



GOV'T EXPECTS A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN FLOW OF PEOPLE VISITING THE TAIPA OLD TOWN DURING THE CNY HOLIDAYS, COMPARED TO PREVIOUS YEAR

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HONG KONG AND MACAU LAUNCH DIRECT LINKAGE FOR BOND MARKETS

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ANALYSTS EXPECT THE LOCAL GAMING INDUSTRY TO GENERATE MODERATE REVENUE GROWTH DURING THE LUNAR NEW YEAR SPRING FESTIVAL

P3

AP PHOTO



Myanmar China yesterday announced a ceasefire agreement between Myanmar's military and the Kokang rebel group MNDAA, following months of conflict along their shared border. Beijing brokered the deal, aiming to stabilize the region and address issues impacting Chinese interests in Myanmar's northeast.

AP PHOTO



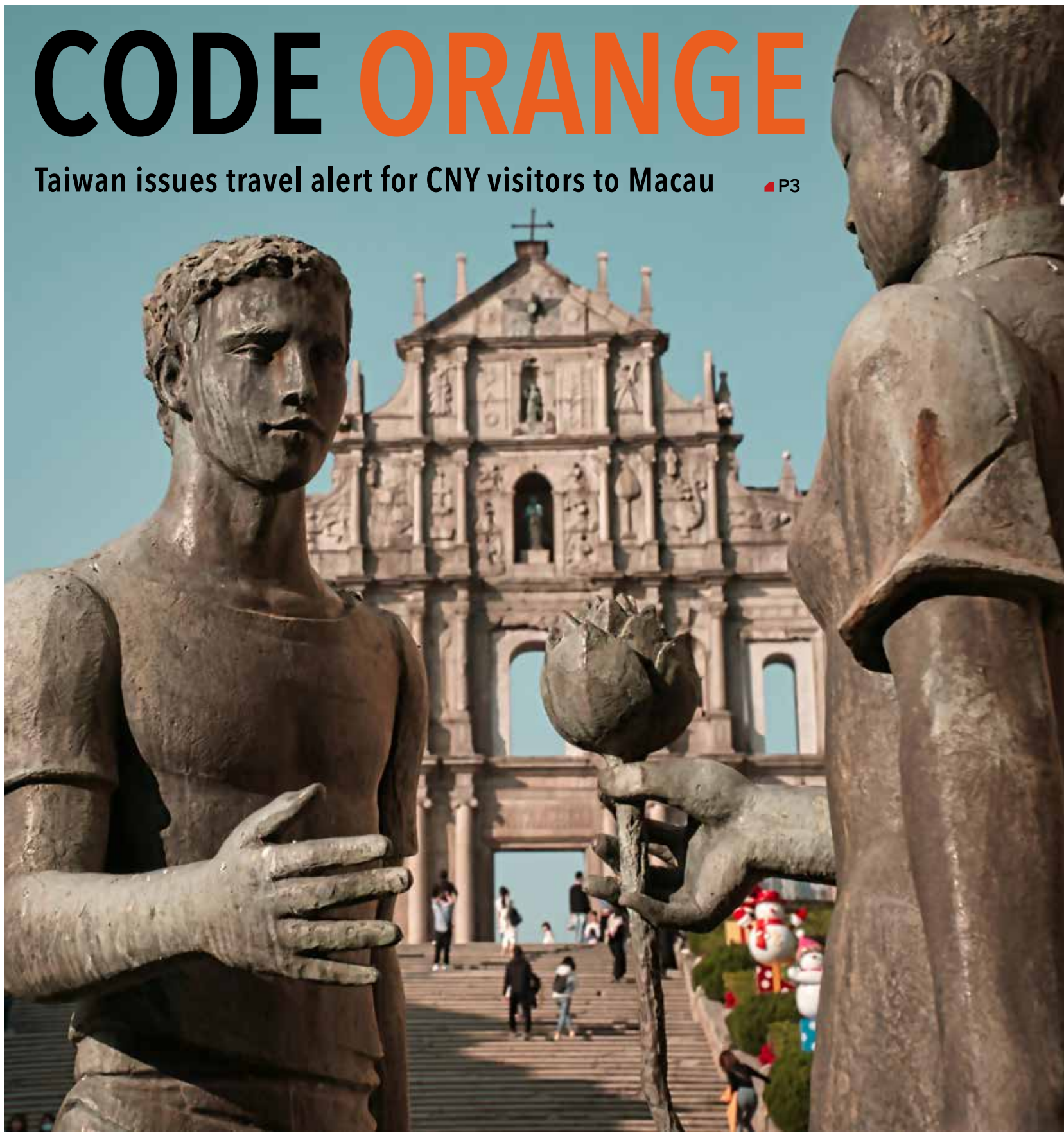
Indonesia Flash floods and landslides triggered by torrential rains swept through Central Java yesterday, killing 17 people and leaving eight missing. Rescuers face challenges due to bad weather and rugged terrain while searching devastated villages for survivors and recovering victims' bodies.

AP PHOTO



Japan Dozens of companies, including major sponsors like Nissan and Toyota, yesterday pulled ads from Fuji Television following allegations of a sexual assault involving former pop star Masahiro Nakai. The scandal prompted criticism of the network's handling of the case and calls for transparency.

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CRIME REPORT

PHISHING SCAMS TOP THE LIST OF CYBERCRIMES THAT GREW MORE IN 2024

RENATO MARQUES

THE director of the Judiciary Police (PJ), Sit Chong Meng, revealed yesterday in a press conference that scams using phishing sites to collect credit card data topped the list of cybercrimes growing more in 2024.

The information was revealed during a presentation of the results of the force's work last year.

Addressing the topic, Sit noted that "last year, there were 689 cases related to this type of crime, an increase of 1.1 times [when compared to 2023], which caused losses of over 14 million patacas to companies and the population. This is the type of cybercrime that saw the biggest growth last year," adding that "fraudsters have been illegally using [new] messages and [a large variety of] phishing websites to steal credit card data, luring the public with [advertisings] of novelties [new things or products], which has made prevention difficult."

He noted that despite advancements in controlling and fighting cybercrime on different fronts, phishing is far from being controlled, adding that only more awareness and better knowledge from the population of this type of crime can



produce better results.

The PJ director noted that the force increased its online

and in-person anti-fraud awareness campaigns.

The Force organized some

697 information sessions on fraud last year, which gathered 120,000 participants. Additio-

nally, 1,600 posts were published online on the same topic.

Additionally, to prevent scams among young adults, the PJ organized special sessions dedicated to university students titled "Anti-fraud vaccination program on campus" to consolidate student awareness.

According to the PJ, the anti-fraud tools made available by the PJ have been used for over 23,000 searches at the "fraud search" function. As the Times previously reported, this interactive tool allows people to search for particular messages and content received, running it into a database from known scams from PJ or even reporting them as new ones.

STUDENTS TARGETED WITH SCAMS AS A WAY TO REACH THEIR PARENTS

RENATO MARQUES

QUESTIONED by media representatives and other guests on the topic, the Judiciary Police (PJ) director, Sit Chong Meng, further explained that university students are often targets of several types of scams as a way to reach their parents.

"We know that frauds-

ters constantly attempt to target students as a way to reach their parents as they believe they are wealthy people, and so they can profit highly from them," Sit said, advancing that this applies to both the university students from the mainland that are studying in local institutions as well as local students, from senior high school

level that follow "luring leads" online mainly related with opportunities to study abroad.

The same official noted that there are cases in which scammers even submitted letters to the students or families claiming that the students have been accepted by a reputable university abroad, calling for deposits of 1 or 2 million

patacas to prove the family's capacity to pay for the student's tuition.

The PJ director said the force is trying to alert parents to this type of case to tackle this problem.

"This usually happens with outstanding students with good marks and exceptional school performance, so parents do not suspect something is

wrong in this approach," Sit noted.

Citing the figures, the same official noted that in 2023, around 30% of the victims of cybercrimes in Macau were students (over 800 cases). This figure continues to grow (over 900 cases in 2024), significantly increasing the amounts reportedly lost.

According to Sit, 44 million patacas were lost to this kind of scam in 2023, and the sum increased to 68 million patacas last year, an increase of 54.5%.

'Etomidate' to be listed as a forbidden substance

RENATO MARQUES

THE director of the Judiciary Police (PJ), Sit Chong Meng, wants to add the drug "Etomidate" to the list of forbidden substances in Macau.

Sit presented this novelty during yesterday's press conference to address the force work in 2024.

The PJ director noted the hope that this update can be implemented as soon as possible to

address the existing loophole.

"In Hong Kong and other neighboring regions, this drug has already been illegalized, and since they already have laws on it, we fear that criminals will point to Macau to pass it on due to the lack of legislation. We are trying to act fast on this," Sit said, remarking that four cases were detected in Macau and related to the substance.

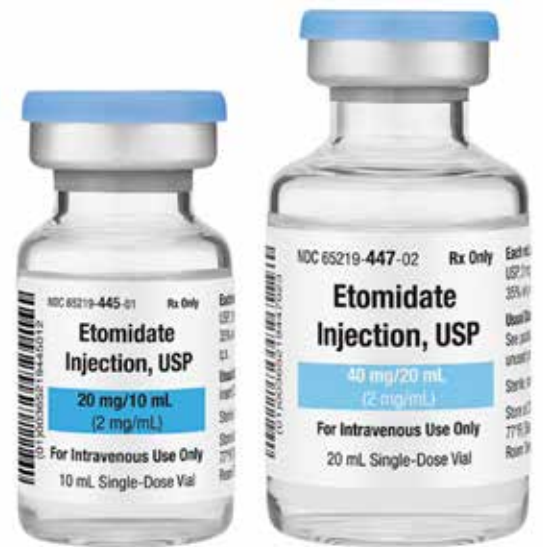
"We have detected

four cases related to this substance in Macau. In three of them, the people were detained because they had other illegal drugs on them. The other case was of a person who was found to have traces of the drug in his electronic cigarette, but he had no drugs on him."

Etomidate is a non-barbiturate hypnotic that acts at the level of the reticular-activating system to produce anesthesia. It has been seen

as a common alternative to propofol or ketamine. In several countries, such as the USA, etomidate was detected in combination with fentanyl and medetomidine in August last year.

In a study done in the city of Philadelphia, it was confirmed that the drug was detected as intended for illicit use. The same research has confirmed that etomidate was involved in at least one overdose fatality.



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DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF_Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR_Lynzy Valles
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS_Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS_Alex Torrão, Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Jorge Costa Oliveira, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Sérgio de Almeida Correia, Viviana Seguí DESIGNER_Rebeca Almeida | ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS_JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | NEWS AGENCIES_Associated Press, MacauHub, MacaoNews, Xinhua SECRETARY_Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

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ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com
OFFICE MANAGER_Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com
ADDRESS_Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR Telephones: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84
Advertisement_advertising@macaudailytimes.com
For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

TOURISM

Taiwan issues travel alert for CNY travelers to Macau

VICTORIA CHAN

As the Lunar New Year holiday approaches, Taiwanese authorities advise their citizens to exercise caution when traveling to Macau and Hong Kong, which remain under an "orange" travel alert, the Taipei Times yesterday reported.

According to the report, the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) advisory comes amid heightened tensions since June, when the alert level was raised from "yellow" to "orange." This change followed Beijing's announcement of penalties for those advocating Taiwanese independence.

The current alert advises



against nonessential travel to China and its territories.

Travelers are also reminded that pepper spray, stun guns, electroshock devices, brass knuckles, switchblades, folding knives, retractable batons,

e-cigarette devices, and other potential weapons are strictly prohibited in these regions. The council emphasized that individuals should familiarize themselves with local laws by visiting the websites of the Hong Kong

Police Force, Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department, and Macau Customs Service.

Taiwanese travelers are also encouraged to register with the MAC before their trips to ensure their safety. In case of emergencies, the MAC has established a 24-hour hotline for assistance from its Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Hong Kong and its office in Macau.

Additionally, the MAC has reiterated the importance of adhering to regulations concerning the importation of animal products.

Due to the ongoing threat of African swine fever, travelers are prohibited from bringing meat from land animals.

MPU PROFESSOR NAMED AMONG WORLD'S MOST CITED RESEARCHERS FOR FOURTH YEAR

Leyi Wei, a Visiting Coordinating Professor at the Center for Artificial Intelligence-Driven Drug Discovery at Macau Polytechnic University, has been recognized in Clarivate's "Highly Cited Researchers" list for 2024. This marks his fourth consecutive year in the top 1% of the world's most cited scientists in the interdisciplinary field. Clarivate's annual list highlights influential researchers based on highly cited articles published from 2013 to 2023. This year, more than 6,000 scientists were selected globally. Wei's research focuses on artificial intelligence and bioinformatics, contributing to drug discovery and biomolecular understanding, and it has over 140 publications.

MACAU AND ZHUHAI STRENGTHEN CONSTRUCTION TIES AT SAFETY EXCHANGE EVENT

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), in collaboration with Zhuhai's Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau and the Zhuhai Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone, hosted the "Zhuhai-Macau Construction Safety Visit and Exchange Session."

This event, held at Zhuhai's Future City project, aimed at strengthening construction management connections within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area. Themed "New Vision for Security between Zhuhai and Macau," the session emphasized integrating Macau's safety standards with Zhuhai's construction practices. An exhibition showcased Macau's safety equipment and provided a platform for professionals to exchange knowledge on construction safety and management practices.

TIS HELD ITS ANNUAL CHARITY CONCERT

The International School of Macao (TIS) held its annual music concert, "TIS x RCM Charity Concert 2025," in collaboration with the Rotary Club of Macau (RCM) at the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Center. 133 student musicians performed at the concert. The evening included performances by the TIS Jazz Band. Under the guidance of TIS secondary music teacher Iris Chu, students delivered solo acts, a clarinet quartet, a brass quintet, a septet, and a string orchestra, among other vibrant performances. The concert spanned various musical styles, from the Baroque period to contemporary pieces, showcasing students' skills and musical knowledge. In addition, the event raised MOP33,000, with all proceeds benefiting the Cradle of Hope Association, which supports underprivileged children in the community.

GAMING

CNY forecasted to post a 4% GGR increase y-o-y

RENATO MARQUES

ANALYSTS expect the local gaming industry to generate moderate revenue growth during the Lunar New Year (CNY) Spring Festival.

In their most recent forecast, JP Morgan analysts DS Kim, Mufan Shi, and Selina Li said, "We expect Chinese New Year GGR (Gross Gaming Revenue) to grow moderately at low-to-mid-single digits year over year."

The same analysts also expect a similar GGR performance in the first half of 2025, followed by a better performance in the second half of the year, which should reach a 7% year-over-year increase.

In general, JP Morgan analysts forecast a growth of 5% for the whole year this year.

They noted that the sector's performance during the current month contributed to this forecast. As of last



Sunday (January 19), the industry should have generated about MOP12.1 billion, representing a daily GGR of about MOP636.8 million.

With the arrival of CNY, a traditional high season for Macau, the daily average is likely to increase, particularly during the eight days of the Spring Festival, which starts on January 28 and lasts until February 4.

If the forecast is confirmed, January should post a result slightly above the MOP20 billion monthly line drawn by the government in its annual estimates of MOP240 billion for 2025.

Concurrently, analysts from S&P Global also expect GGR growth in Macau to be between 5% and 6% this year.

The forecast puts the performance of mass-market gaming postings between 15% and 20% above the pre-pandemic results. At the same time, the VIP market volume "will likely stay near current low levels unless regulations change," they remarked.

Despite the promising prospects, S&P analysts warned that the current instability in China's economy could "impair Macau cash flow and (compromise) improvement."



FINANCE

HONG KONG AND MACAU LAUNCH DIRECT LINKAGE FOR BOND MARKETS

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and the Monetary Authority of Macau (AMCM) announced yesterday that they have launched a direct linkage between their respective bond market infrastructures.

This initiative aims to enhance cross-border investment opportunities and bolster the development of bond markets in both regions.

The joint announcement follows months of close cooperation between the HKMA and AMCM to prepare for business arrangements and operational procedures.

The direct linkage will provide a cross-border investment and financing channel, enabling investors from both markets to participate easily and efficiently in each other's bond markets.

Eddie Yue, the HKMA's chief executive, emphasized the significance of this development, stating that it enhances

Hong Kong's status as an international financial center. The direct linkage showcases Hong Kong's role as a 'super-connector' and represents a significant step towards developing the CMU into an international CSD in Asia."

Benjamin Chan, Chairman of the AMCM, emphasized the significance of this milestone for Macau's financial services sector.

"The official launch of the direct linkage between the bond markets of Macau and Hong Kong achieved the first connectivity of Macau's bond market infrastructure, which was established with a CSD located outside Macau. This will provide international investors, including those from Portuguese-speaking countries, with a convenient channel to participate in the bond markets of Macau and Hong Kong, further strengthening Macau's function as the financial services platform serving China and Portuguese-speaking countries."



CRIME

FIVE CASES OF RESIDENTS LURED INTO SCAM JOBS IN 2024

RENATO MARQUES

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) has confirmed that in 2024, it received five cases of local residents lured by criminal groups into scam jobs abroad.

Questioned by the media during the press conference that presented the results of the force last year, the PJ director, Sit Chong Meng, confirmed that five

people had fallen victim to these scams that attract people to work abroad, offering high salaries for jobs that require no specialized or technical proficiency.

According to Sit, from these five victims, four were lured to alleged jobs in Taiwan, while the last one was caught in a similar scheme in Cambodia.

The information that the PJ collected until now noted that the

four residents who went to Taiwan were lured into an alleged scheme of "transporting currency" and ended up involved with a fraudster group dedicated to performing scams in Taiwan.

The residents were allegedly forced to work for this group, acting as money collectors for the scams performed by the group.

According to Sit, they were eventually caught by the Taiwa-

nese authorities and arrested for participating in criminal acts.

The PJ director added that from these, at least one is underage, 16 years old.

He said the local police are in contact with their Taiwanese counterparts, but not much information is available as their case is still under investigation.

As for the resident lured to Cambodia, the PJ said that upon

his arrival, he was forced to work in a so-called "scam farm" performing telecommunication scams such as the ones that often target residents via SMS and phishing websites.

The PJ said that these people are chosen to enroll in the groups due to their high profile or contacts, being through them that the criminal group targets other people to fall victim to scams.

Sit said that according to what the PJ knew, he eventually managed to escape from the location where he was kept captive and contacted some friends in Hong Kong who notified the local police.

His whereabouts were not known with precision for some time due to the location and the fact that he had been hiding in different places. The resident finally returned to Macau after the PJ solicited support from the Embassy of China to track him down and transport him back.

Sit also said that on January 8 this year, a resident called for help from the PJ after suspecting that a family member had been attracted to one of these scams, but the police managed to stop him in time.

He does not rule out the possibility of more cases of this kind being revealed in the upcoming weeks or months.

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TOURISM

Gov't prepares for surge in CNY visitors at Old Taipa Village

VICTORIA CHAN

GOVERNMENT officials anticipate a significant increase in the flow of people visiting the Taipa Old Town area during the Lunar New Year compared to previous years, they said in a press conference yesterday.

In response, the authorities have announced the establishment of crowd control measures at the temporary pedestrian zone to be implemented in the historic district, aiming to enhance safety and manage the expected influx of visitors.

The temporary pedestrian area, which runs from January 29 to February 4, will transform key intersections and thoroughfares in Old Taipa Village into a pedestrian-friendly zone from noon to 7 p.m.



During yesterday's press conference's Q&A session, government officials addressed key concerns from media representatives, including plans to handle the anticipated increase in visitor traffic, transportation arrangements for residents with mobility challenges, and the impact on local businesses.

One pressing concern was the

expected influx of visitors, particularly given the recent introduction of the measure allowing visitors from Zhuhai to enter Macau once a week.

Officials acknowledged that the enforcement of the measure could result in a significant rise in the figure of around 30,000 visitors per day recorded in the area last year.

Authorities are poised to manage the anticipated peak flows, although specific measures will adapt based on real-time assessments.

"I believe that my colleagues will do a good job of regulating and controlling the flow of people, but it will depend on the situation at that time and how to control the flow of people," Yau Yun Wah, director of the Economic and Technological Development Bureau, stated. The police and local departments will monitor crowd dynamics to ensure a safe environment.

TRANSPORTATION FOR RESIDENTS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY

The government will introduce seven-passenger shuttle vehicles during the pedestrian period to assist elderly residents and those

with mobility difficulties. Residents can contact local associations to reserve these services, and the elderly can utilize the shuttles without prior registration. This approach ensures that elderly residents and those with mobility difficulties can access the area without hassle.

CONCERNS FROM LOCAL MERCHANTS

Addressing the challenges faced by delivery drivers in the past year due to the pedestrian zone, officials assured that new measures have been implemented this year to facilitate merchant loading. However, some difficulties may persist due to road closures. Authorities aim to balance the needs of residents and merchants.

Dynamic reservation system for shuttle services

The government emphasized the importance of addressing residents' needs, remarking that the registration system for shuttle services will remain flexible, allowing adjustments based on real-time demand. If necessary, the shuttle bus's operating hours may also be extended beyond the planned 12 p.m. to 7 p.m. window.

ECONOMY

Restaurant receipts rose while retail sales fell in November 2024

VICTORIA CHAN

DATA from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) reveals mixed fortunes for Macau's hospitality and retail sectors in November 2024. While receipts from interviewed restaurants and similar establishments increased by 1.9% year-on-year, retail

sales experienced a significant downturn, dropping by 9.2% during the same period.

Japanese and Korean restaurants performed particularly well, with their receipts rising by 12.6% year over year.

However, compared to October 2024, the restaurant's performance declined

by 4.2%, which was attributed to the slump after the National Day holiday. Chinese restaurants and local-style cafes were responsible for this drop, with their receipts decreasing by 4.3% and 3.7%, respectively.

The retail sector performed even worse, with categories such as watches,

clocks, jewelry, cosmetics, and leather goods experiencing steep declines. Sales plummeted year-on-year by 24%, 12.8%, and 11.2%, respectively. On a brighter note, motor vehicle retailers recorded a sales increase of 26.9%.

Looking ahead, business expectations for December 2024 appeared

more optimistic. Approximately 35% of interviewed restaurants anticipate a month-on-month increase in receipts buoyed by the Christmas holiday season. This figure rises to 56% among Western restaurants and remains at 35% for Japanese and Korean establishments. Conversely, about 17% expected a decrease.

The retail sector mirrors this cautious optimism, with 42% of retailers predicting sales growth in December 2024. Department stores and adult clothing retailers are par-

ticularly hopeful, with expected growth rates of 63% and 48%, respectively. Meanwhile, 20% of retailers foresee a drop in sales.

The Business Outlook Index (BOI) for both sectors suggest a positive trend, with values of 59.3 for restaurants and 61.5 for retail trade. These values indicate a better business outlook for December 2024 compared to November. The survey, comprising responses from 229 restaurants and 161 retailers, represents a significant portion of the industries' receipts.

CORPORATE BITS

First-ever ARC'TERYX 4.0 Design Shop Unveiled at Venetian Macau



ARC'TERYX, the Canadian premium outdoor brand, has opened its first 4.0 Design Shop in Macau at the Shoppes at Venetian. The store's design mimics the layered textures of the mountains, utilizing varying heights of display racks. Inside, customers will find distinctive Macanese touches, including traditional Portuguese tiles incorporated into the wall design. The design of the store is inspired by the "Cliff House" found in the mountains, exploring the shared spirit of professional design, harmony with nature, and a bold, adventurous spirit.

Ring in the Year of the Golden Snake with SJM's 'Snoopy Winter Holidays'



The Year of the Golden Snake is fast approaching, and SJM Resorts (SJM) is bringing festive charm to its hotels and resorts. From now until Feb. 16, Grand Lisboa Palace Re-

sort Macau (GLP) invites guests to experience the "Snoopy Winter Holidays." This Peanuts-inspired celebration includes photo opportunities, themed treats, limited-edition sou-

venirs, creative workshops, and luxurious stay packages. The beloved Peanuts characters are featured throughout the resort. The iconic red doghouse has been adorned with New Year decorations, where a majestic 3-meter-tall Snoopy clutching an auspicious tangerine stands proudly alongside Charlie Brown, Lucy, Linus, and Sally, offering blessings of good luck. Adding a cultural touch, Peanuts characters as dragon dance performers can be found at the limited-time Peanuts souvenir shop. Meanwhile, the Snoopy-themed New Year art workshops invite guests of all ages to embrace their creativity at the GLP Arte on Jan. 18, Feb. 8, and Feb. 15.

Xi discusses with Putin 'multipolar global order' hours after Trump inauguration

VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV,
MOSCOW

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin had a call yesterday with President Xi Jinping, emphasizing the two countries' close ties, a day after Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47th U.S. president.

The two leaders have developed strong personal links that helped bring relations between Moscow and Beijing, growing even closer after Putin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022. China has become a major customer of Russian oil and gas and a source of key technologies amid sweeping Western sanctions on Moscow.

In yesterday's call with Xi, Putin emphasized that Russia-China relations are based on shared interests, equality and mutual benefits, noting that they "don't depend on internal political factors and the current international environment."

"We jointly support the development of a more just multipolar global order and work to ensure indivisible security in Eurasia and the world as a whole," Putin told Xi in remarks carried by the Russian state TV. "Joint efforts by Russia and China play an important stabilizing role in global affairs."

Xi similarly praised close cooperation between Moscow and Beijing, saying it helps "bring positive energy to reforming and developing the global system."

While neither leader directly mentioned Trump in the televised fragment of their call, the timing of the conversation may signal that Putin and Xi want to coordinate their action in dialogue with the new U.S. administration.

AP PHOTO



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks with Chinese President Xi Jinping via videoconference at Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside of Moscow, yesterday

The Chinese president had a call with Trump on Friday and expressed hope for positive ties with the U.S.

Trump had threatened to impose tariffs and other measures against China in his second term, while also hinting at ways in which the two rival powers could cooperate on issues such as regional conflicts and curbing the export of substances used in the production of fentanyl.

Putin, who is yet to talk to Trump, congratulated him on taking office in televised remarks during a video call with officials and welcomed his intention to open a dialogue with Moscow.

Trump told reporters yesterday [Macau time] after taking office that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had told him he wanted to make a peace deal and voiced hope that Putin would follow suit. He added that Putin would be destroying Russia by failing to make a deal, pointing out Russia's economic troubles, including high inflation.

Putin hailed Trump's openness to dialogue as he spoke to Russia's Security Council members shortly before the U.S. president's inauguration.

"We hear the statements from Trump and members of his team about their desire to restore direct

contact with Russia, which were halted through no fault of ours by the outgoing administration," Putin said. "We also hear his statements about the need to do everything to prevent World War III. We certainly welcome such an approach and congratulate the U.S. president-elect on taking office."

The Russian leader also stressed that dialogue between the two nations should be based on "equal basis and mutual respect, taking into account the important role our countries play on some key issues on the global agenda, including the strengthening of global stability and security."

Putin also noted that Moscow is open to dialogue with the Trump administration on the conflict in Ukraine, emphasizing the need to respect Russia's interests and adding that "the most important thing is to remove the root causes of the crisis."

"As for the settlement of the situation, I would like to underline that its goal should not be a short truce, not some kind of respite for regrouping forces and rearmament with the aim of subsequently continuing the conflict, but a long-term peace based on respect for the legitimate interests of all people, all nations living in this region," Putin said. MDT/AP

A 6.4-magnitude earthquake struck southern Taiwan early yesterday, leaving 27 people with minor injuries and some reported damage.

The quake hit at 12:17 a.m. and was centered 38 kilometers southeast of Chiayi County Hall at a depth of 10 kilometers, Taiwan's Central Weather Administration said. The U.S. Geological Survey measured the earthquake at a less powerful magnitude 6.

There were scattered reports of minor to moderate damage around the cities of Chiayi and Tainan.

Taiwan's fire department

TAIWAN

Strong earthquake injures 27 and causes scattered damage

said 27 people were sent to hospitals for minor injuries. Among them were six people, including a 1-month-old baby, who were rescued from a collapsed house in the Nanxi district of Tainan. The Zhuwei bridge on a provincial highway was reported to be damaged.

No deaths have been reported, though rescuers

were still assessing damage.

Two people in Tainan and one person in Chiayi city were rescued without injuries after being trapped in elevators.

The quake caused a fire at a printing factory in Chiayi, but it was extinguished, and there were no reports of injuries.

Last April, a magnitude 7.4 quake hit the island's

mountainous eastern coast of Hualien, killing at least 13 people and injuring more than 1,000 others. The strongest earthquake in 25 years was followed by hundreds of aftershocks.

Taiwan lies along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," the line of seismic faults encircling the Pacific Ocean where most of the world's earthquakes occur. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



In this image from a video, a store worker cleans the floor in Tainan, yesterday

USA | TRUMP'S INAUGURATION

Fact check: false and misleading claims Trump made at inaugural events

IN his first address after being sworn in yesterday [Macau time], President Donald Trump repeated several false and misleading statements that he made during his campaign. They included claims about immigration, the economy, electric vehicles and the Panama Canal. In remarks later at the Capitol's Emancipation Hall, he issued a number of other false claims, including one that distorts pardons made by President Joe Biden as he left office. Here's a look at the facts.

BIDEN DID NOT PARDON 33 MURDERERS

CLAIM: Trump, at Emancipation Hall, said Biden pardoned "what is it, 33 murderers, absolute murderers, the worst murderers. You know, when you get the death sentence in the United States, you have to be bad."

THE FACTS: Biden announced on Dec. 23 that he was commuting the sentences of 37 of the 40 people on federal death row, converting their punishments to life imprisonment. A commutation does not exonerate the person.

In making the announcement, Biden said: "These commutations are consistent with the moratorium my Administration has imposed on federal executions, in cases other than terrorism and hate-motivated mass murder."

The move spared the lives of people convicted in killings, including the slayings of police and military officers, people on federal land and those involved in deadly bank robberies or drug deals, as well as the killings of guards or prisoners in federal facilities.

The three federal inmates that now face execution are Dylann Roof, who carried out the 2015 racist slayings of nine Black members of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina; 2013 Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev; and Robert Bowers, who fatally shot 11 congregants at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018, the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history.

TRUMP RECALLS FALSE CLAIM ABOUT THE 2020 ELECTION

CLAIM: "2020, by the way, that election was totally rigged." — remarks at Emancipation Hall.

THE FACTS: The election was not rigged. Authorities who have reviewed the election — including Trump's own attorney general — have concluded the elec-

tion was fair.

Biden won the Electoral College with 306 votes to Trump's 232, and the popular vote by more than 7 million ballots. Recounts in key states affirmed Biden's victory, and lawsuits challenging the results were unsuccessful.

PELOSI DID NOT REJECT TROOPS ON JAN. 6

CLAIM: Calling the Select Committee to Investigate the Jan. 6th Attack on the United States Capitol the "Unselect Committee of political thugs," Trump alleged that then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi "turned down the offer of 10,000 soldiers" on Jan. 6, 2021 and that she was "in charge of security at the Capitol." — remarks at Emancipation Hall.

THE FACTS: Trump has frequently claimed Pelosi rejected his offer to send National Guard troops to the Capitol on Jan. 6. While he was involved in discussions in the days prior to Jan. 6 about whether the National Guard would be called ahead of the joint session, he issued no such order or formal request before or during the rioting, and the guard's arrival was delayed for hours as Pentagon officials deliberated over how to proceed.

In a 2022 interview with the Democratic-led House committee that investigated the attack, Christopher Miller, the acting defense secretary at that time, confirmed that there was no order from the president.

Pelosi did not direct the National Guard. However, as the Capitol came under attack, she and then-Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell called for military assistance, including from the National Guard.

The Capitol Police Board makes the decision on whether to call National Guard troops to the Capitol. It is made up of the House Sergeant at Arms, the Senate Sergeant at Arms and the Architect of the Capitol. The board decided not to call the guard ahead of the insurrection but did eventually request assistance after the rioting had already begun, and the troops arrived several hours later.

TRUMP REPEATS UNFOUNDED CLAIM ABOUT IMMIGRANTS

CLAIM: Trump, a Republican, said in his inaugural address that the U.S. government "fails to protect our magnificent, law-abiding American citizens but provides sanctuary and protection for

AP PHOTO



President Donald Trump speaks from Emancipation Hall after the Presidential Inauguration, at the U.S. Capitol in Washington

dangerous criminals, many from prisons and mental institutions that have illegally entered our country from all over the world."

THE FACTS: There is no evidence other countries are sending their criminals or the mentally ill across the border.

Trump frequently brought up this claim during his most recent campaign.

INFLATION DID NOT REACH RECORD HIGHS UNDER BIDEN

CLAIM: "I will direct all members of my Cabinet to marshal the vast powers at their disposal to defeat what was record inflation and rapidly bring down costs and prices." — inaugural address.

THE FACTS: Inflation peaked at 9.1% in June 2022 after rising steadily in the first 17 months of Democrat Joe Biden's presidency from a low of 0.1% in May 2020. The most recent data shows that as of December it had fallen to 2.9%.

Other historical periods have seen higher inflation, such as a more than 14% rate in 1980, according to the Federal Reserve.

PROMISE OF AN EXTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE TO COLLECT TARIFFS

CLAIM: Promising to establish an External Revenue Service to collect "all tariffs, duties, and revenues," Trump said in his inaugural address, "It will be massive amounts of money pouring into

our Treasury, coming from foreign sources."

THE FACTS: Nearly all economists point out that American consumers will pay at least part, if not most, of the cost of the tariffs. Some exporters overseas may accept lower profits to offset some of the cost of the duties, and the dollar will likely rise in value compared with the currencies of the countries facing tariffs, which could also offset some of the impact.

But the tariffs won't have the desired impact of spurring more production in the U.S. unless they make foreign-made products more expensive for U.S. consumers.

In addition, many of Trump's supporters, and even some of his appointees, argue that he intends to use tariffs primarily as a bargaining tool to extract concessions from other countries. Yet if an External Revenue Service is established, it certainly suggests Trump is expecting to impose and collect many duties.

CALLS FOR REVOCATION OF EV MANDATE THAT DOESN'T EXIST

CLAIM: "We will revoke the electric vehicle mandate, saving the auto industry and keeping my sacred pledge to our great American autoworkers." — inaugural address.

THE FACTS: It's misleading to claim that such a mandate exists. In April 2023, the Environmental

Protection Agency announced strict limits on greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles. The agency says these limits could be met if 67% of new-vehicle sales are electric by 2032.

And yet, the new rule would not require automakers to boost electric vehicle sales directly. It sets emissions limits and allows automakers to choose how to meet them.

CHINA DOES NOT OPERATE THE PANAMA CANAL

CLAIM: Discussing his desire for the U.S. to take back the Panama Canal: "American ships are being severely overcharged and not treated fairly in any way, shape or form, and that includes the United States Navy. And, above all, China is operating the Panama Canal." — inaugural address.

THE FACTS: Officials in Panama have denied Trump's claims that China is operating the canal and that the U.S. is being overcharged. Ricaurte Vásquez, administrator of the canal, said in an interview with The Associated Press that "there's no discrimination in the fees."

He also said China was not operating the canal. He noted Chinese companies operating in the ports on either end of the canal were part of a Hong Kong consortium that won a bidding process in 1997. He added that U.S. and Taiwanese companies are operating other ports along the canal as well. **MDT/AP**

THE PANAMA CANAL

Panama, familiar with US intervention, bristles at Trump's comments on canal

JUAN ZAMORANO,
PANAMA CITY

U.S. President Donald Trump's insistence yesterday [Macau time] that he wants to have the Panama Canal back under U.S. control fed nationalist sentiment and worry in Panama, home to the critical trade route and a country familiar with U.S. military intervention.

"American ships are being severely overcharged and not treated fairly in any way, shape or form, and that includes the United States Navy. And above all, China is operating the Panama Canal," Trump said.

In the streets of the capital, some Panamanians saw Trump's remarks as a way of applying pressure on Panama for something else he wants: better control of migration through the Darien Gap. Others recalled the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama with concern.

Panama President José Raúl Mulino responded forcefully yesterday, as he did after Trump's initial statement last month that the U.S. should consider repossessing the canal, saying the canal belongs to his country of 4 million and will remain Panama's territory.

Luis Barrera, a 52-year-old cab driver, said Panama had fought hard to get the canal back and has expanded it since taking control.

"I really feel uncomfortable because it's like when you're big and you take a candy from a little kid," Barrera said.

At a rally in Phoenix in December, Trump said he might try to get the canal back after it was "foolishly" ceded to Panama. He complained that shippers were overcharged and that China had taken control of the key shortcut between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

Earlier this month, Trump wouldn't rule out using military force to take it back.

The United States built the canal in the early 1900s as it looked for ways to facilitate the transit of commercial and military vessels between its coasts. Washington relinquished control of the waterway to Panama on Dec. 31, 1999, under a treaty signed in 1977 by President Jimmy Carter.

The canal is a point of pride

for Panamanians. On Dec. 31, they celebrated the 25th anniversary of the handover, and days later they commemorated the deaths of 21 Panamanians who died at the hands of the U.S. military decades earlier.

On Jan. 9, 1964, students protested in the then-U.S. controlled canal zone over not being allowed to fly Pa-

namians. On Dec. 31, they celebrated the 25th anniversary of the handover, and days later they commemorated the deaths of 21 Panamanians who died at the hands of the U.S. military decades earlier.

On Jan. 9, 1964, students protested in the then-U.S. controlled canal zone over not being allowed to fly Pa-

na's flag at a secondary school there. The protests expanded to general opposition to the U.S. presence in Panama and U.S. troops got involved. A group of protesters this year burned an effigy of Trump.

The canal's administrator, Ricaurte Vásquez, said this month that China is not in control of the canal and that all nations are treated equally under a neutrality treaty. He said Chinese companies operating in the ports on either end of the canal were part of a Hong Kong consortium that won a bidding process in 1997. He added that U.S. and Taiwanese companies operate other ports along the canal as well. Omayra Avendaño, who works in real estate, said Trump's threat should be taken seriously. "We should be worried," she said. "We don't have an army and he's said he would use force."

On Dec. 20, 1989, the U.S. military invaded Panama to remove dictator Manuel Noriega. Some 27,000 troops were tasked by then-President George H.W. Bush with capturing Noriega, protecting the lives of Americans living in Panama and restoring democracy to the country that a decade later would take over control of the Panama Canal.

Avendaño said she was 11 years old the last time the U.S. invaded her country and hoped Panama's current government would seek international support to head off Trump's designs on the canal. "I remember the disaster that it was," she said. MDT/AP

Panama President Mulino responded forcefully yesterday, saying the canal belongs to his country of 4 million and will remain Panama's territory

this day in history

1980 SOVIET DISSIDENT SAKHAROV BANISHED



One of the Soviet Union's most outspoken critics, nuclear physicist Dr Andrei Sakharov, has been ordered into internal exile.

Officials in Moscow were angered by an interview Dr Sakharov gave American television last week, in which he called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

It was the final straw after the Nobel peace prize winner had escaped arrest during more than 13 years of dissident activity.

In the interview, Dr Sakharov also told American viewers he supported plans to boycott the summer Olympics in Moscow.

He said he was in favour of the US sanctions ordered by President Carter in retaliation for the invasion.

The scientist and his wife, Yelena Bonner, were seized by officers of the Soviet secret service, the KGB, while walking in a Moscow street.

Dr Sakharov was stripped of his official honours.

The couple were given two hours to pack before being sent to Gorky, an industrial city 250 miles east of Moscow and off limits to foreign reporters.

Dr Sakharov was credited with creating the first Soviet hydrogen bomb - but later became involved in campaigning for nuclear disarmament.

He won the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize because of his fight for human rights.

In a recent interview with the BBC, Dr Sakharov spoke about the need for change in the Soviet Union.

He said: "Our country, like every modern state, needs profound democratic reforms. It needs political and ideological pluralism, a mixed economy and protection of human rights and the opening up of society."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

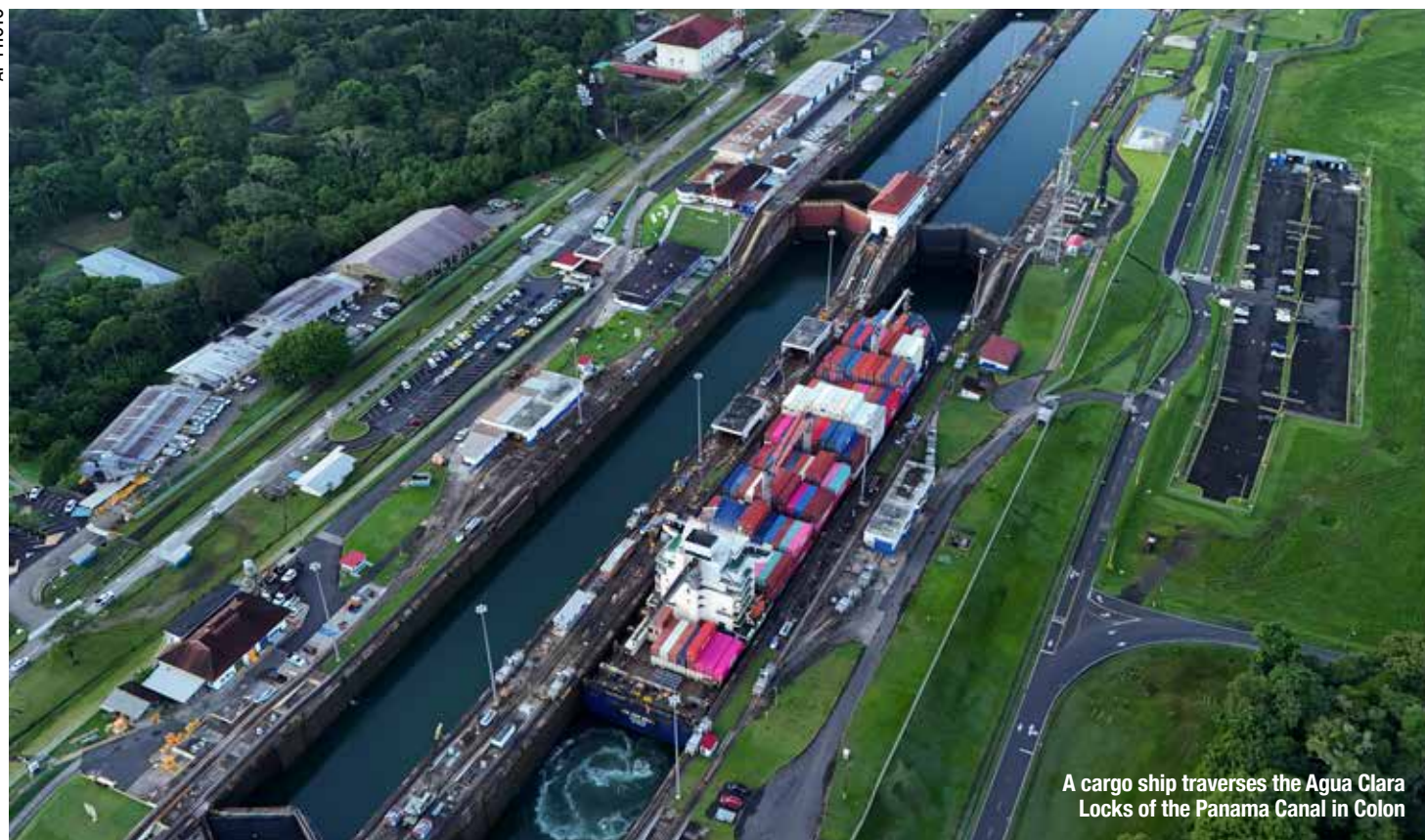
Dr Sakharov spent nearly seven years in exile in Gorky where he continued to write letters and appeals in support of human rights activists.

He staged three hunger strikes protesting at his own persecution and seeking permission for his wife to go to the United States for medical treatment for eye and heart problems.

In 1983, Yelena Bonner was charged with slander against the Soviet state as she was about to board a plane to fly to the US. Dr Sakharov claimed it was a trumped-up charge to prevent her travelling abroad. She, too, was ordered to remain in exile in Gorky.

After President Mikhail Gorbachev ordered his release in 1986, Dr Sakharov became a leading member of the pro-democracy movement.

He also helped to lead the opposition in the new Soviet parliament in 1989 and was involved in drafting a new constitution. He died on 14 December 1989 of a heart attack.



A cargo ship traverses the Agua Clara Locks of the Panama Canal in Colon

AP PHOTO

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Maintain action. Ignore rumors and gossip, especially about money. Adjust around a financial obstacle. Decrease obligations and stay in communication. Collaborate for lucrative gain.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Support your partner. A formidable barrier blocks the path, so take care. You can see what wasn't working, and each other's blind spots.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Rest and save energy. Traffic or shipping delays could slow the action. Resist the temptation to push too hard or risk breakage. Nurture health.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Fun is available, despite challenging obstacles. Don't try to force an issue, especially in your romantic relationship. Wait for better conditions. Share something delicious.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
our home and family require attention. Care for someone. Misunderstandings spark easily. Don't believe everything you hear. Practice patience. Find humor in the situation.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Study the developments. Let go of a preconception. Issue statements. Miscommunications arise easily. Hold your complaints and patiently clarify. Use simple language. Pictures help.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Focus on short term needs. A financial barrier could delay the action. Stay in communication to facilitate payments. Keep promises and agreements.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Smile and take charge. Provide leadership to resolve a breakdown. Show up and do what needs to be done. Give your word and keep it.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Hide out and wait for developments. Recharge batteries and rest. You're especially sensitive. Avoid catching a cold or bug with rest and hot liquids.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Keep everyone in the loop who needs to know. Challenges could disrupt team communications. Tempers may be short. Don't antagonize anyone. Model patience and diplomacy.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Your profession and industry are undergoing changes. Old assumptions get challenged. Disruption closes one door and opens others. Pay close attention. Watch for opportunities.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Delays and blockage could frustrate your travel and investigation today. Find the simplest route and monitor conditions. Postpone what you can. Study options.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-3	6	fine
Changchun	-14	-7	fine
Chengdu	7	14	overcast
Chongqing	9	14	rain
Fuzhou	10	20	overcast
Guangzhou	11	21	cloudy
Guiyang	9	16	overcast
Haikou	15	21	cloudy
Hangzhou	5	17	cloudy
Harbin	-14	-9	snow
Hefei	-1	17	fine
Nanjing	3	17	cloudy
Shanghai	6	15	cloudy
Taipei	15	21	cloudy
Wuhan	5	19	cloudy
Hong Kong	18	19	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-7	-3	showers
Frankfurt	2	3	cloudy
Paris	6	8	rain
London	2	4	showers
New York	-11	-7	sunny

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Golf stroke; 5- Old gas brand; 9- Praiseful poems; 13- Ayatollah's predecessor; 14- Deli sides; 16- Aloe ___; 17- Free from doubt; 18- Name; 19- Ballpark figs.; 20- God of thunder; 21- Good hole card; 22- Hawk homes; 24- Spouse; 26- Possesses; 27- Shut; 29- Belief; 33- Off the leash; 34- Sandusky's lake; 35- Ages and ages; 36- Last; Abbr.; 37- Light-colored hair; 38- Best; 39- Denier's words; 41- Sick as ___; 42- Devoutness; 44- Former monetary unit of Austria; 46- Dated; 47- Untrustworthy one; 48- Decorate anew; 49- Polite refusal; 52- Fur scarf; 53- Corona fruit; 57- Composer Khachaturian; 58- Light ___; 60- Inter ___; 61- Persian fairy; 62- Motionless; 63- Experiment; 64- Wait ___; 65- Meddlesome; 66- Bluesy James;

DOWN 1- Hey, over here!; 2- No way; 3- Tropical tuber; 4- Vacuum bottle; 5- Fancy home; 6- Pizzeria order; 7- Fill to surfeit; 8- Hooter; 9- Supervise; 10- He played Ricky; 11- Art Deco master; 12- Talk back to; 15- Kelp; 23- Break off; 25- Peer Gynt's mother; 26- Rubber gasket; 27- Hue; 28- Numbers game; 29- Sing like Bing; 30- Short letters; 31- Benjamin; 32- Catch a view of; 33- Respiratory organ; 34- Like some statesmen; 37- West Atlantic islands; 40- Mohammedan; 42- Launch site; 43- Quarantine; 45- Spy org.; 46- Like heaven's gates; 48- Churns up; 49- California wine valley; 50- Mine finds; 51- Stallion's mate; 52- Scott of "Charles in Charge"; 54- Belinda Carlisle's "Should ___ You In?"; 55- Atomizer output; 56- I could ___ horse!; 59- RR stop;

Yesterday's solution

C	A	M	E	L	T	P	K	S	C	A	S	E
U	P	O	N	A	H	O	R	A	A	B	E	L
B	A	R	E	R	R	O	I	L	R	A	M	S
A	R	T	V	E	E	R	S	R	E	T	I	E
A	C	A	R	T	Y	E	S	E	S			
M	I	L	L	E	R	T	S	A	R	S		
A	R	I	A		S	E	E	Y	A	R	H	E
N	O	T	W	I	T	H	S	T	A	N	D	I
A	N	Y	T	O	O	T	H	A	T	O	I	
G	L	A	M	P	S		R	U	D	O	L	F
A	G	I	L	E		W	H	E	A	T	E	R
E	N	E	M	Y		W	H	E	A	T	E	R
K	E	E	P		O	J	O	R	E	R	I	C
C	A	S	E		F	R	E	I	R	E	S	E
G	R	E	D		S	E	S	E	S	A	S	S

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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BILLIONAIRES, TECH TITANS, PRESIDENTS

A GUIDE TO WHO STOOD WHERE AT TRUMP'S INAUGURATION

ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON & ALEX CONNOR, WASHINGTON

THE crowded dais in the Capitol Rotunda on Inauguration Day featured four of the world's five wealthiest men, five U.S. presidents, tech titans and business moguls, and two foreign leaders with prime spots.

President Donald Trump welcomed a mix of traditional, unprecedented and unorthodox guests — from Supreme Court justices to the vice president of China, and the head of TikTok, an app U.S. authorities have flagged as a national security risk, next to the person Trump has chosen to lead the intelligence community.

Scattered throughout were the president's family members and other familiar faces in Trump's orbit. Lawmakers mostly sat in front of Trump,

watching the new president take the oath of office.

Here's who was up on the dais and who they sat next to.

1. Shou Zi Chew, the CEO of TikTok was seated next to Tulsi Gabbard, whom Trump has nominated to be the director of national intelligence. Trump intervened this weekend in an attempt to halt a ban on TikTok, which is seen as a potential national security threat. The president has credited the social network with helping him win last year's election, but the platform faces a ban if the China-based parent company does not find a Washington-approved buyer.

2. Joe Rogan, who is among the world's most popular podcasters, sat down for a three-hour interview with Trump in the last stretch of the campaign and ultimately endorsed him a day before Election Day. Trump has expressed

gratitude to him.

3. A cadre of billionaires and tech titans sat on the same row. They included Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Google CEO Sundar Pichai and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, the world's richest man. They were seated behind Trump's wife, Melania, and children, but ahead of several of his Cabinet nominees. Musk, who has grown closer to Trump since the election, was the one sitting closest to Trump. Bernard Arnault, CEO of French magnate LVMH, the biggest seller of luxury goods in the world whose brands include Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior, was on the opposite side of the dais.

4. Barron Trump is Trump's youngest son. He has been credited by the president for his campaign's online outreach, saying he introduced him to internet personalities he

had never heard of before. Barron Trump is now 18 and a freshman New York University business student, but he will have a bedroom in the White House.

5. Kai Trump, one of Trump's granddaughters, is a social media influencer and avid golfer. Kai Trump is only 17 but has become more popular over the past year, stepping up on stage at the Republican National Convention and briefly speaking at a rally over the weekend. She is the daughter of Donald Trump Jr., who has helped his father with some of his picks and is seen as an enforcer of loyalty in his orbit.

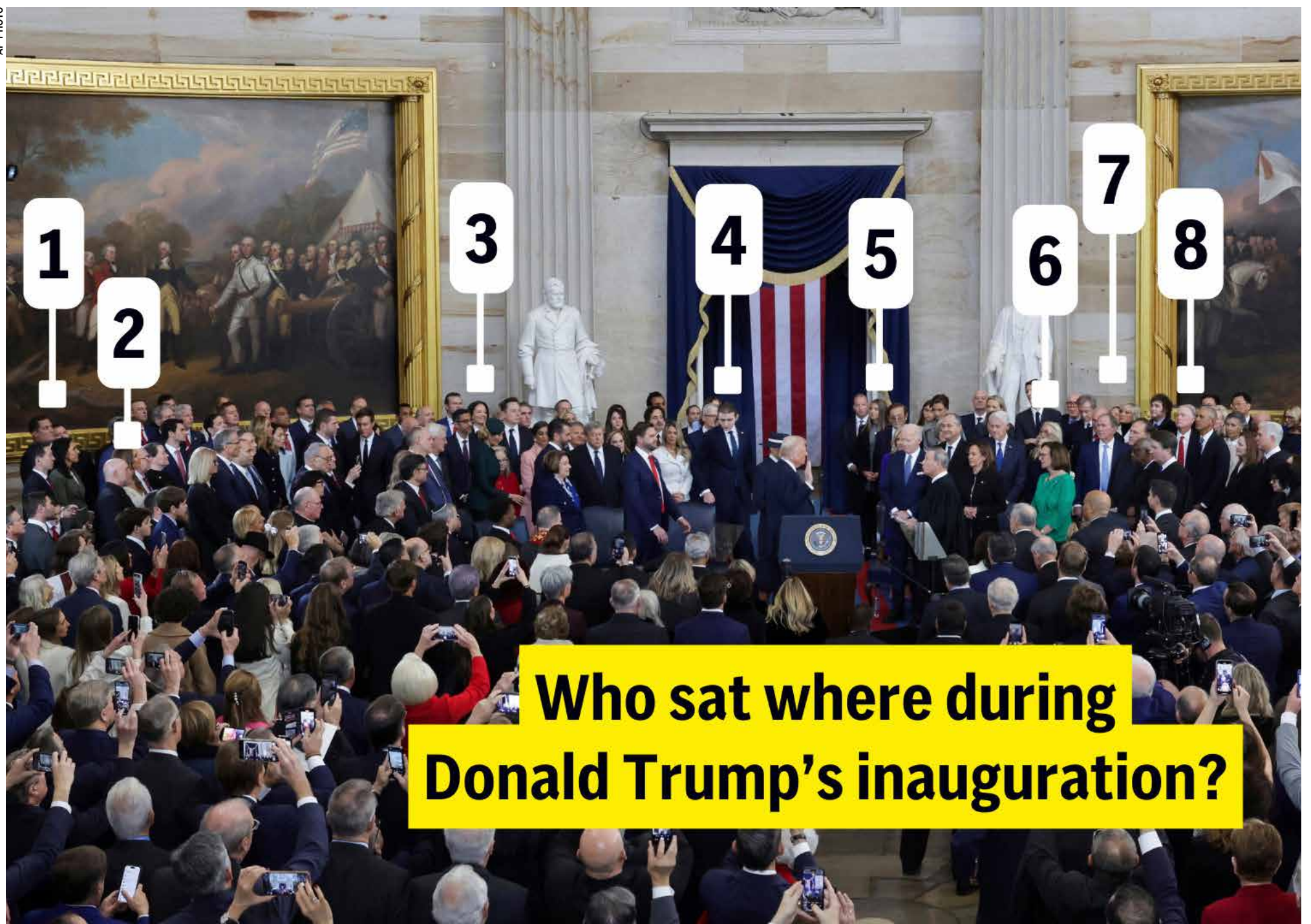
6. Miriam Adelson and John Paulson were among the largest donors to the Trump campaign and got prime seating for the ceremony next to incoming White House chief of staff Susie Wiles. Paulson, a billionaire investor, was the

host of a Palm Beach, Florida, fundraiser that set a single-event record, adding \$50.5 million to the campaign last April. Adelson is the co-owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks and widow of billionaire casino magnate Sheldon Adelson. She is a major supporter of Trump and, with Zuckerberberg, was hosting another inaugural event on Monday.

7. Former Presidents Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, outgoing President Joe Biden were given prime seats as well. All their wives, except for former first lady Michelle Obama, were also seated there. Michelle Obama had previously announced he would be skipping the swearing-in ceremony. She gave no reason.

8. Foreign leaders. In an unprecedented move, Trump invited foreign leaders to the inauguration, and they also got coveted seats for the ceremony. Argentina President Javier Milei was seated next to Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni. They were also next to China's Vice President Han Zheng, whom President Xi Jinping sent to represent him. The Chinese ambassador to the United States, Xie Feng, was also nearby. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



TENNIS

Sabalenka reaches the Australian Open semifinals as she seeks a third title in a row

HOWARD FENDRICH,
MELBOURNE

ARYNA Sabalenka's bid for a third consecutive Australian Open championship will continue after she got past Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 2-6, 6-2, 6-3 in a surprisingly difficult quarterfinal yesterday night.

The No. 1-ranked Sabalenka has now won 19 matches in a row at Melbourne Park and will face her good friend, No. 11 seed Paula Badosa, in the semifinals tomorrow

Sabalenka had run her set streak to 25 at the place — dating all the way to the 2023 final — when she grabbed the opener against 2021 French Open runner-up Pavlyuchenkova. But Sabalenka had a hard time harnessing her intimidating strokes on a windy evening in Rod Laver Arena until doing so down the stretch and collecting the last three games after the third set was tied at 3-all.

"Honestly," Sabalenka said,

AP PHOTO



"I was just praying."

She won her first major championship at Melbourne Park in 2023, then added another last January, before raising her total to three Grand

Slam trophies at the U.S. Open last September.

The last woman to win the Australian Open three straight years was Martina Hingis from 1997 to 1999.

Badosa's 7-5, 6-4 victory over No. 3 Coco Gauff in the day's first quarterfinal was surprising, sure, but nothing compared with how significant a win by No. 27 Pavlyuchenko-

va over Sabalenka would have been.

And that certainly seemed like it might occur for much of the second set and at least the start of the third. Instead, Pavlyuchenkova fell to 1-8 in Grand Slam quarterfinals, including 0-4 at the Australian Open.

So how did Pavlyuchenkova nearly pull off the win this time?

By handling Sabalenka's big serves, first and foremost, reading them well and delivering deep returns. It took a bit of time to find the range, but once she did, Pavlyuchenkova was nearly perfect: After Sabalenka held all four of her service games in the first set, she lost five of the next six.

Pavlyuchenkova also produced stinging groundstrokes that equaled her powerful opponent's for much of the contest. And by showing off some talent with her volleying, claiming eight of the first nine points she finished at the net — one even appeared to be a sort of mistake but landed in, eliciting a wry smile from Pavlyuchenkova.

As things stayed tight, Sabalenka grew frustrated, her short-accompanying grunts and post-point screams growing louder. After getting broken to fall behind 1-0 in the third set, she hit her racket against the blue court.

Eventually, though, she was able to smile and look ahead to trying to return to the final with one more victory. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

FRAGILE TRUCE RESTS ON NEW US ADMINISTRATION

After 15 months of fighting that has claimed tens of thousands of lives, a long-awaited ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas came into force on Sunday.

The tranquility of the sky above Gaza and Israel for the first time in more than a year and the arrival of hundreds of lorries in the Palestinian enclave carrying aid have undoubtedly further spurred hopes that an end to the Israel-Hamas conflict is in sight.

But these hopes may be premature. The necessary conditions to realize a permanent end to the hostilities are still not in place. What has been achieved so far is only the beginning of the first phase of a three-phase temporary truce, and the reason why it could happen is primarily due to the power transition in Washington rather than a solution that appeases the animosity between the two conflicting parties.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said recently that Israel retains the right to resume military action against Hamas, with renewed strength and "in new ways", should the ceasefire deal collapse.

Notably, the Israeli leader outlined three "principles" that guided the negotiations for the ceasefire deal with Hamas, which are presumably also the conditions that the US promised Israel it would support in exchange for Tel Aviv's inking of the first phase of the ceasefire deal and cooperation to implement it at least during the critical juncture of the new US president's inauguration.

The three principles are Israel's right to return to war if the negotiations in the second phase, which are due to start on the 16th day after the ceasefire commences, prove a failure; securing the release of a greater number of hostages, although apart from the 33 hostages Hamas agreed to release in the first stage, it remains unknown how many more hostages it holds are still alive; and Israel's continued control over the Philadelphia Corridor along the Gaza-Egypt border and the security buffer zone surrounding Gaza.

In the first stage of the deal, Hamas has agreed to return 33 hostages in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, with the remaining living hostages to be released in the second phase. Although Hamas wants a complete end to the war before it releases all the hostages, that's something unacceptable to Israel, and the ceasefire deal will automatically collapse the moment Hamas fails to hand over living hostages to move the negotiations forward.

That means if Hamas does not return more living hostages in the second stage, which is very likely as that is the only bargaining chip it has got, Tel Aviv will not have any scruples about realizing its objective by resuming its offensive.

It is also not known whether Israel will agree to pull out of the buffer zone between it and Gaza by a certain date, or whether its presence there will be open-ended, as some Western observers say. Not to mention that the truce can be broken any time if either side makes a reckless move while passing the buck to the other side. Ceasefires between Israel and Hamas which have halted previous wars have eventually broken down because of skirmishes.

So the present ceasefire is fragile. Whether it can move the situation in the direction of a permanent end to the war and then a "two-state solution" depends on whether the new US administration will continue to allow the tail to wag the dog. [Abridged]

TRUMP MISTAKES SPAIN FOR A MEMBER OF THE BRICS BLOC AND REPEATS THE THREAT OF MASSIVE TARIFFS

THE BUZZ

U.S. President Donald Trump has apparently confused Spain for a member of the BRICS bloc of developing economies, causing some head-scratching and jitters over possible tariffs in Madrid.

Spain is not in BRICS, whose initials stand for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Spain is a member of NATO, along with the U.S., and of the European Union.

Trump erroneously said Spain was in BRICS when a journalist asked him about NATO countries like Spain which don't meet the NATO minimum of spending 2% of economic output on defense.

Trump started his answer by saying "Spain is very low," referring to its

defense expenditures, but quickly veered into speaking about the BRICS.

"They're a BRICS nation, Spain. Do you know what a BRICS nation is? You'll figure it out," he told the reporter from the presidential desk in the Oval Office.

Trump repeated his threat to put costly tariffs on BRICS, saying "we are going to put at least a 100% tariff on the business they do with the United States."

Spanish Education Minister Pilar Alegría, who acts as a spokeswoman for the government, said she wasn't sure why Trump made the comment.

AP PHOTO



Sunma Piamboon (left) and her partner Danaya Phonphayung show their wedding ring in Bangkok

THAILAND GEARS UP FOR A CELEBRATION AS MARRIAGE EQUALITY LAW TAKES EFFECT

JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI

THEY have been in a committed relationship for more than 13 years, and even had a wedding in 2019. Since then, Danaya Phonphayung and Sunma Piamboon, both women, have considered themselves a married couple, even if same-sex marriages were not legally recognized.

The walls of their home in suburban Bangkok are decorated with faded photos from their happy union, filled with joy and love from their families and friends. Come tomorrow, their wedded status will be recognized by the nation as well, when a law that allows members of the LGBTQ+ community in Thailand to get married and have the same legal rights as heterosexual couples takes effect.

The couple said they can't wait to formalize their union. They plan to register their marriage at a district office near their home on the very first day that the law allows.

"I think I'll cry," Danaya, an office worker, said with a big smile, thinking about the moment that they will sign the paper. "I'm so happy. It's something that was more than I could've dreamed of, that suddenly this day is happening."

"We live together. We bought a house. We bought a car. But we cannot share these things together like a married couple. When this is happening, we feel that it's our rights that we need to secure as quickly as possible," she said.

The marriage equality bill, which sailed through both the House of Representatives and the Senate, amended the Civil and Commercial Code to change the words "men and women" and "husband and wife" to "individuals" and "marriage partners." It would open up access to full legal, financial and medical rights for LGBTQ+ couples.

Sunma, who owns a travel agency, said that she had realized how crucial being legally married was when Danaya was hospitalized with dengue fever, as they don't live close to her parents.

"The doctors asked me who I was, and I said I was the girlfriend, and they were like, 'so what?' I couldn't make any decision until her condition became quite serious," she said. "I was so upset, like, if I had lost her ... there would be nothing that could've made up for it. So, I think this is very important for both of us."

How marriage equality became law

Thailand has a reputation for acceptance and inclusivity, but struggled for decades to pass a marriage equality law. Thai society largely holds conservative values. Members of the LGBTQ+ community say they face discrimination in everyday life, although they note that things have improved greatly in recent years.

The government led by the Pheu Thai party made marriage equality one of its main goals.

Last week, Government House invited dozens of LGBTQ+ couples and activists for a photo op and a meeting with Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and several high ranking officials to celebrate the law coming into effect, making Thailand the first in Southeast Asia and the third place in Asia, after Taiwan and Nepal, to legalize same-sex marriage.

The organizers of Bangkok Pride have collaborated with relevant government agencies to hold a grand celebration in central Bangkok and facilitate couples who wish to register their marriage on the very first day. They said that more than 300 couples have registered to officially tie the knot tomorrow at the event. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



South Korea Impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol denied ordering military intervention against lawmakers during his martial law decree. Appearing in court, yesterday, Yoon argued his actions were a warning to opposition parties. The Constitutional Court will determine whether Yoon remains in office amid growing national unrest.

AP PHOTO



United States President Donald Trump signed yesterday an executive order delaying TikTok's ban for 75 days, allowing parent company ByteDance more time to find a U.S. buyer. The ban, approved by Congress and upheld by the Supreme Court, was originally set to take effect Sunday.

AP PHOTO



United States The Senate unanimously confirmed Marco Rubio as Secretary of State yesterday [Macau time], marking the first Cabinet appointment for President Donald Trump's second term. Rubio, a Florida senator and foreign policy expert, garnered bipartisan support as the first Latino to hold the position.

AP PHOTO



Switzerland European leaders at Davos yesterday vowed to counter President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate accord. EU Chief Ursula von der Leyen reaffirmed Europe's commitment to fighting climate change, calling the pact "humanity's best hope" and emphasizing the need for global cooperation.