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THE SIX GAMING CONCESSIONAIRES MUST PRESENT THEIR PLAN TO HOST OR SUPPORT SPORTS EVENTS FOR THIS YEAR, WITHIN A MONTH

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SSM, IAS TO JOINTLY LAUNCH VIRTUAL MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS FOR THE ELDERLY

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MAINLAND CITIES IN GBA WILL PILOT A NEW POLICY OF ISSUING ENDORSEMENTS FOR TALENTS TO TRAVEL TO HONG KONG, MACAU

▲ P5

Japan Nissan reported a 55% jump in its October-December profit yesterday, as the Japanese automaker gears up for a less bumpy journey with its French alliance partner Renault. Profit for the quarter at Yokohama-based Nissan Motor Co. totaled 50.6 billion yen (\$386 million), up from 32.7 billion yen in the previous year. Quarterly sales surged 29% to 2.8 trillion yen (\$21 billion).



Philippines American forces and their allies in Asia are ready for battle after years of joint combat exercises, a United States general said, adding that Russia's setbacks in Ukraine should serve as a warning to potential Asian aggressors. U.S. treaty allies "have shown that they will band together, that they will not stand for aggression from these nations that have decided they want to change the world order out here," Maj. Gen. Joseph Ryan (pictured) said.

Afghanistan Dozens of desperate Afghans, including women and children, dashed toward the Kabul airport following a rumor that claimed aid flights were leaving for Turkey to help rescue earthquake victims. Videos and photos posted on social media since yesterday [Macau time] showed dozens of people running in the darkness and cold toward the airport.



Sweden The Swedish domestic security agency warned Wednesday that the threat of attacks in the Scandinavian country has increased in the weeks since a far-right activist burned a Quran outside the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm. The agency noted that international reactions to the events outside the embassy last month "have been extensive" and "the assessment is that the security situation has deteriorated."

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Beijing calls US claims over balloons 'information warfare'

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GAMING CONCESSIONAIRES HAVE UNTIL MARCH TO PRESENT A PLAN FOR SPORTS EVENTS

RENATO MARQUES

THE six gaming concessionaires must give a presentation next month about how they plan to host or support sports events for this year, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong said at the Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday.

Ao Ieong was at the AL to participate in a Q&A session with the lawmakers on several matters.

The Secretary was replying to an inquiry from lawmaker Leong Sun Iok regarding the development and improvement of the Macau International Marathon event as well as other long-distance running events, but the discussion soon turned to the promotion of "tourism+sport."

Ao Ieong said that although the pandemic has caused some delays to the government's plan to develop the sector over the past three years, over this period Macau continued to host several large-scale sports competitions. She added that present conditions will allow a quicker development of this policy.

The gaming concessionaires are part of this initiative and so the government will receive their proposals up until March, and then liaise with them and other organizations to coordinate the events.

Macau started 2023 by hosting the Macao International Regatta, sponsored by MGM, and its second edition took place last month.

On Wednesday, the Sports Bureau and Sands China also unveiled the hosting of the 2023 Sands China Macao International 10K run, which will be held on March 19.



Other annual events such as the Macau Grand Prix (in November) and the Macao International Marathon (in December) have also been confirmed, the latter under the title sponsorship of Galaxy Entertainment.

The possibility of the return of the 3x3 Basketball Tournament (in the past sponsored by Wynn) has also already been considered, as well as another event of the World Table Tennis (WTT) Champions Macao (in the past also sponsored by Galaxy Entertainment).

When Ho Iat Seng first presented "Tourism+Sport" in the first policy address of his government, he said that there would be at least one sports event per month, and that this initiative that would be supported by the gaming concessionaires, who would sponsor two events each per year.

In relation to the development of the marathon event, Ao Ieong said that the organizers will study

the possibility of expanding the number of participants and the choice of other roads for the marathon, "according to the possibilities and capabilities of the roads," she said, noting the need to pay attention to road safety as well as traffic concerns.

Still, the Secretary hinted that

the local marathon can use the so-called Cotai Strip (Estrada do Istmo) in the future, as proposed by Leong.

Regarding the proposal to increase the capacity and number of events, Ao Ieong said that it is a more complex matter, saying that it's not easy to host several mara-

thon events in one year but it "might be possible to host the 10K run twice."

Other lawmakers like Ma Chi Seng also proposed a "mega-event" that would link Macau, Hong Kong, and Zhuhai with the hosting of a marathon event in the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HKZMB).

In response, Ao Ieong said that it is unlikely that such a "mega-event" could be held, since it would require very complex negotiations between the three regions and the setup of a closed-circuit area in the bridge.

The fact that the overall length of the HKZMB is about 55 kilometers, while the marathon distance is 42.195 km, appears to have been overlooked.

In a rare move, the president of the AL, Kou Hoi In, took the opportunity of the debate to intervene: not to put a question, but rather to call on the government to improve the coordination and efficient organization of such events in general, including sports events.

GOV'T CANNOT REVEAL WHICH EVENTS MACAU WILL HOST OF NATIONAL GAMES

THE government cannot yet reveal which events from the 2025 National Games (which will be co-hosted by Macau, Hong Kong, and Guangdong province) are to be hosted in Macau, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong said in a response to lawmaker Ron Lam. Lawmaker Lam wanted to know which sports events will be hosted in Macau, calling on the government to make the announcement in order to allow advance preparations to begin. "We need to follow the instructions of the national authority," she said, adding, "what I can advance is that

we proposed to host sports in which we are competitive and in which we have experience organizing, such as table tennis." Ao Ieong also hinted that Macau might be hosting a competition in electronic sports (e-sports). "It is possible as there will be this type of [video] games in the National Games," she said, adding that certain the participation of local gamers from this competition. "They will join through a different association [General Association of Athletics of Macau] as there isn't a formal e-sports athletes' association in Macau."

Ron Lam proposes end to mask mandate

LAWMAKER Ron Lam is calling on the government to put an end to the mandate requiring the wearing of face masks in public following other countries in the region taking similar steps.

Lam made his proposal Wednesday during the period before the agenda of

the plenary session at the Legislative Assembly.

"I suggest that the public should not wear a mask after the epidemic. This is not only an option for the resumption of normality in society, it is also actually beneficial for public health in general and can alleviate the peak of the spread in a

next wave," Lam said, citing similar resolutions in places like Singapore, South Korea, and Japan.

Lam also noted that studies indicate that "frequent contact with the virus, especially with different strains, during a period of low probability of transmission [high antibodies], can

allow continuous reinforcement of immunity. On the contrary, the prolonged use of a mask and other external means to prevent contact with the virus can affect immunity. After a period of low probability of transmission, the infection is easier and the transmission more widespread." **RM**



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SSM and IAS to jointly launch virtual medical appointments for the elderly

RENATO MARQUES

THE Health Bureau (SSM) and the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) will jointly launch a new service that aims to provide virtual medical appointments to the elderly in subsidized retirement homes, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong announced yesterday at the Legislative Assembly.

The new service announcement came in response to an inquiry by lawmaker Si Ka Lon about the use of this type of remote appointments for follow-up consultations for patients who have reduced mobility.

According to Ao Ieong, in the first phase of the project, the equipment will allow



communication between patients and physicians and will be installed in the IAS-subsidized elderly homes and will potentially extend to other homes depending on results.

The appointments will be managed by a team at the Conde de São Januário Hospital Center who will handle the registration, consultation, and

prescriptions, among other matters.

The Secretary also noted that the sharing of the system that electronically manages the patient health records between the public and private sectors has been available since the third quarter of last year. However, so far, not many private institutions

have made use of this service.

Ao Ieong also noted that after the revision of the Organic Law of the Health Services, the SSM is now able to deal with all matters related to the Electronic Health Record Platform, including constitution, maintenance, and management and accordingly can better assess use and operation of the platform.

She noted that, currently, the main goal is to improve information sharing between the different healthcare providers. This is to avoid inconsistencies and errors of judgment caused by lack of information about the patients' background and medical history, as well as to reduce the unnecessary repetition of exams and laboratory tests to save resources.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS TO SUBMIT ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

STAFF REPORTER

NON-PROFIT private schools will be required to set up a task force on financial management and submit an annual statement of accounts to the Educational and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ).

"In accordance with the improvement of non-tertiary education in Macau and the implementation of the 'Statute of Private Schools of Non-tertiary Education', it is necessary to thoroughly inspect the current regulation on accounting format for private schools," said André Cheong, the spokesman for the government's top advisory body, the Executive Council (CE), and Secretary for Administration and Justice of Macau.

According to CE, non-profit private schools should change their fiscal year from September 1 to the following August 31, submit the 2023-2024 statement of accounts before January 2025, and submit their annual statement of accounts and audit reports before the end of May following each fiscal year.

Schools will be fined MOP 30,000 if they do not comply with the regulation, for example, by failing to set up the task force or submit statements of accounts regularly, said director Kong Chi Meng of DSEDJ.

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GAMING

WYNN: MARKET MAKES ROARING RETURN FOLLOWING CNY RESULTS

WYNN Macau's recovery was evident during the recent Chinese New Year holiday period after the heavy losses it recorded in 2022.

In an earnings announcement, Wynn Macau posted a loss of US\$235.8 million in 2022, higher than last year's US\$208.1 million.

Since 2020 concessionaires in Macau have suffered unprecedented losses due to strict measures to prevent and contain Covid-19, which led to a sharp drop in the number of visitors.

However, with the easing of restrictions, the gaming sector has welcomed back an increasing number of guests as the region has reopened to travel and tourism.

For Wynn Macau, on the non-gaming side, hotel occupancy was at 96%, and its tenant retail sales increased by 34% compared to Chinese New Year in 2019.

"Overall, during the Chinese New Year period, we delivered our

ANTHONY LAM



strongest EBITDAR performance since the onset of the pandemic, approximately US\$4 million of normalized EBITDAR per day," said Craig Billings, CEO of Wynn Resorts.

In the casino, mass table drop reached 95% of 2019 Chinese New Year levels with "strong play" across the spectrum from premium mass to core mass. Direct VIP turnover was 40% above pre-

-Covid Chinese New Year levels.

"And, importantly, we estimate that our hold-normalized GGR market share during the month of January was consistent with 2019 levels despite all the changes in

the junket environment, despite the expectations of those who continue to incorrectly believe that we are solely a VIP-focused organization," the official added.

The gaming operator says the business remains "very, very strong" with mass gaming, direct VIP and retail sales better than previously similar period in the past.

Meanwhile, Billings noted that there was some junket activity over the course of Chinese New Year. However, the situation changed a lot from the pre-Covid period.

After decades of easy profit and a reputation for helping China's richest funnel money overseas, junkets have faced a hard crack-down, beginning with the arrest of junket mogul Alvin Chau.

With the new gaming laws, authorities now have increase oversight of casinos in an effort to stop capital flight and accelerate the enclave's integration into the SAR.

"What I would say is that the market has roared back, Macau was a ranger on the mass side, on the direct VIP side, on the retail side, and on the occupancy side during Chinese New Year, and it outperformed our expectations for the lull period shortly thereafter," Billings said.

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GAMING

Strong momentum for MGM as properties see 'very healthy recovery'

LYNZY VALLES

MGM Resorts officials have confirmed that there is a "strong momentum" in its business and that its 2023 outlook remains bright, partly propelled by MGM China's rapid return to profitability in the year-to-date.

MGM China was badly impacted by the Covid-19-related restrictions that saw a plunge in revenues by up to 44% in 2022.

Macau authorities remained adamant in their strict border measures last year, echoing Beijing's strict zero-Covid-policy, resulting in the casino sector bleeding cash. This was coupled with the uncertainty surrounding the gaming concessions.

However, following the full reopening last month, the casino sector is also back to business.

In an earnings call with analysts, the gaming operator's officials revealed that it has seen many guests returning so far this year.

In fact, in the quarter-to-date, MGM China's combined properties are the highest earning businesses within the company, pushing its market share — in the single digits pre-



-pandemic — to 16%.

The mass piece volumes were 100% over its 2019 levels.

"Our room occupancy approached 100%, and our restaurant coverage actually exceeded 2019 Chinese New Year levels. This was largely due to all these non-gaming events and concerts that drew a lot of incremental visitors to us," Hubert Wang, president

and chief operating officer of MGM China, said on the call.

Also, Wang said that in January, on the gaming side, the group have seen a "very healthy, above market average recovery" in both mass and direct VIP segments.

"Our daily mass GGR was on par with the 2019 level for the month of January during Chinese New Year, and far ex-

ceeded last year's Chinese New Year level, actually. And we are also encouraged to see that direct VIP segment in terms of rolling volume far exceeded 2019 level as well," said the executive.

"It is also very encouraging to see the January run rate extend into the first week of February so far. So all in all, we are very confident in a solid and sustainable recovery of Macau market this year and beyond," he added.

During the Chinese New Year, MGM China was making a little over USD5 million a day.

Macau had 451,047 visitor arrivals during Spring Festival, which was up 297.0% from the previous lunar new year, which fell in early February 2022.

During the Spring Festival holiday from Jan. 21 to 27, China saw nearly 2.9 million cross-border trips, up 120.5% year on year, and 308 million domestic trips, up 23.1% and back to 88.6% of the 2019 level for the same period.

Meanwhile, MGM Resorts CEO and president Bill Hornbuckle said that the calendar in March is positioned to have the best hotel revenue month in its history.

Hornbuckle said demand for upcoming events in Las Vegas is driving demand for its hotels.

NET REVENUES PLUNGE 44% IN 2022

In the gaming operator's fourth quarter and full year 2022 financial and operating results, data shows that MGM China has posted net revenues of USD674 million in the current year compared to USD1.2 billion in the prior year, a decrease of 44%. Also its Adjusted Property EBITDAR recorded loss of USD203 million in the current year compared to Adjusted Property EBITDAR of USD25 million in the prior year.

During the fourth quarter, net revenues of USD175 million were recorded compared to USD315 million in the prior year quarter, a decrease of 44%.

The current quarter was negatively affected by a three-day Covid-19 related property closure at MGM Cotai and was more significantly impacted by travel and entry restrictions in Macau compared to the fourth quarter of last year.

GBA to pilot new travel endorsement policy for talents

STARTING from Feb. 20, mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area will pilot a new policy of issuing endorsements for talents working in the mainland to travel to Hong Kong and Macau.

According to the National Immigration Administration (NIA), the policy designates six categories of talents eligible for the application of such documents: excellent talents, mea-



ning those who either contribute tremendously to the area's development or are much-needed; scientific research talents; educa-

tion talents; health talents; legal talents; and other qualified talents in the Greater Bay Area.

An eligible candidate can apply for travel endorsements to the HKSAR and Macau SAR either respectively or together, with the validity periods ranging from five years and three years to one year, depending on the candidate's category, according to the policy.

While excellent talents can submit their

applications to any immigration management authority above the county-level in the Greater Bay Area, other categories of talents can only submit them to such authorities above the county-level within the place where they work, according to the policy.

The policy will substantially boost the smooth, efficient and orderly flow of various elements such as talents and technical skills in the area, and will inject new momentum into the socio-economic development of the mainland, as well as Hong Kong and Macau, said the NIA. **MDT/XINHUA**

NEW ROUND OF DSAL TRAINING TO BEGIN

Registration will open for the 27th round of "Vocational Training Program with Subsidy" from next Monday (Feb. 13) to Friday (Feb. 17). Industries including tourism are recovering after the relaxation of border crossing policies, and the program is open for people who are still impacted during this period of economic recovery, said the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL). The program, which was divided into two parts, targets either qualified working people or freelancers or qualified unemployed people, with a maximum subsidy of MOP 5,000 or 6,656. DSAL reminds applicants that supporting documents must be genuine and correct; the qualification and subsidy may not be issued otherwise, and applicants must bear any potential legal consequences.

MTEL HOPES TO EXTEND BUSINESS IN COOPERATION ZONE

MTel's chairman and CEO, Michael Choi Tak Meng, expressed his desire at the telecom's spring luncheon for the number of its customers to increase to between 12,000 and 13,000 this year from the current 7,000. He mentioned that the company is readying the network for buildings in New Urban Zone Area A and will launch the 100Gbps local service in response to the "1+4" adequate diversification development strategy for industries like modern finance, metaverse, and big health. Choi also expects the permission of Macau telecom operators to conduct business in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin in coordination with the Macau New Neighborhood (MNN) project.

LOCAL MAN ARRESTED FOR APPROPRIATING LOST PROPERTY IN TAXI

A local man is suspected of appropriating lost property, including a camera and its accessories to a total value of MOP 18,000, while taking a taxi. Following the owner's report, the Public Security Police Force of Macau (PSP) launched an investigation and discovered the suspect using the taxi's CCTV and the transaction record. The suspect admitted having taken the lost property from the taxi. The lost items were found at his workplace.

310,000 SARs, TAIWAN RESIDENTS COVERED BY BASIC MEDICAL INSURANCE IN MAINLAND

Taiwan residents working or living on the Chinese mainland are eligible for basic medical insurance, and they can pay premiums and enjoy the benefits in accordance with regulations, a mainland spokesperson said Wednesday. A total of 310,000 people from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan had been covered by basic medical insurance on the Chinese mainland by the third quarter of 2022. Zhu Fenglian, spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said at a press conference. They include 127,000 people covered by basic medical insurance for urban employees, and 183,000 by basic medical insurance for rural and non-working urban residents, Zhu added.

BALLOONED

BEIJING 'S CONDUCTED SPY PROGRAM FOR YEARS: P

THE Chinese balloon shot down off the South Carolina coast was part of a large surveillance program that China has been conducting for "several years," the Pentagon said yesterday [Macau time].

When similar balloons passed over U.S. territory on four occasions during the Trump and Biden administrations, the U.S. did not immediately identify them as Chinese surveillance balloons, said Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary. But he said "subsequent intelligence analysis" allowed the U.S. to confirm they were part of a Chinese spying effort and learn "a lot more" about the program.

He refused to provide any new details about those previous balloons. When pressed, Ryder would only say that the balloons flew over "sites that would be of interest to the Chinese."

One of the possible incidents was last February.

Maj. Gen. Kenneth Hara, the adjutant general in Hawaii, tweeted about a balloon over Kauai a year ago. He said U.S. Indo-Pacific Command "detected a high-altitude object floating in air in the vicinity of the Hawaiian Islands" and sent up aircraft to intercept it. He said they visually confirmed it was an unmanned balloon with no identification markings.

Ryder declined to say whether

AP PHOTO



this was one of the four previous incidents that the U.S. had discussed. Pacific Air Forces, the Air Force command in the Indo-Pacific, said that balloon was not shot down.

The recent balloon was shot down by a U.S. military fighter jet on Saturday. The Navy and Coast Guard are still working to recover

pieces of the downed balloon so they can be analyzed.

China claims it was a civilian balloon used for meteorological research and sharply criticized the U.S. for shooting it down.

In response to questions about China's explanation, Ryder said Wednesday that, "I can assure you this

was not for civilian purposes ... we are 100% clear about that."

Ryder said North American Aerospace Defense Command began tracking the balloon as it approached U.S. airspace. It passed north of the Aleutian Islands on Jan. 28 and moved largely over land across Alaska and then into Canadian air-

pace before crossing back into the U.S. over northern Idaho on Jan. 31, U.S. officials have said.

Top administration officials were briefing members of Congress on the Chinese balloon surveillance program in classified sessions on Wednesday and Thursday. Avril Haines, director of national intelligence; Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman; Gen. Glen VanHerck, head of U.S. Northern Command; and Colin Kahl, the under secretary of defense for policy, were among those expected to brief lawmakers.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. has briefed dozens of countries on the program, which officials said has been active over five continents.

"The United States was not the only target," he said at a news conference with visiting NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg. Blinken said he and Stoltenberg had spoken about the "systemic and tactical challenges" that China poses to the alliance and the importance of combatting them.

The foreign countries would include nations the U.S. believes have been surveilled in the past as well as NATO allies.

Stoltenberg agreed on the nature of the Chinese threat, saying the balloon incident "confirms a pattern of Chinese behavior" and noting that Beijing had "invested

SURVEILLANCE

AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE DEPARTMENT TO REMOVE CHINESE-MADE CAMERAS

AUSTRALIA'S Defense Department will remove surveillance cameras made by Chinese Communist Party-linked companies from its buildings, the government said yesterday after the U.S. and Britain made similar moves.

The Australian newspaper reported that at least 913 cameras, intercoms, electronic entry systems and video recorders developed and manufactured by Chinese companies Hikvision and Dahua are in Australian government and agency offices, including the Defense Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Hikvision and Dahua are partly owned by China's Communist Party-ruled government.

Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles said his department is assessing all its surveillance technology.

"Where those particular

AP PHOTO



cameras are found, they're going to be removed," Marles told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "There is an issue here and we're going to deal with it."

Asked about Australia's decision, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning criticized what she called "wrongful practices that overstretch the concept of national security and abuse

state power to suppress and discriminate against Chinese enterprises."

Without mentioning Australia by name, Mao said the Chinese government has "always encouraged Chinese enterprises to carry out foreign investment and cooperation in accordance with market principles and international rules, and on the basis

of compliance with local laws."

"We hope Australia will provide a fair and non-discriminatory environment for the normal operation of Chinese enterprises and do more things that are conducive to mutual trust and cooperation between the two sides," she told reporters at a daily briefing.

The U.S. government

said in November it was banning telecommunications and video surveillance equipment from several prominent Chinese brands including Hikvision and Dahua in an effort to protect the nation's communications network.

Security cameras made by Hikvision were also banned from British government buildings in November.

An audit in Australia found that Hikvision and Dahua cameras and security equipment were found in almost every department except the Agriculture Department and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Australian War Memorial and National Disability Insurance Agency have said they will remove the Chinese cameras found at their sites, the ABC reported.

Opposition cybersecurity spokesman James Pater-

son said he had prompted the audit by asking questions over six months of each federal agency, after the Home Affairs Department was unable to say how many of the cameras, access control systems and intercoms were installed in government buildings.

"We urgently need a plan from the ... government to rip every one of these devices out of Australian government departments and agencies," Paterson said.

Both companies are subject to China's National Intelligence Law which requires them to cooperate with Chinese intelligence agencies, he said.

"We would have no way of knowing if the sensitive information, images and audio collected by these devices are secretly being sent back to China against the interests of Australian citizens," Paterson said.

MDT/AP

BALLOONED

ENTAGON

China calls US claims over balloons 'information warfare'

heavily in new military capabilities, including different types of surveillance and intelligence platforms."

"We have also seen increased Chinese intelligence activities in Europe," he said. "We just have to be vigilant. We need to be aware of the constant risk of Chinese intelligence and step up what we do to protect ourselves."

Those briefings were continuing Wednesday, and the State Department has sent a cable to all U.S. embassies and consulates outlining the administration's case against China and instructing American diplomats to discuss these points with their host governments. However, the cable is less specific than what has been briefed to allies and partners.

Off the South Carolina coast, meanwhile, Navy divers began pulling pieces of the downed Chinese spy balloon from the depths of the ocean floor on Tuesday, using sophisticated reconnaissance drones dubbed the Kingfish and the Swordfish to locate the debris.

Ryder said agents from the FBI and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service are cataloguing the debris and transporting it for further processing. **MDT/AP**

CHINA yesterday said U.S. accusations that a downed Chinese balloon was part of an extensive surveillance program amount to "information warfare against China."

The Pentagon earlier said the Chinese balloon shot down off the South Carolina coast Saturday was part of a program involving a number of such airships that China has been operating for "several years."

At yesterday's daily briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning repeated China's insistence that the large unmanned balloon was a civilian meteorological airship that had accidentally blown off course and that the U.S. had "overreacted" by shooting it down.

"It is irresponsible," Mao said at a daily briefing. The latest accusations "may be part of the U.S. side's information warfare against China."

U.S. officials have dismissed China's claims and agents from



Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning

the FBI and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service are cataloguing debris recovered from the ocean and transporting it for further processing.

When similar balloons passed over U.S. territory on four occasions during the Trump and Biden administrations, the U.S. did not immediately identify them as Chi-

nese surveillance balloons, said Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary.

But he said "subsequent intelligence analysis" allowed the U.S. to confirm they were part of a Chinese spying effort and learn "a lot more" about the program.

"I can assure you this was not for civilian purposes ... We are

100% clear about that," Ryder said.

Top administration officials were briefing members of Congress on the Chinese balloon surveillance program in classified sessions this week.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken canceled a visit to Beijing planned for this week in the wake of the incident, dealing a setback to efforts at arresting a further deterioration of bilateral relations that have spiraled to their lowest level in decades.

He said the U.S. has briefed dozens of countries on the program, which officials said has been active over five continents.

"The United States was not the only target," he said at a news conference with visiting NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg.

Blinken said he and Stoltenberg had spoken about the "systemic and tactical challenges" that China poses to the alliance and the importance of combatting them. **MDT/AP**

AD

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USA

The spy who wasn't? New York police officer wants badge back

BOBBY CAINA CALVAN,
GARDEN CITY (N.Y.)

ON a September day in 2020, New York City Police Officer Baimadajie Angwang kissed his toddler goodbye and was about to drive to work when he was surrounded by rifle-toting FBI agents.

You're under arrest, the bewildered cop was told. The charge: Being a secret agent for China.

Angwang, a former U.S. Marine, spent six months in a federal detention center before he was freed on bail while awaiting trial on charges that he fed information about New York's Tibetan community to officials at the Chinese consulate in New York.

Then, just as suddenly, it was over. Federal prosecutors in Brooklyn dropped the charges Jan. 19, saying only that they were acting "in the interest of justice." They didn't explain further.

Now Angwang says he wants to be reinstated to the police force, which suspended him with pay while the case was pending. But more than that, he wants answers.

"Why did you start the investigation on me? Why did you drop all the charges?" said Angwang, who was born in Tibet but was granted political asylum in the U.S. as a teenager.

"We want an explanation. We're demanding it because you owe me," he said during an interview at his attorney's office. "You can't just put me in jail for six months and ruin my name, ruin my reputation and give all this stress to my family members and friends, and then you say, 'in the interest of justice.' You just going to leave it like that?"

China's Communist Party has ruled over Tibet for seven decades and China has claimed a vast stretch of the Himalayas as part of its territory since the 13th century. But the relationship has been fraught with tension, with many Tibetans — some in exile — seeking independence.

The original charge against Angwang was that he began supplying information to Chinese officials on Tibetan independence



Baimadajie Angwang

groups in New York in 2018.

In court documents, prosecutors said Angwang was a threat to national security. He was charged with being an unregistered foreign agent, making false statements to federal investigators, obstruction of justice and wire fraud. There were no allegations of espionage, a more serious accusation.

In building its initial case against Angwang, prosecutors argued that he provided intelligence on ethnic Tibetans who might cooperate with Chinese officials and advised them on how to expand China's "soft power" in New York.

Specifically, the government said, he sought a tit-for-tat arrangement that would give him a 10-year visa to his homeland in return for surveillance information and access to the police department.

The case was built partly on recorded phone calls, including some in which authorities said Angwang called a consular official "big brother" and "boss."

Angwang told The Associated Press his words were either mistranslated from Mandarin or taken out of context. He said he became superficially friendly with Chinese officials because he needed the visa to visit his homeland, so his parents and other relatives could finally meet his daughter.

The judge presiding over the case sought answers about why the charges were

dismissed, but federal prosecutors declined to divulge classified information that might have given clues.

The U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn declined to comment.

The judge agreed to dismiss the case without prejudice, meaning the government could press charges again, a possibility hanging over Angwang but his lawyer suggests is unlikely.

The attorney, John Carman, surmised his client became caught up in the Trump administration's effort to root out Chinese espionage across U.S. institutions, including the economy, academics and other facets of public life. Angwang contends there were shades of racism targeting people with Chinese links.

"I think our criminal justice system sometimes goes off the track when it has a publicity aspect to it and when it has a political aspect to it. And this case had both," Carman said.

Angwang first visited the U.S. as a teen on a cultural exchange visa. He went back to Tibet but later returned to the U.S. He moved in with an uncle in Queens and was granted asylum at age 17.

In his adopted country, Angwang enlisted in the U.S. Marines and served in Afghanistan. After being discharged, he joined the Army Reserves and enrolled in the police academy.

He said it was his way of giving back to a country that

has been so good to him.

With the charges dropped, he said he wants to regain the good graces of his Tibetan community, which remains suspicious.

"I'm very proud of my heritage. I love my culture and I love the community," Angwang said. He said he was wrongly depicted as a three-way traitor.

Norbu Choezung, the president of the Tibetan Community of New York and New Jersey, a group comprising some 10,000 members of Tibetan heritage, remains wary. He, too, wants the government to provide more details about why it dropped the case.

"It's a little fishy," Choezung said. "We as a community definitely want to dig deeper why his charges have been dropped, and how those things happened."

U.S. District Judge Eric Komitee, who presided over the case, was left with questions but said he was glad Angwang's ordeal was over.

"In some ways a straightforward case but also in some ways, especially given the landscape of statutes at issue, a complicated matter," the judge said, also noting the "fanfare" in which the case was brought.

"It's unfortunate, obviously, that Mr. Angwang did serve as much time as he did in jail pretrial or in detention pretrial," the judge said, "but better late, as they say, than never." MDT/AP

this day in history

1962 RUSSIA FREES US SPY PLANE PILOT



American spy plane pilot Francis Gary Powers has been freed from prison in the Soviet Union in exchange for a Russian spy jailed in the US.

Gary Powers was sentenced to 10 years in a Soviet prison after his U-2 plane was shot down over Russia in May 1960.

But on Saturday the former US Air Force captain, 32, walked into West Berlin across a bridge separating the city's east and western sectors.

At the same time Russian spy Colonel Rudolph Abel crossed in the opposite direction.

Colonel Abel had served five years of a 30-year term for running a spy ring in the US.

His sentence was commuted by US Attorney-General Robert Kennedy two weeks ago.

However, the Russians have always denied any knowledge of Colonel Abel and even now maintain Mr Khrushchev freed the US pilot simply as a "goodwill gesture".

Another American, student Frederic Pryor, was also freed from the eastern bloc at the same time as Gary Powers.

Mr Pryor had been held in East Germany without charge since last August.

'Weather plane'

Gary Powers' capture in 1960 caused an international crisis.

Initially the American authorities believed there was no evidence left of either plane or pilot and tried to convince the Russians the U-2 had been a weather plane.

However, the Russians then produced Mr Powers alive and well claiming he had admitted spying for the CIA.

Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev demanded an apology from US President Eisenhower and when none was forthcoming plans for a superpower summit in Paris collapsed.

US authorities have said it will be at least a week before the freed airman is allowed to meet the press. [...]

The release of the American pilot comes a year after that of the two US airmen whose reconnaissance aircraft was shot down over the Barents Sea in January 1960.

Four of the crew died. Authorities in the USSR claimed the plane had been in Soviet airspace.

The two survivors, John McKone and Freeman Olmstead, were held in prison in Moscow for a year before being freed.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Gary Powers was not universally recognised as a hero in the US - some people felt he should not have allowed himself to be captured alive.

However he was cleared of any blame for the loss of the U-2 by both the CIA and the Senate. But Gary Powers nevertheless felt cold-shouldered by his former employer and ended up working as a helicopter pilot for a Los Angeles television station.

He wrote a book about his experiences - Operation Overflight.

He was killed in a helicopter crash in 1977 and is buried in the military cemetery at Arlington in Virginia, USA.

In 2000 after a campaign by his family, he was posthumously honoured by the US Air Force on the 40th anniversary of his plane being shot down.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19

If you're feeling uncertain, spend some time alone and reevaluate your motives as well as your needs. Get the whole family involved in a worthwhile cause or cultural event.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20

You can accomplish the most if you travel for business purposes. Your need to obtain additional details will lead you into strange topics of conversation.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21

Don't take your frustrations out on loved ones. You will have a tendency to put on pounds. Business partnerships should turn out to be quite lucrative.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Don't make promises. You should not get involved in joint ventures. Don't get involved in secret affairs or underhanded involvements.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Your emotional attitude with respect to your status and direction in society may be unrealistic. You can benefit financially if you put money or maintenance into your living quarters.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You can get into weight loss programs or go out and change your image with a new look in clothing, hairstyle, and attitude. Restrictions may be difficult for you to live with.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Uncertainties regarding relatives will make situations uncomfortable if you attend a family function. You may be overreacting to a situation at hand. It's time to get yourself back on track.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Be cautious while traveling to foreign countries. This will not be the best day to make changes or renovations to your residence. You can win points if you present your ideas today.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Not the best day for business trips. You can meet a new romantic partner or secure the love connection you already have by going out and entertaining yourself.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Short trips to visit others will do the whole family a world of good. Don't be taken advantage of by any fast talking salesperson trying to part you from your cash.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You may jump from the frying pan into the fire if you make a move today. You can expect to face opposition on the home front.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Don't get into heated discussions. Think of starting a new business or emotional partnership. Sign up for courses that will help you understand yourself better.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	6	cloudy
Changchun	-7	0	snow
Chengdu	8	11	rain
Chongqing	10	15	cloudy
Fuzhou	11	18	rain
Guangzhou	17	23	rain
Guiyang	4	12	rain
Haikou	22	29	cloudy
Hangzhou	6	9	rain
Harbin	-13	-3	snow
Hefei	3	8	rain
Nanjing	5	10	overcast
Shanghai	7	10	cloudy
Taipei	15	20	rain
Wuhan	4	9	rain
Hong Hong	19	23	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-3	-2	overcast
Frankfurt	-1	4	cloudy
Paris	3	9	cloudy
London	5	9	cloudy
New York	2	13	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Foot of a horse; 5- Don't match; 10- Monarch; 14- Designer Gucci; 15- Big dipper; 16- Muffin topper; 17- Baseball family name; 18- Follows orders; 19- Structure for storing grain; 20- Military post; 22- Ledge; 23- Prophet; 24- Lo-cal; 26- Defense covering; 29- Unselfish; 33- Responsibility; 34- Area of land; 35- Hog's home; 36- Nota ___; 37- Potala Palace site; 38- Analogous; 39- British verb ending; 40- Grab; 41- Novelist Calvino; 42- Keep at a distance; 44- Cut into small pieces; 45- Mormon state of western USA; 46- Ship stabilizer; 48- Old; 51- Indecent; 55- Monetary unit of Lesotho; 56- Biological subdivision; 58- ___ yellow ribbon...; 59- Wrinkle remover; 60- Best of a group; 61- Are you ___ out?; 62- Chinese dynasty; 63- Many times; 64- Motion picture;

DOWN 1- Dutch name of The Hague; 2- Earthen pot; 3- Smell or fragrance; 4- Two pairs; 5- Shut; 6- Toil; 7- Yemeni port; 8- Artful; 9- The Crystals' ___ a Rebel"; 10- Legit; 11- Netman Nastase; 12- Dudley Do-Right's love; 13- Flub; 21- Able was ___; 22- Leave in, to an editor; 24- Flat contract; 25- South American Indian; 26- "Steal This Book" author Hoffman; 27- Like non-oyster months; 28- French Impressionist; 29- Feed on grass; 30- Industrialist Schindler; 31- Functional; 32- Church council; 34- Femoral region; 37- Actress Olin; 38- Physically active; 40- Gorge; 41- Got it; 43- "The ___ Class" (O'Toole); 46- Coach Rockne; 47- Ruhr city; 48- Meager; 49- Actress Spelling; 50- Like ___ of bricks; 51- Military group; 52- Start of something small?; 53- Boxer Spinks; 54- Dextrous, lively; 56- Prizm maker; 57- Pixie;

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Lurdes de Sousa *



A.I. AND PHILANTHROPY

C-3PO: Sir, it's quite possible this asteroid is not entirely stable.
Han Solo: Not entirely stable? I'm glad you're here to tell us these things. Chewie, take the "Professor" in the back and plug him into the hyperdrive.

C-3PO: Sometimes I just don't understand human behavior. After all, I'm only trying to do my job."

IF you were born in the 70's or 80's, your teen and early adult age may have been immersed in the Star Wars saga, created by George Lucas, in 1977. The saga had all the ingredients of success: first generation of visual effects, the battle between the light side of the force and the dark side, a love story and a myriad of eccentric characters that enchanted generations. Among them were the famous android couple C-3PO/R2-D2. These Androids became known to us with their unforgettable sense of humor, honesty, devotion, evil and compassion (at times more human than the humans). Lucas, we understand today, was writing about the future. Artificial Intelligence, or A.I., is here to stay.

A.I. presents in both grand and mundane ways. ChatGPT is the talk of the town and much is still to be written about this algorithm that composes and thinks for us. ChatGPT even has the capacity to admit its mistakes as OpenAI, the chatbot creators, explain in its introducing note.

Philanthropy has, surprisingly, been absent from the debates about A.I. despite the role it can play in shaping A.I.'s full potential as a force for good. Philanthropy has a privileged position in the finance industry where it is a driving force for moral responsibility and is a source of public leadership.

Philanthropist Organizations (PO's) must use their internal and external influence to build a future in which A.I. works ethically and effectively to help solve humanity's greatest challenges.

It's time to define what role philanthropy play in protecting the most vulnerable and ensuring that A.I. works for social improvement.

This is the purpose of the newly created "Global AI Action Alliance", a platform for philanthropic and technology leaders to engage in the development of A.I. best practice. It is led by 20 senior philanthropic leaders and POs. It proposes a 4-action plan with a strong commitment to learning and action. But it is yet to be seen how this can be achieved, and by which means or legitimate channels.

As Dan Huttenlocher, Dean of the MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing and Board Chair of the MacArthur Foundation, observed in the recently held Davos Forum, "A.I. can help us leapfrog some of the societal challenges we face, but we have to design it to do so. There's no such thing as a 'good technology' in and of itself — we have to make it work for us."

Action can be translated into many ways as A.I. will impact a broad range of potential issues but some advocates say that, to start, organizations should consider appointing a Chief Tech Ethics Officer to take responsibility and marshal necessary resources. Some even suggest an A.I. Ombudsman.

After all, A.I. programs such as ChatGPT are only programmed, like C-3PO, to do "their job". We should allow philanthropy and society at large to ensure that the extraordinary potential of A.I. works with ethics and for the common good.

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Macau Daily Times is the official media partner of the Associação Internacional de Filantropia (Macau).

AP PHOTO



John Lithgow and Julianne Moore in a scene from "Sharper"

DRIVE IN

CON ARTISTS ACCUMULATE IN THE SLINKY 'SHARPER'

JAKE COYLE,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

ALMOST invariably, we root for the con artist.

Seldom does the ingenuity and cleverness of a good hustler, card sharp or con man not win us over. They are, of course, walking metaphors for the movies. Through finesse and daring, they pull the wool over our eyes while emptying our pockets.

They're also great roles for actors, our best liars, to showcase their powers of slight-of-hand seduction and subtle transformation. "Sharper," a fitfully delicious pile of deceptions and double-crosses, is made with evident appreciation for the genre. It opens with a definition of its title — "one who lives by their wits" — and "Sharper," too, skates by nimbly enough by coasting on its cast's smarts.

"Sharper," which opens in theaters Friday and lands Feb. 17 on Apple TV+, is a slinky, slick caper that finds ways to distort expectations while unfolding a puzzle-box narrative. Before its lesser third act, "Sharper" — propelled especially by the performances of newcomer Briana Middleton and the more veteran Sebastian Stan — manages to juggle its plot twists with panache.

It opens with a seemingly sweet note of romance. Sandra (Middleton) breezes into a used bookshop on the Lower East Side to pick up a copy of Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God." She tells the guy behind the counter — Tom (Justice Smith) — that she's getting

her PhD in Black feminist studies. The scene could be a meet cute for a bookish romcom. But given that opening title card, we're on guard for the scam. She's forgotten money — is that the play? A free book? They go on a date and later return to the store to hold in their hands a first edition of "Jane Eyre." Maybe that's the goal? A fiendish scheme to swipe rare Charlotte Brontës? But as a character says later in "Sharper," if you're going to steal, steal big.

"Sharper," structured as a series of vignettes each titled after a particular character, unspools as a series of ever-expanding cons. First, there is Sandra, in need of \$350,000 to rescue her drug addict brother from his debtors. Once that plays out, the second chapter rewinds to Sandra's past, and her chance encounter with a skilled grifter, Max (Stan). He takes Sandra under his wing to school on the art of deception. His system starts, kind of wonderfully, with reading the newspaper: "So you can lie about anything." And he's single-minded about the work.

"I don't watch movies," Max says. "They're a waste of time."

First off, ouch. But this is also an early hint, in Brian Gatewood and Alessandro Tanaka's layered screenplay, that the grifters of "Sharper" — unlike, say, Paul Newman of "The Sting" or Leonardo DiCaprio of "Catch Me if You Can" — are a more sober variety of fabulist, less a stand-in for the make-believe of movies than a concept to question and interrogate.

As "Sharper," smoothly hel-

med by British TV director Benjamin Caron, continues to widen, it brings in more characters and backstories, including a New York socialite (Julianne Moore, also a producer) who's dating a billionaire widower (John Lithgow). But the progression begins to work against the film. As "Sharper" turns increasingly melodramatic, we're well-conditioned by then to look for the con, and see it coming a long ways out. The streetwise characters — especially the appealingly rigorous Max, who seems like he walked in from a Paul Schrader film or a David Mamet noir — also wouldn't be so easily duped by the late plot maneuvers. After a promising start, "Sharper" grows duller.

But there's plenty here to savor. Middleton, who had a small role in George Clooney's "The Tender Bar," brings such a shape-shifting radiance to the film that when she's not present, the movie sags even as its star power increases. And Stan, an actor I've not previously had a strong sense of, has never been so arresting on screen. His cool nonchalance gives "Sharper" a bracing edge. The scenes that pair Middleton and Stan together are its most potent. Plus, who can resist a con that includes, to pose as a PhD student, cramming great quotes of literature? Oh, the riches that can be unlocked by "Call me Ishmael."

"Sharper," an A24 release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for language throughout and some sexual references. Running time: 116 minutes.

★★★★★

IRENE SAM, MDT

FILIPINO chef Johanne Siy of Lolla in Singapore wins the Asia's Best Female Chef Award for 2023. Voted for by the 300-plus members of the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants Academy, this coveted accolade provides an opportunity to celebrate women in gastronomy who continue to push the boundaries of excellence with their skills, techniques and craft.

Siy is the first Singapore-based chef to win the prestigious award. She will be honoured as part of the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2023 in-person awards ceremony on the 28th of March 2023 – the first full-scale gathering of Asia's gastronomic community since 2019. The awards and event programme will return to Singapore this year in collaboration with host destination partner Singapore Tourism Board to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, which debuted in the Lion City in 2013.

William Drew, Director of Content for Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, says: "Johanne Siy's deep understanding of the provenance of ingredients and her flair for presenting cuisine that is produce-driven, alongside mindful inclusions of the culinary traditions she grew up with, make her a worthy recipient of the Asia's Best Female Chef Award. Her work at Lolla is a true reflection of the many years spent and intentional experiences sought in order to hone her craft."

Siy has been Lolla's head chef since 2020 and has led the restaurant to its first-ever placement in the extended 51-100 list of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2022 at No.75. Lauded for its considered emphasis on produce, seasonality and intentional simplicity, Siy's food spotlights



TASTE OF EDESIA

Celebration in gastronomy

Asian-inspired modern European cuisine that often pays homage to her Filipina heritage.

Born in Dagupan, Philippines, Siy left a corporate career to pursue a passion for the culinary arts. She trained at The Culinary Institute of America in New York and has apprenticed under chefs Eric Ripert (Le Bernardin) and Daniel Boulud (Café Boulud). Her experiences in the kitchens of the world's leading restaurants also include a four-year stint at Restaurant André (Singapore). Here, she

formed part of the team that secured the restaurant's highest rankings in the 50 Best Restaurants lists in 2017: No.2 in Asia's 50 Best Restaurants and No.14 in The World's 50 Best Restaurants.

A pivotal point in Siy's learning journey were her years spent travelling, training and learning in the kitchens, farms and forests of the Nordic countries, including enriching stints at Noma and Relae in Copenhagen, and Fäviken in Sweden. An interest in working with

dough also led her to apprentice at Andersen and Maillard in Copenhagen and lead product development at sourdough specialists Starter Lab in Singapore.

A meal at Lolla is a testament to her gathered experiences and cooking ethos. Lolla opened its doors in 2012, offering Mediterranean-inspired small plates. Eleven years later, it remains a solid fixture in Singapore's fine-dining landscape, holding steadfast to the ideology of 'the best produce, simply prepared'.

Under Siy's tutelage, the Lolla

experience features modern European cuisine with nods to the Nordics and gastronomic inspirations from Asia. Dishes like crab 'relleno', aligue sauce and kaffir lime are a tribute to her roots thanks to the inclusion of the 'aligue' sauce from the Philippines—a paste of river crab tomalley cooked with aromatics – and to the dish being served within the crab's own shell.

Another popular small plate, named caviar, sturgeon and egg yolk sauce, pairs caviar with the fish the eggs are harvested from. Lolla's tasting menus are evidence of a low-waste kitchen, with examples such as an herb paste made from the pulp of house-made herb oils, forming the flavour base of parmesan crisp, herbs, weeds and flowers.

Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



THE HOUSTON 1500M TURF

2023-02-11|Sat|16:00

My banker of the day is the offspring of Nostradamus in **Sheng Li Bao**. If there was no trouble caused at the start in his last run, another win should be recorded in his consistent performance. This Saturday's 1500M race is his first race beyond 1200M, which in my opinion should suit him better in the running, expect he can atone here and give this contest a real shake. His trainer has done a fair bit of work ahead of this longer trip for **Sheng Li Bao**, booking of C.L Cheng again is a bonus, he rode him in his last start, and with that experience he should give **Sheng Li Bao** his best shot at scoring another win.

Race 4 Horse No. 6 Sheng Li Bao Win and Place Bets



OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

NEW GREEN BARRIER BUILT FOR SELF-INTERESTS

The visits French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire and his German counterpart Robert Habeck paid to the United States earlier this week were another appeal to the US administration to skip the articles in the Inflation Reduction Act that harm the interests of Europe's green industry.

The act, with the majority of the \$370 billion government fund it involves going to companies investing in clean energy in the US in the form of tax cuts and subsidies, has irked almost all major players in the green industry, including the European Union, the Republic of Korea, India and Japan, as it openly tilts the playing field of the industry to the US by means of excessive government interference.

The fear of it sucking businesses from the European Union to the US prompted French President Emmanuel Macron to pay a visit to the US in December last year with the intention of getting the Joe Biden administration to halt the act.

But the French president failed in that endeavor, which spurred the European Union to propose its own version of the act, the Green Deal Industrial Plan on Feb 1.

Under the plan, 250 billion (\$272 billion) is to be made available to new energy enterprises in the EU to counter the influence of the US act on EU businesses.

The visits of Le Maire and Habeck to the US were reportedly the bloc's last shot at convincing the US to have second thoughts about its subsidies before implementing the plan. It will not be easy for either side to come up with that much money in a short time without raising inflation further.

High inflation and the shortage of labor are two major concerns of both the EU and the US. Yet the large-scale subsidies they are proposing will undoubtedly further aggravate both.

Nonetheless, the US is trying to persuade the EU to accept the Inflation Reduction Act by blaming its necessity on China. After her talks with Le Maire and Habeck on Wednesday, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen encouraged the EU to introduce the subsidies at an early date, saying that the US and EU subsidies would end the two sides' dependency on China for green products.

This is the first time that the Joe Biden administration has openly tried to steer the EU's discontent with the act toward China. But its reason for doing so is clear. It wants to cover up the distorting nature of its selfish and shortsighted act, which leaves the EU and other parties no choice but to follow suit, and scapegoat China for it.

In doing so, the US is intent on forming a green club so it can redefine the game rules of the green industry and technology and weaponize the sector and climate issues. If unchecked, green products and technology will become geopolitical tools of the West.

CLIMATE CHANGE PROTESTERS FINED OVER 'LAST SUPPER' PROTEST

THE BUZZ

Five climate change protesters were fined yesterday [Macau time] for gluing themselves to the frame of a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" in the Royal Academy of Arts.

The five activists from the group Just Stop Oil glued their hands to the painting's border and one sprayed graffiti on the wall at the London museum in July, as part of a series of disruptive protests aimed at raising awareness about climate change.

Following a two-day trial, District Judge William Nelson

ordered all five to pay 486 pounds (\$587) each for criminal damage. He said the protesters were "reckless" because they knew they would damage the painting's frame — but also said that the "primary cause" of the protest "was to gain media attention and not to cause damage to a work of art."

The 16th-century painting, which was unharmed, is attributed to one or more of Da Vinci's pupils and is believed to be the most accurate record of the original.

Just Stop Oil said it wanted to put pressure on Britain's government to halt new oil and gas licenses.

AP PHOTO



OVER 17,000 KILLED

SURVIVORS OF TURKEY, SYRIA QUAKE STRUGGLE TO STAY WARM, FED

MEHMET GUZEL, ANTAKYA

THOUSANDS who lost their homes in a catastrophic earthquake huddled around campfires and clamored for food and water in the bitter cold, three days after the temblor and series of aftershocks hit Turkey and Syria, killing more than 17,000.

Rescuers continued their race to pull more people alive from the rubble, with the window closing to find trapped survivors. While stories of miraculous rescues briefly buoyed spirits, the grim reality of the hardship facing tens of thousands who survived the disaster cast a pall.

In the Turkish city of Antakya, dozens of people scrambled for aid in front of a truck distributing children's coats and other supplies.

Ahmet Tokgoz, a survivor, called for the government to evacuate people from the devastated region. While many of the tens of thousands who have lost their homes have found shelter in tents, stadiums and other temporary accommodation, others have spent the nights outdoors since Monday's 7.8 magnitude quake.

"Especially in this cold,

it is not possible to live here," he said. "People are warming up around campfires, but campfires can only warm you up so much. ... If people haven't died from being stuck under the rubble, they'll die from the cold."

Meanwhile, the first U.N. aid trucks to enter rebel-held northwest Syria from Turkey since the quake arrived yesterday. Smaller aid organizations have sent in shipments, but the U.N. is only authorized to deliver aid through one border crossing and road damage has prevented that thus far.

Winter weather and damage to roads and airports from the quake have hampered the response throughout a region already contending with the repercussions of more than a decade of civil war in Syria. That conflict displaced millions of people within Syria and left many reliant on humanitarian aid, while also sending millions more over the border into Turkey to seek refuge.

Some in Turkey have complained the response was too slow. Any perception that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government has mismanaged the crisis could hurt him at a time when he faces a tough battle for reelection in

May. Erdogan — who was scheduled to continue his tour of devastated areas yesterday — has sought to play down the criticism.

Meanwhile, emergency crews on both sides of the border worked through the night to find survivors. Experts said the survival window for those trapped under the rubble or otherwise unable to obtain basic necessities was closing rapidly. At the same time, they said it was too soon to abandon hope.

In the Turkish town of Elbistan, rescuers formed human chains as they dug through collapsed buildings, urging quiet in the hopes of hearing stifled pleas for help. But more and more often, they pulled out dead bodies from under the rubble.

The family of Havva Havvam still hoped to see three of its members alive again, sitting by the fire opposite their former home, now the pile of debris.

In Antakya to the south, rescuers pulled out a young girl, Hazal Guner, from the ruins of a building and also rescued her father, Soner Guner, news agency IHA reported.

As they prepared to load the man into an ambulance, rescue crews told him that his daughter was alive. "I love you all," he faintly whispered. **MDT/AP**

Norway's justice minister apologized for having failed to admit, when quizzed in Parliament, that she had installed and used TikTok on her government-issued phone. The popular video-sharing app is Chinese owned, which has raised fears in the West that Beijing could use it to scoop up user data or push pro-China narratives or misinformation.

AP PHOTO



EU Twitter failed to provide a full report to the European Union on its efforts to combat online disinformation, drawing a rebuke yesterday from top officials of the 27-nation bloc. The company signed up to the EU's voluntary 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation last year — before billionaire Tesla CEO Elon Musk bought the social media platform.

USA An Oklahoma firearms dealer is under investigation after more than 200 shotguns were found in a dumpster outside a store he owns in suburban Oklahoma City, according to a search warrant by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. "A Midwest City sanitation worker found a large, but unknown number of firearms in a dumpster ... located near International Firearm Corporation" owned by Raymond Anthony "Tony" Mussatto in Midwest City, according to a Jan. 26 search warrant by ATF agent David Moore.

AP PHOTO



USA Google, a company built on finding quick answers to people's questions, suddenly finds itself grappling for a response to a potential threat to its internet empire — a form of artificial intelligence that long-time rival Microsoft is now deploying to attack its dominant search engine. Microsoft's assault combined with concerns about Google's ability to ward it off hammered its corporate parent, Alphabet Inc.