

MGTO vows to relaunch discounted bus & ferry fares for foreign visitors

Yuki Lei

The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has reaffirmed its commitment to attracting more “international” tourists to Macau by offering a range of tourism incentives and products, including discounted bus and ferry fares from Hong Kong to Macau for foreign passengers arriving via Hong Kong International Airport.

However, MGTO did not say when it planned to relaunch the discounts.

The remarks were made by MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes in response to a written interpellation by indirectly-elected lawmaker-cum-unionist Lei Chan U last month, which noted that the government has earmarked 650 million patacas and 235 million patacas in the annual budgets for 2023 and 2024, respectively, to expand the sourcing of tourists, including offering concessions such as hotel and transport discounts to attract foreign visitors

According to the tourism chief’s written reply, this year, in addition to maintaining its focus on mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as foreign markets in Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, MGTO will also “relaunch” its efforts in Europe, the US, and

India, while “exploring” potential markets in the Middle East.

The statement quoted Senna Fernandes as noting late last month that MGTO plans to continue last year’s “sea, land, and air” transport promotions, in conjunction with local, regional, and international airlines, to offer discounted air tickets and value-added product packages targeting passengers on direct flights from various international destinations to Macau and Hong Kong.

In a bid to attract more international tourists to choose Macau as a tourist destination, MGTO stated that it would continue its ongoing plan to provide “diversified” tourism products, including incentives such as “air tickets + hotel, accommodation, food and beverage and entertainment,” developed in cooperation with the travel trade both domestically and internationally.

According to MGTO, organising and participating in roadshow promotion campaigns and major international travel shows in Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand, remain a key focus of its tourism promotion efforts this year.

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This undated and unlocated handout photo by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) last year shows a family of foreign visitors posing with their discounted ferry tickets.

Far-right Romania politician loses appeal against presidential vote ban

BUCHAREST – Romanian far-right politician Calin Georgescu yesterday lost an appeal against a decision barring him from standing in the country’s presidential election re-run, as hundreds protested outside the court.

Romania’s electoral bureau on Sunday had rejected Georgescu’s candidacy for the May re-run of last year’s annulled presidential election, sparking violent clashes and plunging the EU and NATO member bordering war-torn Ukraine into deeper uncertainty.

Georgescu had filed an appeal challenging that decision. But the constitutional court yesterday rejected it.

“The appeal was rejected unanimously,” the court said in a statement. Its reasoning was to be published later.

The ruling cannot be appealed further in Romania, spelling the end of Georgescu’s meteoric rise since he shot to prominence last November, when he unexpectedly

topped a first round of presidential voting. The election was cancelled before the second round could take place.

George Simion, who leads the far-right AUR party lending its support to Georgescu, accused the court of “mocking the Romanian people” and “attacking our democracy and our essential rights and freedoms”.

Outside the court, several hundred Georgescu supporters shouted “thieves” after news of the court’s decision spread.

“This is no longer a democracy. What are we living in? A dictatorship,” Marius Vasile, a 51-year-old pensioner, told AFP earlier.

“We want to elect whom we want... It’s him [Georgescu] we want. We don’t want anyone else,” said Marinela Simona Cheosa, a 45-year-old engineer waving a big Romanian flag.

Georgescu, a 62-year-old former senior government official, filed his appeal on Monday, saying the decision to bar him was “blatantly unlawful”. – AFP

China launches 18 satellites from Hainan commercial spacecraft launch site

WENCHANG, Hainan – A group of 18 low Earth orbit satellites was launched aboard the Long March-8 Y6 carrier rocket from the Hainan commercial spacecraft launch site in Hainan Province in the early hours of today.

The satellites, the fifth group of its kind, have entered the preset orbit successfully, according to the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC). They will constitute China’s commercial internet constellation Spacesail.

This mission marks the inaugural launch from the site’s No. 1 launch pad, which, following the inaugural launch from the No. 2 pad on November 30, 2024, signifies the dual-pad readiness of China’s first commercial spaceport for future missions.

The No. 1 launch pad, standing 83 meters tall, is tailored for the Long March-8 rocket. It features a modular steel structure design and employs a

dual-direction flame deflection cone for cooling and noise reduction for the first time, enhancing rapid reuse capabilities.

The launch pad now supports a seven-day launch and seven-day reset cycle, crucial for meeting surging launch demands.

The construction of the Hainan commercial spacecraft launch site commenced in July 2022. It completed its first launch mission in November 2024.

Now it is advancing the construction of the phase II project.

The Long March-8 rocket, developed by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology under the CASC, is a medium-lift liquid-fueled rocket optimized for cost-effective, multi-satellite launches to low- and medium-Earth orbits.

The mission marks the 563rd flight of the Long March rocket family, the pillar of China’s space transport system.

– Xinhua

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Ex-Philippine leader Duterte bound for Hague over ICC drug war case

A plane carrying former Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte left the Philippine capital bound for The Hague yesterday following his arrest on an International Criminal Court warrant stemming from his deadly crackdown on drugs, Manila said. – Story on p. 8

UN urges halt to suffering after Syria killings

The United Nations yesterday urged a halt to suffering in western Syria, reporting whole families were massacred in a wave of sectarian violence that monitors say killed over 1,000 civilians. – Story on p. 11

Trump says will buy a Tesla to show support for Musk

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he will buy a “brand-new Tesla” in support of his top donor and close advisor, Tesla CEO Elon Musk, after share prices tanked amid recession fears and Musk’s controversial actions in Washington. – Story on p. 12

Customs catches 2 mainlanders red-handed in people-smuggling case

Yuki Lei

Two mainland men were caught red-handed on Saturday night for their involvement in Macau-bound people smuggling by boat at Hac Sa Beach, according to a statement by the Macau Customs Service (SA) yesterday.

The two arrestees, aged 20 and 30, include the suspected "snakehead", who is currently in custody for aiding and abetting illegal immigration. The other has been transferred to the Public Security Police (PSP) Immigration Department for deportation.

According to the statement, in the evening of March 8, customs officers monitored through their intelligent maritime surveillance system and infrared night-vision cameras a suspicious vessel sailing on an unusual course in coastal waters off Hac Sa Beach, believing to be engaged in an illegal immigration activity.

The vessel and its male skipper were subsequently intercepted by customs officers from the speedboat patrol team, while the male illegal immigrant was arrested near the barbecue pits at Hac Sa Beach.

2 fishing vessels sink in Fai Chi Kei, govt says 'no abnormality found'

Meanwhile, the Macau Customs Service has seized two fishing vessels anchored off Fai Chi Kei's Fai Fu social rental housing estate. In reply to public broadcaster TDM's enquiry, the Customs Service said that the wooden fishing boats sank one after another, but

it had immediately taken on-site action to prevent other vessels from colliding with them, while notifying the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) to follow up on the matter.

In response to concerns raised by a member of the public about potential fuel spillage from the two vessels and its impact on health, the Marine and Water Bureau was quoted by TDM as emphasising that facilities such as grease traps and double-layered absorbent strips have been set up at the scene to prevent pollution of the sea surface, adding that "so far, no obvious fuel spillage has been observed".

The Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) also stressed, according to TDM, that no fuel pollution or dead fish had been found on the sea surface, nor has there been any abnormality in the water quality testing data recently. ■

**In the context of people smuggling, a "snakehead" refers to a leader or organiser within a human smuggling network. The term originates from organised crime and is often used to describe individuals or groups who facilitate illegal immigration, usually for profit.*

"Snakeheads" are known for arranging transportation, forged documents, and other logistics to help people cross borders illegally. They often charge high fees for their services, and the journeys they organise can be extremely dangerous, sometimes resulting in exploitation, abuse, or even death for the migrants. — DeepSeek



This handout photo provided by the Macau Customs Service (SA) yesterday shows two custom officers holding the illegal immigrant at Hac Sa Beach on Saturday night.

Sands 10K bib collection to start today

Kristina Vallesteros

With the 2025 Sands China Macao International 10K race set for this Sunday, participants can collect their number bibs starting today.

According to a Sports Bureau (ID) statement yesterday, runners can pick up their number bibs, timing chips, and notes-to-participants at the Olympic Sports Centre – Indoor Pavilion in Taipa.

Collection will be available from 12 noon to 9 p.m. today, continuing to Friday from 12 noon to 9 p.m., and on Saturday from 12 p.m. to 10 p.m. The statement noted that bib packs can be collected by presenting the registration receipt and ID. Those unable to collect the bib in person may authorise someone else to do so, provided the authorised person has their ID, the participant's registration receipt with an authorisation signature, and a copy of his or her ID.

The 10K race will begin at 7 a.m. and the Fun Run at 7:45 a.m. from Sai Van Lake Square on Sunday, finishing inside the Olympic Sports Centre Stadium.

The statement added that this year "The FUNkiest Costume Award" is themed "Ocean Run"



This handout photo provided by the Sports Bureau (ID) last night shows participants in last year's race displaying their number bibs.

and that participants are encouraged to incorporate oceanic elements into their costumes to promote marine environment protection and biodiversity.

To enter the costume contest, the statement noted that participants must upload a photo of themselves in their costumes, along with their number bib via the mobile app from 9 a.m. on March 15 to 9 a.m. on March 16. A total of 10 winners will

be selected after the race to receive a dining voucher. Participants are reminded to familiarise themselves with the race regulations and prepare for the race based on their physical conditions.

Participants may visit the official website www.macao10k.com or follow the 'Macao Major Sporting Events' Facebook page and the '澳門體育' WeChat public account. ■

Elderly woman loses HK\$420,000 in phone scam: police

Ada Lei

A local elderly woman has lost HK\$420,000 (433,230 patacas) in two phone scams, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Lei Chi Hou said in a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Lei, the woman received a call from a hidden number on Thursday and thought it was her son. The caller claimed to have been involved in a fight with "his ex-girlfriend's husband" and

was currently at a police station, needing to pay HK\$220,000 as "medical fees." The caller told her that the case was being handled by a "lawyer named Chen." The woman later that day handed HK\$220,000 to a man claiming to be "lawyer Chen" in the central district.

The woman received another hidden number call on Friday, in which the caller claimed to be "lawyer Chen's assistant." The caller asked for an additional

payment of HK\$200,000 as "medical fees". The woman travelled alone to Hong Kong the same day to hand over HK\$200,000 to a man claiming to be "lawyer Chen's assistant."

The woman mentioned the incident to her son during dinner on Friday, but her son said it never happened. The woman realised she had been scammed and reported the total loss of HK\$420,000 to the police on Saturday. ■

Police bust 2 illegal currency exchange dealers

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police separately arrested two men from the mainland on Monday for engaging in illegal currency exchange deals, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Lei Chi Hou said during a regular press conference yesterday.

In the first case, the 34-year-old man surnamed Wang told the police that he is jobless.

According to Lei, PJ officers on patrol saw Wang providing an illegal currency exchange deal to a female gambler in a casino in Cotai on Monday. The gambler transferred 497 yuan through scanning the QR code provided by Wang, while Wang handed over HK\$500 to the gambler. Wang and the gambler were apprehended on the spot. The gambler then turned witness in the case. Under questioning, Wang admitted to exchanging HK\$500 with the gambler for 497 yuan. Wang also admitted to having engaged in illegal currency exchange activities since February,



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Lei Chi Hou looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.

— Photo: Ada Lei

having earned HK\$100 for every HK\$10,000 exchanged, receiving HK\$5,000 (5,140 patacas) in total. The police have seized two mobile phones, HK\$10,000, and HK\$7,500 in chips, along with the HK\$500 found on the gambler.

In the second case, the 34-year-old man surnamed Ying told the

police that he is jobless.

According to Lei, PJ officers discovered that Ying was engaging in an illegal currency exchange deal with a female gambler in a casino in Nape during a patrol on Monday. Ying showed the gambler a QR code on his phone. After scanning it, the gambler transferred 28,800 yuan, while Ying handed over HK\$30,000 to the gambler. Ying and the gambler were apprehended on the spot. The gambler then turned witness in the case. Under questioning, Ying admitted to having engaged in illegal currency exchanges in Macau since January, earning 200 to 250 yuan for every 10,000 yuan exchanged, resulting in a total income of 30,000 yuan. The police seized HK\$140,000 and HK\$40,000 in chips from Ying, as well as HK\$30,000 from the gambler.

The suspects in the two cases have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing illegal currency exchange charges. ■

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. MIST IN THE MORNING AND AT NIGHT. FORCE 2 TO 3 EAST TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 98%.

19°C~26°C

Source: SMG



Think tank urges govt to 'dynamically' adjust 'Community Consumption Grand Prize'



Collective Wisdom Policy Centre Vice Chairman Ngan Iek Hang (third from right) and Asia Pacific Association for Gambling Studies Chairman Zeng Zhonglu (second from right) address yesterday's forum on the government's efforts to integrate social resources and enhance the business environment for local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), at the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations headquarters in Toi San district. — Photo: Yuki Lei

Yuki Lei

The Collective Wisdom Policy Centre think tank hosted yesterday a forum to discuss the government's efforts to integrate social resources and enhance the business environment for local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), on the sidelines of which Vice Chairman Ngan Iek Hang urged the government to "dynamically" adjust the upcoming round of its "Community Consumption Grand Prize" campaign, while Asia Pacific Association for Gambling Studies Chairman Zeng Zhonglu underlined that while local SMEs are highly motivated to innovate, they are also facing increasing constraints.

The Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT), in conjunction with the Macau Chamber of Commerce (ACM), has announced that the new round of their consumer promotion campaign will run from March 24 to June 1. Following the same format as the previous two campaigns, discount coupons will be drawn from e-wallets on weekdays for users to redeem and use over the weekends.

Ngan said: "We have received feedback from many residents who hope for greater flexibility in the timing of the coupon draws and redemptions, as different residents have varying consumption schedules. Some individuals work week days, while others work shifts, resulting in different times or patterns for purchasing and using goods or services."

He suggested that the government examine overall consumption habits to ensure that such consumer promotion campaigns will have a broader reach and greater effectiveness, supporting the sustainable development of small- and medium-sized enterprises while alleviating residents' financial burden.

Regarding the challenges that SMEs continue to face in their business environment, Ngan emphasised the need for the government to conduct

a comprehensive survey: "Although the recovery of the tourism industry has pushed up the number of visitor arrivals to the city, we suggest that the government conduct a comprehensive survey, collect data for different communities and industries, and evaluate the situation in conjunction with new methods such as e-payment, so as to introduce more comprehensive support measures".

He also urged the government to introduce additional measures, such as interest subsidies and improvements to the existing SME Credit Guarantee Scheme, to alleviate the pressure on SMEs facing insufficient liquidity for loan repayments during their operations.

'SMEs limited to their local circles'

"Most of Macau's entrepreneurs are limited to their local circles, and their external networks are not sufficiently strong, leading to many emerging business opportunities going undiscovered," Zeng said when speaking to the media on the sidelines of the one-day forum, which was held at the headquarters of the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (commonly known as Kai Fong, its short name in Cantonese).

Highlighting the conditions necessary for innovation and entrepreneurship, he emphasised the need for SMEs to transform their development with the help of supporting industries, such as information technology (IT) and the Internet, to create growth opportunities.

Zeng suggested that the government arrange for local entrepreneurs and young people to intern and work at large advanced high-tech enterprises in the mainland, allowing them to gain experience before returning to Macau to start their own businesses here. He also recommended that the government establish a mechanism for cross-sectoral networking relations. ■

2025MIECF sees 15 pct rise in int'l participants

Rui Pastorin

The three-day 2025 Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum and Exhibition (2025MIECF) has drawn exhibitors, traders and delegations from close to 40 countries and regions, marking a 15 percent increase in the number of international participants compared to last year's edition, the organisers said in a statement yesterday.

The Macau government-hosted event is slated to be held from March 27 to 29 at Cotai Expo at The Venetian Macao in Cotai.

Among the upcoming event's five exhibition zones are the "Debut Economy Projects Zone" and the "Green Future Industry Zone", having drawn over 60 overseas enterprises to showcase their latest environmental projects. The statement added that over 100 international enterprises from the Asia Pacific, Europe and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) and regions will participate in the event.

Meanwhile, exchange activities such as the Roundtable Seminar on Green and Low-Carbon Urban Transformation and Industry Cooperation will feature representatives from places such as Belgium, Brazil, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. There will also be five themed business matching

sessions for buyers and trade visitors from home and abroad.

Moreover, Gino Van Begin, Secretary General of ICLEI* – Local Governments for Sustainability, is set to deliver the forum's keynote speech entitled "Innovative Green Development and Building a Beautiful City", while there are 20 themed activities where invited experts and industry leaders will discuss topics such as new trends and opportunities in the development of global carbon markets, low-carbon transformation and industry cooperation.

More information can be found on <http://www.macaomiecf.com> One can also email info@macaomiecf.com or call 8798 9675. ■

*Bonn-based ICLEI stands for International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. It is now commonly known as ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. ICLEI is a global network of local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Founded in 1990, ICLEI works with cities, towns, and regions to help them achieve their sustainability goals, address environmental challenges, and improve the quality of life for their residents. The organization focuses on areas such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, resource efficiency, and sustainable urban planning. — DeepSeek



This file photo provided by the Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum and Exhibition (MIECF) yesterday shows participants in an activity during a previous edition of the event.



澳門電力股份有限公司

Companhia de Electricidade de Macau - CEM, S.A.

NOTICE

COMPANHIA DE ELECTRICIDADE DE MACAU - CEM, S.A. ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

CONVENING NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that, in accordance with the law and the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Ordinary Meeting of the General Assembly of Companhia de Electricidade de Macau - CEM, S.A. registered at "Conservatória dos Registos Comercial e de Bens Móveis de Macau" under reference no. 590 (SO), will be held on 31 March 2025 (Monday) at 9:15 am, at the Company, CEM Building, 9th floor, Estrada D. Maria II, in Macau, with the following Agenda:

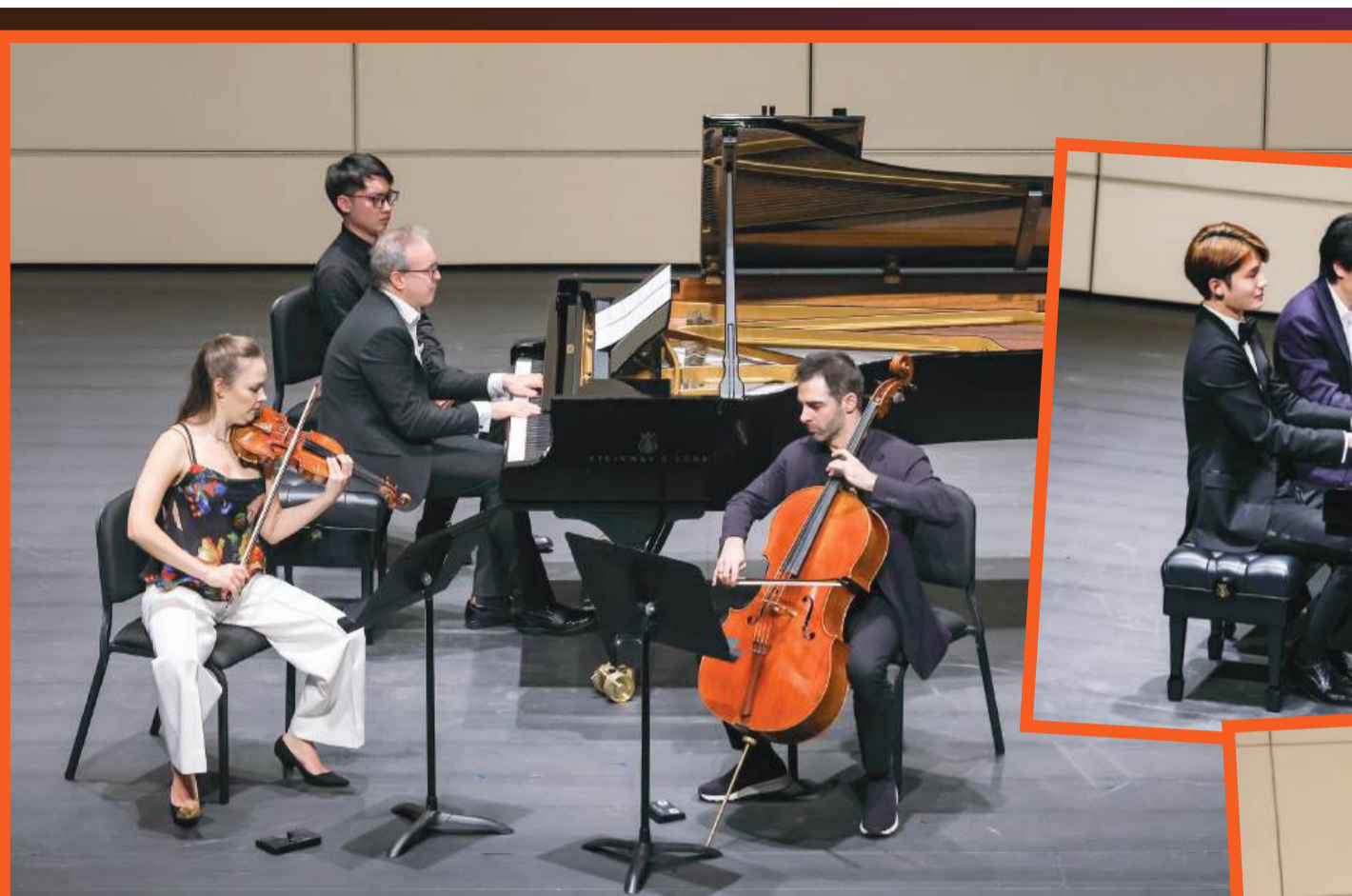
1. Discussion and decision on the Annual Report and the Financial Statements of the Board of Directors, as well as the Supervisory Board's opinion for the year 2024;
2. Discussion and decision on the profit appropriation proposal from the Board of Directors;
3. Election of members of the following corporate bodies of the Company: Two Members of the Board of Directors and Supervisory Board Members;
4. Other business relevant to the Company.

The documents related with points 1 and 2 of the Agenda and all connected documents are available for Shareholders' consultation, during office hours, at the Company.

Macau, 3 March 2025

The President of the Board of the General Meeting
Pansy Ho

Info Line 2833 9911
www.cem-macau.com



Niu Niu (front) and Lio Kuok Man perform together at Sunday's "Tribute to Brahms – Free Flow Chamber Music" concert. – Photos provided by Macao Orchestra



Macao Orchestra's innovative 'Chamber Music Sunday' bridges music & casual experience

Review by William Chan

My father and I attended the "Tribute to Brahms – Free Flow Chamber Music" concert on Sunday, organised by the Macao Orchestra (OM), in the Macau Cultural Centre's Small Auditorium. For 200 patacas, attendees enjoyed an afternoon featuring four 45-minute programmes of Brahms' music, complete with three intermissions.

The first two sessions included three piano sonatas performed by Russian pianist Alexei Volodin; and two violin sonatas played by Czech violinist Josef Špaček and Chinese pianist Niu Niu, while the next two sessions featured performances by Lio Kuok Man, the orchestra's Music Director and Principal Conductor as well as a seasoned pianist, violinist Alexei Volodin and cellist Pablo Ferrández.

We particularly enjoyed the first two sessions, as my father is a devoted fan of one of the violin sonatas performed. I also believe the concert's greatest strength lies in its flexibility, allowing the

audience to select the pieces they are most interested in without feeling obligated to stay for the entire four-hour programme. This approach, in my view, aligns with the concert's intention to create a more accessible and enjoyable experience for all attendees.

Musically, the Small Auditorium was well-suited for the intimate sonata and trio formats, with its size providing better acoustics than the Grand Auditorium. Although I am not too acquainted with Brahms' work, I appreciated the cozy atmosphere and quality performances.

This review focuses on the orchestra's innovative attempt to host a relaxed Chamber Music Sunday event. Lio, at the beginning of the concert, introduced the concert by mentioning its casual nature, reminding and encouraging the audience to enjoy free coffee and snacks between sessions.

The concert included coffee, drinks, and snacks, making it an appealing deal. Overall, the experience was delightful. Classical music often grapples with the challenge of long, formal concerts that

can alienate modern audiences. However, this event defied expectations by drawing a surprisingly large crowd, thanks in part to the performance of rising star Niu Niu*. His impeccable playing occasionally outshone the violinist, captivating the nearly full house during the second session.

The new arrangement of serving snacks during intermissions had mixed results. During the first, a single coffee machine couldn't keep up with demand, creating issues within the short 15-minute break. By contrast, the 30-minute second intermission ran smoothly, offering a variety of snacks, such as radish cake, Szechuan chicken salad, and egg tarts, with efficient staff assistance enhancing the experience.

While the event didn't fully achieve a seamless blend of casual dining and classical performance, the effort to create a more relaxed format was commendable. The structured setting and limited flexibility remain a contrast to genres like jazz or pop. Even so, the experience was thoroughly enjoyable, and the orchestra's

innovative approach holds promise for future developments.

Priced at just 200 patacas, with various discounts available, the concert was an incredible bargain. Lio noted that Sunday's performance was a special event, part of a Brahms mini-festival, and he seized the opportunity to organise an additional concert featuring himself and the star soloists. While the concert was far from "casual," given the gathering of classical music stars in one venue, it offered a rare chance to witness these renowned artists perform in Macau. Looking ahead, regular performances of this calibre, potentially in more relaxed settings and featuring local musicians, could provide a consistent and successful concert experience for Macau's audiences.

* Niu Niu is the stage name of Zhang Shengliang, who was born into a musical family in Xiamen, Fujian Province, in 1997. Niu Niu signed to EMI Classics at the age of nine, making him the youngest pianist ever signed to an international classical label. Since then, he has released nine albums.



Xiamen-born piano soloist Niu Niu (left) and Czech violinist Josef Špaček bow after performing Brahms's violin sonata at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) on Sunday. – Photo: William Chan



35th Macao Arts Festival to highlight 2025 Culture City of East Asia status



Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man (second from right) speaks during yesterday's press conference at MGM COTAI about the upcoming 35th Macao Arts Festival (FAM) as three other IC officials look on. — Photo: Tony Wong

Tony Wong

The 35th Macao Arts Festival (FAM) will be held between April 25 and May 31, with a special selection of performances from Japan and South Korea, alongside various Chinese performances to highlight Macau's status as a 2025 Culture City of East Asia, the government announced yesterday.

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced details of this year's annual arts festival during a press conference at MGM COTAI yesterday.

IC President Deland Leong Wai Man said during yesterday's press conference that the 35th Macao Arts Festival will present 15 different programmes comprising two arts exhibitions and 13 performances, covering theatre, Chinese opera, dance, and music, among others.

In addition to the performances and exhibitions, according to the press conference, 33 outreach activities will be held, covering meet-the-artist sessions, backstage tours, pre-show talks, lectures, workshops and screenings of international stage performances, among others.

Leong also underlined that local groups would account for about half of the groups slated to give performances during the upcoming arts festival.

The culture chief also said that this year's festival is budgeted to cost 23.4 million patacas.

This year's budget represents a decrease of 1.5 million patacas from last year's one of 24.9 million patacas.

During the three-year COVID-19 pandemic from early 2020 through 2022, the annual arts festival was only suspended in 2020.

Sales of tickets for the 35th Macao Arts Festival will commence

at 10 a.m. on Saturday next week, March 22.

Leong said that this year's arts festival, themed "Growth", is expected to showcase, through diverse artistic creations, the festival's continued growth alongside its artistes and members of the audience, further polishing Macau's "golden business card" as a "City of Performing Arts".

Leong said that the upcoming arts festival will feature internationally renowned shows while being committed to highlighting Macau with traditional Chinese culture as its mainstream, demonstrating Chinese culture's enduring creativity.

Leong underlined that the arts festival will stay committed to promoting the growth and development of local arts groups while also strengthening its presence in the community, aiming to enrich residents' daily lives.

Leong also said that with this year marking Macau as a 2025 Culture City of East Asia, the upcoming arts festival will be organised with special emphasis on promoting cultural exchanges between China, Japan and South Korea, such as by featuring a Japanese musical and a traditional South Korean drum dance, alongside various Chinese shows such as a fusion performance of Chinese orchestra music and Cantonese opera.

The 2025 Culture Cities of East Asia comprise China's Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) and Huzhou City in Zhejiang Province, Japan's Kamakura and South Korea's Anseong.

Details in English about the 35th Macao Arts Festival can be checked on: <https://www.icm.gov.mo/fam/35/en/>. ■

Sands China hosts academy achievements & roadmap presentation

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort (IR) operator Sands China hosted its Sands China Academy Achievements and Roadmap Presentation yesterday at The Londoner Macao in Cotai, which saw the presentation of certificates to 54 trainees graduating from the academy's sub academies, of which 12 were also awarded for their exceptional performance.

The Sands China Academy, the company's talent development platform established in 2015, features eight specialised sub academies that cover MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions), hospitality, IR management, entertainment, facilities, responsible gaming, procurement, and retail, according to information provided by Sands China yesterday. Its programmes have drawn over 3,600 participants, of which more than 3,300 have graduated.

The event was held to showcase the company's successes in nurturing young talent over the past year and also featured students' discussions and videos.

In his speech yesterday, Sands China Executive Vice Chairman Wilfred Wong Ying-wai said: "For over two decades, Sands China has been devoted to cultivating talent. We have invested deeply in local talent development and fully support the Macau government's policy of 'Building Macau through Talent Training'".

Moreover, a launch ceremony for the "Sands China Integrated Resort Leader Development Programme" was held at yesterday's event, with a professional curriculum set to be created by the programme in collaboration with Cornell University in New York and talent assessment service provider SHL.

Sands China Chief Executive

Officer and Executive Director Grant Chum Kwan Lock said during his speech that the programme is tailor-made for middle and senior management staff and aims to "enhance their forward thinking and strategic decision-making skills through international exchanges and the introduction of advanced management models from around the world."

Chum also noted in his speech that the Sands China Academy has, over the past five years, partnered with local organisations to "launch numerous training programmes, delivering 1,500 professionals to the industry". He added that the company's continuous refining of efforts to cultivate management talent has resulted in over 23,300 promotional opportunities for staff, increasing the ratio of Macau locals in management positions to 90 percent. ■



Graduates pose with guests yesterday during the Sands China Academy Achievements and Roadmap Presentation at The Londoner Macao in Cotai. — Photo: Rui Pastorin

Govt urges those without measles immunity to get vaccinated

Tony Wong

The Macau Health Bureau (SSM) is urging all those who have no immunity against measles to get vaccinated considering that a number of states in the United States are currently being hit by measles outbreaks and that measles infections are being reported in some neighbouring countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam.

An SSM statement on Monday night noted that according to data from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as of last week 222 measles cases had been recorded in the country during its ongoing outbreak, while 94 percent of the patients had not been vaccinated against the disease or whose vaccination records were unknown.

According to the statement, the CDC data indicated that nearly 80 percent of the measles patients during the country's ongoing outbreak were children and teenagers, where an unvaccinated

child had died after being infected with measles, while an unjabbed adult had been confirmed by the authorities as having been infected with measles after he or she died, with his or her exact cause of death still being identified.

The SSM statement did not lay out details about the ongoing measles situations in the Philippines and Vietnam.

The statement underlined that due to the current measles situations elsewhere, Macau is now facing a risk of recording imported measles cases, despite being a place where the disease is not endemic.

People are generally immune to measles after getting vaccinated against it or having previously been infected with the disease.

Consequently, the statement said, the Health Bureau is now urging all those who have no immunity against measles to get inoculated against the disease, particularly those who will travel

to countries and regions where measles is currently prevalent.

The statement underlined that vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles.

According to the statement, those aged below 18 need to receive at least two MMR jabs, a vaccine against measles, mumps, and rubella (aka German measles), after the age of one, to become completely immune to measles. In general, the statement noted, the Health Bureau recommends that children receive an MMR jab when they are 12 months and 18 months old.

Moreover, according to the statement, those aged 18 or over who were born after 1970 should receive an MMR jab if they have never been infected with measles and have not been vaccinated against the disease after the age of one, particularly those who take care of babies such as domestic helpers and those working at day nurseries. ■

STOCK MARKETS

Hang Seng Index closes flat

HONG KONG — Hong Kong's stock market ended flat yesterday with the benchmark Hang Seng Index slightly down 0.01 percent to close at 23,782.14 points.

The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index rose 0.35 percent to end at 8,755.37 points, while the Hang Seng Tech Index rose 1.39 percent to end at 5,967.23 points. — Xinhua

MGTO vows to relaunch discounted bus & ferry fares for foreign visitors

Continued from p.1

In response to Lei's enquiry about the effectiveness of Macau's new gaming industry law encouraging gaming concessionaires to expand their overseas markets and the introduction of gross gaming revenue (GGR) tax reduction and waiver measures, MGTO said that last year's GGR tax reductions and waivers granted to gaming concessionaires for expanding their overseas markets had increased year on year. It cited the

Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC), which confirmed a 66 percent year-on-year increase in foreign arrivals last year, thanks to the gaming concessionaires' "diversified and high-quality experiences" offered to their clients, including the setting-up of specific gaming areas for foreign visitors, the expansion of overseas promotion offices, the introduction of membership privileges for foreign guests, the provision of private jet services, and the launch of overseas

publicity and promotion campaigns in cooperation with various government entities.

The tourism chief said, as quoted by the statement, that MGTO would oversee the fulfilment of the concessionaires' commitments to expand overseas sourcing of tourists and enhance the industry's competitiveness.

When asked by Lei about the ongoing study on the second stage review of the tourism development master plan, MGTO said the

relevant study would be completed in the second quarter of this year and its findings would be announced in due course.

Meanwhile, in an interview with public broadcaster TDM on Monday, MGTO Deputy Director Cheng Wai Tong reaffirmed the government's target of attracting three million foreign visitors this year. He noted that MGTO has recently travelled to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

(UAE) to promote Macau's tourism market to the respective travel trade there. Cheng also revealed plans for MGTO to cooperate with Hong Kong and Guangdong to promote the regional "multi-destination" brand, aiming to attract visitors from long-haul markets in Europe, such as France, and Germany, as well as India, with the total budget for international tourism promotions this year expected to be similar to that of last year. ■

Macao also a financial hub in GBA



This aerial drone photo taken on July 5, 2024 shows both parts of Macao and Hengqin.

— Xinhua

*Commentary by Ip Sio Kai**

Macao is not only a good example of the success of "One Country, Two Systems" but also a key city in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, an important hub of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and a gateway to cooperation with Portuguese-speaking countries. The Macao Special Administrative Region's (SAR) government upholds the "One Country, Two Systems" policy, building "one center, one platform and one base" to help the region fully integrate into the Greater Bay Area and the national development policy.

Drawing on President Xi Jinping's speech during his inspection tour to Macao, in which he outlined "four hopes" and "three expectations", and the Macao SAR government's vision, the SAR can strengthen its role in financial connectivity and innovation in the Greater Bay Area. By leveraging its advantage of being "backed by the motherland and connected to the world", Macao can play a leading role in promoting high-level financial opening-up, helping the country realize its broader development goals.

First, cross-border financial cooperation between Macao and Hengqin, a 106-square-kilo-meter island near the SAR poised to become a free trade zone, is entering a key breakthrough phase. So Macao should leverage its unique position as a facilitator of both domestic and international cooperation, and connect national policies on institutional opening-up with the standards and rules of the Greater Bay Area.

With careful planning, Macao can continue to develop the "Macao plus Hengqin" model to enrich "One Country, Two Systems" and

strengthen ties between international markets and the Chinese mainland. And by adopting a "dual-line management" approach, Macao can streamline cross-border financial management, enhance market access, and create efficient mechanisms for cross-border investments and financing in high-tech industries and healthcare, paving the way for high-quality development in the second phase of the development of the cooperative zone.

Second, as a major international financial hub, the Hong Kong SAR has long been a key player in cross-border financing, offshore renminbi business, and economic exchanges. The development of Macao's bond market can help boost Hong Kong's offshore renminbi business and strengthen its capital market. As such, Hong Kong and Macao should deepen collaboration to integrate their financial resources by focusing on sectors such as offshore renminbi business, green finance, financial technology, and talent exchanges.

By connecting Macao Central Securities Depository and Clearing Limited with Hong Kong's Central Money Markets Unit, the two cities can jointly expand financial services and capital flows, advancing the country's opening-up while meeting the needs of various international markets.

And third, Macao's unique position as a special administrative region enables it to serve as a crucial bridge which improves the Greater Bay Area's financial connectivity with the rest of the world. Macao should continue to leverage its existing mechanisms such as the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries and the China-

Portuguese-speaking Countries Cooperation and Development Fund to work with the central government to strengthen ties with Portuguese-speaking countries, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership member states, and key Belt and Road countries.

Through effective trade and investment agreements, Macao can attract more investment due to its low-tax system and access to the mainland's vast market. By building a China-Portuguese cross-border digital trade settlement platform, exploring investment mechanisms between Portuguese-speaking countries' sovereign funds and taking other initiatives, Macao can strengthen its role in international economic collaboration.

Besides, the Macao SAR government can enhance the role of the China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Cooperation and Development Fund in helping boost the development of Portuguese-speaking countries. By increasing its investment, Macao can become a leading investor in less-developed Portuguese-speaking countries. And by a new model of integration of industry and finance featuring mainland risk assessment plus Macao financial output plus market expansion in Portuguese-speaking countries, Macao can expand its market in Portuguese-speaking countries, improve its international financial profile, and better narrate the story of the Chinese nation's rise.

*The author is a member of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC, a member of the Executive Council of the Macao SAR, and a member of the Legislative Assembly of Macao. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Port fees, another foot-shooting proposal: China Daily editorial

China Daily Editorial

China is a major player in the global maritime sector. That the United States has now turned its fire on China's shipbuilding and maritime shipping sector is another indication that the US administration is relentlessly intensifying its bid to suppress China's development.

In a move that is expected to create chaos in the world ocean shipping industry, and hugely disrupt global trade flows and supply chains, the administration has proposed steep new fees on Chinese-built and Chinese-operated ships docking at US ports.

US President Donald Trump is reportedly drafting an executive order that would impose fees on any vessel that enters a US port, "regardless of where it was built or flagged, if that vessel is part of a fleet that includes vessels built or flagged in the PRC [People's Republic of China]". The US would also impose tariffs on Chinese cargo-handling equipment, according to the draft order.

The document draws from a US Trade Representative's Office proposal last month to levy fees of up to US\$1.5 million on Chinese-built vessels entering US ports after an investigation by the United States Trade Representative (USTR) concluded that China has been using "unfair policies and practices" to dominate the shipbuilding industry and global maritime and logistics sectors, which "burdens or restricts US commerce".

But China's shipbuilding industry has led the world for more than a decade in terms of shipbuilding completion volume, new orders received and backlog orders, thanks to the country's complete industry chain, strong manufacturing capability, and breakthroughs in technological innovation. The advancement of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road has given additional momentum to the fast growth of its shipbuilding industry.

The US, on the other hand, has seen its ranking in commercial shipbuilding decline from No 1 in 1975 to 19th. As former trade representative Katherine Tai bemoaned, the US builds "less than five ships each year, while the RPC is building more than 1,700 ships."

Yet it is nonsensical to attribute the US' competitive failure to so-

called unfair practices by China. The US' claims that the country "displaces foreign firms, deprives market-oriented businesses of commercial opportunities, and creates economic security risks" are groundless and instead reflect the "tough-on-China" strategy the US has adopted because of its peer pressure anxieties.

The World Shipping Council (WSC) estimates the USTR's proposed port fees "could add US\$600-US\$800 per container" with the additional costs to be inevitably passed on to the end consumers, which means it is the US businesses and consumers that will have to pay the price of increased shipping costs. They are also likely to push inflation higher and further harm the US economy, which is already suffering the self-inflicted wounds from the administration's wanton weaponization of tariffs.

According to the WSC, the fees, if imposed, would amount to an additional tax on US consumers of up to US\$30 billion annually.

It is unrealistic for the US administration to expect that the US will be able to exclude Chinese-built ships from its ports without hurting the US' own trade interests, or for potential ship buyers to switch to non-Chinese shipyards to avoid the costs proposed by the US, given that Chinese shipbuilders account for more than half of all merchant vessel cargo capacity produced globally each year.

There is also the question of whether the administration will impose the fees on a US entity that owns or operates a US-flagged vessel built in China, or US operators that have purchased ships from Chinese shipyards. Not to mention that the move may also violate the US' Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation treaties.

If the US pushes ahead with its planned port fees, the damage will be multiple times that caused by the disruptions to commercial shipping in the Red Sea due to attacks on merchant ships by Yemen's Houthi militants last year. The US can also expect China taking countermeasures to safeguard its own shipbuilding industry's legitimate rights and interests.

The US really should think twice before resorting to yet more hooliganism to try and gain a competitive edge.

— Courtesy of China Daily