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07 Jan 2025

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**LEI CHAN U URGED THE GOV'T TO AMEND THE MECHANISM THAT ADJUSTS ELDERLY PENSIONS BASED ON THE INFLATION RATE**

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**ELLA LEI EXPRESSES CONCERNS ON THE IMPACT OF NEW OUTDOOR VENUE ON LOCAL SMES**

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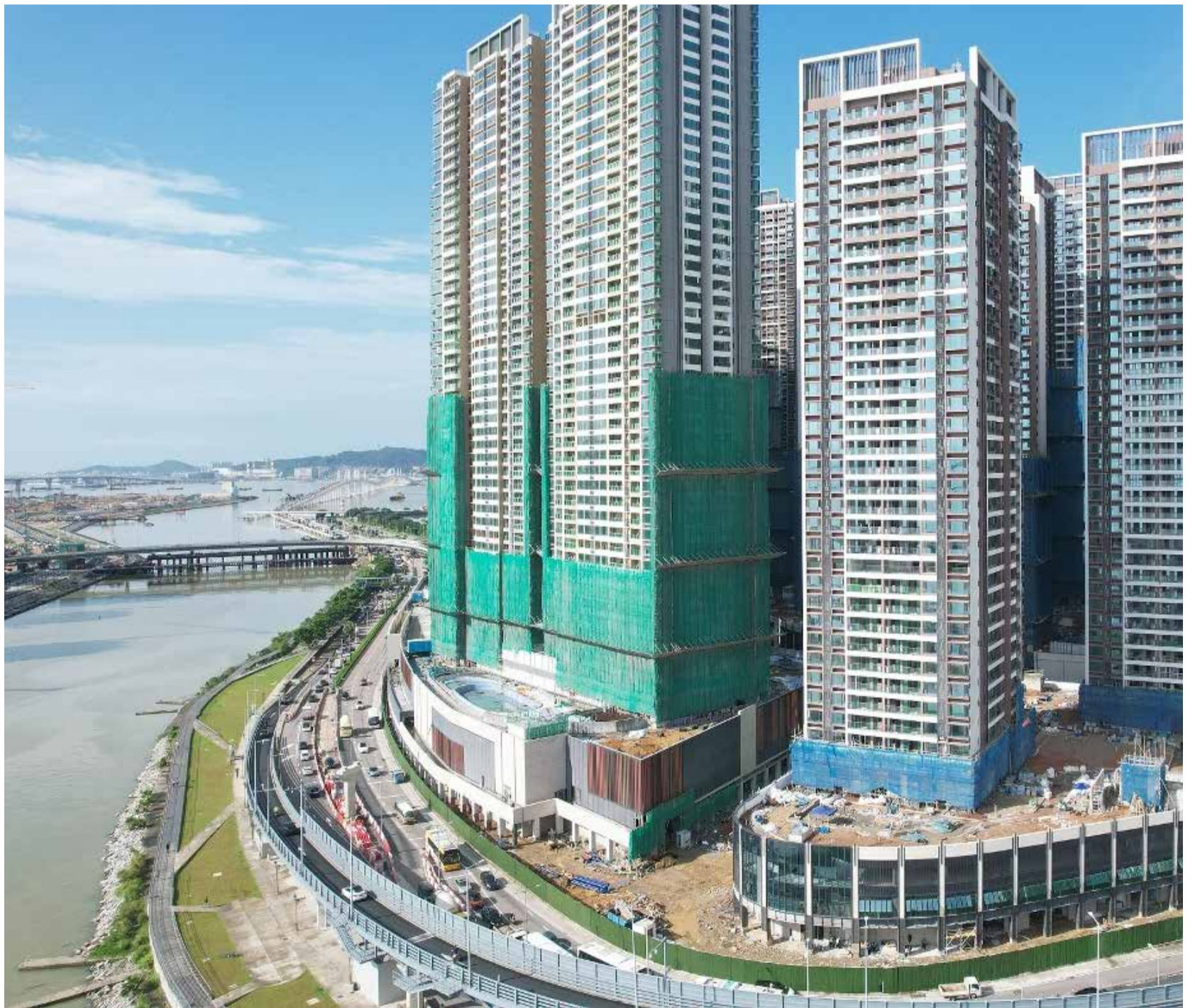
**BEIJING PROTESTS US SANCTIONS FOR ITS ALLEGED ROLE IN HACKING, COMPLAINS OF FOREIGN HACKER ATTACKS**

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# STINKY SITUATION

**Gov't links foul odor in Areia Preta to drainage issues from the Lot P temporary housing project** ▲ P3



AP PHOTO



**Philippines** A group of Afghan nationals arrived in the Philippines yesterday to process special immigrant visas for their resettlement in the United States, as part of an agreement between Manila and Washington. The Philippines agreed last July to temporarily host a U.S. immigrant visa processing center for a limited number of Afghan nationals aspiring to resettle in America.

AP PHOTO



**Indonesia's** new government started an ambitious project yesterday to fight malnutrition by feeding nearly 90 million children and pregnant women that is expected to cost \$28 billion through 2029, although critics question whether the program is affordable.

AP PHOTO



**South Korea's** anti-corruption agency and police debated yesterday more forceful measures to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol after their previous attempt was blocked by the presidential security service last week. The discussions highlighted the obstacles facing the criminal investigation into Yoon's Dec. 3 martial law decree, which led to his impeachment on Dec. 14.

AP PHOTO



**France's** former President Nicolas Sarkozy (pictured, left) went on trial yesterday over alleged illegal financing of his 2007 presidential campaign by the government of late Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi. The so-called "Libyan case," the biggest and possibly most shocking of several scandals involving Sarkozy, is scheduled to run until April 10, with a verdict expected at a later date.

RENATO MARQUES



**FINANCE**  
**BAD LOANS HIT A 20-YEAR HIGH**

**HEALTH**  
**INFLUENZA INFECTIONS ON THE RISE, TO PEAK IN CNY**

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FINANCE

# BAD LOANS HAVE HIT A 20-YEAR HIGH; SECTOR CLAIMS THERE IS NO CAUSE FOR ALARM

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE local banking sector has continued on an escalation of non-performing loans over the year of 2024, with November hitting the highest level in 20 years, a report on the monetary and financial statistics released by the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) noted.

According to the same report, the non-performing loan ratio increased from 5.4% at the end of October to 5.5% at the end of November last year.

In total, non-performing loans accounted for MOP54.88 billion at the end of November last year, making it the 21st consecutive month of growth.

The last time there was a drop in the non-performing loan ratio was back in February 2023, when the rate dropped marginally from 1.7% to 1.6%. At this time, the total sum on the line was MOP20.04 billion.

When compared year-over-year with 2023, bad loans have grown in amount by 87.6%, from MOP29.26 billion

NON-PERFORMING LOANS							end of period figures		
Year	Month	NON-PERFORMING LOANS			NON-PERFORMING LOAN RATIOS				
		Total	Resident	Nonresident	Total	Resident	Nonresident		
		MOP million			(%)				
2024	1	43 682.0	14 793.5	28 888.5	4.0	2.8	5.2		
	2	44 831.9	14 903.4	29 928.4	4.1	2.8	5.5		
	3	45 212.9	15 519.0	29 694.0	4.2	2.9	5.5		
	4	46 011.6	15 835.3	30 176.3	4.3	3.0	5.5		
	5	48 460.9	18 255.5	30 205.4	4.4	3.4	5.3		
	6	49 732.4	16 222.9	33 509.5	4.6	3.0	6.1		
	7	49 744.4	16 307.0	33 437.4	4.7	3.1	6.3		
	8	54 118.4	20 448.0	33 670.4	5.1	3.9	6.3		
	9	54 724.5	20 519.2	34 205.2	5.2	4.0	6.5		
	10	54 919.7	20 553.4	34 366.3	5.4	4.0	6.8		
	11	54 878.8	20 543.9	34 334.9	5.5	4.0	7.0		

Note: Along with the implementation of the new "Financial Reporting Standards" since 1 January 2022, which includes the "International Financial Reporting Standard 9 - Financial Instruments (IFRS 9)", the "expected credit loss model" has been adopted for the recognition and measurement of impairment of financial assets.

(2.6% ratio) to MOP54.88 billion.

The same report from AMCM also shows that while bad loans to residents have remained stable for the three months ending in November 2024, those related to non-residents of Macau have been consecutively growing, representing MOP34.33 billion (7% ratio) at the end of November.

Despite the poor outcomes, the banking sector has said that the figures are not yet alarming and that banks are acting on the problem, Ip Sio Kai, the chairman of the Macau Association of Banks and deputy general manager of the Bank of China Macau Branch, told public broadcaster TDM.

Ip stated that while the si-

tuation does not pose a significant impact on the capacity of the banking institutions to provide financial services to clients, the sector is concentrating efforts on reducing the non-performing loans through the cancellation of the loans (covered by the Bank), followed by direct negotiation with the clients for the recovery of the assets related to

the non-performing loans.

The same official noted that the sums of non-performing loans are likely to continue to grow "under the current economic situation." He explained that this is mostly due to the lack of capacity of the SMEs to repay the loans they have contracted in the last few years, taking advantage of the support measures enforced by the government.

Ip remarked that if the Interest Subsidy Plan, previously enforced by the government, is canceled or restructured, some SMEs whose receipts have not yet recovered will face added difficulties as they might have to repay not only the remaining unpaid loan amounts but also additional interest.

Also, speaking to TDM, economist José Luis Sales Marques shared similar opinions with Ip, noting that this growth of bad loans reflects the difficulties of companies in fulfilling their obligations on the loans they have contracted.

He also agreed that, from the point of view of the banking sector, the ratios and amounts on the line are not likely to constitute a significant danger for the banking institutions.

Nonetheless, Sales Marques noted that this fact reveals information about the performance of the local economy and so deserves attention and close follow-up.

SOCIETY

# Lei Chan U advocates for a new mechanism to adjust pensions

RENATO MARQUES

**L**AWMAKER Lei Chan LU, representing the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), has urged the government to amend the mechanism that adjusts elderly pensions based on the inflation rate.

In a written inquiry to the government submitted through the Legislative Assembly, the lawmaker said that several issues have been de-

tected in the application of the current system, causing a loss of purchasing power and consequently creating additional difficulties for senior citizens who depend on such social support.

Lei noted that, according to the government's evaluation, the cumulative Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) variation from the latest pension adjustment (in January 2020) to September 2024 was 2.47%.



Since the adjustment mechanism is capped at a 3% variation condition, no pension adjustment has been enforced this year.

Such a factor has caused the pension amount to remain unchanged for nearly five years, which does not comply with the reality experienced by citizens, who have seen their expenses grow significantly over the same period, Lei said.

The matter has been raised on several occasions in the past, and the government has promised to study the proposals aired regarding the creation of an "Elderly CPI," i.e., a different evaluation of the inflation rate that takes into account specific products and services required and more commonly used by seniors, while excluding others they do

not use that contribute to the "wrong evaluation" of the current situation.

The lawmaker noted that despite the government's response back in 2022 that it would take data samples from elderly households during the latest Census conducted by the Statistics and Census Service, no update on the status of this work has been provided so far.

Lei wants the new government to provide a clear update on this work as well as on the intentions aired by the Chief Executive, Sam Hou Fai, in his political platform, to link the pension fund with the Vitality Index.

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# Foul odor in Areia Preta linked to Lot P temporary housing project

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE foul odor at Av. Norte do Hipódromo in Areia Preta and the elderly housing facility originates from unpleasant smells overflowing from the drainage channels associated with the Lot P temporary housing project.

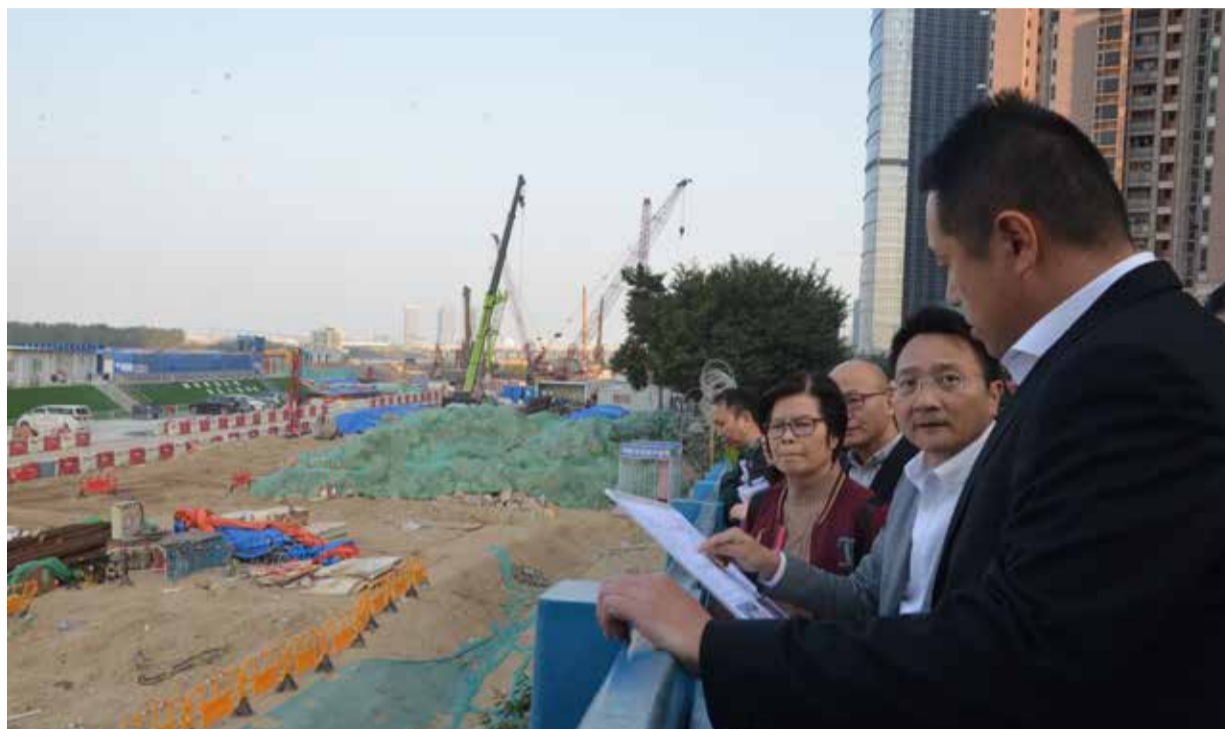
In a joint statement yesterday, the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) and the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) said that the issue has been worsened by ongoing cleaning operation.

In light of these findings, an inter-departmental committee meeting was held yesterday to urge the project contractor to adopt effective mitigation measures.

These measures include enhancing cleaning protocols, improving sealing during the cleaning process, and installing activated carbon filters at exhaust outlets to help alleviate the odors. The cleaning operations are expected to be completed within the week.

In addition to the issues related to the temporary housing project, the discharge of sewage and sediment from the stormwater box culvert in Av. Norte do Hipódromo has also been identified as a sporadic source of odor.

The inter-departmental committee has requested that the relevant cleansing company increase its efforts to regularly clean the stormwater channels, ensuring that sediment buildup does not contribute to the unpleasant smells.



While the current odor issue is not directly linked to the design and construction of the northern section of the Light Rail Transit (LRT), the bureaus said it is taking proactive steps to mitigate any potential impacts.

Measures include cleaning temporary drainage channels, diverting seawater to dilute effluents, and regularly flushing outfalls to prevent odor accumulation.

Long-term plans are also underway to increase sewage treatment capacity, particularly with the ongoing development of a sewage treatment plant on the artificial island of the Macao Boundary Crossing Facilities of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

According to DSPA, the issue

was raised in a written question by lawmaker Ron Lam, who pointed out that the mudflat development work for the construction of the light rail system has been underway for over a year.

Residents have complained that the sewage interception pipes and the drainage outlet of the pumping station are clogged with stones and waste, causing the accumulation of sludge and the release of a foul smell.

In response, the DSPA explained that in 2016, there were only three rainwater discharge outlets along Av. Norte do Hipódromo, and the wastewater interception works completed in 2019 covered these three outlets.

However, DSPA has now revealed that there are five rainwater

drainage points near the seafront, with two of them also draining wastewater.

Residents in the area have reported experiencing a persistent foul smell when walking in the area, and some have even observed oil and other floating objects on the sea surface.

Lam has called for the government to investigate the reasons for the misconnection of storm sewers, including whether the relevant design companies need to be held accountable and the source of the sewage.

Lawmaker Leong Hong Sai has suggested that interception projects should be carried out at outfalls where sewage is found, and sewage should be directed into sewage treatment plants.

## VIETJET AIR FLIGHT DIVERTS DUE TO CABIN SMOKE

A Vietjet Air flight from Nha Trang, Vietnam, to Macau encountered smoke in the rear cabin, prompting an emergency return to Nha Trang on Jan. 3. In response to inquiries, the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) confirmed that Vietjet Air sent another aircraft to transport the passengers. The rescheduled flight departed at 8:01 p.m. and arrived at Macau International Airport at 10:57 p.m., operating normally throughout. The AACM emphasized that safety is the industry's top priority and conducts regular inspections of operators and aviation companies at the airport to ensure compliance and address any deficiencies.

## FSS REMINDS CONTRIBUTIONS FOR LAST YEAR'S Q4

January marks the contribution month for the fourth quarter of 2024 for Social Security System (FSS). Employers can use platforms including Macao One Account to pay mandatory system contributions for employees with unchanged employment situations, as well as employment fees for non-resident workers. Beneficiaries can also make their contributions through the platform or designated banks during the contribution month.

## UPM LAUNCHES NEW GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Macao Polytechnic University (UPM) has launched three new master's and doctoral programs to strengthen the Greater Bay Area's talent pool. The offerings include a PhD in Physical Education and Sports Science, a Master's in Technology and Innovation in Sports, and a Master's in Environmental Intelligence. The PhD program explores competitive sports and industry management. The master's programs focus on AI, data analytics, and the intersection of technology and sustainability. The Sports Technology program, offered in collaboration with Shanghai Sport University, provides training in smart rehabilitation and sports tech. The Environmental Intelligence program integrates environmental science and smart city concepts.

## ECONOMY

# Ella Lei expresses concerns on the impact of new outdoor venue on local SMEs

RENATO MARQUES

**L**AWMAKER Ella Lei, representing the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), has expressed concerns over the impact of the new Outdoor Performance Venue on the businesses of local small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

In a written inquiry to the government, the lawmaker expressed concerns about the fact that the new venue is located in Cotai due to

the need for enough space, as well as traffic and noise concerns, which might not align with the purpose of increasing the business of local SMEs through the visitors attending the events.

Lei said that, according to government-provided information, the authorities have so far received around 10 proposals for events at this new venue scheduled to take place this year from organizers in Asia, Europe, and the



United States.

The lawmaker suggested that the government take the initiative or encourage the event organizers to introduce

schemes to allow visitors and residents participating in the performances or sports events to enjoy preferential discounts on community

spending, among other measures, to attract those visitors to visit other places in Macau and spend at those locations too.

The same lawmaker also suggested that the government find attractive ways to extend the length of stay of tourists, revitalize the local community economy, and continue to promote the non-gaming elements to achieve the goal of diversifying the economy while benefiting local and traditional SMEs.

### 35 CASES OF ILLEGAL TOUR GUIDING IN 2024

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) reported receiving 35 complaints about illegal tour guide activities in 2024. The government conducted joint inspections, resulting in reports against 17 suspected illegal guides. Provisional data indicates over 34.9 million tourists visited Macau last year. In response to this influx, the MGTO continues to monitor the tourism industry and collaborate with other departments to combat illegal activities disrupting the market. Last year, the MGTO carried out 1,615 inspections at entry and exit ports, tourist attractions, and shopping areas to ensure orderly tourism operations.

### TWO MEN ARRESTED FOR BURGLARY

Police have arrested two men suspected of burglarizing a shop and stealing HKD48,000. One of the suspects, a former employee of the store, deceived a locksmith into believing he had lost the key, enabling him to unlock the door. The theft was reported last Saturday after the store manager discovered the lock had been cut open. Officers intercepted the two men, aged 29 and 33, and found HKD6,000 in their possession. The locksmith later confirmed he had been misled into assisting with the break-in.

### STRONG WINTER MONSOON TO BRING TEMPERATURE DROP THIS WEEKEND

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) forecasts a strong winter monsoon approaching Macau later this week, causing temperatures to drop over the weekend. The predicted low for Saturday is 11 degrees Celsius, with many areas in the Pearl River Delta possibly falling to 10 degrees or below. From today until tomorrow, easterly winds will bring increased cloudiness and light rain. As air pressure rises in central China, the winter monsoon will move southward, leading to a significant temperature drop in South China starting Friday.

## HEALTH

# INFLUENZA INFECTIONS ON THE RISE, TO PEAK IN CNY

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU has entered the peak period of influenza, with the number of consultations for the illness increasing significantly in recent weeks, according to health officials in a press conference yesterday.

Leong Iek Hou, head of Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Division of the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control of the Health Bureau (SSM), stated that Macau entered the peak period of influenza late last month.

Last week, the number of influenza consultations among adults and children increased by 39% and 23% week-on-week, respectively. Leong expects the influenza virus to remain active in the next few weeks, and different influenza viruses may circulate alternately. "Vaccination can prevent four subtypes of the virus, including H1, H3, and two B types," she noted.

Chang Tam Fei, director of the emergency department of Conde de S. Januário, said that the average daily number of consultations has continued to rise since late last month, with the average follow-up time reaching 71 minutes.

"We use 800 consultations as a warning line, and we have seen numbers consistently exceed this threshold," Chang said.

Manpower and hospital beds have been allocated according to the situation, and Chang urged patients with mild symptoms to make use of community medical facilities to reduce the burden on hospitals.

Chan Choi Wan, deputy head of the Department of Communicable Disease Prevention and



Control, revealed that a total of 162,000 people have been vaccinated against influenza, an increase of nearly 42% year-on-year. The vaccination results for high-risk groups are satisfactory. In addition to influenza, Macau has also seen an upward trend in various acute respiratory in-

fectious diseases, with the detection rates of respiratory influenza viruses and enteroviruses being 12.4% and 21% respectively.

Health officials in Macau are urging the public to get vaccinated against influenza as soon as possible to combat the ongoing peak season.

Over the weekend, the SSM has already issued an alert regarding the active influenza virus in the region, indicating that it has surpassed the warning level and is now at epidemic peak.

Recent data from hospital surveillance shows a notable increase in influenza-like illness visits since late December 2024.

Specifically, adult emergency room visits for such cases rose by 39%, while visits among children increased by 23.1%. In the 52nd week of 2024 alone, influenza-like cases constituted 5.2% of total adult visits and 15.6% among children, reflecting a concerning trend.

The bureau reported a significant rise in the positive rate of influenza viruses detected in patients, jumping from 2.6% in the previous week to 15%, exceeding the warning threshold of 14.5%. The predominant strain identified is influenza A H1, accounting for 75% of cases.

Additionally, four cluster infection events were recorded in December, primarily affecting schools. Macau has reported 21 critical cases requiring ventilators this year, with five fatalities; most affected individuals had not been vaccinated.

## RISE IN GASTROENTERITIS CASES DRIVEN BY NOROVIRUS INFECTIONS

IN recent weeks, Macau has seen a significant increase in acute gastroenteritis cases, with a notable surge in norovirus infections, the Health Bureau (SSM) reported.

According to SSM's data, the number of people seeking medical attention for acute gastroenteritis rose from an average of 88 cases per week in No-

vember 2024 to 125 cases by the end of December. Additionally, the weekly average of reported norovirus infection cases jumped from 12 in November to 92 by the end of December.

The majority of the cases were attributed to either foodborne gastroenteritis or human-to-human transmission involving large groups of people.

The bureau has notified the relevant departments and implemented infection control measures in response to 12 collective gastroenteritis outbreaks, seven of which were confirmed to be caused by norovirus.

"Acute gastroenteritis is usually caused by viruses or bacteria, and the most common pathogens are norovi-

rus and salmonella," the SSM explained.

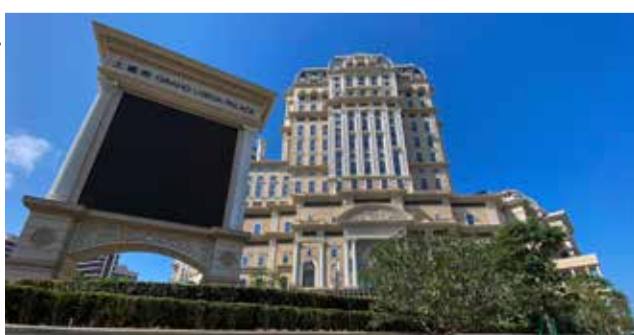
"Transmission can occur through contaminated food or water, contact with infected individuals, or exposure to contaminated objects."

The SSM is urging the public to prioritize personal, environmental, and food hygiene to prevent the further spread of the disease. VC

## THE ADVENTURES OF ALICE

# Grand Lisboa Palace to host new residency show

THIS year, Grand Lisboa Palace will host a new residency show, as announced by the gaming operator. SJM Resorts, in partnership with the renowned Hong Kong Ballet, is inviting talented male and female dancers with strong skills in ballet or contemporary dance to audition for "The Adventures of Alice @



Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau.

This reimaged clas-

sic story will come to life through performances, imaginative costu-

mes, and up-close interaction with the audience under the guidance of artistic professionals. Successful candidates will be engaged on short-term performance contracts.

Septime Webre, the artistic director of the Hong Kong Ballet, emphasizes the unique benefits of participating in "The Adventures of Alice" residency show.

He highlights how this program serves as a platform for dancers to elevate their careers and showcase their talents.

The production, cho-

reographed by Webre, will be performed on selected days throughout 2025 at the Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau.

The experience features a lively parade, whimsical performances, and interactive workshops, taking place on a state-of-the-art 360-degree stage at the Atrium on Level 1 of the resort.

Auditions will be held on Jan. 11 and Jan. 12 at the Macao Conservatory School of Dance and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, respectively. VC

TESLA

# Data helped police after Las Vegas truck explosion, but experts have wider privacy concerns

BERNARD CONDON,  
NEW YORK

**Y**OUR car is spying on you. That is one takeaway from the fast, detailed data that Tesla collected on the driver of one of its Cybertrucks that exploded in Las Vegas earlier this week. Privacy data experts say the deep dive by Elon Musk's company was impressive, but also shines a spotlight on a difficult question as vehicles become less like cars and more like computers on wheels.

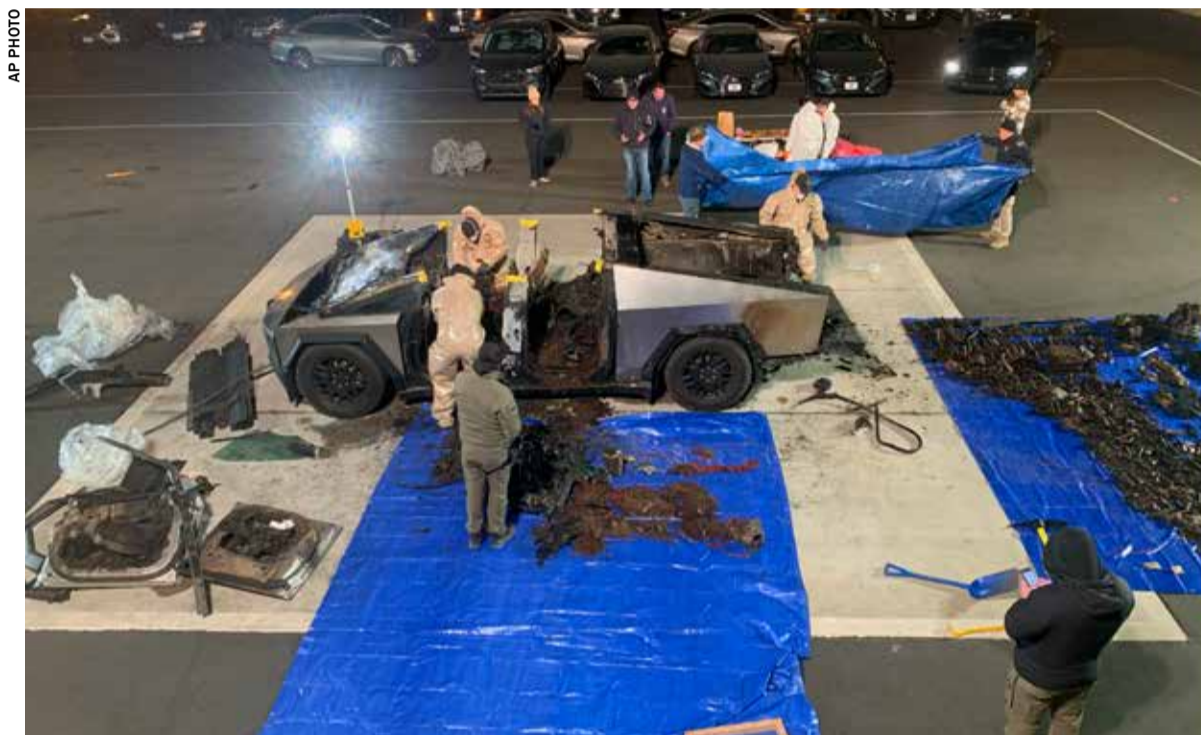
Is your car company violating your privacy rights?

"You might want law enforcement to have the data to crack down on criminals, but can anyone have access to it?" said Jodi Daniels, CEO of privacy consulting firm Red Clover Advisors. "Where is the line?"

Many of the latest cars not only know where you've been and where you are going, but also often have access to your contacts, your call logs, your texts and other sensitive information thanks to cell phone syncing.

The data collected by Musk's electric car company after the Cybertruck packed with fireworks burst into flames in front of the Trump International Hotel Wednesday proved valuable to police in helping track the driver's movements.

Within hours of the New Year's Day explosion that burned the driver beyond recognition and



Tesla Cybertruck involved in an explosion outside the Trump Hotel in Las Vegas

injured seven, Tesla was able to track Matthew Livelsberger's movements in detail from Denver to Las Vegas, and also confirm that the problem was explosives in the truck, not the truck itself. Tesla used data collected from charging stations and from onboard software -- and to great acclaim.

"I have to thank Elon Musk, specifically," said Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sheriff Kevin McMahill to reporters. "He gave us quite a bit of additional information."

Some privacy experts were less enthusiastic.

"It reveals the kind of sweeping surveillance going on," said Da-

vid Choffnes, executive director of the Cybersecurity and Privacy Institute at Northeastern University in Boston. "When something bad happens, it's helpful, but it's a double edged sword. Companies that collect this data can abuse it."

General Motors, for instance, was sued in August by the Texas attorney general for allegedly selling data from 1.8 million drivers to insurance companies without their consent.

Cars equipped with cameras to enable self-driving features have added a new security risk. Tesla itself came under fire after Reuters reported how employees from 2019 through 2022 shared drivers'

sensitive videos and recordings with each other, including videos of road rage incidents and, in one case, nudity.

Tesla did not respond to emailed questions about its privacy policy. On its website, Tesla says it follows strict rules for keeping names and information private.

"No one but you would have knowledge of your activities, location, or a history of where you've been," according to a statement. "Your information is kept private and secure."

Auto analyst Sam Abuelsamid at Telemetry Insight, said he doesn't think Tesla is "especially worse" than other auto com-

panies in handling customer data, but he is still concerned.

"This is one of the biggest ethical issues we have around modern vehicles. They're connected," he said. "Consumers need to have control over their data."

Tensions were high when the Cybertruck parked at the front doors of Trump's hotel began smoking, then burst into flames. Just hours earlier a driver in another vehicle using the same peer-to-peer car rental service, Turo, had killed 15 people after slamming into a crowd in New Orleans in what law enforcement is calling a terrorist attack.

Shortly before 1 p.m., the Las Vegas police announced they were investigating a second incident.

"The fire is out," the police announced on the social media platform X, one of Musk's other companies. "Please avoid the area."

Tesla shortly thereafter swung into action.

"The whole Tesla senior team is investigating this matter right now," Musk wrote on X. "Will post more information as soon as we learn anything."

Over the next few hours, Tesla was able to piece together Livelsberger's journey over five days and four states by tracking, among other things, his recharging stops in various locations, including Monument, Colorado, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Flagstaff, Arizona.

There are no federal laws regulating car data similar to those that restrict information collection and sharing by banks and health care providers. And state laws are a grab-bag of various rules, mostly focused on data privacy in general.

Daniels, the privacy consultant, thinks that new national laws are needed because rules have not kept up with technology.

"I think law enforcement should have access to data that can help them solve things quickly," she said. "But we have a right to privacy." MDT/AP

## CORPORATE BITS

### Galaxy boosts community tourism through training initiatives



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) is enhancing its collaboration with the Macau SAR Government to promote community tourism and support the revitalization of local attractions. Since 2023,

GEG has focused on the Lai Chi Yun Shipyards project, offering training programs to improve understanding of Macau's tourism resources among its team members and the community.

In late 2024, GEG partnered with the Macao University of Tourism to launch the "Experience Macao with GEG" initiative, which included seminars on local history and culture.

Over 300 participants attended these seminars, gaining insights into Taipa and Coloane's heritage from experts.

Additionally, a five-day study program allowed 25 frontline staff to explore Macau's cultural preservation efforts through classroom lectures and site visits.

These initiatives aim to deepen employees' knowledge of Macau's tourism landscape, enhancing their ability to promote the region as a premier destination for visitors.

### MGM's Imperial Court and Five Foot Road earn accolades



MGM's two signature regional Chinese restaurants, Imperial Court and Five Foot Road, have once again received One-Diamond honors from the prestigious Black Pearl Restaurant Gui-

de 2025.

To celebrate their achievements, Executive Chef Homan Tsui of Imperial Court and Executive Sous Chef Yang Dengquan of Five Foot Road have intro-

duced new tasting menus that showcase the finest regional specialties.

Hubert Wang, president and COO of MGM China Holdings Limited, expressed pride in the accolades, emphasizing the dedication of the Golden Lion Team to deliver exceptional dining experiences.

The Black Pearl Restaurant Guide, which has gained respect in the culinary world since its establishment eight years ago, continues to influence the global perception of Chinese cuisine. With over 300 featured restaurants across 30 cities, it remains a vital resource for discerning diners seeking quality dining experiences.

# Beijing protests US sanctions for its alleged role in hacking, complains of foreign hacker attacks

ELAINE KURTENBACH,  
BANGKOK

**C**HINA has slammed a decision by the U.S. Treasury to sanction a Beijing-based cybersecurity company for its alleged role in multiple hacking incidents targeting critical U.S. infrastructure, while the Chinese cyber security agency complained Monday of attacks on Chinese networks.

Asked about the sanctions against Beijing-based Integrity Technology Group, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said the country has cracked down on cyber attacks and that Washington was using the issue to “defame and smear China.”

“For some time now, the U.S. side has been playing up so-called Chinese cyber attacks and has even initiated illegal unilateral sanctions against China,” Guo said. “China firmly opposes this and will take necessary measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.”

Integrity Technology Group said the move by Washington had “no factual basis.”

“The company firmly oppo-



ses the U.S. Treasury Department’s unwarranted accusations and Illegal unilateral sanctions on the company,” the company, also known as Yongxin Zhicheng Technology Group, said in a statement Monday to the Shanghai Stock Exchange.

The China National Cyber Security Information Center said it had discovered attacks from

various malicious websites and foreign IP addresses, including some in California and Florida. It also reported attacks from the Netherlands, Singapore, Mexico, Turkey and Vietnam using Trojan programs, botnets, phishing, theft of intellectual property and violations of privacy.

“They pose a major threat to China’s domestic networked

units and internet users and some activities have been suspected of criminal offenses,” the center said in a notice on its WeChat social media site.

On Friday, the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control hit Integrity Technology with sanctions that block access to U.S. property and bank accounts and prevent the targeted people and

companies from doing business with Americans. It cited alleged multiple hacks against U.S. victims, including incidents attributed to Flax Typhoon, a Chinese state-sponsored campaign that targets U.S. critical infrastructure.

The sanctions did not appear to be related to an incident in which the Treasury Department reported that Chinese hackers had remotely accessed several of its workstations and unclassified documents in a major breach of cybersecurity.

The Treasury Department said it learned of that 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.

U.S. officials are grappling with the fallout from a massive Chinese cyberespionage blitz known as Salt Typhoon that they say gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans.

Late last month, officials said at least eight telecommunications companies, as well as dozens of nations, had been affected by Salt Typhoon.

Integrity Technology said the sanctions would not adversely affect its business since it does not operate in the U.S. and has no assets there. It added that it abides by all laws and regulations and that it “has always adhered to the corporate vision and mission of bringing a sense of security to the world.” MDT/AP

## Cyberspace authorities purge internet of ‘troll farms’

**C**HINA’S cyberspace regulators shut down over 400 websites and platforms in 2024, punishing 2.39 million online accounts and merchants to combat activities associated with the “online troll farms”.

“Troll farms” are groups hired to post online comments, make purchases and manipulate public opinion to boost popularity or attack competitors. These groups may create fake accounts, spread misinformation, or engage in astroturfing to disguise paid activity as genuine user engagement.

According to a news release from the Cyberspace Administration of China on Friday, authorities have further intensified efforts to crack down on these activities since the start of the

new year.

The release stated that some online troll farms exploit social events to gain attention, while others create false reputations for merchants or manipulate ratings and reviews for films and celebrities, generating fake traffic data.

Such activities severely harm the online ecosystem, the statement said. Last year, over 400 websites and platforms were shut down, and 4.82 million pieces of illegal and harmful information were removed, the cyberspace administration said.

Authorities imposed punishments on 2.39 million online accounts and merchants, as well as 52,000 online groups.

The administration has disclosed several typical cases.



Some online trolls set up self-service ordering platforms offering services such as boosting reviews, “likes” and engagement on short-video, livestreaming and social media platforms, the release noted.

Cyber administration authorities have shut down platforms dedicated to on-

line troll farms and worked with app stores to intercept or remove certain applications.

Authorities have also investigated the misuse of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and applications designed to generate fake traffic.

Some online troll farms

frequently used bot accounts to post in bulk in comment sections, taking advantage of opportunities to boost rankings and create trending topics, the cyberspace administration said.

Certain software tools have developed AI-writing functions and account farms for one-click posting, facilitating account manipulation and topic fabrication.

In response, authorities urged online platforms to handle illegal accounts in accordance with laws and agreements. They have collaborated with relevant departments to crack down on AI-tool-based online troll farm organizations and guided platforms to enhance technical measures to intercept and deal with account-farming software and bot accounts.

The release said that cyber administration authorities will continue working with relevant departments to maintain “high pressure” and severely punish online troll farms’ activities, resolutely preventing their resurgence.

The cyberspace administration has also urged the public to actively participate in oversight and report online misconduct by providing timely information about potential violations.

It reminded netizens to exercise caution when encountering online part-time job offers to avoid being deceived into participating in online troll farm activities, which could result in personal and financial losses. CHINADAILY

MALAYSIA

# Jailed ex-leader Najib wins appeal to pursue bid to serve corruption sentence at home

**M**ALAYSIA'S imprisoned former Prime Minister Najib Razak yesterday won an appeal to pursue his bid to serve his remaining corruption sentence under house arrest.

In an application in April last year, Najib said he had clear information that then-King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah issued an addendum order allowing him to finish his sentence under house arrest.

Najib claimed the addendum was issued during a pardons board meeting on Jan. 29 last year chaired by Sultan Abdullah that also cut his 12-year jail sentence by half and sharply reduced a fine. But the High Court tossed out his bid three months later.

The Court of Appeals, in a 2-1 ruling yesterday, ordered the High Court to hear the merits of the case. The decision



A supporter of former Prime Minister Najib Razak waits outside the Court of Appeals, in Putrajaya, Malaysia, yesterday

came after Najib's lawyer produced a letter from a Pahang state palace official confirming

that then-Sultan Abdullah had issued the addendum order. "We are happy that finally

Najib has got a win," his lawyer Mohamad Shafee Abdullah said. "He is very happy and very relieved that finally they recognized some element of injustice that has been placed against him."

The lawyer said Najib gave a thumbs-up in court when the ruling was read.

He said it was "criminal" for the government to conceal the addendum order. Shafee noted that a new High Court judge will now hear the case.

In his application, Najib accused the pardons board, home minister, attorney-general and four others of concealing the sultan's order "in bad faith." Sultan Abdullah hails from Najib's hometown in Pahang. He ended his five-year reign on Jan. 30 last year under Malaysia's unique rotating monarchy system. A new king took office a day later.

Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail has said he

had no knowledge of such an order since he wasn't a member of the pardons board. The others named in Najib's application have not made any public comments.

Najib, 71, served less than two years of his sentence before it was commuted by the pardons board. His sentence is now due to end on Aug. 23, 2028. He was charged and found guilty in a corruption case linked to the multi-billion-dollar looting of state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad.

The pardons board didn't give any reason for its decision and wasn't required to explain. But the move has prompted a public outcry over the appearance that Najib was being given special privileges compared to other prisoners.

Najib set up the 1MDB development fund shortly after he took office in 2009. Investigators allege at least \$4.5 billion was stolen from the fund and laundered by Najib's associates through layers of bank accounts in the United States and other countries, financed Hollywood films and extravagant purchases that included hotels, a luxury yacht, art and jewelry. More than \$700 million landed in Najib's bank accounts.

Najib is still fighting graft charges in the main trial linking him directly to the scandal. **MDT/AP**

KOREAS

# South Korea says North Korea fired a ballistic missile into the sea

KIM TONG-HYUNG,  
SEOUL

**N**ORTH Korea yesterday fired a ballistic missile that flew 1,100 kilometers before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, South Korea's military said, extending its weapons testing weeks before Donald Trump returns as U.S. president.

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the midrange missile was fired from an area near the North Korean capital Pyongyang and that the launch preparations were detected in advance by the U.S. and South Korean militaries. It denounced the launch as a provocation that poses a serious threat to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The joint chiefs said the military was strengthening its surveillance and defense

posture in preparation for possible additional launches.

Japan's Defense Ministry said the missile landed outside its exclusive economic zone and that there were no reports of damage to vessels or aircraft.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba expressed concern that the North's accelerated pace in missile tests is advancing its capabilities. The North last year tested various nuclear-capable systems that threaten its neighbors and the United States, including a new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile that achieved both the highest altitude and longest flight time of any missile the country has launched.

Blinken holds talks in Seoul as political turmoil shakes South Korea

The launch came as U.S.



Secretary of State Antony Blinken was visiting Seoul for talks with South Korean allies over the North Korean nuclear threat and other issues.

Blinken's visit comes amid political turmoil in South Korea following President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived martial law decree and subsequent impeachment by parliament last month,

which experts say puts the country at a disadvantage in getting a steady footing with Trump ahead of his return to the White House.

In a news conference with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, Blinken condemned North Korea's latest launch, which violates U.N. Security Council resolutions against the North. He also reiterated

concerns about the growing alignment between North Korea and Russia in Moscow's war on Ukraine.

According to U.S., Ukrainian and South Korean assessments, North Korea has sent more than 10,000 troops and conventional weapons systems to support Moscow's war campaign. There are concerns that Russia could transfer to North Korea advanced weapons technology in return, which could potentially enhance the threat posed by leader Kim Jong Un's nuclear-armed military.

Blinken described the military cooperation between Russia and North Korea as a "two-way street," saying Russia has been providing military equipment and training to the North and "intends to share space and satellite technology."

Blinken and Cho both dismissed concerns about damage to the U.S.-South Korea alliance in the aftermath of the political turmoil in Seoul. Experts had warned that Yoon's martial law decree — which lasted only hours but has rattled poli-

tics, high-level diplomacy and financial markets for weeks — exposed the fragility of South Korea's democratic system in a divided society.

"We had serious concerns about some of the actions that President Yoon took and we communicated those directly to the government," Blinken said. "At the same time we have tremendous confidence in the resilience of South Korea's democracy, in the strength of its institutions and in the efforts that it's making to work through those institutions, pursuant to the constitution and the rule of law to resolve differences and to do so peacefully."

Kim's warning ahead of Trump's return

In a year-end political conference, Kim, the North Korean leader, vowed to implement the "toughest" anti-U.S. policy and criticized the Biden administration's efforts to strengthen security cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo, which he described as a "nuclear military bloc for aggression." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



# TikTok creators left in limbo while awaiting decision on potential platform ban

JONATHAN LANDRUM JR. & HALELUYA HADERO

**W**ILL TikTok be banned this month? That's the pressing question keeping creators and small business owners in anxious limbo as they await a decision that could upend their livelihoods. The fate of the popular app will be decided by the Supreme Court, which will hear arguments on Jan. 10 over a law requiring TikTok to break ties with its Chinese-based parent company, ByteDance, or face a U.S. ban.

At the heart of the case is whether the law violates the First Amendment with TikTok and its creator allies arguing that it does. The U.S. government, which sees the platform as a national security risk, says it does not.

For creators, the TikTok doomsday scenarios are nothing new since President-elect Donald Trump first tried to ban the platform through executive order during his first term. But despite Trump's recent statements indicating he now wants TikTok to stick around, the prospect of a ban has never been as immediate as it is now with the Supreme Court serving as the final arbiter.

If the government prevails as it did in a lower court, TikTok says it would shut down its U.S. platform by Jan. 19, leaving creators scrambling to redefine their futures.

"A lot of my other creative

friends, we're all like freaking out. But I'm staying calm," said Gillian Johnson, who benefited financially from TikTok's live feature and rewards program, which helped creators generate higher revenue potential by posting high-quality original content. The 22-year-old filmmaker and recent college graduate uses her TikTok earnings to help fund her equipment for projects such as camera lens and editing software for her short films "Gambit" and "Awaken! My Neighbor."

Johnson said the idea of TikTok going away is "hard to accept."

Many creators have taken to TikTok to voice their frustrations, grappling with the possibility that the platform they've invested so much in could soon disappear. Online communities risk being disrupted, and the economic fallout could especially be devastating for those who mainly depend on TikTok and have left full-time jobs to build careers and incomes around their content.

For some, the uncertainty has led them to question whether to continue creating content at all, according to Johnson, who says she knows creators who have been thinking about quitting. But Nicola Bartoli, the vice president of sales at The Influencer Marketing Factory, said the creators she has interacted with have not been too worried since news about a potential TikTok ban has come up repeatedly over the years, and then died down.

"I believe a good chunk think it is not going to happen," said Bartoli, whose agency works to pair influencers and brands.

It's unclear how quickly the Supreme Court will issue a decision. But the court could act swiftly to block the law from going into effect if at least five of the nine justices deem it unconstitutional.

Trump, for his part, has already asked the justices to put a pause on the ban so he could weigh in after he takes office. In a brief — written by his pick for solicitor general — Trump called the First Amendment implications of a TikTok ban "sweeping and troubling" and said he wants a "negotiated resolution" to the issue, something the Biden administration had pursued to no avail.

While waiting for the dust to settle in Washington, some creators are exploring alternative ways to promote themselves or their business, encouraging users to follow them on other social media platforms or are investing more time producing non-TikTok content.

Johnson says she is already strategizing her next move and exploring alternative opportunities. While she hasn't found a place quite like TikTok, she's begun to spend more of her time on other platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube, both of whom are expected to benefit financially if TikTok vanishes.

According to a report by Goldman Sachs, the so-called

creator economy, which has been fueled in part by TikTok, could be worth \$480 billion by 2027.

Because the opportunity to monetize content exists across a range of platforms, a vast amount of creators have already diversified their social media presence. However, many TikTok creators have credited the platform — and its algorithm — with giving them a type of exposure they did not receive on other platforms. Some say it has also boosted and provided opportunities for creators of color and those from other marginalized groups.

Despite fears about the fate of TikTok, industry analysts note creators are generally avoiding making any big changes, like abandoning platform, until something actually happens.

"I'm anxious but also trying to be hopeful in a weird way," said Brandon Hurst, who credits TikTok with rescuing his business from obscurity and propelling it into rapid growth.

A year after joining TikTok, the 30-year-old Hurst, who sells plants, said his sales doubled, outpacing the traction he'd struggled to gain on Instagram. He built his clientele through the live feature on TikTok, which has helped him sell more than 77,000 plants. The business has thrived so much that he says he now employs five people, including his husband and mom.

"For me, this has been my sole way of doing business," Hurst said. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1980 GANDHI RETURNED BY LANDSLIDE VOTE



The people of India have voted Indira Gandhi back into power - less than three years after rejecting her "emergency dictatorship".

When the last of the 196 million votes in national elections were counted, her Congress (Indira) party had won 351 of the 525 contested seats in the lower house of parliament, or Lok Sabha.

Mrs Gandhi's triumph virtually wiped out her party's two major contenders. Neither the Janata nor the Lok Dal party gained the requisite 54 seats to qualify for recognition as the official opposition.

Underscoring the extent of her victory, was the election of her son Sanjay, who had been blamed for many of the excesses of the emergency rule. He is out of prison on appeal against his conviction for stealing then destroying the master copy of a film satirizing his mother's rule.

Mrs Gandhi, who had ruled India for 11 years until 1977, successfully appealed to India's rural masses with her two election slogans, "Banish Poverty" and "Law and Order".

During the 63-day campaign, the 62-year-old gave up to 20 speeches a day during a 40,000 mile tour of 384 constituencies.

But Mrs Gandhi's political comeback will be viewed with suspicion. During the 19 months of emergency rule, introduced after she was accused of electoral malpractice, democracy was suspended, many opposition politicians were imprisoned and a compulsory birth control programme was introduced.

When Mrs Gandhi sought to have the regime legitimized through the polls, she was defeated by Morarji Desai's Janata party.

The last time she appeared in parliament was in 1978 when she was expelled on charges involving harassment of government officials during the emergency. She is still under investigation on charges of abuse of power, although the assumption is these will now be shelved.

Her electoral victory is partly due to the break-up last summer of the fragile coalition which formed the Janata party, leaving caretaker prime minister Charan Singh in control.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Indira Gandhi's first formal speech after her election victory spoke of compromise, even for her opponents.

She said the nation had to be lifted from the "ruinous state" into which it had fallen.

Her son Sanjay was later killed in an air crash.

In 1984 she ordered the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar to flush out Sikh militants who were pursuing self rule for Punjab.

Two months later she was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards.

Her eldest surviving son, Rajiv, succeeded her as prime minister. He, too, was assassinated, in 1991, by supporters of the Tamil Tigers in retaliation for ordering the deployment of troops in Sri Lanka.

His widow, Sonia, took over the leadership of the Congress party in 1998.

In 2004, she won the general election and returned Congress to power.

But she unexpectedly refused to take up the post of prime minister, handing it instead to former finance minister Manmohan Singh.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
 Make repairs and renovations. Fix up your place over the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Renovate and improve your living conditions.

**TAURUS**  
 Apr. 20-May. 20  
 Listen and learn. Organize, edit and plot over the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Study, research, and write. Share and network.

**GEMINI**  
 May. 21-Jun. 21  
 This could be a profitable period. Buying things comes easily over the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Avoid reckless spending. Stash savings.

**CANCER**  
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
 Develop a passion. You're energized for personal projects, with Mars in your sign for seven weeks. Take powerful action. Grow stronger with each step.

**LEO**  
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
 Clean closets, garages and attics. Simplify and reduce clutter over about seven weeks. Finish old business and prepare for what's ahead, with Mars in Cancer.

**VIRGO**  
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
 Share ideas, resources and solutions. Collaborative efforts thrive, with Mars in Cancer. Support your team over the next seven weeks. Together, anything's possible.

**LIBRA**  
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
 Advance professionally over the next seven weeks. Move forward boldly, with Mars in Cancer. Energize your career with enthusiastic efforts and passion. Provide excellence.

**SCORPIO**  
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
 Your traveling cravings grow stronger over the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Explore new terrain, near or far. Study a fascinating subject.

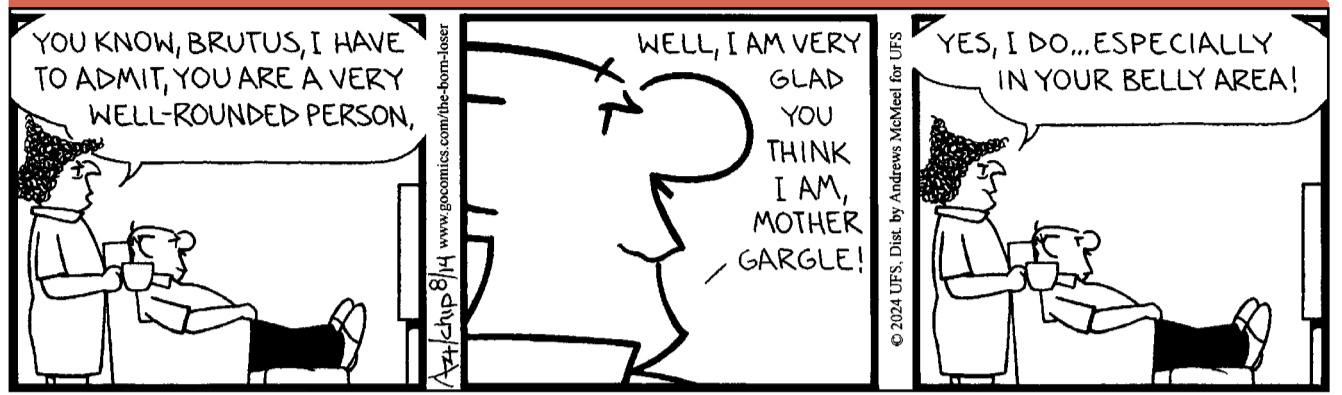
**SAGITTARIUS**  
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
 Manage taxes, insurance and investments. Make plans and budgets together over the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Grow your family savings.

**CAPRICORN**  
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
 Let another take the lead. Collaborative efforts get farther. Delegate and share to get farther over the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer.

**AQUARIUS**  
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
 Work faster and make more money. Focus energy on work for the next seven weeks, with Mars in Cancer. Harvest an especially productive period.

**PISCES**  
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
 Actions speak louder than words. With Mars in Cancer, you're especially lucky in love. Creativity flourishes over seven weeks. Passion inspires your artistry.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-3	5	cloudy
Changchun	-18	-10	overcast
Chengdu	5	9	rain
Chongqing	8	9	rain
Fuzhou	9	16	cloudy
Guangzhou	8	22	cloudy
Guiyang	3	10	rain
Haikou	15	24	cloudy
Hangzhou	2	7	overcast
Harbin	-22	-15	snow
Hefei	-2	8	fine
Nanjing	-1	9	cloudy
Shanghai	2	9	overcast
Taipei	12	17	cloudy
Wuhan	0	10	overcast
Hong Kong	18	19	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-3	1	snow
Frankfurt	2	6	showers
Paris	3	7	cloudy
London	-1	4	cloudy
New York	-4	0	cloudy

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Unhearing; 5- French cheese; 9- Jumps on one leg; 13- 2:1, e.g.; 15- Itches; 16- French friend; 17- Of The \_\_\_; 18- Cushions; 19- Mall event; 20- Teacher's favorite; 21- Meander; 23- One or the other; 25- Congers, e.g.; 26- Encroachment; 27- Locks; 30- Sgt., e.g.; 31- Brewery kilns; 32- Synopsis; 37- Solemn ceremony; 38- Vows; 40- 100 centavos; 41- Costume; 43- Senator Sam of Watergate fame; 44- Vinegar's partner; 45- Singer Etheridge; 47- Having a sharp tip; 50- Vocal; 51- Capital of the Bahamas; 52- Musical composition for two; 53- Mai \_\_\_ (drink); 56- Parentheses, essentially; 57- Hullabaloo; 59- Upright; 61- Boyfriend; 62- Regrets; 63- Cherished ones; 64- Shrivelled, without moisture; 65- Days of \_\_\_; 66- One hunted;

DOWN 1- Faucet fault; 2- Alleviate; 3- Busily working; 4- Fish appendage; 5- Go around; 6- 500 sheets; 7- Not Rep. or Dem.; 8- Concentrated extracts; 9- Must; 10- City in Nebraska; 11- Stacked; 12- Clairvoyant; 14- Female beast; 22- Cheer for a matador; 24- Pressing need; 25- Cosmetician; 26- Move slowly; 27- Ripped; 28- Shower; 29- Ballpark figs.; 32- \_\_\_-Foy, Quebec; 33- Month of showers; 34- Guns; 35- Egyptian fertility goddess; 36- A Chaplin; 38- Death notice; 39- Comrade in arms; 42- \_\_\_ Lisa; 43- Overjoyed; 45- Sweet dessert; 46- Before, in verse; 47- European capital, in song; 48- Academy award; 49- Magazine copy; 51- Apprehends; 52- Go-getter; 53- Eye drop; 54- Farm unit; 55- \_\_\_-bitsy; 58- Twosome; 60- Agt.;

**Yesterday's solution**

RENTA	EMU	PIERS			
ORION	MET	APLEA			
PINEAPPLE	RAISA				
FINA	OTTS	ASTER			
ALOSY	ASSET				
ALOHAS	AERO				
BEFORE	RAILWAY				
ENID	HER	EDAM			
ATECROW	SNAILS				
NOLAN	NOEL	AAS			
OTERI	ESTABLISH				
TESLA	YAE	AERIE			
EDSEL	SYR	NABAL			

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	

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GOLF

# HIDEKI MATSUYAMA HAS RECORD-SETTING START TO THE PGA TOUR SEASON WITH VICTORY AT KAPALUA

DOUG FERGUSON, KAPALUA

**H**IDEKI Matsuyama opened the new season with a record performance, though it was hard to tell from his emotions. He was a machine at The Sentry, with 35 holes at birdie or better to finish at 35-under par, both PGA Tour records.

He only broke into a wide smile when his caddie, Shota Hayafuji, spoke to him on the side of the 18th green Sunday at Kapalua after one final birdie gave Matsuyama the scoring records and a three-shot victory over Collin Morikawa.

"Otoshidama arigato gozaimasu."

It translates roughly to thanks for a traditional Japanese gift to children in the new year to wish them luck and prosperity. Matsuyama won \$3.6 million from his 11th career victory.

There was little luck involved over four days on a Plantation



Hideki Matsuyama

course that was vulnerable as ever without hardly any wind for which it was built. Matsuyama made only one bogey over the final 59 holes to finish at 35-under 257.

Staked to a one-shot lead going into the final round, Matsuyama holed out from 107 yards for eagle on the third

hole, expanded the lead when Morikawa had consecutive three-putts — one for par, another for bogey — and answered a late challenge with another wedge to 4 feet.

He closed with an 8-under 65 and started the new season in ways Matsuyama would not have imagined.

The 32-year-old Japanese star had only a few days of practice leading into the season opener because he was not feeling well, most recently with sores in his mouth. He decided on a whim to switch to a more center-shafted putter he received a few days after Christmas.

"I used the putter for the first here," Matsuyama said through his interpreter. Asked why that style of putter worked so well for him, he added, "I'm not sure, but it went in."

The last one was for the record book. Matsuyama wasn't entirely sure that 34 under had been the record for 72 holes. The tournament already was in the bag.

"That last putt, it felt like if I make it, then it's going to be the record," he said. "So I'm so happy that it went in."

He extended his arm and lightly pumped his fist when it fell. His 35 under broke by one the record to par Cameron Smi-

th set at Kapalua in 2022. It also was his 35th hole of birdie or better, breaking the record set by Smith in 2022 and matched by Sungjae Im at Kapalua last year.

"He was matching me yesterday shot-for-shot," said Morikawa, alluding to both posting a 62 in the third round that set them apart from the field.

"Today he just never let up," Morikawa said. "Then you get to the third hole and the guy holes it. I just knew I had to be on top of everything, and just kind of let a few slip on that front nine. Played a good back nine, but to win on a course like this, conditions like this, you've got to have it for 72 (holes). And I had it for 65."

Morikawa closed with a 67 to finish three behind at 32-under 260.

Matsuyama has three PGA Tour victories in the last 10 months, all of them against strong fields — Riviera last February, the first FedEx Cup playoff event in August. He moves to No. 5 in the world ranking.

Matsuyama began to build some separation when he holed a sand wedge from 107 yards on the third hole, the ball landing in front of the pin, taking one hop and disappearing in the cup for eagle. **MDT/AP**

AD



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& NOTARIES  
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**FOOTBALL**

# Indonesia fires head coach ahead of vital World Cup qualifiers

**I**NDONESIA has dismissed Shin Tae-yong as head coach of its national team, the country's federation announced yesterday.

"This decision was made based on long and mature considerations and evaluations carried out by as a whole regarding the team's performance and the long-term goals that the Indonesian National Football Team wants to achieve" the Indonesian federation, known locally as PSSI, said in a statement.

Appointed in 2020, the South Korean boss had led Indonesia to the third round of qualification for the 2026 World Cup for the first time. In November, the team defeated Saudi Arabia 2-0 to move into third place in the six-team group with four games remaining.

At a press conference in Jakarta, PSSI chairman Erick Thohir, who handed Shin a contract extension to 2027

last June, explained the decision.

"The dynamics of the national team need special attention from us," Thohir said. "We see the need for a leader who can better implement strategies agreed upon by the players, good communication and better implementation."

There was no announcement of a replacement, though there is speculation that the new boss could be European.

The national team's recent success has been driven by the naturalization of players of Indonesian heritage, born and raised in Europe. Of the team that started November's victory over Saudi Arabia, only Marselino Ferdinan, who scored both goals, was born in the Southeast Asian nation.

Indonesia's next qualifier is against Australia in March. **MDT/AP**

**BASKETBALL**

# Malik Monk, Domantas Sabonis lead dominant Kings

JANIE MCCAULEY,  
SAN FRANCISCO

**M**ALIK Monk had 26 points and 12 assists, Domantas Sabonis contributed 22 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists, and the Sacramento Kings dominated the Golden State Warriors 129-99 yesterday (Macau time) for their fourth straight win despite playing without leading scorer De'Aaron Fox.

The Kings never trailed, led 75-51 at halftime and didn't look back — with many frustrated home fans heading early for the Chase Center exits while Sacramento's lively contingent chanted "Let's go Kings!"

Stephen Curry scored 26 to go with seven rebounds after resting the first night of a back-to-back Saturday against the Grizzlies, and Andrew Wiggins added 18 points.

This marked Sacramento's first visit to Chase Center since coach Mike Brown — the former top assistant for Golden State — was dismissed Dec. 27 following a 13-18 start. War-



AP PHOTO

Sacramento Kings guard Devin Carter (22)

riors coach Steve Kerr continued to express his "shock" over good friend Brown's firing. Doug Christie is interim coach.

**TAKEAWAYS**

Kings: Fox bruised a glute muscle when he fell hard on a flagrant foul by Memphis big man Jaren Jackson Jr. ... Sacramento hit 10 of its initial 17 shots — 5 for 9 on 3s — to go ahead 25-14.

Warriors: Forward Jonathan Kuminga will be sidelined for at least three weeks with a sprained right ankle he injured against Memphis on Saturday night.

**KEY MOMENT**

Curry had a dazzling stretch but it was one of few highlights for his team. With 9:44 left in the second quarter, the first of Curry's two four-point plays got Golden State back within 40-29. Draymond Green hit from deep the next time down to make it an eight-point game before Curry converted another four-point play after a foul by Sabonis.

**KEY STAT**

A night after dishing out 32 assists, the Warriors were held to 22, matching their total of turnovers. **MDT/AP**



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**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**SANCTIONS SHOW THAT  
 BEIJING WILL BROOK NO  
 CHALLENGE TO CHINA'S  
 CORE INTERESTS**

By putting 10 United States entities on its Unreliable Entity List and 28 US entities on its Export Control List on Thursday, the first work day of the new year, Beijing is not only responding to the most recent arms sales to Taiwan and the probe into China's conventional semiconductor sector that the Joe Biden administration announced late last month, but also reminding the incoming US administration of China's resolve to guard its red lines.

All of the 10 US companies that China has identified as "unreliable" have participated in arms sales to Taiwan island and carried out so-called military and technical cooperation with its secessionist-minded authority despite Beijing's strong opposition. In doing so, they have violated the one-China principle and the provisions of the three Sino-US joint communiques, and seriously undermined peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Beijing's move is thus fully justified as they have sought to undermine China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Taiwan question is China's internal affair, concerns China's core interests, and brooks no external interference. The one-China principle is a recognized basic norm of international relations and a universal consensus of the international community. China has therefore always firmly opposed the US selling weapons to the island, which is a breach of the US administration's avowal of not supporting "Taiwan independence".

The entities added to the Unreliable Entity List are prohibited from engaging in import and export activities related to China or making new investments in the country. Their senior managers are prohibited from entering China, and the work permit, stay or residence qualification of the senior managers of these enterprises in China has been revoked.

The decision to sanction the 10 US entities was made in accordance with the Foreign Trade Law, the National Security Law and the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, according to the statement the Ministry of Commerce of China issued on Thursday when the sanctions came into force.

The decision to sanction the other 28 US entities was made in accordance with the Export Control Law and the Regulations on Export Control of Dual-Use Items, with the purpose of safeguarding national interests and fulfilling international obligations such as nuclear nonproliferation, the ministry said in a separate statement issued at the same time.

Dual-use items are prohibited from being exported to those on the Export Control List, and exporters must apply to the ministry for approval if there are exceptional circumstances.

Although the ministry has not specified the background for the sanctions on the 28 US entities, almost all of them are involved in weapons manufacturing or arms selling that are overtly and covertly related to some key issues that have close bearings on China's national security and interests and nuclear proliferation problems in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

The 38 entities are the most US entities China has sanctioned in one go, reflecting how the US under the Biden administration has intensified its challenging of China's red lines and core interests while carrying out its China-containment strategy, which is fundamentally flawed as it is based on a false perception of China's development.

"It is important to rise above estrangement and conflict with a broad vision," President Xi Jinping said in his New Year message. But when it comes to China's core interests, the space for that "rise" and "vision" have been defined clearly. It is to be hoped that the incoming US administration can accurately heed the unspoken part of the New Year message from Beijing and it is perceptive enough to give up any illusion that it can challenge Beijing on relevant issues. [Abridged]

Gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Israelis in the occupied West Bank yesterday, killing at least three people and wounding seven others. Violence has surged in the territory since Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of Gaza ignited the ongoing war there.

The attack occurred in the Palestinian village of Al-Funduq, on one of the main east-west roads crossing the territory. Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service said two women in their 60s and a man in his 40s were killed, and the military said it was looking for the attackers.

Palestinians have carried out scores of shooting, stabbing and car-ramping attacks against Israelis in recent years. Israel has launched near-nightly military raids across the territory that frequently trigger gunbattle with militants. There has also been a sharp rise in attacks on Palestinians by Israeli settlers, leading the United States to impose sanctions.

The Palestinian Health Ministry says at least 838 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza.



LEBANON

**HEZBOLLAH LEADER  
 NASRALLAH WAS KILLED  
 LAST YEAR INSIDE THE  
 WAR OPERATIONS ROOM,  
 AIDE SAYS**

KAREEM CHEHAYEB,  
 BEIRUT

**H**EBZOLLAH leader Hassan Nasrallah was killed in an Israeli airstrike last year while inside the militant group's war operations room, according to new details Sunday disclosed by a senior Hezbollah official.

A series of Israeli airstrikes flattened several buildings in Beirut's southern suburbs on Sept. 27, 2024, killing Nasrallah. The Lebanese Health Ministry said six people died. According to news reports, Nasrallah and other senior officials were meeting underground.

The assassination of Nasrallah, who had led Hezbollah for 32 years, turned months of low-level strikes between Israel and the militants into all-out war that battered much of southern and eastern Lebanon for two months until a U.S.-brokered ceasefire took effect Nov. 27.

"His Eminence (Hassan Nasrallah) used to lead the battle and war from this location," top Hezbollah security of-

ficial Wafiq Safa told a news conference Sunday near the site where Nasrallah was killed. He said Nasrallah died in the war operations room. He did not offer other details.

Lebanese media had reported that Safa was a target of Israeli airstrikes in central Beirut before the ceasefire but appeared unscathed.

During the first phase of the ceasefire, Hezbollah is supposed to move its fighters, weapons and infrastructure away from southern Lebanon north of the Litani River, while Israeli troops that invaded southern Lebanon need to withdraw all within 60 days. Lebanese army soldiers are to deploy in large numbers and alongside United Nations peacekeepers be the sole armed presence in southern Lebanon.

Lebanon and Hezbollah have been critical of ongoing Israeli strikes and overflights across the country and for only withdrawing from two of dozens of Lebanese villages it controls. Israel says that the Lebanese military has not done its

share in dismantling Hezbollah infrastructure.

Hezbollah's current leader Naim Kassem in a televised address Saturday warned that its fighters could strike Israel if its troops don't leave the south by the end of the month.

Meanwhile, Israel's defense minister Israel Katz echoed similar sentiments should Hezbollah's militants not head north of the Litani River and their infrastructure remain intact.

"If this condition is not met, there will be no agreement, and Israel will be forced to act on its own to ensure the safe return of the residents of (Israel's) north to their homes," he said.

Safa said that Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who negotiated the ceasefire deal with Washington, told Hezbollah that the government will meet with U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein soon. "And in light of what happens, then there will be a position," said Safa.

Hochstein had led the shuttle diplomacy efforts to reach the fragile truce. **MDT/AP**



**Russian** troops in eastern Ukraine have captured the stronghold of Kurakhove after a monthlong battle. Russia's Defense Ministry claimed yesterday, adding the wrecked town to the Kremlin's list of conquests in the partially occupied Donetsk region during the almost three-year war.



**Germany** The death toll in the attack on a Christmas market in Magdeburg last month has risen to six as a woman succumbed to her injuries, prosecutors said yesterday. Prosecutors in Naumburg said the 52-year-old woman died in a hospital, German news agency dpa reported. More than 200 people were injured in the Dec. 20 attack.



**Montenegro** Several thousand people rallied in on Sunday demanding the resignations of top security officials over the shooting earlier this week that left 12 people dead, including two children. Chanting "Resignations" and "Killers," protesters outside the Interior Ministry demanded that Interior Minister Danilo Šaranović and Deputy Prime Minister for Security and Defense Aleksa Bečić step down.



**Austrian** Freedom Party leader Herbert Kickl (pictured) met with the president yesterday amid expectations he could be tasked with forming a new government, marking the first far-right leadership since World War II. Kickl's party won 28.8% of the vote in September's parliamentary election, surpassing outgoing Chancellor Karl Nehammer's conservative party.