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**A TRAFFIC INCIDENT OCCURRED YESTERDAY WHEN A PRIVATE CAR REAR-ENDED A BUS, LEAVING THE FEMALE DRIVER OF THE CAR UNRESPONSIVE AT THE SCENE**

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**NEW COLLABORATION MODEL BETWEEN GAMING OPERATORS AND JUNKETS**

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**THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SANDWICH-CLASS HOUSING PROJECT IN IAO HON WILL START THURSDAY, MARKING THE FIRST URBAN RENEWAL PILOT INITIATIVE BY THE GOV'T**

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AP PHOTO



**Hong Kong** A pair of five-year-old pandas, named An An and Ke Ke, celebrated their first Christmas early in a park yesterday. An An, the male panda, was presented with an ice slab that had "Merry Christmas" written on it with sweet potato and carrots while Ke Ke got a snowman garnished with slices of carrot and apple.

AP PHOTO



**Japan's** beloved former Emperor Akihito marked his 91st birthday yesterday, as he continues to pursue his lifetime research into goby fish, care for his wife and pray for peace. Akihito, who abdicated in 2019 and handed over the Chrysanthemum throne to his son, Emperor Naruhito, now holds the title of Emperor Emeritus.

AP PHOTO



**Australia-US** Former U.S. Marine Corps pilot Daniel Duggan will be extradited from Australia to the United States over allegations that he illegally trained Chinese aviators. Australia's Attorney General Mark Dreyfus approved the extradition yesterday, ending the Boston-born 55-year-old's nearly two-year attempt to avoid being returned to the U.S.

AP PHOTO



**Brazil** Santa Claus braved the sticky heat of the Amazon rainforest, taking two boats to bring gifts to children in a village near Manaus. The visit was arranged by Amigos do Papai Noel, a Brazilian charity that has been taking gifts to children in the Amazon rainforest for the past 26 years.

# XI'S VISION, CE'S COMMITMENT

To uphold Xi Jinping's directives is foremost task for gov't, says Sam Hou Fai as the president urges for economic shift

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**TOURISM**  
**FRUITFUL YEAR FOR VISITOR FIGURES**

**MERRY AND BRIGHT**  
**CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS AS CITY MARKS ITS MILESTONES**



# Xi urges economic shift as city inaugurates

**C**HINESE President Xi Jinping urged the casino hub to diversify its economy as Sam Hou Fai was sworn in as the city's new Chief Executive Friday at an event marking the 25th anniversary of Macau's handover to China.

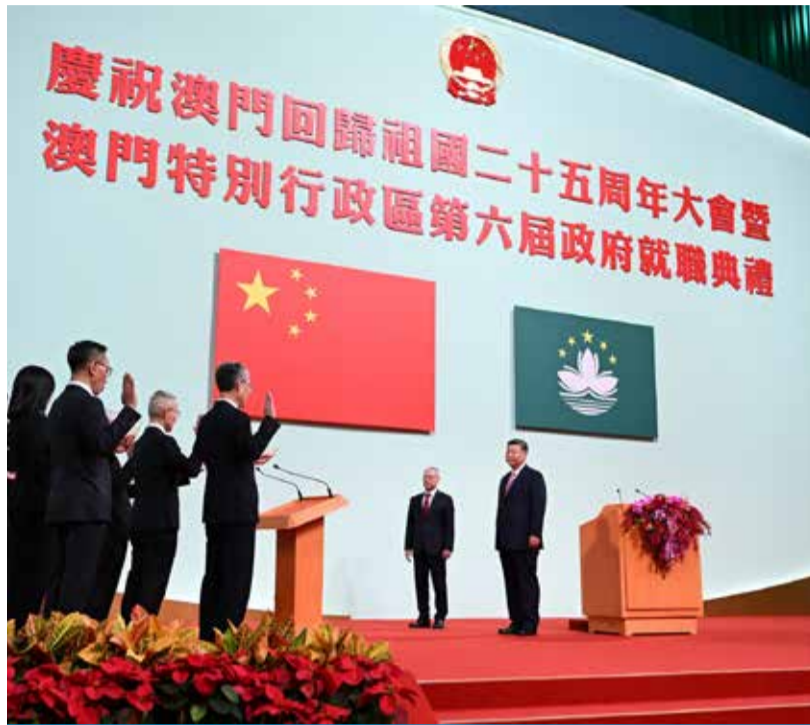
Since its 1999 handover, the city of 687,000 has evolved from a monopoly-driven gambling enclave into the world's largest gaming hub, drawing hordes of tourists from mainland China.

The casino boom has improved living standards, but authorities are concerned the semi-autonomous city's economy is unhealthily dependent on the industry.

Economically, from 1999 to 2024, Macau has witnessed its most prosperous era, marked by rapid development, an improved quality of life, and enhanced fulfillment and happiness for its residents.

Macau's GDP per capita was ranked around 40th globally in 1999. Now Macau is the second-richest place in the world after Luxembourg, according to a Forbes magazine ranking of the world's richest countries and regions.

During a gala dinner last week, Xi praised Macau's progress on economic diversification over the past five



years and its strengthened international influence.

He called for the city to expand its international role while attracting global talent to build a better Macau.

Xi said Friday the city should enhance its industrial development planning, strengthen policy support and boost investment to nurture internationally competitive new industries, in what observers said were

stronger and more specific comments than before.

"The special administrative region's government and all sectors of society have to show more care to young people and create a better environment and conditions for their growth, talent development and fulfilling their aspirations," he said.

Sam has promised to accelerate plans to boost tourism and other

sectors such as Chinese medicine, finance, tech, exhibitions and commerce.

Although political activism has never seriously challenged Beijing in Macau, authorities have tightened control in recent years, particularly after Hong Kong was rocked by months of protests in 2019.

Last year, the city updated its national security law.

Xi said "national sovereignty, se-

curity and development interests are above all," while noting the need to safeguard the city's autonomy.

He said security is a precondition for development and residents should cherish their hard-won stability and peace.

Xi emphasized that over the past 25 years since Macau's return to China, significant progress has been made in advancing the 'One country, two systems' framework

# Sam Hou Fai sworn in, backed by Beijing's confidence

LYNZY VALLES

**N**EW Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai — Macau's first leader born in mainland China — was sworn in Dec. 20, as Macau's sixth-term Chief Executive during a ceremony presided over by President Xi Jinping.

This event coincided with the 25th anniversary of Macau's return to China.

The inauguration took place at the Macao East Asian Games Dome, attended by about 1,300 guests, including government officials and dignitaries.

In his inaugural speech, Sam expressed his "deep honor and responsibility" in assuming this role, emphasizing his commitment to leading the new

government team towards a future for Macau.

He articulated a vision grounded in the principles of "Striving Together, Upholding Integrity, and Innovating," which he believes will guide the administration in breaking new ground for the region.

Sam pledged to uphold this principle faithfully and ensure Macau remains a region where its people govern themselves with a high degree of autonomy.

He underscored the importance of maintaining constitutional order as outlined in both the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the Basic Law of Macau.

Additionally, he vowed to strengthen patriotic education and enhance mechanisms for safeguarding



national security while improving Macau's legal framework.

The new leader of the city has vowed to address the territory's unbalanced and uncoordinated economic development.

Addressing social issues, Sam said he is committed to enhancing residents' livelihoods through practical solutions in

areas like healthcare, social security, elderly care, childcare, transportation and urban renewal.

He believes that by leveraging the SAR's unique advantages, the region can better serve national interests while integrating into broader developmental frameworks like the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Moreover, he expressed an intention to bolster Macau's role as a bridge between China and Portuguese-speaking countries while actively participating in national initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

He aims to cultivate top talent in science and technology sectors to position Macau as an international hub for skilled professionals.

Sam called for fostering social consensus around branding Macau as "law-based," "vibrant," "cultural," and "blissful."

Meanwhile, President Xi Jinping said the central government will fully support Sam and the new SAR government in fulfilling its duties.

He expressed his confidence in Sam's ability to

fulfill his duties conscientiously and live up to the responsibilities entrusted to him.

During the ceremony, Xi emphasized the importance of uniting all sectors of society under Sam's leadership to uphold the principles of 'One country, two systems' and "Macau people governing Macau," while ensuring a high degree of autonomy and safeguarding national interests.

Xi called for a robust advancement of a diversified economy in Macau, urging the new administration to enhance the well-being of its citizens and utilize Macau's unique advantages to integrate more effectively into China's broader development strategy.

He also highlighted the need for deeper international cooperation, encouraging Sam to contribute significantly to Macau's growth.

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# new Chief Executive



tailored to Macau's unique characteristics.

He highlighted the remarkable transformation the region has undergone and its enhanced international standing.

Xi hoped for the new government to unite and lead the diverse population in seizing opportunities, driving reforms, and fulfilling responsibilities to contribute even more.

This involved further utilizing the strengths of the 'One country, two systems' model and achieving new milestones in its high-quality development.

"We must stay committed to this cause. The values embodied in the cause of 'One country, two systems,' namely, peace, inclusiveness, openness and sharing, are relevant to not only China but also the whole world. These values should be che-

rished by us all," Xi said.

Xi also expressed four hopes for the newly inaugurated government: first, to promote appropriate economic diversification; second, to enhance governance as a special administrative region; third, to establish a platform for higher standards of openness; and fourth, to maintain social harmony and stability.

Further, Xi said the youth repre-

sent the hope and future of the region, describing them as a dynamic force in both the development of Macau and the broader advancement of China.

He hoped young people will cherish their connection to both the Special Administrative Region and the motherland.

Xi encouraged them to set ambitious goals, take meaningful action, and contribute to the development

of the region. By doing so, he believes they can unlock their potential and play a vital role in building a prosperous motherland and a vibrant Macau.

With Beijing's policy agenda now dominating Macau's development, the casino hub is deepening economic links and social integration with neighboring Guangdong province.

China has designated a special zone on Hengqin Island in neighboring Zhuhai city, jointly run by Guangdong and Macau, to help foster new industries. That zone is planned to have about 120,000 Macau residents by 2035.

Xi said Macau must participate proactively in the Greater Bay Area initiative, which Beijing aims to link Macau, Hong Kong and nine other Guangdong cities into an economic powerhouse.

Xi concluded his three-day trip in Macau Friday.

During his stay, he visited the Macau University of Science and Technology and the special zone on Hengqin Island, and attended a lavish cultural performance.

He also met Macau's former city leaders and Hong Kong's Chief Executive, among others.

After seeing Xi off at the airport, Sam told reporters he pledged to face challenges head-on and be bold in action, saying his government would be clean, practical and close to its people. **LV/AGENCIES**

## CE: GOVERNMENT'S FOREMOST TASK IS TO UPHOLD XI'S SPEECHES

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Chief Executive (CE), Sam Hou Fai, has said that studying, upholding, and implementing the spirit of President Xi Jinping's speeches during his visit is the foremost task for all sectors in Macau and the administration team.

Sam was speaking during a government symposium Saturday (Dec. 21) about studying, promoting, and implementing President Xi's speeches.

At the same opportunity, the CE said this is the government's most important political mission now and in the future.

"President Xi's insightful and profound remarks during his visit to Macau have set the direction for the future development," Sam said.

The symposium, held at the China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform Complex, was attended by about 650 participants.



These included the vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Edmund Ho; director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the MSAR, Zheng Xincong; former Chief Executives, Chui Sai On and Ho Iat Seng; Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

in the MSAR, Liu Xianfa; Commander of the Macao Garrison of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, Yu Changjiang; and personnel from the representative offices of the Central government in Macau, persons-in-charge of the executive, legislative, and judicial authorities of the MSAR Government, and members of various sectors in Macau.

During the sympo-

sium, the CE said, regarding Xi's speeches, the government will seize opportunities, reform with determination, and fulfill its responsibilities to better leverage the institutional advantages of 'One country, two systems.'

Sam reviewed President Xi's speeches, noting they were connected to history, the present reality, and the future, scientifically addressing

major theoretical and practical issues.

First, to fulfill the mission of safeguarding national security with a stronger sense of responsibility, to be well prepared and equipped for adverse situations, and to make the best effort to safeguard against all kinds of risk, thereby maintaining prosperity and stability.

Second, the government will enhance its

administrative effectiveness by deepening reform and innovation.

Third, the government will adhere to the principle of putting people first and make every effort to improve people's livelihoods.

Fourth, the government will more diligently promote appropriate economic diversification.

Fifth, the government will take a more proactive approach to facilitate overall national development.

Sixth, the government will focus on youth work.

Also speaking at the symposium, Director Zheng shared his six learning experiences on studying, promoting, and implementing the spirit of President Xi's speeches.

He hoped all sectors in Macau could treat studying, promoting, and implementing the spirit of President Xi's series of speeches as their long-term commitment, integrate them into real life and deepen and broaden the interpretation and promotion.



**TOURISM**

# FRUITFUL YEAR FOR VISITOR FIGURES, ALL GOALS SHOULD BE REACHED

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HIS year was fruitful for visitor figures, with the goals set by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) all being achieved or within close reach, statistics show.

MGTO's goal was for at least 33 million visitors, including at least 2 million international visitors.

Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) figures for November note the 2 million international visitors goal has already been surpassed.

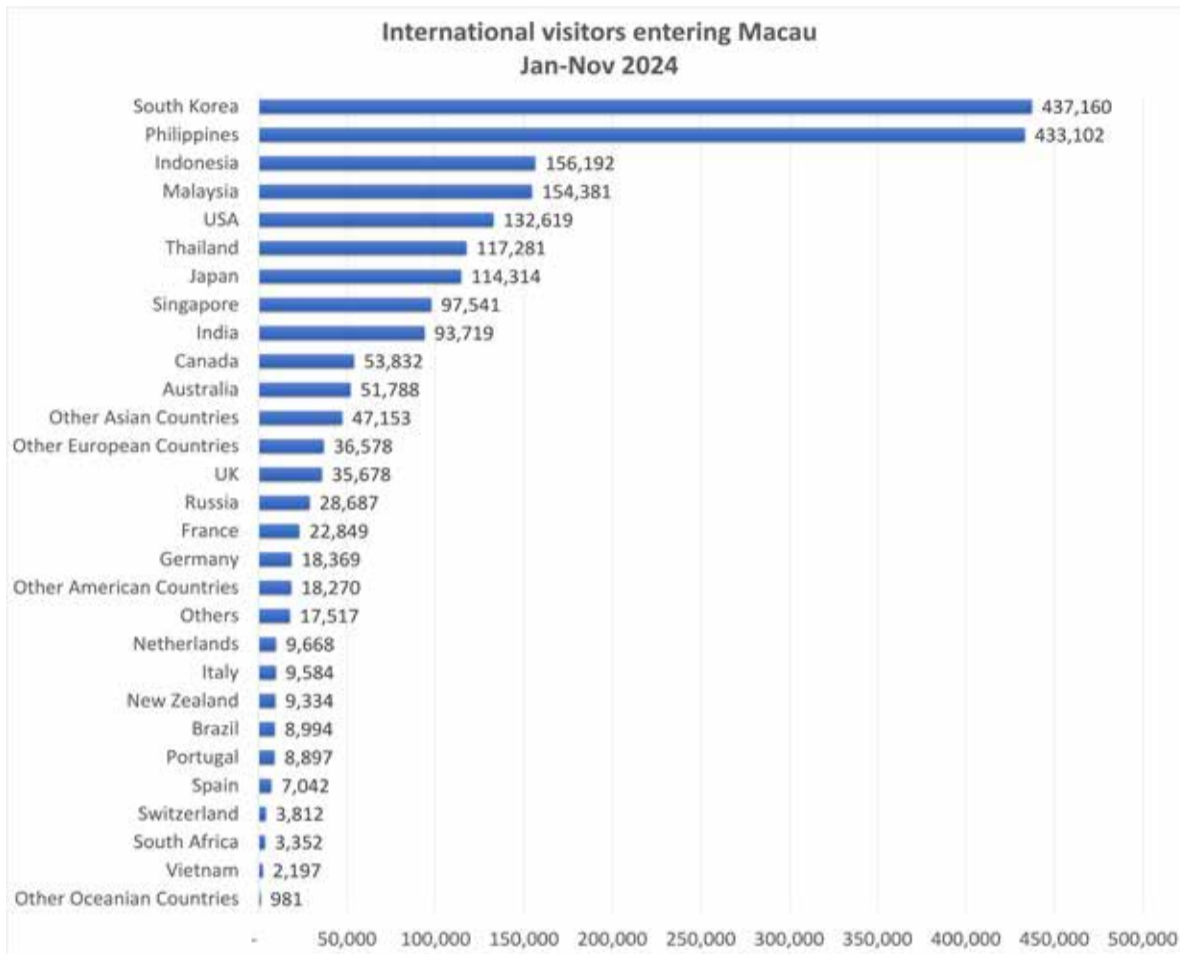
By the end of November, 2,130,891 international visitors had arrived, including notably those from South Korea (437,160), the Philippines (433,102) and Indonesia (156,192).

Visitors from South Asian countries increased this year due to the resumption of many flight routes not only at the Macau International Airport but also at the Hong Kong International Airport.

These figures, as the Times has previously reported, include visitors from the Philippines and Indonesia, two major markets of non-resident workers (TNR) to Macau and the neighboring region of Hong Kong.

Like last year, non-resident workers were significantly represented among international visitors, especially those working in Hong Kong. Because of proximity as well as visa requirements, Macau has historically been the preferred destination after departing Hong Kong while waiting for working permit renewals, the so-called "U-turns."

The same happens as new workers have been recruited to fill vacant posts in Macau.



The new law on hiring non-resident workers does not allow a person entering Macau on a tourism visa to apply for a work visa while in the territory.

These workers must remain outside Macau while awaiting their blue card. They stay in Hong Kong or, in many cases currently, the mainland.

At the same time, these type of "visitors" account for the growth of same-day visitors.

Still, there were significant increases for visitors from other countries such as Malaysia (154,381), which doubled in the first 11 months of this year when compared to the same period last year.

Visitors from the USA (132,619) accounted for significant growth of about 64%

year-on-year, while European visitors recorded increases ranging between 36.4% (UK)

and 136.9% (Russia). In general, the international visitor figure is 74.5% hi-

gher than last year.

## GENERAL VISITOR ON THE VERGE OF BEING REACHED

According to DSEC, at the end of November, 31,888,313 people had visited Macau, 1.1 million short of the forecasted 33 million.

Considering the monthly visitor average was 2.9 million, it is likely this year will end with close to 35 million visitors, that is, about 6% higher than the forecast.

For the time being, the government has only admitted to having reviewed the forecast to as many as 34 million.

The average length of stay for visitors in November remained steady at 1.2 days.

According to the most recent figures related to the days starting on Macau handover day (Dec. 20) and until Sunday (Dec. 22), there was a progressively high number of visitors entering Macau.

On Dec. 20, 77,033 visitors entered Macau, followed by 110,484 on the following day (Dec. 21) and 124,518 on Sunday (Dec. 22).

## LAWMAKER CALLS TO OPTIMIZE TOUR ROUTES

**I**N recent months there has been a significant increase in visitor arrivals, with numbers surpassing 30 million in November, reaching approximately 87% of pre-pandemic levels. The average daily arrival rate currently stands at about 95,000.

This surge coincides with the upcoming relaxation of travel restrictions for residents of Zhuhai and Hengqin. However, disparities in recovery across different regions of Macau remain evident.

In response to the rising visi-

tor numbers, the government is focusing on expanding tourist sources and enhancing tourism infrastructure to support sustainable growth. Recent policy changes, including Zhuhai's "one trip per week" initiative and Hengqin's "one visa, multiple entries" plan, are expected to further boost visitor numbers. "Residents of Zhuhai and Macau have always had close exchanges," said lawmaker Zheng Anting.

Despite these positive developments, challenges persist.

Zheng expressed concerns in a written inquiry to the Legislative Assembly (AL), stating, "Merchants in Macau's North District have reported business losses due to shifts in consumer behavior." Local leaders are urging the government to optimize "in-depth tour" routes and improve transportation connections to enhance tourist experiences. Additionally, as visitor numbers rise, Zheng called on authorities to address customs clearance efficiency at busy ports like Border Gate and Qingmao Port.

# Decorative items suspected cause of Ritz fire

**D**ECORATIVE lanterns placed at the façade of the Ritz Building in Senado Square are the suspected cause of the fire that erupted in the early hours of Dec. 21, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has said.

The small fire of caused nonstructural damage to the building, which is part of the Macau Historical Center's listed heritage,

said the IC.

In the past few months, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), which oversees the building, has been placing decorative items related to Macau's MGTO mascot, Mak Mak, on the façade as well as on the building's rooftop.

One of these decorative items caught fire and

the fire's heat and black smoke damaged the exterior walls, said the IC report.

IC staff who inspected the site found no severe or structural damage.

The bureau has said it will coordinate the repair work on the building's exterior walls to ensure the listed building is kept in good condition. **RM**



RENATO MARQUES



## Free ferry rides and sea cruise for the 25th Anniversary

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of Macau's return to China, complimentary ferry rides were offered Dec. 23 between the Inner Harbour, Zhuhai and Wan Chai. Additionally, local bus fares were waived Dec. 20, along with fares for eight sea cruises.

The ferry service commenced 9 a.m., drawing large crowds at the Inner Harbour Pier eager to take advantage of the offer.

"We organized a group of ten to take the ferry to have lunch in Wan Chai," said one older passenger, who expressed hope for more such opportunities.

Mainland tourists also seized the chance to enjoy free rides.

One family visiting Macau for the first

time said, "It's convenient to travel between the mainland and Macau, and these free rides benefit everyone."

Another local echoed this sentiment, adding, "I hope there will be more discounts to attract more people to Macau."

Along with the ferry service, Yuetong Shipping launched eight free sea cruises Dec. 22 and 23 to commemorate the anniversary.

Departing from A-Ma Pier, each 1.5-hour voyage took passengers to the Science Museum before returning.

Due to high demand, the shipping company increased the number of cruises from five to eight, distributing 160 tickets. NS

### SPORTS

# Tennis legends unite for 2024 MGM Tennis Masters

VICTORIA CHAN

THE "2024 MGM Macau Tennis Masters" begins today with two days of competition featuring a fresh team-based format that brings together global legends and top-ranked players.

In the lead-up to the tournament, players have embraced Macau's cultural heritage and community spirit, uniting sports, culture and tourism to spark excitement across the city.

The festivities commenced with a Tennis Clinic at the Macau Tennis Academy, where icons Li Na and Karolina Muchova mentored junior tennis players aged nine to 18.

Many of these budding talents, already champions in the Greater Bay Area, had the extraordinary opportunity to hone their skills alongside international stars.

"I cherish this rare opportunity to play with the legends. I am truly amazed at their proficient skills and try to catch their actions up close in detail to enhance my skills," said one young participant.

VICTORIA CHAN



The public engagement bonanza continued yesterday morning at the iconic A-ma Temple.

Li Na, Michael Chang, Wang Xinyu, and Karolina Muchova, along with some junior tennis talents from the day before, showcased their skills in a lively Mini Tennis exhibition, bringing the joy of tennis closer to fans and fostering tennis popularity in the local community.

The quartet then visited Barra Kitchen to savor several snacks reflecting Macau's rich culinary heritage as a UNESCO-designated "City of Gastronomy," including the iconic Por-

tuguese tarts and mango mochi.

The "2024 MGM Macau Tennis Masters" officially starts at 1 p.m. today at the Macau Forum, with the much-anticipated Captain's Skills Challenge, which will set the stage for a friendly yet competitive rivalry between Team Li Na and Team Michael Chang.

The opening day will feature two men's singles matches as well as a mixed doubles match.

Two lucky fans will be chosen to participate in the Captain's Skills Challenge, adding to the festive and community-driven spirit.

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GAMING

# NEW COLLABORATION MODEL BETWEEN GAMING OPS, JUNKETS

**T**HE gaming industry is witnessing the emergence of a new partnership model between gaming concessionaires and junkets.

According to an interview with Ming Pao Hong Kong newspaper, U Io Hung, the president of the Macau Gaming Promoter Professionals Association, "The past two months have seen this trend take form and are projected to persist."

He emphasized that junkets are expected to play a larger role in the management of these gaming establishments.

Under revised regulations, each junket—officially termed a gaming intermediary—can partner with only one concessionaire and is barred from operating its own VIP rooms. This shift marks large shift in the junket model, which previously relied on revenue sharing. Instead, junkets now earn commissions for promotional services, capped at 1.25% of rolling chip turnover, and are prohibited from extending credit to gamblers.

This fresh collaboration model between gaming concessionaires and junkets has already undergone trial runs at two venues operated by Galaxy Entertainment Group and Melco Resorts & Entertainment, with the results being "very positive," according to U.



"The results from this new model so far have been very positive," he remarked, indicating that integrated operations could significantly enhance business for junkets.

The number of licensed junkets in Macau has fluctuated dramatically, dropping from a peak of 235 in 2013 to just 23 by December 2024.

Despite this decline, U expressed optimism about the future, stating that ongoing discussions with the Macau government aim to improve conditions for junkets

amid a transforming industry landscape.

The government has set a limit for 2025 on the number of junkets the city's six gaming operators can partner with, restricting it to 50, the same cap as the current year.

U, who leads one of the licensed junkets, announced they are in talks with the government to improve the operational environment for junkets, acknowledging that the local gaming industry is "undergoing transformation." NS/TC

IAO HON

# Construction begins on sandwich-class housing project

NADIA SHAW

**C**ONSTRUCTION on the first sandwich-class housing project in Iao Hon will likely begin Dec. 26, according to the Public Works Bureau (DSOP).

The project, located near the Soi Lei Building on Rua Oito, will divert existing pipes and improve soil conditions in the area surrounding the intermediate housing project.

"This is a crucial step in enhancing the infrastructure for our community," said Si Kun Hong, vice chairman of the New Chinese Youth Association.

The project is part of the government's urban renewal initiative, which began with work consigned in November.

The site has already been secured, with signs placed about 2.5 meters

from Rua Sete to protect adjacent historic buildings during construction.

The pipe diversion and soil improvement will unfold in three stages over four months, with a third-party entity monitoring the surrounding structures and roads for safety.

As construction progresses, warnings have been made that some street access near the Son Lei Building will be temporarily narrowed.

DSOP officials have organized clarification sessions with residents to foster understanding and collaboration throughout this period.

"We hope the community will support this vital development," added Si Kun Hong, emphasizing its potential to revitalize the area and bolster economic growth in Iao Hon.



## DRIVER DIES AFTER CAR COLLIDES WITH BUS

**A** 55-year-old woman tragically lost her life yesterday when her car rear-ended a bus around 4 p.m. at the intersection of Avenida de Veneslau de Morais in Macau, as confirmed by authorities last night.

The Fire Services Bureau responded to reports of smoke at the scene, where initial investigations revealed that the bus had stopped to allow pedestrians to cross when it was struck. The collision caused the front of the private vehicle to catch fire.

The driver was found unresponsive at the scene and

was rushed to Conde S. Januário Hospital for emergency treatment. Reports indicate that she was not breathing upon the arrival of emergency services.

Additionally, two passengers on the bus sustained injuries and were also taken to the hospital for care.

The Public Security Police gathered evidence at the scene and suspect that the private car lost control and collided with the bus ahead. They are currently investigating the cause of the accident and urge any witnesses to contact the police with relevant information. LV



EDUCATION

## EPM CALLS FOR INCREASED SUPPORT FROM PORTUGAL

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE Portuguese School of Macau (EPM) is facing a teacher shortage and is calling on the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation of Portugal (MECI) to provide financial support and accelerate recruitment, according to EPM Foundation president Neto Valente.

Speaking at a conference in Lisbon late last week, Va-

lente said the EPM needs "top professionals" to maintain its position as a "benchmark school" in learning, according to a report from Ponto Final.

He said the school must "mobilize itself to keep up with and surpass the advantages that newer schools can offer" by adopting "strict management of the funds made available to it."

Valente highlighted the need for "major improvement

works" at the school due to existing space limitations.

He said MECI support is essential, both financially and in providing teachers, as well as in recognizing the qualifications obtained by students.

The EPM was created by Decree-Law No. 89-B/98.

It has faced several setbacks over the years, including the failure to fully comply with the financial fund provided by the Portuguese State and the Fundação Oriente, as well as the commitment made by the Portuguese State to provide an annual subsidy to guarantee its share and the financial resources necessary for the school's operation.

With 780 students, most of whom are not native speakers of Portuguese, Valente said the school's operating costs amount to 8 million euros, with the Portuguese State contributing just 10% of the total expenses.

He said the EPM is a "Portuguese school in China" and receives support from the Macau government, without interference, which is why the Portuguese government must also collaborate to ensure its continued success.



WHAT'S ON

# December festivities as city celebrates its milestones

STAFF REPORTER

**C**HRISTMAS is around the corner, and with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Macau as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) as well as the 75th anniversary of the founding of People's Republic of China (PRC), December is filled with festivities for everyone.

Themed around "Symphony of Time and Space" this year, the annual city-wide light show "Light Up Macao" is back in town until Feb. 28.

Hailing from Macau, Hong Kong, mainland China, and overseas, artists and designers have created a landscape of installations across the Macau Peninsula, Taipa, and Coloane.

Interested visitors can explore art pieces, flagship installations, interactive installations, light sculptures, and projection mapping performances.

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) also encourages participation in the gift redemptions and giveaways.

An extended activity called "Luminescent Night at Travessa do Armazém Velho" will also run for the same duration as "Light Up Macao 2024", inviting the public to explore Rua dos Ervanários which will be adorned with lighting elements alongside online games and workshops to demonstrate the nighttime charm of the district.

Meanwhile, MGM and acclaimed Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou have collaborated to present the production "Macau 2049", which will be open until Feb. 2.

The production promises to showcase the essence of Chinese culture through the integration of art and cutting-edge technology, redefining the imagination of cultural heritage and performing arts.

With the return of the annual Christmas Market to Tap Seac Square Dec. 16, the Christmas spirit is sure to spread.

Open from 2 p.m. to 11 p.m. with closing hours extended to midnight on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Eve, the market boasts characteristic booths selling a variety of products ranging from gifts to food and beverages.

In addition to the booths, facilities like the Christmas train, inflatable slide, and merry-go-round are also available for children free of charge.

The Christmas Market will be open until Jan. 1.

Until tomorrow, the public will see portuguese jazz virtuoso Zé Eduardo bringing his Jazz Mission



Big Band at the Dom Pedro V Theatre.

Joined by Portuguese vocalists Marta Garrett and Sofia Rodrigues among other local artists, the ensemble will perform a selection of jazz classics and carols to set the Christmas mood.

Attendees can also indulge in Portuguese delicacies at the cocktail reception.

On Dec. 25, the public can enjoy a special fireworks display in celebration of the Christmas holiday as well as the 25th anniversary of the handover, which will start at 9 p.m.

The same day, the Macao Orchestra will be having the "Unforgettable Melodies at the Ruins of St. Paul's" in coordination with local choirs.

The Studio City resort is also spreading holiday spirit with its "Winter-Fun Wonderland," a haven of Christmas-themed facilities and attractions.

Open until Jan. 1, visitors can enjoy a free skating experience at the Dreamland Ice Park by registering as a member or by posting Winter-Fun Wonderland pictures on social media with two or more designated hashtags.

Those who have always wanted

to see snowfall can head for a stroll at the Snowflake Bridge, where a sight of snowflakes falling awaits.

Other activities include shopping for festive treats at the Winter Market, and taking more pictures by photo spots Penguin Snow Mountain and Wishmas Tree.

On selected dates, visitors can meet and greet Santa Claus and the Gingerbread Man, adding a touch of enchantment to the season.

For sports fans, the 2024 MGM Macau Tennis Masters is staged Dec. 24 to 25, at the Macao Forum.

The public can expect to see a lineup of Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) players captained by tennis legends Li Na and Michael Chang, with matches consisting of best-of-three tiebreak sets with a tiebreaker in the final set.

The 2024 Macau Snooker Masters is also set to take place at the Grand Ballroom Theater at Wynn Palace this month.

Running Dec. 25 to 28, this year's event will feature a new format and another star-studded lineup.

Ronnie O'Sullivan, seven-time World Snooker Championship winner, will face off against top players in a "Best-of-7 Frames" format.

ADVERTORIAL

## GREAT TIMES

Savor the Countdown: Indulge in MGM's New Year's Eve Culinary Celebrations

As the year winds down and the clock ticks towards 2025, there's no better way to celebrate than under the iconic glass roofs of MGM MACAU and MGM COTAI. This New Year's Eve, join us in a dazzling blend of gourmet indulgence, live music, and an enchanting atmosphere designed to create memories that last a lifetime. From the clinking of Champagne glasses to the thrill of live DJ performances, MGM promises a night of grandeur for foodies and revelers alike.



Whether you're a Champagne aficionado, a fan of finely crafted snacks, or simply someone who loves to celebrate in style, MGM MACAU and MGM COTAI have curated the ultimate New Year's Eve experience. Let's bid farewell to 2024 in the most delicious way possible and welcome 2025 with elegance, excitement, and unforgettable flavors.

Here's a sneak peek at the tantalizing offers that will make your New Year's Eve celebration unforgettable:

**MGM MACAU: Celebrate in Style at ABA Bar**

Raise a toast to the new year with the sophisticated ambiance of ABA Bar. Perfect for an intimate gathering or a lively celebration, the Countdown Package offers:

- \$780\*: A bottle of Champagne and one delectable snack.
- \$1,560\*: Two bottles of Champagne and three snacks to share.

Whether you're savoring the bubbles or indulging in perfectly paired bites, ABA Bar is the ultimate destination to ring in 2025 with finesse. (Minimum charge: \$200 per person)

**MGM COTAI: Festive Elegance at Bar 58**

For those seeking a vibrant yet refined celebration, Bar 58 offers the ultimate New Year's Eve party. With a package designed for groups, enjoy:

- \$1,288\* (for up to 4 persons): A bottle of Champagne or selected spirit paired with a snack platter.

Gather your closest friends and toast to the new year in the glamorous surroundings of Bar 58, where every sip and bite is a tribute to the finer things in life.

**MGM COTAI: Anytime New Year's Eve Dinner Set**

Under the shimmering glass roofs of MGM COTAI, Anytime offers the perfect combination of chic ambiance, exceptional flavors, and celebratory vibes. For the true culinary connoisseurs, the Anytime New Year's Eve Dinner Set is a feast for the senses. Revel in a luxurious selection of flavors:

- \$1,288\* per set: Includes a bottle of Champagne, seasonal oysters or caviar, a snack platter including charcuterie and cheese platter, as well as small bites.

This indulgent package is perfect for those who wish to elevate their celebration with a decadent dining experience. (Minimum charge: \$300 per person)

**Countdown in the Glow of MGM**

Limited seats are available for these exclusive New Year's Eve packages, so be sure to reserve your spot before it's too late! Cheers to a sparkling new year! 🥂

For enquiries and reservations, please call (853) 8802 3888. \*All prices are in MOP and subject to a 10% service charge.

過量飲酒危害健康  
Consumir bebidas alcoólicas em excesso prejudica a saúde  
Excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages is harmful to health  
禁止向未滿十八歲人士銷售或提供酒精飲料  
A venda ou disponibilização de bebidas alcoólicas a menores de 18 anos é proibida  
The sale or supply of alcoholic beverages to anyone under the age of 18 is prohibited



# CHINA'S GETTING A BIG ELECTRIC CAR BATTERY SWAPPING BOOST IN 2025. WOULD THAT WORK ACROSS THE GLOBE?

ALEXA ST. JOHN

**C**HINA will soon see a massive expansion of electric vehicle battery swapping, as global battery maker CATL said Wednesday it is investing heavily in stations there next year.

Battery swapping is not new — but it's had a challenging journey. Adoption of electric vehicles has varied in regions across the globe over the past several years, and that doesn't always bode well for building new infrastructure.

While the technology could do well in China, it's uncertain whether it could work in other countries.

AP PHOTO



## WHAT IS BATTERY SWAPPING?

Battery swapping allows EV drivers to pull into a station on a low battery and receive a swapped, fully-charged battery within minutes.

An EV has to be equipped with the right technology to receive a swap — and not many models around the world currently have it. Automakers have to buy into the idea, and EV adoption among consumers also has to grow, so that investing in new infrastructure seems worthwhile. Consumers also have to be comfortable not owning their battery.

## WHY COULD IT WORK IN CHINA?

China is much further along in adopting EVs than other countries.

Not only is it the world's largest auto market, but in July, the country hit a milestone with 50% of new sales electric — and it accounts for most of this year's global EV sales.

China supports EV growth through government subsidies and mandates. So it makes more sense for companies to invest in unique EV infrastructure there because that's more likely to be needed.

## WHAT OTHER ATTEMPTS AT BATTERY SWAPPING HAVE OCCURRED?

The most notable example might be Israeli startup Better Place, which tried its hand at swapping in 2007.

But the company shut down a few years later after investing a lot of money and coming up

against roadblocks with logistics. EV adoption was especially low at the time.

## COULD IT WORK IN THE UNITED STATES? EUROPE?

Startup Ample, for example, has a modular battery swapping station that it says can complete a swap in 5 minutes. That's important as charging time remains a point of concern for prospective EV buyers. Even the fastest fast chargers could take at least 15 minutes for a decent charge.

But in the U.S., pure EVs only accounted for 8% of new vehicle sales as of November.

Meanwhile Nio, a rival Chinese EV brand, has about 60 swap stations in northern Europe, and the EV adoption is higher there than the U.S., but the same challenges

remain.

Different automakers put different batteries in their various EV models, so a station would need all of those available if the industry didn't agree to a standardized battery, and not all of those models are out yet in volume. This is something that really needs scale.

Swapping could help with EV cost — currently a barrier to adoption for many — because a driver wouldn't necessarily own the most expensive part of an EV: the battery.

Greg Less, director of the University of Michigan Battery Lab, said with proper framing and education, people might like the idea of battery swapping. To him, it's not unlike buying a propane-fueled grill and purchasing a refilled tank every so often. But it would

require a rethinking of car ownership.

"Where I could see it working is if we went entirely away from vehicle ownership and we went to a use-on-demand model," Less added. "I don't think we're there yet."

## WHAT VEHICLE USES MIGHT BE BEST FOR SWAPPING?

Battery swapping might make most sense for ride-sharing or other fleet vehicles.

Drivers of buses, taxis, Uber or Lyft vehicles want to spend as much time on the road as possible, transporting customers and making money. If battery swapping can shorten the time needed to charge EVs, that makes driving one less disruptive to their business. **MDT/AGENCIES**

# China says US is 'playing with fire' after latest military aid for Taiwan

**T**HE Chinese government protested Sunday the latest American announcements of military sales and assistance to Taiwan, warning the United States that it is "playing with fire."

U.S. President Joe Biden authorized Saturday the provision of up to \$571 million in Defense Department material and services and in military education and training for self-ruled Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its territory and says must come under its control. Separately, the Defense Department

AP PHOTO



President Joe Biden

said Friday that \$295 million in military sales had been approved.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry statement urged the U.S. to stop arming Taiwan and stop what it

called "dangerous moves that undermine peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."

U.S. military sales and assistance aim to help Taiwan defend itself and deter China from launching an attack.

The \$571 million in military assistance comes on top of Biden's authorization of \$567 million for the same purposes in late September. The military sales include \$265 million for about 300 tactical radio systems and \$30 million for 16 gun mounts.

Taiwan's Foreign Ministry welcomed the approval of the two sales, saying in a post on X that it reaffirmed the U.S. government's "commitment to our defense."

In October, the U.S. approved \$2 billion in arms sales to Taiwan, including the first-time delivery of an ad-

vanced surface-to-air missile defense system, also drawing China's criticism while Beijing has responded with war drills around Taiwan.

Taiwan earlier this month demanded that China end its ongoing military activity in nearby waters, which it said undermined peace and stability and disrupted international shipping and trade.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has said he would not commit to defending Taiwan if China were to invade during his presidency.

Trump has also said that Taiwan should pay the U.S. for defending it against China, likening the relationship to insurance. Taiwan spends about 2.5% of its GDP on defense. **MDT/AP**



# Beijing says Philippine plan to deploy midrange missiles would be 'extremely irresponsible'

**C**HINA said a plan by the Philippines to deploy midrange missiles would be a provocative move that stokes regional tensions.

The Philippines top army official told reporters in Manila yesterday that the military plans to acquire a midrange system to defend the country's territory amid tensions with China in the South China Sea.

"Yes, there are plans, there are negotiations, because we see its feasibility and adaptability," Lt. Gen. Roy Galido said.

The U.S. deployed its Typhon midrange missile system in the northern Philippines in April and troops from both countries have been training jointly for the potential use of the heavy weaponry.

China opposes U.S. military assistance to the Philippines and has been particularly alarmed by the deployment of the Typhon system. Under President Joe Biden, the U.S. has strengthened an arc of military alliances in the Indo-Pacific to counter China, including in any confrontation over Taiwan.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that deployment of the weapon by the Philippines would intensify geopolitical confrontation and an arms race.

"It is an extremely irresponsible choice for the history and people of itself and the whole of Southeast Asia, as well as for the security of the region," she told a daily briefing.

"I want to reiterate that the introduction by the Philippines of such a mid-range missile system, which is both strategic and offensive, is a provocative and dangerous move in coordination with external forces to create regional tensions, incites geopolitical confrontation, and provokes an arms race. This is an extremely irresponsible decision for the people of the Philippines, Southeast Asian countries, the history, and regional security," Mao said.

The Philippines would not necessarily buy the Typhon system, Galido said.

The army is working not only with the United States but with



other friendly countries on a long list of weapons platforms that it plans to acquire, he said.

The Philippines defense plan includes protecting its exclusive economic zone, which reaches 200 nautical miles.

"It is paramount for the army to be able to project its force up to that extent, in coordination, of course, with the Philippine navy and the Philippine air force," Galido said. **MDT/AP**

## US-CHINA

# Republican senators demand an end to science and tech cooperation with China

**DIDI TANG,**  
**WASHINGTON**

**A** group of Republican senators is demanding that the Biden administration revoke a science and technology agreement with China, barely a week after the two countries renewed cooperation for five more years to keep ties from deteriorating.

In a letter last week to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the lawmakers, led by Sen. Jim Risch, the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the era in which such cooperation made sense "is long gone" and the extension only "opens the door for further cooptation of

American research."

The renewal of the agreement just before President Joe Biden leaves office "denies the incoming administration a chance to weigh in on this highly controversial agreement," they said, urging the administration to "reverse course."

In addition to Risch, the letter was signed by Sens. John Barrasso, Pete Ricketts, Todd Young and Bill Hagerty.

The first such agreement was signed in January 1979 when the two countries established diplomatic ties to counter the influence of the Soviet Union and when China severely lagged behind the U.S. and other Western nations in science

and technology.

The agreement was extended in 2018, and it was given temporary extensions last year and this year to allow for negotiations as the tech war between the two countries has escalated.

The State Department has said the new agreement has a narrower scope and more guardrails to protect U.S. interests, including covering only basic research and not facilitating the development of critical and emerging technologies.

The Republican senators said they had "deep concerns" that those measures were not sufficient to protect intellectual property and prevent illicit

transfer of knowledge.

The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the letter Thursday.

Deborah Seligsohn, assistant professor of political science at Villanova University, said the U.S. stands to lose more if it cuts off science and technology cooperation with Beijing.

"The irony is that as China has become our peer, we have so much more to gain from working with Chinese science than we did in earlier eras, and yet at this moment, when we have the most to gain, there is a demand that we shut the door," she said. **MDT/AP**

## ADVERTORIAL

# GREAT TIMES

A Feast to Remember: Celebrate New Year's Eve at MGM



**T**he countdown to 2025 is upon us, and there's no better way to bid farewell to 2024 than with an unforgettable culinary journey at MGM MACAU and MGM COTAI. This New Year's Eve, indulge in exquisite dining experiences at MGM, surrounded by loved ones and the enchanting glow of celebration. Whether you crave French delicacies, Asian-inspired bistro, festive buffet brimming with international delights or festive cocktails, MGM has curated a selection of dining experiences to make your New Year's Eve magical. As the clock strikes midnight, raise your glass to a year of new beginnings, surrounded by unforgettable flavors, loved ones, and the magic of MGM.

### MGM MACAU: A Night of Elegance and Flavor Aux Beaux Arts

Step into the world of French gastronomy with Chef Olivier Elzer's exquisite 6-course degustation menu. Designed to elevate the evening with sophistication, this experience showcases the finest French delicacies, making it the perfect choice for hotel guests and locals to toast to the new year in style.

### Rossio

For those seeking comfort and flavor, Rossio's menu offers a delightful mix of modern preparations and seasonal favorites featuring Seared Atlantic Grouper and Grilled Wagyu Rump Cap, making a perfect choice for those who want to celebrate with a touch of indulgence.

### MGM COTAI: Gourmet Delights and Festive Vibes Grill 58

Experience an elegant evening of fine dining at Grill 58 with a 6-course chef-curated set menu, including a welcome glass of Champagne. Pair this with live entertainment from 7 PM to 1 AM and complimentary access to the Countdown Party at Bar 58, where the sounds of a live band and dazzling views of The Spectacle create the perfect backdrop to welcome 2025.

### Aji

Celebrate the festive season at Aji with an innovative interpretation of Asian bistro. This 6-course set menu, paired with a glass of Champagne, highlights bold flavors and modern twists, including Caviar Chawanmushi, a luxurious take on a classic Japanese dish and a perfectly marbled Grilled MB5+ Short Rib that elevated with contemporary techniques. Dine amidst Aji's vibrant red ambiance and let the dazzling lights of MGM COTAI's The Spectacle shine on your special evening.

### Coast

For those who love variety, Coast's buffet is a feast for the senses, featuring live stations and holiday classics for you to celebrate with family and friends over a bountiful spread that captures the essence of the season.

### Bar Patuá

Toast to the new year with Bar Patuá's festive cocktails with your friends or enjoy a bubbly night with Champagne packages, setting the perfect festive scene for New Year's Eve. Cheers to a spectacular 2025!

These exclusive dining experiences are available for one night only and seats are limited. For enquiries and reservations, call (853) 8802 3888.

Note: All prices are in MOP and subject to a 10% service charge.

過量飲酒危害健康

Consumir bebidas alcoólicas em excesso prejudica a saúde

Excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages is harmful to health

禁止向未滿十八歲人士銷售或提供酒精飲料

A venda ou disponibilização de bebidas alcoólicas a menores de 18 anos é proibida

The sale or supply of alcoholic beverages to anyone under the age of 18 is prohibited



RISHI LEKHI, KANGPOKPI

INDIA

## TENS OF THOUSANDS DISPLACED BY ETHNIC VIOLENCE SUFFER SQUALID CONDITIONS IN CAMPS

**PHALNEIVAH** Khonsai ran for her life when violence struck her neighborhood in India's restive northeast, carrying just the bare essentials in the hope that she and her family could return soon.

Khonsai, her husband and three children left behind their house, which was torched by a mob, and made for the hills, where thousands of people from their community headed for safety.

That was in May last year. Almost 19 months later, Khonsai, 35, is still away from home, living in a government building that was turned into a relief center with squalid conditions and little privacy.

The relief camp is in Kangpokpi, about 50 kilometers from Imphal, the capital of India's northeastern Manipur state, which has been wracked by ethnic violence since last year. In the building's damp and dark interior, fabric partitions separate at least 75 families like hers driven away from their homes.

"It is very difficult to live here," Khonsai said, as women went about their daily chores such as washing clothes and dishes.

The violent ethnic clashes erupted last year between the majority Meitei community and the minority Kuki-Zo tribes in Manipur. The conflict has claimed more than 250 lives and displaced at least 60,000 people.

The state remains divided into two ethnic zones, one controlled by the Meiteis and the other by the Kuki-Zo community. The factions have formed armed militias that patrol roads checking for signs of their rivals. Borders and buffer zones guarded by security forces separate the two regions. Youths spend nights guarding vulnerable villages.

Khonsai, a Kuki, said the struggles of living in a relief center are



A Kuki tribal woman washes cloths outside a relief camp in Kangpokpi, Manipur, last week

taking a toll on the family's health but they can't go back home because they fear for their lives.

"If we go back, they will kill us. There is no hope for going back," she said.

The Meiteis, who are predominantly Hindus, live in the Imphal Valley and nearby districts, while the Kuki-Zos live in hilly areas. The violence began last year when Meiteis demanded that they be listed by the government as a Scheduled Tribe, which would bring them more benefits such as quotas in jobs and educational institutions. That categorization would also bar non-Meiteis from buying land in the Meiteis' strongholds in the Imphal Valley.

The Kukis opposed this, saying such benefits should be given

only to tribal groups that are less developed economically and less educated.

Soon, protests by both sides turned violent. Each side rampaged through villages, torching houses, massacring civilians and driving tens of thousands from their homes. Violence had receded in recent months, except for occasional flareups, but returned in November when 10 people were killed by paramilitary soldiers.

The Kuki-Zo community has been particularly hit hard by the violence. They accuse state Chief Minister N. Biren Singh of siding with the Meiteis and have sought his removal. They now seek federal rule over the state and administrative autonomy for the com-

munity.

Singh, a Meitei, has denied the accusations. His administration says people from the hill tribes — who share ethnic lineage with Myanmar's Chin tribe — are using illegal drugs to finance a war against the Hindu community. Manipur's government is led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

The displacement crisis has, however, impacted both communities. While most of the displaced from the Kuki-Zo community have gone to the hills, the Meiteis have taken shelter in refugee camps in Imphal. The mistrust between the two communities is far from over, with people from each side unable to venture into

the other's zone.

Yengsom Junksom Memi, a Meitei, used to live in Kangpokpi until attackers rampaged her home and forced her family to run for their lives. Memi first took refuge in a police station before moving to a relief center in Imphal where she lives with 600 other displaced Meiteis. She said her house has been taken over by the attackers.

"We have no future left. It is difficult to even manage food in the morning and evening," Memi said.

Ngamminlun Kipgen, spokesperson for the Committee on Tribal Unity, which represents Kukis, blamed the federal government for failing to end the violence.

"I think the prime minister needs to intervene," Kipgen said.

India's opposition parties have been urging Modi to visit Manipur. Modi has not visited the state since the violence started but has instructed his home minister, Amit Shah, to find a solution.

Kipgen said a division of the state into two separately administered parts, one for the Kukis and the other for Meiteis, could calm the situation.

"The nation must understand that the Kukis and the Meiteis for the time being are not able to live together, so the state or the central government should not force both communities at this critical juncture to come together," Kipgen said. **MDT/AP**

FLIGHT MH370

## Malaysia agrees to resume 'no find, no fee' hunt

**MALAYSIA'S** government has agreed in principle to accept a second "no find, no fee" proposal from a U.S. company to renew the hunt for flight MH370, which is believed to have crashed in the southern Indian Ocean more than 10 years ago, Transport Minister Anthony Loke said Friday.

Loke said Cabinet ministers gave the nod at their meeting last week for Texas-based marine robotics firm Ocean Infinity to continue the seabed search operation at a new 15,000-square-kilometer (5,800-square-

-mile) site in the ocean next year.

"The proposed new search area, identified by Ocean Infinity, is based on the latest information and data analyses conducted by experts and researchers. The company's proposal is credible," he said in a statement.

The Boeing 777 plane vanished from radar shortly after taking off on March 8, 2014, carrying 239 people, mostly Chinese nationals, on a flight from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Beijing. Satellite data showed the plane deviated

from its flight path to head over the southern Indian Ocean, where it is believed to have crashed.

An expensive multinational search failed to turn up any clues, although debris washed ashore on the east African coast and Indian Ocean islands. A private search in 2018 by Ocean Infinity also found nothing.

Under the new deal, Ocean Infinity will get \$70 million only if significant wreckage is discovered, Loke said. He said his ministry will finalize negotiations with Ocean Infinity in early 2025. **MDT/AP**





AUTOMOBILE

# Nissan, Honda announce plans to merge, creating world's No. 3 automaker

MARI YAMAGUCHI & ELAINE KURTENBACH, TOKYO

**J**APANESE automakers Honda and Nissan have announced plans to work toward a merger, forming the world's third-largest automaker by sales as the industry undergoes dramatic changes in its transition away from fossil fuels.

The two companies said they had signed a memorandum of understanding yesterday and that smaller Nissan alliance member Mitsubishi Motors also had agreed to join the talks on integrating their businesses.

Honda's president, Toshihiro Mibe, said Honda and Nissan will pursue unifying their operations under a joint holding company. Honda will initially lead the new management, retaining the principles and brands of each company. The aim is to have a formal merger agreement by June and to complete the deal and list the holding company on the Tokyo Stock Exchange by August 2026, he said.



Nissan Chief Executive Makoto Uchida, left, and Honda Chief Executive Toshihiro Mibe, center, and Takao Kato CEO of Mitsubishi Motors, right, attend a joint news conference yesterday

No dollar value was given and the formal talks are just starting, Mibe said.

There are "points that need to be studied and discussed," he said. "Frankly speaking, the possibility of this not being implemented is not zero."

Automakers in Japan have lagged behind their big rivals in electric vehicles and are trying to cut costs and make up for lost time.

A merger could result in a behemoth worth more than \$50 billion based on the market capitalization

of all three automakers. Together, Honda, Nissan and Mitsubishi would gain scale to compete with Toyota Motor Corp. and with Germany's Volkswagen AG. Toyota has technology partnerships with Japan's Mazda Motor Corp. and Subaru Corp.

News of a possible merger surfaced earlier this month, with unconfirmed reports saying that the talks on closer collaboration partly were driven by aspirations of Taiwan iPhone maker Foxconn to tie up with Nissan by buying shares from the Japan's company's other alliance

partner, Renault SA of France.

Nissan's CEO Makoto Uchida said there had been no direct approach to his company from Foxconn. He also acknowledged that Nissan's situation was "severe."

Even after a merger Toyota, which rolled out 11.5 million vehicles in 2023, would remain the leading Japanese automaker. If they join, the three smaller companies would make about 8 million vehicles. In 2023, Honda made 4 million and Nissan produced 3.4 million. Mitsubishi Motors made just over 1 million.

Nissan, Honda and Mitsubishi announced in August that they would share components for electric vehicles like batteries and jointly research software for autonomous driving to adapt better to dramatic changes centered around electrification, following a preliminary agreement between Nissan and Honda set in March.

Nissan has struggled following a scandal that began with the arrest of its former chairman Carlos Ghosn in late 2018 on charges of fraud and

misuse of company assets, allegations that he denies. He eventually was released on bail and fled to Lebanon.

Speaking Monday to reporters in Tokyo via a video link, Ghosn derided the planned merger as a "desperate move."

From Nissan, Honda could get truck-based body-on-frame large SUVs such as the Armada and Infiniti QX80 that Honda doesn't have, with large towing capacities and good off-road performance, Sam Fiorani, vice president of AutoForecast Solutions, told The Associated Press.

Nissan also has years of experience building batteries and electric vehicles, and gas-electric hybrid powertrains that could help Honda in developing its own EVs and next generation of hybrids, he said.

But the company said in November that it was slashing 9,000 jobs, or about 6% of its global work force, and reducing its global production capacity by 20% after reporting a quarterly loss of 9.3 billion yen (\$61 million). MDT/AP

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C&C RECEIVED THE 1ST SILVER  
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IN MACAU (2023)





AP PHOTO



GERMANY

# Christmas market attack claims lives in Magdeburg

**F**OUR women and a 9-year-old boy were killed and 200 people were injured when a man drove into a Christmas market teeming with holiday shoppers in the German city of Magdeburg — an attack that has left Germans mourning the victims and with a shaken sense of security.

## HOW DID THE ATTACK UNFOLD?

At first, Thi Linh Chi Nguyen thought the loud bangs were fireworks. The 34-year-old manicurist from Vietnam, whose salon is near the Christmas market, was on the phone during a break when she heard the noise just after 7 p.m. on Friday. Then she saw a car drive through the market at high speed. People screamed and a child was thrown into the air by the car.

The woman recalled seeing the car bursting out of the market and turning right onto Ernst-Reuter-Allee street and then coming to a standstill at a tram stop where the suspect was arrested.

The Christmas market was surrounded by concrete barriers designed to prevent attacks, but there was a gap left for emergency access, wide enough for a car to speed through.

The market area reopened Sunday, and residents walked slowly amid the shuttered food, drink and craft stands. Nearby, people stopped to light candles or leave flowers at a growing makeshift memorial.

## WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Police say the dead are four

women, aged 45, 52, 67 and 75, and a boy, aged 9. He was named as André Gleissner by fire department officials in the Elm-Asse region west of Magdeburg, where he was a member of the children's fire brigade.

Authorities said 200 people were injured, including 41 in serious condition. They were being treated in multiple hospitals in Magdeburg, which is about 130 kilometers (80 miles) west of Berlin, and beyond.

## WHO IS THE SUSPECT IN THE ATTACK?

Prosecutors said the suspect, a 50-year-old Saudi doctor, is under investigation on suspicion of murder, attempted murder and bodily harm. In a closed-door hearing on Saturday evening, a judge ordered that he be kept in custody pending a possible indictment.

Several German media outlets identified the suspect as Taleb A., withholding his last name in line with privacy laws, and reported that he was a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy. He has lived in Germany since 2006, practicing medicine in Bernburg, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Magdeburg.

The suspect's X account describes him as a former Muslim. It is filled with tweets and retweets focusing on anti-Islam themes and criticism of the religion, while sharing congratulatory notes to Muslims who left the faith. He was critical of German authorities, saying they had failed to do enough to combat the "Islam-

mification of Europe." He has also voiced support for the far-right and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

## WHAT WAS THE MOTIVE?

Investigators are analyzing the suspect's computers, mobile devices and other evidence, trying to understand what motivated him to drive his black BMW into a crowd in the eastern German city. Prosecutors said the motive may have been "dissatisfaction with the treatment of Saudi refugees in Germany."

Intelligence agencies say that increasingly they are seeing attackers with a confusing mix of beliefs and motivations. The head of Britain's domestic intelligence agency MI5, Ken McCallum, said in October that "straightforward labels like 'Islamist terrorism' or 'extreme right-wing' don't fully reflect the dizzying range of beliefs and ideologies we see."

There are unanswered questions about what the authorities knew about the suspect. The head of the Federal Criminal Police Office, Holger Münch, said the agency — Germany's equivalent of the FBI — received a warning from Saudi Arabia in November 2023, but that the information was unhelpful.

Münch said the suspect "published a huge number of posts on the internet," was in contact with various authorities and "made insults and even threats" — but was not known to be violent.

Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

also acknowledged it had received a warning about the suspect last year.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is facing criticism about security lapses that allowed the attack to happen, and was heckled by some bystanders during a visit to Magdeburg on Saturday.

## A STRING OF ATTACKS

The violence shocked all of Germany, prompting several other German towns to cancel their weekend Christmas markets as a precaution, and out of solidarity with Magdeburg's loss. Berlin kept its markets open but increased the police presence.

Germany has suffered several extremist attacks in recent years, including a knife attack that killed three people and wounded eight at a festival in the western city of Solingen in August. Friday's attack came eight years after an Islamic extremist drove a truck into a crowded Christmas market in Berlin, killing 13 people and injuring many others.

Those attacks have led cities to beef up security at Christmas markets and other events.

The horror triggered by yet another act of mass violence in Germany makes it likely that migration will remain a key issue as Germans head toward an early election on Feb. 23.

It is the latest in a string of incidents around the world in which vehicles have been used as weapons by jihadi attackers, far-right extremists and others whose motives were unclear. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1968 FIRST ASTRONAUTS ORBIT MOON



The Apollo 8 spacecraft has taken its crew of three astronauts safely into orbit around the Moon, the first manned space mission to achieve the feat.

The climax of the mission began at 0959 GMT, when Frank Borman, James Lovell and William Anders were about 78 miles from the Moon.

Right on schedule, the crew fired their rocket engine to send Apollo 8 into the first of 10 elliptical lunar orbits.

The engine burned for just over four minutes, and then suddenly the avid audience of television-watchers on Earth had the first-ever eyewitness account of the lunar surface from astronaut James Lovell.

"The moon is essentially grey," he said. "No colour. Looks like plaster of Paris. Sort of a greyish beach sand."

Shortly afterwards, the spacecraft passed out of contact with mission control in Houston, travelling into the dark side of the Moon — never seen directly by humans before, as it always faces away from the Earth.

There followed a tense 45 minutes in which radio communication was impossible — a drama which will be repeated on each circuit around the Moon.

Once back in contact, Apollo 8 then fired another engine, sending it into circular orbit 69 miles (110 km) above the Moon's surface.

About two and a half hours afterwards, the astronauts beamed back the first television pictures of what they were seeing.

As the pictures flooded in, the astronauts broadcast the first words of Genesis, describing the creation of the world.

They then signed out: "From the crew of Apollo 8, we pause with good night, good luck and merry Christmas and God bless all of you — all of you on the good earth."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The crew of Apollo 8 spent 20 hours in orbit around the Moon, before returning to Earth. They splashed down in the Pacific on 27 December, landing just 5,000 yards (4,500 metres) from their target point. They were picked up by the aircraft carrier Yorktown.

They returned as national heroes. The next mission, Apollo 9, took off at the beginning of 1969, to test a Moon-landing module.

That same year, the crew of Apollo 11 became the first men to walk on the Moon.

James Lovell went on to command the ill-fated Apollo 13, which was crippled by an explosion on board in 1970. He and his crew returned to Earth safely.

Budget constraints brought the first phase of American lunar exploration to an end in 1972. Then, in January 2004, US President George Bush announced American astronauts would return to the Moon by 2020 as the launching point for missions further into space.









## BETHLEHEM PLANS ANOTHER SOMBER CHRISTMAS UNDER THE SHADOW OF WAR IN GAZA

MELANIE LIDMAN,  
BETHLEHEM

**T**he Nativity Store in Manger Square has sold handmade olive wood carvings and religious items to people visiting the traditional birthplace of Jesus since 1927. But as Bethlehem prepares to mark its second Christmas under the shadow of the war in Gaza, there are almost no tourists, leaving the Nativity Store and other businesses unsure of how much longer they can hold on.

For the second straight year, Bethlehem's Christmas celebrations will be somber and muted, in deference to ongoing war in Gaza. There will be no giant Christmas tree in Manger Square, no raucous scout marching bands, no public lights twinkling and very few public decorations or displays.

"Last year before Christmas, we had more hope, but now again we are close to Christmas and we don't have anything," said Rony Tabash, the third-generation owner of Nativity Store.

Israel's war against Hamas has been raging for nearly 15 months, and there still is no end in sight. Repeated ceasefire efforts have stalled.

Since the war began, tourism to Israel and the Israeli-occupied West Bank has plummeted. And after Israel barred entry to most of the 150,000 Palestinians in the West Bank who had jobs in Israel, the Palestinian economy contracted by 25% in the past year.

The yearly Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem — shared among Armenian, Catholic and Orthodox denominations — are usually major boons for the city, where tourism accounts for 70% of its yearly income. But the streets are empty this season.

Tabash said he continues to open the store every day, but often an entire week will go by without a sale. Tabash works with more than 25 local families who create hand-carved religious items out of the region's storied olive wood. But with no buyers, work has dried up for these families.

### LOTS OF ROOM AT THE INN

The number of visitors to the city plunged from a pre-COVID high of around 2 million visitors per year in 2019 to fewer than 100,000 visitors in 2024, said Jiries Qumsiyeh, the spokesperson for the Palestinian tourism ministry.

According to the Christmas story, Mary was forced to give birth to Jesus in a stable because there was no room at the inn. Today, nearly all of Bethlehem's 5,500 hotel rooms are empty.

The city's hotel occupancy rate plunged from around 80% in early 2023 to around 3% today, said Elias Al Arja, the head of Bethlehem Hoteliers Association. At his own hotel, the Bethlehem Hotel, he said he has laid off a staff of more than 120 people and retains just five employees.

The city hosts more than 100 stores and 450 workshops dealing

with traditional Palestinian handicraft, Qumsiyeh said. But just a week before Christmas, when the city should be bursting with visitors, Manger Square was mostly empty save for a few locals selling coffee and tea. Only two of the eight stores in the main drag of the square were open for business.

Qumsiyeh worries that when the war ends and tourism eventually rebounds, many of the families that have handed down traditional skills for generations will no longer be making the items that reflect Palestinian heritage and culture.

Many are leaving the region entirely. "We have witnessed a very high rate of emigration since the beginning of the aggression, especially among those working in the tourism sector," said Qumsiyeh.

### A CHRISTMAS WITHOUT JOY

Almost 500 families have left Bethlehem in the past year, said Mayor Anton Salman. And those are just the families who moved abroad with official residency visas. Many others have moved abroad on temporary tourist visas and are working illegally, and it's unclear if they will return, Salman said.

Around half of the population in the Bethlehem area, including nearby villages, works in either tourism or in jobs in Israel.

The unemployment rate in Bethlehem is roughly 50%, said Salman. Unemployment across the West Bank is around 30%, accor-

ding to the Palestinian Economy Ministry.

Canceling Christmas festivities is one way to draw attention to the difficult situation in Bethlehem and across the Palestinian territories, said Salman. "This year we want to show the world that the Palestinian people are still suffering and they haven't the joy that everybody else in the world having," said Salman.

It is another blow to the Holy Land's dwindling population over the decade due to emigration and a low birthrate.

Christians are a small percentage of the population. There are about 182,000 in Israel, 50,000 in the West Bank and Jerusalem and

1,300 in Gaza, according to the U.S. State Department.

### FINDING THE LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

Father Issa Thaljieh, the parish priest of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Church of the Nativity, said many families are struggling financially, leaving them unable to pay rent or school fees, much less buy Christmas presents or celebrate the holiday in other ways. The church's social services have tried to help, but the needs are great, he said.

Thaljeh said his Christmas message this year focused on encouraging Palestinians in Bethlehem to stay despite the challenges.

"A church without Christians is not a church," he said, as workers hand-polished the ornate brass candelabras in the cavernous, empty church a week before the holiday.

"The light that was born when Jesus Christ was born here is the light that moves beyond darkness, so we have to wait, we have to be patient, we have to pray a lot, and we have to stay with our roots because our roots are in Bethlehem," he said.

Some families are finding ways to bring back pockets of joy.

Bethlehem resident Nihal Bandak, 39, gave into her three children's requests to have a Christmas tree this year, after not having one last year. Decorating the tree is the favorite part of Christmas of her youngest daughter, 8-year-old Stephanie.

Mathew Bandak, 11 was thrilled his family brought back some of their traditions, but also torn.

"I was happy because we get to decorate and celebrate, but people are in Gaza who don't have anything to celebrate," he said.

Rony Tabash, the third-generation owner of Nativity Store, said he will continue to open the store, because it's part of his family's history.

"We are not feeling Christmas, but in the end, Christmas is in our hearts," he said, adding that the entire city was praying for a ceasefire and peace. "We have a big faith that always, when we see Christmas, it will give us the light in the night."

MDT/AP





SHANE LANTZ, SEATTLE

NFL

# Seahawks' loss to Vikings sends their playoff chances tumbling

**F**OR the Seattle Seahawks, there is now no easy path to the postseason.

According to the NFL, the Seahawks' probability of making the playoffs fell to 24% after Sunday's 27-24 loss to the Minnesota Vikings, who pulled ahead on a late touchdown pass from Sam Darnold to Justin Jefferson and held on thanks to a game-sealing interception of Seattle's Geno Smith.

Had they beaten the Vikings, the Seahawks could have clinched the NFC West by winning their final two games. Their fate is now out of their hands. The division-leading Los Angeles Rams could eliminate the Seahawks with a win over the Arizona Cardinals on Saturday.

"Our destiny is not in our hands right now, which is tough," coach Mike Macdonald said. "But we still have a ton of football to play for. I mean a break here or there, we're right back in it and we're rolling."

Just two weeks ago, the Seahawks led the NFC West by one game and had a better than 50% chance of making the postseason. Now, they are one game behind the Rams, who beat the New York Jets on Sunday for their fourth straight win.

The Seahawks would still have a chance at the division title if Los



Seattle Seahawks quarterback Geno Smith (7) walks off the field after the 27-24 loss to the Minnesota Vikings of an NFL football game, Sunday

Angeles loses on Saturday.

"We've just got to handle our part, which is win out and then let the chips fall where they fall,"

linebacker Ernest Jones IV said.

"Hopefully catch a little luck and we can get in there. But, yeah, it's a tough one."

Seattle could still win the strength-of-victory tiebreaker over the Rams to clinch the division, but the situation that would make that

possible is extremely unlikely. It would require San Francisco, Las Vegas, Minnesota, New Orleans and Buffalo to lose out and Denver, Miami, Atlanta and Arizona to win the rest of their games.

The Seahawks fell out of contention for a wild-card spot with Sunday's loss.

They also fell to 3-6 this season at Lumen Field. It's just the third time since the stadium opened in 2002 that Seattle has finished with a losing record at home. That happened previously in 2021 and 2008.

Next up is a Thursday night game at the Chicago Bears, who have lost nine straight.

"We've got to win two, but it starts with one," Smith said. "We've got a tough Chicago team on the road. I know their record isn't the greatest, but you watch film on those guys, they've got a tough team with a lot of talent. So we've got to be ready coming off a short week, traveling on Christmas. Guys got to get their minds ready to go." MDT/AP

AD

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**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**MACAO SAR EMBARKING ON NEW STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT**

In his speech commemorating the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland on Friday, President Xi Jinping spoke highly of the special administrative region's achievements in socioeconomic development, summarized its experience over the past five years since his last visit, expressed his hope for the SAR's future, and promised the central authorities' full support for Macao.

The world has witnessed tremendous changes over the past five years. The spillover effects of some burning regional issues have rippled across many countries and regions. But thanks to its firm upholding of the "one country, two systems" principle and the hard work of local people, Macao has largely withstood the external uncertainties and maintained steady progress in all fields with the strong support of the motherland.

With its gaming industry developing in a healthy and orderly manner in accordance with the law, the SAR has made new achievements in moderately diversifying its economic development and a number of key emerging industries are flourishing, and its tourism and leisure industries have grown in importance.

The Macao SAR government has continually improved the legal and institutional guarantees for the SAR's development, enabling it to actively participate in the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the integrated development of the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. Meanwhile, the "hard connectivity" of infrastructure and "soft connectivity" of rules and mechanisms between Macao and the mainland have been improved.

Local residents are benefiting from the development dividends, as the SAR government has more resources and larger space to improve people's livelihoods, and properly handle housing, medical care, education, elderly care and other people-friendly projects.

As the SAR has strengthened education on the Constitution and the Basic Law, and national security, public awareness of relevant issues has been markedly raised, helping the SAR resist external interference. At the same time the rights of Macao residents have been fully guaranteed.

On the world stage, with a stable economic and trade relationship being formed between the SAR and more countries and regions, Macao's international influence and popularity have been greatly enhanced. It has become a key hub for exchanges and cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries and, in this capacity it is playing a special role in promoting Belt and Road cooperation.

Macao has smoothly implemented the "one country, two systems" framework, which has laid a solid foundation for its development. By making the most of the momentum driving China's national rejuvenation, the SAR has the conditions and capability to achieve better development in the foreseeable future.

As President Xi urged, Macao should bear the bigger picture of national and world development in mind, and keep up with the trend of the times to further identify its own position in the national development strategies and raise its international profile. In the process, the SAR needs to continue to focus on promoting moderate economic diversification, improving its governance efficiency and maintaining social stability.

To ensure a brighter future, Macao should be united and focused under the banner of loving the country and Macao. And it should be more open and inclusive, and recruit talents from all over the world.

With the country's modernization at a critical stage, Xi called on the SAR government and Macao people to be brave in reform and innovation, and better leverage the advantages of "one country, two systems" to fully release Macao's development potential in the new era. In doing so, Macao will also be able to contribute more to the nation's rejuvenation.

**POPE FRANCIS CALLS FOR A CEASEFIRE ON ALL FRONTS IN HIS PRAYER AHEAD OF CHRISTMAS**

**THE BUZZ**

Pope Francis called for a ceasefire on all war fronts in his Sunday Angelus prayer ahead of Christmas, condemning the "cruelty" of bombing schools and hospitals in Ukraine and Gaza.

"Let the weapons fall silent and let the Christmas carols ring out!" Francis said, delivering his Sunday blessing from indoors due to a cold and as a precaution ahead of a busy Christmas period.

"Let us pray that at Christmas there will be a ceasefire on all war fronts, in Ukraine, in the Holy Land, throughout the Middle East and throughout the world," the pope said.

Francis recalled, as he often does, the "battered Ukraine" that continues to be hit by attacks on cities, "which sometimes damage schools, hospitals and churches."

He also expressed his pain thinking of Gaza, "of such cruelty, to the machine-gunning of children, to the bombing of schools and hospitals ... How much cruelty!"

Francis on Saturday also criticized Israel's actions in Gaza and said that his envoy had been unable to enter the territory because of Israeli bombing.



AP PHOTO

**HOLIDAY TRAGEDY**

**STAMPEDES AT CHARITY EVENTS IN NIGERIA LEAVE 67 DEAD, MANY OF THEM CHILDREN**

**CHINEDU ASADU, ABUJA**

**S**TAMPEDES during three Christmas charity events across Nigeria have left at least 67 people dead in the past week, many of them children. Families are struggling during the country's worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

At least 35 children were killed in southwestern Oyo state last Wednesday. And on Saturday, 22 people died in southeastern Anambra state while 10 died in the capital, Abuja, where more than 1,000 people had gathered at a church to receive clothes and food.

Here's why people in Africa's most populous country are risking their lives for holiday donations.

**INFLATION AT A 28-YEAR HIGH**

"There is hunger in this Nigeria. Every Nigerian needs food," one woman, in tears, told the local Arise television after the stampede in Abuja.

The economic crisis is blamed on the government's policies to save money and attract investors, which have contributed to pushing the inflation rate to a 28-year high of 34.6%. Meanwhile the naira currency languishes at record lows against the dollar.

At least 63% of Nigeria's more than 210 million people population is poor, ac-

ording to the government's statistics office. The government has struggled to create jobs. And when people gather to protest hardship, security forces are quick to clamp down. In August, more than 20 people were shot dead by security forces during nationwide protests.

"The average Nigerian has seen food go out of their reach," said Cheta Nwanze, managing partner at the Lagos-based SBM Intelligence research firm. In 2022, the firm found that about 97% of Nigerians spend up to 63% of their income on food, but that share must have grown since then, he said.

Some of those who died in Abuja had waited overnight outside the church in cold weather for the chance to enter early, according to Loveth Inyang, a witness who rescued a baby from the crush.

**SECURITY IS COSTLY, TOO**

Deadly stampedes are not new in Nigeria and are often caused by lack of adherence to public safety measures. But analysts say people's desperation to survive is making crowd control more difficult.

Accounts from witnesses and police in Abuja and Anambra showed that the stampedes occurred before the events started as people tried to secure prime positions.

In Abuja, the church was

forced to cancel the event, leaving bags of rice and clothing items inside.

Organizers of such charity events often do not consider security a priority, said Ademola Adetuberu, who runs the Abuja-based Barricade Executive Protection security firm.

Meanwhile, the number of events is increasing as philanthropists and organizations try to meet the growing demand for food.

"If organizers of such events brainstorm more, get professionals to advise them and have a budget for security, this can be prevented," Adetuberu said.

**HOW AUTHORITIES ARE RESPONDING**

Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu has asked authorities to no longer tolerate "operational lapses" by organizers of such events, while police have made it mandatory for organizers to get prior permission before hosting them.

But such commitments are not new and usually difficult to enforce, analysts said.

"People's incomes have been squeezed through the entire year. When they hear somewhere that food is being distributed, their natural instinct is to go," Nwanze said. "Add this to our notoriously poor queue culture and you have the perfect storm that will lead to such a stampede." **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

**UK** The British economy flatlined in the third quarter of the year, according to downwardly revised official figures yesterday, in another blow to the new Labour government that has made growth its number one mission. In its latest revision of the July to September period, the Office for National Statistics said the British economy showed no growth against the previous estimate of 0.1%.



AP PHOTO

**Albania's** prime minister said Sunday the ban on TikTok his government announced a day earlier was "not a rushed reaction to a single incident." Prime Minister Edi Rama said Saturday the government will shut down TikTok for one year, accusing the popular video service of inciting violence and bullying, especially among children.



AP PHOTO

**Lebanon** A Christmas tree stands among the fallen stones of what remains of St. George Melkite Catholic Church in southern Lebanon. Once a vibrant community center, the 18th-century church is in ruins after an Israeli airstrike in October.



AP PHOTO

**Italy** Rome's iconic Trevi Fountain reopened Sunday after three months of renovations, just in time for the inauguration of the 2025 Jubilee Holy Year that is expected to draw millions of visitors. The renovation work on the 18th-century monument that's one of the Italian capital's main attractions cost 327,000 euros (\$341,000).

**HOLIDAY TIMES**

Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Monday December 30. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times.