



EDUCATION: MACAU'S PERFORMANCE IN THE THREE CORE SUBJECTS HAS MAINTAINED A STEADY UPWARD TREND: PISA

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GOV'T REPORTS LOSSES OF MOP6.55 BILLION FROM INVESTMENTS

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CHINA RAISES STAKES IN CYBERSCAM CRACKDOWN IN MYANMAR, THOUGH LOOPHOLES REMAIN

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AP PHOTO



Philippines A passenger bus lost control while negotiating a downhill curve in a central Philippine mountain village and plunged into a deep ravine, killing at least 16 people and injuring 12 others, officials said yesterday. Eight of the wounded in the accident, which happened Tuesday afternoon in Hamtic town in the province of Antique, were in critical condition at a local hospital, officials said.

AP PHOTO



Dubai Russian President Vladimir Putin began his trip to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as Dubai hosts the United Nations' COP28 climate talks — despite facing an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court over the war in Ukraine. Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE has signed the ICC founding treaty, meaning they don't face any obligation to detain Putin.

AP PHOTO



The Netherlands announced it would support Ukraine in 2024 with a 2.5 billion euros allocation, as the 21-month war drags into another winter and concerns grow that Kyiv's war effort may falter without continued Western support. Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot announced the allocation during a visit to Ukraine. "Be assured of our support," she said at a press conference after a meeting with her Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba.

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ANTHONY LAM



Activist Mary Davis calls for wider employment opportunities for persons with disabilities who have 'great deal of talent' in an exclusive interview with the Times

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71.19%

LAS VEGAS SANDS UPS STAKE IN CHINA UNIT

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EDUCATION

MACAU STUDENTS SCORE AMONG THE WORLD'S BEST ON PISA 2022

RENATO MARQUES

Local students have achieved high scores in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Focused on measuring 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges, the local students have put Macau among the best countries and regions of the world. Macau came second in mathematics, third in science and seventh in reading skills among 81 countries and regions around the globe.

Macau was only surpassed in mathematics by Singapore and in science by Singapore and Japan, with the city-state topping the scores in all three categories of PISA 2022 tests.

Although the results show that Macau students are among the very best of the 690,000 secondary-level students who took the tests, Macau's results also show drops in the scores except for science.

In mathematics, Macau scored 552 points (6 points less than in PISA 2018), while in reading, local students achieved a score of 510



points (15 points less than in PISA 2018). The score in science (543 points) was the same as four years ago.

The scores put Macau well above the average for OECD countries and regions and even above some neighboring regions such as Hong Kong or Taiwan, although these also scored results in the top 10 for all categories, except for Hong Kong in reading (11th overall).

The inequalities among Asian countries and regions are also well displayed in the PISA 2022 report that has at both the top and

the bottom several Asian countries and regions.

As one example, Cambodia was the country that scored lowest in all three categories with the Philippines also being in the last three to six positions of the list.

On the results obtained by Macau students, the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau (DSEDJ) is said to be very pleased with the outcome and performance, noting that globally Macau was in second place worldwide, just behind Singapore, a record that DSEDJ described as "historic."

Besides the overall score, the DSEDJ also noted that the local education system has achieved success in reducing the gap between students from socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds.

"Among high-performing countries/economies, Macau has the weakest relationship between students' literacy performance and socioeconomic status (i.e., the impact of socioeconomic and cultural context on students' mathematics literacy performance is relatively smaller)," DSEDJ said.

"Macau's socioeconomically disadvantaged students outperformed students with similar situations in different countries/economies, and even outper-

med many of the more advantaged students in the participating countries/economies," the bureau added, citing the conclusion of OECD report that considered the local education system of high quality in terms of fairness and inclusion.

STUDENTS' COMPETENCIES TRENDING UP

The Macau-China PISA Study demonstrates that in the past 20 years, Macau's performance in the three core competencies has maintained a steady upward trend, according to national project manager Cheung Kwok Cheung.

According to the scholar, who is a professor at the University of Macau, Macau's grade repetition rate has dropped in recent years. He said there is also an increase in the number of students studying at the same age in the same grade, which significantly increases students' sense of belonging.

TOP 10 BEST PERFORMERS IN PISA 2022

Position	Mathematics	Science	Reading
1	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore
2	Macau	Japan	Ireland
3	Taiwan	Macau	Japan
4	Hong Kong	Taiwan	South Korea
5	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan
6	South Korea	Estonia	Estonia
7	Estonia	Hong Kong	Macau
8	Switzerland	Canada	Canada
9	Canada	Finland	USA
10	Netherlands	Australia	New Zealand

Gov't launches tender to rent 30 commercial spaces in public housing buildings

The Housing Bureau (IH) yesterday launched a public tender to rent 30 vacant commercial spaces in public housing developments.

In a press statement, the IH said the spaces are intended for food and beverage establishments or other general shops and commercial activities.

According to IH, the idea is to liven up the area and, at the same time, allow residents from the buildings to have easier access to the goods and services necessary for their daily lives.



The bureau said that the offers will be done by way of a verbal bidding (auction), in which there is a

base value attributed by the government, with bids matching or increasing the price until a final price is

achieved.

Those who wish to submit bids will have to register in advance, with the deadli-

ne at 5:30 p.m. on Jan. 5, 2024.

The 30 commercial spaces on tender are located in the Peninsula at Fai Chi Kei Public Housing buildings - Fai Fu Building, Fai Ieng Building, Ilha Verde Public Building, and Mong Ha Public Housing - Mong Tak Building; as well as in Taipa Public Housing buildings - Iat Seng Building and Lago Building. Some of the commercial spaces are also located in Coloane's Seac Pai Van Public Social development - Lok Kuan Building and Ip Heng Building.

Of the 30 spaces, 19 have been assigned for general commercial purposes, while the other 11 are to be dedicated to food and beverage establishments.

The IH also notes that among the 11 spaces for food and beverage venues, six are not permitted to use gas for cooking.

The area of the spaces for rent vary between 21 square meters and about 359 square meters.

The cheaper space will go on the bid with a base price of 5,000 patacas, while the most expensive has a minimum value for the first bid of 60,500 patacas.

Contenders will bid upwards in multiples of 500 patacas.

Interested parties should register to bid with IH. **RM**

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EXCLUSIVE | MARY DAVIS

Special Olympics global chief: First-hand experience promotes hiring people with disabilities

ANTHONY LAM

EXPERIENCING the qualities of Special Olympics athletes will help SME employers decide to hire them, Mary Davis, CEO of Special Olympics International, said in an exclusive interview with the Times.

The Special Olympics – including its Macau branch – is not only a sporting event organizer but is also a service provider supporting people with intellectual disabilities. It has long helped participants find employment.

Davis said that besides sports training, the organization also provides vocational training for athletes.

“Skills such as teamwork, time-keeping, collaboration and leadership are cultivated in our athletes,” Davis said. “These skills are all transferrable to everybody’s daily lives.”

Over 95% of Macau businesses are micro, small and medium-sized. To them, each employee is vital and they expect everyone to use their own abilities to the utmost. This may discourage these SMEs from hiring Special Olympics athletes as well as other candidates with disabilities.

To combat the situation, Davis cited communication as the key.

“I would first ask them to invite our athletes to meet and speak to other employees at the company, so everybody can see the values that [the athletes] will bring [to the company],” Davis said. “[The company] can see their joy, passion and enthusiasm that are comparable to other people’s.”

Athletes will also have the chance to share their first-hand knowledge and experience with the company, so that the company can better understand their qualities. In Davis’s experience, employers have spoken highly about the values that Special Olympics athletes have brought to their companies.

Volunteering for the Special Olympics is also a way to trigger incentives for hiring Special Olympics athletes, Davis added,



because through these activities both employers and employees can interact with athletes and better understand their abilities.

Support for parents is also crucial. Recently, an education and information-based app has been built to provide support to new parents and their families with intellectually disabled children, so that they will have more knowledge and understanding of the particular types of disabilities their children experience.

“It could be Down Syndrome or autism, but we explain the different types of disabilities,” Davis explained. “We also introduce them to the Special Olympics and related programs.”

It is also important, Davis added, that the app familiarize them with the strengths and talents that these children possess.

“It’s a stigma to have children with intellectual disabilities, but we want to show that there should not be any shame,” Davis said. “These people have a great deal of talent and abilities, and with necessary opportunities, training and education, they can excel across a broad range of areas.”

She then recounted that in last Sunday’s marathon, an athlete from the local Special Olympics completed the half marathon in two hours, while the other two competitors finished the race. She also said that when Special Olympics athletes compete, their differences – if any – cannot be discerned from their appearance or performance.

“**These people have a great deal of talent and abilities, and with necessary opportunities, training and education, they can excel across a broad range of areas**

MARY DAVIS
CEO OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS INTERNATIONAL

Sports bring self-confidence and self-esteem to Special Olympics athletes, Davis added. The athletes’ families also experience great pride in their children.

In addition to this, peer groups are also provided to help parents and children with early diagnosis and interventions.

Davis said the organization provides training to healthcare workers so they become familiar with people with intellectual disabilities. There are many occasions, she said, in which healthcare workers and clinicians do not understand or appreciate that their patients are actually intellectually disabled. Many healthcare workers may consider their autistic patients as being merely uncontrollable, introverted or badly behaved.

In addition, the organization operates regular health check-ups for their athletes. Davis said many people with intellectual disabilities do not understand that the discomfort or inconvenience they experience from physical illnesses or conditions

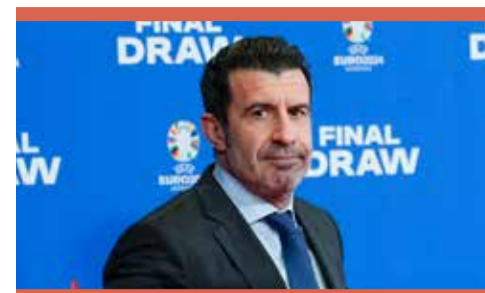
are preventable, curable and unnecessary.

For example, she said, a person suffering blurred eyesight may consider this normal until an ophthalmologist runs tests on them and confirms their eye problems – be that short-sightedness or long sightedness – to them. Only then will they get proper treatment and prescriptions.

The Macau Special Olympics runs a similar healthcare program in partnership with local clinicians.

Of the 32 sports that the Special Olympics International offers, 14 are available in Macau. The criterion for offering a sport is mainly the capability of providing that sport in a particular jurisdiction. There are 2,000 athletes in Macau, but the organization is striving to reach out to more people with intellectual disabilities.

Davis added that the organization has not established age limits on its athletes, adding that provided the athletes are physically fit, they will be able to “be the best in what they can do.”



LUÍS FIGO TO JOIN SPORTS COLLECTORS CONVENTION

The “Asian Sports Collectors Convention” is set to feature legendary Portuguese football star, Luís Figo. The convention, which starts tomorrow and ends Dec. 10, will include football stars and influencers from various regions to promote the culture of trading cards. Considered to be one of the greatest players of his generation, the 51-year-old professional footballer won Ballon d’Or in 2000 and the Golden Foot award in 2011. He retired from professional football in 2009. The convention “combines investment and sports collectibles, covering an area of 8,000 square meters with over 400 card vendors,” according to organizers.

MGTO PLEDGES TO STRENGTHEN DEVELOPMENT IN GASTRONOMY

The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) has pledged to continue to steer the city’s development as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy towards “deeper progress, [to] strengthen international marketing measures, and organize mega gastronomic events and training programs.” In the recently convened “Macao-Creative City of Gastronomy” 2023 work meeting, MGTO director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said the office will capitalize on Macau’s background and current resources to “promote diversified development between “tourism + gastronomy.” At the meeting, officials of various governmental entities and industry delegates reported on their work progress and relevant tasks underway to advance Macau’s tourism development.

OVER 1,300 APPLICATIONS FOR SENIORS HOUSING RECEIVED

The Social Welfare Bureau has received 1,319 applications for the residences for senior citizens, which are under construction in Areia Preta. The applications have come from around 1,800 residents. More applications are expected for the first batch of 759 apartments, according to the IAS. The first batch of approved work is scheduled for completion in May 2024, and the bureau is trying to finish it as quickly as possible so that seniors can move in as soon as possible. The housing will be put into service in 2024. There are 1,815 residential units in the apartment block, and each residential unit is equipped with basic household equipment.

OPERATION FINDS SIX ILLEGAL HOSTELS

A joint operation between the Public Security Police and the Macao Government Tourism Office to crack down on illegal hotels found six units suspected of illegally providing accommodation in the ZAPE area and Taipa. Authorities intercepted six people involved in illegal activities as the investigation confirmed that it was an illegal hostel. In an operation from Nov. 20 to Nov. 27, authorities found 36 people involved in illegal activities including illegal currency exchange and overstaying.

GAMING

LVS increases shares in Sands China

LAS Vegas Sands is increasing its holdings in Sands China, the Las Vegas-based gaming company announced in a regulatory filing with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (HKSE).

The company said that via a holding company known as Venetian Venture Development Intermediate II, it is purchasing USD24.31 million worth of Sands China equity.

"For illustration purposes, based on the closing price of HKD20.20 per share as quoted on The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong Limited on the date of the Share Purchase Transaction, the Funding Amount equals the total price of approximately 96,600,247 shares, representing approximately 1.19% of the total issued shares," according to the filing.

Based on that 1.19%, Sands' ownership of the China unit increases to 71.19% from 70%.

Meanwhile, as analysts are forecasting top-line growth for Macau operators, Sands' move to up its stake in Sands China proves prescient.

"While it might be intuitive to link Macau's mass gross gaming revenue (GGR) growth potential to China's GDP, historical data suggest a weak correlation. Visitation, gaming spending and time spent at casinos together have a more significant correlation with Macau's mass GGR," observed Citi analyst George Choi in a recent note to clients.

As cited in a Casino.org report, Choi's comments on mass market GGR are important to Sands China because mass and premium mass in Macau are already flirting with pre-pandemic levels and because Sands China is one of the dominant operators in those two segments. LV

GAMING

CASINOS FACE LOWEST TRADING LEVELS SINCE BORDER REOPENING

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU concessionaires are trading at rock-bottom valuations since earlier this week as operators were saddled with declines of at least 20% since the beginning of the year.

Although casino operators' revenues and profits are rebounding following the reopening of borders on Jan. 8, stocks prices have taken a downturn.

On Monday, only MGM saw an increase, rising 1% between Jan. 1 and Dec. 4, while the rest of the operators looked downhill.

SJM Holdings has witnessed the steepest decline, down 48%, followed by Melco Resorts & Entertainment, with a 38% plunge.

Galaxy Entertainment Group and Sands China, who ranks as the third-best performer of the six, have experienced falls of 21% and 22%, respectively. Wynn Macau has slipped 32%.

"We understand valuations alone may not drive the stocks in this

RENATO MARQUES



market, but we can't help but think these stocks are oversold," JPMorgan analysts said in a recent note.

"At the current level of FCF yield [...] just the cash flow paying down debt should generate [around] 15% annual returns on equity for names such as MGM, Wynn and Melco. We see great value in Macau names."

Yesterday, MGM, Sands China, Melco and SJM were on the green as

their shares rose 4.4%, 3.96%, 3.63% and 2.21% respectively.

Galaxy and Wynn were still slightly down by 0.73% and 0.027%, respectively.

Last month, Macau's gaming revenue reached MOP16.04 billion, a figure that represents a significant 435% increase compared to the same period last year when the city was still under Covid restrictions.

AD

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BUDGET 2022

Gov't reports losses of MOP6.55b from investments

RENATO MARQUES

THE final report on the budget execution for last year was approved by the Legislative Assembly Tuesday evening.

It is notable in the report that financial investment applications made through the government accounts last year registered losses amounting to MOP6.55 billion.

The Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, said that he does not expect such a bad outcome this year nor in the upcoming year.

"Regarding the financial investments, the losses on these investments



in 2022 have been MOP 6.549 billion, that is minus MOP14.94 billion than [the result obtained] in 2021.

This [fact] was due to the high volatility verified in the global investment environment and also simulta-

neously due to the increase of the interest rates that reduced the dynamic of growing of the market. But we expect that this year and also next year our investments [earnings] can surpass the inflation rate."

Lei also noted that the effective ordinary receipt from the government at the end of 2022, was MOP109.14 billion, that is, MOP14.53 billion more than in 2021, an increase of 15.1%.

In the same session, the Commissioner of Audit, Ho Veng On, noted that the total expenditure by the government was MOP102.1 billion, which means that the total assets in 2022 have grown by MOP68.1 billion, a figure that joins the fiscal reserves accounts balance of MOP558 billion.

Regarding the summary of the accounts related to the eight government-owned institutions, a total income of MOP10.9 billion was registered, while total expenses reached MOP23 billion. At the end of 2022 the same eight publicly owned institutions had an accumulated MOP363.5 billion in assets.

GBA FAIR

LEI: MACAU EXERTING EFFORTS TO ADVANCE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

STAFF REPORTER

SECRETARY for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong pointed out in his speech at the opening ceremony of the 2023 Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Fair for Trade in Services that as a pivotal part of the Greater Bay Area, Macau is making continuous efforts to advance the integrated development of digital technology and trade in services.

With the promotion and development of digital technology, the total import and export volume of trade in services in the first three quarters of this year saw a year-on-year increase of 151%. The new trend emerging in trade in services, coupled with the launch of the "1+4" industrial development policy, "will create a better environment for the further development of trade in services and the digital economy," according to Lei.

The government has organised for over 20 representatives from an assortment of sectors, including trade, conventions and exhibitions, finance, e-commerce, traditional Chinese medicine, science and technology, tourism, marketing, logistics, import and export, to visit the fair.

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Forum on MICE Tourism Economy, as part of the multi-venue event, will be held at the Galaxy International Convention Center today, where a number of experts in the sector from China and overseas will discuss the pressing issues and development paths of MICE trade and map out new strategies to fuel innovation in the sector.

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SANDS LIFESTYLE MACAO

AUTOMAKER

VOLKSWAGEN-COMMISSIONED AUDIT FINDS NO SIGNS OF FORCED LABOR AT PLANT IN XINJIANG

AN audit commissioned by Volkswagen has found no indication of forced labor at its plant in China's Xinjiang region, where Western governments have accused the Chinese government of human rights violations against the Uyghur ethnic minority.

The German automaker has come under fire for operating in Xinjiang, a remote western region that borders Central Asia. The U.S. government has blocked imports from Xinjiang unless it can be proven that the products were not made with forced labor.

The auditor, Loening — Human Rights and Responsible Business, conducted 40 interviews and was able to inspect the factory freely, said Markus Loening, a former German human rights commissioner who founded the consultancy.

"We could not find any indications or evidence of forced labor among the employees," he said in remarks provided by Volkswagen from a media briefing in Germany yesterday [Macau time].

China launched a crackdown in Xinjiang around 2017 in response to a series of bombings, knifings and other attacks by Uyghurs "unhappy with the communist-ruled government's



policies toward their ethnic group," observers said. Analysts estimate that a million or more people have been detained in what China has called vocational training and education centers.

The government denies any human rights violations and says the measures successfully eliminated a terrorist threat.

The Volkswagen plant in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, is no longer assembling vehicles and functions only as a distribution hub. About 10,000 vehicles a year undergo quality checks before they are delivered to

dealers in the region.

The number of workers has fallen to 197 from about 650 between 2015 and 2019, Volkswagen said. Of the total, 47 are Uyghurs and 150 are from China's Han majority.

"The employees are paid above average and have little to do," Loening said.

A law firm in Shenzhen, an industrial hub in eastern China, carried out the audit, accompanied by staff from Loening. The factory is owned by Volkswagen's joint venture with SAIC Motor, a major Chinese automaker. **MDT/AP**

FINANCE

British financier sought for huge tax fraud is extradited to Denmark from UAE

A Dubai-based British hedge fund trader sought by Danish authorities for allegedly orchestrating a \$1.7 billion tax fraud, considered one of the largest in the Scandinavian country, has been extradited from the United Arab Emirates, officials said yesterday.

Financier Sanjay Shah was convicted in May in Dubai of masterminding a scheme that ran from 2012 to 2015 in which foreign businesses pretended to own shares in Danish companies and claimed tax refunds for which they were not eligible. A court in the United Arab Emirates had cleared his extradition.

"It goes without saying that we as a society cannot accept that our state treasury is exposed to it," Danish Taxation Minister Jeppe Bruus said, calling it "one of the biggest criminal fraud cases in Danish history."

Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen added that Denmark was "sending an important signal that you cannot achieve impunity by staying abroad."

Shah's British lawyer Chris Waters told Danish broadcaster TV2 that his client denies any wrongdoing and "continues to doubt that he can receive a fair trial in Denmark." His Danish lawyer, Kåre Pihlmann, told TV2 that they need to read the case file of more than 300,000 pages before deciding on their line of defense.

Yesterday, Danish police officers traveled to Dubai to pick up Shah, the Danish Justice Ministry said.

Once on Danish soil, he will formally be arrested and Denmark's prosecution authority will request that he be remanded in custody. A trial in suburban Copenhagen is set for Jan. 8. **MDT/AP**



Sanjay Sha

CORPORATE BITS

MGM hosts art symposium, unveils local artist's works



MGM held an art symposium themed "From Lines to Pixel," yesterday where leading industry figures from around the world shared insights into the new trend of art and technology

integration in today's digital era.

On the same day, MGM joined with local artist Eric Fok, with whom MGM has collaborated for many years, to showcase his

very first digital art piece.

Using technology, the hotel's public space has been transformed into a 360-degree digital art spectacle creating a brand-new cultural and tourism experience that embodies the ethos of the "art of living."

Pansy Ho, chairman and executive director of MGM China Holdings Limited, said, "We unite three of our arts partners, who have collaborated with us on various projects, to be today's speakers at the symposium, to jointly explore the path ahead for digital art, [and] advancing the local arts and culture scene."

Melco co-organizes SAR handover anniversary



In celebration of the 24th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland, Melco Resorts & Entertainment and Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) recently co-organized an event titled "FAOM x Melco's Celebration of the Return to the Mother-

land Variety Show."

Co-hosted by Macau Gaming Enterprises Staff Association and the Gaming Employees Home, the event took place at the Macao Federation of Trade Unions Youth Center.

Meanwhile, Lee Chong

Cheng, president of FAOM acknowledged that the training institutions under the FAOM have provided training to "more than 15,000 people, and the job referral services department and its job matching agencies have assisted more than 3,500 people in successful job matchings."

"Such achievements rely on the strong support of FAOM from companies including Melco," said Cheng.

Melco's collaboration has included nearly 60 activities with over 200 volunteer participations — offering 610 volunteer hours to benefit 440 FAOM beneficiaries, according to a statement issued by the gaming operator.

AP FILE PHOTO



CRIME

China raises stakes in cyberscam crackdown in Myanmar, though loopholes remain

HUIZHONG WU, BANGKOK

China is ramping up a crackdown on online scams operated by criminal syndicates in border areas of military-ruled Myanmar in an effort that has included a shootout, confession videos and national TV broadcasts of arrests of high-profile suspects.

But the drive has been confined to a limited area and appears unlikely to root out the kingpins behind the human trafficking and other illicit activities aimed at cheating people of their savings via phone calls and online overtures, schemes that are thought to generate tens of billions of dollars in revenue a year.

Over the summer, China announced a series of joint operations with neighboring countries that led to thousands of people being returned to China, many of whom had been lured by the promise of high-paying jobs. Experts say many are victims who were forced into conducting the scams. Those campaigns did not include arrests of ring leaders in Myanmar.

"As soon as we discover them, we hand them over," said Lu Jiantang, the vice-chair of foreign affairs in Wa, whose job is ensuring that people fleeing fighting in neighboring areas do

not include scammers.

On Nov. 18, China's Ministry of Public Security announced that authorities in northern Myanmar had handed over some 31,000 suspects. Among them, police said, 63 were key players of scamming groups, the police said.

"China seems to be very focused and intent on cleaning its border," said Jason Tower, an expert on Myanmar's cyberscam industry at the U.S. Congress-backed think tank United States Institute of Peace said.

Among those arrested are a few related to some of the most powerful people in two special administrative zones close to China's border with military-ruled Myanmar.

The Kokang Self-Administered Zone and the Wa Self-Administered Division both share a border with China and are heavily influenced by their bigger neighbor. The people living in both places share language and culture with China. Those living in Kokang are ethnically Chinese. Wa senior politicians, who have their own Communist Party, have ties to China's Communist Party dating back decades and run their government along lines similar to Chinese party committees.

In mid-November, the Chinese police announced they had issued warrants for four people,

all surnamed Ming, on suspicion of cyberscams, murder and illegal detention. The family is one of the most powerful in Kokang, with members in the government and local police, and are said to have Chinese passports. A few days later, the state broadcaster CCTV showed footage of police taking three of the four suspects across the border in southwestern Yunnan province.

CCTV reported that Ming Xuechang, a family patriarch and one of the alleged leaders of a scam syndicate, died by suicide when local authorities tried to arrest him on Nov. 15. Myanmar's military government issued a statement saying that Ming had shot himself during the arrest.

The renewed effort to stamp out the scam rings followed a violent shootout Oct. 20 in Kokang in a compound belonging to the Ming family, according to local media. The former editor-in-chief of the Chinese state-backed news outlet Global Times, Hu Xijin, appeared to confirm that undercover police were killed in the incident.

"China is determined to eradicate the poisonous cancer of cyber scams in northern Myanmar ... and this ultimately led to the demise of the Ming family, who are said to have killed four of our undercover military

police," Hu wrote in a recent Weibo post.

The Ministry of Public Security did not respond to a faxed request for comment.

The Ming family are not the only powerful Kokang families caught up in the drive.

A few days before the Chinese issued their arrest warrants for the Mings, Wei Qingtao, a member of another powerful Kokang family, was seen in a video circulated on Chinese social media, which is customarily censored, urging his relatives to let people forced into scamming rings go.

"This time the Chinese government has made its resolution, without clearing away the cyberscams, they'll never withdraw their police," Wei said.

Two other men appeared in similar videos. One, Liu Zhengqi, was the CEO of Fully Light Group, the biggest conglomerate in the Kokang zone. Another, Bi Huijun, is a son-in-law of Ming Xuechang.

In late October, China issued arrest warrants for two men who held senior government positions in the Wa Division. One was head of the Wa Construction Ministry. The other was a county chief. A few days later, the Wa Communist Party said they had been expelled from the party. It's unclear if they have been detained.

Wa police handed 194 Chinese

nationals to Chinese authorities on Nov. 28, according to Wa's state media, Voice of Wa State. Wa officials says such handovers are routine.

Kokang has sent some 26,000 people over back to China in recent weeks, said Yin Masan, head of the Administrative office in Kokang. Of those, 16,000 went voluntarily. "Our police and authorities are cracking down."

The crackdown has become a factor in Myanmar's conflict.

On Oct. 27, three ethnic armed groups launched a new offensive in northern Shan state against the army. Calling themselves the Three Brotherhood Alliance, they include fighters from the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, or MNDAA, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army.

The MNDAA said the offensive has two main objectives, first, to defeat government-backed forces in charge of Kokang. The second, to vanquish cyberscammers.

The offensive has put pressure on Kokang's government.

"At a minimum, they understood very well which way the wind was blowing in China," said Richard Horsey, a senior advisor for the International Crisis Group who tracks Myanmar.

Others say that China is showing it won't tolerate the scams anymore, regardless of how powerful are the people behind them.

"They want to send a signal, they want to kill the chicken to scare the monkey, to quote a Chinese proverb," said Huazong, a well-known Chinese documentary filmmaker who has covered Myanmar for over a decade. "No one is allowed to provide shelter for these people."

Still, it's unclear how comprehensive China's crackdown will be. Bai Suocheng, the main military commander in charge of Kokang, is also said to have been involved in scams, but none of his family are known to have been arrested.

Those on the ground dispute that all the masterminds have been swept up.

"Among these 31,000 people, there's no heads of cyberscams. Before we even launched the operation, a Myanmar military helicopter lifted these people away," said Li Kyar Wen, a spokesman for the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, which is one of the outfits leading the fighting. A spokesman for Myanmar's military did not respond to a request for comment.

Though it may have become harder to run the scams, the syndicates still can take advantage of instability and corruption prevailing in the border areas.

"It's gotten riskier," said Horsey. However, "there's a massive financial incentive to keep this going. The rewards are still there."

MDT/AP

RUSSIA

Under Putin, the uber-wealthy 'oligarchs' still rich but far less powerful

JIM HEINTZ, TALLINN

WHEN Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the outside world viewed those Russians known as "oligarchs" as men whose vast wealth, ruthlessly amassed, made them almost shadow rulers. A "government of the few," in the word's etymology.

The term has persisted well into Putin's rule, broadening in popular usage to refer to almost any Russian with a substantial fortune.

How much political power any of Russia's uber-rich now wield, however, is doubtful.

A few hours after Putin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, a televised meeting he held in the Kremlin with top industrialists and entrepreneurs showed how the dynamics had changed: Putin simply told them he had no choice but to invade.

Despite the harsh consequences to their wealth that the tycoons could expect from the war, they had to accept it; the power was his, not theirs.

THE ORIGINAL OLIGARCHS

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, astute businessmen who had already begun building operations as government controls loosened under Mikhail Gorbachev's "perestroika" reform policies took advantage of the privatizing of state industries to quickly establish vast holdings.

Fast-talking mathematician Boris Berezovsky epitomized the breed, becoming the largest dealer for Russia's largest automaker and managing to buy the vehicles at a loss to the manufacturer. He took over the management of the Sibneft oil company, the national airline Aeroflot and gained control of Russia's biggest TV channel, then known as ORT.

Somewhat less-colorful than Berezovsky but still prominent figures from the era included media mogul Vladimir Gusinsky, whose NTV channel made him highly influential, and oil tycoons Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Roman Abramovich.



Putin (right) congratulates members of the Russian delegation, from left: conductor Valery Gergiyev, businessman Roman Abramovich and Nizhny Novgorod Gov. Valery Shantsev, after it was announced that Russia would host the 2018 soccer World Cup in Zurich, in Dec 2010

PUTIN'S NEW DEAL

Upon taking office, Putin was well aware of the widespread resentment ordinary Russians felt for the ultra-wealthy who thrived while millions struggled through the economic changes. In the summer of 2000, Putin met in the Kremlin with about two dozen of the men regarded as the top oligarchs. The meeting was closed, but reports later said he made them a sternly clear deal: Stay out of politics and your wealth won't be touched.

"The guarantee ... was that all the riches amassed before his presidency could be kept by their owners, and this has never changed," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace analyst Alexandra Prokopenko wrote in a commentary this year. "Loyalty is what Putin values above all else."

By then, Berezovsky had already begun criticizing Putin. Within months, he left Russia for the United Kingdom and was granted asylum in 2003. Ten years later, he was found dead in his home; a disputed post-mortem examination said he appeared to have hanged himself.

Gusinsky, whose media holdings were critical of Putin and even satirized him, was hauled into jail amid an investigation

of misappropriated funds; within weeks, he agreed to sell his holdings to an arm of Russia's state natural gas monopoly, and he left the country.

Khodorkovsky, regarded as Russia's richest man at the time, lasted longer, establishing the Open Society reformist group and showing increased political ambitions. But he was arrested in 2003 when special forces stormed onto his private plane and spent a decade in prison on convictions of tax evasion and embezzlement before Putin pardoned him and he left Russia.

Putin tolerated the 2012 presidential run against him by Mikhail Prokhorov, who made a fortune in metals, but the bid was widely seen as a Kremlin-supported red herring aimed at creating the impression of genuine political pluralism in Russia.

THE OLIGARCHS' FUTURE

Despite the blows to their assets as a result of the Ukraine war, most of Russia's ultra-wealthy have stayed quiet about the conflict or offered only mild, token criticism.

Banking and brewing entrepreneur Oleg Tinkov was a rare exception, denouncing the war and calling its supporters "morons." He left the country in late

2022 and later renounced his citizenship.

Mikhail Fridman, a co-founder of Russia's largest private bank, called the war a tragedy and for the "bloodshed" to end. He holds Israeli citizenship and had lived in Britain, but reportedly returned to Moscow after fighting between Israel and Hamas began.

"Even as the elites grumble, they continue to show loyalty," Prokopenko wrote.

But she and other analysts suggest that loyalty had not been enough for Putin and that he wants to create a new cadre of hugely wealthy figures who are beholden to him by distributing the assets that the state has seized from foreign companies exiting Russia and through invalidating the privatizations from the 1990s.

Analyst Nikolai Petrov of Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs wrote that Russia is engaged in deprivatization "intended to redistribute wealth to a new generation of less-powerful individuals and shore up the president's own position."

"A new group of quasi-owner state oligarchs is being created, with wealth and control redistributed from the 'old nobles' to the new," he said. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1983 TOMCAT HALTS STEEPLEJACK



Chief chimney-topper Fred Dibnah has been halted in his work after a ginger tomcat got to his latest assignment first.

Troublesome feline George has climbed a height of 160 ft (49 m) up an industrial chimney and is resisting attempts to bring him back down.

His escapade has stopped Lancashire based Mr Dibnah, 45, who has been the subject of several television documentaries.

An attempt by Mr Dibnah to reach the ginger feline failed when George climbed even higher.

An emergency meeting was called between the fire brigade, the RSPCA and Mr Dibnah to resolve the issue.

It was decided George should be left on the chimney in the hope a lonely night at such a height without food may encourage him to come down.

But Mr Dibnah is not impressed with the cat's antics because there is work to be done.

Mr Dibnah said: "If we leave it up there all night it might get so fed up and hungry that it might come down on its own."

"Failing that it is holding my job up. I have got a few hundred pounds at stake and I can not be held up with a cat."

He pledged to return to try to rescue George tomorrow if he still had not come down - this time perhaps armed with a sack.

Mr Dibnah won public acclaim after a local BBC Television broadcast included a news item showing him gilding and installing the topmost finial of Bolton Town Hall.

His new-found celebrity status was confirmed in 1979 when he was invited to take part in the making of an hour long television film series about people with unusual occupations.

The film Fred Dibnah - Steeplejack won two awards.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Mr Dibnah was held-up for 30 hours in total as a distressed George paced and cried at the top of the chimney resisting another attempt to be rescued by the steeplejack.

Eventually an expert from Manchester coaxed him to the rim and then pulled him into a cage by the scruff of his neck.

Mr Dibnah then climbed the chimney to collect the cage from the expert.

The steeplejack has carved out a career in broadcasting and has starred in 20 documentaries since his first appearance on television in 1979.

They have included his work as a steeplejack, the restoration of his steamroller and industrial archaeology programmes.

He died in November 2004 only weeks after filming his final series touring the UK on a traction engine.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 You can clear up important legalities and sign contracts today. Entertain those who can provide you with valuable information and knowledge.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
 Don't be too eager to spend what's left over; more unexpected expenses are evident. Don't overspend on luxury items. Family get-togethers will be interesting.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
 You will be able to make financial gains. Put your energy into moneymaking ventures. Compromise if you have to, to avoid verbal battles.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Make sure to arrange in advance to spend quality time together. Take time to catch up on gossip and make plans to do a little adventure travel.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Things are looking up. Do something constructive outside. Compromise if you wish to have any fun at all. Risky ventures may turn in your favor.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Opportunities to get ahead are evident. Trips, educational pursuits, or projects that could lead to new outlooks should be on your agenda.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You will be in an overly generous mood today. You've been in a rut and you need to do something that will help you break the pattern you've fallen into.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Minor health problems may flare up if you haven't been taking care of yourself or have been burning the candle at both ends. Try to get out and socialize.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Sign up for seminars that will expand your business awareness. Focus your efforts on details, and keep to yourself in order to finish your work.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 You will be drawn to individuals who can provide you with both intellectual conversation and physical passion. One sided attractions are likely.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Your trendy style and unique way of doing things will entice new acquaintances. You must be careful not to ignore the needs of the youngsters in your family.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 If you haven't already, don't be afraid to start your own small business on the side. You need to control your temper and deal with the situation rationally.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

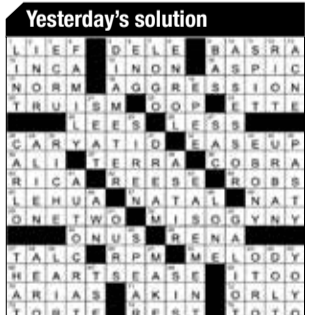
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-3	9	fine
Changchun	-11	-2	fine
Chengdu	5	15	fine
Chongqing	9	20	fine
Fuzhou	11	23	cloudy
Guangzhou	13	23	fine
Guiyang	4	18	cloudy
Haikou	19	23	cloudy
Hangzhou	4	16	fine
Harbin	-20	-10	fine
Hefei	3	23	fine
Nanjing	4	20	fine
Shanghai	6	16	fine
Taipei	15	20	fine
Wuhan	4	23	fine
Hong Hong	21	25	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-17	-13	cloudy
Frankfurt	-2	3	cloudy
Paris	6	7	rain
London	7	8	rain
New York	3	6	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Locale; 6- Duffer's goal; 9- Whatsoever; 14- Movie critic Roger; 15- Time to remember; 16- Lover of Juliet; 17- Art of stuffing animals; 19- Rod used to reinforce concrete; 20- N.Y. neighbor; 21- The ___ the limit; 22- Spring up; 23- Be sorry for; 25- Circumference; 26- Rectangle having equal sides; 29- Complacent; 31- Weights; 32- A little brown; 36- Web locale; 37- Part of H.R.H.; 38- Clarified butter; 40- Segment; 43- Radiant; 45- Iams alternative; 46- Punctual; 47- Stable compartment; 50- Corn syrup brand; 51- Pile; 52- A Baldwin brother; 54- Short life?; 57- Part of Hispaniola; 58- Flattery; 61- About 1% of the atmosphere; 62- Like cool cats; 63- Western; 64- Sturm und ___; 65- Frozen Wasser; 66- Conductor Zubin;

DOWN 1- Rejection power; 2- Abba of Israel; 3- Immediately following; 4- Paranormalist Geller; 5- Airport abbr.; 6- Jaunty; 7- Military force; 8- Beams; 9- Censure; 10- Start of a saying on forgiveness; 11- Circumference; 12- Strap; 13- Knowledge; 18- Politico Kefauver; 23- Nervous person, maybe; 24- Intense anger; 25- Firearm; 26- Brillo rival; 27- Witty remark; 28- A law ___ itself; 29- Dictation taker; 30- Scratch the surface of; 33- Inuit dwelling; 34- Eldest son of Noah; 35- Jalopy; 37- Short trip; 39- CPR specialist; 41- Speaking; 42- Not in the pink; 43- Swiftly; 44- Boxer's warning; 47- Fab Four name; 48- Coniferous evergreen forest; 49- Follow, as advice; 50- Hangs on to; 51- Roe source; 52- Tennis great Arthur; 53- Former monetary unit of Angola; 54- Alternative to a shower; 55- Belinda Carlisle's "Should ___ You In?"; 56- Gumbo veggie; 59- Male cat; 60- ___ kwon do;



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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THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF Human Rights

WHEREAS recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

WHEREAS disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed

determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

WHEREAS Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

WHEREAS a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of

SCIENCE IS A HUMAN RIGHT – AND ITS FUTURE IS ENSHRINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

ANDREA BOGGIO,
BRYANT UNIVERSITY

DEC. 10 marks the anniversary of the 1948 signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Though contested, imperfect and unfulfilled, the declaration remains a milestone in human civilization as one of the earliest times the world came together to distill and assert general principles key to peaceful living on this planet.

Nested in Article 27 of the declaration is a lesser-known right: the human right to science. As a legal scholar, I have immersed myself in the study of this human right for the past six years. This process has allowed me to uncover a multifaceted right containing many entitlements that, together, can reshape the current relationship between science, society and the state.

Even though the international community has paid little attention to this right, and many people may be unfamiliar with it, the human right to science is an important part of the declaration. I believe its dual potential to protect the value of science in society and ensure that science serves humanity is worth discovering and appreciating as a framework to govern scientific progress.

SHORT HISTORY OF THE HUMAN RIGHT TO SCIENCE

Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads: "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."

The drafters capitalized on

the earlier work of the authors of the American Declaration of Human Rights, which had recognized science as a human right just a few months before. In that context, the Chilean delegation argued that culture, the arts and science are crucial forms of human expression deserving the highest recognition.

The transition from the American to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was almost seamless. No opposition was mounted against its inclusion among the human rights. Rather, the debate focused on the legitimacy of governments, under human rights law, to impose political aims on science, an issue that could not be ignored after the U.S. deployment of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Ultimately, the view that science should be pursued for the sake of truth and not be tied to any specific purpose prevailed.

The right to science was reaffirmed with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1966 and by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2020.

SCIENCE AS A CULTURAL RIGHT

History is an important guide for the international community as it rediscovers the human right to science. The choice to include science among the cultural rights but distinguish it from other cultural expressions has important consequences for how the human right to science is valued and applied.

By including science among the cultural rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

pays tribute to science as an expression of human creativity. As part of culture, science embodies ingeniousness in managing the fragility of the human condition by attempting to know more about it.

The point is well developed in a 2012 report by the then-Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights Farida Shaheed. There she writes, "The right to participate in cultural life entails ensuring conditions that allow people to reconsider, create and contribute to cultural meanings and manifestations in a continuously developing manner." The right to science "entails the same possibilities in the field of science, understood as knowledge that is testable and refutable, including revisiting and refuting existing theorems and understandings."

Science is thus a meaning-making activity that emerges from the scientific community's concerted effort to deploy human creativity to make sense of the world that people inhabit, including our own selves. This is possible only when human creativity is recognized and guarded. The drafters of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights did not fail to pick up on this cue and included scientific freedom as an element of the human right to science. It asks states to agree to "respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity."

The recognition of scientific freedom as a human right casts science and scientists with a special status in society. They possess the power and responsibility to do good for humanity. These benefits, though, can materialize only if scientific creativity is un-

leashed and protected.

SCIENCE'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights purposely distinguished "scientific advancement and its benefits" from "the cultural life of the community" and "the arts." Textual analysis is at the core of legal interpretation, making this choice of words consequential. Parsing cultural rights into three areas – the cultural life, the arts and scientific advancement – and connecting "benefits" to "scientific advancement" signal that what science offers to society is qualitatively different from other forms of culture.

People use a variety of knowledge systems along with science in their daily lives. These include religion, local traditions, indigenous knowledge and superstition. In this mix, science is assigned unique explanatory and practical powers that allow it "to provide the most reliable and inclusive way to understand the universe and the world around and within us."

The arts uniquely capture universal emotions and can mobilize action, but the artistic experience is inherently subjective and individual. Religion can also organize collective action but is based on conditions of faith rather than trust. By contrast, science stands out as a unique source of shared understanding of what happens in the world around us and inside us. As a collective and concerted attempt to discover truths about the physical and social worlds, science offers reliable insights that can be used as a rational basis for collective action, including policy. Furthermore, science is uniquely positioned to produce

benefits for humanity in the form of applied knowledge.

An example of the universal and beneficial character of science is knowledge around cardiac pacing that led to the development of pacemakers to treat arrhythmias. Emerging from the confluence of medicine, biology, physics, chemistry and engineering, the basic and applied knowledge behind pacemakers is universal because the principles used to develop them is consistent across the planet and can be replicated by any lab. Furthermore, the devices are incontrovertibly beneficial to any person suffering from certain heart conditions, irrespective of their creed, identity or nationality.

If you are not persuaded, just think about how the development of eye glasses has improved visual impairment around the world.

CULTIVATING SCIENCE FOR HUMANKIND

In 1948, the international community agreed to elevate science as a protected human right. The drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights endowed the generations following them with the challenge of using international law to build a better, more peaceful world.

While not a panacea, reaffirming why science is valuable can help improve how it's practiced and taught, as well as help scientists build trust among the public.

Bringing these principles to life requires the public to support science and demand that it serves humankind. The human right to science gives policymakers and the scientific community the tools to realize this agenda. It is up to everyone to make good use of this gift. **MDT/THE CONVERSATION**

FOOTBALL

Teenager Shaw helps US women win over China in exhibition match

US 2, CHINA 1

JAEDYN Shaw scored the go-ahead goal in the 79th minute to give the United States a 2-1 comeback victory over China yesterday [Macau time] in the Americans' final match of the year.

It was the second of two exhibition matches against China. The United States won the first 3-0 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on Saturday.

Shaw's second international goal came in front of her hometown crowd in Frisco. The 19-year old, who grew up just blocks from Toyota Stadium, was making her first start for the national team.

"I love being here in this stadium, and I have so many memories here," said Shaw, who had some 50 family members and friends at the game. "I'm just so happy to be able to play here at this level and play on this team."

Shen Mengyu scored in first-half stoppage time to give China



United States' Jaedyn Shaw (center right)

the lead. Shen tapped in Siqian Wang's well-placed header off a free kick.

The goal snapped a seven-game shutout streak for the Americans.

Sam Coffey scored her first international goal in the 62nd minute from the top of the box to even the score. She celebrated by raising her hands over her head and was mobbed by her teammates.

"It was just one of the best

moments of my life," she said. "I've worked my whole life for moments like these and to share them with this team is just a dream come true. What matters most though is that we came away with the win."

The matches closed a difficult year for the United States after the four-time champions were eliminated from the Women's World Cup this summer in the round of 16 after a scoreless draw

with Sweden.

The United States was playing under interim coach Twila Kilgore, who will lead the team while newly named head coach Emma Hayes finishes out the Women's Super League season with Chelsea.

Hayes wasn't expected to take over the U.S. team until May, but last week she met with players and she was involved in selecting the roster for the final two games

against the Steel Roses.

The United States rolled out a very different lineup for Tuesday night's game, making seven changes. While scorers Sophia Smith and Trinity Rodman were on the bench, Aubrey Kingsbury replaced Casey Murphy in goal, and Shaw, one of three teenagers on the final roster, started at forward.

Veterans Alex Morgan, Becky Sauerbrunn, Alyssa Naeher and Crystal Dunn were given some time off as Kilgore focused on youth for the year's final training camp and matches.

Emily Fox was subbed out at halftime because of the concussion protocol, replaced by Midge Purce.

Captain Lindsey Horan nearly scored the go-ahead goal in the 66th minute, but she was offside. Korbin Albert, who plays professionally for Paris Saint-Germain, made her U.S. debut in the second half, subbing in for Horan.

The team honored retired defender Ali Krieger for her 108 appearances with the national team. Krieger played her final match for the United States in 2021, after playing on the World Cup-winning teams in 2015 and 2019.

Krieger retired from professional soccer last month after helping Gotham FC to the National Women's Soccer League championship. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

Business Views

Kelvin Chan, MDT/AP Business Writer

EU ON AI REGULATION: CAN LEADERS REACH A DEAL?

The generative AI boom has sent governments worldwide scrambling to regulate the emerging technology, but it also has raised the risk of upending a European Union push to approve the world's first comprehensive artificial intelligence rules.

The 27-nation bloc's Artificial Intelligence Act has been hailed as a pioneering rulebook. But with time running out, it's uncertain if the EU's three branches of government can thrash out a deal Wednesday in what officials hope is a final round of talks.

Europe's yearslong efforts to draw up AI guardrails have been bogged down by the recent emergence of generative AI systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT, which have dazzled the world with their ability to produce human-like work but raised fears about the risks they pose.

Those concerns have driven the U.S., U.K., China and global coalitions like the Group of 7 major democracies into the race to regulate the rapidly developing technology, though they're still catching up to Europe.

Besides regulating generative AI, EU negotiators need to resolve a long list of other thorny issues, such as limits on AI-powered facial recognition and other surveillance systems that have stirred privacy concerns.

Chances of clinching a political agreement between EU lawmakers, representatives from member states and executive commissioners "are pretty high partly because all the negotiators want a political win" on a flagship legislative effort, said Kris Shrishak, a senior fellow specializing in AI governance at the Irish Council for Civil Liberties.

"But the issues on the table are significant and critical, so we can't rule out the possibility of not finding a deal," he said.

Some 85% of the technical wording in the bill already has been agreed on, Carme Artigas, AI and digitalization minister for Spain, which holds the rotating EU presidency, said at a press briefing Tuesday in Brussels.

If a deal isn't reached in the latest round of talks, starting Wednesday afternoon and expected to run late into the night [today, Macau time], negotiators will be forced to pick it up next year. That raises the odds the legislation could get delayed until after EU-wide elections in June — or go in a different direction as new leaders take office.

One of the major sticking points is foundation models, the advanced systems that underpin general purpose AI services like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Bard chatbot.

Also known as large language models, these systems are trained on vast troves of written works and images scraped off the internet. They give generative AI systems the ability to create something new, unlike traditional AI.

The AI Act was intended as product safety legislation, like similar EU regulations for cosmetics, cars and toys. It would grade AI uses according to four levels of risk.

The new wave of general purpose AI systems released since the legislation's first draft in 2021 spurred European lawmakers to beef up the proposal to cover foundation models.

Researchers have warned that powerful foundation models, built by a handful of big tech companies, could be used to supercharge online disinformation and manipulation, cyberattacks or creation of bioweapons.

France, Germany and Italy have resisted the update to the legislation and are calling instead for self-regulation — a change of heart seen as a bid to help homegrown generative AI players, such as French startup Mistral AI and Germany's Aleph Alpha, compete with big U.S. tech companies like OpenAI.

[Abridged]

The top U.S. and Chinese diplomats agreed yesterday to keep building on recent progress in bilateral ties and work together to keep the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza from spreading.

Both Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken referred in a telephone call to last month's closely watched meeting between the two countries' leaders in San Francisco following years of frigid ties.

"The important task for both sides at present is to continue the positive impact of the San Francisco meeting, implement the consensus reached by the two heads of state, and consolidate the momentum of stabilizing Sino-

-U.S. relations," Wang said, according to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Blinken also emphasized that the two sides should build on progress at the summit, according to the U.S. State Department.

President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping agreed at their meeting to keep channels of communication open and resume military-to-military talks. Yet, major political differences between the countries remain far from resolved.

Wang and Blinken also discussed the Israel-Hamas war, where China has been trying to play a role in negotiations, and agreed to maintain communications on the situation.



WIKIPEDIA, WRAPPED

HERE ARE 2023'S MOST-VIEWED ARTICLES ON THE INTERNET'S ENCYCLOPEDIA

REMEMBER what you researched for in 2023? Well, Wikipedia has the receipts.

English Wikipedia raked in more than 84 billion views this year, according to numbers released yesterday [Macau time] by the Wikimedia Foundation, the non-profit behind the free, publicly edited online encyclopedia. And the most popular article was about ChatGPT (yes, the AI chatbot that's seemingly everywhere today).

Since its launch just over a year ago, OpenAI's ChatGPT has skyrocketed into the public's consciousness as the technology makes its way into schools, health care, law and even religious sermons. The chatbot has also contributed to growing debates about the promise

and potential dangers of generative AI, much of which is documented on its Wikipedia page.

The second most-read article on Wikipedia in 2023 was the annual list of deaths, which sees high traffic year after year — taking the #4 and #1 spots in 2022 and 2021, respectively. Individual entries for notable figures who passed away also garnered significant interest this year, including pages for Matthew Perry and Lisa Marie Presley.

Meanwhile, the highly anticipated 2023 Cricket World Cup took third place — alongside three other cricket-related entries in Wikipedia's top 25 articles this year, including the Indian Premier League at #4, marking the first time cricket content has made the

list since the Wikimedia Foundation started tracking in 2015.

"Barbenheimer," Taylor Swift and more also appeared to sway our 2023 internet-reading habits.

According to the Wikimedia Foundation, this top 25 list was created using English Wikipedia data as of Nov. 28. Numbers for the full year are set to be updated by the nonprofit on Jan. 3, 2024.

The top countries that accessed English Wikipedia overall to date in 2023 are the United States (33.2 billion) and the United Kingdom (9 billion) — followed by India (8.48 billion), Canada (3.95 billion) and Australia (2.56 billion), according to Wikimedia Foundation data shared with The Associated Press. MDT/AP

TOP 25 ARTICLES ON ENGLISH WIKIPEDIA

1. **ChatGPT**: 49,490,406 pageviews
2. **Deaths in 2023**: 42,666,860 pageviews
3. **2023 Cricket World Cup**: 38,171,653 pageviews
4. **Indian Premier League**: 32,012,810 pageviews
5. **Oppenheimer (film)**: 28,348,248 pageviews
6. **Cricket World Cup**: 25,961,417 pageviews
7. **J. Robert Oppenheimer**: 25,672,469 pageviews
8. **Jawan (film)**: 21,791,126 pageviews
9. **2023 Indian Premier League**: 20,694,974 pageviews
10. **Pathaan (film)**: 19,932,509 pageviews
11. **The Last of Us (TV series)**: 19,791,789 pageviews
12. **Taylor Swift**: 19,418,385 pageviews
13. **Barbie (film)**: 18,051,077 pageviews
14. **Cristiano Ronaldo**: 17,492,537 pageviews
15. **Lionel Messi**: 16,623,630 pageviews
16. **Premier League**: 16,604,669 pageviews
17. **Matthew Perry**: 16,454,666 pageviews
18. **United States**: 16,240,461 pageviews
19. **Elon Musk**: 14,370,395 pageviews
20. **Avatar: The Way of Water**: 14,303,116 pageviews
21. **India**: 13,850,178 pageviews
22. **Lisa Marie Presley**: 13,764,007 pageviews
23. **Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3**: 13,392,917 pageviews
24. **Russian invasion of Ukraine**: 12,798,866 pageviews
25. **Andrew Tate**: 12,728,616 pageviews



US imposed sanctions on a Belgian involved in procuring electronics for the Russian military, his companies and a group of Belarusian firms and people tied to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control targeted a network led by Belgium-based Hans De Geetere, which included nine entities and five people across Russia, Belgium, Cyprus, Sweden, Hong Kong, and the Netherlands. They are accused of being involved with procuring military-grade equipment for Russia.

Belgium Six people have been taken into custody in Belgium and the Netherlands in connection with an inquiry into suspected exports of "sensitive" products and technology that might be banned under sanctions against Russia, Belgian prosecutors said. The investigation was launched following a tipoff and information provided by unidentified U.S. "government agencies," prosecutors said in a statement. They said the agencies were investigating illegal exports of dual-use goods and money laundering in the United States.

Sweden On the brink of joining NATO, Sweden has signed a defense cooperation agreement with Washington that will allow the United States access to all of the military bases across the Scandinavian country, saying the deal would bolster regional security. Swedish Defense Minister Pål Jonson said the deal, signed in Washington yesterday, "will create better conditions for Sweden to be able to receive support from the United States in the event of a war or crisis."



Vatican Pope Francis said yesterday he was feeling "much better" after a two-week bout of bronchitis but again asked an aide to read his remarks. Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, told his weekly general audience that he still gets tired if he speaks too much. He turns 87 on Dec. 17.