

'Short-circuit' fire breaks out in Lago Building, landing 2 in hospital

Yuki Lei

A fire broke out at a flat in Block 5 of Lago ("Lake") Building in Taipa yesterday morning, resulting in two residents having to be rushed to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre for emergency treatment, with 54 firefighters and 12 emergency vehicles deployed – and the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) stated that "no residents were in need of temporary rehousing".

The accident scene was a flat on the 7th floor of Block 5 of Lago Building – a subsidised home-ownership scheme (HOS) estate – on Rua da Madeira (馬德拉街). According to public broadcaster TDM's live stream, Fire Services Bureau (CB) Vice Commissioner Lam Chon Sang told reporters that the flat was gutted by the blaze, while two neighbouring flats incurred minor damage, with their wooden doors charred. He said: "The scene showed significant damage to the lift, and the temperature was extremely high due to the wind pushing the flames through the flat," adding that the wind had made the rescue efforts even more challenging.

The fire required an open hose and airway rescue operation*, Lam said,

pointing out that the smoky blaze was extinguished within 15 minutes.

According to Lam, as the door to the flat was open when the firemen arrived, the heat had already intensified, making conditions challenging for the firefighters. They had to carry their equipment up the stairs, further complicating the rescue efforts, Lam underlined, adding that the temperature was already dangerously high when they accessed the lift area.

More than 20 dwellers self-evacuated from the scene. Lam confirmed that the flat did not have a sprinkler system, denying allegations that the alarm did not go off when the fire broke out.

The Fire Services Bureau identified the two female victims, both locals, as residents of the ill-fated flat aged 79 and 51, noting that they appeared unconscious and were suffering from smoke inhalation when they were found by firefighters in the corridor of their floor.

According to the bureau, the fire started in the living room, with the preliminary investigation indicating that the cause was a short circuit in the TV set.

The Social Welfare Bureau issued a statement saying that it was "very

concerned" about the fire incident in Lago Building, noting that immediately upon learning of the incident, they arranged for social workers and staff from various social service organisations in Taipa to provide on-site emotional support and counselling to the dwellers, addressing their needs.

The Housing Bureau (IH) said in a statement that it had requested the building's management company to provide an incident report on the fire for further investigation into the situation of the building's alarm system and hydrant's water pressure.

According to the IH statement, the on-site communal area on the 7th floor of the building concerned was heavily blackened, public lighting below the 8th floor was affected, and two of the five lifts were inoperable due to flooding by the fire-fighting operation. ■

* An open hose and airway rescue refers to a specialised rescue technique used in emergency situations, particularly in confined spaces or environments where people are trapped and require immediate access to breathable air. This method involves deploying a hose or similar device to provide a continuous supply of fresh air to the victims while rescuers work to extricate them safely. – DeepSeek



This photo circulating on social media platforms shows yesterday morning's fire in a flat of Block 5 of Lago ("Lake") Building in Taipa.

STOP PRESS! Trump says discussing 'major' economic deals with Putin



US President Donald Trump (right) meets with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. – AFP

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump said yesterday that he and Russian leader Vladimir Putin are discussing "major" economic deals as part of discussions on ending the war started by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"I am in serious discussions with President Vladimir Putin of Russia concerning the ending of the War, and also major Economic Development transactions which will take place between the United States and Russia. Talks are proceeding very well!" Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

Trump issued the statement after being joined by French President Emmanuel Macron at the White

House for a conference call with other G7 leaders on the third anniversary of the start of the full-scale Russian invasion.

After three years of steady US and European support for Ukraine's fight against Russia, Trump has entered talks with Moscow on a settlement – while leaving it unclear how much say Ukraine and European countries will be allowed in shaping the terms.

In his post, Trump said he had also highlighted to other G7 leaders his goal of getting Ukraine to sign an agreement giving the United States access to its natural resources in return for US support in any peace settlement.

"I emphasised the importance of the vital 'Critical Minerals and Rare-Earths Deal' between the United States and Ukraine, which we hope will be signed very soon!" Trump wrote.

"This deal, which is an 'Economic Partnership,' will ensure the American people recoup the Tens of Billions of Dollars and Military Equipment sent to Ukraine, while also helping Ukraine's economy grow as this Brutal and Savage War comes to an end."

Meanwhile, Trump also said yesterday that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky may visit the White House 'this week or next' and that the Ukraine war could end 'within weeks'. (More on page 11)

– AFP

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The Macau Post Daily

Xi says bilateral ties show China, Russia good neighbors, true friends

President Xi Jinping said yesterday that history and reality show that China and Russia are good neighbors that cannot be moved away, and true friends who share weal and woe, support each other and achieve common development.

– Story on p. 7

Father of freed Gaza hostage says fellow Arabs should be outraged by Hamas

The father of Hisham al-Sayed, a Bedouin Muslim returned to Israel after nearly a decade in Gaza captivity, on Sunday urged "the Arab world" to speak out against abuses by Hamas.

– Story on p. 10

Stunned Social Democrats turn to supporting role in new German govt

After a humbling election defeat for Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his Social Democrats (SPD), the party looked to collect itself yesterday in preparation for a potential new role as the junior partner in a conservative-led government.

– Story on p. 12

Car loses control during film shoot, 12 hurt incl 4 kids

William Chan

The driver of a car being filmed by a mainland crew lost control during a film shoot yesterday in the city centre, injuring 12 people including four children.

The incident occurred around 2:30 p.m. Traffic police spokesman Ma Chio Hong told reporters at the scene that the crew was filming on a closed section of road when the vehicle, which had intended to turn

from Rua do Seminário (三巴仔橫街) into Largo do Aquino (亞堅奴前地), crashed into a roadside metal barrier instead and subsequently drove into Calçada de Francisco António (三層樓斜巷). The accident resulted in injuries to 12 people who were waiting in Calçada de Francisco António.

Ma noted that the filming was authorised by local authorities, and police officers were present to ensure safety during the filming.

The driver, a 62-year-old man from the mainland, was unharmed. He has both a mainland driving licence and a permit to drive in Macau, Ma said. The driver passed a breathalyser test after the accident.

A male witness named Lei told reporters that the crew was filming a drifting* scene when the vehicle lost control at high speed while navigating the corner.

According to Fire Services Bureau (CB) spokesman Kuok Pan, the injured included three males and

nine females, with four children aged five and six. Among the injured, two individuals are local residents, nine are from the mainland, and one holds a Singapore passport.

Kuok told reporters at the scene that all the injured were conscious and stable at the time of the press briefing. They suffered mainly from abrasions and contusions, and were taken to Kiang Wu Hospital for medical treatment.

Ma added that the police are currently reviewing CCTV footage from the scene and have sequestered the vehicle that caused the accident for a thorough inspection. ■

* Drifting is a driving technique where the driver intentionally oversteers, causing the rear wheels to lose traction while maintaining control through the turn. This creates a dramatic, sideways slide, which is both visually striking and technically challenging. — DeepSeek



A police officer stands near the damaged car involved in yesterday's film-shoot accident in Calçada de Francisco António, with glass scattered in the lane.

— Photo: William Chan

Police bust 4 mainlanders for loansharking

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police have separately arrested three men and a woman from the mainland for engaging in loansharking activities, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

In the first case, there are three suspects. A 37-year-old woman surnamed Jiang, two 29-year-old men surnamed Zhang and Wan, told the police that they are jobless.

According to Cheong, the police received a report about a loan-sharking activity from the security department of a casino in Cotai on Sunday. A man from the mainland met a member of a loan-sharking gang on that day, who introduced the man to the three suspects as he wanted to borrow money, and they discussed the deal's terms. The man borrowed HK\$240,000 from the gang and agreed to pay 20 percent "interest" for each winning hand and signed a "loan agreement".

Cheong noted that Wan collected the interest while Jiang and Zhang monitored the victim while he was playing the tables. The victim had lost over HK\$160,000 in chips after six hours of gambling. Zhang told him to stop gambling but the victim refused, leading to a dispute that alerted the security staff to call the police. The police arrived and apprehended the three suspects on the spot.

The police investigation showed that Wan had earned HK\$100,000 in "interest" from the victim. The police confiscated HK\$160,000 in chips involved in the case.

In the second case, the 35-year-old male suspect surnamed Chen told the police that he is a businessman.

According to Cheong, the

police received a report from a male mainlander on Friday, saying that Chen had arranged a gambling loan for him. The man had been approached by Chen in a casino in Cotai, who offered him a high-interest loan. The victim invested HK\$100,000, while Chen added HK\$200,000, totalling HK\$300,000 as "gambling capital". Both agreed in a signed deal that around 26 to 30 percent of each winning stake would be deducted as interest.

According to Cheong, the victim was down to HK\$90,000 after six hours of gambling. Chen asked him to stop but he refused. When the victim went outside to smoke, Chen took the remaining HK\$90,000 and left the casino. The victim could not reach Chen and reported the case to the police on the same day. Under questioning, the victim indicated that approximately HK\$70,000 was taken as interest from him.

Police found Chen in another casino in Cotai the same day and arrested him.

The four suspects in the two cases have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of usury. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.

— Photo: Ada Lei

USJ Int'l Cultural Carnival 2025: A Celebration of Diversity

Adrian Vallesteros

The University of Saint Joseph (USJ) will host its International Cultural Carnival 2025 this Saturday, March 1, from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. at its Ilha Verde Campus.

According to the statement, the one-day event will showcase over 30 cultural booths run by USJ staff, students, and alumni from over 50 nationalities, inviting members of the public to partake in a vibrant cultural experience. The statement noted that its main aim is to open the university to members of the public and enable them to immerse themselves in USJ's multicultural environment, while at the same time giving international students and faculty members a chance to get to know the local culture.

The carnival will commence with an opening parade, where spectators can sample a raft of traditional food from around the globe, the statement said. The statement highlighted that the event's booths will represent culinary delights from countries including China, Brazil, the Philippines and Vietnam, allowing visitors to broaden their knowledge of diverse culinary traditions.

Aside from the food offerings, the event will feature information booths from various USJ faculties, offering

insights into university life and a chance to consult directly with faculty members about academic programmes and enrolment opportunities, according to the statement.

One of the aspects of the carnival will be the "Bottle to Blooms: Grow a Greener Future!" workshop organised by USJ Library. The statement said that participants can learn to transform glass bottles and plastic containers into decorative flower pots, promoting sustainability and creativity. The workshop aims to inspire attendees

to adopt eco-friendly practices.

The carnival will also include a broad range of performances, featuring local punk/rock band SCAMPER, traditional martial arts demonstrations, and various dance acts. There will also be a mini-market that will showcase eco-friendly products created by USJ alumni.

The USJ International Cultural Carnival 2025 is free and open to all. For further details, please visit the official USJ website: <https://www.usj.edu.mo/en/event/usj-international-cultural-carnival-2025/> ■



This poster downloaded from the USJ website promotes Saturday's International Cultural Carnival and provides the QR code for registration.

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY.
A FEW RAIN PATCHES LATER.
FORCE 3 TO 5 EAST TO
NORTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH
GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL
RANGE BETWEEN
60% AND 95%.



14°C~18°C

Source: SMG

Police bust illegal currency exchange dealer

Ada Lei

A man from the mainland was arrested on Saturday for engaging in an illegal currency exchange deal, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

The 29-year-old suspect surnamed Gan told the police that he is jobless.

According to Cheong, the police received a report about an illegal

currency exchange activity from a casino in Cotai on Saturday. Gan approached a male gambler in a smoking lounge of the casino and offered a currency exchange deal. The gambler showed interest in the deal and agreed to exchange 14,400 yuan for chips worth HK\$15,000. The gambler then scanned the QR code provided by Gan and transferred 14,400 yuan to him. The police apprehended Gan and

the male gambler on the spot. The gambler then turned witness in the case.

Under questioning, Gan told the police that he had made a profit of HK\$375 from the deal. The police seized HK\$77,000 in chips from Gan.

Gan has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing an illegal currency exchange charge, according to Cheong. ■

Medical graduates, private clinics face competition

Interview by Yuki Lei

During a plenary session of the Legislative Assembly (AL) on Friday, Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long said he expects medical graduates to face employment pressure in the next three years – in response to which a medical graduate admitted in an interview with the *Post* yesterday, “I feel that the reward for my hard efforts is not proportional”, while lawmaker-cum-physician Chan Iek Lap pointed out that the government’s free healthcare policy has also made it difficult for private clinics and hospitals to recruit and retain doctors and nurses.

During Friday’s Legislative Assembly plenary session, Dr Lo said that he expects over 600 medical graduates each year from 2025 to 2027 across 15 healthcare professions, including 150 medical graduates and 230 nurses annually. He added that, given the current growth in healthcare demand, the supply “doesn’t seem capable of absorbing the large demand for doctors”.

Fierce competition for medical posts

To pursue her dream of becoming a doctor, Chan, a local woman, like all medical graduates, stood out among numerous competitors six years ago and successfully enrolled in Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou to study clinical medicine. Little did she know, this would only be the beginning of a long journey filled with internships and examinations before she could be qualified to practise.

As a medical graduate last year, Chan acknowledged that the pressure to find employment has always been significant, primarily due to the increasing number of graduates. She said: “More and more of them are piling up every year, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic of the past few years when vacancies have not been opening up. Now, a new group of entrants has to compete with those already in the field, but the number of available jobs is very limited”. However, she was quick to add that there was a need for human resources within local hospitals. Currently working as an intern at a local hospital, Chan said: “...Staff often need to schedule their shifts, doctors in the inpatient



Lawmaker-cum-doctor Chan Iek Lap poses after yesterday’s interview with the *Post* at his office in the Macau Chamber of Commerce (ACM) Building in Zape. – Photo: Yuki Lei

department have to take turns supporting the emergency services, and they must work extra shifts at weekends”.

Facing the saturation of the medical profession in Macau, as she sees it, Chan pointed out that this was not only happening at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre, but also at the private Kiang Wu Hospital: “Many general practitioners are actually waiting for the opportunity of specialist training. However, due to the restrictions of the local Health Professionals Council’s specialist training programme, many graduates can only take up positions as general practitioners (GPs), resulting in fierce competition for positions, but the hospitals remain short-staffed, and there’s even a succession gap in human resources”.

Expressing her “disquiet” about employment difficulties and the development of “big health”, Chan noted that the implementation of the new system has intensified competition between existing doctors and new recruits. Additionally, she said, the sudden changes in the development of a new industry (big health) had not allowed enough time for local professionals to advance, with the government prioritising the acquisition of non-local talents, which,

she argued, further reduced employment opportunities for locals: “Rather, it is the lack of corresponding developmental foundations that affects the career direction of each individual in such an environment”.

Lawmaker calls for ‘good breeding ground’ for medical graduates

Speaking to the *Post* yesterday morning at his office in Zape, Dr Chan said that the specific conditions of the medical profession make it difficult for doctors and nurses to switch to other professions, resulting in relatively limited employment options, especially in a small city like Macau. He said: “For the past seven and eight years, more and more [medical] graduates have been returning [to work in Macau], but it has become increasingly difficult for them to enter the field...One graduate I know even switched to working as a food delivery rider”.

Dr Chan pointed out that tackling the surplus of medical graduates in Macau requires a larger healthcare base. However, he added, unlike Hong Kong’s population of seven million, Macau’s limited patient pool restricts the demand for more doctors: “Historically, 40 years ago, the first group of doctors who returned to Macau faced fewer challenges.”

Citing SSM Deputy Director Kuok Cheong U, who has told reporters recently that the government will not recruit a large number of doctors due to quota constraints, Dr Chan pointed out that local staffing levels are primarily based on retirements and resignations, making it very challenging to bring in new recruits: “A doctor might work for 30 to 40 years, leaving little room for advancement for newcomers”.

He emphasised the collaborative efforts of the community to create a favourable environment for young people to fully realise their talents in healthcare professions:

“How can we, through the efforts of all parties, endeavour to provide these medical graduates with a good breeding ground so that they can join local healthcare-related professions and explore their own talents?”

Dr Chan underlined that he was not asking the government to absorb all young people into public or private hospitals, but instead to provide a favourable environment, pointing out that while the government’s free healthcare policy was particularly important during the pandemic, it has also further affected the viability of the private healthcare sector: “Nowadays, people are accustomed to free healthcare, leading to a misconception that seeing a doctor costs nothing, which affects their choices”. For private medical institutions, the government’s support for healthcare organisations was insufficient and their development was similarly constrained, he said, suggesting that the government allocate part of the resources for healthcare services to private clinics to facilitate the balanced development of public and private healthcare services.

In response to criticisms regarding the presence of a large number of non-local doctors in Macau, Dr Chan said that these doctors are specialists and “should not be too competitive vis-à-vis the young local doctors nowadays”. He pointed out that the complexity of Macau’s laws and regulations restricts the development of local doctors: “In Macau, doctors must complete one year’s internship and pass examinations before qualifying to practise, and then face competition for admission as specialists, which makes the training process even harder and more time-consuming”. He again called on the government to shorten the training period for specialists. ■



Image courtesy of Pexels

2025 Women’s Sports Carnival to be held next month

Ginnie Liang

The Sports Bureau’s (ID) Sports Development Department Chief Chao Kuok Wai announced yesterday during a press conference at the bureau’s headquarters in Zape that the 2025 Macau Women’s Sports Carnival is slated to be held on March 22 in Largo do Senado (議事亭前地) and on March 23 at the Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion, aiming to encourage women to participate in physical exercise in various ways.

The two-day event, which is jointly hosted by the bureau and the Macau Women’s General Association (commonly known as Fu Luen in Cantonese) will be divided into two parts, namely the public sports and fitness exhibition, and the inter-team sports competition, according to Chao.

Chao said that on the first day of the event, women groups and associations from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA) will perform demonstrations of sports programmes with different regional characteristics together with local public fitness interest classes coaches and students on March 22 at 3 p.m. in the city’s main square, Largo do Senado (“Senate Square”).

According to Chao, there will be two categories in the inter-team sports competition for women born between 1985 and 2007 and women born between 1965 and 1984. Participants can form a team of eight, completing the activities set by the

organisers and reaching the finish line in the fastest time.

Chao noted that each person can only sign up for one team, and no more than five teams can be signed up for each association, with the maximum number of teams standing at 70.



Women’s General Association of Macau Vice President Ng Ka Teng (right) and the Sports Bureau’s (ID) Sports Development Department Chief Chao Kuok Wai look on during yesterday’s press conference about the upcoming Macau Women’s Sports Carnival at ID headquarters in Zape. – Photo: Ginnie Liang

Meanwhile, the organisers also invited members from women’s associations in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) to participate in the competition, which will be separated into two divisions, namely the Local Competition and the GBA Friendship Competition, Fu Luen Vice President Ng Ka Teng said during yesterday’s press conference.

In addition, Chao told reporters on the sidelines of the press conference that a women’s disease prevention and healthcare station will also be set up during the event to raise women’s health awareness.

Chao also revealed that in preparation for the 15th National Games to be held later this year, elements related to the National Games will be added to the event to promote public sports and allow more members of the public to learn about the National Games during the event.

Interested local female residents can sign up for the event at buy.goutmall.com/macau-womenssportsfestival by noon on March 14.

Members of the public can visit the bureau’s website at www.sport.gov.mo. Enquiries can be made by calling 2823 6363 (Sports Bureau), or 2835 3748 (Fu Luen). ■



Local comic association gathers GBA artists for exhibition

Rui Pastorin

At the basement level of Livraria Portuguesa (“Portuguese Bookshop”), The Greater Bay Area Manga Artists’ Exhibition 2025 is being presented, with those interested able to view the works of six artists until Sunday.

The exhibition kicked off on Saturday.

The 2025 edition of the exhibition, organised by the Association of Promoting Macau Comics and Animation Cultural Exchange (APMCACE), once again gathers artists from Macau, Hong Kong and the mainland, presenting over 30 works.

Concerning local artists, there are pieces by local artists Vincent Ho (湖水藍), who is again showcasing his first personal work “Cruel Angel”, while Macau comic illustrator Jet Wu (胡智杰) is presenting his “What have I seen” series.

Works by the mainland’s Chinese fantasy art illustrator and Chengdu Academy of Fine Arts Associate Professor Chen Wei are also on display. The biographies of the artists displayed at the gallery point out that Chen is a CG (computer graphics)

artist whose works have been published in different parts of the world. Works by another mainland artist, the creations by Chen Jiguang, who, according to his artist bio, is the deputy dean of the Digital Media School of Sichuan University of Culture and Arts and head of its animation major, are also on display.

Representing Hong Kong are Leung Wai Ka, a veteran cartoonist and former editor-in-chief of various comic books such as “Eternal Dragon Slayer” and “The Legend of the Black Panther”, and manga artist Beyen Dai (戴慶賢). Dai, according to information at the gallery, has been responsible for colour illustrations and cover art of many comics.

The Portuguese Bookshop is located at 16 Rua de São Domingos (板樟堂街). The exhibition is open to the public every day from 11 p.m. to 7 p.m., according to the bookshop’s Facebook page.

Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin

Sam urges revamp of civil service team, 'Macau + Hengqin' promotion

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai yesterday convened the first meetings of the two leadership groups he set up earlier this month, namely the Leadership Group for Public Administration Reform and the Leadership Group for Promoting the Development of the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, underlining that the establishment of the two leadership groups aims to ensure the implementation of the spirit of the various important speeches made by President Xi Jinping during his inspection visit to Macau in December last year, the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) announced in a statement yesterday.

According to the statement, Sam reaffirmed that the two leadership groups chaired by him aim to enhance governance capability and to strengthen top-level guidance and cross-departmental coordination.

In addition to the two leadership groups, Sam also set up three coordination or working groups earlier this month chaired by Secretary for Administration and

Justice André Cheong Weng Chon, namely the Coordination Group for Public Administration Reform, the Working Group for Coordinating Legal Matters, and the Working Group for Urban Beautification and Cleanliness.

According to yesterday's statement, the meetings of the two leadership groups were attended by Sam's five policy secretaries and his chief-of-cabinet Chan Kak. In addition, yesterday's meeting of the Leadership Group for Public Administration Reform was also attended by Chan Chi Kin, acting director of the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP). Chan Chi Kin is one of the bureau's three deputy directors.

According to the statement, yesterday's meeting of the Leadership Group for Public Administration Reform covered various topics related to further boosting governance capability and public-administration service quality, such as improving public entities' powers, responsibilities, functions, duties, organisational structures, and personnel systems, strengthening



This handout photo released by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday shows Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addressing yesterday's meeting of one of the two leadership groups.

and improving the management of officials of bureaus and other bureau-level entities, deepening the development of e-government, and expanding the government's e-service aiming to make it more convenient for residents and businesses to complete public administrative formalities.

Sam underlined during the meeting that the important point of Macau's public administration reform should be to revamp its civil service team with the aim of enabling them to

meet the city's current socioeconomic situation and its development needs in various aspects.

Moreover, the statement said, the Leadership Group for Public Administration Reform is also planning to promote cooperation between the Commission of Audit (CA) and the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau in jointly conducting performance audits concerning the public administration's use of its human resources with the

aim of ensuring their rational use.

During yesterday's meeting of the Leadership Group for Promoting the Development of the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, according to the statement, Sam urged his five policy secretaries to thoroughly understand and implement the requirements laid out by Xia Baolong, who heads both the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office (HKMWO) of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO) during his fact-finding visit to Hengqin early this month.

Sam urged his five policy secretaries to strengthen the government's cross-departmental coordination and to ensure the implementation of key tasks in various fields, with the aim of further facilitating the convenient flow of talents, capital and goods in Hengqin, complying with the projected "Macau + Hengqin" new strategic positioning, and advancing the high-quality achievements in the in-depth cooperation zone's second-phase development goals. ■

Gongbei Customs seizes contraband worth 1 billion yuan in Pilot FTZs

Ginnie Liang

Gongbei Customs announced yesterday in a statement that it has cracked a series of cases involving smuggled alcoholic beverages in the mainland's Pilot Free Trade Zones (FTZs)*, in which a total of eight criminal cases were filed, and a total of more than one million bottles of bonded wine and spirits were seized, with a total value of more than 1 billion yuan (1.1 billion patacas).

According to the statement, Gongbei Customs busted a number of supply chain service companies that declared the import of overseas alcohol and other goods into the Pilot Free Trade Zones and the Special Customs Supervision Areas in the mainland by underquoting prices, and then smuggling the goods into the mainland by falsely reporting the nature of trade on the cross-border e-commerce platforms.

In June 2024, the anti-smuggling department of Gongbei Customs, in conjunction with the anti-smuggling departments of Haikou and Jinan customs, carried out arrests by sending 419 police officers to carry out the anti-contraband operation in Haikou, Jinan, Zhuhai, and other places, and successfully seized a series of cases of smuggled imported



This undated handout photo provided by the Gongbei Customs yesterday shows customs officers checking contraband alcohol.

alcoholic beverages by falsely reporting the nature of trade and underreporting prices, arresting 58 suspects, and seizing 1,178 bottles of alcoholic drinks, the statement said.

In the whole of 2024, the anti-smuggling department of Gongbei Customs investigated 44 smuggling criminal cases involving the Pilot Free Trade Zones and the Special Customs Supervision Areas, involving a commercial value of 1.367 billion yuan, the statement said.

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that taking advantage of the special regulatory

policies of the Pilot Free Trade Zones and the Special Customs Supervision Areas to smuggle imported goods by making false trade declarations on the nature of goods and pricing may result in criminal charges such as a result of illegal business operations and money laundering, facing severe penalties. ■

*Pilot Free Trade Zones (FTZs) in the Chinese mainland are special economic areas established by the central government to test and implement new policies and reforms aimed at liberalising trade, investment, and financial services.

IAM to remove 2 withered candlenut trees in Guia Hill Municipal Park

Ginnie Liang

Two old candlenut trees affected by brown root rot in Guia Hill Municipal Park will be removed by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) early next month in order to ensure public safety, the bureau said in a statement yesterday.

According to the statement, the two trees were found to be infected with the disease years ago, and the bureau afterwards invited dendrologists from the Guangzhou Institute of Forestry and Landscape Architecture to conduct inspections of both trees and provide advice on their maintenance, while also continuing to take remedial measures such as pest and disease control, fertiliser application, and medication.

However, the ancient trees have not shown improvement in their growth conditions and have withered, the statement said.

During the removal work, members of the public are advised to follow the on-site instructions and refrain from entering the enclosed areas to avoid accidents.

Aleurites moluccanus, or candlenut, is a flowering tree in the spurge family. It grows up to 30 metres tall.

The bureau pledged in the statement that it will continue to monitor the situation of old trees throughout the city. Anyone who finds abnormalities in any tree can contact the bureau by calling 2833 7676 or via "IAM Connect", according to the statement. ■



This undated handout picture provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the two sick candlenut trees that are about to be removed.

STOCK MARKETS

Hang Seng Index closes 0.58 pct lower

HONG KONG – Hong Kong's stock market ended lower yesterday with the benchmark Hang Seng Index down 0.58 percent to close at 23,341.61 points. The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index fell 0.55 percent to end at 8,618.88 points, and the Hang Seng Tech Index fell 1.19 percent to end at 5,789.52 points. —Xinhua

3,941 fined for illegal smoking in Macau last year

Tony Wong

Anti-smoking inspectors fined 3,941 people for illegally puffing away in 2024, the Health Bureau (SSM) said in a statement yesterday.

The number reported last year represented an increase of 27.1 percent from the 3,101 recorded in 2023.

In Macau, smoking is banned in all indoor public venues and facilities, except smoking lounges in casinos and at the airport. In addition, smoking is also prohibited within a 10-metre-area of all public bus stops.

Illegal smoking carries a fixed fine of 1,500 patacas.

Moreover, smoking is only permitted in designated areas of public parks, gardens and recreational areas.

In addition to the 3,941 cases of illegal smoking, according to yesterday's statement, the bureau, in conjunction with inspectors from other relevant public entities, last year fined 138 travellers for bringing e-cigarettes



This undated handout photo released by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday shows its anti-smoking staff inspecting a snooker hall.

into or taking them out of Macau and 126 offenders for violating various other rules listed in the Tobacco Prevention and Control Law.

According to yesterday's statement, 604 out of the illegal smoking cases reported last year occurred in restaurants and other eateries, 531 in casinos, and 361 in parks and sitting-out areas.

Meanwhile, yesterday's statement also announced that last year the bureau's anti-alcohol inspectors fined 47 offenders for violating the Law on the Prevention and Control on Minors' Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages, including 11 for selling minors alcoholic drinks or providing them with such drinks at public venues. ■

'The Cherry Orchard' to be held at CCM, Isabel Huppert in lead role



This undated handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) last week shows a scene from *The Cherry Orchard*.

Rui Pastorin

French actress Isabelle Huppert is set to perform the lead role of Lyubov for the play "The Cherry Orchard" reimagined by Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues, which will be staged at the Macau Cultural Centre's (CCM) Grand Auditorium on April 4 and 5, according to a recent statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC).

Cherry Orchard was the last play that Russian playwright Anton Chekhov wrote and premiered in 1904, Wikipedia notes. The IC statement pointed

out that the reimagining debuted in 2021 and was conceived by the Avignon Festival, which is led by director and playwright Rodrigues. It is performed in French and has "a minimalist, yet striking" set, the statement noted.

Huppert, 71, will be portraying the play's elusive and complex Lyubov, who the statement said returns home when her family estate is about to be sold to pay off debts.

The statement said that the award-winning Huppert is known for her versatility and has played a raft of characters, mostly "women

marked in tragedy or wrapped in mystery". She is "considered one of the greatest actresses of her generation", according to Wikipedia. She is also the most nominated actress for France's national film award, the "César Award", for which she has been nominated 16 times, winning twice.

Huppert has garnered nominations and several awards, among which are a BAFTA Award and a Golden Globe Award, to name a few.

More details can be found on www.icm.gov.mo and www.ccm.gov.mo. ■

Alibaba to invest 380 billion yuan in AI, cloud computing

BEIJING – Chinese tech giant Alibaba said yesterday that it will spend 380 billion yuan on artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud computing over the next three years, a week after co-founder Jack Ma Yun was seen meeting President Xi Jinping at a conference in Beijing.

Investors have piled into Chinese technology stocks since the start of the year, with Alibaba – which runs some of the country's biggest online shopping platforms – seeing its shares soar to three-year highs.

But shares of the e-commerce behemoth nosedived in New York after the big investment push raised worries that the spending would dent profitability.

"The main takeaway is that Alibaba's ambitious spending plans for fiscal 2025 are creating some anxiety that the company's bottom-line will take a sizeable hit this year, negating the momentum that it has garnered," said a note from Briefing.com.

At 16:35 GMT yesterday, shares of Alibaba were down more than nine percent.

Alibaba plans to "invest at least 380 billion yuan (US\$53 billion) over the next three years to advance its cloud computing and AI infrastructure", a company statement said.

The firm said its strategy was aimed at "reinforcing [Alibaba's] commitment to long-term technological innovation... [and] underscores the company's focus on AI-driven growth".

The statement did not detail how the company would allocate the funds or what specific projects would be supported.

It did add that the investment

would exceed its total AI and cloud spending over the past decade.

Alibaba last week reported an eight percent bump in revenue for the three months through December, beating estimates to reach 280 billion yuan – and triggering a 14 percent surge in its Hong Kong shares on Friday.

CEO Eddie Wu Yongming said last week that the quarterly results "demonstrated substantial progress in [Alibaba's] 'user-first, AI-driven' strategies and the re-accelerated growth of our core businesses".

The company and its industry peers endured years of dampened investor confidence after the central government launched a regulatory crackdown on the tech sector in 2020.

But they have been riding higher in recent months, buoyed by the launch of a chatbot by Chinese startup DeepSeek that has upended the world's AI industry.

The turnaround comes as the world's second-largest economy continues to tackle sluggish consumption and persistent woes in the property sector.

At a meeting with business luminaries last week, Xi hailed the private sector and said the current economic problems were "surmountable" – a move widely interpreted as a show of support for big tech.

Ma remains an influential figure despite no longer being an Alibaba executive and shunning the limelight since authorities brought down affiliate Ant Group's high-stakes IPO in 2020.

His inclusion in the meeting hinted at his potential public rehabilitation following the tangle with regulators.

– AFP, MPD

Zimbabwean president launches Chinese-invested industrial park

HARARE – Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa yesterday attended the ground-breaking ceremony for a Chinese-invested industrial park, hailing it as a boost to the southern African country's industrialization.

The Palm River Energy Metallurgical Special Economic Zone in Beitbridge, Matabeleland South Province, with a US\$3.6-billion investment by Chinese company Xintai Resources, will be implemented in five phases over 12 years, targeting to produce chromium-based materials and coke.

"It is my expectation that the Palm River Energy Metallurgical Special Economic Zone project will play its part as a critical block for our nation's industrialization and modernization. We look forward to this project helping to drive our national economy forward and unlocking unprecedented opportunities for employment, technological progress, and social development," said Mnangagwa.

He said the project is a huge boost to Zimbabwe's path to industrialization as it integrates energy and metallurgy, two critical sectors with the potential to redefine the country's industrial landscape.

"These integrated systems and processes highlight the drive toward issues of sustainable mining, low greenhouse gas emissions, low waste production, and energy self-sufficiency through recycling of the resultant waste," said Mnangagwa.

According to the president, domestic mineral value addition ensures that Zimbabwe derives maximum benefits from its abundant natural resource endowments.

"To this end, the promotion of revenue from exports, job creation, economic diversification, industrial development, reduced dependence on raw commodity prices, technological advancement, and improved local infrastructure development should be scaled up," Mnangagwa said.

"We are dedicated to prioritizing enhanced investments in exploration and, most importantly, value addition of minerals driving toward industry development and economic growth," he added.

In 2018, Mnangagwa declared Beitbridge a special economic zone to enhance foreign direct investment and improve local business competitiveness. – Xinhua