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CHINA LASHES OUT AT G7 OVER STATEMENTS ON MARITIME SECURITY

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China-Pakistan A Chinese shipyard launched a second Hangor-class submarine for Pakistan last week. Part of an eight-submarine deal, the vessel enhances Pakistan's naval capabilities. China supplies over 81% of Pakistan's military imports, strengthening ties amid ongoing regional tensions with India over disputed borders.



EU-China The European Parliament banned Huawei lobbyists last week after Belgian authorities arrested several individuals in a bribery probe. Prosecutors suspect Huawei of influencing lawmakers to favor its commercial interests. The scandal follows previous corruption allegations against EU officials linked to Qatar in 2022.

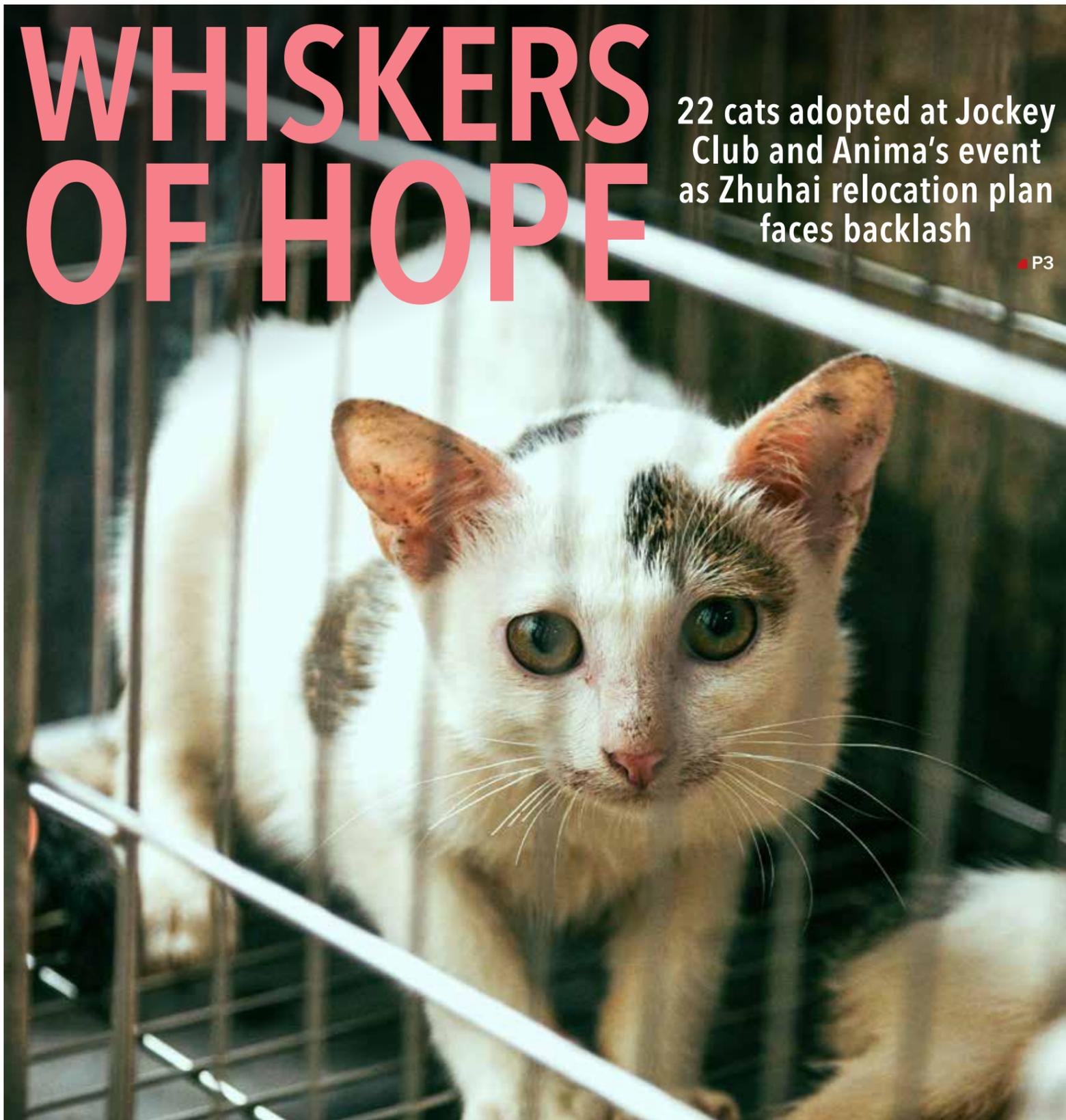


USA The U.S. Senate passed a bill increasing penalties for fentanyl traffickers. The bipartisan HALT Fentanyl Act permanently classifies fentanyl analogs as Schedule 1 drugs. Critics argue it mirrors failed "war on drugs" policies, disproportionately affecting minorities. The bill now heads to the House.



USA-S.Africa Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared South Africa's ambassador to the U.S. "persona non grata". The decision follows Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool's remarks about demographic shifts in America. South Africa condemned the move, emphasizing its commitment to maintaining diplomatic ties with Washington.

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ECONOMY

ASSOCIATION PROJECTS STABLE ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AMID UNEVEN RECOVERY

LYNZY VALLES

THE Macau Economic Association (MEA) has projected a stable outlook for the region's economy despite persistent inconsistencies in key economic indicators.

According to government data, money supply (M2) reached a record MOP786 billion in January, marking a 6.4% year-on-year increase, which indicates ample liquidity. However, domestic demand for loans has weakened, leading to a decline in the overall loan-to-deposit ratio to 78.5%. Meanwhile, the non-performing loan ratio rose to 5.68%, reflecting challenges faced by the banking sector.

Investor and consumer confidence remains subdued due to economic uncertainties.

Although the Hang Seng Index has benefited from growth in mainland China's technology sector, the stock prices of Macau's six major Hong Kong-listed enterprises have remained under pressure.

Meanwhile, despite high vi-



ditor numbers, hotel occupancy, and robust tourism activity reaching, per capita spending has declined.

Last year's annual retail sales fell 14.9% year-on-year.

In the first two months of 2024, under the influence of policies such as Zhuhai and

Hengqin's multiple-entry visas, average daily visitor arrivals reached 113,000, a 10.3% increase. However, the average daily gross gaming revenue only rose by 2.2% to MOP644 million, a more modest increase than expected.

For January and February,

the association's Prosperity Index stood at 6.6 and 6.5, respectively.

Projections indicate that from March to May, the index will likely remain between 6.4 and 6.6, maintaining an overall "stable" economic outlook.

However, industry exper-

ts warn that economic performance in the first quarter may fall short of expectations, requiring careful future assessments.

Preliminary estimates place gross gaming revenue for the first nine days of March at approximately MOP5.75 billion, with a daily average of MOP639 million.

Investment organizations forecast March's total gross gaming revenue to range between MOP19 billion and MOP20 billion, making it unlikely for the first-quarter revenue to reach the SAR government's target of MOP20 billion per month.

Macau also faces external challenges, including global economic uncertainties, U.S. tariff increases, a slowing mainland economy, and Renminbi depreciation.

Additionally, competition from neighboring regions' gaming industries and changing consumption patterns among mainland visitors—particularly reduced spending on luxury goods—pose challenges for the local retail sector.

SPORTS

Kenyan runners dominate Sands10k as Macau's Wang Kun sets new record

LYNZY VALLES

KENYAN runners dominated the 2025 Sands China Macao International 10K, with Vincent Kibet Langat and Betty Sigei claiming victory in the men's and women's categories, both setting new race records.

Meanwhile, Macau's Wang Kun made history, breaking the local record in the local men's division.

Organized by the Sports Bureau, Sands China Ltd., and the General Association of Athletics of Macau, the race took pla-

ce yesterday, starting at Sai Van Lake Square.

The 10K race began at 7 a.m., followed by the Fun Run at 7:45 a.m. Participants crossed Sai Van Bridge, passed through the Cotai Strip, and finished at the Olympic Sports Centre Stadium.

The men's race saw an electrifying finish as Vincent Kibet Langat clocked a record-breaking 28:07.09, edging out Ethiopia's Teresa Nyakola Gela by just 0.11 seconds. Kenyan runner Harrison Wanjiru took third place.

On the women's side, Betty Sigei successfully

defended her title, finishing in 31:23 and setting a new race record. Fellow Kenyans Cintia Chepngeno and Daisilah Jerono completed the podium.

In the Macau athletes' category, Wang Kun delivered a standout performance, winning the men's division with a record time of 31:27.

Wong Chin Wa and Ip Weng Tou followed in second and third place. Hoi Long topped the local women's division with a time of 38:42, with Chao Kin I and Law Kwan Wai rounding out the top three.



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Jockey Club and Anima launch cat adoption initiative following public outcry

VICTORIA CHAN

THE Macau Jockey Club, in collaboration with Anima Macau, hosted a cat adoption event yesterday after canceling plans to relocate nearly 100 stray cats from the racecourse to Zhuhai following public backlash.

The event aimed to find suitable homes for the remaining cats, with animal welfare as the top priority, amid broader concerns about the city's stray animal policies.

The adoption event, held at the former racecourse from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., allowed members of the public to adopt nearly 30 cats, while 60 others were already placed with animal protection groups.

Anima announced the event on its social media on Saturday evening, detailing procedures and requirements for potential adopters.

The Jockey Club's initial plan to relocate the cats to Zhuhai sparked significant controversy, drawing criticism from former workers, volunteers, and the wider community.

Isabel Cheang, a former employee who helped care for the cats, expressed serious concerns about the lack of transparency.

"There is absolutely no supervision. We are worried about them. They were reluctant to announce it until the end," Cheang said in a TDM report.

"So we had no choice but to tell the public about the matter. I cannot watch the cats die. In today's transparent infor-

VICTORIA CHAN



mation age, the best way to address concerns is to be transparent, which stops rumors. However, they could not even do this. The more they cover up the matter, the more people will doubt them."

Another former worker advocated for local adoption, stating, "Other former workers have sent photos to me saying they are looking for people to

adopt cats at the Macau Jockey Club. It's best that someone adopt the cats locally. There is too little protection for them if they are sent to the mainland."

Responding to the controversy, the Jockey Club released a statement confirming it had reached a consensus with Anima to co-organize the adoption event. Anima's executive president, Zoe Tang, had pre-

viously expressed disappointment with the initial relocation plan, calling it "Greyhound Story 2.0" and emphasizing the need for a more humane approach.

"It's very disappointing because it's just like 'Greyhound Story 2.0', you know," Tang said in a TDM report. "We are trying to give it a chance because we have received a call from Miss

Mary Yung, and she is willing to have a place to temporarily house the cats in her area first, and some organizations can help later to rehome them, either individually or in groups."

Lawmaker Ron Lam described the situation as the "tip of the iceberg" of a larger problem, calling for the implementation of the trap-neuter-return (TNR) practice instead of the current trap-neuter-adopt (TNA) approach.

"We have been stressing that the stray animal problem in Macau exists because the SAR government still does not have a comprehensive policy for it," Lam said.

"The TNA practice, which is currently implemented, does not help resolve the issue in the long run. It cannot effectively suppress the number of stray animals on the streets. Therefore, we always say that the government must adopt TNR. Adoption alone cannot solve the problem—it merely covers it up."

The Jockey Club maintained in its statement that it had been working closely with the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) since announcing its closure, submitting monthly reports and ensuring a healthy environment for the cats.

However, previous adoption attempts faced challenges, with some cats struggling to adapt to home environments, resulting in failed adoptions.

At yesterday's event, interested adopters were required to be over 18 years old and bring valid identification documents, proof of address, and photos of their homes' windows showing installed screens.

These measures were implemented to ensure the cats' safety and welfare. The IAM also set up a service counter at the event to assist with ownership registration changes for adopted cats.

IAM issued a statement yesterday that 22 cats had already been adopted by the end of the day.

Jardim da Flora unveils new children's skating rink

THE Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has announced the completion of construction on a new children's skating rink in the Jardim da Flora area, offering a diverse space for children's activities.

According to the IAM, the skating rink, spanning an area of 450 square meters, will be

linked to a children's bicycle and scooter field, creating a hub for various recreational pursuits.

Tam Wai Fong, a spokesperson for the IAM, stated that the decision to convert the former plant maze into a skating rink was made due to the maze's dete-

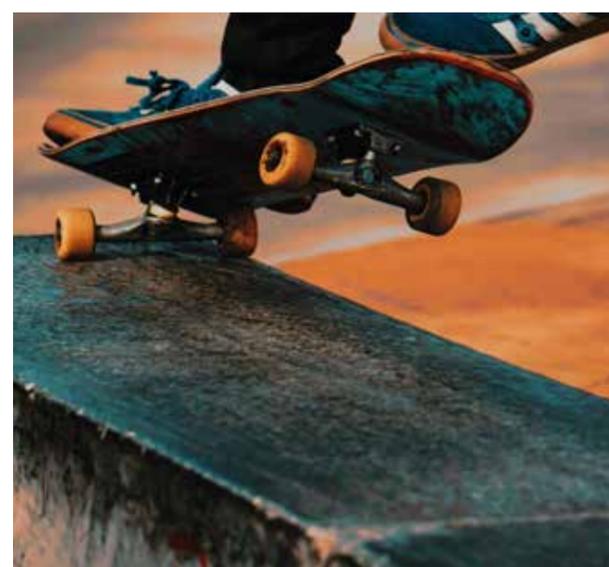
rioration caused by heavy rain and sun exposure.

Furthermore, the IAM revealed that the skating rink is situated atop a water reservoir, which made it challenging to plant trees and build shade facilities in the area. T

he new facility is currently in the final stages,

with the official opening date yet to be announced.

In addition to the skating rink, the IAM has also undertaken the renovation of the Guia Hill Military Tunnel. The institute has carried out painting and maintenance work, as well as improvements to the ventilation system and the replacement of the damaged surveillance and emergency communication equipment. Two groups of tunnels are now open to the public for tourist visits. VC



HOUSING

Soho residence receives occupancy permit after lengthy delay

THE Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) has approved the issuance of an occupancy permit for the Soho Residence building, more than a decade after construction began.

The project faced significant delays due to its association with the Sin Fong Garden controversy. Soho Residence, a 27-story luxury development with 126 units, is located next to Sin Fong Garden—a building that was rebuilt after severe structural issues were discovered in 2012, forcing the evacuation of over 200 residents.

In addition to concerns over poor-quality concrete in Sin Fong Garden, Macau's courts ruled that the company behind Soho Residence was also responsible for the structural damage to the neighboring building.

In a statement released on Saturday, the DSSCU confir-

med that the occupancy permit would be granted to the contractor by Tuesday, allowing for the sale of units in the development.

While construction was completed in August 2024, an inspection revealed structural deficiencies, which have only recently been addressed, according to the bureau.

The DSSCU emphasized the importance of the final inspection stage in the building process, stating that "all completed works must undergo inspection to ensure compliance with the approved project, thereby protecting the rights and interests of residents and consumers."

The bureau also highlighted that the contractor was required to follow recommendations from public services to rectify any deficiencies promptly in order to secure the occupancy permit. **LV**

PUBLIC WORKS

MODERNIZATION OF COLOANE WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT BEGINS

THE modernization works of the Coloane Wastewater Treatment Plant have officially started, aiming to enhance Macau's wastewater treatment capacity.

Upon completion, the plant will treat approximately 65,000 cubic meters of wastewater daily, meeting the highest standard—Level IA—of the National Standard GB18918-2002 for pollutant emissions from wastewater treatment plants.

Some of the highly treated wastewater will be used to produce recycled water, contributing to sustainable water management. The modernization also includes optimizing the odor treatment system to minimize the environmental

impact on air quality in the surrounding area.

The Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) said it will continue to optimize the infrastructure and equipment of wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs), modernizing those that meet appropriate conditions. This will raise the quality of effluent to higher standards.

Various measures will be maintained to ensure the proper functioning of WWTPs, including monitoring operating data, inspecting facilities, holding regular meetings with operating companies, and conducting effluent quality tests by an independent third party, among others. **VC**



POLICY ADDRESS

CE ENGAGES EDUCATION LEADERS TO SHAPE FUTURE POLICIES

VICTORIA CHAN

CHIEF Executive Sam Hou Fai met with representatives of the Educators Association of Macau over the weekend to discuss recommendations for the upcoming Policy Address, emphasizing the need for educational reform in line with national goals.

During the meeting at the Government Headquarters, Chan Hong, president of the Educators Association of Macau, highlighted the recent directive from the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, which aims to transform the nation into a major educational powerhouse by 2035.

Chan urged the Macau government to reassess and enhance its education policies to align with this ambitious framework.

The association presented four key recommendations tailored to Macau's current educational landscape.

These recommendations included fostering unique school functions to promote diversity,



revising the Educational Fund's funding assessment, addressing challenges posed by declining birth rates, and fortifying a nationalistic educational foundation.

In addition to these recommendations, other board members voiced concerns regarding the quality and equity of education, land use for educational facilities, and the promotion of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education.

They stressed the need for improved training for science and technology professionals and enhancements to medical services and complementary educational facilities, particularly in

Zone A of the new landfills.

Sam expressed gratitude for the association's proactive engagement and assured them that their insights would be thoroughly analyzed.

He underscored education's crucial role in societal development, advocating for a student-centered teaching philosophy that prioritizes students' mental and physical health.

Sam called for a comprehensive elevation of educational standards in Macau and a collaborative effort to cultivate innovative professionals suited to meet the evolving demands of society.

MOTORSPORT

MACAU GP WINNER ERNO KOSTAMO LEADS EUROPEAN RIDERS AT NORTH WEST 200

STAFF REPORTER

FORMER Macau Grand Prix winner Erno Kostamo will headline a strong European contingent at this year's Briggs Equipment North West 200, taking place from May 7-10, according to Belfast News Letter.

The Finnish rider, a star of the International Road Racing Championship (IRRC), made his road racing debut in 2016 at Imatra, his home event.

Kostamo first competed at the North West in 2019, securing an 11th-place finish in the Superstock class on a Penz BMW.

Returning last year, the 32-year-old impressed with three top-ten finishes, including fifth and sixth in the Superstock races, sixth in the opening Superbike event, and 10th in the feature NW200 Superbike race. He will race his RSV Motorsport M1000RR BMW in Portrush.

In addition to his 2022 Macau GP victory—achieved when many top riders were absent due

to Covid restrictions—Kostamo has defeated leading TT competitors Michael Dunlop and Peter Hickman at Imatra.

Joining him at the North West 200 is two-time IRRC Supersport champion Laurent Hoffman, a regular at both the NW200 and Macau. The 42-year-old Belgian finished 16th in last year's opening Superbike race and 18th in the blue-riband Superbike event. He will compete on a Ho-

ffmann by MRP BMW M1000RR in the Superbike and Superstock races.

France's three fastest Isle of Man TT riders will also be in action. Amalric Blanc, a top-ten finisher in last season's Superstock class, will race a Honda Fireblade for Team Gazzz58 in both the Superbike and Superstock categories.

Eddy Ferre will also ride a Honda Fireblade for the Opti-mark Road Racing squad, while Jonathan Goetschy will take on a demanding schedule with three machines—a Ducati Panigale V2, a BMW S1000RR, and an Aprilia RS660 Supertwin—competing under the Team Opti-mark banner.



CRIME

Man detained for using AI to fabricate and spread rumor

A man has been detained for eight days by public security authorities for using AI tools to create and disseminate a false rumor about a celebrity allegedly losing 1 billion yuan gambling in Macau, the authorities reported on Friday.

The rumor, which surfaced on March 10, claimed that a prominent celebrity had lost a staggering amount while gambling in Macau, quickly circulating on online platforms and sparking intense speculation among netizens.

Cybersecurity authorities launched an investigation, which revealed that Xu, a

36-year-old man, had used an AI content-generation app at 10 a.m. on March 10, 2025, to fabricate and publish a post with the title, "Top celebrity exposed for losing 1 billion yuan in overseas gambling, triggering a public outcry."

The fabricated post rapidly spread across various online platforms, fueling public discussion and causing related rumors to dominate trending topics.

As a result, the Ministry of Public Security's cybersecurity department announced that Xu had been placed under an eight-day administrative detention.

F&B

Macau sees increase in Michelin-starred restaurants in 2025 Guide

STAFF REPORTER

THE 2025 edition of the Michelin Guide Hong Kong Macau reveals an increase in the number of Michelin-starred restaurants in Macau's casino resorts compared to the previous year.

The newly released list includes several notable changes, such as four restaurants earning their first Michelin star and one receiving a promotion to two stars.

However, one restaurant was omitted this year as it is temporarily closed.

The Michelin Guide's 2025 announcement took place at the Grand Lisboa Palace in Cotai last week.

This year's guide features 19 restaurants in Macau, a rise from the 16 establishments listed last year.

Macau's top-tier restaurants, holding three Michelin stars, remain unchanged.

Jade Dragon, located at the City of Dreams resort by Melco Resorts & Entertainment, and Robuchon au Dôme,



Sushi Kissho by Miyakawa

a French restaurant at the Grand Lisboa Hotel managed by SJM Holdings, continue to uphold their status.

Chef Tam's Seasons, which was awarded its first Michelin star in 2024, has now been promoted to two stars in this year's guide.

Other two-star establishments in Macau include The Huaiyang Garden at The Londoner Macao (Sands China Ltd), The Eight at Grand Lisboa, Alain Ducasse at Morpheus (City of Dreams), Feng Wei Ju at StarWorld Hotel (Galaxy Entertainment), and Wing Lei at Wynn Macau.

The 2025 edition also introduces several new one-star restaurants, including Aji at MGM Cotai, led by Singaporean chef Pan Sihui, and Mizumi at Wynn Palace.

Additional one-star newcomers include Zuicho at the Karl Lagerfeld Hotel and Sushi Kissho by Miyakawa at Raffles at Galaxy Macau.

In total, the guide highlights 54 restaurants in Macau, including 11 Bib Gourmand spots, 24 'selected' eateries, and one 'Green Star' restaurant.

AD

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DIRE STRAIT

China's top legislator stresses firm action against 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities, external interference

CHINA'S top legislator Zhao Leji last week emphasized resolutely combating "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and curbing interference from external forces.

Zhao, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, made the remarks at a symposium in Beijing marking the 20th anniversary of the enforcement of the Anti-Secession Law.

Zhao, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, stressed the importance of unwaveringly advancing the cause of national reunification.

Over the past 20 years, especially since the 18th CPC National Congress, the country has further enriched the legal framework for punishing "Taiwan independence" separatist activities, resolutely fought against separatism and countered interference, while improving systems and policies that contribute to the well-being of Taiwan compatriots, he noted.

These efforts have effectively upheld the one-China principle and made continuous progress in opposing "Taiwan independence" and promoting reunification, Zhao said.

"Resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China's complete reunification is a shared aspiration of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation and a natural requirement for realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," Zhao added.

Zhao emphasized the need to strengthen confidence and determination in advancing national reunification.

This includes resolutely safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity to protect the shared homeland of the Chinese nation, facilitating cross-strait exchanges and cooperation to jointly foster lasting prosperity of the Chinese nation, and promoting Chinese culture to forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, he stated. XINHUA



'FILLED WITH ARROGANCE'

China lashes out at G7 over statements on maritime security

CHRISTOPHER BODEEN,
TAIPEI

CHINA has lashed out at accusations it is endangering maritime safety made by top diplomats from the Group of 7 industrialized democracies in a joint statement, saying the G7 members are "filled with arrogance, prejudice and malicious intentions."

Even for China's generally overheated diplomatic language, the statement issued Saturday was unusually vitriolic, although it did not threaten any retaliation.

In the Friday statement that sparked the Chinese response, the G7 said, "We condemn China's illicit, provocative, coercive and dangerous actions that seek unilaterally to alter the status quo in such a way as to risk undermining the stability of regions, including through land reclaims, and building of outposts, as well as their use for military purpose."

"We reaffirm that our basic policies on Taiwan remain unchanged and emphasize the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as indispensable to international security and prosperity," the statement said, referring to the crucial waterway separating China from the self-governing



From left, Japanese Foreign Minister Iwata Takeshi, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani and EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas attend the G7 foreign ministers meeting in La Malbaie, Canada

island republic it claims as its own territory.

In the response issued through its embassy in Canada, where the two-day G7 meeting was held in La Malbaie, Quebec, China said the statement "repeated the same old rhetoric, ignored facts and China's solemn position, grossly interfered in China's internal affairs, and blatantly smeared China."

"The statements are filled with arrogance, prejudice and malicious intentions to suppress and attack China. China strongly deplores and opposes this and has lodged solemn representations with the Canadian side," the statement said.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea, through which passes around \$5 trillion in global trade. It has dismissed and occasionally clashed with other countries that claim parts of the sea, especially the Philippines, a U.S. treaty partner.

China is not a member of the G7 but closely follows all comments and references to its international status made by international organizations or in foreign countries, responding to criticism with caustic language.

China has firmly rejected a U.N.-affiliated court's ruling that invalidated most of its claims to the South China Sea

and says its claim to Taiwan is non-negotiable, even if China has to use force against the island.

China routinely sends ships and warplanes into airspace and waters near Taiwan, built military bases on human-made islands in the South China Sea and recently staged surprise live-fire exercises in the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand for which it gave no advance notice.

Australia's aviation authority said it learned of the drills just 30 minutes before they began, not from Beijing but from a pilot flying in the area, and 49 commercial flights were forced to alter their flight paths in response.

The G7 did not mention the drills in its statement.

"We share a growing concern at recent, unjustifiable efforts to restrict such freedom and to expand jurisdiction through use of force and other forms of coercion, including across the Taiwan Strait, and in the South China Sea, the Red Sea, and the Black Sea," the G7 said.

China has the world's largest navy, including three aircraft carriers, with a fourth on the way. It has a base in Sheikhdom of Djibouti in the Horn of Africa and consistently has expanded the range of the force. MDT/AP

DIPLOMACY

US IMPOSES SANCTIONS ON THAI OFFICIALS AFTER UYGHUR MEN ARE DEPORTED TO CHINA

THE U.S. State Department over the weekend announced sanctions on an unknown number of current and former Thai officials for their role in deporting at least 40 Uyghur men to China.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he was immediately moving to impose visa restrictions on current and former officials responsible for or complicit in the deportations. No Thai official has been named. The visa restrictions were not explained but can entail a denial of entry to the U.S.

"We are committed to combating China's efforts to pressure governments to forcibly return Uyghurs and other groups to China, where they are subject to torture and en-



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio

forced disappearances," Rubio said in a statement. The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Saturday said it had multiple times clarified with countries that have conveyed their concerns over the safety of the men that China assured that they would be unharmed, and that Thailand

would follow up on their well-being.

"Thailand has always upheld a long tradition of humanitarianism, particularly in providing assistance to displaced persons from various countries for more than half a century and will continue to do so," the ministry said in a statement.

Thailand's ministers of defense and justice said they scheduled a trip to visit the men in China next week. A number of Thai journalists were invited to join them.

In Facebook posts, the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok said 40 Chinese nationals who had been "smuggled" were repatriated to Xinjiang on a chartered flight and they had "all

returned home and reunited with their families after more than 10 years."

The Uyghurs are a Turkic, majority Muslim group native to Xinjiang in China's far west.

More than 300 Uyghurs fleeing China were detained in 2014 by Thai authorities. By February, 48 Uyghurs remained in Thai detention when authorities prepared to send them back to China despite calls from Thai lawmakers and international officials not to do so.

Rubio has been a longtime critic of Beijing, and he was twice sanctioned by the Chinese government in 2020 over his support for the rights of Uyghurs and people in Hong Kong. MDT/AP

INDONESIA

Cocoa farmers work with businesses to fight the bitter impact of climate change

VICTORIA MILKO & DITA
ALANGKARA, TANJUNG REJO

THE loud whirr of a chainsaw sounds through the forest as a small group of farmers gathers around a tree filled with red seed pods. With one slow stroke, a severed knobby branch hits the ground.

"Now it will help the tree grow new fruit," farmer Tari Santoso says with a smile.

Thousands of cocoa farmers across Indonesia like Santoso are working with businesses and other organizations to protect their crops from the bitter impacts of climate change and underinvestment that have pushed cocoa prices to record levels.

Cocoa trees are high maintenance: Grown only near the equator, they require a precise combination of steady temperatures, humidity and sunlight. It takes five years for a tree to start producing the seeds that are processed into cocoa used to make chocolate and other delectable foods.

Climate change raises the risks for farmers: Hotter weather hurts yields and longer rainy seasons trigger the spread of fungus and deadly pests. Increasingly unpredictable weather patterns have made it harder for farmers to deal with those challenges.

So farmers are switching to other crops, further reducing co-



A farmer picks cocoa pods at a plantation in Tanjung Rejo

coa supplies and pushing prices higher: In 2024, prices nearly tripled, reaching about US\$12,000 per ton, driving up chocolate costs and leading some chocolate makers to try growing cocoa in laboratories.

Indonesia is the third-largest producer of cocoa in the world, behind Cote D'Ivoire and Ghana, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, farmers are joining with businesses and nongovernmental organizations to develop

better growing practices and improve their livelihoods.

Sitting in the shade of his forest farm in south Sumatra, 3 miles (5 kilometers) from a national park where Sumatran tigers and rhinos roam, farmer Santoso is working with Indonesian chocolate maker Krakakoa.

After he began working with the company in 2016, Santoso starting using practices that helped his cocoa trees flourish, regularly pruning and grafting new branches onto older trees

to promote growth and prevent the spread of disease. He is using organic fertilizer and has adopted agroforestry techniques, integrating other crops and trees such as bananas, dragon fruit, coffee and pepper, into his farm to foster a healthier ecosystem and invest in other income sources.

"It wasn't very successful before we met Krakakoa," Santoso said. "But then, we received training ... things are much better."

Krakakoa has trained more than 1,000 cocoa farmers in Indonesia according to its founder and CEO, Sabrina Mustopo. The company also provides financial support.

Santoso and other farmers in Sumatra said the partnership helped them to form a cooperative provides low-interest loans to farmers, with interest paid back into the cooperative rather than to banks outside of the community.

Cocoa farmers who need bigger loans from government-owned banks also benefit from partnering with businesses, as the guaranteed buyer agreements can provide collateral needed to get loans approved, said Armin Hari, a communications manager at the Cocoa Sustainability Partnership, a forum for public-private collaboration for cocoa development in Indonesia.

Dozens of other businesses, the government and nongovernmental organizations and cooperatives are also working with cocoa farmers to better cope with climate change, benefiting thousands, Hari said. He pointed to a collaboration between Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency and the local division of international chocolate maker Mars, which have released a new variant of cocoa that produces more pods per tree. **MDT/AP**

AUSTRALIA

American influencer who caused outrage after snatching a baby wombat issues apology

AN American influencer who sparked outrage after posting a video of her snatching a baby wombat from its mother while in Australia apologized yesterday [Macau time], saying she had acted out of concern for the young animal's welfare.

Australian authorities had threatened Sam Jones with deportation after she posted a video on her Instagram account of her running with a wombat joey in her hands from its mother on a roadside at night.

"I ran, not to rip the joey

away from its mother, but from fear she might attack me," Jones, who also uses the name Samantha Strable, posted on social media.

"The snap judgement I made in these moments was never from a place of harm or stealing a joey," she added.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the video of the young wombat being grabbed was "just an outrage."

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said his department was investigating whether Jones had



A wombat walks at a wildlife sanctuary in Bendalong on the South Coast

breached the terms of her visa before she left the country on Friday.

"There's never been a better day to be a baby

wombat in Australia," Burke said after she left Australia voluntarily.

Burke said he did not expect Jones would apply

for an Australian visa again.

The animal appears to be a common wombat, also known as a bare-nosed wombat. It is a protected marsupial found only in Australia.

Montana-based Jones claimed she became "extremely concerned" when she found the two wombats on a road not moving.

"As wombats are so often hit on Australian roads, I stopped to ensure they got off the road safely and didn't get hit," Jones said.

"However, as is seen

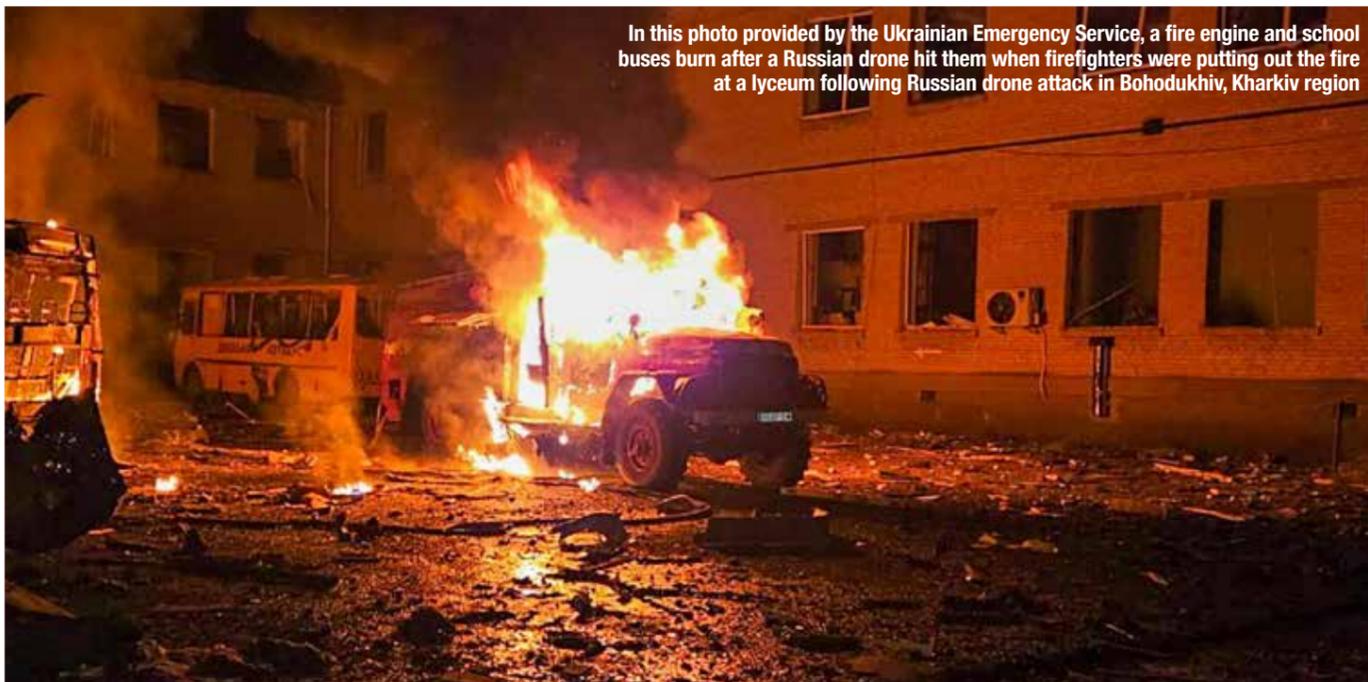
from the video, when I walked up to them, the joey did not move or run off. I was concerned it may have been sick or injured, and made a snap judgement to pick up the joey and see if that was the case," she added.

An unidentified man laughs as he films Jones saying: "I caught a baby wombat." They both note the mother's sounds of aggression.

Animal welfare experts said Jones could have harmed the joey by dangling it by its two forelegs.

Jones did not immediately respond to The Associated Press's questions, including where and when the baby wombat was captured. Jones declined to reveal her current whereabouts to the AP. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, a fire engine and school buses burn after a Russian drone hit them when firefighters were putting out the fire at a lyceum following Russian drone attack in Bohodukhiv, Kharkiv region

CEASEFIRE TALKS...

Russia and Ukraine trade overnight aerial attacks after Putin sets out conditions for ceasefire

SAMYA KULLAB, KYIV

RUSSIA and Ukraine traded heavy aerial blows overnight, with both sides Saturday [yesterday, Macau time] reporting more than 100 enemy drones over their respective territories.

The attacks comes less than 24 hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin met with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff to discuss details of the American proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in the war with Ukraine.

Putin told a press conference on Thursday that he supported a truce in principle but set out a host of details that need to be clarified before it is agreed. Kyiv has already endorsed the truce proposal, although Ukrainian officials have publicly raised doubts as to whether Moscow will commit to such a deal.

Speaking to reporters in Kyiv on Saturday, after virtual talks between Western allies hosted by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Zelenskyy voiced Ukraine's support for the 30-day full ceasefire proposal to discuss a longer-term peace plan, but said Russia would attempt to derail talks with conditions and "butts".

Starmer has told allies to "keep the pressure" on Putin to back a ceasefire in Ukraine, hailing Ukraine as the "party of

peace." Starmer said Putin will "sooner or later" have to "come to the table."

In a statement earlier on Saturday, Zelenskyy had accused Moscow of building up forces along the border.

"The build up of Russian forces indicates that Moscow intends to keep ignoring diplomacy. It is clear that Russia is prolonging the war," he said.

However, Zelenskyy stressed that if Russia did not agree with the U.S. proposal there would be "specific, harsh and straightforward" response from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

He also said that Kyiv's troops were maintaining their presence in Russia's Kursk region after Trump said Friday that "thousands" of Ukrainian troops had been surrounded by the Russian military.

"The operation of our forces in the designated areas of the Kursk region continues," Zelenskyy said. "Our troops continue to hold back Russian and North Korean groupings in the Kursk region. There is no encirclement of our troops."

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke Saturday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. In the call, they discussed next steps to follow up on recent meetings in Saudi Arabia and agreed to continue working towards restoring

communication between the United States and Russia, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement.

A possible phone call between Putin and Trump to settle outstanding ceasefire issues could be arranged after Witkoff delivers the messages in Washington, Peskov said. "There is an understanding on both sides that such a call is needed," Peskov said.

"There are certainly some grounds for cautious optimism," Peskov said of the ceasefire proposal. "A lot still needs to be done, but the president has shown solidarity with President Trump's position."

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday he was "cautiously optimistic," too. Speaking to reporters at the end of a Group of Seven meeting in Canada, Rubio said Trump administration officials plan to spend the weekend debriefing Witkoff on his session with Putin and on next steps.

The talks with Putin did not appear to secure the immediate agreement for a ceasefire that Rubio had said Americans would press Putin for. But, "we certainly feel like we're at least some steps closer to ending this war," Rubio said.

Ukraine's air force said Saturday that Russia had launched a barrage of 178 drones

and two ballistic missiles over the country overnight. The attack was a mixture of Shaheed-type drones and imitation drones designed to confuse air defenses. Some 130 drones were shot down, while 38 more failed to reach their targets.

Russia attacked energy facilities, causing significant damage, striking energy infrastructure in the Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa regions, Ukraine's private energy company DTEK said in a statement on Saturday. Some residents were left without electricity.

"The damage is significant. Energy workers are already working on the ground. We are doing everything possible to restore power to homes as soon as possible," the energy firm said.

Falling drone debris in Russia's Volgograd region sparked a fire in the Krasnoarmeysky district of the city, close to a Lukoil oil refinery, according to Gov. Andrei Bocharov, who provided no further details. Nearby airports temporarily halted flights, local media outlets reported. No casualties were reported.

The Volgograd refinery has been targeted by Kyiv's forces on several occasions since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than three years ago, most recently in a drone attack on Feb. 15. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1968 ANTI-VIETNAM DEMO TURNS VIOLENT



More than 200 people have been arrested after thousands of demonstrators clashed in an anti-Vietnam war protest outside the United States embassy in London.

The St John Ambulance Brigade said it treated 86 people for injuries. Fifty were taken to hospital including up to 25 police officers.

The trouble followed a big rally in Trafalgar square, when an estimated 10,000 demonstrated against American action in Vietnam and British support for the United States.

The mood at the rally was described as good humoured. The violence broke out when the protesters marched to the US embassy in Grosvenor Square.

The embassy was surrounded by hundreds of police. They stood shoulder to shoulder to cordon off the part of the square closest to the embassy.

Tensions rose as the crowd refused to back off and mounted officers rode at the demonstrators.

The protesters broke through the police ranks onto the lawn of the embassy, tearing up the plastic fence and uprooting parts of a hedge.

During a protracted battle, stones, earth, fire-crackers and smoke bombs were thrown.

One officer was treated for a reported serious spinal injury, another for a neck injury.

One officer had his hat knocked off and was struck continuously on the back of the head with a stick from a banner as he clung, head down, to his horse's neck.

Earlier the actress Vanessa Redgrave was allowed to enter the embassy with three supporters to deliver a protest.

She had been one of the speakers at the rally in Trafalgar Square.

Labour MP Peter Jackson, has said he will be tabling a private question for answer by the Home Secretary about what he called "police violence".

He told The Times newspaper: "I was particularly outraged by the violent use of police horses, who charged into the crowd even after they had cleared the street in front of the embassy."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

There was another big anti-Vietnam war demonstration on 27 October 1968. An estimated 25,000 took part in the march and once again trouble flared outside the US embassy in Grosvenor Square.

But security was very tight. There were 1,000 police outside the embassy and officers lined the streets of the march to prevent a repeat of the trouble in March. The last American troops left Vietnam on 29 March 1973.

The following year there were frequent violations of the peace treaty.

In 1975, fullscale warfare resumed between North and South Vietnam - without American intervention. In 1976 the first elections were held to a National Assembly, finally reuniting North and South.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 You and a partner could seem to work at cross purposes. Avoid sharp words. Take time to resolve misunderstandings. Have patience with each other.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
 Stick to the routines you've been practicing. Play strictly by the rules. Move carefully to avoid sharp objects or accidents. Watch for unexpected obstacles.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
 Romance, creativity and fun are distinctly possible, by avoiding silly arguments. Breakdowns require patience. Discover the divinity of forgiving, especially oneself. Relax and recreate.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Focus on matters close to home. Maintain a philosophical outlook and positive attitude. Everything works out, despite challenges or frustrations. Enjoy domestic comforts.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Communication is key. You can get what you need. Let others know and people are happy to contribute. Avoid assumptions. Listen and learn.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 More income is possible, requiring discipline and patience. Track numbers to avoid expensive mistakes. Don't throw money around blindly. Keep your sense of humor.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You have the power to make things happen. Don't push too hard or risk breakage. Gentle persuasion works better. Let the little stuff go.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Slow down and think things over. Clean old messes before making new. Review where you've been. Avoid travel or fuss and take it easy.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Friends get you where you want to go. Avoid provoking jealousies or upsets. Keep promises. Don't rock the boat. Another's suggestions prove valuable.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Professional efforts may not work as planned. Stay flexible and consider other options. Persistence pays off in the long run. Keep your cool.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Expand your territory while making time for deviations. Consider consequences in advance. Delays and unexpected obstacles could slow the action. Draw upon hidden resources.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 A lack of funds threatens your plans. Establish efficiencies and cost-saving measures. Costs may be higher than anticipated. Collaborate with your partner for solutions.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	0	9	cloudy
Changchun	-8	1	cloudy
Chengdu	5	7	rain
Chongqing	8	10	rain
Fuzhou	9	14	cloudy
Guangzhou	12	20	cloudy
Guiyang	2	6	rain
Haikou	14	18	rain
Hangzhou	3	14	fine
Harbin	-11	0	fine
Hefei	0	16	fine
Nanjing	0	13	fine
Shanghai	2	12	fine
Taipei	11	12	cloudy
Wuhan	2	15	overcast
Hong Kong	17	19	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-5	-1	snow
Frankfurt	-2	9	sunny
Paris	2	11	sunny
London	2	8	cloudy
New York	3	15	showers

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Continental identity of a Chinese person; 6- Give a ring; 10- Queens stadium; 14- Esther of "Good Times"; 15- Neighborhood; 16- Linguist Chomsky; 17- Relative by marriage; 18- Rubber overshoe; 19- Jason's craft; 20- Evaluate; 22- Brief joke; 24- Blemish; 26- Deer horn; 27- Erik of "CHiPs"; 31- Begley and Wynn; 32- Boatwain; 33- Apparel; 36- Craze; 39- Tell all; 40- Works hard; 41- Room in a casa; 42- Sun, delivery; 43- Slender boat; 44- Purchaser; 45- Wreath of flowers; 46- Make right; 48- Dried strip of egg dough; 51- Defunct airline; 52- Slammer; 54- Chewed the scenery; 59- ET transports; 60- Quickly, quickly; 62- One way to play; 63- Prefix with conference; 64- Ike's ex; 65- Hit the road; 66- Oceans; 67- Finishes; 68- Made a mistake;

DOWN 1- Operatic solo; 2- Juniors, perhaps; 3- Ailments of body or society; 4- Wings; 5- Reporter; 6- Where the truck driver rides; 7- Buck follower; 8- Hotelier Helmsley; 9- Delay; 10- Slowpokes; 11- Mezzo-soprano Marilyn; 12- Enthusiastic; 13- Latin love; 21- Melancholic; 23- Former Fords; 25- Radioactive gas; 27- Recedes; 28- Boot bottom; 29- Nicholas II was the last Russian one; 30- Chafe; 34- Carnival site; 35- Vote into office; 36- Actress Dunaway; 37- One of the Baldwins; 38- Pub missile; 40- Follow very closely; 41- California's Big ____; 43- Relinquish; 44- Prickly shrub; 45- Setbacks; 47- Be in the red; 48- Like some checking accounts; 49- Alley Oop's girlfriend; 50- Red fluorescent dye; 52- Humble homes; 53- Magic stick; 55- ____ and terminator; 56- Shred; 57- Gutter site; 58- ____ Scott Decision; 61- Dance step;

Friday's solution

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

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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



Manhattan F Unit
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Hellene Garden (Coloane)
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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)
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73.95 m² / 796 ft² | HKD 6,980,000

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FORMULA 1

McLaren's Norris wins wet and wild Australian Grand Prix, Hamilton finishes 10th

STEWART BELL, MELBOURNE

MCLAREN'S Lando Norris has won a chaotic rain-affected Australian Grand Prix, his first at Albert Park, with the Brit just managing to stay ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen following a third safety car late in yesterday's season-opening Formula 1 race.

Lewis Hamilton had a miserable Ferrari debut. The seven-time champion finished 10th and was annoyed by constant radio messages from his pit team.

Norris started Melbourne's first wet race since 2010 from pole position. But, while he initially came under increasing pressure from Piastri, who set a series of fastest laps until his papaya team told him to hold



McLaren driver Lando Norris of Britain leads Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of the Netherlands during the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, yesterday

position, the Australian spun at the penultimate corner on lap 44 as the rain intensified and dropped down the order. A late race fightback helped Piastri recover to take ninth place — including passing Hamilton on the final lap — and two cham-

pionship points.

Verstappen finished 0.895 of a second behind Norris after starting from third on the grid, and took advantage of Piastri's misfortune and the final safety car and tire stops. Mercedes' George Russell closed out the

top-three.

"I knew I had a good pace, but I made one mistake in turn six and he got me in the DRS and the DRS around here is probably like a second or something so that allowed it to keep staying within that second," said Norris, who scored McLaren's 12th win in Australia to steal the outright record from Ferrari.

"I know what I'm capable of, I know what I can do, but obviously it's just round one, so we need to go and do it again next weekend and then continue from there. A long season ahead, we've just got to keep our head down and keep pushing."

Williams endured a mix bag, with Alex Albon securing his best result since Abu Dhabi 2020, and new recruit Carlos Sainz — who won here last year driving for Ferrari — out at the final turn on the opening lap.

Mercedes was thrilled to get two cars in the top five, with Russell onto the podium, his first since winning in Las Vegas last year. Rookie Andrea Kimi Antonelli, who replaced Hamilton at the silver squad, showed his class with a superb fightback drive from 16th on the grid, following his Q1 exit, to finish fifth.

Aston Martin's Lance Stroll also made the best of the chaotic conditions to move up from 13th to sixth, ahead of Sauber's Nico Hülkenberg, bringing home eight points in what has been a difficult weekend for the green team with its car uncompetitive in dry running.

Ferrari is the most successful constructor at the Australian Grand Prix, with 11 wins since its first in 1987, but it will leave Melbourne disappointed with just five points to show after Charles Leclerc finished eighth and Hamilton 10th.

The Scuderia was seen as a potential championship challenger ahead of the season start and has plenty of work to do ahead of the Chinese Grand Prix next week.

The Melbourne race had a thrilling start with Racing Bull's Isack Hadjar out on the formation lap, and Alpine's Jack Doohan joined Sainz in crashing out on the opening lap.

There were just 14 finishers. **MDT/AP**



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OPINION

China Daily

Amakobe Sande, UNICEF representative to China



URGENT TASK TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN CONFLICTS

By almost every measure, 2024 was one of the worst years on record for children living in conflict zones in UNICEF's history. More than one in every six children globally now live in areas affected by conflict, and are forced to face unthinkable violations.

Unfortunately, 2025 does not look much better for children.

Children do not start wars but they pay the highest price for them. They are more likely than adults to be killed or maimed by bombs or weapons. They lose the protection and care of family members and friends. They're abducted from their homes, recruited by armed groups and sexually violated. Their schools and hospitals are destroyed, and many are denied life-saving aid, based simply on who they are or where they live.

From the Democratic Republic of Congo to Haiti, to Myanmar, Sudan and beyond, we cannot allow a generation of children to become collateral damage to the world's unchecked wars. The United Nations Children's Fund, or UNICEF, refuses to accept this deadly new normal. We can all work together to make change happen.

Citizens everywhere can begin by refusing to avert our gaze from children's suffering, or not staying silent when attacks on children occur, just because it is too distant or the situation too complex. We must insist that protecting children from conflicts they had no hand in triggering is the cornerstone of our shared humanity. We should support leadership that takes decisive action to end and prevent attacks and violence against children trapped in war zones.

All warring parties where conflicts rage must act to fulfil their obligations to protect children — ending attacks that kill and injure children or destroy their schools, hospitals and other infrastructure and services they rely on, and stopping abduction, sexual violence and recruitment of children in conflicts.

Warring parties must also unflinchingly enable safe access to life-saving and protective services and supplies for children. This includes taking action to prevent and end attacks on humanitarian workers risking their lives to save and protect children.

Governments that have influence over warring parties should use that influence to ensure children are protected in accordance with the requirements of international law, reinforcing diplomatic efforts to prevent and end violations against children.

International peace and security institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council and regional organizations, should re-engage in collective action to consistently prioritize the safety and well-being of children trapped in armed conflicts, including proactive diplomatic efforts to end conflicts.

The international community should urgently increase investment in programs to protect children impacted by conflicts, alongside investments to intensify efforts to monitor and report on violations against children and advocacy to end them once and for all.

Action is being taken, including here in China, by both the government and ordinary citizens. Last year, for example, people, including children, in China raised 19.5 million yuan (\$2.7 million) to support children affected by the conflict in Gaza. These funds were donated to the embassy of the State of Palestine in Beijing, which in turn donated them to UNICEF.

In other words, we must all come together to protect children from the horrors of war, reverse this deadly "new normal" of attacks against children, and preserve our shared humanity.

Children cannot wait. We must act now. [Abridged]

A group of House Republicans during the weekend put forward legislation seeking to prevent Chinese students from studying in American schools, as some U.S. lawmakers are targeting China over national security concerns.

Rep. Riley Moore, R-W.Va., introduced the bill that could bar Chinese nationals from receiving visas that allow foreigners to travel to the U.S. to study or participate in exchange visitor programs. Five other Republicans co-sponsored the measure.

By granting Chinese nationals such visas, the U.S. has "invited" the Chinese Communist Party "to spy on our military, steal our intellectual pro-

perty, and threaten national security," Moore said in a statement.

The measure is unlikely to pass, and it has drawn criticism from organizations and scholars over concerns that hostile policies and rhetoric toward Chinese students could hurt U.S. interests.

"No policy should target individuals solely on the basis of their national origin," Fanta Aw, executive director and CEO of NAFSA, an association of international educators, said in a statement.

"Making international students — the most vetted and tracked nonimmigrants in the United States — a scapegoat for xenophobic and anti-Chinese sentiment is misguided and antithetical to our national interest," Aw said.



Police officers investigate a nightclub after a massive fire in the town of Kocani

51 DEAD AND MORE THAN 100 INJURED IN NIGHTCLUB FIRE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

KONSTANTIN TESTORIDES, SKOPIE

A massive fire tore through a nightclub in North Macedonia's eastern town of Kocani yesterday, killing 51 people and injuring more than 100, authorities said.

The blaze broke out around 2:35 a.m. during a concert by a local pop group at the Pulse nightclub, Interior Minister Panche Toshkovski told reporters.

He said pyrotechnics caused the roof to catch fire. Videos showed chaos inside the club, with young people running through the smoke as the musicians urged people to escape as quickly as possible.

Officials said the injured have been taken to hospitals around the country, including the capital, Skopje, many with severe burns. The effort was being assisted by multiple volunteer organizations.

Health Minister Arben Taravari said 118 people have been hospitalized, adding that he had received offers of assistance from neighboring countries, including Albania, Bulgaria and Greece.

"All our capabilities have been put to use, in a maximum effort to save as many lives as possible of the you-

ng people involved in this tragedy," Taravari told reporters, at times looking visibly shaken.

This is the worst tragedy in recent memory to befall the landlocked nation, whose population is less than 2 million.

"This is a difficult and very sad day for Macedonia. The loss of so many young lives is irreparable, and the pain of the families, loved ones and friends is immeasurable," Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

"The people and the government will do everything in their power to at least slightly alleviate their pain and help them in these most difficult moments."

Family members gathered in front of hospitals and Kocani's city offices begging authorities for more information.

The club was in an old building that was previously a carpet warehouse and has been running for several years, according to local media MKD.

The fire caused the roof of the single-story building to partially collapse, revealing the charred remains of wooden beams and debris. Police cordoned off the site and sent in evidence gathering teams in an operation also involving state

prosecutors.

Toshkovski said authorities would investigate the venue's licensing and safety provisions, adding that the government had a "moral responsibility" to help prosecute anyone responsible. Police have arrested one man already, but he didn't provide details on the person's involvement.

As they awoke to news of the overnight tragedy, the country's immediate neighbors and leaders from further afield in Europe sent condolences.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, posted on X that she was "deeply saddened" and said the 27-nation bloc "shares the grief and pain of the people of North Macedonia." North Macedonia is a candidate for EU membership.

Condolences also poured in from politicians across the region, including Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Marta Kos, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"I wish those who were injured a speedy recovery. Ukraine mourns alongside our (North) Macedonian friends on this sad day," Zelenskyy wrote on X. MDT/AP



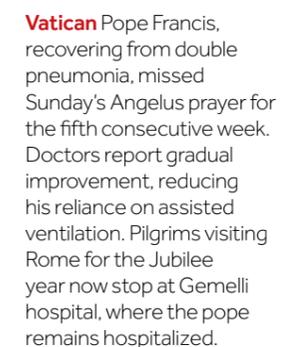
USA President Trump ordered deep cuts yesterday [Macau time] to Voice of America and related U.S.-funded media. Nearly all staff were placed on leave, silencing the pro-democracy broadcaster for the first time in 83 years. Critics warn the move weakens America's ability to counter global authoritarianism.



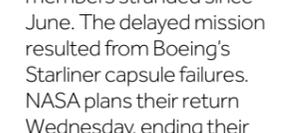
Syrians celebrated yesterday [Macau time] the 14th anniversary of the civil war's start, marking the first commemoration since President Bashar Assad's ouster. Rebels toppled Assad in December after a swift offensive. The transitional government faces challenges, including rebuilding and negotiating sanctions relief with Western powers.



Serbia Tens of thousands rallied in Belgrade over the weekend ahead of a major anti-government protest. Demonstrators accuse President Aleksandar Vucic of corruption and stifling democracy. Vucic warned of possible violence, blaming Western interference. Protesters, led by students, demand accountability and fair governance.



Vatican Pope Francis, recovering from double pneumonia, missed Sunday's Angelus prayer for the fifth consecutive week. Doctors report gradual improvement, reducing his reliance on assisted ventilation. Pilgrims visiting Rome for the Jubilee year now stop at Gemelli hospital, where the pope remains hospitalized.



Space A SpaceX capsule carrying four astronauts arrived at the International Space Station yesterday, replacing two NASA crew members stranded since June. The delayed mission resulted from Boeing's Starliner capsule failures. NASA plans their return Wednesday, ending their unexpected nine-month stay in orbit.