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IC PRESIDENT MOK IAN IAN REVEALED  
THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS AIMING  
TO DELIVER THE ANTICIPATED NEW  
CENTRAL LIBRARY IN 2025
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**China's** Foreign Ministry described outgoing U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday as a "doomsday clown" and said his designation of China as a perpetrator of genocide and crimes against humanity was merely "a piece of wastepaper." The allegations of abuses against Muslim minority groups in China's Xinjiang region are "outright sensational pseudo-propositions and a malicious farce," spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters.   
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**Japan** One person was killed and at least 17 injured in a massive pileup of at least 134 vehicles in blizzard conditions on a highway in northern Japan, officials said. About 200 people were stranded in the pileup, which forced the closure of the Tohoku Expressway in Miyagi prefecture, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said.



**Thai** officials yesterday filed criminal charges against a popular former politician, accusing him of defaming the monarchy by broadcasting criticism of government efforts to secure supplies of coronavirus vaccines. The action against Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit came just a day after Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha told reporters that that his government will prosecute anyone who shares false information about coronavirus vaccines.

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BIDEN SWORN IN  
TO UNDO TRUMP
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On his first day in office, President Joe Biden will take a series of executive actions - on the pandemic, climate, immigration - to undo the heart of Trump's agenda and reunite a deeply divided nation



MACAU TALENTS WANT TO RETURN HOME FOR A BETTER CAREER, RESEARCH SHOWS



THE URBAN MASTER PLAN STILL HAS SCOPE FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS: EXPERTS



**ACADEMIC  
SLAMS OPINIONS  
ON DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE  
CRIMINAL  
DEFINITION**

As opinions crop up following the attempt to make domestic violence charges semi-public crimes, social work academic and anti-domestic violence advocate Cecilia Ho described this as a "reversal." Ho said it is not the public crime definition that jeopardizes domestic harmony, but the violence. With the public crime definition, public powers can intervene when domestic violence takes place and provide support for victims. When the legislation was discussed 10 years ago, the government had plans to make domestic violence a semi-public crime, which would leave the authorities with no way to sue the suspect unless it was agreed to by the victims.

**PARLIAMENT TO  
VOTE ON MOTION  
FOR BANKRUPT  
AIRLINE LOANS  
HEARING**

Two lawmakers have called for a parliamentary hearing to investigate the decision-making process behind the issue of five separate loans that amounted to MOP212 million to VIVA Macau Airlines, which no longer exists. The airline's maiden flight was on December 16, 2006 and it ceased operation in 2010 due to its inability to settle fuel costs. The airline was a low-cost carrier and at any one time operated flights to 12 destinations at maximum. The motion requires a simple majority of attending members to pass.

# IC AIMS TO COMPLETE NEW CENTRAL LIBRARY BY 2025

ANTHONY LAM

**O**N the sidelines of yesterday's opening ceremony of the 20th Macao Fringe Festival, the president of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), Mok Ian Ian, revealed that the government is aiming to deliver the anticipated New Central Library in 2025.

According to the government's latest plan, the new integrated reading facility will be situated in the building of the former Hotel Estoril, just across Tap Seac Square from the current Central Library and the IC Headquarters.

Last year, the government unveiled four design plans developed by four internationally acclaimed architecture firms that were commissioned to design the New Central Library.

A public consultation process on the designs was conducted right after they were unveiled and concluded last year. The IC received more than 730 opinions from the general public.

In addition, the IC has also consulted with experts in library construction.

"Therefore, we are analyzing both public opinions and expert comments," Mok explained.

"We consider public opinions exceptionally heavily," she said, saying that the library is built for the people.

Mok disclosed that the public is mostly concerned with the design of the library, its nearby facilities, its functions and the size of its future collection. Some opinions focused on the overall budget for the construction.

The president said the bureau would try its best to maintain a strong pace for the analytical work. "Difficulties mainly fall previously on integrating public and expert comments," Mok explained. After



the IC's analysis, the project will move on to pinpointing a design plan and then the construction phase.

For the time being, the IC still considers the four plans fit for Macau. However, it will further con-

sider the costs and other factors in order to decide on a specific plan.

Covid-19 immigration restrictions will, Mok admitted, obstruct the design team that is chosen from traveling. However, the IC will use electronic means to com-

municate with the architecture firm and convey its comments and suggestions, if any, on the design.

Mok refrained from making promises about the possibility of opening a tender before the end of this year.

## FRINGE FESTIVAL OPENS WITH NEARLY SOLD OUT BOX OFFICE

**T**HE 20th Macao City Fringe Festival officially opened yesterday with an almost sold-out box office, despite the fact that some events were involuntarily cancelled.

It is noted on the festival's website that some rearrangements and cancellations would be taking place at the festival. "Performances in Body Traveller will be rearranged, and the dance workshop Combstrength Technique in Body Playground, held [today] at 8:30 p.m., will be cancelled," the notice reads.

The cancellation was made necessary because the four artists performing in the show had travelled to mid-risk areas in the preceding 14 days,

violating the health measures in force in Macau, meaning they are unable to skip quarantine upon arrival, according to the festival host, the Cultural Affairs Bureau's (IC) president, Mok Ian Ian.

Meanwhile, fewer than 10 shows still have unsold tickets as of press time.

The participatory exhibition "Art Exhibition for All," which also opened yesterday, provides a platform for the public to display their creative works from January 20 to 25 at Rotunda de Carlos da Maia, and from January 26 to 31 next to the Flower City Garden.

Those interested are welcome to submit artworks during the exhibition period. **AL**

# Galaxy announces winter bonus to team members

**G**ALAXY Entertainment Group (GEG) has announced that a one-off special payment equivalent to one month of salary will be awarded to the eligible team members at senior ma-

nager and below, covering around 98% of its team members.

The bonus will be made payable to eligible team members on February 10.

Eligible team mem-

bers who joined GEG between January 2 and October 3, 2020 will receive the bonus on a pro-rata basis.

Francis Lui, Vice Chairman of GEG remarked, "Our expansion

from 2021 and beyond will create tremendous opportunities to team members. Delivering this will have its challenges and difficulties at time, but working hard as a team and differentiating

ourselves will be rewarding."

Last summer, the gaming operator did not offer discretionary bonus to employees at all levels as it did annually in recent years. This was due

to the Covid-19 effect to the economy.

Earlier, the other four gaming operators including SJM, MGM, Wynn and Melco has announced similar bonuses to their employees. **LV**

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# Survey: Improved career prospects draw local talents back

HONEY TSANG

**E**NHANCED career development is the biggest motivation for Macau citizens living abroad to return to the city, according to a survey released yesterday by the Talents Development Committee.

The survey polled 314 Macau citizens living in overseas countries and regions from September 15 to October 13, 2020. All the respondents held a bachelor's degree or higher, with almost 10% having a doctoral degree, and 71.3% were living in Hong Kong, China or Taiwan during the interview period.

Overall, 63% of the interviewees reported intentions to return to Macau. This desire was found to be most pronounced among younger respondents.

Around 62%, or 196 out of 314, said that the key impetus for their return to Macau was that the city could provide them a better path for career development.

This was followed by around 53% of respondents saying they wanted to reunite with family in Macau or experience better living conditions.

Apart from those groups, approximately 38% said that they may return to the city as it is easier for them to secure jobs here.

MACAU PHOTO AGENCY



Over half of the respondents have professional qualifications or licenses recognized by other regions. Among them, education, finance and information certifications topped the list.

Meanwhile, the research also delved into the roadblocks that hindered would-be returnees from coming back to Macau.

Paradoxically, most young respondents stated that the biggest

hindrance is that it was hard for them to find suitable jobs and obtain a professional qualification in Macau.

For middle-aged respondents, detractors included a lack of growth for their profession, lowered salary, reduced quality of the living environment and the inability to apply overseas for residency and schools for their family members and children.

As a result, the committee suggested that the government roll out incentives to attract talents to return, such as establishing online applications for residence permits and local schools for the families of returnees.

They also recommended that the authorities increase the city's standards for professional qualifications in a bid to attract more talents from abroad.

## EIGHT PUBLIC CAR PARKS TO UNDERGO REFURBISHMENTS

The SAR government has inked an agreement with a parking management company stipulating that the refinement projects for the city's eight public car parks shall be completed by 2023. The enhancements comprise of refurbishments for the floor, walls and ceiling; strengthening the video surveillance system; installing more contactless payment machines and establishing a system for recognizing car plates.

## REGISTRATIONS FOR 2021 ELECTIONS INCREASE

The number of registered individual voters for the upcoming legislative election increased by 6% to 325,180. Official data shows that there were 308,020 registered voters during the 2017 election. In 2019, the number of residents who applied to become registered voters was 2,302. However, last year the number jumped to 15,903. 60% of the new voters were residents under the age of 39 years old.

# Urban Master Plan still has holes to fill, experts say

HONEY TSANG

**T**HE current Urban Master Plan for the period of 2020-2040 still has scope for further improvement to make Macau more liveable, convenient and accessible for residents and tourists, according to industry experts speaking at a business event yesterday.

"To me, the biggest concern is that [the Master Plan] didn't really analyze the existing problems of Macau," Christine Choi Wan Sun, the president of the Board of Directors of the Architects Association of Macau and co-founder of JWCC Architecture, stated at a panel discussion titled "32.9sq kms: The Challenges Facing Macau's Urban Master Plan."

One of the shortcomings of the plan, according to the experts, is that it only considers Macau's residents but not the daily floating population which includes tourists and cross-border workers,



who have far exceeded the numbers of the local population.

The failure to address the floating population will add extra pressure to this "small and populated" city – especially on the beleaguered public transportation system.

Rui Leão, the president of the International Council of Portuguese Speaking Architects, echoed this idea, adding that, "In the long term,

the floating population has an impact on overall transportation."

Official data shows that Macau had a population density of 20,400 people per square kilometer in 2019, which catapulted it to the status of one of the world's most populated regions.

The high population and influx of daily visitors have been putting strain on the city's transportation system.

To thin out the heavy traffic, Manuel Wu, a member of the Macau SAR Heritage Committee, suggests that the government think outside the box and explore tapping into water resources to develop water transportation.

Wu cited the example of using water transportation to send people from the Inner Harbor in the Macau Peninsula to Coloane to help

decrease road traffic.

Choi emphasized that it is crucial for the government to integrate all transportation links in the future so people can get around every part of the city with ease.

According to the Master Plan, the government is set to segment the entire city into 18 numbered zones, which is another shortcoming of the urban planning project in Choi's view.

This method of segmentation makes "no reference to the previous history of Macau," and will cause Macau's cultural identity to lose its spirit, she expressed.

Considering limited amount of space in the city, Choi urged the government to "go beyond the traditional methods and explore different ideas" to create a more sustainable and accessible city.

"Sometimes we reclaim land, but that's not the only solution. We should tap into water resources more, such

as water transportation and floating architecture," Choi added.

The Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DS-SOPT) promulgated the draft of the Urban Master Plan in September 2020, followed by a period of public consultation from September to November that year.

The Master Plan outlined 13 strategic goals, including greater integration into the Greater Bay Area, the development of more commercial districts, greater use of public transportation, and molding Macau, with its total land area of 36.8 square kilometers, into a more habitable city for the projected population of 808,000 by 2040.

According to official information, a report detailing the results of the public consultation is in the pipeline and will be published soon.

The talk was hosted by the British Chamber of Commerce in Macao at MGM Cotai.



# MIGRANTS TO FACE FINANCIAL HARDSHIP IF THEY STAY PUT IN TOWN

HONEY TSANG

It will be expensive for foreign workers to stay in Macau during the Spring Festival as the city's cost of living and cost of accommodation will be higher, local associations voiced the opinion on a TDM radio program Macau Forum yesterday.

Some in Macau society have suggested that local enterprises offer accommodation subsidies as an impetus for their employees to stay in town during the festival.

However, the founder of the Macau Businesswomen Association, Kong Mei Fan, who was on the program, said that this will impose an extra burden upon local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who have been hit hard by the economic fallout of Covid-19 as they already have a fixed payroll to process during Lunar New Year.

The chairman of the Macau Overseas Worker Employment Agency Association, Ao Ieong Kuong Kao, said there conditions are unfavourable for foreign workers staying in

Macau during Chinese New Year. There will be no place for them to sleep if they stay, he said.

Some in the community proposed that the government roll out financial incentives to keep the blue cardholders in the city during the festival.

However, others opposed the idea, saying there is no guarantee that foreign workers will stay in Macau even they are given fiscal stimulus, as it is impossible to track and monitor their whereabouts.

Last week, the government appealed to both locals and mainland workers to avoid unnecessary travel and spend the festival in Macau in order to minimize the risk of infection.

The announcement was made two days after China reported its first three-digit case count on January 10, the highest daily Covid-19 case count for the last five months.

Some of China's municipal governments, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Anhui, have also urged residents to spend the Lunar New Year in their towns and to avoid traveling.

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## TOURIST ARRIVALS

# Gradual rise in mainland visitors

LYNZY VALLES

The number of December tourist arrivals grew 3.6% month-to-month to 659,407, however this data still represents a year-on-year decline of 78.6%, the Statistics and Census Service said in a statement yesterday.

According to its data, the number of visitor arrivals stood at more than 5.89 million in 2020, a decline of 85% year-on-year. This was slightly less than the figures in the data recently published by the Public Security Force.

Covid-19 has brought

global tourism to a standstill, crippling the economy of the SAR due to its heavy reliance upon the sector.

Meanwhile, according to the official data, the 2020 arrivals' length of stay rose slightly by 0.3 days year-on-year to 1.5 days, while the duration for overnight visitors rose by 0.3 days to 2.5 days.

There were 390,300 overnight and 269,107 same-day visitors in total.

Mainland China has been the city's main source of visitors after the government announced its entry ban on tourist arrivals from outside Greater China.

However, the city still recorded an 83% year-on-year decrease last year in mainland tourist numbers to 4,754,239 – the majority of which came prior to the pandemic.

Meanwhile, in December, the number of mainland visitors fell by 71% year-on-year to 606,884, 261,297 of whom travelled under the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS).

This decrease was also mainly attributed to the Covid-19 restrictions put forth by both the SAR and the central government.

As of now, the central government is still not issuing group visas to its citizens despite calls from the city's tourism authorities. However, local officials note that this request is still under negotiation.

Despite the group visas not being issued, Macau's number-one source market has gradually been able to apply for IVS since the SAR opened its borders in August to these residents in a bid to recuperate tourist arrivals.

Further, December visitors from the nine Pearl River Delta cities in the Greater Bay Area totalled 327,611, 138,773 (42.4% of the total) of whom came from Zhuhai. Meanwhile, there were 46,786 visitors from Hong Kong and 5,685 from Taiwan.

## MARKET VENDORS EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT SIGNING FUTURE CONTRACTS

ANTHONY LAM

Current wet market vendors are worried that they may fall into a legal grey area, if not a trap, when they are required to sign leasing contracts with the government pending the passing of a bill.

The current bill being discussed at the Legislative Assembly's First Standing Committee shall, if passed, govern the particulars concerning wet market vending stalls. The core of the bill goes to the requirement for contract signing upon leasing and public bidding for stalls.

The bill also proposes requiring stall tenants to operate in-person for no fewer than 240 days per year. Considering many current stalls are operated by married couples, with one person handling the sales and the other running errands, vendors are worried that they will fall into a trap and be eligible for punishment by the government.

In addition, the government has proposed installing surveillance ca-

FALAQ LAZUARDI



meras to record the operational status of stalls. Vendors have expressed their objections to the government, which has agreed to pursue other options.

Members of the committee pointed out that the definitions in the bill are vague. It proposes that the markets be a place for selling "multifaceted products and services," prompting members to clarify whether fresh fish, meat and vegetables fall within the definitions.

Speaking after the session of the First Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, the president of the committee, lawmaker Ho Ion

Sang, remarked, "Of course, the legal stipulations make a framework only."

He emphasized, "The terms and clauses in future contracts shall be relatively rich and detailed."

The committee also reminded the government to align the legal stipulations with future contract terms and clauses.

In addition, Ho cited the Municipal Affairs Bureau as saying that they have no intention to transform wet markets into integrated communal facilities. However, if conditions allow, the bureau will bring in livelihood services such as key copying and shoe fixing services.



# HKBU to host the withdrawn World Press Photo 2020 in March

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Institute for Journalism and Society at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) will be hosting the World Press Photo 2020 exhibition in Hong Kong this March, the World Press Photo Foundation announced yesterday.

The exhibition was subject to difficulties when it was suddenly ended without any notice or justification last October after being held in Macau for just one week, 18 days earlier than expected.

The grounds of the shutdown were allegedly political, as a series of awarded photos depicting the scenes of social unrest, protests, and confrontation between Hong Kong citizens and the authorities were on display.

When the exhibition was launched in Macau, the region was the only city in the Chinese territory to host it.

Speculation that Macau would not display the "sensitive" images at the World Press Photo event in the SAR were proven to be incorrect, with the organizers following

RENATO MARQUES



the international standards for the worldwide display of photography.

Senior Lecturer and Director of International Journalism at the Journalism Department of HKBU, Robin Ewing, confirmed to the Times that the exhibition, which is to be hosted at the Koo Ming Kown Exhibition Gallery from March 1 to March 21 this year, will not undergo any changes and will feature all the winning photo-

journalism works.

"The Institute for Journalism and Society, part of the Journalism Department at Hong Kong Baptist University is hosting the World Press Photo Exhibition 2020 in March. We have made no adjustments to the exhibition, and it will include all of the winning photos as well as the winning photo interactive [display]," Ewing replied to the Times, adding, "We are aware of

the early closure of the exhibit in Macau, but we trust that Hong Kong's law guaranteeing freedom of the press will continue to be respected."

In a previous statement to the Times, the World Press Photo Foundation, which is responsible for the worldwide contest and exhibitions, said they were not excluding the possibility of other Chinese cities joining the exhibition program at a later stage – something which has now been confirmed with the exhibition being held in Hong Kong.

"Regarding exhibitions in China, we are in talks with exhibition partners and hope to confirm new locations soon," the foundation said last year.

Several Chinese cities and topics involving the country and its people were involved in the 2020 exhibition.

According to data from the organizers, China is one of the top three countries of origin from which photographers submit their work to the annual contest, making it an important part of the photojournalism scene.

## PHILIPPINE CONSULATE'S DEAPERA CONCLUDES DUTY

The Philippine Consulate General Lilybeth Deapera has concluded her tour of duty in the SAR. Deapera was head of post for six years until January 15. "Consul General Deapera made the welfare of the Filipinos in Macau her top priority," the statement from the consulate read. In September 2016, after a series of dialogues with the Filipino community, the consulate provided regular services from Sunday to Thursday every week to accommodate clients whose days off fall on a Sunday.

## OM TO PRESENT VALENTINE'S DAY CONCERT

The Macao Orchestra (OM) will present the "Valentine's Day Concert – Love in Spring" at 8 p.m. on February 26 at the Macao Cultural Centre Grand Auditorium. The concert will be conducted by Jing Huan, Principal Conductor of the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra, who will join with the OM and young violinist Mengla Huang in presenting Korngold's famous Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35.

AD



**britcham**  
The Growth of the Chinese Vineyard

Join our first Brews & Buzz evening in 2021 with **Karen Gaignon, Sommelier and Senior Area Sales Manager at EMW Fine Wines** as she shares the buzz of China's evolving wine industry and introduces the tasting of selected wines from Ningxia and Xinjiang Province. Thereafter, we will continue with a free flow selection of drinks and bites.

EMW Fine Wines is the distributor for The Legacy Peak Wines and Tiansai Wines. The vineyard of the former is located in the beautiful scenic area of the Xixia King Tombs (Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region) and is one of very few vineyards in China with vines over 18 years old. Tiansai Wines has the utmost modern facility located at the foot of Tianshan Mountain in the Gobi Desert and has received special honour as China's Model Site for Grape Cultivation and Fermentation.

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**Venue: Davidoff Room - Macallan Bar, Galaxy Macao, 2/F**  
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1900: Presentation, Wine Tasting, Brews & Buzz  
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**America's New President: A Turning Point for US/China Relations?**  
**Speaker: Prof Priscilla Roberts, Associate Professor, City University of Macau**

**FMCC Breakfast Meeting**  
**Wednesday, 27 January 2021**



**Introduction:**  
When President Donald Trump took office, he promised a new era of U.S. toughness towards China, focusing especially on trade. During the turbulent 2020 election, as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold and China became increasingly assertive, Democrats and Republicans found little common ground, but both parties largely agreed against a wide range of Chinese policies. Many commentators have suggested that the Trade War is far from over. Will the forthcoming Biden presidency serve to moderate or escalate Sino-US antagonism? To answer this question, U.S. Politics and foreign affairs expert, Prof. Priscilla Roberts, will share her analysis on what could be the most unprecedented and critical point in history.

**Date: Wednesday, 27 January, 2021**  
**Time: 9:00a.m. - 10:30a.m. (Reception: 8:45am)**  
**Venue: Sofitel Macau at Ponte 16**  
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# GOV'T LABELS POMPEO 'DOOMSDAY CLOWN' OVER GENOCIDE CLAIMS

**C**HINA'S Foreign Ministry described outgoing U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday as a "doomsday clown" and said his designation of China as a perpetrator of genocide and crimes against humanity was merely "a piece of wastepaper."

The allegations of abuses against Muslim minority groups in China's Xinjiang region are "outright sensational pseudo-propositions and a malicious farce concocted by individual anti-China and anti-Communist forces represented by Pompeo," spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters at a daily briefing.

"In our view, Pompeo's so-called designation is a piece of wastepaper. This American politician, who is notorious for lying and deceiving, is turning himself into a doomsday clown and joke of the century with his last madness and lies of the century," Hau said.

Pompeo's announcement earlier doesn't require any immediate actions, although the U.S. must take the designation into account in formulating policy toward Chi-



Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying

na. China says its policies in Xinjiang aim only to promote economic growth and social stability.

The U.S. has previously spoken out and taken action on Xinjiang, implementing a range of

sanctions against senior Chinese Communist Party leaders and state-run enterprises that fund repressive policies in the vast, resource-rich region. Last week, the Trump administration announ-

ced it would halt imports of cotton and tomatoes from Xinjiang, with Customs and Border Protection officials saying they would block products from there suspected of being produced with forced labor.

Many of the Chinese officials accused of having taken part in repression are already under U.S. sanctions. The "genocide" designation means new measures will be easier to impose.

The move is the latest in a series of steps the outgoing Trump administration has taken to ramp up pressure on China over issues from human rights and the coronavirus pandemic to Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong and the South China Sea. China has responded with its own sanctions and tough rhetoric.

China has imprisoned more than 1 million people, including Uighurs and other mostly Muslim ethnic groups, in a vast network of prison-like political indoctrination camps, according to U.S. officials and human rights groups. People have been subjected to torture, sterilization and political

indoctrination in addition to forced labor as part of an assimilation campaign in a region whose inhabitants are ethnically and culturally distinct from the Han Chinese majority.

The Associated Press reported on widespread forced birth control among the Uighurs last year, including the mass sterilization of Muslim women, even while family planning restrictions are loosened on members of China's dominant Han ethnic group.

China has denied all the charges, but Uighur forced labor has been linked by reporting by the AP to various products imported to the U.S., including clothing and electronic goods such as cameras and computer monitors.

James Leibold, a specialist in Chinese ethnic policy at La Trobe in Melbourne, Australia, said international pressure appears to have had some effect on Chinese policies in Xinjiang, particularly in prompting the government to release information about the camps and possibly reducing mass detentions.

"So hopefully we'll see a continued continuity with regards to the new (Joe Biden) administration on holding China to account," Leibold said in an interview. **MDT/AP**

## COVID-19

### BEIJING RECORDS NEW CASES, DEFENDS RESPONSE

**B**EIJING, recorded seven more coronavirus cases yesterday amid a lingering outbreak in the country's north.

Another 46 were recorded in Jilin province, 16 in Heilongjiang on the border with Russia, and 19 in Hebei, the province surrounding Beijing.

China has now recorded a total of 88,557 cases since the virus was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, with 4,635 deaths.

China is hoping to vaccinate 50 million people against the virus by mid-February and is also releasing schools early and telling citizens to stay put during the Lunar New Year travel rush that begins in coming days.

A panel of experts commissioned by the World Health Organization criticized China and other countries this week for not moving to stem the initial outbreak of the coronavirus earlier, prompting Beijing to concede it could

have done better but also to defend its response.

"As the first country to sound the global alarm against the epidemic, China made immediate and decisive decisions and insisted on timely detection, reporting, isolation, and treatment despite incomprehensive information at the time. We have gained time to fight the epidemic and reduce infections and deaths," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters on Tuesday.

"We are firmly opposed to politicizing issues related to virus tracing, as this will not help the international community to unite and cooperate in the fight against the pandemic," Hua said.

A team of experts from WHO are quarantined in Wuhan ahead of beginning field visits aiming to shed light on the origins of the virus that is thought to have jumped to humans from animals, possibly bats. **MDT/AP**

### WASHINGTON STATE NIXES METHANOL PLANT MEANT TO SUPPLY CHINA

**O**FFICIALS in Washington state denied a key permit for a large proposed methanol plant, saying the project that aims to send the chemical to China to be used in everything from fabrics and contact lenses to iPhones and medical equipment would pump out too much pollution.

A significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions and inconsistencies with the Shoreline Management Act were the main reasons the permit was rejected for the project planned on the Columbia River, the state Department of Ecology said in a news release.

The \$2 billion Northwest Innovation Works plant proposed in Kalama would take natural gas from Canada and convert it into methanol. It would then be shipped to China to make olefins — compounds used in many everyday products.

An environmental analysis done by the state agency found that the facility would be one of the largest sources of carbon pollution in Washington, emitting nearly 1 million metric tons a year within the

state, and millions of tons more from extracting natural gas, shipping the product to Asia and final uses of the methanol, officials said.

"I believe we were left with no other choice than to deny the permit for the Kalama project," Ecology Director Laura Watson said in a written statement. "The known and verifiable emissions from the facility would be extremely large and their effects on Washington's environment would be significant and detrimental."

The Department of Ecology last year had demanded additional environmental analysis, saying after five years of planning, its backers had failed to provide enough information about the greenhouse gas emissions and how they would be offset.

The company has 21 days to appeal the permit decision.

"While we are disappointed by this ruling and evaluating our options for an immediate appeal, we feel confident that science and reason will prevail," Kent Caputo, attorney for Northwest Innovation Works, said in a news release.

The company is backed by the Chinese government and has said the project will create 1,000 jobs and generate up to \$40 million in annual tax revenue. The company also has said it would offset any emissions produced directly or indirectly in Washington state.

"We volunteered to set mitigation standards that will make Washington state the national leader," Northwest Innovation Works CEO Simon Zhang said in the news release. "We want to create a model project for Kalama, the state, and the nation."

Conservation groups, including Columbia Riverkeeper, the Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity, have been steadfast in their opposition.

"We can't keep pretending these dirty fossil fuel projects don't jeopardize our continued existence by accelerating the climate crisis and destroying essential habitat," Jared Margolis, an attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a news release. "Thankfully, Washington has stepped up and rejected this monstrosity." **AP**





INAUGURATION DAY

# Facing crush of crises, Biden takes helm as US president

**J**OE Biden swear the oath of office to become the 46th president of the United States, taking the helm of a deeply divided nation and inheriting a confluence of crises arguably greater than any faced by his predecessors.

The very ceremony in which presidential power is transferred, a hallowed American democratic tradition, will serve as a jarring reminder of the challenges Biden faces: The inauguration unfolds at a U.S. Capitol battered by an insurrectionist siege just two weeks ago, encircled by security forces evocative of those in a war zone, and devoid of crowds because of the threat of the coronavirus pandemic.

Stay home, Americans were exhorted, to prevent further spread of a surging virus that has claimed more than 400,000 lives in the United States. Biden will look out over a capital city dotted with empty storefronts that attest to the pandemic's deep economic toll and where summer protests laid bare the nation's renewed reckoning on racial injustice.

He will not be applauded — or likely even acknowledged — by his predecessor.

Flouting tradition, Donald Trump departed Washington yesterday ahead of the inauguration rather than accompany his successor to the Capitol. Trump, awaiting his second impeachment trial, stoked grievance among his supporters with the lie that Biden's win was illegitimate.

Biden, in his third run for the presidency, staked his candidacy less on any distinctive political ideology than on galvanizing a broad coalition of voters around the notion that Trump posed an existential threat to American democracy. On his first day, Biden will take a series of executive actions — on the pandemic, climate, immigration and more — to undo the heart of Trump's agenda. The Democrat takes office with the bonds of the republic strained and the nation reeling from challenges that rival those faced by Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"Biden will face a series of urgent, burning crises like we have not seen before, and they all have to be solved at once. It is very hard to find a parallel in history," said presidential historian Michael Beschloss. "I think we have been through a near-death experience as a democracy. Americans who will watch the new president be sworn in are now acutely aware of how fragile our democracy is and

AP PHOTO



President-elect Joe Biden is joined by his wife, Jill Biden, as they celebrate Mass at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle during Inauguration Day ceremonies

how much it needs to be protected."

Biden will come to office with a well of empathy and resolve born by personal tragedy as well as a depth of experience forged from more than four decades in Washington. At age 78, he will be the oldest president inaugurated.

More history will be made at his side, as Kamala Harris becomes the first woman to be vice president. The former U.S. senator from California is also the first Black person and the first person of South Asian descent elected to the vice presidency and will become the highest-ranking woman ever to serve in government.

The two sworn in during an

inauguration ceremony with few parallels in history.

Tens of thousands of troops were deployed on the streets to provide security precisely two weeks after a violent mob of Trump supporters, incited by the Republican president, stormed the Capitol in an attempt to prevent the certification of Biden's victory.

The tense atmosphere evoked the 1861 inauguration of Lincoln, who was secretly transported to Washington to avoid assassins on the eve of the Civil War, or Roosevelt's inaugural in 1945, when he opted for a small, secure ceremony at the White House in the waning months of World War II.

Despite security warnings, Biden declined to move the ceremony indoors and instead will address a small, socially distant crowd on the West Front of the Capitol. Some of the traditional trappings of the quadrennial ceremony will remain.

The day began with a reach across the aisle after four years of bitter partisan battles under Trump. At Biden's invitation, Mitch McConnell and Kevin McCarthy, the Republican leaders of the Senate and House, joined him at a morning Mass, along with Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leaders. The most powerful figures in Washington, along with their

spouses, bowed their heads in prayer in the socially distanced service just a few blocks from the White House.

Once at the Capitol, Biden will be administered the oath by Chief Justice John Roberts; Harris will be sworn in by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina member of the Supreme Court. The theme of Biden's approximately 30-minute speech was "America United" — a call to set aside differences during a moment of national trial.

Biden oversaw a "Pass in Review," a military tradition that honors the peaceful transfer of power to a new commander in chief. Then, Biden, Harris and their spouses were joined by a bipartisan trio of former presidents — Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama — to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

Joe Biden planned a 10-day blitz of executive orders on matters that don't require congressional approval — a mix of substantive and symbolic steps to unwind the Trump years. Among the planned steps: rescinding travel restrictions on people from several predominantly Muslim countries; rejoining the Paris climate accord; issuing a mask mandate for those on federal property; and ordering agencies to figure out how to reunite children separated from their families after crossing the border.

The difficulties he faces are immense, to be mentioned in the same breath as Roosevelt taking office during the Great Depression or Obama, under whom Biden served eight years as vice president, during the economic collapse. **MDT/AP**

## NETWORKS STICK WITH TRUMP IN HIS UNUSUAL GOODBYE SPEECH

**A**T the end of Donald Trump's presidency, television networks left the mute button unused.

They covered Trump's farewell address at Joint Base Andrews, the opening event of a most unusual inauguration day, from beginning to end without pulling away — a possibility that MSNBC's Joe Scarborough raised as the outgoing president began to talk.

"We're going to dip into this for as long as the president manages to tell the truth," Scarborough said.

His network, along with ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox News and NBC, did not pull away. Trump bragged about his election vote totals but dropped the persistent claim that he had really won. He wished the new administration well but did not mention successor Joe Biden by name.

It was "a very gracious speech," Fox News Channel's Martha MacCallum said. CNN's Wolf Blitzer, meanwhile, called it "totally inappropriate" and said it was "pretty repulsive" that Trump didn't cite Biden.

There will be many jarring media juxtapositions on the day of ceremony. Air Force One, carrying Trump to Florida without him attending the inauguration, taxied on the runway

AP PHOTO



as the loudspeaker played "My Way." Television cameras then switched to Biden and his family at church.

The inauguration was to come with the ba-

ckdrop of a small audience and extraordinary security, due both to the coronavirus pandemic and the Capitol riot by Trump supporters two weeks earlier.

Setting up the day, Americans with different points of view had clear choices of media outlets that would reflect how they felt.

"There are so many people who voted for Trump that have a hole in their heart this morning," said "Fox & Friends" host Ainsley Earhardt. Her Fox News colleague Dana Perino, while noting that Biden had received more votes, said she hoped the outgoing Trump administration "can feel some measure of success and hold their heads high."

The New York Times marked Trump's exit with an exhaustive project documenting every person or entity he had insulted on Twitter before his account's suspension on Jan. 8. The Washington Post updated its count of lies and misstatements by Trump: 30,534 heading into his last day as president.

Over on CNN, Dana Bash watched Trump leave the White House for the final time as president and walk to the Marine One helicopter.

"He looks small," she said. "He just looks like a small man." **MDT/AP**



LAST DAY AT THE WHITE HOUSE

# Trump pardons ex-strategist Steve Bannon, dozens of others



Trump's former chief strategist, Steve Bannon

JONATHAN LEMIRE,  
WASHINGTON

**P**RESIDENT Donald Trump pardoned former chief strategist Steve Bannon as part of a flurry of clemency action in the final hours of his White House term that benefited more than 140 people, including rap performers, ex-members of Congress and other allies of him and his family.

The last-minute clemency, announced yesterday, follows separate waves of pardons over the past month for Trump associates convicted in the FBI's Russia investigation as well as for the father of his son-in-law. Taken together, the actions underscore the president's willingness, all the way through his four years in the White House, to flex his constitutional powers in ways that defy convention and explicitly aid his friends and supporters.

To be sure, the latest list was heavily populated by more conventional candidates whose cases had been championed by criminal justice activists. One man who has spent nearly 24 years in prison on drug and weapons charges but had shown exemplary behavior behind bars had his sentence commuted, as did a former Marine sentenced in 2000 in connection with a cocaine conviction.

But the names of prominent Trump allies nonetheless stood out.

Besides Bannon, other pardon recipients included Elliott Broidy, a Republican fundraiser who pleaded guilty last fall in a scheme to lobby the Trump administration to drop an investigation into the looting of a Malaysian wealth fund, and Ken Kurson, a friend of Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner who was charged last October with cyberstalking during a heated divorce.

Bannon's pardon was especially notable given that the prosecution was still in its early stages and any trial was months away. Whereas pardon recipients are conventionally thought of as defendants who have faced justice, often by having served at least some prison time, the pardon nullifies the prosecution and effectively eliminates any prospect for punishment.

"Steve Bannon is getting a pardon from Trump after defrauding Trump's own supporters into paying for a wall that Trump promised Mexico would pay for," Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff said on Twitter. "And if that all sounds crazy, that's because it is. Thank God we have only 12 more hours of this den of thieves."

And while other presidents have issued controversial pardons at the ends of their administration, perhaps no commander in chief has so enjoyed using the clemency authority to benefit not only friends and acquaintances but also ce-

lebrity defendants and those championed by allies.

Yesterday's list includes its share of high-profile defendants. Among them were rappers Lil Wayne and Kodak Black, both convicted in Florida on weapons charges. Wayne, whose real name is Dwayne Michael Carter, has frequently expressed support for Trump and recently met with the president on criminal justice issues. Others on the list included Death Row Records co-founder Michael Harris and New York art dealer and collector Hillel Nahmad.

Other pardon recipients include former Rep. Rick Renzi, an Arizona Republican who served three years for corruption, money laundering and other charges, and former Rep. Duke Cunningham of California, who was convicted of accepting \$2.4 million in bribes from defense contractors. Cunningham, who was released from prison in 2013, received a conditional pardon.

Trump also commuted the prison sentence of former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, who has served about seven years behind bars for a racketeering and bribery scheme.

Bannon has been charged with duping thousands of donors who believed their money would be used to fulfill Trump's chief campaign promise to build a wall along the southern border. Instead, he allegedly di-

verted over a million dollars, paying a salary to one campaign official and personal expenses for himself.

Bannon did not respond to questions.

Trump has already pardoned a slew of longtime associates and supporters, including his former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort; Charles Kushner, the father of his son-in-law; his longtime friend and adviser Roger Stone; and his former national security adviser Michael Flynn.

A voice of nationalist, outsider conservatism, Bannon — who served in the Navy and worked at Goldman Sachs and as a Hollywood producer before turning to politics — led the conservative Breitbart News before being tapped to serve as chief executive officer of Trump's 2016 campaign in its critical final months.

He later served as chief strategist to the president during the turbulent early days of Trump's administration and was at the forefront of many of its most contentious policies, including its travel ban on several majority-Muslim countries.

But Bannon, who clashed with other top advisers, was pushed out after less than a year. And his split with Trump deepened after he was quoted in a 2018 book making critical remarks about some of Trump's adult children. Bannon apologized and soon stepped down as chairman of Breitbart. He and Trump have recently reconciled.

In August, he was pulled from a luxury yacht off the coast of Connecticut and brought before a judge in Manhattan, where he pleaded not guilty. When he emerged from the courthouse, Bannon tore off his mask, smiled and waved to news cameras. As he went to a waiting vehicle, he shouted, "This entire fiasco is to stop people who want to build the wall."

The organizers of the "We Build The Wall" group portrayed themselves as eager to help the president build a "big beautiful" barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, as he promised during the 2016 campaign. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history



### 1950 ACCLAIMED AUTHOR GEORGE ORWELL DIES



The writer, George Orwell, has died after a three-year battle against tuberculosis.

Until the last, news had been positive and it was hoped Mr Orwell was improving.

On Friday morning he had a long talk with a friend about his plans for the future.

However, a few hours later he suffered a fatal haemorrhage in a London hospital.

But illness had not dimmed George Orwell's enthusiasm for writing.

His last novel, 1984, published last summer was written in between periods spent in hospital.

The controversial book - like Animal Farm - was widely viewed as an attack on the Communist system.

However, it brought George Orwell widespread critical acclaim including the award of £357 by the influential Partisan Review for the year's most significant contribution to literature.

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in June 1903 into a family of relatively prosperous civil servants working in India on behalf of the British Empire.

He is said to have assumed his pseudonym, inspired by the River Orwell, near his parent's house in Suffolk, to spare his family embarrassment.

Orwell's early writings often drew on his own experiences of poverty which were in marked contrast to his privileged background.

He spent time living as a tramp in the East End of London and as a dishwasher in Paris - events which inspired his first book in 1933, Down and Out in London and Paris.

It was followed in 1934 by his first novel, Burmese Days.

And in 1938 after returning wounded after fighting for the socialists in the Spanish Civil War he wrote Homage to Catalonia.

But it was only five years ago that the book which made him world-famous, Animal Farm, appeared.

In reaction to the sudden glare of fame, Orwell moved to the island of Jura, off the coast of Scotland.

The move aggravated his tuberculosis which had developed after his return from Spain.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

George Orwell's work has remained popular over the years, especially Animal Farm and 1984.

He began writing 1984 after resigning from the BBC World Service in September 1943 where he had been employed writing and producing news for India.

It was his increasing frustration with the Ministry of Information, which censored the news during World War II, which led to his resignation and subsequently became the central theme of 1984.

Words and phrases from the novel have passed into everyday usage, particularly "Big Brother".

The book was also made into a film released in 1984.

George Orwell's name itself has become an adjective - "Orwellian" - meaning an oppressive system.

1984 and Animal Farm frequently appear in lists of the world's best-ever selling novels.



**YOUR STARS**



**ARIES**

**Mar. 21-Apr. 19**

Your sensitive, affectionate nature will capture the heart of anyone you are attracted to. Don't start a dispute unless you're prepared to accept irreversible results. Don't take on too much of a financial burden.



**TAURUS**

**Apr. 20-May. 20**

You can get ahead if you present your ideas to superiors. It might be time to pick up the slack and do your share. Emotional matters may not be easy for you to handle.



**GEMINI**

**May. 21-Jun. 21**

You will do well if you mingle with the brass today. You can ask for favors and get sound advice from close friends or relatives. It won't take much to upset your lover.



**CANCER**

**Jun. 22-Jul. 22**

Find out more, if you want to start your own business. Don't spend more than is necessary on travel or friends. Don't hesitate to voice your opinions at a group meeting; however, keep your thoughts to yourself at home.



**LEO**

**Jul. 23-Aug. 22**

You may want to stay in the background today. This will not be the day to have minor surgery. You can't make things better if you don't know what to fix. Don't push your luck.



**VIRGO**

**Aug. 23-Sep. 22**

Rest and relaxation will be more favorable than you think. You can accomplish a great deal. You've been in a rut and you need to do something that will help you break the pattern you've fallen into.



**LIBRA**

**Sep. 23-Oct. 22**

You can look around for the right place and enlist some of your friends to help you move. Trips will be enjoyable, and communication with your lover will clear up any misconceptions. Partnerships could be tense.



**SCORPIO**

**Oct. 23-Nov. 21**

Children may be demanding, and entertainment could cost a lot more than you can really afford. Opportunities for romance will develop through group endeavors; however, the association won't last.



**SAGITTARIUS**

**Nov. 22-Dec. 21**

You can't make things better if you don't know what to fix. Your dynamic, determined approach will win favors as well as a helping hand. Don't overspend on children or on large purchases.



**CAPRICORN**

**Dec. 22-Jan. 19**

Romance will unfold if you take trips or get together with friends. Kick your shoes off and relax. Do your own research and be prepared. Don't be a pest or a troublemaker today.



**AQUARIUS**

**Jan. 20-Feb. 18**

You may find that you are a little lucky today. You need to mingle with people who can spark enthusiasm and confidence in you. Deception is probable if you don't use discrimination.



**PISCES**

**Feb. 19-Mar. 20**

Visitors are likely to drop by and chances are, they may even stay a little longer than you want them to. Problems with in-laws or relatives may be more damaging than you realize.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

**EASY**

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

**EASY+**

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

**MEDIUM**

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

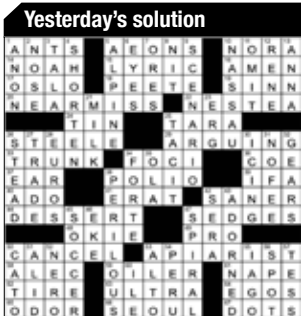
**HARD**

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

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Pineapple fiber; 6- Aristotle, to Alexander the Great; 11- Light touch; 14- Head cold; 15- Declaim; 16- \_\_\_ roll; 17- Chop into small pieces; 18- Vain; 20- To the point; 21- Hard to find; 23- Farm layers; 24- Ire; 26- Unacknowledged; 28- More bohemian; 30- So far; 31- Falls short; 32- War horse; 33- Sis's sib; 36- Split apart; 37- Reconnoiter; 38- Long time; 39- Form of poem, often used to praise something; 40- Skin of the upper part of the head; 41- Common person of ancient Rome; 42- Total; 43- Makes rhapsodic; 44- Assign; 47- Hiding place; 48- Light purple; 49- Like pie?; 50- Takes too much; 53- Capital of Kentucky; 56- Embankment; 58- Hi-\_\_\_ monitor; 59- Deadly virus; 60- Paradises; 61- Nav. officer; 62- Grow to maturity; 63- Melodies;

**DOWN** 1- "The Joy of Cooking" author Rombauer; 2- Pack and send; 3- Hesitant; 4- Director Jean-\_\_\_ Godard; 5- Appears; 6- Start of a saying on forgiveness; 7- Advocate forcefully; 8- Chinese "way"; 9- Polo Grounds legend; 10- Ruled; 11- Emblem; 12- Biscotto flavoring; 13- Walked back and forth; 19- Show to a table; 22- \_\_\_ Lingus; 25- Egypt's river; 26- Deplete; 27- Russian no; 28- Bushy hairstyle; 29- Sudden assault; 30- Coral island; 32- Fish covering; 33- German composer; 34- Choir attire; 35- Singles; 37- Strike breaker; 38- Exclamation to express sorrow; 40- Giggle; 41- Short drama; 42- Ayatollah's land; 43- French connections; 44- Actress Woodard; 45- Seductively beautiful woman; 46- Category; 47- The devil; 49- Della's creator; 51- Sand hill by the sea; 52- Cong. meeting; 54- U.S. law enforcement agency; 55- Alley \_\_\_; 57- Web address ending;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

**Emergency calls** 999

**Fire department** 28 572 222

**PJ (Open line)** 993

**PJ (Picket)** 28 557 775

**PSP** 28 573 333

**Customs** 28 559 944

**S. J. Hospital** 28 313 731

**Kiang Wu Hospital** 28 371 333

**Commission Against**

**Corruption (CCAC)** 28326 300

**IAM** 28 387 333

**Tourism** 28 333 000

**Airport** 59 888 88

**Taxi** 28 939 939 / 2828 3283

**Water Supply** – Report 2822 0088

**Telephone** – Report 1000

**Electricity** – Report 28 339 922

**Macau Daily Times** 28 716 081



**FOR SALE**

**Superb Studio, Old Taipa**  
HK\$3,780,000 650 ft² 1 1 1

**FOR RENT**

**Taipa Village studio**  
HK\$8,500/mth 478 ft² 1 1 1

**Rain Dance Property**  
"We dance until it's SOLD!"

**Apartment in the Historical Centre**  
HK\$3,900,000 840 ft² 2 1 1

**PROPERTY LIST**

[Taipa] Buckingham 2 2 2  
1,439 ft² \$11,770,000 (ref: 19045004)

[Taipa] Ocean Garden Fragrant Court 4 3 3  
3,500 ft² \$24,000,000 (ref: 20036001)

[Taipa] Designer 2 bedroom 2 1 1  
630 ft² \$11,500/mth (ref: 20121001)

[Taipa] Nova Park 2 2 2  
1,148 ft² \$14,500/mth (ref: n/a)

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## CHINA PLANS ONLINE PAYMENT RULES THAT MAY HIT ANT, TENCENT

**C**HINA proposed measures to curb market concentration in its online payment market, potentially dealing another blow to financial technology giant Ant Group Co. and its biggest rival Tencent Holdings Ltd.

The central bank said yesterday that any non-bank payment company with half of the market in online transactions or two entities with a combined two-thirds share could be subject to anti-trust probes, according to draft rules released by the People's Bank of China.

If a monopoly is confirmed, the central bank can suggest the cabinet impose restrictive measures including breaking up the entity by its business type. Firms already with payment licenses would have a one-year grace period to comply with the new rules, the PBOC said.

The rules present the strongest and most detailed message yet of regulators' plans to curb monopolistic practices in the online payments industry. Ubiquitous in China, Ant and Tencent have transformed how consu-

mers shop through their mobile apps that are used by a combined 1 billion people.

The regulator also vowed "comprehensive" oversight of companies in the space, and their transactions with affiliated parties. It will step up supervision of any changes to shareholders or beneficiaries at payments firms, it said.

"This shows there's no let-up in regulatory tightening on the sprawling fintech businesses," said Dong Ximiao, a researcher at Zhongguancun Internet Finance Institute.

Regulators shocked markets in November by suspending billionaire Jack Ma's record initial public offering of Ant as they stepped up oversight. Ant has since been ordered to overhaul its business and an antitrust investigation was launched into affiliate Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.

While they've stopped short of directly asking for a breakup of Ant, the central bank has stressed that the company needs to "understand the necessity of overhauling" and come up with a

timetable as soon as possible.

Ma emerged in public yesterday for the first time since China began clamping down on his businesses, ending several months of speculation over his whereabouts. Global investors are still seeking clarity on what the future holds for the world's largest fintech firm.

Mobile payments are only part of what contribute to online transactions, but they have become the most important platform in China. Alipay, the app operated by Ant, held 55.6% of the mobile payments market as of the second quarter last year, according to internet consultant iResearch. Tencent had a 38.8% share.

Room for growth in online payments is limited after years of a head-to-head rivalry between Ant and Tencent's Wechat Pay. Total transactions were 59.8 trillion yuan as of June 30, up 8.8% from a year earlier, according to iResearch. That's sharply down from increases of 23% and 65% during the same period in 2019 and 2018, respectively.

**BLOOMBERG**

## Netflix soars after hit shows push subscribers past 200 Million

**N**ETFLIX Inc. ended its biggest year in company history with a bang, adding more customers than expected and saying it no longer needs to borrow money to build its entertainment empire.

The world's leading paid streaming service attracted 8.51 million new subscribers in the final three months of the year, helped by the popularity of hit shows such as "Bridgerton" and "The Queen's Gambit." That outpaced Netflix's own forecast and the 6.06 million projected by Wall Street, and its shares rose 14% in pre-market trading.

The earnings report included two key milestones for Netflix: The company passed the 200 million-subscriber mark for the first time and said its cash flow will allow it to stop relying on debt to fuel its growth. With \$8.2 billion in cash -- and a credit line that hasn't been drawn down -- Netflix said it no longer needs external financing. It's also considering stock buybacks, something it hasn't done in about a decade.

The pandemic has provided a huge boost to Netflix's business, forcing people inside and limiting other entertainment options like

movie theaters and concerts. The company added 25.9 million customers in the first six months of last year, and ended up adding 36.6 million customers in all -- a record.

"It's accelerated that big shift from linear to streaming entertainment," Spencer Neumann, the company's chief financial officer, said on a call with investors and analysts Tuesday.

Netflix has repeatedly warned that the surge in the first half of 2020 would limit its growth in subsequent quarters -- what it calls the "pull-forward" effect. Neumann cautioned this would continue to affect growth in 2021, and Netflix gave a conservative estimate for the current quarter. It expects to add 6 million new subscribers in the period, compared with an average analyst estimate of 7.45 million.

But Netflix found more runway than expected in the latest period.

Its growth during the last year dispelled two common critiques of the company. Skeptics of Netflix have long identified its debt as a looming disaster, arguing an economic recession would cripple the company and cause customers to cancel subscriptions en masse.

**MDT/BLOOMBERG**



## CORPORATE BITS

### MGM attains another China Green Building certification label



MGM Cotai was awarded a Three-star Green Building Operation Label, the highest rating under the "China Green Building Label"

certification scheme, from the China Green Building and Energy Saving (Macau) Association.

With double honors in its

tally, the gaming operator said that its Cotai property has become the "only mega complex and hotel in Macau to gain three-star certification in both Green Building Design and Operation Label."

The achievements also made MGM Cotai of being the first hotel in the Greater Bay Area and second in Greater China to receive the certifications.

As cited in the statement, the property uses unconventional water resources in a practical way, which results in a utilization ratio of up to 12%.

Also, its energy use intensity is even 24% lower than hotels with similar scale in Macau.

### Restaurants at Sands China properties on festive promotions



Sands Resorts Macao and Sands Macao will present a range of exquisite menus and dining promotions to celebrate the Year of the Ox at The Venetian Macao, The Parisian Macao, The London-

ner Macao and Sands Macao's award-winning restaurants.

From Feb. 11 to 21, six signature restaurants including North, La Chine, Lotus Palace, Dynasty 8, Golden

Court and Brasserie will welcome an auspicious year with traditional dishes ushering in good fortune and happiness. At North, dishes include festive and warming favourites such as braised fish head with sea cucumber, fresh abalone, fish maw in superior broth and more will be available. Dynasty 8 will offer a nine-course Chinese New Year set menu, incorporating a selection of ingredients including sea cucumber, abalone, red spotted grouper, for up to ten people. The contemporary Cantonese restaurant, Golden Court, will prepare dishes for the festive occasion, featuring ingredients such as tossed salmon, sea cucumber, jelly-fish and crab roe.



BASEBALL

# Springer agrees to \$150m, six-year deal with Jays: AP source

RONALD BLUM  
& ROB GILLIES, TORONTO

**A**LL-STAR outfielder George Springer became the most prominent among baseball's free agents to reach an agreement this offseason, a \$150 million, six-year contract with the Toronto Blue Jays, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity yesterday [Macau time] because the deal was subject to a successful physical.

It would be the largest contract in team history.

Springer, who turned 31 in September, is a three-time All-Star who has spent his entire seven-season career with Houston and was the World Series MVP when the Astros beat the Los Angeles Dodgers in seven games for their first title in 2017. The championship was later tainted when it was discovered Houston illicitly stole signs that season.

AP PHOTO



Houston Astros' George Springer

Springer hit .265 with 14 homers and 32 RBIs during the shortened 2020 season, earning a prorated \$7,777,778 from a \$21 million salary.

He has a .270 career average with 174 home runs and 458 RBIs, including career bests of .292 with

39 homers and 96 RBIs in 2019.

Under new owner Steve Cohen, the New York Mets also were said to be interested in Springer.

A slow free agent market saw only 21 of 181 players who became free agents following the

World Series enter yesterday with finalized agreements.

The Blue Jays have an emerging young core and are able to add at least one major contract before their younger players like Bo Bichette and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. earn a lot more. Toronto has

been linked to most of the top free agents this winter, but now has the one it wanted most.


The upstart Blue Jays went 32-28 during the pandemic-altered 2020 season, finishing third in the AL East behind Tampa Bay and the New York Yankees and qualifying for the expanded postseason. They were swept in two games by the AL champion Rays in a first-round series.

Toronto had success despite moving its home games to Buffalo, New York, after the Canadian government didn't allow the team to play in Canada because of the COVID-19 risk of frequent travel throughout the U.S. It's not clear where the Blue Jays will begin the 2021 season.



The Blue Jays have had to overpay free agents to play in Canada before, but the Springer contract will be just the second \$100 million-plus deal in team history. Vernon Wells and the Blue Jays agreed to a \$126 million, seven-year contract in 2006. At the time it was sixth-largest deal in baseball history.

Because Springer turned down an \$18.9 million qualifying offer, Houston will receive an extra pick in next July's amateur draft after the fourth round and Toronto will lose its second-highest draft pick and also forfeit \$500,000 of international signing bonus pool space for the 2022-23 signing period. **AP**









AD



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## OPINION

### World Views

Lionel Laurent, MDT/Bloomberg



## COVID-19 VACCINE PASSPORTS ARE A TICKET TO NOWHERE

Every identity document brings its own dystopia. Austrian author Stefan Zweig, who saw the modern passport change international travel after the First World War, wrote: "Formerly man had only a body and soul. Now he needs a passport as well, for without it he will not be treated like a human being." More recently, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., the spread of biometric passports raised concerns over security and privacy. "With the old passport, we knew where we stood," the BBC reported in 2006.

Today, it's the prospect of a Covid-19 vaccine certificate that's conjuring up digital-dictatorship fears. The idea is being pushed by the travel industry as a leap towards normality after the worst year on record for international tourism and by technology firms eager for lucrative government contracts and a gold mine of data. Yes, it's nice to daydream about being able to travel freely again, but critics say it would introduce an unequal society in which an inoculated elite get the freedom to fly long-haul, attend concerts or dine in restaurants. Do we really want to be divided between the jabs and the jab-nots?

This might all make for a great episode of "Black Mirror," but it's not what advocates within the European Union, led by tourism-dependent Greece, have in mind right now. Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has proposed such vaccine passports as a way to travel freely from one country to another, and also as an incentive to be vaccinated. There's no plan to ban unvaccinated travelers.

Still, with European leaders set to debate the topic this week, and Commission boss Ursula von der Leyen backing the idea as a "medical necessity," there's a risk that attempts at sketching out workable vaccine passports will snowball into a distraction from bigger public-health issues. Much like last year's hasty enthusiasm for digital immunity certificates for those with antibodies from infection, or contact-tracing apps to break transmission chains, it's too much, too soon.

The problem here is that we're just a few weeks into a vaccination campaign that is going to run into late 2021. It's very early to be talking about vaccine certificates when the EU has administered doses equivalent to just 1.3% of its population so far — and is expected to cover 70% of its adult population only by the summer.

Rather than a twin-track society, we are more likely to get a twin-track bureaucracy: Some people brandishing a vaccine certificate, others a negative Covid-19 test. Is this going to be a game-changer? Given we have yet to see full concrete results of vaccine campaigns in terms of immunity, it's likely test results will be key for a while yet.

Instead of being a unity project that might harmonize the EU's 27 divergent approaches, vaccine passports are creating new arguments. Romania's president has called it a "divisive" idea, while Clement Beaune, France's junior minister for European affairs, says the debate is too "premature" — and he has a point. The EU's energy right now should be directed toward getting needles in arms, not building castles in the air. If there's one thing that could actually delay a vaccination campaign, it's this kind of debate, argues Alberto Alemanno, a law professor at French business school HEC. It creates incentives to fake certificates or cut the vaccine line.

Vaccine passports may very well be needed one day for Covid-19, just as they are for yellow fever in some countries. The privacy and ethics concerns associated with this idea are valid, but they are solvable, and our discomfort may one day look as quaint as Zweig's. The biggest challenge right now is keeping the debate grounded in reality, and making sure it doesn't get in the way of immunization. We're not there yet.

[Abridged]

## PORTUGAL LEADS IN AVERAGE VIRUS CASES PER CAPITA

Portugal has the highest seven-day average rate of new cases per capita and the second-highest rate of new deaths in the world, according to Johns Hopkins University.

The daily new cases per 100,000 population rose from 51 on Jan. 5 to 98 on Tuesday. The average daily deaths per capita rose from 0.75 to 1.63 during the same period.

Portugal is in lockdown, but the government is reluctant to close schools. Authorities have launched a program of rapid coronavirus tests at schools in the hardest-hit areas of the country.

Some teachers are unhappy about the policy, pressing for a national school closure.

The surge is pushing the public health system, especially hospitals, to capacity. The Health Ministry expects to open a field hospital yesterday with 58 beds on the grounds of the Lisbon University campus. Authorities are opening more temporary medical installations at sites outside the health sector, including hotels, university residences and churches, with 2,300 beds.

Portugal reported 14,647 new confirmed cases and 219 deaths in the last 24 hours.

### JACK'S BACK

## CHINESE E-TYCOON ENDS SILENCE WITH ONLINE VIDEO

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINA'S highest-profile entrepreneur, Jack Ma, appeared yesterday in an online video, ending a 2 1/2-month absence from public view that prompted speculation about the future of the e-commerce billionaire and his Alibaba Group.

In the 50-second video, Ma congratulated teachers supported by his foundation and made no mention of his disappearance or official efforts to tighten control over Alibaba and other internet companies over the past six months. The video appeared on Chinese business news and other websites.

The normally voluble Ma disappeared from public view after he irked regulators by criticizing them in an Oct. 24 speech at a Shanghai conference. Days later, regulators suspended the planned multibillion-dollar stock market debut of Ant Group, a financial platform that grew out of Alibaba's payments service, Alipay.

That prompted speculation online about whether the 56-year-old Ma, China's biggest global business celebrity and a symbol of its tech boom, had been detained or might face legal trouble. Alibaba and the government haven't responded to questions about him.

The Jack Ma Foundation said in a statement: "Jack Ma participated in the online ceremony of the annual Rural Teacher Initiative event on January 20." The foundation and Alibaba didn't respond to questions about Ma's status and when his next public event might be.

President Xi Jinping's government says anti-monopoly enforcement against



internet companies will be a priority this year. Alibaba and other companies have been fined for violating anti-monopoly rules. Some social media services have been reprimanded for lapses in enforcing censorship.

In his October speech, Ma complained regulators had an antique "pawnshop mentality" and were hampering innovation, according to Chinese media. He appealed to them to make it easier for entrepreneurs and young people to borrow.

## In the 50-second video, Ma congratulated teachers supported by his foundation and made no mention of his disappearance

That clashed with the ruling party's marathon campaign to reduce surging debt in China's financial system that prompted fears about a possible bank crisis and led rating agencies to cut Beijing's credit rating for government borrowing.

Some people suggested the ruling Communist Party was making an example of Ma to show entrepreneurs couldn't defy regu-

lators. But finance experts said Xi's government was uneasy about Alibaba's dominance in retailing and Ant's potential financial risks.

Anti-monopoly regulators warned executives Alibaba and five other tech giants in December not to use their dominance to block new competitors from entering their markets. The central bank and other regulators have ordered Ant to overhaul its business before its market debut can go ahead.

Alibaba's share price in Hong Kong is down 10% since October but recovered some of its loss from its low point this month.

Ma, a ruling party member, stepped down as Alibaba chairman in 2019 but is a member of the Alibaba Partnership, a 36-member group with the right to nominate a majority of the company's board of directors. He played a leading role in developing Ant, which grew out of Alibaba's online payment service, Alipay.

In the video, Ma, wearing a blue sweater over a white T shirt and gray trousers, smiled and waved to viewers. It included a scene the video said showed Ma visiting a school supported by his foundation on Jan. 10. MDT/AP



India began supplying coronavirus vaccines to its neighboring countries yesterday, as the world's largest vaccine making nation strikes a balance between maintaining enough doses to inoculate its own people and helping developing countries without the capacity to produce their own shots. India's Foreign Ministry said the country would send 150,000 shots of the AstraZeneca/Oxford University vaccine, to Bhutan and 100,000 shots to the Maldives.

Libya A fire, followed by an explosion at an ammunition warehouse at a naval academy killed three people, including two officers, a spokesman said yesterday. It was not clear what caused the overnight blaze at the academy. Four people were also wounded in the incident.

Russia The Kremlin brushed aside calls from the West to release opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who was arrested upon his return to Russia from Germany following treatment for poisoning with a nerve agent. Moscow called his case "an absolutely internal matter." Navalny blames his poisoning on President Vladimir Putin's government, which has denied it.

Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel said that Germany is extending its pandemic restrictions, including the closure of schools and stores, until mid-February amid concerns that new mutations of the coronavirus could trigger a fresh surge in cases. Germany's infection rate has stabilized in recent days, indicating that existing restrictions may have been effective in bringing down the numbers.

Portugal Local councils sent out teams wearing protective clothing and accompanied by a police officer to gather votes from people in home quarantine and from residents of elderly care homes before a presidential election being held amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Authorities have taken exceptional measures to ensure that voting in Sunday's ballot is possible, even with the country currently in lockdown.