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**INCREASE IN VISITOR ARRIVALS LED TO CONTINUED IMPROVEMENTS IN INDICATORS SUCH AS HOTEL OCCUPANCY RATE AND THE EMPLOYMENT MARKET: MEA**

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**CRIME ALERT: AUTHORITIES WARN OF 72% SPIKE IN ONLINE SCAMS**

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**BEIJING IS RAISING ITS RETIREMENT AGE, NOW AMONG THE YOUNGEST IN THE WORLD'S MAJOR ECONOMIES**

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AP PHOTO



**China-US** The Biden administration is cracking down on cheap products sold out of China, expanding a push to reduce U.S. dependence on Beijing and bolster homegrown industry, but that could trigger higher prices for U.S. consumers who flock to popular shopping sites like Temu and Shein. President Joe Biden's proposed rule says foreign companies can't avoid tariffs simply by shipping goods that they claim to be worth \$800 or less. Sellers mainly from China have used the so-called de minimis exemption to flood the U.S. market, shipping dresses, shoes, toys and bags directly to American shoppers in small packages.

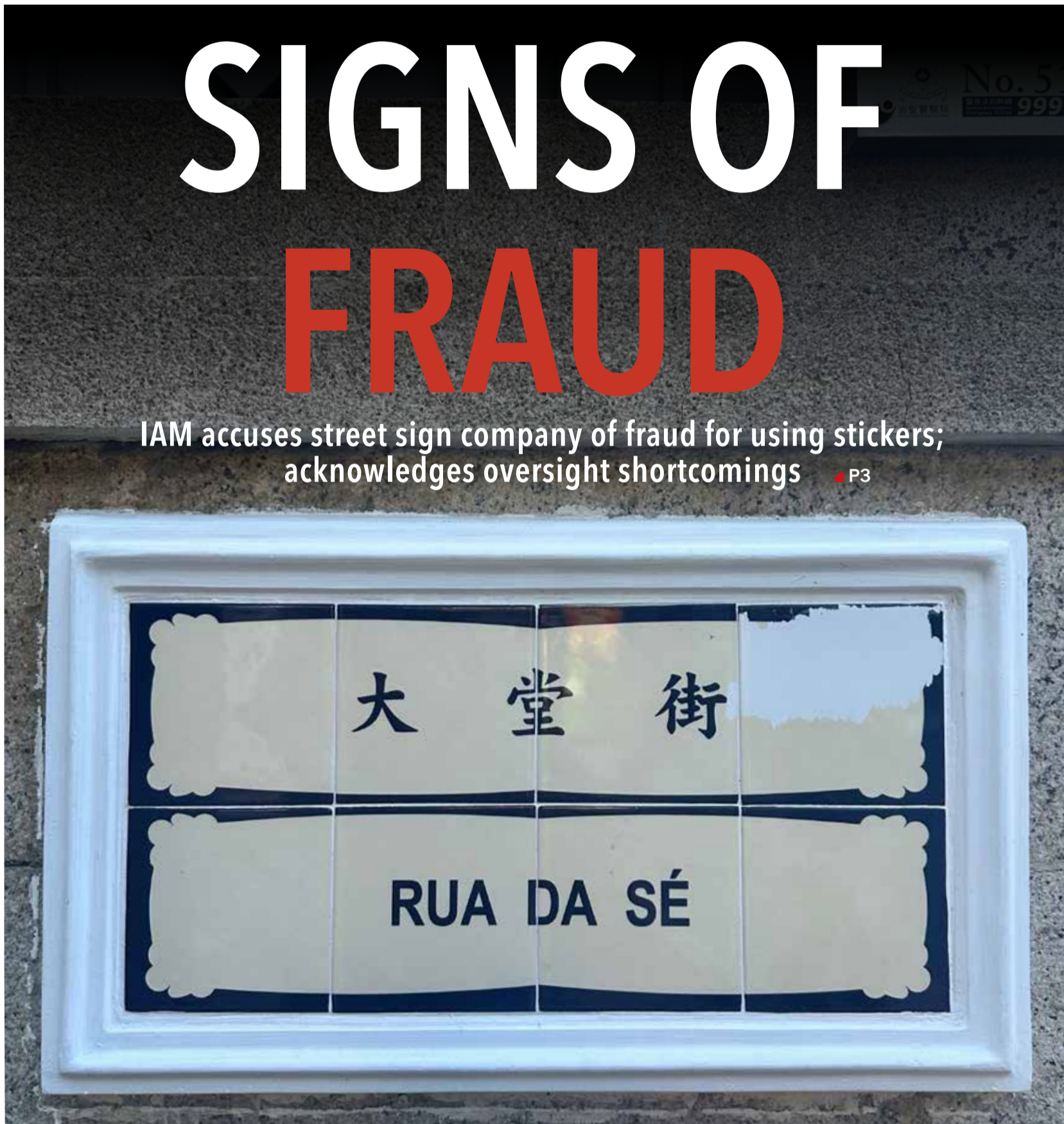
**Philippines** A televangelist, who calls himself the "anointed son of God" and once claimed to have stopped an earthquake, pleaded not guilty Friday to charges of abuse of minors and human trafficking in a court arraignment that's the latest mark of his reversal of fortune. Apollo Carreon Quiboloy and four of his co-accused were brought under heavy security to the regional trial court in Pasig city in metropolitan Manila for the human trafficking charges and was later arraigned by video from police detention by another court handling a separate non-bailable case of child abuse.

AP PHOTO



**Vietnam** The death toll in the aftermath of Typhoon Yagi climbed to 233 on Friday as rescue workers recovered more bodies from areas hit by landslides and flash floods, state media reported. Flood waters from the swollen Red River in the capital of Hanoi were beginning to recede, but many neighborhoods remained inundated and farther north, experts were predicting it could still be days before any relief is in sight. Across the country, 103 people are still missing and more than 800 have been injured.

VICTORIA CHAN



# SIGNS OF FRAUD

**IAM accuses street sign company of fraud for using stickers; acknowledges oversight shortcomings**

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**COMPULSORY ARBITRATION PROPOSED FOR FAMILY DISPUTES**

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**HOLIDAY TOURISM SURGE ON MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL'S FIRST DAY**

P2

# MEA: 'Stable' economic index as visitor surge fuels jobs

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE increase in visitor arrivals has led to continued improvements in indicators such as local hotel occupancy and the employment market, reports the Macau Economic Association (MEA).

The MEA has released the latest trend of the Macau Economic Prosperity Index, indicating a stable economic outlook for the city.

According to the report, the July and August economic indicators remained "stable," with the economic outlook index reaching 6.4 and 6.6 respectively, slightly above the upper edge of the "stable" rating.

This was driven by summer vacation tourism, which saw over 6 million visitor arrivals in the two-month period, with average daily visitor arrivals of

VICTORIA CHAN



97,000 and 118,000, respectively, and average daily gross gaming revenues of MOP600 million and MOP640 million.

Macau's money supply M2 also rose 4.3% year-on-year to a record high of MOP764.3

billion in July, further strengthening the city's economic resilience.

However, the report noted China's Consumer Confidence Index and the share prices of the six major tourism and ga-

ming operators remain in the "downturn" category, reflecting the uncertainties in Macau's external environment.

Despite the challenges, the MEA is optimistic about the city's economic outlook, par-

ticularly in the fourth quarter.

"The upcoming National Day Golden Week in October, coupled with the intensive year-end celebrations, will contribute to the improvement of the local business environment, supporting the overall economic sentiment index to remain at a 'stable' level between 6.4 and 6.5 points from September to November," the report said.

Furthermore, the report suggested the imminent interest rate cuts by global central banks, including the possibility of a 0.25% rate cut by the US Federal Reserve next week, could benefit Macau's market conditions and stimulate the real economy.

"With the US economic data starting to show signs of weakness and inflation gradually declining, the market generally expects the Fed to start the pace of interest rate cuts as scheduled at next week's rate meeting," the report said.

Overall, the MEA's assessment indicates Macau's economic outlook remains stable, with positive factors expected to drive the city's performance in the fourth quarter.

## LABOR

# Locals occupy 90% of gaming industry managerial jobs

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE percentage of local workers in mid- and senior-level positions at Macau's six gaming concessionaires reached 90.35% in the first half of the year, according to the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL).

Responding to lawmaker Song Pek Kei, the DSAL reported that as of the end of June, the six operators - Sands China, Galaxy Entertainment, Wynn Macau, MGM China, Melco Resorts and SJM Holdings - employed 27,140 non-residents and 76,225 locals.

This puts the overall proportion of local hires at 73.7%.

The DSAL said the government was maintaining the proportion of

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local workers in the middle and senior management of the six tourism and leisure companies at no less than 85%.

By the end of June, the proportion had reached 90.3%.

The authorities said hiring non-resident workers is necessary "for the development of the MSAR as a world center of tourism and leisure and the needs

of the socio-economic development of Macau."

Lawmaker Song Pek Kei warned, "the employment of local workers is not adequately safeguarded" despite the government's assurances.

Song has warned "large gaming companies have great advantages in terms of resources, are a priority option for residents, and provide many jobs. How-

ever, given the significant increase in demand for human resources, the employment of local workers is not adequately safeguarded."

For its part, the DSAL said it will "rigorously monitor" the approval of non-resident worker permits and "continuously review and improve the verification and approval process."

It added that different measures will be introduced "to adapt jobs according to the development of companies and their actual employment needs, in order to establish a balance between supply and demand in the labor market and to guarantee local residents priority and sustained access to employment."

## HOLIDAY

# TOURISM SURGE ON MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL'S FIRST DAY

**T**HE first day of the three-day Mid-Autumn Festival holiday in mainland China saw a significant influx of tourists into Macau.

A total of 125,314 visitors arrived in the city yesterday, while 122,685 had departed.

In total, various ports recorded about 670,621 entries and exits.

Most of these movements occurred at the Border Gate, followed by the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge port and the Qingmao Port.

China is expected to see an average of 1.8 million daily cross-border trips around this year's Mid-Autumn Festival holiday, a 21.9% increase from the same period last year, official data shows.

According to the National Immigration Administration, cross-border travel will peak tomorrow.

Passenger flow will significantly increase at major international airports as well as land crossings to Hong Kong and Macau.

The administration has requested border-check agencies nationwide to step up the monitoring of passenger flows and port operation, and ensure safe, efficient and smooth customs clearance for passengers.

The Mid-Autumn Festival is one of China's most important traditional holidays.

Taking place annually on the 15th day of the eighth month in the Chinese lunar calendar, it will be observed Sept. 17 this year. LV

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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

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# IAM declares fraud over street sign company using stickers

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has accused a company contracted to replace hundreds of bilingual street signs of defrauding the project through the unauthorized use of stickers instead of the specified manufacturing method.

According to the IAM, the replacement street signs were required to be manufactured using an underglazing technique for enhanced durability and visibility.

But the company allegedly used cheaper stickers, violating the material requirements outlined in the contract.

Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong told an Executive Council press briefing Friday the IAM had filed a police complaint over "suspected fraudulent conduct and material usage irregularities."

He assured the public an investigation is underway to ascertain responsibility.

Cheong said this is not merely a quality issue but also potentially involves criminal fraud.

In a statement, the IAM acknowledged "shortcomings in its oversight processes for monitoring compliance, communicating issues, and ensuring accountability."

An internal review has been launched to examine contracting and supervision protocols.

Cheong said the non-compliant signs will be replaced as swiftly as possible.

Going forward, the evaluation



VICTORIA CHAN

and selection of contractors for public projects will factor in lessons from this incident.

Nine companies bid on the project, which was awarded to the lowest bidder.

However, Cheong noted other criteria were part of the evaluation but not disclosed publicly.

In future, the IAM will strengthen accountability and transparency.

Photos circulating online show street signs employing yellow stickers rather than the customary Portuguese tile painting technique.

Several signs depict stickers, faded from weather exposure,

peeling away to expose blank white tiles underneath.

Multiple signs along R. dos Eucaliptos photographed Friday afternoon displayed stickers stripping off and falling to the pavement.

A comparable circumstance was seen for signs near R. das Acacias Rubras - one new, one old, with stickers plainly noticeable.

Social media comments on the pictures have raised questions about the workmanship and the project administration.

Some have speculated contractors may have "cut corners" by using cheaper stickers instead of the specified tile manu-

ring process.

Several critics have faulted IAM's oversight, suggesting it failed to properly monitor the work.

"How can millions spent on a project for the public be done with stickers? And if it wasn't discovered by the public, nobody would know," said one critic.

"Is there an oversight department responsible for approving these works and ensuring goods are legitimately obtained, rather than simply taken without proper authorization?" said another.

"IAM should have investigated immediately instead of waiting for a complaint," the social media user added.

## CRIME

# Authorities urge vigilance as online scams surge 72%

NADIA SHAW

**T**HE Office of the Secretary for Security (GSS) yesterday called for increased vigilance as reported fraud cases surged dramatically in 2024.

The warning noted three prevalent types of scams: phishing text messages, fraudulent online ticket purchases, and part-time job scams.

From January to August, authorities recorded 372 cases of credit card

theft, a 72% increase from the previous year.

Additionally, there were 201 instances of online shopping fraud, with nearly 70% linked to fake ticket sales.

The police have also noted a rise in part-time job scams, which saw a 48% increase, with 93 reported cases during the same period.

As online fraud proliferates, phishing scams, often disguised as legitimate communications,

have become increasingly sophisticated, according to GSS.

Fraudsters send text messages containing links that lead victims to fake websites designed to steal personal information.

The Secretary for Security has emphasized the importance of verifying any unsolicited messages and avoiding clicking on suspicious links.

Online ticket fraud has particularly targeted younger individuals eager to at-

tend concerts and events.

Many victims have purchased tickets from unofficial sources, only to find themselves scammed.

The police have urged the public to refrain from trusting "internal channels" or ticket scalpers and to be wary of any requests for advance payments.

Part-time job scams typically involve fake job postings on social media, where victims are misled into paying upfront for supposed tasks. Authorities have warned that if a job requires personal information or an advance payment, it is likely a scam.

In response to the escalating fraud rates, the police have implemented va-

rious anti-fraud measures, including an anti-fraud program that has assisted over 36,000 individuals in identifying potential scams.

A recent exchange meeting with the financial industry aimed to enhance strategies for preventing online fraud.

As the fourth quarter approaches—a time historically associated with increased online fraud—the Secretary for Security has urged the public to remain vigilant.

Individuals are encouraged to report suspicious activities and use available resources, such as the police's anti-fraud hotline, to safeguard their personal information and finances.

## MACAU ON ALERT AS DENGUE SPREADS NEARBY

Health officials say Macau is in close contact with neighboring regions after three dengue fever cases were reported just across the border, according to director of Health Bureau (SSM) Alvis Lo Iek Long. No confirmed dengue cases have spread to Macau so far. Lo said if one does, officials will immediately combat mosquitos in the affected area. He also warned parents to watch for respiratory infections as students return to school, citing a typical uptick. Anyone with fever or other symptoms should seek care to prevent spreading illnesses, the secretary advised. While the rainy season wanes, lowering dengue risk, cooperation continues on potential regional health threats.

## RAPID CAREER EXPANSION OFFERED FOR RESIDENTS

A new "first hire, then train" program unveiled by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and SJM Resorts will provide career training and 50 jobs for local residents. The "Specific Plan for SJM Tourism Service Ambassadors" will accept applications through to Sept. 16. Trainees will receive eight months of catering instruction before choosing additional cross-training in security or shuttle services. Those excelling can become department heads or managers over time. The program aims to develop well-rounded tourism professionals through skills courses, certifications, and on-the-job experience across resort operations.

## TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE FORUM PROMOTES HEALTH

The 7th Belt and Road Forum on the Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine was held Friday in Beijing. Choi Peng Cheong, president of Macau's drug regulatory body, delivered a keynote on using traditional Chinese medicine to improve health in Belt and Road countries. The forum focused on expanding traditional Chinese medicine trade, integrating it with Western medicine and modernizing production. Choi said Macau would continue developing platforms to introduce traditional Chinese medicine internationally and ensure product quality and safety. The forum announced formation of an expert committee and launched traditional Chinese medicine tours to promote exchanges along the Belt and Road.

CE ELECTION

# Sole candidate Sam Hou Fai to unveil political platform Sept. 28

NADIA SHAW

**S**AM Hou Fai, the sole candidate for Chief Executive, is set to publicly present his political program on September 28.

The event will include a briefing session with Sam, specifically for the 400 members of the Electoral Committee.

This meeting will be held at the Complex of Commerce and Trade Co-operation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries.

Over the weekend, the sole candidate for the sixth term, met with technology leaders to discuss the sector's future.

The gathering, held at the Man Kei Industrial Building, featured prominent figures, including Chui Sai Peng Jose, president of the Association for Promotion of Science & Technology of Macau, and Xu Aoa, president of the Macau Youth Science Education Association.

A total of 21 representatives from various technology associations participated in the discussions, which focused on key issues such as technological innovation,



scientific research, and collaboration with Portuguese-speaking countries.

The meeting underscored the necessity of fostering new productive forces centered on innovation, establishing regulatory frameworks for the Greater Bay Area, and modernizing traditional Chinese medicine.

Participants emphasized the importance of nurturing talent in

scientific research to support Macau's diversified economic development.

Meanwhile, according to lawmaker José Pereira Coutinho, in their "private conversation," Sam expressed his commitment to being more receptive to various segments of society.

As cited in a TDM report, Coutinho conveyed his personal support for Sam's candidacy, adding that his

willingness to engage with diverse perspectives is crucial.

Also, last week, Sam met casino industry leaders, advocating for a "healthy, orderly and sustainable" development model.

This initiative aims to promote economic diversification in a sector often scrutinized for its societal impact.

Key figures from major gaming companies reiterated their com-

mitment to enhancing non-gambling offerings and supporting local businesses.

Sam's extensive judicial background sets him apart from his predecessors, who primarily emerged from business sectors.

He is focused on integrating Macau into the national development landscape, steering the city toward a sustainable and diversified future.

Sam has previously issued a stark warning about the region's gambling industry.

He emphasized the urgent need for economic diversification, particularly considering the gaming sector's unchecked growth.

Responding to questions about the industry's impact, he described it as having become "uncontrolled."

He stressed the Central Government's call for Macau to diversify its economy is not optional but a necessary directive for the government.

His campaign continues to emphasize its commitment to gathering input from various sectors of society as he prepares for the Oct. 13 election.

PUBLIC HOUSING

# Seniors' housing project to welcome first residents in October

NADIA SHAW

**T**HE Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) has announced over 900 units in the elderly housing project are ready for occupancy contracts, with signing scheduled for mid-October.

This initiative provides affordable housing for the city's aging population.

Located in Lot P of Area Preta district, this government project is a pilot aimed at improving living conditions for seniors.

The first phase of the project has seen significant expansion, increasing from an initial 759 units to more than 1,500.

The bureau received over 1,500 applications from more than 2,200 applicants.

Of the units that have

RENATO MARQUES



completed the selection process, 900 have been allocated to over 1,300 individuals, representing about 70% of total applications.

Kam Kit Ling, head of the Elderly Services Division of the IAS told TDM that among the applications, 470 were submitted as individual applications, while the remainder were joint applications.

The bureau is actively contacting seniors who have successfully completed the housing selec-

tion process to arrange for the signing of occupancy agreements.

Plans are in place for the remaining eligible applicants to move in shortly thereafter.

Kam said the basic facilities and clubhouse for the public housing will be operational at the same time as the occupancy agreements are signed.

The bureau will assist seniors in familiarizing themselves with their new units during this process.

Additionally, a dedicated mobile application designed to monitor residents' activity levels is set to launch in the fourth quarter.

The seniors' residence project is designed to foster active and healthy lifestyles among residents, offering affordable and comfortable housing options.

The accommodation units are available in single- and twin-bed configurations, each featuring uniform basic decor, essential bathroom and kitchen fixtures, as well as furniture and appliances.

The design emphasizes simplicity, style and comfort, with barrier-free bathrooms equipped with shower chairs to ensure accessibility, while non-barrier-free bathrooms are fitted with shower screens.

## COMPULSORY ARBITRATION PROPOSED FOR FAMILY DISPUTES

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE government has proposed compulsory arbitration for divorces and parental rights disputes to resolve sensitive family issues more harmoniously.

Under the proposed bill, specific family law cases like divorce and child custody battles would first go through mandatory arbitration with trained mediators.

This process aims to address arguments over spousal and child financial support, living arrangements, and the distribution of property in a constructive setting before matters go to court.

The mediators could come from the Social Welfare Bureau's (IAS) roster of about 300 social workers with experience in family services.

Based on a review of average caseloads, the legislation is expected to apply to about 250 eligible cases annually.

The arbitration process would involve designated fa-

mily mediators guiding discussions over a 60-day period, extendable by another 30 days if needed.

Failure to participate in good faith would result in higher court fees to encourage cooperation.

"We are hoping this intervention may help estranged parties resolve issues outside of an adversarial court process," said director Leong Weng In of the Legal Affairs Bureau (DSA).

Issues like disagreements over parental rights or living situations post-divorce could potentially be addressed through compromise.

The goal, according to Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong, is to handle divorces and disputes over children in a more harmonious, solution-focused manner rather than escalating matters through litigation.

Mediation aims to produce mutually agreeable outcomes in the best interests of families. VC

PROPERTY

# China hands PwC a 6-month ban and fine over audit of the collapsed developer Evergrande

SIMINA MISTREANU & ZEN SOO,  
HONG KONG

**C**HINESE authorities have banned the accounting firm PwC for six months and fined it over 400 million yuan (\$56.4 million) over its involvement in the audit of collapsed property developer Evergrande.

The punishment is the heaviest yet for international accounting firms operating in China. PwC will be banned from signing off on any financial results in the country for six months. Already, it has been losing clients.

China's Ministry of Finance said in a statement Friday that it was imposing 116 million yuan (\$16.35 million) in fines and confiscation of illegal gains on PwC Zhong Tian, also known as PwC China, as well as a six-month business suspension, revocation of PwC's Guang-

zhou branch and an administrative warning.

A separate regulator, the China Securities Regulatory Commission, also imposed fines and confiscations totaling 325 million yuan (\$45.8 million) on PwC for allegedly failing to perform due diligence in the audit of Evergrande.

China's finance ministry said PwC issued "false audit reports" of Evergrande and that the audit procedures had "serious defects" in design and implementation, leading to many false conclusions. It also accused PwC of not maintaining "professional skepticism" and failing to point out errors and a lack of information disclosure by Evergrande during the audits.

The securities regulator said 88% of the records kept by PwC regarding the real estate projects were inconsistent with the actual



implementation and were "seriously unreliable." When on-site investigations were carried out, some projects were still "a piece of vacant land" despite being considered to have met the delivery conditions, the regulator said.

"The work performed by PwC Zhong Tian's Hengda audit team fell well below our high expectations and was completely unac-

ceptable," Mohamed Kande, global chair of PwC, said in a statement on its website. Hengda is the principal subsidiary of China Evergrande Group.

"It is not representative of what we stand for as a network and there is no room for this at PwC," he said.

The statement said PwC Zhong Tian has cooperated fully with regulators, respects their decisions

and will fully comply with the administrative penalties.

PwC China has fired six partners and five staff directly involved in the Hengda audit, it said. The firm is also in the process of issuing financial penalties for current and former firm leaders who were responsible for the business, the statement said.

PwC came under Beijing's scrutiny after the January collapse of Evergrande, the world's most indebted developer and a symbol of China's ongoing property crisis.

China's securities regulator said in March that Evergrande had inflated its mainland China revenues by almost \$80 billion in 2019 and 2020. In May, authorities fined the company \$577 million.

PwC had audited Evergrande's accounts for 14 years until 2023 and gave it a clean bill of health.

PwC has been the largest of the "big four" accounting firms operating in China, taking in nearly 8 billion yuan (\$1.1 billion) in revenues in 2022, above competitors Deloitte, KPMG and EY, according to the Chinese Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

China has been cracking down on excessive borrowing by developers during a prolonged property market slump that has hit many other parts of the economy, including construction, building materials and home appliances. **MDT/AP**

AD

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# Gov't is raising its retirement age, now among the youngest in the world's major economies

HUIZHONG WU & EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA, BEIJING

**S**TARTING next year, China will raise its retirement age for workers, which is now among the youngest in the world's major economies, in an effort to address its shrinking population and aging work force.

The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's legislature, passed the new policy Friday after a sudden announcement earlier in the week that it was reviewing the measure, state broadcaster CCTV announced.

The policy change will be carried out over 15 years, with the retirement age for men raised to 63 years, and for women to 55 or 58 years depending on their jobs. The current retirement age is 60 for men and 50 for women in blue-collar jobs and 55 for women doing white-collar work.

"We have more people coming into the retirement age, and so the pension fund is (facing) high pressure. That's why I think it's now time to act seriously," said Xiujian Peng, a senior research fellow at Victoria University in Australia who studies China's population and its ties to the economy.

The previous retirement ages were set in the 1950's, when life expectancy was only around 40 years, Peng said.

The policy will be implemen-

AP PHOTO



ted starting in January, according to the announcement from China's legislature. The change will take effect progressively based on people's birthdates.

For example, a man born in January 1971 could retire at the age of 61 years and 7 months in August 2032, according to a chart released along with the policy. A man born in May 1971 could retire at the age of 61 years and 8 months in January 2033.

Demographic pressures made the move long overdue, exper-

ts say. By the end of 2023, China counted nearly 300 million people over the age of 60. By 2035, that figure is projected to be 400 million, larger than the population of the U.S.

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences had previously projected that the public pension fund will run out of money by that year.

Pressure on social benefits such as pensions and social security is hardly a China-specific problem. The U.S. also faces the issue as analysis shows that cur-

rently, the Social Security fund won't be able to pay out full benefits to people by 2033.

"This is happening everywhere," said Yanzhong Huang, senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations. "But in China with its large elderly population, the challenge is much larger."

That is on top of fewer births, as younger people opt out of having children, citing high costs. In 2022, China's National Bureau of Statistics reported that for the

first time the country had 850,000 fewer people at the end of the year than the previous year, a turning point from population growth to decline. In 2023, the population shrank further, by 2 million people.

What that means is that the burden of funding elderly people's pensions will be divided among a smaller group of younger workers, as pension payments are largely funded by deductions from people who are currently working.

Researchers measure that pressure by looking at a number called the dependency ratio, which counts the number of people over the age of 65 compared to the number of workers under 65. That number was 21.8% in 2022, according to government statistics, meaning that roughly five workers would support one retiree. The percentage is expected to rise, meaning fewer workers will be shouldering the burden of one retiree.

The necessary course correction will cause short-term pain, experts say, coming at a time of already high youth unemployment and a soft economy.

A 52-year-old Beijing resident, who gave his family name as Lu and will now retire at age 61 instead of 60, was positive about the change. "I view this as a good thing, because our society's getting older, and in developed countries, the retirement age is higher," he said.

Li Bin, 35, who works in the event planning industry, said she was a bit sad.

"It's three years less of play time. I had originally planned to travel around after retirement," she said. But she said it was better than expected because the retirement age was only raised three years for women in white-collar jobs. **MDT/AP**

# Economy softens in August as Beijing continues to grapple with lagging demand

**C**HINA'S economy softened in August, extending a slowdown in industrial activity and real estate prices as Beijing faces pressure to ramp up spending to stimulate demand.

Data published by the National Bureau of Statistics Saturday showed weakening activity across industrial production, retail sales and real estate this month compared to July.

"We should be aware that the adverse impacts arising from the changes in the external environ-

ment are increasing," said Liu Aihua, the bureau's chief economist in a news conference.

Liu said that demand remained insufficient at home, and the sustained economic recovery still confronts multiple difficulties and challenges.

China has been grappling with a lagging economy post-COVID, with weak consumer demand, persistent deflationary pressures and a contraction in factory activity.

Chinese leaders have ramped up investment

AP PHOTO



in manufacturing to rev up an economy that stalled during the pande-

mic and is still growing slower than hoped.

Beijing also has to

deal with increasing pressure to implement large-scale stimulus measures to boost economic growth.

While industrial production rose by 4.5% in August compared to a year ago, it declined from July's 5.1% growth, according to the bureau's data released.

Retail sales grew 2.1% from the same time last year, slower than the 2.7% increase last month.

Fixed asset investment rose by 3.4% from January to August, down

from 3.6% in the first seven months.

Meanwhile, investment in real estate declined by 10.2% from January to August, compared to last year.

The figures released Saturday come after trade data for August saw imports grow just 0.5% compared to a year ago.

The consumer price index rose 0.6% in August, missing forecasts according to data released last week. Officials attributed the higher CPI to an increase in food prices due to bad weather.

But the core CPI, which excludes food and energy prices, rose by just 0.3% in August, the slowest in over three years. **MDT/AP**

MALAYSIA

# Sexual abuse at Islamic welfare homes exposes weaknesses in child protection

EILEEN NG KUALA LUMPUR

A police swoop on 20 child welfare homes in Malaysia where hundreds of children were allegedly sexually abused has exposed weaknesses in child protection in the country and cast a spotlight on the Islamic business group that ran the homes.

Malaysian authorities rescued 402 children, half of them boys and the rest girls, from 20 homes run by Global Ikhwan Services and Business Holdings, a group aiming to promote an Islamic way of life, during the police sting last week. Police detained 171 suspects, including religious teachers and caretakers.

The business group was founded by Ashaari Mohamad, who headed the Islamic sect Al Arqam — a cult that was deemed heretical and banned by the government in 1994. He died in 2010, but the group has continued to flourish.

Details of alleged serious abuse at the homes have sparked outrage and shock in the predominantly Muslim nation. Activists called for all child centers to be regulated and monitored, and for the Welfare Department to strengthen enforcement on religious institutions.

"The horrific sexual and physical abuse that has been reported... is a major wake-up call. It demands that we re-evaluate the quality and scope of our child protection services," a group of 38 child activists, rights groups and social workers said in a joint statement.

National police chief Razarudin Ismail has said some of the children, aged from one to 17, were believed sodomized by their guar-



This photo shows business shops owned by Global Ikhwan, an Islamic business group linked to a banned religious cult, in suburb of central Selangor state, Malaysia

dians and also taught to sexually abuse each other. He said they were denied medical treatment and burnt with hot metal spoons as punishment for being disobedient.

The children, whose parents are Global Ikhwan employees, were placed at the homes since they were infants and believed to be indoctrinated from young to be loyal to the group, police have said. The children were also believed to have been exploited to collect public donations. The case is being investigated for sexual abuse, child neglect and human trafficking.

Razarudin was quoted by national Bernama news agency as saying Friday that 49 children under five years old, and another 10 who were autistic or have disabilities have been handed to the Welfare Department. The rest are still undergoing medical screening. He said so far at least 13 teens were found to have been sodomized

while 172 have long-term physical and emotional injuries.

Razarudin said the children were home-schooled and has no formal education. He said some of them have not seen their parents for years, as the company sent them to work abroad. Police are investigating whether the children were separated from their parents voluntarily or forced by the company.

UNICEF Malaysia said the children would need long-term medical and psychological support for the trauma they experienced.

"As long as children in Malaysia reside in unregulated institutional care settings, they will remain at heightened risk of suffering violence and abuse," said its Malaysian representative Robert Gash.

Mokhtar Tajudin, a spokesman for Global Ikhwan, told the Associated Press on Friday that the homes were not directly run by the

group. He did not elaborate. Global Ikhwan in a statement denied the sexual abuse allegations, calling it an attempt by certain parties to tarnish the group's business reputation.

Global Ikhwan owns mini-markets, bakeries, restaurants, pharmacies, properties and other businesses in some 20 countries. The company employs some 5,000 people.

Global Ikhwan shot in the limelight in 2011 when it formed an "Obedient Wives Club" that sparked controversy by teaching women to be "good sex workers" to keep their husbands from straying.

Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, a political science professor at Universiti Sains Malaysia who has conducted research into Global Ikhwan, said the group was an "economic success story" and had a decade ago agreed to reform and shed ties with Al-Arqam.

He said that although Al Arqam communal villages were abolished by the government decades ago, many followers shifted to urban homes but were still believed to be practising a form of communal living. Children were sent to such homes to obtain Islamic teachings as parents work for the company, he said.

Few details are known on its religious teachings or how company is run behind closed doors. Its corporate video showed pictures of Global Ikhwan top officials with Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and other government leaders, an indication of its influence.

The Children's Commissioner at the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia, Farah Nini Dusuki, questioned how the homes could have run undetected for years. Islamic authorities in central Selangor state, where the majority of the raided homes are located, have said only two of the homes were registered as Islamic schools.

She also voiced concerns of possible unreported abuse cases due to Global Ikhwan's nationwide network. Islamic authorities have said they are monitoring Global Ikhwan amid concerns over attempts to revive the Arqam movement.

"Who knows how many children suffer the same fate out there and also how long they have to endure this abuse before being exposed," said lawmaker Syerleena Abdul Rashid.

Often hailed as a moderate Muslim nation, Malaysia is wary of groups that preach Islam not sanctioned by the government because of fears they could cause unrest. Muslims account for two-thirds of its 34 million people. **MDT/AP**

INDIA

# New Delhi's chief minister announces resignation two days after he was released on bail

ONE of India's main opposition figures and New Delhi's chief minister said he would resign from office yesterday, two days after he was granted bail in a bribery case.

Arvind Kejriwal, a fierce critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was arrested nearly six months ago ahead of national elections on charges of receiving bribes from a liquor distributor. India's top

court released him on bail Friday.

Kejriwal has consistently denied the accusations and called them a political conspiracy.

"Today I have come to ask the public whether you consider Kejriwal honest or a criminal," he said in a public address Sunday at the headquarters of his Aam Aadmi Party, which governs New Delhi. "I will resign from the

post of chief minister two days from today."

Kejriwal said his party — a part of a broad alliance of opposition parties called INDIA and was the main challenger to Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in June's elections — will hold a meeting later to decide who will take over his position.

He also demanded the New Delhi elections, schedu-

led for February next year, be held in November instead.

Opposition parties widely condemned Kejriwal's arrest. They accused Modi's government of misusing federal investigation agencies to harass and weaken its political opponents. They pointed to several raids, arrests, and corruption investigations of key opposition figures in the months before the elections.

**MDT/AP**



Aam Aadmi Party leader and Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal

VATICAN

# Pope slams both Harris and Trump as 'against life' and urges Catholics to vote for 'lesser evil'

NICOLE WINFIELD, ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE

**P**OPE Francis on Friday slammed both U.S. presidential candidates for what he called anti-life policies on abortion and migration, and he advised American Catholics to choose who they think is the "lesser evil" in the upcoming U.S. elections.

"Both are against life, be it the one who kicks out migrants, or be it the one who kills babies," Francis said.

The Argentine Jesuit was asked to provide counsel to American Catholic voters during an airborne news conference while he flew back to Rome from his four-nation tour through Asia. Francis stressed that he is not an American and would not be voting.

Neither Republican candidate Donald Trump nor the Democratic candidate, Kamala Harris, was mentioned by name.

But Francis nevertheless expressed himself in stark terms when asked to weigh in on their positions on two hot-button issues in the U.S. election — abortion and migration — that are also of major concern to the Catholic Church.

Francis has made the plight of migrants a priority of his pontificate and speaks out emphatically and frequently about it. While strongly upholding church teaching forbidding abortion, Francis has not emphasized church doctrine as much as his predecessors.

Francis said migration is a right described in Scripture and that anyone who does not follow the Biblical call to welcome the stranger is committing a "grave sin."

He was also blunt in speaking about abortion. "To have an abortion is to kill a human being. You may like the word or not, but it's killing," he said. "We have to see this clearly."

Asked what voters should do at the polls, Francis recalled the civic duty to vote.

"One should vote, and choose the lesser evil," he said. "Who is the lesser evil, the woman or man? I don't know."

"Everyone in their conscience should think and do it," he said.

The Harris and Trump cam-

AP PHOTO



Pope Francis holds a news conference aboard the papal plane on his flight back after his 12-day journey across Southeast Asia and Oceania, last week

paigns did not immediately respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press.

U.S. President Joe Biden, an observant Catholic, shares Harris' strong support for abortion rights, a stance that prompted some Catholic bishops and other conservatives to call for him to be denied access to Communion.

After meeting Francis in person at the Vatican in October 2021, Biden came away saying the pope told him he was a "good Catholic" and should continue receiving Communion.

Francis, asked on previous occasions about some U.S. bishops who want to deny Communion to Biden over his support for abortion rights, has said bishops should be pastors, not politicians.

Friday's news conference was not the first time Francis has weighed in on a U.S. election. In the run-up to the 2016 election, Francis was asked about

Trump's plan to build a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border. Francis declared then that anyone who builds a wall to keep out migrants "is not Christian."

In responding Friday, Francis recalled that he celebrated Mass at the U.S.-Mexico border and "there were so many shoes of the migrants who ended up badly there."

Trump pledges massive deportations, just as he did in his

rights and has emphasized support for reinstating a federal right to abortion.

In his comments, the pope added: "On abortion, science says that a month from conception, all the organs of a human being are already there, all of them. Performing an abortion is killing a human being. Whether you like the word or not, this is killing. You can't say the church is closed because it does not

allow abortion. The church does not allow abortion because it's killing. It is murder."

However, cells are only beginning the process

of developing into organs in the earliest weeks of pregnancy. For example, cardiac tissue starts to form in the first two months — initially a tube that only later evolves into the four chambers that define a heart. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says that by 13 weeks, all major organs have formed. **MDT/AP**

**"One should vote, and choose the lesser evil. [...] Who is the lesser evil, the woman or man? I don't know."**

POPE FRANCIS

first White House bid, when there was a vast gulf between his ambitions and the legal, financial and political realities of such an undertaking.

The U.S. bishops conference, for its part, has called abortion the "preeminent priority" for American Catholics in its published voter advice. Harris has strongly defended abortion

## this day in history

### 1978 THOUSANDS DEAD IN IRAN EARTHQUAKE



More than 11,000 people are feared dead after an earthquake measuring 7.7 on the Richter scale hit the south-east region of Iran.

The three-minute quake, the world's strongest this year, struck at 1938 local time this evening.

The town of Tabas, 600 miles (965km) from Tehran, has been completely flattened and 40 villages within a 30-mile (48-km) radius of the epicentre have been damaged.

The shock demolished mud-walled houses and brick structures alike. It is estimated that just 2,000 of the 13,000 inhabitants of Tabas are still alive.

An eye-witness and survivor described the scene. "One giant heave, and the town turned into a graveyard. All that is left are thousands of bodies, mounds of ruins and hundreds of dazed survivors," he said.

It is reported that all the town's doctors perished.

More than 700 soldiers have been drafted in to help with the relief operations and medical teams, field hospitals, food and other supplies are being flown in.

Water and electricity supplies have been cut and all communication lines into Tabas have also been destroyed. Water is being brought in from Mashad, nine hours' drive away.

Survivors and aid workers on the ground have appealed for international assistance.

Local people are frantically pulling bodies from the rubble and taking them to the cemetery but aid workers have already warned of disease and infection.

The Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, has announced three days of national mourning.

The last major earthquake to strike Iran was in 1962 when 10,000 people were killed in the north-west region of the country.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The final number of those who died rose to 26,000.

Rescue teams continued the clean-up operation in Tabas and surrounding villages for several weeks.

However, there was widespread discontent with the way the Iranian government handled the aftermath of the quake and this fuelled growing opposition to the Shah. Four months later, on 16 January 1979m, the Shah and his family were forced into exile.

Iran is very vulnerable to earthquakes - the capital, Tehran, is known to sit on at least 100 fault lines.

In December 2003 a quake in Bam killed about 30,000 people and, in February 2005, more than 500 people died in the Zarand area in another quake.

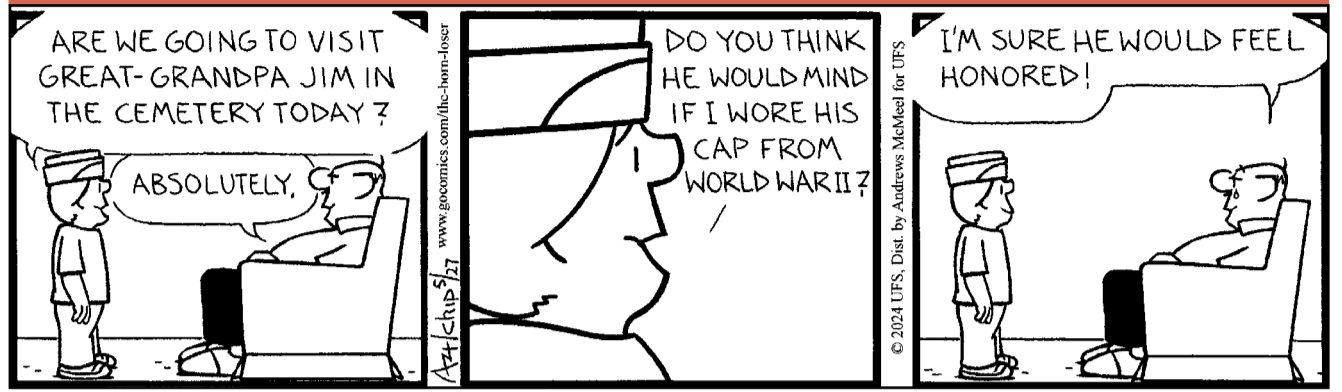


MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

 <b>ARIES</b> Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Have fun! Collaborate for shared benefit. Friends teach you valuable tricks. Share what you're learning. Socialize and enjoy common interests. Reinforce a positive connection.	 <b>TAURUS</b> Apr. 20-May. 20 Develop a professional project with profit potential. Polish and beautify the presentation. Imagine winning a contest or challenge. Get expert support to advance faster.
 <b>GEMINI</b> May. 21-Jun. 21 Things fall into place for an educational exploration. You can find funding for tickets or tuition. Research options and make reservations. Learn from experienced friends.	 <b>CANCER</b> Jun. 22-Jul. 22 A profitable opportunity is worth investigating. Financial discussions produce valuable results. Tackle detailed chores. Collaborate. Propel a shared venture to lucrative new heights.
 <b>LEO</b> Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Collaboration and partnership comes easily today. Coordinate to adapt around an unexpected situation. Focus on practical priorities and pull together for common gain.	 <b>VIRGO</b> Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Prioritize your mental, physical and spiritual health. Notice what's needed. Exercise and meditation recharge your energy. Nurture yourself with rest and good food.
 <b>LIBRA</b> Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Love, romance, passion and fun take priority. Indulge your favorite hobbies and pastimes. Enjoy your favorite people and activities together. Let your heart lead.	 <b>SCORPIO</b> Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Savor domestic pleasures and comforts. Romantic conditions blossom. Beautify your surroundings and enjoy the harmony. Share fun and delicious flavors with family and friends.
 <b>SAGITTARIUS</b> Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Finesse the details with a creative project. Carefully edit and improve. Share encouragement and motivation. Use your persuasive arts. Share a compelling story.	 <b>CAPRICORN</b> Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Discover ways to improve your financial outlook. Visualize immense success. Consider all possibilities. Follow through with action. Your creativity can generate positive cash flow.
 <b>AQUARIUS</b> Jan. 20-Feb. 18 You're growing stronger and more confident. Show respect and gain love. Your charm is captivating. Learning skills leads to new friends. Indulge your own passions.	 <b>PISCES</b> Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Let your imagination run free. Find a peaceful spot to envision and make plans. Consider what's next and organize your preparations. Relax and enjoy.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	17	27	cloudy
Changchun	11	23	cloudy
Chengdu	23	34	rain
Chongqing	31	38	fine
Fuzhou	24	35	cloudy
Guangzhou	25	34	showers
Guiyang	20	27	showers
Haikou	25	31	cloudy
Hangzhou	25	28	rain
Harbin	12	21	showers
Hefei	20	28	overcast
Nanjing	24	28	rain
Shanghai	27	30	rain
Taipei	25	31	cloudy
Wuhan	23	32	cloudy
Hong Kong	29	33	showers
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	12	26	sunny
Frankfurt	12	18	cloudy
Paris	13	21	cloudy
London	10	21	cloudy
New York	19	26	cloudy

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Four Corners state; 5- Flat sound; 9- Room in a casa; 13- Head of France; 14- Wigwag; 15- Southwestern art colony; 16- Ms. Bombeck; 17- Practice piece; 18- Sea-going eagle; 19- Mountain range; 21- "Miss Saigon" setting; 22- Heroic; 23- Pouches; 25- Half-moon tide; 27- Long-distance race; 31- Basic monetary unit; 35- Now \_\_\_ me down...; 36- K-6; 38- Depart; 39- Blazed a trail; 40- Fragrant bed?; 42- Put on; 43- Bring to mind; 46- Editor's note; 47- That's \_\_\_!; 48- Continues a subscription; 50- Frenzied rush; 52- Lack; 54- Hit with an open hand; 55- \_\_\_ even keel; 58- Some MIT grads; 60- Exceedingly; 64- Table d'\_\_\_; 65- Old sailors; 67- \_\_\_ Misbehavin'; 68- Void partner; 69- Distinguishing characteristic; 70- Struck, old-style; 71- Till bills; 72- Bone; Prefix; 73- Ballpark figs.;

**DOWN** 1- Salt Lake City college team; 2- Hatcher of "Lois and Clark"; 3- Look \_\_\_, I'm Sandra Dee; 4- Rumor; 5- Harden; 6- Twirled; 7- Family car; 8- Appeared; 9- Spire; 10- Seniors' org.; 11- Burt's ex; 12- Wait \_\_\_!; 14- Instructor; 20- Snitch; 24- Goes it alone; 26- "You've got mail" co.; 27- Distance runner; 28- Advil rival; 29- Radioactive gas; 30- Bird homes; 32- Big dipper; 33- Shun; 34- Actress Taylor; 37- Runs into; 41- Least original; 44- Dog-houses; 45- Lamb's dam; 47- Pacify; 49- Handles; 51- Dallas player, briefly; 53- Cherished ones; 55- This can't be!; 56- Person, place, or thing; 57- Salt tree; 59- Bed support; 61- Lens holders; 62- Bad mood; 63- Ed and Mel of baseball; 66- Draw;

**Friday's solution**

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

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<b>PJ (Picket)</b> 28 557 775	<b>Electricity - Report</b> 28 339 922
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<b>Kiang Wu Hospital</b> 28 371 333	
<b>Commission Against Corruption (CCAC)</b> 28326 300	
<b>IAM</b> 28 387 333	
<b>Tourism</b> 28 333 000	
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Jade Garden (Taipa)  
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# A new era in Asian soccer begins when the AFC Champions League Elite debuts

JOHN DUERDEN

**T**HE first edition of the AFC Champions League Elite begins today with stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar and Riyad Mahrez looking to lead their Saudi Arabian clubs to success in Asia.

Al-Nassr, Al-Hilal and Al-Ahli are among the favorites to win next May's final and reinforce the ambitions of the Saudi Pro League (SPL) of becoming one of the best in the world.

In the summer transfer windows of 2023 and 2024, SPL clubs spent over \$1 billion on transfers to bring top-level players from the big European leagues.

Al-Hilal midfielder Ruben Neves joined Al-Hilal in 2023 from Wolverhampton Wanderers of the English Premier League for a fee of around \$60 million and has no doubt that the SPL has enough quality.

"I have said this a few times — if you compare my data from English football to Saudi football, I run even more, but with the difference that I run in 40 degrees," Neves said



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, centre, celebrates with Bruno Fernandes after the UEFA Nations League soccer match between Portugal and Scotland at the Luz stadium in Lisbon, Portugal, Sept. 8

after helping Portugal to a 2-1 Nations League win over Scotland on Tuesday when Ronaldo scored the winning goal.

"I am in good shape physically. Both Cristiano and I proved today that Saudi football has quality."

Al-Hilal is the most successful team in Asia with four continental titles and starts its campaign

against Al-Rayyan of Qatar. Ronaldo won five UEFA Champions Leagues but has yet to win a major trophy with Al-Nassr and he will face Iraq's Al-Shorta while Mahrez and Al-Ahli hosts Persepolis of Iran in Jeddah.

As well as the big stars, also reinforcing the chances of the giants from Jeddah and Riyadh, is that

from the quarterfinal stage on, all games will take place in Saudi Arabia.

There are bigger changes however. The Elite version replaced the AFC Champions League as the continent's top tournament.

The number of teams participating has reduced from 40 to 24. Instead of 10 groups of four, there are

two groups of 12, divided into east and west geographic zones, with teams playing eight games with the top eight progressing to the second round.

In the east zone, China, South Korea and Japan all have the maximum allocation of three teams though Australia has only the Central Coast Mariners.

Clubs from the A-League have struggled in the Champions League in recent years but if the Mariners can succeed, there may be more places for Australian teams in the future.

"We know if we perform and we carry out our game plan and play our way, we know we can compete," Central Coast head coach Mark Jackson said. "We've shown that. Whether we can compete consistently on that front, again with the size of squads these teams have, how they can travel because I'm sure these teams travel in a different way to how we travel."

The Elite tournament has become more lucrative with the winner receiving \$10 million in prize money, an increase from \$4 million last season. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily

Xinhua Commentary

US TARGETING OF HONG KONG OFFICES BENEFITS NO ONE

The U.S. Congress' latest bill on Hong Kong, which targets the region's representative offices in the United States, is pure political manipulation that will benefit no one.

The so-called Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office Certification Act, recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, requires the U.S. President to remove the extension of certain privileges, exemptions and immunities to the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (HKETO) "if Hong Kong no longer enjoys a high degree of autonomy from the People's Republic of China."

The bill is just another case of the United States politicizing normal economic and trade cooperation to badmouth and suppress China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). It is also another move of the United States to play the Hong Kong card to contain China.

The HKSAR government strongly condemned the act. The Chinese foreign ministry warned of resolute countermeasures if the U.S. side advances the egregious act. The United States has deliberately chosen to ignore the fact that the HKETOs in Washington, New York and San Francisco were established in the 1980s in accordance with laws. Since then, the offices have been dedicated to strengthening and broadening economic and trade ties between the two sides, and expanding cooperation in the cultural sector.

Last year alone, officials in the Washington office attended around 300 events, engaging with people from all walks of life in the American society.

The successful and lawful operations of the HKETOs have proved to be mutually beneficial for Hong Kong and the United States. Shutting down the offices will only undermine communication and exchange between the two sides, costing the U.S. society an important channel to learn about the Asian financial hub. Or, is the United States doing so intentionally to keep the American public in the dark about Hong Kong's liveliness? If the offices are to be closed, it is bound to damage the relationship between the two sides, and in particular, harm America's own interests.

Over the years, the offices have played a vital role in helping U.S. companies benefit from their economic and trade exchanges with Hong Kong. Statistics show that the United States enjoyed a cumulative trade surplus of up to 271.5 billion U.S. dollars with Hong Kong in the past decade. As of 2023, over 1,200 U.S. companies had set up businesses in Hong Kong.

The United States is wrong to think that it can contain Hong Kong by targeting the representative offices.

With Hong Kong's security guaranteed and its business environment improved, the region has grown more and more attractive to international investors.

The World Competitiveness Yearbook 2024, published by the International Institute for Management Development, a business school headquartered in Switzerland, shows that Hong Kong's competitiveness has climbed two places to rank fifth worldwide.

Earlier this year, a report from the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong indicated that nearly 80 percent of surveyed enterprises voiced trust in the rule of law in Hong Kong.

It is widely acknowledged that Hong Kong has a free, open and fine business environment. In the future, Hong Kong will only open its doors wider to the world, offering limitless business opportunities.

Any egregious moves by the United States aimed at slandering Hong Kong cannot stop the region from prospering in a law-based and increasingly open environment. Certainly, the United States playing the Hong Kong card will never succeed in containing China either.

VENEZUELA ARRESTS SIX FOREIGNERS ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED IN A PLOT TO KILL PRESIDENT MADURO

THE BUZZ

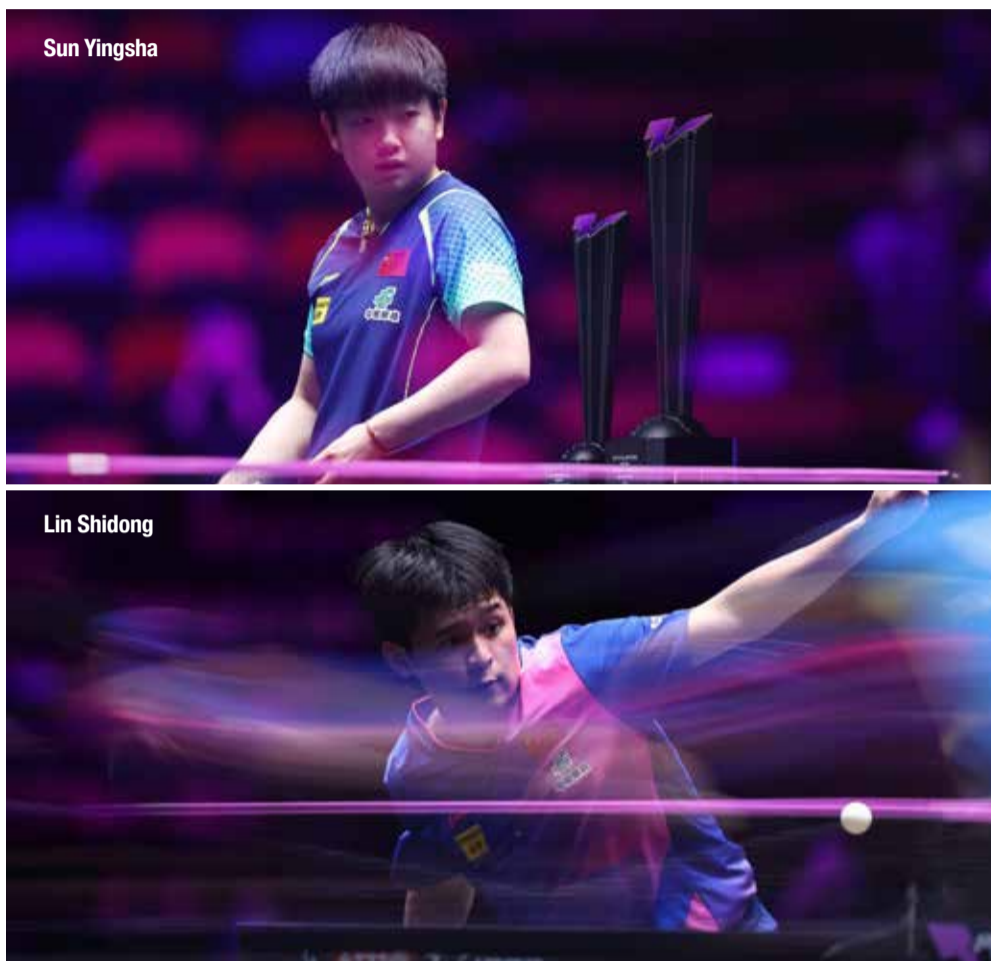
Three Americans, two Spaniards and a Czech citizen were arrested Saturday after Venezuelan officials accused them of coming to the South American country to assassinate President Nicolas Maduro.

The arrests were announced on state television by Diosdado Cabello, the nation's powerful interior minister. Cabello said the foreign citizens were part of a CIA-led plot to overthrow the Venezuelan government and kill several members of its leadership. In the television program, Cabello showed images of rifles that he said

were confiscated from some of the plotters of the alleged plan.

The arrest of the American citizens included a member of the Navy, who Cabello identified as Wilbert Joseph Castañeda Gomez. Cabello said that Gomez was a navy seal who had served in Afghanistan, Iraq and Colombia. Spain's embassy in Venezuela did not reply to a request for comment on the arrests of its citizens.

The U.S. State Department late Saturday confirmed the detention of a U.S. military member and said it was aware of "unconfirmed reports of two additional U.S. citizens detained in Venezuela."



SPORTS

SUN YINGSHA AND LIN SHIDONG CLAIM VICTORY AT WTT CHAMPIONS MACAO 2024

NADIA SHAW

THE WTT Champions Macao 2024 wrapped up with exciting finals, where China's Sun Yingsha and Lin Shidong claimed the Women's and Men's Singles titles, respectively, at the Macao East Asian Games Dome.

The finals featured an all-Chinese showdown in the women's category and an exciting match between Lin Shidong and Dang Qiu in the men's final, both of which took place last evening.

In the women's final, Sun went up against Wang Yidi and secured a 4-2 victory against the world number four.

Sun, already a two-time WTT Champions winner this season, returned to Macao determined to reclaim the title she first won in 2022.

Backed by an enthusiastic crowd, Sun delivered another commanding performance, taking her total to five WTT

Champions trophies and continuing her dominance on the global stage.

After her intense match, Sun expressed her gratitude for the support from fans, stating, "The crowd has been amazing this week. Ever since the Paris Olympics, WTT Macao Champions is the first match in this new cycle, and there were so many fans coming here to cheer for me and Team China."

Following her victory, the world number one added, "I want to thank all the fans for coming here to see the action and also wish everyone a happy Mid-Autumn Festival."

In the men's final, Lin of China faced off against Germany's Dang, emerging victorious with a decisive 4-0 win.

During the men's singles semifinals, 19-year-old Lin delivered a stunning upset by defeating top seed Wang Chuqin 4-1.

Lin's impressive journey to the finals included

victories over Lin Yun-Ju of Chinese Taipei and Japan's Tomokazu Harimoto, establishing him as a formidable contender.

"I think I exceeded my own expectations in this event. I honestly didn't expect to make it to the finals, let alone win the championship. In the previous event, I was really eager to win the title - I desperately wanted it. This time around, I was just as motivated, but I ended up performing even better than I had imagined," said Lin.

Spectators at the WTT Champions Macao 2024 enjoyed an exhilarating matches at the Macao East Asian Games Dome, showcasing the finest talents in table tennis.

With two new champions crowned, the table tennis world now turns its attention to the next WTT Series event, China Smash 2024, taking place in Beijing from September 26 to October 6.



**Yemen** A missile fired by Yemen's Iran-backed rebels landed in an open area in central Israel yesterday and triggered air raid sirens at its international airport, in the latest reverberation from the nearly yearlong war in Gaza. There were no reports of casualties or major damage, but Israeli media aired footage showing people racing to shelters in Ben Gurion international airport. The airport authority said it resumed normal operations shortly thereafter.

**USA** A California biotechnology company that helps doctors detect genetic causes for cancer is among those that could be cut out of the U.S. market over ties to China, underscoring the possible tradeoffs between health innovation and a largely bipartisan push in Congress to counter Beijing's global influence. The competition between the world's superpowers is hitting Complete Genomics, whose employees, some in white lab coats stitched with U.S. flag arm patches, spin samples in test tubes and huddle around computers in San Jose. Its founder and chief scientific officer said he's frustrated that geopolitics is interfering with science.



**Serbia** on Friday demanded that an election be held and ethnic Serbs return to police and judiciary in a Serb-populated northern region of Kosovo where tensions have fueled fears of instability and new armed clashes. Populist President Aleksandar Vucic (pictured) also called for the withdrawal of Kosovo's special police from the region bordering Serbia that remains a flashpoint amid stalled efforts by Western countries to help negotiate a solution to the dispute.

**Vatican** Pope Francis declared Friday that China was "a promise and a hope" for the Catholic Church, offering extensive praise for Beijing at the end of a four-nation tour through Asia and again expressed hope to one day visit. Francis declared himself "happy" with the process, saying both sides were engaging in negotiations in a spirit of good will. "I'm happy with the dialogue with China," he said. "The result is good."