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Bangladesh Residents attacked an air force base in Cox's Bazar yesterday after a dispute over a helmet violation. Soldiers opened fire, killing one person. The military blamed "miscreants" for the violence. Bangladesh's interim government has arrested 8,000 people since launching a crackdown on unrest earlier this month.



Italy An American Airlines flight from New York to New Delhi was diverted to Rome due to a security concern. Fighter jets escorted the plane, and passengers underwent additional screenings. Authorities later determined the threat was not credible, and the flight was cleared to continue.



West Bank Israeli tanks entered Jenin for the first time in decades yesterday [Macau time] as part of a crackdown on militants. Defense Minister Israel Katz said troops will remain in some areas for a year. Palestinians condemned the move as an escalation. Around 40,000 residents have fled the area.



Germany's conservative party won national elections, with Friedrich Merz set to become chancellor. The far-right AfD surged to second place, gaining support amid immigration concerns. Merz pledged strong support for Ukraine, rejecting Trump's negotiations with Russia that excluded Kyiv and Europe.

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'CHINA TRAVEL WITH CHINESE FILMS' TO BOOST TOURISM

The 'China Travel with Chinese Films' campaign, which aims to boost tourism in China by leveraging the popularity of Chinese films, was launched in Macau and Hong Kong during the weekend. The campaign, organized by the China Film Administration and China Media Group, also aims to create themed travel routes to enhance international interest in Chinese culture and revitalize inbound tourism. On the same day, the Chinese blockbuster 'Ne Zha 2' premiered in Hong Kong and topped the opening box office for animated films in the region.

CONSTRUCTION OF NEW STATION ENTRANCES ON EAST RAIL LINE TO BEGIN SOON

Construction of entrances and exits for the ES1 and ES2 stations on the northern section of the East Rail Line will begin in phases shortly. Authorities announced that part of the sidewalk and fitness facility area will be temporarily closed off. Last week, the Public Works Bureau met with local associations and merchants to discuss the project. Representatives expressed support, requesting that residents' travel and parking needs be prioritized during construction.

MAINLAND BRANCHES OF MACAU, HK BANKS TO OFFER CARDS

Starting March 1, mainland branches of banks from Macau and Hong Kong can offer bank card services, according to a National Financial Regulatory Administration (NFRA) notice. The move aligns with amendments to the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) and aims to boost financial integration within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. It will allow foreign currency and yuan bank cards for overseas Chinese citizens and enhance economic cooperation between the mainland and the SARs.

TRANSPORT

COMMITTEE CALLS FOR DIAGONAL MOTORCYCLE PARKING TO ENHANCE SAFETY AND EFFICIENCY

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Transport Advisory Committee is urging local authorities to replace straight motorcycle parking spaces with diagonal options, a move aimed at improving safety and efficiency in the densely populated city.

Currently, motorcycle parking in Macau includes both straight and diagonal spaces, but the majority are straight, which pose challenges for riders.

Parking in a straight space requires riders to maneuver their motorcycles at a 90-degree angle, a process that can be time-consuming and hazardous.

Residents have expressed frustration over the difficulties these spaces create.

"If you are on certain road sections, you first need to park your motorcycle and then use various methods to straighten it because motorcycles cannot turn 90 degrees," said a local resident in a TDM report. "The best solution is to increase diagonal parking spaces."

The narrow roads and high population density in Macau mean that motorcycles are a primary mode of transport for many residents. However, the existing parking design has led to safety concerns.

Another resident noted, "I try



VICTORIA CHAN

to find some legal parking spaces, but I often end up squeezing into smaller gaps, which makes me anxious about scratching my bike or blocking others."

Industry experts also criticize the current arrangement.

Tou Chio Fai, head of the Environmental Electric Motorcycle Association, pointed out that the design is particularly unsuitable for electric motorcycles, which often struggle to fit into straight parking spaces. "Now, motorcycles are no longer suitable for straight parking," he explained. "Most are already pressed against the parking racks, which makes parking more difficult for everyone."

To address these issues, the Transport Advisory Committee has suggested gradually converting straight parking areas into diagonal

ones.

This change, according to committee member Lei Chong Sam, could utilize vacant land and underused parking lots in the vicinity to compensate for the reduction in spaces due to the conversion. "There are many temporarily vacant areas in Macau," he said.

"Can we open them up for motorcycle parking or consider charging a reasonable fee for currently unused spaces?"

The committee emphasizes that improving motorcycle parking design should start in areas that prioritize public needs.

This push for change echoes discussions from 2019, when former lawmaker Sulu Sou brought the issue to the Legislative Assembly. He proposed changing Macau's current "right-angled" parking spaces

to diagonal designs, following global trends that favor angled bays for their safety and efficiency.

Initially, the Transport Bureau indicated it would "actively consider" the proposal in 2019 but later retracted this stance, claiming that diagonal parking would reduce the overall number of available spaces. However, studies from various municipalities worldwide support diagonal parking as a safer alternative.

For instance, a California-based parking design consultancy highlighted that diagonal spaces require a smaller turning radius and are less likely to cause blocked access, a common problem with straight parking.

Research from the Department of Urban Planning Affairs in Bahrain also noted that angled bays could significantly improve the use of space, particularly in narrow streets like those found in Macau. Similar studies from Brazil, Argentina, Hawaii, and Spain reaffirmed that angled bays facilitate better traffic flow and parking efficiency.

Many private parking lots had begun adopting this design to optimize space, with examples already seen in facilities across the city.

A previous poll conducted by Sou on Facebook indicated strong public support for diagonal parking, with 92% of over 1,700 participants favoring the change in 2019.

ROAD SAFETY

Jaywalking fines continue to grow, close to 200 weekly

RENATO MARQUES

THE Public Security Police Force (PSP) has reportedly fined almost 200 people for jaywalking violations committed between February 10 and 16.

The number of people caught and fined for this type of traffic offense has been progressively growing, with fines almost



doubling between late December last year and early January this year.

According to the PSP, 187 people were prosecuted for jaywalking in

that week. The force has vowed to continue closely monitoring these cases, particularly in areas where proper pedestrian crossings are available.

The 187 fines issued in a week amount to an average of about 27 per day, a figure higher than last year's average of about 23 daily penalties.

The PSP noted that infractions, including crossing roads at locations not designated as crossings (such as when a zebra crossing is within 50 meters) or ignoring red pedestrian signals, carry a MOP 300 fine.

The PSP stated that

this strict enforcement of the rules ensures the safety of pedestrians and vehicles, following many complaints from residents and road users and several accidents caused by illegal road crossings.

Despite increased enforcement, which has resulted in many fines, the phenomenon seems far from being curbed. People frequently cross Macau's streets unlawfully.

Last week, a man was hit by a vehicle while allegedly crossing illegally at Avenida Leste do Hipódromo, in yet another serious incident of this kind.

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ECONOMY

Macau included in US list of 'foreign adversaries'

RENATO MARQUES

A memorandum signed by President Donald Trump on the "America First Investment Policy" notes that the Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR) has been officially included in the list of the United States of America's "foreign adversaries."

The February 21 memo aims to clearly distinguish between the countries and regions that are US allies or adversaries for investment purposes.

Macau is listed in memo section 4, which defines who are the "foreign adversaries" of the US, stating, "For purposes of this memorandum, the term 'foreign adversaries' includes the People's Republic of China (PRC), including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Macau Special Administrative Region; the Republic of Cuba; the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; the Russian Federation; and the regime of Venezuelan politician Nicolás Maduro."

In the first section of the memo, the US President notes that "America's investment po-



MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
THE SECRETARY OF LABOR
THE SECRETARY OF ENERGY
THE SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY
THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE
THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISERS

licy is critical to our national and economic security. Welcoming foreign investment and strengthening the United States' world-leading private and public capital markets will be a key part of America's Golden Age."

The same document also adds that "The United States has the world's most attractive assets, in technology and across our economy, and we will make it easier for our overseas allies to support United States jobs, United States innovators, and United States

economic growth with their capital."

Trump notes that while the US is committed to maintaining an open investment environment that benefits the country, "new and evolving threats can accompany foreign investment."

Aiming directly at China, Trump noted, "Certain foreign adversaries, including the People's Republic of China (PRC), systematically direct and facilitate investment in United States companies and assets to obtain cutting-edge

technologies, intellectual property, and leverage in strategic industries. The PRC pursues these strategies in diverse ways, both visible and concealed, and often through partner companies or investment funds in third countries."

The US President remarks that reciprocity is needed in this relationship with the PRC, adding, "The PRC does not allow United States companies to take over its critical infrastructure, and the United States should not allow the PRC to take over United States

critical infrastructure."

The memo was made public the same day US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent met China's Vice Premier He Lifeng. The US President called on Bessent to curb Chinese investments in critical sectors of the US economy.

The same document notes that Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are at the top of Trump's concerns, with the US President stating, "It is the policy of the United States to preserve an open investment environment to help ensure that artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies of the future are built, created, and grown right here in the United States. Investment in our economy from our allies and partners, some of whom have tremendous sovereign wealth funds, supports the national interest. My Administration will make the United States the world's greatest destination for investment dollars, to the benefit of all of us."

Also listed as areas of concern were investments in businesses involved in critical technology, critical infrastructure, personal data, and other sensitive areas, as well as the intention to restrict foreign investors from access to US assets.

Trump states these measures "will ease in proportion to their verifiable distance and independence from the predatory investment and technology-acquisition practices of the PRC and other foreign adversaries or threat actors."

Two residents injured in blaze at Lake Building

TWO residents, 51 and 79 years old, have been reportedly injured in a blaze that occurred yesterday morning at the Lake Building in Taipa.

According to reports on-site, the flames broke out around 7 a.m. and were allegedly caused by an electrical short circuit inside a residential unit on the seventh floor of Block 5 of the public housing building.

According to the Fire Services Bureau (CB), both injured were residents of the unit where the fire occurred. They were found unconscious by firefighters and transported to



the public hospital for emergency treatment.

Eight other people on three floors sought help and were assisted by firefighters, but they did not require medical assistance.

The CB also noted the fire had spread and partially affected two other residential units. Some residents from the building complained that the fire alarm

system had not sounded, but the CB said that when they arrived at the scene, the fire alarm was operating.

According to a statement from the Social Welfare Bureau, none of the residents have solicited help from the bureau for temporary lodging. The CB is investigating to ascertain the causes of the fire.

RM

12 HURT IN TRAFFIC ACCIDENT DURING FILMING SESSION

STAFF REPORTER

A traffic accident occurred yesterday at Rua do Seminário when a private car lost control during a movie filming session.

The incident took place around 3 p.m. as the car veered off course, crashing into a fence and then rushing down a three-story sloping alley.

A total of 12 people were injured, including four children, all of whom were sent to Kiang Wu Hospital for treatment. The injured individuals were all members of the acting crew.

After the crash, the car was found parked in a narrow pedestrian ramp with extensive dents on its body, and the rear pump handle was loose.

As seen in photos circulating online, the ground was scattered with debris, and broken glass was found on the staircase.

Local media reports indicate that the car, which was part of the filming crew, lost control after turning from Rua do Seminário towards Largo do Aquino. The injured included three men and nine women, ranging in age from 5 to 61.



A screenshot showing the car starting to lose control towards Largo do Aquino

Two were local residents, while the others held Exit-Entry Permits for Hong Kong and Macau, and one was a Singaporean passport holder. The injuries were mostly contusions and abrasions.

The police confirmed that the filming crew had applied for permission to film and had closed the road for the session.

The 62-year-old driver, who holds both a valid mainland driving license and a dual-entry permit, was uninjured and passed a breathalyzer test.

WOMEN'S SPORTS CARNIVAL TO FEATURE GBA PARTICIPANTS

VICTORIA CHAN

THE highly anticipated "Macau Women's Sports Carnival" will take place from March 22 to March 23, featuring participants from the Greater Bay Area (GBA), officials announced at a press conference yesterday.

Since its inception in 2003, this annual event has focused on promoting physical fitness and encouraging sports participation among women in Macau.

The carnival aims to provide diverse sports experiences, fostering a community of female athletes.

Chao Kuok Wai, chief of the Sports Development Department, emphasized the importance of encouraging women to adopt a healthy lifestyle through lifelong sports.

"By holding enriching and diverse sports activities, we hope to spread the message of 'sports together and physical fitness' to different groups," Chao explained.



Chao Kuok Wai and Ng Ka Teng

The event also aims to raise awareness about the physical and mental health of women across various sectors of society.

This year's event will feature mass sports demonstrations and a fitness exhibition.

Notably, the organizers have

invited women's groups from cities across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area and Hengqin to participate.

The event is divided into two parts: a mass sports and fitness exhibition at Senado Square at 3 p.m. on March 22, where partici-

pants will showcase various sports events; and a fitness and sports competition at the Tap Seac Sports Stadium at 9 a.m. on March 23, where competitors will be grouped by age.

"We will continue to invite women's groups from the Greater Bay

Area to take part in team competitions and share experiences," said Ng Ka Teng, vice chairwoman of the Macau Women's General Association.

"This provides an important platform for women in Macau to communicate with their counterparts in the region."

Additionally, a women's disease prevention and health care station will be set up at the Tap Seac Sports Stadium on March 23 to enhance women's health awareness.

"Participants can seek advice and consultations on health matters during the event," said Chao.

The event will also incorporate elements related to the 15th National Games of China, which will be held later this year, in an effort to promote the upcoming national sports event.

"As the most significant sports competition in China, the National Games present a great opportunity to engage the public in sports," Ng noted. "We hope everyone can come together to support the National Games in Macau."

Registration for the recreational sports games on March 23 is now open online, with a maximum of 70 teams allowed to participate.

EDUCATION

MUST submits application for new campus in Hengqin

STAFF REPORTER

THE Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) has submitted an application to the Macau government for a new campus in Hengqin, according to president Joseph Hun-wei Lee. The request, made late last year, is part of the university's long-term expansion plan, driven by a lack of space on its current campus in Taipa.

Lee highlighted that the new campus would aim to foster scientific collaboration with mainland China and the Greater Bay Area, focusing on fields such as traditional Chinese medicine, high technology, environmental science, and engineering.

Speaking during the university's Open Day, Lee said that the university's efforts in Hengqin have already begun, with the establishment of the MUST Innovative Research Ins-



Joseph Hun-wei Lee

titution over the past three years, alongside other initiatives related to material science.

"We have been building the MUST Innovative Research Institute in Hengqin for three years, and we're building up several platforms, notably the two state key labs that have a base there. We are also

building a significant enterprise in material science and engineering focusing on medical displays and biomaterials," Lee said, as cited in a TDM report.

In addition to expanding in Hengqin, MUST is diversifying its academic offerings, introducing new bachelor's programs in

global operations management, acupuncture and massage, biomedical sciences, and doctoral programs in education, environmental sciences, biomedical sciences, engineering, and leisure management.

Moreover, Lee noted that student enrollment would remain steady, with new enrollment levels expected to stay around 7,000 for the next academic year.

Featuring nearly 200 activities, including display booths, exhibitions, and interactive sessions, the Open Day on Sunday highlighted MUST's academic and scientific achievements.

The event drew over 5,000 visitors, offering insights into research and campus life. Founded in 2000, MUST's current campus in Taipa spans 210,000 square meters and serves over 23,000 students.

FITCH

LVS CREDIT RATING BOLSTERED BY STRONG PERFORMANCE IN SINGAPORE AMID SLOW MACAU RECOVERY

STAFF REPORTER

FITCH Ratings Inc. recently issued a memo indicating that the credit rating for Las Vegas Sands Corp. (LVS) remains at 'BBB-' with a 'Stable' outlook, despite a "slightly weaker-than-expected rebound" in the Macau casino market.

This, however, was counterbalanced by the "strong performance" seen in Singapore's casino market, supporting the company's overall position.

Fitch analysts David Kempf and David Lowenstein highlighted the LVS' competitive positions in both Macau and Singapore, its robust free cash flow, and its large scale as key strengths.

These advantages, however, are tempered by the possibility of heavy capital investment and potential economic weakness in China.

Earlier this month, LVS revealed that the plan-

ned expansion of Marina Bay Sands would likely be completed by June 2030, with a targeted opening in January 2031. In October 2024, the company announced an USD8 billion investment in the second phase of the Marina Bay Sands development. LVS was also reported to be seeking an SGD12 billion loan to fund its Singapore expansion.

Meanwhile, Fitch noted that the stable outlook reflects rising visitation and spending in both Macau and Singapore.

The Macau gaming market had a strong start to 2024, although it slowed later in the year, likely due to the weakening Chinese economy.

The mass-market baccarat segment is near pre-pandemic levels, particularly in the premium mass market. However, the Macau VIP market is still below 2019 levels due to the disappearance of junket operations.



A view of newly developing area, bottom, and downtown area seen from a hilltop in the coastal city of Gwadar

AVIATION

Pakistan's newest airport is a bit of a mystery

RIAZAT BUTT, GWADAR

WITH no passengers and no planes, Pakistan's newest and most expensive airport is a bit of a mystery. Entirely financed by China to the tune of \$240 million, it's anyone's guess when New Gwadar International Airport will open for business.

Located in the coastal city of Gwadar and completed in October 2024, the airport is a stark contrast to the impoverished, restive southwestern Balochistan province around it.

For the past decade, China has poured money into Balochistan and Gwadar as part of a

multibillion dollar project that connects its western Xinjiang province with the Arabian Sea, called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC.

Authorities have hailed it as transformational but there's scant evidence of change in Gwadar. The city isn't connected to the national grid — electricity comes from neighboring Iran or solar panels — and there isn't enough clean water.

An airport with a 400,000 passenger capacity isn't a priority for the city's 90,000 people.

"This airport is not for Pakistan or Gwadar," said Azeem

Khalid, an international relations expert who specializes in Pakistan-China ties. "It is for China, so they can have secure access for their citizens to Gwadar and Balochistan."

CPEC has catalyzed a decadeslong insurgency in resource-rich and strategically located Balochistan. Separatists, aggrieved by what they say is state exploitation at the expense of locals, are fighting for independence — targeting both Pakistani troops and Chinese workers in the province and elsewhere.

Members of Pakistan's ethnic Baloch minority say they face discrimination by the government and are de-

nied opportunities available elsewhere in the country, charges the government denies.

Pakistan, keen to protect China's investments, has stepped up its military footprint in Gwadar to combat dissent. The city is a jumble of checkpoints, barbed wire, troops, barricades, and watchtowers. Roads close at any given time, several days a week, to permit the safe passage of Chinese workers and Pakistani VIPs.

Intelligence officers monitor journalists visiting Gwadar. The city's fish market is deemed too sensitive for coverage.

Many local residents are frazzled.

"Nobody used to ask where we are going, what we are doing, and what is your name," said 76-year-old Gwadar native Khuda Bakhsh Hashim. "We used to enjoy all-night picnics in the mountains or rural areas."

"We are asked to prove our identity, who we are, where we have come from," he added. "We are residents. Those who ask should identify themselves as to who they are."

Hashim recalled memories, warm like the winter sunshine, of when Gwadar was part of Oman, not Pakistan, and was a stop for passenger ships heading to Mumbai. People didn't go to bed hungry and men found work easily, he said. There was always something to eat and no shortage of drinking water.

But Gwadar's water has dried up because of drought and unchecked exploitation. So has the work.

The government says CPEC has created some 2,000 local jobs but it's not clear whom they mean by "local" — Baloch residents or Pakistanis from elsewhere in the country. Authorities did not elaborate.

Gwadar is humble but charming, the food excellent and

the locals chatty and welcoming with strangers. It gets busy during public holidays, especially the beaches.

Still, there is a perception that it's dangerous or difficult to visit — only one commercial route operates out of Gwadar's domestic airport, three times a week to Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, located at the other end of Pakistan's Arabian Sea coastline.

There are no direct flights to Balochistan's provincial capital of Quetta, hundreds of miles inland, or the national capital of Islamabad, even further north. A scenic coastal highway has few facilities.

Since the Baloch insurgency first erupted five decades ago, thousands have gone missing in the province — anyone who speaks up against exploitation or oppression can be detained, suspected of connections with armed groups, the locals say.

People are on edge; activists claim there are forced disappearances and torture, which the government denies.

Hashim wants CPEC to succeed so that locals, especially young people, find jobs, hope and purpose. But that hasn't happened.

"When someone has something to eat, then why would he choose to go on the wrong path," he said. "It is not a good thing to upset people."

Militant violence declined in Balochistan after a 2014 government counterinsurgency and plateaued toward the end of that decade, according to Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies.

Attacks picked up after 2021 and have climbed steadily since. Militant groups, especially the outlawed Baloch Liberation Army, were emboldened by the Pakistani Taliban ending a ceasefire with the government in November 2022.

MDT/AP

CORPORATE BITS

Sands China presents 'Concert of Love in Seoul' over Valentine's Day weekend



Sands China Ltd. hosted the "Concert of Love in Seoul" on Feb. 15 at The Venetian Theatre, in collaboration with the Cultural Affairs Bureau and the Macao Orchestra. Featuring the Macao Or-

chestra and renowned South Korean musicians, the event celebrated cultural diversity and the power of classical music.

As part of the Sands China Performing Arts Program-

me, the concert featured flutist Jasmine Choi, conductor Sunwook Kim, and soprano Lee Myung-Joo.

The performances included arias from Puccini operas, Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture, and a reimagined Butterfly Lover flute piece.

Sands China also hosted a sharing session with Choi, engaging 140 local music enthusiasts.

Wilfred Wong, executive vice chairman of Sands China Ltd., emphasized the company's commitment to fostering cultural exchange and enhancing Macau's status as a hub for the performing arts.

Wynn's Chinese Wine Awards draw nearly 200 wineries



The 2025 Wynn Signature Chinese Wine Awards will take place from February 28 to March 5 at Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace.

As the largest competition of its kind, the event will feature an elevated judging system, a distinguished panel of 27 internationally renowned jud-

ges, and expanded award categories.

This year's competition has drawn nearly 200 of China's top wineries, submitting over 900 wines for blind tasting evaluations based on the 100-point international standard. New award categories, including Wynn Sommelier's Choice and Best Young Winemaker, will be introduced.

In addition to rigorous judging, Wynn will host wine seminars, Masterclasses, and exclusive wine dinners. The awards ceremony on April 11 will promote winning wines globally, further positioning Chinese wines on the world stage.

TRANSPORT

Surge in passenger trips showcases robust transportation network

CHINA'S Spring Festival travel rush this year, which concluded on Saturday, witnessed over 9 billion passenger trips, setting multiple records and showcasing the country's robust transportation system and its capability to manage the largest annual human migration, the Ministry of Transport said last weekend.

The 40-day travel period, which began on Jan 14, recorded a total of 9.02 billion passenger trips, marking a 7.1% year-on-year increase, the ministry said.

Of these trips, 513 million were made by rail, up 6.1% year-on-year, while air travel accounted for 90.2 million trips, up 7.4% compared with the same period last year. Both railway and civil aviation passenger volumes reached new highs during the travel rush.

Road travel accounted for 8.39 billion trips, a year-on-year increase of 7.2%. Self-driving travelers accounted for 7.17 billion of these trips. Waterways recorded 31.21 million passenger trips, an increase of 7.6% compared with the same period last year.

"As Chinese people are getting richer, they are not only enjoying the Spring Festival holiday by returning home but are also finding more di-



Passengers go through ticket checks at the Zaozhuang Railway Station in Shandong province on Saturday, the last day of this year's Spring Festival travel rush

verse ways to celebrate, such as traveling to new destinations," said Liu Dongmei, a researcher at the Ministry of Transport's Research Institute of Highway, adding that during the travel rush, one person is likely to make multiple trips.

Liu Xin, a senior engineer and researcher at the China Academy of Transportation Sciences, said: "Since 2023, the demand for travel during Spring Festival has been high.

In the past, people returned home and stayed with their families. But now, some people return home for a couple of days and then use the rest of the holiday to travel with their parents, either within China or to other countries."

Experts also noted that the expansive transportation network, including roads and railways, has eased the pressures of traveling long distances, allowing people to reunite more effortlessly with their

loved ones during the most important holiday in China.

Liu Xin said that China's extensive road network, which includes the world's longest expressway, serves as a robust foundation for the growing popularity of self-driving trips.

Highlighting a notable shift in people's travel habits and preferences since 2020, he said: "An increasing number of individuals are choosing to drive home by themselves. The demand for privacy and

safety has notably increased, making self-driving trips a top choice."

For rail passengers, the difficulty of buying a train ticket has eased due to China's expanding railway network and improved services.

According to China State Railway Group Co, the national railway operator, more seats were provided during the Spring Festival travel rush, marking a year-on-year increase of 8.4% and setting a new record.

Zheng Fengyun, 68, a native of Chifeng in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, who lives with his son in Beijing, said he could effortlessly travel home to see his relatives. Although Zheng arrived at the station late due to traffic and missed his train to Chifeng, he managed to get a ticket via phone for another train scheduled for departure three hours later.

"It is so easy now. Even if I miss a train, I can catch another one soon," he said, recalling that in the past, missing a train would cause significant trouble due to ticket shortages and the difficulty of buying one at the station.

"The rail station is also more comfortable now, making it easy to spend hours while waiting for the next train," he added. **CHINA DAILY**

WAR GAMES

China holds live-fire exercises in Gulf of Tonkin after Vietnam marks its territorial claims

DAVID RISING,
BANGKOK

CHINESE authorities said they began live-fire exercises in the Gulf of Tonkin yesterday, only days after Vietnam announced a new line marking what it considers its territory in the body of water between the two countries.

China's Maritime Safety Administration said the exercises would be focused on the Beibu Gulf area, closer to the Chinese side of the Gulf of Tonkin, and would run through Thursday evening.

It gave no further details, but the drills follow an announcement last week by Vietnam establishing a baseline used to calculate the width of its territorial waters in the Gulf of Tonkin.

State-run Vietnam News reported that the baseline was in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and would provide "a robust legal basis for safeguarding and exercising Vietnam's sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction."

Vietnam has not publicly responded to the Chinese drills.



China and Vietnam have long had a maritime agreement governing the Gulf of Tonkin, but have been locked in competing claims

in the nearby South China Sea over the Spratly and Paracel Islands and maritime areas.

China has been growing

assertive in pursuing those claims, and in October assaulted 10 Vietnamese fishermen near the Paracel Islands, three of whom suffered broken limbs.

In addition to Vietnam, China's claims overlap with those of the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and while Indonesia has also figured in violent confrontations with the Chinese coast guard and fishing fleets in the waters around the Natuna Islands.

Tensions have been particularly high with the Philippines, with regular confrontations between the

two countries.

Most recently, a Chinese navy helicopter flew within 10 feet of a Philippine patrol plane last week over the South China Sea, near the hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal off the northwestern Philippines.

Leaders in Australia and New Zealand also said China should have given more warning before its navy conducted an unusual series of live-fire exercises in the seas between the two countries, forcing flights on Friday and Saturday to divert on short notice.

Political leaders from both countries emphasized that China didn't breach international law, but said they had only been given "a couple hours notice" rather than the usual 12 to 24 hours. **MDT/AP**

MILITARY

Japan and Philippines agree to deepen defense ties

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

JAPAN and the Philippines agreed yesterday to further deepen their defense collaboration and talk about protecting shared military information in the face of mutual alarm over China's increasing actions in the region.

Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani and his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro, forged the agreements in a meeting in Manila where their concern over China's actions in the disputed South China Sea and East China Sea was high in the agenda.

Japan and the Philippines are treaty allies of the United States, and the three have been among the most vocal critics of China's assertive actions in the region, including in the contested waters.

At the opening of his meeting with Nakatani, Teodoro said the Philippines was looking forward to boosting defense relations with Japan "against unilateral attempts by China and other countries to change the international order and the narrative."

Nakatani said after the meeting that he agreed with Teodoro "to strengthen operational cooperation," including joint

and multinational defense trainings, port calls and information-sharing.

"We also agreed to commence discussion between defense authorities on military information protection mechanism," Nakatani said.

The Philippines signed an agreement with the United States, its longtime treaty ally, last year to better secure the exchange of highly confidential military intelligence and technology in key weapons to allow the sale of such weaponry by the U.S. to the Philippines.

Then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Teodoro signed the legally binding General Security of Military Information Agreement in Manila at a time when the U.S. and the Philippines were boosting their defense and military engagements, including large-scale joint combat drills, largely in response to China's increasingly aggressive actions in Asia.

Nakatani said that he and Teodoro "firmly concurred that the security environment surrounding us is becoming increasingly severe and that it is necessary for the two countries as strategic partners to further enhance defense cooperation and collaboration in order to maintain peace and stability in Indo-Pacific."

Japan has had a longstanding territorial dispute with China over islands in the East China Sea. Chinese and Phi-

lippine coast guard and navy ships, meanwhile, have been involved in a series of increasingly hostile confrontations in the South China Sea in the last two years.

Also high in the agenda of Nakatani and Teodoro, a copy of which was seen by The Associated Press, was the "expansion of bilateral cooperation, especially in the context of the Reciprocal Access Agreement."

Last year, Japan and the Philippines signed the agreement allowing the deployment of Japanese and Philippine forces for joint military and combat drills in each other's territory. The Philippine Senate has ratified the agreement, and its expected ratification by Japan's legislature would allow the agreement to take effect.

The agreement with the Philippines, which includes live-fire drills, is the first to be forged by Japan in Asia. Japan signed similar accords with Australia in 2022 and with Britain in 2023.

Japan has taken steps to boost its security and defensive firepower, including a counterstrike capability that breaks from the country's postwar principle of focusing only on self-defense. It's doubling defense spending in a five-year period to 2027 to bolster its military power.

Many of Japan's Asian neighbors, including the Philippines, came under Japanese aggression until its defeat in World War II, and Tokyo's efforts to strengthen its military role and spending could be a sensitive issue.

Japan and the Philippines, however, have steadily deepened defense and security ties largely due to concerns over Chinese assertiveness in the region. **MDT/AP**



Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro (right) greets his Japanese counterpart Gen Nakatani in Makati city, yesterday

INDONESIA

Shariah court sentences two men to up to 85 lashes for having gay sex

AN Islamic Shariah court in Indonesia's conservative Aceh province yesterday sentenced two men to public caning for having gay sex.

The couple, aged 24 and 18, were arrested on Nov. 7, after neighborhood vigilantes in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, suspected them of being gay and broke into their rented room to catch them naked and hugging each other.

The lead judge said that the two college students were "legally and convinc-



Two gay men sit inside a courtroom during their trial at Sharia court in Banda Aceh, yesterday

ingly" proven to have had gay sex and would receive 85 and 80 strokes respectively.

"During the trial it was proven that the defendants committed illicit acts, including kissing and having

sex," said the judge, Sakwanah, who goes by a single name like many Indonesians. "As Muslims, the defendants should uphold the Shariah law that prevails in Aceh," she added.

She said the three-judge panel decided against imposing the maximum sentence of 100 lashes because the men were outstanding students who were polite in court, cooperated with authorities and had no previous convictions.

Prosecutors previously demanded each get

80 strokes, but the judges decided on a harsher punishment for the older man because they believed that he was the one who had encouraged and provided a place for sexual relations.

Both prosecutors and the lawyers for the two men said they accepted the sentence and will not appeal.

Aceh is considered more devout than other areas of Muslim-majority Indonesia and is the only province allowed to observe a version of Islamic Shariah law.

Indonesia's secular central government granted Aceh the right to implement Islamic Shariah law in 2006 as part of a peace deal to end a separatist war. A religious police and court system have been established, and the new law is a

significant strengthening of Shariah in the region. Each year since then, more than 100 people have been publicly caned.

Aceh implemented an expansion of Islamic bylaws and criminal code in 2015 that extended Shariah law to the province's non-Muslims, who account for about 1% of the population, and allows up to 100 lashes for morality offenses including gay sex and sex between unmarried people. This will be the third time that Aceh has caned people for homosexuality.

Caning is also a punishment in Aceh for gambling, drinking alcohol, women who wear tight clothes and men who skip Friday prayers. **MDT/AP**

UKRAINE-US

Zelenskyy says progress made on reaching an agreement on rare minerals deal

JUSTIN SPIKE, KYIV

A contentions Trump administration proposal to give the U.S. \$500 billion worth of profits from Ukraine's rare earth minerals as compensation for its wartime assistance to Kyiv has been taken off the table, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said yesterday [Macau time], indicating a more equitable deal is in the works.

Zelenskyy had earlier declined a U.S. draft agreement on exploitation of his country's valuable minerals such as lithium used in the aerospace, defense and nuclear industries because it did not contain security guarantees and came with the \$500 billion price tag.

"The question of \$500 billion is no longer there," Zelenskyy told a news conference at a forum of government officials in Kyiv marking the three-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian leader said considering aid as a debt to be repaid would be a "Pandora's box" that would set a precedent requiring Kyiv to reimburse all its backers.

"We do not recognize the debt," Zelenskyy said. "It will not be in the final format of the agreement."

No further details were given on the state of negotiations. Ukraine has insisted on security guarantees that it needs to deter any potential Russian aggression in the future.

Trump's special envoy to the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, said on CNN's "State of the Union" that he expects a deal this week allowing the U.S. to play a greater role in exploiting Ukraine's mineral resources.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the administration's minerals plan was to create a U.S.-Ukraine partnership, calling it a "win-win."

"We make money if the Ukrainian people make money," Bessent told Fox News Channel's Sunday Morning Futures program.

Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, left the Kyiv forum early along with Economic Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko



AP PHOTO

for what Yermak said were talks with U.S. officials on a potential deal.

Later, Yermak posted on social media that he'd spoken with U.S. officials, including Bessent and Trump's national security adviser Mike Walz, saying it had been a "constructive conversation."

"We are making progress," Yermak wrote. "The USA is our partner and we are grateful to the American people."

ZELENSKY SAYS HE'D GIVE UP PRESIDENCY FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP

In response to a pointed question from a reporter on whether he would give up his presidency for peace in Ukraine, Zelenskyy said he would if it achieved a durable end to the fighting under the security umbrella of the NATO military alliance.

"If to achieve peace, you really need me to give up my post, I'm ready," he said. "I can trade it for NATO."

His comment appeared to be aimed at recent suggestions by President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin that elections should be held despite Ukrainian legislation prohibiting them during martial law.

UKRAINE FEARS TRUMP'S POLICY SHIFT TOWARD PUTIN

Trump's engagement with Russian officials and his recent

agreement to reopen diplomatic ties and economic cooperation with Moscow have marked a dramatic about-face in U.S. policy that has rattled leaders in Ukraine and across Europe.

Zelenskyy has expressed fear that Trump pushing a quick resolution would result in Ukraine losing territory and being left vulnerable to future Russian aggression. U.S. officials have asserted the Ukrainian leader would be involved if and when peace talks actually start.

Trump, however, prompted alarm and anger in Ukraine this week when he suggested Kyiv had started the war and Zelenskyy was acting as a "dictator" by not holding elections.

Yesterday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the state TASS news agency that Moscow and Washington would continue bilateral talks at the end of next week.

Ryabkov said the talks would take place between department heads from both countries' foreign ministries, adding that "quite a lot" of contact was ongoing between the Russian and American sides.

EUROPEAN LEADERS PREPARE FOR TALKS WITH ZELENSKY AND TRUMP

European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and other top EU officials were headed to Kyiv Mon-

day for talks with Ukraine's government as Europe scrambles to devise a response to the Trump administration's U.S. policy changes, and to maintain support for Kyiv if aid from Washington ends.

The U.K. said it would announce new sanctions against Russia on Monday, describing them as the biggest package since the early days of the war. Foreign Secretary David Lammy said the measures would be aimed at eroding Russia's "military machine and reducing revenues fueling the fires of destruction in Ukraine."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron were to both visit Washington this week as Europe attempts to persuade Trump not to abandon Ukraine in pursuit of a peace deal.

Russia launches record drone strikes on eve of anniversary

Earlier, Zelenskyy said Russia had launched 267 drones into Ukraine overnight, more than in any other single attack of the war.

Ukraine's air force said 138 drones were shot down over 13 Ukrainian regions, with 119 more lost enroute to their targets.

Three ballistic missiles also were fired, the air force said. One person was killed in the city of Kryvyi Rih, according to the city military administration. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1964 CASSIUS CLAY CROWNED WORLD CHAMPION



Cassius Clay, 22, has been crowned heavyweight champion of the world after beating Sonny Liston in one of the biggest upsets in boxing's history.

Clay, from Kentucky, was announced the winner after the hot favourite retired at the end of the sixth round in Miami.

When the bell rang for the start of the seventh round, Liston stayed on his stool in the corner of the ring - saying he did not want to continue.

Florida state attorney Richard Gerstein is to launch an inquiry into the fight.

Clay was earlier fined around £900 for disgraceful conduct after he ranted at his 32-year-old opponent during the weigh-in.

He had chanted "I wanna rumble...I wanna rumble!" before saying "You're a tramp. I am going to eat you up. Somebody's going to die at the ringside tonight. Are you scared?"

Liston had built his reputation on two first round knock-outs of Floyd Patterson and in the boxing world he was thought to be invincible.

Clay had come into the fight after suffering his greatest humiliation to date - being knocked down by Henry Cooper's left hook.

Liston reigned supreme when he was challenged by former Olympic gold medallist Clay, who ring experts said was "all talk".

The majority of sports journalists covering the bout thought that Clay, who was 7-1 underdog, would be no match for Liston. Only half of the seats had been sold and around 8,000 people attended the fight.

The fight started at 0310 GMT at the Convention Hall in Miami Beach and Liston had been widely expected to retain his title in the third round.

Liston, known as the "dark destroyer", had managed to pin Clay to the ropes during round two but in round three the champion was forced to retreat, with his left eye pouring with blood.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The World Boxing Association let Cassius Clay keep his heavyweight championship following the controversy over his fight with Sonny Liston at Miami Beach.

Miami State attorney Richard Gerstein said a month-long inquiry revealed no evidence of match-fixing. He added that there was little doubt that Liston was suffering from a sore shoulder during the fight.

Both the original fight and the rematch a year later in Maine, which Clay won with a first-round knockout, have been dogged by allegations of rigging.

Muhammad Ali, as he was later known to his adoring fans, said the victory in Miami over Liston was the most important of his career - because he had proved he was qualified to be champion of the world.

Shortly after the fight, Clay surprised the sports world by announcing that he had joined the Nation of Islam and had changed his name to Muhammad Ali.

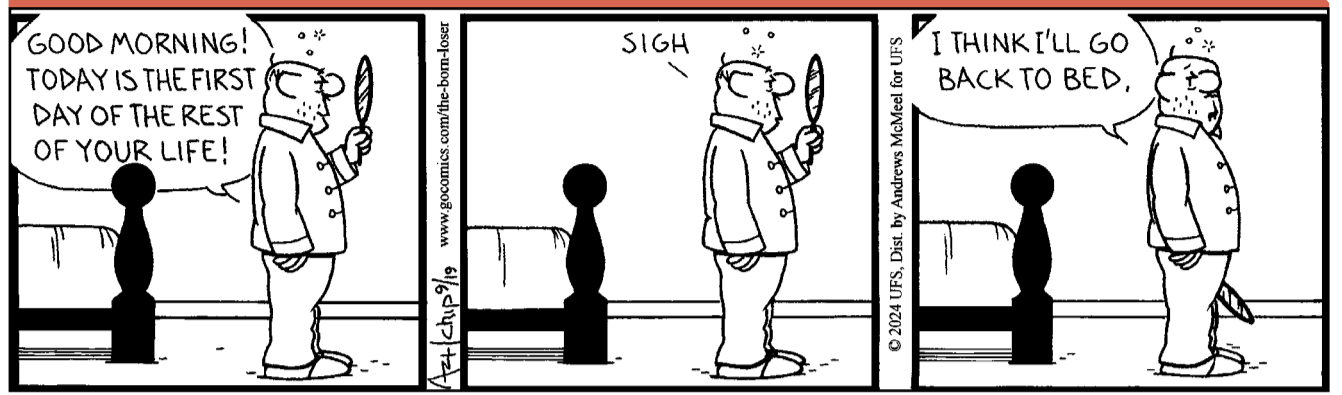
His boxing career lasted 20 years, during which he won 56 fights and scored 37 knock-outs.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

<p>ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Energize home renovation, beautification and repairs. Develop domestic projects for satisfying results, with Mars stationing direct. Paint can make a big difference with little expense.</p>	<p>TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Communications flow more freely, with Mars direct in Cancer. Get the word out. Polish and edit public statements. Creative projects flower. Connect and network.</p>
<p>GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Discover new markets and efficiencies. Get an income turbo boost, with Mars direct. Tap into rising demand and growing momentum. Lucrative projects unfold.</p>	<p>CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 A personal ambition flowers, with Mars direct in your sign. Use your superpowers for good. Pour energy into realizing a dream. Dress the part.</p>
<p>LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Plan your moves in detail. Clean, sort and organize, with Mars direct. Pursue reflection, introspection and peace. Meditate on dreams, wishes, wants and prayers.</p>	<p>VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Teamwork grows a spark into flame. Coordination amplifies your reach, with Mars direct. Community participation generates results. Direct energy for a passionate cause.</p>
<p>LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Advance an exciting project. Your professional stature and influence rise, with Mars direct. Pour energy into raising your career to the next level.</p>	<p>SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Widen an exploration. Travels, studies and investigation reveal new possibilities, with Mars direct in Cancer. Research clues abound. Make brilliant connections and discoveries.</p>
<p>SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Lucrative projects are heating up. You're energized to make money, with Mars stationing direct today. Take advantage of profitable conditions to grow shared accounts.</p>	<p>CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Your partnership feels supercharged, with Mars stationing direct. Collaborative actions have greater power. Take on big goals and dreams. Together, you can do anything.</p>
<p>AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Power into physical activities and practices, with Mars direct. Regular action gets fabulous results. Nurture your health with good food, rest, medicine and nature.</p>	<p>PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Put your action and energy where your heart desires. Passions are on the rise, with Mars stationing direct. Romance, fun and creativity flower anew.</p>

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-3	10	fine
Changchun	-7	0	fine
Chengdu	5	13	overcast
Chongqing	8	12	overcast
Fuzhou	7	15	cloudy
Guangzhou	11	20	rain
Guiyang	0	7	overcast
Haikou	16	20	rain
Hangzhou	2	9	cloudy
Harbin	-9	-4	snow
Hefei	-1	12	cloudy
Nanjing	1	9	overcast
Shanghai	2	8	overcast
Taipei	12	18	cloudy
Wuhan	1	13	cloudy
Hong Kong	17	19	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-12	-6	sunny
Frankfurt	7	12	rain
Paris	4	9	rain
London	3	10	cloudy
New York	4	12	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Russian retreat; 6- And here it is!; 10- Relinquish; 14- Early anesthetic; 15- Hwys.; 16- Word of woe; 17- Rodeo horse; 18- Top-rated; 19- Divide; 20- Cul-de-; 21- Glad; 23- Numbers game; 24- Final notices; 26- Floating bombs; 27- Hammerlike tool; 29- Steak order; 31- Winglike parts; 32- Paris divider; 33- Poseidon's domain; 36- In spite of; 40- Miss-named?; 41- Mob scenes; 42- To ___ (just so); 43- Gets ready; 44- Utterly senseless; 46- Forest makeup; 48- Island greeting; 49- Resounding blow; 50- Garr and Hatcher; 52- Boob tubes; 55- Clapton of rock; 56- Busy place; 57- Attempts; 59- He played Ricky; 60- Thought; 61- Smells; 62- Marine mammal, secure something; 63- Untidy condition; 64- Grannies;

DOWN 1- Ball belles; 2- Name on a razor; 3- Cacao candy; 4- Coop denizen; 5- Jughead's pal; 6- Snares; 7- Looking down from; 8- Contradict; 9- Peer Gynt's mother; 10- U.S. gangster; 11- Put on cloud nine; 12- Pub pastime; 13- This, in Tijuana; 22- Court fig.; 23- Fabric woven from flax yarns; 25- Exploded; 26- ___ Lisa; 27- Jazz flutist Herbie; 28- Sunburn soother; 29- Trials; 30- Fragments; 32- Boutique; 33- Location; 34- Cabinet dept.; 35- Got older; 37- Like some vbs.; 38- Evens the score; 39- Pinch; 43- Writing instrument; 44- The Greatest; 45- Capital of Massachusetts; 46- Trio; 47- Mrs. Gorbachev; 48- Zones; 49- Marries; 50- It may turn; 51- Holiday lead-ins; 53- Aloe ___; 54- Flat sound; 56- That guy; 58- Old vitamin bottle abbr.;



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
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 HKD 7,500,000 4 bed 3 bath

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

RUGBY

Halfway through the Six Nations, Ireland still

FOSTER NIUMATA

IRELAND and France set up their blockbuster clash in Six Nations rugby next month with contrasting wins in the third round.

Ireland had the savvy and depth to overcome a red card and a fire-d-up Wales in Cardiff 27-18 and remain unbeaten in its historic three-peat bid. The first Wales game under new coach Matt Sherratt was yet another loss, but for the Welsh it felt like spring has sprung.

France's response to an upset loss to England was to maul Italy 73-24, its highest score in the Six Nations.

That ensured the two best teams will meet in Dublin in two weeks with the title probably going to the winner.

England stayed in the title race by beating Scotland for the first time since 2020 despite being outscored three tries to one.

Here's the AP's takeaways at the halfway stage.

THE ENGLISH TEACHER

Matt Sherratt is suddenly Wales' favorite Englishman. He might just

be the permanent coach replacement the Wales Rugby Union is looking for since Warren Gatland resigned two weeks ago, unable to halt Wales' toxic losing streak. Sherratt, a former primary school teacher, accepted the job on condition that it was just for the three remaining Six Nations games.

Straight after, he signed a long-term deal with Cardiff club, where he's been head coach since 2023. But the surprisingly strong performance by Wales, which led Ireland 18-13 after 54 minutes, could prompt a rethink by all parties if the team continues to improve: Scotland is next.

A natural bounce by Wales was expected from changing coaches and returning home for the first time since November, but even Sherratt was taken aback by how well the team played after three training sessions. In a big moment, it took forensic replays for the TMO to find a knock on to rule out a try by debutant winger Ellis Mee, which would have lifted Wales to within a point with the conversion to come and less than seven minutes remaining. Despite saying he loved all of his first week in charge, Sherratt

later reiterated he wasn't interested in a permanent role with Wales. "I'm pretty certain on my next steps," he said, "and that's back at Cardiff."

LES ROUGE

The French players showed how pained they were with the England result and performance two weeks ago by how determined they were to crush Italy.

The French were quietly seething after gifting a one-point win to England because they blew up so many try opportunities — Damian Penaud fumbled three chances.

That took a Grand Slam off the table and jeopardized France's title hopes. Not entirely forgotten, either, was being humiliated by Italy last year in Lille in a lucky 13-13 draw.

The difference there was captain Antoine Dupont didn't play last year's Six Nations. "A player like that always makes the difference," Italy coach Gonzalo Quesada said. So does Italian defenders falling off and under rampaging French players, who were relentless at Stadio Olimpico. Dupont feasted on the opportunities to score two tries and assist in three more.

There have been four instances in the 25-year Six Nations era of a player being involved in five tries in a single match, and Dupont has

two of them, according to statistician Opta. Next up is the probable championship decider with Ireland in Dublin, where Dupont will



Wales' Ellis Mee falls short of the try line, during

AD



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



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rules and Dupont's France rebounds

face his toughest, active counterpart, Jamison Gibson-Park. Both of them have two man-of-the-match awards after three rounds.

ENGLAND'S EXPECTATIONS

Just two games ago, England fans were complaining that their team couldn't close out games.

Two closed-out wins later, the fans are complaining about how dull England are in winning them.

CONSECUTIVE ONE-POINT WINS OVER

France and Scotland — teams which had lengthy winning runs against England — have England on its first winning streak in more than a year. Boos were heard on Saturday but winning ugly is not an unfamiliar sight at Twickenham. France and Scotland each scored three tries and England found a way to prevail thanks to a defense that was heavily criticized last year. On Saturday, Will Stuart, Ellis Genge, captain Maro Itoje, the Currys and Ben Earl held the line and Ollie Chessum ruled the lineout in his first test in 11 months. The backs lacked ambition but flyhalf Fin Smith, in his second test start, slotted the penalty kick that counted.

They have probably saved coach Steve Borthwick's job while staying in the title hunt.

LIONSWATCH

Having clinched the Triple Crown, the symbol of home nations supremacy, Ireland will likely dominate the Lions squad to tour Australia. But if a Lions team was picked from the round, it would bizarrely have hefty representa-

tion from the two losing teams, Scotland and Wales.

The Scotland backs were electric, especially wing Duhan van der Merwe, whose best game in this campaign gave him the best player award against England for the third straight year. Scotland flanker Jamie Ritchie was another standout.

Also rolling back the years was Wales No. 8 Taulupe Faletau, whose fifth game of the season produced 15 carries. His captain Jac Morgan made 12 carries and 13 tackles while the new front row, including a first cap for tighthead WillGriff John in three years, won four scrum penalties from Ireland in the first half.

Another veteran, Maro Itoje, had his best game yet as England's new captain, beside props Will Stuart and Ellis Genge.

Notwithstanding his misses off the tee, Scotland flyhalf Finn Russell showed his attacking nous far more effectively than opposite Fin Smith, who still showed out with 16 tackles and a nerveless penalty kick from halfway.

For Ireland, Bundee Aki, bloody nose and all, was big off the bench and 35-year-old flanker Peter O'Mahony played 80 minutes for the first time since the 2023 World Cup and tallied 19 tackles, seven carries, and three lineout grabs. **MDT/AP**



the Six Nations rugby match between Wales and Ireland, at the Principality Stadium, in Cardiff

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IN MACAU (2023)



OPINION

World Views

Adriana Gomez Licon, MDT/AP



'DARK MAGA' SPREADS AS CONSERVATIVES EMBRACE MUSK'S INFLUENCE ON TRUMP

At an annual gathering of conservative activists, the signature red "Make America Great Again" hats popularized by President Donald Trump were interspersed with a noticeable number of the black "Dark MAGA" hats made popular by Elon Musk.

It was just one sign of Musk's emerging influence and how the world's wealthiest man — who once backed Democrats Barack Obama and Joe Biden — has become a conservative power center in his own right due to his connections to Trump.

"He is an authentic and unique individual. I am glad he is on the team," said Whitney Mason, a 62-year-old real estate agent who was traveling from Seattle.

Musk was an unexpected guest of honor at the Conservative Political Action Conference, with his appearance announced hours before he took the stage wielding a chainsaw. The prop, and his comments, left little subtlety about his role or his influence, days after the Trump administration claimed in court that Musk was not in charge of his signature Department of Government Efficiency.

Speakers at CPAC frequently brought up DOGE, playfully named after a meme coin with the face of a Shiba Inu dog popularized by Musk in 2021. They variously referred to him as a "white knight," a "hero of free speech," and according to one of his harshest critics, Steve Bannon, "Superman."

The Trump administration, under Musk's advice, has fired thousands of federal workers without warning. It gave employees an option to resign and gutted agencies without congressional approval. The Tesla and SpaceX CEO, who bought Twitter in 2022, has pledged to identify areas to cut costs and streamline services and save trillions of taxpayer dollars, with directives that spark confusion and have prompted demonstrations across agencies.

As Trump spoke at CPAC on Saturday, Musk announced federal workers would get an email to explain what they accomplished over the last week, saying "failure to respond will be taken as a resignation."

"Elon is doing a great job," Trump said in his speech on Saturday. "We love Elon, don't we? He's a character."

Critics have said that Musk could stand to benefit from his close relationship with Trump as there are a number of federal investigations and safety programs created through federal agency orders that are hitting Tesla's plans to create fleets of robo-taxis and self-driving cars. Musk's SpaceX also has major contracts with the Pentagon, NASA and intelligence agencies.

The Trump administration has not yet declared any actions that could benefit Tesla or Musk's other companies.

Musk's positions on issues like H-1B visas for high-skilled immigrant workers have made him a target of popular MAGA figures such as Bannon, who once served as Trump's chief strategist and hosts the influential "War Room" podcast. Musk was born in South Africa and was once on an H-1B visa.

Bannon has previously cast the world's richest man as a "parasitic illegal immigrant" and an "oligarch," who will abandon Trump when he deems him no longer useful. Bannon didn't criticize Musk at CPAC and instead faced scrutiny for making a straight-arm gesture on stage that critics on the right and left compared to a Nazi-style salute. Bannon said he was giving the crowd a wave.

A few miles away, at a Washington hotel near the White House, more than a thousand anti-Trump activists and thought leaders gathered at the Principles First Summit and laughed repeatedly as another billionaire, Mark Cuban, charged that Trump was "overselling" and Musk's actions so far were not helping people who voted for the Republican president. [Abridged]

China's President Xi Jinping had a call with Russia's President Vladimir Putin yesterday and said he was pleased with Moscow's efforts to hold a summit with the U.S. toward ending the war in Ukraine, state broadcaster reported.

Putin updated Xi on the latest contacts with the U.S., according to CCTV, which didn't give further details.

Xi said that "China is pleased to see that Russia and relevant parties have made positive efforts to resolve the crisis," according to CCTV.

The Chinese side "expressed support" for the dialogue between Russia and the U.S. and said it is prepared to assist to peacefully resolve

the conflict, according to a statement from the Kremlin.

The call came as a dozen leaders from Europe and Canada visited Ukraine's capital yesterday to mark the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion and show their support for Kyiv.

Xi also reiterated China's stance, which includes a "Friends of Peace" group established last September with several other countries, to promote efforts to end the war.

China and Brazil issued a joint peace plan last year that calls for a peace conference with both Ukraine and Russia and no expansion of the battlefield.



TRAVELOG

THE PACIFIC DIVING PARADISE OF PALAU WANTS TRAVELERS TO EXPLORE ITS CULTURAL DEPTHS, TOO

NICOLE EVATT, KOROR

WHILE researching an upcoming trip to Palau, a tiny island nation dotting Micronesia's western edge, I found endless information about its famed mushroom-shaped Rock Islands and spectacular diving sites, including over 50 World War II wrecks.

But what I discovered upon arrival was a destination eager to highlight something else: its rich culture on solid land.

The remote archipelago's efforts to encourage activities like village tours and traditional handicraft workshops appears to be helping tourism rebound from pandemic-era lows. Visitor numbers have surged from about 5,000 in 2021 to more than 50,000 in 2024, according to the country's visitors authority. Chinese travelers lead the recovery despite recent diplomatic tensions.

"We've been known for our crystal clear water, but there's more to see," says Sean Tekriu, who welcomes visitors to Palau's Badruchau Stone Monoliths, one of the many land-based attractions touted by tourism officials. "We want to showcase our culture, our heritage and our lifestyle."

Palau, a cluster of more than 300 islands, can be reached directly from several locations, including Macau; Hong Kong; Macau; the Phi-

lippines and Taiwan. It's best known for its underwater landscapes, with 1,500 fish species and 400 hard corals.

Palauans are passionate about protecting these natural treasures and have designated 80% of their waters as a protected sanctuary — one of the highest proportions of any country. Upon entry, we were required to sign the "Palau Pledge" in our passports, promising to safeguard the environment for future generations.

Many visitors come to dive the historic wreckage — remains of the Japanese naval stronghold in the Pacific. One of the most notable relics is Iro Maru, a massive, 470-foot supply ship that rests upright with schools of lionfish and clownfish darting through its corridors.

Jellyfish Lake, once Palau's most Instagrammable attraction, where snorkelers snapped selfies with throngs of harmless jellyfish, now lies nearly empty due to rising ocean temperatures. However, snorkelers, like myself, can still experience Palau's marine beauty at sites like Ngemelis Wall, known as the Big Drop-Off. As I glided along the surface, I spotted swarms of vibrant fish and a nurse shark deep below, its silhouette growing fainter as the coral cliff plunged a thousand feet into darkness.

My peaceful float was interrupted by a sudden sharp

sting on my knee. When I surfaced, I found it bleeding, with no obvious culprit. Only later, while reviewing my photos, did I discover my likely attacker: The notoriously aggressive, yellow-and-black Titan Triggerfish was caught in one frame, its mouth agape with tiny, razor-sharp teeth.

At Tebang Woodcarving Shop, artisans chronicle Palauan oral history through traditional carved wooden panels, or storyboards. Visitors can purchase these works of art, which can be up to 20 feet long, or take a class to learn how to craft their own.

"We have a passion for sharing our stories," says McMichael Mutok Jr., who tries to preserve his country's history through his work at the National Register. A common storyboard legend, he explains, is of the breadfruit tree, which details how jealousy over a magical fish-sprouting tree led to it being submerged underwater along with an entire island.

Dozens of storyboards are on display at the Etpison Museum, which also showcases Micronesian artifacts like giant Yapese stone currency. Both the Etpison and Belau National Museum feature a wealth of local history and customs, such as the "first childbirth" ceremony, a cleansing and healing ritual that celebrates first-time mothers. MDT/AP



Vatican City Pope Francis remained hospitalized yesterday for a 10th day due to a lung infection and early-stage kidney issues. Doctors say his condition is stable but critical. U.S. Cardinal Timothy Dolan described Francis as "very fragile" and near death, though the Vatican has not confirmed this.



France A trial began yesterday for Joël Le Scouarnec, a former surgeon accused of sexually abusing 299 patients over 30 years. His crimes were discovered in 2017 after a child reported him. Investigators found detailed abuse records. He faces up to 20 more years in prison.



Congo President Felix Tshisekedi last weekend announced plans for a unity government amid worsening violence. The Rwandan-backed M23 rebels have seized key cities in eastern Congo, killing thousands. Tshisekedi admitted military losses but vowed to continue fighting. Rwanda denies involvement despite U.N. reports of its support.



Hollywood "Conclave" won Best Ensemble at the SAG Awards, surprising Oscar watchers. Cast members celebrated backstage with Timothée Chalamet and Ariana Grande. The event also highlighted Hollywood's concerns over artificial intelligence, with actors pushing for stricter regulations on AI-generated performances.