



AN EXHIBITION FEATURING 25 SELECTED CALLIGRAPHY WORKS AND PAINTINGS BY QI BAISHI OPENED YESTERDAY AT WYNN PALACE

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ASSOCIATION URGES LOCAL WOMEN TO PRIORITIZE CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

P8

GOV'T SIGNALS IT'S PREPARED TO DOUBLE DOWN ON SUPPORT FOR THE ECONOMY AS TRUMP TARIFFS LOOM

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AP PHOTO



China-UK A suspected Chinese spy with business ties to Prince Andrew (pictured) has been barred from the UK because of concerns he poses a threat to national security. A British immigration tribunal upheld the decision last week in a ruling that revealed the Chinese national had developed such a close relationship with Andrew that he was invited to the prince's birthday party.

AP PHOTO



Australia Five Australians who had spent almost 20 years in Indonesian prisons for heroin trafficking returned to Australia on yesterday under a deal struck between the two governments, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said. However, there was uncertainty about whether they could potentially serve out their life sentences in Australian prisons.

AP PHOTO



France Pope Francis' one-day visit to the French island of Corsica yesterday, two days before his 88th birthday, puts a dual focus on the Mediterranean, highlighting local traditions of popular piety on the one hand and migrant deaths and wars on the other.

Russia Two oil tankers have taken heavy damage amid a storm in the Kerch Strait, spilling oil and sparking an emergency rescue operation, Russian officials told state news outlets yesterday. The Volgoneft-212 tanker, which was carrying a crew of 13 and a cargo of fuel oil, ran aground and had its bow torn away.

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XI IS COMING TO TOWN

President Xi Jinping to make three-day visit to Macau starting Wednesday for handover celebrations and Sam Hou Fai's inauguration

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LUIS MELO'S NEW BOOK THE SOUTH END OF TOWN REVISITED

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WU ZHILIANG

MACAU SAR CAN CONTRIBUTE TO 'TELLING GOOD STORIES OF CHINA'

GANG WEN,
MDT/CHINA DAILY

Wu Zhiliang, president of the Board of Directors of the Macao Foundation, says that the Macao SAR's cultural development can contribute to the endeavor of sharing China's positive narratives.

- How do you view Macau's development since its return to the motherland? Among the achievements made by Macau, what impressed you the most? In your sector, has there been any major progress over the past 25 years?

Wu Zhiliang (WZ) - Over the past 25 years, there has been significant progress in Macau's development. If we look at it from a historical perspective, the Macao Special Administrative Region is indeed in its best period of development now. Macau's economy has become more integrated with the world, and her social structure has become increasingly diversified as a result. In terms of economic development, as its status as a world-class tourism and leisure center has become increasingly reinforced, Macau's economy has become increasingly resilient. The improved economic prospects have also made the Macao SAR government more capable of improving people's livelihoods, and as a result, improving their quality of life.

Meanwhile, the city's community spirit and of helping one another out remains the same, not to mention the desire of residents to carry out the spirit of patriotism. It is with patriotism as the guiding focus that the people of Macau have created an economic miracle and have united as one to overcome occasional adversities such as SARS, calamities caused by typhoons Hato and Mangkhut, charges instigated by external forces and the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

- The central government has rolled out an array of policy initiatives for Macau. Does any particular policy benefit your sector? If so, how?

WZ - The central government has indeed rolled out many policy initiatives that help further develop the potential of Macau. In terms of culture, for example, it is with the full support of the central government that the "Historic Centre of



Wu Zhiliang, president of the Board of Directors of the Macao Foundation

Macau" was successfully inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005. This is an affirmation by the international community of the role of Macau as an exchange platform for promoting dialogue between different civilizations. And since its inscription, the Macao Foundation and the educational and cultural agencies of the government have consistently collaborated with local schools and associations to organize dissemination and research projects surrounding the historic center, which reinforce the connotations of the historic center and all of Macau. The "Macao Story" has also become more complete.

Over the past 25 years, we have also witnessed a shift in cultural work in Macau, from bilateral exchanges between two countries (Portugal and China) to multilateral exchanges between China and a greater variety of countries and civilizations. For example, Macau is now part of UNESCO's Creative City Network of gastronomy, while it is also home to the World Health Organization's Collaborating Centre for Traditional Medicine and a United Nations University Institute. In 2025, we will also be one of the annual East Asia Cities of Culture representing China.

In addition to Macau's established international cultural events, such as the International Music Festival, the Art Festival, the Macau Fringe, the Arts and Cultural Festival between China and Portugue-

se-speaking Countries, a new pattern is emerging whereby the world can understand China through the Macau SAR, and explore ways to achieve a harmonious co-existence of humankind through experiencing the Macau SAR. And because one of the objectives of the policy initiatives rolled out by the central government is to further develop Macau into a genuine international city, Macau's cultural development can further elevate its international status and eventually help establish it as a city with international status.

- This year marks the third anniversary of the establishment of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. In your opinion, how should Macau continue to leverage the Hengqin zone's advantages to further develop itself and your sector?

WZ - The In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin provides a hinterland for Macau to expand its economic and social development. Over the past three years we have witnessed increasing connections between the two territories, especially through the Macau New Neighbourhood new residential project, where living conditions with an ambience similar to that in Macau are being created. Social services and education provided by grassroot associations in Macau have also been extended to Hengqin, not to mention public services like the Health Centre (a govern-

ment clinic) and a 24-hour one-stop government service center.

There are now about 6,500 Macau businesses settled in the In-Depth Cooperation Zone, which comprises about 11 percent of all businesses in operation in the Zone. A business incubation base has been set up by the University of Saint Joseph in Macau, in collaboration with Zhuhai enterprises. The University of Macau is about to build new campuses in the zone soon, and other Macau higher education institutions will follow suit.

The cultural sector is also setting foot in the zone, seeing it as an ideal springboard to promote exchanges and dialogue between different cultures and art forms.

- The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has seen many notable developments over the past few years. How has Macau's integration with other parts of the GBA impacted your career? What kind of collaboration in the GBA you are anticipating?

WZ - One of Macao's positions in the GBA, as detailed in the Outline Development Plan, relates to culture and tourism — that is, to develop into a world-class tourism and leisure center, as well as a base for exchange and cooperation where Chinese culture is the mainstream and diverse cultures coexist. Since one of the basic principles of the GBA development is innovation and reform, we should also bear this in mind when we are building

a "Cultural Bay Area", as described in the Outline Development Plan.

Combining the respective strengths of Guangdong as the pioneer of the nation's reform and opening-up, and Hong Kong and Macau as free and open economies, the GBA cities are fully capable of shaping common cultural values when joining forces to promote a vibrant development of culture. We should also create conditions to promote exchanges and mutual learning among different cultures and civilizations, with Hong Kong and Macau as the bases. The two cities share development targets in common, while there are also distinctions. Both cities can have a positive impact on improving hospitality levels and the quality of GBA cities in the Chinese mainland.

To reinforce and realize these development goals, it is impossible for Macau to monopolize cultural and arts development in the GBA context. We should instead promote a "Cultural Bay Area" to blossom everywhere, and promote more interaction and mutually complementary exchanges between the cities.

- Macau is a unique blend of Chinese and Portuguese cultures. How do you think this fusion can help the nation enhance communication with the international community and tell good stories of China?

WZ - Different ethnicities, cultures, religions and faiths have co-existed and co-prospered in Macau throughout her history, thereby forming her unique features as a place where China meets the West, where the past meets the present, and where there are not only differences but also commonalities. Chinese wisdom calls for inclusion and tolerance of differences while always seeking commonalities. The historical experience of Macau has enriched the connotations and external influence of the Chinese culture. It has built a bridge in academic and technological exchanges. It is an example of exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations. Such cultural symbolism is so easily identified, and the Macau SAR has formed its own system of discourse in telling the stories of China in languages that other civilizations are able to understand. MDT/CHINA DAILY

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CHINA DAILY INTERVIEW

Erwin Neher: Laureate on a mission

STEPHY ZHANG, CHINA DAILY

GERMAN Nobel laureate Erwin Neher has a close affinity with traditional Chinese medicine, saying the potential of TCM, with a history of more than 2,000 years, has drawn him to the Macau Special Administrative Region to deepen his research in the field.

The renowned biophysicist, specializing in cell physiology, holds true to his belief with a resounding vote of confidence in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area's bid to be a world-class innovation and technology hub that could take on Silicon Valley.

Neher, who was appointed by the Macau University of Science and Technology in 2016 to head a biophysics laboratory named in his honor, won the 2024 Chinese Government Friendship Award in late September, becoming the first expatriate scientist in the Hong Kong and Macau SARs to receive the nation's top friendship award. The prize was created in 1991 in recognition of foreign experts' outstanding contributions to China's development.

TCM ENTHUSIAST

Neher's story with China is one of serendipity, driven by his immense interest in TCM.

The honor of being awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine in 1991 along with German cell physiologist Bert Sakmann won Neher worldwide fame as countries made a beeline for his counsel and academic expertise.

"I did get offers, of course. But the offer here was particularly attractive because I'm going to learn more about the ingredients of traditional Chinese medicine," he tells China Daily in an exclusive interview in Macau.

"I've always been interested in traditional Chinese medicine, and I saw potential in using the techniques I had developed to study the components that you can isolate from traditional Chinese medicine formulations," he says, referring to his job at the MUST lab where he combines his research on ion channels with TCM to explore the effects of some small molecules in Chinese herbal medicine through ion channels to find solutions for various diseases.

A longtime fan of TCM, Neher jumped on the chance, saying it's a continuation of his research from the 1980s in which he and Sakmann developed a new technology to record the abnormal activity of ion channels that are closely linked to conditions like cancer, inflammation, Alzheimer's disease and stroke.

Neher is convinced that TCM,



Erwin Neher, director of a lab for innovative drug discovery at MUST, gives an interview to China Daily in Macau

developed over thousands of years in China, has identified substances that work in various ways. He says formulations of TCM contain numerous substances that influence the human body's signal mechanisms. "We have learned so much in the past 30 to 50 years about these signals (in our bodies) that it's time to look into the formulations of TCM." Besides doing academic research with TCM, the biophysicist, who is currently recovering from a fractured ankle, says that he is trying some TCM given to him by a friend to speed up bone regeneration.

"I must say I don't know many other laboratories in this field. But what's here is very impressive. The school has basically everything in terms of analytical instrumentation that you can imagine."

The MUST lab is supported by the Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) - a research fund set up by the Macau SAR government in 2004. Members of the lab are also accessible to national funding programs.

Neher says the funds have enabled the facility to compete with others. In 2020, the FDCT allocated 170 million patacas (\$21.21 million) for 141 scientific research projects. The funding grew to 300 million patacas for 200 projects in 2021, and to 350 million patacas for 214 projects in 2022.

OBSERVING PROGRESS

Currently, Macau has 10 higher education institutions and four State Key Laboratories. In November 2023, the Macau SAR government unveiled a plan for the city's economic diversification from 2024 to 2028, pledging to strive for substantive progress in developing the innovation and technology industry.

Its cooperation zone with Guangdong province, established in September 2021 on Zhuhai's Hengqin Island, has so far created

30 national and provincial-level technological innovation platforms. The zone encompasses incubators for technology firms, and research and development institutions, with about 300 firms recognized as "national high-tech companies", and with more than 40 specialized enterprises.

Over the years, Macau has also set up two national co-working spaces - the Macau Young Entrepreneur Incubation Centre and the University of Macau Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship - to provide workspaces and support services for local technological innovation teams.

Neher is impressed by the substantial growth he has seen in Macau's scientific infrastructure in the past eight years. "Things are happening here, maybe 10 times faster than in my home country, Germany," he says, noting that every time he returns to Macau, he finds much progress has been made in architecture, laboratories and equipment.

The laureate lauds China's readiness to adopt innovative approaches, which he finds more constructive than the often skeptical attitude in Germany to wards new developments.

In his view, Chinese people's willingness to integrate new methods of communication, payment and other advancements into their daily lives has fostered an ecosystem ripe for technological breakthroughs. "The Chinese government is making huge efforts to take the country forward by improving and amplifying science and engineering, particularly in medical sciences."

In 2019, the same year when the outline development plan for the Greater Bay Area was revealed, Neher became director of the Shenzhen Neher Neural Plasticity Laboratory on the recommendation of a Chinese student of his. It's the first

"Nobel lab" for neuroscience at the Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

"I see Shenzhen as being the most rapidly developing area in the world," says Neher, adding that the country's tech and innovation hub has a highly appealing talent program that attracts individuals at all levels, positioning the city as a technological leader in various aspects globally.

He believes the Hong Kong and Macau SARs, combined with Shenzhen, have the potential to emulate Silicon Valley in the future, and the Greater Bay Area will become a world innovation center.

BASIC RESEARCH IS KEY

"But my position is always that, in order to get really new insight, one also needs to do basic research which just asks how things work."

For any person aiming to be the first to make a genuine breakthrough in drug development, one must grasp the underlying principles better than others with the same goal, he says, and greater support must be given to fundamental research to strike a balance between it and practical applications.

Citing the European Research Council, which allocates grants to individuals supporting research teams for five years on topics that promise fundamental knowledge breakthroughs, Neher suggests that Macau, besides funding innovation, new products and medicines, could introduce more programs to support basic research to attract Nobel laureates like himself.

Chinese scientists are already making significant contributions to the international exchange of knowledge, he says, as evidenced by their growing presence at major events like the recent World Life Science Conference in Hainan province which Neher attended. "Chinese scientists do play an in-

creasing role in that international dialogue."

Neher attributed his path to a Nobel Prize to his early interest in research when he became fascinated with various subjects, including technology, electronics, horology and biology. It was through those interests that he discovered his passion for biophysical research and decided to focus on this field.

However, according to Neher, a good scientist requires a certain mindset. "You need to have an inquisitive kind of mind, the ability to identify a problem and to be so captivated by that problem that you hardly stop thinking about it and will think about it from all angles."

He says scientists may possess the ability to design experiments with positive expectations to solve problems effectively, but they may get disappointed because it's inevitable that experiments rarely yield immediate results. With luck, a scientist with a brilliant mind can navigate these challenges by contemplating mechanisms thoroughly.

Asked what it would take to win the Nobel Prize, Neher refers to what a colleague had once told him: The number one rule - there is no rule at all.

NEHER'S BIOGRAPHY

1963-66

Studied physics at the Technical University of Munich

1967

Obtained Master of Science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison

1970

Obtained doctorate in physics from the Technical University of Munich

1972-82

Research associate at the Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry

1975-76

Research associate at Yale University

1983-2011

Director of the Membrane Biophysics Department at the Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry

1989

Fairchild Scholar at the California Institute of Technology

1991

Awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine

2016

Appointed director of Dr Neher's Biophysics Laboratory for Innovative Drug Discovery at the Macau University of Science and Technology

2019

Became director of the Neher Neural Plasticity Nobel Prize Laboratory at the Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences

2024

Received the Chinese Government Friendship Award

EXCO WELCOMES SIX NEW MEMBERS

RENATO MARQUES

THE new Chief Executive (CE), Sam Hou Fai, has appointed the members for the upcoming Executive Council (ExCo), according to the Government Information Bureau.

The new ExCo will feature 11 members, including six newcomers, while the remaining five members have been retained from the previous composition.

Among the new members is Ip Sio Kai, lawmaker and deputy General Manager of the Macau branch of the Bank of China, who served as Sam's campaign office head during his CE bid.

Another key addition is Lao Ngai Leong, a well-known businessman in the construction sector who is also the Vice Chairman of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese and a Macau Delegate to the National People's Congress.

Other new additions to the ExCo panel include: Leong Wai Fong, Executive Director of the Board of Directors of the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute; Song Pek Kei, lawmaker and representative of the Fujian community in Macau; Samuel Tong, President of



Ip Sio Kai



Lao Ngai Leong



Leong Wai Fong



Song Pek Kei



Ben U Seng Pan



Samuel Tong Kai Chung

the Macau Institute of Management; and Ben U, Professor at the Faculty of Science and

Technology of the University of Macau and Deputy Director of the State Key Laboratory of

Analog and Mixed-Signal VLSI. Among those who continue to serve on the CE's advisory

council is lawyer and member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Leonel Alves, who has been part of the ExCo since 2004, being the council's longest-standing member.

The ExCo will also retain member and spokesperson, André Cheong, who has been reappointed as Secretary for Administration and Justice.

Other returning members include: Chan Chak Mo, lawmaker and businessman; Chan Ka Leong, Chairman of the General Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Macau (Kai Fong); and Frederico Ma, chairman of the Science and Technology Development Fund.

The six new ExCo members will replace former members Peter Lam, Lee Chong Cheng, Iau Teng Pio, Ieong Tou Hong, Zhang Zong Zhen and Chao Weng Hou.

The 11 members will have their official appointment gazetted Dec. 20, when they will also be sworn into office.

The primary role of the ExCo is to assist the CE in policymaking and review bills and proposals for administrative regulations before they are published or sent to the Legislative Assembly for debate and voting.

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MSAR 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Xi Jinping to visit Macau for handover celebrations, new CE inauguration

RENATO MARQUES

THE General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, the President of the People's Republic of China, and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission, Xi Jinping, will visit Macau from Dec. 18 to Dec. 20 to attend the 25th anniversary celebration of Macau's return to the motherland and the inauguration ceremony of the sixth-term government of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR), according to a press statement from the Government Information Bureau (GCS).

During his three-day visit, Xi will also conduct an inspection tour of the city.

The official announcement confirmed longstanding rumors that had circulated about the attendance of the high-ranking official at this year's milestone celebrations.

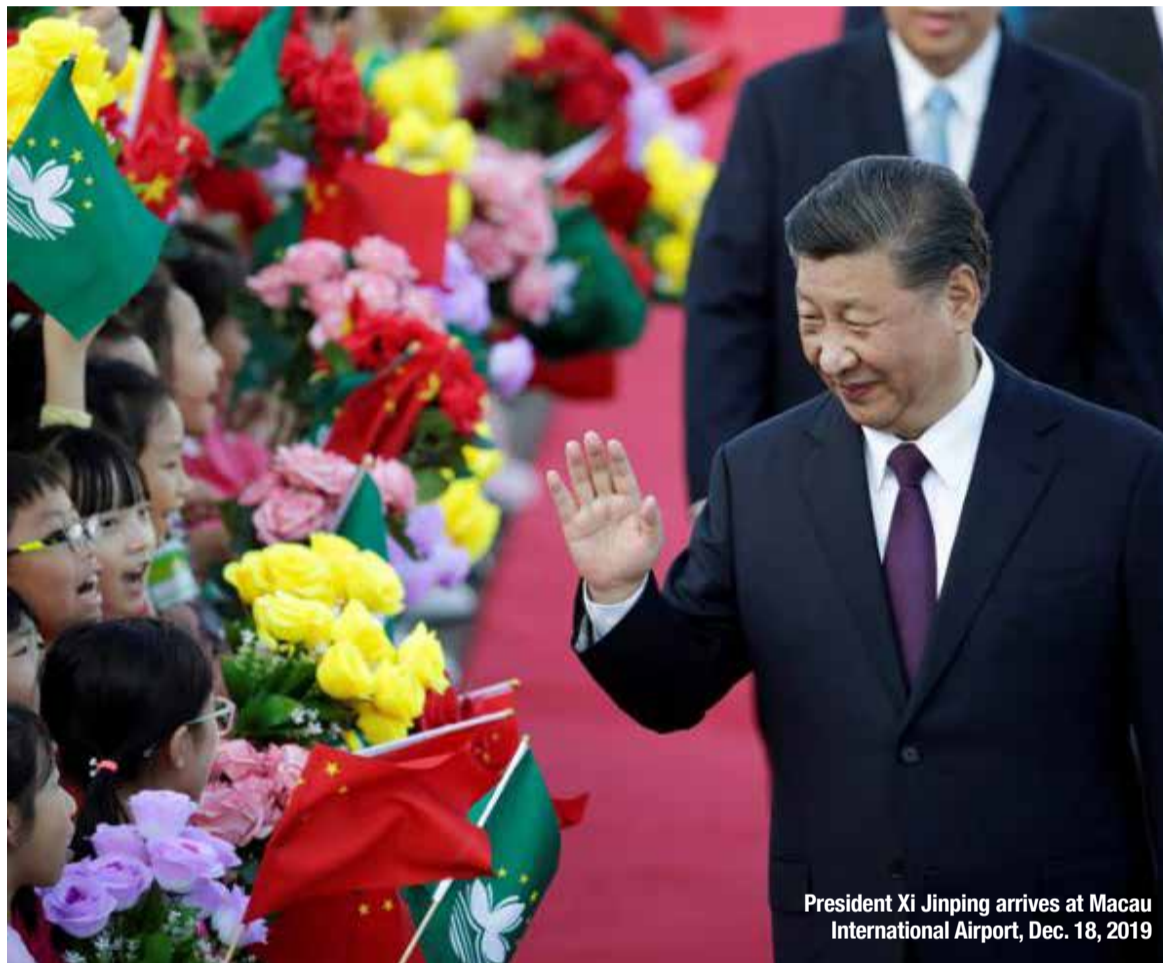
Speculation about Xi's presence was fueled by previously announced measures, such as the total ban on flying unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) and a directive from the Chief Executive (CE) in early November, which called for all firearms to be surrendered to the police.

The order, published on the government's official gazette in early November, was the first of this kind in the past 25 years. This order applied to all those who own firearms for self-defense purposes and private security companies, with a deadline for handing over of all firearms by Dec. 17.

At the time, the CE measure was justified by the solemnity and social significance of the upcoming celebrations and as a precautionary measure to ensure public order and safety.

The order also suspended all shooting exercises and sports competitions at the Macau International Shooting Centre between Dec. 1 and Dec. 22, as well as the business operations of shops selling arms and ammunition from Dec. 17 to Dec. 20.

Ahead of the celebrations, police authorities have been on high alert and launched



President Xi Jinping arrives at Macau International Airport, Dec. 18, 2019

an interdepartmental joint command center to respond to any emerging security concerns.

In an extensive publication under the section "You and Security" on the Unitary Police Service (SPU) website, authorities stated they would closely monitor the situation in Macau and would take immediate action where necessary to safeguard security and ensure citizens can enjoy happy and peaceful festivities.

The SPU highlighted that given the series of celebrations and holidays commencing with the handover celebrations on Dec. 20, it was deemed necessary to elevate the state of alert.

Of particular concern appears to be the opening of the Cotai outdoor event venue (on Dec. 28), which the SPU anticipates will attract many visitors to Macau.

These events, coupled with the holidays of local residents, are expected to increase the flow of people at border crossings and on the streets. As such, authorities have highlighted the potential increase in the number of possible risks that may affect public safety.

As an immediate effect of

the raised police state of alert, officers from the Public Security Police Force – including those assigned to tourism duties – have been seen wearing bulletproof vests while on duty on the streets of Macau over the last few days.

CE HAILS XI'S VISIT FOR THE MSAR CELEBRATION.

Following the announcement of President Xi's visit to Macau, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng extended his warmest welcome to Xi and expressed his gratitude for the Central government's support for Macau.

In a GCS statement, Ho praised Xi's leadership, stating that "under President Xi's care and guidance, Macau has furthered the implementation of the 'One country, two systems' principle, 'Macau people governing Macau,' and the city's enjoyment of a high degree of autonomy, leading to social stability and economic prosperity."

Ho also noted that Xi's decision to visit Macau and take part in the 25th-anniversary celebrations demonstrates "the great importance the Central government attaches to Macau, and also showcases its ge-

nuine affection for Macau."

INCOMING CE ALSO THANKS XI FOR HIS VISIT

In addition to Ho, the sixth-term CE, Sam Hou Fai, has also extended his welcome and gratitude to Xi for visiting Macau to attend the celebrations of the 25th Anniversary of Macau's handover and the inauguration ceremony of the sixth-term government of the MSAR.

According to a statement from GCS, Sam said he was greatly honored to have President Xi present at the celebrations. Reiterating Ho's sentiments, he said Xi's visit is a clear demonstration of the significant support and care of the Central government towards Macau and was a significant event.

Sam reaffirmed the new-term MSAR government "would unite and lead all sectors of Macau society, under the vision of 'Striving Together, Upholding Integrity and Innovating.'"

He further emphasized his promise to "continuously enhance the practice of the 'One country, two systems' principle with Macau characteristics" and to promote prosperous and stable development.



FRANCIS LUI APPOINTED GEG CHAIRMAN

Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) has appointed Francis Lui Yiu Tung as its new chairman. Previously the deputy chairman, Francis is expected to positively influence the group's business development, according to a company filing with the Hong Kong stock exchange. His father, Lui Che Woo, the founder and a prominent casino magnate, passed away Nov. 7 aged 95. Francis joined Galaxy in 1979, becoming an executive director in 1987 and deputy chairman in 1997. In a statement, the official said he aims to fulfill his father's vision of transforming Galaxy into a leading integrated tourism and leisure company.

PJ ARRESTS 84 INDIVIDUALS IN ILLEGAL MONEY EXCHANGE

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested 84 individuals involved in illegal money exchanges for gambling, seizing HKD9.6 million in cash and casino chips from Nov. 30 to Dec. 30. Among those arrested were nine local residents, one Hong Kong resident, and 74 mainlanders. The suspects have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office. The police have conducted five operations against money-changing syndicates, significantly disrupting their activities around Macau casinos. The arrests follow the enactment of the law on combating illegal gambling crimes on Oct. 29.

IAM EXPANDS ONLINE SERVICES

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has recently introduced new electronic services to enhance community engagement and streamline access to public facilities. These online offerings include rental applications for auditoriums, activity rooms, and guided tours at the Macau Tea Culture Museum and long Sam Tong Pavilion. Designed for associations and schools, these facilities support various activities such as training sessions, conferences and exhibitions. To improve service efficiency and accessibility for all residents, users can book these services through the "Macao One Account."

UM RECEIVES BIODIVERSITY SPECIMENS

The University of Macau (UM) has received a significant donation of 1,491 biodiversity specimens from Dr. Emmett R. Easton, a former faculty member. Collected during the 1990s, the UM said these specimens are crucial for studying the evolution of Macau's ecological environment. The donation includes both dried and fluid-preserved specimens, with some potentially representing species now extinct in the region. This collection is aimed at enhancing research capabilities at UM. Dr. Easton, who now resides in the U.S., previously donated hundreds of specimens upon his retirement.

LUIS MELO'S NEW BOOK: THE SOUTH END OF TOWN REVISITED

PAULO COUTINHO

AZOREAN author and lawyer Luís Mesquita de Melo, 60, launched his latest novel, "Nas Esquinas do Olhar" (At the Corners of the Gaze), on Saturday to an almost full house at Livraria Portuguesa.

The event marked the continuation of a literary journey that has taken readers from the Atlantic shores of the Azores to the vibrant cultures of Macau and Vietnam, spanning from the 1980s to the present.

In a brief interview with the Macau Daily Times, Melo reflected on the changes in Macau since the 1980s, admitting that "so much has changed," though some habits die hard: "The old smoky casinos gave way to cathedrals that hide the true nature of the city. The dark side of casinos, as reflected in my book, is still the same, but the lights are brighter."

Born in Horta, on the island of Faial, Melo studied law at the University of Lisbon before embarking on an international career. In the 1990s, he moved to Macau, where he contributed to legislative modernization efforts



and served as an advisor to the president of the Legislative Assembly.

After practicing law in Portugal, he returned to Macau and later relocated to Vietnam, where he currently works. In both locations—central to the narrative of his novel—he served as a legal counsel and corporate executive in the gaming industry.

This privileged position gave Melo inspiration for his writing. "The inside knowledge of the casino industry, especially having witnessed human weaknesses, inspired me to write from a different perspective—opposed to the glamour of a certain idea of gambling," he explained.

"Nas Esquinas do Olhar" is described as "a profound explo-

ration of human experiences," set across the 1980s to the present day, according to the book's introduction, published by Astrolábio in Lisbon.

The novel intertwines the lives of three protagonists, including Álvaro dos Reis, a character whose name subtly nods to the heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa. It delves into the darker side of

gambling in Macau and the grim realities of human exploitation in Vietnam.

For lawyer Sérgio de Almeida Correia, who presented the book on Saturday, Melo's engaging writing style immerses the reader in the plot, "as if [the reader] becomes part of the story, identifying with the characters" in their daily struggle to exist—to be.

"At some point, when you are immersed in the reading, it's hard to tell fact from fiction," Correia added, attributing this effect to the fact that Melo's latest work is "pretty much autobiographical."

In conclusion, Correia categorized the novel as part of the "great tradition of travel literature."

And Melo, a sailor himself, has already embarked on a voyage in his quest to pull up anchor from his origins and sail into pure fiction, a truly universal theme.

"Imagine a hotel built in the middle of the ocean, and all the possibilities it can witness when it comes to human nature... But to be honest, I don't know where this will take me until I develop this idea further. But I have the title in mind: 'Floating Hotel,'" the author told the Times.

"Nas Esquinas do Olhar" is Melo's third book, following "A Humidade dos Dias" (2019) and "Navegações e Outras Errâncias" (2021), which delve into his Azorean roots and global narratives.

EVENTS

Exhibition of Qi Baishi's digitalized artworks unveiled

VICTORIA CHAN

To commemorate the 160th anniversary of renowned Chinese artist Qi Baishi's birth, an exhibition titled "Lotus Blossoms in Pairs, Plum Blossoms in Clusters – The Artistic World of Qi Baishi" was inaugurated yesterday at Wynn Palace.

Organized by the Beijing Fine Art Academy and the Federation of Associations of Cultural Sectors of Macau, the exhibition aims to showcase the profound heritage of Chinese culture and the unique appeal of Macau, while also promoting Chinese art on the global stage through the display of Qi Baishi's digitalized masterpieces.

Wu Hongliang, president of the Beijing Fine Art Academy, said the exhibition features 25 selected calligraphy works and paintings by Qi Baishi, symbolizing the



25th anniversary of Macau's return to China. The inclusion of lotus-themed artworks reflects the beauty of Xiangtan, Hunan—Qi Baishi's hometown, also known as the "City of Lotus"—and the deep connection between Macau, the "Island of Lotus," and the artist's place of origin.

"This exhibition not only promotes Chinese culture but also incorporates modern technology to offer visitors a fresh perspective on Qi Baishi's

art, demonstrating the in-depth integration between art and technology," said Wu Zhiliang, president of the Federation of Associations of Cultural Sectors of Macau.

Linda Chen, president and vice chairman of the Board of Wynn Macau, Limited, said the exhibition is a new innovative project of Illuminarium at Wynn Palace that is dedicated to promoting the diversification of Macau as a bridge for cultural exchange between East

and West and showcasing Chinese culture and art on the international stage.

The exhibition is divided into two sections. The first section, "Tianqu Scenery Paintings: Digital Art World of Qi Baishi," will bring the master's works to life at the Illuminarium through immersive experiences.

The second section, "Blossoming Flowers of Home: Bird-and-Flower World of Qi Baishi" and "Joyous Flowers for a Prosperous Year: Auspicious World of Qi Baishi," will display the artist's Chinese painting masterpieces depicting auspicious objects, inviting viewers to interactively experience Chinese literature's appreciation of calligraphy and paintings.

The exhibition is open to the public with free admission from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday until Feb. 15, 2025.

MGTO TO CONTINUALLY BOOST TOURISM

NADIA SHAW

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is extending its collaboration with Qantas to promote airfare discounts aimed at attracting international visitors. This initiative, which began this year with Air Macau, has a budget of MOP100 million and focuses primarily on international routes.

MGTO director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes told TDM yesterday that while specific details on ticket sales are still pending, the emphasis will be on discounted fares and promotional activities in local shopping centers.

Macau's hotel occupancy rate has recently reached an impressive 90%, and it is expected to remain strong during the Christmas to New Year's Day holidays. In addition to Qantas, Air Macau plans to resume flights to destinations such as Fukuoka, Japan, although updates from Qantas have yet to be received.

The upcoming holiday season is expected to provide various opportunities to local hotels and businesses.

In December, several events are scheduled, including a fireworks display on Christmas Day, a concert performance Dec. 28 at the outdoor arena in Cotai, and the return of "Light Up Macao 2024."

The lights festival features artists from overseas, mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau.

Senna Fernandes expressed optimism about reaching a target of 33 million visitors in 2024, with hopes of surpassing 34 million by year-end. This year alone, the number of international tourists has already exceeded two million, marking a significant recovery for the sector, she said.

Looking ahead, MGTO is planning promotional roadshows in Akihabara, Japan, as well as industry conferences in Riyadh and Dubai.

Festive Cheer in a Winter Wonderland

WINTER. The last season in our annual calendar and a time for both quiet reflection and jubilant celebration. As the weather turns colder, we develop a deeper appreciation for the warmth and comfort that good food and clothing provide while reminiscing on the events of the year behind us, the highs and lows, and most importantly, our friends and family that accompanied us every step of the way. Winter is both a time to be thankful for all the blessings in our lives, and to celebrate the beautiful sentiments of companionship that bind us all together.

If you are looking for a seasonal gift for loved ones, wish to share an indulgent feast of exquisitely cooked delicacies with friends, or even to immerse yourself and your family in a magical Christmas atmosphere filled with excitement and joy, then the “Wynn Festive Wonderland”—a series of events and promotions held at Wynn Palace and Wynn Macau over the festive period—offers everything you need and more.

The first stop on your journey around Wonderland should be the ShopSpree Galleria in the lobby of Wynn Palace that features a festive Luis Vuitton carousel that has been especially relocated from Paris. Visitors can sit back in comfort beneath the iconic monogrammed canvas and ride the velvet-draped carousel while enjoying the parade of cute and colorful animals that adorn the scene. If the finesse and luxury of Luis Vuitton manages to peak your interest, you are invited to indulge in a little retail relaxation at both Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace where you can take advantage of “The Grand Gift of Wonder” shopping experience that offers all guests who spend MOP18,000 or more on the same day at designated boutiques the chance to win up to MOP200,000 in retail gift certificates!

The Illuminarium at Wynn Palace is also hosting the “Lotus Blossoms in Pairs, Plum Blossoms in Clusters – The Artistic World of Qi Baishi” exhibition from December 15, 2024, until February 15, 2025, to commemorate the life of one of China’s most celebrated painters.



Louis Vuitton Unveils Holiday Carousel for the Festive Season



“Lotus Blossoms in Pairs, Plum Blossoms in Clusters – The Artistic World of Qi Baishi” exhibit

Qi Baishi’s works feature whimsical depictions of nature in a highly individual and unconventional style that portray a sense of spontaneity. His life and art overflow with a deep respect for peace, a sentiment that is symbolic of the bond that uni-

tes Macao and the motherland, making this exhibition the perfect accompaniment for the 25th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Macao SAR. Moving on, indoor sports events are often widely enjoyed during the winter season,



Wynn Presents - 2024 Macau Snooker Masters

so after enjoying artistic reveries in the Illuminarium, you can carry on over to the Wynn Palace Grand Theater Ballroom from December 25 to 28 to cheer on the world’s elite snooker players as they compete for the championship in the “2024

Macau Snooker Masters” that will once again welcome the return of “Wynn Brand Ambassador” Ronnie O’Sullivan back to the city.

But what would Christmas be without an opulent selection of the most delicious and hearty treats for the whole family to enjoy? The Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star SW Steakhouse at Wynn Palace is presenting a festive Christmas Dinner from December 20 to 26 and a New Year’s Dinner from December 28 to January 1. Over the festive period, Fontana, Sweets, Lakeside Trattoria, and Buns & Bubbles are all rolling out special Christmas additions to their menu that promises to arrest your senses and create a fanfare on your tastebuds to announce Christmas is finally here. If festive tipples are more to your liking, the SW Bar is offering the finest collection of Christmas cocktails crafted by an elite bartender specially invited from Shanghai for a limited time to help Macao raise a glass to the festive holidays. Wing Lei Bar, the Palace Reserve Club, and Cinnerbar are likewise unveiling a range of specially crafted drinks that will tantalize the senses and warm the cockles of the heart.

Alternatively, if you prefer to immerse yourself in the cultural tranquility of Chinese tea, Wynn Palace is hosting an exclusive “Savor the Elegance of Time” session on December 28 and 29 featuring a tea ceremony ritual led by tea master Zhang Gui Jing. This session focuses on the unique qualities of Yunnan Dianhong black tea and Master Zhang will guide visitors on an exploration of the depth of its flavor while pairing it with a selection of hand-picked dishes. The sweet aroma and golden hues of Dianhong black tea are sure to make a perfect addition to your Wonderland experience.

All this and more awaits you at Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace, two resorts that are dedicated to providing memorable shopping, dining, and event experiences for their guests. During this time of festive merrymaking, the “Wynn Festive Wonderland” and its rich variety of sights and attractions offers a little bit of magic for everyone to come and enjoy.



The signature restaurants at Wynn Palace and Wynn Macau present festive dining experiences

Wynn Palace hosts exclusive “Savor the Elegance of Time” premium tea tasting experience

WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION URGES MORE CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Women's General Association of Macau has strongly urged local women to prioritize cervical cancer screening, with data showing that around 20% of young women in the city have never undergone a pap smear test.

The association's medical center has provided over 85,000 pap smear tests in the past 15 years, according to Wong Kit Cheng, lawmaker and vice president of the association. She stressed the



importance of raising awareness among young women about the need for cervical cancer screening, as the incidence rate of the disease remains high in the 20-49 age group.

"The data shows that the screening work has achieved a certain degree of success in detecting lesions in the pre-cancerous phase, as well as in providing timely treatment to prevent the development of a malignant tumor," said Wong, as quoted by Jornal do Cidadão.

The government has been collaborating with local institutions since 2009 to launch a cervical cancer screening program. Pap smear tests, which can detect abnormal cells in the cervix, are considered one of the most effective

and simple methods for early detection of the disease.

In addition to its efforts in cervical cancer prevention, the Women's General Association has also been providing free breast cancer screening services to residents since 2017, serving over 23,000 women. According to Wong, the risk of breast cancer among middle-aged women aged 50 and over has increased significantly.

The association plans to focus even more on preventing cervical and breast cancer, as well as HIV. Wong hoped the government and private companies will invest more resources into the prevention, screening, and diagnosis of these diseases, to increase the cure rate and reduce the mortality rate.

ILCM's Christmas bazaar supports local charities

NADIA SHAW

THE International Ladies' Club of Macau (ILCM) held its Annual Christmas Charity Bazaar yesterday at the Grand Coloane Resort. This year's theme, "Island's Gift of Giving," reflects ILCM's commitment to philanthropy and festive celebration. The event featured a variety of activities designed to engage attendees and raise funds for local charities.

The bazaar began at 11 a.m. with an opening ceremony, followed by performances, including a unique "When East Meets West" instrumental show. Attendees enjoyed giant



lawn games and choir performances from local schools, including the MAC and TIS choirs. The day rounded off in exciting activities such as tug-of-war competitions and a Santa show.

Ada Chan, director of Marketing and

Communications for the Grand Coloane Resort, emphasized the event's significance in her opening remarks. "It's all about coming together for a bigger purpose—spreading goodwill and supporting those in need," she stated. The col-

laboration between ILCM and the resort has been a tradition since it began in 2011.

ILCM president Jolene Zhao echoed Chan's sentiments, expressing gratitude for the support from vendors and volunteers.

"The money we raised today is going directly to charities that help people in need this season," Zhao said. She highlighted the importance of community involvement, noting that contributions made during the bazaar would significantly impact local charitable organizations.

Among the many charities supported by ILCM are the Cradle of Hope Association, Good Shepherd Centre, and the Holy House of Mercy, providing essential services ranging from child welfare to elderly care within the region.

CRIME

WOMAN LOSSES HKD390,000 IN ONLINE GAMBLING SCAM

STAFF REPORTER

A woman has reported a significant financial loss of HKD390,000 after falling victim to an online scam linked to a purported "Taiwanese male netizen."

Police said the victim, a middle-aged woman, became involved in the scheme after meeting the suspect while browsing the internet on September 22.

The suspect, claiming to work in computer maintenance at a Macau casino, allegedly informed the victim of a loophole in a gambling website that promised easy profits.

Trusting his assertions, she registered for an online gambling account and transferred funds to various designated

bank accounts as instructed.

Initially, the victim's account appeared to show winnings of HKD100 million. However, when she attempted to withdraw her funds, she was met with demands from "customer service" for additional payments as a "margin" before any withdrawals could be processed.

Following discussions with family members who identified the situation as fraudulent, the victim reported the incident to the police on December 5. Investigations are ongoing, but no arrests have been made at this time.

Authorities urge the public to exercise caution when engaging in online transactions and to be wary of unsolicited offers promising quick financial returns.

CORPORATE BITS

Lai Chi Vun Shipyards reopens to public



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) has completed the Phase 1 revitalization project on the Lai Chi Vun Shipyards - X11-X15 earlier this month.

The project features a variety of attractions, including a historical exhibition hall,

children's entertainment areas, and cultural spaces aimed at both local residents and international visitors.

Revitalized through a collaboration between the gaming operator and the Macau SAR government, the revamped site inclu-

des a presentation area for 80 spectators, educational shipbuilding games for children, and a 60-meter-long Skypark. The exhibition hall incorporates digital technology to vividly showcase Macau's shipbuilding heritage.

In addition to ongoing activities, a Christmas Market will take place every weekend in December, offering games, food, and performances. The shipyards will be open on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on weekends from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

GEG has stated that it will collaborate with local SMEs and groups to organize different types of performances and activities at the Lai Chi Vun Shipyards.

MGM Theater launches first residency show: Macau 2049



Seven years after its opening, the MGM Theater has debuted its first-ever residency show, Macau 2049.

Created in collaboration with renowned filmmaker Zhang Yimou, the show pre-

miered yesterday with an opening ceremony attended by Pansy Ho, chairperson of MGM China Holdings Limited.

Macau 2049 is an 80-minute performance featu-

ring eight chapters that celebrate Chinese intangible cultural heritage through diverse cultural expressions. This innovative show utilizes advanced technologies from 20 countries to reinterpret traditional arts such as Peking Opera and Lion Dance, while also being presented in eight international languages to reach a global audience.

Zhang Yimou emphasized the show's goal of harmonizing ancient civilization with modern advancements, celebrating cultural diversity. Alongside the show, MGM also unveiled a kinetic art installation, "The Dancing Lion: Rise of Good Fortune," which further merges technology and cultural artistry.

Gov't signals it's prepared to double down on support for the economy as Trump tariffs loom

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
BANGKOK

CHINESE leaders met this week to plot economic policy for the coming year, sketching out plans to raise government spending and relax Beijing's monetary policy to encourage more investment and consumer spending.

Leaders of the ruling Communist Party wrapped up their two-day Central Economic Work Conference last week with praise for President Xi Jinping's guidance and a pledge to "enrich and refine the policy toolbox" and defuse risks facing the world's second-largest economy. One of the biggest: threats by President-elect Donald Trump to sharply raise tariffs on imports from China once he takes office.

Here's a look at the priorities outlined in this week's meetings in Beijing and their potential implications.

A FOCUS ON FUNDAMENTALS

Analysts said the broad-brush plans from the annual Central Economic Work Conference and an earlier meeting of the 24-member Politburo were more of a recap of current policy than any ambitious new initiatives.

China's economy has been growing slightly more slowly than the "about 5%" target lea-



ders set for this year as a prolonged crisis in its real estate sector has weighed on business activity. Weaker housing prices and job losses during the COVID-19 pandemic have left many Chinese unable or unwilling to spend as much as they may have in the past. That has meant supplies of many goods outstrip demand, causing prices to fall or at least remain flat.

The government began rolling out a range of initiatives earlier this year that included paying subsidies when people turn in old appliances and vehicles to buy new ones, expanding access to affordable housing and cutting interest rates to make mortgages more affordable.

According to a readout by the official Xinhua News Agency, the leaders agreed this week to put "greater emphasis on

ensuring and improving the people's well-being and giving people a growing sense of fulfillment, happiness and security."

That includes policies to stop people from relapsing into poverty, providing a stronger healthcare system and expanding care for older people, it said. It could also include subsidies to families to encourage them to have more children, now that the population is declining.

WHO PAYS, AND HOW?

The leaders committed to raising China's deficit, which has been long capped at 3% of its GDP, and to doing more to encourage consumer spending by bringing wage increases in line with the pace of economic growth. The government will issue more special ultra-long-term bonds to do that, state media said without giving any

dollar amounts.

At the national level, China can afford to do that. Its national debt-to-GDP level is about 68%, compared with Japan's 250% and 120% in the United States. At the local level, huge amounts of debt remain a problem, with many Chinese workers going under- or unpaid. City and regional governments are deeply in debt after their tax revenues fell due to the property crisis and the pandemic, while spending continued to rise.

Details of any increased spending may emerge later, possibly during the national legislative session in March, analysts said.

EASIER CREDIT FOR INVESTMENT AND HOUSING PURCHASES

Earlier this week, the Politburo endorsed plans to pursue "moderately loose" monetary policies, rather than the "prudent" stance that had prevailed for the past decade.

The last time China adopted that approach was in 2008-2010, when the central bank eased credit aggressively as an antidote to the shocks of the global financial crisis, noted Tao Wang of UBS.

Earlier this year, the People's Bank of China began cutting interest rates and the required reserves banks must keep on deposit, and is expected to cut rates further in coming months,

Wang said.

Cheaper credit would make it easier to finance purchases of housing and other investments as the central bank plays a growing role in helping keep markets stable and boosting the economy.

Expectations of lower interest rates have caused bond prices to soar. But overall, investors who were hoping for more details of planned policies appeared disappointed with the outcome of the week's meetings. On Friday, the Shanghai Composite index fell 2%, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng sank 2.1%.

OVERALL, A CAUTIOUS APPROACH AS CHINA AWAITS TRUMP'S SECOND TERM

Xi's longer-term blueprint for building an innovative, high-quality modern economy remains the framework for China's future course as leaders fine-tune policy details while watching to see what Trump does once he takes office.

As the U.S. and other trading partners have imposed ever tighter controls on China's access to advanced technology, such as the latest computer chips and the tools and materials to make them, Beijing has retaliated with its own targeted measures.

Economists say China's leaders are holding back on more drastic moves to support the economy, which is growing at a reasonably fast pace despite its chronic weaknesses, as they wait to see what happens.

"Chinese authorities have been stuck in a more reactionary policy mode, as the uncertainty of U.S. tariff plans makes it difficult for policymakers to make any commitment just yet," Yeap Jun Rong of IG said in a report. "There may still be room for positive surprises, but much will lie in any upcoming policy specifics." **MDT/AP**

ANALYSIS

Xi is likely to decline Trump's inauguration invitation, seeing it as too risky to attend

DIDI TANG,
WASHINGTON

CHINESE leader Xi Jinping would likely see President-elect Donald Trump's invitation to attend his inauguration as too risky to accept, and the gesture from Trump may have little bearing on the increasingly competitive ties between the two nations as the White House changes hands, experts say.

Trump's incoming press

secretary, Karoline Leavitt, confirmed last week that Trump extended an invitation to the Jan. 20 ceremony. The Chinese Embassy in Washington said it had no information to provide. But experts don't see Xi coming to Washington next month.

WHY WOULDN'T XI ATTEND?

"Can you imagine Xi Jinping sitting outdoors in Washington, D.C., in January at the feet of the

podium, surrounded by hawkish members of Congress, gazing up at Donald Trump as he delivers his inaugural address?" said Danny Russel, who previously served as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs.

Russel, now vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said Xi would not allow himself to "be reduced to the status of a mere guest celebrating the

triumph of a foreign leader — the U.S. president, no less."

Yun Sun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, a Washington-based think tank, said Beijing will play it safe when there's no protocol or precedent for a Chinese leader to attend the inauguration of a U.S. president.

"I don't think the Chinese will take the risk," Sun said. There could be risks in the guest list, for

example, Sun said, noting that Taiwan's top diplomat in the U.S. attended the swearing-in of President Joe Biden in 2021. Beijing considers Taiwan to be Chinese territory and has repeatedly warned the U.S. that it is a red line not to be crossed.

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS?

But it should be expected that planning is underway for Trump and Xi to meet in person soon,

Russel said. Trump prefers in-person meetings with foreign leaders, especially key adversaries, and Beijing might believe it can get a better deal by dealing directly with Trump, Russel said.

Trump's return to the White House is expected to further intensify the U.S.-China rivalry. He has picked several China hawks for his Cabinet, including Sen. Marco Rubio as the secretary of state and Rep. Mike Waltz as the national security adviser.

Beijing has adopted a "wait-and-see" approach but says it is prepared to hit back should Washington raise tariffs on Chinese goods or make other unfriendly moves. **MDT/AP**

PHILIPPINES-INDONESIA

WOMAN ON DEATH ROW RECALLS A STUNNING LAST MINUTE REPRIEVE AND 'MIRACLE' TRANSFER

SLAMET RIYADI,
YOGYAKARTA

FILIPINO death row inmate Mary Jane Fiesta Veloso knelt to pray when officers came to take her to an execution site in May 2015, just a few feet away from her isolation cell on an Indonesian prison island, where a 13-member firing squad was waiting.

While she prayed, the Philippines government was wrapping up a lengthy legal battle over her fate. Veloso's life was ultimately spared — temporarily — by Indonesia's Attorney General's Office, which issued a stay of execution shortly before Veloso was to be executed with eight other death row inmates.

"Lord, many people there believe that I am guilty, but many people out there believe that I am innocent. Lord, You are the One who knows everything, You knew that I am innocent, so I beg You, please prove that by saving me," Veloso recalled praying in a tearful interview with The Associated Press at a female prison in Yogyakarta on Tuesday.

DUPED INTO BECOMING A DRUG COURIER

The reprieve aimed to provide an opportunity for Veloso's testimony to expose how a criminal syndicate duped her into being an unwitting accomplice and courier in drug trafficking.

Shock washed over Veloso as a group of officials from the attorney general's office informed her of the stay just as she was being led out to the execution site on Nusakambangan prison island. In tears, she remembered a cocoon she saw the previous night hanging from a tree branch near her cell.

"In the Philippines we believe that if there is a cocoon, there will be a new life," Veloso said. "That means I will not be executed because God will give me a new life."

Veloso, now 39, was arrested in 2010 at the airport in the Indonesian ancient city of Yogyakarta, where officials discovered about 2.6 kilograms (5.7 pounds) of heroin hidden in her luggage. The single mother of two sons was convicted and sentenced to death.

Veloso has maintained her innocence throughout her 14 years of incarceration. She has spent her time in prison

AP PHOTO



Filipino death-row drug convict Mary Jane Veloso poses for a photo with a Mother Mary statue during a Christmas event at the Yogyakarta Women's Prison in Gunung Kidul, Indonesia, last week

designing Indonesian batik clothing, painting, tailoring and learning interior design and other skills.

Veloso was granted a stay of execution because her alleged boss was arrested in the Philippines, and the authorities there requested Indonesian assistance in pursuing a case against her. The woman, who allegedly recruited Veloso to work in Kuala Lumpur, Maria Kristina Sergio, surrendered to police in the Philippines just two days ahead of her scheduled execution.

The dramatic turn of events began last month, when in an unusual last-ditch effort to delay Veloso's death, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. announced that a deal had been reached for Indonesia to send Veloso home after a decade of pleading from Manila.

"Mary Jane Veloso is coming home," Marcos said in a statement. "Arrested in 2010 on drug trafficking charges and sentenced to death, Mary Jane's case has been a long and difficult journey."

A PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENT

A "practical arrangement" between Indonesia and the

Philippines was signed on Dec. 6, to send Veloso home, which is expected before Christmas.

Although there is no treaty between the countries, Indonesia and the Philippines are both members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the transfer of convicts in the ASEAN region is in accordance with the bloc's Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty, said Raul Vasquez, the undersecretary at the Department of Justice of the Philippines, after the signing ceremony.

There are about 530 people on death row in Indonesia, mostly for drug-related crimes, including 96 foreigners

Indonesia's Yusril Ihza Mahendra, Indonesia's coordinating minister for law, human rights, immigration and corrections, lauded the transfer agreement as a "historic milestone" between Indonesia and the Philippines, and part of the new administration of President Prabowo Subianto's "good neighbor" policy.

Once repatriated, Mahendra said, if the Philippines want to pardon Veloso or grant clemency, "that is entirely their authority in which

we must also respect," the minister added. The Philippines, Asia's largest Roman Catholic nation, has abolished the death penalty.

'LIKE A MIRACLE'

Veloso described the decision as being "like a miracle when I have lost all hope."

"For almost 15 years I was separated from my children and parents, and I could not see my children grow up," she said, her eyes filled with tears. "I wish to be given an opportunity to take care of my children and to be close to my parents."

Born in Cabanatuan, a city in Nueva Ecija province, Veloso was the youngest of five siblings of a family who lived in extreme poverty. Her father worked as a seasonal agricultural worker on a sugar cane plantation and her mother collected discarded bottles and plastic to sell to junk shops. Veloso dropped out of school in her first year of high school and married her husband when she was just 16 years old.

The couple later separated and she became a single mother to two young sons, forcing her to emigrate to Dubai in 2009 to work as maid. She

returned to the Philippines before the end of her two-year contract after an attempted rape by her employer. A year later, Veloso was recruited by Sergio to be employed as a domestic servant in Malaysia but later was shifted to Indonesia.

MAJOR DRUG SMUGGLING HUB

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime says Indonesia is a major drug smuggling hub despite having some of the strictest drug laws in the world, in part because international drug syndicates target its young population.

Indonesia's last executions were carried out in July 2016, when an Indonesian and three foreigners were shot by firing squad.

There are about 530 people on death row in Indonesia, mostly for drug-related crimes, including 96 foreigners, the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections' data showed as of last month. The Indonesian government recently agreed in principle to return five Australian nationals and a French national to their home countries.

"I was not a good Catholic before, and prison has changed my life into a skilled person who has become closer to God," Veloso said. "I am ready to build a new life, like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon." **MDT/AP**

ONE WEEK INTO A NEW SYRIA

Rebels aim for normalcy and Syrians vow not to be silent again

SARAH EL DEEB, DAMASCUS

AT Damascus' international airport, the new head of security — one of the rebels who marched across Syria to the capital — arrived with his team. The few maintenance workers who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager to learn what will happen next.

They quickly unloaded all the complaints they had been too afraid to express during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told the bearded fighter they were denied promotions and perks in favor of pro-Assad favorites, and that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned of hardcore Assad supporters among airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens.

As Al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, announced: "This is the first time we talk."

This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong.

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead.

At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will

AP PHOTO



have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate."

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again."

IDLIB COMES TO DAMASCUS

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

"It will take a year to solve problems" he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000.

Right now, the fighters and the public are learning about

each other.

The fighters drive large SUVs and newer models of vehicles that are out of reach for most residents in Damascus, where they cost 10 times as much because of custom duties and bribes. The fighters carry Turkish lira, long forbidden in government-held areas, rather than the plunging Syrian pound.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tolerant.

But many Syrians remain suspicious. Some fighters sport ribbons with Islamist slogans on their uniforms and not all of them belong to HTS, the most organized group.

"The people we see on the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident from the southern city of Daraa, where the 2011 anti-Assad uprising began. He was concerned by reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings.

"We should be fearful," he said, adding that he worries some insurgents feel superior to other Syrians because of their years of fighting. "With all due respect to those who sacrificed, we all sacrificed."

Still, fear is not prevalent in Damascus, where many insist they will no longer let themselves be oppressed.

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discretely to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said.

Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria.

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us."

THE FIGHTERS MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO REASSURE

On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. People ransacked the airport's duty free, smashing all the bottles of liquor. The rebels blamed some of this on fleeing government loyalists.

The public stayed indoors, peeking out at the newcomers. Shops shut down.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order, ordering a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect

properties.

After a day, people began to emerge.

For tens of thousands, their first destination was Assad's prisons, particularly Saydnaya on the capital's outskirts, to search for loved ones who disappeared years ago. Few have found any traces.

It was wrenching but also unifying. Rebels, some of them also searching, mingled with relatives of the missing in the dark halls of prisons that all had feared for years.

During celebrations in the street, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles. Insurgents posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. Suddenly shops and walls everywhere are plastered with revolutionary flags and posters of activists killed by Assad's state.

TV stations didn't miss a beat, flipping from praising Assad to playing revolutionary songs. State media aired the flurry of declarations issued by the new insurgent-led transitional government.

The new administration called on people to go back to work and urged Syrian refugees around the world to return to help rebuild. It announced plans to rehabilitate and vet the security forces to prevent the return of "those with blood on their hands." Fighters reassured airport staffers — many of them government loyalists — that their homes won't be attacked, one employee said.

But Syria's woes are far from being resolved.

While produce prices plunged after Assad's fall, because merchants no longer needed to pay hefty customs fees and bribes, fuel distribution was badly disrupted, jacking up transportation costs and causing widespread and lengthy blackouts.

Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise.

One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

"We need a long time to clean this up," he said.

FRANCE

PRESIDENT MACRON NAMES CENTRIST ALLY BAYROU AS NEXT PRIME MINISTER

SYLVIE CORBET, PARIS

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron late last week named centrist ally François Bayrou as prime minister in an effort to address the country's deep political crisis, after a historic parliamentary vote ousted the previous government last week.

Bayrou, 73, a crucial partner in Macron's centrist alliance, has been a well-known figure in French politics for decades. His political experience is seen as key in efforts to restore stability as no single party holds a majority at the National Assembly.

Macron's office said in a statement that Bayrou "has been charged with forming a new government."

Former Prime Minister Michel Barnier resigned last week following a no-confidence vote prompted by budget disputes in the National Assembly, leaving France without a functioning government. Macron in an address to the nation vowed to remain in office until his term ends in 2027.

BAYROU VOWS TO SEEK 'NEEDED RECONCILIATION'

During the handover ceremony, Bayrou said that "no one knows the difficulty of the situation better" than he does.

"I've taken reckless risks all along my political life to raise the issue of debt and deficits in the most important elections," he said.

France is under pressure from the European Union's executive body and financial markets to reduce its colossal debt, estimated to reach 6% of its gross domestic product this year.

"I know that the risks of difficulties are much greater than the chances of success," Bayrou said, adding that he hopes to lead the country towards a "needed reconciliation."

"I think this is the only possible path to success," he said.

Bayrou is expected to hold talks with political leaders from various parties in the coming days in order to choose new ministers.

AP PHOTO



France's newly appointed Prime Minister Francois Bayrou

A DIFFICULT POLITICAL CHALLENGE

The task before him is challenging as Macron's centrist alliance does not have a majority in parliament and Bayrou's Cabinet will need to rely on moderate lawmakers from both the left and right to be able to stay in power.

Some conservatives are expected to be part of the new government.

Macron's strategy aims at preventing far-right leader Marine Le Pen from holding "make or break" power over the government. Le Pen helped oust Barnier by joining her National Rally party's forces to the left to pass the no-confidence motion last week.

Le Pen said on Friday that her party will adopt a wait-and-see approach for now and called on Bayrou to "hear" her voters' demands, including preserving their purchasing power.

Bayrou's appointment comes also in line with Macron's efforts to build a non-aggression pact with the Socialists so that they wouldn't support any future move to topple the new government.

The Socialists said Friday they would not take

part in the new Cabinet but did not rule out possible "compromises" regarding policies. They asked Bayrou for a commitment not to use a special constitutional power to pass a law without a vote at parliament.

"We expect you to provide the guarantees needed to avoid another no-confidence vote," the party wrote in a letter to Bayrou.

A WEIGHTY PARTNER IN MACRON'S CENTRIST ALLIANCE

Bayrou leads the centrist Democratic Movement,

party officials guilty and sentenced the party to pay a fine.

Bayrou became well known to the French public when he was education minister from 1993 to 1997 in a conservative government.

Three times a presidential candidate

Bayrou was three times a candidate for president, in 2002, 2007 and 2012, which made him a familiar face in French politics.

His name had repeatedly surfaced as a potential prime minister in the past, but he was repeatedly passed over.

He is widely considered having helped lay the groundwork for Macron's rise to power

in 2017. Long before the French president upended the country's politics by crushing the traditional right and left, Bayrou tapped into voter frustration with entrenched conservative and Socialist camps.

A father of six and a practicing Catholic, Bayrou has played up his rural farming roots in the Pyrenees mountains, showing off his knowledge of tractors and cattle-raising — even while spending most of his time in the corridors of political power in Paris. **MDT/AP**

France is under pressure from the European Union's executive body and financial markets to reduce its colossal debt

known as MoDem, which he founded in 2007.

In 2017, he supported Macron's first presidential bid and became a weighty partner in the French president's centrist alliance.

At the time, he was appointed justice minister, but he quickly resigned from the government amid an investigation into the MoDem's alleged embezzlement of European Parliament funds.

He this year was cleared in the case by a Paris court, which found eight other

this day in history

1969: MPs VOTE TO ABOLISH HANGING



MPs have voted by a big majority for the permanent abolition of the death penalty for murder.

A great cheer went up in the Commons as the final result was announced shortly before midnight. The voting was 343 in favour, 185 against, a majority of 158, to permanently end hanging in Britain.

The decision came at the end of a seven-and-a-half hour debate which saw the Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, the Conservative leader, Edward Heath, and Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe go through the same lobby to support abolition.

Under the terms of the Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act 1965 hanging was suspended for an experimental period of five years. Today's result means it is now unlikely to be brought back.

Earlier, Tory MP for Streatham in south London, Duncan Sandys, presented a petition to parliament calling for the return of hanging. He claimed to have as many as a million signatures.

Home Secretary James Callaghan opened today's debate. He told a packed House the number of murders in Britain had varied between a low of 114 and a peak of 154 over the years between 1957 and 1968.

He concluded: "These figures show that the murder rate is not soaring as a result of the abolition of capital punishment but remains remarkably stable."

But there was criticism from Tory benches of the government's decision to press ahead with the debate before five year suspension laid down in the 1965 Act had expired.

The Opposition Spokesman on Home Affairs, Quintin Hogg, said although he could not prove it statistically, "there are people dead today who might have been alive if the law had been different."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The House of Lords voted two days later in favour of abolishing the death penalty. By a majority of 46, peers supported an end to hanging. An amendment which would have extended the suspension of capital punishment for a further three years was defeated.

It was clear peers' minds had been made up by the decision of all three party leaders in the Commons to vote for abolition. However, the death penalty was retained for offences like treason and piracy with violence until 1998. As a result the gallows remained in place at Wandsworth Prison. In 1999 the home secretary signed the sixth protocol of the European Convention of Human Rights which formally abolished the death penalty in the UK and ensured it could not be brought back. Figures for 2003 show there are 83 countries in the world which retain the death penalty.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

<p>ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Make connections despite delays. Travel and exploration reveal treasures, with Mercury direct today and for three months. Confirm reservations. Plan carefully and go.</p>	<p>TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Monitor markets. Shift as needed. Money, invoices and payments flow faster, with Mercury direct now. Find opportunity in changes. Sign contracts. Negotiate deals.</p>
<p>GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Nurture yourself. Partnership misunderstandings diminish. Communication clarifies naturally, with Mercury direct today. Express what you appreciate. Connect more deeply.</p>	<p>CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Relax. A physical obstacle dissolves. It's easier to concentrate and communicate, with Mercury direct for three months. Traffic flows again. Discover health solutions.</p>
<p>LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Adapt around social changes. Listen to your muses. Express yourself creatively, with Mercury direct. Practice your persuasive arts. Share your passion, possibilities and affection.</p>	<p>VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Collaborate and strategize. Adapt around professional challenges. Family communications clarify, with Mercury direct. Share your visions. Determine domestic improvements. Clean messes. Discuss possibilities.</p>
<p>LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Creative efforts leap forward, despite travel complications. You're especially brilliant, with Mercury direct. Sign papers. Post and publish your views. Communicate and connect.</p>	<p>SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Financial challenges reorient. Transactions flow again, with Mercury direct. It's easier to discuss money. Confusion diminishes noticeably. Barriers dissolve. Make deals and bargains.</p>
<p>SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Listen powerfully. It's easier to resolve misunderstandings, with Mercury direct in your sign. Serve as a translator for others who don't get each other.</p>	<p>CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Consider dreams. Maintain healthy practices and routines. Words and traffic flow better, with Mercury direct for three months. Keep a journal. Plan and strategize.</p>
<p>AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Nurture a broken heart. Communication barriers evaporate. Team coordination aligns naturally, with Mercury direct. Background noise quiets and you can hear each other again.</p>	<p>PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Manage domestic changes patiently. It's easier to advance professionally, with Mercury direct. Brainstorming gets more productive and creative again. Discuss possibilities. Develop opportunities.</p>

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-3	7	fine
Changchun	-16	-8	fine
Chengdu	0	12	fine
Chongqing	3	12	fine
Fuzhou	8	17	fine
Guangzhou	8	19	fine
Guiyang	0	13	fine
Haikou	13	19	cloudy
Hangzhou	0	13	fine
Harbin	-20	-13	fine
Hefei	-4	13	fine
Nanjing	-1	12	fine
Shanghai	2	10	fine
Taipei	12	16	overcast
Wuhan	-3	15	fine
Hong Kong	18	19	sunny
WORLD			
Moscow	-2	-1	snow
Frankfurt	7	10	showers
Paris	7	11	cloudy
London	7	11	cloudy
New York	9	10	showers

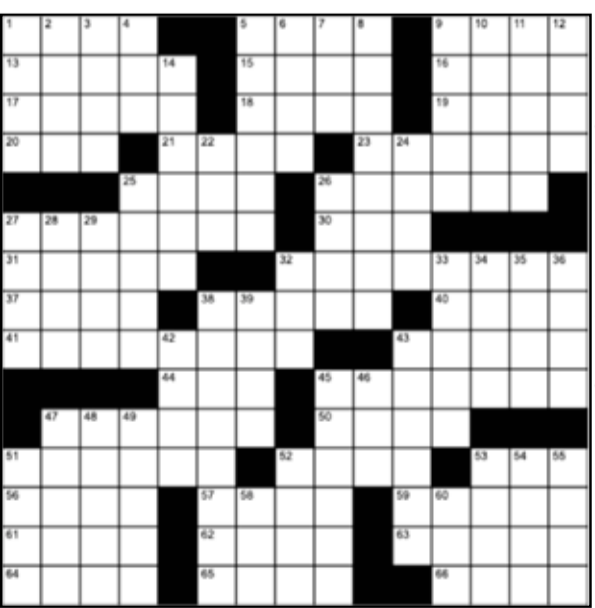
CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Struggle for air; 5- Auctioneer's cry; 9- Venetian blind part; 13- Young hooter; 15- Shot, briefly; 16- Pitchfork part; 17- River that flows through Paris; 18- Singer k.d.; 19- I cannot tell ___; 20- DDE's predecessor; 21- On ___ with; 23- Pester; 25- Exploitative one; 26- Compel by intimidation; 27- Room for infants; 30- Ben-___; 31- Shed ___; 32- Petrol; 37- Told; 38- Speechify; 40- Bustles; 41- Good spirits; 43- Cream-filled cookies; 44- CIO's partner; 45- Highest singing voice in women; 47- Deadly fly; 50- One hunted; 51- Dough; 52- Sideways look; 53- ___ Tin Tin; 56- Sigmund's daughter; 57- Predictive sign; 59- Rock concert venue; 61- ERA, for one; 62- Tear; 63- Have a feeling about; 64- Ripped; 65- CPR experts; 66- Lows;

DOWN 1- Gee whizz!; 2- Amazes; 3- Narrow opening; 4- Farm enclosure; 5- Payment for regular work; 6- Actor Sharif; 7- K-O connection; 8- Shelter for a canine; 9- Belle or Bart; 10- Light purple; 11- Licorice-like flavoring; 12- Summer shirts; 14- One making fun; 22- Apiece; 24- Flying start?; 25- Grammarian's concern; 26- FDR's fireside ___; 27- Pusher pursuer; 28- Bryce Canyon site; 29- Actor Auberjonois; 32- Lass; 33- King of CNN; 34- Creative thought; 35- Lunch time, often; 36- Exxon predecessor; 38- Seaward; 39- Govern; 42- Pro ___; 43- Musical dramas; 45- Uses money; 46- Galena or bauxite; 47- Scout master?; 48- Sub detector; 49- Gladden; 51- Sail support; 52- Fast time; 53- Gambling mecca; 54- Not ___ many words; 55- Scottish refusals; 58- 13th letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 60- Sleep acronym;

Friday's solution

SLAM	TESA	ECHO
TALE	ANOTE	SAAB
AIMS	STAIN	OLIO
GRASSHOPPER	IRE	
TRAT	RIFF	
BISTRG	SOSOON	
TEM	EARTH	FROR
ELMS	YEARS	ANTA
ALDON	ADULT	ION
AROARD	GERMAN	
INRI	NEO	
TEL	CONSIDERATE	
RBIS	DIODE	GIRL
OOZE	ENTER	ULEE
SNEE	ASA	ESSE



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- 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
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Nam Long (Taipa Village)
2 bed 1 bath
59.92 m² / 645 ft² | HKD3,650,000



Jade Garden (Taipa)
4 bed 3 bath
379.04 m² / 4,080 ft² | HKD 11,880,000



Ocean Garden Cattleya Court (Taipa)
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BASKETBALL

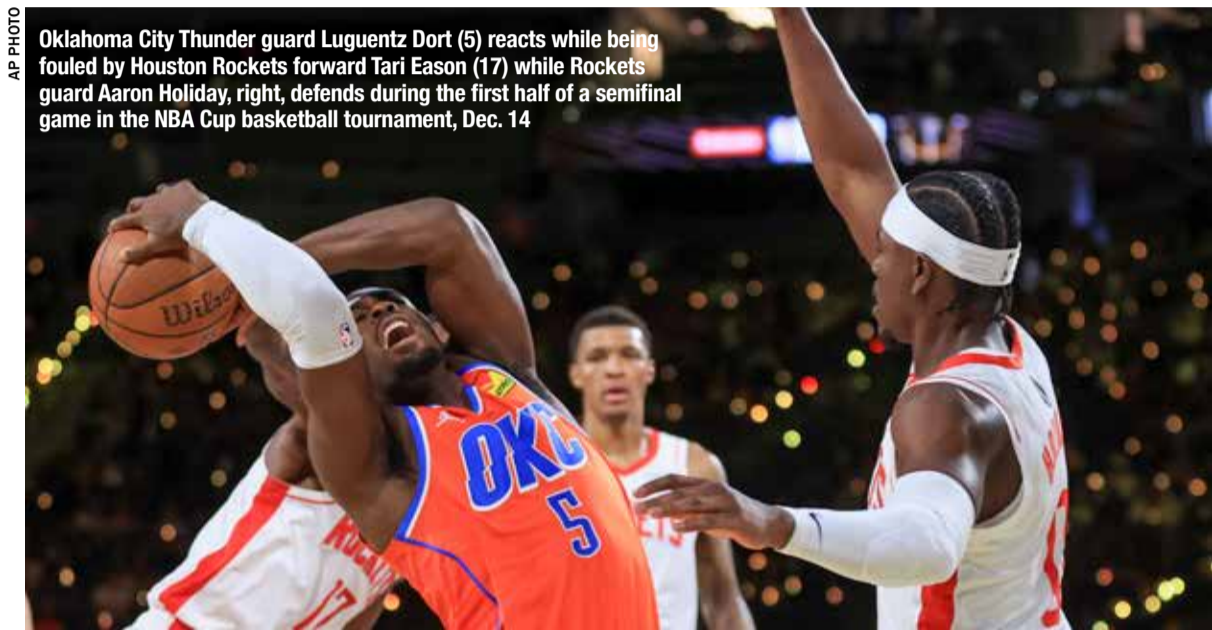
Rockets-Thunder NBA Cup semifinal was a clash of defense, and it was predictable

TIM REYNOLDS, LAS VEGAS

It was midway through the third quarter of the Oklahoma City-Houston NBA Cup semifinal matchup on Saturday night. Thunder star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had just made a short jumper in the lane and, to his delight, a time-out was immediately called.

He needed it. He retreated to midcourt, crouched down, propped himself up by his fingertips and took deep breath after deep breath. It was that sort of night. And given the way the Rockets and Thunder have defended all season long, such a game was predictable.

In the end, it was Oklahoma City 111, Houston 96 in a game where the teams combined to shoot 41%. The immediate reward for the Thunder: two days off to recover. The bigger reward: a matchup with Milwaukee on Tuesday night for the NBA Cup, with more than \$300,000 per player the difference between winning and losing.



AP PHOTO Oklahoma City Thunder guard Luguentz Dort (5) reacts while being fouled by Houston Rockets forward Tari Eason (17) while Rockets guard Aaron Holiday, right, defends during the first half of a semifinal game in the NBA Cup basketball tournament, Dec. 14

“That’s what defense does for you,” said Thunder coach Mark Daigneault, whose team has held opponents to 41% shooting or worse a league-best 11 times this season — and is 11-0 in those games. “It keeps you in games.”

The Rockets-Thunder semifinal was basketball, with elements of football, rugby, hockey and proba-

bly even some wrestling thrown in. It wasn’t unusual. It’s how they play: defense-first, tough, gritty, physical.

They are the two top teams in the NBA in terms of field-goal percentage defense — Oklahoma City came in at 42.7%, Houston at 43.4% — and entered the night as two of the top three in scoring defense. Orlando led entering Saturday at 103.7

per game, Oklahoma City was No. 2 at 103.8, Houston No. 3 at 105.9. (The Thunder, by holding Houston to 96, passed the Magic for the top spot on Saturday.)

Houston finished 36.5% from the field, its second-worst showing of the season. When the Rockets shoot 41% or better, they’re 17-4. When they don’t, they’re 0-5.

“Sometimes it comes down to making shots,” Rockets coach Ime Udoka said. “Especially in the first half, we guarded well enough. ... But you put a lot of pressure on your defense when you’re not making shots.”

Even though scoring across the NBA is down slightly so far this season, about a point per game behind last season’s pace and two points from the pace of the 2022-23 season, it’s still a golden age for offense in the league. Consider: Boston scored 51 points in a quarter earlier this season.

Saturday was not like most games. The halftime score: Rockets 42, Thunder 41. Neither team crossed the 50-point mark until Dillon Brooks’ 3-pointer for Houston gave the Rockets a 51-45 lead with 8:46 left in the third quarter.

Brooks is generally considered one of the game’s tougher defenders. Gilgeous-Alexander is one of the game’s best scorers. They’re teammates on Canada’s national team, and they had some 1-on-1 moments on Saturday. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

The Conversation

Libby Richards, Purdue University



WHY WINTER MAKES YOU MORE VULNERABLE TO COLDS

You've probably heard "Don't go outside in the winter with your hair wet or without a coat; you'll catch a cold."

That's not exactly true. As with many things, the reality is more complicated. Here's the distinction: Being cold isn't why you get a cold. But it is true that cold weather makes it easier to catch respiratory viruses such as the cold and flu.

Research also shows that lower temperatures are associated with higher COVID-19 rates.

As a professor of nursing with a background in public health, I'm often asked about infectious disease spread, including the relationship between cold and catching a cold. So here's a look at what actually happens.

Many viruses, including rhinovirus – the usual culprit for the common cold – influenza, and SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, remain infectious longer and replicate faster in colder temperatures and at lower humidity levels. This, coupled with the fact that people spend more time indoors and in close contact with others during cold weather, are common reasons that germs are more likely to spread.

The flu and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, tend to have a defined fall and winter seasonality. However, because of the emergence of new COVID-19 variants and immunity from previous infections and vaccinations decreasing over time, COVID-19 is not the typical cold-weather respiratory virus. As a case in point, COVID-19 infection rates have surged every summer since 2020.

More specifically, cold weather can change the outer membrane of the influenza virus, making it more solid and rubbery. Scientists believe that the rubbery coating makes person-to-person transmission of the virus easier.

It's not just cold winter air that causes a problem. Air that is dry in addition to cold has been linked to flu outbreaks. That's because dry winter air further helps the influenza virus to remain infectious longer. Dry air, which is common in the winter, causes the water found in respiratory droplets to evaporate more quickly. This results in smaller particles, which are capable of lasting longer and traveling farther after you cough or sneeze.

How your immune system responds during cold weather also matters a great deal. Inhaling cold air may adversely affect the immune response in your respiratory tract, which makes it easier for viruses to take hold. That's why wearing a scarf over your nose and mouth may help prevent a cold because it warms the air that you inhale.

Also, most people get less sunlight in the winter. That is a problem because the sun is a major source of vitamin D, which is essential for immune system health. Physical activity, another factor, also tends to drop during the winter. People are three times more likely to delay exercise in snowy or icy conditions.

Instead, people spend more time indoors. That usually means more close contact with others, which leads to disease spread. Respiratory viruses generally spread within a 6-foot radius of an infected person.

In addition, cold temperatures and low humidity dry out your eyes and the mucous membranes in your nose and throat. Because viruses that cause colds, flu and COVID-19 are typically inhaled, the virus can attach more easily to these impaired, dried-out passages. [Abridged]

HUGE AND RARE MEKONG CATFISH SPOTTED IN CAMBODIA, RAISING CONSERVATION HOPES

THE BUZZ

Six critically endangered Mekong giant catfish — one of the largest and rarest freshwater fish in the world — were caught and released recently in Cambodia, reviving hopes for the survival of the species.

The underwater giants can grow up to 10 feet long and weigh up to 300 kilograms (661 pounds), or as heavy as a grand piano. They now are only found in Southeast Asia's Mekong River but in the past inhabited the length of the 4,900-kilometer-long river, all the way from its outlet in Vietnam to its northern reaches in China's Yunnan province.

The species' population has plummeted by 80% in recent decades due to rising pressures from overfishing, dams that block the migratory path the fish follow to spawn and other disruptions.

Few of the millions of people who depend on the Mekong for their livelihoods have ever seen a giant catfish. To find six of the giants, which were caught and released within 5 days, is unprecedented.



AP PHOTO South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung

SOUTH KOREAN LEADERS SEEK CALM AFTER YOON IS IMPEACHED

HYUNG-JIN KIM & KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

SOUTH Korea's opposition leader offered yesterday to work with the government to ease the political tumult as officials sought to reassure allies and markets, a day after the opposition-controlled parliament voted to impeach conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol over a short-lived attempt to impose martial law.

Liberal Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, whose party holds a majority in the National Assembly, urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on Yoon's impeachment and proposed a special council for policy cooperation between the government and parliament.

Yoon's powers have been suspended until the court decides whether to remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Lee, who has led a fierce political offensive against Yoon's embattled government, is seen as the frontrunner to replace him. He lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by a razor-thin margin.

He told a televised news conference that a

swift court ruling would be the only way to "minimize national confusion and the suffering of people."

The court will meet to discuss the case Monday, and has up to 180 days to rule. But observers say that a court ruling could come faster. In the case of parliamentary impeachments of past presidents — Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016 — the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park.

Lee also proposed a national council where the government and the National Assembly would work together to stabilize state affairs, and said his party won't seek to impeach Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, a Yoon appointee who's now serving as acting president.

"The Democratic Party will actively cooperate with all parties to stabilize state affairs and restore international trust," Lee said. "The National Assembly and government will work together to quickly resolve the crisis that has swept across the Republic of Korea."

It's unclear if Lee's proposed council will be realized.

In a meeting with the parliament speaker, who touched upon Lee's idea, Han said he will closely

cooperate and communicate with the National Assembly but didn't specifically say whether the government intends to join the council. Kweon Seong-dong, floor leader of the ruling People Power Party, separately criticized Lee's proposal, saying that it's "not right" for the opposition party acting like the ruling party.

Kweon, a Yoon loyalist, said that his party will use existing PPP-government dialogue channels "to continue to assume responsibility as the governing party until the end of President Yoon's term."

The Democratic Party has already used its parliamentary majority to impeach the justice minister and the chief of the national police over the martial law decree, and had previously said it was also considering impeaching the prime minister.

Yesterday, Han had a phone call with U.S. President Joe Biden, discussing the political situation in South Korea and regional security challenges including North Korea's nuclear program. Biden expressed his appreciation for the resiliency of democracy in South Korea and reaffirmed "the ironclad commitment" of the United States, according to both governments. MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

US Inclement weather plagued areas of the U.S. in the first half of the weekend, with dangerous conditions including heavy snow in upstate New York, a major ice storm in Midwest states, severe weather warnings around Lake Tahoe and unusual tornado activity in Central California.



AP PHOTO

US The suspect in the killing of UnitedHealthcare's CEO has added a prominent defense lawyer to his legal team as Manhattan prosecutors work to return him from Pennsylvania to face a murder charge. Luigi Mangione will be represented by Karen Friedman Agnifilo (pictured), who was a high-ranking deputy in the Manhattan district attorney's office for years before entering private practice.



AP PHOTO

France At least 11 people have died after Cyclone Chido caused devastating damage in the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean. France's Interior Ministry said yesterday. The ministry said it was proving difficult to get a precise tally of the dead and injured amid fears the death toll will increase.



AP PHOTO

UN-Syria The United Nations special envoy for Syria yesterday called for a quick end to Western sanctions after the ouster of President Bashar Assad. The government has been under strict sanctions by the United States, European Union and others for years as a result of Assad's brutal response to what began as peaceful anti-government protests in 2011.