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Vietnam scrambled to evacuate more than a million people in its central lowlands as a strong typhoon approached while some regions are still dealing with the aftermath of recent killer floods, state media said. Typhoon Molave is forecast to slam into Vietnam's south central coast with sustained winds of up to 135 kilometers per hour today.



Thailand Pro-democracy demonstrators have expanded their protests internationally, marching to the German Embassy to appeal to Chancellor Angela Merkel's government to investigate whether Thailand's king has exercised political power during his extended stays in Bavaria. The protesters acted while criticizing their own Parliament, which began a special two-day session earlier this week to address political tensions resulting from the near-daily pro-democracy protests.



Pakistan A powerful bomb blast ripped through an Islamic seminary on the outskirts of the northwest Pakistani city of Peshawar yesterday morning, killing at least eight students and wounding 136 others, police and a hospital spokesman said. The bombing happened as a prominent religious scholar during a special class was delivering a lecture about the teachings of Islam at the main hall of the Jamia Zubairia madrassa.

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Macau registers continuous drop in blue card holders

LYNZY VALLES

THE Macau SAR recorded a total of 181,697 non-resident workers in September, down nearly 9,700 from the start of the pandemic in February and almost 12,000 since the start of the year.

In January, the majority of migrant workers in the region came from mainland China and worked in the construction and the wholesale and retail trade sectors.

A data release provided by the Public Security Police Force implied that there have been continuous cuts to and non-renewals of non-resident worker's permits, commonly known as blue cards, since the pandemic outbreak.

Of all the sectors in the region, hotels, restaurants and similar activities recorded the biggest drop. This sector has the largest number of migrant workers, followed by domestic work and construc-



tion. In September, there were 47,497 non-resident workers in the hospitality sector, down from 54,174 in February, a drop of 13.1%.

Although there is no available data showing how many blue cards were terminated or not renewed, the Times previously reported that the government may impose stricter measures on the

issuing of blue cards in order to protect local workers amid the recent rise in unemployment.

This may only be imposed on non-skilled quotas, as previously noted by experts in the human resources sector.

Since the pandemic began, there have been several repatriation flights to different countries, including the Philippines,

Myanmar and Nepal. The Philippines, for example, has conducted 10 repatriation flights back to Manila so far, with another one coming up in the first week of November.

Since February, small and large corporations, including gaming junkets, have been laying off employees – particularly non-resident workers – due to the economic downturn caused by the nearly non-existent tourism and a sharp decrease in gaming patrons due to the strict travel restrictions.

Recent figures show that Macau's unemployment rate has risen to 4.1% for the resident workforce and to 2.8% overall for the period of June to August.

During this period, the city has had a total labor force of 404,000 and a labor force participation rate of 70.2%. A total of 392,500 people were employed, 276,600 of which were local residents.

It is still unknown whether the

local labor market is willing and able to replace the 9,700 migrant workers that left the city due to the pandemic since February.

These non-residents, who were formerly employed by hotel operators, usually have jobs including housekeeping, cleaning and security. These job types are not typically filled by locals.

However, with the current law on the employment of migrant workers, as well as the fact that up until now, no foreigners have been able to enter Macau, it is highly likely that these job posts will not be easily filled, even if the economic situation improves.

Until Macau opens its doors to foreigners, these former non-residents are unable to come back, even if they have an employer waiting for them.

The Times previously interviewed several blue card holders who were laid off and took repatriation flights home. Many of them said that their employers pledged to contact them when their companies were more financially stable. However, they will not be able come back to Macau with tourist visas as they will be required to hold valid work permits prior to entering the SAR, as the new law states.

MUNICIPAL BUREAU HAS NO PLAN TO CHANGE IDENTICAL STREET NAMES

ANTHONY LAM

THE Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has announced that it has no plans change the names of Macau streets that are identical to other streets in the city because of the risk of administrative disturbance.

A total of 34 pairs of streets and roads in Macau share the same name in either one or both of the official languages. For example, there are two streets named Avenida Dr. Sun Yat Sen in the city, which have different names in Chinese.

The one in Macau runs from Macau Fisherman's Wharf to the roundabout at Macau Tower. The street in Taipa runs from Altira Macau to the Inn Hotel. In addition, the roundabout right in the middle of the Taipa road was named Rotunda Dr. Sun Yat Sen.

Despite the possible confusion, the IAM does not consider changing the street names in question to be a good idea because further confusion could arise.

For example, if the names of the streets were to change, the registrations of properties and businesses on those streets would need to be changed as well. Property and business registrations are under the authority of the Commercial and Movable Assets Registry.

The repetition of the street names was due to the political structure of the Portuguese administration, when Macau was separated into Macau City and Island City. Both cities had their own municipal bodies to name streets and roads. It was completely legitimate for the two different cities to have the same street or road name.

Furthermore, some streets in Macau reflect the district they are located in incorrectly. For example, Estrada da Ponte de Pac On is located near the current Taipa Campus of the City University of Macau. The famous Travessa da Paixão also does not mean the same thing in Chinese, translating to "the Love Alley." The Portuguese name actually means the Passion of the Christ, having Christian connotations.

LAWMAKER WANTS CANTONESE LANGUAGE LISTED AS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

JULIE ZHU

LAWMAKER Sulu Sou has written an interpellation to the local government asking for it to preserve the Cantonese language, listing it as intangible cultural heritage.

The lawmaker remarked that it is necessary for the Macau SAR government to take further measures to promote Cantonese because it is the native language of Macau.

According to the local government's statistics, until the Macau handover, the number of people using Cantonese as their daily language had been increasing continuously. Conversely, after the handover, the number has declined.

In 2016, 80.1% of the city's population used Cantonese as their first language, down 7.8 percentage points compared to 2001. Among people aged between the age of 3 and 19

at the time of the 2016 study, 87% of them used Cantonese as their first language, compared to 94.1% in 2001.

In 2017, the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau (DSEJ) declared that the department wanted to improve the coverage of Putonghua-instructed-Chinese subjects in local schools.

"Similar to Portuguese and English, encouraging the students to study Mandarin aims at increasing [students'] linguistic competitiveness. However, it is worth reiterating that [DSEJ] should not mix language study and Chinese study," Sou said. He hopes local government will not replace Cantonese with Mandarin.

In Sou's opinion, in recent years, pupils increasingly do not understand Cantonese due to the rise in immigration in concert with educa-

tion policies.

Sou asked the government whether the authority will invest more resources in improving the qualifications of Cantonese teachers, increasing Cantonese courses, and protecting the career development rights of Cantonese teachers whose mother tongue is Cantonese, sparing no effort to safeguard the teaching of the language.

He also wants to know the exact percentage of schools currently teaching Chinese subjects in Cantonese, and the measures to combat the alleged rise in the number of students who do not understand Cantonese.

"Will the government study the inclusion of Cantonese in the list of intangible cultural heritage [...] so that the precious local language can be preserved and promoted?" Sou asked.

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF (DIRECTOR) Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
 MANAGING EDITOR Daniel Beitler daniel@macaudailytimes.com
 CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Anthony Lam, Emilie Tran, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Joseph Cheung, Julie Zhu, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Lynzy Valles, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Viviana Segui
 DESIGNERS Eva Bucho, Miguel Bandeira | ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | NEWS AGENCIES Associated Press, Bloomberg, MacauHub, MacauNews, Xinhua
 SECRETARY Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

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ADMINISTRATOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
 Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com

OFFICE MANAGER Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com
 ADDRESS Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR
 Telephones: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84
 Advertisement advertising@macaudailytimes.com
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FINANCE SECRETARY INVITES CHINESE ENTREPRENEURS TO TAP INTO MACAU'S ADVANTAGES

SECRETARY for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong has encouraged Chinese entrepreneurs from around the world to collaborate with those in Macau, to connect them with new opportunities brought by the upcoming development phase occurring in China.

"We are willing to work with overseas Chinese entrepreneurs and overseas Chinese to make due contributions to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," the secretary pledged.

His comment was made last week during his speech at the World Summit of Chinese Entrepreneurs, which was being held alongside the Macao International Trade and Investment Fair and two other trade shows.

Representing the Macau government, Lei highlighted that the country will have another stage of rejuvenation and innovation. He said that businesses in Macau could help entrepreneurs leverage both the domestic and international markets.

"[It will] foster multilayered connections with the 'Belt and Road Initiative' and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA)," the official said. "[It will] better serve the needs of the country and [play to] Macau's strengths."

The secretary also made reference to the "profound changes"



the world was facing, with Covid-19 as one.

"Resuscitating the economy under counter-pandemic [measures] has become the primary task of governments and [people from] all walks of life around the world," the secretary pointed out.

"In this process, the supporting role of innovation and technology in promoting economic recovery will become more important," Lei added.

He then said that innovative technology provided a huge impetus for the construction of "smart cities." This will have a profound impact on improving the quality of life of residents and allow all sectors of society

to enjoy the effects of the technological transformation of civilization.

On behalf of the Special Administrative Region government, Lei said that they would support Chinese entrepreneurs becoming participants and beneficiaries of Macau's integration into the national economy.

As he concluded his speech, the secretary stressed that 2020 is the final year of China's plan to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects and the 13th Five-Year Plan. "It is the key to achieving the first centenary goal, laying a solid foundation for the 14th Five-Year Plan and the second centenary goal," the secretary said.

"With the strong support of the central government, Macau has achieved results in epidemic prevention and anti-epidemic [measures], and I have a deeper understanding that the motherland will always be the strongest backer for us and overseas Chinese," Lei added.

The summit has been held in Macau since 2004. The secretary used this as proof of Macau's power to consolidate Chinese entrepreneurs around the world and make progress in national economic development and civilization.

The theme of the summit was "Technology and Life-Sustainable Development of Smart Cities." AL

ELLA LEI WANTS MORE LOCALS IN FINANCE INDUSTRY

Lawmaker Ella Lei has asked the local government to involve more local residents in the financial services industry. In Lei's recent written interpellation to the SAR government, she asked about the development of Macau's financial industry. The local government proposed promoting a modern financial industry in its 2020 policy address. Lei said that the unemployment rate has been continuously growing amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the local government should train more local residents, especially university graduates, to join the industry. Lei condemned the statistics from the Labor Affairs Bureau (DSAL), which show that there are over one thousand non-local workers in the finance industry. The government is still approving more new blue cards to allow non-local people to work in this sector. Lei asked about how the government would encourage local residents to enter this industry and what policies there are to encourage talented local people to join.

SPORTSWEAR DESIGN CONTEST FOR SPORTS DELEGATION STARTS TOMORROW

Co-organized by the Sports Bureau and the Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Center, the sportswear design contest for the Macau sports delegation will start accepting registrations on October 29, according to a statement released by the sports authority. The deadline for registration and submission is 9 p.m. on November 20. The competition includes the design of five types of sportswear for men and women, including tracksuits, short-sleeved polo shirts, short-sleeved t-shirts, and shorts. There are bonuses and certificates available for participating the contest. The winning works will have the opportunity to become the sportswear style of the Macau SAR sports delegation. Macau residents aged 18 and older are welcome to register as a company or individual.

QINGMAO PORT CONSTRUCTION TO CONTINUE AT NIGHT

The local government has given contractors at the Qingmao Port approval to continue construction at night between October 30 and November 7. The government has allowed the constructor to install the skyway between 8 p.m. and 7 a.m. during the aforementioned period. During these hours, Avenida do Comendador Ho Yin towards Rua Norte do Patane will be closed. Previously, Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo Arrais do Rosário said that the Qingmao Port project was expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2021. The Qingmao Port will be located 800 meters southeast of the Gongbei Border Gate and will become an independent electronic border gate with an estimated 200,000 daily crossings. The Qingmao Port will mainly consist of e-channels for passport control, with no vehicle checkpoints available.

Visitor crossings climb to 40,000 in sign of gradual recovery

FIGURES released by the Public Security Police Force (PSP), which handles immigration matters in Macau, showed that on average there were 40,000 daily visitors entering and exiting last week.

Last week's daily figures fluctuated within a range of 3,000 visitors, from 39,700 to 42,700 during the first six days. There were only 35,100 visitors recorded on Sunday, the last day of the week.

Visitor arrivals are seeing a gradual improvement, although the number of daily entries is still far below pre-Covid levels.

In October, the city welcomed just over 77,000 visitors in the first

four days of the month, 87.4% fewer than in the equivalent period a year earlier. The data showed that Friday, October 2 was the busiest day, recording some 22,116 tourist arrivals.

Normally, there is huge influx of visitors from mainland China in first week of October. October 1 is China's National Day, and residents of the mainland enjoy a week-long holiday.

It is not uncommon for them to travel to all corners of the world. However, this year, with strict travel restrictions, they mainly roamed around the country, excluding visits to the Macau Special

Administrative Region.

Lau Pun Lap, President of the Macau Economic Association, blamed the Covid-19 nucleic acid test requirements for the poor performance while at a recent university seminar.

Macau recorded between almost 15,000 daily visitor arrivals in September,

while tourism endorsements for Macau were limited to Guangdong Province for most of the month. The total month saw almost 450,000 visitors, according to government data. The performance in September equated to a rise of about 98% compared to August.

The data also showed



SHELDON Adelson is considering the unthinkable: selling his Las Vegas casinos.

After decades as one of the biggest magnates on the Strip - presiding over properties like the Venetian and before that the Sands, an old stomping ground for Frank Sinatra - the billionaire's love affair with Vegas appears to be ending. As Bloomberg reported, Adelson has hired an adviser to sell his properties in the city. Asking price: at least \$6 billion.

A sale of the resorts, which is far from certain, could come at a difficult time for America's gambling capital. The city has been hit hard by the coronavirus, with visitors down 55% this year and casino revenue on the famous Strip off by 45% through August.

While casinos were allowed to reopen in early June, customers - especially those who travel by plane - are only slowly coming back. MGM Resorts International announced plans to lay off 18,000 workers in late August, many of them in Las Vegas. Wynn Resorts Ltd. said this month it was closing its Encore resort during the slow midweek days.

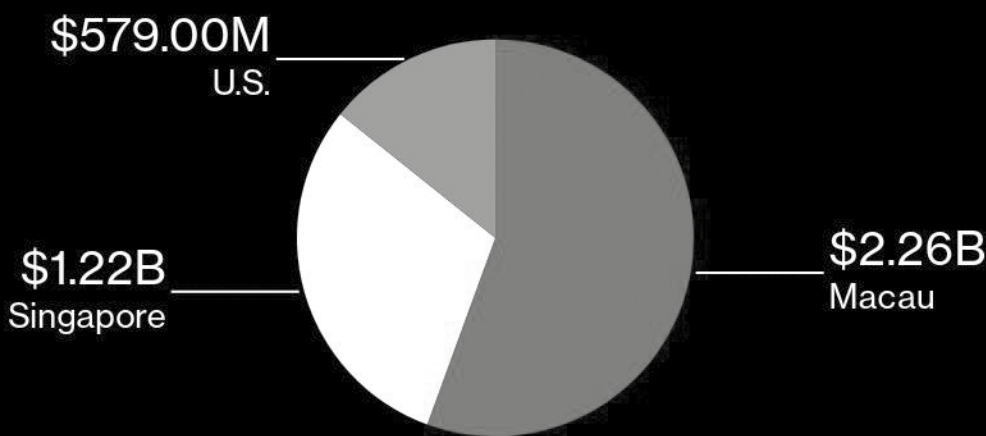
Even the city's big casino trade show started yesterday in a virtual format. Until consumers feel freer to travel

Adelson's LVS exploring \$6 billion

BLOOMBERG

Stripped of Illusions

Las Vegas Sands' U.S. division only accounts for about 16% of operating income



Source: Bloomberg

Note: Group operating expense and other development projects with negative operating income haven't been shown.

and spend, the opportunities in Las Vegas may be limited, Sands executives said during a conference call last week.

"I don't see a lot of things in Las Vegas for us until there is a chan-

ge structurally," said Rob Goldstein, the company's president.

If Sands were to sell its Nevada properties, it would represent an exit from the U.S. casino business - at least for

now. The bulk of its revenue already comes from Macau and Singapore, and the company has plans to spend another \$5.5 billion in those markets. The U.S. was already a small

and shrinking part of his business, accounting for less than 15% of revenue last year.

"The growing insignificance of the U.S. market explains to you why Las Vegas Sands is

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sale of Vegas casinos



looking to offload their U.S. properties," said Ben Lee, a Macau-based managing partner at IGamiX. "It is 15% of revenue but 80% of regulatory pain and burden."

A recovery in Asia helped improve Sands' operating results in the third quarter, Adelson said in an earnings call last week. In Singapore, Marina Bay Sands had a profitable quarter as operations progressively resumed across the resort during the summer.

The money from a sale could allow the company to fund other development opportunities.

Sands dropped out of the competition to build a casino in Japan earlier this year due to terms executives described as unfavorable. Adelson, 87, has expressed interest in building in New York City, an opportunity that could arise next year.

A spokesman for Sands said the company intends to keep its headquarters in Las Vegas. Adelson, who in good years has paid himself \$1 billion or more in dividends, appreciates the lack of a state income tax in Nevada. His family owns the local newspaper, the Las Vegas Review-Journal, and has multiple homes in Malibu, California, a short private jet flight away.

"Sheldon's a businessman first and foremost," said Sig Rogich, a former public-relations adviser to Adelson. "He

does not let sentiment get in the way of good business dealings. He's always been a buyer and seller."

Indeed, Sands sought buyers for the company's casino in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 2013, but withdrew when it didn't get the price it wanted. Five years later, it sold the property for \$1.3 billion.

If Sands were to sell its Nevada properties, it would represent an exit from the US casino business - at least for now

The Venetian was the first resort Adelson constructed. He built it on the site of the former Sands casino, which he had purchased in 1988 so that he could build a convention center next door. The \$1.5 billion Venetian was among the most expensive hotels in the world when it opened in 1999. Eight years later, Adelson added the Palazzo, a \$1.8 billion adjacent resort with its own casino.

Adelson, who made his first fortune in Las Vegas running the Comdex computer industry trade show beginning in 1979, pioneered the concept of linking casinos with meetings and convention space. Casino operators at the time thought the conventioners weren't big gamblers and didn't specifically cater to them. The oversized suites in the Ve-

netian were specifically aimed at business people, with work and meeting space, and amenities such as fax machines. Other casinos soon copied Adelson's formula.

He was also an early adopter of a build-and-sell model, offloading the retail space at the Venetian in 2004 to help finance his expansion into Macau and Singapore.

He's continued to promote Las Vegas. This month, the Venetian hosted filming of the latest season of the popular business TV show "Shark Tank."

Adelson, who received treatment last year for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, has been an undeniable presence in Las Vegas. He fought to lure a National Football League team to town with a new stadium (the Raiders moved there without him). He also opposed a monorail that he didn't think was a good investment (it went bankrupt twice and doesn't stop at his casinos).

Jan Jones Blackhurst, a former mayor of Las Vegas and current board member of rival Caesars Entertainment Inc., said that if someone does pay Adelson's asking price for the properties, it will be a sign that investors are still interested in the city.

"Sheldon is 87 - maybe he doesn't need the aggravation," Jones Blackhurst said. Still, she adds, "I can't imagine Las Vegas without Sheldon." **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

OPINION

David Fickling, Bloomberg

SHELDON ADELSON'S LAST ROLL OF THE DICE MAY BE HIS BOLDEST

No one ever said that the casino industry didn't involve risky bets.

Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire founder of Las Vegas Sands Corp., is considering a \$6 billion sale of the Nevada casinos that made his fortune, people familiar with the matter told Gillian Tan and Christopher Palmeri of Bloomberg News.

That's a gutsy move. The casino industry is in the grip of a record slump. Gaming revenues on the Las Vegas Strip were down 39% from a year earlier in August. In Macau, where Sands China Ltd.'s resorts accounted for 61% of its parent's operating income last year, the year-on-year fall in casino gambling revenues was 90% last month. Singapore, whose Marina Bay Sands hotel forms the third leg of Adelson's empire, has been closed off to the outside world by coronavirus and is only slowly recovering. After such a run of bad cards, isn't this a moment to stand pat?

Things aren't playing out that way. Indeed, if anything, Adelson is upping the stakes on a strategy that's sustained Las Vegas Sands for its 16-odd years as a listed company: betting larger and larger sums on his Asian operations in the hope that returns from the properties will outstrip anything available in Nevada.

There are substantial drawbacks involved in that approach right now. The Macau casinos are entirely dependent upon licenses due to expire in 2022. The territory's government has yet to release details of requirements for license renewals, and there are enormous political risks inherent in the process. Macau is caught in the crossfire of a deteriorating U.S.-China relationship. Thanks to their Macanese resorts, Las Vegas Sands and fellow Vegas mainstay Wynn Resorts Ltd. have the biggest exposure to China and its territories among members of the S&P 500.

Macau's government has long orbited closer to Beijing than Hong Kong ever did, and any vestiges of independence are being squeezed out under President Xi Jinping's drive to integrate the two territories with mainland Chinese cities as a unified Greater Bay Area megalopolis. Adelson, meanwhile, is politically exposed as one of the most substantial donors to President Donald Trump, China's leading antagonist in the trade war. A bet that Sands's licenses will be renewed without extracting crippling penalties is a wager that the diplomatic wildfire razing so many aspects of the U.S.-China trading relationship will leave Macau untouched.

Singapore isn't without problems, either. A lawsuit by a gambler at Marina Bay Sands last year has resulted in a police investigation into how the casino handles players' money, calling attention to its relationship with the junket operators who provide finance and travel arrangements to bring in high-rolling gamblers.

While Singapore's casino regulator has already closed its investigation, that license is also up for renewal in 2022. Any adverse finding from the police probe or problems renewing its Macau license would complicate efforts to show that Sands has the ethical and financial capacity to keep operating its Singapore gaming floors.

One way of spreading those sorts of risks would involve diversifying. Until recently, you could have argued Las Vegas Sands was doing this. Alongside its original core business in Nevada, the company was looking to build a \$10 billion resort in Japan as that country opened up its gambling market — but Adelson walked away from that in May.

Adelson himself is 87 years old, owns 52% of the company, and was treated last year for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. A changing of the guard wouldn't necessarily be a disaster. Chief Operating Officer Robert Goldstein and Chief Financial Officer Patrick Dumont have long experience managing the company, and if anything, a Las Vegas Sands without Adelson's close association with Trump may have an easier time of it in Macau. Still, mogul-run casinos carry a fair amount of "key person risk." Wynn Resorts, whose founder Steve Wynn stepped down as chief executive officer in 2018 after reports in the Wall Street Journal about sexual harassment of employees, has trailed the performance of its rivals ever since.

Most importantly, nothing changes the fact that a casino empire focused on four separate jurisdictions just 12 months ago is now looking to place all its chips on two. You can take Adelson's decision to double the stakes in Macau and Singapore as a sign of his confidence that he holds all the cards, but in truth even he doesn't know which way the regulators will go. Investors wagering on Sands's next chapter should remember that, for a skilled player, a strong hand and a bluff can look exactly the same.

AGNES LAM CONCERNED ABOUT WATER SEEPAGE ISSUES

Lawmaker Agnes Lam has questioned the Macau government regarding a water seepage issue. The lawmaker is concerned about water seepage issues which have persisted for decades. The reason for this lies in the unclear jurisdiction between different government departments. In Lam's opinion, the local government has not clearly decided which department should be responsible for handling water seepage issues. They have never revealed the detailed number of cases and the percentage of resolved cases. Lam believes that water seepage is a problem that is far more than just a "private dispute," as in some cases, the problem often ends up threatening public hygiene and safety. Lam asked the government whether it will consider new laws or new regulations that will give inspectors access to enter private homes and examine water leakage problems.

ADVISOR ASKS ABOUT PUBLIC BATHROOM HYGIENE

A member of the advisory council of the northern district, Kou Ngon Fong, has expressed his concerns about the cleanliness of public bathrooms. Earlier this week, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) received reports about the odor of public bathrooms on Guia Hill. The department followed up and has been carrying out improvements to the facility. Kou proposed that the department conduct a comprehensive examination of all 83 public bathrooms in the city in order to ensure their cleanliness. In addition, Kou hopes the IAM will review its municipal project operation in order to use public money wisely. Kou proposed that the government should report the effectiveness of the improvement work of public projects to the public.

GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGES ACTIVE PREVENTION OF DENGUE FEVER

The local government's dengue fever prevention taskforce is encouraging families to remove stagnant water at home. The taskforce is encouraging the population to remove stagnant water that has accumulated at home, raising awareness about the prevention of dengue fever. The taskforce has been holding a contest for the day for the disposal of stagnant water. This activity comprises four phases and is currently in its fourth phase, which runs from September 26 to November 14. All Macau residents, at each stage of the contest, can dump the stagnant water in their homes on Saturdays and then contact the taskforce in order to register for a lucky draw. Those who accumulate six or more registrations will be able to participate in the draw. The draw in the fourth phase will take place in December, and 10 individuals will be rewarded with supermarket coupons valued at 500 patacas.

HK DRAFTS LAW TO MAKE COVID TESTS MANDATORY FOR SOME

HONG Kong is drafting a law that would make Covid-19 tests mandatory for people with symptoms and other specific groups, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said, as the city continued to slowly ease virus-related restrictions.

Lam announced the plan to enact a new law mandating tests for known clusters and high risk groups at a weekly briefing, without elaborating. The government said earlier this month that it was studying the legal framework for mandatory coronavirus testing. Officials said later on Tuesday that dining at bars and restaurants would be allowed until 2 a.m. and that dancing and live events could resume.

Restaurants will also be allowed to operate at 75% capacity, up from 50%, and masks won't be required when exercising in indoor venues. The changes go into effect on Friday.

The number of people allowed at group gatherings will remain at just four for another week, officials said.

It's "unavoidable that there may be some sporadic cases and small clusters in the community from time to time," said Secretary for Food and Health



Sophia Chan. "The most important thing is that we have the capacity and capability to actually stabilize the situation once there are infections or outbreak."

The moves follow a voluntary city-wide summer testing program that unearthed only a handful of positive cases. The program was bedeviled by public skepticism and suspicion that the Beijing-backed drive was a move to harvest residents' DNA. The government denied those claims.

"We hope every citizen can voluntarily do testing to make society not affected by the epidemic," Lam said. "But Hong Kong is a very free society and the volunteers may not appear. For the purpose of public health, we really need some specific people to get tested."

Lam's disapproval rating rose to 73.8% in a new Hong Kong Public Opinion Programme poll released Tuesday - the worst result since a late March-early April survey.

She is set to discuss economic policies in Beijing next week, and will meet with officials from Guangzhou and Shenzhen about the Greater Bay Area after her trip to the capital. President Xi Jinping visited the border city of Shenzhen earlier this month and urged young people from Hong Kong to move to China, part of an effort to more closely integrate the financial hub - which saw historic anti-government protests last year - with the mainland. MDT/BLOOMBERG

Fewer one-on-one continuing education lessons approved

JULIE ZHU

THE Education and Youth Affairs Bureau (DSEJ) is no longer approving some one-on-one continuing education courses, according to Wong Chi Iong, Chief Executive of the Division of Continuing Education Scheme of DSEJ.

During yesterday's TDM radio program Macau Forum, a local woman surnamed Lo called to complain about the DSEJ because she could not take one-on-one lessons anymore.

"Before, I could take one-on-one lessons. However, now there must be many students. Isn't that a gathering? Does the crowd not affect pandemic prevention measures? Should we keep a distance from other stu-



dents?" asked Lo.

In August, the MSAR government announced its plan for the fourth phase of the continuing education program. The program started on September 1 this year and will last until August 31, 2023.

The government is subsidizing up to 6,000 patacas for each qualified local resident aged 15 or

above to continue their own education in a wide range of subjects.

The DSEJ had previously disclosed that the program had been expanded on an experimental basis to cover courses run in Zhuhai. These courses are either accredited or recommended by the Zhuhai government.

There were as many as

150,000 participants registered in the third phase of the plan as of the middle of last year.

Previously, many local residents were using the subsidy to study for university degrees on the mainland or abroad.

DSEJ ranking official Wong called TDM radio and responded to Lo's complaints.

According to Wong, the DSEJ is not approving one-on-one lessons anymore because the department wants to use public money more wisely.

Wong said that the DSEJ will consider approving these lessons only when the lesson requires specific equipment, or when the subject must be lectured on a one-on-one basis. These include driving courses or piano lessons.

Other lessons, such as languages, computer, dance and accounting management, will not be considered to require one-on-one teaching, according to Wong.

For the fourth phase of the continuing education program, the DSEJ received applications from 350 organizations. Only 220 were approved.

In the third phase of the continuing education program, the DSEJ filed 41 reports regarding violations to the judiciary department.

In order to prevent fraud in the continuing education scheme, students and lecturers are required to take attendance twice for every class now.

The DSEJ set a higher bar for the fourth round of continuing education lessons. Courses such as pet grooming, singing and other entertainment-type subjects were removed from the continuing education program.

Taiwan says new arms purchases to boost credible defense

TAIWAN said yesterday that recently proposed purchases of U.S. missiles and other arms systems will boost the island's ability to credibly defend itself amid rising threats from China.

The comments from defense ministry spokesperson Shih Shun-wen came a day after China said it would exact unspecified retaliation against companies that make the weapons systems, including Lockheed Martin Corp., Raytheon Technologies Corp. and Boeing Co.'s defense division, the lead contractor on a \$2.37 billion sale of Harpoon missile systems to Taiwan.

Facing a potential Chinese foe with overwhelming superiority in missiles, soldiers, ships and planes, Taiwan has struggled to assure its own people and its key ally, the U.S., that it is capable of and willing to see to its own defense. The sides split during a civil war in 1949 and China considers Taiwan its own territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary.

"The purchase of these weapons



Taiwan marines salute to Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen during an offshore anti-terrorism drill off New Taipei City in 2019

will enhance Taiwan's credible combat capabilities and asymmetric combat capabilities," Shih told reporters at a briefing, using a term for countering a much stronger foe with precision weapons and advanced tactics. "This will also enhance our overall combat capabilities to contribute to maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin yesterday again accused the U.S.

of violating its commitments to China while bolstering the confidence of those such as the ruling Democratic Progressive Party of President Tsai Ing-wen who favor the island's independence from China.

Washington should "revoke the arms sale plan to Taiwan so as to avoid further damage to China-U.S. relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," Wang told reporters. "China will take legitimate and necessary

measures to resolutely defend national sovereignty and security interests."

The Trump administration on Monday notified Congress of plans for the sale of the Harpoon system, whose missiles are capable of striking ships and land targets. Boeing says the missile uses GPS-aided inertial navigation and delivers a 500-pound blast warhead. It can target coastal defense sites, surface-to-air missile sites, exposed aircraft, ships in

port, and port and industrial facilities.

That followed another proposed sale announced Oct. 21 of \$1.8 billion worth of weaponry, including missile and rocket systems, and upgraded equipment for Taiwan's F-16 jet fighters.

Taiwan has long been an irritant in U.S.-China relations. Washington has no formal relations with the island's democratically elected government but is its main ally. U.S. law requires the government to ensure Taiwan can defend itself. In recent years, weapons sales to the island have increased in quantity and quality, as China builds the world's second most powerful military dedicated largely to defeating Taiwan and achieving its goal of annexation.

Stepped-up patrols by Chinese warplanes this year have put Taiwan's forces under greater strain, increasing the importance of developing new weapons systems or buying them from abroad.

Beijing regularly pressures American companies including Boeing in an effort to influence U.S. policy. China is one of Boeing's biggest markets for commercial aircraft, which might make it vulnerable to a boycott, but China's defense ministry mentioned only Boeing's military arm, Boeing Defense, not its civilian jetliner business. AP

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The houses are set in the heart of the World Heritage Site of the Douro Valley and its famous winery landscape where the world's Ports are produced. Both restored relics overlooking the Rio Douro, these eight rooms houses have been blessed with gorgeous wooden floors, plush queen beds and marble baths; the best have dazzling river views. But it is the welcome that makes this place stand out from the crowd.



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AP PHOTO



Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin (center)

MALAYSIA

Embattled PM gets respite but survival in balance

EILEEN NG,
KUALA LUMPUR

A key ally's reaffirmed support for Malaysia's prime minister offers him a respite after his failed bid to declare a coronavirus emergency, but his political survival still hangs in the balance.

Eight months after taking office, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin is being challenged by opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who says he has majority support to form a new government with defections from Muhyiddin's ruling coalition.

The support reportedly comes from the United Malays National Organization, the biggest party in the unelected governing coalition that was angry at being sidelined amid rivalry with Muhyiddin's own Malay party.

Muhyiddin sought to checkmate his rivals with a proposed coronavirus emergency that would have suspended Parliament and given him uncontested powers — but he miscalculated.

The king stepped out of his largely ceremonial role Sunday to declare Muhyi-

ddin's proposed emergency was unnecessary and existing laws were enough to fight a spike in coronavirus cases. Many Malaysians were angered by Muhyiddin's move, and a senior UMNO official called on him to resign.

UMNO leaders discussed whether to abandon Muhyiddin but the party said in a statement later that it would remain in the coalition but demanded respect and better cooperation.

Analysts warned the situation is still fluid and Muhyiddin's position remains precarious. He only has a slim two-seat majority in Parliament and unhappy UMNO lawmakers could still shift alliance to Anwar.

Oh Ei Sun, a senior fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, said more political maneuvering is expected as Muhyiddin needs to get approval for 2021 budget in Parliament next month. If he is unable to pass the bill, pressure will build for him to resign or call new elections.

"Muhyiddin can now cling on to his political survival only at the whims of UMNO, which sees re-

solved factional struggles. It would appear that his ship is going down but has not completely capsized yet," Oh said.

Muhyiddin took power in March after withdrawing his party from Anwar's governing alliance that won 2018 polls. He tied up with the corruption-tainted UMNO and other opposition parties to form a Malay-centric government but his administration has been fraught with infighting.

UMNO, which had ruled Malaysia since independence from Britain in 1957 but was ousted in 2018, has been vexed by its lack of senior Cabinet positions.

Muhyiddin did away with the deputy premier post and retained key posts such as finance and economic for his party and proxies. His appointments of second-tier UMNO leaders to Cabinet posts have divided UMNO leadership, and the party was further upset by a state leadership tussle after winning a crucial election last month.

Former Prime Minister Najib Razak, who remains out of jail while appealing his 12-year sentence for corruption, has voiced su-

pport for Anwar — a key player in the reformist government that ousted Najib in 2018.

Anwar has not named the lawmakers supporting him for fear they may be bribed or harassed, and there are doubts he can form a coalition as UMNO and a Chinese-dominated party in Anwar's camp are at loggerheads.

The king met Anwar earlier this month but has postponed meetings with party leaders to verify Anwar's claim of a majority support. He has also called for support for the budget to cope with the pandemic — despite his rejection of the emergency plan — after Malaysia's cases doubled to more than 27,000 in just a few weeks.

Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, political science professor at Malaysia's University of Science, said Muhyiddin's emergency plan was really an admission of defeat but he received "an indirect slap on the face" from the king.

"If the budget is not passed, that signifies that his government has lost its majority. (Muhyiddin) will have lost whatever legitimacy he has to lead the government," he said. AP

this day in history



1979 CHAIRMAN HUA ARRIVES IN LONDON



The first Chinese leader to visit Britain, Chairman Hua Kuo-Feng, has arrived in London at the start of a six-day visit.

He was welcomed at Heathrow airport by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who paid tribute to China as a "great and historical nation which has a crucial role to play in world affairs".

She said the two countries enjoyed a "close understanding in many fields" and she hoped their talks would further improve relations.

In his reply, Chairman Hua stressed "the important role Western Europe has to play in defending world peace".

He said this was why China had given "high priority to the development of good relations with the West European countries".

Chairman Hua was given the kind of treatment usually reserved only for royalty and presidents.

The Coldstream Guards formed a guard of honour before he was taken to the luxury Claridges hotel, where he and his party will be staying.

Chairman Hua has an invitation to lunch at Buckingham Palace where the Queen will personally take him on a tour of the state rooms.

This is the Chinese leader's first visit to the non-Communist world, apart from a short stay in Iran before Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was forced into exile.

During his visit, he is expected to discuss trade, various bilateral issues, including the future of Hong Kong, and world peace.

It is hoped he and Mrs Thatcher will sign a number of deals, including an air services agreement giving Chinese airlines the rights to fly to Britain.

Trade issues are expected to focus on the process of modernisation in China - in particular improvements to its armed forces, transport infrastructure and industry.

The Chinese delegation will pay a visit to Rolls Royce in Derby, BP and British Rail's technical centre.

Chairman Hua, who spent 20 years of his life in the Chinese agricultural sector, will also be shown a farm in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, and fit in a quick visit to Oxford University, before flying on to Rome on Saturday.

He has already spent a week each in France and West Germany.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

In an interview before his visit to Western Europe, Chairman Hua was quoted as saying he wanted to see for himself the reality of advanced economic, scientific and technological experience to see how they could benefit China's modernisation programme.

The trip paved the way to improved relations between Britain and China.

Official negotiations on the future of Hong Kong began in 1982 and were completed with the handover on 1 July 1997.

The Queen became the first British monarch to visit China in 1986.

However, the brutal suppression of the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 led to a breakdown in China's relations with the West.

China has since become of the world's leading growth economies, prompting greater trading links with the West. But in 2005 the EU and US were still enforcing an embargo on arms sales to China imposed after Tiananmen Square.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You need to slow down. You need to take a walk, put things into perspective, and get a reality check about your place in the world. Trying so hard to keep busy could be a coping device.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Grab some herbs you've never cooked with. Pick out a specialty cheese. And be sure to ask the folks to grow or made the items for some ideas. Before you know it, you'll have a few new favorite foods.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Do your best to live in the moment and enjoy the time you're having while you're having it. There are too many unknowns to be able to assume that things are going to go completely the way you want them to.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Schedules are very important. Make sure everyone knows when and where they're expected to be. Confirm itineraries. Double-check with all involved. You can't take anything for granted today.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

If you don't move forward with things now, some important people might get the idea that you aren't totally sure about what you're doing. And even if you aren't sure, they certainly don't need to know about it!



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Relax and just enjoy the fruits of your labor. All your hard work has paid off. You're a little bit higher up that mountain of accomplishments, and your position provides you with one heck of a view!



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Just because someone from your past is suddenly back on the scene doesn't mean that you're going to have the same kind of relationship with them that you once had.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Your self-control is strong right now, but you need to make sure that you're using it at the right times. Resisting temptation isn't good to do just for its own sake.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Bake some cookies, read a book, call up an old friend. Do something that doesn't drain your wallet and offers some concrete results you can feel proud of.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Let them know how special they are and how much you value their friendship. Video chat, phone call, handwritten note, or e-mail, choose the medium and get your message across.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

If someone is telling you that you need to add more discipline and structure into your life, they're probably projecting their own needs on to you, so take what they say with a grain of salt.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

This pride thing has gotten out of hand. It's one thing to not want to appear needy in front of people you admire, but it's quite another to sacrifice your progress for your ego.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	5	18	clear
Harbin	-3	8	cloudy
Tianjin	7	17	clear
Urumqi	5	12	clear
Xi'an	10	16	shower
Lhasa	3	19	clear
Chengdu	13	18	cloudy
Chongqing	16	18	drizzle
Kunming	13	20	shower
Nanjing	15	21	overcast
Shanghai	17	21	overcast
Wuhan	15	19	overcast
Hangzhou	16	23	overcast
Taipei	22	26	drizzle
Guangzhou	19	30	cloudy
Hong Kong	22	26	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	5	9	clear
Frankfurt	8	12	drizzle
Paris	9	13	drizzle
London	9	13	clear
New York	12	14	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Work up lather; 5- Type of ray; 10- Back talk; 14- Opposed to; 15- "Farewell!"; 16- This, in Tijuana; 17- Friendly; 19- ___ impasse; 20- Greek letter; 21- Abounding; 23- Yalie; 25- Corolla part; 26- City on the Rhine; 29- Middy; 31- Effluent system; 35- French article; 36- Dweeb; 37- Marquis ___; 38- Mediterranean resort area; 40- Sarcastic; 41- Carve; 42- 1994 Costner role; 43- Bambi's aunt; 44- Unit of magnetic induction; 45- Got on; 46- Pitfall; 47- Pilgrim John; 49- Market indicator; 51- Enthusiastic applause; 54- Caterpillar competitor; 58- Taylor of "Mystic Pizza"; 59- Wealthy; 63- Floor model; 64- Marsh of mystery; 65- Gainsay; 66- Stately aquatic bird; 67- Arabian republic; 68- Some votes;

DOWN: 1- Subsided; 2- Draft classification; 3- Take ___ from me; 4- Sty; 5- Prattle; 6- Flurry; 7- Russian space station; 8- Liquefied by heat; 9- Until now; 10- Having no junction; 11- Piedmont province; 12- Ollie's partner; 13- Album unit; 18- Actor Linden; 22- Relax; 24- Inactive; 25- Pea holder; 26- Rupture; 27- In readiness; 28- Birthmark; 30- ... ___ mouse?; 32- Faucet stuff; 33- Minneapolis suburb; 34- Summarize; 36- Kathmandu resident; 37- Called one's bluff; 39- Inference; 40- Scoundrel; 42- Long, long time; 45- Go back on one's word; 46- Like a professor's jacket; 48- Fluffy; 50- Poem of praise; 51- Auto pioneer; 52- Vista; 53- Soprano Gluck; 55- Gen. Robert ___; 56- Actress Sofer; 57- Ice cream brand; 60- Flight; 61- Fail to tell the truth; 62- Sweetie;

Yesterday's solution

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

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PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
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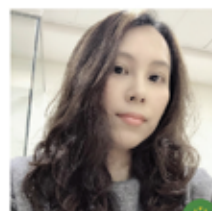
Juliet Risdon
+853 6680 9804
juliet@jmlproperty.com



Elda Lemos
+853 6226 8566
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SCAN ME

Property Hotlist



Seaview Garden, Macau

\$10,900,000

1,420 ft²

3 2



SCAN ME



Villa da Taipa, Taipa

\$13,000/mth

1,450 ft²

3 2



SCAN ME



Large 3+1 bed One central High floor apartment & balcony

\$29,800/mth

2,332 ft²

3 4



SCAN ME

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- [Coloane] Houston Court 1 1 980 ft² **\$10,800/mth** (ref: 20091001)
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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

HSBC CFO says shift to remote working may help deepen cost cuts

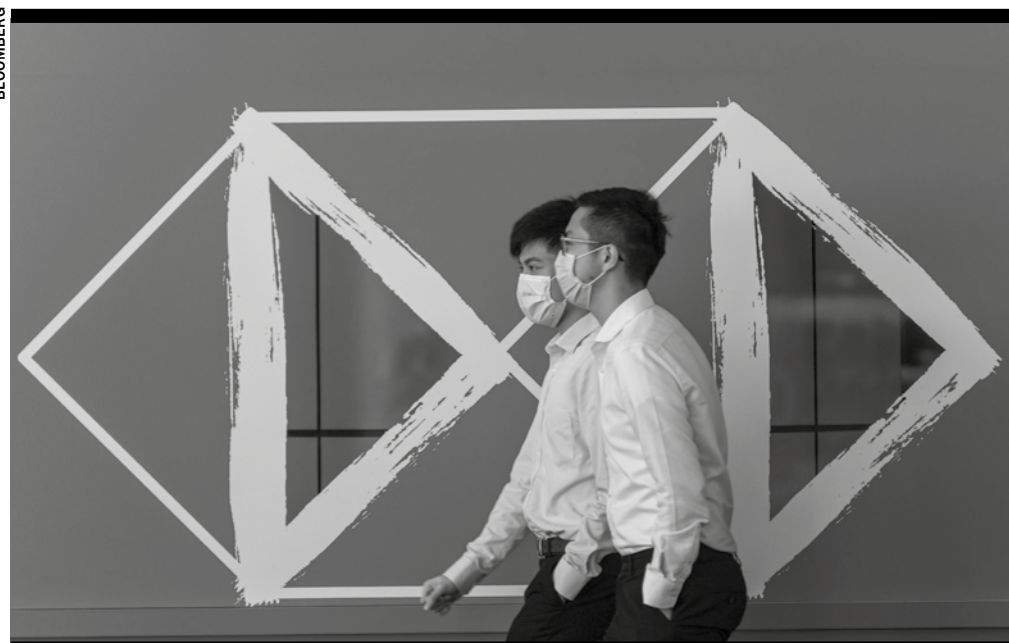
ALFRED LIU,
HARRY WILSON
& MANUS CRANNY

HSBC Holdings Plc is counting on the new normal spawned by the pandemic to boost its cost-cutting effort.

A shift in customer behavior could reduce the bank's reliance on its physical branches, while more remote working for some of its staff may reduce office costs, according to Chief Financial Officer Ewen Stevenson.

"We're seeing far higher level of digital engagement than what we saw pre-Covid in some places," Stevenson said in a Bloomberg Television interview yesterday after the lender reported third-quarter results. "That will allow us to be more assertive about reducing some of the physical distribution costs we've got."

With most of its employees working from home, the lender is also evaluating how to move to "more of a hybrid model" of working



and use video technology to reduce the need for business travel.

"The balance we could get to is two or three days a week at home, two or three days a week in the office," Stevenson said, noting that would vary significantly across business lines.

HSBC, which pared back its expected loans losses for this year and posted higher

profits than estimated, said Tuesday it expects to cut costs deeper than previously, aiming to reduce the annual cost base beyond a \$31 billion target for 2022. It also expects to exceed a target to reduce risk-weighted assets by \$100 billion.

The bank could start charging for basic banking services "in some markets" because low interest ra-

tes meant they were losing money, Stevenson also said Tuesday.

HSBC isn't the only bank to be rethinking ways of doing business. Last week, Barclays Plc told investors it was evaluating actions to reduce structural costs with Finance Director Tushar Morzaria citing a move to house call-center operations in its branches. BLOOMBERG

BANK OF CHINA AIMS TO BOOST DEBT TEAM ON OFFSHORE DEAL SURGE

BANK of China Ltd. plans to expand its headcount in the offshore bond business by 40% as it fights with global banks for a greater slice of a market that's seen a surge in Chinese borrowers.

The lender is seeking to add 20 more staff to its offshore bond team over the next five years, Hu Kun, its general manager of investment banking and asset management department said in an interview. The bank aims to win more dollar bond deals by Chinese technology giants and also sees rising interest in euro notes by mainland borrowers, he added.

The team currently has about 50 staff across offices in Hong Kong, Singapore and London, covering deals in Asia, Europe, Middle East and Africa, he said.

"Our investment in human resources will be based on the rapid growth of the offshore bond market and BOC's overall development layout," Hu said in an interview with Bloomberg. "It is a logical business development."

One of the big four Chinese banks, Bank of China has kept its top rank in the China offshore bond market since 2016, according to Bloomberg's league table data. Over this period, the dollar bond segment for Chinese issuers has doubled to \$864 billion as the nation's firms sought funding for overseas acquisitions and debt refinancing.

Yet when compared to top international investment banks, Hu said he sees room for the bank to improve its debt capital market-related services, such as settlement, market-making and credit research. MDT/BLOOMBERG

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OPINION

Our Desk

Julie Zhu



WEAR YOUR MASK, MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

I support you and respect you when you wear a mask because you personally thought it through and decided that it was prudent to do so for various reasons, including protecting others. I appreciate it and I also encourage you, and I will keep liking you while you continue wearing a mask until you find it acceptable to not have to wear it anymore.

However, whenever you wear your mask, do mind your own business for the sake of the freedom of everybody who does not share an identical position to you.

I, for one, do not share this sentiment. But I do think that your thoughts are none of my business, because we are all different people and everybody is different.

I wear a mask whenever I enter any premises that require me to wear a mask. For instance, on the bus, in a taxi, in government buildings, sometimes at the supermarket, sometimes in a shopping center, even at a friend's house at their request.

Even though I disagree with all these must-wear-a-mask-here policies, and even though I have thought that from the beginning until today that masks only protect us from our fears, I still comply with all the abovementioned rules.

Wearing a mask in indoor spaces is a general rule that the majority have implemented or somehow forced the government to implement. I never agreed with it in the first place, not now or ever. But I go along with it as it is, in my opinion, a reflection of how society has been functioning since life has existed: the majority win in the short term.

Not only I am ok with the rule about wearing masks indoors, I support it, and I don't resent it for even a little bit because of what I have just explained.

However, I only hold this obligation when I am at these premises. Once I set foot on the streets, freedom is my natural right, including the freedom not to wear a mask.

When I am feeling ill or diagnosed with some kind of transmissible sickness, I wear a mask wherever I go, I try to keep my distance from people, and I try to avoid going to work.

Again, nobody has any right to tell other people what to do or not to do unless ... or maybe there is no unless.

If you are really unhappy with other people not wearing a mask on the street, you can try to force the Macau government to pass an order to require all pedestrians to wear a mask. Then I and other people will conform to it. If you cannot, I again recommend that you "wear your masks, and mind your own business."

You can define who you are, who you want to be, however you want to live your life, how you want to name and identify yourself, but that's it. Your definitions end with you. You have no right to define others, to say who they are or who they are not, to decide what they can do or what they cannot do.

Wear your mask, mind your own business.

BARRETT SWORN IN AT COURT AS ISSUES IMPORTANT TO TRUMP AWAIT

THE BUZZ

Amy Coney Barrett was formally sworn yesterday as the Supreme Court's ninth justice, her oath administered in private by Chief Justice John Roberts. Her first votes on the court could include two big topics affecting the man who appointed her.

The court is weighing a plea from President Donald Trump to prevent the Manhattan district attorney from acquiring his tax returns. It is also considering appeals from the Trump campaign and Republicans to shorten the deadline for receiving and counting absentee ballots in the battleground states of North Carolina

and Pennsylvania.

Northeastern Pennsylvania's Luzerne County filed legal papers at the court arguing that Barrett should not take part in the Pennsylvania case. It's not clear if she will vote in the pending cases, but she will make that call.

Barrett was confirmed Monday by the Senate in a 52-48 virtual party line vote. She is expected to begin work as a justice on Tuesday after taking the second of two oaths required of judges by federal law.

AP PHOTO



'WE'RE WORKING ON IT: POPE'S COVID ADVISERS AND THE MASK

NICOLE WINFIELD, ROME

POPE Francis' decision to forgo wearing a mask has been noticed, with some concern, by the commission of Vatican experts he appointed to help chart the Catholic Church's path through the coronavirus pandemic and the aftermath.

The Rev. Augusto Zampini, one of the key members of the pope's COVID-19 commission, acknowledged yesterday that at age 83 and with part of his lung removed after an illness in his youth, Francis would be at high risk for complications if he were to become infected with COVID-19.

"He has started to use the mask now," Zampini said in response to reporters' questions. "And I hope he will use it in the general audiences, when he is close to the people. If you're in an open space, we know that it's different. But well, we are working on that."

Francis has courted some criticism for declining to wear a mask when indoors, even though Vatican regulations call for masks indoors and out when social distancing cannot be guaranteed. While Francis' lung condition could help explain

his decision to forego the mask, he donned one for more than two hours last week when he presided over an indoor and outdoor interreligious prayer service in downtown Rome.

Francis has courted some criticism for declining to wear a mask when indoors [against] Vatican regulations

Yet the following day, Francis went maskless during his indoor general audience in the Vatican auditorium, including when he shook hands with a handful of similarly maskless bishops and leaned in to speak privately to each one. On Saturday, he met with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who arrived wearing a mask only to take it off for the audience in the pope's library.

Photos of the maskless leaders caused a mild stir in Spain over the weekend, but the prime minister's office dismissed it by saying the delegation was following Vatican protocol rules. Spain last week became the first country in Western Europe with more than 1 million confirmed

virus cases.

The Vatican has declined to respond to questions about Francis and masks.

Zampini said the recent rise in infections in the tiny city state have commission members and the Vatican as a whole concerned. Thirteen Swiss Guards and a resident of the hotel where Francis lives have recently tested positive.

"We are very worried," Zampini said, noting that the Vatican has strong regulations about keeping social distancing and washing hands within the territory. "We have all protocols in place, but still we have cases."

He acknowledged, though, that the contagion within the Vatican has merely driven home the danger of the virus so that the Vatican itself can be witness to what the rest of the world is experiencing and help be part of the solution.

The commission is working to address the current needs of the church around the world with concrete acts of assistance, while also developing policy recommendations for how governments and institutions can re-think global economic, environmental, social, health care and other structures to be more equitable and sustainable. AP

Afghanistan A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle near a police special forces base yesterday, setting off a gunfight with police followed by a second suicide bombing, a coordinated attack that killed three people, Afghan officials said. Four militants were also killed. Habib Shah Ansari, provincial health director in Khost said that so far three bodies and around 30 wounded, both military and civilian, were brought to hospital.

AP PHOTO



Bangladesh About 10,000 people from an Islamist group marched through the nation's capital yesterday to denounce the display of caricatures of Islam's Prophet Muhammad in France, while the group's leader urged Muslims around the world to boycott French products.

AP PHOTO



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defense chief Mark Esper stepped up the Trump administration's anti-China message in India yesterday, exactly a week ahead of America's presidential election. With President Donald Trump in a tight race for a second term against former Vice President Joe Biden, Pompeo and Esper sought to play on Indian suspicions about China to shore up a regional front against increasing Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.

AP PHOTO



U.S. A fast-moving wildfire forced evacuation orders for some 100,000 people and seriously injured two firefighters as powerful winds across the state prompted power to be cut to hundreds of thousands. A smoky fire exploded in size to over 11 square miles (29 square kilometers) after breaking out around dawn in Orange County, south of Los Angeles.