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Hong Kong announced yesterday plans to cut 10,000 civil service jobs by 2027 and invest heavily in artificial intelligence. The budget aims to address an \$11.2 billion deficit. Authorities will also issue bonds and increase airport departure taxes to stabilize the city's finances.



AP PHOTO

US-China A Montana man faces sentencing for threatening ex-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy over the Chinese spy balloon incident. Prosecutors seek two years in prison, arguing threats against public officials have sharply risen. Defense attorneys request probation, citing the defendant's lack of criminal history.



AP PHOTO

South Pacific Three tropical cyclones—Rae, Seru, and Alfred—are active this week in the South Pacific, an unusual phenomenon. Rae affected Fiji, Alfred threatens Australia with heavy rain, and Seru moves near Vanuatu. Scientists cite atmospheric fluctuations as possible factors behind this rare simultaneous storm activity.



AP PHOTO

Australia A Sydney nurse was charged for making online threats after stating she would refuse to treat Israeli patients. The charges, carrying a possible 22-year sentence, follow growing antisemitic attacks in Australia. Another nurse involved in the incident remains under police investigation.

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INJURED TODDLER RETURNS HOME AFTER TAICHUNG GAS EXPLOSION

The two-year-old girl who suffered severe head injuries in the Taichung gas explosion has returned to Macau on a medical plane yesterday, according to Taiwanese media reports. The explosion, which occurred on February 13, claimed the lives of two members of a Macau family visiting Taichung, while five others were injured. The deceased were cremated on February 20. The toddler, who underwent surgery and remained in intensive care, is reportedly still in a coma.

EXTERNAL TRADE DROPS 11% IN JANUARY

Macau's external merchandise trade fell by 11.2% year-over-year to MOP11.90 billion in January 2025, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC). While exports edged up by 0.3% to MOP1.13 billion, imports dropped by 12.2% to MOP10.77 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of MOP9.64 billion. Re-exports of perfumes and wine surged by 213.5% and 90.8%, respectively, while casino-related articles and watches declined. Domestic exports fell by 9.5%. Imports of consumer goods dropped 9.6%, though fuel imports rose by 8.2%.

AIRPORT TO IMPROVE TRAFFIC PROCESSING SYSTEM

The Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) has announced that Macau International Airport is replacing its Air Traffic Services Information Processing System. The upgrade, aimed at improving connectivity between the air traffic management systems of Macau and Hong Kong airports, is expected to be completed in the second half of this year. In addition to this system replacement, the airport is also preparing to enhance its communication, navigation, and surveillance systems.

PUBLIC HOSPITAL TO HOST HEALTH EDUCATION LECTURES

The Conde de S. Januário Hospital (CHCJS) will offer a series of thematic health education lectures throughout March, focusing on various medical topics. Expert nurses will guide discussions on endocrinology, gynecology, psychiatry, and internal medicine, among others. Lectures are open to residents, with limited space available. A complete schedule is available on the Health Bureau's website. The sessions will take place at CHCSJ and Health Centers.

ECONOMY

US MEMORANDUM POSES CHALLENGES FOR CITY'S CROSS-BORDER INVESTMENTS AND TECH COLLABORATIONS

RENATO MARQUES

THE memorandum titled "America First Investment Policy" (AFIP) may cause some impact in Macau, mostly related to gaming companies' cross-border investments and challenges to technology collaborations with Chinese universities.

In an exclusive interview with the Times, Professor Alex Sili Zhou, an Associate Professor of Economics and Finance from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Macau, said that the memorandum's clear objective is protecting the national economic security of the United States and guarding against investment from China (including Macau and Hong Kong) in the US.

It limits or prevents investments involving "critical technologies, key infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, energy, raw materials, personal data, or other strategic and sensitive areas."

"From Macau's perspective, the direct impact will primarily relate to cross-border investment restrictions. Macau's gaming companies, such as Sands China and Galaxy Entertainment [Group], that have closer ties to mainland Chinese capital or are involved in the One Belt and One Road infrastructure projects, may encounter US finan-

cing restrictions under the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act (FIRRMA)," the scholar said.

"For instance, Wynn Resorts, the parent company of Wynn Macau, underwent scrutiny by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the US due to its shareholder structure," Zhou further explained.

"Gaming companies [...] that have closer ties to mainland Chinese capital may encounter US financing restrictions

PROFESSOR ALEX SILI ZHOU
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF MACAU

"Additionally, technology collaborations with Chinese universities could be at risk. For example, some key laboratories in Macau, such as those focusing on Integrated Circuits and Chinese Medicine Quality Research, may face restrictions under the US Export Control Reform Act if their research and development involve US technologies or partnerships with sanctioned Chinese firms like Huawei," he added.

Although indirectly, additional implications could arise and affect

people in Macau more broadly if additional measures are taken at the level of cross-border capital flow.

Zhou explained, "For instance, Macau banks and payment platforms, such as Macau Pass and MPay, could face exclusion from SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) if they provide services to

geopolitical aspects). He also noted that the AFIP has shifted the focus of the new American president's policies towards an investment strategy, extending beyond just trade considerations, as was the case in the past.

As the Times reported earlier this week, a memorandum signed by President Donald Trump on the AFIP notes that the Macau Special Administrative Region 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 U.S. allies or adversaries for investment purposes. Macau is listed in Section 4 of the memo, which defines the "foreign adversaries," including the People's Republic of China (including Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions), 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. The memo aims to curb Chinese investments in critical sectors of the American economy and was made public the same day that its Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent met China's Vice Premier He Lifeng.



Professor Alex Sili Zhou

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POLICY ADDRESS 2025

Synergy of Macau urges CE to show 'courage' in tackling pressing issues

RENATO MARQUES

THE Synergy of Macau Association claims that the new Chief Executive (CE), Sam Hou Fai, needs "courage" to address the issues currently troubling society.

In an extensive comment on the recent CE meetings with several civil society associations, groups, and individuals, Johnson Ian, leader of the association, noted that the CE has already listed most of the major problems that local society is facing but has provided no insight into how he plans to solve them.

Ian also pointed out that while courage is essential for the new government's success, constant self-improvement, answering all questions about the positives and negatives, and always telling the truth are also necessary.

He remarked that only by following these strategies can the government "break the deadlock" that he claims Macau is currently in, in which problems have been identified for a long time but nothing concrete has been done to advance toward a solution.

"[Sam Hou Fai] has pointed out Macau's existing problems all in one go, which requires a certain degree of courage, but what society needs are solutions," Ian said, noting that the CE has done a re-



Johnson Ian

markable job of summarizing all the issues, troubles, and concerns of society in various fields.

However, society does not know yet if he can face them once and for all, unlike previous leaders who, while also identifying the same problems, failed to produce results.

"Mr. Sam stated that these longstanding problems and new challenges cannot be avoided and must be confronted directly. He urged members of the Economic Development Council and various sectors of the community to explore and study practical solutions and to propose more cons-

structive, feasible, effective, and long-term strategies that contribute to Macau's overall economic development," Ian remarked.

He added that all the issues highlighted by the CE are "factual and did not arise today."

"Concerns such as the dominance of the gaming industry, the dependency on visitors solely from the mainland, the tax revenue reliant on gaming, the lack of innovation, and insufficient industrial diversification compared to societal expectations, among others, have always existed, are acknowledged by society at large, and have been discussed in the

economic sections of newspapers on a weekly basis," said Ian.

"The problem is that the government has been acting 'evasively' instead of 'directly addressing' these issues. The government has consistently relied on gaming revenue to sustain economic growth and social well-being," he added.

The leader of the association added to his analysis by stating, like several lawmakers have recently, that the government's statistics do not accurately reflect the true state of affairs, particularly regarding the unemployment rate.

He accused the previous gover-

ment of yielding and allowing companies to hire unskilled foreign labor instead of solving the problem of youth unemployment and underemployment in Macau, claiming that they took the "easy road."

For Ian, Macau's economy is clearly "in a crisis." While he is aware that these difficulties cannot all be solved at once, he claims that asking society for opinions and suggestions is not enough for the CE if he does not know how to act on them or does not intend to.

"The SAR government should face up to the difficulties and take into account the different views of society instead of making exaggerated remarks, glossing over the problems, and procrastinating. At the present stage, it should openly and honestly disclose the situation, data, and basic ideas that the SAR government has [to tackle the issues]. Otherwise, society will not be able to get a full picture of the problems," he said.

Ian added that the government must show its determination and come up with a solution in the face of the pressing problems related to employment, satellite casinos, transportation, and the survival of small and medium-sized enterprises, "because society has talked about these relevant issues and solutions many times before."

Chief firefighter allegedly falsified attendance records

LYNZY VALLES

THE Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) has uncovered a case involving a chief of an operational post at the Fire Services Bureau (CB) who allegedly falsified attendance records to conceal his absence during working hours.

Following a report received in 2024, the CCAC launched an investigation and found that between December 2023 and May 2024, the chief in question left Macau twice during his scheduled work hours or supplementary shifts.

Additionally, he was absent from his operational post on three separate oc-



casions but later returned to clock out over an hour after his actual departure.

To cover up his absences, the chief falsely recorded that he was on duty during these instances. Based on these findings, he is suspected of commi-

ting the crime of forgery by a public servant, as stipulated in the Penal Code.

The case has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office for further legal action and reported to the CB for internal handling.

In response, the bureau emphasized that all public servants must adhere to the law, particularly law enforcement personnel, who should uphold strict discipline and integrity in their duties.

Last year, the anti-corruption watchdog has exposed two customs officers suspected of exaggerating their illnesses to obtain prolonged sick leave.

One officer was granted over 1,400 days of sick leave, receiving more than MOP1.7 million in wages, while the other accumulated over 900 days, collecting over MOP1.3 million.

Despite their extended absences, they continued to receive full salaries.

MAN FOUND DEAD WITH FEET TIED IN COLOANE

STAFF REPORTER

Authorities yesterday are investigating the death of a 61-year-old man whose charred body was discovered in a burned apartment in Coloane, with his feet tied.

A fire broke out in a unit on the sixth floor of Edificio Lok Kuan, Block 4, in Coloane, at approximately 7:30 p.m. last night.

Firefighters arrived and extinguished the blaze.

Upon entering the unit,

they discovered the charred body of a 61-year-old male resident.

Authorities evacuated around 20 people.

According to a Macao Daily News report, the deceased was found with his legs tied, raising suspicions about the circumstances of his death.

Firefighters also noted that the unit's iron gate was obstructed by a TV cabinet.

No further details were disclosed as of press time.



PUBLIC WORKS

GOV'T DEMOLISHES RUINED BUILDING WARNING PROPERTY OWNERS OF RESPONSIBILITIES

VICTORIA CHAN

THE government recently demolished a dilapidated building on Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida after its roof collapsed, posing a significant threat to public safety.

The Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) has issued a warning to property owners to assume responsibility for the maintenance and conservation of buildings to prevent similar risks.

The DSSCU initiated the demolition process after an inspection confirmed the building was in a state of ruin, with its roof severely damaged. Despite issuing an urgent notice to the owners to carry out the demolition, no response was received, prompting the DSSCU to act swiftly to eliminate the public safety hazard.

The DSSCU emphasized that building degradation not only endangers lives but can also cause property damage and other public safety risks. Property owners are required to monitor their buildings regularly and address maintenance issues promptly.



The department conducts inspections based on regular checks, citizen complaints, or referrals from other agencies. If a building shows signs of disrepair, owners are notified to hire qualified professionals to assess its condition and submit a "Building Condition Report" within a set deadline.

In cases of severe disrepair or imminent collapse, the DSSCU can order immediate repairs or demolition.

If owners fail to act, the adminis-

tration will carry out the necessary work and charge the costs to the owners. Non-compliance with DSSCU orders can result in fines ranging from MOP2,500 to MOP500,000, depending on the severity of the violation and whether the owner is an individual or a legal entity.

The DSSCU urges property owners to prioritize building maintenance to safeguard public safety and avoid penalties. Detailed guidelines and procedures are available on the DSSCU website.

HERITAGE

Cultural Fund receives five applications for historic building renovations

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced that the Cultural Development Fund (FDC) has received five applications for the second round of the 2024 "Financial Support Plan for the Maintenance of Historic Buildings."


The matter was discussed during Tuesday's latest meeting of the Cultural Heritage Council. The IC also addressed the government's right of preference regarding classified real estate, which was included on the meeting agenda. A presentation was given on the planned cultural heritage projects for the year.

The five proposals sub-

mitted to the FDC were referred to the IC for technical analysis. After review, the Council agreed that they met the necessary conditions for support.

According to regulations, applicant entities must hire a professional consulting firm to develop a restoration plan, which will then be submitted to the FDC's Activity and Project Assessment Committee for final evaluation and financial approval.

As for the government's right of preference in acquiring classified real estate, the IC sought the Council's opinion on applications related to three undisclosed classified properties. **RM**



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4. Location for Submission of Proposals:	Mr. Chu Tan Neng – Executive Director CAM – Macau International Airport Co. Ltd. CAM Office Building, 4 th Floor Av. Wai Long Taipa, Macau
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GAMING

MGM China seeks USD2 billion loan for refinancing: reports

MGM China Holdings Ltd. is reportedly in talks to secure a syndicated loan of approximately USD2 billion, marking its first such borrowing since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a Bloomberg report.

According to sources familiar with the matter, the Macau casino operator is negotiating with over a dozen banks for a five-year loan denominated in Hong Kong dollars.

The funds are expected to be used for refinancing, though discussions are still ongoing, and details may change.

The company is also exploring expansion opportunities for its casino resorts in Macau, aiming to attract a broader customer base

beyond traditional high rollers.

However, challenges such as China's economic slowdown and regulatory scrutiny could impact the sector's growth prospects.

Last year, MGM China made key financial moves, including canceling a USD750 million loan from its parent company, MGM Resorts International, in March. In June, the casino operator issued USD500 million in notes to repay part of its revolving credit facility.

MGM China has emerged as one of Macau's fastest-growing casino operators. The company's market share of gaming revenue surged to a record 15.8% in 2023, up from about 10% before the pandemic. LV

Lawmaker advocates AI-driven psychological support services

VICTORIA CHAN

LAWMAKER Lam Lon Wai is urging the government to develop an artificial intelligence (AI)-based psychological support platform, leveraging technologies like DeepSeek and big data technology to provide residents with instant emotional support and preliminary mental health assessments.

In a written inquiry, Lam highlighted the rapid advancements in AI, particularly in natural language processing, which he believes can deliver "efficient and convenient" online psychological support services. He proposed interdepartmental collaboration between the government, technology companies, and academic institutions to create an integrated platform that offers 24-hour access to AI-driven counseling and emotional support.

Lam pointed to the success of AI chatbots like ChatGPT, launched in 2022, and studies showing that AI voice assistants can effectively alleviate symptoms of mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

He emphasized that AI psychotherapy serves as a valuable complement to traditional therapy, especially in addressing immediate needs when mental health professionals are in short supply.

The lawmaker cited DeepSeek, a large-scale language model developed by a Chinese company, as



a potential foundation for such a platform.

He also referenced Hong Kong's "Mental Health Companion" app, developed by students at the University of Hong Kong, which uses big data and AI to monitor users' mental health through metrics like sleep quality, heart rate, and stress levels.

The app also connects users to a 24-hour hotline for professional support and includes therapeutic activities like journaling and meditation.

Lam stressed the need for Macau to adopt similar innovations, particularly as demand for psychosocial support continues to rise.

He called on the government to integrate technological advancements into its "BigHealth" deve-

lopment strategy, ensuring more efficient and direct responses to community needs.

Furthermore, Lam acknowledged the potential concerns residents might have regarding AI support services, particularly related to data privacy. He urged the government to enhance public acceptance by formulating stringent policies on data protection and ensuring compliance with international security standards.

"Such platforms can provide instant emotional support and preliminary psychological assessments to residents through chatting with robots, and at the same time offer 24-hour online psychological counseling," Lam said, urging authorities to prioritize the development of AI-driven mental health services.



AVIATION

FIRST EMIRATES PILOT RECRUITMENT ROADSHOW IN MACAU

EMIRATES will hold its first-ever pilot recruitment roadshows in Macau on March 6 and 7, aiming to attract experienced pilots as part of the airline's global expansion plans.

The Dubai-based carrier will host three sessions at the St. Regis Macao, with events scheduled at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. on March 6, and 10 a.m. on March 7.

Emirates is seeking candidates for roles such as Direct Entry Captains, Accelerated Command, and First Officers (both type-rated and non-type-rated). The airline recently updated its recruitment policies, offering higher salaries and expanded eligibility criteria.

Captain Brian Tyrrell, Emirates' senior vice president of Fleet, emphasized the airline's growth trajectory and its modern fleet, which serves over 148 destinations. "We look forward to welcoming pilots from Macau to join our team," he said.

While Emirates does not currently operate direct flights to Macau, the Macao Government Tourism Office has encouraged the airline to consider establishing a Dubai-Macau route.

The roadshows mark Emirates' first recruitment event in Macau, with similar events planned in Spain and Portugal this month. VC

FILMING ACCIDENT LEADS TO SUSPENSION OF PROJECT PERMIT

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has suspended the filming permit for a project following a traffic accident earlier this week that injured 12 crew members.

The incident occurred during a high-speed driving sequence, which the Public Security Police (PSP) had previously deemed unsafe for filming at Rua do Seminário.

The IC convened an interdepartmental meeting to evaluate the situation and determined that the filming crew had failed to comply with safety guidelines. As a result, the project is now prohibited from filming in Macau, and the IC has requested a detailed



report from the production company, which could lead to the permit's permanent revocation.

According to IC regulations, the bureau is responsible for assessing filming license applications, particularly for projects involving complex technical requirements. Prior to the accident, officials had expressed concerns about the lo-

cation's suitability for high-speed maneuvers.

The injured crew members, who included residents from Macau, mainland China, and Singapore, have since been released from the hospital. The driver, who lost control of the vehicle, passed an alcohol test and was reportedly unfamiliar with the area.

EDUCATION

PAKISTAN'S TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY FINDS HOPE AND DIGNITY AT A CULINARY SCHOOL

BABAR DOGAR, LAHORE

FOR transgender students involved in a very special project at a culinary school in Pakistan, there is more to a class than just learning the art of cooking.

Neha Malik used to dance at parties and weddings for a living and was, occasionally, a sex worker. Since January, she has been enrolled in a new course for the trans community at the Culinary & Hotel Institute of Pakistan.

The free six-month program in the city of Lahore, Pakistan's cultural capital, welcomed its first group of 25 trans students in January; the second group of 25 began training on Feb. 1.

Now, Malik, 31, dreams of working as a chef in Dubai, the futuristic, skyscraper-studded city in the United Arab Emirates.

She never misses a class. "I am so absorbed in learning that I don't have time to dance anymore," she added.

Many Pakistanis have entrenched beliefs on gender and sexuality, and trans people are often considered outcasts in the conservative Muslim-majority country. Some are forced into begging, dancing and even prostitution to earn money. They also live in fear of attacks.

The U.N. development agency said last year that the majority of trans people in Pakistan reported experiencing violence or abuse and that most reported being denied employment opportunities because of their gender identity. Just 7% were employed in formal sectors, the UNDP added.

Trans women in public office and the media have raised awareness about a marginalized and misunderstood community, and



Transgender persons attend cooking class at the Culinary & Hotel Institute of Pakistan, in Lahore

overall, the community has seen some progress in the protection of their rights.

Supreme Court rulings allow them to self-identify as a third gender, neither male nor female, and have underscored they have the same rights as all Pakistani citizens.

Last year, Lahore got its first ride-sharing service for trans people and women in an effort to protect them from discrimination and harassment, and in 2022 Pakistan launched a hotline for trans people.

"Society usually looks down on us," said Malik. "We have to change this mindset. Now, people come up to me and ask what I do when they see me in a chef's coat and hat."

Since classes started, students file into the Lahore culinary school with backpacks and beaming smiles, swapping their colorful clothes for white uniforms.

However, it's a struggle. They each get a monthly stipend of 8,000 rupees, around \$26 — nowhere near enough to live on as a student.

"How can we survive on that when my rent is 15,000 rupees?" said 26-year-old Zoya Khan. Her utility bills swallow up most of it, she said.

So she performs at a few events a month.

"I used to earn a decent amount (from dancing), I won't lie," she added. But "there was no respect in it."

"Why do we come here? It's

because we see hope," said Khan, who wants to start her own business after graduating — a roadside cafe.

Nadia Shehzad, the institute's chief executive, said the project will help the trans community, a "rejected and ignored sector of society" get equal recognition.

The school is trying to get government officials to help the aspiring chefs with visas to go abroad for work, Shehzad said. There are also talks with local hotels and restaurants about jobs once the students graduate — with wages of up to 30,000 rupees, or about \$107.

Still, it's not easy for trans people to leave behind dancing, begging and sex work for the culinary program, said Shabnam Chaudry, a trans commu-

nity leader.

Many wonder if society would give them work — or if people at restaurants would eat food cooked by trans chefs.

In the past, Chaudry said she had seen many trans people taking makeup and sewing courses, only to fail to find jobs afterward and be forced to return to begging and dancing to survive.

She is also concerned about their prospects of finding a job: Pakistan has hundreds of thousands of young people with skills and degrees who cannot find work.

"In the face of this tough competition, who will give jobs to trans people," Chaudry asked. "People are not ready to shake hands with us." MDT/AP

CORPORATE BITS

TIS hosts international community art exhibition



The International School of Macao (TIS) recently hosted the International Community Art Exhibition, featuring student artwork from TIS, Macau Anglican College (MAC), and School of the Nations

(SON) in Grades 7-9 and 10-11.

The event highlighted the role of creativity in education and the value of collaboration among international schools.

Lorne Schmidt, head of School, emphasized the exhibition's importance in providing students a chance to showcase their work alongside peers from different backgrounds.

The exhibition not only celebrated artistic talent but also aimed to inspire the broader community to recognize the arts as an essential part of education and cultural growth.

This initiative underscores the schools' shared commitment to fostering creativity, collaboration, and artistic development in Macau's youth, reinforcing the integral role of the arts in shaping a well-rounded educational experience.

L'attitude at City of Dreams unveils revamped menu



L'attitude at City of Dreams officially launched its new chapter last week, unveiling a refreshed identity with a brand-new menu and a new head chef.

As a signature venue blending

fashion, art, and culinary expertise, the restaurant embraces a modern dining philosophy.

The redesign of the interiors complements its new identity, creating an "inviting and lively" atmosphere for guests.

The relaunch event, titled "The Sky's The Limit," featured a dynamic evening of music, creative cocktails by guest mixologist The Old Man Hong Kong, and an unforgettable dining experience. The space now features contemporary design elements, including bold orange accents and sleek, modern aesthetics.

Chef Alican Dadayli, with over 15 years of experience, leads the kitchen with a Mediterranean-inspired menu.

Signature dishes include glazed smoked salmon, fisherman seafood, and linguini pasta with langoustine, all showcasing the finest seasonal ingredients and Mediterranean flavors.

DEFENSE

Stress and fear roil a tiny, rapidly militarizing Japanese island near Taiwan

MARI YAMAGUCHI, YONAGUNI

THIS tiny island on Japan's western frontier has no chain convenience stores. Nature lovers can dive with hammerhead sharks and watch miniature horses graze on a hill.

But the wooded mountain ranges now carry radar sites. A southern cattle ranch has been replaced with the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force's Camp Yonaguni. Japan and its ally, the United States, hold joint military exercises here. Plans are underway to add a new missile unit and expand a small airport and port.

All of the buildup has cemented the island as a front line in a potential clash over Taiwan, the self-governing democratic island on greater China territory.

"As a child, I was so proud of this westernmost border island," said Fumie Kano, an innkeeper on Yonaguni. "But recently, we are repeatedly told this place is dangerous, and I feel so sad."

The militarization has been especially felt as the island's population shrinks. There are less than 1,500 local residents. Supporters say new servicemembers arriving are needed for the island's safety and struggling economy. Opponents like Kano say the military buildup is damaging the environment, making the island's economy dependent on the military and could provoke an attack.

ON THE FRONT LINE

Yonaguni is only 110 kilometers east of Taiwan, around which China has bolstered military activity. Worried about a conflict, Japan has made a "southwestern shift" in its military posture and accelerated defense buildup and spending around the front line.

Missile units for PAC-3 interceptors have been deployed on Yonaguni and nearby Ishigaki and Miyako islands.

Yonaguni residents find themselves at the center of the geopolitical tension. A recent government plan to deploy more missiles, possibly long-range, has caused unease about the future of the island, even among those who initially supported hosting troops.

Kano, a Yonaguni native, recalls that officials and residents once wanted to improve the economy and environment through commercial exchanges with Taiwan by operating direct ferries between the islands. But that was set aside when a plan to host Japanese troops became an easier alterna-

AP PHOTO



A general view of a fishing port at Kubura village on Yonaguni, a tiny island on Japan's western frontier

tive to gain government subsidies and protection.

Disagreement about the plan has divided the small community. Support for hosting Japanese troops carried in a 2015 referendum; that meant the island's fate would be largely decided by the central government's security policy.

A year later a 160-member coast watch unit was set up to monitor Chinese military activity, with radars built on Mount Inbi and elsewhere. Now there are about 210 troops, including an electro-warfare unit. Servicemembers and their families account for one-fifth of the island's total population.

The local economy largely depends on the servicemembers and their families who use local shops, schools and community services.

There's worry on the island about the pace and extent of the militarization, says Kyoko Yamaguchi, a potter. "Everything is pushed through in the name of the Taiwan emergency, and many feel this is too much."

A nonfatal crash in October of a Japanese army tilt-rotor aircraft Osprey during a joint exercise with the U.S. military on the island also caused apprehension.

JAPAN AND CHINA BUILD THEIR MILITARIES

Japan's air and maritime forces in Okinawa's prefectural capital

of Naha are key to protecting the country's southwestern airspace and territorial waters.

The Naha-based Southwest Air Defense Force is the busiest of Japan's four regional air forces. In fiscal 2023, the force was scrambled 401 times, or 60% of the national total of 669, mostly against the Chinese, according to the Defense Ministry.

Rear Adm. Takuhiro Hiragi, commander of Fleet Air Wing 5 of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, says his group's mission is to fly P-3C aircraft over the East China Sea near Okinawa and its remote islands, including Yonaguni, and the Japanese-controlled Senkaku island, which Beijing claims.

"We have to be mobile, quick and thorough to keep tabs in this region," Hiragi said, noting the presence of key sea lanes in the area, including those that China uses to navigate the Pacific Ocean. "We watch over their exercises, not only near Taiwan but wherever necessary."

Defense officials say China has been accelerating its military activities in the area between Taiwan and Yonaguni.

In August, a Chinese Y-9 reconnaissance plane briefly violated Japanese airspace off the southern main island of Kyushu, prompting Japan's military to scramble fighter jets and warn the plane. A Chinese survey ship separately violated Japanese terri-

torial waters off a southern island days later. In September, the Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning and two destroyers sailed between Yonaguni and nearby Iriomote, entering a band of water just outside of Japan's territorial waters.

GROWING FEAR

Yonaguni fisherfolk, who closely monitor foreign vessels, have been among the first to see the growing Chinese military activity.

In 2022, several ballistic missiles China fired as part of an exercise landed off Japan's southwestern waters following then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan visit in August. One of them landed just 80 kilometers from Yonaguni while more than 20 local fishing boats were operating.

Though it caused no injuries or damage, the Chinese drills kept fisherfolk from operating for a week, Yonaguni fisheries association chief and town assembly member Shigenori Takenishi said.

Fear of a Taiwan war rekindles bitter memories here of the Battle of Okinawa, in which about 200,000 people, nearly half of them civilians, were killed. Historians say the army sacrificed Okinawa to defend Japan's mainland. Today Okinawa's main island hosts more than half of the 50,000 American troops in Japan.

"Being at the center of this issue is very stressful for residents,"

said shopkeeper Takako Ueno. "I don't want people to imagine this beautiful island turning into a battlefield."

To keep that from happening Yonaguni needs to be fortified, says Mayor Kenichi Itokazu, a military buildup advocate who has campaigned for the deployment of more Japanese troops for decades.

WHAT HAPPENS IN AN EMERGENCY?

Some residents feel uneasy about their vulnerability, even amid the military buildup.

A government evacuation plan last year showed moving 120,000 people from five remote islands, including Yonaguni, to Japan's main islands would take at least six days. Some question whether such an evacuation is even possible.

Itokazu, the mayor, wants to build a shelter in the basement of a new town hall and to expand the Higawa port for evacuation by ship, a plan opposed by environmentalists who say there are rare marine species there.

But there's skepticism from some.

"It's absurd," Kano said of the evacuation plan, because all of Japan would be in danger if Okinawa is dragged into fighting. "I just hope the money will be spent on policies that will help the people in Yonaguni live peacefully."

MDT/AP

AP PHOTO

The air traffic control tower stands at Chicago's Midway International Airport



AVIATION

Southwest Airlines flight abruptly rises to avoid another plane crossing Chicago runway

COREY WILLIAMS & KATHLEEN FOODY, CHICAGO

PILOTS on a Southwest Airlines flight attempting to land at Chicago's Midway Airport were forced to climb back into the sky to avoid another aircraft crossing the runway on Tuesday morning.

Airport webcam video posted to X shows the Southwest plane approaching a runway just before 9 a.m. Tuesday before its nose abruptly pulls up. A smaller jet is seen crossing the runway that the passenger plane was set to use.

Southwest Flight 2504 safely landed "after the crew performed a precautionary go-around to avoid a possible conflict with another aircraft that entered the runway," an airline spokesperson said in an email. "The crew followed safety procedures and the flight landed without incident."

Audio recording of communication between the smaller jet and the control tower recorded its pilot misstating instructions from a ground tower employee, who repeated that the pilot should "hold short" of a runway. About 30 seconds later, the ground tower ordered the pilot "hold your

position there."

The tower employee is then heard saying: "Flex-Jet560, your instructions were to hold short of runway 31 center."

Separately, a recording of communication between the Southwest crew and another ground tower employee captured its pilot reporting "Southwest 2504 going around" and following directions to climb back to 3,000 feet.

Seconds later, the audio captures the pilot asking the tower: "Southwest 2504, how'd that happen?"

The second plane, described as a business jet, entered the runway without authorization, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

Flexjet, the plane's owner, said the company is aware "of the occurrence in Chicago."

"Flexjet adheres to the highest safety standards and we are conducting a thorough investigation," a spokesperson said in a statement. "Any action to rectify and ensure the highest safety standards will be taken."

Both the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board say they are investigating.

The Southwest Flight was en route to Midway Airport

from Omaha, Nebraska, according to FlightAware.

Air traffic control audio makes clear that the business jet failed to heed clear instruction not to cross the runway, said Jeff Guzzetti, a former NTSB member and former FAA investigator.

Guzzetti called it a "very serious runway incursion," but added: "However, the sky is not falling because last year was the lowest recorded number of serious runway incursions in a decade."

There were 22 of these serious events in 2023, but just seven in 2024, he said, citing FAA data.

There can be several factors that contribute to these incidents, Guzzetti said: "Was the crew distracted? Was the controller overworked?"

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy said Tuesday afternoon on X that while the NTSB and the FAA are investigating, one thing is clear: "However, it is imperative that pilots follow the instructions of air traffic controllers. If they do not, their licenses will be pulled."

John Goglia, a former NTSB member, said the near-crash shows "the system worked exactly as it was designed to."

That is because the Southwest pilot was aware that the other plane wasn't going to stop in time, he said.

Investigators will likely look at factors including how well-staffed the tower was and whether instructions coming out of the tower were clear, he said.

"Those things do happen," he said, citing possible miscommunication, including a pilot mishearing instructions.

The past few weeks have seen four major aviation disasters in North America. They include the Feb. 6 crash of a commuter plane in Alaska that killed all 10 people on board and the Jan. 26 midair collision between an Army helicopter and an American Airlines flight at Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport that killed all 67 aboard the two aircraft.

A medical transport jet with a child patient, her mother and four others aboard crashed Jan. 31 into a Philadelphia neighborhood. That crash killed seven people, including all those aboard, and injured 19 others.

Twenty-one people were injured Feb. 17 when a Delta flight flipped and landed on its roof at Toronto's Pearson Airport. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1963 ARGOUD CHARGED OVER DE GAULLE PLOT



Antoine Argoud, President De Gaulle's arch enemy and a former colonel in the French Army, has been charged with an assassination attempt on the president two years ago.

Argoud was, until now, the only active member of the Algerian Secret Army (OAS), an organisation opposed to Algerian independence that has used violent methods to promote its cause.

He was found by police yesterday tied up and badly bruised in the back of a blue van in central Paris after a tip-off.

He claims he was kidnapped from Munich, Germany, by the French secret service, known as Les Barbouzes (the Bearded Ones).

But the man who phoned police about Argoud's whereabouts claimed to be a member of the OAS.

He told the police: "Argoud has betrayed us. He has failed in all the tasks which he should have organised - especially the attempt on the life of President de Gaulle at the Petit Clamart last August.

"You can pick him up now. He is very near you." The blue van was found just yards from the Quai des Orfèvres, the French equivalent of Scotland Yard.

After a failed coup led by General Raoul Salan in August 1961, Argoud was captured and imprisoned in the Canary Islands.

But last March he escaped to Madrid dressed as a Spanish officer.

Two months later, he made his way to Germany where he tried to drum up support for his cause among French Army units based there.

He has since courted the more moderate version of the OAS, the illegal National Resistance Council (CNR) led by former prime minister Georges Bidault and Jacques Soustelle.

Fifteen of Argoud's associates are already on trial at a military court in Paris for their part in the de Gaulle assassination plot.

Argoud himself was sentenced to death in absentia while he was on the run.

This sentence will be set aside in preparation for a new trial.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The OAS was founded in 1961 and led by General Raoul Salan.

It represented French settlers in Algeria and campaigned against independence in Algeria and France using terrorist means - including the attempted assassination in August 1961 of the French president General de Gaulle.

In March 1962 de Gaulle reached agreement with Algerian nationalists to give Algeria independence.

General Salan was captured and jailed in April 1962 and the organisation gradually disintegrated.

Colonel Argoud argued that his trial in December 1963 was not legal because he had been taken back to France against his will. But the trial went ahead and he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

He was released, along with other former OAS members, during a general amnesty in May 1968.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Share what you're learning with your friends. All may not be as it seems; consider and speculate. Envision and articulate. Find solutions in conversation.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Your work is attracting attention. Prepare for a performance or presentation. Get your ducks in a row. Expect the unexpected and make backup plans.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Travel entices. Expect deviations and changes. Stick to reliable routes, transport and connections. Advance preparation beats spontaneity now. Study and research your options.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Manage financial responsibilities with your partner. Confirm intuition with data to adapt around changes. Revise budgets for current conditions. Guard extra for unexpected expenses.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Listen to discover your partner's ideas. Share fantasies and dreams. Collaboration lightens the load and is more fun. Love makes everything seem possible.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Profit from attention to details. Practice your technique and moves. Stretch to grow stronger. Focus on sidestepping obstacles. Rest deeply and well when done.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Relax and have fun. Reconnect with someone who shares a passion. A flexible attitude adapts around changes. Keep an open mind and heart.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Adapt your home around domestic changes. Make repairs and renovations. Listen to your family to discover their priorities. Stick to practical, durable solutions.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Resolve details with creative projects. Facts can dispel old fears. Research and write your discoveries. Adapt your message around the latest news and share.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Profitable opportunities come together. Sign contracts and send invoices. Get your old stuff appraised. Buy and sell. Stay on budget despite changing conditions.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Get into a fun personal project. Tune and adjust around a changing situation. Use your confidence and talents for a satisfying purpose. Invent exciting possibilities.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Quiet time soothes your spirit. Meditate on upcoming plans. What's missing? Notice opportunities hiding under changes. Reduce stress with peaceful fun. Relax and consider.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

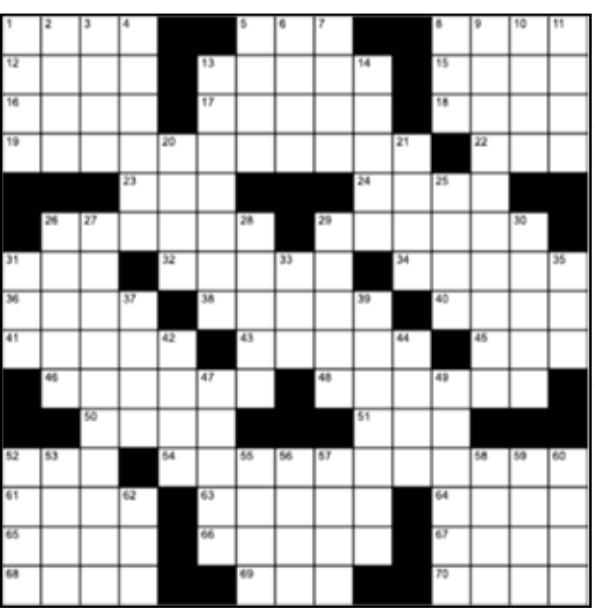
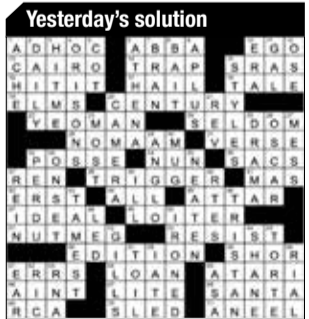
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-1	14	cloudy
Changchun	-7	9	fine
Chengdu	3	13	cloudy
Chongqing	6	20	fine
Fuzhou	11	20	rain
Guangzhou	13	22	overcast
Guiyang	3	19	cloudy
Haikou	16	25	cloudy
Hangzhou	6	20	cloudy
Harbin	-10	4	fine
Hefei	3	20	fine
Nanjing	4	20	cloudy
Shanghai	8	16	rain
Taipei	14	19	cloudy
Wuhan	1	22	fine
Hong Kong	19	21	sunny
WORLD			
Moscow	-12	-2	sunny
Frankfurt	3	8	rain
Paris	2	9	cloudy
London	1	9	cloudy
New York	4	13	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Jeanne ____ (French saint); 5- ____ Miserables; 8- Supplements, with "out"; 12- Eastern nanny; 13- Greek goddesses of the seasons; 15- Tablet; 16- Dorothy's dog; 17- What you put on snooze; 18- Brainchild; 19- An organization; 22- Butterfly catcher; 23- Camera type, briefly; 24- Sound quality; 26- Remove the color from; 29- Late-night flight; 31- Rhyming boxing champ; 32- Suckle; 34- Fine fur; 36- Pulls; 38- Carryalls; 40- Bring up; 41- Conductor Zubin; 43- Japanese dish; 45- "Wheel of Fortune" buy; 46- Flight of steps; 48- Run chore; 50- Jekyll's alter ego; 51- Crew tool; 52- Hit-show sign; 54- Encircling; 61- Tart; 63- Noise; 64- Switch ending; 65- Chuck; 66- Curved letters; 67- Nothing, in Nogales; 68- Editor's note; 69- LAX posting; 70- Prepared to drive;

DOWN 1- Info; 2- OT prophet; 3- Phooey!; 4- Select; 5- "Damn Yankees" role; 6- Part of QED; 7- Delhi dress; 8- Prefix with center; 9- Chili ingredient; 10- Robert ____; 11- Blind piece; 13- Butch, e.g.; 14- Act badly; 20- Family; 21- Agrees tacitly; 25- Close by; 26- Depressed spirits; 27- Tower for the guidance of mariners; 28- ____ Perot; 29- Baseball's Pee Wee; 30- Oxlike antelope; 31- 24-hr. bank feature; 33- Poker legend Ungar; 35- Before, to Burns; 37- Hang around; 39- Burial clothes; 42- Helps; 44- Persia, today; 47- Employ again; 49- Fervent; 52- Grounded fleet; 53- Underground part of a plant; 55- Red flower; 56- Corrosion; 57- Draft rating; 58- Dies ____; 59- Lymph ____; 60- Incite; 62- Queue after Q;



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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CHINA TO STEP IN?

If US attempts World Bank retreat, the China-led AIIB could be poised to step in – and provide a model of global cooperation

TAMAR GUTNER
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

DONALD Trump's animosity toward multilateralism and international organizations is well known. Just hours after taking office on Jan 20, 2025, the U.S. president announced his intention to withdraw from the World Health Organization and the Paris agreement on climate change.

Could the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank be next?

Certainly, supporters of the twin institutions – that have formed the backbone of global economic order for 80 years – are concerned. A Trump-ordered review of Washington's support of all international organizations has led to fears of the U.S. reducing funding or pulling it altogether.

But any shrinking of U.S. leadership in international financial institutions would, I believe, run counter to the administration's ostensible geopolitical goals, creating a vacuum for China to step into and take on a bigger global role. In particular, weakening the World Bank and other multilateral development banks, or MDBs, that have a large U.S. presence could present an

opportunity for a little-known, relatively new Chinese-led international organization: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank – which, since its inception, has supported the very multilateralism the U.S. is attacking.

AIIB'S PARADOXICAL ROLE

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was created by China nine years ago as a way to invest in infrastructure and other related sectors in Asia, while promoting “regional cooperation and partnership in addressing development challenges by working in close collaboration with other multilateral and bilateral development institutions.”

Since then, it has served as an example of an international body willing to deeply cooperate with other major multilateral organizations and follow international rules and norms of development banking.

This may run counter to the image of Beijing's global efforts portrayed by China hawks, of which there are many in the Trump administration, who often present a vision of a China intent on undermining the Western-led liberal international order.

But as a number of scholars and other China experts have suggested, Beijing's strategies in global economic governance are often nuanced, with actions that both support and undermine the liberal global order.

As I explore in my new book, it is clear that today the AIIB is a paradox: an institution connected to the rules and norms of the liberal international order, but one created by an illiberal government.

The AIIB is deeply tied to the rules-based order as displayed through its many cooperative connections with other major multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank and the

Japan-led Asian Development Bank.

As such, the AIIB may present a Chinese counterpoint in a landscape where U.S. leadership is receding.

THE COOPERATIVE DESIGN OF THE AIIB

For decades, multilateral development banks have served the important task of lending billions of dollars a year to support economic and social development.

They can be vital sources of funding for poverty reduction, inclusive economic growth and sustainable development, with a newer emphasis on climate change. These international lenders have also been remarkably durable in today's climate of fragmentation and crisis, with member nations actively considering ways of further strengthening them.

At the same time, MDBs perennially face criticism from civil society organizations who highlight areas of weak performance and are concerned about potential downsides of the major MDBs' greater emphasis on working more closely with the private sector. MDB expert Chris Humphrey has also noted that major “MDBs were built around a set of geopolitical and economic power relationships that are coming apart before our eyes.”

When Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 proposed creating the AIIB to lend for infrastructure development in Asia, there was a lot of suspicion among major nations about China's intentions.

The Obama administration responded to the move by urging other countries not to join. Its concern was that China would use lending to gain further influence in the region, but without adhering to strong environmental and social standards.

Nonetheless, all the other ma-

major nonborrowing nations, with the exception of Japan, joined the new bank. Today, the AIIB is the second-largest multilateral development bank in terms of member countries, behind only the World Bank. It currently has 110 member nations, which translates to over 80% of the global population. With US\$100 billion in capital, it is one of the medium-sized multilateral lenders.

From the get-go, the AIIB was designed to be cooperative.

HOW THE AIIB TOOK ITS CUE FROM OTHERS

The bank fits into the landscape of other multilateral development banks in a variety of ways. The AIIB's charter is directly modeled on the Asian Development Bank's foundation, and built into the AIIB's charter is the bank's mission of promoting “regional cooperation and partnership in addressing development challenges.”

The AIIB shares similar norms and policies with other major multilateral development banks, including its environmental and social standards.

Alongside borrowing foundational principles, the AIIB also works in close conjunction with its peers. The World Bank initially ran the AIIB's treasury operations. The AIIB has also co-financed a high percentage of its projects with other multilateral development banks, particularly in its first years.

In a recent sign of cooperation, in 2023, a deal between the AIIB and World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) saw the AIIB issue up to \$1 billion in guarantees against IBRD sovereign-backed loans. This increased the IBRD's ability to lend more money, while diversifying the AIIB's loan portfolio.

As of Feb. 6, 2025, the AIIB has

306 approved projects totaling \$59 billion. Energy and transportation are its two largest sectors of lending. Recently approved projects include loans to support wind power plants in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and a solar plant in India. India, which has a bumpy relationship with China, is one of the bank's largest borrowers, along with Turkey and Indonesia.

COOPERATING AND COMPETING WITH CHINA

From its birth until recently, the multilateral AIIB has repeatedly distinguished itself from China's bilateral initiatives. Chief among those is China's Belt and Road Initiative, an umbrella term for infrastructure lending by Chinese institutions that has been criticized for lacking transparency and accountability.

Indeed, some Belt and Road Initiative-linked projects have faced concerns about corruption, costs and the opacity of the loan agreements.

In the past several years, the AIIB has made more mention of synergy with Belt and Road lenders, and the bank now hosts the secretariat of a facility, the Multilateral Cooperation Center for Development Finance, that offers grants and support to developing countries seeking to finance infrastructure in countries where Belt and Road lending takes place. This may blur the line between the AIIB and lending under the Belt and Road umbrella, but it does not appear to weaken the bank's standards.

Concerns about the level of Chinese government influence at the AIIB are not new. Canada froze its ties with the bank in June 2023, pending a review of allegations by a Canadian staff member, who dramatically quit after accusing the bank of being dominated by members of China's Communist Party.

No other member nations expressed such concern, and Canada has not yet published any review. A group of AIIB executive directors oversaw an internal review that found no evidence to support the allegations.

As the new U.S. administration formulates its policies toward China, it would do well to take into account the variation in China's strategies in global economic governance, as a recognition of areas of cooperation, competition and conflict requires more nuanced responses. In many areas, the U.S. will both cooperate and compete with China.

Paradoxically, any moves by the Trump administration to pull back from multilateral organizations may leave the AIIB, whether or not it is an anomaly, in a position to offer a better model of cooperation than leading multilateral development banks with a powerful U.S. role. **MDT/THE CONVERSATION**

FOOTBALL

Matildas condemn misogynistic comments by radio host about Australian women's soccer team

THE Matildas joined in the heavy criticism yesterday of a commercial radio host's misogynistic and crass comments about Australia's national women's soccer team. The host has since been taken off-air.

The Matildas, coming off losses to Japan and the United States in the SheBelieves Cup, were the subject of a bizarre and offensive rant by comedian and host Marty Sheargold on his Triple M radio program.

Among other things, he described the players as high schoolers with "all the infighting and all the friendship issues" and asked his co-hosts if they had "any men's sports" to talk about.

"There's something wrong with the Matildas. They had that wonderful tournament out here where we all fell in love with them, even though they didn't make the quarters," Sheargold said, referring to the 2023 World Cup where Australia reached the semifinals at home.

Rosie Malone, who played field hockey for Australia, posted an edited version of Sheargold's comments on social media, describing them as "disgus-



ting" and "horrendous."

"It's 2025 and something like this is being aired on prime-time radio," she posted. "I heard this on the radio yesterday — on the way to training and all I could think about was the young girls sitting in the car with their parents, maybe on the way to or from their own training sessions hearing this.

"I'm sure many of them would have been hurt and confused. I was in disbelief."

Matildas players Alex Chidiac and Clare Wheeler responded to Malone's Instagram post, with Chidiac saying she was "so sick" of such commentary and Wheeler saying "sport is for everyone and these views are for no one."

Matildas captain Steph Catley said the comments were "completely unacceptable."

In a statement Wednesday, Football Federation Australia said: "Such remarks not only diminish the extraordinary achievements and contributions of our women's national football team but also fail to recognize the profound impact

they have had on Australian sport and society."

"The Matildas have inspired a new generation of Australians ... who now see a future for themselves in football and sport more broadly. They have broken barriers, set new standards, and elevated the game to unprecedented heights. Their success has been instrumental in transforming women's sport in Australia, and they deserve to be covered with the respect and professionalism they have earned."

Sports minister is critical

Australia's sports minister, Anika Wells, described the comments as "boorish, boring, wrong" and soccer's national players' union said "it is important such ignorance does not go unchecked."

The "comments were disgusting, pathetic and deeply misogynistic, showing a complete lack of respect for women's sport and football as a whole," Professional Footballers Australia chief executive Beau Busch said. "The Matildas have inspired countless Australians as players and fans. To diminish their achievements — or women's sport more broadly — is not just insulting but shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the importance of our sport in this country."

The Triple M network said the comments didn't "align with (its) views and values" and took the program off air. It said a new drive show would be announced soon. Sheargold also issued an apology.

"Any comedy, including mine, can miss the mark sometimes, and I can see why people may have taken offense at my comments regarding the Matildas. I sincerely apologize," Sheargold said. **MDT/AP**

AD

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Saturdays, 9-11am, Taipa Stadium

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- Co-operation
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OPINION

Business Views

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



A CHINESE ALTERNATIVE TO THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN HAS ARRIVED

A strong conviction trade is being shaken. As international stocks are outperforming this year, global investors are asking if their faith in US exceptionalism has gone too far.

The contrast is most glaring when we look at China's big tech. BYD Co., Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., Tencent Holdings Ltd. and Xiaomi Corp., the so-called BATX after their acronyms that span electric-vehicle manufacturing, e-commerce to social media and video gaming, have risen 46% on average. By comparison, the Magnificent Seven stocks have barely registered any gains year-to-date.

The arrival of DeepSeek was a wake-up call to US politicians that China has not been left out of the global technological upgrade despite Washington's stringent export controls on AI-related chip products. It was also a welcoming reprieve for asset managers. They can finally tell investors that while growth stocks rarely come cheap, they do exist.

Entering 2025, being long US big tech was by far the most crowded trade. But there was unease. A whopping 89% said US equities were overvalued, the most since at least April 2001, according to Bank of America Merrill Lynch's latest fund managers survey.

Chinese tech now offers an alternative. Generative AI is not the only field where export controls have failed. Sales at US-sanctioned telecom and smartphone giant Huawei Technologies Co., for instance, jumped by 22% last year, the fastest growth since 2016. It's beating Apple Inc. in China.

Or consider the auto space. EV makers are redefining what it means to be a luxury car. Xiaomi's SU7 mimics Porsche Automobil Holding SE's Taycan in power and braking, but includes AI that can help with parking and greet drivers with their favorite song. For all of its add-on features, Xiaomi sells for roughly half the price of a Taycan. Its stock is cheap, too. Despite the recent run-up, Xiaomi and fellow EV maker BYD trade at 45 times and 23 times forward earnings, respectively, versus Tesla Inc.'s 121 times.

Meanwhile, the US market has become expensive and distorted. A handful of tech names make up nearly a third of the S&P 500 Index. With the explosive growth in passive funds, which are often on the long side and disproportionately favor large caps, market concentration risk has become pronounced. In their need to diversify, global investors are certainly keen to find an alternative to the Magnificent Seven.

But Chinese government should by no means be complacent. While fund managers are ready to reshuffle their portfolios and lessen their dependence on US assets, it's by no means guaranteed that they will come back to China. They might allocate to Europe instead — stocks there are starting the year with a bang as well, as traders bet on a ceasefire in Ukraine.

For now, Beijing is trying to soften its image. Last week, President Xi Jinping met with a group of tech titans, including Alibaba founder Jack Ma, China's most high-profile tech billionaire. But while I doubt one staged photo op alone is enough to erase all the grievances investors have been feeling since the tech crack-down was first launched in late 2020, it's a start to try and release China from its value trap.

Courtesy Bloomberg/Shuli Ren

THE MAIN INGREDIENTS IN SIERRA LEONE'S KUSH ARE SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS AND CANNABINOIDS, REPORT FINDS

THE BUZZ

A new report released yesterday [Macau time] by an anti-transnational crime group has identified the core chemical components of kush, a synthetic drug that has swept through Sierra Leone and the region in the past few years.

The report by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime conducted the first known testing of the most common varieties of kush available in Sierra Leone and neighboring West African countries and found that it contained either nitazenes or synthetic cannabinoids.

"Nitazenes are potent and often deadly synthetic opioids that have

spread rapidly across global retail drug markets, including European countries, particularly since 2022," the report reads. "Illustratively, in 2023 in Estonia and Latvia, 48% and 28% of drug deaths, respectively, were attributable to nitazenes. One of the nitazenes detected in kush is 25 times more potent than fentanyl."

Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio last year declared a war on kush, calling it an epidemic and a national threat. He launched a task force on drug and substance abuse, promising to lead a government approach focused on prevention and treatment involving law enforcement and community engagement.



People photograph cigars on display at the XXV Cigar Festival at the Convention Palace in Havana

CUBA'S CIGAR FAIR SHOWCASES HUMIDORS AS THE NEW OBJECT OF DESIRE

ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ, HAVANA

CUBA'S legendary cigars, hand-rolled from the finest tobacco leaves, have long captivated connoisseurs, and now a growing number of enthusiasts recognize the vital importance of humidors, those meticulously crafted boxes that help preserve their quality and longevity.

More than mere containers, humidors, some true works of art in wood, regulate humidity and temperature, and can cost thousands of dollars.

"Other countries produce humidors, but we create them with passion, just like in the old days," said Adrián Morán Lipis, of Humidores Clave, one of several workshops showing off their creations at Cuba's annual cigar trade fair that runs through Friday in Havana.

Humidor prices range from \$200 for basic 25-cigar models to thousands for exclusive pieces.

Humidores Clave, for example, showcased a carved black and white humidor valued at \$2,000. Last year's festival gala featured a humidor auction — with their respective cigars — that raised a staggering \$19.3 million, highlighting the high value placed on these luxury items.

Some of the humidors on display at this year's fair resembled iconic buildings

Some of the humidors on display at this year's fair resembled iconic buildings, adorned with Cuban flags, intricate train designs, or striking abstract patterns. One particularly eye-catching humidor emulated a shark's fin, soaring over a meter in height. Innovation was also evident, with features like remote-controlled trunks and hidden compartments.

Considered as some of the world's finest, Cuban

cigars have solidified their position in the premium tobacco market.

Habanos S.A., a joint venture between Cubatabaco and Altadis, holds the global monopoly on Cuban cigar sales. In 2024, their sales surged to \$827 million, a 16% increase over the previous year, with China, Spain, Switzerland and Great Britain as key markets.

The company also hosts the annual Habanos Festival, a key event for collectors, aficionados and distributors worldwide. Attendees tour plantations, participate in seminars and high-stakes auctions, and witness the latest in humidor craftsmanship.

"A humidor is more than a box; it's a special shelter for tobacco," said José Ernesto Aguilera, a master craftsman whose pieces have been featured in numerous festival auctions.

"Tobacco is a prince, and we build the castle it deserves." MDT/AP



Australia An amateur boxer was sentenced yesterday to at least 14 months in jail for attacking a referee after a Sydney soccer match in 2023. The assault left the referee with fractures and lost teeth. The judge called the attack cowardly and senseless public violence.



Nepal Thousands gathered yesterday at Pashupati temple in Kathmandu for the Hindu festival Shivaratri. Holy men and devotees openly smoked cannabis, a practice normally illegal but allowed during the festival. Advocates argue for legalization, citing medicinal benefits and historical cultural significance.



United States President Donald Trump announced yesterday [Macau time] a new "gold card" visa offering U.S. residency and citizenship for a \$5 million investment. The program replaces the EB-5 visa and aims to attract wealthy applicants. Trump suggested selling millions of these visas to reduce the national deficit.



United States Bitcoin fell below \$90,000 Tuesday, erasing some gains seen since Trump's pro-crypto policies began. The drop follows a report on declining consumer confidence and recent hacks. Despite volatility, crypto supporters see this as an investment opportunity amid ongoing regulatory discussions.