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MACAU SALARY INCREASES SLOW TO 1.1% THIS YEAR, BUT EMPLOYERS FORECAST A STRONGER 3.1% RISE IN 2027

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT FLOWS INTO MACAU PLUNGED 43.5% TO MOP6.2 BILLION IN 2025

CHINESE BRANDS CUT TIES WITH FRENCH FOOTBALL STAR KYLIAN MBAPPÉ AFTER HIS APPARENT REFERENCE TO MAO AS DICTATOR



Japan Manga artist Tetsuya Chiba, creator of the influential boxing series "Ashita no Joe," has died at 87. His publisher said yesterday he died at a Tokyo hospital Thursday. Chiba championed peace and freedom of expression, drawing on childhood wartime experiences in China.



Indonesia Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli's two Indonesia concerts will proceed despite objections from the country's leading Muslim clerical body over his past support for Israel. Organizers confirmed yesterday the performances at Borobudur Temple and Jakarta, saying they would promote tourism, culture and peace.

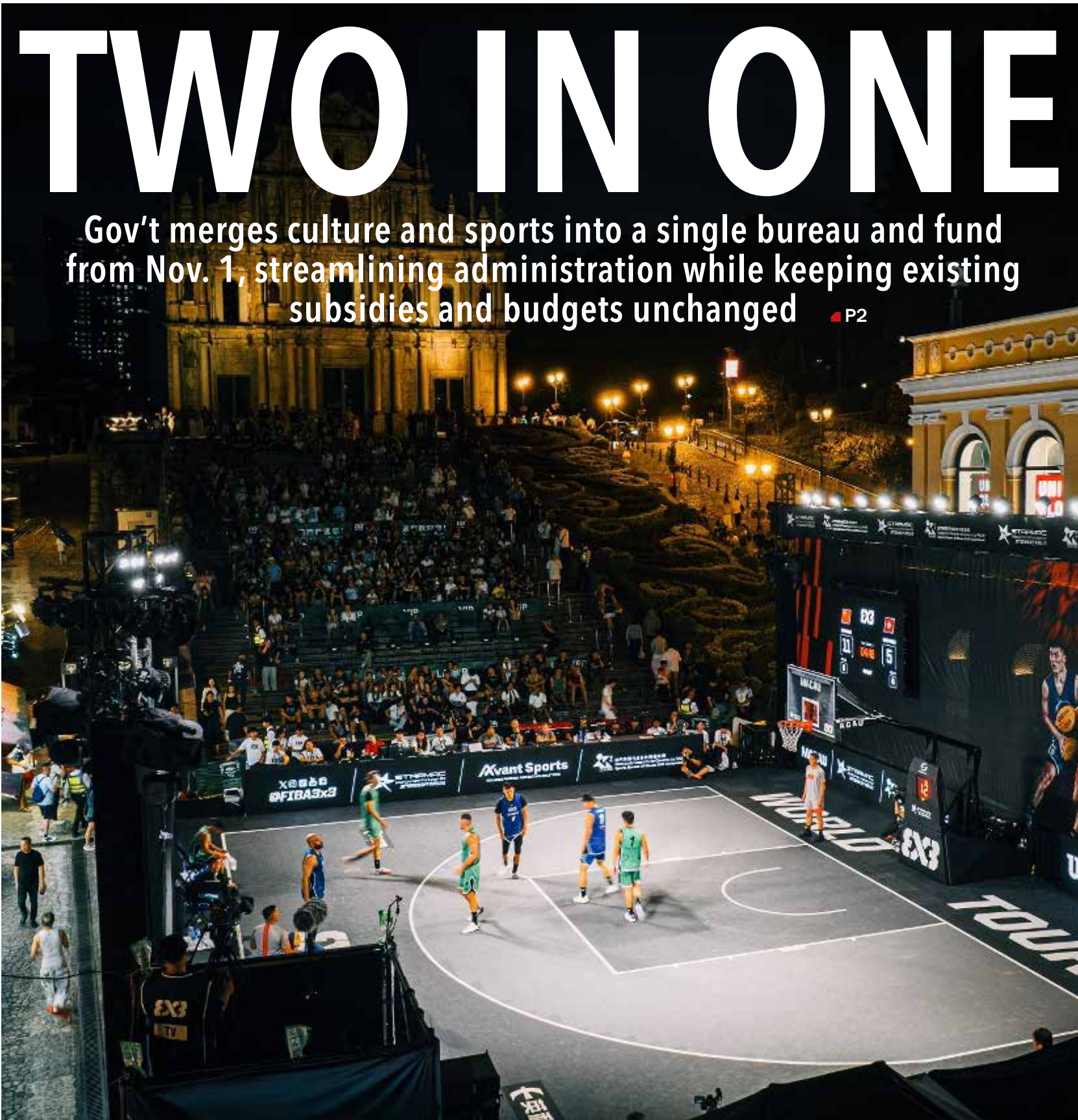


Israel's election yesterday may leave the country without a clear governing majority for weeks or months. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and rival Gadi Eisenkot face a tight coalition contest, with smaller parties potentially deciding whether either can assemble the required 61 parliamentary seats. (see p12)



UK Two 24-year-old men were charged yesterday with national security offenses linked to a suspected plot targeting RAF Fairford, an American-operated air base in England. One faces allegations of assisting Iranian intelligence. Authorities found gasoline but no explosives during their investigation of the incident.

More on backpage



TWO IN ONE

Gov't merges culture and sports into a single bureau and fund from Nov. 1, streamlining administration while keeping existing subsidies and budgets unchanged

TRAFFIC ESCAPE ROUTES BLOCKED, MORE THAN 100 RESIDENTS FINED

ADMINISTRATION ANTI-GRAFT WATCHDOG FAULTS SPORTS BUREAU OVER FITNESS CENTERS

ADMINISTRATION REFORM

CULTURE AND SPORTS TO MERGE INTO NEW BUREAU NEXT MONTH

NADIA SHAW

IN one of the government's most significant public administration overhauls, the Executive Council has approved the creation of a Cultural and Sports Bureau and a unified Cultural and Sports Fund, effective Nov. 1, 2026, merging the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), Cultural Development Fund (FDC), Sports Bureau (ID), and Sports Fund (FD).

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, the Executive Council (ExCo) spokesperson, said the restructuring is intended to strengthen governance, improve the use of public resources, and support Macau's economic diversification.

"Setting up the Cultural and Sports Bureau is an important step for the Macau SAR government to advance public administration reform," Wong said at Tuesday's press conference.

"Through functional integration and structural restructuring, the new department will deliver better public services, effectively promote Macau's culture, improve public fitness, and support the development of cultural and sports industries," he said.

The new bureau will be formed through the merger and reorganization of the four existing bodies.

Authorities state that it will carry out eight core functions: tangible and intangible cultural heritage; libraries and archives;

cultural and artistic development; cultural, historical, and publishing affairs; cultural and sports industry promotion; cultural and sports facilities; mass sports and competitions; and elite athlete training and sports science.

LEANER STRUCTURE

The reorganization will significantly reduce the bureaucracy's leadership and management layers. The four current bodies have three president-level leaders, six vice-president-level leaders, 13 departments and 31 divisions.

Going forward, the new bureau will have one director, three deputy directors, eight departments and 16 divisions. This represents a reduction of two president-level leaders, three vice-president-level leaders, five departments, and 15 divisions.

The bureau's departments will include Cultural Heritage; Culture and Arts; Cultural and Historical Studies and Dissemination; Cultural and Sports Industries; Cultural and Sports Facilities and Resources Management; Sport for All and Competition Operations; and Athlete Training and Sports Science.

A Library and Archive unit, equivalent to a department, will also be established, along with three divisions reporting directly to the director: Promotion and Cooperation, Administration and Finance, and Organization and Information Technology.

Deland Leong, who currently

NADIA SHAW



heads both bureaus and will also be the president of the new structure, said the reductions apply to leadership and supervisory positions rather than frontline operations.

"The reductions involve the number of leaders and supervisors, including two senior-level personnel, three deputy senior-level personnel, and 15 division-level supervisory personnel," Leong said. "We have already fully communicated about the related work over the past period."

She added that the merger is part of the government's broader agenda for public administration reform and governance.

"We hope that after the merger, first, our structure will be more streamlined and our efficiency will improve," Leong said. "In the future, our public services will be of higher quality, and our activities will gradually become more streamlined."

FUND CONSOLIDATION

The ExCo also completed discussions on the draft administrative regulation establishing the Cultural and Sports Fund, which will also take effect on Nov. 1, 2026.

The fund will be autonomous, supervised by the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, and will operate within the new Cultural and Sports Bureau.

It will also continue to provide financial support and awards for activities and projects involving culture, arts, sport, cultural and sports industries, and cultural heritage protection.

Unlike the current funds, the new fund will have no internal subordinate units or staff establishment. It will have only an administrative committee of seven members, each entitled to monthly remuneration equal to 80% of 100 points on the public service salary index.

The Cultural and Sports Bu-

reau (DSCD) will provide centralized administrative and technical support services.

The government said the fund will establish unified criteria for approving subsidies and awards. By combining the administrative support and assessment mechanisms of the FDC and the FD, authorities expect to simplify procedures and apply consistent oversight requirements to individuals and to public or private entities.

Wong said the changes follow the principles of clear functions, streamlined efficiency, mutual coordination, and innovative services, and are based on Administrative Regulation No. 13/2025.

"After the two funds are merged, the use of resources will be more efficient, faster and of higher quality," Wong said. "The specific operations will continue to be optimized in the future."

CULTURAL AND SPORTS FUNDING UNCHANGED

Leong sought to reassure that existing support would not be disrupted during the transition.

"Whether cultural or sports projects, subsidies that are ongoing or under application will remain unchanged, ensuring a smooth transition," she said in response to media inquiries.

Leong said the government will use the merger to improve application procedures and create a unified service window for applicants.

She also reaffirmed that neither the bureau's operating budget nor the fund's subsidy budget will change. The FDC's budget has been at least MOP200 million, and overall funding for cultural and sports projects will remain unchanged.

Both administrative regulations will take effect on Nov. 1, 2026.

GOVERNANCE

CCAC flags ID's poor oversight on fitness centers

NADIA SHAW

MACAU'S anti-corruption watchdog found negligence and enforcement failures in the Sports Bureau's (ID) supervision of fitness centers.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) said ID had failed to exercise its statutory supervisory powers effectively and had misinterpreted procedures for investigating and penalizing administrative offenses.

The inquiry followed complaints received over two years alleging that fitness centers operating as sports or fitness clubs were conducting commercial activities without the prior

approval required under Decree-Law No. 47/98/M. The CCAC states it initiated sanctioning procedures against nine establishments in mid-July 2024.

However, seven establishments received no fine notices, and the CCAC took no follow-up measures against them.

In response to the

CCAC, ID attributed the suspension of those cases to a legislative review the Legal Affairs Bureau was undertaking. CCAC rejected that explanation, stating proposed legal changes did not provide statutory grounds for halting enforcement.

CCAC investigators also found that proceedings had

already been suspended for eight months before the bureau received notice of the legislative review. CCAC further challenged ID's belief that inspectors needed to enter premises and personally witness violations to establish grounds for enforcement.

It states, "At one time, it believed that it was necessary

to enter the involved premises to carry out an inspection and personally witness relevant illegal facts in order for such acts to be considered the grounds for the decision to be made."

Following the inquiry, the CCAC states that ID reviewed all cases, conducted further inspections, and implemented corresponding measures.

CCAC closed the inquiry but placed it under retrospective review, allowing ongoing monitoring of the bureau's supervision and complaint handling.

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SOCIETY

Fire bureau warns that blocking escape routes won't be tolerated; 102 fined

YUKI LEI

THE Fire Services Bureau (CB) has completed 102 administrative penalty procedures against residents who blocked building escape routes with motorcycles or other items, with 37 additional cases underway, the bureau informed during its activity report for the first nine months.

The CB took the opportunity to warn citizens that it will continue to enforce the law in all cases when initial warnings are ignored.

Speaking at a quarterly press conference yesterday, Sheong Wa, acting head of the bureau's Research and Planning Department, said many residents have a habit of parking motorcycles around buildings, blocking escape routes and emergency access routes, and that the situation often fails to improve after warnings.

"We will continue to promote awareness through multiple channels so that riders understand the fire safety hazards of leaving motorcycles in escape routes — enforcement is also a necessary means," he said.

The bureau conducted 7,595 fire safety inspections at various premises during the first three quarters, advising rectification or posting notices when non-fixed



objects blocked escape routes, and taking enforcement action in cases of repeated non-compliance or serious circumstances.

In the same period, it handled 680 fire calls, up 59 or 9.5% year over year, with 547 requiring no hose deployment — 80.44% of the total.

Forgotten stoves, left-behind embers, burning incense and joss paper offerings, short circuits, and equipment faults accounted for 441 cases, or 64.85% of all fire calls.

AMBULANCE CALLS CONTINUE TO GROW

Ambulance calls reached 35,895, up 2,137 or 6.33% year on year, mainly for dizziness, abdominal pain, breathing difficulties, vomiting, fever and injuries.

The bureau continued to urge residents to use ambulance services prudently and only in cases of real necessity.

On equipment, Sheong said the bureau has recently purchased high-reach water spray vehicles and related tools that met expect-

tations, and will consider firefighting drones once the technology matures.

Staff are sent for training on the mainland, in Hong Kong, and overseas, with annual drills across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area.

He also noted that CB has recently produced materials for non-resident workers and speakers of less common languages on stove and electrical safety and fire escape to inform everyone about these risks.

SECOND BATCH OF CENTRAL FUND PAYMENTS DEPOSITED

The Social Security Fund (FSS) announced that the second batch of approved applicants for 2026 withdrawals from government-managed sub-accounts under the Non-Mandatory Central Provident Fund System received their payments earlier this week. Beneficiaries who applied by paper form in August or September for the 2026 Special Allocation from Budget Surplus, and whose applications were approved, had the allocation and any remaining sub-account balance deposited into designated bank accounts on October 27. The fund reminds residents to stay alert for fraud, stating it does not send text messages with hyperlinks.

REGISTRATION OPENS FOR NOVEMBER ECOLOGICAL ZONE ACTIVITIES

Registration is now open for activities in Macau's Ecological Zones, with limited spots available on a first-come, first-served basis. The November Open Days, organized by the Environmental Protection Services Bureau (DSPA), will be held on November 14 and 28 at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., offering 120 spots for two-hour guided tours of Ecological Zones I and II. Participants can view plants and birds and learn about the mangrove ecosystem. A family nature workshop on November 14 has 10 places per session, and a wetland birdwatching tour on November 28 offers 50 places. Registration is available on the bureau's website.

PJ REPORTS ANOTHER 15 VICTIMS OF 'TIKTOK' AND 'MPAY' SCAMS

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have received reports of several additional fraud cases, including 10 phone scams impersonating "TikTok customer service" and five "MPay phishing text message" scams, in which 15 people lost a total of nearly MOP560,000. The PJ stated that one female victim lost as much as MOP152,000, while the other nine victims lost between MOP2,826 and MOP110,000. Of the five people who fell victim to the "MPay phishing scam," one elderly person was found to have lost MOP30,000, while the other four lost between MOP2,540 and MOP5,400.

CRIME

Sharp decline in students victimized by scams, police say

YUKI LEI

THE number of students falling victim to scams has fallen by nearly 60% year over year, with overall telecom and online fraud cases down 43.8% in the first three quarters, according to the Judiciary Police (PJ), which called its campus anti-fraud work a staged success.

PJ Director Sit Chong Meng said the force relies on the School Safety Liaison Network and a model of proactive prevention, coordinated response, and follow-up support for



youth crime. The Campus Anti-Fraud Vaccine Program is now in its third year.

While results have been encouraging, some students still need greater

awareness, so the force needs more targeted prevention alongside broad publicity. This year, the force has worked with telecom operators to use artificial intelligence and

big data to proactively intercept scams.

Speaking at a session on non-tertiary and recurrent education, Sit noted that offenses involving minors have been trending upward, making stronger coordination urgent.

The force runs programs, including the Crime Fighter Seed Program, Community Safety Youth Leaders Scheme, Campus Anti-Fraud Ambassadors, and a new Campus Anti-Drug Elite Program, using peer influence to guide young people.

Sit made three recommendations: strengthen education and timely reporting to protect against sexual offenses; provide proper guidance to stop campus bullying and assaults; and pursue multi-party cooperation to improve students' digital literacy. He also called for integrating national security education with crime prevention education.

The School Safety Liaison Network, established in 2008, now includes nine higher education institutions and 75 primary and secondary schools.

The Secretary for Security's office said that several departments are participating in a cross-departmental youth protection network led by the Education and Youth Development Bureau.

GOVERNANCE

CE REAFFIRMS MACAU'S SAFEGUARDING OF PRESS FREEDOM AS WORLD CHINESE NEWSPAPERS MEET

YUKI LEI

MACAU fully safeguards press and publication freedom under the Basic Law and the Press Law and has consistently supported the media sector in strengthening its professional capabilities and achieving healthy development, Chief Executive (CE) Sam Hou Fai said as he opened the 59th Annual Conference of the Chinese Language Press Institute.

Speaking at yesterday's opening ceremony, Sam said Macau's rising profile as a global center for tourism and leisure has demonstrated in practice that "one country, two systems" enjoys significant institutional advantages and strong vitality.

"The annual conference of the Chinese Language Press Institute has come to Macau once again, underscoring the industry's care for and support of the 'one country, two systems' cause and the development of the Macau Special



Administrative Region," he said. "We hope everyone will take this opportunity to explore Macau, see more of it, and help promote and report on Macau. We welcome you to send more staff to Macau for interviews and exchanges in the future to deepen cooperation."

Sam said the news media play

an irreplaceable role in disseminating information, exchanging ideas, promoting development and public oversight, and, in the new environment, carry the important mission of spreading positive energy, building soft power, enhancing mutual trust, and building consensus. He said he be-

lieved the conference would help advance the high-quality development of Chinese-language newspapers worldwide and contribute to telling the story of "one country, two systems," Macau, and China.

The CE noted that his government is aligning with the national 15th Five-Year Plan and advancing Macau's Third Five-Year Plan, based on Macau's positioning as a world center of tourism and leisure, a platform for China-Portuguese-speaking countries, a base for exchange and cooperation where Chinese culture is the mainstream and diverse cultures coexist, and a highland for talent.

He also said the government is pursuing economic diversification through four major projects and a government guidance fund, advancing Hengqin-Macau integration and building Macau into a bridgehead for national high-level opening up and a window for exchanges between Chinese and

Western civilizations.

The annual conference, themed "How Chinese-Language Press Can Expand Its Influence Amid Unprecedented Changes of a Century" and running through October 29, opened yesterday morning, with guests and industry representatives from across Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, as well as overseas Chinese communities, arriving in Macau.

At a welcome dinner hosted by the Government Information Bureau (GCS) on Monday evening, Louie Wong said Macau was honored to host fellow Chinese newspaper professionals, noting that the conference had previously been held in Macau in 1996 and 2006. He said the 27 years since Macau's return had shown that the most direct and powerful way to practice "one country, two systems" is to convert institutional advantages into governance capacity, cultural heritage into city appeal, and national opportunities into tangible benefits for residents.

Dato' Lok Nam Fai, representing the press institute, thanked GCS for the invitation and said that Chinese-language newspapers carry the mission of passing on Chinese culture and conveying authentic voices, with exchanges at the conference expected to inject new vitality into the industry's future.

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LABOR

Macau pay rises slow to 1.1%, 2027 outlook improves, survey finds

YUKI LEI

AVERAGE actual salary increases in Macau slowed to 1.1% this year, down from 1.6% last year, with 23 of 38 surveyed organizations saying that they are freezing salaries, the 2026 Greater Bay Area (GBA) Pay and Benefits Survey found.

Excluding organizations that froze pay, the average increase noted was 2.5%. For 2027, the average forecast increase is 3.1%. Of the 38 local organizations, 15 said they hoped to raise pay, while the rest said they needed to wait and see. None predicted a freeze.

Presenting the Macau findings, Iao Kit U, the chair of the survey's Macau chapter, said staff turnover had fallen, with voluntary resignation rates declining overall. Departures were driven mainly by a lack of promotion and development opportunities, followed by pay — suggesting employees are becoming more cautious about job-hopping.



STARTING SALARIES AVERAGE MOP16,500

Among bachelor's degree holders, average starting pay was MOP16,500, the same as for sub-degree graduates, while master's degree holders and above averaged MOP19,000. Data analysis commanded the highest average starting pay at MOP18,500.

Across the three locations, graduate starting pay was broadly stable, at about HKD19,500 in Hong Kong, MOP16,000 in Macau, and RMB6,000 in Guangdong.

Fixed bonuses averaged 1.1 months' basic salary, with non-fixed bonuses ranging from 0.8 to 1.5 months.

More than 60% of surveyed companies offered medical benefits, including hospitalization and outpatient care, and new offerings this year included volunteer leave, mental health services, and flexible benefits plans.

Of the 38 Macau companies surveyed, 36 employed non-resident workers, who accounted for 36.7% of frontline and junior staff,

18.5% of clerical staff, 15.8% of middle management, supervisors, and professionals, and 10.6% of managerial staff.

The annual survey, covering July 2025 to June 2026, was conducted between July and September and included 221 companies — 78 from Hong Kong, 38 from Macau, and 105 from nine Guangdong cities — representing more than 270,000 employees.

It was co-organized locally by the University of Macau's Faculty of Business Administration and the Macau GBA Human Resources Association.

Across the region, 89 of 221 companies reported freezing pay this year, and the overall adjustment fell to about 2.38%.

Finance and technology performed better, while property lagged. Next year's overall increase is forecast at about 3%.

Hong Kong's increase was 2.3%, down from 2.5%, while Guangdong's nine cities rose from 1.8% to 2%, with next year's forecast at 3.8%.

Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management president Ray Leung said forecasts for 2027 showed an uptick across Hong Kong, Macau and Guangdong.

"This reflects that although enterprises remain affected by the external economic environment and cost pressures, they are still confident about future development and talent demand," he said.

GBA MOBILITY SLOWED

The survey also found that talent mobility across the GBA has slowed markedly, with Hong Kong's voluntary resignation rate falling from 19.3% in 2024 to 16.7% in 2026 and Guangdong's from 30.9% to 19.2%.

A new AI section found that many companies are trialing generative AI tools and automation, though more than 60% have yet to establish formal AI policies, governance structures, usage guidelines, or risk management systems.

Most are still experimenting, and the survey expects no mass replacement of workers by AI in the near term, but rather the creation of new roles in data analysis and AI implementation.

The survey found that training investment has risen, particularly in AI capabilities, with companies opting to upskill existing staff rather than recruit. Starting pay in information technology, once the highest, has fallen, while demand for data analysis roles has surged.

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INVESTMENT FLOWS INTO MACAU DROPPED BY 43.5% IN 2025

RENATO MARQUES

INWARD direct investment flows to Macau fell 43.5% year over year to MOP6.20 billion in 2025, according to the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

In a statement, DSEC said this significant drop was due to reduced reinvestment by foreign direct investors and to large loan repayments by some enterprises.

According to the same release, inward direct investment in 2025 primarily flowed into Financial Activities (MOP7.81 billion) and the Construction Sector (MOP1.41 billion).

Meanwhile, investment flows into Macau came primarily from the mainland (MOP5.62 billion) and from Hong Kong (MOP7.47 billion).

Inward direct investment income totaled MOP42.51 billion in 2025, with investment income in the Gaming Sector at MOP33.42 billion and in Financial Activities and Wholesale & Retail Trade at MOP12.67 billion and MOP5.57 billion, respectively.

Regarding outward direct investment, local enterprises recorded a negative outflow of MOP1.93 billion in 2025 as some adjusted their mainland investment strategies.

Meanwhile, new investments from Macau enterprises in Wholesale & Retail Trade and the Banking sector totaled MOP1.38 billion and MOP602 million, respectively.

As of the end of 2025, inward direct investment stock totaled MOP403.70 billion, while outward direct investment stock totaled MOP106.50 billion. Outward direct investment stock in the mainland totaled MOP78.82 billion, with the Greater Bay Area (GBA) cities accounting for 76.6%.

DSEC noted that Direct Investment Statistics aims to

provide an overview of direct investments between Macau and other economies, defined as investment in which an enterprise holds 10% or more of the equity share capital.

Principal statistical indicators include stock (the accumulated value of direct investment over past years) and flows (the change in direct investment in the reference year), as well as enterprise financial data such as equity capital, income, and loans.

For statistical purposes, the mainland and Macau are treated as two economies.

Statistical results are drawn from the Enterprise Survey,

which covers Macau's enterprises engaged in the Industrial Sector; Construction; Wholesale & Retail Trade; Hotels, Restaurants & Similar Activities; Transport, Storage & Communications; Financial Activities; Gaming; and Real Estate Development, Leasing & Sale Activities, among others; however, individuals are excluded.

The statistical unit is an enterprise. If an enterprise has one or more establishments engaged in different economic activities, the enterprise's industry will be classified according to its main economic activity, as reported in the questionnaire.

For example, data on hotels, restaurants, and other establishments of a gaming enterprise are included in the statistics of the Gaming Sector.

CORPORATE BITS

MGM's 'Brilliant Teen' program promotes positive values



MGM's "Brilliant Teen" financial literacy program, launched in May in partnership with the Bosco Youth Service Network and the Macau Responsible Gaming Education and Promotion Association, concluded with a Hong Kong study tour on October 24. The initiative sought to

promote financial literacy, responsible entertainment, and positive values among Macau's youth and families through educational activities, corporate visits, and community exchanges.

The study tour brought 40 participants to two Hong Kong counseling centers to

learn about gambling disorder prevention, treatment, and support services and to strengthen cross-border collaboration. Earlier activities included a visit to MGM Cotai, where students explored responsible gaming, sustainability, and hospitality operations, as well as a parent-child financial literacy adventure.

Tina Wong, MGM's Director of Responsible Gaming, reaffirmed the company's commitment to empowering young people, promoting responsible financial habits, and fostering a harmonious society through ongoing community engagement and educational initiatives that support Macau's sustainable development.

Wynn showcases Chinese wines for the Tatler Best Asia Pacific



Wynn showcased its culinary excellence and commitment to promoting Chinese wines at the Tatler Best Asia Pacific 2026, held in Shanghai earlier this week.

Wynn highlighted its Signa-

ture Chinese Wine Awards through exclusive tastings, receptions, and collaborations with chefs.

Chef Tam's Seasons retained its place on Tatler's Best 100 Restaurants list,

and Wing Lei Bar debuted on Tatler's Best 100 Bars list.

At the awards ceremony, Wynn Macau President Linda Chen emphasized Macau's role in introducing Chinese wines to international audiences. Wynn showcased 26 award-winning Chinese wines and hosted tastings featuring wines from leading wineries.

The event also featured culinary collaborations led by Chef Tam Kwok Fung, showcasing Cantonese, Chaozhou, and Ningbo cuisines alongside premium Chinese wines. Wynn's Mark Lloyd further highlighted Wing Lei Bar's innovative cocktails during guest shifts, reinforcing Wynn's dedication to gastronomy, hospitality, and international cultural exchange.

DIPLOMACY

Chinese brands cut ties with Mbappé over 'Chinese dictator' remark

E. EDUARDO CASTILLO,
BEIJING

FRENCH soccer star Kylian Mbappé's face appears in ads across China, from subway stations to elevators, but now at least three companies are cutting ties with the national team captain after he made some comments apparently referring to Mao Zedong, the founding leader of Communist China, as a dictator.

Beverage maker Dongpeng, dairy giant Mengniu and cheese maker Milkground announced Tuesday in similarly worded statements that they were ending agreements with the soccer star, each saying they oppose "any words and actions that hurt national sentiment."

The companies did not specify what prompted their decisions, but they released their statements after a clip that appeared to show Mbappé being interviewed ahead of going on the French online talk show "The Bridge" circulated on X.

In the video, Mbappé is asked about his favorite meme of himself, and the soccer star replies that it was "a video someone



AP PHOTO

made of a guy ... I think he was a Chinese dictator" before the video shows an altered image depicting Mbappé's face on the blue-suited body of Mao Zedong.

Soccer fans online jokingly call the star — who's said to overshadow many of his teammates and

even the teams he plays on — a dictator, and memes showing him as Mao or other autocratic leaders are widely circulated.

The Associated Press was immediately unable to reach Mbappé's representatives for comment.

China's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs spokesperson Guo Jiakun said in response to a question about the controversy that "words and actions that hurt the feelings of the Chinese people will naturally be met with joint opposition from all sectors of Chinese society."

Social media platform RedNote joined the criticism, saying in a separate statement that the company had a content partnership with Mbappé that ended on Dec. 31, 2024, and that it would "remove related promotional materials." It likewise expressed opposition to "any conduct that hurts national sentiment."

Mbappé's account on RedNote was not accepting new followers Tuesday.

Mbappé has featured in advertising campaigns in China for products from electrolyte drinks to milk and cheese. In one commercial for Dongpeng, Mbappé delivers a slogan in Chinese; in an ad for Mengniu, he appears alongside Argentine soccer star Lionel Messi.

On Chinese social media, there were already several comments criticizing the soccer star.

The hashtags "Dongpeng ends partnership with Mbappé" and "Several brands end partnerships with Mbappé" topped Weibo's trending list. "Football fans boycott Mbappé" was also trending, with some users expressing anger at his remarks or telling him not to come to China. **MDT/AP**

ZHANG YIMING

ByteDance founder reclaims top spot in country's rich list

BYTEDANCE founder Zhang Yiming reclaimed the top spot on a list of China's richest people, driven by his company's push into artificial intelligence.

The rankings released by The Hurun Research Institute on Tuesday reflected that the country's high-tech sectors were rising but others like consumer and real estate were under pressure.

The institute, which has published the list annually since 1999, found a record 1,529 people with more than 5 billion yuan (about \$750 million), up 6.6% from last year.

The number of billionaires based on their net worth in U.S. dollars rose to 1,176, up 155 people — 176 more than the U.S. That was slightly below the 1,185 people in 2021.

Zhang topped the list with \$100 billion, up 43%,



AP PHOTO

"almost all of it on the back of AI," and the amount was a record high for China's richest person, Rupert Hoogewerf, Hurun Report chairman, said in a statement. Hoogewerf noted that ByteDance's Doubao is China's most used AI assistant.

ByteDance is also the

parent company of popular short-video platforms Douyin and TikTok.

"AI is the biggest single wealth engine on this list: 160 Hurun rich listers — 1 in 10 — now make their money from AI," he said.

Bottled water magnate Zhong Shanshan fell to second place with \$61

billion, down 23%, while Robin Zeng, chairman of CATL, the world's largest maker of batteries for electric vehicles, came third, Hurun said.

Hurun cross-checked its information with entrepreneurs, regulators, industry experts and others to compile the list, while acknow-

ledging limitations.

Chinese artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek founder Liang Wenfeng, a new face on the list, ranked seventh. AI chipmaker Cambricon chair Chen Tianshi was 10th.

"This year's gains were polarised — entrepreneurs in AI, semiconductors and robotics surged ahead, whilst those in consumer, real estate and traditional manufacturing saw their wealth shrink — a two-speed economy," Hoogewerf said.

China last week said its economy grew 4.5% in the July-September quarter from a year ago, fueled by robust exports, moving closer to meeting its official annual growth target for the year. For the whole year, Chinese leaders have set a growth target of 4.5% to 5%, down from last year's 5% expansion.

While some industries

were thriving thanks to government support for technologies such as AI and electric vehicles, owners of small businesses reported tough times as their customers cut back on spending.

China's domestic demand has been weighed down by a yearslong downturn in its property market.

The Hurun list reflected that too.

Hoogewerf said Lei Jun, chairman of Chinese smart consumer electronics maker Xiaomi, was this year's "biggest faller," with his wealth halved to \$25.1 billion. Consumer fortunes also fell across the board, Hoogewerf said.

"Today, for the first time ever, not a single mainland property developer remains in the Top 100 — the only property names left at the top are the Hong Kong landlord families," he said.

MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Finnish President Alexander Stubb, left, meets with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre in Oslo

PUTIN'S WAR

Leaders of Finland and Norway speak on the phone with Russian president

FINLAND'S president and Norway's prime minister spoke on the phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin, officials said Tuesday.

The call, confirmed by the offices of Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre and Finnish President Alexander Stubb, followed an Oct. 20 meeting in Oslo between the two Nordic leaders, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff.

The call was held in consultation with Ukraine, according to the official statements by the two Nordic countries. Stubb and Støre initiated the call to discuss the war and upcoming trilateral talks involving Russia, Ukraine and the United States that are expected to take place in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in November.

The two European leaders spoke on behalf of their own countries and not the whole of Europe, the statements said.

"The discussion was frank and substantive," Stubb said. "We are neighboring countries to Russia. The outcome of this war will have a direct impact on our and the

broader European security. Ending the war requires direct discussions."

"The war comes with enormous human and material costs," Støre said. "The suffering and destruction will impact generations. In the call we stressed the importance of de-escalation."

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back for updates. AP's earlier story follows below.

Russia and Ukraine began observing a localized ceasefire in a devastated southern Ukrainian city Tuesday, before a planned humanitarian mission brokered by U.S. first lady Melania Trump, but Moscow kept up its deadly missile attacks on other cities in the meantime.

The local pause in fighting started at 3 a.m. to allow an aid mission into the Russia-occupied city of Oleshky later this week. The situation in Oleshky is desperate, with food and medical supplies running perilously low for the up to 2,000 people still there, as drones and land mines restrict movement.

Deep mistrust between Russia and Ukraine, as Moscow's full-scale invasion

nears the five-year mark in February, has undermined previous attempts at limited ceasefires, which quickly unraveled or never took hold.

The humanitarian truce was a high-stakes operation for both Moscow and Kyiv, with both sides keen to win U.S. President Donald Trump's favor.

Russian and Ukrainian negotiators as well as the militaries of the two countries confirmed in separate statements that the Oleshky ceasefire had begun.

According to her office, Melania Trump led talks with civilian negotiators from Russia and Ukraine after meeting with U.N. officials who briefed the American first lady on the situation in Oleshky.

Up to 2,000 people are stranded in the city, unable to leave because of explosive mines and drone attacks in the area, according to the U.N. The partly occupied Kherson region of Ukraine where Oleshky is located is notorious for the dangers of Russian drone attacks on soldiers and civilians.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that "so far there have been no re-

ports of violations."

Pope Leo XIV spoke earlier this month with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin, urging them to allow humanitarian aid into Oleshky and the safe evacuation of civilians, the Vatican said.

Negotiators involved in the aid mission said doctors, medicines, food supplies and water would be taken to Oleshky before evacuation corridors are opened.

The Kremlin said at the time that Putin voiced support for the Vatican's plea, and an agreement was reached to coordinate efforts in this regard.

Moscow and Kyiv have blamed each other for the humanitarian crisis.

Russia, as the occupying power, must under international law ensure that civilians under its occupation live safely. Ukraine has repeatedly tried to negotiate a humanitarian corridor for evacuations and aid delivery with Moscow.

The aid mission is planned ahead of a new round of U.S.-brokered talks between delegations from Russia and Ukraine expected next month that will seek to lay the groundwork for detailed peace negotiations later.

The local ceasefire is due to last through Saturday, or longer if needed. Its geographical scope was unclear, though it was centered on Oleshky and other nearby parts of the Kherson region.

Oleshky is about 550 kilometers (340 miles) southeast of Kyiv, where the Dnipro River separates Russian and Ukrainian forces. Oleshky sits across the Dnipro River from the city of Kherson, the region's administrative capital. Russian forces seized Kherson in the early stages of the 2022 full-scale invasion, but retreated across the river several months later.

The Ukrainian-held side of the Kherson region was quiet Tuesday. Only Russian reconnaissance drones were in the sky, local authorities said, though they cautioned it was too early to draw any conclusions and that they didn't trust Russia.

"It's too early to say. Let's wait and see, because you can't trust the enemy, especially the Russians," Yaroslav Shanko, head of the Kherson city administration, told The Associated Press.

"There have been previously announced ceasefires more than once, and they had no effect on Kherson ... and, let's say, a lull like this is sometimes even frightening,"

MDT/AP

this day in history

1962 WORLD RELIEF AS CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS ENDS



The world has breathed a collective sigh of relief after the superpowers reached an agreement ending the immediate threat of nuclear war.

Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev has agreed to dismantle all Russian missiles based in Cuba and ship them back to the Soviet Union.

The announcement was made in a public message to President John F. Kennedy broadcast on Moscow Radio.

In response, President Kennedy said the decision to remove the Cuban missiles was an "important contribution to peace".

He has also promised the US will not invade Cuba and will eventually lift the US naval blockade imposed on the island.

The blockade will continue until effective UN inspection ensures that the missiles in Cuba have been dismantled.

The crisis began on 14 October after a U-2 reconnaissance plane revealed the existence of several nuclear missiles based in on the Caribbean island capable of reaching the US.

Then, a week ago, President Kennedy made a TV address to the nation denouncing the Soviets' actions. He declared a naval blockade on Cuba and threatened the USSR itself with attack if any Cuban missile were launched against the USA.

Since then the world has been on tenterhooks wondering which superpower would back down first, desperately hoping this was not the beginning of a nuclear World War III.

Four days ago, faced with a huge US fleet including eight aircraft carriers that had formed an arc 500 miles (800km) from the eastern tip of Cuba, Soviet vessels approaching the island turned back.

The British Foreign Secretary the Earl of Home welcomed Khrushchev's decision to dismantle the weapons in Cuba and praised President Kennedy's diplomatic skills. [...]

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

In the summer of 1962 Nikita Khrushchev gave the go-ahead for nuclear missiles to be installed on Cuba to protect it from US invasion and also to counterbalance US superiority in long- and medium-range nuclear weapons based in Europe. After a US spy plane spotted the missile bases, the news was announced by President Kennedy and for a week the world hovered on the brink of all-out nuclear war. It was the Soviets who eventually backed down after Khrushchev insisted Kennedy promise not to invade Cuba. He also demanded the withdrawal of Jupiter missiles in Turkey. Kennedy publicly agreed to the first request and secretly agreed to the second. The US ended its blockade on 20 November 1962, the Soviets removed their nuclear weapons by the end of the year and US missiles in Turkey were withdrawn in 1963. A hot line between the USA and USSR was set up to prevent such a crisis happening again.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Be aware of the limitations of the Moon Alert because today it is taking place in your Money House. Guard against temptations to shop and buy things. Be wise and restrict your spending to food and gas



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Today might feel loosey-goosey and indecisive because the Moon Alert is in your sign. Although this promotes creativity and lighthearted socializing with others, it's a poor time to make realistic, financial decisions.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Most of the time, I believe in trusting your gut instincts. However, today, your instincts might lead you astray because of the Moon Alert. Keep your wits about you. Deal with delays and goofy mistakes at work.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

This is a lovely day to schmooze with friends and groups! You'll also enjoy fun outings with kids, as well as sports events. Meanwhile, for many of you, old flames are back on the scene.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

People notice you more than usual. However today, the Moon Alert is taking place at the top of your chart, which means your poor decisions and choices will be public!



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

This is a fun day to explore your surroundings. Be a tourist in your own city. Learn something new. Go someplace you've never been before. Reach out and talk to neighbours as well as people from other cultures.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

This is a tricky day because today's Moon Alert is taking place in the part of your chart that deals with shared property, taxes, debt, inheritances and insurance issues. All that red-tape stuff.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Conversations with partners, spouses and close friends might feel like two ships passing in the night because today's Moon Alert occurs directly opposite your sign. Mixed signals and misinterpretations will be classic.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You'll enjoy seeing old friends and groups from your past. However, today the Moon Alert will rob you of some of your efficiency when it comes to your job or your daily tasks. Sit this one out.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

This is a wonderful, creative day for you! Artists can be productive making art. Any of you will enjoy appreciating art as well as appreciating social engagement with others, including children and sports events.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You will be best served relaxing at home today and keeping a low profile, especially because most of this day is a Moon Alert. Don't volunteer for anything within the family. Don't agree to anything important.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Today you want to get out and talk to others to share your ideas and possibly teach or persuade people to your way of thinking. However, most of this day is a Moon Alert.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	1	15	fine
Changchun	-7	9	overcast
Chengdu	13	18	overcast
Chongqing	16	19	rain
Fuzhou	20	25	cloudy
Guangzhou	20	29	cloudy
Guiyang	15	21	overcast
Haikou	24	30	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	14	20	cloudy
Harbin	-6	3	cloudy
Hefei	11	18	overcast
Nanjing	11	20	cloudy
Shanghai	14	20	cloudy
Taipei	19	22	rain
Wuhan	15	20	overcast
Hong Kong	25	27	sunny

WORLD

Moscow	0	12	sunny
Frankfurt	4	15	sunny
Paris	5	15	sunny
London	8	16	sunny
New York	8	16	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Strong ____ ox; 5- Put ____ fight; 8- Top-rated; 12- Carryalls; 14- Garage sale warning; 15- Kit item; 16- Chicago's airport; 17- Reading rooms; 18- Learning method; 19- Automobile; 21- Sloping letter; 23- Pro ____ (for now); 24- Road curve; 25- Picnic pest; 26- Seaport in N Spain; 30- Bottom line; 32- Dens; 33- Wretchedly unhappy; 37- ____ time (never); 38- Not hollow; 39- Tide type; 40- German composer; 42- Pee Wee of the Dodgers; 43- More healthy; 44- Exam taker; 45- Female rabbit; 48- Astronaut Grissom; 49- Small batteries; 50- Firstborn; 52- Irregular; 57- Russian pancake; 58- "Othello" villain; 60- Not hesitant; 61- Mambo king Puente; 62- Mixture; 63- Prongs; 64- Cong. meeting; 65- One of the Bobbsey twins; 66- "Great" dog;

DOWN 1- Tiny particle; 2- Manhattan neighborhood; 3- Rat- ____; 4- Pianist Peter; 5- ____-friendly; not too technical; 6- Slender metal fastener; 7- Aided; 8- Name on a razor; 9- Alley Oop's girlfriend; 10- Out; 11- Vote into office; 13- Some mattresses; 14- First man; 20- Corp. VIP; 22- Peter the Great, e.g.; 24- Red fluorescent dye; 26- Tell all; 27- Must've been something ____; 28- ____ dancing is popular with cowboys!; 29- Thin soup; 30- Floor worker; 31- Bowling alley divisions; 33- Shifts; 34- Borscht ingredient; 35- Emit coherent light; 36- Fencing blade; 38- Answer to a problem; 41- Witches; 42- A place for vacationers; 44- Shade at the beach?; 45- Sums owing; 46- Stan's pal; 47- Prepares for publication; 49- Peek- ____; 51- Baseballer Slaughter; 52- Not "fer"; 53- Nevada senator Harry; 54- "Give that ____ cigar!"; 55- Arabian gulf; 56- Dissolve, as cells; 59- Chicken -- king;

Yesterday's solution

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

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

AP PHOTO



Josasath Liefde, a wood carver, works in his workshop in Pikienslee

TRADITION

IN SURINAME'S RAINFOREST, SAAMAKA WOODCARVERS FACE THE PULL OF GOLD MINING AND LOGGING

STEVEN GRATTAN, PIKI SEEI

STANDING atop a giant block of wood, 63-year-old Alingo Doekoe bent over and swung a traditional pick, skillfully chiseling away shards of timber. Bit by bit, a board for Adjiboto, a traditional Saamaka game with roots in West Africa, was taking shape.

Here in Piki Seei — the Saamaka name for the village officially known in Dutch as Pikienslee — tembe, the Saamaka tradition of woodcarving and decorative art, has long been part of everyday life.

The Saamaka are one of six tribal peoples in Suriname whose ancestors escaped slavery during Dutch colonial rule, building independent communities in the country's forested interior more than three centuries ago.

Mostly practiced by men and passed from fathers and elders to younger generations, tembe can be seen in everything from benches, paddles and boats to combs, doors and the wooden houses that line communities along the river. The surrounding forest has sustained Saamaka communities for centuries, providing food, building materials and resources central to their cultural traditions. But expanding gold mining and logging are putting increasing pressure on the environment, while drawing men away from their villages and traditional crafts.

For the carvers who remain,

that shift is about more than the loss of an art form.

"Woodcarving is part of who we are," Josasath Liefde, 50, a carver in Piki Seei, said. "It is a Saamaka tradition that will continue to live on."

CARVING HOLDS GENERATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Tembe geometric designs can carry meanings and stories, while the craft turns wood into objects used in daily life.

Doekoe has spent decades carving wood and working to preserve Saamaka traditions. He is involved with Totomboti, a collective in Piki Seei that brings together carvers and works to pass cultural knowledge to younger generations.

Several of the carvers at Totomboti are Rastafarians, followers of a spiritual movement that originated in Jamaica in the 1930s and emphasizes African identity and a connection to nature. While Rastafari is not practiced by all Saamaka, the faith has a particularly strong presence in Piki Seei. Doekoe said he and other men in the village embraced it after recognizing similarities with their own spiritual traditions and knowledge of the natural world.

At their workshop, blocks of wood and shavings covered the ground as carvers worked on pieces in various stages of completion. Doekoe said they use fallen trees when possible and occasionally cut down others,

taking care to limit their impact on the forest. According to the Totomboti collective, its woodworkers use just one or two logs a year, selectively harvesting hardwood trees suited to their craft.

But for Doekoe, woodcarving is about more than the objects they produce. Saamaka music, language and art preserve elements of the African cultures of their ancestors, who were forcibly transported to Suriname during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

"There is knowledge hidden within our art," he said.

Liefde learned from his father how to turn trees into objects his family and community needed. He makes benches and paddles and builds boats as long as 15 meters (49 feet).

"If you have to leave this place, you need a boat, and the wood used to make that boat comes from this forest," he said. "So, this is our livelihood."

GOLD AND LOGGING PULL MEN AWAY

Doekoe sometimes goes two months without selling anything. He said younger men can see others their age return from the gold fields with money to buy cars and other things, making mining an attractive alternative to carving.

Gold mining and logging, both legal and illegal, have expanded across Suriname's forested interior, offering the pos-

sibility of income but bringing significant risks and environmental damage. One Saamaka gold miner, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals from his employers, said he knows those risks intimately.

In 2016, an excavator crushed his arm while he was working in a gold mine. He lost the arm, but eventually went back.

"I came back to this work because I have a goal I want to achieve, and I believe I can achieve it this way," he told The Associated Press from beneath a makeshift shelter with a tarp roof shielding workers from the intense sun.

The miner supports two adults and five children and sees few alternatives capable of providing the money he needs. He hopes eventually to earn enough from mining to expand a chicken farm on land he already owns.

Before losing his arm, the man also carved traditional wooden hair combs. Many of the trees he used have since been cut down, he said, forcing people to travel farther to find suitable wood.

He still knows how to make the combs but is no longer physically able to do so.

His experience illustrates the complicated economic choices facing some Saamaka men. Mining can offer a way to pursue goals that require cash, even when the people doing it recognize its dangers.

"There is definitely pressure on young men to go into gold mining," he said. "You have to make your own way in life."

Liefde sees the departure of young men differently. He said he has warned his own children against working in the gold fields. He said some young men who left the village for work have died.

"The person who leaves may see it as an opportunity for himself," Liefde said. "I see it as a loss for the village."

CARVERS PASS THE TRADITION ON

In Piki Seei, some carvers are trying to make sure the next generation still has another choice.

Carvers associated with Totomboti have worked with local children, arranging lessons outside school hours where they learn to measure and shape wood and make objects themselves.

The Saamaka Museum in the village provides a place where carvings can be displayed and sold, while visitors from outside the community provide another market. Carvers who live or work elsewhere also return to the village to practice their skills.

Doekoe said tourism and sales to foreign visitors can give artists an incentive to remain in their communities. But preserving the craft is about more than finding buyers.

He described days at the Totomboti workshop when the men deliberately put down their tools. Instead of carving, they sit together, exchange ideas and tell stories handed down by their ancestors.

"It is spiritual, and it is life," Doekoe said. "It lives in our stories."

Young people still come to him wanting to learn. He might start a beginner with a small piece of wood, showing him how to mark and shape it into a hair comb that could then be given to a friend. But passing on those skills also depends on protecting the forest that provides the materials and inspiration for their work.

Doekoe warned that gold mining and logging are leaving damage he believes cannot be reversed, transforming waterways and destroying the conditions that allow forests to regenerate.

"The forest is no longer the same, and it will never recover to what God created," he said.

And it is the next generation, he fears, that will bear the consequences.

"When the seeds of the trees that should grow can no longer grow, the children who grow up here will not experience the forest as it is today," he said.

MDT/AP

FOOTBALL

Ballon D'Or winner Kane heads back to Munich for 'special welcome'

JAMES ELLINGWORTH,
DUESSELDORF

AFTER an historic Ballon D'Or win and an emotional speech, Harry Kane is heading back to Germany for a "special welcome" at Bayern Munich and a slightly less glamorous cup game.

Kane's the first English winner of the prize in 25 years and it ends some even longer streaks in Germany. Bayern is celebrating its first Ballon D'Or winner in 45 years and it's also the first for any player at a German club since 1996.

"We're all delighted with Harry Kane's performance. It's not just his goals that make him an exceptional footballer, and it's not just on the pitch that he's a special character," sporting director Christoph Freund said.

"Harry is a great guy, you very rarely come across someone like him, world-class yet so down-to-earth. Harry has taken the center-forward role to a whole new



level — he's an inspiration, especially for young players. He's undoubtedly one of the greatest in football history."

Kane was on his way from Lon-

don back to Munich for training Tuesday, assistant coach Aaron Danks said.

Bayern has teased a "special welcome" for Kane ahead of We-

nesday's German Cup second-round game against second-division Magdeburg. Danks said the England captain would be available to play Wednesday as the club continues its defense of a trophy decided last season by his hat trick in the final.

Bayern has also promised there'll be recognition of his achievement when it faces arch-rival Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga "Klassiker" on Saturday.

Kane is Bayern's fourth Ballon D'Or winner

after German greats Franz Beckenbauer, Gerd Müller and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, who was the last winner in 1981. Robert Lewandowski was the runaway

favorite for the prize in 2020, when a decision was taken not to award the trophy because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The win comes at an otherwise somber time at the club, with head coach Vincent Kompany undergoing medical treatment after his sudden collapse at training last week, and midfielder Joshua Kimmich on leave after a death in the family.

"You see the extremes that life has to offer," Danks said. "The immense joy Harry experienced yesterday and the moments we've had over the past few weeks. It's important to realize that people are what matter most." **MDT/AP**

Kane is Bayern's fourth Ballon D'Or winner after German greats Beckenbauer, Müller and Rummenigge

AD

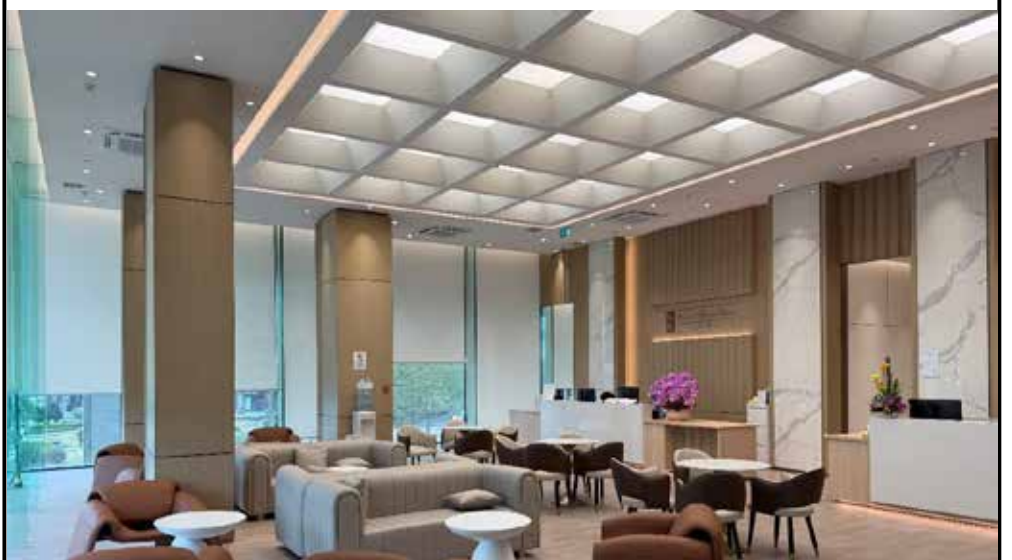


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Obstetrics & Gynaecology : Dr. Luo Yifan, Dr. Fong Kuan Io
Cardiology : Dr. Jin Chun, Dr. Leong Man Kin
Otorhinolaryngology, Head & Neck Surgery : Dr. Cheng Zheng Ang, Dr. Liu Shuiming, Dr. Luo Junji
Orthopaedics : Dr. Lam Kun Kuan
Plastic Surgery : Dr. Lam U Lin
Dermatology : Dr. Chan Pou San
Urology : Dr. Lo Kwong Yin, Dr. Zhao Yun Qiao
Paediatric Surgery : Dr. Yeung Chung Kwong
Paediatrics : Dr. Zhang Zhiqin
Ophthalmology : Dr. Lai Iat Fan
General Medicine : Dr. Ng Kam Hong, Dr. Lam Weng Chio
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OPINION

World Views

Giovanna Dell'orto, MDT/AP



ISRAEL'S ELECTION IS ABOUT MORE THAN NETANYAHU

Israel's election is widely seen as a referendum on Benjamin Netanyahu, the country's longest-serving prime minister. Polls suggest a tight race with his main rival, former military chief Gadi Eisenkot. But the vote will also test how Israelis weigh security, military service and accountability after years of war.

Israelis vote for parties rather than individual candidates. No party has ever won a majority in the Knesset, so the contest will continue after the polls close, as larger and smaller parties negotiate to assemble a governing coalition. It could be weeks or even months before a prime minister is named.

The election takes place under the shadow of the Hamas-led attack of Oct. 7, 2023, when militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251 others. The attack and the wars that followed have left an enduring mark on Israeli society.

Campaign debates have centered on the security failures that allowed the attack and the burden of prolonged conflict. According to the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank, 68% of Jewish Israelis say their attitudes toward Oct. 7 are central to their choice of party.

Netanyahu has resisted calls for a commission of inquiry into the attack and maintained a hawkish stance, including toward Iran. His opponents have emphasized his responsibility for the security breakdown and criticized his efforts to exempt ultra-Orthodox Jewish men from military service.

That issue has become especially divisive as ceasefires remain fragile and many Israelis continue to serve. About a quarter of Jewish voters surveyed by the Israel Democracy Institute cited mandatory military service as a key factor in their decision.

Netanyahu's coalitions have long depended on ultra-Orthodox parties that demand exemptions for young men engaged in religious studies. Eisenkot, who lost his son and two nephews in combat in Gaza, has pledged to end the de facto exemptions.

Netanyahu's Likud remains Israel's largest party. Eisenkot leads the centrist Yashar, the largest opposition party. Other contenders include former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, running on a joint ticket with centrist Yair Lapid; far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir; and former general Yair Golan, whose center-left Democrats favor a Palestinian state.

Yet the plight of Palestinians and prospects for peace have received little attention in the campaign. Israelis are largely opposed to Palestinian statehood, and Netanyahu has accused his opponents of planning to establish a state with the slogan "Right or Palestine." His opponents have condemned settler violence in the West Bank, but no major candidate has advocated reviving the long-moribund peace process.

Mansour Abbas, leader of Ra'am, the first Arab-led party to join a governing coalition, has focused instead on crime in Arab communities. He has named a mainstream Jewish politician as his deputy, positioning his party as a potential coalition partner.

The result will also have consequences abroad. President Donald Trump endorsed Netanyahu last week, but the U.S.-Israel alliance has been tested by the unresolved war with Iran. Israel's international standing has suffered because of the war in Gaza. An international arrest warrant has been issued against Netanyahu, while rights groups and U.N. officials have accused Israel of genocide – an allegation Israel vehemently denies.

Whoever forms the next government will confront not only the security anxieties that dominate this election, but also the difficult task of repairing Israel's international relationships. [Abridged]

US FUTURES AND ASIAN STOCKS ADVANCE FOLLOWING A RALLY ON WALL STREET

Asian stocks were mostly higher Tuesday after an AI-led rally on Wall Street ahead of major corporate earnings and central-bank decisions. U.S. futures edged higher and oil prices extended losses. South Korea's Kospi jumped more than 4% and was trading 3.6% higher at 5,667.99 by midday. Computer chipmaker SK Hynix surged 7% and Samsung Electronics gained 4.8%. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 added 2.2% to 63,542.77. Testing equipment maker Advantest jumped more than 10% and OpenAI investor SoftBank Group climbed 7%. Hong Kong's Hang Seng gave up early gains, slipping 0.2% to

23,174.44, while the Shanghai Composite edged 0.1% lower to 3,692.58. Traders were watching for any major announcements from a closed-door high level meeting, or plenum, of China's ruling Communist Party. Taiwan's Taix rose 0.5%. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 advanced 0.3% to 8,838.10. On Monday, the S&P 500 rose 0.7% and more than recovered its losses from last week, pulling within 1.8% of its all-time high set earlier this month. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 0.3%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 0.8%.

THE BUZZ

AP PHOTO



ENVIRONMENTALISTS CELEBRATE LULA'S REELECTION IN BRAZIL

ENVIRONMENTALISTS, Indigenous groups and climate scientists are celebrating the reelection in Brazil of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, which brings the prospect of a continued focus on stopping the illegal cutting of the Amazon, the largest rainforest in the world.

But supporters also warned that a Congress increasingly dominated by the far right and the agribusiness caucus could undermine those efforts to protect the forest and combat climate change.

Lula defeated Sen. Flávio Bolsonaro, son of far-right former President Jair Bolsonaro, in Sunday's runoff with 51.78% of the vote to 48.21%. After trailing in the first round, Lula staged a comeback to win by 4.4 million votes.

"The Amazon can breathe a sigh of relief," said David Lapola, a Brazilian scientist and lead author of a chapter on so-called tipping points in an upcoming United Nations climate report. Scientists debate the threshold beyond which the dense, humid Amazon rainforest could shift to a drier ecosystem, with irreversible consequences for biodiversity and the climate. About 60% of the Amazon lies in Brazil.

In the Amazon, Indigenous communities and advocacy groups mobilized voters and, aided by court rulings last week, helped secure government transportation for those living in remote areas.

Flávio Bolsonaro refused to concede Monday and said he would ask the electoral court to nullify the results. He faces a high hurdle: presenting evidence of fraud sufficient to overturn Lula's winning margin and persuading the court before the results are certified Dec. 18.

Flávio Bolsonaro had pledged to pursue policies aligned with those of his father, who governed from 2019 through 2022. Deforestation surged under Jair Bolsonaro as his administration weakened environmental enforcement agencies and loosened regulations. Lula's government last week announced the lowest Amazon deforestation rate on record.

Lula is expected to continue efforts to curb deforestation and finance a sustainable economy through international donations as well as public and private funding. While he was the clear favorite for environmentalists and climate scientists, Lula has put forward policies that have drawn criticism. Most recently, he has supported efforts to drill for oil in offshore waters near the Amazon.

Flávio Bolsonaro had denied climate change while casting himself as an environmental defender. He offered few details on forest protection or financing, calling for "modernizing" environmental laws and giving Amazon landowners more decision-making

power – proposals environmentalists warned could weaken safeguards and accelerate deforestation.

Brazil's Climate Observatory, a nonprofit coalition of 172 organizations, welcomed Lula's reelection but said seven in 10 incoming lawmakers oppose the climate and environmental agenda. It cited recent measures weakening pesticide rules, Indigenous land rights and environmental licensing, and urged Lula to broaden his alliances and strengthen ties with Congress.

"The goal of ending deforestation across Brazil's biomes must be pursued relentlessly," the group said.

"A Congress strengthened by forces seeking to open Indigenous lands to mining and weaken environmental protections remains a serious threat," said Ana Alfinito, an Amazon Watch legal adviser.

Claudio Angelo, the Climate Observatory's head of international policy, said Lula's reelection had already delivered a result: a \$500 million pledge Monday from the Netherlands to the Tropical Forest Forever Facility, a Brazil-backed fund launched at last year's U.N. climate summit in Brazil.

The initiative pays developing countries to keep forests standing but has struggled to secure an initial \$10 billion by year's end. The Dutch pledge brings commitments to \$7.8 billion. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



USA Libertarian candidates could undermine Republican prospects in closely contested Senate races in Texas, Ohio and Kansas. Party strategists fear conservative protest votes, fueled partly by opposition to President Donald Trump's Iran war and expanded executive authority, could shift enough support to Democrats.

AP PHOTO



USA Artificial intelligence developer Anthropic warned prospective investors yesterday [Macau time] that advanced AI could enable deadly weapons, cyberattacks or autonomous harm. Its initial public offering filing devotes 93 pages to risk factors, including inadequate safeguards, scarce computing resources and reliance on major customers.

AP PHOTO



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has received a confidential investigation report into Iranian warships joining January naval exercises despite his orders. His office confirmed yesterday the inquiry was complete. The drills, also involving China and Russia, triggered criticism from the United States.

Nigeria At least 62 people were killed and 52 wounded when gunmen attacked a community in northeastern Nigeria's Taraba state Friday. The assault displaced thousands, with victims reportedly fleeing into the Benue River. Authorities said yesterday that recovery operations were continuing.

AP PHOTO



Congo's Ebola outbreak has surpassed 10,000 confirmed cases, with nearly half of patients dying, government figures showed yesterday. The Bundibugyo strain has no approved vaccine or treatment. Violence, mistrust and weak surveillance have complicated containment as infections spread across multiple African countries.