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Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre

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A THIRD COVID-19 PATIENT WAS DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL LEAVING THE NUMBER OF CASES IN MACAU AT SEVEN

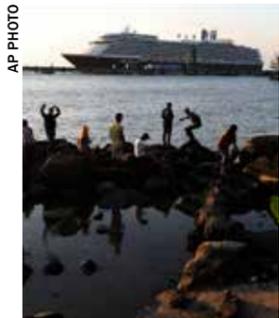
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CHINA'S NEW HK, MACAU BOSS USED TO RIP CROSSES FROM CHURCHES

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MGM RESORTS INTERNATIONAL'S LONGTIME CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER JIM MURREN PLANS TO STEP DOWN

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Cambodia A cruise ship that had been stranded at sea for about two weeks after being refused entry by four Asian governments because of virus fears finally docked yesterday in Cambodia. Cambodia agreed to let the MS Westerdam dock at the port of Sihanoukville after Thailand barred it on Wednesday, following similar bans by Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines. They kept the ship away over concerns that it would expose them to the new virus from China.

China Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. warned that the coronavirus responsible for killing more than 1,300 people in China is exerting a fundamental impact on the country's consumers and merchants, and will hurt its revenue growth in the current quarter. Alibaba said the virus is undermining production in the economy because many workers can't get to or perform their jobs. It has also changed buying patterns with consumers pulling back on discretionary spending, including travel and restaurants.

Japan A powerful earthquake hit off Japan's northern coast yesterday, but there were no reports of serious damage or injuries and no danger of a tsunami, officials said. The meteorological agency said the quake measured a preliminary magnitude of 7 and was located far off the northeastern coast of Hokkaido. It was centered 60 kilometers below the ocean's surface and east of Etorofu island, a Russian-held island that is also claimed by Japan.

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BLOOMBERG

COVID-19 CRISIS

GOV'T LAUNCHES PROACTIVE ECONOMIC SUPPORT

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BEIJING REPORTS SPIKE IN VIRUS CASES, DISMISSES PROVINCIAL HEADS

AP PHOTO



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GOV'T LAUNCHES ECONOMY RELIEF MEASURES

RENATO MARQUES

The government announced yesterday a raft of financial measures aiming to make the recovery for both local residents and companies easier in the coming months.

The Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, made the announcement at the daily press conference of the New Coronavirus Contingency Coordination Center, used to update the media on the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) situation.

"The Macau government is aware of the uncertainties felt by the population during this epidemic, and the best solution for this problem is to face it by promoting measures to mitigate the pressure felt [by the population]," Lei said before presenting five groups of measures, including initiatives that aim to support residents, companies in general, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), among others.

Regarding the population, the pack of measures being proposed by the government will include about 70% of the Professional Tax being returned up to a ceiling of 20,000 patacas. Formerly the rate that was returned by the govern-

ANTHONY LAM



ment was 60%.

Meanwhile, the percentage deducted from taxable income will also be raised from 25% to 30%.

According to Lei, the measures will directly benefit some 170,000 to 180,000 residents, the same number that will benefit from property tax exemptions for the housing units.

A double issuing of health vouchers in the amount of 600 patacas this year, an exemption from the payment of electricity and water bills for a period of three months (March through May inclusive) and the issuing of a special electronic voucher (e-voucher)

worth 3,000 patacas to all Macau residents to stimulate spending at local stores are among the measures being introduced by the government.

Questioned on how the e-voucher will work, Lei said that it would be through a Macau Pass card that will be issued to each Macau resident that can be used for payments of as much as 300 patacas per day. The balance on the card will only be valid for a period of three months.

"This measure aims to support the SMEs of different sectors so they can continue to operate and offer more jobs to local residents,"

Lei said. He added that work on the e-vouchers had already begun and that the cards would be distributed "whenever we are in a more stable situation."

Families receiving subsidies from the Social Welfare Bureau will also be issued a double subsidy in September to complement one that will be advanced in March.

Questioned by the media on this, Lei said that the government has not established a ceiling for the cost of electricity or water bills, calling on the people to make rational use of the help that has been provided by the government.

There will also be benefits announced for companies under rules for exemption from payment of the tourism tax of 5% for all companies for a period of six months. This includes hotels, restaurants, bars, clubs, spas, karaokes, gyms, and other tourism-related services, under a measure that affects a total of 864 establishments, according to the Secretary.

All commercial vehicles will also be exempt from paying the Road Tax this year, including logistics vehicles, taxis, and travel agency vehicles, among others.

Some 3,000 SMEs will benefit from a tax reduction by allowing these companies increase their deduction ceiling from the complementary income tax to 300,000 patacas.

Additionally, SMEs that started operating less than two years ago also meet the criteria to apply for a special financial support loan of up to 600,000 patacas, which is to be paid back within eight years interest-free.

Several commercial licenses, inspection fees, and stamp duties for companies will also be waived by the government in an attempt to ease the burden of administrative taxes as well as bureaucratic processes.

Third patient discharged from hospital, confirmed cases drop to 7

RENATO MARQUES

A third coronavirus patient was discharged from hospital yesterday afternoon, the clinical director of Conde de São Januário Hospital Center (CHCSJ), Doctor Lei Wai Seng, informed during yesterday's daily press conference, leaving the number of confirmed cases in Macau now at seven.

The patient, a 56-year-old woman from Wuhan was considered to meet the conditions to be discharged and left the CHCSJ yesterday at around 4 p.m., Lei said.

The woman, who had

arrived in Macau on January 23 and initially tested negative for the virus, was one of the cases retested after 48 hours and found to be infected.

"After 17 days of treatment in which we used steroids and also assisted breathing equipment she showed improvements in her situation," Lei explained, adding, "According to the radiological scan that we made her lungs do not show any symptoms [...] and so she was discharged from the hospital."

According to the clinical director of CHCSJ, the patient has already settled her treat-

ment bill, which totaled MOP52,000.

At the moment seven patients remain under the care of the public hospital. Health authorities say that all of them are in a good condition and should be discharged soon.

Although it has been nine days since the last new case of the virus was reported in Macau, the screening of people considered potential risks will continue.

According to Lei, in the 24 hours leading to yesterday's press conference, the Health Bureau (SSM) had tested 387 samples collected from

people deemed to have the highest risk of being infected, such as shuttle bus drivers.

"We have tested over 400 [shuttle bus] drivers. We already have the results of over 200 of these cases and all came out negative. We will continue with this plan although we have not found anyone with symptoms," said Lei.

The SSM is also testing patients that are hospitalized for clinical reasons other than the coronavirus to ensure that there are no concealed cases and that patients in normal hospital wards will not infect other people.

FOURTH ROUND OF MASKS SELLING MIGHT COME FROM SPECIAL GBA SUPPLIER

Two days into the third round of face masks distribution organized by the government, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao Ieong U has announced that the government is already planning a fourth round, which it intends to source from a new production unit supplying the entire Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA).

"Through a local taskforce team, we are preparing a production chain in the mainland that will supply masks to the Greater Bay. We hope that in the fourth round of the mask sale we can supply masks produced and supplied by this [production] chain," Ao Ieong said, adding that the announce-

ment of fourth round would be made in a timely fashion.

For the time being, the Secretary said that this fourth round is a "preliminary proposal."

Ao Ieong also hinted that the government is working on guidelines to be distributed to both casino staff and civil servants ahead of a potential return to operations of both sectors. The official said that the authorities are studying the possibility of reopening these two sectors by February 19, but that it was still undecided.

On the same topic, the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong said, "we will only reopen [the casinos] when it is safe to do so." **RM**

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RENATO MARQUES

THE recent and dramatic change in local weather is unlikely to influence the ability of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) to spread, the Macau health authorities have informed.

Despite the rain and foggy conditions typical of the Macau springtime, health officials say "there is no evidence at the moment that relates a faster spread of virus [to] different environment or temperature conditions."

Specialists from Macau's Health Bureau (SSM) remarked that so far, what is known about the virus indicates that it is self-sustaining and can spread in all weather conditions, as the number of different countries and regions currently affected shows.

The topic has been addressed several times and experts interviewed by media outlets seem unable to reach a consensus on the matter.

Amesh Adalja, an infectious diseases physician and senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security who has mostly dealt with the coronavirus that causes Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), has been quoted saying that this type of virus "doesn't have that seasona-

Health authorities: foggy weather unlikely to influence virus spread



lity [that usually happens with flu viruses] because it's an animal to human virus and not something that that you see causing disease in a seasonal pattern."

Nevertheless, he notes that Covid-19 seems to act more like a

seasonal cold.

"We've seen, basically, explosive spread inside China of person-to-person transmission, so in that sense it is behaving like a common-cold causing coronavirus," says Adalja.

Based on this, he believes that "seasonality will play a role," and that as the outbreak unfolds and we approach spring and summer it is likely that we will see a reduction in cases.

A similar opinion was expres-

sed the director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Anthony Fauci.

"It's not unreasonable to assume that cases will die down come spring," Fauci said, adding, "We hope when the weather gets warmer it will diminish a bit. However, we don't know that about this [new] coronavirus. We don't have a backlog of history."

Another expert taking a cautious approach was Nancy Messonnier from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Regarding the possibility that warmer weather conditions will contribute to a slowdown in cases, she said, "I think it's premature to assume that. We haven't been through even a single year with this pathogen."

Messonier added that due the degree of uncertainty with this new virus, public health officials must plan for the unexpected and for the possibility that the outbreak will continue regardless of the weather conditions.

Schools not following DSEJ special instructions, claims Sulu Sou

CONTRARY to the instructions issued by the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau (DSEJ), that education during the Covid-19 outbreak should focus on revision, some schools are giving their students tests, lawmaker Sulu Sou has said.

The education regulator has repeatedly stated that despite the special school suspension, education can be conducted through online channels. The special school suspension period will count as school days, eliminating the need to shorten the summer holiday in compensation for the lost time.

Later, the Bureau issued an instruction that "classes" conducted during the suspension period should focus on revision rather than teaching students new knowledge.

Afterwards, the education bureau stressed that although students should be revising, no tests or examinations should be conducted in any form



Lawmaker Sulu Sou (middle right) and New Macau Association President Kam Sut Leng (middle left)

during the outbreak.

All of these instructions were given so that schools would not be pressured to make progress in their teaching plans, as is stipulated in the legal Curriculum Framework and the Basic Knowledge Requirement.

However, Sou obtained information that a secondary school had arranged an online English test for its students. Meanwhile, a primary school has assigned its students a worksheet on an untaught chapter.

The lawmaker found

discrepancies between the government's instructions and the actual implementation. The finding was noted right after Sou's meeting with the education regulator.

On February 11, in a meeting with the DSEJ, the lawmaker presented complaints that the bureau's requirements had increased the burden on educators.

The DSEJ, in response, stressed that the brief school suspension period does not pose an enormous threat to a student's 15-year education. They

should utilize this opportunity to educate themselves about epidemic prevention measures.

The education regulator also instructed schools to continue with the legally stipulated curriculum into the following term or semester.

Extracurricular competitions have also been affected by the outbreak. The DSEJ has postponed many, with others canceled. It will continue to monitor the situation in order to evaluate suitable dates for their commencement. **AL**

COMPLAINTS ABOUT FACEMASK RESELLING RECEIVED BY HEALTH AUTHORITY

THE Health Bureau (SSM) has confirmed reports that facemasks sold under the administration by the government are being resold to people at a higher price.

These reports, according to the health regulator, were made by associations helping the government with mask sales.

In response, the SSM strongly condemned such activities.

The Public Security Police Force (PSP) has confirmed that it will step up its efforts to monitor and deter mask reselling, although it has not received any reports so far.

The police force is still reviewing what types of charges can be pressed against local residents reselling government masks. On the contrary, if foreign workers are selling masks obtained from government sources, they may be violating stipulations in the Foreign Labor Law.

The SSM has recently become aware of reselling activities in the Iao Hon District.

Ten masks were being sold for MOP35, when they can be acquired at legal distributors at the government's price of MOP8.

Meanwhile, during the first phase of mask sales, there were reports that ID data had been misappropriated for the purchase of masks. The PSP revealed that as of February 11, a total of 30 reports of such activities have been received. Of these cases, two have been solved, 12 are under investigation and 12 were caused by human error.

If the ID data of a resident was erroneously entered into the computer system or was simply misappropriated, the affected resident can be rebated with the corresponding quantity of masks.

The SSM also reminds residents that no free masks will be offered at the entrance of government medical facilities, such as health centers and the Conde S. Januário Hospital. Residents visiting these venues should supply their own masks. **AL**



LONGTIME CEO JIM MURREN TO STEP DOWN FROM MGM

CHRISTOPHER PALMERI

MGM Resorts International's longtime chairman and chief executive officer, Jim Murren, plans to step down before his contract expires - departing as the casino company copes with fallout from the deadly coronavirus.

Murren, 58, will remain on the job until a successor is named, the company said Wednesday in a statement. He's held the post since 2008 and has been with MGM since 1998. On a conference call, Murren said he would remain involved in efforts to win a casino license in Japan.

"Our growth areas of sports betting, Japan and entertainment have never looked better," he said. "Our bench of management talent is deep."

Separately, MGM on Wednesday withdrew its earnings forecast for 2020, citing the impact of the virus on its casinos in Macau and Las Vegas. That sent the shares down as much as 5.8% to \$31.70 in extended trading. They were up 1.2% this year through Wednesday's close in New York.

The company, fresh off the sale of some of its last remaining real estate, said the virus has made its outlook "unpredictable." To placate investors, MGM announced a \$3 billion share repurchase, including a \$1.25 billion tender offer starting Thursday, and raised its dividend 15%.

Like other casino owners in the Chinese enclave of Macau, MGM Resorts shut its operations there this month under a government order. That's led to a loss of business - all while the company has to keep paying staff and maintaining its properties. Last year, MGM got about 27% of its revenue from Macau, the largest gambling market in the world.

Even before the coronavirus hit, business in Macau was already hurting because of the political unrest in Hong Kong and trade tensions between the U.S. and China. Gaming revenue in the region fell 8.4% industrywide in the final three months of 2019.

BACCARAT PLAYERS

Las Vegas, where MGM is the biggest operator, is also taking a hit as fewer Asian baccarat players travel to the U.S. Profits from those customers were about \$100 million lower in 2019 than they had been the year before, the company told investors.

MGM had previously forecast as much as \$3.9 billion in earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization for 2020. The company spent about \$10 million in the fourth quarter on its sports-betting business, which includes a joint venture with GVC Holdings Plc. Profitability in that business may not come until 2025, MGM President Bill Hornbuckle said on the call.

The Chinese government clo-

sed Macau's casinos for a 15-day period that began Feb. 5, although Matt Maddox, CEO of rival Wynn Resorts Ltd., told investors last week there's no certainty as to when they will reopen. Wynn said it is losing about \$2.5 million a day in Macau. MGM put its figure at \$1.5 million a day.

To boost returns, Murren spearheaded MGM Resorts' "asset light" strategy, by selling its real estate while continuing to operate the properties. Previously announced transactions are

expected to bring in net cash proceeds of \$8.2 billion, including the still-to-close sale of the MGM Grand hotel in Las Vegas.

KERKORIAN ERA

Murren joined the company when it was under the control of founder and billionaire Kirk Kerkorian, who died in 2015, and he was the force behind CityCenter, the massive Las Vegas Strip development that opened in 2009, during the financial crisis. He's also led the company's current effort to open a resort in Japan.

In October, the company named Keith Meister, the founder of Corvex Management LP, to its board, an acknowledgment that activist investors have been pres-

uring the hotel-casino operator to boost returns.

Murren was also instrumental in bringing professional sports to Las Vegas. He was involved in the building of T-Mobile Arena and bringing the Golden Knights, Aces and Raiders to the city.

An independent board committee is conducting the search for his successor, the company said.

Earnings for the fourth quarter of 2019, excluding some items, totaled 8 cents a share, missing the 25-cent average of analysts' estimates. The company cited weaker than expected results in Macau and the related softness in Las Vegas. Revenue, at \$3.2 billion, met projections. **BLOOMBERG**

MGM CHINA REPORTS REVENUE GROWTH OF 19% LAST YEAR

MGM China Holdings saw its revenue grow 19% to approximately HKD22.8 billion in 2019, according to unaudited financial data released yesterday, while adjusted EBITDA grew by 28% year-on-year to approximately HKD6.2 billion.

During the 12 months ended December 31, the Macau casino operator recorded notable growth in mass table win, which increased 37% in year-on-year terms. Meanwhile, slots win was up just 1% compared with 2018 and VIP table win was flat, according to MGM China.

The casino operator said it saw approximately 86% of profit from non-VIP businesses last year.

Full-year market share rose to 9.5% up from 7.9% in 2019, the highest level in five years.

MGM's second Macau property, MGM Cotai, continues to ramp since it opened to the public in February 2018. Adjusted EBITDA at the property was up 177% to HKD2.4 billion. Main

floor table games win grew 77% year-on-year to approximately HKD6.9 billion, slot win was up 41% to HKD1 billion, and VIP table games win was up 220% to approximately HKD4 billion.

Meanwhile, the company said that the peninsula-based property MGM Macau "remains resilient and generated solid profit."

Accounting for about one-third of overall Macau gross gaming revenue, MGM Macau saw a 4% dip in adjusted EBITDA to HKD3.8 billion last year. The property completed a seven-month renovation on the casino floor in the final quarter of 2019, part of a long-term optimization project that will continue in future, according to MGM China.

The hotels at the two Macau properties were closed in response to the Chief Executive's decision to temporarily suspend all gaming and entertainment activities until February 20, the company said in the financial statement. **DB**

Taiwan requests removal from Philippines' China travel ban

LYNZY VALLES

TAIWAN has requested that the Philippines remove the Chinese island from temporary travel restrictions targeting China, noting that it was "wrongly included" in the blanket ban designed to prevent spread of the novel coronavirus.

Amid the ongoing outbreak that has killed over 1,300 patients, several countries and regions have imposed travel bans, particularly on China, to limit the outbreak.

With the exception of the Philippines, no other countries in Asia have issued a travel ban on Taiwan. Thus, Taiwan has expressed "grave concern" about its inclusion in the ban.

Philippine authorities previously said that the travel ban – which applied to China and its SARs – would include Taiwan, as the region is listed under China in the World Health Organization (WHO) list.

In a statement released on Wednesday by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Manila, the office condemned the temporary travel ban, stressing that Taiwan is a sovereign and independent state.

"It is a factual error for WHO to regard Taiwan as a part of [the] P.R.C. The Philippines should not be misled by WHO's wrong information on Taiwan. We urge the Philippine government to immediately correct its decision on Taiwan and remove Taiwan from the travel ban," the statement read.

The state also clarified that it has taken measures to contain the spread of Covid-19.

AP PHOTO



In response, the Philippine government said it would look into the appeal to lift the inclusion of Taiwan in the temporary travel ban.

There are currently 18 confirmed coronavirus cases in Taiwan and no fatalities, compared to Hong Kong's 49 confirmed cases.

There are only seven remaining cases in Macau, a much lower number compared to the other two regions, yet the city was included in the Philippines' and Taiwan's travel bans.

Nearly 1,200 Macau stu-

dents were unable to return to Taiwan to resume their studies after the Taiwanese government suspended Hong Kong and Macau residents' entry to the territory.

Macau's inclusion in the Philippines' ban is because the semi-autonomous territory is a special administrative region of China and is listed by WHO as such. The travel restriction has affected hundreds of passengers in Macau, particularly tourists from the Philippines visiting their families here.

As reported by the Times yesterday, 134 distressed Fi-

lipinos have called on their government to provide a chartered flight to take them back home.

This group has submitted a petition to the Philippine Consulate to ask for assistance. Last week, some of them turned to social media to plead for help, as they are running out of money and time. There are still several Filipinos stranded in the SAR who have not made themselves known to the consulate. Some are just waiting for the travel ban to be lifted, and are hoping that this will occur before their visas expire.

TEMPERATURES TO DROP AS LOW AS 10 DEGREES NEXT WEEK

At the beginning of next week, the minimum temperature will drop to around 10 degrees Celsius, according to weather forecast by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG). The air temperature will drop significantly on Sunday, February 16, as the region will be affected by a strong winter monsoon. The local weather will be cold and dry. Due to disturbances in the upper air, it will remain showery with some thunderstorms today and tomorrow. The public are advised to be aware of the change in weather and keep themselves warm. Tomorrow's weather is said to be cloudy with occasional showers and a few thunderstorms. Temperatures will range between 18 C and 22 C.

MORE PARTIES DONATE TO MACAU AND MAINLAND CHINA

More individuals and groups have raised funds and donated facemasks to Macau and mainland China. Ou Mun Páng Ip Chek Ip Cong Vui, a local Macau scaffolding association, raised over 40,000 patacas to be donated to mainland China. Nam Yue (Group) Company Limited donated 100,000 facemasks to the Macau SAR government. Meg-Star donated 10 million patacas to mainland China in addition to other medical supplies. Fukien Women Association of Macau and members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference of Fujian Province donated 20,000 and 29,000 facemasks respectively to the SAR government.

FSS PAYS OLD-AGE AND DISABILITY PENSIONS TODAY

The Social Security Fund (FSS) has announced that old-age pension or disability pension applicants who received approval notices in January this year will receive their payments today. The FSS appeals to the people concerned to cooperate with the SAR government's epidemic prevention recommendations, to stay at home, and to refrain from going to banks to "update their passbooks" because of this. The FSS also said that the number of working days from January 30 will not count towards the application period of various benefits and allowances, and that residents should wait until public services return to normal before applying. In addition, beneficiaries of the old-age and disability pensions can provide proof of life until the end of March without affecting the normal payment of benefits in April. The FSS reiterated that the payment deadline for contributions for the fourth quarter of 2019, the employment fee for non-resident workers, and contributions of casual workers for December 2019 will be extended to February 28 and that any late payments will be exempt from interest and fines.

TDM denies allegations staff were asked to take unpaid leave

PUBLIC broadcaster TDM has denied allegations that it asked some of its employees to take unpaid leave following the outbreak of Covid-19.

To deter the spread of the virus, the government has implemented several measures, which includes encouraging companies to avoid sending workers living in mainland China across the border for work.

Recently, information about workers being required to take unpaid leave circulated on social media.

According to Portuguese newspaper Hoje Macau, the president of TDM's Executive Council, Manuel Pires, has denied the allegations, calling them rumors. Pires said that the company had only received requests for unpaid leave.

"There were no unpaid

leave orders that were imposed on workers. I admit that there have been requests from workers to take unpaid leave, but I do not recall any cases. I guarantee that the company did not ask anyone to take an unpaid vacation," Pires told Hoje Macau.

However, he admitted that there were employees living in the neighboring region that were asked take days of

vacation leave while they are unable to go to work.

"I admit that there are cases where the superiors agreed with the workers so that they could take vacation days during this situation," Pires added.

On another note, amid the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, the official said that workers who came from the mainland during the Chinese New Year period

did not undergo a 14-day quarantine period due to the company's workload.

Although the situation may have caused discomfort for some workers who would have preferred that their colleagues be sent home, he assured that they were required to wear masks in the newsroom.

"Unfortunately, we cannot afford to have these workers isolated for 14 days, because we have a service that never stops," Pires said.

TDM's Executive Council did not immediately reply to a Times enquiry on the matter yesterday. LV



HKEX FACES TOUGH YEAR WITH CHINA LINKS IN FLUX

HONG Kong's exchange faces a challenging year as the spreading coronavirus chokes off deals, adding more urgency to its efforts to convince Beijing to further open its markets and cement the bourse's role as a gateway to China's corporate giants.

With deal makers stranded at home and large parts of the Chinese economy under lock down, no initial public offerings have priced since mid-January after an initial flurry, posing an early challenge for Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Ltd. to retain its spot as the world's No. 1 IPO market.

News this week that Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., which made a big splash last year with a \$13 billion listing in the city, won't be able to join the trading link between Hong Kong and mainland

China also underscored the difficulties the bourse faces in forging closer connections with investors in the world's second-largest economy. That strategy is seen as key to its future growth after last year's failed bid for London's stock exchange.

"There's always uncertainty and the market knows that China never committed to anything," said Chi Man Wong, a Hong Kong-based analyst at China Galaxy International Financial Holdings Ltd. "Most of the time Hong Kong is ready, and it all depends on China."

Other initiatives such as Primary Connect, which will allow Chinese investors to subscribe to Hong Kong IPOs and vice versa, and ETF Connect, are still both up in the air and at the mercy of Chinese policy makers.

Alibaba's secondary listing was a big win for the exchange and raised hopes that more of China's biggest companies would go the same route. The company's exclusion from Stock Connect stems from an undisclosed agreement between Hong Kong and the mainland exchanges to keep companies with secondary listings and weighted voting rights out.

"It's up to regulators on both sides to agree on stock connect inclusions, and it's usually the Chinese side which needs more time to think," said Andrew Lam, director of BDO Hong Kong. "Especially with the coronavirus outbreak right now, any policy unrelated to virus control has to give way."

An exchange spokesman said "there have been no recent deve-

lopments in how Stock Connect is structured. HKEX continues to support all developments that it believes to be in the best interests of the region's financial markets, investors and issuers."

While deals may be in question, the virus-stoked market gyrations caused trading volumes to more than double so far this year. A respite from the 19% plunge last year as the city was rocked by pro-democracy protests, which are still showing no signs of ending.

Sharnie Wong, an analyst with Bloomberg Intelligence, said in a recent report that the volatility stemming from the virus outbreak could "boost" the exchange's first-quarter earnings.

Its top spot in IPOs last year can to a large degree be ascribed to major reforms two years ago, which allowed companies with dual

class structures to sell shares and lifted a ban on secondary listings by Chinese companies.

Stock Connect, and the demand it has created since coming online more than five years ago, is also a big part of that success. The link allows Chinese investors to buy about \$15 billion in shares in Hong Kong a day, offering a key route around the nation's capital controls for mainland investors.

Underscoring the importance of Stock Connect, Charles Li, the exchange's chief executive officer, said in an interview with Bloomberg Television in 2017 that "a pure Hong Kong listing would probably not be compelling" when asked about the potential for luring the mega IPO of Saudi Aramco.

Companies included in Hong Kong's Hang Seng Composite Index are qualified for the link. But the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges have the final say on which Hong Kong stocks are eligible for Chinese buying, while Hong Kong decides on flows into the city. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

HONG KONG

Schools won't reopen before at least March 16

DANIELA WEI

HONG Kong will extend school closures at least to March 16 due to concerns about the spread of coronavirus, Secretary for Education Kevin Yeung said in a briefing yesterday.

"We are continuing to listen to medical professionals," Yeung said. "We will announce the date to resume school when all conditions are satisfied."

The third and final secondary school placement exam for Grade 6 primary school students will be canceled, he said. As of now, the written university entrance exams

taken by graduating high school students are still scheduled for March 27. The government will decide by the end of February whether to postpone those as well.

The city's students haven't gone to school since the scheduled Lunar New Year break began in late January. Before they returned, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announced that schools would stay closed through at least March 2 in response to the viral outbreak.

Parents have been anticipating - and dreading - extended closures. The University of Hong Kong said earlier this week that it wouldn't resume on-campus instruction until

the end of March at the earliest.

Yeung said the city might consider delaying summer vacation to make up for the lost class time, and encouraged students to continue online and virtual learning while schools are closed.

Hong Kong has 50 confirmed coronavirus cases and is on the front lines of the now-global battle to contain the illness, which has claimed more than 1,300 lives in mainland China since emerging in December. Nearly 60,000 people in China have been diagnosed with the virus, most in Hubei Province, where the outbreak began. **BLOOMBERG**

HONG KONG

LANDLORDS START TO SLASH RETAIL RENTS AS VIRUS BITES

SHAWNA KWAN

HONG Kong's biggest landlords have begun to slash rents for their commercial tenants as retailers struggle amid the spreading coronavirus.

Sun Hung Kai Properties Ltd., the city's largest developer by market value, will reduce rents for February by 30% to as much as 50% for some of its mall tenants to help them ride out the impact from the disease, the company said in a statement Wednesday.

Wharf Real Estate Investment Co. annou-

nced a similar move for its Harbour City shopping center, dropping this month's rents by half, Apple Daily reported.

Retailers in Hong Kong have been under immense pressure since last year's anti-government protests, which oftentimes turned violent and brought the city to a halt. Retail sales slumped 19% in December, the 11th straight monthly decline, latest data from the government show. The increasing number of confirmed coronavirus cases is keeping most people off the streets, resulting

in greatly reduced foot traffic.

Mainland Chinese visitors, who used to come to Hong Kong to buy everything from luxury watches to discount cosmetics, plunged 53% in December from a year earlier. That's set to fall even further after the government said it will start to quarantine people arriving from across the border.

Other landlords including Swire Properties Ltd. and MTR Corp. said Wednesday they would continue to provide rental-relief measures that have been in place since last year. **BLOOMBERG**

HEESU LEE AND SAM KIM

NORTH KOREA

Kim Jong Un's ski resort ambitions are melting

CLIMATE change and the coronavirus are threatening Kim Jong Un's ambition to ski his way out of international sanctions.

The North Korean leader, who once went to school in Switzerland, has made tourism a centerpiece of his economic vision since taking power almost a decade ago, building ski resorts to attract winter-sports enthusiasts and hard currency.

But with the coronavirus spreading in China, Kim has shut the border to his neighbor, cutting off the largest group of tourists to North Korea. Worse still, like other snow centers from the French Alps to Japan, North Korea is falling victim to changing Arctic weather patterns that are warming winters and reducing the levels of snow on lower slopes.

North Korea, a mountainous country roughly at the same latitude as Colorado, reported this month that higher-than-usual temperatures are causing "abnormal climatic phenomena." South Korea's weather office says average temperatures in its northern neighbor will probably rise 15% by 2040 from 1981-2010 levels.

"North Korea will face the same challenges posed by global warming," said Kong Woo-seok, a geography professor at Seoul's Kyung Hee University. "The question lies in whether each country has the infrastructure and the social system to cope with these changes. In this regard, North Korea could be more vulnerable than others."

Kim built his first ski resort in an eastern valley called Masikryong in 2013, two years after taking power, and has visited the coastal area frequently. He plans to extend the project to a 260-mile-long tourism belt that would cost almost \$8 billion in the next five years.

Masikryong, with just 17 kilometers of slopes, has a top elevation of 1,363 meters, putting it at the same height as some of the lower slopes in Europe, and more than 2,000 meters below the top of Aspen in Colorado.

The North Korean complex came under the spotlight in 2014 when the nation released a photo of Kim taking a solo ride up the mountain on a three-decade-old chair lift supplied by China after sanctions had reportedly blocked Western companies from selling luxury equipment to the country.

Guests of the resort have included former NBA star Dennis Rodman and Japanese pro-wrestler-turned-lawmaker Antonio Inoki. Last year, a group of South Korean skiers went there for training ahead of South Korea's Pyeongchang Winter Olympics as part of reconciliation efforts.

Christian, a 39-year-old skier who asked to be identified only by his first name for fear of being banned from North Korea, said

BLOOMBERG



Masikryong Ski Resort in North Korea

his trip to Masikryong a year ago almost got canceled because the resort told him it might close due to a "really bad snow season."

"We were lucky that the resort was open when we got there," he said by email.

Masikryong isn't North Korea's only ski resort. Near the town of Samjiyon bordering China, where residents celebrate winter with ice sculptures that resemble everything from missiles to torches, North Korea is hoping to finish rebuilding another complex by the end of this year.

And in Yangdok, a snowy town 60 kilometers northeast of the capital Pyongyang, Kim attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony in December to mark the completion of a third facility, featuring hot springs and a horse racetrack. Two months later, a North Korean website said residents of the town were "enjoying happiness and civilization not imaginable even in the Garden of Eden."

Kim's enthusiasm for luxury resorts isn't just about propaganda. The growing number of tourists from around the world seeking new adventures, and the rapid increase in international travelers from neighboring China present a valuable potential source of foreign reserves.

A seven-night trip including visa, return flights from Beijing on Air Koryo and accommodation in Pyongyang and Masikryong costs from 1,495 Euro (\$1,632), according to travel company Uri Tours Inc.

Some 200,000 Chinese tourists visited North Korea in 2018, a North Korean tourism official told Chinese news agency Xinhua.

That number of Chinese visitors would spend a total of \$152 million on average globally, according to calculations based on Nielsen data. Their contribution would be a sizable chunk of the \$240 million the nation earned in exports.

While that number may drop this year due to the coronavirus outbreak, the economic potential remains large, with even the chance of South Korean visitors increasing.

Last month President Moon Jae-in said South Korea could restart tourism to North Korea, as he pledged to help alleviate the standoff between Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump after their

failed summit in Hanoi last year.

His proposal quickly drew a U.S. warning to proceed with caution as it could end up breaching sanctions imposed on North Korea.

North Korea attracted more than 2 million South Korean tourists before the cross-border project ended in 2008, when a woman visiting a North Korean mountain resort was fatally shot after wandering close to a military facility.

Kim has renewed his emphasis on "self-reliance" since his failed summit with Trump, moving forward with tourism and other projects. He is mobilizing some of his 1.2-million Korean People's Army to build resorts.

Stationary cable cars at the summit of the 1,360-metre Taehwa Peak at Masikryong Ski Resort.

Ralph, another skier from Germany who also wished to be identified by his first name for the same reason, visited Masikryong in March 2018 and said the resort was on a par with his favorite destinations in Switzerland, Germany and Japan. He said the threat of global warming was "on the same level as lower-lying small European ski resorts."

"Hopefully for Korea it will get more relaxed and more people will be able to enjoy it," he said. "I would truly love to go back there."

BLOOMBERG

CHINA PARK OPERATOR WARNS OF CASHFLOW WOES AS VIRUS SHUTS GATE

A Chinese national park operator risks becoming the first high-profile victim of the coronavirus outbreak in the country's nascent asset-backed securities market, warning against a weakening ability to generate cashflows.

Slender West Lake Tourism Development Group Co., which runs a top-rated national park in the eastern city of Yangzhou, said a statement Wednesday that the epidemic is having a negative impact on its 2.2 billion yuan (\$320 million) asset-backed notes.

Slender West Lake issued the bond-like product in October 2018, using income streams from ticket sales as its underlying asset.

The national park has remained closed since the outbreak began, the company said in a filing to the Shanghai Clearing House, adding that its cashflows may be "significantly affected."

The park operator is the latest addition to a growing list of businesses, especially those in the consumption sector, that are hurting from the dea-

dly virus outbreak. The epidemic, which has claimed over 1,300 lives in China so far, has jolted the world's No. 2 economy and raised concerns about rising unemployment as many offices and factories remain shut.

Tourism is among the sectors hit the hardest. Besides the picturesque Slender West Lake, popular destinations such as the Great Wall of China, the Forbidden City and Disneyland in Shanghai have also remained closed.

"The virus outbreak has badly affected consumption and business operations, and cashflows from underlying assets of some asset-backed securities may come under pressure, leading to potential repayment difficulties," according to a research note by Huatai Securities Co.

Slender West Lake now has seven domestically-traded bonds outstanding, with a combined value of 3.45 billion yuan, according to Bloomberg-compiled data. BLOOMBERG



COVID-19

China reports spike in virus cases with new way of counting

YANAN WANG, BEIJING

CHINA yesterday reported a sharp spike in deaths and infections from a new virus after the hardest-hit province of Hubei applied a new classification system that broadens the scope of diagnoses for the outbreak, which has spread to more than 20 countries.

Japan reported its first death, a woman in her 80s who had been hospitalized since early February. She is the third confirmed fatality outside of mainland China, after deaths in the Philippines and Hong Kong.

The new diagnostic approach came on the same day that Hubei and its stricken capital, Wuhan, replaced their top officials in an apparent response to public criticism of how authorities have handled the epidemic.

The death toll in China reached 1,367, up 254 from the previous day. The number of confirmed cases jumped 15,152 to 59,804. The unusually large increases were due to the change in Hubei's approach.

The total now includes more than 13,000 cases of "clinical diagnosis" in Hubei, which appears to include those based on a doctors' analysis combined with lung imaging, as opposed to waiting for laboratory test results.

In breaking down the large number of new cases in China, National Health Commission

spokesman Mi Feng said Hubei had adopted a revised diagnosis and treatment plan aimed at accelerating the identification and treatment of patients.

That adds a "clinical diagnosis case" classification to identify suspected cases who appear to have pneumonia so that patients can be accepted as soon as possible and treated as confirmed cases, Mi said, adding that should "reduce severe illness and mortality."

One expert said the changed case definition in Hubei likely speaks to the crush of patients the health system is experiencing and the backlog of untested samples.

"Clearly in Wuhan, the health system is under extreme pressure and so the first priority has to be the patient," said Mark Woolhouse, a professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh.

He said it wasn't unprecedented for case definitions to rely on doctors' diagnoses rather than wait for laboratory confirmation, and that these kinds of changes usually happen when there are simply too many patients to process in a fast-moving outbreak.

"I'm not surprised that this has happened given the way the outbreak has been going in China," Woolhouse said. "You have to be pragmatic and take the concerns of the patient first and treat them as if they already have the disease, even in the absence of lab confirmation."

China also appointed new high-level officials in Hubei and Wuhan.

The public has widely criticized local officials for failing to respond quickly and decisively to the new virus. Authorities initially assured people that there was little to no risk of human-to-human transmission, a statement that was later retracted. Wuhan residents said hospitals were overcrowded and lacked sufficient medical supplies. Doctors who tried to share information early on were reprimanded by police for "spreading rumors."

Many countries have implemented travel restrictions on recent visitors to China, which has more than 99% of the world's reported infections.

In an unprecedented measure to contain the disease, recently named Covid-19, the Chinese government has placed the hardest-hit cities — home to more than 60 million — under lockdown. One district in Shiyuan, a city in Hubei, has implemented "wartime measures," barring residents from leaving even their apartment compounds for two weeks.

According to a local government notice, neighborhood committees will distribute basic necessities at a fixed time and at fixed prices, as well as help residents purchase any medicine they might urgently need.

Xu Min, a resident of Shiyuan's Zhangwan district, said her neighborhood entrance was being

guarded by community workers and security staff.

"It doesn't have too much of an impact on our life, except that we're not allowed to go out," Xu said.

World Health Organization spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said the agency is seeking more clarity from China on the updates to its case definition and reporting protocol.

"It is our current understanding that the new case definition widens the net, and includes not only lab-confirmed cases but also clinically diagnosed cases based on symptoms and exposure," Jasarevic said in an email to The Associated Press.

"The jump in cases today reflects the broader definition," he said.

An advance team of WHO experts has been in China since Monday. The team is here to "discuss specific arrangements for the China-WHO joint mission with the Chinese side," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a daily online briefing.

"The purpose of the joint mission is that experts of both sides can have in-depth communication on the situation and efforts of prevention and control, and come up with advice for China and other affected countries," Geng said.

In Vietnam, official media reported that a village of 10,000 northwest of the capital, Hanoi, was put in lockdown due to a cluster of cases there.

The online newspaper VN Express cited a senior official of Vinh Phuc province as reporting an increase in cases in Son Loi. Vietnam has confirmed 16 cases, most of them in the province.

Japan's Health Ministry announced yesterday that 44 more people on a cruise ship quarantined in the port of Yokohama, near Tokyo, have tested positive for Covid-19. The ship has 218 infections among its 3,700 passengers and crew.

Health Minister Katsunobu Kato told reporters five of the patients who were already sent to hospitals for isolation and treatment have severe symptoms and are on artificial respirators or under intensive care.

Another cruise ship, the Westerdam, finally docked yesterday in Cambodia after being turned away by several Asian and Pacific governments. No cases of the viral illness have been confirmed among its 1,455 passengers and 802 crew members, according to operator Holland America Line.

Thailand refused to allow the Westerdam to dock this week after it had already been turned away by the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan and Guam over virus concerns.

The Westerdam began its cruise in Singapore last month and its last stop before it was refused further landings was in Hong Kong, where 51 cases of the viral disease have been confirmed. AP

MORE THAN 60,000 INFECTED GLOBALLY

- Mainland China: 1,367 deaths among 59,804 cases, mostly in the central province of Hubei.
- Hong Kong: 51 cases, 1 death
- Macau: 10
- Japan: 251, including 218 from a cruise ship docked in Yokohama, 1 death
- Singapore: 58
- Thailand: 33
- South Korea: 28
- Malaysia: 19
- Taiwan: 18
- Vietnam: 16
- Australia: 14
- Germany: 16
- United States: 15. Separately, one U.S. citizen died in China
- France: 11
- United Kingdom: 9
- United Arab Emirates: 8
- Canada: 7
- Philippines: 3 cases, including 1 death
- India: 3
- Italy: 3
- Russia: 2
- Spain: 2
- Belgium: 1
- Nepal: 1
- Sri Lanka: 1
- Sweden: 1
- Cambodia: 1
- Finland: 1

BEIJING PICKS NEW PROVINCIAL LEADERS IN VIRUS EPICENTER

YANAN WANG, BEIJING

CHINA yesterday replaced its top officials in the central province of Hubei and its capital, Wuhan, the epicenter of a viral outbreak that has infected more than 45,000 people worldwide.

Former Shanghai Mayor Ying Yong succeeds Jiang Chaoliang as the ruling Communist Party's chief in the beleaguered province, the Xinhua state news agency reported, while Wang Zhonglin will take over from Ma Guoqiang as the party secretary in Wuhan.

The high-level appointments follow the sacking earlier this week of two leaders of the provincial health commission. State media also reported that a slew of others were expelled from the party for transgressions related to the epidemic.

The public has widely criticized local officials for their handling of the outbreak of a new form of



AP PHOTO

coronavirus. The virus first surfaced December in Hubei's capital, Wuhan, and has since spread to more than two dozen countries.

Many countries have implemented travel restrictions on recent visitors to China, which has more than 99% of the world's reported infections.

In an unprecedented measure to contain the disease, the Chinese go-

vernment has placed the hardest-hit cities — home to more than 60 million — under lockdown.

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nobu Kato told reporters five of the patients who were already sent to hospitals for isolation and treatment of COVID-19 have severe symptoms and are on artificial respirators or under intensive care.

Another cruise ship, the Westerdam, finally anchored yesterday off Cambodia after being turned away by several Asian and Pacific governments. AP



AP PHOTO

Police wearing masks guard a road checkpoint before entering the Son Loi commune in Vinh Phuc province, Vietnam

VIETNAM LOCKS DOWN VILLAGE WITH CLUSTER OF CASES

VIETNAMESE news media say a community northwest of the capital Hanoi has been locked down due to a cluster of cases of Covid-19 confirmed there.

The village of Son Lai in Vinh Phuc province was quarantined after Vietnam's 16th case was confirmed in a 50-year-old man. According to the Health Ministry, the quarantine will last 20 days.

The online newspaper VN Express says the latest case has a daughter who was infected. She was part of a group of eight Vietnamese workers for a Japa-

nese company who had been training in Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak.

The workers returned to Vietnam on Jan. 17, and six have so far tested positive for the virus.

Vinh Phuc province has 11 of the country's 16 cases, with the man bringing Son Lai's total to eight.

Provincial authorities have established mobile shops and provided food and free masks to over 10,600 people.

Authorities have also set up a field hospital with 300 beds and a 200-bed facility at a military school. AP

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FAQ

HOW VIRUS IS IMPACTING ASIA'S CRUISES AND PASSENGERS

DEE-ANN DURBIN
& DAVID KOENIG

A new viral outbreak is wreaking havoc on cruises in Asia, where some passengers are stranded aboard ships and others can't leave China.

Japan's health ministry has confirmed 174 cases of the virus aboard Carnival Corp.'s Diamond Princess, which is docked in Yokohama, Japan. The ship that carried 3,700 passengers and crew into Japan is expected to remain under quarantine until at least Feb. 19.

The operators of a cruise ship that had been barred for days from docking by four governments said it will finally dock and disembark passengers in Cambodia.

Thailand denied permission for the MS Westerdam to dock at a Thai port after it had already been turned away by the Philippines, Taiwan and Japan. The ship has been unwelcome because it stopped in Hong Kong on Feb. 1., but no cases of the disease have been confirmed among the more than 2,200 passengers and crew on board.

Here are some questions and answers about the virus's impact on the cruise industry and passengers:

HOW MANY CRUISE SHIPS ARE IN ASIA RIGHT NOW?

The Cruise Lines International Association — which represents around 90% of global cruise capacity — says around 10 of its 272 member ships are currently in Asia. Only the Diamond Princess has confirmed cases of virus, the

association said. At least six of the 10 ships have canceled their itineraries for now, including Royal Caribbean's Spectrum of the Seas and MSC's Splendida.

HAVE ANY SHIPS BEEN ALLOWED TO LET PASSENGERS OFF?

Yes. On Sunday, Dream Cruises said passengers on its World Dream were cleared to disembark in Hong Kong after screenings found no positive tests for the virus. The ship had arrived in Hong Kong four days earlier.

In Italy, more than 6,600 passengers and crew were allowed to disembark from Carnival's Costa Smeralda on Jan. 31 after a Chinese passenger was found to have the flu and not the virus.

And in New Jersey, passengers were allowed to disembark last Friday even as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tested four passengers for the virus. The passengers tested negative and the CDC cleared the ship for its next voyage.

ARE CRUISE SHIPS BANNING SOME PASSENGERS FROM BOARDING?

Yes. Policies vary, but in general, cruise companies won't allow passengers or crew to board if they have visited, traveled from or passed through airports in China, Hong Kong and Macau within a certain time period — usually 14 or 30 days. They also aren't allowing people to board if they have been in close contact with someone with the virus. Royal Caribbean was banning all passen-

gers with passports from China, Hong Kong and Macau, but the company lifted that ban Monday. Norwegian Cruise Lines is still banning passengers who hold those passports.

IS A QUARANTINE THE BEST WAY TO HANDLE AN OUTBREAK?

According to Tara Smith, a professor who researches infectious diseases at Kent State University's College of Public Health, a hospital — not a ship — is the best place to keep people quarantined. The Diamond Princess may have already had environmental contamination when the quarantine began, which puts passengers and crew at risk of further transmission. "I think this was done without a lot of thought to consequences of ongoing transmission within the ship and the mental health of the passengers," Smith said.

WHAT OTHER PRECAUTIONS ARE CRUISE LINES TAKING?

Cruise lines are scanning the temperatures of passengers and crew and having them complete questionnaires before they board any ship. MSC says it's conducting deep cleaning on its ships. Royal Caribbean also says it has stepped up cleaning of its ships and air filtration systems.

CAN PASSENGERS CATCH THE VIRUS THROUGH THE VENTILATION SYSTEMS?

Japanese health ministry official Masami Sakoi said the cabins on the Diamond Princess have separate air-conditioning systems,

so guests aren't sharing the same air. "We do not consider the air-conditioning system as the cause of spreading infections," he said.

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR PASSENGERS ABOARD THESE SHIPS?

Christina Kerby, a communications director with a health care company in San Francisco, struck an upbeat tone in her Twitter posts aboard the Westerdam. She says the ship is holding spin classes, magic shows and towel-folding demonstrations. But she expressed regret when Philippine crew members couldn't disembark in Manila to see their families, as they'd hoped. The situation is more grim aboard the Diamond Princess, where those under quarantine watched as officials in hazmat suits carried off sick passengers. Passenger David Abel has described the ship as a "floating prison."

WHEN WILL CRUISE OPERATIONS RETURN TO NORMAL?

That's unclear because the situation is very fluid. Royal Caribbean has cancelled eight China sailings through March 4. Princess Cruises has cancelled at least 12 cruises, including two scheduled to leave Shanghai in June. Holland America said it's weighing port restrictions in Asia before deciding on a cruise scheduled to leave Yokohama on Feb. 28. Cunard says the Queen Elizabeth won't make scheduled stops in Hong Kong and Shanghai in March and April. Norwegian Cruise Lines has canceled

scheduled Asian cruises on the Norwegian Spirit through Dec. 7.

In some cases, cruises are being rerouted. Norwegian said a 24-day cruise leaving South Africa on March 22 that was supposed to end in Singapore will now last 27 days and end in Greece, for example.

HOW MUCH WILL THIS IMPACT CRUISE COMPANIES?

Asia is not yet a major destination for cruises. This year, around 10% of cruise ships worldwide were scheduled to be deployed to Asia, according to Cruise Lines International Association. That's down slightly from 2017, and compares to 32% deployed to the Caribbean and 28% to Europe and the Mediterranean.

Still, companies say the disruption will affect their bottom line. Carnival Corp. said Wednesday that if the company suspends all its operations in Asia through April, it will shave 55 cents to 65 cents per share off its 2020 earnings. Wall Street is expecting the company to earn \$4.47 a share this year, according to FactSet.

The virus may not have much impact on cruise bookings outside of Asia, says UBS analyst Robin Farley. Past experience shows that concerns about viruses usually remain regional, she said.

Cruise companies will likely see lower passenger volumes coming out of Asia. The association said its members expected 4.2 million passengers from Asia this year, or 12.5% of all passengers. That would be up from 3.4 million in 2016.

But even if 2020 passenger volumes from Asia are lower than expected, they can recover quickly. In 2015, a viral outbreak in South Korea hurt demand for cruises from China. But by 2016, South Korea was once again a top destination for Chinese travelers, Farley said. AP

US admiral hopes Philippine security pact can still be saved

THE move by the Philippines to end a security pact that allowed U.S. forces to train in the country potentially "challenged" future American operations with Filipino forces, a U.S. admiral said yesterday.

Adm. Philip S. Davidson, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, told a foreign policy think-tank in Sydney that he hoped the U.S. State Department would be able to negotiate a solution that would keep the Visiting Forces Agreement in place.

"It's a 180-day notice, so we have some time for diplomatic efforts to be pursued here," Davidson said. "I hope we can get to a successful outcome."

The Philippines notified the United States on Tuesday it would end the agreement, in the most serious threat under President Rodrigo Duterte to their 69-year bilateral treaty alliance.

In Washington, President Donald Trump, when asked about the Philippines' decision, said "I



Adm. Philip S. Davidson, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, speaks at the Lowy Institute in Sydney, yesterday

never minded that very much, to be honest. We helped the Philippines very much."

He added: "We helped them defeat ISIS. I get along, actually I have a very good relationship there. But I really don't mind if they would like to do that. That's fine, we'll save a lot of money. My views are different than other people. I view it as thank you very

much, we save a lot of money. But if you look back, if you go back three years ago, when ISIS was overrunning the Philippines, we came in and literally single-handedly were able to save them from vicious attacks on their islands."

A senior administration official said Washington was disappointed.

"The United States shares a long history with the government and people of the Philippines and recognizes that regional and global security is best served through the strong partnership that is enabled by the Visiting Forces Agreement," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Davidson said the United States did not have such agreements with every country in the region.

"But our ability to help the Philippines and their counter-violent extremist fight in the south, our ability to train and operate within the Philippines and with Filipino armed forces would be challenged without that Visiting Forces Agreement," Davidson said.

American forces have provided intelligence, training and aid that allowed the Philippines to deal with human trafficking, cyberattacks, illegal narcotics and terrorism. U.S. military assistance helped Philippine for-

ces quell a disastrous siege by Islamic State group-aligned militants in southern Marawi city in 2017.

The accord, known by its acronym VFA, legally allows the entry of large numbers of American forces along with U.S. military ships and aircraft for joint training with Philippine troops. It specifies which country will have jurisdiction over American soldiers who may be accused of crimes while in the Philippines, a sensitive issue in the former American colony.

A separate defense pact subsequently signed by the allies in 2014, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, allows the extended stay of U.S. forces and authorizes them to build and maintain barracks and warehouses and store defense equipment and weapons inside five designated Philippine military camps.

A Filipino senator and former national police chief, Panfilo Lacson, said terminating the treaty would reduce the two allies' 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty "to a mere paper treaty as far as the U.S. is concerned." The U.S. Embassy in Manila described the notice to terminate the agreement as "a serious step with significant implications for the U.S.-Philippines alliance." AP

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what's ON



THE LONG JOURNEY: THE FORBIDDEN CITY AND MARITIME SILK ROAD

TIME: 10am-9pm (Last entry at 6:30pm; closed on Mondays and public holidays)

UNTIL: April 13, 2020

VENUE: Macau Museum of Art

ADMISSION: Free

ENQUIRIES: (853) 87919814

A PANORAMA OF RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS 3.0

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

UNTIL: March 15, 2020

VENUE: Macau Museum of Art

ADMISSION: Free

ORGANIZERS: Cultural Affairs Bureau; Macau

Museum of Art; Palace Museum

ENQUIRIES: (853) 8791 9814

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

CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PRODUCTS FROM THE PALACE MUSEUM AND EDUCATION AREA

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

UNTIL: April 13, 2020

VENUE: Macau Museum of Art

ADMISSION: Free

Offbeat

CHRISTIAN COWAN LIVES OUT HIS CHILDHOOD FASHION DREAM

Christian Cowan equates showing his fashion collections with continuously living out a childhood dream.

"I'm always going to be so ecstatic every time I wake up and know I've got a show," Cowan told The Associated Press before his fall-winter collection (pictured) rolled out this week at New York Fashion Week.

In a few short years, the 25-year British designer has developed a high-profile fan base within the artistic community. That sits well with him since he said it's musicians and actresses who inspire him in the first place.

Cowan counts Lady Gaga, Beyoncé, and Keke Palmer among celebrities who have embraced his designs. And then there's Cardi B. Cowan dressed the Grammy-winning recording artist for the cover of her debut album, "Invasion of Privacy."

"It was early on and she asked me for a few outfits, and I loved her and loved her personality. ... She only had a few tracks then and I loved them. So we loaned her looks and then we just built a friendship and a working relationship," Cowan said.

As for latest collection, Cowan calls it the most evolved he's ever done, right down to the custom fabrics and wide range of accessories.

"We are doing eyewear this season, we've got handbags, there's many more layers. It's just really evolving in its technique. It's just a big wow factor, deep show," Cowan said.

He worked in prints and earth tones rich in gold and brighter greens and put crystal-studded net face masks on some of his models. There was also a fair amount of black and purples. The collection showcased metallic and sequin mini-skirts, including a closing look with a gigantic bow on the back. In addition to bold pops of color, he included a head-to-toe leopard print look.

Cowan said he was inspired by various means of power, from natural and vivid to ritualistic and wealth. He explained some of the ways he chose to depict it: "Fireworks, which are a ceremonial aspect of power, and animal print, and ocelot, which is an animal-wear power."

TV canal macau



13:00	TDM News (Repetição)
13:30	Telejornal RTPi (Diferido)
14:30	O Sábio
15:45	Beo and Peno Sr.1
16:00	Animaizinhos Selvagens Exploradores
16:15	Portugueses Pelo Mundo Sr.1o
17:00	Conferência de Imprensa Saúde (Directo)
18:05	Império (Repetição)
18:55	TDM Entrevista (Repetição)
19:30	Ouro Verde Sr.2
20:30	Telejornal
21:15	Semana Internacional
21:50	Dez Grandes Segredos e Mistérios
22:20	Império
23:15	TDM News
23:50	Madre Paula
00:35	Telejornal (Repetição)
01:20	RTPi Directo

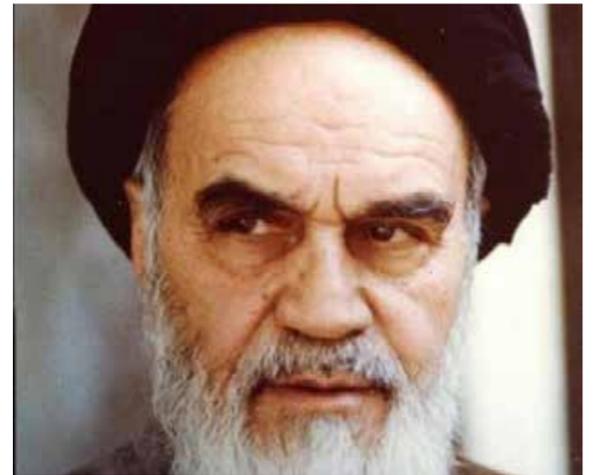
cinema



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.

this day in history



1989 AYATOLLAH SENTENCES AUTHOR TO DEATH

Iranian Muslim leader Ayatollah Khomeini has issued a death threat against British author Salman Rushdie and his publishers over the book *Satanic Verses*.

Scotland Yard is providing the author with specialist protection and advice and all 11,000 staff at publishers Viking have received internal memos about the potential danger.

Security has been increased at offices, bookshops and distribution depots.

Mr Rushdie's editorial director has said a promotional tour of America may have to be cancelled.

The Ayatollah - as Imam, or chief spiritual guide, of Shia Muslims across the world - broadcast a fatwa (edict) on Tehran Radio to eliminate the writer and declared the rest of the day should be one of mourning.

His message said: "I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of the *Satanic Verses* book, which is against Islam, the Prophet and the Koran, and all those involved in its publication who are aware of its content are sentenced to death."

Mr Rushdie, 42, responded hours later. "I am very sad it should have happened," he said. "It is not true this book is a blasphemy against Islam."

"I doubt very much Khomeini or anyone else in Iran has read this book or anything more than selected extracts taken out of context."

He explained the *Satanic Verses* attempts to investigate conflicts between religious and secular viewpoints.

Published last September, the *Satanic Verses* has sold 100,000 hardback copies in the UK and US and was runner up for the Booker and Whitbread literary awards.

Already banned in five countries, the first demonstrations against the book took place in Bradford, West Yorkshire, where a copy was publicly burned.

Politicians in Westminster have expressed outrage at the threat and have called on the government to complain formally to Iran.

The Iranian Prime Minister Hussain Mousavi has sanctioned Hezbollah groups to "take the necessary action" against the author.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Protests against the *Satanic Verses* took place across the world and several individuals were assaulted in connection with it.

Salman Rushdie spent the next nine years living in 30 secret locations across the UK.

He denied reports that police protection cost up to £11m a year.

In September 1998, the new Iranian President Mohammed Khatami publicly declared the state would not support the fatwa.

Mr Rushdie was able to make more public appearances, including a cameo in the film *Bridget Jones' Diary*.

However Islamic hardliners continue to uphold the death sentence and one Iranian foundation has put a \$2.8m bounty on the author's life.

Technically a fatwa cannot be revoked and only dies with the person it is directed against.



AP PHOTO

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Don't act too rashly today. Your impulsive side lacks an accurate perspective on what's going on right now. If you follow your impulses today, you could regret it tomorrow.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Do you feel like you have innovative and important new ideas that no one is listening to? You should realize that you can't wait for other people to stop and hear out what you have to say.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

It's very important for you to be around opinionated people every once in a while. Not only does it help exercise your verbal sparring skills, but it also helps keep you on your toes.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Being honorable is something you should do for its own sake, not just for the sake of showing how selfless you are. There's no point in helping others if your true goal is to promote yourself.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Someone you care about could be headed for a better future, and news of the imminent departure could cause you to suddenly realize that you care about them more than you realized.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Not everything is as it seems. The faster you can adjust to the realities, the faster you will be able to grab a new opportunity that's hovering just outside of your universe right now.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Interesting travel opportunities are coming your way, although they might require a small sacrifice on your part. If you're itching for a change of scenery, today's the day!



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

If your boss is becoming a major problem in the workplace, you'll have to step up and be the voice of leadership soon. What? Do you think that you aren't up for the challenge? Come on!



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Don't be surprised if a random encounter turns out to be a reunion. People have connections to you that you aren't aware of yet. Enjoy the laughter of recognition. It's a small world after all.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Despite your recent fears, you should have no business problems today. All the pieces are going to fall together perfectly, and you'll be able to plan a big celebration soon.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

If you can set aside any insecurities, you should be able to turn an ordinary meeting into an extraordinary encounter. All it takes is saying what you feel and not being afraid of how the other people might react.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You have a lot confidence in your ideas, and that confidence is well founded, but that doesn't mean that everyone else needs to know all the ins and outs of what you believe!

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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3	1							
5							2	
		4	2					
							3	5
							8	
	5	6						7
			3	1				
			8					

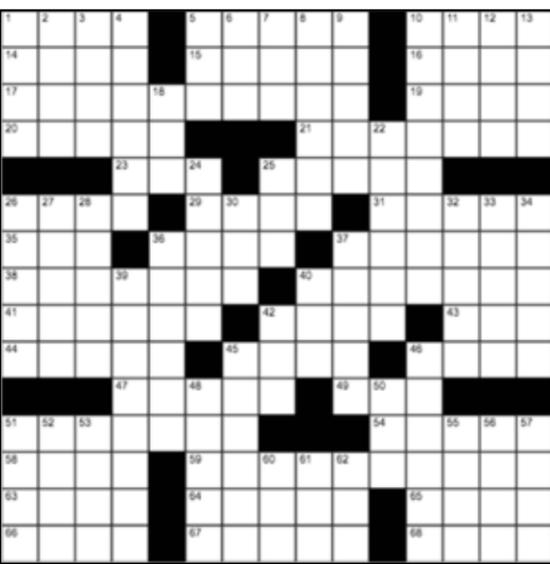
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	8	clear
Harbin	-22	-9	snow shower
Tianjin	-2	8	smoggy
Urumqi	-12	-3	clear
Xi'an	-1	8	overcast
Lhasa	-5	4	snow shower
Chengdu	7	12	overcast
Chongqing	10	12	overcast
Kunming	3	20	clear
Nanjing	7	10	drizzle
Shanghai	8	10	moderate rain
Wuhan	2	7	drizzle
Hangzhou	6	9	moderate rain
Taipei	17	21	cloudy
Guangzhou	18	26	cloudy
Hong Kong	19	24	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-6	-4	flurry
Frankfurt	0	5	overcast
Paris	0	4	clear
London	4	6	drizzle
New York	-7	1	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Close with force; 5- Swedish imports; 10- Geezer; 14- Verdi opera; 15- Carousal; 16- Corrida cries; 17- Make slender; 19- Faux pas; 20- Egyptian peninsula; 21- Creatures; 23- Oxlike African antelope; 25- Battery terminal; 26- Comics canine; 29- Tidy, without fault; 31- San Marino surround; 35- Singer Shannon; 36- Gyro bread; 37- Evening party; 38- The tiniest bit; 40- Nocturnal carnivore; 41- Gray sea turtle; 42- Be sorry for; 43- Pantry pest; 44- Silvery fish; 45- Identical; 46- Region; 47- Put away papers; 49- Georgia, once; Abbr.; 51- Extraordinary occurrence; 54- Another time; 58- Mine entrance; 59- Prophetic revelation; 63- Sheltered, nautically; 64- Donnybrook; 65- Reclined; 66- Blend; 67- Milk snake; 68- Gaelic language of Ireland or Scotland;

DOWN: 1- Disrespectful back talk; 2- Taylor of "Mystic Pizza"; 3- Mideast gulf; 4- Contrive; 5- Vane dir.; 6- Calendar abbr.; 7- Onassis, to pals; 8- Solidus; 9- ___ evil...; 10- Skin preparation; 11- Spicy stew; 12- Trompe l'oeil; 13- Cookbook amts.; 18- Loud noise; 22- Stupidity; 24- Oneness; 25- Car club; 26- Smells; 27- Fabric of jeans; 28- ___ France; 30- Basque separatist organization; 32- Bellowing; 33- Sierra ___; 34- Gossipmonger; 36- Kind of license or justice; 37- Satisfies; 39- Bringing bad fortune; 40- Outer edge; 42- Cushion; 45- Oozed; 46- Sock pattern; 48- Wool source; 50- Gal of song; 51- Polite address; 52- Monty Python's Eric; 53- Monetary unit of Cambodia; 55- On ___ with; 56- Egyptian goddess of fertility; 57- Branta sandvicensis; 60- No longer young; 61- Bee follower; 62- ___ Lingus;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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OLYMPICS

Tokyo, IOC officials reiterate that the games are on

STEPHEN WADE, TOKYO

TOKYO Olympic organizers reiterated their message yesterday at the start of two days of meetings with the International Olympic Committee: The 2020 Games will not be waylaid by the virus that is spreading from neighboring China.

"I would like to make it clear again that we are not considering a cancellation or postponement of the games. Let me make that clear," organizing committee president Yoshiro Mori said, speaking through an interpreter to dozens of top IOC officials gathered in Tokyo.

The Olympics open in just over five months, and the torch relay begins next month in Japan — a clear signal the games are getting close.

Although there have been no deaths in Japan attributed to the coronavirus, Tokyo and IOC officials are clearly jittery. Sitting among the officials this time was Dr. Richard Budgett, the IOC's medical and scientific director.

Last week Toshiro Muto, the



CEO of the Tokyo organizing committee, said he was "seriously worried that the spread of the infectious disease could throw cold water on the momentum toward the games."

He backed down a day later and said he was confident the games

would go forward, which is the message this time.

On Wednesday, the virus forced the cancellation of a Formula One race set for April in Shanghai, which draws more than 100,000 over a race weekend.

The Hong Kong and Singapore

rounds of the World Rugby Sevens Series were rescheduled from April to October, with organizers saying the decision was taken "in response to continued health concerns relating to" the outbreak of the virus. Also, the SportAccord conference, an event with close ties

to the Olympic movement, will not take place in Beijing in April as scheduled, organizers said yesterday.

The virus has also wiped out the indoor world track and field championships in Nanjing, golf tournaments, soccer matches, and almost all sports in China, including Olympic qualifying events. It is also keeping Chinese athletes from traveling to qualify, which could put their presence in Tokyo in jeopardy.

Saburo Kawabuchi, a former Olympian and the so-called mayor of the Olympic Village that will house 11,000 athletes and thousands more staff members, suggested Tokyo's hot and humid summer would stop the virus.

"The biggest concern is the coronavirus and the infection," he said, speaking in Japanese. "Currently we don't have any clue when this issue will be resolved. Based on various pieces of information we receive, it seems that this virus is not as strong as the influenza virus. The virus is susceptible to humidity and heat. In Japan, we have the rainy season which could defeat the virus."

John Coates, an IOC member who heads the regular inspection visits to Tokyo, said he expected to receive reports on the virus from the Japanese government, the Tokyo city government, and local organizers in order to see the "necessary precautions that are being taken." AP

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OPINION

Editorial

Paulo Coutinho



THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA?

Nothing will be the same after the outbreak of the Wuhan coronavirus, recently dubbed Covid-19, that infected mainland China and the world with an epidemic disease, financial hurdles, and uncertainty.

The major case in point is the way the communist country leaders dealt with the situation in the first instance: shutting down inconvenient voices for trying to warn people about an unknown and extremely contagious virus, in the likes of SARS in late December.

Li Wenliang, a Wuhan eye doctor, in contact with the sick, who first spread the news on a closed chat group of fellow medics, was detained, questioned, and forced to apologize “for spreading rumors” – only to contract the virus himself and tragically die from it last week.

Even on his death berth, Li suffered abuse. State media broke the news of his death Thursday night last week only to retract it a few hours later at 2am Friday. The good doctor, deemed a national hero in China’s frenzied social media, was officially declared dead the next hour, at around 3am, when the story was already all over the major news broadcasters.

Beijing came out in force saying it would investigate “in depth” the circumstances surrounding his death and with a great deal of hypocrisy praised the efforts of Li Wenliang. I guess what they really want to know is how the news was leaked, and who did it.

Medical staff in China or Macau or elsewhere are the front-line workers who put their lives in danger when dealing with extremely contagious diseases. They should be encouraged and protected by the political elite, not persecuted by dystopian paranoia.

No wonder Li’s death fueled popular anger against Xi Jinping’s Communist ruling clique. Moreover, popular disappointment is shifting from seemingly innocuous social media over to mainstream media, to academia and onto the streets.

Last week, a woman was photographed in Shanghai holding a sign calling for freedom of speech and a group of Chinese academics have signed an open letter calling for the government to issue an apology to the deceased doctor and for more freedom of speech and rights guaranteed by the constitution to be protected.

One of the petitioners is Xu Zhangrun, a law professor from one of the country’s top universities, who lambasted the Communist regime:

“It is a system that turns every natural disaster into an even greater man-made catastrophe. The coronavirus epidemic has revealed the rotten core of Chinese governance; the fragile and vacuous heart of the jittering edifice of state has thereby shown up as never before,” he wrote in an essay. Beijing’s propaganda machine has been blaming Western “conspiracy theorists” for overly criticizing China, but this time heavy criticism comes from within.

As the virus spread more fiercely and the death toll shot up, over 60 million people in several provinces were put in lockdown – something unthinkable in the liberal West.

Doctor Jeremy Farrar, disease expert, to Der Spiegel: “It is doubtful that the inhabitants of major Western cities would put up with a several-week-long cutoff of their cities. Such draconic measures would cause a huge disruption to communities and to society. If the worst-case scenario really happens, people will probably be asked to stay at home on a voluntary basis. But for such voluntary measures to work, it is very important that politicians and public health experts start preparing people now with open, honest and transparent communication. Trust is crucial, it takes time to be established and it can be lost quickly.”

Trust is of essence indeed, and that is what the Chinese people are losing. It may be a long shot to say that things will never be the same in China. But after the Hong Kong conundrum and the Covid-19 epidemic, nothing should stay the same.

Japan announced last night its first death from a new virus from China, hours after confirming 44 more cases on a cruise ship quarantined near Tokyo as fears of the spreading disease mount in the country.

Health Minister Katsunobu Kato said the first fatality is a woman in her 80s who had been hospitalized since Feb. 1 when she was diagnosed with pneumonia. Her confirmed diagnosis came after her death, he said. The woman, a resident of Kanagawa prefecture near Tokyo, was the mother-

-in-law of a taxi driver who also became a newly confirmed case, Japanese media reported. Health Ministry officials declined to confirm a relationship at the request of her family.

Officials also confirmed two other cases, a doctor in his 50s who works at a hospital in western Japan and a man in his 20s who lives in Chiba, near Tokyo. None had a record of traveling abroad in recent weeks or contacts with Chinese — a possible sign that the virus is spreading inside the country.



Catholic religious paintings and Bibles are displayed behind bars at an underground Catholic church in Jiexi county, Guangdong province



Thailand The shopping mall that was the site of Thailand’s worst-ever mass shooting reopened yesterday, four days after security forces killed a gunman who was holed up inside, ending the bloody rampage. A total of 29 people were killed by the soldier, who kept police at bay at the Terminal 21 Korat mall in northeastern Thailand for about 16 hours over the weekend before being killed. More than 200 Buddhist monks presided over a ceremony attended by business owners and shoppers.

CHINA’S NEW HK, MACAU BOSS USED TO RIP CROSSES FROM CHURCHES

CHINA named an official known for tearing crosses from the roofs of churches to lead the agency that oversees Hong Kong and Macau, in the biggest shakeup yet after months of unrest.

Xia Baolong, 67, the vice chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, will replace Zhang Xiaoming as director of the Hong Kong & Macau Affairs Office, the State Council said Thursday. Zhang will become a vice director, it said, and will be responsible for day-to-day tasks.

The director of the Macau Liaison Office, Fu Ziyang, and his Hong Kong counterpart Luo Huining were also appointed deputy director of Hong Kong Macau Affairs Office while at the same time they remain as heads of the two Liaison Office institutions in the SARs.

Xia is a former close aide to President Xi Jinping and served as Communist Party chief of Zhejiang province during the crackdown on Christian churches.

Xia’s installation follows last month’s appointment of Luo Huining as head of China’s Liaison Office in Hong Kong. The choice of Luo, a Communist Party cadre known for executing Xi’s

anti-corruption campaign, was seen as a signal of Beijing’s intention to restore order over Hong Kong after months of violent unrest opposing China’s grip on the city.

“The reshuffling at this interesting moment may point to a deep distrust from Xi Jinping toward the former faction dealing with Hong Kong affairs,” said Sonny Lo, a Hong Kong-based academic and political commentator.

“It’s clear that Xi Jinping wants to have a clear grasp of the situation in Hong Kong - that’s the major point,” Lo added. “We’ll probably see some adjustment in Chinese policy toward Hong Kong.”

Since Hong Kong’s handover, back in 1997, the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office has had four directors: Liao Hui, Wang Guangya, former head Zhang Xiaoming and current director Xia Baolong. Excluding Xia, the remaining three directors have long been engaged in Hong Kong and Macau affairs.

Xia is one of the highest state level leaders managing the SARs’ affairs office. He is currently the Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Con-

ference (CPPCC). Unlike Zhang, Wang and Liao, Xia has a rich background in important positions at the Chinese Communist Government.

The rare appointment of such a senior official potentially signals a permanent overhaul in how Beijing manages the former British colony. The Communist Party issued a communique late last year signaling greater intervention in everything from education in Hong Kong to how the city picks its leader.

Xia’s push in 2014 and 2015 to tear down crosses on the roofs of churches in the eastern province of Zhejiang was widely criticized by the international community. He was subsequently appointed to a leadership role on the CPPCC, the nation’s political advisory body and a post usually seen as a transition toward retirement for senior leaders.

Xia’s appointment came as much of the world was focused on China’s replacement of top officials in virus-stricken Hubei. Yesterday, China also announced the replacement of Jiang Chaoliang, the party’s Hubei secretary, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. **MDT/AGENCIES**



Philippines-US The move by the Philippines to end a security pact that allowed U.S. forces to train in the country potentially “challenged” future American operations with Filipino forces, U.S. admiral Adm. Philip S. Davidson, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (pictured), told a foreign policy think-tank in Sydney. *More on p11*



Puerto Rico’s government has lost more than \$2.6 million after falling for an email phishing scam, according to a senior official. The finance director of the island’s Industrial Development Company, Rubén Rivera, said in a complaint filed to police that the agency sent the money to a fraudulent account. Rivera said the government agency transferred the money on Jan. 17 after receiving an email that alleged a change to a banking account tied to remittance payments, according to a police statement.