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MACAU RCR electronics

LAWRENCE HO'S MELCO WILL SCRAP ITS PLANS TO ACQUIRE ANOTHER 10% SHARE IN AUSTRALIA'S CROWN RESORTS

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LOCAL STUDENTS AT TAIWAN UNIVERSITY REQUEST ASSISTANCE

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HONG KONG PROTESTERS SAY THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE CORONAVIRUS IS FUELING NEW SUPPORT FOR THEIR MOVEMENT

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Hong Kong has lifted a quarantine on the World Dream cruise ship after clearing all crew members of the new virus. The ship has been placed under quarantine since it docked Wednesday after eight mainland Chinese passengers on a voyage last month were diagnosed with the virus.

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Afghanistan Two U.S. soldiers were killed and six wounded in a so-called insider attack in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province late Saturday when an Afghan dressed in an Afghan army uniform opened fire, the U.S. military said. A member of Nangarhar's provincial council, Ajmal Omer, told The Associated Press that the gunman was killed.



India Dozens of artists and activists gathered in India's capital yesterday to demand an end to violence against women in a country where such crimes are rising despite tough laws enacted seven years ago. A play was performed in a park in central Delhi at the event in solidarity with the global One Billion Rising movement.

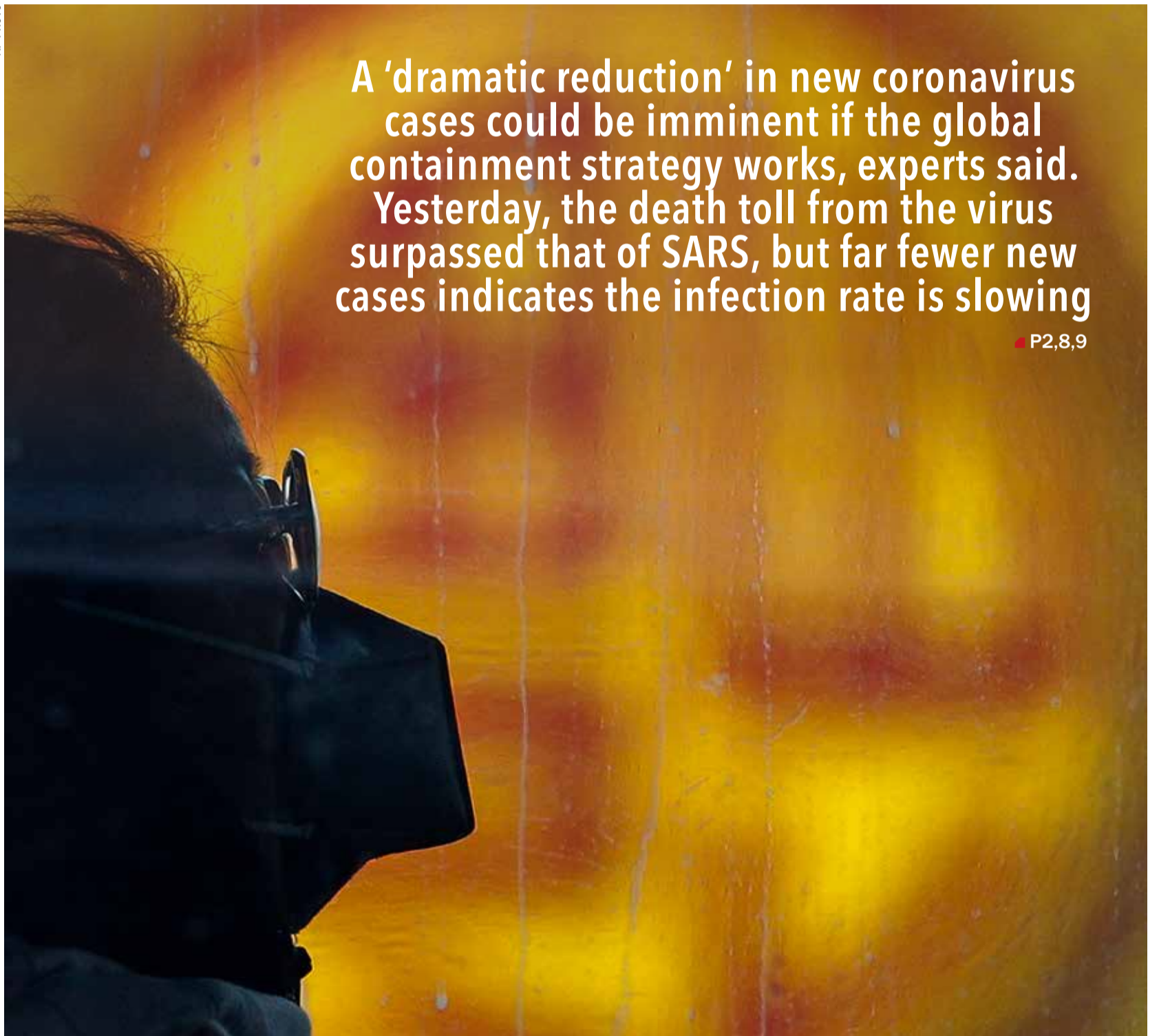


Libya's warring sides ended several days of U.N.-brokered talks without reaching a deal to consolidate a provisional cease-fire in and around the capital, the U.N. said. Another round of talks was proposed for later this month "as both sides agreed to the need to continue the negotiations."

More on backpage

CONTAINMENT PAYS OFF

AP PHOTO



A 'dramatic reduction' in new coronavirus cases could be imminent if the global containment strategy works, experts said. Yesterday, the death toll from the virus surpassed that of SARS, but far fewer new cases indicates the infection rate is slowing

P2,8,9

DSAL CLAIMS NO LAYOFFS AFTER DISMISSAL CASE 'COORDINATION'

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BORDER TRAFFIC NEARS ZERO AS HOTELS CLOSE FOR SUSPENSION

P2

AUTHORITIES SAY BORDER TRAFFIC NEAR ZERO AS HOTELS CLOSE

RENATO MARQUES

THE Public Security Police Force (PSP) said that there has been a significant decrease in the number of people crossing the borders of Macau, with the traffic now considered minimal.

This information came during yesterday's press conference organized by the Novel Coronavirus Contingency Coordination Center at the Health Bureau (SSM) facilities.

The PSP representative noted that between January 27 and February 8, Macau's border checkpoints registered total movement of 1.74 million entries and exits, representing a 76% decrease.

"Yesterday [February 8], at all border checkpoints of Macau, there were entries of 22,000 people, from which 8,100 were Macau residents, a drop of 17.8% when compared to the previous day," he said. Of the 22,000 people entering, only 2,200 were tourists, just 10% of the total number of entries.

The situation in the opposite direction was similar, with 24,000 people exiting Macau. Of these, 8,500 were residents of Macau, resulting in a drop of 19.8% compared to the previous day. The



RENATO MARQUES

number of tourists exiting the region was 2,200, with non-resident workers (TNRs) making up the most exits from Macau (12,000) and the percentage of tourists dropping by 40% when compared to the previous few days.

According to the PSP, the numbers are significantly lower than the ones registered in the previous days, hence the traffic is considered minimal at the moment.

The PSP representative noted that 2,400 people also entered and exited Macau via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, which would further decrease numbers since, as of midnight

yesterday, Hong Kong authorities started enforcing mandatory quarantine measures for all people entering, including residents of Macau. The PSP spokesperson said that the number of tourists entering Hong Kong has dropped by 64.4% to just 621 people, adding, "until noon today [yesterday], seven people, from which four were from Macau and three were foreigners, have turned back and gave up on entering Hong Kong via the bridge."

Questioned by the media about the large number of non-resident workers (22,000) still crossing the borders on a daily basis and po-

tentially putting the effectiveness of such infection control measures at risk, the PSP spokesperson insisted that the current measures of the government are effective.

"As I mentioned, the total number of people that cross the borders [of Macau] is just 46,000, that is compared to a normal peak period of around 600,000 a day. There was a drastic reduction and so I think that the measures [enforced by the Macau government] are effective."

NINE PATIENTS MAY BE RELEASED SOON

During yesterday's press conference, Dr. Chang Tam Fei, on behalf of the SSM, told the media that currently the nine patients diagnosed with the coronavirus in the care of health authorities have all responded well to treatment. They are in good condition and may be discharged from hospital soon.

"Honestly, we expect, in the next few days, they can be released from the hospital. We don't have any serious situations at the moment," Chang said. "We still need to perform more tests to release them and we are not exactly sure when this can happen."

Nevertheless, he noted that the

nine novel coronavirus cases will probably be discharged in the next few days. "They are not going to stay much longer, it should be just a few more days. We will announce them case by case," Chang said.

TOURISM BOARD CONFIRMS CLOSURE OF 15 HOTELS

Fifteen hotels have informed the government of their complete closure during the 15-day suspension on gaming activities that began last week, according to Inês Chan, a representative of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

Previously, it was announced that The St. Regis Macao, Four Seasons Macao and Conrad Macao were closed, as well as and the Grand Harbour Hotel located in the Lam Mau area. Joining them yesterday was the Legend Palace, Sofitel Ponte 16 and Rocks Hotel at Fisherman's Wharf. The others, whose names were not disclosed, are hotels from lower quality categories as well as hostels, Chan informed.

Chan was questioned about several other hotel units not mentioned in the MGTO report who have suspended their online bookings. She said, "besides the closed units, there are some that due to a lack of human resources are restricting the number of reservations. But since they are not stopping their operations, they do not need to communicate that [rearrangement] to MGTO as it's a business-related measure."

HEALTH AUTHORITIES CALL ON THOSE WITH SYMPTOMS TO SEEK HELP

RENATO MARQUES

LAST Friday, Macau health authorities requested citizens experiencing symptoms similar to the symptoms of the novel coronavirus infection to step forward and seek immediate help from the Conde de São Januário Hospital Center (CHCSJ).

During the daily press conference organized by the New Coronavirus Contingency Coordination Center and the Health Bureau (SSM), citizens were urged not to panic.

"If someone has been in a situation involving possible contact [with infected people], they should pay attention to their physical condition. If you have a fever, cough and other symp-

toms, you can go to the CHCSJ Emergency Department for a medical consultation to carry out further risk assessments and tests."

The SSM also emphasized that "the new type of coronavirus can be cured through early treatment" and called on all citizens, especially those who regularly come into contact with a large numbers of tourists, to wear masks.

"In cases where one is feeling unwell [with symptoms] such as fever and cough, citizens should seek medical treatment for diagnosis and detection as soon as possible," the SSM stated.

This information was reiterated during the daily press conference on Saturday, when the SSM said, "it is important

to note that it is likely that there is the possibility of some hidden cases already existing in Macau," adding, "to prevent an outbreak in the Macau community, it is mandatory to take appropriate protective measures."

The request by health authorities was yesterday explained by CHCSJ doctor Chang Tam Fei, who noted that in the past few days the number of requests of people seeking treatment of the virus at the emergency room had been falling.

"Two or three days ago we had around 400-500 requests per day, now [we] have only 300 [requests]. This may be because people prefer to stay home and not come to the hospital," Chang said.

WORK SUSPENSION FOR CIVIL SERVANTS TO LAST ANOTHER WEEK

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng has ordered all non-essential civil servants to remain at home, as their exemption from work has been extended until the end of this week, in order to help combat the spread of the novel coronavirus.

In the executive order Ho signed, only civil servants in essential departments will work. Other civil servants must stay at home and avoid leaving their homes.

This is the second full week the government has suspended work for the SAR's civil servants, except for those working in emergency services.

During the work exemption period, public departments will only provide emergency and basic services.

Before the Chinese New Year holiday ended, the local government implemented measures that called on

civil servants working in non-essential services to stay home.

The Secretary for Administration and Justice, André Cheong Weng Chon, had also previously asked civil servants to stay at home during the holiday extension, "decided in consideration of disease prevention and control."

On a separate note, Macau residents wishing to go to Hong Kong or have been to the mainland in the 14 days prior to the date of their intended arrival in Hong Kong will be subjected to Hong Kong's 14-day quarantine measure.

The measure applies to all people who have been to the mainland in the 14 days prior to entering Hong Kong.

The Macau government is also calling on the local community to "stay united during this critical moment in disease-control work." LV

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Times

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DSAL claims dismissal case has been solved, worker disagrees

RENATO MARQUES

THE Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) claims to have resolved a case of alleged staff dismissal involving about 20 non-resident workers employed by the operator of a sauna and nightclub located inside Hotel Fortuna. The bureau said that after discussing the matter with the company and its employees, it has now been agreed that there are no dismissals.

The controversial case unearthed by the Times has become one of the first reported examples of layoffs connected to the 15-day closure of gambling venues.

Last week, several workers reported that they were issued a letter in Chinese – a language that they cannot read – and told it said that they accepted the terms of the two-month leave of absence from work. Reviewed by the Times, the letter in fact acknowledges the termination of the worker and states that they have already received all due compensation.

The DSAL said on Saturday that it has “already contacted the workers and the employer representatives to follow up” on the case.

In a statement issued by the government, the DSAL noted that the incident “is mainly related to the work arrangement issues caused by the temporary



DSAL director Wong Chi Hong

closure of the relevant business premises.”

“After the coordination [from DSAL], both parties have a clear knowledge that there are no dismissals. The employer representatives agree to protect the labor rights and interests of their workers according to the law, and coordinate with their workers about the work arrangements during the closure period.”

At least one of the workers involved in the case told the Times yesterday that the report from the DSAL is inconsistent with the employee's experience

The former staff member said, “I have no knowledge of [this mediation] and, as I told you earlier, everything still stands the same.”

“The Labour Affairs Bureau did not contact me or any of my colleagues that I know of,” added the source who has requested anonymity, remarking that many of those involved in the case have already left Macau.

The employee said that no agreement with the employer had been reached and that nobody from the DSAL was ever involved in the negotiations. Instead, the employees were told by company personnel that they would have to accept the dismissal.

“I was forced to sign that letter. The manager told me if I don't sign and take that money the company is going to close, and I won't be able to find any of the bosses to [even] collect my salary

[from January].”

The Times tried to reach other sources that had previously contributed to this case but it was not possible to reach them yesterday.

The DSAL statement did not address the questions addressed to the department by the Times last week.

The Bureau said that despite the general closure of most public entities, it has arranged staff to be on duty during this period. It has called on members of the public that have any enquires on labor rights and interests, or any urgent complaints, to call to the emergency hotline 6288 6091 between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., promising to assist in a timely manner.

IAM URGES PUBLIC TO WATCH FOOD HYGIENE

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has urged the public to pay attention to food hygiene, particularly concerning food delivery services. According to a statement released by the IAM, although the public has reduced dining outside, the number of orders on food delivery services has increased. The IAM has warned food suppliers, such as supermarkets and shops, to regularly sterilize their operating spaces, and to maintain good ventilation. Food delivery trolleys should be sterilized and cleaned regularly. Regarding food delivery services, the IAM is reminding the relevant operators to comply with Macau's food safety laws and to keep records of every single service, including food producers and food suppliers, delivery times and locations, among other details.

DSAT TO IMPLEMENT TRAFFIC CONTROL FOR ROAD WORKS

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) will implement traffic control measures on several streets for engineering projects involving main roads. From February 11 until March 1, traffic closures and parking bans will be enforced on a specific section of Rua Central and Rua do Padre Luis Frois S.J. According to a statement released by the DSAT, the bureau and the water company had discussed preponing the water pipe paving project while there was less traffic to lessen the impact on the public. Traffic controls will also be in place at Estrada do Arco and Avenida do Alm. Lacerda for the same purpose.

SCHOLAR HSUEH SHOU SHENG, FOUNDER OF UM PREDECESSOR, DIES

The University of Macau (UM) has announced that Professor Hsueh Shou Sheng, the founding rector of UM's predecessor institution, has died. In a statement issued to media, UM described Hsueh as a distinguished scholar and educator with remarkable achievements. He played a key role in the founding of UM's predecessor, the University of East Asia (UEA), after he came to Macau in 1980. Hsueh served as the UEA's rector from 1981 to 1986, and from 1987 to 1991. During his term, Hsueh's efforts resulted in the establishment of many academic and research units, laying the cornerstone for UM's development. Before Macau's handover to China, Prof Hsueh served as a vice chairman of the Macau Basic Law Drafting Committee and made important contributions to the founding of the Macau Special Administrative Region. “Prof Hsueh dedicated his whole life to the advancement of higher education,” read the UM statement. “He will be forever missed by all members of UM.”

Hospital refutes nurses' allegations in open letter

LYNZY VALLES

A group of nurses from Kiang Wu Hospital have published an open letter accusing the private hospital of engaging in malpractice which undermines the government's strategy to control the local outbreak of novel coronavirus, also known as 2019-nCoV.

In the letter, which was published online and signed as a “group of frontline workers,” the nurses listed a series of malpractice incidents which had occurred at the hospital.

One of the allegations

was that not all the masks distributed to staff were surgical masks, which are necessary to effectively prevent the wearer from being infected with the virus. The nurses also said that the hospital had refused to provide protective equipment to personnel in the respiratory department.

The patient who was diagnosed as the eighth case of novel coronavirus in Macau is a 64-year-old woman from Macau. She was transferred to Kiang Wu Hospital when her fever and cough did not improve despite being

admitted to Conde S. Januário Hospital.

According to Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, the local woman caused a potentially serious incident which resulted in the isolation of around 20 medical staff at Kiang Wu Hospital, after it was discovered that she had concealed information regarding her travel to the mainland.

According to the open letter, the hospital also does not provide accommodation for nurses who are in close contact with patients showing symptoms of the virus, stating

that the hospital “has not yet provided a suitable and isolated place to house the most exposed nurses.”

In the conclusion of their letter, the nurses mentioned that one of the patients who was diagnosed with fever “was not put in an isolation room for 14 days,” a measure to prevent the spread of possible infection.

However, Kiang Wu Hospital dismissed the accusations, stating that frontline nurses may be suffering from psychological and emotional pressures, hence the issuing of an open letter.

As cited in local media reports, the hospital said it “strongly urged that you do not create rumors, do not spread rumors, and do not believe rumors.”

Meanwhile, the medical director of Conde S. Januário Hospital, Dr. Lei Wai Seng, urged the employees to submit their concerns to hospital management.

“We do not want or have the right to prohibit the demonstration of workers, but these situations can be used by other people with the intention of causing a negative environment among those who are at the forefront of fighting the epidemic,” said Lei.

The official clarified that health authorities are in contact with the city's hospitals and clinics to ensure that they have enough equipment and accessories to protect against the virus. Lei says the stockpiles should last for up to six months.

Casinos lose millions and ditch deals in Macau

BRUCE EINHORN, JINSHAN HONG & DANIELA WEI

THE lights of the Casino Lisboa, a landmark of Macau's night-time skyline, have gone dark.

The SJM Holdings Ltd. casino turned them off on the first day of a 15-day shutdown to contain the spread of the coronavirus, exemplifying the crisis facing the world's biggest gambling hub.

Some casino companies have already detailed their losses. Wynn Resorts Ltd. said Feb. 6 that its Macau outpost, which accounts for about 75% of its revenue, is down \$2.5 million a day. Melco Resorts & Entertainment Ltd. said it would step back from a \$1.2 billion deal to take a 20% stake in Australia's Crown Resorts Ltd. and reassess all non-core investments this year.

Overall, Fitch Ratings estimated that the crisis could wipe out \$3.3 billion in cash flow for the six Macau operators, including Wynn, Melco and two other U.S.-listed companies with businesses in the Chinese territory across from Hong Kong, Las Vegas Sands Corp. and MGM Resorts International.

The depth of the losses, though, depends on how long it takes to bring the lethal new virus under control. Macau's \$36 billion industry is highly dependent on Chinese visitors; during the recent Lunar New Year holiday, tourism from the mainland fell by roughly 80% - and that was before the casinos closed.

"It hurts that we still need to pay for the staff and other fixed costs," said U. Io Hung, founder of Pacific Intermediary Co., which makes travel arrangements and provides credit and high-stakes games for big-money gamblers from China. "The only work I have done lately is to keep canceling the hotel and flight bookings for my clients."

It's likely to get worse before it gets better. It's not clear the gaming floors will reopen at the end of the current suspension, Fitch Solutions Macro Research warned in a report published Feb. 5. Even if they do, Chinese gamblers may stay away longer if travel still seems risky or if the economic hit from

the virus has everyone tightening their spending.

In its report, Fitch noted "a significant risk" of an extended closure of the casinos and forecast the city's economy would shrink 3.8% this year after a 3.2% contraction in 2019.

Macau's beleaguered casino operators were hoping the Year of the Rat would bring them good fortune. A thaw in the U.S.-China trade standoff could have reinvigorated mainland visitors. The resorts have embarked on projects representing several billions of dollars in investment, including a new phase of Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd.'s resort on the Cotai Strip, the debut of the British themed resort, the Londoner, from Sands China Ltd., and hope for the long-delayed HKD39 billion (\$5 billion) project from billionaire Stanley Ho's SJM.

Now, with travel around the region ground to a halt, it's not clear when many of the migrant workers who work on those construction projects will be able to return.

The renovations and development are critical to Macau's broader efforts to reinvent itself with more family-friendly and middle-market offerings. Tourists and casual gamblers accounted for more than half of Macau gaming revenue for the first time last year, and the casinos have been eager to broaden their appeal.

Las Vegas casinos, for example, get roughly two-thirds of their revenue from non-gaming sources like food, entertainment and retail. That accounts for just 10% of revenue in Macau.

For now, though, there's little the casino operators can do. The monorail is empty, several stores and restaurants are operating at reduced hours if they're open at all. The ruins at Macau's famed St. Paul's Church, usually packed with tourists, are hushed.

On a Jan. 29 earnings call, Las Vegas Sands President Robert G. Goldstein tried to sell optimism.

"There will be a lot of people there the day that virus is resolved," he predicted. "We will be happy to sleeve them and welcome them back." **BLOOMBERG**

EVA BUCHHO



GAMING

Wynn is losing \$2.5 million a day on casino shutdown

CHRISTOPHER PALMERI

WYNN Resorts Ltd. is losing about \$2.5 million a day in Macau after the Chinese government ordered casinos there closed to deter the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

The company employs about 12,200 people in the region. Although the casinos were ordered closed for a 15-day period that started Feb. 5, Wynn Chief Executive Officer Matt Maddox

said last week that it was too early to predict when they would reopen.

"The team on the ground is working with the government on a daily basis and watching very carefully if there will be any continued outbreaks of the virus," Maddox said on a call with investors. "So far, we feel like things are fairly well contained. And we're just watching it very carefully."

Maddox said his primary focus is the safety of em-

ployees and customers. The company halted operations at its casinos in Macau, but still has limited service in its hotels and restaurants for remaining guests.

President Craig Billings said insurance wouldn't cover the company's losses. "Business interruption insurance is related to a physical event that caused the business interruption," he said. "So a storm or some type of damage. That obviously isn't the case here."

Macau has become the breadbasket of the U.S. casino industry and the world's largest gambling hub. Wynn gets as much as three-fourths of its revenue from the Chinese enclave, while Las Vegas Sands Corp., the industry leader, generates more than 60%. But business there had already begun to soften last year amid the trade war with the U.S. and civil unrest in Hong Kong.

Last week, Las Vegas-ba-

sed Wynn reported fourth-quarter results that fell short of analysts' estimates - because of the slowdown in Macau and its home market of Nevada.

Revenue declined 2% to \$1.65 billion, missing the \$1.71 billion average of analysts' estimates. The company also reported a loss of 62 cents a share, excluding some items. Analysts were forecasting a 90-cent profit.

The Encore Boston Har-

bor in Massachusetts, the company's newest resort, posted a profit of \$15.3 million. Maddox said that while the property had opened "softer than we thought," a new customer loyalty program and the addition of lower-priced restaurants to serve daytime slot machine players were leading to improved results.

Wynn stock is down 3.4% this year, weighed down by concerns about the coronavirus. **BLOOMBERG**

GAMING

MELCO PULLS PLUG ON CROWN DEAL IN YET ANOTHER BLOW TO PACKER

ANGUS WHITLEY
& CHARLES CAPEL

MELCO Resorts & Entertainment Ltd. scrapped an agreement to buy another AUD880 million (\$593 million) stake in Crown Resorts Ltd., a blow to billionaire James Packer's plans to retreat from his Australian casino business.

In a statement, casino-resort operator Melco said it won't buy a second tranche of shares in Crown that equated to an additional 10% of the Melbourne-based company. While Melco cited the impact of the coronavirus on Asian tourism and the temporary closure of casinos in Macau - including its own - the completion of the Crown deal had been in doubt for months.

Melco in May last year said it would buy 20% of Crown from Packer, the company's dominant shareholder, and even increase that holding as part of a global expansion beyond the gambling center of Macau. That vision began to unravel in August when the deal was sucked into an Australian regulatory probe into Crown. Days later, Melco announced it would delay the second half of the purchase and said it might scrap it completely if the inquiry made unreasonable demands.



AP PHOTO

"It is Melco's belief that, at this time, its capital needs to be deployed on its core assets," the company said in its statement. Now left with about 10% of Crown, Melco said it won't

seek a seat on the board.

In separate statements, Packer's private investment company Consolidated Press Holdings Pty and Crown confirmed the cancellation of the

agreement but didn't comment further.

The death of the Melco deal - in its original form, at least - leaves Packer once again without his chosen suitor. Crown,

the vehicle for most of his personal wealth, considered selling to U.S. rival Wynn Resorts Ltd. early last year before the discussions leaked to the media and talks broke down.

The gaming regulator in Sydney is conducting a public inquiry into Melco's planned acquisition. It's also assessing Crown's suitability to run a new casino in the city following media reports last year that Crown used junket operators linked to drug traffickers to attract wealthy Chinese gamblers.

A spokeswoman for the inquiry declined to comment on Melco's announcement or say whether it would alter the investigation, which is due to hold public hearings on Feb. 24. Crown has said the media reports in question were part of a "deceitful campaign" that sought to damage its reputation.

Melco said it's now reassessing all non-core investments in the pipeline for 2020. On Tuesday, Macau's government asked casinos to suspend operations for half a month in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Countries around the world are restricting travel to and from mainland China. Macau is the only part of China where casinos are legal.

"Melco's decision not to purchase more shares in Crown Resorts may spur questions about the casino operator's long-term focus," said Margaret Huang, gaming and lodging analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence. **BLOOMBERG**

Local students at Taiwan university request assistance

THE Higher Education Bureau (DSES) has received requests for assistance from local students studying in National Chengchi University in Taipei, following the implementation of quarantine measures which apply to Hong Kong and Macau residents entering Taiwan from February 7.

According to a statement issued by DSES, the affected students said that university requires Macau students residing on campus to find accommodation outside the university in order to undergo home isolation for 14 days.

The bureau said that it had contacted the Macao Economic and Cultural Office in Taiwan (DECM) to follow up on the condition of the affected students.

After communication



between DECM's director Ho Weng Wai and the president of National Chengchi University, the university responded by saying it would consider providing a viable subsidy plan to Macau students, including assistance to help them stay in hostels near the campus.

The university is set to

announce the specific arrangements later.

Although DECM has informed the Mainland Affairs Council in Taiwan, there has been no response from them yet.

The DSES then pledged that it would keep in close communication with DECM, the Macau Overseas College Studen-

ts Service and the Macao & Taiwan Youth Exchange Promotion Association.

In addition, the bureau called on Macau students headed for Taiwan to prepare a sufficient stockpile of masks and necessary supplies so they would be better prepared to prevent the spread of the virus.

Last week, lawmaker Sulu Sou called on the government to provide assistance to some 4,500 local students currently studying in Taiwan, following the issuing of Taiwan's most recent quarantine regulations.

The lawmaker mentioned that some students could not undergo isolation and quarantine because they had roommates who may be worried about cross-infection, implying the measure would not be

effective among students.

Sou added that the DSES and the relevant local units could play an important role in issuing guidelines for the two regions to improve the ties between government units and schools.

He also suggested the local government release information on its websites to warn local residents of the immigration policies of other regions regarding Macau.

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong office of Taiwan's Tourism Bureau also warned on its social media page that Macau residents entering Taiwan would be quarantined for 14 days. The bureau stressed that Macau residents entering Taiwan would not be allowed to leave the territory before the

end of the 14-day period. It reminded travelers to follow its communication channels, as measures are subject to change without prior notice.

To cope with the quarantine situation, airlines operating flights between Macau and Taiwan have made certain arrangements.

Since the end of last month, Air Macau has allowed its passengers to change their date of travel at no handling charge. Starlux Airlines will cancel all its services between the two locations from now until March 28. Changes and cancellations are being offered at no charge. As for Tigerair Taiwan and EVA Air, passengers are allowed to make changes or cancellations under certain conditions at no charge. **LV/AL**



HONG KONG

ACTIVISTS SEE VIRUS FUELING MORE SUPPORT FOR MOVEMENT

IAIN MARLOW & NATALIE LUNG

PROMINENT activist Ventus Lau stood outside a restaurant this week, handing out surgical masks and asking recipients to shout pro-democracy slogans - including the popular rallying cry "Liberate Hong Kong! Revolution of our times!"

For Lau, who has organized some of the biggest anti-government protests since they began last June, the demonstrations are on hold as fear of a new coronavirus in neighboring China keeps the city's 7.4 million residents avoiding large crowds. But he says frustration over the government's handling of the public health crisis will fuel even more support for the protest movement after the virus scare subsides.

"It's hard to separate the protests and the epidemic - they are in the same vein," said Lau, who like other protest organizers sees the disease as a new front in the broader struggle for more democracy. "The battle against the virus has helped us see the government's incompetence and the failures of our system."

Hong Kong's protests erupted in June of last year in opposition to a since-scraped bill allowing extraditions to mainland China.

Even before coronavirus cases began emerging in recent weeks, the financial hub's economy fell into recession after months of violent clashes between riot police and protesters.

The frequency of larger-scale protests began subsiding after a landslide win for pro-democracy forces in last November's district council elections, followed by the Chinese New Year holidays and now the virus scare. There have only been two major rallies - in early December and on New Year's Day - in the last two months, compared with regular protests at the height of the movement.

Isolated protests took place away from the city center late Saturday night, where wooden boards, bicycles and other objects were used to block roads in the vicinity of Sheung Tak Estate, Tseung Kwan O. Bricks were thrown at police officers, the government said, prompting the use of tear gas and pepper spray to disperse crowds. Police said 60 people were arrested.

REASSESSING TACTICS

The broader pause has prompted protesters to reassess their tactics to meet their key demands,

including an independent inquiry into police abuses and meaningful elections. That has been on display in the past few weeks with the rise of pro-democracy unions, including one by medical workers calling for the city to seal off the mainland border, as well as organizing ahead of September elections for Hong Kong's powerful Legislative Council.

Many in the protest movement are also registering voters for the city's so-called "functional constituencies," seats in the legislature allotted to industry groups, according to veteran activist and former professor Joseph Cheng.

The broader pause has prompted protesters to reassess their tactics to meet their key demands

"This is going to be a very important aspect of the movement - you can't organize large-scale protests activities because people obviously have to stay home" amid the outbreak, Cheng said. But he said the new limitations it imposed wouldn't stop the movement.

"The resentment certainly has been building and spreading," he said. "People are trying to find

ways to express anger against the government despite the virus."

'MISHANDLED THE VIRUS'

The current outbreak - and reports that it was covered up by Communist Party officials - has struck a deep chord with many in Hong Kong, where the protests were driven by a deep distrust of China. The city also has vivid memories of Beijing's cover-up of 2003's outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, which killed almost 300 people in Hong Kong and crippled its economy.

Hong Kong's government has come under fire for a shortage of surgical masks, choosing quarantine sites close to residential areas and a failure to quickly and fully shut its border with the mainland. Residents have struggled to buy key staples, from

rice to toilet paper, due to panic buying that retailers and the government say is unwarranted. "Rumors are like viruses" Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung wrote in his weekly blog yesterday, urging people to ignore malicious commentary that could promote confusion and panic.

"Ridiculous" prices for face masks should be curbed by the

government, according to Jeffrey Lam, a member of Hong Kong's advisory Executive Council, Radio Television Hong Kong reported. "Hong Kong people cannot afford HKD2,000 (\$257) a box," he said.

"The government has mishandled the virus," said Joshua Wong, one of the city's most well-known democracy campaigners. "In the short term, it will reduce the number of protests. But over the long term it will just encourage more moderate, maybe even pro-Beijing people, to come out and criticize the government over things such as the shortage of surgical masks."

Residents in areas that have quarantine centers or where they are planned have held demonstrations in the past couple of weeks.

Yesterday, rallies were held in two New Territories towns over quarantine centers, RTHK reported. Several people were detained and one man was hospitalized with head injuries in a demonstration in Sai Kung against a holiday camp being turned into an emergency medical facility, according to the report.

In the eastern district of Tai Po, dozens of people gathered to object to a proposal to use a local clinic for patients with mild symptoms of the coronavirus, RTHK said. There have been similar protests in the districts of Mei Foo and Fanling, according to the report.

EVOLVING PROTESTS

With tourism down and the retail sector hurting as people stay home and avoid shops and malls, there's a strong likelihood of more layoffs and economic pain. Flag carrier Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd. requested that almost 27,000 employees take three weeks of unpaid leave.

That could focus more anger against increasingly unpopular leader Carrie Lam's administration, said Wayne Chan, 29-year-old graphic designer, frontline protester and convenor of the Hong Kong Independence Union.

"In the coming future, there will only be more people losing their basic way of life and the government will become their punching bag," he said, while noting that "the risk of protesting has gone up" at a time when there is a deadly outbreak.

At the end of the day, the movement is about Hong Kongers' ability to protect themselves, said Eric Lai, vice convenor of the Civil Human Rights Front, which organized some of the city's largest demonstrations.

"The slogan we have now among the community is 'Recover Hong Kong, resist the virus of our times,'" he said. The disease-prevention movement is part of a larger one "using civil society as a platform to keep people from the coronavirus. Whether it's opposing the anti-extradition bill, resisting police brutality, it's all about protecting ourselves." **BLOOMBERG**

When Chinese consumers stay home, the world's retailers take hit

THE spreading coronavirus is showing the world what happens when Chinese consumers stay away: Shopping streets empty out, stores close and sellers of everything from sneakers to fancy handbags sound the alarms.

Across China, where the deadly outbreak emerged, shopping malls have been shuttered. In the cosmetics shops of Seoul, the glitzy department stores of Tokyo's Ginza district and the luxury boutiques of Paris, Chinese tourists are dwindling. Taking the hit are companies ranging from U.S. sportswear giant Nike Inc. to Japanese cosmetics maker Shiseido Co. to British fashion brand Burberry Group Plc.

"Reliance on the Chinese consumer is about to be fully exposed," Flavio Cereda, an analyst at Jefferies, wrote in a note to clients.

Exposure has come swiftly for the likes of Burberry, which generates 40% of its sales from China's shoppers at home and abroad. The trenchcoat maker on Friday warned the virus is wiping out as much as 80% of sales at stores that remain open in China. More than one-third of its outlets there have been shuttered.

Canada Goose Holdings Inc. said the coronavirus is "having a material negative impact," following a similar announcement earlier from Nike. Shiseido said the outbreak cut China sales of four of its top brands by more than half during the Lunar New Year holidays. Walt Disney Co. said profit will shrink by \$135 million if Shanghai Disneyland, which it shut as a precaution to limit the spread of the virus, remains closed for two months.

LUXURY GOODS

The stakes are especially high for luxury-goods companies like Burberry, LVMH and Kering SA, which have ridden a wave of Chinese demand. Mass-market

BLOOMBERG



chains such as Starbucks Corp. and clothier Uniqlo have also pinned their hopes on the fast-growing market, full of consumers eager to splash out on foreign brands.

Making matters worse for retailers, the virus has coincided with the Lunar New Year - one of the biggest travel and shopping seasons for the Chinese. Last year, shoppers spent 1 trillion yuan (\$143 billion) in the weeklong period.

Shares of Louis Vuitton parent LVMH, Gucci owner Kering and other European luxury companies slipped Friday after Burberry's warning, though they remain near all-time highs after a multiyear sales boom in China. Many executives have said they expect only a short-term hit from the virus, and the sector has proved resilient in the face of recent threats such as anti-government protests in Hong Kong.

The luxury business also bounced back from previous illness outbreaks in China, including the SARS virus in 2003. But its

exposure to the country was much smaller then, and the government has responded more aggressively this time around, imposing quarantines around the virus epicenter of Wuhan and travel restrictions elsewhere. Even consumers who are free to move about are reluctant to venture forth and risk catching the virus.

"What we're seeing is consumers are self-quarantining," Burberry Chief Financial Officer Julie Brown said in an interview. The suspension of package-tour sales is keeping many Chinese from making the overseas trips that have traditionally fueled growth in luxury spending. "As restrictions spread, this effect will worsen," she said.

JAPANESE LABELS

Japanese brands may be among the hardest hit. Shiseido and Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing Co. each generate about one-fifth of sales from China - a proportion that in both cases more than doubled in the past

five years. Back home, Japanese businesses have also benefited from a surge in Chinese tourists, who spend almost twice as much as other overseas visitors.

"In department stores, drug stores, duty-free stores, it's clear we're seeing an impact to our sales from fewer Chinese tourists," Shiseido CEO Masahiko Uotani said.

Japanese department-store operators posted double-digit-percentage year-on-year declines in tax-free sales - a gauge of Chinese tourist spending - during the holiday period. In China, about half of Uniqlo and Ryohin Keikaku Co.'s Muji stores have been closed as part of the efforts to contain the virus.

Companies reporting earnings in coming weeks, such as Walmart Inc. and Kering, will flesh out the bigger picture.

"Chinese consumers' spending patterns are going to have an impact on global consumption trends," said Jason Yu, a Shanghai-based managing director at Kantar, a consumer

trends consultancy. "Nobody can remain intact in such a globalized environment."

MARKETING CUTS

Some businesses are shutting their doors now rather than risk the bad publicity that a virus outbreak in a store would bring, Yu said. Others, such as Danish brewer Carlsberg A/S and Shiseido, have scaled back marketing in China.

"We are working on being as agile as possible," Ralph Lauren Corp. CEO Patrice Louvet said on a call last week.

Broad-based consumer-goods companies may be better insulated than luxury labels, as shoppers keep buying staples like shampoo and skin cream while eschewing splurges on leather handbags.

Investors shrugged off L'Oreal's warning of a short-term sales hit, focusing instead on its better-than-expected sales growth in the most recent quarter. Japanese personal-care and cosmetics maker Kao Corp. boosted output after seeing an uptick in demand for disinfectant and bathroom cleaner.

Home-bound consumers can also keep shopping online, which will "definitely help" counteract the negative impact of the virus outbreak, the French cosmetics giant's CEO Jean-Paul Agon said on a call.

Luxury brands that are more dependent on discretionary spending may have to bet on the resilience of shoppers like 51-year-old Lily Li. The Beijing resident canceled a February trip to Las Vegas, where she had hoped to stock up on her favorite luxury brand, Kering-owned Bottega Veneta.

"I'm doing zero shopping right now," Li said. "Hopefully the virus will be gone by spring. Then I can travel around and make up for the shopping I missed." **BLOOMBERG**

CORPORATE BITS

SJM donates 20 million patacas to Hubei

Casino operator Sociedade de Jogos de Macau, S.A. (SJM) has announced a donation of 20 million patacas to aid coronavirus control and relief efforts in Hubei province, including purchasing much-needed medical supplies and protective equipment.

The donation was made under the coordination of

the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macau SAR.

Daisy Ho, chairman of the SJM board of directors, said, "SJM stands firmly with the Macau SAR government and all Macau people in [their] efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus."

With the health and sa-

fety of customers and employees its primary concern, SJM has been maintaining close communication with the relevant government departments and rolling out preventive measures in strict adherence to government guidelines, and has remained united with the community in the fight against the virus.

MGM waives 15 days of rent for retail tenants

MGM China has announced it will waive 15 days of basic rent for the period of February 5 to 19 for all retail tenants inside the MGM Macau and MGM Cotai properties, as a sign of its support for local business using practical measures.

MGM's retail tenants include leading local brands and small and medium enter-

prises (SMEs), thus waiving their rents is expected to help relieve their financial stress.

"At this difficult time, our thoughts are also with our retail tenants, especially the local SMEs. We hope that this rent relief can help alleviate their burdens, so that they can ride out the current hardship for a swift

recovery," said Grant Bowie, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director of MGM China Holdings.

The gaming company said it would continue to fight the epidemic by following the government's direction in the spirit of solidarity and cooperation, and working together with the local community.

AP PHOTO



China's virus death toll surpasses SARS but new cases fall

CHINA'S virus death toll rose by 89 yesterday to 811, passing the number of fatalities in the 2002-2003 SARS epidemic, but fewer new cases were reported in a possible sign its spread may be slowing as other nations stepped up efforts to block the disease.

Some 2,656 new virus cases were reported in the 24 hours ending at midnight Saturday, most of them in the central province of Hubei, where the first patients fell sick in December. That was down by about 20% from the 3,399 new cases reported in the previous 24-hour period.

"That means the joint control mechanism of different regions and the strict prevention and control measures have worked," a spokesman for the National Health Commission, Mi Feng, said at a news conference.

Also yesterday, new cases were reported in Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia and Spain.

More than 360 cases have been confirmed outside mainland China.

"Dramatic reductions" in the spread should begin this month if containment works, said Dr. Ian Lipkin, director of Columbia University's Center for Infection and Immunity. He assisted the World Health Organization and Chinese authorities during the outbreak of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome.

Warmer weather will reduce the virus's ability to spread and bring people out of enclosed spaces where it is transmitted more easily, Lipkin said in an online news conference. However, he said, if new cases spike as people return to work after the Lunar New Year holiday, which was extended to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, then "we'll know we're in trouble."

The fatality toll passed the 774 people believed to have died of SARS, another viral outbreak that originated in China. The total of 37,198 confirmed cases of the new virus vastly exceeds the 8,098 sickened by SARS.

NEW INTERNATIONAL CASES

Six more cases were reported in Japan among 3,700 passengers and crew aboard the quarantined cruise ship Diamond Princess.

South Korea reported a new case in a 73-year-old woman whose relatives visited Guangdong province in southern China, raising its total to 27. The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the family members, a 51-year-old South Korean man and a 37-year-old Chinese woman, were confirmed infected later Sunday.

Vietnam reported its 14th case. The Health Ministry said she is a 55-year-old woman in Vinh Phuc province, northwest of Hanoi, where six earlier patients were

found to be infected.

Malaysia reported its 17th case. The 65-year-old woman's son-in-law was diagnosed earlier with the virus.

Spain confirmed its second case in Mallorca, a popular vacation island in the Mediterranean. The first case was a German tourist diagnosed a week ago in the Canary Islands off northwest Africa.

HK RELEASES QUARANTINED CRUISE SHIP

The 1,800 passengers and 1,800 crew members of the cruise ship Dream World were released from quarantine after Hong Kong authorities said tests of the crew found no infections.

The ship was isolated after eight mainland Chinese passengers were diagnosed with the disease last month.

Port official Leung Yiu-hon said some passengers with symptoms

tested negative but there was no need to test all of them because they had no contact with the infected Chinese passengers.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong began enforcing a 14-day quarantine for arrivals from mainland China. The territory's chief executive, Carrie Lam, has refused demands by some hospital workers and others to seal the border completely.

WUHAN OPENS HOSPITAL, FARMER PROMISED SUPPORT

A 1,500-bed hospital built in two weeks in Wuhan, the city at the center of the outbreak, accepted its first patients on Saturday, the government announced. Another 1,000-bed hospital built in 10 days opened last week.

The government of the city of 11 million people said it would begin carrying out twice-daily disinfection of hospitals, markets, public toilets and other facili-

ties starting Sunday.

The government of the surrounding province of Hubei it will pay subsidies to farmers, other food producers and supermarkets and give tax breaks to companies that donate to anti-virus work, the official Xinhua news agency said. It said the government will subsidize overtime for employees of companies making medical supplies.

China's leaders are trying to keep food flowing to crowded cities despite anti-disease controls and to quell fears of possible shortages and price spikes following panic buying after most access to Wuhan and nearby cities was cut off.

Two more flights from Wuhan carrying American citizens, permanent residents and close relatives landed in the United States, the State Department said. A spokesman said more than 800 Americans have been evacuated from Wuhan.

A plane evacuating more than 200 people from Wuhan landed Sunday in Britain. British officials said the flight, the country's second evacuation plane, brought back 105 British citizens and family members, as well as 95 European citizens and family members. The passengers will be quarantined at a hotel for 14 days.

A charter flight carrying Filipinos from Wuhan arrived in the Philippines. The 29 adults and one infant will be quarantined for 14 days. At least 56 Filipinos initially planned to join the flight home, but some changed their mind and others feared they couldn't immediately return to their jobs and lives in Hubei due to travel restrictions, officials said.

Elsewhere in China, the industrial metropolis of Chongqing in the southwest told residential communities to close their gates and check visitors for fever. The government said the spread of the virus through "family gatherings" had been reported in Chongqing but gave no details.

The WHO director-general said it will send experts to China starting today or tomorrow.

Asked whether that will include members of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus replied, "We hope so." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

DOCTOR'S DEATH HIGHLIGHTS DANGERS ON FRONT LINES OF OUTBREAK

THE death of a doctor who issued an early warning about the new virus in China represents a grim reminder that the first health care workers to recognize new outbreaks are sometimes among their earliest victims.

Dr. Li Wenliang's death underlined the dangers health workers have faced in similar epidemics, including SARS and Ebola.

On Dec. 3, Li wrote on his social media account that he saw a test sample suggesting the presence of a coronavirus similar to SARS. In early January, the 34-year-old eye doctor was visited by police who forced him to sign a statement admitting to having spread falsehoods.

Within days, he developed a cough and fever, began having trouble breathing and was hospitalized. His death was confirmed Friday, prompting a deluge of messages of mourning and outrage at how he was treated.

The death was an all-too-familiar occurrence, said Dr. Michael Ryan, head of the World Health Organization's health emergencies program.

"We're very sorry to hear the loss of any health care worker

AP PHOTO



that's attempted to care for patients," Ryan said Friday. "We have suffered similar losses like the death of Carlo Urbani during SARS."

In 2003, Urbani was an Italian doctor at the U.N. health agency's Hanoi office and investigated the unusual case of a patient suffering respiratory symptoms in a private hospital. Urbani treated patients, took samples and worked to im-

prove infection control policies in Hanoi.

Weeks later, he died of the same disease — severe acute respiratory syndrome — in a Bangkok hospital.

Doctors working at the early stages of any new outbreak are particularly vulnerable, said Dr. Bharat Pankhania, a University of Exeter infectious disease expert.

"At the beginning, doctors are just not aware of what kind of behaviors may be dangerous," he said. When Li was exposed to the new virus, "he didn't know an outbreak was already underway and what precautions he should take," Pankhania said.

Doctors and nurses also were infected in the early stages of multiple Ebola outbreaks, before the

lethal disease was recognized and proper infection control policies were implemented.

"It's just bad timing," Pankhania said. "Doctors get infected because they are in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Among people infected in the current outbreak, 82% have suffered only mild disease, WHO estimated. Fatal cases have been most common in people aged over 60 and those with other health problems, like diabetes or high blood pressure. Fewer than 2% have died, according to the latest figures.

Li, however, may have been at risk for a more serious illness because he was treating patients before he knew to take any precautions, doctors said. He also may have been exposed to an especially large dose, given that eye doctors tend to work close to patients' faces.

A study published Friday in the Journal of the American Medical Association underscored the dangers faced by health care workers. The report detailed illnesses in 138 people treated at Zhongnan Hospital in Wuhan, including 40 hospital workers believed to have become infected on the job. More than 10 of them were presumed to have been infected by a single patient who was admitted to the surgical ward with abdominal symptoms. **MDT/AP**

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AUSTRALIA MEGA-FIRE DOUSED AS TORRENTIAL RAIN BRINGS RELIEF

A wildfire that burned out an area eight times the size of Manhattan has been put out as torrential downpours across Australia's east coast brought relief to firefighters who have been battling blazes for several months. The number of fires still burning across New South Wales has reduced to 37, according to the Rural Fire Service, from more than 130 at the start of the year, after parts of the state were hit with several hundred millimeters of rain in recent days. While the downpours will be welcomed by farmers dealing with prolonged drought conditions, they brought with them the risk of flooding across many coastal areas. Sydney was forecast to receive around 100 millimeters of rain yesterday, with the deluge expected to continue today.

DUTERTE SEEKS MILITARY PACT EXIT AS US TOUTS STRONG TIES

President Rodrigo Duterte plans to order the termination of a longstanding military pact with the U.S., the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported, though the U.S. State Department reiterated that relations between the nations remain strong. The reported plans follow Duterte's threat in January to end the agreement after Washington canceled a visa for a senator who used to lead his drug war. Such a move could upend the decades-long alliance as Beijing continues its rise as a military power from the contested waters of the South China Sea to nations across Asia. The U.S. has been seeking to reassure allies in Southeast Asia of its commitment to the region. A State Department official said that the U.S.-Philippine alliance remains a cornerstone of U.S. efforts to promote a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific region.

STRIKE SHUTS KASHMIR TO REMEMBER MAN EXECUTED BY INDIA

Shops and businesses shut in Indian-controlled Kashmir yesterday and authorities imposed a lockdown in some parts of the disputed region's main city after separatists called for a strike to mark the anniversary of the execution of a Kashmiri man who was convicted in an attack on the Indian Parliament. Hundreds of police and paramilitary soldiers patrolled largely deserted streets in Srinagar. Authorities put old parts of the city under lockdown, with major roads blocked by razor wire and barricades in anticipation of anti-India protests and possible violence. Most Kashmiris were incensed when in 2013, Mohammed Afzal Guru was secretly hanged in a New Delhi jail on charges of being involved in a 2001 Parliament attack that killed 14 people, including five gunmen. Most Kashmiris believe Guru was not given a fair trial.

Soldier kills 26 in bloodiest shooting spree in Thailand

A soldier with a grudge gunned down 26 people and wounded 57 in Thailand's worst shooting spree before he was fatally shot inside a mall in the country's northeast yesterday, officials said.

Officials said the soldier was angry over a financial dispute, first killing two people on a military base and then went on a far bloodier rampage Saturday, shooting as he drove to the mall where shoppers fled in terror.

It took police sharpshooters 16 hours to end the crisis.

Authorities said Sgt. Maj. Jakrapanth Thomma was behind the attack in Nakhon Ratchasima, a hub for Thailand's relatively poorer and rural northeastern region. Much of the shooting took place at Terminal 21 Korat, an airport-themed mall filled with colorful Lego sculptures, a merry-go-round and huge replicas of landmarks from around the world.

"This incident was unprecedented in Thailand," Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha told reporters as he gave the final tally yesterday after visiting the wounded in hospitals.

"I hope this is the only one and the last incident, and that it never happens again. No one wants this to happen. It could be because of this person's mental health in this particular moment," he said.

Prayuth said he was worried that people inside the mall could be accidentally hit by bullets fi-



Terminal 21 Korat mall in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand

red by police, but added, "I have checked, that didn't happen."

Video taken outside the mall showed people diving for cover as shots rang out mid-afternoon Saturday. Many were killed outside the mall, some in cars, others while walking.

Shortly before midnight, police announced they had secured the above-ground portion of the mall, but were still searching for the shooter. About 16 hours later, officials held a news conference outside the mall to announce the gunman was fatally shot.

Defense Ministry spokesman

Kongcheep told Thai media that the first person killed was the commanding officer of the 22nd Ammunition Battalion, in which the suspect also served. He said the gunman had fired at others at his base and took guns and ammunition before fleeing in an army Humvee.

Terminal 21 Korat, a multi-level glass and steel mall, is designed to resemble an airport terminal, complete with a mock control tower and departure gates. A large model passenger jet dangles from wires beside one of the main escalators.

Each of its seven retail floors

is decorated to represent a different country. A giant replica of Paris' Eiffel Tower soars to the ceiling, while a model of London's Big Ben dominates another area, and a massive model of California's Golden Gate Bridge spans an open courtyard. A two-story golden Oscar statue towers over a food court.

Many malls in Thailand, including Terminal 21's namesake in Bangkok, have metal detectors and security cameras at entrances manned by uniformed but unarmed security guards. Checks on those entering are often cursory at best. **MDT/AP**

SINGAPORE

Grocery chain starts limiting how much people can buy

MICHELLE JAMRISKO

SINGAPORE authorities urged residents to relax on their shopping sprees that have emptied supermarket shelves, saying supplies aren't under threat even as response efforts to battle the coronavirus outbreak have escalated.

Pictures circulated online of snaking lines at supermarkets as people snapped up rice, instant noodles, toilet paper and sanitization products. Online grocers including

Amazon.com Inc. and RedMart Ltd. said they have limited or no delivery slots.

Yesterday, local supermarket chain NTUC FairPrice imposed some purchase limits "to ensure more customers have access to high demand items," according to notices put up in outlets. Each shopper can buy up to four packs of paper products, two bags of rice, four bundles of instant noodles and SGD50 (\$36) worth of vegetables.

Singapore raised its response level to the virus to Orange on Friday, the same grade as during the SARS epidemic. The designation means the nature of disease is severe and spreads easily from person to person, but is being contained in the city-state, where it hasn't spread widely.

Authorities reported seven more confirmed cases of the virus late Saturday, bringing Singapore's total to 40 - the largest number of infections outside China, excluding a

quarantined cruise ship in Japan. Four victims are in critical condition, and one is on oxygen support, the government said. All the new cases are Singapore citizens or permanent residents, and none had traveled to China recently.

How Singapore residents react to the virus outbreak "is a major test for our nation," Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in a Facebook post Saturday.

"There is no need to panic," he said later. "We are not locking down the city or confining everybody to stay at home. We have ample supplies, so there is no need to stock up with instant noodles, tinned food, or toilet paper, as some people did

yesterday."

Lee joined a chorus of officials reacting to a scene that's playing out across the island. For weeks, stocks of hand sanitizers and masks have disappeared as quickly as they were being replenished, and panic buying has now spread to other daily goods.

"In times of uncertainty, it is natural that we want to protect ourselves and the ones that we love," Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing said in a Facebook post Saturday. "However I urge all of us to think of the larger communities we belong to. Hoarding means that we deprive others of things that they really need." **BLOOMBERG**

SYRIAN TROOPS GAIN TERRITORY IN PUSH TO CONTROL KEY HIGHWAY

SYRIAN government forces captured new areas from insurgents in their efforts to control a key highway in the northwest Saturday, as Turkey sent more reinforcements into the war-torn country, state media and opposition activists said.

The weeklong government offensive has created a humanitarian crisis with about 600,000 people fleeing their homes in Syria's last rebel stronghold since the beginning of December, according to the United Nations.

Rebels control much of Idlib province and parts of the neighboring Aleppo region that is home to some 3 million people — many of them displaced from other parts of Syria.

The Syrian offensive appears aimed for now at securing a strategic highway in rebel-controlled territory, as opposed to an all-out campaign to retake the entire province, including the city of Idlib, the densely populated provincial capital.

"Our aim is to clear the highway and evict terrorists from it," a Syrian commander on the



ground told state TV. He was referring to the M5 highway, which links the capital Damascus with the northern city of Aleppo.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said government forces still have 30 kilometers of the highway to clear before it comes under full control of the army

for the first time since 2012.

Syrian state TV reported Saturday that government forces captured four villages in Aleppo province near the highway.

It added that Syrian troops and demining experts have cleared explosives and mines from the recently captured town of Saraqeb that sits on an intersection where the M5 meets with the M4 highway, linking Syria's

coast with the country's east.

Syrian state media and the Observatory later reported that government forces captured the village of al-Eis and its strategic hill just east of the M5.

The new push came as Turkey, a main backer of the opposition, sent more reinforcements into Idlib, according to the Observatory and Idlib-based media activist Taher al-Omar who is embedded with militants.

The Observatory said a convoy consisting of 430 vehicles entered Syria since Friday night, raising the number of vehicles that entered Syria since last weekend to well over 1,000.

A rare clash on Feb. 3, between Turkish troops and Syrian soldiers left seven Turkish soldiers and a Turkish civilian dead as well as 13 Syrian troops.

The violence has also raised tensions between Russia and Turkey, which have been working together to secure cease-fires and political talks, despite backing opposite sides of the conflict. **MDT/AP**

ISRAEL BLOCKS PALESTINIAN EXPORTS IN ESCALATING TRADE CRISIS


THE Israeli military blocked Palestinian agricultural exports yesterday in the latest escalation of a monthslong trade war that comes amid fears of renewed violence as well.

Following Defense Minister Naftali Bennett's instruction, the military said it would not allow the Palestinians to transfer their products through their land crossing to Jordan, the West Bank's only direct export route to the outside world.

The Western-backed Palestinian Authority said Israeli forces at checkpoints blocked vegetable shipments that were in their way to export abroad. The Ministry of Agriculture statement said vegetable exports to Israel were worth \$88 million last year, comprising 68% of the West Bank's overall vegetable exports.


The crisis erupted in September, when the Palestinians decided to stop importing beef from Israel. The Palestinian Authority claimed most of the 120,000 head of cattle they imported monthly from Israel was itself imported and that they therefore preferred to import directly from abroad. The move appeared aimed at reducing the Palestinians' economic dependence on Israel. **MDT/AP**

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TIME: 10am-6pm daily (Last admission at 5:30pm; closed on Wednesdays, open on public holidays)

ADDRESS: No. 10, Travessa de António da Silva

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2896 8820

TREASURE OF SACRED ART OF ST. JOSEPH'S SEMINARY

TIME: 10am-5pm daily (Closed on Wednesdays, open on public holidays)

VENUE: St. Joseph's Seminary and Church, Rua do Seminário

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2835 7911

XIAN XINGHAI MEMORIAL MUSEUM

TIME: 10am-6pm daily (Closed on Tuesdays)

VENUE: No. 151-153, Rua de Francisco Xavier Pereira

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 2845 0062

THE WORLD AT THEIR FINGERTIPS – EXHIBITION OF WEAVING, DYEING AND EMBROIDERY SKILL ART OF JIANGSU PROVINCE AND GUANGXI ZHUANG AUTONOMOUS REGION

TIME: 9am-7pm (Open on public holidays)

UNTIL: February 16, 2020

VENUE: Chun Chou Tong Pavilion, Lou Lim Ioc Garden

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8988 4000

Offbeat

PUPPY IN CRIME: DEPUTIES TAKE MAN, DOG INTO CUSTODY IN THEFT

A Florida man and his furry "accomplice" were taken into custody by authorities who said the man shoplifted from a store.

Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office said Logan Wilson was arrested Wednesday and charged with petit theft and possession of meth, WTSP-TV reported.

Wilson admitted to stealing \$259 worth of items from Bass Pro Shops, deputies said. He was arrested during a traffic stop after he was seen leaving the store.

Deputies also took Wilson's four-legged friend into custody. A sheriff's office Facebook post showing an officer holding a small puppy said deputies took care of the "cutest accomplice" before handing him over to Hillsborough County Animal Services.

Animal services will care for the dog until his owner is released from jail. Animal services has listed the puppy as "pre-adopted." Deputies said that if the owner doesn't claim the dog, it will go up for adoption.

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

TV canal macau



13:00	TDM News (Repetição)
13:30	Telejornal RTPi (Diferido)
14:30	O Sábio
15:15	Bing
15:25	Animaizinhos Selvagens Exploradores
15:40	Portugueses Pelo Mundo Sr.1o
16:25	Contentor 13
17:00	Conferência de Imprensa Saúde (Directo)
18:15	Contraponto (Repetição)
19:15	Aqui Há História (Repetição)
19:30	Ouro Verde Sr.2
20:30	Telejornal
21:15	O Mar Que Desapareceu
22:20	Império
23:15	TDM News
23:50	The Chronicles of Wu Li - In St. Paul's College
01:15	Telejornal (Repetição)
02:05	RTPi Directo

this day in history



1952 INDIA PASSES FIRST TEST OF DEMOCRACY

The Congress Party of India, led by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, has won an outright victory in the country's first general election.

The party has won 249 of the 489 seats contested in the Lower House, and even with 133 results yet to be declared it is clear that the Congress Party will control the next Parliament.

The victory has earned Pandit Nehru a further five-year term in office. He has led the interim government since 1947, when power passed from British to Indian hands, but this makes him India's first prime minister to be elected by universal suffrage.

The elections are widely seen as a test for India's ability to succeed as a democracy following independence from Britain two years ago.

They are the first to be held under the new constitution, drawn up with the British parliamentary system as a model.

There were fears that extremist groups would use the opportunity to whip up inter-ethnic tensions, but to everyone's relief voting has so far gone peacefully.

The polling operation is on a massive scale.

There are 176 million people eligible to vote, although only 15% can read or write.

Symbols are being used on ballot papers for each of the parties and independent candidates, so that those who cannot read know where to cast their vote.

Voters are not even required to mark their ballot papers - they simply have to put them into a box marked with the symbol of their favoured candidate.

About 18,000 candidates are running for 4,412 seats: 497 in the Lok Sabha, or lower house of parliament, and the rest in state government.

Although the Congress Party, which has been inextricably linked with the drive for independence, has secured an absolute majority in the parliamentary elections, it suffered some unexpected setbacks in state elections.

In three southern states in particular - Madras, Hyderabad and Travancore-Cochin - the party failed to win an outright majority in the face of strong support for the Communist Party.

The result has caused some concern in the Congress Party. The states do not have to follow central government policies, so the Communist Party's strength there could potentially cause the government serious difficulties.

However, two of the most feared militant parties - the Hindu Mahasabha, and the separatist Sikh Akali Party - did so badly that both parties are expected to collapse following the elections.

Courtesy BBC News

cinema



CINETEATRO

For the public health and safety, and to better cooperate with the government's anti-virus precaution, Cineteatro Macau has decided to suspend all movie screenings from January 27, 2020 until further notice.

IN CONTEXT

The Communist Party of India (CPI) continued to be a thorn in the government's side for some years, particularly in the southern states.

In 1957 it was elected to rule the state government of Kerala (formerly Travancore-Cochin and neighbouring Malabar), only to have the government dismissed and President's Rule declared in 1959.

The CPI is now split into several splinter groups.

Although it still has support in Kerala and in some other states, its share of the parliamentary vote has more than halved.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru governed the country until his death in 1964, and remains a towering figure in independent India's early political history.

The Congress Party, largely led by Nehru family members, continued in an almost unbroken run of power until 1989.

Following a decisive victory in the 1996 elections, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the strongest party and formed a government under its moderate leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee.

But in 2004, the Congress Party once again returned to power under former Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 It doesn't matter whether you're actively looking to add some romance to your life right now or not. Today, you will be unable to escape the flirtatious energy that is flowing all around you.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Today, a jolt of new life could be injected into one of your older relationships. Either you're suddenly seeing them in a new light, or they're seeing you differently. It doesn't much matter.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Just taking a long, leisurely walk around your neighborhood might do the trick. Dancing is another great idea. If you can't hit the town, just turn up the radio and move your body!

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 You'll want to play it safe today. There is a lot of confusion in the air right now, and your communication could be what's causing it. People could take what you say the wrong way.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Give all of your opinions during a meeting or discussion so that everyone in the room knows where you stand. You will get back way more than you give, maybe not today, but very soon.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Be careful about making any compromises today. Sure, things might look logical at first, but you could get burned in the end unless you go over the details and get things nailed down.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 It's not the time to back off and jealously guard your energies. Now is the time to reach out and connect with other people. Let them see what you're capable of.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Be very careful about doing any business transactions with friends or family members right now, no matter how much said business transactions seem like a sure thing.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Skip talking about the weather. Instead, touch on more significant topics. If you can make an emotional connection, you can encourage a positive change in someone you might never even meet again.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Just ask for what you want. If you deserve something, you'll get it. And if you don't, you won't. If it's no, it's not the answer you want to hear, but at least you'll know sooner and can move on to bigger and better things.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Entertain yourself with solo pursuits. This is not a good day for team sports because your ability to do what you're told won't be strong. You'll be prone to asking a lot of questions of your authority figures.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Your mind is razor sharp today, and it will enable you to tackle all your assignments and commitments with the grace of a ballet dancer! Other people would feel overwhelmed if they were in your toe shoes, but not you!

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

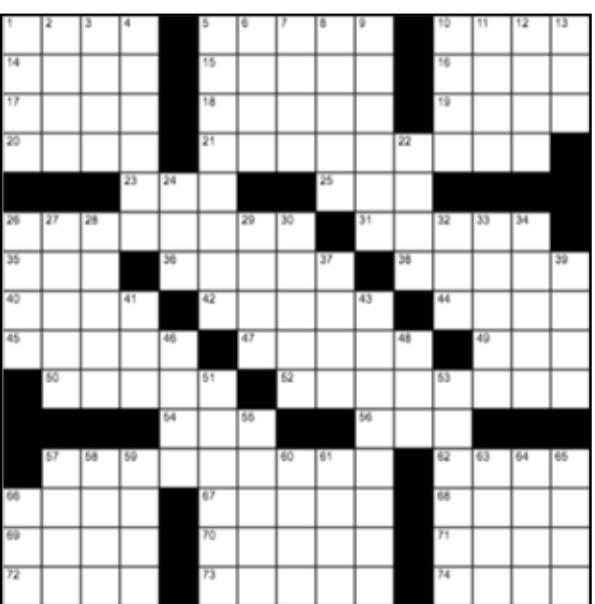
	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	12	clear
Harbin	-21	-7	clear
Tianjin	-2	12	clear
Urumqi	-7	4	clear
Xi'an	-1	13	cloudy
Lhasa	-8	6	clear
Chengdu	8	13	cloudy
Chongqing	10	12	overcast
Kunming	6	16	moderate rain
Nanjing	2	15	cloudy
Shanghai	5	14	cloudy
Wuhan	3	10	drizzle
Hangzhou	3	14	cloudy
Taipei	13	19	cloudy
Guangzhou	12	20	cloudy
Hong Kong	15	19	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	1	3	cloudy
Frankfurt	3	13	moderate rain
Paris	5	12	moderate rain
London	4	11	drizzle
New York	2	4	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Grave; 5- Not quite right; 10- Capital of Norway; 14- Buck follower; 15- Circular water container; 16- Mormon state of western USA; 17- Paint unskillfully; 18- Roman general; 19- Lacking; 20- One of the Baldwins; 21- Queen of Egypt; 23- Where ___?; 25- Patsy; 26- Factional; 31- Short-tempered; 35- Luau instrument; 36- Academy award; 38- Refute by evidence; 40- Seizures; 42- Room at the top; 44- Came to; 45- Easily broken; 47- ___ bleu; 49- Smoking alternative; 50- Come to terms; 52- Unfinished detail; 54- Biblical beast boat; 56- Sunblock letters; 57- Petty thieves; 62- Floating ice; 66- Centrepiece of the human face; 67- Chocolate substitute; 68- Hog sound; 69- Warts and all; 70- Oklahoma city; 71- Network of nerves; 72- Curved; 73- Range rover; 74- General ___ chicken;

Friday's solution

E	T	T	U	T	O	O	L	S	E	T	A
R	E	I	N	A	S	K	E	W	H	A	A
A	B	T	A	S	A	R	A	H	E	R	T
S	H	O	W	S	K	A	I	T	A	L	I
P	E	R	I	L	S	A	P	H	I	R	E
T	O	T	E	M	O	N	C	E	E	R	A
A	S	H	S	T	E	E	R	A	V	E	
L	E	S	I	S	C	O	R	D	A	N	T
L	E	C	T	U	R	E	R	E	R	E	P
R	E	V	I	E	W	C	U	R	D	A	T
U	T	E	P	U	N	I	T	E	P	L	A
B	A	S	E	P	O	N	D	S	U	P	T
E	B	T	O	N	C	O	S	L	O	A	N





Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731	
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300	
IAM 28 387 333	
Tourism 28 333 000	
Airport 59 888 88	



<p>FOR SALE</p>  <p>Waterfront Duet Brand New Studio Apartment HK\$5,100,000 469 ft² 1</p>	<p>FOR RENT</p>  <p>Nam Long, Neat 2 Bed, Taipa \$11,800/mth 645 ft² 2 1</p>	<p>FOR SALE</p> <p>[Macau] One Central 2 2 2 1,269 ft² \$12,500,000 (ref: 19070002)</p> <p>[Macau] Loft apartment 2 2 2 2,220 ft² \$9,990,000 (ref: 15115464)</p> <p>[Taipa] Connected unit 4 2 2 1,404 ft² \$8,380,000 (ref: 19096006)</p> <p>[Coloane] Large apartment 2 3 2 2 2,530 ft² \$12,980,000 (ref: 19096000)</p>	<p>FOR RENT</p> <p>[Macau] Vai Fung Triplex 2 2 2 n/a \$15,800/mth (ref: 19121001)</p> <p>[Taipa] New Studio 1 470 ft² \$9,500/mth (ref: 19101002)</p> <p>[Taipa] One Bedroom 1 1 1 740 ft² \$10,900/mth (ref: 19101006)</p> <p>[Macau] Keng Ou office space 3 2,352 ft² \$38,000/mth (ref: 19096002)</p>
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Property of the Week



Waterfront Duet – Brand New Studio Apartment
HK\$5,100,000 469 ft² 1 🏠



Brand new studio apartment in Macau.

Occupancy permit to be issued in the first part of 2020. The studio is on a mid-level floor, and it's a great chance to own something brand yet relatively inexpensive. As a small property rental yields will be higher than the larger units, as will tax and building management fees.

A 30% deposit has been paid on the property, the buyer will be required to transfer the deposit plus any price increase.

Property Hotlist



Nam Long Apartment, Taipa Village
\$4,780,000
785 ft²
1 🏠 1 🏠



Va Fat Apartment, Taipa
\$4,380,000
725 ft²
2 🏠 1 🏠



Nam Long, Neat 2 Bed, Taipa
\$11,800/mth
645 ft²
2 🏠 1 🏠



Nova Grand Apartment, Taipa
\$17,800/mth
935 ft²
2 🏠 1 🏠



More Listings

For Sale

- [Macau] One Central 2 🏠 2 🏠 1,269 ft² **\$12,500,000** (ref: 19070002)
- [Macau] Loft apartment 2 🏠 2 🏠 2,220 ft² **\$9,990,000** (ref: 15115464)
- [Taipa] Connected unit 4 🏠 2 🏠 1,404 ft² **\$8,380,000** (ref: 19096006)
- [Coloane] Large apartment 2 🚗 3 🏠 2 🏠 2,530 ft² **\$12,980,000** (ref: 19096000)
- [Taipa] Manhattan 3 🏠 2 🏠 1,720 ft² **\$12,980,000** (ref: 19096006)

For Rent

- [Macau] Vai Fung Triplex 2 🏠 2 🏠 n/a **\$15,800/mth** (ref: 19121001)
- [Taipa] New Studio 1 🏠 470 ft² **\$9,500/mth** (ref: 19101002)
- [Taipa] One Bedroom 1 🏠 1 🏠 740 ft² **\$10,900/mth** (ref: 19101006)
- [Macau] Keng Ou office space 3 🏠 2,352 ft² **\$38,000/mth** (ref: 19096002)
- [Cotai] One Grantai 3 🏠 3 🏠 2,122 ft² **\$23,000/mth** (ref: 19030001RT)

Recent Movements

Sold Pearl on the Lough, 4 beds, Taipa



Sold Lakeview, Macau
3 beds, 3 baths



Rented Studio, Macau, 1 bath

JML Events



Cradle of Hope



Caritas Macau



Macau Bats Junior Rugby Team



Macau Golf Masters

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SKATING CHAMPION HANYU WINS FOUR CONTINENTS

TWO-TIME Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu won the men's free skate on Sunday to claim his first Four Continents figure skating title and complete a Japanese sweep of the men's and women's events.

Hanyu, first after the short program, received 187.60 points for a total of 299.42. Jason Brown of the United States was second in the free skate to finish second overall with 274.82 points while Japan's Yuma Kagiyama was third with 270.61 points.

Hanyu went into the free skate with a 15.99 point-lead after setting a world-record score in

the short program. He put his hand on the ice on the opening element of the free skate — a quad lutz — but quickly recovered to land a clean quad salchow.

Although he fell on the quad toeloop and it wasn't his most impressive free skate, Hanyu comfortably won by a wide margin to claim his first Four Continents title.

Japan's Rika Kihira claimed the women's title on Saturday.

China's Boyang Jin, who was second after the short program, fell to fourth place while local favorite Junhwan Cha of South Korea was fifth. AP

Ex-Olympic swim champ blames contamination for failed test

GERALD IMRAY

FORMER Olympic swimming champion Roland Schoeman said Saturday that contaminated supplements were responsible for him failing a doping test and being banned for a year.

Schoeman claimed in a statement that his positive test for metabolites of the substance GW501516 in May 2019 was likely down to contamination in "carefully selected" supplements he was taking at the time.

The South African said there were no problems with two doping tests he took before the failed test or two immediately after.

GW501516, also known as Cardarine or Endurobol, is banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency in the category of "hormones and metabolic modulators." WADA also alerted athletes in 2013 that it failed medical trials and was a toxic threat to health if used as a performance enhancer. It's a black market substance consid-



In this 2013 file photo, Roland Schoeman reacts after winning the Men's 50m Freestyle final at the Fina Swimming World Cup in Berlin

ered to be a cancer risk.

World swimming body FINA announced Wednesday that it had banned Schoeman for a year from May last year.

"It's important to note that FINA would normally apply an automatic two- or four-year ban for doping based on the evidence," Schoeman said in his statement. "I sat in Lausanne with FINA officials for over seven hours, answering any and all questions. It's testament to FINA's unders-

tanding that this was possibly inadvertent cross-contamination that I only received a one-year ban."

Schoeman said by the time he was notified of the failed test, "there was none of that month's supplement supply left" to check for contamination.

The 39-year-old Schoeman said he's still aiming to swim at the Tokyo Olympics this year. His ban ends on May 17. The Olympics start in late July.

Schoeman won three medals at the 2004 Athens Olympics including gold in the 4x100-meter freestyle relay. He's also a three-time world champion and broke four individual world records and the 4x100 freestyle world record with the South Africa team.

"Frankly, I disbelieved other athletes when they claimed contamination," Schoeman said. "I now know from painful experience that it isn't quite that simple." AP

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OPINION

Tax Matters

Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa



MAJOR CHANGES TO STAMP DUTY

The Legislative Assembly of Macau has passed a new law introducing substantial changes to the Stamp Duty ("SD") Regulations and Chart. The law was unanimously approved by lawmakers on 30 October 2019, but is still awaiting publication in the Official Gazette.

The seven envisaged changes are the following:

1) Abolition of fiscal stamps (estampilhas), in order to simplify the assessment and collection of the stamp duty, which will in the future be made by "payment receipt" (selo de verba) and through electronic means.

2) Elimination of several stamps from the SD Chart, which are outdated. E.g., stamp duty on the lease of movable assets subject to registration, on concession contracts, on donations inter vivos, on private written documents.

3) Clear identification of the tax subjects and of the payment deadlines. Regarding each act or fact subject to SD, the new law will specifically determine who will be the tax subjects that shall assess, charge and pay or deliver the payment of SD to the tax administration. Moreover, the law will set forth the relevant deadlines to fulfil the referred obligations.

4) Strengthening of the supervision and enforcement of the law by the tax administration, which translates into (i) much higher fines in cases of non-compliance; (ii) the imposition to the entities that collect SD to keep the documents and records of the operations for a period of five years; (iii) the release of credit institutions, insurance companies, legal practitioners, auditors, accountants, real estate agents and brokers, from their professional secrecy obligations, regarding SD obligations, if so requested by the tax administration services; (iv) the granting of powers to the tax administration's supervision officers to request the collaboration of the police and administrative authorities in case of need.

5) Simplification of the provisions for penalties. The existing provisions are revoked and some others are created setting forth penalties for non-compliance.

6) Changes to the SD on rental agreements. There are three major changes in this regard: (i) a special regime is created for refunding the excess of SD paid, in the case of agreements that terminate prior to the term agreed by the parties; (ii) in order to relieve the payment of SD vis-à-vis agreements that have a long term, a special regime is created to allow the landlords to pay the SD on an annual basis; (iii) aiming to promote the arbitrage in Macau and reduce the litigation in court, the law establishes a reduction to half of the SD that would be payable, if the contracting parties agree to subject any conflicts arising from the rental relationship to arbitrage.

7) The agreements for the use of shops in shopping centres will be subject to the payment of SD. The courts in Macau – both the Court of Second Instance and the Court of Final Appeal – had previously ruled that the lease of shops in shopping centres did not qualify as rental agreements and therefore should not be subject to the payment of SD. The view of the tax administration has always been that the economic substance is identical in these agreements and in the other lease agreements for the use of shops outside shopping centres. The Macau Government took this opportunity to change the law and establish that these agreements will be subject to the payment of SD, too, pursuant to the principle of equality.

The new law was approved by the Legislative Assembly in final version, but after more than three months it has not yet been published. Let's wait to see how it will be implemented.

The metagenome sequence of the novel coronavirus strain separated from pangolins was 99 percent identical to that from infected people, indicating pangolins may be an intermediate host of the virus, a study has found.

The study was led by South China Agricultural University. According to Liu Yahong, president of the university, the research team analyzed more than 1,000 metagenome samples of wild animals and found pangolins as the most likely intermediate host.

Results showed that pangolins are a potential intermediate host of the novel coronavirus, Liu said, adding that the research

will support the prevention and control of the epidemic, as well as offer scientific reference for policies on wild animals.

Shen Yongyi, a professor with the university and a member of the research team, said previous research had found the novel coronavirus originated in bats, but as the current outbreak happened in winter, it was unlikely that people had been directly infected by bats, which are hibernating.

"So our task is to find the intermediate host that 'bridges' bats and people," Shen said.

Shen said there are usually multiple intermediate hosts, and pangolins might just be one of them.



CRYPTO SPHERE BEGINS TO FEEL ILL EFFECTS OF VIRUS

OLGA KHARIF

The coronavirus outbreak in Asia is starting to ripple through the cryptocurrency world in some unanticipated ways - the cancellation of conferences and even the shuttering of facilities that process transactions.

From the informal MeetUps held during the initial days of Bitcoin to the extravaganzas at the height of the crypto bubble, gatherings have been a key for wooing investors. NiTRON2020 in Seoul, Hong Kong Blockchain Week 2020 and Token2049 have been postponed.

Crypto lending startup DeFiner was reported to have canceled a 10-city tour investor because of the epidemic that has swept through parts

of China. Mining pool BTC.top, whose computers help verify transactions, said one of its server farms was shut down by Chinese authorities seeking to prevent the virus from spreading. Equipment makers including MicroBT, a maker of gear used by mining farms, said they are delaying shipments.

"Events like the coronavirus are unfortunately going to be more 'normal' than 'black swan' over the coming decades," said Dave Balter, chief executive officer at researcher Flipside Crypto. "The impact on specific industries will be felt, but that will become part of the new normal."

Whether the virus is affecting coin prices has been debated since the beginning of the outbreak. Advocates say it's helped raise the

haven appeal of cryptocurrencies, while skeptics cite a lack of strong correlations with other asset classes. The Bloomberg Galaxy Crypto Index has jumped 60% since December.

China has been epicenter for the crypto sector almost since the introduction of Bitcoin in 2009. Twenty of the top 50 crypto exchanges are based in the Asia-Pacific region and accounted for about 40% of Bitcoin transactions in the first half of 2019, according to data from Chainalysis. Within the region, the most exchanges are in China, the research firm found.

Five mining entities - all of them based in China - control about 50% of all computing power on the Bitcoin network, analysis from TokenAnalyst found. **BLOOMBERG**



Israel The Israeli military blocked Palestinian agricultural exports yesterday in the latest escalation of a monthslong trade war that comes amid fears of renewed violence as well. The military said it would not allow the Palestinians to transfer their products through their land crossing to Jordan. *More on p11*



Spain confirmed its second case of the new virus from China, and a plane evacuating more than 200 people from the Chinese city at the center of the epidemic landed yesterday in Britain. The coronavirus case was detected in Mallorca, a popular vacation island in the Mediterranean Sea, Spain's National Microbiology Center said. *More on p8*



UK Trains, flights and ferries have been cancelled and weather warnings issued across the United Kingdom and elsewhere in northern Europe yesterday as Storm Ciara, named by the Met Office national weather agency, battered the region with hurricane-level winds.



Zambia At a Chinese-run hospital in Zambia, some employees watched as people who recently returned from China showed up with coughs but were not placed in isolation. A doctor tending to those patients has stopped coming to work, and health workers have been ordered not to speak publicly about the new virus that has killed hundreds around the world.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Ardhy Fernando/Xinhua



Hometown tradition. People perform a lion dance during a Cap Go Meh Festival celebration held by the Chinese community in Padang of West Sumatra, Indonesia. The Cap Go Meh Festival, also known as Lantern Festival, is celebrated on the 15th day of the Chinese Lunar New Year.