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A LOCAL MAN SUSPECTED OF RUNNING A SERIES OF SCAMS INVOLVING FALSE JOB OFFERS WILL REMAIN IN PREVENTIVE CUSTODY WHILE AWAITING TRIAL, THE MP ANNOUNCED

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MGTO RAMPS UP EUROPEAN TOURISM PROMOTION IN SPAIN

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TRUMP WANTS JORDAN AND EGYPT TO ACCEPT MORE REFUGEES AND FLOATS PLAN TO ‘CLEAN OUT’ GAZA

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AP PHOTO



Korea The lifetime ban on former South Korean international Son Jun-ho (pictured), imposed in China last year after charges of match-fixing, has not been extended to the rest of the world, the Korea Football Association (KFA) announced last week. “With this, the ban on Son is only applicable in China,” the KFA said in a statement.

AP PHOTO



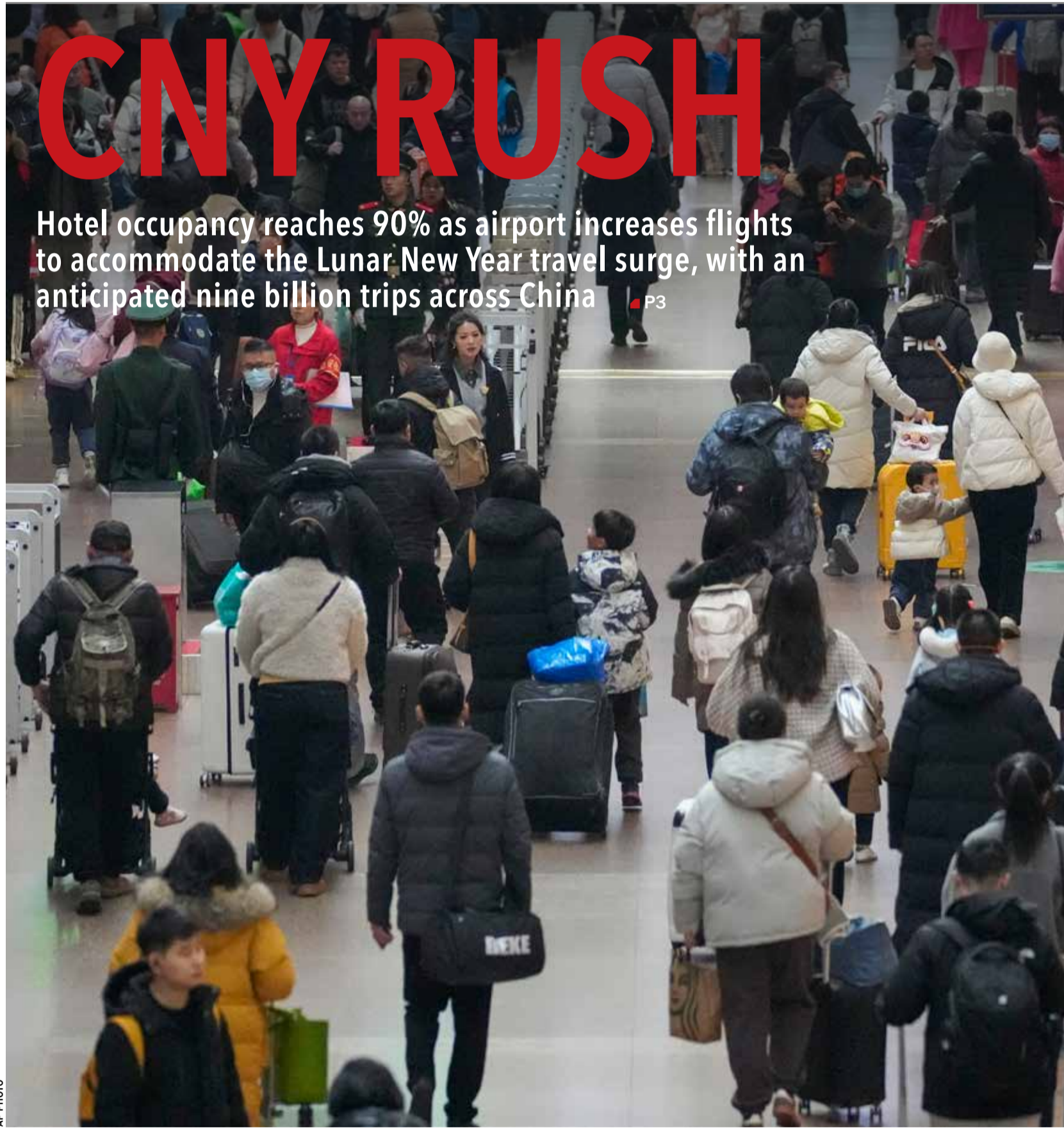
Philippines launched a comic book on Friday to counter what the country says is China’s disinformation campaign to push its expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea. The 40-page comic book, titled “The Stories of Teacher Jun,” contains colorful caricatures of a Filipino teacher and his young students discussing the complex territorial disputes in simple terms and highlights the Philippine position.

India celebrated its 76th Republic Day yesterday with a colorful parade displaying its military might and cultural diversity on a boulevard in the heart of country’s capital. Tens of thousands of people lined the road to watch the long parade to mark the anniversary of the official adoption of India’s Constitution on Jan. 26, 1950.

AP PHOTO



Australians celebrated and protested across the country yesterday as Australia Day drew attention to political differences over Indigenous rights months out from a federal election. Australia Day marks a British colony being established at Sydney Cove on Jan. 26, 1788, which eventually led to Britain claiming the entire country without a treaty with its Indigenous inhabitants.



CNY RUSH

Hotel occupancy reaches 90% as airport increases flights to accommodate the Lunar New Year travel surge, with an anticipated nine billion trips across China

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AP PHOTO

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NEW BUS STOP OPENS AT MGM COTAI, KAM PEK STOP RENAMED

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced the opening of a new bus stop in front of the MGM Cotai building starting today. The stop, located on Avenida da Nave Desportiva/ MGM Cotai, will be served by bus routes 50, 701X, and N5. This new addition aims to improve public bus services in the area, which previously had only one stop located at the rear of MGM Cotai. In a separate change, DSAT revealed that the former "Kam Pek Community Centre" bus stop will now be renamed "Almeida Ribeiro/ Mercado Kam Pek," effective immediately. This renaming is part of an ongoing effort by DSAT to clarify and standardize the naming of bus stops across the city.

MACAU TO ADD NEARLY 4,300 HOTEL ROOMS WITH NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) has reported that four hotels are currently under construction in Macau, with 10 more projects in the design phase. Upon completion, the four hotels and ten proposed projects are expected to add 2,928 rooms and 1,301 rooms, respectively, to the city's accommodation capacity. Government data shows that Macau currently boasts 146 hotel establishments. According to the latest data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC), the average occupancy rate of guest rooms has increased by 4.9% year-on-year.

ID HOSTS ANTI-DOPING SEMINAR FOR ATHLETES AND COACHES

The Sports Bureau (ID) held an anti-doping seminar at the Athletes Training and Training Center to raise awareness of anti-doping among local athletes and coaches. More than 160 Macau athletes and coaches attended the event, which was led by professionals from the Macau Sports Medicine Center. The seminar covered the latest anti-doping policies, sample collection processes, and common banned substances and their effects on athletes' health.

LABOR

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE DECLINES TO 2.4% IN 2024

STAFF REPORTER

THE SAR's unemployment rate showed positive signs of improvement in 2024, according to the latest data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

The overall unemployment rate for the year decreased by 0.9 percentage points, reaching 1.8%, while the unemployment rate for local residents fell by 1.0 percentage point, reaching 2.4%.

The decrease in unemployment comes in the wake of a stable economic recovery throughout the year, with median monthly earnings for employed individuals rising slightly.

The median earnings of the employed population stood at MOP18,000, up by MOP500 from



the previous year. Employed residents saw a similar increase, with median monthly earnings of MOP20,500, also up by MOP500 year-on-year.

Despite the overall positive trend, the fourth quarter of 2024

showed some stability, with the general unemployment rate remaining steady at 1.7% and the unemployment rate for local residents holding at 2.3%. However, the general underemployment rate saw a slight increase of 0.4

percentage points, reaching 1.5%.

In terms of sector performance, employment in industries such as construction and retail trade saw declines in the fourth quarter, with the construction sector losing 1,600 jobs and retail trade losing 800 jobs. In contrast, the real estate and business activities sector saw an increase of 1,900 jobs.

While total employment decreased by 1,000 and the number of employed residents dropped by 1,700, the number of unemployed individuals remained largely stable at 6,700. The report also revealed a slight decline in the proportion of new labor market entrants seeking their first job, which stood at 13.9% of the total unemployed.

Amid economic recovery, lawmaker Ella Lei believes that while the unemployment rate is currently relatively low, there are still issues of underemployment and residents on very low wages who are close to being unable to sustain themselves and their families.

CreditSights: Gaming revenue to grow by 8% this year

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU'S gross gaming revenue (GGR) is projected to grow by 8% in 2024, surpassing the government's target for 2025, according to CreditSights.

The Fitch Group division estimates that GGR could reach MOP 245 billion this year, slightly higher than the government's target of MOP 240 billion, and would represent 84% of the pre-pandemic level seen in 2019.

"This projection assumes that visitor numbers in 2025 will improve to around 94% of 2019 levels, and that GGR per visitor will see a modest 2% year-on-year increase, rising to MOP



6,606 from MOP 6,493 in 2024," the firm added.

Macau's GGR in 2024, initially projected at MOP216 billion, has already surpassed the target for last year, reaching MOP226.8 billion—an increase of 24% compared to 2023.

CreditSights also pointed to several "positive catalysts" supporting the gaming sector, including the easing of travel restrictions and the

completion of casino renovations, room conversions, and new entertainment offerings.

Hotel occupancy is expected to improve this year, fueled by new projects from the city's gaming operators.

Macau welcomed an estimated 35 million visitors in 2024, a 24% increase year-on-year, although this still represents only 89% of 2019 arrival numbers.

EDUCATION

MAINLAND STUDENTS MUST SUBMIT EXAM SCORES FOR LOCAL UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU universities have reinstated pre-pandemic admissions policies, requiring mainland students to submit college entrance exam scores as part of their applications.

This policy shift follows a recent scandal involving the submission of fraudulent academic credentials by some students.

The decision coincides with the conclusion of the 2025 joint examination for recommended students from Macau to mainland universities, which saw the admission of 1,301 students from local secondary schools.

To aid these students, the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and the Macau New Chinese Youth Association hosted a "Sharing Session for Students Studying in the Mainland" late last week.

Kong Chi Meng, director of the Education and Youth Development Affairs Bureau, announced that only mainland students

with valid college entrance exam scores will be eligible for admission, ending temporary Covid-era measures allowing enrollment in international courses.

The change follows a scandal involving 24 mainland students who allegedly used fraudulent credentials to gain admission to the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST).

Kong emphasized that universities must report suspected fraud to the bureau, although no similar cases have been reported from other institutions.

To counter fraud, the bureau has established a task force in collaboration with police and local colleges, alongside a campus awareness campaign to educate students about fraud prevention.

At the sharing session, students learned about life and academic culture on the mainland. Kong encouraged them to follow President Xi Jinping's guidance, embrace national development, and embody values of patriotism, innovation, and a global perspective.

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MGTO expects nearly 90% hotel booking rates for Lunar New Year

VICTORIA CHAN

As the Lunar New Year approaches, hotel bookings in Macau are nearing capacity, with expectations that occupancy rates could exceed 90% on peak days.

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), shared insights into the city's tourism trends during an interview yesterday with the press.

Fernandes revealed that the average number of tourists in Macau over the past week has surpassed 100,000. She anticipates that, during the Spring Festival, this number could rise to an average of 185,000 visitors per day.

"Recently, we were informed by hotels that their reservation rate had reached 90% a few days ago," said Fernandes. "I believe that this Lunar New Year will see very optimistic results overall. While it may be overly ambitious to expect an average of 95% occupancy, I am confident that we will exceed 90%."

As of 9 p.m. last night, Macau welcomed a total of 130,854 tourist arrivals, while Saturday saw 137,856 tourists entering the SAR.

The influx of visitors is attributed in part to recent policy changes, including the "one trip per week" and "multi-entry with one visa" policies for Zhuhai and Hengqin, which have significantly boosted tourism.

Fernandes also acknowledged emerging challenges in the region, particularly in light of Thailand's recent draft legaliza-



tion of casinos.

She stressed the importance of diversifying Macau's tourism offerings to maintain its competitive edge. "With continued efforts to diversify our marketing and advertising strategies, Macau will attract a broader range of tourists in the future, ensuring greater opportunities for growth," she added.

Meanwhile, a check conducted by the Times yesterday found that several hotels in Cotai are already fully booked, with available five-star hotels charging as much as over MOP4,300 per night.

China's Lunar New Year travel rush has kicked into high gear, with billions of trips expected in coming days for the peak of the 40-day annual mass migration — the world's biggest annual movement of humanity.

The actual new year holiday, which marks the start of

the year of the snake in the 12-month lunar calendar, comes on Wednesday, while New Year's Eve on tomorrow is reserved for family gatherings and traditionally fireworks displays.

Many began travelling on

Jan. 14 and the rush will reach a peak over the weekend.

In total, 9 billion trips — mostly by car — are expected over the 40-day travel rush, according to a report from the Associated Press.

Trips by train will surpass

510 million, with another 90 million travelling by air. The government didn't say how the travel figures compared with any other 40-day period during the year.

Trips are now far more comfortable than in past years, when travelers often crammed into train cars for trips that could last days — if they were fortunate enough to buy a ticket, which are now mostly sold online.

Traditionally the festival has been a time for families to gather, with members of China's huge migrant worker population using up all their vacation time on the annual visit that for many offers the only chance to see parents and children.

Rising prosperity and the decline in family customs in recent years has prompted those with the means to travel overseas, mostly to South East Asia, but also Japan and South Korea. Cross-border trips are expected to rise by nearly 10%, including foreign tourists willing to risk the crowds to take in the spectacle.

The government grants eight public holiday days from Jan. 28 to Feb. 4. While fireworks have been all but eradicated under President Xi Jinping, traditional events such as temple markets draped in auspicious bright red colors continue to draw visitors in their millions.

AIRPORT TO ADD FLIGHTS

MACAU International Airport Company Limited (CAM) announced plans to increase flight frequency during the Chinese New Year season to accommodate rising travel demand.

CAM revealed that passenger reservation rates have surpassed 90% ahead of the Year of the Snake, prompting the airport to collaborate with airlines to adjust flight schedules accordingly.

To meet the demand, CAM will add a total of 58 additional regular and charter flights to mainland China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, and Malaysia, providing more travel options for passengers.

Additionally, CAM will offer parking discounts from January 25 to February 7 for travelers departing or arriving at the airport. Passengers can enjoy a 50% discount on parking

for up to five consecutive days when presenting valid travel identification and original departure and return boarding passes.

To celebrate the Chinese New Year, CAM has decorated its passenger terminal with balloon sculptures and artwork, creating a festive atmosphere for travelers. A series of seasonal programs are also planned, including the distribution of Spring Festival couplets and a special appearance by the God of Wealth.

CONSUMER RIGHTS

Gov't establishes interdepartmental task force to ensure consumers' rights during CNY

RENATO MARQUES

THE Consumer Council (CC) has announced the formation of an interdepartmental task force aimed at protecting consumer rights during the Lunar New Year (CNY) season. The task force will work to ensure market order, promote fair business practices, and

enhance consumer confidence among both residents and tourists during this peak consumption period.

The CC noted this period as the "peak consumption season" of the year and a time of concern for consumer rights.

In light of this, 10 government departments held meetings to strengthen col-

laboration and establish a task force to ensure smooth operations during the Spring Festival.

This group comprises the CC and nine other government departments, including Customs, Judiciary Police, Public Security Police Force, Economic and Technological Development Bureau, Macao Go-

vernment Tourism Office, Transport Bureau, Municipal Affairs Bureau, Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau, and Post and Telecommunications Bureau. They gathered to discuss each department's efforts to protect consumer rights and prepare for the CNY.

Additionally, the departments are said to main-

tain close communication through a notification mechanism to provide timely support and services to residents and tourists in need.

The group emphasized that merchants must comply with the law and promote honest business practices to uphold Macau's positive image as a tourist and shopping destination.

The CC expressed concerns regarding the presentation of prices, which should always be displayed in MOP. Closer supervision is anticipated primarily in the CNY markets, fairs, stalls, and shops selling items related to the CNY, such as decorative goods, praying and worship items, and firecrackers.

PUBLIC LIBRARY UPGRADE TO IMPACT SERVICES DURING CNY

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will upgrade the information system of the Public Library from 8 p.m. on January 28 until 11:59 p.m. on January 31, coinciding with the Chinese New Year celebrations. The upgrade will temporarily suspend several services, including the library catalog, electronic resources, mobile app, and self-service kiosks. Circulation services at the Red Market Library and 24-hour book drops will also be affected. The public is advised to make arrangements in advance, as all branch libraries will be closed from Chinese New Year's Eve to the third day of the holiday, except for the Red Market Library.

SMG ISSUES LOW- TEMPERATURE WARNING

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) has issued a yellow low-temperature warning as the region braces for a prolonged cold spell. Residents are urged to take necessary precautions to prevent hypothermia, with the Health Bureau (SSM) advising on appropriate measures. The minimum temperature is expected to drop to around 10 degrees Celsius from January 28 to January 29, the first day of the Lunar New Year. In light of the forecast, the SS urges residents to take precautions, particularly the elderly and those with chronic conditions.

UK POULTRY IMPORTS OFFICIALLY BANNED DUE TO AVIAN FLU

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has announced a ban on poultry meat and products from East Sussex and Shropshire, UK, due to a highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza outbreak. The bureau emphasized that import applications from these regions will not be approved. All fresh food entering Macau must undergo compulsory inspection and quarantine, requiring health certifications from the country of origin. With the outbreak, local health authorities cannot issue these certificates, rendering imports ineligible. The bureau will continue to monitor animal-derived product applications and implement preventive measures in line with World Organization for Animal Health guidelines.

FITUR

MGTO RAMPS UP EUROPEAN TOURISM PROMOTION

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has expanded its presence at this year's Feria Internacional de Turismo (FITUR), one of the world's largest international tourism trade fairs, held in Madrid, Spain. This strategic initiative aims to boost visitor arrivals from long-haul markets, particularly Europe.

Under the leadership of MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, this is the first time since the pandemic that the office has had a dedicated booth at FITUR. The booth highlights the "Macao Tourism Exchange" and presents updated tourism products, emphasizing the destination's appeal to European travelers. In addition to the fair, MGTO is launching tar-



geted marketing campaigns across Europe, collaborating with key tourism partners and online platforms.

A key event at the fair was the Macao Tourism Exchange, where Senna Fernandes announced that

the enhanced FITUR presence marks the beginning of intensified promotional efforts aimed at the European market in 2025.

The MGTO booth also features an "Experience Macao" section, which includes a virtual reality tour

that offers attendees an immersive look at Macau's diverse attractions. This interactive display aims to engage travel operators and media throughout the five-day event.

In collaboration with HBX Group, MGTO is launching a 2025 marketing campaign targeting six European countries: Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The campaign will use online platforms like Hotelbeds and Bedsonline to educate European travel agents, airlines, and other industry stakeholders about Macau's unique offerings.

Additionally, MGTO is rolling out destination marketing initiatives and special hotel deals through platforms such as Travelport and eDreams ODIGEO to drive sales and encourage longer stays in Macau.

To further strengthen its European presence, MGTO has scheduled two major European trade events in Macau: the ECTAA 2025 Macao Summit in June and the 50th APAVT Congress in December.

SPRING FESTIVAL

MGTO launches new webpage for Lunar New Year celebrations

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) launched a new webpage yesterday that provides information on Lunar New Year (CNY) celebrations.

The page is hosted at (<https://www.macaotourism.gov.mo/article/cny/celebrations-2025>). It is available in Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Portuguese, and English, aiming to disclose information on all the events and activities of this year's celebrations program to locals and visitors.

The page features various New Year activities and promotional videos presented by MGTO, the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT), the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the Sports Bureau (ID), and the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), among other government departments and tourism operators.

Residents and visitors can also check information about CNY activities through the "Experience Macao" mobile application and the QR code on the themed website.

In addition to the three main activities, including the



Golden Dragon Parade, Float Parade, and Fireworks, the MGTO also noted the wide range of activities that will extend to the Macau Grand Prix Museum. The museum will be open to the public during the CNY holidays, including Tuesday, February 4 (the seventh day of the Lunar New Year). It will also host the Year of the Snake Calligraphy activity from January 29 to February 4.

At the extended "Illuminate Macau 2024," visitors can attend a themed workshop on CNY and performances, among other activities, at specific times.

The temporary pedestrian zone in Taipa Old Village will also host a unique market at the outdoor car park on Rua Fernão Mendes Pinto.

As also announced, IC will open the doors to a series of cultural venues for an

extended time.

Regarding sports, ID will organize "2025 CNY Festivities Recreational and Sports Activities," which will suit families in community areas. These activities take place from the third to the twelfth day of the new year (Jan. 31 to Feb. 9) and include a "Cycling Tour," "CNY Sports Festival," and "CNY Motorcycle and Classic Car Parade."

Special activities are also being prepared in collaboration with the six gaming concessionaires for the "Six Revitalization Zones," namely Mount Fortress (Melco Resorts & Entertainment), Bazaar Pagoda (SJM Resorts), Lai Chi Vun Shipyard (Galaxy Entertainment Group), Iec Long Firecracker Factory and Taipa Houses (Sands China), Barra (MGM) and Rua da Felicidade (Wynn Macau).

CRIME

SUSPECT IN SCAM INVOLVING FALSE JOB OFFERS TO REMAIN IN PREVENTIVE CUSTODY

RENATO MARQUES

A local man suspected of running a series of scams involving false job offers will remain in preventive custody while awaiting trial, the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) announced in a statement.

According to the MP, after the preliminary investigation, the judge decided to place the man in preventive custody due to the severity of the charges and the amount involved. The judge also noted that the penal framework for such crimes could pose a risk of the suspect attempting to escape justice.

The case, uncovered by the Judiciary Police (PJ) a few days ago, involves a man who claimed to be in charge of a large construction project in Macau and made false job offers to people from the mainland. He promised to arrange employment for them in exchange for

recruitment and reference fees.

The MP also discovered that the same man was involved in five other cases opened by the MP in 2023, using the same modus operandi.

The suspect is believed to have defrauded more than 300 people in a scheme totaling over MOP580,000.

The MP also stated that, under the terms of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Office will continue leading the investigation to uncover all details, amounts, and potential victims.

In the same statement, the MP warned jobseekers to be cautious of job offer scams and to verify the legitimacy of recruitment advertisements carefully.

The MP also specifically addressed concerns for mainland residents: if they wish to work in Macau, they must follow all formal and legal procedures to protect their interests.

A new luxury hotel towers over Havana as Cuba's economic troubles mount and tourism plummets

ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ,
HAVANA

IT'S impossible to miss. The huge rectangular mass of concrete and glass — the tallest building in Havana — dominates the city skyline, towering 150 meters (490 feet) above colonial homes with its 542 luxury rooms and majestic views of the city and the sea.

The Selection La Habana hotel, managed by Spanish chain Iberostar, has yet to be inaugurated but it is already the target of criticism — and not only for its unusual shape. Cubans are questioning the government's allocation of millions of dollars towards luxury tourism while the island grapples with a severe economic crisis and tourism numbers plummet to historic lows.

"All that money could have been spent to build hospitals and schools," lamented Susel Borges, a 26-year-old artisan, as she looked up to the towering edifice, known to locals as the "K



AP PHOTO
People walk past the Selection La Habana new hotel, managed by Spanish chain Iberostar, in Havana, Cuba

and 23 building" because of its location.

Located near the legendary Habana Libre hotel and the iconic Coppelia ice cream parlor, the new hotel is part of a government plan to build a dozen luxury establishments — mainly in Havana — that did not stop even during the COVID-19 pandemic and while existing luxury hotels remained largely unoccupied.

For decades, tourism drove the Cuban economy, generating annual revenues of up to

\$3 billion. But in December, Cuban authorities said only 2.2 million tourists visited the island in 2024, a decrease of roughly 200,000 from 2023 and significantly lower than the 4.2 million tourists who visited in 2019.

The government attributes the decline in tourism to a "perfect storm" of factors including supply shortages, a severe energy crisis causing massive blackouts and a lack of personnel, due to emigration and low wages. Furthermore, the island

is grappling with a surge in U.S. sanctions, including restrictions on travel by U.S. citizens, a ban on cruise ships and other measures specifically designed to stifle the growth of Cuba's tourism industry.

"Tourism is gone," said Julio García Campos, driver of a shiny red 1951 Pontiac with an original engine. "Tourists used to line up to get on one of these!" he said, recalling a bygone era when the island was bustling with American and European travelers following a removal of sanctions by then-President Barack Obama.

The new Selection La Habana, like all other hotels in Cuba, is state-owned and operates under GAESA, a conglomerate belonging to the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces that has often been criticized because of the opacity of its businesses. As a military-run operation, it is exempt from audits by the Comptroller General's Office and has not disclosed the amount it invested in the 40-story hotel.

Cuban economist Pedro Mon-

real notes the "incongruity" of investing capital in the tourism sector when very little is being allocated to strategic areas such as agriculture.

"With food insecurity a concern, it's troubling that agricultural investment lags significantly behind tourism investment, remaining 11 times lower," Monreal noted last year on social media.

Architects also expressed little enthusiasm for the new hotel, pointing at its disruptive appearance within the environment, its excessive height violating urban regulations and tall glass windows that are ill-suited for a tropical climate.

"This building serves as a perfect example in our classes of what should not be done in terms of bioclimatic design," said Abel Tablada, an architect and university professor, adding it's "unforgivable" that the little money available to the Cuban state has been allocated to a building that does not add value to the city. **MDT/AP**

AUTOMOBILE

Kia recalls more than 80,000 US autos due to improper air bag deployment

AUTOMAKER Kia America is recalling more than 80,000 vehicles due to floor wiring beneath the front passenger seat that can become damaged and prevent airbags and seat belts from

deploying properly.

Damaged wiring can also cause an unintended side curtain air bag deployment, according to documents filed with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The recall covers 80,255 2023-2025 Niro EV, Plug-in Hybrid (PHEV), and Hybrid vehicles.

To remedy the situation, dealers will inspect, replace and reroute the floor wiring assembly, as necessary, for free. In addition, dealers will install wiring covers. Owners will be notified by letters mailed in March.

The recall follows one in November, when Hyundai and Kia recalled over 208,000 electric vehicles to fix a transistor in a charging control unit that could be damaged and stop charging the 12-volt battery. That in turn could cause loss of drive power, increasing the risk of a crash.

CORPORATE BITS

MGM spreads festive cheer with community initiatives for Lunar New Year



As the Lunar New Year nears, MGM continues its tradition of community support, organizing events benefiting over 3,100 individuals, including seniors, students, and people with

disabilities. Key initiatives included the 11th annual "Spring Clean for Love," providing home cleaning services for 220 elderly residents, and distributing hand-knitted scarves and

gift packs to 14 social welfare organizations.

Intergenerational activities like the "Calligraphy Workshop" and "Songs for Spring Festival" brought students and seniors together. MGM's Golden Lion Volunteer Team entertained seniors with classic songs, lion dance performances, and festive couplets.

Additionally, MGM's charity haircut program offered free grooming sessions to over 150 seniors, with support from local students.

These efforts aim to enhance social harmony, encourage youth engagement, and foster a spirit of care for the elderly as the city welcomes the Year of the Snake.

Melco celebrates Year of the Snake with festive offerings across properties



Melco Resorts is ringing in the Year of the Snake with a series of festive dining experiences, entertainment, and activities at City of

Dreams, Studio City, and Altira Macau.

Highlights include traditional rice pudding gift boxes, exclusive menus at

Michelin-starred restaurants, and cultural celebrations for visitors of all ages.

From January 25 to February 7, City of Dreams' acclaimed restaurants such as Jade Dragon and Yi will offer specialty menus featuring dishes like Braised Abalone, Seafood Soup, and signature dim sum.

Studio City and Altira will also host themed events and culinary delights, including rice pudding gift boxes designed with symbols of prosperity and good fortune.

Festive attractions also include the "Majestic Snake Brings Fortune" installation, parades, and workshops will add to the celebrations.

DISPUTED SEA

Philippines accuses China's forces of harassing fisheries vessels

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

CHINESE coast guard ships and a Chinese navy helicopter harassed a group of Philippine fisheries vessels conducting a scientific survey in a hotly disputed area of the South China Sea, forcing them to cancel the operation, the Philippine coast guard said Saturday.

Beijing has repeatedly asserted sovereignty over most of the South China Sea and accused rival claimant states, including the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia of encroachment. China has demarcated its territorial claims with a 10 dashed-line printed on maps but has not provided the exact coordinates.

The incident took place Friday near Sandy Cay, three small uninhabited sandbars flanked by an artificial island base of Chinese forces and a Philippines-occupied island in the Spratlys archipelago, the coast guard said.

The Chinese coast guard ships approached two larger vessels, which maneuvered to avoid a collision, and a navy helicopter flew low over two smaller boats deployed by the ships, forcing the survey to be called off.

A Chinese coast guard statement said that it drove the Philippine ships away after they entered the waters without China's permission and attempted to land on the cay — which is called Tiexian Reef in Chinese — and conduct sand sampling.

Videos released by the Phil-



AP PHOTO
A Chinese Coast Guard boat sails around Sandy Cay in the South China Sea, last week

ppine coast guard show a Chinese coast guard ship sailing very close to a vessel officials identified as belonging to the Philippines. Another video shows a Chinese military helicopter hovering low over the rough seas near a vessel flying a Philippine flag.

The latest flare-out of the long-simmering territorial disputes in one of the world's busiest trade and security passageways could test President Donald Trump's commitment to maintain America's role as a counterweight to China, which has increasingly carried out assertive actions in the disputed waters.

His predecessor, Joe Biden, strengthened an arc of security alliances in Asia while in office in

a bid to curb China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea, East China Sea and around Taiwan, a self-governed island which Beijing has vowed to take by force if necessary.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio in a telephone call last week with his Philippine counterpart, Enrique Manalo, discussed issues of mutual concern, including "the People's Republic of China's dangerous and destabilizing actions in the South China Sea," State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said.

Rubio "conveyed that the PRC's behavior undermines regional peace and stability and is inconsistent with international law," Bruce said in a readout of the call.

Rubio "underscored the United States' ironclad commitments to the Philippines under our Mutual Defense Treaty," Bruce said.

Biden and his administration had repeatedly warned China that the U.S. is obligated to help defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under armed attack including in the South China Sea. China has warned the U.S. to stay away from what it says is a purely Asian dispute.

In 2017, China accused the Philippine military of secretly plotting to occupy and build a structure on one of the three sandbars, about 2.5 nautical miles from the Philippines-occupied Thitu Island, two senior Philippine officials told The

Associated Press at the time.

China protested and surrounded the sandbars with three navy ships, a coast guard ship and 10 suspected militia ships, according to a confidential Philippine government security report seen by the AP at the time.

Chinese and Philippine diplomats resolved the issue by agreeing that forces from both sides should not set foot on the sandbars, the two Philippine officials said.

Chinese ships, however, have continuously kept watch off the sandbars since then, according to the Philippine military.

Separately, the Philippine coast guard said it has been ordering Chinese coast guard ships to stay away from the Scarborough Shoal, another disputed area about 124 nautical miles off the northwestern Philippines.

The Chinese coast guard ships have approached up to 60 nautical miles from the Philippines coast in recent weeks, well within the country's exclusive economic zone, a stretch of water where a coastal state has exclusive rights to tap resources, but where foreign ships have rights of "innocent passage" as provided under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Philippine coast guard said.

The Chinese coast guard has defied the Philippine coast guard order to leave the area, which it said falls within Chinese waters. It warned the Philippines "to immediately stop all infringement activities, provocations and false accusations." **MDT/AP**

CHINA-US

Beijing tells Rubio to behave himself in veiled warning

KEN MORITSUGU,
BEIJING

CHINA'S veteran foreign minister has issued a veiled warning to America's new secretary of state: Behave yourself.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi conveyed the message in a phone call Friday, their first conversation since Marco Rubio's confirmation as President Donald Trump's top diplomat four days earlier.

"I hope you will act accordingly," Wang told Rubio, according to a

Foreign Ministry statement, employing a Chinese phrase typically used by a teacher or a boss warning a student or employee to behave and be responsible for their actions.

The short phrase seemed aimed at Rubio's vocal criticism of China and its human rights record when he was a U.S. senator, which prompted the Chinese government to put sanctions on him twice in 2020.

It can be translated in various ways — in the past, the Foreign Ministry has used "make the



right choice" and "be very prudent about what they say or do" rather than "act accordingly."

The vagueness allows the phrase to express an expectation and deliver a veiled warning, which

le also maintaining the courtesy necessary for further diplomatic engagement, said Zichen Wang, a research fellow at the Center for China and Globalization, a Chinese think tank.

"What could appear to be confusing is thus an intended effect originating from Chinese traditional wisdom and classic practice of speech," said Wang, who is currently in a mid-career master's program at Princeton University.

Rubio, during his confirmation hearing, cited the importance of

referring to the original Chinese to understand the words of China's leader Xi Jinping.

"Don't read the English translation that they put out because the English translation is never right," he said.

A U.S. statement on the phone call didn't mention the phrase. It said Rubio told Wang that the Trump administration would advance U.S. interests in its relationship with China and expressed "serious concern over China's coercive actions against Taiwan and in the South China Sea." **MDT/AP**

KOREAS TENSION

North Korea says it tested cruise missile system and vows 'toughest' response to US

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

NORTH Korea said yesterday it tested a cruise missile system, its third known weapons display this year, and vowed "the toughest" response to what it called the escalation of U.S.-South Korean military drills that target the North.

The moves suggested North Korea will likely maintain its run of weapons tests and its confrontational stance against the U.S. for now, even though President Donald Trump said he intends to reach out to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The official Korean Central News Agency said Kim observed the test of sea-to-surface strategic cruise guided weapons on Saturday.

The term "strategic" implies the missiles are nuclear-capable. KCNA said the missiles hit their targets after traveling 1,500-kilometer (932-mile) -long elliptical and figure-eight-shaped flight patterns, but that couldn't be independently verified.

KCNA cited Kim as saying that North Korea's war deterrence capabilities "are being perfected more thoroughly" and affirming that his country will make "strenuous efforts" to defend stability "on the basis



AP PHOTO
Leader Kim Jong Un, right, inspects testing of sea-to-surface strategic cruise guided weapons at an undisclosed location in North Korea, Saturday

of more powerfully developed military muscle."

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea had launched "several" cruise missiles toward its western waters from an inland area at around 4 p.m. on Saturday. It said South Korea maintains a readiness to "overwhelmingly" repel any provocations by North Korea in conjunction with its military alliance with the U.S.

In a separate statement carried by KCNA on Sunday, North Korea's Foreign Ministry criticized the U.S. for committing "serious military

provocations aiming at" North Korea with a series of military exercises with South Korea this month.

"The reality stresses that the DPRK should counter the U.S. with the toughest counteraction from A to Z as long as it refuses the sovereignty and security interests of the DPRK and this is the best option for dealing with the U.S," the Foreign Ministry statement said.

DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the abbreviation of its formal name. The Foreign Ministry warning was in line with Kim's vows to imple-

ment the "toughest" anti-U.S. policy during a year-end political meeting.

North Korea views U.S. military training with South Korea as invasion rehearsals though Washington and Seoul have repeatedly said their drills are defensive in nature. In recent years, the U.S. and South Korea have expanded their military exercises in response to North Korea's advancing nuclear program.

The start of Trump's second term raises prospects for the revival of diplomacy between the U.S. and North Korea, as Trump met Kim

three times during his first term. The Trump-Kim diplomacy in 2018-19 fell apart due to wrangling over U.S.-led economic sanctions on North Korea.

During a Fox News interview broadcast Thursday, Trump called Kim "a smart guy" and "not a religious zealot." Asked whether he will reach out to Kim again, Trump replied, "I will, yeah."

Many experts say Kim likely thinks he has greater bargaining power than in his earlier round of diplomacy with Trump because of his country's enlarged nuclear arsenal and deepening military ties with Russia.

In South Korea, many worry that Trump might scale back military drills with the Asian U.S. ally and abandon the goal of the complete denuclearization of North Korea and focus on eliminating its long-range missile program, which poses a direct threat to the U.S., while leaving its nuclear attack capabilities against South Korea intact.

On Monday, Trump called North Korea "a nuclear power" as he spoke of his personal ties with Kim during a news conference at the Oval Office after his inauguration. Washington, Seoul and their partners have long shunned describing North Korea as a nuclear state because that could be seen as accepting its pursuit of nuclear weapons in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

After his first summit with Kim in 2018, Trump baffled many in South Korea by unilaterally announcing the suspension of major summertime military drills, calling them "very provocative" and "tremendously expensive."

North Korea hasn't commented on Trump's latest overture. Sunday's cruise missile tests were the North's first known weapons launches since Trump's inauguration. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH KOREA

Prosecutors indict impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his martial law, reports say

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

SOUTH Korean prosecutors yesterday indicted impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol on rebellion in connection with his short-lived imposition of martial law, news reports said, a criminal charges that could put him to death or jail for life if convicted.

This is the latest blow to Yoon, who was impeached and arrested over his Dec. 3 martial law decree that plunged the country into huge political turmoil. Separate from criminal judicial proce-

dings, the Constitutional Court is now deliberating whether to formally dismiss Yoon as president or reinstate him.

South Korean media outlets, including Yonhap news agency, reported that the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office indicted Yoon over rebellion. Calls to the prosecutors' office and Yoon's lawyers went unanswered.

Yoon, a conservative, has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, calling his martial law a legitimate act of governance meant to raise public



AP PHOTO
South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol

awareness of the danger of the liberal-controlled National Assembly which obstructed his agenda and impeached top offi-

cials. During his announcement of martial law, Yoon called the assembly "a den of criminals" and vowed to eliminate

"shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces."

After declaring martial law on Dec. 3, Yoon sent troops and police officers to the assembly, but enough lawmakers still managed to enter an assembly chamber to vote down Yoon's decree unanimously, forcing his Cabinet to lift it.

The martial law imposition, the first of its kind in South Korea in more than 40 years, lasted only six hours. However, it evoked painful memories of past dictatorial rules in the 1960s-80s when mi-

litary-backed rulers used martial laws and emergency decrees to suppress opponents.

South Korea's constitution gives the president the power to declare martial law to keep order in wartime and other comparable emergency states, but many experts say the country wasn't under such conditions when Yoon declared martial law.

Yoon insists he had no intentions of disrupting assembly work including its floor vote on his decree and that the dispatch of troops and police forces was meant to maintain order. But commanders of military units sent to the assembly have told assembly hearings or investigators that Yoon ordered them to drag out lawmakers. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



President Donald Trump speaks to reporters aboard Air Force One as he travels from Las Vegas to Miami on Saturday

this day in history

1945 AUSCHWITZ DEATH CAMP LIBERATED



The Red Army has liberated the Nazis' biggest concentration camp at Auschwitz in south-western Poland.

According to reports, hundreds of thousands of Polish people, as well as Jews from a number of other European countries, have been held prisoner there in appalling conditions and many have been killed in the gas chambers.

Few details have emerged of the capture of Auschwitz, which has gained a reputation as the most notorious of the Nazi death camps.

Some reports say the German guards were given orders several days ago to destroy the crematoria and gas chambers. Tens of thousands of prisoners - those who were able to walk - have been moved out of the prison and forced to march to other camps in Germany.

Details of what went on at the camp have been released previously by the Polish Government in exile in London and from prisoners who have escaped.

In July 1944 details were revealed of more than 400,000 Hungarian Jews who were sent to Poland many of whom ended up in Auschwitz. They were loaded onto trains and taken to the camp where many were put to death in the gas chambers.

Before they went they were told they were being exchanged in Poland for prisoners of war and made to write cheerful letters to relatives at home telling them what was happening.

According to the Polish Ministry of Information, the gas chambers are capable of killing 6,000 people a day.

Courtesy BBC News

US

Trump wants Jordan and Egypt to accept more Palestinian refugees and floats plan to 'clean out' Gaza

WILL WEISSERT & ZEKE MILLER, ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE

PRESIDENT Donald Trump said Saturday he would like to see Jordan, Egypt and other Arab nations increase the number of Palestinian refugees they are accepting from the Gaza Strip, potentially moving out enough of the population to "just clean out" the war-torn area to create a virtual clean slate.

During a 20-minute question-and-answer session with reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump also said he has ended his predecessor's hold on sending 2,000-pound bombs to Israel. That lifts a pressure point meant to reduce civilian casualties during Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza, which is now halted by a tenuous ceasefire.

"We released them today," Trump said of the bombs. "They've been waiting for them for a long time." Asked why he lifted the ban on those bombs, Trump responded, "Because they bought them."

Trump has built his political career around being unapologetically pro-Israel.

On his larger vision for Gaza,

Trump said he had a call earlier in the day with King Abdullah II of Jordan and would speak with President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi of Egypt the following day.

"I'd like Egypt to take people," Trump said. "You're talking about probably a million and a half people, and we just clean out that whole thing and say, 'You know, it's over.'"

Trump said he complimented Jordan for having successfully accepted Palestinian refugees and that he told the king, "I'd love for you to take on more, cause I'm looking at the whole Gaza Strip right now, and it's a mess. It's a real mess."

Such a drastic displacement of people would openly contradict Palestinian identity and deep connection to Gaza. Still, Trump said the part of the world that encompasses Gaza, has "had many, many conflicts" over centuries. He said resettling "could be temporary or long term."

"Something has to happen," Trump said. "But it's literally a demolition site right now. Almost everything's demolished, and people are dying there."

He added: "So, I'd rather get involved with some of the Arab nations, and build housing in a different location, where they

can maybe live in peace for a change."

There was no immediate comment from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office.

Trump has offered non-traditional views on the future of Gaza in the past. He suggested after he was inaugurated on Monday that Gaza has "really got to be rebuilt in a different way."

The new president added then, "Gaza is interesting. It's a phenomenal location, on the sea. The best weather, you know, everything is good. It's like, some beautiful things could be done with it, but it's very interesting."

Resuming delivery of large bombs, meanwhile, is a break with then-President Joe Biden, who halted their delivery in May as part of an effort to keep Israel from launching an all-out assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah. A month later, Israel did take control of the city, but after the vast majority of the 1 million civilians that had been living or sheltering in Rafah had fled.

"Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs and other ways in which they go after popula-

tion centers," Biden told CNN in May when he held up the weapons. "I made it clear that if they go into Rafah ... I'm not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with Rafah, to deal with the cities, that deal with that problem."

The Biden pause had also held up 1,700 500-pound bombs that had been packaged in the same shipment to Israel, but weeks later those bombs were delivered.

Trump's action comes as he has celebrated the first phase of a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel that has paused the fighting and seen the release of some hostages held by Hamas in Gaza in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Negotiations have yet to begin in earnest on the more difficult second phase of the deal that would eventually see the release of all hostages held by Hamas and an enduring halt to the fighting.

If the remaining hostages are not released, the Israeli government has threatened to resume its war against Hamas, which launched a massive assault against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. MDT/AP

IN CONTEXT

Although few details of the liberation of Auschwitz were given in the British press at the time, it had gained a reputation as the worst of the German concentration camps. On 8 May 1945 a State commission compiled by the Soviets with advice from Polish, French and Czechoslovak experts revealed the full horror of conditions at the camp. Nearly 3,000 survivors of various nationalities were questioned and on the basis of their evidence the report estimated 4,000,000 people had perished there between 1941 and early 1945.

The dead included citizens from the Soviet Union, Poland, France, Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Italy and Greece.

The commission, which had previously investigated conditions at Majdanek, Treblinka and other camps, described Auschwitz as the worst in its experience.

It found evidence of experiments carried out on humans "of a revolting character". According to the evidence, the commission said the Germans had moved out up to 60,000 inmates - those still fit enough to walk - when they retreated. The few thousand who were left behind were freed by the Russians.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Manage your professional schedule carefully. Check completed tasks from your list, one by one. A beneficial development opens lucrative career doors. Take charge.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Learn new skills and make new friends. Discuss the route and destination with someone who's been there. Listen carefully. Monitor news and conditions.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Streamline financial routines and practices. Invest in the success of your shared venture. Keep your best interests in mind. Contribute what you can.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Discover something new about your partner. Compromise for a winning solution to an old challenge. Resolution provides lasting benefits. Express your feelings respectfully.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Take action for what you want. Practice your physical routines to grow stronger. Reduce stress to restore your energy and vitality. Savor delicious and healthy flavors.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Play something interesting with people you enjoy. Having fun is contagious. Generate harmony with family, friends and your sweetheart. Share delicious moments together.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Explore domestic renovation options. Beautification projects restore harmony where missing. Play with color, shape and texture. Paint and lighting upgrades provide inexpensive brightness.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Share and connect. An intensely creative moment flowers naturally. Discuss passions and curiosities. Express ideas and gratitude freely. Take action for what you love.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Focus on a profitable opportunity. Increase efficiency to save. Monitor cash flow to maintain positivity. A push now can have lasting and lucrative benefits.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Consider new possibilities with a personal project. Do the homework for simple solutions. Polish your presentation before unveiling. Take advantage of an energy surge.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Coordination, organization and planning pay extra. Get productive behind closed doors, in peace and quiet. Recharge with soothing rituals and comforts. Relax and plot.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Someone is saying something nice about you. Pull together with your team to plot a victorious effort. Broaden your reach by connecting with friends.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

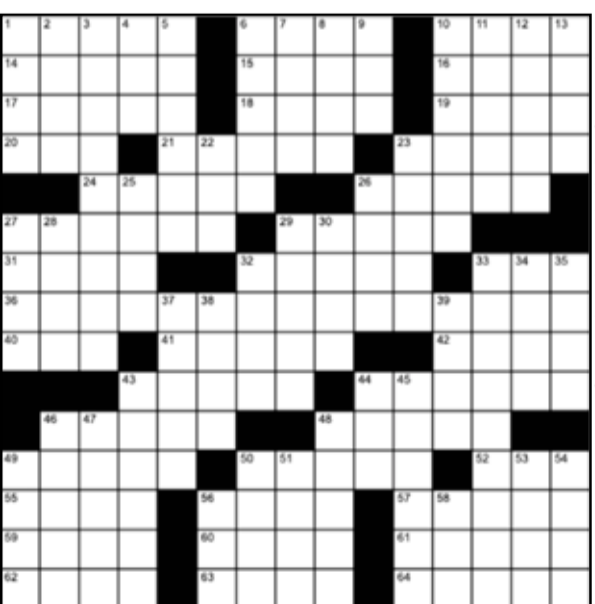
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-7	-2	fine
Changchun	-12	-2	snow
Chengdu	0	10	cloudy
Chongqing	4	12	fine
Fuzhou	6	15	fine
Guangzhou	7	15	cloudy
Guiyang	0	6	overcast
Haikou	11	17	cloudy
Hangzhou	1	5	fine
Harbin	-17	-6	snow
Hefei	-5	4	fine
Nanjing	-3	4	fine
Shanghai	1	5	fine
Taipei	8	13	cloudy
Wuhan	-5	8	fine
Hong Kong	13	19	sunny
WORLD			
Moscow	4	5	rain
Frankfurt	7	12	rain
Paris	8	11	cloudy
London	8	9	rain
New York	0	4	sunny

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Flat-topped hills; 6- Quote; 10- Milky Way maker; 14- Hello; 15- On the briny; 16- To ___ (just so); 17- Coffee choice; 18- Take ten; 19- Highway division; 20- U.K. record label; 21- Pot starters; 23- Dog-___ (like some used books); 24- Concur; 26- Song from the past; 27- Offshore sight; 29- Inspire anew; 31- Buckeye State; 32- Beetle Bailey's boss; 33- Rock's ___ Fighters; 36- In spite of; 40- Copycat; 41- Harvests; 42- Like some vaccines; 43- Sketches; 44- Tranquil; 46- Scornful look; 48- Chart anew; 49- Imitating; 50- Light purple; 52- Fan setting; 55- Four-sided fig.; 56- ___ dancing is popular with cowboys; 57- Maternally related; 59- Okinawa port; 60- Piercing places; 61- Orlando attraction; 62- Baseball's Hershiser; 63- Minerals; 64- Attire;

DOWN 1- Created; 2- K-6; 3- Debutante; 4- I see!; 5- Adventurous expedition; 6- ___ blanche; 7- Fortuneteller's start; 8- Dick Tracy's love; 9- Devour; 10- Disease of the body; 11- Pong maker; 12- Actress Taylor; 13- Bird feed; 22- Not pos.; 23- Comic DeGeneres; 25- Increase in size; 26- Gymnast Korbut; 27- A Chaplin; 28- Breakfast chain, for short; 29- Rough files; 30- ___ and crafts; 32- "Saint Joan" playwright; 33- Hearth; 34- ___ epic scale; 35- Eyeball; 37- Like some vbs.; 38- Salty drop; 39- "David Copperfield" wife; 43- Pertaining to the teeth; 44- Mediterranean, e.g.; 45- Hosted; 46- Chucked weapon; 47- Recess in a wall; 48- Like non-oyster months; 49- River under the Ponte Vecchio; 50- Tale teller; 51- Memo starter; 53- Western Native Americans; 54- Dampens; 56- The fifth sign of the zodiac; 58- "Car Talk" ainer;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
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- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
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VA FAT (Taipa Village)
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Nam Long (Taipa Village)
2 bed 1 bath
59.92 m² / 645 ft² | HKD3,650,000



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



Ocean Garden Cattleya Court (Taipa)
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TENNIS | AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Be brave. That's what Madison Keys kept telling herself on the way to winning

HOWARD FENDRICH,
MELBOURNE

BE brave. Go for it. Those were the mantras Madison Keys turned to as she confronted the most significant points of her tennis career, trapped in the cauldron of a third set that was tied at 5-all, 30-all in the Australian Open final against two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka on Saturday.

No reason to be anything but aggressive now, Keys thought. No reason to try to wish there weren't nerves accompanying the moment. No reason to worry — as the American long did along the journey from prodigy at age 12 to major champion less than a month before her 30th birthday — about what would happen if things didn't quite work out.

"I just kept saying, 'Be brave.' And, 'Go for it.' I kind of just kept repeating that. That



Madison Keys of the U.S. kisses the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Saturday

was really my goal for the day — to just be proud, no matter a win or a loss," Keys said in an interview with The Associated Press after winning her first Grand Slam title with a 6-3, 2-6, 7-5 victory over the No. 1-ranked Sabalenka in Rod Laver Arena.

"I went after it, every single

point. And if I missed it and I just didn't execute, I could live with that. I didn't want to have any sort of regret that I was passive and I missed. (Then) it could have been something where I thought: 'I should have done something else,'" Keys said, her hands clasped as she recalled what transpired about

two hours earlier. "So I kind of just kept saying that, over and over."

She spread the credit for her achievement. To the team around her, including Bjorn Fratangelo, a former player who has been her partner for years, her coach since mid-2023 and her husband since November. To her therapist, with whom she spoke or texted frequently over the past two weeks. To her friends on tour who lifted her up when she needed it.

They all believed in Keys, she said, and now, lately, she believed in herself, too.

At her post-match news conference, Keys discussed at length the ways in which her outlook changed.

She used to be concerned about never living up to the hype that accompanied her from before she was even a teen and only increased when she made her first appearance in a Grand Slam semifinal at

Melbourne Park at age 19 (she lost to Serena Williams). She used to think nothing about her tennis career would matter if she never managed to claim a major trophy. She used to assume the sport's best never felt jitters like those hampering her during her first Grand Slam final at the U.S. Open at age 22 (she lost to Sloane Stephens).

Eventually, Keys let all of that go. It was OK not to obsess over others' opinions. It was OK if she never won a Slam. It was OK to face the nerves, because, after all, that's how the greats succeed — they feel discomfort but play through it.

"I was nervous my entire career. So is Novak (Djokovic). So was Roger (Federer). Everybody has been," Fratangelo, a former player who looked on with reddened eyes as Keys accepted her trophy, said during the tournament. "It's just how you deal with it. And she's starting to deal with it in a better way."

MDT/AP

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Urology : Dr. Lo Kwong Yin Richard, Dr. Zhao Yun Qiao

Paediatric Surgery : Dr. Yeung Chung Kwong

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OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

BETTER TRAJECTORY FOR SINO-US RELATIONS REQUIRES ACTIONS IN LINE WITH DIRECTION INDICATED BY TALKS

In a telephone conversation with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed Beijing's hope and expectation that China and the United States can find the right way to get along in the new era.

Coming one week after Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke with Donald Trump shortly before his inauguration as the 47th president of the United States, the conversation between Wang and Rubio maintained the practical optimism for bilateral relations expressed by the two leaders.

So far, the Trump administration's statements regarding relations with China are distinctly different from those of its confrontational predecessor, with Trump saying that he looks forward to maintaining good relations with President Xi and emphasizing that the two countries can work together to solve many problems in the world. Likewise, Rubio said the US hopes to have candid communication with China, resolve differences, manage the bilateral relationship in a mature and prudent manner, and work together to address global challenges and maintain peace and stability in the world.

Wang said that the two heads of state having pointed out the direction and set the tone for China-US relations, it is now incumbent on the two sides to maintain communication, manage their differences and expand cooperation in line with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, with a view to finding the right way for the two countries to get along with each other.

By opening his talks with Rubio with that call, Wang has unmistakably expressed Beijing's expectation that the new US administration, at the executive level, can work together with its Chinese counterpart to faithfully transform the consensus reached between the two heads of state into concrete actions, projects, programs and initiatives of cooperation, communication and coordination in various fields with a shared sense of responsibility and urgency.

That the talks between Wang and Rubio came three days after the latter hosted a meeting of the foreign ministers of Japan, India and Australia in Washington under the Quad framework is probably no coincidence. All three countries taking part in the Quad have markedly accelerated their respective efforts to repair ties with China since Trump won the 2024 US presidential election, and achieved remarkable progress. Their face-to-face talks with the new top US diplomat should have provided the latter with a firsthand knowledge of how unpopular the clique-building attempts of the former US administration were among its allies and, more importantly, Beijing's openness to work for the common good of the Asia-Pacific and beyond with all like-minded partners.

Both China and the US, two great countries, are pursuing their own dreams and are committed to making the lives of their people better. In the process, as Wang stressed, China has no intention to overtake or replace any country. But it will safeguard its legitimate right to development. Major countries shoulder their due international responsibilities to safeguard world peace and help all countries achieve common development.

As Xi said to Trump in their phone call on Jan 17, China and the US share extensive common interests and broad space for cooperation, and the two countries can become partners and friends, contribute to each other's success, and enjoy common prosperity, which will benefit both countries and the whole world.

It is inevitable that China and the US, two major countries with different national conditions, should have some differences. But the key to peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation is mutual respect for each other's core interests and major concerns, and finding appropriate ways to solve issues. [Abridged]

DEVASTATING TOLL FOR GAZA'S CHILDREN: OVER 13,000 KILLED AND AN ESTIMATED 25,000 INJURED, UN SAYS

THE BUZZ

The war in Gaza has been devastating for children: More than 13,000 have been killed, an estimated 25,000 injured, and at least 25,000 hospitalized for malnutrition, according to U.N. agencies.

As Britain's deputy U.N. ambassador, James Kariuki, recently told the Security Council, "Gaza has become the deadliest place in the world to be a child."

"The children of Gaza did not choose this war," he said, "yet they have paid the ultimate price."

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Af-

fairs reported last week that of the 40,717 Palestinian bodies identified so far in Gaza, one-third - 13,319 - were children. The office said Friday the figures came from Gaza's Ministry of Health.

The U.N. children's agency, UNICEF, said the estimate of 25,000 children injured came from its analysis based on information collected together with Gaza's Health Ministry.

U.N. deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said nearly 19,000 children had been hospitalized for acute malnutrition in the four months before December.



AP PHOTO

CLIMATE

NEARLY 250 MILLION CHILDREN MISSED SCHOOL LAST YEAR BECAUSE OF EXTREME WEATHER: UNICEF

GERALD IMRAY,
CAPE TOWN

At least 242 million children in 85 countries had their schooling interrupted last year because of heatwaves, cyclones, flooding and other extreme weather, the United Nations Children's Fund said in a new report Friday.

UNICEF said it amounted to one in seven school-going children across the world being kept out of class at some point in 2024 because of climate hazards.

The report also outlined how some countries saw hundreds of their schools destroyed by weather, with low-income nations in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa hit especially hard.

But other regions weren't spared the extreme weather, as torrential rains and floods in Italy near the end of the year disrupted school for more than 900,000 children. Thousands had their classes halted after catastrophic flooding in Spain.

While southern Europe dealt with deadly floods and Asia and Africa had flooding and cyclones, heatwaves were "the predominant cli-

mate hazard shuttering schools last year," UNICEF said, as the earth recorded its hottest year ever.

More than 118 million children had their schooling interrupted in April alone, UNICEF said, as large parts of the Middle East and Asia, from Gaza in the west to the Philippines in the southeast, experienced a sizzling weeklong heatwave with temperatures soaring above 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit).

"Children are more vulnerable to the impacts of weather-related crises, including stronger and more frequent heatwaves, storms, droughts and flooding," UNICEF executive director Catherine Russell said in a statement. "Children's bodies are uniquely vulnerable. They heat up faster, they sweat less efficiently, and cool down more slowly than adults. Children cannot concentrate in classrooms that offer no respite from sweltering heat, and they cannot get to school if the path is flooded, or if schools are washed away."

Around 74% of the children affected in 2024 were in middle- and low-income countries, showing how climatic

extremes continue to have a devastating impact in the poorest countries. Flooding ruined more than 400 schools in Pakistan in April. Afghanistan had heatwaves followed by severe flooding that destroyed over 110 schools in May, UNICEF said.

Months of drought in southern Africa exacerbated by the El Niño weather phenomenon threatened the schooling and futures of millions of children.

And the crises showed little sign of abating. The poor French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean off Africa was left in ruins by Cyclone Chido in December and hit again by Tropical Storm Dikeledi this month, leaving children across the islands out of school for six weeks.

Cyclone Chido also destroyed more than 330 schools and three regional education departments in Mozambique on the African mainland, where access to education is already a deep problem.

UNICEF said the world's schools and education systems "are largely ill-equipped" to deal with the effects of extreme weather. MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

Sudan Some 70 people were killed in an attack on the only functional hospital in the besieged city of El Fasher in Sudan, the chief of the World Health Organization said yesterday, part of a series of attacks coming as the African nation's civil war escalated in recent days.



AP PHOTO

Israel Four female Israeli soldiers who were taken in the attack that sparked the war in Gaza returned to Israel on Saturday after Hamas militants paraded them before a crowd of thousands in Gaza City and handed them over to the Red Cross. Israel later released 200 Palestinian prisoners in the second exchange of a fragile ceasefire.



AP PHOTO

Haiti The transitional presidential council said the Trump administration's decisions to freeze aid programs, deport migrants and block refugees will be "catastrophic" for Haiti. Leslie Voltaire (pictured) made the comment in an interview with The Associated Press in Rome on Saturday following a meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican. He visited the pope to ask for help for Haiti.



AP PHOTO

United Nations refugee chief said Saturday that some 200,000 refugees have returned to Syria from neighboring countries since the government of Bashar Assad was overthrown last month. The influx comes after an estimated 300,000 refugees returned from Lebanon late last year while it was under bombardment during the Israel-Hezbollah war.