



THE GOV'T IS CONSIDERING IMPLEMENTING A HOUSING EXCHANGE SYSTEM TO ALLOW RESIDENTS TO MOVE INTO LARGER UNITS AS THEIR FAMILIES GROW

P3

PROPERTY MARKET POISED TO CONTINUE STRUGGLING, WHILE RENTS SET TO RISE

P6

TRUMP'S FREEZE ON FOREIGN AID COULD GIVE CHINA AN OPENING ON THE WORLD STAGE

P10



Pakistan A Pakistani separatist group claimed responsibility yesterday for killing seven bus passengers in Balochistan late Tuesday. The Baloch Liberation Army said the victims were tied to security forces, but authorities denied this. The BLA has conducted attacks in the region, targeting both civilians and Chinese workers.



India's ruling party named Rekha Gupta (pictured) as chief minister of New Delhi state. The move follows the BJP's election victory after 27 years. Gupta pledged to tackle pollution and infrastructure issues. Women hold only 14% of parliamentary seats despite a pending law requiring 33%.



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol appeared yesterday in two courts defending his martial law decree. One hearing reviewed rebellion charges, while another assessed his impeachment. Yoon denies wrongdoing, but critics argue his actions threatened democracy. The Constitutional Court may rule on his removal in March.



Israel Hamas returned the bodies of four Israeli hostages yesterday, including a mother and her two children. Israel confirmed their deaths from airstrikes. Since October 7, Hamas has held 66 captives, with 30 declared dead. A second ceasefire phase is under negotiation for further releases.

More on backpage

CAN'T HEAR YOU!

Noise complaints largely ignored despite legal crackdown P4



GAMING CASINOS' REVENUE FACES MODEST DECLINE IN FEBRUARY: ANALYSTS

P7



P15

MGTO SUBSIDIZES TOURS TO EXPLORE MACAU'S HISTORIC CENTER

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) continues to enhance local tourism with subsidized activities in February, including the "Through the Ages: Theaters & Cinemas in Macao" guided tour. Set for the weekends of Feb. 24-25 and March 2-3, the tours feature two themes, allowing participants to stroll through historic neighborhoods while learning about Macao's cinematic past. This initiative aims to boost community engagement and support the local economy through diverse tourism experiences.

IC PRESENTS ACCLAIMED PLAY BY ANTON CHEKHOV

Chekhov's theatrical classic "The Cherry Orchard" will be staged on April 4 and April 5 at the Macao Cultural Centre's Grand Auditorium, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced. The play will be directed by Tiago Rodrigues, an internationally acclaimed director currently leading the Avignon Festival, and will also feature Golden Globe winner Isabelle Huppert in the lead role. Originally premiering in 1904 as a portrayal of how different social classes responded to societal changes in Russia, Rodrigues's reimagined version aims to draw an analogy with the current era.

PUBLIC LIBRARY VISITORS UP BY 9% Y-O-Y

Macao's public libraries logged a total of 2.7 million visitors in 2024, indicating a growth of 9% year-on-year, according to data from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC). As cited in a TDM report, IC noted that demand for library resources has been increasing steadily, with the number of borrowers rising by 3.45%, while figures for borrowed books and audio-visual materials remained similar to 2023. Most users were teenagers or middle-aged individuals, though the proportion of children and senior citizens has also been growing.

LRT

RAYMOND TAM SAYS CONDITIONS ARE MET FOR EXTENSION TO QINGMAO

RENATO MARQUES

THE Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raymond Tam, has stated that a preliminary study on extending the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) East Line to the Qingmao border post has concluded that the project is feasible.

The announcement was made yesterday in response to lawmaker Leong Sun Iok's inquiry into the development of the LRT and public transportation in Macau.

At the Legislative Assembly, Tam said that the LRT expansion projects have been progressing well. With the opening of the Barra Station on the Peninsula and the recent additions of the Seac Pai Van and Hengqin lines, the system has expanded its coverage and strengthened Macau's public transportation network.

Regarding the progress of work on the East Line, Tam added, "Construction on the East Line is progressing steadily, with approximately 30% of the overall project completed and progress aligning with expectations."

He further stated that ongoing work includes soil reinforcement in the tunnel section and other land-related structural developments.

ral developments.

"Underground tunnel construction is expected to begin in the first quarter of 2025. The detailed design of the train system has also been nearly completed," the Secretary remarked.

Responding to calls from lawmaker Leong for a timeline on the LRT's extension to Qingmao, Tam said that while the study confirmed the project's feasibility, it also highlighted significant challenges.

"The tunnel extending from the East Line ES1 Station to the Qingmao Port is expected to pass through the Border Gate Arch, both sides of the Border Gate Inspection Building, Sun Yat Sen Municipal Park, and several other important facilities," he said.

"Additionally, the geology along the route is complex, and the technical difficulty is relatively high. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a protection plan for these structures during construction and to coordinate the integration of Qingmao Port Station with the surrounding environment."

As a result, Tam stated that the estimated construction timeline has not yet been finalized.

As the LRT system continues to develop, the government is also evaluating necessary changes to its integration with other public transportation, particularly buses.

One of Leong's key proposals was expanding electronic payment options for the LRT. Several other lawmakers supported this call, questioning why the government has struggled to upgrade the gate system to accommodate more payment methods.

Lawmaker Ngan Iek Hang humorously remarked that even the vending machines selling drinks at LRT stations accept more payment options than the train system itself.

In response, Tam said that the government will continue to assess viable improvements, monitor trends in the electronic payment market, and gradually enhance the LRT's fare collection system to improve the travel experience for residents and tourists. However, he did not provide a concrete plan or timeline for these changes.

"We have been gathering feedback, and we will incorporate these suggestions into our work," Tam said.

Leong also urged the government to make better use of the LRT during large-scale events by implementing special measures for occasions such as marathons, concerts, and other high-attendance gatherings.

gh-attendance gatherings.

He suggested that event organizers and the LRT could collaborate on travel packages, offering attendees complimentary rides during specific hours or throughout the event.

This, he argued, would enhance the experience for participants while increasing LRT usage and demonstrating its efficiency.

Tam noted that the government has already initiated trial collaborations for major events. He cited successful cases during the inaugural concert at the Cotai Outdoor Venue and the New Year countdown, both of which delivered positive results.

He added that the LRT has been steadily increasing its passenger capacity and adjusting its services accordingly, including deploying four-car trains at night.

Tam also highlighted ongoing improvements, such as the addition of retail spaces in some stations, and confirmed that all commercial spaces at Barra Station have already been leased.

WEST LINE REMAINS IN EARLY PLANNING STAGES

Several lawmakers pressed Tam for an update on the proposed LRT West Line. Tam acknowledged that discussions are ongoing but emphasized that the project is still in the conceptual phase. While he did not dismiss the possibility of constructing a new line linking Qingmao Port to Barra Station via the western side of the Peninsula, he stressed that significant planning, evaluation, and feasibility studies are required before moving forward. Macau's 2021-2030 Land Transportation Master Plan introduced the idea of a West Line, suggesting that an additional six-kilometer LRT route could benefit approximately 250,000 people. However, no specific route has been proposed yet, and the government is still assessing the feasibility of the project.

RENATO MARQUES



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NOISE COMPLAINTS LARGELY IGNORED DESPITE LEGAL CRACKDOWN

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) and the Public Security Police (PSP) received more than 3,100 noise complaints from residential buildings last year, yet only 68 cases resulted in prosecutions and fines.

According to data released by the authorities, the majority of complaints, around 2,800, were directed to the PSP, while approximately 300 were submitted to the DSPA last year.

Most complaints stemmed from noise generated by social activities, with this category accounting for 7,075 of the total complaints. Other notable sources included industrial and commercial activities, which generated 1,306 complaints, and construction work, which accounted for 456.

Despite the high volume of complaints, the enforcement of noise laws has proven difficult. DSPA officials noted that many cases were not pursued due to the inability to detect noise during monitoring periods.



"The enforcement of the noise law has been generally smooth and will continue to be optimized in the future," a DSPA spokesperson said, according to a Macao Daily News report. However, they emphasized the need for cooperation from complainants to effectively gather evidence.

The DSPA also acknowledged a low prosecution rate, a trend observed in neighboring regions. Authorities explained that the unpredictable nature of social noise makes it challenging for officers to collect evidence, as disturbances often cease by the time law enforcement arrives on the scene.

In response to ongoing concerns about noise pollution, the DSPA has enhanced public awareness campaigns regarding noise regulations, targeting areas where people frequently gather. The agency has also disseminated information in multiple languages to improve understanding among non-resident workers.

Despite calls for legislative changes, the DSPA stated that the current noise control periods, established after extensive public consultation, will remain in effect unless a consensus for revision is reached within the community.

TOURISM

City records 27% increase in visitor arrivals in January

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU welcomed 3,646,561 visitors in January 2025, reflecting a 27.4% year-on-year increase, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

Same-day visitors rose 45.6% to 2,155,279, while overnight visitors increased 7.9% to 1,491,282. The average length of stay decreased slightly to 1.0 day, attributed to the higher proportion of same-day visitors.

Visitors from mainland China grew 33.8% to 2,750,284, with 1,606,802 arriving under the Individual Visit Scheme—a 44% increase.

Among them, 111,698 visited under the "one trip per week" measure, which

25,933 traveled under the "multiple-entry" measure. Visitors from Hong Kong (577,983) and Taiwan (77,163) rose 5.8% and 28.8%, respectively.

International visitors totaled 241,131, marking a 21% year-on-year rise.

The Philippines (+42.2%), Indonesia (+54.6%), and Malaysia (+9%) recorded growth, while visitor numbers from Thailand (-26.6%) and Singapore (-11.3%) declined.

The number of visitors from South Korea (+29.9%) and Japan (+13%) also increased.

By mode of entry, 81.9% of visitors arrived by land (2,987,663), 10.6% by sea (385,015), and 7.5% by air (273,883), showing year-on-year growth across all categories.

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IN MACAU (2023)



HEALTH

Officials warn of continued influenza and gastrointestinal infections in Spring

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Health Bureau (SSM) has reported a 29.1% influenza positivity rate, reflecting a slight decrease in cases since the Spring Festival holiday. However, officials stress that the virus remains active within the community.

As spring approaches, cases of respiratory and gastrointestinal infectious diseases are expected to rise.

During a press conference yesterday, Leong Chon Kit from the Center for Disease Control noted that the influenza positivity rate peaked at 29.1% in the fourth week of the year, an improvement compared to last year's peak of 32.9%.

He reported approximately 1,282 medical visits related to influenza in the past week alone, including 1,035 adults and 247 children.

In addition to influenza, the SSM has recorded 15 outbreaks of gastroenteritis since the start of the year, affecting about 178 individuals. Fortunately, the symptoms have been relatively mild, with no severe cases or fatalities reported.

Mandatory disease reports showed no significant increases in cases of norovirus, rotavirus, salmonella, or bacterial food poisoning.

The average weekly number of norovirus cases has decreased from 14 last year to 10 this year, while ro-



tavirus and salmonella cases remained stable at averages of three and one per week, respectively.

Leong further explained that before the emergence of Covid-19, coronaviruses were common in the region, often causing cold-like symptoms.

"Rhinoviruses are responsible for many colds, and other viruses, such as human metapneumovirus and certain strains of gastrointestinal viruses, are also present during this season," he stated.

"Since there is no vaccine available for many respiratory infections, general preventive measures are essential," Leong advised.

Wong Fong Ian, head of the Pediatrics Department at Conde de S. Januário Hospital, reported that patients visiting pediatric emergency departments are primarily suffering from gastroenteritis, with symptoms of diarrhea and

vomiting.

Most cases are mild, and patients generally recover within a few days with adequate rest, hydration, and good personal hygiene. However, Wong cautioned that if symptoms recur after improvement, it may indicate reinfection or complications.

However, he emphasized that individuals should be alert for more severe symptoms such as abdominal pain, mucus or blood in the stool, or persistent fever, which require immediate medical attention.

The SSM has reiterated the importance of maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene to minimize the risk of infections.

Officials confirmed that the current influenza strain, type A (H1N1), aligns with the vaccine components procured by the government, highlighting the effectiveness of vaccination in reducing the severity of cases.

E-COMMERCE

MPay among first three global e-wallets to support Huawei watch

STAFF REPORTER

A wearable payment technology was recently introduced in Macau, representing a development in the local digital payment landscape.

As reported by China Daily, Huawei announced a strategic collaboration with Macau Pass during a launch event in Malaysia earlier this week, where the tech giant revealed its latest products, including the Huawei Mate X5 | Ultimate Design.

Through the partnership, Macau's leading e-payment platform has become one of the first three global e-wallets to support the Huawei Watch.

"We're honored to partner with global technology leader Huawei as one of the first three international e-wallets to support the Huawei Watch," Macau Pass chairman and CEO Sun Ho said, adding that the collaboration is a notable innovation in Macau's financial technology industry.

Users of the new technology can link their MPay accounts to the Huawei Watch, allowing them to make payments simply by tapping their wrist. This feature is particularly convenient during physical activities such as fitness regimens and outdoor recreation.

With the use of encryption technology, the system also ensures secure transactions and prevents QR code fraud for users, the news report stated.

"Technology exists to

serve humanity," Huawei Device Business Hong Kong director Dickson Yang said. "This collaboration will drive innovation in wearable payment technology, with plans to explore further partnerships in various sectors, aiming to build a comprehensive ecosystem for wearable devices."

Meanwhile, the local payment services company received the Huawei Outstanding Ecosystem Award 2025 at the launch event.

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

New Classics: Aux Beaux Arts Redefines French Dining at MGM MACAU

French gastronomy is entering a bold new era at MGM MACAU, where Aux Beaux Arts unveils its "New Classics" — a visionary reimaging of brasserie-style dining. Led by Michelin-starred Consultant Chef Olivier Elzer and Chef de Cuisine Basil Yu, this transformation seamlessly marries time-honored techniques with contemporary flair, offering a refined yet accessible take on French cuisine.



Nestled in the heart of Grande Praça at MGM MACAU, the restaurant's ambiance echoes the golden time of 1930s Paris, setting the stage for a celebratory dining experience. The menu pays tribute to classic French cuisine while incorporating Macau's cultural influences. Highlights include the



Lobster Salad, where succulent seafood meets creamy burrata and butter lettuce, and the Skate Wing, a French coastal delicacy enhanced with a Southeast Asian-inspired spiced butter sauce. The Yellow Chicken with Piperade Basquaise showcases farm-to-table simplicity, while desserts such as Paris Brest and Clafoutis provide a sweet finale.

Starting from today, guests can experience this culinary evolution through à la carte and tasting menus, immersing themselves in the "New Classics" vision. For reservations, please call (853) 8802 2319 or visit MGM MACAU's website.



JLL

PROPERTY MARKET POISED TO CONTINUE STRUGGLING, WHILE RENTS SET TO RISE

LYNZY VALLES

THE property sector's rental performance improved last year; however, prolonged high-interest rates dampened investment sentiment, leading to sluggish property sales.

According to JLL's "Macau Property Market Review and 2025 Market Forecast," the market is set to face ongoing challenges this year.

The city's property market continued its adjustment in 2024 due to weakening external economic conditions, with ongoing challenges expected this year amid a lack of overseas investment and cautious investor sentiment, driven by high-interest rates.

Mark Wong, director of Value and Risk Advisory at JLL Macau, stated that while Macau's local economy remains stable, it still heavily depends on tourism and entertainment. Other sectors, particularly those tied to local livelihoods, face mounting pressures.

He added that economic and interest rate policies under the new U.S. administration have also impacted Macau's real estate market, slowing the confidence recovery.

Speaking about this year's forecast, Wong noted that local developers and investors may release more properties to ease high-interest loan financing burdens.

For JLL, investment returns are expected to gradually recover, al-

LYNZY VALLES



beit at a slow pace.

The city's residential transaction volume rose 4.9% year-over-year to 3,057 transactions, with 230 pre-sale transactions recorded, according to the Financial Services Bureau (DSF).

New home sales increased in mid-2024 following new project launches but did not sustain momentum in the second half of the year.

Two major projects obtained pre-sale permits in 2024, totaling 2,072 units, with the majority supplied by the Pearl Metropolitan project in the Macau Peninsula.

As of the third quarter of last year, 2,140 units were under construction or recently completed. Se-

veral major residential projects, including Soho Residence and Lake Yoho, are set to add a total gross floor area of 145,012 square meters in the near term.

The residential leasing market, however, showed an upward trend.

Luxury apartment rents increased 2.5% year-over-year, while mid-range residential rents surged by 13.7%. In contrast, capital values declined due to high-interest rates.

Luxury residential values fell by 11.4%, while mid-range residential properties dropped 9.7%. Investment yields showed slight growth, reaching 2.0% and 2.3%, respectively, for luxury and mid-range properties.

"Macau's home prices have

plunged over 20% from their market peak, with some units seeing declines of up to 30%," Wong said.

Developers have adopted aggressive pricing strategies to boost sales, but these price corrections have resulted in substantial losses for recent buyers, affecting investment confidence and consumer spending.

OFFICE MARKET UNDER PRESSURE

JLL reported that the office market remained under pressure, with a 12.7% drop in newly registered companies in 2024.

Leasing demand was primarily driven by cost-saving relocation

needs. JLL's Macau Office Index recorded a 4.5% decline in overall office rental values, with Grade A office rents dropping 6.0% year-over-year. By Q3 2024, office vacancy rates stood at 12%.

Retail sales also suffered, with total sales value for the first three quarters of 2024 reaching MOP 53.48 billion, a 16.9% decline year-over-year.

Key retail categories such as watches, clocks, and jewelry; leather goods; and department store merchandise reported double-digit declines.

"The popularity of outbound travel and lower per capita tourist spending have slowed retail sector recovery," Wong remarked.

However, the realtor expects retailers to actively seek prime locations to open new stores, including newcomers from abroad.

"The retail property market will likely maintain a polarized trend, with leasing activities remaining active for prime shops in tourist areas, while neighborhood shops continue to face pressure," he concluded.

Recently, the Macau Real Estate Development Association forecasted a dip of 8% to 11% in the property market this year, adding that it may take up to two years for the market to begin rebounding. The association stressed out that the sector faced a downward trend in Q4 of 2024, despite the lifting of property curbs last April.

TAICHUNG TRAGEDY

Macau toddler injured in explosion shows signs of improvement

VICTORIA CHAN

THE two-year-old girl from Macau, critically injured in a gas explosion at a Taichung shopping mall last week, is showing gradual improvement.

The child, who underwent emergency brain surgery, remains in intensive care but no longer requires temperature-controlled treatment, according to Taiwanese reports.

The China Medical University (CMU) Children's Hospital in Taichung confirmed that the toddler's vital signs are stable, and her brain pressure is steadily decreasing.

The girl, who suffered

severe head trauma, a cerebral hemorrhage, and cerebral edema in the explosion, was initially in a coma and required emergency craniotomy surgery to relieve brain pressure. She also underwent hypothermia treatment to aid recovery.

Hospital officials stated that the child has passed the critical seven-day post-surgery period but remains under close monitoring.

"Although her brain pressure has decreased, she is not yet out of danger," the hospital said in a statement.

The explosion, which occurred last Thursday at the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi shopping mall, killed four

people and injured 39 others.

Among the victims were a four-generation Macau family visiting Taiwan. Two family members died in the incident, while five others were injured. Two have since been discharged, but the toddler's 85-year-old great-grandmother and 24-year-old uncle remain hospitalized.

AIRLINES REFUTE RUMORS OF REFUSING TO TRANSPORT BODIES

Two airlines operating routes between Taiwan and Macau have refuted reports that they refused to transport the bodies of the victims back to Macau, according to multiple media

reports.

Taiwanese media initially reported earlier this week that both Starlux Airlines and Air Macau declined to transport the bodies back to the SAR.

However, Starlux Airlines and Air Macau have denied these claims.

The carriers have assured that they are willing to provide support and assistance to the affected families. They reiterated their commitment to providing humanitarian assistance in such situations.

Rumors surfaced on social media earlier this week claiming that airlines had refused to transport the bodies of the deceased

back to Macau, allegedly forcing the families to hold a farewell ceremony and cremate the remains in Taiwan.

In a statement reported by multiple Taiwanese media outlets, Starlux clarified that while they had received inquiries about the service, no formal request had been made.

The airline emphasized its established procedures for transporting remains and expressed willingness to assist in such tragic circumstances. "We always assist travelers with their requests, especially in une-

xpected situations," a representative stated, as cited in reports.

Similarly, Air Macau affirmed its readiness to provide support and maintain communication with all involved parties. "We are willing and able to provide assistance at any time," the airline said in a statement.

This response comes as part of a coordinated effort by the Macau Government Tourism Office, which has mobilized its Tourism Crisis Assistance Team along with the Macau Red Cross to support the families affected by the explosion.



ADVERTORIAL

Gaming revenue faces modest decline in February

VICTORIA CHAN

THE city's gambling revenue for February is projected to range between MOP18.3 billion and MOP19.4 billion, with analysts forecasting a year-on-year change of -1% to +5%, according to reports from major brokerage firms.

Reports indicate that the average daily gambling revenue in Macau from February 10 to 16 was MOP642 million, down from MOP725 million during the Lunar New Year period.

For the first 16 days of February, total gaming revenue stood at MOP11.9 billion. Morgan Stanley forecasts that total gaming revenue for February could range from MOP18.3 billion to MOP19.4 billion, suggesting a slight year-on-year decline of 1% or a potential increase of up to 5%.

Meanwhile, Macquarie anticipates revenue between MOP18.5 billion and MOP19.3 billion, projecting a year-on-year decrease of 1% to 3% for the first two months.

Bank of America Securities noted that Lunar New Year travel patterns may have influenced the numbers, as many tourists postponed their visits until after February 5.

They predict that gaming revenue for the month will remain flat compared to last year, with a slight month-on-month increase, indicating a combined year-on-year decline of 2% to 3% for January and February.

Additionally, Macquarie highlighted shifts in market share among Macau's major resorts. Sands China and Melco Crown saw market share increases of 1.5% and 2%, respectively, in January, while Wynn Macau and MGM China experienced declines of 1.5% and 2%.

Analysts suggest that ongoing renovations at Sands China may boost its appeal, making it a favored choice among investors.

Despite mixed trends, analysts remain cautiously optimistic, with Galaxy Entertainment, MGM China, Wynn Macau, and Sands China favored for their growth potential.

However, SJM and Melco Crown received "neutral" and "underweight" ratings, reflecting ongoing challenges in the sector.

SANDS CHINA NEWS

Unsung Heroes Behind our Clawsome Lobsters

Did you know that the lobster is an animal that mates for life, thus symbolising love and eternity? You probably do know that Sands China and British pop art master Philip Colbert have brought a series of pop art exhibitions to Macao. One of them is the colourful maritime and cultural tourism art exhibition, **Coastal Fantasia: The Lobster King's Vacation in Macao**, which features larger-than-life installations and sculptures of Colbert's Lobster character – creating can't-miss Instagrammable spots for couples.

A 15-metre-high inflatable **Lobster Submarine** features Colbert's iconic Lobster arriving in Macao piloting a bright yellow submarine to the waterfront of the Macao Science Center – adding a splash of colour to the city's dazzling shore. This enormous art installation pays homage to The Beatles' Yellow Submarine and Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures, perfectly blending Colbert's playful style with classic pop art and 60s British nostalgia to bring his retro-futuristic world to Macao.

On the Cotai Strip, a 7-metre-high inflatable installation, **Lobster Flamingo**, features Colbert's well-known Lobster King floating in a bright pink flamingo pool ring at The Venetian Macao's outdoor lagoon, enjoying the mesmerising scenery of the Cotai Strip. With his playful pop art style, Colbert has brought Lobster on holiday to Macao, turning the space into a fun, laid-back vacation scene.

Here's another 'did you know' for you: Behind the successful arrival of Lobster lies a team of **over 200** professional and dedicated unsung heroes! They have meticulously executed precise calculations and arrangements to conquer the challenge of installing such large-scale art pieces in water that rises and falls. So come get a close look at Coastal Fantasia for yourself before March 16, when Lobster says goodbye to the lagoon and shoreline. In the meantime, you can see more of Lobster at Philip Colbert's city-wide art installations at Sands China's revitalisation areas of the former Iec Long Firecracker Factory and Taipa Houses until March 16 and at The Parisian Macao's Le Jardin until May 14.



VICTORIA CHAN

AVIATION

WHAT'S THE KEY TO SURVIVING A PLANE CRASH? SKILLED CREW, STRONG SEATS AND WINGS THAT DETACH

MICHAEL CASEY

AFTER watching videos of a Delta Air Lines jet catch fire upon landing and flip over on a Toronto runway, it's fair to wonder how anyone could have survived.

But aviation experts said it was not surprising that all 76 passengers and four crew walked away from Monday's disaster, with 21 people suffering minor injuries and only one still hospitalized yesterday [Macau time]. It's a credit, they said, to advances in plane design as well as a crew that flawlessly executed an evacuation plan.

"When I first saw (footage of) that aircraft upside down at the airport, I was like: 'How can that happen? And how can anybody survive that?'" Michael McCormick, an assistant professor and program coordinator for air traffic management at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, said. "It was absolutely astounding to watch the people actually climbing out."

PASSENGER JET DESIGN A FACTOR

McCormick and others said the fact that there were only minor injuries shows that passenger jet design and engineering have greatly improved over time.

Fuel tanks are stored in the wings, so the wings are designed to break off in a crash to remove a seriously explosive hazard, he said. The tail-like fin of a plane known as a vertical stabilizer is frangible — or easily broken — meaning an aircraft that has flipped over can stay flat on the ground and passengers and crew are able to evacuate, he said.



"Aviation is and remains the safest form of transportation," McCormick said, adding that it was no fluke 80 people were able to walk away from the Toronto crash. "That is because the safety of aviation is constantly improving."

Jeff Guzzetti, an airline safety consultant and a former investigator for the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board, said the seats and seat belts also helped to prevent fatalities. He noted that passenger jet seats are designed to withstand impacts of up to 16 times the force of gravity and that the seat belts restrained the passengers who were suspended upside down as the plane slid to a halt on the runway at Toronto Pearson International Airport.

"The odds of getting injured or killed in a commercial airline

accident is far less than driving in your car," Guzzetti said.

CREW EXECUTED THE EVACUATION PLAN

Experts also credited the crew, who calmly and quickly shepherded many of the passengers off the plane before emergency crews even arrived on the scene. Deborah Flint, CEO of Greater Toronto Airports Authority, called the flight crew "heroes," while their boss, Delta CEO Ed Bastian, praised their response as a "testament to the safety that's embedded in the systems."

"It's horrifying. When you look at the video you can imagine when I received the text minutes after it happened, hearing that there was a regional jet upside down on an active runway with 80 people on board, how I felt without knowing it, what

was transpiring," Bastian said in an interview with CBS Mornings.

"But the reality is that safety is embedded into our system," he said. "Air travel in the United States is the safest form of transportation and travel there is. Period. And it's because we train for events like this."

WHAT WAS IT LIKE INSIDE THE CABIN?

Flight 4819 from Minneapolis to Toronto, operated by Delta subsidiary Endeavor Air, crashed on landing around 2:30 p.m. Monday. Videos show the plane hitting the runway hard, bursting into flames then skidding along the tarmac and flipping over.

"It was very uncomfortable, a very just solid, uncomfortable experience — forceful on the impact, sideways movement and suddenly

just inverted," Peter Carlson, a paramedic who was traveling to Toronto for a conference, told The Associated Press. "The only mission was to get out."

Carlson was awarded at the paramedics conference for his "courageous and meritorious actions" in helping other passengers. The certificate says his actions "preserved life, reduced injury and provided calm."

"I have a laceration, abrasion, some bruises on my legs, some bruises on my ribs, but alive," Carlson said. "Everyone is alive. I don't know if I am deserving of going into miracle territory but it's amazing."

Other videos appear to show passengers scrambling out of an upside-down cabin as workers assist them off the plane onto the snowy tarmac and emergency crews hose the aircraft with water.

PASSENGERS TAKE ACTION

Some passengers "who have been harmed as a result of the crash" retained the law firm Rochon Genova, according to Vincent Genova, head of the company's Aviation Litigation Group.

"Our clients, similar to many other passengers, suffered personal injuries of a serious nature that required hospital attention," Genova said in a statement. "With our involvement, we expect to reach a timely and fair resolution for these clients and others who reach out to us."

A spokesperson for Delta confirmed it has offered each passenger \$30,000 and is "telling customers this gesture has no strings attached and does not affect rights."

A Canadian investigator refused to comment on preliminary theories, although aviation experts told AP they will likely consider weather conditions, as well as the possibility of human error or an aircraft malfunction.

TSB announced yesterday that crews were moving the wreckage from the runway to a hangar for further examination. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

MGM partners with Air Macau to enhance in-flight dining



Macau-based hospitality group MGM has teamed up with Air Macau to introduce an upgraded in-flight dining experience for business-class passengers. The collaboration showca-

ses culinary expertise from MGM's Imperial Court and Aux Beaux Arts, offering a refined selection of Chinese and Western dishes.

MGM's chefs have worked closely with Air Macau's ca-

tering team for nearly a year, providing technical guidance on menu design, recipe development, and culinary training.

The new menus, launching on March 1, will be available on flights to over 10 major destinations, including Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul.

Hubert Wang, president & COO of MGM China, emphasized that this initiative reinforces Macau's reputation as a Creative City of Gastronomy while enhancing its appeal as a global travel destination.

By integrating fine dining with air travel, MGM stated that the partnership aims to promote Macau's rich culinary culture to international visitors before they even arrive.

Chef Marino D'Antonio joins 8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana at Galaxy Macau



Galaxy Macau has appointed Italian chef Marino D'Antonio as the new executive chef of 8½ Otto e Mezzo BOMBANA, a Mi-

chelin one-star restaurant. Chef Marino, known for his experience in Michelin-starred establishments, previously collaborated with

Chef Umberto Bombana to open Opera Bombana in Beijing.

To mark his appointment, Chef Bombana and Chef Marino will host a special dinner on February 26 and 27, featuring a menu that highlights seasonal ingredients such as Hokkaido King crab, Périgord black truffle, and Mayura beef.

Chef Marino also plans to introduce new signature dishes, including Veal and Ham Agnolotti and Marinated Langoustine with Oscietra caviar.

Additionally, the restaurant will launch a new lunch menu in March, available on Fridays and Saturdays. The menu will feature Italian dishes with a focus on seasonal ingredients.

HONG KONG: ENGAGEMENT OF SOCIETY IN GBA PROJECT AT STAKE

ANALYSIS

A report this week by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) questioned the role of Hong Kong's societal involvement in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) project.

Although the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) leadership has engaged with the plan, "the reaction of the territory's population and many businesses is lukewarm," the briefing, titled "Hong Kong is Marginalised within the Greater Bay Area," states.

"Given popular concern about a potential influx of mainland Chinese into Hong Kong," it adds, the local government has tended to prioritize GBA schemes that help to open the mainland market for Hong Kong firms, improve cross-border transport links, or boost local housing developments, such as the proposed Northern Metropolis close to the border.

Reciprocal policies will be expected; otherwise, the territory's policymakers risk being perceived as insufficiently supportive of the GBA initiative, leading to their views being ignored by mainland policymakers and the territory's interests being marginalized, the report argues.

Municipal governments in the region are competing with each other fiercely, and insufficient cooperation between the Hong Kong government and its counterparts in Guangdong could result in Hong Kong's marginalisation in major initiatives, the EIU alerts.

EIU's assessment is that the impact of the GBA initiative on businesses within the territory, at least in the short term, "will probably be limited, owing in part to the fundamentally different regulatory regimes governing Hong Kong and mainland China."

Some positive developments will be agreed under the GBA, including the data-transfer agree-



Xia Baolong visited the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Youth Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub last week

ment between Hong Kong and the GBA area, agreed in December 2023. However, the overarching data-transfer regulations remain cumbersome and thus represent only a marginal improvement.

Investors should also be aware that elements of Hong Kong's business environment that are crucial to its competitive advantage could be affected by policies and regulations introduced under the GBA umbrella.

Companies should monitor announcements about GBA-related reforms closely, as well as high-level interactions between Hong Kong officials and their counterparts in Guangdong and the central government in Beijing.

"Businesses involved in strategic industries should also monitor potential competitive dynamics between Hong Kong and other GBA cities in the mainland," reflect the EIU analysts, echoing concerns recently stated by mainland authorities.

Xia Baolong, the head of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO), urged Hong Kong to focus more on national integration and align itself with the GBA initiative.

Last week the SAR's Chief Secretary, Eric Chan, said that Xia was "very, very concerned about Hong Kong," as quoted in a report by

South China Morning Post.

Xia's comments came after meeting with the neighboring city's top officials last week, in a two-day trip that included a visit to Hengqin and meetings with Macau's top officials.

According to Chan, Xia urged Hong Kong to "try our very best to integrate into the mainland's national policies, especially the Greater Bay Area initiative."

GBA RISES AS GLOBAL HUB FOR TECH INDUSTRY

DRIVEN by collaborative efforts, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is emerging as a global powerhouse for future industries such as artificial intelligence and smart robotics, technology experts said this week at a forum in Shenzhen.

"Future and emerging industries such as AI, humanoid robots, brain-computer interfaces and life sciences have taken center stage in scientific and technolo-

gical advancement and industrial upgrading," said Xu Xiaolan, former vice-minister of industry and information technology and a member of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee.

However, she noted that these industries are still in their early stages and require further scientific and technological efforts.

"The Greater Bay Area, with its unique

geographical advantages, abundant innovative resources, rich talent pool and mature financial system, has become a hot spot for global investors and innovative enterprises," said Xu, who is also board chairperson of the Chinese Institute of Electronics.

The institute, in collaboration with several scientific research and industry organizations, unveiled an initiative for future industry cooperation in the GBA at the forum. The initiative pro-

poses launching more application projects, attracting more international high-tech startups, establishing an open talent service ecosystem, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and facilitating diversified international capital investments.

"The initiative is particularly timely for Hong Kong, which is at a pivotal moment in its industrial transformation," said Xi Ning, chair professor of robotics and automation and director of the Advanced Technologies Institute at the University of Hong Kong. **MDT/CHINA DAILY**

US tourists begins first-ever themed tour to Greater Bay Area

ON THE AGENDA

A group of U.S. tourists departed last Sunday on a first-ever themed trip to China's Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Designed to offer American tourists an immersive experience of a technologically advanced, safe, open and vibrant China, the tour

to Beijing, Macau, Hong Kong and Shenzhen was the first GBA-themed trip organized by the China National Tourist Office and the U.S. Tour Operators Association.

Byron Lorenz, one of the travelers, told Xinhua that this was his first visit to China. "We're going to four different places in China. I am looking forward to enjoying the Chinese culture, explo-

ring local tours, and doing some shopping."

He believes that traveling in person, rather than relying on books or videos, provides a deeper understanding of the culture and environment. "It definitely allows you to understand the culture more."

In December last year, China announced a significant relaxation of its

visa-free transit policy, extending the permitted stay for eligible foreign travelers from the original 72 and 144 hours to 240 hours, or 10 days.

Following the first GBA tour from Los Angeles, more travel routes to China will be organized in collaboration with American travel agencies, according to Air China North America. **XINHUA**



US tourists of a first-ever themed trip to GBA pose at the Los Angeles Airport this week

ANALYSIS

Trump's freeze on foreign aid could give China an opening on the world stage

DIDI TANG, WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's restrictions on foreign aid and targeting of a key agency funding programs around the world may be offering an opening to America's biggest adversary — China.

From the dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development to quitting international groups, Trump's drastic "America First" moves have raised concerns among some lawmakers and experts about whether the U.S. is ceding global influence to its rivals, especially at a time when Washington is fretting over Beijing's growing clout at the cost to American interests.

Foreign assistance offered the U.S. a source of "soft power" — allowing it to cultivate goodwill, build alliances and counter adversaries in a bid to shore up national security without having to dispatch troops, weapons or other more coercive measures.

In Cambodia, the contrast could not be sharper than China sending \$4.4 million to support demining operations, as Trump halted a \$6.3 million grant from the State Department's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement partly meant to clear "U.S.-origin unexploded ordnances as the remnants of war."

Administration officials say it's past time to review how America spends money abroad.

Asked if the U.S. was giving China and Russia an opening for greater global influence, national security adviser Mike Waltz denied that, telling NBC's "Meet the Press" recently that "all too often, these missions and these programs ... are not in line with strategic U.S. interests like pushing back on China."

In Panama, the Trump administration got the government to quit the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing's flagship overseas development program, prompting condemnation from China.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE US TO STEP BACK

Experts and lawmakers disagree on the impact of the U.S. taking a step back from foreign aid. Lawsuits are challenging the administration's freeze on foreign assistance and moves against USAID, with temporary holds on some of those efforts.

"The second Trump administration will deliver the goal for China" of wielding greater global influence, Feng Zhang, a visiting



scholar at Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Center, said at a recent debate in Washington.

Sen. Andy Kim, a Democrat from New Jersey, was worried for the same reason. "China doesn't even need to fight for their influence around the world now because of our own effort," Kim said recently on "Meet the Press."

Rep. John Moolenaar, a Republican from Michigan who chairs the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, said it could be time for change on foreign assistance.

"I think as we dig into this, we're going to find out what's been working and what hasn't been working," he said. "And then how do we innovate to a new way of promoting American interests, American values and being clear on what those values are."

Dennis Wilder, a senior fellow at the Initiative for U.S.-China Dialogue on Global Issues at Georgetown University, said global influence goes beyond foreign aid, with the U.S. commanding the world's most powerful military and its dollar dominating the financial system.

Let's not "accept at face value that China is ready or able to step in where the U.S. may be leaving a vacuum," Wilder said.

The Chinese embassy in

Washington said Beijing is "willing to work with all countries and parties, including the U.S., to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the field of development, so as to promote common development and prosperity among all countries."

THE FOREIGN AID RIVALRY

The two countries — the primary players in global development — are spending foreign assistance differently. Most Chinese money is issued as debt and typically spent on energy and infrastructure projects.

Most U.S. funds were disbursed as grants or loans with low or no interest rates in areas like public health and humanitarian aid, said AidData, an international development research lab at William & Mary University's Global Research Institute.

In Peru, Chinese money helped build the \$1.3 billion megaport in Chancay, which opened in November during a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping. U.S. foreign aid in Peru, by contrast, was used to finance coffee and cacao as alternatives to cocaine production.

Elsewhere, American dollars helped fight HIV/AIDS in Africa, treated malnourished children in South Sudan and provided medical services at an immi-

grant shelter in Mexico.

Acknowledging that the U.S. should fund tangible foreign projects like ports and factories, Congress in 2018 established an institution to combine government funding with private investments for projects such as the trans-Africa rail project in Angola.

Overall, China spent \$1.34 trillion on nearly 18,000 overseas development projects between 2000 and 2021, averaging about \$61 billion a year, AidData said.

The U.S. disbursed \$1.24 trillion in foreign aid, including military assistance, between 2001 and 2023, the research lab said.

USAID, created during the Cold War to counter Soviet influence, is the single largest U.S. government player in foreign aid. It paid out \$43.8 billion in 2023, AidData said. That is equivalent to less than 1% of total annual government spending.

US COULD RISK GOODWILL ABROAD

Because of the differences in the types of projects funded, China is unlikely to step in as the U.S. retreats, but Beijing still wins because foreign aid is about building relationships and goodwill, said Samantha Custer, director of policy analysis at Ai-

dData.

"These countries are watching the U.S. and how it engages with its partners and its workers, and they're making determinations as to whether the U.S. is a reliable economic and security partner, and increasingly there are concerns that we are not," Custer said.

That will feed into Beijing's narrative that it's a responsible partner and global leader while sowing doubt about the U.S., she said.

New York-based China Labor Watch, which monitors labor conditions and investigates practices such as the use of forced labor in China, relies on U.S. funding for about 90% of its budget, and the aid freeze has forced the group to lay off or put on unpaid leave most of its U.S. staff, group founder Li Qiang said.

China now has a strategic opening as the go-to alternative for countries seeking investments without political conditions, said Salvador Santino Regilme, an associate professor of international relations at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

"The broader implication of the U.S. aid freeze is a return to militarized diplomacy, where soft power is sidelined in favor of hard-power coercion," he said.

MDT/AP

SECURITY

Australian and New Zealand militaries monitoring three Chinese warships off Australia

ROD MCGUIRK, MELBOURNE

THE Australian and New Zealand militaries were monitoring three Chinese warships moving unusually far south along Australia's east coast on an unknown mission, officials said yesterday.

The Australian government revealed a week ago that the warships had traveled through Southeast Asia and the Coral Sea and were approaching northeast Australia.

Defense Minister Richard Marles said that the Chinese ships — the naval frigate Hengyang, cruiser Zunyi and replenishment vessel Weishanhu — were “off the east coast of Australia.”

Defense officials did not respond to a request for comment on a Financial Times report that the task group from China's military, the People's Liberation Army, was 150 nautical miles (278 kilometers) east of Sydney.

“There is no doubt that this is, not unprecedented, but an unusual event,” Marles told Sky News television.

Marles said Australian navy ships and air force planes were monitoring the Chinese ships' movements through international waters that are in Australia's exclusive economic zone, the area beyond its territorial waters where a nation has exclusive eco-



In this photo provided by the Australian Defense Force, the People's Liberation Army-Navy Jiangkai-class frigate Hengyang travels in the Torres Strait off Australia's coast

nomics rights.

“They're entitled to be where they are; Australia is also entitled to be prudent and we are monitoring very closely what the activities of the task group are,” Marles told reporters.

“What we will do whenever this mission is over on the part of the Chinese task group is engage in a full assessment of what the Chinese were seeking to achieve in respect of this mission,” he added.

In Beijing, China's foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun

was asked at a media briefing on Wednesday about the Chinese warships' location and replied he was not aware of the situation. The Chinese Embassy in Australia did not immediately respond to a request for comment yesterday.

Australia engages with Papua New Guinea and New Zealand over Chinese warships

Marles said Australia had engaged with its nearest neighbor Papua New Guinea over its response because the Chinese had traveled around the South Pacific island

nation's coast on their way to Australia's exclusive economic zone.

Australia was also “working very closely” with New Zealand, which is separated from the Australian east coast by the Tasman Sea, he said.

New Zealand's military was also monitoring the Chinese ships by sea and air “in coordination with Australia,” New Zealand Defense Minister Judith Collins said in a statement.

“We have not been informed by the Chinese government why

this task group has been deployed into our region, and we have not been informed what its future plans are,” she added. “We will continue to monitor these vessels.”

Jennifer Parker, an expert associate of Australia's National Security College and a former Australian naval officer, said Chinese warships rarely traveled so far south along the nation's east coast.

“This is part of a broader power projection from the PLA-Navy and we should expect to see more of this in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean,” Parker said.

The Chinese deployment comes as the head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Adm. Samuel Papparo visits Australia this week.

Parker said the timing was likely coincidental given the Chinese deployment would have been planned well in advance and the United States doesn't release information about their senior officers' travel until close to the visit.

“Without knowing exactly where the ships are going, the point of this deployment, I think, is to demonstrate to Australia that they have the capability to come down and operate in our maritime domain,” Parker said.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told a news conference he was not worried by reports of Chinese warships off Sydney.

“The Chinese naval ships are complying with international law, but as we do, we are monitoring the situation and observing what is going on, as you would expect,” Albanese said.

Relations between the Chinese and Australian militaries remain dangerous

Three Chinese warships visited Sydney Harbor in 2019. But their voyage had been approved by the Australian government. **MDT/AP**

THAILAND

China begins repatriation of more than 1,000 online scam workers rescued from Myanmar

AN airlift carrying more than 1,000 Chinese nationals who had worked at online scam centers in eastern Myanmar began yesterday, after the rescued workers were taken across the border to Thailand and put on chartered flights to China.

Thailand, China and Myanmar have coordinated efforts over the past month to shut down the scam centers that bilked victims around the world out of billions of dollars through false romantic ploys, bogus investment pitches and ille-



A bus, believed to be carrying Chinese nationals, crosses the 2nd Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge in Mae Sot in Thailand's Tak province

gal gambling schemes.

Hundreds of thousands of people from Southeast

Asia and elsewhere are estimated to have worked at such centers in Myanmar,

Cambodia and Laos, and many were recruited under false pretenses for other jobs and found themselves trapped in virtual slavery.

Thai officials said recently that as many as 10,000 people may be repatriated from Myanmar from the online scam centers.

So far, 16 flights, or about four a day, have been scheduled to repatriate the Chinese nationals, accompanied by police. Because of the large number of Chinese — the projected number so far is 1,041 —

Thailand is allowing Beijing to handle most of their processing and investigations on their return to China.

Thai officials told reporters yesterday the rescued workers were being taken in batches of 50 across a bridge from Myanmar's Myawaddy to Thailand's Mae Sot, where they were processed — including with biometric scans — and sent on by bus to Mae Sot's airport.

There they boarded China Southern Airlines planes, whose destination was shown by flight tracking

websites as Jinghong in southwestern China's Yunnan province.

Thai authorities are overseeing the evacuation and processing of scam center workers from other nations. Last week, some 260 people from 20 nations, including many from Africa, crossed from Myanmar into Thai custody after they were reportedly rescued from scam centers.

The organized repatriation of freed scam workers from nations other than China will begin on Sunday, Thai PBS reported.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra on a visit to Beijing earlier this month told Chinese leader Xi Jinping that Thailand would crack down on the scam networks. **MDT/AP**

UKRAINE WAR | 3 YEARS ON

Russia seems to have time on its side as talks start

WHEN Russian troops rolled into Ukraine three years ago, they brought their parade uniforms with them on the push to Kyiv. President Vladimir Putin expected a quick victory.

What Putin dubbed the "special military operation" has turned into Europe's largest conflict since World War II. Tens of thousands have been killed, entire cities have been reduced to smoldering ruins, millions of Ukrainians became refugees, and Russia was isolated from the West.

Now as senior Russian and U.S. officials are talking again and setting the stage for summit meeting, Putin appears closer than ever to cementing Moscow's gains of about a fifth of Ukraine's territory and keeping it out of NATO.

President Donald Trump sharply reversed the three-year U.S. policy of isolating Russia when he called Putin and said afterward they agreed "to work together very closely" to end the war. He said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy "will be involved" in negotiations but didn't elaborate.

Trump also expressed understanding of Putin's key demand on the pivotal issue of Ukraine's prospective NATO membership that the U.S. and other alliance members previously described as irreversible. "They've been saying that for a long time that Ukraine cannot go into NATO," Trump said of Russia. "And I'm OK with that."

Putin invaded on Feb. 24, 2022, after demanding that NATO abandon membership for Ukraine and pull back the alliance's troops on NATO's eastern flank -- actions rejected by the West.

He claimed his move was necessary to safeguard Russia's security interests and protect Russian speakers in Ukraine. Kyiv and its allies denounced his move as an unprovoked act of aggression. Ukrainians saw it as Moscow's attempt to destroy their national sovereignty and identity.

Russian troops reached the outskirts of Kyiv early in the invasion but pulled back a month later amid heavy losses and Ukraine's attacks on supply lines. More humiliating setbacks came in September and October 2022, when a Ukrainian



AP PHOTO

counteroffensive forced Russia to pull back from large parts of the Kharkiv region in the northeast and the Kherson region in the south.

Fortunes changed in 2023 when a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south failed to cut Russia's land route to the Crimea Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed from Kyiv in 2014.

Russia seized the combat initiative last year with offensives along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front, making slow but persistent gains. In the fall, Russian forces captured the most territory since the opening of the war.

Moscow also pummeled Ukrainian infrastructure with waves of missiles and drones, destroying much of its power generating capacity.

Ukraine struck back in August with an incursion into Russia's Kursk region to try to distract Moscow's forces in the east and gain more leverage in potential peace talks. Ukraine still holds some of those gains, but its limited resources are stretched, making it difficult to defend strongholds in the east.

While Zelenskyy earlier demanded Russia's full withdrawal from all occupied areas as a precondition for talks, he later acknowledged Kyiv can't immediately reclaim all its territory. He said Ukraine won't abandon its goal of joining NATO — even though Trump dismissed that as "impractical" — and Zelenskyy emphasized

needing reliable Western security guarantees and a robust European peacekeeping force to prevent Russian attacks.

Trump's call with Putin and ensuing Russia-U.S. talks in Saudi Arabia shattered the Biden administration's "nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine" policy. Trump blamed Kyiv for failing to make a deal with Moscow that could have prevented the war, praised Russia's military might and even suggested that Ukraine "may be Russian someday."

Zelenskyy said Ukraine won't accept any deal negotiated without Kyiv and insisted that European allies must participate in peace talks. He dismissed a U.S.-proposed draft agreement that would give Washington a large share of Ukraine's rare earth minerals as too focused on U.S. interests and had no security guarantees for Kyiv.

Trump's approach stunned European allies, whose shock deepened when Vice President JD Vance sharply rebuked them at the Munich security conference over free speech and migration.

While the Trump administration said European allies weren't welcome at the peace talks, it encouraged them to provide security guarantees for Kyiv in what former British ambassador Nigel Gould-Davies called a contradictory approach.

Putin's key goals remain much the same — that Ukraine renounce joining NATO and enforce the use of the Russian

language to keep the country in Moscow's orbit — but now wants Kyiv to withdraw its forces from the four regions Moscow has seized but doesn't fully control.

Putin ruled out a truce, arguing it would benefit Kyiv. But some Kremlin-watchers believe he could accept it if Kyiv agrees to hold elections after a ceasefire.

Trump echoed Putin's line that Zelenskyy, whose term expired last year, needs to face voters, while Kyiv maintains elections are impossible to hold amid a war. Trump escalated that notion yesterday [Macau time] by posting on social media that Zelenskyy was "a Dictator without Elections."

It's unclear who would monitor any potential ceasefire.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said NATO should play no role and that any European troops taking part should not be covered by NATO's charter obliging allies to aid of any member under attack.

While the U.K. and others signal readiness to deploy troops for such a mission, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said after the U.S.-Russian talks in Saudi Arabia that Moscow won't accept troops from any NATO members in a peacekeeping force.

Some reports suggested Chinese or Brazilian troops as part of a monitoring force, but those countries haven't signaled any intention of participation. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1972 NIXON MAKES HISTORIC VISIT TO CHINA



The American President Richard Nixon has arrived in China at the start of a week-long summit aimed at ending 20 years of frosty relations between the two countries.

His visit began with an unexpected audience with Chairman Mao Zedong at the leader's home. Few details have been released, but officials said the one-hour meeting involved a "serious and frank discussion".

After a modest reception at Peking airport, the president was formally welcomed at a lavish banquet held in the Great Hall of the People and hosted by Prime Minister Chou En-lai.

Mr Chou described Mr Nixon's long journey to China as a "positive move" responding to the wishes of the peoples of both countries.

He hinted at the years of tension between China and the United States - largely due to American support for nationalists in Taiwan - and credited both governments for "common efforts" to open the gate to better contacts at last.

The president responded positively. "There is no reason for us to be enemies," he said. "Neither of us seeks the territory of the other; neither of us seeks domination over the other; neither of us seeks to stretch out our hands and rule the world."

Using one of Mao's own quotations, Mr Nixon said it was time to seize the day and seize the hour "for our two peoples to rise to the heights of greatness which can build a new and better world".

There followed an elaborate round of toasts, in which the 800 guests at the banquet wandered from table to table clinking thimble-sized glasses containing Chinese firewater.

Commentators said the elaborate banquet was in marked contrast to the coolness of the president's reception at the airport.

This historic visit was engineered by the president's national security adviser, Dr Henry Kissinger, during two visits to China last year. It is part of a policy of rapprochement aimed at restoring diplomatic relations between the two sides.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The BBC carried extended news bulletins of President Nixon's ground-breaking visit to China - which included a walk along the Great Wall.

The Chinese people eagerly followed news of the visit and newspapers rapidly sold out. The main diplomatic achievement of the visit was the Shanghai joint communiqué which declared Taiwan to be part of China. Formal diplomatic relations were restored between the US and China in 1979 following a second communiqué which suggested a further weakening of US ties with Taiwan. In February 2002, President George W. Bush visited China to mark the 30th anniversary of Nixon's historic trip. The two countries continue to disagree over Taiwan.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Reflect on how to bring the delights of your dreams into the material realms. Just be mindful of how you feel internally, taking care to pull back if your head starts to spin.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Your world becomes more vibrant and intense, helping you see things from a higher and more matter-of-fact perspective. Focus on what is necessary to build stronger foundations.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You'll have a chance to break through emotional walls, but be mindful not to overreach. It'll be vital that you focus on cultivating and respecting healthy boundaries.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Bring awareness to any dreams or morning epiphanies you experience, searching for spiritual meaning. You'll have plenty to stay busy with, helping you feel empowered with each task completed.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Focus on strengthening deep and fulfilling bonds, encouraging you to go deep with someone special. Be mindful of your influence. Have fun and share laughs.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Taking care of your body has a direct impact on your ability to function professionally and within your private affairs, so be sure to focus your efforts accordingly. Knowing your limitations will play a vital role.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
You'll have a chance to uncover new levels of creative thinking, so don't hesitate to pull from the shadows when searching for inspiration. Your conversations will also seem more profound.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Connect with simple pleasures to remind yourself of the vast beauty this world has to offer. Pamper yourself before heading to bed when Venus activates, helping you release physical stress.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Consider how you find further meaning, balancing logic and emotion without abandoning spiritual perspectives. Your heart can feel challenging to control at times.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Try not to overanalyze your options or get caught up in perfectionist patterns, putting your mind into hyperdrive. Try to stay busy while navigating.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Find your footing by connecting with members of the community who are knowledgeable, supportive, and interested in building strong relationships. This energy can also improve your following online.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Get serious, taking in the full scope of your current situation to discover fresh ways to navigate it. Time spent alone can take these reflections to the next level, helping you better identify strengths.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	3	cloudy
Changchun	-17	-7	fine
Chengdu	8	10	rain
Chongqing	10	14	overcast
Fuzhou	9	11	overcast
Guangzhou	15	22	cloudy
Guiyang	2	6	rain
Haikou	19	23	cloudy
Hangzhou	3	6	cloudy
Harbin	-20	-10	cloudy
Hefei	1	11	cloudy
Nanjing	4	11	cloudy
Shanghai	4	8	cloudy
Taipei	15	16	rain
Wuhan	4	12	overcast
Hong Kong	17	20	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-9	-4	sunny
Frankfurt	4	12	cloudy
Paris	11	15	cloudy
London	10	14	rain
New York	-6	1	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Monumental; 5- Isaac's eldest; 9- Engine parts; 13- Top-of-the-line; 14- Nick of "Cape Fear"; 16- Farm team; 17- Peter the Great, e.g.; 18- Medicine measures; 19- Musical Horn; 20- ___ boy; 21- Lance on the bench; 22- Summon for active duty; 24- Numerous; 26- Indonesian resort island; 27- Departing; 29- Swiftly; 33- Make into law; 34- An apple or a planet will have this at the centre; 35- Robert ___; 36- Vegas opening; 37- Male duck; 38- Roadhouse; 39- How sweet ___; 41- Hard to hold; 42- Total disorder; 44- Aided; 46- "Surprise Symphony" composer; 47- Pager sound; 48- Unit of language; 49- Kingdoms; 52- Sun. speech; 53- ___ and rave; 57- Decorative case; 58- Twix's partner; 60- Nautical direction; 61- Bring in; 62- Digging tool; 63- Shipping deduction; 64- National symbol; 65- Kind of prof.; 66- Some linemen;

DOWN 1- I could ___ horse; 2- Pillar; 3- ___ the finish; 4- Clay products; 5- Termination; 6- Like a smokestack; 7- ___-ran; 8- Salt Lake City player; 9- Crash; 10- Rink leap; 11- Course list?; 12- Ginger cookie; 15- Fugitive; 23- Boxer Laila; 25- Colony member; 26- Like a tree trunk or a yipping dog; 27- Flying pests; 28- Fertile area in a desert; 29- Author Dahl; 30- Troy story; 31- Dovetail part; 32- Longings; 33- Kazan; 34- Crawl; 37- Abhors; 40- Brother or sister; 42- Teen's desire; 43- Combine chemically with water; 45- Religious sch.; 46- Large stinging wasp; 48- Garden intruders; 49- Coral formation; 50- List shortener; 51- Charisma, atmosphere; 52- Mariners can sail on seven of these; 54- Space pioneer Shepard; 55- Dweeb; 56- Summer shirts; 59- New Deal org.;

Yesterday's solution

A	M	B	I		A	L	A	S		C	A	A	N			
S	E	A	M		S	L	A	T	E		O	S	L	O		
H	A	R	P		T	E	R	R	A		N	A	T	O		
E	T	R	A	D	E		D	E	R		S	P	A	N		
					N	A	E	S		E	C	H	O			
A	T	T	E	M	P	T	S		H	O	R	N	E	T		
R	O	I	L		L	O	A	M		S	T	A	P	E		
O	R	K		E	A	T	E	N		O	E	R				
A	R	E	N	A		T	A	L	E		O	M	E	N		
R	E	D	E	E	M		N	E	A	R	M	I	S	S		
		A	B	I	A		E	T	U	I						
L	E	S	T		R	R		E	N	T	R	E	E			
I	D	L	E		R	E	F	L	S		T	I	V	O		
A	G	U	N				O	W	L	E	T		E	D	E	N
R	E	M	S				H	E	A	D		E	N	S		

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	
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DRIVE IN

'UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE' NEEDS TO BE SEEN TO BE BELIEVED

JAKE COYLE,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

IT'S not unusual for a city to double for another metropolis in movies. New Yorkers have long been able to spot when Toronto has been substituted for the Big Apple. Matthew Rankin, though, has gone more than a step, or maybe 85 steps, further.

His "Universal Language" takes place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but the culture is entirely Iranian. Farsi is the spoken tongue. At Tim Hortons, tea is served from samovars. It's as if we've been knocked over the head and woken up in some snowy, Canadian version of an Abbas Kiarostami film.

It's both an extremely exact homage to the films of Kiarostami, Jafar Panahi and other Iranian masters, and a comic lament for how distant their movies might feel for a Winnipegian director. Rankin has joked that "Universal Language" brings together the rich poetry of Iranian filmmaking and a Canadian cinema that emerged "out of 50 years of discount furniture commercials."

AD



A scene from the film "Universal Language" (Oscilloscope Laboratories)

The gags start immediately, with an opening title logo for "A Presentation of the Winnipeg Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young People" — a twist on the Iranian institute that produced '70s classics, like Kiarostami's Koker trilogy.

Like those films, Rankin's is framed with kids. In the first scene, a displeased French teacher (Mani Soleymanlou) chastises his you-

ng students for speaking Persian. One child, an aspiring comedian, is dressed as Groucho Marx. Another says a turkey stole his glasses. Another wants to be a Winnipeg tour guide. The teacher asks them all to read from their book. In unison they read: "We are lost forever in this world."

"Universal Language," scripted by Rankin, Ila Firouzabadi and Pirouz Nemati, lightly juggles a

handful of characters we intermittently check in with. That includes an adult tour guide (Pirouz Nemati), whose attractions include the site of "the Great Parallel Parking Incident of 1958." There are also two girls (Rojina Esmaeili and Saba Vahedyousefi) who find a banknote frozen in ice. A character named Matthew Rankin (played by Rankin) is traveling to Winnipeg by bus to visit his ailing

mother after departing his bureaucratic job in Montreal. Oh, and there are turkeys. Lots and lots of turkeys.

Rankin's film, his second following the also surreal "Twentieth Century" (2019), is propelled less by narrative thrust than the abiding oddity of its basic construction, and the movie's slavish devotion to seeing it through without a wink. As the movie moves along in formally composed shots, something wistful takes shape about the possibilities of connection and of insurmountable distances.

I've twice now seen "Universal Language," a prize-winner in Cannes' Directors Fortnight last year that was shortlisted for the best international Oscar, and I still barely believe it exists. Rankin's movie, in melding two worlds, risks taking place in neither, of letting its cinephile concept snuff out anything authentic. But while I'm not, at the moment, begging for a subsequent French New Wave movie set in Saskatchewan, I've not gone long without thinking about "Universal Language." I guess Rankin's movie dream has filtered into those of my own.

"Universal Language," an Oscilloscope Laboratories, release, is not rated by the Motion Picture Association. In Farsi and French. Running time: 89 minutes. ★★★★★

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蛇年帶來挑戰與變革，但亦有新機遇！

THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE BRINGS CHALLENGES AND CHANGES,
BUT NEW OPPORTUNITIES AS WELL!



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BOOK IT

'Disposable' a journey through the inequities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic

FIVE years after COVID-19 first emerged, the United States is still grappling with the aftereffects of the pandemic that killed millions of people worldwide. They include the gaps in the nation's health care system and social safety net that were highlighted by the pandemic's effects.

Those inequities are the focus of journalist Sarah Jones' "Disposable: America's Contempt for the Underclass," a deeply reported, enlightening and empathetic look at the populations that were hit hardest by the pandemic.

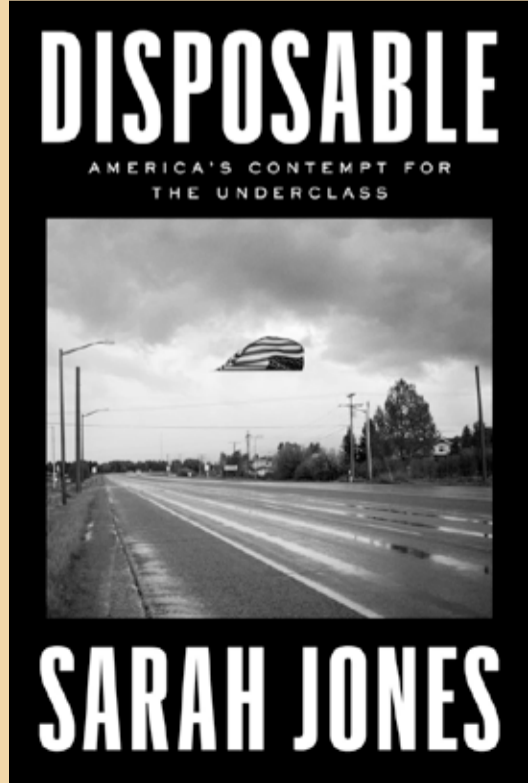
Jones takes readers on a journey to illustrate the disproportionate impact the pandemic had on lower-income, Black and Latino communities, showing how the consequences spanned from nursing home residents to front-line health workers.

"Like all major disasters, the pandemic is a moment of revelation," Jones writes. "Through it, we see America as it is, and not as we would like it to be."

Jones underscores her point with staggering details and statistics about how unaddressed gaps in the health care, worker safety and other systems compounded the pandemic's toll.

But the most powerful parts of her book are the personal stories she gathers from families affected by COVID-19. They include Jones' own family and her grandfather's death from COVID.

Jones offers at least some hope that while the gaps in health care and other needs remain after the pandemic, that chronicling them the way she has creates a memorial in itself that could spur action. **ANDREW DEMILLO, MDT/AP**



"Disposable: America's Contempt for the Underclass" by Sarah Jones (Avid Reader Press)

TASTE OF EDESIA

Latin Flavours

IRENE SAM, MDT

THIS week, MGM launches its first stellar line up for its 'Gastronomic Journey with Star Chefs' series of 2025, featuring Ricardo Chaneton, Executive Chef and Co-founder of Hong Kong's Michelin-starred MONO, ranking among Asia's 50 Best Restaurants. From now to 22nd, guests can experience MONO's modern Latin American flavors with French finesse in the unique 'Asian Bistronomy' atmosphere of **Aji at MGM COTAI**. Born and raised in Venezuela,

Chef Chaneton is renowned for interpreting Latin American cuisine through refined French culinary techniques. His culinary journey began in Venezuela before honing his skills at the three-Michelin-starred Quique Dacosta in Spain.

His distinguished career includes roles at Mirazur, ranked No. 1 on The World's 50 Best Restaura-

ts list, and as the Executive Chef at the Michelin-starred Petrus in Hong Kong. In 2019, Chaneton co-founded MONO, which earned a Michelin star for three consecutive years from 2022 onward and currently ranks 27th on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2024 list.

During the three-day culinary showcase, Chef Chaneton will present MONO's philosophy through carefully selected seasonal Latin American ingredients. Both the eight-course lunch and nine-course dinner tasting menus feature signature dishes including Fabien D'eneour Plounéour-Menez Pigeon with a sauce combining over twenty Latin American spices, as well as Chef Chaneton's iconic Mexican Purple Corn Inflatita, which is enhanced by the umami-rich seaweed sauce from chef's secret receipt.

Surprisingly, out of the entire exceptional meal, MDT's favourite is the bread. Crafted with their very own Masa Madre, aged for over

1900 days, MONO's sourdough undergoes an unceasing evolution. MONO's Masa Madre sourdough, adorned with the infinity symbol bread tag, represents MONO's hope and dedication to preserving this legacy.

It has been with MONO since before day one, and continue to count the days of the sourdough to honor the timeless staples of cooking and the ongoing evolution of MONO's culinary journey.

This year alone, the rustic loaf has seen a slew of interesting experimentations with the addition of poppy seeds, lavender, black/white sesame seeds, and even cacao nibs. Served with exquisite Arbequina olive oil, which follows an organic and biodynamic approach, reflecting MONO's shared values of respecting nature.

The olives are harvested by hand under the illumination of a full moon, offering an otherworldly experience.

What's more, the main course, Danish Langoustine with Ecuadorian Cacao Expressions, and the dessert, Carúpano 70% Chocolate Textures, are the creations that play from MONO's magic on its signature fresh cacao.



Essence of Vibrant Parisian Nights

DIPTYQUE launches Orphéon 2025 this year, an exquisite fragrance collection filled with limited editions celebrating moments where music, art, and life come together.

Orphéon is more than just a fragrance; it is an olfactory journey that transports you to the legendary Orphéon jazz club, a haven of creativity and inspiration for Diptyque's founders, nestled beside the Maison Diptyque in the heart of the Saint-Germain quarter in Paris.

It is a true olfactory daydream, capturing the warm, vibrant atmosphere of the locale, where people would dance, laugh, and discuss the world.

Imagine curls of tobacco smoke mingling with powdery trails of blusher, winding across the burnished wood of the Orphéon.

This evocative fragrance unfolds with carefully selected notes: warm and reassuring cedar recalls the wooden counters and tables that witnessed countless conversations; silky swirls of tonka



bean conjures up to lingering traces of light tobacco; vivacious juniper berries recalls echoes of festive evenings and gin cocktails; and delicate jasmine captures the timeless elegance of tho-

se who frequented Orphéon. Each note harmoniously recreates the essence of the venue, a hub of liberty and artistic effervescence where jazz melodies and lively discussions intertwine. **IS**

OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

NO REASON FOR CHINA AND EU NOT TO BE PARTNERS

With the European Union feeling betrayed by the “America first” Donald Trump administration on many fronts, including trade and the Ukraine crisis, some Western observers have tried to characterize Beijing’s reaching out to the EU at this juncture as opportunistic.

But they should be reminded that diplomatic engagements such as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visit to Ireland on Monday take careful planning and time to arrange, rather than being impromptu or opportunistic.

China and Ireland are both strong advocates of multilateralism and free trade, and China is willing to work with the Western European country to enhance their mutually beneficial cooperation, making it bigger, stronger, deeper and more concrete, in order to achieve shared development and prosperity, as Wang told Irish Taoiseach Micheal Martin during their meeting in Dublin on Monday.

That Wang struck a similar chord in his meeting with Kaja Kallas, the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy of the European Commission, as well as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his Czech and French counterparts, during their respective meetings on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Munich late last week, only serves to show that China views its relations with the EU from a strategic and long-term perspective.

China and the EU have extensive common interests, and their cooperation is greater than competition. The two sides also have more consensuses than differences.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of China-EU diplomatic relations, the two sides should take this as an opportunity to review the experiences of their successful cooperation, reaffirm their strategic partnership, uphold dialogue and cooperation as the guiding principles, stick to the fundamental tone of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, and remain strategic partners based on mutual respect, trust, and long-term stability, as Wang said during his meeting with Kallas.

There are no fundamental conflicts of interest or geopolitical contradictions between China and the EU, and the two sides have no reasons not to strengthen their bilateral relations in ways that best serve their common interests. China and the EU are major trading partners and investment targets. In 2024, the China-EU trade volume is forecast to have reached \$785.8 billion, and the two-way investment stock \$260 billion. China is willing to share its development opportunities with the EU and to promote the docking of its Belt and Road Initiative with the EU’s Global Gateway Initiative to promote common high-quality development.

As China continuously opens its door wider, it will offer more opportunities. China and the EU should fully recognize the complementary advantages, mutual benefit and win-win nature of their economic and trade cooperation. In the face of some trade frictions that have emerged, such as their disputes over the bloc’s “anti-subsidy” tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles, the two sides should work together to properly handle them and maintain the stability of China-EU economic and trade cooperation.

The two sides should anchor the positioning of their partnership, adhere to dialogue and cooperation, maintain the main tone of mutual benefit and win-win collaboration, continue to be strategic partners, and work together to realize the bright prospects of peace, security, prosperity and progress.

Despite the challenges, China and the EU should be partners, not rivals. They should add more stability and certainty to the world, not more complexity and complications. As two major players on the world stage, China and the EU can provide stability and certainty in this time of turbulence and change, and provide more leadership and support for global development. [Abridged]

TRUMP BACKS IDEA TO SEND SOME DOGE SAVINGS TO AMERICAN CITIZENS

President Donald Trump said that he likes the idea of giving some of the savings from Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency back to U.S. citizens as a kind of dividend.

He said at an investment conference in Miami yesterday [Macau time] that the administration is considering a concept in which 20% of the savings produced by DOGE’s cost-cutting efforts goes to American citizens and another 20% goes to paying down the national debt.

Trump also said the potential for dividend payments would incentivize people to report wasteful spending. “They’ll be reporting it themselves,” Trump said. “They participate

in the process of saving us money.”

Later, as he flew back to Washington aboard Air Force One, he was asked by a reporter about the plan floated by Musk.

“I love it,” the Republican president told reporters on the plane.

A day earlier, Musk wrote on his social media platform that he “will check with the President” in response to a suggestion that Trump and Musk should announce a “DOGE Dividend” that would send a refund to taxpayers from part of the savings created by DOGE. Its efforts have already led to thousands of federal government employees being fired or laid off.

AP PHOTO



AS MELANIA RETURNS TO THE WHITE HOUSE, SHE’S WINNING CHINESE FANS

JOYCE Yip, a 39-year-old entrepreneur in southern China’s Guangzhou, has a new celebrity crush: Melania Trump.

The two-time first lady has become an online celebrity in China, especially among women. That may be surprising, given her husband’s hostility toward China, but social media posts reflect an admiration for her independence, her taste in fashion and how she’s raising her teenage son.

And, perhaps most importantly, her stoic allegiance to President Donald Trump despite his misogynistic comments, allegations that he’s had extramarital affairs and his being found liable for sexual abuse in a civil suit brought by a New York advice columnist.

“She looks heroic, elegant and resolute, so powerful and majestic, loving it so much,” Yip wrote on the Instagram-like platform Xiaohongshu after the inauguration last month.

After the first lady wore a wide-brimmed hat to the inauguration, similar products appeared on online shops and knitting influencers on Xiaohongshu posted videos showing people how to make their own within 48 hours.

By China’s conventional standards, women

are expected to be supportive of their husbands and to focus on raising children. But Melania Trump’s streaks of independence also appeal to Chinese fans, as does her ascent from small-town Slovenian roots to the top of the world’s social ladder.

“Chinese fans like her having both traditional and modern sides of a woman,” said Jingsi Wu, an associate professor of media studies at Hofstra University in New York.

Both sides are on display in a 4-year-old video that showed Melania Trump refusing to hold her husband’s hand as they disembarked from Air Force One. The video has scored more than 5 million “likes” on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, and still generates views and comments.

Around half a million people liked a November post on Xiaohongshu that joked about how unwilling the usually reserved Melania Trump must be to return to the very public life of a first lady. A satire in The New Yorker magazine meant to be critical of her marriage to the president received 1 million views on Bilibili, a YouTube-like platform, and only seemed to boost her popularity.

Almost 30,000 people liked a November post

about a years-old interview Melania Trump and her husband did on The Ellen DeGeneres Show, saying their relationship was “super sweet.”

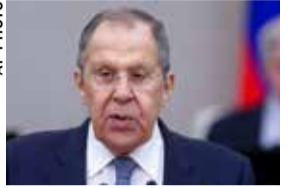
Ge Yahan is among Melania’s fans. The 24-year-old from Zibo on China’s eastern coast calls Melania a mysterious lady who was brave enough to follow her dreams from a small town in Slovenia to the United States.

Her celebrity crush brings in a bit of pocket money too. She has been selling unauthorized copies of Melania’s new self-titled memoir translated to Mandarin by AI on China’s social media underground for eight yuan (\$1.10).

Donald Trump has been openly critical of China’s economic practices as barriers to America’s financial success. He launched a trade war during his first term by imposing hefty tariffs on Chinese imports, adding more after he returned to office last month. Earlier this year, Trump claimed, without evidence, that thousands of Chinese immigrants are flooding the U.S. to build an “army” and attack America.

But Wu, the academic, said people in China often see U.S. politics as akin to a soap opera. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



South Africa Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov attended the G20 meeting in Johannesburg yesterday. The summit follows U.S.-Russia talks in Saudi Arabia that sidelined European allies. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio boycotted the event, citing South Africa’s policies as anti-American. European nations reaffirmed support for Ukraine.

AP PHOTO



South Africa U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio skipped the G20 meeting in Johannesburg, calling South Africa’s stance anti-American. Rubio criticized its Israel genocide case and ties to China. His absence marks a shift in U.S. diplomacy as European allies push for engagement with South Africa.

AP PHOTO



Vatican City Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni yesterday [Macau time] visited Pope Francis in the hospital, reporting him in good spirits despite pneumonia. The 88-year-old pontiff’s condition remains stable. The Vatican has not disclosed how long he will remain hospitalized as treatment continues.

AP PHOTO



Olympics The International Olympic Committee announced a sponsorship deal with Chinese electronics company TCL yesterday, replacing Japan’s Panasonic. The agreement, lasting through 2032, includes support for audiovisual and AI technology at Olympic venues. Japan’s Toyota and Bridgestone also withdrew from Olympic sponsorship last year.