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**INDIA AND EUROPEAN UNION CLINCH THE ‘MOTHER OF ALL DEALS’ IN HISTORIC FREE TRADE AGREEMENT AFTER TWO DECADES OF NEGOTIATIONS**

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AP PHOTO



**South Korea** Yesterday, North Korea launched multiple short-range ballistic missiles into the sea between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The launches – days before a key party congress – followed recent tests of hypersonic weapons and heightened tensions over drone activity. Missiles traveled roughly 350 kilometers.

AP PHOTO



**United States** Donald Trump announced yesterday [Macau time] increased tariffs on South Korean imports – from 15% to 25% – citing delays in Seoul’s legislative approval of a 2025 trade deal. South Korean ministers are heading to Washington for talks as lawmakers consolidate bills to implement a \$350 billion investment plan.

AP PHOTO



**Philippines** ICC judges in The Hague ruled that former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is fit to stand trial for crimes against humanity tied to his war on drugs. The hearing – delayed since September – has been rescheduled for Friday, Feb. 23 following medical evaluations. Duterte plans to appeal.

AP PHOTO



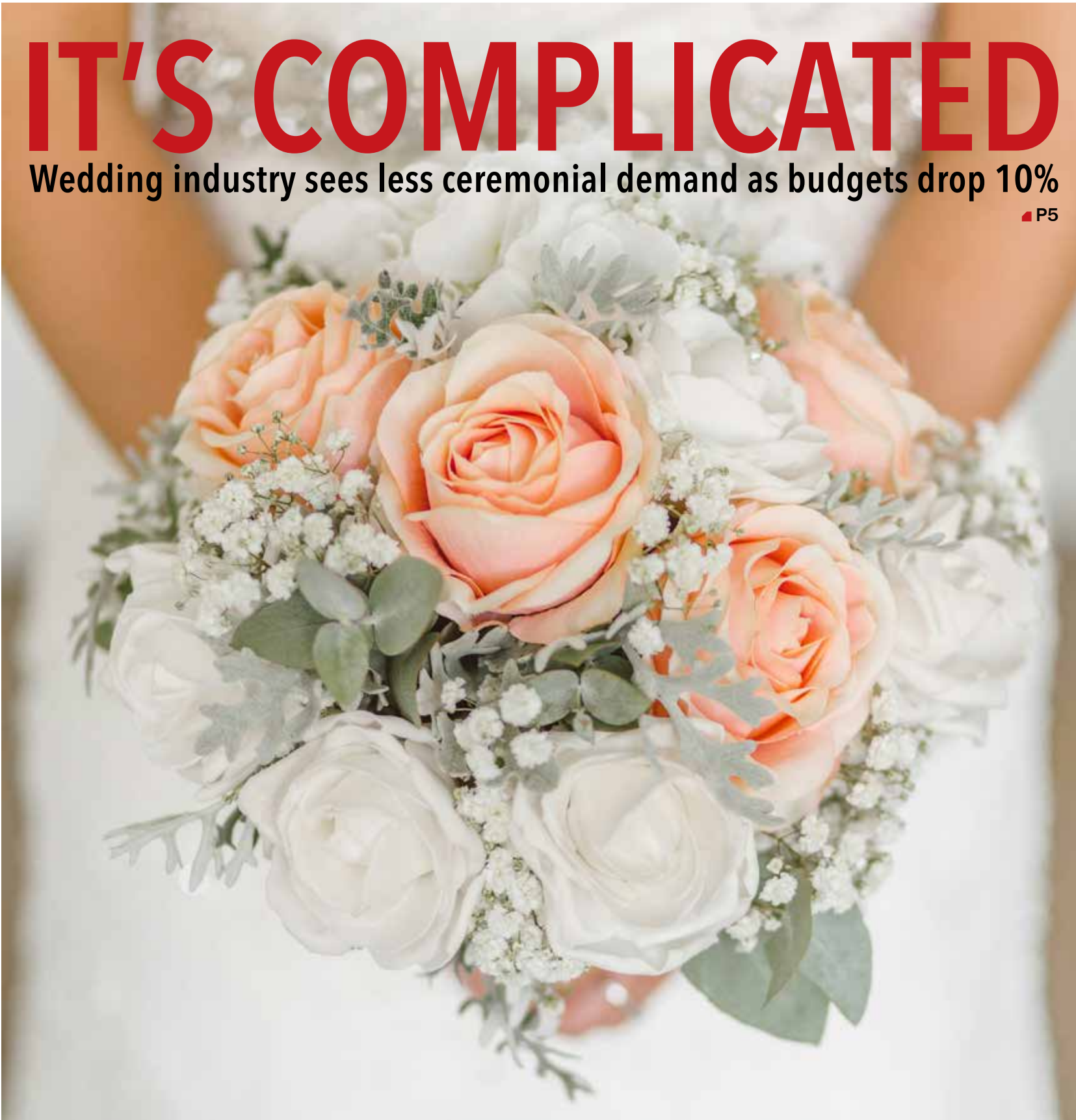
**Myanmar** Amnesty International said that Myanmar’s junta used “ghost ships” to import over 109,000 tonnes of jet fuel in 2025, evading sanctions and fueling deadly airstrikes. Tactics include disabling tracking systems, false flags, and ship-to-ship transfers to obscure fuel origins and supply chains.

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Wedding industry sees less ceremonial demand as budgets drop 10%

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GOVERNANCE

# SAR PROTECTS MEDIA RIGHTS AND INTERESTS WITH PRACTICAL SUPPORT, SAYS SAM HOU FAI

YUKI LEI

**C**HIEF Executive Sam Hou Fai hosted a reception for Chinese-language media yesterday to welcome the Year of the Horse, stressing the government's commitment to safeguarding the industry's rights and interests while providing practical assistance to media organizations in their reporting and coverage activities.

In his opening remarks, the Chief Executive underscored, as always, the full implementation of the guiding principles from President Xi Jinping's important speeches during his inspection of Macau.

He noted topics such as steady economic recovery, positive developments in diversified industries, progress in the construction of the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, deepening public administration reforms, the continued optimization of livelihood policies, and the maintenance of social harmony and stability, which he said reflect new achievements in advancing Macau's various initiatives.

He expressed gratitude to journalists for their "active participation and accurate reporting of

YUKI LEI



significant events" over the past year, including the eighth Legislative Assembly election, the 80th anniversary commemorations of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, as well as the first joint hosting of the National Games by Guangdong and Hong Kong.

"On behalf of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) Govern-

ment, and in my personal capacity, I extend my most sincere gratitude to all of you here and to the broader journalism community," he said.

While emphasizing the government's commitment to earnestly implementing President Xi's important speeches and instructions in alignment with the opening year of the national 15th Five-Year Plan, Sam urged the press to collaborate with the government in advancing these key initiatives.

He encouraged journalists to "spread positive energy and amplify constructive voices," serving as a bridge between the public and the government.

He also called for continued efforts to highlight stories of individuals striving for success and realizing their dreams in both mainland China and the SAR. "Let more readers and viewers discover China's peace, fairness, and kindness through objective

examples," he said.

He added that the SAR government will continue to safeguard the industry's rights and interests in accordance with the Basic Law and the Publication Law, while actively supporting the press through professional exchanges and technical training programs to enhance the industry's overall quality.

According to the official website of the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS), Macau enjoys freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of publication. The bureau noted that despite its small size, the city has a well-developed media sector, with 13 regularly published Chinese-language daily newspapers, as well as numerous weekly publications and online media outlets as of early this year.

To ensure journalistic independence, the authorities have established legal safeguards protecting reporters' rights to interview, report, and access information.

The bureau also reported that 109 publications were effectively registered last year, including six newly registered titles covering weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual formats, while six publications had their registrations canceled during the year.

SOCIETY

# IAM to launch 'tailored' revitalization projects for São Domingos, São Lourenço Markets

YUKI LEI

**F**OLLOWING optimization projects at several of Macau's traditional markets, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced that it will implement a "tailored" revitalization strategy to study the redevelopment of both São Domingos Market and São Lourenço Market.

"We aim to introduce suitable new business types and creative, enthusiastic operators to enhance the markets' appeal and competitiveness, in-



jecting fresh vitality into operations," the IAM stated in its revised response

to Legislative Assembly member Ella Lei.

The bureau emphasized

that it will take into account the actual conditions and unique charac-

teristics of each market and hawker area, as well as the consumption needs of local residents and tourists.

According to the bureau's statement, public tendering procedures will be initiated at suitable markets or hawker areas to establish new stalls, while operators will be encouraged to diversify their product offerings in response to market demand and enhance competitiveness, thereby promoting the sustainable development of the hawker industry.

The statement, as no-

ted by IAM president Chao Wai Ieng, also outlines plans to restructure the Iao Hon hawker area and launch optimization and redesign initiatives for the Fai Chi Kei hawker area within the year.

The planning process will consider factors including community attributes, surrounding environments, potential customer bases, public needs, and tourist consumption patterns.

The initiative, according to the statement, will involve phased upgrades to hardware facilities and surrounding environments across all hawker areas, with a particular focus on enhancing fire prevention capabilities and electrical safety to further improve the overall business environment.

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EDUCATION

# DSEDJ tuition subsidy application window extended to 26 days

NADIA SHAW

**T**HE Executive Council announced yesterday that the SAR Government plans to continue providing tuition subsidies to eligible residents enrolled in non-higher education institutions across Guangdong Province.

However, under new draft rules, students attending the Hengqin School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School in the Hengqin Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone will not be eligible for additional tuition and learning supplies subsidies.

Council spokesperson Wong Sio Chak said the measures are part of ongoing education cooperation between Guangdong and Macau.

Meanwhile, acting director of the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), Iun Pui Iun, noted that more than 26,000 students are expected to benefit from the 2025-2026 education subsidies.

According to Iun, students at the Hengqin School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School



will instead be eligible for local education system benefits, including textbook subsidies, free education assistance, or tuition support.

Subsidy amounts will remain unchanged from last year. Preschool tuition subsidies are capped at MOP8,000 per student, while subsidies for primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary students are capped at MOP6,000.

Subsidies for learning supplies also remain unchanged, at MOP1,150 for preschool,

MOP1,450 for primary, and MOP1,700 for junior and senior secondary students.

Wong added that the application period has been extended to 26 days to allow applicants sufficient time to submit their materials. Applications will be accepted by the DSEDJ from April 20 to May 15, 2026.

For eligible applicants, subsidies will be disbursed in a lump sum starting in October, through bank transfers to a SAR bank account held by a parent, guardian, or adult student.

Under the rules, tuition subsidies cannot be combined with free education under Administrative Regulation No. 19/2006, tuition assistance under No. 20/2006, or recurrent education under No. 21/2018. Learning supplies subsidies also exclude textbook assistance provided under Administrative Regulation No. 29/2009.

The measures will take effect the day after promulgation.

## SCHOOL MATERIALS SUBSIDY APPLICATIONS OPEN IN APRIL

The Executive Council also announced that applications for the higher education school materials subsidy for the 2025-2026 academic year will open in April, with eligible students able to receive a one-off allowance of MOP 3,300.

Online registration will open on April 1 and close on May 29.

Eligible students must hold a Macao SAR Resident Identity Card and be enrolled in higher education courses in Macau or abroad that lead to an academic degree or have a duration of at least two academic years. Courses must be offered by accredited public or private institutions, the Council added.

Requirements remain consistent with last year. Beneficiaries are required to submit documents including the course name, minimum standard duration, and year of first enrollment.

Funds will be deposited within 60 days after the last day of the registration period into a Macao pataca (MOP) bank account opened by the beneficiary at a bank in Macau.

## PSP REPORTS 910 VIOLATIONS AT HENGQIN PORT IN 2025

The Public Security Police (PSP) said it recorded 910 violations at Hengqin Port last year, including 82 cases of illegal parking in no-entry zones, along with 30 traffic accidents. Residents told TDM Forum that private cars often block tourist bus loading areas, creating safety risks when buses are reversing. The PSP noted heavy usage during morning peak hours and confirmed continued enforcement. Authorities will assess traffic facilities and work with the Transport Bureau to adjust planning and improve signage.

## PSP ARRESTS MAN FOR STREET HARASSMENT

The Public Security Police (PSP) apprehended a 23-year-old mainland Chinese man on suspicion of sexually harassing a local woman in public. The incident occurred last Friday evening, where the approximately 30-year-old victim said the suspect touched her thigh and buttocks. The victim immediately reported the incident to police. Using a shop's surveillance footage and the "Eyes in the Sky" system, officers located and arrested the suspect at Friendship Square about three hours later. The man admitted to committing the act.

## AIR MACAU RESUMES DIRECT FLIGHTS TO TAIYUAN

Air Macau will resume direct flights between Macau and Taiyuan starting tomorrow, with three weekly round trips on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. The airline said the resumption coincides with the Spring Festival travel rush and winter holiday season, providing convenient travel for residents visiting family or traveling for leisure. The carrier said that the flights will expand travel options and strengthen economic ties between Macau and Shanxi. The airline also expects the service to promote exchanges in cultural tourism, business events, and youth educational programs.

## TRASH CAN FIRE IN NAPE DEEMED SUSPICIOUS BY AUTHORITIES

The Fire Services Bureau received a report Monday that a trash can in a stairwell at the end of a building on Rua de Londres had caught fire. By the time firefighters arrived, the fire had already been extinguished by building management using water. Firefighters launched an investigation into the cause and found the circumstances unusual, prompting them to refer the case to the Judiciary Police for further investigation. After inspection, they classified the incident as an arson case and transferred it to the relevant department for follow-up. No injuries or health issues were reported.

2025 STATS

# Macao Foundation Q4 subsidies triple to nearly MOP1.8b

RICAELA DIPUTADO

**T**HE Macao Foundation (FM) distributed approximately MOP1.79 billion in subsidies during the fourth quarter of 2025, representing a threefold increase from the previous year's MOP606.7 million allocation.

This substantial growth in funding was primarily directed toward association operating expenses, with traditional organizations such as residents' and workers' associations receiving significant support.

Throughout the year, the FM approved over



1,300 funding requests across three main categories: association operational costs, scholarship programs, and academic initiatives.

The financial support plan funded more than

180 projects, while both community activities and exchange programs each supported nearly 400 separate initiatives.

Major beneficiaries included the General Union of Neighbourhood

Associations of Macao, which received MOP49 million for operational expenses, Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival gift baskets, and various activities, plus an additional MOP3.5 million specifically for their medical center renovations and equipment procurement.

The Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) obtained MOP36.9 million for similar operational and programmatic needs, though it subsequently returned MOP4.4 million due to adjustments related to previous project funding.

In the education

sector, the University of Macau (UM) secured over MOP1.17 billion for campus expansion projects, including land acquisition within the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The FM further demonstrated support for educational development through scholarship programs for Portuguese-speaking students, approving 120 applications totaling more than MOP5.9 million for living expenses, tuition, and accommodation during their studies in Macau.

The published figures represent only a portion of the FM's total annual disbursements, excluding additional allocations, such as the MOP1.5 billion for cooperative agreements reported separately in the annual review.



# GOV'T EXPANDS COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: SSM

LYNZY VALLES

**T**HE local government has reported progress in promoting mental health services, with over 156,000 residents participating in more than 2,700 community activities between 2022 and the third quarter of 2025.

The data was released in response to a written interpellation submitted by lawmaker Vong Hou Piu.

According to Health Bureau (SSM) director Lo Iek Long, the government has focused on three main strategies: early intervention in diseases, decentralization of resources, and changing mindsets to encourage voluntary help-seeking.

In 2025, more than 127,000 people took part in monthly health promotion events, including community health consultation posts and flash health stations, designed to raise awareness of both physical and mental health.

In Vong's interpellation, he queried how the government ensures that mental health services



in community neighborhoods are "not merely one-way promotional activities, but effectively identify and follow up on high-risk or needy cases, forming a closed loop from outreach to intervention."

In his reply, Lo said that mental health services have been integrated into all nine community health centers, offering outpatient mental health consultations and psychotherapy.

Additionally, non-profit organizations have partnered with the government to provide a 24-hour psychological consultation platform and a support hotline for residents in need.

In Vong's query, he noted that in the Asian sociocultural context, stigma regarding mental health problems remains a challenge, and social prejudices often act as invisible barriers preventing indi-

viduals from seeking professional help.

A study by a local university found that "self-stigma," such as believing that seeking psychological help is a sign of weakness, is the main factor deterring professional support. For many Asian communities, maintaining "face" is crucial, which closely affects the willingness to seek help.

The recently released 2025

Macau Secondary School Student Mental Health Survey shows that when students feel stressed, their main sources of support are friends (29%) and family (17%), while fewer than 0.5% seek professional support.

Meanwhile, Lo said the government has established the "Community Mental Health Partner Plan," collaborating with more than 100 institutions and reaching over 102,000 workers, offering training, psychological support, and referral services.

Additionally, the Training Base for Physical and Mental Health Support trained over 470 professionals by the end of 2025.

Since the start of the year, reports from the Judiciary Police (PJ) show that the city has seen five cases of unattended bodies discovered.

Macau recorded 91 suicide cases in 2024, marking a new local high and an increase from 88 cases in 2023. Data for 2025 has not yet been released.

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) encourages residents to be conscious of their psychological and emotional state as well as those of their relatives and friends. If in need, residents can call Caritas Life Hope hotline (28525222) or IAS' counseling hotline (28261126).

## PUBLIC WORKS

# Citizens Sports Park phase one construction begins, affecting several bus routes

RICAELA DIPUTADO

**C**ONSTRUCTION on phase one of the Citizens Sports Park began Monday at the former Yat Yuen Canidrome site, affecting several bus routes and resulting in the relocation of the Canidrome bus stop by approximately 100 meters.

At the site, the area from the original bus stop (M31-Gen. C. Branco/Canidromo) to the road near the canidrome's main entrance has been cordoned off with water-filled barriers for construction. The bus stop has been temporarily relocated about 100 meters away.

Affected bus routes include 1 (Barra), 5X (NAPE), 23 (Macau Tower), 25B (Hengqin Port), 33 (Fai Chi Kei), and night route N1B (Praça Ferreira Amaral).

Transmac has posted notices at the original



stop and deployed staff on-site to assist passengers, aiming to minimize inconvenience.

During construction, temporary traffic measures will be implemented on Avenida do General Castelo Branco near the Rehabilitation Centre for the Blind, and metered parking spaces along this section will be suspended.

Centre director Kelly Chan, in an interview with TDM, said the authorities had communicated with the centre

prior to the works.

She noted that the centre has reminded its members to exercise caution when entering and exiting the premises and that those encountering difficulties may contact staff for assistance. Chan also expressed hope that authorities would continue to communicate with the centre and provide advance notice of traffic and access changes, allowing the centre to better inform its members.

To align with construction progress, the con-

tractor will build a covered pedestrian walkway in stages around the former canidrome's main entrance to ensure pedestrian safety. The works are expected to be completed by February 14.

According to the Public Works Bureau, the first phase includes the demolition of existing structures and the construction of Buildings No. 1, 2, and 3, along with an underground parking garage. Completion is expected by April 2029.

Building No. 1 will be four stories, housing swimming pools, basketball courts, jogging tracks, and children's cycling paths.

Building No. 2 will be six stories, featuring skateboarding facilities, table tennis areas, climbing walls, volleyball courts, and two floors of badminton courts. Building No. 3 will be seven stories, including a five-a-side football field, multi-purpose halls, and outdoor spaces.

The second phase will begin after the first-phase venues open and will include a four-story children's pavilion, as well as an athletics field with eight running tracks and an artificial grass football field.

## EDUCATION

# TIS HOSTS 2026 VEX ROBOTICS MACAU CHAMPIONSHIP

**T**HE International School of Macao (TIS) hosted the 2026 VEX Robotics Macau Championship recently, bringing together six schools and over 200 students across 50 teams.

The event showcased student skills in design, engineering, and teamwork in a large-scale robotics competition, according to the school's statement.

Among the guests was Dr. Yang Lei, associate professor and director of Undergraduate Studies at the Macau University of Science and Technology's Faculty of Innovation Engineering.

In her keynote, she

highlighted the role of STEM education, emphasizing curiosity, creativity, and perseverance, and noted that students' work reflects the skills that will shape future technologies in Macau and beyond.

One of the event's highlights was the Excellence Award, recognizing top performance in design, teamwork, competition, and documentation.

TIS's robotics team 85301X "No!" received the award and will represent Macau at the VEX World Championship in St. Louis, Missouri, marking their second consecutive appearance.





# Wedding industry's demand simplifies and budgets drop by 10%

RICAELA DIPUTADO

**T**HE recent "54th Wedding, Banquet, Beauty & Jewellery Expo" saw wedding companies noting that couples in recent years tend to simplify wedding ceremonies, and their wedding preparation budgets have decreased by about 10% compared to previous years.

The three-day expo, held at the Fisherman's Wharf Convention and Exhibition Center, featured nearly 50 exhibitors and close to 100 booths, and attracted several soon-to-be-married couples.

In recent years, the number of marriage registrations has moved away from the pandemic lows but cannot be described as a rebound.

Last year was a favorable one for weddings with a double spring and leap month, but marriage registrations in the first three quarters still fell by 13%.

Looking ahead, demand in the local wedding market remains sta-



ble, and efforts will continue to expand services to meet these needs.

Some wedding planners believe that Macau has a stable demand for weddings and that enhancing service quality is key to adapting to market changes.

According to Macao Daily News, a representative in charge of local wedding planning confirmed that outdoor weddings have become increasingly popular.

The wedding planner said that

this year's exhibition seemed busier than the last, with many couples already beginning to plan their weddings. However, due to the current economic situation, banquet scales have shrunk from the previous 20 to 30 tables to just over 10 tables.

Traditional indoor banquets are no longer the mainstream. More and more couples prefer outdoor ceremonies, and many simply have a family meal after registering, indicating that simplifying ceremonies

is the prevailing trend.

Faced with constant market changes, the representative's company has proactively adjusted its pricing to align with market trends. Services have expanded from banquet decorations to comprehensive wedding planning, integrating resources such as wedding dresses and makeup to provide full-service, one-stop solutions, helping busy young people simplify wedding preparations.

Regarding market prospects, the company believes that as the post-2000 generation gradually reaches marriageable age, the wedding market will continue to have stable demand.

Meanwhile, a traditional Chinese wedding coordinator mentioned that due to the uncertain economic outlook, most couples opt to streamline wedding ceremonies, reducing demand for traditional Chinese wedding coordination services.

However, it is difficult for the industry to lower fees accordingly, as the services provided are quite intricate, involving active follow-up from the moment the couple pays the deposit and requiring full-day coordination on the wedding day, from ceremony oversight to verifying gold items and attire.

The coordinator believes that although the wedding market is not as booming as before, Macau still has a stable demand for weddings. She plans to continue adapting to market changes while providing high-quality services.

A photography company stated that, having been established for over two years, its wedding photography business has been relatively modest due to Macau's small population base.

However, because local labor costs are high, wedding photography fees are difficult to compare with those in other markets, and it is also challenging to tap into tourist clientele.

**J**P Morgan estimated Macau's gross gaming revenue (GGR) at MOP 17.8 billion for the first 25 days of January, citing its own channel checks.

Analysts DS Kim, Selina Li, and Lindsey Qian noted that last week's run rate held at MOP693 million per day, remaining steady week on week despite a lower VIP win rate, while daily revenue of MOP 712 million was recorded through January 25.

This pace marks a "pretty solid" improvement over December's daily average of MOP624 million, the

## GAMING

# JP Morgan: GGR holds steady in January

analysts commented.

Regarding January's outlook, the analysts said, "We are still comfortable modeling January GGR to grow 15-20% year on year, likely toward the high end of this range, which in turn should allow GGR to grow by around 13% in 2M26 and 1Q26."

Earlier this month, JP Morgan cut its 2026 forecast for industry-adjusted EBIT-

DA among Macau's six operators to MOP71.9 billion. The revised estimate still reflects a 5.0% increase over the bank's MOP68.5 billion projection for 2025, for which operator results have yet to be reported.

The bank also tempered its outlook for the fourth quarter of 2025, recently trimming Macau industry EBITDA expectations by

3% due to higher operating expenses and weaker flow-through.

It wrote, "Some of the headwinds are seasonal or one-off, but two straight quarters of softer margins may suggest a trend - at least that's what investors may feel in the near term."

JP Morgan downgraded its Macau outlook to "selective." **NS**



## CORPORATE BITS

### Galaxy to co-present 'Cirque de la Symphonie - Melodies of Movies'



Macau will host the "Cirque de la Symphonie - Melodies of Movies" performance on February 14 at 8 p.m. at the Broadway Theatre of Broadway Macau.

The performance will

combine symphonic music with circus acts, featuring aerial performances, acrobatics, juggling, magic, clowning, mime, and dance.

The Macao Orchestra

will perform classical pieces spanning ballet, opera, and Hollywood film scores, while the Cirque de la Symphonie, composed of international gymnasts and circus artists, accompanies the music with choreographed acts.

The concert, sponsored by Galaxy Entertainment Group under its Venue Partnership Pilot Program, will last approximately one hour and 30 minutes with an interval. Tickets are available through the Macau Ticketing Network at MOP300, MOP220, and MOP150.

The event is jointly presented by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, Macao Orchestra Company, Limited, and Galaxy Entertainment Group.

### MGM Cotai to host opening of Hong Kong International Airport city terminal



Macau will welcome the opening of the "City Terminal for Hong Kong International Airport" at MGM Cotai on Feb. 4, the gaming operator announced.

The facility is a

collaboration between Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), Zhuhai Airport, MGM, and China Travel Tours Transportation Services Hong Kong Limited, aimed at improving

cross-border travel and tourism services within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

This marks the first off-airport and overseas check-in terminal jointly operated by HKIA and Zhuhai Airport in Macau.

According to a statement, the terminal features self-service check-in counters, real-time flight information, and SkyLimo transport links, offering travelers a streamlined experience for flights to and from Hong Kong.

Organizers said the new facility will also support the city's position as a regional tourism hub while enhancing convenience for both business and leisure travelers.



DIPLOMACY

# Starmer heads to China seeking a thaw in relations but risking rift with Trump

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

**U**.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer is heading to China, seeking a thaw in relations with Beijing at a time of strained ties with the United States.

He's hoping for an economic boost to Britain, but risks the wrath of China hawks at home — and of U.S. President Donald Trump, who's already heaping tariffs and criticism on America's closest allies.

Starmer is due to meet China's President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang during the visit to Beijing and Shanghai that starts today, the first by a U.K. leader since 2018. He is expected to be accompanied by Business Secretary Peter Kyle and dozens of corporate chiefs as Britain seeks Chinese technology and investment, alongside greater access to the world's second-largest economy for U.K. financial services, cars and Scotch whisky.

"China is no longer just the world's factory; it is also becoming a global market," said Zhao Minghao, a professor in the Institute of International Studies at Shanghai's Fudan University.

The key word stressed by both sides is "pragmatic." As Trump roils the world order, both London and Beijing are looking for a more stable relationship.

China's government said it sees the visit as an opportunity to enhance political trust and deepen "pragmatic cooperation."

"In the current complex and volatile international situation, it

is in the common interest of both peoples of China and the U.K., as permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, to maintain communication and strengthen cooperation," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said yesterday at a daily briefing in Beijing.

## FROM GOLDEN ERA TO BIG CHILL

Kerry Brown, director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London, said the trip comes as dramatic shifts in geopolitics create new opportunities for U.K.-Chinese relations.

But he said "Starmer is going to be talking to a very skeptical audience.

"Britain has not been very consistent in its relations with China. We have been very hot and cold," Brown said.

The relationship has soured since the short-lived "golden era" proclaimed in 2015 by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron, who took Xi to a traditional English pub during a state visit. Beijing's restrictions on civil liberties in Hong Kong, China's support for Russia in the Ukraine war and growing concern about espionage and economic interference have widened the gap between London and Beijing.

Cameron's Conservative successors barred Chinese investment in sensitive telecoms infrastructure and squeezed China out of investment in new U.K. nuclear power plants.

Starmer's center-left Labour Party government carried out a

AP PHOTO



review of relations with Beijing after it was elected 18 months ago. It says its approach is one of hard-headed pragmatism — protecting national security from Chinese espionage and interference while keeping up diplomatic dialogue and economic cooperation with the Asian superpower.

Both Britain's economy — the world's sixth largest — and Starmer's popularity could use a boost.

His government has struggled to deliver the economic growth it promised and ease a cost-of-living crisis for millions of households. Labour lags behind hard-right Reform UK in opinion polls, and nervous Labour lawmakers openly mull whether it would be better to ditch Starmer for a more charismatic leader, such as Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham.

## AMERICA'S ALLIES LOOK TO CHINA

Starmer's visit to China comes as cracks are starting to

appear in his attempt to strike up a warm relationship with Trump — efforts rewarded with a trade deal that reduced U.S. tariffs on Britain's key auto and aerospace industries.

For months Starmer refrained from public criticism as Trump attacked the mayor of London, slammed British immigration policy and sued the BBC for \$10 billion.

But in recent days, Starmer has spoken out against Trump's desire to take over Greenland — calling it "completely wrong" — and condemned Trump's disparaging comments about the role of U.K. and other NATO troops in Afghanistan, which Starmer called "insulting" and "appalling."

Starmer says Britain does not need to choose between the U.S. and China. But he travels to Beijing days after Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney. Next month it's the turn of German Chancellor Friedrich

Merz, as some of America's strongest allies hedge their bets against the unpredictable Trump.

Zhao said growing unease among U.S. allies over Washington's recent policy moves, including on tariffs, Greenland and the war in Ukraine, "have triggered a wave among allies to recalibrate their policies to 'de-risk' from the United States."

But rapprochement with Beijing brings the risk of a rift with Washington. Trump has threatened to slap a 100% tariff on all Canadian goods after Carney struck a trade deal with China on his trip this month.

The trip follows U.K. approval of a 20,000 square-meter Chinese Embassy near the Tower of London despite strong opposition from critics who say the "mega-embassy" will make it easier for China to conduct espionage and intimidate dissidents. **MDT/AP**

RESOURCES

# Trump invests in another US rare earth miner to loosen China's grip on supply

**T**HE U.S. is taking a minority stake in an Oklahoma rare earth miner, the latest government investment in the sector as it seeks to minimize its reliance on imports of a material used prevalently in smartphones, robotics, electric vehicles and many other high tech products.

China processes more than 90% of the world's critical minerals and has used its dominance in the market to gain leverage in the trade war with Washington.

USA Rare Earth said yesterday [Macau time] that the U.S. Commerce Department is investing \$1.6 billion in the company to advance work on a mine in Texas and to build a magnet manufacturing facility in Oklahoma.

Shares of USA Rare Earth jumped more than 13% before U.S. markets opened.

The agreement with the Commerce Department's CHIPS program includes \$277 million in proposed federal funding and a \$1.3

billion senior secured loan. The Commerce Department will get 16.1 million shares of common stock in return, as well as rights to buy 17.6 million more.

"USA Rare Earth's heavy critical minerals project is essential to restoring U.S. critical mineral independence," Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick said in a statement. "This investment ensures our supply chains are resilient and no longer reliant on foreign nations."

The Trump administration is intensifying efforts to build up the critical mineral industry in the United States to work to break the chokehold that China has on the global supply chain.

Industry insiders, analysts and lawmakers have warned for years that America's dependence on China for critical minerals — a list of 50 minerals that includes 17 sought-after rare-earth elements — is a national security vulnerability.

AP FILE PHOTO



Attempts by President Donald Trump to acquire Greenland is part of that push.

USA Rare Earth, based in Stillwater, Oklahoma, is the third U.S. operator in which the Trump administra-

tion has invested in recent months.

The Pentagon invested \$400 million in rare-earth producer MP Materials. It gave the U.S. company a \$150 million loan in August. **MDT/AP**



DIPLOMACY

# India and EU clinch the 'mother of all deals' in a historic free trade agreement

RAJESH ROY &  
SAM MCNEIL, NEW DELHI

**A**FTER nearly two decades of negotiations, India and the European Union announced yesterday they have reached a free trade agreement to deepen economic and strategic ties. The accord — dubbed the “mother of all deals” — could impact as many as 2 billion people.

The deal is also one of the biggest bilateral engagements on commerce and comes as Washington targets both India and the EU with steep import tariffs.

“This agreement will bring major opportunities for the people of India and Europe,” India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a virtual address to an energy conference. “It represents 25% of the global GDP and one-third of global trade.”

India and the EU also agreed on a framework agreement for deeper defense and security cooperation, and a separate pact aimed at easing mobility for skilled workers and students, signaling their partnership extends beyond commerce.

Speaking at a joint news conference in New Delhi with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa, the Indian leader said the partnership with the EU “will strengthen stability in the international system” at a time of “turmoil in the global order.”

AP PHOTO



Indian PM Modi (center) welcomes European Council President Antonio Costa (left) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen before their meeting in New Delhi, yesterday

Washington is targeting both India and the EU with steep tariffs, disrupting established trade flows and pushing major economies to seek alternate partnerships.

The negotiations for the India-EU deal got a new impetus after U.S. President Donald Trump's strong-arm tactics over tariffs and Greenland.

“Europe and India are making history today. We have concluded the mother of all deals,” von der Leyen said in a post on X.

In a speech later, she said the accord was a tale of “two giants” — the world's second and fourth largest economies — “who chose partnership, in a true win-win fashion.” She also said it sends “a strong message that coopera-

tion is the best answer to global challenges.”

The deal, further integrating supply chains and strengthening joint manufacturing power, will also cut up to 4 billion euros (\$4.7 billion) in annual tariffs for exporters and create jobs for millions of workers in India and in Europe.

A formal signing of the deal could come later this year after a legal scrubbing of the text while it is expected to go into effect sometime early next year, after ratification by the EU Parliament.

India is expected to reduce or eliminate tariffs for 96.6% of EU exports, while Brussels will reciprocate with similar reduction covering nearly 99% of India's shipments by trade value in a phased manner, according to sta-

tements from both sides.

India's sectors poised to gain from the deal include textiles, apparel, engineering goods, leather, handicraft, footwear and marine products while the EU's gains will be in wine, automobiles, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, among others.

A quota system for automobiles, wines and whisky has been agreed on, bringing down steep duties.

The European Commission said tariffs charged by India on cars will gradually go down from 110% to as low as 10%, while they will be fully abolished for car parts after 5-10 years. Tariffs ranging up to 44% on machinery, 22% on chemicals and 11% on pharmaceuticals will also be mostly eli-

minated, it added.

On European wine, the tariffs in India would come down from 150% to 20% for the premium range.

New Delhi has excluded from the deal dairy products such as milk and cheese along with cereals citing “domestic sensitivities” about those products. The EU for its part won't allow concessional tariffs on imports of Indian sugar, meat, poultry and beef products, officials at Indian Trade Ministry said.

India is looking to diversify its export destinations as part of a strategy to offset the impact of higher U.S. tariffs, including an extra 25% levy on Indian goods for its unabated purchases of discounted Russian oil, bringing the combined tariffs imposed by the United States on its Asian ally to 50%.

For the EU, the deal offers the bloc expanded access to one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, and helps European exporters and investors reduce their reliance on more volatile markets.

Bilateral trade between India and EU stood at \$136.5 billion in 2024-25. The two sides hope to increase that to about \$200 billion by 2030, Indian officials said.

“Ultimately, the agreement is about creating a stable commercial corridor between two major markets at a time the global trading system is fragmenting,” said Indian trade analyst Ajay Srivastava. **MDT/AP**

PHILIPPINES

## Gov't grounds company's fleet of passenger ships after at least 18 die

**P**HILIPPINE officials yesterday grounded the entire fleet of passenger ships belonging to a company that owned a ferry that sank in the south and left at least 18 people dead, with more than 300 others rescued.

Ten people, mostly crew members and the captain of the M/V Trisha Kerstin 3, which sank early Monday off an island in Basilan province, are still missing. A search led by the coast guard and the navy continued

AP PHOTO



in waters where an oil sheen was spotted, coast guard Admiral Ronnie

Gavan said.

Coast guard divers and a remotely operated

unmanned vehicle will be deployed to locate and check the wreckage, which is estimated to be 76 meters below the sea surface, as part of the search, he said.

The steel-hulled cargo and passenger ferry, which had three decks, sank off the island village of Baluk-baluk in Basilan province while en route to Jolo island from the southern port city of Zamboanga with 317 passengers and 27 crew members on board.

The coast guard initially reported that it was carrying 332 passengers but later said 15 of them decided not to board at the last minute, Transport Secretary Giovanni Lopez said.

At least 316 people were rescued and 18 bodies, including that of an infant, have been recovered, he said.

Lopez said the indefinite grounding of all passenger ships of the ferry owner, Aleson Shipping Lines, Inc., would allow an inspection to determine their seaworthiness. Other companies would be allowed to deploy their ferries and the coast guard may provide free rides to prevent a major transport disruption in a

region where ferries are the main mode of travel.

“We'll make sure that this will never happen again,” Lopez said in a news conference, adding that Aleson's ferries had figured in 32 safety-related incidents since 2019.

It's not clear how many passenger ships would be grounded. The company did not immediately comment on the government order.

A rescued passenger, Mohamad Khan, who lost his 6-month-old baby, said the ferry suddenly listed to one side, hurling him, his wife and other people into the sea in the darkness. Khan and his wife were rescued but their baby drowned. **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO



UK

# King Charles III believes 'harmony' can help save the planet

DANICA KIRKA, LONDON

**C**AN it be that, like many baby boomers, King Charles III feels misunderstood?

That might sound like a strange question for a man with his own public relations team and easy access to any journalist in the realm. But 16 years after he wrote a book explaining his vision for saving the planet, the king has teamed up with Amazon Prime to make a film spelling out that philosophy.

The documentary delves into Charles' concept of "harmony," the idea that restoring the balance between the human and natural worlds is crucial to combatting global warming and many other major problems facing humanity.

Along the way, the king also confronts his critics, who have lampooned him as a dilettante flitting aimlessly from one cause to another with no rhyme or reason. Charles believes that climate change, urban planning, sustainable agriculture, traditional crafts and fostering understanding between religions — causes to which he has devoted much of his adult life — are inter-related issues that must be dealt with to create more liveable communities.

"I think we need to follow harmony if we are going to ensure that this planet can support so many," he said in a trailer for the film. "It's unlikely there's anywhere else."

## 'CYCLES AND LOOPS' OF NATURE

To help explain these ideas, experts including Tony Juniper, the former head of Friends of the Earth in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Emily Shuckburgh, a University of Cambridge climate scientist, appear with Charles in "Finding Harmony: A King's Vision," available on Amazon from Feb. 6. The narrator is Kate Winslet.

The king wants people to recognize that humans are as much a part of the natural world as the birds and the trees, something that can be obscured as we rush to work in air-conditioned offices, then drive to the supermarket to buy food wrapped in plastic, Juniper told The Associated Press.

The "cycles and loops" of nature are still what govern human society, Juniper said, and reconnecting with that is critical as we confront global warming, soil erosion, ocean plastics and the chemicals building up in our food chains.

"All of that is reversible, all of that fixable," he said. "But it's

going to require more of us to understand that we are not outside nature, we are in it."

Juniper believes Charles is uniquely qualified to deliver this message because he has been campaigning on these issues for decades and continues to do so even as other world leaders shun environmental protection.

"If there's one person in the world who is literally a globally recognized figure, who has authenticity derived from an incredible track record on these subjects, it is King Charles III," Juniper said.

## TURNING THE PAGE

Charles addressed the idea of restoring balance in the natural world in his 2010 book "Harmony: A New Way of Looking at Our World," written with Juniper and Ian Skelly, a former BBC presenter.

So why return to the subject now?

Part of it may be the hope of reaching a new audience through a streaming service with global reach. Prince William, Charles' heir, ventured into the same space last year when he revealed his plans for the monarchy on comedian Eugene Levy's Apple TV show "The Reluctant Traveler."

But the king also wants to

shift the focus back to an issue he hopes will define his legacy after two years in which the media, and the public, were distracted by other matters, said Ed Owens, author of "After Elizabeth: Can the Monarchy Save Itself?"

First there was Charles' cancer diagnosis, which forced him to step away from public duties for several months in early 2024 and raised nagging questions about his health. Then there were the continuing tensions with his younger son, Prince Harry, and the scandal surrounding his brother Andrew's links to the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

With Charles apparently past the worst of his cancer treatment, and Andrew stripped of his titles, now may be the time to turn the page.

"Let us not be in any in any doubt, that this is a very deliberate attempt to rebrand monarchy after a couple of very difficult years," Owens said.

Even so, the king can't be accused of only taking up these issues recently.

Charles gave his first speech on the environment in February 1970, when he was just 21 and still a student at Cambridge.

In 1990, he founded Dumfries House, the flagship project of the King's Foundation, to promote sustainable agriculture, traditional arts and crafts, health and well-being.

The house and surrounding 2,000-acre estate in southwestern Scotland operate as a laboratory of sorts for the philosophy of harmony, offering courses that seek to teach the principles of nature while preparing students to work on farms, in hotels and restaurants — and on construction sites. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1990 ROMANIANS CALL FOR GOVERNMENT CHANGE



Tens of thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators have taken to the streets of the Romanian capital, Bucharest to protest against the interim government of Ion Iliescu.

It was the biggest demonstration in the capital, since the revolution just over a month ago which led to the fall and execution of the former communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

The protesters converged on Victory Square, where Mr Iliescu's National Salvation Front party has its headquarters.

They called for the resignation of Mr Iliescu and the removal of all former communists from the party.

The demonstrators claim the interim president is denying opposition parties the chance to stand on equal terms with the ruling party in the free elections planned for May.

Mr Iliescu himself appeared on a balcony overlooking the square and promised to carry on talking with the opposition parties.

Ion Ratiu, leader of the opposition National Peasants' Party, told the BBC: "We are at long last emerging from a dictatorship that's lasted virtually 45 years and we had hoped we could advance toward democracy and this is precisely why the young people shed their blood."

"Yet these demonstrations today make it look to me as if there is going to be a new attempt at taking over power from the people."

He is holding more talks with Mr Iliescu later this week, but said the opposition's limited access to the media meant there was little hope of a fair election.

The revolution began in mid-December with a protest in the town of Timisoara against the deportation of Hungarian priest, Laszlo Tokes, who had denounced Ceausescu in a sermon.

What began as a small protest, quickly grew into a massive anti-government riot. Many demonstrators were shot when troops were brought in to restore order.

But the demonstrations continued and Ceausescu and his wife were captured trying to flee the country, tried and executed on Christmas day.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Ion Iliescu remained in power until 1996. But rather than pushing through democratic reforms as he had promised, he blocked moves to prosecute those behind the shootings in the December revolution. There has been much speculation since the overthrow of Ceausescu that it was not so much a revolution as a coup, plotted by Iliescu and his supporters. It was Iliescu who ordered Ceausescu's trial and subsequent execution. He was finally ousted from power by a centre-right government in 1996 - but three governments later and prolonged political feuding led to the re-emergence of Iliescu's opposition party. He was returned to power in 2000 at the head of the party of Social Democracy, promising faster reforms to get Romania into the EU.



YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

It might be difficult to understand when and how to be critical today. In a business or professional context, you'll have it a bit easier, though. Early morning conflict will force you to look at things in a more truthful light.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Don't be too surprised if your silly side and your sophisticated side struggle today. Opt toward playing the grown-up. Sounds like it won't be as much fun, but in the long run it will make you a lot more friends.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

What's your rush? The plans you have will have to wait anyway, so there's no sense in running around. Keep your focus on what needs to happen today, and let tomorrow take care of itself.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You can express yourself today in any manner that you wish, but be sure to let the people you're dealing with know that you mean what you say. It's a good strategy to work on things from several angles.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

When was the last time you spent the day by yourself? It may be time for you to slow down and coast for a while. Take life slowly and peacefully.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Time is a huge factor for you today, and it might throw a wrench into your carefully laid plans. It will have an elastic quality, stretching out to go way too slowly at times.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Whatever you do today, whether it's running errands, starting a romance... do it all the way! There's no going halfway for you right now. If you do, you're cheating yourself out of an amazing opportunity.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Your long period of confidence might be going through a bumpy patch in the road. It's not the end of the world if you doubt yourself every once in a while, so don't beat yourself up about it.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Efforts to reparent yourself will be successful thanks to sweet connections between the Taurus Moon, Uranus, and Saturn. Recognizing patterns that require breaking will be half the battle.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

A person from your past may make a surprise appearance today, and you have no reason not to welcome them with open arms. No matter how things were left between the two of you, right now they're better.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Make a conscious effort to spend some more time with friends. Their energy is something you can feed off, something that can inspire you to investigate a new direction in your life.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Have you been playing a marathon game of phone tag with a friend? It's time to stop the madness. Do whatever you can to get in touch today.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-6	1	cloudy
Changchun	-24	-14	fine
Chengdu	2	14	cloudy
Chongqing	6	11	overcast
Fuzhou	10	13	cloudy
Guangzhou	12	23	fine
Guiyang	4	11	overcast
Haikou	17	24	cloudy
Hangzhou	2	9	cloudy
Harbin	-26	-15	cloudy
Hefei	-2	9	fine
Nanjing	0	9	cloudy
Shanghai	3	8	cloudy
Taipei	13	14	rain
Wuhan	0	11	cloudy
Hong Kong	16	18	sunny

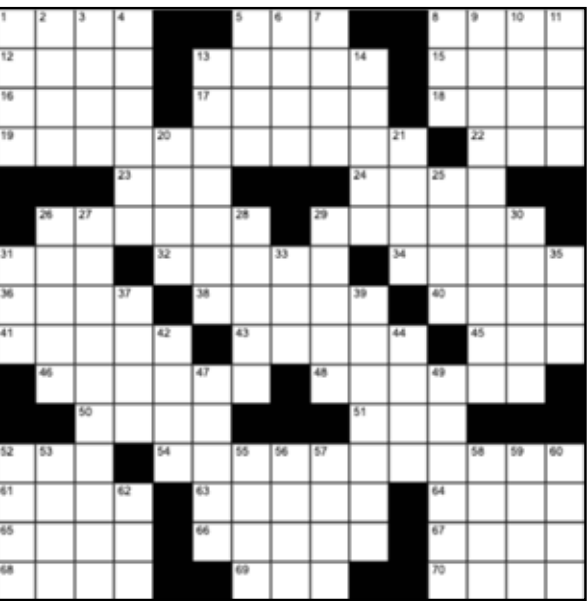
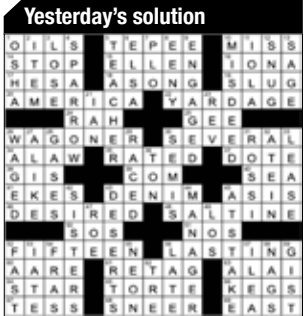
WORLD

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
Moscow	-12	-9	snow
Frankfurt	0	2	snow
Paris	1	8	cloudy
London	3	9	cloudy
New York	-14	-6	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1-Greenspan of the Fed; 5- Granola morsel; 8- Put a lid \_\_\_\_; 12- Punjabi princess; 13- On the wagon; 15- Sandwich shop; 16- Actor Stoltz; 17- January, in Juárez; 18- Square; 19- An organization; 22- Begley and Wynn; 23- Claiborne of fashion; 24- Skyrocket; 26- Wide street; 29- Powerful; 31- Despot Amin; 32- Rub out or remove from memory; 34- Slippery as \_\_\_\_; 36- Pinch; 38- Blue book filler; 40- Nights before; 41- Killer whales; 43- French beans?; 45- Conclude; 46- Surprisingly; 48- North African desert; 50- Tableland; 51- Outback hopper; 52- Mine find; 54- Sorceress; 61- Second letter of the Greek alphabet; 63- Having wings; 64- Loyal; 65- Like a line, briefly; 66- Oohed and \_\_\_\_; 67- Prayer ending; 68- Architect Saarinen; 69- Fannie follower; 70- Puts into words;

DOWN 1- Space; 2- Metallica drummer Ulrich; 3- Black cuckoos; 4- Actress Kidman; 5- A Chaplin; 6- Support in chicanery; 7- Hatcher of "Lois and Clark"; 8- Keats work; 9- Imaginary; 10- \_\_\_\_ Three Lives; 11- Sardine containers; 13- Convulsion; 14- Perch; 20- Silver screen; 21- Asta's mistress; 25- First class; 26- I don't give \_\_\_\_; 27- Device that measures a liquid's thickness; 28- Bridge positions; 29- Chairs; 30- Actress Davis; 31- Altar vow; 33- Opposite of NNW; 35- Timothy Leary stash; 37- Patriot Nathan; 39- Longed for; 42- Zaire's Mobutu \_\_\_\_ Seko; 44- Ammo; 47- Capital of Yemen; 49- Main arteries; 52- Bassoon relative; 53- Russo of "Get Shorty"; 55- Edible mollusk; 56- That's a laugh!; 57- To \_\_\_\_ (just so); 58- Columnist Bombeck; 59- Chop \_\_\_\_; 60- Chamber workers; Abbr.; 62- "Much \_\_\_\_ About Nothing", play by Shakespeare;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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  
HKD 10,800,000 3 bed 2 bath



# 'GALAXY MACAU CHILL COFFEE' PROMOTES 'TOURISM + GASTRONOMY' AND EMPOWERS LOCAL SMES



The three-day "Galaxy Macau Chill Coffee" at the Galaxy International Convention Center brought together 60 exhibitors, including more than 40 local SMEs and Macau brands, attracting over 12,000 visitors.



GEG enhanced engagement at the Festival by hosting diverse side activities to foster industry exchange and elevate public understanding of coffee culture.



GEG supported local SME participants by inviting world-class coffee champions to engage with them, and partnering with media partners to launch livestreaming activities.



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) firmly believes that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are essential to driving the moderate and diversified development of Macau's economy. Guided by this belief, GEG has long embraced the "Large Businesses Leading Small Businesses" model, leveraging its resources and platforms to prioritize the procurement from Macau's SMEs and foster their sustainable development.

As part of the "GEG SME Series", GEG recently hosted the "Galaxy Macau Chill Coffee" Macau Coffee Cultural Festival at the Galaxy International Convention Center. Serving as Macau's first large-scale coffee cultural festival organized by an integrated tourism and leisure enterprise, the three-day event brought together 60 exhibitors, including more than 40 local SMEs and Macau brands, and attracted over 12,000 visitors.

The Festival not only celebrated Macau's vibrant coffee culture, but also reinforced its unique appeal as a "World Center of Tourism and Leisure". Maximizing the Festival's impact, GEG, in collaboration with the supporting units and media partners, provided comprehensive support to exhibitors by waiving participation fees and offering logistical and promotional resources. Furthermore, engagement was also enhanced through the participation of world-class coffee champions and diverse side activities, including competitions, workshops, and talks designed to foster industry exchange and elevate public understanding of coffee culture.



GEG strengthened the Festival's brand identity by organizing a logo and event name design contest.



GEG introduced a "Coffee Tasting Rewards Program" at the Festival to encourage on-site consumption.



GEG collaborated with a local eco-friendly supplier to incorporate green elements into the venue design, repurposing wooden pallets into tables and chairs and adopting eco-friendly materials for tableware.



TENNIS

# What to know about the heat policy at the Australian Open

JOHN PYE, MELBOURNE

**T**HE Australian Open put its Extreme Heat Protocol into play for the second time this tournament because of searing heat yesterday.

The policy uses a 'Heat Stress Scale' ranging from 1 to 5 and taking into account the air temperature, radiant heat, humidity and wind speed.

When the index hits 5, play is suspended on outside courts and the roof is closed on the three arenas at Melbourne Park which have retractable covers.

That happened on Saturday during Jannik Sinner's match on the center court.

The roof was open to start Day 10 but the measures were imposed again after Aryna Sabalenka beat Iva Jovic 6-3, 6-0. The roof was closed for the next match, a men's quarter-final between No. 3 Alexander Zverev and American Learner Tien.

"At the end of the match, it was really hot out there," Sabalenka said. "I'm glad they kind of closed the roof kind of, like, almost halfway so we had

AP PHOTO



a lot of shade in the back so we could go back and stay in the shade.

"I guess, yeah, as a woman," she added, laughing, "we are stronger than the guys, so they had to close the roof for the guys so they don't suffer!"

The protocol aims to ensure

player safety and consistency during extreme conditions. With temperatures forecast to reach 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) late yesterday, organizers were prepared.

The Australian Open introduced the Heat Stress Scale in 2019, a measure from 1 to

5 that takes into account four climate factors: air temperature, radiant heat, humidity and wind speed.

It was developed to provide consistency for all players and minimize the risk of heat-related illness.

It sets thresholds for cooling

interventions. In the event of extreme heat, the tournament referee has the authority to suspend play or order extra cooling breaks.

Play is automatically suspended when the index hits 5 in women's and men's singles.

The referee may suspend the calling of any upcoming matches on outdoor courts. And if matches on the outdoor courts have been suspended, the referee may make the decision to close the roof — or to keep the roof closed — for any upcoming matches on the arena courts.

The referee will make the decision as to when to call for the resumption of play, and each player must be given at least a half-hour of notice prior to the resumption of play.

When the index reaches 4, organizers can impose an extra 10-minute break between the second and third sets in women's singles matches and between the third and fourth sets in men's singles.

In an arena stadium, if the roof is closed before the end of the first set in a women's singles match or before the end of the second set in a men's singles match, there will be no extra cooling breaks.

Sabalenka said she knew going into the match that some precautions would be taken when the scale hit 4 and then the full policy implemented when it hit 5. **MDT/AP**

AD

## New Rugby Season

Saturdays, 9-11am, Taipa Stadium

BOYS AND GIRLS, AGES 6 – 18

- Team working
- Co-operation
- Fitness and FUN



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OPINION

The Conversation

Atom Sarkar, Drexel University



CAN SHOES ALTER YOUR MIND?

**Athletic** footwear has entered a new era of ambition. No longer content to promise comfort or performance, some brands now claim their shoes can activate the brain, heighten sensory awareness and even improve concentration by stimulating the soles of the feet.

Nike, for example, says it is “tapping into the brain-body connection” to help wearers feel more present and focused. Other companies sell “neuro-insoles,” socks and textured footwear designed to stimulate the nervous system.

It is a compelling idea. The feet are rich in sensory receptors, so could stimulating them really sharpen the mind?

As a neurosurgeon who studies the brain, I find the neuroscience suggests the reality is more complicated – and far less dramatic – than the marketing implies.

The soles of the feet contain thousands of mechanoreceptors that detect pressure, vibration, texture and movement. Signals from these receptors travel through peripheral nerves to the spinal cord and up to the somatosensory cortex, which maintains a map of the body. The feet occupy a meaningful portion of this map, reflecting their importance in balance, posture and movement.

Footwear also affects proprioception – the brain’s sense of where the body is in space – which relies on input from muscles, joints and tendons. Because posture and movement are closely linked to alertness and arousal, changes in sensory feedback from the feet can influence how stable or grounded a person feels. This is why neurologists and physical therapists pay close attention to footwear in patients with balance disorders or gait problems. Changing sensory input can alter how people move, but influencing movement is not the same as enhancing cognition.

Minimalist shoes, with thinner soles and greater flexibility, allow more sensory information to reach the brain than heavily cushioned footwear. In laboratory studies, reduced cushioning can increase awareness of foot placement and ground contact, sometimes improving balance or gait stability. However, more sensation is not automatically better. The brain constantly filters sensory input, prioritising what is useful and suppressing what is distracting. For people unaccustomed to minimalist shoes, increased sensory feedback can raise cognitive load, drawing attention toward the feet rather than freeing mental resources for focus or performance.

Scepticism deepens when claims turn to concentration. Sensory input from the feet activates somatosensory brain regions, but brain activation alone does not equal cognitive enhancement. Focus and attention rely on distributed networks involving the prefrontal cortex, parietal regions and the thalamus, as well as neuromodulators such as dopamine and norepinephrine.

There is little evidence that passive underfoot stimulation – textured soles, novel foams or subtle mechanical features – meaningfully improves concentration in healthy adults. Some studies suggest mild sensory input may increase alertness in specific populations, such as older adults training balance or patients in rehabilitation, but these effects are modest and highly context-dependent. Feeling more sensation does not mean the brain’s attention systems are working better.

That does not mean reported mental effects are imaginary. Belief and expectation play a powerful role in perception and performance. Placebo effects are well documented in neuroscience, and believing a shoe improves focus can change behaviour enough to produce measurable effects. Footwear that alters posture or movement may indirectly affect mood, confidence or perceived mental clarity.

Neuroscience supports the idea that shoes can change sensory input, posture and movement. It does not support claims that footwear can reliably improve concentration for the general population. Shoes may change how the journey feels, but the most meaningful mind-altering effects still come from sustained movement, training, sleep and attention – not sensation alone. [Abridged]

WORKERS FROM BANGLADESH SOUGHT JOBS IN RUSSIA BUT INSTEAD GOT SENT TO COMBAT IN UKRAINE

An Associated Press investigation found that Bangladeshi workers were lured to Russia under the false promise of civilian work, only to be thrust into the chaos of combat in Ukraine. Many were threatened with violence, imprisonment or death.

AP spoke with three Bangladeshi men who escaped from the Russian military, including Rahman, who said that after arriving in Moscow, he and a group of fellow Bangladeshi workers were told to sign Russian documents that turned out to be military contracts. They were taken to an army camp for training in drone warfare techniques, medical evacuation procedures and basic combat skills using heavy weapons.

The three Bangladeshi men shared harrowing accounts of being coerced into front-line tasks against their will, including advancing ahead of Russian forces, transporting supplies, evacuating wounded soldiers and recovering the dead. The families of three other Bangladeshi men who are missing said their loved ones shared similar accounts with relatives.

Neither the Russian Defense Ministry, the Russian Foreign Ministry nor the South Asian country’s government responded to a list of questions from AP.

Full story on [macaudailytimes.com.mo/category/buzz](https://macaudailytimes.com.mo/category/buzz)

AP PHOTO



American YouTuber and online streamer Darren Jason Watkins Jr., known as IShowSpeed, meets fans at Independence Square in Accra

ISHOWSPEED CELEBRATES 50 MILLION YOUTUBE SUBSCRIBERS WHILE ON TOUR IN AFRICA

MARK BANCHEREAU, DAKAR

**T**HE American streamer and YouTuber IShowSpeed is on the final leg of a 28-day tour of Africa aimed at showcasing the continent’s cultural diversity, which is often overshadowed by images of poverty and violence.

“I’ve done so many incredible things in my life,” he said during a stop in Botswana. “But this trip is different. It opened my eyes. Africa is not what I thought.”

The tour of 19 countries across southern, eastern and North Africa began in Angola in late December. He attended the Africa Cup of Nations final in Morocco on Jan. 18, then visited Senegal, celebrating the national soccer team’s victory with fans, and Nigeria, where he passed 50 million YouTube subscribers and marked his 21st birthday.

On Monday, he visited Ghana, trying jollof rice, meeting a traditional ruler and receiving a massage at the shea butter museum.

“I am back home, there ain’t no better feeling,” the content crea-

tor, whose real name is Darren Watkins Jr., said upon arriving in Ghana, revealing that his ancestry traces to the West African country. He’s expected to arrive Tuesday in Namibia, likely the tour’s final stop.

For his “Speed Does Africa” series, Watkins streamed live on YouTube. In videos lasting up to nine hours, he sampled local dishes, learned traditional dances and challenged athletes, often shouting in excitement. Large crowds of his followers swarmed him at many of his destinations.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICA

Since the tour began, dozens of African American internet users have expressed support in widely shared videos.

Pape Seye, a 40-year-old resident of Dakar, highlighted Watkins’ visit to the House of Slaves on Gorée Island, a symbol of the Atlantic slave trade that sent millions of Africans into bondage.

“Americans, especially Black Americans, need to know that our histories are tied, that many of our ancestors might have been deported from

Gorée,” he said.

Some critics have been more skeptical. Beninese influencer Nelly Mbaa, known online as Afro Chronik, said that Watkins embodies a Western expectation that young Black men be valued for spectacle rather than intellect. She said he’s followed not for subtle humor, but for performing “an absurd, exaggerated and grotesque character.”

“If he were to abandon this persona — the constant grimacing, shouting and controversial remarks — his audience would likely disappear,” Mbaa said.

IShowSpeed has more than 50 million YouTube subscribers, 45 million Instagram followers and 47 million on TikTok.

He has built his brand on loud, exaggerated and sometimes aggressive reactions that became his online persona, but also sparked controversy. In 2022, he was banned from professional online gaming competitions after a sexist outburst against a female player and briefly suspended from YouTube for showing sexual content in a video game. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



**Australia** Yesterday, parts of Victoria state hit 48.9 degrees Celsius in a record-setting heat wave. Attendance at the Australian Open halved as authorities enacted extreme heat protocols. Wildfires burned across the region. Meteorologists expect the heat wave to continue through the weekend.

AP PHOTO



**Russia** is offering bonuses, pardons, and citizenship to attract recruits – domestic and foreign – for its war in Ukraine. Incentives include up to \$50,000 per enlistee. Reports show coercion of migrants and prisoners. Nearly 3,400 foreign nationals have died fighting for Russia, Ukrainian officials estimate.

AP PHOTO



**Oman** Three French tourists drowned yesterday when their tour boat capsized off Muscat, Oman. The vessel was carrying 25 tourists, a guide, and a captain. Two others sustained minor injuries. Authorities are investigating the cause of the accident in the Gulf of Oman.

AP PHOTO



**Congo** One year after M23 rebels seized Goma in eastern Congo, the city remains under their control. Economic collapse persists with shuttered banks, school closures, and widespread poverty. Over 7 million people remain displaced amid ongoing humanitarian crisis near the Rwanda border.

**Social Media** Jury selection began this week in Los Angeles for a landmark trial accusing Meta, TikTok and YouTube of deliberately addicting children and harming mental health. The case – seen as a bellwether – could reshape youth safeguards, liability protections and social-media business practices worldwide.