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AP PHOTO



India At least four workers have died after an avalanche swept away a large construction crew working on a highway near the mountainous border with Tibet, Indian army said Saturday. The incident took place near the Mana Pass in northern Uttarakhand state on Friday, and 55 construction workers were initially trapped under snow.

AP PHOTO



India Wearing colorful robes and fearsome masks, monks danced to drums and cymbals in a Himalayan monastery, evoking the wrathful Buddhist deity Mahakala. The cham dance, performed before Tibetan New Year (Losar), calls on Mahakala to remove obstacles and cleanse the space of negative energy.

AP PHOTO



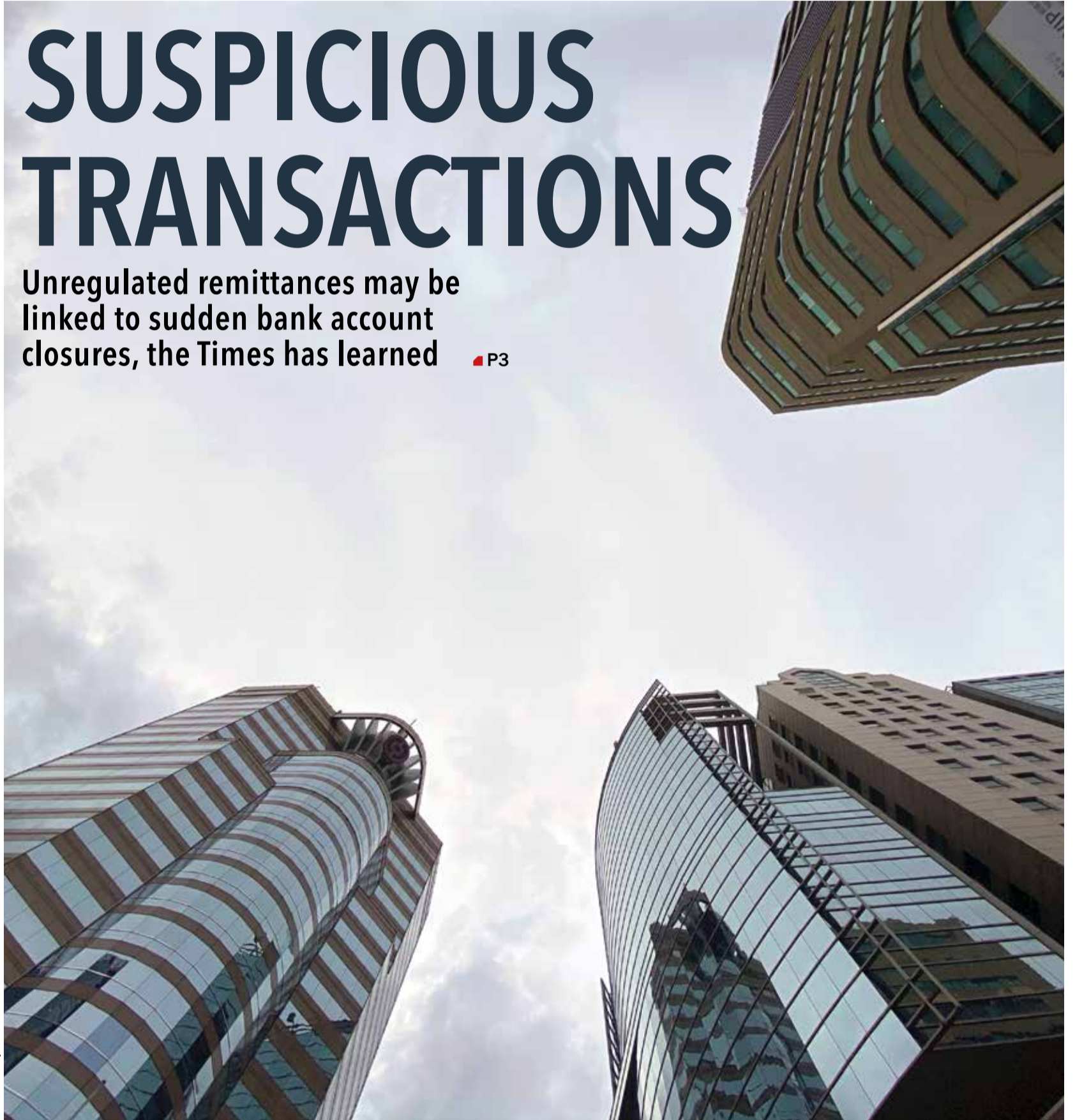
Philippines A fire gutted a three-story residential building late last week in less than an hour in the Philippines' capital region, killing eight people, officials said. The blaze, which also injured at least one resident, broke out after midnight in the building, which was mostly made of wood, as people slept in San Isidro Galas village in suburban Quezon city.

AP PHOTO



New Zealand The owners of an island volcano where 22 tourists and local guides died in an eruption had their criminal conviction for failing to keep visitors safe thrown out by a judge on Friday. The ruling absolves the company from paying millions of dollars in restitutions to the families of those bereaved in the 2019 explosion on Whakaari.

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ECONOMY

GDP reaches MOP403b in 2024 with 8.8% growth

STAFF REPORTER

THE economy continued its recovery in 2024, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growing by 8.8% year-on-year in real terms, re-

aching MOP 403.3 billion, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

The city's overall economic output returned to 86.4% of its 2019 level. Per capita GDP rose by 7.6% to MOP 587,922, while the

implicit GDP deflator, measuring overall price changes, increased slightly by 0.4% to 105.0.

The growth was primarily driven by a 9.2% rise in service exports, supported by a 23.8% increase in visitor arrivals. Gaming

services saw a significant 21.8% boost, although other tourism-related exports declined by 6.1% due to a high comparison base from the previous year. Compared to 2019, however, tourism services still registered a 13.0% increase. In contrast, merchandise exports and imports declined by 14.5% and 7.6%, respectively.

Domestic demand also showed moderate growth, rising by 2.3% year-on-year. Private consumption expenditure grew by 4.9%, driven by stable employment and economic activity. Household spending in Macau increased by 3.8%, while overseas consumption surged by 11.1%. However, government consumption expenditure declined by 5.1% following the end of the "Livelihood Subsidy Scheme."

Investment activity remained strong, with gross fixed capital formation increasing by 4.6%. Private construction investment rose by 5.1%, and equipment investment saw a notable 31.1% jump. Public equipment investment edged up by 1.2%, while public construction investment dropped by 10.0% due to the completion of major infrastructure projects.

In the fourth quarter of 2024, GDP expanded by 3.4% compared to the previous quarter, bringing economic output to 88.0% of

its pre-pandemic level.

The Macau Economic Association (MEA) previously projected that full-year GDP would grow by about 9% in real terms year over year in 2024, recovering to approximately 86.5% of the pre-pandemic level of 2019.

EMPLOYMENT RATE SHOW MODEST DECLINE

The unemployment rates experienced decreases for the period of November 2024 to January 2025, according to DSEC.

The general unemployment rate fell to 1.6%, while the rate for local residents decreased to 2.1%, down 0.1 and 0.2 percentage points, respectively, from the previous quarter.

The decline is attributed to a reduction in job seekers during the Chinese New Year, with the total number of unemployed individuals dropping by 500 to 6,200.

However, the overall labor force decreased by 2,500 to 382,500, and total employment fell by 2,000 to 376,300.

Notably, employment in the Gaming sector increased, while the Hotels, Restaurants, and Construction sectors saw declines. The underemployment rate also dropped to 1.3%, with 5,000 individuals affected, primarily in Real Estate and Business Activities.

GAMING

Melco keeps 'a close eye' on Thailand for expansion amid legalization push

LYNZY VALLES

MELCO Resorts & Entertainment is gearing up to enter Thailand as the country moves toward legalizing casinos.

With the potential to become a premier gaming and entertainment hub in Southeast Asia, Thailand presents a significant opportunity for the company.

CEO Lawrence Ho confirmed in January the company's ambition to secure a license to operate an integrated resort in Thailand once the regulatory framework allows for it.

To support this effort, Melco has already estab-

lished a Thai subsidiary dedicated to studying the feasibility of such an endeavor.

"We see Thailand as a generational opportunity that probably happens once every century," Ho remarked in a recent earnings call with analysts.

"We've conducted extensive studies, made multiple visits, and even opened an office in Thailand. While it is still early days, we remain vigilant and flexible in our approach, including potential partnerships and structural adjustments," he added.

Having gained experience from previous bidding processes, such as



in Japan, Melco is taking a measured stance in Thailand, noting that the group is still in the "very early innings in

Thailand." However, Ho said that the gaming operator will "keep a very close eye to it."

Meanwhile, chief financial officer Geoff Davis also highlighted Melco's strategic outlook on intellectual property (IP) fees, emphasizing that the company has taken industry trends into account while setting its pricing model at a competitive level.

Thailand's revised draft of the entertainment complex bill outlines strict conditions for the implementation of casinos, with local punters being required to have at least THB50 million (USD1.5 million) in fixed deposits for at least six months to be able to enter casinos.

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

EXPANDING INVESTMENTS

Melco is ramping up investments across its properties,

with a strong focus on enhancing customer experience and expanding technological capabilities.

Ho announced in the call that the company remains committed to its Macau operations, where efforts are underway to improve visibility and accessibility.

"Our primary objective is to attract and retain high-quality, high-value customers," Ho stated.

At Studio City, renovations to the high-limit area are nearing completion, while at City of Dreams, enhancements around the main casino entrance aim to boost foot traffic.

Additionally, all baccarat tables in Macau will feature smart technology by the end of March, optimizing marketing and player reinvestment strategies.

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SOCIETY

SUDDEN CLOSURE OF BANK ACCOUNTS MAY BE RELATED TO 'UNLAWFUL' REMITTANCES

RENATO MARQUES

SEVERAL banking institutions in Macau have reportedly informed clients of sudden account closures, according to sources familiar with the issue.

An investigation by The Times suggests that these closures may be connected to accounts involved in "unlawful" remittance activities, particularly among non-resident workers (TNR) from the Philippines.

The investigation reveals that many of these workers use a "middleman" to transfer money to GCash, an e-payment platform.

The process typically involves the workers sending money to a middleman's bank account, who then acts as an informal remittance service, offering a slightly better exchange rate.

Filipino workers in Macau can currently remit money through local remittance companies, such as BDO Unibank, Pacific Ace, and Global Remit, with fees ranging from MOP25 to MOP30, depending on the method used for the receiver to collect the funds.

The intermediaries charge a flat fee of MOP20 and allow transfers to be made through bank transfers, eliminating the need to visit a remittance center.

Some would also opt to visit a bank and deposit money through Cash Withdrawal and Deposit Machines (CWD) located across the city.

However, this method often results in multiple deposits and



transactions into their accounts, particularly during the first week of the month.

Some TNR clients, especially those with Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU), have reportedly been notified of account closures, with no clear explanation given.

The Times reached out to BNU for comment, but the bank declined to provide details, citing banking confidentiality.

"All information regarding BNU clients, whether individuals, companies or institutions, is subject to banking confidentiality. BNU values the trust that all customers place in the Bank, therefore, as you may understand, we will not disclose any information about any of our customers' financial rela-

tionship with BNU," the bank stated to the Times inquiry.

The same institution added, "On the other hand, we may assert that no new policies have been implemented recently. BNU operates and has always operated in accordance with best financial practices and in strict compliance with the Regulatory Authority's guidelines."

In response to the Times' query, the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) emphasized that both banks and account holders must adhere to agreed terms and conditions.

It also noted that banks are entitled to terminate business relationships with customers after providing prior notice, and customers can reach out to resolve

issues.

"In line with the bank's 'Customer Acceptance Policy' and commercial decision, the bank reserves the right to terminate the business relationship with the customer with prior notice. In special circumstances, account holders may contact the bank to come up with a resolution," the AMCM added.

The AMCM clarified that banks must conduct thorough due diligence before establishing business relationships, in line with anti-money laundering and terrorism financing guidelines.

"Banks shall conduct customer due diligence procedures, which shall include but not limited to understanding customer's background, purpose of account and tran-

saction, etc., in accordance with the AMCM's 'Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism Guideline' as well as respective internal 'Customer Acceptance Policy,'" the bureau said.

Some workers have explained that they prefer this method of transferring money because it offers lower fees and avoids the time-consuming process of using official remittance services.

Sources revealed that due to the rise of online remittance services, registered remittance companies are seeing a significant drop in business.

"Business is nothing like it was before bank transfers or GCash became popular. There are many days now, even at the end of the month when we're usually busiest, that we don't have as many transactions," said a teller at a remittance center, who requested to remain anonymous.

Around two years ago, the AMCM issued a warning against using the mobile app YourPay for remittances from Macau to Indonesia, as it was not authorized to operate in Macau and was deemed illegal.

The AMCM stated that the app was promoted across various media platforms.

The authority clarified that it is not authorized to conduct financial activities in Macau, making it illegal.

Under Macau's financial regulations, individuals involved in unauthorized financial operations may face significant fines.

PORTUGUESE MINISTER PAULO RANGEL TO VISIT MACAU

Portuguese Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, Paulo Rangel, will visit Macau this month, marking the first visit by a senior Portuguese official since the pandemic. Rangel will attend the Boao Forum in China and meet with Chinese officials, including his counterpart, Wang Yi, according to TDM. In Macau, he will meet Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, engage with the Portuguese community, and hold discussions with Consul General Alexandre Leitão. This will be the first meeting between Rangel and the new Chief Executive. Rangel is also expected to return later this year for Portugal's Camões Day celebrations.

TOURIST FINED FOR EXITING MOVING TAXI ON AMIZADE BRIDGE

A woman who exited a moving taxi on the Amizade Bridge has been fined MOP 600 for violating Macau's traffic laws. A viral video circulating on social media shows the tourist leaving the vehicle while it was still in motion. According to the taxi driver, she said she was feeling unwell and needed fresh air. She later managed to hail another taxi on the bridge to continue her journey to Macau International Airport. Traffic laws strictly prohibit passengers from entering or exiting moving vehicles. The taxi driver will not face penalties, as he reportedly took all necessary precautions.

GAMING

Casino revenue rises 6.8% in February

GAMING revenues in February climbed by 6.8% year-on-year to MOP19.74 billion, surpassing analysts' forecasts, according to the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau.

The positive performance was partly attributed to the Lunar New Year holiday, or Golden Week, which brought an influx of visitors.

Macau welcomed approximately 1.3 million arrivals during the eight-day holiday, a slight decline of 3.5% compared to the previous year.

However, January's total visitation of 3.6 million surpassed 2019 figures by 6%



February's visitation data is expected later this month.

Last month, JP Morgan Securities (Asia Pacific) Ltd. reported that the gambling sector experienced stron-

ger-than-anticipated demand following the Lunar New Year holiday.

This memo comes after the city reported a year-on-year decline of 5.6% in gross gaming revenue

(GGR), totaling MOP 18.25 billion in January.

Despite the post-holiday resilience, JP Morgan forecasts Macau's full-year GGR to grow by only 1% to 4% in 2025, lower than the industry consensus of 5% growth.

Also, Citigroup has sharply reduced its 2025 growth forecast for the city's GGR, citing the disappointing Chinese New Year CNY gambling volume and the implementation of US tariffs on Chinese exports.

The banking group now predicts a 1% year-on-year decline in first-half GGR, compared to its earlier 7% growth forecast. LV

EMPLOYMENT

SATELLITE CASINO WORKERS BRACE FOR UNCERTAINTY AS TRANSITION DEADLINE NEARS

VICTORIA CHAN

As the three-year transition period for satellite casinos approaches its conclusion, workers are bracing for potential job losses and reduced benefits amid significant industry changes.

The impending deadline, set for the end of the year, will restrict operations of the remaining 11 satellite casinos to management companies, intensifying concerns about job security among employees.

Many workers, some with nearly two decades of experience in the gaming sector, fear that these changes will adversely affect their welfare.

"We are worried about whether our benefits will be reduced and if we will be able to keep our jobs amid potential operational shifts," shared one employee who has dedicated over a decade to the casino, as reported by TDM.

Another anonymous employee, reflecting on the uncertainty, expressed anxiety about adapting to new roles if operational changes occur.

"I'm concerned about my ability to handle a new job," they stated.

The transition has already resulted in displacement for some, with colleagues being transferred to unrelated departments, such as kitchens, while others, particularly older workers, have opted for early retirement.



The operational model for satellite casinos is poised for a significant shift, restricting them to earning only fixed management fees starting next year.

This change raises concerns about financial viability; some managers argue that if these fees are set at unsustainable levels, it could impede their ability to repay bank loans. To ensure sustainability, they are advocating for rental prices to be aligned with operational performance.

Lawmaker Lei Leong Wong emphasized the broader implications, noting that the closure of satellite casinos could impact not only employees but also surrounding small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). "Business owners near the

satellite casinos are also worried," Wong said.

Wong urged the government to announce a clear plan to safeguard job opportunities for affected workers and to consider the economic ripple effects on the community.

While gaming concessionaires are responsible for employees under their contracts, many satellite casino workers are employed by contractors, leaving them in a precarious position.

Adding to the discussion, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai spoke about the handling of satellite casinos, emphasizing the contractual obligations of gaming concessionaires in managing these establishments. He stated, "I believe gaming con-

cessionaires will coordinate well with satellite casino operators. Workers of satellite casinos are sent to work there by gaming concessionaires. They are supposed to have an arrangement to take over them." He also mentioned that if gaming concessionaires require assistance, the SAR government would be ready to help.

Sam clarified, "Of course, gaming concessionaires will have their business judgment in dealing with these workers. If they need help from the SAR government, we will provide them help. Will the SAR government intervene in their discussion? It's more on the gaming concessionaires. There are supposed to be contracts. Also, they are supposed to have certain antici-

ations during the transition period. They should consider how to deal with it."

The concerns extend beyond the casino workers themselves.

As reported last week, Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak has also voiced apprehension about the potential closure of satellite casinos, emphasizing the social and economic ramifications.

During a press conference on the 2024 crime report last week, Wong stated that the government is closely monitoring the situation, particularly its impact on employment and nearby businesses. He noted that while the issue is not currently a public security concern, it could evolve into one if not addressed promptly.

Lawmakers affiliated with the Macau Federation of Trade Unions, including Leong Sun Iok, Ella Lei, and José Pereira Coutinho, have echoed these concerns. They highlighted the significant impact on businesses in the ZAPE area following the closure of seven satellite casinos two years ago and warned that the loss of another 11 venues could devastate the local economy.

Pereira Coutinho has called for an extension of the transition deadline, while Lei and Leong have urged gaming concessionaires to find solutions, such as acquiring the casinos or reintegrating displaced workers into other properties.

SECURITY

Wong Sio Chak considers amending law after filming accident

RENATO MARQUES

The Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, has admitted to considering amendments to the current law to grant the government more power to prosecute individuals and entities that disregard authorities' advice during filming sessions on public streets.

Wong addressed the issue following media inquiries regarding an incident last week, in which 12 people were injured during the filming of a street pursuit scene on Rua do Seminário.

The media questioned whether authorities were considering prosecuting the filming team for failing



to follow safety instructions. According to the government's legal analysis, Wong stated that there is no legal basis for prosecution since the accident occurred on a "closed-to-traffic" street, which is treated as private property under

the law. Although authorities claim the vehicles' speed was "not that high," Wong pointed out that the police, after assessing the scene before issuing the filming permit, imposed safety requirements that the crew

did not fully adhere to. He also noted that the injuries were minor and not directly caused by the car crash. "The injured people were not hit by the car but fell while trying to escape, tripping, hitting walls, and suffering similar

minor accidents," he explained.

"We do not permit reckless or unsafe driving. Following this incident, we contacted the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), which subsequently suspended the filming license."

While considering amendments to the law, Wong emphasized the need for a balanced approach to avoid excessively strict regulations that could harm Macau's reputation and discourage filmmakers from choosing the city as a filming location. Such restrictions, he noted, would contradict the government's efforts to promote Macau as a movie-friendly destination.

VISA EASING LEADS TO FEWER OVERSTAYS

At the same time, Wong highlighted that recent measures facilitating mainland residents' access to visas for Macau have significantly reduced cases of illegal immigration and overstaying.

According to official statistics, cases of illegal immigration among mainland residents dropped by 33.1% in 2024, while instances among foreigners fell by 42.3%. Additionally, overstaying cases among mainland residents holding individual visas decreased by 39.6%.

"[The reduction] is directly related to the visa-easing policies. If you can easily obtain a visa to Macau, there is no need to stay illegally," Wong stated. He added that "nowadays, mainland residents can obtain visas more easily, and Zhuhai residents can visit Macau more frequently. Previously, each visa allowed only one entry, but now Zhuhai residents can use their visas to visit Macau at least once per week. As a result, the number of illegal immigrants and overstayers has decreased."

MACAU GP

FIA unveils new 'time attack' racing format for World GT cup

RENATO MARQUES

THE FIA GT World Cup, set to take place in Macau this November, will introduce a new qualifying format, which was unveiled at the latest World Motor Sport Council meeting.

The "Super Pole" session will serve as a second qualifying round, featuring the top 10 fastest drivers from the initial session. A key change is that in the Super Pole, racers will have two individual flying laps on a fresh set of tires, allowing them to push for their best lap around the Guia Circuit without interference from other drivers or yellow flags.

The concept of this "Time Attack" session is not new, having been suggested multiple times in the past. GT3 cars often struggle to fully exploit their performance on the narrow Guia track, making the revised format a welcome change.

The FIA GT Commission stated: "Following an in-depth revision incorporating competitors' feedback, the qualifying format of the FIA GT World Cup has been revised. In addition to the 30-minute qualifying session known from previous editions (Q1), a second segment

(Q2), reserved for the top ten drivers from the first session, has been added."

The rest of the event schedule remains unchanged, featuring a 12-lap qualifying race on Saturday, followed by the 16-lap FIA GT World Cup-deciding main race on Sunday.

Two-time FIA GT World Cup winner and reigning champion Maro Engel praised the update, saying, "It's a great idea to introduce the Super Pole session in Macau. This will be one of the most spectacular and exciting sessions of the season, and it should also ensure sporting fairness. The fans have a lot to look forward to."

Similarly, last year's qualifying race winner and two-time main race winner (2019 and 2023), Raffaele Marciello, added, "In Macau, it was always tricky to have a clean lap. With this new format, you won't hear the excuse of traffic or a red flag. Having only two laps will be very challenging, but now the fastest guy will probably be on pole!"

The eighth edition of the FIA GT World Cup, held as part of the Macau Grand Prix, will take place on November 13-16 on the streets of Macau.



RENATO MARQUES

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POLY MGM MUSEUM Collaborates with Nanjing Yunjin Brocade Museum to Promote Intangible Cultural Heritage



Since the opening of POLY MGM MUSEUM, it has played a crucial role in cultural exchange, fostering the mutual learning of international art treasures, intangible heritage techniques, and cultural stories. The POLY MGM MUSEUM recently co-organized the Museums Exchange Program — "Yunjin Brocade — A Conversation on Intangible Cultural Heritage and Innovation" with the Nanjing Yunjin Brocade Museum. Featuring Jian Mingwei, the Director

of Nanjing Yunjin Brocade Museum, and Zhou Shuangxi, the national-level inheritor of the Nanjing Yunjin weaving technique, an intangible cultural heritage of mankind, this event has facilitated in-depth discussions among nearly 100 participants, with the focus on the protection, inheritance, innovation, and contemporary value of Yunjin brocade.

The collaboration of these two museums began with the current inaugural exhibition of the POLY MGM MUSEUM, "The Maritime Silk Road — Discover the Mystical Seas and Encounter the Treasures of the Ancient Trade Route", featuring a precious brocade work titled "Silk Road Splendor" created by Zhou Shuangxi, a prized collectable of the Nanjing Yunjin Brocade Museum. As the leading brocade among China's three famous brocades, Nanjing Yunjin embodies a thousand-year-old Chinese civilization and is a precious intangible cultural heritage. To boost diverse cultural and artistic interactions between the two cities, the Nanjing Yunjin Brocade Museum gifted two brocade artworks, co-created by Zhou Shuangxi, to the POLY MGM MUSEUM. These works depict natural landscapes and celebrate the beautiful mountains and rivers of China, thereby strengthening the friendship between the two places. Jian Mingwei hopes to extend the modern artistic power of Nanjing Yunjin with these two signature brocade artworks, while showcasing the nation's great craftsmanship and innovation to spread Chinese cultural stories more widely.



During the event, Zhou Shuangxi highlighted the importance of exhibitions like "Silk Road Splendor", which allows more people to appreciate China's intangible cultural heritage and helps its inheritance and development. He also stressed the preservation of Yunjin Brocade requires not only more people's deep understanding and learning, but also the transmission of the cultural spirit behind it.

As museums serve as essential platforms for promoting regional culture to a broader audience, the POLY MGM MUSEUM plans to continue launching exhibitions and extension activities, including seminars, inter-museum exchange programs, and workshops, to further enhance worldwide cultural communications.



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POLITICS

'Two sessions' to focus on economic growth, innovation and policy shifts

CHINA'S national "two sessions," a key political event shaping the country's policy direction, are set to convene in Beijing this week against the backdrop of a complex and challenging domestic and global environment.

The annual session of the top political advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, will commence tomorrow. The session of the top legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC), will open on Wednesday.

The Chinese premier, top legislator, top political advisor, chief justice, and top procurator will present work reports. Lawmakers will review the government's annual budget and development plan. They will deliberate an amendment to the law on deputies to the NPC and local people's congresses.

On the sidelines of the event, ministers from various government departments will engage with the public through interviews and press conferences, clarifying policies and responding to pressing concerns.

The "two sessions" serve as a critical window to observe China's development plan for the coming year. Decisions and policy announcements made here will not only affect the lives of 1.4 billion Chinese but also have an impact outside the country's borders.

So, what can be expected from this year's "two sessions"?

GROWTH TARGET FOR 2025

Typically, the GDP growth target set in the government work report is one of the most closely watched figures. As China's economy shifts toward high-quality development, GDP is not the sole measure of the economy. But it remains an important indicator.

In 2024, China achieved its growth target of around 5 percent, thanks in large part to a series of significant macroeconomic measures introduced to offset economic downturn pressure.

GDP growth serves as a cornerstone metric with profound and wide-ranging significance. Despite the challenges China's economy has faced in recent years, it is projected to contribute about 30 percent of global economic growth in 2024, making it the largest source of growth for the world economy.

INCREMENTAL POLICIES

To achieve its growth target, China will roll out more targeted policies to stimulate economic activity. The government work report is expected to announce policy measu-



res to ensure the goal is met.

China has already signaled a shift in its macroeconomic stance. At the Central Economic Work Conference last December, policymakers pledged to roll out more proactive macro policies in 2025. Notably, they decided to adopt a "moderately loose" monetary policy, marking a significant departure from the "prudent" approach over the past 14 years.

The meeting outlined nine key priorities, with boosting consumption at the forefront. This reflects China's emphasis on domestic demand as a top economic priority. In 2025, large-scale equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade-in programs are expected to be promoted with greater intensity and in a broader scope.

According to Finance Minister Lan Fo'an, China in 2025 will actively use the room for a higher deficit, increase the issuance of local government special-purpose bonds, continue to issue ultra-long special treasury bonds, and increase transfer payments from the central government to local governments. The specifics of these plans will also be a key focus of this year's "two sessions."

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LEADERS, LEGISLATORS, ADVISORS

During the "two sessions," Chinese leaders, who are NPC deputies themselves, will interact with their fellow lawmakers at group deliberations. They will also interact with

political advisors to discuss hotspot topics that matter most to state governance.

These interactions serve as a window for observing how the central leadership stays informed about grassroots realities. This is a defining feature of Chinese democracy, often described in contemporary discourse as whole-process people's democracy.

In recent years, President Xi Jinping, a deputy of Jiangsu province's delegation to the 14th NPC, has typically participated in the delegation's deliberations.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, also attended the meetings of the NPC delegation of the armed forces and joined group discussions of political advisors from various sectors.

During these interactions, Xi emphasized key priorities such as supporting the growth of the private sector and private enterprises, accelerating digital economy development, and advancing high-level opening-up -- all crucial to China's economic and social progress.

FOREIGN POLICY

The "two sessions" also shed light on China's foreign policy, as the foreign minister typically holds a press conference on the sidelines of the meetings.

Last year, Foreign Minister Wang Yi answered 21 questions during a 90-minute press

conference, with journalists from across the world participating.

The foreign minister touched on various regional and international hotspot issues, such as the Ukraine crisis and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He also expounded on China's foreign policies toward Russia, the United States, Europe, and Global South countries.

During this year's "two sessions," China's propositions on international relations are particularly noteworthy against the backdrop of a rapidly changing and turbulent global landscape.

AI, INNOVATION

Without a doubt, technological innovation will be a key focus during this year's "two sessions," with the artificial intelligence (AI) industry very likely to take center stage.

Over the past month, Chinese tech start-up DeepSeek sent shockwaves through the global AI industry and capital markets by introducing an open-source and popular chatbot.

Domestically, companies such as Tencent, Baidu, and BYD have begun integrating DeepSeek into their products. Some local governments have also announced collaborations with the DeepSeek AI model to enhance public ser-

vices, while others have organized training sessions to help officials and business professionals better understand the development and applications of DeepSeek and other AI technologies.

In fact, AI has already emerged as one of the hottest topics at many of this year's provincial-level "two sessions." Many AI-related plans mentioned in provincial government work reports focus on building innovation platforms, promoting deeper industry integration, and improving policy frameworks.

It's important to note that the rise of innovations like DeepSeek reflects China's commitment to taking the lead in technological advancements and its broader strategic focus on talent cultivation, innovation-friendly environment improvements, and the nurturing of non-public investments. These elements are expected to be underscored during the "two sessions."

Additionally, the sessions provide a crucial platform for lawmakers and political advisors to offer suggestions and foster broad consensus on national development. Some of them are corporate executives and leading researchers. What AI-related proposals and suggestions they will present will be a major point of interest for China watchers. **MDT/CHINADAILY**

INDONESIA

Millions of Muslims mark the start of the holy month of Ramadan

NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA

MUSLIMS in Indonesia are shopping for sweets and new clothes and taking part in traditional festivities as millions observe the holy month of Ramadan, which started on Saturday.

Celebrations in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country range from colorful nighttime parades and cleaning family graves to preparing food for predawn breakfasts and elaborate post-sundown meals known as "iftars."

Each region in the vast archipelago nation of 17,000 islands has its own way to mark the start of Ramadan, when Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse from sunrise until sunset for the whole month.

Even a tiny sip of water or a puff of smoke is enough to invalidate the fast. At night, family and friends gather and feast in a festive atmosphere.

Religious Affairs Minister Nasrudin Umar announced on Friday that Ramadan will begin on Saturday, after the sighting of the crescent moon was confirmed by Islamic astronomy observers in Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh.

Shortly after the announcement, mosques flooded with devotees offering evening prayers known as "tarawih" on the first



eve of Ramadan. In Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia, tens of thousands of worshippers crammed together shoulder-to-shoulder.

The daylong fasting is aimed at bringing the faithful closer to God and reminding them of the suffering of the poor. Muslims are expected to strictly observe daily prayers and engage in heightened religious contemplation. They are also urged to refrain from gossip, fighting or cursing during the holy month.

Flares, drums and tradition
Samsul Anwar, his wife and their 8-year-old nephew were

among hundreds of people taking part in a torchlight parade along the streets of their neighborhood in Tangerang, a city just outside the capital of Jakarta, on Wednesday after evening prayers.

They carried torches, lit flares and played Islamic songs accompanied by the beat of rebana, the Arabic handheld percussion instrument, as they walked along the cramped streets of the densely populated neighborhood.

"Every year we welcome Ramadan with a tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation," said Anwar.

Chinese Indonesian communi-

ties also participated in the parade by performing the vibrant "barongsai" or "lion dance," a prominent part of Chinese New Year celebration, to the sound of drums and trumpets.

The barongsai performance "was also held to show unity between the religious communities of Chinese and Muslim, aiming to increase religious tolerance," Anwar said.

Cost of living anxieties

It's also an exciting time for business. Hotels, restaurants and cafes all prepare special Ramadan promotions, and shoppers flock to shopping centers for new clo-

thes and home decorations for the holiday of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan. Children often receive new clothes and gifts.

However, some Muslims worry how they will cope financially during Ramadan this year amid soaring prices.

"Everything to do with cooking is rising (in cost) day by day," said Asih Mulyawati, a mother of two who lives in Jakarta's outskirts of Tangerang. "I worry this situation will impact Ramadan celebrations."

Despite soaring food prices in the past month, popular markets such as Tanah Abang in Jakarta were teeming with shoppers buying clothes, shoes, cookies and sweets before the holiday.

Indonesia's Trade Ministry has said prices of imported staple foods including wheat, sugar, beef and soybeans have increased sharply this year as a result of rising global commodity prices and supply chain disruptions.

But many people say the rise in prices not only impacts imported foods but also local commodities like rice, eggs, chili, palm oil and onions. Many also blame the government for rising gas and electricity prices.

"The current gloomy economic situation and extreme weather recently also contribute to the soaring prices and the weakening of people's purchasing power," said Heru Tatok, a trader in Jakarta's Pasar Senen market. **MDT/AP**

KOREAS

US aircraft carrier arrives in South Korea, days after North Korea test-fired missiles

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

A U.S. aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea yesterday in a show of force, days after North Korea test-launched cruise missiles to demonstrate its counterattack capabilities.

The arrival of the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group at the South Korean port of Busan was meant to display a solid U.S.-South Korean military alliance in the face of persistent North Korean threats, and boost

interoperability of the allies' combined assets, the South Korean navy said in a statement.

It said it was the first U.S. aircraft carrier to travel to South Korea since June.

The deployment of the carrier is expected to infuriate North Korea, which views temporary deployments of such powerful U.S. military assets as major security threats. North Korea has responded to some of the past deployments of U.S. aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and



The USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier is escorted into a navy port in Busan, South Korea, yesterday

nuclear-powered submarines with missile tests.

Since his Jan. 20 inauguration, President Do-

nald Trump has said he will reach out to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un again to revive diplo-

macy. North Korea hasn't directly responded to Trump's overture but alleged U.S.-led hostilities against North Korea have intensified since Trump's inauguration.

North Korea said Friday it test-fired strategic cruise missiles earlier last week to inform its adversaries of its military's counterattack capability and the readiness of its nuclear operations. After watching the launches, the North's fourth missile testing event this year, Kim ordered his military to be

fully ready to use its nuclear weapons.

Experts say Kim won't likely accept Trump's overture anytime soon as he is now focusing on his support of Russia's war against Ukraine with provision of weapons and troops. They say Kim could consider resuming diplomacy with Trump when he thinks he cannot maintain his country's current booming cooperation with Russia.

Kim and Trump met three times from 2018-19 during Trump's first term to discuss the future of North Korea's nuclear program. Their high-stakes diplomacy eventually collapsed due to wrangling over U.S.-led economic sanctions on North Korea. **MDT/AP**

European leaders pledge to stand by Ukraine after confrontational Oval Office meeting with Trump

STEFANIE DAZIO & SUSIE BLANN, BERLIN

EUROPEAN leaders pledged late Friday to stand by Ukraine in the wake of the contentious Oval Office meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, with their statements in support of their neighbor on the continent ensuring a deepening transatlantic rift.

European leaders already were shaken by Vance's speech to the Munich Security Conference two weeks ago in which he lectured them about the state of their democracy. As prime ministers and presidents across the continent scrambled to respond, they have held a series of emergency summits to discuss security.

Another major summit was scheduled yesterday in London, hosted by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer. More than a dozen European and EU leaders, including Zelenskyy, will gather for a meeting meant to drive forward action on Ukraine and security.

Starmer spoke with both Trump and Zelenskyy on Friday and maintained his strong support for Ukraine, his office said in a statement.

"He retains unwavering support for Ukraine, and is doing all he can to find a path forward to a lasting peace based on sovereignty and security for Ukraine," the statement said.

The European leaders' comments Friday largely did not mention Trump or Vance, but rather sought to assure Ukraine of their support as the war with Russia enters its fourth year. Zelenskyy re-posted their comments on X, writing "thank you for your support" to each — likely a dig at the Trump administration.

During the extraordinary meeting Friday in Washington, Trump chided Zelenskyy after Vance, one of the administration's most skeptical voices on Ukraine, said he was being disrespectful for debating Trump in the Oval Office in front of the American media.



President Donald Trump, right, meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office at the White House, Friday

"Have you said 'thank you' once?" Vance asked Zelenskyy.

The Ukrainian president said four times during the course of their exchange that he was thankful or had already expressed his thanks.

Trump then called off the signing of a minerals deal that he said would have moved Ukraine closer to ending its war with Russia. Zelenskyy left the White House shortly after Trump shouted at him, showing open disdain. The White House said the Ukrainian delegation was told to leave.

A senior Ukrainian official said Zelenskyy spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte and President of the European Council Antonio Costa after he left the White House, describing all the conversations as "supportive" of the Ukrainian leader. The official, who is familiar with the matter, requested anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly.

Italy's Premier Giorgia Meloni, however, proposed "an immediate summit" between the United States and European allies "to speak frankly about how we intend to face today's great challenges, starting with Ukraine." She urged the West to stay united.

"Every division of the West makes us all weaker and favors those who would like to see the decline of our civilization," she said. "A division would not benefit anyone."

Some posts on X were directed to Zelenskyy. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told him "your dignity honors the bravery of the Ukrainian people. Be strong, be brave, be fearless. You are never alone, dear President."

And Friedrich Merz, Germany's likely next chancellor, wrote: "Dear Volodymyr @zelenskyyua, we stand with #Ukraine in good and in testing times. We must never confuse aggressor and victim in this terrible war."

The victory for Merz's party yesterday in Germany's national election ensured that Ukraine has an even stronger supporter in the European Union's largest country. Merz during the campaign promised to unite Europe in the face of challenges from both Russia and the United States.

But Alice Weidel, co-leader of the far-right, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party and one of Merz's challengers, wrote "Historic. Trump & Vance!" on X with a link to a video of the meeting. AfD's platform calls for the immediate lifting of sanctions against Russia and opposes weapons deliveries to Ukraine. Weidel also met with Vance in Munich.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán praised Trump for his conduct in the Oval Office, casting Zelenskyy as working against peace in his own country.

"Strong men make peace, weak men make war," Orbán

wrote on X. "Today President Donald Trump stood bravely for peace. Even if it was difficult for many to digest. Thank you, Mr. President!"

Orbán is a consistent backer of the Kremlin and has been outspokenly antagonistic against neighboring Ukraine. After winning the last Hungarian elections in 2022, less than six weeks after Russia's full-scale invasion, he cited Zelenskyy as one of the opponents he had defeated in the campaign.

Meanwhile in Estonia, which borders Russia, Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said the only obstacle to peace is Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to continue the war.

"It is time for Europe to step up," Tsahkna said in a statement. "We do not need to wait for something else to happen; Europe has enough resources, including Russia's frozen assets, to enable Ukraine to continue fighting."

And Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's reminded Ukraine of what's at stake for the Nordic and Baltic countries, and others, if Russia's aggression spreads.

"You are not only fighting for your freedom but also for all of Europe's," Kristersson wrote on X. European officials from Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Spain, among others, also offered their support to Ukraine. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1974 TURKISH JET CRASHES KILLING 345



A Turkish Airlines DC10 has crashed near Paris killing all 345 people on board.

The plane was on a regular flight from Ankara to London via Paris. It came down just minutes after take-off at 1235 GMT, scything a mile-long trail through the forest of Ermenonville.

Among the victims were 200 passengers, many of them British, who had been transferred from British Airways flights cancelled because of a strike by engineers at London airport.

No-one was killed on the ground, although the forest is popular with walkers.

Only blackened stumps of trees remained where the pilot had probably attempted a crash landing. Bits of clothing and other wreckage from the plane were strewn across the whole area.

Hundreds of rescue workers, from the Red Cross, Protection Civile as well as fire and ambulance crews, were on the scene within half an hour.

But there was no-one to be rescued. All that remained to be done was to collect the bodies and take them to the church of St Pierre at Senlis.

From there, soldiers transferred the bodies onto army vehicles during the night to be driven to the medical centre in Paris, where they will be examined by forensic scientists.

Eyewitnesses in the nearby village of St Pathu said they heard an explosion and saw flames coming from the plane long before it plunged into the forest.

Some bodies were found close to the village, about six miles from the crash site, which also suggests the plane may have exploded in mid-air.

Crash investigators looking for clues to the world's worst air disaster to date will start by studying the jet's engines. They are also looking for the black box flight recorder.

The possibility of sabotage has not been discounted.

Among the victims were 17 members of Bury St Edmunds rugby club, returning from a trip to Paris.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

British trade union leader James Conway, general secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, an Olympic silver medalist and four leading London models were among those killed in the crash. The final death toll was 346.

The Paris crash was the worst in aviation history up to this date and the first involving a fully-loaded wide-bodied jet since they had entered passenger service four years before. The accident was probably caused by a cargo door coming open during the flight, leading to a sudden loss of pressure inside the cabin and causing part of the flooring to collapse which damaged the controls and made it impossible for the crew to regain control.

An almost identical accident had happened in June 1972 when a DC10 lost its rear cargo door, causing the floor to buckle and jam some of the controls. Safety recommendations made following that crash had not been implemented.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

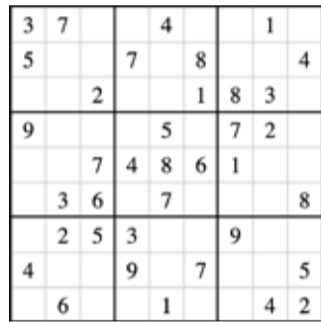
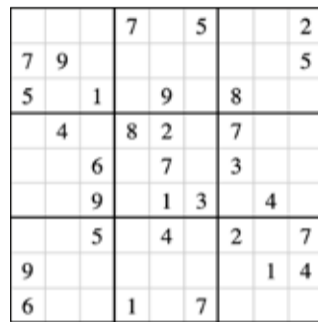

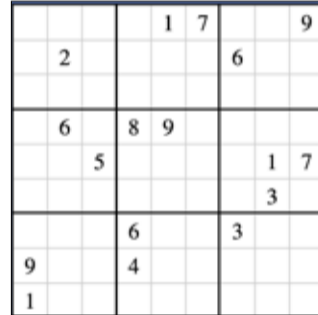
YOUR STARS

| | |
|--|--|
|  ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Stick to tried-and-tested personal styles, with Venus stationing retrograde in your sign over five weeks. Do what worked before. Beauty feeds you. Nurture yourself. |  TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Listen to your angels and ancestors. Familiar pathways beckon with, Venus retrograde for five weeks. Meditate and look within. Foster compassion. Appreciate beauty. |
|  GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Share and connect. Strengthen lasting bonds and relationships, with Venus retrograde for five weeks. Old friends and lovers can reappear. Get nostalgic together. |  CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Maintain your position. Clean messes. Prioritize professional basics over five weeks, with Venus retrograde. Look back to what worked before. Handle urgent matters. |
|  LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Practice and refine your studies. Return to familiar and favorite topics and destinations, with Venus retrograde. Find comfort and beauty in tradition and ritual. |  VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Conserve resources. Reduce waste. Collect funds from work done previously, with Venus retrograde in Aries. Grow savings over five weeks. Guard heirlooms and treasures. |
|  LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Prosper through collaborative habits. Reminisce with your partner. Nostalgic reflection reveals valuable solutions, with Venus retrograde for five weeks. Imagine a satisfying future. |  SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Stick to tested methods, techniques and recipes. Prioritize health and fitness, with Venus retrograde. Hone what you've been doing rather than trying new tricks. |
|  SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Reconnect with beloved people. Look back on what you love, with Venus retrograde. Indulge in retrospection. Share old family photos. Reflect on beauty and passion. |  CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Connect with elders and ancestors. Stick to familiar domestic routines, with Venus retrograde for five weeks. Traditional flavors, activities and colors provide comfort. |
|  AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Reflect on the past. Explore ancient creative wisdom. Over five weeks, with Venus retrograde, share traditions, histories and retrospective works. Artistic expression flourishes. |  PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Reduce expenses for now. Revise budgets, expectations and marketing plans over five weeks, with Venus retrograde. Stick to conservative, low-risk investments. Share resources. |

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

| | |
|---|--|
| EASY  | EASY+  |
| MEDIUM  | HARD  |

WEATHER

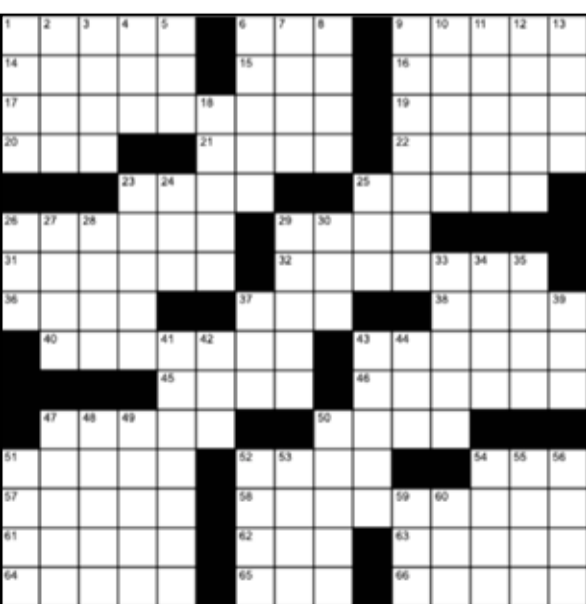
| | MIN | MAX | CONDITION |
|--------------|-----|-----|---------------|
| CHINA | | | |
| Beijing | -2 | 8 | cloudy |
| Changchun | -11 | 1 | fine |
| Chengdu | 9 | 15 | rain |
| Chongqing | 13 | 16 | cloudy |
| Fuzhou | 18 | 27 | overcast |
| Guangzhou | 20 | 28 | thunderstorms |
| Guiyang | 9 | 18 | cloudy |
| Haikou | 22 | 31 | thunderstorms |
| Hangzhou | 10 | 12 | rain |
| Harbin | -19 | -2 | fine |
| Hefei | 2 | 3 | rain |
| Nanjing | 7 | 8 | rain |
| Shanghai | 10 | 12 | rain |
| Taipei | 18 | 23 | overcast |
| Wuhan | 3 | 4 | rain |
| Hong Kong | 21 | 23 | rain |
| WORLD | | | |
| Moscow | -1 | 2 | snow |
| Frankfurt | -2 | 10 | sunny |
| Paris | 1 | 10 | sunny |
| London | -1 | 9 | sunny |
| New York | -1 | 4 | sunny |

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Coral colonies; 6- U of U athlete; 9- Kind of metabolism; 14- Paella pots; 15- Mus. slow-up; 16- Alert, knowing; 17- Permissible; 19- Bowling alley divisions; 20- ___ Boot; 21- Scottish refusals; 22- Finds pleasing; 23- Autograph; 25- Birth-related; 26- Takes by theft; 29- Yes, there is ___; 31- Outcome; 32- Marine crustacean; 36- ___ epic scale; 37- Pea holder; 38- Poker variety; 40- Exhortation; 43- Declared; 45- French friend; 46- Fondle; 47- Line of cliffs; 50- Torn clothing; 51- Author Dahl; 52- Honeycomb unit; 54- Get the picture; 57- Excuse; 58- Ghostly; 61- It's a wrap; 62- Mag. staffers; 63- Temporary stop; 64- Lying flat; 65- Conscription org.; 66- Toned down;

DOWN 1- Highway; 2- Singer Fitzgerald; 3- Architectural annexes; 4- ___ Schwarz; 5- Compass reading; 6- Living in a city; 7- Wall covering slab for a kitchen or bathroom; 8- French summers; 9- Sentimental songs; 10- Expect; 11- Decaf brand; 12- Staggering; 13- Discounted by; 18- Emo anxiety; 23- Sweatbox; 24- Unwell; 25- San Francisco's ___ Hill; 26- Hit-show sign; 27- Change for a fifty; 28- Son of Isaac; 29- Unescorted; 30- Deity; 33- Romanov rulers; 34- Novel ending?; 35- Regrets; 37- Hawaiian food; 39- Driller's deg.; 41- Small fish; 42- Little devil; 43- Milan's La ___; 44- Children's game; 47- Of the sun; 48- City on the Nile; 49- Composer Berg; 50- Like non-oyster months; 51- Grate; 52- Billiard implements; 53- Wraps up; 54- Closed; 55- Otherwise; 56- Watched warily; 59- LP speed; 60- Greek cross;

Friday's solution

Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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Nam Long
 HKD 6,988,000 4 bed 2 bath



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



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

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



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



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



Chun Leong (Taipa)
2 bed 1 bath
68.28 m² / 735 ft² | HKD 4,480,000



Ocean Garden Cattleya Court (Taipa)
2 bed 2 bath
73.95 m² / 796 ft² | HKD 6,980,000

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Rugby league returns to Vegas; tries galore, big hits and a cliff-hanger finish

RUGBY league returned to Las Vegas yesterday in its continuing mission to convert Americans to football without pads, drawing 50,000 fans to Allegiant stadium where the grit of the quintessential Australian sport mixed with the glamor of the entertainment capital.

Curious locals mixed with traveling fans of teams from Australia, New Zealand and England on a day that saw four matches: two from Australia's National Rugby League (NRL), one from England's Super League and a women's international between world champion Australia and England.

The day delivered tries galore, big hits and a cliff-hanger finale.

The NRL has committed until 2028 to play regular season matches in Las Vegas as part of a strategic plan to win an international audience for the sport.

Australia has been courting the US market since 1987 when it played a State of Origin match between New South Wales and Queensland in Long Beach. Sun-



Penrith Panthers Daine Laurie dives across the line to score a try at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, Saturday

day's crowd was an improvement on last season when 40,746 people watched the Manly Sea Eagles play the South Sydney Rabbitohs and the Sydney Roosters play the Brisbane Broncos.

RAIDERS RAMPANT

Seb Kris scored the first try of the 2025 season after six minutes and added another as the Canberra Raiders eased to a 30-8 win over the New Zealand Warriors.

Xavier Savage also scored a

double and Matthew Timoko added a try from a sharp, well-directed Raiders attack. Kurt Capewell and Roger Tuivasa-Sheck scored tries for the Warriors who made too many handling errors to produce a sustained attacking threat.

The Warriors also were lax on defense, missing 40 tackles in the opening match of the NRL season.

PANTHERS WIN THRILLER AGAINST SHARKS

Reigning premiers the Penrith Panthers delivered a cliff-hanger

finale, producing a 75th minute try to Daine Laurie to clinch a 28-22 win over the Cronulla Sharks.

The Panthers led 12-10 at half-time and 22-10 after 52 minutes with tries to Isiah Yeo, Izack Tago, Laurie and Paul Alamoti. But the Sharks rallied strongly with second half tries to Kayal Iro and Addin Fonua-Blake to cut the lead to two points.

Laurie's late try allowed the Panther's to celebrate coach Ivan Cleary's 55th birthday in Vegas.

Warriors over Wolves

The Wigan Warriors beat the Warrington Wolves 38-24 in an English Super League match.

Wigan led 24-0 at halftime with tries to Tyler Dupree, Abbas Miski, Bevan French and Harry Smith in the repeat of last year's Challenge Cup final. Jai Field, Jake Wardle, Luke Thompson and Liam Marshall added second half tries as the United States became the seventh country to host a Super League match.

JILLAROOS EXCEL

Halfback Tarryn Aiken pulled the strings as the Australian Jilla-

roos crushed England 90-4 in the women's international.

Aiken produced an extraordinary play-making performance, picking England apart and laying on five tries for Tamika Upton, including a first half hat-trick. Julia Robinson and Jessica Sergis also scored hat-tricks in a 17 tries to one victory. England's only try was scored by Georgia Roche 34 seconds from fulltime.

England prop Vicky Whitfield was taken to hospital after a second half head clash with Sarah Togatuki which stopped the game for 10 minutes.

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS

It wouldn't be NRL Las Vegas without some naughtiness. Raiders players Hudson Young and Morgan Smithies were forced to apologize after being temporarily evicted from their hotel Thursday over a scuffle involving an inflatable baseball bat.

"Obviously things got a little bit out of hand on Thursday night," Young said. "I'm embarrassed for myself, my teammates, the NRL and the game." MDT/AP

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Paediatric Surgery : Dr. Yeung Chung Kwong

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Orthopaedic Surgery & Sports Medicine : Dr. Lam Kun Kuan

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OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

DPP WILL HAVE TO PAY AN INCREASINGLY HIGHER PRICE TO CONTINUE ITS DOOMED PAYCHECK POLICY

Although the cross-strait situation remains stable, thanks to the strategic restraint Beijing exercises, the secessionist-minded Democratic Progressive Party authorities on Taiwan island have never stopped trying to make waves by proving their value to their external backers.

With the return of the “America first” fixated Donald Trump administration, the Lai Ching-te authorities of the island are focused on using economic interests to woo the administration’s support for their secessionist cause. In their latest move in that regard, the DPP unveiled a plan to build a “non-red supply chain” with the United States at the expense of the island’s competitive industry and development prospects.

Taiwan’s semiconductor sector and dominant enterprises, the core competitiveness of the island, are to be employed as the means to meet their narrow ends.

The eagerness of the Lai authorities to cater to the Trump administration, whose coveting of the island’s semiconductor industry is no secret, with their “paycheck policy” has met with wide opposition of the sector but garnered some “positive” responses from the US administration.

Shortly after Lai pledged to boost investment in the US under the excuse it was responding to the Trump administration’s “global tariff threats”, the US administration released \$5.3 billion in previously frozen foreign aid, including \$870 million in security exemptions for programs in the Chinese island, late last week.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio reaffirmed Washington’s opposition to any change to the “status quo” in the Taiwan Strait, while saying that the US remains committed to its long-standing policies on Taiwan.

Yet the Lai authorities must be aware that the new administration stops short of mentioning such words as “values”, “democracy” or “freedom” that dominated its predecessor’s statements on Taiwan. Instead, the emphasis is on “investment”, “tariffs” and “industries”. That requires the DPP authorities to ceaselessly increase their input and adjust their expectations of the US side.

The shock waves caused by the US’ about-face in its foreign and economic policies over the past month must have kept the Lai authorities in an extremely uneasy state. And the price Ukraine now faces for the US’ support should give the DPP authorities cause for thought as they should realize that the price for the US’ backing has risen steeply.

What the DPP authorities value the most is the US’ reiterating of its “commitment” to “protect Taiwan” in case of “emergency”. But what the US seems to be willing to promise so far is that it will prevent the “emergency” from happening rather than it will protect the island.

So Trump’s refusal to answer a question from the media about whether “the US would allow China to take control of Taiwan by force” ahead of the first official Cabinet meeting of his second term on Wednesday must have dealt a heavy blow to the expectant Lai authorities.

Responding to that question, Trump said, “I never comment on that. I don’t want to ever put myself in that position.” And Taipei’s unease will only have been further heightened by Trump’s claim of his “great relations” with his Chinese counterpart, and the unquestioned openness of the US leader to strengthen economic and trade cooperation with the mainland.

That means, which should also be to the delight of the Trump administration, the Lai authorities will have to raise their stakes in the risky gambling. But the question is after offering even the jewel in the crown of the island’s economy in the first month of the new US administration being in office, what else can they use to pay tribute to their imagined backers in Washington during the rest of their tenure. [Abridged]

SOUTH KOREAN POLICE SUMMON JAPANESE WOMAN FOR KISSING BTS MEMBER WITHOUT CONSENT

THE BUZZ

South Korean police said Friday they are summoning a Japanese woman for questioning over allegedly kissing Jin, a member of the K-pop supergroup BTS, without consent during a free hug event last year.

A police officer who answered the phone at Seoul’s Songpa police station said it requested the woman to appear for questioning over an allegation of sexual harassment. The police station refused to disclose her identity citing privacy.

The station said it had launched an investigation after receiving an online complaint and refused to provide further details because an investigation was under way.

Media reports said that South Korean police were able to confirm the identity of the woman with the help of Japanese police.

The reports said the woman, who is in her 50s, was refusing to appear for questioning.

The woman wrote in an online blog post that “My lips touched his neck. His skin was so soft,” according to Yonhap news agency.



AP PHOTO

ISRAEL CUTS OFF AID TO GAZA IN ATTEMPT TO PRESSURE HAMAS TO ACCEPT NEW CEASEFIRE PROPOSAL

TIA GOLDENBERG & SAMY MAGDY, TEL AVIV

ISRAEL stopped the entry of all goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip yesterday and warned of “additional consequences” if Hamas doesn’t accept a new proposal to extend the first phase of a fragile ceasefire.

Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the truce and said its decision to cut off aid was “cheap extortion, a war crime and a blatant attack” on the truce deal. Both sides stopped short of saying the ceasefire had ended.

The first phase of the ceasefire, which included a surge in humanitarian assistance, expired on Saturday. The two sides have yet to negotiate the second phase, in which Hamas was to release dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout and a lasting ceasefire.

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with

regulations, said the decision to suspend aid was made in coordination with the Trump administration.

Israel says the new proposal is backed by the US

Israel said yesterday that it supports what it described as a proposal from U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff to extend the first phase of the ceasefire through Ramadan — the Muslim holy month of dawn-to-dusk fasting that began over the weekend — and the Jewish Passover holiday, which ends on April 20.

Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire, according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office.

Hamas warned that any attempt to delay or cancel the existing ceasefire agreement would have “humanitarian consequences” for the hostages and reiterated that

the only way to free them was through implementing the deal and negotiating the second phase.

Hamas has said it is willing to free the remaining hostages all at once in Phase 2, but only in return for the release of more Palestinian prisoners, a permanent ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

An Egyptian official said Hamas and Egypt would not accept a new proposal aimed at returning the remaining hostages without ending the war. The official noted that the agreement had called on the two sides to begin negotiations over Phase 2 in early February.

The official, who was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said mediators were trying to resolve the dispute. There was no immediate comment from the United States or Qatar, which along with Egypt has served as a key mediator with Hamas. MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

Uruguay Yamandú Orsi (pictured), a telegenic left-leaning former mayor and history teacher, took office as Uruguay’s new president on Saturday, at the helm of a government that has pledged to strengthen the social safety net while reversing years of economic stagnation.



AP PHOTO

Brazil As Rio de Janeiro’s Carnival celebrations kicked off on Saturday, dozens of dogs dressed as superheroes, clowns and cartoon characters paraded alongside their owners in one of the city’s most beloved canine street parties. About 100 dogs wagged their tails to samba music and socialized at the so-called Blocao street party.



AP PHOTO

UK It was supposed to cap a week of whirlwind diplomacy advancing the prospect of peace in Ukraine. But a summit of European leaders yesterday has been overshadowed by the extraordinary scolding by U.S. President Donald Trump of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on Friday for being ungrateful for U.S. support. More on p8



AP PHOTO

French police said at least three people were killed when a tropical storm packing fierce winds and torrential rains thumped the French Indian Ocean island of Reunion on Friday. Tropical Cyclone Garance brought heavy rain and winds exceeding 200 kilometers per hour, causing floods, power cuts and damage to buildings.