

**17 SEATERS**  
**A-CHANGIN'**  
 Advertise with us  
 +853 287 160 81

www.rcr-macau.com  
**RCR** electronics

**THE DISCOVERY OF A SIGNIFICANT FRAUD AND MONEY LAUNDERING OPERATION TOTALING MORE THAN MOP650,000 HAS LED TO THE APPREHENSION OF FOUR INDIVIDUALS** P2

**NONGFU SPRING CONDEMNS HK WATCHDOG FOR 'LACKING SCIENTIFIC BASIS' IN REPORT** P2

**HONG KONG IS TESTING OUT ITS OWN CHATGPT-STYLE TOOL AS OPENAI PLANNED EXTRA STEPS TO BLOCK ACCESS** P6



AP PHOTO



**China-US** A federal appeals court has reversed the conviction of a researcher who was accused of hiding work he did in China while employed at the University of Kansas. Feng "Franklin" Tao (pictured) was convicted in April 2022 of three counts of wire fraud and one count of making a materially false statement. U.S. District Judge Julie Robinson threw out the wire fraud convictions a few months later but let the false statement conviction stand. She later sentenced him to time served.

AP PHOTO



**Afghanistan** Heavy rains have killed at least 40 people and injured nearly 350 others, Taliban officials said yesterday. Separately, at least 17 died when a bus overturned on a main highway, official media said. Sharafat Zaman Amar, a spokesperson for the Public Health Ministry, confirmed that 40 people had died in Monday's storm and that 347 injured people had been brought for treatment to the regional hospital in Nangarhar from Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province, and nearby districts.

AP PHOTO



**Bangladesh** Police fired tear gas and charged with batons during violent clashes between a pro-government student body and student protesters overnight, leaving dozens injured at a public university outside the capital, authorities and students said yesterday. The violence spread early yesterday at Jahangir Nagar University in Savar, outside Dhaka, where protesters demanded an end to a quota reserved for family members of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971, allowing them to take up 30% of governmental jobs.



# HEALTHY MACAU

**Gov't announces plans aimed at enhancing community health, setting ambitious targets to be met by 2030** P3

VICTORIA CHAN



**TOURISM**  
**VISITOR NUMBERS REACH 16 MILLION IN H1** P4

**GAMING**  
**CASINOS EMBRACE NEW BACCARAT SIDE BET** P5

VICTORIA CHAN



CRIME

# FOUR SUSPECTS DETAINED IN SERIOUS FRAUD AND MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

VICTORIA CHAN

**A**UTHORITIES in Macau have discovered a major fraud and money laundering scheme, resulting in the arrest of four suspects. The case involves a criminal syndicate that defrauded a victim from mainland China of over MOP650,000.

The investigation began on June 3 when a mainland Chinese victim came to Macau to report losing MOP650,000 in an online investment scam. Investigators then identified four bank account holders as suspects: Chiu, 32;

Chui, 33; Liang, 38; and Mok, 37 – all residents of Macau excepting Mok, who is from the mainland.

According to the police, the first suspect, Chiu, 32, admitted to contacting the victim on social media and persuading him to invest in virtual currency trading platforms. From June 15 to July 9, Chiu allegedly transferred the victim's money through five different Macau bank accounts linked to the four suspects. When the victim was unable to withdraw any returns, he reported the crime.

Police made contact with the

four suspects on the mainland on July 15 and brought them to Macau for investigation. Chiu told investigators he had received the fraudulent funds, converted them to Chinese yuan, and transferred the money to payment platforms controlled by unnamed criminal group members. In exchange, Chiu said he was given 12% of the stolen funds, with 10% designated as his cut and 2% reserved for any middle man involved. The other three suspects received a 10% cut.

Chiu further implicated the other three suspects, saying he

had recruited the other Chui, Liang, and Mok to open additional bank accounts and help launder the money. According to the case, Chui and Mok received a total of MOP350,000, while Liang received MOP140,000 after transferring funds between the various accounts.

During questioning, all four suspects refused to cooperate with police. Further investigations revealed Chui and Liang had past involvement in multiple fraud schemes using their bank accounts. In total, the cases linked to the four involved over

MOP360,000.

The Public Security Police Force stated the cases would be transferred to Public Prosecutions Office for formal charges. They indicated they would investigate whether the suspects participated in any other related criminal activities.

Authorities are urging the public to refrain from opening bank accounts or lending their accounts to others for the purpose of illegal activities as they can be easily exploited for money laundering and the transfer of illicit funds.

# Nongfu Spring condemns Hong Kong watchdog for 'lacking scientific basis' in report

LYNZY VALLES

**N**ONGFU Spring, the largest bottled water producer in mainland China, has strongly criticized a report released by Hong Kong's Consumer Council, labeling it as "extremely unscientific and irresponsible."

The report "Taste, Mineral and Safety Test on 30 Bottled Water Products," released by the watchdog Monday, claimed that the company's product contained levels of a potentially harmful chemical that exceeded the EU limit.



In response, Nongfu Spring has demanded an apology from the watchdog for what they perceive as a baseless accusation.

The Chinese beverage giant revealed it had already

issued a legal letter to the council claiming that there were errors in the report.

The beverage firm is demanding clarification and apology from the council, claiming its findings caused

panic among Hong Kong and mainland consumers, as well as "massive" damage to its brand.

Nongfu Spring is also being sold in Macau supermarkets.

Shares of Nongfu Spring experienced a 2.7% decrease in trading value, reaching HKD32.60 in Hong Kong yesterday, following a 4.6% drop the previous day.

The Hangzhou-based company stated that the council's evaluation of their drinking water was based on natural mineral water standards, which led to an inaccurate report.

Nongfu Spring's bottled water contains three micrograms per liter of bromate, which is within the maximum acceptable concentration for natural mineral water set by the

European Union.

The company emphasized that its drinking water fully complies with domestic and international safety standards and qualifies as a high-quality product.

Nongfu Spring criticized the Hong Kong watchdog for using third-party instead of domestic standards to evaluate drinking water produced and sold in China.

The company also pointed out that the report used unprofessional and misleading terms, leading consumers to misconstrue the safety of the product.

In response to media enquiries, the Consumer Council confirmed that it had received a lawyer's letter from Nongfu Spring and that it is currently considering its options.

www.macaudailytimes.com.mo

**REACHING OUT!**

+25,000

Like us on facebook.com/mdtimes



MacauDaily 澳門每日時報  
**Times**

DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF\_Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com  
ASSISTANT EDITOR\_Lynzy Valles  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS\_Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS\_Alex Torrão, Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Jorge Costa Oliveira, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Sérgio de Almeida Correia, Viviana Seguí DESIGNER\_Rebeca Almeida | ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS\_JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | NEWS AGENCIES\_Associated Press, MacauHub, MacaoNews, Xinhua SECRETARY\_Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com

OFFICE MANAGER Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com

ADDRESS Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR Telephones: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84

Advertisement advertising@macaudailytimes.com

For subscription and general issues:

general@macaudailytimes.com | Printed at Welfare Printing Ltd

# Health Bureau announces ambitious plan to improve health by 2030

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Health Bureau (SSM) has drafted a plan to improve local health with ambitious goals to be achieved by 2030.

The plan was unveiled yesterday morning in a meeting that was also to commemorate the 20th anniversary of when Macau's policies to become a "Healthy City" were established.

As Alvis Lo, the director of SSM, mentioned in his initial speech, this new plan is deeply rooted in, and inspired by, the country's general plan of "Healthy China 2030."

Lo also mentioned that both "Healthy China 2030" and the local plan consider global strategies and frameworks formulated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international organizations, adjusted for Macau.

The plan is "based on long-term planning, strengthening top-level design, and mobilizing public participation," Lo said, adding that it "includes policy directions, action strategies, specific goals, and evaluation indicators."

Taking the health of the local population as its core value, the plan "combines resources in the fields of health, education, culture, sports, and other fields; integrates health elements into all public policies; and cooperates with the development of the macro-health industry of the SAR government," the same official remarked.

The full plan has 20 specific



goals and 52 evaluation indicators "that need to be achieved by 2030," covering areas such as health risk factors, mental health, chronic diseases, and infectious diseases.

"We hope that, by 2030, Macau can achieve [these goals]. The overall aim is to improve health literacy, popularize healthy lifestyles, control major chronic diseases, and continuously improve residents' quality of life," the SSM director concluded.

## 20 VERY AMBITIOUS GOALS

As the director of SSM noted, the plan includes 20 goals "to be achieved by 2030," although, on closer inspection, they may be too ambitious.

Some examples include,

"eradicate the epidemic of HIV/AIDS," "eradicate hepatitis types B and C" and "lower consumption of tobacco and alcohol."

Other examples include "contain the growing trend of obesity," and "accelerate the eradication of cervical cancer."

To achieve such ambitious goals, the SSM has identified three major challenges including "inadequate practices of a healthy life," "increase of risk of chronic diseases," and "growing demand for health services." To address such challenges, the government drafted three political guidelines, "decentralize resources from the hospital to the community," "change the paradigm from healthcare to health management," and

"change the mentality from a passive health management to an active one."

With these three orientations in mind, the authorities aim to develop another three implementation strategies that include the "elaboration of health policies that will improve the system and services," "create a healthy environment to mobilize the participation of the community," and, "promote healthy behaviors to achieve health self-management."

In his speech, Lo noted that such directions directly emanated from the words of President Xi Jinping who pointed out that people's health should be strategically prioritized to promote the construction of

a healthy China. This includes five key areas: popularizing healthy living, optimizing health services, improving health security, building a healthy environment, and developing health industries.

## BIG HEALTH CHALLENGES ARE MOSTLY PREVENTABLE

The director of SSM believes that, although there are some challenges in the implementation of the health plan, most of the "big issues" are preventable.

"With the urban development, aging population, and lifestyle changes in Macau, chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, and cancer have become the most important health challenges in Macau," Lo said, adding that such factors are "causing the demand for medical services to continue to rise and becoming a problem for Macau residents, representing the main cause of death."

"Fortunately, most chronic diseases are preventable. We can prevent the occurrence and development of chronic diseases and reduce the negative impact on residents' health by formulating healthy policies, building a healthy environment, and helping residents practice healthy behaviors," he remarked.

During several presentations from the six specialized workgroups, which followed the general presentation of the plan, hypertension was cited as an example. According to these presentations, similar to other countries and regions internationally, there is a high incidence of the condition in Macau but, unlike in other places, in Macau the condition is more concerning because many people do not know about it.

# 90% of teenagers not exercising recommended amount

RENATO MARQUES

**A** survey on health behavior of secondary education level students in 2022-23 has revealed that 90% of teenagers do not perform the recommended level of daily physical activity, the Health Bureau (SSM) noted in the "Healthy Macau Plan" for 2030, presented yesterday morning.

According to the results of the survey, most students in Macau do not comply with the World Health Organization



standards that state that children and adolescents aged between 5 and 17

years old should have at least 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-high physical intensity activity.

The same survey also noted that over 70% of lo-

cal students spend most of their extracurricular time using electronic screens engaging in entertainment media.

This, together with other unhealthy habits such as the low consumption of fruits and vegetables, is an example of one of the "challenges," named in the plan under the broad umbrella of "practice of unhealthy lifestyles."

WHO also suggests that the daily intake of fruits and vegetables should not be lower than five portions (around 400

grams) that, according to the same survey, 40% of Macau youngsters fail to do.

SSM also noted that at least 30% of the residents of Macau eat more red meat and salt than recommended.

SSM also said that the younger generation is poorly informed about these lifestyle choices and falsely believe that high blood pressure, high glycemia, and high lipids in the bloodstream are issues that only older people should be concerned with.



**TOURISM**

# VISITOR NUMBERS REACH 16 MILLION IN FIRST HALF OF 2024

VICTORIA CHAN

MACAU'S tourism industry is showing strong signs of recovery in the first half of 2024, according to data from the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

Provisional data shows over 16.7 million visitor arrivals, a 43.6% increase from 2023. This reaches 82.5% of levels in 2019.

The impressive rebound is attributed to support measures by the Central Government that have helped MGTO to open new markets and strengthen Macau's position as a tourism and leisure hub. International visitors significantly increased, with over 1.17 million, a 146.4% rise year-on-year, reaching 67.2% of 2019 levels. Package tour visitors surged to 928,000 in the first five months, a 230% increase.

The accommodation sector

benefited, with the average hotel occupancy rate from January to May 2024 rising 7.7 percentage points to 84.3%, just 7.2 points lower than in 2019. Hotel guests increased 25% compared to 2023, exceeding pre-pandemic levels by 6%.

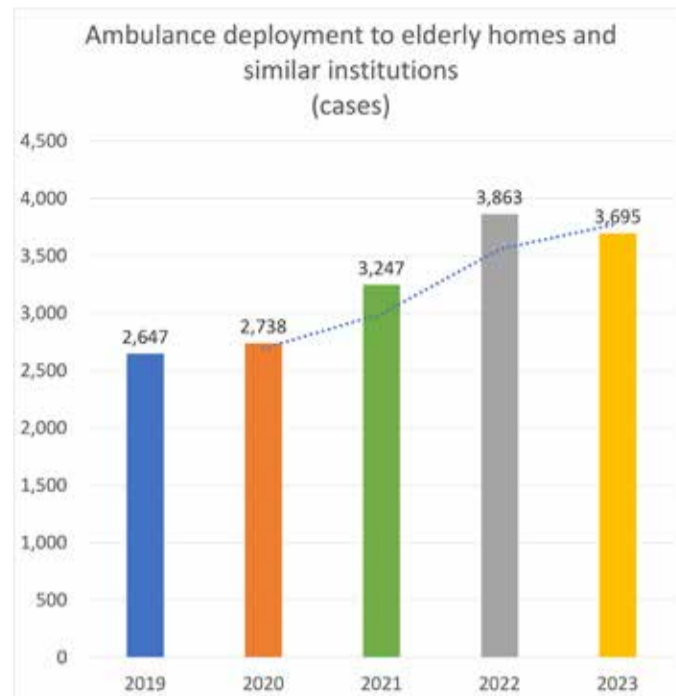
MGTO is leveraging Central Government support like increased Mainland visitor tax exemption limits and expanded visa policies to further boost development. MGTO actively promotes Macau internationally, completing six overseas street promotions in the first half of the year.

Macau will celebrate its 25th anniversary with a series of celebratory events planned for the second half of the year, including the 32nd International Fireworks Display Contest and "My Treats for You" campaign to attract more international visitors.

A recent report from the Asia Tourism Exchange Center (ATEC) suggests the tourism markets in Macau and Hong Kong are poised for a swift rebound in 2024. This anticipated recovery is driven by several key factors, including support from mainland authorities, a diverse array of cultural and tourism events, and a swift rebound in the aviation sector.

According to the report, mainland Chinese visitor arrivals to Macau are projected to recover to 91% of pre-pandemic levels this year, marking a notable 62.18% year-on-year increase.

This surge is largely credited to effective promotional campaigns, such as special travel offers on airfare, cross-border transport, accommodation, dining, entertainment and show tickets.



## DEPLOYMENT OF AMBULANCES TO ELDERLY HOMES IS STABILIZING

RENATO MARQUES

THE number of calls received by the Fire Services Bureau (CB) for the deployment of ambulances to assist with emergencies related to elderly homes and similar institutions in Macau is stabilizing after having peaked during the pandemic. Such a conclusion can be taken from the figures provided to the Times by the CB in response to an inquiry.

According to CB, the number of ambulances deployed to attend emergencies at this type of institution has grown significantly since 2020 and until the end of 2022 (2,738 to 3,863 cases).

Last year (2023) was the first year that the number of cases dropped (3,695), that is, -168 cases than in the previous year but, in reality,

and since there were fewer requests for ambulances in general, the service paid to elderly homes corresponded to 8.58% of all ambulance deployments in Macau last year.

Nonetheless, the figure of 2023 (3,695) represents the deployment, on average, of more than one ambulance to this type of institution per day.

The time that this type of service was accountable to a smaller percentage of CB services was back in 2019 when the service represented 6.31% of all ambulance deployments.

Although the number of deployments has reduced in 2023 it is still the second higher figure from the five years in analysis and represents a growth of over 1,000 cases per year (+39.6%) when compared year-on-year with 2019.

**ESPORTS**

# Riot brings TFT tournament to Macau

NADIA SHAW

THE second edition of the Teamfight Tactics (TFT) Macau Open will take place from Dec. 13 to 15, 2024. This prestigious Esports tournament will feature 512 competitors from all around the world who will be vying for a share of the USD300,000 (MOP2.4 million) prize pool, the Tactician's Belt, and the Macau Open title. The winner will take home USD100,000

(MOP805,000).

Following a successful inaugural event in Las Vegas, Riot Games announced plans to host the second TFT Open in Macau.

The main event will take place over three days, with players competing in multiple rounds of matches. Players will initially be seeded based on their rankings in the previous set (Set 12), then split into lobbies of eight to play three games each. The top four point earners from

each lobby will advance to the next round.

"Everything, from when we timed the event to how we brought people in and qualified people, and how we did things like co-streaming, are all part of how we build this event experience that feels like it can help broaden out the interest of esports to the TFT audience as a whole," said Michael Sherman, global head of esports for Teamfight Tactics and 2XKO.

Teamfight Tactics, a



strategy game and League of Legends spinoff released by Riot Games in 2019, has a strong following in Asia. Riot selected Macau, the world's largest gambling hub, as the next destination for the tournament

it piloted in Las Vegas. "Macau is such a great way for us to bring this experience to Asia without alienating players from all over the world," said Sherman. Like its American counterpart, Macau is an

ideal tourism and travel hub for an international event.

The event's location has not yet been confirmed, and two types of passes, competitor and spectator, will be sold.

# Study finds gaming operators lack transparency in community contributions

VICTORIA CHAN

A recent study sponsored by the Macau Foundation, conducted by the Asia Pacific Association for Gambling Studies (APAGS), has shed light on the information disclosure practices of Macau's major gaming operators over the past decade.

The study, which evaluated the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices of these operators from 2012 to 2021, highlighted several critical areas where transparency was lacking, raising concerns about gaming operators' contributions to the local community.

The study, led by Zeng Zhonglu from the Center for Gaming and Tourism Studies at Macao Polytechnic University, used data primarily sourced from the Macau SAR Government's annual policy reports, annual reports, and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) disclosures of the six gaming companies, along with their websites and financial results.

One of the key findings of the study was the limited transparency in information disclosure practices by Macau's gaming operators. Specifically, the study identified gaps in disclosing sensitive information related to the employment of local workers, the proportion of local workers in management posi-



VICTORIA CHAN

tions, and the amount of procurement from local small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These areas are crucial as they represent the tangible contributions of the SAR government and Macau society to the gaming companies.

"Without specific data, it is challenging to make accurate assessments," commented Zeng Zhonglu, as cited in media reports.

The study's data was collected before the new gaming law came into effect on Jan. 1, 2023, which imposes more rigorous requirements for measurement. However, the research team believes that the study provides a systematic case for quantifying the fulfillment of social responsibilities by gaming companies.

Another significant aspect highlighted in the study is the lack of responsiveness by gaming operators to stakeholder expectations, particularly those of the government. Zeng Jia, a co-author of the study, stated, "our analysis reveals a pattern where gaming operators often delay or provide inadequate responses to stakeholder expectations, particularly in areas critical to social responsibility and community engagement." The study segmented the government's requirements, including economic diversification, support for SMEs, responsible gaming practices, and the promotion of local workers, with the latter showing the weakest response from the six gaming companies.

Despite the transparency deficiencies and lack of proactive responsiveness, the gaming operators have made substantial contributions to Macau's economy. Sands China Ltd emerged as the largest taxpayer among the gaming operators, contributing approximately MOP218.3 billion (USD27.3 billion) over the past decade. This financial support plays a critical role in bolstering Macau's government finances during economic challenges. Following Sands China, Galaxy Entertainment Group contributed MOP195.4 billion (USD24.4 billion), and SJM contributed MOP190.9 billion (USD23.9 billion). Melco Resorts & Entertainment, Wynn Macau, and MGM China also made significant contributions.

In terms of employment, the study revealed that the six gaming operators collectively employed 80,808 local residents in 2019, accounting for 28.7% of Macau's local workforce. SJM employed the highest proportion of local employees (24.1%), followed by Sands (23.1%) and Galaxy (18.8%). Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the number of local employees slightly decreased to 76,265 in 2021, still representing 27.2% of Macau's total employment.

While the study focused on the period preceding the operators' latest 10-year concessions, awarded in 2022, which require a more hands-on role in Macau's economy and residents' day-to-day lives, the research team believes their findings provide a strong case for quantifying the fulfillment of social responsibilities by gaming companies.

While the study focused on the period preceding the operators' latest 10-year concessions, awarded in 2022, which require a more hands-on role in Macau's economy and residents' day-to-day lives, the research team believes their findings provide a strong case for quantifying the fulfillment of social responsibilities by gaming companies.

While the study focused on the period preceding the operators' latest 10-year concessions, awarded in 2022, which require a more hands-on role in Macau's economy and residents' day-to-day lives, the research team believes their findings provide a strong case for quantifying the fulfillment of social responsibilities by gaming companies.

## GOV'T TO DEVELOP NATIONAL REGULATIONS ON EV PARKING

The Office of the Secretary for Security has announced that the security sector will collaborate with relevant government departments to examine the national regulations and guidelines on the parking and charging range of electric vehicles, as well as indoor charging. The office has cited the Transport Bureau's commitment to monitoring the progress of electric vehicles and promptly updating relevant guidelines and inspection requirements for frontline vehicle inspectors. This comes amid lawmaker Ma lo Fong's query to the government concerning the increasing popularity of electric vehicles that urged authorities to review and enhance the standards of fire protection equipment in public parking lots.

## ELDERLY WOMAN DEFRAUDED MILLIONS IN ONLINE INVESTMENT SCAM

An elderly woman has fallen victim to an online investment scam and subsequently reported a loss of approximately MOP2.46 million to the authorities. The Judiciary Police revealed that the victim met an individual online who claimed to be a data analyst for a Hong Kong-based financial management company. This individual falsely assured the victim that they could generate profits through foreign exchange investments. The victim proceeded to download a mobile application and invested HKD60,000 as instructed. Initially, the account reflected profits, but the victim was then informed that she needed to recharge the account in order to make a withdrawal. Consequently, she wired approximately MOP2.4 million to the designated account.

## GAMING

# Casinos embrace new baccarat side bet

NADIA SHAW

A new baccarat side bet option, known as "Small 6/Big 6," has become prevalent in all of Macau's concessionaires' key properties, paying up to 50 times the stake. Macau's gaming regulator, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ), approved the bet in late April this year.

The "Small 6/Big 6" side bet, a variant of the popular "Lucky Six" found in Macau casinos, pays 22 to 1 if the winning banker hand is composed of two cards

with a face value of six. The side bet pays 50 to 1 for a winning banker hand with a face value of six, composed of three cards.

As players become more acquainted with the attractive payouts and strategic opportunities presented by the new "Small 6/Big 6" baccarat side bet, gaming experts believe this move signals a strategic shift by Macau's casino operators.

The "Small Tiger" side bet, which pays 22 to 1 for a winning banker hand with a two-card total of six, exhibits a house edge of 14.33%. In contrast, the

"Big Tiger" side bet, offers odds of 50 to 1 for a winning banker hand with a three-card total of six, demonstrates a slightly higher house edge of 15.25%.

According to GGRAsia, Macau casino operators Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd and Sands China Ltd were the earliest adopters of this new side bet option. Both companies had already launched the offer at their respective properties by early May, coinciding with the Labor Day holiday period.

In late May, MGM China Holdings Ltd and Wynn

Macau Ltd also started offering the Small 6/Big 6 bet option at their respective casino properties' mass and high-limit gaming areas. Melco Resorts & Entertainment Ltd also has the Small 6/Big 6-side bet option throughout its main floors and the "Qi Long" high-limit baccarat play area. The side bet option is also offered at the main floors and the "Phoenix Pavilion" high-limit baccarat play zones at SJM's Grand Lisboa and Grand Lisboa Palace.

While the house edge for these new side bets



AP PHOTO

is lower than the 16.68% edge for the traditional "Lucky Six" bet in Macau, the operators are hoping that the additional bet-

ting options and attractive payouts will appeal to players, as well as contribute to increased hold rates in Macau's casinos.

TECH

# Hong Kong is testing out its own ChatGPT-style tool as OpenAI planned extra steps to block access

KANIS LEUNG, HONG KONG

**H**ONG KONG'S government is testing the city's own ChatGPT-style tool for its employees, with plans to eventually make it available to the public, its innovation minister said after OpenAI took extra steps to block access from the city and other unsupported regions.

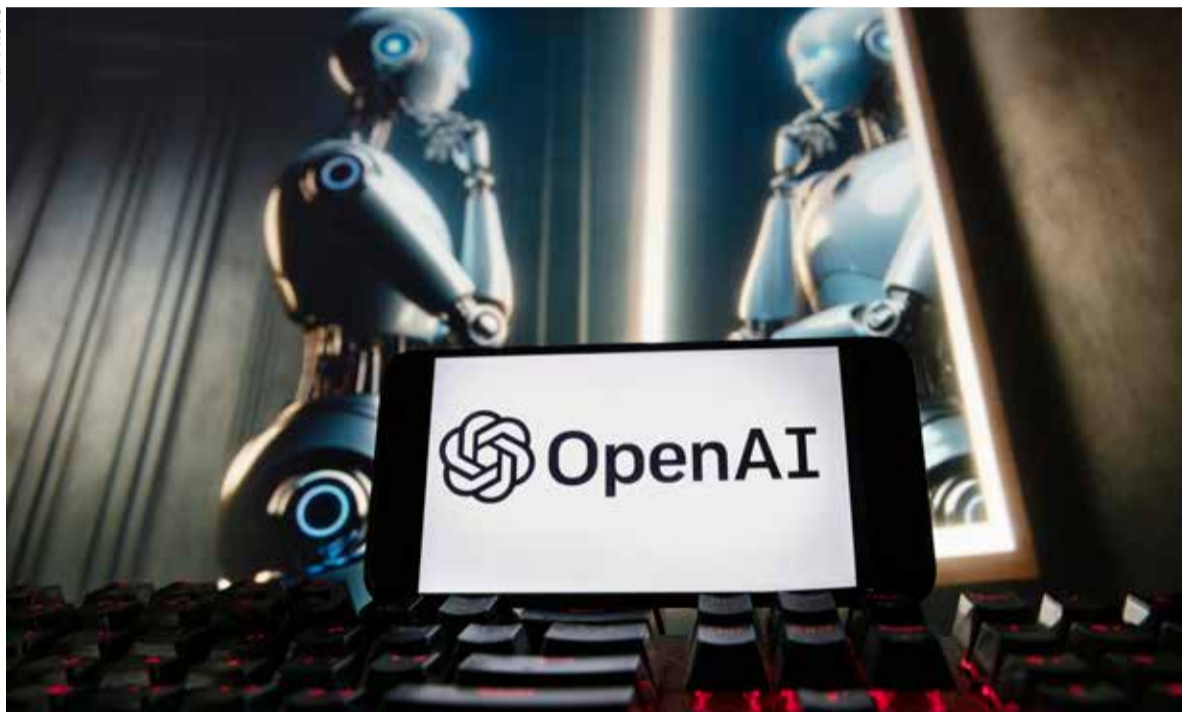
Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry Sun Dong said on a Saturday radio show that his bureau was trying out the artificial intelligence program, whose Chinese name translates to "document assistance application for civil servants," to further improve its capabilities. He plans to have it available for the rest of the government this year.

The program was developed by a generative AI research and development center led by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in collaboration with several other universities.

Sun said the model would provide functions like graphics and video design in the future. To what degree it would compare to the capabilities of ChatGPT was unclear.

Sun's bureau did not respond to The Associated Press' questions

AP PHOTO



about the model's functions.

Sun said on the radio show that industry players and the government would play a role in the model's future development.

"Given Hong Kong's current situation, it's difficult for Hong Kong to get giant companies like Microsoft and Google to subsidize such projects, so the government had to start doing it," he said.

Beijing and Washington are locked in a race for AI supremacy, with China having ambitions to

become the global leader in AI by 2030.

China, including Hong Kong and neighboring Macau, is not on the list of "supported countries and territories" of OpenAI, one of the best-known artificial intelligence companies.

The ChatGPT maker has not explained why certain territories were excluded but said accounts in those places attempting to access its services may become blocked.

According to a post on Ope-

nAI's online forum and local media reports, the company announced in an email to some users that it would be taking additional measures to block connections from regions not on the approved list starting July 9. It did not explain the reasons behind the latest move.

Francis Fong, the honorary president of the Hong Kong Information Technology Federation, said it was hard to say whether the capabilities of the program

in Hong Kong could match those of ChatGPT. With the input of AI companies in the city, Fong said he believed it could technologically catch up with the standards.

"Will it become the top? Maybe may not necessarily be as close as that. But I believe it won't be too far behind," he said.

He also said a locally developed AI program might more accurately address local language and localized issues, but adding it would "make sense" if the final product appears to be "politically correct."

Like most foreign websites and applications, ChatGPT is technically unavailable in China because of the country's firewall, which censors the internet for residents. Determined individuals can still gain access via commonly available "virtual private networks" that bypass restrictions.

Chinese tech giants such as Alibaba and Baidu have already rolled out primarily Chinese-language AI models similar to ChatGPT for public and commercial use. However, these AI models must abide by China's censorship rules.

In May, China's cyberspace academy said an AI chatbot was being trained on President Xi Jinping's doctrine, a reminder of the ideological parameters within which Chinese AI models will operate.

Also in May, SenseTime, a major Chinese artificial intelligence company, launched SenseChat for users in Hong Kong, where most of the population speaks Cantonese as their mother tongue rather than Mandarin. A check yesterday found the application could not provide answers to questions, such as what the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 and Hong Kong's protests in 2019 were about. **MDT/AP**

PARIS 2024

# World swimming body promises more anti-doping tests of Chinese team before Olympics

GRAHAM DUNBAR,  
GENEVA

**C**HINESE swimmers going to the Paris Olympics are undergoing increased drug testing of at least eight times this year before the Games, World Aquatics said on Monday.

The Chinese swim team in Paris is set to have 11 athletes who tested positive for a banned heart medication in 2021, six months before the Tokyo Olympics.

In Tokyo, the swimmers won three gold medals.

A Chinese state-backed

investigation in June 2021 blamed mass contamination by food in a hotel kitchen though without evidence to prove it. The case was not publicly revealed until reporting three months ago by the New York Times and German broadcaster ARD.

The World Anti-Doping Agency has been widely criticized — and targeted by a United States federal investigation — for accepting the explanation in 2021 when travel to China was not possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. A WADA-appointed prosecutor in Switzerland

AP PHOTO



last week cleared the Montreal-based agency of bias toward China in a report that had a limited remit.

Swimming's governing

body also appointed a panel to study how it handled the case three years ago, including following WADA at the time by not challenging the Chinese

claim at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

The panel's 11-page report with recommendations was published on Monday, 12 days before swim events start in Paris at La Defense Arena. It detailed a promise of more anti-doping tests for some countries ahead of the Olympics and especially China.

World Aquatics said "a certain number of athletes from specific nations will be tested four times" since the start of the year by the Lausanne-based International Testing Agency, which runs an-

ti-doping programs for many Olympic sports.

Chinese athletes competing in Paris "will be tested by the ITA no less than eight times during this same period," the world swim body said. Those samples would ideally not be collected by the Chinese anti-doping agency and also not be tested by laboratories in China.

World Aquatics is set to publish those test results before the Olympics opening ceremony on Friday of next week.

"What is extremely clear, and what cannot be taken for granted, is that the trust of the aquatics community is vital to the continued success of World Aquatics as an international federation," the governing body said. **MDT/AP**

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

A recently signed agreement will open a direct line of communication between China and the Philippines' presidential offices to try and prevent any new confrontation from spiraling out of control in the disputed South China Sea, according to highlights of the accord seen by The Associated Press on yesterday.

China and the Philippines have forged such emergency telephone hotlines at lower levels of their bureaucracies in the past to better manage their disputes, particularly in two fiercely disputed shoals where the Philippines has accused Chinese forces of increasingly hostile actions and China says Philippine ships have encroached despite repeated warnings.

The territorial faceoffs, however, have persisted uncontrollably in the past year, sparking fears of a larger armed conflict that could involve the United States, which has repeatedly warned that it's obligated to defend the Philippines, a key Asian treaty ally, if Filipino forces come under an armed attack in the disputed waters.

In a confrontation between Chinese and Philippine forces at the Philippines-occupied Second Thomas Shoal in August 2023, the Philippine government said it was unable to reach Chinese officials through an established "maritime communication mechanism" for several hours as the clash happened. That emergency telephone hotline was arranged after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing in January 2023.

Chinese and Philippine officials dealing with the territorial disputes held crucial talks in Manila on July 2, following a violent confrontation



Chinese Coast Guard holds an axe as they approach Philippine troops on a resupply mission in the Second Thomas Shoal at the disputed South China Sea, last month

## DISPUTED SEA

# New accord establishes a hotline Chinese and Philippine presidents can use to stop clashes

in the Second Thomas Shoal in which Chinese coast guard personnel reportedly wielded knives, an axe and improvised spears in a chaotic faceoff that injured Philippine navy personnel and damaged two of their motorboats. The Chinese forces also seized seven Philippine navy rifles, said the Philippine military chief, who demanded China return the firearms and pay for the damages.

Both sides "recognized the need to strengthen the bilateral maritime communication mechanism on the South China Sea" and signed an arrangement "on improving Philippines-China maritime communication mechanisms," the Depart-

ment of Foreign Affairs in Manila said in a statement after the talks in Manila, but did not provide a copy or details of the agreement.

A copy of the highlights of the agreement, seen by the AP, said it "provides several channels for communication between the Philippines and China, specifically on maritime issues, through the representatives to be designated by their leaders."

The hotline talks could also be done "through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs counterparts, including at the foreign minister and vice foreign minister levels or through their designated representatives," it said,

and added without elaborating that Philippine officials were "in discussions with the Chinese side on the guidelines that will govern the implementation of this arrangement."

There was also a plan to set up a new communication channel between the Chinese and Philippine coast guards "once the corresponding memorandum of understanding" between them is concluded, according to the agreement.

During the recent talks in Manila, China and the Philippines agreed on two other confidence-boosting steps to intensify "cooperation between their respective coast guard authorities" and the possible convening of a maritime

forum between Chinese and Philippine scientists and academic leaders.

"Both sides recognized that there is a need to restore trust, rebuild confidence and create conditions conducive to productive dialogue and interaction," the Philippine department of foreign affairs statement said after the talks. It added that China and the Philippines "affirmed their commitment to de-escalate tensions without prejudice to their respective positions."

It said that "there was substantial progress on developing measures to manage the situation at sea," but acknowledged that "significant differences remain." MDT/AP

## KOREA TENSIONS

# A N. Korean diplomat in Cuba defected to S. Korea in November, Seoul says

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

SOUTH Korea's spy agency said yesterday that a senior North Korea diplomat based in Cuba has fled to South Korea, the latest in a series of defections by members of the North's ruling elite in recent years.

The National Intelligence Service said media reports on the defection of a North Korean counselor of political affairs in Cuba were true. A brief statement by the NIS public affairs office gave no further details.

South Korea's mass-circulation Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported earlier

yesterday that diplomat Ri Il Kyu fled to South Korea with his wife and children in November.

Chosun Ilbo cited Ri as telling the newspaper in an interview that he had decided to defect because of what he called disillusionment with North Korea's political system, an unfair job evaluation by Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry, and the ministry's disapproval of his hopes to visit Mexico to treat his neural damage. He said that hospitals in Cuba didn't have the necessary medical equipment to treat his health problem due to international sanctions.

Other South Korean media outlets carried similar reports later yesterday.

Ri defected before South Korea and Cuba established diplomatic ties in February, an event that experts say likely posed a political blow to North Korea, whose diplomatic footing is largely dependent on a small number of Cold War-era allies like Cuba.

The Chosun report said Ri had been engaged in efforts to block Cuba from opening diplomatic ties with South Korea until his defection. The report said Ri won a commendation from leader Kim Jong Un

for his role in negotiations with Panama that led to the release of a ship detained in 2013 for allegedly carrying banned items like missiles and fighter jet parts. The report said Ri was then a third secretary of the North Korean Embassy in Cuba.

The South Korean government says the number of highly educated North Koreans with professional jobs escaping to South Korea has steadily increased in recent years. But it's still unusual for a member of the North's ruling elite to come to South Korea.

About 34,000 North Koreans have defected to



A North Korean flag flutters in the wind atop a 160-meter tower in the North's Kijong-dong village near the truce village of Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone in Paju, South Korea

South Korea to avoid economic hardship and political suppression since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. A majority of them are women from the North's poorer northern regions who arrived in South Korea since the mid-1990s, when North Korea suffered a devastating famine that was estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of people.

In 2016, Tae Yongho, then a minister at the North Korean Embassy in London, defected to South Korea. He told reporters in Seoul that he decided to flee because he didn't want his children to live "miserable" lives in North Korea and he fell into "despair" after watching North Korean leader Kim execute officials and pursue development of nuclear weapons. MDT/AP

# Top EU leaders will boycott meetings hosted by Hungary's Orbán after his outreach to Russia, China

JUSTIN SPIKE, BUDAPEST

**T**OP officials of the European Union will boycott informal meetings hosted by Hungary while the country holds the EU's rotating presidency, after Hungary's pro-Russian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held a series of rogue meetings with foreign leaders about Ukraine that angered his European partners.

The highly unusual decision to have the European Commission president and other top officials of the body boycott the meetings in Budapest was made "in light of recent developments marking the start of the Hungarian (EU) presidency," commission spokesperson Eric Mamer posted Monday on X.

Hungary took over the six-month rotating role July 1, and since then Orbán has visited Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, China, and the United States on a world tour he's touted as "peace mission" aimed at brokering an end to Russia's war in Ukraine.

That angered many leaders in the EU, who said they had not been informed in advance of Orbán's plans and rushed to emphasize that the nationalist

leader was not acting on behalf of the bloc during his surprise meetings with Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping.

Hungary's European affairs minister, János Bóka, lashed out at the commission's decision, writing on X on Monday that the body "cannot cherry pick institutions and member states it wants to cooperate with."

"Are all Commission decisions now based on political considerations?" Bóka wrote.

A Hungarian government spokesperson, Zoltán Kovács, also suggested the decision was a product of political bias, writing on X: "Sacrificing the institutional setup for private political purposes and disregarding (the Commission's) role for ideological and political motives."

The decision by the European Commission applies to informal meetings hosted by Hungary, and means senior civil servants will attend instead of top officials like the European Commission president, currently Ursula von der Leyen.

Orbán's government has gone against the European mainstream by refusing to supply Kyiv with weapons to deter Russia's invasion and by threatening to block financial assistance



Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán

to the war-ravaged country.

In an interview with Hungarian newspaper Magyar Nemzet on Monday, Orbán's political director said that following his trip to Moscow — the first such visit from an EU head of state or government in more than two years — the prime minister had briefed the leaders of other EU countries "in writing about the negotiations, the experiences of the first phase of the peace mission and the Hungarian proposals."

"If Europe wants peace and wants to have a decisive say in settling the war and ending the bloodshed, it must now work out and implement a change of direction," said Balázs Orbán, who is not related to the premier.

But von der Leyen accused Orbán of trying to mollify the Russian leader with the trip, writing on X: "Appeasement will not stop Putin. Only unity and determination will pave the path to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine."

Hungary's government has long argued for an immediate cease-fire and peace negotiations in the conflict in Ukraine, but has not outlined what such moves might mean for the country's territorial integrity and future security. It has exhibited an adversarial posture toward Ukraine while maintaining close ties to Moscow, even after its full-scale invasion in Feb. 2022.

Orbán's critics have accused him of acting against the unity and interests of the EU and NATO, of which Hungary is a member, and of pursuing an appeasement strategy concerning Russia's aggression.

**MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1976 AFRICAN COUNTRIES BOYCOTT OLYMPICS



The opening ceremony of the 21st Olympic Games in Montreal has been marred by the withdrawal of 25 African countries.

They are all protesting at New Zealand's sporting links with South Africa.

The International Olympic Committee's refusal to ban New Zealand, whose rugby team is currently touring South Africa, has resulted in the boycott.

South Africa has been banned from the Olympics since 1964 for its refusal to condemn apartheid.

A spokesperson for the New Zealand Olympic Committee said the All Blacks tour of South Africa had been arranged by the New Zealand Rugby Union which was an autonomous body and nothing to do with the Olympics.

He said it was illogical to single out New Zealand as it was one of 26 countries to have played sport in South Africa during the past year.

More than 300 competitors will now not take part in the Games which will mean many events will have to be cancelled or re-scheduled.

Athletics events will be particularly affected by the absence of Filbert Bayi from Tanzania, who holds the world record in the 1500m and John Akii-Bua of Uganda, world record-holder in the 400 metres hurdles.

The latest country to announce its withdrawal was Kenya. In a statement issued just hours before the opening ceremony, the country's foreign minister James Osogo said: "The government and the people of Kenya hold the view that principles are more precious than medals."

He said the decision by the IOC not to ban New Zealand would give "comfort and respectability to the South African racist regime and encourage it to continue to defy world opinion."

The IOC will now have to decide what sanctions should be imposed on the boycotting countries, who risk being expelled from the Olympic movement.

Approximately 20 of the 26 countries who have withdrawn from the competition had already travelled to Montreal but will now return home.

The list of those boycotting the Olympics is: Libya, Iraq, Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria, Gambia, Sudan, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Algeria, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Central African Republic, Gabon, Chad, Togo, Niger, Congo, Mauritius, Upper Volta and Malawi.

Courtesy BBC News

## USA

# Trump's economic plans include proposed tariffs, tax cuts and no taxes on tips

JOSH BOAK, WASHINGTON

**T**HE first night of the Republican National Convention kept its official focus on the economy yesterday (Macau time) even after Saturday's shooting at a rally in Pennsylvania in which former President Donald Trump was injured.

Speakers argued that Trump would fix inflation and bring back prosperity simply by returning to the White House as president.

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin lamented, "Tonight, America, the land of opportunity, just doesn't feel like that anymore."

But Trump has released few hard numbers and no real policy language or legislative blueprints, and most of the speakers Monday didn't get into details either. Instead, his campaign is betting that voters care more about attitude than policy specifics.

Trump says he wants tariffs on trade part-



ners and no taxes on tips. He would like to knock the corporate tax rate down a tick. The Republican platform also promises to "defeat" inflation and

"quickly bring down all prices," in addition to pumping out more oil, natural gas and coal.

The platform would address illegal immigration in part with the

"largest deportation program in American history." And Trump would also scrap President Joe Biden's policies to develop the market for electric vehicles and renewable energy.

Democrats and several leading economists say the math shows that Trump's ideas would cause an explosive bout of inflation, wallop the middle class and — by his extending his soon-to-expire tax cuts — heap another \$5 trillion-plus onto the national debt. **MDT/AP**

## IN CONTEXT

Countries protesting at New Zealand's participation in the Games continued to withdraw throughout the opening days.

Egypt subsequently withdrew and the final number of absences was 33.

In the first two days of the Games a million Canadian dollars were lost in event cancellations and seat refunds.

South Africa was banned from the Olympics until 1992 when apartheid laws were repealed in the country.

Britain came home from the Montreal Olympics with just one bronze medal in the track and field events. But swimmer David Wilkie gave Britain her first men's swimming gold medal in 68 years and also took the world record.

Nadia Comaneci of Romania, 14, took over the mantle of best gymnast in the world from Olga Korbut, after winning the first maximum score of 10.00 in Olympic history. She went on to win three gold medals.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Compromise with your partner on financial matters. Resist the temptation to throw money around. Avoid provoking an argument. Find a mutually beneficial agreement.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Treat your partner with compassion through changing circumstances. You're the stabilizing influence. Stay on the practical road. One phase ends and the next begins.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
Prioritize your work, health and fitness. You can do what's needed. Take one step after another. Get farther than expected. Disciplined efforts pay off.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Follow your heart. Reach a turning point in a creative project, or with love, romance or family. Emotional support goes a long way.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
Realize domestic dreams with dedication. Change directions to avoid obstacles. Make repairs and keep systems operational. Get family support. Cook up something delicious.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Take a new tack with a creative project. Back up ideas with research. Keep your cool despite chaos. Follow through on what you said.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Things may not go as planned financially. Hold your temper. Avoid outbursts. Discipline and experience make a difference. Pay bills. Take care of business.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
Personal breakdowns lead to breakthroughs. Postpone important decisions until you're sure. Wait to see what develops. Avoid automatic responses. Stay graceful and diplomatic.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Stay out of someone else's fuss. Lay low, in peace and quiet. Avoid overstimulation. Complete one project to make space for the next.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Navigate team changes. Call in reinforcements. You can meet a shared challenge. Sort out roles and responsibilities. You're stronger together. Share a common possibility.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Discipline pays, professionally. Chaos and changes interrupt your work. Stay calm and carry on. Get support as needed. Discover a lucky break in disguise.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Enjoy an exploration. Make plans and reservations. Look before leaping. Avoid provoking someone with a short temper. Stay frugal and practical. Avoid distractions. Investigate.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

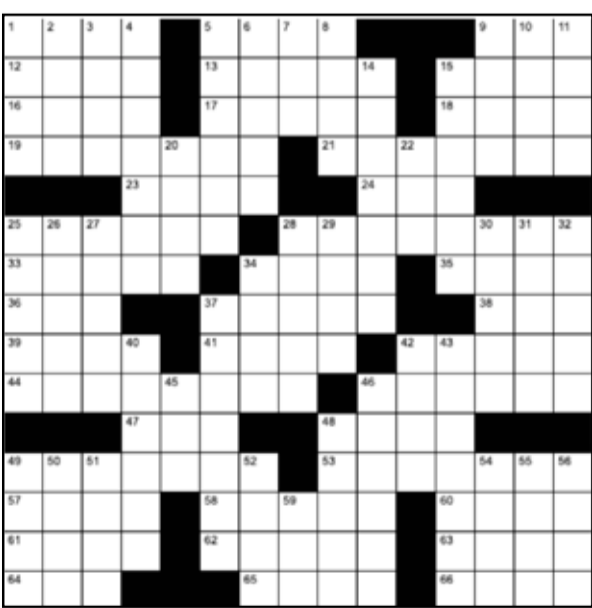
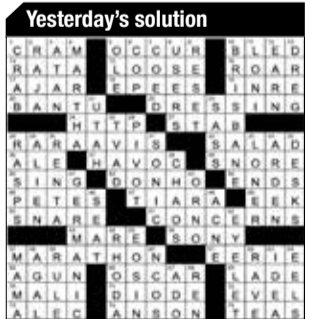
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	22	34	fine
Changchun	23	29	thunderstorms
Chengdu	24	30	rain
Chongqing	29	38	cloudy
Fuzhou	28	39	fine
Guangzhou	27	33	showers
Guiyang	22	29	cloudy
Haikou	26	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	27	37	thunderstorms
Harbin	24	28	thunderstorms
Hefei	27	34	overcast
Nanjing	28	34	cloudy
Shanghai	27	36	cloudy
Taipei	27	33	fine
Wuhan	29	35	fine
Hong Kong	30	33	showers
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	21	32	thunderstorms
Frankfurt	15	27	cloudy
Paris	17	28	cloudy
London	14	25	cloudy
New York	22	33	clear

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Actor McGregor; 5- Yard tunneler; 9- Upper limb; 12- Buddhist monk; 13- Do \_\_\_ a Waltz?; 15- Jazz singer James; 16- Blue-pencil; 17- "Circle of Friends" author Binchy; 18- Nair competitor; 19- Guest; 21- Most strange; 23- Mantel piece; 24- Eggy drink; 25- Mother of Calcutta; 28- Tries; 33- Collect; 34- Dagger; 35- Suffix with concession; 36- \_\_\_ favor; 37- Printer refill; 38- Pasture used for grazing; 39- Hot times abroad; 41- Outback hoppers; 42- Perfect; 44- Tranquility; 46- \_\_\_ Fideles; 47- Arrest; 48- Tons; 49- Sucker-armed swimmer; 53- Absence of sound; 57- At hand; 58- Sample; 60- Tailor's line; 61- "First Lady of Song" Fitzgerald; 62- Actor Hawke; 63- Anklebones; 64- Hearst kidnap grp.; 65- "...countrymen, lend me your \_\_\_"; 66- Agitate;

DOWN 1- Mtn. stat; 2- Dry watercourse; 3- French friends; 4- Indigenous inhabitants; 5- Brunch cocktail; 6- Chicago airport; 7- Golfer Trevino; 8- Overhang; 9- Suit to \_\_\_; 10- AAA suggestions; 11- Damon of "Good Will Hunting"; 14- Go back in; 15- Stumper; 20- Soviet news service; 22- Fish eggs; 25- Ribbons; 26- Act badly; 27- Less common or less cooked; 28- Bother; 29- Driving aids; 30- Heaps; 31- Rare delight; 32- Bobby of the Black Panthers; 34- Chimney grime; 37- Testimonial; 40- Lady of Spain; 42- Worshipped one; 43- Abhors; 45- Siesta; 46- Foreigners; 48- \_\_\_ Is Born; 49- Individuals; 50- Prison room; 51- Currency unit in Western Samoa; 52- Overfill; 54- Fastidious; 55- Colombian city; 56- Bahrain bigwig; 59- \_\_\_ Na Na;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

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



It's prime time to **BUY & RENT!**

**jml property**

CONTACT US & SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY!

hello@jmlproperty.com  
www.jmlproperty.com

f jmlmacau @jmlproperty

**Va Fat**  
HKD 3,780,000 2 bed 1 bath

**Tou Un**  
HKD 2,750,000 1 bed 1 bath

**Jade Garden**  
HKD 11,880,000 4 bed 3 bath

AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Athletes dive into the Seine River from the Alexander III bridge on the start of the first leg of the women's triathlon test event for the 2024 Paris Olympics in Paris, 2023

PARIS 2024

# WILL THE SEINE BE CLEAN ENOUGH BY THE OLYMPICS? NOT EVEN THE EXPERTS KNOW YET

TOM NOUVIAN & SUMAN NAISHADHAM, PARIS

WITH the Paris Olympics less than two weeks away, a question hangs over the Games: Will the Seine Ri-

ver be clean enough for athletes to swim in?

Triathlon and marathon swimming are scheduled to take place in the Seine, where it has been illegal to swim for more than a century. Despite the city's effort-

ts to clean up the long-polluted river, the water has tested unsafe for humans in recent weeks, and cleaner on other days. The Games run from July 26-Aug. 11.

To clean up the river, Paris invested 1.4 billion

euros (\$1.5 billion) in building infrastructure to catch more stormwater when it rains — the same water that contains bacteria-laden wastewater that enters the river during periods of heavy rain and makes it unsafe to swim in.

In May, Paris officials inaugurated a giant underground water storage basin next to the Austerlitz train station aimed at collecting excess rainwater and stopping wastewater from entering the Seine. The basin can hold the equivalent of 20 Olympic swimming pools of dirty water that will now be treated and is the centerpiece of major infrastructure improvements that the city has rushed to finish in time for the Games, but to also ensure that Parisians have a cleaner Seine in years to come.

But a few spells of heavy rain could push E. coli levels beyond the limit of 900 colony-forming units per 100 milliliters that the World Triathlon Federation has determined as safe for competitions.

"The Seine is not a special case," said Metin Duran, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Villanova University who has researched stormwater management. "It really is a complicated and very costly problem."

Paris, like many old

cities around the world, has a combined sewer system, which means that the city's wastewater and stormwater flow through the same pipes. With heavy or prolonged periods of rain, the pipes' capacity is reached, which means raw wastewater flows into the river instead of a treatment plant.

On a daily basis, the monitoring group Eau de Paris has tested the river water, yielding results that showed unsafe E. coli levels in recent weeks followed by results in early July that showed improvement.

Paris Olympic organizers have said that if heavy rain affects the Seine's flow during the Games, the triathlon would no longer feature the swimming portion — and the marathon swimming competition would be relocated to the Vaires-sur-Marne Nautical Stadium in the greater Paris region.

"It's not very common, but it has happened a few times," said Ollala Cernuda, head of communications at World Triathlon, an international body for the sport, about the possibility of the swim portion being cancelled.

"And it's always linked with water quality issues," Cernuda said.

But organizers remain optimistic that drier, sunnier weather than

what the French capital experienced in June will allow the events to go as planned — buffeted by the infrastructure upgrades. The sun's ultraviolet rays kill bacteria like E. coli in water.

An AP analysis of weather data showed that in 2024, Paris has seen the second-most days with rain than any year since 1950, surpassed only by 2016.

Importantly for the Seine's water quality, there have also been few stretches of days without rain.

Paris only experienced one weeklong dry spell this year — in early June, whereas between 1950 and 2020, it was typical for the city to have at least three such periods by the end of June, according to the analysis.

"Predictions of rainfall have become much more accurate up to a week in advance," said Jennifer Francis, a scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center in Massachusetts. "But the seasonal patterns of past decades no longer provide reliable guidance in our warmer world."

With the Games approaching, the feverish debate over the cleanliness of the Seine River has become a source of frustration for some athletes like Léonie Périault, a French triathlete who won a bronze medal in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

"Every time I meet someone, they worry that I'm going to swim in the Seine," Périault said. "But I've been swimming in this river for several years now. In youth competitions, we swam regularly in the Seine and never had problems."

Last year, Périault took part in a test event in the Seine.

"The setting was incredible with the Eiffel Tower as a backdrop and the water conditions were not worse than anywhere else in the world," she said.

On Saturday, the French Sports Minister Amélie Oudéa-Castéra took a plunge to demonstrate that the famed river is clean enough. Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo has also said she would swim in the Seine this week. **MDT/AP**

**仁德** CENTRO MÉDICO PEDDER  
• 仁德醫療中心 •

*We bring high quality of medical service to Macau*

**General Surgery** : Dr. Fok Manson, Dr. Lai Cheuck Seen Edward, Dr. Lau Wing Kee Peter, Dr. Kwong Man, Dr. Nie Fu Zhong, Dr. U Chong San, Dr. Lei Chin Chong

**Breast Surgery** : Dr. Leong Iat Lun

**Urology** : Dr. Lo Kwong Yin Richard, Dr. Zhao Yun Qiao

**Paediatric Surgery** : Dr. Yeung Chung Kwong

**Paediatrics** : Dr. Zhang Zhiqin

**Obstetrics & Gynaecology** : Dr. Fong Kuan Io

**Plastic & Aesthetic Surgery** : Dr. Lam U Lin

**Orthopaedic Surgery & Sports Medicine** : Dr. Lam Kun Kuan

**ENT** : Dr. Cheng Zheng Ang

**Cardiology** : Dr. Jin Chun, Dr. Leong Man Kin

**General Medicine** : Dr. Ng Kam Hong, Dr. Lam Weng Chio

**Dietitian** : Chan Lai U Joey

Avenida da Praia Grande No 599, Edifício Comercial Rodrigues 14 e 15 Andar, em Macau  
T. 2832 2298 / 2832 2229 Website: www.peddermacau.com  
Opening Hours: Mon - Fri 10:00 - 19:00 Sat 10:00 - 14:00 Sun & PH closed

PARIS 2024

# Who is carrying the Olympic torch through Paris? A BTS star, a garbage collector and more

SYLVIE CORBET & TOM NOUVIAN, PARIS

**F**ROM the Louvre Museum to the Eiffel Tower, from Paris' posh districts to working-class neighborhoods, hundreds of people have carried the Olympic torch through the French capital for two days of celebrations before the Summer Games kick off at the end of the month.

Joyful crowds lined up along the route Sunday and Monday.

"I got super emotional," BMX world champion Matthias Dandois said after carrying the torch in front of the Eiffel Tower. "I'm from Paris, and I grew up playing so much sport and watching the Olympics, and it was a dream to be a part of it."

About 10,000 people were chosen to carry the flame across

France from the southern city port of Marseille, where it arrived on May 8, to the opening ceremony on July 26. Many are athletes. Others were picked because they represent art, culture and gastronomy, volunteer for charities or are deeply involved in community life.

Dressed in white, they ran at a slow pace to the cheers of spectators. The flame reached the top floor of the Eiffel Tower on Monday with French judoka and Olympic champion Clarisse Agbegnenou.

Francky Mbotto, a 26-year-old middle-distance runner from Central African Republic who lives in Paris, carried it near the Arc de Triomphe.

"This is incredible! It's so emotional. It's Olympism that is being highlighted," he said, adding that the relay is meant to deliver a "message of peace."



French photographer JR, left, and athlete Sandra Laoura hold the Olympic torch in the courtyard of the Louvre museum

Another torchbearer, Eva David, a wheelchair basketball athlete, described it as "a real moment of jubilation."

Belgian singer Mentissa carried the torch as her songs were played. "Sport and music really bring people together and make us forget our daily lives," she said.

The torch made its grand entrance in Paris for Bastille Day

on Sunday with military horse rider Col. Thibaut Vallette, gold medalist at the 2016 Rio Games. It was handed to a relay by students from the multicultural northern suburbs of Seine-Saint-Denis in front of French President Emmanuel Macron.

Former World Cup winner Thierry Henry, who leads France's Olympic soccer team, later carried the flame down the

Champs-Elysees avenue.

Among the torchbearers who attracted the most attention was K-Pop icon Jin, a member of the band BTS, who carried it Sunday evening in front of the Louvre.

"It was an honor to be part of such a meaningful moment," he said, according to his management agency.

Jin's relay drew a significant crowd. Sofia Boukhabla, 23, said she had very little interest in watching the Games but rushed with her friends to see Jin. "He is so cute," she exclaimed.

Late on Sunday, Ludovic Franceschet, a local garbage collector, brought the flame inside Paris City Hall, where it spent the night under high protection. Franceschet, who seeks to raise environmental awareness with hundreds of thousands of followers on TikTok and Instagram, seized the occasion to remind residents and visitors to put their trash in bins.

The torch relay was also the chance to pay tribute to victims of the 2015 attacks in the French capital at the Bataclan concert hall and elsewhere. Lassana Bathily, the Mali-born employee who saved lives during an attack at a kosher supermarket, carried the torch at the Pantheon monument. MDT/AP

AD

生活藝術雜誌 LIVING & ARTS MAGAZINE

**MACAUCLOSER**

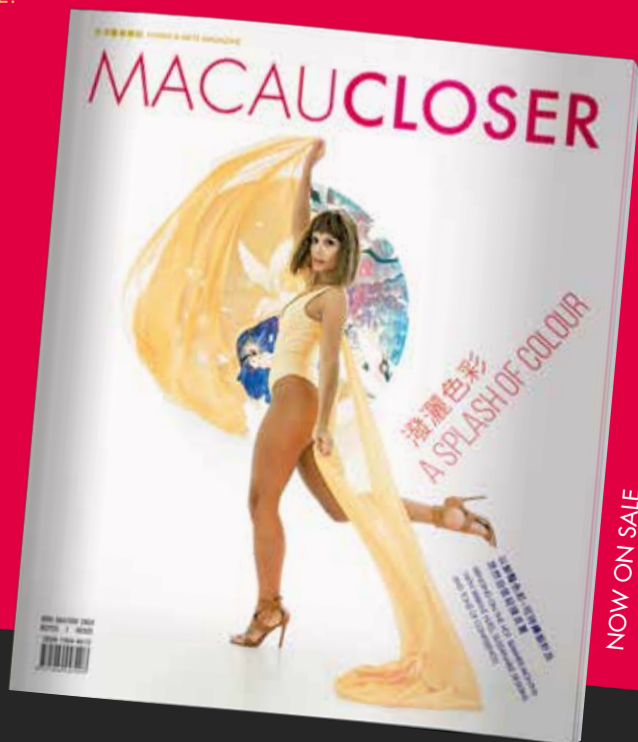
NEW WEBSITE >>



潑灑色彩

A SPLASH OF COLOUR

以鮮豔色彩、可持續設計及昂然自信迎接炎夏  
BRINGING ON THE HOT SUMMER MONTHS WITH  
VIBRANT HUES, SUSTAINABLE DESIGNS AND TONS  
OF CONFIDENCE!



NOW ON SALE

## Enjoy the Good Life Boa Vida Starts Here



Discover  
Now



T +853 2856 7888  
Terms & conditions apply



OPINION

**Business Views**

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg



**XI MUST END THIS SILLY 30-YEAR-OLD TAX TREATY**

The system is ruining China's public finance and is the root cause of the nation's biggest economic problems.

So what if China levies taxes on private jets and golf clubs? Clawing money out of the very rich isn't going to push the country off a fiscal cliff.

Expectations are rising that a tax reform is on the agenda at next week's Third Plenum, a once-in-five-year conclave of top officials charting China's economic future. A complete overhaul of consumption taxes — till now limited only to a handful of items such as tobacco, refined oil and alcohol — may be on the table. Municipalities might be allowed to impose levies on luxury services to broaden their income stream, according to local media reports.

A third year into a property slump, China's municipal finance has become untenable. Land sales, which used to account for about one third of local governments' total income, have fallen 42% from their 2021 peak.

Last year, borrowings from local government financing vehicles, essentially off-budget debt, reached 60 trillion yuan (\$8.3 trillion), or 48% of China's gross domestic product, according to estimates from the International Monetary Fund. That's twice as big as the central government's liabilities. Some provinces, such as Tianjin, Guizhou and Yunnan, are struggling to cover their interest payments, noted Moody's Investors Service.

This dire fiscal dilemma has prompted some desperate behaviors from local officials, who are looking around all corners to find money and make ends meet. Some are addicted to traffic fines. Between 2020 and 2022, municipalities' non-tax penalty revenue grew by 24%, data from the Ministry of Finance shows. Others are misappropriating social welfare funds, such as meal subsidies for poor rural students, to settle debt. And is there a statute of limitation in China? Some bureaucrats have asked companies to pay tax bills dating back to the 1990s.

While creative, these fundraising tactics are also detrimental to the mood on the street. Local bureaucrats are society's first impression of the political apparatus. Drivers and street hawkers are angry with big fines, while people are easily spooked by online rumors of missing public pension money. Businesses are not willing to hire either, because of exorbitant social security contributions. Clearly aware of this issue, Beijing has repeatedly warned local officials not to use aggressive gimmicks.

But a thorough audit and harsh words from the State Council, China's top governing body, did not resolve the core issue in the country's fiscal system. A three-decade-old tax agreement, which former premier Zhu Rongji strong-armed out of reluctant local cadets, reclassified the types of levies municipalities could charge and redefined how central and local government share fiscal income.

In the early 1990s, as China's economic miracle started to materialize, the power center in Beijing felt poorer as it watched coastal regions prosper. By 1993, the central government was getting only 22% of the total government revenue, from 40.5% a decade earlier.

The 1994 reform was essentially a power grab. That year, the central government's revenue share soared to 56%, even as its spending remained largely unchanged. Since then, while Beijing still relies on local tax offices to collect dues, it's been getting more than what it spends and gets to decide how and to whom it distributes money. Municipalities, meanwhile, are saddled with the lion's share of public spending, forcing them to seek alternative non-tax income, such as fostering real estate development and selling land.

The possible luxury tax that Chinese media is talking about is a half-baked partial solution that complies with the archaic 1994 tax treaty. While the central government collects all existing consumption taxes, municipalities will be allowed to keep this new levy, according to Cailianshe, a Beijing-based financial media outlet. But how many cities have private jets circling in the air? This proposal is at best a populist move that yields few concrete yuan. It can't pull impoverished provinces from the brink of default.

[Abridged]

Health workers in Ivory Coast began giving children the latest malaria vaccine earlier this week, the beginning of a regional campaign that experts hope might curb the impact of one of Africa's top killers.

The West African country became the first to start rolling out the newest shot targeting malaria in an effort that aims to cover about 250,000 children under two. The three-dose vaccine known as R21/Matrix-M was developed by Britain's Oxford University and was authorized by the World Health Organization last October.

Research suggests it is more than 75% effective at preventing severe

disease and death in the first year and that protection is extended for at least another year with a booster.

Alice Kanga was one of many who brought their children to get vaccinated Monday. "It's really important for the children, for their health," she said.

In 2021, WHO endorsed the first malaria vaccine, known as Mosquirix, made by GSK. But that vaccine requires four doses and protection fades within months. GSK also previously said it would only be able to make about 15 million doses.



Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin

**THAILAND IS SET TO ROLL OUT A CONTROVERSIAL USD13.8 BILLION HANDOUT PLAN IN DIGITAL MONEY TO CITIZENS**

JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI, BANGKOK

THAILAND'S prime minister said Monday that eligible businesses and individuals can register from August for digital cash handouts, a controversial program that will cost billions of dollars and is meant to boost the lagging economy.

The government announced in April the widely criticized ambitious plan, named the Digital Wallet, meant to give 10,000 baht (about \$275) to 50 million citizens in digital money to spend at local businesses.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin posted on the social platform X, saying the registration will begin Aug. 1 and that he has given instructions to ensure the smooth implementation of the program.

The "Digital Wallet" was a major campaign promise of the ruling Srettha's Pheu Thai party ahead of last year's general election. The government says that this scheme will cause an "economic tornado," and Srettha has said the stimulus and subsequent consumption are expected to boost gross domestic pro-

duct growth by 1.2 to 1.6 percentage points.

However, economists have criticized the program, calling it an ineffective way to contribute to sustainable economic growth compared to other measures.

In addition, its financing has faced several hurdles, delaying its planned implementation. At first, the government said the state Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives would cover some of the funding needed. However, after warnings by financial experts, it was announced that the project's funding would come out of the 2024 and 2025 fiscal budgets.

Deputy Minister of Finance Julapan Amornivat said at a news conference on Monday the budgetary funding became possible after the plan's estimated cost dropped from 500 billion baht (\$13.8 billion) to 450 billion baht (\$12.4 billion), asserting that all estimated 50 million people will still be part of the program as only up to 90% of those eligible utilized them in previous handouts.

Julapan added that the Digital Wallet committee has agreed to exclude tens

of thousands of shopowners and cash recipients who have a record of committing fraud in past programs.

The plan also has certain limitations, such as excluding certain goods that are yet to be decided, and earlier proposals suggested oil, services, and online purchases should be among them. Julapan said the Commerce Ministry would handle the exclusions set to be announced next week after the detailed plan is submitted to the Cabinet.

Thailand has in recent years suffered from a sluggish economy that appears to have deteriorated with no clear sign of growth. This month, the World Bank's Thailand Economic Monitor projected GDP growth of 2.4% for the year 2024.

The ruling Pheu Thai party had initially suggested digital wallet payments for all Thais 16 and older, but later this was limited to only lower-income Thais, defined as people with yearly incomes not exceeding 840,000 baht (about \$23,000) and savings in financial institutions not totaling more than 500,000 baht (\$13,700). MDT/AP



Israel Under American pressure, Israel has pledged to deliver large quantities of humanitarian aid into the war-ravaged Gaza Strip. But at the same time, the U.S. and Israel have allowed tax-deductible donations to far-right groups that have blocked that aid from being delivered. Three groups that have prevented humanitarian aid from reaching Gaza — including one accused of looting or destroying supplies — have raised more than \$200,000 from donors in the U.S. and Israel.

Brazilian authorities launched a mega-operation in Rio de Janeiro that sent a force of nearly 2,000 military and civil officers into 10 low income neighborhoods Monday seeking to regain control of areas dominated by organized crime. The officers deployed in the city's western zone, an area that has been the target of intense territorial disputes involving drug traffickers and militias in recent years, the Rio de Janeiro state government said in a statement.



USA One of the two Americans convicted in the 2019 stabbing death of an Italian plainclothes police officer has been granted house arrest after an appeals court significantly reduced his original life sentence. Gabriel Natale-Hjorth (pictured) can serve his 11-year, four-month sentence at the home of a grandparent in the seaside town of Fregene, west of Rome, state-run RAI and LaPresse news agencies reported, citing a court decision Monday.

Kenya Police hurled tear gas canisters yesterday to break up protests in Nairobi and several other towns and cities accusing the president of poor governance and demanding his resignation despite his dismissal of nearly the entire Cabinet last week. Businesses in Nairobi remained closed for fear of a repeat of the looting that occurred during demonstrations last week, when protesters stormed into parliament and several were killed by police.