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THE HENGQIN LIGHT RAIL LINE OFFICIALLY BEGAN OPERATIONS; A CEREMONY WAS HELD TO CELEBRATE THE LAUNCH OF THIS NEW EXTENSION TO THE MAINLAND SIDE

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SONG MAN LEI APPOINTED AS TUI PRESIDENT, BECOMING THE FIRST WOMAN TO HOLD THE POSITION

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HONG KONG LAUNCHES PANDA SCULPTURE TOUR HOPING THE BEAR CRAZE BOOSTS TOURISM

P6



China condemned Lithuania for expelling three Chinese diplomats as relations deteriorate. Lithuania cited international law but gave no details. The dispute coincides with probes into a Chinese ship allegedly damaging Baltic Sea data cables. Beijing warned of potential countermeasures.



Australia Police seized 2.3 tons of cocaine worth \$494 million and arrested 13 people after a fishing boat broke down off Queensland. The drugs, from South America, were linked to a gang. Some suspects face life sentences for conspiracy to import drugs, authorities said yesterday.



New Zealand Scientists in Dunedin dissected a spade-toothed whale, the world's rarest, found in July. Only seven specimens exist. Researchers aim to decode its biology, aided by Māori cultural practices honoring ocean deities and treating the whale as a sacred treasure.

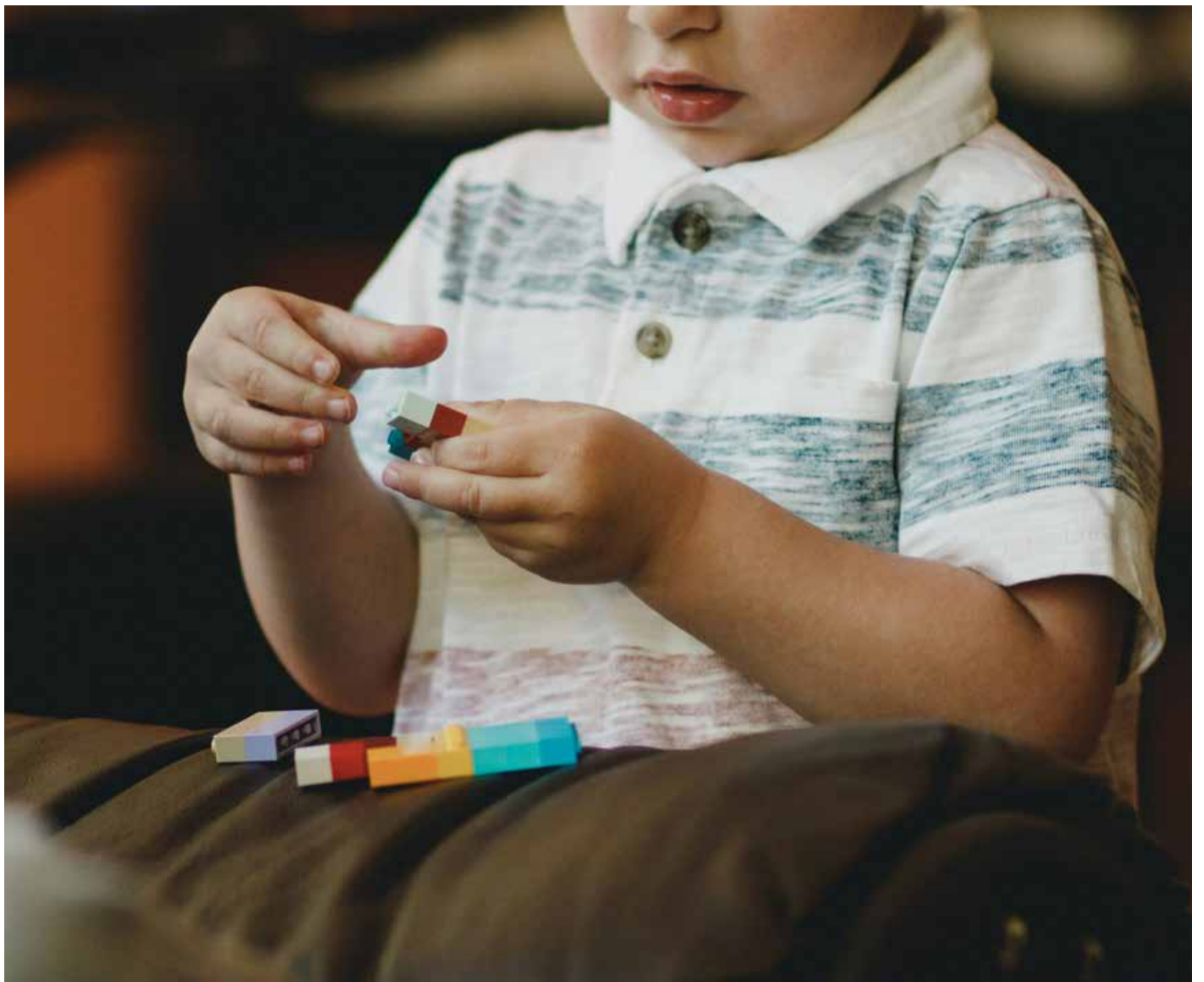


Netherlands The UN court yesterday began hearings on obligations to address climate change, pushed by island nations fearing extinction from rising seas. Vanuatu and others demand accountability from top polluters. The non-binding ruling could guide future legal actions and global policies.

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FOSTERING INCLUSION

Navigating the autism community's diverse needs requires understanding and inclusion, according to a Times report on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities P4-5



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FAOM SURVEY REVEALS HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS AMONG WORKERS

A recent survey conducted by the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) and the Women's Committee of the Confederation of Trade Unions has revealed high levels of stress experienced by workers in the city. Over 60% of residents reported that their families had not benefited from the economic recovery following the pandemic. This sentiment was echoed by nearly 62% who identified economic factors as their primary source of stress.

The survey, which focused on the stress experienced by workers in their family life, found that almost 57% of participants felt persistent high work pressure, highlighting a trend where economic improvement had not translated into improved family well-being.

Among the various pressures faced by workers, 67% of respondents cited living expenses as their greatest burden, followed closely by mortgage repayments (46%) and the costs associated with raising children (43%).

This financial strain is compounded by the fact that many families are still grappling with the aftereffects of the pandemic, which has left them in precarious financial situations, according to the survey.

In response to these findings, Leong Sun Iok from the



FAOM, emphasized the need for government intervention, highlighting that nearly 80% of respondents strongly urged the government to introduce more financial assistance measures to alleviate living pressures.

According to Leong, proposed measures included optimizing economic structures, establishing a training fund for education and skills enhancement, and implementing di-

rect financial assistance such as living subsidies and housing support.

The survey also explored ways to relieve stress, with 65% of respondents indicating that spending time with friends or family was their preferred method.

Additionally, over 70% expressed a desire for more community resources dedicated to cultural and leisure activities. The survey was held from June

to November 2024, with a total of 1,110 valid questionnaires collected.

60% of those in households earning less than MOP50,000 reported significant pressure, with those earning under MOP30,000 reporting feeling particularly overwhelmed.

Additionally, the association revealed that individuals aged 35-54, especially those in the 45-54 age group, reported high stress levels. Manual

workers and those in clerical positions also indicated greater pressure in their lives.

Leong called on companies to consider policies to support worker well-being, such as "limiting weekly working hours to 48, standardizing maternity leave across sectors to align with international standards, and promoting family-friendly workplace policies such as flexible working hours and childcare support."

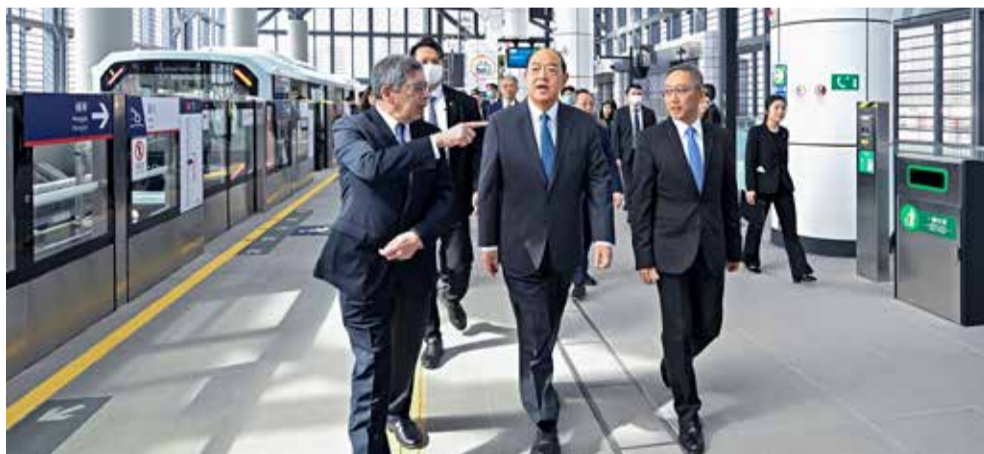
TRANSPORT

Hengqin line opening expands Macau's LRT

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Hengqin Light Rail Line officially began operations yesterday. A commissioning ceremony was held to celebrate the launch of this new extension.

The new light rail lines are an extension of the Taipa Line, which spans 11 stations over 9.3 kilometers. These extensions include the Seac Pai Van Extension Line, which consists of two stations and a transfer station expansion over 1.6 kilometers, connecting to Seac Pai Van. Additionally, the Hengqin Extension Line features two station



expansions along a distance of 2.2 kilometers, linking Hengqin to Macau.

The launch of the Seac Pai Van Extension Line is anticipated to improve transportation connecti-

ty by providing improved access from the Macau Peninsula and Taipa Island to Seac Pai Van and the Union Hospital.

In his remarks at the opening ceremony, Ho

Cheong Kei, chairman of the Board of the Macau Light Rapid Transit Corporation Limited, expressed gratitude for the support and cooperation from the Macau and Zhuhai gover-

naments throughout the planning and construction of the Hengqin Line.

"The light rail company is honored to operate the groundbreaking Hengqin Line project," Ho said. "On behalf of the company, I would like to sincerely thank both sides for their efforts across the development and construction in overcoming the challenges in building this important historical line, which connects the two regions for the benefit of the people."

The new Hengqin Line has officially began operations at 1:11 pm yesterday, enabling passengers to easily transfer to and from

Hengqin Port.

Ho noted that the line signifies the symmetry of rail transportation between Macau and the mainland, facilitating greater integration and communication for Macau residents within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area.

Ho emphasized the light rail company's commitment to providing safe and comfortable travel experiences for passengers, stating, "We will continue to optimize and improve the quality of service, strengthen safety management, and ensure that every passenger can enjoy a comfortable travel experience."

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REVITALIZATION OF HISTORICAL DISTRICTS

Lawmakers question plan's real effects

RENATO MARQUES

THE government plan that aims to revitalize six historical districts was the subject of a debate yesterday at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

The plan, which calls for the support of the six gaming concessionaires who will oversee the development and revitalization of a designated area, was questioned by several lawmakers regarding its actual impact.

In the initial inquiry from lawmaker Ella Lei, Lei noted that although the plan commenced last year, visible results and progress has been slow, particularly in terms of infrastructure improvements.

"We can see that the progress and results of revitalization vary from zone to zone," Lei said. "The government should periodically evaluate the results of the revitalization plans for the different zones so that the participating companies can adjust and optimize them according to reality."

Lei also called on authorities to study the needs and degree of business participation in these areas, and define a timetable for the revitalization of each area so that residents and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can participate and take advantage of the economic development of community neighborhoods.



Elsie Ao leong



Deland Leong



Ella Lei

In response, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao leong, said that over the last year, these historic areas have held more than 750 artistic and cultural performances, which have "attracted more than 1.7 million visitors and contributed to a significant increase in the flow of people in the community districts." She added that hosting these events created opportunities for more than 200 entities and companies in those areas.

This response did not satisfy a large number of lawmakers, who questioned the effects beyond these statistics. Lei added that there are issues stemming from changes in the areas, and that these mat-

ters require significant coordination. As sufficient action has not been undertaken to address these challenges, it has been difficult to obtain the desired results.

Several other lawmakers also commented, including Leong Sun Iok, Che Sai Wang, Angela Leong, Leong Hong Sai, Lo Choi In, Ron Lam, and José Pereira Coutinho. Voicing similar concerns, they called on the government to provide greater clarity and transparency, and above all, to be more effective in their efforts to revitalize the broader economies of those areas and not just the specific venues and facilities.

Che remarked, "Despite these plans, more and more stores are closing. Even if tourists are returning, their spending is insufficient to sustain local businesses."

He urged the government to create a more concrete plan to address the problem in the mid and long term, rather than relying on

short-lived events and festivals that provide a temporary boost to visitor numbers without lasting economic benefits.

Angela Leong called for a designated calendar and timeline to provide visibility over the progress, and transparency as to when businesses could expect to see changes or improvements. Lo suggested that the government put the onus on the gaming concessionaires to make shuttle buses available to transport tourists to these old districts.

Lam and Pereira Coutinho expressed concerns about the investments made to date and the potential return on investment expected.

Lam noted that "it is important to know how much was spent to develop these areas. There is no information and feedback on this," he said. "There is also no evaluation of the results, and people do not see any obvious changes in the areas from this revitalization plan."

Lam criticized the lack of parking areas and transportation, adding that in the neighboring region of Hong Kong, a similar project had been undertaken with the support of the Hong Kong Jockey Club, and suggested that the local government learn from that experience. Lam concluded by saying, "Something more concrete is needed beyond mere debating ideas or ambitions."

In defense of the plan, government officials assured lawmakers that improvements are underway, but acknowledged that more time is needed for the full effects to be realized.

The Secretary advanced that the project to cover the Rua da Felicidade with a canopy is progressing and that several projects are also ongoing at the Inner Harbour piers.

The president of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), Deland Leong, also added that the revitalization of the area of the Ruins of St Paul's is also commencing, with plans for a new path connecting the monument to Mount Fortress set to launch next year, among other projects.

More time is also needed for the revitalization of the Inner Harbour's Piers (14 to 16 and 23 and 25), the IC president noted, explaining that there is a lot to do to improve the environment to make the area more attractive to tourists. Nonetheless, he said that advancements would be seen in this area during the next year.

This session, which will extend into today, marks the last Q&A session with the current government officials before the administration transitions Dec. 20.



SONG MAN LEI APPOINTED TUI PRESIDENT

STAFF REPORTER

JUDGE Song Man Lei made history as the first woman to be appointed president of the Court of Final Instance (TUI). Her appointment was made by Ho Iat Seng for a three-year term, according to an executive order published yesterday in the Official Gazette.

This official appointment comes after she was appointed as acting president of TUI in September, following the resignation of former president Sam Hou Fai in August, who stepped down to run for the position of Chief Executive.

In 1996, Song became the first female deputy prosecutor of the Public Prosecutions Office. In 2012, she was appointed as the first female judge to the TUI. In 2017, she prosecuted her former superior, ex-prosecutor general Ho Chio Meng, to 21 years in prison on charges of fraud, money laundering, and criminal association.

Earlier this year, Song served as the president of the Chief Executive's Electoral Affairs Committee, which oversaw the election process for Macau's upcoming new leader.

INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION NOT A CONCERN FOR AO IEONG

RENATO MARQUES

DURING the Q&A session at the Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao leong, expressed confidence that interpretation and translation were not an issue when dealing with international visitors.

Questioned on the topic of the tour guides and other tourism operators' lack of language proficiency in the context of the government's bid to revitalize six historic districts, the Secretary said that automatic machine translation could effectively address this issue. She added that several ongoing experiences and initiatives involving the machine translation system developed by the Macau Polytechnic University are underway within the government and at the AL.

In April this year, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) director, Maria Helena de Sena Fernandes, mentioned the idea of building a translation system for tour guides.

At the time, Senna Fernandes said that the idea was still in the preliminary stage, and it was unknown whether it was feasible.

The same official noted that implementing such a system was not an easy task as it would need appropriate equipment, software, and comprehensive testing prior to implementation.

The use of an automatic interpretation and translation system was tested historically during a press conference of an event organized by the tourism authorities. The results were disastrous, with MGTO staff having to provide human translation and audio-receiving devices to the non-Chinese-speaking media due to major failures in the machine translation that rendered the information unintelligible.

This is Ao leong's final appearance at the AL in her current role as Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture. She is set to transition into a new position in the upcoming government under Sam Hou Fai, where she will succeed Ho Veng On as Commissioner of Audit.

15TH NATIONAL GAMES BUDGET TO EXCEED MOP620 MILLION

The budget for the upcoming 15th National Games, co-hosted by Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau in 2025, is projected to exceed MOP620 million. This budget will cover a range of expenses, including athlete accommodation, transportation, and the renovation of government venues, which alone is expected to cost MOP230 million, according to the Legislative Assembly's Second Standing Committee on the 2025 budget. Additionally, a capital injection of MOP1.24 billion is planned for airport expansions.

SSM REPORTS LOW FLU RATES

The Health Bureau reported that as of late November, the infection rates for influenza and COVID-19 in the region are both below 5%, indicating low levels of infection. According to Director Alvis Lo, the currently circulating COVID-19 variant is primarily from the JN.1 series. The bureau has completed the procurement of vaccines and urges all residents, particularly those at high risk, to promptly be vaccinated. Over 140,000 influenza vaccine doses have been administered this season, with a satisfactory uptake rate.

WOMAN APPREHENDED OVER FAKE EMPLOYMENT

Police apprehended a woman in her 40s from mainland China who claimed that she paid MOP18,600 to a shop for assistance in obtaining foreign worker status, which she believed would make it easier for her to purchase goods in Macau. The police received a referral from the Labour Affairs Bureau, and discovered that the woman's work did not match the domestic duties reported under her foreign worker status. She admitted to coming to Macau irregularly since March 2023 to purchase skincare products and handbags, and requested the shop owner's help in applying for a blue card.

POLICE PROBE NEW INVESTMENT FRAUD CASE WITH MOP1.84M IN LOSSES

The police are investigating a new investment fraud case involving a middle-aged woman who lost MOP1.84 million. The victim met a netizen through a messaging app in late October, and they quickly formed a romantic relationship. In early November, the suspect convinced her that online futures trading would yield quick profits. Believing this claim, the victim deposited a total of MOP1.84 million into an online banking account provided by the suspect over 23 transactions. When she later saw a supposed profit of MOP9.4 million and attempted to withdraw funds, the suspect claimed there was an issue with the transfer, prompting the victim to report the incident to the police.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Navigating autism community's needs

VICTORIA CHAN

THE public's perception of autism often remains clouded by misconceptions, but the Macau community is working to bridge the gap and empower individuals on the spectrum. Organizations like Caritas Macau, Macau IC2 Association, and Special Olympics Macau are making concerted efforts to support those with autism, while families navigate the unique challenges faced by their loved ones.

Together, they are striving to create a more inclusive society that celebrates the diversity of the autism community.

Today marks the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, a United Nations observance that aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society.

In an interview with the Times, Paul Pun, the Secretary-General of Caritas, shed light on the unique challenges faced by individuals with autism and the organization's efforts to address them.

Pun emphasized that the misconception that people with autism "should be the same as others" often hinders their integration into society. He explained that the different communication styles and social barriers associated with autism can lead to misunderstandings, with some beha-

viors regarded as "suspicious."

However, Pun stressed the importance of recognizing the talents and specialized skills that many individuals with autism possess, such as exceptional abilities in fields like science, mathematics, and geography.

To address these challenges, Caritas Macau is taking a proactive approach.

The organization aims to organize art exhibitions that will showcase the expressive and creative talents of individuals with autism, providing them with an opportunity to share their unique perspectives with the broader community.

As Pun noted, "If we know how to appreciate the artistic talent of people with autism, we can also appreciate people with autism."

Contrary to common misunderstandings, the causes of autism are highly complex and not directly related to parenting environments, according to Ruby O, a representative of the Macau IC2 Association's parent committee.

"Ordinary people have a great misunderstanding of the causes of autism, often thinking that a closed parenting environment or lack of caregiver ability is to blame," O explains.

The public's perception of autism is often distorted, conflating high-functioning autistic individuals with geniuses, or equating autism with intellectual disability or dementia.



"In fact, around 70% to 80% of children with autism have an intellectual deficiency, and their intellectual development is unbalanced," O said.

Contrary to the belief that autism is incurable, the Macau IC2 Association has seen many children make significant improvements through early intervention and education.

"Many children with autism will be greatly improved and can be independent in society," O says.

As a non-profit run by people with autism and intellectual disa-

abilities, the Macau IC2 Association hopes the Macau government can provide even greater support, such as venues and funding. While the government's rehabilitation plan has achieved notable results, O emphasizes the need for more attention and assistance, including strengthening caregiver support.

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS THROUGH PROGRAMS

Ada Lo, a teacher at the Macau IC2 Association, has witnessed firsthand the transformative

LYNZY VALLES

LAWMAKERS Ho Ion Sang and Angela Leong have urged the government to reform the city's current legal frameworks on accessibility.

In a separate written interpellation, Ho was critical of the city's current regulations, noting that on September 1 last year, the mainland implemented a new law aimed at creating a barrier-free environment. This law in the mainland marked a step in safeguarding the rights of disadvantaged groups, providing a framework for enhancing accessibility across various public services.

"The existing Law No. 9/83/M, which aims to eliminate architectural barriers, has been in place in Macau for 40 years without amendment. It is outdated and primarily focuses on motor disabili-

Lawmakers call for reforms to accessibility

ties, neglecting the needs of those with visual and auditory impairments," said Ho.

"Planning and designing a barrier-free environment must be integrated into the concept of universal design," Ho insisted.

He highlighted that the current standards merely serve as guidelines without binding authority, which limit their effectiveness in ensuring accessibility in private developments. For the lawmaker, this does not meet the development needs of Macau nor does it align with national progress. On this basis, he urged the government to improve applicable legal frameworks.

"Will the government define a timeline for the creation of new legislation

to establish a barrier-free environment?" he asked.

In response, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Ao Ieong U, addressed the matter in a plenary session at the Legislative Assembly yesterday, noting that "architectural standards for designing universal and barrier-free projects" had already been incorporated into the design requirements for public works.

The evaluation and approval of private works always require compliance with the provisions of Law No. 9/83/M (rules for the elimination of architectural barriers) by the public works authorities. However, compliance is currently voluntary for private works.

"In recent years, the SAR government has pro-

posed and encouraged companies to meet the accessibility requirements of the standards in the design of large projects, including those that involve shopping centers and entertainment facilities. Active collaboration in their implementation has been achieved in this regard," said Ao Ieong.

"Through the joint efforts of various public services and the sector, the number of public buildings and private construction projects that meet the necessary conditions has been progressively increasing, providing improved barrier-free facilities in accordance with the standards," she added.

Ho also called for greater collaboration with private enterprises. "Regarding large establishments

like shopping centers and integrated resorts, will authorities encourage owners to incorporate more barrier-free facilities during design or renovation?" Ho asked.

Echoing similar sentiments, lawmaker Leong stressed in her inquiry that creating a barrier-free environment is "a crucial measure to support the social integration of persons with disabilities and is an important hallmark for evaluating the civilization and progress of society."

She recalled the city's "Ten-Year Plan for Rehabilitation Services of the Macau Special Administrative Region from 2016 to 2025," which includes 34 short, medium, and long-term projects related to barrier-free facilities for

...fostering inclusion and understanding



“If we know how to appreciate the artistic talent of people with autism, we can also appreciate people with autism.”

PAUL PUN
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF CARITAS

assist them and encourage acceptance of diversity.”

With Macau's economic growth, Lo advocated for increased government intervention and support, including the deployment of more social workers to assess the quality of life for this community and ensure their needs are met.

Pun also advocated for policy changes to encourage more comprehensive assessments and the development of individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with autism. Pun emphasized the need for tailored support and understanding, as they may need additional time or accommodations.

FINDING HOPE THROUGH DEDICATED SUPPORT

For some residents, support from friends has made a significant impact.

When Muri Denize's son was diagnosed with autism at age three, she embarked on a journey to find the right resources and interventions to support his development.

“I got support from people around me and, of course, by asking around, from friend to friend that give me information about what autistic kids need, and what kind of therapies could be beneficial,” Denize explains.

The family's comprehensive approach has had a profound impact. “The interventions that our family chose made a positive impact on my child's development, and of course, with consistency in doing it,” Denize says. This includes therapies like ABA, speech, and occupational therapy, as well as a specialized diet that has helped improve her son's concentration and reduce hyperactivity.

As Denize looks to the future, her hopes are both personal and social. “I just hope he can be independent one day and can live like normal people,” she shares.

But Denize knows true inclusion requires societal change. “I think it's important that the government provides support for special needs people by educating the community more broadly,” she said.

FOSTERING INCLUSION AND EMPOWERMENT

As the national director of Special Olympics Macau, Hetzer Siu is dedicated to engaging the local community and breaking down the discrimination faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities. A longtime volunteer himself, Siu understands the vital role that community members can play in the success of the organization's programs.

“We try to contact different schools to recruit volunteers from secondary schools, giving them the opportunity to interact with people with intellectual disabilities and learn how to communicate and form friendships with them to reduce discrimination,” Siu explained. By immersing volunteers in direct interactions with Special Olympics athletes, the organization aims to shift societal attitudes and cultivate empathy.

But the organization's reach extends beyond just recruiting volunteers. “We invite students to volunteer to join our event, encourage them to interact with athletes in a unified space,” Siu said, emphasizing the importance of creating shared spaces where individuals with and without disabilities can come together and understand each other.

Siu's own journey with the Special Olympics Macau has spanned over three decades, from volunteering in 1988 to eventually becoming the national director.

“I love and believe in the philosophy of the Special Olympics. We want to create a society without discrimination. I hope Macau can become a harmonious society where everyone is accepted,” he said.

impact of supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities. She remarked, “They can come up with new ideas, and take responsibility for small tasks. Maybe eight to ten people can do a good job of an activity,” highlighting the remarkable capabilities of her students.

Macau's associative society plays a crucial role in providing opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities, with programs like the Special Olympics Macau and parent-child activities organized by the Self-help Family

Association offering avenues for physical, mental, and social development.

However, Lo believes more can be done to support this community, particularly in the education system. “There may be some process to teach teachers how to help people on the borderline, or people with autism, to help themselves,” she suggested.

“There should be more training for teachers to help understand the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities, and those on the autism spectrum, to better

law for barrier-free environment

visually impaired persons in pedestrian areas.

However, Leong is critical on how these projects “only contain generic descriptions without any specific division of tasks or content.”

Back in September, the Commission of Audit released a critical report addressing significant shortcomings in the planning and execution of barrier-free pedestrian facilities for individuals with visual impairments in Macau. The report revealed substantial uncertainties regarding these initiatives, including unclear deadlines, project scope, and implementation details.

“Will the authorities consider reviewing these projects and presenting a more detailed, phased, and verifiable timeline to

ensure clear instructions for the execution of each project? To enhance transparency and credibility in planning, will they also create a more concrete supervision and evaluation mechanism?” she questioned.

Ao Ieong then noted that the Steering Group for Planning Rehabilitation Services will “review the status of the execution of the plans and their implementation,” ensuring that the recommendations are acted upon.

The official added that the group is focusing on “planning and evaluation in terms of needs and effectiveness.” The goal is to establish a mechanism that improves “the monitoring of actual progress and effectiveness” of the plans.



DIRE STRAIT

Taiwan's leader visits East-West Center as China criticizes his two-day visit to Hawaii

AUDREY MCAVOY, HONOLULU

TAIWAN'S leader visited a U.S. State Department-funded think tank and educational institution Sunday on the second day of a two-day visit to Hawaii that's part of a Pacific island tour that has already triggered criticism from Beijing.

Lai Ching-te met and exchanged gifts with the president of the East-West Center, which is on the University of Hawaii's flagship Manoa campus. He spoke to an audience at the center but journalists were escorted out of a conference hall before he began speaking.

China's Foreign Ministry said it "strongly condemned" U.S. support for Lai's visit and had lodged a complaint with the U.S. It also denounced a newly announced U.S. weapons sale to Taiwan, a self-governing island that China claims as its own territory.

"China will closely monitor the situation's development, and take resolute and forceful measures to safeguard the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said the statement.

Hawaii was Lai's first stop on a weeklong voyage that will later take him to the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau. They account for three of the 12 countries that



Taipei has formal diplomatic relations with.

Suzanne Puanani Vares-Lum, president of the East-West Center, said her institution is the perfect place for Lai to visit because it promotes relations among the United States, Asia and the Pacific.

She said it's not unusual for leaders from around the world to come to Hawaii given the state's location and what makes it special.

"There is something about Hawaii that allows us to really just see where we connect on a human to human level," Vares-Lum said in an interview.

Lai's predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, visited the East-West Center in 2019 and 2017.

On Saturday, Hawaii Gov. Josh Green hosted Lai at the state's emergency management agency where they discussed disaster preparedness. Green, who was an emergency room physician before becoming governor, posted on social media that he and Lai discussed how their experiences in health care informed their governance. Lai is also a physician by training and obtained a Master of Public Health degree from Harvard University.

"Together, we extended a warm aloha to Lai and his delegation, highlighting Hawaii's shared values of resilience and collaboration with Taiwan," Green said in an Instagram post.

Lai also posed for photos with Hawaii congressional represen-

tatives and state lawmakers at a dinner banquet with the Taiwanese American community.

U.S. Rep. Ed Case, a Democrat who represents Honolulu in Congress, said on social media that he told the audience that "our ties endured on shared values and interests to advance mutual goals and meet shared challenges."

It is unclear whether Lai will meet with any senior officials from the Biden administration or anyone from the incoming Trump administration during his Hawaii stay.

President-elect Donald Trump said in an interview with Bloomberg in July that Taiwan should pay for its defense. The island has purchased billions of dollars of defense weaponry from the U.S.

Trump evaded answering whether he would defend the island from Chinese military action.

The new arms announced by the U.S. State Department Friday include \$385 million in spare parts and equipment for a fleet of F-16s, as well as support for tactical communication system to Taiwan.

The U.S. is obligated to help the island defend itself under the Taiwan Relations Act but maintains a position of strategic ambiguity over whether it would ever get involved if Taiwan were to be invaded by China.

Tsai drew vocal opposition from China when she stopped in New York last year on her way to Latin America. She met with former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy at the time.

The Chinese military also launched drills around Taiwan last year as a "stern warning" over what it called collusion between "separatists and foreign forces" days after Lai stopped over in the U.S.

China also strongly objects to leading American politicians visiting the island as it views any official contact with foreign governments and Taiwan as an infringement on its claims of sovereignty over Taiwan. Washington switched its formal recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

Gov't launches panda sculpture tour as the city hopes the bear craze boosts tourism

THOUSANDS of giant panda sculptures will greet residents and tourists starting Saturday in Hong Kong, where enthusiasm for the bears has grown since two cubs were born in a local theme park.

The 2,500 exhibits were showcased in a launch ceremony of PANDA GO! FEST HK, the city's largest panda-themed exhibition, at Hong Kong's airport yesterday. They will be publicly displayed at the Avenue of Stars in Tsim Sha Tsui, a popular shopping district, this weekend before setting their footprint at three other locations this month. One designated spot is



Part of 2500 panda sculptures are displayed at the Hong Kong International Airport

Ocean Park, home to the twin cubs, their parents and two other pandas gifted by Beijing this year. The design of six of the sculptures, made of recycled rubber barrels and resins among other materials, was inspired by these bears.

The cubs — whose birth in August made their

mother Ying Ying the world's oldest first-time panda mom — may meet visitors as early as February.

In a separate media preview event on Monday, the

new pair of Beijing-gifted pandas, An An and Ke Ke, who arrived in September, appeared relaxed in their new home at Ocean Park. An An enjoyed eating bamboo in front of the cameras and Ke Ke climbed on an installation. They are set to meet the public on Sunday.

The displays reflect Hong Kong's use of pandas to boost its economy as the Chinese financial hub works to regain its position as one of Asia's top tourism destinations.

Pandas are considered China's unofficial national mascot. The country's giant panda loan program with overseas zoos has

long been seen as a tool of Beijing's soft-power diplomacy.

Hong Kong's tourism industry representatives are upbeat about the potential impact of housing six pandas, hoping to boost visitor numbers even though caring for pandas in captivity is expensive. Officials have encouraged businesses to capitalize on the popularity of the bears to seize opportunities in what some lawmakers have dubbed the "panda economy."

The organizer of the exhibitions also invited some renowned figures, including musician Pharrell Williams, to create special-edition panda designs. Most of these special sculptures will be auctioned online for charity and the proceeds will be donated to Ocean Park to support giant panda conservation efforts. **MDT/AP**

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

PHILIPPINES

Impeachment complaint filed against VP Sara Duterte after she threatened president

AN impeachment complaint was filed yesterday against Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte, who is facing a legal storm over a death threat she made against the president and her alleged role in extra-judicial killings of drug suspects, corruption and failure to stand up to Chinese aggression in the disputed South China Sea.

The impeachment bid filed by several prominent civil society activists in the House of Representatives accuses Duterte of violating the country's Constitution, betrayal of public trust and other "high crimes," including the death threats she made against the president, his wife and the speaker of the House of Representatives.

Duterte did not immediately issue any response to the impeachment bid, which accused her of about two dozen alleged crimes.

"We're hoping that with this complaint, we can end the nightmare that our vice president has brought to the people," said Rep. Percival Cendana, who gave the required endorsement of the complaint.

The vice president's threats showed the "extent of respondent's mental incapacity, her depravity and lack of mental fitness to continue holding the high office of vice president of the Philippines," said a copy of the complaint seen by The Associated Press. "The same constitute not only betrayal of public trust but also a high crime which would warrant her immediate impeachment from office."

Duterte, a 46-year-old lawyer, was also accused in the complaint of having unexplained wealth and of allowing a continuation of the extra-judicial killings of drug suspects begun by her father, a former mayor of southern Davao City, when she held that position in the past.

The vice president's legal troubles have unfolded with the backdrop of her increasingly bitter political feud with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and his allies. She said in online news conference on



House Secretary General, Reginald Velasco, left, receives an impeachment complaint filed yesterday

Nov. 23 that she has contracted an assassin to kill Marcos, his wife and Speaker Martin Romualdez if she were killed, a threat she warned was not a joke.

She later said she was not threatening him but was expressing concern for her own safety.

The impeachment complaint will be scrutinized by the Philippine Congress, which is dominated by allies of Marcos and his cousin and key backer, Romualdez, who also has been politically at odds with the vice president.

The process could take weeks or months. Congress is to start its Christmas recess on Dec. 20 and resume on Jan. 13. Many legislators will then start campaigning for reelection before May 12 midterm elections.

The House has been investigating the alleged misuse of 612.5 million pesos (\$10.3 million) of confidential and intelligence funds received by Duterte's offices

as vice president and education secretary. She has since left the education post.

She has refused to respond to questions in detail in tense televised hearings. Duterte also vehemently protested when her chief of staff, Zuleika Lopez, was ordered temporarily detained for allegedly hampering the inquiry. Lopez has been released from hospital detention.

Philippine police have filed criminal complaints against Duterte and her security staff for allegedly assaulting authorities and disobeying orders in an altercation in Congress over Lopez's detention.

Duterte has accused Marcos, his wife and Romualdez of corruption, weak leadership and attempting to muzzle her because of speculation she may seek the presidency in 2028.

The National Bureau of Investigation subpoenaed Duterte to face investigators about her threats

against them.

The police, military and the national security adviser immediately boosted the security of the Marcoses after the threats.

The president has said an impeachment of Duterte would waste time while the country faces other challenges, but her opponents have said they will proceed to foster accountability and the rule of law.

Marcos and Duterte won landslide victories as running mates in the 2022 election but have since fallen out over key differences. The two offices are elected separately in the Philippines, which has resulted in rivals occupying the country's top political posts.

Marcos and Duterte differ on their approaches to China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and their views on the deadly anti-drug crackdown conducted by Duterte's father, Rodrigo Duterte, who was the previous pre-

sident in addition to ex-mayor of Davao.

The complainants in the impeachment, including former military officers from a group called Magdalo, accused her of refusing to condemn Chinese aggressive actions against Philippine forces in the South China Sea. The complainants did not cite China by name.

The brutal drug crackdown left thousands of mostly poor suspects dead in killings mostly by police that are being investigated by the International Criminal Court as a possible crime against humanity.

The impeachment complaint cited a key witness to the killings, former police officer Arturo Lascanas, as saying that Sara Duterte allowed the extra-judicial killings of drug suspects to continue in Davao city when she served as its mayor. The drug crackdown was launched by her father when he was mayor. **MDT/AP**

Philippine navy shadows Russian submarine spotted in the South China Sea

THE Philippine military deployed a navy ship and air force planes to shadow a Russian submarine, which passed through the South China Sea off the country's western coast last week, a security official said yesterday.

The Russian submarine

identified itself in response to a Philippine navy two-way radio inquiry, saying it was en route home to Russia's eastern city of Vladivostok after joining an exercise with the Malaysian navy, Jonathan Malaya, assistant director-general of the National

Security Council, said.

The submarine, like other foreign ships, has the right of "innocent passage" in the country's exclusive economic zone but it still sparked concern when it was spotted on Thursday about 80 nautical miles (148 kilometers) off the

Philippine province of Mindoro, Malaya said.

The submarine was sighted after it surfaced due to weather-related conditions, Malaya said.

"All of that is very concerning," President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. told reporters when asked about the

submarine. "Any intrusion into the West Philippine Sea, of our EEZ, of our baselines is very worrisome. So, yes, it's just another one."

Marcos used the Philippine name for the South China Sea, where his country plus Vietnam, Malay-

sia, Indonesia and other coastal states have faced an increasingly aggressive China, which claims the busy waterway virtually in its entirety.

An alarming spike in territorial confrontations, particularly between Chinese and Philippine coast guard and naval forces, starting last year has prompted closer surveillance by the United States and other Western governments of the key global trade route. **MDT/AP**

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Chief of ICC lashes out at US and Russia over threats and accusations

MOLLY QUELL, THE HAGUE

THE president of the International Criminal Court lashed out at the United States and Russia for interfering with its investigations, calling threats and attacks on the court "appalling."

"The court is being threatened with draconian economic sanctions by another permanent member of the Security Council as if it was a terrorist organization," Judge Tomoko Akane, in her address to the institution's annual meeting, which opened yesterday.

Akane was referring to remarks made by U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, whose Republican party will control both branches of Congress in January, and who called the court a "dangerous joke" and urged Congress to sanction its prosecutor. "To any ally, Canada, Britain, Germany, France, if you try to help the ICC, we're going to sanction you," Graham said on Fox News.

This marks the first time the global court of justice calls out a sitting leader of a major Western ally.

Graham was angered by an announcement last month that judges had granted a request from the court's chief prosecutor Karim Khan to issue arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his former defense minister and Hamas' military chief for crimes against humanity in connection with the nearly 14-month war in Gaza.

The decision has been denounced by critics of the court and given only milquetoast approval by many of its supporters, a stark contrast to the robust backing of an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin last year over war crimes in Ukraine.

Graham's threat isn't seen as just empty words. President-elect Donald Trump sanctioned the court's previous prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, with a travel ban and asset freeze for investigating American troops and intelligence officials in Afghanistan.



Akane on Monday also had harsh words for Russia. "Several elected officials are being subjected to arrest warrants from a permanent member of the Security Council," she said. Moscow issued warrants for Khan and others in response to the investigation into Putin.

The Assembly of States Parties, which represents the ICC's 124 member countries, will convene its 23rd conference to elect committee members and approve the court's budget against a backdrop of unfavorable headlines.

The ICC was established in 2002 as the world's permanent court of last resort to prosecute individuals responsible for the most heinous atrocities — war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression. The court only becomes involved when nations are unable or unwilling to prosecute those crimes on their territory. To date, 124 countries have signed on to the Rome Statute, which created the institution. Those who have not include Israel, Russia and China.

The ICC has no police force and relies on member states to execute arrest warrants.

U.S. President Joe Biden called the warrants for Netanyahu and the former defense minister "outrageous" and vowed to stand with Israel. A year ago, Biden called the warrant for Putin "justified" and said the Russian president had committed war crimes. The U.S. is not an ICC

member country.

France said it would "respect its obligations" but would need to consider Netanyahu's possible immunities. When the warrant for Putin was announced, France said it would "lend its support to the essential work" of the court. Another member country, Austria, begrudgingly acknowledged it would arrest Netanyahu but called the warrants "utterly incomprehensible." Italy called them "wrong" but said it would be obliged to arrest him. Germany said it would study the decision. Member Hungary has said it would stand with Israel instead of the court.

Global security expert Janina Dill worried that such responses could undermine global justice efforts. "It really has the potential to damage not just the court, but international law," she told The Associated Press.

Milena Sterio, an expert in international law at Cleveland State University, told the AP that sanctions against the court could affect a number of people who contribute to the court's work, such as international human rights lawyer Amal Clooney. Clooney advised the current prosecutor on his request for the warrants for Netanyahu and others.

"Sanctions are a huge burden," Sterio said.

Also hanging heavy over the meeting in the Hague, are the internal pressures that Khan faces. In October, the AP reported the 54-year-old

British lawyer is facing allegations he tried to coerce a female aide into a sexual relationship and groped her.

Two co-workers in whom the woman confided reported the alleged misconduct in May to the court's independent watchdog, which says it interviewed the woman and ended its inquiry after five days when she opted against filing a formal complaint. Khan was never questioned. He has denied the claims.

The Assembly of States Parties has announced it will launch an external probe into the allegations. It's not clear if the investigation will be addressed during the meeting.

The court, which has long faced accusations of ineffectiveness, will have no trials pending after two conclude in December. While it has issued a number of arrest warrants in recent months, many high-profile suspects remain at large.

Member states don't always act. Mongolia refused to arrest Putin when he visited in September. Sudan's former President Omar al-Bashir is wanted by the ICC over accusations related to the conflict in Darfur, but his country has refused to hand him over. Last week, Khan requested a warrant for the head of Myanmar's military regime, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, for attacks against the country's Rohingya Muslim minority. Judges have yet to decide on that request.

"It becomes very difficult to justify the court's existence," Sterio said. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1989 MALTA SUMMIT ENDS COLD WAR



The leaders of the two world superpowers, the USA and the USSR, have declared an end to the Cold War after two days of storm-lashed talks at the Malta summit.

At a joint news conference held on board the Soviet cruise ship, Maxim Gorky, the two men announced they had set the stage for big reductions in troops and weapons in Europe.

The Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, also said: "I assured the President of the United States that I will never start a hot war against the USA."

For his part, US President George Bush said: "We can realise a lasting peace and transform the East-West relationship to one of enduring co-operation. That is the future that Chairman Gorbachev and I began right here in Malta."

The Malta summit is being hailed as the most important since 1945 when Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt agreed a post-war plan for Europe at Yalta.

The two men have met face-to-face for the first time against a backdrop of fast-moving change in Eastern Europe.

In the past few weeks Hungary has opened its borders with the West, the Berlin Wall has fallen, followed by the government of Czechoslovakia. Only yesterday the fledgling East German government of only seven weeks was also forced to resign.

Both leaders spoke hopefully of the changes sweeping Eastern Europe - but they also spoke of the need for caution, particularly with regard to the future of Germany and the prospect of reunification.

Mr Bush said: "It is not for the United States to dictate the pace of change in Germany or anywhere else."

Mr Gorbachev said: "The world is leaving one epoch and entering another. We are at the beginning of a long road to a lasting, peaceful era. [...]"

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Malta summit is regarded by many as the official end of the Cold War, although little of substance was actually agreed.

The summit followed a series of arms-reduction treaties between the two superpowers, including Salt II in 1979 and the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty in 1987.

Presidents Bush and Gorbachev went on to sign a treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe in November 1990, establishing parity between East and West, and the first of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties in December 1991.

The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe continued with the fall of the Romanian government and the reunification of Germany in 1990. Although Mikhail Gorbachev was seen as a hero by the outside world, within the Soviet Union the slow progress of reform and declining economic conditions eventually led to the break-up of the union and his resignation in December 1991.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Professional opportunities arise in conversation. Share what you're up to and what's needed. Listen for resources, partnership and what you can provide.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Travel and romance excite your senses. Schedule logistics carefully. Spread your wings and explore new vistas with someone you love. Expand your own boundaries.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 It's a good time for a significant conversation about money. Connect with the ones who share your financial interests. Advance to the next level.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Collaborate with your partner. Cooperate and coordinate to share the load. Create stability by remaining grounded. Work together to win and share the prize.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Pursue long-term goals. Practice strengthens your physical performance. Maintain routines. Your mind and heart are on the same track.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 You're especially creative. Love kindles into passion. Connect with people you love. Share the possibilities you've been inventing. Imagine and envision together.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Prioritize home and family. Unleash your imagination and then assess what's realistically achievable. Have fun with beautiful details.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Take advantage of good conditions. Communication flows easily. Still, listen carefully. Think before you speak. Ask questions. Exchange ideas. Remember what's important.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Silver trickles into your pockets. Gather resources. Opportunities arise naturally through social connections. Collaborate for mutual gain.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Your star's on the rise. Honor the integrity of your word. Give thanks for your blessings. Use your power for good. Celebrate and shine.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Pamper yourself. Prioritize your emotional, physical and spiritual health and wellness. Complete one project before beginning the next. Rest and savor peaceful pursuits.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Connect with friends and loved ones. Relax and listen. Learn from someone experienced. Get advice and then make your own decisions. Share resources.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY					EASY+					
9	5		1		8					
					5	6	3	1		
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MEDIUM					HARD					
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6					3					
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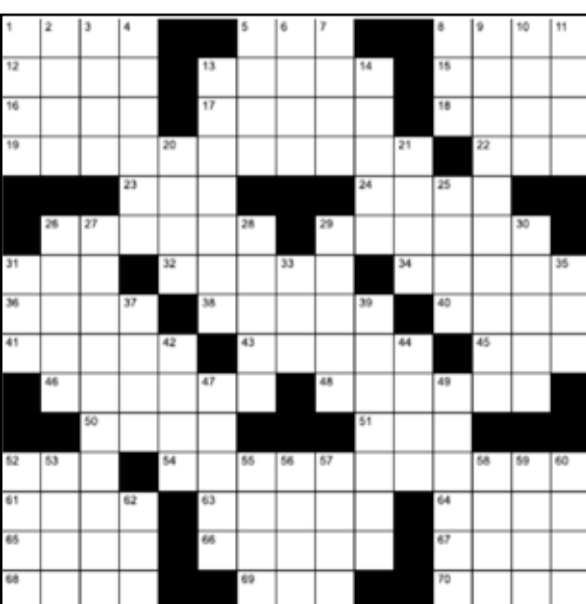
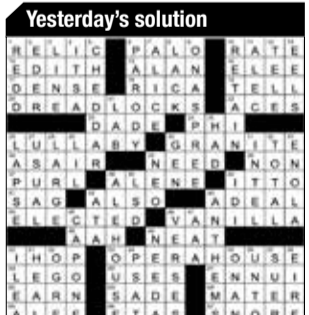
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-4	7	fine
Changchun	-12	-8	fine
Chengdu	8	15	rain
Chongqing	12	14	rain
Fuzhou	15	21	overcast
Guangzhou	13	26	fine
Guiyang	11	14	rain
Haikou	21	26	cloudy
Hangzhou	8	17	cloudy
Harbin	-20	-12	cloudy
Hefei	4	14	overcast
Nanjing	7	16	cloudy
Shanghai	10	16	overcast
Taipei	19	22	rain
Wuhan	8	16	cloudy
Hong Kong	22	23	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-1	2	snow
Frankfurt	0	6	cloudy
Paris	3	7	rain
London	3	7	overcast
New York	-1	5	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Composer Khachaturian; 5- Filthy place; 8- Miles away; 12- Queue; 13- Madame de ___; 15- Solitary; 16- Palindromic address; 17- Rich cake; 18- Moon goddess; 19- An organization; 22- Composer Rorem; 23- Fleming who created Bond; 24- Social misfit; 26- Former monetary unit of Finland; 29- Mischievous person; 31- Witticism; 32- Spine-tingling; 34- Spud; 36- Tolkien tree creatures; 38- Harder to find; 40- Construction locale; 41- Skylit lobbies; 43- Man and Wight; 45- Cereal grass; 46- Hebrew liturgical prayer; 48- Soundless; 50- "Barton Fink" director; 51- Hair stuff; 52- Aardvark snack; 54- Praiseworthy; 61- Vaporize; 63- Hit the road; 64- Follow; 65- Deep affection; 66- Inquired; 67- Writer Bombeck; 68- Just manages, with "out"; 69- DDE opponent; 70- College bigwig;

DOWN 1- ___ mater; 2- Narrow inlets; 3- Collections of anecdotes; 4- Autobiography; 5- Greek portico; 6- Fruit-filled pie; 7- Himalayan legend; 8- The works; 9- Basis; 10- Actress Heche; 11- Interpret; 13- Skunk, e.g.; 14- Hotelier Helmsley; 20- Birthday treat; 21- Robin's digs; 25- Some VCRs; 26- One-twelfth of a year; 27- Charming; 28- Thin as ___; 29- Country dances; 30- Free to attack; 31- Give ___ break; 33- Collection agcy.; 35- Emeritus; Abbr.; 37- Silage storage tower; 39- Ruled; 42- One of the Baldwins; 44- Hill toy; 47- Name on a bomber; 49- Overjoyed; 52- Word that can precede bodied and seaman; 53- Breakfast area; 55- Small plateau; 56- Earn; 57- Nights before; 58- Uncovered; 59- Capital city of Peru; 60- Flair; 62- Guitarist Paul;



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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AD

FOOTBALL

STAR-STUDDED SAUDI ARABIAN, JAPANESE AND CHINESE CLUBS SETTING THE PACE IN ASIAN CL

JOHN DUERDEN

LED by Cristiano Ronaldo, Riyad Mahrez and Aleksandar Mitrovic, Saudi Arabian clubs are dominating the western zone of the AFC Champions League Elite but, in the east, Japan is on top with Chinese clubs bouncing back after a difficult period.

Al-Ahli, Al-Hilal and Al-Nassr are first, second and third in the western zone group, the 24 teams in the tournament are divided into two groups of 12, and are already guaranteed a place in the Round of 16.

It has not been easy however. Like the European version, Asia's top tier tournament has expanded the number of group stage games from six to eight putting extra demands on even the cashed-up Saudi Arabian clubs.

"The tournament is very difficult, it is similar to the UEFA Champions League," said Al-Hilal boss Jorge Jesus. "If we want to succeed, we must manage in the required manner.



Pressure and fatigue are the fate of big clubs that compete in all tournaments and we are up to the task."

CHINESE REVIVAL

With the domestic seasons in east Asia already over, there

are fewer demands on clubs who are in action on Tuesday and Wednesday and the three Chinese teams are in the top eight with seven points each.

After years of financial problems and clubs folding, fans are enjoying the relative suc-

cess of the clubs especially as the national team has won two of its last three qualifiers to keep hopes of the 2026 World Cup alive.

Shanghai Shenhua and Shanghai Port are in the running as are Shandong Taishan.

"In the AFC Champions League, all our preparations are 100%, and our efforts are also 100%," Tang Tian, Shandong assistant coach, said. "We will review and prepare for the away game against Kawasaki and strive for a satisfactory result."

JAPANESE CLUBS FLYING HIGH

Kawasaki Frontale is one of three Japanese clubs in the top four. Vissel Kobe is top and will seal its knockout stage place if it defeats South Korea's Pohang Steelers.

"When we looked at the competition in the beginning, it was always in our thinking that we would need three, four wins to go through," Kobe coach Takayuki Yoshida said. "Now

we're close but we have an important game in Korea next."

Yokohama F. Marinos will be close to doing the same if it can defeat Central Coast Mariners of Australia. John Hutchinson spent ten years as a player at the A-League club and is now the fourth Australian to coach Yokohama, succeeding Harry Kewell in July who followed Kevin Muscat and Ange Postecoglou.

Under Hutchinson, Yokohama has won its last five games to climb into seventh in the J.League and third in the Champions League, following last week's defeat of Pohang.

"I'm happy with the boys and their performance," said Hutchinson. "We ended up with the three points and have our game against Australia's Central Coast Mariners next. We want to win that game to climb the table."

The Mariners, Australia's sole representative in the tournament, have just one point from five games and are in desperate need of a win. **MDT/AP**

AD

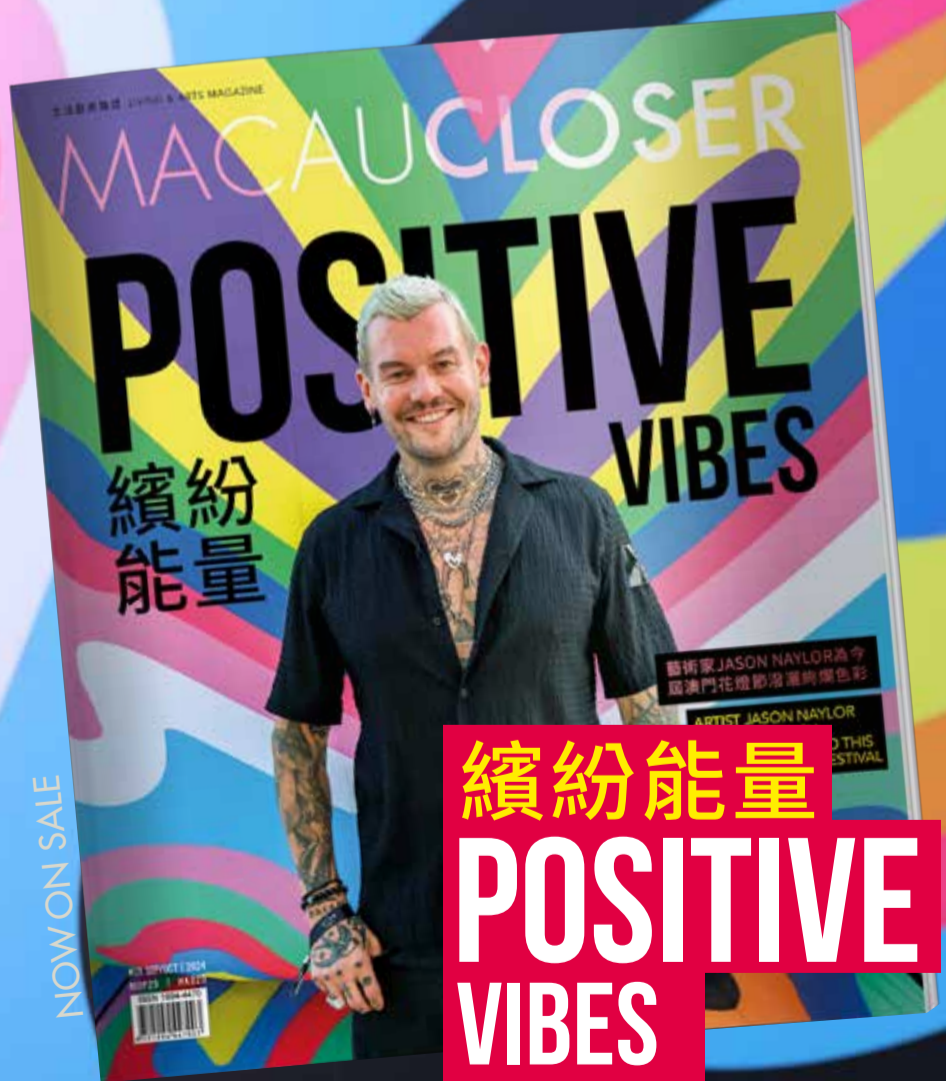


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RUGBY

Australia women win the Dubai Sevens again and Fiji men end their title drought

A 90-meter intercept try by women's sevens player of the year Maddison Levi clinched Australia's fifth successive Dubai title against archrival New Zealand in the final on Sunday (early yesterday, Macau time).

Australia won 28-24 despite conceding four tries. It reached the final allowing only two.

Meanwhile, Fiji's men ended a 21-tournament, 2 1/2-year title drought by beating surprise finalist Spain 19-5.

Australia and New Zealand have been the women's sevens benchmark for years. Only they have won the Olympics, World Cups or world series. Only they have won the Dubai Sevens, also, in the world series and their third straight final in the desert was another classic.

Tries by Faith Nathan and Teagan Levi shot Australia to 14-0. New Zealand fought back with tries by Jorja Miller and Risi Pouri-Lane to trail 14-12.

Right on halftime, new Aus-



THE CANADIAN PRESS/HO-WORLD RUGBY/ZACH FRANZEN

tralia captain Bella Nasser's show and go unleashed her from inside her half to score, and they led 21-12.

New Zealand came back fast and physical with tries by Theresa Setefano and Manaia Nuku to move ahead 24-22.

They went for the decisive blow with two minutes to go but Levi, who had been shackled all game, intercepted 10 meters out

from her own try-line and raced clear for the winning score.

Her 15th try gave her the women's record for a single tournament in the world series, eclipsing the 14 by New Zealand's Portia Woodman-Wickliffe in 2015 in Atlanta.

Crucially for Australia, Tia Hinds and Teagan Levi converted their four tries, while New Zealand missed two of four.

Spain's men reached their first final in world series history by beating Britain in the quarter-finals and New Zealand in the semifinals. New Zealand ended South Africa's four-season reign in Dubai in the quarters.

Spain dominated the first half and opened with a Pol Pla try from a Manu Moreno back-pass.

But two fingertip knock-ons with the try-line begging and

a try-saving tackle on Eduardo Lopez by Fiji's Filipe Sauturaga came back to bite Spain.

Sauturaga spun out of a tackle to tie the score on halftime. Then Fiji pulled away in the second half. Jeremaia Matana fended off Lopez to score, then Viwa Naduvalo smashed through two defenders and gifted fellow replacement Ilikimi Vunaki the last try behind the posts.

Fiji's last tournament win was in Toulouse in May 2022. The two-time Olympic champion went winless through the entire 2022-23 and 2023-24 world series. Fiji last won in Dubai in 2015.

"It's been a long time coming, a two-year wait," emotional Fiji coach Osea Kolinisau said. "I'm so happy to get the monkey off our back now."

"We worked really hard the last six months, we suffered disappointment at the Olympics (lost the final to France). But I told the boys hard work always pays off, and it paid off here." MDT/AP

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大律師 ASSOCIATES:

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羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues
馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
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法律專家及外地註冊律師

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



OPINION

The Conversation

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LIGHT EXERCISE CAN YIELD SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE BENEFITS, NEW RESEARCH SHOWS

Everyday physical activity, like going for a short walk or playing with the kids, may provide short-term benefits for cognitive health, equivalent to reversing four years of cognitive aging. That was a key finding for my colleagues and me in our new study, which was published in the journal *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*.

Prior to enrollment into a study of diet and dementia risk, we asked a diverse sample of 204 middle-aged adults to check in five times per day for a period of nine days, via a smartphone application.

Each check-in involved completing a brief survey that asked about their mood, dietary choices and whether they engaged in any physical activity in the roughly three and a half hours leading up to the survey. In addition, participants completed a few brief brain games – meaning performance-based cognitive assessments that lasted about one minute each – to assess mental speed and short-term memory.

My team found that performance on our measure of cognitive processing speed improved during check-ins when participants reported being physically active in the time leading up to the survey. While we didn't see improvements in our measure of working memory, the time taken to complete the memory task mirrored what we saw for the measure of processing speed.

We observed these improvements in speed regardless of whether the activity was lighter intensity or moderate-to-vigorous intensity. This led us to conclude that movement, whether it took the form of intentional exercise or part of a daily routine, was the essential ingredient for achieving this benefit.

As a rule, we get slower, both physically and mentally, as we age. While research on exercise and living a healthy lifestyle has demonstrated the long-term cognitive and brain health benefits of remaining physically active, much of this work has focused on the moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity – or what most of us think of as exercise – recommended by the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

Still, these guidelines and other experts recommend that adults move more and sit less.

My colleagues and I are interested in understanding how moving more can improve our cognitive health or reduce our risk of dementia as we age, at what timescale these benefits show up, and what types of movement qualify.

Our study relied on participants to report whether they had been physically active during the time between each check-in. Even though participants were provided training on how to think about the intensity levels, it's possible that each participant had a slightly different perception of their activities.

For example, a participant may not have believed their recent walk actually qualified as a moderate-intensity activity. Physical activity monitors that can dissociate time and intensity might help future research unravel these associations more clearly.

It isn't yet clear whether these short-term benefits accumulate over time to result in long-term improvements in brain health and dementia risk reduction. Research efforts are underway by our team to better understand these associations over broader timescales.

My research involves data collection via smartphones and wearable devices to help us better understand how health-promoting behaviors and cognitive health interact as we age. This type of digital approach allows my team to pursue questions about how everyday behavior and experience influence cognition in daily life and represents a significant methodological advancement in the dementia risk and prevention research space.

Using these tools, we aim to better identify individuals at risk for negative cognitive outcomes and new targets for dementia prevention.

Many of us have felt it, and now it's official: "brain rot" is the Oxford dictionaries' word of the year.

Oxford University Press said yesterday that the evocative phrase "gained new prominence in 2024," with its frequency of use increasing 230% from the year before.

Oxford defines brain rot as "the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging."

The word of the year is intended to be "a word or expression that re-

flects a defining theme from the past 12 months."

"Brain rot" was chosen by a combination of public vote and language analysis by Oxford lexicographers. It beat five other finalists: demure, slop, dynamic pricing, romantasy and lore.

While it may seem a modern phenomenon, the first recorded use of "brain rot" was by Henry David Thoreau in his 1854 ode to the natural world, "Walden."

Oxford Languages President Casper Grathwohl said that in its modern sense, "brain rot" speaks to one of the perceived dangers of virtual life, and how we are using our free time."



NOTRE DAME'S REOPENING

STARS, HEADS OF STATE, SOLEMN RITUALS AND HIGH-SECURITY CELEBRATIONS

JOHN LEICESTER

The reopening of Notre Dame this coming weekend is going to be a high-security affair, with a repeat of some of the same measures used during the Paris Olympics and the sealing off to tourists of the cathedral's island location in the heart of the French capital.

After more than 5 years of reconstruction following the fire that devastated Notre Dame in 2019, invite-only ceremonies Saturday and Sunday will usher in its rebirth.

Police chief Laurent Nuñez said only people with invitations and the island's residents will have access to the Ile de la Cité in the middle of the River Seine, which includes Notre Dame and habitually hums with tourists.

He said about 50 heads of state and government are expected and that security arrangements are drawing on the police measures that sealed off large sections of central Paris for the Paris Games' flamboyant opening ceremony.

"A very high level of security will be applied," Nuñez said in an interview published Monday in *Le Parisien*.

Archbishop to bang on the doors

The first celebrations starting Saturday afternoon will blend religious ritual and showbiz. Paris Archbishop Laurent Ulrich will preside at a reopening service, banging on Notre Dame's shuttered doors with his staff to reopen them, the cathedral website says.

The archbishop will also symbolically reawaken Notre Dame's thunderous grand organ. The fire that melted the cathedral's lead roofing coated the huge instrument in toxic dust. Its 8,000 pipes, ranging in size from that of a pen to over 10 meters tall, have been painstakingly disassembled, cleaned, and returned.

There will also be psalms, prayers and singing. French President Emmanuel Macron will attend and address the VIP guests.

A musical show

After the service, opera singers Pretty Yende, from South Africa, and Julie Fuchs, from France; Chinese pianist Lang Lang; cellist Yo-Yo Ma; Benin-born singer Angelique Kidjo; Lebanese singer Hiba Tawaji and others will perform at a concert Saturday evening for the cathedral and those who took part in the reconstruction, says the

show's broadcaster, France Télévisions.

The security cordon sealing off the whole of the Ile de La Cité, plus a stretch of the Seine's southern bank and nine of its bridges, will be in place from early Saturday evening to Sunday night, the police chief said. Only those involved in the ceremonies and residents will be granted access, he said. All shops on the island — many are geared to the tourist trade — as well as boat tours that start and stop there will be closed for the weekend, he added.

Sunday Mass and buffet

The Paris archbishop will also lead an inaugural Mass and consecration of the new altar on Sunday morning.

Nearly 170 bishops from France and other countries will join the celebration, as well as priests from all 106 parishes in the Paris diocese, the cathedral website says.

It says Mass will be followed by a "fraternal buffet" for the needy.

Public viewing areas capable of holding 40,000 people will be set up on the Seine's southern bank, so spectators can follow the two days of events on screens, the police chief said. **MDT/AP**



Germany Volkswagen workers staged 2-hour strikes at nine plants, protesting proposed pay cuts and potential factory closures. Union leaders blamed management for failures amid slack demand. Talks resume December 9, with workers preparing for potential escalation if demands remain unmet.



Senegal marked the 80th anniversary of the Thiaroye massacre, demanding answers from France over the deaths of colonial soldiers in 1944. President Faye announced commemorations and education reforms. France acknowledged the massacre but avoided detailing the number of victims.



Guinea A stadium stampede yesterday [Macau time] in Nzerekore killed 56 during a soccer match after clashes erupted over a disputed penalty. Tear gas caused chaos. Many victims were children. Authorities launched an investigation into the tragedy, which occurred at a military leader's tournament.



Switzerland Trafigura went yesterday on trial for alleged bribery involving Angolan oil contracts. Swiss prosecutors accuse the firm of paying \$5 million to an official for deals between 2009-2011. Trafigura denies wrongdoing, citing improved compliance. The case could extend into January.