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IN THE FIRST HALF, THE LABOR BUREAU CONDUCTED 1,600 INSPECTIONS ACROSS VARIOUS WORKPLACES, UNCOVERING FIVE SAFETY AND HEALTH VIOLATIONS

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CHINA ISSUES RARE PRAISE TO PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT FOR CRACKDOWN ON ONLINE GAMBLING

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AP PHOTO



China-US Several U.S. states, led by Missouri, are actively divesting from Chinese companies amid broader national security concerns. This reflects a growing trend where states take independent action against perceived foreign threats. The measures highlight tensions between economic interests and geopolitical strategy, as states balance investment returns with national security priorities.

AP PHOTO



Taiwan Typhoon Gaemi hit the island yesterday, causing significant flooding and landslides, and resulting in three fatalities and over 220 injuries. Despite improved warning systems, Taiwan's dense population and geography make it vulnerable to such natural disasters. The storm, which previously affected the Philippines, also led to the cancellation of military air drills in Taiwan as it moves toward mainland China.

AP PHOTO



Indonesia The French air force's stopover in Indonesia as part of the Pegase mission underscores France's strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific amidst China's growing influence. The mission, which includes displays of military aircraft, aims to enhance French-Indonesian military cooperation. This visit aligns with broader French efforts to assert influence in the region through diplomacy and defense engagements.

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Taobao unveils free shipping on clothing sales to several Asian postcodes, including Macau, to outpace fast-fashion rivals

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TASTE OF EDESIA



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HENGQIN CHECKPOINT REMODEL TO ENHANCE EFFICIENCY BY NOVEMBER

The completion of a significant renovation project at the Central Transport Platform on the second floor of the Hengqin checkpoint has been announced by the Public Works Bureau. The project is expected to be finished in November and has incurred a cost of over MOP190 million. The project aims to "optimize the traffic environment" and "increase the efficiency and operation of the border crossing environment", while providing more convenient facilities for travelers between Macau and Hengqin. The upgrades include optimized pedestrian facilities, a weather-protected corridor, 19,000 square meters of pavement, and designated passenger drop-off and pick-up areas for various modes of transportation.

600 ELDERLY TO BE AFFECTED BY ALLOWANCE REVIEW

The Social Welfare Bureau has started sending out letters to approximately 600 recipients of the elderly allowance as part of a regular eligibility review. Beneficiaries must confirm identification details by filling out forms and providing documents to the bureau either physically or through the Macau One Account app. Those living outside of Macau need to prove their residence. The bureau said the verification aims to better monitor recipients and manage public funds. Payments for the next MOP9,000 grant are scheduled for October, when over 100,000 beneficiaries in total are expected. Permanent residents aged 65 and above can apply annually for the subsidy through the bureau.

FASHION POP-UP SHOP TO PROMOTE LOCAL DESIGNS IN GUANGZHOU

Local fashion brands will have an opportunity to expand their presence in the Greater Bay Area market next month. The Cultural Affairs Bureau is organizing a pop-up shop featuring Macau designs alongside the Greater Bay Area Craft Fair in Guangzhou from Aug. 23 to Sep. 1. Brands must apply with product samples, certificates, and resumes for a chance to be featured. Those selected will provide eight to 10 unique collections comprising at least five pieces each to sell at the pop up.



HEALTHY MACAU 2030

DSEDJ EFFORTS FALLING SHORT OF PLAN GOALS

RENATO MARQUES

The Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) has initiated several efforts with local schools to educate students on healthy lifestyles and physical fitness, the bureau said in a response to an inquiry from the Times, but most youngsters in Macau do not comply with international standards for physical activity.

In that response, DSEDJ said the government is "actively guiding students, through various ways and means, to learn and lead a healthy lifestyle and to develop a variety of healthy habits that improve physical and mental well-being, including sports and physical activities that enhance physical fitness."

Some of these efforts have been implemented in schools' curriculum, the DSEDJ explained, saying: "DSEDJ has made Physical Education and Health (PE) a compulsory subject for students through the implementation of statutory regulations. These include the 'Curriculum Framework for Formal Education of Local Education System' and the 'Requirements

of Basic Academic Attainments for Formal Education of Local Education System.'" DSEDJ added that, according to such guidelines, "at the primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels, schools are required to allocate no less than 70 minutes per week (approximately two class periods) for this area of study."

DSEDJ also said in the same response that, as well as the allocation of at least 70 minutes per week for PE classes, "schools also arrange [other] regular physical activity programs, such as morning exercise and exercise between class periods, as complements, to ensure that primary and secondary students have a total of no less than 150 minutes of physical activity per week, including physical education classes."

TOO LITTLE EXERCISE: WHO

A survey on the health behavior of secondary education level students in 2022-23 has revealed that 90% of teenagers do not perform the recommended level of daily physical activity, the Health Bureau (SSM) noted in its "Healthy Macau

Plan" for 2030.

According to the results of the survey, most students in Macau do not comply with the World Health Organization (WHO) standards that state that children and adolescents aged between five and 17 years old should have at least 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-high physical, intense activity.

This fact was also highlighted in DSEDJ's response to the Times; the bureau is now calling on schools to have at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week, including physical education classes. This request does fall very short of WHO's standards, which note that youngsters between five and 17 years old should have at least 420 minutes per week of moderate-to-high physical exercise.

DSEDJ's figure amounts to just 35.7% of the minimum standard as determined by WHO.

Although DSEDJ's response acknowledges that other kinds of "leisure activities" have also been incorporated into the formal curriculum for primary and secondary schools, so that

students can enrich their leisure time and further develop their interests, including sports, the bureau could not provide to the Times any concrete information on what exactly this involves, as well as how long is spent on average by students participating in such extra-curricular activities.

CULTIVATION OF HEALTHY LIVING HABITS PART OF CURRICULA

In the response to the Times, DSEDJ also noted that, besides the guidelines for physical activities and exercise, there are additional aspects taken into account in the schools' curricula that are related to healthy living.

"DSEDJ has integrated the cultivation of healthy living habits in students as an important component into the basic academic attainment requirements for school subjects, such as Moral and Civic Education and General Studies, and has published relevant materials to support teachers in carrying out their specific teaching activities."

The promotion of healthy lifestyles was also said to extend to the food supplied at local schools, with DSEDJ highlighting the existence of a "School Operation Guide" for "the supply of school meals, school food management, and healthy meals."

Information sessions are also part of the activities organized by DSEDJ. The bureau said that, in collaboration with relevant government departments, these sessions "promote healthy eating among students, enabling teachers and students to have a good understanding of food-group classifications, as well as the principles of designing and providing nutritionally-balanced school lunches."

Among these activities, DSEDJ noted the "Fruit Fun Day" and the "Milk and Soya Milk [Distribution] Programs," as well as the setting up of healthy snack kiosks and vending machines in schools. These facilities classify their foods into different categories based on their nutritional quality.

"Furthermore, subsidies have also been provided for schools to hire school health promotion staff to boost health education and related activities in schools, to help students develop healthy eating habits from an early age."

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Times

DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF_Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR_Lynzy Valles
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS_Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS_Alex Torrão, Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Jorge Costa Oliveira, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Sérgio de Almeida Correia, Viviana Seguí DESIGNER_Rebeca Almeida | ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS_JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | NEWS AGENCIES_Associated Press, MacauHub, MacaoNews, Xinhua SECRETARY_Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

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ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com
OFFICE MANAGER_Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com
ADDRESS_Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR Telephones: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84
Advertisement_advertising@macaudailytimes.com
For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

NADIA SHAW

RETAIL

Taobao, the main retail platform of Alibaba Group, will provide free shipping for clothing purchases and will also offer free returns to specific regions, including Macau.

Starting Aug. 3, the move aims to enhance the e-commerce giant's competitive position against other fast-fashion giants Temu and Shein, as reported by Nikkei Asia.

The free shipping initiative will initially target consumers in Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, with plans to extend these initiatives to other Asian markets by the end of year.

The program both encourages more merchants to join and addresses the high return rates associated with live-streaming sales events by offering free returns. Items returned will be sent to

Taobao unveils free shipping to Macau



Taobao's overseas warehouses, mitigating risks for sellers who typically face challenges with returns to original vendors in China.

Taobao's logistics arm, Cainiao, will oversee the shipping process, ensuring a seamless experience

for both buyers and sellers.

An unnamed senior manager at Taobao told the media that this initiative represents "the most strategic change by Taobao this year," highlighting the intense competition in China's e-commerce sector, which has led to dwindling profit margins.

The initiative also aligns with Alibaba's broader strategy to support top merchants in exploring international markets, enhancing their global presence.

The initiative also aligns with Alibaba's broader strategy to support top merchants in exploring international markets, enhancing their global presence.

Scorching weather conditions hit as city records 36.3 degrees

Temperatures in Macau are continuing to rise, leading the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) to maintain the present orange high-temperature warning.

Yesterday, SMG recorded temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius in eight out of 10 weather stations, with the highest one, 36.3 degrees, recorded at the Outer Harbour Terminal at around 3 p.m.

Around the same time, the weather stations located at Mount Fortress and the Macau Wastewater Treatment Plant also recorded temperatures of 36.2 degrees.

The only two weather stations recording maximum tempera-

tures below 35 degrees were the ones located at the University of Macau and Taipa Grande, recording 34.7 degrees and 34.2 degrees respectively.

SMG also noted that, although slightly cooler, the yellow high-temperature warning will still be issued for today, with temperatures expected to rise above 33 degrees.

As a result of tropical cyclone Gaemi, which made landfall yesterday evening at the coast of Fujian Province, a low-pressure area over Macau in the next few days will be responsible for persistent showers and thunderstorms, particularly from tomorrow until next Wednesday. **RM**



LYNZY VALLES

AD

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GAMING

THE LONDONER'S OVERHAUL SHUTTERS CASINO, 1,500 ROOMS; AFFECTS EARNINGS

LYNZY VALLES

PHASE 2 of The Londoner's refurbishment involves the total closure of the Pacifica Casino and a reduction of around 52% in the quantity of room keys offered at the Sheraton, affecting the EBITDA margin for Sands China's portfolio of properties.

The Sheraton hotel brand will no longer remain at The Londoner Macao and will be replaced with "Londoner Grand" by December of this year.

Parent company of Sands China, Las Vegas Sands, revealed the announcement during its second quarter earnings call with analysts.

"Our margins were directly impacted by the disruption caused by the Londoner Grand renovation. We closed the casino [with] 1,500 keys out during the quarter," said Patrick Dumont, president and chief operating officer of Las Vegas Sands.

The executive disclosed that the operator is now "deep into our Londoner Grand renovation program," with plans to complete the first tower by year-end 2024 and of the second tower by May of 2025.

The gaming operator experienced a complete closure of Pacifica Casino for the entire quarter, compared to only a 60% closure in the subsequent quarter.

The casino has been shut down since May and is set to reopen in December.

"As these products come onli-



ne, between the end of 2024 and the first half of 2025, our competitive position will be stronger than ever. We expect meaningful EBITDA growth and margin growth in the future," said Dumont.

Sands China's total gaming revenues for the market grew 24% in the second quarter of 2024 when compared to the second quarter of 2023. In addition, mass gaming revenue grew 29% compared to one year ago.

However, the gaming operator recorded an Adjusted Property EBITDA of USD561 million in the second quarter of 2024, representing a 3.7% rise year-on-year but an 8% drop compared to the Ja-

nuary to March period of the same year.

The company attributed the decrease to low hold on rolling play in Macau, impacting Adjusted Property EBITDA by USD4 million.

Macau operations generated a net revenue of USD1.754 billion, marking a 7.7% increase from the previous year but a 3.3% decrease from the previous quarter.

"We remain confident in the future growth in the Macau market. I believe Macau market for gross gaming revenue will exceed USD30 billion next year and continue to grow year after year. Our business strategy is predicated on investing

in high-quality assets that scale," Dumont said.

"We delivered solid EBITDA for the quarter despite material disruption caused by The Londoner's renovations, and continue to lead the market in gaming and non-gaming revenue, as well as EBITDA market share. We will capture high-value, high-margin tourism over the long term," remarked Robert Goldstein, chairman and chief executive officer of Las Vegas Sands.

The gaming operator remains positive of the outcome of the ongoing Londoner renovations, with hopes to become "one of the best-if not the best" property in Macau.

Data from the group shows that The Londoner's win fee per day on the table side is the second best in its system.

"Now, we're going to open up the better half, hopefully, by the end of the year. Certainly, the limiters are going to come off," said Dumont.

Amid carrying all the costs now associated with the shuttered casino and 1,500 rooms, "the potential of the future is really there." The company stated that it feels "very strong about the potential for the margins to reach where we need to go," citing slot, table win, hotel, and non-gaming amenity performance win.

Institution CLSA has pointed out that the peak of the impact on the ongoing renovations at The Londoner is expected to be felt in the third quarter of 2024.

Grant Chum, CEO and president of Sands China, said in the earnings calls that disruption will actually increase from a room perspective.

"We're operating around 2,500 keys at Sheraton in the second quarter on average over the quarter, and we expect to be down to about 1,300 on average across the third quarter."

For Chum, it is clear there are more keys utilized in the initial part of the quarter, followed by a decrease towards the end.

Additionally, the Cotai Arena, which has been undergoing renovations since January, is set to be fully operational by the year's end.

RUA DAS ESTALAGENS

Sands China to subsidize seven SMEs to set businesses in revitalization project

LYNZY VALLES

A total of seven small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are slated to receive subsidies from the Sands China's entrepreneurship program for the revitalization project at Rua das Estalagens.

The project received 128 applications, with 120 meeting the eligibility requirements, covering categories such as dining, takeaway, retail, cultural and creative industries, and performance.

Yesterday, the gaming operator disclosed the results of its Entrepreneur-



ship Recruitment Program for Rua das Estalagens, part of the company's ongoing Community Revitali-

sation Series. The winning establishments are Café Fantart, Little Port, Olálá, Catfee

Macau, Travessa Gelato, PanPan and Voyage Thai Kitchen.

The objective of the

initiative is to financially support creative business ideas proposed by local residents who are keen on establishing enterprises on Rua das Estalagens, with the aim of "rejuvenating the local economy and contributing to the revitalization of the street."

Disbursed in four stages, the awarded subsidies are up to twice the enterprises' initial capital investment, capped at MOP1 million in order to encourage sustainable development.

"Although this project is a first-of-its-kind and lacks precedent, and with Sands China, frankly, inexperienced in this area, we are truly thrilled and touched to receive enthusiastic support from all walks of life," said Wilfred Wong, executive vice-chairman of Sands China Ltd.

The gaming operator will send information about the selected business plans to relevant government departments and public utility corporations, so as to provide them with the support and connections needed for opening and help them settle in the area as quickly as possible.

"We hope that this group of aspiring and creative local residents will use the energy and enthusiasm of youth to bring a new atmosphere to the neighbourhood," Wong added.

Program applicants need a minimum of MOP300,000 in capital to commence the entrepreneurial journey.

Sands China announced the program in April this year, as the gaming operator pledged to revitalize the area as one of its commitments to government.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

NADIA SHAW

GAMING

THE Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) has intensified its crackdown on unlicensed junket activities following recent casino inspections.

Under Macau's revised junket laws, individuals must obtain a valid license from the government to engage in junket business. Each licensed junket is permitted to sign an intermediary contract with only one of the six concessionaires and is prohibited from operating their own VIP rooms or holding revenue-sharing agreements with casino operators.

In a WeChat statement recently, the DICJ reported that special inspections revealed "suspicious behaviors," indicating unlicensed individuals were involved in junket activities. The bureau has launched investigations and warned it will rigorously address suspected gaming law violations, implementing measures to bar offenders from entering casinos.

Last September, Macau limited the number of licensed junkets for 2024 to 50 as a maximum. However, only 22 licensed junkets were operating in the market as of June this year. DICJ has conducted inspections and audits of Macau casinos, focusing on VIP rooms and mid-market areas to prevent illegal activities such as unauthorized be-

DICJ cracks down on unlicensed junket activities



ting and unlicensed junket operations.

These inspections involve reviewing transaction documents and records related to gambling activities. During these reviews, unlicensed junket activities were discovered, prompting DICJ to initiate investigations. The bureau will take necessary measures against suspected offenders, including banning them from entering casinos.

DICJ emphasizes that all gaming activities must adhere strictly to existing laws and regulations, ensuring the integrity of the city's gaming environment.

In line with the upcoming Law No. 7/2024, which takes effect Aug. 1, DICJ will further enhance its monitoring efforts. This law stipulates that only concessionaires can engage in credit business, reinforcing the regulatory framework governing Macau's gaming industry.

JEFFERIES

Crackdown on illegal money exchanges threatens tourism

VICTORIA CHAN

THE crackdown on illegal money exchanges, marked by increased police presence on casino floors, could negatively impact summer holiday visitation, according to a recent report by brokerage firm Jefferies.

The report notes the heightened focus on illegal fund flows in Macau follows a recent press conference by China's Ministry of Public Security, where authorities vowed to strengthen cooperation between Macau and the Chinese mainland in clamping down on illegal money exchange activities.

'Money changers' who operate around Macau's casinos have been identified as a key channel for illicit fund movements between the Chinese mainland and Macau.

"We are keeping a close eye on this change, as the heightened focus could deter summer

holiday visitation, especially following China's Ministry of Public Security's recent press conference regarding the illegal money exchanges in Macau on July 5," the Jefferies analysts wrote.

Despite the ongoing crackdown, the equity research team emphasized that daily gaming revenue estimates for the rest of the month stand at MOP560 to MOP 660 million per day, implying a monthly revenue range of MOP18.4 to MOP19.4 billion.

However, the analysts noted the uncertainty around macroeconomic conditions in Macau "continues to temper momentum in the market," putting pressure on the performance of gaming operators in the region.

"Macau continues moderate post-COVID recovery, but China's macro-overhang remains a barrier," the Jefferies analysts concluded.

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LABOR

DSAL REPORTS FIVE SAFETY VIOLATIONS IN 1,610 INSPECTIONS

NADIA SHAW

IN the first half of 2024, the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) conducted 1,610 inspections across various workplaces, uncovering five occupational safety and health violations. The-

se violations were primarily linked to issues involving work at heights and with inadequate protective measures on construction sites.

During a TDM Radio Forum, Lei Seak Chio, director of DSAL's Department of Oc-

cupational Safety and Health, reported that the construction sector has largely adhered to the "Construction Industry Occupational Safety and Health Law," which took effect in November 2023. Out of the total inspections, 826 focused specifically on construction sites, where the violations revealed critical safety concerns, including insufficient measures for working at heights and unsafe electrical practices.

In response to the violations, DSAL issued four stop-work orders to halt operations until necessary safety improvements were verified through follow-up inspections. Lei also addressed a recent incident where a foreign worker died after falling from a high-rise building while replacing an air conditioner, emphasizing the challenges in monitoring safety in household projects. He urged property management companies and homeowners to report safety concerns to facilitate timely interventions.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention No. 167 emphasizes the importance of worker safety and health in the construction industry. Key provisions require employers to: implement safety measures, provide training and information to workers; and ensure safe work environments. The convention highlights the need for risk assessment and management, along with the need for appropriate safety equipment.

Lawmaker advocates for enhancing budget precision in public projects

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Public Finance Affairs follow-up committee has revealed that five out of 10 projects monitored during the last quarter of 2023 have changes to their budgets due to input errors, according to the committee's president, Wong Kit Cheng.

In a statement, Wong announced the formation of a team to monitor the data generated by the Financial Services Bureau, ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the information submitted in quarterly performance reports.

"In the budget execution report for the fourth



quarter of 2023 regarding projects in which the budget had been adjusted by more than 100 million patacas, there were around 10 that we wanted the government to submit supplementary information on," Wong said.

"Among them, we found that five of the

projects had clerical errors related to the input amount, which affected our follow-up. However, after the government's explanation and adjustment of the amount, the information submitted in the first quarter of 2024 has been adjusted."

Wong also noted that

relevant government departments have reviewed some deficiencies in the current input procedures and have made relevant adjustments.

"The amount of the first quarter information temporarily submitted is correct and will not have any impact on the fiscal budget utilization of the entire government department," Cheng said.

"At the same time, we will also establish relevant input training, as well as a monitoring team to check the input information submitted in the quarterly performance report, ensuring accuracy and completeness."



CRIME

DRUG BUST: SUSPECT ARRESTED FOR TRAFFICKING COCAINE

VICTORIA CHAN

AUTHORITIES have arrested a 27-year-old Tanzanian man, identified as Biseko, for his alleged involvement in the trafficking of cocaine in Macau.

According to Judiciary Police (PJ), they had had earlier received information indicating that an African man was engaged in drug trafficking in Macau. After a thorough investigation, the suspect was identified and tracked down in Taipa. On July 24, at around 10:45 p.m., criminal investigation personnel intercepted the suspect near his residence in the North District.

During the search of the suspect's home, the authorities seized a tin can containing 45 small packages of cocaine, weighing a total of 16.35 grams, as well as more than 300 small transparent plastic bags believed to be used for drug packaging. Additionally, the police confiscated HKD5,100 and MOPD4,200 in cash, suspected

to be drug proceeds.

The suspect, who tested negative for drug use, refused to cooperate with the investigation and provide details about the source of the drugs or his involvement in the drug trafficking activities. According to the investigation data, the authorities believe that the suspect has been engaged in drug trafficking in Macau for about half a month, primarily supplying to nightclub dealers.

In this operation, the police seized a total of 16.35 grams of cocaine, worth approximately MOP59,000.

The police have detained the suspect and the case will be forwarded to the Public Prosecutions Office for the crime of illegal trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and for further investigation.

The bureau said it will continue to investigate the source of the drugs and any other individuals involved in the suspect's alleged drug trafficking operation.

CRIME

SUPERMARKET THIEF ARRESTED

THE Public Security Police (PSP) have arrested two men suspected of stealing approximately MOP2,600 worth of goods from a supermarket.

According to a report filed with police on July 21, a tally clerk at a supermarket in ZAPE discovered a shortage of goods after counting the store's inventory.

Surveillance video from July 18 and July 21 showed three men stuffing goods into plastic bags while staff were distracted.

Using footage from the supermarket cameras and surveillance system, police identified and detained two suspects on July 22: an unemployed man in his 40s, who holds a travel

permit to Hong Kong and Macau; and an unemployed man also in his 40s, who holds a Chinese passport.

Both men admitted to stealing from the store twice, citing financial hardship as their motivation. The goods were transported to mainland China by a third man, who remains at large as investigations continue.

During a search of the suspects' residence, officers discovered an unlicensed accommodation operation. The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has since sealed the offending residence for violating the regulations that govern short-term rentals. The investigation continues. VC

FINANCE

China cuts 1-year benchmark rate, moving to boost economy as world markets languish

ELAINE KURTENBACH, BANGKOK

CHINA ratcheted up its effort to reinvigorate its economy yesterday by cutting a key policy rate and interest paid on bank deposits.

The move coincided with a downturn in world stocks, extending losses in Chinese markets that have declined this year while share prices soared in many other countries.

By midday, Hong Kong's Hang Seng was down 1.4% and the Shanghai Composite index lost 0.4%.

The People's Bank of China said it cut the lending rate for one-year medium term policy loans by 20 basis points to 2.3%. That is the biggest rate cut since China's economy was slammed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The rate on 7-day loans was reduced to 1.7%.

Major state-run banks cut deposit rates to relieve pressure on their finances, reducing the rate paid on one-year fixed deposits by 10 basis points to 1.35%, the official Xinhua News Agency reported, citing official rates released yesterday by the country's "Big Four" banks: Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Agricultural Bank of China, Bank of China and China Construction Bank.

The banks cut deposit rates three times last year and this was the first reduction for 2024, it said.



But while lower deposit rates may be good for the bank's balance sheets they won't encourage more consumer spending — the one thing most economists agree is needed to help revive growth that has been falling for years and was hit especially hard by a downturn in China's property sector.

"Banks are already passing on lower deposit rates to savers; which will do nothing to encourage spending in the current environment, and people will instead save even more to generate the same return they were earning before," RaboResearch said in a commentary.

Growth in the world's second-largest economy slowed to 4.7% in the last quarter, down from 5.3% in January-March.

Earlier this week, the central bank cut several of its other lending rates, sticking to a cautious approach to stimulating the economy.

The flurry of rate cuts this week

followed a major policy-setting meeting of the ruling Communist Party last week that laid out ambitious plans for reforms in many areas of the economy but did not spell out any specific plans for stimulus driven by government spending.

Instead, the party has opted for fine-tuning.

The planning meeting focused on mapping out long-term goals but also emphasized short-term targets, Nicholas Yeo of abrdn, formerly Standard Life Aberdeen plc, said in a report.

"This was unusual, but positive, as this could be an indication of the authorities' growing awareness of the need to address the country's lagging economic growth," he said.

The rate cut also helps relieve pressure in the bond market since the central bank also has cut collateral requirements for its medium-term lending facility, enabling lenders to sell bonds normally used as collateral. **MDT/AP**

AVIATION

Southwest breaks 50-year tradition, plans to start assigning seats

SOUTHWEST Airlines is doing away with its 50-year tradition and plans to start assigning seats and premium seating for customers who are seeking more legroom.

The airline said yesterday that it has been studying customer preferences and expectations and is making the changes because of what they've heard, but it could also generate revenue and boost financial performance.



While Southwest has used an open seating model for 50 years, the company said that it understands that preferences have changed, with more customers taking longer flights and wanting an assigned seat. Southwest unveiled changes to how it has boarded flights on the same day it reported that it topped profit and revenue ex-

pectations for the second quarter.

The airline is said it will offer redeye flights for the first time.

Southwest said that its first overnight, redeye flights will land on Feb. 14, 2025 in nonstop markets that include Las Vegas to Baltimore and Orlando; Los Angeles to Baltimore and Nashville; and Phoenix to Baltimore. It plans to phase in additional redeye flights over time. **MDT/AP**

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

Tradition Meets Innovation:
MGM "Full Moon Reunion"
Mooncake Gift Box Shines for
Mid-Autumn Festival



As the Mid-Autumn Festival approaches, it's time to send heartfelt wishes to your loved ones. This year, the mooncake scene welcomes a fresh collaboration to elevate your festive experience. MGM joins hands with the renowned Chinese lifestyle design brand Duanmu to present the "Full Moon Reunion" Mooncake Gift Box, fusing Chinese ancient art and traditions with innovative elements.



Inspired by the poem by Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai, the gift box design ingeniously combines the "Flower and Dragon" Qing Dynasty Imperial Carpet from MGM's art collection with the unique Chinese patterns of Duanmu. What's more, the reimagined antique masterpiece incorporates interactive elements. Each gift box includes character stickers inviting everyone to craft their own Mid-Autumn stories and cherished reunion moments with creativity.

In addition to the classic White Lotus Seed Paste Mooncake with Double Yolk, popular Mini Custard Mooncake and the Assorted Mini Mooncake gift boxes are also on offer. Providing trendy flavors, such as red bean paste, sesame, durian, and more.

Create your unique Mid-Autumn scene by ordering the "Full Moon Reunion" Mooncake Gift Box. For more information, visit mgm.mo or call (853) 8802 3888.



THE POVERTY OF AFFLUENCE

ANALYSIS
BY LEANDA LEE, MDT

FOOD is our joy and our medicine. So important is it that the second of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals is to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, too, provides for "the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food..." Access to safe, nutritious, affordable and diverse food that does not damage earth's natural systems in its production, assembly, transportation, and management of waste to maintain health for both people and the planet is a more comprehensive goal.

There is an expectation that developed countries are better placed to ensure the right to access nutritious and safe food, and to guarantee fair distribution. The excesses of affluent societies, however, have imposed stresses on communities which are gradually becoming recognised. As with any crisis, there is a storm of elements that have burdened some wealthy nations with chronic diseases and mental dis-ease.

Industry-level disincentives have created a failure in the system - particularly in the U.S. - to question the state of knowledge as to what provides for health and wellbeing: A drive for profitability at the expense of society at large; distorted and incomplete scien-

tific understanding about macro-nutrient and eating pattern recommendations; and the historical impact and market distortion of government subsidies on agricultural production. These failures have created food deserts in some nations where there may be fast food outlets on every corner but no ready access to affordable or good-quality fresh food.

The damage done by UPFs (Ultra Processed Foods) at the population level as reported in the British Medical Journal in 2023 manifests in rising rates of obesity. As a comparison, the prevalence of obesity in the U.S. is currently at 42% of the population.

The overweight population in China in 2023 was around 35%, with obesity at 14% of the adult population. Across almost all age groups in China the burden has shifted from underweight dominance in 1990 to overweight dominance in 2022 as cited in the Lancet in 2024.

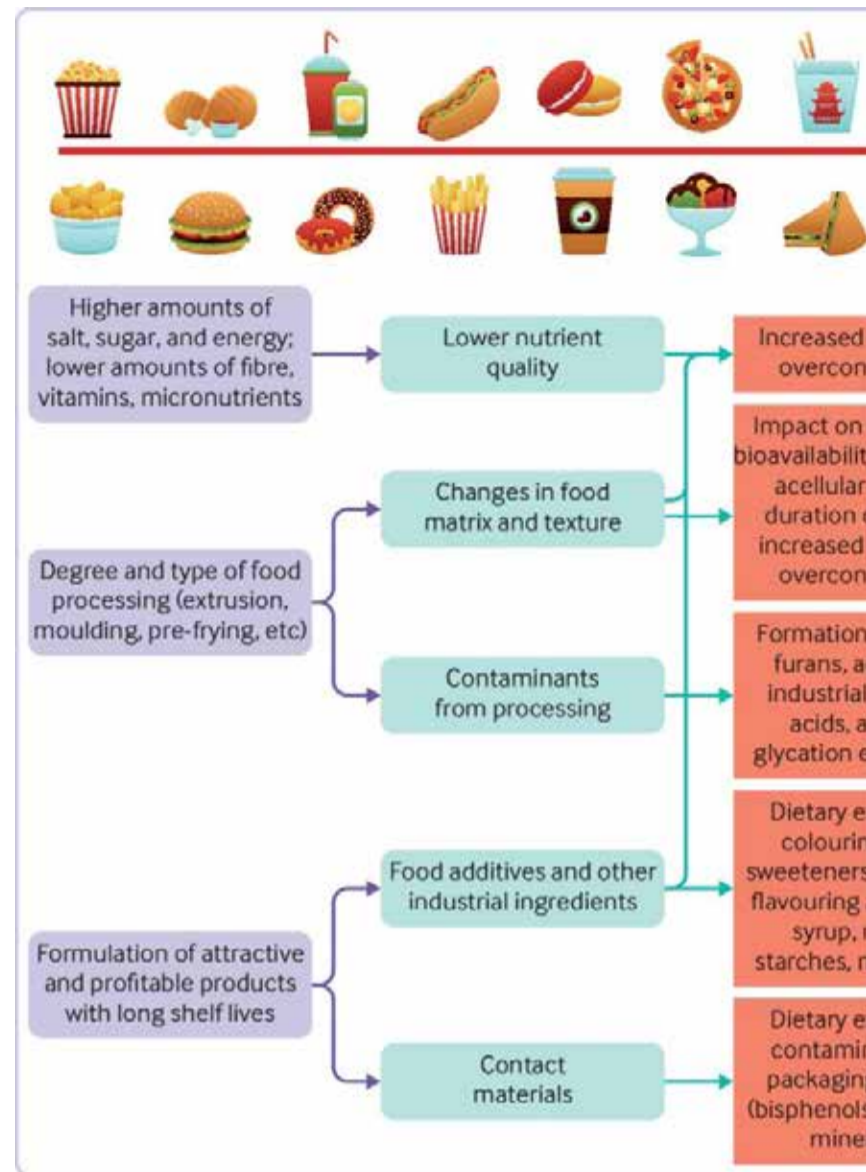
Type two diabetes is another health outcome of urbanization, diet and sedentary trends: 12% of the U.S. population has diabetes, but China has the highest number of diabetics globally with the China Diabetes Market Report: 2024-2032 stating that in the last 30 years, from less than 1% of the population, the level has increased to 12%, a direction which presents a gold mine for the diabetes therapeutics and diagnostics industries! Other outcomes of increased uptake of UPFs are hypertension, inflammatory and vascular diseases, cardio-vascular mortality, several cancers, de-

pression and anxiety which are all blowing out the size and costs of medical industries and are the causes of much social disruption and human suffering.

The world has much to learn from the experience of living on the SAD (the Standard American Diet). The proportion of UPFs in the average American adult diet is 58% and for the Brits is 57% as reported in 2023. We are slowly building an understanding in nutritional sciences what good and bad dietary choices are doing to our health.

The nascent studies on the microbiome prove to be offering important insight into the relationship between physical and mental health and traditional foods as medicine. Although strong evidence is mounting, there is so much we are still to unpack in terms of how the changes to the food-matrix during processing affect health outcomes. Yet, we still feed our populations with food-like substances our great-grandparents would not have recognised, because it is cheap and hits the manufactured and aggressively marketed taste-bud bliss-point. Like many addictive, attractive and conveniently available substances, once hooked it is hard to come off the UPF diet, and more so if the average citizen is unaware of the dangers.

The South China Morning Post recently reported on "Poor Man's" meal choices in response to Chinese consumer spending cut-backs - one behavioural indicator of lack-luster economic circumstances. This has flow-on effects as bu-



BMJ, 2023: Summary of potential factors and mechanisms linking ultra-

nesses respond with budget offerings. On the face of it, low-price deals provide consumer choice, but provision of such options will prompt suppliers to make cuts along the supply chain.

This is of concern particularly in erstwhile well-to-do urban Chinese populations such as the GBA that have become acclimatized to industrialised fast-food offerings.

Not only are the chronic health problems looming around the corner from the increased uptake of those pseudo-foods, but of additional concern, the oversight and detection of dangerous substances in the enhancers, emulsifiers and many other chemicals the average person cannot remember, let alone pronounce, that are being incorporated to

GBA real estate market sees increased interest from Macau, HK residents

ON THE AGENDA

THE real estate market in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) is experiencing a significant uptick in activity, fueled by a series of favorable policy changes and growing interest from Hong Kong and Macau residents looking to purchase property in the region. Recent developments have pointed to a robust recovery in residential sales, particularly following the easing of market cooling measures and the implementation of supportive housing policies earlier this year.

According to Yicai Global, the increased willingness of Hong Kong and Macau residents to buy properties in the GBA has been notably influenced by po-

licy adjustments in cities like Guangzhou, which recently relaxed home-buying restrictions.

Real estate developers report a surge in visits and sales, especially after local incentives were introduced, including a notable discount offered by New World China to Hong Kong residents, which resulted in significant immediate interest.

The policy changes in Guangzhou, which came into effect on July 5, now allow residents from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and overseas to purchase one property up to 120 square meters in restricted areas, with no limit on size or number of properties in other areas. This easing of restrictions is part of a broader move to make the GBA more ac-

cessible and attractive to potential buyers from these regions, who frequently travel and work across these cities due to their proximity and economic ties.

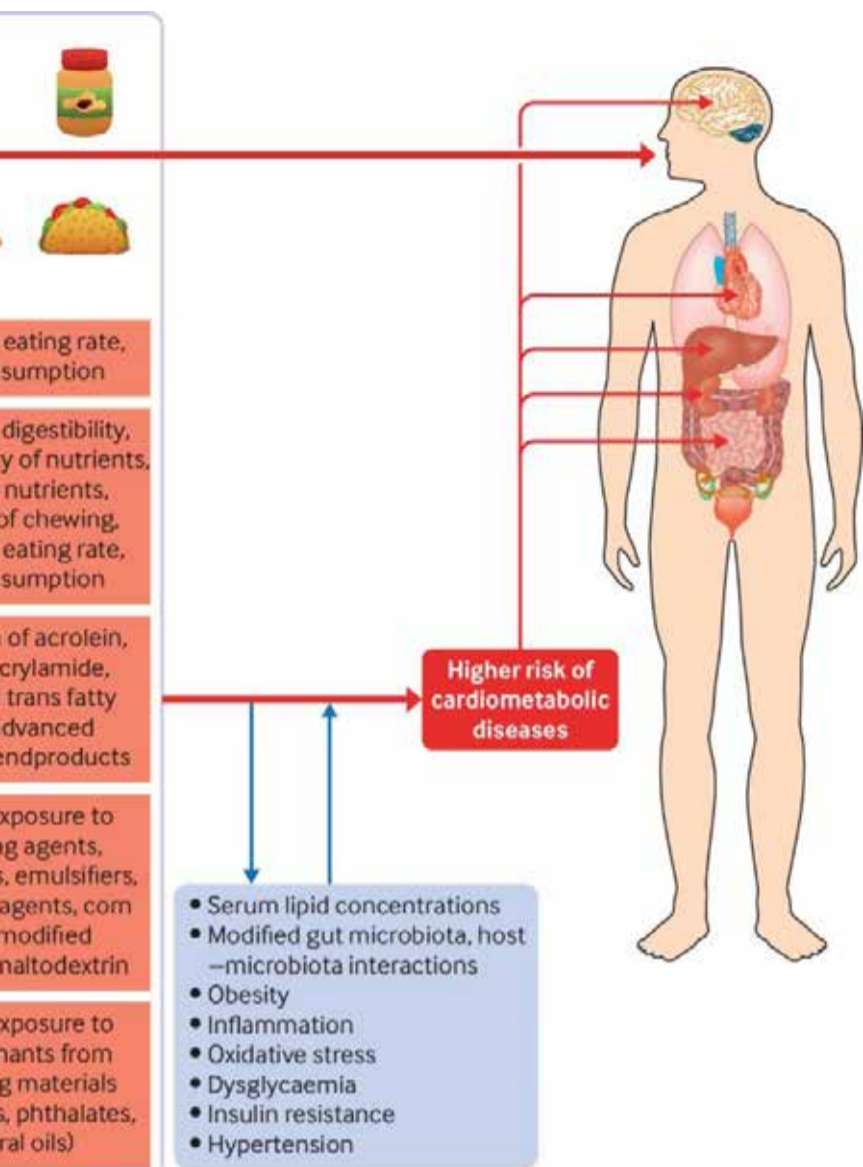
The Dow Jones Institutional News reported that these policy relaxations are part of the "517" policy introduced by the central government, which has spurred not just residential but also commercial real estate activity across the GBA. The policy includes measures such as the elimination of the new home loan rate lower limit and adjustments to the down-payment ratios, which have collectively boosted market sentiment.

Investment in the GBA's real estate market reached RMB 11.9 billion in the first half of 2024,

showcasing the area's appeal not just for residential but also commercial investors, particularly in logistics due to strong demand and potential for capital appreciation. The GBA's investment market in the first six months of 2024 was predominantly driven by state-owned enterprises and private investors, indicating robust confidence in the region's growth prospects.

Connectivity enhancements, such as the opening of new mega bridges like the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, have also played a crucial role in increasing the attractiveness of the GBA for Hong Kong and Macau residents. These infrastructure developments have made commuting and integration across the region smoother, encouraging more residents from the SARs to consider the GBA as a viable location for second homes or investment properties.





thy eating and lifestyle habits. More meat-based, fat-laden, salty and sweet foods in a diet will transition food preferences away from traditional, less-processed meals to fast-food options – an easy choice for people under economic stress and emotional pressure in urban centers where such foods are ubiquitous. UPFs are the new urban comfort food, without the effort.

The relationship between UPFs and the risk of being overweight in China is not straight forward. A 2023 study in the journal “Nutrients” provides evidence for women and adults living in small and medium-sized cities being at higher risk from weight-related outcomes from UPF consumption than the rest of the population but that there is still a general effect which should not be ignored.

Indeed, the increase in weight gain, chronic diseases and consumption of UPFs in urban China suggests lessons can be learnt from the outcomes and responses to the Standard American Diet and what can be gained from adherence to more traditional diets both locally and in the region.

As opined by academics at the Academy of Global Food Economics and Policy at China Agricultural University in the China Daily early this week, shifting food production focus “from merely ensuring food grain security to achieving overall food security, nutritional health, and green and low-carbon development...as well as fruits and vegetables and aquatic products” will nudge the overall system of food production to providing that access to safe, nutritious, affordable and diverse food to all segments of our community even when times are tough – if our tastebuds allow us.

modern industrialised foods will be made far more difficult in such a market.

The history of food scandals in China (such as the tragedy of melamine in Sanlu Group’s milk) continues today with the latest uproar over the case of cooking oil logistics negligence as reported in the Times July 12. This does not bode well in a market where the

consumption of UPFs is growing. Worse, global trends suggest that in tough economic times cheaper processed foods become the choice for poorer segments of the community.

Chinese urbanites are noticeably dumpier than populations of neighbouring countries. Statistical evidence supports this observation and warns against unhealth-

WORK IN PROGRESS
NOTES ON ACADEMIC STUDIES



The ozone concentration and changes in the sensitivity of its formation in Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) from a carbon neutral perspective

Hao Jianghong, Li Yue, Zhao Ying, Cheng Qinyu, Zhao Xiuyong, Chen Dongsheng
Journal of Resources and Ecology (2024)

To investigate the potential impact of emission reduction measures on ozone (O₃) formation under the carbon neutrality target, we examined the changes in O₃ concentration and their sensitivity to various parameters in the urban and suburban areas of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). In this study, we used the Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF), the Sparse Matrix Operator Kernel Emissions (SMOKE) and the Community Multi-scale Air Quality Modeling system (CMAQ) air quality model to simulate O₃ formation in three key years of 2020, 2030 and 2060, based on the Ambitious-pollution-Neutral-goal scenario data from the Dynamic Projection for Emissions in China (DPEC) model. The decoupled direct method (DDM) module embedded in CMAQ was used to calculate the first-order sensitivity coefficients of O₃ to nitrogen oxides (SO₃_NO_x) and volatile organic compounds (SO₃_VOC). The results show several important trends in the O₃ concentrations and sensitivity. (1) For the changes in O₃ concentrations, in terms of different seasons, the O₃ concentration in the GBA region shows an increasing trend in winter in both 2030 and 2060 compared to 2020. In terms of different cities, the O₃ concentration in Shenzhen shows a significant increasing trend compared to the other cities. (2) For changes in O₃ sensitivity, SO₃_NO_x shows an increasing trend, with the negative area declining and the positive area increasing. In 2030, the negative absolute value of SO₃_NO_x is reduced, indicating that the NO_x titration effect will be weakened. In 2060, SO₃_NO_x becomes positive in most areas of the GBA region. For SO₃_VOC, the future scenario shows positive values throughout the study area for all years, but a decreasing trend. (From the Abstract)



Cross-border university choice in China's Greater Bay Area

Xiujian Xie, Danling Li, Jisun Jung
Higher Education Quarterly (2024)

This study explored Chinese students’ motivations for selecting a cross-border university in China’s Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and how they perceive their undergraduate experiences. The GBA was developed as an international economic cluster in China. Despite the vitality of the GBA’s international education sector, few studies have focused on individual students’ perspectives on cross-border higher education choices and experiences. We interviewed twenty students and two academics in charge of university admissions about their opinions and reflections concerning a GBA cross-border university. Students’ university choices were linked to different admission profiles, parental influences, institutional features and interactions between students and the institutions. Our study has significant implications for leaders and policymakers in higher education seeking to attract talented university students, improve enrolment and promote students’ learning experiences in cross-border higher education institutions. (From the Abstract)



NATIONAL SECURITY

Lai will testify in his defense at Hong Kong trial, lawyer says

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

A defense lawyer said yesterday that prominent publisher Jimmy Lai will testify in his defense in the landmark national security trial brought under a security law that has all but wiped out public dissent.

Lai, the 76-year-old founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, was arrested in 2020 during a crackdown on the mass pro-democracy protests that rocked Hong Kong in 2019. He was charged with colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security and conspiring with others to put out seditious publications. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison.

On Wednesday, Lai's lawyer Robert Pang argued his client had no case to answer because the prosecutors' evidence was insufficient. Pang said the

prosecution had failed to prove Lai's intent after the introduction of the 2020 law and stressed the importance of freedom of speech.

But judges Esther Toh, Susana D'Almada Remedios and Alex Lee, who were approved by the government to oversee the case, ruled against him yesterday.

"Having considered all the submission, we ruled that the first defendant has a case to answer on all charges," Toh said, without elaborating.

Lai appeared to be at ease after the ruling.

Pang said in court that Lai would testify in his defense. The case has been adjourned to Nov. 20.

Observers said Lai's high-profile case, which has already stretched over 90 days, is a trial of press freedom and a test for judicial independence in the Asian financial hub.

When Britain handed back



Hong Kong to China in 1997, the city was promised to have its Western-style civil liberties kept intact for 50 years. However, the freedoms that once set Hong Kong apart from mainland China, including freedoms of press and assembly, have drastically shrunk since the enactment of the 2020 se-

curity law.

Beijing and Hong Kong governments insist that the law brought back stability to the city following the social unrest.

The prosecutors have alleged that Lai had engaged in requesting foreign countries, especially the United States, to take actions against Beijing

"under the guise of fighting for freedom and democracy."

They pointed to Lai's meetings with former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other senior senators in the United States in July 2019 to discuss a now-withdrawn extradition bill that sparked the massive anti-government protests that year. They alleged Lai had sought support from the U.S. on sanctioning Beijing and Hong Kong's leaders who allegedly cracked down the movement.

In 2022, six former Apple Daily executives entered guilty pleas and admitted to the court they conspired with Lai to call for sanctions or other hostile activities against Hong Kong or China. They were convicted and await sentencing behind bars.

During the trial, some of the former executives, alongside two others who also pleaded guilty to collusion charges, have testified as the prosecution's witnesses.

Hong Kong, once seen as a bastion of media freedom in Asia, ranked 135th out of 180 countries and territories in Reporters Without Borders' latest World Press Freedom Index. **MDT/AP**

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合夥人 PARTNERS:

官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha ° 山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues ° 馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata ° 趙魯 Zhao Lu °* 馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques

大律師 ASSOCIATES:

高文軒 Adelino Correia °
羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues
馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
陶義德 António Isóo de Azeredo
白穎怡 Iclia Berenguel
冼玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves
馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins
飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira °
莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura
安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos
巴慧雅 Vera Bastos
歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo
陳芷喬 Joana Chan

大律師 ASSOCIATES:

顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan
諾瑪莉 Maria Noras
康靜雅 Viviana Hong
梁淑嵐 Ana Leon
黃瀚賢 Frederico Vong
斐彥德 Gonçalo Figueiredo
吳靈鋒 Ng Teng Fong

實習律師 TRAINEE LAWYERS:

陳健雄 Eurico Chan
戴博晴 Tai Pok Cheng
吳佩愉 Ng Pui U
陳子健 Kimi Chan

法律專家 及 外地註冊律師

JURISTS AND LAWYERS
QUALIFIED IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS:

林思潔 Jessie Lin
羅成軒 José J. Rodrigues
楊詩婷 Si Teng leong

法律專家 JURISTS:

張偉鴻 Cheong Wai Hong
伍福賢 Domingos Ng
許栢桓 Rui Fernandes Brás

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





Foreign ministers and delegates attend the plenary session of the 57th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, yesterday

LAOS

Myanmar violence, South China Sea tensions are top issues as ASEAN's diplomats meet

JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI,
VIENTIANE

SOUTHEAST Asian foreign ministers and top diplomats from key partners including the United States and China are gathering in the Laotian capital yesterday for the start of three days of talks expected to focus on the increasingly violent civil war in Myanmar, tensions in the South China Sea and other regional issues.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will participate in the meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Vientiane, which come as both Beijing and Washington are looking to expand their influence in the region. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is also expected to attend.

Lao Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith thanked ASEAN members and partners for their "unwavering collective effort" that led to its past achievements and emphasized the importance of the bloc's continuous work to promote peace and stability.

"In light of the rapid and complex geopolitical and geoeconomic changes, we need to further enhance ASEAN centrality and unity so as to promote the relevance and resilience of ASEAN, aiming at addressing emerging challenges and

seizing opportunity in the future," he said in an opening statement.

For the ASEAN nations — Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos — the violence in Myanmar is at the top of the agenda as the bloc struggles to implement its "five-point consensus" for peace.

The plan calls for the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties. The military leadership in Myanmar has so far ignored the plan and has raised questions about the bloc's efficiency and credibility to mediate for peace.

Broader talks, including diplomats from elsewhere in the region including Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, are expected to focus on issues including the economy, security, climate and energy.

Regional issues, including Cambodia's decision to build a canal off the Mekong River that Vietnam, which is downstream, worries could have ecological and security implications, as well as massive dam building projects in Laos further upstream could also feature in the meetings.

In Myanmar, the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021 and suppressed widespread nonviolent protests that sought a return to democratic rule, leading to increasing violence and a humanitarian crisis.

In an effort to put pressure on Myanmar, ASEAN has prohibited it from sending any political representatives to top-level meetings, and it has sent bureaucrats instead. Aung Kyaw Moe, the permanent secretary of Myanmar's Foreign Ministry, is representing the country in this week's meetings, which run through Saturday.

More than 5,400 people have been killed in the fighting in Myanmar and the military government has arrested more than 27,000 since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. In addition, there are now more than 3 million displaced people in the country, with the numbers growing daily as fighting intensifies between the military and Myanmar's multiple ethnic militias as well as the so-called people's defense forces of military opponents.

As the needs of civilians grow, discussions on humanitarian assistance to Myanmar will also be a focus of the ASEAN talks, Bolbongse Vangphaen, head of the Thai Foreign Ministry's department for ASEAN, told reporters ahead of the

meetings.

Thailand, which shares a long border with Myanmar, has already been heavily involved in providing humanitarian assistance, and Bolbongse said the country is ready to support the next phase of delivery being planned by the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management.

He did not say when or where the aid delivery would be.

Thailand initiated its first delivery of aid to Myanmar in March from the northern province of Tak. It was said to be distributed in Kayin state to approximately 20,000 out of millions of people displaced by fighting.

Landlocked Laos is the bloc's poorest nation and one of its smallest, and many have expressed skepticism about how much it can accomplish while the crises mount. But it is also the first ASEAN chair that shares a border with Myanmar. Laos has already sent a special envoy to Myanmar for meetings with the head of the ruling military council and other top officials in an attempt to make progress on the peace plan.

ASEAN also has introduced a mechanism of trilateral informal consultation among its current, past, and future chairs, specifically for ensuring continuity in its res-

ponse to the situation in Myanmar. The troika met for the first time on Wednesday, attended by Laos, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Indonesia Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said after Wednesday's meeting that she raised concerns about increasing numbers of cross-border crimes and refugees resulting from the crisis in Myanmar. She said she urged ASEAN to "promote trust and confidence-building through a balanced and low-key approach" to foster a dialogue among all stakeholders in Myanmar.

"The worsening conditions in Myanmar have a direct impact on efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region," she said.

Dulyapak Preecharush, a professor of Southeast Asia Studies at Bangkok's Thammasat University, said ASEAN is not the only stakeholder when it comes to Myanmar, with China and India also major players — and both attending the ASEAN meetings.

Progress on Myanmar "needs to start with countries that share borders with Myanmar, such as China, India and Thailand, to find a joint consensus to address the problems" before expanding to other countries, he said.

In other issues, ASEAN members Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei are locked in maritime disputes with China over its claims of sovereignty over virtually all of the South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping. Indonesia has also expressed concern about what it sees as Beijing's encroachment on its exclusive economic zone.

An estimated \$5 trillion in international trade passes through the South China Sea each year. China has been increasingly involved in direct confrontations, most notably with the Philippines and Vietnam.

This year, tensions between the Philippines and China have escalated, with Chinese coast guard and other forces using powerful water cannons and dangerous blocking maneuvers to prevent food and other supplies from reaching Filipino navy personnel.

The Philippines, a treaty partner with the U.S., has been critical of other ASEAN countries for not doing more to get China to back away from its increasingly assertive approach.

China and the Philippines said Sunday they have reached a deal that they hope will end the confrontations, aiming to establish a mutually acceptable arrangement at the disputed area without conceding either side's territorial claims.

The rare deal could spark hope that similar arrangements could be forged by Beijing with other countries to avoid clashes while thorny territorial issues remain unresolved.

ASEAN has been working with China to produce a South China Sea code of conduct, which is expected to be part of the talks in Vientiane. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



A market in Niamey, Niger

NIGER | A YEAR AFTER THE COUP

Life has become more dangerous and desperate

CHINEDU ASADU & BABA AHMED, ABUJA

WHEN a group of military officers appeared on state television in Niger one year ago to announce a dramatic coup, they said they deposed the West African nation's elected government for two key reasons: its security and economic crises.

But those challenges have persisted, even worsened. The country's 26 million people — among the world's youngest and poorest — are struggling after the junta severed ties with key international partners, who have imposed sanctions and suspended security and development support affecting close to half of Niger's budget.

The coup was the latest and perhaps most significant of the recent military takeovers in Africa's Sahel, the vast, arid expanse south of the Sahara Desert that has become a global hot spot for extremist violence. Niger had been the West's last reliable partner in the region in battling jihadists linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

Now, a crucial U.S. drone base is gone, along with U.S. forces vacating ahead of a September deadline. More than 1,000 French troops also pulled out after being told to leave. A key China-backed pipeline once meant to turn Niger into an oil exporter has stalled with

the insecurity and uncertainty.

Support from international partners, notably the European Union, had made up close to 40% of Niger's budget. With that gone, "we are only looking for something to live on," said one resident in the capital, Niamey, Ibrahim Amani. Everything has become more expensive, he said.

On the streets, where thousands of mostly young people cheered the coup in its early dramatic days, there is growing frustration. But there are no public protests amid concerns about possible retaliation by the junta, which still holds deposed President Mohamed Bazoum in detention. The junta has said he will be charged with treason, to widespread criticism abroad.

There's a "real depressing effect on the ability of the government to provide services and on the ability of businesses to thrive," said Daniel Eizenga, a research fellow with the African Center for Strategic Studies.

As Niger's military leaders consolidated their grip on power, they promised a three-year transition period to civilian rule. Analysts now say that is unlikely to happen on time.

The junta, along with those in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso, is breaking away even from longtime West African allies.

The three countries, after expelling the forces of former

colonizer France, have "completely changed the geopolitical dynamics" of the region and are forming their own anti-Western, pro-Russian alliance, said Ulf Laessing, head of the Sahel program at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Russia is a new force in the Sahel, but its ability to make up for Niger's lost security support is limited. "Niger's army is running out of material with the retreat of Western forces which the Russians — which has sent troops to Niger as its new security partner — can only partly compensate," Laessing said.

On the ground, insecurity has worsened. Niger has quickly become the new target for extremists. Violent killings by rebels and militia groups more than doubled, from 770 people killed in the year before the coup to 1,599 in the year that followed, according to the U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, or ACLED.

Extremists carried out nearly five times as many large-scale attacks — involving at least 10 deaths — in the year after the coup, ACLED data shows.

"Al-Qaida and IS militants have ... consolidated control over more territory since the junta took power by taking advantage of security force limitations that the withdrawal of Western support has contributed to," the American Enter-

prise Institute's Critical Threats Project said in a new report.

That follows the trend in Mali and Burkina Faso, even after military juntas have invoked insecurity to justify taking power, experts have said.

"The coming years are likely to be difficult and violent in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, given the absence of clear inclusive strategies," Alexander Thurston, an associate professor of political science at the University of Cincinnati, said in the new report.

On the business front, Niger's already import-dependent economy is reeling from sanctions and the impact of border closures in the early days after the coup.

The status of hundreds of millions of euros in support from the European Union, one of Niger's biggest donors, remains unclear. That affects agriculture, education, security, businesses and humanitarian activities along with work addressing migration.

Neither Russia nor other countries like Iran that Niger's junta is seeking closer ties with is likely to step up and fill such gaps, said Eizenga with the African Center for Strategic Studies.

"Russia is ultimately acting in the interest of Russia," he said. "And none of these other countries has the resources to provide the assistance that former partners did." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1956 EGYPT SEIZES SUEZ CANAL



Egypt's president, Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, has announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company to provide funding for the construction of the Aswan High Dam.

The British Government and French stockholders who own shares in the Suez Canal Company have reacted with shock to the news.

In a two-and-a-half hour speech delivered to a mass gathering in Alexandria, Nasser said the Nationalisation Law had already been published in the official gazette.

He said all company assets in Egypt had been frozen and stockholders would be paid the price of their shares according to today's closing prices on the Paris Stock Exchange.

Twelve Egyptians have been appointed members of a special board which will manage the newly-nationalised company.

The Suez Canal is a key waterway for world trade and an important source of revenue for Britain.

The Suez Canal Company, which manages the waterway, is legally Egyptian but, in 1869 was granted a 99 years' concession.

It was not due to revert to the Egyptian Government until November 16, 1968.

President Nasser, who took control of Egypt following a Coup d'Etat four years ago, has been implementing a nationalisation programme in the country, and was vehement in his criticism of the West.

He said 120,000 Egyptians had died building the canal but Egypt was receiving just a tiny proportion of the company's £35m annual earnings.

President Nasser's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal company comes following Britain and America's withdrawal of financial assistance towards the Aswan Dam.

It is understood the USSR agreed last month to provide an unconditional loan towards the project.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

As well as nationalising the Suez Canal Company, Nasser also blockaded the Straits of Tiran — Israel's only outlet to the Red Sea. Britain and France joined forces with Israel, although this alliance was denied for years afterwards.

On 29 October, 1956, Israeli troops invaded Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

Two days later, British and French military forces attacked and invaded Egypt's canal zone after President Nasser had refused their offer of creating a buffer zone between Israel and Egypt.

The Soviet Union threatened to intervene on Egypt's behalf.

President Eisenhower of the United States and the UN, fearing the USSR would use the crisis as a way of gaining power in the Middle East, pressured Britain, France and Israel into agreeing to a cease-fire and eventual withdrawal from Egypt in November 1956.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Work gets more interesting over three weeks, with Mercury in Virgo. Discover efficient tricks. Balance your health, work and fitness. Have fun getting physical.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
Over three weeks, with Mercury in Virgo, it's easier to put your feelings into words. Express your affection. Make bold declarations. Share your love.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
Decorate, beautify and add ambiance. Put your love into your home, with Mercury in Virgo for three weeks. Music and lighting work wonders.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Creative communications thrive and flower. You're especially brilliant for the next three weeks, with Mercury in Virgo. Talk about subjects near to your heart.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Network, wheel and deal. Communication gets profitable over three weeks, with Mercury in Virgo. Put your heart into your work and cash flows in.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Make important connections. Your natural communicative gifts and artistic creativity are enhanced over the next three weeks, with Mercury in your sign. Speak powerfully.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Introspection, writing and organization provide peaceful restoration, with Mercury in Virgo. Take time for ritual, meditation and spiritual or philosophical contemplation. Rest and recharge.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Get more done faster by committee. Your team gets stronger over three weeks, with Mercury in Virgo. Friends help you advance during this phase.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Take charge to advance professionally, with Mercury in Virgo. First, determine what you would love. Speculate, imagine and articulate. Stretch into bold possibilities.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Explore options. Make travel plans, with Mercury in Virgo. Communications and transport flow freely. Expand territory over three weeks. Make long distance connections.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Make valuable connections. Communication gets lucrative, with Mercury in Virgo for three weeks. Financial discussions, inquiries and requests can get fruitful. Network and collaborate.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Collaborate with someone attractive. Partnership flowers over three weeks, with Mercury in Virgo. Compromise and negotiate for mutually beneficial solutions. Discuss possibilities together.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

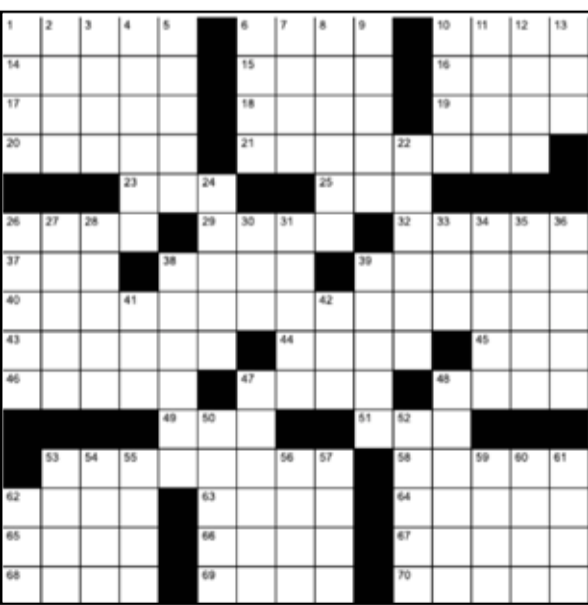
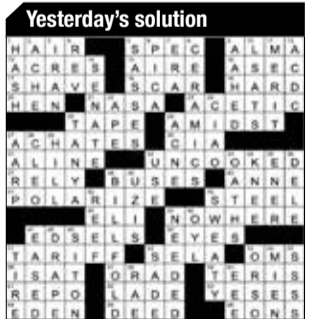
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	25	31	cloudy
Changchun	22	27	rain
Chengdu	23	34	rain
Chongqing	28	36	fine
Fuzhou	25	28	rain
Guangzhou	27	37	showers
Guiyang	22	32	cloudy
Haikou	26	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	29	35	thunderstorms
Harbin	23	24	rain
Hefei	27	32	rain
Nanjing	29	34	overcast
Shanghai	28	33	rain
Taipei	26	30	rain
Wuhan	28	36	fine
Hong Kong	29	33	thunderstorms
WORLD			
Moscow	16	25	cloudy
Frankfurt	18	26	showers
Paris	17	24	showers
London	13	23	cloudy
New York	21	30	sunny

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Ethical; 6- ___ first you don't...; 10- Long objects used to row a boat; 14- Creamy white; 15- Canadian First Nation; 16- Saxophone part; 17- Flat circular plates; 18- Actress Deborah; 19- ___ saw Elba; 20- Spud state; 21- High school memento; 23- Under the weather; 25- Paving material; 26- Superhero fashion must?; 29- Kemo ___; 32- Wahine's welcome; 37- Acapulco gold; 38- Cape Canaveral org.; 39- Fuel oil; 40- In spite of; 43- Bars legally; 44- ___-poly; 45- Bambi's aunt; 46- Affirmatives; 47- Having a sound mind; 48- Highland hillside; 49- St. crosser; 51- Heavens; 53- Flat flour or corn bread; 58- Great grade; 62- Window section; 63- Neb. neighbor; 64- Bluffer's ploy; 65- ___ yellow ribbon...; 66- Singer Tennifer; 67- Selling point; 68- Pronto!; 69- Prayer ending; 70- Romanov rulers;

DOWN 1- Calf-length skirt; 2- Roman poet; 3- Civil rights leader Parks; 4- Jughead's pal; 5- Popular disinfectant; 6- Repulsive; 7- At liberty; 8- Add fizz; 9- Earth; 10- Cream-filled cookie; 11- Dynamic start?; 12- Smell to high heaven; 13- Star Wars letters; 22- Intellectual; 24- Atty.-to-be exams; 26- Brooklyn's ___ Island; 27- ___ by any other name...; 28- Annie of "Designing Women"; 30- Fire proof?; 31- Iraqi port; 33- Blazed a trail; 34- Willow branch; 35- Reddish brown; 36- Aquarium buildup; 38- Tries to bite; 39- Valleys; 41- Heartache; 42- Large amount; 47- Rarely; 48- Go around; 50- Panorama; 52- Purity unit; 53- Mai ___; 54- Draft classification; 55- Gather; 56- Alley; 57- Related by blood; 59- Actress Kudrow; 60- Addict; 61- Tennis units; 62- Sch. group;



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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HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath

AD



From left: Susan Sarandon, Megan Mullally, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Bette Midler in a scene from "The Fabulous Four" (Bleecker Street)

DRIVE IN

A THIRD-ACT FRIENDSHIP COMEDY IN 'THE FABULOUS FOUR'

LINDSEY BAHR,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

SCHEDULING a movie's release date is an imperfect science and occasionally an art. Just

look at the masterpiece that was "Barbenheimer."

While most are open to experimentation in figuring out just what audiences want and

when in the wild west of modern theatrical moviegoing, there's also an unwritten rule that it's best to leave big superhero movie weekends clear of com-

petition. But whoever thought to open the third-act female friendship comedy "The Fabulous Four" alongside "Deadpool & Wolverine" deserves a raise. Because if any audience is being underserved on the opening weekend of an oxygen-sucking, violent and self-referential superhero mashup, it's women over 60.

So, what better way to escape the merc with a mouth than a trip to Key West with Bette Midler, Susan Sarandon, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Megan Mullally?

In the vein of "80 for Brady" and "Book Club," "The Fabulous Four" may not be a great movie, but it's also better than it looks. Although it strains for raucousness with edibles and a parasailing expedition gone wrong, there is something admirably sane about it too even if you don't believe a single moment. It begins, as many of these kinds of films do, with a somewhat tortured explanation of why these women became friends in their youth. Though it nods at a slight age difference between college peers Lou (Sarandon) and Marilyn (Midler) and the two gals they met in New York, Alice (Mullally) and Kitty (Ralph), it's better to not do the math.

Besides, the more in-

teresting question is not why four single girls in the same building became friends, but rather how they maintained that closeness over the decades. This big life mystery goes largely unexplored, instead focusing on the 40-year estrangement between Lou (now a heart surgeon) and Marilyn. It's a drama that for utterly incomprehensible reasons Alice (a rock star, seriously) and Kitty (a cannabis entrepreneur grandma) are still entangled in.

Marilyn, recently widowed, is newly engaged and desperately wants Lou to be at her wedding. Alice and Kitty lure Lou to Key West under false pretenses, telling her that she's won a polydactyl (six-toed) cat and can visit the Hemingway House. They don't have anything more elaborate in store in this lie. Their plan, it seems, is just to roll up to Marilyn's house and surprise their unwitting hostage. This seems misguided at best but becomes retroactively cruel when the cause of the fallout is finally revealed. Why meddle now?

The movie was directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse, the Australian filmmaker behind great and varied female-focused films like "How to Make an American Quilt," "The Dressmaker" and "Muriel's Wedding," and written by Jenna Milly and Ann Marie Allison. And it never quite harmonizes. These characters, fabulous as they may be individually or on paper, aren't greater

together somehow.

As Marilyn and Lou dance around this ancient feud, you start to feel bad for Alice (mostly there to be a quip machine) and Kitty, who would have much more fun ditching them and going off on their own adventure. Midler plays Marilyn so big and broad that she's more parody than person, although there is a grain of intrigue in the 70-something who gets engaged two months after her beloved husband dies and becomes obsessed with creating TikToks. Sarandon's Lou is the most thoughtfully developed character, as a rule-abiding woman whose life is in desperate need of a shakeup. She has some cringey moments too (the aforementioned edibles), but also several charming flirtations with the bachelors of Key West (Bruce Greenwood and Timothy V. Murphy).

This is a movie that should have probably leaned far less on wild hijinks with diminishing returns and more into the smaller moments of what it means to be friends for 40 years. But it's not without its charms, either. I'm not going to argue with them breaking into song out of nowhere. That kind of break from reality, especially with this cast, is always welcome.

"The Fabulous Four," a Bleecker Street release in theaters Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "drug use, some sexual material, language." Running time: 98 minutes. ★★☆☆

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NOW ON SALE

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

tTUNES

Jimin's 'Muse' is charming, not necessarily innovative

FLYING solo from the nest of a mega successful band is difficult, but BTS member Jimin did it with last year's "FACE," his first studio album under his own name. Finding that magic with a sophomore outing is always a much harder proposition. And doing so while serving South Korea's mandatory military service for men of a certain age? That's nigh impossible.

While most likely recorded and produced before Jimin's December 2023 enlistment, the K-pop superstar's second album, titled "MUSE," feels a bit subdued and almost melancholy in its beats.

It's not a record in search of an audience — that's built in, always waiting for a new release. "Muse" functions like a palace bard (Jimin's label, BIG HIT) in search of something to say to keep fans' spirits up while the prince (Jimin) is away on duty. Will his subjects remember him fondly? Will they keep him in their hearts until his return? Although an official press release describes "Muse" as a work portraying Jimin's "journey of finding inspiration from his surroundings," it feels more like a sometimes-fruitless search for an elusive muse.

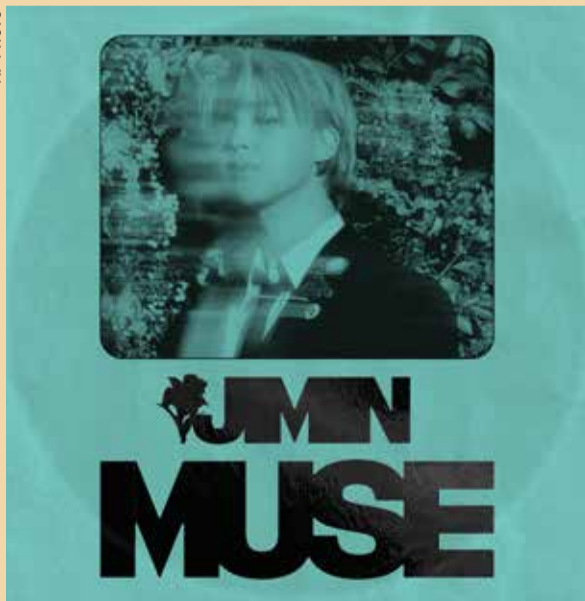
Across the seven songs — which feels more like six, because "Interlude: Showtime" is an instrumental that leads into the third track, the single "Smeraldo Garden Marching Band (feat. Loco)" — Jimin finds his footing with songs that don't aim to be innovative but are charming nonetheless. Clearly a fan of the sad trombone, which was also used on "FACE," Jimin employs the instrument on the lively tune, mixing hip-hop with an orchestra and unsyncopated beats. Visually, the song's music video was loosely inspired by The Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." It's a wholesome bop that feels fast and slow at the same time.

Elsewhere, "Who" is an enchanting R&B tune that slays the dance floor and the hearts of its patrons with a little recorder-like accent on the beat. The other one that grabs with its rhythm is "Be Mine," a bombastic afrobeat song.

The album closes with "Closer Than This," a love letter to fans that was previously released in December, a stripped back, easy listening coda.

While "Muse" doesn't reinvent the wheel, it will keep Jimin's fans entertained. **CRISTINA JALERU, MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



"Muse" by JIMIN. (BigHit)

TASTE OF EDESIA

Taste of Southern Italy

IRENE SAM, MDT

THIS summer, Wynn Palace's Fontana presents us with a gastronomic journey to experience the rich culinary culture of southern Italy, from Naples, Puglia, and Sicily to savor

the sweetness of Marzano tomatoes, the rich taste of olive oil, the zest of Amalfi lemons, and the irresistibly aroma from different kinds of herbs. Travel further south along the spectacular coastline of Italy to discover an abundance of fresh Mediterranean

seafood including red Sicilian prawns, sea bream, sea bass, and more. The Italian Chef will be creating a series of southern Italian dishes with fresh ingredients, including Coastal Seafood Platter, Veal Milanese, Salt Crusted Whole Branzino, various selections of delicious pasta such as Orecchiette with Burrata and Red Prawns as well as Neapolitan-style pizzas. In addition to the classic gelato and freshly made desserts, to end this gastronomic adventure of Italy with the perfect sweet note.

Fontana at Wynn Pa-

lace is a perfect space to celebrate with family and friends, the restaurant is a two-tier theater, with spectacular views overlooking the fountains. Drawing inspiration from the porcelain, textiles, furnishings and architecture of the Ming dynasty — the interior décor is a masterful recreation of Chinoiserie design in the 21st century. The dazzling dragon-themed "Viardot Dragon mirror collection" by renowned 19th century Chinoiserie French furniture artist Gabriel-Frédéric Viardot takes center stage in the restaurant.



Portraits of Intention

JOINING hands with Faculty Department from New York, Making Sense - Volume 1, is a

creative collaboration between Faculty Department and Le Labo, telling 12 stories of individuals

across California who have fearlessly hand-crafted lives of their own making.

These tender portraits of a diverse group—a musician, a woodworker, a writer, a chef, a cera-

mist, a landscape artisan, and more—offer intimate studies of living with intention, purpose, and care. Collectively, they are a celebration of the path less traveled and its infinite routes. **IS**



OPINION

Asian Views

Trinh Nguyen, Nikkei Asia



MALAYSIA SHEDS SHORT-TERMISM TO BECOME ASIA'S COMEBACK KID

While Thailand's policy uncertainty risk premium has been rising during a year of political upheaval, Malaysia has been charting an economic comeback by being unusually quiet and stable politically.

Malaysia had been the poster child of unstable politics with three prime ministers in the four years since Najib Razak left office in 2018 due to the 1MDB scandal that tainted not just his administration but also the country. Populist policies were given priority as political survival took precedence over longer-term strategic economic considerations. As a result, Malaysia lagged behind more politically stable and reform-minded countries such as India and Vietnam in attracting investors.

Fast-forward to today, and Malaysia is quickly rising in investors' perceptions as the comeback kid of Asia. Due to his Pakatan Harapan alliance in parliament, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim is likely to stay in power until the next general election, expected in 2027. This opens more policy space in the short term.

Politically difficult reforms have taken center stage, including rationalizing the diesel subsidy, raising the sales and services tax to 8% from 6%, and reviving a new light-rail transit system in Penang. The budget deficit is expected to narrow this year to 4.3% of GDP from 5.1% in 2023 due to efforts to reduce subsidies.

Rising U.S.-China tensions have made Malaysia a beneficiary of companies seeking a location with solid infrastructure, talent, and an existing ecosystem of high-tech manufacturing. Malaysia is well-positioned to benefit from medium to high-tech capital-intensive supply chain diversification. The Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) agreement is expected to be signed in September to capitalize on Malaysia's relatively cheaper input costs.

FDI inflows increased to \$58 billion in 2023 from \$34 billion in 2014. Net FDI fell to \$9 billion last year from \$17 billion in 2022 as Malaysian companies took advantage of growth in regional counterparts.

According to Bloomberg, despite weak regional deals so far in 2024, the volume of mergers and acquisitions has surged 87% from a year ago to \$8.3 billion. As Malaysia gains traction as an attractive destination for high-tech investment and as a key player in the semiconductor, data processing, renewable, and electric vehicles value chain, interest has garnered from Western companies, but also those in the Middle East and China.

In contrast, Thailand is embarking on a populist budget that includes digital cash handouts that will widen the fiscal deficit and are unlikely to add productivity. The country's fragile politics have motivated Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin to prioritize short-term gains that undermine longer-term fiscal sustainability.

The recent low turnout of Chinese Malaysians and Indian Malaysians in a local Penang election might be a cautionary tale of dissatisfaction with Anwar's alliance that could be a harbinger of Anwar's base becoming alienated while his alliance fails to make inroads with Malay voters.

Anwar is yet to fully address his campaign promise to push for needs-based rather than race-based affirmative action economic reforms. He has also had to contend with corruption, following the halving of Najib's sentence, and anti-graft chief Azam Baki remaining in his post despite a stock-ownership scandal.

Still, Anwar has taken important steps in rationalizing subsidies and increasing tax revenue. While the window of reform remains open, he needs to do more to gain much-needed foreign investment and pave the way for expanding economic opportunities. [Abridged]

Courtesy Trinh Nguyen/Nikkei Asia

TAYLOR SWIFT'S MUSEUM ERA IS ON FULL DISPLAY AT LONDON'S V&A

THE BUZZ

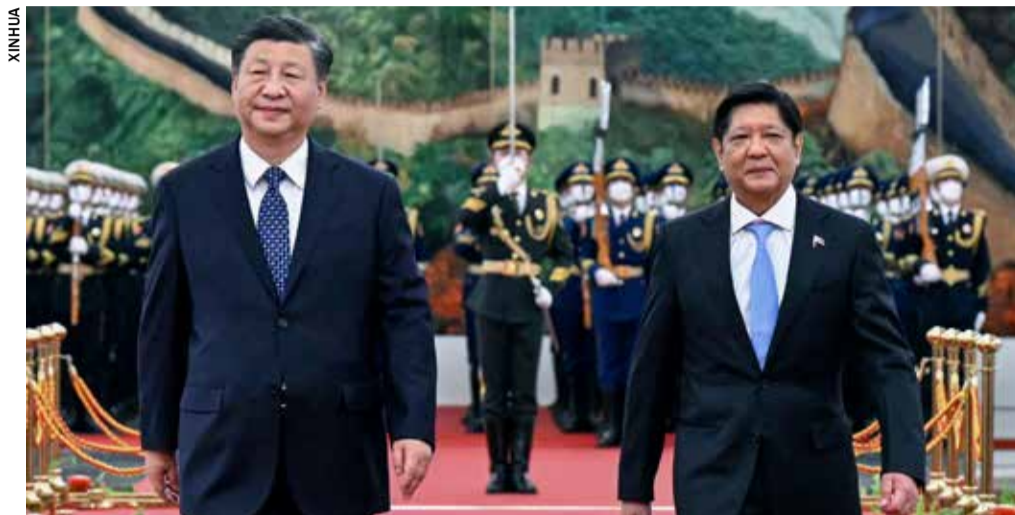
Taylor Swift fans who missed her world tour or those who can't get enough of her can catch her at the museum this summer.

As a celebration of her double run of sold-out shows in London on her Eras Tour, real items from Swift's different musical eras have been integrated into galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Costumes, guitars and other memorabilia from the pop star's archive have been curated into a "Songbook Trail" that opens Saturday and runs through Sept. 8.

"There's so many really iconic objects and looks worn by Taylor across her career from her breakout moment in country," said Kate Bailey, senior curator of theater and performance at the V&A. "It's wonderful to be able to share her musicality and her microphone. So, many, many things."

The exhibit is not the first museum treatment of Swift. Last summer, the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York City presented "Taylor Swift: Storyteller," featuring a different array of costumes and objects spanning her career.



CHINA ISSUES RARE PRAISE TO PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT FOR HIS BAN ON ONLINE GAMBLING

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

China issued a rare compliment to the administration of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. yesterday for his order banning widespread and Chinese-run online gaming operations. Marcos accused some of venturing into crimes including financial scams, human trafficking, kidnappings, torture and murder.

Marcos's order in his state-of-the-nation address Monday immediately banning all Chinese-run online gambling outfits — estimated to number more than 400 across the Philippines and employing tens of thousands of Chinese and Southeast Asian nationals — came amid an ongoing government crackdown backed by Beijing.

China, through its embassy in Manila, belatedly welcomed Marcos's move.

"We believe this decision echoes the call of the Philippine people and serves the common interests of people of both countries," a Chinese Embassy statement issued Thursday night in Manila said. "China is ready to continue its strong law enforcement cooperation with the Philippines and better protect the safety and well-being of the two peoples."

The Chinese Embassy statement attributed to an unnamed spokes-

person stated that China prohibits all forms of gambling and added that the Chinese government has cracked down on Chinese citizens engaging in overseas gambling businesses including the so-called Philippine offshore gaming operators, or POGO.

"POGO breeds serious crimes and gravely undermines the interests of both Philippine and Chinese peoples," the Chinese Embassy said.

The Philippine government crackdown has led to the shutdown of several sprawling complexes where authorities suspect thousands of Chinese, Vietnamese and other nationals mostly from Southeast Asia have been illegally recruited with promises of high salaries but later forced to work in dismal conditions and threatened with severe harm if they disobeyed orders or tried to escape.

"Disguising as legitimate entities, their operations have ventured into illicit areas furthest from gaming such as financial scamming, money laundering, prostitution, human trafficking, kidnapping, brutal torture, even murder," Marcos said in his address. "The grave abuse and disrespect to our system of laws must stop."

Marcos' closure order covered online gaming outfits, which have acqui-

red permits from Philippine authorities, and those, which have been operating underground. The order would be strictly enforced despite the massive scale of the task, Philippine officials said.

"The absolute policy of the president is no more POGO," Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin told The Associated Press last month.

Marcos ordered his government's gaming agency to wind down the operations of the gambling outfits by year's end. He asked labor officials to look for alternative jobs for Filipino workers who would be displaced because of the shutdowns.

The Philippines, Washington's oldest treaty ally in Asia, has a complicated relationship with China, including significant trade engagements and cooperation against crime. But they have also had longstanding disputes, particularly in two contested shoals in the busy South China Sea.

Marcos's predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, nurtured cozy ties with Chinese President Xi Jinping while often denouncing U.S. security policies. Marcos has, in stark contrast, worked to deepen defense ties with the U.S. and its Western and Asian allies since taking office in mid-2022 despite China's warnings and alarm. **MDT/AP**

Alaska NORAD tracked two Chinese and two Russian military bombers near Alaska, noting their presence in the U.S. Air Defense Identification Zone but not perceiving them as a threat. The response involved U.S. and Canadian fighter jets, highlighting increased military activities by China and Russia in the region. This follows recent instances of Chinese naval presence near Alaska, emphasizing the strategic interest both nations have in the Pacific, impacting regional security dynamics.



US-Israel Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed Congress in Washington to bolster U.S. support for Israel's ongoing conflict with Hamas. Amidst protests and security concerns, Netanyahu emphasized Israel's determination to achieve "total victory." The discussions also focused on a potential cease-fire deal, highlighting complex geopolitical dynamics as international efforts continue to resolve the conflict.



US President Joe Biden delivered a solemn address, announcing his decision not to seek re-election in 2024, emphasizing the defense of democracy over personal ambition. His speech marked a historic moment as he chose to step aside, underscoring the gravity of protecting democratic values and passing the torch to a new generation of leadership in a politically polarized environment.



UK A police officer has been suspended following the release of a video showing the officer kicking a man on the ground at Manchester Airport. The incident, which led to protests and calls for calm from the Mayor of Greater Manchester, occurred after the officer and his colleagues, who were threatened during an arrest, responded with force. The police force is facing scrutiny over the violent confrontation that was caught on camera and sparked significant public outcry.