

17
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NEWS

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MACAU RCR electronics

A MAJOR FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT IS SET TO BEGIN ON COLOANE'S WESTERN COAST, WITH THE FIRST PHASE FOCUSING ON MARINE WORKS TO MINIMIZE DISRUPTION

P3

TUI: KONG CHI FACES UP TO 21 YEARS IN PRISON FOR CORRUPTION CHARGES

P5

STRICTER THAN KOREA: THAILAND'S CASINO BILL DISCOURAGES THE WORKING CLASS FROM GAMBLING

P5



AP PHOTO



Malaysia Huawei launched the world's first tri-foldable phone, the Mate XT, yesterday in Kuala Lumpur. Priced at 3,499 euros, it features a 10.2-inch screen and folds twice. Analysts say U.S. trade restrictions pose challenges, but Huawei remains competitive in the foldable phone market.

AP PHOTO



Australia's central bank cut its benchmark interest rate yesterday for the first time since 2020. The Reserve Bank lowered the cash rate to 4.1% as inflation eased. Officials warned against expecting further cuts soon, while the government welcomed the move ahead of national elections.

AP PHOTO



Japan Senior Afghan Taliban officials arrived in Tokyo for talks with Japanese officials and grant organizations. The discussions focus on building a more inclusive political system and securing humanitarian aid. Japan does not recognize the Taliban government but seeks engagement on human rights issues.

AP PHOTO

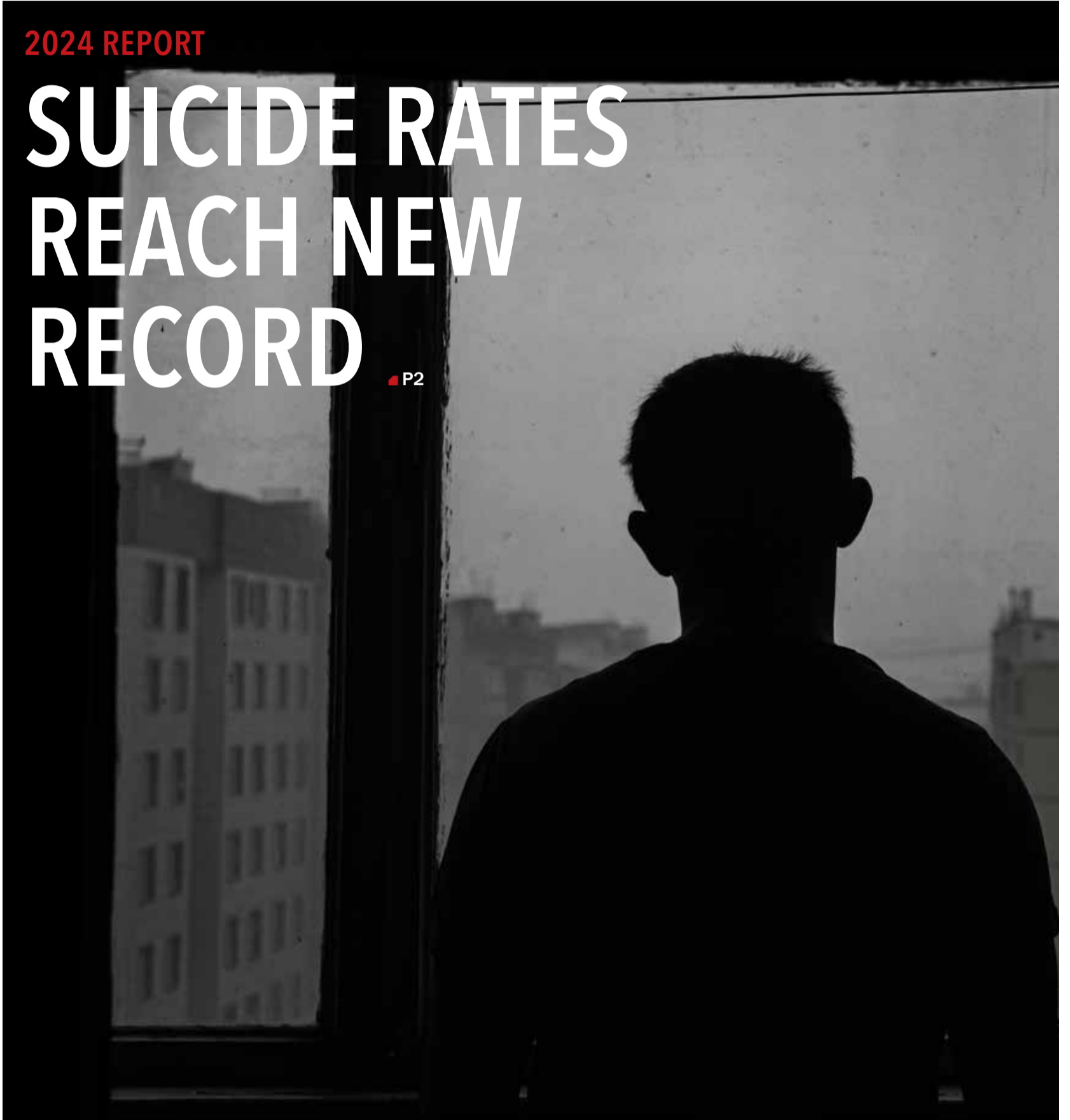


Middle East Egypt is working on a plan to rebuild Gaza, countering a U.S. proposal to depopulate the territory. Officials met with European and Arab diplomats this week to discuss funding. The plan includes temporary safe zones and a non-Hamas administration, though Israel opposes Palestinian self-rule in Gaza.

2024 REPORT

SUICIDE RATES REACH NEW RECORD

P2



GRAND PRIX

MACAU RACE TO HOST FINAL ROUND OF 2025 TCR AUSTRALIA

P4

POLLUTION

CITY RECORDS INCREASE IN UNHEALTHY AIR QUALITY DAYS

P2

MENTAL HEALTH

SUICIDE RATES IN 2024 REACH NEW RECORD HIGH WITH 2.3% Y-O-Y INCREASE

RENATO MARQUES

THE cases of suicide in Macau continued to grow in 2024, as shown in a report from the Health Bureau (SSM) on the monitoring of suicide.

According to the figures released, in 2024, there were 90 cases of confirmed suicides, two more (+2.3%) than in 2023, constituting a new record high of suicide cases in Macau.

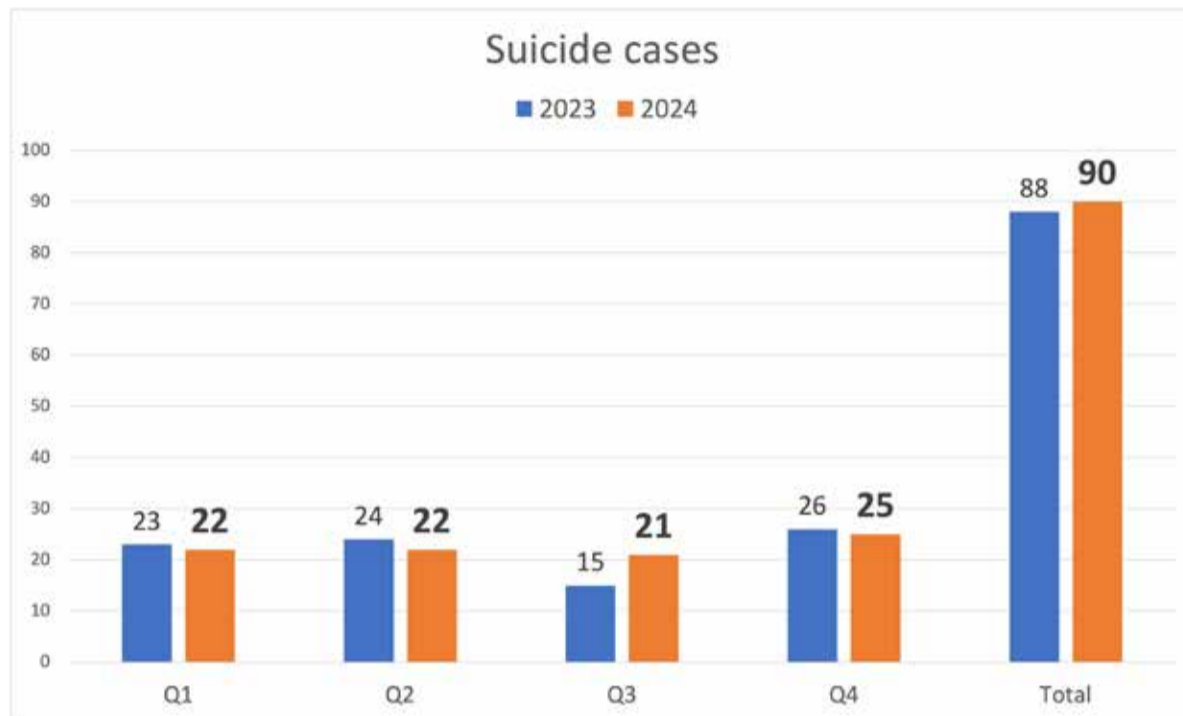
The figure represents an average of one suicide case every four days for the whole year. The same report shows that the local residents accounted for the increase (two more cases in 2024), while the number of suicides among non-residents (14) remained the same as in 2023.

In general, data shows that 84.4% of the suicides reported in Macau referred to local residents (+0.3% y-o-y), while the non-residents accounted for 15.6% (-0.3% y-o-y).

Although statistical data related to the significant causes of death in Macau in 2024 is not yet available, suicide occupied the number nine right after Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases (CLRD), which include four commonly overlapping chronic diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis.

In both years, the quarter that recorded the most suicides was the fourth quarter of the year (Q4), with 2024 presenting one case less than in 2023.

According to the latest release



that reports on the Q4 of 2024, there were a total of 25 cases of suicide recorded, 20 of which were related to local residents, while the other five involved non-residents. The same report notes that the people involved were between 13 and 75 years old, which indicates a large spectrum of issues among all age groups.

As in the previous quarters of this year, the SSM said, "According to data analysis, this quarter, the possible causes of suicide are mainly the result of mental illness and emotional, financial or gambling-related problems."

However, the bureau acknowledged that the causes of suicide are complex and often involve mental illness, psychological, socio-economic,

family, human relations, and biological genetic factors. SSM added that the government and the bureau are paying special attention to suicide as an issue, which they have said "requires everyone's attention, and everyone needs to take an active role as a suicide prevention advocate."

The bureau calls on residents to take an active role in supporting and communicating with those who may be experiencing emotional distress and encourage those who are experiencing emotional problems to seek professional help actively.

"The Macau SAR government has attached great importance to the mental health of residents, not only by continuously increasing

access to services and expanding the social support network through effective interdepartmental communication and cooperation mechanisms between public departments and social service institutions, but also by mobilizing the entire society through families, schools and the community to pay joint attention and forward infor-

mation on their initiative, so that the relevant departments can quickly intervene and eliminate potential risks," SSM said.

The bureau said that it has been allocating more resources to improve accessibility to mental health services in Macau continuously.

With the launch of the mental health service at the Inner Harbour Health Centre, residents can make an appointment in advance at the health centres in Tap Seac, Fai Chi Kei, Areia Preta, Ilha Verde, Jardins do Oceano, Nossa Senhora do Carmo - Lago, Praia do Manduco, Seac Pai Van and the Inner Harbour, without the need for a transfer letter."

The bureau is also increasing training for community health professionals on mental health care and diagnostic and treatment techniques to integrate specialized mental health services into the community health system, aiming to integrate specialized mental health services into the community health system.

SSM appeals to anyone who is experiencing emotional distress to call the Caritas "Hope for Life" hotline at 2852 5222 for counseling services.



ENVIRONMENT

City records rise in unhealthy air quality days

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU'S air quality deteriorated significantly in 2024, with a marked increase in "unhealthy" and "very unhealthy" days compared to the previous year, according to a report from the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG).

The findings reveal that

the Ká Hó station recorded the highest health-risk index of the year at 216 on October 19.

As cited in a Ponto Final report, SMG indicates that last year, Macau experienced two "very unhealthy" days and 136 "unhealthy" days, a stark rise from just 91 such days recorded in 2023. The overall number of "good" or "moderate" air quality days also fell, dropping



pping to 2,058 from 2,099 in the prior year.

The October 19 reading

at Ká Hó highlighted ozone as the primary pollutant, with other stations

reporting high indices as well—200 in Taipa and 182 in Coloane.

Notably, the health-risk index at the Macau roadside station peaked at 135 on December 30, with PM2.5, or fine particles, identified as the main pollutant on that day.

The trend of declining air quality has persisted since 2022, with authorities noting an increase in

unhealthy days since 2021.

The SMG utilizes a network of automated monitoring stations to assess air quality, focusing on pollutants such as PM2.5, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone.

In light of these findings, officials advise the public to limit outdoor activities during periods of poor air quality, especially near congested areas.

The air quality classifications align with standards from the United States, Canada, and other regions, emphasizing the importance of public health.

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IAS

Second round of elderly housing applications closes as move-ins continue

VICTORIA CHAN

THE second round of applications for government-subsidized elderly apartments closed last Friday, with 483 applications received, involving 600 people, according to Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) president Hon Wai.

The number of applications decreased compared to the first round, which saw more than 1,000 applications.

Addressing ongoing concerns and service improvements, Hon Wai discussed the first phase of the senior apartment program.

"After the Chinese New Year, some residents from the previous phase continue to move in. By the time this phase is completed, an estimated 900 households from the earlier batch will have settled in," said Hon Wai on the sidelines of the bureau's annual spring lunch.

The government's elderly apartment program provides a total of 1,815 units.

In the first round, 900 applications were received, and selected applicants were assigned units. Among them, 600 households moved in last year, while the remaining 300 are scheduled to move in this year. Authorities are currently finalizing procedures, with move-ins expected to be completed next month.

Responding to tenant con-



cerns, including reports of odors in some apartments, the official reassured that the IAS is addressing the issue.

"We have not received recent reports regarding odors, but we are aware of the issue. If tenants have concerns, they can request to change rooms or select another unit. We strive to accommodate their needs," he stated.

Regarding trends in social assistance applications for low-income families, Hon Wai noted a decline in both the number of applications and families seeking aid. He attributed this to the effectiveness of Macau's social support systems.

"This indicates that many families previously reliant on assistance have benefited from a system established over 20 years

ago," he said.

He added that more than 5,000 families apply for assistance each period, benefiting over 11,000 individuals.

The continued decline in applications suggests that many families are improving their financial stability through various support mechanisms, including education and employment opportunities.

The official has reiterated its dedication to enhancing social welfare in Macau as it embarks on a new chapter under its sixth administration.

In outlining the IAS's priorities for 2025, the bureau president, Hon Wai, highlighted key initiatives aimed at improving social services, particularly for the elderly.

"We aim to establish an impro-

ved structure for elderly care, increase the ability to detect hidden cases of elderly people living alone or in isolation, monitor elderly residential facilities, and enhance ancillary services and the surrounding environment," said the official.

Additionally, Hon Wai emphasized the importance of "deepening family education, creating an environment conducive to childbirth and family growth, and defining the development directions for the ten-year action plans on elderly support and rehabilitation services from 2026 to 2035."

Reaffirming the IAS's commitment, he said the bureau would "work with an entrepreneurial spirit, move forward together, stay on the right path, and invest in innovation."

MICE

GOV'T AIMS FOR STRONGER INTERNATIONALIZATION IN 2025

Vincent U, president of the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), noted shifts in business formats globally, affecting Macau's convention and exhibition sector. In 2024, Macau hosted 1,524 events, a 31.4% increase year-on-year, though participants dropped 17.1%. Non-gaming revenue declined 8.2%, and visitor spending fell 10.3% to 4,323 yuan. Despite this, U emphasized strong recovery, predicting increased internationalization in 2025, with a 15% rise in overseas visitors. Authorities plan to enhance industry training and collaboration with global exhibition organizations.

IC EXTENDS CALL FOR FILMART EXHIBITORS

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will accept applications from local film and TV production entities for the "Macao Pavilion" at the Hong Kong International Film & TV Market (FILMART) from Feb. 18 to Feb. 20. This opportunity follows a strong response to the open call for 2025. Eligible companies must have supported at least six non-local projects filmed in Macau between 2014 and 2024. The IC will select a maximum of eight exhibitors based on specific criteria. More details and application forms are available on the Macao Cultural and Creative Industries website.

PUBLIC WORKS

Major flood control project set for Coloane's western coast

VICTORIA CHAN

A major flood control project is set to begin on Coloane's western coast, with the first phase focusing on marine works to minimize disruption to nearby residents and businesses, according to local community leaders and government representatives.

The project, detailed on Coloane's official website, includes the construction of a 1,200-meter flood pre-



vention embankment, four flood gates, and a hydrological observation station.

The initial phase, scheduled to begin in late March or early April, will focus on

clearing seabed silt, said Yeong Keng Hoi, a representative of the Son I Welfare Association.

"The project is expected to start at the end of March or April. The SAR government has assured that since the first phase will take place entirely at sea, it will not impact coastal residents or the surrounding environment," Yeong stated in a TDM report.

Meanwhile, the Macau Institute of Engineers has proposed enhancements

to coastal support facilities during the construction period. Eddie Wu, the institute's president, suggested that the government consider utilizing existing structures to improve public accessibility and amenities.

"The facilities along the shore and waterside are temporary. When the water level is low, they can be safely used by the public. The government should explore options such as opening up temporary parking spaces or even reconsidering the positioning of the pier while constructing the embankment," Wu said.

The initial phase of the project is expected to be completed within three years.

WOMAN ACCUSED OF FALSELY REPORTING RAPE OVER GAMBLING DEBT

A 34-year-old mainland woman is suspected of falsely accusing a man of rape after a dispute over HKD5,000 in gambling debt. The Judiciary Police noted inconsistencies in her report, indicating a false accusation. The case was referred to the Procuratorate for further investigation. According to the case file, the woman met the man at a casino on February 14, stayed in his hotel room, and later claimed rape. Investigators discovered she continued gambling with him before reporting the incident.

MACAU GRAND PRIX

LOCAL GP CONFIRMED AS FINAL ROUND OF 2025 TCR AUSTRALIA

RENATO MARQUES

WORLD Sporting Consulting Limited (WSC) and TCR Australia confirmed yesterday that the final round of the 2025 TCR Australia touring car season will be held during this year's Macau Grand Prix.

TCR Australia organizers announced in a statement that the series' final round will take place from November 13 to 16 as part of the Guia Race. TCR Australia Series cars and drivers will also compete in the final round of the Kumho FIA TCR World Tour.

Following the previous announcement of the TCR World Tour's return to Australia at Shell V-Power Motorsport Park (The Bend) on September 12-14, the TCR Australia Series will contest two rounds alongside the world's elite TCR teams.

WSC, the global rights holder of TCR, has extended the opportunity for TCR Australia teams to race against the world's leading TCR teams on the Guia



Circuit. At the same time, WSC announced that it will fully cover freight costs for Australian teams heading to Macau.

This announcement finali-

zes the five-round TCR Australia Series, which will kick off at Raceway (Wanneroo) in Western Australia on June 6-8, supporting the Supercars Cham-

pionship.

The Perth event will be followed by appearances at One Raceway (New South Wales), Winton Raceway (Victoria), The

Bend (South Australia), and the finale in Macau.

WSC group president Marcello Lotti said, "TCR Australia has always been one of TCR's more important and exciting competitions, rooted in the long-standing tradition of touring car racing in the country. It's great that we've been able to extend our cooperation to a second event and offer Australian competitors the unique opportunity to finish the season in Macau."

TCR Australia Series director David Sonenscher added, "I'm thrilled to bring the TCR Australia Series to one of the most iconic circuits in the world and certainly one of the greatest challenges for a driver."

The opportunity to extend our cooperation with the Kumho FIA TCR World Tour and showcase Australian drivers on the highest international stage at Macau demonstrates the unique opportunity TCR Australia and the global TCR platform provide for all participants."

This announcement also means TCR Australia will replace TCR Asia and TCR China as the expanding field for Macau, which has recently been dominated by the latter two. This shift will give the event a broader international perspective.

ARCHITECTURE

Projects of local company shortlisted at GBA Architecture Awards

RENATO MARQUES

TWO projects from the local architecture firm LBA Arquitectura e Planeamento Lda. (LBA) have been shortlisted for the 2024 Cross-Strait Architectural Awards (CADA). According to the statement, the shortlisted projects include the Barra Light Rapid Transit (LRT) Station and the Fai Chi Kei Social Housing.

The CADA, organized by the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, awards architectural design and urban planning projects focusing on built work within the Greater Bay Area (GBA). "We are happy with this recognition. The CADA 2024 HKIA Architecture Awards are an important benchmark for peer-reviewed evaluation of



best practices in architecture. In the GBA, it is the most prestigious recognition for design practices," said Rui Leão, partner at LBA.

"This recognition is a testament to our team's dedication to pushing the boundaries of architectural design while ad-

dressing the evolving needs of communities and the environment. We are thrilled to be part of such a prestigious platform that celebrates global architectural excellence in the GBA," he added.

The firm also noted that the two projects exemplify LBA's com-

mitment to creating spaces that harmonize functionality, aesthetics, and environmental responsibility.

The winners of the CADA 2024 HKIA Architecture Awards will be announced at a gala ceremony in Hong Kong on March 1 of this year.



TELECOM

MTel EXPANDS CUSTOMER BASE AND FOCUSES ON AI DEVELOPMENT

TELECOM firm MTel experienced steady growth in 2024, with its customer base surpassing 10,000 through various promotional activities.

Notably, over 60% of residents in government-subsidized elderly apartments are now MTel customers, MTel chairman and CEO Michael Choi told the press yesterday.

Looking ahead, Choi highlighted the company's focus on artificial intelligence (AI) integration and expansion into Hengqin.

Additionally, MTel is targeting the new residential buildings in Zone A, where re-

sidents are expected to move in soon. To support this initiative, the company will host an introductory meeting within the next two months to explain how AI can enhance internet services.

Choi also revealed that MTel's request to lower Internet service fees, submitted to the government last year, has been approved. As a result, the company has reduced its original service fees to 65% of last year's rates.

Moving forward, MTel plans to propose further price reductions, including discounted plans for specific user groups. LV

GAMING

Stricter than Korea: Thailand's proposed casino bill discourages working class from gambling

LYNZY VALLES

THAILAND'S revised draft of the entertainment complex bill outlines strict conditions for the implementation of casinos, with local punters being required to have at least THB500 million (USD 1.5 million) in fixed deposits for at least six months to be able to enter casinos.

The requirements also include an entry fee capped at THB5,000 (USD 150).

Ben Lee, managing partner at IGamiX Management & Consulting Ltd., pointed out that while the THB500 entry fee, equivalent to just USD15, was likely aimed at discouraging the working class from gambling, it would not pose a significant deterrent to the middle and upper classes.



"This fee is similar to what we see in Singapore and is relatively low. It will keep out the working class, which is a good thing [for social concerns]. However, it should not deter the middle and upper class, who will find the convenience of local access outweighing the cost and time required to travel not only to the border casinos but also elsewhere within the region to

play," Lee told the Times.

The revised draft also includes limiting the size of the casino to no more than 10% of the venue's total area and requiring a separation between the casino and the rest of the complex with separate entrances.

Other businesses such as hotels, department stores, and even amusement parks or yacht clubs must be housed within the en-

tertainment complexes, making them multifaceted tourism destinations.

Despite the entry fee potentially limiting the number of lower-income gamblers, Lee believes the proposal's THB500 million deposit requirement for local players will create an even bigger barrier. "The THB500 million deposit will almost certainly deter most locals, as it would anywhere else," Lee explained, implying that this is a high entry threshold that could exclude a significant portion of the population.

The gaming expert noted that the disclosure requirement for locals wishing to gamble is an unusual step that hasn't been seen even in countries with some of the toughest conditions in the region.

"The last rule has not been seen anywhere, not even in South Ko-

rea or Vietnam, who have some of the toughest conditions," he said.

Echoing similar sentiments, Daniel Cheng, a gaming consultant based in Singapore, noted that a "further THB500 million bank deposit requirement would render Thai casinos no better than foreigner-only regimes like South Korea's," he said, as cited in a report issued by the South China Morning Post.

New public hearings for the revised draft law take place from February 15 to March 1.

The Thai government plans to pass the casino bill this year, hoping to attract more foreign investment and increase tax revenue. Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd. and MGM Resorts International are reportedly exploring potential opportunities in Thailand as a way to mitigate risks in Macau. Las Vegas Sands Corp. has also expressed interest in expanding into the Thai market.

Analysts have warned that Macau's dominance could be threatened by Thailand.

Thailand welcomed 26 million visitors in the first nine months of 2022 and aims to reach 40 million tourists by 2025—a milestone Macau was close to achieving in 2019. "Thailand is the greatest challenge for any gaming jurisdiction in Asia," Lee previously noted.

COURTS

Kong Chi faces 21 years in prison for corruption charges

STAFF REPORTER

THE Court of Final Appeal (TUI) sentenced former deputy prosecutor Kong Chi to 21 years in prison for accepting bribes in exchange for interfering in several criminal investigations, filing illegal cases, and retrieving seized property.

In a statement issued by TUI, the court also sentenced business couple Choi Sao Ieng and Ng Wai Chu to 16 years and 10 years in prison, respectively, for conspiring with Kong Chi to engage in illegal activities.

In the initial ruling, the Court of Second Instance sentenced Kong Chi to 17 years in prison, Choi to 14

years, and Ng to six years.

The court initially convicted the trio for committing several crimes, including "passive corruption for an unlawful act," "prevarication," "violation of judicial secrecy," "abuse of power," and "personal favoritism."

Additionally, Kong Chi was convicted of the crime

of "unjustified wealth."

After reviewing the case, some charges were dismissed as unsubstantiated.

However, Kong Chi was convicted of "leading or directing a gang," while the couple was found guilty of "participating in a gang." The TUI noted in a statement that, although their actions were not typical of

organized crime, the sustained, coordinated nature of their offenses suggested the existence of a triad society.

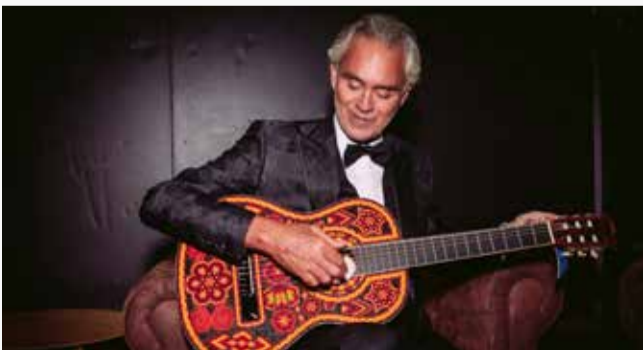
The TUI emphasized that while the crimes committed by the three defendants were not typical of gang-related offenses, the evidence presented in the case revealed a stable and

long-standing organization.

This group had been involved in illegal activities over several years, with members communicating covertly and conspiring to carry out criminal schemes. The court concluded that this provided ample evidence of the existence of a criminal organization.

CORPORATE BITS

Andrea Bocelli to perform at the Galaxy Arena



Andrea Bocelli, the world-renowned Italian tenor, will perform at Galaxy Arena in Macau on March 29, marking his debut in the city's largest indoor venue.

The concert promises a unique setlist, offering fans in Macau, Hong Kong, and the Asia-

-Pacific region an exceptional opportunity to experience Bocelli live.

Celebrated for his ability to blend opera, Italian folk, and pop music, Bocelli is the biggest-selling artist in the classical genre with over 90 million albums sold.

Bocelli has achieved significant international success, including his unforgettable duet with Sarah Brightman on "Time to Say Goodbye", which topped the German singles chart for an impressive 14 weeks.

Over his 30-year career, he has collaborated with stars like Celine Dion and Sarah Brightman and performed for prominent figures such as U.S. presidents and the British royal family.

A long-standing ambassador for Italian culture, Andrea Bocelli drew worldwide attention in 2020 with his record-breaking Music for Hope event, which became one of the largest musical live-stream performances of all time.

AirAsia named World's Best Low-Cost Airline for 2025



AirAsia has been recognized as the World's Best Low-Cost Airline for 2025 by AirlineRatings.com.

The ranking evaluates airlines based on factors

such as pricing, route network, onboard services, and safety, with top low-cost carriers required to maintain a seven-star safety rating.

Since launching in 2001 with two aircraft, AirAsia has expanded to serve over 130 destinations across Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Cambodia, flying more than 800 million passengers to date.

In 2024 alone, it carried 63 million passengers with an 89% load factor.

In Macau, local airport authorities said that AirAsia's top management has recently shown renewed interest in expanding operations in the region.

The airline has presented three- and five-year plans, which airport authorities are currently evaluating.

SECURITY

Vice minister Liu tours Thai-Myanmar border to highlight crackdown on scam centers

JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI,
BANGKOK

EFFORTS to shut down online scam centers in Myanmar appeared to gain momentum this week as a top Chinese security official visited both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border ahead of expected large-scale repatriations of workers in the illicit industry.

The visit by Liu Zhongyi, China's vice minister of public security and commissioner of the Criminal Investigation Bureau, was part of a stepped-up effort by the three countries to address the online scam problem, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai told reporters.

Areas of Myanmar bordering Thailand have been serving as havens for criminal syndicates employing an estimated hundreds of thousands of people from Southeast Asia and elsewhere who help carry out online scams including false romantic ploys, bogus investment pitches and illegal gambling schemes.

Such scams have cost victims around the world tens of billions of dollars, while the people recruited to carry them out have often been tricked into taking the jobs under false pretenses and find themselves trapped in virtual slavery.

Last week, some 260 people from 20 nations, including many from Africa, crossed from Myanmar into Thailand after they



Chinese believed to have been trafficked and trapped into working in online scam centers after they were rescued in Myawaddy district in eastern Myanmar

were reportedly rescued from scam centers.

Thailand and China coordinate crackdown on scam centers

On a visit to China in early February, Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra vowed along with China's leader Xi Jinping to crack down on the scam networks. Just ahead of her visit, Thailand cut off electricity, internet and gas supplies to several areas in Myanmar along the border, citing national security and severe damage that Thailand has suffered from scam operations.

The repatriations of foreign workers from Myanmar have been organized by the Border Guard Force in Myawaddy, a militia of the

Karen ethnic minority that exercises control over the area. However, critics have accused it of being involved in the criminal activities, at least to the extent of providing protection to the scam centers.

The group's leader, Saw Chit Thu, denied in a news conference on Monday that his group was involved in scam activities, but acknowledged business links to some properties hosting the centers, which he said initially operated simply as resorts.

Thai media reported last week that Thailand's Department of Special Investigation was considering seeking arrest warrants for Chit Thu and others for alleged human trafficking.

Thousands of workers employed by scam networks

Thai officials have said as many as 7,000-10,000 more people may be repatriated, but Phumtham cautioned that Thailand would only receive those that are ready to be taken back right away by their home countries.

The Bangkok Post newspaper reported that an initial batch of about 600 Chinese nationals from scam centers are expected to be flown back to China on chartered flights when Liu concludes his visit.

Liu visited the border areas in Thailand's Tak province on Monday and appeared in Myawaddy in Myanmar, apparently at a location

where hundreds of people believed to have been rounded up from several scam centers are being held awaiting repatriation.

Video of Liu's visit showed hundreds of people there sitting on the ground with their belongings in a large open-walled hall.

"China is actively conducting bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Thailand, Myanmar, and other countries, taking comprehensive measures to address both the symptoms and root causes, and working together to block criminals from committing crimes in relevant countries," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said in Beijing.

"This is part of our joint efforts to eradicate the scourge of online gambling and telecom fraud, and to maintain the safety of people's lives and property and the order of exchanges and cooperation among regional countries."

Stories of Chinese trapped in Myanmar hurt Thailand's reputation

Dramatic stories of Chinese people being lured to work in Thailand only to be trafficked into a scam compound in Myanmar spread widely on social media in China, causing alarm and denting Thailand's reputation as a safe destination for Chinese visitors.

Among those trapped was Chinese actor Wang Xing, who arrived in Thailand on a promise of getting a job and was abducted to Myanmar. He was quickly rescued after the incident circulated on social media.

An earlier crackdown on scam centers in Myanmar was initiated in late 2023, after China expressed embarrassment and concern over illegal casinos and scam operations along its border in Myanmar's northern Shan state.

Ethnic guerrilla groups with close ties to Beijing shut down many operations, and an estimated 45,000 Chinese nationals suspected of involvement were repatriated. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Chinese navy helicopter flying 'too close' to Philippine patrol plane

A Chinese navy helicopter flew within 10 feet of a Philippine patrol plane yesterday in a disputed area of the South China Sea, as the Filipino pilot warned by radio: "You are flying too close, you are very dangerous."

The helicopter was attempting to force a Cessna Caravan turbo-prop plane belonging to the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources out of what China claims is its



A Chinese military helicopter flies close to a Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic (BFAR) aircraft above Scarborough shoal

airspace over the hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal off the northwestern Phil-

ippines. Invited foreign media representatives on the

plane witnessed the tense 30-minute standoff as the Philippine plane pressed on with its low-altitude patrol around Scarborough with the Chinese navy helicopter hovering close above it or flying to its left in cloudy weather.

"You are flying too close, you are very dangerous and endangering the lives of our crew and passengers," the Philippine pilot told the Chinese navy helicopter by radio at one

point. "Keep away and distance your aircraft from us, you are violating the safety standard set by FAA and ICAO."

The pilot was referring to the standard distance between aircraft required by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration and the International Civil Aviation Organization to prevent air disasters.

The Philippine Coast Guard and the Bureau of Fisheries said in a statement that they remain "committed to asserting our sovereignty, sovereign rights and maritime jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea, despite the aggressive and escalatory actions of China."

They referred to the Philippine name for the stretch of waters in the South China Sea closer to the Philippines' western coast.

Chinese officials did not immediately comment on the incident, but in past encounters they have steadfastly asserted China's sovereign rights over the Scarborough and surrounding waters and warned that its forces would protect the country's territorial interests at all costs.

Yesterday's encounter, which is expected to be protested by the Philippine government, is the latest flashpoint in a decades-long territorial standoff in one of the world's busiest trade routes. **MDT/AP**

KOREAS

Kim slams US and Asian rivals for pursuing 'absurd' plans to denuclearize North

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

NORTH Korea yesterday criticized the United States and Asian neighbors for pursuing the "absurd" goal of denuclearizing the North and said it will push to expand its nuclear forces under the direction of its authoritarian leader Kim Jong Un.

The statement by Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry came after the top diplomats of the U.S., South Korea and Japan met at a security conference in Germany and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening military cooperation and reinforcing an international sanctions regime to counter Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions.

The North Korean ministry accused the U.S. of trying to realize an "outdated and absurd plan" of denuclearizing the North and warned of "overwhelming and decisive counteraction" against its rivals if it perceives its security is under threat. It said the North will "consistently adhere to the new line of bolstering the nuclear force" established by Kim and "thoroughly deter the U.S. and its vassal forces" from threats and blackmail against the North's sovereignty.



It was the latest North Korean statement accusing the U.S. of maintaining hostile policies against Pyongyang, though state media has so far avoided directly naming U.S. President Donald Trump, who, during his first term, engaged in unprecedented summits with the North Korean leader.

U.S. Secretary of State Mark Rubio held a three-way meeting with the South Korean and Ja-

panese foreign ministers in Munich, Germany, on Saturday and reaffirmed their commitment to the North's "complete denuclearization" and maintaining an effective sanctions regime targeting the country's weapons program. The countries also agreed to bolster defense and deterrence, including by expanding three-way military exercises and strengthening Japan and South Korea's military capabilities, ac-

ording to a joint statement released after the meeting.

Likely no quick fix under Trump

Trump and Kim met three times in 2018 and 2019 during Trump's first term, but their diplomacy quickly collapsed over disagreements about exchanging the release of U.S.-led sanctions for North Korean steps to wind down its nuclear and missile programs. North Korea has since

suspended any meaningful talks with Washington and Seoul as Kim ramped up his testing activity and military demonstrations to counter what he portrayed as "gangster-like U.S. threats."

Kim's foreign policy priority is now Russia, which he has supplied with weapons and troops to help prolong Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Seoul fears that Kim may receive economic assistance and advanced technology to develop his arsenal in exchange for its military supporting Russia.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said a diplomatic delegation led by Kim Ik Song, director of the Bureau for Affairs with Diplomatic Corps, departed for Russia on Monday in the latest diplomatic activity between the countries. The agency didn't specify what will be discussed during the meetings.

Trump's election win has touched off speculation about a possible resumption of summit-driven diplomacy with Kim, but analysts say a quick return to 2018 is unlikely, given the significant changes in the regional security situation and broader geopolitics since then.

North Korea's nuclear program is no longer an independent issue but connected with broader challenges created by Russia's war on Ukraine and further complicated by weakened sanctions enforcement against Pyongyang.

Kim's efforts to boost North Korea's presence in a united front against Washington could also gain strength if Trump's efforts to increase tariffs and reset global trade rekindles a trade war with China, the North's main ally and economic lifeline, according to some experts. **MDT/AP**

PHILIPPINES

VP Duterte asks Supreme Court to void her impeachment and block Senate trial

PHILIPPINE Vice President Sara Duterte asked the Supreme Court yesterday to void her impeachment and block a Senate trial that could remove her from office.

The House of Representatives, which is dominated by the allies of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., impeached Duterte on Feb. 5 over accusations that included plotting to assassinate the president and large-scale corruption. The Senate was expected to turn itself into an impeachment court to try Duterte after Congress



resumes June 2.

The vice president, through her lawyers, asked the 15-member high court to annul her impeachment and block the trial because

its initiation "was procedurally defective, constitutionally infirm and jurisdictionally void."

Lawyer Israelito Torreon told reporters the

complaint was sent to the Senate too fast for some of the House signees to study it.

"This is part of a plan probably to eliminate her as a probable contender" in the 2028 presidential elections, Torreon said, saying it could not be described as anything other than political persecution.

A conviction in the Senate trial would bar her from holding public office.

The impeachment complaint focused on Duterte's statements at a Nov. 23 online news conference that she would have the pre-

sident, his wife and cousin House Speaker Martin Romualdez assassinated if she herself was killed in their escalating political feud. She has denied that she meant to threaten to kill them.

She was also accused of misusing intelligence funds as vice president and as education secretary before she has resigned from that position as her alliance with the president crumbled last year. She has not publicly provided a detailed response to accusations of graft and corruption.

Duterte, the daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte, ran as Marcos' vice presidential running mate in 2022, but their alliance quickly frayed.

While campaigning for senatorial candidates in May 12 midterm elections, Marcos has been publicly denouncing the bloody anti-drugs crackdown and failure of his predecessor to denounce China's hostile actions against Philippine forces in the disputed South China Sea without naming the Dutertes.

Last week, Rodrigo Duterte said during a campaign rally that 15 senators should be killed to free up more vacancies for his allies in the midterms. Police filed criminal complaints Monday against the former president over those statements. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



U.S., Russian and Saudi officials at the meeting yesterday at Diriyah Palace, in Riyadh

PUTIN'S WAR

Top Russian, US officials talk ending the war in Ukraine –without Kyiv

MATTHEW LEE, RIYADH

THE top diplomats from Russia and the U.S. met yesterday in Saudi Arabia to discuss improving ties and negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine — talks that represented a rapid and major change in American foreign policy under President Donald Trump.

No Ukrainian officials were present at the meeting, which comes as the beleaguered country is slowly but steadily losing ground against more numerous Russian troops in a grinding war that began nearly three years ago. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country won't accept any outcome from this week's talks since Kyiv isn't take part. European allies have also expressed concerns they are being sidelined.

Beyond Ukraine, the meeting — attended by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and other senior officials — is expected to focus on thawing relations between the two countries, whose ties have fallen to their lowest level in decades. It is meant to pave the way for a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

CONCERNS FROM ALLIES THEY ARE BEING SIDELINED

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Monday that the talks will be

primarily focused on “restoring the entire range of U.S.-Russian relations, as well as preparing possible talks on the Ukrainian settlement and organizing a meeting of the two presidents.” U.S. State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said the meeting is aimed at determining how serious the Russians are about wanting peace and whether detailed negotiations can be started.

Bruce added that even though Ukraine would not be at the table yesterday, actual peace negotiations include the country. Kyiv's participation in any peace talks was a bedrock of U.S. policy under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, whose administration also led international efforts to isolate Russia over the war.

Still, the recent U.S. diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Kyiv and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favorable to them. France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the U.K. on Monday to decide how to respond.

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday said he spoke by phone to Trump and Zelenskyy following the meeting.

“We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine,”

Macron wrote on social media platform X. “To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be accompanied by strong and credible security guarantees for the Ukrainians,” he said and vowed to “work on this together with all Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians.”

SAUDI ARABIA'S ROLE

The meeting at the Diriyah Palace in the Saudi capital of Riyadh also highlights de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to be a major diplomatic player, burnishing a reputation severely tarnished by the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Saudi state media described the talks as happening at the prince's direction. Like the neighboring United Arab Emirates, the prince also has maintained close relations to Russia throughout its war on Ukraine, both through the OPEC+ oil cartel and diplomatically as well.

Saudi Arabia has also helped in prisoner negotiations and hosted Zelenskyy for an Arab League summit in 2023. Zelenskyy said he would travel to the kingdom later this week.

Rubio was accompanied by U.S. national security adviser Mike Waltz and special envoy Steve Witkoff, while Lavrov sat next to

the Kremlin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and national security adviser Mousa al Alban joined Rubio, Lavrov and others for the start of the meeting but were expected to leave early in the talks.

Ahead of the talks, Kirill Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund who the Kremlin said might join, underscored the importance of the meeting.

“Good U.S.-Russia relations are very important for the whole world. Only jointly can Russia and the U.S. address lots of world problems, resolve for global conflicts and offer solutions,” Dmitriev, who said he and his team would focus on economic issues at the talks, told AP.

The Saudi-owned satellite channel Al Arabiya, citing the Russian delegation, described Moscow's priority as “real normalization with Washington.”

The meeting marks the most extensive contact between the two countries since Moscow's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion. Lavrov and then-U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked briefly on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting in India nearly two years ago, and in the fall of 2022, U.S. and Russian spymasters met in Turkey amid Washington's concerns that Moscow could resort to nuclear weapons amid battlefield setbacks.

WAR CONTINUES

Meanwhile, Russia continued to pummel Ukraine with drones, according to Kyiv's military. The Ukrainian air force said Russian troops launched a barrage of 176 drones at Ukraine overnight, most of which were destroyed or disabled by jamming. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1997 CHINA'S REFORMIST DENG XIAOPING DIES

China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping has died at the age of 92.

He had been suffering from failing health for several years and was last seen in public three years ago.



The country's official news agency said his death was the result of advanced stages of Parkinson's Disease complicated by a lung infection and that he had failed to respond to emergency treatment.

Although he was officially retired, no important decision affecting China was made without Deng Xiaoping's approval.

He was known internationally as the leader who crushed the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 but also as the man credited with opening up China to economic reform.

Chinese radio's shortwave English language service praised his “outstanding” leadership as a “great Marxist and the true architect of China's socialist reforms and modernisation”.

A funeral committee has been announced, to be headed by Jiang Zemin, which regional experts say makes him the most likely candidate to gain the leadership.

Meanwhile Tiananmen Square the symbolic heart of China and the communist party is reported to be peaceful, with no sign of extra security.

The BBC's Beijing Correspondent Humphrey Hawksley said that given Deng Xiaoping's stated disregard for the “cult of the personality” it was unlikely there would be any grand state funerals.

Humphrey Hawksley said: “Deng wished to hand over rule to a collective leadership of modern thinking technocrats and not a god-king that China has traditionally been accustomed to.”

International reaction to the news has been complimentary about the dead dictator and his contribution to the world economy.

US Secretary of State Madeline Albright said he was “an historic figure” and that the US would continue to pursue a “multi-faceted relationship with China”, based on issues of trade, the environment and human rights.

The UK's Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind expressed his hope economic and political reforms would gather speed, not only for China but to protect Hong Kong's future.

The British colony is due to be handed back to the Chinese in June and the Chinese leadership has already said it intends to dismantle a recently-implemented democratic system.

But Hong Kong Democratic Party Chairman, Martin Lee, says if the Chinese leadership tries to control Hong Kong “freedoms will be eroded”.

“The rule of law will be whittled down. And that cannot be good because Hong Kong's freedoms are a foundation for a bright future,” he said.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

When Deng took power in 1978 he announced a new era of reform.

He dismantled collective farming and allowed private enterprise including special free market zones.

Politically, Deng had a reputation as a hardliner, and repeatedly ordered crackdowns on dissidents.

He drew global condemnation when he used the army to crush student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in June 1989.

China is a military superpower, the world's most populous country, and has a vast economy experiencing both growth and diversification.

But political freedom remains heavily suppressed, and even the Chinese Communist Party's guarantee of liberal freedoms in Hong Kong is becoming questionable.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Be sure to take it easy when it comes to taking on new work or social invitations. Intimate conversations can take essential dynamics to the next level.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
Seek communities that are supportive and bring a sense of ease. You'll feel more connected with society as a whole.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
Close deals, tie up loose ends, and set your sights on new horizons. Trust in your skillset, but look for opportunities to refine and mature on a public and professional scale.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Expect an uptick in signs and synchronicities, watching for opportunities to communicate with and strengthen your connection with the other side.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Transformation, new commitments, and intimate bonding go hand in hand, though you'll need to make sacrifices along the way.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Be mindful to take care of yourself, finding personal balance so you can make room for healthy partnerships. Share your thoughts with those you trust most.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Make your health and wellness a priority. Now is the time to embrace routines that elevate the way you feel and function.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Invest in your friendships, passions, and love affairs. Release grief by inviting in more fun and making peace with what you cannot change.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Give more attention to your private life. Lead with compassion to make the most of these vibes, even when you don't see eye to eye with those you encounter.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Though fresh inspiration will motivate you to chase big dreams, try to ground in the present to decipher which actions should be taken at the moment.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
The pursuit of knowledge will fulfill you like never before, so be sure to outline a plan for what you'd like to learn. Emotionally charged conversations will also be prevalent, helping to reveal people's true colors.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Put your agenda first throughout the coming weeks, especially if you've taken a back seat recently. You'll feel validated when you share your visions and passions.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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HARD

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				4	2			
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			6					7
8								

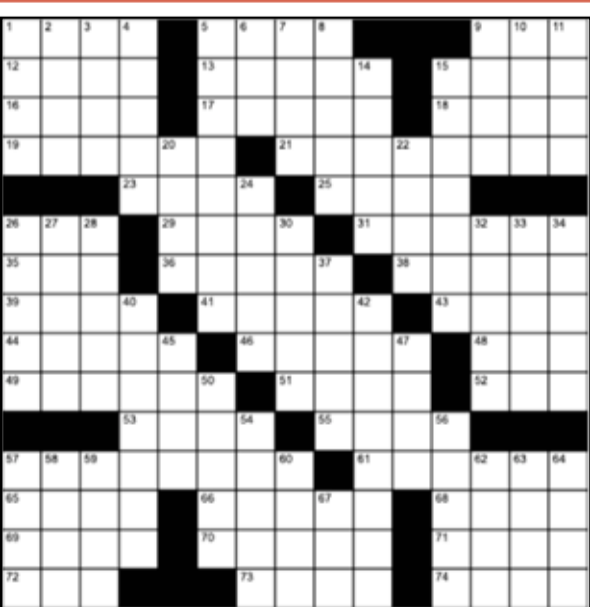
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-3	5	cloudy
Changchun	-16	-6	fine
Chengdu	8	12	rain
Chongqing	8	14	cloudy
Fuzhou	9	14	overcast
Guangzhou	14	22	cloudy
Guiyang	2	7	rain
Haikou	18	25	rain
Hangzhou	3	10	rain
Harbin	-19	-10	cloudy
Hefei	0	12	overcast
Nanjing	3	12	overcast
Shanghai	3	10	overcast
Taipei	14	18	overcast
Wuhan	1	9	rain
Hong Kong	18	19	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-12	-6	snow
Frankfurt	-2	5	cloudy
Paris	8	11	cloudy
London	8	9	cloudy
New York	-7	-2	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- The ___ Ranger rode a horse called Silver; 5- Exxon predecessor; 9- Boater or bowler; 12- Footless; 13- Coral colonies; 15- Ornamental fabric; 16- Must've been something ___; 17- 71% is under water; 18- Bookie's concern; 19- Medical treatment place; 21- Vigorous exercises; 23- Cpls.' superiors; 25- Sisters; 26- Partner of away; 29- Hog sound; 31- Obtained; 35- Before, in verse; 36- Some horses; 38- Witherspoon of "Legally Blonde"; 39- "Pirates of the Caribbean" star; 41- Bridget Fonda, to Jane; 43- Tabula ___; 44- Deplete; 46- Hotelier Helmsley; 48- Encountered; 49- Hoi ___; 51- Ladies of Spain; Abbr.; 52- ___-Cone; 53- Bubbly drink; 55- Bahrain bigwig; 57- Tubular pasta; 61- Not us; 65- Skip past; 66- Cruise ship; 68- Not tricked by; 69- Narrow path for walkers, cars or ships; 70- Rock; 71- Active one; 72- Common article; 73- Impressed; 74- Kind of D.A.;

DOWN 1- Not of the cloth; 2- Iridescent gem; 3- Denier's words; 4- Perfect places; 5- Building; 6- Neptune's domain; 7- Antitoxins; 8- Many times; 9- ___ but known...; 10- Electrically versatile; 11- Hardy lass; 14- Gesture of indifference; 15- Marine crustacean; 20- Helicopter pioneer Sikorsky; 22- ___ about; 24- Slow mover; 26- Sick and tired; 27- You ___ right; 28- Beat back; 30- Leg joints; 32- Crews; 33- Ruhr city; 34- Cool!; 37- Cross the goal line; 40- Throb; 42- Captivated; 45- Impoverished; 47- Be that ___ may...; 50- Graven images; 54- Writer Loos; 56- Harper sitcom; 57- Shed feathers; 58- Eastern nanny; 59- Silver screen; 60- ___ pronounce you...; 62- Slaughter of baseball; 63- Hwys.; 64- Put in order; 67- Opposite of WSW;



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 7,500,000 4 bed 3 bath

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

ICE HOCKEY

CANADA BEATS FINLAND 5-3, WILL FACE UNITED STATES IN 4 NATIONS FINAL

NATHAN MacKinnon scored twice. Connor McDavid had a goal and an assist. Sidney Crosby flipped in an empty-netter from center ice after Finland cut a four-goal deficit to one in the final minutes.

Canada's best players came through in the 4 Nations Face-Off yesterday [Macau time] to earn a rematch of their fight-filled preliminary bout with the United States. The rivals will meet in the tournament final.

"That's what you need: big plays from big-time players," Crosby said after the 5-3 victory over Finland. "These guys are used to playing in these big games under the spotlight and delivering. They did again tonight."

Canada and the United States will play on Thursday night in a sequel to a round-robin game in Montreal last week that started with three fights and ended with the Americans celebrating a 3-1 victory. Canadian forward — and Boston Bruins captain — Brad Marchand will take the ice as an



Canada's Mark Stone, center, celebrates after a goal by Connor McDavid during first period of a 4 Nations Face-Off hockey game against Finland

opponent at the TD Garden in a series where fans had to be asked not to boo the opponents' national anthem.

Jordan Binnington stopped

23 shots for Canada on the same ice where he clinched the 2019 Stanley Cup for the St. Louis Blues. Brayden Point also scored and Sam Reinhart had

three assists as the Canadians opened a 4-0 lead in the first 25 minutes.

Sweden rallied after falling behind just 35 seconds into

the game, and Samuel Ersson made 31 saves yesterday to beat the United States in the 4 Nations Face-Off round-robin finale, handing the title game-bound Americans their first loss of the tournament.

The nightcap meant nothing to either the Americans or Swedes: The U.S. had already clinched a spot in Thursday night's championship game against Canada, which beat Finland earlier, and Sweden needed Canada to falter to have a chance of making the final.

With some fans wearing powdered wigs and colonial-era tricorne hats, the Boston crowd bellowed "The Star-Spangled Banner" before the game — a response to the Canadians who booed the U.S. national anthem before the early matchups in Montreal. Chants of "U-S-A!" rang out through the TD Garden in the final minutes, with goalie Jake Oettinger pulled for an extra skater, but the Americans couldn't beat Ersson to force overtime. **MDT/AP**

AD

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Plastic & Aesthetic Surgery : Dr. Lam U Lin

Orthopaedic Surgery & Sports Medicine : Dr. Lam Kun Kuan

ENT : Dr. Cheng Zheng Ang

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DISCOVER MORE

BASKETBALL | NBA

The All-Star break is almost over. It's time for the stretch run toward the playoffs

TIM REYNOLDS,
BASKETBALL WRITER

THE trade deadline is gone. The All-Star break is about to end. Luka Doncic is with the Los Angeles Lakers. Jimmy Butler is with the Golden State Warriors. Anthony Davis is with the Dallas Mavericks, though it's unknown when he'll play again.

The dust has settled. It's time for the stretch run.

Here comes the fun part of the season. Every club has between 26 and 30 games remaining in this 7 1/2-week sprint to the April 13 finish line, play resuming today when Charlotte faces the Lakers. And teams will point to recent history as proof that just getting into the playoffs means anything can happen: No. 5, No. 6, No. 7 and No. 8 seeds have made their way to the conference finals in the last two years alone.

"I'm looking forward to the challenge," said the Warriors' Stephen Curry, the now two-time All-Star Game MVP. "It's basically a playoff game every



single night, and that usually brings the best out of you."

Some teams can go ahead and start planning for the playoffs.

Oklahoma City and Cleveland are both 44-10, tied for the best record in the league. Defending champion Boston, currently No. 2 in the Eastern Conference, remains on pace to obliterate league records for 3-pointers made and attempted in a season. The Celtics, New York, Denver, Houston and the Lakers all have winning

percentages over .600, which is an excellent sign — 132 of the last 133 teams to reach the break with such a record have wound up making the postseason.

"We have obviously a pretty good basketball team," said Oklahoma City All-Star guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the current MVP favorite according to BetMGM Sportsbook. "We have a little bit more experience. We have an opportunity to, for sure, win an NBA championship. Now we're going to

have to earn it."

Then there's the other end of the spectrum, that being the teams that are out of the mix.

Over the last 20 seasons, 98.8% of the teams that have winning percentages under .400 at the break wind up missing the playoffs. If that form holds, that eliminates Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Toronto, Charlotte, Utah, New Orleans and Washington.

So, based on the numbers, that means seven teams are in, seven teams are out, and 16 teams remain in the middle fighting for what will be the last nine playoff spots — five to be clinched on or before the end of the regular season on April 13, four others to be won in the play-in tournament later that week.

"The last 25 to 30 games are really important for everyone," said Miami guard Tyler Herro, the league's new 3-point shootout champion. "We've got a new group, in a sense, and we're going to hit the ground running. It's going to happen fast. Everything is going to matter throughout this next month and a half."

The Heat traded Butler to the Warriors, getting back Andrew Wiggins in return. San Antonio landed De'Aaron Fox from Sacramento, and the Los Angeles Clippers — who have barely had Kawhi Leonard available this season, but he's playing now — figure they're right in the mix to challenge as well.

"I think we got a really good chance," Clippers All-Star guard James Harden said. "We added some shooting, we added some defense and obviously with a healthy Kawhi we've got a chance to compete with anybody. So, I think for us, it's just finding out how we want to play and attacking it."

Milwaukee added Kyle Kuzma, moving Khristian Middleton — a Bucks mainstay for years — to Washington in that deal. And Phoenix didn't trade Kevin Durant, which is a sign that the Suns are hoping their star trio of him, Devin Booker and Bradley Beal can make a push.

"We're all figuring it out, man," Durant said. "We've got 28, 29 games to go to figure it out. That's the fun part, trying to figure out how to get out of a slump." **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

Business Views

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



FOUR REASONS TO BUY CHINA TECH, AND ONE FATAL SNAG

Chinese tech companies are suddenly hot.

The Hang Seng Tech Index has soared 23% this year, far outpacing the Nasdaq 100's 5.3% gain. Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. and Tencent Holdings Ltd.'s shares are back to their 2022 levels, while EV makers BYD Co. and Xiaomi Corp. hit new record highs.

The trillion-dollar question now is whether global investors late to the game can still chase the rally. While China's big tech companies remain cheap by historical standards, buying them is not for the faint-hearted. Over the last five years, the investing world has undergone grief, anger and resignation as the government's regulatory actions killed their golden goose.

But the vibe surrounding China is improving, and there are four good reasons to believe this rally has legs — with one major obstacle.

First, the primary cause of Chinese tech's loss of value in recent years has been regulatory crack-downs. Ironically, internet platforms' political fortunes are improving as the economic slump drags on. Beijing now relies on Big Tech to provide income for people who have lost their jobs.

Indeed, President Xi Jinping uncharacteristically attended a meeting with Jack Ma — the highest-profile casualty of the government's campaign — and other prominent entrepreneurs on Monday in a show of support for the private sector after years of turmoil. Symbolically, it means Big Tech is no longer perceived as the villain that squeezed small businesses and choked young startups. The companies have become essential to social stability — partly resolving Beijing's unemployment problem, especially with the young college graduates who might prefer live streaming and building personal brands to mind-numbing desk jobs.

Second, investor positioning matters. DeepSeek, a little-known upstart that created an artificial intelligence model almost as powerful as OpenAI at a fraction of the cost, was a wake-up call to global asset managers in their single-minded pursuit of the Magnificent Seven. Evidence is mounting that China Inc. is outcompeting the world, and allocators have to reflect that new realization in their portfolio construction. This rally has room to go if more reshuffle their holdings and diversify away from US exceptionalism.

Third, the geopolitical landscape has also become more benign. During the Biden years, global investors fled, worried that more Chinese companies would be placed on US sanctions lists as Beijing stood by the Kremlin in the war against Ukraine.

Fourth, China's macroeconomic conditions may have improved, too. In January, new money supply hit a record high, boosted by a fiscal push that Xi had promised last September. New government bond issues totaled 693 billion yuan (\$96 billion), up from 295 billion yuan a year ago. Meanwhile, Beijing is aiming to prioritize domestic consumption, which bodes well for consumer tech stocks.

So the stars seem aligned in the country's favor — but for one snag, in my view. China remains an ultra-competitive market. Its best and brightest will continue to be at each other's throats, fighting over market share, adding deflationary pressure, and pushing down corporate profits.

The verdict is still out as to whether the stock market can come out of hibernation. But one thing is certain: China, which has been brushed away by global investors, is exciting again. [Abridged]

Courtesy Bloomberg/Shuli Ren

DELTA JET FLIPS UPSIDE DOWN ON A SNOWY TORONTO RUNWAY AND ALL 80 ABOARD SURVIVE

THE BUZZ

A Delta Air Lines jet flipped on its roof while landing Monday at Toronto's Pearson Airport, but all 80 people on board survived and those hurt had relatively minor injuries, the airport's chief executive said.

Snow blown by winds gusting to 40 mph (65 kph) swirled when the flight from Minneapolis carrying 76 passengers and four crew attempted to land at around 2:15 p.m. Communications between the tower and pilot were normal on approach and it's not clear what went so drastically wrong when the plane touched down.

Peter Carlson, a passenger traveling to Toronto for a paramedics conference, said the landing was "very forceful."

"All the sudden everything just kind of went sideways and then next thing I know it's kind of a blink and I'm upside down still strapped in," he told CBC News.

Canadian authorities held two brief news conferences but provided no details on the crash. Video posted to social media showed the aftermath with the Mitsubishi CRJ-900LR overturned, the fuselage seemingly intact and firefighters dousing what was left of the fire as passengers climbed out and walked across the tarmac.

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AP PHOTO

Kim Sae-ron (2023)



DEATH OF S.KOREAN ACTOR AT 24 SPARKS DISCUSSION ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET CULTURE

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

SOUTH Korean actor Kim Sae-ron's death this week has triggered an outpouring of grief and calls for changes to the way the country's celebrities are treated in the public arena and on social media, which critics say can foster a culture of harassment.

The 24-year-old, who began her career as a child actor and earned acclaim for her roles in several domestic films, including the 2010 crime noir "The Man from Nowhere," was found dead by a friend at her home in Seoul on Sunday. The National Police Agency has said that officers are not suspecting foul play and that Kim left no note.

Once among the brightest stars on South Korea's vibrant movie and television scene, Kim struggled to find work after a 2022 drunk driving incident, for which she was later fined in court.

Online posts in South Korea are notoriously

harsh toward celebrities who make missteps, especially women, and Kim faced constant negative coverage from news organizations that capitalized on public sentiment.

Newspapers and websites criticized her whenever she was seen partying with friends, or when she complained about her lack of work and nasty comments on social media. She was even criticized for smiling while filming an independent movie last year.

Following Kim's death, several of the country's major newspapers yesterday published editorials and opinion pieces lambasting the toxic online comments about the actor. Some invoked the 2019 deaths of K-Pop singers Seol-li and Goo Hara and the 2023 death of "Squid Games" actor Lee Sun-kyun while calling for a change in the "harsh, zero-tolerance" culture toward celebrities.

The Hankook Ilbo newspaper said the country's media outlets were part of the problem, lamenting that some

outlets continued to exploit Kim for clicks even after her death, using provocative headlines that highlighted her past struggles.

The watchdog Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media yesterday criticized news organizations for blaming social media without considering their own "sensational and provocative reporting."

Born in 2000, Kim began her acting career at age 9, with the 2009 film "A Brand New Life," portraying a girl's struggles to adjust to a new life after being left at an orphanage by her father.

She rose to stardom with "The Man from Nowhere," which was one of the biggest hits in the South Korean movie scene that year and won her a domestic acting award.

She starred in various movies and TV shows before the 2022 drunk driving incident.

Gold Medalist, Kim's former management agency, did not immediately answer calls for comment. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



United States Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency is seeking access to IRS taxpayer data, sources said yesterday [Macau time]. Lawmakers expressed concern over potential privacy violations and system disruptions. Musk's office claims the move is aimed at uncovering waste and fraud, while critics warn of legal overreach.

AP PHOTO



United States Indigenous activist Leonard Peltier will be released from a Florida prison today [Macau time] after President Biden commuted his sentence. Convicted in 1977 for the killing of two FBI agents, Peltier's case has been a decades-long human rights issue. Supporters celebrate, while law enforcement criticizes the decision.

AP PHOTO



Mexican singer Paquita la del Barrio died on Monday (yesterday, Macau time) at 77 in Veracruz. Known for songs about female empowerment, she gained fame with hits like "Rata de dos patas." Her passing was met with tributes from fans and musicians, honoring her impact on Latin music.

Vatican authorities said yesterday [Macau time] that Pope Francis has a complex infection in his respiratory system and will require more targeted drug treatment. Officials said the 88-year-old pope is suffering from a "polymicrobial respiratory tract infection," but gave no further details on the severity of his illness or what would change in his treatment.