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**CONSTRUCTION BEGUN ON THE LRT EAST LINE, WHICH IS BUDGETED AT NEARLY MOP10 BILLION AND WILL BE BUILT IN TWO SECTIONS: LAM WAI HOU**

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**HO IAT SENG VISITS FUJIAN FOR COOPERATION, PROMOTING MACAU**

P2

**FOREIGN MINISTER WANG YI TO VISIT WASHINGTON AHEAD OF POSSIBLE XI-BIDEN MEETING**

P7



AP PHOTO



**Malaysia's** government said yesterday it will allow Lynas Rare Earth to continue to import and process rare earths until March 2026, after the Australian miner proposed a new technology to extract radioactive elements from the waste it produces. The Lynas refinery in Malaysia, its first outside China producing minerals that are crucial to high-tech manufacturing, has been operating in central Pahang state since 2012. But the company has been embroiled in a dispute over radiation from waste accumulating at the plant.

AP PHOTO



**Bangladesh** The bodies of at least 17 people were recovered from a train crash outside the Bangladesh capital that may have occurred after one of the trains disregarded a red signal, officials said yesterday. The rescue operation was halted early in the morning a day after rescuers and residents together extracted passengers from the wreckage, said fire official Mosharraf Hossain at Bhairab, in the central district of Kishoreganj. He said 26 others were injured.

AP PHOTO



**Russia** Imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny on Monday refused to leave his cell and skipped a court hearing, protesting after prison officials took away all of his writing supplies, his allies said. Navalny, who is serving a 19-year prison term, was due to participate via video link in a court hearing on one of many lawsuits he had filed against his prison. His ally Ivan Zhdanov said the politician refused to leave his cell after prison officials took away all of his writing supplies.

More on backpage



# HIGH FALL

**Macau casinos on track to hit another post-pandemic high in October**

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MDT INTERVIEW | STACEY KENT

**SEIZE THE MOMENT CRUCIAL TO STAGE PERFORMANCES**



P2

**TOURISM**  
**SEPTEMBER ARRIVALS DROPPED, YET AT 83% OF PRE-COVID LEVELS**

P3



**ABOUT 120 PEOPLE  
VACCINATED  
AGAINST  
MONKEYPOX**

Between Jan. 1 and Oct. 20 this year, 126 people in the city received the monkeypox vaccine, with local authorities having procured 2,800 doses, the local broadcaster has reported. In September, Macau recorded its first local monkeypox case. Before that, two cases reportedly had connections with Macau – a Hong Kong patient who had been to Macau during the incubation period, and a local resident who was a close contact with a monkeypox patient – that the Health Bureau (SSM) had followed up. The SSM also disclosed that, so far, no additional cases have been logged.

**28 FIRMS TO  
PARTICIPATE IN  
'MACAO WEEK IN  
FUJIAN-XIAMEN'**

28 Macau companies will participate in a roadshow to promote products from Macau and Portuguese-speaking countries. The roadshow will be named "Macao Week in Fujian-Xiamen" and will commence tomorrow. The event will expand the mainland market and attract mainland residents to Macau for travel. As the third event of its kind, "Macao Week in Fujian-Xiamen" will unfold a mega roadshow along Zhongshan Road Pedestrian Street in Siming District of Xiamen for five consecutive days. Four of the local companies are participating for the first time, according to the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM).

**42% EMPLOYERS  
HAVE NOT PAID  
CONTRIBUTIONS:  
FSS**

As of yesterday, approximately 11,000 employers have not yet paid the Social Security System's obligatory system contributions for their employees for the third quarter of 2023, accounting for about 42% of the total employers who need to pay contributions. The Social Security Fund (FSS) has called for employers and residents to better use the "Macao One Account" to make payments.

**Q&A STACEY KENT  
JAZZ SINGER**

ANTHONY LAM

**STACEY** Kent, one of the world's most beautiful jazz voices, will be returning to Macau for the third time for a one-night-only show at the Venetian Theater. The show is part of the program of the 35th Macao International Music Festival (FIMM).

Currently busy on tour in the US, the jazz singer spoke with the Times to prepare her Macau audience for her upcoming show. She disclosed that as her new album Summer Me, Winter Me will be released on Nov. 10, songs from the record – including released singles "If You Go Away" and "Under Paris Skies" – will be in the program. Apart from these songs, the show will be focused on "Songs from Other Places," which is both the name of one of her previous albums and this show.

**MDT: How excited are you about returning to Macau after nine years?**

**Stacey Kent (SK):** I can't believe it's already been nine years! I'm looking forward to returning – we've been in Macau twice, and each time has been wonderful, with lots of good memories. There are beautiful theaters and lovely people. I can sense that people have been waiting for us to come and we've been waiting to come back, so it's palpable excitement. I am also very excited to come back to Macau and perform "Tango in Macao" for the very first time in Macau. Last time we were there, the song hadn't been written yet. So it's much fun and exciting.

**35TH FIMM**

**STACEY KENT: SEIZE THE  
MOMENT CRUCIAL TO STAGE  
PERFORMANCES**



**MDT: How is this show different from the previous two in Macau? What have you prepared for the audience?**

**SK:** Each performance is different. The last two times we were in Macau, we were on different projects. This is another different project. It will be me with Jim Tomlinson – my husband, saxophonist, composer, producer and arranger – we are always together. But this time, there will be our pianist Art Hirahara. This show will focus on the project we've been doing for years, and the album that came out last year – "Songs from Other Places." We will also play newer songs and songs from older albums. There

will also be materials that have not been recorded yet, but will be played live. So it will be based on what the three of us do as one voice in "Songs from Other Places," which I am very proud of as well as love presenting and sharing on stage.

**MDT: How should your Macau audience prepare for "Tango in Macao" and "Songs from Other Places"?**

**SK:** Our current tour is actually nine weeks long in 14 countries. Although we're basing the program on a core repertoire, because the three of us know each other and our materials so well, we can bounce around

from song to song according to the mood we're in and [that] we feel in the house. Each show can be different from each other. For example, in the Quebec show, although there was a set list, at a moment when my mood came for a particular song, I just threw it in because we were so much in the mood.

I think the thing about being on stage is very much having the feeling of being present – not about the future or the past. All that [the] audience needs to do is to open their ears and come on this journey with us. I think the thing about making this particularly beautiful music is how it touches people's hearts.

**CE visits Fujian for cooperation,  
promoting Macau**

**CHIEF** Executive Ho Iat Seng departed for Fujian Province yesterday for official visits and negotiations regarding cooperation between the two jurisdictions, the government announced in a statement.

The head of the government will return home

on Oct. 27.

This delegation will include officials such as Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong, chief of the CE office Hoi Lai Fong and chief of Lei's office Ku Mei Leng.

In this visit, the local delegation will visit Fuzhou and Xiamen. The

former city is the provincial capital and the latter is one of the first four Special Economic Zones in China.

During his visit, Ho will have high-level meetings with his Fujian counterparts, in particular the Macao-Fujian Cooperation Conference. The delegation will also visit

projects on "Big Health," technology and urban planning in Fuzhou.

During the Cooperation Conference, Lei will meet members of the Standing Committee of the CPC Fujian Provincial Committee and Executive Vice Governor of Fujian Province, Guo Ningning,

and sign the fourth "Memorandum on Deepening Cooperation between Fujian and Macao."

In Xiamen, Ho will attend the opening ceremony of the "Macao Week in Fujian-Xiamen" where a Macau delegation of entrepreneurs will attend a Xiamen-Macao business-matching and networking seminar.

While the CE is away, Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong will be Acting CE. **AL**

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GAMING

# Macau on track to hit another post-pandemic high in October

LYNZY VALLES

**M**ACAUI has recorded MOP14.6 billion in gaming revenues as of Monday, according to investment bank JP Morgan, which shows that the casino sector is slated to hit another post-pandemic high.

In a note yesterday, analysts said that the value corresponds to a daily average of MOP635 million and that it is on track to reach another post-pandemic high "quite comfortably," buoyed by China's eight-day holiday.

Forecasting a consolidated gross gaming revenue of between MOP18.5 billion and MOP19 billion in October, JP



Morgan analysts DS Kim, Mufan Shi and Selina Li said that gaming revenues had normalized back to MOP575 million

per day, up by 20% week-on-week.

This comes as the sector experienced a post-Golden Week

slowdown, following the eight-day holiday where the city saw over 900,000 visitors.

The Golden Week of the Na-

tional Day holidays, which is followed the Mid-Autumn Festival holiday, has resulted in a greater number of visitors to Macau than initially forecasted.

The holiday period posted a 16.4% increase on the expectations stated by Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) officials, with a daily average of 116,429.

The city's casino recovery is sustaining its momentum, despite gaming revenues hitting MOP14.94 billion in September, a six-month low for the region, but a significant improvement on last year. The numbers fell 13% from the previous month. Revenues were 68% of 2019 pre-Covid levels.

August revenues soared a staggering 686% from a year earlier to the highest level since January 2020, amid a summer holiday boom.

Gross gaming revenue (GGR) reached MOP17.2 billion, which surpasses the median analyst estimate of a 678% increase and has rebounded to 71% of the 2019 levels.

STAFF REPORTER

**V**ISITOR arrivals in September dropped 28.6% month-on-month to 2.30 million, following a post-pandemic record-breaking figure in August due to the summer holidays.

The figure, however, soared to 312.5% when compared to the same period last year, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

Recovery is still underway as September figures were 83% of pre-Covid levels, as September 2019 recorded approximately 2.76 million visitor arrivals.

In relation to the source of visitors, the number of visitors from mainland China jumped by 216.2% year-on-year to 1.59 million with those traveling under the Individual Visit Scheme (746,605) surging by 296.8%.

Visitors from Hong Kong (534,755) and Taiwan (50,660) rocketed by 1,058% and 665.8% year-on-year respectively.

Analysed by checkpoint, the number of visitor arrivals by land increased by 249.3% year-on-year to 1,837,842 in September; among them, 44.8% arrived through the checkpoint of Border Gate (822,883), 31.9% came via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (587,149) and 16.4% via the Hengqin port (301,644).

Meanwhile, visitor arrivals by sea and by air leapt by 1,980.4% and 918.5% year-on-year to 274,423 and 188,791

TOURISM

## September arrivals dropped, yet at 83% of pre-Covid levels



respectively, albeit from a low base as restrictions were still in place during the same period last year.

In the first three quarters of 2023, visitor arrivals increased by 356.6% year-on-year to 19,928,168.

### CHUNG YEUNG SEES 300,000 VISITORS

A total of 301,705 tourists visited the city over

the Chung Yeung festival extended weekend, which lasted from Friday to Monday. One-third of the visitors arrived through the Border Gate.

The figure shows the city has sustained its momentum with an average of 100,568 visitors per day, following the nearly one million arrivals during the National Day Golden Week.

STATS

## MAINLAND TRAVEL PERMITS FOR HONG KONG AND MACAU ON THE RISE

**887,000** mainland travel permits for Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan residents were issued, showing a year-on-year increase of 358.5%, which also marked an increase of 151.8% from the same period in

The number of documents issued for mainland residents traveling to and from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan jumped by 2,071.2% year on year to 25.45 million and it rose by 113.3% from the same period in 2019, the National Immigration Administration (NIA) said Tuesday at a press conference in Beijing.

Additionally, 887,000 mainland travel permits for Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan residents were issued, showing a year-on-year increase of 358.5%, which also marked an increase of 151.8% from the same period in 2019.

The NIA data showed that 608,000 visas were issued in the third quarter of the year to foreign



nationals, indicating a yearly surge of 268.5%, returning to the same level as in 2019.

Immigration departments across China inspected 123 million border entries and exits in the third quarter of 2023, a year-on-year increase of 454.4%. According to NIA data, 61.69 million of the total crossings were made by mainland residents, while 50.18 million crossings were made by residents from Hong Kong and Macau special administrative regions and Taiwan.

A total of 4.66 million ordinary passports were

issued from July to September, representing an increase of 1,356.3% from last year, the administration said.

According to the NIA, over 13,000 criminal cases related to national border control were investigated, with more than 23,000 suspects arrested and 817 criminal gangs dismantled.

In accordance with the law, cases involving 20,400 foreign nationals who engaged in illegal entry, residence and employment were prosecuted, with 7,102 of them being deported, the NIA said.

MDT/XINHUA



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

### GP MUSEUM TO LAUNCH SERIES OF ACTIVITIES

The Macao Grand Prix Museum will launch a series of special activities and arrangements in tandem with the arrival of the 70th Macao Grand Prix next month, according to the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO). The highlights include a brand-new mapping show, a retrospective video that captures the Macao Grand Prix's highlights, a special exhibition on an internationally-leading racing team, virtual reality feature, extension of opening hours and special discount for ticket purchase on site, among others. Every night of November, a brand-new mapping show will be projected upon the exterior wall of the museum, namely the Mapping show of "Macao Grand Prix Museum Chronicles: 70 Legendary Years."

### UM HOLDS EXHIBITION DEPICTING HENRIQUE DE SENNA FERNANDES' WORKS

The University of Macau (UM) is holding an exhibition to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Macanese writer Henrique de Senna Fernandes. The exhibition, which started Oct. 16 and will continue until Dec. 18, showcases the writer's life, including his professional career and literary works, as well as thematic introductions. It also features portraits of him taken by author Yao Feng. Senna Fernandes was a renowned lawyer and writer who created a number of novels and short stories, including A Trança Feiteiceira (The Bewitching Braid) and Amor e Dedinhos de Pé (Love and Tiny Toes).

ANTHONY LAM

**CONSTRUCTION** has begun on the LRT East Line, which is budgeted at nearly MOP10 billion and will be built in two sections, the director of public works, Lam Wai Hou, has announced.

The conclusion of construction is expected between February and March in 2028.

According to a statement recently issued by the Public Works Bureau (DSOP), construction commenced on Oct. 20. Earlier announcements from the government stated that the line will run from the Taipa Maritime Terminal to near the Border Gate Checkpoint through New Urban Zones A and E.

The DSOP hopes that the line will complement the local transport capacity, ease road traffic and promote sustainability. It added that the line will be a direct link between the northern part of the city and the city's economic hub - Cotai.

Once opened, the East Line will serve a projected population of 100,000 residing in New Urban Zone A alone. There will be a station within the vicinity of the Border Gate and three stations in Zone A, before connecting with the existing Taipa Line.

### PUBLIC WORKS

# CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON MOP10 BILLION LRT EAST LINE EXPECTED EARLY 2028



The East Line and the eastern end of the Taipa Line will become a key route serving passengers using the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, the Taipa ferry terminal and the airport.

Measuring 7.7 km in length and having six underground

stations, the East Line will have 90,000 square meters of station space. The three stations at Zone A will be connected with an already-announced underground commercial area.


All stations will be equipped with platform doors.

The Barra Extension of the

LRT Taipa Line is expected to be opened by the end of the year. The Hengqin and Seac Pai Van Lines are now under construction.

When the East Line starts operations, the LRT network will be 24 km long and have 21 stations.

AD



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### SPORTS

## SANDS CHINA HOSTS GOLF DAY WITH 4 PRO CHAMPIONS AND LOCAL YOUNG GOLFERS

STAFF REPORTER

**SANDS** China hosted four renowned professional golfers on Monday at the Front Lawn and at The Venetian Macao for Sands Golf Day, including Minjee Lee, Lydia Ko, Minwoo Lee and Collin Morikawa.

At the event, the four pros led a skills challenge with 16 young local golfers from the Macau Junior Golf Association.

"At Sands China, we are committed to supporting the development of local sports talent and nurturing the growth of young athletes," said Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China Ltd.

"Our aim is to provide a unique platform for interaction and mentorship, motivating young athletes to pursue their goals with unwavering determination, and we hope to help them realise their full potential and contribute to the rich sporting legacy of



our city," he added.

During the first part of the event Monday, the Front Lawn Challenge, the professional golfers demonstrated their accuracy at a lively skills challenge, where they attempted to hit long-distance shots at designated targets.

It was followed by the Long Putt Skills Challenge, where the 16 young golfers were divided into four groups, with each group led by a pro golfer.

Each group played on behalf of either the Macau Deaf Association or Orbis Macau. At the end

of the challenge, Sands China donated a total of MOP100,000 to the two organisations based on the results of the friendly competition.

Minjee Lee, a ten-time LPGA Tour winner, said: "I am thrilled to be part of this event to inspire young people and ignite their passion for sports, while supporting two local charities. The opportunity to demonstrate and share my love for golf with junior players in Macao is a privilege on its own; seeing their enthusiasm and potential is doubly rewarding."



ENERGY

# Gaza has oil markets on edge, more urgency to shift to renewables, IEA head says

DAVID MCHUGH, FRANKFURT

**T**ENSIONS from the war in Gaza could help accelerate the move away from planet-warming fossil fuels like oil and gas and toward renewable energy, electric cars and heat pumps — similar to how sharp increases in the price of oil during the 1970s unleashed efforts to conserve fuel, the head of the International Energy Agency said.

“Today we are again facing a crisis in the Middle East that could once again shock oil markets,” said IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol. That comes on top of the stress on energy markets from Russia’s cutoff of natural gas to Europe over its invasion of Ukraine, he said.

“Put these two things together, and no one can convince me that oil and gas are safe and secure energy choices for countries or consumers,” Birol told The Associated Press in an interview ahead of the publication yesterday of



the IEA’s annual world energy outlook, which analyzes the global picture of energy supply and demand.

“This could further accelerate the energy transition around the world,” with renewable sources like wind or solar offering a “long lasting solution” to energy security issues as well as climate change, he said.

The attack on Israel by the militant organization Hamas and the ensuing Israel military operations has raised fears of a wider Mideast conflict. So far oil price rises have been relatively moderate. International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$90.17 per barrel yesterday, up from around \$84 on the eve of the Hamas attack. So far the fighting has not led

to a supply interruption.

Fossil fuel prices are down from 2022 peaks, but “markets are tense and volatile,” said the IEA in the report.

“Some of the immediate pressures from the global energy crisis have eased, but energy markets, geopolitics, and the global economy are unsettled and the risk of further disruption is ever present,” it said.

Birol pointed out that there was “a major government response” to the energy supply concerns that arose 50 years ago from the Arab oil embargo imposed during the 1973 Yom Kippur war.

It sent oil prices nearly 300% higher and led to the founding of the IEA in 1974 to help shape a collective response to the disruption. That was followed by the 1978 Iranian revolution, which added another price shock. At the time, the solutions included the rollout of nuclear power plants and the imposition of mileage standards for cars.

“This time, we have all of the available technologies,” Birol said. “We have solar, wind, nuclear power, electric cars. They will extend significantly around the world and it will be an additional boost to the energy transition.”

He pointed to the rapid rollout of electric cars, saying that in 2020 only one in 25 cars was electric but in 2023 it was one in five. Meanwhile the share of fossil fuels in electricity generation has fallen from 70% ten years ago to 60% today and should reach 40% by 2030, he said.

Concerted international action at the upcoming United Nations climate conference is needed to expand use of clean technologies and find new ways of financing the massive investment that is needed, especially in the developing world, the IEA said.

The report also pointed to a shifting role for China, once a leading source of increased demand for energy due to rapid industrialization and growth. **MDT/AP**

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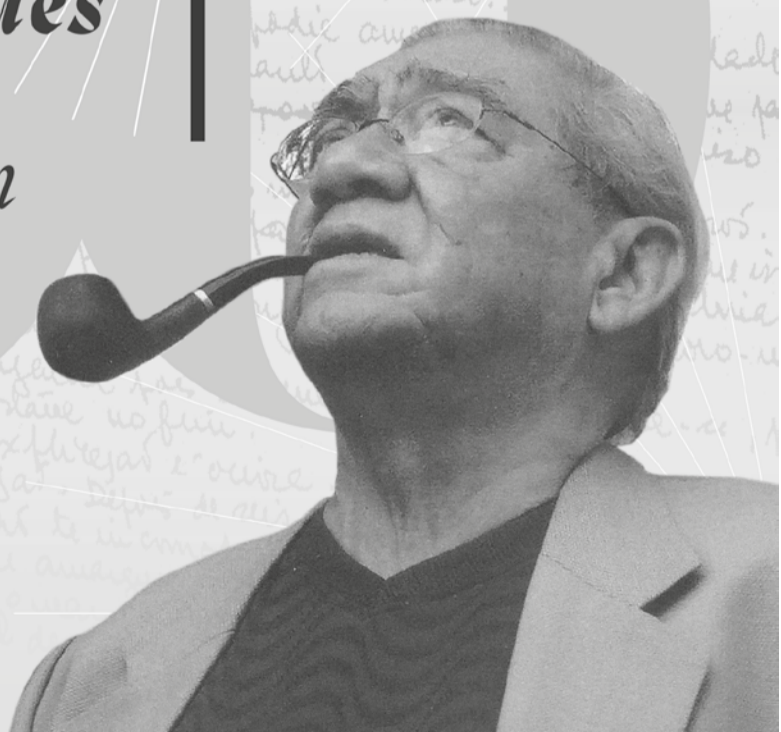
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Myanmar police hand over five telecom and internet fraud suspects to Chinese police at Yangon International Airport in Yangon, late August

ORGANIZED CRIME

# CHINA CRACKDOWN ON CYBER SCAMS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA NETS THOUSANDS BUT 'LEAVES NETWORKS INTACT'

HUIZHONG WU, BANGKOK

ZHANG Hongliang, a former restaurant manager in central China, took various gigs in and outside China to support his family after losing his job during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In March, a job offer to teach Chinese cooking at a restaurant led him into a cyber scam compound in Myanmar, where he was instead ordered to lure Chinese into giving up their savings for fake investment schemes via social media platforms.

Zhang is one of tens of thousands of people, mostly but not all Chinese, who have become ensnared in cyber scam networks run by powerful Chinese criminal syndicates in Southeast Asia. Regional and Chinese authorities have netted thousands of people in a crackdown, but experts say they are failing to root out the local elites and criminal networks that are bound to keep running the schemes.

When scam operations are shut down in one place they often just resurface elsewhere. The problem is an embarrassment for Beijing and is discouraging ordinary Chinese from traveling to Southeast Asia out of fear they might be duped or kidnapped and caught up in a cyber scam operation.

In recent years, media reports have uncovered instances of young people being lured to places in Cambodia or Myanmar for high-paying jobs, only to be forced to work as scammers. Rescue organizations say people are regularly beaten or face physical punishments such as being forced to run laps if they don't perform well.

In August, China, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar agreed to set up a joint police operations center to tackle cyber scams in the region. On Oct. 10, China's Ministry of Public Security announced that its "Summer Operation" had successfully brought back 2,317 scam suspects from northern Myanmar to China.

## 'LEADERS AND BACKBONE' CRIMINALS

The ministry announced yesterday that as of the end of September it had caught 387 "important leaders and backbone" criminals in cyber scam syndicates. It was unclear how many were from overseas-based criminal gangs versus domestic ones.

China calls such people suspects, though experts say most of them are victims who were forced to work for the criminals. They question how they will be treated once back in China.

The schemes based in coun-

tries like Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia are run by Chinese bosses hand-in-hand with local elites. Many are based in places where China has financed big construction projects through leader Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative.

Myanmar's border regions long have been a magnet for criminals — historically including drug producers and traffickers — because of lax law enforcement. Such places are generally under the control of ethnic minority armed groups, either opposed to or allied with Myanmar's central government. Some also cooperate with organized crime gangs.

"From the vantage point of the Chinese government, it's a source of extreme embarrassment that you have so many of these Chinese criminals operating all across Southeast Asia," said Jason Tower, an expert on transnational crime with the United States Institute of Peace.

The syndicates also are known for "pig butchering" cons, where scammers entice individuals, often halfway across the world, to invest their money in bogus schemes after duping them into digital romances.

The scammers divide their targets into two categories: Chinese and non-Chinese. They

use scripts, images of models and influencers and translation software to trick the people they contact by phone or online into parting with their money. Victims can be anywhere in the world.

Zhang was working in Thailand and on a visa run to Laos when he met the man who lured him to the scam compound in Myanmar. Giving what he said was his last name, Gao, he claimed to be a broker and travel agent for Chinese living in Thailand.

Zhang and his wife wanted extra money to pay for in vitro fertilization to have another child.

Gao suggested he go work in Myawaddy, in eastern Myanmar's Kayin state, teaching a local chef how to cook Chinese dishes in Gao's new restaurant. The pay would be double what Zhang made in China.

Zhang was wary. Since a 2021 coup, military-controlled Myanmar has been embroiled in civil conflict. But Gao reassured him that he wouldn't be doing anything illegal and said the restaurant would have plenty of customers since many cyber scam businesses were operating in the area.

That might have raised a red flag but it was only once he got

to Myanmar that Zhang realized his predicament. He asked to go back home, saying there was a family emergency. His family helped him scrape together some 40,000 yuan (\$5,472) to pay off the debt Gao claimed he owed him, and he slipped away one night, swimming across the Moei River into Thailand, where he turned himself in to Thai police, who contacted the Chinese Embassy.

Zhang showed the AP copies of his deportation notice from the Thai Immigration police and a temporary ID card. He returned to China in late June and was questioned by Chinese police but not detained. He has been sharing his story on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, to alert others to the risks and says people often contact him about relatives trapped in cyber scam compounds.

"We all went out with this wonderful sense of hope, but then reality slammed us in the face," he said.

In total, China has detained some 4,000 suspects and returned them back to China.

The Ministry of Public Security has claimed "breakthrough results" through operations in coordination with Myanmar authorities. On Monday, they announced they had repatriated another 2,349 people. The ministry did not respond to a faxed request for comment.

## ENFORCEMENT WEAKNESSES

One 31-year old former chef who was smuggled into Myanmar's Wa State earlier this year said he saw his company hand over four people to Chinese police with little fanfare in September. Other companies did the same, said the man, who was smuggled into Myanmar and later rescued by a non-profit organization. He declined to be named out of fear of government retribution, and The Associated Press could not independently verify his account.

Overall, the enforcement actions don't seem very comprehensive, experts say. The groups now based in Myanmar originally were located in Cambodia. When Cambodia cracked down on online gambling rings and illegal casinos in 2019, many of the groups just moved to less well policed places in Myanmar. Some were taken over by rival gangs.

China's efforts to repair its image have so far not made much headway, said Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a professor of political science at Thailand's Chulalongkorn University.

"You can crack down on these symptoms and the manifestations ... that you can see in the borderland areas," he said, "but they'll come back unless you really have a sustained effort."

MDT/AP



DIPLOMACY

# Top Chinese diplomat to visit Washington ahead of possible Xi-Biden meeting

DIDI TANG, WASHINGTON

**C**HINA'S top diplomat will come to the United States tomorrow for a three-day visit, the latest move by Washington and Beijing to keep high-level talks open amid tense bilateral relations.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is scheduled to meet with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan over a range of issues, including the Israel-Hamas conflict, the Ukraine war and a recent vessel collision in the South China Sea, according to senior administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the trip.

Wang's trip to Washington will come just about three weeks ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco, where it's possible that President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping will meet.

The officials did not confirm the leaders' meeting, nor did they



Foreign Minister Wang Yi

say if Wang's visit would prepare for such a meeting. Instead, Wang's trip was described as reciprocal to Blinken's visit to Beijing in June.

Beijing has yet to confirm if Xi will travel to San Francisco for the annual APEC summit.

Wang plans to make clear Chi-

na's "position and principles on the relationship with the U.S. and our legitimate concerns," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a daily briefing yesterday.

China hopes to "jointly push the bilateral relationship back to the track of sound and stable

development," Mao said, reflecting a more upbeat tone than the one heard from Beijing in recent weeks.

U.S.-China relations have deteriorated rapidly since 2018 over issues such as trade imbalance, human rights in the northwestern region of Xinjiang, the militarization of the South China Sea, the rising pressure on the self-governed island of Taiwan and the pandemic. Last November, Biden and Xi met in Bali, Indonesia, on the sidelines of the Group of 20 meeting of leading rich and developing nations. The two sides agreed to resume talks, set up work groups on specific issues and expand person-to-person exchanges.

The relationship had barely warmed up when Washington accused Beijing of flying a spy balloon over the U.S. territory in February, drawing stern protests from Beijing and plunging bilateral relations to another low.

Blinken traveled to Beijing in June, when bilateral relations began to improve. Earlier this mon-

th, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer led a delegation of six senators to China, in the first visit by U.S. lawmakers since 2019. This week, California Governor Gavin Newsom is in China to discuss climate change.

When Wang arrives in Washington, American officials will push China to be more constructive in the Middle East, the senior administration officials said. Earlier this month, Blinken discussed with Wang the importance of maintaining stability in the region and discouraging other parties from entering the conflict, according to the State Department.

The weekend collisions between Philippine and Chinese vessels off Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea also will be brought up in meetings with Wang, the U.S. officials said.

While Wang's visit won't solve any differences, it's part of the U.S. diplomatic effort toward open communications to minimize risks, the American officials said.

MDT/AP

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ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

# Israel increases strikes on Gaza, as two more hostages are freed

NAJIB JOBAIN,  
SAM Y MAGDY & RAVI, RAFAH

**I**SRAEL escalated its bombardment of targets in the Gaza Strip, the military said yesterday, ahead of an expected ground invasion against Hamas militants that the U.S. fears could spark a wider conflict in the region, including attacks on American troops.

The stepped-up attacks, and the rapidly rising death toll of thousands killed in Gaza, came as Hamas released two elderly Israeli women who were among the hundreds of hostages it captured during its devastating Oct. 7 attack on towns in southern Israel.

Amid a flurry of diplomatic activity in Israel since the war started, French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Tel Aviv yesterday, meeting with the families of French citizens who were killed or held hostage before heading to talks with top Israeli officials.

He told Israel's President Isaac Herzog that he came "to express our support and solidarity and share your pain" as well as to assure Israel it is "not left alone in the war against terrorism."

Gaza's 2.3 million people have been running out of food, water and medicine since Israel sealed off the territory following the attack. A third small aid convoy entered Gaza on Monday carrying only a tiny fraction of the supplies aid groups say is necessary.

With Israel still barring the entry of fuel, the United Nations said aid distribution would soon grind to a halt when it can no longer fuel trucks inside Gaza. Hospitals overwhelmed by the wounded are struggling to keep generators running to power lifesaving medical equipment and incubators for premature babies.

Yesterday, Israel said it had launched 400 airstrikes over the past day, killing Hamas commanders, hitting militants as they were preparing to launch rockets into Israel and striking command centers and a Hamas tunnel shaft. The previous day, Israel reported 320 strikes.

The Palestinian official news agency, Wafa, said



Yocheved Lifshitz, one of the two women released from Hamas captivity late Monday, meets people at the hospital in Tel Aviv

many of the airstrikes hit residential buildings, some of them in southern Gaza where Israel had told civilians to take shelter.

An overnight strike hit a four-story residential building in the southern city of Khan Younis, killing at least 32 people and wounding scores of others, according to survivors.

The fatalities included 13 from the Saqallah family, said Ammar al-Butta, a relative who survived the airstrike.

He said there were about 100 people there, including many who had come from Gaza City, which Israel has ordered civilians to evacuate.

"They were sheltering at our home because we thought that our area would be safe. But apparently there is no safe place in Gaza," he said.

"We continue to attack forcefully in Gaza City and its environs, where Hamas is building up its terrorist infrastructure, where Hamas is arraying its troops," said Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari. He again told Palestinians to head south "for your personal safety."

On Monday night, the two freed hostages, 85-year-old Yocheved Lifshitz and 79-year-old Nurit Cooper, were taken out of Gaza at the Rafah crossing into Egypt, where they were put into ambulances, according to footage shown on Egyptian TV. The women, along with

their husbands, were snatched from their homes in the kibbutz of Nir Oz near the Gaza border. Their husbands, ages 83 and 84, were not released.

"While I cannot put into words the relief that she is now safe, I will remain focused on securing the release of my father and all those — some 200 innocent people — who remain hostages in Gaza," Lifshitz' daughter, Sharone Lifshitz, said in a statement.

Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv released photos Tuesday of Lifshitz sitting in an armchair, being wheeled in a wheelchair down a hall, soldiers in tow, and kissing unidentified people.

The women were freed days after an American woman and her teenage daughter. Hamas and other militants in Gaza are believed to have taken roughly 220 people, including an unconfirmed number of foreigners and dual citizens.

Lifshitz, an artist and academic in London who spells her name differently to her parents, told reporters last week that her parents were peace activists, and her father would drive to the Gaza border to take Palestinians to east Jerusalem for medical treatment.

Kindness, she said last week, could somehow save them.

"I grew up, you know, with all these Holocaust stories about how all my uncles' lives were saved because" of acts of kindness, she said.

"Do I want that to be the story here?" she asked. "Yeah."

On Monday, Hamas released a video showing the handover, with militants giving drinks and snacks to the dazed but composed women, and holding their hands as they are walked to Red Cross officials. Just before the video ends, Lifshitz reaches back to shake one militant's hand.

Around the same time, Israel's internal security service, Shin Bet, released a recording showing Hamas prisoners — most in clean prison uniforms, but one in a bloody t-shirt and at least one wincing in pain — sitting handcuffed in drab offices talking about the Oct. 7 attack.

The Associated Press could not independently verify either video, and both the hostages and the prisoners could have been acting under duress.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas. Iranian-backed fighters around the region are warning of possible escalation, including the targeting of U.S. forces deployed in the Mideast, if a ground offensive is launched.

The U.S. has told Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon and other groups not to join the fight. Israel and Hezbollah have traded fire almost daily across the Israel-Lebanon border, and Israeli warplanes have struck targets in Syria, Lebanon and the occupied West Bank in recent days.

## this day in history

### 1984 EUROPE GRANTS EMERGENCY AID FOR ETHIOPIA



The EEC is donating £1.8 million to help combat the famine in Ethiopia.

Officials from Oxfam, Save the Children, Christian Aid and the Red Cross believe that up to 10 million people are facing starvation unless the flow of aid is increased.

Aid agencies lobbied EEC ministers in Brussels in response to the latest drought to hit the country.

Hugh McKay from the Save the Children Fund said: "This is an excellent start and will buy us a little time to develop a long term strategy to deal with this tragedy."

The Community has also ordered the immediate shipment of 5,000 tons of food with more to be delivered soon.

The worst affected areas are the northern provinces of Tigre, Wollo and Eritrea, where a 10-year drought and a succession of wars have produced the worst famine in Ethiopia's modern history.

As the announcement was made the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission said it would hold an emergency meeting with Western governments to discuss ways to improve airlifting food to the region.

Local officials are said to be trying to clear congestion at ports to get more food to the rest of the country. Up to 1,000 tons of food a day are now being handled, up from 500 a few weeks ago.

A recent report shown on the BBC highlighted the harrowing problems being faced in Ethiopia and led to an overwhelming public response.

Overseas director of Oxfam Michael Harris said: "On one day alone we received 1,000 calls from people offering help, including three who offered transport aircraft."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

One million people are thought to have died in the famine of 1984 despite money from around the world helping to improve the situation. In December 1984 rock stars joined together to record "Do they know it's Christmas?". The single raised more than £12 million for famine victims in Africa. Live Aid in July 1985, organised by Bob Geldof, raised more than £70 million for the cause. Two massive concerts were staged in London and Philadelphia. Artists including Paul McCartney, U2 and Madonna performed on the day. Many Ethiopians continue to rely on food aid from abroad. In 2004 the government began a drive to move more than two million people away from the arid highlands of the east. It said the programme was a lasting solution to food shortages.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**



**ARIES**

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Get the whole family involved in a worthwhile cause or cultural event. You need to do something that will make you feel better about yourself. Be up front if you don't want to be embarrassed.



**TAURUS**

Apr. 20-May. 20

Plan your day carefully. Don't be afraid to confront situations concerning loved ones in order to solve any problems that may exist. Don't rely on others to handle the workload.



**GEMINI**

May. 21-Jun. 21

Don't make those you live with feel unloved or unworthy. Get promises in writing or you will be disappointed. Opportunities to get together with friends will be enlightening and entertaining.



**CANCER**

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Take a break; you can finally mend any disputes on the home front. Concentrate on work or make changes to yourself. This is not the best day to visit relatives who get on your nerves.



**LEO**

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You will find that joint ventures could easily turn out to be dead end projects. Opportunities to make advancements through good business sense are evident.



**VIRGO**

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Don't overindulge in anyway. You're in the mood to get out and visit friends. You may exaggerate your emotional situation. You will have a great day if you just say what you feel.



**LIBRA**

Sep.23-Oct. 22

Take on positions that offer on the job training or pay for courses related to the business. You can get a lot done if you get your hands on the right equipment.



**SCORPIO**

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Don't reveal anything about your personal life that could be used adversely. Romance will be on your mind, and chances for ideal connections are in the works.



**SAGITTARIUS**

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You can accomplish a great deal. Travel will be exciting. Your ability to deal with others will help you accomplish your goals. You will do your best work on your own.



**CAPRICORN**

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Consider applying for a job in another part of the world. Opportunities for love will develop while traveling or while attending religious functions. Do not trust others with important information.



**AQUARIUS**

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You will profit from home improvement projects and real estate deals. Think twice before you speak. People you live with will not be terribly happy with you regardless of what you do today.



**PISCES**

Feb.19-Mar. 20

Social functions will bring you in touch with new lovers. Concentrate on work. You need to get down to basics with regard to yourself.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

**EASY**

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

**EASY+**

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

**MEDIUM**

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

**HARD**

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	9	24	fine
Changchun	4	21	cloudy
Chengdu	16	23	cloudy
Chongqing	19	21	rain
Fuzhou	21	29	cloudy
Guangzhou	21	30	cloudy
Guiyang	17	22	showers
Haikou	24	28	rain
Hangzhou	16	27	overcast
Harbin	0	18	cloudy
Hefei	12	25	cloudy
Nanjing	14	26	cloudy
Shanghai	18	25	fine
Taipei	22	26	cloudy
Wuhan	15	24	cloudy
Hong Hong	26	29	overcast

**WORLD**

Moscow	-4	1	overcast
Frankfurt	8	12	rain
Paris	11	16	rain
London	8	12	rain
New York	14	22	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Bank takeback; 5- Lute of India; 10- \_\_\_ ex machina; 14- Just \_\_\_; 15- Analyze a sentence; 16- Prefix with meter; 17- Not fem.; 18- Wrong; 19- Willingly; 20- Fall; 22- Most strange; 24- Hawaiian food; 25- Blues singer James; 26- Companion of a child; 30- Horselike African mammal; 35- Atmosphere; 36- Flee; 37- Stan's pal; 38- Waterfall; 41- Time spans; 43- Early computer; 44- Curve; 45- "...and seven years \_\_\_"; 46- Dreadlocks wearer; 47- Threshold; 50- X-ray units; 53- "Sister Act" extra; 54- Worldly; 58- Speaks publicly; 62- Voice of America org.; 63- President Garfield's middle name; 66- "\_\_\_ Rider" starred Clint Eastwood; 67- Indonesian resort island; 68- Heat home; 69- Church section; 70- Window part; 71- Body of values; 72- Furniture wood;

DOWN 1- Hindu hero; 2- Son of Isaac and Rebekah; 3- Annoyance; 4- Reside in; 5- Iberian peninsula inhabitant; 6- Cartesian conclusion; 7- Prefix with angle; 8- It's a good thing; 9- Bowling alley button; 10- Spanish surrealist; 11- Writer Wiesel; 12- Western Native Americans; 13- Separate by a sieve; 21- May celebrant; 23- Stubble remover; 25- Poetic time; 26- Nervous person, maybe; 27- Woody vine; 28- Upbeat, in music; 29- Calendar col.; 31- Clockmaker Terry; 32- Swell up; 33- Crest; 34- Man of morals; 39- Feline; 40- Without \_\_\_ in the world; 41- All for; 42- Pertaining to the management of public wealth; 44- Commercials; 48- Capek play; 49- Be short with; 51- Make \_\_\_ for oneself; 52- Modern bank card; 54- Baths; 55- Morales of "NYPD Blue"; 56- Small rivulet; 57- Complain; 59- Record; 60- Lohengrin's bride; 61- Search; 64- Root word?; 65- What \_\_\_ bid?;

**Monday's solution**

B	A	N	J	O	M	A	R	L	A	S	S	O						
C	L	E	A	R	O	T	E	I	N	E	P	T						
D	I	S	R	E	G	A	R	D	C	E	D	A	R					
A	T	A	T	A	K	I	A	S	E	N	E	R	O					
G	R	I	D	E	S	E	N	T	R	E								
G	R	A	T	I	S	H	E	N	S									
R	E	Y	N	A	R	D	R	E	V	E	A	L						
L	O	V	I	E	N	E	N	E	R	G	E	R						
L	O	V	I	E	R	E	C	O	L									
M	E	A	N	T														
P	A	T	C	H														
A	D	E	L	E														
A	S	N	E	R														

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 PSP 28 573 333 Macau Daily Times 28 716 081  
 Customs 28 559 944  
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## DRAMA | IDENTITY

# WHAT'S IN A GAME? 'DEAR ENGLAND' PROBES THE NATION THROUGH THE LENS OF ITS SOCCER TEAM

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

**O**UTSIDE of families, few relationships are as intense as those between sports teams and their fans. In the case of England's bond with its national soccer team, it's not always been healthy.

James Graham's play "Dear England" looks at the state of the nation through the ups and downs — and there have been many downs — of England's men's soccer team. From 1966 World Cup champions to persistent underachievers dogged by a rump of hooligan supporters, the team became a source of national anxiety.

That changed under manager Gareth Southgate, who since 2016 has forged England's most cohesive squad in many years. Best known for his low-key manner and three-piece suits, Southgate transformed the team's fortunes and its culture, drawing new fans and instilling a newfound sense of pride.

That redemptive story inspired Graham to use sports "to make sense of the national moment" for a country that has been plunged into political instability and forced to question its place in the world since the U.K.'s 2016 referendum decision to leave the European Union.

"I think that there is a self-defeating tailspin we get into when we get in trouble," Graham said, referring to both soccer and society. "As demonstrated in our political system right now. We keep doubling down on the failure."

"I think we could possibly af-



Actor Joseph Fiennes, left, and writer James Graham on stage as they look at the script for the play based around the England soccer manager Gareth Southgate entitled 'Dear England'

ford ourselves a healthier response to losing whereby you then reset and reform and reinvent -- which is what Gareth tried to do," Graham told The Associated Press during a break in rehearsals.

Graham has become Britain's go-to writer for state-of-the-nation drama with an entertaining twist. He turned backroom 1970s parliamentary machinations into riveting drama in "This House," charted the rise of media mogul Rupert Murdoch in "Ink" and skewered a TV game-show cheating scandal in "Quiz." Graham also scripted "Sherwood," a TV detective drama steeped in the divisive legacy of Britain's 1980s coal miners' strike.

Actor Joseph Fiennes, who plays Southgate with quiet intensity, said "there's an absolute

sense of joy which is at the heart of James's writing" which lets the audience know "they're there to have fun."

"And when you have fun, that experience can take you to places and get you to challenge ideas about yourself -- identity, national identity, psyche, masculinity, mental health," said Fiennes, whose screen performances include the title role "Shakespeare in Love" and an authoritarian patriarch in TV drama "The Handmaid's Tale."

The play's title comes from the open letter Southgate wrote to the nation on the eve of the European championships in 2021, praising his team and their role in forging "a much more tolerant and understanding society" and stressing the sport's ability to "inspire and unite."

Graham frames it as a tale of redemption from a shattering moment in Southgate's career as a player -- his failed penalty kick in the semi-finals of the 1996 European championships that sent England out of the tournament.

Fiennes said that made Southgate "the patron saint of penalty failures" -- and gave him a deep empathy for his young players and a determination to make things better for them than they were for him.

The psychology of make-or-break penalty kicks fascinates Graham, who as a 14-year-old watched Southgate miss that shot in 1996. He said it was the first time he felt "the universe saying, just because you want it doesn't mean you deserve it, or doesn't mean it's going to happen."

"I love the metaphor of what the penalty represents, way beyond sport," Graham said. "That moment when you have to make a decision and then there's a consequence of that decision and it's how you then deal with that failure or that loss. And that could be going on a date, going for a job. It could be anything. I feel like I'm constantly walking up to a ball and making a decision."

Graham says part of "Gareth's gentle journey" has been to exorcise the "toxic tribalism" the team can attract. English soccer has become more family-friendly and its fans more diverse, helped by the inspiring success of the women's squad, the Lionesses, who won the European championship in 2022.

A year earlier, the men's team made it to the final of the Euros, but did not get a fairytale ending. Amid outbreaks of fan violence, England lost the game -- on penalties, of course -- and the young Black players who had missed their shots received a torrent of online abuse.

Not everyone welcomes the players' decision to take the knee and speak out against racism, or supports player Marcus Rashford's anti-poverty campaigning.

And Southgate still hasn't led England to a major trophy. The play ends at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where -- spoiler alert -- England lost to France in the quarter-finals.

That provides a perfect, poignant ending for a play. But Graham wishes it had been different.

"I would probably sacrifice the ending of the play that we have for England to have won the World Cup again and just got rid of that itch that we can't seem to scratch."

"Dear England" runs at the Prince Edward Theater in London until Jan. 13 and gets a cinema release across the U.K. and Ireland in January. **MDT/AP**



David Beckham and Bobby Charlton, who died this week: two greats of England's football



FOOTBALL | EPL

# Son delivers best impression of Kane to lead Spurs to win over Fulham and top of table

TOTTENHAM 2, FULHAM 0

**W**ITH a clinical finish and a neat assist, Son Heung-min delivered his best impression of Harry Kane to propel Tottenham back to the top of the Premier League yesterday [Macau time].

The 2-0 win over Fulham showed once again that Tottenham can thrive without the departed Kane this season.

Especially with Son, the player who has replaced Kane as the team's center forward, in such prolific form.

Both of Tottenham's goals came from the same source — Fulham defender Calvin Bassey giving away possession when passing out from the back under pressure — and Son had a key role in each of them.



Tottenham's Son Heung-min (right) scores his side's opening goal

In the 36th minute, the South Korea captain was on hand to collect a pass from Richarlison after Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg intercepted Bassey's clearance. Son showed great footwork to cut in-

side, around covering defender Tim Ream, and curl a shot into the far corner from the edge of the area.

The second goal, scored by playmaker James Maddison in

the 54th, was similar as Hojbjerg again stopped a pass from Bassey reaching its intended target. Bassey is a left-footed player who was deployed Monday as a right-sided center back and he misplaced both passes with his right foot.

Hojbjerg stabbed a first-time pass to Son, whose deft lay-off went into the path of Maddison and the England playmaker slotted home under former Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd Leno.

"That was what won us the game tonight, the work without the ball," Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou said. "Both our goals came from that."

Tottenham regained the two-point lead with which the team entered the weekend and remained unbeaten after nine games, along with north London rival Arsenal. It has 23 points under Postecoglou, who took over as Totte-

nham manager in the offseason, and that's the most any coach has gained from his first nine games in charge in the competition.

Kane might be pouring in the goals in Germany — he has nine in eight games for Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga — but Son is doing the same for Tottenham since being pushed up front by Postecoglou, having started the season on the left wing.

Son has seven goals, the same as Liverpool's Mohamed Salah and only two behind top scorer Erling Haaland of Manchester City.

Maddison has also slotted in seamlessly since joining from relegated Leicester in the offseason. That was his first home goal, after scoring twice on the road, and he celebrated by performing a darts pose alongside Son.

"Coming to a club like Tottenham, which is obviously a bigger club in stature than Leicester, the scrutiny, the responsibility, the pressure goes up a notch," Maddison said. "I love that. I thrive off that — 60,000 fans were here today and I love these occasions."

Fulham stayed in 13th place on 11 points.

"At the end of the day, the goals we gave away are identical," said Ream, Fulham's captain. "Players at this level will punish you if you give the ball away in those areas." **MDT/AP**



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**OPINION**

**Business Views**

Debby Wu, Bloomberg



**MOUthing OFF  
 AGAINST BEIJING**

There is a Chinese expression that describes a pair of close male friends who endure trials and tribulations, and it's probably an apt one right now to describe Foxconn founder Terry Gou and fellow tycoon Jack Ma.

Back in 2015, few would have thought of the pair as 難兄難弟 or "brothers in misfortune." At the zenith of their respective careers, they joined SoftBank Group Corp. founder Masayoshi Son onstage to help promote his robotics business in Tokyo. Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. was the undisputed leader in Chinese e-commerce and Foxconn Technology Group was an increasingly indispensable partner to Apple Inc.

Half a decade later, Ma has become almost a cautionary tale. His now infamous 2020 critique of Chinese regulation and banking ignited a chain of events that wiped out \$850 billion of value from Alibaba and his fintech pioneer Ant Group Co. Beijing, unamused, began a yearslong crackdown on the private sector that virtually flattened the world's largest tech landscape.

The lesson then was no company or personage was too important for Beijing to humble. For many, it showed Chinese President Xi Jinping clearly was less concerned with economic growth (much of which stemmed from the tech industry) than with ensuring the Communist Party's hold on power.

But Gou, who's vying for Taiwan's [leadership] next year, may have failed to absorb the lesson.

I was flabbergasted when the iPhone billionaire proclaimed in August the Party wouldn't dare touch Foxconn. It had too many foreign investors and global customers including Apple and Tesla for China to mess with, his reasoning went. It was an emotional moment. Gou — known for making off-the-cuff remarks — was at the time announcing his candidacy and responding to a question about whether Beijing could exert undue influence over him through a business empire that revolves almost entirely around China.

"If the Chinese Communist Party decides to seize Hon Hai's assets because I will not abide by its instructions, I would say, 'yes, please do it!'" Gou said, invoking Foxconn's flagship unit. "I shall not take orders from the Chinese Communist Party."

I had an ominous feeling. Beijing sees self-governing, democratic Taiwan as part of its territory, to be reclaimed at some point in the future. With a series of tax audits and land-use reviews reported in state-run media this week, the country's "mandarins" may have chosen to send a message to the Taiwanese entrepreneur. Beijing didn't explain its actions, as is often the case.

The probes have cost Hon Hai and its affiliates some \$9 billion of market value this week. Gou cancelled his only campaign event on Monday and didn't schedule a public appearance for Tuesday. His campaign office has remained silent, choosing to refer reporters to Foxconn.

That market wipeout isn't anywhere close to the vengeance wrought on Alibaba. But as with Ma, the episode represents a major test for Gou, who generated most of his \$6.5 billion fortune from making devices for Western brands like of Apple and Dell in China.

People close to the company are blaming his current troubles on the provocative comments. There's no evidence for now to believe that Foxconn's trajectory will be similar to Alibaba's, but Beijing has in past years not hesitated to exert its influence, including over overseas institutions. That could impact Apple too — it's just too early to say how.

Ma in the end had to relinquish control over Ant and Alibaba and give up the limelight. For Gou, he's likely considering the right balance between political ambition and business interests, as he weighs options to woo Taiwanese voters without provoking Beijing.

Courtesy Bloomberg

China has replaced Defense Minister Gen. Li Shangfu, who has been out of public view for almost two months, state media reported yesterday. No further information was given.

Li is the second senior Chinese official to disappear this year, following former Foreign Minister Qin Gang, who was removed from office in July with no explanation offered.

Li, who became defense minister during a Cabinet reshuffle in March, hasn't been seen since giving a speech on Aug. 29. There is no indication that the disappearances of Qin and Li signal a change in China's foreign or defense policies.

Li is under U.S. sanctions related to his overseeing weapon purchases from Russia that bar him from entering the country. China has since cut off contacts with the U.S. military, mainly in protest over U.S. arm sales to Taiwan, but also strongly implying that Washington must lift the measures against Li, which Beijing refuses to publicly recognize.

The announcement from state broadcaster CCTV said that both Li and Qin had been removed from the State Council, China's Cabinet and the center of government power. CCTV also announced Lan Fo'an's new appointment as finance minister, and Yin He'jun as science and technology minister.

AP PHOTO



A small wooden boat is towed into a port in Yangyang, South Korea

**FOUR SUSPECTED NORTH  
 KOREAN DEFECTORS  
 FOUND IN A SMALL BOAT  
 IN SOUTH'S WATERS**

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

FOUR North Koreans were found in a small wooden boat in South Korean waters yesterday in what is likely a rare case of North Koreans taking a risky sea voyage to flee to the South, Seoul officials said.

More than 30,000 North Koreans have fled to South Korea to avoid poverty and political oppression since the late 1990s. A vast majority of them have come via China and then Southeast Asian countries, and defecting by sea is uncommon because it's more dangerous.

A South Korean coast guard ship found the boat south of the two Koreas' eastern sea border yesterday morning, after a report by a fishing boat. The four people on board identified themselves as North Koreans, coast guard officials said.

South Korea's military said it secured the custody of the North Koreans in coordination with the coast guard, after chasing their boat along the sea border. A military statement said the North Koreans were suspected of defecting to South Korea, but gave no further details.

South Korean public broadcaster KBS, citing an unidentified government official, reported that the

four North Koreans — a man and three women — are members of one family. KBS said they weren't armed and didn't wear military uniforms when they were found.

South Korea's Unification Ministry declined to provide personal details of the four, saying an investigation was underway.

Defecting by sea is much more dangerous and many North Korean escapees were believed to have ended up dying after their boats sank amid bad weather.

But some still opt to use a sea route because they can defect in a group and it takes much shorter time than the China-Southeast Asian route, which typically takes weeks or months before coming to South Korea, according to Ahn Kyung-su, head of DPRKHEALTH.ORG, a website focusing on health issues in North Korea.

Ahn, who has interviewed many defectors, said that North Koreans typically slip across their country's border with China alone or in pairs without sharing their escape plans with anyone, including their family members, because of fears about arrests. Ahn said the four North Koreans found yesterday are likely from one family, who left a coastal town relatively close to the South Korea sea border the

previous day.

If they are determined to be genuine defectors, it would be the second case of North Koreans fleeing to the South by sea this year. In May, nine defected by sea off the Korean Peninsula's west coast, according to South Korea's Unification Ministry.

North Korean defectors are required to undergo questioning by South Korean authorities to determine whether their desire to resettle is genuine.

In 2019, South Korea deported two North Korean fishermen who said they wished to resettle, after determining they were criminals who had killed 16 fellow crew members. Earlier, several North Koreans were arrested after South Korean investigations concluded they were spies who had entered the country posing as defectors.

The 2019 deportation drew withering criticism by human rights groups, which argued that South Korea's liberal government at the time had hurriedly expelled the fishermen in the hopes of improving ties with North Korea, after learning North Korean authorities were pursuing them.

North Korea's state media didn't immediately report on the four North Koreans. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Iceland's prime minister and women across the volcanic island nation went on strike yesterday to push for an end to unequal pay and gender-based violence. Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir said she would stay home as part of the "women's day off," and expected other women in her Cabinet would do the same. "We have not yet reached our goals of full gender equality and we are still tackling the gender-based wage gap, which is unacceptable in 2023," she told news website mbl.is.

AP PHOTO



Spanish police said they have confiscated 11 pieces of ancient gold jewelry that were taken out of Ukraine illegally in 2016. A police statement said five people who were attempting to sell the pieces in Spain have been arrested in recent weeks. Those arrested included two Ukrainians, one of them an Orthodox Church priest, and three Spaniards. The jewelry was said to be worth 60 million euros and dated from between the eighth and fourth centuries B.C.

AP PHOTO



Panama Protesters blocked streets across Panama on Monday, demanding the government rescind a contract to continue copper mining in a biodiverse region. Teaching and construction unions led calls against the contract with environmentalists, saying continued development threatens forested land and crucial groundwater just 120 kilometers west of the capital, in the state of Colon.