



**THE MACAU UNION HOSPITAL CARRIED OUT ITS FIRST ONCOLOGICAL TREATMENTS FOR CANCER PATIENTS REFERRED BY THE HEALTH BUREAU**

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**South Korea** says it has detected suspected trash-carrying balloons launched by North Korea, in the latest round of a Cold War-style psychological warfare between the war-divided rivals. The metropolitan government of Seoul issued text alerts Wednesday saying that objects likely to be North Korean balloons were spotted in regions north of the city. It advised people to stay indoors and beware of objects dropping from the sky.



**Indonesia** Pope Francis urged Indonesia to live up to its promise of “harmony in diversity” and fight religious intolerance on Wednesday, as he set a rigorous pace for an 11-day, four-nation trip through tropical Southeast Asia and Oceania that will test his stamina and health.



**Lebanon-Cyprus** European aid sent to Lebanon in an attempt to regulate migration by sea is funding practices that violate human rights, according to a global watchdog report published yesterday.



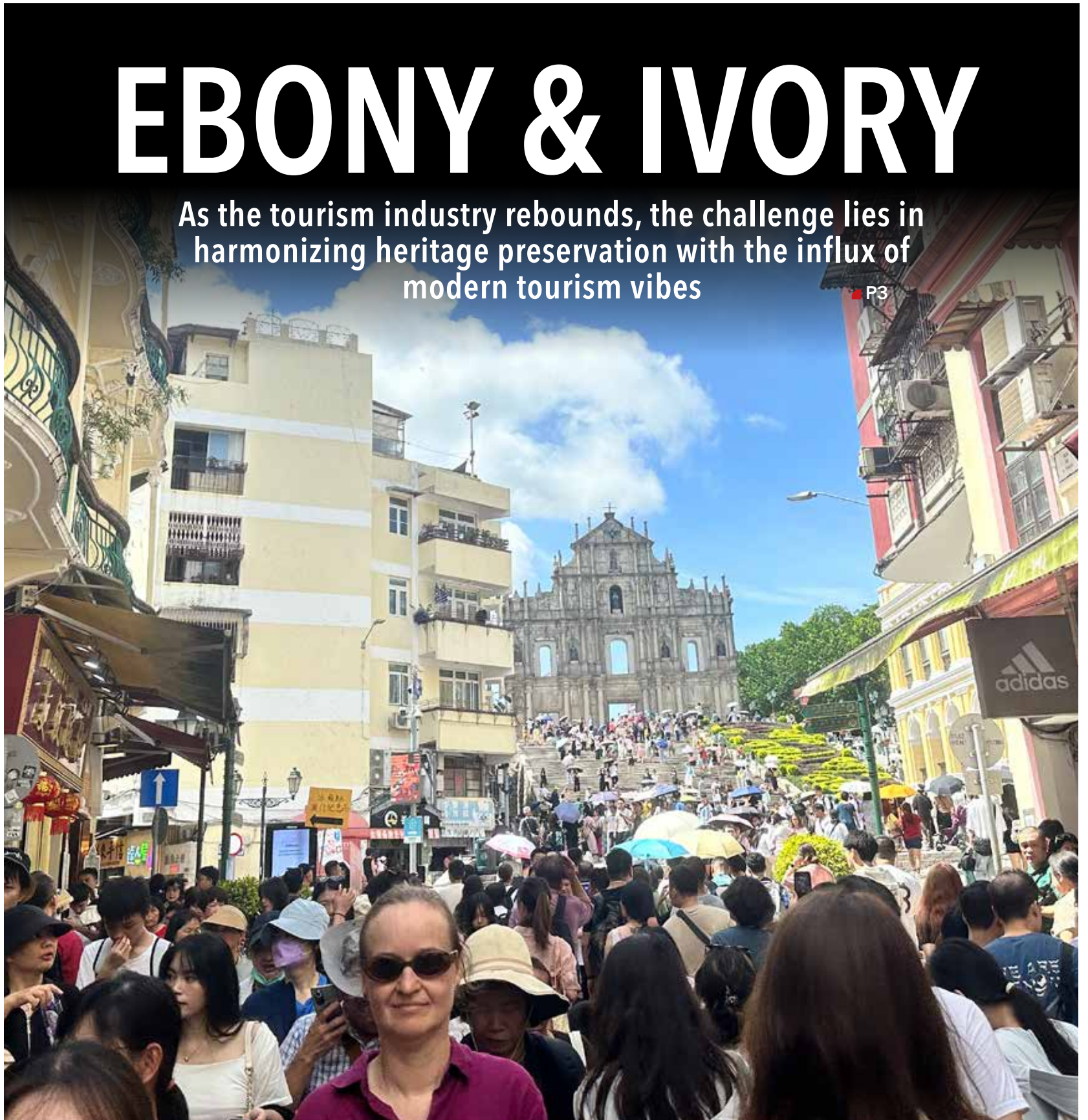
**Serbia** is a Russian ally and will never impose sanctions against Moscow or join NATO, the Balkan nation’s deputy prime minister said Wednesday as he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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# EBONY & IVORY

As the tourism industry rebounds, the challenge lies in harmonizing heritage preservation with the influx of modern tourism vibes

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### LUÍS GOMES APPOINTED CHAIRMAN OF SPORTS FUND

Luís Gomes has been appointed chairman of the Board of Directors of the Sports Fund, succeeding Pun Weng Kun. The appointment, effective immediately, was announced in a dispatch signed by Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, published yesterday in the Official Gazette. In addition to this role, Gomes has been named Coordinator of the Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee for this year's event and is currently acting president of the Sports Bureau. Pun has taken on the role of Secretary-General for the Macau Organizing Committee for the upcoming National Games and related events.

### INFLUENZA VACCINATIONS UP 20%

The Health Bureau reported that, from late September 2023 to Aug. 18 of this year, 175,000 residents in Macau received the influenza vaccine, marking a 19.1% increase from the previous year. Vaccination rates for children reached 56.9%, while rates for kindergarten, primary, and middle school students were 81.3%, 78.7%, and 67.3%, respectively. Institutional staff had a high vaccination rate of 91.6%. The bureau emphasized that a robust protection network has been established. However, it noted low vaccination rates for tetanus, cough, and measles among adults, urging those in need to promptly vaccinate themselves.

### TAIPA LIGHT RAIL SEES INCREASE IN PASSENGERS

The Taipa Light Rail Line recorded an average of 15,900 passengers per day in August, reflecting an increase of 2,700 passengers from the previous month. From January to August this year, the average daily passenger volume exceeded 11,000, with February witnessing a peak of 16,700 passengers—second only to the line's inaugural month.

### TRANSPORT BUREAU CONSIDERS MOTORCYCLE PARKING AT PAK WAI

The Transport Bureau is studying the feasibility of adding motorcycle parking spaces at the Pak Wai parking lot. The bureau plans to consult with the contracting company and conduct an overall review of the lot's usage. This follows a suggestion from a listener of TDM Radio to enhance motorcycle parking. However, the bureau noted that narrow private spaces and lanes complicate this addition. Factors like pedestrian safety, parking space management, and turning room will be assessed.

### HEALTH

# MACAU UNION HOSPITAL BEGINS CANCER TREATMENTS

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE Macau Union Hospital carried out its first oncological treatments late last week for cancer patients referred by the Health Bureau (SSM), marking the beginning of radiotherapy services at the facility.

By obtaining internationally renowned medical equipment and advanced technologies, "treatment effectiveness" is boosted, allowing the hospital to provide patients with higher quality medical care, the hospital said in a statement.

The statement said radiotherapy services at Macau Union Hospital will also gradually come into service starting Sept. 16.

The institution expressed its goal of "providing better quality medical services to patients, thus reducing the need to seek treatment outside the territory,



striving to achieve the goal of 'treating serious diseases without leaving Macau'".

Cancer has long been a leading cause of death in Macau, accounting for nearly 30% of fatalities last year, according to official statistics.

Improving radiotherapy is key to better treating patients and reducing the need to seek care abroad.

Macau Union Hospital recently invested in a TrueBeam system for stereotactic radiotherapy and an Ethos system for

online adaptive radiotherapy with artificial intelligence – the first of their kind in Hong Kong and Macau.

"They enable high-speed and high-precision personalized treatments," the hospital statement said.

### FINANCE

## AGTECH ACQUIRES CONTROLLING STAKE IN ANT GROUP BANK

NADIA SHAW

**A**GTECH Holdings Limited has announced the acquisition of a controlling stake in Ant Bank (Macao), a digital banking unit of Ant Group, for MOP243 million (approximately USD30.26 million).

The deal, disclosed earlier this week, elevates AGTech's ownership to 51.5%, making the digital bank an indirect subsidiary of the Hong Kong-listed lottery company, which is backed by Alibaba Group.

Chairman and CEO Sun Ho said, "This acquisition is a milestone for AGTech. It reflects our commitment to the financial service sector of Macau and the broader digital economy, expanding our reach into the digital financial sector."

Ho highlighted the poten-

tial for this move to inject "new vitality" into financial technology innovation in the region and assisting the local government's strategy to diversify the local economy beyond its reliance on gambling.

AGTech, known for its electronic payment services like the Macau e-wallet MPay, aims to enhance synergies between its existing services and Ant Bank's offerings.

The company plans to develop unique cross-border financial services to attract international tourists to Macau.

Ant Group remains the second-largest shareholder of Ant Bank (Macao) and has pledged to support its growth alongside AGTech.

This acquisition follows Ant Group's recent restructuring, which aims to streamline its operations into three independent business units.



## SSM to target youth smokers

**T**o curb youth smoking, the Health Bureau (SSM) has announced its commitment to monitoring e-cigarette law enforcement, focusing on areas where teenagers frequently gather to smoke.

According to authorities, there are plans to compile a list of these "black spots" and conduct targeted inspections, particularly around schools, to address illegal smoking among minors.

If a smoker under the age of 16 is caught, a letter will be sent to their parent or guardian.

Additionally, SSM has collaborated with the Education and Youth Development Bureau to recommend schools post no-

tices discouraging smoking in nearby pick-up and drop-off areas.

In response to a query from lawmaker Leong Hong Sai, the bureau said customs has been vigilant about e-cigarette use among young people in Macau.

In 2023, authorities seized 700 e-cigarette devices and approximately 5,900 cartridges.

In the first half of this year alone, around 200 devices and 10,000 cartridges were confiscated.

Authorities have also inspected shops suspected of selling e-cigarette products, uncovering 193 potential illegal cases by the end of June. LV

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# Association: Balance heritage with modern tourism amid rebound

NADIA SHAW

**M**ACAU'S tourism industry is on the rebound, showing signs of robust recovery following the pandemic.

Recent statistics reveal hotel occupancy rates soaring to between 80% and 90% of pre-pandemic levels, with a notable influx of visitors from Asian markets.

This revitalization is further supported by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), which has launched a promotional campaign titled "Limited Edition Macau," aimed at attracting tourists from regions beyond the mainland.

MGTO's initiatives come as Macau seeks to broaden its visitor demographic beyond traditional markets.

A significant focus is on the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector, bolstered by the Hengqin-Macau connection, which simplifies travel between the two regions.

This integration is expected to enrich the tourism experience, especially with Hengqin's theme



park attractions, which are currently absent from Macau.

However, a hotel association highlighted a distinct performance gap between integrated resorts on the Cotai Strip and hotels on the Macau Peninsula.

Speaking to the Times on the sidelines of the FMCC Charity Gala Dinner 2024 press conference yesterday, vice chairman of the Macau Hotel Association, Rutger Verschuren, shared his insights on the evolving landscape of Macau's tourism.

"The Cotai Strip benefits from a very strong identity," Verschuren noted. "Cotai is brand new, it's gaming, it's shopping, it's dining, it emulates Vegas."

These factors, coupled with the inclusion of non-gaming attractions, have drawn a larger share of visitors.

In contrast, hotels on the Macau Peninsula face challenges stemming from properties that possess more heritage as opposed to those that place a greater emphasis on gaming.

a premier destination for international travelers.

## LEVERAGING ATTRACTIONS AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Despite its array of attractions—including the iconic Macau Tower and various museums—the Macau Peninsula has not fully capitalized on its potential.

Verschuren said creating a distinct identity for the peninsula, such as "Friendship Avenue," could help to differentiate it from the Cotai Strip.

He proposed more walking tours for foreign tourists to get an idea of Macau's essence and showcase the peninsula's unique culture and history.

"For example, it [Friendship Avenue] could be a walk that stretches from the ferry terminal all the way to Senado Square" offering all sorts of cultural, historical and architectural delights, "such as the cultural center, the Lotus Square, shopping at One Central, MGM, Wynn. There's a lot to see, both left and right," said Verschuren.

"Transportation challenges remain a significant hurdle for visitors," he said.

Slow taxi services and a complex bus system have made navigation difficult, particularly for tourists unfamiliar with the area or with such long Portuguese names.

This disparity has led to a notable trend where day-trippers dominate visitor numbers, although there is a gradual increase in the length of stay as families choose Macau as their travel destination.

Verschuren said "the upcoming Golden Week is anticipated to further boost hotel occupancy rates, with expectations of reaching near-full capacity during peak days."

Major events, including concerts and trade shows, have historically provided a significant influx of visitors, benefiting hotels across the city.

Looking ahead, the Macau Hotel Association's vice chairman predicts Macau could "fully recover to 2019 visitor levels by the summer of 2024," driven by a more diverse mix of tourists from outside the Chinese-speaking market.

Verschuren also touched on the potential introduction of new air routes, "such as Emirates from Dubai, could open doors to emerging markets like India and the UAE."

This diversification is crucial as the city aims to establish itself as

## EVENTS

# French chamber gala supports Oxfam's paper recycling project

NADIA SHAW

**T**HE France Macau Chamber of Commerce (FMCC) will host its annual Charity Gala Dinner Sept. 20 at the Grand Ballroom of MGM Macau.

This year's event, themed "A Journey Through Time and Space," commemorates 60 years of Sino-French relations while raising funds for Oxfam's paper recycling initiatives in Macau.

At a press conference yesterday, FMCC president Rutger Verschuren expressed appreciation for the sponsors and announced the evening will feature a performance by the Sino-French jazz band, Alice and the Wanderers, who will travel from Shanghai for the occasion.

Additionally, Verschuren said "This year, we're also very excited to con-



FMCC's Rutger Verschuren and Oxfam's Wong Shek Hung

tinue with the second edition of the Macau ESG Awards 2024."

With ESG Awards submissions closing last week, the FMCC's jury will thoroughly review each entry, and winners will be announced during the event, recognizing organizations in three categories: Best Project, Best SME, and Best NGO, all for their outstanding

commitment to environmental, social and governance principles.

Oxfam, the sole beneficiary of this year's gala, has been active in Macau since 2012, focusing on poverty alleviation and promoting global citizenship education.

The organization's paper recycling project aims to improve the livelihoods of cardboard

collectors and boost recycling rates in a city where only 20% of paper waste is currently recycled.

"We are excited to partner with Oxfam and support their paper recycling project through this year's gala," Verschuren said.

"By raising awareness and funds, we hope to inspire greater community involvement in sustainability efforts and improve the welfare of elderly cardboard collectors in Macau."

The FMCC Charity Gala Dinner 2024 promises an exquisite evening featuring French cuisine, live entertainment, and exciting lucky draw prizes.

Proceeds from the event will directly support Oxfam's paper recycling project, "contributing to a more sustainable future" for Macau.

## WEATHER

# TYPHOON YAGI APPROACHING WITH POTENTIAL SIGNAL NO. 8

**T**HE Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) has warned there is now a "moderate to relatively high" chance Macau will issue Tropical Storm Signal No. 8 tonight as Typhoon Yagi intensifies. At 11 p.m. yesterday, Yagi was located around 460 km southeast of Macau, packing winds of 150 kph as it moved west-northwest near Hainan Island.

The SMG said Yagi could further intensify into a super typhoon nearing Macau tomorrow. Circulation from Yagi is expected to begin affecting the territory today, gradually increasing winds and thunderstorm frequency.

If Yagi intensifies as predicted and passes within 300 km south of Macau, winds will rapidly rise Friday along with heavy rain and storms, making No. 8 signal likely.

Low-lying areas may see flooding up to 0.5 meters

Friday prompting a "relatively high" blue storm surge warning.

Flooding risks will increase if Yagi takes a more northern track or strengthens significantly, so authorities cannot rule out issuing a yellow storm surge alert.

Meanwhile, Macau's highly anticipated 32nd International Fireworks Display Contest has been postponed due to uncertain weather conditions, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) announced yesterday. The event, featuring fireworks from teams in Russia and France, was set for Sept. 7.

MGTO is closely monitoring weather forecasts and evaluating safety concerns. Further details regarding rescheduling will be provided soon.

Updates will be communicated as decisions are made regarding the new schedule. VC/NS



EVENTS

# BBMACAO BLENDS LANGUAGE AND ART IN COMMUNITY EXCHANGE EVENT

VICTORIA CHAN

A local group that organizes language exchange events, Macao BlaBla Language Exchange (BBMacao), has hosted a vibrant event that blended language exchange with artistic expression, featuring works from talented local artists.

The event, recently held at the Harley Davidson Bar in Old Taipa Village, aimed to foster a sense of community whilst also providing a platform for artists to showcase their creations.

"The main purpose of these events is to help people make new friends here in Macau within an international setting," said Chloe Cheong, one of the event organizers.

"We started with just language exchange, and then began incorporating artistic elements as well."

The latest event featured a 3D animator and two photographers, who each presented their creations and discussed the inspiration behind their work.

According to the organizers, the group aims to provide a platform for both local and international artists to promote their art and network with one another.

The event series, initiated in March, began with a focus on language exchange but quickly evolved to incorporate diverse artistic elements.

The group often focuses on informal conversations to enhance language skills and cultural understanding.

Cheong elaborated on the evolution of the events, stating, "We started with language exchange and then integrated artistic traits. Each event features different artists—such as painters, photographers, or designers—providing them with a platform to exhibit their work and engage



with the attendees." BBMacao further shed light on the group's mission, emphasizing the importance of language exchange and community building.

"BBMacao aims to create a space where individuals can exchange languages, make new friends, and appreciate art and culture together. It's about fostering connections that go beyond mere social interactions," said Cheong.

Meanwhile, the participating artists shared their motivations for showcasing their work.

Denzel Calangi, one of the photographers, explained: "I kind of wanted to print my photos to bring life to them. Because if they're not printed, they're just going to be on my phone. They're just going to be digitally noticed. But here, even if it's at the bar, even for a short while, they can be

seen by a lot of people." He added: "When I take photos, I always try to photograph things that I can connect with. And when I take photos, I hope that people don't just see a pretty picture. I hope that they can see where I've been and what I perceive as beauty. I hope that the viewer finds some connection to my photographs."

Kara Michelle Cenon, a participating 3D animator, shared her inspirations, stating: "I've always liked art, but ever since I was young, I've been searching for the right art for me. And then I stumbled on gaming [and] video games. And actually, the art in games is fascinating. There are different types of graphic art and those are, actually, quite underrated. So I want people to also experience the beauty of both video game art and the moving characters."

Marjolene Estrada, another photographer exhibiting her work, explained the focus of her portfolio.

Her exhibition showcases her best works completed over the past year.

"I've been a portrait photographer for almost 10 years. One of the techniques I always use nowadays, which I learned during the pandemic, is long exposure. I wanted to take advantage of Macau's rich and vibrant lighting, especially of its casinos, and experiment with long exposure to capture the city's magical effects," she said.

Estrada also emphasized the importance of Macau's supportive community, which has helped her achieve her artistic goals.

"I wouldn't do this alone if I didn't have friends. It's very rewarding to have a good community

here in Macau that loves art as well and that [is] willing to do art with you. So I would say even if I am the artist, I am not mainly the artist, just the artist. It is a lot of different people involved."

The first BBMacao event drew 10 attendees earlier this year, and now it regularly sees over 60 participants.

With each gathering the community expands, with both regular attendees and newcomers joining in the meet ups that are held at least once a month.

Bla Bla Language Exchange is a global community initiative designed to help individuals practice languages and connect with new people in a social environment.

Globally, these groups aim to bridge cultural gaps by bringing together participants from diverse backgrounds.

GAMING

# CLSA: 'FX crackdown' appears overblown

VICTORIA CHAN

CONCERNS that a crackdown on foreign currency exchanges may hurt the city's lucrative casino industry seem overblown, according to a new report. According to CLSA analysts Jeffrey Kiang and Leo Pan, Macau's August gross gaming revenue (GGR)

grew 6% month-on-month to around MOP19.8 billion, despite recent publicity about enhanced enforcement in Macau and on the Chinese mainland against unlicensed touts that offer to change Chinese yuan (RMB) into Hong Kong dollars (HKD), and vice versa.

As the analysts observed, "Despite the illicit

money exchange crackdown, August GGR increased 6% month-on-month."

This growth in GGR, the analysts noted, "signals to us that [a] crackdown in Macau should have stabilized," even though the July figures may have been weaker due to various international sports events that "had diluted

foot traffic."

The CLSA report's conclusions align with previous statements made by Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd.

In a mid-August earnings presentation, Galaxy Entertainment's management reportedly said that "business momentum has been intact in third-quarter 2024 thus far."

Looking ahead to October's Golden Week, a week-long holiday on the mainland, coinciding with China's National Day on Oct. 1, CLSA's "proprietary data suggest hotel booking" levels had "not trended down," with "28 out of 34 hotels" the brokerage tracks "fully booked on the weekend of Oct. 5."

The analysts also noted the "average room rate" of the hotels they surveyed for the October Golden Week was at a level equal

to USD499 per night, indicating strong demand.

Overall, the report suggests concerns over the crackdown's impact may have been "overdone."

To crackdown on illicit currency exchanges, the government has proposed strengthening laws around unregulated money trading operations.

An amendment to the draft "Law to Combat Gambling Crimes" would make unauthorized foreign exchange transactions criminal offenses.



BEHIND THE WHEELS

# Edmunds compares SUVs 2025 Hyundai Santa Fe and 2025 Kia Sorento

DAN FRIO, MDT/EDMUNDS

**T**HE Hyundai Santa Fe and Kia Sorento are like pro football's Kelce brothers, Travis and Jason: Both have had distinguished careers, both offer different strengths, and you'd be glad to have either on your team. But chances are you can only afford one of these SUVs. Which one will be the better buy? Edmunds' car experts break down the key differences.

## COMING FROM THE SAME FAMILY

Hyundai and Kia are connected corporately and use similar hardware underneath for their vehicles. That's the case for the Santa Fe and Sorento. Their powertrains are pretty much the same, as are many of their tech features. The redesigned Santa Fe that debuted for 2024 has made cross-shopping even more significant. That's because the Santa Fe now has a third-row seat to match the Sorento's. Previously, the Santa Fe was just a five-passenger SUV.

These two SUVs aren't quite as roomy for seven people as the larger Kia Telluride and Hyundai Palisade. But their third rows are certainly good enough for occasional use, such as when you need to take extra kids to sports practice or when you're the designated driver for a night out with friends.

Hyundai and Kia also price their SUVs competitively. Including the destination fee, you're looking at an approximate starting price of \$33,000 for the Sorento and \$35,000 for the San-



This photo provided by Hyundai shows the 2025 Santa Fe

ta Fe. Both top out at around \$48,000 fully loaded.

Main warranty coverage is also the same: a fantastic five year/60,000-mile bumper-to-bumper warranty and a 10-year/100,000-mile powertrain warranty.

## HYUNDAI SANTA FE: MORE STANDARD POWER

Interestingly, the Santa Fe has a distinct power advantage. A turbocharged four-cylinder engine that makes 277 horsepower is standard. This is far meatier punch than the Kia's 191-horsepower non-turbo four-cylinder engine. You'll feel the difference with quicker acceleration for passing and accelerating up to highway speeds.

To be fair, only the two least expensive Sorento trim levels

come with the 191-horsepower engine. Every other Sorento trim gets the same 277-horsepower turbo engine as the Santa Fe.

What about towing? If you want to pull off-road or water toys, or a small camper trailer for example, the Santa Fe can haul up to 3,500 pounds when properly equipped. That number rises to 4,500 pounds with the off-road-oriented XRT trim. The 2025 Sorento is the same. It can pull 3,500 pounds when properly equipped with the turbocharged engine, or 4,500 pounds with the new X-Pro Prestige trim.

## KIA SORENTO: PLUG-IN HYBRID EFFICIENCY

While the Santa Fe makes more power out of the box, the Kia Sorento offers something

the Hyundai doesn't: a plug-in hybrid powertrain. Both models offer hybrid engines that can get up to an EPA-estimated 36 mpg combined. But the Sorento takes it a step further with its available plug-in version. This rechargeable Sorento can go about 32 miles solely on electricity before it switches over to being a regular hybrid. Here, it still gets an estimated 34 mpg.

There are two good reasons to consider the Sorento Plug-in Hybrid. One is convenience. If you live within 30 miles of work, or if your travels are typically limited to a local area, you could cover most of your driving on electric power and rarely visit a gas station. All you need to do is charge up

at home nightly. Frequently driving the Sorento Plug-in Hybrid on electric power can also significantly reduce your carbon footprint.

Efficiency comes at a price, however. The Sorento Plug-in Hybrid costs about \$9,000 more than the standard hybrid to start and about \$16,000 more than the basic gas model. That's a hefty premium that will likely take many years to pay for itself on gas savings alone.

## RUGGED VS. RACY

Style is subjective, of course, so there's no winner here. The Santa Fe and Sorento offer two dramatically different looks. With its boxy profile and sharp edges, the recently redesigned Santa Fe recalls a classic Jeep Cherokee or even the newer Land Rover Defender. It's a tough and rugged design, especially in XRT trim, which adds higher ground clearance, unique wheels and all-terrain tires. On the other hand, the Sorento's sleeker, softer shape, with its rounded corners, tapered windows and bold front end, will likely appeal to buyers with sportier tastes.

## EDMUNDS SAYS

The Santa Fe and Sorento are as evenly matched as you might expect from corporate twins. The Santa Fe's extra power and towing give it an edge, while the Sorento's lower starting price and optional plug-in hybrid make it more budget-friendly and fuel-efficient. Depending on your needs, both are winners.

## CORPORATE BITS

### The Venetian Macao's Presidential Suite crowned in World Travel Awards



The Venetian Macao's Presidential Suite has been awarded 'Macao's Leading Hotel Suite 2024' at the World Travel Awards, marking its third consecutive win in this category. This

recognition highlights the suite's exceptional quality and the hotel's commitment to excellence in a competitive market.

Kris Kaminsky, Senior Vice President of Hotel Oper-

ations at Sands China Ltd, expressed gratitude for the award, emphasizing the dedication of the hotel team in achieving such esteemed accolades. "This is the third time The Venetian Macao's Presidential Suite has received this award, which, in a highly competitive market, is an honor worth celebrating. We are grateful to the World Travel Awards for recognizing our continual pursuit of perfection," said Kaminsky.

The Presidential Suite, spanning 720 square meters, features four luxurious bedrooms, stunning views of the Cotai Strip, and a range of opulent amenities, including a private bar, sauna, Jacuzzi, and dedicated fitness and media rooms.

### Wynn Macau unveils Drunken Fish



Wynn Macau has introduced its latest culinary gem, Drunken Fish, with a concept that promises to delight diners with a selection of the finest seafood and wines. Executive Chef Henry Zhang Zhicheng, renowned for his innovative approach to Chinese and Southeast Asian cuisines, will lead the kitchen.

The menu will feature an array of rare seafood dishes, crafted with diverse cooking techniques to create dynamic dining experiences that invite guests to explore new flavors. The restaurant's Chinese name, "Jiu Kun," reflects both China's rich cultural heritage and Wynn's vision for the future. "Jiu"

evokes the premium seafood offerings and the allure of liquor, encouraging guests to indulge in exceptional dishes paired with Moutai and fine Chinese wines. "Kun" is inspired by the legendary Master of the Sea, symbolizing the ocean's vastness. Drunken Fish will also host Macau's only Moutai Bar.



AP PHOTO

This satellite photo taken by Planet Labs PBC shows two Chinese corvettes docked at the Ream Naval Base



DIPLOMACY

# Cambodia says China gifting two warships as expansion of strategic port finishes

SOPHENG CHEANG & DAVID RISING, PHNOM PENH

**C**AMBODIA'S Defense Ministry said yesterday that China is giving its navy two warships of the type it has had docked for months at a strategically important base being expanded with Beijing's funding, which has raised concerns of China establishing a permanent naval presence on the Gulf of Thailand.

Ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata told The Associated Press that China would give Cambodia two newly built Type 56 corvettes, smaller vessels typically used for coastal patrols, next year at the earliest.

She would not comment on reports that China also planned to hand over to Cambodia newly expanded facilities at

Ream Naval Base, including a lengthy new pier capable of accommodating much larger naval vessels than Cambodia has in its own fleet. Maly did say the final phase of construction would soon be completed.

The United States and others have expressed concerns about China's navy establishing a base at Ream, which would give it easy access to the Malacca Strait, a critical shipping route between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Those concerns grew after two Type 56 corvettes docked at the newly built pier in December, and have maintained a presence there on-and-off ever since.

Cambodia has said one of the reasons the Chinese corvettes have been there for so long was that it was considering similar warships for its own navy, and for training.

Maly said the two corvettes

being given to Cambodia, the Type 56C variant, came after Cambodia requested China's support.

"It is in the aim of strengthening the capacity and ability of Cambodia to protect and maintain peace, stability, security as well as for supporting search and rescue operations and other humanitarian activities," she said.

China's Foreign Affairs Ministry would not comment on the ships or the report that Beijing would turn over the newly expanded Ream base facilities to Cambodia, telling the AP in a faxed reply to a query that "we're not aware of the relevant information."

Controversy over the Chinese activity at the Ream base initially arose in 2019 when The Wall Street Journal reported that an early draft of a reputed agreement seen by U.S. officials would allow China 30-

year use of the base, where it would be able to post military personnel, store weapons and berth warships.

Cambodia's then-Prime Minister Hun Sen denied there was such an agreement, emphasizing that Cambodia's Constitution did not allow foreign military bases to be established on its soil.

Chinese work on the base has continued and Hun Sen's successor as prime minister, his son Hun Manet, has insisted the same thing.

If China's People's Liberation Army Navy, or PLAN, were to be granted preferred, or exclusive, access to Ream in exchange for the warships it is giving Cambodia and for its work on the base, it could be a deft way to work around the constitutional issues, said Euan Graham, a senior defense analyst with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

"It's quite a smart move, as it allows Cambodia to maintain its line that it hasn't deviated from the constitution by creating a foreign base. And China has no shortage of warships to donate," he said.

"I expect that China may retain a naval complement on board the corvettes, post-transfer. The real question is what level of access the PLAN will have to Ream, and whether that access is exclusive," Graham added.

China currently only operates one acknowledged foreign military base, in the impoverished but strategically important Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti, but many believe that its military is busy establishing an overseas network.

The U.S. has more foreign military bases than any other country, including multiple facilities in the Asia-Pacific region.

Thus far, only Chinese naval vessels have been given permission to use the new pier. In February, two Japanese destroyers were routed instead to the nearby Sihanoukville commercial port. A Royal Australian Navy frigate was also directed to Sihanoukville for a port call ending yesterday.

Maly said Cambodia had the right to promote cooperation with all partners for its benefit, so long as constitutional regulations were followed.

"Cooperation has to comply with the goals and the principles of the Cambodian Constitution especially the protection of its sovereignty, integrity and independence," Maly said.

Cambodia is China's closest ally in Southeast Asia, while China is Cambodia's most important ally and benefactor, with a strong influence on its economy.

Beyond military projects, China funds numerous others in Cambodia — particularly infrastructure, including airports and roads, but also private projects such as hotels, casinos and property development. Some 40% of Cambodia's \$11 billion in foreign debt is owed to China. **MDT/AP**

DIRE STRAIT

# US envoy to Taiwan declares ties 'rock solid'

**T**HE top U.S. envoy to Taiwan yesterday said American support for the island is "rock-solid, principled, and bipartisan," and said Washington will continue to follow through on its commitments to ensure the island can defend itself against threats from China.

Raymond F. Greene's remarks come at a time of uncertainty over mainland China's intentions toward the island, part of China's territory — to be taken by force if necessary — and amid conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East that threaten to draw the U.S.

in further.

Greene made clear Taiwan was a top priority, especially the security of shipping in the crucial Taiwan Strait that divides the island and continental China.

The U.S. will "continue to maintain the ca-

capacity to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion against Taiwan," Greene said, referencing the Taiwan Relations Act that ensured such backing following the breaking of formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1979, when Washington nor-

malized relations with the Communist government in Beijing.

Greene said the Executive Branch has notified Congress of approximately \$38.4 billion in Foreign Military Sales to Taiwan since 2010, including over \$6.4 billion under the Bi-

den administration, along with the equivalent of \$345 million in transfers of arms from existing U.S. stocks.

Upgraded and new F-16 jet fighters, Abrams tanks and other equipment have arrived or are in the pipeline, while Taiwan is expanding its production of domestic arms including submarines and anti-landing and ground to air missiles. **MDT/AP**



AP FILE PHOTO

Former Bamban Mayor, Alice Guo



## INDONESIA

# Police arrest a fugitive Filipino ex-town mayor wanted for illegal online gaming scams

JIM GOMEZ & EDNA TARIGAN,  
JAKARTA

A dismissed town mayor who fled the Philippines after being accused of helping establish an illegal online gaming and scam center catering mostly to clients in China has been arrested near Indonesia's capital, officials said yesterday.

Indonesian authorities arrested Alice Guo at a house in Jakarta's satellite city of Tangerang just

before midnight on Tuesday, according to Khrista Murti, chief of the international division of the National Police.

Guo was in custody and awaiting deportation to the Philippines, Murti said, adding that her arrest was the result of "cooperation between Indonesian and Filipino's police."

Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. thanked the Indonesian authorities.

"Let this serve as a warning to those who attempt to evade jus-

tice," Marcos said and added that arrangements were being made to bring Guo back to the Philippines where she faces a slew of criminal charges.

After Guo fled the Philippines in July, she was tracked in Malaysia and Singapore before turning up in Indonesia. Two companions, who reportedly slipped out of the Philippines with her without going through normal immigration and clearing procedures, were recently arrested in Indonesia.

Guo ran as a Filipino candidate in 2022 elections and won as mayor of the rural town of Bamban in Tarlac province north of Manila. She was accused of helping establish a massive complex with several buildings near the town hall as a hub for an illegal online gambling and scam outfit that catered mostly to clients in China, where gambling is forbidden.

A Senate committee ordered Guo arrested after she refused to appear in hearings looking into

the illegal gambling business that flourished under Marcos's predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, who nurtured cozy ties with Chinese President Xi Jinping while often criticizing the United States and European countries.

Guo has also been accused of concealing her Chinese nationality to run for public office, which is reserved for Filipino citizens only. At the time, a few senators suggested she may be working as a Chinese spy.

Guo has denied any wrongdoing but was dismissed from her post for grave misconduct by the Ombudsman, an agency that investigates and prosecutes government officials accused of crimes, including graft and corruption.

In July, Marcos ordered an immediate ban on widespread and mostly Chinese-run online gaming operations, accusing them of involvement in human trafficking, torture, kidnappings and murder.

The crackdown on the 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 — was backed by Beijing.

It resulted in the shutdown in the Philippines of sprawling complexes, where authorities suspect thousands of Chinese, Vietnamese and other nationals mostly from Southeast Asia have been illegally recruited and forced to work in dismal conditions.

Philippine senators say the massive online gambling industry has flourished largely due to corruption in government regulatory agencies and big payoffs to officials.

Indonesia and the Philippines signed an extradition agreement in 1976. **MDT/AP**

## THAILAND

# After the king's endorsement, country's new Cabinet with some familiar faces

THAILAND yesterday welcomed a new Cabinet after King Maha Vajiralongkorn approved the appointment of 35 members to serve under Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra.

Paetongtarn took office on Aug. 16, after her predecessor, Srettha Thavisin was forced out of office by a court ruling that he had violated an ethics law by appointing a Cabinet member who had served time in prison in connection with a bribery case. She is the daughter of for-

mer Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted by a military coup in 2006 but remains politically influential.

Paetongtarn is leader of the Pheu Thai Party, which took power after last year's general election. It formed a government after members of the conservative Senate refused to endorse the prime minister nominated by the progressive Move Forward Party, which won the most seats in the poll.

The new Cabinet is substantially the same as



Thailand's new Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra

Srettha's, with five of the deputy prime ministers retaining their jobs. Also keeping their jobs are Interior Minister Anutin Charnvi-

rakul, and Finance Minister Pichai Chunhavajira, who are both also deputy prime ministers, as well as Foreign Minister Maris

Sangiampongsa.

The new Cabinet's royal endorsement, published in the government gazette, followed weeks of speculation over its composition after the pro-military Palang Pracharath Party was removed from the ruling coalition that Srettha had formed. The party and its leader, retired General Prawit Wongsuwan, were widely believed to be behind the ethics case brought before the Constitutional Court that cost Srettha his job before he completed a full year in office.

Paetongtarn's Pheu Thai party invited its long-time rival, the Democrat Party, to join the governing coalition, with party leader Chalermchai Sri-on appointed Minister of Natural Resources, a post

previously held by Prawit's brother.

Pheu Thai's predecessor, the Thai Rak Thai Party, ended years of Democrat domination of electoral politics in 2001 when its billionaire founder and leader, Thaksin, became prime minister. After Thaksin was ousted in 2006, the Democrats linked up with other conservative forces in Thai society to try to thwart a comeback of his political machine. Thaksin's ouster triggered years of struggle between his supporters and his opponents, in the streets, in the courts and at the ballot box.

Because Srettha lost his position over an ethics issue involving a Cabinet minister, Paetongtarn's appointments were vetted to ensure they were free of legal problems. **MDT/AP**



PUTIN'S WAR

# Ukraine's FM Kuleba resigns as Russian strikes kill 7 people in Lviv

ILLIA NOVIKOV &  
EMMA BURROWS, KYIV

**F**OREIGN Minister Dmytro Kuleba, one of Ukraine's most recognizable faces on the international stage, submitted his resignation yesterday ahead of an expected major government reshuffle. Russian strikes, meanwhile, killed seven people in a western Ukraine city, a day after one of the deadliest missile attacks since the war began.

Kuleba, 43, didn't give a reason for stepping down. His resignation will be discussed by lawmakers at their next session, parliamentary Speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk said on his Facebook page. Four other Cabinet ministers tendered their resignations late Tuesday, making the Cabinet reshuffle likely the biggest since Russia's February 2022 invasion.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy indicated last week that a reshuffle was imminent, with the war poised to enter a critical stage and as its 1,000-day mark looms in November.

Zelenskyy needs to keep up Ukraine's morale amid the grinding war of attrition with its bigger neighbor and steel the country's resolve for what will be another hard winter. Russia has been smashing Ukraine's power grid, knocking out some 70% of generation capacity and rupturing heat and water supplies. And yesterday's deadly attack on Lviv — a city near the border with NATO member Poland and far from the front lines — underscored how all of Ukraine is at the mercy of Moscow's long-range capabilities.

The Ukrainian army's risky incursion almost a month ago into Russia's Kursk border region raised Ukrainian spirits and countered months of grim news from the front line in eastern Ukraine. The incursion's ultimate goals are unclear, though Zelenskyy says Ukraine wants to create a buffer zone there that would prevent cross-border Russian attacks.

Russian President Vladimir Putin remains bent on pushing his army deeper into eastern Ukraine, meanwhile. Russia's onslaught in Done-



Firefighters work near a residential building damaged by a Russian strike in Lviv, yesterday

tsk, where Ukraine is short of troops and air defenses, and long-range missile strikes that repeatedly hit civilian areas of Ukraine signal that Putin will remain uncompromising and unrelenting in his efforts to crush Ukrainian resistance.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said late Tuesday that Putin believes Russia "can slowly and indefinitely subsume Ukraine through grinding advances and that Russia can achieve its goals through a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces and by outlasting Western support" for Kyiv.

Zelenskyy is also keeping in mind the U.S. presidential election in November, which could bring a shift in key U.S. military support for his country.

During the war Kuleba has been second only to Zelenskyy in carrying Ukraine's message and needs to an international audience, whether through social media posts or meetings with foreign dignitaries. In July, Kuleba became the highest-ranking Ukrainian official to visit China since Russia's invasion. He has been foreign minister since March 2020.

Kuleba's successor is not yet known but is expected to be announced on Thursday. Several Ukrainian media outlets, citing unnamed sources, said Kuleba's deputy, Andrii Sybiha, would become the country's chief diplomat.

The new foreign minister will likely accompany Zelenskyy to the U.N. General Assembly in New York next week, which is an opportunity to lobby global leaders for their support.

More than half the current Cabinet will undergo changes, said Davyd Arakhamia, a leader of Zelenskyy's party in the Ukrainian parliament. Ministers will be resigning yesterday and new appointments will be made Thursday, he said.

Zelenskyy's five-year mandate expired in May. He remains in power under the provisions of martial law.

Meantime, the nighttime strike on Lviv injured 52 people as well as killing seven, Ukraine's Rescue Service said. The strike was carried out with a Kinzhal missile and drones and targeted defense industry enterprises, Russian news agency Tass said, citing the Russian Defense Ministry.

Local officials disputed the targeting claim. Lviv Mayor Andrii Sadovyi and the Ukrainian Catholic University published a photo of a family whose mother and three daughters were killed in the attack that struck their home. The father survived but was in critical condition, Sadovyi said.

The eldest daughter, 21-year-old Yaryna, was a program manager at the European Youth Forum, a platform of the continent's youth organizations, her colleagues wrote on Facebook. "We

will neither forget nor forgive" the attack, they said in the post.

Another Russian attack injured five people in Kryvyi Rih, Zelenskyy's hometown, regional head Serhii Lysak said.

Kuleba said the Lviv and Kryvyi Rih attacks showed Ukraine's need for more Western support. "To put an end to this terror, Ukraine's partners must promptly deliver the promised air defense systems and ammunition, as well as strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities and allow us to launch long-range strikes on all legitimate military targets in Russia," he wrote on X.

Zelenskyy reacted to the attacks by urging Ukraine's allies to give Kyiv "more range" to use Western weapons to strike deeper into Russian territory.

The attack happened a day after two ballistic missiles blasted a military academy and nearby hospital in Poltava in eastern-central Ukraine, killing 53 people and wounding almost 300 others, Ukrainian officials said.

The missiles tore into the heart of the Poltava Military Institute of Communication's main building, causing several stories to collapse.

Poltava is about 350 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Kyiv, on the main highway and rail route between Kyiv and Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, which is close to the Russian border. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1997 MOTHER TERESA DIES



Mother Teresa, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who devoted her life to helping the sick and the poor, has died at the age of 87.

She died of a heart attack at the headquarters of the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta shortly before 1700 BST.

The nun from Skopje, Macedonia, had been battling ill health for some years, and in March stepped down as head of the order of nuns she founded.

She was revered by many around the world as a living saint for her work with the dispossessed.

The Pope often praised her work and a Vatican spokesman told reporters he was "deeply hurt" by the news of her death.

"The Pope believes she is a woman who has left her mark on the history of this century," he said.

The head of the Catholic church in England and Wales, Cardinal Hume, said she was an "enormously significant figure - everyone knows who Mother Teresa is".

Born Agnes Bojaxhiu in Skopje, then part of the Ottoman Empire later Macedonia, she took the name Sister Teresa in Ireland, where she began her training as a nun with the Loreto Sisters.

She founded her order in 1948 and went out to work in the slums of Calcutta.

She was sometimes accused by Hindus in her adopted country of trying to convert the poor to Catholicism by "stealth" and criticised by liberals who disliked her conservative stance on abortion and contraception.

But her biographer and friend Navin Chana said she would be remembered as someone who "gave the word compassion a new dimension".

CourtesyBBCNews

## IN CONTEXT

Tens of thousands of people lined the route of Mother Teresa's funeral procession in Calcutta a week later.

Her successor as head of the Missionaries of Charity was Sister Nirmala.

In 1997 the order which Mother Teresa had run for almost half a century was 4,000-strong and established in 130 countries.

It cared for 7,000 children and treated about four million sick people each year.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

## YOUR STARS



### ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Make repairs and renovations. For the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer, put energy into your home to upgrade your living conditions.



### TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Creativity sparks at will. You're especially brilliant. Get the whole story, with Mars in Cancer for seven weeks. Study, research, and write your thesis.



### GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Bring home the bacon. Avoid reckless spending. You're energized to make money, with Mars in Cancer. This could be an especially profitable seven-week phase.



### CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Follow your own drum. Energize personal projects, with Mars in your sign. You're especially inspired and powerful over about seven weeks, spurred into action.



### LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

It's easier to give things away for about seven weeks. Clean closets, garages and attics. Finish old business, with Mars in Cancer. No more excuses.



### VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You're a star. Empower your team over the next seven weeks. Realize a dream. Collaborative efforts thrive, with Mars in Cancer. Together, anything's possible.



### LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Pour energy into your career. Move forward boldly, with Mars in Cancer over the next seven weeks. Push to advance professionally. Action gets results.



### SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Put on your traveling shoes. Explore and discover new terrain over the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Learn about a fascinating subject.



### SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Make future plans and budgets over seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Pay debts. Grow your family savings. Manage taxes, insurance and investments.



### CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Feed each other energy and inspiration. Work with a partner over the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Collaborative efforts get farther.



### AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Exercise creates a positive feedback loop. Mars in Cancer energizes physical efforts over a seven-week phase. You're growing stronger. Power into a productive period.



### PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Passion inspires creativity. Take action for love over seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Practice your arts, crafts and games. Express what's in your heart.

## The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



## SUDOKU

### EASY

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

### EASY+

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

### MEDIUM

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

### HARD

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

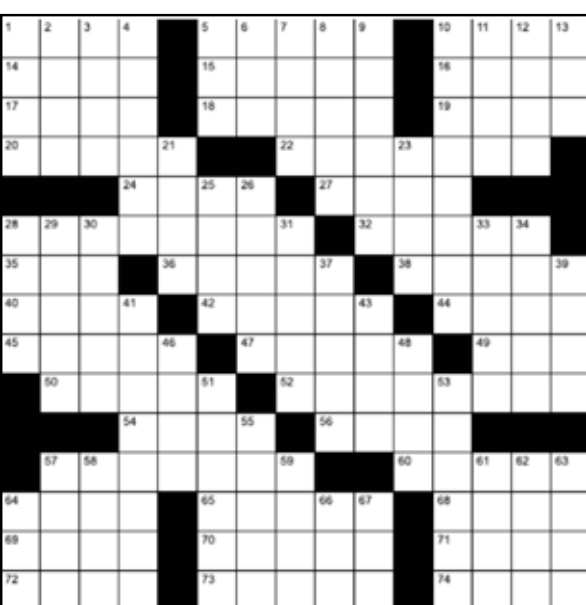
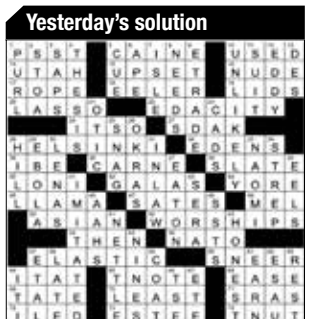
## WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	21	29	fine
Changchun	15	23	fine
Chengdu	28	39	cloudy
Chongqing	33	40	fine
Fuzhou	27	33	cloudy
Guangzhou	26	35	showers
Guiyang	21	32	cloudy
Haikou	25	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	26	35	fine
Harbin	15	21	fine
Hefei	26	35	cloudy
Nanjing	26	36	fine
Shanghai	27	34	cloudy
Taipei	26	32	fine
Wuhan	28	38	fine
Hong Kong	27	32	thunderstorms
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	9	22	fine
Frankfurt	18	31	overcast
Paris	14	18	rain
London	17	20	rain
New York	18	26	fine

## CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Piedmont wine center; 5- Device with 88 keys; 10- Yours, in Tours; 14- Senate position; 15- Take pleasure in; 16- Attic; 17- Breaks bread; 18- Flying pests; 19- Small combo; 20- Outsider; 22- Strategic withdrawal; 24- Meadows; 27- Psychic; 28- Acts; 32- Churns up; 35- Corrida cry; 36- Warhorse; 38- Villain's look; 40- Chain piece; 42- Actress Burstyn; 44- Big bash; 45- Caesar's tongue; 47- Actor Lorenzo; 49- Dallas sch.; 50- Less bananas; 52- Sanatorium; 54- Magician Henning; 56- First king of Israel; 57- Converting to leather; 60- Like non-oyster months; 64- Top-of-the-line; 65- Gallows loop; 68- Concordes; 69- Camp beds; 70- Ham it up; 71- Strong \_\_\_ ox; 72- Yalies; 73- Thick; 74- Itches;

DOWN 1- Away from port; 2- Marine mammal, secure something; 3- French actor Jacques; 4- In and of \_\_\_; 5- Cribbage marker; 6- Tavern; 7- Not quite closed; 8- Short letters; 9- Bivalve mollusk; 10- Changing; 11- When said three times, a 1970 war movie; 12- Think nothing \_\_\_; 13- Judge in 1995 news; 21- Modernists; 23- Classic cars; 25- Comic Johnson; 26- Sniff; 28- Voting-pattern predictor; 29- Inventor Howe; 30- \_\_\_-car; 31- Psalms interjection; 33- Slightest; 34- Alabama city; 37- Audition tapes; 39- Actor Julia; 41- Compassion; 43- Mission control gp.; 46- Light gas; 48- Cowboy boot attachment; 51- Kaput; 53- You got that right!; 55- Garden figure; 57- Implement; 58- Opposed; 59- Continue; 61- "\_\_\_ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto); 62- Ollie's partner; 63- IRS IDs; 64- Pass with flying colors; 66- Ave. crossers; 67- A really big shoe?;



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

AD



## INTERVIEW

## EAST TIMOR PRESIDENT SEES POPE STOP AS OPPORTUNITY, NOT TIME TO DWELL ON PAST SINS

ADAM SCHRECK, DILI

**T**he president of East Timor sees Pope Francis' upcoming visit as a prime opportunity to promote Asia's youngest country on the world stage, not a time to confront the legacy of abuse by influential members of the clergy in the deeply Catholic nation.

During an interview yesterday with The Associated Press, President José Ramos-Horta also predicted progress soon on a major energy project with Australia, and urged China and the United States to act as "benevolent superpowers" as they compete for influence in the Southeast Asian country.

The 74-year-old former independence fighter and Nobel laureate returned to the presidency in 2022 with campaign pledges that included tackling poverty, creating jobs and improving political stability.

Francis is due to arrive Monday in the impoverished and youthful nation of 1.3 million people, also known as Timor-Leste, following visits to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Walls are still being dabbled with fresh paint and banners and billboards seemingly everywhere have been hoisted to welcome the pope.

An estimated 700,000 people are expected to participate in a papal Mass the following day in the seaside capital, Dili, and many others are likely to line the streets try to catch a glimpse of the pope.

The visit is a "reward" for the depth of faith shown by Timorese, some 98% of whom identify as Catholic, and recognition of the progress toward peace the country has shown in recent years, Ramos-Horta said.

There's another benefit for the little-known nation, a former Portuguese colony wedged between Indonesia and Australia: "The pope's visit is the biggest, the best marketing anyone can aspire to to promote the country, to put the country on the tourist map," he said.

The visit comes just days after the president and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, a fellow former resistance leader, hosted United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to mark the 25th anniversary of a U.N.-backed referendum that led to East Timor's independence from neighboring Indonesia in 2002.

It will be the first time Pope Francis has encountered the Timorese faithful since the Vatican acknowledged in 2022 that Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, another hero in the country's struggle



**" [Pope's visit] is a reward for the depth of faith shown by Timorese.**

**" D. Ximenes sheltered people, he saved people and people don't just forget that...**

**" I see the two superpowers as benevolent superpowers. Or they should be benevolent superpowers.**

for independence, had sexually abused young boys.

Meanwhile, a popular American missionary priest revered for his role saving lives in the liberation fight, Richard Daschbach, is serving a 12-year sentence in a Timorese prison for molesting disadvantaged girls.

The pope has met with abuse victims in other countries, but it's not clear if he will do so or address the matter publicly in East Timor.

Belo and Ramos-Horta shared the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts toward "a just and peaceful solution to the conflict in East Timor," which was deeply scarred by a brutal Indonesian occupation and bloody liberation struggle that followed the country's break from Portugal in 1975.

Both men still command respect, alongside other indepen-

dence heroes, given their and the church's resistance to the occupation, in which as many as 200,000 people were killed. Many Timorese doubt or are willing to look past the serious charges involving Belo, who was secretly sanctioned by the church and is banned from voluntary contact with minors.

"We leave it entirely to the pope and the people around him on how to manage this," Ramos-Horta said when asked whether Francis should address the history of sex abuse during his visit, adding that he knows that "the Vatican takes it seriously."

"What is a concept of justice is fairness. People, yes, continue to deeply respect Bishop Belo for his courage, his contribution to their struggle. He sheltered people, he saved people and people don't just forget that ... or castigate

him, ostracize him," the president said.

No further condemnation is needed because the Vatican has already taken action, Ramos-Horta said. Having the pope raise the matter during his visit "would be like trying someone twice."

East Timor struggles with high levels of unemployment and malnutrition, and 42% of the population lives below the national poverty line. Nearly two-thirds of the country's citizens are under 30 years old, making youth job creation a high priority.

The oil and gas industry is the bedrock of the economy and the main source of government revenues. But a major offshore site is tapped out and the country needs new reserves to come online to fill the gap.

Ramos-Horta said he is hope-

ful a breakthrough could come "very soon," possibly in the next three months, on plans for the exploration of a natural gas field that is key to East Timor's financial future.

Development of the promising offshore Greater Sunrise gas field, shared between Australia and East Timor, has been stalled for more than two decades — mainly over the question of which country the fuel should be piped to.

Australia's Woodside Energy, which has the largest stake in the project after East Timor's national oil company, said in response to questions yesterday that the companies and governments "have continued to make progress" on various aspects of the negotiations.

It added that it remains committed to developing the field if "there is fiscal and regulatory certainty necessary for a commercially viable development to proceed."

Timorese officials believe that piping gas into their country would deliver more benefits for their people despite the added logistical challenges. That remains the aim, Ramos-Horta said, adding that any alternative would have to be "a very persuasive proposal."

The presidential palace where the interview took place and several other key government buildings were constructed with help from China, which wants to deepen its influence among Pacific island nations.

China is one of East Timor's top trading partners. In 2023, the two countries boosted their ties by reaching a "comprehensive strategic partnership."

"I understand the suspicion on the part of the United States, their fears, in relation to China," he said. "But I do not see China as a threat to anyone," he added later.

Ramos-Horta said he welcomed Beijing's help in areas such as improving agriculture, water management and food security, but saw "no need" for closer security ties with China.

He did, however, highlight the positive role played by the United States Peace Corps in East Timor and said he would welcome additional help from U.S. military engineers on the ground. U.S. Navy Seabees construction personnel are continuously based in East Timor, building and renovating schools and clinics.

"The U.S. might fear China. We don't fear (them) and we don't fear also the U.S. I see the two superpowers as benevolent superpowers. Or they should be benevolent superpowers," he said. **MDT/AP**



FOOTBALL

# Palestinians face one of Asia's toughest tests in the third round of WC qualifying

**T**HE Palestinian team is closer to the World Cup than ever after reaching the third round of qualifying in Asia as one of the top 18 on the continent.

The next phase starts with one of the toughest possible soccer assignments in Asia, with the Palestinians taking on South Korea in front of 66,000 fans in Seoul tomorrow. The South Koreans have qualified for the past 10 World Cup tournaments, and were semifinalists in 2002.

The top two from each of the three groups in this Asian qualifier will claim six of the eight spots allocated to the Asian Football Confederation at the 2026 World Cup. The teams that finish third and fourth will go into a fourth round to compete for two more spots.

"Our goal is to be among the first four teams in the group, and we are capable of that," Makram Daboub, head coach of the Palestinian team, told The Associated Press. "I'm very happy to have re-

AP PHOTO



ached this important stage, and I am very proud of the players, and it is the result of teamwork."

Facing South Korea and English Premier League talent such as Son Heung-min is a different challenge for the team ranked No. 96 in the world.

"Son is a very excellent player, but we are playing against the Korean national team and he also has other good players, so our focus is more on the group and playing with the best teams in

Asia," Daboub said.

The other teams in Group B include Iraq, Jordan, Oman and Kuwait.

The Palestinians spent time in Malaysia preparing for their opening match and will return to Kuala Lumpur for next week's game against Jordan.

Daboub's squad is familiar with playing on the road.

The Palestinian team progressed through the second round of continental qualifying for the first

time in its history in June but, because of the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, staged its "home" games in nearby Kuwait and Qatar.

Israel launched a major offensive in Gaza in response to an Oct. 7 Hamas attack into southern Israel in which around 1,200 people were killed and another 250 people were abducted.

The war is now in its 11th month and has killed more than 40,000 people, according to Gaza health

officials.

"The situation is getting more difficult in all aspects," Daboub said. "What worries me most is, in addition to the psychological aspect as a result of the situation, there is also the physical condition of the players, because most of them are without clubs."

The game in Seoul is the first for Hong Myung-bo in his second spell as head coach of the South Korean team.

"I think the match is important for the national team, not for me personally," Hong, who resigned after the 2014 tournament in Brazil, said. "This is World Cup qualification."

The toughest qualifying group in Asia is Group C, which contains Japan, Australia and Saudi Arabia.

Japan, which opens at home against China, has 20 Europe-based players on its roster and is Asia's highest-ranked team at No. 18.

Australia and Saudi Arabia are each aiming for their seventh World Cup appearance. **MDT/AP**

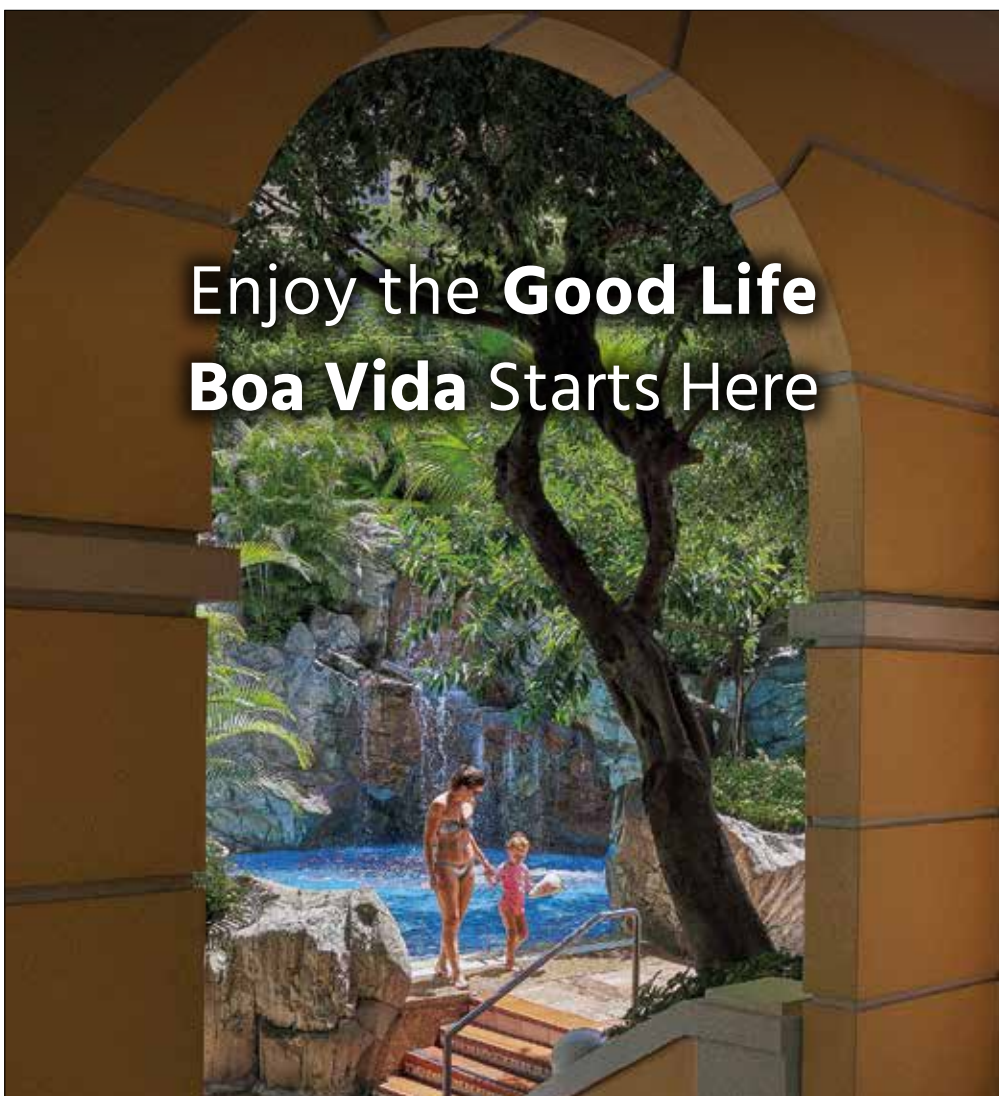
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OPINION

The Conversation

Harish Narasimhan, University of Virginia



LONG COVID: TARGETING SPECIFIC IMMUNE CELLS COULD REVERSE DAMAGE IN LUNGS

The long-term effects of respiratory viral infections such as COVID-19 are a major public health burden. Some estimates suggest over 65 million people around the world suffer from long COVID-19.

Efforts to better understand this condition, however, have been hampered by its ability to affect multiple organ systems, such as those involving the lungs, brain and heart. This is further complicated by the lack of animal models that can sufficiently mimic the disease.

Animal models, such as mice and rats, are a crucial tool that researchers use to study human diseases and develop treatment strategies. Although there are major differences between humans and animal models, the vast majority of our immune and organs systems function similarly. Such similarities in physiology have made significant health care discoveries, including those related to COVID-19, possible.

I am an immunology researcher in the Sun Lab at the University of Virginia. We study the role the immune system plays in respiratory viral infections such as influenza and COVID-19. In our newly published research, we developed a new mouse model to study long COVID-19 and found that blocking certain overactive immune cells can restore lung function.

Our team wanted to better understand the long-term effects of COVID-19 on the respiratory system. To do this, we worked to identify key features associated with lung scarring following COVID-19.

First, we examined lung samples from patients with long COVID-19. Although these patients were infected several months to years before the samples were taken, we found evidence of an overactive immune system in their lungs, particularly within areas that failed to fully repair themselves after infection.

Next, we aimed to create a mouse model for long COVID-19 by comparing the pathology of mice infected with four different types of respiratory viral infections. Surprisingly, we found that mice infected with influenza virus, rather than the COVID-19 mouse models scientists currently use, best replicated the physical features of severe chronic lung disease. The reasons why infections from different respiratory viruses affect the lungs in different ways are unclear. But preliminary evidence suggests it may be because each virus targets different types of cells "in humans and mice."

Additionally, since long COVID-19 is about the damage left behind after infection, it seems less important what virus causes the problem in our animal model than that the damage is similar to what we want to address in human patients.

Using our new mouse model, we were able to identify the presence of an abnormal cluster of cells in mice lungs – made up of the same dysfunctional immune and epithelial, or structural, cells seen in the lungs of long-COVID-19 patients. Additionally, we found that the uncontrolled activity of these immune cells in the lungs impeded structural cells from repairing themselves. It also hindered them from restoring gas exchange, the process of taking in oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide.

The drugs we tested in our study have already been approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat severe COVID-19 and other inflammatory conditions. We hope our findings can spur further research on using these drugs to treat long COVID-19.

Our work may have applications beyond long COVID-19. Growing evidence suggests that many respiratory viral infections, such as influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus, may result in chronic lung disease. Considering the four pandemics and even more respiratory viral epidemics that have occurred in the past 100 years, studying the cellular and molecular similarities between respiratory viral infections may be critical to how medical practitioners respond to future viral outbreaks. [Abridged]

VOLVO BECOMES LATEST CARMAKER TO SCALE BACK ELECTRIC AMBITIONS, EASES GOAL TO AT LEAST 90% BY 2030

THE BUZZ

Sweden-based Volvo Cars has eased off on its pledge to stop selling cars with internal combustion motors by 2030, saying slow rollout of places to charge up and withdrawal of purchase incentives will leave room for a few cars that still need fossil fuels.

Volvo Cars, part of China's Geely Holding, now foresees a model lineup at the end of the decade that's at least 90% electric cars and has widened that to include both battery-only and plug-in hybrids that combine battery power with an internal combustion engine.

On top of that, up to 10% could be a "limited number" of mild

hybrids, which mainly run on internal combustion and store electric power from braking in a 48-volt battery to assist acceleration and improve fuel economy.

The company said it was adjusting to "changing market conditions and customer demands."

"We are resolute in our belief that our future is electric," CEO Jim Rowan said in a statement yesterday. "However, it is clear that the transition to electrification will not be linear, and customers and markets are moving at different speeds of adoption."

AP PHOTO



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

TURKEY SEEKS TO JOIN THE BRICS BLOC OF EMERGING ECONOMIES, A KREMLIN OFFICIAL SAYS

NATO member Turkey has applied for membership in the BRICS bloc of developing economies, a senior Kremlin official said yesterday, as Russia and China seek to counter the West's global influence.

Yuri Ushakov, President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs aide, told reporters that Turkey has submitted an application "for full membership" in the bloc that Russia this year chairs, and it will be considered.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has stated several times that his country aspires to become a member of the BRICS alliance, according to Omer Celik, a spokesman for Erdogan's ruling party. But Celik stopped short this week of confirming that Turkey has applied formally.

The BRICS alliance was founded in 2006 by Brazil, Russia, India and China, with South Africa joining in 2010. It re-

cently has undergone an expansion, and now includes Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia has said it's considering joining, and Azerbaijan and Malaysia have formally applied.

BRICS has a stated aim to amplify the voice of major emerging economies to counterbalance the Western-led global order. Its founding members have called for a fairer world order and the reform of international institutions like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Erdogan, who has been in power for more than two decades, has sought to carve a more independent foreign policy for Turkey and to enhance its global influence. The country is also frustrated by the lack of progress in its membership talks with the European Union.

Last week, Erdogan said Turkey should "si-

multaneously" develop relations with both the East and the West.

Turkey, which straddles Europe and Asia, joined the NATO military alliance in 1952. It began talks to join the European Union in 2005 but the negotiations have stalled due to concerns over democratic regression under Erdogan's administration, and ongoing disputes with Cyprus, an EU member, among other challenges.

BRICS is expected to discuss taking in new members in a meeting in Russia next month.

Putin earlier this year welcomed Turkey's interest in the bloc and promised that Moscow "will support this aspiration and desire to be together with the countries of this alliance, to be together, closer, to solve common problems."

On Monday, Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also said Turkey expressed interest in joining BRICS. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Red Sea Salvagers abandoned an initial effort to tow away a burning oil tanker in the Red Sea targeted by Yemen's Houthi rebels as it "was not safe to proceed," a European Union naval mission said yesterday [Macau time].

AP PHOTO



Iraq Women fear rise in child marriages as lawmakers consider giving conservative clerics more say, potentially allowing marriages of girls as young as 9.

AP PHOTO



Venezuela A global human rights watchdog yesterday implicated Venezuelan security forces and pro-government armed groups in killings that occurred during the protests that followed the country's disputed July presidential election.

USA Ahead of their debate, Donald Trump and Kamala Harris outline contrasting economic strategies: Trump favors extensive tax cuts, while Harris proposes increased taxes on the wealthy to fund housing and parental tax breaks.

Nigeria Over 100 villagers in northeastern Nigeria were killed by suspected Boko Haram militants in a brutal attack targeting a market and homes in the Tarmuwa council area of Yobe state.

AP PHOTO



Italy Luca Guadagnino and Daniel Craig debut "Queer" at the Venice Film Festival, with Craig delivering a raw performance in this adaptation of a William S. Burroughs novel set in 1950s Mexico City.