



China builds out Hong Kong story line

A Post investigation finds witness in media mogul's trial was mistreated

BY SHIBANI MAHTANI

HONG KONG — Some of the 12 were starting to relax. It had been about two hours since they set off from a quiet pier in Hong Kong in August 2020, jerrycans of fuel, backpacks and fishing rods nestled between them in the crowded boat, its silver-white hull striking against the blue waters.

The piercing sound of a whistle cut through the calm. A speedboat, carrying five or six uniformed men, all armed, pulled alongside. They ordered the boat's driver to turn off the engine. A second, much bigger vessel soon arrived — "CHINESE COAST GUARD" in bold lettering on its side — making clear what they already knew: It was over.

A year before, mass protests had erupted in their city, turning these young Hong Kongers into street fighters and international advocates. After Beijing passed a draconian new national security law that would crush the territory's remaining freedoms and impose long prison sentences on pro-democracy activists, they tried to flee — only to be apprehended in international waters by China. The account of their capture at sea is described here for the first time from court documents obtained by The Washington Post and people familiar with how the event unfolded.

Among those on board was a man who would soon emerge for Beijing as a prized capture: Andy Li Yu-hin. More than three years later, his place in the remaking of Hong Kong in China's image is becoming clear.

On Monday, Hong Kong's highest profile trial since the 2020 SEE HONG KONG ON A18

Pilots avoid mental care for fear of losing wings

BY ANDREA SACHS

The commercial airline pilot kept his condition a secret for years. He was supposed to inform the Federal Aviation Administration that he was seeing a therapist for anxiety and depression, but he couldn't bring himself to share his despair. He was afraid of the repercussions.

"I lied to the FAA about the treatment I was receiving because that would have opened a can of worms. I would have been grounded until I was better," said the 31-year-old first officer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because his airline did not authorize him to talk with journalists. "It is very easy to just not tell them what's going on."

The pilot continued working, but his symptoms worsened. During long stretches of depression, he ate little and was consumed by hopelessness. He could no longer conceal his mental health crisis from his employer or the FAA. He decided to ground himself.

"I started to think I had two options: I either stop flying or I die," he said.

His story speaks to a larger problem in the profession: Many pilots would rather ignore or hide their mental health problems SEE PILOTS ON A6

THE COLLECTION



CAROLYN VAN HOUTEN/THE WASHINGTON POST

Michelle Farris and her husband, Tim Farris, take a walk around D.C.'s Mount Zion Cemetery, where her distant relative Moses Boone is buried in an unknown location. After the toddler died in 1904, anthropologist Ales Hrdlicka took his brain.

SMITHSONIAN TARGETED VULNERABLE D.C. RESIDENTS FOR BRAIN COLLECTION

BY NICOLE DUNGCA AND CLAIRE HEALY

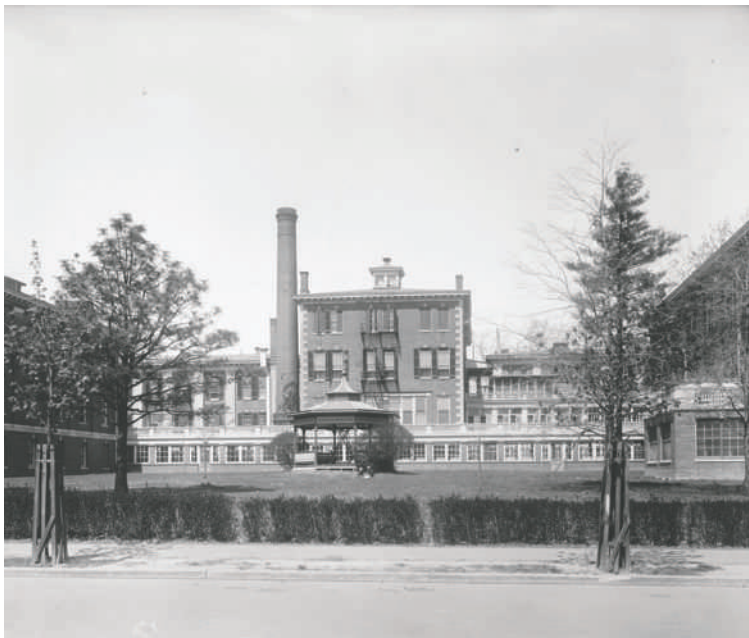
A 59-year-old Black woman died of epilepsy in October 1903 at the Washington Asylum Hospital, an institution that housed the District's indigent. Almost five months later, tuberculosis killed a 21-month-old Black toddler at Children's Hospital in D.C. The next month, an 11-year-old White boy died of a lung condition at Children's.

Upon their deaths, one of the Smithsonian Institution's top anthropologists, Ales Hrdlicka, enlisted the local institutions and doctors to help him remove their brains to build a "racial brain collection." Hrdlicka, who sought brains and other body parts to prove now-debunked theories on racial differences, was taking advantage of the District's most vulnerable residents, records show.

The Smithsonian would eventually acquire more than 280 brains from around the world. More than a quarter — 74 — of the brains still held by the Smithsonian were from local people, according to documents reviewed by The Washington Post. Of those, 48 were Black.

At least 19 of the brains are described in documents as having been removed from fetuses, including one SEE COLLECTION ON A8

Search the Smithsonian's records at wapo.st/database.



NATIONAL PHOTO CO. COLLECTION/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Hrdlicka took brains from those who died at Children's Hospital in D.C., pictured in 1910, for his work at the Smithsonian.

Charitable groups scramble for volunteers

Community needs rise across United States, but help is increasingly hard to come by

BY JOE HEIM

The Denver Rescue Mission served more than 1.2 million meals to people who were homeless or financially struggling this year, far more than it had ever served. But it accomplished that monumental task with far fewer volunteers than it had just four years ago.

Like many nonprofit organizations across the country that rely on volunteers, the mission is finding it harder to engage people who are willing to donate their time. Even as the need for help has increased, the number of Americans who formally volunteer has continued to decline, according to reports by the Census Bureau and organizations tracking volunteerism.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the Denver nonprofit with nine locations relied on 16,000 volunteers annually, some who worked just once and others who were regulars, said Sarah Hood, director of volunteer services. This past year that number SEE VOLUNTEERS ON A5



MARVIN JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST

Volunteers serve a meal at Miriam's Kitchen in Washington on Nov. 29. The organization's volunteer count remains below what it was before the coronavirus pandemic, even as demand has soared.

Biden upset by his low polling

PRESIDENT SAID TO WANT STAFF ACTION

Growing unease about trailing Trump

BY TYLER PAGER

The night before President Biden departed Washington to celebrate Thanksgiving on Nantucket, Mass., he gathered his closest aides for a meeting in the White House residence.

After pardoning a pair of turkeys, an annual White House tradition, Biden delivered some stern words for the small group assembled: His poll numbers were unacceptably low and he wanted to know what his team and his campaign were doing about it. He complained that his economic message had done little to move the ball, even as the economy was growing and unemployment was falling, according to people familiar with his comments, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a private conversation.

For months, the president and first lady Jill Biden have told aides and friends they are frustrated by the president's low approval rating and the polls that show him trailing former president Donald Trump, the front-runner for the Republican nomination — and in recent weeks, they have grown upset that they are not making more progress.

"We do not discuss the President's private conversations one way or the other," Andrew Bates, a White House spokesman, said in a statement. "The President and first lady meet regularly with their senior team for updates and to SEE BIDEN ON A4

Flood of falsehoods: AI fake news surges online

BY PRANSHU VERMA

Artificial intelligence is automating the creation of fake news, spurring an explosion of web content mimicking factual articles that instead disseminates false information about elections, wars and natural disasters.

Since May, websites hosting AI-created false articles have increased by more than 1,000 percent, ballooning from 49 sites to more than 600, according to NewsGuard, an organization that tracks misinformation.

Historically, propaganda operations have relied on armies of low-paid workers or highly coordinated intelligence organizations to build sites that appear to be legitimate. But AI is making it easy for nearly anyone — whether they are part of a spy agency or just a teenager in their basement — to create these outlets, producing content that is at times hard to differentiate from real news.

One AI-generated article recounted a made-up story about Benjamin Netanyahu's psychiatrist, a NewsGuard investigation found, alleging that he had died and left behind a note suggesting the involvement of the Israeli prime minister. The psychiatrist appears to have been fictitious, but the claim was featured on an SEE FAKE NEWS ON A13

IN THE NEWS

The skid continues The Commanders' losing streak stretches to five games following their 28-20 loss to the Los Angeles Rams. D1

A contractor's killing An Israeli airstrike left a man working for USAID and his young family dead, intensifying calls within the Biden administration for accountability. A11

THE NATION Florida GOP leaders voted to strip the authority of Chairman Christian Ziegler, under investigation for an alleged sexual assault. A2 A stem cell offers clues to a cancer mystery. A4

THE WORLD Volodymyr Zelensky is used to staying above the U.S. political fray, but it's growing harder. A10 Crowded, besieged, bombed and famished, Gaza is fertile ground for disease. A12

THE ECONOMY The push to bring iMessage to Android feels just as fraught as ever, Chris Velazco writes. A14

THE REGION D.C. settled with a police union lodge accused of selling and shipping hundreds of bottles of liquor without proper permits. B1

A Q-and-A session with Montgomery County fire chief nominee Charles Bailey, who would be the agency's first Black leader. B1 A Reform Judaism conference in D.C. reflected the complicated state of affairs for the religious movement amid the Israel-Gaza war. B1

STYLE Letterboxd feels like a vintage internet. Can it stay that way? C1 At the Met's "Women Dressing Women" exhibition, there's an understanding that stating what makes a female designer unique is impossible and, more importantly, reductive. C1

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