

Xi commends Macau's achievements in past 5 'extraordinary' years, raises 3 expectations

Tony Wong

President Xi Jinping yesterday raised three expectations for Macau so that the special administrative region can make greater development achievements: embracing a broader vision, embracing diversity and inclusiveness, and continuing to forge ahead with resolve.

Xi, who is on his three-day inspection visit in Macau until today, also commended Macau for its achievements over the past five "extraordinary" years while delivering a speech during a welcome banquet held by the local government yesterday evening marking the 25th Anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland today.

The dinner held at the Macau East Asian Games Dome in Cotai was attended by about 600 guests.

Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan, entered the banquet hall at around 6:15 p.m., accompanied by outgoing Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng and his wife, Cheng Soo Ching.

Yesterday was Ho's last day at the helm of the local government.

Ho is succeeded by Sam Hou Fai today who alongside his principal officials and chief public prosecutor will be sworn in by Xi this morning.



President Xi Jinping delivers a speech during yesterday evening's banquet hosted by the local government at the Macau East Asian Games Dome in Cotai. - Photo: Xinhua

Sam becomes the Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) sixth-term and fourth chief executive today, the 25th Anniversary of the establishment of the MSAR.

In his speech at yesterday's banquet, Xi noted that the past five years have been "extraordinary" in the history of Macau's development. Against

the background of accelerating global transformation not seen in a century and the once-in-a-century pandemic, Xi said, the fifth-term MSAR government led by Ho



has rallied and led all sectors of Macau's civil society to rise to the challenges, made results-orientated efforts, ensured a steady economic recovery and achieved progress in all undertakings.

Macau has written a new chapter in the successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle with Macau characteristics, Xi said.

4 major achievements

In his speech, Xi listed Macau's four major achievements over the past five years.

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Xi attends gala marking Macau's return anniversary

President Xi Jinping attended a gala show marking the 25th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland at the Macau East Asian Games Dome last night.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, is in Macau for the anniversary celebrations, the inauguration of the sixth-term government of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR), and an inspection tour of the MSAR.

Xi and his wife Peng Liyuan walked into the venue accompanied by outgoing MSAR Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng and his wife Cheng Soo Ching, and were greeted with a standing ovation from the audience.

They watched performances including songs, dances and a musical. At the end of the variety show, which lasted over an hour, Xi joined the audience in singing "Ode to the Motherland," wishing the country prosperity and Macau an even brighter future.

- Xinhua, MPD

Singers, dancers and musicians perform during last night's gala show at the Macau East Asian Games Dome. - Photo: Xinhua



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The Macau Post Daily

Last month's visitors return to 97.3 pct of pre-pandemic Nov 2019

Macau visitor arrivals rose by 9.6 percent year on year to 2.83 million last month, recovering to 97.3 percent of the level in the same month of pre-pandemic 2019, the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) announced yesterday. - Story on p. 11

Hanoi karaoke bar fire kills 11, arson suspected

A fire ripped through a karaoke bar in the Vietnamese capital, killing 11 people and injuring two others in a case of suspected arson, police said yesterday.

- Story on p. 14

Putin ready to meet Trump to talk Ukraine deal

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday he was ready for talks at "any time" with US President-elect Donald Trump, who has touted his ability to strike a Ukraine peace deal within hours of coming to office. - Story on p. 16



'Noite Lisboaeta' to take place from Dec 24

Rui Pastorin

A themed night market is set to take place at Lisboaeta Macau in Cotai from December 24, Christmas Eve, to 29.

Open from 4 p.m. to midnight during the period, the six-day event, entitled "Noite Lisboaeta – the Night Market with the Most Macanese", will take place at the leisure complex's "Macau Palace Piazza" and "Old Macau Street" and comprises four core elements: Eat, Play, Pet and Fun, according to a Lisboaeta Macau statement provided yesterday.

"Noite Lisboaeta translated from Portuguese means "Lisboner Night". Customarily, the term "Macanese" refers to Macau's community of mixed Portuguese and Asian descent, as well as their diaspora, accounting for less than 2.0 percent of the population.

Food stalls, carnival games, and live music performances will be held throughout the event, which is set to offer a "memorable festive atmosphere with Macanese-Portuguese vibes", the statement said. Moreover, the night market will feature a pet-friendly zone to enable participants to "share joyful moments with their furry friends".

The statement added that the



This poster provided by Lisboaeta Macau yesterday promotes the upcoming "Noite Lisboaeta – the Night Market with the Most Macanese".

night market also aims to leverage "the synergies of the 'Macao Outdoor Performance Venue', stimulating community economic development and immersing visitors in a distinctive blend of traditional culture and modern innovation, showcasing the essence of Macanese and Portuguese inspired culture, further enhancing Macau's night economy".

Details can also be found on <https://www.lisboetamacau.com/en/>

*In Chinese, the night market event is called "夜葡天地 – 「最有澳門FEEL嘅夜市", which directly translated means "Night Port – The Night Market with the most Macau FEEL".

2 books to be launched during 'Macanese Evening'

Rui Pastorin

The trilingual (Chinese, Portuguese and English) "Patuá for everyone – A self-study guide" and "Memórias de Macau: Homenagens em Lisboa à três notáveis figuras da nossa literatura" (Memories of Macau: Homage in Lisbon to three notable figures of our literature) are set to be launched during the Macanese Evening event at the International Institute of Macau's (IIM) headquarters on Rua de Berlim (栢林街).

Aimed at beginners, "Patuá for everyone – A self-study guide", according to a recent IIM statement, is a didactic and illustrated self-study book that features easy-to-understand applications and exercises on the Portuguese-Asian Creole language, as well as information on Macanese culture. It was written by Macanese culture researcher and "Unchinho de Língua Maquista: Patuá bit by bit – Flashcard book" author Elisabela Larrea and language teacher and linguistics researcher Carolina Nogueira, both of whom are Macanese and members of the Macanese Culture Research Association (MACRA), which organises "Patuá pa Vós" ("Patuá for You") seminars aimed at igniting interest in Patuá* and enhancing understanding of Macau's cultural characteristics.

"Unchinho di Língua Maquista" is Patuá for "A Bit of the Macanese Language".



This poster recently provided by the International Institute of Macau (IIM) promotes the upcoming launch of "Patuá for everyone – A self-study guide" (right) and "Memories of Macau: Homage in Lisbon to three notable figures of our literature".

Both authors will be at the upcoming event to introduce the self-study guide, with IIM Secretary-General António Monteiro as the moderator.

Regarding Memories of Macau, the statement said that tribute sessions under IIM's initiative were organised in Lisbon in October to "honour three distinguished personalities from or related to Macau who stood out in the field of literature".

They are researcher and writer António Aresta, who has a number of works published on Macau, Chinese culture, and the presence of Portugal and the Portuguese in the Far East; late lawyer, teacher and Macanese writer Henrique de Senna Fernandes, on the centenary of his birth; and J.J. Monteiro, who the statement described as "the greatest

Portuguese popular poet of Macau", with the presentation of his last and posthumous book, "Vulgaridades Chinesas ["Chinese Vulgarities"]".

Testimonials and presentations recorded by Celina Veiga de Oliveira, José Rocha Diniz, Ana Cristina Alves, António Aresta, José Joaquim Monteiro Júnior, and a preface by Jorge Rangel are also featured in this edition.

The event is slated to start from 6:30 p.m., with the statement adding that it is also open to members of the public.

* Patuá is Macau's highly endangered Portuguese-Asian Creole, nowadays spoken by just a few dozen people in Macau and a number of hundreds overseas, in California in particular.



Indian man cheats ex-colleague out of HK\$41,000 with 'work visa in US'

Yuki Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested on Wednesday a non-permanent resident from India for cheating a Southeast Asian man he met in 2021 out of HK\$41,000 by claiming he could help him obtain a work visa for the US.

According to a regular police press conference yesterday, the male suspect, aged 39, surnamed Rajinder, met the middle-aged victim in 2021 when he was working as a security guard, and they remained in contact until early this year, when the suspect received

HK\$41,000 from the victim as "a deposit for a US visa application".

The victim lost contact with the suspect after transferring the HK\$41,000 to him on January 24 and reported the case to the Judiciary Police in October, PJ spokesman Chong Kam Leong said during yesterday's press conference.

The Judiciary Police arrested on Wednesday the suspect at his home in San Kio district, and he admitted to defrauding the victim so that he could pay his daily expenses and rent.

Rajinder, who told the police that he is currently employed as a



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chong Kam Leong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference at the PJ headquarters in Zape. – Photo: Yuki Lei

part-time driver, was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing a fraud charge involving a large sum of money.

Uni student loses HK\$550,000 in 'fake police' phone scam

Yuki Lei

A young man studying in Macau has fallen victim to a "fake police" phone scam, resulting in a loss of HK\$550,000, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chong Kam Leong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Chong, the victim, holding an Exit-Entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macau, received a call early last month from a person who claimed to be a "police officer", accusing him of "sending a large number of fraudulent messages to the mainland".

The victim then followed the instructions to download the Skype software, had a video chat with the "police officer" and 15 days after the call was asked to deposit all of his savings into a designated Hong Kong bank account for "the funds to be checked", amounting to a total of HK\$550,000.

Chong noted that the victim did not report the case to the Judiciary Police until Wednesday, when the "police officer" once again asked him to transfer more money to the designated bank account.

2 young men cheated out of 60,000 patacas in online chatting scams

Meanwhile, earlier this week, two non-local young men fell prey to online chatting scams in which they were defrauded of 49,700 patacas and 10,500 patacas respectively as purported security deposits for "sexual services".

According to the press conference, both victims met people who claimed to be women on social media platforms. While chatting, the "women" indicated to the victims that they were ready to provide sexual services, but then they used different reasons to tell the victims to top up certain accounts and buy game time cards, "or else".

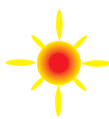
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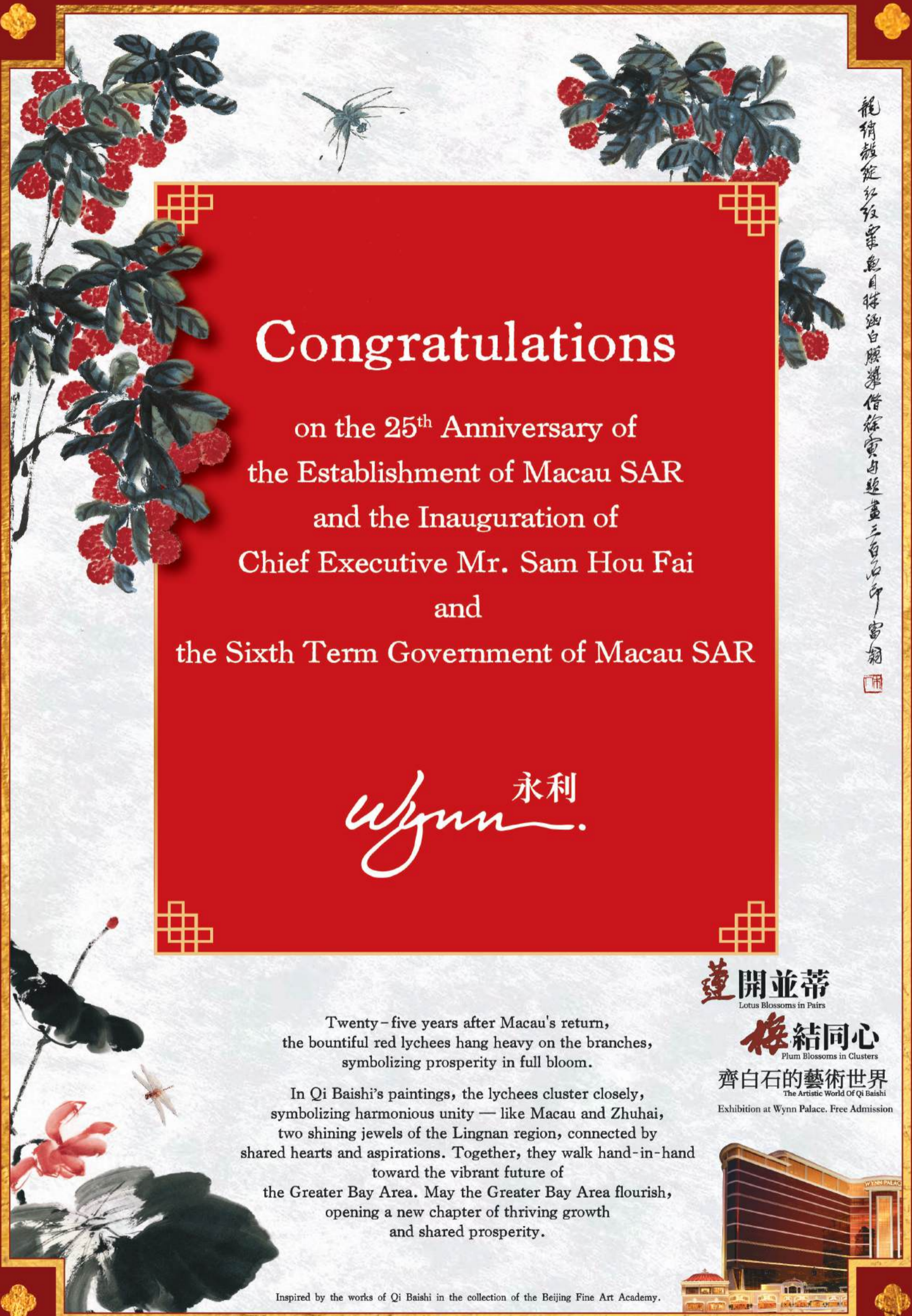
Macau Weather

COLD AND VERY DRY. FINE. FORCE 3 TO 4 NORTH TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5 WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 30% AND 65%.



11°C~19°C

Source: SMG



龍精鼓旋紅荔枝
魚目珠涵白膜華
借綠實與題畫
三百四十年
富朝

Congratulations

on the 25th Anniversary of
the Establishment of Macau SAR
and the Inauguration of
Chief Executive Mr. Sam Hou Fai
and
the Sixth Term Government of Macau SAR

永利
Wynn

Twenty-five years after Macau's return,
the bountiful red lychees hang heavy on the branches,
symbolizing prosperity in full bloom.

In Qi Baishi's paintings, the lychees cluster closely,
symbolizing harmonious unity — like Macau and Zhuhai,
two shining jewels of the Lingnan region, connected by
shared hearts and aspirations. Together, they walk hand-in-hand
toward the vibrant future of
the Greater Bay Area. May the Greater Bay Area flourish,
opening a new chapter of thriving growth
and shared prosperity.

Inspired by the works of Qi Baishi in the collection of the Beijing Fine Art Academy.

蓮開並蒂
Lotus Blossoms in Pairs

梅結同心
Plum Blossoms in Clusters

齊白石的藝術世界
The Artistic World Of Qi Baishi
Exhibition at Wynn Palace. Free Admission





Xi visits Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST)



President Xi Jinping (center), also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, talks with students in the library of Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) in Taipa yesterday. – Xinhua

President Xi Jinping visited the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) yesterday morning.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), talked with teachers, students and scientific researchers there.

Xi was accompanied by Ho Iat Seng, the outgoing chief executive of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR).

Established after Macau's return to the motherland in 1999, MUST has become a comprehensive university with the largest enrollment in Macau.

Xi was briefed on the development

of two state-level key laboratories at the university – one on the quality of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and the other on lunar and planetary science.

Hailing TCM as the gem of the Chinese civilization, Xi urged efforts to well inherit, develop and utilize it, and promote it to the rest of the world.

Talking about China's achievements in lunar exploration, he said Macau has proven to be capable of conducting cutting-edge world-class scientific research.

In May 2023, Xi wrote back to MUST teachers and students who took part in the development of "Macao Science 1," satellites jointly developed by the mainland and Macau.

Visiting the data center for science and application of the satellites yesterday, Xi observed the real-time operation of the satellites on monitor screens.

Xi told the audience that "Macao Science 1" is a successful example of deepened high-tech cooperation between Macau and the mainland, showcasing the outstanding innovative and creative capabilities of Macau's sci-tech sector.

In the university library, Xi talked with students. "I am very happy to see that Macau's education is thriving and you are full of vitality and confidence," he said.

Cai Qi and other senior officials attended the activities. – Xinhua

Xi's visit to MUST a 'great encouragement': DSEDJ chief



Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Director Kong Chi Meng speaks to reporters after President Xi Jinping's visit to the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) in Taipa yesterday. – Photo courtesy of TDM

Yuki Lei

President Xi Jinping visited yesterday morning the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST), and Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Director Kong Chi Meng said that Xi's inspection of the development of Macau's tertiary education was a "great encouragement" to the sector.

Speaking to the media after Xi's visit to the university in Taipa, Kong said, according to public broadcaster TDM, that he had briefed Xi on the changes in Macau's tertiary education development over the past 25 years since its return to the motherland in 1999, as well as the work done to respond to the nation's needs in general and Macau's needs for an appropriately diversified economy in the future in particular.

He cited Xi's satisfaction with and recognition of the overall development of Macau's tertiary education, especially the development of patriotic education, while also affirming the complementary role of Macau's higher education disciplines in the appropriately diversified development of the city's economy.

Citing the president's hope that Macau's higher education would continue to thrive and prosper, Kong told the media that there are currently more than 60,000 tertiary education students in Macau, close to one-tenth of the city's population, demonstrating the popularity of higher education.

Kong remarked that Xi had expressed his expectation of continuing to strengthen Macau's patriotic education, as well as the opening up of more disciplines that meet Macau's development needs in the future.

Kong cited Xi's message of "Macau's education and the Special Administrative Region (SAR) are growing together, and Macau's education will be better tomorrow" as his wish for the development of Macau's higher education.

According to Xinhua, during the two-hour visit to the university, Xi, accompanied by Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, was briefed on the development of Macau's higher education, as well as the latest scientific research achievements of the state key laboratories on lunar and planetary sciences (SKLPlanets) and the quality of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), underlining the importance of inheriting, developing, utilising, and promoting well "the precious treasure left by our ancestors" to the rest of the world. Xi, as cited by Xinhua, which also underlined his confidence that Macau has proven to be capable of conducting cutting-edge world-class scientific research, as evidenced by the nation's achievements in lunar exploration.

Xi also visited the data centre for science and application of the satellites at the university, during which, Xinhua noted, he stressed that "Macao Science 1" is a successful example of deepened high-tech cooperation between Macau and the mainland, showcasing the outstanding innovative and creative capabilities of Macau's sci-tech sector.

In his exchanges with the students, the president also encouraged them to cherish their precious time of learning, advising them to come up with great ideals, share the destiny of the motherland, keep pace with the times, and realise the value of their lives. ■

Xi's wife visiting Macau Museum experiences Macau's 'deep cultural confidence': IC chief

Yuki Lei

While President Xi Jinping was visiting the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST), his wife Peng Liyuan visited the Macau Museum near the Ruins of St. Paul's yesterday morning, and Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man said she hoped that through the visit of "this prominent guest" to the museum, it will demonstrate the creativity of Macau's young generation in terms of cultural heritage, as well as the deep cultural confidence and development of cultural undertakings that have been accumulated in Macau since its return to the motherland 25 years ago.

Peng, accompanied by Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng's wife, Cheng Soo Ching, stayed at the museum at Monte Fort for about an hour, during which she talked with students who had just visited it, and she even joined an activity of making almond cookies – a local delicacy and popular souvenir.

According to Leong, as reported by public broadcaster TDM, she briefed Peng, with the help of various exhibits, on the history of Macau's development from a small fishing village to an important entrepôt on the Maritime Silk Road, as well as the evolution of Macau's culture and history.

In a media interview after Peng's visit, Leong told reporters that Peng, during her first visit to the museum, had shown her interest in the lives of Macau residents influenced by the local blend



President Xi Jinping's wife, Peng Liyuan, talks with students who had just finished visiting the Macau Museum on Monte Fort yesterday morning. – Photo: Xinhua

of Chinese and Western cultures, while also expressing her interest in the current "museum fever" – the trend of attending exhibitions, purchasing cultural and creative items, and immersing ourselves in the grandeur of Chinese civilization, that has been gaining traction and raised the number of visitors to museums, according to *China Daily* – in Macau by asking whether residents, especially children, do visit museums during holidays to learn about the city's history and culture.

Speaking to the media, Leong quoted

Peng's recognition of turning the Macau Museum into a second classroom for students to learn about the city's history, and her encouragement to students to study Macau's history and culture well so that they can better assist in the construction of Macau in the future and make greater contributions to it.

During her visit, Peng also talked to intangible cultural heritage and traditional handicraft artisans, expressing her support and encouragement to the young people who are willing to devote themselves to the cultural heritage industry. ■



Xi inspects Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin

President Xi Jinping yesterday praised the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin for its role in bolstering Macau's economic diversification, and urged further efforts to improve connectivity and facilitate market integration in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), made the remarks during an inspection of the cooperation zone as part of his three-day visit to the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR).

Xi arrived in Macau on Wednesday for the celebrations of the 25th Anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland, the inauguration of the sixth-term government of the MSAR, and an inspection tour of the region.

Hengqin, located at the southern tip of Zhuhai in Guangdong Province, is separated from Macau by a narrow stretch of water. Established in 2021, the cooperation zone serves as a vital platform for promoting Macau's appropriate economic diversification.

During his visit, Xi toured an exhibition highlighting the achievements of the cooperation zone's development, and commended its progress in recent years.

"Practice has proven that the central authorities' decision to develop Hengqin and establish the cooperation zone is completely correct," Xi said.

He was briefed on the joint initiative of Guangdong and Macau to build a high-level scientific and technological platform for traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). The



President Xi Jinping (center, front), also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission talks with Macau residents living in Hengqin during an inspection of the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, yesterday. Xi, accompanied by Ho Iat Seng, the outgoing chief executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR), inspected the cooperation zone yesterday. — Xinhua

president praised the integration of advanced multidisciplinary technologies and the zone's support for the global advancement of TCM.

Xi also met with Macau residents living in Hengqin and young entrepreneurs from Macau who have started businesses in the zone. He emphasized that the development of Hengqin provides vast opportunities for Macau's youth to achieve their ambitions, and expressed hope that more young people from Macau will build remarkable careers there.

Speaking with individuals involved in the zone's planning, construction, management and services, Xi lauded them as pioneers of

and contributors to Hengqin's development.

Xi stressed the importance of concrete measures and tangible outcomes in promoting Macau's appropriate economic diversification, improving residents' livelihoods and boosting employment.

He called for new institutional achievements in leveraging the advantages of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework and aligning the rules and mechanisms of the two sides.

Additionally, he stressed the pioneering role of deeper integration of Hengqin and Macau in facilitating market integration in the GBA.

Xi urged improvements in connectivity to

accelerate the creation of a highly coordinated economic system and a deeply aligned regulatory framework between Hengqin and Macau and elevate their integration to a higher level.

Efforts should focus on enhancing public services and social security systems to foster a high-quality living environment that facilitates living, working and entrepreneurship for Macau residents, Xi said.

He also emphasized the need to fully utilize the central government's support policies to foster a world-class business environment.

Senior officials including Cai Qi attended the event. — Xinhua

Xi meets HKSAR CE John Lee in Macau



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with HK Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu in Macau yesterday. — Xinhua

President Xi Jinping yesterday urged Hong Kong and Macau to strive for greater accomplishments and achieve better development, as the practice of "One Country, Two Systems" has entered a new stage.

The two special administrative regions (SARs) should learn from each other, strengthen exchanges and cooperation, and create a brighter future, Xi said when meeting with Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR John Lee Ka-chiu, who was in Macau for the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland.

Noting that the country has high expectations for Hong Kong, Xi expressed the hope that Lee and the HKSAR

government will govern firmly and prudently, vigorously promote the economy and seek development, and strive to achieve new success for Hong Kong.

Lee said that he will make efforts to lead Hong Kong in promoting the economy, seeking development and effectively improving people's livelihoods. He said Hong Kong will actively participate in the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA) and better integrate into the overall national development.

Senior officials including Cai Qi and Xia Baolong were present at the meeting.

— Xinhua



Congratulations on
the 25th Anniversary of
the Establishment of
the Macao Special Administrative Region

STOCK MARKETS

Hang Seng Index closes 0.56 pct lower

HONG KONG — Hong Kong's stock market ended lower yesterday with the benchmark Hang Seng Index down 0.56 percent to close at 19,752.51 points.

The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index fell 0.40 percent to end at 7,152.13 points, while the Hang Seng Tech Index dipped 0.66 percent to close at 4,439.47 points. — AFP



Xi commends work of Macao SAR's executive, legislative, judicial organs



President Xi Jinping (front, centre) poses for group photos with officials of the executive, legislative and judicial organs of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) yesterday on the sidelines of their meeting. — Photo: Xinhua

President Xi Jinping said yesterday that the executive, legislative and judicial organs of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) have comprehensively, accurately and unwaveringly implemented the “One Country, Two Systems” policy.

When meeting with officials of the three organs, Xi said they have performed their duties pragmatically and effectively over the past five years, headed by MSAR

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng.

The achievements of the outgoing MSAR government are remarkable and widely recognized, Xi said, noting that the central government fully acknowledges and highly appreciates it.

Thanks to efforts of successive terms of the MSAR government in uniting all sectors of society to continue striving forward, Macao has achieved leapfrog development

and the practice of “One Country, Two Systems” in Macao has been a great success, he said.

Xi also expressed the hope that the officials will fully support the incoming chief executive and the new MSAR government, continue to contribute to the development of Macao, and make efforts to build a better Macao.

Yesterday afternoon, Xi also met

with representatives of the Macao SAR's disciplined services.

Cai Qi and other senior officials attended the meetings. Ho and MSAR Chief Executive-designate Sam Hou Fai also participated in the activities.

Sam and other principal officials will be sworn in by Xi during a solemn ceremony at the East Asian Games Dome in Cotai this morning. — Xinhua, MPD



Congratulations on the
25th Anniversary of the Establishment
of the Macao SAR and to
Mr. Sam Hou Fai
on His Inauguration as the
Sixth-term Chief Executive



Xi meets former chief executives

President Xi Jinping yesterday afternoon met with Edmund Ho Hau Wah and Fernando Chui Sai On, former chief executives of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR).

Ho is also vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Significant changes have taken place in Macao since its return to the motherland 25 years ago, with its accomplishments widely recognized, Xi said.

Xi told Ho and Chui that during their tenures as chief executives, they had led the SAR government and people from all walks of life in resolutely safeguarding national security and maintaining prosperity and stability of Macao, laying a solid foundation

for Macao's long-term development. He commended their remarkable contributions to the sound development of Macao today.

Xi expressed the hope that Ho and Chui will support the incoming chief executive and the new term of the local government in administering the MSAR in accordance with the law, and make continuous contributions to the stable and sustained practice of “One Country, Two Systems.”

Ho and Chui said they will spare no effort to support the incoming chief executive and the next term of MSAR government in uniting and leading people from all walks of life to open a new chapter in Macao's development.

Senior officials including Cai Qi and Xia Baolong were present at the meeting. — Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (center) poses with Edmund Ho Hau Wah (left) and Fernando Chui Sai On, former chief executives of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) during a meeting at the “New Bamboo Mansion” guesthouse on Penha Hill yesterday. — Xinhua



Macao brims with joy, hope ahead of 25th return anniversary

Normally busy managing her restaurant, Macao resident Ana Maria Manhão Sou is lately very occupied with an important task: choreographing a Portuguese folk dance for a gala celebrating the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to China.

Manhao Sou is a member of a unique group in Macao known as the "Macanese" – individuals of Portuguese descent born and raised locally. As the choreographer for the performance, she was thrilled to contribute to the city she calls home.

"I'm very honored to be part of the grand celebrations and to showcase the rich blend of Chinese and Western cultures of Macao to the world," she said, adding that the preparations have reinforced her sense of belonging and love for the motherland.

For the celebrations, President Xi Jinping arrived in Macao on Wednesday afternoon on a special plane.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, will attend a gathering celebrating the 25th anniversary of Macao's return and the inauguration ceremony of the sixth-term government of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) today.

News of Xi's arrival headlined the front pages of Macao's mainstream media yesterday, with much emphasis on the president's description of Macao as "a pearl in the palm" of the motherland in a brief speech at the airport.

Macao Daily News, the leading local newspaper, highlighted the airport's welcoming crowd of hundreds of people including children, together with joyful dragon and lion dances. It also published a photo series showcasing Macao's transformation over the past 25 years.

The Macao SAR is brimming with

cheerful vibes in the days leading up to the 25th anniversary.

Anniversary-themed posters and floral decorations adorn popular sites such as the Ruins of St. Paul's, while national flags and Macao SAR flags flutter along the streets.

A lion dance team performed at Macao Tower, culminating in celebratory banners unfurling from the lions' tongues on a platform 233 meters above the ground, much to the delight of tourists.

"This year's decorations are the most vibrant in 25 years, with an array of flags and lights. As a resident of Macao, it makes me feel warmly embraced by my country," said Leung Chon Long, a local middle school teacher who is the same age as the Macao SAR.

Next to the Macao Science Center, a heart-shaped tree is surrounded by two giant arm-shaped light installations, symbolizing Macao's growth and prosperity under the care of the motherland. This trending photo spot caught the attention of a group of students visiting from Hong Kong, another SAR of China.

Monica Zhang, a high school student from Hotung Secondary School in Hong Kong, has been impressed by the joyful atmosphere in Macao's streets. "The city has become more modern since my last visit," she said, expressing the hope to make friends during her study tour.

Traditionally known for its casinos, Macao has transformed into a modern, international metropolis with strong support from the central government, achieving remarkable

progress in both economic development and residents' livelihoods.

The city has been striving to appropriately diversify its economies, with the gaming sector's share of GDP falling to 37.2 percent last year. A key driver of Macao's economic diversification, the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone on Hengqin Island, located near Macao, was established in 2021 to expand living options and work opportunities for Macao residents.

Local entrepreneur Elwin Ho is seizing opportunities arising from these rapid developments. As the founder of an artificial intelligence (AI) company in the cooperation zone, Ho aspires to blaze new paths in the innovation and technology sector.

Leong Chon Kit, head of the Youth Association of Returned Overseas Chinese in Macao, noted that the 25th anniversary of Macao's return is a special occasion that reminds all residents of the significant achievements the city has made.

On Wednesday night, the association, along with more than 60 local youth associations, participated in a banquet celebrating the anniversary. "It is crucial for us to share this touching moment together and express our love for the motherland," Leong said.

An anniversary is not just about celebrations, but also a moment of hope. For Manhão Sou, her simple wish is to receive more guests at her restaurant. "We aim to introduce a new menu featuring more distinctive Macanese dishes, allowing tourists to relish the rich culture of Macao," she said.

— Xinhua



Outgoing Macao Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng offers a toast during a gala banquet on the eve of celebrations for the 25th Anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland, at the East Asian Games Dome in Cotai yesterday evening. — AFP

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Commemoration affirms success of 'One Country, Two Systems'

*Grenville Cross**

At midnight on December 19, 1999, China resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Macao from Portugal, and now the 25th anniversary has arrived. Having been governed by Portugal since the 16th century, its return triggered national celebrations – an estimated 30,000 people converged on Tian'anmen Square alone. Following the return of Hong Kong and Macao to the motherland, the Taiwan question became the only historical issue requiring resolution.

Whereas thanks to the outgoing Hong Kong governor, Chris Patten, who arbitrarily manipulated the previously agreed democratic settlement, the United Kingdom's handover of Hong Kong in 1997 was marred by acrimony, the return of Macao was the polar opposite.

At the handover ceremony, Chinese president Jiang Zemin said, "Our two sides have worked together in conformity with the historical trend of the times and brought about the smooth transition and transfer of government in Macao." In consequence, Macao had entered into "a brand-new era in its development".

The Portuguese president, Jorge Sampaio, concurred. He said the agreement with China over Macao's future had been "sensible and peaceful". Given his country's long association with the territory, he called the handover "an essential unique moment in the history of Macao", and so it has proved.

The Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration on Macao was signed in 1987, and then absorbed into its Basic Law, which was enacted by the National People's Congress in 1993. It provides (Article 5) that the socialist system will not apply in Macao after 1999, and that the "capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years" (this is identical to the Hong Kong Basic Law's Article 5).

In contrast to Patten, the last Portuguese governor of Macao, General Vasco Rocha Vieira, faithfully observed the joint declaration, and this ensured a smooth handover.

From the outset, it was hoped that Macao would be governed in accordance with Deng Xiaoping's visionary "One Country, Two Systems" policy, and this has been achieved.

As in Hong Kong, president Jiang explained that the future special administrative region would be vested "with executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication", and this became the reality.

Since the handover, the executive and legislative branches have performed effectively. The best interests of the residents have been prioritized, and each has conscientiously contributed to national objectives. Whenever frictions have emerged, they have been resolved in a constructive spirit.

President Jiang also said the "Macao compatriots have a glorious tradition of patriotism", and this has been amply borne out. For example, the Macao Basic Law's national security provisions, which are drafted in identical terms to Hong Kong's (Article 23 in both places), were implemented without difficulty in 2009 and enjoyed popular backing.

Social stability has been maintained in Macao, and its per capita GDP is among the highest in Asia. It has a high Human Development Index and the world's second-highest life expectancy (after Hong Kong). According to the World Bank, life expectancy



Pedestrians walk underneath national and regional flags displayed at the city's main square, Largo do Senado ("Senate Square") last week. The PRC and MSAR flags symbolise the most fundamental principle for the existence of the Macao Special Administrative Region – the "One Country, Two Systems" policy. The MSAR celebrates the 25th Anniversary of its establishment today. – AFP

has risen from 65 years in 1960 to 84.8 years this year.

The judiciary, presided over until August by the Court of Final Appeal's chief judge, Sam Hou Fai (who served for almost 25 years and is now the chief executive designate) has ensured stability. It has upheld the rule of law, maintained legal standards and handled its caseload with professionalism, sensitivity and skill. Sam set a fine example that will undoubtedly inspire his successor, Song Man Lei, a former prosecutor. Having been Macao's first female deputy prosecutor, Song is now its first female chief judge, a feat that will encourage many younger women.

One striking aspect of Macao's post-reunification development has been its role as a bridge linking China to other parts of the world. In 2023, for example, an agreement was signed between Macao and Zhejiang province to facilitate access by the Portuguese-speaking countries to Zhejiang's wholesale center for small products (the world's largest). Zhejiang has China's fourth-largest economy, and Macao is also helping it to strengthen cooperation with Latin America and Europe.

As a special administrative region of China, Macao has remained highly autonomous politically and economically. It is sometimes called the "Las Vegas of Asia", and has opened up by developing its gaming, tourism and service industries.

Although famous for its gaming (which nets healthy revenues), Macao has sought to diversify its economy. In 2023, the six biggest casino concessionaires committed to investing US\$15 billion in the coming decade, 90 percent of which will be spent on non-gaming development.

Although Macao is one of the world's most densely populated cities and has many visitors every year, it has developed a sophisticated transportation network. It has modernized roads, an effective light rail system, comprehensive bus services and visitor-friendly taxis.

Macao has also spread its wings globally and now participates in over 100 international organizations, including the International Association of Prosecutors, whose executive committee met in the city in April.

In May, when Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, visited Macao, he emphasized its credentials as an international city and highlighted its advantages. They included the "One Country, Two Systems" policy, sufficient development space, an internationalized business environment, a unique mix of Chinese and Western cultures, a strong economic base, and a passion for loyalty and patriotism.

As Beijing envisages the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area becoming an economic powerhouse by 2035, the development of Hengqin (a small island in Zhuhai city in the mainland that neighbors Macao) as a special zone will be crucial. The Hengqin cooperation zone, established in 2021, is now witnessing scientific and technological research, high-end manufacturing, and traditional Chinese medicine production. Every effort is being made to attract foreign investment in advanced manufacturing, financial services and e-commerce, and steady progress is being made.

As an international city, Macao also has other irons in the fire.

Since 1999, Macao has also helped the country to develop its ties with the Portuguese-speaking world. They have included commerce, culture and tourism, covering many areas. On November 22, for example, a three-week film festival got underway, featuring 30 films from China and the Portuguese-speaking nations, divided into five sections. The first section focuses on the works of Chinese director Guan Hu and Portuguese director Miguel Gomes, while the other sections involve a variety of Chinese and Portuguese-language films.

With Beijing's encouragement, Macao is busily honing its technological credentials. It is now developing integrated units, new energy projects and even artificial intelligence. It is establishing a supply chain for chips, from design to testing, which complements Hong Kong's endeavors in this area. The Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is creating an environment in which Macao's innovation and industry transformation can proceed apace.

The new-term Macao government will be inaugurated today, and President Xi Jinping has indicated his expectations of the incoming chief executive, Sam Hou Fai. He wants him to adopt a spirit of responsibility, further diversify the gaming economy, tackle livelihood issues and improve the city's national security regime. Although some people have prospered in Macao, others are struggling, with housing costs being a serious social problem. Sam will need to think outside the box if he is to tackle these issues, as he appreciates.

He is committed to the spirit of "upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground", and reform will be his "key focus", which is encouraging. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lives of the vulnerable have been impacted, and social welfare policies will require overhauling. Sam hopes to win people's trust and enhance governance capabilities while upholding national security. His challenge will be to turn these laudable aspirations into practical policies capable of yielding concrete results.

Sam intends to meet with his Hong Kong counterpart, John Lee Ka-chiu, to share views, which is a step in the right direction. He believes there is "significant potential and space for synergy and joint development between us and Hong Kong", and nobody can gainsay that.

By pooling their talents and working constructively together, the two SARs can have a huge impact on the GBA and beyond.

By any yardstick, the "One Country, Two Systems" policy has more than proved its worth in Macao, and joyous celebrations on the 25th anniversary are wholly warranted. While maintaining the best of the past, it has provided a framework for the city's relentless progress. There appears no reason why, given its success, it should not be extended beyond 2049 (the expiry date envisaged by the Joint Declaration), and this would benefit the entire country.

**The author is a senior counsel and law professor, and was previously the director of public prosecutions of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The views do not necessarily represent those of China Daily.*



CONGRATULATIONS ON
 THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
 THE MACAO SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION AND
 THE INAUGURATION OF MR. SAM HOU FAI AS
 THE SIXTH TERM CHIEF EXECUTIVE





President Xi Jinping (center, front) joins the audience in singing "Ode to the Motherland" at the end of a gala marking the 25th Anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland at the Macao East Asian Games Dome in Cotai last night. – Xinhua

President Xi Jinping gestures during a welcoming dinner at the East Asian Games Dome in Cotai on the eve of celebrations for the 25th anniversary of China's resumption of its exercise of sovereignty over Macau. Portugal handed its temporary administration back to China at midnight on December 19, 1999, resulting in the establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) on December 20, 1999. – AFP



Xi commends Macau's achievements in past 5 'extraordinary' years, raises 3 expectations

Continued from p.1

Firstly, Xi said, Macau has made new progress in its appropriate economic diversification. With its gaming industry developing in a healthy and orderly manner in accordance with the law, Xi said, Macau, as a world-class tourism and leisure centre, continues to offer new services, and major emerging industries are booming.

Xi praised Macau for actively participating in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA), adding that the Macau-Hengqin integration is deepening where the level of physical connectivity of infrastructure and institutional connectivity of rules is increasing.

Macau now enjoys a stronger foundation and broader space for its economic development, Xi said.

Secondly, Xi said, Macau has reached a new level in improving its people's well-being. To meet the practical needs of its residents, Xi noted, Macau has increased spending on improving their well-being and taken solid steps on the ground to deliver tangible benefits to residents in areas that directly impact their lives, including housing, healthcare, education, and elderly care.

With public well-being better secured and social undertakings making all-round progress, Xi said, Macau has become a pleasant and favourable place to live and work in.

Thirdly, Xi said, Macau's political and social foundation, rooted in love for the nation and love for Macau, is more solid and stronger.

Xi said that Macau's laws and institutional mechanisms for safeguarding national security have been improved, while its residents' rights, including democracy, human rights and freedoms, remain fully protected.

Xi said that Macau has strengthened its public education of the Constitution, the MSAR Basic Law, the national conditions and history, and the national security. Consequently, Xi said, people of all sectors in Macau now have a stronger sense of national identity and cherish deep feelings for the nation as much as they love their family.

Fourthly, Xi said, Macau's international influence and visibility have risen significantly.

Xi said that solid progress has been made in establishing Macau as "One Centre, One Platform, One Base", while Macau's exchange and cooperation with Portuguese-speaking countries have become closer.

Xi said that Macau's remarkable achievements made over the past five years are attributable to the full and faithful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, to the vigorous support of the central government and the mainland, and to the active involvement of the international community.

The achievements are also the result of the hard work and all-out efforts of people from all sectors in Macau united under the leadership of the MSAR government, Xi said.

Macau enjoys the unique advantages of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle and has laid a solid foundation for its development, Xi noted.

Thanks to the nation's development, Xi said, Macau is blessed with opportunities and abilities to soar higher and make greater development achievements.

3 expectations

Xi raised three expectations for Macau so that the special administrative region can make greater development achievements.

Firstly, Xi said he hoped that Macau will embrace a broader vision.

Xi said that Macau should proactively align itself with national development strategies such as the GBA development and seek to play a bigger role on the international stage.

Secondly, Xi said he hoped that Macau will embrace diversity and inclusiveness.

Xi said that Macau should uphold the underlying values of love for the nation and love for Macau while embracing greater openness, inclusiveness and solidarity, and work to attract the best minds to jointly build a better Macau.

Thirdly, Xi said he hoped that Macau will continue to forge ahead with resolve.

Xi said that Macau needs to demonstrate stronger resolve and greater courage in reform and innovation, as well as leveraging the institutional strengths brought about by the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle with the aim of breaking new ground in its development.

Ho said in his speech that Macau should make greater contributions to building China into a stronger country and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Ho expressed his firm belief that the sixth-term chief executive, Sam Hou Fai, will lead the new government and all sectors of Macau to write a new chapter in the practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle with Macau characteristics. ■

A Macao Water Felicita A Região Administrativa Especial de Macau pela passagem do seu 25^o aniversário e deseja a todos um Feliz Natal



澳門自來水
MACAO WATER



Last month's visitors return to 97.3 pct of pre-pandemic Nov 2019

Ginnie Liang

Macao visitor arrivals rose by 9.6 percent year on year to 2.83 million last month, recovering to 97.3 percent of the level in the same month of pre-pandemic 2019, the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) announced yesterday.

In the first 11 months of the year, visitor arrivals grew by 26.2 percent to 31.088 million, back to 87.8 percent of the figure in the same period in 2019, the statement said.

Same-day visitors (17.17 million) and overnight visitors (14.71 million) rose by 37.4 percent and 15.2 percent year on year respectively.

Visitors' average length of stay fell by 0.1 day year on year to 1.2 days, with that of overnight visitors remaining unchanged at 2.3 days.

The number of mainland visitors increased by 11 percent year on year to 1.9 million last month, while the number of visitors from the nine Pearl River Delta cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) increased by 13.7 percent year on year to 0.96 million.

Analysed by checkpoints, the number of visitor arrivals by land grew by 10.3 percent year-on-year to 2,268,471 in November, among whom 48.5 percent arrived through the Border Gate checkpoint (1,101,007), 33.1 percent came via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao



This photo taken last month shows locals and tourists at the annual Macao Food Festival in Sai Van Lake Square.

— Photo: Ginnie Liang

Bridge (751,316) and 14.1 percent via the Macau-Hengqin checkpoint (319,928). Meanwhile, visitor arrivals by ferry (312,614) and by air (250,956) increased by 0.4 percent and 16.5 percent year-on-year respectively.

Visitors from China's Taiwan region rose by 29.3 percent to 71,280 in November, while those from Hong Kong dipped by 0.8 percent to 554,053 last month.

Foreign visitors rose by 20.9 percent to 241,057, 7 percent up from the November 2019 level. Most foreign visitors came from South Korea (48,594), the Philippines (48,641), Malaysia (20,716), and the US (16,218). ■

New stamps to be issued today to celebrate 25th Anniversary of MSAR

Ginnie Liang

Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) Director Derby Lau Wai Meng announced yesterday that the bureau will launch a thematic pack of stamps today in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland.

Lau made the remarks during a press conference about new stamp releases at the CTT headquarters.

According to Lau, the pack comprises a series of seven stamps and souvenir sheets related to the reunification of Macau with the motherland, including the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR), and its 1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th and 25th anniversaries.

The cover adopts the design elements of the stamp issue "25th Anniversary of the Establishment of the MSAR", with the lotus flower as the main theme, conveying the meaning that Macau will continue to prosper and develop steadily thanks to the strong support of the motherland and move towards a better future, Lau said.

The lotus flower is the official emblem of the MSAR, which was established on December 20, 1999 when Portugal's temporary administration of the city came to an end.

The thematic pack is priced



This handout photo released by the Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) yesterday shows the thematic pack "25th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region" that will be issued today.

at 330 patacas and will be available for sale at the Philatelic Shop of the General Post Office (GPO) and the Communications Museum from today, and the Rua do Campo (水坑尾) Post Office from December 26.

Meanwhile, Lau also announced that the bureau will also issue a set of 12 themed stamps and two souvenir sheets in celebration of the 1999 transfer of administration, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Macau, as well as a set of stamps for the "25th Anniversary of the People's Liberation Army Garrison Stationed in Macau" comprising six stamps

and a souvenir sheet, which will be available for sale at the General Post Office (9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.) in Largo do Senado (議事亭前地), and the Communications Museum (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.) on Estrada de Dona Maria II (馬交石炮台馬路).

In the meantime, as Chinese New Year (CNY) is approaching, the bureau will launch a Lunar Year of the Snake greeting card, which will be available for sale at the Philatelic Shop of the General Post Office today, and next Thursday, which is priced at 15 patacas and can be sent to all destinations in the whole world without affixing stamps. ■

Congratulations on
the 25th Anniversary of the
Establishment of the Macau SAR

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Why is richer-than-ever Macao still ambitious for more?

Commentary by Xinhua writer Zheng Xin

Let's play a quick game. Picture Macao. What comes to mind? Neon nights pulsing with energy? Check. The grandeur of a lotus-shaped hotel piercing the skyline? Check. And, of course, the glittering casino floors – chips clinking and fortunes made or lost in a heartbeat.

For decades, Macao has been synonymous with opulence. It is labeled the world's "gambling capital" (yes, it is not Las Vegas) and boasts one of the world's highest densities of Michelin-starred restaurants.

Since its peaceful transition from Portuguese rule to a special administrative region (SAR) of China on December 20, 1999, Macao's rich blend of East-meets-West culture and heritage has remained remarkably intact. The title of a top YouTuber's travel vlog might easily read, "You won't believe this is China."

And yet, for all the glitz, wealth and acclaim, Macao is uneasy. Restless. Sure, it is Asia's richest city and a crown jewel of China's "One Country, Two Systems" policy. But beneath the surface lies a quiet urgency. As the Macao SAR approaches its 25th anniversary, its leaders and residents are facing a fundamental question: in a city that seems to have it all, what is next?

HEART WILL GO ON

In the 1980s, late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping elaborated on the concept of "One Country, Two Systems." The idea ensured that the unique characteristics of Hong Kong, which is now linked with Macao by the longest bridge-cum-tunnel sea crossing in the world, would be preserved after its 1997 transition from British colonial rule to an SAR of China. This concept was often encapsulated by the phrase: horse racing, ballroom dancing and stock trading will go on as usual. This expression illustrates the vision that Hong Kong's capitalist system, local lifestyle and legal framework would continue unchanged, maintaining Hong Kong's status as a free port and an international hub for trade and finance.

A helpful way to understand "One Country, Two Systems" is through the concept of "live, let live and thrive being cohesive," as Hong Kong and Macao can maintain their own characteristics while contributing to and benefiting from the broader development of a unified nation. For the first time, a remarkable new chemistry between two seemingly contradictory systems has been created, possibly named "Sinergy" – a portmanteau of "Sino" and "synergy."

This vision extended beyond rhetoric. Hong Kong's century-old horse racing culture has come to symbolize continuity, while its globally interconnected financial industry remains one of the world's best. The city's entertainment landscape continues to reflect its lifestyle traditions.

The same principle was applied to Macao, which retains its distinct social and economic systems under this shared framework. Macao's gaming industry serves as an example of this arrangement in practice, as casino gambling is banned throughout the Chinese mainland. The industry, which had previously been a monopoly, was liberalized in 2002, opening the market to more operators. By 2006, Macao's gaming revenue had surpassed that of Las Vegas, solidifying its position as the world's largest gaming hub. This growth underscores the unique resilience of its economic system under the "Two Systems" model.

The "One Country, Two Systems" policy grants Macao significant autonomy. This includes executive, legislative and independent judicial powers, as well as final adjudication authority. While foreign affairs remain under the jurisdiction of the central government in Beijing, the SAR's Basic Law allows Macao to manage certain external matters autonomously.

For example, Macao can negotiate and sign agreements with other countries, regions and relevant international organizations on topics such as trade, economic cooperation, finance, shipping, communications, tourism, culture, science and technology and sports, under the name "Macao, China."

Central to this framework is the principle of "One Country." Observers note that Macao has demonstrated a strong sense of national identity, with patriotism evident even before the handover. Entrepreneurs from Macao have also played roles in fostering economic ties, contributing to China's reform and opening-up by introducing technology and management expertise to the mainland.

Since its return to China, Macao's judicial system has undergone reforms to improve accessibility and representation, aligning with the principle of "the people of Macao administering Macao." Changes have included an increase in local representation within the judiciary, the use of Chinese as a primary courtroom language, and separate handling of civil and criminal cases to enhance efficiency.

Over 400 laws have been enacted or amended in the SAR since 1999, including the adoption of a national security law in 2009, which has been highlighted as part of efforts to align governance with the "One Country, Two Systems" policy.

"There are debates during legislative discussions, but when it comes to laws concerning national security, there is a clear consensus among lawmakers that what benefits the country benefits Macao," said Kou Hoi In, Macao's top legislator.

The experiences of Macao and Hong Kong have highlighted the interconnectedness of the "One Country" and "Two Systems" elements. Without the "One Country" component, the "Two Systems" arrangement would face challenges in sustaining itself. Observers have pointed to Macao's emphasis on national pride and local stability as key contributors to its relatively harmonious development. Meanwhile, the social unrest in Hong Kong in 2019 has been cited as a moment that underscored the importance of fulfilling constitutional requirements, such as safeguarding national security, to maintain stability.

The relationship between the "One Country" and "Two Systems" principles has been described metaphorically as akin to the heart circulating blood to sustain life. Proponents of this view suggest that the "One Country" principle is essential to maintaining the vitality and effectiveness of the "Two Systems," allowing them to function in tandem.

PLACE THE SAFE BET

The continuity ensured for Macao has not led to stagnation. Instead, it has provided a foundation for notable progress. Many of the challenges Macao faced prior to its return in 1999, including those stemming from its colonial history, have been systematically addressed over the years.

Before 1999, Macao faced serious socio-economic challenges, including years of negative growth, high unemployment rates, and deteriorating public safety. In 1999, Macao, then with a population of about 437,000, recorded 49 murders and 65 kidnappings in a year.

Since 2003, however, the city has maintained a record of zero or very low incidents of serious violent crime. Its public safety is now one of the best in the world.

Wong Sio Chak, secretary for security of the Macao SAR government, said strong support from the central government serves as a formidable safeguard and deterrent against illegal activities, while effective leadership by the Macao SAR chief executive ensures efficient crime-fighting measures.

Economically, from 1999 to 2024, Macao has witnessed its most prosperous era, marked by rapid development, an improved quality of life, and enhanced fulfillment and happiness for its residents.

– Macao's economy has surged since its return to China. Its GDP per capita was ranked around 40th globally in 1999. Now Macao is the second-richest place in the world after Luxembourg, according to a Forbes magazine ranking of the world's richest countries and regions;

– Tourism has expanded dramatically, from 6.6 million visitors in 1999 to 39.4 million in 2019. This number for the first seven months this year reached 19.74 million, rebounding to nearly 83 percent of the pre-COVID level during the January-July period in 2019;

– The city now boasts an average life expectancy of 83.1 years, among the highest globally;

– Its unemployment rate averaged below 2.0 percent since 2012, signaling nearly full employment.

Despite remarkable achievements, Macao's heavy reliance on a single industry was starkly exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to sharp economic fluctuations.

Recognizing this, and with strong support from the central government, Macao has been actively exploring appropriate economic diversification.

The "1+4" strategy now guides Macao's growth, aiming for a balanced and resilient economy. The "1" focuses on enhancing tourism and leisure to make Macao a world-class destination, while the "4" targets the development of big health, modern finance, high technology, as well as cultural, sports, and trade-related industries.

This diversification has already shown promising results. As of 2023, non-gaming sectors had accounted for over 60 percent of Macao's GDP.

THE ONE BIG THING

As Macao marks a quarter-century of returning to the motherland, it faces a crucial question: What's next for a city that has already achieved considerable prosperity? For many visitors, Macao is often oversimplified as a mere entertainment capital, a "Las Vegas of the East."

However, Macao is far more than a backdrop for tourist spectacle. Its future is deeply intertwined with China's broader ambitions, including initiatives like the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Belt and Road (B&R), positioning Macao as an integral part of China's unfolding global narrative.

Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs as an analogy, Macao has largely fulfilled its physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem needs. Now, it is striving for self-actualization by aligning with the nation's development strategies to realize its full potential. Imagine Macao as a local influencer who has become deeply connected to a network with over a billion followers.

With support from the central government, Macao now maintains trade ties with more than 120 countries and regions and is a member of over 190 international organizations. Holders of a Macao SAR passport are granted visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 147 countries and territories, while Macao's status as a separate customs territory and free port remains unchanged. Macao's low-tax regime ranks among the world's most competitive, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) recognizes it as one of the most open economies for trade and investment.

Macao, uniquely having both Chinese and Portuguese as official languages and sharing linguistic and legal similarities with Portuguese-speaking countries, is naturally positioned as a service platform for trade cooperation between China and the Portuguese-speaking world of nearly 300 million people.

The city hosts the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries, also known as Forum Macao, China's only multilateral platform leveraging linguistic ties. Since its establishment, trade between China and these nations has grown by about 20-fold.

In 2021, the Macao SAR government formed a committee to deepen integration into national development, with eyes on initiatives like the Belt and Road and the Greater Bay Area plan. That same year, the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone was launched on the neighboring Hengqin island, marking a milestone in regional collaboration.

The zone, which has expanded Macao's development space by over 100 square kilometers, now serves as a critical platform for over 6,500 Macao-funded enterprises, making it the most concentrated area for Macao-funded enterprises in the Chinese mainland.

As Carlos Cid Álvares, president of the Macao Delegation of the Portugal-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry, aptly pointed out, "Macao may be small, but the potential of the Greater Bay Area is huge."

"So I never talked about the 700,000 residents in Macao," he said. "I talk about 80 million people in the Greater Bay Area."

Macao is pursuing self-actualization by positioning itself as:

– A global center for tourism and leisure, bridging East and West;

– A golden platform of commercial and trade cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries;

– A generative base for exchange and cooperation under "One Country, Two Systems," where Chinese culture predominates while diverse cultures harmoniously coexist.

The youth of Macao is dreaming bigger than ever before, with many choosing to move beyond stable traditional industries and embrace the challenges of innovation and entrepreneurship. As a reimagined land of potential, Macao serves as a dynamic bridge, linking its rich past with the promising future of the motherland while seamlessly navigating the vast sea of global prospects. – Xinhua