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THE NEW BUS OPERATOR CONTRACTS WILL RETAIN DISCOUNTED FARES FOR SENIORS, STUDENTS AND OTHERS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS PLEDGED P2

GOV'T AUDITOR FINDS SECURITY FLAWS IN AIRPORT MANAGEMENT P4

A DISPUTE OVER RENT MONEY OWED FOR A CHESS BOARD ESCALATED WHEN ONE PLAYER PULLED OUT A LARGE KNIFE IN A PUBLIC PARK P2



Thailand Bombers attacked a major government office in Thailand's insurgency-plagued far south as hundreds of local officials and Muslim clerics met to discuss fighting COVID-19. At least 20 people were hurt, none seriously.



Pakistan's prime minister said he fears the new coronavirus will devastate the economies of developing nations, and warned richer economies to prepare to write off the debts of the world's poorer countries. Imran Khan criticized recent comments by the president of neighboring Afghanistan, which appeared to reference accusations that Pakistan used militants to further its own goals in years past.



Iran's state television has issued its most drastic warning so far about the new coronavirus, saying the outbreak could kill "millions" in the Islamic Republic if the public keeps traveling and ignoring health guidance. The warning came in a bulletin broadcast yesterday.



Iraq's president named former governor of the city of Najaf, Adnan Al-Zurfi, as prime minister-designate (pictured), following weeks of political infighting, as Baghdad residents rushed to stock up on supplies hours before a days-long curfew was set to take hold amid a global pandemic.

More on backpage

MACAU CHOOSES LOCKDOWN

THE CITY DROPS ITS QUARANTINE APPROACH FOR NON-CHINA VISITORS IN FAVOR OF AN ENTRY BAN P3



VEGAS CASINOS DIVIDED ON CLOSURE POLICY AMID CORONAVIRUS ENCROACH P5 GAMING



MUST DEVELOPS RAPID TEST FOR COVID-19 IN NEW BREAKTHROUGH P12

OVERSEAS STUDENTS WORRY ABOUT NOT RECEIVING E-VOUCHERS

Overseas Macau students have expressed concerns about not being able to collect the 3,000 patacas e-voucher, according to a report by Macao Daily News. The Youth Association of People recently received inquiries from overseas Macau students regarding the government's e-voucher program. Students deem the claiming period for the e-voucher to be short, which may not allow them to collect the money before the deadline. The local government requires that every resident who wishes to collect the money must present their physical ID either themselves or by a trustee. Students complained that such policies are inconsiderate because overseas students cannot necessarily be in Macau in person.

FIREFIGHTER PLACED ON TEMPORARY SUSPENSION AFTER THEFT CLAIMS

A firefighter from the Fire Services Bureau who is accused of stealing from an unlocked shop earlier in February has been temporarily suspended from work, according to the Secretariat for Security. On February 25, the 27-year-old firefighter is said to have entered the shop where he stole a total of 50,000 Macau patacas in cash, one diamond bracelet and two bottles of wine. The case has already been transferred to the prosecution authority. The firefighter is required to regularly report to the police authority. The fire services authority has also started a disciplinary procedure against him. The security authority stated that if the crime is proven at court, the security force will pursue disciplinary action against the man.

HEBEI MEN DETAINED IN MAINLAND FOR HIDING MACAU TRAVEL RECORD

Two men from Baoding, a Hebei city, have been put into administrative detention for 10 days because of their dishonesty about their travel records. On February 29, the two men came to Macau and on March 5 they returned to Hebei. The two men did not report their travel records to the relevant local government and did not go through a voluntary quarantine at home, instead attending multiple parties and entering public spaces. On March 16, the concerned government issued a 10-day administrative detention punishment for the two men. Administrative detention is a form of punishment on the mainland to temporarily restrict a person's freedom of movement.

GOV'T ASSURES CONCESSIONARY FARES TO STAY UNDER NEW BUS CONTRACTS

ANTHONY LAM

THE government has assured lawmakers that the current passenger privileges on public bus services would likely be retained when the new services contracts are finally agreed.

Currently, seniors, students and residents with special needs can apply to the contactless e-payment company, Macau Pass, for a registered card that will automatically apply the aforementioned discounts on their bus rides.

When paying bus fares with the Macau Pass card, passengers pay MOP3 or MOP4 dollars each ride. Senior citizens and residents with special needs can ride free of charge, while students travel at half price.

Ella Lei, president of the legislature's Committee for the Follow-up of Land and Public Concession, disclosed that the Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário, had assured during the yesterday's committee meeting that such discounts are likely to be retained under the new contracts.

The committee was additionally concerned about two topics: the manner of calculating the



subsidy for bus operators, and the operation of side revenue streams, such as advertising and bus rental services.

However, the committee president disclosed that her colleagues were not entirely happy, as the government is still not able to provide a new subsidy calculation mechanism to the legislature.

Lawmakers in the committee claimed that the current calculation mechanism is too complicated. In order to determine how much subsidy is to be given to the bus company, the calculation requires data about the size of the bus used for each route or operation, as well as the distance that the route or operation

has covered.

"Generally speaking, society doesn't have a clear picture on how the amount of subsidy is calculated," Lei said. "Lawmakers also find this mechanism not very scientific or reasonable."

Lei added that the subsidy is approved once the bus company deploys a bus. This has generated concerns from the public and even the Audit Commission. The mechanism has caused a phenomenon colloquially referred to by the public as "ghost buses", which describe buses deployed for the sake of deployment, rather than for transporting passengers.

Furthermore, the committee

is concerned about the ambiguous stipulation in the current contract regarding side revenue streams operated by the two bus companies. These side operations regularly charter buses to take casino employees and run advertisements on their vehicles.

Theoretically, Rosário said, these incomes should be differentiated. He has pledged to the committee that the new contract will address this topic with respect to whether they will be allowed to run side businesses, and how they can run them if approved.

After the committee meeting, Secretary Rosário expressed his confidence in confirming a contract in June or July, stating that "It will be in the third quarter at the latest."

Details of the contract are currently under discussion at the Executive Council, so the secretary declined to make further comments on them, especially as negotiations with bus companies are ongoing.

The government extended all bus concessions for 14 months in October 2019. The updated contract will expire at the end of this year.

CRIME

Chess player threatened over MOP20 board rent

JULIE ZHU

ONE game of chess played in a public park in Macau reached a "life threatening" level recently, according to a case reported by the Public Security Police Force (PSP), after a player pulled a knife on a person demanding rent money for use of a chess board.

As reported during yesterday's joint police press conference, the case took place on Sunday (March 15) and involves three men: the suspect, a self-proclaimed owner of a chess set, and the latter's companion.

At around 3 p.m. on Sunday at the Areia Preta Triangle Garden, the suspect was playing chess with a group of his friends. Later, the alleged owner approached the suspect claiming that the set of chess belonged to him.

A sentence written on the board stated that anybody who wished to use the board should put down a 20 patacas "deposit". The self-proclaimed chess owner asked the suspect for 20 patacas as "rent" for using the board.

After several unsuccessful attempts to col-

lect the money, the supposed owner left the scene and returned with a friend whereupon the three men became engaged in an argument.

The suspect left the garden and returned with a knife, which was long enough to be defined as a banned weapon. While chasing the chess owner and the chess owner's friend, nearby on duty PSP police officers noticed the situation and called for the armed man to stop, which he did.

The suspect is a 58-year-old Macau local resident who is a maintenance worker. He said

that he had found the knife on the streets years ago and appropriated it for his workplace. The second man is a Macau local resident in his 60s.

In a second, unrelated case also reported yesterday, a male resident has accused his girlfriend of fraud and theft after she used his credit card and sold his watch to a pawn shop.

According to the Judiciary Police, the woman is a 43-year-old Macau resident. The two have been romantically involved and living together in the city since August 2019.

On March 14, the man went to Hong Kong and left the credit card in Macau. The woman claimed the man gave her permission to use the credit card.

On March 15, she accrued 141,700 Macau patacas in purchases on the credit card. On the same day, she sold her boyfriend's watch at a pawn shop for HKD35,000. The man claimed a total loss of HKD198,700 to the police authority.

The police authority has charged the woman with aggravated theft and fraud.

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Health authorities: no travelers can avoid medical examination

RENATO MARQUES

THE health authorities admitted yesterday that they have been experiencing several problems with Macau residents returning from overseas that refuse to cooperate with the local authorities regarding certain preventive measures. However, the government has insisted that all people arriving from areas considered of high risk must undergo the proper medical checks.

Yesterday, the coordinator of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center, Leong Iek Hou, admitted that the authorities have been experiencing problems with several residents who have expressed an unwillingness to undergo the mandatory medical examination at a location indicated by the Health Bureau (SSM).

According to the official, the most pressing case refers to a group of teenaged residents of Macau who arrived from Portugal in the early hours of yesterday morning.

Upon their arrival, in accordance with the current rules, they should have been brought to a medical facility to undergo a period of isolation and medical examination. However, because they were underage, the process required the authorization of their parents or guardians. Leong admitted that there was some miscommunication, and insufficient information



on the part of the parents, as some of the parents thought they could choose between doing the "quarantine period" at home or at the medical facility, which the coordinator explained is incorrect.

"All people arriving from areas considered of high-risk of contagion need to submit to the medical examination at a medical facility to be indicated by the SSM. Only those arriving from areas of moderate risk can opt for doing self-quarantine at home," Leong reaffirmed.

In a letter shared with the media the parents claimed to have not been informed about the situation or to have received any communication from the SSM staff who received the youngsters at the airport. The parents said

that they had waited for three hours at the airport without being informed of the situation. They are calling on the government to improve its procedures.

The director of the SSM, Lei Chin Ion, remarked that according to the Law on Prevention, Control and Treatment of Infectious Diseases, the health authorities have the right to undertake the tasks to manage the situation and ensure the needs of citizens, with a period of 24 hours in which they should communicate with spouses or other family members about the situation of the person undergoing medical examinations.

Lei appealed to residents to abide by the law and cooperate with the authorities on the protection of the health of all the citizens, in-

cluding those being examined.

Leong also noted that according to the same laws, "anyone refusing to submit to a voluntary medical examination is subject-

ted to compulsory hospitalization measures as well as criminal liability."

Lei added that citizens, as well as parents and guardians, have the right, according to the same law, to appeal the decision of the health authorities to the courts in cases where they feel that the authorities have failed to comply with their duties and competencies. However, Leong noted that even this appeal procedure cannot suspend the medical examination procedures.

Addressing the procedures of all the people arriving from high-risk areas, Leong said, "All of them [during the period of isolation] need to undergo two nucleic acid tests independent of their age."

As the Times reported last week, an isolation period is not the same as quarantine and usually takes about three days to be concluded. It occurs in cases where the first test is negative. After the first test, people need to remain in isolation for at least 48 hours, the time needed for the second test to be performed. The results of such tests take on average six to eight hours to be known.

MACAU SEES 13TH CASE IN STUDENT RETURNEE

MACAU confirmed its 13th case of Covid-19 infection this evening in a 20-year-old local resident who has been studying in the United Kingdom. The female student recently left the British capital of London to travel to Hong Kong via Kuala Lumpur. Arriving in Hong Kong on Monday night, the patient made the connection to Macau via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge. Upon arrival at the border post of the

bridge, health authorities detected a fever in the patient and sent her to the Conde de São Januário Hospital. After nucleic acid testing, the student was confirmed to be infected with the novel coronavirus. The patient's health status is considered normal, but she remains currently hospitalized. An investigation into her travel arrangements and those she may have had close contact with is ongoing.

Macau drops quarantine measures, goes into lockdown

LYNZY VALLES

THE Macau SAR is in a partial lockdown after an Executive Order stated that from today, no individuals – aside from Macau residents, non-resident workers of Macau, and travelers from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan – will be allowed to enter the region.

The recent measure was announced in a dispatch signed by Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng after the city recorded two new cases after 40 days of no Covid-19 cases. As of last night, 13 cases have been recorded in total.

Starting today, all non-residents – excluding residents of mainland China, Hong Kong, Ma-

cau and Taiwan, as well as holders of non-resident worker cards in Macau – will be prohibited from entering the SAR.

This measure overrules an earlier restriction that took effect yesterday requiring that individuals arriving from all countries and regions in the world – except for the three aforementioned regions – must undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine.

The SAR has progressively issued quarantine measures targeting different countries during the pandemic outbreak. However, in this instance, it has decided to ban all entries to the SAR. The change represents an abandonment of the earlier quarantine method in

favor of a complete ban.

According to the Executive Order, the health authorities have the power to exempt residents of countries and territories outside China from compliance with the new measure under certain circumstances. Such an exemption could be granted also with a view to ensure the proper operation of public services in the community and of meeting the community's basic day-to-day needs.

The director of Macau's Health Bureau, Lei Chin Ion, explained yesterday that the new measure was necessary to address the challenge posed by a potential hike in imported cases.

"It is our responsibility

to protect and take care of the residents but it is not our responsibility to take care of the foreigners and this also been followed by other countries," said Lei. "We have no capacity [to treat] so many people."

Speaking to the Times, local sociologist Larry So noted that for Macau, the lockdown is inevitable.

Although, the global pandemic crisis is causing a psychological impact, So expressed the belief that the SAR is still fortunate that it is not experiencing a shortage in face masks and necessary items amid the lockdown.

"The lack of all these medical supplies – fortunately not in Macau but in places overseas – are causing a high level of anxie-

ty," he added.

"In the past two to three months, we have been under such situation where people are not coming to visit. I think it's better to have a lockdown so we can clean ourselves up," he added.

"Most countries are doing the same [procedure]. Even though you open Macau, tourists won't be coming anyway. We are all aware of this [effect] on the economic situation," So told the Times.

So additionally remarked that hopefully by next winter, everything will have resumed to normal operating conditions, adding that the continuous virus outbreak in other countries and the panic among people

worldwide would make it challenging for many places to see a recovery by summer.

"The psychological impact is really very serious. People in Macau are kind of tired of locking themselves up and are kind of depressed," said So.

The partial lockdown of the Macau SAR was set out in Executive Order No. 72/2020 published in yesterday's Official Gazette.

It has been issued, in accordance with the Law on the Prevention, Control and Treatment of Infectious Diseases, in view of developments regarding the global spread of Covid-19 and in order to prevent infections being imported to Macau from overseas.

SPORTS

MOTORCYCLE RACE USED FOR MACAU GP RIDER SELECTION CANCELLED

RENATO MARQUES

THE legendary Isle of Man TT (Tourist Trophy) races (IOMTT), an annual motorcycle sport event run on the Isle of Man in May and June has seen its 2020 edition cancelled.

The event, known as the oldest and the most dangerous motorcycle racing event in the world, is the latest to join the list of major sports events being cancelled all over the world amid the outbreak of the Covid-19.

According to the IOMTT organizing committee, the decision was made by the

Council of Ministers of the Isle of Man Government.

Besides the event's relevance in the British and international road racing panorama, the event is also known to be one of the two major road racing events used by the local Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee (MGPOC) to recruit the motorcycle racers who compose the grid for the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix.

Previous experience and races in the IOMTT is also an important factor when analyzing the curriculum vitae of each racer to be allowed to race on the Guia Cir-

cuit event.

Every year, the MGPOC organizes a delegation to attend the event where they also take an opportunity to promote the Macau GP racing weekend.

The cancellation of the IOMTT event might also interfere with sponsorship for teams and riders as they engage in other competitions later in the season.

As per the latest information, there is no indication yet that the Macau GP is not going ahead as planned. It is unclear how far the cancellation of IOMTT will affect the Macau GP, if at all.

SPORTS

MACAU FIVB TOURNAMENT POSTPONED UNTIL TOKYO 2020

THE Macau leg of the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) will be postponed until the Olympic Games in Tokyo this year, in response to the latest development of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infection, the Sports Bureau said in a statement.

The FIVB's Women's Volleyball Nations League (VNL) Macao 2020 was scheduled to be held from June 2 to 4 at the Macao Forum.

Last week, the Sports Bureau informed the Times that preparations

for the event were progressing as planned and according to schedule.

However, the organizing committee of the VNL in the region has now received a notification from the FIVB that it has decided to postpone the local tournament and would only resume normal activities after the Tokyo Olympics.

The organizing committee pledged that it will be in constant communications with the FIVB and will make an announcement to volleyball fans once an

appropriate date is set for the event.

In a statement issued by the FIVB, the organization remarked, "the decision to postpone the VNL will ensure that athletes can focus on looking after their health and fitness, and will enable national leagues, that are currently having to suspend events, to conclude their seasons when the situation improves."

Presently, the FIVB has cancelled one event and postponed another in April due to the outbreak. LV

GOV'T AUDITOR ACCUSES AIRPORT MANAGEMENT OF OVERLOOKING SECURITY FLAWS

ANTHONY LAM

THE Macau International Airport Company (CAM), the concessionaire that manages the daily operation of the Macau International Airport, has been accused of overlooking security loopholes in the baggage handling process.

This was pointed out yesterday in a report compiled by the government's Audit Commission, which highlighted a flawed security system proposed by CAM that was later abandoned. It said that the system had the potential for explosives to be smuggled into checked luggage.

Originally, under the proposal, passengers were required to have their luggage scanned and sealed with an easily detached sticker prior to starting their check-in procedure. The report suggested that the time interval between the sealing and check-in procedure could allow passengers to insert prohibited or dangerous items into their luggage.

In response, the airport upgraded its scanners for detecting explosives to a four-tier system that detects explosives automatically.

However, a fundamental flaw was spotted: The system could lose track of the luggage and lead to the necessity for human checking. This realization has significantly jeopardized the efficiency of the airport, according to the report.

Moreover, the last layer of



inspection did not come at the same time as the X-ray image of the suspected luggage, which, in the opinion of the Audit Commission, could pose a risk to the inspecting officer, who would not know if the bag's contents were potentially dangerous.

The report pointed out that the four-tier scanner system was never put into operation because the safety and security flaw would not be accepted by the Civil Aviation Authority.

The report accused the management of CAM of having a passive response to the security flaw. CAM had approved the new system in 2014 but did not actually put the MOP70-million system into operation. Not until June 2018 did CAM follow up the problem under pressure from the government.

The Audit Commission also accused CAM of liberally spending funds on a provisional business aviation hangar that was set to operate for nine years but operated for just ei-

ght and a half years. Worse still, it serviced less than 75% of its occupancy rate expected by CAM. The Audit Commission estimates a loss ranging between MOP80 million and MOP166 million.

Moreover, the Audit Commission did not see any immediate necessity for CAM to end the hangar's operation after just eight and a half years.

CAM issued a statement yesterday in response to the report. It pledged to scrutinize its operation and correct the mistakes pointed out by the Audit Commission. It also said that it believes it will further improve under the leadership of the new government.

Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário, told the press yesterday afternoon that he was aware of the report, but did not have time to finish reading it yet. He clarified that the accusations are against CAM instead of the aviation authority.

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GAMING | LAS VEGAS

Adelson's casinos stay open in city divided over virus

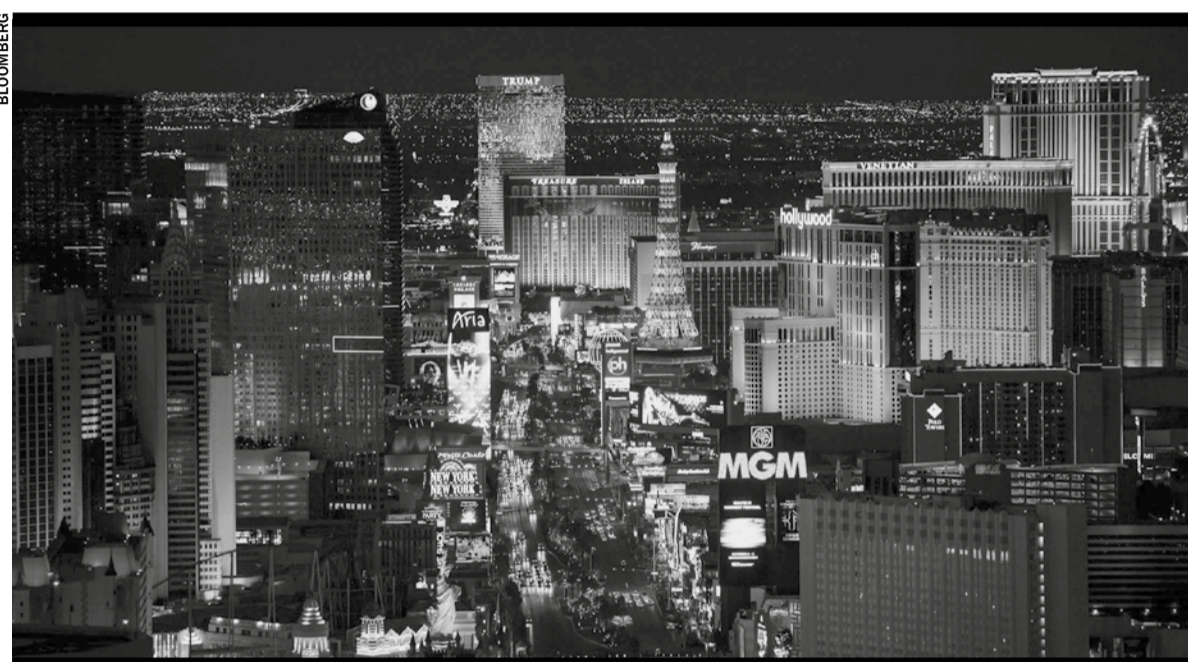
MGM Resorts International and Wynn Resorts Ltd. both announced over the weekend that they were closing their Las Vegas casinos until the coronavirus threat passes. But not the giant Venetian down the street.

The property, owned by billionaire Sheldon Adelson's Las Vegas Sands Corp., is keeping its doors open, relying on safety precautions - such as canceling meetings and shows and frequently wiping down slot machines - to keep employees and guests safe.

"Our team members are our most valuable asset and we have every intention of getting through this challenging situation together," the company said in a statement. Management is still assessing the situation on a daily basis, and plans could change.

Casino closures in the divided city follow a mandatory order issued in Macau last month requiring an unprecedented 15-days of non-operation. The measure was praised by the public for containing an initial local outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus in February.

But at Adelson's Sands resort in Las Vegas, customers still ate and gambled yesterday. Many other hotels and casinos in Las Vegas remained open, as does air travel to McCarran International Airport. A Sands employee cafeteria is being shuttered, to limit close contact, with workers being given other food options. Unlike other operators, though, Sands said: "The company is not considering layoffs or any changes to any of our existing health-care benefit plans."



For now, the company's position stands in stark contrast to that of President Donald Trump, a former casino owner himself whose political rise was supported by Adelson. On Monday, Trump called for Americans to avoid gatherings of more than 10 people. "We have an invisible enemy," said the president, who was criticized by some for not recognizing the threat sooner. "This is a bad one."

Adelson has been a close confidant of Trump and one of his biggest donors, making the apparent split more notable. In fact, the president was supposed to speak at this month's Republican Jewish Coalition conference in Las Vegas, held at Adelson's Venetian. Trump canceled as the virus threat escalated, and the event was postponed.

The shutdown over whether to close casinos comes at a time when the industry is pleading for relief from lawmakers.

"In a matter of days, the U.S. casino industry went from a growing, thriving segment of the U.S. economy to a near standstill," American Gaming Association Chief Executive Officer Bill Miller said in a statement seeking stimulus funding. It followed airlines making their own push Monday for \$58 billion in aid from Congress.

The casino industry, like so many, is wrestling with how best to survive the pandemic. Government officials in at least a half-dozen states, including New York, Massachusetts, Ohio and Illinois, have ordered casinos to close in hopes of preventing the spread of the virus.

In Las Vegas, the biggest U.S. casino market, operators have been divided. On Sunday, Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak ordered schools and state offices shut, but he stopped short of casinos,

saying he would "strongly support" any operators that did close. MGM and Wynn went ahead and did just that.

Unlike other operators, Sands said it is not considering layoffs or any changes to its employee healthcare benefits

Casino giants Caesars Entertainment Corp. and MGM Resorts International are drawing down their credit as they cope with coronavirus fallout. Caesars said Monday that it would tap more than \$1.15 billion from its revolving credit lines. Earlier, Bloomberg News reported that MGM is planning to draw down

as much as \$1.5 billion of its backup loans.

Meanwhile, Wynn Chief Executive Officer Matt Maddox told employees and guests he's been consulting with an infectious disease specialist and following federal guidelines on crowds.

Some industry insiders also point to Macau, which took swift action, shutting down all public events in January, just before the big Chinese New Year, followed by a 15-day closure of the casinos in February. Business remains slow, with access limited. But the region, one of the top tourist destinations in the world, reported only 12 cases since the crisis began, with 10 having since been discharged by the local hospital, according to the government information bureau.

Other casino operators, such as Caesars Entertainment Corp., Boyd Gaming Corp. and Red Rock Resorts Inc., are staying open. Business-interruption insurance - which could be paid if a government orders a shutdown, but not if the company decides to close on its own - is one factor in the thinking, according to Bloomberg.

Compounding the decision-making is the huge debt the casino industry carries, due in part to feverish dealmaking over the past few years. Caesars, for example, is being acquired by Eldorado Resorts Inc. in a transaction worth a combined \$17.3 billion in cash, stock and debt when it was announced last June. Caesars and others have been drawing on their revolving credits lines, to save cash for the tough times ahead.

The Las Vegas-based operator of properties such as Caesars Palace and Planet Hollywood has canceled all live events through the end of March, closed its buffets and cut staff.

"We are taking these bold measures now and look forward to welcoming guests back to enjoy world-class entertainment experiences as soon as we are able," Caesars said in a statement. **DB/AGENCIES**

MACAU

Analysts converge on 75% revenue fall this March

DANIEL BEITLER

ANALYSTS are converging on a projected fall in gross gaming revenue of between 75% and 80% this month, after February 2020 recorded the lowest monthly revenue since 2004.

JP Morgan Securities (Asia Pacific) said in a note seen by GGRAsia that March revenue was tracking "a little better, but still bad" com-

pared to February. Average daily gross gaming revenue was down between 75% and 80% in year-on-year terms in the first 15 days of the month, its analysts said.

Estimates show that the VIP segment has dropped by between 70% and 75% in year-on-year terms, faring only marginally better than the mass market segment. However, JP Morgan analysts said that the difference

was "within expectations and not very telling."

Sanford C. Bernstein said it was also forecasting a 75% to 80% contraction for the month on the basis that tight visitation controls for mainland residents remain in place. It also believes the market is being led by the VIP segment which has showed signs of "significant volatility."

The estimates were

made prior to new entry restrictions introduced yesterday that prevent anyone from outside the greater China region from entering Macau.

Even so, JP Morgan had earlier said that similar restrictions would have little effect on Macau's casinos, given that the "significant concentration of Macau's GGR comes from Chinese players."

Last year, tourists from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong accounted for over 92% of visitor arrivals to Macau. The only notable source market believed to be affected by the new restriction is South Korea, Macau's fourth-largest visitor market, which still accounted for less than 2% of 2019 visitors.

Gross gaming revenue dropped 87.8% last

month, according to official data provided by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, after the local government ordered a 15-day mandatory closure of casinos to contain a coronavirus outbreak in the city. Year-to-date revenue for the first two months of the year sits at 25.2 billion patacas, down almost 50% compared to a year earlier.



ANALYSIS

CORONAVIRUS COULD VERY WELL SLOW BY THE SUMMER

DAVID FICKLING

ONE great unknown about the coronavirus pandemic currently circling the globe is how it will respond as the weather gets warmer.

The virus will “go away in April,” President Donald Trump told a meeting of governors last month, “as the heat comes in.” That over-confident assertion has attracted criticism from virologists and fact-checkers. Most respiratory diseases — such as influenza and the mundane rhinovirus and coronavirus strains that cause the common cold — do indeed spread more rapidly in the cold, dry conditions of the winter months. But it's been impossible to say for sure how Covid-19 would behave in summer and late spring for an obvious reason — the strain didn't exist until around November last year.

At the same time, evidence is starting to emerge that temperature and humidity do make a difference in the ability of the virus to infect large numbers. That should give health services hope for some respite as summer spreads across northern temperate regions, aiding the ability to plan for renewed outbreaks once winter rolls around.

We can't simulate summer conditions in countries currently in the grip of winter, but we can do something almost as good — look at what's happening in places closer to the equator where the climate is milder.

There's been suggestive evidence on this front for some time. Iran, which accounts for about 90% of coronavirus cases in the Middle East, is unique in the region for mostly sitting on a plateau where winter conditions resemble

those of more northerly countries. At the same time, some Southeast Asian nations with close business and tourism links to China have seen surprisingly few cases, even if you assume their less developed public health systems are missing infections. Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines have each seen fewer cases than Estonia, Slovenia or Iceland, despite a combined population more than 100 times as large.

A study uploaded to medical pre-print server MedRxiv Monday plots recorded cases against climate conditions to suggest that there is indeed a significant correlation between outbreaks and the weather. In extreme cold and very hot and wet conditions the virus is “largely absent,” the researchers from Spain, Portugal and Finland wrote, meaning that people in tropical and polar climates are un-

likely to see local transmission of cases.

Arid regions will see a higher rate of infections but the worst-hit areas will be temperate countries and high-altitude areas closer to the equator. The period between June and September should see a slowing rate of infections in much of Europe and North America, they wrote, although areas closer to the poles in Scandinavia, Russia and Canada may see worsening conditions as the climate warms enough to support local infections.

Another pre-print study by four Beijing-based researchers uploaded to the arXiv server last week comes to a similar conclusion after analyzing the infection rates in 100 Chinese cities. That rate, known as the R0, is a key determinant of an infection's propensity to spread. For Covid-19 it's currently estimated to be around 2.2, but moving it below 1 should, if sustained, be enough to turn the current out-of-control epidemic into an outbreak that goes extinct on its own.

Increasing the temperature by one degree centigrade reduces

the R0 by 0.0383 and increasing humidity by 1% pushes it down by 0.0224, the researchers found. That should be particularly significant in places with hot, wet summers, they wrote: In the event the Tokyo Olympics goes ahead, the R0 in the city would likely be at extinction levels below 1, given normal summer conditions.

The results shouldn't be too surprising. The mechanism that causes influenza and colds to spread faster in the winter isn't perfectly understood. It appears to relate to the way virus particles can stay active on surfaces such as elevator buttons and door handles for longer in mild weather; the way people show greater susceptibility to throat infections when breathing cold, dry air; and to our tendency to congregate in warm, close conditions where diseases spread easily during winter weather. Still, it would be remarkable if Covid-19 really behaved in a manner different from every other coronavirus, or indeed almost every other common respiratory virus.

Don't start planning any summer holidays on the expectation this disease will vanish with the sun. For one thing, both studies are still just computer models, and neither has been through peer review. On top of that, even a reduced rate of infection will only slow, rather than halt the spread of this pandemic. In most places, it won't even be sufficient to push the R0 below 1, in the absence of other measures such as social distancing.

Still, one worst-case scenario for this disease — where it rampages through lower-income regions of Africa and Southeast Asia, and there's no seasonal break for health services to catch a breath before the next wave — is looking less likely than it did a few weeks ago. That still leaves a range of very grim scenarios, but right now we should take what comfort we can get. **BLOOMBERG**

Beijing to deepen reform of government functions, enhance employment stability

CHINA will deepen the reform of government functions, foster new drivers of growth, cultivate new forms of industry in the digital economy and keep employment stable, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided yesterday.

Li pointed out that the reform of government functions must be deepened, and the Internet Plus approach and the nationwide entrepreneurship and innovation initia-

tive must be promoted to create more opportunities for business start-ups, job creation and flexible employment.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Monday showed that a total of 1.08 million new urban jobs were created in the first two months this year. The surveyed urban unemployment rate in February stood at 6.2 percent, up by one percentage point from January.

“Keeping employment stable is our top priority

this year. And smaller firms are crucial in providing employment. Related departments must work in synergy to support these firms,” Li said.

It was urged at the meeting that unreasonable restrictions that hinder the resumption of work should be lifted to enable more people to return to work and resume their income at the earliest possible time, as the epidemic situation continues to ease.

The meeting urged

deepening the reform of government functions. Temporary control measures that are no longer necessary and arbitrary certification and fee requirements must be removed. The recent beneficial policies for businesses should be delivered in a straightforward way, and the procedures be handled online as much as possible to deliver benefits to companies, especially micro, small and household businesses as soon as possible.

“We must resolutely

deepen the reform of government functions. Temporary control measures that are no longer necessary must be removed to clear the unreasonable impediments. The government needs to scale up support for Internet Plus and the platform economy, and related departments should have a keen grasp of their needs. We should fully recognize the vital role the platform economy has played in fighting the epidemic,” Li said.

The meeting called for

intensifying support for Internet Plus and the platform economy to cultivate new forms of industry in the digital economy and create new jobs and professions. Traditional industries should upgrade themselves faster by harnessing the industrial internet and developing online and cloud services. Integrated online and offline services will be promoted, focusing on elderly care, childcare and domestic services and other sectors with high potential of job creation. The platforms for employee sharing and employment security will be further developed to provide online employment and social security services for the flexibly-employed. **XINHUA**

Thailand enacts shutdowns to curb spread of coronavirus

BUSABA SIVASOMBOON,
BANGKOK

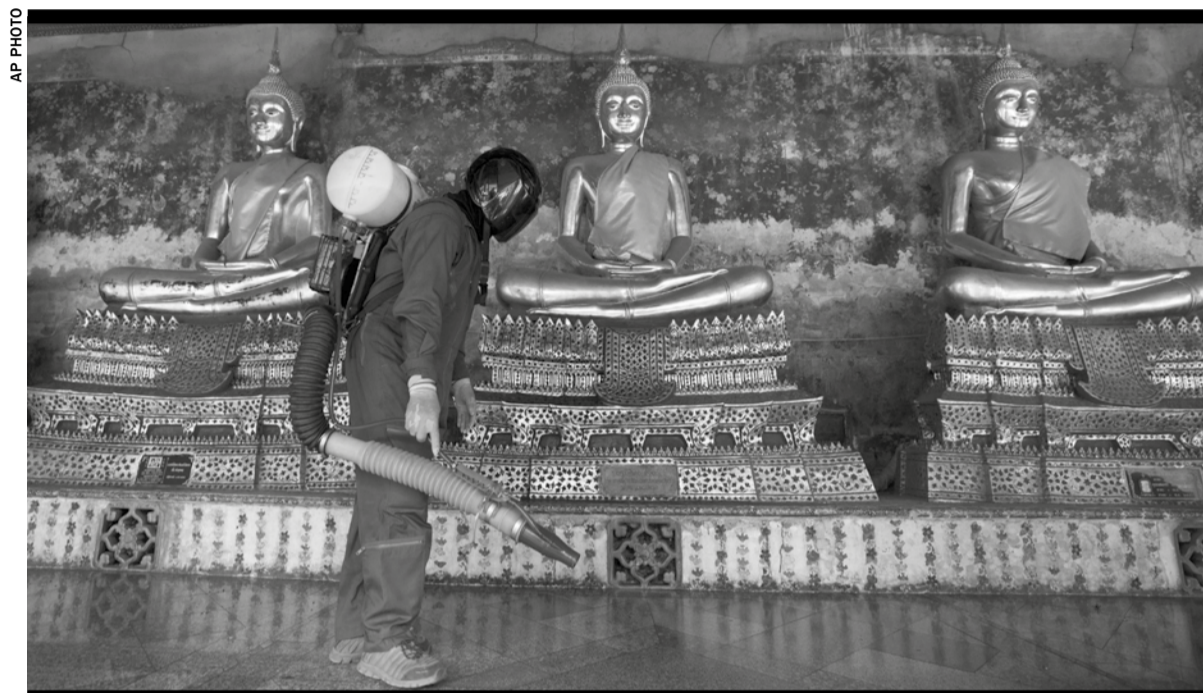
THAILAND'S government has enacted stronger measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus, including postponing the country's biggest holiday, shutting down schools and closing bars.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's Cabinet approved the steps at a meeting at which all attendees wore face masks and sat 1 meter (3 feet) apart, as recommended by health experts.

The plan to postpone Songkran — the annual three-day traditional New Year's holiday in April — is one of a number of measures to discourage the gathering and movement of large numbers of people. Millions of Thais normally travel from the cities to their hometowns to celebrate Songkran. The holiday will be rescheduled at a later date.

Government-run educational institutions through university will be closed for two weeks starting today, initially in Bangkok and adjoining provinces.

Gathering places such as bars, karaoke parlors, movie theaters, gymnasiums, boxing stadiums and other sports venues will be subject to closure as ordered by provincial governors. Such venues



in Bangkok are to close for two weeks beginning today.

The closing of restaurants and malls in Bangkok will be at the discretion of its governor. Meanwhile, restaurants are required to implement strict disinfection procedures and health safety measures. Several in Bangkok have already halted table service and are only providing takeout and delivery.

The governors of two provinces, Buriram in the northeast and Uthai Thani in the north, have

already regulated travelers with health checks and banned gatherings of more than 50 people.

While the new coronavirus can be deadly, particularly for the elderly and people with other health problems, for most people it causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. Some feel no symptoms at all and the vast majority of people recover.

Speaking at a news conference after the weekly Cabinet meeting, Prayuth said Thailand remains

open to foreign visitors, even though strict conditions apply for people arriving from six places designated by the government as disease-infected zones: China, Hong Kong, Macao, South Korea, Iran and Italy.

Arrivals from those areas must have health certificates issued no more than three days before boarding along with health insurance, and must download cellphone applications developed by the government to keep track of them

and their health in Thailand.

Under plans apparently not yet implemented, they would also be required to self-isolate for 14 days after arrival.

Officials have spoken of applying the same rules to people coming from any country with an ongoing outbreak but have not clarified when or how that would be implemented.

Thailand's huge tourism sector is taking a major blow from the COVID-19 outbreak. It accounted for 15.5% of total employment — 5.8 million jobs — in 2017, according to a report by Bangkok Bank.

The government said it would reduce the price of public utilities including water and electricity by 3% to help people and businesses suffering financially.

The government also announced plans to create temporary six-month jobs, but gave no details.

"Under the current circumstances, prevention and protection measures against COVID-19 are the first priority of Thailand," Deputy Prime Minister Wisanu Krea-ngam said Monday when he announced many of the measures proposed to fight the outbreak.

"The effects on the economy, tourism, exports and trade come second," he said. "We don't know yet how serious this battle will be. We are putting in everything to deal with it and then later we will come up with an economic rehabilitation plan."

Thailand, the first country outside China to confirm a new coronavirus case, reported 30 new cases yesterday, bringing its total to 177. AP

INDIA

Stringent virus testing criteria may mask toll

A British citizen appeared at a public hospital in India's capital with a cough, difficulty breathing and a private clinic's referral for a coronavirus test. She was turned away.

Indian authorities said yesterday that they are not expanding testing for the virus, as most affected nations are doing, despite mounting criticism from some experts that the limited tests could mask the true toll of the disease in the world's second most populous country.

The World Health Organization has urged countries to test as many people as possible to curb the pandemic, but India has taken a different approach, limiting testing to those who have traveled from affected countries or come in contact with a confirmed case and shown symptoms after two weeks of quarantine.



Indian authorities said the WHO guidance didn't apply in India because the spread of the disease has been less severe than elsewhere. Balam Bhargava, who heads the Indian

Council of Medical Research, India's top medical research body, said the guidance was "premature" for India, where community transmission hadn't yet been detected.

"Therefore it creates more fear, more paranoia and more hype," he said.

The British patient sent home from the hospital last week in New Delhi didn't fulfill India's testing criteria.

The woman, who requested anonymity fearing business consequences for her employer, said she told hospital officials that she may have had contact with a coronavirus patient in her hospitality sector job, but couldn't be sure.

After trying and failing to be tested a second time, she left India this week for France, where her family lives, and which President Emmanuel Macron said Monday was "at war" with the virus, announcing extreme measures to curb the disease.

Indian authorities have justified their strict testing limits as a way to keep a deluge of people from demanding tests that would cost the government money it needs to combat other diseases such as tuberculosis, malnutrition and HIV/AIDS. ICMR said that there was

no need to offer such testing more widely. However, authorities said they're preparing for community spread by bolstering their lab testing infrastructure.

As a result of the stringent criteria, sick people with potential exposure to the new virus are being sent home, and some experts fear that India's caseload could be much higher than government statistics indicate.

Bhargava said virus infections in India can still be traced back to people who traveled into the country from affected locales. He said if community transmission is detected, then testing protocols would be revised.

Authorities have confirmed 126 cases, most of which have been "imported" — linked to foreign travel or direct contact with someone who caught the disease abroad.

India is conducting only about 90 tests per day, despite having the capacity for as many as 8,000. So far, 11,500 people have been tested. AP

With borders and businesses closing, world hunkers down

CHRIS BLAKE, BANGKOK

WITH borders slamming shut, schools and businesses closing and increasingly drastic restrictions on movement in place, tens of millions of people were hunkered down yesterday, heeding government calls to isolate themselves and slow the spread of the new coronavirus.

From Southeast Asia to Europe to the Americas, people found their lives upended by lockdowns and social distancing.

Shoppers in Malaysia stood in long lines to stock up at picked-over supermarkets. Commuters in the Philippines waited in huge traffic jams at checkpoints set up to take their temperatures before entering the capital city. Officials in seven San Francisco Bay Area counties issued a sweeping shelter-in-place mandate, ordering millions of residents to stay at home and go outside only for food, medicine and outings that are absolutely essential.

The cancellations of treasured holidays and community events continued to build, with Thailand saying it was calling off its water festival in April and the organizers of the so-called "most exciting two minutes in sports" — the Kentucky Derby — reportedly prepared to announce the delay the horse race for the first time since World War II.

Fresh moves to contain the virus came even as Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the virus was first detected late last year and which has been under lockdown for weeks, reported just one new case yesterday.

The fronts in the battle have clearly shifted outside China, with its case-load now outnumbered by those outside its borders. And Spain is now the fourth-most infected country, surpassing South Korea, where new cases have been subsiding.

With the number of cases worldwide topping 181,000,



a surge of patients in Madrid's hospitals fueled worries across Europe of what lies ahead. Pleas went out to funnel masks and ventilators to places struggling with soaring caseloads.

"There is no easy or quick way out of this extremely difficult situation," Mark Rutte, the prime minister of the Netherlands, said in the first televised speech by a Dutch premier since 1973.

The virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, for most people, but severe illness is more likely in the elderly and people with existing health problems. More than 79,000 people have recovered from the illness.

Nevertheless a growing sense of crisis has roiled financial markets. Shares reversed early losses in Asia yesterday after the U.S. stock market plunged to its worst day in more than three decades and huge swaths of many economies came to a standstill as businesses and travel shut down due to the outbreak.

Only China, Italy and Iran have more infections than Spain, where the number increased by roughly 20%, to 9,191 and fatalities rose to 309, according to the Spanish Health Ministry. It switched to a new reporting system, so the actual number may be higher.

A somber Rutte told viewers "a large part" of the Netherlands' 17 million people are likely to contract the virus. So far, 1,413 people have tested positive

and 24 have died. The government closed schools, restaurants and bars and banned gatherings of more than 100 people.

Countries from Canada to Switzerland, Russia and Malaysia announced sharp new restrictions on the movement of people across their borders.

"We have a window of time at the moment to slow the spread of the virus," said Ulrike Demmer, a spokeswoman for Germany's government, which reversed its earlier insistence that border controls would not work. It imposed new limits on crossings with France, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark and Luxembourg, after German infections increased by more than 1,000 over 24 hours.

Malaysia banned foreign travel and is allowing only essential services to stay open. France allowed people to leave home only to buy food, go to work, or do other essential tasks, restrictions President Emmanuel Macron said were heightened because people hadn't complied with earlier guidelines and "we are at war."

India shut down the Taj Mahal to visitors. Most schools and entertainment facilities were already closed across India, the world's second-most populous country with 1.3 billion people.

The first confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported in Somalia, which has one of Africa's weakest health systems after nearly three decades of conflict.

As the pandemic expanded its reach, China and South Korea were trying to hold their hard-fought gains. China is quarantining new arrivals, who in recent days have accounted for an increasing number of cases, and South Korea starting Thursday will increase screenings of all overseas arrivals.

Infections have continued to slow in South Korea's worst-hit city of Daegu. But there's concern over a steady rise of infections in the Seoul metropolitan area, where new clusters have emerged.

Italy reported another jump in infections, up more than 3,000 to 27,980. With 2,158 deaths — including 349 more in just the last 24 hours — Italy now accounts for well over a quarter of the global death toll. Cases, however, slowed in Lombardy, the hardest-hit region.

In the United States, officials urged older Americans and those with chronic health conditions to stay home, and recommended all group gatherings be capped at 50 people. Americans returning from abroad encountered chaotic airport health screenings that clearly broke all virus-fighting rules against having packed crowds close together.

School closings in 56 countries kept more than 516 million students home, the United Nations said. New York City joined those ranks Monday, closing a school system with 1.1 million students. **AP**

this day in history



1982 JUDGE HALTS 'OBSCENITY' TRIAL

Charges of gross indecency brought by Mary Whitehouse against a National Theatre director ended today after intervention by the Attorney-General - with both sides claiming victory.

Moral campaigner Mary Whitehouse had brought the private prosecution against director Michael Bogdanov over the play *Romans in Britain*, which features a male rape scene, under the Sexual Offences Act 1956.

A senior Treasury counsel, representing Attorney General Sir Michael Havers, appeared in court to end the case immediately after the prosecution withdrew its evidence.

It is understood Sir Michael took the decision because it was no longer in the public interest to pursue the hearing at the Central Criminal Court.

On the third day of the trial the judge had made three rulings:

- the Sexual Offences Act could be applied to events on the stage

- a simulated sexual act could still amount to gross indecency

- the motive of "sexual gratification" did not have to be proved for the offence to stand.

Mrs Whitehouse is said to have withdrawn the case because she had proved an important legal point.

But Mr Bogdanov, 43, who faced up to two years in prison if convicted under the Act, said the case had been withdrawn because Mrs Whitehouse, who has never seen the production, knew a jury would not rule in her favour.

He had denied being party to a simulated act of male homosexual rape during the play and said he had suffered a great deal of stress since the prosecution was first brought about 18 months ago.

The landmark case drew fears in arts circles that a victory for Mrs Whitehouse could lead to a return to severe censorship on productions or alternatively cause constant fear of prosecution amid artists and performers.

The case centred on a scene in *Romans in Britain* in which a young celt, who is also a trained Druid priest, is the subject of attempted buggery by a Roman soldier.

The play ran at the Olivier Theatre during the autumn and winter of 1980 and met with varied reviews.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The case caused a furore in the media and amongst the public who were shocked by Mrs Whitehouse's bold attack on a play and its possible implications.

Mrs Whitehouse said she was safeguarding morality in society but her case was seen as unnecessary meddling because the production had been billed as an 'adult play'.

Despite constant ridicule, Mrs Whitehouse pursued unwavering campaigns to limit sex in broadcasting.

She took on further prosecutions against a range of corporations and people.

Although largely perceived as a 'spoilsport' her moral crusade made her a household name in an increasingly open society. Mrs Whitehouse died aged 91 after a long illness in November 2001.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

There's no need to keep worrying about a conversation that you have to have. All you need to do is look the other person square in the eye and everything will be fine.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Generosity is a major part of who you are, and it's something you should always value and cultivate. But resist the urge to help out one of your co-workers now.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You could be one impressive mastermind today, coming up with a lot of ideas and starting a lot of new projects - that someone else can finish.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Luckily, you'll be able to defuse it quickly and easily. Of course, you might have to be the one to bend over backward more than anyone else, but you won't mind too much. It's all for the best.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

If you know something is wrong in one of your relationships, why aren't you paying more attention to it? It doesn't take more time or energy to look at these issues deeply.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

A unique person could make quite an impression in your world. They could emerge in a public place, and you won't be the only person confused by what they're talking about.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Be careful not to get too friendly, though, or you might send out the wrong (overly encouraging) message! Crowded areas could also give you lots of energy, so spend time in a busy public space if possible.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Someone who has been elusive in the past is suddenly making themselves available to you. In fact, they might even start making a bit of a nuisance of themselves!



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Belonging to a group is very important to you right now. The team dynamic can buoy you up if you get in a funk and inspire you when you need some fresh thinking.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Maybe this means you need to join a gym, or maybe it means you need to hook up with a personal trainer to supercharge your workout. Turning up the heat on yourself can help you rise to the occasion.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Find out what they're really trying to say, and then address the content of their remarks. By showing them so much respect, you'll effectively point out to them that they weren't doing the same for you.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

After you've gotten rid of the garbage you don't need in your life any more, think about ridding yourself of the negative people you don't need in your life any more. Stop going to that cranky cashier.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY				EASY+						
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7		9 6 1				7		2	6	
2				6 1						9
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MEDIUM				HARD						
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	2		6		8	1				
	1 8 3									7
8					3			1 4		3
			2 7	4				7		6
4 6		7				2				

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-2	11	clear
Harbin	-16	0	clear
Tianjin	0	12	cloudy
Urumqi	-2	7	clear
Xi'an	2	16	cloudy
Lhasa	-2	11	cloudy
Chengdu	10	15	overcast
Chongqing	11	16	overcast
Kunming	8	20	cloudy
Nanjing	2	12	clear
Shanghai	5	10	clear
Wuhan	5	16	clear
Hangzhou	4	12	cloudy
Taipei	15	16	drizzle
Guangzhou	13	18	overcast
Hong Kong	16	19	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	2	6	cloudy
Frankfurt	2	10	moderate rain
Paris	6	9	moderate rain
London	2	10	drizzle
New York	0	9	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Authenticating mark; 5- Ed.'s pile; 8- Lubricates; 12- Gaelic language of Ireland or Scotland; 13- Dense element; 15- One of the Baldwins; 16- Nobelist Wiesel; 17- Maker of Pong; 18- Type of market; 19- Keep cold; 22- Pot used to contain the ashes of a dead person; 23- Beer; 24- Soccer star Mia; 26- Going out with; 29- Keep possession of; 31- TKO caller; 32- Make amends; 34- Egyptian peninsula; 36- Foolish; 38- Coral island; 40- Arrest; 41- Hilo hi; 43- The Hunter; 45- Boob tubes; 46- Inhabitant of Troy; 48- Scottish sheep dog; 50- Fiddlesticks!; 51- Mme., across the Pyrenees; 52- Actress Arthur; 54- Silly person; 61- Rustic; 63- "Arabesque" actress; 64- Romain de Tiroff, familiarly; 65- Woody's boy; 66- Great Lakes tribesmen; 67- ___ Abby; 68- Evil is as evil ___; 69- NASA affirmative; 70- Kon-Tiki Museum site;

DOWN: 1- Psychic; 2- Author ___ Stanley Gardner; 3- In your dreams!; 4- Ogle; 5- Allot; 6- Toronto paper; 7- Poet Teasdale; 8- Stumblebum; 9- Persons who claim superior enlightenment; 10- Lecherous look; 11- Scrutinize; 13- Purplish red; 14- Supple; 20- Hip bones; 21- Puts away; 25- Chief; 26- Distributed cards; 27- Within one's financial means; 28- Boarded; 29- Piece of history; 30- Green; 31- Nutritional std.; 33- Hide-hair link; 35- French pronoun; 37- Red-bearded god; 39- French slack; 42- Cracked; 44- Workers' rights org.; 47- ___ of Two Cities; 49- Texas border city; 52- Small fastener; 53- Peseta replacement; 55- When said three times, a 1970 war movie; 56- Small combo; 57- Vichysoise ingredient; 58- NASA launch vehicle; 59- Romance lang.; 60- Roman emperor; 62- Greek goddess of the dawn;

Yesterday's solution

S	M	E	A	R	A	B	A	T	E	P	T	A
T	I	T	L	E	D	E	G	A	S	A	R	M
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R	O	U	T	I	N	E						
A	S	S	O	R	T							
T	A	M	O	E								
E	K	E										
S	A	R	C	A	S	T	I	C				
M	E	A	L	S								
R	O	U	S	T	S							
D	E	F	A	C	T	O						
R	A	I	T									
E	T	E										
A	N	N	O	N	E							
R	O	D										

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	



<p>FOR SALE</p> <p>Pearl on the Lough Duplex, Taipa HK\$34,000,000 4,000 ft² 5 3 1</p>	<p>FOR RENT</p> <p>One Grantai Spacious Apartment, Cotai \$23,000/mth 2,122 ft² 3 3 3</p>	<p>FOR SALE</p> <p>[Macau] Jade Garden 4 3 3 3,180 ft² \$18,000,000 (ref: 19126002)</p> <p>[Macau] Seaview Garden 3 2 2 1,420 ft² \$11,800,000 (ref: 20016004)</p> <p>[Macau] Waterfront Duet Studio 1 1 469 ft² \$5,100,000 (ref: 20016001)</p> <p>[Taipa] Nam Long 1 1 1 785 ft² \$4,780,000 (ref: 20016009)</p>	<p>FOR RENT</p> <p>[Coloane] Grand Coloane Resort 1 1 1 710 ft² \$10,000/mth (ref: n/a)</p> <p>[Taipa] Nam Long 2 1 1 645 ft² \$11,800/mth (ref: 19111001)</p> <p>[Macau] Vai Fung Triplex 2 2 2 1,065 ft² \$15,800/mth (ref: 19121001)</p> <p>[Taipa] Manhattan 4 2 2 2,305 ft² \$26,800/mth (ref: 19091003)</p>	<p>jml 卓雅物業 property SINCE 1994</p> <p>(853) 2835 2699 hello@jmlproperty.com www.jmlproperty.com</p> <p>f jmlmacau @ jmlproperty</p>
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HONG KONG'S JOBLESS RATE CLIMBS TO 9-YEAR HIGH

HONG Kong's jobless rate surged to the highest level in almost a decade in February as the full force of disruptions from the novel coronavirus outbreak hit the city's already struggling businesses.

The unemployment rate climbed to 3.7% for the December-to-February period, the highest since January 2011 and more than the median estimate of 3.6% among economists surveyed by Bloomberg. The fifth straight month of higher unemployment extends the longest such run since 2009, which occurred in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The underemployment rate also rose to a five-year high of 1.5%, the government said in a statement.

"The labor market deteriorated sharply, as the Covid-19 epidemic caused severe disruptions to a wide range of economic activities and dampened economic sentiment," Law Chi-kyong, Secretary for Labour and Welfare, said in a government statement. "The labor market will be subject to even greater pressure in the near term, and the exact impact will hinge on the duration and severity of the pandemic around the world."

The year-on-year decline in total employment widened to 2.5%, the most since the Asian financial crisis, Law said in the statement. Consumption and tourism-related sectors had a surge in the jobless rate to 6.1%, the highest in about a decade. Unemployment in the food and beverage service industry was even worse, climbing to 7.5%.

Meanwhile, unemployment in construction "deteriorated drastically as construction activities saw a visible slowdown" while underemployment in transportation rose noticeably because of sharply reduced travel and cargo flows, Law said.

In a blog post on Sunday, Financial Secretary Paul Chan warned the jobless rate would likely climb to its highest level in nine years in February, with hotels, retailers, restaurants and construction among the industries hit hardest. The underemployment rate is also likely on the rise, he said.

The escalating global pandemic is the latest blow to Hong Kong's economy, which plunged into recession last year after months of anti-government protests. The city's economy is forecast to grow in a range of -1.5% to +0.5% this year, Chan forecast in

the budget released in late February. The plan includes HKD120 billion (\$15.5 billion) in relief measures, with a HKD10,000 handout to permanent residents age 18 and older.

"The rise in the unemployment rate reflects how the economy is going through a severe downturn," said Tommy Wu, a senior economist with Oxford Economics, before the jobless figures were released. "Obviously, those who lost their jobs will cut their spending. Even among people who are employed, they will also turn more cautious," he said, because of the possibility of wage freezes, reductions in pay and further job cuts.

As the rest of the world struggles with the spread of Covid-19, Hong Kong's early measures to combat the virus have shown some success partly because of memories of the deadly SARS virus in 2003. Currently, confirmed cases in Hong Kong stand at 153 with four deaths, despite the city's proximity to mainland China.

Those close economic ties with the mainland, however, also mean the success so far in keeping infections under control has not translated to similar upswings across key economic indicators. **BLOOMBERG**

CORPORATE BITS

Melco offers one-year contract for unemployed construction workers



Melco Resorts & Entertainment, with support from the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), has offered 100 job opportunities to unemployed local construction workers.

According to a statement, the gaming operator recently held a recruitment fair to hire local workers for its various construction projects. This comes following the negative effects of the Covid-19 outbreak on the construction industry.

Successful applicants will be offered a one-year employment contract, starting work this month, and on-the-job training to enhance

technical skills for personal growth.

Melco pledged to work closely with DSAL and FAOM to support the Macau SAR Government's efforts to sustain the local workforce.

Lawrence Ho, Chairman and CEO of Melco, said, "At this challenging and unprecedented time, we stand with the people and the Macau SAR Government in our fight against the impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak."

"The current recruitment project looks to support the needs of the local community through the effective creation of job opportunities and the sense of togetherness," he added.

AD

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13TH JUNE @ STARWORLD SAVE the DATE

BRITCHAM MACAO'S PEACE 'N' LOVE BALL

DON'T MISS THE BUS

THIS year's European Championship was postponed for one year yesterday because of the coronavirus outbreak.

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said the spreading virus currently "makes football and all life in Europe quite impossible."

The tournament is now scheduled to be played from next June 11 to July 11.

The UEFA executive committee made the decision after hosting a video conference call with its 55 national member federations.

The European Championship final typically attracts a broadcast audience of 300 million worldwide and made UEFA a profit of 830 million euros (\$912 million) four years ago.

"Moving Euro 2020 comes at a huge cost for UEFA," Ceferin said in a statement.

The decision was taken during an intense day of talks with member federations and the leaders of European club soccer, which is in a near-total shutdown.

It is still far from clear when the public health crisis could ease enough for European soccer to resume. Still, taking Euro 2020 off the calendar clears valuable weeks in which domestic leagues and cups, and the Champions League and Europa League, could be completed.

"We think postponing the Euro is the only (way) to get a chance to

FOOTBALL

UEFA postpones Euro 2020 by one year

AP PHOTO



the national leagues and to all the club competitions to finish," Ceferin said.

Euro 2020 was scheduled to start on June 12 in 12 countries from Ireland to Azerbaijan, and Russia to Italy. A one-year postponement

became UEFA's favored option last week.

The freeze on games amid the pandemic has put broadcasting deals worth hundreds of millions of dollars on hold and could lead to the 2019-20 season being annulled

in some competitions.

UEFA's first call was with leaders of the European Club Association and European Leagues groups, plus the FIFPro players' union.

Completing domestic league seasons would allow titles to be

awarded and decide entries for the next Champions League and Europa League. The first qualifying games are already scheduled for late June.

If resuming the season is possible, UEFA's options to complete this season include playing the quarterfinals and semifinals as single games instead of over two legs where each team has a home match.

The Champions League final is scheduled for May 30 in Istanbul, but the Turkish city could also be asked host the semifinals in a mini-tournament at a later date. The likely last available date to play the final is June 27.

Also, 16 of UEFA's members are involved in the Euro 2020 playoffs, which were scheduled to be played on March 26 and 31. They will decide the last four entries in the 24-nation final tournament, and could now be played in early June.

Postponing Euro 2020 has also created a backlog of national team games in a packed calendar managed by FIFA.

June 2021 was occupied by the UEFA Nations League final tournament of four teams, plus the start of FIFA's inaugural 24-team Club World Cup. It is due to be hosted in China and feature eight European clubs but no broadcasting or sponsor deals have yet been announced.

FIFA has not commented on revising its Club World Cup plan. **AP**

AD

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OPINION

World Views

Ramesh Ponnuru, Bloomberg

THE ECONOMIC MYTHS
US DEMOCRATS
PEDDLED AT DEBATE

At their debate in Ohio Tuesday night, Democratic presidential candidates emphasized what's wrong with the economy. That's not at all surprising: The party out of the White House typically magnifies problems, and progressives are predisposed to think that the market has created a lot of them that government can fix. Sometimes this impulse leads to the identification of real abuses by business and improvements in public policy to curb them. Sometimes, though, ideology cuts its tether to reality. That's what happened over and over on the debate stage. The candidates peddled one myth after another.

Myth No. 1: Medical bills cause 500,000 bankruptcies a year. This line is a favorite of Senator Bernie Sanders, and he repeated it at the debate — this time saying that the half a million bankruptcies were all the result of cancer alone. But that number appears to be vastly exaggerated. A 2018 study found that medical events caused only 4 percent of bankruptcies, which would yield a number closer to 30,000 cases. And even those bankruptcies were in many cases caused more by lost work due to illness than by medical bills. Sanders's suggestion that his Medicare for All plan would have prevented all those bankruptcies is therefore mistaken.

As Washington Post columnist Megan McArdle has pointed out, the expansion of health insurance because of Obamacare does not appear to have done much to bring the number of bankruptcy filings down. That suggests that medical bills don't cause as many bankruptcies as Sanders believes.

Myth No. 2: We have high health care costs because of industry profits. Twice Sanders denounced drug and insurance companies for making \$100 billion in profit, suggesting that their profits are responsible for our spending more on health care than other advanced countries. But Americans spend \$3.5 trillion on health care each year. Those profits are less than 3 percent of total spending. In many cases, the desire for profits drives costs down. Chris Pope, a health-care analyst at the conservative Manhattan Institute, notes that private Medicare Advantage plans have lower costs and more extensive coverage than traditional Medicare plans do.

Myth No. 3: Pharmaceutical companies are responsible for the opioid crisis. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Kamala Harris, Mayor Julian Castro, former Rep. Beto O'Rourke and the businessmen Tom Steyer and Andrew Yang: All of them said the pharmaceutical companies were the bad guys here. If they had said the drug makers had contributed to the problem, especially in its early stages, they would have been on solid ground. But none of them so much as gestured toward the possibility that the industry was less than wholly responsible for opioid deaths.

(...) Most heroin users didn't start with prescription opioids, and the proportion of those who did has been falling. The opioid crisis is increasingly about people who never got prescription opioids. But the Democratic candidates (like too many Republicans) don't appear to understand that.

Myth No. 4: Nine in ten Americans haven't seen a raise in 40 years. Steyer said it at the debate, and Pete Buttigieg has said it on another occasion. But the evidence doesn't back up this depressing claim. The Congressional Budget Office has looked at income trends from 1980 to 2015 and found widespread gains. The bottom 20 percent were making 32 percent more at the end of that period, even after adjusting for inflation. Account for changes in taxes and government spending, and they were making 79 percent more. The middle 60 percent of households also saw a 32 percent gain (or 46 percent after taxes and transfers).

Our free-market economy isn't perfect. But too much of what the Democrats think they know about it simply isn't so.

[Abridged]

Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson, were released from an Australian hospital yesterday, five days after they were diagnosed with the new coronavirus, media reported.

Queensland state's health department would not comment on media reports that the 63-year-old celebrities had been discharged from the Gold Coast University Hospital to self-isolate in a rented house.

Hanks' management did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The couple arrived in Australia in late January on the Gold

Coast, where an Elvis Presley biopic directed by Baz Luhrmann was to be shot. Hanks plays Presley's manager, Colonel Tom Parker. The film, slated for release in October 2021, has suspended production, Warner Bros. said.

Wilson, a singer-songwriter, has performed in Brisbane and Sydney during the couple's stay in Australia.

Australian television journalist Richard Wilkins has revealed that he tested positive to the virus on Sunday. He had met Wilson at the Sydney Opera House on March 7 and again at Nine Network's Sydney studio two days later.

MUST DEVELOPS RAPID
TEST FOR COVID-19

JULIE ZHU

A research team led by Azhang Kang, a professor at the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST), has developed a smart system for faster diagnosis of the novel coronavirus.

The system is called the Artificial Intelligence System for Screening, Diagnosis and Prediction of Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia and was developed by Professor Zhang's collaborative team.

It is an artificial intelligence-assisted diagnostic system working through a chest CT and X-Ray. It can quickly screen a large number of "suspected" pneumonia patients, assist diagnosis and in-hospital clinical assessments, and complete the full cycle management of Covid-19 patients, according to a statement from MUST.

The system can quickly and accurately diagnose Covid-19. Currently, an experienced radiologist spends 15 to 20 minutes reading a chest scan in order to ascertain the status of the patient, whereas the MUST system can complete a test and a diagnosis



JULIE ZHU

in 20 seconds with an accuracy rate of 90%.

The system, which issues an alert for severe disease conditions, is appropriate for helping medical professionals carry out evaluations on the effectiveness of certain medicines used to treat the symptoms of the coronavirus.

At present, the system is housed on a cloud service by the National Bioinformatics Center, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and available to use by anyone in China, but soon its availability will be international.

On March 10, this system was implemented

in the Wuhan Jinyintan hospital for frontline deployment, at the same time being deployed and tested in the Sun Yat-Sen University Memorial Hospital, the Third Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-Sen University, Remin Hospital of Wuhan University, the Central People's Hospital in Yichang of Hubei province, the First Affiliated Hospital of Anhui Medical University and the First People's Hospital in Kashgar, Xinjiang and other medical institutions, according to MUST. The next phase will roll out the application nationwide and worldwide.

REPORT

MANY SMALL BUSINESSES HAVE NO
INTEREST IN INTEREST-FREE LOANS

JULIE ZHU

A recent survey showed that many of the city's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have no plans to apply for the government's interest-free loans designed to shore up their business.

The survey was conducted by the Collective Wisdom Policy Center and the General Union of Neighborhood Associations of Macau at the beginning of March.

In total, the association collected 1,238 valid questionnaires from local retailers. More than 70% of

respondents have been established for more than six years. Over 90% reported business losses during the epidemic period, with half of these claiming to have seen their business diminish by 50% or more.

Amid the tough economic period, the local government has advertised a subsidy plan for local SMEs involving interest-free loans of up to 600,000 patacas with a maximum repayment period of eight years. As the Times previously reported, the measure is not new, with the first iteration of the scheme launched back in 2003.

According to the survey, over 40% of respondents have no plans to ask for special financial help. Most of these "independent" shops said that they have sufficient cash flow to support them in not applying for the scheme.

Besides subsidies for SMEs, the local government has also implemented a water and electricity bill exemption scheme as well as an e-voucher worth 3,000 patacas to be distributed to every Macau resident. More than one-third of respondents believe that these are more effective measures to shore up the economy.



AP PHOTO

Sri Lanka's defense authorities are warning more than 100 Sri Lankans who have evaded quarantine process after returning from coronavirus-hit countries to register with the police immediately or face legal action that includes six months imprisonment.

New Zealand's government said yesterday it would spend billions of dollars supporting hard-hit companies as it tries to shore up an economy headed for recession because of the coronavirus. The stimulus package is equivalent to 4% of GDP.



AP PHOTO

Britain's dramatic escalation of social restrictions to fight Covid-19 was sparked by new scientific evidence suggesting that 250,000 people in the U.K. and more than 1 million in the U.S. might die if the country did not suppress the spread of the new coronavirus. Imperial College London epidemiologists advising the U.K. government have published an analysis drawing on data from Italy, the hardest-hit European country with nearly 28,000 cases and 2,158 deaths.

Russian health officials ordered coronavirus testing for everyone who returned from European countries in the last 14 days. The decree released yesterday by the country's public health watchdog also outlines mandatory testing for everyone who returned from abroad in the past month and exhibited flu-like symptoms.



AP PHOTO

G7 The United States and its top economic allies pledged to more closely share real-time information about the coronavirus and the availability of medical equipment and to support jobs, global trade and investment. They also vowed to bolster science, research and technology and work to restore public confidence about the pandemic threatening the world's economy.