

20<sup>th</sup>  
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SANDS MACAO ANNIVERSARY

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# 20 years of progress: The Sands Macao story told by those who lived it



*From left: Armino Gonçalves, Amy Lee and Raymond Ho are long-time team members who have evolved right alongside the city thanks to Sands Macao*

When Sands Macao opened its doors on this day 20 years ago, it changed the trajectory of Macao. The city's first Las Vegas-style integrated resort made a spectacular first impression with its now iconic neon facade and glamorous lobby, not to mention the hotel, spa, restaurants and entertainment under one roof.

A destination in itself, Sands Macao symbolised a new beginning for the city. The government had just ended the local gaming monopoly, opening the industry to a handful of foreign investors. Among the most ambitious developers was the late Sheldon Adelson, an American entrepreneur who owned Las Vegas Sands and envisioned Macao as the "Las Vegas of Asia".

In just two decades, the company's growth and influence have reverberated across many areas of society, from tourism to jobs, real estate, construction, and the hospitality industry. And it all started with Sands Macao. To celebrate the integrated resort's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we sat down with three long-serving team members from different departments to see the transformation through their eyes.

## • Building something from scratch

When Amy Lee walked into the office on her first day as a payroll manager in 2003, she was taken aback. With just a few months to go until the opening and Sands Macao busy on a hiring blitz, there had been no time to invest in office plans, desk assignments, or permanent furniture.

Amy stayed in payroll for a few more years before shifting her focus to other human resource-related tasks. In 2007, she was promoted to the director of payroll and HR shared services and then to the director of human resources in 2009. Since 2011, she's been the vice president of human resources. "These opportunities through Sands have boosted my confidence and resilience," she shares.

Even as the company has grown, from just 80 team members at Sands Macao in 2003 to over 26,000 across Sands China today, Amy says she still feels a sense of belonging. She credits her team members and the company's HR strategy.

In addition to a supportive work environment, Sands Macao pioneered several work-life benefits—team member shuttle buses, diverse training programmes, and free staff meals in the canteen—that elevate the everyday experience. "Macao has changed from a quiet city into a thriving one," says Amy. "In the past, when tourists visited the city, they would only see the Ruins of St. Paul's and casinos. Now, we have great restaurants and concerts, art exhibitions and luxury shopping in the form of integrated resorts."



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**THE GOVERNMENT HAS OFFICIALLY RECLAIMED THE LAND UPON WHICH THE FORMER HORSE RACING COURSE SITS, COVERING A TOTAL AREA OF OVER 363,000 SQM** P4

**MACAU'S ECONOMIC PROSPERITY INDEX WILL REMAIN RELATIVELY HIGH BETWEEN MAY AND JULY** P6

**MASTERCARD: APAC DESTINATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY TRENDING AS CONSUMER SPENDING ON TOURISM REMAINS ROBUST AND PASSENGER TRAFFIC SOARS** P8

AP PHOTO



**China-Russia**

Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping yesterday reaffirmed their “no-limits” partnership that has deepened as both countries face rising tensions with the West, and they criticized U.S. military alliances in Asia and the Pacific region. At their summit in Beijing, Putin thanked Xi for China’s proposals for ending the war in Ukraine, which have been rejected by Ukraine and its Western supporters as largely following the Kremlin’s line. [More on p9](#)

AP PHOTO



**Taiwan-US**

The White House will send an unofficial delegation to Taiwan this weekend for the inauguration of the island’s leader-elect, the Biden administration announced earlier this week, in a move that is certain to upset China but unlikely to draw excessive responses from Beijing as the two countries try to stabilize relations. A senior White House official said the move is in line with longstanding U.S. practice to send the delegation — which includes two former senior officials and a scholar — to the inauguration ceremony Monday. Lai Ching-te (pictured) of the Democratic Progressive Party will take office, succeeding Tsai Ing-wen of the same party.

AP PHOTO



**Indonesian**

authorities seeded clouds earlier this week, trying to prevent further rain and flash floods after deluges that hit Sumatra Island over the weekend left at least 67 people dead and another 20 missing. Monsoon rains triggered a landslide of mud and cold lava from Mount Marapi, eventually causing rivers to breach their banks. The deluge tore through mountainside villages in four districts in West Sumatra province just before midnight on Saturday.

[More on backpage](#)

# GROWTH NAVIGATOR

**Macau able to leverage unique position in Asia through diversification amid Asia-Pacific’s emergence as fastest growing region: Think tank** P4



**20 YEARS SANDS MACAO BRIMS WITH CONFIDENCE IN SAR’S FUTURE** P5



P17

### SMG WARNS HEAVY RAIN OVER WEEKEND

The city's meteorological bureau predicts that this year's warm and humid air flow will be extremely strong, and noted that there have been many heavy rains since mid-to-late April. The southwest monsoon is more likely to break out early next week, and Macau will continue to experience showers and thunderstorms, the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) warned. The bureau added that since the southwest monsoon will be accompanied by a large amount of warm and humid unstable airflow, showers are expected to increase from this weekend. It is expected that the cumulative rainfall in a single day will be high, and the daily cumulative rainfall will exceed 50mm or more.

### HYPERTENSION PATIENTS ON UPWARD TREND

The Health Bureau (SSM) will organize a "Blood Pressure Check" scheme to commemorate World Hypertension Day today, in the hope of promoting health and wellness among locals. Government data shows that that hypertension was the second leading cause of death in Macau in 2022, accounting for 11.1% of deaths, following closely behind malignant tumors. The SSM and Kiang Wu Hospital have registered approximately 97,000 hypertension patients in 2022, marking an increase of over 2,500 compared to the previous year. This upward trend has persisted over the past decade, with a significantly higher increase observed among men compared to women.

### FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES AT MOP229B

Macau's foreign exchange reserves amounted to MOP229.2 billion at the end of April 2024, data from the Monetary Authority of Macao shows. The reserves increased by 1.3% from the revised value of MOP226.2 billion (USD28.07 billion) for the previous month. The SAR's foreign exchange reserves at end-April 2024 represented 11 times the currency in circulation or 91.1% of pataca M2 at end-March 2024. The trade-weighted effective exchange rate index for the pataca rose 1.08 points month-on-month and 4.09 points year-on-year to 105.2 in April 2024, implying that, the exchange rate of the pataca grew against the currencies of the city's major trading partners.

### PATA SUMMIT

# ASIA PACIFIC: FASTEST GROWING REGION AS MIDDLE CLASS EXPANDS

HOWARD TONG

A think-tank based in Singapore has identified the Asia-Pacific region as the fastest growing region due to an expanding middle class and rising household incomes.

Giving a presentation on the comprehensive overview of the global economic landscape and its implications for the tourism sector at the Pacific Asia Tourism Association (PATA) annual summit, Andrew Staples, Editorial director of Economist Impact, strongly believes that, based on analyzing the current global economic conditions and outlook, the Asia-Pacific region was the top region as an engine of growth for the world economy.

According to the executive, Macau can leverage its unique position in Asia and the Greater Bay Area to benefit from this rapid economic growth through diversifying its economy.

"Countries within the Asia Pacific region are hotter economies. These are economies that are growing above that average for the global economy in the world. And conversely, if you go to the other side of the globe to the West, those countries are not growing as fast."



Andrew Staples, Editorial director of Economist Impact

However, he also highlighted many potential economic risks that he and this think tank agree could pose a risk towards such growth.

These include current ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and in Israel, the souring of relations between China and the US, potential changes in US political leadership, and the prevalence and influence of AI, especially for the spread of misinformation, which is seen as a big risk towards these growing economies.

PATA, taking place from May 15 to May 18 at the Grand Lisboa Palace, is a membership association working to promote the responsible development of travel and tourism in the Asia Pacific region. For the summit, many industry leaders of tourism in Asia have gathered together for exchanges and for networking.

During the summit, keynote speakers and other industry leaders are discussing ongoing and future tourism trends in the Asia Pacific region.

Macau Government Tourism Office director Helena de Sena Fernandes gave an opening speech, highlighting Macau's "visitor arrivals having recovered to 83% of 2019 levels, and Macau is now embracing a new era of leveraging its "1+4" development strategy and leisure industry to diversify its economy."

On the sidelines of the event, Fernandes said that following the launch of the Individual Visit Scheme to eight cities in the mainland, the bureau plans to initially launch online promotion and then follow up with offline promotion activities in the latter half of the year, depending on the circumstances.

Regarding cities without direct flights to Macau, Fernandes expressed her hope to leverage the resource cooperation within the GBA. This would allow tourists to reach Macau via Guangzhou and Zhuhai, she said.

Simultaneously, the GBA will be promoted as a destination with multiple stops in one journey, in collaboration with Macau and Hengqin, to facilitate "group travel" and provide tourists with the opportunity to explore the tourism resources of Macau and Hengqin, the director added.

### STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau government announced yesterday that it has officially reclaimed the land upon which the city's horse racing course sits, covering a total area of 363,192 square meters.

According to information published in the Official Gazette, the lease of the land by the Macau Jockey Club (MJC) began on Dec. 31, 1995 and had been renewed multiple times, including most recently as a 24-year concession until Aug. 31, 2042. However, the government announced in January that the MJC's concession would be terminated from

## Gov't reclaims Jockey Club



April 1, 2024.

After the termination, the Secretary for Transport and Public Works,

Raimundo do Rosário reclaimed the land under his authority and determined the total land area to

be 363,192 square meters. This land is now private property of the state and the MJC is not entitled to

receive any compensation.

The government has not yet determined what the future use of the land will be, with Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng stating at a Legislative Assembly meeting in April that any development would likely take "eight to 10 years." However, Ho confirmed the land would not be used for gambling activities.

The MJC, operated by the Macau Horse Race Co. since 1989, had been suffering financial losses for several years, with its situation worsening in recent years. The termination of the horse racing concession contract came into effect on April 1.

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For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

# Almost 10% of all visitors to Macau on Buddha's Birthday were foreigners

RENATO MARQUES

**D**ATA disclosed by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) on border crossings over the holiday of Buddha's Birthday (May 15) shows that 8,632 foreign visitors entered Macau during the 24 hour period.

The number accounts for 9.77% of the total number of visitor entries (88,338) on the same day.

As the Times had previously reported, during the Labor Day Golden Week (May 1-5), the number of international visitors was already showing growth, having reached 5.99% during that period, an increase of 2% when compared to the Easter and Ching Ming Festival this year.

The Times also reported that the influx of foreign visitors was particularly high and noticeable on the last of the five days that comprised the Golden Week, when most of the visitor flow was in the opposite trend, that is, leaving Macau. On May 5, some 9,046 foreign visitors ente-

red Macau, while the average over the five days was 7,238.

It is not yet clear if this influx was just occasional or is part of a new trend that might have started early this month. Confirmation of the situation will be possible when the authorities release the full data from this month, which should happen mid-next month.

For the time being analyzing only the single day of May 15, some 3,942 of these foreign visitors (45.67%) have entered Macau through the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Port, while another 1,616 (18.72%) arrived via the Macau International Airport. The third highest arrival point was the Taipa Ferry Terminal, accountable for 1,134 entries (13.14%).

## SOUTH KOREANS DOMINATED Q1

Official statistics released by the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) and related to the first quarter of this year (January to March) show that visitors from South Korea have topped the ranking of

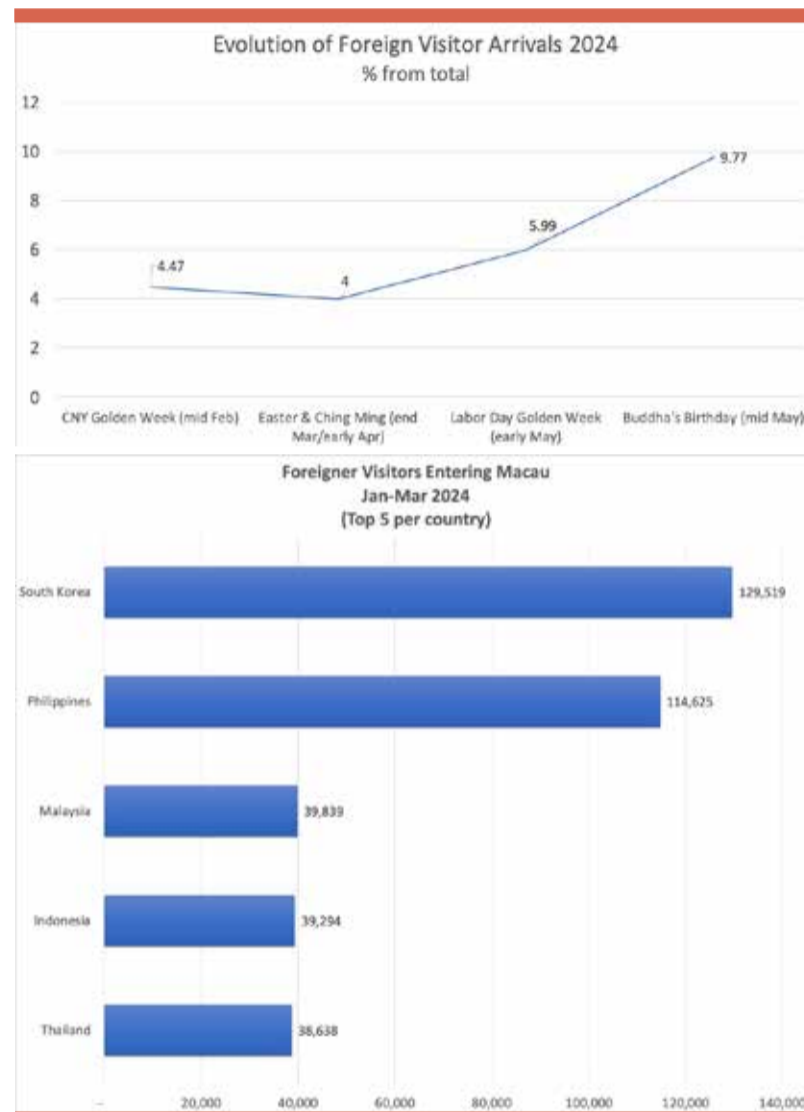
foreign visitors to Macau.

In Q1, a total of 129,519 South Koreans visited Macau, followed by those from the Philippines (114,625). Those from Malaysia came third although there is a very significant gap between these and the first two. 39,839 Malaysians entered Macau in Q1, slightly more than the Indonesians (39,294) and the Thailanders (38,638), who complete the top five of the countries supplying the most foreign visitors to Macau.

The first of the non-Asian countries is the USA in sixth position (33,383) followed by Australia in ninth position (16,563).

The first among the European countries is the UK (9,518), although it is in the twelfth position overall.

The Q1 also closed with a total of 584,017 visitors to Macau, a figure that contributes to the optimism expressed recently by the local tourism authorities which have said to be confident Macau will reach its goal of two million international visitors this year.



# Sands Macao celebrates 20th anniversary, brims with confidence in city's future

STAFF REPORTER

**U**NDER a display of fireworks and Las Vegas-style performances, Sands Macao celebrated its 20th anniversary, marking two decades since kicking off Macau's era of integrated resorts.

The opening of Sands Macao in May 2004 drew a colossal crowd eager to experience the luxurious new landmark. 20 years later, Sands Macao records millions of visits annually, paving the way for Sands China's sister properties across the Cotai Strip.

"With our significant presence in Macau of more than two decades, Sands China takes immense pride in bearing witness to and actively participating in the flourishing development of



this remarkable city," said Wilfred Wong, executive vice chairman of Sands China Ltd. "Together, we are writing an indelible chapter in history."

The inauguration of Sands Macao served as the pivotal moment in Macau's era of tourism. Wong recalled that Sands China subsequently em-

barked on a transformative journey that reshaped the Cotai skyline, effectively materializing the visionary aspirations of the company's late founder,

-free shops, and superstar entertainment at two arenas and four theatres.

The 20th anniversary celebration featured a nod to the original entertainment that captivated guests at the opening of Sands Macao, highlighted by burlesque costumes and song and dance sequences. Local singer German Ku and London's West End artist Kayleigh Stephenson delivered performances, including a duet, accompanied by a pyrotechnic display.

Later, during the gala dinner, multi-platinum-selling vocal harmony group The Overtones delivered feel-good classics.

"Sands China brims with confidence in the future of Macau," Wong said. "Guided by the exceptional leadership of the two governments and fortified by the unwavering support of society at large, we shall persist in our pursuit of innovation, unveiling novel experiences for residents and tourists alike."

Sheldon G. Adelson.

"The resounding success of Sands Macao paved the way for a sustainable future and the robust development of our company," Wong said. "We subsequently continued our business ventures in Macau by bringing the triumphant integrated resort model of Las Vegas to the city, transforming undeveloped land to build The Venetian Macao, an integrated resort encompassing MICE, entertainment, dining, retail, and accommodation, among other things."

Today, Sands China's portfolio of properties features over 12,000 hotel rooms and suites, 150 dining options, the region's premier meetings and conventions destination, more than 720 duty-

### USJ'S COMMUNICATION PROGRAM RECEIVES RECOGNITION

The University of Saint Joseph's (USJ) Bachelor of Communication and Media program has been recognized as one of the best in Asia. USJ recently obtained the title of "Top Media & Mass Communication Colleges in Asia - 2024" by the Asia Education Review. In a statement, the university remarked, "The USJ's Bachelor of Communication and Media program has consistently demonstrated a commitment to delivering a comprehensive and contemporary curriculum that equips students with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in the rapidly evolving media landscape." The Asia Education Review is renowned for conducting research and analysis of educational institutions across Asia.

### FORMER CANIDROME TO HAVE NEARLY 500 PARKING SPACES

The future sports garden planned for the former Canidrome will feature a car park with 490 parking spaces for light vehicles and motorcycles, as stated by the Public Works Bureau. Spanning over 40,000 square meters, the sports garden plot will be divided into four sections, with an outdoor athletics field. Pavilion one will stand at a height of four floors and will include a swimming pool, children's pool, basketball court, running track, and a cycle path for children, while the other will have a six floor-high building that will house a skate park, table tennis courts, wall climbing facilities, volleyball courts, and badminton courts. The other two pavilions will feature multipurpose rooms.

### MACAU GP MUSEUM OFFERING FREE ENTRY MAY 18 AND JUNE 1

The Macau Grand Prix Museum is offering visitors free entry and special gifts on two Saturdays, May 18 and June 1, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) announced. The promotion is a part of the International Museum Day, celebrated on May 18, and also celebrates the third anniversary of the reopening of the museum after an extensive refurbishment. Also, by taking a photo or video of the answer to share on Facebook, WeChat or Instagram with the tag "#MGPM#3rdanniversary", they can win gifts from the museum. As part of the celebrations of the third anniversary, the gift shop at the museum will also feature a special sale of gift sets for the whole month of June.



### ECONOMY

## PROSPERITY INDEX FORECAST TO REMAIN HIGH

HOWARD TONG

**T**HE Macau Economic Association (MEA) released a report yesterday forecasting that Macau's economic prosperity index will remain relatively high between May and July.

In the report, the off-season for Macau's tourism has been March and April, with a decline in inbound tourists. However, the average length of stay for overnight visitors has increased slightly. The number of hotel guests and hotel occupancy rates have remained at "overheating" and "hot" levels respectively.

The index is composed of 13 indicators, including visitor numbers and hotel occupancy, and has a maximum score of 10 points. The MEA expects the index to hold steady at 6.6 points over the next three months.

The report noted that recent measures by the central government to facilitate travel from mainland China to Macau will provide a further boost to the local economy.

The MEA particularly highlighted the addition of eight more mainland Chinese cities to the individual travel scheme as especially beneficial for Macau's economy.

With all Chinese provincial capitals now included, this is expected to drive an increase in domestic tourism.

Looking back over the past year, the MEA observed that Macau's GDP growth and other key economic indicators have performed well. For instance, the economic prosperity index stood at a stable 6.4 points this March, a significant improvement over the "below-average" figure of 4.5 points recorded in the

same month last year.

The central government has recently introduced measures to benefit Macau, including expanding the individual travel scheme to cover all Chinese provincial capital cities. This is expected to significantly boost mainland tourist numbers and provide an economic boost over the next three months, potentially lifting the economic prosperity index to a "hot" level of 6.6 points. Local enterprises, especially SMEs, are advised to prepare for the anticipated increase in tourists by optimizing their services and competitiveness.

As a sign of Macau's economic resurgence, the report also noted that the magazine Global Finance had ranked Macau as the world's second-richest place, trailing only Luxembourg.

### CRIME

## MAN DEFRAUDS FRIEND OF HK15 MILLION OVER CASINO DEBT

STAFF REPORTER

**A** Macau resident has been apprehended by the police on suspicion of defrauding a friend from mainland China of approximately HKD15 million. The suspect, who is 41 years old and reportedly employed in the financial industry, allegedly deceived the victim by falsely promising to invest the funds in a casino for re-

demption purposes.

The incident took place in January of this year, when the suspect convinced the mainland man to invest HKD2 million, assuring him of a monthly profit of MOP50,000. The victim transferred the amount through a bank account and subsequently received a profit of RMB125,000. Encouraged by the suspect, the victim decided to increase the investment and

transferred an additional HKD13 million.

However, after no updates were provided, the victim became suspicious and reported the case as a suspected fraud. On Wednesday, the police apprehended the suspect at Hengqin Port. During questioning, the suspect confessed to the crime and revealed that he had collaborated with two other individuals to deceive the victim.

### HKMAO

## Xia Baolong urges continued patriotic support

STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE director of China's top offices overseeing Hong Kong and Macau affairs visited the Macau Chamber of Commerce on earlier this week, highlighting the city's key strengths and urging continued support for the SAR government.

During a recent meeting, Xia Baolong emphasized that President Xi Jinping places great importance on Macau's development and the well-being of its people. He praised Macau's 'One country, two systems' advantages, which according to him, have provided the city with a solid constitutional foundation for long-term stability and prosperity.

Xia also highlighted Macau's highly internationalized business environment, noting that the city has established trade relationships with over 120 countries and regions, and is a member of more than 190 international organizations. Macau, he said, is recognized by the World Trade Organization as one of the most open economies for trade and investment in the world, thanks to its simple low tax rates and status as a separate customs territory and free port.

Turning to Macau's

economic strengths, Xia pointed out that the city's GDP has grown from 51.9 billion patacas in 1999 to 444.5 billion patacas in 2019, with an average annual growth of 11%. After the COVID-19 pandemic, Macau's economy surged 80.5% in 2023, placing it among the top five in the world in terms of per capita GDP.

The official also emphasized that Macau's traditional patriotism and loyalty to the country have been crucial in supporting the MSAR government's efforts to implement policies and initiatives. He urged all sectors in Macau to continue advocating patriotism and loyalty, as well as to work together to enhance the city's "golden name card" as an international metropolitan.

The Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Ao Ieong U, echoed Xia's sentiments, noting that his visits to local associations and a school reflected Macau's strong patriotic foundation. Ao Ieong said the government will continue leveraging Macau's unique cultural blend of Chinese and Western influences to promote appropriate economic diversification and transform the city into a hub for performing arts and sports.



FOOTBALL

# Former Portugal stars in Macau for an exhibition match this weekend

RENATO MARQUES

A team of former Portuguese national team stars has arrived in Macau for a series of promotional activities that include an exhibition match.

The "Portugal Icons" is led by legendary Luís Figo and also includes famous names representing Portugal in major international events such as the World Cup or the European Cup, including Nuno Gomes, Pauleta, Dimas, Tiago, Bosingwa, Maniche, Hélder Postiga and Ricardo Quaresma.

For most, Figo is the best-known name of the Portuguese side due to his phenomenal career: not just wearing the national jersey of Portugal, but mostly under the world-famous banners of FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, and Inter Milan. He won 127 caps for the Portuguese national team, setting a record, and has been described as one of his generation's best players.



Luís Figo during his visit in December

Besides many team titles, Figo was honored with the Ballon d'Or in 2000 and FIFA World Player of the Year 2001, surpassing British star David Beckham.

He is also part of the FIFA 100,

a list of players chosen by late football legend Pelé to commemorate FIFA's 100th anniversary.

He is regarded as a football legend by the International Federation of Football History

and Statistics.

This is the second time that Figo has visited Macau, having been in the SAR late last year to take part in the inaugural Asia's Sports Collectors Convention.

### FIVE-A-SIDE EXHIBITION MATCH ON SUNDAY

The "Portugal Icons" will take on the Greater Bay Area (GBA) Flying Dragons, a team consisting of football players from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau (GBA and Hong Kong All Stars Sports Association).

Among those representing the GBA Flying Dragons will be names such as Natalis Chan, Eddie Ng, Frankie Lam, Eddie Cheung, Danny Chan, Chan Chi Hong, Leslie George Santos, Wong Chin Hung, Chan Tat Sun, Che Chi Man, Emmanuel Noruega, Hoi Man Io, Wu Qunli, Hu Zhijun, and Lu Lin.

According to information from organizers SJM Resorts S.A., the match will take place at the East Asian Games Dome and will consist of two parts of 20 minutes each.

The match kickoff is scheduled for 4 p.m. on Sunday (May 19).

Additionally, among several promotional activities, organizers are also said to be holding a "Legends of Tomorrow - Football Camp" to allow local young players to interact with the football "stars."

The program of the event also includes several musical and dance performances with Tai Chi Band, "Street Dance of China 2" including Ye Yin, Long Fei, MC Liao Bo, and DJ Li Yulong.

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LYNZY VALLES

TRAVEL

# APAC DESTINATIONS GAIN MOMENTUM: MASTERCARD

THE global travel sector is breaking boundaries in 2024 as consumer spending on tourism remains robust and passenger traffic soars, according to the latest report from the Mastercard Economics Institute (MEI).

In a report released yesterday, titled "Travel Trends 2024: Breaking Boundaries", data shows that APAC destinations are significantly trending, comprising half of the top 10 hot spots that have demonstrated the greatest momentum among travelers.

According to the MEI, APAC passenger traffic is rebounding, particularly for shorter, intra-regional trips. For example, this summer's top destinations for travelers from Hong Kong include Bangkok, Okinawa, Fukuoka, Nagoya, Tokyo, Seoul, Manila and Kaohsiung.

"Consumers in the Asia Pacific region have an intense desire and willingness to travel and are becoming increasingly savvy to ensure they get the best value and unforgettable experiences from their trips," said David Mann, chief economist, Asia Pacific, Mastercard.

"For tourism authorities, retailers, the hospitality and F&B sectors, the bottom line is that

costs matter. In today's economy, foreign exchange rates and spending power have become vital components in driving a traveler's assessment of value when they are making their plans. This suggests that businesses targeting tourism dollars need to review their current strategies, and

shift them if necessary, to maintain their appeal to travelers."

The Chinese mainland's travel dynamic has shifted, as more Chinese tourists prioritize domestic trips over international ones.

Yet, additional upside growth is expected in 2024, supported

by visa exemptions in APAC and beyond, as well as an increase in international flight capacity, benefiting destinations such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

Meanwhile, international tourism traffic leaving the Chinese mainland continues to recover and is now at 80.3% of 2019 levels.

As cited in the report, Japan emerged as the #1 trending destination worldwide growing 0.9%, as it welcomed 3,081,600 visitors from abroad in March 2024 – the highest level ever – even before the peak travel season begins.

Driven by a weak yen (the lowest since 1990), Japan's favorable exchange rate is expected to help it remain the clear tourism frontrunner throughout 2024, benefitting Japanese businesses catering to tourists and the local economy overall, the report noted.

Meanwhile, Mastercard has noted that tourists today prefer laid-back vibes, except in spots where luxury retail and fine dining provide exceptional value for money.

In Hong Kong, tourism spending on casual dining and fine dining is respectively 248% and 237% higher in the year ending March 2024 than at the same time last year.

Looking ahead, the MEI anticipates this momentum will continue as consumers around the world prioritize meaningful experiences and allocate more of their budgets to travel.

The report provides comprehensive insights into the evolving landscape of the travel industry across 74 markets, including 13 in the APAC region.



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IN MACAU (2023)





DIPLOMACY

# Putin expresses gratitude to Xi for China's initiatives to resolve Ukraine conflict

EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA  
AND CHRISTOPHER BODEEN,  
BEIJING

AP PHOTO



Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin attend an official welcome ceremony in Beijing yesterday

**R**USSIA'S Putin expressed gratitude to Xi Jinping for China's initiatives to resolve the Ukraine conflict at their Beijing summit yesterday where the Chinese leader said China hopes Europe will return to peace and stability soon and that China will play a constructive role.

China last year offered a broad plan for peace outlining general principles for ending the war in Ukraine, and didn't offer new specifics on how Beijing might be prepared to engage with both sides of the conflict.

"China hopes for the early return of Europe to peace and stability and will continue to play a constructive role toward this," Xi said, speaking alongside Putin.

Putin said he will inform the Chinese leader in detail about "the situation in Ukraine" and said "we are grateful for the initiative of our Chinese colleagues and friends to regulate the situation."

China has significant influence as a key supporter of Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. It continues to supply Russia with key components that Moscow needs for its productions of weapons, and its purchase of Russian oil and gas has helped boost the Russian economy.

Before their remarks, the two leaders signed a joint statement on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership between their two nations after their initial meeting. Xi said China and Russia will continue to uphold a position of non-alliance and non-confrontation.

Putin was greeted by Xi with full military honors at the Great Hall of the People, the massive seat of the ceremonial legislature sitting aside Tiananmen Square in the heart of the capital Beijing.

In their following meeting, Xi congratulated Putin on his election to a fifth term in office and celebrated the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations forged between the former Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China after it swept to power in a civil war in 1949. Putin faced no credible opposition in the presidential race, and, like Xi, has not laid out any plans for any potential successors.

Xi said the two countries were furthering their relationship as "good neighbors, good friends, good partners," according to state broadcaster CCTV, echoing their

commitment to the "no limits" relationship they signed in 2022, just before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Since then, Russia has become increasingly economically dependent on China as Western sanctions cut its access to much of the international trading system.

Russian state news agency RIA-Novosti quoted Putin as saying that Russia-China relations are "not directed against anyone. Our cooperation in world affairs today is one of the main stabilizing factors in the international arena."

Putin complimented Xi on his signature "One Belt One Road" initiative that seeks to build roads, ports, power plants and other infrastructure connecting China to its neighbors and soaking up Chinese industrial output at a time of declining demand at home.

"Our cooperation in world affairs today is one of the main stabilizing factors in the international arena," Putin was quoted as saying. The report made no mention of the war in Ukraine that has killed tens of thousands with no resolution on the horizon.

On the eve of the visit, Putin said in an interview with Chinese media that the Kremlin is prepared to negotiate over the conflict in Ukraine. "We are open to

a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including ours," Putin was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency.

The Russian leader's trip comes as his country's forces have pressed an offensive in northeastern Ukraine's Kharkiv region that began last week in the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began, forcing almost 8,000 people to flee their homes.

Along with Moscow's efforts to build on its gains in the nearby Donetsk region, the 2-year-old war has entered a critical stage for Ukraine's depleted military that is awaiting new supplies of anti-aircraft missiles and artillery shells from the United States.

"We have never refused to negotiate," Putin was quoted as saying by Xinhua. "We are seeking a comprehensive, sustainable and just settlement of this conflict through peaceful means. We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including ours."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said any

negotiations must include a restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression, and security guarantees for Ukraine.

China claims to take a neutral position in the conflict, but has backed Moscow's contentions that Russia was provoked into attacking Ukraine by the West, despite Putin's public avowals of his desire to restore Russia's century-old borders as the reason for his assault.

Putin has blamed the West for the failure of negotiations in the opening weeks of the war and praised China's peace plan for Ukraine that would allow Moscow to cement its territorial gains.

"Beijing proposes practicable and constructive steps to achieve peace by refraining from pursuing vested interests and constant escalation of tensions, minimizing the negative impact of the conflict on the global economy," he had said.

Putin said a Chinese proposal in 2023, which Ukraine and the West rejected, could "lay the groundwork for a political and diplomatic process that would take into account Russia's security concerns and contribute to achie-

ving a long-term and sustainable peace."

The Kremlin said in a statement that during their talks this week, Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping will "have a detailed discussion on the entire range of issues related to the comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation and determine the new directions for further development of cooperation between Russia and China and also have a detailed exchange of opinions on the most acute international and regional issues."

Speaking Tuesday in the upper house of Russian parliament, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow and Beijing are "objectively interested in maintaining our lead in efforts to establish a more fair and democratic world order."

"Russia and China aren't alone in their efforts to reform an international system and help establish a multipolar global order," he said.

Lavrov noted that the "duet of Moscow and Beijing plays a major balancing role in global affairs," adding that "the Russian president's forthcoming visit to (China) will strengthen our joint work."

Moscow has forged increasingly close ties with Beijing as the war has dragged into a third year, diverting the bulk of its energy exports to China and relying on Chinese companies for importing high-tech components for Russian military industries to circumvent Western sanctions.

The Russia-China military ties have also strengthened. They have held a series of joint war games in recent years, including naval drills and patrols by long-range bombers over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. Russian and Chinese ground forces also have deployed to the other country's territory for joint drills.

China remains a major market for Russian military, while also massively expanding its domestic defensive industries, including building aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines.

Putin has previously said that Russia has been sharing highly sensitive military technologies with China that helped significantly bolster its defense capability. In October 2019, he mentioned that Russia was helping China to develop an early warning system to spot ballistic missile launches — a system involving ground-based radar and satellites that only Russia and the U.S. possessed.

MDT/AP

FIRST AI DIALOGUE

# US CITES 'MISUSE' OF AI BY CHINA, BEIJING PROTESTS WASHINGTON'S RESTRICTIONS

JAMEY KEATEN &  
KELVIN CHAN, GENEVA

U.S. officials raised concerns about China's "misuse of AI" while Beijing's representatives rebuked Washington over "restrictions and pressure" on artificial intelligence, the governments said separately yesterday, a day after a meeting in Geneva on the technology.

Summaries of the closed-door talks between high-level envoys, which covered AI's risks and ways to manage it, hinted at the tension between Beijing and Washington over the rapidly advancing technology that has become another flashpoint in bilateral relations.

China and the United States "exchanged perspectives on their respective approaches to AI safety and risk management" in the "candid and constructive" discussions a day earlier, National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said in a statement. Beijing said the two sides exchanged views "in-depth, professionally, and constructively."

The first such U.S.-China talks on AI were the product of a November meeting between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping in San Francisco. The talks testified to concerns and hopes about the promising but potentially perilous new technology.



"The United States underscored the importance of ensuring AI systems are safe, secure and trustworthy in order to realize these benefits of AI — and of continuing to build global consensus on that basis," Watson said. Referring to the People's Republic of China, she added: "The United States also raised concerns over the misuse of AI, including by the PRC."

She didn't elaborate on the type of misuse or other actors

behind it.

Beijing, meanwhile, "expressed a stern stance on the U.S. restrictions and pressure in the field of artificial intelligence" against China, the country's Foreign Ministry's Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs said in a social media post.

Beijing has previously lashed out at Commerce Department export controls limiting access to advanced computer chips that can be used for AI. Biden in Au-

gust signed an executive order to restrict U.S. investments in China's AI industry.

China also advocates for the United Nations to take a leading role in the global governance of AI, a move that could sideline the U.S.

Both sides recognized that while AI presents opportunities, "it also poses risks," the Chinese statement said.

China has built one of the world's largest digital surveillance

systems, which have an AI component, deploying cameras in city streets and tracking citizens through chat apps and mobile phones.

Watson said the U.S. wants to keep communication open with China on AI risk and safety "as an important part of responsibly managing competition," an allusion to the multifaceted and growing rivalry between the world's top two economic powers.

Helen Toner, an analyst at Georgetown's Center for Security and Emerging Technology, said that "the real verdict on whether these talks were successful will be whether they continue into the future."

AI is already having a vast effect on lifestyles, jobs, national defense, culture, politics and much more — and its role is set to grow.

China warned as far back as 2018 of the need to regulate AI but has nonetheless funded a vast expansion in the field as part of efforts to seize the high ground on cutting-edge technologies.

Some U.S. lawmakers have voiced concerns that China could back the use of AI-generated deepfakes to spread political disinformation, though China, unlike the U.S., has imposed a set of new laws banning manipulative AI fakery. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH CHINA SEA

# Filipino activists decide not to sail closer to disputed shoal, avoiding clash

ABOUT 100 Filipino activists on wooden boats have decided not to sail closer to a fiercely disputed shoal in the South China Sea yesterday to avoid a confrontation with dozens of Chinese coast guard and suspected militia ships guarding the area.

Accompanied by journalists on four boats, the activists will distribute food packs and fuel to Filipino fishermen about 58 nautical miles southeast of Scarborough Shoal and then sail back home, Emman Hizon and other organizers said.

Chinese and Philippine coast guard and accompanying ships have had a series of increasingly



hostile territorial faceoffs at Scarborough, which is surrounded by the Chinese coast guard, and at Philippine-occupied Second Thomas Shoal since last

year. The Chinese ships have used powerful water cannons and employed blocking and other dangerous maneuvers that led to minor collisions, injured

several Filipino navy personnel and strained diplomatic ties.

The United States has repeatedly warned that it's obligated to defend the

Philippines, its longtime treaty ally, if Filipino forces, ships or aircraft come under an armed attack in the region, including in the busy South China Sea. That has sparked fears a conflict could involve Washington if the territorial disputes escalate out of control.

The activists and fishing community leaders, who belong to a nongovernment coalition called Atin Ito, Tagalog for This is Ours, provided aid to Filipino fishermen and floated symbolic territorial buoys Wednesday on their way to Scarborough's outlying waters to assert Philippine sovereign rights over the atoll. But two Chinese coast guard ships started sha-

dowing them Wednesday night, according to Hizon and the Philippine coast guard.

A group of 10 activists managed to evade the Chinese blockade by at least 46 ships in the outlying waters and distributed food and fuel to Filipinos fishing closer to the atoll. That was cited by the activists in declaring that their mission was a success.

"We managed to breach their illegal blockade, reaching the vicinity of Bajo de Masinloc to support our fishers with essential supplies," said Rafaela David, an activist leader who led the voyage to the disputed waters. "Mission accomplished."

The Philippine coast guard deployed three patrol ships and a light plane to keep watch on the activists, who set off from western Zambales province. Dozens of journalists joined the three-day voyage. **MDT/AP**

LEGAL INTEGRATION

# GUANGDONG HELPS TO CONNECT BAY AREA RULES

ON THE AGENDA

**G**UANGDONG province is accelerating the connection of rules, regulations and mechanisms with the Hong Kong and Macau special administrative regions to further promote the deep and integrated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Zhu Wei, deputy director of the Guangdong Provincial Development and Reform Commission, told a news conference in Guangzhou, the provincial capital, earlier this week that promoting the integration of rules and regulations in the Bay Area is a key but difficult step in deepening all-around connectivity.

Describing it as a long-term systematic project, he said progress has been made on the integration of rules and mechanisms with the two SARs in recent years.

She Qiongshe, chief judge of the Fourth Civil Division of the Guangdong High People's Court, said the first judicial guidance on commercial disputes involving Hong Kong and Macau issued by the court promoted respect for the autonomy of the parties involved and expanded the range of legal solutions that could be chosen.

As long as they do not violate the basic principles of national laws, enterprises with funding from Hong Kong or Macau that are registered in the Hengqin, Qianhai and Nansha pilot free trade zones can negotiate and choose extraterritorial laws to resolve



AI-generated illustration of the cityscape representing GBA's cities

their contract disputes, She said.

Chinese mainland courts can also confirm the evidentiary validity of official documents produced by Hong Kong and Macau courts, arbitration institutions and government agencies, he said.

When handling commercial cases involving Hong Kong and Macau, they may submit litigation documents to Hong Kong and Macau parties in a manner that complies with Hong Kong or Macau laws or practices, he said.

"We will continue to introduce guidelines for the connection of judicial rules between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, and continuously promote the connection mechanism of judicial rules and mechanism in the three regions," She said.

Sun Zutong, commissar of the traffic management bureau at the Guangdong Provincial Department

of Public Security, said the bureau has worked with related departments to enable drivers and car owners from Hong Kong and Macau to use both mainland and SAR cards and payment apps to pay highway and bridge tolls in Guangdong.

Efforts are also underway to upgrade parking facilities in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai to recognize license plates from Hong Kong and Macau.

Over 320,000 drivers from the SARs have obtained their mainland driver's licenses without needing to take a test.

Wei Wentao, a spokesman for the Guangdong provincial government service data management bureau, said the bureau has launched the construction of a "Digital GBA" to promote the effective connection of rules and mechanisms through digitalization. **MDT/CHINA DAILY**

## Fossilized teeth provide new insights into dinosaurs in south China

ACROSS CHINA  
BY YUAN QUAN

**F**OUR large dinosaur teeth unearthed in Guangdong Province have been confirmed by Chinese scientists to be from the Tyrannosauroida group dating back 70 million to 66 million years ago, making it the southernmost fossil evidence of this taxon in China.

The four teeth can be traced back to the Maastichtian stage, the most recent phase of the Late Cretaceous period. Three of these specimens were discovered in 2010 in the city of Sihui by an amateur

fossil enthusiast who later donated them to a local museum. The other tooth was found at a construction site in the provincial capital Guangzhou in 2020 by one researcher and is currently housed in the collection of Sun Yat-sen University.

The three teeth discovered in Sihui were remarkably well-preserved, boasting crowns exceeding 6 cm in length, and the tooth fragment found in Guangzhou is 3.3 cm long. However, all four fossils exhibited similar morphological characteristics, including generally serrated edges and smooth enamel.

These features are con-

sistent with those of Tyrannosauroida teeth and distinguish them from those observed in other large carnivorous dinosaurs, according to a research article recently published in the international journal *Cretaceous Research*.

Lead author Xing Lida, an associate professor at China University of Geosciences (Beijing), said that Tyrannosauroida is a bipedal predatory dinosaur exhibiting significant variations in body size, making it the dominant group during the middle and late Cretaceous period.

Compared with other Tyrannosauroida teeth

found in China, the sizes of the four fossils are small.

The research team is facing difficulties in accurately estimating the body lengths of the teeth owners due to the inability to pinpoint the exact locations of the teeth in the mouth.

A conservative estimate suggests that the teeth owners measure at least five to six meters in length, according to Wang Donghao, a member of the research team at China University of Geosciences (Beijing).

Together with previous records of fossilized dinosaur eggs found in the region, the discovery of the teeth also suggests that a variety of dinosaur species thrived in southern China before the mass extinction at the end of the Cretaceous period, Xing said.

**MDT/XINHUA**

BRIEFS

### VISA-FREE ENTRY FOR FOREIGN TOURISTS VIA CRUISE SHIPS

China has implemented a new policy allowing visa-free entry for foreign tourist groups arriving on cruise ships at any cruise ship port along the country's coastline. Effective from May 15, this policy enables tourist groups, each consisting of two or more foreigners organized by Chinese travel agencies, to enter visa-free through 13 ports, including Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, and Sanya. Visitors can stay in China for up to 15 days and are permitted to visit coastal provinces, municipalities, and the autonomous regions of Macau and HK, as well as Beijing. Additionally, seven cruise ports, such as Dalian, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, are designated as visa-free transit ports for nationals from 54 countries. The National Immigration Administration has introduced measures to streamline entry and exit procedures for foreign cruise passengers, enhancing the overall travel experience.

### MEXICAN DIPLOMAT: OPPORTUNITIES IN BAY AREAS

Mexico's ambassador to the PRC, Jesús Seade Kuri, highlighted the potential for Mexico to integrate with China's bay areas, such as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, emphasizing the long-term vision and economic power of the GBA. This integration is seen as vital for fostering international collaboration and economic growth, positioning the GBA as a model for global development. China's bay areas, particularly the GBA, offer significant opportunities for economic and technological development. This region, which includes major cities like Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, and Macau, is a hub of economic activity and innovation. The GBA comprises 11 cities, and is being developed with substantial investments to create a highly integrated and luxurious region.

### DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN GUANGZHOU'S FINANCIAL INDUSTRIES

The Guangzhou Municipal People's Government has launched the "Guangzhou Digital Economy High-Quality Development Plan," aimed at accelerating the digital transformation of financial industries in the region. This plan supports advancements in banks, securities, insurance, futures, and funds, fostering innovative and diverse digital finance platforms. Key initiatives include the development of cross-border finance, technology finance, and green finance, alongside the promotion of digital RMB applications. The plan also focuses on establishing the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Digital Finance Science and Technology Innovation Center and the Guangdong Digital Finance Innovation Industrial Park. These efforts aim to upgrade trading platforms such as the Guangdong Equity Trading Center and "enhance financial risk monitoring through technological advancements," municipal authorities said.

## SINGAPORE

# NEW PM VOWS TO 'LEAD IN OUR OWN WAY' AS LEE DYNASTY ENDS AFTER HALF-CENTURY

EILEEN NG, KUALA LUMPUR

SINGAPORE'S new Prime Minister Lawrence Wong vowed to make "tomorrow better than today" as he took his oath of office yesterday in a carefully planned political succession designed to ensure stability in the Asian financial hub.

A U.S.-trained economist, Wong, 51, succeeds Lee Hsien Loong, 72, who stepped down after two decades. He is the city-state's fourth leader and the first born after Singapore's independence in 1965.

Lee's departure marked the end of a family dynasty led by his father Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first leader, who built the colonial trading outpost into one of the world's richest nations during 31 years in office.

Wong paid tribute to his predecessors for dedication to the nation, saying "we stand on the shoulders of giants." But he said his leadership style will differ as he navigates Singapore through a more troubled world.

"This is a passing of the baton not just between leadership teams but also across generations," Wong said. "We will lead in our own way. We will continue to think boldly and think far."

The transition has been meticulously crafted by the People's Action Party, one of the world's longest-serving political parties and known for its clean and effective governance. It is not expected to change the dynamics in the tiny nation of some 6 million people.

Wong, a civil servant turned politician, came to prominence while coordinating Singapo-

AP PHOTO



Singapore's new Prime Minister Lawrence Wong makes a speech after being sworn in at the Istana in Singapore, yesterday

re's successful fight against COVID-19. But he wasn't the first choice for the top job.

Heng Swee Keat, a former central bank chief and education minister, was the anointed successor but he withdrew his nomination in 2021. Wong was then picked by the People's Action Party in 2022 to fill the vacuum and quickly promoted to deputy prime minister.

Wong warned that Singapore must brace for a "messier, riskier and more violent world" by staying united and blazing new trails. As global powers fight to shape a new world order, he said protectionism and rampant nationalism will deepen.

Amid China-U.S. rivalry, he said Singapore — which has stayed neutral — would continue to engage both nations.

Wong has retained the Cabinet and held onto his finance portfolio as he prepares for his first big test in general elections. Those are

due by 2025. Before taking office, he promoted Trade Minister Gan Kim Yong as one of two deputy premiers. The other deputy is Heng.

Lee stayed on as a senior minister, a path taken by all former premiers.

While victory in the election is assured, Wong must clinch a stronger wing after the PAP suffered a setback in 2020 polls over voters' rising discontent with the government.

Singapore under Lee's rule flourished into one of the world's wealthiest nations, but it also became one of the most expensive cities to live in. The PAP has also been criticized for tight government control and a government-knows-best stance, media censorship and the use of oppressive laws against dissidents.

Issues like widening income disparity, increasingly unaffordable housing, overcrowding caused by immigration and restrictions

on free speech are often used as fodder by the opposition and have loosened the PAP's grip on power.

"One-party dominance in Singapore is weakening but the challenge for the PAP leadership is to slow down the process," said Eugene Tan, a law professor at Singapore Management University.

Bridget Welsh, a Southeast Asia political expert, said Lee "will be remembered for steering Singapore quietly and successfully through turbulent waters from the 2008-2009 financial crisis and COVID-19. He helped to build resilience in Singapore. ... (But) Singapore has become a more complex society, with more open demands, making the task of governing (for Wong) more challenging."

Wong was born seven years after Singapore separated from Malaysia and gained independence. His father was a migrant from China and his mother was a tea-

cher. Unlike many senior PAP leaders, he didn't have a privileged background. Observers have said this could help him relate better with the common citizen.

Wong earned a scholarship to study in the U.S., later obtaining a masters' degree in economics from the University of Michigan and another masters' degree in public administration from Harvard University. He spent years in public service including as a principal private secretary to Lee before entering politics in 2011. He has handled the defense, education, communications, culture, community and youth portfolios.

Like Lee, Wong is active on social media. Married with no children, he doesn't reveal much about his private life but has offered glimpses into his interests in music and dogs, and he is a fan of tennis star Roger Federer. He often posts videos of himself playing guitar.

Wong has launched a Forward Singapore plan to let Singaporeans have a say in how to develop a more balanced, vibrant and inclusive agenda for the next generation.

"This is my promise to all Singaporeans. I will serve you with all my heart. I will never settle for the status quo. I will always seek better ways to make tomorrow better than today," Wong said.

Law professor Tan said Wong's immediate priorities will be to address issues including the rising cost of living, housing affordability and job security. "Bread-and-butter issues remain vital even for a prosperous country, partly because of Singapore's innate vulnerabilities," he said. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN and the United States signed an arrangement to jointly develop a new type of missile defense system as the allies seek to defend against the growing threat of hypersonic weapons, which are possessed by China and Russia and being tested by North Korea.

The project was initially agreed between Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and U.S. President Joe Biden at their summit last August and reaffirmed between the leaders during Kishida's April visit to Washington. The Glide Sphere Interceptor is planned for deployment by the mid-2030s.

## DEFENSE

## Japan, US move ahead in co-developing hypersonic weapons interceptor

Wednesday's agreement determines the allocation of responsibility and decision-making process, a first major step in the project, Japanese defense ministry officials said. They hope to decide on Japanese contractors and start the development process by March 2025.

Hypersonic weapons are designed to exceed Mach 5, or five times the

speed of sound, posing a threat to regional missile-defense systems with their speed and maneuverability. Developing interceptors of them is a challenge.

Japan's defense ministry called it a "pressing issue" and noted that hypersonic weapons in the region have dramatically improved in recent years.

Under the arrange-

ment, Japan is responsible for developing a part at the interceptor's tip that separates in space to destroy the incoming warhead, as well as its rocket motors, officials said.

Japan has earmarked 75.7 billion yen (\$490 million) for initial development and testing of the interceptor, according to the defense ministry. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



ISRAEL-HAMAS

# UN's top court opens hearings on the Israeli military's incursion into Rafah

MOLLY QUELL, THE HAGUE

**S**OUTH Africa told the United Nations' top court yesterday the situation in Gaza has reached "a new and horrific stage" as it sought emergency measures to halt Israel's military operation in the enclave's southern city of Rafah.

It was the third time the International Court of Justice held hearings on the conflict in Gaza since South Africa filed proceedings at The Hague-based court in December accusing Israel of genocide.

"Seven months ago South Africa could not have imagined that Gaza would be largely wiped off the map," the country's ambassador to the Netherlands, Vusimuzi Madonsela, told the panel of 15 international judges yesterday.

During hearings earlier this year, Israel strongly denied committing genocide in Gaza, saying it does all it can to spare civilians and is only targeting Hamas mi-



South Africa's agents Vusimuzi Madonsela, seated right, and Cornelius Scholtz, seated second left, talk prior to the start of hearings at the International Court of Justice, in The Hague, Netherlands, yesterday

litants. The country says Rafah is the last stronghold of the militant group.

South Africa argues that the military operation has far surpassed justified self-defense. "Israel's actions in Rafah are part of the end game. This is the last step in the destruction of Gaza," lawyer Vaughan Lowe said.

According to the latest request, the previous preliminary orders by The Hague-based court were not sufficient to address "a brutal military attack on the sole remaining refuge for the people of Gaza." Israel will be allowed to answer the accusations on Friday.

In January, judges ordered

Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza, but the panel stopped short of ordering an end to the military offensive that has laid waste to the Palestinian enclave. In a second order in March, the court said Israel must take measures to improve the humanitarian situation.

South Africa has to date submitted four requests for the international court to investigate Israel. It was granted a hearing three times.

Most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced since fighting began.

The war began with a Hamas attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which Palestinian militants killed around 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages. Gaza's Health Ministry says over 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, without distinguishing between civilians and combatants in its count.

South Africa initiated proceedings in December 2023 and sees the legal campaign as rooted in issues central to its identity. Its governing party, the African National Congress, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the occupied West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Blacks to "homelands." Apartheid ended in 1994.

On Sunday, Egypt announced it plans to join the case. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Israeli military actions "constitute a flagrant violation of international law, humanitarian law, and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 regarding the protection of civilians during wartime."

Several countries have also indicated they plan to intervene, but so far only Libya, Nicaragua and Colombia have filed formal requests to do so. **MDT/AP**

# Facebook and Instagram face fresh scrutiny under the European Union's strict digital regulations

KELVIN CHAN, LONDON

**T**HE European Union opened fresh investigations yesterday into Facebook and Instagram over suspicions that they're failing to protect children online, in violation of the bloc's strict digital regulations for social media platforms.

It's the latest round of scrutiny for parent company Meta Platforms under the 27-nation EU's Digital Services Act, a sweeping set of regulations that took effect last year with the goal of cleaning up online platforms and protecting internet users.

The European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, said it's concerned that the algorithmic systems used by Facebook and Instagram to recom-



mend content like videos and posts could "exploit the weaknesses and inexperience" of children and stimulate "addictive behaviour." It's worried that these systems could reinforce the so-called "rabbit hole" effect that leads users to in-

creasingly disturbing content.

The commission is also looking into Meta's use of age verification tools to prevent children from accessing Facebook or Instagram, or be shown inappropriate content.

Only children aged 13 and older are allowed to use the platforms. It's also looking into whether the company is complying with DSA rules requiring a high level of privacy, safety and security for minors.

"We want young people

to have safe, age-appropriate experiences online and have spent a decade developing more than 50 tools and policies designed to protect them," Meta said in a prepared statement. "This is a challenge the whole industry is facing, and we look forward to sharing details of our work with the European Commission."

They're the latest DSA cases to focus on child protection under the DSA, which requires platforms to put in place stringent measures to protect minors. The commission opened two separate investigations earlier this year into TikTok over concerns about risks to kids.

"We are not convinced that Meta has done enough to comply with the DSA obligations — to mitigate

the risks of negative effects to the physical and mental health of young Europeans on its platforms Facebook and Instagram," European Commissioner Thierry Breton said in a social media post.

The cases announced Thursday aren't the first for Facebook and Instagram. They're already being investigated under the DSA over concerns they're not doing enough to stop foreign disinformation ahead of EU elections next month.

Social media platform X and ecommerce site AliExpress are also being investigated over their compliance with the EU rules.

There's no deadline for the investigations to wrap up. Violations could result in fines of up to 6% of a company's annual worldwide revenue. **MDT/AP**

# SLOVAK POLITICIANS CALL FOR COOLING POLITICAL DIVISIONS AFTER PRIME MINISTER IS SHOT

BELA SZANDELSZKY, PETR DAVID JOSEK & PHILIPP JENNE, BANSKA BYSTRICA

**S**LOVAK politicians have called for calm in the Central European country after Prime Minister Robert Fico was shot multiple times by a would-be assassin on Wednesday, a rare instance of political violence that prompted soul-searching among leaders in the deeply divided society.

Fico was in serious but stable condition yesterday, a hospital official said, after the populist leader was hit multiple times in an attempt on his life that shook the small country and reverberated across the continent weeks before European elections.

A suspect was in custody, and Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estok said Wednesday that an initial investigation found "a clear political motivation" behind the attack on Fico while he was attending a government meeting in a former coal mining town.

The minister did not specify what the motivation was. Fico has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond, and his return to power last year on a pro-Russian, anti-American message led to even greater worries among fellow European Union members that he would abandon his country's pro-Western course.

The attempt on Fico's life came at a time of high division in Slovakia, as thousands of demonstrators have repeatedly rallied in the capital and around the country to protest his policies. It also comes just ahead of June elections for the European Parliament.

Slovakia's outgoing and next presidents — political rivals — appeared together in an appeal for Slovaks to overcome their increasingly tense political differences for the good of the country.

Outgoing President Zuzana Caputova, an opponent of Fico, said yesterday that the heads of the country's political parties would meet in an effort to bring calm, saying the attack was a reflection of an increasingly polarized society.

"Let us step out of the vicious circle of hatred and mutual accusations," Caputova said at a news conference in the capital Bratislava. "What happened yesterday was an individual act. But the tense



Police arrest a man after Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico was shot and injured following the cabinet's away-from-home session in the town of Handlova, Slovakia, Wednesday

atmosphere of hatred was our collective work."

President-Elect Peter Pellegrini called on political parties to suspend or scale back their campaigns for European elections, which will be held June 6-9, to prevent "stand-offs and mutual accusations between politicians."

"If there is anything that the people of Slovakia urgently need today, it is at least basic agreement and unity among the Slovak political representation. And if not consensus, then please, at least civilized ways of discussing among each other," Pellegrini said.

Fico's government, elected last September, has caused controversy by halting arms deliveries to Ukraine, and has plans to amend the penal code to eliminate a special anti-graft prosecutor and to take control of public media. His critics worry that he will lead Slovakia — a nation of 5.4 million that belongs to NATO — down a more autocratic path.

Zuzana Eliasova, a resident of the capital Bratislava, said the attack on Fico was a "shock" to the nation and an attack on democracy at a time when political tensions were already running high.

"I believe that a lot of people or even the whole society will look into their conscience, because the polarization

here has been huge among all different parts of society," she said.

Doctors performed a five-hour operation on Fico, who was initially reported to be in life-threatening condition, according to director of the F.D. Roosevelt Hospital in Banska Bystrica, Miriam Lapunikova. He is being treated in an intensive care unit.

Five shots were fired outside a cultural center in the town of Handlova, nearly 140 kilometers (85 miles) northeast of the capital, government officials said.

Slovak police have provided no information on the identity of the shooter. But unconfirmed media reports suggested he was a 71-year-old retiree who was known as an amateur poet, and may have previously worked as a security guard at a mall in the country's southwest.

Slovakia's Security Council met in the capital of Bratislava yesterday to discuss the situation, a government office said, adding that a cabinet meeting would follow.

Fico returned to power in Slovakia last year, having previously served twice as prime minister. He and his Smer party have most often been described as left-populist, though he has also been compared to politicians on the right like the nationalist prime minister of

neighboring Hungary, Viktor Orbán.

Fico's comeback caused concern among his critics that he and his party — which had long been tainted by scandal — would lead Slovakia away from the Western mainstream. He promised a tough stance against migration and non-governmental organizations and campaigned against LGBTQ+ rights.

Despite the controversy surrounding Fico's leadership, condemnation of the attack came from both his allies and adversaries. On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a message to President Caputova, expressing his support and wishing the prime minister a fast and full recovery.

"This atrocious crime cannot be justified," Putin said in the message released by the Kremlin. "I know Robert Fico as a courageous and strong-willed person. I truly hope these personal qualities will help him overcome this harsh situation."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also denounced the violence against a neighboring country's head of government.

"Every effort should be made to ensure that violence does not become the norm in any country, form or sphere," he said. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1978 CHARLIE CHAPLIN'S STOLEN BODY FOUND



The coffin containing the body of Charlie Chaplin - missing since his grave was robbed 11 weeks ago - has been found.

It was dug up from a field about a mile away from the Chaplin home in Corsier near Lausanne, Switzerland.

The legendary comedian died on Christmas Day last year, aged 88. He was buried two days later in the village of Corsier in the hills above Lake Geneva.

Swiss police have arrested two men - a Pole aged 24 and a Bulgarian aged 38 - and say they have confessed to stealing the coffin and reburial it.

Names of the accused have not been released, but police say they are both motor mechanics.

They were traced after police kept a watch on 200 phone kiosks and tapped the Chaplins' phone after the family received ransom demands of £400,000 for return of the body after it went missing in March.

Sir Charles' 51-year-old widow, Lady Oona Chaplin, refused to pay up saying: "Charlie would have thought it ridiculous." In further calls the kidnapers made threats to harm her two youngest children.

The family kept silent about the ransom demands and various rumours circulated about the missing coffin.

One Hollywood report suggested it had been dug up because Sir Charles was a Jew buried in a gentile cemetery.

Lady Chaplin, daughter of playwright Eugene O'Neill inherited about £12m after the death of her husband.

The couple and their eight children have been living in Lausanne since 1952.

A spokesman for the Chaplins said: "The family is very happy and relieved that this ordeal is over."

Superintendent Gabriel Cettou, the head of the Geneva police, said the two men would be charged with attempted extortion and disturbing the peace of the dead.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Roman Wardas, a 24-year-old Pole, and Gantscho Ganev, a 38-year-old Bulgarian, were convicted in December 1978 of stealing the coffin and trying to extort £400,000 from the Chaplin family.

Wardas was sentenced to four-and-a-half-years' hard labour for masterminding the bizarre plot to hold Charlie Chaplin's body to ransom. He said he was inspired by an article about a similar case in an Italian newspaper and believed it was the answer to his financial difficulties.

His Bulgarian accomplice, described as a "muscle man" with a limited sense of responsibility, was given a suspended 18-month sentence.

Sir Charles' coffin was reburied in a theft-proof concrete grave.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Your attention and energy are in demand. Rely on your team and guard sacred alone time for exercise and peace. Ask for what's needed.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Have fun. Someone's saying nice things about you. Listen for love and find it everywhere. Discuss passions, interests and curiosities. Consider wild possibilities.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
Strengthen domestic infrastructure with home improvement projects. It's easy (and expensive) to overextend. Use what you have where possible. Keep it elegantly simple.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Use your creative and communication skills to advance a heartfelt project. Reach out to your networks for support. Invent new possibilities and share them.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
Discover new possibilities in conversation. Monitor your market. Grab a lucrative opportunity. Don't lose what you've got to chase a mirage. Invest in stability.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Energize a personal project. Refine your vision or mission statement. Articulate what you see possible. Invite participation. Share your ideas far and wide.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Allow yourself time for peaceful rest and meditation. Patiently plan your moves. Imagine perfection and a logical pathway. Relax with art, music and nature.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
One good connection leads to another. Talk with friends and discover unexpected solutions. Everything you need is within your networks. Reach out and collaborate.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
A professional spotlight shines your way. Your influence is rising. Polish your materials and prepare to launch. You're especially creative. Put something wonderful together.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Adventure beckons. Study your route and make reservations. Choose reality over fantasy. Study options. Your research can unveil fascinating treasures. Dig into it.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Your financial management is appreciated. Don't brag or complain about money. Costs may be higher than expected. Move quickly to grab a lucrative opportunity.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Have fun together. You and your partner can build something wonderful. Play around with wild ideas. Discuss interests and passions. Invent new possibilities. Get creative.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sanson**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

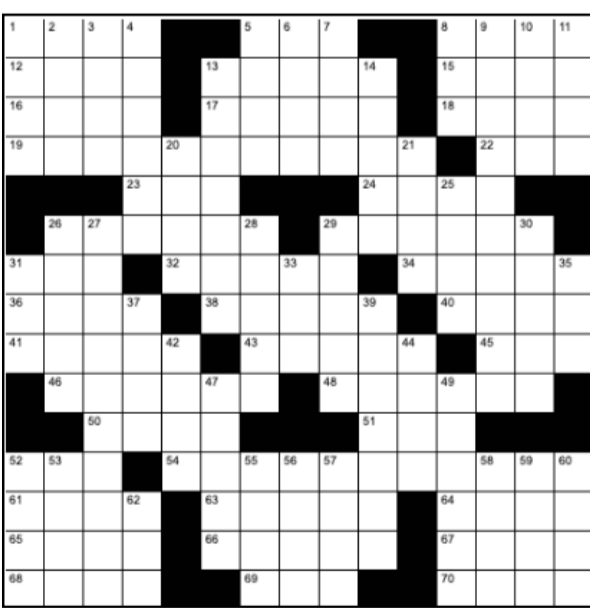
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	17	34	fine
Changchun	9	29	cloudy
Chengdu	20	30	rain
Chongqing	22	32	cloudy
Fuzhou	15	29	cloudy
Guangzhou	21	32	cloudy
Guiyang	15	20	rain
Haikou	25	31	cloudy
Hangzhou	14	31	fine
Harbin	10	27	cloudy
Hefei	16	32	fine
Nanjing	16	31	fine
Shanghai	18	29	fine
Taipei	20	27	cloudy
Wuhan	18	32	fine
Hong Kong	24	27	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	7	19	showers
Frankfurt	12	16	rain
Paris	12	21	cloudy
London	13	22	cloudy
New York	14	23	cloudy

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Antitoxins; 5- Neptune's domain; 8- Upper limbs; 12- Trompe l'...; 13- Babe Ruth's number; 15- Chair; 16- Shut with force; 17- Give guns again; 18- Unattractive; 19- An organization; 22- A really big shoe?; 23- Plant juice; 24- Adolescent; 26- Security round; 29- Directing head; 31- Popular ISP; 32- Proverb, saying; 34- Jeopardy; 36- Catcher's glove; 38- Look of disdain; 40- Grandma; 41- Wee hour; 43- Senior; 45- Sugar amt.; 46- Picks up the check; 48- River of song; 50- Jai \_\_\_; 51- \_\_\_ Grande; 52- Scrap; 54- Shaman; 61- Journalist Jacob; 63- Ignited again; 64- Carry; 65- Prince William's school; 66- Connected series of rooms; 67- A big fan of; 68- Letterman rival; 69- Speak; 70- James of "The Godfather";

DOWN 1- Slammin' Sammy; 2- Slippery fish; 3- Narrow inlets; 4- Just about; 5- Queens stadium; 6- QED middle; 7- Ethereal; Prefix; 8- Sun Devils' sch.; 9- Reconstitute; 10- Boy or man; 11- Eye problem; 13- Camera stands; 14- Act badly; 20- Irene of "Fame"; 21- Kind of tide; 25- Genesis setting; 26- Sharp end; 27- Modification; 28- Bowling alley divisions; 29- West Yorkshire city; 30- Washer cycle; 31- Latin lover's word; 33- Hair goop; 35- One circuit; 37- Chinese weight; 39- Big revision; 42- Sir's counterpart; 44- Drops from the sky; 47- Layers; 49- Originating in the mind; 52- Baseball's Hershiser; 53- Religious practice; 55- \_\_\_ ex machina; 56- Bones found in the hip; 57- Large town; 58- \_\_\_ Lisa; 59- \_\_\_ boy!; 60- Inert gas; 62- \_\_\_-Cat;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

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



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**Va Fat**  
HKD 3,780,000 2 bed 1 bath

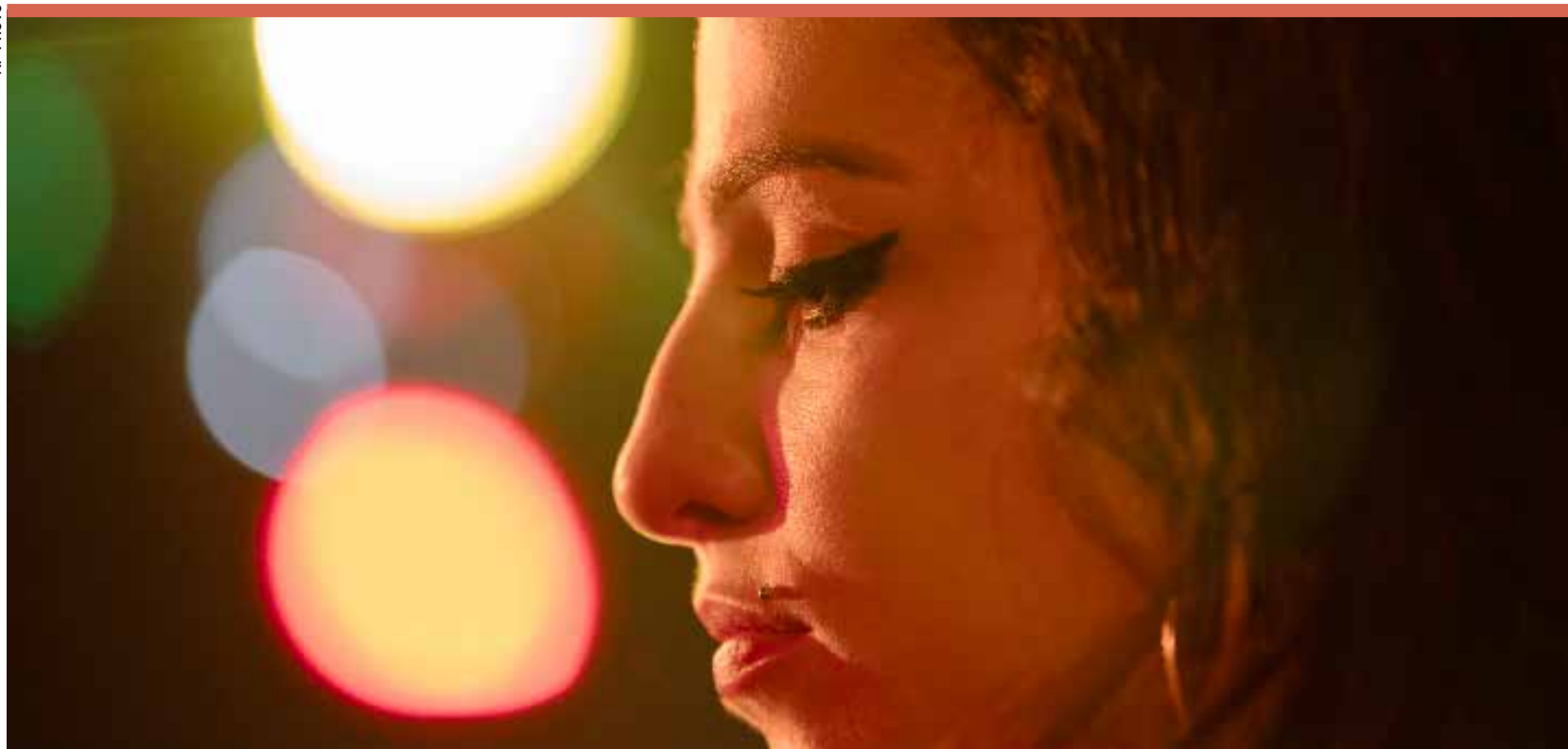
**Tou Un**  
HKD 2,980,000 1 bed 1 bath

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

AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

AP PHOTO



DRIVE IN

# AMY WINEHOUSE STORY FLATTENED IN FRUSTRATING BIOPIC 'BACK TO BLACK'

LINDSEY BAHR,  
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

“**B**ack to Black “ as a movie is a tame and mediocre affair. A conventionally told biopic about

a talented artist who became famous, struggled with drugs, depression and bulimia, and died early. There are nice performances from gifted actors like Marisa Abela, Jack O’Connell,

Eddie Marsan and Lesley Manville, and a soundtrack of hits that helps fill the space.

But as a portrait of Amy Winehouse? It is simply dreadful.

The main problem with any movie about Winehouse is that a defining film already exists — Asif Kapadia’s Oscar-winning documentary “Amy,” released four years after her death from alcohol poisoning at age 27. Told through archival material, home videos and observations from those around her, it felt as intimate and unfiltered as a diary.

“Amy” was a sobering portrait of addiction, fame and complicity that also let you get to know and love the person behind the songs, the eyeliner, the beehive, the bloodied ballet slippers and the invasive paparazzi photos. It was no one’s idea of sensationalistic and she’s doing most of the talking.

“Amy” was also a movie that didn’t sit well with her grieving family. Her father, Mitch Winehouse, said it was misleading and contained “basic untruths.” After it won the Oscar, he doubled down saying that it had no bearing on her life and was manipulative. Kapadia, he said, was more exploitative of his daughter than anyone.

Following her death, Mitch started a foundation in her name to help young people and wrote a book about her and being the father of an addict. Her mother Janis narrated a documentary, “Reclaiming Amy,” released in 2011. And after years of declining to participate in a narrative

biopic, the estate decided to allow one with full use of the songs. Like many musical biopics made alongside an estate, it’s hard not to look at “Back to Black” skeptically, wondering whose interests the film is serving.

Sam Taylor-Johnson, who directed, has said that she wanted to take the idea of “blame” out of the equation, that the family had zero input on her cut and would not benefit financially. And yet it also seems like a direct response to Kapadia’s film, depicting more than a few key moments wildly differently. They’re not just shown in a different light — some are telling a completely different story.

The screenplay by Matthew Greenhalgh is empathetic to the ex-husband Blake Fielder-Civil (O’Connell) and her father Mitch (Marsan), both of whom have been villainized over the years. In the film, most are just caught up in a whirl of inevitability and the retrospective blur of grief.

There seems to be an excessive amount of rationalizing in the way everyone involved talks about “Back to Black,” over justifying its existence and its choices. But just because everyone keeps telling us that it’s a celebration doesn’t mean that we have to get on board. I’m not sure what is celebratory about dramatizing this tragedy, or helpful, or

artful, or particularly revelatory about it either. The media, for example, is reduced mainly to the paparazzi camped outside her place as though that’s where the problem stopped.

Taylor-Johnson has said she didn’t want to glamorize depression, addiction or bulimia either, but the latter, which she struggled with before she was famous, is barely even acknowledged. Depiction of eating disorders is inherently fraught, but there had to have been a way to address such a large part of her life and self-image more directly.

Though linear, the story is also oddly confusing, assuming that the audience knows many details of her life (like, say, the bulimia) and the people in it. The film rushes through major career moments in montage, seeming to slow down only for a few things: A performance, Amy’s face in various forms of drunken distress and agony or scenes with her and Blake. Was it attempting a freewheeling jazz form, or is it just messy?

In some ways, this portrait of Amy Winehouse makes her immense talent the sideshow and her obsession/romance/heartache over Blake the defining story of her adult life. This is at least somewhat redeemed by the chemistry between Abela and O’Connell, who look far too glowing and healthy to be believable as heroin addicts.

But the greatest failing is how shockingly cliché the ending is. For all of “Back to Black’s” tiptoeing around delicate subjects, its romantically photographed sendoff to Amy is perhaps the most dangerously glamorized shot in the film. It doesn’t even fade to black after a title card announces her death. Before anyone can feel anything, they’ve cut to Amy telling the audience that all she wants is for her songs to make people forget about their troubles for a bit.

By this point, it reads more like a closing statement for a film that never wanted to challenge, offend or move anyone. Mission accomplished.

“Back to Black,” a Focus Features release in theaters Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for “drug use, language throughout, sexual content and nudity.” Running time: 122 minutes.  
★ ★ ★ ★

AD



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**FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS**



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Chef Olivier Elzer



TASTE OF EDESIA

# Provençal delights

IRENE SAM, MDT

**D**AYS ago, epicureans were treated to a sumptuous evening filled with quintessence Provençal culinary delights curated by MGM's team at **Aux Beaux Arts**, together with Chef Olivier Elzer.

Olivier Elzer is a French chef who has garnered a total of 27 Michelin stars in 16 consecutive years while working in France and Hong Kong. He is widely recognized for his Two-Miche-

lin-Stars restaurant L'Envol in Hong Kong and Seasons by Oliver E. in Taiwan. In view of his success with the two restaurants, Elzer ventured into the casual dining genre by establishing Clarence in Hong Kong in 2022.

Together with his talented team from Clarence, including Executive Chef Simon So, Chief Sommelier Tristan Pommier, and Mixologist Ben Wall, Chef Elzer created an experience meticulously designed to paint a culinary canvas of quintes-

sence cuisines of the land and sea from Marseille to the border of Monaco, across the crystal blue waters of the Mediterranean coast, showcasing the unique gastronomic essence of ultimate freshness, diverse flavours and aesthetics.

The celebrated collaboration offered guests with the options of à la carte and degustation set menu, including signature dishes of Clarence, such as Skate Wing Cooked Teppan, Lamb Shoulder like Navarin, Chocolate Croffle.

MDT was particularly impressed with desserts introduced by Chef Steven Jin, which included Tarte Tropezienne, Melon Calisson Colombier, and Coffee Hazelnut Chanteclair Couve.

## Guest DJ and Mixology at W

**T**HIS month, **W Macau - Studio City** blends incredible music with unforgettable local and global mixology delights. At **Blind Tiger**, esteemed global mixologists will showcase their craft against different creations from the hotel's Head Mixologist, Samio Choi, delivering ingenuity with local twists and a fusion of flavour and techniques from around the world. During even-numbered months, Living Room will shine the spotlight on emerging local mixologists, as well as W Macau - Studio City's very own skilled team of mixologists, offering innovative creations that celebrate Macau's vibrant

cocktail culture, and serving as a platform to showcase the exceptional talents of the city's beverage industry.

Today and tomorrow at 9PM, Blind Tiger will be hosting an exclusive event 'Blind Tiger X Plantation Rum - MIXO Night', where Samio will be joined by guest mixologist, Christyne Lee to craft exclusive cocktails infused with the rich flavors of Plantation Rum. Christyne is the Head Bartender of Singapore's Tess Bar & Kitchen and one of today's most accomplished female mixologists. With a knack for creating crowd-pleasing classics with a modern interpretation, Christyne has garnered

many achievements including the World Gourmet Summit Singapore Mixologist of the Year in 2022, and she has also won The Naked Grouse Cocktail Challenge in 2019.

At the 'Blind Tiger X Plantation Rum - MIXO Night', Christyne will present exclusive botanically inspired cocktails such as MYSTIC AURORA, which incorporates Plantation Pineapple Rum, lavender cordial, yuzu juice and soda water, and CORAL BLOSSOM, which is a blend of Plantation 3 Stars Rum, sake, cherry blossom cordial, elderflower liqueur, and lemon juice. Contrastingly, Samio will be serving drinks

inspired by the concept of 'behind the kitchen'. His exclusive menu will include drinks like FORMOSA MEMORY, which is a blend of Plantation 5 Year Barbados Rum, honey herbal jelly liqueur, skinless chili pepper extract, oriental beauty tea, and micro bubbles, as well as ANTI - HOT AND SOUR which is a Plantation pineapple rum based drink with the flavors of passion-fruit, yuzu, wine vinegar, pepper, and hellfire bitter. Setting the tone and bringing guests together during this two-night event will be local guest DJ ZIYANG, with exclusively curated sets that deliver a unique blend of sound. IS



**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**BIDEN UNWISELY  
 DONS THE MANTLE  
 OF 'TARIFF MAN'**

When asked at a news conference in Stockholm [earlier this week] whether they support the European Union following the United States in slapping punitive tariffs on Chinese electric cars, along with other high-tech and new energy products, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the visiting German Chancellor Olaf Scholz gave a clear answer — No.

“As far as tariffs are concerned, we are in agreement that it is a bad idea to dismantle global trade,” Kristersson told reporters on the second day of Scholz’s visit to Sweden.

Scholz noted that half of the EVs imported into Europe from China were produced by Western manufacturers, including US EV makers, hinting that considerable parts of the raised tariffs will be paid by Western companies and consumers.

Yet that has not deterred Biden who has done a full 180 on tariffs. Back in 2019, Biden slammed then US president Donald Trump’s move to impose tariffs on \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports.

“Trump doesn’t get the basics. He thinks his tariffs are being paid by China,” Biden said at the time. “Any freshman econ student could tell you that the American people are paying his tariffs.” Then in 2020, while campaigning for the White House, Biden vowed to remove Trump’s tariffs if elected.

Now Biden has not only maintained most of the broad-based tariffs from the Trump-era that he was once highly critical of, but also added to them. Touting it as a “smart approach” that precisely targets the products of a selected few industries in which he is “determined to ensure America leads the world”.

His trade representative was left racking her brain to try and justify Biden’s apparent reversal on the tariffs at a White House news conference on Tuesday.

That US Trade Representative Katherine Tai denied the aforementioned side effects of the China-related tariffs, which she once cited as reasons to press the Biden administration to reexamine and cancel the Trump tariffs, is a telling sign that the Biden administration has introduced the new tariffs for its own political gains.

The US National Retail Federation was more forthcoming, calling on Biden to repeal the tariffs, arguing that “as consumers continue to battle inflation, the last thing the administration should be doing is placing additional taxes on imported products that will be paid by US importers and eventually US consumers”.

The reason why Biden has maintained the Trump tariffs and introduced new ones is because he cannot afford to show weakness on China-related issues ahead of the election. But his miscalculation on that is evident. Trump drew scorn in 2018, after declaring, “I am a tariff man.” Biden now looks like one too, and he has thrown himself into a pit dug by Trump only to lift the latter out of it.

**FIFA MOVES TOWARD ENDING SOCCER TRADITION AND  
 LETTING LEAGUE GAMES BE STAGED IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

**THE  
 BUZZ**

FIFA recently moved toward ending decades of soccer tradition by ordering a review of its policy that currently blocks domestic league games being played in other countries.

Fans are likely to object to their teams’ home matches potentially being moved thousands of miles away, though it has become routine for United States pro sports leagues to stage games in Europe, Asia and South America that help build their brands and fan bases.

One soccer great, who has worked for FIFA presenting televi-

sed events, objected to the plan within hours.

“No. No. No,” Gary Lineker, the former England and Barcelona striker who won the Golden Boot as top scorer at the 1986 World Cup, wrote on social media.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia are expected to be willing hosts to lure competitive games from top European countries, and FIFA recently agreed to withdraw from an ongoing court case in New York filed by promoter Relevent to challenge the veto on organizing competitive league games.

**BILLIONAIRE FRANK  
 MCCOURT SAYS HE’S  
 PUTTING TOGETHER  
 A CONSORTIUM TO  
 BUY TIKTOK**

HALELUYA HADERO

**B**ILLIONAIRE businessman and real estate mogul Frank McCourt said earlier this week that he’s putting together a consortium to purchase TikTok’s U.S. business, adding to the number of investors hoping to benefit from a new federal law that requires TikTok’s China-based parent company to sell the popular platform or face a ban.

McCourt is organizing the bid in consultation with the investment bank Guggenheim Securities and “with the goal of placing people and data empowerment at the center of the platform’s design and purpose,” according to an announcement on the website of his Project Liberty initiative.

If a sale occurs, the former owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers said he would plan to restructure TikTok and give more agency to people “over their digital identities and data” by migrating the platform to an open-source protocol that allows for more transparency.

McCourt said he doesn’t use TikTok personally, but his businesses and internet-focused initiative do. The bid is an extension of his long-running interest in re-making the internet with better data privacy protections, an effort he’s focused on through Project Liberty. He founded the project “to build a new digital civic architecture for a safer, healthier internet,” according to the organization’s website.

So far, his vision to re-make TikTok has received the backing of Jonathan Haidt, a well-known social psychologist whose



US businessman Frank McCourt

recent book “The Anxious Generation” focuses on how smartphones and social media have contributed to a mental health crisis among young people.

“We thought this was a really fantastic opportunity to accelerate the creation of an alternative internet,” McCourt told The Associated Press in an interview.

Other investors, including former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, have expressed a desire to purchase TikTok. However, parent company ByteDance has already said it does not plan to sell the platform. Some experts have also noted the Chinese government is also unlikely to approve a sale — especially not one that includes the recommendation engine that powers the videos that populates users’ feeds.

McCourt said he’s not interested in TikTok’s current algorithm because “top-down” recommendation engines conflict with his view of how such platforms should be managed. He also thinks ByteDance will sell TikTok’s U.S. business at some point.

For now, though, the company has been fighting back against the law

passed last month, which would disrupt one of its most lucrative markets.

Last week, ByteDance and TikTok filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government to block the law from going into effect. On Tuesday, eight TikTok creators filed their own challenge, arguing the law violates their First Amendment rights to free speech.

The company also has been waging a legal battle in Montana to block a state law that would ban the video-sharing platform.

On Tuesday, TikTok, Montana users and the state of Montana agreed to put a stay on a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Montana’s first-in-the-nation ban while the federal lawsuits are decided.

Montana’s law, which was temporarily blocked before it could take effect on Jan. 1, would be nullified if a company that is not based in a country designated as a foreign adversary acquires TikTok.

McCourt is worth \$1.4 billion, according to Forbes. He sold the Dodgers for \$2 billion in 2012 to Guggenheim Baseball Management. In 2016, he bought the French soccer club Marseille. **MDT/AP**



**South Korean** court ruled in favor of the government’s contentious push to drastically boost medical school admissions yesterday, posing a setback to concerted efforts by incumbent doctors to spike the plan. A standoff between the government and doctors opposed to the plan has shaken the country’s medical system for months. With broad support from senior doctors, more than 12,000 junior doctors, who are medical interns and residents, remain off the job since February.



**South Africa** told the United Nations’ top court yesterday the situation in Gaza has reached “a new and horrific stage” as it sought emergency measures to halt Israel’s military operation in the enclave’s southern city of Rafah. It was the third time the International Court of Justice held hearings on the conflict in Gaza since South Africa filed proceedings at The Hague-based court in December accusing Israel of genocide. **More on p13**

**Zimbabwe** An Islamist group operating in the northern Cabo Delgado province used boys as young as 13 in attacks on a town last week and residents who were forced to flee the fighting recognized some of the child soldiers as their missing relatives, advocacy group Human Rights Watch said Wednesday. Al-Shabab, which is affiliated to the Islamic State group, has previously been accused by UN agencies of kidnapping children and using them as soldiers in its insurgency in the region, which began in 2017.

**Venezuela** The son-in-law of a prominent opposition leader has pleaded guilty to money laundering charges for his role in a vast bribery conspiracy to siphon USD1.2 billion from the state-owned oil company. As part of his plea agreement announced earlier this week in federal court in Miami, Fernando Vuteff admitted to earning at least \$4.1 million from a Spanish real estate company and financial institutions in Europe and Malta used to launder money on behalf of several Venezuelan government insiders.

## • A new era of gaming



“Wow!” exclaimed Raymond Ho as he walked into Sands Macao for the first time in 2004. He remembers the sky-high ceilings, the enormous chandelier over the escalator, the sleek green-felted gaming tables, and a palpable sense of good things to come.

Until 2002, gaming remained a monopoly in Macao, and it was exciting to see the city entering a new era of business. “When I heard an American company was going to open a huge casino, I was eager to join because I thought it had the potential to become massive, and I wanted to be part of that,” recalls Raymond. There was just one problem: He had never worked in a casino before. “I had zero experience. But thankfully, the company invests in team member training,” he says.

Over the past 20 years, he has built a career with Sands China and is now the vice president of VIP gaming operations, overseeing Sands Macao and The Plaza Macao. From the gaming floor to the executive office, he’s had a unique chance to observe the industry’s seismic shifts. “Sands Macao has had a great impact. Before the integrated resort opened, most people had negative impressions of Macao’s gaming industry. Not many people wanted to work in it – but Sands Macao changed that by diversifying the whole experience,” he says.

The integrated resort also paved the way for Sands China to develop world-class infrastructure across the city for meetings, conferences, and events of all sizes. “Twenty years ago, finding a property in Macao with more than 500 rooms was impossible,” he says. “Now, The Venetian Macao alone has 3,000 rooms and suites. And Sands China has made it happen.”

## • Driving into the future

When Armindo Gonçalves was a teenager, he wasn’t sure where life would take him. Exploring his options, he tagged along with a friend to a Sands Macao recruitment fair. He was hired as a chauffeur in 2003, before the integrated resort officially opened. It was a perfect fit for Armindo. As a car enthusiast, he appreciated the chance to drive many rare and interesting vehicles.

Very quickly, Armindo stood out as a capable driver. He was calm and responsible, with an innate sense for when his guests wanted to chat or enjoy a quiet ride. So, when it came time to assign a chauffeur to Sheldon Adelson, Armindo’s manager knew he was the person for the job.

After that first assignment, Armindo became Adelson’s go-to chauffeur for the next 18 years. Every time Adelson came to Macao, Armindo drove for him, and although Adelson tended to be serious and taciturn en route, they established a rapport over the years.

Armindo’s dedication paid off, and in 2017, he was promoted to assistant manager of limousine services. Since he joined Sands Macao 21 years ago, he has watched the city change through his windscreen, enjoying a front-row seat as new properties arise from the reclaimed soil of Cotai. “It all started with Sands Macao,” he says. When I joined in 2003, it was the only integrated resort. Now, we have a thriving hospitality industry, and Mr. Adelson’s vision has completely transformed Cotai.”



# Where legends begin Celebrating 20 years of glamour

Join us in celebrating the magnificent 20-year legacy of Sands Macao! Being the first Las Vegas-style integrated resort in Macao, Sands Macao has been instrumental in introducing numerous 'firsts' to the city. From the introduction of the first authentic American steakhouse, Copa Steakhouse, Sands Macao has evolved into a must-visit destination for both local and international food enthusiasts. To mark this momentous milestone, Sands Macao has undergone innovative enhancements to its dining offerings and prepared exclusive dining privileges for our valued guests.

## A symphony of flavours composed by visionaries of taste



Wong Tak Wing, Senior Chef

### Golden Court

At the award-winning Cantonese restaurant Golden Court, Senior Chef Wong Tak Wing, who has worked at noted Cantonese restaurants including Michelin-starred, is on a mission to make the restaurant a top choice for inventive and refined Cantonese cuisine. This can be seen and tasted in the restaurant's signature dishes, such as the fragrant double-boiled pigeon soup with bird's nest and Jinhua ham, the creative Macao sole cooked two ways, and the juicy baked chicken in rock salt with extra crispy skin.



Daniel Verissimo Sousa, Chef

### Copa Steakhouse

Heading up Macao's first authentic American style steakhouse, Copa Steakhouse, is Portuguese native Daniel Verissimo Sousa. Chef Sousa has worked at prestigious and Michelin-starred restaurants and hotels in Europe and Macao and has introduced a number of exceptional signatures that reflect this experience and his personal style. This includes the classic pan-fried jumbo lump crab cake; and the perfectly seared USDA prime rib eye steak elevated by a selection of sauces.



## Sands Macao 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary dining privileges

As a token of gratitude, the 'Sands Macao 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dining Rewards' campaign is offering diners a Celebratory Dessert Trio and signature dim sum at Golden Court priced at MOP20, plus selected dishes for MOP200, and a 20 percent discount on banquet bookings until May 31, 2024.



Scan for details