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A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER HAS SEEN A WORRYING TREND EMERGE AS THE FACILITY'S OCCUPANCY RATE HAS RISEN TO 70% IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR

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AP PHOTO



Chinese authorities say at least 11 people have died and 30 are missing in the partial collapse of a highway bridge in the northwest of the country following heavy storms and flooding. A similar number are missing in the southwest after dozens of houses were destroyed by storms. The official Xinhua News Agency said five vehicles that fell off the bridge have been recovered after the structure in Shaanxi province crumbled at around 8:40 p.m. Friday.

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AP PHOTO



Malaysia Traditional pomp and cannon fire on Saturday marked the coronation of billionaire King Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar, who pledged to govern fairly during the five-year term he will serve under a unique rotating monarchy system. Sultan Ibrahim, 65, was sworn in on Jan. 31. Saturday's coronation at the national palace formalized his role as Malaysia's 17th king in a ceremony steeped in Malay culture and pageantry.

AP PHOTO



South Korea said yesterday it was bolstering its anti-Pyongyang propaganda broadcasts across the tense border with rival North Korea, after the North launched more balloons likely carrying trash toward South Korea. The Cold War-style psychological battle between the two Koreas is adding to already-high tensions on the Korean Peninsula, with the rivals threatening stronger steps against each other and warning of devastating consequences.

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ALL IS WELL

The gov't debunks rumors over the condition of the Chief Executive, clarifies Ho Iat Seng is in 'good health' amid extended leave

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EVENTS

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S ARTS FESTIVAL OPENS

MACAU'S inaugural International Children's Arts Festival opened yesterday, pledging to be a vibrant celebration of creativity aimed at engaging young minds and families alike.

Notable figures attended the opening ceremony, including Ao Ieong U, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, and representatives from the Centre Pompidou in France, who emphasized the importance of nurturing creativity in children.

The festival, which runs from July to August 2024, features an array of performances, art exhibitions, and interactive workshops designed to inspire a passion for the arts in children.

The festival is tailored for children aged 3 to 12, with each child requiring adult accompaniment.

At the opening ceremony, Centre Pompidou representatives highlighted the importance of nurturing creativity in children.



"It is crucial for their overall development. Engaging in art experimentation helps cultivate observation, imagination, and self-expression," said the deputy director of Visitors and Education at Centre Pompidou, Selma Céline.

The ongoing exhibition, "Fantastic Art World from Centre Pompidou," demonstrates how artistic experiences can enrich children's lives. Organized by the IC, MGM and Centre Pompidou, the exhibition runs from July 23 to October 27.

It inspires children to interact with art, exploring themes of light, color and form through interactive installations.

The Centre Pompidou's exhibition at the Macao Museum of Art (MAM), features three distinct thematic zones: "Passing Through," "Laterna Magica," and "Rhythms Shapes Colors." Each zone offers experiences to inspire creativity and promote parent-child interaction.

The IC has received enthusiastic public support for the festival, which aims to provide children with interactive workshops and a night visit to the Macao Museum of Art (MAM).

To further inspire creativity among the youth, additional sessions for its Art Camps have been announced. The extra sessions have been added for August, allowing more families to participate.

The following camps, "Mysterious Art Playground - Children's Creative Camp" and the "Fantastic Creative Door - Family Art Camp," sold out quickly. Workshops will be conducted in Cantonese, Mandarin and English, catering to Macau's diverse community.

Tickets for the exhibition and Art Camps are available through the Macau Ticketing Network, with discounts for seniors and students.

As the festival unfolds, it promises to be a transformative experience for children and families, fostering a love for the arts and enriching their creative journeys.

CULTURE

Repair progress for Chio Family Mansion slower than expected

NADIA SHAW

THE repair progress for the Chio Family Mansion has been slower than expected, said the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Ao Ieong U.

However, speaking on the sidelines of the opening ceremony of the city's first International Children's Arts Festival, the official explained that "the internal mapping and research work had been completed."

Due to the building being vacant for an extended period, and because environmental cleanup is necessary before repairs can commence, the restoration work is expected to start in the final quarter of 2024, with hopes of completion in the first quarter of the following year.

"I hope that citizens and young people can not only



appreciate the architectural art of the Chio Family Mansion but also enhance their understanding and promotion of traditional Chinese culture," said Ao Ieong.

In relation to the Ruins of St. Paul's, Ao Ieong said the installation of a lightning protection system is currently being studied.

She said this work is still in the research stage, and the most suitable plan will be chosen based on "the geographical environment of the area and the value of the heritage buildings."

Beijing's State Administration of Cultural Heritage will

also be consulted during this process. The official said the study is expected to take one to two months, emphasizing the significance of the Ruins of St. Paul's by stating, "this is one of the most core and important cultural relics in Macau's World Heritage," thus necessitating a prudent approach in selecting the protection plan.

Moreover, the Lai Chi Vun Shipyard area is undergoing site optimization and will be temporarily closed until December.

Ao Ieong said the primary goal of this project is to improve the exhibition content and methods related to shipbuilding and fishery.

Additionally, the project aims to establish parent-child leisure facilities and incorporate catering and leisure elements.

She was optimistic about the outcome, stating, "we hope to launch a new experience during the festive period at the end of the year." However, she said the optimization project does not include the installation of a simulated ice rink.

WEATHER

PRAPIROON NEARS HAINAN AS MACAU BRACES FOR IMPACT

TROPICAL Storm Prapiroon is intensifying as it moves north-northwest over the South China Sea, with landfall expected at Hainan Island today, according to the latest forecasts.

The storm, currently located more than 400 km south of Macau, is expected to bring more frequent showers and thunderstorms to the region until today, with winds reaching wind force 6 and occasional gusts.

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) is considering issuing higher tropical cyclone warning signals depending on the latest track and intensity changes.

Meanwhile, Tropical Cyclone "Gae-mi" is also developing over the sea east of the Philippines and is expected to move towards the sea east of the Taiwan region.

Flooding of up to 0.3 meters is forecast within the Inner Harbor area today due to the combined influence of astronomical tides. VC

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Microsoft outage had minimal impact on Macau

VICTORIA CHAN

THE global tech disruption that caused malfunctions in Microsoft Windows computers Friday has had a relatively limited and manageable effect on Macau, according to the Judiciary Police (PJ).

The faulty software update caused technological havoc worldwide, grounding flights, knocking down some financial companies and news outlets, and disrupting hospitals, small businesses and government offices.

Local authorities, meanwhile, reported the incident only impacted eight critical infrastructures in Macau to varying degrees, including one cash remittance company.

Additionally, the internal computer systems of three gaming operators, public service institutions, and two insurance companies were affected, but their services remained uninterrupted.

The PJ said the cyber security center will continue to monitor the development of the incident and strengthen communication and coordination with relevant departments and institutions. This is to ensure timely and effective responses to any potential cyber risks that may arise.

The announcement from Macau comes as Microsoft acknowledged "service disruptions" worldwide, with users unable to access various Microsoft 365 apps and services. The company said it was taking "mitigation actions" to address the problem.



A long queue for HK Express at the Hong Kong International Airport as the airline experienced major disruptions due to Microsoft outage, Friday

The breadth of the outages highlighted the fragility of a digitized world dependent on just a few providers for key computing services.

In the neighboring region, Hong Kong-based airlines like HK Express and Cathay Pacific, in addition to its airport authority, have advised passengers to arrive at the airport at least three hours prior to their flight due to the technical difficulties.

The Times observed long lines at various counters within Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), as nu-

merous travelers wait to complete their check-in procedures.

HK Express for instance, experienced a notably lengthy line, leading to a delay in flights. For instance, the departure from Hong Kong to Manila was postponed for more than five hours.

Businesses and governments worldwide experienced hours-long disruptions — their computer monitors glowing blue with error messages — and they scrambled to deal with the fallout. CrowdStrike's CEO said some of their systems will

require time-consuming manual fixes.

Thousands of flights were canceled and tens of thousands were delayed, leading to long lines at airports in the U.S., Europe, Asia and Latin America.

Airlines lost access to check-in and booking services in the heart of the summer travel season. By late afternoon Eastern time, the worst appeared to be over, though there were still lingering cancellations and delays do to the cascading effect of the disruption.

Gov't clears rumors over the health condition of CE

RENATO MARQUES

THE government has responded to rumors about the health of the Chief Executive (CE), Ho Iat Seng.

The Government Information Bureau (GCS) has issued a short statement in response to several media inquiries

"The Chief Executive, Ho Iat Seng, will continue to be on leave from July 20 to 29 inclusive. During his ongoing leave period, the Chief Executive has undergone routine medical check-up



RENATO MARQUES

exams and received related medical treatment. Currently, he is in good health," the GCS statement said. Rumors began after the CE extended his leave by 10 days after a

previous extension from July 4 to July 19. Initially, Ho was on annual leave from June 21 to July 3.

The statement noted that, during this period, Ho had undergone some medical procedures, but referred to them as "routine check-up exams" not caused by a health emergency. It said Ho "received medical treatment" and is "in a good health condition."

Earlier this month, media outlets quoted an anonymous source saying that Ho would declare his intention to run for reelection as CE around "mid-August."

The same unnamed person claimed the leave extension from July 4 to July 19 was related to the CE allegedly wanting

to "take some extra rest before the election campaign."

Although Ho's intention to run for a second five-year term has been the subject of considerable speculation, no information has been forthcoming either from Ho or from anyone in his camp.

Questioned directly by the media in mid-May this year, Ho said, "We have not yet reached the point in the election process [of filing applications for candidacies] and, therefore, no decision has been made yet."

Among the rumors circulating was the idea that Ho could be dropping his intention to rerun for the CE post due to a sudden health issue.

59 CHARGED IN BUSTED ILLEGAL ONLINE BETTING OPERATION

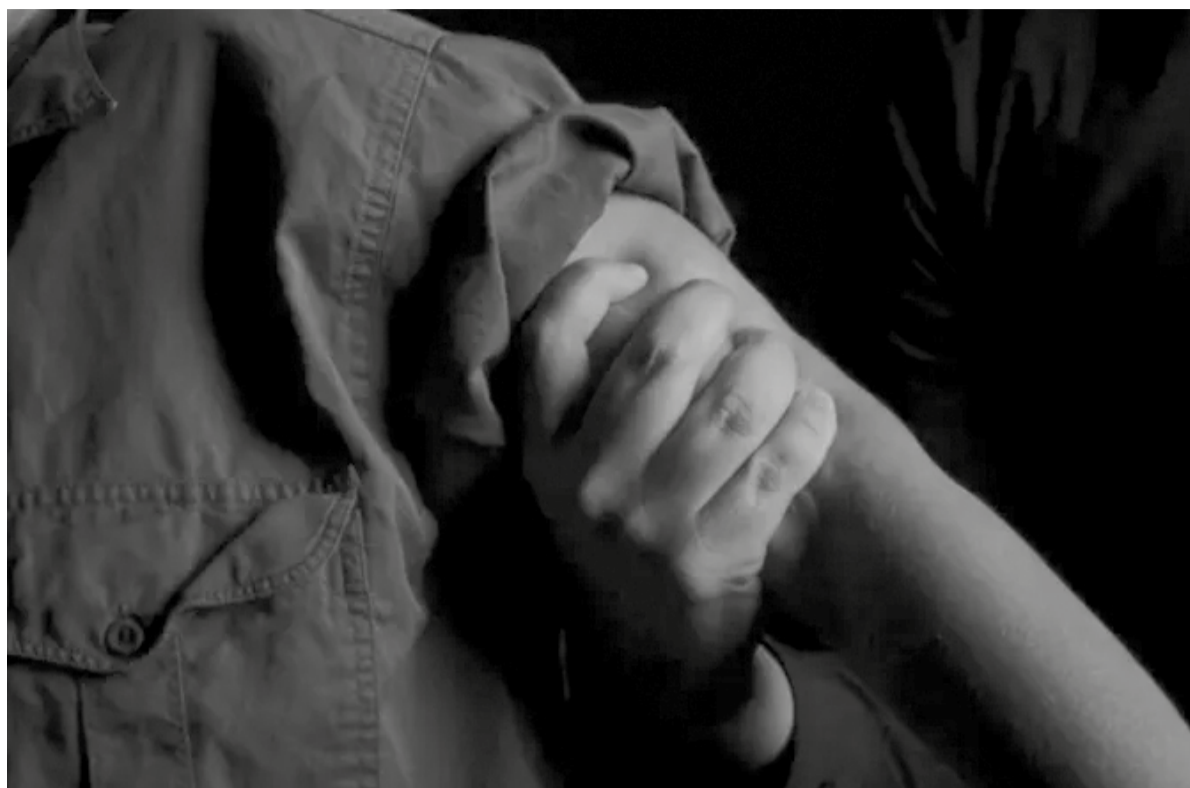
59 individuals were indicted for their roles in an illegal online sports betting ring with operations spanning Macau, Hong Kong and mainland China, the Public Prosecutions Office announced Friday. The defendants are accused of criminal association and illegal gambling for earning commissions from football and basketball betting websites hosted abroad that authorities say raked in over MOP1.08 billion since 2016. A joint operation resulted in the bust and seizure of nearly MOP8.6 million in cash locally. Two of the 59 defendants are in pretrial detention while the others are out on bail but banned from leaving Macau pending charges carrying up to three years in prison.

TAXI HITS WOMAN ON PEDESTRIAN CROSSING

A woman suffered injuries and required transportation to hospital after a collision with a taxi at a pedestrian crossing on Dr. Sun Yat Sen Street in Taipa. The incident occurred about 11 a.m. yesterday and was being investigated. Traffic flow returned to its usual state shortly after the incident.

TRADE PASSING THROUGH HZMB AMOUNTS RMB100B IN H1

In the first half (H1) of the year, the combined worth of imports and exports passing through the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge amounted to RMB104.41 billion, marking a 16.4% rise from the previous year. Gongbei Customs reported the total value of construction materials traded was approximately CNY3.47 billion, a 23% increase compared to the same period last year. The Zhuhai port of the HZMB Bridge has been recognized by Gongbei Customs as a key integrated logistics center within the Greater Bay Area.



SURGE IN MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN SEEKING REFUGE

VICTORIA CHAN

THE domestic violence shelter operated by the Women's General Association of Macau has seen a worrying

trend emerge.

The facility's occupancy rate has risen to 70% in the first half of the year, with most residents being women in their 40s and 50s.

"The people who encounter violence are mostly in the middle ages of 40s and 50s," said Wong Lei Lei, the director of the Women's General Association of Macau, as cited in a

TDM report.

"So, we are now paying attention to the stress and marital status issues among middle-aged people. The reasons for most of them experiencing violence include husbands suspecting the wives of being disloyal, financial problems, or abusers having a violent temperament."

The surge in middle-aged women seeking refuge at the shelter comes as the government grapples with the broader challenges of domestic violence.

According to official statistics, only 8.04% of cases opened by the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) regarding suspected domestic violence crimes have resulted in charges.

Over the past seven years (2017-2023), an average of 105 domestic violence cases were opened per year, with 8 resulting in formal charges.

While the MP reported a 7.63% drop in cases in 2023, the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) investigated 1,781 notifications of suspected domestic violence, with only 40 (2.25%) confirmed cases.

The worrying trends have prompted calls for increased efforts to combat and prevent

domestic violence. The Women's General Association of Macau has emphasized the need for continued follow-up by judiciary and social assistance departments to protect victims' rights and help them escape cycles of abuse.

"This case is particularly brutal and will have serious physical and emotional consequences for the victim," said a police spokesperson, referring to a recent high-profile domestic violence case that involved a man brutally assaulting his wife over two hours.

Experts have urged victims to seek help and report abuse, as the consequences can be severe and long-lasting.

The IAS operates a 24/7 hotline for those at risk of domestic violence, and the Women's General Association of Macau continues its efforts to achieve "zero domestic violence" through shelter services and advocacy for improved support mechanisms.

Residents who are at risk of suffering from domestic violence are encouraged to call the IAS' hotline at 2823 3030. The hotline is available 24 hours a day and assisted by social service professionals.

Taxi driver irregularities spike 120%

VICTORIA CHAN

THE taxi industry is facing a surge in irregularities, with authorities detecting a staggering 121% increase in cases during the first half of 2024 compared to the same period last year, raising concerns over public safety and the need for stricter enforcement measures.

The most concerning issue was a 106.94% rise in refusal to transport, with 149 cases recorded, more than double the 72 cases of the previous year.

According to data from the Public Security Police Force (PSP), the number of irregularities committed by taxi drivers jumped from 194 cases in the first half of 2023 to 430 cases in the same period this year.

Other irregularities included 11 cases of overcharging, a slight increase of 22.22%, and 270 "other irregularities" that saw an annual surge of 138.94%. Authorities also detected 55 cases of unauthorized transport services, double the number from the first half of 2023.



The spike in taxi-related issues has coincided with a broader increase in road safety concerns.

The first half of the year saw 7,666 traffic accidents, an 18.32% rise compared to the same period last year.

Pedestrian safety has also emerged as a significant problem, with 4,614 cases of pedestrians crossing the road without observing traffic rules, a nearly fourfold increase from the 926 cases re-

corded in the first half of 2023.

Authorities remain committed to addressing the growing concerns surrounding irregularities committed by taxi drivers and ensuring the safety and well-being of all road users in Macau.

The PSP's report further outlined various other infractions, including illegal parking, mobile phone use while driving, failure to wear a seatbelt, failure to yield, and

disregard for traffic signs.

Notably, there was a significant increase in cases related to not obeying traffic signs, which rose by 262.8%.

In total, the first half of the year in Macau witnessed 367,641 infractions related to the Road Traffic Law and the Highway Code Regulation, resulting in fines totaling 98.52 million patacas. This represents a 19.98% increase compared to the same period in 2023.

PARTY PLENUM

MACAU, HK, TAIWAN COMPATRIOTS VOW TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN NEW-ROUND REFORM, OPENING UP

PEOPLE from all walks of life in the special administrative regions (SAR) of Hong Kong and Macao, as well as Taiwan compatriots living on the mainland, have voiced their support for and enthusiasm for a resolution recently passed at a key plenum.

The 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted the resolution on further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization at its third plenary session held in Beijing from Monday to Thursday last week.

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said that Macau will further leverage the 'One country, two systems' policy, capitalize on the region's strengths as an international cooperation platform, and strive for national rejuvenation through the advancement of Chinese modernization.

Embracing the new opportunities created by reform and opening up has become

a consensus among the societies of both Hong Kong and Macau.

John Lee, Hong Kong's top official, said the key plenum, focusing on the topic of further comprehensively deepening reform and advancing Chinese modernization, is of great significance for Hong Kong. He called on all sectors in Hong Kong to take on their share of responsibilities, seize this opportunity, and make contributions to the country's modernization endeavors.

National legislators and political advisors from the two regions said that the plenum has significantly bolstered confidence across various sectors in Hong Kong and Macau.

Taiwan business people and compatriots have also expressed their support for deepening reform and expanding opening up, showcasing their confidence in the mainland's development.

MDT/XINHUA

Macau racers excel at Lamborghini Super Trofeo Asia

RENATO MARQUES

MACAU racers Charles Leong and André Couto scored great results over the weekend in Round 3 of the Lamborghini Super Trofeo Asia (LSTA), raced at the Inje Speedium in South Korea.

Racing in the PRO class, Leong, who teamed up with Japanese driver Miki Koyama, secured second and third position overall on Race 1 Saturday and Race 2 Sunday respectively.

With these results, the pair driving the Lamborghini Huracán Super Trofeo EVO2 for the SJM Iron Lynx Theodore Racing team leads the championship with a five-point gap for the closest competitors.

Although the duo expressed some disappointment after the race due to feeling victory in the races was potentially within reach, it was nonetheless the team's sixth consecutive podium, showing a consistency that takes it to the top of the championship leaderboard now the season has reached the half-way.

After the races, Leong said he felt the car lost some race pace in the last section, which is inexplicable for now, but added the team will now analyze the data to create an even better performance for the round in Fuji Speedway in Japan.



TWO WINS FOR COUTO IN THE PRO-AM CLASS

Racing at the same event but competing for a different category (pro-am), Macau driver André Couto, teamed with Chinese racer Jason Chen and made a perfect weekend scoring two wins in both Saturday and Sunday races.

With these two wins, the pair, driving the Lamborghini Huracán Super Trofeo EVO2 for Madness Racing Team, has extended their lead even further on top of the pro-am class championship leaderboard.

Couto will take the comfortable lead to the next round to be hosted at Fuji Speedway, a circuit the local racer knows extremely well from his long experience at the Japanese Super GT series.

Round 4 of the LSTA is scheduled for the weekend of August 16 to 18.

The championship, composed of a total of six rounds, will move in mid-September to Shanghai Circuit in China before the Grand Finale in mid-November at the Spanish circuit of Jerez De La Frontera.

GASTRONOMY

10 Malaysian chefs showcase 40 authentic dishes in food festival

THE Malaysian Cultural and Food Festival has returned to the Galaxy Macau, featuring an authentic taste of Malaysia's vibrant cuisine and culture.

Galaxy's East Square has been converted into a tropical paradise for a two-week event, ending July 31.

The venue boasts a pop-up market offering a variety of traditional snacks and cultural handicrafts from 11 different cities, along with 10 different types of fresh durians imported from Malaysia.

The biggest Malaysian event in Macau, showcases 10 well-known Malaysian chefs showcasing their skills live, along with more than 40 authentic dishes served in their original flavors.

This year's festival also commemorates the 50th year of diplomatic relations between China and Malaysia.

"This year's Malaysian Food Festival is a key event organized by Galaxy Macau in support of the SAR Government's efforts to deepen cross-sector integration and strengthen the synergy between 'tourism + gastronomy'," said Roger Lienhard, executive vice president - Hospitality of Ga-

laxy Macau, during the festival's opening late last week.

"I believe the deep bond between Macau and Malaysia will shine brightly here, allowing visitors to enjoy delicious food while celebrating the profound connection between the two places."

The goal of this year's event is to offer a more comprehensive and genuine display of traditional Malaysian cuisine, arts and culture.

More than 50 varieties of Malaysian spices, totaling over 5,000 kilograms, have been transported to Macau, in addition to over five tons of premium durians carefully chosen to please the diners.

Meanwhile, speaking to the press, Harrison Lun, vice president of Food & Beverage at Galaxy remarked, "We have already brought in 10 chefs, which is the biggest crew from Malaysia this time and also we brought in a lot of ingredients and new dishes also from the Malaysian hawker style stores."

Asked about its projections for the 10th edition of festival, the official noted, "We expect to be able to achieve at least 3,000 people for the buffet because it's spread across two weeks." LV



CORPORATE BITS

Melco to open skateboard park, host FISE



Melco Resorts & Entertainment is slated to host the "International Festival of Extreme Sports (FISE): Battle of the Champions (BOTC) 2025" in the city in March 2025.

To support the sport's deve-

lopment in Macau, Melco has announced it will soon open a skateboard park at Studio City to provide enthusiasts with a well-equipped skateboarding venue.

Hosted in collaboration with

Rakuten Sports and event organizer Hurricane Group, the Festival is the first event of its kind to occur in Macau and the Greater Bay Area.

The FISE World Series is the world's largest comprehensive extreme sports event that comprises 9 extreme sports including rock climbing, skateboarding, BMX Freestyle park and breaking.

Clarence Chung, Melco Board director, said, "The festival will combine sports and youth culture in a vibrant festival atmosphere to appeal to both locals and visitors, while demonstrating Melco's steadfast commitment to bringing world class events and performances to Macau."

MGM co-launches 'Shop Macau Fun Macau!' campaign



To help Macau brands further boost their online and offline exposure and expand business, MGM, the Industrial Association of Macau (AIM) and the BOC Macau,

have joined forces to roll out the "MGM Macau Premium Product Promotion Program 2024 - Shop Macau Fun Macau! Campaign."

The campaign, running

until Aug. 31, is designed with the distribution of e-coupons through the BOC Macau App, conducive to maximizing sales and recognition of Macau products, and establishing the reputation for local brands.

Kenneth Feng, president and executive director of MGM China Holdings Limited, said, "It is our honor to jointly organize this campaign with AIM and BOC Macau to offer e-coupons in the summer peak season, bringing MOP25 discount for customers who make a single purchase of MOP75 or above at MinM-Plaza."

DISPUTED SEA

China and the Philippines reach deal in effort to stop clashes

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

CHINA and the Philippines reached a deal they hope will end confrontations at the most fiercely disputed shoal in the South China Sea, the Philippine government said yesterday.

The Philippines occupies Second Thomas Shoal but China also claims it, and increasingly hostile clashes at sea have sparked fears of larger conflicts that could involve the United States.

The crucial deal was reached yesterday, after a series of meetings between Philippine and Chinese diplomats in Manila and exchanges of diplomatic notes that aimed to establish a mutually acceptable arrangement at the shoal without conceding either side's territorial claims.

Two Philippine officials, who have knowledge of the negotiations, confirmed the deal to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity and the government later issued a brief statement announcing the deal without providing details.

"Both sides continue to recognize the need to deescalate the situation in the South China Sea and manage differences through dialogue and consultation and agree that the agreement will not prejudice each other's positions in the South China Sea," the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila said.

Neither side has yet released the text of the agreement.

China has disputes with several governments over land and sea borders, many of them in the South China Sea, and the rare deal with the Philippines could spark hope that

AP PHOTO



similar arrangements could be forged by Beijing with other rival countries to avoid clashes while thorny territorial issues remain unresolved. It remains to be seen, however, if the deal could be implemented successfully and how long it will last.

Chinese coast guard and other forces have used powerful water cannons and dangerous blocking maneuvers to prevent food and other supplies from reaching Filipino navy personnel at Manila's outpost at the shoal.

The yearslong territorial standoff at the shoal has flared repeatedly since last year between Chinese coast guard, navy and suspected militia

ships and Philippine coast guard-escorted navy boats transporting food, water and fresh navy and marine personnel to an outpost on a long-grounded and rusting warship, the BRP Sierra Madre.

In the worst confrontation, Chinese forces on motorboats repeatedly rammed and then boarded two Philippine navy boats on June 17 to prevent Filipino personnel from transferring food and other supplies including firearms to the ship outpost in the shallows of the shoal, according to the Philippine government.

After repeated ramming, the Chinese seized the Philippine navy boats and dama-

ged them with machetes and improvised spears. They also seized seven M4 rifles, which were packed in cases, and other supplies. The violent faceoff wounded several Filipino navy personnel, including one who lost his thumb, in a chaotic skirmish that was captured in video and photos that were later made public by Philippine officials.

China and the Philippines blamed each other for the confrontation and each asserted their own sovereign rights over the shoal, which Filipinos call Ayungin and the Chinese call Ren'ai Jiao.

The United States and its key Asian and Western allies,

including Japan and Australia, condemned the Chinese acts at the shoal and called for the rule of law and freedom of navigation to be upheld in the South China Sea, a key global trade route with rich fishing areas and undersea gas deposits.

In addition to China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have been locked in separate but increasingly tense territorial disputes in the waterway, which is regarded as a potential flashpoint and a delicate fault line in the U.S.-China regional rivalry. The U.S. military has deployed navy ships and fighter jets for decades in what it calls freedom of navigation and overflight patrols, which China has opposed and regards as a threat to regional stability.

Washington has no territorial claims in the disputed waters but has repeatedly warned that it is obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

One of the two Philippine officials said the June 17 confrontation prompted Beijing and Manila to hasten on-and-off talks on an arrangement that would prevent confrontations at Second Thomas Shoal.

During final meetings in the last four days, two Chinese demands that had been key sticking points were removed from the draft deal.

China had previously said it would allow food, water and other basic supplies to be transported by the Philippines to its forces in the shoal if Manila agreed not to bring construction materials to fortify the crumbling ship, and to give China advance notice and the right to inspect the ships for those materials, the officials said.

The Philippines rejected those conditions, and the final deal did not include them, according to the Philippine official. **MDT/AP**

SHAANXI

11 dead and dozens missing after a highway bridge crumbles in flooding and heavy storms

CHINESE authorities say at least 11 people have died and 30 are missing in the partial collapse of a highway bridge in the northwest of the country following heavy storms and flooding. A similar

number are missing in the southwest after dozens of houses were destroyed by storms.

The official Xinhua News Agency said five vehicles that fell off the bridge have been recove-

red after the structure in Shaanxi province crumbled at around 8:40 p.m. Friday. A photo released by Xinhua showed a section of the bridge snapped and folded down at almost a 90-degree angle into the

rushing brown water below.

It said rescue operations were still underway Saturday in the province's Zhashui county, with some 20 cars and 30 people still missing.

In Sichuan province to the southwest, an estimated 30 people were missing and around 40 houses wrecked in flooding and storms, Xinhua reported. It said roads, bridges and communication networks

in hardest hit Hanyuan county had been damaged or knocked out and that rescue teams had been working since before dawn to restore communications and transport connections. **MDT/AP**

AL EMRUN GARJON,
JULHAS ALAM &
KRUTIKA PATHI, DHAKA

Bangladesh imposes nationwide curfew as deadly protests over government jobs escalate

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina's government late Friday announced a nationwide curfew across Bangladesh and ordered the deployment of military forces to maintain order following days of deadly clashes over the allocation of government jobs.

The announcement was made by Obaidul Quader, the general secretary of the ruling Awami League party, and came after police and security officials fired on protesters earlier Friday and banned all gatherings in the capital. Several people were killed, media reports said.

Quader said the military was deployed to help the civilian administration keep order.

The protests, which began weeks ago but escalated sharply this week, represent the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina since she won a fourth consecutive term in office after elections in January. Main opposition groups boycotted those polls.

There were varying reports of the number of people killed Friday, with Independent Television reporting 17 dead and Somoy TV reporting 30. An Associated Press reporter saw 23 bodies at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, but it was not immediately clear whether they had all died on Friday.

A death toll of 22 people was reported late last week, in what had so far been the bloodiest day of demonstrations, according to local media, as protesting students attempted to impose a "complete shutdown" of the country.

Authorities could not be reached immediately to confirm figures for the deaths.

The chaos has highlighted cracks in Bangladesh's governance and economy and the frustration of young graduates who face a lack of good jobs.

The government has deployed police and paramilitary forces across the capital to lock down campuses and break up protests. On Wednesday, universities including the country's largest suspended classes and closed dormitories, and on Friday police in Dhaka said they were banning all gatherings and demonstrations in the capital.

An Associated Press reporter saw border guard officials fire at a crowd of more than 1,000 protesters who had gathered outside the head office of state-run Bangladesh Television, which was attacked and set on fire by protesters the previous day.

The border guards shot at the crowd with rifles and sound grenades, while police officers fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Bullets littered the streets, which were

AP PHOTO



also marked by smears of blood.

Internet services and mobile data were widely disrupted on Thursday night and remained down on Friday in the capital, Dhaka. Social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were also not loading. It coincided with a widespread internet outage on Friday that disrupted flights, banks, media outlets and companies around the world, but the disruptions in Bangladesh were substantially greater than seen elsewhere.

A statement from the country's Telecommunication Regulatory Commission said they were unable to ensure service after their data center was attacked Thursday by demonstrators, who set fire to some equipment. The Associated Press was not able to independently verify this.

Student protesters said they will extend their calls to impose a shutdown on Friday as well, and urged mosques across the country to hold funeral prayers for those who have been killed. Major universities have said they will close their doors until tensions ease.

The protesters are demanding an end to a quota system that reserves up to 30% of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971 against Pakistan.

They argue the system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement, and they want it replaced

with a merit-based system.

But Hasina has defended the quota system, saying that veterans deserve the highest respect for their contributions to the war regardless of their political affiliation.

The Bangladeshi leader is credited for bringing stable growth to Bangladesh, but rising inflation — thanks in part to the global upheaval sparked by the war in Ukraine — has triggered labor unrest and dissatisfaction with the government.

Even though job opportunities have grown in some parts of the private sector, many people prefer government jobs because they are seen as more stable and lucrative. But there aren't enough to go around — each year, some 400,000 graduates compete for around 3,000 jobs in the civil service exam.

"What is unfolding in Bangladesh is deeply unsettling for a generation that only asked for a fair opportunity in public service recruitment," said Saad Hammadi, a freedom of speech advocate with the Canada-based Balsillie School of International Affairs. "That a peaceful protest against a state policy would slip into the peak of lawlessness shows the government's lack of farsightedness and inefficient policy governance," Hammadi said.

"The internet shutdown makes matters worse. Local news sites are inaccessible, and people in the country are left incommunicado with the rest of the world all in the pretext of conducting sweeping operations by the state that have often resulted in serious human rights violations," he added in an email.

Bangladesh has previously shut down internet services in areas affected by protests, using it as a measure to suppress dissent by opposition parties. Inter-

The chaos has highlighted cracks in Bangladesh's governance and economy and the frustration of young graduates who face a lack of good jobs

net watchdog Access Now said it recorded three shutdowns in the country in 2023 — all of which overlapped with opposition rallies and were limited in scope to one city or district. That came after six shutdowns in 2022.

CIVICUS, a nonprofit that tracks civic freedoms around the world, last year downgraded Bangladesh to "closed," the worst rating that it could assign, along with China and Venezuela, following a crackdown on the country's opposition members and supporters ahead of its national election.

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has backed the protesting students

and vowed to organize its own demonstrations, and many of their supporters have joined in the students' demonstrations. On Friday, police fired tear gas at a few hundred BNP supporters, and arrested senior BNP leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

The Awami League and the BNP have often accused each other of fueling political chaos and violence, most recently ahead of the country's national election, which was marred by a crackdown on several opposition figures while Hasina's government accused the party of attempting to disrupt the vote.

Hasina's government had earlier halted the job quotas following mass student protests in 2018, but last month, Bangladesh's High Court nullified that decision and reinstated the quotas after relatives of the 1971 veterans filed petitions, triggering the latest demonstrations.

The Supreme Court has suspended that ruling pending an appeal hearing, and said in a statement it will take up the issue yesterday.

On Wednesday, Hasina urged protesters in a televised address to "wait with patience" for the court verdict, saying that she believes they "will get justice" and "will not be disappointed." MDT/AP

GERMANY

Chancellor praises lithium deal with Serbia that could reduce Europe's dependency on China

DUSAN STOJANOVIC,
BELGRADE

GERMAN Chancellor Olaf Scholz praised a tentative deal between Serbia and the European Union signed on Friday that paves the way for the disputed excavation of lithium, a mega project that could reduce Europe's dependency on China but one that has been fiercely criticized by environmentalists and opposition groups.

Scholz attended a "critical raw materials summit" in the Serbian capital where a memorandum of understanding between the EU and Serbia's government on a "strategic partnership" on sustainable raw materials, battery supply chains and electric vehicles was signed. He said after the signing ceremony that "this is an important European project," adding that it's necessary for Europe "to remain sovereign in a changing world and not be dependent on others, which is why new sources of raw materials should be discovered."

"I'm glad the decision was made," Scholz said. "I admit, this decision required courage, but it was made at the right moment."

Germany, the largest carmaker in Europe, is seeking to secure lithium for its electric vehicle makers as the EU struggles to reduce its dependence on imports from China. Lithium is a critical substance in making batteries for electric vehicles



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić

China currently dominates the supply chain for lithium-ion batteries.

"This is a project that is good because it will be developed in an environmentally compatible way, and is good because it creates economic activity and prosperity where world history made it possible to bury raw material in the earth, and we are now extracting it," Scholz said.

Serbia's constitutional court earlier this month overturned a previous ruling to cancel a \$2.4 billion mining project launched by British-Australian mining company Rio Tinto in the fertile western Serbian valley of Jadar, which is believed to be the largest lithium discovery in Europe.

The Serbian government's decision to cancel the excavation

plans came after thousands of protesters in Belgrade and elsewhere in Serbia blocked major roads and bridges in 2021 to oppose Rio Tinto's plans because of potential hazards to the environment. The protests were the biggest challenge yet to the increasingly autocratic rule of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić.

A heavy police presence on Friday prevented groups of protesters from coming close to the government building in the new part of Belgrade where the signing ceremony took place.

Zlatko Kokanovi, an anti-mining activist from the region where the lithium excavations would take place, said that "we will defend ourselves with all means, because we have no other backup state."

"I'm a father of five and I would like to see those who will come to push me out of my land," he told the regional NI television. "There are some of us who think with our own heads and not with Scholz's head, who only has in mind his own profits and interests."

Vui has said the lithium excavation will only go ahead with the highest ecological standards, and if automakers and battery producers in Germany and other EU states build factories in Serbia, rather than directly exporting raw materials to those countries.

Vui praised the landmark deal as groundbreaking that will bring into Serbia, a developing country, billions of dollars in investments.

"This day fills me with great hope for our country," Vui said. This will be a turning point and a big change and a quantum leap into the future of Serbia."

Serbia is formally seeking EU membership, but has maintained close political and economic ties with China and Russia, despite Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The signed agreement is seen by analysts as a major boost for Vui and his hard-line policies.

"I really believe that we are making historic opportunity for Serbia and the EU," said European Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič, who signed the memorandum of understanding in the name of the EU. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1977 DENG XIAOPING BACK IN POWER



The disgraced deputy Prime Minister of China, Deng Xiaoping, is to return to Chinese Government.

The Chinese Communist Party conference has restored him to the offices of Vice Premier of the State Council, Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee, Vice-Chairman of the Military Commission and Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army.

He was dismissed from his posts after the leftist Gang of Four blamed him for the uprising in Tiananmen Square in April last year after Premier Zhou Enlai's death.

Since the death of Chairman Mao last September the Gang of Four has sidelined Mr Deng and attempted a programme of radical reform.

But Mao Tse Tung's named successor as CCP chair, Hua Guofeng, has been purging the Party of extremist influences such as the Gang of Four.

The Gang of Four was formally expelled from the CCP at a meeting of the Central Committee's Third Plenum last weekend.

The Gang includes Mao's fourth wife, Jiang Qing, former vice premier and politburo member Zhang Chunqiao, former factory worker Wang Hongwen and Shanghai intellectual Yao Wenyuan.

The official CCP newspaper, The People's Daily, last week accused the group of trying to "rebuild" the Communist Party, excluding senior officials and creating a "mass organisation".

Chinese authorities now regard "pleading the Gang's innocence" as a "counter-revolutionary act".

A party official in Kiangsi who defended the group recently was "denounced for his crime" at a meeting of 4,000 people.

Premier Hua has also identified far-left tendencies in party leaders of 13 of China's 29 administrative regions and removed them from power.

Courtesy BBC News

MIDEAST TENSIONS

Israel shoots down a missile fired from Yemen hours after strike on Houthi rebels

JOSEF FEDERMAN
& MICHAEL WAKIN,
JERUSALEM

THE Israeli military said it intercepted a missile fired from Yemen early yesterday, hours after Israeli warplanes struck several Houthi targets in the Arabian peninsula country.

The Israeli airstrikes — in response to a deadly Houthi drone strike on Tel Aviv — were

the first time Israel is known to have responded to repeated Houthi attacks throughout its nine-month war against Hamas. The burst of violence between the distant enemies has threatened to open a new front as Israel battles a series of Iranian proxies across the region.

The Israeli army late Saturday confirmed the airstrikes in the western Yemeni port city of Hodeidah, a Hou-

thi stronghold.

It said the strikes, carried out by U.S.-made F-15 and F-35 warplanes, were a response to hundreds of Houthi attacks.

Israel, along with the U.S., Britain and other Western allies with forces in the region, have intercepted almost all of the Houthi missiles and drones. But early Friday, a Houthi drone penetrated Israel's air

defenses and crashed into Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial and cultural capital, killing one person.

The Israeli military said Saturday's strike, some 1,700 kilometers from Israel, was among the most complicated and longest-distance operations by its air force. It said it hit the port because the area is used to deliver Iranian arms to Yemen. **MDT/AP**

IN CONTEXT

By the end of 1978 Deng Xiaoping had effectively wrested power from Hua Guofeng.

The Gang of Four members had been arrested in October 1976 and were put on trial in 1980 for their part in an attempted coup.

In 1978 Deng oversaw the historic change of direction for China, the stressing of the so-called "Four Modernisations" of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology. During Deng's long hold on power, he instituted a variety of reforms aimed at decentralising the economy and opening the country to international trade.

He resigned from his last official Party post in 1989, after he and other Party elders ordered the use of military force to clear Tiananmen Square.

He remained extremely influential until his death in 1997, and it was Deng who agreed to Jiang Zemin's elevation to Party chief and Deng who nominated Hu Jintao as Mr Jiang's successor.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

<p>ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Consider an exciting career opportunity. Make professional changes under this Capricorn Full Moon. Redirect efforts over two weeks toward talents, passion and purpose.</p>	<p>TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Your exploration changes and adapts. The Full Moon illuminates a shift in your educational direction. Experiment with new concepts for a few weeks.</p>
<p>GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Collaborate for financial growth over two weeks following this Full Moon. Shift directions for changing conditions. Deepen bonds. Pull together. Long-term benefits are possible.</p>	<p>CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Make adjustments together. Collaborate for shared commitments around changes under this Full Moon. Adapt for solutions over two weeks. Love provides foundational strength.</p>
<p>LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Begin a new physical health, work and fitness phase. Adapt practices for changing conditions over the next two weeks, illuminated by this Capricorn Full Moon.</p>	<p>VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Express your heart, imagination and artistry. Today's Full Moon shines on a transition. Adapt directions with a romance, passion or creative endeavor. Shift perspectives.</p>
<p>LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Make repairs. Renovate, remodel and tend your garden. Adapt with domestic changes over two weeks. Nurture your home and family under this Full Moon.</p>	<p>SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Start another chapter. A two-week Full Moon phase highlights communications, connection and intellectual discovery. Adapt around challenges. Keep channels open. Write, edit and share.</p>
<p>SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Make a shift around income and finances. Discover profitable opportunities in new directions under this Capricorn Full Moon. Redirect attention toward fresh potential.</p>	<p>CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 A challenge reorients you. This Full Moon in your sign illuminates new personal directions. Expand boundaries for a few weeks. Develop an inspiring possibility.</p>
<p>AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Review priorities. This Full Moon illuminates the dawn of a two-week introspective phase. Balance old responsibilities with new. Process transitions. Consider the past and future.</p>	<p>PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 One social door closes and another opens under this Full Moon. Adapt with community and team changes over two weeks. Share appreciation and salutations.</p>

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	27	33	rain
Changchun	23	29	rain
Chengdu	23	31	cloudy
Chongqing	29	39	fine
Fuzhou	29	38	fine
Guangzhou	25	32	rain
Guiyang	22	30	cloudy
Haikou	25	31	rain
Hangzhou	29	40	fine
Harbin	22	28	rain
Hefei	27	37	fine
Nanjing	29	37	cloudy
Shanghai	27	34	overcast
Taipei	27	33	fine
Wuhan	30	37	fine
Hong Kong	28	31	thunderstorms
WORLD			
Moscow	15	22	thunderstorms
Frankfurt	17	28	cloudy
Paris	19	27	cloudy
London	17	24	cloudy
New York	22	28	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Eat away at; 6- "First Lady of Song" Fitzgerald; 10- ABA member; 14- Christmas song; 15- Fastens a knot; 16- Antitoxins; 17- ___ fours (crawling); 18- Ark-eologist?; 19- The Supremes, e.g.; 20- French textile city; 21- Irritating; 23- Hill builder; 25- Golf ball prop; 26- Roseanne, formerly; 29- Black-and-white treat; 32- Prince Valiant's wife; 37- Jurist Fortas; 38- Chapters of history; 39- Made use of; 40- In spite of; 43- Fly; 44- Broadcasts; 45- TV's "Science Guy"; 46- Bloodsucking worm; 47- Singer Lovett; 48- Petri dish get; 49- JFK listing; 51- Ball girl; 53- Retriever; 58- Flaming felony; 62- Prefix with drama; 63- Run in neutral; 64- Napped leather; 65- Egyptian fertility goddess; 66- Can't do without; 67- Sporting blades; 68- Fast jets, for short; 69- Trampled; 70- March honoree, for short;

DOWN 1- Environmental sci.; 2- Indian princess; 3- Like many a thesis defense; 4- Basic monetary unit; 5- Actress Burstyn; 6- Gas burner or Sicilian volcano; 7- Large cat; 8- Simple shed; 9- ... who lived in ___; 10- Piedmont wine center; 11- Gull's cousin; 12- Math subject; 13- Center Ming; 22- Pines; 24- Rich cake; 26- Commonplace; 27- Overhead; 28- Knot again; 30- Cheering word; 31- Composition; 33- Went first; 34- "Dallas" family name; 35- Skater Harding; 36- Wrath; 38- One or the other; 39- Challenged; 41- WWII female enlistee; 42- Up to, briefly; 47- Climbing device; 48- Sudden; 50- Contaminate; 52- Relaxes; 53- Not so much; 54- Came down to earth; 55- Manager; 56- Toast topping; 57- Comic Fox; 59- Leak slowly; 60- Concert halls; 61- Catbird seat?; 62- Fire starter?;

Friday's solution

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

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



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Nam Long (Taipa Village)
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59.92 m² / 645 ft² | HKD3,650,000



Jade Garden (Taipa)
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ANALYSIS

With AI, jets and police squadrons, Paris is securing the Olympics – and worrying critics

JOHN LEICESTER, PARIS

A year ago, the head of the Paris Olympics boldly declared that France's capital would be "the safest place in the world" when the Games open this Friday. Tony Estanguet's confident forecast looks less far-fetched now with squadrons of police patrolling Paris' streets, fighter jets and soldiers primed to scramble, and imposing metal-fence security barriers erected like an iron curtain on both sides of the River Seine that will star in the opening show.

France's vast police and military operation is in large part because the July 26-Aug. 11 Games face unprecedented security challenges. The city has repeatedly suffered deadly extremist attacks and international tensions are high because of the wars in

Ukraine and Gaza.

Rather than build an Olympic park with venues grouped together outside of the city center, like Rio de Janeiro in 2016 or London in 2012, Paris has chosen to host many of the events in the heart of the bustling capital of 2 million inhabitants, with others dotted around suburbs that house millions more. Putting temporary sports arenas in public spaces and the unprecedented choice to stage a river-borne opening ceremony stretching for kilometers (miles) along the Seine, makes safeguarding them more complex.

Olympic organizers also have cyberattack concerns, while rights campaigners and Games critics are worried about Paris' use of AI-equipped surveillance technology and the broad scope and scale of Olympic security.

Paris, in short, has a lot riding

AP PHOTO



on keeping 10,500 athletes and millions of visitors safe. Here's how it aims to do it.

THE SECURITY OPERATION, BY THE NUMBERS

A Games-time force of up to 45,000 police and gendarmes is also backed up by a 10,000-strong contingent of soldiers that has set up the largest military camp

in Paris since World War II, from which soldiers should be able to reach any of the city's Olympic venues within 30 minutes.

Armed military patrols aboard vehicles and on foot have become common in crowded places in France since gunmen and suicide bombers acting in the names of al-Qaida and the Islamic State group repeatedly struck Pa-

ris in 2015. They don't have police powers of arrest but can tackle attackers and restrain them until police arrive. For visitors from countries where armed street patrols aren't the norm, the sight of soldiers with assault rifles might be jarring, just as it was initially for people in France.

"At the beginning, it was very strange for them to see us and they were always avoiding our presence, making a detour," said Gen. Éric Chasboeuf, deputy commander of the counter-terror military force, called Sentinelle.

"Now, it's in the landscape," he said.

Rafale fighter jets, airspace-monitoring AWACS surveillance flights, Reaper surveillance drones, helicopters that can carry sharpshooters, and equipment to disable drones will police Paris skies, which will be closed during the opening ceremony by a no-fly zone extending for 150 kilometers around the capital. Cameras twinned with artificial intelligence software — authorized by a law that expands the state's surveillance powers for the Games — will flag potential security risks, such as abandoned packages or crowd surges,

France is also getting help from more than 40 countries that, together, have sent at least 1,900 police reinforcements. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

EASING OF VISA RESTRICTIONS GOOD FOR IMPROVEMENT OF CHINA-INDIA TIES

In a move that could help ease strained China-India economic and trade relations, New Delhi is reportedly planning to speed up the process of issuing visas for Chinese engineers and technicians in a bid to make up for the delays at manufacturing units that have already cost the country billions of dollars. The technicians are mainly needed to operate Chinese-made machinery installed in India's high-tech manufacturing units in industries ranging from telecommunications to steel production and solar panels.

The Indian Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade is trying to formulate a framework along with the ministries of home and external affairs that will fast-track visas for Chinese engineers and technicians, with the aim of reducing the visa processing time to 30 days or less from the previous period of four to five months, according to reports.

India virtually stopped issuing visas to Chinese visitors following a deadly clash between Chinese and Indian troops in a disputed border area in June 2020. Reports from the Indian media suggest there was subsequently a significant decline in the issuing of visas to Chinese nationals, dropping to 2,000 so far in 2024 compared with around 200,000 in 2019. Other restrictive measures India has taken against China include the prohibition of hundreds of Chinese mobile apps, delays in approvals for Chinese investments, and a reduction in the number of direct flights between the two countries.

Yet these measures have been a double-edged sword as they have also taken a toll on India's economy. For example, the Indian government's visa restrictions have already caused production losses of \$15 billion for the electronics manufacturing sector alone in the last four years, The Economic Times newspaper has said, citing an industry estimate.

The situation, if it remains unchanged, will certainly hinder Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitious "Make-in-India" initiative aimed at boosting manufacturing and turning the country into a global manufacturing hub. The program includes plans to cut red tape, develop infrastructure and make it easier for companies to do business in India.

Such measures to enhance confidence and convenience are exactly what the country needs given the capriciousness of the government departments when it comes to dealing with foreign companies doing business in India. Despite the country's seemingly vast and promising consumer market, a string of prominent multinational companies including electronics giant Foxconn have been forced to exit, scale down or consider pulling out of the Indian market over the years because of the harsh business environment in India in terms of taxation and arbitrary law enforcement. In the World Bank's Global Doing Business report, India used to be ranked as one of the worst countries in the world to start a business, which earned it the reputation of being a "graveyard for foreign companies".

Chinese companies have been among the biggest victims, especially because of an orchestrated campaign against Chinese economic interests in India. In 2022, Indian authorities seized \$725 million from Chinese smartphone company Xiaomi, accusing it of breaking the country's foreign exchange laws by making illegal remittances abroad, a charge that the company denies. The seizure prompted Beijing to urge New Delhi to "provide a fair, just and nondiscriminatory business environment for Chinese companies".

China and India are each other's major trading partners, and together they are expected to account for nearly half of global growth this year, according to the International Monetary Fund's estimate this week. Hopefully, the latest move by India to ease visa restrictions on Chinese technicians is not made out of expediency, but rather part of a long-term strategy that will see the country become more amenable to Chinese and other foreign businesses.

A woman whose murder conviction was overturned after she served 43 years of a life sentence was released Friday, despite attempts in the last month by Missouri's attorney general to keep her behind bars.

Sandra Hemme, 64, left a prison in Chillicothe, hours after a judge threatened to hold the attorney general's office in contempt if they continued to fight against her release. She reunited with her family at a nearby park, where she hugged her sister, daughter and granddaughter.

"You were just a baby when your mom sent me a picture of you," she

said. "You looked just like your mamma when you were little and you still look like her."

Her granddaughter laughed. "I get that a lot."

Hemme had been the longest-held wrongly incarcerated woman known in the U.S., according to her legal team at the Innocence Project. The judge originally ruled on June 14 that Hemme's attorneys had established "clear and convincing evidence" of "actual innocence" and he overturned her conviction. But Republican Attorney General Andrew Bailey fought her release in the courts.



VIETNAM

COMMUNIST PARTY CHIEF NGUYEN PHU TRONG, THE COUNTRY'S MOST POWERFUL LEADER, DIES AT AGE 80

NGUUYEN Phu Trong, general secretary of Vietnam's ruling Communist Party and the country's most powerful politician, has died following months of ill health, official media said Friday. He was 80.

"General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party Nguyen Phu Trong passed away at 13:38 on July 19, 2024, at the 108 Central Military Hospital due to old age and serious illness," the Nhan Dan newspaper said.

Official media said a state funeral would be held.

Trong had dominated Vietnamese politics since 2011, when he was elected party chief. During his tenure, he worked to consolidate the Communist Party's power in Vietnam's single-party political system. In the decade before he took the top role in Vietnamese politics, the balance of power had shifted more toward the governmental wing led by then-Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung.

Born in 1944 in Hanoi, Trong was a Marxist-Leninist ideologue who earned a degree in philosophy before becoming a member of the Communist Party at the age of 22. He viewed corruption as the single gravest threat in maintaining the party's legitimacy.

"A country without discipline would be chaotic and unstable," Trong said in 2016 after being re-elected to the party's helm. Officially, Vietnam has no top leader, but the Communist Party chief is traditionally seen as the most powerful.

He launched a sweeping anti-corruption campaign known as the "blazing furnace" that singed both business and political elites. Since 2016, thousands of party officials have been disciplined. They included former presidents Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Vo Van Thuong and the former head of parliament, Vuong Dinh Hue. In all, eight members of the powerful Politburo were ousted on corruption allegations, compared to none between 1986 and 2016.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "saddened" by Trong's death and called him "a pivotal figure in Vietnam's recent history," U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said.

During Trong's tenure as president and Communist Party chief, Guterres said, "Vietnam continued its remarkable development journey to emerge as one of the world's fastest-growing economies and an important partner for the United Nations," the

spokesman said.

Trong studied in the Soviet Union from 1981 to 1983, and there was speculation that under his leadership, Vietnam would move closer to Russia and China. However, the Southeast Asian nation followed a pragmatic policy of "bamboo diplomacy," a phrase he coined that referred to the plant's flexibility, bending but not breaking in the shifting headwinds of geopolitics.

Vietnam maintained its traditional ties with its much larger neighbor, China, dispute differences over sovereignty in the South China Sea. But it also drew closer to the United States, elevating its ties with its former Vietnam War foe to its highest diplomatic status, a comprehensive strategic partnership.

The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party offered its condolences to the Vietnamese people.

It said that "Trong was a close comrade and sincere friends" of China's ruling party and called him "a staunch Marxist and a great leader," the state news agency Xinhua reported.

U.S. President Joe Biden issued a statement mourning Trong's death. **MDT/AP**



Myanmar An intensification of fighting in its civil war has brought a sharp increase in destructive attacks on schools, a group that monitors armed conflict in the Southeast Asian nation said in a report Saturday. Myanmar Witness said the attacks have further strained Myanmar's already fractured school system, taking away education for millions of children who have also been forced to flee their homes, miss vaccinations and suffer from inadequate nutrition.



French alleged neo-Nazi sympathizer was sentenced to two years in prison after making threats online and was suspected of wanting to target the Olympic torch relay, authorities said Saturday. The Paris public prosecutor's office said in a statement the 19-year-old man was convicted after a swift trial overnight Friday on charges of sharing bomb-making instructions on social media, posts inciting hate and death threats as well as posts with personal information that put people at risk.

United Nations Security Council unanimously approved more transparent procedures Friday for the hundreds of individuals, companies and other entities who are subject to U.N. sanctions and want to get off the blacklists. The resolution, co-sponsored by Malta and the United States, also authorizes the establishment of a new informal working group by the Security Council to examine ways to improve the effectiveness of U.N. sanctions.

Vatican City Pope Francis accepted the resignation of a Colombian bishop who was mentioned in a book about members of Colombia's clergy who have allegedly committed acts of sexual abuse. The Vatican said in its daily news bulletin that the pope approved the resignation of Bishop Oscar Augusto Múnica from the apostolic vicariate of Tierra Adentro in southwest Colombia. The Vatican's brief statement didn't explain why the bishop had resigned from his post.