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 20 May 2020

"THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' "

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SJM WORKERS SEEK GOV'T HELP AFTER MASS FOOD POISONING CASE FOR ALLEGED BREACH OF SICK LEAVE ENTITLEMENT

LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS JOIN WHO ASSEMBLY BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

THE COURT OF SECOND INSTANCE HAS CLEARED A HOTEL UNIT AT SANDS COTAI CENTRAL OF ANY LIABILITY OVER A 2016 SUICIDE

China reported six new cases. Three of the new cases were listed as imported. Two were registered as local infections in Jilin province, and another local case was identified in Hubei province, where China's outbreak was centered. Authorities in Hubei carried out nucleic acid tests on more than 1.5 million people between May 11 and May 17.

LAST COVID PATIENT DISCHARGED

END OF SECOND WAVE



EU is supporting the World Health Organization. The EU is urging all countries to back the U.N. agency after President Donald Trump threatened to permanently cut U.S. funding. European Commission spokeswoman Virginie Battu-Henriksson says global cooperation is "the only effective and viable option to win this battle."

Australia's trade minister has described as "deeply disappointing" China's imposition of tariffs of around 80% on Australian barley in a dispute that has been linked to Australian support for a coronavirus inquiry. The tariffs come a week after China banned beef imports from Australia's four largest abattoirs over labeling issues. Trade Minister Simon Birmingham says Australia could appeal to the World Trade Organization to resolve both disputes.



Hong Kong's leader says the city is ramping up testing for the coronavirus, especially for workers at the busy international airport and caregivers at homes for the elderly and disabled. Carrie Lam said that tests would be increased from 4,500 to 7,000 daily, with both the government health department and university laboratories taking part.



TERRIFIC 12 TOURNAMENT TO GO AHEAD AMID COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS



More on backpage



ANTHONY LAM

LAST MACAU COVID-19 PATIENT RECOVERS AS SECOND WAVE SUBSIDES

ANTHONY LAM

ALL patients diagnosed with Covid-19 have officially recovered, the Health Bureau (SSM) revealed yesterday at the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center's daily press conference.

After a brief absence from the daily press conference in the past few weeks, SSM director Lei Chin Ion reemerged to preside over yesterday's press conference. He said that he had returned to the panel to announce some good news.

"Our last Covid-19 patient has been discharged from hospital [yesterday] afternoon," the director said. The patient is now in recovery quarantine at the Public Health Clinical Center in Coloane, where she was treated.

The patient is a 15-year-old girl who had been studying in the U.K. and was returning to her home-

town due to the outbreak in Europe. She left the U.K. on March 16 and arrived in Hong Kong the next day, with a stopover in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

She then stayed in Hong Kong for a week before arriving in Macau via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge on March 24, when she was intercepted at the border with respiratory symptoms. She was then sent to the government hospital for testing and was later diagnosed with the virus. She was hospitalized for 56 days.

"From March 15, when the second wave of outbreak started, until [yesterday], we've passed 66 days," the SSM director said. "We managed to save all the patients, without any deaths, any in-house infections or any intra-medical staff infections."

The bureau director thanked all medical staff for their contributions

and work.

Yesterday was the 41st consecutive day that Macau registered no new cases of Covid-19. With all the existing patients now recovered, the so-called second wave, which mostly consists of returnees from Europe and North America, appears to have subsided in the territory.

Despite this, Lei reiterated the importance of the infection response measures currently in place. He also noted that discussions have regularly been held with authorities from Zhuhai and Hong Kong to determine the direction of future measures.

He also added that the population eligible for Covid-19 nucleic

testing would be gradually expanded.

The arrival of summer this month prompted one journalist to ask the SSM when it expects public swimming pools to reopen.

Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), disclosed that the SSM has been in discussion with the Sports Bureau, which oversees local public swimming pools. However, no exact date of reopening could be provided yesterday.

Even if these facilities were permitted to reopen, certain measures and restrictions would apply, according to Leong. The amount of people allowed in the facility will be lowered to avoid crowds at swimming pools.

All swimmers will need to get their body temperature measured, as well as show an acceptable Macau Health Code.

The authorities previously stated that they would monitor the cleanliness of private swimming pools. As of yesterday, Leong disclosed there have been no poor hygiene situations recorded.

GOV'T RESTARTS QUARANTINE HOTEL SEARCH

THE government is restarting its efforts to find hotel venues for quarantine purposes.

The only hotel currently being used as a quarantine venue is the Pousada Marina Infante, where 316 people were being accommodated as of noon yesterday.

Given changes in arrival policies, more people are entering the city, but they are still required to undergo 14-day quarantine at a designated hotel.

Inês Chan, an official from the Macao Govern-

ment Tourism Office (MGTO), revealed that the government is already looking for appropriate hotel properties to accommodate the increasing numbers of entrants undergoing mandatory quarantine upon arrival in Macau.

As previously, the MGTO declined to name the hotel currently in discussions with the government. However, they did reveal that it is one of the 12 hotels previously used. The criteria for quarantine hotels have not changed. **AL**

Local health officials join WHO Assembly by videoconference

MACAU'S Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Ao Ieong U said that health officials and other government staff gained new insight from the opening session of the World Health Organization's (WHO) 73rd World Health Assembly on ways to enhance the territory's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Four local officials attended the opening session via videoconference late Monday evening. This included Secretary Ao Ieong; the Director of Health Services, Dr



Lei Chin Ion; the Adviser to the Office of the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Dr Lo Iek Long; and the Chief of the Center for Disease Prevention and Control, Dr Lam Chong.

During the opening ceremony, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered an address detailing China's proposal regarding a number of measures to support the global fight against Co-

vid-19. He said that China would provide \$2 billion over two years to fight the pandemic and the economic fallout.

His speech came shortly before the European Union's 27-member bloc and other countries called for an independent investigation into China's handling of the pandemic.

In his address, Xi said that China insists on always maintaining an open, transparent and responsible attitude. The Chinese president said that the country had acted res-

ponsibly for the safety and health of its people, as well as in the interests of global public health.

According to a summary statement issued by the Macau government, Xi called on all countries to "come together to build a human health community."

The World Health Assembly is the highest level decision-making body of the WHO. Its main functions are to determine WHO policies, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, as well as review and approve

planning and budget plans.

The assembly, which is being held in Geneva, Switzerland, was gathered to analyze the working report of the WHO Director-General, the WHO Budget, the anti-epidemic work of WHO member states, and international cooperation, among other topics. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, consideration of many of these matters has been deferred. The 194 WHO member state representatives discussed several matters this week by videoconference. **DB**

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MACAU PHOTO AGENCY



Court clears hotel from liability over guest death

RENATO MARQUES

THE Court of Second Instance (TSI) has cleared a hotel unit at the Sands Cotai Central development of any liability over the suicide of a guest in a hotel room.

The TSI ruling confirmed the decision that was previously announced by the Court of First Instance (TJB) in March 2019. The

judge noted that although article 809 of the Macau Commercial Code considers the host responsible for the death or injury of a guest or his companions during the period of their stay, this rule has a clear exception which states "unless the cause of death results from an action that cannot be attributed to the hotel."

Based upon the findings from the Judiciary Police (PJ) investi-

gation, the TJB ruled the death as a suicide. This is more than enough to satisfy the exception outlined in the law.

The family of the deceased has filed an appeal and is attempting to obtain compensation from the hotel. They wish to be granted a total of over MOP2.2 million, with 1 million patacas being claimed for compensation for the death, 1 million for non-pecuniary losses

which are usually classified as pain and suffering, as well as a claim of around 211,000 patacas for funeral expenses.

Both courts considered the claims of the family to be unreasonable, on the basis that the death was the result of the woman's own actions.

The case dates back to July 2016, when the woman from the mainland was found dead after hanging herself in the bathroom of the room she was staying in. The hotel staff members found the body upon searching the room after she failed to present on the checkout date and was unresponsive to calls or knocks at the room door.

At the time, the PJ investiga-

tion also revealed that before her death, the woman had been held in the hotel room against her will by two men from a group of four loan sharks who she had borrowed money from to play in a casino VIP room.

The TSI noted that while the four men were charged by the Public Prosecutions Office for the crimes of loan sharking and kidnapping, they had been found not guilty by the TJB in May 2018.

The judges of the TSI also said that although they had reviewed the sentences and decided that the trial should be repeated, the crimes the men are being accused of are unrelated to the cause of the woman's death. This was the reason the judges felt that the two cases could be judged separately. The outcome of this case would not influence the claims for compensation from the hotel operator, because the purpose of the retrial is not to ascertain whether the victim's death resulted from suicide or homicide, nor is it to establish a relationship between the kidnappers and the hotel unit.

The family's appeal also aimed to prove that the ruling regarding the actions of the four men lacked sufficient evidence, which was the reason for their claim that the TJB could not have concluded the ongoing criminal proceedings against the four men. This claim was rejected by the TSI.

Casino workers seek government help after mass food poisoning case

JULIE ZHU

YESTERDAY, six members of the New Macau Gaming Staff Rights Association delivered a petition of complaint to the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) asking the government to intervene in their employer's alleged decision to classify sick days as unpaid leave.

The complaint was specifically filed on behalf of a group of approximately 30 employees of gaming operator Sociedade dos Jogos de Macau (SJM) or its affiliate casino properties.

Earlier this month, a large group of workers from four different casinos – all connected to SJM – were diagnosed with food poisoning on the same night.

According to the Health Bureau, the case appears to be connected with an employee catering area for the four prop-

erties. Thirty-two of the people in this group dined at the facility on May 1, while the others did so on April 30 and May 2.

According to Cloee Chao, Chairperson of New Macau Gaming Staff Rights Association, the workers accused their employers of defining their days off work as "unpaid leave." They accused SJM of depriving them of their rights for holiday. However, different SJM casinos have implemented their own management policies, Chao explained. Taking more than one day off work may be regarded as unpaid leave pursuant to the corresponding company.

Chao said that as of 3 p.m. yesterday, SJM has not provided any information towards a resolution.

The workers hope SJM will not regard their ab-

sence as unpaid leave.

The group, all of whom are Macau local residents, expect their companies to cover their medical expenses. The workers have spent thousands of Macau patacas for one to four days of medical treatment. Most of them took at least one day off work.

SJM is said to have only covered the medical expenses for those who were taken to hospital by ambulance straight from the company after the food poisoning incident.

Some of the uncompensated workers were not sent to the hospital directly from their company immediately following the incident. They only visited the hospital after they had left their workplace. SJM has said it will take no responsibility for compensating this group of workers, according to Chao.

The group complained to the company, but the person in charge responded to the workers' appeal with the same information.

Chao's association has filed the petition with the DSAL because Macau's labor relations law does not include provisions concerning food poisoning on-duty. As a result, the casinos were wary of compensating the workers.

"The workers were not responsible for the food poisoning case," said Chao, urging the gaming operator to take responsibility for those affected.

The incident involved 53 people, of whom 13 are male and 40 are female. Their ages range from 26 to 60 years old.

The 43 people the SSM has had contact with said that they developed diarrhea, fever and vomiting from April 30. Three employees were hospitalized.

MGM RESORTS REDEEMS \$700 MILLION FROM REAL ESTATE TRUST

MGM Resorts International has announced the redemption of \$700 million (5.6 billion patacas) worth of "operating partnership units" from its real estate trust, MGM Growth Properties (MGP). The move comes as the Las Vegas-based casino operator seeks to shore up its financial liquidity during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Under its agreement with MGP, MGM Resorts can purchase up to another \$700 million through February 2022 from a total of \$1.4 billion made available to the company.

Upon completion of the transaction, MGM Resorts will have approximately 56.7% economic ownership in MGP.

According to a press statement, MGM Resorts intends to use the \$700 million in proceeds to repay amounts drawn under its revolving credit facility. As of March 31, 2020, exclu-

ding MGM China and MGP, and after giving effect to the redemption and MGM Resorts' recent bond offering, MGM Resorts had liquidity of approximately \$5.3 billion.

"[This] announcement is another example of our efforts to bolster our already strong liquidity position during the Covid-19 pandemic," said Bill Hornbuckle, acting CEO and President of MGM Resorts. "As we gear up to reopen and safely welcome our guests once again at our properties across the U.S., maintaining a strong balance sheet and preserving our financial flexibility remain critical pillars of long-term success."

"This transaction both strengthens MGM's balance sheet and delivers significant accretion to MGP. We continue to see significant value in our MGP stake and are optimistic that future redemptions will occur at higher prices." **DB**

POLICE WARN PUBLIC ABOUT SUSPICIOUS MESSAGES

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have published a warning about a suspicious mobile message. The message includes an unverified hyperlink bearing the domain of instant messaging system, Whatsapp, as well as a message appearing to be from the government's bank, Bank of China. The message reads: "Click the link to join the [group] immediately and get soaring shares which will be announced tomorrow." In the statement issued by the PJ, it was disclosed that "a number of residents" have reported the message to the law-enforcement authority. The PJ approached the bank to verify the message, which denied sending it. The PJ reminds the public to remain vigilant and report similar cases to the authorities.

DRUNK MAN ROBS AND DRIVES AWAY UNLOADING TRUCK

Two workers had their truck stolen by a drunk man while cargo was being unloaded from it, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) announced. The truck stopped 50 meters from the location of incident, however. As the workers chased after the truck, patrolling PSP officers were alerted and intercepted the suspect. When questioned on-site by the police, the suspect confessed to drinking and having lost his memory as a result. The two workers contacted their employer, who is not suing the suspect for stealing the truck. In the end, the suspect was only charged with drunk driving.

LOCAL MAN ACCUSED OF DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Nine grams of ketamine and cocaine have been seized by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) during the authority's regular traffic operations. The suspect is a local man in his 20s, surnamed Lei, who said he was unemployed. On the day of the incident, the police signaled the suspect to pull aside for inspection. He looked panicked, so the officers asked to perform a search of his person and his car. The officers then discovered the drugs in the car. After searching the suspect's residence, the police discovered more drugs. The suspect then confessed that he had obtained them for MOP4,000 that night. The suspect was charged by the police with drug dealing and drug consumption, as well as driving under influence of substances.

INSTALLATION AIMS TO PROVOKE THOUGHT ON RECLAMATION WORKS

LYNZY VALLES

A 3D sound and art installation, intending to provoke thought about the precarity between land and sea, and invention and destruction, kicked off yesterday at Creative Macau.

"Mountain surrounded by Sea" is a sound and art installation produced by Macau-based artists Crystal W. M. Chan and Benjamin K. Hodges. The two artists split their time between Macau and the U.S.

The exhibition is divided into two parts. On one side of the exhibition venue there are stage flats painted in pale green, a typical domestic house color in Macau. Together with a patterned carpet on the floor, this set recreates an imaginary Macau apartment.

The artists have created a domestic interior space to symbolize the homes that people are trying to build on newly reclaimed land.

The scene hints at the current reclamation that is occurring on the seas in front of Ocean Gardens.

"We're playing with this idea that Macau is an island but it's not an island anymore because of these land reclamations and the homes that we are building



here," Chan told the Times.

Chan was quarantined in the city for 14 days after coming back from New York. She said this was also a time for her to reflect on the massive reclamation works that had occurred in Macau, which led to the creation of this artwork and its exhibition.

The first land reclamation project was undertaken by the Portuguese government in 1863. Currently, two-thirds of the land in Macau is reclaimed land and reclamation remains an ongoing project.

"The development in Macau is constant. We're part of the reason that these developments are happening. I think I want to create this work so people will have the time to contemplate the city we're living in, especially now that we're in this quarantine period," the artist said.

Hodges also echoed the same sentiments, noting that the reclamation works that are going on also portray local peoples' aspirations for more land to build residential areas.

"As I've lived here more, I realize that a lot of people are really aspiring for homes for the future," he said.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the room there are styrofoam containers filled with water which have 3D animated seafood projected onto them. Styrofoam containers are used to portray the use of the item by fishermen to keep their catch fresh. These containers are also commonly used in front of seafood restaurants to display fresh seafood that customers can choose.

Thus, a ripple effect is created on the surface of the water to represent the disturbance of the environment during reclamation.

"We have this animated, almost ghostly [3D seafood]. It is a bit of reference to the ecological changes that may happen with the development of Macau," said Hodges. "Not that we're anti-development, but we're talking about the changes and that animals, just like humans, also need to adapt to it."

Furthermore, the installation also features around two hours of original sound. The soundtrack was created by Chan with the aim of "evoking feelings of longing and desolation."

MUST launches book on Tong King-sing studies

JULIE ZHU

THE Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) will continue its research on historical figures Zheng Guanying and Tong King-sing with a new book launched yesterday.

Yesterday marked the 188th anniversary of Tong King-sing's birth. MUST took the opportunity to organize a symposium to celebrate the 20-year anniversary of the founding of MUST. They also held an academic symposium on Zheng Guanying and Tong King-sing, and a ceremony to mark the first issue of a new publication, titled "Tong King Sing Studies Vol. 1".

Tong, Zheng and other late Chinese elites were involved in China's modernization and affairs related to Macau. Their contributions to the modernization of China have been widely recognized as worthy of Chinese national history



and commemoration.

These historical figures are also said to have been important contributors to Macau's development as a base for patriotism, and the coexistence of mainstream Chinese culture and other cultures.

The first edition of Tong King Sing Studies includes 11 research papers and academic reviews related to Tong. The papers systematically outline the story of Tong's family in the former county of Xiangshan, Guangdong, and their

relationship with Macau. They also explore Tong's industrial and commercial ideas, his social relationships and his views on the English language.

Researchers also translated letters written by Tong and other Chinese elites to the governor of California and included them in the 200-page book.

"In this new era, it is of great practical significance to promote Tong and Zheng's spirit of patriotism, the empowerment

of the country, hard work and innovation, as well as the open-mindedness associated with opening up," said Tong Ka Lok, Vice President of MUST.

Tong, who is also the Director of the Editorial Board of Tong King-sing Research, said that MUST would continue investing into the study of Xiangshan's and Macau's history, and cultural research in order to support the local youth in developing a sense of nationalism and patriotic spirit.

In recent years, Macau has strengthened research of Chinese traditional culture and local history and culture. This kind of historical research has become an area of academic interest for MUST. With the support of the Macao Foundation, the Higher Education Bureau, the Cultural Affairs Bureau and many other organizations, MUST has carried out many research projects in this area.

In 2019, Macau's first doctorate in Chinese history and Macau history was launched at MUST. The school recently established the Macau History Research Center of the Chinese History Research Institute. The university believes that the center will advance Macau's academic development in history research, and will enhance Macau's global influence and develop research into Macau's history.

BASKETBALL

Terrific 12 tournament to go ahead amid Covid-19 restrictions

RENATO MARQUES

THE East Asia Super League (EASL) will push through with The Terrific 12 basketball tournament this year, despite the many Covid-19 restrictions in place.

According to EASL CEO Matt Beyer, the event will take place on its original dates in late September this year. The last two editions of the event were also staged in Macau.

Beyer's revelation came during an online talk hosted late last week, themed "Basketball After Covid-19." The talk was organized by Hoop Coaches International, a group dedicated to elite youth basketball coaching in Asia and Australia, and Philippine professional basketball team Blackwater Elite.

Sharing his perspective regarding the basketball industry's development following Covid-19, Beyer said that he is currently working closely with local officials to ascertain

whether the event can proceed as originally planned.

"For this fall, so far, we are planning to have our event in Macau from September 15 to 20," Beyer said. "We are already in the final planning stages with the Macau Sports Bureau, and we are discussing a strategic partnership with one of the major integrated resorts for that."

The EASL CEO also noted that the pandemic has already been contained in Macau, as there have been no new cases since last month and those who were infected have basically recovered.

Although he expressed his hope that the tournament will go ahead, Beyer also remarked that for that to happen it is necessary for the Asian basketball leagues to resume their activity. However, this has not yet occurred, with all the leagues being put on hold due to the coronavirus crisis.

Additionally, two important stakeholders in this process, the Korean Basketball League and the Japanese B.League, had already announced the cancellation of their seasons. Meanwhile, another important player, the Philippine Basketball Association, will make a final decision on their national league by August.

The Chinese and Taiwanese Leagues are further along in their processes, with the former announcing a potential return to the courts in July. Taiwan's Super Basketball League was the only league that did not stop games. They managed to end the season on April 30, with Taiwan Beer coming out as a final winner after six games against the Yulon Luxgen Dinos.

Without giving away any details about EASL's intentions regarding the event, Beyer hinted that The Terrific 12 could still be in the position to move ahead, with representatives from China, Taiwan, and the Philippines potentially.



RENATO MARQUES

AGNES LAM CALLS ON HIKERS NOT TO LITTER

LAWMAKER Agnes Lam has reminded hikers to pick up their rubbish after finishing their leisure activities.

Taking to the hills and the countryside has recently become popular in Macau and Hong Kong. People in Macau have been in quarantine or social distancing for more than three months, from when the first wave of Covid-19 broke out in the city. Outdoor areas are believed to be safer as airflow is usually better.

It has come to Lam's attention that the amount of rubbish being irresponsibly dumped around the countryside has recently risen. Some people have even left masks behind.

While hiking, she also noticed a worker carrying a large bag of rubbish and walking along a hiking trail in Coloane.

The lawmaker is recommending that the authorities remove rubbish bins from green areas to make people aware of their responsibility.

She also reminded the public to take their rubbish with them to ease the burden on rubbish collectors. **AL**

AD

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RENATO MARQUES



HO IAT SENG TO ATTEND NPC UNDER SPECIAL SAFETY MEASURES

CHIEF Executive (CE) Ho Iat Seng will travel to Beijing to attend the opening of the third session of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) to be held on May 22 in the capital.

The CE will be accompanied by his Chief-of-Office, Hoi Lai Fong. Both will be traveling to Beijing from May 20 to 22.

This will be Ho's first meeting of the NPC since he took office as CE on December 20 last year.

During Ho's absence, the Secretary for Administration and Justice, André Cheong, will take the role of

Acting Chief Executive.

The 13th NPC meeting has been garnering attention because there will be special safety measures put in place due to Covid-19.

As previously declared by local health authorities, the Macau representatives will be subjected to the same safety measures as any other citizen. Dr Alvis Lo reaffirmed during Monday's daily press conference of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center that they will have to undergo nucleic acid tests to ensure they do not have the virus. **RM**

LOST E-VOUCHERS MAY BE REISSUED IN SCHEME'S SECOND PHASE



In response to a written question from lawmaker Agnes Lam, the Economic Bureau (DSE) stated that provisions would be made for local residents who have lost their consumption cards so that they may enjoy the subsidy in the second phase of the scheme.

"The card is ready for use, and no identity verification is needed while using it," the bureau explained in the response. "There are no restrictions under

which the card must be used by its registrant."

As a result, the DSE will make arrangements before the commencement of the second phase of the consumption subsidy scheme to include residents who have lost their cards.

The government has reminded people to keep their cards safe and not to sell their cards because the same card is to be used for the second phase of the scheme. **AL**

1,210 SUBSIDIZED SMES HAVE CLOSED DOWN SINCE 2003

SINCE 2003, some 1,210 local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which received government subsidies under the SME Aid Scheme, have closed down, according to the Deputy Director of the Economic Bureau (DSE), Lau Wai Meng.

Over the past 17 years, the SAR government financially supported 13,329 SMEs. The number of closed business represents approximately 9% of the total number.

Twenty-five SMEs shut down during the Covid-19 pandemic, most of which were from the retail and food and beverage sector.

The SME Aid Scheme provides interest-free financial assistance to SMEs for the purposes of purchasing equipment, renovating, and ge-

neral working capital, among others. The maximum aid amount per enterprise is MOP600,000. The maximum period for loan repayment is eight years.

According to Lau, a lack of capital and mismatch between business services and the actual demands of the market are the reasons behind the closures.


Lau also voiced disagreement with suggestions that the government should lower the entry bar for the subsidy. The DSE official said that some applicants with low income and low expenditure had applied for the highest subsidy.

Lau highlighted that the approval procedure must be well considered because all subsidies come from public money. **JZ**

ANTHONY LAM



AD



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WHO bows to calls from countries for independent virus probe

THE World Health Organization bowed to calls yesterday [Macau time] from most of its member states to launch an independent probe into how it managed the international response to the coronavirus, which has been clouded by finger-pointing between the U.S. and China over a pandemic that has killed over 300,000 people and leveled the global economy.

The “comprehensive evaluation,” sought by a coalition of African, European and other countries, is intended to review “lessons learned” from WHO’s coordination of the global response to COVID-19, but would stop short of looking into contentious issues such as the origins of the new coronavirus. U.S. President Donald Trump has claimed he has proof suggesting the coronavirus originated in a lab in China while the scientific community has insisted all evidence to date shows the virus likely jumped into humans from animals.

In Washington, Trump faulted WHO for having done “a very sad job” and said he was considering whether to cut the annual U.S. funding from \$450 million a year to \$40 million. “They gave us a lot of bad advice, terrible advice,” he said. “They were wrong so much, always on the side of China.”

Later, Trump tweeted a letter he had sent WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. In the letter, Trump said “the only way forward” is if WHO “can actually demonstrate independence from China.”

Trump said that unless WHO commits to “substantive improvements over the next 30 days,” he will make a temporary suspension of U.S. funding permanent.

WHO’s normally bureaucratic annual assembly this week has been overshadowed by mutual recriminations and political sniping between the U.S. and China. Trump has repeatedly attacked WHO, claiming that it helped China conceal the extent of the coronavirus pandemic in its early stages. Several Republican lawmakers have called on Tedros to resign.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said yesterday it was time to be frank about why CO-

VID-19 has “spun out of control.”

“There was a failure by this organization to obtain the information that the world needed and that failure cost many lives,” Azar said. Speaking hours after Chinese President Xi Jinping announced China would provide \$2 billion to help respond to the outbreak and its economic fallout, Azar said the U.S. had allocated \$9 billion to coronavirus containment efforts around the world.

Tedros said he would launch an independent evaluation of WHO’s response “at the earliest appropriate moment” — alluding to findings published in a first report by an oversight advisory body commissioned to look into WHO’s response.

The 11-page report raised questions such as whether WHO’s warning system for alerting the world to outbreaks is adequate, and suggested member states might need to “reassess” WHO’s role in providing travel advice to countries.

In his opening remarks at the WHO meeting, Tedros held firm and sought to focus on the bigger troubles posed by the outbreak, saying “we have been humbled by this very small microbe.”

“This contagion exposes the fault lines, inequalities, injustices and contradictions of our modern world,” Tedros said. “And geopolitical divisions have been thrown into sharp relief.”

Trump said ‘the only way forward’ is if WHO ‘can actually demonstrate independence from China’

China, meanwhile, sought to divert attention to its renewed efforts to slow the coronavirus pandemic, with Xi announcing the \$2 billion outlay over two years to fight it. Last year, China donated about \$86 million to WHO.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Ullyot characterized China’s newly announced contribution as “a token to



distract from calls from a growing number of nations demanding accountability for the Chinese government’s failure to meet its obligations.” He said that since China was “the source” of the outbreak, it had “a special responsibility to pay more and give more.”

Xi insisted that China had acted with “openness, transparency and responsibility” when the epidemic was detected in Wuhan. He said China had give all relevant outbreak data to WHO and other countries, including the virus’s genetic sequence, “in a most timely fashion.”

Xi said that in recent weeks, China has dispatched medical supplies to more than 50 African countries and that 46 Chinese medical teams were currently on the continent helping local officials.

Other world leaders including the presidents of France, South Korea and

tion has claimed that WHO criticized a U.S. travel ban that Trump ordered on people arriving from China.

Trump ordered a temporary suspension of funding for WHO from the United States — the health agency’s biggest single donor — pending a review of its early response. The advisory body, echoing comments

from many countries, said such a review during the “heat of the response” could hurt WHO’s ability to respond to it.

Xi said China supports the idea of a comprehensive review of the global response to COVID-19 and that it should be “based on science and professionalism led by WHO, and con-

ducted in an objective and impartial manner.”

Tedros emphasized that WHO declared the coronavirus outbreak to be a global health emergency on Jan. 30, its highest level of alert, at a time when there were fewer than 100 cases outside of China. In the following weeks, WHO warned countries there was a narrowing “window of opportunity” to prevent the virus from spreading globally.

During the first few months of the outbreak, WHO officials repeatedly described the virus’s spread as “limited” and said it wasn’t as transmissible as flu; experts have since said COVID-19 spreads even faster. It declared the outbreak to be a pandemic on March 11, after the virus had killed thousands globally and sparked large epidemics in South Korea, Italy, Iran and elsewhere. **AP**

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AP PHOTO



Trump's use of malaria drug likely to be welcomed in India

EMILY SCHMALL &
ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL,
NEW DELHI

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's declaration that he was taking an antimalarial drug of dubious effectiveness to help fend off the coronavirus will likely be welcomed in India.

Trump's previous endorsement of hydroxychloroquine catalyzed a tremendous shift in the South Asian country, spurring the world's largest producer of the drug to make much more of it, prescribe it for front-line health workers treating the virus and deploy it as a diplomatic tool, despite mounting evidence against using the drug for COVID-19.

Trump said that he was taking hydroxychloroquine as a measure of protection against the virus. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, however, has cautioned against using it outside of hospitals because of the risk of serious heart problems.

Suhhil Gupta, a pharmacist in New Delhi, said yesterday that Trump's announcement shouldn't carry any weight in India.

"He's not a pharmacist. His statements are not relevant to the field," Gupta said.

Still, India's policy on the decades-old drug, used to prevent malaria and treat lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, drastically changed after Trump tweeted in March that the drug, used together with an antibiotic, could be "game changers" in the fight against

the pandemic. India's health ministry quickly approved it as a prophylactic for health care workers and others at high risk of infection, and as a treatment for critically ill patients.

Officials in Mumbai even drew up a plan to administer hydroxychloroquine to thousands of slum dwellers as a preventive measure against the virus.

Indian health officials have declined repeated requests for comment, limiting communications to daily health briefings, the last of which occurred May 11.

The rules say that drugs such as hydroxychloroquine be used only after a rigorous scientific and ethical review, continued oversight by an ethics committee and ensuring informed consent — none of which happened with HCQ, according to Dr. Amar Jesani, a medical ethics expert.

The Mumbai proposal was ultimately shelved amid questions of the ethics of administering HCQ, as the drug is known, without first subjecting it to clinical trials. Still, the Indian government has recommended more and more people use it, contravening 2017 rules for emergency use of untested drugs, Jesani said.

India initially banned HCQ exports, but lifted the ban after Trump threatened "retaliation." At the same time, India's government ordered manufacturers to ramp up production from 1.2 million to 3 million pills a

month — causing company shares to skyrocket. From the U.S. to Australia, sales jumped.

Officials have even said that Indian plantations could increase the growing capacity of cinchona trees, whose bark contains the compound quinine, which has been used to treat malaria since the 1860s. Quinine can also be made synthetically.

The Indian government itself purchased 100 million HCQ pills, according to government data, to distribute to states and donate to countries including Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Dominican Republic.

India is the world's largest producer of generic drugs, a fast-growing industry that has brought down pharmaceutical prices globally. During the HIV/AIDS crisis, India played a similar role as in the coronavirus pandemic, boosting global supplies of life-saving drugs.

The problem this time, experts say, is that the hydroxychloroquine hype is based on a flimsy study, with little to no evidence that it prevents or treats COVID-19.

Still, a sharp rise in demand has reduced supplies for patients with lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.

India's hurried guidance has also impeded scientific trials that could determine whether the benefits of taking HCQ outweigh the risks.

"We should do a trial. I think that is the right way to come to answer on this question. But the (government)

made our job harder," said Dr. Bharath Kumar, whose team has proposed a trial.

Meanwhile, evidence against using HCQ for the coronavirus is growing.

A U.S. study of 368 patients in veterans' hospitals, the largest study yet examining HCQ's value as a coronavirus antidote, found no benefits and even more deaths among those given the drug.

The Indian government's own assessment of 19 drugs found that HCQ wasn't the most promising. A task force noted that while HCQ was readily available, the strength of scientific evidence for the mechanism of action was fairly low.

With more than 101,000 cases and 3,163 deaths, the coronavirus hasn't yet overwhelmed India's limited health care system. But that's starting to change in some hot spots as a stringent weeks-long nationwide lockdown begins to ease, allowing for greater mobility of the country's 1.3 billion people.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Maharashtra, the coastal state in central India bearing a third of India's virus caseload. The state's medical education and research agency has been administering HCQ to patients in public hospitals and clinics, according to court records.

Agency chief Dr. Tatyrao P. Lahane said protocols set by India's government were being followed and declined to answer further questions. **AP**

this day in history



1965 BRITISH POLICE TO BE ISSUED WITH TEAR GAS

Britain's police are to be armed with tear gas guns and grenades to be used against armed criminals or dangerous individuals.

The Home Secretary, Sir Frank Soskice, made the announcement in the House of Commons today.

He assured MPs the gas caused only temporary discomfort with no long-term side-effects.

"Non-toxic tear smoke" already used by the police in the Colonies would be stored at 40 police centres in England and Wales and at six in Scotland.

It is the first time British police are being issued with the "non-lethal weapon" - although London's Metropolitan Police and four other forces have been able to obtain supplies from the military in emergency cases.

Sir Frank made clear the chemical would be used only "in dealing with armed criminals or violently insane persons in buildings from which they cannot be dislodged without danger or loss of life".

He said the gas would have no long-term effect on people who came into contact with it.

Sir Edward Dodd, the Chief Inspector of Constabularies, told the BBC tear gas would under no circumstances be used for crowd control.

"The Secretary of State has asked chief constables to report to him the circumstances under which weapons are used whenever it is necessary to use them," he said.

He envisaged it would be used only "two or three times a year".

CS gas was developed at the Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment at Porton in Wiltshire.

It is delivered in a grenade or cartridge and has an immediate effect - victims experience watering eyes and blurred vision which wears off as soon as they leave the area affected.

The idea of allowing issue of tear gas to police was first recommended by a working party in 1962.

For the last 10 years, police chiefs have expressed concern about the vulnerability of their officers and members of the public on rare occasions when criminals barricade themselves in buildings and there is no alternative but to send in armed officers.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Tear gas is widely accepted by police forces around the world as a means of controlling civilian crowds.

British police carry guns or tear gas to deal with sieges, armed robberies, terrorist attacks or diplomatic duties. However, tear gas was often used against demonstrators at the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in the 1970s.

CS gas was used for the first time on the British mainland to control rioters in Toxteth, Liverpool in 1981, but rarely since then.

CS spray was cleared for use in 1996 as a safer alternative to police batons but three forces - Nottinghamshire, Northants and Sussex - still do not use it because of health concerns.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You had things all lined up, and now you're just going to have to line them up in a new configuration. This is actually a very good day for you. You're learning a valuable lesson at a very affordable price.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Give people the benefit of the doubt and you'll dramatically increase the chances of having a stress-free day. Just let their grumpiness roll off your back and try to remember how funny or amusing they can be.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

And if it's something you never thought you'd do in a million years, that's even better! Taking yourself out of your comfort zone has never yielded better results.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Try to accept things the way they are right now even if they're not exactly how you want them to be. Keep in mind that things will never be perfect. The sooner you can learn how to be more flexible the better!



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

They appreciate the fact that you believe they're capable of great things! You have to be willing to be disliked if you truly want to inspire other people.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You can add sunshine to the lives of other people, but only if they let you. Today, if someone refuses to be anything but gloomy or grouchy no matter how many jokes you tell, just move on.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Take a chance and you'll start to appreciate your independence in a whole new way. If you're in a relationship, you and your partner may be entering a phase of separation.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Put your household at the top of your priority list. There has been some tension growing there, and you need to try to create more harmony. It won't take much.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You've needed to say something to a close friend for a while, and today is the perfect day to say it. The energy centered around communication is very strong, and instant clarity is likely.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You have the skills and the instincts to manage your money well, so try trusting yourself more. Do the research and you'll never doubt yourself again.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Instead of skimming the surface with light small talk, ask more questions. Probe. And when you're asked for input, don't be shy about giving it. Exchanging ideas leads to increased positive energy.

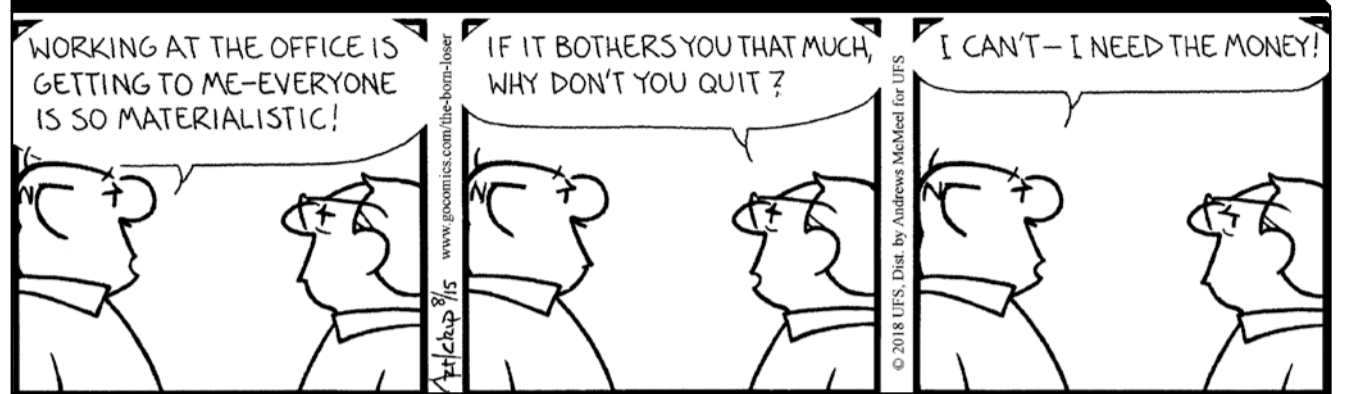


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Not everyone is going to be happy. Is a compromise possible? You've always been open to new ideas and change, so investigate a way to make everyone happy.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

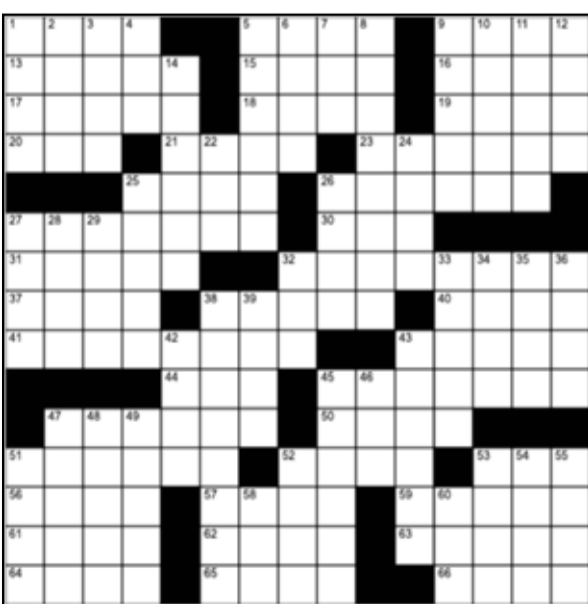
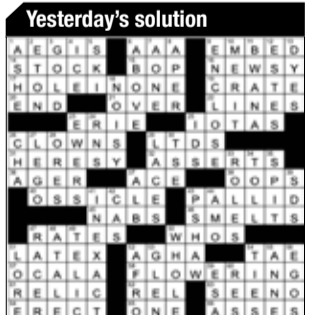
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	15	29	cloudy
Harbin	10	18	cloudy
Tianjin	17	28	clear
Urumqi	19	26	cloudy
Xi'an	15	27	overcast
Lhasa	8	19	drizzle
Chengdu	20	30	cloudy
Chongqing	22	30	drizzle
Kunming	16	30	clear
Nanjing	16	30	cloudy
Shanghai	19	29	overcast
Wuhan	19	30	cloudy
Hangzhou	17	31	overcast
Taipei	22	25	drizzle
Guangzhou	24	30	thundershower
Hong Kong	25	30	thundershower
WORLD			
Moscow	5	16	clear
Frankfurt	12	24	cloudy
Paris	13	23	clear
London	12	24	clear
New York	11	20	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Soccer legend; 5- Fiddlesticks!; 9- Gush; 13- Buddy; 15- Architect Saarinen; 16- Pocket problem; 17- Hinge; 18- Animal house; 19- ___ breve; 20- It may come after you; 21- Stratum; 23- More spine-tingling; 25- Fast time; 26- Country; 27- Slander; 30- Wedding words; 31- Tumults; 32- Pertaining to the management of public wealth; 37- About; 38- Member of a motorcycle gang; 40- Sat on the back of a horse; 41- Woman hired to suckle another's infant; 43- Satisfied; 44- Not for a Scot; 45- Devotees to the god of revelry; 47- Heavy hitter; 50- Oops!; 51- Dazed; 52- Growl; 53- ___ Cruces, NM; 56- Neet rival; 57- Excited; 59- ___ and desist; 61- Mozart's "___ kleine Nachtmusik"; 62- Libertine; 63- Ruin; 64- K-6; 65- Carry; 66- Floating platform;

DOWN: 1- Father; 2- Chieftain, usually in Africa; 3- As it happens; 4- Id's counterpart; 5- Erase; 6- Be a mother to; 7- Onassis, to pals; 8- Bullfighter; 9- Puppeteer Lewis; 10- Salk's conquest; 11- Actress Barkin; 12- Put on; 14- Furry swimmers; 22- Officeholders; 24- Harrow rival; 25- Admit; 26- Kind; 27- Get one's ducks in ___; 28- Kingly address; 29- Pillar; 32- Supplement, with "out"; 33- Mountain spinach; 34- Lepidopterous insect; 35- It's a thought; 36- Sign over; 38- Boastful person; 39- Of course!; 42- Go back, in a way; 43- Parch with heat; 45- Elasticized cord; 46- Gotcha!; 47- Gastropod mollusk; 48- Singer Frankie; 49- Violinist Zimbalist; 51- Arrow poison; 52- Joint problem; 53- Magma; 54- Starting; 55- Denomination; 58- Sticky stuff; 60- Musical aptitude;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
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- 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
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OVER 15,000 HONG KONG SHOPS MAY CLOSE WITHOUT RENT RELIEF

SHAWNA KWAN

FROM luxury boutiques to mom and pop stores, Hong Kong's retailers are hurting. Unless landlords can offer more relief, one in four could disappear by December if sales don't improve, putting an end to the city's reputation as a shopping mecca.

That's the gloomy prediction of Hong Kong Retail Management Association Chairman Annie Yau Tse, who says the rent reductions that came after public pressure on landlords in February aren't sufficient. Most are only willing to cut rents by 10% to 20%, far from the retail industry's demand of 50% or more. The association estimates there are around 62,400 retail stores in the city.

"Not all landlords have provided a subsidy or rental reduction and our drop in sales is larger than the extent of the relief," said Alain Lam, the finance director of Oriental Watch Holdings Ltd. The high-end watch seller has 11 stores in Hong Kong, seven of which are leased. "If the pandemic persists, we may consider shutting down or moving stores."

It's a grim forecast being echoed across the Asian financial center. Once regarded as one of the world's best shopping destinations, Hong Kong retail is a shadow of its former self.

Anti-government protests and now the coronavirus pandemic have kept mainland Chinese, the city's biggest source of inbound tourists, at home. Even locals are scared of going



to shopping malls lest they contract the virus, which after a hiatus has started spreading again.

Retail sales by value sank 42% in March after a record 44% plunge in February. The city's economy contracted 8.9% in the first quarter from a year ago, the Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong said Friday, the worst reading in four decades of data.

"We are barely surviving now," said Brian Hui, a sales assistant at a small store selling men's apparel in Mong Kok's T.O.P. center. The new mall, home to many South Korean and Japanese brands, was al-

most empty on a recent Wednesday afternoon, despite its location on Nathan Road, one of the city's premier retail strips. Hui estimated sales have fallen more than 50%.

The store asked that some staff go on unpaid leave and requested a rent cut from landlord Link Real Estate Investment Trust. The developer gave a 20% discount, but Hui said it hasn't helped much.

"It's better if we could get more of course, but it's quite hard to negotiate," he said.

Often, landlords' reluctance to lower rent can stem from their dominant market position. "Hong Kong is un-

like other places," said Patrick Wong, a real estate analyst with Bloomberg Intelligence. "There are just a few major landlords so their power is quite strong, not many tenants can fight."

The Hong Kong Retail Management Association, which represents more than 8,000 companies and whose members employ over half the local retail workforce, named the most unhelpful landlords in terms of rent relief in a survey last month.

Link Reit was there, along with behemoths like CK Asset Holdings Ltd.'s Hutchison Whampoa Properties Ltd., New World Development Co. and

Sun Hung Kai Properties Ltd. Link Reit said in an emailed statement that it has offered to reduce rents, grant rent-free periods and allow some retailers to pay by installment. Offering targeted, rather than across-the-board, relief is "the optimal way to help tenants most in need," it said.

Sun Hung Kai said it had looked into different tenants' situations and had lowered some rents between February and April. New World said it also introduced some rental-reduction measures in February through April and is reviewing individual cases.

Another landlord, China-chem Group, whose leasing portfolio spans office to retail and industrial, is offering discounts of between 20% and 50% to the majority of tenants, the South China Morning Post reported last week, citing Chief Executive Officer Donald Choi. Chinachem has even allowed some tenants to pay close to zero rent.

In Hong Kong, rent is a huge cost. The city's Causeway Bay area has the most expensive shop rents in the world, surpassing even New York's Upper Fifth Avenue and London's New Bond Street, data from Cushman & Wakefield Plc show.

The Hong Kong Retail Management Association's Yau Tse said some landlords are making decisions month-by-month, with many reluctant to commit to a more straightforward six-month relief package, for example.

"Their rent reductions have been very unreasonable, not enough to help us through this difficult situation at all," Yau Tse said. "We will continue urging landlords to stand with us in these tough times, with corporate social responsibility in mind." **BLOOMBERG**

CORPORATE BITS

Sands Macao distributes meal packs as part of anniversary tradition



Sands Macao distributed complimentary boxed lunches to local taxi drivers Monday, in celebration of the hotel and entertainment complex's 16th anniversary.

Taxi drivers arriving at the hotel earlier this week were greeted by Sands Macao team members handing out meal packs.

According to the statement issued by the gaming

operator, the lunch packs featured doubled boiled chicken soup with Chinese herbs and sea coconut, sautéed prawns and scallops with broccoli, soy sauce chicken, an anniversary birthday bun, and an apple.

This year's meal packs also included a bottle of alcohol-based hand sanitizer and two surgical facemasks.

Danny Tang, vice president and general manager of Sands Macao, said, "As we like to do each year, our thanks go to Macau's taxi fleet for providing an essential service for the city – especially during the current Covid-19 pandemic."

The Manor appoints new executive sous chef



The St. Regis Macao, Cotai Strip has welcomed Michele Dell' Aquila as executive sous chef at The Manor.

The chef has created a series of new, grill-inspired dishes accented with unique

local flavors, as cited in a statement.

These include a succulent aged Miyazaki Wagyu beef striploin, served with potato mille-feuille, matsutake mushroom and black truffle,

as well as tender Brittany lobster poached with Oscietra caviar and sea urchin sauce.

With more than 10 years of experience in the Macau market, Dell' Aquila brings his knowledge of the city's fine dining scene and expertise gained over 20 years in Europe and Asia to The Manor's New York-inspired menu that is infused with local flavors.

"I am excited to join The Manor team to enhance its reputation as one of the truly exquisite dining destinations in Macau, from our renowned a-la-carte evening menus, our special lunch selections, as well as our much sought-after Brunch and Chá Gordo offerings," Dell' Aquila said.

AP PHOTO



Dome beach at Makrinissos in Cyprus' seaside resort of Ayia Napa

MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS &
BARRY HATTON, AYIA NAPA

THE Mediterranean resort town of Ayia Napa is known for its boisterous parties. Each summer, thousands of young foreign tourists pack the dance floors of its nightlife district after a day at the beach.

But the pandemic silenced the exuberant Napa Strip district as the island nation of Cyprus went into a lockdown to halt the spread of the coronavirus. Now nightclub owners wonder when social distancing rules will be eased enough for the party to resume — and what those new parties will look like.

“We know at nightclubs, young people will go to dance and have a good time. But then you have to tell them that they have to keep 2 meters apart from each other?” asked Charalambos Alexandrou, the spokesman for a group representing local clubs, bars and restaurants.

Across southern Europe, in places where tourism drives much of the economy, officials are weighing how to entice travelers to come back, even while the pandemic remains a threat. Juggling the sometimes-competing needs of health and business, authorities are introducing measures to reassure visitors that taking a holiday is safe again.

Social distancing rules may work in restaurants, but that's not likely to solve the quandary facing Ayia Napa's nightclubs. Alexandrou said this will be “a

Beaches, nightclubs? Europe mulls how to get tourists back

season of trying to survive,” not seeking a profit.

One idea being considered is asking holidaymakers to take a COVID-19 test prior to their arrival. Cyprus has officially reported 916 cases of COVID-19 and 17 deaths.

The country's deputy minister for tourism, Savvas Perdios, said Cyprus will initially look to bring tourists from nearby countries that have managed to contain the virus — Greece, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and some central European and Nordic nations.

Authorities will take more time to assess the course of the pandemic in the United Kingdom and Russia, the island's primary tourism markets, before rolling out the red carpet for those countries.

Tourists in the near future will have to navigate a different set of expectations, routines and rules to counter the virus.

Christos Angelides, president of the Cyprus Hotel Managers' Association, said new rules being announced soon will mean that from the moment tourists step out of their bus or taxi from the airport, their luggage will be dis-

infected and taken straight to their rooms. Reception procedures will be done electronically, with employees behind a plexiglass screen and cleaning staff in full protective gear.

Guests eyeing a vacation in Portugal, another major southern European holiday destination, will probably look beyond a hotel's online reviews to see if it has the “Clean&Safe” seal now being awarded by local tourism officials. The seal indicates that the establishment, be it a hotel, restaurant or other venue, has enacted recommended hygiene and safety procedures to protect against the virus.

Tourists in the near future will have to navigate a different set of expectations, routines and rules to counter the virus

The idea has been a big success in a desperate sector that accounts for 15% of Portugal's gross domestic product and 9% of the country's jobs. The online classes needed to obtain the seal are being attended by

around 4,000 people a week.

“It's a question of making people feel safe to travel and having confidence in the place where they're going,” said Luís Araújo, president of the government agency Turismo de Portugal.

Portugal lies at the opposite end of the Mediterranean Sea from Cyprus, but its challenge is the same: how to reconcile social distancing and hygiene rules with fun and relaxation.

“Restrictions scare away any tourist,” Araújo acknowledged.

The Portuguese government says discotheques will be the last places to open, but many hotels intend to start reopening June 1.

Among the changes being adopted: Guests will not check into their rooms until 24 hours after the last occupant has checked out, to allow time for thorough cleaning and airing of the space. Waiting for sunbeds may come to an end as some hotel guests will get one for their own exclusive use. Buffets are unlikely to be offered, but room service is expected to thrive.

Another challenge is how to reopen southern Europe's famous beaches.

Portugal has come up with a plan to get people back on the sand starting on June 6. Sunbathers must stay 1.5 meters (5 feet) apart, with umbrellas at least 3 meters (10 feet) apart. New signs and an app will use a traffic-light system of red, yellow and green indicating which beaches are full, partly full or have few people. Paddle boats and water slides will be prohibited.

In an attempt to shore up public confidence, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa went to his local cafe for morning coffee and had lunch at a Lisbon restaurant with the speaker of parliament on Monday, the first day those businesses reopened after a lockdown.

Even with all the efforts to make tourists feel safe, worries about the coronavirus are not going away.

U.K. personal trainer Kenny Dyer canceled an Easter vacation in Cyprus and is hopeful of venturing back in October. But Dyer attached a condition that governments may find hard to guarantee.

“I wouldn't want to fly somewhere where there's a sudden spike in coronavirus cases, and I would have to be quarantined abroad,” Dyer said. **AP**

OPINION

Our Desk

Julie Zhu



MASKS ARE SCARIER...

I am not here to disagree with, disapprove of or disrespect those who wear facemasks. Wearing a facemask is within everybody's rights: their right to make a choice, their right to living with that choice, and even their right to impose that choice upon others.

I don't doubt for a single second the medical, physical, mental, and even financial benefits wearing a facemask can bring to all of us. However, not being able to see a single person's face on the street frightens me, but not because of the monotonous and toneless city I wander through, nor the quieter nights.

It is the singular hue that makes me feel tongue-tied and hopeless, truly hopeless. In contrast, those "colorful exercisers" on the tops of the hills, the elderly Mahjong lovers, and some "white savages" give me a bit of comfort.

Macau has a population density of over 20,000 people per square kilometer, nearly triple of that of Singapore and Hong Kong; or six times that of Japan, the Philippines, and the Netherlands; or over 138 times that of mainland China; 178 times that of Portugal; and 588 times that of the United States.

Naturally, I support wearing a facemask in Macau and even demand it from people with specific illnesses which are medically confirmed to be airborne or able to be transmitted to others through saliva.

It saddens me to see nearly everyone wearing a facemask, except the aforementioned "weirdos" (I say this in the good sense) of course. Literally seeing everyone engaging in the same behavior.

In a society that claims to be diverse, it seems that this city somehow has the power to unify thoughts and perhaps even consciences once in a while.

Luckily, I assume that there will never be a law that punishes people not wearing facemasks while roaming the streets.

Again, this is not about the facemasks themselves. It's about the scary and dare I say absent-minded following of the crowd, the "make no move, make no mistake" mentality.

Experience tends to tell people that there is a bright side in every evil person.

Thankfully, there is indeed a bright side for Macau, with hope lying in the elderly and foreigners.

On my way to some tourist attractions, I noticed that senior citizens had gathered inside their own ground floor house-shop properties to play Mahjong. No one was wearing facemasks. Well done, grandma and grandpa. You have certainly understood that you have been through tough times and know where this time will take us.

It doesn't make sense why some people try to force facemasks on the elderly. Young people accuse seniors of being neglectful or uninformed. In reality, young peoples' university degrees and certificates are only products purchased in the market of a capitalist society. The elderly have gone through way more epidemics and pandemics than we have.

Restaurants have been full of patrons for months inside these closed-door environments, without social distancing and facemasks.

I love seeing people who care about their health and others', but I wish to see more diversification in Macau.

Once again, it is not the facemasks that bother me, it is our singlemindedness.

A registry of death certificates in Mexico City suggests there were 4,577 cases where doctors mentioned coronavirus or COVID-19 as a possible or probable cause of death, more than three times the official death toll in the city.

The federal government acknowledges only 1,332 confirmed deaths in Mexico City since the pandemic began, less than a third as many as the investigation revealed.

The anti-corruption group Mexicans Against Corruption said in a report yesterday [Macau time] that it got access to a database

of death certificates issued in Mexico City between March 18 and May 12. It showed that in explanatory notes attached to 4,577 death certificates, doctors included the words "SARS," "COV2," "COV," "Covid 19," or "new coronavirus."

The virus' technical name is SARS-CoV-2. The notes the group counted included terms like "suspected," "probable", or "possible" role of the virus in the deaths. In 3,209 of the certificates, it was listed as a suspected contributing factor along with other causes of death, like pneumonia, respiratory failure, septic shock or multiple organ failure.



UK JOBLESS CLAIMS SURGE BY RECORD AMOUNT AS PANDEMIC HITS

DANICA KIRKA, LONDON

UNEMPLOYMENT claims in Britain jumped by a record amount in April to their highest level since the 1990s, underscoring the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the economy despite government programs to keep workers on payrolls.

Jobless claims surged by 856,000 in April, to 2.1 million, the highest since 1996 and an increase of 69% from the month before, the Office of National Statistics said yesterday. The figures covered only the first weeks of the lockdown, said Jonathan Athow, a statistician at the ONS.

As bad as it was, economists suggested it could have been much worse. The government created a job retention program to prevent millions of people from being laid off by effectively putting them on the government payroll.

"The fact unemployment hasn't already shot up far higher given the huge fall in GDP and temporary closure of around a quarter of businesses is a good result for the government," said Andrew Wishart, an economist at Capital Economics. That

"reflects the 7.5 million people on its furlough scheme that may otherwise have been made redundant," he added.

The government wage support scheme is due to ask employers to share costs from August, so job losses could accelerate if employers decide that their businesses can't survive and give up.

As bad as it was, economists suggested it could have been much worse

Among the sectors hit hardest were hospitality and construction. Job vacancies also dropped sharply, with the number of empty posts falling by 170,000 to 637,000 in the three months to April compared with the previous quarter.

The unemployment rate was at 3.9% in March, the last month for which full labor market statistics are available. Experts predict it will rise toward 10% by the fall.

Economist Kallum Pickering of Berenberg bank said that would mean an increase in the number of unemployed workers to around 3.3 million

from about 1.35 million in March – far exceeding the previous peak of 2.7 million in October 2011 in the wake of the financial crisis.

An unemployment rate peak of 10% would still be well below the rate in the U.S., where the jobless rate hit 14.7% already in April and is forecast to rise further.

The British government also announced yesterday it was quadrupling the size of loans available to larger businesses which have been affected by the coronavirus crisis, many of whom have already used the job retention scheme to put workers on furlough.

The Treasury said companies will now be able to receive up to 200 million pounds (\$245 million) under the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme, from 50 million pounds before. The scheme is available for firms with an annual turnover of more than 45 million pounds.

Suren Thiru, head of economics at the British Chamber of Commerce, said the change "will help ensure that more businesses of all sizes get access to the finance they need to help weather this unprecedented economic storm." AP

India The number of coronavirus cases in India has surged past 100,000, and infections are now on the rise in the home states of the migrant workers who left cities and towns during the nationwide lockdown. India's Health Ministry yesterday reported a total of 101,139 cases of the coronavirus and 3,163 deaths. Over the past week, India has seen an average of almost 4,000 news cases a day.



South Korea has reported 13 fresh cases, a possible sign that a recent outbreak in the capital area is stabilizing, as officials prepare to reopen schools. Nine of the new cases were from Seoul and nearby regions, where dozens of infections have been linked to clubgoers who went out in early May as the country began relaxing social distancing measures.

Indonesia This year celebration for the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan will be muted in Indonesia's capital as authorities extended the enforceable restrictions. Jakarta Gov. Anies Baswedan announced that a large-scale social restriction, initially slated to end Friday, will be extended to June 4.



Markets Asian shares rose yesterday on optimism about a potential vaccine for the coronavirus after hopes for a U.S. economic recovery in the second half of the year sent Wall Street into a rebound. Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 added 1.9% in morning trading to 20,517.42. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 jumped 2.0% to 5,569.20. South Korea's Kospi was up 1.8% to 1,972.73. Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 1.8% to 24,362.80, while the Shanghai Composite edged up 0.5% to 2,889.42.

Dubai Long-haul carrier Etihad Airways says it has fired staff because of fewer flights during the coronavirus. The Abu Dhabi-based, state-owned carrier says in a statement "it is clear the demand for travel in the near future will be significantly reduced and as a result we must make difficult decisions to ensure Etihad will weather this storm." AP