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PAY RAISE FOR CIVIL SERVANTS NOT EXPECTED, LAWMAKER COUTINHO SAYS

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CHINA SAYS A VISIT BY COOK ISLANDS' PM NOT MEANT TO ANTAGONIZE SOUTH PACIFIC NATIONS

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XINHUA



China A landslide in Sichuan province killed one person and buried homes, with 28 still missing yesterday. Nearly 1,000 rescuers are using drones and life-detection radars despite ongoing rainfall and further collapses. Authorities blame heavy rains and geological conditions for the disaster.

China Two retired Chinese officials were sentenced for leaking state secrets to a foreign intelligence agency under the guise of consulting, China Daily reported yesterday. Authorities yesterday said espionage targeting retirees has increased, and warn that national security laws require strict confidentiality even after leaving government roles.

AP PHOTO



Egypt The Aga Khan IV was laid to rest in Aswan, Egypt, near his grandfather. A private ceremony followed a Lisbon service attended by world leaders. His son, Rahim Al-Hussaini, now leads the Ismaili Muslim community, which spans over 30 countries and emphasizes philanthropy.

AP PHOTO



Israeli police raided a Palestinian bookstore in east Jerusalem, detaining owners and confiscating books deemed to incite violence. The store, known for intellectual discourse, was shut down. Tensions remain high amid the Israel-Hamas war and continued Israeli military operations in the West Bank.

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ECONOMY

PEREIRA COUTINHO CLAIMS ECONOMY IS NOT AS STRONG AS THE GOV'T SUGGESTS

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKER José Pereira Coutinho believes the actual state of the local economy is not as positive as the government has been portraying.

He argues that this situation calls for greater intervention from the Legislative Assembly (AL) members to enhance their oversight efforts.

Pereira Coutinho's comments were made during an interview with the media on the sidelines of the AL Spring Lunch yesterday afternoon at the MGM Macau.

Addressing priorities for the new government led by Sam Hou Fai, the lawmaker said, "We need measures that can increase employment. We are extremely dependent on gambling revenue, and investments made in the non-gaming sector have not been effective in terms of hiring, creating new jobs, and boosting revenue for other economic activities. We must do much more to build confidence in Macau's future."

According to the government, the city's economy is on track for continued recovery, driven by sustainable tourism, rising non-gaming



RENATO MARQUES

investments, and a stable financial system.

However, for Coutinho, the economy is "not in good shape."

"Unemployment is high, inflation is skyrocketing, and

the inflation rate [announced] doesn't reflect the reality people are facing," he added.

Government data shows that Macau's inflation rate for 2024 was 0.74%, a decrease of 0.2 percentage points from

2023's 0.94%.

Price indices for essential goods, like food and non-alcoholic beverages, increased by 1.1%, but lower prices for items like pork and edible oils partially offset the rise. Housing and fuel costs grew by 0.45%, while transport costs dropped by 3.26%.

Additionally, it's becoming increasingly difficult to find a job in Macau.

The lawmaker noted that many young graduates have been searching for their first job for two or more years, which he believes is a serious issue.

"It's not easy because, as you know, the civil service isn't hiring anymore, with a few exceptions, and the six gaming concessionaires are not looking to hire more staff either. We will soon face another major problem with the satellite casinos, a matter that was addressed in the past but remains unresolved."

He pointed out that if the satellite casinos close permanently, tens of thousands of jobs could be lost—not only in the casinos but also in the surrounding areas where they operate.

"The restaurants and other

services surrounding the satellite casinos, which mostly operate in the city center, are at risk. This issue must be addressed. The only solution I see is to extend the deadline [for the closure of casinos not owned by license holders] for another three years to allow time to find long-term solutions," he explained.

PAY RAISE FOR CIVIL SERVANTS NOT EXPECTED

When questioned about his expectations regarding a potential pay raise for civil servants in the 2025 Policy Address, Pereira Coutinho said he doesn't expect one. "It seems the Secretary [for Economy and Finance] is hesitant about adjusting the salaries of civil servants, claiming concern over causing waves in society," the lawmaker said, though he expressed that such an adjustment is necessary and justifiable, given the growing loss of purchasing power due to rising prices of essential goods and services.

AL ELECTIONS

'New Hope' expects to lose one lawmaker

RENATO MARQUES

DIRECTLY elected lawmaker José Pereira Coutinho says that the "New Hope" (Nova Esperança) group, which he represents, is expecting to lose one seat in the Legislative Assembly (AL) after this year's elections.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of the AL Spring Lunch yesterday, the lawmaker noted that it is getting harder to compete for the directly elected seats at

the AL and that he expects his group, supported by the Macao Public Servants Association (ATFPM), to be able to elect one lawmaker in the upcoming elections.

"We're analyzing; the changes are drastic, and there are already movements in society in terms of gifts, trips, and so on [by other groups]. And I believe that holding a seat for the New Hope list would already be an excellent result for the next AL elections," he said.



RENATO MARQUES

He added that there is also ongoing "unfair treatment" by the Chinese channels of the public broadcaster TDM, which has been giving preference to other lawmakers to

speak on both radio and TV programs.

When questioned on whether this leading role would continue to be held by Pereira Coutinho or poten-

tially move to Rita Santos, the lawmaker said that it is still to be decided by the board of directors of ATFPM, which he stated would be holding a meeting this Friday to dis-

cuss the matter.

Almost certain is the stepping down from the post of the current lawmaker Che Sai Wang. On the matter, Pereira Coutinho added that to represent a broader range of people, someone must have a deep knowledge of both Western and Eastern cultures and be proficient in both official languages. "It's important to have a voice in the AL, a voice that is fluent in Portuguese and Chinese. This is extremely important because they are both official languages. [The seat] will be for whoever the ATFPM board decides. I have fulfilled this duty since 2005 and have already completed five terms."

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For subscription and general issues: general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

AL

Kou Hoi In marks 2024 as the busiest legislative year

RENATO MARQUES

THE president of the Legislative Assembly (AL), Kou Hoi In, stated that 2024 is the legislative year with the busiest agenda. Kou made these remarks in a speech at yesterday's AL Spring Lunch.

"2024 is the year when the AL has had its most overloaded agenda. Nevertheless, all the lawmakers, with an active and pragmatic attitude in performing their duties, have fulfilled their responsibilities according to the law, with a strong sense of mission and responsibility," the president said.

"They have worked collaboratively with the government, fostering positive interaction and frank cooperation. As a result, the efficiency and effectiveness of this Chamber have improved, ensuring that all work is carried out in a solid, orderly, and stable manner," he added.

Reviewing the most notable laws approved by the AL over the past year, Kou highlighted legislation related to national security,



RENATO MARQUES

including the Legal Regime for the Control of Weapons and Related Items, which he described as providing a solid legal foundation for strengthening national security defense, preventing and resolving

risks, and ensuring the stable implementation of the 'One country, two systems' principle in Macau.

Kou also highlighted 2024 as the year of effective implementation of the principle of "Macau gover-

ned by patriots," which saw further progress in amending regulations related to the elections for the Chief Executive (CE) post and the AL.

This work also expanded to include the law regarding Oaths of

Office.

"The approval of these three legislative initiatives was crucial to ensure, on one hand, that the election of the sixth CE was successfully concluded under the terms of the law in 2024 and, on the other hand, to establish a disciplinary framework for the upcoming elections of the eighth AL to be held this year," Kou said.

Looking ahead, the president stated that this year marks the end of the current legislative term, which concludes in August, and the beginning of the new CE and government term. He noted that these factors imply that "the upcoming work will be even more intense."

Kou noted that the plenary has already approved nine bills and one draft resolution in the first reading, which the three Standing Committees are currently debating.

As is known, bills cannot transition from one legislative term to another, meaning these works must be completed before the end of the current term; otherwise, the bills must be dropped and resubmitted at a later stage.

Kou also anticipated significant work regarding the new government's presentation of its first Policy Address. The address will include seven sessions at the AL and the first two at the CE, followed by extended (eight-hour) sessions with each of the five sectorial secretaries.

AL ELECTIONS

Ron Lam has not decided on candidacy renewal

SPEAKING to the Times, Ron Lam, a directly elected lawmaker representing the Association of Synergy of Macao, said he has not yet decided whether to run for the post again. According to Lam, many factors, such as the balance between work and family, must be considered before a final decision is made.

When questioned on the matter, he did not exclude the possibility of the same group continuing to present a candidacy for the lawmaker post but with a different leader.

However, he left this decision for future evaluation within the association. The Synergy of Macao was first announced in 2017 by Lam, a former member of the Macao Federation of Trade Unions, along



with retired senior civil servant Vitor da Rocha Vai, former editor of Macao Daily News Johnson Ian, and the then vice-convener of the Northern District Community Service Consultative Committee Ho Chong Chun.

Also, lawmaker Lo Choi In expressed confidence in the compe-

tiveness of this year's elections but emphasized the importance of maintaining communication between the government and residents. With a team of 13 to 14 candidates, her group is hopeful for improved results and continued success in future elections, said Lo. **RM**

LYNZY VALLES



AL ELECTIONS

WONG KIT CHENG ADVOCATES FOR GREATER FEMALE REPRESENTATION

LAWMAKER Wong Kit Cheng has voiced her commitment to increasing female representation in the Legislative Assembly (AL), emphasizing the need for more women in politics to better protect the rights and interests of women and families.

In an interview yesterday on the sidelines of the AL Spring Lunch, Wong discussed her dedication to promoting family services and family rights, stressing that her team's continued presence in the AL is vital to advancing these causes.

"We hope to see more women in the AL so that we can better protect women's rights and interests. As a representative, I aim to invest more in promoting family services and family rights," Wong said. "We need more lawmakers in the AL to advoca-

te for women, children, and families."

As vice-chairman of the Women's General Association of Macau, Wong emphasized that an increased number of female lawmakers would provide a stronger focus on the issues affecting women, children, and families.

While championing women's and children's rights, Wong also underlined the need for sustainable development across the region, ensuring the well-being of all citizens.

"We are deeply concerned about people's livelihoods. Women's and children's rights are our top priority, but the development of all of Macau involves thousands of families. We must address the sustainable development of the entire SAR," she said. **LV**

MIXOLOGIST TRAINING PROGRAM LAUNCHED TO BOOST TOURISM SECTOR CAREERS

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and SJM Resorts, Ltd. have unveiled the "SJM Resorts Talent Mixologist Development Plan," aimed at enhancing local human resources and diversifying career paths in the tourism and leisure sector. Starting today, the initiative offers 10 mixology steward positions on a "hire first, then train" basis, providing extensive training and internship opportunities over 24 months.

VINCENT U APPOINTED TO IAEE CHINA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Vincent U, president of Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPI), has been named to the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) China Board of Directors, becoming the sole representative from Hong Kong and Macau in the global exhibition industry body. The IAEE, a leading global organization in the exhibition industry, includes over 20,000 members worldwide. IPI stated that the new China Steering Committee aims to enhance collaboration within the Chinese exhibition sector, promote best practices, and support sustainable industry growth.

EMIRATES AIRLINE CONSIDERED FOR DIRECT FLIGHTS TO MACAU

The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) will kick off a promotional campaign in the United Arab Emirates next month, according to director Helena de Senna Fernandes, as reported by Va Kio. The initiative aims to enhance travel promotions and encourage Emirates Airline to consider a direct flight to Macau, similar to its service to Hong Kong. Additionally, MGTO plans to participate in tourism fairs in Saudi Arabia and Berlin and conduct promotional trips to Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia.

TAXI DRIVER'S DEATH HIGHLIGHTS HEALTH CONCERNS IN INDUSTRY

Kuok Leong Son, chairman of the Taxi Drivers' Mutual Association, has stressed the importance of providing medical support for occupational health issues, urging drivers to prioritize their well-being despite concerns over illness. This follows the tragic death of a taxi driver who crashed into a guardrail while off duty, reportedly feeling unwell before the incident. The tragedy has underscored the need for greater health awareness within the taxi industry. Many drivers, citing financial pressures, delay regular physical check-ups, often only seeking medical attention once symptoms become severe.

LYNZY VALLES



ROAD TRAFFIC

ELLA LEI ADVOCATES FOCUSING ON ROAD SAFETY OVER PENALTIES FOR PEDESTRIANS AND DRIVERS

LYNZY VALLES

LAWMAKER Ella Lei has affirmed that the committee is focused on improving road design to prevent accidents during the ongoing discussions regarding the revision of the Road Traffic Law.

Speaking to the press on the sidelines of the Legislative Assembly's (AL) Spring Lunch yesterday, Lei, who chairs the First Standing Committee of the AL, pointed out that certain road features, such as poorly designed zebra crossings and blind spots caused by curved roads, can contribute to traffic accidents.

"When an accident occurs, we need to examine the road design thoroughly," Lei explained. "If we

find that issues like visual blind spots or poorly placed crossings are involved, it is essential to make corrections to prevent further incidents."

Along with road design, the lawmaker emphasized the importance of public awareness campaigns to improve road safety.

"Drivers may not always be familiar with new roads or specific traffic conditions, especially tourists who are not accustomed to the streets," she said.

"At the same time, pedestrians also need to be more cautious. It's not just about drivers—pedestrians must also pay attention, especially when crossing streets without looking."

In terms of legal reforms, Lei hi-

ghlighted the ongoing deliberation of amendments to the Road Traffic Law in the committee, of which she is the president.

She explained that although the new government has brought a change in leadership, the discussions are progressing.

"We have already talked about some key principles, such as the demerit points system and other significant aspects. Now, we are waiting for both the government and committee to fine-tune the technical details," Lei noted. "Once we have a clearer understanding, we'll invite the government to attend the next meeting to discuss further."

The lawmaker also addressed

concerns raised by the public regarding the current traffic regulations.

A contentious issue has been the different legal consequences for pedestrians and drivers involved in traffic violations.

"There is a feeling in the community that the penalties for pedestrians who break the law—such as crossing the street at the wrong time—are less severe than those for drivers," Lei stated.

"Some believe this creates an imbalance, and we need to carefully examine this issue to ensure fairness."

Although Lei acknowledged the need for stronger deterrents, she emphasized that the primary focus should be on improving safety for both pedestrians and drivers.

"It's important that we don't just focus on penalties but also on creating a safer environment for everyone on the road," she said. "In the upcoming amendments, there will likely be provisions aimed at improving pedestrian safety, particularly in terms of road crossing behavior and mobile phone use while walking."

Another area of concern for Lei is the rise in pedestrian-related accidents. While she understands the importance of penalties, Lei pointed out that the law must also address how pedestrians use the road.

"If a pedestrian crosses the street without looking, especially while distracted by their mobile phone, it can be dangerous for both them and the driver."

The law must account for these behaviors, and education campaigns should also be part of the solution."

"We need to ensure that drivers and the industry as a whole are more proactive in preventing accidents. It is not just about reacting after an incident occurs but also about preventing these situations in the first place," she said.

GAMING

Casino revenue growth forecast slashed by Citi amid US tariff impact

VICTORIA CHAN

CITIGROUP has sharply reduced its 2025 growth forecast for Macau casino gross gaming revenue (GGR), citing disappointing Chinese New Year (CNY) gambling volume and the implementation of US tariffs on Chinese exports.

The banking group now predicts a 1% year-on-year decline in first-half GGR, compared to its earlier 7% growth forecast.

January GGR averaged

VICTORIA CHAN



MOP589 million daily, falling short of expectations, while the first five days of February saw daily GGR of approximately MOP900 million.

The Chinese New Year Golden Week, typically a peak period, was marred by last-minute trip cancellations among high-value mainland players, many

of whom are factory owners in export sector, coinciding with the U.S. tariffs imposed in the beginning of February.

"These two data points turn us more cautious on near-term GGR trends," said Citi analysts George Choi and Timothy Chau in a GGRAsia report.

They noted that the implementation of U.S. tariffs on February 1 coincided with the end of the Chinese New Year Golden Week, dampening gaming demand.

Looking ahead, the analysts expressed some optimism, suggesting that player sentiment may begin to recover in the second half of 2025 as the effects of the tariffs dissipate. They highlighted upcoming events, such as a concert by Hong Kong singer Jacky Cheung in June, as potential catalysts for increasing demand.

Citi projects that GGR for the second half of 2025 could reach MOP119.5 billion, which would imply a daily run rate of approximately MOP650 million. This forecast suggests a 6% year-on-year growth, although analysts caution that the comparison base from the previous year is relatively low.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Macau Union Hospital faces backlash for long waits

STAFF REPORTER

LAWMAKER Leong Hong Sai has reported receiving feedback from residents regarding the insufficient availability of specialist services and extended waiting times at the Macau Union Hospital.

In a written inquiry, Leong highlighted concerns about the “lack of specialized outpatient services” and the “long waiting times” faced by patients.

He reminded authorities of previously announced initiatives, such as expanding specialized outpatient services and increasing staff training at the public hospital, and sought updates on

these developments.

Leong further emphasized that the purpose of establishing Macau Union Hospital is to enhance medical education, facilitate the application of scientific research in healthcare, and boost Macau's healthcare sector, in alignment with the strategic direction of medical tourism.

Highlighting the success of health tourism in South Korea and Thailand, particularly in plastic surgery and gender-affirming procedures, he advocated for the hospital to set clear legal standards and guidelines for aesthetic medicine services to safeguard the rights and interests of both patients and practitioners.

Macau recognized as one of Asia's top walkable cities

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU has been recognized as one of Asia's top nine walkable cities by the travel website Skyscanner, praised for its compact size and 517 attractions.

However, experts suggest further improvements to pedestrian infrastructure and traffic management to enhance its appeal.

Skyscanner ranked Macau among Asia's most walkable cities based on criteria such as total area, attractions, walking time between sites, crime rates, cleanliness, and pollution levels. As the only Chinese city on the list, Macau's less than 10-square-kilometer area and dense concentration of attractions contributed to its ranking.

Japan's Nagasaki and Hiroshima topped the list, also appearing in Skyscanner's global top 10.

Architect Lui Chak Keong believes Macau has the potential to create more small pedestrian zones, providing alternative routes without disrupting the daily mo-



vement of residents. However, he emphasizes that such zones should be designed with the needs of local residents, businesses, and delivery services in mind.

“Pedestrianization requires an assessment of the impact on residents and businesses,” Lui said in a TDM report. “If the zones are too large, it could increase traffic in the area and cause inconvenience.”

Lawmaker Che Sai Wang called for improvements to the transport system and adjustments to road construction, ensuring that travel and traffic apps accurately reflect Macau's traffic and mapping realities. He also stressed the importance of better communication between the traffic department and the tourism bureau.

Che, speaking to TDM, cited Rua de Cinco de Outubro, where the lack of sidewalks often leads to conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles. “It's a main thoroughfare, and it would be better to have separate lanes for vehicles and pedestrians,” he said. “If we can designate pedestrian walkways, it would help small and medium-sized businesses thrive.”

Both experts agreed that adding shaded resting areas along walkways would further enhance Macau's walkability. While the city's ranking as the 10th most accessible city globally is commendable, Che believes there is still room for improvement in accessible road construction and transport infrastructure.



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DIPLOMACY | SOUTH PACIFIC

China says a visit by Cook Islands' prime minister isn't meant to antagonize others

CHINA insisted that a visit this week by the prime minister of the Cook Islands to Beijing is not meant to conspire against anyone in the South Pacific, despite the trip stirring up a diplomatic spat between the tiny nation and its chief benefactor, New Zealand.

The visit appears to be part of China's campaign to woo tiny island nations in the South Pacific, where Beijing has been using its economic weight and diplomatic heft in what critics say is a push to reduce the influence of the United States and its allies and give itself access to mineral resources, fisheries and global stature.

"The relationship between China and the Cook Islands is not directed against any third party and should not be subject to or disrupted by any third party," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said yesterday.

New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters said he had repeated in a phone call to Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown that he should discuss with New Zealand the contents of the so-called Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and other agreements that Brown intends to sign in

China
"This lack of consultation is a matter of significant concern to the New Zealand government," Peters' office said in a statement Sunday.

The Cook Islands, a collection of 15 small islands with a population of 15,000 but a large exclusive economic zone, has been self-governing in free association with New Zealand, its largest source of

aid. The almost 60-year-old arrangement allows Cook Islanders to hold New Zealand citizenship and passports and to work and live in New Zealand.

Brown has said that New

Zealand has been advised that the deal with China does not touch on security but that New Zealand does not have to review the exact wording of any documents.

He has said his state visit to Beijing, starting this weekend, would focus on renewable energy and agriculture but that it would also touch on maritime issues and shipping and seabed minerals development, areas New Zealand, Australia, the U.S. and others have been particularly concerned about.

The lack of transparency surrounding such agreements has redoubled concerns, particularly since the Solomon Islands switched its alliances from Taiwan to China and struck a secretive security pact that has raised fears of China's security forces gaining a foothold in the region long dominated by the U.S., Australia and New Zealand.

The security pact has raised concerns of a Chinese naval presence in the region and the basing of ground troops that could challenge other countries' access to the region that lies close to Australia and over which Japan and the U.S. fought savage battles during World War II. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Economy expected to rebound continuously in 2025: economist

THE Chinese economy is expected to rebound continuously in 2025 despite new variables, an economist said as reported by Chinese financial news outlet Yicai on Sunday.

The unprecedented popularity of the domestic cultural and travel consumption market during the Spring Festival holiday and the emergence of DeepSeek AI model have contributed to people's confidence in the Chinese economy, as well as positive expectations, said Guan Tao, global chief economist at BOCI China.

According to the report, the country plans to further boost consumption among



urban residents. Data show that the median nominal per capita disposable income of urban residents grew 4.65 percent on a five-year compound average basis from 2020 to 2024.

Furthermore, China needs to promote a new type of urbanization and comprehensive rural revitalization

in a coordinated manner, promote the integrated development of urban and rural areas, and further stimulate rural consumption potential.

China's economic policy focuses have shifted to benefiting people's livelihood and promoting consumption, a signal sent by a meeting in July 2024.

Recently, the government has pre-delivered 81 billion yuan (\$11.09 billion) of funds for consumer goods trade-in in 2025 to support local governments in the continuous implementation of the policy.

Moreover, China launched an action plan to promote large-scale equipment renewal and trade-in of consumer goods in March 2024 as part of efforts to boost domestic demand and support economic growth. Official data showed that the trade-in scheme has boosted last year's sales of automobiles by 920 billion yuan, and that of home appliances by 240 billion yuan.

MDT/CHINA DAILY

CHINESE CARGO SHIP RUNS AGROUND ON RUSSIA'S SAKHALIN BUT NO SPILL REPORTED

THE governor of Russia's Pacific island region of Sakhalin has declared an emergency after a Chinese cargo ship ran aground off its southwest coast.

There was no danger to the crew of the An Yang 2, which is carrying coal and heavy fuel oil, Gov. Valery Limarenko said in a post on Telegram yesterday [Macau time]. Russia's emergencies ministry said 20 crew were aboard.

Limarenko said that no fuel spillage was recorded, but local authorities had to be prepared for any scenario. Bad weather has prevented access by rescue teams to the bulk carrier, which is stranded in shallow waters off Sakhalin's Nevelsky district, he added.

Regional authorities said they were preparing to pump

fuel out of the damaged vessel, marooned some 200 meters offshore.

Earlier this year, hundreds of volunteers in southwestern Russia spent weeks trying to contain a massive fuel oil spill from two storm-stricken tankers in the Kerch Strait near Crimea.

The Sakhalin region, which is located in Russia's Far East, comprises a large island of the same name and the four Kuril Islands, the subject of a decades-long territorial dispute between Russia and Japan that has prevented them from signing a peace treaty at the end of World War II.

Soviet troops captured the islands, known in Japan as the Northern Territories, at the end of the war, and Russia has retained control ever since. **MDT/AP**



People gather around a corpse flower that begins to bloom at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney

DOWN UNDER

Australia holds its nose for third rancid bloom of rare corpse plant in three months

ROD MCGUIRK, MELBOURNE

A rare bloom with a pungent odor like decaying flesh has opened in the Australian capital in the nation's third such extraordinary flowering in as many months.

The corpse flower, also known by its scientific name *amorphophallus titanum*, bloomed for the first time in its 15 years at

Canberra's Australian National Botanic Gardens on Saturday and was closing yesterday, staff said.

Another flowered briefly in the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens in late January, attracting 20,000 admirers. Similar numbers turned out to experience another rancid bloom at the Geelong Botanic Gardens southwest of Melbourne in November.

WHAT IS A CORPSE FLOWER?

The corpse flower or corpse plant, known as bunga bangkai in its native Indonesia, is endemic to the rainforests of western Sumatra.

It only blooms for a few days every 7 to 10 years in its natural habitat. Its rancid scent attracts pollinators such as flies.

There are thought to be only 300 of the plants in the wild and

fewer than 1,000 including those in cultivation.

WHY HAVE THREE BLOOMED?

Canberra's acting nursery manager Carol Dale said there was no clear explanation for Australia's spate of putrid blooms.

A flower is produced when the plant has stored enough energy in its underground tuber known as a corm.

"One of the theories is that a lot of these plants are of a similar age, so they have just stored up enough carbohydrates in the corm to finally produce a flower," Dale said.

"All of the plants around Australia are held in different conditions, so it's unusual that they're all flowering at the same time," she added.

She said Canberra, Sydney and Geelong had different climates. Gardeners used different fertilizing regimes on each plant and different management plans.

WAS THE CANBERRA BLOOM EXPECTED?

Dale said that after 15 years without a bloom, she had decided that Canberra, which occasionally receives snowfall, was not the place for a corpse plant to thrive.

"It's been in our collection for slightly longer than these plants would normally take to flower for the first time, so we just didn't think we had the right conditions here in Canberra," Dale said.

"So yes, it did catch us by surprise; a very pleasant one," she added.

The flower began opening around lunchtime on Saturday and its rancid odor quickly deteriorated.

"By Saturday evening, it was incredibly pungent. We could smell it from across the road. It was definitely gag worthy," Dale said.

The crowds attracted to the 135-centimeter (53-inch) tall flower were limited to the hundreds by a ticketing system due to space constraints within the greenhouse.

Admirers likened the stench to a range of dead animals, rotten eggs, sweaty socks, sewage and garbage.

Dale said the worst had passed by yesterday.

"We collected pollen about an hour ago and when you're right up close to the plant, it's still got that rotting flesh smell," she said.

MDT/AP

PHILIPPINES

US Marine from California identified as one of 4 people killed in plane crash

A U.S. Marine from California was identified by military officials Sunday as one of four people killed when a plane contracted by the U.S. military crashed in a rice field in the southern Philippines.

Sgt. Jacob M. Durham, 22, of Long Beach, died Thursday in the crash of an aircraft that was conducting a routine mission "providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support at the request of our Philippine allies," officials at Camp Pendleton, Ca-

lifornia, said in a statement. Officials said the cause of the crash was under investigation.

Three defense contractors also were killed in the crash, military officials have said.

The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines confirmed the crash of a light plane in Maguindanao del Sur province. The bodies of the four people were retrieved from the wreckage in Ampatuan town, said Ameer Jihad Tim Ambolodto, a safety officer of Maguindanao del Sur.



The body of a victim is covered with a blanket as members of security forces stand around wreckage of airplane in a rice field in Maguindanao del Sur province

U.S. forces have been deployed in a Philippine military camp in the country's south for decades to help provide training and advice to

Filipino forces battling Muslim militants. The region is home to minority Muslims in the largely Roman Catholic nation.

Windy Beaty, a provincial disaster-mitigation officer, told The Associated Press on Thursday that she received reports that residents saw smoke coming from the plane and heard an explosion before the aircraft plummeted to the ground less than a kilometer (about half a mile) from a cluster of farmhouses.

Durham was trained as an electronic intelligence/electromagnetic warfare analyst assigned to 1st Radio Battalion, I Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group, officials said. He

joined the Marines in January 2021 and was promoted to his current rank on Feb. 1.

Durham's awards include the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, a Meritorious Mast, and Naval Aircrew Insignia, officials said.

"Sgt. Durham embodied the highest traditions of the Marine Corps — exemplifying composure, intelligence, and selfless leadership," Lt. Col. Mabel B. Annunziata, commanding officer of 1st Radio Battalion, said in the statement. "He was deeply respected and loved by his fellow Marines." MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Trump meets with Zelenskyy at Trump Tower, last September

this day in history

1975 TORIES CHOOSE FIRST WOMAN LEADER



The British Conservative Party has chosen Margaret Thatcher as its new leader.

She will be the first woman to head a British political party after a landslide victory over the other four - male - candidates.

Mrs Thatcher - who served as Secretary of State for Science and Education in Ted Heath's Government - exclaimed "It's like a dream."

She said: "Good heavens, no. There's far too much work to be done."

Mrs Thatcher, 50, forced Ted Heath to resign as leader last week when she trounced him in the first round of the leadership race with 130 votes to his 119.

Conservative Party confidence in Mr Heath - prime minister from 1970 to 1974 - was rattled by his failure to win general elections in both February and October last year.

Chairman of the influential 1922 Backbench Committee - whose 276 members are largely responsible for deciding party leaders - Edward du Cann, told BBC Television: "We have a new and rather exciting leader. Mrs Thatcher will make the Tory Party distinctive."

At a press conference at the House of Commons the new leader thanked her campaign team and looked forward to retaining Ted Heath and other members of the current Shadow Cabinet, though probably not in the same jobs.

Mrs Thatcher - a mother of twins married to Denis, an oil executive - put in a brief appearance at a party in Pimlico before having a working dinner with Conservative Chief Whip Humphrey Atkins in Westminster.

Former Northern Ireland Minister Willie Whitelaw was her closest challenger, but still only gained 79 votes in comparison to the 146 she polled in the second ballot of the contest.

The other candidates were Sir Geoffrey Howe, QC, and Mr Prior who each received 19 votes and John Peyton trailed in last with just 11 votes.

Courtesy BBC News

ANALYSIS

US officials are bound for Europe for top-level talks on Ukraine

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's national security adviser said yesterday [Macau time] that top administration officials will meet with European officials this week about how to end the war in Ukraine, nearly three years after Russia launched an all-out invasion.

Less than a day earlier, the New York Post reported that Trump had a phone call with Russian leader Vladimir Putin to discuss steps toward a negotiated solution. Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One as he flew to the Super Bowl in New Orleans, Trump declined to discuss his reported phone conversation with Putin.

"I don't want to do that. We're trying to end that war. It's a war that would have never happened if I were president, but we're making progress. But I can't tell you," he said.

Asked to clarify whether his conversations with Putin took place before he took office or after, Trump said, "I've had it. Let's just say I've had it. And I expect to have many more conversations. We have to get that war ended. It's going to end."

There was no immediate confirmation of the call by the Kremlin.

WALTZ: EUROPE NEEDS TO TAKE BIGGER ROLE

In a television interview, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz said the Russian economy is not doing well and that Trump "is prepared to tax, to tariff, to sanction" Moscow to get Putin to the negotiating table. Waltz also underscored that the Trump administration is looking to use this week's engagements to begin talks on clawing back some of the United States' assistance to Ukraine. He said European allies will also need to take a greater role in supporting Ukraine going forward.

"We need to recoup those costs and that is going to be a partnership with the Ukrainians in terms of their natural resources and their oil and gas and also buying ours," Waltz said in an appearance on NBC's Meet the Press. "Those conversations are going to happen this week. And I think an underlying principle here is that the Europeans have to own this conflict going forward. President Trump is going to end it. And then in terms of security guarantees, that is squarely going to be with the Europeans."

Vice President JD Vance will be in Paris today [Macau time] for an artificial intelligence summit that's gathering govern-

ment officials and will head later in the week to the Munich Security Conference, where Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will lead the battle-weary country's delegation. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Trump's special envoy on Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, will also be in Munich.

On Wednesday, Hegseth will join the main international forum for drumming up weapons and ammunition for Ukraine. He's set to participate in a meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels the following day.

KYIV UNDER PRESSURE

Putin is closer than ever to achieving his objectives in battle-weary Ukraine, with little incentive to come to the negotiating table, no matter how much Trump might cajole or threaten him, according to Russian and Western experts interviewed by The Associated Press.

Putin has previously said Trump was "clever and pragmatic," and even parroted his false claims of having won the 2020 election. Trump's opening gambit was to call Putin "smart" and to threaten Russia with tariffs and oil price cuts, which the Kremlin brushed off.

Trump boasted during the presidential election campaign

that he could end the war in 24 hours, which later became six months. He's indicated the U.S. is talking to Russia about Ukraine without Kyiv's input, saying his administration already had "very serious" discussions.

That would run counter to the Biden administration's position that echoed Zelenskyy's call of "Nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine." The Ukrainian leader has suggested any peace deal reached without Kyiv's input would send the dangerous signal that adventurism pays to authoritarian leaders in China, North Korea and Iran.

Meanwhile, Trump has hinted he and Putin could soon take "significant" action toward ending the war, in which Russia is suffering heavy casualties daily while its economy endures stiff Western sanctions, inflation and a serious labor shortage. But the economy has not collapsed, and because Putin has unleashed the harshest crackdown on dissent since Soviet times, he faces no domestic pressure to end the war.

UKRAINE HOPES TO MAKE ITS CASE IN MUNICH

Andriy Yermak, a top Zelenskyy adviser who will attend the Munich security conference, has told AP the Ukrainian delegation will use its platform to present Kyiv's position on ending the war. He said Kyiv hopes to discuss what security guarantees could be put in place to prevent repeated aggression by Russia.

The Munich summit comes at a pivotal moment for Ukraine, which is striving to establish a relationship with the new U.S. administration, a key partner during its yearslong war against Russia. MDT/AP

IN CONTEXT

Ted Heath refused to serve in Margaret Thatcher's shadow cabinet.

Margaret Thatcher set about re-building grass-roots conservatism, outside the Home Counties.

Willie Whitelaw and Sir Keith Joseph were key members of her advisory team.

She was regarded as a right-wing Conservative, pre-occupied with domestic affairs. She went on to win the 1979 general election to become the first female prime minister in the UK.

Her Conservative Party was elected with an overall majority of 43 seats.

She was forced to resign after losing the leadership election in November 1990.

Her 11 years in power made her the longest serving Brit

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Spring into action, moving with confidence as the universe guides and supports you. Try not to get frustrated and resist social pressures.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Curiosity will drive you, though your focus may shift toward more intuitive and emotional themes. It is better to be at a loss for words than speak impulsively.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Don't let fears from the past prevent you from dreaming for the future. You'll have a chance to productively think these visions through, bringing confidence to the heart and clarity to your mind.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Allow yourself to be moved by creative visions, spiritual experiences, and any synchronicities you encounter, soaking up each ounce of support the universe offers.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Themes around transformation and sacrifice will be pronounced, so try to consider which chapters need closing. You'll feel more at peace and open-hearted, unlocking new levels of consciousness.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Bond with loved ones over shared beliefs and moral dispositions. This harmonious energy can bridge gaps, helping you better understand those you don't always agree with by finding common ground.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Find pleasure in the tasks you take on. Catch up with friends, especially if you've been overly caught up in your projects.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Find a creative flow; allowing divine inspiration to move through you. Get back into your work week routines, throwing some extra pampering.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 A cleansing and nurturing energy fill your space. Honor what you need to feel nurtured and grounded, providing this support of yourself.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 New dreams for the future can provide a clearer understanding of what's to come. Just be mindful that plans rarely unfold precisely as they're envisioned, vowing to stay flexible.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Carve out some time for romance, seeking out sweetness with those you love most. Notice how you change when in the presence of others, considering if someone is a positive or negative influence.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 The stars will be looking for opportunities to support and bless you, so try to trust good fortune when it arises. It'll be vital that you don't speak everything that's on your mind.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

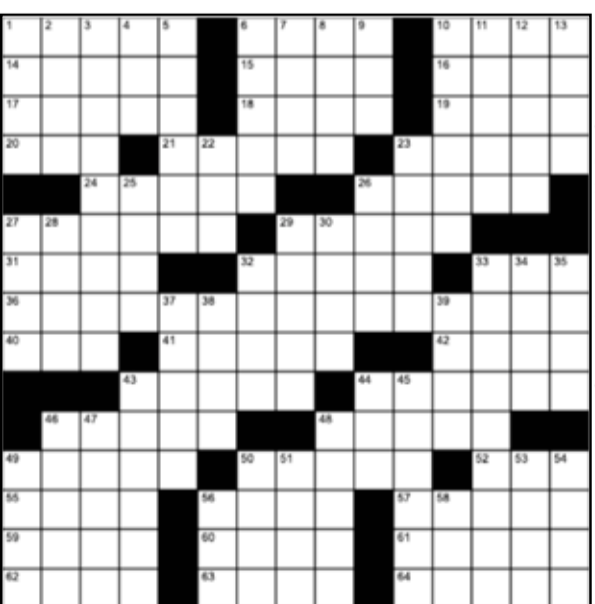
	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	4	cloudy
Changchun	-17	2	fine
Chengdu	4	13	cloudy
Chongqing	7	14	cloudy
Fuzhou	6	19	cloudy
Guangzhou	10	21	cloudy
Guiyang	0	16	cloudy
Haikou	16	20	rain
Hangzhou	1	14	cloudy
Harbin	-23	-4	snow
Hefei	-1	10	rain
Nanjing	1	13	rain
Shanghai	1	13	overcast
Taipei	13	22	fine
Wuhan	0	10	rain
Hong Kong	15	19	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-7	-3	snow
Frankfurt	4	7	cloudy
Paris	2	6	cloudy
London	2	5	cloudy
New York	-2	1	snow

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Orgs.; 6- Brazilian soccer star; 10- Serpents; 14- Infield fly; 15- Sight organs; 16- Red sign; 17- Actress Verdugo; 18- Smell ___; 19- Spanish appetizer; 20- Jiff; 21- Harder to find; 23- Oozes; 24- Perfect; 26- Ahead of time; 27- Prizes; 29- Annie of "Designing Women"; 31- Soft drink choice; 32- Big name in insurance; 33- Contend; 36- In spite of; 40- Dreyer's partner in ice cream; 41- Cream-filled cookies; 42- ___ to differ; 43- Agenda entries; 44- Frightens; 46- Pond scum; 48- Hot stuff; 49- Mall frequenters; 50- More competent; 52- Alley-___; 55- Inventor Rubik; 56- Adopted son of Claudius; 57- Chavez or Romero; 59- Person who is liable to tell untruths; 60- Historical periods; 61- Bring together; 62- ___-majesté; 63- Lavish affection (on); 64- Fresh-mouthed;

DOWN 1- Simians; 2- Boot bottom; 3- Forte; 4- "Sister Act" extra; 5- Was merciful to; 6- Bit of wisdom; 7- Jane ___; 8- Shakespearean king; 9- Body shop fig.; 10- Late bloomers; 11- Madame de ___; 12- Opium flower; 13- Pampering places; 22- Small batteries; 23- The devil; 25- Sketch; 26- Sicilian mount; 27- Skin disorder; 28- Timber; 29- Mexican money; 30- Ed and Mel of baseball; 32- Throat-clearing sound; 33- Venereal disease of cattle; 34- Arrow poison; 35- Breakfast staple; 37- Bits; 38- Family diagram; 39- Old phone buttons?; 43- Refrain from noticing; 44- "___ loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah"; 45- Performing animal show; 46- Eagle's nest; 47- Horne and Olin; 48- Hard to call; 49- Narrate; 50- Dynamic beginning; 51- Spoiled child; 53- Wild ones are sown; 54- One hunted; 56- Homer's TV neighbor; 58- Bambi's aunt;

Yesterday's solution



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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 HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath

RUGBY | SIX NATIONS

Ireland unbeaten, France upset by England and Italy dominates Wales in round 2

FOSTER NIUMATA, LONDON

GRAND Slam is on for Ireland after riveting second round of Six Nations rugby. Only Ireland remains unbeaten after it swatted aside Scotland 32-18 at Murrayfield yesterday [Macau time].

England came into title contention by shocking France 26-25 at Twickenham on Saturday night.

The wooden spoon was probably decided in rainy Rome when Italy defeated Wales in successive matches for the first time.

Here's the AP's takeaways from the second round.

ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER SCOTLAND DEFEAT

Annual talk of this being the best Scotland side in years made Ireland regard their match at Murrayfield as a potential banana skin. Flyhalf Sam Prendergast, playing away from Dublin for the first time, spoke about how emotional the anthems were and how keyed up the packed Murrayfield crowd was. That was snuffed out swiftly. Within 30 minutes, Ireland charged into a 17-0 lead with two converted tries. Two more were denied by being held up over the line. The Scots were smashed and two of their best backs, Finn Russell and Darcy

Graham, collided heads and had to leave the field. The Irish played like they were going for their first win over Scotland, not their 11th in succession. Their ruthless efficiency was apparent in the stats. Scotland had more ball, carried 200 more meters, forced 80 more tackles and broke more tackles but it made no difference. The final score flattered Scotland and took the air out of another hyped Six Nations title bid. "There is a feeling of satisfaction after that one," Ireland captain Caelan Doris said. The defending two-time champion Irish travel to Wales in two weeks, and two weeks after that France visits Dublin in the probable title decider.

ENGLAND OVERCOMES ITS DEMONS

The roar at Twickenham that greeted England's stunning upset of France was also the release of 11 months of frustration. England had lost seven straight to traditional foes and blown leads against New Zealand (three times), France and Australia. So, to English rugby fans, when France scored to lead 25-19 with less than five minutes remaining, in the words of baseball immortal Yogi Berra, it was deja vu all over again. But England didn't fall apart this time. It rallied the old-fashioned way. Ben Earl jackaled

Thomas Ramos and was followed by a penalty, a lineout, a maul and a slick backline move. Center Ollie Lawrence was the first receiver, flyhalf Fin Smith took the backdoor pass, and Elliot Daly, on the field for four minutes, swung off his wing into a big midfield hole just 10 meters from the try-line. While France threw away its advantage, England had demons to overcome to still go and take the game. It was a breakthrough night for England's closing-time confidence, its much maligned bench, and starting a more conventional flyhalf.

SMITH AND SMITH

Marcus Smith was a Lion after his second England cap. He apprenticed for three years behind Owen Farrell and George Ford and the England 10 jersey was finally his on the June 2024 tour of Japan and New Zealand. But after eight tests, seven of them losses, he may be second choice again after Fin Smith's winning performance against France in his first test start. Fin paid his dues. He made his Premiership debut at age 17 and lost his first 10 matches. The next year, Worcester folded and Northampton hired the Under-20 Six Nations Grand Slam winner. Fin helped the Saints win the Premiership last year. Picking Fin to



Ireland's Sam Prendergast in action during the Six Nations match between Scotland and Ireland at Murrayfield Stadium, Edinburgh, Sunday

start for England ahead of Marcus, who was moved to fullback, was a big call. But Fin is more of a traditional 10 than Marcus, taking the ball to the line and getting the centers more involved. He made early errors but nothing that cost England and he grew more comfortable. Fin showed good judgement, assisted in two tries and kicked his two conversions including the match-winner. "This," he said, "is cool for a first start."

FORZA ITALIA

During the 2022 Six Nations, tournament organizers sent out a statement rejecting rumors of perennial struggler Italy being replaced by world champion South Africa. Just a month later, Italy fa-

mously beat Wales in Cardiff with a last-gasp converted try that ended a seven-year, 36-test losing streak in the tournament. Since then, an Italy team turned around by Kieran Crowley and blossoming under Gonzalo Quesada has become a respected, competitive threat. The Azzurri gave their most mature performance yet in beating Wales for the third time in four years. No last-minute heroics were needed in Rome. Italy led from the 20th minute. Given the uncommon tag of favorite, faced with unrelenting rain that limited attacking opportunities and a Wales lineup desperate amid a 13-test losing streak, Italy handled the pressure and outsmarted Wales. Among standout efforts by Giacomo

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Nicotera, Sebastian Negri, Martin Page-Relo, Paolo Garbisi and Tommaso Allan, the brightest was No. 8 Lorenzo Cannone, who led everyone on the field in carries, meters carried, tackles, dominant tackles and defenders beaten. Two of his turnovers became penalties kicked between the posts by Allan. Cannone said, "The final result speaks for us."

LIONSWATCH

In the only matchup of Lions countries, the Irish pack hammered the Scots so skillfully that rookie flyhalf Sam Prendergast seemed to have plenty of time to make a lot of good choices. He was voted player of the match. Jamison Gibson-Park and James Lowe also enjoyed a ride from the graft given by the likes of Caelan Doris, who put in a captain's shift of a team-leading 10 carries and 80 meters plus 17 tackles. Even the supposedly fading Peter O'Mahony made a second-best nine valuable carries and two turnovers in his 51 minutes. Also, loosehead prop Andrew Porter, picked for the 2021 Lions but injured before the tour, shaded opposite and 2021 Lion Zander Fagerson, and even added a chargedown. Scotland co-captain Rory Darge had 17 tackles but he also was subsumed by Ireland's supremacy. At Twickenham, Tom Curry was a workhorse again on both sides of the ball, and with Ben Earl on his shoulder. **MDT/AP**



Scotland's Darcy Graham is stretchered off during a Six Nations match

SCOTLAND RUGBY STARS DARCY GRAHAM AND FINN RUSSELL INVOLVED IN NASTY CLASH OF HEADS DURING 6 NATIONS

Scotland rugby players Darcy Graham and Finn Russell were involved in a nasty-looking clash of heads and were unable to continue during a Six Nations match against Ireland on Sunday. Graham, a prolific winger, and Russell, the team's flyhalf, co-captain and star player, were attempting to tackle Ireland scrumhalf Jamison Gibson-Park — only to crash directly into each other in the 21st minute. Both players initially lay prone with their arms outstretched at Murrayfield. Russell was able to walk off himself and underwent a Head Injury Assessment, after which he was withdrawn. Scotland coach Gregor Townsend said Russell passed the HIA — the tournament's official account on X said the flyhalf had failed it — but was still pulled out of the game. "There were a couple of things he wasn't remembering about plays. So we made the call not to put him back on," Townsend said. "He's obviously frustrated. It's a freak injury when you collide with your own player. Graham received a lengthy period of treatment before being placed on a stretcher and taken off the field on a cart. He gave a thumbs-up to the crowd as he was carried toward the tunnel and was also replaced.

RUGBY

Portugal, Spain qualify for the 2027 Rugby World Cup

SPAIN will appear in a men's Rugby World Cup for the first time since 1999 after reaching the Rugby Europe Championship semifinals yesterday [Macau time].

Portugal joined the Spanish to achieve back-to-back World Cups in 2027 in Australia.

Spain beat Switzerland 43-13 in Yverdon-les-Bains to qualify.

Los Leones (The Lions) previously qualified for the 2023 World Cup but were deducted points for fielding an ineligible player twice and fell out of position. They were also thrown out of qualifying for the 2019 Rugby World Cup for using ineligible players.

Spain's only other



appearance in rugby union's top event was in 1999 in Scotland, where the team lost all three of its pool games against Uruguay, South Africa and Scotland.

The Portuguese, nicknamed Os Lobos (The Wolves), beat visiting Germany 56-14 to go two for two in the REC, Europe's second-tier competition after the Six Nations.

Portugal went winless in its World Cup debut in 2007 in France

but made a huge splash in its return in 2023 in France again by beating quarterfinal-bound Fiji and drawing with Georgia.

Spain, Portugal, Georgia and Romania secured the four direct qualifying places from Europe this weekend, leaving eight more qualifying spots open around the world.

The 2027 World Cup will feature 24 teams for the first time, up from 20. **MDT/AP**

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C&C RECEIVED THE 1ST SILVER "DEIGNAN AWARD" FOR RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MACAU (2023)



OPINION

Business Views

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



XI HAS SQUANDERED HIS MOST POWERFUL TRADE WAR WEAPON

The tables have turned. As US President Donald Trump reignites his trade war with China, he's got all the bargaining chips.

The growth trajectories of the world's two-biggest economies have diverged sharply since Trump's first term. While global investors are doubling down on US exceptionalism, keeping faith that the dollar and American equities will continue to outperform, the Chinese economy is limping along and might not be able to shake off deflation, perhaps for decades to come.

The tables have turned. As US President Donald Trump reignites his trade war with China, he's got all the bargaining chips.

This could use some introspection. Knowing that the US wanted an ugly divorce as early as 2018, when Trump first started slapping tariffs on Chinese imports, did President Xi Jinping mismanage the economy somehow, or was it pure bad luck?

In a global trade war, the economy with a powerful consumer base wins. Trump can throw insults at foreign heads of state and coerce big businesses to reshore in the US, because he is able to block access to the world's most resilient spenders. Selling goods and services to Americans is just that much more profitable, thanks to robust demand.

That insight seems to have gone missing in Beijing. Instead of encouraging consumption, Beijing has doubled down on industrial policy. It's fostering high-end manufacturing, such as electric vehicles, semiconductors and robotics, with subsidies and cheap financing. State-owned banks have been offering low-interest loans to industrial companies, while reining in lending to the real estate sector, which arguably triggered a deep property downturn.

At the same time, the welfare of China's middle class has been ignored. As they stumbled out of pandemic-related lockdowns in late 2022, they have discovered an economy that suffers from long Covid. "Rotten tails," or residential projects distressed developers had sold but were unable to finish, are peppered across the country. A harsh big tech crackdown has left fresh college graduates jobless and their middle-aged parents anxious. Between 2018 and 2024, the number of births tumbled by more than a third, hard evidence of the economic pressure couples are facing.

Consumers are hunkering down. Household savings more than doubled from 2018 to about 151 trillion yuan (\$20.7 trillion) last year, even as banks repeatedly cut deposit rates.

This also puts Xi in a tight spot as he jostles with a mercurial Trump, who has a knack for finding pain points. As an example, the US Postal Service is temporarily suspending inbound international packages from China and Hong Kong, potentially delaying or blocking shipments from retailers like Shein and PDD Holdings Inc.'s Temu. That would hurt: Textile and apparel that the two e-commerce platforms sell are the third-biggest category of US imports from China after computers and electrical equipment. Without exporters, Xi can kiss his 5% growth target goodbye.

After Trump's win, perhaps in a nod to its vulnerability, Beijing signaled to the public in December that boosting consumption would be its top priority this year. Is that a real pivot, or mere lip service? Only time will tell. But one thing is certain: Xi squandered his most powerful trade war weapon — his people. [Abridged]

Courtesy Bloomberg/Shuli Ren

TURKEY'S ERDOGAN AGAIN REJECTS US PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE PALESTINIANS FROM GAZA

THE BUZZ

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan again rejected a U.S. proposal to relocate Palestinians from Gaza and said Israel should pay for the damage it caused there and for reconstruction to begin.

"We do not consider the proposal to exile the Palestinians from the lands they have lived in for thousands of years as something to be taken seriously," Erdogan said during a visit to Malaysia yesterday.

"No one has the power to force the Palestinian people to

experience a second Nakba," he added, referring to the mass displacement of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

Erdogan, who is on a four-day tour of Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan, highlighted the severe destruction in Gaza.

He said Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's government should look for funds to "compensate" for what he said was damage amounting to \$100 billion "instead of looking for a place for the people of Gaza."



A Mexican long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris nivalis*)

THE PROOF IS IN THE SALIVA

MEXICAN LONG-NOSED BATS ARE NO STRANGERS TO SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA

TY ONEIL & FELICIA FONSECA, FLAGSTAFF (ARIZ.)

SCIENTISTS have long suspected that Mexican long-nosed bats migrate through southeastern Arizona, but without capturing and measuring the night-flying creatures, proof has been elusive.

Researchers say they now have a way to tell the endangered species apart from other bats by analyzing saliva the nocturnal mammals leave behind when sipping nectar from plants and residential hummingbird feeders.

Bat Conservation International, a nonprofit group working to end the extinction of bat species worldwide, teamed up with residents from southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico and west Texas for the saliva swabbing campaign.

The samples of saliva left along potential migration routes were sent to a lab at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, where researchers looked for environmental DNA — or eDNA — to confirm that the bats cycle through Arizona and consider the region their part-time home.

The Mexican long-nosed bat has been listed as endangered under the En-

dangered Species Act since 1988, and is the only one in Arizona with that federal protection. It is an important species for pollinating cactus, agave and other desert plants.

Officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department announced the discovery in late January. While expanding Arizona's list of bat species to 29 is exciting, wildlife managers say the use of this novel, noninvasive method to nail it down also deserves to be celebrated.

"If we were trying to identify the species in the absence of eDNA, biologists could spend hours and hours trying to catch one of these bats, and even then, you're not guaranteed to be successful," said Angie McIntire, a bat specialist for the Arizona's Game and Fish Department. "By sampling the environment, eDNA gives us an additional tool for our toolkit."

Every spring, Mexican long-nosed bats traverse a lengthy migratory path north from Mexico into the southwestern U.S., following the sweet nectar of their favorite blooming plants like breadcrumbs. They return along the same route in the fall.

The bat conservation

group recruited ordinary citizens for the mission, giving them kits to swab samples from bird feeders throughout the summer and fall.

Inside the university lab, microbiology major Anna Riley extracted the DNA from hundreds of samples and ran them through machines that ultimately could detect the presence of bats. Part of the work involved a steady hand, with Riley using a syringe of sorts to transfer diluted DNA into tiny vials before popping them into a centrifuge.

Sample after sample, vial after vial, the meticulous work took months.

"There's a big database that has DNA sequences of not every animal but most species, and so we could compare our DNA sequences we got from these samples to what's in the database," Riley said. "A little bit like a Google search — you've got your question, you're asking Google, you plug it into the database, and it turns up you've got a bat, and you have this kind of bat."

Kristen Lear, of the conservation group, said the collection of eDNA has been used successfully for determining the presence of other kinds of wildlife in various environments, so the group proposed trying it with bats. MDT/AP



Serbia Protesters blocked bridges and roads in Serbia, marking 100 days since a deadly train station collapse. The anti-government movement, fueled by corruption allegations, is growing nationwide. President Aleksandar Vučić accuses demonstrators of plotting a foreign-backed coup, escalating political tensions.



Kosovo's ruling party won the most seats in Sunday's election but fell short of a majority. Prime Minister Albin Kurti seeks allies to form a government amid stalled Serbia negotiations and frozen foreign aid. Opposition parties gained ground, reflecting voter discontent.



Vatican A top Vatican official criticized U.S. migrant crackdowns and USAID cuts, warning of humanitarian consequences. Cardinal Michael Czerny (pictured) urged Trump's administration to uphold Christian values, calling mass deportations and funding freezes devastating for vulnerable populations and church-run aid programs.



United States President Trump announced 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, including from Canada and Mexico. Reciprocal duties on nations taxing U.S. goods will follow. Markets reacted negatively, with analysts warning of inflation risks and potential global trade disputes.



France World leaders and tech giants gathered in Paris for an AI summit. U.S. Vice President JD Vance met European officials amid rising tensions over trade and military spending. The summit focuses on AI governance, innovation, and preventing monopolization by U.S.-China tech firms.