



Taiwan dept store gas blast kills 2 Macau residents, injures 2-year-old girl

7-member family from Macau affected



This photo shows the damage following yesterday's explosion on the 12th floor of the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi Department Store in Taichung. — AFP



This picture taken and released by the Taichung Fire Department via Taiwan's Central News Agency (CNA) shows the scene after yesterday's explosion at the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi Department Store in Taichung. — AFP



A couple walk past debris following yesterday's explosion at the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi Department Store in Taichung, central Taiwan. — AFP

Management of chronic diseases diet

Locations of 'My Health Depends on Me' stations
<https://www.ssm.gov.mo/apps1/selfhealth/ch.aspx#>

Build a Healthy Macao Together

Yuki Lei
A gas explosion occurred at a department store in Taichung City, China's Taiwan region, at about 11:30 a.m. yesterday, resulting in at least four deaths and 30 injuries – and the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) later released a statement

confirming that two local residents were killed, and one seriously injured in the blast.

A total of five local residents affected by the incident were injured, including a two-year-old girl, according to MGTO. Consequently, two Macau residents were

killed and five were injured by falling debris.

The explosion on the department store's 12th floor where a foodcourt undergoing renovations is located, according to footage released by the island's semi-official Central News Agency (CNA), which showed that the explosion

damaged the building's façade and windows. More than 200 people were evacuated from the store and six from lifts. The fire department sent 56 vehicles, 136 people, a dog and a drone to carry out search and rescue operations.

Continued on p.2

No 'mobile stations' for flu jabs: SSM

Tony Wong

The government has ruled out the possibility of setting up "mobile stations" for influenza vaccinations due to health and safety issues, according to a regular meeting of the Northern District Community Service Consultative Council yesterday where officials from the Health Bureau (SSM) briefed its members about the government's ongoing work tackling influenza.

Chan Ian Ian, a deputy convenor of the government-appointed council, made the remarks while briefing reporters after yesterday's closed-door meeting.

According to Chan, several councillors suggested

during the meeting that the Health Bureau set up "mobile stations" for influenza vaccinations in the community with the aim of boosting jab rates.

Currently, flu jabs are provided to local residents at public health centres free of charge. Paid flu vaccinations are also provided at certain private medical institutions such as Kiang Wu Hospital for non-local residents.

The officials replied yesterday that there are the respective health and safety requirements for facilities used for vaccinations because of which the bureau will not set up "mobile stations" for influenza vaccinations in the community, according to Chan. ■



The faithful perform a memorial ceremony for Chinese sea goddess Mazu in Tianjin yesterday. The annual ceremony was added to the national intangible cultural heritage list in 2014.

— Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

'Ne Zha 2' becomes first Chinese film to gross 10 billion yuan

Animated blockbuster "Ne Zha 2" became the first Chinese film to gross 10 billion yuan when its total global earnings, including presales, reached the mark yesterday evening.

— Story on p. 7

Israel says Hamas must free 3 living hostages this weekend

Israel warned yesterday that Hamas must release three living hostages this weekend or face a resumption of the war in Gaza, after the Palestinian militant group said it was committed to the truce agreement.

— Story on p. 10

Afghan held after ramming attack injures 28 in Munich

An Afghan asylum seeker was arrested after a suspected car ramming attack injured at least 28 people in the Bavarian state capital of Munich yesterday, police said.

— Story on p. 12

Taiwan dept store gas blast kills 2 Macau residents, injures 2-year-old girl

Continued from p.1

Macau family of 4 generations

As quoted by Taiwan media, Taichung City Mayor Lu Shiow-yen said that among the dead and injured were seven tourists – a family of four generations from Macau, who were walking in front of the department store and were about to go to a neighbouring department store when the explosion occurred. She added that the grandfather died instantly, the grandmother died after the hospital's treatment to save her life had failed, while the two-year-old girl, whose cardiopulmonary function had ceased before arriving at the hospital, was undergoing endotracheal intubation*. The grandparents were reportedly hit by falling objects. Lu, who visited the injured in the hospital, also told reporters that the great-grandmother sustained a fracture, while other family members in their twenties and thirties suffered minor injuries.

Cheng Ching Hospital's casualty list showed that of the seven Macau victims, a 58-year-old woman surnamed Lou was pronounced dead, a 24-year-old man surnamed Tang suffered a craniofacial laceration, while a 30-year-old

man surnamed Tang and a 31-year-old woman surnamed Ip suffered abrasions on their arms and legs. The girl, who sustained severe head trauma and lung contusions, has been transferred to the China Medical University Hospital for follow-up treatment. According to a spokesperson for the Taiwan authorities' Mainland Affairs Council, the girl has meanwhile "successfully" undergone surgery. The spokesperson also said that other members of the family would arrive in Taiwan from Macau today.

The MGTO statement said it had been notified yesterday of a suspected gas explosion in a department store in Taichung, where two Macau residents died and one sustained serious injuries, but the exact circumstances, the statement added, were still "subject to further verification".

Sam, MGTO convey condolences

In the statement, MGTO expressed "great concern" over the tragedy and extended its "deepest" condolences and sympathies to the family members of the victims, noting that "we are currently in touch with the family members to provide appropriate assistance".

Moreover, the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) said in a statement that Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai was "highly concerned" about the gas explosion at the department store in Taichung, also conveying his heartfelt condolences and sympathies to the family members of the local victims, while instructing Macau's relevant public entities to render full assistance to the victims and their family members.

The MGTO statement noted that upon having been notified of the blast, MGTO immediately contacted the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and the travel trade to enquire about and follow up on the incident, and the latter confirmed that no local tour groups were currently in Taichung.

According to a separate MGTO statement yesterday evening, a MGTO crisis response team has been sent to Taichung in conjunction with the Macau Red Cross to provide the victims with appropriate assistance.

Macau residents who need assistance may contact the MGTO 24-hour hotline on 2833 3000.

According to Taiwan media reports, the incident was caused by an explosion during renovations on the 11th and 12th floors, suspected to have been caused by an

inadvertent leakage of gas during the replacement of an LPG tank. However, as reported by CNA, Taichung Deputy Mayor Cheng Chao-hsin said that the authorities were still in the initial phase of the rescue operation, adding that an official report and a complete list of injuries will be provided only after the investigation has been concluded, including assessing the legal implications, identifying the source of the blast, determining the cause of the explosion, and collaborating with relevant city government entities.

He also described the incident as a major accident, adding that some debris had been found inside the department store, and that structural and civil engineers had already entered the site for a structural inspection.

According to CNA, Taichung Fire Bureau Chief Sun Fu-you said that according to preliminary investigations no explosive material had been found at the scene, nor had there been a dust explosion, pointing out that workers at the scene had told prosecutors that they had smelt gas prior to the blast, and that further investigations were needed to find out where the odour had come from. He clarified that two of

the four deceased were found on the 11th and 12th floors, while the other two were found on the pavement in front of the building.

The city has set up a task force to continue the investigations and aftercare work. The department store concerned was ordered to suspend business and could resume business only after confirming that safety was not at risk.

Shin Kong Mitsukoshi President Richard Wu Xin-yang said, according to Taiwan media reports, that his company would assume responsibility. He also reportedly offered to pay NT\$1 million (245,000 patacas) for each victim killed in the wake of the blast. Those injured were also offered a certain amount of money.

Shin Kong Mitsukoshi (SKM – 新光三越百貨) is a Taiwanese brand of high-end department stores operating throughout Taiwan, with concessions also located in mainland China. The brand is a joint venture of the Taiwanese Shin Kong Group and Japanese Mitsukoshi. ■

* Endotracheal intubation is a medical procedure used to insert a tube into the trachea (windpipe) to maintain an open airway, facilitate ventilation, and ensure adequate oxygenation. – Poe

Police bust illegal mahjong parlour in Areia Preta

William Chan

The Judiciary Police (PJ) busted on Tuesday an illegal mahjong parlour in Areia Preta district, PJ spokesman Leng Kam Lon said at a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Leng, the police recently received a tip-off regarding the establishment, located on the mezzanine level of a building. Upon arrival at the scene on Tuesday, police encountered three locked doors leading to the parlour. Inside, they discovered four local women playing mahjong, with one mainland woman waiting her turn, alongside the proprietor of the establishment, a local woman surnamed Cheang.

Under questioning, the 60-year-old Cheang told the police that she rented the mezzanine floor in mid-2024 to operate the mahjong parlour with a monthly rent of 9,000 patacas, charging 100 patacas per hour for each mahjong table. With this setup, she claimed to earn 18,000 patacas monthly from her parlour.



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Leng Kam Lon looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.

– Photo: William Chan

Cheang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a charge of running an illegal gambling business.

According to Macau's gaming legislation, commercial mahjong businesses can only be run by the city's six gaming concessionaires. ■

'Todos Fest! Inclusive Arts Festival' returns for 5th edition

Kristina Vallesteros

The vibrant atmosphere of inclusivity returns as the fifth edition of the "Todos Fest! Inclusive Arts Festival" takes place on March 1-2 at the Small Auditorium and Art Plaza of the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape.

"Todos" is Portuguese for "everyone".

According to a statement earlier this week by local art organisation Comuna de Pedra, this year's festival, sponsored by integrated resort operator Sands China, features a diverse range of programmes, including performances, film screenings, workshops and an inclusive market.

The statement noted that this year's festival will open with a performance by "French dance revolutionary" Jérôme Bel's acclaimed work "Gala", a 90-minute performance that features both professional dancers and amateur performers.

The statement added that on the programme is also Macau film director Kinkuan Chao's (周建君) recent work "Nice to Meet You", a documentary that follows three actors with physical and mental disabilities strolling around Macau, accompanied by their drama mentors.

Todos Fest! continues to support inclusivity in the arts, uniting local, international, and Hong Kong artists, local volunteers, community organisations, seniors, and individuals with physical and



This poster downloaded from the Comuna de Pedra Facebook page last night promotes the upcoming "Todos Fest! Inclusive Arts Festival".

mental disabilities, the statement said.

Festival Curator and Director of Comuna de Pedra (meaning "Stone Community" in English), Jenny Mok Sin Teng (莫倩婷), expressed her enthusiasm, with the statement quoting her as saying:

"The concept of inclusivity, which has been at the heart of our festival, is gaining more attention and profoundly impacting our community."

Tickets can be purchased on <http://hk.mikecrm.com/6YfBead> with various discounts available. ■

Published since Aug 2004

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- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua



Macau Weather

MAINLY CLOUDY.
A FEW LIGHT RAIN PATCHES.
FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO
NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL
RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 98%.



15°C~18°C

Source: SMG

'No significant growth in local birth rate in coming years': scholar

Interview by Yuki Lei

Macau's birth rate continues to fall, with the number of births expected to drop to 3,500 this year – and Macau Comprehensive Social Studies Association Chairman Nelson Kot Man Kam told the *Post* yesterday, that he expected there would be no significant increase in the local birth rate in the coming years, which would have a "negative" impact on the city's economic and social development, urging the government to introduce a policy to strengthen its support for childbearing.

According to the Health Bureau, as of January 27, there were only 284 newborns recorded at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre and private Kiang Wu Hospital this year, a shortfall of 17 compared to the 301 newborns recorded during the same period last year. Over the past decade, the local birth rate dropped from 11.8 per 1,000 to 5.5 per 1,000 last year, with 3,712 births recorded last year.

In a phone interview with the *Post*, Kot said: "I don't foresee that there will be any increase in the birth rate in the next couple of years," highlighting several factors contributing to this trend, particularly over the three-year COVID-19 pandemic, including the city's economic downturn, job insecurity, high cost of education, and the amount of time and money spent on raising children.

Kot also referenced data from the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), pointing out that there were only about 4,000 students enrolled in local kindergartens this year. He remarked on the phenomenon that "there are more people keeping pets than children at present".

The continuing decline in the birth rate will adversely affect the overall development of Macau, according to Kot, starting with nurseries and schooling. In the long term, he added, it would also have an impact on the local labour market and the city's financial stability.

In his view, the government has a responsibility to alter the factors influencing young locals' decisions about having children or not by either increasing benefits or reducing the costs associated with childcare. He said: "The government needs to formulate an effective fertility policy and provide more support to young families but, at the same time, all sectors of the community also must work together to create an environment that encourages childbearing".

Kot also said that while the government currently encourages young families to have children by offering a maternity allowance of about 10,000 patacas, public servants also benefit from an additional monthly family allowance of about 940 patacas until their children graduate from university. However, he was quick to add, private sector employees typically do not receive similar benefits, leading to concerns that having children will increase family expenses, ultimately reducing their willingness to have children.

He suggested the government "come up with some bold thinking" in following the policies of other countries and regions encouraging more locals to have children, including raising the city's maternity leave to 180 days, launching a policy of home ownership for families with several children, as well as considering the provision of low-interest mortgages or other subsidies to help young families improve their living environment.

"Having children is actually a big deal", Kot said, who added that in the private sector, he hoped that the government could promote



Undated file photo of Macau Comprehensive Social Studies Association Chairman Nelson Kot Man Kam. – Photo provided by the association yesterday

the provision of flexible working hours by private-sector enterprises so that parents can better balance their work and family life.

Regarding the fact that quite a number of countries and regions have relaxed their immigration policies in the wake of declining birth rates, Kot said that the local government could start with its non-local talent acquisition scheme to increase the scores for those applying to immigrate to Macau with more family members, thereby promoting population growth, especially an increase in the number of young families: "An increase in the number of children will help other sectors in Macau, such as childcare centres, schools and teachers". ■



金沙中國片區活化項目
Sands China's Community Revitalization Programme

PHILIP COLBERT
澳門MACAO
ART TOUR 藝術之旅

2025
15.01
16.03

Limited-Time CNY Activities at Former Iec Long Firecracker Factory and Taipa Houses

- 1 | Check out Philip Colbert's Macao Edition and Signature Sculptures
- 2 | Free lobster themed Fai Chun written by calligrapher on site
2025.01.25-26 15:00-18:00
Former Iec Long Firecracker Factory
- 3 | Chinese instrumental performances
2025.02.01 - 02.02 16:00-18:00
Former Iec Long Firecracker Factory

• Lobster Firecracker Macao Edition

• Lobster Cockerel Macao Edition

More details on Sands China's Community Revitalization Programme

Organizer: 金沙中國 Sands China Ltd

Supporting Entity: 澳門特別行政區政府旅遊局 DIRECÇÃO DOS SERVIÇOS DE TURISMO MACAO GOVERNMENT TOURISM OFFICE

文化局 INSTITUTO CULTURAL

The Huaiyang Garden joins Sands China's Forbes 5-Star portfolio

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort (IR) operator Sands China said in a statement on Wednesday that the two-Michelin-starred The Huaiyang Garden has been added to its Forbes Five-Star portfolio, being included in the 2025 Forbes Travel Guide (FTG), while the company also retained five-star ratings across its luxury properties.

The statement said that the company's total number of five-star awards across all categories is now eight, adding that The Londoner Macao's Londoner Court and The Londoner Hotel, The Parisian Macao's Paiza Lofts, The Grand Suites at Four Seasons, Four Seasons Hotel Macao, Zi Yat Heen and The Spa at Four Seasons Hotel

Macao all retained their Five-Star ratings.

Sands China President and CEO Grant Chum Kwan Lock was quoted by the statement as saying: "This year, our Michelin two-star restaurant, The Huaiyang Garden, has been awarded five stars from Forbes, alongside our five luxury hotels that have continued to achieve the five-star rating year after year.

"Forbes Travel Guide is considered the gold standard for the industry globally, this array of accolades is a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence as we remain steadfast in our support of the mission of establishing Macau as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure", Chum added.

Sands China Senior Vice President

of Hotel Operations Kris Kaminsky was quoted as saying: "In addition to being recognised for our industry-leading facilities by such an esteemed guide we see this outstanding result as an acknowledgement of the dedication of our team and the unparalleled excellence they deliver to every guest, every day".

Huaiyang cuisine (淮扬菜) is one of the four major culinary traditions of Chinese cuisine, originating from the Huai River and Yangtze River regions, particularly in Jiangsu Province.

According to the Forbes Travel Guide website, Macau remains the world's destination with the most Five-Star hotels for the third year straight.



This undated handout photo provided by Sands China on Wednesday shows the two-Michelin-starred The Huaiyang Garden at The Londoner Macao in Cotai.

SJM garners 13 FTG 5-Star Awards

Rui Pastorin

SJM Resorts' Grand Lisboa on the peninsula and Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai have together received a total of 13 FTG Five-Star awards this year, with The SPA at Palazzo Versace Macau, Mesa by José Avillez, Zuicho and Don Alfonso 1890 each receiving the honours for the first time, according to a statement from the integrated resort operator on Wednesday.

The statement noted that GLP had received the most Five-Star awards for its restaurants and Spas worldwide. Mesa by José Avillez has this year been elevated to a Forbes Five-Star restaurant.

Grand Lisboa Palace Macau, THE KARL LAGERFELD MACAU, The Spa at GLP, The Spa at THE KARL LAGERFELD and the Palace Garden restaurant each marked their third consecutive year of

earning the Five-Star awards.

Meanwhile, Grand Lisboa Hotel, The Spa at Grand Lisboa, Robuchon au Dôme, and The Eight have retained their Five-Star awards for the sixth consecutive year.

SJM Managing Director Daisy Ho Chiu Fung said: "We are honoured to once again be recognised by the prestigious Forbes Travel Guide, earning a total of 65 stars, with three new restaurants and one spa joining our already distinguished list of award-winning establishments..."

"We are especially proud that Grand Lisboa Palace now holds the highest number of Five-Star restaurant and spa awards globally among integrated resorts. This achievement underscores our commitment to delivering a consistently refined brand experience", Ho added, congratulating the dedicated teams for their hard work and commitment.



This undated handout photo provided by SJM Resorts on Wednesday shows Grand Lisboa on the peninsula.

Wynn Macau, Wynn Palace receive 'highest 5-star honours' from FTG 2025

Rui Pastorin

Wynn Macau, Limited said in a Wednesday statement that Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace are the only integrated resorts worldwide with six individual Forbes Travel Guide (FTG) Five-Star awards in this year's FTG, while Chef Tam's Seasons marks the first time that it garnered the FTG Five-Star Restaurant award.

The statement added that Wynn Palace also continues to be the world's largest FTG Five-Star resort for a second consecutive year and houses four FTG Five-Star Restaurants, more than any other individual resort in the world.

The statement said that all the Five-Star award recipients were as follows:

Wynn Macau; Encore at Wynn Macau; The Spa at Wynn Macau; The Spa at Encore; Golden Flower; Wing Lei; Wynn Palace; The Spa at Wynn Palace; Chef Tam's Seasons; Mizumi; Sushi Mizumi; SW Steakhouse.

Wynn Macau, Limited Chief Operating Officer Frederic Luvisutto was quoted by the statement as saying: "We are proud that Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace are individually the most FTG awarded resorts in the world, and Wynn Palace continues to hold onto its position as the world's largest FTG Five-Star resort. This is testament to our dedicated team members who always go above and beyond to deliver exceptional guest experiences."



This undated handout photo provided by Wynn Macau, Limited on Wednesday shows Wynn Macau in Nape.

MGM garners 7 5-Star Awards in FTG 2025



This undated handout photo shows MGM MACAU in Nape.

Rui Pastorin

MGM has garnered seven Five-Star Awards in the FTG 2025 across both its Macau and Cotai properties, with MGM MACAU marking its 10th consecutive year of achieving the Five-Star rating, according to a Wednesday statement by the integrated resort operator.

The statement noted that the Tria spas at both MGM MACAU and MGM COTAI have both earned the Five-Star rating for the sixth consecutive year. Moreover, MGM COTAI's Emerald Tower, the Skylofts and Sichuanese restaurant Five Foot Road, as well as MGM MACAU's newly renovated Chinese Lingnan restaurant Imperial Court have all received Five-Star Awards for the fourth consecutive year.

MGM China Holdings Limited President and Chief Operating Officer Hubert Wang Zhiqi was quoted by the statement as saying: "As MGM MACAU celebrates its 10th consecutive Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star award, this milestone reflects our commitment in delivering world-class experiences. The fresh new look of our award-winning Imperial Court restaurant and Tria spa at MGM MACAU, featuring exclusive therapies, treatments and facilities, demonstrates our continuous innovation".

He added: "These achievements not only reinforce our leading position in Macau's luxury hospitality sector but also strengthen Macau's appeal as a premier global destination for international travellers."

Melco leads with most 5-Star Awards in Macau & Asia in 2025 FTG

Rui Pastorin

Melco Resorts & Entertainment said in a statement on Wednesday that it has garnered the most Five-Star awards in Macau and Asia in the 2025 FTG, having also this year attained three new FTG Five-star awards in the Hotel, Restaurant and Spa categories.

The statement noted that the three new FTG Five-Star awards were granted to Studio City's Epic Tower, The Spa at Epic Tower and Altira Macau's

Aurora restaurant. The integrated resort operator was presented with 19 Five-Star awards across its hotels, restaurants and spas in the 2025 FTG.

The statement said that altogether, they have gathered a total of 107 stars in Macau and Asia.

The statement quoted Melco Chairman and CEO Lawrence Ho Yau-lung as saying: "It is an honour to be recognised once again by FTG. We are thrilled to receive three new Five-Star

awards across our hotels, restaurants and spas this year, highlighting our dedication to creating integrated resorts that offer superlative design, operation and guest experience".

He added: "We are excited to welcome new and returning guests at our properties in Asia and Europe in the year ahead, as we continue to and enhance our luxury hospitality and entertainment offerings across Melco's portfolio."



This undated handout photo provided by Melco Resorts and Entertainment shows the City of Dreams (COD) integrated resort complex in Cotai.

Local businesses talk about factors affecting sales

Vox pop by Kristina Vallesteros, Rui Pastorin,

A business can be affected by various external factors that may cause them to either thrive or struggle such as consumers' preferences to spend money outside of Macau or the general economic situation. The *Post* has interviewed several local businesses around Avenida Horta e Costa (高士德大馬路) and Avenida Sidónio Pais (士多烏拜斯大馬路) to learn more about their stories and the situations they might be facing.

Far from the bustling days

A 26-year-old local woman employed in a boutique reported that business had remained steady leading up to the Chinese New Year (CNY), but it remained far from the bustling days of previous years. She emphasised that the boutique's location being outside of tourist areas significantly reduces customer visits. She hopes that by setting up more promotions, the shop can attract more shoppers.

A lack of footfall

Similarly, Zhang, who works at a jewellery shop, shared her concerns about the general lack of tourists and local customers visiting the area, which in turn affects sales. She noted that the downturn

has led to the closure of several neighbouring businesses in her shop's area, further decreasing foot traffic and complicating efforts to attract customers.

Zhang, a local in her fifties, recalled a time when business thrived, particularly during the local government's distribution of consumption cards during the COVID-19 pandemic in Macau. Back then, she said that locals were more inclined to shop in person instead of turning to online options or travelling to the mainland. Zhang said she advocates for the reintroduction of these consumption cards in order to encourage local shopping and support struggling businesses.

'Time to start again'

Meanwhile, around Avenida Sidónio Pais, some businesses have recently closed down. And another one, which sells toys and stationery, is holding on until April, with the owner telling the *Post* that he was not planning to renew his shop's lease once it ends.

Business has not been good for 40-year-old Aaron, who owns the shop. He cited factors like locals preferring to drive to the mainland for shopping, especially on the weekends, as it is now more convenient. "What you see is like



A for rent sign is seen on a shop window around Avenida Sidónio Pais (士多烏拜斯大馬路) that has recently gone out of business.

— Photo taken earlier this week by Rui Pastorin

nobody is on the streets".

He added that many people like to compare prices to those in the mainland, noting: "Most of them think that the prices in the mainland are cheaper than Macau. So that's why people are not spending money in Macau".

Aaron said that he also feels the effects of online shopping through platforms like Taobao. "People also like comparing the prices on the internet too. For example, if you are selling things imported from China, there are a lot of options, it's very tough". Altogether, it creates a complex situation that cannot be

amended right away, according to Aaron.

Aaron's shop has been open for a year, noting that for the first six months, the sales were "not pretty good, but okay". But after the summer, sales had dropped by over 50 percent. Trying for a few more months, the decision to close the shop was finally made. "It's very hard, especially if you're hiring somebody to run the business, it's impossible. For us, we're doing this ourselves. We're giving up the salary...I think it's time to start again and go back and work for somebody".

Keeping up with the times

Meanwhile, Ma, who works in a shop selling gadgets and electronics, fares better, noting that business performance has mostly been alright and is finally starting to pick up after a year or so of operation.

However, the 25-year-old said that they were initially also affected by online shopping and the preference for locals to shop in the mainland, especially during public holidays when people started going there to buy goods.

Regarding online shopping, he noted that being able to service a customer on site and providing a more personalised experience is not something that can be found online. Despite this, he added: "The issue is that most people would rather have the convenience of buying online quickly than essentially sitting down and having a chat with someone while shopping".

But Ma still highlighted the importance of keeping up with the times: "Essentially, I think stores in general have to start venturing online as well, I think that's one of the few ways to go about it. The whole physical store thing has been in decline for a while now, ever since COVID-19 ended", he concluded. ■

Mainland quartet scam local senior with TCM: police

William Chan

Four people from the mainland have been apprehended for defrauding a local 70-year-old woman on the street by peddling purportedly valuable traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), Public Security Police (PSP) Lam Keong said in a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Lam, the group, comprising three women and one man aged between 50 and 65, targeted the victim on Rua de Nam Keng (南京街) in Taipa on Tuesday. Initially, one of the female suspects engaged the victim in a conversation about the purportedly valuable TCM product, with the other two female suspects later joining in to promote the product to the elderly woman.

Subsequently, the male suspect, masquerading as a TCM vendor, entered the conversation and sold the remedy to the victim for 18,600 patacas. The victim soon realised she had fallen victim to a scam and promptly reported the case to the police.



This undated photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows evidence including the young sliced mulberry branches seized from the suspects.

Later that day, the quartet were apprehended at a hotel in the city centre. The police confiscated a total of 5.2 kilogrammes of young sliced mulberry branches which the quartet used to pretend to be precious TCM, along with the ill-gotten gains. TCM shop owners told the police that the mulberry branches seized were worth 300

patacas, Lam pointed out.

Under questioning, the quartet admitted to the crime. They told the police that they had also scammed another victim out of 200 patacas since their stay in Macau last Friday.

The quartet have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing organised crime and fraud charges. ■

Police bust mainland illegal currency exchange dealer

William Chan

A woman from the mainland has been arrested for engaging in an illegal currency exchange deal, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a special press conference yesterday.

The 44-year-old suspect surnamed Chen told the police that she is jobless.

According to Leng, the police saw Chen and a mainland male gambler engaged in an illicit currency exchange transaction at a Cotai casino on Wednesday. Just as the duo were finalising the exchange, with the gambler

transferring 19,300 yuan to Chen in exchange for her HK\$20,000 in casino chips, police intercepted them and seized the casino chips from the gambler, along with HK\$71,400 in casino chips and HK\$100,000 in cash from Chen.

Under questioning, Chen told the police that she made 550 yuan from the transaction and said that she had earned 50,000 yuan since she began engaging in illicit exchange activities last month.

Chen was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing an illegal currency exchange charge, according to Leng. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the mainland suspect to a PJ vehicle outside the PJ headquarters in Zape. — Photo: William Chan

STOCK MARKETS

Hang Seng Index closes 0.2 pct lower

Hong Kong's stock market ended lower yesterday with the benchmark Hang Seng Index down 0.2 percent to close at 21,814.37 points. The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index fell 0.69 percent to end at 8,002.63 points, while the Hang Seng Tech Index fell 0.87 percent to end at 5,235.28 points.

— Xinhua

IC to hold community cultural events this weekend



This undated handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows the previous "Culture in the Community" activities in Barra.

Ginnie Liang

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will launch its "Culture in the Community" initiative tomorrow and Sunday, bringing 16 pop-up events to 14 neighbourhoods across Macau, according to an IC statement yesterday.

Centred around the themes of "More Reading" and "More Music," the programme aims to enrich residents' daily life with cultural experiences, with the "More Reading" series of activities which will transform community spaces into storytelling hubs, featuring interactive sessions, sing-alongs, and games to encourage reading among children and strengthen family bonds, the statement said, adding that a book donation station will also allow residents to leave books they no longer read, promoting a culture of reading.

The "More Music" activities will feature performances by the Macao Orchestra (OM), Macao Chinese Orchestra (OCHM), and the Cultural Affairs Bureau's

performing arts academy, offering live music and interactive sessions where residents can join impromptu performances, the statement said.

Events will take place in two daily sessions, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., at locations including Zona de Lazer Temporária da Doca do Lam Mau (林茂塘市政臨時休憩區), Zona de Lazer da Rua Quatro do Bairro Iao Hon (祐漢第四街休憩區), Jardim da Flora (二龍喉公園), and various sitting out areas and parks around the city.

For the full schedule, members of the public can visit <http://www.icm.gov.mo>.

IAM to hold nature education workshop next month

Meanwhile, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) will organise two nature education workshops in March to promote ecological awareness and deepen understanding of local flora and fauna, the bureau said in a statement yesterday.



This undated handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) shows the previous "Building an Insect Hotel" workshop that took place at the Taipa Houses-Museum.

On March 8, the "Building an Insect Hotel" workshop will take place at the Taipa Houses-Museum from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m., where participants can learn about the role of insects in ecosystems and create their own "insect hotels", the statement said.

The following day, March 9, the "Bird Flight Automata" workshop will be held at the same location from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., exploring the mechanics of bird flight through a hands-on craft activity.

Both workshops are open to residents aged five to 80, with a fee of 50 patacas per group of two, the statement said, adding that registration begins next Monday via the "Macao One Account" system or in person at various IAM service centres in the city.

Participants are encouraged to bring their own water bottles and wear light-coloured long-sleeved clothing and sports shoes, the statement said, adding that details can be viewed at <http://www.iam.gov.mo> or call 2833 7676 for further enquiries. ■

Customs busts 4 claw machine shops for offering fake stuffed toys worth 110,000 patacas

Ginnie Liang

Macau Customs Service officers on Wednesday busted four claw machine shops suspected



The bogus brand stuffed toys seized from four claw machine shops on Wednesday are displayed at the Macau Customs Service (SA) headquarters in Pac On, Taipa. – Photo courtesy of TDM

of offering gamers stuffed toys infringing on various brands' intellectual property rights (IP), involving 303 bogus items worth 110,000 patacas in total, according to the prices set by the retailers, a customs spokesperson said during a press conference in Pac On, Taipa yesterday.

According to the spokesperson, the four shops are located in Fai Chi Kei district and in the Avenida do Ouvidor Arriaga (雅廉訪大馬路) and Avenida do Almirante Lacerda (提督馬路) areas respectively.

One male shop owner, one male and two female claw machine owners, were arrested on Wednesday, according to the spokesperson, adding that the four suspects aged between 31 to 41 are local residents.

The spokesperson said that the four shops belong to the same owner, and opened one after

another from 2021 to 2024.

According to the spokesperson, the Macau Customs Service received a tip-off at the end of last year and discovered that the four claw machine shops were suspected of buying copyright-infringed products outside Macau for customers trying to win a prize from the claw machines.

The spokesperson did not reveal the affected brands or the type of toys.

The spokesperson noted that the bogus items were purchased for 7.80 yuan to 30 yuan and customers were charged 3 patacas per game.

The spokesperson said that the suspects have been transferred to the Public Prosecution Office (MP). According to the Industrial Property Code Decree-Law No 97/99/M, the suspects face a hefty fine and up to six months in jail. ■

Avenida do Nordeste skywalk to be completed in June 2027: govt

Tony Wong

The government said yesterday that its skywalk project along Avenida do Nordeste (東北大馬路) in the peninsula's Areia Preta district, which got off the ground last week, is scheduled to be fully completed in June 2027.

The government also reaffirmed yesterday that various special measures will be implemented aiming to alleviate the adverse impact of the project's duration on the traffic in the area.

The Northern District Community Service Consultative Council held a regular meeting yesterday where officials from the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) and the Transport Bureau (DSAT) briefed its members about the Avenida do Nordeste skywalk project and the government's various traffic measures to be implemented during the project's execution.

Running along almost the entire length of Avenida do Nordeste, the 600-metre-long skywalk will run between Avenida de Venceslau de Moraes (慕拉士大馬路) and Rua Central da Areia Preta (黑沙環中街).

On the side in Avenida de Venceslau de Moraes, the skywalk will be linked to the podium area of the Mong Son social rental housing estate, while on the other side near Rua Central da Areia Preta, the skywalk will be linked to the podium area of the government's high-rise rental residential building for senior citizens on Plot P, with other access points outside the Polytec Garden (保利達花園) and La Baie Du Noble (海名居) private residential estates.

Briefing reporters after yesterday's closed-door meeting, Fu U On, a member of the government-appointed council, noted that there will be a total of 13 access points to the skywalk.

No escalators at 2 access points

Fu quoted the officials as saying that two access points to the skywalk will not be equipped with an escalator, namely one outside the Hoi Pan Garden (海濱花園) residential estate and one outside the Kam Hoi San Garden (金海山花園) residential estate, while all other access points will be equipped with escalators, lifts and staircases.

Fu quoted the officials as saying that there will not be enough space at the two access points, with both a lift and a staircase, to have an escalator.



Northern District Community Service Consultative Council Deputy Convener Chan Ian Ian (right) and member Fu U On look on during yesterday's press briefing after the government-appointed council's closed-door meeting at the Government Services Centre in Areia Preta district. – Photo: Tony Wong

According to Fu, the officials also underlined during the meeting that the skywalk project's work will be carried out in different phases and by different sections along the avenue with the aim of reducing the adverse impact of the project's execution on the traffic in the area.

Moreover, the officials also said that the government will hire a third-party institution to closely monitor the air quality as well as the levels of noise and wastewater generated during the project's execution.

Fu also quoted the officials as saying that with the skywalk project's various works to move forward, some street parking spaces for motorcycles in the neighbourhood will be suspended in phases during the project's execution, but no alternative parking spaces will be temporarily set up in the vicinity because there is a sufficient number of motorcycle parking spaces in carparks in the area.

The skywalk project was initially slated to get off the ground in the second quarter of last year and be completed in early 2027, but due to postponements it finally got off the ground last week.

According to Fu, the officials said during yesterday's meeting that the project is now scheduled to be fully completed in June 2027.

Chan Ian Ian, a deputy convener of the council, told reporters that QR codes will be set up at different locations at the construction site for residents to scan to submit their opinions and suggestions concerning the execution of the skywalk project. According to Chan, the officials pledged during the meeting that the government will reply to the submitted opinions and follow up accordingly as soon as possible. ■



Vehicles turn into Avenida de Venceslau de Moraes from Avenida do Nordeste, where construction of a skywalk started, on Wednesday. – Photo: Tony Wong