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A SURVEY SHOWS THAT WHILE NEARLY 56% OF RESPONDENTS AGED 18 TO 35 EXPRESS A DESIRE FOR MARRIAGE, ONLY 38% ARE WILLING TO HAVE CHILDREN

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THE WORLD WELCOMES 2025 WITH LIGHT SHOWS, EMBRACES AND ICE PLUNGES

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AP PHOTO



Taiwanese leader Lai Ching-te pledged to strengthen the island's defenses in the face of escalating Chinese threats, saying in a New Year's address on Wednesday that Taiwan was a crucial part of the "line of defense of democracy" globally. "Taiwan must be prepared for danger in times of peace," Lai said in his address.

AP PHOTO



South Korean impeached president Yoon Suk Yeol, in a message to conservative supporters rallying outside his Seoul residence, vowed to "fight to the end" against "anti-state forces," while his legal team warned yesterday that police officers attempting to detain him could face arrest by his presidential security service or even civilians.

AP PHOTO



Japan's Emperor Naruhito and his family greeted throngs of New Year's well-wishers from a balcony window at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo yesterday. Some shouted "banzai" — "long live" — while others waved small paper Japanese flags. "I feel for those who are still greatly suffering," Naruhito said, referring to the quake in western Japan that struck a year ago.

AP PHOTO



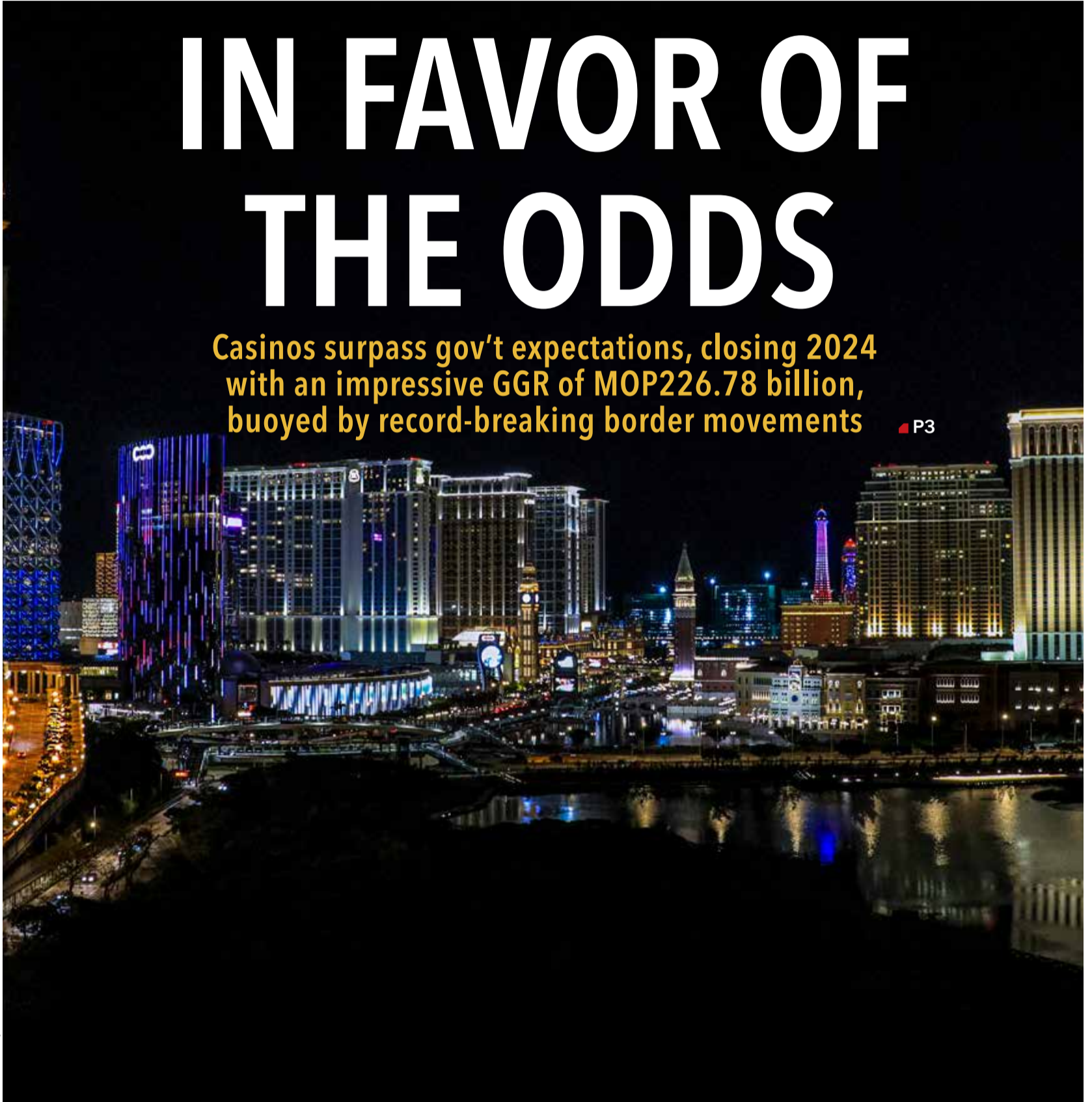
Bangladesh A court in the southeast yesterday rejected a plea for bail by a jailed Hindu leader who led large rallies in the Muslim-majority country demanding better security for minority groups. Krishna Das Prabhu, 39, faces sedition charges after he led huge rallies in the southeastern city of Chattogram.

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IN FAVOR OF THE ODDS

Casinos surpass gov't expectations, closing 2024 with an impressive GGR of MOP226.78 billion, buoyed by record-breaking border movements

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DSAL AND FAOM CO-HOST JOB-MATCHING SESSION

Local residents seeking employment will have an opportunity to connect with potential employers in two sector-specific job-matching sessions, co-organized by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and the Federation of Trade Unions of Macao (FAOM). Scheduled for Jan. 9, the sessions aim to address the local job market's demands while assisting job seekers. From 9 a.m. today to noon on January 8, interested candidates can register online for one of the 100 available positions. The morning session will focus on the cleaning sector, offering 73 vacancies, while the afternoon session will cater to business groups with 27 positions.

FSS INTRODUCES NEW PROOF-OF-LIFE PROCESS

The Social Security Fund (FSS) announced that nearly 170,000 beneficiaries of the old-age and disability pension must provide proof of life annually. Starting Jan. 1, beneficiaries can conveniently use the "Macao One Account" mobile app for this procedure, utilizing facial recognition technology. This option is available even outside Macau, eliminating the need for in-person visits. Beneficiaries can also provide proof of life using self-service machines or by visiting designated locations in Macau.

MPU RECTOR HIGHLIGHTS INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION AT GLOBAL AI FORUM

Marcus Im, rector of Macao Polytechnic University (MPU), addressed the Times Higher Education (THE) Global AI Forum, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary education in shaping future talent. The forum, themed "Higher Education in the AI Era," brought together leading scholars to explore innovations and partnerships in academia. Im pointed out MPU's commitment to integrating AI across diverse fields, including drug discovery and environmental management.

MAN ARRESTED FOR TAKING LEFT-BEHIND BACKPACK WITH MOP100,000

A 60-year-old man was arrested for taking a backpack containing MOP100,000 from a bus. On Dec. 27, the Public Security Police received a report from a passenger who had left the bag on the bus. After verifying with the bus company, police used the "Eyes in the Sky" system to identify the suspect and intercepted him the next day near Avenida Dr. Sun Yat-Sen in Taipa. He confessed to using some cash for gambling and lending it to friends. Police recovered MOP12,000 from his home and are investigating the remaining amount.

SURVEY

ONLY 38% WILLING TO HAVE CHILDREN

LYNZY VALLES

A recent survey conducted by the Chinese Youth Advancement Association shows that while nearly 56% of respondents aged 18 to 35 express a desire for marriage, only 38% are willing to have children. The survey's results, which collected 1,010 valid responses, show a growing hesitation among young people regarding family planning, influenced significantly by economic factors and societal pressures.

The findings suggest that financial stability plays a crucial role in these decisions. Many respondents identified childcare expenses, personal income, and housing costs as major deterrents to having children. Nearly half of those surveyed indicated that comprehensive childcare services would significantly enhance their willingness to start a family, emphasizing the need for improved support systems.

During the press conference announcing the survey results, the association noted that while there is an expectation for marriage among many youths, nearly 28% remain uninterested due to financial pressures and lifestyle differences. Furthermore, over 46% reported feeling societal or fami-



lial pressure to marry, which complicates their personal desires. The report also highlighted that many young people feel they need to achieve certain financial milestones before considering marriage.

A significant portion of respondents expressed a preference for engaging in social activities that could lead to potential partnerships, such as sports events or community gatherings. However, the overarching sentiment remains one of caution; nearly 36% stated they were unwilling to have children at all.

In response to these findings, the association has proposed several policy recommendations aimed at alleviating some of the pressures faced by young couples. These include extending maternity leave, increasing financial support for families, and creating an inclusive childcare network. The association argues that such measures could foster a more conducive environment for marriage and childbearing.

With declining birth rates already evident—3,712 births were recorded in 2023—the need for

effective policy interventions is more pressing than ever, the association highlighted. The official birth rate in Macau has been declining in recent years, dropping to just 5.5 per thousand people in 2023, down from 6.4 per thousand in 2022—the lowest since 1985. Local associations have called on the government to take more substantive action to address the low birth rate. These measures include developing a stronger culture of marriage and childbearing, as well as implementing more robust support measures for families.

Lawmaker calls for comprehensive support amid birth rate decline

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU'S birth rate has continued to decline in recent years, posing significant challenges to the region's sustainable development.

According to the latest data, the number of babies born in Macau last year dropped by 3.2% to 3,603, a trend that has drawn concern from policymakers and community leaders.

Lawmaker Wong Kit Cheng, chairman of the Women's General Association, highlighted that the Year of the Dragon, which was expected to



boost the birth rate, did not significantly influence residents' willingness to have children. Wong emphasized that the long-term low birth rate will present severe challenges to Macau's

social sustainability.

In response to the declining birth rate, Wong suggested that Macau should learn from mainland China's recent policies, which aim to accelerate the improvement of the

childbirth support system and promote a more family-friendly social environment. Specifically, the concept of "cost-sharing" in terms of implementing various maternity leave arrangements could help support enterprises in adopting more family-friendly measures, an approach that Macau could potentially adopt.

Looking ahead, Wong called for the SAR government to take a more proactive and leading role in addressing the issue. She recommended the establishment of a comprehensive and systematic mechanism to encour-

age childbirth, including the integration of various policies related to marriage, childcare, and housing support. Wong also suggested the implementation of immediate administrative measures, such as providing bonuses and subsidies for parents with newborns and young children, as well as supporting businesses in offering additional family-friendly benefits.

As Macau addresses the declining birth rate, lawmakers highlight the need for a coordinated, multi-pronged approach involving the government, social enterprises, and businesses. Experts believe that creating a more child-friendly environment and implementing targeted policies and incentives is essential to tackling the issue effectively.

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GAMING

Casinos with results above gov't expectations despite December's 'poor' results

RENATO MARQUES

MACAU casinos closed the year with an accumulated gross gaming revenue (GGR) of MOP226.78 billion. The final figures released by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) show the result to be some 5% higher than initially forecasted.

The figure obtained in 2024 also represents an increase of 23.9% compared year-on-year with 2023, when the GGR was MOP183.06 billion.

Despite the final results of the year proving to be almost 5% higher than forecasted, December was eventually the month with the poorest results of the year when compared year-on-year with the equivalent month of 2023, registering a drop of 2% from December 2023 and being the only month of the whole year in the red.

Still, the monthly result, reaching MOP18.2 billion, was just the third-lowest monthly result of 2024 behind September (MOP17.25 billion) and June (MOP17.69 billion).

On average, in 2024, the local casinos earned revenues of MOP18.90 billion.

Analysts from several entities, including JP Morgan and Citi-



group, have pointed out that the three-day visit from President Xi Jinping to Macau from Dec. 18 to 20 was the main factor contribu-

ting to the result of December, noting a significant slowdown around this period.

According to the current gover-

ment forecast for 2025, the sector is expected to be worth some MOP240 billion, or an average of MOP20 billion per month, which

is 5.83% higher than in 2024.

A month ago, when the 2025 forecast was presented, it elicited mixed feelings from lawmakers, with some considering the amount "very conservative," while others expressed fears that the government could be overestimating receipts while underestimating threats to the sector, such as regional competition and other external factors.

Although the industry has been experiencing a rapid recovery post-Covid, the results of Macau's gaming industry remain very far from those reached back in 2013, when the GGR was MOP370.75 billion, which was almost 63.5% higher than the 2024 result.

ONE-MONTH SALARY BONUS TO BE DISTRIBUTED BY ALL GAMING CONCESSIONAIRES

All six gaming concessionaires have announced plans to distribute discretionary financial bonuses to their workers. The bonuses, worth one month's salary, will be paid later this month before the Lunar New Year, they announced in separate press statements. Additionally, Sands China Limited (SCL) has announced a salary increase for 99% of its employees, effective from March this year. SCL pay adjustments vary by income level, with lower-salaried staff (below MOP16,000/month) receiving a higher percentage increase, while those earning wages above MOP16,000 will see their salaries increase at a fixed percentage of 2.5%. For the time being, no other gaming concessionaire has announced salary increases for 2025, but as this practice becomes the norm after such an announcement by one of the competitors, others usually follow suit.

MONTHLY GROSS REVENUE

	2024	2023	Variance
Jan	19,337	11,580	+67.0%
Feb	18,486	10,324	+79.1%
Mar	19,503	12,738	+53.1%
Apr	18,545	14,722	+26.0%
May	20,188	15,565	+29.7%
Jun	17,694	15,207	+16.4%
Jul	18,595	16,662	+11.6%
Aug	19,754	17,213	+14.8%
Sept	17,253	14,937	+15.5%
Oct	20,787	19,501	+6.6%
Nov	18,438	16,043	+14.9%
Dec	18,202	18,567	-2.0%

*Units in MOP billion

TOURISM

Record-breaking border movements in 2024

RENATO MARQUES

THE Public Security Police Force (PSP) has announced that last year, there were record-breaking border movements at the borders of Macau.

According to the information, almost 210 million border crossings to and from Macau were recorded in 2024, a figure that constitutes the highest record ever. Additionally, the PSP also noted that in 2024, the highest single-day record of border movements was achieved on August 24, with a total of 753,000 trips recorded in 24 hours.

The PSP noted that



the results account for an increase of 17.5% year-on-year when compared to the around 180 million trips made in 2023.

The figures released also show that the majority of the border crossings were made by local residents (77.9 million) or 36.3%, whi-

le visitors accounted for some 69.88 million or 32.5%.

Concurrently, authorities revealed that the highest single-day

passenger flow recorded at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge was on February 12, with a new record-high of 131,000 trips.

In the statement, the PSP also stated that they are continuing efforts to improve the border checkpoints to facilitate convenience, speed, and safety in border crossings, particularly between Macau and the mainland.

The same authorities also revealed that between Dec. 30, 2024, and Jan. 1, 2025, there were almost 2 million passenger movements (1,928,998) at all the border checkpoints of Macau. Of these, some 657,517 were visitors.

HENGQIN PORT BREAKS RECORD FOR PASSENGER, VEHICLE FLOWS IN 2024

The inbound and outbound passenger traffic through Hengqin Port exceeded 22.8 million in 2024, marking a 36% year-on-year increase, according to statistics from the Hengqin Border Inspection Station. Vehicle traffic also saw significant growth, rising 24% to 2.4 million vehicles. These figures set new records for both passenger and vehicle flows. Notably, over 1.58 million single-plate vehicles from Macau crossed Hengqin Port last year, accounting for 66% of the total traffic.

The port also recorded its highest-ever single-day passenger flows five times in 2024, with the peak reaching over 103,000 passengers in a single day.

Authorities anticipate even higher traffic this year following the implementation of Hengqin's "one visa, multiple entries" policy on January 1, which benefits approximately 50,000 eligible Hengqin-registered residents and residence permit holders.

TOURISM

RESIDENTS LIVING CLOSE TO TOURIST SITES COMPLAIN OF EXCESSIVE CROWDING AND NOISE

RENATO MARQUES

RESIDENTS living close to several major tourist sites have complained that the large number of visitors who visited Macau in 2024 is not respecting those who live in those areas and that there is excessive crowding and noise in many surrounding areas, Che Mei Leng, president of the Macao Sam Pa Mun Residents Mutual Aid Association, said in an interview with public broadcaster TDM.

Che said that residents living near the Ruins of Saint Paul's have made several complaints over the year due to the excessive noise caused mostly by the use of megaphones by tourist guides.

She added that this happens when the number of tourists is particularly high, and the tour groups are large.

The same resident representative also noted that the guides are not following the routes created by the Macao Government Tourism Office and that they often detour into streets that are not part of these routes, causing



further disturbance.

In the past, there were also many complaints from the residents living in these major tourist areas, including the entry of tourists into private residential buildings to sit on the staircases, eat, and even urinate.

In another interview with TDM, Lam Sao Chan, head of the Macao Tourist Guides Union, acknowledged that there are very specific rules and instructions that the guides must follow while performing their activities, which include the disclosure of the

route and some details to the visitors even before they leave the buses.

Lam said that the association has also called on guides not to use their microphones and speaker systems too much while commuting on foot, using them

only at specific locations where presentations and explanations are necessary.

The same official noted that tourists are a necessity for the survival of Macau's economy and also called on residents not to exaggerate their complaints.

AD



澳門特別行政區
REGIÃO ADMINISTRATIVA ESPECIAL DE MACAU
科學技術發展基金
FUNDO PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DAS CIÊNCIAS E DA TECNOLOGIA

Notice
First Application for the 2025 Funding Scheme for Innovation and Research of Enterprises of FDCT
(Matching projects, Non-Certified Enterprises, Potential or Growing Technology Enterprises, Key Technology Enterprises)

I. Objectives
To align with the policy address of the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region, FDCT has launched the "Funding Scheme for Innovation and Research of Enterprises" to support technology enterprises at different stages of development to conduct various types of technological research, encourage industry-academia collaboration, promote the transformation of applied research results, focus on cultivating mature research achievements, and enhance the contribution of technological innovation to the social and economic development of Macao.

II. Types of Applications, Maximum Funding Amount, and Requirements for Project Completion

Application Categories		Maximum Funding Amount	Output Requirements
Matching projects	R&D projects initiated by successful matching with tertiary institutions via the "Industry-Academia-Research Matching Platform" of FDCT.	Not exceed MOP250,000, or MOP500,000 if the technology provider is a local tertiary institution.	The technology maturity level must reach Level 5 or above
Non-certified Enterprises	R&D projects carried out by enterprises that have not yet been certified under the Technology Enterprise Certification Programme of DSED or recognized as 'enterprises engaged in technological innovation business' by the Commission for the Review of Enterprises Engaged in Technological Innovation Business, in accordance with Article 6 of the Tax Incentive Scheme for Science Technology and Innovation Business (Law No. 1/2021).	Not exceeding MOP 1 million	The technology maturity level must reach Level 5 or above
Potential or Growing Technology Enterprises	R&D projects carried out by 'Potential Technology Enterprises' or 'Growing Technology Enterprises' certified under the Technology Enterprise Certification Programme of the DSED, or by enterprises recognized as 'enterprises engaged in technological innovation business' by the Commission for the Review of Enterprises Engaged in Technological Innovation Business, in accordance with Article 6 of the Tax Incentive Scheme for Science Technology and Innovation Business (Law No. 1/2021).	Not exceeding MOP 3 million	The technology maturity level must reach Level 6 or above
Key Technology Enterprises	R&D projects carried out by 'Key Technology Enterprises' certified under the Technology Enterprise Certification Programme of the DSED.	Not exceeding MOP 5 million	Level 6 or above

III. Funding Recipients and Application Eligibility

- Commercial entrepreneurs or commercial enterprises registered in the Macao Special Administrative Region.
- Applications shall be submitted by the entities with legal personality referred to in the preceding clause. If the relevant entity does not have legal personality, the application shall be made through the entity with legal personality to which it belongs.
- Applicants shall not owe any taxes or social security contributions to the Macao SAR.
- For non-certified enterprises, applicants shall meet the following criteria:
 - Registered in the Macao SAR for one year or more. For incubating enterprises of the national-level maker space in Macao, the registration period may be less than one year.
 - Employ no fewer than three full-time employees. For incubating enterprises of the national-level maker space in Macao, the number of full-time employees may be fewer than three.
- For potential or growing technology enterprises, applicants shall meet one of the following conditions:
 - Recognized as a "potential technology enterprise" or "growing technology enterprise" under the Technology Enterprise Certification Programme of the DSED.
 - Recognized as an "enterprise engaged in technological innovation business" by the Commission for the Review of Enterprises Engaged in Technological Innovation Business, as stipulated in Article 6 of the Policy of Tax Incentives for Enterprises Engaged in Technological Innovation Business (Law No. 1/2021).
- For key technology enterprises, applicants shall be recognized as a "key technology enterprise" under the Technology Enterprise Certification Programme of the DSED.

IV. Application Period
Matching Category: From the 1st to the 10th of January, April, July, and October 2025
Non-certified Enterprises, Potential or Growing Technology Enterprises, Key Technology Enterprises: From 13 January 2025 to 13 February 2025 (First event in 2025)

V. Priority of Support

- Priority will be given to projects that involve collaboration with local tertiary institutions or enterprises in Hengqin.
- Priority will also be given to research and industrial development projects that align with policies such as the Second Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2021-2025), the Development Plan for Appropriate Economic Diversification of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2024-2028), the Policy Address for the Fiscal Year 2025, and relevant plans and programs of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, particularly projects that promote areas such as traditional Chinese medicine, integrated circuits, electronic components, the Internet of Things, big data, artificial intelligence, new energy, space science, advanced materials, and biomedicine.

VI. Supporting Input
Applicants must invest R&D funds in an amount no less than the funding provided by the FDCT.

VII. Application Method
Applicants shall log in to the online funding application system at the following address and complete and submit the application proposal before the application deadline:
Submission address for hard copies: Room K, 11th Floor, Macau Square, 43-53A Avenida do Infante D. Henrique, Macao. Inquiry phone number: +853 2878 8777
Website: <https://apps.fdct.gov.mo/sams/public/main-page.faces>
Additional Requirement for Matching Category: Successful matching with higher education institutions through the FDCT "Industry-Academia-Research Online Matching Platform" (<http://uam.fdct.gov.mo/>)

President of FDCT Administrative Committee,
Che Weng Keong
2 January 2025

NEW YEAR MESSAGE

President Xi and Macau leadership outline vision for high-quality development

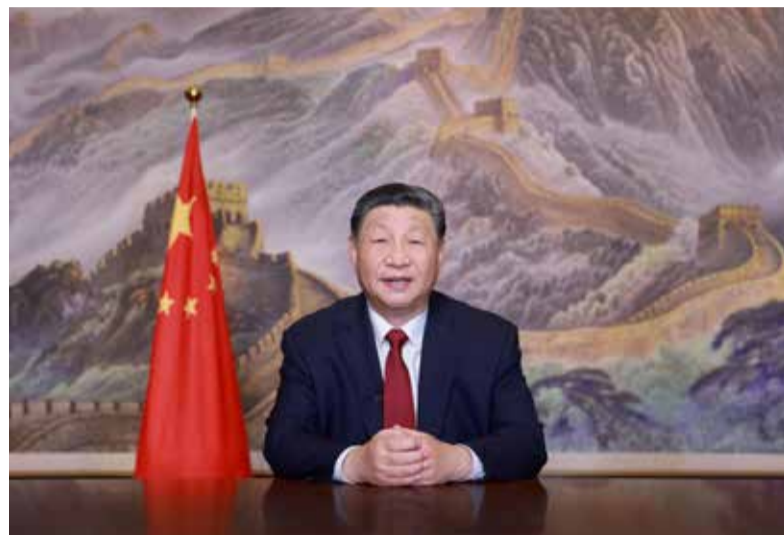
VICTORIA CHAN

AS Macau ushers in the new year of 2025, the Chief Executive (CE), Sam Hou Fai, delivered a New Year speech. In his remarks, Sam reflected on the profound significance of 2024, which marked the 25th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland.

He highlighted President Xi Jinping's visit to Macau late last year, where the President outlined his vision for Macau's future development.

Echoing such directives, the CE emphasized the importance of upholding national interests and leveraging Macau's institutional strengths to drive high-quality development.

Looking ahead, Sam pledged that the new-term government would take the initiative to reform and innovate to usher in a new chapter of progress for Macau. He called on all sectors of society to unite their efforts,



asserting that "the future of Macau will surely be more brilliant and splendid" with the support of the Central government.

In a separate address, President Xi reflected on China's remarkable progress over the past year while also looking ahead to the country's continued high-quality development. The President noted that China's economy had rebounded and was expected to exceed RMB130

trillion in GDP, with impressive growth in new industries and technologies.

Recounting his visits to various localities, Xi expressed his ongoing concern for people's livelihoods, stating, "I have always been concerned about the employment and income increase, 'the old and the young,' education and medical care that everyone cares about." Xi also emphasized China's role as

a responsible major country on the global stage.

Looking ahead to 2025, Xi pledged that China would "implement more proactive policies, focus on high-quality development, promote high-level scientific and technological self-reliance, and maintain the good momentum of economic and social development." He expressed confidence in overcoming any challenges.

Resounding the sentiments shared by the CE and the President, the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Macau SAR, Liu Xianfa, also delivered a New Year's message reflecting on the city's remarkable progress over the past 25 years since its return to the motherland. Liu highlighted the significance of 2024 and noted Xi's high affirmation of Macau's achievements.

The Commissioner also emphasized that under the guidance of President Xi's diplomatic strategy, China has "expanded

and deepened its all-round diplomatic layout, firmly defended its core national interests, adhered to international fairness and justice, and promoted the building of a community with a shared future for mankind."

He pledged that the diplomatic work related to Macau would "continuously enhance its global influence and attractiveness, and create a more favorable international environment for continuously creating a new situation for high-quality development."

He pledged that the diplomatic work related to Macau would "thoroughly practice the concepts of 'diplomacy for the people' and 'diplomacy for the benefit of Macau,'" to "continuously enhance its global influence and attractiveness, and create a more favorable international environment for continuously creating a new situation for high-quality development of the 'one country, two systems' cause."

AD



澳門特別行政區
REGIÃO ADMINISTRATIVA ESPECIAL DE MACAU
科學技術發展基金

FUNDO PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DAS CIÊNCIAS E DA TECNOLOGIA

Notice

First Application for the 2025 Research and Innovation Funding Scheme of FDCT (Capacity Enhancement Category, Basic Research Category, and Applied Research Category)

I. Objectives

In line with the policy objectives of the Macao SAR Government, the Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) has launched the "Funding Scheme for Research and Innovation." Through multi-tiered funding categories, the Scheme supports Macao's scientific research institutions and researchers in conducting in-depth technological studies to continuously enhance research capabilities and the capacity for cutting-edge original innovation, thereby maintaining the leading position of Macao's advantageous disciplines. At the same time, the Scheme aims to strengthen industry-academia-research collaboration, encourage the generation of applied scientific research results, and focus on the transformation and cultivation of mature research outcomes, thereby improving the contribution of scientific and technological innovation results to the social and economic development of Macao.

II. Funding Recipients and Application Eligibility

- Public higher education institutions or public medical institutions in the Macao SAR.
- Private higher education institutions established under the laws of the Macao SAR.
- Private non-profit entities established under the laws of the Macao SAR.
- Researchers engaged in research and development in the Macao SAR.

III. Application Categories, Maximum Funding Amount, and Evaluation Factors and Criteria

Application Categories		Maximum Funding Amount	Output Requirements
Capacity Enhancement Category	Research projects led by new researchers or those aiming to enhance their research capabilities.	Not exceeding MOP 500,000.	Including but not limited to academic or applied outcomes.
Basic Research Category	Basic or applied basic research projects conducted to enhance cutting-edge original innovation capabilities.	Not exceeding MOP 3,000,000.	Including but not limited to academic or applied outcomes. At project completion, the technology readiness level must not exceed Level 3.
Applied Research Category	Applied research projects conducted to meet the policy needs of the Macao SAR Government or enterprise demands.	Not exceeding MOP 3,000,000.	Expected research outcomes must include software, hardware (prototypes, models), technical standards, formulas, new materials, or new processes, and specify the economic or social benefits that can be achieved after project implementation. At project completion, the technology readiness level must reach Level 4 or above.

IV. Application Period

From January 13, 2025, to February 13, 2025.

V. Priority Support

- To support industry-academia-research collaboration in Macao, applied research projects will be given priority when budget constraints exist.
- For applied research projects, priority will be given to projects in collaboration with enterprises in Macao or Hengqin, especially those partnering with enterprises certified under the Technology Enterprise Certification Programme of the Economic and Technological Development Bureau.
- For basic and applied research projects, priority will be given to collaborative research projects between higher education institutions in Macao.

VI. Supporting Input

For basic and applied research projects, if collaborating with commercial enterprises, those enterprises must provide matching funds amounting to no less than 10% of the funding granted by the FDCT.

VII. Application Method

Applicants must log into the online funding application system provided below, fill out, and submit the application proposal before the application deadline. Address for submitting hard copy documents: 11K, Macau Plaza, Avenida do Infante D. Henrique, No. 43-53A, Macau. Inquiry telephone: 28788777. Website: <https://apps.fdct.gov.mo/sams/public/main-page.faces>

President of FDCT Administrative Committee,
Che Weng Keong
2 January 2025

AL ELECTIONS

CANDIDATES EXCLUDED FROM PREVIOUS ELECTIONS ARE STILL BANNED FROM RUNNING THIS YEAR

RENATO MARQUES

THE candidates who were excluded from running in the Legislative Assembly (AL) elections in 2021 are still not eligible for this year's elections, the new president of the Electoral Affairs Committee for the AL elections (CAEAL), Seng Ioi Man, said on the sidelines of the inauguration ceremony for the president and members of CAEAL.

Questioned by the media on the topic, Seng clarified that the previous ban on such candidates was valid for five years and has not yet expired. This means that all the excluded candidates who were part of the pro-democracy camp will not be able to run in the summer elections this year.

Seng noted that, according to the amendments made to the electoral laws aimed at "better protecting national security," all candidates who have been banned for being considered disloyal to the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR)



or the People's Republic of China cannot participate in any decision-making posts related to the MSAR.

The CAEAL president also noted that in the last review of the election law, clear qualification standards were established that all candidates must

possess to be eligible.

Back in 2021, the CAEAL excluded 15 candidates from the election run after an evaluation classified them as ineligible due to having performed activities or expressed opinions that were against the national rules and, thus, not being con-

sidered "patriots."

The AL comprises 33 lawmakers; 14 of them are elected by universal suffrage, 12 are chosen by indirect suffrage (as representatives of sectorial groups), and the remaining seven are appointed directly by the Chief Executive.

At the moment, the 14 lawmakers elected by universal suffrage are Si Ka Lon, Zheng Anting, Wong Kit Cheng, Leong Sun lok, Leong Hong Sai, Ron Lam, Ma Io Fong, José Maria Pereira Coutinho, Ella Lei, Song Pek Kei, Che Sai Wang, Lo Choi In, Ngan Iek Hang, and Nick Lei.

AD

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STOCK MARKET

Global shares are mixed after New Year holiday. Chinese shares sink

YURI KAGEYAMA, TOKYO

GLOBAL shares were mixed yesterday, the first day of trading for 2025, with losses of more than 2% in Chinese benchmarks.

France's CAC 40 dropped 0.5% to 7,346.33, while Germany's DAX rose 0.2% to 19,947.91. Britain's FTSE 100 was virtually unchanged at 8,174.85.

The futures for the S&P 500 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average were 0.4% higher.

Investors remain cautious over what U.S. President-elect Donald Trump might do once he takes office, including raising tariffs on imports from China and other Asian countries.

The Shanghai Composite index dropped 2.7% to 3,262.56 and the

Hang Seng in Hong Kong fell 2.2% to 19,623.32.

A survey of factory managers, the Caixin China Purchasing Managers Index, showed activity expanding at a slower pace in December as the index fell to 50.5 from 51.5 in November, on a scale where readings above 50 show expansion. New orders, employment and business sentiment weakened.

Upbeat talk by Chinese leader Xi Jinping in a New Year's address did little to raise optimism among market players who are hoping for more aggressive action to support the economy and boost share prices.

"We have adopted a full range of policies to make solid gains in pursuing high-quality development. China's economy has rebounded and is on an upward tra-

jectory," Xi said in a New Year message, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific, Australia's S&P/ASX 200 rose 0.5% to 8,201.20 and South Korea's Kospi was flat at 2,398.94.

On Wednesday, markets were closed on Wall Street for the New Year's Day holiday, as were nearly all other world markets.

U.S. stock indexes closed mostly lower Tuesday as the market delivered a downbeat finish on the final day of another milestone-shattering year on Wall Street.

The U.S. markets' stellar run was driven by a growing economy, solid consumer spending and a strong jobs market.

Skyrocketing prices for companies in the artificial intelligence busi-

ness, such as Nvidia and Super Micro Computer, helped lift the market to new heights.

After three interest rate cuts in 2024, the Fed has signaled a more cautious approach heading into 2025 with inflation remaining sticky as the country prepares for Trump's transition into the White House. Trump's threats to hike tariffs on imported goods have raised anxiety that inflation could be reignited as companies pass along the cost of tariffs.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude oil rose 26 cents to \$71.98 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, added 28 cents to \$74.85 a barrel.

The U.S. dollar slipped to 156.79 Japanese yen from 157.24 yen. The euro cost \$1.0368, up from \$1.0359. **MDT/AP**

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

Set Sail for Family Fun at the 2025 MGM Macao International Regatta



As the annual international sporting event "2025 MGM Macao International Regatta" approaches, water sports enthusiasts and families are invited for a treat with the introduction of the Family Fun Day, open to the public all weekend long. The special event offers a blend of thrilling sailing experiences and engaging activities designed for all ages, promising a weekend full of fun and unforgettable memories and immersing the whole city in the excitement of competitive sailing.



Embark on a unique sailing experience to discover the allure of water sports and dive into a world of exhilarating sea adventures. Test your skills in exciting challenges at the game booths with exclusive giveaways. Be sure not to miss the workshops featuring hands-on activities that foster family bonding and unleash creativity. There's something for everyone at the Family Fun Day, bringing families closer together through fun and interactive experiences.

Join us for a dynamic weekend filled with adventure and laughter. For more information on the event schedule and details, visit mgm.mo.

2025 MGM Macao International Regatta | Family Fun Day

Date: January 11-12, 2025 (Saturday and Sunday)
Time: 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Location: Macau Kun Iam Statue Waterfront Leisure Area - Seaside Promenade



AP PHOTO



GREATER BAY AREA TURNS INTO DYNAMIC GROWTH ENGINE FOR NEW QUALITY PRODUCTIVE FORCES

BYD, a front-runner in the global new energy vehicle (NEV) market, set a new record last year, with October marking a milestone sales achievement of 500,000 NEVs sold in a single month.

In the first 11 months of 2024, BYD sold 3.75 million vehicles, over 40 percent higher than the same period in the previous year. The NEV sector is the epitome of the rapid development of strategic industries in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), where BYD was born.

Covering an area of 56,000 square kilometers, which is less than 0.6 percent of the country's total land area, the GBA generated an economic output exceeding 14 trillion yuan (about 1.95 trillion U.S. dollars) in 2023, roughly one-ninth of the national total.

It stands as one of China's most open and economically dynamic areas, and is also among the regions with the highest economic development quality.

PACESETTER IN HIGH-QUALITY GROWTH

Eyeing high-quality sustainable development, Guangdong Province, in recent years, outlined action plans for 20 strategic industry clusters, ranging from the automotive industry, new-generation electronic information technology, green petrochemicals, to intelligent home appliances and advanced materials.

Statistics reveal that in 2023, the 20 strategic industry clusters in Guangdong saw a 5.2 percent year-on-year increase in value-added, contributing to 40 percent of the province's total GDP.

Among them, the three mainstay industries -- namely, computers,



communications and other electronic equipment manufacturing; electrical machinery and equipment manufacturing; and the automotive manufacturing industry -- saw value-added growth rates of 3.6 percent, 8.8 percent, and 11.2 percent, respectively, serving as the "stabilizers" for Guangdong's manufacturing sector.

Shenzhen in particular, as a pioneer in China's reform and opening-up drive, has established specialized teams to aggregate expertise in three key industries -- pharmaceutical and medical devices, NEVs, and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

These initiatives aim to further promote the development of these industries, cultivate more new pillars, and stimulate stronger new dynamics. Huang Ming, an official with Shenzhen's Industry and Information Technology Bureau, stated that Shenzhen is capitalizing on the historic shift in the global

automotive industry.

The city has set a strategic aim to expedite the growth of a "world-class, next-generation automotive hub." "Without the strong support of the Guangdong provincial authorities and Shenzhen authorities, there would be no BYD as it is today," said Wang Chuanfu, chairman and president of BYD.

INNOVATION-DRIVEN

2024 marks the fifth anniversary of the release of the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao GBA.

From the reform and opening-up, to new quality productive forces, the success of the GBA's economic miracle has been a testament to how innovation prompts impetus to drive growth. Science and technology constitute a primary productive force.

To get prepared for future industries, the GBA has established two national laboratories, 30 national key

laboratories, and 430 provincial key laboratories, forming a tiered, diverse, and distinctive laboratory system and laying a solid foundation for innovation, noted Gong Guoping, an official with Guangdong's department of science and technology.

With consumption becoming a more significant driver of economic growth, the GBA is actively developing new consumption patterns. It is utilizing new technologies like big data, cloud computing, AI, the Internet of Things, and blockchain to enhance consumer experiences, stimulate cross-border consumption, and foster the integrated development of the region. In the first half of 2024, a total of 44.66 million trips were made by Hong Kong residents to Shenzhen.

Given that Hong Kong has a population of 7.5 million, this means on average, each Hong Kong resident traveled to Shenzhen six times, which is roughly once a month per person.

By September 2024, the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, located just across the river from Macau, has seen a total of 6,461 Macau-invested companies established.

The number of Macau residents living in the zone had reached 16,539, marking a 19.1 percent increase year on year. "The Greater Bay Area isn't just about economic growth, it's about connecting markets," said Fu Tang Long, a Macau entrepreneur. From flying taxis to streamlined multi-entry travel permits, the GBA continues to pioneer innovative initiatives, establishing a benchmark for robust regional economic integration.

PRO-BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Boosting global allure hinges on a business-friendly environment. Over the recent years, the GBA has striven to align with global benchmarks, fostering a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment.

Guangdong, for instance, has enacted a package of regulations to enhance the business environment, safeguard the interests of foreign investors, manage social credit, and protect intellectual property rights.

These measures are instrumental in bolstering the GBA's reform, innovation, and development efforts.

These efforts yielded tangible results. The Global Investment Promotion Conference for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao GBA last year resulted in 1,933 projects, with a combined investment totaling 2.26 trillion yuan. Guangdong has been rated as the province with the best business environment reputation for four consecutive years, noted Zhu Yonghui with the GBA development office in Guangdong.

Zhu added that by aligning with international high-standard economic and trade rules and continuously deepening business environment reforms, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao GBA is facilitating the convenient and efficient cross-border flow of people, goods, capital and information, and is becoming "one of the most promising growth poles globally." **MDT/XINHUA**

Guangzhou to open 10 new metro, intercity rail lines in 2025

ON THE AGENDA

THE metro and intercity rail network in Guangzhou, located in Guangdong province, is set to expand significantly in 2025 with the addition of 10 new metro and intercity lines, which will span a total of 173 kilometers, as reported by the city's metro operation company.

Recently, the city inaugurated its first subway loop line, Line 11, measuring 44.2 kilometers and serving key urban districts including Tianhe, Baiyun, Yuexiu, Liwan, and Haizhu. Liu Zhicheng, Party chief and chairman of Guangzhou Metro Group, emphasized that this new line enhances efficient circulation and seamless connectivity within the

city, thereby improving travel for local residents.

The design of the stations along Line 11 is inspired by intangible cultural heritage, featuring elements from Cantonese opera, embroidery, porcelain, lion dance, carving, and traditional Chinese medicine.

This integration aims to showcase Guangdong's cultural identity and es-

tablish a cultural corridor within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Additionally, the northern extension of the Guangzhou-Qingyuan intercity railway was also launched recently, contributing to a combined metro and intercity network that now exceeds 1,000 kilometers.

According to company data, Guangzhou's metro network encompasses 705.1 kilometers of metro lines alongside 338.3 kilometers of intercity railways.

Guangdong Province, China's economic powerhouse, handled a record-breaking 600 million passenger trips in 2024, including a surge in trips to and from Hong Kong, according to Guangzhou Railway Group.

Passengers made over 27 million trips between Guangdong and Hong Kong via the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong high-speed railway in 2024 as of last Saturday, a yearly increase of 37 percent, according to the railway group.

With increasing train

routes connecting cities in the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, more passengers are using this high-speed railway for tourism, business and visiting relatives, among others.

Zhang Zhe, director of the passenger transport department of the railway group, said the huge passenger flow reflects the continuous progress of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the vitality of thriving economic development.

MDT/AGENCIES

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Spring Festival travel expected to reach record high

LUO WANGSHU

CHINA'S Spring Festival travel volume is expected to reach a record high, with transport authorities meticulously making preparations, including increasing transportation capacity, strengthening transportation coordination, enhancing safety measures and optimizing services, officials said.

The Spring Festival travel rush, or chunyun, is set to break historical records this year, with an estimated 9 billion trips expected to be made across the country during the 40-day period from Jan 14 to Feb 22, according to Li Chunlin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission.

This marks a nearly 7 percent increase from 2024, when the number of trips reached 8.4 billion.

For many, China's Spring Festival travel rush is not just the beginning of the year, but a journey home — a journey filled with reunions, joy and traditions.

As the world's largest annual human migration unfolds once again, it not only highlights the sheer scale of this extraordinary feat, but also serves as a powerful testament to the Chinese government's ability to organize, manage and execute such a complex operation. It's a remarkable celebration of homecoming, family and the human spirit, and a resounding verification of China's management capabilities on a global stage.

At a national video conference on Tuesday, Li outlined plans



to ensure a smooth and efficient Spring Festival travel season. He emphasized the importance of enhancing transportation capacity, improving safety measures and optimizing passenger services.

"We are committed to delivering a safe, warm and convenient Spring Festival journey," he said.

The 2025 chunyun period will see surges in rail and air travels. The number of rail passenger trips is expected to surpass 510 million, while civil aviation is set to handle 90 million trips, with both numbers reflecting increases over 2024 levels. Self-driving travel will remain the dominant mode of transportation.

In preparation, authorities are taking comprehensive steps to accommodate the anticipated passenger flow, including expanding transportation capacity, im-

proving coordination between different modes of transportation and enhancing emergency response capabilities.

The Ministry of Transport has also established a team to oversee Spring Festival operations, ensuring smooth integration of rail, road, sea and air transportation services. Li Yang, vice-minister of transport, noted that both overall travel demand and single-day peak travel numbers are expected to hit new records, requiring rigorous planning and resource allocation.

The railway network is preparing for two peak travel days — Jan 25, before the holiday, and Feb 4, the last day of the holiday. Spring Festival falls on Jan 29 this year and the holiday goes from Jan 28 to Feb 4.

To meet the surge in demand, the rail sector plans to increase

daily passenger train services to a peak of 14,100 before the holiday and 14,200 afterward.

This is a 3.9 percent and 4.3 percent increase, respectively, compared with last year's capacity. High-speed trains on key routes, including from Guangdong province's Guangzhou and Shenzhen, and Shanghai and Beijing, will provide overnight services to meet the demand.

Officials are also improving connectivity between different modes of transportation. With an eye on convenience, transport authorities are ensuring smooth transfers for travelers, especially for "first and last mile" connectivity from transport hubs to destinations.

Electric vehicles will continue to grow in popularity during the travel rush, with an expected increase in EV usage compared to

previous years. According to Li, the vice-minister, the percentage of electric vehicle travel during the National Day holiday in October reached 15.9 percent, and the upcoming Spring Festival holiday is expected to see similar trends. However, the growing demand for charging stations remains a challenge.

"Every holiday, the difficulties of finding charging stations and the anxiety over battery range are common problems travelers face," Li said. "To tackle this issue, we're actively working on solutions and making preparations to ensure a smoother journey for everyone."

As of November, more than 33,000 charging posts had been installed across China's expressways, an increase of 12,000 from 2023. In addition, about 97 percent of the more than 6,000 service areas on China's expressway network have charging posts.

However, during peak periods, some regions still face insufficient charging capacity. The Ministry of Transport is addressing this by deploying mobile charging stations and optimizing the distribution of existing infrastructure based on demand forecasts. Travelers can also check for available charging stations through various apps and on-site displays.

Li assured that efforts are underway to further expand charging facilities, with a goal of achieving general coverage of fixed and mobile charging infrastructure by the end of 2025, ensuring that electric vehicle users have a smooth travel experience.

In addition to addressing capacity issues, authorities are focused on maintaining safety standards across all transportation networks. Strict safety protocols will be enforced, including enhanced inspections and risk assessments. Special measures will be taken to prevent congestion and ensure smooth traffic flow, particularly at key travel hubs and bottleneck areas. **CHINA DAILY**

A lantern workshop makes snakes cute for the Lunar New Year

THE brightly lit snake lanterns coil from oversized heads that don't fit the usual image of the slithery reptile — they are cute.

It's the year of the snake in the Chinese zodiac, and in an era when cuteness reigns supreme, a workshop in eastern China is churning out hundreds of snake lanterns with cartoony big eyes — and smiles instead of flickering tongues — for Lunar New Year displays at parks,

tourist sites and shopping malls.

"When you come close, you can see they look like snakes, but with a cute feeling," said Wang Yongxun, the owner of the workshop in Weifang city in Shandong province.

The colorful lanterns stand taller than the average person and are built on wiry metal frames. They incorporate dragon elements, Wang said, as the snake is known as the "little dra-

gon" in Chinese culture.

The Chinese zodiac is a 12-year cycle with a different animal for each year, and the year of the snake, which begins Jan. 29, follows the year of the dragon.

The snake is a symbol of spirituality, reproduction and longevity in China but may also represent evil and danger.

While they can give people a feeling of terror, snakes were considered a

guardian of the home in ancient Chinese culture and harming them would bring bad luck, said Wang Juan, a folklore expert at Peking University.

"We have played down the aggressiveness of the snake, so it is culturalized," she said. "This is what we call the incorporation of nature into the sequences of human beings and a manifestation of mutual care between humans and nature." **MDT/AP**



Wang Yongxun shows his snake shaped lanterns on display at his workshop factory in Weifang ahead of the Chinese Year of the Snake in eastern China's Shandong province

SOUTH KOREA

AIR CRASH INVESTIGATORS EXTRACT BLACK BOX DATA AS GRIEVING FAMILIES MOURN THE VICTIMS

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

GRIEVING relatives of the victims of the South Korea plane crash gathered at the site to pay respects to their loved ones on New Year's Day, as officials said they've extracted data from one of the retrieved black boxes to find the exact cause of the crash.

All but two of the 181 passengers and crew on board the Boeing 737-800 operated by Jeju Air died when it crashed at Muan International Airport, in southern South Korea, on Sunday.

Video showed the aircraft without its landing gear deployed landing on its belly at high speed and then skidding off the end of the runway into a concrete fence and bursting into flames. The footage showed the plane was experiencing an apparent engine problem in addition to the landing gear malfunction.

Investigators say the pilot received a warning from air traffic controllers of possible bird strikes and the plane issued a



Mourners wait to pay tribute to the victims of a plane fire at a memorial altar at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea, last week

distress signal before the crash.

The Transport Ministry said in a statement Wednesday that it has completed works to extract data from the cockpit voice recorder — one of the two black boxes recovered from the wreckage. It said the data would be converted into audio files.

A damaged flight data recorder will be sent to the United States for an analysis, the ministry added.

All of the victims were South Korean, except for two Thais nationals, with many returning from Bangkok after Christmas holidays.

The bereaved families visited the site on Wednesday for the first time since the crash for an emotional memorial service. They were bused to the site where they took turns laying white flowers. Many knelt and bowed deeply before a memorial table laid with food, including

“ddeokguk,” a Korean rice cake soup eaten on New Year's Day.

The Transport Ministry said authorities have completed the complicated process of identifying all 179 victims. It said the government has so far handed over 11 bodies to relatives.

The country is observing seven days of national mourning following the deadliest disaster in South Korea's aviation history in decades.

The government has begun safety inspections of all 101 Boeing 737-800s operated by the country's domestic airlines. On Tuesday, a team of U.S. investigators, including representatives from Boeing, examined the crash site.

Officials have said they will consider whether the airport's localizer — a set of antennas housed in a concrete fence at the end of the runway designed to guide aircraft during landings — should have been constructed with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact. **MDT/AP**

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The world welcomes 2025 with light shows, embraces and ice plunges

FROM Sydney to Mumbai to Paris to Rio de Janeiro, communities around the world welcomed 2025 with spectacular light shows, embraces and ice plunges.

The New Year's Eve ball dropped in soggy Times Square, where thousands of revelers stuck it out in heavy rain to celebrate the start of 2025 in New York City.

Countries in the South Pacific Ocean were the first to ring in the New Year, with midnight in New Zealand striking 18 hours before the ball dropped in Times Square. Auckland was the first major city to celebrate, with thousands thronging downtown or climbing the city's ring of volcanic peaks for a fireworks vantage point.

Conflict muted acknowledgements of the start of 2025 in places like the Middle East, Sudan and Ukraine.

American Samoa will be among the last to welcome 2025, a full 24 hours after New Zealand.

EARLIEST FIREWORKS

A few hours after Auckland, fireworks blasted off Australia's Sydney Harbor Bridge and across the bay. More than a million people gathered at iconic Sydney Harbor for the celebration. British pop star Robbie Williams led a singalong with the crowd.

The celebration also featured Indigenous ceremonies and performances that acknowledged the land's first people.

AMERICAN TRADITIONS, OLD AND NEW

In New York City, crowds cheered and couples kissed when the ball weighing almost 6 tons (5.4 metric tons) and featuring 2,688 crystal triangles descended down a pole in Times Square. The celebration included musical performances by TLC and Jonas Brothers.

The revelry culminated with a dance party and a carpeting of soggy confetti as attendees left singing along to Frank Sinatra's version of "New York, New York."

Angie Cuadrado, from Virginia, said she hopes 2025 is going to be great. "We're sending positive vibes everywhere," she said.

Las Vegas' pyrotechnic show will be on the Strip, with 340,000 people anticipated as fireworks are launched from the rooftops of casinos. Nearby, the Sphere venue will display for the first time countdowns to midnight in different time zones.

In Pasadena, California, Rose Parade spectators were camping out and hoping for prime

AP PHOTO



spots. And some 200,000 people flocked to a country music party in Nashville, Tennessee.

ASIA PREPARES FOR YEAR OF THE SNAKE

Much of Japan shut down ahead of the nation's biggest holiday, as temples and homes underwent a thorough cleaning.

The upcoming Year of the Snake in the Asian zodiac is heralded as one of rebirth — alluding to the reptile's shedding skin. Other places in Asia will mark the Year of the Snake later, with the Lunar New Year.

In South Korea, celebrations were cut back or canceled during a period of national mourning following Sunday's crash of a Jeju Air flight in Muan that killed 179 people.

CHINA AND RUSSIA EXCHANGE GOODWILL

Chinese state media covered an exchange of New Year's greetings between leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a reminder of growing closeness between two leaders who face tensions with the West. Xi told Putin their countries will "always move forward hand in hand," the official Xinhua News Agency said.

China has maintained ties and robust trade with Russia since the latter invaded Ukraine in 2022, helping to offset Western sanctions and attempts to isolate Putin.

SEASIDE CELEBRATIONS AND BEYOND

In India, thousands of revelers in the financial hub of Mumbai flocked to the city's bustling promenade facing the Arabian

Sea. In Sri Lanka, people gathered at Buddhist temples to light oil lamps and incense sticks and pray.

In Dubai, thousands attended a fireworks show at the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper. And in Nairobi, Kenya, scattered fireworks were heard.

A HOLY YEAR BEGINS

Rome's traditional New Year's Eve festivities have an additional draw: the start of Pope Francis' Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century celebration projected to bring some 32 million pilgrims to the Eternal City in 2025.

On Tuesday, Francis celebrated a vespers at St. Peter's Basilica. During Mass on Wednesday he is expected to again appeal for peace in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Jan. 1 is a day of obligation for Catholics, marking the Solemnity of Mary.

In Saint Paul, Minnesota,

about 400 Catholics joined the archbishop for a rare 11 p.m. Mass followed by a champagne reception in the city's monumental cathedral.

"People have the tradition to stay up and toast the new year, so we said, 'Ok, let's build on that,'" said the Rev. Joseph Johnson.

PARIS RECAPTURES THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT

Paris capped a momentous 2024 with its traditional countdown and fireworks extravaganza on the Champs-Élysées. The city's emblematic Arc de Triomphe monument was turned into a giant tableau for a light show that celebrated the city's landmarks and the passage of time, with whirring clocks.

"Paris is a party," proclaimed Mayor Anne Hidalgo.

The Summer Olympics and Paralympic Games hosted in

the French capital from July to September had transformed the city into a site of joy, fraternity and astonishing sporting achievements.

WINTRY WEATHER, FOR GOOD AND BAD

London rang in the New Year with a pyrotechnic display along the River Thames. With a storm bringing bitter weather to other parts of the United Kingdom, however, festivities in Edinburgh, Scotland, were canceled.

But in Switzerland and some other places, people embraced the cold, stripping and plunging into the water in freezing temperatures.

MILLIONS REVEL IN RIO

Rio de Janeiro threw Brazil's main New Year's Eve bash on Copacabana beach, with barges shooting off 12 straight minutes of fireworks. Thousands of tourists on cruise ships and charter boats witnessed the show up close, while many more streamed onto the sand to find their spot.

The crowd on Copacabana was expected to exceed 2 million people — most decked out in white to keep with tradition. They packed together to enjoy concerts by Brazilian music legends Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethânia and Ivete Sangalo, among others. Right after the fireworks concluded, Brazil's biggest pop star, Anitta, took the stage.

"It's so magical. It's an incredible thing," Alejandro Legarreta, a tourist from Puerto Rico, said after diving into the ocean. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



AP PHOTO



MIDEAST

A new year dawns on a Middle East torn by conflict and change

GHAITH ALSAYED, WAFAA SHURafa & LUJAIN JO, DAMASCUS

IN Damascus, the streets were buzzing with excitement earlier this week as Syrians welcomed in a new year that seemed to many to bring a promise of a brighter future after the unexpected fall of Bashar Assad's government weeks earlier.

While Syrians in the capital looked forward to a new beginning after the ousting of Assad, the mood was more somber along Beirut's Mediterranean promenade, where residents shared cautious hopes for the new year, reflecting on a country still reeling from war and ongoing crises.

War-weary Palestinians in Gaza who lost their homes and loved ones in 2024 saw little hope that 2025 would bring an end to their suffering.

The last year was a dramatic one in the Middle East, bringing calamity to some and hope to others. Across the region, it felt foolish to many to attempt to predict what the next year might bring.

In Damascus, Abir Homsai said she is optimistic about a future for her country that would include peace, security and freedom of expression and would bring Syrian communities previously divided by battle lines back together.

"We will return to how we

once were, when people loved each other, celebrated together whether it is Ramadan or Christmas or any other holiday — no restricted areas for anyone," she said.

But for many, the new year and new reality carried with it reminders of the painful years that came before.

Abdulrahman al-Habib, from the eastern Syrian city of Deir el-Zour, had come to Damascus in hopes of finding relatives who disappeared after being arrested under Assad's rule. He was at the capital's Marjeh Square, where relatives of the missing have taken to posting photos of their loved ones in search of any clue to their whereabouts.

"We hope that in the new year, our status will be better ... and peace will prevail in the whole Arab world," he said.

In Lebanon, a tenuous ceasefire brought a halt to fighting between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group a little over a month ago. The country battered by years of economic collapse, political instability and a series of calamities since 2019, continues to grapple with uncertainty, but the truce has brought at least a temporary return to normal life.

Some families flocked to the Mzaar Ski Resort in the mountains northeast of Beirut on Tuesday to enjoy the

day in the snow even though the resort had not officially opened.

"What happened and what's still happening in the region, especially in Lebanon recently, has been very painful," said Youssef Haddad, who came to ski with his family. "We have great hope that everything will get better."

On Beirut's seaside corniche, Mohammad Mohammad from the village of Marwahin in southern Lebanon was strolling with his three children.

"I hope peace and love prevail next year, but it feels like more (challenges) await us," he said.

Mohammad was among the tens of thousands displaced during more than a year of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. Now living in Jadra, a town that was also bombarded during the conflict, he awaits the end of a 60-day period, after which the Israeli army is required to withdraw under the conditions of a French and U.S.-brokered ceasefire.

"Our village was completely destroyed," Mohammad said. His family would spend a quiet evening at home, he said. This year "was very hard on us. I hope 2025 is better than all the years that passed."

In Gaza, where the war between Hamas and Israel

has killed more than 45,500 Palestinians, brought massive destruction and displaced most of the enclave's population, few saw cause for optimism in the new year.

"The year 2024 was one of the worst years for all Palestinian people. It was a year of hunger, displacement, suffering and poverty," said Nour Abu Obaid, a displaced woman from northern Gaza.

Obaid, whose 10-year-old child was killed in a strike in the so-called "humanitarian zone" in Muwasi, said she didn't expect anything good in 2025. "The world is dead," she said. "We do not expect anything, we expect the worst."

The war was sparked by the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas-led attack on southern Israel in which militants killed around 1,200 people and abducted some 250 others.

Ismail Salih, who lost his home and livelihood, expressed hopes for an end to the war in 2025 so that Gaza's people can start rebuilding their lives.

The year that passed "was all war and all destruction," he said. "Our homes are gone, our trees are gone, our livelihood is lost."

In the coming year, Salih said he hopes that Palestinians can "live like the rest of the people of the world, in security, reassurance and peace." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1993: US AND RUSSIA HALVE NUCLEAR WARHEADS



The United States of America and the Russian Federation have agreed to cut the number of nuclear warheads they have by between 3,000 and 3,500.

US President George Bush, who leaves office this month, and his Russian counterpart Boris Yeltsin, signed the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty - Start II - in Moscow.

Currently each side has about 10,000 warheads and Start II marks the biggest reduction ever agreed.

In addition, sea-based weapons will be cut to 1,750 each and all land-based multiple-warhead missiles will be eliminated.

Mr Bush said the treaty offers "for parents and children, a future free from fear", and Mr Yeltsin called it "a treaty of hope".

The treaty means that by 2003, three-quarters of the nuclear warheads possessed by both countries at the start of the 1990s will have been destroyed.

Mr Yeltsin believes Start II shows that Russia has abandoned the arms race.

"I think it important for Russia's might as a great power to be determined not by the quantity of missiles but by the living standards of its citizens, the development of culture, education and national traditions," he said.

Mr Yeltsin admitted the treaty will meet opposition before it is ratified in the Russian parliament.

The US Congress also has to agree to Start II, as well as the parliaments of the former Soviet republics of Byelorussia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan where nuclear weapons are still held.

Mr Yeltsin has been criticised for making too many concessions to the US, by relinquishing all of Russia's land-based SS-18 missiles with multiple warheads - the core of its strike capability.

By contrast the US appears to have kept a tactical advantage by agreeing to halve its submarine-based warheads, which form the heart of its nuclear arsenal.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

By 2001, the two countries had met the criteria set out in Start I.

Start II was ratified by the US Congress in 1996 and Byelorussia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan transferred warheads in their territory to Russia and destroyed the accompanying delivery vehicles.

In 1997, US President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin had to extend the treaty's deadline to 2007 and set out to begin negotiations on a Start III treaty for further reductions.

The Russian parliament eventually agreed to Start II in 2000, but it, and Start III, were abandoned.

Instead, in 2002, US President George W Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty - better known as the Treaty of Moscow.

By 2012, the treaty aims to cut the nuclear warheads of each side from levels of between 6,000 and 7,000, to between 1,700 and 2,200 each.

But measures outlined in Start II to destroy the methods of delivering nuclear weapons - such as bombers, submarines and launchers - were not addressed in the Moscow Treaty.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Keep team objectives in mind. Resist being impulsive, especially with friends. Avoid a disagreement about priorities. Patiently keep your side of the bargain.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Keep your wits about you in a chaotic moment at work. All is not as it appears. Leave misconceptions behind. Run a reality check.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Curtail travel until traffic flows clearly. Unexpected delays and distractions could arise. Avoid stepping on others. You're learning valuable tricks. Study the conditions.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Stick to practical financial priorities. Communicate and collaborate to determine best practices. First figure out what really matters. Provide motivation. Celebrate results together.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Reality may clash with a romantic fantasy. What you get could be surprising. Communication unravels a mystery. Keep your patience and sense of humor.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Choose stability over illusion. Avoid risky or vague ideas. An intensely creative moment flowers naturally. Plot a long-term course. You can get what you need.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Keep practicing your game. Listen to intuition. Handle responsibilities before going out to play. Learn by doing. Tweak and adjust to improve efficiency.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Determine which home improvements to prioritize. Detailed planning saves you money and time. Research and compare for best quality and value. Adjust the budget.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Too much information could confuse the situation. Don't fund a fantasy. Welcome contributions from others. Be methodical to advance. Listen with your heart.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Follow the budget. Cost overruns could throw things off. Hold out for the best deal. Avoid distractions or silly arguments. Share and accept assistance.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Consider a new style. Get clear on what you want before investing time, money or energy. Dress for the part you'd love to play.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Take a moment to assess. Review potential consequences. Clear clutter and organize. Imagine and plan. Wait for developments. Go for substance over symbolism.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

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

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

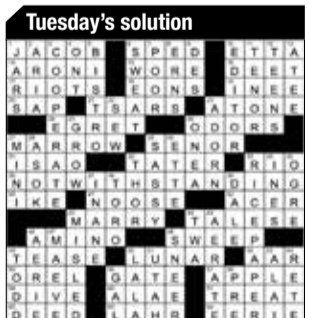
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-6	5	fine
Changchun	-15	-7	fine
Chengdu	3	15	fine
Chongqing	7	15	cloudy
Fuzhou	10	18	fine
Guangzhou	10	21	cloudy
Guiyang	3	14	cloudy
Haikou	17	23	cloudy
Hangzhou	3	10	cloudy
Harbin	-24	-13	fine
Hefei	-2	10	cloudy
Nanjing	1	11	fine
Shanghai	4	11	fine
Taipei	15	16	rain
Wuhan	-1	12	fine
Hong Kong	17	22	sunny
WORLD			
Moscow	-7	-2	snow
Frankfurt	-2	4	cloudy
Paris	-3	3	sunny
London	-2	3	sunny
New York	-2	4	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Summer shirts; 5- Base times height; 9- Parlor game; 14- Seniors' org.; 15- James of "The Godfather"; 16- Skip ___; 17- Bruins' sch.; 18- Moreno of "West Side Story"; 19- Vixen's master; 20- Vacuum bottle; 22- Tornado; 24- Red flower; 25- Actually existing; 26- Conductors' rods; 29- Windows predecessor; 31- ___ there yet?; 32- First class; 33- Musical ability; 36- Ich bin ___ Berliner; 37- Shouting; 40- Grande; 41- ___ Tafari (Haile Selassie); 42- Work up lather; 43- Harper sitcom; 45- Late bloomer?; 47- Roman general; 48- Sewing instrument; 51- Molten flow; 52- Peeved; 54- Whenever; 58- Grocery, e.g.; 59- He loved Lucy; 61- Novelist Bagnold; 62- City on the Rhine; 63- Traditional prayer ending; 64- Punjabi princess; 65- Minimum; 66- Days of ___; 67- Bad mood;

DOWN 1- Lacking play; 2- "From ___ according to his abilities..."; 3- Author ___ Stanley Gardner; 4- Songbird; 5- Beyond; 6- Elevate; 7- Chow down; 8- Med school subj.; 9- Gambling house; 10- Humbles; 11- Leases; 12- Palm fruits; 13- Blank look; 21- Medium of exchange; 23- Broaden; 26- Boxer Max; 27- Sills solo; 28- Sawbucks; 29- Tooth; 30- Quick cut; 32- Tropical plant; 33- Archer of myth; 34- Opera set in Egypt; 35- Laugh heartily; 38- First name in cosmetics; 39- Sauce; 44- Radiators; 45- Idolizes; 46- Most cunning; 47- Like a dog; 48- Twangy, as a voice; 49- ___ nous; 50- Name on a bomber; 51- Modern surgical tool; 53- WWII event; 55- ___ instant; 56- Short skirt; 57- Prepare for publication; 60- Funnyman Philips;



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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AD

tTUNES

IN GRAMMY SPOTLIGHT, KHRUANGBIN WANTS TO 'LET THE MUSIC SPEAK FOR ITSELF'

IF you think your Spotify playlist is getting a little too long, consider the one shared by the members of Khruangbin. It's got 51 hours of songs.

"I'm trying to listen to as many different things as possible before they all start to sound kind of the same," says Mark Speer, the trio's guitarist and musical explorer, capturing interesting sounds from Thailand to the Middle East.

"We lose Mark sometimes for a small period of time because he's on an anthropological dig," says bassist Laura Lee. Drummer Donald "DJ" Johnson finishes her thought: "For the quintessential Chinese funk."

The mainly instrumental Khruangbin's sonic explorations have paid off of late, with a warmly received 2024 album, "A La Sala," that reached the top 40 of the Billboard 200 and a Grammy Award nomination for best new artist. Not that any of that is going to their heads.

"I think we're just going to keep leaning in what we do and keep trying to be more the silhouette version of ourselves as much as we can and let the music speak for itself, because that's who we are. We don't like the spotlight in that way," says Lee.

The Texas trio makes music that's hard to describe, a mix of

AP PHOTO

Mark Speer, left, and Laura Lee Ochoa, of Khruangbin



soul, surf rock, psychedelic and funk that creates a melodic, Afro-pop-inspired, reverb-heavy sound with nods to other cultures. The band's name is appropriately travel-related — Khruangbin is the Thai word for airplane.

"Mark's storytelling feels like words, even though there are no words. And my storytelling feels like math even though there are no numbers necessarily. And DJ is

the translator between my language and Mark somehow," says Lee.

They are highly collaborative, working in the studio and performing live with Leon Bridges on two EPs, Paul McCartney, Vieux Farka Touré, Wu-Tang Clan, Childish Gambino, Toro Y Moi, Men I Trust and more.

For "A La Sala," Khruangbin focused on the trio, realizing that they didn't need anyone else in

the studio. They say that was empowering.

"I think because we had just been through a process of collaborating quite a lot, it felt important for us to just huddle, just the three of us," says Lee. "When it's just the three of us, it's like a deep breath and a collective sigh."

Most of their music is instrumental, but vocals — either ghostly or a full-on lyric song —

have been employed, like on "May Ninth" from the new album, with the lyrics "Memory burned and gone/A multicolored gray."

"The music comes first," says Johnson. "And when we finish putting everything together, if we feel that it needs one more thing, something missing, or we just want a vocal texture, then usually we go down the path of adding that." **MARK KENNEDY, MDT/AP**

AD

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**MACAU
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TASTE OF EDESIA

Epic Japanese Dining

IRENE SAM, MDT

REOPENED with a fresh look at Wynn Palace, Mizumi's Executive Chef Hironori Maeda partnered recently with celebrity sushi master Chef Takayoshi Watanabe for an exquisite Japanese meal in December. Chef Watanabe is the third-generation Chef Owner of Teruzushi, a sushi restaurant in Fukuoka that was opened over 60 years ago by his grandmother. In addition to his masterful skills, Chef Watanabe is renowned for his entertaining presentation of sushi which has attracted diners from across the globe. In collaboration with Chef Maeda, who was honored three times in Japan's largest culinary competition RED U-35 and whose expertise has led to him being included in Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia, Chef Watanabe brought his masterful skills to Macao for three nights, providing guests the opportunity of enjoying an impeccable sushi meal at Wynn Palace.

First up was Chopped Toro, Uni

Sea Urchin, Kristal Caviar Wrapped with Kyushu Seaweed (Teruzushi). This dish is a signature offering of "Teruzushi," featuring fresh tuna head meat, paired with high-quality Hokkaido sea urchin and caviar. It showcased a delightful three-layer seafood combination that instantly tantalizes the taste buds. The top part of the tuna belly, known as the "otoro," accounts for only 0.5% of the entire fish. It is soft, fatty, and rich in flavor, regarded as one of the four prized parts of the tuna, alongside the neck, muscle, and cheek. Next up was Cooked Female Snow Crab (Mizumi) To highlight the natural flavor of female snow crab, it was simply steamed. Chef Maeda carefully adjusted the steaming time based on the size of each crab leg to ensure optimal texture. The crab's innards are known as the "red jewel box," with vibrant colors and rich umami that tantalize the palate, perfectly enhanced by vinegar and citrus.

Another highlight was Kyushu Black Lip Abalone (Teruzushi x Mizumi). Kyushu, located in southern Japan, is renowned for

its seafood. Chef Watanabe takes pride in selecting high-quality local abalone. Slow-cooked to retain the essence of the ocean, the abalone was paired with Chef Maeda's secret abalone liver sauce, ensuring each bite is a delightful surprise. Charcoal Grilled Chateaubriand Saga Wagyu with Uni Sea Urchin and White Truffle (Teruzushi x Mizumi) came to follow. The tenderloin from the beef's midsection, known as "Chateaubriand," is the most tender part of the entire cow, yielding only two portions per animal, making it extremely rare. Using a combination of low-temperature cooking and charcoal grilling, excess fat melts away, creating a melt-in-the-mouth experience. Chef Maeda skilfully and repeatedly grilled the chateaubriand and allowed it to rest, ensuring it remains juicy and tender. The white truffle from Italy, often referred to as the "white diamond" of the kitchen, is harvested only from November to December and retains its flavor for just 10 days. Paired with grilled Saga wagyu chateaubriand and sea urchin, this dish presented a luxurious culinary experience.



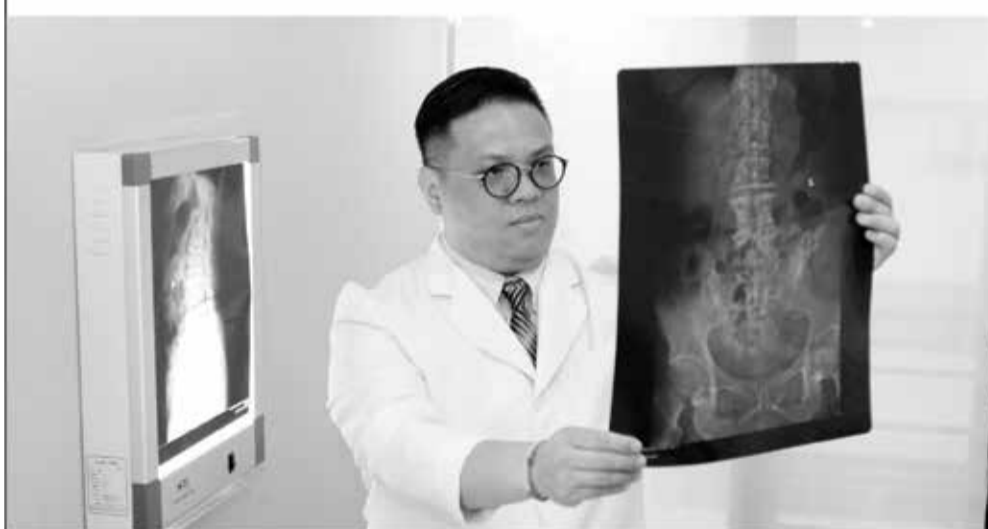
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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**LATEST SPY SERIES
 INSTALLMENT OFFERS
 NOTHING NEW**

Washington does enjoy a spy story. It seems that a frisson of excitement spreads through the political circle in the US capital at the thought of peepers prying into their guarded intimacies. So what better way to step into the New Year and greet a new administration than with the recounting of another tall tale of being voyeuristically viewed.

This time the storyteller is Assistant Treasury Secretary Aditi Hardikar, who, in a letter to the leaders of the Senate Banking Committee, outlined the hackneyed trope of Chinese hackers remotely accessing United States Treasury Department workstations and unclassified documents via a "China state-sponsored Advanced Persistent Threat actor".

Likewise in US media accounts, as in a string of similar scaremongering thrillers in recent years, this was another intrusion attributed to "hackers linked to the Chinese government/state", or simply "one of China's intelligence agencies". All said with certainty, without any elaboration, let alone any evidence, to support the claim.

The response from Beijing, which is by now well-versed in the United States' sensationalized narratives in which it plays the villain, revealed how tiresome it finds such "groundless accusations that lack evidence".

Beijing "has always opposed all forms of hacker attacks", said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning. "We are even more opposed to the spread of false information against China for political purposes."

Her counterpart at the Chinese embassy in the US denounced the letter as an effort to "smear" China's reputation, and urged Washington to stop slandering China.

As in similar previous exchanges, Beijing's diplomatic envoys pointed to the fact that China is a constant target of hacking, with the US a regular perpetrator of such snooping.

It all seems very familiar. And so, as we enter a new calendar year and brace for a new chapter in bilateral ties with a new US administration in weeks, since there is nothing new, or unusual in an episode like this in today's China-US relationship, perhaps the opportunity should be taken to rethink this pattern of exchanges.

Except for adding additional chill to the already frosty bilateral ties, what can such a blame game do? Assigning China a malicious role may serve some parties' need for an insidious national security threat. But after all the hoopla surrounding the alleged cybersecurity threats from China, has the US actually publicly verified any of them? Is it less secure? If so, why, given the money it pumps into national security?

The Treasury accusation is concerning because it is the latest freshly-baked anti-Beijing narrative that has been cooked up and delivered straight out of the oven by the previous and current US administrations.

In March, Washington charged seven Chinese nationals with a hacking operation that had allegedly lasted at least 14 years. The White House recently claimed at least nine US telecommunications companies, including AT&T and Verizon, were hacked. The FBI and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency even accused "actors affiliated with the People's Republic of China" of targeting US general elections. The hackers allegedly targeted the phones of president-elect Donald Trump, vice-president-elect JD Vance, and people working for Vice-President Kamala Harris' campaign. The hysteria has gone to such an extent that US authorities have told China Telecom Americas it is a national security threat.

There are malicious cyber actors at work. And with artificial intelligence making picking virtual locks easier, the constructive engagement of Beijing and Washington on cybersecurity would undoubtedly be of great practical value. [Abridged]

GUNMAN WHO KILLED AT LEAST 12 PEOPLE IN A SHOOTING RAMPAGE IN MONTENEGRO DIES BY SUICIDE

THE BUZZ

At least four others were wounded in the shooting rampage in the western town of Cetinje on Wednesday that followed a bar brawl, officials said.

The shooter, identified as 45-year-old Aco Martinovi, killed the owner of the bar, the bar owner's children and his own family members, Interior Minister Danilo Šaranovi said.

The attacker, who was fled after the rampage, was later located and surrounded by police. He died after shooting himself in the head, Šaranovi said.

Police had dispatched a special unit to search for the attacker in the town, which is located about 30 kilometers (18 miles) northwest of the capital, Podgorica. All the roads in and out of the city have been blocked as police swarmed the streets.

Šaranovi said that Martinovi had died while being taken to a hospital in the capital and succumbed from the "severity of his injuries."

The government has declared three days of national mourning starting yesterday, with Prime Minister Milojko Spaji describing the shooting as a "terrible tragedy."



CHINA-US

TREASURY SAYS CHINESE HACKERS REMOTELY ACCESSED WORKSTATIONS, DOCUMENTS IN 'MAJOR' CYBER INCIDENT

**ERIC TUCKER,
 WASHINGTON**

Chinese hackers remotely accessed several U.S. Treasury Department workstations and unclassified documents after compromising a third-party software service provider, the agency said earlier this week.

The department did not provide details on how many workstations had been accessed or what sort of documents the hackers may have obtained, but it said in a letter to lawmakers revealing the breach that "at this time there is no evidence indicating the threat actor has continued access to Treasury information." The hack was being investigated as a "major cybersecurity incident," it added.

"Treasury takes very seriously all threats against our systems, and the data it holds," a department spokesperson said in a separate statement. "Over the last four years, Treasury has significantly bolstered its cyber defense, and

we will continue to work with both private and public sector partners to protect our financial system from threat actors."

In Beijing, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson gave China's standard response to hacking allegations.

"We have repeatedly stated our position on such groundless accusations that lack evidence," Mao Ning said at a daily briefing. "China consistently opposes all forms of hacking, and we are even more opposed to the dissemination of false information against China for political purposes."

The incident comes as U.S. officials are continuing to grapple with the fallout of a massive Chinese cyberespionage campaign known as Salt Typhoon that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans. A senior White House official said Friday that the number of telecommunications companies confirmed to have been affected by the hack has now risen to nine.

The Treasury Department said it learned of the latest problem on Dec. 8, when a third-party software service provider, BeyondTrust, flagged that hackers had stolen a key "used by the vendor to secure a cloud-based service used to remotely provide technical support" to workers. That key helped the hackers override the service's security and gain remote access to several employee workstations.

The compromised service has since been taken offline, and there's no evidence that the hackers still have access to department information, Aditi Hardikar, an assistant Treasury secretary, said in the letter earlier this week to leaders of the Senate Banking Committee.

The department said it was working with the FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and others to investigate the impact of the hack, and that the hack had been attributed to Chinese state-sponsored culprits. It did not elaborate. **MDT/AP**



New Zealand Driver yesterday ran down two police officers down as they patrolled on foot in the early hours of New Year's Day, killing one and seriously injuring the other, the country's police chief said. The attack jolted a country where the killing of police officers on duty is rare.



Syria Protesters held a sit-in Wednesday demanding justice for four activists who were forcibly disappeared in 2013 and whose fate remains one of the most haunting mysteries of the country's 13-year civil war.

Saudi Arabia said on Wednesday that the kingdom executed six Iranian men for drug smuggling, sparking strong objections from Iran at a time when the two countries are trying to mend relations. The Saudi Interior Ministry said the six men had been caught smuggling hashish into the kingdom and were executed after an appeal was rejected by the country's Supreme Court.



UK Parts of the United Kingdom were flooded Wednesday as heavy rains and powerful winds continued to disrupt New Year's celebrations. Several communities in the Manchester area were flooded, with several homes evacuated and cars submerged up to their roofs on roads and in parking lots after nearly a month's worth of rain fell in two days.



Vatican City Pope Francis ushered in the New Year with a renewed appeal for the faithful to reject abortion, calling for a "firm commitment" to protect and respect life from conception to natural death. Francis, 88, celebrated a New Year's Day Mass in St. Peter's Basilica on Wednesday that was dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus.