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Italy Premier Giuseppe Conte put his entire country on lockdown to combat the coronavirus, banning all but the most important travel and putting the final kibosh on social gatherings after Italians failed to take previous warnings to heart amid skyrocketing infections. Two days after imposing the same strict measures in the hard-hit north, Conte urged all 60 million Italians to stay home. More on p8



Japan A task force set up by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved a 430 billion yen (\$4.1 billion) package that includes support for small to medium-size businesses hit by the coronavirus outbreak, amid criticisms over his handling of the crisis. The package also includes subsidies for parents who need to take time off work due to school closures, funding for development of virus vaccines and test kits and for extra production of protective masks, banning of their resale.



EU A European Union summit via computer. The EU parliament a virtual ghost village in a shortened session. The assembly's president working from home, self-isolating due to coronavirus. The disease that shutdown Italy has not hit Brussels in a major way but it has struck at the heart of politics in Europe.

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MACAU SCHOOLS TO REOPEN NO LATER THAN APRIL 20

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HONG KONG RESIDENT ARRESTED FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING

A Hong Kong resident has been arrested for drug trafficking, according to the Judiciary Police (PJ). After receiving a tip-off regarding a 26-year-old man from Hong Kong, the PJ found the man in a hotel located in the ZAPE area. The police authorities were seized 92 packs of cocaine with a net weight of 31.17 grams, worth about MOP80,000. The suspect admitted to selling drugs to customers in Macau. For each pack he sold, he was compensated with HKD60. He had been in Macau for five days and had already sold 50 packs. The PJ believes that the drug trafficking situation has worsened following Macau's reopening of entertainment venues such as nightclubs.

GOV'T RECEIVES 160,000 FACEMASKS FROM ANONYMOUS DONOR

An anonymous enterprise has donated 160,000 facemasks to the Macau government, local authorities disclosed on Monday. According to a statement by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre, the donation will help the government in its fight against the Covid-19 epidemic. It follows several other donations of facemasks, hand sanitizers and cash in recent weeks by casino operators and other large local enterprises. The government has sold over 20 million facemasks to residents and non-resident workers since late January under a distribution system designed to ensure an uninterrupted supply to the city. The next round of mask distribution will begin on Friday, according to the government.

LAWMAKERS WANT EXPLANATION ON PENALTIES FOR UNLICENSED MEDICAL PRACTICE

Lawmakers want the local government to further explain the city's healthcare professional qualification and registration regime, in particular, regarding unlicensed medical practices. The bill proposed that harboring unlicensed medical practices should lead to a suspension of medical services for a minimum of two years. Lawmakers have different opinions regarding this specific provision. According to the bill, when a medical organization hires unlicensed doctors, the organization is disqualified from practice. When considering the punishment of healthcare professionals for irregularities, the bill proposes to consider the relevant parties' financial capability as a criterion for the level of punishment. Lawmakers and the Legislative Assembly's legal advisors have different opinions on this topic, and have requested further explanation from the government.

GOV'T STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF HONEST TRAVEL DECLARATIONS AFTER CASE SLIPS THROUGH

ANTHONY LAM

HONEST travel history declarations are one of the most important factors in preventing another coronavirus outbreak in the city, the Health Bureau (SSM) stressed yesterday, after it announced that one mainland tourist had been dishonest in the declaration but managed to enter and exit Macau.

At yesterday's daily press conference, Leong Iek Hou, the coordinator of the SSM's Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), announced that a mainland tourist had managed to enter Macau without declaring previous travel in South Korea within the last 14 days.

The Zhuhai CDC disclosed the case to its Macau counterpart on Monday under the regional communication mechanism. It is not clear how the Zhuhai entity learned of the person's travel history.

The suspicious person flew from Incheon, South Korea, to Shenyang, Liaoning province of China, on March 3. Two days later, the person flew to Zhuhai and entered Macau that evening.

The current immigration measures enacted in Macau require all who have been to severely affected areas, such as South Korea, Italy and Japan, to make an honest declaration about their travel history, and undergo quarantine at Pousada Marina Infante.

Upon receiving the notice, the SSM reviewed the health declaration submitted by the case and found no mention of the travel history to South Korea. The health authority reported the incident to the Public Security Police Force (PSP) for investigation.

According to the Contagious Disease Prevention and Treatment Law, making a false health declaration may lead to six months' imprisonment, or a fine that equates to a maximum of 60 days.

The PSP acted promptly and traced the suspicious case, sending them to Pousada Marina

AP PHOTO



Infante for quarantine. It was later learned that the case entered Macau with a mainland Chinese passport, which suggests that they may overstay their visa in order to complete the quarantine period.

The PSP explained that further arrangement may be made with regards to the situation. Now that the investigation has concluded, relevant documents are with the Public Prosecutions Office for review.

The reliability of the self-declaration scheme has previously been called into question. With global travel common, quick and affordable, people are curious to learn how the local authorities plan to close down predictable loopholes.

Macau's health authority has been emphasizing that efforts on the containment of contagious diseases should not only rely on the government. The participation of the general public is crucial.

In previous press conferences, both the SSM and the PSP have reiterated the importance of honest health declarations. It has also been repeatedly stressed that failing to be honest is a criminal offence. Although the individual in the aforementioned cases now faces prosecution, the deterrent effect of the health declaration mechanism on future entrants remains unclear.

“How have we achieved 35 days with zero new infections? It relied on the diligence of the public.”

LEONG IEK HOU
CDC COORDINATOR

“How have we achieved 35 days with zero new infections?” asked Leong at yesterday's press conference. “It relied on the diligence of the public.”

“We have been using a wide range of channels to stress the

importance of honest declaration,” added the coordinator. “There will be loopholes, of course, but I have introduced that we have strong connections with other cities in the region.”

In addition to its direct communication channels with other cities within the region, Macau can also make use of the World Health Organization (WHO) network.

For example, in previous outbreaks of Japanese encephalitis and measles, countries with an epidemic notified Macau through the People's Republic of China, under the WHO communication mechanism.

“We try our best to close loopholes at different levels, but still, the most important point is that the general public honestly declare their travel history,” Leong said at last.

She made no comment on the possibility that the person who falsely declared their travel history and entered Macau might have infected others during their time in the city.

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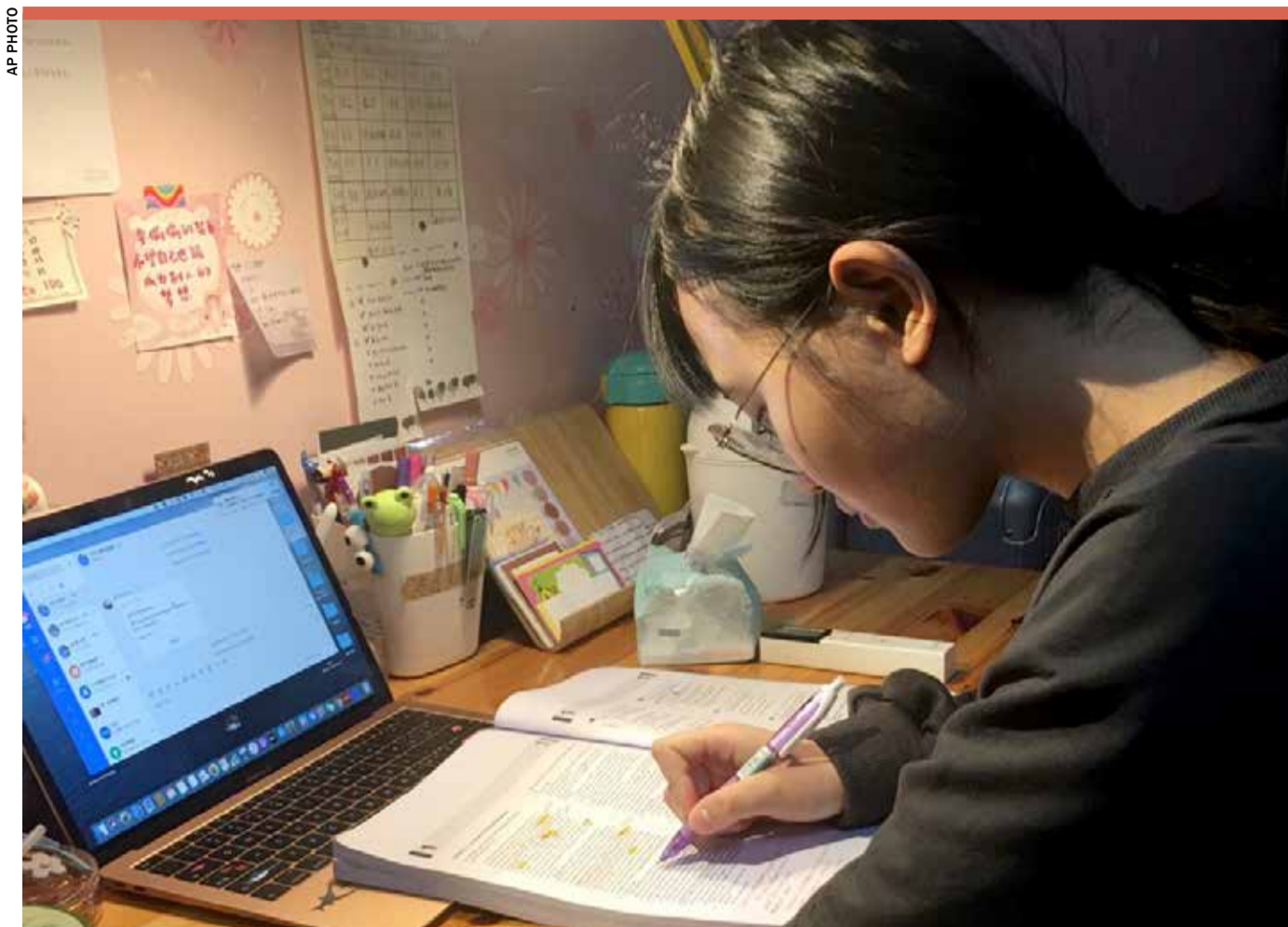
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A high school junior in the Chinese city of Chongqing studies at home

HIGHER EDUCATION

54 STUDENTS IN TAIWAN REQUEST TRANSFER TO LOCAL UNIVERSITIES

JULIE ZHU

FIFTY-FOUR local residents who are currently enrolled in university programs in Taiwan have asked for a transfer to Macau universities, according to a report by Macao Daily News.

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, in February, Taiwan implemented a policy that sought to restrict the entrance of Macau and Hong Kong residents to Taiwan, including Macau residents currently studying at Taiwanese universities.

As of Monday, the Higher Education Bureau (DSES) received a total of 179 inquiries from local residents who are university students in Taiwan asking to transfer to a Macau university.

So far, the DSES has already approved five cases. Three students have already registered and will start attending local universities in September.

According to a report by TVBS News, nearly 8,000 students from Macau and Hong Kong have not returned to Taiwan due to the island's recent policies restricting the admittance to Taiwan for residents of the SARs. The report said that National Taiwan University has 978 students from Macau and Hong Kong and over 500 of them are still not able to enter Taiwan.

The Macau contingency consists of about 1,200 students who are unable to return to Taiwan to resume their studies. In total, around 4,500 students from Macau are studying at universities in Taiwan at Tamkang University, Ming Chuan University, National Taiwan University, and Soochow University, among others.

Meanwhile, as of 4 p.m. on Monday, nearly 1,200 local parents had registered their children for facemask purchases. These children are currently studying outside Macau, in areas including Taiwan, mainland China, Hong Kong, Portugal, and Australia.

In order to assist Macau residents who are studying outside of the city, the DSES launched an online system to help them buy facemasks.

Qualified students can register online through this system. Their family members can collect the facemasks and have them sent abroad to their place of residence. The registration must be completed before 5 p.m. tomorrow.

Macau schools to reopen in phased approach next month

JULIE ZHU

THE city's non-tertiary schools will reopen no later than April 20, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Ao Ieong U announced yesterday, after meeting with the city's lawmakers to inform them of education-related matters during the coronavirus outbreak period.

At the current stage, the local government expects primary, secondary and high schools to resume in the beginning of April. Other schools will follow in a phased approach, according to the government's plans.

Students in the final year of high school will resume on March 30. Lawmaker Zheng Anting reported to the media yesterday that this resumption is not mandatory, meaning that parents or students can still choose not to go to school.

Some lawmakers believe that the different levels of schooling should reopen at different times. According to Zheng, school resumption should not occur on the same date for all classes. Some lawmakers believe that decision to resume school should be delayed for younger students, with the

conditions governing their return to school made stricter than for older students.

Each level will gradually resume activities, depending on the epidemic development. Once high schools resume work, students will follow the city's health instructions, including sitting no less than one meter away from one another, wearing facemasks, completing health declaration forms and undergoing body temperature scans.

The government's decision is based on the development of the epidemic in the mainland, especially in the nearby cities of Zhongshan and Zhuhai. According to the Secretary, these two cities have not recorded new Covid-19 cases for more than 20 consecutive days.

School resumption means that some students will travel from Zhongshan and Zhuhai to Macau to attend school. Ao Ieong urged students and teachers who are still in the mainland to return to Macau. These students and teachers are also required to go through 14 days of quarantine before heading back to school.

School reopening may still be postponed depending on the epidemic deve-

lopment.

There is no schedule to reopen universities as of now. Over 18,000 mainland students are enrolled in Macau's university programs. Considering that these students are spread across different places in mainland China, the government has not yet decided when to reopen universities. Local universities have already launched online learning platforms for students, which means that the students' study progress is less likely to be affected in comparison to non-tertiary level institutions.

The local government will announce the university resumption date with at least 14 days' notice.

On the sidelines of yesterday's meeting, lawmaker José Pereira Coutinho expressed disappointment over the government's decision and highlighted several issues that had gone unaddressed.

He voiced particular concern about the supply of facemasks for children. Although, the government did not answer the lawmaker about facemask storage, Secretary Ao Ieong pledged that local government will have a sufficient supply of facemasks for students.

"We need to be very careful especially with underage children," said Coutinho. "From the second and third phase of masks [supply], we already felt that the government has a bit of pressure in getting the masks [for children]," Coutinho said. "Children's facemasks are very important; we must ensure that we have masks in all schools."

Coutinho also raised concerns about the safety of students boarding busy public buses while commuting to school every day.

AD

Notes on hand washing

1. Wash hands frequently with liquid soap and water, or use alcohol-based handrub for disinfection.
2. Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds, including front and back of the hands, fingers, nails, wrists and forearms.
3. Dry hands with paper towel or hand dryer; never share towels with others.

Scan QR Code to access the 'Special webpage against Epidemics' webpage for latest information on the outbreak.

or enter URL:
<https://www.ssm.gov.mo/PreventWuhanInfection/>

Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre
Enquiries: Centre for Disease Control and Prevention
Tel: 28708600

The Macao SAR Government urges:
Let's all persist; Avoid crowd gathering; Wash hands frequently;
Wear a mask properly; Declare health conditions; Reduce leaving Macao.

RESIDENTS CAN VISIT ESCAPED COW NICKNAMED 'MACOW'

The cow that escaped from the slaughterhouse in Ilha Verde last year has been moved into its new home in Seac Pai Van. Members of the public can now visit it. José Tavares, president of the Executive Council of the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced yesterday. Tavares added that the space housing the cow is satisfactory. Before moving into the new residence, the cow underwent quarantine. As part of the effort to retrieve the cow, workers with the IAM administered five shots of anesthetic to the animal, rendering its products inedible. The cow's original owner expressed a willingness to gift the cow to the IAM. The cow was set to be butchered before it escaped from the slaughterhouse on December 4, 2019. It wandered around Ilha Verde for a brief period before being caught. A name for the cow has not yet been announced, but previously, netizens proposed names for the animal, including "MaCow" and "Ou Ao," meaning "Macau cow".

MACAU INC. RELEASED FEATURING LIU LIANG COVER



The March edition of Macau Inc. magazine has been released, with academician Liu Liang, Rector of the Macau University of Science and Technology, making the cover this month. The cover story is about epidemic prevention and the role of integrated medicine amid the current coronavirus outbreak, which has taken over public discourse in the past few months. In addition to the cover story, this edition of Macau Inc. includes a comprehensive review of the various stages of the government's response to the outbreak, from its first formal moves in early January to its recent success in eliminating the virus from the territory. There is also special mention of the measures taken by the six gaming concessionaires to help the Macau community during the past two months, including their donations to the government and partnerships with local associations.

FLOOD PREVENTION WORKS TO BEGIN IN NORTHERN DISTRICT

In the third quarter of this year, the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) will start building flood prevention facilities along the coast of Fai Chi Kei to Ilha Verde, in order to guard against the risk of flooding in these areas. From Rua da Ilha Verde to Zona de Lazer da Avenida Marginal do Lam Mau, along a distance of 2,500 meters, the DSSOPT will build a 1.2-meter-tall flood wall, approximately 3.2 meters above the sea level, as well as valves to prevent seawater intrusion. The construction period for this project is 360 working days.

GAMING

NEARLY HALF OF ALL CASINO TABLES BACK IN OPERATION

LYNZY VALLES

A total of 3,100 gaming tables have resumed operation since the reopening of casinos in February, representing 46% of the total number of tables.

On February 20, casinos in the region resumed their activities in phases after the Macau SAR government ordered a mandatory 15-day casino shutdown to combat the spread of Covid-19.

According to data from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, up to March 9, a total of 38 casinos had reopened, with only one casino not presenting a request to resume activity, while two casinos remain closed, as they had been prior to the government's order.

The bureau said that since the reopening, it has carried out several inspections in the casinos and has detected 28 cases of non-compliance with the Health Bureau's guidelines, namely the distance and arrangement of gaming tables and seats, as well as the non-use of masks by customers in casinos.

Prior to the resumption of the city's casinos, the government required gaming operators to adopt certain measures, such as filling out health declaration forms and the mandatory use of face masks.

The government also imposed body-temperature checks at casino entrances and an increase in space between



gaming tables to avoid a large number of people from concentrating in a small area.

Macau casino operators were told to reopen at the stroke of midnight on February 20, unless they applied for a grace period if they considered themselves not ready to resume operations. Six casino concessionaires could apply to the government for a maximum of 30-day closure extension period during which time they will not be required to operate. After the extension period elapses, the casino operators are required to resume normal operations.

The closure of the casinos was one of the major reasons as

to why the city's gross gaming revenue last month tumbled 87.8% from a year earlier, recording only 3.1 billion patacas.

Gaming analysts expect little improvement this month with brokerage JP Morgan Securities (Asia Pacific) Ltd. forecasting that revenue may still plunge as much as 80%.

Meanwhile, a note from brokerage Sanford C. Bernstein states that gross gaming revenue was 1.4 billion patacas through the first eight days of the month, down 79% year-on-year. Assuming that travel restrictions are still in place by the month-end, Bernstein predicts the city's revenue to tumble between 75% to 85% year-on-year

this March.

Also cited in the note, Melco Resorts & Entertainment and Wynn Macau are outperforming their rivals due to their weight in the VIP sector. The research house states that the VIP segment is performing better during this outbreak period.

April's gross gaming revenue performance will be influenced by several factors, including whether restrictions to issuing the Individual Visit Scheme permits for mainland residents to travel to Hong Kong or Macau will be lifted, as some expect. These restrictions have reduced the entry of tourists and gamblers from the mainland into Macau.

Singapore politician dubs Macau battle against Covid-19 'Platinum Standard'

RENATO MARQUES

AN opposition politician in Singapore has commended Macau's approach to battling the outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus, dubbing it "Platinum Standard." Lim Tean's comments were made on the politician's Facebook page, "People's Voice Singapore."

In the acknowledgment that Macau had discharged the last of the 10 patients being treated for the Co-

vid-19, Lim said, "The territory now has zero coronavirus patients and no new cases for over a month. [...] Despite being next to mainland China, it only had 10 cases of the virus."

In the long post, the leader of the country's opposition party added that if there is one territory or country that deserves a platinum medal for protecting its people's health and safety, it should be Macau. He praised the region's authori-

ties for their efforts in containing the disease outbreak and listed several measures undertaken by the local government, including the closing of the casinos, bars, cinemas, and other entertainment venues as well as the government's mask distribution program.

Lim also praised the enforcement of mask usage on public transport, comparing it with the situation in Singapore, where people continue to fo-

cus on whether it is necessary to wear a face mask if one is not sick. Besides Macau, Lim also mentioned Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Thailand as other good examples of places where the wearing of face masks is widespread and encouraged, resulting in a lower number of cases of Covid-19 when compared to Singapore.

Lim urged several ministers and other people in charge of Singapore's task force on the Covid-19 outbreak,

to "learn from these countries [and regions] instead of making excuses all the time when explaining why Singapore is seeing a spike in the number of cases."

Currently, the city-state has confirmed a total of 160 cases of Covid-19 from which 93 have recovered. No deaths due to Covid-19 have been yet reported in Singapore.

Yesterday was Macau's fifth day Covid-19-free after a month without any new cases being reported.



SPORTS

Women's Volleyball going ahead but FIVB does not rule out changes

RENATO MARQUES

PREPARATIONS for the Macau round of the FIVB Women's Volleyball Nations League, scheduled for early June this year are ongoing and in line with the initial schedule, the Sports Bureau (ID) said in a statement to the Times.

"The preparatory work of the FIVB Women's Volleyball Nations League – Macao 2020, which is due to be held from June 2 to 4, 2020, is ongoing according to schedule. The Sports Bureau will continue to maintain its close communication with the FIVB in every aspect of the event," the ID said.

Although preparations are being undertaken according to the plans, the international volleyball federation (Fédération Internationale de Volleyball or FIVB), the main organizer of the worldwide event, has not ruled out the possibility of making changes to the calendar due to the outbreak of Covid-19.

In a statement to the Times, the organization said, "The FIVB is monitoring the outbreak of coronavirus very closely on an hour-by-hour basis. This is a very fast-moving, global issue and we are in regular consultation with national as well as global authorities, including the International Olympic Committee and the World Health Organization, to determine any potential impact on upcoming FIVB events."

"Should any changes need to be made to our competition calendar we will alert all FIVB stakeholders at the earliest opportunity," the statement added.

In the same statement, the international governing body noted that it is willing to enact changes to the calendar if needed, in circumstances where hosting the events would put "the health and well-being of all athletes, officials, and fans" at risk.

The FIVB Women's Volleyball Nations League, known to be one of the major international sports events being held in Macau annually, is scheduled to be held from June 2 to 4, when the Pool 11 matches are to be played.

The three-day event this year counts the participation of teams from China, Brazil, Serbia, and Belgium.

The competition is scheduled

to start on May 19 with the Pool 4 matches hosted by China. It includes the participation of the teams representing Japan, South Korea, and Thailand. The mainland city which will host this first round has yet to be announced.

In total, the schedule of the competition comprises five rounds to be hosted in China, with the third and fourth to take place in Macau and Hong Kong respectively.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 has led to the cancellation and postponement of several major international sports events, including the Chinese Formula One Grand Prix, the Indian Wells tennis tournament, and the MotoGP event in Thailand.

Other events have been authorized to be held but with restrictions, such as the barring of spectators. These circumstances are in place for several football matches as well as the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix.

Locally, the ID announced only the cancellation of this year's martial arts event – the Wushu Masters Challenge. Formerly it was planned to move the event this year to May, a change from earlier years when it was held in July and August.

As for the Macao International Dragon Boat Races, scheduled for June 21, 22 and 25, the ID added that the preparation of the event is also being undertaken according to the original plan.

SEVERAL PUBLIC SPORTS FACILITIES TO REOPEN TODAY

SEVERAL public sports facilities under the management of the Sports Bureau (ID) are reopening from today, the ID announced in a statement.

Among the facilities reopening are the table tennis areas of Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion, Lin Fong and Tamagnini Barbosa Sports Center, the Olympic Sports Center in Taipa and the Bowling Center in Cotai.

The badminton courts at the Olympic Sports Center, the Taipa Northeast Sports Center (the former University of Macau's sports pavilion), the Macau East Asian Games Dome and the Gymnasium of Sir Robert Ho Tung Primary School will also be available to the public.

The Nautical Centers of both Cheoc Van and Hac Sa will also reopen their doors.

This follows the reopening of several other facilities on March 2 which included mostly running tracks and tennis spaces. This latest

spate of reopening comes after the decision from the government to lower the restriction on the practice of sports after the temporary closure measures enforced in February.

Nevertheless, the ID warns users that there are access limitations at such facilities, according to government regulations and guidelines, in order to avoid the gathering of a large number of people.

The bureau also notes that, at this time, public benches, locker-rooms, and shower-rooms will not be available for public use.

To access the facilities, the users must wear a mask, and authorize the checking of their body temperature at the entry, as well as presenting an updated health declaration to security staff. According to the same statement, the ID will resume activities of the remaining public sports facilities as soon as possible, according to the general development of the epidemic. **RM**

IAM ANNOUNCES PUBLIC TOILET OVERHAUL PROJECT TO COMPLETE THIS YEAR

THE Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) is planning to improve public toilets across the special administrative region by transforming them into "high quality facilities," the government announced yesterday.

The project, which will begin this year, will involve the IAM renovating all public toilets in Macau in stages.

The bureau will study the interior design and layout of toilet space and adjust the proportion of male and female compartments, as well as the ratio for child-friendly compartments. Handrails will be added where needed in order to meet the needs of the elderly.

The IAM will also seek to introduce environmentally-friendly elements to the facilities, increase the amount of indoor foliage and review ventilation to improve the problem of bad odors.

New equipment designed to reduce physical contact within public toilets will be introduced, including automatic sensors for toilet flushing and the dispensing of toilet paper and soap.

These measures are hoped to raise the level of community hygiene and contribute toward the development of a healthy city, according to the IAM.

In total, some 60 public toilets will be reorganized under the project, while 23 facilities will be renovated. The IAM plans to draw on the assistance of the Macau Architects Association, with local architects designing the new facilities.

The President of the IAM, José Tavares, said yesterday that his bureau expects the project to be completed within the calendar year.

Previously, the IAM renovated public toilets in the areas of Lotus Flower Square, Tap Seac Square on the Macau peninsula and near Hac Sa Beach in Coloane.

With a view to reinforcing the epidemic prevention measures introduced by the government, the IAM said it regards it "necessary to speed up the development of work to improve public hygiene facilities" by initiating the public toilet overhaul project this year.

In a statement released by the government yesterday, the IAM also advanced that the project would help local workers and small businesses in Macau, with the planned renovation expected to create around 1,200 jobs. **DB**

QUANZHOU

Mom, son safe after 52 hours trapped in hotel rubble

A 10-year-old boy and his mother have been rescued 52 hours after being trapped in the collapse of a virus quarantine site in southeastern China where 20 people have died.

Video released by rescuers showed the two being pulled from the debris of the hotel that collapsed on Saturday. The woman and boy were discovered late Monday night and they were freed around midnight after three hours of painstaking digging.

The hotel in the city of Quanzhou had been a quarantine site for people exposed to the new coronavirus, which for most people causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The death toll in the collapse rose to 20 yesterday, with 10 people missing. A total of 71 people had been inside the hotel when it crumbled in mere seconds.

The building had been illegally reconstructed several times, the official Xinhua News Agency quoted an unidentified senior official saying. Shang Yong, deputy head of the Ministry of Emer-

gency Management, told reporters a comprehensive accident investigation will be launched to identify the cause of the collapse, and any official found responsible would be held to account.

Construction of the building began in 2013 and it was converted into an express hotel in 2018.

Two supermarkets on the first floor were being remodeled, and a pillar reportedly deformed a few minutes before the collapse, Xinhua said Sunday, quoting a district official.

Rescuers have been issued protective gear and disinfectant to minimize exposure to the virus.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover.

In mainland China, where the virus first exploded, more than 80,000 people have been diagnosed and nearly 60,000 have so far recovered.

Most parts of China are quarantining people from high-risk areas or even those who traveled abroad or simply outside their home regions areas for 14 days. AP



Xi Jinping visits medical facilities in Wuhan yesterday

COVID-19

XI VISITS VIRUS' EPICENTER AS FEARS OF RECESSION GRIP WORLD

YANAN WANG AND MATT SEDENSKY, BEIJING

CHINA'S president visited the center of the global virus outbreak yesterday as Italy began a sweeping nationwide travel ban and people worldwide braced for the possibility of recession.

President Xi Jinping's trip to the coronavirus' epicenter of Wuhan — his first since the start of the outbreak — came as parts of his country return to normalcy, and was a sign of the diminishing threat the illness presents in China as it spreads west.

Nowhere was that more evident than Italy, where travel restrictions previously limited to the country's north were extended everywhere beginning yesterday, with soldiers and police enforcing bans. Some 9,172 people were infected in Italy and 463 have died and there was a growing sense the numbers would only worsen.

"We're only at the beginning," said Dr. Massimo Galli, head of infectious disease at Sacco Hospital in Milan, where people at the city's main train station were required to sign forms certifying the necessity of their travel.

Outbreaks worsened in France, Spain and Germany, and fear grew in the United States, where more than 750 people are infected and even some top political leaders were quarantined.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The World Health Organization says people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while severe

cases may last three to six weeks. In mainland China, where the outbreak emerged in December, almost three-fourths of its more than 80,000 patients have recovered.

Regardless, the virus has shaken global markets, with stocks taking their worst one-day beating on Wall Street since 2008 and oil prices suffering their most brutal losses since the start of the 1991 Gulf War.

Even with Asian markets posting modest gains yesterday, fear was rampant that economies stood at the brink of recession.

"Right now, it's all-out panic," said Phil Flynn of the Price Futures Group brokerage.

Xi's trip to Wuhan came as the country recorded just 19 new cases of the virus. The official Xinhua News Agency said Xi visited a hastily built hospital, visited with patients and encouraged staff to "firm up confidence in defeating the epidemic." He then visited Wuhan residents under quarantine at home, Xinhua reported.

The visit also was likely to be seen as an attempt to bolster views of the ruling Communist Party's handling of the crisis. Xi was conspicuously absent from the public eye during the early days of the outbreak and alarms were not sounded until late January.

Wuhan and nearby cities have been under lockdown since then, though, in a virus-containment measure.

Ying Yong, the party secretary of Hubei province where Wuhan is located, told local officials that preparations should be made for resuming business production and the safe and orderly movement of individuals, according to a notice published on Hubei's government website.

Already, there are signs the lockdown is loosening. Jingzhou, a city in Hubei, has ordered roads and villa-

ge entrances in low-risk areas to be reopened to restore agricultural production.

The edge toward normalcy in China and improving reports from South Korea — where new infections continued to dip — contrasted with a widening problem elsewhere in the world.

Italy's far-reaching restrictions were to last through April 3 and violators risked up to three months in jail or fines of 206 euros (\$225). Schools and universities were remaining closed and pubs, eateries and cafes were to shutter at dusk.

"Our habits must be changed, changed now," Conte said.

In the U.S., President Donald Trump was planning to announce proposals today aimed at curbing the economic fallout from the outbreak. He said the measures would include payroll tax relief.

Trump dove into handshakes with supporters and flew back from a Florida fundraiser with a lawmaker who later went into a voluntary quarantine because he came into contact with someone who had tested positive for the virus. Trump's incoming chief of staff, too, went into quarantine, also stemming from concerns from a conservative political gathering an infected person attended.

Worldwide, more than 114,000 cases of the virus have been reported in about 100 countries. The leader of WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said, "the threat of a pandemic has become very real."

The most recent additions are Panama, adding to a few dozen cases in Latin America, and Mongolia, which borders China. Authorities there said yesterday the country's first virus patient was a French energy worker who met with colleagues and traveled while he was infected. AP



Rescuers place a boy pulled from the rubble of a collapsed hotel on a stretcher in Quanzhou, Fujian Province

INDONESIA

Dutch king apologizes for colonial killings

ANDI JATMIKO
& NINIEK KARMINI, BOGOR

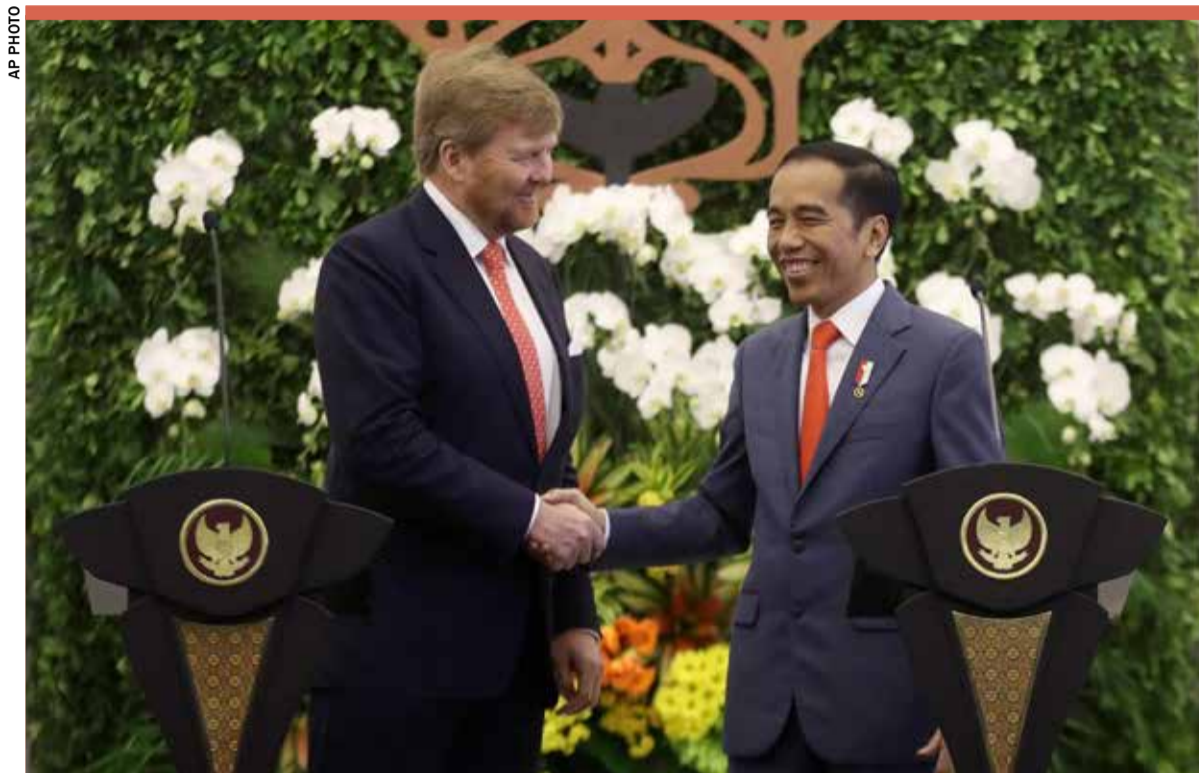
KING Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands apologized yesterday for his country's aggression during its colonial rule of Indonesia and formally recognized the Southeast Asian country's independence date, in his first state visit to the former Dutch colony.

The king's apology was conveyed after he and Queen Maxima were hosted by Indonesian President Joko Widodo and his wife, Iriana, at an official ceremony in the ornate colonial-style presidential palace in Bogor, just outside the capital, Jakarta.

The Netherlands did not initially apologize for its 350 years of colonial rule and aggression until 2013, when the Dutch ambassador expressed remorse for a series of massacres carried out by the Dutch military to crush resistance against colonial rule in Java and Sulawesi islands after Indonesia's 1945 declaration of independence. That apology came only after the victims' widows took the Dutch government to court.

"In line with the previous statement by my government, I would like to express my regret and apologize here for the excessive violence on the part of the Dutch in those years," the king said at a joint news conference with Widodo. "I do so with full awareness that the pain and sorrow of the affected families will be felt for generations."

Indonesia declared its independence from Dutch colonial rule on Aug. 17, 1945, but the Netherlands refused to acknowledge



King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands shakes hands with Indonesian President Joko Widodo (right) after a joint press conference at the presidential palace in Bogor, West Java

it and fought unsuccessfully to maintain control of the lucrative Asian outpost. It finally recognized the country as an independent nation in December 1949.

Indonesian authorities claim some 40,000 people were killed during the fighting, while most Dutch historians estimate the dead at about 1,500.

A 1968 Dutch report acknowledged "violent excesses" in Indonesia but argued that Dutch troops were conducting a "police action" often incited by guerrilla warfare and terror attacks. The Dutch government has never prosecuted any soldiers for the killings despite a U.N. report condem-

ning the attacks as "deliberate and ruthless" as early as 1948.

The 2013 apology by the Dutch ambassador cleared the way for the biggest-ever Dutch trade mission to Indonesia in November 2013, led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

Subsequent apologies were made by Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders in 2016 and Rutte late last year during visits in Indonesia. But unresolved demands from those affected by past war crimes still loom large over the monarch's current visit.

"On Aug. 17, it will be 75 years since Indonesia declared its proclamation, claiming its place

among free and independent countries," the king said yesterday. "Today, the Dutch government explicitly acknowledged it both politically and morally."

The four-day state visit by the royal couple, who arrived in Jakarta on Monday, aims to deepen economic ties with Indonesia. It's the first trip to Indonesia for the king since he ascended the throne in 2013, and the fourth for the queen, whose previous trips were part of her role as U.N. Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development.

The king and queen started their busy day by laying a wreath at the Kalibata Heroes Cemetery

to honor Indonesia's war dead, especially those who fell during the War of Independence. In the afternoon, the royal couple laid a wreath at Menteng Pulo Cemetery, the resting place of almost 4,300 Dutch soldiers who died during World War II and the independence war.

The king and Widodo witnessed the signing of agreements for economic partnership in the areas of agriculture, health care, coastal protection and the maritime industry.

Under the Widodo administration, ties between the two countries have strengthened significantly.

"We certainly cannot erase our history, but we can learn from the past," Widodo said. "We try to learn from history to strengthen our commitment to build an equal relationship that respects and benefits each other."

Widodo's visit to the Netherlands in 2016 was the first by an Indonesian leader since Abdurrahman Wahid in 2000. In 2010, then-President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono canceled a visit at the last minute amid moves by a separatist group to have him arrested for alleged human rights violations.

The Dutch royal couple is scheduled to meet the Sultan of Yogyakarta today. Tomorrow, the king and queen will visit Lake Toba in North Sumatra province, one of Indonesia's "10 new Balis," an ambitious plan to boost tourism and diversify Southeast Asia's largest economy. They will also visit Sebangau National Park on Borneo island tomorrow. AP

INDIA

Holi festival subdued over coronavirus concerns

HINDUS threw colored powder and sprayed water in massive celebrations of the festival of Holi in India yesterday, but the enthusiasm was subdued compared to previous years because of fears of the new virus.

Brightly colored powder filled the air in most parts of North India. But in the capital, New Delhi, many events were canceled as the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country rose to 47.

Holi, which marks the advent of spring, is widely celebrated in India, Nepal and other South Asian countries.

Most years, millions of



people from toddlers to the elderly throw powder at each other and play with water balloons and squirt guns.

But this year Prime Minister Narendra Modi

tweeted that he would not participate in public Holi celebrations because of the virus outbreak.

"Yes, it's coronavirus that made us cancel our programs," said Anshuman

Ghulati, festival director of Holi Moo, one of the biggest Holi events in New Delhi which last year drew some 7,000 people from around the world.

"People are scared this

year, we have canceled our event," he said.

Other groups in New Delhi also canceled their plans.

Atul Goyal, president of United Residents Joint Action, said there would be no gala lunches or water dance events.

"Considering the coronavirus outbreak, you are advised to cancel Holi gatherings, in particular playing with water and touching of nose, eyes and lips and shaking hands," the group said in an advisory.

But many defied the recommendations in other parts of the country.

People danced and smeared each other with colors in the northern state

of Uttarakhand. Still, "there has been some effect from the coronavirus on celebrations," said Neeraj Kumar, a resident of the state.

Sellers of colored powder and water guns said their sales had plunged.

"The fear that customers have over the coronavirus and the large number of people that are getting sick has made them slightly disinterested in celebrating Holi. So our sales have become very less this Holi," vendor Jitender Pandey said.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. AP

ITALY

Premier locks down entire country to stop virus

COLLEEN BARRY &
ANTONIO CALANNI,
MILAN

ITALIAN Premier Giuseppe Conte put his entire country on lockdown yesterday [Macau time] to combat the coronavirus, banning all but the most important travel and putting the final kibosh on social gatherings after Italians failed to take previous warnings to heart amid skyrocketing infections.

Two days after imposing the same strict measures on a quarter of the country, in the hard-hit north, Conte urged all 60 million Italians to stay home. The only travel allowed will be for proven work reasons, for health conditions or other cases of necessity.

"Our habits must be changed, changed now. We all have to give up something for the good of Italy. When I speak of Italy, I speak of our dear ones, of our grandparents and of our parents," Conte said. "We will succeed only if we all collaborate and we adapt right away to these more stringent norms."

The nationwide restrictions take effect today until April 3 and include extending the closures of schools and universities and closing pubs, eateries and cafes at dusk.

Conte took to task young people who continued to gather socially as the virus spread, saying "this night life ... we can't allow this any more."

Italy registered 1,807 more confirmed cases as of yesterday, for a national total of 9,172. The number of dead in Italy also increased by 97 to 463 — most of them elderly with previous ailments.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in



Police officers and soldiers check passengers leaving from Milan's main train station

about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover. In mainland China, where the virus first exploded, more than 80,000 people have been diagnosed and more than 58,000 have so far recovered."

Despite registering the largest number of cases outside of China, Italy has seen only superficial compliance with measures aimed at reducing social contact, including closing cinemas and theaters and banning fans from soccer games. The government gradually expanded the so-called red zones.

Restrictions on movement initially applied to 11 towns in northern Italy with a total population of around 50,000 people before being expanded Sunday to all of

seasonably quiet. For the first time, checkpoints were set up at the city's main train station to screen travelers. People at Milan Central Station were required to sign a police form, self-certifying why they were traveling.

"Until a few days ago, the thinking was the alarm would pass in some weeks, we just need to follow the rules. Now we need to explain to citizens that the situation is very, very serious, our hospitals are at the point of collapse," the mayor of the Lombardy city of Bergamo, Giorgio Gori, told RAI state television.

People circulating inside the city and in the provinces were subjected to spot checks to ensure they had valid reasons for being out. Violators risked up to three

out. The time-honored Italian tradition of an espresso at the corner cafe — gone. Customers now are required to take tables, if possible, the one furthest from the bar. The evening aperitif is also frowned upon; bars close at 6 p.m. Even going to the grocery store is a major expedition.

Sofia Celeste, a single mother of two in Milan, was hoping to avoid going out for groceries by ordering online, but deliveries for Milan are booked solid until next week. "It sounds like we should not go anywhere," she said. "I organized a dinner with the girls' babysitter, and was going to do some shopping, but even then I feel like it's risky."

Her water-delivery man — who has a heart condition — arrived Monday wearing a mask. "He said, 'I have to work,'" Celeste recounted. Her small family in isolation is being sustained by emails from the parish priest saying they are missed and a note from the catechism teacher sending the kids messages and prayers.

The regions affected by the decree are among the most productive in Italy. Industry leaders worried about a perception being created abroad that all business was shut down and commercial deliveries of exports cannot be made.

The civil protection agency has emphasized that commercial freight is not affected by the crackdown. AP

"Our habits must be changed, changed now."

GIUSEPPE CONTE
ITALIAN PREMIER

Lombardy and 14 provinces in the neighboring regions of Veneto, Piedmont and Emilia Romagna.

On the first business day since the government locked down a broad swath of the north, confusion reigned over who could go where and under what circumstances.

Streets in Milan, Italy's financial hub and the main city in Lombardy, were un-

months jail or fines of 206 euros (\$225).

Earlier Monday, civil protection authorities shut down all ski areas nationwide after one tried to tempt kids who are locked out of school to the slopes. That signaled an end to patience with the sort of wheeling-and-dealing that is often admired in Italy.

Under the extended measures, casual errands are

this day in history



1985 GORBACHEV BECOMES SOVIET LEADER

There is a new man in charge at the Kremlin - Mikhail Gorbachev has taken over following the death of Konstantin Chernenko.

Chernenko, 73, died yesterday after a long illness - but his death was only announced to the Soviet people this morning. Sombre music preceded the news on radio and television and scheduled programmes were cancelled.

The speed of naming of his successor - at 54 the youngest man to take over as general secretary of the Soviet communist party - has taken people by surprise.

In another break with tradition, Mr Gorbachev has announced arms talks with the Americans in Geneva will go ahead tomorrow.

Chernenko lasted only 13 months in the top job. He was in poor health when he was appointed and his death was caused by heart failure brought on by problems with his lungs and liver.

He is the third Soviet leader to die in just over two years. Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982 after 18 years in power. He was 75. Yuri Andropov died 18 months later aged 69.

The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher will attend Chernenko's funeral on Wednesday - but the United States President Ronald Reagan will not be going.

The BBC's Moscow correspondent, Tim Sebastian, says Mr Gorbachev's appointment marks a dramatic change in leadership in Moscow.

He says Mr Gorbachev is a dynamic figure who has moved rapidly through the Soviet hierarchy.

"There seems little doubt the Gorbachev administration will look different. More outgoing, more approachable, more concerned with its public image," he reported.

"But its aims and its approach seem likely to be familiar. Despite his lively and flexible manner, Gorbachev is still a strict, orthodox Marxist in no sense has he shown himself to be a liberal."

Mr Gorbachev's acceptance speech gave a hint of the changes to come. He spoke of his desire to freeze the deployment of weapons and reduce the international nuclear weapons stockpiles.

Mrs Thatcher has already indicated her approval at his appointment. Following his recent visit to Britain, she said: "I like Mr Gorbachev. We can do business together."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Mikhail Gorbachev radically changed the course of Soviet foreign policy, signing a number of agreements with the United States on nuclear disarmament.

He introduced a policy of openness or "glasnost" and he was also the architect of "perestroika" or deep political and economic reforms. But his reforms led to severe economic hardship at home. Growing nationalist movements spearheaded by the Baltic states led him to propose a loose federation of Soviet states.

But this proved the last straw for communist hardliners. In August 1991 he survived a coup attempt - largely thanks to the support of the Russian authorities, under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin continued to attract more support which led eventually to the resignation of Gorbachev on 25 December 1991. The Soviet flag, the hammer and sickle, was lowered for the last time on 31 December.

Gorbachev is now president of the Green Cross - an organisation concerned with the clean-up of chemical and biological weapons. His wife Raisa, the only wife of a Soviet leader to become a public figure in recent times, died of leukaemia in 1999.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You've been sailing along nicely and capably navigating the most threatening waters for a good long while. You should be proud of how you've handled yourself recently.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Right now, you need to give yourself a lot of compassion, because soon you could be in the middle of things, and it could get pretty hot in that kitchen. The only way to keep cool is to stay confident.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Money issues may be weighing heavily on your mind right now, although there's no reason to be nervous about it. You're merely more aware of the reality of your financial situation, which is a good thing.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Getting involved in new projects or relationships isn't the best use of your time, so decline any invitations today, even if the opportunity seems promising.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Let your generosity and compassion play the leading role in any type of bargaining today. In the end, what you give up will be surpassed by the goodwill you gain.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Are you nervous about an upcoming family gathering? You shouldn't be. The stars say that there will be much more acceptance coming your way than you anticipated and way less judgment than you feared.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Now is the time to take your craziest germ of an idea and show it to the world. You are well positioned to gather up many different types of admirers who think that your way of doing things is pretty special.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Your instincts are right on target, and if you can muster up enough bravado to get you through the day, you'll soon be riding on a wave of genuine confidence.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

What are your plans for today? If you don't have an answer, you need to get to work! Find out what's up with your friends, and then find out how you can get involved.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Getting to know someone is an art form you've mastered. Today, put in some time to make this tenuous new connection more solid. It's as easy as asking questions and listening to the answers.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You should realize that just like you can change your life through certain acts and deeds, you can also change your body through how much or how little you exercise.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You could be forced to rethink your health when a typical activity leaves you a bit more winded than expected. Frustration will lead you to make declarations of dramatic change.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

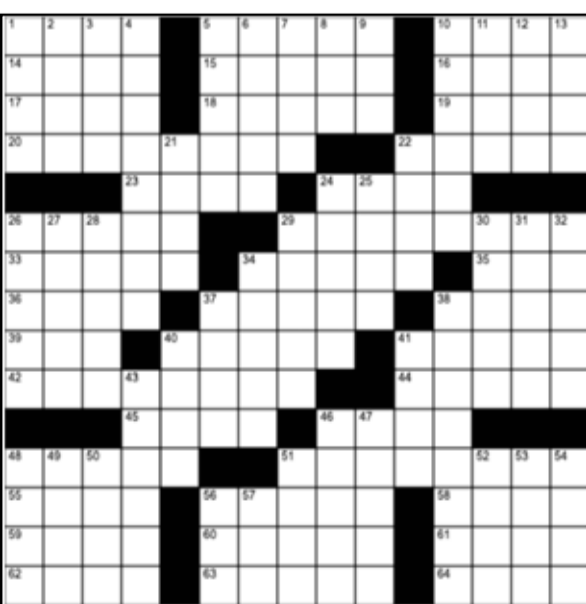
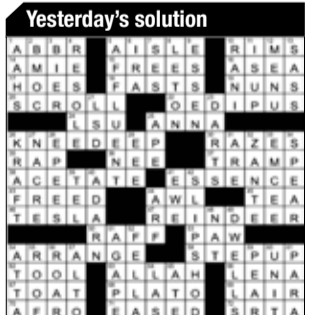
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-4	14	clear
Harbin	-9	3	clear
Tianjin	3	17	clear
Urumqi	-6	2	cloudy
Xi'an	0	20	cloudy
Lhasa	0	14	clear
Chengdu	10	16	overcast
Chongqing	13	16	overcast
Kunming	9	22	clear
Nanjing	5	16	cloudy
Shanghai	6	16	overcast
Wuhan	5	17	cloudy
Hangzhou	6	17	cloudy
Taipei	15	17	cloudy
Guangzhou	15	23	cloudy
Hong Kong	18	22	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	3	7	drizzle
Frankfurt	10	13	drizzle
Paris	12	14	drizzle
London	7	14	drizzle
New York	4	15	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Close with force; 5- Fluff, as bangs; 10- Hey, over here!; 14- "Mon Oncle" director; 15- Omega's opposite; 16- Rival of Bjorn; 17- Shrinking sea; 18- Guide; 19- Unclothed; 20- Heater; 22- Fads; 23- Mass utterance; 24- Civil disturbance; 26- Render weaponless; 29- Hair on the upper lip; 33- Rate; 34- Mother of Isaac; 35- "___ and hers"; 36- Arizona river; 37- Charged; 38- Electric fish; 39- Sister of Zsa Zsa; 40- Polite; 41- Journalist ___ Rogers St. Johns; 42- Tyrannic; 44- Slightly intoxicated; 45- Biblical garden; 46- Staff leader?; 48- Dreadlocks wearer; 51- Tom of unknown parentage; 55- ___ saw Elba; 56- Mead subject; 58- Robert of "The Sopranos"; 59- Heating fuel; 60- Rainbow maker; 61- Emperor of Rome 54-68; 62- Fill to surfeit; 63- Bewildered; 64- Well-behaved;

DOWN: 1- Lead; 2- Pasternak heroine; 3- Somewhat; 4- Prickly heat; 5- Sip; 6- John of England; 7- Mimic; 8- That woman; 9- Decoration at the top of a chair leg; 10- Party animal?; 11- Garden pest; 12- Team; 13- Driving aids; 21- Rifle adjunct; 22- Portnoy's creator; 24- Bucolic; 25- The wolf ___ the door; 26- Exhorted; 27- Green; 28- Brother of Prometheus; 29- Frenzied; 30- Chirp; 31- Small mountains; 32- Short literary composition; 34- Eurasian juniper; 37- Confirmation, e.g.; 38- Improving the mind; 40- Musical epilogue; 41- To ___ (perfectly); 43- Diminutive; 46- Shut; 47- Wool source; 48- Gym counts; 49- Region; 50- Chair; 51- French friends; 52- Jazz singer Laine; 53- Dynamic beginning; 54- Stepped; 56- Relaxing resort; 57- Singer Garfunkel;



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



FOR SALE

Kinglight Carpark, Taipa
HK\$1,450,000 1

FOR RENT

Spacious Apartment, Ocean Gardens
\$35,000/mth 3,700 ft² 4 4

FOR SALE

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

FOR RENT

- [Taipa] One room apartment 1 1 1
740 ft² \$10,900/mth (ref: 19101006)
- [Coloane] Hellene Garden 1 3 3
1,663 ft² \$14,000/mth (ref: n/a)
- [Taipa] Nova Grand 2 1 1
935 ft² \$17,800/mth (ref: 19091005)
- [Cotai] One Grantai 3 3 3
2,122 ft² \$23,000/mth (ref: 19030001RT)

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AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

JACK MA STEPS UP BATTLE WITH WECHAT TO WIN MERCHANTS

ALIPAY, the mobile payment app owned by billionaire Jack Ma, is stepping up its competition with WeChat to get more of its 900 million users to tap expanded services in everything from real estate purchases to restaurant and cinema bookings.

Alipay is targeting 40 million merchants and services providers in China to use its mini programs – a lite app that sits on top of its interface and provides quick access to an array of services. The company has been experimenting with the initiative for three years and now has about 1.7 million such programs.

The move escalates the competition between Alipay and WeChat, the super app owned by Asia's second largest company and Jack Ma's rival billionaire Pony Ma. After seeing a surge in online demand during the Covid-19 virus outbreak, Alipay introduced incentives to encourage developers to create mini programs that help users cope with the impact.

"We've seen a spike in demand for online services," He Yongming, vice president of Alipay's open ecosystem business. "This trend

BLOOMBERG



will only grow stronger even after the virus outbreak ends."

Ant Financial, the company that owns Alipay, estimates there are as many as 100 million small merchants in China. The goal is to drive these merchants to the mini programs, also enabling them to manage customer data, conduct promotions and marketing analysis.

It has shown initial success in helping some companies wea-

ther the economic impact of the virus shutdown in China. Meicai, a \$7 billion startup that connects farmers with restaurants, used the mini program to instead link directly with retail customers. It saw more than 800,000 new users from across 80 cities in China order groceries in a week, according to a joint statement.

A property service provider began offering real estate auctions

via the mini program, selling 110 million yuan (\$16 million) in property in total over three days, according to Ant. It used Alipay's identity verification system, a live-stream of the auction in real-time and a private blockchain that incorporated the local notary agency.

After Ant rolled out its Covid-19 coping incentives, more than 1,200 developers created 181 new mini programs on Alipay focusing on

grocery deliveries, legal and medical advice, it said in a statement yesterday.

But Alipay was late to the game three years ago on mini programs. The lite-app model championed by competitor WeChat, which has 1 billion-plus users, was one of its most important initiatives back in 2017. WeChat's users can now access ride hailing services, order food in restaurants and pick cinema seats. The company sells ads on the mini services to generate cash.

WeChat has been chipping away at Alipay's market share, partly due to the advent of mini programs. Alipay accounted for about 54% of the mobile payments market in the third quarter, according to researcher Analysys, a significant drop from when it used to control most of the sector.

When it comes to making money, Alipay is taking a different approach than inserting ads. Instead it wants to generate income by providing customer analysis to its merchants, or even help with financing, He said.

"We're different in terms of what we can offer to service providers compared with WeChat," said He. "Our mini-program service will provide more functions to meet SME demands in user management, payments and financing."

MDT/BLOOMBERG

AD

PRESENTED BY
銀河娛樂集團
Galaxy Entertainment Group

13TH JUNE @ STARWORLD SAVE the DATE

A vibrant, multi-colored bus (yellow, orange, blue) is the central focus. The side of the bus features a large rainbow graphic with the text "BRITCHAM MACAO'S PEACE 'N' LOVE BALL" in a playful, bubbly font. Below the rainbow, it says "DON'T MISS THE BUS". On the roof rack, there are several colorful suitcases and a guitar. The background is white with some faint, stylized text and graphics.

BRITCHAM MACAO'S PEACE 'N' LOVE BALL
DON'T MISS THE BUS

BASEBALL

At 27, Bogaerts becomes leader for revamped Red Sox

HE'S been a fixture for so long in the Boston Red Sox lineup that it seems hard to believe Xander Bogaerts is only 27.

"I know, time goes by so quick," he said.

Signed as a 16-year-old in Aruba, a two-time World Series champion and now with a contract that could take him through the 2026 season.

Over time, the All-Star shortstop has become the second-longest tenured player in the Red Sox clubhouse. With Dustin Pedroia out of camp as he deals with a setback in his rehab from a knee injury and contemplates his career, only center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. -- called up earlier than Bogaerts in 2013 -- has been with the Red Sox longer.

"Because of the confidence and probably because of the success that leads to the confidence, he's starting to be a leader in that clubhouse," manager Ron Roenicke said.



Boston Red Sox's Xander Bogaerts

cke said. "And he certainly is with the Latin players. He's been a big influence on them. But I think he is on everybody. His attitude, the way he walks in everyday, for me, makes a big difference."

"When you talk to him he's always in a good mood, he's

always smiling, and he works. And that's important for us as a staff to not always have to be the ones that try to talk to guys and pump them up and get them, whether it's working hard or working the right way. If their peers do it, it's huge," he said.

Bogaerts finished fifth in the AL MVP voting last season and made his second All-Star team. He hit .309 with 33 homers, 117 RBIs and 52 doubles, and set career highs in on-base (.384) and slugging (.555) percentages.

"I don't want to be someone

else or put up numbers like someone else. I think that's when the pressure comes," he said. "I just know how I play the game and what I'm capable of and just continue to strive to become great and I think that's always a motivation factor and trying to be the best and people recognize that."

With 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers, Bogaerts' bat is a key to Boston's production.

"When I talk about a deep lineup, he helps push that lineup back to where it's tough to get through all nine," Roenicke said. "Whether I put him at third or fourth or I know he likes fifth also, that's a tough five guys to get through."

"So, what he did last year, I know in '17 he had a big year offensively, '18 good again, last year big. He's becoming a real consistent offensive threat, not just in homers but in average, driving in runs, and that allows us to put him pretty much anywhere in the lineup," he said.

Bogaerts' ability to speak four languages -- English and Spanish as well as Dutch and Papiamentu, the languages of his native Aruba -- enables him to easily act as clubhouse ambassador for new players. And, with so many new faces and young players in camp, it's a role he takes responsibly. **AP**

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OPINION

World Views

Shuli Ren, Bloomberg

THE LAST PLACE YOU'D THINK TO HIDE IN A MELTDOWN

As if markets didn't have enough trouble. With the coronavirus outbreak intensifying, and the first shots of an oil price war fired, investors seem to be left with few good options. Could there be anywhere to hide in the world of corporate credit?

China, despite two years of record defaults, may be in better shape to withstand an oil slump than the U.S. For now, traders in Asia can sit tight and watch how hard the mighty angels on the other side of the Pacific fall.

Oil's tailspin is bringing back harsh memories of early 2016, when West Texas Intermediate crude tumbled below \$30 a barrel, well beneath the breakeven point for many American producers. U.S. junk bonds' credit spread over Treasuries shot as high as 8.4%, almost doubling the five-year average.

The price of oil remains a major catalyst there. When WTI falls below \$50 a barrel, the correlation coefficient between that level and the spread of junk bonds more than doubles to 73%, recent sensitivity analysis conducted by HSBC Holdings Plc shows. Energy, metals and mining companies represent about 15% of the high-yield cash bond market.

To make matters worse, a new host of fallen angels — investment-grade firms that get downgraded to junk — may make the high-yield bond universe a bit too crowded. The energy sector comprises roughly a quarter of the \$846 billion BBB rated corporate issues in the U.S. When market sentiment is already weak, the last thing traders need is a flood of new supply.

Asia paints a different picture. Whereas U.S. junk bonds are dominated by companies that profit from "drill, baby, drill," Asia is all about build, baby, build.

Just look at who dominates issuance. Even in the throes of the coronavirus outbreak, Asia's dollar bond market didn't freeze up, with more than \$34 billion of deals in February, up a third from a year earlier. Mainland companies continued to dominate — as they have in recent years — with 65% of the total. Chinese real-estate developers raised a whopping \$6.4 billion. Energy companies, by comparison, barely registered. No surprise there: Most Asian countries are net importers.

In Asia, what really matters is Beijing's liquidity stance — and there are signs that the coronavirus is ending China's corporate deleveraging campaign, which began in late 2017. From benchmark rate cuts to re-lending facilities for small businesses, officials are tweaking all sorts of rules to ensure that China Inc. doesn't face a liquidity crisis.

With many sales offices still closed, China's highly leveraged developers are by all means distressed. But are they any worse off now than, say, in late 2018, when industry titans were wondering if they'd survive a harsh winter? At that point, Beijing had shut down the shadow financing channels that developers relied heavily upon for refinancing.

This month, however, Beijing substantially lowered the hurdle for onshore bond issuers, lifting restrictions that prevented companies with a ratio of outstanding bonds-to-equity of more than 40% from raising money. This directly benefits real-estate developers, which have better ratings onshore, thanks to their land banks.

In the past, if the U.S. sneezed, Asia would catch a bad flu. With China's rise, markets in the region are slowly evolving. Federal Reserve rate cuts now matter less than Beijing's liquidity stance. For once, Asia may just provide some diversification benefits.

China's food prices jumped 21.4% over a year earlier in February as anti-virus efforts disrupted supplies, adding to pressure on communist leaders who are trying to revive economic activity.

Overall consumer prices rose 5.2% over a year ago, down from January's eight-year high of 5.4% but well above the ruling Communist Party's traditional annual target, government data showed yesterday.

Pork prices, which have more than doubled over the past year due to an outbreak of African swine fever that disrupted su-

plies, rose by 9.3% compared with January. The government reported no year-on-year price increase.

The price of fresh vegetables rose 9.5% over a year ago.

The government has yet to announce this year's inflation target, but in previous years it has tried to keep consumer price increases below 3%.

Food prices spiked after panic buying in January sparked by the suspension of most access to Wuhan, the city at the center of the coronavirus outbreak. The government announced a crackdown on hoarding and price gouging.



AP PHOTO

DUTCH PROSECUTORS: RUSSIA WANTS TO THWART MH17 INVESTIGATION

MIKE CORDER, SCHIPHO

A Dutch prosecutor said yesterday that there are "strong indications" Russia wants to undermine investigations into the downing of Malaysia Flight 17 and told judges at the trial of four suspects that many witnesses fear for their safety.

Prosecutor Thijs Berger made the statement on the second day of the trial of three Russians and a Ukrainian charged with the murder of all 298 passengers and crew killed when a missile shot down the Amsterdam-to-Kuala Lumpur flight on July 17, 2014. The suspects weren't present.

Prosecutors allege that a Russian Buk missile shot down the flight from an agricultural field in a region of eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Moscow rebel forces. Russia denies any involvement in the downing.

Berger told judges that there was evidence Russian intelligence agents attempted to hack into the computers of Malaysian and Dutch investigations into the downing of MH17.

"This information casts a dark shadow over these proceedings," he said. "There are strong indications that the Russian government is very keen to

thwart this investigation and that it is not averse to deploying the Russian security services to this end. These Russian security services have been accused of multiple murders in recent years committed in various European countries."

Another prosecutor, Dedy Woei-a-Tsoi, told judges that "every effort will have to be made to hear witnesses safely."

"The fate of flight MH17 has become known as a textbook example of a disinformation campaign by the Russian government."

WOEI-A-TSOI
PROSECUTOR

Prosecutors said Russian interference didn't stop there and accused Moscow of attempting to hide the truth about what happened.

"The fate of flight MH17 has become known as a textbook example of a disinformation campaign by the Russian government," Woei-a-Tsoi said. "It is clear we have not yet seen the end of it."

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined comment on the trial, saying that Russia had not been involved in the in-

ternational investigation.

Hearings this week are taking stock of progress in the international investigation. The examination of evidence — likely including a visit to the wreckage of the plane that was pieced together in a hangar on a Dutch military base — could start later this year, or in 2021.

After years of investigations, an international team of investigators and prosecutors last year named four suspects: Russians Igor Girkin, Sergey Dubinskiy and Oleg Pulatov as well as Ukrainian Leonid Kharchenko. More suspects could face charges as the investigations continue.

None are attending the trial. Only Pulatov has Dutch lawyers representing him in court.

About 20 family members were present in the courtroom for the hearings and more followed the case at a conference center near the central city of Utrecht via a video link.

Bryan and Lisa Clancy, flew from Australia to be present. Bryan lost his brother and sister-in-law in the downing of MH17.

"We've come here to try and make sure that justice is going to be followed and that the truth comes out as to what actually happened," Bryan said. AP

Europe's airports say they expect 187 million fewer passengers this year due to the virus outbreak, which is "turning into a shock of unprecedented proportions for our industry." The ACI Europe, which represents the sector, estimated that the outbreak will mean a 13.5% drop in airport passengers in the first quarter alone. That translates to 1.32 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) in lost revenue.



AP PHOTO

Iran will recognize doctors and nurses who die combating the new coronavirus as "martyrs" like slain soldiers, the country's supreme leader announced yesterday as the outbreak killed 54 more people and pushed the nation's death toll to 291. The decision by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei comes amid a propaganda campaign already trying to link the fight against the virus to Iran's long, bloody 1980s war with Iraq.

Hollywood continued to reschedule its upcoming movie releases due to the coronavirus, as Sony Pictures yesterday announced that it's moving "Peter Rabbit 2" to August. "Peter Rabbit 2" had been set to hit U.K. and European theaters on March 27, and open in the U.S. on April 3. Instead, Sony said the sequel to 2018's "Peter Rabbit" will launch on Aug. 7.



AP PHOTO

Afghanistan The United States began withdrawing troops from Afghanistan, the U.S. military said yesterday, taking a step forward on its peace deal with the Taliban while also praising Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's promise to start releasing Taliban prisoners after he had delayed for over a week. The U.S.-Taliban deal signed Feb. 29 was touted as Washington's effort to end 18 years of war in Afghanistan.