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LEGAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR LEONG WENG IN CITES EQUALITY PROVISION IN LABOUR RELATIONS LAW TO DOWNPLAY ALLEGED BLACKLISTS

P3

PORTUGUESE NATIONAL DEPORTED FROM MACAU ON OVERZEALOUS POLICING

P4

CHINA WELCOMES ARAB AND MUSLIM DIPLOMATS FOR TALKS TO END WAR IN GAZA

P6



AP PHOTO



Hawaii President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. of the Philippines said the situation in the South China Sea “has become more dire” as China expands its presence in an area where multiple nations have competing territorial claims. China has showed interest in atolls and shoals that are “closer and closer” to the coast of the Philippines, with the nearest atoll about 60 nautical miles away, Marcos said.

AP PHOTO



India and Australia are set to hold talks focused on bolstering their strategic, defense and security ties yesterday in New Delhi. Australia’s foreign minister Penny Wong and defense minister Richard Marles arrived to meet with their counterparts for the second India-Australia 2+2 Dialogue, where they’re expected to discuss regional and global issues, according to a statement from India’s Ministry of External Affairs.

AP PHOTO



Argentina His legions of fans call him “the crazy” and “the wig” due to his ferocity and unruly mop of hair, while he refers to himself as “the lion.” He thinks sex education is a Marxist plot to destroy the family, views his cloned mastiffs as his “children with four paws” and has raised the possibility people should be allowed to sell their own vital organs. He is Javier Milei, Argentina’s next president. More on macaudailytimes.com.mo

More on backpage

APPS FOR ALL

New apps to be launched to expand e-governance, Secretary Cheong promises

P3



F&B
RESTAURANTS HAD FULL-HOUSES IN SEPTEMBER

P2



GAMING
NOVEMBER’S PREMIUM MASS REVENUES SURGE 37%

P3

HENGQIN SEES OVER 8.6 MILLION VISITORS TO SEPTEMBER

Hengqin has seen over 8.6 million visitors in the first nine months of the year, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. The Cooperation Zone will strengthen the synergy of the cultural tourism promotion work between the regions, and continue to participate in Macau roadshow promotion activities in the mainland.

GOV'T PLEDGES CRACKDOWN ON SCALPERS

The Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) stated that the SAR government is concerned about ticket scalping for concerts and large-scale performance events. The SAR government will also review relevant laws in a timely manner, noting that fraud cases involving online purchase of tickets for performance events have increased significantly this year.

CENTENNIAL RETROSPECTIVE OF LOK CHEONG'S ART TO OPEN FRIDAY

The exhibition "Centennial Retrospective of Lok Cheong's Art" will be inaugurated Nov. 24 at the Macao Museum of Art, with 150 artworks. The exhibition will also feature some of his sketches and his friends' works which will be exhibited for the first time. The artworks include oil paintings, watercolors, Chinese paintings, drawings, manuscripts and documents, displaying Lok Cheong's artistic career and achievements over 50 years from the 1950s. Lok Cheong (1923-2006) served as the President of the Macau Artist Society for a lengthy period of time, supporting emerging artists, and promoting cultural and artistic exchanges between the Chinese Mainland and Macau.

UM HOLDS COMPETITION ON PROGRAMMING

The Faculty of Science and Technology of the University of Macau (UM) recently held the 2023 International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) (Asia Macau Regional Contest), with the aim of promoting the exchange of programming skills. According to a statement from the UM, the regional contest in Macau drew the participation of 82 teams from 67 renowned universities and from 8 secondary schools in China. Approximately 300 students and teachers gathered at UM to compete in the regional championship and exchange ideas on programming.

POLICY ADDRESS 2024

IMPROVEMENTS REGARDING OFF-PLAN PROPERTIES LAW REVIEWED

ANTHONY LAM

PROTECTIONS for off-plan property purchases will be refined through legal means, Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong told parliament yesterday.

During his policy question session yesterday, the senior official was asked by lawmaker Ip Sio Kai about laws concerning the industry and related to real estate property transactions. Ip works as the deputy head of Bank of China, Macau Branch.

The lawmaker mentioned that under current laws, mortgages approved for off-plan properties are not well protected. He pointed out that during his multi-decade career, he has not seen laws that prioritize bank loan recovery.

Although a law has been established to facilitate preliminary registration for off-plan properties, he added, banks will only become prioritized creditors after both the construction of the properties and the property registration.

"The period in between sale of off-plan properties and official registration of real estate properties can be lengthy," the lawmaker said, emphasizing that banks are not well-protected during this period.

In response, Cheong admitted that the off-plan property law – promulgated in 2013 – has only done half the job. The rest, he said, concerns transaction prices and modes, which should



see improved governance by law.

"The process was slowed down because we wanted to take the Trust Law as a reference to handle [off-plan property transaction prices]," Cheong recalled. "However, after the promulgation of the Trust Law, industry practitioners said that they needed more time to study the effect of the law. As a result, we will continue studying the feasibility of any related laws."

The official pledged that when the government reviews the off-plan property law, provisions concerning the aforementioned areas will be proposed for approval by parliament.

Another question that Ip raised was related to judicial efficiency and legal provisions related to financial industry practices. He pointed out that many foreign-funded banks tend not to provide certain products or services "due to a misunders-

tanding of local laws," although similar products and services are provided by Chinese-funded banks.

On the other hand, the lawmaker added that there were occasions in which these foreign-funded banks complain to the Macao Association of Banks about lengthy judicial procedures concerning bankruptcy and debt recovery.

Cheong admitted that such procedures are lengthy because the interests and legal procedures involved are complex. In this regard, he added, an overhaul of existing laws and regulations is required to speed up the process.

Regarding Ip's question on sub-mortgages, Cheong said that all mortgages in Macau are officially registered, and banks have priority when disputes arise. In addition, he does not see changes in laws as necessary

when it comes to banks being notified about a property transaction. In his opinion, property transactions are usually conducted through realtors, lawyers and the public notary. These institutional procedures are effective in lowering the odds of unregistered transactions.

In his question, Ip pointed out that when a mortgaged property owner seeks a sub-mortgage, no notification needs to be made to the primary creditor, who will thus not become aware of the sub-mortgage.

On the other hand, creditor banks are not notified immediately when a mortgaged property is put up for sale. In his opinion, this poses the possibility of multiple sales of a single property at the same time, which has happened before.

Cheong has also pledged that laws related to financial activities will have ongoing improvements made to provide a stable business environment for investors and entrepreneurs from within and outside Macau.

He also highlighted that the government has promulgated two laws – the Trust Law and the reviewed Legal System governing the Financial System – during the past legislative term as a means to improve the city's business environment.

On urban renewal, Cheong said that legislation is only the first step. Both the government and the market need to investigate the most suitable way to approach each renewal project.

STATS

Restaurant takings surge in September

THE receipts of restaurants and similar establishments interviewed by the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) went up 35.9% year-on-year in September 2023, the DSEC noted in a release.

Leading the hike were Western Restaurants (+68.5%), followed by

Chinese Restaurants (+46.5%), and Local Style Cafes, Congee & Noodle Shops (+35.3%), while this increase was partially offset by the drop registered in Japanese & Korean Restaurant operations (-27.9%).

Compared month-on-month with August 2023, the receipts of the

interviewed restaurants and similar establishments showed a decrease of 13.7% in September, a fact attributed to the end of the summer holiday period.

While all types of establishments interviewed registered a decrease in receipts, Japanese & Korean Restaurants and

Western Restaurants were the ones with the greatest drop, by 24.2% and 19.7%, respectively.

As regards the business expectations for October, 31% of the interviewed restaurants and similar establishments expect their receipts to increase month-on-month due to the ex-

pected influx of visitors during the National Day golden week.

Western Restaurants and Chinese Restaurants were the most optimistic with 39% and 33% respectively of all those interviewed saying that they were expecting increases in receipts for October. **RM**

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POLICY ADDRESS 2024

Gov't to launch new apps to expand e-governance

ANTHONY LAM

A minimum of two new apps will be launched next year to help expand the digital services provided by the government, Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong said yesterday at the parliament.

Cheong attended the policy question session at the parliament yesterday afternoon.

Lawmaker Ngan Iek Hang asked about the further digitization of public services. Currently, with laws and regulations in place, a variety of government documents can be either applied for or even obtained in digital form on the government's One Account app.

Questions were raised regarding how the app can be expanded to cater to further needs. In response, Cheong pointed out that the government will launch at least two new apps to provide further services. One of the apps will target the

needs of businesses and associations.

The reason behind the need for new apps is that the existing app already has many functions. For optimization of user experience and stability, additional apps are needed to differentiate between the needs of common users and users representing businesses or associations.

Therefore, he hinted, the number of functions currently on the One Account app will likely remain unchanged. Functions related to businesses and associations will rely on the new app.

The official added that e-governance does not only rely on providing public access through the use of technology, but also on the collection and use of data "to achieve more accurate and scientific governance." He added that a personnel administration platform concerning public entities is also being constructed.

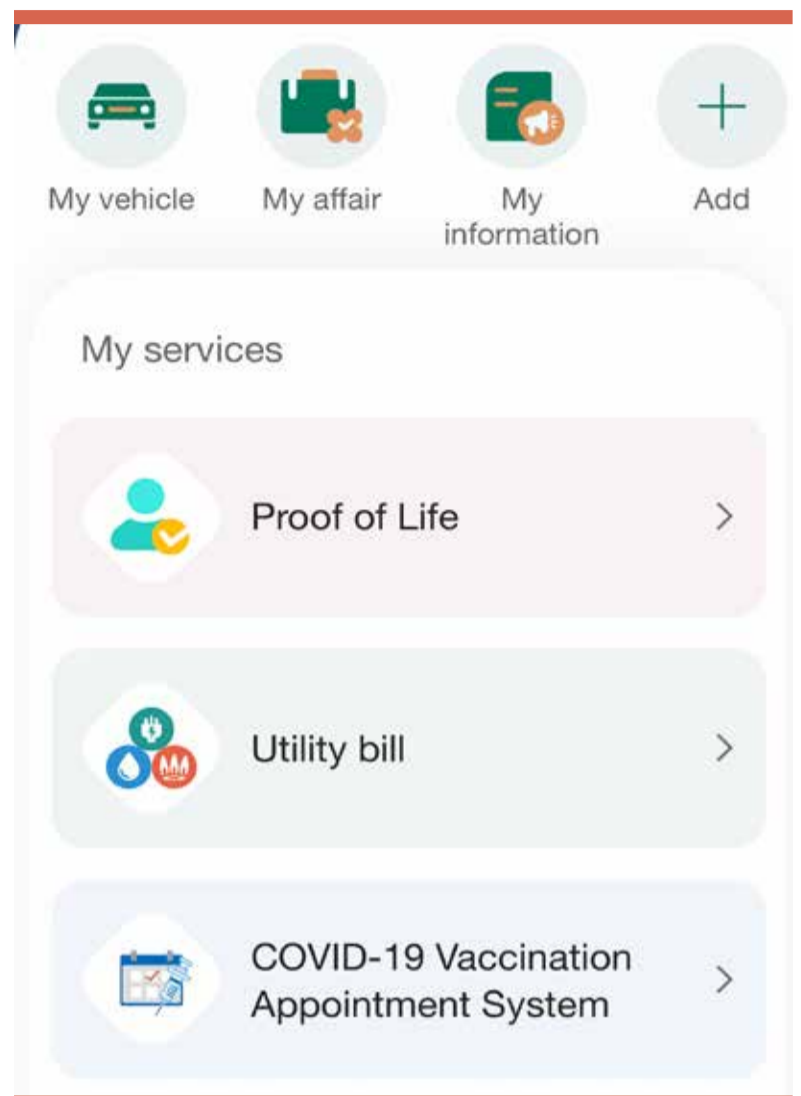
Ngan further asked how the

government would synergize digital and physical services through automatic kiosks. For example, he said, although the application for certain documents can be conducted online, a physical copy is required for certain entities. As such, he asked how 24-hour service kiosks could help in these situations.

Director Chao Wai Ieng of identification services said that seven automatic service centers will be opened next month, providing 38 services from 11 public entities. They will be located across the city.

Several lawmakers also raised questions about the publicization of government data. Director Ng Wai Han of the public administration and civil service disclosed that originally only 170 data sets were publicized. Now there are 650 sets, involving 39 bureaus or government entities.

The data sets concern topics such as healthcare, urban environment, education, social security,



public security and immigration, administration and legal affairs, entrepreneurship and business, as

well as tourism and gambling. She pledged that the government would continue to improve in this area.

DSAJ director cites equality provision to downplay alleged blacklists

ALL employees are under the protection of the principal of equality provisions in the Labour Relations Law, director Leong Weng In of Legal Affairs said yesterday, in response to a lawmaker's question on employee blacklists.

Leong attended the policy question session at the parliament yesterday afternoon with her superintendent, Secretary for Administration and Justice Andre Cheong.

Lawmaker Leong Sun Iok pointed out in his question that certain large companies, such as the casino operators, allegedly have employee blacklists consisting of candidates who are said to have committed major errors or misconduct.

Leong argued that when employees are asked to give consent to past employment and background investigations, the bargaining power is not balanced. Effectively,

they are forced to give consent in these situations.

In response to the alleged existence of employee blacklists, director Leong said that the Labour Relations Law protects all jobseekers and employees against discrimination. Whenever they are treated differently without legitimate reason, employers who discriminate unjustly against them can be subject to penalties.

However, employers usually cite past mistakes to support not hiring a candidate, she said.

She also reiterated that consent is required for the retrieval of personal information, in response to the lawmaker's question on background investigations.

She added that her bureau will work consistently with the Labour Affairs Bureau in the implementation of existing laws and any future legislative review. **AL**

GAMING

NOVEMBER'S PREMIUM MASS REVENUES SURGE 37% OVER 2019 LEVELS

THE premium mass gambling segment is experiencing a 37% increase in the average bet per player, up to HKD22,251 this November, compared to the same month in 2019 – with Galaxy emerging as a leader in the surge.

As the gaming sector is undergoing significant uptick, the growth is attributed to high-profile events and robust luxury retail spending by mainland Chinese visitors amid its economy regaining momentum.

Analysts from Citigroup noted that despite a 21% decrease in the number of gamblers, the total premium mass wager reached approximately HKD9.5 million.

The rise in wager amounts was significant during the week-long National Day Holiday where the all-time high bet per player of HKD29,633 was recorded in October.

Gaming operator Galaxy captured nearly 38% of the market share, while Sands China holds about 20%, although it saw a decline from around 20% in October to 14% in November thus far.

According to Citi, The Horizon room at Galaxy alone saw the day's highest single-room wager totaling HKD1,866,000, while players at Sands China Plaza's Apex room averaged wagers of HKD63,077 each.



The gaming industry is also benefiting from the events recently in the city, including the two-week Macau Grand Prix, and concerts by Teens in Times and Westlife.

Back in September, Citi analysts observed that the rise in revenues could be largely attributed to the abundance of whales.

Whales refers to players who wager between HKD100,000 and 500,000 per hand.

In their survey, the analysts found that the average minimum bets across Macau are on the rise, indicating an improvement in player quality within the mass sector.

GAMING TAXES AT MOP51.5 BILLION

The government has acquired more than MOP51.5 billion so far this year in gaming taxes up to October, according to data released by the Financial Services Bureau. The value exceeds the forecast for the entire year 2023, which had been set at MOP50.8 billion. Gaming taxes from January to October represent more than 50% of the total revenue that the government had estimated for this year, which was at MOP130 billion. **LV**

IMMIGRATION FOLLOWED LAW REFUSING ENTRY OF PORTUGUESE NATIONAL

RENATO MARQUES

THE Immigration Services of the Public Security Police Force (PSP) have abided by the law in the case of the Portuguese national, resident in Shenzhen, who was stopped from entering Macau last Saturday.

The problem was the expiration date of the woman's Portuguese passport, which according to the same local authorities, had less than three months validity.

As it is stated in Article 4 of the Administrative Regulation 38/2021 that refers to the rule stated in Number 2 of Article 20 of Law 16/2021, which regulates the matter, "on the date of entry into the MSAR (Macau Special Administrative Region), the minimum remaining validity period of the passport, travel document or other document admitted for migration control purposes must be more than the intended duration of stay in the MSAR, plus 90 days."

Such a requirement is also noted by the Macao Government Tourism Office on their website in the section dedicated to "Entry Requirements" to Macau.

According to the law and regulation earlier mentioned, immigration authorities can "conditionally admit other documents for immigration control" in Macau such as the Exit and Entry Permit to Travel to Hong Kong and Macau issued by the mainland authorities, as well as a Hong Kong

RENATO MARQUES



Permanent Identity Card, or Hong Kong Reentry Permit.

Other exceptions to the rule also include special documents held by aircraft or vessel crew members.

As the Portuguese national was not included in any of these exceptions and could not fulfill the entry requirements for passport holders at the time of her attempt to enter Macau she was not given permission to enter, as immigration authorities previously noted.

To the public broadcaster TDM, the woman had previously said that she had used the same passport to enter the neighboring region of Hong Kong on two occasions on the same day. Moreover, she was holding a receipt of her passport renewal issued by the Portuguese Consulate in Guangzhou, which was ignored by the police.

This is justified by the laws and regulations of Hong Kong, whose Immigration Department, unlike

that of Macau, states on their official website that, "In general, all visitors to Hong Kong must have a passport that is valid for at least one month after the period of their intended stay in Hong Kong. However, documents issued to stateless persons must be valid for a minimum of two months after the period of intended stay," a piece of travel advice that is also shared by the Hong Kong Tourism Board on their official webpage.

To TDM, the Portuguese wo-

man who was denied entry complained of a lack of communication and courtesy by the local Immigration officers who, according to her statements, did not explain to her the relevant issue and the consequences that would result. She criticized also the fact that she was deprived of her passport and placed in a room for a long period before anyone from the local authorities explained to her that she had been denied entry to Macau based on passport expiry date.

TOURISM

Visitor arrivals in October down 16% y-o-y from pre-pandemic levels



RENATO MARQUES

THE number of visitor arrivals to Macau continues to recover steadily with last month (October 2023) registering an increase of 19.8% month-to-month when compared with September this year, a release from the Statistics and Census Service notes.

Nonetheless, the total figure of 2,757,308 reached last month fell some 16.41% short of the number registered back in October 2019, with 452,443 fewer people visiting Macau this October.

From the October total, same-day visitors (1,451,703) and overnight

visitors (1,305,605) also show significant gains, particularly day visitors, as the average length of stay has dropped significantly when compared to 2022 (-0.6 days year-on-year) to 1.2 days (the same as in 2019).

To clarify, only the visitors who stay in legal hotels or hostel units in Macau are considered overnight visitors. Often the "same-day visitors" numbers include those who are in Macau over 24 hours.

It is not clear if this occurs because these visitors stay overnight with family or friends or if they are lodged in other kinds of accommodation that escape the oversight of authorities. Accommodation in homes for other than non-resident workers, residents or their guests is illegal in Macau.

As for those who stayed overnight in Macau, the

average stay was 2.3 days, decreasing by 0.9 days y-o-y when compared to 2022 and down 0.1 days when compared with 2019.

Unsurprisingly, the mainland continues to be the place of origin for the most significant share of visitors to Macau (1,949,510), that is 70.7% of the total. From this group, those traveling under the Individual Visit Scheme made up over half (1,009,269).

Last month also saw an increase in the number of visitors arriving from Hong Kong (592,325) and Taiwan (53,667), with those from HK topping the October 2019 figure (567,777).

In the first ten months of this year (Jan to Oct) the number of visitor arrivals has reached 22,685,476, with a slightly higher share of overnight visitors (11,542,405) than same-day visitors (11,143,071).

TOURISM

Hong Kong's Disneyland opens first Frozen-themed attraction, part of a \$60b global expansion

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

HONG Kong Disneyland opened its first Frozen-themed attraction yesterday, with thousands of eager visitors turning up to experience the new rides, some lining up for hours to get an early start.

Based on Disney's wildly popular Frozen animation film, the new section of the park features landscapes and characters from the movie and two new rides, a roller coaster and a boat ride that takes visitors through different scenes featured in the film.

"Over the past decade, the film has grown into one of the most successful franchises in Disney history," said Josh D'Amaro, chairman of Disney Experiences. "World of Frozen represents Hong Kong Disneyland's largest and boldest expansion since the park opened in 2005."

The opening comes after Disney announced in September a \$60 billion



expansion of its parks and cruises over about a decade. Now that Chinese tourists are venturing abroad again after the pandemic, the pandemic, the new attraction is meant to be a game changer for a theme park that has run losses for years.

Some of the hundreds of Disney fans who lined up hours ahead of time were dressed like characters from Frozen.

Disney enthusiast Bryan Darmanic, who had travelled from California with his wife and daughter, were among

the first visitors to the Frozen-themed roller coaster and received limited edition souvenirs to commemorate the experience.

"The World of Frozen is really well-designed and beautiful," said Darmanic, whose family was making its first visit to the Hong Kong theme park.

Winnie Ip, a tourist from Macao, said she arrived at 9 a.m. in the morning ahead of the opening of the Frozen section.

The Frozen attractions were "magnificent," Ip said.

Hong Kong has been beefing up the park to try and draw more visitors. In June 2022, it debuted its Momentous multimedia and fireworks show, which is staged at its castle on most nights.

Elsewhere, Disney plans to launch a Zootopia-themed area at its Shanghai Disneyland in December, a Fantasy Springs port at Tokyo DisneySea next spring and a Frozen-themed Kingdom of Arendelle at Disneyland Paris, slated to open in either 2024 or 2025. **MDT/AP**

CARS

VOGT RESIGNS AS CEO OF CRUISE FOLLOWING SAFETY QUESTIONS, RECALLS OF SELF-DRIVING VEHICLES

KYLE Vogt has resigned as CEO of Cruise, General Motors' autonomous vehicle unit, as questions build about the safety of self-driving cars.

Vogt's decision to step down, announced yesterday [Macau time], follows a recent recall of all 950 Cruise vehicles to update software after one of them dragged a pedestrian to the side of a San Francisco street in early October. The California Department of Motor Vehicles revoked the license for Cruise.

The company earlier announced it had paused operations for a review by independent experts.

"The results of our ongoing reviews will inform additional next steps as we work to build a better Cruise centered around safety, transparency and trust," the company said in a statement. "We will continue to advance AV technology in service of our mission to make transportation safer, cleaner and more accessible."

Cruise won approval to transport fare-paying passengers last year. Since then, the autonomous vehicles have drawn complaints for making unexpected, traffic-clogging stops that critics say threaten to inconvenience other travelers and imperil public safety.

Late last year, U.S. safety regulators said they were investigating reports that autonomous robotaxis run by Cruise can stop too quickly or unexpectedly quit moving, poten-

tially stranding passengers.

Problems at Cruise could slow the deployment of fully autonomous vehicles that carry passengers without human drivers on board. It also could bring stronger federal regulation of the vehicles, which are carrying passengers in more cities nationwide.

Cruise had been testing 300 robotaxis during the day when it could only give rides for free, and 100 robotaxis at night when it was allowed to charge for rides in less congested parts of San Francisco. Vogt earlier said most collisions were caused by inattentive or impaired human drivers, not the AVs.

Cruise's statement said its board had accepted Vogt's resignation. Mo Elshenawy, Cruise's executive vice president of engineering, will become president and chief technology officer. It said Craig Glidden also will serve as president and continue as chief administrative officer for Cruise, an appointment announced earlier.

GM acquired a majority stake in Cruise when it was a startup in 2016. The company invested to take 80% stake in the company in May 2021.

Vogt attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was a co-founder of Twitch, an interactive livestreaming service for content including gaming, entertainment, sports and music. Amazon acquired Twitch for about \$1 billion in 2014. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Sands China to sign MoU with MPU on smart tourism



Sands China and Macao Polytechnic University are joining forces in a bid to boost the development of smart tourism in Macau through a memorandum of understanding and the co-hosting

of a smart tourism symposium on Nov. 24 at The Londoner Macao.

The MOU aims to strengthen research on smart tourism, technological innovation, and talent development

by deepening exchanges between the academic and business sectors. The symposium will explore the opportunities and challenges for Macau in promoting the development of a smart tourism city and nurturing smart tourism technology professionals in the city.

A statement from the gaming operator noted that the event will also feature a demonstration from a new school-enterprise cooperation project that applies artificial intelligence to Macau's leisure industry. The project's tourism training software features a real-time dialogue generation system that is based on large language models.

The Ritz-Carlton, Macau announces Christmas F&B offerings



The Ritz-Carlton, Macau has announced its festive offerings for the upcoming merriest time of year.

This season, The Ritz-Carlton Café has curated a variety of menus catering to all occasions. The Sun-

day Treasure Festive Brunch Buffet guarantees a feast that delivers everything from chilled and hot seafood, to mains, sides, and a charcuterie and carving station, not to mention dozens of desserts.

The hotel will also launch Savor the Season Festive Dinner, a five-course menu, available for two evenings only, Dec. 24 and Dec. 25.

The Wonderful Afternoon Festive Intermezzo tea set will be available from Dec. 23 to Jan. 1.

Also this year, the hotel is offering a Delectable Turkey Takeaway Set that is available with advance bookings from Nov. 20 to Dec. 31, 2023.

China welcomes Arab and Muslim diplomats for talks on ending the war in Gaza

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

CHINA'S top diplomat welcomed four Arab foreign ministers and the Indonesian one to Beijing yesterday, saying his country would work with "our brothers and sisters" in the Arab and Islamic world to try to end the war in Gaza as soon as possible.

The ministers from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Indonesia chose to start a tour of world capitals in Beijing, a testament to both China's growing geopolitical influence and its longstanding support for the Palestinians.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told the foreign diplomats that their decision to start in Beijing shows their high level of trust in his nation.

"China is a good friend and brother of Arab and Islamic countries," Wang said in opening remarks at a state guest house before their talks began. "We have always firmly safeguarded the legitimate rights and interests of Arab (and) Islamic countries and have always firmly supported the just cause of the Palestinian people."

China has long backed the Palestinians and been quick to denounce Israel over its settlements in the occupied territories. It has not criticized the initial Hamas attack on Oct. 7 — which killed about 1,200 people — while the United States and others have called it an act of terrorism. However, China does have



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (foreground center) stands with his counterparts at the Diaoyutai state guesthouse in Beijing, yesterday

growing economic ties with Israel.

The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, called for an immediate cease-fire and the entry of humanitarian aid and relief to the Gaza Strip.

"There are still dangerous developments ahead of us and an urgent humanitarian crisis that requires an international mobi-

lization to deal with and counter it," he said.

He added they appreciated the resolution issued by the United Nations Security Council, calling for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses in Gaza, "but we still need more efforts and cooperation."

China — the world's second-largest economy after the U.S.

— has become increasingly outspoken on international affairs and even gotten directly involved in some recently, albeit cautiously.

In March, Beijing helped broker an agreement that saw Saudi Arabia and Iran reestablish ties after seven years of tension in a role previously reserved for longtime global heavyweights like

the U.S. and Russia.

The five foreign ministers will visit a number of capitals in an effort to pursue a cease-fire, get aid into Gaza and end the war, Prince Faisal said last weekend. The secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Hissein Brahim Taha, is also accompanying them to Beijing.

Israel's retaliatory strikes on the Gaza Strip have so far killed more than 11,500 people, according to Palestinian health authorities. Another 2,700 have been reported missing, believed buried in rubble.

"This isn't Israel's first war against the Palestinian people," said Riyad Al-Maliki, the Palestinian Authority foreign minister. "However, Israel wants this to be its last war, where it takes full control of the Palestinian people's presence on what's left of the historical land of Palestine."

Israel's ambassador to China, Irit Ben-Abba, said yesterday, that her country is allowing sufficient humanitarian aid into Gaza in collaboration with international organizations and that "putting pressure on Israel in this regard is politically motivated and is not conducive to the humanitarian assistance which is needed."

She also said that they hoped for "no one-sided" resolution by the Security Council and that they expected a clear statement calling for the "unconditional release of the 240 hostages" who were abducted by Hamas during its attacks, "rather than calling for a cease-fire." **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

Front-runner candidate picks former representative to US as running mate



William Lai (left) the candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party and Hsiao Bi-ki

THE front-runner candidate in Taiwan's top election has picked the long-term de facto ambassador to the United States as his running mate.

Government's No. 2 William Lai announced yesterday on his Facebook page the nomination of Hsiao Bi-ki — who was born in Japan to a Taiwanese father and an American mother — as his running mate in January's elections. His choice wou-

ld likely bolster support among backers of his ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which has long defied Beijing's demands to return the island under the rule of the Communist Party.

Lai and Hsiao face a divided opposition, led by the Nationalist Party, also known as the Kuomintang or KMT, that has sought to draw independent candidates to their ticket. Polls show Lai is ahead.

Lai currently serves as deputy to leader Tsai Ing-wen, who is restricted from running for a third four-year term. In his Facebook post, Tsai said Hsiao had been crucial to cooperation with the U.S., Taiwan's chief ally.

"This team, following

Tsai's eight years in power, is completely prepared to withstand all challenges, both domestically and from China," Lai's post said.

Hsiao later told a news conference that she had been prepared well to deal with a range of challenges by her upbringing, her years as a legislator representing eastern Taiwan and her eight years as Taiwan's representative in Washington.

Taiwan faces threats to its democracy from within and to its security from outside, "but there is no way I can avoid this," said Hsiao, 52, who was partly raised in New Jersey and has degrees from Oberlin College and Columbia University. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

Third release of treated water from damaged Fukushima plant ends safely, operator says

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

THE release of a third batch of treated radioactive wastewater from Japan's damaged Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean ended safely as planned, its operator said yesterday, as the country's seafood producers continue to suffer from a Chinese import ban imposed after the discharges began.

Large amounts of radioactive wastewater have accumulated at the nuclear plant since it was damaged by a massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011. It began discharging treated and diluted wastewater into the ocean on Aug. 24 and finished releasing the third 7,800-ton batch. The process is expected to take decades.

The discharges have been strongly opposed by fishing groups and neighboring countries including China, which banned all imports of Japanese seafood, badly hurting Japanese producers and exporters of



scallops and other seafood.

The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, said the third release, like the two previous ones, went smoothly and marine samples tested by it and the government showed that levels of all selected radionuclides were far lower than inter-

national safety standards.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, in a meeting last Friday with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco, asked China to immediately lift the seafood ban but achieved

only a vague agreement to "find ways to resolve the dispute through meetings and dialogue in a constructive manner."

The two sides will convene a meeting of scientific experts to discuss the release but there was no timetable for a possible lifting of the ban, Kishida said.

Japan's government has set up a relief fund to help find new markets for Japanese seafood, and the central and local governments have led campaigns to encourage Japanese consumers to eat more fish and support Fukushima seafood producers.

TEPCO is also providing compensation to the fisheries industry for "reputational damage" to its products caused by the wastewater release, and said it has mailed application forms to 580 possible compensation seekers.

The wastewater is treated to remove as much radioactivity as possible to meet legally releasable standards and then greatly diluted with seawater before it is discharged. TEPCO and the

government say the process is safe, but some scientists say the continuing release of water containing radionuclides from damaged reactors is unprecedented and should be monitored closely.

Yesterday's completion of the release of the third batch of wastewater brings the total to 23,400 tons. TEPCO plans a fourth release by the end of March 2024. That would only empty about 10 of the approximately 1,000 storage tanks at the Fukushima plant because of its continued production of wastewater, though officials say the pace of the discharges will pick up later. The tanks currently hold more than 1.3 million tons of wastewater, most of which needs to be retreated to meet safety standards before release.

TEPCO and the government say discharging the water into the sea is unavoidable because the tanks need to be removed from the grounds of the plant so that it can be decommissioned. MDT/AP

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IN MACAU (2023)



MIDDLE EAST

Yemen's Houthi rebels hijack Israeli-linked ship in the Red Sea, take 25 hostages

ISABEL DEBRE & JON GAMBRELL, JERUSALEM

YEMEN'S Houthi rebels seized an Israeli-linked cargo ship in a crucial Red Sea shipping route yesterday [Macau time] and took its 25 crew members hostage, officials said, raising fears that regional tensions heightened over the Israel-Hamas war were playing out on a new maritime front.

The Iran-backed Houthi rebels said they hijacked the ship over its connection to Israel and would continue to target ships in international waters that were linked to or owned by Israelis until the end of Israel's campaign against Gaza's Hamas rulers.

"All ships belonging to the Israeli enemy or that deal with it will become legitimate targets," the Houthis said.

Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the Houthis' chief negotiator and spokesman, later added in an online statement that the Israelis only understand "the language of force."

"The detention of the Israeli ship is a practical step that proves the seriousness of the Yemeni armed forces in waging the sea battle, regardless of its costs and costs," he added. "This is the beginning."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office had blamed the Houthis for the attack on the Bahamas-flagged Galaxy Leader, a vehicle carrier affiliated with an Israeli billionaire. It said no Israelis were on board.

The ship's Japanese operator, NYK Line, said the vessel had no cargo at the time of the hijacking. Its crewmembers are from the Philippines, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Mexico, NYK said.

Japan yesterday condemned the hijacking. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said the Japanese government was doing its utmost for an early release of the crew through negotiations with Houthi rebels, while also communicating with Israel and cooperating with the governments of Saudi Arabia, Oman and Iran.



The Galaxy Leader is seen at the port of Koper, Slovenia in Sept. 2008

The Houthis said they were treating the crew members "in accordance with their Islamic values," but did not elaborate on what that meant.

Netanyahu's office condemned the seizure as an "Iranian act of terror." The Israeli military called the hijacking a "very grave incident of global consequence."

Israeli officials insisted the ship was British-owned and Japanese-operated. However, ownership details in public shipping databases associated the ship's owners with Ray Car Carriers, founded by Abraham "Rami" Ungar, who is known as one of the richest men in Israel.

Ungar told The Associated Press he was aware of the incident but couldn't comment as he awaited details. A ship linked to him experienced an explosion in 2021 in the Gulf of Oman. Israeli media blamed it on Iran at the time.

Authorities confirmed yesterday that the captain and the first mate on the Galaxy Leader were Bulgarians.

Bulgaria's top police officer, Zhivko Kotsev, told reporters that they were in touch with their families. "Nobody has sought contact with us up to this moment," he said.

International shipping often involves a series of management companies, flags and owners stretching across the globe in a single vessel.

Two U.S. defense officials

confirmed that Houthi rebels seized the Galaxy Leader in the Red Sea on Sunday afternoon local time. The rebels descended on the cargo ship by rappelling from a helicopter, the officials said, confirming details first reported by NBC News. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter.

The ship's seizure resembles others previously conducted by Iran, which has long armed the Houthis.

Twice in the last month, U.S. warships have intercepted missiles or drones from Yemen that were believed to be headed toward Israel or posing a threat to American vessels. The USS Carney, a Navy destroyer, intercepted three land attack cruise missiles and several drones that were launched by Houthi forces toward the northern Red Sea last month.

On Nov. 15 the USS Thomas Hudner, another destroyer, was sailing toward the Bab-el-Mandeb strait when the crew saw a drone, reported to have originated in Yemen. The ship shot down the drone over the water. The officials said the crew took action to ensure the safety of U.S. personnel, and there were no casualties or damage to the ship.

Satellite tracking data from MarineTraffic.com analyzed by the AP showed

the Galaxy Leader traveling in the Red Sea southwest of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, more than a day ago. The vessel had been in Korfez, Turkey, and was on its way to Pipavav, India, at the time of the seizure reported by Israel.

It had its Automatic Identification System tracker, or AIS, switched off, the data showed. Ships are supposed to keep their AIS active for safety reasons, but crews will turn them off if it appears they might be targeted or to smuggle contraband, which there was no immediate evidence to suggest was the case with the Galaxy Leader.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which provides warnings to sailors in the Persian Gulf and the wider region, put the hijacking as having occurred some 150 kilometers (90 miles) off the coast of Yemen's port city of Hodeida, near the coast of Eritrea. It later cited a security officer with the ship's company saying the vessel had been taken to Hodeida.

The Red Sea, stretching from Egypt's Suez Canal to the narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait separating the Arabian Peninsula from Africa, remains a key trade route for global shipping and energy supplies. That's why the U.S. Navy has stationed multiple ships in the sea since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on Oct. 7. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1985 SUPERPOWERS AIM FOR 'SAFER WORLD'



The Geneva summit has ended in optimism but with no agreement on the "Star Wars" space defence system.

Both United States President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev spoke of the world being a "safer place" at the end of their two-day meeting in Switzerland.

The two men broke with convention and met together without advisers in discussions President Reagan dubbed the "fireside summit".

The negotiations have resulted in the Geneva Accord, which commits the two countries to:

- speeding up arms talks
- working towards the abolition of chemical weapons
- a new commitment to human rights

It is the first time the world's superpowers have met for six years and both countries have pledged to convene again in Washington and Moscow.

A news blackout placed on the proceedings was finally lifted when the leaders spoke at the closing ceremony and at separate news conferences afterwards.

Mr Reagan has remained firm in his refusal to stop research in the "necessary defence" of the Star Wars programme, despite the Soviet president saying the door should be "firmly shut" on weapons in space.

But both leaders were optimistic a new rapport between the old enemies had been reached.

"I came to Geneva to seek a fresh start in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union - and we have done this," President Reagan said.

And Mr Gorbachev told reporters at a news conference they should move away from confrontation.

"I would be so bold as to state that despite the fact there is as much weaponry as before, the world is nevertheless a safer place," he said.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

In December 1987 the US and USSR signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty - the first ever agreement to reduce the total number of nuclear arms since their invention.

It was followed by further accords in 1991, 1993 and 2002, which all reduced the numbers of nuclear warheads.

The Strategic Defence Initiative - Star Wars - was abandoned by President Bill Clinton in 1993 amid allegations test results had been falsified.

The programme was resurrected by President George W Bush in 2002 as the Ground-based Midcourse Defence (GMD) Test Bed.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Try to be there for someone if they need assistance. Try not to allow superiors or those in a higher position to take advantage of you.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Stay out of other people's affairs. Don't make unreasonable promises. You may find yourself in the limelight for the wrong reasons.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Travel and social activity will bring about interesting talks, not to mention contacts. You might have a problem juggling your time. Underhandedness will affect your reputation.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Listen to the complaints of others. Make money using your ingenuity and creative talent. You need time to make things better. Difficulties with your mate may lead to isolation.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Take the time to close deals that have been up in the air. Consider a conservative investment that will stay solid when everything else goes sour.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. Use discretion in your dealings and refrain from making verbal promises of any kind.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You can make progress if you deal with the right individuals. You may have a rather hectic day due to events that children are involved in.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Take positive action. You will get along well with your colleagues today. You can meet new friends who will let you know just how valuable you are.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Do something that will be stimulating and creative. They won't pay you back and you'll be upset. Take time to deal with the concerns of children.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 However, you should be concerned about what they want in return. Your unique contribution to the organization will enhance your reputation.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 A little volleyball or other outdoor sports should be on your agenda. Work quietly on your own and you will forge ahead. Use your creative abilities to come up with new ideas and directions.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 You could be quite erratic regarding your personal relationship. Changes in your home may be alarming at first. Put your efforts into physical fitness programs or competitive sports.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

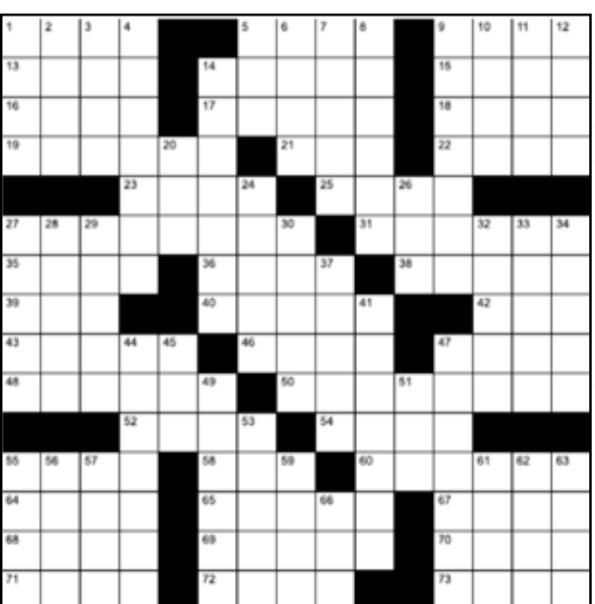
	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	1	13	cloudy
Changchun	-3	7	fine
Chengdu	8	17	overcast
Chongqing	11	19	cloudy
Fuzhou	12	24	fine
Guangzhou	11	26	fine
Guiyang	7	21	cloudy
Haikou	19	26	rain
Hangzhou	5	20	fine
Harbin	-7	2	cloudy
Hefei	5	23	fine
Nanjing	7	21	fine
Shanghai	9	19	fine
Taipei	18	23	cloudy
Wuhan	7	23	fine
Hong Kong	22	26	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-9	-6	overcast
Frankfurt	2	11	cloudy
Paris	5	12	rain
London	4	11	cloudy
New York	9	9	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Sensitivity; 5- Christiania, today; 9- Additional; 13- Chemical used on trees; 14- Taboos; 15- Actress Foch; 16- Go it alone; 17- To the left, at sea; 18- Gola of Israel; 19- Group of six; 21- ___ canto; 22- Egyptian cobras; 23- Garden pest; 25- Pulls in; 27- Rear curtain of a stage; 31- Dared; 35- Auction site; 36- Rat-___; 38- Conger catcher; 39- And not; 40- Clear; 42- First name in Notre Dame football; 43- Bring to mind; 46- Gilpin of "Frasier"; 47- Interview-wear; 48- Monger; 50- Hermits; 52- The Emerald Isle; 54- Be up and about; 55- Ferrara family; 58- Monetary unit of Burma; 60- Llama's cousin; 64- Bridle; 65- Braid; 67- On ___ with; 68- Writer Sarah ___ Jewett; 69- "Casablanca" actor; 70- Team; 71- Underworld river; 72- Cabinet dept.; 73- Cheek;

DOWN 1- Soviet news service; 2- Burn balm; 3- Ashy substance; 4- Russian revolutionary; 5- Alley ___; 6- Stuffed shirt; 7- "Arabesque" actress; 8- Stableman; 9- All together; 10- Falsehoods; 11- Short cut?; 12- Hearing organs; 14- Pure; 20- Antiquity, old-style; 24- Arose; 26- No-win situation; 27- Elaine's last name on "Seinfeld"; 28- Overhead; 29- Christmas song; 30- Nervous person, maybe; 32- Actor Kinski; 33- Creepy; 34- Mild oaths; 37- Wearies; 41- Prescribe; 44- Brand of facial tissue; 45- Always, poetically; 47- Exceed; 49- Small wave; 51- Like Abner; 53- Thermoplastic yarn; 55- Archer of myth; 56- Spanish muralist; 57- Very small; 59- Bern's river; 61- Capital city of Western Samoa; 62- Scoundrels; 63- Mars' Greek counterpart; 66- Like some vbs.

Yesterday's solution



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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Hellene Garden
 HKD 13,000/mth 3 bed 2 bath

AP PHOTO



ABALONE

A CURIOUS SOUTH AFRICAN SEA SNAIL IS A PRIZED DISH IN ASIA – THAT HAS MEANT A TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION

GERALD IMRAY, HAWSTON

NEARLY every house in Hawston has a boat in its yard, sometimes two.

It takes a moment to realize many are out of action, grass sprouting through holes in hulls that haven't touched water for years. They are relics of another time, when people fished for their livelihood and the ocean provided more than enough.

Those languishing boats and other economic problems in Hawston are the result of changes in the market to South African abalone, a curious fist-sized sea snail that is a highly prized morsel in East Asia and the unwitting instigator of 30 years of trouble for fishing communities along Africa's southern coast. Abalone here was abundant and especially tasty, yet the demand largely put the village and its traditional fishers out of business, or made them criminals overnight.

Raphael Fisher was born into fishing, as just about everyone was in Hawston. He grew up diving for the abalone that South Africans call perlemoen — or, affectionately, “perly” — in the rocky coves. He was learning to work his father's boat in his late teens. Every boy wanted to be a perly fisher in Hawston, he said. It was the thing.

But over the last three decades, poachers have swept in and swept up every snail they could find —

every sackful a fat payday. They can get \$50 a kilogram. It's reduced the endangered South African abalone to unprecedented low levels, wildlife groups say.

At first, the South African government banned abalone fishing completely. Now, strict quotas give Fisher and other small operators lucky enough to get them the rights to catch 120 kilograms a year. Hardly anything.

“The fishing has all been taken away,” he said. “It's totally different now. They took the bread out of people's mouths.”

It's why a different poaching — not for big profits, but to put food on the table — has also ensnared so many traditional fishers up and down this coast. Fisher faced that temptation.

GANGS AND GOURMETS

A 2022 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime estimated the illegal trade heading to the hub of Hong Kong was worth nearly \$1 billion between 2000 and 2016, and growing.

The total legal abalone fishing quota in South Africa is set at a maximum of 100 metric tons a year. Hong Kong is importing between 2,000-3,000 metric tons of illegal South African abalone a year, the report estimated. Some is moved on to other big markets in China, Japan and Taiwan.

Organized crime and turf ba-

ttles over illegal abalone that are sometimes marked by brutal gang killings have overwhelmed South African coastal communities. Thousands of poor young men have been drawn in as foot soldiers.

Hawston and its troubles are likely unknown in Hong Kong, where the high-class Forum restaurant offers cooked South African abalone at \$190 a can for customers to take away. Abalone is more than a delicious treat for millions of Chinese, said Wendy Chan, managing director at the Lamma Rainbow, a local seafood restaurant on Hong Kong's Lamma Island.

“It carries a symbolic meaning,” Chan said. “After you have abalone, you will become wealthy or it will bring you good luck in the upcoming year.”

It's a sign of prestige or something you would give as a gift. Chan also rates South African abalone highly, as so many do, with its rich taste and slightly chewy texture.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature says nearly half of all abalone shellfish species around the world are threatened with extinction, many affected by pollution and climate change and part of the larger story of devastation of marine wildlife.

Danie Keet, chairman of the Community Against Abalone

Poaching group, has seen gang-related abalone poaching play out for 15 years in nearby Gansbaai, another South African coastal town. The poachers arrive in groups in broad daylight on pickup trucks and in their wetsuits, rubber duck boats towed behind them, he said.

It's highly organized. Divers prize the abalone off the reefs and get them to shore in bags. Runners hide them in the dunes for others to take to stash houses. Lookouts watch for police and can warn the divers, who keep cellphones with them sealed watertight in condoms.

They are all the first cogs in a \$60 million-a-year illicit business, according to the TRAFFIC Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network.

Keet said authorities don't have the resources to patrol hundreds of miles of coastline and the poaching has become embedded.

“In the beginning they used to dive at night a lot. That changed as they noticed that they can just get away with it,” Keet said.

The demand has spurred an alternative to wild abalone — farmed abalone. HIK Abalone has a total of around 13 million abalone at any one time at their two south coast farms.

Abalone as far as the eye can see — from tiny specks to as big as your hand — in rows and rows of open-top tanks. None have felt the ocean or a rock. Here, they

cruise surprisingly quickly under black plastic cones they have for underwater hiding places. They are bred, fed and set to be killed at the farm to be shipped, dried or canned, to Hong Kong, a few exported live for high-end customers.

ABALONE FARMS

Farms are tinkering with the abalone life cycle by selective breeding to get them to grow to a size they can be sold and eaten as fast as possible, said HIK CEO Bertus van Oordt.

“Our main aim is to get them bigger, faster,” van Oordt said.

The farms that have sprouted up have no role in conservation. Van Oordt said he would like to do something, but it's unclear what effect the tank-bred abalone may have in the wild. Van Oordt said he is also unwilling to put abalone in the sea “to create a bigger poaching environment.”

“If the government comes up with a plan so we can protect what we put back in, we'll be in,” van Oordt said. “We'll give the abalone for free.”

Officially, authorities are sticking to fishing quotas for now, but there are signs of change after a government-led meeting of all players early this year, said Markus Burgener, a senior program coordinator at TRAFFIC. It was “the most positive development I've seen for years and years,” Burgener said.

The key, Burgener said, must be involving communities like Hawston instead of shutting them out.

Faced with the choice of his life when abalone fishing was banned and poaching ramped up, Fisher, 53, found another way. He works at the HIK farm.

His distrust of the system stems from the fact his father, a pioneer of Hawston's fishing community for years, was denied a quota, his livelihood cut off with a swipe of a pen from someone in an office.

The younger Fisher's job at HIK has enabled him to keep two small fishing boats going. They are guarded in his yard by two of his other prized assets, dogs Zara and Toby, growing precautions against the crime born out of the unemployment and poverty of Hawston.

Hawston's harbor is broken-down, the scarcity of abalone leaving it far less used. A spray of graffiti on one of the walls still announces, “We Love Hawston.”

Fisher does fish his abalone quota, banding together in a small consortium with others to share costs, but it's a part-time affair now. With sunglasses perched on top of a baseball cap, he scans the sky and the sea as his father might have, assessing what weather is coming and if he can go fishing this weekend. Not necessarily for abalone. Just fishing.

“When it's in you, it's in you,” he said. **MDT/AP**

FOOTBALL | EURO2424 QUALIFIERS

Belgium's Lukaku scores 4 goals to set record, Portugal's perfect 10

JOSEPH WILSON

BELGIUM striker Romelu Lukaku scored four first-half goals to lead a 5-0 rout of 10-man Azerbaijan in their final European Championship qualifying game yesterday [Macau time], and Serbia locked up its spot at Euro 2024 after drawing 2-2 with Bulgaria.

Spain's 3-1 win over Georgia was overshadowed by Barcelona midfielder Gavi suffering what appeared to be a serious injury to his right knee.

Lukaku leads scoring in the qualifiers with 14 goals, four more than Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo and five ahead of France's Kylian Mbappe.

Lukaku's haul is a record for a European Championship qualifying campaign, beating the previous mark of 13 goals held by Poland's Robert Lewandowski (in Euro 2016 qualifying) and Northern Ireland's David Healy (in Euro 2008 qualifying).

The Roma striker took all four

AP PHOTO



of his goals between the 17th and 37th minutes in an awesome display of clinical finishing.

"It was an outstanding performance by Romelu," Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco said. "He scored with every shot. You can't do better."

Following Lukaku's opener to make it 1-0, Azerbaijan went down to 10 players in the 24th after Eddy Pascual got his second

yellow card.

Belgium had already qualified along with Austria from Group F before the game in Brussels, but the victory meant it finished in first place with 20 points from eight games, one point more than Austria. Sweden beat Estonia 2-0 and ended up third in the group.

Lukaku, who was also celebrating his son's birthday, said that his team was poised to "go far" in

Germany.

Lukaku started qualifying by scoring a hat trick against Sweden in March. The 30-year-old striker only failed to score in one of the eight qualifying games. Azerbaijan frustrated him in September in a 1-0 win for Belgium.

He has also scored nine goals in 14 games for Roma since he was loaned to the Italian club from Chelsea in the offseason.

GAVI HURT

Ferran Torres scored one goal after setting up Robin Le Normand's opener in Spain's win to finish atop Group A.

Gavi was in tears when he limped off the field in the 24th minute in Valladolid.

Gavi's goal for Spain in a 1-0 win at Norway in October had already secured spots for both Spain and Scotland at next year's tournament in Germany.

The 19-year-old Barcelona player took a hard hit to the side of his right knee when he and a Georgia player collided a few minutes before he had to come off. He kept playing and appeared to hurt the same leg while trying to control a ball. After that he immediately signaled to the team that he could not continue.

Scotland was second with 17 points after it drew 3-3 with Norway in a Glasgow thriller.

PERFECT 10

Bruno Fernandes and Ricardo Horta scored in Portugal's 2-0 win over Iceland in Lisbon to make it a clean sweep of 10 wins in as many qualifiers for Roberto Martinez's team.

Slovakia beat Bosnia and Herzegovina 2-1 also in Group J, and Luxembourg beat Liechtenstein 1-0.

Portugal and Slovakia had already qualified. **MDT/AP**

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FOOTBALL | BASKETBALL | DAILY TRAININGS

OPINION

The Conversation

Aimee Pugh Bernard,
 University of Colorado



IMMUNE HEALTH IS ALL ABOUT BALANCE

For immune health, some influencers seem to think the Goldilocks philosophy of “just right” is overrated. Why settle for less immunity when you can have more? Many social media posts push supplements and other life hacks that “boost your immune system” to keep you healthy and fend off illness.

However, these claims are not based on science and what is known about immune function. Healthy immune systems don't need to be “boosted.” Instead, the immune system works best when it is perfectly balanced.

Your immune system requires a delicate balance to operate properly. When it's out of balance, your immune system itself can cause disease.

The immune system is the mobile defense system of your body. It is a complex network of cells and organs that work together to protect your body from infection and disease. Your immune cells are continually on patrol, traveling throughout your body looking for infectious invaders and damage.

New immune cells are created in your bone marrow. Certain immune cells – called B and T cells – are the special forces of the immune system, playing an important role in the elimination of infectious invaders. Because of this role, these cells undergo a rigorous boot camp during their development to ensure they will not discharge friendly fire on healthy cells in the body.

Any B cell or T cell exhibiting activity against the self – or autoreactivity – is killed during training. Millions of newly created B and T cells are killed every day because they fail this training process. If these self-reactive cells escape destruction, they could turn against the body and carry out an inappropriate autoimmune attack.

My research investigates how B cells are able to slip past the checkpoints the immune system has in place to guard against autoreactivity. These tolerance checkpoints ensure that autoreactive immune cells are either purged from the body or held in permanent lockdown and unable to engage in inappropriate responses that would target healthy tissue.

You've likely seen advertisements for dietary supplements that promise to “boost immune function.” While this may sound appealing, it is important to keep in mind that the immune system functions best when perfectly balanced.

If the immune system is like a thermostat, turning it up too high results in overactivation and uncontrolled inflammation, while turning it down too low results in a failure to respond to infection and disease.

Because sustaining immune balance is critical, tinkering with the immune system through the use of supplements is not a good idea unless you have a clinical deficiency in certain vital nutrients.

Eating a well-balanced diet, exercising regularly, reducing stress and getting decent sleep, on the other hand, can help your body maintain a functioning and healthy immune system. Although these lifestyle behaviors are not foolproof, they contribute to overall good health and ultimately to a more healthy immune system.

In reality, vaccines are the only safe and effective tool beyond healthy lifestyle behaviors to support your immune system. Vaccines contain harmless forms of pathogens that help to train your immune cells to recognize and fight them. When you come into contact with the real and harmful version of the pathogen out in the wild – whether it's at a grocery store, social event or school – at a later date, these fully trained immune memory cells will immediately begin to fight and destroy the pathogen, sometimes so quickly that you don't even realize you've been infected.

In a world where people are continually bombarded by the marketing mantra that more is better, rest assured that when it comes to the immune system, maintaining perfect balance is just right.

[Abridged]

HEAVY FIGHTING BREAKS OUT AROUND ANOTHER GAZA HOSPITAL AS BABIES EVACUATED TO EGYPT

THE BUZZ

Heavy fighting erupted around a hospital in northern Gaza where thousands of patients and displaced people have been sheltering for weeks, as Israel pressed an offensive it says is aimed at eradicating Hamas and uprooting their militant infrastructure.

A shell struck the second floor of the Indonesian Hospital, killing at least 12 people, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza and a medical worker inside the facility. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

The advance came a day after the World Health Organization evacuated 31 premature babies from Shifa Hospital. At least 28 were transported

to Egypt yesterday. More than 250 critically ill or wounded patients remain stranded at the compound, which Israeli forces stormed days ago.

The plight of Gaza's hospitals is at the focus of a battle of narratives over the war's brutal toll on Palestinian civilians, thousands of whom have been killed or buried in rubble since the conflict was sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7 rampage into southern Israel.

Israel says Hamas uses civilians as human shields and operated a major command hub inside and beneath Shifa, while critics say Israel's siege and relentless aerial bombardment amount to collective punishment of the territory's 2.3 million Palestinians.



Sam Altman participates in a discussion during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Summit, last week

OPENAI'S NEW CEO SAYS HE'S LAUNCHING INVESTIGATION INTO ALTMAN'S FIRING

COURTNEY BONNELL, LONDON

THE new head of ChatGPT maker OpenAI said yesterday that he would launch an investigation into the firing of co-founder Sam Altman and work to reform the company's management following a corporate shakeup that shocked the artificial intelligence world.

The developments come after a weekend of drama and speculation about how the power dynamics would shake out at OpenAI, whose chatbot kicked off the generative AI craze by producing human-like text, images, video and music.

It ended with former Twitch leader Emmett Shear taking over as OpenAI's interim chief executive and Microsoft announcing it was hiring Altman and OpenAI co-founder and former President Greg Brockman to lead a new advanced AI research team.

Despite the rift between the key players behind ChatGPT and the company they helped build, both Shear and Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella tweeted that they are committed to their partnership.

Microsoft invested billions of dollars in the startup and helped provide the computing power to run its AI systems. Na-

della wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that he was “extremely excited” to bring on the former executives of OpenAI and looked “forward to getting to know” Shear and the rest of the management team.

In reply on X, Altman said “the mission continues,” while Brockman posted, “We are going to build something new & it will be incredible.”

OpenAI said Friday that Altman was pushed out after a review found he was “not consistently candid in his communications” with the board of directors, which had lost confidence in his ability to lead the company.

In a post yesterday on X, Shear said he would hire an independent investigator to look into what led up to Altman's ouster and write a report within 30 days.

“It's clear that the process and communications around Sam's removal has been handled very badly, which has seriously damaged our trust,” wrote Shear, who co-founded Twitch, an Amazon-owned livestreaming service popular with video gamers.

He said he also plans in the next month to “reform the management and leadership team in light of recent departures into an effective force” and speak with employees, investors

and customers.

After that, Shear said he would “drive changes in the organization,” including “significant governance changes if necessary.” He noted that the reason behind the board removing Altman was not a “specific disagreement on safety.”

OpenAI last week declined to answer questions on what Altman's alleged lack of candor was about. Its statement said his behavior was hindering the board's ability to exercise its responsibilities.

An OpenAI spokeswoman didn't immediately reply to an email yesterday seeking comment. A Microsoft representative said the company would not be commenting beyond its CEO's statement.

After Altman was pushed out Friday, he stirred speculation that he might be coming back into the fold in a series of tweets. He posted a photo of himself with an OpenAI guest pass on Sunday, saying this is “first and last time i ever wear one of these.”

Hours earlier, he tweeted, “i love the openai team so much,” which drew heart replies from Brockman, who quit after Altman was fired, and Mira Murati, OpenAI's chief technology officer who was initially named as interim CEO. **MDT/AP**



USA A federal appeals court is hearing arguments today [Macau time] on whether to reinstate a gag order against Donald Trump in the federal case charging him with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. Prosecutors with special counsel Jack Smith's team will urge a three-judge panel of the Washington-based appeals court to put back in place an order barring the former president from making inflammatory statements about lawyers in the case and potential witnesses.



USA Former first lady Rosalynn Carter, the closest adviser to Jimmy Carter during his one term as U.S. president and their four decades thereafter as global humanitarians, has died at the age of 96. The Carter Center said she died Sunday (yesterday, Macau time) after living with dementia and suffering many months of declining health. The statement said she “died peacefully, with family by her side” at 2:10 p.m. at her rural Georgia home of Plains.



France Holding olive branches and white banners, French performers from different religious and ethnic backgrounds led thousands of people on a silent march through central Paris on Sunday to call for peace between Israelis and Palestinians and unity in France. The crowd, which included actors Isabelle Adjani and Emmanuelle Beart as well as singers and other cultural figures, marched from the Arab World Institute toward the Museum of Art and History of Judaism, located across the Seine River.