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NEWS

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Good Life Starts Here

TOTAL VISITOR SPENDING ROSE 5.8% ANNUALLY TO MOP 75.36 BILLION IN 2024, WHILE SINGAPOREANS TOPPED SPENDING PER CAPITA

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TRUMP'S AI AMBITION AND CHINA'S DEEPSEEK OVERSHADOW AN AI SUMMIT IN PARIS

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AP PHOTO



China on Friday lashed out at what it called U.S. "coercion" after Panama declined to renew a key infrastructure agreement with Beijing following Washington's threat to take back the Panama Canal. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said at a briefing that China "firmly opposes the U.S. smearing and undermining the Belt and Road cooperation through means of pressure and coercion."

AP PHOTO



Bangladesh's interim government headed by Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus said Friday it will contain vandalism and arson taking place across the country. The development comes amid concern from a major opposition party and neighboring India over attacks on a historic house linked to ousted former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

AP PHOTO



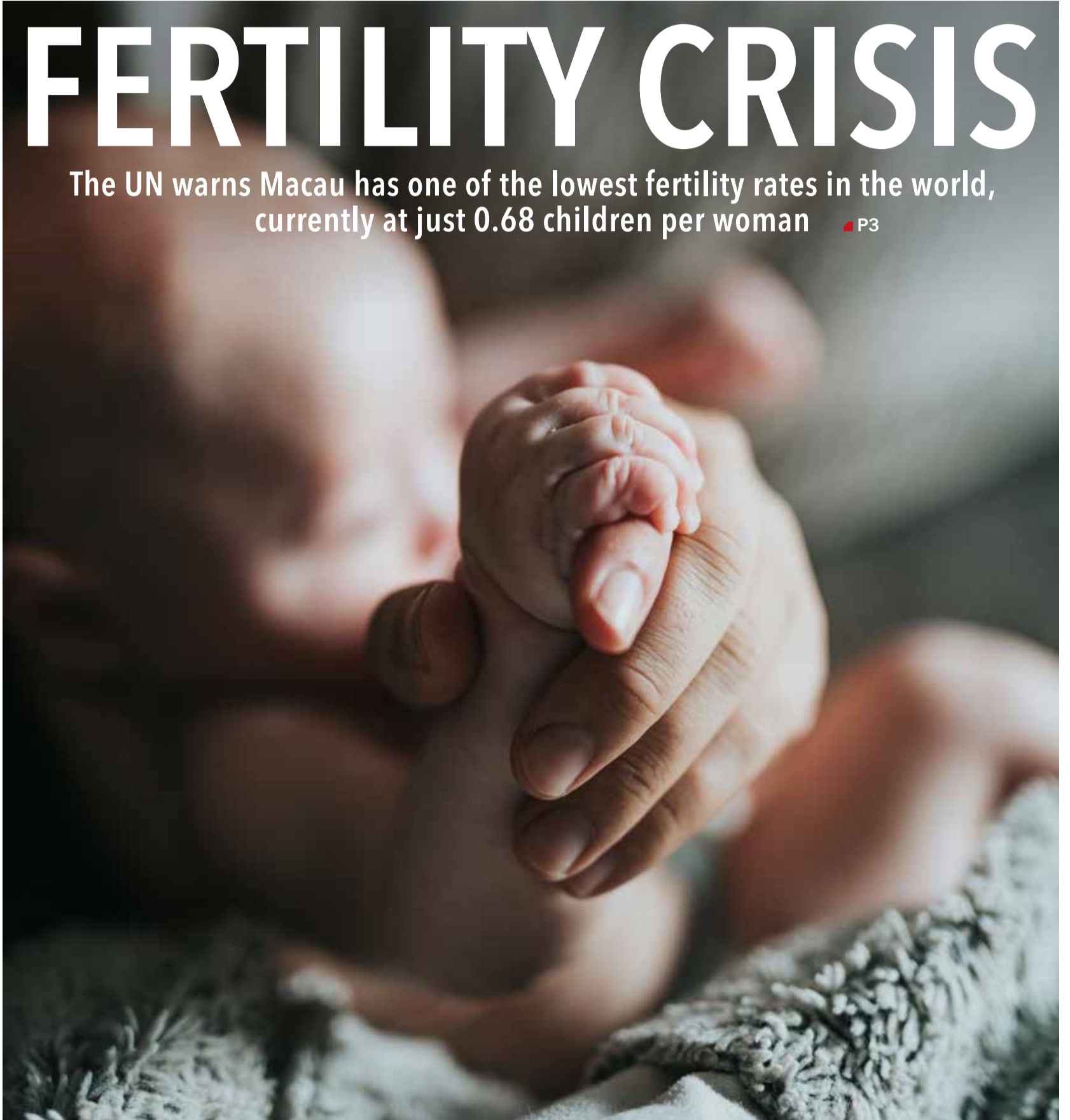
Thailand Five Thai workers released after being held hostage for over a year in Gaza arrived in Bangkok yesterday. They were embraced by family members, some of whom cried, in the arrivals hall at Suvarnabhumi airport. Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sagniampongsa and the Israeli Ambassador to Thailand Orna Sagiv were both at the airport to welcome home the freed hostages.

India At least 31 suspected Maoist rebels and two police officials were killed yesterday in the deadliest combat so far this year in central India, police said. Hundreds of police and paramilitary soldiers launched an operation in the forests of the Indravati area of Chhattisgarh state based on intelligence that large number of rebels had gathered there.

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FERTILITY CRISIS

The UN warns Macau has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world, currently at just 0.68 children per woman P3



MDT REPORT
SCHOOLS HAVE THE LIBERTY TO DECIDE ON MOBILE PHONE BANS: DSEDJ

EDUCATION

DSEDJ: SCHOOLS HAVE THE LIBERTY TO DECIDE ON MOBILE PHONE BANS ON THE CAMPUS

RENATO MARQUES

The Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) stated that schools in Macau have the autonomy to establish their own rules regarding mobile phone use by students on campus. In a written response to an inquiry from the Times, the bureau clarified that they only offer guidelines.

While the topic is not new, it has recently resurfaced in public discourse following the Macau Portuguese School's (EPM) announcement that it is contemplating a ban on the use of this type of electronic device on campus.

In response to the Times, DSEDJ said, "Utilizing the School Operations Guide, the DSEDJ provides schools with references on the use of information appliances and how to assist students in making good use of the internet."

"Schools are also reminded to refer to the health authority's recommendations concerning daily screen time on electronic devices for different age groups [as well as] to guide students to foster the right attitude and proper habits in using the Internet and mobile phones whilst striking a balance between schoolwork and leisure time," it added.

The education authority is also said to promote healthy habits regarding electronic device use through parenting education, preventive and continuous guidance activities, and publicity efforts



on social media platforms, among others.

"DSEDJ continuously raises the awareness of making good use of electronic products among parents and young people, enhances their Internet literacy, teaches students to exercise self-discipline when using electronic products, and reminds parents to set a good example to their children," the bureau remarked.

The DSEDJ also noted that most schools have installed phone lockers to store students' mobile phones during classes.

"Most schools have phone lockers/holders for students who have obtained parental consent to bring mobile pho-

nes to school to place and keep their devices orderly during school hours to prevent classroom teaching and student concentration from being disturbed."

In an interview with public broadcaster TDM, Jorge Neto Valente, president of the EPM Foundation, stated that the school board is focused on enhancing efforts to limit the use of electronic devices, with the goal of fostering socialization among students rather than screen time.

He also noted that there is a lack of consensus within the school community on this issue, as parents hold differing opinions, prompting the school to initiate a survey.

STUDY FINDS SCHOOL PHONE BANS NOT ENOUGH TO ALTER BEHAVIOR

Banning phones in schools is not linked to students getting higher marks or better mental wellbeing, a study by the University of Birmingham that claims to be the first of this kind suggests.

According to the study, the academics found that students' sleep patterns, classroom behavior, exercise, and time spent on their phones also seem to be the same in schools with phone bans and those without.

However, the same researchers found that spending longer on smartphones and social media was generally

linked to worse results for all those measures.

According to a report from the British broadcaster BBC, Dr. Victoria Goodyear, the study's lead author, remarked that the findings were not against smartphone bans in schools but suggested that those bans, as an isolated measure, are insufficient to tackle the negative impacts.

Goodyear added that to tackle the problem of excessive use of devices; the focus needs to be on reducing how much time students spend on their phones and that such a factor is beyond school gates.

The study, published by the Lancet's Journal for European Health Policy, compared 1,227 students and their 30 different secondary schools' rules for smartphone use during break and lunchtime.

The study used the internationally recognized Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales to determine participants' well-being. It also looked at students' anxiety and depression levels.

Throughout the world, there are many examples of jurisdictions and countries that have adopted restrictive measures (including the complete ban on mobile phones in schools). Those that adopted such rules earlier, like Australia and the UK, are now moving the debate on banning not access to devices but to certain types of content, such as social media platforms, for under-16s.

GAMING

Casino revenue sees slight dip during CNY

STAFF REPORTER

The city's casinos underperformed during the recent Chinese New Year (CNY) holiday, with daily gross gaming revenue (GGR) averaging MOP780 million.

This represents a 1% decrease from last year and

an 8% drop compared to 2019, according to Seaport Research Partners.

Between January 28 and February 4, Macau welcomed 1.31 million visitors, averaging 163,700 per day. This marked a 3.5% decline from last year but still surpassed 95% of pre-pandemic levels.

Analyst Vitaly Umansky noted, "Estimated per visitor GGR was US\$593, +3% vs. CNY 2024 and -3% vs. CNY 2019.

However, reports suggest stronger premium play than mass market play in Macau." He added that spend-per-visitor figures might be misleading,

as the city likely saw a rise in non-gaming visitors during the holiday.

Umansky's data shows that CNY 2019 contributed around 2% to the GGR, while CNY 2024 is expected to account for about 2.6%, based on a projected annual GGR of MOP242 billion.



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DEMOGRAPHICS

UN warns Macau has one of the alarmingly lowest fertility rates

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU'S declining birth rate has become a significant demographic concern, reflecting broader trends across China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

As fertility rates in these regions hover around or even fall below 1.4 children per woman, experts are increasingly concerned about the long-term socio-economic effects.

Data from the United Nations suggests that in 2024, Macau, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are part of a growing group of regions where fertility rates have dipped to alarmingly low levels. While the global fertility decline started in the 1990s, these regions have seen more drastic changes in recent years. China, for instance, has experienced a sharp drop in its fertility rate since the 1990s, reaching 1.01 births per woman by 2024.

Macau's fertility rate stands at 0.68, one of the lowest globally, and Hong Kong is not far behind with 0.73 births per woman. Taiwan follows with 0.86.

Data from the World Population Prospects 2024 report reveals that fertility rates have drastically changed across the globe.

This trend is part of a broader phenomenon in Eastern and Southeast Asia, where fertility rates have continued to decline despite economic growth and modernization.

In some areas, fertility rates have dropped so low that they now face the potential of population decline, which could strain pension systems, healthcare, and overall economic productivity.

In 2023, Japan's birth rate fell to a new low for the eighth straight year, which was described as critical, urging authorities to do everything they can to reverse the trend.

In the UN's report, Japan ranked fifth with 1.22 births per woman, followed by Korea, Singapore and Thailand.

Currently, fertility levels are at or above 2.1 births per woman in 45% of countries and regions, which represent about a third of the global population.

However, over 10% of countries (13%) still maintain fertility levels of 4.0 or higher, with the majority of these nations located in sub-Saharan Africa.

Other countries such as Af-



ghanistan, Sudan, and Yemen also fall into this category, with Nigeria being the largest nation with such high fertility rates.

In 1994, nearly 40% of countries had fertility rates of 4.0 or higher.

Today, one-third of these countries have seen their fertility rates drop below 2.1, while another third still report rates above 4.0, according to the report.

By 2054, no country is expected to have a fertility rate higher than 4.0, and fewer than 30% of countries will still report fertility rates above 2.1 births per woman.

Meanwhile, the delayed childbearing trend is also seen in the increasing average age at which women are having children.

While the average age of motherhood was under 25 in 1994, it has now surpassed 30 in many of the affected regions, including in China and Hong Kong.

Earlier this year, the Health Bureau (SSM) has projected that the city will see fewer than 3,500 births in 2025, the lowest number since 2004.

As of the beginning of the Chinese Year of the Snake, the bureau reported 284 newborns had been registered in the city's hospitals by January 8, a drop of 17 from the same period in 2024.

The SSM expressed concern

about the continuing decline in the birth rate, stating that reaching 3,500 births would be a "good" result.

According to projections, Macau's fertility rate is expected to reach its lowest level in over 20 years by 2025, marking a significant decline from the 6,571 births recorded in 2013.

Official statistics show that Macau recorded 3,712 births in 2023, representing a sharp de-

Macau's fertility rate stands at 0.68, one of the lowest globally, and Hong Kong is not far behind with 0.73 births per woman

cline of 43.5% compared to a decade ago, and a notable decrease from the 7,913 births during the Lunar Year of the Dragon in 1988.

Lawmaker Wong Kit Cheng previously highlighted that the Year of the Dragon, which was expected to boost the birth rate, did not significantly influence residents' willingness to have children.

In response to the matter, the lawmaker suggested that Macau should learn from mainland China's recent policies, which aim to accelerate the improve-

ment of the childbirth support system and promote a more family-friendly social environment.

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

Last year, amid the government's push for a higher birth rate, a birth encouragement video released by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) faced public backlash, as many residents criticized the government's messaging and its perceived lack of understanding of the challenges faced by families.

The one-minute clip depicts a smiling baby and toddler to encourage married couples to have children.

Critics argued the clip's simplistic messaging overlooked key struggles like insufficient parental leave allowances, costly childcare and education, skyrocketing housing prices, and lengthy work hours that dominate residents' lives.

In overlooking these real concerns, critics argue the video provides an unrealistic portrayal of family life that does not reflect the complex considerations faced by parents.

PORTUGUESE PRESIDENT TO VISIT IN JUNE

The President of Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, is expected to make a visit in June, according to Teledifusão de Macau (TDM). The president will participate in activities related to the June 10 celebrations of the Day of Portugal, Camões, and Portuguese overseas communities. In a statement to TDM, Portuguese Consul General Alexandre Leitão confirmed that Sousa will arrive before or after June 10 and emphasized the significance of the visit, recognizing the contributions of the local Portuguese community.

CE STRENGTHEN TIES BY MEETING HEILONGJIANG OFFICIALS

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai recently met with Xu Qin, Secretary of the Heilongjiang Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China, to discuss enhancing cooperation between Macau and Heilongjiang. During his visit, Sam attended the opening ceremony of the 9th Asian Winter Games, praising its grand scale and showcasing China's ability to host major international events. He emphasized Macau's role as a bridge for exchanges with Portuguese-speaking countries. Both officials noted increased interactions since the launch of the Facilitated Individual Travel Scheme, expressing hopes for expanded collaboration in education, tourism, and traditional medicine.

TAP SEAC CRAFT MARKETS ARE COMING BACK IN APRIL

Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced the Tap Seacraft Market will take place from Apr. 24 to May 4 at Tap Seac Square. This popular event, held twice a year, aims to promote cultural and creative products from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area. Applications for stall operators and creative workshops are open from Feb. 5 to Feb. 26 and Feb. 5 to Feb. 19, respectively. Over 220 stalls will feature original handicrafts and gastronomy. Selection for stall operators will be determined by a lottery if necessary, while workshop proposals will be evaluated based on several criteria.

APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR SUBSIDISED NURSERIES IN MARCH

Parents can apply for subsidized nurseries from Mar. 1 to Mar. 26, with the admission list published on May 2. This year, 38 nurseries are available, 33 of which accept online applications while five require in-person visits. To streamline the registration process, the online application features a pre-filling function, allowing parents to use a "Child Information Registration Code" to avoid repeated data entry. If a child needs to switch nurseries after admission, guardians must cancel the current registration and re-register at the new location.

HEALTH

SSM REPORTS TWO FATAL INFLUENZA CASES

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Health Bureau (SSM) confirmed two influenza-related deaths Friday, marking the sixth and seventh severe cases of the year. Both victims, a 69-year-old woman and a 35-year-old man, were unvaccinated against seasonal flu and succumbed to complications from influenza A.

The first fatality, a 69-year-old resident with multiple chronic illnesses, was reported as the sixth severe case. Despite being hospitalized, her condition deteriorated, and she passed away. Medical authorities attributed her death to influenza A and pneumonia.

The second fatality, a 35-year-old man considered high-risk for influenza, began experiencing symptoms at the end of last month but delayed seeking medical care.

Earlier this month, he visited the Emergency Department at Conde de São Januário Hospital where he was diagnosed with the flu and prescribed medicine.

However, his condition worsened, and he was admitted to the hospital last week after developing chest pain.

Diagnosed with influenza A and acute myocarditis, he was



transferred to the Intensive Care Unit and intubated before passing away on Friday.

Health officials confirmed that the influenza virus is currently active in Macau, with the epidemic having reached its peak.

The SSM urged residents,

particularly high-risk groups such as pregnant women, children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic illnesses, to get vaccinated promptly.

To facilitate this, flu vaccination services will be available at multiple health centers across Macau from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Pun Ka Lon, manager of the Peng On Tung Tele-Assistance Service, noted in a TDM report a slight increase in service users, rising from 1,200 to 1,300 in recent months. The center is also optimizing its 15-year-old database system, with upgrades expected to

enhance services through technology and data analysis by the end of 2025.

Also, according to the same media outlet, Sou Leng Man, an emergency doctor at Kiang Wu Hospital, said its emergency department saw an average of 470 visits per day on weekdays and 530 visits during the holidays from February 1 to 7.

The number of visits remained stable, with an average waiting time of 32 to 40 minutes for patients with mild symptoms.

Over the past week, the hospital's emergency department treated 30% to 40% of patients with flu-like symptoms. The positive rate for rapid influenza tests was around 22%, with 94% of cases identified as type A influenza. Doctors have been prescribing specific influenza medications, which are expected to last for more than five months.

In response, the hospital administered 620 flu vaccinations between February 3 and 8, with a peak of 240 on the final day. 70% percent of recipients were local residents.

Meanwhile, data from the SSM yesterday shows that more than 5,400 residents received flu vaccinations over the weekend.

GBA

Tai Kin Ip commits to development of Hengqin

VICTORIA CHAN

TAI Kin Ip, Secretary for Economy and Finance, reaffirmed his commitment to fostering economic synergy between Macau and Hengqin during a recent meeting with Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macau Work Office. Their discussions centered on advancing the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone, aimed at enhancing regional economic development and integration within the Greater Bay Area.

Tai emphasized that the Macau government will adopt a more open-minded, responsible, and realistic approach to industrial development.

This includes optimizing the business environment, coordinating efforts across sectors, and attracting investment through innovative economic policies and increased support for financial and human resources.

During his visit, Xia inspected the Cooperation Zone's industrial development and planning initiatives.

He underscored the importance of implementing President Xi Jinping's directives to ensure effective governance and strategic development that aligns with national goals.

In response, Tai outlined the Macau government's strategic vision for the economy leading up to 2025. He stressed the need for



a pragmatic approach to enhance economic governance, attract investment, and improve the business environment.

His department plans to actively formulate policies that support industrial diversification, increase financial investment,

and strengthen human resources. Additionally, Tai addressed the importance of ongoing evaluations of development initiatives using President Xi's "three checks, three observations" criteria.

He expressed a commitment to building the Hengqin Coopera-

tion Zone by focusing on facilitating the movement of talent, capital, logistics, and data, which are essential for regional economic integration.

Tai also highlighted Macau's vital role in international cooperation, particularly with Portuguese-speaking countries. He reiterated the necessity of aligning with national strategies to bolster bilateral trade and investment while actively participating in Greater Bay Area development.

Through initiatives for "outward expansion" and attracting foreign investment, the Macau government aims to promote international economic and trade cooperation effectively.

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY PRICES DROP 12% Y-O-Y IN 2024

Macau's residential property prices show an 11.7% year-on-year decrease, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). The indices for existing residential units and pre-sale units dropped by 11.3% and 6.1%, respectively. Quarter-on-quarter, the price index fell by 2% in Q4 2024. Prices for residential units in the Macau Peninsula increased by 0.2%, while those in Taipa and Coloane remained unchanged. Additionally, the index for larger homes (over 100 square meters) rose by 3.1%.

TAXI CRASHES INTO RAILING, DRIVER DIES AFTER TREATMENT

A taxi crashed into a railing near the entrance to the public parking lot at Mong In Building, located at Rua de Francisco Xavier Pereira. The accident occurred at around 7 p.m. on Friday. First responders arrived at the scene, and the 44-year-old driver was rushed to the hospital. The victim later died at the hospital while receiving emergency treatment.

ECONOMY

Visitors spent 5.8% more in 2024; Singaporeans top spending per-capita

RENATO MARQUES

THE total visitor spending (excluding gaming expenses) rose 5.8% annually to MOP75.36 billion in 2024, the Statistics and Census

Service (DSEC) reported. The result was credited to the motivation stemming from a 23.8% rise in visitor arrivals. Total spending by overnight visitors (MOP62.31 billion) and same-day visitors (MOP13.05 billion) grew by

3.5% and 17.9%, respectively. Despite the increase in total value, per-capita spending by visitors decreased by 14.6% year-on-year to MOP2,157. The per-capita spending of overnight visitors (MOP3,884) and sa-

me-day visitors (MOP691) fell respectively by 8.2% and 12.7%, year-over-year. According to the same report, visitors primarily spent on shopping (45.4% of the total), followed by accommodation (25.5%) and food and beverages (20.9%).

Analyzed by the primary purpose of the visit, per-capita spending of visitors coming to Macau to attend performances/competitions (MOP5,076) and MICE events (MOP4,323) was relatively high in 2024.

Singapore visitors spent the most in Macau in 2024 (MOP2,834), followed by those from Thailand (MOP2,598) and mainland China (MOP2,503).

While expenditures from Thailand and mainland China dropped by 22.7% and 18.1%, respectively, Singapore recorded an increase of 6.6%. Spending from South Korea (MOP2,405) came fourth, followed by Japan (MOP2,093).

Both market results represented drops, with South Korea being accountable for the most significant (-33.8%) while Japan dropped only 1.4%.

Visitors from Malaysia (MOP1,992) and Taiwan dropped by 15% and 8.8%, respectively, year-over-year, while Hong Kong visitors (MOP1,009) also decreased by 13%. DSEC conducts the Visitor Expenditure Survey at major departure points to collect data on visitors' expense items and spending during their stay.

2024 Q4 SPENDING DOWN 0.2%

In Q4 of 2024, the total spending of visitors (MOP19.15 billion) edged down by 0.2% year-on-year, with that of overnight visitors (MOP16.28 billion) falling by 0.7%, while that of same-day visitors (MOP2.87 billion) rising by 2.8%.

Per-capita spending of visitors (MOP2,126) dropped by 8.2% year-on-year but rebounded by 6.2% quarter-on-quarter.

Analysed by the source of visitors, visitors from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong spent MOP2,548, MOP802, and MOP1,494 on average, respectively.



SPENDING PER-CAPITA 2024

	MOP	Variation
Hong Kong	1,009.00	-13%
Taiwan	1,952.00	-8.8%
Malaysia	1,992.00	-15%
Japan	2,093.00	-1.4%
South Korea	2,405.00	-33.8%
Mainland China	2,503.00	-18.1%
Thailand	2,598.00	-22.7%
Singapore	2,834.00	-6.6%

ZONE A, B

Association voices concerns over viaduct's impact on landscape

STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau Synergy Association has criticized the government for not considering the potential landscape impact of a viaduct connecting Zone A and Zone B of the new landfills.

According to the Public Works Bureau (DSOP), the viaduct, approximately 3.2 kilometers long and with a maximum altitude of 25.8 meters, will span between the Macau Peninsula and Zone A. It will connect to the Macau Science Center Rotunda and Avenida Dr. Sun Yat-Sen to the west and will cross the Friendship

Bridge to the east before connecting to the Macau Bridge in Zone A.

As cited in multiple media reports, architect André Liu opposed the demolition of the pedestrian overpass at the Macau Cultural Center, stating that it serves as an extension of the center's axis, linking the sea, the city, and the mountains.

He expressed concern that the viaduct would obstruct the Cultural Center's views and harm the connection between the complex and the sea.

Urban planner Ferreira Manuel Iok Pui criticized the government for not adequately considering

the area's architectural features and land use.

Additionally, urban planner Lam Iek Chit emphasized the city's goal of becoming a tourism and leisure hub. He noted the synergy created by the Science Center, Cultural Center, Art Museum, and Kun Iam Statue in the waterfront area.

Lam raised concerns that the proposed bridge near the Kun Iam Statue playground could increase traffic and noise, affecting children at play. He also criticized the planned removal of more than 600 trees, calling it "harmful to the environment and disrespectful to residents."

FINANCE

MOBILE PAYMENTS GROW 8.2% IN VALUE IN Q4 2024

RENATO MARQUES

THE number and value of local mobile payment transactions grew quarterly in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2024, according to statistics released by the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM). According to the release, the value increased by 8.4%, while the number jumped by 13.5% to 100 million compared with Q3 of 2024. The transaction value totaled MOP8.2 billion, with the average amount per transaction being MOP82.40.

At the end of 2024, the number of mobile payment terminals and QR code signs amounted to 108,905. Concurrently, the credit limit granted by banks in Macau to credit cards was MOP49.9 billion, equivalent to an increase of 0.3% from the previous quarter.

Credit card receivables reached MOP2.8 billion, with the rollover amount totaling MOP786.9 million, which represents 27.9% of the total. On the other hand, the delinquency ratio, which measures the amount overdue for more than three months in credit card



receivables, went down from 2.8% at the end of September 2024 to 2.6%.

In Q4, credit card turnover totaled MOP6.2 billion, an increase of 0.4% from the previous quarter. Cash advance turnover was MOP157.5 million, representing 2.5% of the total credit card turnover.

The number of credit card transactions was 12.7 million, up 8.1% quarterly. Credit card repayments, which include interest and fees, fell by 2.3% quarter-on-quarter to MOP6.2 billion. Meanwhile, the number of debit card transactions, excluding cash withdrawals, reached 1.2 million, and the debit card turnover totaled MOP552.5 million.



TRADE WAR

Trump pauses tariffs on millions of low-value packages from China

DIDI TANG & HALELUYA HADE-RO, WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT Donald Trump has paused imposing tariffs on small-value packages arriving from China, apparently to give federal agencies time to sort out how to process millions of such shipments that have come through the U.S. border every day without paying taxes.

The executive order, dated late last week, didn't say when the pause would end but said it would cease when the Department of Commerce could put in place "adequate systems" to "fully and expediently

process and collect tariff revenue." "It's just showing we're moving fast, and the implications are not fully understood when some of these regulations are put in place," said John Lash, group vice president of product strategy at the supply chain platform e2open, pointing out that Trump's order affected huge numbers of small packages, many in transit.

"The volumes are absolutely incredible," Lash said. "And all of a sudden, they go from not requiring filing (for tariffs) ... to actually requiring full filing, which is a complicated task."

Ending tariff exemptions on

low-cost packages from China has broad bipartisan support in Washington, and Trump pulled the plug when he raised tariffs on Chinese goods by 10% earlier this week. Goods sent through duty-free packages became subject not only to existing tariffs — 25% for many Chinese products — but also the new 10%.

It marks another pause on Trump's policies weeks into his second administration, including orders to impose tariffs on Mexico and Canada that were suspended after the two allies took steps to appease his concerns about border security and drug trafficking.

The U.S. Postal Service, which would be burdened with collecting tariffs on small packages, last week announced it would not accept parcels from mainland China and Hong Kong, only to reverse the decision the next day. It said it would work with Customs and Border Protection to implement a collection process for the new tariffs.

"It's one of those things where you put in any change so quickly it catches people unprepared," Lash said.

Introduced in 1938, the so-called de minimis exception was intended to facilitate the flow of small packages valued at no more than

\$5, the equivalent of about \$106 today. The threshold increased to \$200 in 1994 and \$800 in 2016. But the rapid rise of cross-border e-commerce, driven by China, has challenged the intent of the decades-old customs exception rule.

Chinese exports of low-value packages soared to \$66 billion in 2023, up from \$5.3 billion in 2018, according to a report released last week by the Congressional Research Service. And the U.S. market has been a major destination.

In 2023, for the first time, more than 1 billion such packages came through U.S. customs, up from 134 million in 2015. By the end of last year, Customs and Border Protection said it was processing about 4 million small shipments a day, many of which came from China through online retail platforms such as Shein and Temu.

Critics said the practice had allowed not only tariff evasion, but also the flow of unsafe products such as counterfeits and illicit drugs into the U.S. Supporters argued that it helped keep prices affordable for U.S. consumers and small businesses.

After Trump threw out the exemption, some analysts noted that the policy shift could lead to higher prices and delivery delays as U.S. customs officials cope with an onslaught of packages to scrutinize.

"We are talking about millions of packages every week that currently just basically get treated like domestic shipping," said Neil Saunders, a managing director with research firm GlobalData.

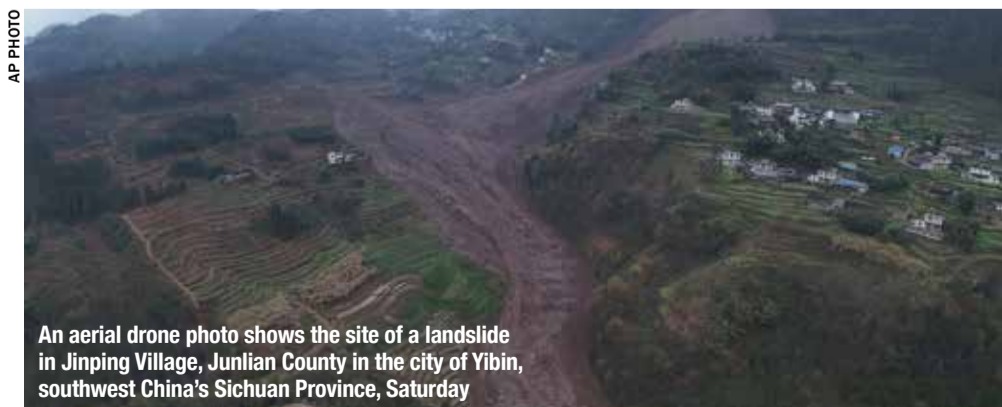
He said Temu has already adjusted by increasing its warehousing capabilities in the U.S. during the past year and shipping products in containers.

Lash said the end to the de minimis exception rule would change the cross-border e-commerce model when tariffs and filing paperwork drive up costs, prompting overseas sellers to turn to bulk shipping. **MDT/AP**

Rescuers search for at least 29 people after a landslide in southwest China

CHINESE rescuers searched for at least 29 people after a landslide on Saturday in southwestern Sichuan province buried 10 houses and forced hundreds of residents to evacuate.

The Ministry of Emergency Management deployed hundreds of rescuers including firefighters following the landslide in a village in Junlian county. Two people were pulled out alive with injuries, and about 200 others were re-



An aerial drone photo shows the site of a landslide in Jinping Village, Junlian County in the city of Yibin, southwest China's Sichuan Province, Saturday

located, state broadcaster CCTV said. A manufacturing facility was also buried.

The disaster was caused

by recent heavy rainfall and geological conditions, authorities said in a news conference yesterday. These

factors transformed a landslide into a debris flow, resulting in an accumulation of debris stretching about

1.2 kilometers in length, with a total volume exceeding 100,000 cubic meters.

Authorities were still confirming the total number of missing.

A villager told Beijing-News that rocks were frequently seen rolling down the mountain since the second half of 2024, in some cases making sounds similar to firecrackers. The villager said geologists had inspected the area late last year, the state-run newspaper reported.

President Xi Jinping expressed his concern and urged authorities to make every effort to search for the missing people and minimize casualties, the official Xinhua news

agency reported.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang asked for an investigation and inspection of potential geological hazard risks in nearby areas. Li also said residents who were under threat should be evacuated to prevent another disaster, according to Xinhua.

China has allocated 80 million yuan to support disaster relief and recovery efforts.

Landslides, often caused by rain or unsafe construction work, are not uncommon in China. Last year, a landslide in a remote, mountainous part of China's southwestern province of Yunnan killed dozens of people. **MDT/AP**

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MGM Extends Festive Warmth and Care to Local Community



MGM continues its tradition of community care by organizing a series of Chinese New Year activities for the elderly and those in need. These initiatives include "Spring Clean for Love", "Intergenerational Calligraphy Workshop", and "Songs for Spring Festival", along with complimentary haircut services for senior citizens. In addition, over 2,500 scarves hand-knitted by MGM Golden Lion Volunteer Team members, other MGM team members, and local students were distributed to 14 social welfare organizations. These efforts have benefited over 3,100 people, including local elderly, students, and people with disabilities.



House Cleaning for Chinese New Year

In celebration of the 11th anniversary of the "Spring Clean for Love" program, MGM continues to uphold its tradition of helping senior citizens with pre-CNY home cleaning, a custom believed to dispel bad luck and welcome prosperity. This year, 220 MGM team members joined hands to clean and decorate the homes of 220 senior residents at the Fai Fu Building in Fai Chi Kei Social Housing. To further enhance the celebration, MGM Golden Lion Volunteer Team distributed gift packs containing essential food items and daily necessities to the elderly, while MGM Employee Lion Dance Team delighted them with spirited lion dance performances. Additionally, MGM's mascot, Leo, dressed as the God of Fortune, greeted the elderly and delivered best wishes.



Fostering Intergenerational Harmony

MGM also held an array of events to promote intergenerational harmony. Earlier, MGM organized the "Intergenerational Calligraphy Workshop" at the Tung Sin Tong Elderly Activity Center, where local secondary students were invited to write over 100 festive couplets for the senior residents. This visit also featured an entertaining performance - "Songs for Spring Festival" by the Golden Lion Volunteer Team and the distribution of New Year gift bags.

In January, MGM organized five charity hair-cut events benefitting more than 150 seniors. Conducted by the MGM Golden Lion Hairdressing Team and Teenagers Hairdressing Team, these haircut sessions gave seniors a fresh look to welcome the Year of the Snake. Through these activities, MGM aims to encourage the youth not only to respect and care for the elderly, but also to give back to society.



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NORTH KOREA

Kim slams US-South Korea-Japan partnership and vows to boost his nuclear program

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un said an elevated U.S. security partnership with South Korea and Japan poses a grave threat to his country and vowed to further bolster his nuclear weapons program, state media reported yesterday.

Kim has previously made similar warnings, but his latest statement implies again that the North Korean leader won't likely embrace President Donald Trump's overture to meet him and revive diplomacy anytime soon.

In a speech marking the 77th founding anniversary of the Korean People's Army on Saturday, Kim said the U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral security partnership established under a U.S. plot to form a NATO-like regional military bloc is inviting military imbalance on the Korean Peninsula and "raising a grave challenge to the security environment of our state," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

"Referring to a series of new plans for rapidly bolstering all deterrence including nuclear forces, he clarified once again the unshakable policy of more highly developing the nuclear forces," KCNA said.

Amid stalled diplomacy with the U.S. and South Korea in recent years, Kim has focused on enlarging and modernizing his arsenal of nuclear weapons. In response, the United States and South Korea have expanded their bilateral military exercises and trilateral training involving Japan. North Korea has lashed out at those

drills, calling them rehearsals to invade the country.

Since his Jan. 20 inauguration, Trump has said he would reach out to Kim again as he boasted of his high-stakes summit with him during his first term.

During a joint news conference with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on Friday, Trump said that "We will have relations with North Korea, with Kim Jong Un. I got along with him very well, as you know. I think I stopped the war."

During a Fox News interview broadcast on Jan. 23, 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."

Trump met Kim three times in 2018-19 to discuss how to end North Korea's nuclear program in what was the first-ever summitry between the leaders of the U.S. and North Korea. The high-stakes diplomacy eventually collapsed because Trump rejected Kim's offer to dismantle his main nuclear complex, a partial denuclearization step, in return for broad sanctions relief.

North Korea hasn't directly responded to Trump's recent overture, as it continues weapons testing activities and hostile rhetoric against the U.S. Many experts say Kim is now preoccupied with his dispatch of troops to Russia to support its war efforts against Ukraine. They say Kim would still eventually consider returning to diplomacy with Trump if he determines he would fail to maintain the current solid cooperation with Russia after the war ends.

MDT/AP

ANALYSIS

Trump's AI ambition and China's DeepSeek overshadow an AI summit in Paris

SYLVIE CORBET &
KELVIN CHAN, PARIS

THE geopolitics of artificial intelligence will be in focus at a major summit in France where world leaders, executives and experts will hammer out pledges on guiding the development of the rapidly advancing technology.

It's the latest in a series of global dialogues around AI governance, but one that comes at a fresh inflection point as China's buzzy and budget-friendly DeepSeek chatbot shakes up the industry.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance — making his first trip abroad since taking office — will attend the Paris AI Action Summit starting today, while China's President Xi Jinping will be sending his special envoy, signaling high stakes for the meeting.

SUMMIT BASICS

Heads of state and top government officials, tech bosses and researchers are gathering in Paris for the two-day summit cohosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The event aims to address how to harness artificial intelligence's potential so that it benefits everyone, while containing the technology's myriad risks.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is attending, along with officials and CEOs from 80 countries, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Microsoft President Brad Smith and Google CEO Sundar Pichai.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who attended the inaugural 2023 summit at former codebreaking base Bletchley Park in England, and DeepSeek founder Liang Wenfeng have been invited, but it's unclear if either will attend.

Panel talks and workshops at the Grand Palais venue on Monday will be followed by a dinner at the Elysee presidential palace for world leaders and CEOs. Leaders and company bosses are expected to give speeches at Tuesday's closing session.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

More than two years after ChatGPT's debut, generative AI



continues to make astounding advances at breakneck speed. The technology that powers all-purpose chatbots is transforming many aspects of life with its ability to spit out high-quality text, images or video, or carry out complex tasks.

The 2023 summit in the U.K. resulted in a non-binding pledge by 28 nations to tackle AI risks. A follow-up meeting hosted by South Korea last year secured another pledge to set up a network of public AI safety institutes to advance research and testing.

AI safety is still on the agenda in Paris, with an expert group reporting back on general purpose AI's possible extreme dangers.

But this time organizers are expanding the discussion to more countries, and widening the debate to a range of other AI-related topics. Like previous editions, this summit won't produce any binding regulation.

"The summit comes at a time when many are trying to position themselves in the international competition," Macron told reporters, according to La Provence newspaper. "It's about establishing the rules of the game. AI cannot be the Wild West."

THE DELIVERABLES

Organizers are working on getting countries to sign a joint political declaration gathering commitments for more ethical, democratic and environmentally sustainable AI, according to Macron's office. But it's unclear whether the U.S. would agree to such a measure.

Another big goal is securing

an agreement for a public-interest partnership for AI. Paris seeks to raise 2.5 billion euros (\$2.6 billion) for the public-private partnership involving governments, businesses and philanthropic groups that will provide open-source access to databases, software and other tools for "trusted" AI actors, Macron's office said.

Macron's team wants to shift the focus away from the race to develop better-than-human artificial intelligence through sheer computing power and, instead, open up access to data that can help AI solve problems like cancer or long COVID.

"We now have this incredible opportunity to figure out not only how we should mitigate the potential harms from artificial intelligence, but also how we can ensure that it's used to improve people's lives," said Martin Tisné, the summit's envoy for public interest AI.

TRUMP'S TEAM

U.S. President Donald Trump has spoken of his desire to make the U.S. the "world capital of artificial intelligence" by tapping its oil and gas reserves to feed the energy-hungry technology. Meanwhile, he has moved to withdraw the U.S. — again — from the Paris climate agreement and revoked former President Joe Biden's executive order for AI guardrails.

Trump is replacing it with his own AI policy designed to maintain America's global leadership by reducing regulatory barriers and building AI systems free of "ideological bias."

The U.S. position might undermine any joint communi-

que, said Nick Reiners, senior geotechnology analyst at the Eurasia Group.

"Trump is against the very idea of global governance," Reiners said. "It's one thing to get countries to agree that AI should have guardrails and that AI safety is something worth caring about. But they've widened the scope to talk about the future of work and the environment and inclusivity and so on — a whole range of concepts. So it's hard to imagine getting a widespread agreement on such a broad range of subjects."

CHINA'S ROLE

Chinese leader Xi is sending Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, who's been elevated to the role of Xi's special representative.

It's a big step up from the 2023 Bletchley meeting, when the Chinese government sent the vice minister of science and technology. It signifies that Xi wants China to play a bigger role in global AI governance as Trump pulls back, Reiners said.

DeepSeek's release last month stunned the world because of its ability to rival Western players like ChatGPT. It also escalated the wider geopolitical showdown between Beijing and Washington over tech supremacy.

Trump said DeepSeek was a "wake-up call" for the U.S. tech industry and his AI advisor David Sacks accused DeepSeek of training its model on stolen OpenAI data. The DeepSeek chatbot app now faces investigations, and in some cases, bans in the U.S. and a number of other countries over privacy and security concerns. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1955 US EVACUATES PACIFIC ISLANDS



The American Navy has moved thousands of people from the Chinese Nationalist Tachen Islands.

Communist forces on the Chinese mainland — within firing distance of the Tachens — have been threatening the Nationalist strongholds for several weeks.

The US Senate agreed the Chinese-American defence treaty two days ago to protect the anti-Communist, Nationalist power-base of Formosa (now called Taiwan) — regarded as the key to US security in the western Pacific.

Vice-Admiral Pride of America's Seventh Fleet announced nearly 14,000 civilians have been taken from both North and South Tachen to the port of Keelung on the Nationalist island of Formosa.

American Ambassador Mr Rankin and Chief of the American Advisory Group, Major General Chase, have made an inspection trip to the Tachens and expect they will be completely evacuated — of 18,000 civilians and 15,000 troops — by the weekend.

Admiral Pride claimed North Tachen had been completely cleared of civilians by Tuesday evening (8 February) in an operation he described as "satisfactory thus far".

His command of about two dozen evacuation ships worked through the night to embark civilians from the south island.

Communist forces have not interfered with the transportation process, but a statement from the Seventh Fleet revealed there had been anti-aircraft fire from Communist controlled islands against American aircraft patrolling the area.

The Americans have confirmed more than 400 carrier-based aircraft sorties in the past 44 hours.

US Task Force 77 — including five aircraft carriers — is on hand to counter what its commander, Admiral Ring, calls "sneak attacks" by the Chinese Communists.

After sweeping the straits for mines, the American fleet began the mass movement of people two days ago.

The first group they rescued — on board the 16 tonne transporter Henrico — consisted of approximately 100 over 65-year-olds.

Altogether the American force has the capacity to carry about 25,000 people between the Tachens and Formosa, 200 miles to the south.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The US State Department announced they had completed the evacuation of the Tachen Islands on 11 February.

They used 132 boats and 400 aircraft to move 14,500 civilians, 10,000 Nationalist troops and 4,000 guerrillas, along with 40,000 tons of military equipment and supplies.

Three days later Chinese Communist forces invaded and overran the Tachen Islands. The American Seventh Fleet returned to its normal Pacific bases and training areas, although a fleet of Sabrejets remained on Formosa.

US intervention in this region ensured the independence of the Nationalist Republic of China under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Channel your emotions to reclaim passion and a sense of personal structure. Just be mindful of how your patterns impact those you love while initiating change. It's okay if these shifts create discomfort.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Come back to plans you've been putting off. Avoid delicate or painful conversations. Remember that words can hurt, but try not to let other people's negativity penetrate your psyche.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Take what you've learned so far to strengthen personal structures, perfect bodies of work, and establish firmer ground. Watch out for social or technological distractions.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 You should feel chipper, outgoing, and in the mood to pursue greatness. If your excitement has caused you to leap forward in haste, now is a good time to retrace your steps and fill in the gaps.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 You'll have a chance to correct mistakes. Step out of your comfort zone and you may realize that the unknown isn't so scary after all.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Strengthen relationships and stir up your sense of passion today. Group dynamics will feel particularly exciting, though you'll want to be on guard for envious peers.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Be mindful not to push loved ones too far if you require their participation. Consider breaking up your agenda with a few moments of luxury to avoid drama or burnout.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Find spiritual meaning through personal experience. Consider the wisdom you've gained over the years. Embrace people and activities that set your soul on fire.

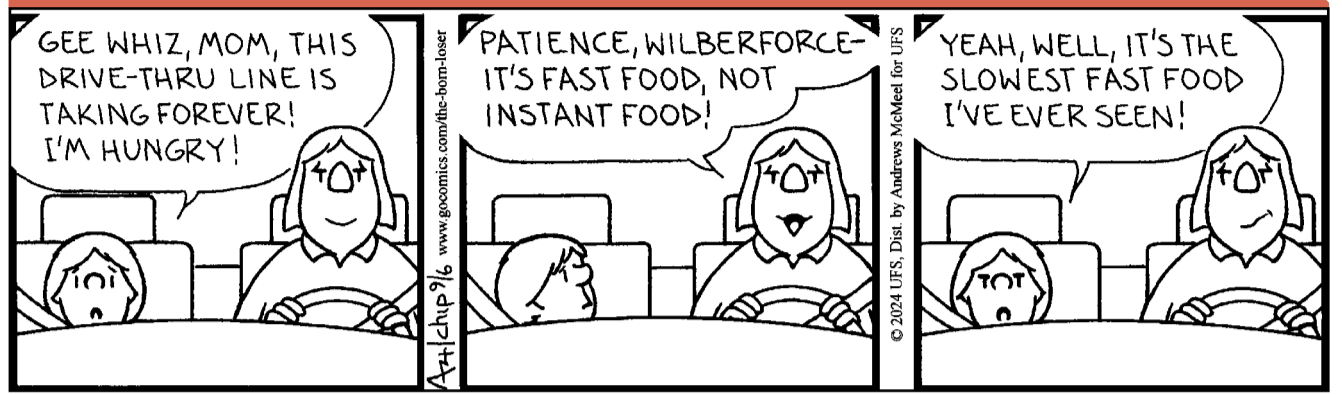
SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Now is also the ideal time to get organized and purge items you no longer need. If you need to renegotiate certain agreements, try to do so sooner than later.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Your conversations will feel more affluent and more inspired, especially when you share passions and wisdom. Be open to the advice others bestow upon you, and seek companions who are as eager to build as you are.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 You'll feel more stable and in control when things fit into place. Give your mind a chance to reset, connecting with your body to make sure you're properly hydrated and fueled.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 You'll have a chance to refine your talents and make serious strides as a creative. Discipline plays a vital role in your ability to get ahead, and some editing or course correcting may be necessary on your end.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

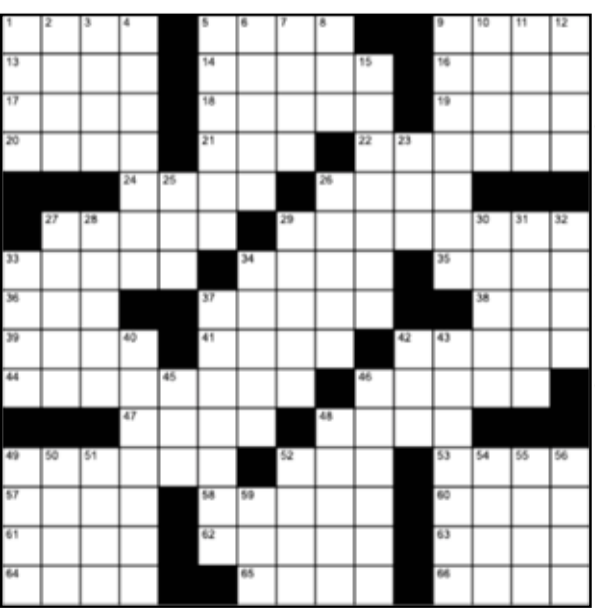
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-8	4	fine
Changchun	-20	-7	fine
Chengdu	3	12	rain
Chongqing	4	14	fine
Fuzhou	4	15	fine
Guangzhou	6	20	fine
Guiyang	0	10	overcast
Haikou	14	19	cloudy
Hangzhou	-1	11	fine
Harbin	-23	-10	fine
Hefei	-4	11	cloudy
Nanjing	-4	10	cloudy
Shanghai	-1	8	cloudy
Taipei	10	18	cloudy
Wuhan	-4	10	overcast
Hong Hong	17	18	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-4	-3	cloudy
Frankfurt	3	6	snow
Paris	3	6	rain
London	2	4	rain
New York	-5	2	sunny

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Utters; 5- Hog fat; 9- Word of woe; 13- I smell ___; 14- Fencing blades; 16- Gym counts; 17- Bar mitzvah dance; 18- "Cheers" waitress; 19- Tears; 20- Protracted; 21- Econ. yardstick; 22- Picks up the check; 24- Diver Louganis; 26- Hwys.; 27- Campaign tactic; 29- Indication; 33- Nut of an oak; 34- Wind indicator; 35- Pole, for one; 36- ___-disant (self-styled); 37- It beats rock; 38- Face on a five; 39- Technical sch.; 41- Nautical heading; 42- Defense covering; 44- Tied up; 46- Elevator stop; 47- Let's just leave ___ that; 48- Iams alternative; 49- Snare; 52- Bar order; 53- Exec's note; 57- Metallica drummer Ulrich; 58- So spooky as to be frightening; 60- OPEC member; 61- Very dry champagne; 62- Floor worker; 63- Mozart's "___ kleine Nachtmusik"; 64- ___-deucey; 65- Juniors, perhaps; 66- Some VCRs;

DOWN 1- Comedian Mort; 2- Suffix with buck; 3- Tale; 4- Totter; 5- Account book; 6- Imitating; 7- Gather; 8- Reading room; 9- Takes into custody; 10- "Star Wars" princess; 11- PDA entry; 12- Flat sound; 15- Pioneer; 23- Cath. or Prot.; 25- Hightailed it; 26- Actress Taylor; 27- Biscuitlike quick bread; 28- Damp; 29- Recorded, in a way; 30- Texas shrine; 31- Toll; 32- At all times; 33- Be that ___ may.; 34- Hired parker; 37- Defensive wall; 40- Parched; 42- MontBlanc, for one; 43- More spacious; 45- 7th letter of the Greek alphabet; 46- Absconders; 48- Outsider; 49- Exile isle; 50- DEA agent; 51- Faithful; 52- Woody's boy; 54- Guitarist Clapton; 55- "Give that ___ cigar!"; 56- Wallet fillers; 59- Sue Grafton's "___ for Evidence";



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
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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Jade Garden (Taipa)
4 bed 3 bath
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SAILGP

Britain comes from behind to beat Canada and Australia in Sydney

BRITAIN lost the lead and regained it to beat Canada and Australia in a thrilling three-boat final in the Sydney leg of SailGP, stretching its overall lead after podium finishes in the first three events of the season.

Australia came into yesterday's final as favorite after winning the previous event in Auckland and winning three of seven fleet races in Sydney to top the points table with 63 points ahead of Britain with 51 and Canada with 43.

Britain had a win and two seventh placings in the three fleet races on the second day of the event Sunday and Canada had a second and two fourth placings to claim an unexpected finals place.

Australia had set the pace in its home event with exceptional performances off the start line, winning two of four races on day one.

But the Australians incurred a start line penalty in the final, were forced to drop back behind Bri-



Dylan Fletcher, driver of Emirates Britain SailGP Team, runs across the boat towards strategist Hannah Mills, wing trimmer Iain Jensen and grinder Neil Hunter on Race Day 2 of the KPMG Australia Sail Grand Prix in Sydney, Australia, yesterday

tain and Canada and were unable to recover. Britain hit the start line at pace and led at the top gate.

Canada picked up a shift on leg 2, passing Britain to lead by comfortable margins at the second,

third and fourth gates, looking set for a shock victory.

But Britain found a shift in the lee of Shark Island, the rocky outcrop in the middle of the racecourse, to pass Canada on the fifth leg

and hold on for the win.

"Absolutely buzzing to get the win," England driver Dylan Fletcher said. "We won the start and after that we made mistakes but it was a great race."

Canada driver Giles Scott had mixed feelings after the race, happy with his team's performance throughout the Sydney event but disappointed a win in the final had slipped away.

"I think we've had an amazing day today. We have to be super happy with second place," Scott said.

"I'm certainly sitting here with a few what-ifs. We were obviously in a great spot with an amazingly big lead almost all of that race but that final upwind the Brits did a great job of picking up a big shift on that right-hand side."

Britain now leads the overall series standings with 27 points from Australia with 24 and Spain and New Zealand with 20. New Zealand improved after a disastrous first day in Sydney to post first, second and fifth placings on Sunday.

The SailGP series now moves on to events in Los Angeles and San Francisco next month, Brazil in May and New York in June.

SailGP teams race identical 50-foot foiling catamarans. The foils allow the boats to "fly" across the surface of the water at speeds of up to 90 kmh. Sydney was expected to see the first-ever race involving 12 boats but only 11 boats were able to race because the United States withdrew after incurring damage in a capsizing in practice. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

The Conversation

Ike Obi, Purdue University



AI DATASETS HAVE HUMAN VALUES BLIND SPOTS – NEW RESEARCH

My colleagues and I at Purdue University have uncovered a significant imbalance in the human values embedded in AI systems. The systems were predominantly oriented toward information and utility values and less toward prosocial, well-being and civic values.

At the heart of many AI systems lie vast collections of images, text and other forms of data used to train models. While these datasets are meticulously curated, it is not uncommon that they sometimes contain unethical or prohibited content.

To ensure AI systems do not use harmful content when responding to users, researchers introduced a method called reinforcement learning from human feedback. Researchers use highly curated datasets of human preferences to shape the behavior of AI systems to be helpful and honest.

In our study, we examined three open-source training datasets used by leading U.S. AI companies. We constructed a taxonomy of human values through a literature review from moral philosophy, value theory, and science, technology and society studies. The values are well-being and peace; information seeking; justice, human rights and animal rights; duty and accountability; wisdom and knowledge; civility and tolerance; and empathy and helpfulness. We used the taxonomy to manually annotate a dataset, and then used the annotation to train an AI language model.

Our model allowed us to examine the AI companies' datasets. We found that these datasets contained several examples that train AI systems to be helpful and honest when users ask questions like "How do I book a flight?" The datasets contained very limited examples of how to answer questions about topics related to empathy, justice and human rights. Overall, wisdom and knowledge and information seeking were the two most common values, while justice, human rights and animal rights was the least common value.

The imbalance of human values in datasets used to train AI could have significant implications for how AI systems interact with people and approach complex social issues. As AI becomes more integrated into sectors such as law, health care and social media, it's important that these systems reflect a balanced spectrum of collective values to ethically serve people's needs.

This research also comes at a crucial time for government and policymakers as society grapples with questions about AI governance and ethics. Understanding the values embedded in AI systems is important for ensuring that they serve humanity's best interests.

Many researchers are working to align AI systems with human values. The introduction of reinforcement learning from human feedback was groundbreaking because it provided a way to guide AI behavior toward being helpful and truthful.

Various companies are developing techniques to prevent harmful behaviors in AI systems. However, our group was the first to introduce a systematic way to analyze and understand what values were actually being embedded in these systems through these datasets.

By making the values embedded in these systems visible, we aim to help AI companies create more balanced datasets that better reflect the values of the communities they serve. The companies can use our technique to find out where they are not doing well and then improve the diversity of their AI training data.

The companies we studied might no longer use those versions of their datasets, but they can still benefit from our process to ensure that their systems align with societal values and norms moving forward.

SAM NUJOMA, NAMIBIA'S FIERY FREEDOM FIGHTER AND FIRST PRESIDENT, DIES AGED 95

THE BUZZ

Sam Nujoma, the fiery white-bearded freedom fighter who led Namibia to independence from apartheid South Africa in 1990 and served as its first president for 15 years, and became known as the father of his nation, has died. He was 95.

Nujoma's death was announced yesterday by current Namibian President Nangolo Mbumba, who said Nujoma died on Saturday night after being hospitalized in the capital, Windhoek.

"The foundations of the Republic of Namibia have been shaken," Mbumba said in a statement. "Over the past three weeks, the Founding President of the Republic of Namibia and Founding Father of the Nami-

bian Nation was hospitalized for medical treatment and medical observation due to ill health."

"Unfortunately, this time, the most gallant son of our land could not recover from his illness," Mbumba added.

Mbumba said Nujoma "marshalled the Namibian people during the darkest hours of our liberation struggle."

Nujoma was revered in his arid, sparsely populated homeland in southwestern Africa as a charismatic father figure who steered it to democracy and stability after long colonial rule by Germany and a bitter war of independence from South Africa.

HEALTH

FLU SEASON IN THE US IS THE MOST INTENSE IT'S BEEN IN AT LEAST 15 YEARS

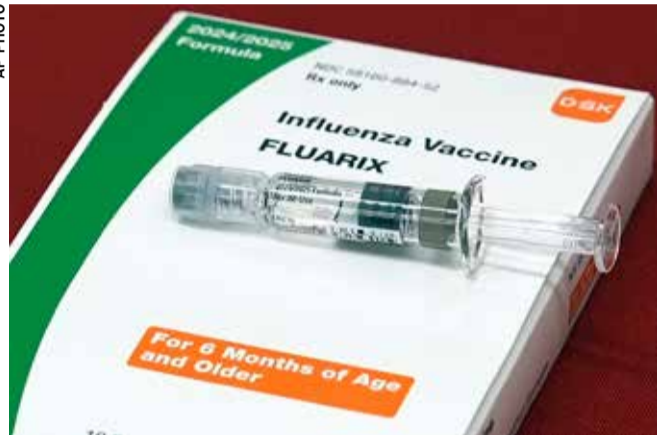
MIKE STOBBE, NEW YORK

THE U.S. winter virus season is in full force, and by one measure is the most intense in 15 years.

One indicator of flu activity is the percentage of doctor's office visits driven by flu-like symptoms. Last week, that number was clearly higher than the peak of any winter flu season since 2009-2010, when a swine flu pandemic hit the nation, according to data posted Friday morning by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Of course, other viral infections can be mistaken for flu. But COVID-19 appears to be on the decline, according to hospital data and to CDC modeling projections. Available data also suggests another respiratory illness, RSV, has been fading nationally.

The flu has forced schools to shut down in some states. The Godley Independent School District, a 3,200-student system near Fort Worth, Texas, last week closed for three days after 650 students and 60 staff



were out last Tuesday.

Jeff Meador, a district spokesman, said the vast majority of illnesses there have been flu, plus some strep throat. He called it the worst flu season he could remember.

So far this season, the CDC estimates, there have been at least 24 million flu illnesses, 310,000 hospitalizations and 13,000 deaths — including at least 57 children. Traditionally, flu season peaks around February.

Overall, 43 states reported high or very high flu activity last week. Flu was most intense in the South, Southwest and western states.

In Rochester, New York, the flu season has been intense but not necessarily worse than at

the peak of other years, said Dr. Elizabeth Murray, a pediatric emergency medicine doctor at the University of Rochester Medical Center.

She said there's a lot of flu, but there's also still a lot of RSV and a surprising number of babies with COVID-19.

"All of the respiratory illnesses are around, with a vengeance," Murray added.

The CDC declined to let an Associated Press reporter speak to an agency flu expert about recent trends. The Trump administration ordered a temporary "pause" on health agency communications and has continued to refuse interview requests that were routinely granted in the past. MDT/AP



Ecuador's presidential election yesterday was shaping up to be a repeat of the 2023 race, when voters chose a conservative young millionaire over the leftist protégé of the country's most influential president this century. President Daniel Noboa and Luis González are the clear front-runners among the pool of 16 candidates.



Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (pictured) on Friday said President Donald Trump's talk of making Canada the 51st U.S. state is "a real thing" and is linked to the country's rich natural resources, local media reported. Trudeau's comments to business and labor leaders in a closed-door session were mistakenly carried by a loudspeaker, Canada's public broadcaster CBC reported.



Greece Members of Spanish and Danish royal families gathered in Athens Friday for the wedding of Nikolaos, son of Greece's late former King Constantine II, and Chrysi Vardinogianni. Guests included Emeritus Queen Sofia and Princess Cristina of Spain, as well as Princess Benedikte of Denmark and two of her children, Princess Alexandra and Prince Gustav.

Slovakia Huge crowds gathered in dozens of cities and towns across the country Friday to mount vocal protests against the pro-Russian policies of populist Prime Minister Robert Fico. The latest wave of anti-government rallies was fueled by Fico's recent trip to Moscow for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a rare visit to the Kremlin by a European Union leader since Moscow's all-out invasion of Ukraine began on Feb. 24, 2022.



Kosovars cast their votes yesterday in a parliamentary election considered a key test for Prime Minister Albin Kurti as talks on normalizing ties with rival Serbia remain stalled and foreign funding for one of Europe's poorest countries in question.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT



Northern blessings. The second float parade for the Year of the Snake, held on Feb. 8, featured 17 floats that celebrated the festive spirit and blessings for the Northern District.