flare into an armed conflict, Marion Miranda, Santa Ana's disaster-mitigation officer, told The AP.

"One problem is where we

could bring potential refugees and the budget for that," Miranda said.

In another rural Cagayan town southwest of Santa Ana called Lal-lo, part of the airport was designated as a possible encampment site for American forces.

Unlike the two massive military bases that American forces used to occupy, including a Navy base at Subic Bay that was about the size of Singapore and had a vibrant red-light district, the U.S. military is building a new presence in a much smaller area within Philippine camps.

During largescale combat drills called Balikatan — Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder" — that ended Friday, Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters carrying allied forces, their weapons and other supplies landed and took off at the Lal-lo airport and the navy camp in Santa Ana. A few journalists, including from The AP, were invited to witness the combat maneuvers.

"It's an important location. It's critical because it is an EDCA site so it's a very big deal to both the United States and to the Philippines," U.S. Marine Lt. Col. Matthew Schultz told journalists at Lal-lo airport.

"One of the challenges that

we have in this airfield now is there is not a lot of parking space or taxiways or additional apron space in order to facilitate a lot of aircraft," Schultz said.

The EDCA accord, which was signed in 2014, had an initial term of 10 years and has been automatically extended with both sides in agreement, Ambassador to the U.S. Jose Manuel Romualdez said by telephone from Washington.

The agreement allows rotating batches of U.S. forces to stay rent-free at the military sites and store their defense equipment — except nuclear weapons — there.

The U.S. has allocated more than \$82 million for the construction of ammunition and fuel storage, an urban combat training facility, aircraft parking, runway repairs and warehouses for humanitarian response items in the first five EDCA sites.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. agreed to add four more EDCA sites where U.S. forces could stay, including the Philippine navy camp in Santa Ana and the Lal-lo airport, last year.

Marcos and other Philippine officials say the renewed U.S. military presence would bolster Philippine external defense and help Filipinos respond more rapidly to natural disasters and is not directed at any country.

China, however, has expressed alarm over the increased U.S. troop deployments in the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia and said the EDCA sites in the northern Philippines could serve as surveillance outposts and staging grounds for U.S. forces to contain Beijing. **MDT/AP**

USA

Trump suggests Chinese migrants are 'here to build an army.' The migrants tell another story

FU TING, ALI SWENSON
& DIDI TANG, NEW YORK

IT was 7 a.m. on a recent Friday when Wang Gang, a 36-year-old Chinese immigrant, jostled for a day job in New York City's Flushing neighborhood.

When a potential employer pulled up near the street corner, Wang and dozens of other men swarmed around the car. They were hoping to be picked for work on a construction site, at a farm, as a mover — anything that would pay.

Wang had no luck, even as he waited for two more hours. It would be another day without a job since he crossed the southern U.S. border illegally in February.

The daily struggle of Chinese immigrants in Flushing is a far cry from the picture former President Donald Trump and other Republicans have sought to paint of them as a coordinated group of "military-age" men who have come to the United States to build an "army" and attack America.

Since the start of the year, as the Chinese newcomers adjust to life in the U.S., Trump has alluded to "fighting age" or "military age" Chinese men at least six times and suggested at least twice that they were forming a migrant "army." The talking point also appears in conservative media and on social platforms.

"They're coming in from China — 31, 32,000 over the last few months — and they're all military age and they mostly are men," Trump said during a campaign rally last month. "And it sounds like to me, are they trying to build a little army in our country?"

Asian advocacy organizations say they worry the rhetoric could encourage further harassment and violence toward the Asian community, which saw more hate incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wang, who traveled several weeks from Wuhan, China, to Ecuador, to the southern U.S. border, said the idea that Chinese migrants were building



Wang Gang, 36, front, a Chinese immigrant, talks with the driver of a car with others as they try to get a daily paid job working construction or in another trade in the Flushing neighborhood of the Queens borough of New York

a military "does not exist" among immigrants he has met.

"We came here to make money," he said.

Immigrants in Flushing said they came to escape poverty and financial losses from China's strict lockdown during the pandemic, or to escape the threat of imprisonment in a repressive society where they couldn't speak or exercise their religion freely.

Since late 2022 — when China's three-year COVID-19 lockdown began to lift — the U.S. has seen a sharp rise in the number of Chinese migrants.

Most who have come are single adults, according to federal data. There are more men than women on the perilous route, which typically involves flying to South America and then making the long, arduous trek north to the U.S. border.

One reason men may come alone in higher numbers is the danger, said a 35-year-old Chinese man who only gave his family name of Yin because he was concerned about the safety of his wife and children, who remain in China for now.

"This trip is deadly. People die. The trip isn't suitable for women — it's not suitable for anyone," said Yin.

Immigrants in Flushing said they came to America to escape China, not to fight on its behalf.

Thirty-six-year-old Chen

Wang, from southeastern China, said he decided to come to the U.S. in late 2021 after he posted comments critical of the ruling party on Twitter. He was admonished by local police and feared that he could be imprisoned.

More than two years later, he is still unemployed and lives in a tent in the woods that he has made into a home. Chen described his fellow Chinese on the journey as simply people "chasing a better life."

To be sure, U.S. intelligence leaders have grave concerns about the threat China's authoritarian government poses to the country. There also have been crimes committed by Chinese immigrants, including the arrest in March of a Chinese national breaching a military base in California, but there has been no evidence that migrants from China are coming to the U.S. to fight Americans.

Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell last month called the Chinese nationals "economic migrants."

China has said it strongly opposes illegal immigration. Its foreign ministry said Trump's claims of a Chinese migrant army were "an egregious mismatch of the facts." The Department of Homeland Security didn't respond to requests for comment.

Steven Cheung, communications director for the Trump campaign, said letting so many Chinese migrants into

the U.S. sets a "dangerous precedent" that nefarious actors could exploit.

"These individuals have not been vetted or screened, and we have no idea who they are affiliated with or what their intention is," he said in an emailed statement.

Sapna Cheryan, a psychology professor at the University of Washington, said the claims about Chinese migrants — made without evidence — build on pervasive stereotypes that Asian people do not belong in the country.

These ideas have fueled violence against Asian Americans and could embolden people again, she said.

Li Kai, also known as Khaled, a 44-year-old Muslim from a city close to Beijing, said he was worried about Trump's statements regarding illegal immigration and Muslims, but said he has no choice other than to stay.

He was one of the few who made the trip with his family. He shares a bunk bed and sofa with his wife and two sons in a temporary home in Flushing where he has placed an American flag on the wall.

When his sons are at school, he studies for a commercial driver's license. He hopes to find a job and start paying taxes.

"Now that I have brought my family here, I want to have a stable life here," he said. "I would like to pay back."
MDT/AP

this day in history

1955 COMMUNIST STATES SIGN WARSAW PACT



The Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc allies have signed a security pact in the Polish capital, Warsaw, after a three-day conference.

Announcements in Warsaw and Moscow said the Soviet Prime Minister, Marshal Nikolai Aleksandrovič Bulganin, and leaders of seven other countries approved the draft of a new mutual aid agreement called the Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance.

It is designed, among other things, to ensure close integration of military, economic and cultural policy between eight Communist nations.

Signatories to the treaty — the USSR, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania — have agreed to unify their forces under one command although at this stage it is not known who will take this post.

Yugoslavia, the only European Communist state not included in the pact, was expelled in 1948 from Cominform, the Communist information agency for refusing to acknowledge Soviet supremacy.

The treaty, signed at the Warsaw Palace, comes in the wake of news that West Germany has been accepted by western nations into Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) following talks earlier this month in Paris.

In a speech at the beginning of the Warsaw talks, Marshal Bulganin warned that the USA, Britain and France were turning West Germany into "the principal hotbed of the danger of war in Europe" by allowing it to re-arm.

He said allowing West Germany into Nato was "the major obstacle" to reunification of Germany.

Existing bilateral agreements between nations of the Eastern Bloc, he stated, were no longer sufficient to ensure their security and this Warsaw Pact would supersede all of those.

He added that Nato was also encouraging countries in the Near and Middle East to form military blocs to plan attacks on the Soviet Union and its allies.

In his concluding speech today, Marshal Bulganin emphasised the pact was inspired by the Leninist principle of peaceful co-existence between democratic nations and said they wanted to abide by the United Nations Charter.

However the Times newspaper editorial today points out that unifying the armies of all eight countries will also allow the USSR to base its own troops in member states and "would certainly help to keep the satellites in order".

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Warsaw Pact countries placed their forces under the command of Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Koniev. The Warsaw Pact did allow the USSR to suppress nationalist rebellions. Its troops crushed uprisings in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 which prompted Albania to withdraw from the pact later that year.

The democratic revolutions of 1989 in eastern Europe heralded the end of the Warsaw Pact and the Cold War between east and west.

East Germany withdrew in 1990 and on July 1 1991 at a final summit meeting of Warsaw Pact leaders in Prague, Czechoslovakia, it was declared "non-existent".

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Practice your poker face. Don't worry. Relax and have fun. Play your best hand. Add some spice to the package. Make a dreamy connection.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
 Get into domestic projects. Make a change. A little elbow grease goes far. Clean, sort and organize. Clear clutter. Make repairs. Generate dreamy results.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
 You're especially creative. Express your story. Write, craft and edit. Launch a project to the next level. Share breaking news. Connect with your wider circle.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Get into action and profits roll in. It could get chaotic. Advance a dreamy possibility. Grab a lucky break. Tap into a lucrative situation.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Advance a personal dream. Focus on here and now. Take action for a heartfelt cause. List your blessings and discover more than expected.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 You can get especially productive behind closed doors. Balance energetic creativity with quiet reflection. Meditate on beauty. Envision a dream realized. Invent inspiring possibilities.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Align forces with your team to propel your project to new levels. Find what you need nearby. Take advantage of favorable conditions to advance.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Disciplined action can advance a professional dream. New doors open. Pursue an opportunity that's too great to pass up. Develop a project with heart.

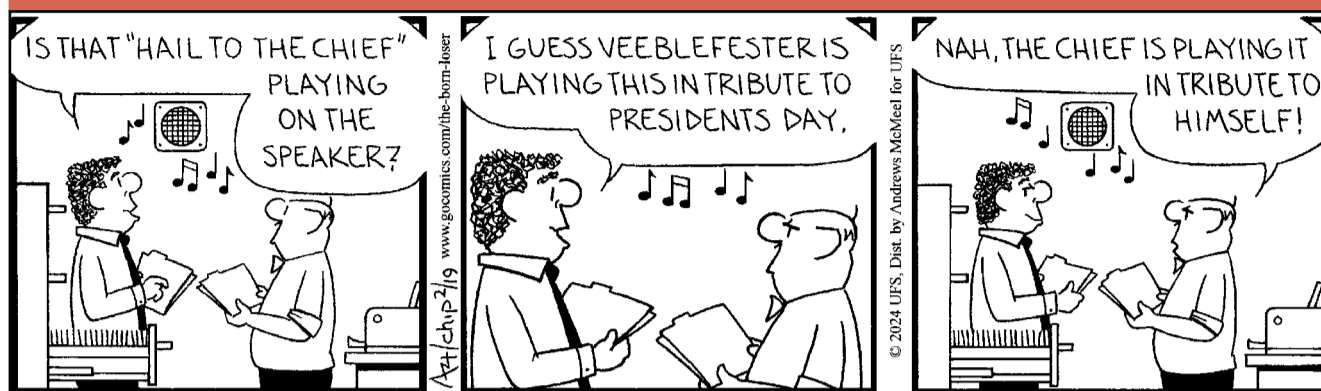
SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Explore a curious puzzle. Travel appeals, but could be risky. Study options. Does a connection need to happen in person? Find a simple solution.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Take advantage of lucrative conditions. Action now can get especially profitable. Collaborate to manage shared accounts. Focus to cover immediate expenses. Patiently save.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Share an idea with your partner. Get help building your dream. Express your vision. Accept feedback and listen for the gold. Win with coordinated action.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Health comes first. Nurture yourself with extra rest, good food and exercise. Connect with nature and reduce stress. Music and art feed your spirit.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

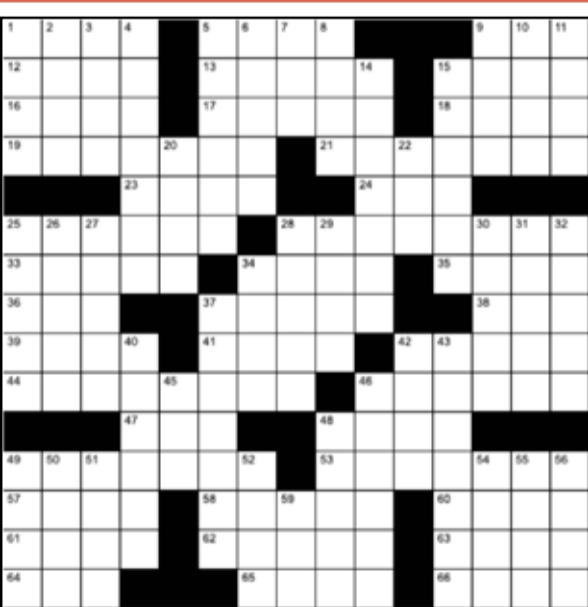
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	16	31	overcast
Changchun	15	19	cloudy
Chengdu	16	29	cloudy
Chongqing	16	29	rain
Fuzhou	15	28	fine
Guangzhou	20	31	fine
Guiyang	14	24	cloudy
Haikou	24	30	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	16	28	fine
Harbin	10	18	cloudy
Hefei	13	29	fine
Nanjing	14	28	fine
Shanghai	17	27	fine
Taipei	19	23	cloudy
Wuhan	15	30	fine
Hong Kong	23	26	sunny
WORLD			
Moscow	4	13	cloudy
Frankfurt	13	27	sunny
Paris	11	17	rain
London	12	17	rain
New York	15	23	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- On or towards the Mediterranean, for example; 5- Superhero fashion must?; 9- Bass, e.g.; 12- Sports figure; 13- Racetracks; 15- Faucet fault; 16- Put in order; 17- Tortilla chip dip; 18- Actress Skye; 19- Abilities; 21- Move forward; 23- Dissolve; 24- Short snooze; 25- Settle up front; 28- At whatever time; 33- Hilton competitor; 34- Writer Anita; 35- "All The Way To ___", song by REM; 36- Binges, briefly; 37- Begets; 38- Sea plea; 39- Adolescent; 41- Sailors; 42- Name; 44- Commonplace; 46- Topeka's state; 47- Hide-hair connector; 48- Burden of proof; 49- Loss of memory; 53- Drunken; 57- Paint layer; 58- The dark; 60- Canadian gas brand; 61- Prone to prying; 62- Welcome; 63- Singing voice; 64- Significant period; 65- Kill; 66- Writing table;

DOWN 1- Kind of prof.; 2- Greek portico; 3- British nobleman; 4- Try; 5- Expensive; 6- Halt, salt; 7- Close friend; 8- "Born Free" lion; 9- Elvis ___ Presley; 10- "The Mod Squad" role; 11- Sporting blade; 14- Sorrow; 15- Baby's napkin; 20- Tidy; 22- Covered vehicle; 25- Snapshot; 26- U-Haul competitor; 27- Alleviated; 28- Fret; 29- Weed whackers; 30- Sleeveless garments; 31- Name on a bomber; 32- Thorny flowers; 34- Prevaricator; 37- Gazing; 40- Degrees in a right angle; 42- Lacking slack; 43- In the place of; 45- Rejections; 46- Difficult to understand; 48- Milo of "Barbarella"; 49- Teenage problem that breaks out; 50- Heath; 51- Mission control gp.; 52- Broadcasts; 54- Spot in the ocean; 55- Concordes; 56- Captain ___; 59- Hair goop;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Quilter Annie Mae Young, of the Gee's Bend area in Alabama, poses in front of her quilt at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston

THEY MADE ONE-OF-A-KIND QUILTS THAT CAPTURED THE PUBLIC'S IMAGINATION

THEN TARGET CAME ALONG

ANNA FURMAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

OVER the past two decades, Gee's Bend quilts have captured the public's imagination with their kaleidoscopic colors and their daring geometric patterns. The groundbreaking art practice was cultivated by direct descendants of slaves in rural Alabama who have faced oppression, geographic isolation and intense material constraints.

As of this year, their improvisational art has also come to embody a very modern question: What happens when distinctive cultural tradition collides with corporate America?

Enter Target. The retailer launched a limited-edition collection based on the quilters' designs for Black History Month this year. Consumer appetites proved to be high as many stores around the country sold out of the checkered sweaters, water bottles and faux-quilted blankets.

"We're actually in a quilt revival right now, like in real time," says Sharbreon Plummer, an artist and scholar. "They're so popularized, and Target knew that. It created the biggest buzz when it came out." Indeed, there has been a resurgence of interest among Gen Z and millennials in conscious consumption and the homemade — with "cottagecore" style, baking bread, DIY bracelets — but both are at odds with the realities of fast fashion.

The Target designs were "inspired by" five Gee's Bend quilters who reaped limited financial benefits from the collection's success. They received a flat rate for their contributions rather than pay proportionate to Target's sales. A spokesperson for Target wouldn't share sales numbers from the collection but confirmed that it indeed sold out in many stores.

Unlike the pay structure of the Freedom Quilting Bee of the 1960s — an artist-run collective that disbursed payment equitably to Gee's

Bend quilters, who were salaried and could set up Social Security benefits — one-off partnerships with companies like Target benefit only a small number of people, in this case five women from two families.

The maxim "representation matters" is not new, but it's gaining wider traction. Still, when visibility for some doesn't translate into meaningful change for a marginalized community as a whole, how is that reconciled?

A HISTORY OF OUTSIDERS

"Every stage of the finances has been problematic," says Patricia Turner, a retired professor in World Arts and Culture and African American Studies at UCLA who traced the commodification of Gee's Bend quilts back to the white collector Bill Arnett in the 1990s. "I'm really bothered by Target's in-house designer manipulating the look of things to make it more palatable for their audience," she says of the altered color palettes and patterns.

Target spokesperson Brian Har-

per-Tibaldo said that quilters had the opportunity to provide input on multiple occasions throughout the process.

"We worked with five quilters from The Quilters of Gee's Bend on a variety of limited-time only items," he wrote in an emailed statement. "As is standard with limited-time collections at Target, each quilter was paid a discussed and agreed upon fee for their services. As outlined in our contracts, Target had the right to make final design decisions, however, with the goal of honoring their storied heritage, the process was highly collaborative."

While thumbnail-size photos of the makers appeared on some marketing materials and the text "Gee's Bend" was printed on clothing tags, the company's engagement with the quilters was limited. As soon as Black History Month ended, the quilters' names and images were scrubbed from the retailer's site.

Target has pledged to spend more than \$2 billion on Black-owned businesses by 2025.

The situation today mirrors that of the 1990s, when some quilters enjoyed newfound visibility, others were disinterested and still others felt taken advantage of. (In 2007, several quilters brought a series of lawsuits against the Arnett family, but all cases were settled out of court and little is known about the suits because of nondisclosure agreements.)

The profit-oriented approach that emerged, which disrupted the Quilting Bee's price-sharing structure, created "real rifts and disharmony within the community," Turner explains, over engaging with collectors, art institutions and commercial enterprises. "To have those bonds disrupted over the commercialization of their art form, I think, is sad."

REPRODUCING ART OUT OF CONTEXT

Quilts are made to mark major milestones and are gifted to celebrate a new baby or a marriage, or to honor someone's loss. Repurposing fabric — from tattered blankets, frayed rags, stained clothes — is a central ethos of the community's quilting practice, which resists commodification. But the Target collection was mass-produced from new fabrics in factories in China and elsewhere overseas.

The older generations of Gee's Bend quilters are known for one-of-a-kind designs with clashing colors and irregular, wavy lines — visual effects borne of their material constraints. Most worked at night in houses without electricity and didn't have basic tools like scissors, let alone access to fabric stores. Stella Mae Pettway, who has sold her quilts on Etsy for \$100 to \$8,000, has characterized having scissors and access to more fabrics now as a paradox of "advantage and a disadvantage."

Many third- and fourth-generation artists returned to quilting

as adults for a creative and therapeutic outlet, as well as a tether to their roots. After her mom died in 2010, quilter JoeAnn Pettway-West revisited the practice and found peace in completing her mother's unfinished quilts. "As I'm making this stitch, I can just see her hand, stitching. It's like, we're there together," she says. "It's a little bit of her, a little bit of me."

Delia Pettway Thibodeaux is a third-generation Gee's Bend quilter whose grandmother was a sharecropper and whose bold, rhythmic quilts are now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's permanent collection. For the Target collection, she received a flat fee rather than a rate proportional to sales.

"I was kind of concerned in the beginning" about how quilts would be altered to fit with the collection, Pettway Thibodeaux says. "But then again when I saw the collection, I felt different."

Claudia Pettway Charley, a Gee's Bend quilter and a community manager at Nest, a nonprofit, said in an emailed statement that the collaboration was "a great way to make our designs accessible" to a wide audience.

"We had no idea how large this campaign would be and what it would mean to our community," she said.

LOOKING FOR ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

Because job opportunities are so limited in Gee's Bend, many fourth-generation quilters have left the area to take jobs as teachers, day care workers, home health aides, and to serve in the military.

"We, as the next generation, we was more dreamers," Pettway-West says.

National recognition has certainly brought some positive change. But more visibility — from museum exhibitions, academic research, a U.S. Postal Service stamp collection — hasn't necessarily translated into economic gains. After all, the average annual income in Boykin, Alabama, is still far below the poverty rate at about \$12,000, according to the nonprofit Nest.

"This is a community that still, to this day, really needs recognition, still needs economic revitalization," says Lauren Cross, Gail-Oxford Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts at The Huntington Museum of Art. "And so any economic opportunities that, you know, funnel back to them, I support."

Target's line in particular, though, is disconnected from the group's origins and handmade practice, she says. It's a problem that distills the very challenge at hand when something handcrafted and linked to deep tradition goes national and corporate.

"On one hand you want to preserve the stories and that sense of authenticity," Cross says.

"And on the other hand," she asks, "how do you reach a broader audience?" **MDT/AP**

AUTO RACING

Power, Newgarden begin Indy quests by adapting to new strategists and engineers

**MICHAEL MAROT,
INDIANAPOLIS**

JOSEF Newgarden and Will Power went back to work last weekend with revamped teams. The drivers' race strategists, Tim Cindric and Ron Ruzevski, will miss Saturday's Indianapolis Grand Prix and the Indianapolis 500 on May 26 while serving two-race suspensions for cheating. So will engineers Luke Mason and Robbie Atkinson.

How quickly the drivers adapt to the new voices on their radios could determine whether either of the two 500 winners and series champs can achieve their traditional May goal of putting team owner Roger Penske back in victory lane.

"It's not ideal losing someone off your stand. Losing two people is definitely not ideal. We were better off with them," Power said Thursday at India-



AP PHOTO

Will Power of Australia, drives into a turn during a practice session for the IndyCar Grand Prix auto race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway

napolis Motor Speedway. "But I sat down with Dave (Faustino) and we just said we're going to do absolutely the best we can with what we've got. We've got very good people on the team. It is what it is."

Fortunately for Team Penske, Faustino and Power have a longstanding relationship that should help smooth the transition between now and IndyCar's most prestigious race, the 500, in

two weeks.

But this is certainly not how the team owner wanted to start what he has long considered the most important month on the series' schedule.

Penske became a household name by changing the image of auto racing. He brought an exacting, businesslike approach to the Brickyard's historic Gasoline Alley and when the pole-winning runs and race

victories started piling up, he won converts, too.

Now, though, The Captain's ship is taking on water.

Six weeks after Newgarden won the season opener at St. Petersburg, Florida, series officials determined the team's three cars each had a software system that provided the drivers with horsepower boosts on starts and restarts — violating series rules.

"For Ron and I as leaders of this team, it's not about what we did, it's about what we didn't do," Cindric said this week in a statement. "It is our responsibility to provide the team and all our drivers with the right processes to ensure something like this can't happen. For that, I apologize to Roger, our team and everyone that supports us. Our No. 1 job is to protect and enhance the reputation of our brand and that of those that support us."

The drivers took the hardest hits.

Newgarden was stripped of his win, Scott McLaughlin was stripped of a third-place finish and all three drivers lost 10 points and were fined \$25,000. Although Power was cleared of any wrongdoing and none of McLaughlin's team members were punished, Power and Newgarden are now dealing with the transition to new team members.

"That's the call that Roger made, and there's nothing I can do about it," Power said.

Newgarden said after the weekend's qualifying he was surprised that team president Cindric was suspended.

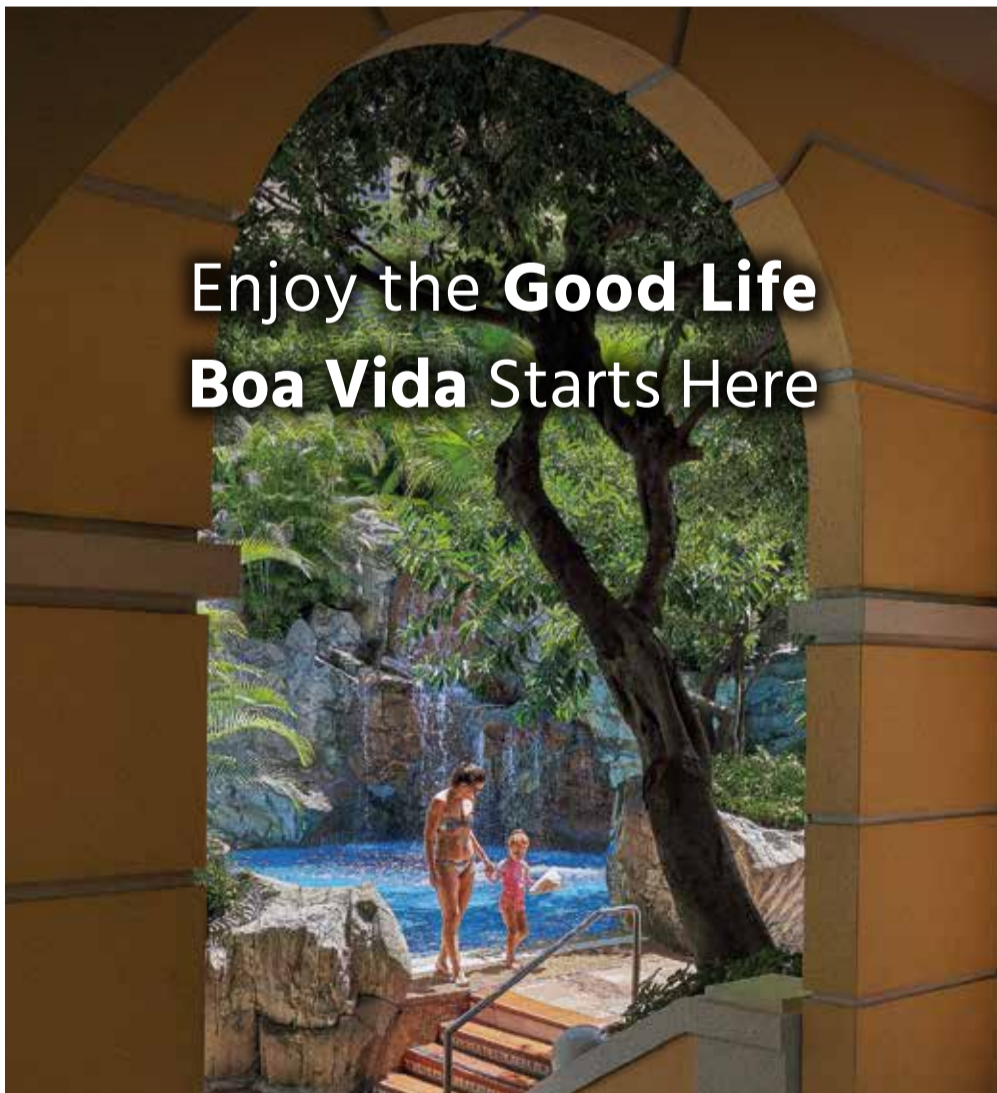
"I was surprised, but this isn't my team, it is Roger's team," Newgarden said. "And all I can say is I am so happy to be here. It is not disingenuous, I feel so good to be here, and we've got a team, a little different than it looked last year, but not that different. We're here as a team and we're ready to go." **MDT/AP**



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OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

HUNGARY AND CHINA WORKING TOGETHER TO RAISE THEIR 'HOMECOMING' RELATIONS TO NEW HEIGHTS

The "welcome home" greeting Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban extended to visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping upon his arrival at Budapest Airport on Wednesday night highlights the friendly relations between the two nations.

In his signed article published on Wednesday in the Hungarian newspaper Magyar Nemzet, President Xi wrote: "Our bilateral relationship is at its best in history, and has embarked on a golden voyage."

That China and Hungary are good friends and good partners with deep mutual trust is not incidental. Hungary was one of the first countries to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with China in 1949. Together, the two countries have set a fine example of building a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation. The bilateral relationship has since been developing steadily with tangible results, and was elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2017.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of diplomatic ties between the two countries. It is expected that Xi's visit, the second in 15 years, will not only witness the deepening of the traditional friendship toward a bilateral community with a shared future, with a series of economic and trade cooperation projects and cultural exchange programs to be unveiled under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and other mechanisms.

Hungary is a top investment destination for Chinese investment in the European Union, as well as its important trading partner in Central and Eastern Europe, with their bilateral cooperation being strong, fruitful and dynamic.

China is pursuing high-quality development and promoting high-standard opening-up. Hungary on its part is also making every effort to advance its development. To further tap into their complementarity, the two countries need to forge greater synergy between their development strategies and strive to make new achievements in practical cooperation so as to accelerate the construction of the Budapest-Belgrade railway link and other significant cooperation projects. The two countries have great potential and space to strengthen their cooperation in clean energy, artificial intelligence, the digital economy, green development and other areas.

China highly appreciates Hungary upholding its strategic autonomy on the world stage as well as within the EU. Sound China-Hungary ties are conducive to keeping the relationship between China and Central and Eastern Europe as well as the overall China-Europe ties advancing in the right direction.

China and Hungary have similar views and positions on international and regional situations. By remaining committed to solidarity and collaboration, Beijing and Budapest can jointly champion true multilateralism and promote peace and development. The two countries should advocate for an equal and orderly multipolar world and inclusive economic globalization that benefits all.

It is to be hoped that no matter how the international landscape evolves, China and Hungary will always view and approach the bilateral relationship from a broad perspective and with a long-term view.

Amazon's self-driving robotaxi unit is being investigated by the U.S. government's highway safety agency after two of its vehicles braked suddenly and were rear-ended by motorcyclists.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in documents posted on its website yesterday it will evaluate the automated driving system developed by Zoox.

Both crashes happened during the daytime hours, and the motorcyclists suffered minor injuries. In both cases, the agency confirmed that each of the Amazon vehicles was operating in autonomous mode leading up to the crashes.

The agency said the probe will focus on the performance of the com-

pany's automated driving system during the crashes, as well as how it behaves in crosswalks around pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.

A message was left early Monday seeking comment from Zoox.

Zoox reported the crashes under an order to automated vehicle companies issued in 2021.

Amazon acquired Zoox in June of 2020 for a price that analysts pegged at over \$1 billion. The company later planned to launch a shuttle service exclusively for its employees. Analysts say they expect Amazon to use the Zoox system for autonomous deliveries.

Zoox vehicles don't have a steering wheel or pedals.

AP PHOTO



U.S. President Joe Biden greets President Xi Jinping at the Filoli Estate in Woodside, USA, Nov. 15, 2023

CHINA AND US ENVOYS WILL HOLD FIRST TOP-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

JAMEY KEATEN, GENEVA

HIGH-level envoys from the United States and China are set to meet in Geneva today for talks about artificial intelligence, including the risks of the fast-evolving technology and ways to set shared standards to manage it.

The meeting, billed as an opening exchange of views, is the first under an inter-governmental dialogue on AI agreed during a multi-faceted meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November.

Both the U.S. and China

see AI as crucial for national security and economic growth, with Biden administration officials saying they plan to focus on the development of safe, secure and trustworthy AI. The officials insisted on anonymity to preview the meeting on a phone call with reporters.

They also said the U.S. would outline how it was addressing possible risks from the technology by creating voluntary commitments with the sector's leading companies and requiring safety tests of AI products.

China's official Xinhua news agency, citing the Foreign Ministry, said the two

sides would take up issues including the technological risks of AI and global governance.

The U.S. government also sees efforts undertaken on AI by China as "possibly undermining the national security" of America and its allies.

The National Security Council at the White House said the U.S. team is being led by presidential adviser and senior director for technology and national security, Tarun Chhabra, and the State Department's acting special envoy for critical and emerging technologies, Seth Center. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Serbia Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba made a surprise visit to Russia-friendly Serbia yesterday, together with Ukraine's first lady, Olena Zelenska, in a sign of warming relations between the two states. On his first visit to Serbia since the start of the Russian aggression on Ukraine in 2022, Kuleba met Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and new Serbian Prime Minister Milos Vucevic, whose government includes several pro-Russian ministers, including two who have been under U.S. sanctions.

British police have charged three men with assisting the Hong Kong intelligence service amid growing concern that hostile states are trying to interfere with democracy and economic activity in the U.K. The three men were among 11 people arrested earlier this month in Yorkshire and London by counterterrorism police using provisions of a new law that allows suspects in national security and espionage cases to be detained without warrant. The eight other suspects were released without charge.

COURTESY BBC



UK King Charles has handed over a prestigious role with the Army Air Corps to his son Prince William, BBC News yesterday reported. "The great thing is he's a very good pilot indeed," said the King. It's unusual for the King and the Prince of Wales to both take part in an engagement - and this has been a symbolic handing over of the baton. The King had become colonel-in-chief of the Army Air Corps 32 years ago - and now he has been succeeded by his eldest son, Prince William.

Central African Republic Armed rebels attacked a Chinese-run gold mining town and killed at least four people in Central African Republic, authorities said. The Coalition of Patriots for Change, an alliance of rebel groups aligned with former President Francois Bozize, had carried out the attack in Gaga, a village roughly 125 miles from the capital, Bangui. The death toll might rise and included several individuals who worked at the nearby mine. Several others were injured in the attack.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon



Buddha Day. Buddhists wait for a lantern parade as part of festivities celebrating the birthday of Buddha, at Dongguk University in Seoul.