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A CROSS-BORDER LOAN SHARK SYNDICATE WAS BUSTED IN A JOINT OPERATION OF LOCAL AND MAINLAND POLICE WHICH ARRESTED NEARLY 50 SUSPECTS: PJ

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RUSSIA THREATENS RETALIATION IF UKRAINE DEMANDS NOT MET

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GAMING PROMOTERS DOWN 50% FOLLOWING JUNKET SCANDAL

P3



AP PHOTO



China yesterday expressed “serious concerns and dissatisfaction” with the United States over reports of a request to allow the departure of diplomats and their families from China amid tightening anti-pandemic measures. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said China’s anti-virus regulations were in line with international treaties governing the treatment of diplomatic personnel and that the nation was “undoubtedly the safest country in the world at the moment.”

AP PHOTO



China Repeated COVID-19 testing of millions of Beijing residents is starting to test the patience of some as the city clamps down on the virus ahead of the coming Winter Olympics. A third round of mass testing that started yesterday for the 2 million residents of Fengtai district drew complaints online and from residents bundled up against the wind to wait in line outdoors. The skies were sunny, but the daytime high hovered around the freezing point. *More on p6*

Covid-19 The World Health Organization said there were 21 million new coronavirus cases reported globally last week, the highest weekly number of COVID-19 cases recorded since the pandemic began. The number of deaths was largely unchanged, at more than 50,000. In its weekly assessment of the pandemic, the U.N. health agency said the number of new coronavirus infections rose by 5% and that the rate of increase appears to be slowing; only half of regions reported an increase in COVID-19.

More on backpage

MASS SHALL RETURN

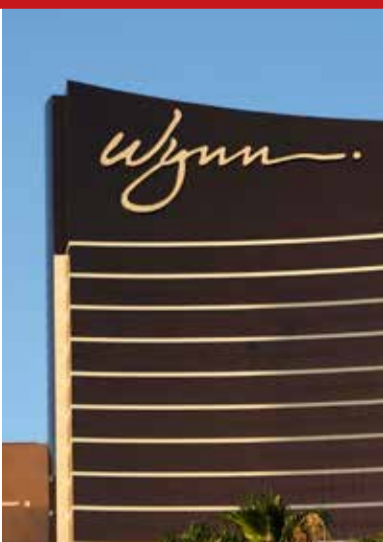
Academic estimates this year’s tourist arrivals can reach as much as 20 million

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GAMING
WYNN SIGNS MULTIBILLION-DOLLAR DEAL TO DEVELOP CASINO IN UAE SHEIKHDOM

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AP PHOTO



HAO VS LVS
SANDS LAWYER CLAIMS ASIAN AMERICAN SEVERED TIES BEFORE CONCESSION TENDER

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HAO VS LVS

DEFENSE LAWYER CLAIMS AAEC, NOT LVS, SEVERED TIES BEFORE LICENSE TENDER

RENATO MARQUES

CONNECTIONS between the Asian American Entertainment Corporation (AAEC) and the local subsidiaries of Las Vegas Sands Corporation (LVS), set up to bid for the 2001-2002 gaming concessions public tender, were broken by the AAEC, not LVS, the legal representative of LVS told a Macau court yesterday.

The lawyer, Luís Cavaleiro de Ferreira, was making closing remarks for the defense before the court reaches a final judgment in the case of AAEC vs LVS. AAEC is led by the Taiwanese businessman Marshal Hao.

Ferreira told the court that the AAEC demand is unreasonable, not only because of the amount of compensation sought (over MOP60 billion) but because of the circumstances under which the partnership was severed. In the defense's view the failure to conclude the deal and the replacement of AAEC with Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) at a later stage of the tender process was motivated by AAEC's refusal to accept the agreed conditions that would have resulted in the renewal of a document [Letter of Intent] (LOI), thereafter alleged to have expired.

According to the legal representative of LVS, the company was compelled to seek other partners to run the gaming concession since "Hao and CDIB [China Development Industrial Bank] refused to sign the necessary documents requested by the Gaming Commission to establish proof of the relationship between the two stakeholders."

"The LOI expired on January 15, 2002, as was not renewed because Mr. Hao refused to do so, although such was always the intention of Venetian [Venture Development] (one of the subsidiaries of LVS). We tried until the very end to convince them [to renew the LOI]."

Cavaleiro de Ferreira also said that this is the reason why communications continued between LVS and AAEC beyond



the date of January 15, "not because the agreement was still valid, as the plaintiff previously said, but because we were trying to reach a new agreement," he noted.

Expanding on the claim that the LOI had expired on January 15, Cavaleiro de Ferreira denied that the agreement with AAEC was still valid at the time of the closing of the tender. He also argued that, since the LOI had expired, the clauses of the document stating that both parties were impeded from negotiating with other potential partners had also been lifted. Therefore, Ferreira concluded, the agreement reached with GEG was not in breach of any contract between AAEC and LVS.

LVS' legal representative also told the court that AAEC was well aware of the expiration of the agreement and, furthermore, that AAEC was the first party to attempt to find a partner to replace Venetian, allegedly initiating conversations with GEG and others.

At stake is an updated amount ranging between MOP57.9 billion and MOP62.2 billion (USD7.4 billion to 7.8 billion) in compensation. Hao is claiming damages resulting from the breach of contract which allegedly ended AAEC's chances of securing a gaming license.

LVS REFUTES CLAIMS OF COPIED BID

Another of the claims made by AAEC lawyer Jorge Menezes in his final remarks to the court on Friday was that the proposal submitted to the gaming commission by the consortium formed by LVS with GEG (after LVS severed ties with AAEC) was "almost a complete copy" of the one previously submitted by AAEC.

Yesterday, Cavaleiro de Ferreira refuted the accusation, stating that the LVS-GEG proposal had several sections which were practically identical to the LVS-AAEC proposal, because those sections had been written by LVS.

"We did not submit a copied proposal; we submitted our proposal. Concerning the gaming section, the entire proposal submitted by AAEC was ours. It was composed by LVS staff or people hired by LVS. It was written according to our business model and the model we had been following in Las Vegas since 1999," he said. Ferreira added specifically that the executive summary, previously mentioned by Menezes, had been written by the LVS lawyer David Friedman using a document titled "Expression of Interest" which sets out the LVS' vision for the gaming industry and the Integrated Resort model.

AAEC WOULD NOT HAVE WON WITH LVS

One of the major pillars of AAEC's case is the accusation that LVS had been granted a license in partnership with AAEC – just as it was later granted one with GEG – because the company's experience of the gaming sector counted the most. Cavaleiro de Ferreira de-

nies this assertion.

The defense lawyer cited the final tender report in which AAEC was ranked in last position of the 18 bidders, to calculate hypothetically what the ranking of AAEC would have been if it had scored all LVS' points.

In this hypothetical, AAEC-LVS would score 5,348 points, that is, almost 1,000 points below the third position, and last winning bid, from Sociedade de Jogos de Macau (SJM). According to Cavaleiro de Ferreira's calculations, a consortium between AAEC-LVS would have been classified in the seventh position leaving both firms without licenses.

The lawyer used this argument to try to convince the court that, contrary to what the plaintiff has argued, the AAEC proposal was not the same as the Galaxy and the result would not have been the same either.

"AAEC would not see a license granted [either way] because their proposal was bad. It was not sufficient when compared to the highest bidders, and this had nothing to do with Venetian. It [concerns] their responsibility," Cavaleiro de Ferreira concluded.

The plaintiff had argued otherwise, claiming that the gaming commission had a "discretionary power" to evaluate the candidates and the proposals according to the criteria and as a whole, saying that it is their belief that if the consortium between AAEC-LVS had operated together it would have scored higher than a simple sum of the scores of each firm independently.

Menezes cited the example of the amends made by the commission after the evaluation by the consultancy company Arthur Andersen LLC, namely that the score for the SJM that had won one of the concessions due to these significant amendments.

Cavaleiro de Ferreira disagreed and said that the commission's discretionary power was limited by the relevant laws having the sides not been able to prove otherwise.

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Academic estimates up to 21.7 million tourist arrivals in 2022

ANTHONY LAM

An academic has estimated that the city will see this year's tourist arrivals ranging from 9.9 million to 21.7 million.

The University of Macau (UM) held a press conference yesterday to report its Macau Macroeconomic Forecast 2022.

The report's estimation of the city's economic performance this year, besides the projected figures of tourist arrivals, is that the government's total income will range between 51.2 and 65.9 billion patacas. The fluctuation in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated to be between 3.6% and 37.9%.

The university expects that the city's economic performance will be similar to last year, but the key factor is the number of tourists.

On the sidelines of the event, Patrick Ho Wai Hong, assistant professor of Economics at the UM, highlighted several factors as critical for the city's economic performance.

These factors are the status of the Covid-19 pandemic, the eco-



economic performance of mainland China, as well as the international political environment. Ho stressed that Macau is very exposed to external factors, given that it is a small open economy.

When discussing the estimate, Ho said that in the best case, there

will be a slight improvement from 2021. However, he stressed that nobody should expect the economy to return to pre-Covid levels this year, considering that tourist arrivals are unlikely to recover so soon.

The worst case, he said, will be

if the city sees only one quarter of its pre-Covid tourist arrivals: even worse than the 2021 figure.

Nevertheless, he sees an improved outlook if no new variants of the virus cause any major disruption. He also believed that the city's economy will perform similarly to

last year.

Commenting on the proposed Gambling Law review, Ho said that the passage of the bill will help clarify the future of the industry, giving confidence to new concessionaires to make investments in other sectors and industries. This, he said, would not only benefit the casino industry, but also the city in general.

Concerning his economic recommendations for the government, Ho hopes that further financial assistance will be offered to the city's small and medium enterprises. Additional livelihood subsidies would also be beneficial, he added.

Praising the government for its efforts in maintaining the employment rate by investing in public works, Ho admitted that Macau's economy will not return to the level of a decade ago within the next two years, adding that a recovery in tourist arrivals to between 60% and 70% of the pre-Covid era would be as good as could be expected.

According to Ho, tourist arrivals are a key variable in the forecast of this year's economic performance. The best-case estimate, he said, was made based on a situation in which quarantine-free immigration between Macau and Hong Kong is permitted, as well as a normalization of the border between Macau and mainland China. Should this situation be realized, he said, the economy of the city will improve.

Number of gaming promoters down 50% following junket scandal

LYNZY VALLES

The number of gambling promoter licenses in the city has decreased nearly 50% in just one year in the aftermath of the arrest of Suncity Group CEO and junket mogul, Alvin Chau.

As cited in the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, Macau currently has only 46 junket licensees for the current year: far fewer than the approved 85 license gaming promoters.

According to reports, junkets account for 75% of Macau's VIP gaming revenue, equating to around USD3 billion each year.

Although the major junket brands such as Tak Chun, Meg-Star International and Golden Group remain in operation, the bureau did not provide further information on the dramatic decrease in junket operators.

Back in December, Chief

Executive Ho Iat Seng admitted that the existence of junket operators is a "problem" for Macau. Consequently, he said that when the gambling law is amended, the government will enforce it rigorously. He expressed hopes that junket operators will adopt the remuneration system as prescribed by the relevant executive regulations.

This year's figure is only a fraction of the 235 licensed junket operators recorded in 2013.

The arrest of Chau in November was an alarming blow for the sector, as Suncity Group immediately shut down its VIP gaming rooms in Macau casinos in the days following the arrest.

The swift downfall of a corporation that once handled as much as HKD180 billion staked by high rollers in its VIP rooms in a single month underscores China's severe crackdown in

the world's largest gaming hub.

Chau confessed to establishing overseas gambling platforms and carrying out illegal virtual betting activities. As part of their regular activities, junkets service high-rollers and extend credit to them.

In 2019, Suncity operated up to 17 VIP gaming rooms in Macau and accounted for nearly half of the gaming hub's VIP market, according to reports.

Meanwhile, in a draft of the gaming law amendment recently announced, these gaming promoters may continue to operate in the local gaming industry provided they are attached to a single concessionaire.

In subsequent sections the bill stipulates that licensed junket operators may not pass on any of their activities and responsibilities to third parties to act on their behalf; and they are forbidden from exclusively using special areas of the casinos (VIP rooms).

LEONG WAI MAN TO SERVE AS IC PRESIDENT FROM FEB. 1

The SAR government has appointed Leong Wai Man as president of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) for a term of one year, according to the Official Gazette yesterday.

Leong "is appointed, on a service commission (...), to exercise the position of president of the IC, for a period of one year, from February 1, 2022," the announcement read.

Leong has been the vice president of the IC since 2018.

In a reply to the Times last week, the IC confirmed that the vice president of the IC, Leong, is now acting president following the appointment of former IC president Mok Ian Ian as chairman of the Macao Science Center, S.A. (MSC).

The announcement of Mok's transfer came unexpectedly last week as her appointment at



the IC was originally until February 2023. Mok's appointment to the MSC took effect last Wednesday.

Mok was proposed for the position by Alexis Tam Chon Weng,

former Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture back in 2018.

She replaced Cecilia Tse who had resigned only two months after her appointment due to health reasons. LV

CRIME

PJ APPREHENDS SIX SUSPECTS FROM CROSS-BORDER LOAN SHARK SYNDICATE

ANTHONY LAM

A cross-border loan shark syndicate was busted in a joint operation involving the local and mainland police, which arrested nearly 50 suspects, Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday.

The local police apprehended six suspects in Macau, while their mainland counterparts arrested more than 40. The local police pointed out that some suspects had returned to mainland China after allegedly committing crimes in Macau.

The syndicate is reportedly involved in 14 cases of loan-sharking, involving more than 4.2 million Hong Kong dollars. The syndicate was also found to be laundering the money through cross-border bank transfers.

In a special press conference held on the case yesterday, the PJ revealed that four of the six suspects apprehended are mainland residents. The remaining two are local residents



and reportedly worked as drivers. The two local residents are named Lei, 28 years old, and Chan, 38 years old.

Their main role in the syndicate was to rent apartments in

low-rise buildings to conceal the debtors.

According to the PJ, the gang first came to their attention last year upon conducting spot checks at certain casinos. During

the operation, they discovered a case of loan-sharking. Afterwards, police received a series of reports of debtors being falsely imprisoned.

Later, the PJ arrested 16 people, five of whom are currently in custody in the prison in Coloane. Considering the inter-jurisdictional nature of the case, the PJ conducted further investigations in collaboration with the mainland police.

Both police forces made joint arrests at the end of December, 2021. Investigations revealed that the syndicate started operations as early as January 2021.

Members of the syndicate have reportedly imprisoned their debtors in five different apartments, the windows of which were sealed with wooden boards to avoid complications. It is alleged that the debtors were forced to take nude pictures, drink dirty water and were beaten regularly.

In another case, the PJ apprehended two Filipino men

for trading and consuming illicit addictive substances.

The suspects are named Pascua, 36 years old, and Lariosa, 29 years old. They were arrested on Tuesday.

After obtaining information about the pair, the PJ conducted an operation Tuesday on Rua da Praia do Manduco, where the two men were seen talking.

Police confronted the two suspects immediately and found a small amount of methamphetamine in a cigarette carton that Pascua had just discarded. Pascua confessed to the police that the substance was purchased from Lariosa.

Both men were sent to hospital for drug tests the results of which showed that they had consumed methamphetamine.

Meanwhile, the police searched the apartment rented by Lariosa and seized a small amount of the substance and implements for its consumption.

In total, 2.15 grams of the substance was seized to the value of about MOP6,000.

It was reported that the drug was purchased for both personal use and resale.

The police believed the deal has been in effect for two to three weeks.

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Gambling sector's service quality remains steady

ANTHONY LAM

A recent study has confirmed that the quality of service in the city's gambling sector has remained at the same level as in 2020.

With its first edition conducted in 2013, the annual study, officially known as the Gaming Service Index (GSI), was commissioned from SGS Hong Kong by the Macau Gaming Research Association (MGRA).

The 2021 GSI is 130 points, based on a reference level of 100 points established in the inaugural 2013 edition of the index. The GSI last year was unchanged in comparison to that of 2020.

The study gives concerned parties the capacity and allows "gaming operators to monitor and promote service quality of the gaming industry in Macau," the MGRA noted in a statement.

The GSI was calculated

PHOTO ARCHIVE



ted after incognito visits to 12 major casinos in the city, namely Grand Lisboa, StarWorld, MGM Macau, Sands, Wynn Macau, Grand Lisboa Palace, Galaxy, MGM Cotai, Venetian, Wynn Palace, City of Dreams and Studio City.

It covered seven frontline departments – cashier, cloakroom, table game dealer, membership, securi-

ty, slot machines and shuttle bus – with a total of 864 data points collected from November to December 2021.

With masks on last year, the MGRA said that the evaluation of smiles had been changed to an observation of facial expressions visible around the eyes.

This time, SGS collected 624 data points from Cotai and 240 from the Macau Pe-

ninsula. The Macau Peninsula GSI has continued to rise since the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2019, and reached a historical high of 139 in Q4 of 2021. In contrast, the Cotai GSI index has been volatile in recent years.

2021 indices for the two districts saw the first convergence emerge, with the Macau Peninsula achieving 139 points and Cotai 135.

DSEDJ DEPUTY TO REPLACE LOU PAK SANG

Deputy director of the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Kong Chi Meng is set to replace outgoing director Lou Pak Sang from February 1. The announcement in the Official Gazette yesterday follows Lou Pak Sang's resignation after leading the department for a year.

The Higher Education Bureau (DSES) was merged with the DSEJ and became the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) in February 2021. Prior to directing the amalgamated department, Lou had directed the former DSEJ since 2018, and served as deputy director from 2011 to 2018. Lou had worked in the bureau since 1997. Kong, the incoming director, has served in the bureau since 2007.



BEIJING DIRECTS FURTHER REFORM OF GBA

A joint statement from National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Commerce in Beijing yesterday advocates relaxing market access in Shenzhen, as part of efforts to further promote trade reform and liberalization in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The statement detailed special measures to facilitate market access. These propose the development and application of advanced technologies, as well as the finance and investment in sectors including medicine and health, education and culture, and transportation.

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CHINA 2008 VS 2022

RICHER, STRONGER, MORE CONFRONTATIONAL

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINA has undergone history-making change since the last time it was an Olympic host in 2008: It is richer, more heavily armed and openly confrontational.

As President Xi Jinping's government prepares for February's Winter Olympics, it has greater leverage to exert influence abroad and resist complaints from the United States and other governments over trade, technology theft and its treatment of Taiwan, Hong Kong and China's Muslim minorities.

The economy is three times larger today. The ruling Communist Party is using that wealth to try to become a "technology power" and is spending more on its military than any country other than the United States.

"2008 was a turning point," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, an expert on Chinese politics at Hong Kong Baptist University. "That was the beginning of China's assertiveness."

As fireworks exploded over Beijing in August 2008, China was about to overtake Japan as the No. 2 global economy. The ruling party celebrated with the most expensive Summer Games to date.

Foreign media dubbed it China's "coming out party," echoing

the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 that symbolized Japan's recovery from World War II. After three decades of keeping its head down to focus on development, Beijing was ready to emerge on the global stage as an economic and political force.

The ruling party declared its more assertive stance in 2012, the year Xi took power, in a document that called for "more strategic rights," military status and a bigger global role.

Xi's government sees its system of one-party dictatorship under threat and accuses Washington of trying to deny China its rightful role as a global leader. The ruling party is tightening control over society and business and using internet filters and other censorship to shut out what it deems unhealthy foreign influences. It is doing more to intimidate Taiwan, the island democracy Beijing says belongs to China.

"You can see that China is forced by the United States and its allies such as Australia, Japan and Britain to do so," said Shi Yinhong, a professor of international relations at Renmin University in Beijing.

Xi is seeking to cement his control over the country. He is expected to use key political meetings late in 2022 to try to break with tradition and stay in power for a third five-year term

as head of the ruling party. Earlier, he had the Chinese constitution changed to get rid of term limits on his role as president.

Once "more open to the outside world," China now is "much more paranoid," Cabestan said.

Beijing has sent warplanes in growing numbers to fly near Taiwan. It is pouring money into developing nuclear-capable missiles that can hit the United States and aircraft carriers and other weapons to extend its military reach beyond China's shores.

Chinese leaders believe, Shi said, that they need to defend themselves on several fronts: a tariff war launched by then-President Donald Trump in 2018; curbs on access to U.S. technology; and military alliances involving Japan, Australia and other governments to counter Beijing's claims to the South China Sea and other territory.

"If there is a bad relationship between China and another country, it is because the other country harms China," Shi said.

In 2008, Summer Games preparations included a \$43 billion makeover of the Chinese capital. The party built the eye-catching Bird's Nest stadium and other Olympic venues, installed new subway lines and upgrading roads. Exercise equipment was installed in thousands of public parks across China.

The capital, one of the world's smoggiest cities, launched a "blue sky" campaign that shut down or replaced power plants, steel mills and other facilities and imposed traffic controls at an estimated cost of \$10 billion.

Today, Xi's government is wrestling with debt, pollution and other excesses of earlier years. It's also in the midst of a marathon campaign, launched before he took power, to steer the economy to sustainable growth based on consumer spending instead of exports and investment.

Under a vaguely defined initiative — dubbed "common prosperity" after a 1950s slogan — the ruling party is trying to narrow a politically volatile wealth gap between a billionaire elite and China's working-class majority.

Successful private sector companies in e-commerce and other fields are under pressure to invest in the party's efforts to reduce reliance on the United States, Europe and Japan as technology suppliers by developing computer chips and other products. They are paying for rural job creation and other political initiatives.

Xi and other leaders promise to open markets wider to foreign and private competitors while also saying government-owned banks, oil producers, telecom carriers and other companies are the "core of the economy." Business groups complain that despite steps such as ending limits on foreign ownership in auto manufacturing, global companies are being squeezed out of promising technology and other fields.

"China will continue to expand its opening up to the outside world," Xi said in a Jan. 17 speech by video link to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He promised to "ensure all enterprises have equal status before the law and equal opportunities."

In a slap at Washington, Xi complained about "hegemonic bullying" and said governments need to "abandon a Cold War mentality."

As athletes and reporters arrive ahead of the Feb. 4 opening of the Winter Games, Chinese leaders face the challenge of shoring up slumping economic growth while they try to contain coronavirus outbreaks and force real estate developers, an industry that supports millions of jobs, to cut debt that Beijing worries is dangerously high.

China rebounded quickly from the 2020 pandemic and became the only major economy to grow that year. But growth fell abruptly in late 2021 as Beijing's debt crackdown bit, triggering a slump in real estate sales and construction.

The economy expanded by a robust 8.1% in 2021 but growth tumbled in the last quarter to 4% over a year earlier. Forecasters say the slump will deepen before interest rate cuts and other stimulus measures can take effect. The World Bank and private sector economists have trimmed this year's growth forecasts to as low as 5%, though that still would be among the world's strongest.

"Economic stability is the top focus in 2022," said Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics in a report. **MDT/AP**



An open dumpster in a low-income neighborhood in Jakarta

INDONESIA

Jakarta is sinking, polluted and now moving

EDNA TARIGAN, JAKARTA

JAKARTA is congested, polluted, prone to earthquakes and rapidly sinking into the Java Sea. Now the government is leaving, and moving the country's capital to the island of Borneo.

President Joko Widodo envisions the construction of a new capital as a panacea for the problems plaguing Jakarta, reducing its population while allowing the country to start fresh with a "sustainable city" that has good pu-

blic transportation, is integrated with its natural environment and is in an area that's not prone to natural disasters.

"The construction of the new capital city is not merely a physical move of government offices," Widodo said last week ahead of parliament's approval of the plan. "The main goal is to build a smart new city, a new city that is competitive at the global level, to build a new locomotive for the transformation ... toward an Indonesia based on innovation and technology based on a green economy."

Skeptics worry, however, about the environmental impact of plunking a sprawling 256,000-hectare city down in Borneo's East Kalimantan province, which is home to orangutans, leopards and a wide array of other wildlife, as well as committing \$34 billion to the ambitious project amid a global pandemic.

"The new capital city's strategic environmental study shows that there are at least three basic problems," said Dwi Sawung, an official with the WALHI environmental group.

"There are threats to water systems and risks of climate change, threats to flora and fauna, and threats of pollution and environmental damage," she said.

First proposed in 2019, Widodo's plan to establish the city of Nusantara — an old Javanese term meaning "archipelago" — will entail constructing government buildings and housing from scratch. Initial estimates were that some 1.5 million civil servants would be relocated to the city, some 2,000 kilometers northeast of Jakarta, though ministries and government agencies are still working to finalize that number.

It will be located in the vicinity of Balikpapan, an East Kalimantan seaport with a population of about 700,000.

Indonesia is an archipelago nation of more than 17,000 islands, but currently 54% of the country's more than 270 million people live on Java, the country's most densely populated island and where Jakarta is located.

Jakarta itself is home to about 10 million people and three times that number in the greater metropolitan area.

It has been described as the world's most rapidly sinking city, and at the current rate, it is estimated that one-third of the city could be submerged by 2050. The main cause is uncontrolled ground water extraction, but it has been exacerbated by the rising Java Sea due to climate change.

Beyond that, its air and ground water are heavily polluted, it floods regularly and its streets are so clogged that it is estimated congestion costs the economy \$4.5 billion a year.

In constructing a purpose-

-built capital, Indonesia will be taking a path that others have in the past, including Pakistan, Brazil and Myanmar.

The committee overseeing the construction is led by Abu Dhabi's crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan — no stranger to ambitious building projects at home in the United Arab Emirates — and also includes Masayoshi Son, the billionaire founder and chief executive of Japanese holding company SoftBank, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who currently runs the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

State funds will pay for 19% of the project, with the rest coming from cooperation between the government and business entities and from direct investment by state-run companies and the private sector.

Public Works and Housing Minister Basuki Hadimuljono said initial planning had been carried out by clearing 56,180 hectares (138,800 acres) of land to build the presidential palace, the national parliament and government offices, as well as roads linking the capital to other cities in East Kalimantan.

The idea is to have the core government area done by 2024, Hadimuljono said. Current plans are for about 8,000 civil servants to have moved to the city by then.

Widodo previously said he expected the Presidential Palace would be moved to the new capital city before he ends his second term in 2024, along with the Home, Foreign, and Defense Ministries and the State Secretariat.

The whole relocation process is scheduled to be completed by 2045. **MDT/AP**

AUSTRALIAN LUNGFISH

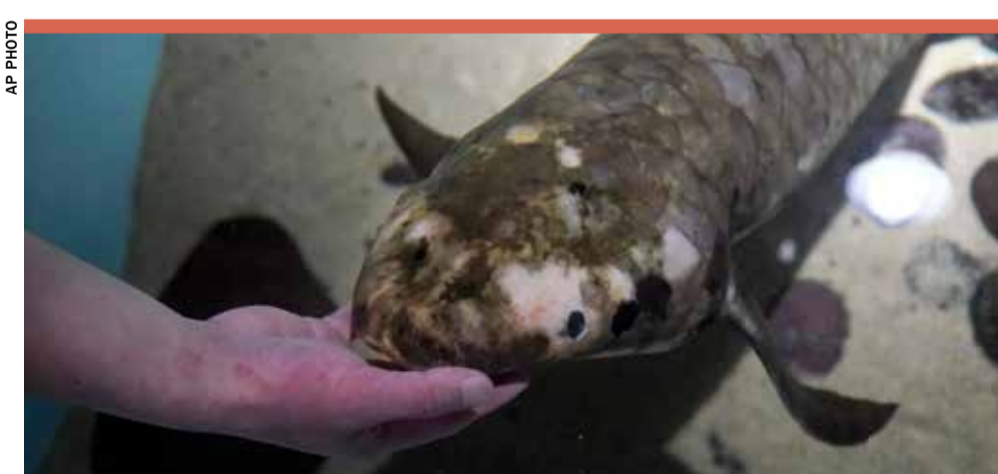
Meet Methuselah, the oldest living aquarium fish

MEET Methuselah, the fish that likes to eat fresh figs, get belly rubs and is believed to be the oldest living aquarium fish in the world.

In the Bible, Methuselah was Noah's grandfather and was said to have lived to be 969 years old. Methuselah the fish is not quite that ancient, but biologists at the California Academy of Sciences believe it is about 90 years old, with no known living peers.

Methuselah is a 4-foot-long, 40-pound Australian lungfish that was brought to the San Francisco museum in 1938 from Australia.

A primitive species with lungs and gills, Australian lungfish are believed to be the evolutionary link



Methuselah was brought to the California Academy of Sciences in 1938 from Australia

between fish and amphibians.

No stranger to publicity, Methuselah's first appearance in the San Francisco Chronicle was in 1947: "These strange creatures — with green scales looking

like fresh artichoke leaves — are known to scientists as a possible 'missing link' between terrestrial and aquatic animals."

Until a few years ago, the oldest Australian lungfish was at the Shedd Aquarium

in Chicago. But that fish, named Granddad, died in 2017 at the age of 95.

"By default, Methuselah is the oldest," said Allan Jan, senior biologist at the Academy and the fish's keeper. Methuselah's care-

takers believe the fish is female, although it's difficult to determine the species' sex without a risky blood draw. The Academy plans to send a tiny sample of her fin to researchers in Australia, who will try to confirm the sex and figure out the fish's exact age.

Jan says Methuselah likes getting rubbed on her back and belly and has a "mellow" personality.

"I tell my volunteers, pretend she's an underwater puppy, very mellow, gentle, but of course if she gets spooked she will have sudden bouts of energy. But for the most part she's just calm," Jan said. Methuselah has developed a taste for seasonal figs.

"She's a little picky and

only likes figs when they are fresh and in season. She won't eat them when they're frozen," said Jeanette Peach, spokeswoman for the California Academy of Sciences.

The Academy has two other Australian lungfish that are younger, both believed to be in their 40s or 50s, Jan said.

The Australian lungfish is now a threatened species and can no longer be exported from Australian waters so biologists at the Academy say it's unlikely they'll get a replacement once Methuselah passes away.

"We just give her the best possible care we can provide, and hopefully she thrives," Jan said. **MDT/AP**

UKRAINE CRISIS

Russia threatens retaliation if security demands not met

VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV,
MOSCOW

RUSSIA warned yesterday it would quickly take “retaliatory measures” if the U.S. and its allies reject its security demands and continue their “aggressive” policies, ratcheting up pressure on the West amid concerns that Moscow is planning to invade Ukraine.

Russia has repeatedly denied it has any such designs, but the United States and its NATO allies are worried because Russia has massed an estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine’s border and launched a series of war games in the region.

At the heart of the standoff are questions about Ukraine’s future: Russia has demanded guarantees that NATO will never admit the country and other ex-Soviet nations as members and that the alliance will roll back troop deployments in other former Soviet bloc nations. Some of these, like the membership pledge, are nonstarters for NATO, creating a seemingly intractable stalemate that many fear can only end in a war.

Speaking to lawmakers yesterday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said he and other top officials will advise President Vladimir Putin on the next steps after receiving written replies from the United States to the demands. Those answers are expected this week — even though the U.S. and its allies have already made clear they will reject the top Russian demands.

“If the West continues its aggressive course, Moscow will take the necessary retaliatory measures,” he said.

While Russia is currently waiting for the American reply, Lavrov indicated it wouldn’t wait forever: “We won’t allow our proposals to be drowned in endless discussions,” he said.

Asked by lawmakers if Russia could expand military cooperation with Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua as part of its retaliatory measures, Lavrov responded merely that Moscow has close ties with those countries and is seeking to deepen them.



In this photo taken from video and released by the Russian Defense Ministry yesterday, the Russian navy’s missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov sails off for an exercise in the Arctic

Earlier this month, Lavrov’s deputy pointedly refused to rule out the deployment of Russian military assets to Cuba and Venezuela — far closer to the U.S. than Ukraine — if Moscow’s security demands aren’t met.

NATO said this week it was bolstering its deterrence in the Baltic Sea region and the U.S. ordered 8,500 troops on higher alert for potential deployment to Europe. Western nations have also sent planeloads of weapons to help Ukraine strengthen its defenses.

Amid the escalating tensions, Ukrainian officials have sought to calm nerves.

Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that while the concentration of Russian troops near Ukraine poses a threat, “their number is now insufficient for a large-scale offensive.”

“They are still missing some key military elements and systems to mount a big, full-scale offensive,” Kuleba told reporters.

As others have, he noted that causing alarm could be an end in itself. Russia, he said, hopes to destabilize Ukraine by “spreading panic, raising pressure on Ukraine’s financial system and launching cyberattacks.”

“President Putin would be happy to see that plan succeed so that he doesn’t even need to turn to military force to put Ukraine in a vulnerable position,” he said.

His comments were latest from Ukrainian officials who have sought to reassure their citizens. Speaking late Tues-

day in the second televised speech to the nation in as many days, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine was “strong enough to keep everything under control and derail any attempts at destabilization.”

Several rounds of high-stakes diplomacy have failed to yield any breakthroughs in the standoff, but another attempt was going forward.

Presidential advisers from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany are set to meet in Paris to discuss ways to revive a stalled peace agreement for eastern Ukraine.

In 2014, following the ouster of a Kremlin-friendly president in Kyiv, Moscow annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula and threw its weight behind a separatist insurgency in the country’s eastern industrial heartland. Fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed rebels has killed over 14,000 people, and efforts to reach a settlement have stalled.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Moscow expects a “good frank” talk at the Paris meeting.

Russia has repeatedly accused Ukraine of planning to retake the areas controlled by the rebels — something Kyiv denies. Yesterday, Lavrov again alleged that the West is encouraging Ukraine to launch an offensive and rejected the Western talk about an imminent Russian invasion as “hysterics.”

In addition to the military moves, the U.S. and its allies have threatened sanctions like never before if Moscow

sends its troops into Ukraine, but they have given few details, saying it’s best to keep Putin guessing.

On Tuesday, U.S. President Joe Biden told reporters that Putin “continues to build forces along Ukraine’s border,” and an attack “would be the largest invasion since World War II. It would change the world.” He warned that there would be serious economic consequences for Putin, including personal sanctions, in the event of an invasion.

Asked to comment on Biden’s statement, Peskov pointed out that the Russian president and other top officials don’t have assets in the West but reaffirmed that such U.S. sanctions would be “politically destructive” for bilateral ties.

Britain is also promising sanctions, and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has urged European nations to do more to support Ukraine.

The U.K. has sent anti-tank weapons to Ukraine, though it has ruled out sending combat troops.

“We’ll be legislating to toughen up our sanctions regime and make sure we are fully able to hit both individuals and companies and banks in Russia in the event of an incursion,” she told the BBC. “What’s important is that all of our allies do the same.”

Amid the soaring tensions, the U.S., Britain, Australia, Germany and Canada have also moved to withdraw some of their diplomats and dependents from Kyiv. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1990 ROMANIANS CALL FOR GOVERNMENT CHANGE



Tens of thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators have taken to the streets of the Romanian capital, Bucharest to protest against the interim government of Ion Iliescu.

It was the biggest demonstration in the capital, since the revolution just over a month ago which led to the fall and execution of the former communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

The protesters converged on Victory Square, where Mr Iliescu’s National Salvation Front party has its headquarters.

They called for the resignation of Mr Iliescu and the removal of all former communists from the party.

The demonstrators claim the interim president is denying opposition parties the chance to stand on equal terms with the ruling party in the free elections planned for May.

Mr Iliescu himself appeared on a balcony overlooking the square and promised to carry on talking with the opposition parties.

Ion Ratiu, leader of the opposition National Peasants’ Party, told the BBC: “We are at long last emerging from a dictatorship that’s lasted virtually 45 years and we had hoped we could advance toward democracy and this is precisely why the young people shed their blood.”

“Yet these demonstrations today make it look to me as if there is going to be a new attempt at taking over power from the people.”

He is holding more talks with Mr Iliescu later this week, but said the opposition’s limited access to the media meant there was little hope of a fair election.

The revolution began in mid-December with a protest in the town of Timisoara against the deportation of Hungarian priest, Laszlo Tokes, who had denounced Ceausescu in a sermon.

What began as a small protest, quickly grew into a massive anti-government riot. Many demonstrators were shot when troops were brought in to restore order.

But the demonstrations continued and Ceausescu and his wife were captured trying to flee the country, tried and executed on Christmas day.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Ion Iliescu remained in power until 1996. But rather than pushing through democratic reforms as he had promised, he blocked moves to prosecute those behind the shootings in the December revolution. There has been much speculation since the overthrow of Ceausescu that it was not so much a revolution as a coup, plotted by Iliescu and his supporters. It was Iliescu who ordered Ceausescu’s trial and subsequent execution. He was finally ousted from power by a centre-right government in 1996 - but three governments later and prolonged political feuding led to the re-emergence of Iliescu’s opposition party. He was returned to power in 2000 at the head of the party of Social Democracy, promising faster reforms to get Romania into the European Union.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

It's time to reevaluate your own motives and make changes to yourself first. Children could cost you more than you can afford. Plan events like camping or white water rafting.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

You may want to get a little extra rest. You are prone to infections and fevers. Broaden your horizons and look into programs that will teach you awareness and relaxation.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You will be ready to jump on anyone who gets in the way of your progress today. Unexpected events may be upsetting. Your ideas are good and career moves can be realized.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Try to understand both sides of the issue before taking sides. If you work in conjunction with someone else you may find they're trying to steal your thunder.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You may be thinking of starting your own business. They didn't fully understand what was expected. You will probably have to defend your mate. Purchases will be well worth it and they will last a long time.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Your creative ideas must be put to good use. Think about taking the time to complete unfinished domestic chores. Investments that deal with property will pay off but could cause conflict with some family members.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You will do well in social settings, and new and interesting individuals may spark a romantic curiosity. Turn things around, make sure that they do their share.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Changes in your domestic situation will prove to be favorable in the long run. Be prepared to have relatives or close friends introduce you to new and exciting individuals.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You don't owe anyone an explanation. Do your own thing, you need time to yourself. Obstacles may stand in your way where career and success are concerned.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Don't waste this exciting day by sitting at home. This is a great day to beautify your living quarters or to entertain at home. Don't hesitate to sign up for lectures or seminars that will enlighten you.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Watch your weight gain due to water retention. You will have original ideas for ways to make extra money. You should not be concerned with coworkers who insist on spreading rumors.

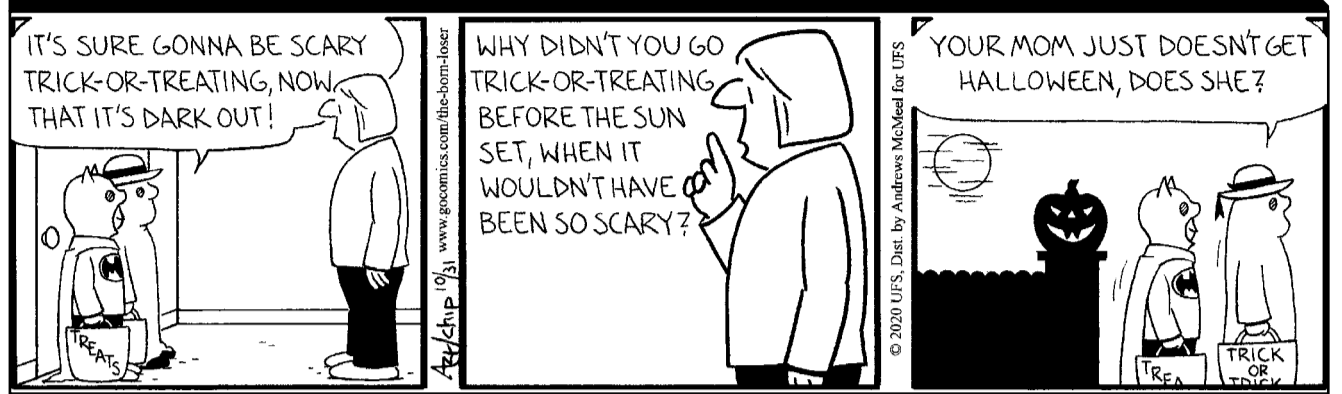


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You should be looking into making changes around the house. You should check out prestigious clubs or groups that have a cause you believe in.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

7	6		9	1	5			
			8	7		2	6	
2	3	4		9				
	4	6			5			
	6	8	1	4				
1			2	8				
	5		4		3	2		
1	4	3	2					
3	2	5			1	4		

EASY+

		1	5	4				
8	3							7
	6	5		8	9			
			4	5	7			
3			8	6				9
	9	3	1					
	7	5			6	1		
2					7		8	
		6	8	1				

MEDIUM

	4		5		1			
		2		7				
2					8	5		
		5		3	6			
	3			1				
6	2		7					
4	8				1			
	7	9						
2		4		9				

HARD

	3	1						
			5	7				
			8					
6					5	4		
2	3							
		2						
9		4						
						1	3	
					2		8	

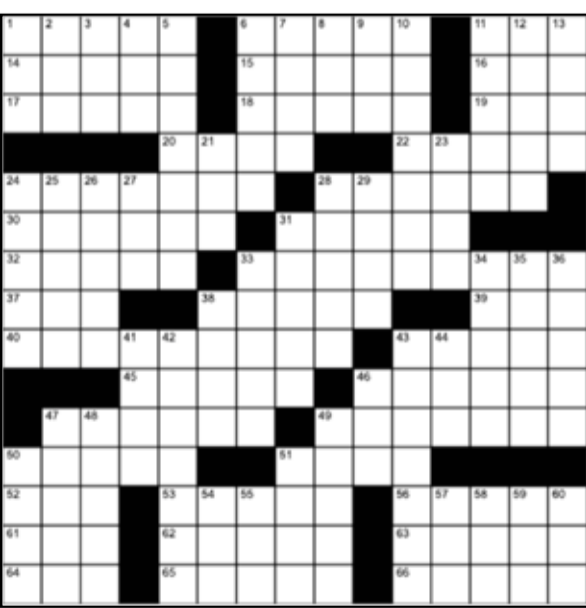
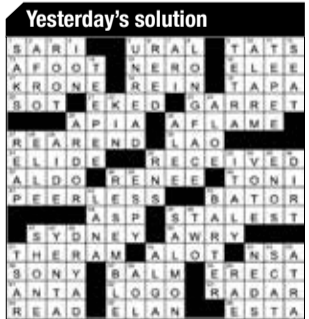
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	3	fine
Harbin	-18	-6	fine
Tianjin	3	5	rain
Urumqi	4	7	rain
Xi'an	8	10	rain
Lhasa	-6	-2	fine
Chengdu	13	20	overcast
Chongqing	6	8	rain
Kunming	2	5	rain
Nanjing	20	24	cloudy
Shanghai	5	7	rain
Wuhan	5	6	rain
Hangzhou	-22	-11	cloudy
Taipei	0	3	snow
Guangzhou	-11	-1	fine
Hong Kong	16	21	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-10	-7	snow
Frankfurt	3	6	rain
Paris	8	10	overcast
London	2	10	overcast
New York	-3	1	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Martini garnish; 6- Off-limits; 11- Doo-wop syllable; 14- Puerto ___; 15- Pertaining to people; 16- Cartesian conclusion; 17- Hot spots; 18- Similar; 19- Genetic material; 20- Grant temporary use of; 22- Snow conveyances; 24- Money set aside for a particular purpose; 28- Ceremonial prayer; 30- Deviate suddenly; 31- Satisfies; 32- Brown; 33- Withered; 37- Frozen Wasser; 38- Uruguayan friend; 39- Vietnam's ___ Dinh Diem; 40- Unload a ship; 43- Like a marsh; 45- Unfolds; 46- Off flight; 47- Picnic; 49- Trap; 50- Nahuatl speaker; 51- Metal containers; 52- Small child; 53- Open, as a gate; 56- Creamy white; 61- United; 62- Bucolic; 63- Fuel transport; 64- Debussy's "La ___"; 65- D. ebenum, a tropical tree; 66- Food and water;

DOWN 1- Granada gold; 2- Actress Tyler; 3- Vanilla ___, American rap star; 4- Covered vehicle; 5- Shackle; 6- Express gratitude; 7- ___ Lang Syne; 8- ASCAP rival; 9- Cask wood; 10- Ragtime dance; 11- Femme fatale; 12- Accessible; 13- Latin lesson word; 21- Before; 23- Whip; 24- Much of Mississippi?; 25- Expect; 26- Employ again; 27- Mohawk-sporting actor; 28- Big; 29- Langston Hughes poem; 31- Agitates; 33- Encompassed about; 34- Gandhi's land; 35- Actress Samantha; 36- Holmes's creator; 38- Yemeni port; 41- Cast a ballot; 42- Connoisseur; 43- Official sitting; 44- Directional ending; 46- Abby's twin; 47- Form of oxygen; 48- Say; 49- Ahead of time; 50- Molecular component; 51- James of "The Godfather"; 54- Essence; 55- Pal in the 'hood; 57- Contend; 58- Corrida cry; 59- Roulette bet; 60- Decade divs.;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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Ref: 2109 6001 1,663 ft² 3 2 1

AD

GAMING

UAE SHEIKHDOM TO ALLOW CASINOS AS WYNN RESORTS PLANS PROJECT

ONE of the seven sheikhdoms in the United Arab Emirates said yesterday [Macau time] it will allow "gaming" while announcing a multibillion-dollar deal with Las Vegas-based casino giant Wynn Resorts.

The announcement by Ras al-Khaimah comes after months of rumors about gambling coming to the UAE, home to skyscraper-studded Dubai and oil-rich Abu Dhabi. Islam, the religion of the Arabian Peninsula, prohibits gambling.

While the other emirates haven't announced similar deals, casino operator Caesars Palace operates a massive resort already in Dubai — without gambling.

Initially, a statement issued by Wynn Resorts and Ras al-Khaimah authorities only referred to "gaming," without elaborating. The emirate's Tourism Development Authority repeatedly declined to answer questions from The Associated Press on whether "gaming" involved cash betting.

However, a statement from the authority said a new gaming division would require "compliance with all applicable laws and regulations (including financial crime laws) from operators, suppliers and employees." It also would "ensure responsible gaming at all levels."

Gaming is often used as a euphemism for gambling in the United States.

Michael Weaver, a spokesman for Wynn Resorts Ltd., referred questions back to regulators in Ras al-Khaimah. However, all of Wynn Resorts' locations in Las Vegas, Macau and Massachuse-

AP PHOTO



ttts feature resorts built around their casino floors.

A filing to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission by Wynn Resorts said it entered an agreement with Ras al-Khaimah for "the development and subsequent management of an integrated resort." The term "integrated resort," born in Singapore, refers to a hotel that includes a casino and other amenities.

Wynn stock closed up nearly 2% to \$86.46 a share in trading Tuesday on the Nasdaq Stock Market after the announcement. The casino industry as a whole has been hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

A statement on the deal, also posted to Wynn Resorts' website, included repeated mentions of

"gaming" facilities at the site.

"The newly announced integrated resort is still in its early design phase and due for completion by 2026," a followup statement from Marjan, the Ras al-Khaimah developer involved in the deal, said. "These are all the details that can be provided at this stage."

Ras al-Khaimah is the northern-most emirate in the UAE, a federation in which individual autocratic rulers wield wide powers in their emirate. Ras al-Khaimah, or "the top of the tent" in Arabic, is ruled by Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi and is most-widely known for its eponymous RAK Ceramics company.

But Ras al-Khaimah has been trying to raise its profile for years

in the tourism market, which is dominated by Dubai. It draws tourists from India, Russia, the United Kingdom and Egypt. It has liberal alcohol rules and an area focused on beach resorts, while also advertising outdoor activities around Jebel Jais, the highest point in the country at 1,934 meters (6,345 feet) above sea level.

The Wynn Resorts development is planned to be built on Ras al-Khaimah's artificial Al-Marjan Island and will include around 1,000 hotel rooms, a mall, a convention center, restaurants and the "gaming area."

J.P. Morgan analyst Joseph Greff said that Wynn Resorts' move into the UAE would mean "significant foreign direct in-

vestment" and would benefit from the UAE's local population of 9 million — which includes a vast population of foreign workers.

"We look at this beach resort as a super-regional-more-than-just-gaming high-end resort with solid (return-on-investment) prospects," Greff wrote in an analysis of the deal.

Gambling remains rare in the wider Mideast, with casinos only in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.

Casinos long have been rumored to be considered as a way to raise money in the UAE and boost its tourism industry, particularly in Dubai, home to the long-haul carrier Emirates. Already, duty-free car raffles bombard those flying through Dubai International Airport.

A 2004 U.S. diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks speculated that Dubai's casino plans had "been put on ice due to deference" to the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the country's first president after unification in 1971.

But in recent years, rumors about casinos kept growing. Britain's famed ship the Queen Elizabeth 2 opened as a hotel in Dubai in 2018 after over \$100 million of repairs. It still has its deactivated slot machines on board. Caesars similarly opened in 2018. Construction work is ongoing involving projects for casino firms MGM, the Bellagio and Aria.

However, casinos and the large amounts of cash they generate raise the danger of money laundering. Already, war profiteers, terror financiers and drug traffickers sanctioned by the U.S. in recent years have used Dubai's real-estate market as a haven for their assets. Ras al-Khaimah also found itself linked to the case of an Alaska man who laundered \$1 billion held in South Korea for Iran.

MDT/AP

CORPORATE BITS

Melco offers Valentine's Day spa packages



With Valentine's Day just around the corner, Melco is preparing a series of romantic surprises for lovers available from February 12 to 14, the gaming operator has announced in a statement.

Morpheus Spa, located at the City of Dreams, will offer Valentine's Day spa treatments from now till February 28, including The Exquisite Sensation Package (150 minutes) and Margy's Monte

Carlo Noble Experience (150 minutes).

From February 12 to 14, guests at NÜWA Spa at the City of Dreams who reserve the Valentine's Day spa treatment for two will be offered two glasses of red wine in the spa suite free of charge.

Also, the Golden New Year Revival (120 minutes) offers guests the Golden Sugar Body Scrub (30 minutes), the Soothing Massage with fragrant oil enriched with gold particles (30 minutes), and the Omorovicza Gold Hydralifting Facial (60 minutes), and a complimentary upgrade to a couples' suite.

From February 1 to 28, Altira Spa will offer a Love Journey Spa Package.

Season of love at The Ritz-Carlton and JW Marriott Hotel



On February 14 the Ritz-Carlton Café will offer a six-course Le Saint-Valentin Dinner beginning with a Foie Gras Bon Bon Trio amuse-bouche alongside two glasses of Perrier-Jouët Grand

Brut Champagne. Meanwhile, the Michelin-starred Lai Heen will offer an eight-course Celestial Romance Menu, featuring dishes such as Pan-seared French Foie Gras with Whole

Abalone, Crispy Noodles with Prawn and Tomato in Superior Broth, and Chilled Strawberry Custard with Mixed Nuts.

Also, the five-course Romantic Celebration Set Dinner at The Ritz-Carlton Bar & Lounge will set the perfect tone for a lovely evening for two.

Urban Kitchen at JW Marriott Hotel Macau is preparing to take couples on a journey around the world with a special Valentine's Day Buffet Dinner. Couples will be welcomed with a bottle of Perrier Jouët Grand Brut NV Champagne and Virgin Kir Royale, making an enchanting addition to the guests' romantic celebration.

BEIJING OLYMPICS | SNOWBOARDING

Tough trip to China ahead, Anderson sees gift of world stage

EDDIE PELLIS, COPPER MOUNTAIN (COLORADO)

THERE is part of Jamie Anderson that wishes these upcoming Olympics weren't in China.

The two-time snowboard gold medalist knows she's not the only Olympian who thinks that. One of the many things that makes her unique is that she is willing to say it.

Even in a sport filled with non-conformists, Anderson stands out. The 31-year-old from South Lake Tahoe, California, is one of the most thoughtful people in her business. Part of that, to her, means the question about whether to go to the Beijing Games, which are riven with conflicts about COVID-19, human rights, cybersecurity and more, should at least be something she can talk about freely.

"I definitely thought about protesting and standing up for what I think is right," she told The Associated Press earlier this winter. "And I kind of had to find my yin and yang to that and link the pros and cons. And right now, I feel like I still want to pursue this Olympic journey because it really is such a gift to be on that world stage."

The past few years have forced these kind of calculations among athletes who want to use their platforms to speak out on a range of issues, but have been hemmed in by the Olympic rulebook. The U.S. Olympic team and the IOC have changed their guidelines in



Jamie Anderson stands at the bottom of the big air course after winning her second gold medal during the Winter X Games

an attempt to better define how, and when, athletes can speak out during the Games.

All those guidelines, however, are being put to a different sort of test in the host country.

Rights groups have documented abuses in China, including forced labor, detentions and torture of Uyghurs. The world has been left to wonder about the safety of tennis player Peng Shuai. The U.S. government and others have announced a diplomatic boycott of the Games — a move designed to underscore their disapproval for China's policies, but one that stops short of keeping the athletes at home.

All of which has left it up to the athletes themselves to decide whether to attend, or speak up

about issues in China or anything else on their minds. Very few have been willing to even talk about the issues encircling these Games, let alone sacrifice their Olympic spot. German slider Natalie Geisenberger was among the few to seriously weigh not going, but last week, she came to the same conclusion as so many of her fellow athletes.

"We only have the choice: Do I fly there and give everything or do I just let my sporting dream burst so close to the end?" she said.

A common theme among the few athletes who do speak up is that it wasn't their choice to put these Games in Beijing.

"It can feel very powerless when you read those things, because you think, 'What can I do?'" American figure skier Timothy LeDuc said of

some of the reports of abuses in China.

Noah Hoffman, an American cross-country skier who competed in the 2014 and 2018 Olympics, has been openly critical of the IOC and the Beijing organizers, yet he has said he hopes athletes "stay silent" in Beijing for fear they be punished.

With top-level sponsors, NBC and her own national governing body pushing forward for Beijing, Anderson said she has felt no groundswell among her U.S. teammates to stay home.

"A lot of the athletes I've spoken to, no one really wants to, and I'm not strong standing alone," she said. "And I think it would be a really powerful stance. But I see that a lot of people have been

working so hard to go and this might be their only shot."

Anderson knows how big the Olympics can be for an athlete. She has two gold medals in slopestyle and a silver in big air, which was added to the Olympic program four years ago.

She has made millions, in no small thanks to her top performance on the biggest stage. Earlier this week, she announced her engagement to Canadian snowboarder Tyler Nicholson. She has also tried to stay down-to-earth, focusing on conservation and women's empowerment over her decade-plus at the top of the sport.

She has been unflinchingly honest about the conflicts her lifestyle creates — yes, she wants to be in touch with the planet that literally sustains her career, but she travels heavily and it contributes to global warming.

"It's easy to get sucked into the system, whether you want to or not," she said in a 2017 AP interview. "It's hard to get out until you consciously make the decision. With how passionate I am about snowboarding, it's hard to make that shift."

Her passion, she said, has not waned in the ensuing years, so she, too, will head to Beijing, hoping her presence there might inspire others.

"I don't know (expletive) about politics," she conceded. "I feel like me not going isn't going to make the world any less corrupt."

And though the Olympics have always brought their own set of conflicts beyond whether to compete in China — snowboarders have never fully felt comfortable living in that world — Anderson said there is one overarching reason she keeps going, no matter where they are.

"At least for this one time in life," she said, "the world comes together over sports." **MDT/AP**

FOOTBALL

FIFA links more World Cups to averting migrant deaths at sea

FIFA President Gianni Infantino linked his plan for biennial World Cups yesterday to giving more hope to Africans who risk their lives crossing the sea to Europe.

In a speech to European lawmakers, Infantino said soccer was being dominated by the few who "have everything" and it needed to be more global and inclusive.

"We need to find ways to include the entire world, to give hope to Africans so that they don't need to cross the Mediterranean in order to find, maybe, a better life but more probably death in the

sea," Infantino told the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe at Strasbourg, France.

He spoke on the day Spanish authorities said at least 18 people died and more than 300 were rescued from several boats trying to reach the Canary Islands from North Africa.

"We need to give dignity, not by giving charity but by allowing the rest of the world as well to participate," Infantino told lawmakers at a session he attended with Arsène Wenger, FIFA's director of global development.

FIFA and Wenger have been strongly resisted

across European soccer since launching a formal proposal in September to organize men's and women's World Cups every two years instead of four.

Infantino has said organizing more editions of the World Cup will lead to more countries qualifying and fuel interest there. It would also raise billions of dollars for FIFA and increase funding for its 211 member federations to develop soccer.

Though Infantino was a longtime staffer at UEFA before being elected to FIFA in 2016, a constant theme of his presidency has been countering Europe's domi-

nance of the World Cup — Italy, Spain, Germany and France won the past four tournaments — and its clubs hiring the best players from other continents.

One of Infantino's first big projects at FIFA was adding 16 nations to the World Cup for a 48-team competition from 2026, when Africa will have nine entries instead of five. Europe will get 16.

"In Europe, there is no need for additional possibilities and events," Infantino told lawmakers at the 47-nation Council of Europe which promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law. **MDT/AP**



FIFA president Gianni Infantino

OPINION

World Views

Editors, MDT/AP

IN GLOBAL 5G RACE,
EUROPEAN UNION IS
TOLD TO STEP UP PACE

As the United States grapples with the 5G rollout affecting airlines, a European Union watchdog warned on Monday the EU faces much bigger economic and security threats unless member countries step up cooperation.

The alarm bells are included in a special report on the 27-nation bloc's preparations for 5G, the fifth and next generation of wireless communications. 5G is projected to propel the world into a new digital age -- one with greater technological innovations but also vulnerabilities.

The study by the European Court of Auditors has a two-pronged clarion call, saying Europe is falling behind North America and Asia in the rollout of 5G networks and the EU needs to beef up its strategy to counter accompanying national-security risks.

"There are considerable delays in the member states' deployment of 5G networks and further efforts are necessary to address security issues in 5G deployment," the Luxembourg-based ECA said in its 69-page evaluation.

In the U.S., the start of 5G telecommunication services has prompted airlines to complain about possible interference with planes' navigation instruments and disruptions to air travel.

The world is rushing to install 5G infrastructure as a result of its higher data capacity and transmission speeds, which promise to transform everything from car driving and livestock farming to sports broadcasting and goods manufacturing.

In this race with high economic stakes, EU nations are moving too slowly because of a failure to do things such as assign radio spectrum for 5G services, according to the ECA.

It said a majority of the bloc's member states is set to miss a common rollout target fixed for 2025, when they are supposed to ensure uninterrupted 5G coverage in urban areas and along main transport routes.

By mid-decade, just 35% of all mobile connections in Europe will be based on 5G compared with 51% in North America and 53% in Australia, Japan, Singapore and South Korea, according to a telecommunications industry study cited by the ECA. The projected 2025 figure for China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan is 48%.

As a result, most EU countries may also fail to achieve a more ambitious joint goal for 2030: making 5G services available to all segments of the population.

"There is a high risk that the 2025 deadline -- and therefore also the 2030 one for the coverage of all populated areas -- will be missed by a majority of member states," the ECA said.

The lost economic benefits for the EU could be large. 5G is expected to trigger exponential increases in the consumption of data in a bloc, where services account for about 70% of gross domestic product.

Citing a separate, tech-industry study, the ECA indicated that 5G could add as much as 1 trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) to the European economy and create or transform 2 million jobs between 2021 and 2025.

But such economic rewards require a lot more spending on 5G, whose deployment across the EU until 2025 could cost almost 400 billion euros (\$452 billion), according to the ECA. These funds need to come primarily from mobile network operators, it said.

Differences among EU countries over 5G security partly explain the delays in the rollout of the infrastructure, the ECA said. It highlighted member-state divergences in the treatment of Chinese 5G vendors such as Huawei, which face U.S. allegations of serving the geopolitical ambitions of China's Communist Party.

While the U.S. government has taken a hard line against Chinese suppliers' involvement in American 5G networks, the European Commission -- the EU's executive arm -- has tread more carefully. A key constraint for the European Commission is that national-security decisions remain in member countries' hands.

China will start a nationwide crackdown on money laundering from 2022 to 2024 after stepping up regulatory efforts in recent years, Bloomberg has reported.

According to Bloomberg, eleven government agencies will carry out the campaign, which is aimed at "stopping the spreading trend of money laundering and other related crimes," the People's Bank of China (PBOC) said in a statement yesterday.

The PBOC has investigated and punished money laundering cases with greater intensity in recent years. In June, police arrested over 1,100 people in a sweeping crackdown on the use of cryptocurrencies for money laundering.

Authorities will adopt a national risk prevention system against money laundering, improve relevant laws and regulations, and enhance analysis and investigation of money laundering, the Chinese central bank said.

"Currently, we still face a grim situation of cracking down on money laundering crimes," the PBOC noted, as cited by Bloomberg.

The PBOC and the Ministry of Public Security will take a lead in the crackdown, while customs authorities and regulators securities, foreign exchange as well as banking and insurance will also participate, the report adds.



San Francisco Mayor London Breed pledged continued support for the community

SAN FRANCISCO REPORTS
BIG INCREASE IN ANTI-
ASIAN HATE CRIMES

THE mayor of San Francisco expressed despair over the increase in reported hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders last year, up an astonishing 567% from the previous year, according to preliminary figures released by the police department yesterday [Macau time].

Mayor London Breed pledged continued support for the community, saying she suspects actual numbers are much higher because people are reluctant to report to the police. The initial count shows 60 victims in 2021, up from nine in 2020. Half of last year's victims were allegedly targeted by one man.

It would have broken her heart if the grandmother who raised her had been attacked "in the way that we see so many of our seniors of the AAPI community being attacked," Breed said at Tuesday's press conference. "But that did not happen. Because as a community we protected one another. And that's what we have to do now more than ever."

Hateful attacks against the AAPI community -- Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders -- surged nationally during the pandemic, fueled in part

by then-President Donald Trump's calling COVID-19 a derogatory nickname that insulted China. The Stop AAPI Hate coalition out of San Francisco State University tracked more than 10,000 incidents of hate from March 2020 through September 2021.

In San Francisco and elsewhere, video clips of Asian Americans being attacked and robbed on public streets alarmed the community so much that frightened seniors stayed home. Most recently, former San Francisco Bay Area resident Michelle Go died in New York City after a mentally disturbed man pushed her in front of a subway. Officials there say there is no indication the man was motivated by racial bias, but Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are still rattled.

San Francisco Police Chief Bill Scott said at yesterday's news conference they have expanded the crime tip line to include more languages and are sharing safety tips for Lunar New Year celebrations. But he also acknowledged his department is only part of a criminal justice system that includes prosecution and judges.

Statistics do not show the whole picture because

not everyone reports incidents. Also, prosecutors are unable to tack on hate crime enhancements without a clear statement of bias by the alleged attacker. This has frustrated some victims and their families, who see the charge as a sign of accountability.

San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin, who faces a recall election in June, has come under fire from some Asian American victims.

On Tuesday, lawyers for Anh Lê filed a federal lawsuit against Boudin, saying his office has systematically refused to uphold the rights of Asian Americans victimized by racial violence. Lê says the DA's office never informed him of a lenient plea deal cut with his attackers or the lack of a hate crime charge until after the fact.

Rachel Marshall, a spokeswoman for the DA, said in a statement that Boudin has been a "steadfast advocate" for improved services and support for the AAPI community. He has added multilingual advocates to his office and launched an AAPI elder abuse steering committee, she said.

The mayor at the news conference declined to comment on the lawsuit. MDT/AP



Malaysia Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad is recovering after being hospitalized for the third time since December and is eager to get back on his feet, his daughter said yesterday. The 96-year-old two-time former premier, once the world's oldest leader, was admitted to the coronary care unit at the National Heart Institute on Jan. 20. He underwent an elective medical procedure at the same hospital on Jan. 7.



Ukraine U.S. and European officials are coordinating with natural gas suppliers around the globe to cushion the impact if Russia were to cut off energy supplies in the conflict over Ukraine. Biden administration officials say. The U.S. and European allies have promised punishing economic and political sanctions if Russia moves its military into Ukraine, but worry about repercussions for Europeans from any such sanctions, including Russia potentially cutting off delivery of its natural gas to Europe at the height of winter.

US Demand for Microsoft's cloud-computing services and work software helped boost its quarterly profits by 21% as the pandemic continued to keep many office workers at least partly at home. The Redmond, Washington company reported fiscal second-quarter profit of \$18.8 billion. It posted revenue of \$51.7 billion for the October-December period, up 20% from a year earlier.



US The Environmental Protection Agency is taking a series of enforcement actions to address air pollution, unsafe drinking water and other problems afflicting minority communities in three Gulf Coast states, following a "Journey to Justice" tour by Administrator Michael Regan last fall. The agency will conduct unannounced inspections of chemical plants, refineries and other industrial sites suspected of polluting air and water and causing health problems to nearby residents, Regan said.