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**SJM TO EXPAND ITS FOOTPRINT INTO THE BUDGET ACCOMMODATION SECTOR WITH THE ACQUISITION OF OFFICE SPACE IN HENGQIN**

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**MACAU-HK-GUANGDONG AIR QUALITY IMPROVES, BUT OZONE REMAINS A CHALLENGE**

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**Hong Kong** A court yesterday convicted seven men, including former lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting, of rioting during the 2019 protests. Lam was found to have exploited mob violence for political gain. The defendants face sentencing later. The protests marked a significant turning point in Hong Kong's political history.



**New Zealand** reversed its ban on U.S. commentator Candace Owens, granting her a visa for free speech-related events in February and March 2024. Owens, barred from Australia for controversial Holocaust remarks, continues to face criticism while addressing Christian faith and free speech topics.



**Bangladesh** Supporters of the Nationalist Party marched yesterday (Macau time) to the Indian border, protesting attacks on their diplomatic mission and flag desecrations in India. Rising tensions follow recent arrests and strained bilateral ties. India has restricted visas for Bangladeshis amid these escalating disputes.



**United States** Luigi Mangione, accused of killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, possessed a weapon matching shell casings at the crime scene. Allegedly motivated by disdain for corporate healthcare, Mangione faces extradition to New York. Authorities also recovered writings and forged IDs during his arrest.

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# ARCHIVES BUILDING UP

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**GBA VIEWS**

**OPENING UP: CHINA, THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADER VIA THE GBA**

▲ P8

### CITY SEES DECLINE IN MORTGAGE LOAN APPROVALS

New approvals for residential mortgage loans (RMLs) and commercial real estate loans (CRELs) both saw declines in October 2024, according to the Monetary Authority of Macao. New RMLs dropped by 57.4% month-on-month to MOP1.30 billion, with loans to residents decreasing by 58.5%. In contrast, non-resident loans rose by 8.7%. New CRELs fell by 37.9% to MOP642.21 million, primarily due to a significant decrease in loans to non-residents.

### 'NEW PERSPECTIVES' EXHIBITION OPENS

The Macao Museum of Art (MAM) will host the exhibition "New Perspectives: Modern and Contemporary Works from the Macao Museum of Art" from today to May 25, 2025. This exhibition features nearly 100 pieces across three sections: "Scenery and Images," "Ink Expressions and Concepts," and "Objects, Colors, and New Perspectives." It showcases modern and contemporary artworks in various creative forms, including watercolors, oil paintings, ink art, printmaking, photography, installation and mixed media.

### UTM STRENGTHENS TIES WITH JINAN UNIVERSITY

The Macao University of Tourism (UTM) has signed a cooperation agreement with the Jinan Municipal Education Bureau and Jinan University to enhance educational collaboration between Macau and Shandong Province. This initiative aims to foster the development of talent, allowing for student exchanges and faculty collaborations. During the signing ceremony yesterday, key figures, including Fanny Vong, UTM president, and Liu Chunhua, Secretary of the Party Committee of Jinan University, outlined specific cooperation plans, emphasizing their commitment to improving educational opportunities for students in both regions.

### AVIATION

# GOV'T TO INJECT AIR MACAU WITH NEARLY MOP345 MILLION

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE government is preparing to make a capital injection of MOP344.13 million into Air Macau next year. This allocation is already included in the government's 2025 budget under projects that exceed MOP50 million.

According to the project, the MOP344,126,400 will be directed into the company's operating fund to address its "challenging operating situation, which has resulted in significant losses," as noted in the opinion of the Legislative Assembly's Second Standing Committee, which analyzed the bill in detail.

This capital injection from the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) will directly result in an increase in the com-

RENATO MARQUES



pany's shares, a move that was reportedly requested by Air Macau's major shareholder, Air China.

Following the capital injection, MSAR will hold a total investment of MOP1.6 billion in

Air Macau, reflecting its proportional shareholding in the company.

The opinion from the Second Standing Committee, which approved the bill for voting at the plenary, also mentioned dis-

cussions with government representatives on the issue. It stated that "the company is very likely in a situation where the value of its net assets is less than half the value of its share capital," a situation that is believed to have prompted Air China to seek additional financial support from the MSAR government.

In addition to Air Macau, the same budget bill also includes a planned increase in the share capital of the Macau International Airport Company, amounting to approximately MOP896 million next year.

The largest investment project outlined for 2025 is the construction of the East Line of the Light Rapid Transit system, which is budgeted at nearly MOP4 billion.

# SJM Holdings to develop budget hotel in Hengqin

NADIA SHAW

**S**JM Holdings Limited has recently announced plans to expand its footprint into the budget accommodation sector with the acquisition of nine floors of office space in Hengqin. The company will invest RMB546 million to convert this space into a three-star hotel, strategically located just a five-minute walk from the Hengqin Port.

In a statement, SJM Holdings revealed that the property spans 14,845 square meters, covering the 21st to 29th floors of the Xin De Kou An Shang Wu Zhong Xin commercial development. This initiative aligns with a recent policy initiative by the Hengqin government aimed at repurposing underutilized buildings into hotels, a plan that has gained traction since its introduction in April and subsequent expansion in July.

Daisy Ho, chair of SJM Holdings, emphasized the strategic advantages of the location in the statement. "The pro-



posed acquisition is situated next to the 24-hour Hengqin Port and is in close proximity to our existing hotel portfolio in Macau," she stated. The area is just a five-minute walk from the 24-hour Hengqin Port and a short drive from major hotels like the Grand Lisboa Palace Resort and the Grand Lisboa Hotel.

The new three-star hotel is expected to cater to budget-conscious travelers, particularly mainland Chinese tourists who have often found Macau's accommodation costs to be prohibitive.

The anticipated Jan. 1, 2025 opening of the Hengqin-Macau multiple-entry visa policy is expected to stimulate tourism. This policy will allow eligible visitors to travel back and forth between Macau and Hengqin multiple times within a week. Additionally, the newly inaugurated Hengqin Light Rapid Transit line is expected to enhance accessibility between these locations.

Ho added that the new Hengqin hotel would expand the types of customers that the gaming concessionaire serves.

## AFA AUTUMN SALON 2024 EXHIBITION TO SHOWCASE LOCAL ARTISTRY AT SHOPPES AT PARISIAN

STAFF REPORTER

**A**N art exhibition showcasing more than 200 pieces from 113 artists will open tomorrow at the Shoppes at Parisian.

The "AFA Autumn Salon 2024" has received over 250 submissions this year from artists of various ages and media. The exhibition aims to connect artists with the public and highlight the diversity of local artistic expression.

During the opening, the winners of the "Orient Foundation Art Award" will also be announced. This award, valued

at MOP50,000, supports young artists from Macau or students studying in Macau, funding a one-month residency in Portugal.

The "AFA Autumn Salon 2024" will be hosted across eight exhibition halls, featuring a range of artistic mediums, from traditional oil paintings and ceramics to digital installations and Pop Art.

This event, organized by the Art For All Society (AFA) in collaboration with the Orient Foundation, marks the 15th year of the salon, providing a platform for artists in the city.

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CULTURE

# New archives building to serve as centralized storage for gov't records

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is preparing to open a new 50,000 square meter archives building that will serve as a centralized storage facility for government records and files, director Leong Wai Man said yesterday.

The construction of the massive facility, Edifício dos Arquivos Históricos do Governo, will commence in the second quarter of next year, and is slated to open in 2026.

The building will dedicate over 34,000 square meters to housing files transferred from various public departments across Macau, Leong said in an interview yesterday.

Edifício dos Arquivos Históricos do Governo is located in Pac On, Taipa.

"Its biggest function is to store files," Leong explained. "We actually have other ancillary functions, including receiving, disinfecting, dusting, and repairing the files, as well as digitizing them and providing office space for colleagues working on the archives."

While the ground floor will feature some public exhibition and promotional spaces, Leong emphasized that the archives building's primary purpose will be professional and specialized, unlike the archives facility at Tap Seac Square, which may be better suited for educational and outreach efforts.

"We initially thought that after Tap Seac Square is no longer used to store archives, it could be used as a space for



educational promotion and external exhibitions," Leong said.

"Tap Seac Square has a rich historical background and the entire area is actually a series of cultural facilities. So, if we

want to promote exhibitions to the public, citizens, or even schools in the future, we think it is more appropriate to use the archives building in Tap Seac Square."

The new archives building

is still undergoing renovations to adjust the temperature and humidity for proper file storage.

Leong said the transfer of files from other departments is expected to take place in 2026,

after the renovations are complete.

While the archives will primarily serve government needs, Leong did not rule out the possibility of allowing professional researchers and scholars access to the facilities in the future.

"Sometimes, they will donate some of their precious archives to our SAR government, and they will become archives permanently preserved in our SAR government," Leong said. "I think we can continue to promote and cooperate in this direction in the future."

The bureau also plans to continue digitizing its archives to make them more accessible to the public through its online platform.

"Now everyone can see all the archives in the Macau Archives through the online platform," Leong said. "This will also enable more people to study or conduct research."

## ARCHIVES UNVEILS NEW LOCAL RECORDS CHAPTER

**C**HIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng presided over the ceremonious unveiling of the Edifício dos Arquivos Históricos do Governo yesterday, a landmark project that elevates Macau's archival work, as well as that of the whole region.

The event, held at the intersection of Avenida Son On and Rua Heng Long in Pac On, Taipa, was attended by a host

of government officials, including the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Ao Ieong U, and the director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, Leong Wai Man.

Leong Wai Man highlighted the significance of this event, noting, "This year marks a milestone in the development of Macau's archival sector. With the entry into force of

Law No. 3/2023 (Archives Law) on March 14 this year and the official inauguration of the Government Historical Archives Building today, the development of the Macau SAR's archival sector will move to a new level."

The 13-story building, with an additional floor below ground, will have a gross floor area of over 50,000

square meters and a total usable floor area of over 40,000 square meters.

Leong emphasized the importance of this cultural infrastructure project, stating, "The building will provide sufficient and appropriate space for the preservation and management of Macau's archival resources."

Leong concluded her

remarks by expressing gratitude to the Chief Executive and guests, and expressing her hope that the Macau SAR archival sector would prosper as a result of the project.

The Chief Executive, accompanied by other dignitaries, also visited an exhibition showcasing the new government archives building.

VC

# Lei Wai Nong reflects on team successes in farewell address

NADIA SHAW

**T**HE Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, publicly praised his team yesterday as he approaches the end of his term. In a heartfelt address, Lei commended the dedication and professionalism displayed by his subordinates over the past few years, highlighting their

contributions to Macau's economic resilience.

As the current administration nears its conclusion (Dec. 19), Lei is set to step down alongside fellow secretaries Elsie Ao Ieong for Social Affairs and Culture, and Raimundo Rosário, Secretary for Transport and Public Works. Only André Cheong and Wong Sio Chak will continue in

their respective roles as Secretary for Administration and Justice and Secretary for Security.

In instructions published in the SAR Gazette on December 5, Lei expressed gratitude to all personnel under his supervision. He specifically acknowledged the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) for its innovative strategies



that have bolstered the tourism sector during challenging times. Despite the pandemic, MGTO has successfully attracted visitors, earning accolades such as "most satisfactory destination" for

mainland tourists.

Lei also highlighted the achievements of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, which has played a crucial role in establishing new regulations while

promoting non-gaming elements in licensing.

Furthermore, he noted the collaborative efforts of various bureaus that led to Macau being recognized as the "Best Asian Convention City" for two consecutive years.

Lei added that the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) has been instrumental in advancing high-tech industries and supporting traditional sectors through funding programs.

Lei is set to pass the baton to current DSED director Tai Kin Yip.

# GUANGDONG-HONG KONG-MACAU AIR QUALITY IMPROVES, BUT OZONE REMAINS A CHALLENGE

VICTORIA CHAN

**T**HE governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau have jointly released the 2023 Air Quality Report of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Pearl River Delta Regional Air Monitoring Network.

The report shows a continuous downward trend in various air pollutants, reflecting the effectiveness of emission reduction measures implemented in the region.

According to the report, the average annual concentration values of pollutants such as sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter PM10 and PM2.5 have dropped by 17%, to 86% from their peak levels. This progress is attributed to the various air pollution control measures undertaken by the three governments in recent years.

However, the report notes that the average annual concentration of ozone has remained similar in

RENA TO MARQUES



recent years, indicating that regional photochemical pollution needs to be further addressed. A study on ozone pollution and regional transmission characteristics in the Greater Bay Area was completed earlier this year, pro-

viding scientific data to help the three places better understand and tackle the ozone issue.

The Macau government has announced the "Macau Long-term Carbon Reduction Strategy" and the "Macau Electric

Vehicle Promotion Plan" to reduce air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions.

The Hong Kong government continues to promote initiatives such as the "Hong Kong Electric Vehicle Popularization Road-

map," "Hong Kong Clean Air Blueprint 2035," and "Hong Kong Climate Action Blueprint 2050," which focus on controlling emissions from land and sea transportation, power plants, and non-road mobile machinery.

Additionally, the government is working on phasing out older diesel commercial vehicles and promoting the use of electric vehicles, with the number of electric vehicles in Hong Kong increasing significantly from around 14,000 in 2019 to more than 102,000 as of September 2024, a sevenfold increase over five years.

Guangdong province has also undertaken various measures, including implementing stricter regulations on volatile organic compound emissions, strengthening the control of nitrogen oxide emissions from stationary and mobile sources, and enhancing environmental supervision of diesel trucks.

The regional air monitoring network, consisting of 23 air monitoring stations in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau, continues to play a crucial role in tracking and reporting the air quality in the Pearl River Delta region.

The coordinated efforts of the three governments have yielded tangible results, and they remain committed to further improving air quality in the region.

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## Sam Hou Fai emphasizes necessity for reform in social security system

STAFF REPORTER

**I**NCOMING Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai has acknowledged the persistent economic divide between the affluent and the disadvantaged in the region.

In an interview with state media outlets, Sam highlighted that despite some improvements in the overall economic landscape, vulnerable groups—particularly the elderly—are facing significant challenges due to escalating living costs and the ongoing repercussions of the pandemic.

He emphasized the necessity for reform in Macau's social security system to better support these populations.

The incoming top official pointed out that while Macau is often perceived as a wealthy enclave, many residents struggle to make ends meet.

Meanwhile, he expressed



confidence that his political agenda would come to fruition, particularly concerning the pillars he outlined during his candidacy: building a Macau grounded in the rule of law and characterized by dynamism, culture, and happiness.

Recognizing the need for economic diversification, he aims to address concerns regarding small and medium-sized enterprises while enhancing social welfare for vulnerable populations.

"We must improve the happiness and well-being of Macau residents," he stated. Sam is slated to take office on December 20.

In the interview, Sam envisions Macau as a vital trade link between China and Portuguese-speaking nations, supporting local industries in expanding their international presence.

He said his government aims to utilize Macau's connections with Portuguese-speaking countries to enhance cooperation in technology, finance, trade, and culture.

He also pledged that his administration will explore establishing a cultural hub that merges Eastern and Western influences, alongside tourism initiatives designed to draw more visitors.

# Ho Iat Seng: Macau targets 60% non-gaming value by 2028

NADIA SHAW

**C**HIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng highlighted a significant shift in the region's economic landscape, noting that while gambling remains important, it now accounts for only 37.2% of Macau's gross domestic product (GDP).

Macau's outgoing Chief Executive is preparing to hand over leadership of the city to Sam Hou Fai on Dec. 20.

In recent interviews with mainland media, Ho emphasized the need for economic diversification, stating, "Macau's goal is to increase the share of non-gaming value-added to about 60% by 2028." This transition is particularly crucial in light of challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. "In the face of uncertainties, our economy found it difficult to withstand risks," he said.

Since taking office in December 2019, Ho's administration has focused on reducing reliance on the gaming industry to build a more resilient and capa-

VICTORIA CHAN



ble economy.

The gaming sector has shown signs of recovery, rebounding to approximately 75% of its pre-pandemic levels in 2023. However, Ho warned that the city's heavy dependence on casinos is no longer sustainable. Following revisions to gaming laws in 2022, Macau's casino operators committed to investing MOP118.8

billion (about USD \$14.8 billion) over the next decade, with plans for non-gaming projects significantly outpacing those for gaming.

In November 2023, a formal economic diversification plan was released, outlining objectives for 2024 to 2028. This plan aims for the non-gaming sector to contribute about 60% of GDP

by 2028 while allowing the gaming industry to stabilize post-pandemic. Key areas of focus include tourism and leisure, traditional Chinese medicine and healthcare, modern finance, high technology, and conventions and exhibitions.

Ho also noted efforts to promote performing arts as part of this strategy. "We are committed

to showcasing the city's unique charm," he said, referencing Macau's rich cultural blend of Chinese and Western influences.

The tourism sector has also adapted to changing traveler preferences. In 2023, over 28 million tourists visited Macau, a significant increase compared to previous years. Ho attributed this growth to the government's ability to anticipate shifts in travel patterns post-pandemic and adapt accordingly. He pointed out that while the number of tour groups has sharply decreased from over 500 daily arrivals in 2018 to around 30, independent travelers are increasingly drawn to Macau's cultural offerings.

Despite these advancements, Macau remains heavily reliant on casino taxes, which constituted approximately 80.6% of government revenue from January to November this year.

Ho expressed confidence to Chinese media that with continued support from the central government and strategic investments in infrastructure—such as the new Macau Medical Center—Macau can navigate its post-pandemic recovery while fostering sustainable economic growth. In addition, he noted that the 'One-country, two systems' policy has granted Macau a degree of autonomy that has been crucial during these transformative years.

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EASL BASKETBALL

# BLACK BEARS LOSE PACE, KINGS WIN MACAU CLASSIC REMATCH

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Macau Black Bears were defeated 95-114 by the New Taipei Kings in the final game of a doubleheader on Wednesday evening at Studio City. This marked the Kings' second game of the year in the East Asia Super League (EASL) and their first victory of the season.

The Kings took control early, building a significant lead that they maintained throughout the game, ultimately winning by 19 points. The Kings surged to a 33-17 lead after the first quarter and continued their dominance by outscoring the Bears 35-17 in the third quarter, securing a comprehensive victory.

A standout performance came from former NBA star Jeremy Lin, who led the Kings in scoring with 27 points. Lin was also named Player of the Game, earning his first such honor of the season.

At halftime, Kings head coach Ryan Marchand emphasized the importance of securing

a win, stating, "We're trying to win. In EASL, you probably need to get four wins to move on, so we know we're in trouble if we lose this game." The message was clearly heard, as the Kings came out focused, shooting an impressive 69% from the field in the first quarter. Meanwhile, the Bears struggled offensively, shooting just 23% in the opening period.

The Bears introduced new players to their lineup, including Adonis Thomas, Johnny Wang, and Lei Cheong, all making their EASL debuts. Head coach Garrett Kelly experimented with different rotations following the departures of key players Jean-tal Cylla and Will Artino. Unlike their victory in October, when only eight players saw action, all 12 active players participated in this game.

"We brought in some talent, and they're just trying to get used to each other," Kelly said in a halftime interview. "We tried our best during practice, but really, you've got to do it in front of a



great crowd like this and against a really good team. They're learning on the fly right now."

Unfortunately for the Bears, the new players struggled to gel with the team. Wang and Lei failed to score, while Thomas managed only 13 points on 33% shooting.

The Kings, reigning champions of the P. LEAGUE+ (Taiwan's professional men's basketball league), were in peak form, hitting 48% of their three-point attempts. In contrast, the

Bears struggled from beyond the arc, converting just 24% of their attempts—a significant 27% difference compared to their previous encounter, which the Bears had won.

At the end of the game, Lin shared his thoughts: "It's going to be hard. I feel that EASL has gotten better. They also added a fifth team to each group, so we see the competition is getting better and better. And for us, it comes down to execution and attention to detail. This is high-

-quality basketball, with the best teams from other leagues. It just comes down to doing what the coach wants us to do." Lin also expressed gratitude to the fans, stating, "We're here in Macau today as the away team, but I honestly felt like the home team tonight. Thank you to all the fans who came out. I see all the different jerseys you're wearing. I'm very grateful from the bottom of my heart."

Looking ahead, the Kings will face the Ryukyu Golden Kings of Japan Dec. 25, while the Bears will have a month-long break before returning to action Jan. 15 against the Busan KCC Egis from Korea.

In the other game of the evening, the Taoyuan Pauian Pilots defeated the Suwon KT Sonicboom from Korea 100-64, maintaining a perfect record of three wins in three games. The Pilots currently lead Group A, followed by the Hiroshima Dragonflies, while the Ryukyu Golden Kings lead Group B, ahead of the Meralco Bolts.

E-MOP

## Gov't unveils digital pataca prototype

**T**HE Monetary Authority of Macau (AMCM) unveiled the prototype system for the "Digital Macau Pataca" (e-MOP) yesterday.

Chan Sau San, chairman of the Board of Directors of the AMCM, emphasized that both

digital and physical patacas would hold legal tender status, ensuring they cannot be refused in transactions.

The digital currency initiative includes two types of wallets: hard wallets, which will be card-based and compatible

with self-service exchange machines for converting cash; and soft wallets, which will offer various functionalities such as adding value, transferring money, and making payments via QR codes.

AMCM plans to initially focus on retail

applications while exploring wholesale scenarios as technology advances.

Additionally, there are plans to integrate the digital pataca with digital currencies from mainland China and Hong Kong to facilitate cross-border transactions.

AMCM will implement the process in three stages comprising infrastructure and core system development, an internal closed trial operation, and comprehensive public testing. The digital Macau patacas will only be officially launched once the infrastructure is established and thoroughly tested to ensure that risks are manageable.

Yesterday, the bureau

launched the digital pataca's whitepaper, the first document to explain the project's content, research, and development process. It predominantly justifies the need for the central bank's digital currency, as well as the goals and potential benefits of digital Macau patacas, their positioning, design principles, significance to stakeholders, and development blueprint. LV

## CORPORATE BITS

### Over 2,600 attended Sands' outdoor concert



More than 2,600 audience members attended "Classics Reimagined: Golden Hour Harmonies" at the Macao Cultural Centre Plaza, on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1.

The event featured three musical sessions and a masterclass, showcasing performances by the Janoska

Ensemble, world-renowned pianist Niu Niu, and harmonica player Gordon Lee. Attendees enjoyed harmonious interpretations of classical music during the golden hour at dusk.

The Janoska Ensemble also conducted a masterclass for 17 young musi-

cians, providing professional guidance and insight.

Wilfred Wong, executive vice-chairman of Sands China Ltd., expressed satisfaction with the event, emphasizing its role in promoting art and inspiring local talent within Macau.

"We believe that this concert will help promote the popularisation of art and bring inspiration to young musical talents in Macau. Moving forward, we will continue to introduce high-quality art events that align with the commitments of our company's Community Revitalization Programme and Performing Arts Programme," he said.

### Melco hosts 'Splendors of China' program



Melco Resorts & Entertainment hosted a special event under its "Splendors of China" program. This initiative aims to instill national pride among employees and the local community.

Launched in 2016, the "Splendors of China" program has significantly raised awa-

reness of Chinese culture among Melco employees. It includes various courses and events, with over 9,000 annual participations recorded. Surveys indicate that more than 93% of participants feel increased pride in China's achievements and a desire to learn more about its history

and culture.

The event encouraged employees to wear traditional Chinese outfits, culminating in a "Best Dressed Chinese Outfit Contest." Additional highlights included a keynote speech by Professor Zhu Shou Tong and cultural demonstrations.

Lawrence Ho, chairman & CEO of Melco, said, "The program enriches the experiences of our guests and colleagues, providing meaningful opportunities for our partners and helps preserve invaluable legacies for generations to come. We will continue to promote and instill national pride and patriotism through the program's multifaceted learning opportunities."

ADVERTORIAL

## SANDS CHINA NEWS

### Sands Cares Ambassador Programme Marks 15th Anniversary with Celebration

#### Sands China recognises volunteers and community partners while honouring Dual Celebrations

The **Sands Cares Ambassador Programme** marked its **15th anniversary** with a celebration at The Londoner Macao Dec. 3, attended by around 200 guests, comprising government officials, company executives, representatives from Macao NGOs, and Sands Cares Ambassadors.

Since 2009, team members of different ages and departments have served the community as Sands Cares Ambassadors. The company extended its appreciation to the Ambassadors and long-time local NGO collaborators for their outstanding volunteer work in "walking together" with Macao, while also celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding the People's Republic of China and the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland.

Company executives honoured 25 Ambassadors with awards for their various contributions, including long years of service, number of volunteer hours, and other noteworthy accolades.

Guests received a commemorative gift pack in appreciation of the programme's supporting entities and volunteers. In order to share warmth and care with disadvantaged groups, Sands China invited a Fuhong Society of Macau artist with disabilities to design and produce the gift, promoting the talents of people with special needs in the spirit of inclusiveness and art without boundaries.

As part of Sands Cares, the **Sands Cares Ambassador Programme** has stood firmly with the Macao community for 15 years to provide a platform for team members to serve the community. Starting with only 200 members, it now has more than 3,600 team members who have cumulatively contributed over 310,000 hours of volunteer service.

With Sands China being an important stakeholder in the local community, the Sands Cares Ambassador programme is an influential tool that illustrates the company's unwavering commitment to contribute to society, serving as an important connection between Sands China and local residents. Therefore, On the 15th anniversary of the Sands Cares Ambassador programme, Sands China is calling on all sectors of society to answer the call to "#BeMyVolunteer" and encourage more people to volunteer with Macao's social service organisations.

The Sands Cares Ambassador Programme is part of the Sands Cares global corporate citizenship programme.



INNOVATION

# China policies aim to nurture fresh growth engines

**C**HINA is planning a fresh set of policies to propel growth in the equipment manufacturing sector, focusing on nurturing new growth engines such as new energy vehicles and low-altitude aircraft, amid the country's concerted efforts to promote industrial upgrading and enhance global supply chain resilience, said officials and experts.

The move mirrors the directive to nurture technological innovation to boost the development of new quality productive forces and the establishment of a modern industrial system, which was mapped out at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee on Monday.

The meeting, which was presided over by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, anchored China's key focal points for next year's economic development, as the nation is in a pivotal process of changing its development paradigm from quantity-driven to quality-driven.

The vision is backed by China's ever-stronger equipment manufacturing capability, as reflected in the fact that annual production of new energy vehicles passed the milestone of 10 million units on Nov 14, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, making China the only nation to realize such an achievement.

It took only six years for this figure to grow from 1 million to 10 million, showcasing the nation's unwavering commitment to innovation-driven development.

"Innovation stands as a pivotal force propelling the high-quality advancement of the manufacturing sector, and companies are

increasingly assuming central roles in driving innovation," said Li Jinghong, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and a professor at Tsinghua University.

To date, China has built nearly 10,000 digital workshops and smart factories, of which over 400 have developed into national-level intelligent manufacturing demonstration factories. Artificial intelligence, digital twins and other cutting-edge technologies have been applied in more than 90% of these demonstration factories, according to a report released at the 2024 World Internet Conference.

Businesses are also stepping up efforts to promote green transformation. NBS data showed that the proportion of nonfossil energy consumption increased 2.6 percentage points in the first three quarters, compared with the same period last year, while coal consumption decreased 1.9 percentage points and petroleum use fell 0.9 percentage point.

"Despite China's rapid advancement in the manufacturing sector, challenges persist, notably in balancing innovation investments with operational demands," said Li, the CAS academician.

Xin Guobin, vice-minister of industry and information technology, said at a recent conference that the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology's upcoming policies to further boost manufacturing are expected to strengthen the implementation of large-scale equipment upgrades and trade-in programs for consumer goods to stimulate consumption of major commodities like automobiles. **MDT/CHINA DAILY**

ANALYSIS  
 BY LEANDA LEE

# OPENING UP - CHINA, THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADER VIA THE GBA

**UNDERLINING** Xi Jinping's 2021 statement to the UN General Assembly, in late October of this year Beijing reiterated China's goal of carbon neutrality by 2060. Key targets have been set under a new development philosophy which sees carbon dioxide emissions peaking by 2030 followed by a decline to net zero 30 years later. The recent pledge is for a vision of a low-carbon, green, circular economy.

Although this is an incredible undertaking for an economy of this size and structure, China already holds a position of pride as the supplier of 80 percent of global solar equipment and installation technology and 50 percent of the global wind power equipment and technology as highlighted by Zhang Chuanwei, founder of the Mingyang Group in Zhongshan. Speaking at the 2024 Understanding China Conference last week, Zhang introduced the successes of his company which include the production of clean energy sufficient to supply 25 million people for 20 years to come. Beyond the GBA, Mingyang's reach extends throughout Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe and the Americas. The company's activities exemplify the innovation and opening up that are the intended consequences of the GBA's integrated support systems for local, regional and international investors alike.

Due to the unique investment infrastructure, incentives and ongoing economic development, the multinational company Itochu is seeking investment opportunities in the GBA. Itochu's particular focus is to invest in businesses in en-



Solar panels on a roof are seen near the sunrise over Jiangmen, Guangdong province

vironmental sustainability and to leverage from China into the global marketplace. The general manager of the Guangzhou subsidiary, Katae Tomoaki, is another executive that sees the GBA as offering favourable circumstances for business in the decarbonization and low-carbon sectors.

The range of foundational development incentives and (infra) structures makes the GBA an international market-oriented business environment, especially conducive for multinationals keen to enhance their sustainability credentials. Such credibility relies on a deep level of trust in the supply and value chains, and a holistic systems approach from all levels of government and industry leadership in terms of policy, philosophical and ethical positioning, infrastructure, financial and bureaucratic support, including creativity, cultural buy-in and long-term

vision.

At the 2024 Global Investment Promotion Conference for the GBA in Guangzhou in early November - another of the many facilitation and promotion conferences - BASF chairman, Markus Kameith praised local governmental bodies in Guangdong for understanding and meeting the needs of multinationals in an environmental-conscious market. The fact that the corporation will be able to manage operations entirely on renewable energy from 2025 is indicative of the type of GBA support required by these enterprises. Such environmental incentives and supporting systems and the messaging of a strong global environmental protection brand will continue to encourage global business investment in the GBA and on Chinese soil.

Given the levels of emissions from China's economic activity historically, much of the rhetoric

and policy announcements risk being perceived as propaganda. However, a number of sections in the 2019 Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area acknowledge ecological and environmental concerns and resource limitations in robust terms. Ecological and environmental protection are areas of strengthened cooperation between the three geographical regions. Under a listing of opportunities and challenges, "growing constraints on resources and energy supplies, escalating pressure on ecology and the environment" recognizes the material limits to growth. Further, the section on Basic Principles lays out the systemic perspectives - the interconnectedness of places, peoples, policies and resources in a holistic and highly coordinated fashion: "To pursue green development and ecological conservation. To vigorously take forward ecological conservation, establish the approach of green development, uphold state policies on saving resources and protecting the environment, implement the most rigorous ecological protection system".

Indeed, it was a half-decade prior to this when in 2014 ClientEarth, an environmental law organization based in the UK but active across Europe and the US, was approached by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and the Supreme People's Court to consult on environmental laws, and to train environment court judges and prosecutors. The aim was to encourage the establish-

ment of more environmental groups in China and to enable NGOs to pursue polluting companies and even governmental bodies in the fight against environmental harms. According to James Thornton of ClientEarth, this legislation was the first to allow Chinese federal prosecutors to sue the government. The recommendations were put in place to make it easier for citizens to enable enforcement of environmental protection laws. In 2020, 80,000 environmental cases were brought before the courts. By March 2022, 1,500 environmental judges and 1,200 prosecutors had been trained; all in efforts to raise environmental standards across China. On the financial front, more recently, banks have been lobbied and advised on appropriate investment targets and which investments to avoid that will be of little value in the long run due to environmental and sustainability risks, such as coal-fired power stations.

Systemic change and development rely on integrated legal, financial, economic and cultural elements coming together. It takes time and concerted efforts for policies to be realized, and to be embodied by institutional systems, then to infiltrate through markets and for the message to be trusted. At some point, the momentum gathers, and positive developmental outcomes start to be visible, first to those with interest to test the waters and then invest, and finally to the average citizen. We appear to be on that trajectory, seeing those elements come together.

## GBA affords global firms ease of doing business, space for growth

 ON THE AGENDA  
 BY XINHUA

**CHINA'S** Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) is becoming a world-class business hub where global firms can thrive, members of the global business community said at a conference held in Hong Kong this week.

As China transitions towards an economy driven by innovation, sustainability and inclusiveness, the GBA is poised to lead the way as it serves as a model of integrated development, balancing the dynamism

of the private sector with the guidance of strategic planning, said Michael Hart, president of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in China, at the second Business Conference on Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development.

According to AmCham China's 2024 China Business Climate Survey, the GBA is one of the most attractive locations for investment in China in the eyes of respondents across all industry sectors.

Hart said that members of AmCham China value market access, proximity



to existing operations and good business environment when making investment decisions, acknowledging the GBA's "good work" to ensure equal treatment for foreign-in-

vested enterprises.

Local authorities in the region have sweetened invitations to foreign businesses. Guangdong Province, for instance, has rolled out a raft of policies to en-

sure national treatment for foreign-funded enterprises in terms of access to factors of production, license application, standards setting, and government procurement.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government had vowed in October to make it easier for companies from the Chinese mainland and overseas to set up headquarters or corporate divisions in Hong Kong.

The foundation provided by the GBA offers tremendous potential as a strategic destination for investment, particularly for

U.S. companies, said Noah Fraser, senior vice president of China operations with the US-China Business Council.

Its world-class infrastructure, ports, airports, logistics networks, and advanced digital ecosystems enhance the ease of doing business, he said.

The GBA's growth is rooted in creativity, speed to market, technological innovation and economic diversification, said Fraser.

"It is these principles, coupled with sustainability, that will ensure the region's growth benefits all stakeholders and position the GBA as a model of high-quality development on the global stage," he said.

MDT/XINHUA



TRADE WAR

# US hikes tariffs on imports of Chinese solar wafers, polysilicon and tungsten products

ELAINE KURTENBACH,  
BANGKOK

**T**HE Biden administration plans to raise tariffs on solar wafers, polysilicon and some tungsten products from China to protect U.S. clean energy businesses.

The notice from the U.S. Trade Representative's office said tariffs on Chinese-made solar wafers and polysilicon will rise to 50% from 25% and duties on certain tungsten products will increase from zero to 25%, effective on Jan. 1, following a review of Chinese trade practices under Section 301 of the 1974 Trade Act.

The decision followed a public comment period after the USTR said in September that it was considering such actions.

"The tariff increases announced today will further blunt the harmful policies and practices by the People's Republic of China," USTR Katharine Tai said in a statement. "These actions will complement the domestic investments made under the Biden-Harris Administration to promote a clean energy economy, while increasing the resilience of critical supply chains."

Reports yesterday said U.S. and Chinese officials were meeting this week and next for trade talks ahead of the year's end.

Last week, Washington tightened restrictions on Chinese ac-



AP PHOTO

cess to advanced semiconductor technology. Beijing responded by banning exports to the U.S. of certain critical minerals needed to make computer chips, such as gallium, germanium and antimony. It also stepped up its controls on graphite exports to the U.S.

China provides a very large share of most of those materials and the United States has been working to secure alternative sources in Africa and other parts of the world.

Tungsten is another strategi-

cally vital metal whose production is dominated by China. The U.S. does not produce it, but South Korea is a potential big supplier. It's used to make armaments and is also used in x-ray tubes and light bulb filaments, among other industrial applications. U.S. imports of the metal from China fell to \$10.9 million in 2023 from \$19.5 million the year before.

After Beijing announced its ban on exporting gallium and the other materials to the United States, analysts said tungsten was

another likely area where China might strike back.

Trade frictions have been escalating ahead of the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump, who has vowed to impose 60% tariffs on Chinese goods, among other threats. President Joe Biden has said Trump's promise of broad tariffs on foreign imports would be a mistake.

His administration has kept in place tariffs that Trump imposed during his first term in office, but says it has a more targeted approach.

China has sharply ramped up production of cheap electric vehicles, solar panels, and batteries at a time when the Biden administration has championed moves to support those industries in the U.S.

The U.S. and other trading partners allege China improperly subsidizes exports, giving exporters of solar panels and other products an unfair advantage in overseas markets, where its manufacturers charge lower prices thanks to government support. Washington also says China improperly pressures foreign companies to hand over technology.

China accounts for more than 80% of the market for solar panels at all stages of production, according to the International Energy Agency, more than double domestic demand for those products. Its huge economies of scale have made solar power more affordable, but also concentrated the supply chain inside China. The IEA has urged other countries to assess their solar panel supply chains and develop strategies to address any risks.

In early 2018, the Trump administration imposed 30% tariffs on imports of Chinese solar panels. Beijing filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization charging that the U.S. was unfairly supporting electric vehicle purchases.

The investigation that led the USTR to raise the tariffs on solar panels concluded with a report in May that has prompted increases in tariffs on a range of products including electric vehicles, syringes and needles, medical gloves and facemasks, semiconductors and steel and aluminum products, among others.

It has pushed tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles up to 100% from 25%, raised tariffs on Chinese-made lithium batteries to 25% from 7.5%. **MDT/AP**

WELFARE

# China expands private pension program nationwide: reports

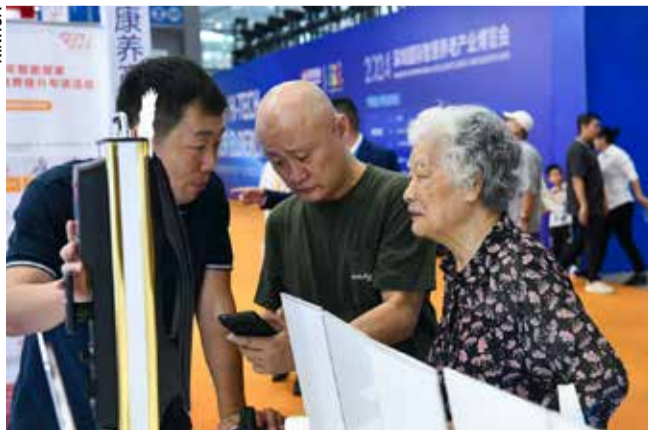
**C**HINA is scaling its private pension fund pilot program to a nationwide level in an effort to address mounting strains on its retirement system, Bloomberg has reported. However, the initiative, first launched in 36 cities in 2022, has already revealed significant hurdles, including lackluster fund performance and tepid investor interest.

Modeled after U.S.-style Individual Retirement Accounts, the program

allows workers to contribute up to 12,000 yuan (\$1,650) annually to tax-advantaged accounts.

This initiative is part of China's broader pension reform, aiming to tackle challenges posed by a rapidly aging population—expected to exceed 400 million individuals aged 60 and older by 2035.

According to Bloomberg, the program's initial rollout garnered attention from global financial players like BlackRock Inc., with some estima-



tes, including Citic Securities Co., projecting potential asset growth to 12 trillion yuan by

2035. On December 15, the program will extend across the nation, as announced by the Ministry

of Human Resources and Social Security.

Additionally, investment options will expand to include sovereign bonds and certain index funds, such as those tracking the CSI 300 stock index, potentially attracting long-term investors.

Despite its potential, the program has faced difficulties. Bloomberg highlights that over 60 million people have signed up, yet only 22% of them have made contributions, according to a March report by local media outlet The Paper. By the end of 2023, the funds had collected a combined 28 billion yuan, and Ping An Securities Co. estimated that figure had doub-

led to 58 billion yuan this year.

Participation growth remains a concern. While over 700 million Chinese citizens are eligible for the program, not all stand to benefit. Only 67 million individuals paid personal income tax last year, with more than 60% taxed at the 3% rate—the same as the pension plan's tax advantage—providing minimal incentive to participate, according to Ping An Securities.

China's decision to delay its retirement age starting next year has also sparked public backlash, further complicating efforts to reform its retirement system.

AUSTRALIA

PAPUA NEW GUINEA GAINS A TEAM IN AUSSIE RUGBY LEAGUE IN DIPLOMATIC PUSH

ROD MCGUIRK, MELBOURNE

PAPUA New Guinea will gain its own team in Australia's rugby league in a soft diplomacy deal announced yesterday linked to limiting Chinese influence in the South Pacific.

The Australian government will spend 600 million Australian dollars (\$380 million) over a decade to add a team from its nearest neighbor to the National Rugby League from 2028.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his Papua New Guinea counterpart James Marape announced the deal at a Sydney news conference. They also announced that a bilateral security deal struck a year ago had officially come into force.

China has pursued its own bilateral security pact on policing with Papua New Guinea and with other South Pacific island nations which U.S. allies, including Australia, fear could undermine regional security.



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (right) shakes hands with Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape at a press conference in Sydney, yesterday

Rugby league is the most popular sport in Papua New Guinea, which has an impoverished population of 12 million mostly subsistence farmers, wracked by tribal warfare, worsening violent crime and civil unrest.

Marape said the security deal with Australia "fits in neatly" with ensuring the safety of players and officials who would be based in the capital, Port Moresby.

"The player is safe when we have good rapport between our two police" forces, Marape told reporters.

Albanese did not directly answer when asked by a reporter if the agreement would prevent Papua New Guinea from striking a security deal with China.

"Security in Pacific is primarily the responsibility of the Pacific family is a principle that we share," Albanese said.

Marape said the security pact with Australia was in his country's interests.

"Australia is a security partner of choice in the first instance," Marape said.

"That doesn't stop us from relating with any nation, especially our Asian neighbors. We relate with China, for instance, a great trading partner, a great bilateral partner, but on security, closer to home we have this synergy and our shared territory needs to be protected, defended, policed," Marape added.

But Peter V'landys, chair of the Australian Rugby League Commission, said the Papua New Guinea government would never jeopardize Australian taxpayer support for the team by striking a security deal with Beijing.

"Rugby league is such a religion in Papua New Guinea that they will never take the risk of losing a rugby league team to do a deal with another country," V'landys told reporters.

Marape described the deal to create a Port Moresby-based football team as "pivotal in ... anchoring" the Papua New Guinea-Australia relationship.

The security pact signed by Albanese and Marape a year ago strengthened Australia's place as the preferred security partner. It was signed six months later than initially planned.

The original June 2023, date was abandoned after a security deal struck between the United States and Marape's government sparked protests in the South Pacific nation a month earlier over concerns that it undermined Papua New Guinea's sovereignty.

Australia agreed to support Papua New Guinea's internal security in areas of policing, courts and prisons.

Australia has also helped Papua New Guinea build a new police training center in the Port Moresby that will be open to recruits from other Pacific nations. MDT/AP

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C&C RECEIVED THE 1ST SILVER "DEIGNAN AWARD" FOR RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MACAU (2023)



SOUTH KOREA

# Yoon defends martial law as an act of governance and vows to 'fight to the end'

**S**OUTH Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol defended his martial law decree as an act of governance and denied rebellion charges, vowing yesterday to "fight to the end" in response to attempts to impeach him and intensifying investigations into last week's dramatic move.

The main opposition Democratic Party quickly slammed Yoon's speech as "an expression of extreme delusion" and "false propaganda." Later Thursday, it and other opposition parties submitted a new impeachment motion against Yoon for a floor vote this weekend.

The opposition-controlled parliament also passed motions yesterday to impeach and suspend Yoon's police chief and justice minister over the imposition of martial law, escalating the pressure on Yoon's embattled government.

Yoon's short-lived Dec. 3 martial law declaration has generated political chaos and large protests calling for his ouster. The decree brought hundreds of armed troops who attempted to encircle parliament and raid the election commission, though no major violence or injuries occurred. Martial law lasted only six hours as Yoon was forced to lift it after the National Assembly unanimously voted it down.



People watch a TV screen showing the live broadcast of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, in Seoul

In a televised speech yesterday, Yoon, a conservative, said he enacted martial law as a warning to the liberal Democratic Party. He called the party "a monster" and "anti-state forces" that he said tried to use its legislative muscle to impeach top officials, undermined the government's budget bill for next year and sympathized with North Korea.

"I will fight to the end to prevent the forces and criminal groups that have been responsible for paralyzing the country's government and dis-

rupting the nation's constitutional order from threatening the future of the Republic of Korea," Yoon said. "The opposition is now doing a sword dance of chaos, claiming that the declaration of martial law constitutes to an act of rebellion. But was it really?"

Yoon said martial law was an act of governance that cannot be the subject of investigations and doesn't amount to rebellion. He said the deployment of nearly 300 soldiers to the National Assembly was designed to maintain order, not

dissolve or paralyze it.

Kim Min-seok, head of a Democratic Party task force, dismissed Yoon's statement as "an expression of extreme delusion" and "a declaration of war against the people."

It's unclear how Yoon's comments will affect his fate. Opposition parties hold 192 seats combined, eight votes short of a two-thirds majority of the 300 members of the National Assembly. The earlier attempt to impeach Yoon failed with most lawmakers from Yoon's governing People Power

Party boycotting the vote.

Yoon's speech was expected to deepen a divide inside the PPP. When party chair Han Dong-hun, a critic of Yoon, called Yoon's statement "a confession of rebellion" during a party meeting, Yoon loyalists angrily jeered and called on Han to stop speaking. Han has urged party members to vote in favor of Yoon's impeachment.

Opposition parties and even some PPP members say the martial law decree was unconstitutional. South Korean law allows the president to declare martial law during wartime or similar emergencies, and they said such a situation did not exist. They argue that deploying troops to seal the National Assembly to suspend its political activities amounted to rebellion because the constitution doesn't give a president such rights in any situation.

The country's law enforcement authorities are investigating whether Yoon and others involved in imposing martial law committed rebellion, abuse of power and other crimes. A conviction for rebellion carries a maximum penalty of death.

The National Assembly on Thursday passed a bill that could introduce an independent counsel to investigate Yoon on rebellion charges without his approval. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

# Nissan reshuffles management to fix its money-losing business

**EMBATTLED** Japanese automaker Nissan has tapped Jeremie Papin, who was overseeing its U.S. operations, as its chief financial officer in a major management reshuffle billed as key to a turnaround.

The move as announced in the United States yesterday. It means Papin, chairman of Nissan's Americas Management Committee, replaces Stephen Ma, who will oversee Nissan Motor Corp.'s China operations.

Ma's replacement had been speculated about

for some time, given Nissan's problems in the key U.S. market, lately dominated by Tesla, Toyota and Ford.

Last month, Nissan said it was slashing 9,000 jobs, or about 6% of its global work force, and reducing global production capacity by 20% after reporting a quarterly loss of 9.3 billion yen (\$61 million).

That was a reversal from the 190.7 billion yen profit recorded the same quarter a year ago. Sales for the quarter through September fell



Jeremie Papin, chairperson of Nissan Americas

to 2.9 trillion yen (\$19 billion) from 3.1 trillion yen.

Chief Executive Mako-

to Uchida took a 50% pay cut to take responsibility for the results and acknowledged Nissan nee-

ded to become more efficient and respond better to market tastes, rising costs and other global changes.

"These executive changes reflect the experience and urgency needed to get the company back on track," Uchida said in a statement. "Nissan will continue to focus on future growth and steadily execute these turnaround efforts to ensure sustainable profitability."

Papin will steer a recovery, given his experience in strategy, business development and investment banking, according to Nissan, which makes the Leaf electric car, Rogue SUV and Infiniti luxury models.

A citizen of both the U.S. and France, Papin was initially with

the French automaker Renault SA, with which Nissan formed an alliance since 1999. In 2023, he was named to Nissan's executive committee, helping shape its growth plans. Previously, Papin worked for more than a decade as a financial analyst at Deutsche Bank, Lehman Brothers and Nomura.

As part of the moves, effective Jan. 1, Christian Meunier, the former chief executive of Jeep, returns to Nissan as chairman of the Americas Management Committee.

Asako Hoshino will continue to oversee the customer experience, while Shohei Yamazaki, China Management Committee chairman, takes over a part of her role and will oversee the Japan-ASEAN region. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Children carry bags of lithium at an illegal mining site in Pasali

NIGERIA

# In lithium boom, many mines are illegal and children do much of the work

TAIWO ADEBAYO,  
NASARAWA

**G**ROWING demand for the lithium used in batteries for electric vehicles and energy storage has created a new frontier for mining in Nigeria.

But it's led to exploitation of children who are often poor and take work in small, illegal mines to support themselves and their families.

The Associated Press recently traveled to the deep bush of Pasali, near the federal capital of Abuja in Nasarawa state, to follow and interview miners operating illegal mines, including some where children work. AP also witnessed negotiations and an agreement to purchase lithium by a company with no questions about the source of the lithium or how it was obtained.

The International Labour Organization estimates more than one million children work in mines and quarries worldwide, a problem particularly acute in Africa, where poverty, limited access to education and weak regulations add to the problem. Children, working mostly in small-scale mines, work long hours at unsafe sites, crushing or sorting rocks, carrying heavy loads of ore, and exposing themselves to toxic dust that can cause respiratory problems and asthma.

Lithium mining began in Pasali a decade ago, transforming a remote and slumbering community into a bustling site for

small-scale illegal mining, said Shedrack Bala, a 25-year-old who began working in the mines at age 15 and now owns his own pit. Dozens of mines now dot the area, all unlicensed.

The mining methods are primitive and dangerous. Miners use chisels and heavy hammers to break through rocks, descending several feet into dark pits. In some old but still viable mines, they crawl through narrow passages snaking between unstable mud walls before starting to dig. For new mines, the ground is blasted open with dynamite.

Bashir Rabi, now 19, started in the pits as an underage worker. AP journalists watched as he wriggled around at the bottom of a pit, where miners can be at risk if dynamite explodes prematurely. They also face danger of suffocating in narrow tunnels that connect pits, or burial from wall collapse.

Rabi hauled up raw lithium ore and passed it to six children, all younger than 10. Wearing rubber slippers and dust-stained shorts and shirts, the children hunched over rubble and chipped away with crude stone tools to extract valuable fragments.

A team of six children can sort and bag up to 10 25-kilogram bags of lithium-rich rock a day. For working from early morning to late evening, the children typically share 4,000 naira (about \$2.42), according to Bala and others who use them.

None of the children in the

group AP saw was attending school. Only two ever had. One, a 5-year-old boy, stopped when he was orphaned. The other was a 6-year-old girl who was pulled out of school by her family, who felt they couldn't afford to send two children to school and prioritized her 11-year-old brother.

The illegal mining thrives on informal networks of buyers and sellers who operate without much fear of the government. Aliyu Ibrahim, a lithium merchant in Nasarawa, owns unlicensed mines and also buys lithium ore from other illegal sites. At his warehouse, he told AP that his business flourishes by paying officials to look the other way. Ibrahim said he then sells his lithium in bulk to Chinese companies.

Ibrahim said he knows that children are working at his mines and others he buys from, but he said many of the children are orphans or poor. He said the work helps them survive.

AP accompanied miners from Pasali illegal mines to Chinese-owned RSIN Nigeria Limited, where a sales agreement was reached without questions about the source of the minerals or the conditions under which they were extracted. Sellers were asked to leave samples to test for lithium content. A price list from the buyers offered 200,000 naira (about \$119) for a metric ton of minerals containing up to 3% lithium.

RSIN Nigeria Limited did

not respond to repeated requests for comment. But in a statement to AP, the Chinese embassy in Abuja said Chinese mining companies in Nigeria "operate in line with local laws and regulations."

Philip Jakpor, a Nigerian activist, said his nonprofit Renewlyn Development Initiative has documented widespread child labor practices across Nasarawa state.

"Revenue generation seems to have trumped the need to protect human rights," Jakpor said. "We expect those operating in the upper spheres of the supply chain to adopt responsible models that prevent abusive conditions in mineral extraction."

Juliane Kippenberg, associate director of children's rights at Human Rights Watch, said global demand for lithium is expected to grow rapidly in coming years and it's imperative for governments to protect human rights and press corporations to do the same.

Segun Tomori, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Mining and Solid Minerals Development, said ongoing reforms such as amending the Minerals and Mining Act are aimed at minimizing the use of child labor. Tomori also said social safety programs such as school feeding initiatives are being revamped to keep children in school and combat child labor. He also cited a program to add mining marshals announced this year to clamp down on illegal mining. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1995 RIOTS BREAK OUT IN BRIXTON



Hundreds of black and white youths have taken to the streets of Brixton, in south London attacking police, ransacking shops and burning cars after the death of a black man in police custody.

About 50 police officers in riot gear have formed a line across Brixton's main road to stifle pockets of trouble and prevent anyone entering the area - the scene of massive rioting in 1981 caused by racial tensions.

One report said two shots were fired as the centre of the demonstration moved into the area of the Ritzy cinema.

A police motor cyclist is reported to have been pulled from his machine by a crowd of at least 10 rioters.

Officers have sealed off a two-mile area around the centre of Brixton and both Brixton and neighbouring Stockwell tube stations have been closed.

A police helicopter has been despatched over the area.

Riots broke out after a peaceful picket of the police station - triggered by the death last week of Wayne Douglas, 26.

Police said Mr Douglas, who was being questioned about a burglary, collapsed at the local police station.

A post-mortem later revealed he had suffered from heart disease.

The protest about his death developed into a march down Brixton's main street.

A standoff ensued between the police and about 100 demonstrators triggering a backlash of violence.

Witnesses have reported hearing groups of black youths shouting "Killers, killers" at the police.

A spokeswoman for the police said seven civilian casualties had been reported so far, and police were also dealing with sporadic pockets of trouble in the area around Brixton town centre.

She said there had been unconfirmed reports of petrol bombs being ignited.

"Officers were wearing protective clothing because we had reports of missiles being thrown," she added.

"We gave them every opportunity to move off peacefully but they hadn't done so."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The violence continued for five hours and 22 people were arrested and charged with public order offences, theft and criminal damage and three police officers were hurt. Riots in Brixton hit the headlines again in July 2001 after an estimated 100 youths went on the rampage, looting and breaking shop windows.

It was triggered by the fatal shooting by police of a man they mistakenly believed had been brandishing a gun.

Twenty-seven people were arrested after these riots.

Alex Owolade, chairman of the anti-racist group Movement for Justice, said the violence was a rebellion against years of "racist injustice" by police in an impoverished area plagued by racial tension.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

<p><b>ARIES</b> Mar. 21-Apr. 19</p> <p>Take advantage of positive financial conditions. Forge ahead and generate profits. Stay on budget. Use what you've kept hidden. Money saved is money earned.</p>	<p><b>TAURUS</b> Apr. 20-May. 20</p> <p>Take charge and do the work to get the results you want. Follow advice from a master. Make valuable discoveries. Follow rules and budgets.</p>
<p><b>GEMINI</b> May. 21-Jun. 21</p> <p>Peaceful privacy brings out your muses. Craft plans, plots and visions. Music tames the savage beast. Routines and rituals satisfy and soothe your spirit.</p>	<p><b>CANCER</b> Jun. 22-Jul. 22</p> <p>You're developing new team strategies. Discuss shared dreams, possibilities and options. Don't take things personally. Share what you're learning.</p>
<p><b>LEO</b> Jul. 23-Aug. 22</p> <p>Unexpected gifts propel a professional opportunity. A career dream appears within reach. Call on friends and allies for support. Handle basics.</p>	<p><b>VIRGO</b> Aug. 23-Sep. 22</p> <p>Travels and studies take focus. Discover hidden beauty. Reinforce structures for support, like reservations, applications or registration. Follow the rules carefully.</p>
<p><b>LIBRA</b> Sep. 23-Oct. 22</p> <p>Discuss shared finances with your partner. Discover unexpected savings or benefits. Keep your thrifty habits and prioritize basic responsibilities.</p>	<p><b>SCORPIO</b> Oct. 23-Nov. 21</p> <p>Take advantage of an unexpected plot twist. Collaborate with a partner to advance shared interests. Team up to harvest a windfall. Self-discipline pays extra dividends.</p>
<p><b>SAGITTARIUS</b> Nov. 22-Dec. 21</p> <p>Build energy with physical action and exercise. Practice moves until your muscles remember. Follow instructions from a respected coach. Grow your heart stronger.</p>	<p><b>CAPRICORN</b> Dec. 22-Jan. 19</p> <p>Stay flexible. Express your heart without pushing an agenda. Listen for what others want. Keep things simple. Have fun with people you love.</p>
<p><b>AQUARIUS</b> Jan. 20-Feb. 18</p> <p>Domestic renovation and chores brighten your space. Invest in efficiency. Clean, sort and organize. Give away stuff you no longer need. Discover hidden treasure.</p>	<p><b>PISCES</b> Feb. 19-Mar. 20</p> <p>Connect, network and brainstorm. Keep promises and agreements. Engage in a fascinating conversation. Generate possibilities together.</p>

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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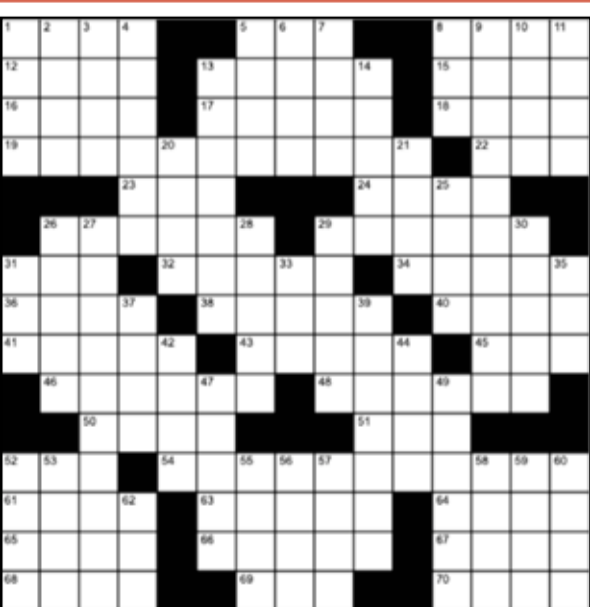
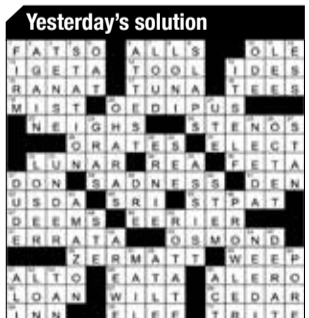
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-3	3	fine
Changchun	-14	-9	fine
Chengdu	5	7	cloudy
Chongqing	8	9	rain
Fuzhou	12	17	overcast
Guangzhou	12	18	cloudy
Guiyang	0	4	overcast
Haikou	17	20	rain
Hangzhou	4	10	cloudy
Harbin	-20	-12	fine
Hefei	0	9	fine
Nanjing	3	9	fine
Shanghai	5	9	cloudy
Taipei	16	17	rain
Wuhan	1	10	fine
Hong Kong	15	21	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-11	-5	snow
Frankfurt	-2	2	fine
Paris	0	2	overcast
London	4	7	cloudy
New York	-4	2	fine

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Close with force; 5- Conductor \_\_\_\_-Pekka Salonen; 8- Canyon sound; 12- Yarn; 13- Make \_\_\_\_ of (write down); 15- Swedish import; 16- Points to; 17- Stigma; 18- Potpourri; 19- Leaping insect; 22- Wrathful emotion; 23- Long-tailed rodent; 24- Jazz phrase; 26- European-style restaurant; 29- Already?; 31- Pro \_\_\_\_; 32- 71% is under water; 34- Miscalculation; 36- Shade trees; 38- A long time; 40- Projecting columns at end of wall; 41- Crazy as \_\_\_\_; 43- Not for kids; 45- Electrically charged atom; 46- On the train; 48- Deutsch, here; 50- Calvary letters; 51- Modern prefix; 52- Slippery swimmer; 54- Thoughtful; 61- Baseball stats; 63- Electron tube; 64- Female child; 65- Seep; 66- Keyboard key; 67- Peter Fonda role; 68- Dagger of yore; 69- \_\_\_\_ rule; 70- "\_\_\_\_ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto);

**DOWN** 1- Adult male deer; 2- Den; 3- Mater preceder; 4- Mr. and Mr.; 5- Within (prefix); 6- Work up lather; 7- Take \_\_\_\_ from me; 8- "\_\_\_\_ Beso" (1962 hit); 9- State in the W United States; 10- Salon sweepings; 11- Slender woodwind; 13- Smokers receptacle; 14- January, in Juárez; 20- Fill to surfeit; 21- Stand; 25- \_\_\_\_ song (cheaply); 26- Feminist Abzug; 27- Paralyze; 28- Mountain nymph of Greek mythology; 29- Gesture of indifference; 30- \_\_\_\_ your life!; 31- Crumpets partner; 33- Wee bit; 35- Hurried; 37- In a minute; 39- Thin; 42- Bust maker; 44- Family diagram; 47- \_\_\_\_ Janeiro; 49- Storage place for dead bodies; 52- God of love; 53- Black, in poetry; 55- 1492 vessel; 56- Drunkards; 57- Thought; 58- Suffers; 59- Very, in Versailles; 60- Robt. \_\_\_\_; 62- Perceive;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

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



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DRIVE IN

# A WORDLESS LATVIAN CAT PARABLE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE IS THE YEAR'S BEST ANIMATED MOVIE

JAKE COYLE,  
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

OF all the post-apocalyptic landscapes we've been treated to over the years, none is as beautiful nor peaceful as that of "Flow."

In Gints Zilbalodis' wondrously shimmering animated fable, a solitary black cat, after escaping a cataclysmic flood, navigates a water world. What brought things to this point is never explained. We're left to look upon this strange, verdant and overgrown landscape through the amber eyes of our unnamed feline protagonist. Humans are completely absent, and it's part of this beguilingly meditative film to wonder not just about what role we played in the flood, but to ponder the grace of the animal life left to inherit the Earth.

As much as I didn't have a wordless Latvian animated movie on my 2024 bingo card, "Flow" — an expected Oscar contender cur-

AP PHOTO



A scene from the animated film "Flow" (Sideshow and Janus Films)

rently in theaters — is quite easily the best animated movie of the year and one of the most poetic ecological parables in recent memory. It's an all-audiences movie, and by that, I'm tempted to include not just young and old, but cats and dogs, too.

When the waters rise, the cat encounters a friendly Labrador, a long-legged secretary bird, a dozing capybara and a bauble-

-hoarding ring-tailed lemur. Cute as they are, they aren't quite your typical animated animals. Part of the allure of "Flow" is seeing animal characters that would normally be anthropomorphized and voiced by celebrity actors — the lemur, in particular, has until now been ruled by Sacha Baron Cohen's King Julian of "Madagascar" — move and sound authentically.

Well, mostly. Circumstances bring these five together aboard a small sailboat, an ark sans Noah.

That "Flow" is made with computer generated animation adds to its dreamy, curiously real surrealism. Zilbalodis created "Flow" with Blender, the free, open-source graphics software tool. His camera moves less with the prescribed, storyboarded form of traditional animation than as a nimble,

roving perspective within a virtual world. That such a natural and sensory movie is made possible by cutting-edge technology is one reason why the dystopic world of "Flow" always feels more hopeful than it ought to.

Another reason is the animals. Though they come from different species and have little means of communication, they together form an odd partnership. The cat is initially wary of each, but they slowly form an evident bond. Their survival hinges on their cooperation, which is occasionally threatened by the self-interest of others (there's a pack of less community-minded dogs) or the cat's own timid reluctance. Staying to face a problem or trust another animal, rather than scampering away, goes against its nature.

In that way, these two- and four-legged creatures, digitally rendered in a human-less future, are both worthy heirs to the planet and furry figures of inspiration for today. Reflections run through "Flow" — in a mirror clutched by the lemur, in the water the cat peers into — but none more so than the image of ourselves gazing back at it.

**"Flow," a Sideshow and Janus Films release is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for peril and thematic elements. Running time: 84 minutes. ★★★★★**

AD

SUN, SAND and Santa 陽光沙灘 海島聖誕

#海島印記 #makingmemories

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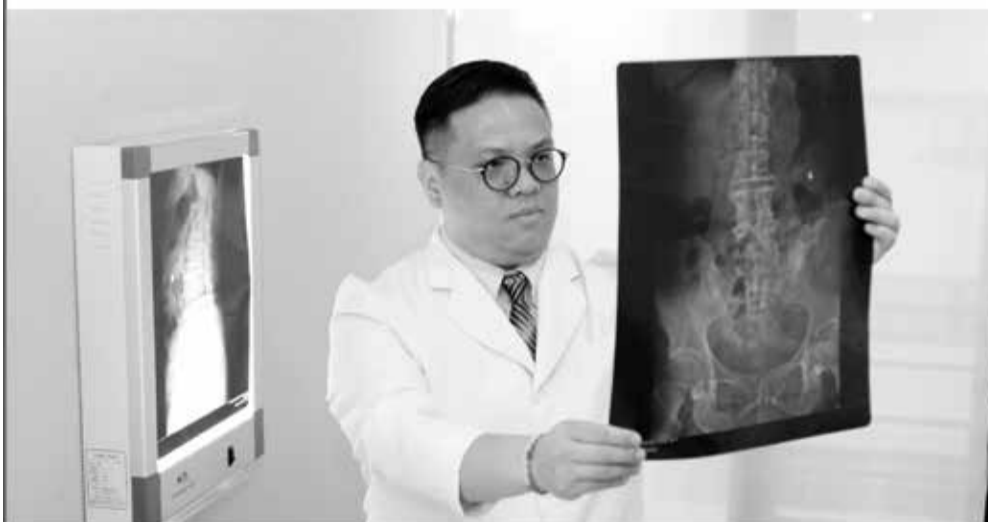


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MDT REVIEW

LIFESTYLE

**N**ESTLED within the opulent Wynn Palace in Cotai, the EliteKinesio Medical Centre stands as a beacon of health and wellness, offering a unique blend of bespoke services and holistic treatment plans. As the first in-spa health center in the region, it aims for guests to leave this tranquil oasis feeling rejuvenated and deeply impressed by the level of care and expertise provided.

In partnership with the largest spa in Macau, which has received Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star accolades, the EliteKinesioMedical Centre at The Spa at Wynn Palace offers a holistic journey that guides guests through personalized care plans tailored to individual needs. Upon entering the facility, guests are enveloped in a serene atmosphere, where decor exudes sophistication, with soft lighting, calming colors, and gentle music creating an environment conducive to relaxation.

Prior to treatment, guests will be guided to a consultation room to begin their journey toward better health with physical therapist Cary Lam.

For Lam, the Medical Centre aims to improve people's movements after injuries, manage pain, and prevent injuries by providing holistic treatments. The center also offers consultations on how to improve fitness, health quality, and lifestyle, which, based on research, helps enhance a person's overall health and wellness.

Lam possesses extensive experience and knowledge, making her a cornerstone of the wellness journey. With a deep understanding of human anatomy and a variety of treatment techniques, she promises to tailor each session to the individual's needs. Her expertise encompasses advanced modalities,

# A holistic journey like no other at a sanctuary of wellness



including High-Intensity Laser Therapy and Fascia Manipulation.

The physical therapist not only focuses on physical rehabilitation but also emphasizes holistic wellness, guiding clients through personalized treatment plans.

"Elitekinesio Medical Centre (Wynn Palace) provides treatment from the outside in, addressing musculoskeletal problems to deep fascia release, including visceral manipulation," said Lam. After discussing guests' health histories and specific concerns, the physical therapist will craft a plan that includes a series of bespoke treatments.

At the center, a tailored approach ensures guests feel valued, as if their wellness is the center's priority.

A highlight of the experience is

the "Series Package," which offers eight bespoke treatments along with two complimentary 45-minute sessions of Physical Therapy, including High-Intensity Laser Therapy (HILT) and Fascia Manipulation. This combination promises to enhance clients' range of motion and alleviate any lingering discomfort.

The first treatment involves HILT, which utilizes advanced laser technology to target areas of pain and tension. The sensation is warm and soothing, allowing the tension in muscles to gradually dissipate. Following this, the Fascia Manipulation session provides a deeper release, focusing on connective tissues that often hold stress.

By the end of the treatments, clients can expect to feel remarka-

bly lighter, with noticeably improved mobility.

In addition to these therapies, the spa also offers Touchless Well-Being Enhancements. These therapies include Cryotherapy, a non-invasive treatment that exposes guests to temperatures as low as -85°C. Initially daunting, the experience is invigorating. The rapid cooling effect is refreshing, and the benefits—ranging from reduced muscle soreness to enhanced recovery—are evident.

Guests can also indulge in Red Light Therapy, where they are illuminated with a warm glow as 14,000 red and near-infrared LEDs work to soothe joints and promote healing.

Another treatment, Vibration and Sound Therapy, is a revelation; the binaural sounds help center

guests' thoughts, reducing stress and anxiety, and leaving them with a profound sense of peace.

The center also allows guests to enjoy the luxurious wet facilities at The Forbes Travel Guide Five-Star Spa. Clients can take advantage of this, relaxing in the serene pools and saunas, further enhancing the overall experience, as it is the perfect way to unwind after all treatments.

Overall, a visit to the EliteKinesio Medical Centre will be transformative.

The combination of innovative therapies, individualized care, and a serene atmosphere offers an exceptional wellness experience. Whether you seek recovery from physical ailments or are simply looking to enhance your well-being, this center is a must-visit.

The commitment to holistic health truly sets EliteKinesio apart, making it a significant addition to Macau's wellness landscape.

The center's targeted objective is to improve people's quality of life and sense of well-being, and to extend holistic wellness and longevity for both the local community and tourists in Macau, supporting the government's objectives in medical tourism.

This initiative aligns with the Macau SAR Government's "1+4" moderate diversified development project by expanding "Tourism + Wellness" programs to foster the growth of the Big Health industry. Whether for local residents or tourists, The Spa at Wynn Macau promises an unparalleled experience.

**L**AUREN Mayberry, frontwoman of the Scottish synth-pop band CHVRCHES, liberates herself from preconceptions on a punchy debut solo album, "Vicious Creature."

Mayberry's striking voice has been central to CHVRCHES' electro-pop since the trio started making music together in 2011. It is sharp and distinct, a key instrument used alongside Iain Cook and Martin Doherty's synths to create a sound that has endured throughout the subsequent decade. Now, her soprano voices feelings and experiences uniquely hers — adding a fire to a project all about ownership.

"Must be something in the air," she declares on the album's opening track. And

tTUNES

## CHVRCHES' Lauren Mayberry makes feminist pop on debut solo album, 'Vicious Creature'

later: "Too much noise might leave you on your own."

Throughout the album, she explores past relationships, family, the music industry and memory.

"I killed myself to be one of the boys," she sings on "Sorry, etc." bluntly listing the concessions she's had to make in order to exceed in the male-dominated music business. "I bit my tongue to be one of the boys/I sold my soul to be one of the boys," she continues, the chorus morphing into

a confessional chant. Above drums and piercing electronic production, the song is all angst and theatrical flair — particularly on the final, whispered verse — and feels distinctly Mayberry.

On "Change Shapes," she details how and why that self-sacrificing happens. "I change shapes till I get what I want from you," she sings over a bouncy guitar and steady percussion. "Punch Drunk" is just that, a lively song atop analog crackles and loose riffs. "Mantra"

uses a warbled beat to a hypnotic effect, as Mayberry takes on an enemy.

Those moments — the ones where Mayberry brawls, heard in her lyrics and the wolf howling back at the boy crying wolf in "Crocodile Tears" — are some of the album's best.

But there are dialed back moments as well — quieter songs, the furthest from her work with CHVRCHES — and they come with their own revelations.

ELISE RYAN, MDT/AP



AP PHOTO

**OPINION**

**One Tech Tip**

Kelvin Chan, MDT/AP Business Writer



**HOW TO PROTECT YOUR COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH ENCRYPTION**

After a sprawling hacking campaign exposed the communications of an unknown number of Americans, U.S. cybersecurity officials are advising people to use encryption in their communications.

To safeguard against the risks highlighted by the campaign, which originated in China, federal cybersecurity authorities released an extensive list of security recommendations for U.S. telecom companies — such as Verizon and AT&T — that were targeted. The advice includes one tip we can all put into practice with our phones: “Ensure that traffic is end-to-end encrypted to the maximum extent possible.”

End-to-end encryption, also known as E2EE, means that messages are scrambled so that only the sender and recipient can see them. If anyone else intercepts the message, all they will see is a garble that can't be unscrambled without the key.

Officials said the hackers targeted the metadata of a large number of customers, including information on the dates, times and recipients of calls and texts. They also managed to see the content from texts from a much smaller number of victims.

If you're an iPhone user, information in text messages that you send to someone else who also has an iPhone will be encrypted end-to-end. Just look for the blue text bubbles, which indicate that they are encrypted iMessages.

The same goes for Android users sending texts through Google Messages. There will be a lock next to the timestamp on each message to indicate the encryption is on.

But there's a weakness. When iPhone and Android users text each other, the messages are encrypted only using Rich Communication Services, an industry standard for instant messaging that replaces the older SMS and MMS standards.

To avoid getting caught out when trading texts, experts recommend using encrypted messaging apps.

Privacy advocates are big fans of Signal, which applies end-to-end encryption on all messages and voice calls. The independent nonprofit group behind the app promises never to sell, rent, or lease customer data and has made its source code publicly available so that it can be audited by anyone to examine it “for security and correctness.”

Signal's encryption protocol is so reputable that it has been integrated into rival WhatsApp, so users will enjoy the same level of security protection as Signal, which has a much smaller user base. End-to-end encryption is also the default mode for Facebook Messenger, which like WhatsApp is owned by Meta Platforms.

Telegram is an app that can be used for one-on-one conversations, group chats and broadcast “channels” but contrary to popular perception, it doesn't turn on end-to-end encryption by default. Users have to switch on the option. And it doesn't work with group chats.

Instead of using your phone to make calls through a wireless cellular network, you can make voice calls with Signal and WhatsApp. Both apps encrypt calls with the same technology that they use to encrypt messages.

There are other options. If you have an iPhone you can use Facetime for calls, while Android owners can use the Google Fi service, which are both end-to-end encrypted.

The only catch with all these options is that, as with using the chat services to send messages, the person on the other end will also have to have the app installed.

WhatsApp and Signal users can customize their privacy preferences in the settings, including hiding IP address during calls to prevent your general location from being guessed. [Abridged]

**UK SPY AGENCY RELEASES ANNUAL CHRISTMAS CARD PUZZLE TO UNCOVER FUTURE CODEBREAKERS**

THE BUZZ

What does a spy agency give for Christmas? How about a riddle wrapped in an enigma inside a mystery.

GCHQ, Britain's electronic and cyber-intelligence agency, this week published its annual Christmas Challenge — a seasonal greeting card that doubles as a set of fiendishly difficult puzzles designed to excite young minds about solving cyphers and unearthing clues.

The challenge is aimed at young people aged 11 to 18, who are encouraged to work in teams and use “lateral thinking, ingenuity and perseverance” to crack the seven brainteasers set by GCHQ's “in-house puzzlers.”

The card is sent by the head of GCHQ — short for Government Com-

munications Headquarters — to other national security chiefs around the world. Puzzles were first included in 2015 and have become an annual tradition.

The agency admits the festive fun has an ulterior motive.

GCHQ Director Anne Keast-Butler said she hoped the card would inspire young people to explore STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — “and to consider what a career in cybersecurity and intelligence might have to offer.”

It also aims to dispel some myths about intelligence work, fueled by super-agent James Bond and other fictional spies.



Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones (left) and Minister for Communications Michelle Rowland attend a press conference in Sydney, yesterday

**STOP THE PRESS!**

**AUSTRALIA PLANS TO TAX DIGITAL PLATFORMS THAT DON'T PAY FOR NEWS**

ROD MCGUIRK, MELBOURNE

THE Australian government said yesterday it will tax large digital platforms and search engines unless they agree to share revenue with Australian news media organizations.

The tax would apply from Jan. 1 to tech companies that earn more than 250 million Australian dollars (\$160 million) a year in revenue from Australia, Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones and Communications Minister Michelle Rowland said.

They include Meta, Google-owner Alphabet and ByteDance, the Chinese owner of TikTok.

The tax would be offset through money paid to Australian media organizations. The size of the tax is not clear. But the government aims to make sharing revenue with media organizations the cheaper option.

“The real objective ... is not to raise revenue -- we hope not to raise any revenue. The real objective is to incentivize agreement-making between platforms and news media businesses in Australia,” Jones told reporters.

The move comes after Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, announced that it would not renew three-year deals to pay Aus-

tralian news publishers for their content.

A previous government introduced in 2021 laws called the News Media Bargaining Code that forced tech giants to strike revenue-sharing deals with Australian media companies or face fines of 10% of their Australian revenue.

Meta said in a statement the current law was flawed and the U.S. company continued to have “concerns about charging one industry to subsidise another.”

“The proposal fails to account for the realities of how our platforms work, specifically that most people don't come to our platforms for news content and that news publishers voluntarily choose to post content on our platforms because they receive value from doing so,” the statement said.

Google has struck revenue-sharing agreements with more than 80 Australian news companies in the past three years and has committed to renewing those deals.

But Google has raised doubts about the government's new approach.

“The government's introduction of a targeted tax risks the ongoing viability of commercial deals with news publishers in Australia,” a Google statement said.

“We are reviewing to-

day's announcement and will have more to say once we've assessed the full impact,” Google added.

TikTok noted that its users didn't seek news.

“As an entertainment platform, TikTok has never been the go to place for news. We will actively engage in the consultation process and look forward to hearing more details,” a TikTok statement said.

Jones said Australian officials had explained the government's intentions to their counterparts in the United States, where most of the digital giants are headquartered. President-elect Donald Trump's administration is planning to increase tariffs against some countries, which has the potential to trigger trade wars.

“We want to ensure that they understand the reasoning, also understand that this is not a tax in the normal sense of the word,” Jones said.

“This is an incentive to bolster up a law that has existed in Australia since 2021,” he added.

Rowland said the revenue-sharing was needed to safeguard Australian democracy.

“The rapid growth of digital platforms in recent years has disrupted Australia's media landscape and it is threatening the viability of public interest journalism,” Rowland said. **MDT/AP**



**Lebanon** Migrant workers seek repatriation amid post-war hardships and alleged abuses under the Kafala labor system. Supported by NGOs and the IOM, over 400 have returned home, but thousands await aid. Sierra Leonean migrants report severe exploitation, violence, and displacement during their stay.



**United States** The Biden and Trump administrations are coordinating on critical foreign crises, including conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, and Syria, ensuring continuity in U.S. policies. Biden's team shared transition plans and security strategies, emphasizing bipartisan efforts on issues like Ukraine support and Middle East stabilization.



**Mali** Human Rights Watch accused Mali's military and Russian Wagner mercenaries of killing 32 civilians and destroying 100 homes after UN peacekeepers left. Islamist groups also executed 47 civilians. Wagner's presence, replacing French forces, has intensified civilian abuses amid ongoing conflict in the Sahel region.



**Saudi Arabia** will host the 2034 FIFA World Cup, though the tournament dates remain undecided. Likely avoiding the June-July summer heat, FIFA will determine scheduling alongside confederations. Proposed venues include 15 stadiums across Riyadh, Jeddah, Neom, Abha, and Al Khobar.