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Pre-holiday bustle



People shop and sightsee along Dongguan Street in Yangzhou, East China's Jiangsu Province on April 28, 2024. Yangzhou, like many other Chinese cities, is expected to see another travel boom during the upcoming five-day May Day holidays, lasting from May 1 to 5 this year. Photo: VCG

Hamas delegation to visit Cairo for cease-fire talks, yet 'prospects slim'

By GT staff reporters

Hopes remain slim of a Gaza cease-fire as a Hamas delegation is expected to visit Cairo, Egypt on Monday for talks, after the group said it is studying a reply from Israel over a cease-fire proposal. Analysts said that while both Israel and Hamas could benefit from a temporary cease-fire, it still lacks factors to be positive. Under the growing international and domestic protests, the moral pressure and diplomatic isolation of Israel and the US may deepen.

According to media reports, Hamas said in a Saturday statement that it has received Israel's official response to its latest cease-fire proposal in Gaza and will review it before submitting its reply, amid the latest efforts by Egypt as a broker.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a Hamas official told Reuters on Sunday that a delegation will visit Cairo on Monday for Gaza cease-fire talks.

Citing two Israeli officials, Axios reported that Israel told Egyptian officials on Friday that it was ready to give hostage negotiations "one last chance" to reach a deal with Hamas before moving forward with a ground invasion of Rafah, where more than one million displaced Palestinians are sheltering due to the conflict, which has lasted more than six months.

"Despite Hamas seeks a cease-fire when Rafah is almost their last stronghold in Gaza, the 'one last chance' claimed by Israel is also for themselves, as in the face of domestic pressure, they need Hamas to free as many hostages as possible before it attacks Rafah," said Niu Xinchun, executive director of the China-Arab Research Institute of Ningxia

Promote 'deeper, broader' interactions between mainland and SARs

China unveils new measures to facilitate opening-up, exchanges

By Li Xuanmin and Sun Langchen

China's National Immigration Administration (NIA) has unveiled an array of new measures on Sunday that bring more conveniences to the entry and exit management of the public and businesses, including streamlining document processing

and application, extending the duration of business stay, and meeting diverse tourism needs, which observers said represent the country's stepped-up effort in promoting high-level opening-up and facilitating international exchange.

The fresh move, adding to a list of policies that promote the integration of the Guangdong-

Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), will greatly facilitate business, people-to-people and tech know-how exchanges between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong as well as Macao Special Administrative Regions (SARs), according to observers. They pointed out that as the link-up further gears up, the scope of interaction be-

tween the Chinese mainland and the two regions is poised to become "deeper and broader."

Under the new policies, which will take effect on May 6, residents aged 16 or above (except for civil servants and active military servicemen) in 20 pilot cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, will be able to

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Moves rebut West's 'capital, talent fleeing' smear

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renew and reissue their passports, as well as travel documents to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan regions via online platform.

Chinese mainland residents who apply for multi-entry to Hong Kong and Macao with business purpose can use smart equipment to get a quick-access endorsement. In addition, the duration of stay for holders of business endorsement to Hong Kong and Macao will be extended from seven days to 14 days.

Specific policies have also been set up for high-level talent and certain key groups, among other policies to shore up outbound tourism to the two SARs.

Beijing and Shanghai will be included into the policy of issuing multi-entry endorsements with a validity of one to five years for six designated categories of talent to travel to Hong Kong and Macao, with a duration of stay less than 30 days for each trip.

The arrangement was initially only applicable to mainland residents in the GBA.

High-level opening-up

The HKSAR government on Sunday said it welcomes enhancements to "exit endorsement for business visit" and

"exit endorsement for talents" by the immigration authorities.

"The two new measures will facilitate Hong Kong's further integration into the national development and achieve concrete results on the solid policy foundation of facilitating the 'southbound and northbound' two-way flow of talents," said a statement released by HKSAR government.

Liu Guohong, director of the Department of Finance and Modern Industries at China Development Institute in Shenzhen, told the Global Times on Sunday that the newly launched policies are of strategic importance taking account of the complex international situation, the two cities' unique role in the country's high-level opening-up landscape, and strengthened economic and social development ties between Chinese mainland and Hong Kong as well as Macao.

It also squarely rebuts certain foreign media outlets' smear against HKSAR, which alleged that foreign capital and global talent have been fleeing from the city. The arrival of more business people and skilled workers will likely drive local economic, commercial, and cultural exchanges with the international community, which is anticipated to draw in foreign investment, boost foreign trade and more, analysts said.

He expounded that the continued internationalization of Hong Kong and Macao will be beneficial to the national opening-up plan, and there are more rooms for cooperation between the Chinese mainland and the two SARs in trailblazing systematic opening-up reforms, given full play to the two regions' advantages of "one country, two systems."

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland. Liang Haiming, chairman of the China Silk Road iValley Research Institute, a Hong Kong-based research institute, told the Global Times that the introduction of some facilitation policies will further strengthen the cooperation and exchange between Macao and the Chinese mainland.

"Hong Kong is also at a stage of transitioning from governance to prosperity, and the central government is fully supporting this process with more stimulus measures," Liang said.

Strengthened link-up

In February, the GBA celebrated its 5th anniversary. While the GBA plan has fueled ripe collaborations within the region, the new arrangements are set to ride on the momentum, further unfolding soaring demands across tourism, retail, hotels and dining sectors and

leading more mainland cities to engage in deeper exchanges with the two SARs analysts said.

Specifically, the initiatives focus on simplifying travel for business professionals and talent from the mainland are expected to generate more business opportunities in Hong Kong and Macao, as well as enhancing the local talent pool and promoting cross-regional knowledge exchange, said Liang.

He added that mainland-based skilled workers may also bring new momentum into innovation and development of Hong Kong and Macao.

Meanwhile, those measures pertaining to encourage people-to-people exchange is also a boon to the tourism market, with Hong Kong local businesses' expectation running high for the upcoming May Day holidays.

It is expected that 1.76 million trips will be made in and out of the Chinese border ports each day during the May Day holidays, up 40.5 percent compared with that of 2023, according to NIA. And as the streak of Hong Kong and Macao residents travelling northward and mainland residents heading southward continues, the traffic at ports which border Hong Kong and Macao SARs is estimated to increase significantly, NIA said.

Rafah invasion 'would mean more moral pressure and isolation against US, Israel'

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University.

Amid the efforts to break the deadlock, on Saturday, Hamas released a video of two hostages, which US media interpreted as a tactic to increase pressure on the Israeli government to reach a cease-fire deal.

Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, believes that the possibility of reaching a cease-fire deal is still limited, especially regarding the attitude from Qatar, a major mediator that has been promoting a cease-fire since last November.

In an interview with Israeli media Haaretz published on Saturday, Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari said that the Israel and Hamas "are not showing enough commitment" to reach a cease-fire and a hostage release deal, and "it gets sabotaged by both sides" when a deal gets close.

Qatar's attitude illustrates how difficult the task of mediating a cease-fire will be, Liu said.

Cease-fire talks between Hamas and Israel since the conflict broke out last October, have been more about hostage release and humanitarian aid, but they have never touched on the fundamentals of a per-



A man writes a message of thanks to students in the US protesting in solidarity with the people of Gaza, on a tent at a camp for displaced Palestinians in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip on April 27, 2024, amid the ongoing conflict. Photo: VCG

manent cease-fire. It means it is just about short-term expediency, Liu said.

The Hamas side wants a complete cease-fire, and the Israelis want a complete elimination of Hamas, and that has not changed, Liu said.

By claiming "one last chance," Israel is aiming to put more blame on Hamas and ease its pressure in the diplomatic sphere, Liu said.

Growing pressure

The cease-fire deadlock comes alongside a summit attended by regional and global leaders in Saudi Arabia, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Speaking at a World Economic Forum special meeting in Riyadh on Sunday, Abbas urged the US to ask Israel to stop the Rafah invasion, as the

US "is the only country capable of preventing Israel from committing this crime."

An Israeli attack on Rafah, which has been the main channel of outside aid into Gaza in the past six months, would be a further humanitarian disaster, Niu said.

Israel now faces a dilemma: with increasing diplomatic isolation and moral pressure from the international community,

Israel must find some way to protect the over 1 million Palestinians in Rafah and even arrange for the transfer of civilians, but on the other hand, it is still unwilling to give ground on stopping the military operation in Gaza, Liu said.

Whether or not a cease-fire is reached, Israel may opt for a compromise in the next phase of the conflict, Liu said, noting that Israel may keep up its partial bombardment of Gaza, but the large-scale invasion in Rafah may be postponed.

Despite the Biden Administration warning Israel against a possible Rafah invasion, US President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed legislation that includes \$26 billion war-time assistance to Israel.

Pro-Palestine demonstration have also occurred in London and Paris. The growing campus protests are a result of US duplicity and hypocrisy, which would put more pressure and cause dilemma for the US, Liu told Global Times.

In fact, the US and Israel have the same fundamental interests and war objectives, and the US still supports Israel to completely eliminate Hamas, which means a Rafah invasion is inevitable, according to Niu.

