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POLICE BUST ILLEGAL BANKING TRANSACTIONS WORTH MOP116 MILLION

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THE ELECTORAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HAS IDENTIFIED THE LINGERING PANDEMIC AS THE 2021 ELECTION'S MAJOR CHALLENGE

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China yesterday reported seven new cases of coronavirus infection in the capital Beijing, where authorities have ordered the testing of hundreds of thousands of residents. Cases have been clustered largely in villages on Beijing's northeastern edge, but authorities are wary of any spread in the capital that could deal a setback to claims it has all-but-contained local spread of the virus. City authorities have already urged residents not to leave the city during the upcoming Lunar New Year holidays.



Japan Three months after he took over from his former boss Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga seems to be struggling to find his feet. His support ratings have sunk amid flaring virus outbreaks and scandals within the ruling party, even as the economy appears to be recovering. The Nikkei financial newspaper said its latest survey found approval ratings for Suga's government had sunk more than 30 points to 42% from 74% in late September.

Nepal Tens of thousands of supporters of a splinter group in the governing Nepal Communist Party rallied in the capital yesterday demanding the prime minister's ouster and the reinstatement of the Parliament he dissolved amid an escalating party feud. The protesters chanted slogans against Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli while they marched peacefully in the center of Kathmandu as thousands of riot police kept close watch.

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China's amended gaming law could impede Macau's 2021 VIP sector: experts

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AMENDED CEPA TO COME INTO EFFECT ON JANUARY 1

Starting from January 1, seven further articles concerning the origin of goods under the Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) will come into effect.

According to a statement from the Macau Economic Bureau (DSE), the amendment will create more favorable conditions for companies, as they benefit from the exemption from custom duties under CEPA.

The move was intended to boost the development of the Greater Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Bay Area.

NATIONAL INCOME AMOUNTS TO NEARLY MOP396B IN 2019

Gross National Income (GNI) at current prices amounted to MOP394.06 billion in 2019, which was MOP51.06 billion less than Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices (MOP445.12 billion). Total outflow of external factor income reflects income earned by non-resident enterprises and investors from investment in Macau. Official data shows that in 2019, the total outflow of external factor income went up by 12% year-on-year to MOP120.6 billion, mainly due to an 8.6% increase in direct investment income (MOP 80.51 billion) earned by some non-resident enterprises and investors from investment in Macau.

SMG ANTICIPATES MORE DAYS WITH POOR AIR QUALITY DUE TO STRICTER STANDARDS

JULIE ZHU

THE Macao Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) will begin to assess Macau's air quality with new and stricter standards from January 1. The bureau has anticipated that the number of days with bad air quality will be higher as a result of the new standards.

Yesterday, the SMG held a press conference for a briefing on the city's new Air Quality Index.

The new index follows the latest World Health Organization Air Quality Guidelines (WHO AQG) Global Update 2005.

According to the new definition, air quality with indexes of 0 to 50, 51 to 100, 101 to 200, 201 to 300, 301 to 400, and 401 to 500 will correspond to Good, Moderate, Bad, Very Bad, Severe and Harmful, respectively.

During the press conference, Tang Iu Man, the Deputy Director of the SMG, said that the new standards may lead to the number of air quality days in 2021 growing by approximately 20% compared to that of 2020.

"The number of days with bad air quality may increase once we use the new index," said Tang. "For example, [in the case of] One Grantai monitor station, the number may increase by 20% after the adoption of the new standards, based on the statistics collected from 2017 and 2018."

However, Tang reiterated that this does not mean that Macau's air quality will be worse.



Once the new standards come into effect, the SMG will issue at least four air quality forecasts a day. The validity of each forecast will be extended from current 19 hours to 31 hours. Such changes will give the bureau the flexibility to issue special notifications earlier.

The classification of air quality levels and related content are defined with reference to the classification of countries and regions, including China, Hong Kong, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

The concentration value of all pollutants corresponding to the "good" air quality level is equal to or lower than the "air quality guideline" in the WHO AQG.

Macau's Air Quality Index is based on the data obtained from

the automatic monitoring network. The sub-index of pollutants, including respirable suspended particulate (PM10), fine suspended particulate (PM2.5), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), ozone (O3), sulphur dioxide (SO2) and carbon monoxide (CO), are calculated using their real-time concentrations and related influences on human health.

When the air quality is bad, very bad, severe or harmful, Sen-

sitive Population Groups, namely people with existing heart or respiratory illnesses, pregnant women, children and the elderly, are especially advised to minimize outdoor strenuous activities and their time spent outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic.

The general public are advised to do the same.

POOR AIR QUALITY DAYS DROPPED BY 60%

The SMG official also remarked that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of days with poor air quality and the volume of air pollutants dropped by approximately 60% compared to last year.

The significant drop was related to the reduced industry and human activities this year.

At the Taipa Hill station, only seven days were registered as having poor air quality from January to October, 19 fewer days than the same period last year.

During the same period, Rua do Campo also reported fewer poor air quality days, only recording 10 days this year, compared to 27 days last year.

COLD WAVE PREDICTED THIS WEEK

A cold wave is expected to reach southern China during the middle of this week. The temperature in Macau will drop remarkably below 10 degrees Celsius. It will remain very cold on New Year's Eve and

New Year's Day. The temperature will further drop to around 6 degrees Celsius. The public is advised to be aware of the change in weather and take precautions against the cold.

MUST scientists demonstrate Chinese herbal medicine's role in treating Covid-19

STAFF REPORTER

A recent study authored by scholars from the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) has provided fresh insight into how Chinese herbal medicine fights against Covid-19.

The research, titled "The Scientific Foundation of Chinese Herbal Medicine against COVID-19," was recently published in Engineering, an internationally recognized academic journal.

The study was steered by Liang Liu, President of the

MUST who rallied teaching and research staff at the institution's State Key Laboratory of Quality Research in Chinese Medicine following the outbreak of Covid-19 to conduct scientific research and screen effective Chinese herbal formulas to help curb the pandemic.

The published study expounds on the scientific foundations of Chinese herbal formulas using multiple high-tech technologies, such as network pharmacology and multivariate mass spectrometry analysis, to identify and uncover the therapeutic

mechanisms behind Chinese herbal medicine to treat Covid-19.

Researchers found that Chinese herbal medicine is effective at helping to reduce the replication of the Covid-19 virus, reduce the risks of an excessive immune stress response and in-

flamatory cells, and protect multiple organs from damage in patients.

The above therapeutic outcomes can be useful in mitigating the severity of the disease and reducing the likelihood of it deteriorating into a severe condition in an individual who is infected with Covid-19.

Moreover, the team also discovered that various Chinese herbal formulas can play therapeutic roles for patients who are infected with other viruses.

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GAMING

China's new crime amendment could cripple Macau's 2021 VIP sector: experts

STAFF REPORTER

THE Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's top legislature, has sanctioned an amendment to the national criminal law criminalizing anyone who "organizes [for] citizens of Mainland China to participate in gambling outside the country (or border), which involves a hefty sum or cases with serious consequences." The amended law will come into force on March 1, 2021.

The new law foreshadows that anyone who "organizes" gambling trips or activities for mainland citizens to Macau will be considered to be breaking the law. It stipulates that a person who commits the gambling offence will be subject to imprisonment of at least five years and up to 10 years.

Wang Changbin, director of the Center for Gaming and Tourism Studies at the Macao Polytechnic Institute, told the Times that the new law, by literal interpretation, could cover all places outside mainland China, including Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and all other countries.

Ben Lee, a Macau-based gaming expert and managing partner of IGamIX Management & Consulting, told the Times that the amendment — which is even "stricter" than the existing law — means that China is taking "one step further" to crack down on



gambling, which may or may not include Macau.

Regarding the existing criminal law, a move to organize more than ten mainland citizens to gamble overseas will be considered illegal. However, the latest change extends its scope regardless of the number of the mainland residents involved.

According to the official document, the latest amendment was made after a careful study by the committee and is intended to further crack down on overseas gambling crimes.

Nonetheless, the document does not specify the definition of a "hefty sum" as well as "cases with

Securing a GGR of MOP130 billion for 2021 will likely not be reached once the new law comes into force

serious consequences."

"Obviously, the city's VIP sector and also premium mass will be severely depressed," Lee observed. Junkets are businesses that act as middlemen for high rollers from China. Wang echoed Lee's remark, saying that "most bets at VIP tables could be easily deemed 'hefty.'"

Lee believes that the government's target to secure an annual

gross gaming revenue (GGR) of MOP130 billion for 2021, equivalent to 44.5% of 2019's figure, will likely not be reached, once the new law comes into force.

The new law arguably acts as a deterrent to not only high-rollers, but also regular gamblers to Macau from China, who are under a greater degree of surveillance from the Chinese government, Lee believes.

Lee also expects the adverse impact of the new law will not affect only casino operators, it will permeate across sectors, with a lot of local SMEs being similarly affected in 2021.

"We have to wait and see

how they [the Chinese government] apply the law and what the threshold is," he stressed, saying it is pointless to interpret the latest law when the details haven't been spelled out yet.

Considering the VIP sector has often accounted for the biggest share of the total GGR, Wang also said the new law could have a detrimental impact on Macau's overall economy.

During the pandemic, official data shows that Macau registered a total of MOP6.74 billion in gross gaming revenue in November, down 70.5% year-on-year.

In the third quarter (Q3) of 2020, VIP baccarat received MOP2.34 billion, accounting for around 48% of the total GGR made from Games of Fortune across the quarter.

The latest amendment to the national criminal law has also heightened the penalties for setting up a casino in China. The new amendment stipulates that any person who opens a casino in mainland China will be fined and sentenced to imprisonment of up to five years. For other cases with "serious consequences," those responsible will be fined and put behind bars for five to 10 years.

The change to Article 303 of the Criminal Law was officially endorsed by the Standing Committee on December 26. The official document detailing the changes was published on the official website and by the state media Xinhua news agency.

Parliamentary election administrator sees pandemic as prime challenge



ANTHONY LAM

THE Electoral Affairs Committee, which will administer next year's Legislative Assembly Election, has identified the lingering pandemic as the election's major challenge, Justice Tong Hio Fong, the committee's president said yesterday.

"For the time being, we don't see any challenges facing the election, apart from the pandemic," Tong explained.

Discussions will be held with the Health Bureau to determine what types of anti-infection measures should be taken during the election, the

committee president disclosed.

On the other hand, the pandemic may pose the risk of postponement to the election. According to the law, the president pointed out, the election can be postponed under certain circumstances. However, it is too early to determine whether this will be necessary.

In addition to the pandemic, the committee will also work on streamlining areas that did not work well in the last election. For instance, there was congestion at the Seac Pai Van Poll Station four years ago. Tong pledged that work will be done in this area.

So far, about 320,000 registered voters are eligible to cast their vote next year. With a larger voter base, the president did not rule out the possibility of a larger budget, workforce and number of polling stations.

Tong also reminded unregistered voters to complete their registration before January 1, 2021 in order to vote in the coming election. Registration can be done in person at registration desks or at government electronic kiosks. Such kiosks are located on the ground floors of the Public Administration Building and the Government Service Building at Areia Preta, as well as at the Government Service Center in Nova Park, Taipa, in addition to all Identification Bureau e-kiosks. All permanent residents aged 17 or above are eligible for registration.

The polling date, according to the law, will be determined by the Chief Executive.

The committee was officially inaugurated yesterday before Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng and witnessed by Hoi Lai Fong, Secretary of the Office of Ho.

CRIME

POLICE BUST SUSPECTS FOR ILLEGAL BANKING TRANSACTIONS TOTALING MOP116M

RENATO MARQUES

THE Judiciary Police (PJ), in cooperation with its counterparts from the Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, has dismantled an alleged crime ring that has carried out illegal banking transactions in Macau since 2016, using modified Point of Sale (POS) terminals that reported the transactions as made in the mainland.

The unveiling of the case resulted from a joint operation by several police authorities on December 27, a PJ spokesperson revealed during a special press conference held yesterday morning at the PJ headquarters.

According to the PJ, it is believed that the total amount of the illegal banking transactions operated through the modified POS terminals is 116 million patacas over the period of approximately four years.

According to the PJ's calculations, the ring should have profited to the tune of the equivalent of 69 million patacas.

The operation run in Macau resulted in the detention of 30 suspects (23 men and 7 women) aged between 22 and 72 years old, of which 18 are residents of the mainland and 12 are local residents.

According to the PJ spokes-



RENATO MARQUES

person, among the 30 detainees, eight are being treated as the ring leaders.

Concurrently, in operations undertaken in the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, which involved a total of 300 police officers, another 39 people aged between 21 to 56 years old were detained. Of these people, five are also being treated as ring leaders, the same spokesperson informed.

Besides a large quantity of

computer equipment, credit cards, and other items related to the operation, the PJ also seized a large sum of cash in several currencies (HKD8,840,000, RMB59,000, and MOP720,000) as well as HKD1,268,750 worth of gaming chips.

The local raid operation involved a total of 110 PJ investigators, who performed searches and seized items considered to be evidence from a total of 12 local

shops, the majority of which were pawnshops, as well as 19 private residences and two companies.

The local force stated that during the investigation that followed the raids it became clear how the crime ring had begun and how the operations were established by the main ring leader, a local man named Wong. Wong allegedly sought help from family members and other acquaintances in the village he is originally

from in the mainland, asking them to recruit members and people in Macau from among their contacts who would be interested in taking part in the scheme.

According to the PJ, he also arranged for some of these people to bring the POS terminals from the mainland into Macau and implement the modifications required so they could be used in Macau without leaving a trace. He explained that the scheme aimed to bypass the regulations enforced in the mainland for the removal of capital, as well as measures in place to counter money laundering activities.

According to several records found, the operation was initially aimed at casino patrons wanting to withdraw money to gamble using their mainland debit and credit cards, simulating, through the POS terminals, such transactions as regular shopping on the mainland. The operations of the group then expanded, with the additional aim of illegal currency exchanges with gambling purposes.

All 30 suspects were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office yesterday to be charged with crimes related to membership and leadership of a criminal organization as well as computer-related fraud.

HEAVIER PUNISHMENT WANTED FOR SEX CRIMES AGAINST MINORS

JULIE ZHU

THE General Union of Neighborhood Associations of Macau has urged the SAR government to apply heavier punishments to perpetrators of sex offences against minors.

The association recently drew up a report concerning child rights protection, concluding that Macau society has insufficient knowledge regarding the topic.

The organization thinks that Macau's punishment regime pertaining to sex crimes against minors is lenient, especially when compared to that of Hong Kong and mainland China. Hong Kong imposes life imprisonment as the heaviest punishment, according to the association.

In Macau, sexual as-



sault against children is subject to between one and ten years imprisonment.

The association is proposing that the government draft a law specifically for protecting children's rights, and that it should explicitly rule that it is the society's responsibility to protect children's rights.

"At the same time, [the

government should] set up a series of policies to protect the children as well to establish a framework for children's long-term development," said Che Mei Leng, deputy director of the association, as cited in a TDM report.

"We recommend the government enhance psychiatric therapy for the offenders in order to prevent the concerned individuals

from committing the same crime again," said Che.

In addition, the group wants enhanced sex education, specifically a universal guideline and assessment criteria for sex education.

Each year, the relevant sex education teaching staff should also undertake training in order to carry out the education work.

TAOBAO

CUSTOMS DENIES COLLABORATION WITH LOGISTICS SUPPLIER

THE Macao Customs Service has denied in a statement claims that it was in negotiation with a logistics supplier to facilitate the direct delivery of Taobao merchandise to Macau.

Apple Daily News in Hong Kong had reported on Monday evening that Taobao and Tmall, online retail platforms owned and operated by Chinese Internet mogul Alibaba, will include Macau in their "free delivery area."

Currently, parcels sent to Macau incur charges on delivery, in contrast to the usual free delivery available in mainland China.

Nonetheless, the reported free delivery will only apply to about a million items of merchandise.

In order to facilitate the

free delivery, the Hong Kong paper reported, the mainland logistics supplier for the two retail platforms "have worked with the Macao Customs [Service] to foster a digital clearance system."

However, the local authority issued a statement yesterday to deny the claim. The customs service stressed that it "has not started any collaborations or any tailor-made digital clearance system with any e-vendor or logistics supplier."

On the other hand, the Hong Kong media outlet also reported that, should the free-of-charge direct delivery be available, 99% of the cargo will arrive in Macau on the day following their arrival into the Zhuhai depot. **AL**

Rosário describes Nam Van Lake proposals as 'big improvement'

ANTHONY LAM

SECRETARY for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário, has reminded residents to consider the big picture rather than focusing on minor details when reviewing the planning for Zones C and D around Nam Van Lake.

He referred to previous plans near the Criminal Court Building – now overruled – that allowed the construction of high-rise buildings up to 80 meters, stressing that the latest draft plan is a big leap forward.

"If the previous plans were not overruled, we would be seeing buildings of 80 [or] 90 meters tall," Rosário said. "So we should look at the big picture, listen to the whole story."

Just before Christmas, the government issued two draft plans for the development of the zones, allowing height clearances from 34 to 50 meters. It stirred up public concerns over the view to and from Penha Hill.

"The height clearances refer to the altitude above sea level," Rosário reminded, hinting that the figures are not unacceptable.



"The future building on land plot C12 will be around 27 meters tall."

But the senior official said the Nam Van Lake area is four meters above sea level. For non-residential buildings, the height is about the level of one floor.

The senior official was asked

if an assessment of the view had been conducted. He affirmed that it had, but said he needed to confirm whether the report can be released. "But the results are supportive to the height not causing impact to the views," he added.

The public consultation period

on the draft plans ended yesterday. The government's decision has prompted a wave of opinions, aside from objections, from both within and outside the construction and engineering industry.

Nonetheless, the senior official dismissed the claim, adding that

he did not feel strong opposition from the industry. After the decision was made, the government held a meeting with industry representatives on the matter.

Meanwhile, the senior official also explained why the government did not open a public tender for the construction of the Elderly Hostel. The construction contract has been designated to China Construction Engineering (Macau) Company Limited.

Justifying the government's decision once again, Rosário reiterated that the Elderly Hostel will be built using the Prefabrication method, which stacks blocks of buildings one atop another like Lego. The method is known to be efficient and generate less waste on site.

"However, local constructors are not experienced in building [using] the method," Rosário explained.

Explaining the choice to use this method, the senior official said that he "felt" that the Chief Executive wanted to prioritize this project, and that he wanted to finish it during this term.

When asked whether it will be a new normal to directly assign public works to non-Macau contractors for the same reason, Rosário declined to respond: "I refrain from making statements on future practices."

Rosário was speaking on the sidelines of the Electoral Affairs Committee's inauguration yesterday.

Christmas season sees 20% increase in tourist arrivals

LYNZY VALLES

THE Christmas season has seen an average of 24,000 daily visitor arrivals to Macau, with the hotel occupancy rate reaching nearly 70%.

Aside from the week being a festive season, the uptick may be attributed to the government's initiative to collaborate with different firms including Tencent, Alibaba, Ctrip, UnionPay International and Air Macau. The collaboration kicked off special offers to attract tourists.

According to data issued yesterday by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the average number of daily visitors was 24,503 from December 23 to 27, while the average daily number of inbound visitors from the mainland was 22,826.

On Christmas Day, December 25, the number of tourist arrivals recorded reached 27,755, which is the second highest single-day visitor arrival figure in the 10



months since the pandemic broke out this year, following the practice day of the Macau Grand Prix (GP) on November 20. Approximately 28,000 tourists visited the city on the first GP day.

During the five-day Christmas holiday period, tourist arrivals recorded a growth of 20.2%, when compared with the daily average of 20,385 visitors from December 1 to 22.

This festive season brought high hopes to local businesses and authorities as it looked at a bounce in visitor arrival numbers following the downfall brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, according to information provided by the industry, the average occupancy rate of hotel venues (hotels and apartments) from December 23 to 27 was 69.4%, among which

the average occupancy rate of three-star to five-star hotels reached and exceeded 70%.

Compared with December 1 to 22, five-star hotels recorded an uptick of 22.25%, and 29.4% compared to November.

As the mainland resumes the issuing of visas for its residents to travel to Macau, the MGTO said that it continues to strengthen

tourism promotion on social media platforms and has cooperated with various online travel agencies to launch promotional products for travel to Macau.

HOTEL OCCUPANCY RATE STOOD AT 44% IN NOVEMBER

Information from the Statistics and Census Service indicated the average occupancy rate of guest rooms in November was 43.9%, representing a month-to-month growth of 4.1 percentage points but a year-on-year decrease of 48

percentage points.

The occupancy rate of 3-star hotels stood at 55.1%.

A total of 473,000 guests checked into hotels & guesthouses in November, indicating a decline of 59.3% year-on-year. Guests from mainland China dropped by 49.3% year-on-year to 404,000.

From January to November 2020, a total of 260,000 package tour visitors were recorded, a decline of 96.7% year-on-year; outbound residents using the services of travel agencies tumbled by 93.2% to 110,000.

DAILY VISITOR ARRIVALS

Average daily arrivals between December 23-27	24,503
Rate increase compared to December 1 to 22	+20.2%
Rate increase compared to November	+15.5%
Rate increase compared to October	+30.5%

COVID-19

WUHAN'S CASES MAY HAVE BEEN TEN TIMES HIGHER, STUDY SHOWS

THE scale of the Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan early this year may have been nearly 10 times the recorded tally, a study conducted by China's public health authorities indicates, leaving the city where the coronavirus first took hold still well short of the immunity required to protect against a potential resurgence.

About 4.4% of those tested were found to have specific antibodies that can fight off the pathogen that causes Covid-19, indicating they were infected some time in the past, according to a serological survey of more than 34,000 people conducted in April by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The data was released late Monday.

That ratio would suggest that with Wuhan home to about 11 million people, as many as 500,000 residents may have been infected, nearly 10 times more than the 50,000 confirmed Covid-19 cases reported by health authorities in mid-April, when the survey was conducted.

China has been criticized internationally for its initial handling of the outbreak, which has spread around the world in a global pandemic in the year since the



BLOOMBERG

first cases emerged. The U.S. has raised questions about China's accounting of the virus fallout in Wuhan, which was quickly eclipsed by larger outbreaks in Europe and North America. A number of revisions of the case and deaths data added to suspicions China was massaging the numbers.

While the serological data may reignite those claims, it is common for health authorities to un-

der-report cases during an acute outbreak, given testing capabilities can be limited and hospitals overwhelmed with a sudden surge in patients. The coronavirus's ability to quietly infect people without making some of them sick until later or even throughout the infection period only exacerbates the problem.

Serological surveillance has been widely used by health pro-

fessionals around the world to gauge the true scale of epidemics, from Covid-19 to AIDS and hepatitis. The prevalence of disease derived from such studies can guide mitigation and vaccination efforts.

The China CDC survey showed a far less impact of the virus outside Wuhan, which was effectively shut off as a way of containing the outbreak. The positive rate

for antibodies dropped to 0.44% for the broader Hubei province, which was also placed under a three-month lockdown. Only two people tested positive for the antibody among the 12,000 surveyed in six other Chinese cities and provinces, including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, suggesting an extremely low prevalence of the virus across the rest of the country.

The results for Wuhan mean even China's worst-hit city is still vulnerable to Covid-19. Epidemiologists say at least half a population needs to have come into contact with the virus for even the minimum threshold for herd immunity. But the city's rate of infection is generally in line with those found in other countries after the first wave of coronavirus infections, the China CDC said in a press release published on its website.

The antibody positive rates in Spain and Switzerland this spring, for example, were as much as 6.2% and 11%, respectively, the China CDC said. While those are higher than the 4.4% found in Wuhan, and come before later waves that have swept across Europe, they still fall short of the herd immunity threshold.

Since quelling the Hubei outbreak, China has largely contained the coronavirus, with sporadic flareups since April snuffed out through aggressive contract tracing and quickly testing millions of people in a matter of days. **BLOOMBERG**

Hong Kongers charged in China plead guilty, relatives told

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

RELATIVES of the 10 Hong Kongers accused of fleeing the city by speedboat during a government crackdown on dissent say they've been informed that their family members pleaded guilty, according to a support group.

The families of the detainees were informed by court-appointed lawyers yesterday that a court in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen will deliver the verdicts today, according to the 12 Hongkongers Concern Group, which is assisting the families.

It was not clear whether the 10 would also be sentenced today, but Chinese courts often issue sentences at the same time as verdicts.

The 10 defendants all faced charges of ille-



Relatives of 12 Hong Kong activists detained at sea by Chinese authorities, attend a press conference in Hong Kong

gally crossing the border, while two of them faced additional charges of organizing the attempt, according to an indictment issued in Shenzhen. The trials began on Monday afternoon, according to a statement issued by the Shenzhen Yantian District court.

Separate hearings were expected for two minors who were also aboard the

boat that was apparently heading for Taiwan when it was stopped by the Chinese coast guard on Aug. 23.

The defendants are believed to have feared they would be prosecuted for their past activities in support of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement. Hong Kong media reports said at least one may have had a warrant out for his

arrest under a tough new national security law imposed on the semi-autonomous territory by Beijing in June.

Relatives of the defendants say that they have been prevented from hiring their own lawyers and that the accusations are politically motivated. The defendants can be sentenced to up to a year in prison for crossing the border and seven years for organizing the trip.

They were picked up after entering mainland Chinese waters for crossing the maritime border without permission. While Hong Kong is part of China, travelers must still pass through immigration when going to and from the mainland. The defendants apparently needed to pass through Chinese waters to get to open seas. **AP**

HONG KONG

TYCOON JIMMY LAI RESIGNS AS NEXT DIGITAL CHAIRMAN

HONG Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai, who was charged earlier this month with colluding with foreign forces under the city's new national security law, resigned as chairman of Next Digital Ltd., the company he founded said in a filing yesterday.

Lai, 73, tendered his resignation "in order to spend more time dealing with his personal affairs," according to the statement. Next Digital said Ip Yut Kin would replace him as chairman.

Lai has also resigned as executive director.

The pro-democracy activist is currently on bail. Lai is a prominent critic of Beijing and Hong Kong's authorities, while his Apple Daily newspaper has vigorously championed the city's protest movement.

Prosecutors in Hong Kong charged Lai earlier this month under the national security law imposed by Beijing

in June, saying he had colluded with foreigners by calling for sanctions against China.

The city's High Court later granted Lai bail of HK\$10 million (\$1.3 million) on Dec. 23, confining him to his house and barring him from giving interviews or posting on social media.

Lai will be unable to travel and required to report to police three times a week under the bail terms, according to Apple Daily.

The state-owned People's Daily slammed the court's decision as "unbelievable," according to a commentary in the mouthpiece of China's Communist Party on Sunday, warning that there are legal grounds for authorities to transfer the case to the mainland.

Lai faces his next bail hearing tomorrow before Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal. **BLOOMBERG**

THAILAND

Bangkok imposes new restrictions amid coronavirus outbreak

OFFICIALS in the Thai capital have announced new restrictions, including the closure of some entertainment facilities during the New Year's holiday, as infections continued to rise following a recent coronavirus outbreak.

After months of seeming to have the COVID-19 situation under control, Thailand has seen two major clusters developing since mid-December that threatened to undo its progress. One has mainly infected hundreds of migrant workers from Myanmar at a seafood market near Bangkok, the capital, while in recent days a cluster has grown connected to a gambling den in an eastern province.

As part of the restrictions announced Monday, hostess bars, gambling venues and massage parlors in Bangkok were ordered by the city government to close from yesterday until Jan. 4. Bars and restaurants will be allowed to remain open during this period, but must close at midnight and adhere to social distancing requirements.

Thailand reported 155 new coronavirus infections yesterday morning. Of those,



134 were local transmissions, 11 were migrant workers and 10 were from state quarantine, according to the government's COVID-19 coordinating center.

Meanwhile, the latest COVID-19 death in nearly two months in Thailand was confirmed on Monday. The victim was a 45-year-old parking attendant at an illegal gambling den in Rayong province, on Thailand's eastern seaboard. Rayong Gov. Channa Leamsang confirmed at least 148 active cases linked to the

gambling den in the afternoon.

The man who died had chronic heart disease and diabetes and his coronavirus test came back positive on Sunday, according to Deputy Public Health Minister Satit Pitutecha. On Monday morning, he became tired and gasped for air before he stopped breathing on the way to a hospital.

In response to the outbreak in Rayong, officials have announced a widespread shutdown, including schools, bars and other

entertainment venues, massage and beauty parlors and department stores. Restaurants in the province will be allowed to operate for takeaway only.

The early closing times for bars and restaurants in Bangkok means that New Year's celebrations are likely to be strongly muted. Some popular midnight-countdown venues, including in the city's central shopping district and along the river-side, had already canceled live concerts and other activities, but some fireworks displays are scheduled to go ahead as planned.

"During the New Year's holiday we won't impose travel restrictions, but there will be measures put in place in many provinces," said Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who visited Rayong yesterday to discuss the situation there.

Kiattiphum Wongrajit, permanent-secretary of

the Public Health Ministry, said the government would impose checkpoints at entry and exit points to some provinces seeking to prevent further spread of the virus. He also said migrant workers would not be allowed to travel outside of their residential and work areas.

Thailand generally has been viewed as successful in combating the coronavirus, due partly to its well-regarded public health infrastructure and people's adherence to mask-wearing and other protocols.

But cases have jumped significantly since an outbreak was detected last week among migrants at a seafood market in Samut Sakhon province. Millions of low-wage jobs in Thailand are filled by workers from less affluent neighboring countries, especially Myanmar.

Samut Sakhon Gov. Weerasak Wijitsaengsri tested positive for the virus after meeting Sunday with senior health officials including Deputy Prime Minister and Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

More than 20% of Thailand's total of 6,440 confirmed cases are migrant workers in Samut Sakhon, and cases connected to the cluster have been found in 44 other provinces.

Samut Sakhon was put under lockdown on Dec. 19, followed by Samut Songkhram and Samut Prakarn.

A government spokesperson warned that the number of new daily coronavirus cases could rise to more than 10,000 in January under a worst-case scenario if the government does not do enough now.

If authorities impose moderate intervention measures, the number of daily infections could rise to around 8,000 by the end of January, while under the strictest measures the number would likely not exceed 1,000, according to the spokesperson, Dr. Taweelilp Visanuyotin of the COVID-19 coordinating center. **AP**

PHILIPPINES

AUTHORITIES BAN TRAVELERS FROM 20 NATIONS WITH NEW STRAIN

THE Philippines has decided to ban travelers from 20 nations with the new Covid-19 strain, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello said yesterday.

The travel ban covers Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and the U.K., Bello said.

The ban will be effective December 30 to January 15, and applies only to Hong Kong and not the whole of China, presidential spokesman Harry Roque said in a

separate briefing.

Filipino workers returning from these countries are exempted from the ban, said the labor chief, who expects as many as 100,000 more repatriates. The new strain hasn't been detected in the Philippines, according to the Department of Health.

Daily infections rose by 886 yesterday, the third straight day when the new case count is below 1,000 as testing also falls below target. With total of more than 471,000, the Philippines has the second highest cases in southeast Asia, next only to Indonesia.

The Philippines has approved Janssen Pharmaceuticals Inc.'s application to conduct a clinical trial of its coronavirus vaccine in the Southeast Asian nation, Food and Drug Administration Director General Eric Domingo said earlier yesterday.

"In the next few weeks, we will be able to begin clinical trials," Domingo said. The trial applications of Chinese firms Sinovac Biotech Ltd. and Sichuan Clover Biopharmaceuticals Inc., and Pfizer Inc.'s application for emergency use for its vaccine are still under review, he said. **BLOOMBERG**

AD



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Dietitian : Chan Lai U Joey

General Surgery : Dr. Fok Manson, Dr. Lai Cheuck Seen Edward, Dr. Lau Wing Kee Peter, Dr. Kwong Man, Dr. Nie Fu Zhong, Dr. U Chong San, Dr. Lei Chin Chong

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AP PHOTO



Tayebeh Mokhber is injected with the Coviran coronavirus vaccine produced by Shifa Pharmed, part of a state-owned pharmaceutical conglomerate, in a ceremony in Tehran yesterday

COVID-19

Iran begins first human trial of locally made virus vaccine

AMIR VAHDAT, TEHRAN

THE first study of the safety and effectiveness of a coronavirus vaccine in Iran began yesterday, state TV reported, with dozens due to receive the domestically developed shot even as details about its production remained slim.

The vaccine, the first in the country to reach human trials, is produced by Shifa Pharmed, part of a state-owned pharmaceutical conglomerate known as Barekat. The company's website describes it as involved in the large-scale production of antibiotics and penicillin, without offering any details about its coronavirus research or previous vaccine development since its founding in 1995.

Iran has struggled to stem the worst virus outbreak in the region, which has infected over 1.2 million people and killed nearly 55,000.

The study, a Phase 1 clinical trial, will enroll a total of 56 volunteers to receive two shots of Iran's vaccine within two weeks, according to Hamed Hosseini, a clinical trial manager, with results to be announced roughly

a month after the second shot. Three people received the first injections yesterday at a ceremony at a Tehran hotel attended by the country's health minister.

"I am happy that the scientific process went ahead in a proper way," said Tayebeh Mokhber, daughter of the Setad Foundation chairman, who was the first to get jabbed. "I hope the conclusion will be health for our people."

The Setad Foundation, controlled by the office of Iran's supreme leader, oversees the Barekat conglomerate.

The treatment, dubbed Coviran, is a so-called inactivated vaccine, meaning that it is made of a coronavirus that has been weakened or killed by chemicals, similar to how polio immunizations are made. Leading Western vaccines, like the shot made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, use newer, less-proven technology to target the coronavirus' spike protein using RNA.

Authorities expect to the vaccine to hit the market by late spring 2021, an extremely aggressive timeline. Before the fast-tracked de-

velopment of coronavirus vaccines, the usual methods of testing a vaccine for safety and efficacy with mass trials could take up to a decade.

With government-funded research into viral proteins and genetics accelerating the development of vaccines worldwide, countries have approved vaccines for emergency use and launched inoculation programs at record-breaking speed.

American drug makers Pfizer and Moderna received endorsement after reporting their vaccines were more than 90% effective at protecting against the coronavirus in large, advanced clinical trials. China and Russia approved their vaccines for emergency use while still in late-stage testing. Their early interim data, although promising, lacks clarity and raises questions about vaccine efficacy.

Iran has not elaborated on its regulatory approval process or plans for more advanced trials.

President Hassan Rouhani has said Iran is cooperating with a "foreign country" to produce another vaccine expected to run in tests in

human volunteers in February, without offering further details.

Still, with progress slow in Iran's vaccine research as Western countries grant approval for emergency use of vaccines and kick off mass inoculation campaigns, Iranian authorities have stressed the need to import vaccines.

Iranian authorities have repeatedly alleged that tough American sanctions undermine their efforts to purchase foreign-made vaccines and inoculate their citizens. While U.S. sanctions do have specific carve-outs for medicine and humanitarian aid to Iran, international banks and financial institutions hesitate in dealing with Iranian transactions for fear of being fined or locked out of the American market.

Iran retains routes to imported vaccines, including through COVAX, an international program designed to distribute coronavirus vaccines to participating countries around the world. On Monday, Iran said it expects a group of U.S.-based benefactors to ship thousands of Pfizer coronavirus vaccine in the coming weeks. **AP**

this day in history

1958 CASTRO'S REBELS EDGE CLOSER TO CAPITAL



A vicious house-to-house battle between rebel guerrillas, led by Fidel Castro, and the Cuban army is raging around the town of Santa Clara, the capital of the province of Las Villas.

The capture of Las Villas is a key goal for the rebel force, known as the 26 July Army, before they advance on the capital, Havana.

Despite being heavily outnumbered by the Cuban army, the rebels have enormous popular support and have won a number of significant victories.

Just a few weeks ago, they were confined to their tiny mountain stronghold at the other end of the island. Now they have advanced into a position where they are poised to take the capital itself.

The guerrillas have been fighting to overthrow the military government of Fulgencio Batista for two years.

But in the last 48 hours about 3,000 people have been killed or injured in some of the bloodiest fighting in the history of Cuba.

The army has countered the rebel attack on Santa Clara with fighter and bomber aircraft, as well as guns and tanks.

One of the rebel leaders, Dr Ernesto "Che" Guevara, has appealed to the government commander in Santa Clara for a truce to clear the streets of the casualties.

Broadcasts on rebel radio said his appeal had been rejected.

The president is reported to be preparing to take personal command of his forces to destroy a convoy of guerrilla soldiers currently moving south from Santa Clara.

In a sign of how desperate the situation has become for the government, President Batista today removed the Commodore of the Navy's air force, Joaquin Yarela Canosa, from his post.

He was the second senior figure in the armed forces to be sacked this week. The army commander in Las Villas, General Alberto Rio Chaviano, lost his job a few days ago.

Meanwhile, amid rumours that President Batista is preparing to flee the island, two of his young sons arrived in New York, accompanied by their grandfather, Manuel Perez Benitoa.

Mr Benitoa denied that the two boys were being evacuated ahead of a government surrender, saying, "I bring them every year to see the snow."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Two days later, on New Year's Day 1959, President Batista fled the country to the Dominican Republic, his government overthrown and his regime at an end.

He was to live the rest of his life in exile in Portugal and Spain and died in Spain in 1973.

Fidel Castro was sworn in as premier on 16 February 1959.

Since then, Cuba has been a one-party state in which Fidel Castro exerts control over virtually every aspect of Cuban life.

From an early stage, his leadership put Cuba on a collision course with the United States.

Antagonism between the two nations led to economic sanctions against Cuba from 1960. Two years later, Fidel Castro brought the world to the brink of nuclear war as his alliance with the USSR provoked the Cuban missile crisis.

Diplomatic relations have never been restored, and the US continues to enforce trade sanctions against Fidel Castro's regime.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Your vision of the future seems less like a carrot on a stick and more like a tease now. But you don't have to give up on it altogether. You just need to add a serious dose of patience to the mix.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

One good thing about lowering financial expectations is that other things just don't matter as much, either. It's a lot harder to get a rise out of you these days. But someone tries to do it anyway. Don't bite.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Now that you've had some time for thought, you can see that most things in your life are not really as foreign as they first seemed. Yep, the shock is starting to wear off. Welcome to the new normal.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

People are entitled to their own opinions. Except when money is involved, that is. Try not to fly off the handle over someone else's ideas about just how your finances should be handled.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You may not be making headway, but given current conditions, going sideways can be considered making progress. As long as you're not moving backwards, you're ahead of the game.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

It's a brave new world, so don't count on anything being regular or routine. Experiment with things a bit. You may find that your biggest asset going forward is an open mind.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Life is a challenge. Even the state you're in can be fun if you have the right attitude. Getting it can take some creativity but once you conjure it up, hold onto it for the duration.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Problems at home aren't unexpected. If you and family members disagree over the details, remind yourself of the basics. And if all else fails, remember that you're all working hard towards improving the bottom line.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You'll get an unexpected boost in your mood. If it's been a while since you've impressed anyone, it will come as a welcome surprise. Be open to it, even when interacting with strangers.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry. And that doesn't even include the schemes. If you want your future to pan out, you've got to lay an honest foundation. Start today.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You have one thing going for you, but it's a big one. Your high energy can tide you over as long as you use it on things that are worth it. Once you start squandering it like money, you're lost.

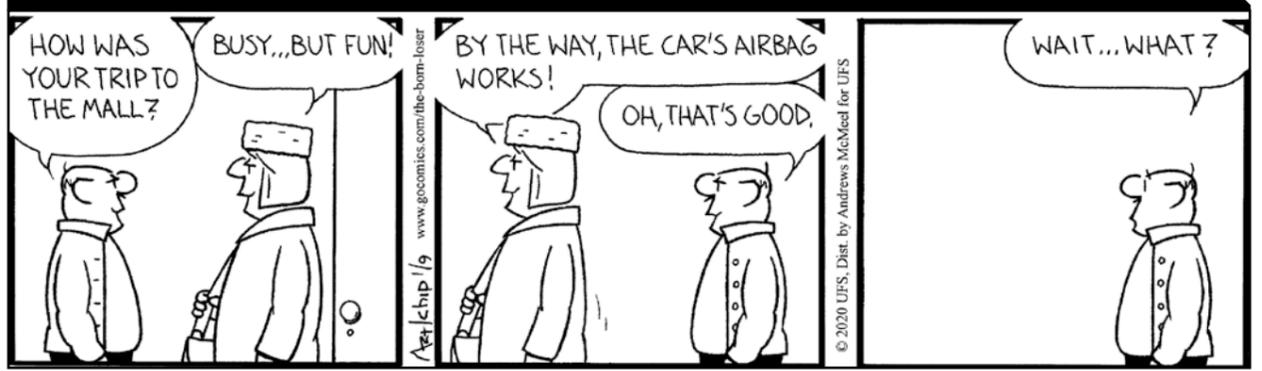


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Daydreaming about the future can either fan the flames of your discontent or help you come up with a realistic map. As long as they don't involve winning the lottery, let yourself indulge in fantasies.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-13	-6	clear
Harbin	-26	-17	cloudy
Tianjin	-11	-5	clear
Urumqi	-21	-15	clear
Xi'an	-7	1	cloudy
Lhasa	-6	13	clear
Chengdu	1	7	cloudy
Chongqing	5	7	overcast
Kunming	3	12	overcast
Nanjing	-6	-2	clear
Shanghai	-5	3	clear
Wuhan	-5	2	clear
Hangzhou	-3	2	clear
Taipei	9	20	drizzle
Guangzhou	9	16	cloudy
Hong Kong	10	19	clear
WORLD			
Moscow	-6	-3	sleet
Frankfurt	1	4	sleet
Paris	3	5	sleet
London	1	3	cloudy
New York	-1	2	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Canned; 5- Viper; 8- No ifs, ____; 12- Mal de ____; 13- Deplete; 15- Oscar winner Patricia; 16- Son of Judah; 17- Nabisco's ____ Wafers; 18- Super; 19- Citizenship; 22- H.S. proficiency test; 23- Vladimir Nabokov novel; 24- Record; 26- Biblical dancing girl; 29- Two-piece bathing suit; 31- Heat meas.; 32- Have a ball; 34- View; 36- Bear up there; 38- Take exception; 40- Starting from; 41- Terra ____; 43- Bucolic; 45- CD earnings; 46- Settle up front; 48- Contusion; 50- Solemn assent; 51- Hesitant sounds; 52- Close friend; 54- Keep cold; 61- Et ____ (and other men); 63- Concert venue; 64- Lipinski leap; 65- Horse of mixed color; 66- Carries on; 67- Airline to Tel Aviv; 68- Shepherd; 69- ____-Aztec languages; 70- Permits;

DOWN: 1- Like ____ of bricks; 2- Lawless character; 3- Coup d' ____; 4- Disavowal; 5- Bhutan's continent; 6- Hawk; 7- Hungarian sheepdog; 8- Gasteyer of "Saturday Night Live"; 9- Regeneration of tissue; 10- Hamlet, e.g.; 11- Dog-powered snow vehicle; 13- Unacknowledged; 14- Singer LaBelle; 20- Smell or fragrance; 21- Tibetan beasts; 25- Size of type; 26- Razor sharpener; 27- Nellie Melba, for one; 28- Each partner; 29- Brief advertisement; 30- Combined; 31- Tampa Bay player, for short; 33- Australian bird; 35- Salamander; 37- Up and ____; 39- Krypton, for one; 42- Mimic; 44- Decoy; 47- Lend ____; 49- Sharon's land; 52- Constituent; 53- Moisturizer ingredient; 55- German Mrs; 56- 1996 Tony-winning musical; 57- Enthusiastic about; 58- Car bar; 59- Nipple; 60- Building wings; 62- Neither Rep. nor Dem.;



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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Amazing View Renovated Duplex apartment
HK\$4,200,000 817 ft² 2 2 2

PROPERTY LIST

- [Macau] One Oasis modern studio 2 1 1
691 ft² \$6,357,000 (ref: n/a)
- [Taipa] Chun Fok apartment 2 2 2
834 ft² \$8,998,000 (ref: 20036002)
- [Taipa] Houston Court 1 1 1
980 ft² \$10,500/mth (ref: 20091001)
- [Taipa] Villa da Taipa 3 2 2
1,450 ft² \$11,000/mth (ref: 20101002)

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EU, CHINA SIGNAL SUPPORT TO COMPLETE LONG-SOUGHT INVESTMENT DEAL

JONATHAN STEARNS

THE European Union and China indicated they could clinch an agreement within days to open the Chinese market further to foreign investors in what would be a major economic and political victory for both sides.

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Wenbin said yesterday that major progress had been made on the accord. And on Monday, EU ambassadors urged the European Commission to complete negotiations soon, according to an official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the talks are confidential. Another official said the commission could announce a draft deal imminently.

"Thanks to efforts from both sides, the talks have been continuously making major achievements recently," Wang said in Beijing. "We hope the deal can be achieved at an early date, which will provide a sound framework for future trade and bring benefit to people on both sides"

A successful conclusion of talks that began in 2013 on an EU-China investment accord would be a salvo against the "America First" challenge to the multilateral order by outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump.

For the EU, the deal would expand access to the Chinese market for foreign investors in industries ranging from cars to biotechnology. Furthermore, the pact would tackle underlying Chinese policies deemed by Europe and the U.S. to be market-distorting: industrial subsidies, state control of enterprises and forced technology transfers.



EU-CHINA RELATIONS

For China, the agreement promises to bolster the country's claim to be a mainstream geopolitical force and may limit risks resulting from a tougher EU stance on Chinese investments in Europe. It also would strengthen Beijing's longstanding call for the start of negotiations on a free-trade accord with the EU, which has insisted such a move depended on an investment deal being reached first.

The expected achievement highlights global cross currents after Trump shook the post-war system over the past four years by sidelining the World Trade Organization, starting a tariff war against China and hitting or threatening U.S. allies in

Europe with controversial import duties.

EU-China relations themselves have been strained this year. A recent Chinese law curbing Hong Kong's autonomy has sparked sharp criticism across Europe, while the EU has accused Beijing of spreading disinformation about the coronavirus and targeted China-based operators with the bloc's first-ever sanctions over cyber attacks.

And while the EU and China pledged in April 2019 to strike an investment accord by the end of 2020, the European side spent recent months downplaying the prospect of a deal this year on the grounds the Chinese government needed to make more concessions.

CLIMATE GOALS

Through all the ups and downs, the EU has criticized Trump's confrontational tactics toward China and urged western engagement with Beijing on everything from fighting climate change to overcoming the pandemic.

The bloc helped prod the Chinese government three months ago to commit to a more ambitious climate-protection goal and, when it came to the investment-pact talks, the EU ended up saying significant progress was made across the board.

The planned deal also signals the EU's determination to assert itself and focus on economic opportunities in Asia even while reaching out to U.S. President-elect Joe Biden to revive trans-

atlantic cooperation. China ranked as the EU's second-largest trading partner last year (behind the U.S.), with two-way goods commerce valued at more than 1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion) a day.

U.S. 'SNUB'

The new U.S. administration may not view the EU-China accord favorably, according to Frank Lavin, a former U.S. undersecretary of commerce for international trade, who urged Brussels to consult with Biden's team in order to better coordinate interactions with China.

"There might be some in Washington who view this as a bit of a gratuitous snub," Lavin said yesterday in an interview on Bloomberg Television. "I don't think it's helpful in the transatlantic relationship and I don't think it's helpful in trying to craft some kind of interaction with China that's a win-win. I think we want to be in a position where both Washington and Brussels are looking to coordinate their approach to China."

The final parts of the investment accord have been put into place in recent weeks in the shadow of higher-profile EU negotiations with the U.K. on a post-Brexit trade agreement and of a hard-fought deal among member countries on a new European budget and pandemic-recovery fund.

While the Brussels-based commission has negotiated the investment pact for the EU, the imminent breakthrough marks another result for Germany during the country's six-month presidency of the bloc ending Dec. 31. Berlin has long championed the goal, stressing the importance of more balanced and deeper European economic ties to China. **BLOOMBERG**

CORPORATE BITS

Philanthropy association raises USD9,900 for #helplebanon2020



The Associação Internacional de Filantropia (Macau) has raised a total of USD9,907.81 for its solidarity campaign titled "#helplebanon2020," which aims to support local NGO Achra-

fieh2020 following the explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4, which left 300,000 people homeless in the Lebanese capital city. The donations were collected and sent to Lebanon

from September to December 2020.

The contributions supported 400 families across three months with food, medical and social care provided by Achrafieh2020 and helped displaced families return to their homes, which had been damaged by the blast.

In a thank you note, Achrafieh2020 expressed its gratitude towards Macau by stating, "The initiative and the effort put to raise this fund is not to be underestimated given the current circumstances where people across the world are facing other challenges," as cited in a statement issued by the philanthropic association.

CEM collaborates with MUST turning low-voltage pillar boxes into artworks



CEM's "Electricity x Culture and Creativity - Pillar Box Revitalization with Art" exhibition was back in town recently, and for the first time the activity was organized in partnership with the Faculty of Humanities and Arts of the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST).

The activity aims revitalize outdoor pillar boxes and customer substations.

Under the supervision of the teachers, 13 stu-

dents have transformed low-voltage pillar boxes into artworks.

"These impressions of Macau interpreted from an artistic perspective will be scattered across the city as in the distribution of electricity to showcase and convey to the public Macau's image and visual information on a hexahedron," the firm said in a statement. CEM said that it will continue organizing various cultural and creative activities to support the Macau SAR Government's policy of promoting the development of local cultural and creative industries.

FOOTBALL

Frustration for Lampard as Chelsea held

CHELSEA 1, ASTON VILLA 1

NOT even another goal from talisman Olivier Giroud could give Chelsea coach Frank Lampard the change in fortune he needs, as his team drew 1-1 with Aston Villa in the Premier League yesterday [Macau time].

That makes it just one win in the past five games for Lampard, who recruited heavily during the summer transfer window to mount a title challenge yet still seems unsure what his best side is. Sixth-place Chelsea is six points behind leader Liverpool, having played one game more than the defending champion.

"This is our tough period at the moment, and we have to fight for it and we'll be stronger for it," Lampard said. "I thought we deserved to win the game, but we didn't and we continue to go through a difficult patch."

Giroud's goals late last season inspired Chelsea to secure a place in this season's Champions League and vindicated Lampard's decision to give the veteran Fran-



Chelsea's head coach Frank Lampard

ce forward a run of games.

After starting Tammy Abraham in the past two league outings, he went for Giroud this time and the Frenchman put Chelsea ahead with an excellent diving header from Ben Chilwell's cross in the 34th minute.

"The attitude of the team was good," Lampard said. "I saw some

really good signs tonight that I liked."

But Villa showed its resilient streak to level through Anwar El Ghazi in the 50th minute and create further chances, with midfielder John McGinn's superb 25-minute strike rattling the crossbar in the 69th minute.

Both sides are level on points

with tough games coming up.

Fifth-place Villa, which leads Chelsea on goal difference but has played two less games, travels to play Manchester United on Friday while Chelsea is set to host Manchester City on Sunday.

That game could yet be in doubt, however, because the match between Everton and City was called off amid City's growing coronavirus outbreak, which forced the team to close its training ground.

This allowed Leicester to jump above Everton and into second place on goal difference, after scraping a 1-1 draw at Crystal Palace thanks to a fine equalizer from Harvey Barnes in the 85th.

Leicester trailed 1-0 after Wilfried Zaha's 58th minute goal and then almost won the match with the last attack of the game at Selhurst Park.

But midfielder Ayoze Perez sliced a difficult chance over with prolific striker Jamie Vardy so close to reaching the ball before him.

"I thought after we conceded the goal, some of our play, the speed of our game, was really good," Leicester manager Bren-

dan Rodgers said. "We end up frustrated that we haven't won the game."

But Rodgers may rue starting with Vardy on the bench.

His replacement Kelechi Iheanacho had a penalty saved by goalkeeper Vicente Guaita in the 20th minute and then missed a free header from close range later in the game.

Those misses proved costly when Palace opened the scoring with Zaha starting and finishing a move which Leicester struggled to read despite only two Palace players being involved.

Zaha turned and accelerated in midfield and then played a pass down the right to Andros Townsend, whose deep cross to the back post was met by Zaha's crisp right-footed volley. His eighth Premier League goal doubled his tally from last season, and moved him just two behind his career-best tally of 10 two seasons ago.

Barnes also finished well and once again from outside the penalty area, just like he had done in a 2-2 home draw with Manchester United last Saturday. AP

AD



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OPINION

World Views

Cathy O'Neil, MDT/Bloomberg



COVID'S WORST SHOULD BE OVER BY VALENTINE'S DAY

Watching the U.S. Covid-19 data every day, as I tend to do, has been a grim ritual. In my neighborhood, in the places where my friends and family live and across the nation, the cases, hospitalizations and deaths just keep getting worse. So when will there be some relief?

I'm betting on Valentine's Day.

First the bad news. As happened around Thanksgiving, the Christmas holiday has brought a lull in the reporting of cases and deaths (as opposed to hospitalizations, which have steadily increased).

So, expect a surge of bad news this week and beyond. Assuming more than 200,000 new cases per day, and a mortality rate of 1.5% (an encouraging improvement over the 2% of a few months ago), an average of 3,000 people should die every day over the next month or so, with bad days getting closer to 4,000 deaths.

Now for the good news. People are getting vaccinated, and pretty soon their numbers will be significant enough to have a positive effect on the big picture.

Although it's hard to know exactly how vaccination will proceed, it's reasonable to guess that the number of inoculated people will increase more or less steadily until it reaches about two thirds of the population, or 200 million, at the end of July. As the number rises, it's likely to have a greater-than-linear effect on cases and deaths, for a couple reasons.

First, consider how the virus proliferates: Cases grow exponentially, as each new victim infects more than one other. But if inoculated people can't transmit the virus, the exponential growth will get turned around, as both the base of the exponent (the transmission rate) and the number of infected decline.

Second, the people at greatest risk of dying are getting vaccinated first. So the mortality rate — the number of deaths per case — will also decline, leading to a faster-than-linear decrease in deaths.

Given these trends, the numbers should start going down by mid-February — first cases, then hospitalizations, then deaths. By early June they should be very small. And assuming the vaccine works for at least 7 months, the numbers should stay down until the end of the year, by which time pharmaceutical companies should have a newer vaccine covering whatever mutations will have occurred.

As usual, there are caveats. Vaccine distribution could hit snags. People could refuse the shots (although the news here is looking pretty good), or be denied access. Vaccines could prove less effective than tests suggested. Inoculated people could prove able to transmit the virus. A mutation in the virus could boost the transmission rate. People could drop their guard too early.

All that said, I'm hopeful that my morning ritual will soon become a lot less dreadful.

CAMBODIA'S FIRST COMMERCIAL EXTRACTION OF OIL BEGINS

THE BUZZ

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said yesterday that the country's long-awaited first commercial extraction of oil has finally begun.

Speaking nationwide on state television, Hun Sen said the first drop of oil was extracted by KrisEnergy, a Singapore-based oil and gas company, from a well in offshore Block A in the Gulf of Thailand, west of the coastal Cambodian province of Preah Sihanouk.

"The start of production is a blessing for our Cambodia," Hun Sen said. "It is a first important step for Cambodia to boost its

capacity to reach its goal as an oil and gas production country." "COVID-19 disturbed but could not destroy our attempt to produce oil," he added.

The 3,000-square-kilometer Block A concession is estimated to hold as much as 30 million barrels of oil reserves. It was discovered in 2004, and initially held by oil giant Chevron, which sold its stake to KrisEnergy in 2014.

KrisEnergy, which was granted production rights by the government in 2017, holds a 95% share in the project, and the Cambodian government the remaining 5%.

OBITUARY

FAMED FRENCH DESIGNER PIERRE CARDIN DIES AT 98



In this 2016 file photo, French fashion designer Pierre Cardin acknowledges applause after a show to mark 70 years of his creations, in Paris

PIERRE Cardin, the French designer whose famous name embossed myriad consumer products after his iconic Space Age styles shot him into the fashion stratosphere in the 1960s, has died, the French Academy of Fine Arts said yesterday. He was 98.

A licensing maverick, Cardin's name embossed thousands of products from wristwatches to bed sheets, and in the brand's heyday in the 1970s and '80s, goods bearing his fancy cursive signature were sold at some 100,000 outlets worldwide.

That number dwindled dramatically in later years, as his products were increasingly regarded as cheaply made and his clothing — which, decades later, remained virtually unchanged from its 60s-era styles — felt almost laughably dated.

A savvy businessman, Cardin used the fabulous wealth that was the fruit of his empire to snap up top-notch properties in Paris, including the Belle Epoque restaurant Maxim's, which he also frequented.

The Fine Arts Academy announced his death in a tweet Tuesday. He had been among its illustrious

members since 1992. The academy did not give a cause of death or say where or when he died.

Along with fellow Frenchman Andre Courreges and Spain's Paco Rabanne, two other Paris-based designers known for their Space Age styles, Cardin revolutionized fashion starting in the early 1950s.

At a time when other Paris labels were obsessed with flattering the female form, Cardin's designs cast the wearer as a sort of glorified hanger, there to showcase the clothes' sharp shapes and graphic patterns. Destined neither for pragmatists nor for wallflowers, his designs were all about making a big entrance — sometimes very literally.

Gowns and bodysuits in fluorescent spandex were fitted with plastic hoops that stood away from the body at the waist, elbows, wrists and knees. Bubble dresses and capes enveloped their wearers in oversized spheres of fabric. Toques were shaped like flying saucers; bucket hats sheathed the models' entire head, with cutout windshields at the eyes.

"Fashion is always ridiculous, seen from before or after. But in the moment,

it's marvelous," Cardin said in a 1970 interview with French television.

Cardin was born on July 7, 1922, in a small town near Venice, Italy, to a modest, working-class family. When he was a child, the family moved to Saint Etienne in central France where Cardin was schooled and became an apprentice to a tailor at age 14.

Cardin would later embrace his status as a self-made man, saying in the same 1970 interview that going it alone "makes you see life in a much more real way and forces you to take decision and to be courageous."

"It's much more difficult to enter a dark woods alone than when you already know the way through," he said.

After moving to Paris, he worked as an assistant in the House of Paquin starting in 1945 and also helped design costumes for the likes of Jean Cocteau. He also was involved in creating the costumes for the director's 1946 hit, "Beauty and the Beast."

After working briefly with Elsa Schiaparelli and Christian Dior, Cardin opened his own house in the city's tony first district. AP



Bangladesh Seven navy ships carrying 1,804 Rohingya refugees arrived yesterday at an isolated island where they will be relocated despite concerns among human rights groups about their safety. Authorities at the island received 433 men, 523 women and 848 children. Authorities insist all were willing to be relocated and no pressure was placed on them.

US has started vaccinating its troops based in South Korea, as its Asian ally reported its highest daily COVID-19 fatalities amid surging cases in the country. The United States Forces Korea says in a statement it started inoculating military and civilian health-care workers, first responders and the USFK command team with the Moderna vaccine yesterday.

Belarus yesterday announced the start of mass coronavirus vaccinations with the Russian-developed Sputnik V shot, becoming the second country after Russia to roll out a vaccine that is still undergoing late-stage studies to ensure its safety and effectiveness.

Gaza Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired a salvo of rockets into the Mediterranean Sea yesterday as part of a self-styled military drill aimed at preparing for a possible war with Israel. Authorities restricted movement along the main coastal road and barred fishing for the duration of the exercises, which were to continue for a period of 24 hours and included the use of aerial drones.



Montenegro's new, pro-Serb authorities have amended a law on religious rights and property that was passed by a previous government but was strongly opposed by the Serbian Orthodox Church, which led months of protests against the bill. The parliament yesterday approved the legislative changes with 41 votes in the 81-member assembly. The revised law was supported by the ruling pro-Serb lawmakers while pro-Western opposition boycotted the session.