



A MAINLAND SCHOLAR SUGGESTS PEOPLE FEEL BOTH 'PREPARED AND AT EASE' WITH THE PROSPECT OF AI SURPASSING HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

P2

LAWMAKER WANTS FOREIGN RESIDENTS OF MACAU TO HAVE EQUAL CONDITIONS IN HENGQIN

P4

CHINESE SHARES JUMP AS BEIJING STEPS UP MOVES TO BOOST SAGGING MARKETS

P6

4.42	4.36	4.38	-2.23	25	神農集團
10.41	10.32	10.31	-1.99	47	維多利
11.89	11.55	11.50	-4.55	72	國能能源
5.33	5.29	5.25	-3.17	824	中國地產
12.30	12.21	12.20		1227	建士科技
7.67	7.55	7.55		27	長安證券
6.06	6.16	6.16			海股份
7.98	7.81	7.81			民生
3.37	3.34	3.34			



Thailand State prosecutors said yesterday they have revived an investigation into whether former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra almost nine years ago violated the law against defaming the monarch, a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Thaksin had been charged in 2016 with violating the law on royal defamation for remarks he made to journalists the previous year when he was in Seoul, South Korea, said Prayut Phetcharakun, a spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General, at a news conference.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed ahead with a diplomatic tour of the Middle East yesterday, meeting Egyptian leaders as part of his efforts to secure a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war in exchange for the release of hostages. Blinken's visit also comes amid growing concerns in Egypt about Israel's stated intentions to expand the combat in Gaza to areas on the Egyptian border that are crammed with displaced Palestinians.



EU's executive arm shelved an anti-pesticide proposal yesterday in yet another concession to farmers after weeks of protests that blocked many capitals and economic lifelines across the 27-nation bloc. Although the proposal had languished in EU institutions for the past two years, the move by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was the latest indication that the bloc is willing to sacrifice environmental priorities to keep the farming community on its side. Despite concessions, protests continued from the Netherlands to Spain and Bulgaria.

More on backpage

MASS CROWD

According to the police, six million border crossings are expected during the 10-day CNY holiday - surpassing 2019 record levels while in the mainland, domestic movements are creating havoc on highways

P3,6



XINHUA

EVENTS
GRAND LISBOA PALACE BASHED FOR CONFUSING SHOW TICKETING

P2

EVENTS
MACAU, BEIJING COMPANIES CO-HOST COMEDY FESTIVAL

P3

GRAND LISBOA PALACE BASHED FOR CONFUSING SHOW TICKETING

ANTHONY LAM

A reported show ticketing saga at the Grand Lisboa Palace resort has gone viral on social media after eager buyers were told there were only 18 tickets publicly available.

For the upcoming Valentine's Day, the resort is set to organize a show featuring young Hong Kong Cantopop star MC Cheung. Tickets to the show are not being sold directly to the public, but are redeemable upon consumption of at least MOP12,000 at the resort or the Grand Lisboa Hotel, also operated by SJM, between Jan. 17 and Feb. 14, or through booking a specific accommodation package. The redemption period started on Monday.

Due to Cheung's popularity in the circle of Cantopop fans, heat at the box office was expected. It was claimed in a post on so-



cial media that a relatively long queue was seen from Sunday evening at the box office at the resort. As the clock reached 1p.m.

on Monday, the social media user said that they were asked to leave by a security guard, citing the mall's closing time as the reason.

Being requested to issue numbered queue tickets, the security guard replied that it was not their responsibility.

It was also claimed in the post that the police were called to the scene by the resort's security department, but had admitted that they could do nothing.

The box office opened at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, according to the post, but it took half an hour to issue tickets to the first person in the line. Later, the social media user overheard that there were only 18 tickets available, the post claimed.

The social media user requested the management of the resort explain the matter and asked for a refund of the money that they spent, should they not get tickets.

According to local online media Allin Media, some in the queue were told to return on Feb. 7 as there would be 100 tickets available. Although they were asked to leave contact details, tickets will not be guaranteed, according to the same report.

The resort's owner and operator, SJM Resorts, S.A., was emailed yesterday for verification and response, but no reply had been received by press time.

ID BESTOWS CASH AWARDS UPON DISTINGUISHED ATHLETES

ANTHONY LAM

THE Sports Bureau (ID) has recently bestowed cash prizes upon 111 athletes and 28 auxiliary personnel, as well as certificates for 223 athletes and 75 auxiliary personnel.

In 2023, there were a total of 111 athletes as well as 28 coaches, youth training coaches and members of the technical support team who were distinguished for an exceptional performance, obtaining monetary prizes in 12 competitions in 10 sports. Meanwhile, certificates of sporting merit were issued to 223 athletes as well as 75 coaches and members of the technical support teams from 19 sports.

In his speech, president of the ID, Pun Weng Kun, congratulated all those who achieved excellent results in the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou and in several international games during 2023.



"With the guidance and cultivation of the seniors of the sports sector and also the directors and coaches of sports associations, the athletes remained firm in the demanding training and achieved good results in the competitions, with the Macau team achieving the best result ever since its participation in the Asian games, breaking records in several Macau modalities," he said.

"In the future, the Macao SAR government will firmly support the development

of sports associations and work together with the associations, providing athletes with support, further promoting the development of high-performance sports to reach higher levels," he pledged.

The "2023 Macau Merit Athletes and Coaches Awards and Certificates Distribution Ceremony" was presided over by the Chief of Staff of the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Ho Ioc San, on behalf of the Secretary herself.

EDUCATION

SCHOLAR SUGGESTS PEOPLE BE PREPARED FOR POSSIBLE AI SWEEP

A mainland scholar has suggested at a seminar organized by the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) that people feel both prepared and simultaneously at ease with the prospect of AI surpassing human intelligence.

Academician Yang Xiongli at the Chinese Academy of Sciences provided a detailed explanation of the relationship between AI and human intelligence.

It is an indisputable fact that AI has been integrated into human society, and this has undoubtedly facilitated social progress while at the same time potentially posing risks of negative impacts on society.

Yang said that with its rapid development, AI may surpass human intelligence in many respects, perhaps at a certain point it may possibly control so-



ciety. He noted that he has previously dismissed this risk.

He now believes his previous view on the supremacy of human intelligence lacks a conclusive scientific basis.

Nonetheless, it is not certain AI capabilities will surpass human intelligence. He cited the recent progress of AI to discuss various possibilities.

For example, Yang said the balanced and har-

monious development of the body requires the coordinated operation of all systems. While the relevant technologies are now available and can be put to use, their necessity must be considered when using them.

He also said that AI can accelerate human exploration of the mysteries of the brain, but the relationship between the two must be considered rationally. **AL**

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TOURISM

PSP EXPECTS UP TO SIX MILLION BORDER CROSSINGS OVER 10-DAY CNY HOLIDAYS

RENATO MARQUES

THE Public Security Police Force (PSP) is expecting some 5.5 to 6 million border crossings over the period of 10 days of the Chinese New Year (CNY) holidays from February 9 to 18.

This forecast was made yesterday by the director of the Public Relations Department of PSP, Lei Tak Fai, during a presentation of the contingency plan for the expected high number of crossings over the holiday period.

According to Lei, the PSP expects some 550,000 to 600,000 people crossing the border per day over this period, which will match the figure obtained back in 2019 or be even higher (+3%).

The police also said they expect the peak of entry to be reached on the third day of the new year (February 12), stating that the force is already implementing several measures to face the expected hike, to keep the public order and control the flow of people and vehicles.



Measures are also being enforced at the border control checkpoints to accelerate the process of border clearance and avoid congestion.

Lei also said that the police authorities will be in close contact with their counterparts of the mainland and Hong Kong to ensure a smooth operation on all sides.

More police and equipment to enforce crowd control measures

are also being deployed to the most popular tourist attractions as well as the surrounding areas of the border posts.

The same official also said that the force will pay special attention to Taipa Village as this area will be targeted with a new pedestrian-only zone for the celebrations, which will force detours of traffic and changes on bus routes.

between 12 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Due to the high number of people, crowd control measures have already been implemented yesterday afternoon at the area of the Ruins of St. Paul's between 3:30 and 5:45 p.m.

The high flow of pedestrians around the Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, Avenida do Infante D. Henrique, and the crossroad with the Avenida da Praia Grande also forced the PSP to special control measures in the afternoon and early evening yesterday.

In 2019, Macau saw over 1.2 million visitor arrivals during the seven-day Chinese New Year Holiday, the highest tally yet, according to government data. The figure amounts to an average of 171,428 arrivals per day.

Last year, Macau had 451,047 visitor arrivals in the seven days that the mainland counts as the Chinese New Year holiday. The tally was up 297% on the previous Lunar New Year, which fell in early February 2022.

IC, Beijing companies to co-host comedy festival in Macau

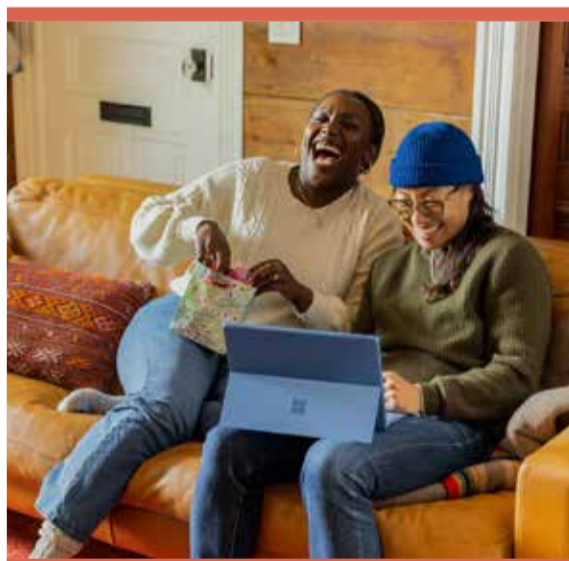
ANTHONY LAM

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will co-organize in March an international comedy festival in Macau, which the organizers claim will be first of its kind for the city.

The organizers are two Beijing companies: Beijing Mahua FunAge Entertainment, Culture and Media Stock Corporation Ltd. and Beijing Daimai Cultural Communications Company Ltd. The event is set to be held between Mar. 11 and 18.

The organizers aim to present "an international, innovative, entertaining and spectacular feast of comedy" and "through unique programs and activities, bringing a colorful and joyful atmosphere to the audience."

During her speech, Director of Culture De-land Leong Wai Man said that in order to cooperate with the "1+4" moderate economic diversi-



fication development strategy, and promote the construction of Macau as a "city of performing arts," the announcement of the festival is being made on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland.

Dubbed by the organizers the first such festival in Macau, the organizers pledged that there will be rich contents, covering comedy award ceremonies, comedy show screenings, carnival interactive shows

and many others. The festival's coming to Macau and presenting a large-scale comprehensive carnival-style event with comedy as the core will enrich Macau's live performances, develop cultural and tourism integration projects, and link Macau and the mainland, the organizers said.

A representative from the organizers recalled his childhood experiences, saying that the happiest days in the past were when he and

his family got together to tell and share jokes during the Chinese New Year. In March of this year, this happy memory will finally be recreated in Macau. Another representative is sure that the festival will attract countless mainland and foreign tourists to visit Macau to watch the performances.

Mahua FunAge was established over 20 years ago. It started by producing and distributing stage plays, and quickly became a comedy brand with market appeal. Later, it worked to expand musicals, online dramas, movies, artist management and other sectors, establishing a professional, all-round diversified entertainment industry system.

The festival will be held with the support from Beijing's representative office in Macau, several local bureaus, Sands China Ltd., Galaxy Entertainment Ltd. and MGM China Holdings Ltd.

EVENTS

SANDS CHINA HOSTS SPRING FESTIVAL AT IEC LONG FIRECRACKER FACTORY

SANDS China hosted a Spring Festival opening ceremony at the former Iec Long Firecracker Factory yesterday with aims to highlight the unique historical and cultural aspects of the city.

The venue was filled with Chinese New Year-themed AI photobooths, family arts and crafts workshops, live music, and other activities.

As part of Sands China's ongoing support for Macau's revitalization efforts, the festival aims to promote the growth of local SMEs and the resurgence of Macau's historical districts.

The activities provide oppor-

tunities for people of all ages to experience traditional Chinese culture in an entertaining manner, while also attracting tourists and invigorating the local economy.

Coinciding with three festivals—Lunar New Year, Valentine's Day, and the Lantern Festival—all occurring in February, the Spring Festival will host numerous events at the Iec Long Firecracker Factory and Taipa Houses, all with free admission.

The festival will run until the end of the month, and both locals and tourists are encouraged to come and explore the offerings it has in store.



WANG SAI MAN WANTS FOREIGN RESIDENTS OF MACAU TO HAVE EQUAL CONDITIONS WHEN ENTERING HENGQIN

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKER Wang Sai Man wants the government to facilitate border crossing between Macau and Hengqin for foreigners who are residents of Macau, he said in a spoken inquiry delivered at the Legislative Assembly.

The lawmaker noted that while the majority of locals (of Chinese nationality) enjoy a facilitated system and the convenience of the "Hengqin-Macau comprehensive border inspection," the same treatment does not apply to those residents of Macau of a foreign nationality, making their access to Hengqin very complex and time-consuming.

Wang noted that the Central government and the Macau SAR have recently released the general guidelines for Hengqin-Macau integration that encourage people to work and live in Hengqin, taking advantage of the accessibility between the two sides in favor of the adequate diversification of Macau's economy.

He says that it is not logical or practical that people who are residents of Macau do not enjoy



the same privileges because they are not of Chinese nationality, noting that some of these people are of "Chinese origin" and highly qualified professionals, "who are precisely the human resources needed for the implementation of the '1+4' Hengqin-Macau economic diversification."

Wang proposes that if these people have already been authorized to work in Macau and wish to work and live in Hengqin, "the local government and the relevant services in the mainland must issue them a certain type of 'safe-conduct' for entry and exit from Hengqin," so these people

can access Hengqin through the automated border crossing clearance points.

Wang also noted the recent measures enforced by the mainland that allows the visa-free entry of foreigners from six countries (France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, and Malaysia) when visiting China for tourism or business with stays of less than 15 days. He added that Macau should also take advantage of these measures to attract more diverse tourists and facilitate the movement of foreigners between Hengqin and Macau for tourism, business, study and visits.



STATS

MORE COMPANIES BUT LESS CAPITAL IN 2023

STAFF REPORTER

A total of 5,011 new companies were incorporated in 2023, an increase of 900 year-on-year amid the gradual economic recovery following the downturn brought about by the pandemic.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows the number of new companies operating in Wholesale & Retail Trade and Business Services totaled 1,877 and 1,359 respectively.

However, the total value of registered capital of the new companies fell 89% year-on-year to MOP1.65 billion in 2023, attributable to the incorporation of new companies with relatively large amounts of capital in Financial Activities in 2022. A 15% year-on-

-year increase would be seen in registered capital if those companies were excluded from the comparison.

Amid the city's recovery, the number of companies in dissolution was 914 in 2023, and the value of registered capital of these companies amounted to MOP486 million.

Analyzed by size of registered capital, there were 3,509 new companies (70% of the total) registered with capital under MOP50,000 in 2023, and the corresponding value of capital (MOP91 million) accounted for 5.5% of the total. Meanwhile, 171 new companies were registered with capital of MOP1 million or over, and the value of capital (MOP1.34 billion) made up 81.2% of the total.

EDUCATION

Legal Regimes of UPM and MUT approved in the final reading

RENATO MARQUES

BILLS relating to the Polytechnic University of Macau (UPM) and the Macao University of Tourism (MUT), the former Macao Institute for Tourism Studies, have been approved at the Legislative Assembly in their final reading on Monday afternoon.

During the debate, lawmakers mostly focused their attention on the recruitment of foreign teachers as well as the recruitment program that will allow the universities to offer higher wages than the ones provided in the ci-



vil servants' regime.

In response, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong explained that the wages are related to the careers and level of the teachers up to the level of Research Professor and so they are more

related to the salaries in force worldwide for this kind of position than with the civil servants' careers.

The new regimes of the UPM and MUT, which also change the name of the second institution, will enter into

force from April 1 this year.

Ao Ieong explained that the change in the designation aims to uniformize the designation and contribute to the international reputation of the university.

She also said that the government wants the MUT to have greater integration with the neighboring areas and particularly with Hengqin, with the expectation that a new campus for the university will be built there, although she did not provide a concrete timeframe for the development of this project.



STATS

MOBILE TRANSACTIONS CONTINUE TO SEE INCREASE

STAFF REPORTER

In fourth quarter of 2023, there was an increase in the number and value of transactions made through local mobile payment tools compared to the previous quarter, according to data from the Monetary Authority of Macao.

In terms of mobile payment, the number of transactions carried out using local mobile payment tools increased by 4.7% compared to the previous quarter, reaching a total of 80.5 million transactions.

The number of mobile payment terminals and QR code sig-

ns also increased by 2.0% from end-September 2023, reaching 102,178.

Regarding credit cards, the credit card credit limit granted by banks in Macau increased by 0.5% from the previous quarter, reaching MOP49.4 billion by the end of 2023.

In terms of payment card turnover, the credit card turnover reached MOP6.2 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023, a growth of 1.5% compared to the previous quarter. The number of credit card transactions increased by 8.5% compared to the previous quarter, reaching 11.1 million transactions.

SANDS CHINA PRESENTS SOUGHT-AFTER CHINESE CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS

WITH aims to assist the local government's goal of diversifying tourism and offerings, Sands China recently unveiled The Exhibition of Annual of Contemporary Art of China 2022 (Macau China) at The Venetian Macao.

The exhibition is now in its 9th edition and is being held outside the mainland for the first time, thereby introducing a greater diversity of art exhibitions to Macau and promote the sustainable development of the local art and cultural industry.

The multifaceted exhibition gives visitors an overview of Chinese contemporary art in 2022 by presenting original works of 28 artists, showcasing some of the most recent creations in this field.

Curated by the art historian and art critic Professor Zhu Qingsheng and his team, the exhibition's works reflect the artists' cultural and existential experiences against the background of themes such as globalisation, the simulation and transformation of information, the intersections between art and technology, the value and boundaries of art, the female perspective, urbanisation processes, and the history of media communication.

For Sands China, the exposition has the goal of "nourishing people's souls through art, and enable Macau's local artists to have a thorough understanding of the trends in the development of Chinese contemporary art – so that they can foresee the evolving trends in this field and gain inspi-



ration for their creative works."

The exhibited works, which include oil paintings, videos, performance art, installations, and others, were selected because they possess originality, offer reflections on and insights into social reality, and reflect the themes of the exhibition and the overall issues explored in Chinese contemporary art in a structured manner – with an aim to initiate a dialogue about art and the spirit of the times.

Among the artists are those who have already achieved significant accomplishments, alongside young artists with increasingly enriched creative backgrounds and international experiences, including art groups engaged in new forms of collective creation.

The Exhibition of Annual of Contemporary Art of China is co-organised by Sands China and

the Chinese Modern Art Archive (CMAA) of Peking University and is supported by the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) Library and Faculty of Humanities and Arts.

The art pieces presented in the exhibition were selected from the book Annual of Contemporary Art of China 2022.

The long-published annual is a yearly survey and record of the overall activities, exhibitions, and published literature related to Chinese contemporary art, and is compiled at Peking University as an archival foundation for the development of Chinese contemporary art.

The current exhibition at Cotai Expo is a follow-up to the recent "Documental Exhibition of Annual of Contemporary Art of China," which ran at Sands Gallery in December 2023 and January 2024.

It offered viewers a com-

prehensive overview of Chinese contemporary art from 2005 to 2022 by showcasing precious publications, surveys, and records, including manuscripts, which provide significant documentation of the evolution of Chinese contemporary art.

With a vast range of global experience, Professor Zhu Qingsheng, an artist better known as LaoZhu, curated both exhibitions.

Besides being chief editor of Annual of Contemporary Art of China and president of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (2016-2021), he is professor and director of the Centre for Visual Studies (CVS) at Peking University and director of the World Art History Institute (WAI) at Shanghai International Studies University. He has been head of the Chinese Modern Art Archive for 37 years, since 1986.

"Macau is China's gateway to

the world, and it also serves as a stepping stone for Chinese contemporary art to the global stage," said Zhu.

"We are literally showcasing the cultural achievements of China's economic reform to the world by hosting 'The Exhibition of Annual of Contemporary Art of China' in Macau – a Special Administrative Region of China with an international art scene," he added.

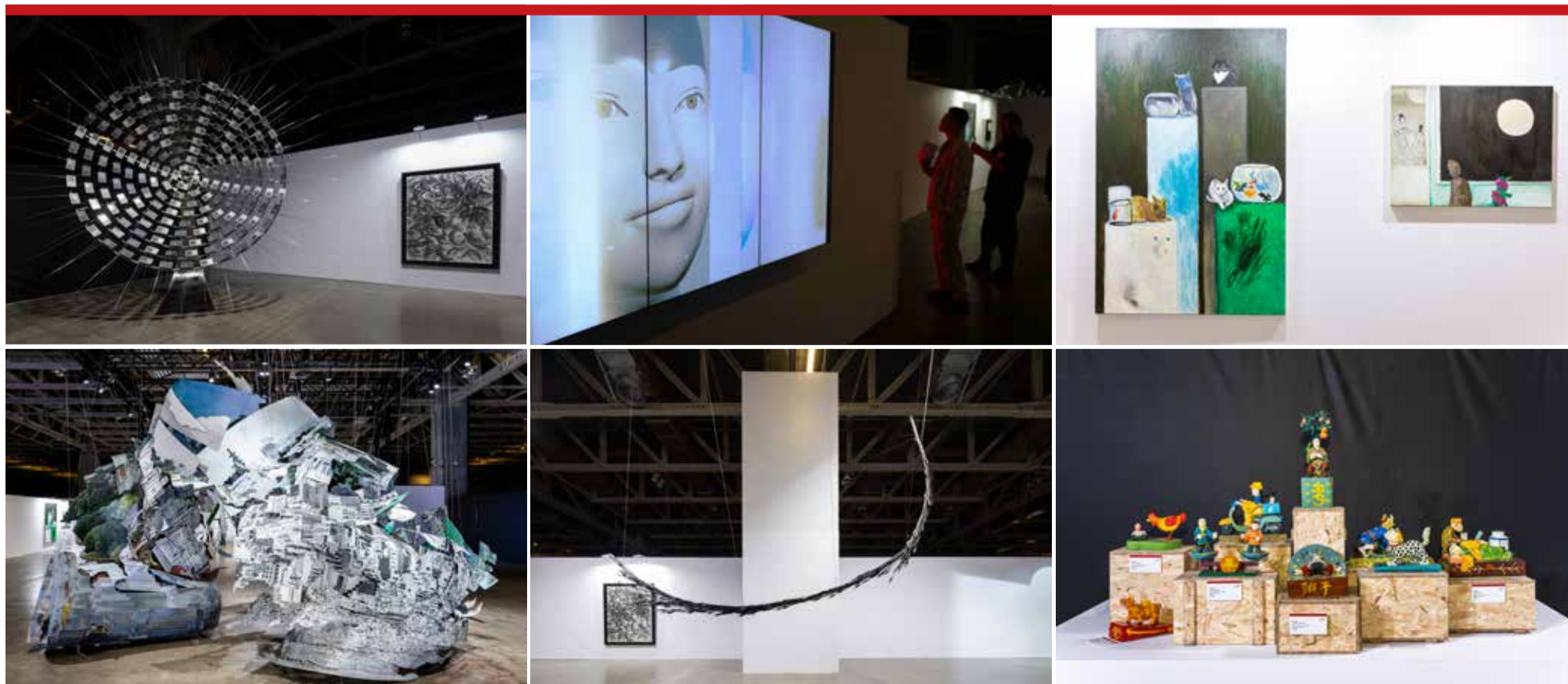
For Zhu, the goal is to bring Chinese contemporary art to an international audience.

"We need to fully express our own systematic theory, value judgment, and research achievements in a concrete and mature way – so that people with different artistic perspectives, cultures, and ideologies can understand the rationale behind each artwork," he added.

The opening ceremony last week was followed by a seminar, where artists were invited to participate in artistic exchanges with LaoZhu, MUST guest professor and renowned artist Ung Vai Meng, MUST professor Gu Yue, and others, in a discussion on the development of contemporary art education and creation in both Macau and the mainland.

The Exhibition of Annual of Contemporary Art of China is part of Sands China's efforts to introduce a greater diversity of art exhibitions to Macau and promote the sustainable development of the local art and cultural industry.

The exhibition is free and open to the public from Feb. 1 to 27, 11 a.m.-7 p.m. daily at Cotai Expo Hall C.





AP PHOTO

CNY

Thousands of vehicles stuck on highways as snow snarls travel

ICY conditions trapped thousands of motorists on highways in central China as snow and freezing rain snarled travel by air, train and road during the annual Lunar New Year holiday rush.

A Chinese travel blogger said she and her boyfriend were waiting with others yesterday for de-icing work to be completed after covering only 30 to 40 kilometers in 13 hours the previous day.

Traveling in the relative com-

fort of a motorhome, Chen Wei appeared unperturbed by the delay in the trip to her hometown. She quoted an old Chinese saying, telling the AP she "accepts what comes and faces it with calmness."

The heavy snow, unusual for central China, was forecast to continue into Wednesday. Millions of people are heading home for the Lunar New Year, which falls on Saturday. Families traditionally gather for dinner the night before.

The central government in Beijing said it would disburse 141 million yuan (\$20 million) in urgent assistance for highway snow removal and related work in 11 provinces to ensure safe travel for the holiday, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

In Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, tree branches snapped under the weight of the snow and the airport closed runways because of icy conditions. Some flights and trains were canceled or delayed, stranding travelers for hours.

A provincial emergency management official told CCTV that 4,000 vehicles were stuck on Monday because of icy conditions. There was no immediate update to that figure yesterday.

Chen and her boyfriend got stuck in Hubei while driving from Hangzhou in eastern China to inland Sichuan province. She described in one widely shared post how they let others stuck in the snow use their toilet and shared water and sausages with them.

One person was killed and 13 others injured in neighboring Hunan province on Monday after a roof collapsed at an agricultural produce fair following a heavy snowfall, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Cotton-padded quilts and other relief items were being sent to Hunan, Xinhua said.

In Japan, heavy snow in the Tokyo area on Monday disrupted trains, knocked out power and grounded more than 100 flights. **MDT/AP**

ECONOMY

Chinese shares jump as Beijing steps up moves to boost sagging markets

ELAINE KURTENBACH, BANGKOK

A Chinese state investment fund promised to expand its purchases of stock index funds, among other moves signaling Beijing's resolve to stabilize markets that have been sagging under heavy selling pressure from a property crisis and slowing economy.

Shares in Shanghai and Hong Kong surged yesterday after the announcement by Central Huijin Investment, whose subsidiaries include Chinese state-owned banks. The gains accelerated after a report by Bloomberg said Chinese President Xi Jinping would meet with market regulators.

The report, citing unnamed people who spoke privately, could not imme-

diately be confirmed. It also said the timing of the meeting was unclear.

Central Huijin has stepped up buying of shares in state-run banks and other companies to counter heavy selling pressure in the Chinese markets, which have been trading at five-year lows. However, Hong Kong's biggest gains yesterday were in technology companies like e-commerce giants Alibaba, which surged 7.6%, and JD.com, which added 7.8%.

The Shanghai Composite index jumped 3.2% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng surged 4%. The Shenzhen A-Share index was 5.2% higher.

Benchmarks recovered all or most of their losses for the month, but remain far below their levels of a year earlier.

Over the weekend, the market watchdog warned it would crack down on market manipulation, insider trading and other abuses and promised to protect smaller investors who usually account for the majority of trading in Chinese markets.

Benchmarks in Shanghai and the smaller market in Shenzhen bounced between small gains and big losses on Monday, while share prices of state-run banks and other big companies rose.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission welcomed yesterday's announcement by Central Huijin, saying that the "historically low level" of share prices highlighted their medium and long-term investment value.

"We firmly support Cen-

tral Huijin to continue to increase the scale and intensity of its holdings, and will create more convenient conditions and smoother channels for its market entry operations," it said at a statement. It promised to "make every effort to maintain the stable operation of the market."

It said it also would facilitate share purchases by institutional investors such as public funds, private equity funds, securities companies, social security funds, insurance institutions, and annuity funds and encourage companies to increase share repurchases.

In a separate notice, the CSRC urged companies to step up mergers and acquisitions and restructuring to enhance the value of listed companies to "strengthen



AP PHOTO

a sense of gains among investors."

"A large number of listed companies have improved quality, efficiency, and become better and stronger through mergers, acquisitions and reorganizations," it said.

It was unclear if such moves will suffice to turn the tide that has rattled the markets despite a flurry of moves to instill confidence and support property developers whose financial woes after the government cracked down on excessive borrowing have been a ma-

major drag on the economy.

In other developments, a commerce ministry official announced measures to encourage people to renovate their homes, buy appliances and to trade in their cars and buy new ones.

"Automobiles, household appliances and home furnishing are the focus of traditional consumption and are closely related to people's lives," the official Xinhua News Agency cited Sheng Qiuping, a vice minister of commerce, as saying. **MDT/AP**

MYANMAR

Nine Security Council members urge a halt to airstrikes by military

EDITH M. LEDERER,
UNITED NATIONS

NINE members of the United Nations Security Council condemned “indiscriminate” airstrikes by Myanmar’s military against civilians before an envoy briefed the council yesterday [Macau time] as part of regional efforts to implement a peace plan that has so far been largely ineffective.

The plan, adopted in April 2021 shortly after the military seized power in a takeover that sparked a civil war, calls for the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by a special envoy from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties.

Veteran diplomat Alouneko Kittikhoun — the special envoy to Myanmar from this year’s ASEAN chair, Laos, and a former U.N. ambassador — addressed a closed council meeting on behalf of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Kittikhoun committed to implementing ASEAN’s “five-point consensus” for peace in Myanmar through continued “quiet diplomacy,” according to a council diplomat familiar with the meeting who spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was private.

The military leadership in Myanmar has so far ignored the plan, and violence and the humanitarian crisis in the country have been growing at a rapid pace.

Before the council meeting, nine of the 15 council members stood before reporters to support a statement read by Britain’s U.N. Ambassador Barbara Woodward, which echoed ASEAN’s call urging Myanmar’s armed forces, “in particular, to cease its attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.”

The military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu



Kyi in February 2021, and is facing an armed pro-democracy resistance movement that is assisted by ethnic minority fighting forces. The military stepped up airstrikes after the three ethnic minority armed groups launched a major offensive in late October, seizing towns in the country’s northeast, along with major border crossings for trade with China.

The nine council members — Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, South Korea, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States — said that, three years after the military takeover, more than 18 million people need humanitarian aid and 2.6 million remain displaced.

At an ASEAN ministerial meeting on Jan. 29, Lao Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith told reporters that Thailand was moving ahead with plans to provide more humanitarian assistance to Myanmar. The nine nations reiterated the council’s appeal for improved humanitarian access.

They expressed increasing concern at the situation in Rakhine state bordering Bangladesh, where more than 1 million Rohingya Muslims fled starting in August 2017, when the military in Buddhist-dominated Myanmar launched a brutal “clearance operation” against them following attacks by the insurgent Arakan Army.

The Arakan Army is part of the alliance of ethnic minority fighters. A Bangladesh official said that more than 100 members of Myanmar’s Border Guard Police fled fighting with the Arakan Army in Rakhine over the past two days and entered Bangladesh, the first time Myanmar forces have been known to flee the country since the ethnic minority armies’ offensive began.

The nine council nations expressed increasing concern that the Rohingya still in Myanmar, who have faced systematic discrimination for decades, are now contending with more restrictions on freedom of movement, as well as the denial of access to medicine and medical care. They demanded the implementation of the Security Council’s first-ever resolution on Myanmar, passed in December 2022, which calls for an immediate end to violence and immediate release of all “arbitrarily detained” prisoners, including Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint.

Myanmar’s U.N. Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, who still represents Suu Kyi’s ousted government, urged the Security Council to adopt a stronger, enforceable resolution, saying, “Democratic forces are gaining ground and the military junta is losing every day.”

The nine council members said they remain dee-

ply concerned at the lack of progress on the resolution’s call for all parties to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, and “the democratic will and interests” of people in

Myanmar. The council diplomat said there was no unanimity at the meeting yesterday on next steps, though there was broad concern at the escalating situation

across the country with the military fighting on several fronts, the risk of atrocities in Rakhine, and the need for better humanitarian access.

The United States pushed for an enforceable Security Council resolution to prevent Myanmar from getting jet fuel, the council diplomat said.

The U.S., U.K., European Union and others imposed sanctions in 2023 on the provision of aviation fuel to Myanmar, but Amnesty International reported Jan. 31 that new evidence suggests Myanmar’s military is using new tactics to evade sanctions.

The human rights organization called 2023 the worst year for airstrikes in Myanmar since the takeover, and said at least seven shipments of aviation fuel to Myanmar were directly linked to a storage unit in Vietnam, an ASEAN member.

According to the council diplomat, China, which has close ties to Myanmar, emphasized the need to give ASEAN’s efforts time and space. Russia, which also has links to Myanmar, reiterated that the council shouldn’t be interfering in the country’s internal affairs. **MDT/AP**

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UK

PM Sunak says King Charles III's cancer was caught early

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

BRITISH Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said yesterday that he was "shocked and sad" to learn that King Charles III has cancer, but is relieved that the illness was caught early.

Buckingham Palace announced Monday evening that the king has begun outpatient treatment for an undisclosed form of cancer. It was found during his recent treatment for an enlarged prostate but is not connected to that condition, the palace said.

"Thankfully, this has been caught early," Sunak told BBC radio, adding that as prime minister he would "continue to communicate with him as normal."

"He'll just be in our thoughts and our prayers. Many families around the country listening to this will have been touched by the same thing and they know what it means to everyone," Sunak said. "So we'll just be willing him on and hopefully we get through this as quickly as possible."

Less than 18 months into his reign, the 75-year-old monarch has suspended public engagements but will continue with state business — including weekly meetings with the prime minister — and won't be handing over his constitutional roles as head of state.



The palace said Charles, who has generally enjoyed good health, "remains wholly positive about his treatment and looks forward to returning to full public duty as soon as possible."

Charles became king in September 2022 when his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, died at the age of 96 after 70 years on the throne.

News of the king's diagnosis comes as his daughter-in-law Kate, Princess of Wales, recovers from abdominal surgery that saw her hospitalized for about two weeks.

Kate is still taking a break from royal duties as she recovers. Her husband, Prince William, who is heir to the throne, also took time off to help look after her and the couple's three children, but is due

to preside over an investiture ceremony at Windsor Castle and a charity dinner on Wednesday.

The king's younger son, Prince Harry, who quit royal duties in 2020 and moved to California, has spoken to his father about the diagnosis and "will be traveling to the U.K. to see His Majesty in the coming days," said the office of Harry and his wife, Meghan. British media reported that he was en route yesterday from Los Angeles.

Charles took the throne intending to preside over a slimmer monarchy with fewer senior royals carrying out ceremonial public duties. But with Charles and Kate both temporarily sidelined, Prince Harry self-exiled to California and Prince Andrew largely ban-

nished from view because of his friendship with sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, the royal "Firm" risks becoming severely overstretched.

William and Charles' wife Queen Camilla are both expected to take on extra public engagements during the king's treatment. There are no current plans to call on the "counsellors of state" — senior royals, including the queen and the heir to the throne — to deputize for the monarch on constitutional duties such as signing legislation and receiving ambassadors.

World leaders sent Charles good wishes, including U.S. President Joe Biden, who tweeted: "Jill and I join the people of the United Kingdom in praying that His Majesty experiences a swift and full recovery."

Charles departed from royal tradition with his openness about his prostate condition. For centuries Britain's royal family remained tight-lipped about health matters.

Disclosing information about his cancer diagnosis — albeit in a limited way — is another break with tradition.

Buckingham palace said that the king "has chosen to share his diagnosis to prevent speculation and in the hope it may assist public understanding for all those around the world who are affected by cancer." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1964 BEATLEMANIA ARRIVES IN THE US



The four members of the British hit band, the Beatles, have arrived in New York at the start of their first tour of the United States.

The young men, with their now infamous mop-head hairstyles, stepped onto the tarmac at Kennedy Airport just after 1300 local time.

There were more than 3,000 screaming teenagers at the airport. Many had skipped school or work. Some were in tears and some were carrying placards with phrases such as "I love you, please stay".

The Beatles' first scheduled appearance will be on American television on Sunday on the Ed Sullivan show. He apparently booked them to appear after seeing the huge crowds who greeted their return to Heathrow from Sweden.

More than 5,000 fans applied for tickets to be part of the audience for the live show - only 750 were lucky enough to get them.

The Beatles - Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, John Lennon and George Harrison - received maximum police protection, the kind of arrangement usually produced for kings and presidents.

There were security barriers too, without which, the Beatles would almost certainly have been crushed by the throng of screaming women.

Elsewhere in the United States, excitement over the Beatles' arrival has reached almost fever-pitch.

Their songs are playing constantly on radio stations, in shops and other places of work.

Millions of Beatle records have already been sold and a company called Puritan Fashions Incorporated, which describes itself as "the only exclusive official licensed manufacturer of Beatle wearing apparel" is marketing T-shirts, sweat shirts, turtle-neck sweaters, tight-legged trousers, night shirts, scarves and jewellery inspired by the Beatles.

Beatle wigs are also for sale at \$2.99 each - or the equivalent of one guinea.

Courtesy BBC News

THE ORDER OF SUCCESSION TO THE BRITISH THRONE

AS King Charles III receives treatment for cancer, he remains Britain's monarch and head of state. This is the order of succession to the throne:

1. Prince William, the eldest son of Charles and the late Princess Diana. He is known as Prince of Wales and is married to Kate, Princess of Wales. Their three children follow him in the line of succession.
2. Prince George of Cambridge, born in July 2013.
3. Princess Charlotte of Cambridge, born in May 2015.
4. Prince Louis of Cambridge, born in April 2018.
5. Prince Harry, the younger son of Charles and Diana, who has relinquished his royal duties but retains his place in line.
6. Archie Mountbatten-Windsor, born to Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, in May 2019.
7. Lilibet Mountbatten-Windsor, born to Harry and Meghan in June 2021.

8. Prince Andrew, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip's second-eldest son.
9. Princess Beatrice, elder daughter of Andrew and his former wife, Sarah Ferguson.
10. Sienna Elizabeth, daughter of Beatrice and Edoardo Mapelli Mozzi, born in September 2021.
11. Princess Eugenie, Andrew and Ferguson's younger daughter.
12. August Brooksbank, born to Eugenie and James Brooksbank in Feb. 2021.
13. Ernest Brooksbank, born to Eugenie and James Brooksbank in May 2023.
14. Prince Edward, the queen and Philip's youngest child.
15. James, Viscount Severn, son of Edward and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh.
16. Lady Louise Mountbatten-Windsor, daughter of Edward and Sophie.
17. Princess Anne, second child and only daughter of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip.



18. Peter Phillips, son of Anne and her ex-husband, Mark Phillips.
19. Savannah Phillips, elder daughter of Peter Phillips and his ex-wife, Autumn Kelly.
20. Isla Phillips, younger daughter of Peter Phillips and Autumn Kelly.
21. Zara Tindall, daughter of Princess Anne and Mark Phillips.
22. Mia Tindall, elder daughter of Zara and her husband, Mike Tindall.
23. Lena Tindall, younger daughter of Zara and Mike Tindall.
24. Lucas Tindall, son of Zara and Mike Tindall.

IN CONTEXT

The Beatles were the first British band to break into the American market.

Their appearance on the Ed Sullivan show reportedly led to a dip in the crime rate to a 50-year low as 73 million people or 40% of Americans tuned into watch.

They performed the songs All My Loving, Till There Was You, She Loves You, I Saw Her Standing There and I Want To Hold Your Hand.

The band appeared twice on the Ed Sullivan show and their performances still rate as the second and third most-watched programmes in the history of US TV. Only the 1983 final episode of Korean war comedy MASH achieved more viewers.

In February 2004, the Beatles were given the President's Award at the Grammys to mark the 40th anniversary of what became known as "Beatlemania". It was accepted by the widows of John Lennon and George Harrison, Yoko Ono and Olivia Harrison.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Don't let emotional upset force you into the poorhouse. You may find it necessary to confront a situation that has gotten out of hand.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Focus on using your creative abilities in other ways. You can meet potential new mates, but make sure that they aren't already committed to someone else.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Problems with financial investments could make you nervous. Your professional attitude will not go unnoticed. Stress may cause minor health ailments.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Travel will be on your mind; however, be careful and proceed with caution as minor accidents will cause delays. Do not get involved with individuals who are already committed to others.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Someone you care about may not be too well. Channel your energy into passionate interludes with your lover. You need to put some trust in others.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Get involved in activities that will bring you knowledge about foreign land, philosophies, or cultures. You would be best to work late in order to avoid such disharmony.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Now is the time for completing hobbies that you've been working on for a long time. You may find yourself in the limelight for the wrong reasons.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Investments may be misrepresented today. Don't overindulge in anyway. Entertainment should include sports events or physical activities.

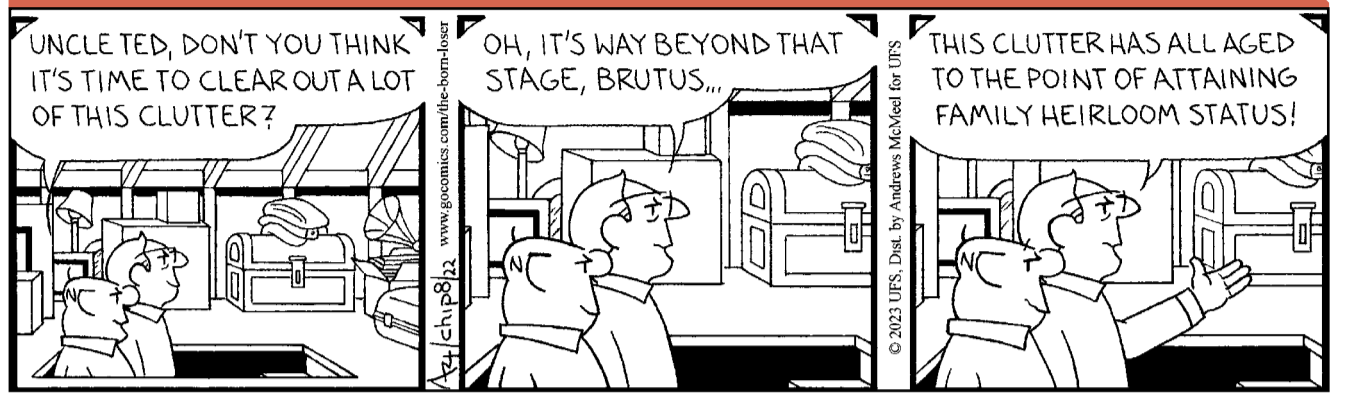
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Older members of your family may try to take advantage of you. Put your time and energy into home improvement. This will not be the day to lend money to friends or family.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
This is probably causing upset and confusion on the home front. It is best not to upset the apple cart if you learn information that may damage a colleague's reputation.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Opportunities for financial gains through investments and games of chance are likely. There's lots to be done and if you meet your deadline you'll be in your boss's good books.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Keep an open mind when listening to the opinions of others. You should be making plans to spend some time with the ones you love.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

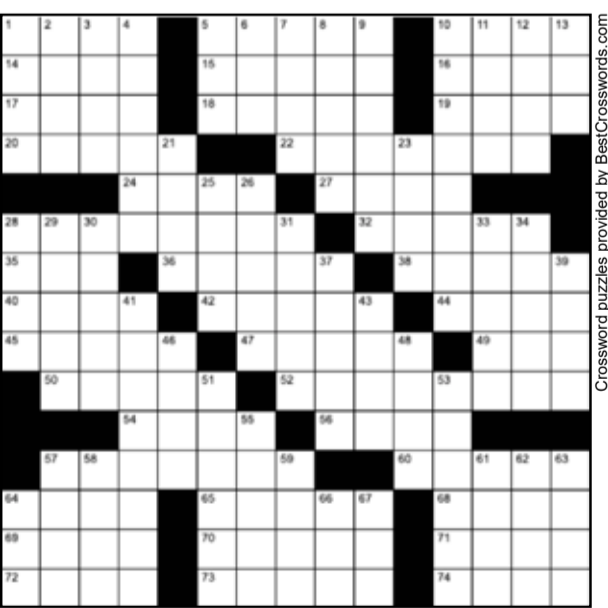
	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-4	4	fine
Changchun	-20	-5	fine
Chengdu	4	8	cloudy
Chongqing	7	9	rain
Fuzhou	9	10	rain
Guangzhou	11	14	rain
Guiyang	-1	0	overcast
Haikou	22	27	cloudy
Hangzhou	0	4	rain
Harbin	-25	-7	fine
Hefei	-3	3	overcast
Nanjing	-2	5	overcast
Shanghai	1	6	overcast
Taipei	15	16	rain
Wuhan	-2	2	snow
Hong Kong	14	19	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-13	-6	snow
Frankfurt	6	10	rain
Paris	11	12	rain
London	4	8	cloudy
New York	-1	7	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- "The Alienist" author; 5- Sleep issue; 10- Make-up artist?; 14- Carpenter's measurement; 15- Gathers; 16- Swenson of "Benson"; 17- Highway; 18- Eight Days; 19- Bender; 20- Salk's conquest; 22- Taking; 24- Garden pest; 27- Cozy; 28- Like Wittenberg University in Ohio; 32- Open space in a forest; 35- Actress Bali; 36- Willow; 38- Single things; 40- Star- tuna; 42- Aquarium buildup; 44- Straight; 45- Kett and James; 47- Gossipmonger; 49- Writer LeShan; 50- Checking out; 52- 8th president of the U.S.; 54- Tackle box item; 56- Chinese weight; 57- Mandible; 60- Former Russian rulers; 64- Biblical gift bearers; 65- Water holes; 68- Family portrait?; 69- Author Hunter; 70- Quality; 71- Novel ending; 72- Hog fat; 73- Accord maker; 74- Oboe, e.g.

DOWN 1- Bellyache; 2- Buck follower; 3- Actual; 4- Edible root; 5- First name in Notre Dame football; 6- Sunday seat; 7- Scottish refusals; 8- Sporting blades; 9- Kind of price; 10- Person engaged in a lawsuit; 11- Get the ground floor; 12- Excited; 13- Squealer; 21- Bread spread; 23- Member of a Nguni people; 25- Bear in the sky; 26- Merrily; 28- Similar; 29- Put together; 30- Delicious; 31- Israeli desert; 33- More urgent; 34- Piece of music written for a solo instrument; 37- Charged; 39- Actor Connery; 41- It may help move aircraft; 43- Sicilian volcano; 46- Rebuff; 48- Assist, often in a criminal act; 51- Gradual increase; 53- Northern Ireland province; 55- Dicembre follower; 57- Coffee, slangily; 58- Food thickener; 59- Enthusiastic vigor and liveliness; 61- Commedia dell'arte; 62- Network of nerves; 63- Highly ranked competitor in sporting events; 64- Singer Torne; 66- It may be flipped; 67- RR stop;

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PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
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Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300	
IAM 28 387 333	
Tourism 28 333 000	
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AP PHOTO



Bohan Phoenix, Chinese American rapper Bohan Phoenix poses for a photograph shoot for his album cover in Los Angeles in 2021

MUSIC

BOHAN PHOENIX EXPLAINS WHY ASIAN RAPPERS OWE BLACK CULTURE AND HE CHOSE TO WORK IN CHINA

HUIZHONG WU, BANGKOK

CHINESE American rapper Bohan Phoenix has straddled both countries in his career. Working with Chinese rappers like the popular Higher Brothers, he has always interspersed English song lyrics with a catchy Chinese chorus.

Far from the flex-heavy culture of rap songs in the Top 40, his latest album "Make You Proud" is a heartfelt, bilingual exploration of the musician's life. In it, Phoenix hits back at the haters who say his Chinese isn't good, and speaks of his own naivety in the commercialized space that is the music industry, and what he's most known for: the dual strands of his Chinese and American lives.

The album was a personal challenge, Phoenix said. He's most proud of its eponymous first song, in which he raps about his average grades in China and moving to the U.S. at age 11, over a repeating series of piano chords.

"When I was posting on Douyin and Chinese social media,

people were like ... 'his Chinese sounds weird,'" he said in an interview with The Associated Press. The comments got to him. "It just got to a point where I was like, I do feel like it's time to challenge myself as an artist."

Once he decided to take the challenge, the rhymes came naturally. His lyrics are different from Chinese rappers who try to compete in the complexity of their rhymes, often using *chengyu*, four-character literary proverbs. It's straightforward, though critics say the vocabulary is simple, at the level of a third-grader.

Phoenix said he's happy with the result, "I had never been able to tell my story so clearly in Chinese before," he said.

For an artist who started rapping in English, Chinese was at first just an ornamentation in his music. But as he got older, Phoenix says he felt more compelled to use Chinese and being more in touch with his mother tongue. When he moved back to China in 2017, he said he "couldn't soundcheck without someone's help, because I just didn't know how to say certain equipment on stage."

His album also touches on politics, though Phoenix says he has never thought of himself or his work as political. Yet its release comes a year after China lifted strict COVID-19 lockdowns, during which passenger flights were reduced and pandemic border controls kept families separated. Phoenix himself couldn't get a visa to go back and see his family for three years.

His music touches on the rise of rap in China as well as the pointed questions raised when Black Lives Matter protests burst out nationwide in the U.S. after the May 2020 murder of George Floyd, who was Black, by a white police officer. On his latest album, "Love for you," Phoenix apologizes to Higher Brothers for saying they were not speaking in support of Black Lives Matter.

During that period, Phoenix said he saw a lack of "accountability" from the Asian rapping community, and "as Asian rappers who made a boatload of money from Black culture, it was only right that we showed up and donated to the cause."

Phoenix had called out 88Ri-

sing, a label that features Asian hip-hop artists, as well as Higher Brothers and Vava, some of the biggest names in the Chinese rapping sphere. The label later announced a donation of \$60,000 in support of funds against racial inequality.

Phoenix's criticism led to a rift with Higher Brothers that hasn't healed. The group told Bohan he should have reached out privately instead of writing about it online. They also said they didn't understand the situation in the U.S.

Back in the U.S. during the pandemic, Phoenix donated money and marched in the streets. He also served as a moderator for a panel about Asian American support for Black Lives Matter. "Everything felt really urgent," he said of the time.

Politics and racism again reared its head during a sharp tick in anti-Asian hate crimes in the U.S., and very visible attacks on elderly Asian Americans in major cities like New York and San Francisco.

Phoenix said he immediately thought of his mother, and worried about her getting attacked in New York. He released a song cal-

led "but I still love you" as part of a campaign #HateIsAVirus, which features people of different ethnicities dancing and singing together. Again, he spoke of Black and Asian solidarity, and of seeing everyone as human first.

"I know I look nothing like you, but I hope that you still love me," the crowd sings in the chorus of the song.

Phoenix is clear on why he does what he does.

"But my need for music isn't about money or fast cars, when I have nothing, it gives me confidence and joy," he raps in "Love For You."

For now, Phoenix is focused on his work in China, in part because he wants to spend time with his grandfather. He still shuttles between the U.S. and China, and is one of the few artists who perform and attract audiences in both countries. He appears as confident in Harlem as he is in Chengdu.

Phoenix is due to join the next season of a popular hip-hop competition show, Rap of China, which has brought rap to the mainstream, in the spring.

To him, China represents possibility.

"For me I'm confident in my music to be in the States, but being in China ... I have always thought, Oh man, what would it be like to be in New York when hip-hop just got started?" he said. "To me, China kind of feels like that. It feels like the wild, wild West." **MDT/AP**

FOOTBALL | EPL

Little separating Liverpool, Man City and Arsenal in title race rich with narratives

STEVE DOUGLAS

ONE team is looking to make history. Another wants to give its long-time manager the perfect send-off. The other is eager for revenge.

An English Premier League title race rich with narratives is shaping up to have a thrilling finish with the top three — Liverpool, Manchester City and Arsenal — separated by just two points with 15 matches remaining.

Arsenal's 3-1 win over Liverpool on Sunday, followed by City's victory at Brentford by the same score on Monday.

LIVERPOOL

(1st, 51 points after 23 games)

Sure, Jurgen Klopp has won the Premier League with Liverpool, ending the storied team's 30-year wait for the title in the process. But that 2020 triumph was tinged with the slightest regret in that it came during the pandemic and there were no fans



Liverpool's Darwin Nunez

inside Anfield when then-Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson and his teammates hoisted the trophy on The Kop. Doing it before a full house and in the final days of Klopp's nearly nine-year tenure would be a fitting way for the German to depart. Liverpool, which has the joint-best defensive

record in the league and is second for most goals scored, still has to play City at home in mid-March and has potentially testing away games at Manchester United and Aston Villa. The biggest thing going against Liverpool could be the fact that the team is still going for silverware on four fronts.

MANCHESTER CITY

(2nd, 49 points after 22 games)

No team in the history of English soccer, dating back all the way to 1888, has won the top-flight for four straight years. That's what City is attempting to do as manager Pep Guardiola strives to break more new ground for an Abu Dhabi-owned club that won the Champions League for the first time last year and the Premier League in seven of the last 12 seasons. For some, any trophy won by City now comes with an asterisk, given the club is under heavy scrutiny while it faces about 80 alleged breaches of the league's financial rules and 30 more relating to its alleged failure to co-operate with an investigation. City has a fully fit squad now that Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne are over their long-term injuries and also a game in hand, leading many to believe a successful title defense is likely, maybe even inevitable.

ARSENAL

(3rd, 49 points after 23 games)

Arsenal's push for a first league title since 2004 is being fueled by a desire to make amends for last season, when the team imploded in the closing weeks after taking an eight-point lead with nine games left. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta seems to be pacing this season better, setting up his team to control games more and not go full throttle like in the first half of the last campaign. He has a deeper squad at his disposal this time round, too. His players will likely have learned lessons from last season, especially mentally in playing under pressure in every match and going toe-to-toe with an always fast-finishing City team. The dominant display against Liverpool on Sunday can only strengthen confidence, with Arsenal seemingly having gotten over a wobble either side of Christmas and winning its last three games while scoring 10 goals. **MDT/AP**

廖國敏
LIO KUOKMAN

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TALENTED MAESTRO LIO KUOKMAN HAS AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR HIS HOMETOWN ORCHESTRA

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

TWO PRIORITY TASKS HIGHLIGHT RURAL WORK CHALLENGES

The No 1 central document for the year that the central government released on Saturday focuses on rural development. It provides indicators of the priorities for the rural work.

The document outlines six major undertakings for the year aimed at comprehensively promoting rural vitalization. They are ensuring national food security, forestalling any large-scale relapse into poverty, improving the development of rural industries, strengthening rural construction, enhancing rural governance, and strengthening the leadership of the Communist Party of China on rural work.

Although most of the six tasks have been stressed over the past few years, the first two carry a greater sense of urgency this year given the widely felt uncertainties and risks associated with the country's external and internal development environment.

Apart from the grave impacts of extreme weather events and global warming on the country's food security, China has to take into account the systemic influences of geopolitical tensions, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Middle East crisis. Not to mention the possible impacts of some countries' weaponizing of normal trade in a bid to hinder China importing food from the world market.

China's population accounts for 17.9 percent of that of the world, while the arable land in the country accounts for only 7 percent of the world's total. Although it has generally realized self-reliance in basic foods after years of struggle, the balance is precariously delicate. The country has been the world's largest food importer for years in a bid to enhance the nation's nutritional conditions.

That's why, apart from diversifying its import sources for food, the country is obliged to further explore the potential of agricultural technology and scientific management to improve the efficiency of its food production. It needs to increase input to promote breakthroughs in agricultural science and technology, optimize the organization of rural production structures and strengthen oversights of farmland protection and reduce food waste.

Notably, after extreme poverty was eliminated in its vast countryside in 2020, avoiding a large-scale return to poverty has been singled out as a key task of rural work, second only to ensuring food security. That demonstrates the grave situation in that regard as a result of the downward pressure on the economy. Those that had been lifted out of poverty in the previous few years, particularly those living on incomes from temporary urban jobs, are also those most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the economy.

The number of jobs for migrant workers are in a decline due to both the overall macroeconomic conditions and the automation of manufacturing. So local governments should guide those looking for jobs to earn their living from their agricultural knowhow, the boom in digital economy, and the green transition of rural life. To that end, as the document stressed, more should be done to bridge the urban-rural gap in public services, improve the mechanism for diverse investment in rural vitalization and expand the rural talent pool. In the process, the farmers' rights and interests must be strictly protected.

TAYLOR, MILEY AND BILLIE HELP GRAMMYS REACH ITS LARGEST AUDIENCE SINCE 2020

THE BUZZ

An average of 16.9 million viewers tuned in to see performances by Miley Cyrus and Billie Eilish and watch Taylor Swift make history at the Grammy Awards on Sunday, the largest audience for the telecast in four years and another consecutive annual increase for a show that is recovering from its pandemic declines.

Ratings were up 34% on Sunday across CBS, Paramount+ and other digital platforms from last year, and with delayed watching included was expected to amass over 17 million viewers.

The telecast peaked with 18.25 million viewers during the in memo-

rium segment, with performances by Stevie Wonder, Annie Lennox, Jon Batiste and Fantasia Barrino.

The numbers Sunday easily beat the 12.4 million people who tuned in to watch Harry Styles, Lizzo and Bad Bunny perform during the show in 2023, along with a tribute to 50 years of rap history.

That's another year of growth seen under host Trevor Noah, who has hosted since 2021. Live viewership was 8.8 million in 2021 and 8.9 million in 2022. The numbers this year are closer to pre-pandemic levels: Music's showcase night was seen by 18.7 million people in 2020.



Crowned Miss Japan, Ukrainian-born Carolina Shiino (center) cried with joy, thankful for the recognition of her identity as Japanese

UKRAINIAN-BORN MISS JAPAN GIVES UP HER TITLE AFTER ARTICLE REVEALS AFFAIR WITH MARRIED MAN

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

The Ukrainian-born winner of this year's Miss Japan beauty pageant and the contest's organizers say she has renounced her title after a magazine published an article about her affair with a married man.

Karolina Shiino was crowned Miss Japan on Jan. 22, setting off renewed public debate over what it means to be Japanese in a country where homogeneity and conformity are still valued.

In a message posted on Instagram this week, Shiino said that after the article came out, she offered to give up her crown and resign from her modeling agency. She said her offers were accepted.

The Associated Press could not immediately reach Shiino for comment.

The Weekly Bunshun magazine reported last week that Shiino had been in a relationship with a doctor who is married. Initially, she appeared to confirm the relationship but said she did not know he was married.

Later, she said her ear-

lier explanation "was not true" and that she was aware of his married status and that he had a family. She apologized and said she was in a state of shock and fear over the report and panicked, which is why she was not able to tell the truth.

"I'm very sorry for causing the tremendous trouble and for acting as if betraying everyone who has supported me," she said on Instagram.

Shiino also apologized to the man's partner and his family, as well as other parties involved.

The office of the Miss Japan organizers yesterday said Shiino's renunciation of the title was accepted and the slot for the 2024 winner would remain empty.

The organization said it "takes seriously our responsibility for causing the ruckus" and apologized to sponsors, judges and others involved. It said it defended Shiino at first, based on her initial explanation that the man she was involved with had told her he was divorced and that she broke up with him when she learned otherwise.

The scandal reignited a wave of criticism of Shiino on social media but also raised questions about why she was mostly blamed for the affair.

The man who was involved, Takuma Maeda, an influencer known as "muscle doctor," acknowledged on Instagram that he had no intention of divorcing his wife and apologized for causing trouble to Shiino and others. He pledged to sincerely devote himself to his work and private life.

In Japan's male-dominated culture, women are expected to be good mothers and wives, and are publicly chastised more than men in case of extramarital affairs.

Last year, famous Japanese actress Ryoko Hirose's acting agency suspended her indefinitely from work contracts over her alleged affair with a married celebrity chef.

Shiino has lived in Japan since moving to the country at the age of 5. Fluent in Japanese, she became a naturalized citizen in 2022. She has worked as a model and said she has as strong a sense of Japanese identity as anyone else, despite her Caucasian look. **MDT/AP**



Ukraine Security at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant remains fragile amid worrying recent staff cuts enacted by Russian authorities occupying the facility, which is one of the 10 biggest atomic power plants in the world, the United Nations nuclear watchdog chief said. International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi, who is in Kyiv, told The Associated Press that his upcoming visit to the plant as the war approaches its two-year milestone will aim to assess the impact of recent personnel reductions after Russia denied access to employees of Ukraine's Energoatom.



Turkey Millions of people across Turkey yesterday mourned the loss of more than 53,000 friends, loved ones and neighbors in the country's catastrophic earthquake a year ago. In Antakya, the capital of the southern province of Hatay, angry crowds jostled with police as officials were led to the commemorations. Mayor Lutfu Savas was greeted with chants calling for him to resign, while Health Minister Fahrettin Koca was jeered and booed as he gave a speech.



Serbia's National Assembly held a tense inaugural session yesterday as the ruling nationalists ignored widespread reports that parliamentary and municipal elections held in December were marred by vote rigging and numerous other irregularities. As the session started, opposition lawmakers gathered around the speaker's stand, whistling, booing and holding signs that read "You Stole the Elections." Others held photos of populist Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic with a caption that read "The mafia boss."