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Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre

Greater Bay Plan

\$158 / 6GB

Data Increase Again

CTM

MACAU IS YET TO DECIDE WHETHER CASINOS SHOULD REOPEN ON THURSDAY WHEN THE 15-DAY CLOSURE ORDER IS DUE TO EXPIRE

P3

E-VOUCHER PARTNER CHOSEN TO GET MONEY TO SMALL BUSINESSES FAST

P3

THE PHILIPPINES MULLS EXEMPTING MACAU AND HK FROM ITS BLANKET CHINA TRAVEL BAN THAT UNTIL RECENTLY INCLUDED TAIWAN

P5

AP PHOTO



Iraq At least four rockets hit near the sprawling U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and a Iraqi base hosting American troops inside the Green Zone yesterday, but caused no casualties and only minor damage, U.S. and Iraqi officials said.

AP PHOTO



Germany Countries with interests in Libya's civil war recommitted themselves yesterday to uphold a barely working arms embargo, four weeks after a peace summit in Berlin was followed by numerous new arms violations, officials from Germany and the U.N. said. Foreign ministers and other officials from a dozen countries gathered on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference to try to bolster a drive to cut off outside military support for Libya's warring parties.

AP PHOTO



Egypt's chief prosecutor yesterday denied allegations that the police tortured a human rights activist and vocal critic of President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi. Police detained Patrick George Zaki (pictured), 28, an Egyptian student at the University of Bologna in Italy, after he arrived in Cairo earlier this month on what was supposed to be a brief visit home.

More on backpage

XINHUA



AP PHOTO



CHINA BATTLE AGAINST VIRUS DRAWS PRAISE AND CRITICISM

P6

AP PHOTO



RELIGIOUS EVENTS ACROSS ASIA ADAPT TO NEW CLIMATE - OR FACE CANCELLATION

P5,7



TWO RECOVER FROM COVID-19, FIVE OTHERS WITH GOOD PROGNOSIS

RENATO MARQUES

THE Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center informed yesterday that another two patients that were being treated for the coronavirus (Covid-19) in Macau have been discharged from hospital, raising the number of recovered people to five.

The information was disclosed by the Conde de São Januário Hospital Center's (CHCSJ) Dr Lo Iek Long during yesterday's press conference, held at the Health Bureau (SSM) facilities.

To the media, Lo revealed that the two patients discharged yesterday are a mother and her daughter, respectively the fourth and

sixth confirmed case of the virus in Macau.

The two patients arrived in Macau from Wuhan on January 21 and started to show symptoms on January 25. They were admitted to the public hospital on January 26.

After receiving treatment, they were in sufficient health to be finally discharged, Lo said. Lo additionally noted that the mother required more attention from medical staff, as the daughter, although testing positive for the virus, never developed symptoms. "After two weeks of isolation and treatment, we tested her twice through a nasopharyngeal test that came out negative, so we allow her to also be discharged

too," Lo explained.

The two women, like the first case discharged from hospital, requested to be exempt from paying the medical expenses that totalled MOP65,700; MOP43,400 for the mother and MOP22,300 for her daughter.

For the time being, Lo explained, "They also did not have that sum on them, and we also require some documents to evaluate their request of payment exemption [...] They will send us the documents so we can analyze their case within a period of 30 days."

Questioned on the topic, Lo clarified that there are several options and decisions regarding the payment of medical expenses beyond simply a full exemption

or full payment: "We can also decide for partial payment or full payment done in instalments if needed." Lo noted that for now, the payment of those patients requesting exemption has been only delayed.

Assessing the current status of the patients in the Coloane Isolation facility, Lo said, "We still have six people in isolation and their health condition is very good and without any symptoms."

The doctor noted that in the last 24 hours, the emergency services of the CHCSJ received three suspicious cases and discharged another seven after confirmation that they were not infected with the disease. Three other cases are waiting for results. The official

added that there are currently other seven people being tested at the Kiang Wu Hospital.

In total, the SSM said that as of February 15, it has analyzed a total of 1,345 suspected cases of the disease, from which 1,325 have been already been excluded. Also, out of the 55 cases of people screened due to being in close contact with those infected, 49 have already been discharged.

Although the health authorities promised not to lower their guard, yesterday was the twelfth consecutive day without any new cases confirmed in Macau.

"Although we have decided to reopen some services to the public, as they are very urgent and needed by the society, we are not returning to normal yet and people should not consider that the battle against the virus has ended," said Lo in response to a question from the media yesterday. "We are still far from that stage."

HO CONGRATULATES NEW HK, MACAU AFFAIRS BOSS

JULIE ZHU

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng congratulated the recently appointed Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council.

Last week, Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Council (CPPCC) Xia Baolong was appointed head at the Office after former director, Zhang Xiaoming, was demoted to deputy director.

Soon after the Chinese government announced Xia's appointment, the Government Information Bureau of Macau issued a statement noting Ho's congratulations, which were sent to Xia on behalf of the Chief Executive and the Macau SAR government.

Ho additionally stated that under the strong leadership of the central government, Ho and the MSAR government will continue to strengthen communication

with the Office, closely cooperate with the mainland, act in strict accordance with the national constitution and the Basic Law, and jointly promote the implementation of the 'one country, two systems' policy framework with Macau characteristics.

Xia is a former party secretary and former governor of Zhejiang province. He is also the second state-level leader who has been dispatched to manage Hong Kong and Macau affairs.

CRIME

FACING POLICE ARREST, MAN CLAIMS HE IS FROM WUHAN

A man who was caught after allegedly stealing from a supermarket over the weekend claimed to be from Wuhan and told police he needed to be sent to the hospital.

The suspected theft took place at a Royal Supermarket store near the Border Gate. According to reports, the suspect was intercepted by security guards at the supermarket. He tried to run

away from them but was prevented from doing so.

Officers from the Public Security Police Force were deployed to the scene to respond to the case. The officers pushed the suspect to the ground and he started shouting that he was from Wuhan, the epicenter of the current Covid-19 outbreak, while groaning about a pain in his chest.

He requested to be sent

to the hospital, but it is not known if the police agreed to the request.

Police officers seized a Macau ID card from the suspect during his arrest.

For the time being, police have not determined the reason behind his claim regarding his origin. The law enforcement authority explained it is currently investigating the case and hence has no further update. **AL**

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Macau Pass designated e-voucher supplier for economy relief plans



Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong

ANTHONY LAM

THE Secretary for Economy and Finance has preliminarily confirmed that Macau Pass will be designated to assist with the distribution and management of the government's e-coupon initiative, because its existing infrastructure makes the payment network the quickest way to get money into the hands of small businesses.

Secretary Lei Wai Nong earlier informed that the government would implement a series of measures and policies in the coming weeks and months to revitalize the economy and lessen the impact of the coronavirus on small businesses.

Among the policies is the e-voucher initiative, which is intended to help local small- to medium-sized enterprises recover from the impact of Covid-19. The amount to be distributed by the government is set at MOP3,000 per local resident and it is intended to boost internal consumption, explained Lei.

For the time being, the government is inclined to collaborate with Macau Pass, the local contactless tap-and-go payment system, to implement the campaign. A special Macau Pass card will be issued to each registered resident when the campaign kicks off.

So far in the government's epidemic control efforts, the use of information technology was commended widely by residents, particularly younger generations and netizens. For example, the government employed live stock monitoring on the sale of face-masks and the remaining quantity at each outlet is displayed online.

The concept of an e-coupon is another use of smart tools by the government to facilitate the delivery of services.

Some questioned the grounds on which the government has chosen to work with Macau Pass in this campaign. Companies are in need of revenue and cannot wait, the secretary said.

The Macau Pass system is widely used in Macau. Aside from the

two bus companies, many retailers and eateries are equipped with a Macau Pass portal to process e-payment. As such, the secretary considered this the quickest way the campaign can be put in to operation. He stressed that the card and payment system are just tools to facilitate the campaign.

Another reason for the decision is that the system is set up for small transactions, which can actually help smaller businesses. He suggested residents patronize smaller businesses, such as local-style cafeterias known as Cha Chaan Tang.

The secretary disclosed during the press briefing that the company will not charge the government any administration charge for implementation of the campaign, which means that the entire fund – a total of MOP2.2 billion from the government – will be used in the market.

Lei emphasized that all personal data collected for the campaign will be “managed” by the Monetary Authority of Macao. Macau Pass will not have access to such data.

The proposed government initiatives have already given rise to scams. Both the Economic Bureau and Macau Pass have issued clarifications to remind the public that the campaign has not yet commenced in response to a website claiming to be collecting people's data for the campaign.

Gov't undecided on whether to open casinos Thursday

DANIEL BEITLER

THE Macau government is still undecided on whether to reopen the city's casinos on Thursday midnight when a 15-day suspension that has rocked the local economy comes to an end.

On February 4, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng took the unprecedented decision to order a 15-day suspension of all gaming and entertainment activities so as to prevent a local outbreak of the infectious novel coronavirus, now known as Covid-19.

The authorities are expected to make an announcement as early as today on whether the 41 casinos across the city are to open their doors again Thursday.

Civil servants are gradually returning to work this week amid a renewed confidence in Macau after the government reported no new cases of the virus were detected in the past 12 days. The authorities yesterday warned the public not to become complacent.

The mandatory closure has

EVA BUCHO



had a ripple effect on the local economy leading to the temporary closure of small and large businesses, particularly in areas dependent on tourism.

The number of visitors, which had already plummeted by nearly 80% prior to the Chief Executive order to close casinos, had dropped close to zero by last week. Despite Ho's reluctance to formally close the border, there were as few as 2,000 daily tourists entering the city last week, according to official data provided by the Public Security Police Force. Last year, the average number of daily visitors in February

was more than 60 times greater.

Gaming analysts predict that the two-week closure – and the ramp up period following it – may shrink year-on-year gross gaming revenue by as much as 50% during the first half of the year.

Zeng Zhonglu, a professor at the Centre for Gaming and Tourism Studies at the Macao Polytechnic Institute, told Chinese-language media that visitor arrivals will pick up at a gradual pace once the epidemic situation on the mainland is resolved and that this will fuel a recovery in the sector.



GOV'T LAUNCHES SURVEY TO ASSESS IMPACT ON MICE

THE Macau Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) has launched a survey to assess the effect of the Covid-19 outbreak in the meetings, incentives, conferencing, exhibitions (MICE) industry.

The virus has disrupted several events and occasions in the city including the six-month-long Art Macao mega event, and the 2020 Macau International Environmental Cooperation Forum & Exhibition.

The IPIM survey will assess various impacts on the industry, from how many events have been canceled to the

estimated reduction in revenue derived from canceled and postponed events.

The survey is also seeking to collect profit forecasts for the first half of 2020 which take into account the epidemic's impact on the economy.

IPIM is calling on operators in the MICE industry to answer the survey by February 21.

The latest data shows that in the first three quarters of 2019 there were 1,075 MICE events, with total number of participants and attendees falling by 8.3% year-on-year to 1.26 million.

Last week, the government announced a raft of financial measures aiming to make the recovery for both local residents and companies in the coming months easier. This includes the measure that aim to support the SMEs of different sectors.

Some 3,000 SMEs will benefit from a tax reduction that allows these companies to increase their deduction ceiling from the current free income tax rate to MOP300,000.

IPIM is set to resume basic services today, alongside many other government entities and departments. LV



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Property of the Week



Large 3/4 Bedroom Apartment, Coloane

HK\$12,980,000 2,530 ft² 3 2 2

A large and open plan apartment that underwent a full renovation from the previous owner. The Master Bedroom and 4th Bedroom have been combined to create a large 'Master Suite' with walk-in wardrobe space and a large bathroom area.

The open plan kitchen merges into the dining and living areas to give a tremendous feeling of space. Two further bedrooms and a bathroom are separated by stairs and a hallway.

Situated on the top floor, there is a generous balcony leading off the living room and access to the building roof terrace via the external staircase. There are two car parks included in this property, it will make a fantastic family home and investment property, there is always a very high demand for rental.

Viewing by appointment.



SCAN ME

Property Hotlist



Beautiful apartment, Coloane

\$7,200,000

1,665 ft²

3 2 1



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Hoi Wan, Taipa

\$5,100,000

900 ft²

2 1



SCAN ME



Renovated Luxury Unit, Central Macau

\$20,000/mth

2 2



SCAN ME



Vai Fung Triplex, Macau

\$15,800/mth

2 2



SCAN ME

More Listings

For Sale

- [Taipa] 2 connected unit 4 2 1,404 ft² \$8,380,000 (ref: 19096006)
- [Macau] Lakeview Tower 3 2 1,344 ft² \$11,000,000 (ref: 19126001)
- [Taipa] Nova City 3 2 1,515 ft² \$11,750,000 (ref: 19106001)
- [Macau] One Central 2 2 1,349 ft² \$14,839,000 (ref: 19096004)
- [Taipa] Jade Garden 4 3 3,180 ft² \$18,000,000 (ref: 19126002)

For Rent

- [Taipa] Nam Long 2 1 645 ft² \$11,800/mth (ref: 19111001)
- [Coloane] Hellene Garden 1 3 3 1,663 ft² \$14,000/mth (ref: n/a)
- [Taipa] Nova Grand 2 1 935 ft² \$17,800/mth (ref: 19091005)
- [Cotai] One Grantai 3 3 2,122 ft² \$23,000/mth (ref: 19030001RT)
- [Taipa] Manhattan high floor 4 2 2,305 ft² \$26,800/mth (ref: 19091003)

Recent Movements

Sold Nam Long, 1 bed, Taipa

Sold Va Fat, Taipa, 1 bed

Rented Macau apartment, 2 bed



JML Events



Cradle of Hope



Caritas Macau



Macau Bats Junior Rugby Team



Macau Golf Masters

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Philippines mulls lifting Macau travel ban 'soon'

LYNZY VALLES

THE Philippines is considering lifting a travel ban to Macau and Hong Kong that has already inconvenienced several hundred migrant workers working in both special administrative regions.

This comes after the country's travel ban to Taiwan was lifted on Friday after the island issued a statement calling on the Philippine government to exclude it from temporary travel restrictions aimed at China. Taiwan stressed that it was "wrongly included" in the blanket ban designed to prevent spread of the coronavirus known as Covid-19.

Mocha Uson, an official from the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), said late last week that according to the country's Department of Labor and Employment, the lifting of the temporary ban may occur soon.

"The ban will be lifted soon,

that is according to Secretary Silvestre Bello III. That's good news. We did not want this to happen but [the issue] has reached the Malacañang Palace and the president," Uson said in a video clip posted on her social media page.

The information was confirmed by the country's tourism secretary who told CNN Philippines that the government is already looking into lifting the temporary travel ban to both SARs. Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat explained that travel restrictions are based on how a country or a territory implements protocols on how to address viral infection.

According to the official, both Hong Kong and Macau have yet to meet the conditions set by the Philippines' Inter-agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases.

The imposition of travel restrictions on tourists from China and its SARs started on February 3 in a bid to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 in the Philippines.

The ban covers all foreigners leaving China, Hong Kong and Macau, including those who visited these areas 14 days prior. Although Filipino citizens are not subject to the new measure, they may be required to undergo a 14-day quarantine upon returning to their home country.

This has inconvenienced Filipino workers working in the three regions, as few or no flights were available. Carriers including Philippine Airlines (PAL), Cebu Pacific Air and Air Asia have canceled all of their flights to and from these Chinese areas.

Late last week, the Philippine Consulate General in the SAR announced that a special direct Macau-Manila flight operated by PAL could be arranged "a week from now" at a regular commercial rate.

This comes after 134 distressed Filipinos in the region submitted a petition to request a chartered flight as their visas are nearing expiry.

Gov't 'studying' procedure to repatriate residents on cruise ships

RENATO MARQUES

THE government does not have a concrete plan as yet on how to repatriate the local residents currently stranded on two cruise ships affected by the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. The acknowledgment was made yesterday by the representative of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Inês Chan during the daily press conference of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center.

Questioned on the topic by the media, Chan admitted that the government is still considering the best solution to address this situation, as there is no final decision, as yet, on how the repatriation of the seven passengers on the two cruise ships will be handled.

"In relation to the situation of the Diamond Princess [cruise ship] which is stranded in Japan, we are following up the case closely and trying to help the Macau residents to return to Macau," replied Chan. "We need to consider several factors such as their health condition as well as the people

that are accompanying them. In this way, the services are still evaluating the best way to bring them back but for the time being, I have no information on this matter."

According to Chan, the five passengers from Macau on board the Diamond Princess cruise ship will be allowed to disembark on Wednesday and the government will find a solution to repatriate them to Macau. Chan assured that for the time being, the only certainty is that they will need to be subjected to a quarantine period to assure their health.

Chan said that the Tourism Crisis Management Office has already contacted the two residents on board of the Westerdam cruise ship that has finally docked in Cambodia after several countries refused to receive the vessel. However, the Office has been advised that the residents cannot leave the ship yet.

The Hong Kong government has recently expressed its intention to freight an airplane to repatriate all of its residents stranded on the Diamond Princess cruise ship.



Passengers of the Westerdam disembark at the port of Sihanoukville, Cambodia

UPCOMING RELIGIOUS EVENTS CANCELED IN SHUTDOWN COMPLIANCE

SEVERAL religious events from the Catholic and Taoist-Buddhist faiths will be canceled over the next few weeks in compliance with the city's effort to contain the Covid-19 outbreak, organizing entities have announced (more on p7).

The Catholic Diocese of Macau has taken action to assist in containing the coronavirus outbreak. It

has instructed all public masses to broadcast on the Diocese's website and YouTube channel rather than be open to the public. The arrangement will remain in effect until March 1, according to the latest information.

The first major event in the Diocese's calendar this year, the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord, the

God Jesus normally held on February 29 and March 1, is canceled as Catholic newsletter the Macau Observer reports.

The event is described by the tourist authority as "a unique Macau religious celebration," in which the image of Christ carrying the Cross is taken in solemn procession from St. Augustine's Church to the

Cathedral for an overnight vigil.

The epidemic will also affect those of the Taoist-Buddhist faith. The Lunar New Year is followed by two major events in the religious tradition, the Opening of Reserve of the Goddess of Mercy and the Feast of the Land Deity.

In the former, believers gather at temples that house

the Goddess to perform rituals and burn incense to pray for blessings.

As for the Feast of the Land Deity, held this year on the second day of the second lunar month, religious rituals will take place at the temples worshipping the deity across the city.

The temple at the Horta da Mitra District has

already announced the cancellation of at least one celebration event. Over the weekend, another temple, the Patane District Land Deity Temple, also canceled this year's celebrations.

The purpose behind the cancellations is to avoid the gathering of large crowds and thereby restrict the potential for the coronavirus to spread. **AL**

AP PHOTO



A security guard wearing a face mask walks through a quiet main Qianmen Street, a popular tourist spot, in Beijing

XI'S EARLY INVOLVEMENT IN VIRUS OUTBREAK RAISES QUESTIONS

YANAN WANG, BEIJING

A recent speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping that has been published by state media indicates for the first time that he was leading the response to a new virus outbreak from early on in the crisis.

The publication of the Feb. 3 speech was an apparent attempt to demonstrate that the Communist Party leadership had acted decisively from the beginning, but also opens Xi up to criticism over why the public was not alerted sooner.

In the speech, Xi said he gave instructions on fighting the virus on Jan. 7 and ordered the shutdown that began on Jan. 23 of cities at the epicenter of the outbreak. His remarks were published by state media late Saturday.

"On Jan. 22, in light of the epidemic's rapid spread and the challenges of prevention and control, I made a clear request that Hubei province implement comprehensive and stringent controls over the outflow of people," Xi told a meeting of the party's standing committee, its top body.

The number of new cases in mainland China fell for a third straight day, China's National Health Commission reported Sunday. The 2,009 new cases in the previous 24-hour period brought the total to 68,500.

Commission spokesman Mi

Feng said the percentage of severe cases has dropped to 7.2% of the total from a peak of 15.9% on Jan. 27. The proportion is higher in Wuhan, the Hubei city where the outbreak started, but has fallen to 21.6% from a peak of 32.4% on Jan. 28.

"The national efforts against the epidemic have shown results," Mi said at the commission's daily media briefing.

Taiwan yesterday reported its first death from the virus, the fifth fatality outside of mainland China. The island also confirmed two new cases, raising its total to 20.

Taiwan's Central News Agency reported that the person who died was a male in his 60s living in central Taiwan. The man had no recent overseas travel history and no known contact with virus patients, CNA said, citing Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung.

China reported 142 more deaths, almost all in Hubei, raising the mainland China death toll to 1,665. Another 9,419 people have recovered from COVID-19, a disease caused by a new coronavirus, and have been discharged from hospitals.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe convened an experts meeting to discuss measures to contain the virus in his country, where one person has died and more than a dozen cases emerged in the past few days without any obvious link to China.

"The situation surrounding

this virus is changing by the minute," Abe said.

Japanese Health Minister Katsunobu Kato said the country is "entering into a phase that is different from before," requiring new steps to stop the virus from spreading further.

About 400 Americans on a quarantined cruise ship in Japan were awaiting charter flights home, as Japan announced another 70 infections had been confirmed on the Diamond Princess. Canada, Hong Kong and Italy said they were planning similar flights.

Japan now has 412 confirmed cases, including 355 from the

cruise ship, and one death from the virus.

Xi's role was muted in the early days of the epidemic, which has grown into one of the biggest political challenges of his seven-year tenure.

The disclosure of his speech indicates top leaders knew about the outbreak's potential severity weeks before such dangers were made known to the public. It was not until late January that officials said the virus can spread between humans and public alarm began to rise.

Zhang Lifan, a commentator in Beijing, said it's not clear why

the speech was published now. One message could be that local authorities should take responsibility for failing to take effective measures after Xi gave instructions in early January. Alternatively, it may mean that Xi, as the top leader, is willing to take responsibility because he was aware of the situation, Zhang said.

Trust in the government's approach to outbreaks remains fractured after the SARS epidemic of 2002 and 2003, which was covered up for months.

Authorities in Hubei and Wuhan faced public fury over their initial handling of the epidemic. Wuhan on Jan. 23 became the first city to impose an unprecedented halt on outbound transportation, a measure since expanded to other cities with a combined population of more than 60 million.

The anger reached a peak earlier this month following the death of Li Wenliang, a young doctor who was reprimanded by local police for trying to spread a warning about the virus. He ended up dying of the disease himself.

In apparent response, the Communist Party's top officials in Hubei and Wuhan were dismissed and replaced last week.

Even as authorities have pledged transparency through the current outbreak, citizen journalists who challenged the official narrative with video reports from Wuhan have disappeared and are believed to be detained.

The fall in new cases follows a spike of more than 15,000 on Thursday, when Hubei began to include cases that had been diagnosed by a doctor but not yet confirmed by laboratory tests.

Overwhelmed by the number of suspected cases, the province has not been able to test every person exhibiting symptoms. The clinical diagnosis is based on doctors' analyses and lung imaging and is intended to allow probable cases to be treated as confirmed ones without the need to wait for a lab result. **AP**

WHO SAYS CHINA BOUGHT THE WORLD TIME

THE head of the World Health Organization praised China's efforts to contain the new disease, saying they have "bought the world time" and that other nations must make the most of it.

The U.N. health agency's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, urged governments to step up their efforts to prepare for the virus, saying "it's impossible to predict which direction this epidemic will take."

Tedros told a gathering of international foreign and security policy leaders in Germany on Saturday that WHO is encouraged there has not yet been widespread transmission outside China and that "the steps China has taken to contain the outbreak at its source appear to have bought the world time."

"We're encouraged that an international team of experts is now on the ground working closely with Chinese counterparts to understand the outbreak," Tedros told the Munich Security Conference.

But he said the agency is "concerned by the con-

tinued increase in the number of cases in China," and by reports about the number of health workers who have been infected or died.

"We must use the window of opportunity we have to intensify our preparedness," he added. "China has bought the world time. We don't know how much time."

This weekend, a team of WHO experts were due to begin a mission in China.

A WHO official, speaking at the conference in Munich, defended China's handling of the outbreak against criticism from the international community.

"Some of the rhetoric for me has not been helpful, not been helpful at all. China has a strong public health and health system," said Dr. Michael Ryan, WHO's chief of emergencies. "I think we as the global community need to change our narrative if we're going to work successfully with China and other countries to stop this disease." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Left: A Buddhist monk adjusts his face mask at the Wat Pho in Bangkok. Top right: A Catholic priest looks at a man during a mass at the Minor Basilica of San Lorenzo Ruiz in Manila's Chinatown. Bottom right: Churchgoers wearing face masks walk out of the St John's Cathedral after attending a mass in Hong Kong

Viral outbreak spooks Asian places of worship

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

IN a popular Catholic church in the Philippines, nearly half of the pews were empty for Sunday Mass. The few hundred worshippers who showed up were asked to refrain from shaking others' hands or holding them during prayers to prevent the spread of the virus that started in China.

In Hong Kong, Cardinal John Hon Tong, wearing a mask, announced the suspension of public Masses for two weeks and urged churchgoers to instead watch them online.

Buddhist temples, Christian churches and Muslim mosques have been ordered closed since Jan. 29 in mainland China, where the new coronavirus strain was first detected in the central city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak. Mosques have canceled weekly Friday prayers since January under an order to avoid "collective religious activities."

Religious leaders should encourage Muslims to "trust the party" and avoid crowds, the Communist Party-controlled body that oversees China's officially authorized mosques said in a statement.

The restrictions and dwindling crowds in religiously diverse places of worship underscore the extent of the scare over the outbreak that has permeated many aspects of life in the hard-hit Asian region. The

virus has killed more than 1,500 people and infected more than 67,000 others, mostly in China, where several cities that are home to more than 60 million people have been placed under lockdown in an unprecedented effort to contain the disease.

All but three of the deaths have been in China. Japan, Hong Kong and the Philippines have reported one fatality each.

In Japan, where Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines are tourist destinations, a sharp decline in the number of foreign visitors has been a palpable setback. At normally popular Suzumushi, or Crickets, temple, a sign read, "Due to the impact of the COVID-19, no waiting expected," using the name given to the disease by the World Health Organization.

"We assimilate with parishioners and many other people. We know that the talk of the town is really this virus and it's obvious that many are scared," said the Rev. Siegfried Arellano, a priest at the Binondo church in the Philippine capital's Chinatown.

Attendance at Masses, Arellano said, "has really dropped."

After consulting health experts, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines announced steps late last month to fight the virus. Churchgoers were advised to avoid hand contact and receive the Eucharist, which symbolizes the body of Jesus Christ, in the hand

instead of the mouth.

They said holy water should be replaced more often in church stoups and a protective cloth installed on the grills separating priests and worshippers in confessional boxes.

In Hong Kong, Tong initially approved precautions that included a choice for churchgoers to watch Sunday Mass online. Those who opted to go to churches were asked to wear masks and told that "singing is suspended," except for short hymns like "Alleluia." The new virus is spread through respiratory droplets, according to health officials.

Tong later announced the two-week suspension of Masses, saying the move was crucial to suppressing the outbreak, and asked Hong Kong's 400,000-strong Catholic community not to panic.

Masses in Singapore's Catholic churches have also been suspended indefinitely starting Saturday to contain the spread of the virus. The city-state has reported that 67 people have been infected, including a senior pastor and several members of the Grace Assembly of God church, which has shut down two premises and quarantined all staff.

Crowds also have thinned at Bangkok's popular Wat Pho, a centuries-old Buddhist temple complex known for its giant reclining Buddha. The temple is normally visited by thousands of tourists,

many of them Chinese, during the peak travel season from December to February, but large numbers of visitors as well as locals have stayed away since the outbreak began, said Phra Maha Udom Panyapho, a monk in charge of tourism at the temple.

A Protestant church in Seoul shut its doors and switched entirely to online worship services after one of its followers tested positive for the virus on Jan. 30.

Other Protestant churches in South Korea have sprayed their halls and rooms with disinfectant, canceled children's Bible school programs and asked followers to minimize socializing. Hundreds of Catholic churches in the country have halted the use of holy water stoups, allowed churchgoers to wear masks during Masses and discouraged those with flu-like symptoms or those who came from countries with confirmed cases of infection from attending.

Unlike public areas such as shopping malls, recreational centers and parks, discouraging the devout from going to their places of worship and imposing other restrictions on sacred sites can be extra sensitive. Amid the risks, some devotees consider going to religious gatherings as a test of faith.

"The virus can't dampen my faith," said Rey Gilber, a 55-year-old father of two who went to Mass at the Binondo church in Manila with his family. "God is always there and won't abandon us."

A key mosque in Malaysia's administrative capital of Putrajaya and two other mosques briefly closed their doors last month to non-Muslim visitors amid the virus scare, but later reopened after Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad called the move irresponsible.

Tens of thousands of ethnic Hindus, meanwhile, gathered last weekend to celebrate an annual festival called Thaipusam in the central Malaysian state of Selangor, undeterred by the outbreak. Malaysia has reported 19 cases of the virus.

Still, hundreds of staff and temple workers along with two dozen ambulances stood by. Emergency medical outposts were established as a precaution at the Batu Caves temple on a limestone hill, where pilgrims and tourists descended to watch devotees pierce their skin with hooks and skewers and carry offerings up a flight of 272 steps to the temple.

"We will not get the virus because God exists here," said Saratha, a 60-year-old housewife.

Without a cure in sight, many Asians have turned to faith.

Religious leaders across Asia have issued public prayers for the sick to recover, the contagion to stop and governments and international health agencies to find a cure.

Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, has not had any confirmed cases and residents walk about and pray in groups five times a day in mosques without masks. More than 60 people with pneumonia-like symptoms, including several foreigners, were placed under observation but later tested negative for the virus.

Indonesian Health Minister Terawan Agus Putranto said a strong immunity, healthy lifestyle and prayers were the best weapons against the outbreak.

"The key is to keep praying and maintain your immunity," Putranto said. "Don't underestimate the power of prayer." AP

AP PHOTO



Civilians flee from Idlib toward the north to find safety near the border with Turkey

Turkey, Russia to discuss grave situation in Syria's Idlib

GEIR MOULSON

A Turkish delegation will travel to Russia today to discuss the situation in Syria's Idlib province amid mounting fears of a humanitarian disaster there, Turkey's foreign minister said.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians in Idlib province are scrambling to escape a widening, multi-front offensive by Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

"What matters is today around 1 million people from Idlib have been moving towards our border," Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a statement Saturday after a phone call with U.S. President Donald Trump in which they discussed Syria and other topics. "We are already hosting 3.5-4 million people. Unfortunately we are not in a position of accepting this another 1 million."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said after meeting his German counterpart on

the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference that 2 million people could head for Turkey's border with Syria if no cease-fire is achieved.

He said a Turkish delegation was due to visit Moscow today to talk discuss the situation in Idlib, much of which remains in rebel hands. The meeting follows previous visits by a Russian delegation to Ankara. Russia supports Assad, while Turkey backs the opposition.

"There are already people coming to our border and, with Germany's support, we are going to build temporary shelters but these are temporary solutions," Cavusoglu said. "We need a cease-fire."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said he pushed Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who was also in Munich, for Russia to lean on Assad's government to stop

the fighting.

"We are very worried that this is going become a humanitarian catastrophe if the fighting there doesn't stop," he said.

According to the Russian foreign minister, parts of Idlib remain 'one of the last hotbeds of terrorism'

Cavusoglu said later Saturday he held a positive meeting with Lavrov.

The Russian foreign minister told the Munich conference after that meeting that parts of Idlib remain "one of the last hotbeds of terrorism, at least the only one on the west bank of the Euphrates."

Lavrov said that agreements between Moscow and Ankara "imply both a cease-fire and a demilitarized zone, but most importantly drawing a line between the normal opposition and terrorists."

"These agreements do not mean the hard fighting against the terrorist the threat will stop," he said.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, said at a news conference that Russia is the key to stopping the crisis since it provides the Syrian government with aerial support.

"Russia offers various excuses," he said.

Roth acknowledged the presence of thousands of jihadists in Idlib but said "that does not justify the indiscriminate bombardment of the civilian population."

"What is needed now as a matter of humanitarian concern for the people of Idlib and as a matter of basic avoidance of another refugee crisis, is firm pressure on [Russian President Vladimir] Putin to stop," he said. He urged Europe to exert that pressure. AP

this day in history



1979: CHINA INVADES VIETNAM

China has sent hundreds of troops into Vietnam after weeks of tension and a military build-up along the border.

Vietnamese Vice-Foreign Minister Nguyen Ko Tach has told ambassadors in Hanoi the Chinese troops have occupied nearly all Vietnamese border positions and are advancing southwards.

He did not give any idea of casualties or whether he would be calling on the assistance of the Soviet Union.

Vietnam and the USSR signed an alliance last year, but military analysts think it unlikely the nine Russian ships in Indochinese waters would be of much value in a land campaign.

An official statement from China has expressed a willingness to negotiate peace "after counter-attacking the Vietnamese aggressors as they deserve."

The assault follows months of exchanges between Chinese and Vietnamese authorities about illegal occupation of the ill-defined frontier territory.

Foreign observers have reported a quadrupling of the Chinese force there, numbering up to 150,000 troops and 300 aircraft, in the past three weeks.

Vietnam appears to have fewer soldiers as up to 100,000 of their troops are currently serving in Cambodia and another 25,000 are in Laos.

The Chinese Government in Peking (later Beijing) claimed the Vietnamese had made over 700 armed incursions into China and killed or wounded over 300 Chinese soldiers and civilians over the last six months.

The official Chinese Hsinhua News Agency said: "We do not want a single inch of Vietnamese territory. All we want is a peaceful and stable border."

Chinese vice-premier Deng Xiaoping has also threatened the Vietnamese Government in Hanoi with "punishment" for its engagement in Cambodia.

Hostilities between Hanoi and the Chinese-backed Cambodian Government broke out last year and culminated in the Vietnamese invasion on Christmas Day and collapse of Pol Pot's regime.

Vietnam has appealed to the United Nations and has not cut off diplomatic relations with China.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The next day Radio Hanoi reported the strategic border towns of Lao Cai and Mon Cai had fallen to the Chinese, along with smaller townships.

The broadcast suggested Vietnam had left much of the fighting to local militias rather than professional soldiers. The only support offered by the USSR was strong verbal condemnation.

China's invasion prompted British MPs to lobby the Labour Government to reconsider its decision to supply China with Harrier jump jets.

The Chinese continued their invasion until early March, taking several major towns.

The invasion led to many more Vietnamese refugee "boat people".

The Chinese Army's withdrawal was completed by 16 March.

Vietnamese troops stayed in Cambodia until 1989.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

There's real heat growing between you and someone else. Unfortunately, this person probably isn't emotionally available right now (no matter how available they may look).



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Your social status is on a rapid upswing, and you'll be in high demand by a wide array of people. Invitations will be coming your way left and right, and you should let yourself be as choosy as you want.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

If someone you know has recently been making a lot of promises but delivering on none of them, today is the day to say something. Ask this person why so many obligations have been neglected lately.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You're positively bursting with pride today, but it's not the bad kind that alienates people and makes you show off. It's the good kind, the kind that fills you with confidence and encourages you.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Have the celebrities in your social circle been getting a bit too big for their britches lately? Popular people are not always popular for the right reasons, and the chinks in their armor are beginning to show.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Could there be too much happening in your life right now? Not according to the stars. They say that your capacity for thinking fast, working faster, and enjoying every minute of the craziness is incredibly high.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Pinning all of your hopes on one person isn't a wise idea right now, so try to be realistic about your expectations. This person might be pretty awesome, but they may not be capable of delivering.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

If you've been separated from the world while nursing a bruised ego, it's time for you to get back into the game! Whether you feel ready or not, today is the day to step up and shift back into life.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Having good luck isn't always a passive experience. You can't just wait for a kind genie to arrive at your doorstep and grant you three wishes. In order to enjoy more luck in your life right now, you have to create it.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Your desire to make a connection with new people deserves to be satisfied, so reach out and approach that person who has been making you smile lately. It won't be difficult to make new friends.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Showing that you have the maturity and tact to negotiate with someone who rubs you the wrong way will send a very powerful signal to some important people you want to impress.

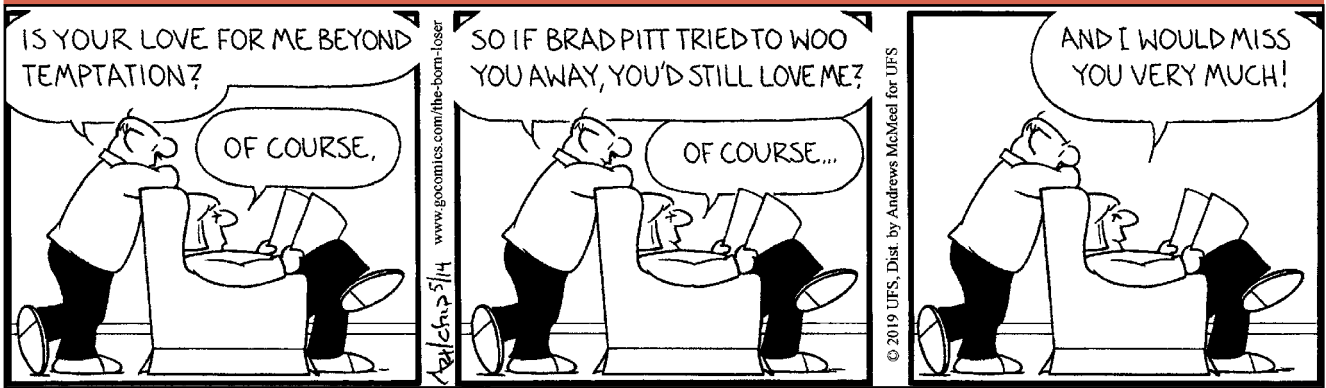


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Eavesdropping on interesting conversations can be a fun pastime, but it can also get you into a lot of trouble if you aren't careful. Play it safe and mind your own business.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	8	clear
Harbin	-21	-9	clear
Tianjin	-5	6	clear
Urumqi	-8	-1	clear
Xi'an	-4	10	clear
Lhasa	-3	14	clear
Chengdu	3	13	cloudy
Chongqing	4	14	cloudy
Kunming	3	11	drizzle
Nanjing	-3	8	clear
Shanghai	0	8	clear
Wuhan	-3	12	cloudy
Hangzhou	-2	9	clear
Taipei	9	12	cloudy
Guangzhou	6	15	cloudy
Hong Kong	10	16	cloudy

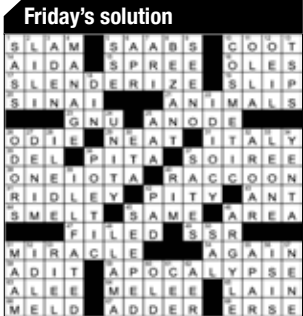
WORLD

Moscow	2	4	drizzle
Frankfurt	6	16	moderate rain
Paris	5	14	drizzle
London	5	13	drizzle
New York	0	4	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Wide-eyed; 5- Gumbo thickener; 9- Georgia, once; Abbr.; 12- Hot rock; 13- Singer Bonnie; 15- Volcano shape; 16- Colorless; 17- Novelist Calvino; 18- Smell ____; 19- Lozenge-shaped; 21- Tongue; 23- Arrest; 25- Gets the picture; 26- FedEx rival; 29- Queue before Q; 31- Sense; 35- Mosquito protection; 36- Lets up; 38- Kitchen gadget; 39- Gator's cousin; 41- Cessation; 43- Pottery material; 44- Omega's opposite; 46- Stormed; 48- Horse-like animal, term of insult; 49- Previous monetary unit of Spain; 51- Fine and delicate; 52- Asian holiday; 53- Dunce; 55- Litter's littlest; 57- Last; 61- Rough shelter; 65- Draft classification; 66- Capital on the Red River; 68- Horse of mixed color; 69- Surgery reminder; 70- Island off Venezuela; 71- Tyler's successor; 72- Tasteless items, junk; 73- Arouse; 74- Use scissors;

DOWN: 1- Designer Gucci; 2- Clothes; 3- Face shape; 4- Cameroon neighbor; 5- Novel; 6- Crazy ____; 7- Unit of currency in Iran and Yemen; 8- Collection of maps, Titan of Greek mythology; 9- Marsh bird; 10- A reel problem; 11- Network of nerves; 14- In shape; 15- Sarcastic; 20- Specify; 22- Will of "The Waltons"; 24- One in second, say; 26- Remove a covering; 27- Hostess Mesta; 28- Halts; 30- Flower segment; 32- Dazzling display; 33- Discontinue; 34- Rendezvous; 37- Sucrose; 40- Cheese; 42- Unusual; 45- Molecular component; 47- Unit of force; 50- Hi hi; 54- Former Russian rulers; 56- Diamond protectors; 57- Party-thrower; 58- Member of a great Peruvian people; 59- Cool; 60- Hardware fastener; 62- Middy; 63- Anklebones; 64- Peeling potatoes, perhaps; 67- Japanese sash;



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply – Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone – Report 1000
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	



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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)

FOR RENT

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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)

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Racketeering hammer gives US legal boost against Huawei

ALYZA SEBENIUS
& DAVID VOREACOS

BY filing a racketeering charge against Huawei Technologies Co., federal prosecutors unleashed a potent legal weapon in a multipronged and increasingly noisy U.S. campaign against the Chinese technology giant.

Huawei engaged in a two-decade racketeering operation to steal intellectual property from U.S. technology companies, as well as conspiracies to launder money and obstruct justice, according to the indictment unsealed last week in federal court in Brooklyn, New York. Those new counts added to earlier charges accusing Huawei of violating U.S. sanctions on Iran and financial fraud.

Deploying the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, or RICO, against the world's largest telecommunications equipment manufacturer gives the Justice Department legal and psychological advantages, said former prosecutors.

"Whether we like it or not, the first thing that people think of when they hear racketeering is organized crime," said David S. Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor. "It means that the jury receives a message that this is a conspiracy at the highest level of criminal conspiracies. That strengthens in the jury's mind that this is a serious case."

Often used against organized crime outfits such as the Mafia, racketeering charges were also deployed by federal prosecutors in Brooklyn in their crackdown on corruption in soccer's govern-

BLOOMBERG



ning body, FIFA. The RICO charge allows them to introduce a greater body of evidence and have wider latitude in seeking to forfeit assets if they win convictions against Huawei and its subsidiaries, said Barbara McQuade, a law professor at the University of Michigan and a former U.S. attorney.

"It gives prosecutors the ability to pull together disparate facts that they might not otherwise be able to pull together," McQuade said.

The U.S. accused Huawei of dominating markets by stealing from six U.S. technology companies and of violating economic sanctions against Iran. Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's chief financial officer and the daughter of the company's billionaire owner, was also charged in the case. She remains free on bail in Vancouver while she fights extradition to the U.S. She argues that the charges are politically motivated.

The new charges come as countries across the globe are deciding which companies will buy

their next generation networks. That could compound Huawei's image problem given the other allegations the U.S. has already leveled against the company, said Martijn Rasser, a senior fellow for technology and national security at the Center for a New American Security.

"The main immediate impact is it's yet another public relations hit," he said. "It's a snowball effect right when countries are making their decisions about Huawei."

Huawei called the charges "unfounded and unfair." The accusations rest on "recycled civil disputes from last 20 years that have been previously settled, litigated and in some cases, rejected by federal judges and juries," a spokesperson said. The indictment is "part of the Justice Department's attempt to irrevocably damage Huawei's reputation and its business for reasons related to competition rather than law enforcement."

Beyond the courtroom, the U.S. has waged a rhetorical offensive

that depicts Huawei as a security risk and an unfair competitor with little separation from the Chinese government. The Trump administration says that Huawei's fifth-generation, or 5G, telecommunications networks pose a national security threat, a claim allies have treated with some skepticism.

The U.K. has given Huawei the green light to help develop Britain's 5G networks - allowing the company to supply equipment such as antennas and base stations, but keeping Huawei out of the most sensitive parts of the network. That decision was a major blow to U.S. efforts to block Huawei from these networks.

The U.S. has threatened to withhold intelligence sharing with allies that utilize 5G networks deemed insecure due to the presence of any Huawei gear. Meanwhile, Canada has indicated its decision may be similar to that of the U.K.

"If the Chinese control the system, they'll take everything that comes down and everything that goes up to the cloud through 5G,"

U.S. National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said at an Atlantic Council event on Feb. 11.

"We have evidence that Huawei has the capability secretly to access sensitive and personal information in systems it maintains and sells around the world," he told the Wall Street Journal.

On Friday, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi offered bipartisan agreement on the threat.

"Nations cannot cede telecommunications infrastructure to China for financial expediency," Pelosi said.

The U.S., however, hasn't publicly provided evidence that details how Huawei's equipment poses a security threat.

U.S. officials have offered a variety of other arguments in warning about the dangers of using Huawei equipment.

Rob Strayer, the State Department's deputy assistant for cyber-policy, pointed out that China has no independent court system. "You cannot have this extrajudicial, non rule-of-law-compliant process where a government can tell its companies to do something," he said in April.

Huawei has also been criticized for being the beneficiary of state-sponsored capitalism, receiving major subsidies from the Chinese government, and for China's pursuit of leadership positions on international telecommunications organizations setting standards for 5G.

The indictment gave U.S. backing to claims by technology companies that Huawei had stolen intellectual property.

"They've done this for decades, and DOJ has decided to call them to account," said Jim Lewis, a senior vice president and director of the Technology Policy Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "Huawei is the poster child for China's commercial spying and this is part of a larger push back from the U.S." **BLOOMBERG**

CORPORATE BITS

MGM donates epidemic prevention items to local associations



MGM has donated masks, disposable caps and other necessary items to local associations to help satisfy the community's need for epidemic prevention supplies. The donation was given

to the frontline staff of the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FOAM), the General Union of Neighborhood Associations of Macau (UGAMM) and Caritas Macau.

The gaming operator also prepared 1,000 supply kits for local elderly citizens which were distributed with the helping hands of the above three organizations.

Each supply kit includes hand sanitizer, toilet paper, noodles, oatmeal and other daily necessities, the gaming operator said in a statement. "We have to thank our community partners, who have assisted us in sending warmth and supplies to the people in need at this critical moment, especially when we can't do that in person due to epidemic prevention reasons," said Grant Bowie, CEO and executive director of MGM China.

Melco to donate MOP5 million for workers' aid fund



Melco Resorts & Entertainment has announced a donation of 5 million patacas to assist in establishing the "Special Aid Fund for Workers

in Need" in collaboration with Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), the gaming operator announced in a statement.

The fund will support members of the community with unstable incomes who are heavily affected by coronavirus known as Covid-19.

Target beneficiaries of the fund donation include workers and self-employed persons such as taxi drivers, coach drivers, and tour guides, as well as their families.

Lawrence Ho, Chairman & CEO of Melco, said, "Melco stands hand in hand with the local community through these particularly difficult times."

Ho pledged that the gaming operator will continue to work closely with the government to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its customers and employees.

RUGBY

FANS TOLD TO REMOVE RAINBOW FLAGS ON ISRAEL FOLAU'S DEBUT

AS Israel Folau made a try-scoring debut for his new club Catalan Dragons on Saturday, a man watching from the stands was told to remove a rainbow flag unfurled in support of the LGBT movement.

Folau has been widely condemned for posting homophobic comments on social media. It led to Folau — a former try-scoring star with Australia's rugby union national team — being fired by Rugby Australia last year.

He was then hired by the Dragons. But the rugby league side, based in southern France, has faced a strong backlash for handing him a 12-month deal.

The security official asking the man to remove the flag — which was draped over a railing — appeared to suggest it was covering up a portion of an advertising hoarding, high up in the stands.

The rainbow flag is used as a symbol of the LGBT movement and promotes social equality.

A woman who said she attended Saturday's game with the flag said that she was twice asked

AP PHOTO



Catalans Dragons Israel Folau has his photo taken with a young fan

to remove it.

Alison Grey tweeted: "Firstly as I was told it was against health and safety. Secondly because it is against club policy."

The Dragons later issued a statement saying it was not club policy and they would look into the matter. It read: "Rainbow fla-

gs are not banned at our club. It is not forbidden. We are gathering more information about what happened."

Folau was left out of the squad for a match at Wakefield Trinity last weekend, but was given a friendly reception at the 10,500-capacity Stade Gilber-

t-Brutus in Perpignan. Young fans posed for photos with Folau afterward. He scored the team's first try early on in a 36-18 win.

The Dragons' chairman, Bernard Guasch, has said his club does not agree with Folau's views and that it signed an agreement with the Rugby Football League

that any transgression by him will immediately terminate his contract.

Speaking after Saturday's match, Dragons coach Steve McNamara was reluctant to debate the issue of Folau's signing.

"Is he a good person? Is he a good player? Will he add value to the team, on and off the field, not judging on any political or religious belief that he's got?" McNamara said. "We will not repeat anything that we've [already] said, whether you [the media] like that or not ... We've said quite clearly we don't agree with [Folau's views]. We've said that. Well, that's it."

In an Instagram post in April that caused widespread outrage and led to his firing, Folau condemned "drunks, homosexuals" and warned "hell awaits" them. He was fired before reaching an out-of-court settlement with the organization in December.

In November, Folau linked the bushfires that have devastated Australia as God's punishment for legalizing same-sex marriage and abortion.

The arrival of Folau was fiercely opposed by the Super League, the Rugby League and the majority of clubs. It led to an agreement, during a recent meeting of clubs in Europe's Super League held in England, on how to deal with future signings. **MDT/AP**

AD



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Orthopaedic Surgery & Sports Medicine : Dr. Lam Kun Kuan

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OPINION

World Views

David Fickling, Bloomberg

BIG DATA WON'T SAVE YOU FROM CORONAVIRUS

How often do you see a piece of economic or financial information revised upward by 45%? And how reliable would you regard a data set that's subject to such adjustments?

This is the problem confronting epidemiologists trying to make sense of the novel coronavirus spreading from China's Hubei province. On Thursday, the tally there surged by 45% — or 14,480 cases. The revision was largely due to health authorities adding patients diagnosed on the basis of lung scans to a previous count, which was mostly limited to those whose swab tests came back positive.

The medical data emerging from hospitals and clinics around the world are invaluable in determining how this outbreak will evolve — but the picture painted by the information is changing almost as fast as the disease itself, and isn't always of impeccable provenance. Just as novel infections exploit weaknesses in the body's immune defenses, epidemics have an unnerving habit of spotting the vulnerabilities of the data-driven society we've built for ourselves.

That's most visible in the contradictory information we're seeing around how many people have been infected, and what share of them have died. While those figures are essential for getting a handle on the situation, as we've argued, they're subject to errors in sampling and measurement that are compounded in high-pressure, strained circumstances. The physical capacity to do timely testing and diagnosis can't be taken for granted either.

Early case fatality rates for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome were often 40% or higher before settling down to figures in the region of 15% or less. The age of patients, whether they get sick in the community or in a hospital, and doctors' capacity and experience in offering treatment can all affect those numbers dramatically.

Even the way that coronavirus cases are defined and counted has changed several times, said Professor Raina MacIntyre, head of the University of New South Wales's Biosecurity Research Program: From "pneumonia of unknown cause" in the early days, through laboratory-confirmed cases once a virus was identified, to the current standard that includes lung scans. That's a common phenomenon during outbreaks, she said.

Those problems are exacerbated by the fact that China's government has already shown itself willing to suppress medical information for political reasons. While you'd hope the seriousness of the situation would have changed that instinct, the fact casts a shadow of doubt over everything we know.

While every piece of information is subject to revision and the usual statistical rule of garbage-in, garbage-out, epidemiologists have ways to make better sense of what is going on.

Well-established statistical techniques can be used to clean up messy data. A study this week by Imperial College London used screening of passengers flying to Japan and Germany to estimate the fatality rate for all cases was about 1% — below the 2.7% of confirmed ones found in Hubei province, but higher than the 0.5% seen for the rest of the world.

When studies from different researchers using varying techniques start to converge toward common conclusions, that's also a strong if not faultless indication that we're on the right track. The number of new infections caused by each coronavirus case has now been identified in the region of 2.2 or 2.3 by several separate studies, for instance — although that number itself can be subject to change as people quarantine themselves and self-segregate to prevent infection.

The troubling truth, though, is that in a society that expects to know everything, this most crucial piece of knowledge is still uncertain. [Abridged]

BANSKY'S VALENTINE'S DAY MURAL COVERED AFTER IT WAS DEFACED

The family who owns a house in southwest England where an artwork from Banksy appeared in time for Valentine's Day has covered the mural after it was defaced.

Temporary fencing was also added Saturday to the home in Bristol and closed-circuit television has been installed to protect the artwork, which shows a young girl firing red flowers from a catapult.

The elusive artist confirmed the mural as his creation on his official Instagram account on Feb. 14. It was later defaced with an expletive.

Kelly Woodruff, the daughter of Edwin Simons, who owns the rented home on which the artwork appeared, said the family felt a "strong responsibility" to ensure that the artwork could be enjoyed by the general public.

"Due to the mindless vandalism to the artwork, the family have taken the very difficult decision to cover the artwork to try to protect it," she said. "All measures are temporary and we ask that the public are patient while we work out the best way to clean the damage, restore and protect it for the future, so everyone can enjoy Banksy's work."

VILLAGES TOLD TO END FOOD SUPPLY INTERRUPTION



Men wearing face masks stand near a barricade at the entrance to their village in China

JULIE ZHU

A series of barricades set up by Guangdong citizens to stop the free movement of people and goods within the province have forced the Guangdong government to issue an urgent notification banning any obstacles to the free movement of vegetable supplies to Macau and Hong Kong.

Last week, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Guangdong Province issued an urgent notification to safeguard the normal production and supply of agricultural resources and products from the "vegetable basket". This seeks to ensure an uninterrupted supply of vegetables to Macau, Guangdong, and Hong Kong.

The notice, which was jointly issued by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Guangdong Province, the transportation authority, and the police authority of Guangdong province, said that setting up checkpoints to block roads and traffic without the approval of the local or central government is prohibited.

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19), mainland citizens have come up with a myriad of ways to block outsiders from entering a village or a community, all designed to prevent the virus from infiltrating the community.

The situation worsened in many provinces as the relevant government authority issued work instructions to

isolate villages, residential buildings and communities. Such policies were issued in Guangdong province on February 7.

Blocking villages, streets, residential buildings and communities has caused chaos to transportation, also creating difficulties in the supply of ordinary daily products.

The urgent notification issued by the three Guangdong authorities also reminded the public that it is prohibited to intercept or slaughter live poultry, and to intercept aquatic seeds and other agricultural products.

This call serves to ensure that important agricultural products will not be held inside a village and prevented from reaching the cities.

HK FACING 'TSUNAMI-LIKE' SHOCKS, SAYS FINANCE CHIEF

HONG Kong is facing "tsunami-like" shocks, and may incur a record budget deficit in the next fiscal year as the city counts the costs of the coronavirus outbreak after months of social unrest, Financial Secretary Paul Chan said.

The impact of the epidemic on the Hong Kong economy is being felt beyond retail, food and beverage and tourism-related industries, Chan said in a blog post Sunday. The short-term economic outlook is "cautious," and shocks can

cause the unemployment rate to "deteriorate rapidly," Chan said.

"In addition to launching counter-cyclical relief measures to support the economy, the government's recurrent expenditure in the past 10 years has continued to increase significantly, and the weakening economy has significantly reduced government revenue from tax and land," Chan wrote, elaborating on the deficit.

The budget shortfall will likely continue for a period

of time, he said.

Economists are revising down their forecasts for Hong Kong's economic growth in 2020, with the virus worsening the current recession which was a fallout from the city's political crisis. The government will seek approval from the territory's legislature for at least HKD25 billion (\$3.2 billion) in fresh funding to reduce the impact of the coronavirus outbreak in the city, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said Friday. **BLOOMBERG**



Israel Opposition leader Benny Gantz is vowing to form a government that will include neither the indicted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor the predominantly Arab parties in Parliament. In a series of TV interviews two weeks before national elections, Gantz looked to project confidence that the March 2 vote will provide the decisive outcome that eluded the two previous elections last year



Israel The Israeli military yesterday said it has thwarted an attempt by the Hamas militant group to hack soldiers' phones by posing as young, attractive women on social media, striking up friendships and persuading them into downloading malware. Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus told reporters that the phones of dozens of soldiers had been infected in recent months, although he said the army detected the scam early on and prevented any major secrets from reaching the Islamic militant group.

France on Saturday reported the first death outside Asia of a person infected with the new virus from China, an 80-year-old Chinese tourist who two French hospitals initially turned away, and also reported a new confirmed case that brought the country's total to 12.



Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro addressed tens of thousands of evangelicals on a Rio de Janeiro beach Saturday, telling them Brazil's government is working to restore morality in Latin America's largest nation, just as pre-Carnival festivities get under way.