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BRAZILIAN AND GERMAN NATIONALS CAN NOW USE THEIR PASSPORTS TO ENTER AND EXIT THROUGH AUTOMATED BORDER-CROSSING PASSAGES

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FOUR RESIDENTS STILL DETAINED ABROAD IN WORK FRAUD SCHEMES

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HONG KONG PLANS TO BAN SUBSTANDARD TINY APARTMENTS

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AP PHOTO



Taiwan's leader Lai Ching-te said Friday he would communicate more with the U.S. over President Donald Trump's concerns over the chip industry and invest more in the U.S., hours after Trump ordered reciprocal tariffs on trade partners. Trump said on last week that Taiwan had taken away the U.S. chip business and said that he wanted it back in the country.

South Korea Former South Korea international Hwang Ui-jo was handed a one-year suspended prison sentence on Friday for filming sexual encounters with a woman without her consent. Hwang was dropped from the national team in September 2023 after being charged with secretly filming two women on four occasions in 2022.

AP PHOTO



South Korea A fire broke out at a resort construction site in Busan on Friday, killing at least six people, fire officials said. About 100 workers managed to evacuate the site, while another 14 were rescued by helicopter from the top of the structure, said Hong Moon-shik, chief of the Busan Gijang District Fire Department.

AP PHOTO



India At least 18 people, including 14 women, were killed in a stampede at a railway station in New Delhi, the Press Trust of India news agency reported yesterday. Many of the victims were Hindu pilgrims who were traveling to the Maha Kumbh festival in Prayagraj in northern India, according to Delhi's caretaker chief minister, Atishi, who uses only one name.

DEMAND DWINDLES

Public housing applications drop significantly; committee proposes swapping one-room for two-room flats P3



TAICHUNG TRAGEDY
TODDLER REMAINS IN COMA FOLLOWING GAS EXPLOSION IN TAIWAN

BUSINESS
GOV'T EXPLORING ADDITIONAL CAMPAIGNS AIMED AT LOCAL SMES

TWO-YEAR-OLD GIRL REMAINS IN COMA FOLLOWING GAS EXPLOSION IN TAIWAN

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAUS tourism crisis assistance team, in collaboration with the Macau Red Cross, reached out to the local family affected by a tragic gas explosion in Taichung, Taiwan last Thursday.

The incident resulted in the deaths of two Macau residents and left five others injured.

Among the injured is a two-year-old girl from Macau who underwent an emergency craniotomy due to severe brain injuries, according to China Medical University (CMU) Children's Hospital, as reported by Focus Taiwan.

The girl was visiting Taichung with six other family members when the explosion occurred at the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi department store just before noon.

The blast sent debris crashing down as the family passed by, tragically resulting in the instant death of the girl's grand-



father, with her grandmother pronounced dead shortly after at the hospital.

The assistance team arrived in Taichung on Thursday evening, promptly visiting the hospitalized family members to convey condolences from Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai.

CMU Children's Hospital officials reported that the girl was in a deep coma upon arrival after being transferred from another hospital. She had suffered a

brain hemorrhage and swelling, and an emergency craniotomy was performed.

As of now, she remains in intensive care with a Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) score of 3, indicating complete unresponsiveness.

Hospital officials stated that efforts are focused on stabilizing her blood pressure and heart rate, reducing pressure on her brain, and preventing infections.

Two of the injured indivi-

duals have already been discharged after treatment.

The girl's parents sustained minor injuries. Her great-grandmother suffered fractures to her ribs and arm, while her uncle sustained fractures to his face and hand. Both are being treated at the Chung Kang Branch of Cheng Ching Hospital, as reported by the hospital's vice superintendent, Huang Jen-chieh.

The explosion resulted in four deaths and 35 injuries, with five in intensive care and six in general wards.

Representatives from the shopping mall provided support, including hotel accommodations and travel arrangements for family and friends visiting Taichung.

Efforts are also underway to arrange the transportation of the deceased residents' remains back to Macau, coordinated by the local Red Cross and relevant authorities.

On February 14, the assistance team accompanied the

family to meet with local funeral and legal service personnel, facilitating the identification of the deceased and discussing arrangements for their remains.

Staff from a Macau insurance company have also arrived to assist with compensation matters related to the incident.

Meanwhile, Hotel Fortune expressed its condolences to the family of one of its long-serving employees, who had worked at the hotel for two decades. In a statement released on Friday, the hotel reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the family.

The company has sent representatives to Taichung to assist the grieving family, and Macau Yin Kui Hospital, affiliated with the hotel, will also offer medical support.

The department store announced that it would provide TWD1 million (around MOP244,500) to each bereaved family as a gesture of condolence.



ASK THE VET
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SOME ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Is a dog urinating blood an emergency?

Although seeing blood in the urine can be scary or upsetting, it is not always the symptom of an emergency. The most common cause of blood in the urine is a urinary tract infection, which is not an emergency and is very treatable. If your dog can pass urine, even if they pass smaller amounts more frequently, it is unlikely to be an emergency.

However, if your dog is straining and unable to pass any urine, this could be a sign of obstruction like a bladder stone within the urethra. This would be an emergency, and veterinary help should be sought immediately so that the veterinarian can pass a catheter to relieve the pressure if required.

It is important to mention that if you notice blood in your dog's urine and bleeding or bruising elsewhere, this is an emergency as it could be a sign of a bleeding disorder or rat poisoning. Examples of other emergency symptoms would be bleeding from the gums, nose, or bottom or bruising of the skin or whites of the eyes.



Is a dog vomiting blood an emergency?

While a dog vomiting blood could be a sign of irritation of the lining of the stomach or food pipe (oesophagus), it could also be a sign of a more severe stomach ulcer or bleeding disorder. Therefore, if there is a lot of blood or there is blood in the vomit multiple times, it should be considered an emergency.

As with blood in the urine, if you see bleeding elsewhere and in the vomit, it could be a sign of a bleeding disorder, and you should seek veterinary attention right away.

Is there an emergency number for pets in Macau?

There is no emergency service for pets

in Macau, but you can contact your usual veterinary clinic if you have an emergency, day or night. If your veterinary clinic is closed, their voicemail message and website will have information on contacting their emergency veterinarian. Some veterinary hospitals in Macau have a 24hr service so know your options.

If you are concerned about what would happen in an emergency, speak to your veterinary clinic who will be able to inform you of their emergency service provider's details in advance so that you feel prepared.

Is a dog fever an emergency?

On its own, a high temperature in a dog is not an emergency, although veterinary advice should be sought within twenty-four hours or if there is any deterioration in your dog's condition. If their breathing, gum colour, hydration, or responsiveness is affected, you should contact your veterinarian right away.

Is a dog abscess an emergency?

If your dog has an abscess, it is generally not an emergency, but you should contact a veterinary professional within twenty-four hours to arrange for them

to be seen. If their condition worsens, or if they are very lethargic, dehydrated, pale, or unresponsive, you should contact a veterinarian as soon as possible.

Conditions that are commonly mistaken for emergencies

Sometimes, understandably, non-emergency conditions can be mistaken for emergencies by pet parents. The list below gives some examples of these conditions that can seem life-threatening but aren't.

Reverse sneezing

Reverse sneezing describes a particular type of snorting behaviour that some dogs are prone to. It can seem serious because it can appear that something is lodged up the nose or that your dog is unable to breathe.

Thankfully, reverse sneezing is harmless. If you are unsure if your dog is reverse sneezing, some videos online show what a reverse sneeze looks and sounds like.

A seizure

A single seizure that lasts less than five minutes and your dog recovers fully from is not an emergency. You do not need to contact your veterinarian until after the seizure has ended. Instead, time the seizure and take a video for your vet.

If your dog fails to come around fully

after a seizure, the seizure lasts more than five minutes, or your dog has more than one seizure, this could be an emergency, and you should speak to your veterinarian promptly.

Kennel cough

Because kennel cough causes coughing fits that can be lengthy and relentless, the condition is commonly mistaken for being more serious. Luckily, the condition rarely causes anything more than coughing and lethargy and is not usually an emergency unless other symptoms are present.

Blood in the stools

The lining of the large bowel and rectum are very vascular, meaning that spots of blood in stool are quite common, especially if they have diarrhoea and are straining. However, streaks of blood are not an emergency.

Conclusion

Remember to keep calm and assess the situation carefully (bearing in mind that animals can lash out in pain or distress). Don't forget that if you are in doubt, you should call your vet—they'll be able to help you decide whether you need to rush your dog in or not.

Hope this info helps
Till next time
Dr Ruan Bester

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RESIDENTIAL

Public housing applications decline sharply amid 'oversupply'

LYNZY VALLES &
VICTORIA CHAN

THE number of applications for public housing in Macau has seen a sharp decline over the past three application periods, according to government data.

This marks the first time that the number of applications has fallen short of the available housing units.

Between 2019 and 2024, the government launched three public housing application rounds, offering a total of more than 13,000 units.

For the first time, the number of available two- and three-bedroom units slightly exceeded the number of applications, marking a shift from previous years when demand far outpaced supply. The 2023 round, which opened from September 27, 2023, to March 27, 2024, provided 5,415 units but received only 6,562 applications.

After disqualifications, 5,076 applications were accepted, leaving 339 units unclaimed—a first in the city's public housing history.

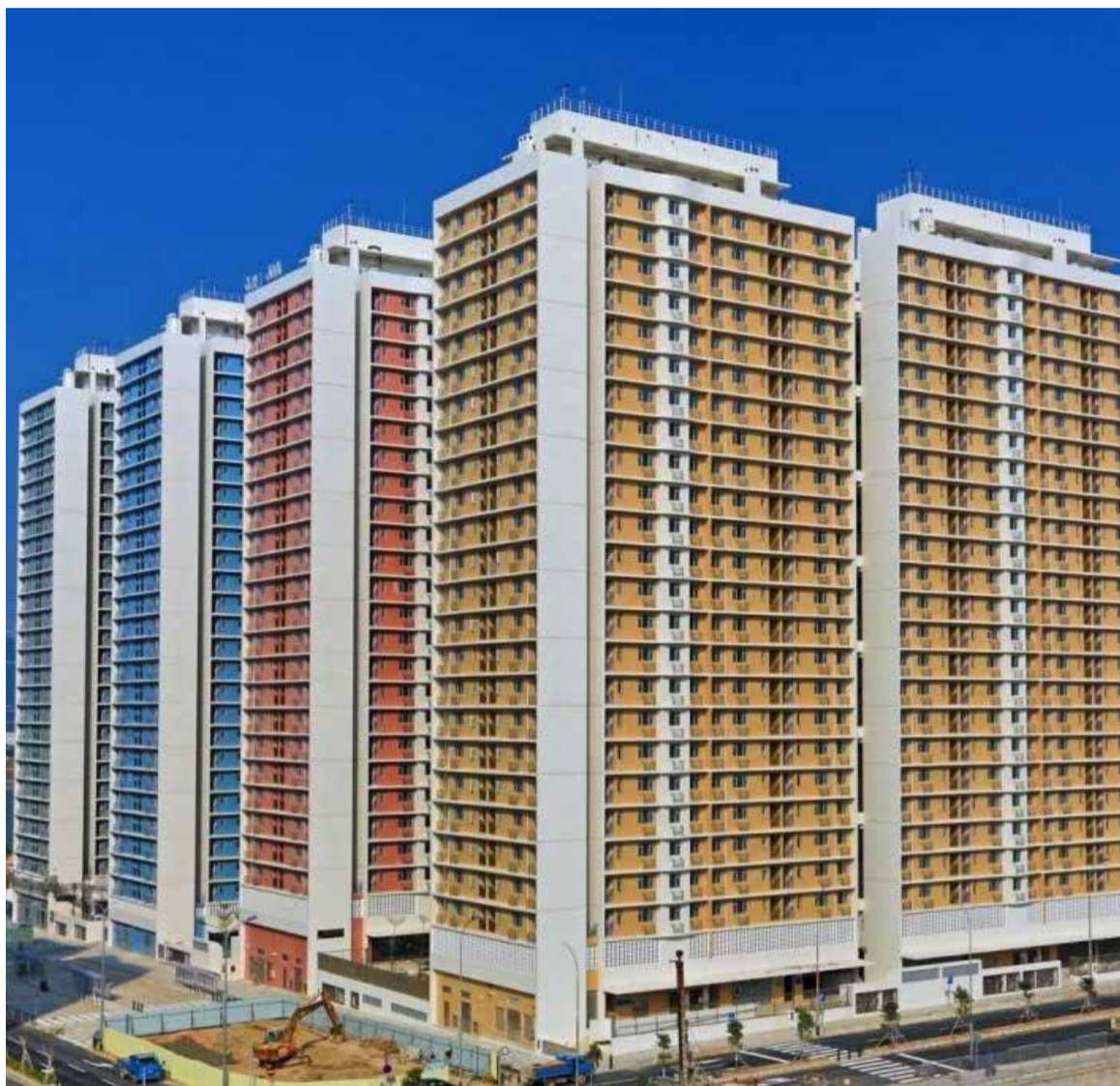
In contrast, the 2019 round saw intense competition, with 37,487 applications for 3,017 units. After disqualifying 1,722 submissions, 35,765 applications were accepted, with 45% from single-person households, 30% from families of three or more, and 25% from two-person households. At the time, there were 10 applicants for each unit.

By the 2021 round, applications for 5,254 units in Zone A dropped to 11,707, with 9,796 accepted after disqualifications.

Two-person households accounted for the largest share of applicants, followed by three-person families.

The latest round underscored this trend, with 6,562 applications for 5,415 units.

Currently, only the housing projects from 2019 have been completed. Projects from 2021 are expected to finish between November 2024 and August 2025, with the A3 lot leading the completion schedule. Meanwhile, the 2023 projects are slated for completion between September 2027 and January 2028, with B5 and B12 anticipated to be the first to finish.



COMMITTEE DISCUSSES REPLACEMENT SYSTEM AMENDMENTS

The Public Housing Affairs Committee recently held its first regular meeting of 2025 to gather opinions and suggestions on public housing policies for the year.

During the meeting, members discussed proposed amendments to the economic housing ordinance's replacement system, which would allow one-room flats to be exchanged for two-room flats.

Some members supported the initiative, believing it could encourage childbirth and help low-income families improve their living conditions.

As cited in a statement released by the Housing Bureau (IH), members emphasized the need for surveys and studies to assess societal demand before implementing the policy.

Others urged careful consideration of eligibility criteria, pricing, and restrictions to ensure the policy effectively targets those in need and allocates public resources fairly.

Additionally, members suggested

evaluating the current economic climate, the supply of public and private housing, and upcoming housing projects to maintain a balance between the public and private housing markets.

PRIVATE HOUSING MARKET RISKS

Some real estate developers have expressed concerns about potential impacts on the private housing market amid the proposed amendments.

With property transactions already slowing, they urged the government to strike a balance between public and private housing development to ensure market stability and support a full economic recovery.

Developers noted that the high interest rate environment and slower-than-expected economic recovery have created uncertainty in the property market.

Average private housing prices have fallen by 30% from their peak, with some properties experiencing declines of 40% to 50%.

This downward trend, coupled with an uncertain market outlook, has led to a

decrease in demand for public housing, as reflected in a significant drop in the latest round of public housing applications.

RESIDENTIAL RENTS ON THE RISE IN 2024

Macau's average rents for shops, office units, and industrial units all saw a decline in 2024, with drops of 1.1%, 2.8%, and 0.1% respectively.

However, residential rents experienced a 3.9% increase, according to the latest data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

The statistics revealed that the average rents for shops in the districts of Areia Preta & Iao Hon (MOP467), Barca (MOP355), NATAP (MOP392), and Horta e Costa & Ouidor Arriaga (MOP489) each experienced year-on-year declines ranging from 3.1% to 4.7%.

In contrast, shops in the ZAPE (MOP670) and NAPE & Aterros da Baía da Praia Grande (MOP612) areas saw modest increases of 0.2% and 0.1%, respectively.

Residential rents, on the other hand, saw significant gains.

KIANG WU HOSPITAL SEES GROWTH IN PATIENT VISITS, PLANS SALARY INCREASES

Kiang Wu Hospital saw a 2.2% increase in Emergency Department visits in 2024, treating 1.46 million patients. The hospital's director, Lau Veng Seng, highlighted a drop in staff turnover to 4.89%, with more healthcare professionals pursuing overseas studies. The Kiang Wu Charitable Association plans to raise salaries in 2025 and enhance collaboration with regional hospitals to improve medical services. Key goals include stabilizing the workforce, improving patient care experiences, advancing medical technologies, and increasing hospital digitalization.

IAM DISTRIBUTES ORNAMENTAL FLOWERS

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) distributed ornamental flowers to the public yesterday, aiming to promote environmental awareness and extend the life of festive plants. Beginning at 11 a.m. in Central Taipa Park and 3 p.m. in Flora Park, IAM offered various plants, including festive citrus, dahlias, and marigolds. The initiative followed the planting of festive decorations to enhance the city's beauty.

LEGAL EDUCATION ALLIANCE HOLDS FIFTH COUNCIL MEETING IN MACAU

The Fifth Council Meeting of the Mainland-Hong Kong-Macau Legal Education Alliance convened at the University of Macau's Faculty of Law, bringing together representatives from 16 institutions. Key figures included Wang Jianyuan and Pan Baoliang from the Central People's Government's Legal Department. The meeting, chaired by Li Juqian, featured a report from CUPL President Ma Huaide and discussions on the 2025 work plan. With membership now at 23, the alliance promotes legal education cooperation across regions.

MACAU HOSTS SESSION ON CHINA'S EDUCATION MASTER PLAN

A promotional session for the "Master Plan on Building China into a Leading Country in Education (2024-2035)" was held in Macau last Friday, attended by around 400 participants. Organized by key government offices, the event featured Vice Minister of Education Wu Yan, who emphasized the importance of aligning Macau's educational strategies with national goals. Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture O Lam highlighted education as foundational for national rejuvenation, pledging to enhance Macau's educational quality and international standing.

IMMIGRATION

MACAU EXTENDS AUTOMATED BORDER PASSAGES TO BRAZILIANS AND GERMANS

RENATO MARQUES

THE Public Security Police Force (PSP) has announced that Brazilian and German nationals can now use their passports to enter and exit Macau through the automated border-crossing passages.

In a statement, the PSP stated that the measure aligns with efforts to facilitate immigration procedures for international visitors and takes effect today (February 17).

“To fulfill President Xi Jinping’s

demand for ‘committing ourselves to building a higher-level platform for opening up to the outside world,’ the Macau Special Administrative Region government is adopting the position of ‘one center, one platform, and one base,’ striving to attract more international resources while creating an important window for exchange and mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilizations,” the PSP noted.

The PSP clarified that passport pre-registration is required before

utilizing the automated passages. It urged visitors aged 18 and older with passports to register at all border checkpoints daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. or at the Immigration Services Building in Pac On from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (excluding weekends and public holidays).

Additionally, the PSP stated that those between ages 11 and 17 can register their passports for automated passages, but a pa-

rent’s or legal guardian’s consent is necessary to complete the registration. Minors must also present a birth certificate and the identity document of their father, mother, or guardian (if accompanied by a guardian, proof of legal relationship is also required). To register, a passport must be valid for more than 90 days.

With the addition of Brazil and Germany, Macau has increased

the number of countries eligible for automated passages to six, following Australia, South Korea, Portugal, and Singapore.

The PSP added that it will continue working to simplify border procedures and expand these services to more travelers.

According to official statistics from 2024, 20,173 German and 9,658 Brazilian visitors traveled to Macau.

LIST OF LOCATIONS TO REGISTER PASSPORTS

Place of Registration	Opening hours
Border Gate Immigration Post (Departures Wing Services)	Daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Qingmao Checkpoint (3rd Floor Macau Departure Wing)	
Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Immigration Checkpoint (Hong Kong and Macau Departure Services)	
Outer Harbour Maritime Terminal Immigration Post (Arrival Area)	
Taipa Maritime Terminal Immigration Post (Arrival Area)	
Airport Immigration Post (Arrival Hall)	
Macao Port Checkpoint Area of the Hengqin Border Checkpoint (Arrival Hall – Visa Lounge)	
PSP – Immigration Services Building at Pac On	From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Public holidays)



COURTS

TSI denies appeal in ‘relationship fraud’ case

RENATO MARQUES

THE Court of Second Instance (TSI) has dismissed a defendant’s appeal in a fraud case involving a romantic relationship, upholding the Court of First Instance’s (TJB) decision to sentence the woman to three years in prison.

According to a statement from the Office of the President of the Court of Final Appeal, the woman began a romantic relationship with a man in 2019 through a social media application.

At the time, she claimed to be single and from a wealthy family in Shenzhen that owned several properties, including an apartment in Taipa’s One Grantai building.

Later that year, she falsely told her partner that she was pregnant with his child and



wanted to travel to the United States to legalize their marriage.

Using various excuses and alleged traditions, she deceived the man into giving her large sums of money, which she justified as a “wedding gift.”

The man gave her a total of MOP230,000, but a few months later, she asked him for another MOP120,000, allegedly to transfer ownership of her housing unit to his name.

She continued to

request money under different pretenses, including an additional MOP100,000, allegedly to support herself during the pregnancy.

The repeated demands prompted the man to visit the Property Registry Office, where he discovered that the apartment was not registered in her name.

Suspecting fraud, he filed a police report.

During the investigation, the woman admitted that all her

claims were fabricated, including her family background, property ownership, and even the pregnancy.

Following the trial, the TJB convicted her of fraud involving a considerable amount and sentenced her to three years in prison.

In her appeal to the TSI, the defendant accused the court of misinterpreting the evidence, claiming that she had never hidden the fact that she was married and had children. However, the TJB refuted her claim after analyzing excerpts from her conversations and social media posts.

She also argued that there was no proof the man had given her a total of MOP350,000.

After reviewing bank records and transfer transactions, the court found sufficient evidence to support the statements made by the man and his mother regarding the payments. Conversation records further validated their claims.

The TSI rejected her appeal and upheld the TJB’s sentence.



SUBSIDIES

GOV’T CONSIDERS MORE SUPPORT FOR SMES

STAFF REPORTER

THE government is exploring additional campaigns aimed at boosting community neighborhoods, according to the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED). In a reply to lawmaker Ella Lei, the bureau confirmed it is considering implementing similar initiatives to the citywide consumption program to further stimulate economic activity in these areas.

The response highlighted that these new efforts aim to attract more visitors to community neighborhoods, which have experienced slower-than-expected economic recovery.

During the 13-week

Consumption Grand Prize campaign, economic benefits were observed in over 22,000 stores, resulting in MOP227 million in direct economic benefits and a total consumption of approximately MOP1.1 billion.

In addition to the program, the government pointed to expanded cultural events, such as Lunar New Year celebrations, in community neighborhoods as a way to draw tourists.

Other cultural and sports activities were also emphasized as part of the strategy to promote local tourism. Furthermore, the government noted that three annual financial support programs for tourism had helped approve 43 activities for 2025.

GAMING

MGM credits record-breaking 2024 to strong performance in Macau

STAFF REPORTER

MGM Resorts has announced that total revenue for 2024 surpassed USD16.16 billion, marking a 6.7% increase over the previous year and setting a new all-time high for the company, the operator confirmed in an earnings call last week.

The standout performer in 2024 was MGM China, with revenue soaring 27.6% to reach USD4.02 billion. This marks a milestone, as it has now become the company's second-largest revenue stream, behind only the Las Vegas Strip division.

"We are thrilled to report the highest full-year consolidated net revenues in MGM's history," said CEO Bill Hornbuckle.

"This achievement was driven by a record-setting performance from MGM China. We're also optimistic about the strong demand we're seeing in early 2025, positioning us for continued growth."

"In Macau, we delivered the highest full-year segment-adjusted EBITDA in MGM China's history," Hornbuckle said. "We continue to outperform in the market, thanks to the exceptional efforts of our team."

The company also highlighted the success of initiatives designed to boost non-gaming revenues, including Macau 2049, its inaugural residency show at MGM Cotai, and the Poly Art Museum at MGM Macau, which saw over 10,000 attendees in a single day during the Chinese New

Year.

Kenneth Feng, president and executive director of MGM China also noted that both MGM China's properties saw a remarkable 18% increase in traffic compared to the 2024 Chinese New Year.

He also highlighted the strength in gaming volumes during the holiday period, with both properties maintaining a strong market share in the mid-teens.

"We had a solid Chinese New Year," Feng said. "Both properties recorded strong traffic, with gaming volume surpassing last year's figures. We also saw a longer tail to the Chinese New Year, with a higher percentage of players arriving after the holiday period, which is a notable change from 2024."



Four residents still detained abroad in work fraud schemes

STAFF REPORTER

FOUR of the five victims of fraudulent work schemes are still detained by authorities in the regions where they were forced to work and have not yet returned to Macau, according to a statement from the Office of the Secretary for Security.

Between September and December of 2024, five locals were coerced into working in fraud centers after being lured by false job offers promising high salaries and minimal qualification requirements.

Among the five victims, most were young people who are either unemployed or lack stable jobs, with one of them being a student.

According to the police, some individuals were aware



that their prospective work might be illegal but chose to overlook the risks in pursuit of easy profits, ultimately falling prey to kidnappers or being detained in foreign countries.

In January, the Judiciary Police (PJ) intervened to prevent a resident from accepting a fraudulent job offer abroad.

Wong Sio Chak, Secretary for Se-

curity, said that it is common for these criminal organizations to cover victims' travel expenses to build trust. Therefore, the Secretary warns that any job offer abroad promising high salaries with few requirements is likely a scam.

Additionally, Wong emphasized that the issue gained more attention after Thai police announced the res-

cue of Chinese actor Wang Xing last month.

After being kidnapped, the actor was taken to Myanmar, where he, like many other Chinese nationals, was coerced into working in a fraud operation.

Thai authorities reported on Saturday that they had apprehended 10 Chinese individuals connected to this case.



SAM HOU FAI MEETS HONG KONG CE TO DISCUSS GBA COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai recently met with Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu at Government House to discuss enhancing industrial cooperation across various sectors, including technology, finance, and culture.

During their meeting, Sam and Lee exchanged views on a wide range of topics, including science and technology innovation, finance, traditional Chinese medicine, tourism, culture and sports, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions), and commerce.

Sam expressed gratitude for Hong Kong's ongoing support of Macau's development, noting that the "one country, two systems" principle provides both Special Administrative Regions (SARs) with significant institutional advantages.

He emphasized that, despite their different development orientations and focuses, Hong Kong and Macau strongly

complement each other. Enhancing cooperation, Sam said, would lead to greater development for both regions.

The two officials also discussed the continuous advancement of judicial assistance between the two SARs. Before the meeting, Sam and his delegation visited the Hong Kong Science Park and the Hong Kong Palace Museum to gain a better understanding of Hong Kong's innovation and technology development, as well as its cultural and heritage cooperation with the mainland.

Sam stated that Macau is accelerating efforts to promote appropriate economic diversification, with a focus on the traditional Chinese medicine and "Big Health" industries, as well as high-tech industries.

He expressed hope that further integration within the Greater Bay Area would enable Hong Kong and Macau to continue deepening cooperation in related industries and the cultural field, thereby promoting joint development.



HONG KONG

Gov't plans to ban substandard tiny apartments. Low-income families fear higher rents

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

JIMMY Au's world shrinks to about the size of a parking space whenever she gets home.

Her cramped Hong Kong home is one of four units carved out of what was once a single apartment. Most of the space is occupied by the bunk bed she shares with her husband and son, and their sleep is often disrupted by neighbors returning late or heading out early. Au's son often gets bruises bumping into things. Privacy is limited, with only a curtain separating the bathroom from the kitchen.

But what troubles Au most about her home is that she might lose it. Hong Kong's government is planning to crack down on what it calls inadequate housing in subdivided apartments, mandating a minimum size and other baseline standards for homes like Au's.

A public consultation period ended last Monday, and the government is aiming to pass the rules into law this year.

The proposed rules leave many low-income residents like Au uncertain about their future in one of the world's most expensive housing markets.

Au, a homemaker who moved from mainland China nine years ago, said her family pays about

\$460 a month in rent, about half of the income her husband makes from irregular renovation jobs.

"I'm afraid the rent will get so high we can't afford it," Au said, sitting on the bed's lower bunk, surrounded by clothes, a fan and plastic storage drawers.

Housing is a sensitive issue in Hong Kong, one of the world's least affordable cities.

Some 7.5 million people live in a small territory that's mostly made up of steep slopes. Just 7%, or 80 square kilometers, of the city's total land is residential. The average price of an apartment of less than 40 square meters last December ranged from about \$13,800 to \$16,800 per square meter, depending on the district.

Beijing, which sees the city's housing problems as a driver of the 2019 anti-government protests, wants the city to phase out subdivided units by 2049. The government is also boosting the public housing supply, aiming to provide 189,000 flats over the next five years.

But some 220,000 people rely on subdivided units, including migrants, workers, students and young professionals.

Most subdivided homes are not far from the standards, the

government said, but an estimated 33,000 units would need major renovations to meet them.

The proposed rules would mandate a minimum size of at least eight square meters (86 square feet), a bar the government says it meant to leave room for low-priced housing. Every unit will also need to have a window, a toilet exclusively for the occupants' use, and a door to separate the toilet from other parts of the home, among other criteria.

The average waiting time for a public flat is five and a half years, but it can take even longer than that.

Landlords will have a grace period to renovate. After that, violations could lead to up to three years' imprisonment and a maximum fine of about \$38,500.

Security guard Fafa Ching has lived in multiple subdivided flats for over a decade. Her current unit costs about \$490 per month and lacks even a bathroom sink, forcing her to collect water from the showerhead with a basin to wash her face. Her home will need renovation to meet propo-

sed requirements for fire safety and separate electricity and water meters.

Ching worries that upgraded homes will be too expensive for her.

The government has said if necessary, it will offer assistance such as helping affected tenants to find other private accommodation or directly providing temporary shelter. A top official told the city's public broadcaster that transitional housing apartments are ready and assured that large-scale enforcement will happen only when proper resettlement arrangements are available.

Chan Siu-ming, a professor at the City University of Hong Kong's social and behavioral sciences department, welcomed the government's taking steps to set minimum standards, but said its resettlement plans are inadequate.

Chan said the impact could be wider than officials expect, and the city's supply of public and transitional housing may not meet needs. Low-income residents may also need help shouldering the cost of moving house, he said.

As of last September, the average waiting time for a public

flat is five and a half years, but it can take even longer than that. Ching said she's waited for eight years.

In an emailed response to questions from The Associated Press, the government said it does not expect significant surges in rent as demand will drop with the increasing public housing supply. It reiterated that the rules will be implemented gradually to avoid causing panic.

Chan added that some single people may be forced into even smaller dormitory-like "bed spaces," which are not covered by the proposed rules. Bed spaces are widely considered to be Hong Kong's worst form of housing — partitioned areas in which residents get barely enough space to fit a single bed and some belongings. They are currently regulated under another law, the government said.

Sze Lai-shan, the deputy director of the Society for Community Organization, a non-government organization, said some people have already been asked to move out of subdivided homes as landlords anticipate the policy.

She suggested the government start registering substandard flats before the legislation comes into force to assess the residents' needs and consider expanding the eligibility for transitional housing. She also hoped the policy would eventually cover those living in tiny bed spaces.

"It's difficult to explain to people that Hong Kong has two sets of housing standards," she said.

In Sham Shui Po, one of the city's poorest districts, bed space resident Law Chung Yu said he doubts that landlords will be able to comply with the rules.

Law, who can't work due to a health problem and rents one layer of a bunk bed, pays around \$280 in monthly rent for the bed space, about 30% of what he gets from the government subsidies he lives on. He shares a bathroom with neighbors in an apartment infested by lice.

"It's basically an armchair strategy, I don't see it having much impact in reality," he said.

Au's never measured her unit, and isn't sure if her unit meets the minimum size. But with her neighboring units falling short of the minimum size requirement, she knows her home would probably be gone too. She hopes the government will help resettle affected households into places that cost the same as their current rent.

Her landlord hasn't discussed the issue with her yet. For now, all she can do is wait.

"I'm taking it day by day. It'd be worse if I think about it so much I develop mental problems," she said. **MDT/AP**

AUSTRALIA-PHILIPPINES

Police help would-be victims avoid online love scams on Valentine's Day

AUSTRALIAN and Philippine authorities took steps on Valentine's Day to help would-be victims avoid hurting their "hearts and bank accounts" in online love scams.

The Australian Federal Police, with the help of Filipino authorities, on Friday publicized online dialogues used by an online love scam syndicate, which had been dismantled in the Philippines, to help foster vigilance.

"The Australian Federal Police is flipping the script on romance scammers this Valentine's Day by revealing real-life dialogue used to target the bank accounts — and hearts — of thousands of potential victims online," a joint statement by the Australian police, the Philippine Anti-Organized Crime Commission and other law enforcement agencies said.

Philippine authorities raided the syndicate's hideout near Manila in October, arrested more than 250 mostly Chinese suspected members and seized computers and other gadgets used in the online fraud.

After an investigation, Australian and Philippine police found the syndicate had attempted to victimize about 5,000 people in Australia alone. They were trying to check if those Australians have already



Kathleen Oehlers of the Australian Federal Police talks during a press conference in Manila, Philippines, Friday

been defrauded, Australian Federal Police officer Kathleen Oehlers said in a news conference in Manila with Philippine anti-crime officials.

About \$15 million have been lost to such online love scams from victims in Australia last year alone, according to Oehlers.

Under the scheme, the suspects would hunt for potential victims, mostly fully employed

males, in online dating apps and then use romantic dialogues to develop a whirlwind romance online. A victim would later be encouraged by a scammer under cover of a fake picture and identity to invest in cryptocurrency, initially with relatively small amounts, before shifting the funds to the syndicate's account, Oehlers said.

Philippine Undersecretary Gilbert Cruz, who heads the

Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission, said that aside from publicizing the dialogues used by the syndicate to lure and defraud victims, the Australian police also provided crucial tips online. They included being wary of red flags like "overly affectionate behavior," he said.

Philippine authorities would take similar steps to foster vigilance, Cruz said.

"The scammer would portray a kind-hearted Filipino woman living in Australia or a local female resident in the Philippines, heartbroken by an ex-fiance who wanted my money, not my love," the statement said.

"I'm sorry if our first day of chat is very emotional. By the way, how's your business?" according to one of the scripts used by the syndicate to shift the topic to cryptocurrency investment.

Last year, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered the closure of the mostly Chinese-run online gaming operations up to the end of 2024, accusing them of venturing into crimes, including financial scams, human trafficking, torture, kidnappings and murder.

The Chinese-run online gambling outfits were estimated to number more than 400 across the Philippines and employ hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Southeast Asian nationals.

The ban forced many remaining syndicates to break into smaller outfits in the Philippines and diversify their operations into an array of online love, cryptocurrency and investment scams, the Philippine anti-organized crime commission said. **MDT/AP**

KOREAS TENSIONS

Seoul says North Korea is destroying facility that hosted reunions of war-separated families

KIM TONG-HYUNG,
SEOUL

NORTH Korea is demolishing a South Korea-built property that had been used to host reunions of families separated during the 1950-53 Korean War, the South's government said Thursday, as it continues to eliminate symbols of engagement between the war-divided rivals.

Relations between the Koreas are at their worst in years, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continuing to flaunt his expanding nuclear weapons



The reunion center is located at the Diamond Mountain, North Korea

program and declaring to abandon long-standing goals of inter-Korean reconciliation, while describing the South as a permanent enemy.

The 12-story building at the North's scenic Dia-

mond Mountain resort, which has 206 rooms and banquet facilities for hosting meetings, had been used for family reunions since 2009. The Koreas last held a family reunion in 2018, after Kim initiated

diplomacy with Seoul and Washington in an effort to leverage his nuclear program for economic benefits.

Negotiations derailed in 2019 after a failed summit between Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump, who was serving his first term, when the Americans rejected North Korea's demands for a major release of U.S.-led economic sanctions in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

The North has since suspended virtually all diplomatic activity with the South and ignored U.S. re-

quests to resume talks while accelerating the development of nuclear weapons and missiles.

Seoul's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said it had confirmed that North Korea was demolishing the building, named the Reunion Center for the Separated Families, and urged the North to suspend the destruction.

The North had previously removed a South Korea-built hotel, golf course and other tourist facilities from the Diamond Mountain resort.

"Demolishing the

reunion center is an act against humanity that crushes the yearning of separated families, as well as a grave infringement of our state-owned property," the ministry said in a statement.

The ministry said the South's government will consider "necessary" countermeasures, including legal action and international pressure, but it isn't clear whether Seoul has any effective options.

In 2023, South Korea filed a 44.7 billion won (\$30 million) damage suit against North Korea for blowing up a joint liaison office just north of their border in 2020.

The lawsuit was seen as symbolic as there's no clear way for South Korea to force North Korea to pay if it is found liable for damages.

MDT/AP

Trump wants denuclearization talks with Russia and China, hopes for defense spending cuts

ZEKE MILLER & MICHELLE L. PRICE, WASHINGTON



AP PHOTO

PRESIDENT Donald Trump said late last week that he wants to restart nuclear arms control talks with Russia and China and that eventually he hopes all three countries could agree to cut their massive defense budgets in half.

Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, Trump lamented the hundreds of billions of dollars being invested in rebuilding the nation's nuclear deterrent and said he hopes to gain commitments from the U.S. adversaries to cut their own spending.

"There's no reason for us to be building brand new nuclear weapons, we already have so many," Trump said. "You could destroy the world 50 times over, 100 times over. And here we are building new nuclear weapons, and they're building nuclear weapons."

"We're all spending a lot

of money that we could be spending on other things that are actually, hopefully much more productive," Trump said.

While the U.S. and Russia hold massive stockpiles of weapons since the Cold War, Trump predicted that China would catch up in their capability to exact nuclear devastation "within five or six years."

He said if the weapons were ever called to use, "that's going to be probably

oblivion."

Trump said he would look to engage in nuclear talks with the two countries once "we straighten it all out" in the Middle East and Ukraine.

"One of the first meetings I want to have is with President Xi of China, President Putin of Russia. And I want to say, 'let's cut our military budget in half.' And we can do that. And I think we'll be able to."

Trump in his first term

tried and failed to bring China into nuclear arms reduction talks when the U.S. and Russia were negotiating an extension of a pact known as New START.

Russia suspended its participation in the treaty during the Biden administration, as the U.S. and Russia continued on massive programs to extend the life-spans or replace their Cold War-era nuclear arsenals.

China has rebuffed past American efforts to draw it into nuclear arms talks, saying the U.S. and Russia first need to reduce their much larger arsenals. A government official reiterated that position on Friday.

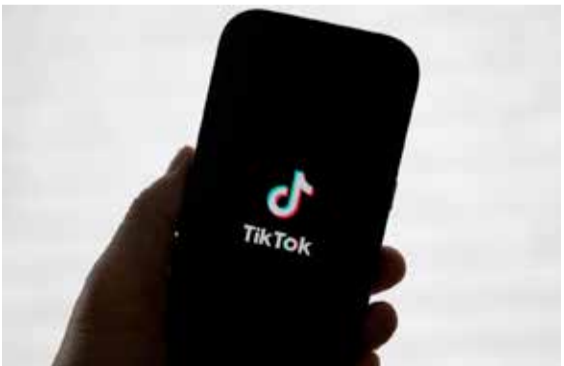
"The U.S. and Russia should ... significantly and substantially reduce their nuclear arsenals and create the necessary conditions for other nuclear-armed states to join the nuclear disarmament process," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said at a daily briefing in Beijing. **MDT/AP**

TECH

TikTok returns to Apple and Google app stores in the US

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

AP PHOTO



TIKTOK has returned to the app stores of Apple and Google in the U.S., after President Donald Trump delayed the enforcement of a TikTok ban.

TikTok, which is operated by Chinese technology firm ByteDance, was removed from Apple and Google's app stores on Jan. 18 to comply with a law that requires ByteDance to divest the app or be banned in the U.S.

A Google spokesperson declined to comment on the company's

move on Friday. Apple did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

The popular social media app, which has over 170 million American users, previously suspended its services in the U.S. for less than a

day before restoring service following assurances from Trump that he would postpone banning the app. The TikTok service suspension briefly prompted thousands of users to migrate to RedNote, a Chinese social media app, while calling

themselves "TikTok refugees."

The TikTok app became available to download again in the U.S. Apple App store and Google Play store after nearly a month. On Trump's first day in office, he signed an executive order to extend the enforcement of a ban on TikTok to April 5.

TikTok has long faced troubles in the U.S., with the U.S. government claiming that its Chinese ownership and access to the data of millions of Americans makes it a national security risk.

TikTok has denied

allegations that it has shared U.S. user data at the behest of the Chinese government, and argued that the law requiring it to be divested or banned violates the First Amendment rights of its American users.

During Trump's first term in office, he supported banning TikTok but later changed his mind, claiming that he had a "warm spot" for the app. TikTok CEO Shou Chew was among the attendees at Trump's inauguration ceremony.

Trump has suggested that TikTok could be jointly owned, with half of its ownership being American. Potential buyers include real estate mogul Frank McCourt, Shark Tank investor Kevin O'Leary and popular YouTuber Jimmy Donaldson, also known as MrBeast. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1959 TURKISH LEADER INVOLVED IN FATAL CRASH



Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes has survived an air crash near London that killed 12 people.

Mr Menderes was on his way to the British capital for talks on Cyprus with the British, Greek and Cypriot premiers when his Viscount jet crashed in Jordan's Wood, near Newdigate in Surrey.

Only 10 of the 22 passengers and crew on board the Turkish Government aircraft survived and two were critically injured.

An official from the Ministry of Civil Aviation said it was the worst crash he had seen.

Turkish press secretary Sefik Penmen told an impromptu conference at London Clinic: "The Prime Minister's condition is quite satisfactory and a bulletin will be issued at 1000 tomorrow. He is feeling quite alright, though he is very sorry about what has happened to his friends."

The plane - from Istanbul - was diverted from Gatwick Airport because of fog and was due to arrive at London Airport at 1600 GMT when it went missing off the radar.

Local resident Margaret Bailey, a trained nurse, was one of the first on the scene - three miles along the flight path from Gatwick - shortly after 1700 GMT.

At about that time the plane carrying Greek Prime Minister Constantin Karamanlis landed at Gatwick without incident.

The Turkish jet lost its wings and had its engines torn off as it ploughed 300 yards through the wood and landed upside down with trees embedded in the mangled fuselage and burst into flames.

Three divisions from Surrey Fire Brigade put out the resulting fires although their efforts were hampered by thick fog.

After receiving first aid at Mrs Bailey's farmhouse, 200 yards away, Mr Menderes was taken to hospital in London 90 minutes later.

Other casualties are being treated at hospitals in East Grinstead, Redhill and Dorking.

The Queen and Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus have sent messages of sympathy.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Cyprus talks for the next day were cancelled.

The Turkish Embassy released a statement to say they did not think there were any suspicious circumstances surrounding the crash.

From his hospital bed, two days later, Mr Menderes initialled a new Cyprus peace agreement made between the Greek, British and Cypriot leaders.

He visited the site of the crash on 25 February and offered the families who had rescued him complementary holidays in Turkey. When the prime minister returned home the next day he received a rapturous welcome from 10,000 Turkish people.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

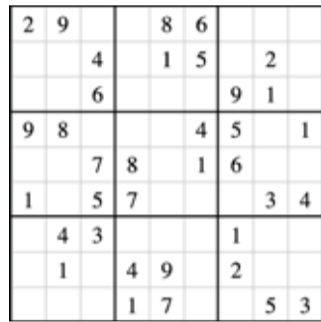
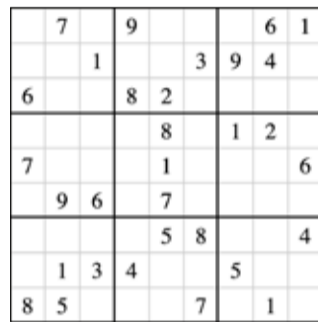

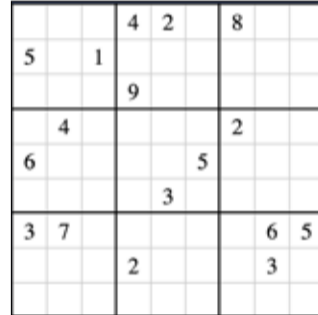
YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 If you're currently flying solo, reinforce yourself with positive thoughts. Please don't force yourself to be active, trusting your body and mind when they say it's time to rest.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Be sure to seek decadence and pleasure unapologetically. Don't let your thoughts get ahead of you, especially if stress about the upcoming work week begins to trickle in.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Capture brilliance by taking a moment to document any fresh ideas that swirl in your psyche. Creative expression will be particularly appealing, so try to choose activities that celebrate your natural genius.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Your intuition and nurturing heart strengthen under these cosmic conditions. Just be mindful of who you go above and beyond for and avoid sacrificing yourself to meet the needs of another.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 If your surroundings start to swirl, take it as a sign to pull back and listen only to the voice within. Reach outside of yourself to find healing, tapping into your intuition and divine connection to cultivate inner peace.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Consider how you can show others just how much you appreciate them without putting much strain on your finances. Try to completely unplug, especially if reaching for your phone has become more compulsive.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 How you handle conflict and challenges comes into focus. Take accountability, and responsibly approach any damage control you must undertake. Do something enjoyable that's just for you.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Embrace stillness once you've awakened, making it a point to choose better ways of thinking and acting. Remember that it's okay to change directions when chasing dreams.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Don't hesitate to spearhead plans that involve your vast network of friends. Conflict could brew, and it may be best to keep a more intimate circle.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Relationships could feel particularly strained if you don't show others compassion and grace, so try to understand where loved ones are coming from.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Your unique point of view will have the power to inspire and spread joy, so be sure to express yourself loudly and with pride. Reminder to tie up loose ends.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 A sense of give and take will be prevalent, especially when it comes to those you cohabitate with. So, if a loved one is kind enough to cook your breakfast, be sure to take care of the dishes!

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY 	EASY+ 
MEDIUM 	HARD 

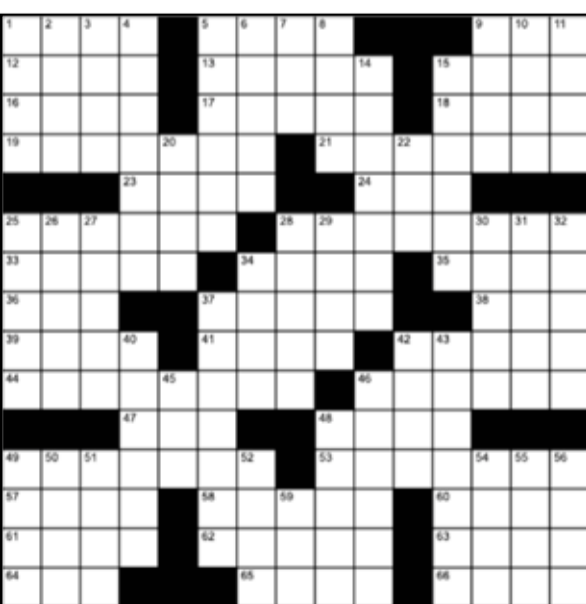
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-1	6	fine
Changchun	-13	-6	fine
Chengdu	7	15	rain
Chongqing	8	13	cloudy
Fuzhou	10	17	fine
Guangzhou	15	25	cloudy
Guiyang	3	6	overcast
Haikou	18	25	cloudy
Hangzhou	5	8	rain
Harbin	-18	-10	snow
Hefei	2	8	overcast
Nanjing	2	9	overcast
Shanghai	5	9	overcast
Taipei	13	18	rain
Wuhan	2	9	rain
Hong Hong	18	21	sunny
WORLD			
Moscow	-12	-9	snow
Frankfurt	-5	3	sunny
Paris	-1	6	sunny
London	1	4	cloudy
New York	-7	1	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Tuneful Horne; 5- Swedish import; 9- General on Chinese menus; 12- Elemental unit; 13- Championship; 15- Siamese sound; 16- Extinct bird; 17- Knight wear; 18- Enthusiasm; 19- Catch; 21- Seesaws; 23- Teri of "Tootsie"; 24- Bee follower; 25- Soggy and reedy; 28- Free; 33- Les ___-Unis; 34- Whine and whimper; 35- Ceremonial act; 36- It's not PC; 37- Penalized; 38- Chat room chuckle; 39- Mine finds; 41- Humerus neighbor; 42- Designer Simpson; 44- Sororal; 46- Closer; 47- West end?; 48- Ethereal; 49- Ore; 53- Stone relic; 57- Somewhat; 58- Gave a hoot; 60- Presidential battleground state; 61- Not that; 62- ___ nous; 63- Bar ___; 64- Sun. delivery; 65- Six feet under; 66- Transcript figs.;

DOWN 1- Stow, as cargo; 2- School on the Thames; 3- Agrees tacitly; 4- Surrounded by; 5- Like some nights; 6- Broadcaster; 7- Banking convenience; 8- Ink spot; 9- Prefix with conference; 10- Go sky-high; 11- Possesses; 14- Put up; 15- Shooting star; 20- Contented sighs; 22- Long fish; 25- Office notes; 26- Pong maker; 27- Speed contests; 28- Nice days, usually; 29- Zeno of ___; 30- Former Houston footballer; 31- Ripped off; 32- Sniggler; 34- Tablet; 37- Kiln; 40- Spirited horses; 42- Dynamic introduction?; 43- From dawn to dusk; 45- Slip up; 46- Required; 48- End of ___; 49- Wrestling surfaces; 50- Spillane's ___ Jury; 51- Neet rival; 52- Ground; 54- Breakfast chain, for short; 55- Ike's ex; 56- Weed whackers; 59- Road with a no.;



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 6,988,000 4 bed 2 bath



Hellene Garden w/ 1 CP
 HKD 7,500,000 4 bed 3 bath



Manhattan F Unit
 HKD 10,800,000 3 bed 2 bath

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Nam Long (Old Taipa)
4 bed 2 bath
130.43 m² / 1,404 ft² | HKD 6,988,000



Manhattan F Unit (Taipa)
3 bed 2 bath
111.76 m² / 1,203 ft² | HKD10,800,000



Hellene Garden (Coloane)
4 bed 3 bath & 1 Car Park
192.58 m² / 2,073 ft² | HKD7,500,000



Chun Leong (Taipa)
2 bed 1 bath
68.28 m² / 735 ft² | HKD 4,700,000



Ocean Garden Cattleya Court (Taipa)
2 bed 2 bath
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BASKETBALL

Wembanyama thought he had a time-saving idea; the NBA DQ'ed him and Chris Paul anyway

TIM REYNOLDS,
SAN FRANCISCO

VICTOR Wembanyama and Chris Paul made history on All-Star Saturday night.

The wrong type of history, that is.

The San Antonio teammates were disqualified from the Skills Challenge on All-Star Saturday night because their shot attempts during the event were not "valid," as the rules required. And afterward, all everyone wanted to know was who came up with the plan.

"I did," Wembanyama said. "I don't regret it. I think it was a good idea."

The challenge included bounce passes, chest passes, shots from three different locations on the floor and dribbling. On the shots — from the corner over an



San Antonio Spurs guard Chris Paul

automated defender, near the top of the arc and at the elbow — players had to either make one or shoot three, whichever came first.

Wembanyama read the rules and determined that if he and Paul simply flipped the three

shots from each location forward they would save a lot of time.

And they did. Their time in the first round was 47.9 seconds, easily the best. It just didn't count after the NBA evidently thought their effort wasn't in the spirit of taking "valid" shots, like

the rules state.

"We had the best time," Wembanyama said. "Numbers speak for themselves."

It was a most unconventional approach, but Wembanyama didn't surprise other competitors with his plan. Golden State's Draymond Green, who paired up with Warriors teammate Moses Moody in the event, said Wembanyama asked people beforehand if his plan was acceptable.

"It definitely sucked to see them throwing the ball like that," Green said. "But what I will say is Wemby walked around the court asking everybody, 'Make one or three attempts?' And Wemby said, 'Oh, so I can get all three of them up there?' So, he asked. Now, he may not have asked the right people. But I will say, in Wemby's defense, he did ask a lot of people."

Green and Moody lost to the Cleveland duo of Donovan Mitchell and Evan Mobley in the final of the skills event. Mitchell reacted by waving two-thumbs-down when Paul and Wembanyama finished, as some in the crowd booed.

"If they weren't disqualified, I think we probably would have just did the same thing, to be honest with you," Mitchell said. "Play to win, I guess."

Mobley indicated that he had similar thinking as Wembanyama.

"I feel like my first round I tried to do a similar thing but made it look like a real shot," Mobley said. "But that didn't work really well, so I switched up my strategy."

Paul also said Wembanyama asked about the strategy beforehand. He said he had a good time nonetheless.

"We tried something that we thought could win," Paul said. "To see if we had the best time, so ... it was fun."

Green said Paul warmed up taking conventional shots, presumably before Wembanyama — a second-year player and the league's reigning rookie of the year, who'll play in his first All-Star Game on Sunday — presented his time-saving plan.

"The old man followed the rookie," Green said, "right off the cliff." **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

AI NEEDS GLOBAL CONSENSUS ON ITS GOVERNANCE

As artificial intelligence breakthroughs in the form of chatbots such as ChatGPT and, more recently, DeepSeek continue pushing the boundaries of the technology, the hopes and anxieties surrounding AI have grown simultaneously.

How to harness the constructive potential of the nascent sector for the benefit of humanity while exerting effective control over the destructive ones has emerged as a new global challenge.

Since the abusive deployment of AI technologies is no longer a mere fearful trope of science fiction, there is a pressing need for a global, intergovernmental consensus on how to approach such technological breakthroughs, which, handled properly, may bring enormous social and economic benefits; or else wreak immeasurable havoc.

With the increasingly obvious damaging potential of AI technologies, a global consensus, rough as it may be at this stage, is of critical importance to ensure the responsible use of AI and the charting of a safe course for the thriving sector.

It is therefore regrettable that the two-day Paris AI Action Summit, which closed on Tuesday, failed to bring on board two of the world's key industry leaders to its demonstration of that imperative solidarity.

The AI Action Statement, which identifies the priority to ensure that "AI is open, inclusive, transparent, ethical, safe, secure and trustworthy, taking into account international frameworks for all", garnered 61 signatories, but not those of the United States and the United Kingdom.

The statement, which underscores the need for "the protection of human rights, gender equality, linguistic diversity, protection of consumers and of intellectual property rights", sets out the ambition to reduce digital divides by promoting AI accessibility, and ensuring the development of AI is transparent, safe, secure and trustworthy.

The US' absence, in particular, from such a needed consensus, reveals a deep divide among the world's key industry leaders that threatens the healthy progress of the AI sector. It is both the natural outgrowth of different outlooks on AI, and very possibly a dangerous driver of bifurcation in AI development in terms of both technological advancement and utilization.

It was no surprise that US Vice-President JD Vance should make clear that the US dislikes regulation, which he said may strangle the emerging new industry given the new administration's stance.

It is also well within expectation that Washington would take AI as a core dimension of its perceived strategic competition with China. The computer chips blockade that has run through both the Joe Biden and Donald Trump presidencies is all about that. Instead of inspiring fresh appreciation of the potential for bilateral cooperation, the disruptive emergence of DeepSeek from China seems to have triggered deeper fear of a Chinese AI threat.

Seemingly oblivious to the irony of his remark, Vance even warned US allies to not partner with "authoritarian regimes" that in his words are "weaponizing" AI.

Despite his remarks about "pro-growth AI policies" taking precedence over safety concerns, the US vice-president also made it sufficiently clear his government is turning AI into a decisive battlefield in what is broadly believed to be a new Cold War between the world's two largest economies.

China's stance on AI governance is clear and consistent. At the G20 Summit on Reform of the Institutions of Global Governance, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for stepping up international governance and cooperation on AI, to make sure that it is used for good and for all, not a game of the rich countries and the wealthy. [Abridged]

ISOLATED INDIGENOUS MAN RETURNS TO TRIBE IN THE AMAZON RAINFOREST AFTER BRIEF CONTACT

THE BUZZ

A young man from an isolated Indigenous tribe who approached a riverine community in Brazil's Amazon returned voluntarily to his people less than 24 hours later, Brazilian authorities said.

The encounter occurred around 7 p.m. local time last Wednesday in Bela Rosa, a community along the Purus River in the southwestern Amazon. Footage obtained by The Associated Press shows him barefoot and wearing a small loincloth, seemingly calm and in good health as he carried two logs.

Locals believe the man was asking for fire. Smartphone video of

the encounter showed one resident trying unsuccessfully to show the man how to use a lighter. Officials from Brazil's Indigenous affairs agency, Funai, arrived soon after and took him to a nearby facility.

Funai said in a statement Friday that the young man returned to the forest on Thursday afternoon. It added that a team of health professionals was sent to assess if the young man had been exposed to any disease to which isolated Indigenous tribes have no immunity.



AP PHOTO

Hong Kong-born giant panda twin cubs make their debut appearance to media in Ocean Park during a greeting ceremony in Hong Kong, Saturday

HONG KONG

RESIDENTS COMPETE TO NAME TWIN PANDA CUBS WHO JUST TURNED SIX MONTHS OLD

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

PANDA craze has once again gripped Hong Kong as residents compete to name the territory's first locally-born giant panda cubs who just turned six months old.

The competition to name the twin cubs, born Aug. 15, launched Saturday following a celebratory ceremony attended by Hong Kong leader John Lee and other officials at Ocean Park, the theme park that houses the twins, their parents and two other giant pandas that arrived from mainland China last year.

Residents can submit their suggestions via the park's website.

Lee said the southern Chinese city now has the largest number of pandas in captivity outside of mainland China, and the cubs' names would be announced in the first half of this year.

The pair, currently identified as the "Elder Sister" and the "Little Brother," will make their public debut on Sunday and meet visitors for five hours daily. Those who want to enjoy time with the cubs outside regular

visiting hours, before the park opens, can pay 1,500 Hong Kong dollars.

During a media preview session on Saturday, the male cub laid on a swing playing with a tree stick before a carer placed him on a slide. The female cub explored the enclosure before climbing onto a tree.

The panda carers said the female cub seemed more active than her male twin. She loves climbing the tree inside the enclosure and resting there while her brother likes to wander around and play with the plants. The male cub has been marked with two purple food-coloring spots on its back to distinguish it from his sister.

The birth of the baby pandas last year made their mother Ying Ying the world's oldest first-time panda mom.

Their popularity on social media also raised hopes for the city's tourism boost. Officials have encouraged businesses to capitalize on the panda craze to seize opportunities in what some lawmakers have dubbed the "panda economy."

Ocean Park's chairman Paulo Pong told re-

porters on Saturday that the park already saw income increases over the Christmas period and Lunar New Year holiday, alongside an uptake in overseas tourists, after the newly arrived pandas from mainland China started to greet the public.

"We're turning the page and we believe the pandas are definitely helping the income of the park," he said.

But caring for pandas in captivity is expensive. Ocean Park recorded a deficit of 71.6 million Hong Kong dollars last financial year, and in 2020 required a government relief fund to stay afloat. Observers are watching if taking care of six pandas will add to its burden or give it a chance to revive its business.

Pong said raising pandas was about animal conservation and education, instead of "just a money exercise."

Pandas are considered China's unofficial national mascot. The country's giant panda loan program with overseas zoos has long been seen as a tool of Beijing's soft-power diplomacy. **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

Austria A 23-year-old man stabbed six passersby in southern Austria on Saturday in what police said was a random attack that left a 14-year-old dead and five others injured. The suspect was detained in the city of Villach, where the attack took place, police said. He is a Syrian national with legal residence in Austria, they said.



AP PHOTO

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says he directed his ministers not to sign off on a proposed agreement to give the United States access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals because the document was too focused on U.S. interests. Zelenskyy's decision to reject a deal, at least for now, was described as "short-sighted" by a senior White House official.



AP PHOTO

Mideast Israel and Hamas completed the sixth exchange of hostages and Palestinian prisoners on Saturday with just over two weeks remaining in their fragile Gaza ceasefire's initial phase, and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio landed in Israel to begin a Mideast tour.

Turkey's foreign minister said Saturday his country would reconsider its military presence in northeastern Syria if that country's new leaders eliminate a Kurdish militant group designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.