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FIFTEEN PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS ARE UNCOOPERATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO SOLVING COMMON WATER LEAKAGE PROBLEMS P2

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China A bus plunged into a sinkhole on a city street in northwestern China, killing at least six people and leaving four missing, authorities said. Some 1,000 emergency workers and 30 vehicles were sent to the site, the emergency management bureau in the city of Xining said. A crane was called in to lift the bus above the sinkhole so rescue workers could look for victims.

China Shanghai ended all official relations yesterday after the Czech capital chose to partner with Taipei instead of Beijing. The foreign affairs office of the Shanghai municipal government snapped that they "strongly condemn (Prague's decision) and solemnly protest!" Shanghai will immediately suspend relations and all official contact with Prague, the municipal government said in a notice.



Australia Smoke haze and poor air quality caused by wildfires temporarily suspended practice sessions for the Australian Open at Melbourne Park yesterday, but qualifying began later in the morning in "very poor" conditions and amid complaints by at least one player who was forced to forfeit her match.

Egypt Officials said yesterday they would investigate the death in custody of a U.S. citizen who had gone on a hunger strike as part of a six-year battle against what he insisted was wrongful imprisonment. Mustafa Kassem, 54, an Egyptian-born auto parts dealer from Long Island, New York, died late Monday of heart failure after a hunger strike he began last year, his lawyers said.

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MACAU'S ECONOMY TO FACE HEADWINDS IN 2020

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

15% of households uncooperative in solving water leakage problems

JULIE ZHU

FIFTEEN out of every 100 house owners or occupants have not cooperated with the Housing Bureau in solving water seepage and leakages in residential units, according to Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong Weng Chon.

In these cases, either the owner or occupant could not be found or, when they were found, they did not allow the Housing Bureau's water leakage control center officers to enter their houses in order to check on or fix the problem.

During yesterday's Legislative Assembly, lawmakers Agnes Lam and Mak Soi Kun asked about persistent water seepage and water leakage problems in Macau.



Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong Weng Chon

Macau law does not allow governmental entities to enter private houses to solve water seepage or leakage problems without the permission of their owners.

"The greatest difficulty is for the center's officers to enter into people's houses. Upon finding that the problem lies in the upstairs house, they [owner or oc-

cupants upstairs] are either not there or do not let us in to check on it and fix it," said Cheong.

Cheong said that he has personally experienced water seepage and leakage problems. He believes that the majority of people who have been residing in Macau for some years suffer from similar problems.

In 2019, 81% of nearly 19,000 water seepage and leakage cases were concluded.

The government is currently analyzing the follow-up procedures of the Housing Bureau's water leakage follow-up team, hoping to improve its operations and solve related problems more effectively.

Lawmakers Agnes Lam and Au Kam San expressed doubt that Cheong's statistics were accurate. Lam in particular poin-

ted out that the quoted 81% could also include situations where property owners fixed the problem, or the cause of the problem was checked but could not be found, despite the follow-up center still listing the situation as "concluded." Whether or not the problems were eventually fixed is still unclear, according to Lam.

According to Cheong, the authorities normally follow up water leakage cases within two weeks.

The Secretary remarked that property owners are responsible for resolving any seepage or leakage problem and that the problem itself is usually a matter between neighbors. If water seepage or leakage is found inside a private property, owners should first investigate the case in order to co-ordinate with occupants for repairs.

Only when property owners fail to solve the problem themselves can the relevant building management company interfere. Otherwise, if the property management company cannot solve the problem, governmental departments can provide help.

Charity expects HKD1.1m from famine campaign

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU Famine 2020, a charity campaign including a core event that requires its participants to refrain from eating for 10 hours, is expected to generate about HKD1.1 million in cash donations.

Amelia Che, Macau Office Director for World Vision, the international Christian charity organizing the campaign, announced this projection at a press conference yesterday held to announce the opening of the campaign.

Che recalled that the benchmark for the same campaign, known as the Macau Famine, is HKD1.1 million each year. Last year, the organization managed to attract about HKD1.2 million in donations from the campaign.

She is confident that the campaign this year will meet its benchmark. "Referencing the donations received from previous years, as well as the programs this year, I believe



Amelia Che, Macau Office Director for World Vision

we will reach the benchmark," said the office director.

Individuals from both the private and public sector have expressed concern over the city's economic performance this year. "We have events suitable for different people," explained Che. "Our lai see [red envelopes] and flag-selling events have been proven very effective in attracting donations."

The two events, the former

of which is officially known as "A Lai See Per Student," accumulate small contributions from the general public to expand donations. Last year, the charity attracted over HKD500,000 of cash donations from schools in the lai see event.

Macau Famine has a core event, the Famine Camp, which requires its participants to fast for 10 hours. It is held to allow participants gain a vivid

experience of staying hungry, alongside promotional sessions held during the camp. This year, it will be held on May 17.

World Vision is responding to hotter weather and tough meteorological conditions that put those living in poorer countries in life and death situations, the charity noted. It is calling people to act against climate change by conserving energy and reducing their waste.

Drinks sponsored by Coca-Cola will be provided to participants at the Famine Camp. When asked if she has discussed waste and recycling issues with the sponsor, Che said, "We have made agreements with Coca-Cola to provide water in barrels. Therefore, participants are encouraged to bring their own reusable tumblers or bottles to use at the Camp."

Companies interested in helping also have the option of joining the "One-meal Famine" event or souvenir sale.

Regardless of whether people are joining any of the events, donations can be made directly via Tai Fung Bank, Bank of China, or by check.

Series of gov't events to celebrate CNY

A collection of 27 activities will be held by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

"The Long Journey: The Forbidden City and Maritime Silk Road" is the biggest of the activities. It is jointly organized by the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) and Beijing's Palace Museum, featuring nearly 150 cultural relics related to the Maritime Silk Road selected from the Palace Museum's collection.

The Macao Chinese Orchestra will present the "Spring Festival Concert" at 3 p.m. on January 18 at Rotunda de Carlos da Maia, and at 3 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. on January 22 at the Jao Tsung-I Academy. The final concert will be held at 6 p.m. on January 23 at Anim'Arte NAMVAN.

The School of Music of the Macao Conservatory will host a concert at 3 p.m. on January 19 at the Auditorium of the Macao Conservatory.

Various "Chinese New Year Activities 2020" will be held throughout the Chinese New Year period at Lao Hon Market Garden, Leisure Area at Edf. Lok Yeung Fa Yuen in Fai Chi Kei, Barra Square, Rotunda de Carlos da Maia, Pak Tai Temple in Taipa and Eduardo Marques Garden in Coloane.

There will be lion dance performances at the Mandarin's House and the "Chinese New Year Concert" at the Lou Kau Mansion. AL

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Assistant professor of the Department of Economics at the UM, Kwan Fung (center)

UM expects local economy to contract 3.7% this year

JULIE ZHU

MACAU'S economy is expected to contract by 3.7% this year, according to the University of Macau's 2020 macroeconomic forecast.

Yesterday, Kwan Fung, assistant professor of the Department of Economics at the UM, revealed this forecast.

The negative 3.7% growth is only a baseline estimate and the research team has an upper and lower bound for its prediction, ranging from an "optimistic" view of 4.7% positive growth to

"pessimistic" view of a 12% contraction. The UM said these forecasts will be updated to reflect the rapidly changing external environment.

The latest statistics show that Macau's economy continued to deteriorate in 2019. Negative growth was recorded for three consecutive quarters, placing Macau firmly in a technical recession. The year-on-year growth rates were -3.8% in the first quarter, -2.2% in the second quarter and -4.5% in the third quarter, respectively.

The 2020 estimate is largely based on a continuation of the

economic factors that slowed growth last year, including the U.S.-China trade dispute.

According to Kwan, the U.S.-China trade dispute is still the most important factor that dominates the growth potential in Macau, as it threatens to slow the mainland economy on which the SAR relies.

The potential risk of sluggish growth in mainland China should not be underestimated because mainland China is the major tourism source market for Macau. Market reform in the mainland will also probably play a critical role in Macau's econo-

mic growth, according to Kwan.

Although China and the United States have just signed the 'phase-one' trade deal to avoid the escalation of economic tensions, the UM team warned that the underlying disagreement has not been completely resolved.

Accordingly, the conflict could reappear in the near future, and economic growth could remain subdued in China and Macau by extension.

Also of relevance to the economic slowdown in Macau is the state of gross gaming revenues across the six concessionaires.

Macau gross gaming revenue was down in year-on-year terms in each quarter of 2019, leaving the full year 3.4% less than in 2018. Gaming analysts are divided over whether revenue growth will return this year.

A third factor is the completion of several major infrastructure projects in both the private and public sectors.

In the upcoming two years, most of the casino operators will complete their work related to investment projects. Meanwhile, the completion and opening of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge completion means that there are no more major investment projects to fuel growth in the SAR.

"Probably the new regime, the SAR government could think about how to use public investment to boost economic growth and this is largely subject to the market's response," said Kwan. However, the scholar warned that Macau cannot pursue public infrastructure projects simply for the sake of maintaining a growth rate without considering the efficiency of these projects.

In 2020, a lack of new investment will contribute significantly and negatively to the economic growth of the region.

Moreover, Macau's exports of services are expected to contract 4.3% in 2020. Exports of goods are expected to decline even faster, by 6% in 2020.

Connected with the weak growth in consumption and investment, imports of goods are expected to rise at a slower rate of 0.1% in 2020. Amid deterioration in export of services, the import of services is also expected to decline. The growth rate of the import of services is forecast to decrease by 0.5% in 2020.

Secretary Lei says bond market still under study

MACAU'S Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, has said that the local government is studying ways to enhance the legal framework necessary to support the operation of a bond market.

Secretary Lei made the remarks on Monday on the sidelines of a signing ceremony for a memorandum of understanding regarding cooperation between Chongwa (Macao) Financial Asset Exchange Co., Ltd, and Luxembourg Stock Exchange.

Lei said that the government will work closely with

Macau's financial services sector in order to attract a greater number of bond issuers to set up and trade products in the territory.

The government has long considered the development of a financial services market in Macau. Last year, Beijing lent its support to the idea as a way of diversifying Macau's economy away from its reliance on the casino sector.

The secretary emphasized the local government was still studying the feasibility of establishing a stock market, and would release the results of its research in

due time. Among the aspects being considered is the overall regulatory system, market demand for such financial services, access to professionals in related fields and the role of investment banks and funds.

With regards to a recent downturn in Macau's economy, Lei reiterated that the government was closely monitoring the global economic situation and would take precautionary steps – such as using financial measures and subsidies to support Macau's economy – if it were deemed necessary. DB

E-payments widely accepted in Macau

SOME 96% of the 176 shops surveyed by the Consumer Council accept e-payments, a survey conducted by the Council has found.

The survey was conducted between August and October last year. It covered 176 shops, among which 110 are in the Council's certification program. Ten of them are accredited by the Council, while the remaining 56 are ordinary shops.

Businesses were asked about the types of non-cash payment methods that they accepted. It was found that Macau Pass is the most widely installed

e-payment method in supermarkets and convenience stores in Macau. Some 92% of the shops accepted Macau Pass as a means of transaction.

Macau Pass is an electronic card payment system for settling small transactions. Similar products include the Octopus Card in Hong Kong and the Oyster Card in the U.K.

The second most popular e-payment method is AliPay from the mainland, with about 91% of the surveyed shops accepting it.

WeChat Pay, another popular mobile payment

system from the mainland, has an acceptance rate of 74% across the responding stores.

As for credit cards, the three most popular issuers are Visa, Mastercard and UnionPay, which have a 68%, 64% and 65% acceptance rate respectively.

In the Council's opinion, the acceptance rates are satisfactory. However, it reminds customers to be aware of the threshold set by some shops. In those shops, a minimum spend must be reached to pay by credit card.

The mobile payment systems developed by Bank of China's Macau Branch and Tai Fung Bank were accepted by 36% and 10% of the interviewed shops respectively. AL

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Single day crossings narrowly miss half-million mark

JUST two weeks after setting a new record, Macau immigration at the Border Gate recorded a new record high in the number of single-day crossings. The number of crossings at Macau's most popular border checkpoint narrowly missed the half-million mark.

According to data pro-

vided by the Public Security Police Force, which oversees immigration matters in Macau, the Border Gate immigration checkpoint recorded 499,000 entries and exits on Saturday, January 11, the highest number ever recorded in a single day.

Two weeks earlier, a new record was set on

Saturday, December 28, when more than 484,000 entries and exits were recorded at the Border Gate checkpoint.

Saturdays are traditionally the busiest day of the week for Macau tourism and the Border Gate is by far the city's busiest checkpoint.

The number of visitors

grew by about 10% last year to reach 39.4 million, setting a new annual record.

Macau's various checkpoints recorded a combined 194 million crossings, an increase of nearly 9% over that of 2018, with approximately 145 million crossings taking place at the Border Gate. According to official data, 2019 was the seventh consecutive year that the number of crossings has grown. DB

Analysts divided

RENATO MARQUES

ANALYSTS of the tourism and gaming industries are seemingly divided when it comes to a proposed tax on visitor arrivals in Macau.

The views, aired this week, follow last week's release of the results of a feasibility study on a visitor tax, which found that most people in the SAR were in favor of such a measure, but most industry operators opposed it.

One person who believes that creating a tourism tax would be a bad idea, especially for the conventions and exhibitions sector (MICE), is Glenn McCartney, Associate Professor in Integrated Resort and Tourism Management at the University of Macau.

According to the scholar, "The government should clearly announce some measures or policies [on the topic], it is not clear why a tourist tax is to be created in Macau. If you have a conference in Macau with 1,000 attendees, that's a 100,000

patacas fee," he said, on the proviso that the proposed visitor tax is set at 100 patacas.

"In that case, I can consider another destination," he said in comments to Hoje Macau. "[The tourism tax] will have consequences and an impact."

As for the impact on gaming, McCartney thinks that a visitor tax would be settled by the gaming operators as "the casino high-rollers won't pay for it. Maybe the casinos will pay for them, but in that case, we have an overcharge to the industry that might not be happy with it."

He added that it will all be dependent on the measures taken by the government.

For McCartney, there are several other ways to control the number of visitors. One such way is through smarter branding. "We have multiple events happening but there isn't a unified image of what Macau is," he said.

Local economist Albano Martins is in agreement with McCartney. Martins said to the same news outlet that the idea to enforce such a tax was a sign that the authorities

IPIM delegation joined China Expo to promote MICE

THE Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) led a delegation of Macau MICE sector representatives to participate in the 16th China Expo Forum for International Cooperation (CEFCO 2020) which took place in the city of Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China.

The event program included a forum where

views on the promotion of the local MICE sector were discussed.

An Executive Director of IPIM, Sam Lei was one of the keynote speakers. He stressed that the MICE sector is an important part of the composition of the modern services sector, having a positive effect on improving the structure of the industrial sector, facilitating diversified economic development and

increasing resource allocation efficiency.

Lei also added that to develop this sector, one of the key elements for the local MICE sector is to strive to attract more high-quality conventions and exhibition activities to be hosted in Macau.

The official presented the benefits and incentives offered by IPIM, including the "one stop service" for MICE bid-

ding, and support provided to all convention organizers interested in hosting events in Macau. To an audience composed of MICE event organizers from several provinces of China and foreign countries, Lei also presented the facilities and venues for convention and exhibition events, noting the advantages of Macau as a "small but refined, small but beautiful" place.

The CEFCO 2020 is organized by the Chinese Council for the Promotion of International Trade and held annually. RM

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over visitor tax impact

RENATO MARQUES



had run out of ideas.

For Martins, the tax is highly ineffective. He compared it to "trying to empty the ocean using a cup."

For the economist, what

Macau needs is not to reduce the number of visitors, but to avoid them clustering on some limited areas of the city.

A different opinion was expressed by a group of analysts

from Sanford C. Bernstein, Ltd. In a statement, they noted that the enforcement of a tourism tax would not have a significant impact on gaming operators or the revenues from gaming.

Analysts Vitaly Umansky, Kelsey Zhu, and Eunice Lee predict that such a measure could only have a small impact on the low-end tourism, such as visitors who spend only a few hours in the region, but it would not affect the main engines of the local economy. The study, conducted by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) showed that the large majority (95%) of residents are in favor of the creation of a tourism tax in Macau, while 80% of the tourism operators opposed it.

The view among tourists was equally conclusive, with about three-quarters of those surveyed admitting the tax would affect their willingness to visit the SAR. About half of the respondents said their intention to visit Macau would be affected by the tax, while a further 25% said it would "depend on the actual situation," MGTO said.

MGTO director Helena de Senna Fernandes has previously hinted that the purpose of the tourist tax if levied, would not be to reduce the number of visitors. Instead, it would be used as a fund for urban development matters. The tourism chief has also said on several occasions that she opposes the introduction of a visitor tax.

71-year-old becomes first influenza fatality

On Monday, the Health Bureau reported the first death related to influenza since January 2019. The deceased, a 71-year-old Macau local resident, had been struggling with a malignant neoplasm disease, developed a fever, shortness of breath and other symptoms on January 7. On January 12, she was taken to the accident and emergency department of Kiang Wu Hospital, where laboratory tests determined that she had the influenza virus. Due to the deterioration of her health, she was sent to the emergency department of Conde S. Januário Hospital (CHCSJ) on the same day. She passed away on Monday morning.

Unlicensed guesthouse found in Taipa

Judiciary Police (PJ) officers inspected a residential unit in Taipa and found that it was an unlicensed guesthouse. It was on Monday, during the PJ's winter crime prevention inspection that the officers uncovered the unlicensed guesthouse. Seven people were found inside the property, all of them mainland residents. The PJ's investigation and identity check found no suspicious circumstances surrounding the case. The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) issued a closure notice to the unlicensed guesthouse. According to Macau's law, operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence, with the offender being liable to pay a fine between 200,000 and 800,000 patacas.

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LYNZY VALLES



Scenes yesterday at Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3, after normal operations had resumed

Macau air passengers faced Manila dilemma after cancelled flights

LYNZY VALLES, MANILA

HUNDREDS of passengers flying between Manila and Macau have been affected by the activity of Taal volcano near the Philippines' capital, which caused disruption and delays to a number of flights between the two regions.

Passengers traveling to Macau on Sunday night via low-cost carrier Cebu Pacific were still able to check-in for its 7:05 p.m. flight. However, confusion arose when the airport authorities announced that all flights had been cancelled due to a runway closure.

The Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) halted operations on Sunday when the volcano alert level was raised to 4. Level 5, the highest, indicates an eruption is underway.

The Manila International Airport Authority, and Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines urged passengers not to proceed to the airport and to coordinate with airlines to confirm their updated flight schedules.

However, some airlines did not inform passengers whether flights would still depart, causing them to arrive at the airport and wait for over two hours at the departure gates.

"There wasn't any announcement that the flight was cancel-

led. Our flight was supposed to be at 7:05 p.m. [on Sunday]. The only announcement they made was that the flight would be delayed and we were asked to wait for 30 to 45 minutes for updates on the flight status," Gizelle Sanchez, a Macau resident bound for the MSAR that night, told the Times.

After about an hour and a half, passengers asked ground employees at the counter for updates, only to find out that the runway was closed until 11 p.m.

All four airport terminals in Manila were following the orders of local authorities to suspend activity on the runway as there was a high chance the volcano would erupt.

However, many passengers did not leave the airport in the hope that their flights would go ahead.

"We couldn't leave because the flights might resume. So we waited until 9:30 p.m. then we saw a huge crowd walking back to the arrival area. We asked the employee at the front desk again, and then she said the flight was actually cancelled. No [official] announcements [were made]," said Sanchez.

On the same flight was Jhel Diaz who told the Times he managed to rebook his flight for the next day at 7:05 p.m. despite the large crowd that swarmed the

Cebu Pacific ticketing office.

He said that he initially saw his flight was cancelled when he checked information from the Macau International Airport website.

According to Diaz, another flight bound to Hong Kong had departed before being requested to return to the airport.

Ticket prices surged 150% to some 2,500 patacas for a one-way flight back to Macau due to soaring demand

Passengers described the airport as a chaotic scene as travelers were rushing to ticketing counters to get the earliest flight on the following day.

It was not guaranteed that the runway would be opened the next day as NAIA runways and ramps had already accumulated a large quantity of ash, which required local authorities to review for safety reasons. Nevertheless, many passengers took their chances with a flight on the following day.

For Sanchez, the earliest flight was only yesterday at 7:05 p.m.

The Times is aware that the earliest morning flight on Monday from Manila to Hong Kong, which was at 5:50 a.m. with carrier Cebu Pacific, was officially cancelled at around 11 p.m. on Sunday.

Passengers that tried to rebook their flights online were only given Tuesday afternoon as the earliest option. Then, after only a few minutes, flights to Macau and Hong Kong yesterday with Cebu Pacific and AirAsia, were made unavailable.

Ticket prices have also surged up to some 2,500 patacas for a one-way flight back to Macau due to the large demand. Usually, one-way tickets cost less than 1,000 patacas.

A total of 516 flights were affected by the suspension of NAIA operations from 6 p.m. Sunday until 9 a.m. Monday.

On Monday, the authorities announced the partial resumption of operations beginning at 10 a.m. for departures, and arrivals at 12 p.m. Priority was given to departure flights so that the NAIA ramps could be cleared of planes parked there since Sunday night. Second priority was given to regular scheduled flights on the Monday.

Yesterday, NAIA Terminal 3 - the largest terminal among the affected airports - was more pe-

ceful and organized than it had been on Sunday evening. Around 1 p.m. yesterday, check-in counters had a moderate number of passengers, which seemed to suggest that daily scheduled flights had resumed normal operations.

Gates at the terminal were also not crowded.

Taal volcano continues to show signs of "an imminent hazardous eruption," obliging a total evacuation of nearly half a million people near the country's capital.

On the way to Manila from the southern part of Luzon, residents in some cities were seen cleaning ash from their houses and vehicles.

A family residing in Batangas fled to their hometown about 2 hours away, and were forced to rent a van as no public vehicles were operating due to low visibility in the area.

"We decided to come home because almost every few minutes we were experiencing small magnitude earthquakes. It was worrying," one family member told the Times.

Taal volcano continuously spewed lava into the sky and trembled yesterday, threatening a bigger and more dangerous eruption.

According to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, about 50 volcanic earthquakes were detected in a span of over eight hours yesterday, indicating rising magma.

The volcano was spurting fountains of red-hot lava 800 meters into the sky, and the massive column of ash and volcanic debris at times flashed with streaks of lightning.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Huge explosion at Zhuhai petrochemical plant

AN explosion occurred at a petrochemical plant in Zhuhai of Guangdong Province around noon yesterday, according to state media China Global Television Network (CGTN). A fire from the explosion was extinguished by 6 p.m.

CGTN reported that casualty numbers were still unknown as of 8 p.m. yesterday, although at that time air quality levels were not beyond normal levels.

The plant is located in the Gaolangang District of the Zhuhai. It is about 50 kilometers from Macau.

Authorities in Zhuhai announced that the fire was caused by an unexpected explosion. People within and around the building were evacuated. The explosion

triggered the emergency procedure, which saw the setting up of an on-site control center.

The incident first came to public attention through social media. A video shared by netizens shows people running away from the scene. Flames were coming from what is believed to be the plant, with a large amount of black smoke in the image.

Another video showed smoke coming out from the site and forming a mushroom cloud above the plant.

Some 40 fire engines and 200 firefighters were deployed from the Zhuhai Fire Services. Other reports said that fire fighters were also deployed from the Fire Services of Guangzhou, Foshan, Jiangmen and Zhongshan. AL



Guangdong province reports 6.3% economic growth in 2019

GUANGDONG Province, one of the country's economic powerhouses, estimated its gross domestic product rose around 6.3% to surpass 10.5 trillion yuan (around \$1.52 trillion) in 2019.

Ma Xingrui, governor of the province, made the announcement yesterday when delivering a government work report at the opening of the annual provincial legislative session.

Facing external uncertainties in 2019, Guangdong, a leading foreign trade player in the country, saw its imports and exports totaling 7.14 trillion yuan, down 0.3% year on year, according to the report.

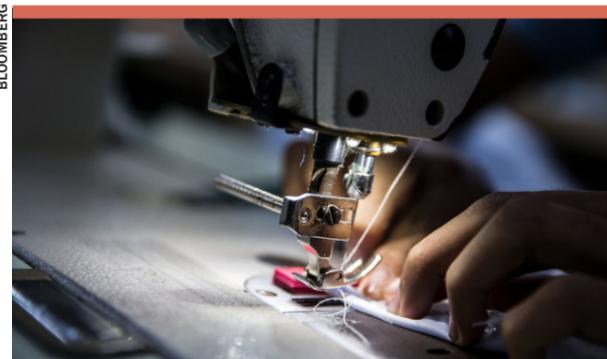
The province unveiled 32 measures to boost high-quality development of foreign trade and explore the international markets. Last year, Guangdong's trade volume with the European Union and ASEAN rose 10.7% and 4.9%, respectively.

Guangdong's actual use of foreign capital rose 3.5% to reach 150 billion yuan in 2019.

The per capita disposable income in the province saw an increase of 8.6% to 38,900 yuan last year.

Guangdong also announced its 2020 growth target at about 6%. XINHUA

Fashion label maker SML explores \$500 million sale



SM L Group Ltd., a closely held garment label maker for fashion brands and retailers globally, is exploring a sale of the business which could fetch about \$500 million, according to people familiar with the matter.

Hong Kong-based SML is working with Citigroup Inc. to seek a buyer for the business, the people said, asking not to be identified because the matter is private. The company has drawn preliminary interest from investment funds as well as other companies in the industry, the people said.

The company makes

woven and printed labels, price tickets, hangtags as well as zippers and buttons, according to its website. Founded in a warehouse office in 1985, SML has since expanded both organically and via acquisitions. It counts offices and production sites in 30 countries including the U.S., Mexico, Spain and Indonesia.

Considerations are still ongoing and SML could still decide against pursuing a sale, the people said. A representative for SML didn't immediately respond to requests for comment, while a representative for Citigroup declined to comment. MDT/BLOOMBERG

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HK pins hopes on trade, finance to restore economy

ERIC LAM & ENDA CURRAN

HONG Kong's government is usually eager to play up the city's resilience in the face of economic calamity, like the bounce-back after the Asian financial crisis and its recovery following the 2003 SARS epidemic.

It's now settling for "less bad than before."

A case in point is last week's rise in an index of sentiment for small- and medium-sized enterprises, aided by a Christmas shopping season that was relatively free from violent street demonstrations.

According to an official statement, that "reflected a moderation in the pessimism of business sentiment" after more than seven months of anti-China protests that wrought destruction in shopping precincts and likely sparked the first annual recession in a decade.

No solution to the political standoff with Beijing is in view, and factors that could propel a rebound are scarce - a return to

last January's record influx of 5.5 million Mainland tourists won't happen soon, if ever. Chances of a stabilization hang more on the city's strengths in finance and trade, both of which mostly serve the Chinese economy.

"There will be many IPOs happening in Hong Kong this year; there's going to be a lot of debt issuance in the credit market, the dollar market because Chinese companies need dollar funding," said Alicia Garcia Herrero, chief economist for Asia Pacific at Natixis. Brightening sentiment among small businesses shows that "Hong Kong is so flexible," she said.

Still, the government estimates that the economy contracted 1.3% in 2019 and economists forecast stagnation in 2020. Financial Secretary Paul Chan pledged last week to spend "boldly" in next month's annual budget to

assist those affected the most by the downturn. Previous stimulus rounds, though, have failed to impress.

The Hong Kong government is set to unveil a fresh series of relief measures "imminently" including extending a transport fare concession to those age 60 and older, from age 65 currently, Sing Tao Daily reported, according to unidentified people.

More bad news is likely in coming months, with unemployment rising and year-on-year declines showing up in tourism arrivals

More bad news is likely in coming months, with stores shuttering as leases come up, unemployment rising and year-on-year declines showing up in tourism arrivals. Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd., the city's flagship airline, is preparing to offer unpaid leave, the South China Morning Post reported.

If confidence among local households, businesses and external visitors is restored and firms no longer consider relocation, then we can expect to see the economy bottom out this year. If not, there could be more woes ahead.

Amid the city's tourism woes, the financial sector's resilience has been remarkable, with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange the

top venue in the world after raising about \$40.3 billion last year, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Chinese companies accounted for almost two-thirds

of the money raised. KPMG forecasts almost as many Hong Kong IPOs this year, raising as much as HKD300 billion (\$38.6 billion) according to a December estimate.

Chinese investors were also net buyers of city stocks for a 10th straight month in Decem-

ber, again signaling the city's role as the conduit for the Mainland. Money is flowing in the opposite direction. Offshore investors have been net buyers of mainland stocks via the exchange links with Hong Kong for all but four months since the Shenzhen link opened in December 2016.

"There are a lot of global investors that want to invest in Chinese stocks and other financial products, and they do it through Hong Kong," said Tommy Wu, senior economist with Oxford Economics in Hong Kong. "That hasn't changed."

For banks like HSBC Holdings Plc and Standard Chartered Plc, analysts expect steady fundamentals in 2020 despite being occasionally dragged into the domestic standoff. There has been little sign of major capital outflows from Hong Kong and pressure has eased in recent weeks since the U.S. and China reached an initial trade agreement, according to Garcia Herrero.

In 2019, the trade war was the initial factor that started to drag down the local economy long before the protests erupted in June. That hammered the city's port, with exports in October plunging the most since 2016.

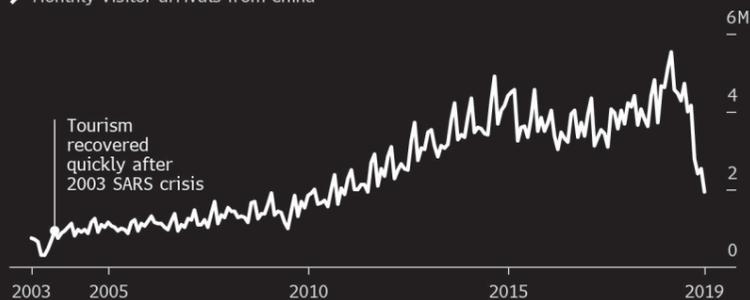
The trade deal signing in Washington this week should cement a modestly improving outlook for global trade, a long-overdue piece of good news for Hong Kong. A cyclical recovery in Asia's manufacturing sector appears to be underway.

"We have gone through very difficult times, but the institutional strength and core competitiveness of Hong Kong remain unchanged," Financial Secretary Chan said in an interview last week with Bloomberg Television's Yvonne Man. "Hong Kong is resilient." BLOOMBERG

Not Coming Back

Tourism from China has fallen by more than half

Monthly visitor arrivals from China

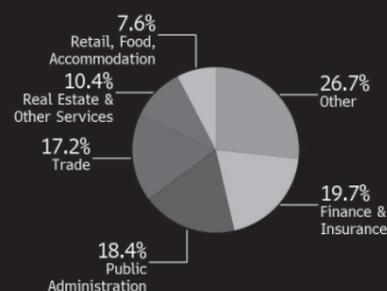


Source: Hong Kong Tourism Board

Bloomberg

Trade & Finance

Hong Kong's economy is still dominated by its traditional strengths



Source: HK Census & Statistics Department, Bloomberg
Note: Chart shows percentage contribution to 2018 GDP at basic prices

Bloomberg

Chow Tai Fook to shut down about a fifth of its HK stores

JINSHAN HONG

CHOW Tai Fook Jewellery Group Ltd. said it plans to shut about 15 of its Hong Kong stores after their leases expire this year, in a sign that major retailers are starting to withdraw from the city's economy as anti-China protests continue.

In the first significant pullback by a luxury retailer after months of fiery demonstrations that have driven tourists away, the world's second-most valuable jewelry chain said in an emailed statement Tuesday that it will not renew the leases of a "mid-teens" number of stores in the year starting April.

Chow Tai Fook is closing the stores because it expects "macro headwinds" to continue to have an impact in the next six to 12 months, it said. Besides the protests that have at times crippled the city, volatile gold prices and U.S.-China trade tensions are



also weighing on the company's outlook.

The company currently has 86 Chow Tai Fook retail outlets and five stores under other brands in Hong Kong. It is the second largest jeweler in the world by market

value, after Tiffany & Co.

The city's retail and tourism sector are poised for contraction after six months of depressed sales and a lackluster Christmas season. Hong Kong, with its zero sales tax and plush shopping malls, was

previously a gateway for luxury brands to reach Chinese consumers, who were known to travel to the city with empty suitcases meant to be filled up with shopping to take home.

With the number of tourists

now at a record low, the first quarter of 2020 is likely to bring a reckoning for retailers: more than 5,600 retail jobs could be lost and thousands of stores shut down in the first half of 2020, according to a recent survey. Prominent restaurants and bars have also announced closure plans, while cosmetics retail chain Sa Sa International Holdings Ltd. said it was likely to shutter 30 stores in Hong Kong this year.

The Lunar New Year, when spending traditionally peaks in Hong Kong amid a flood of vacationing mainlanders, will also likely not provide its usual boost. Visitor numbers plunged 53% during Christmas week compared with a year earlier, according to local media reports.

Chow Tai Fook said that its store closures will mainly be located in tourist districts such as Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui and that it will continue to review store productivity and optimize its retail network in Hong Kong.

The jeweler, controlled by the billionaire Cheng family, has seen same-store sales fall for three consecutive quarters in Hong Kong and Macau. It's now focused on mainland China, where it plans to add 600 new stores in the year ending March 31. BLOOMBERG

Yum China to work with CICC, Goldman on HK Listing

YUM China Holdings Inc. is working with China International Capital Corp. and Goldman Sachs Group Inc. on the preparations of a second listing in Hong Kong, fueling the wave of U.S.-listed Chinese companies returning to a market that's closer to home.

The operator of Pizza Hut and KFC restaurants in China is working with the banks on the share sale, according to people familiar with the matter.

The listing could take place as soon as this year, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the information is private.

A successful share sale by New York-listed Yum China would bolster Hong Kong's push to lure marquee Chinese firms to raise funds in a city that has been shaken by months of pro-democracy protests. It could also be a vote of confidence in the financial hub's future. Hong Kong Exchanges & Clearing Ltd.

has said it's seeing a spike in inquiries about second listings from Chinese companies after Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.'s \$13 billion share sale in November.

The HKEX is discussing with Chinese technology firms including Trip.com Group Ltd. and NetEase Inc. for possible share sales in the city, people with knowledge of the matter told Bloomberg News earlier this month.

Yum China was spun off

from Louisville, Kentucky-based Yum! Brands Inc. in 2016. The unit, which also operates Mongolian hotpot chain Little Sheep as well as Taco Bell in China, had more than 8,900 restaurants across the world's second-largest economy as of the end of September. It hired about 450,000 people in the country, according to its latest presentation.

The company in August agreed to buy a controlling stake in Huang Ji Huang

Group, a Chinese-style simmer pot restaurant operator. Yum China rejected a buyout offer from an investor group led by Hillhouse Capital Corp. in 2018, Bloomberg News reported at that time.

Shares of Yum China have risen 88% since its 2016 debut, outperforming the 60% gain in Dow Jones Industrial Average.

Yum China has mostly outperformed the U.S. benchmark index since its debut

IFR reported last week that Yum China is considering a listing in Hong Kong which could raise as much as \$2 billion, citing unidentified people.

Details of Yum China's proposed offering could still change as deliberations are at an early stage, the people said. A representative for Goldman Sachs declined to comment, while representatives for Yum China and CICC didn't respond to requests for comment. BLOOMBERG

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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

The Greater Bay project is coming and it will bring both opportunities and challenges to our little-big town. Macau Daily Times wants to hear your voice. We invite our readers to write in with Letters to the Editor on the topic of the Greater Bay Area.

Please email your letters to gba@macaudailytimes.com

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Xi strikes optimistic tone after riding out trade war with Trump

WITH China on the verge of signing a deal with Donald Trump to at least temporarily defuse a nearly two-year trade war, Xi Jinping is projecting confidence.

After he warned last year about threats to the Communist Party's rule and "changes unseen in 100 years," Xi began 2020 touting "extraordinary Chinese splendor and Chinese strength." "In the face of severe and complex domestic and foreign situations and various risks and challenges, we have been able to move forward firmly," the Chinese president told party leaders last week.

Problems and challenges remain for Xi, but the phase-one deal the world's biggest economies plan to sign today in Washington gives him reason to accentuate the positive. While party leaders still face a slowing economy, surging debt and new challenges in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the trade agreement has at least given them some certainty that Xi can manage Trump's penchant for diplomatic brinkmanship.

"China's leaders are just happy to have a deal instead of wasting so much energy on arguments and publicity," said Charles Liu, a former economic negotiator with China's United Nations delegation and founder of Hao Capital, a private-equity fund. "They are more confident than ever in how to handle President Trump because his behavior is almost becoming a known quantity."

"Now you can pretty much see that whatever bluster there may be, it doesn't necessarily come with a bite," Liu said.

The deal will reportedly commit China to buying some \$200 billion of U.S. goods, as well as



respecting intellectual property rights and not manipulating its currency. The agreement puts off more sensitive discussions such as the state subsidies and market protections that China has relied on to nurture a growing club of global corporate champions.

YUAN STRENGTHENS

Although repeated setbacks in talks between the two sides have fueled skepticism about the longevity of the truce, investors are also optimistic: The yuan has strengthened to a five-month high against the dollar. The country's flagship English-language newspaper, the China Daily, even hailed a new "spirit of modus

vivendi," or peaceful coexistence with the U.S.

The trade detente can only help as Xi prepares for the party's next twice-a-decade congress in 2022

Communist Party leaders have other reasons to smile as 2020 begins. The economic slowdown has showed signs of stabilizing - economists upgraded their 2020 growth forecasts to 5.9% - while the historic pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong that erupted last year have decreased in both frequency and violence.

"The list of challenges Xi faces in 2020 is undoubtedly long, but from his perspective, so too are the opportunities stemming from declining global leadership and influence of the U.S., whether real or perceived," said Jude Blanchette, Freeman chair of China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

'ALL TACTICAL'

The trade deal gives China confidence that it can weather Trump's pressure campaigns by carefully calibrating retaliation and avoiding direct criticism of the U.S. leader. Meanwhile, much of Trump's attention in the new year has gone toward a looming impeachment

trial in the Senate and a deadly tit-for-tat with Iran.

"The Iranian situation is a very good indication of how Trump does his business," said Charles Liu, of Hao Capital. "You can pretty much read into President Trump's principal objectives. They're pretty much all tactical. He's not an ideologue."

While Trump faces a tough re-election battle after becoming the third U.S. president to get impeached, Xi's domestic position appears as strong as ever. The Communist Party's elite Politburo last month dubbed Xi the "people's leader" - a term once used to describe Mao Zedong - after previously agreeing to remove presidential term limits and enshrine his name in the constitution.

PROTRACTED STRUGGLE

The trade detente can only help as Xi prepares for the party's next twice-a-decade congress in 2022, which will determine whether he'll continue the lead the country for the foreseeable future. This year, Xi is likely to "step up his campaign to hold on to the leadership of the ruling party," according to a report by Tom Rafferty, principal China economist for the Economist Intelligence Unit.

The recent pause in tensions is all the more welcome given the growing consensus in both Beijing and Washington that the two powers are headed for a long-term period of strategic struggle. While celebrating a small victory, Chinese policy makers are girding for a protracted conflict.

"China is now faced with lots of challenges and many of these challenges have their origins in Washington," said Gao Zhikai, a former Chinese diplomat and interpreter for ex-Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. "Whether it's Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Tibet or the South China Sea, you name it, you always see the increasing finger print of the United States." BLOOMBERG

US esports firm Super League seals China deal with movie giant

SHIRLEY ZHAO

SUPER League Gaming Inc., a U.S. esports company, is teaming up with Dalian Wanda Group Co. to help host live events in China, the world's largest gaming market by players.

The alliance, announced yesterday by Super League Gaming's Chief Executive Officer Ann Hand, will allow the Santa Monica, California-based firm to organize video-gaming tournaments in more than 700 movie halls owned or operated by the Chinese conglomerate. The theaters will become esports venues hosting live events, Super League said in a statement.

"What Super League is all

about is bringing in technology - when you marry that up with real-estate infrastructure like Wanda, we can now mainstream esports," Hand told Shery Ahn in a Bloomberg Television interview.

While esports is still taking off globally, China is an emerging power with more than 400 million gamers fueling viewership comparable to U.S. pro sports. Estimates of the global size of the market vary, but Hand said in September that it could be worth \$3 billion in 2023. The industry's revenue streams are about the same as those for traditional sports, including sponsorships, advertising, merchandise, ticket sales and media rights.

"Super League will bring a

new theater and esports experience to the millions of Chinese esports fans and players," Jian Huang, CEO of Wanda Cinema Games, said in the statement.

Super League Gaming, whose shares have plunged about 74% since listing on the Nasdaq stock exchange in February 2019, previously signed another pact with ggCircuit, which operates more than 700 gaming centers worldwide.

The Wanda group, founded by billionaire Wang Jianlin, operates businesses ranging from property, finance to culture. Its cinema arm under the culture group owns Wanda Cinemas Games, which signed the agreement with Super League Gaming. BLOOMBERG



AP PHOTO



Huawei helps China overtake Germany in receiving US patents

SUSAN DECKER &
CHRISTOPHER YASIEJKO

HUAWEI Technologies Co. broke into the top 10 recipients of U.S. patents last year, according to an analysis of filings with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, the latest sign that Chinese companies are aggressive in pursuing the U.S. lead in global technology.

The telecom company's 2,418 patents, along with 2,177 new patents issued to display-screen maker BOE Technology Group,

help propel China into the rank of fourth-biggest recipient of U.S. patents, behind Japan and South Korea but ahead of Germany for the first time, according to the analysis by Fairview Research's IFI Claims Patent Services. "China's growing rapidly but they're still way behind the U.S. in terms of patents," said Larry Cady, a senior analyst with IFI.

International Business Machines Corp. retained its title of top recipient of patents for the 27th year, with a record 9,262 patents, far ahead of No. 2 Samsung Electronics Co. and No. 3 Canon Inc.

Overall, the patent office issued 333,530 patents, an all-time high and a 15% jump after a decline in 2018. Cady said the increase likely reflects efforts to release a bottleneck over what can qualify for a patent, such as in the fields of artificial intelligence.

AI, cloud computing, blockchain and security were among the top areas for IBM, the Armonk, New York, company said. The IBM patents reflect the work of more than 8,500 inventors over 45 states and 54 countries, the company added.

While IBM may be consistently the top recipient of patents, its holdings aren't the largest, IFI found. That title belongs to Samsung Electronics Co. of South Korea, with Canon Inc. of Japan the second-largest corporate owner of patents. The difference, Cady said, is that IBM doesn't keep all of its patents.

"We really look at new patents as an indication of innovation and we regularly review and prune our patent assets," said Jason McGee, chief technology officer for IBM Cloud Platform. "We may get rid of ones that we don't think

are strategic or could be better served with someone else."

IBM also announced that it's joined the License on Transfer, or LOT, Network, which was co-founded by Red Hat Inc. IBM bought the software company for \$34 billion last year.

Group members pledge that all network members will get a license to any patent that ends up with what's known as a "patent assertion entity," meaning a company that doesn't make products and whose sole purpose is to extract royalties from those who do. The group helps protect auto-makers and retailers who are just entering the technology arena that's often marked by lawsuits.

"If you want to be any successful company, you have to be a successful high-tech company," said Ken Seddon, head of the LOT Network.

Overall, the list of top recipients is dominated by American and Asian technology companies. Behind IBM, Samsung and Canon are Microsoft Corp., Intel Corp., LG Electronics Inc. and Apple Inc. topping the list after Canon. Ford Motor Co., which broke into the top 10 last year, was just ahead of Amazon.com Inc. and then Huawei.

While the numbers are small, the fastest-growing patent classifications were in the gene-splicing technology known as CRISPR, hybrid plants, 3-D printing and cancer therapies, the analysis showed.

Many of the patents issued to Huawei relate to things like high-frequency transmission that are needed for the next generation of wireless technology known as 5G.

President Donald Trump's administration in May moved to restrict U.S. companies from doing business with Huawei. The administration has said Huawei gear could be used for spying - an allegation the company denied.

"The U.S. is kind of at a funny position with Huawei - we're threatening them with limiting access to technology and access to the markets," Cady said. "At the same time, 5G is rolling out and they're the dominant in 5G." BLOOMBERG

UK's Johnson says Huawei critics should suggest alternatives

BRITISH Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday that opponents of Huawei should suggest alternatives to the Chinese technology company as countries start building out next-generation wireless networks.

Johnson's comments in an interview with the BBC come after Ame-

rican national security and telecom officials met their British counterparts in London, ahead of a government decision on whether there's a future for Huawei in the U.K.'s new 5G networks.

"The British public deserve to have access to the best possible technology," Johnson said.

"Now, if people oppose one brand or another, then they have to tell us what's the alternative, right?"

Johnson noted that on the other hand, "I don't want, as the U.K. prime minister, to put in any infrastructure that is going to prejudice our national security or our ability to

cooperate with Five Eyes intelligence partners," which include the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The U.S. has been trying to persuade its European allies to avoid using Huawei equipment in superfast next-generation telecom networks, over concerns China's

authorities can compel the company to facilitate electronic spying - allegations Huawei denies. U.S. officials have repeatedly warned they would have to rethink intelligence sharing with any countries that use Huawei gear in 5G networks.

The British gover-

ment is expected to make a final decision on Huawei's role in "non-core" parts of the network, such as antennas. Multiple British media reports said the U.S. delegation told British officials that using Huawei would be "madness" and presented them with a technical file of new security risks. AP

AP PHOTO



Japan's deputy prime minister Taro Aso

Deputy prime minister calls Japan a nation with single race

MARI YAMAGUCHI,
TOKYO

JAPAN'S deputy prime minister described the country as the only one in the world with a single race, language and 2,000-year-old monarchy, sparking criticism that he was ignoring an indigenous ethnic group and Japanese racial diversity.

Taro Aso, who is also finance minister and one of most influential lawmakers in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government, has made a series of remarks in the past deemed insensitive and discriminatory.

"No other country but this one has lasted for as

long as 2,000 years with one language, one ethnic group and one dynasty," Aso said in a speech Monday.

Aso, 79, apologized on yesterday, saying he meant to say Japan has survived a long time without experiencing any major migrations or occupation by other ethnic groups.

Indigenous Ainu people have lived in what is now northern Japan for thousands of years and were officially recognized by a law enacted last year to protect and promote their culture.

Japan also has 2.7 million foreign residents, more than 2% of its total population of 126 million,

according to government statistics. That includes more than 400,000 ethnic Koreans, many of whom came voluntarily or forcibly to Japan during its 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, and about 360,000 Koreans who have been naturalized.

International couples comprised more than 3% of the marriages in 2017. Last year, Japan relaxed visa requirements to allow more foreign workers to make up for a declining workforce in a nation with an aging and falling population.

In his speech Monday, Aso also praised Japan's success in last year's Rugby World Cup and noted

its ethnically diverse team. Japan became "one team" while maintaining its own culture and language, Aso said, stressing the importance of having a clear sense of Japanese identity as the country competes internationally in sports and in other ways.

Last year, Aso blamed the elderly and childless for Japan's aging and declining population. In 2018, he defended a top bureaucrat in his finance ministry against sexual harassment allegations. He was also criticized for comments interpreted as defending Adolf Hitler's motives for the killing of Jews by Nazi Germany. AP

Indonesia: UAE crown prince to lead new capital construction

NINIEK KARMINI,
JAKARTA

ABU Dhabi's crown prince has agreed to lead a committee that will oversee the construction of a new capital city for Indonesia that is estimated to cost \$34 billion, an Indonesian official said yesterday.

Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan said it would be "an honor to play a role in the development of the largest

Muslim-majority country," Indonesian Coordinating Maritime Affairs and Investment Minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan said in a statement.

The committee will also include Masayoshi Son, the billionaire founder and chief executive of Japanese holding company SoftBank, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who currently runs the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, he said.

"We expected their pre-

sence would provide a confidence boost for prospective investors in the new capital," Pandjaitan said.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo met Sheikh Mohammed during a two-day trip to Abu Dhabi that ended on Monday.

Widodo announced last August that Indonesia's capital will move from overcrowded, sinking and polluted Jakarta to a site in sparsely populated East Kalimantan province on Borneo island,

known for rainforests and orangutans.

The capital's relocation to a 180,000-hectare site almost triple the size of Jakarta will cost an estimated \$34 billion. Of that, 19% is to come from the state budget and the rest from cooperation between the government and business entities and from direct investment by state-run companies and the private sector.

Widodo welcomed talks between Indonesian officials and the United Arab Emirates, as well as SoftBank, on the setting up of an Indonesia Sovereign Wealth Fund which will be finalized at the end of this month in Tokyo, the maritime and investment ministry said. AP

Harsh weather kills 70 more people in Pakistan, Afghanistan

AP PHOTO

ROSHAN MUGHAL
& RAHIM FAIEZ, MUZAFFARABAD

SEVERE winter weather has claimed more lives as avalanches triggered by heavy snowfall killed 55 people in Pakistan-administered Kashmir while 15 died in neighboring Afghanistan, officials said yesterday.

The latest deaths raise the two countries' overall death toll from the severe weather to 126 since Sunday.

The disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir was the worst-affected area, with 55 deaths in the past 24 hours, said Waseem Uddin, a spokesman for Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority.

Among those fatalities, 41 died in a single avalanche in the Neelum Valley while 14 people died elsewhere in the region, he told The Associated Press. Avalanches are common in Kashmir, which is divided between Pakistan and India and claimed by both in its entirety.

Earlier on Tuesday, Ahmad Raza Qadri, the minister for the disaster management authority in Kashmir, said they had declared a state of emergency in the affected areas. "Rescuers are facing difficulties in reaching the stricken villages," he said,

Military helicopters were being used to evacuate people as authorities struggle to reopen highways and reach people cut off by heavy snowfall and avalanches in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Also badly affected by heavy snowfall is Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, where 20 people died, said Uddin, adding that some parts in the province was under six inches of snow. Twelve people were also killed in weather-related incidents in Pakistan's eastern Punjab province.

In Afghanistan, the State Ministry for Disaster Management confirmed at least 15 more deaths overnight, raising the death toll in weather-related incidents since Sunday to 39.

So far, about 300 houses have been damaged across Afghanistan because of snowfall, floods and landslides, the agency said. On Monday, residents of the Afghan capital, Kabul, where temperatures dropped to -15 degrees Celsius, abandoned driving and struggled to get to work on snow-covered roads. AP

SOUTH KOREA

Moon could seek exemption of UN sanctions on North Korea

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

SOUTH Korean President Moon Jae-in said yesterday that he could seek exemptions of U.N. sanctions placed on North Korea to bring about improved inter-Korean relations that he believes would help restart nuclear negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington.

Moon has previously made similar comments, despite outside worries that any lifting of sanctions could undermine U.S.-led efforts to eliminate North Korea's nuclear arsenal. His latest overture came about two weeks after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un threatened to bolster his nuclear deterrent in the face of what he called "gangster-like" U.S. pressure and sanctions.

Moon said at a New Year's news conference yesterday that greater inter-Korean cooperation would spur progress in stalemated nuclear diplomacy between North Korea and the U.S. and help gather international support for sanctions exemptions.

"If exceptions from U.N. sanctions are necessary for South-North cooperation, I think we can make efforts for that," Moon said. "I think there is a heightened need for South and North Korea to dial up their cooperation a little bit and promote North Korean-U.S. talks, rather than just looking at



North Korea-U.S. talks."

Moon didn't say on what specific sanction exemptions he may need. He said last year that he would push for the exemption of U.N. sanctions to resume two major inter-Korean economic projects — a jointly run factory park and South Korean group tours to a scenic North Korean mountain. The projects served as a rare legitimate source of foreign currency for the North.

Moon acknowledged that efforts to boost inter-Korean ties would have limits because of the U.N. sanctions. But he said exchanges in sports and individual tours to North Korea are among the areas where the two Koreas can cooperate without violating the sanctions.

The prospect for Moon's possible push to get sanctions exemptions is unclear. When South Korea's foreign minister said in late

2018 that Seoul was considering lifting some unilateral sanctions on North Korea, President Donald Trump responded that South Korea "won't do that without our approval."

Inter-Korean relations have suffered big setbacks since the breakdown of Kim's second summit with Trump in February 2019 in Vietnam. That summit collapsed because Trump rejected Kim's demands for broad sanctions re-

lief in return for dismantling his main nuclear complex, a limited disarmament step. Subsequent talks between Pyongyang and Washington reported little progress.

The development was a blow to Moon, a liberal who espouses greater reconciliation with North Korea. He shuttled between Kim and Trump in 2018, facilitating the early parts of U.S.-North Korean diplomacy such as the first Trump-Kim summit in Singapore in 2018.

Some experts say North Korea is angry with the South because it believes Moon's push led it to waste time and make too many concessions in negotiations with the U.S.

During a key ruling party meeting late last month, Kim expressed deep frustration over the deadlocked diplomacy and said he won't denuclearize if the U.S. persists with its hostile policy on his country. He also said he would unveil a new "strategic weapon" soon and no longer be bound by a weapons test moratorium that he placed at the start of his diplomacy with Trump.

Trump recently sent birthday greetings to Kim, who was believed to have turned 36 on Jan. 8. Senior North Korean official Kim Kye Gwan said Saturday that the birthday messages won't lead his country to return to talks unless the U.S. accepts its demands.

During yesterday's news conference, Moon said Trump's birthday greetings were a "very good idea" that showed his resolve to continue diplomacy with North Korea. Moon noted that the North's response suggested that it hasn't still shut the door on dialogue. AP

Indian state challenges new citizenship law in Supreme Court

SHEIKH SAALIQ,
NEW DELHI

THE southern Indian state of Kerala yesterday became the first to legally challenge a new citizenship law that has triggered nationwide demonstrations.

In a petition to the Supreme Court, the state government said the law violates the secular nature of India's Constitution, and accused the government of dividing the nation along communal lines.

The citizenship law backed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist party provides a path to naturalization for people from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan, unless they're Muslim. It has triggered nationwide protests



and clashes with police, leading to 23 deaths.

The rallies have slowly morphed into much wider anti-government protests.

Critics say the law, which was passed by Parliament on Dec. 11, will be used

in conjunction with a citizenship registry that could require all Indians to produce documents proving their origins, a challenge in a country where many people lack official records including birth certificates.

Kerala, a state ruled by a communist party, has strongly opposed the law and passed a resolution against in early January. The state government criticized the law in front-page advertisements in at least

three national newspapers on Jan. 10, saying the state is "leading the efforts to protect constitutional values."

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party said the move by the state was political.

Pinarayi Vijayan, chief minister of the state, has also written to the heads of 11 other states not ruled by Modi's party, urging them to unite in their fight against the law.

Political challenges for Modi over the law are mounting, setting the stage for a wider confrontation between the federal government and some states that have said they will not implement it.

West Bengal state Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, a staunch Modi critic,

has led several rallies in her state against the law. Punjab, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh states, which are governed by the opposition Congress party, have also announced they will not implement the legislation.

The law has also been rejected in the western state of Maharashtra, where Congress is part of a coalition government.

Modi's government insists that the law is needed to help persecuted non-Muslim minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who came to India before 2015 by giving them Indian citizenship.

Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad says state governments have the "constitutional duty" to implement the law. AP

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Russians hacked company key to Ukraine scandal: researchers

FRANK BAJAK, BOSTON

A U.S. cybersecurity company says Russian military agents have successfully hacked the Ukrainian gas company at the center of the scandal that led to President Donald Trump's impeachment.

Russian agents launched a phishing campaign in early November to steal the login credentials of employees of Burisma Holdings, the gas company, according to Area 1 Security, a Silicon Valley company that specializes in e-mail security.

Hunter Biden, son of former U.S. vice president and Democratic presidential hopeful Joe Biden, previously served on Burisma's board.

It was not clear what the hackers were looking for or may have obtained, said Area 1's CEO, Oren Falkowitz, who called the findings "incontrovertible" and posted an eight-page report. But the timing of the operation suggests that the Russian agents could be searching for material that damaging to the Bidens.



US President Donald Trump

The House of Representatives impeached Trump in December for abusing the power of his office by enlisting the Ukrainian government to investigate Biden, a political rival, ahead of the 2020 election. A second charge accused Trump of obstructing a congressional investigation into the matter.

"Our report doesn't make any claims as to what the intent of the hackers were, what they might have been looking for, what they are going to do with their suc-

cess. We just point out that this is a campaign that's going on," said Falkowitz, a former National Security Agency offensive hacker whose company's clients include candidates for U.S. federal elected offices. In an earlier interview, he told The Associated Press that top candidates for the U.S. presidency and House and Senate races in 2020 have in the past few months each been targeted by about a thousand phishing emails.

Falkowitz did not name the

candidates. Nor would he name any clients.

Russian hackers from the same military intelligence unit that Area 1 said was behind the operation targeting Burisma have been indicted for hacking emails from the Democratic National Committee and the chairman of Hillary Clinton's campaign during the 2016 presidential race.

Stolen emails were released online at the time by Russian agents and WikiLeaks in an effort to favor Trump, special counsel Robert Mueller determined in his investigation.

Area 1 discovered the phishing campaign by the Russian military intelligence unit, known as the GRU, on New Year's Eve, said Falkowitz, who would not discuss whom he notified prior to going public. He said he followed the industry standard process of responsible disclosure, which would include notifying Burisma.

In the report, he said the GRU agents used fake, lookalike domains in the phishing campaign that were designed to mimic the

sites of real Burisma subsidiaries.

Falkowitz said the operation targeting Burisma involved tactics, techniques and procedures that GRU agents had used repeatedly in other phishing operations, matching "several patterns that lots of independent researchers agree mimic this particular Russian actor." Area 1 says it has been tracking the Russian agents for several years.

The discovery's timing — just weeks before presidential primaries begin in the United States — highlights the need to protect political campaigns from targeted phishing attacks, which are behind 95 percent of all information breaches, said Falkowitz.

"This is a real specific, timely case that has real implications," he said. "To discover it and potentially get out in front of it is a significant departure from what's typical in the cyber security community, where someone just tells you, yeah, you're dead."

In phishing, an attacker uses a targeted email to lure a target to a fake site that resembles a familiar one. There, unwitting victims enter their usernames and passwords, which the hackers then harvest. Phished credentials allow attackers both to rifle through a victim's stored email and masquerade as that person. AP

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Iraqis worry US-Iran tensions are eclipsing their protests

SAMYA KULLAB & QASSEM ABDUL-ZAHRA, BAGHDAD

YOUNG Iraqis who drove mass protests demanding sweeping political reforms are worried that the conflict between the U.S. and Iran, which is playing out in part on Iraqi soil, is killing their momentum.

Even before the U.S. drone attack that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the 4-month-old protests against government corruption, poor services and rising Iranian influence in state affairs were beset by internal divisions. A violent security crackdown heightened tensions, leading to hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries as well as targeted killings of sympathizers.

And in the stormy aftermath of the U.S. drone strike that also killed top Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, avoiding another war in Iraq became a top priority for state officials as they scrambled to contain hostilities between Washington and Tehran.

"We are afraid that the uprising is being forgotten and [officials] are focusing on things we don't want, not our main goals," said Noor, an activist in Baghdad's Tahrir Square who asked to be

identified only by her first name, fearing reprisal, like all other protesters interviewed for this story.

"On the other hand, we are trying to be calm and keep people on the street to make the point that we are not with the Americans or the Iranians. We are with Iraq."

There are hopeful signs as Iran and the U.S. appeared to back down — at least in the short term — after Tehran retaliated for Soleimani's killing by firing missiles at two Iraqi bases housing American troops. No one was seriously injured and Iran was unexpectedly forced to shift gears to manage the fallout from its accidental downing of a Ukrainian airliner filled with Iranians.

Nevertheless, the issue of U.S. troop withdrawal in response to the attack that killed Soleimani minutes after he landed at Baghdad airport has monopolized Iraqi politics, with caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi openly calling for their ouster.

"Everyone is busy with America and Iran, but we are still facing attacks on the street," said Zaid, a protester in Baghdad. "Now we've become an easy goal for the militias; they can harm us because no one is focusing on them."

The rejection of Iranian influence over Iraqi state affairs was a core component of the protest movement and demonstrators fear that as tensions between Tehran and Washington ease, Iranian-backed militias will turn on them for vengeance.

The rejection of Iranian influence over Iraqi state affairs was a core component of the protest movement

The protests began Oct. 1, when thousands took to the streets in Baghdad and in the country's predominantly Shiite south. Since then, about 500 people have been killed, most of them shot by security forces who also used tear gas to disperse crowds.

While Friday protests brought out thousands countrywide, the turnout was lower than expected. Adding to their worries, two local journalists known for their coverage of the anti-government protests were found shot dead in a car parked near a Basra police station. And more people were wounded in clashes Saturday between pro-

testers and security forces in Karbala, in southern Iraq, when police fired into the crowd.

"Protesters are certainly more afraid now than they were a few weeks ago but at the same time they want to maintain their ground," said Ruba Ali Hassan, a researcher at York University in Toronto. "They've had such great momentum over the past three plus months and there's great fears this momentum might die down. People are trying to show great support and make sure that the protesters can still move forward but they're on shaky ground unfortunately."

A growing concern among protesters is their belief that Iran-backed militias are seizing on some demonstrators' refusal to grieve over Soleimani as an excuse to attack them. In turn, the attacks fuel the differences of opinion over Soleimani, deepening the rifts between the demonstrators and distracting them from their original purpose.

In the southern city of Nasiriyah, for instance, protesters refused to let a symbolic funeral procession for the Iranian general enter the square where they were camped. Violence broke out and at least one protester was

killed and three wounded when an Iran-backed militia fired on crowds. Demonstrators then burned the headquarters of Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella organization for multiple militia groups and part of the Iraqi security forces.

"Political parties and militias have attempted to create discord within the demonstration square in the center of Nasiriyah — they took advantage of the rifts between protesters," said Ali, a protester based in the city. "We have concerns the emotions arising from his death will rob the protests of its true aims."

The events in Nasiriyah have spooked protesters in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, the epicenter of the movement, who fear similar attacks, several activists said.

Since Soleimani's death, protest organizers have been trying to refocus attention on their movement, three activists said. With that in mind, they issued a statement last week saying their goals had not changed.

At the top of their list is preventing Abdul-Mahdi, who has headed a caretaker government since his resignation in December, from being renamed prime minister, which many suspect the country's political elites would like.

"All the news is about America and Iran, and the elites are trying to make the people forget about the protests in Iraq, and our goal for change and we don't want that," said the protester, Noor. "We are trying to be calm and study what is going on around us. We are telling everyone, stay with Iraq. This is not our war." AP

what's ON



EXHIBITION OF WORKS BY TAM CHECK WUN AND LAO CHON HONG, ARTISTS WINNING THE GRAND PRIZE OF THE JURY AWARD OF THE COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION OF MACAU ARTISTS 2017

TIME: 10am-7pm (Closed on Mondays)

UNTIL: March 1, 2020

VENUE: Exhibitions Gallery and the Nostalgic House of the Taipa Houses

ADMISSION: Free

KONG SENG TICKETING SERVICE: 8988 4000

THE WORLD AS WILL AND IDEA – COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION OF EMERGING ARTISTS FROM MAINLAND CHINA

TIME: 10am-7pm (No admittance after 6:30pm, closed on Mondays)

UNTIL: February 23, 2020

VENUE: Macau Contemporary Art Centre - Navy Yard No.1, located at Rua de S. Tiago Da Barra

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

EXHIBITION BY LIO MAN CHEONG

TIME: 3pm-8pm (Mondays)

12pm-8pm (Tuesdays to Sundays)

UNTIL: February 9, 2020

VENUE: A2 Gallery, Albergue SCM, No.8, Calçada da Igreja de São Lázaro

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2852 2550

2019 CARMO MARKET

TIME: 4pm-6pm (Mondays to Fridays)

12pm-6pm (Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays)

UNTIL: January 19, 2020

VENUE: Carmo Fair, Taipa

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2875 0721

Offbeat

CHRISTMAS CRYSTAL: MAN CHARGED WITH MAILING METH TO INMATE

A man sent some illegal holiday cheer to a woman in jail and he ended up getting arrested himself, officials in a Georgia county say.

News outlets report 40-year-old Timothy Lee Snow sent the woman a Christmas card filled with drugs.

Bibb County Jail inmate Mary Beth Odum, 40, had told Snow over the phone how to put meth and other drugs into a card to send to her in jail, county sheriff's officials said Monday.

Deputies intercepted a contraband-filled card filled with methamphetamine and Suboxone and began investigating Snow. On Jan. 9, deputies followed Snow as he left his residence and found him with meth, Xanax and a revolver. When they searched his home, deputies found more meth, Suboxone, marijuana, steroids, packing materials, a shotgun and a rifle.

Snow was arrested and charged with possession of a firearm, possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute and giving an inmate drugs, news outlets reported.

Odum, who was already in jail, now faces additional charges including attempt to commit offenses pertaining to the possession of drugs and use of communications facilities in a drug transaction.

It's unclear whether Snow has an attorney who can comment on his behalf.

TV canal macau



13:00	TDM News (Repetição)
13:30	Telejornal RTPi (Diferido)
15:00	Água de Mar
15:30	BING
15:45	Os Ursos Boonie na Neve
16:00	As Novas Viagens Philosophicas
16:45	Portugueses Pelo Mundo Sr.1
17:30	Mar de Letras Sr.2
18:05	Império (Repetição)
18:55	TDM Entrevista (Repetição)
19:30	Ouro Verde Sr.1
20:30	Telejornal
21:15	Semana Internacional
21:50	Dez Grandes Segredos e Mistérios
22:20	Império
23:15	TDM News
23:50	O Último Reino Sr.2 - Fim
00:50	Telejornal (Repetição)
01:35	RTPi Directo

cinema



CINETEATRO

09 - 15 Jan



UNDERWATER

ROOM 1

2:30, 4:30, 7:30, 9:30pm

Director: William Eubank

Starring: Kristen Stewart, T.J. Miller, Jessica Henwick

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 95min



1917

ROOM 2

2:30, 4:45, 7:15

Director: Sam Mendes

Starring: Dean-Charles Chapman, George MacKay, Daniel Mays

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 119min



ASHFALL

ROOM 2

9:30pm

Director: Byung-seo Kim, Hae-jun Lee

Language: Korean (English & Chinese)

Duration: 130min



LITTLE WOMEN

ROOM 3

2:44, 4:45, 7:15, 9:45pm

Director: Greta Gerwig

Starring: Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson, Florence Pugh

Language: English (Chinese)

Duration: 135min

this day in history



1997 PRINCESS DIANA SPARKS LANDMINES ROW

Princess Diana has angered government ministers after calling for an international ban on landmines.

Her comments - made during a visit to Angola to see for herself some of the victims of landmines - are being seen as out of step with government policy.

The Junior Defence Minister, Earl Howe, has described the princess as a "loose cannon", ill-informed on the issue of anti-personnel landmines.

Although he is now seeking to distance himself from the criticism, other Conservative backbenchers have been more outspoken.

Peter Viggers, Tory member of the defence select committee, said: "We all know landmines and other weapons are vicious and nasty. The question is how best to negotiate so they are not used in future."

"The government's policy on this has been an extremely careful one and the statements made by the Princess of Wales have not been in line with that policy."

The government is involved in international negotiations for a worldwide ban on landmines, but in the meantime the army is still using them.

The princess has insisted the row over her comments is a distraction and all she was trying to do was help.

She is in Angola as a guest of the International Red Cross, which has been pressing for a landmine ban.

Labour has welcomed the intervention by the princess. It is backing calls for an international moratorium on the use of anti-personnel mines.

Shadow defence spokesman, David Clark, said: "I think we should all welcome the fact she has gone to Angola and she has tried to warn the world of the dangers of these terrible weapons. I think we should be applauding what she's doing."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Princess died in a fatal car crash in Paris on 31 August 1997. Labour was elected to power in May 1997. Shortly after, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, promised to ratify the international Ottawa convention on banning landmines in time for the anniversary of her death.

The convention came into force on 1 March 1999 but a number of key countries refused to sign, including the United States, Russia and China.

To date, they have still not signed the treaty. Campaign groups are continuing to press for a worldwide ban.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

US director Spike Lee to lead Cannes film festival jury

SPIKE Lee will lead the jury of this year's Cannes Film Festival, and festival organizers hope the provocative American director will "shake things up" at the gathering of the world's cinema elite.

Lee said he was "honored to be the first person of the African diaspora" chosen for the prestigious position.

Festival organizer Thierry Fremaux said naming the first black president of the Cannes jury wasn't a political decision, but "a message of universality." Speaking on France's RTL radio Tuesday, Fremaux noted the diverse nationalities of jury members and directors whose films are screened at Cannes.

Many of Lee's films have been shown at Cannes, and his "BlacKkKlansman" won a major prize at Cannes last year. This year's festival runs May 12-23, and the rest of the jury members will be announced in April. "When I got the call ... I



was shocked, happy, surprised and proud all at the same time," Lee said in a letter. He said Cannes "changed the trajectory of who I became in world cinema."

Without explicitly mentioning Lee's career-long fight against racism or other political views, the festival said in a statement Tuesday: "Lee's perspective is more valuable than ever. Cannes

is a natural homeland and a global sounding board for those who (re)awaken minds and question our stances and fixed ideas."

Last year's jury president was Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu, and the festival's top prize went to Korean director Bong Joon-ho's "Parasite," nominated this week for best international film at the Oscars.

Arizona store gives 'Star Wars' record back to Mark Hamill

THE Force was strong enough at an Arizona store to reunite Luke Skywalker with his long-lost vinyl record.

Actor Mark Hamill is praising workers at Bookmans Entertainment Exchange in Flagstaff for returning the "Star Wars: A New Hope" soundtrack that had been a gift from film composer John Williams.

Hamill said in a tweet Saturday that it felt "totally unexpected & positively surreal" to get back the record he hadn't seen since the early 1990s. He commended the store about 145 miles (233 kilometers) north of Phoenix for being honest and not selling it.

"I happily offered to sign any ("Star Wars") items they sent me," the actor wrote.

Williams had written on the vinyl's sleeve: "Dear Mark Hamill, May the force always be with us."

The record was one of numerous "Star Wars" items brought in by a woman after



her father's death in 2018, the Arizona Daily Sun reported. Employees at the Arizona-based chain that sells used books, movies and CDs tried to verify the signature.

Micheil Salmons, the store's general manager, said they eventually tried reaching out to Hamill via so-

cial media. The actor confirmed it was genuine, and the vinyl was sent back to him.

Salmons said Hamill signed a DVD of "Star Wars: A New Hope" and two medals that are replicas of those given to his character and Han Solo, played by Harrison Ford, in the film.

AD



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FOOTBALL

Barcelona axes manager Valverde in midseason with Liga lead

TALES AZZONI

BARCELONA made a rare coaching change midway through the season, replacing Ernesto Valverde with former Real Betis manager Quique Setién on Monday.

The move came four days after the loss to Atlético Madrid in the semifinals of the Spanish Super Cup, a result that significantly increased pressure on Valverde.

The club said it reached an agreement with Valverde to terminate his contract.

Setién, a 61-year-old Spaniard who used to be a midfielder for Atlético Madrid, is known for setting up teams that often mimicked Barcelona's attacking-minded style.

"Throughout his career he has been a proponent of possession-based, attacking football that has been attractive to the fans," Barcelona said.

The club called Setién, who will be officially introduced on Tuesday at Camp Nou Stadium, "one of the most experienced coaches in Spanish football." He was contracted to June 2022.

It is the first time since 2003 that Barcelona has made a change in the middle of the season. Louis van Gaal left the club that January, and since then six other coaches have begun their stints at the start of the season.

Valverde was in charge of the team practice on Monday, which happened before the club's board of directors met to seal his fate.



Valverde met with club president Josep Bartomeu for about an hour before leaving the team's training center.

His departure came with Barcelona leading the Spanish league, and a few weeks from facing Napoli in the round of 16 of the Champions League. Barcelona drew three of its last four Liga games, though, and pressure on Valverde increased after the team conceded two late goals in a 3-2 loss to Atlético in the Spanish Super Cup in

Saudi Arabia.

The list of possible Valverde replacements also reportedly included former Tottenham coach Mauricio Pochettino and reserve team manager Javier García Pimienta. Netherlands manager and former Barcelona star Ronald Koeman also has been a perennial contender for the Barcelona job.

Many rumors initially linked former Barcelona midfielder Xavi Hernández with the club's coaching job. Qatari club Al-Sadd —

where he currently coaches — said the Spanish club was negotiating with the Spain great. Xavi said he met with Barcelona sports director Eric Abidal on Friday in Doha but did not reveal the nature of the meeting. He said he always dreamed of one day coaching Barcelona but was committed to Al-Sadd for now.

There were doubts related to Pochettino's name after he said sometime ago he would never coach the Catalan club. The Argentine

manager used to play and coach for Barcelona's city rival, Espanyol.

Setién had been with Betis since 2017 until deciding to take some time off at the end of last season. He previously coached smaller Spanish clubs such as Racing Santander, Las Palmas and Lugo.

Setién didn't win significant titles as a coach but was the last one to beat Barcelona at Camp Nou Stadium — in 2018, a 4-3 win by Betis in the Spanish league.

Most of his playing career was with Racing Santander, though it was with Atlético that he won the 1985 Spanish Super Cup.

The 55-year-old Valverde had always been criticized by some Barcelona fans. The Spanish Super Cup defeat to Atlético added to the perception many supporters had that Valverde's side threw away leads against important rivals.

He had a good record since arriving in 2017, leading Barcelona to back-to-back Spanish league trophies, but the club had tough Champions League eliminations in the last two seasons. It was humiliated at Liverpool 4-0 after winning the first leg 3-0 in the semifinals last season, and the previous year it squandered a 4-1 first-leg lead against Roma in the quarterfinals.

Valverde's job was also in jeopardy at the end of last season after Barcelona lost the Copa del Rey final to Valencia.

He helped the club win the Copa del Rey in 2017-18, as well as last season's Spanish Super Cup. In 163 matches with Barcelona, he won 108, lost 20 and drew 35.

Valverde received support from Lionel Messi and other players in the squad recently. Former Barcelona coaches Pep Guardiola and Luis Enrique also backed him, and former player Andrés Iniesta criticized the Catalan club for how it handled the situation, saying Valverde deserved more respect. AP

Trump cheered loudly at college football title game

PRESIDENT Donald Trump turned sports fan for an evening as he watched No. 1 Louisiana State University and No. 3 Clemson battle it out in the College Football Playoff championship.

Trump flew to Louisiana for Monday's night's game at the Superdome in New Orleans, accompanied by first lady Melania Trump.

"It'll be a great game. It'll be something that a lot of people want to see," he said as the couple departed the White House.

The president and first lady walked onto the field shortly before the game for the singing of the Na-



tional Anthem. Fans from both teams cheered him loudly. Some greeted him with cheers of "USA, USA." Others chanted, "Four

more years."

The first couple left before the fourth quarter and the final score: LSU 42, Clemson 25.

Trump was in friendly territory. He secured a nearly 20-point victory in Louisiana in the 2016 presidential election.

Trump is also familiar with the two teams. He took in an LSU game in November when the team went up against Alabama.

He also met with many of Clemson's coaches and players when they visited the White House in January 2019 after winning last season's national championship. That visit occurred during a partial government shutdown. With much of the White House staff on furlough, Trump arranged for a fast food buffet of bur-

gers and pizza. White House territorial seal held the fries.

Monday's game featuring two undefeated teams offered Trump a brief break from another turbulent period in his presidency as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi prepares to send two articles of impeachment to the Senate and tensions between the U.S. and Iran continue to simmer.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who predicted a championship for Clemson, flew with Trump aboard Air Force One to Louisiana for the game. Graham is an outspoken supporter of Trump who

opposes the president's impeachment. Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., also hitched a ride to the game.

The president attended the Army-Navy football game last month and was warmly welcomed at the LSU-Alabama game.

"Regardless of your political views, that's pretty cool, having the president at the game," LSU quarterback Joe Burrow said at the time.

Trump drew a mixed response last fall when taking in a mixed martial arts match in New York City. He also was jeered and booed at a World Series game in Washington. AP

OPINION

Macau Matters

Richard Whitfield



SOLAR POWERED RAILWAYS

From my previous musings it should be clear that I am a big fan of renewable energy – we must get away from burning fossil fuels if the human race is to survive on planet Earth. Make no mistake, the planet will survive until the sun blows up, but the conditions needed to support human life here can easily be eliminated if the ecosystem changes to a new equilibrium state because we have pumped too much CO2 into the atmosphere.

Solar power is one of my favorite renewable energy sources. It is largely solid state, i.e. no moving parts to wear out and be maintained, the power source will not run out till the sun stops shining and there are few economies of scale so that energy generation plants can be incrementally added as needed to minimize initial capital investment and widely distributed near to points of demand to minimize transmission losses.

There are some stupidities I regularly see with solar power that I cannot understand. Firstly, there is no point in building solar power “panel farms” far from cities because it just maximizes transmission losses – it is much better to put the panels in cities from an efficiency perspective. Secondly, there is no point in using photovoltaic panels to generate electricity and then use the electricity to heat water; photovoltaic panels only have 20+% energy collection efficiency, whereas solar thermal panels can have 80+% efficiency to directly make hot water.

There is a very good experiment underway in the UK where they are putting photovoltaic panels beside railway tracks and using the electricity generated to power the trains. The experiment is being done because in Europe the capital costs of new renewable energy generation plants are becoming lower than the costs of comparable new fossil fuel plants. Additionally, the tracks are just meters away from the panels so there are virtually no transmission losses. Moreover, trains normally use DC power so that are no DC-AC power conversion losses. Finally, there is plenty of space along the railway tracks to add more panels as the approach proves itself economically. And the panels can provide shade and rain protection over walkways, etc as further side benefits.

There is also a heritage railway in Byron Bay in Australia that is fully powered by photovoltaic panels on the train carriages and the train overnight storage/maintenance sheds. The proposed Hyperloop system for super-high speed trains also incorporates photovoltaic panels over the travel tubes to power the system.

This is the way that solar energy should be done. I see that Macau’s light rail has started operating, but I do not see a single photovoltaic panel anywhere for it – why not? Surely, the roofs of all the stations and covered walkways could be fitted with photovoltaic panels along with the sections of the track that are covered. And, the train carriages themselves could have rooftop panels.

Photovoltaic panels may not provide enough electricity to power the whole light railway – trains and stations – but it should provide a significant part of the total consumption. As important, it would be a great way for Macau to demonstrate its commitment to improving the environment. It would also support regional photovoltaic panel manufacturing and installation industries and help develop expertise in this important field in Macau to help diversify the local economy and establish a new “exportable” service industry. I am sure that many local and regional companies would like to be involved to showcase their expertise to all our tourists.

Why is it that we continue to see these kinds of “future living” experiments being done in other parts of the world, but not in Macau? We should be doing much more here but our government, universities and local industries are letting us down.

GERMAN GOVERNMENT SIGNS \$96 BILLION RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The German government signed a deal yesterday with state-owned train operator Deutsche Bahn to inject almost \$100 billion into the country’s rail infrastructure over the next decade.

Under the agreement, the federal government will contribute 62 billion euros (\$69 billion) toward maintaining and modernizing the existing train network.

Deutsche Bahn will contribute 24 billion euros (about \$27 billion) to the plan that will see ageing tracks and railway bridges replaced.

Transport Minister Andreas Scheuer said the investment – a 54% increase over the previous planning period – would herald a “shining age” for Germany’s railways.

The German government has pledged to expand rail travel as part of its efforts to cut emissions of planet-heating greenhouse gases from transportation.

It recently agreed to cut a value-added tax for train tickets, reducing the cost of long-distance journeys by about 10%.

Canadian officials accidentally push nuke alert to millions

ROB GILLIES

PEOPLE throughout the Canadian province of Ontario awoke Sunday to a cellphone alert warning them of an “incident” at a nuclear plant just east of Toronto — only to later be told the message was a mistake.

The message, which was transmitted throughout the nation’s most populous province, was accompanied by a shrill emergency broadcast noise. It said an unspecified event had occurred at the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station. There was no abnormal release of radioactivity, it added, and people did not need to take protective action.

More than an hour later, utility officials sent another message saying the alert “was sent in error” and that there was “no danger to the public or environment.”

“No further action is required,” said the message, which was also sent to television screens.

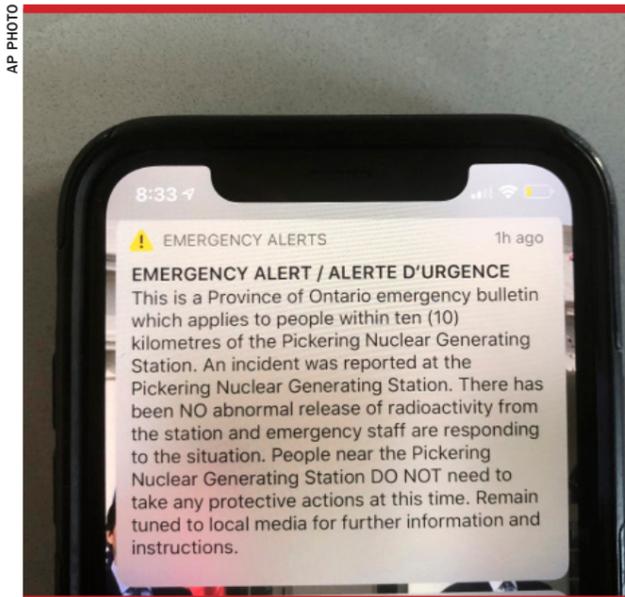
The alert went out during a routine training exercise being conducted by the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre, Ontario Solicitor General Sylvia Jones said in a statement that apologized for the mistake.

She said the government had started a full investigation and would “take the appropriate steps to ensure this doesn’t happen again.”

Jim Vlahos, a 44-year-old Toronto man, awoke to the alert and quickly made a hotel reservation more than 60 miles away in Niagara Falls. He said he figured he would go as far west as possible and then cross the border.

“Having watched ‘Chernobyl’ didn’t help,” he said, referring to the HBO show about the 1986 nuclear disaster in the Soviet Union. “The lack of communication following the alert didn’t help either,” he said.

“I have no problem leaving my phone on for these types of alerts,” Vlahos said. “But I would expect some more info from the government so I wouldn’t have to overreact the way I did.”



AP PHOTO

Many people slept through the first alert and saw it was a false alarm by the time they woke up.

Jonathan Davies, also 44, was taken aback when he spotted the alert while driving. But he waited until after he picked up his Tim Hortons coffee to check the news.

“I can’t cope with much until I have my coffee, at least a few sips,” he said. “I got scared and went online but found no information.” He later saw the follow-up alert that indicated it was a false alarm.

Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan said he was “very troubled” by the message. He said on Twitter that he spoke to provincial officials and demanded an investigation.

Toronto Mayor John Tory joined him, tweeting that there were “far too many unanswered questions” about the warning that was sent across the province of 14 million people.

Terry Flynn, who teaches crisis communications at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, said the error runs the risk of eroding public trust.

“When we have continuous problems in these systems, then we have a lack of trust and people begin to ignore them. So that’s the biggest fallout from this scenario,” he said.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s inspector general recommen-

ded changes to the emergency alert system in the United States after Hawaii officials in 2018 mistakenly warned the public about a nonexistent incoming ballistic missile. An employee at the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency sent the missile alert to cell-phones and broadcasters, triggering panic until the agency sent another message 38 minutes later notifying people it was a false alarm.

Pickering, which opened in 1971, was scheduled to be decommissioned this year, but the provincial government committed to keeping it open until 2024. Decommissioning is now set to start in 2028.

The plant generates 14% of Ontario’s electricity and is responsible for 4,500 jobs across the region, according to Ontario Power Generation.

The station has experienced several earlier incidents. In 2011, a pump seal failure caused the spill of more than 19,200 gallons (73,000 liters) of demineralized water into Lake Ontario, though with no significant risks to public health, according to local authorities.

In 1994, the plant automatically shut down after a faulty valve caused 132 tons of heavy water to spill. It was the first time a Canadian nuclear reactor had to use its emergency core cooling system to prevent fuel overheating. AP



AP PHOTO

Iran The foreign ministry has warned of a “serious and strong response” to a European move toward possible sanctions as the nuclear deal they negotiated unravels. Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said, however, that Iran is “fully ready to answer any good will and constructive effort” that preserves the nuclear deal.

Russia-Libya Libya’s rival leaders have left Moscow without reaching agreement on a ceasefire deal, with Russia trying to downplay the talks’ failure yesterday. The deal was proposed by Russia and Turkey in an effort to bring an end to the north African country’s long-running civil war.



AP PHOTO

France President Emmanuel Macron tried yesterday to calm nationwide tensions and salvage support for his overhaul of the country’s retirement system, as France faced day 41 of crippling strikes. Clutches of union activists gathered in Paris and other cities to demand that the government scrap the pension reform altogether. The plan’s toughest opponents were unmoved by the prime minister’s unexpected weekend decision to suspend a central measure: raising the full pension eligibility age from 62 to 64.



AP PHOTO

Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel is inviting world powers to a summit in Berlin on Sunday to discuss efforts to broker peace in Libya. Merkel’s office said in a statement yesterday that the German leader had decided to host the meeting after consulting with U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.