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**Hong Kong** imposed a temporary lockdown on thousands of residents for the first time to carry out mandatory testing of the coronavirus, with authorities warning the move will be repeated if needed to contain the outbreak. The unprecedented step for the Yau Ma Tei and Jordan areas - known for their night markets - was announced in a government statement at 4 a.m. local time. Authorities aim to complete the exercise within 48 hours, it said.

**Chinese** embassy in the United States on Saturday refuted a Wall Street Journal report that said Beijing was pushing for a high-level meeting to ease tensions between the world's two largest economies. China has discussed a proposal to send Politburo member Yang Jiechi to Washington, and Ambassador Cui Tiankai suggested the idea in letters to U.S. officials and through conversations with intermediaries, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing people with knowledge of the matter.



**China** Eleven workers trapped for two weeks by an explosion inside a Chinese gold mine were brought safely to the surface yesterday. State broadcaster CCTV showed workers being hauled up one-by-one in baskets on yesterday afternoon, their eyes shielded to protect them after so many days in darkness. One worker was reported to have died from a head wound following the blast that deposited massive amounts of rubble in the shaft on Jan. 10 while the mine was still under construction.

**Taiwan** The U.S. has reaffirmed support for Taiwan following China's dispatch of warplanes near the island in an apparent attempt to intimidate its democratic government and test American resolve. The State Department on Saturday said it "notes with concern the pattern of ongoing (China's) attempts to intimidate its neighbors, including Taiwan."

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PORTUGUESE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

# TURNOUT IN THE SAR MORE THAN DOUBLES

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE voter turnout for the Macau-based polling station for the current Portuguese presidential election is more than double the figure of the last presidential election, held five years ago.

According to data disclosed by the Consulate General of Portugal in Macau and Hong Kong (CGPMHK), by the station's closing time, over 1,400 voters had cast their ballots in the election. This figure surpasses the 526 who voted in 2016 when the incumbent president, and this year's candidate, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was elected.

The vote in Macau, which took place over the weekend, started to show signs of a strong turnout when the turnout on Saturday had already surpassed the total for 2016, with 600 voters casting their ballots on the first day.

The Portuguese Consul-General, Paulo Cunha-Alves, was surprised by the turnout. Speaking to the media after the closing of the polling stations, he said, "I was not expecting so many people. It was very encouraging to see the turnout for this event, which is very important to democracy."

For the Consul-General of Por-



Long queues of voters yesterday at the Portuguese Consulate

tugal, the high number of people who showed up to vote might also be related to Covid-19 and the inability of most people to travel for almost one year.

"I think this was also a way people have found to get closer to the country in a year which has been very difficult and where most people could not return home," Cunha-Alves noted.

The special measures in force for Covid-19 pandemic prevention slowed the process relative to previous elections, with a queuing time of about 30 minutes on ave-

rage and waiting times reaching almost one hour during the peak time.

Due to this, the Consul-General noted that in upcoming elections an expansion of the number of polling stations from two to three or four would be considered. He said the decision to have two was made according to the turnout in previous elections.

## FINAL RESULTS KNOWN THIS WEDNESDAY

The final results from the voting of citizens in Macau will only

be known on Wednesday, Cunha-Alves revealed, noting that this is because Macau is an election hub and so will receive the votes cast in South Korea. These votes will be included and counted together.

The presidential race in Portugal this year included a total of seven candidates: Ana Gomes, André Ventura, João Ferreira, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (the incumbent), Marisa Matias, Tiago Mayan, and Vitorino Silva.

In Portugal, special measures have been in place due to the

country registering the highest rate of Covid-19 infections, leading to the government enforcing a new lockdown.

This did not lead to the postponement of the elections, however. They went ahead, with voters being asked to wear face-masks and to carry hand sanitizer and a pen.

This year's unusual presidential race also saw most "street campaigning" activities replaced by online campaigning.

Fearing that the current Covid-19 restrictions could have a deterrent effect, leading people to abstain from voting, Portuguese authorities mounted a concerted campaign in the last few days urging citizens to exercise their right to vote.

If results confirm the last predictions from polling surveys, de Sousa should be re-elected within a single election round.

If the predictions prove wrong and none of the candidates obtain 50% of the votes, a second election round is scheduled to take place on February 14 between the two most voted candidates from the first round.

The new president of the Portuguese Republic will assume office on March 9.

# MGTO lowers expectations for CNY tourist arrivals

HONEY TSANG

**G**IVEN the changeable coronavirus situation in China, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is expecting reduced tourist arrivals in Macau during the Lunar New Year, compared to the Christmas period.

Director of MGTO Helena de Senna Fernandes regards the lowered expectations as a "practical forecast," considering that Macau only has one source market now, which is mainland China.

"As of now, we still have not had an estimate of tourist arrivals during the Spring Festival, as we wish to wait and see for a little longer and garner more



Senado Square during Lunar New Year celebration prior pandemic outbreak

information [before publishing the projected number]," Fernandes said earlier on the sidelines of an event.

Fernandes is also an-

icipating that the local accommodation industry may roll out various promotional packages to entice locals and tourists during the festive period

in February. This may help drive the overall occupancy rate to 70% to 80%, she added.

Earlier this month, the MGTO announced it would

call off all celebratory events planned for the forthcoming Spring Festival, including the fireworks display, parade and other shows.

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has also canceled the annual Spring Festival Fair, Lion Dance performance and temporary stands of incense, in a bid to minimize the Covid-19 transmission risk.

"Even if we mounted a lot of events or promotions during the [Spring Festival] period, they would be likely to fail to attain good outcomes," the official explained.

"And it will increase certain infection risks if we organize events that attract crowds," she said of the reasons for canceling the events.

In view of the climbing number of Covid-19 cases in China, the SAR government issued an appeal earlier in January to urge locals and mainland workers to stay in Macau during the Chinese New Year. The travel advisory has triggered some apprehension in town over the possible adverse impacts of the official entreaty on the city's tourism industry.

Fernandes said the MGTO would touch base with tourism industry players to discuss whether to reinstate the domestic travel stimulus programs, which could provide a much-needed fillip for those subject to financial hardship.

She also added that renovations of the Grand Prix Museum are already underway, with the venue slated to open in the first quarter of 2021.

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# Gov't to obtain insurance for all Covid-19 jab recipients

ANTHONY LAM

**A**LL recipients of Covid-19 vaccines in Macau, including local residents and non-resident workers, shall be insured and the premium will be borne by the government, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong U, said on the sidelines of a government event.

The insurance will be purchased to offer financial support in case a vaccine recipient develops side effects after the shot. Similar insurance plans have always been obtained for medical staff.

In Hong Kong, the government has established a security fund for this purpose.

Details of the plan, such as the policy and cost, will be announced once they are finalized with the insurance industry. In addition, the amount of compensation to be provided is still under discussion, but the Secretary noted that it will be offered on the basis of each condition. Ao Ieong added that the compensation would not be a small amount.

Previously, the government estimated it would cost MOP500 for the administration of each vaccine. Ao Ieong explained that this amount would not only cover the two shots, but also the costs of the insurance for both shots.

The senior official reiterated that medical staff, fire fighters



and paramedics would be within the first groups of vaccine recipients.

Around the world, there are three types of Covid-19 vaccines that are most popular, namely the CoronaVac, Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca.

All three have proved effectiveness to a certain extent and have been purchased by the Macau government.

At another government occasion, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng pledged that local residents and non-resident workers receiving the shots will have the freedom to choose which type they will have administered, should all types be in stock.

## CITY RECORDS 47TH CASE

Last Thursday, 109 Macau residents returned to the city from Europe, the Americas and Oceania, with a final stop-over in Tokyo, Japan. The returnees arrived on two separate flights to Macau from the Japanese capital.

A 43-year-old woman on the second flight tested positive twice at the city's airport, which implied an infection. As mutant strains of SARS-CoV-2 have been reported in Europe, where the woman was returning from, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center disclosed that a DNA testing was run on the sample, with results expected today.

The mutant strains found in

Europe, according to Dr Alvis Lo from the center, are more infectious but not more fatal.

Returnees are required to be in possession of a negative test result issued within 72 hours of their journey commencing. When questioned as to why the woman was not tested in Europe, Lo listed three possibilities: first, the test may not be 100% accurate; second, the patient may be in an extremely early phase of incubation period, meaning that she was infected during the trip home; and third, she may have contracted the virus and already recovered from the disease.

After conducting contact tracing on the patient, the center

identified eight passengers on the same flight as close contacts. Unlike the other passengers, who are in quarantine in the Grand Coloane Resort, the eight close contacts were immediately sent to the Public Health Clinical Center at the Coloane Hill for medical observation.

The patient, meanwhile, is not in the medical care at the government hospital.

## LO ASSURES RECENT CASE POSES NO RISK

Amid public outrage regarding the government's acceptance of the returnees – which the government would violate the city's mini-constitution by refusing to do – Lo stressed that the receiving mission at the airport, in addition to the city's Covid-19 control measures, have proved to be working out.

He stressed that the entire procedure was conducted in a closed loop and was completely under control.

Moreover, Lo reiterated that the flights were commercial operations and not government-chartered repatriation flights.

Social media users have been holding a grudge against the returnees for posing a risk to the city. They are also not happy about the latest patient, who "broke the city's record" of more than 200 days without a case.

They fear that tourists will be afraid to visit Macau with the new case, which would impact the city's economy.

Lo disclosed that cross-departmental operations were initiated once a notice from Air Macau, which operated the two flights, was received. The case has so far posed no risk to the community. "The case will not trigger the suspension of tourism from mainland China," Lo reiterated.

# Returnee from Ukraine to Zhuhai tests positive for Covid-19

ANTHONY LAM

**A**Zhuhai resident has tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 after their quarantine-upon-arrival from Ukraine, the Macau Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center has announced.

The center was notified by its Zhuhai counterpart when the confirmation was obtained.

According to the local center, the new patient completed a 14-day quarantine upon arriving in Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong, before returning home to the Doumen District of Zhuhai for a week of domestic self-health management.



The patient arrived in Guangzhou from the European country on January 2. A Covid-19 nucleic acid test performed on January 23 yielded a positive re-

sult. Furthermore, IgM serologic testing was also run, which also generated a positive result.

It was categorized as an asymptomatic case or a

relapse, as provincial and municipal experts on the mainland referred to it.

Sanitization has been conducted in places the patient has been during

the domestic self-health management period. Close contacts, meanwhile, have been contacted to conduct mandatory health management.

All close contacts have tested negative for the virus.

Authorities in Zhuhai noted that patients who are reinfected are less contagious, but the local center has chosen to be vigilant and request that all people who have been to Doumen District between January 16 and 23 and currently are in Macau seek medical assistance at the government hospital if they develop symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath and loss of sense of taste or smell.

## SHANGHAI'S THE BUND NOW MID-RISK

The Bund in Shanghai, an attraction world-famous for its night views and home to the offices of many large domestic and global enterprises, has been categorized by the Macau center as mid-risk in terms of Covid-19.

The district includes the pedestrian shopping area Nanjing Road.

This means that people who have been to the area in the preceding 14 days shall be quarantined as they arrive in Macau. Individuals passing through the district in a vehicle, however, will not be considered as having been there.

The Friendship Road District of Baoshan District, Shanghai has also been listed as mid-risk.



# PEREIRA COUTINHO, AGNES LAM AGAINST NEW LAW FOR HIRING OF TNRS

RENATO MARQUES

**LAWMAKERS** José Pereira Coutinho and Agnes Lam have voiced their opposition to the application of the new law for the hiring of non-resident workers (TNRs), which they consider to be causing unprecedented difficulties. The acknowledgment was made over two separate spoken inquiries delivered at the Legislative Assembly (AL) last Thursday.

The basis for the dissatisfaction of the two lawmakers is the fact that the provisions of the new law, which entered into force just three months ago, form the main obstacle to unscrambling the issues. These are related to both the stranded TNRs who have recently been dismissed and cannot be reemployed – says Pereira Coutinho – and the recent lack of manpower and difficulties in hiring domestic workers, as Lam claimed.

For Pereira Coutinho, the problem originates from the complicity between the gaming concessionaires and high-ranking gaming inspection officials. This has resulted in the companies being allowed to dismiss a high number of workers without pro-



MACAU PHOTO AGENCY

viding them with sufficient means of survival or alternative avenues to return to their home countries.

“Most of the dismissed are non-resident workers from Asian countries that roam the streets, some begging for money to buy food, and others requesting support from local associations,” Pereira Coutinho said adding that the government is well aware of the situation but does not do anything to relieve the suffering of these dismissed workers. On the contrary, “It was the government that proposed and enforced the new amendments to the law of the hiring of TNRs that created

this ‘social turmoil,’ regardless of having been warned several times by us [lawmakers] in the meetings of the Standing Committee [of the AL] that such changes would result in these disastrous consequences.”

For Pereira Coutinho, such amendments harm both the workers who are unable to find new jobs and the local employers that cannot employ them.

This “scandal” is, according to the lawmaker, is the sole responsibility of the government.

Lawmaker Lam also pointed out problems with the new law, noting that the decision from

the government to liberalize the quotas for the hiring of imported labor for domestic workers from the mainland only resulted in an increase of 50 of these workers in the first 11 months of 2020, a period in which the total figure shrunk by 1,240 people.

Lam notes that the hiring of domestic workers from the mainland is an inadequate solution, as the market conditions in Macau are not attractive for these workers or for the families which, on average, need to pay double the salary earned by foreign workers. This is “a burden that families cannot support” and that

“adds pressure to the families in which both spouses are employed and that in the long term will affect the families, the economy and the Macau society.”

To tackle the cyclical changes and ease the lack of domestic workers, Lam suggests that the government “explore legal ways or [enforce] special measures to allow families to hire dismissed TNRs who are currently stranded in Macau for a long period.”

Lam noted that this measure would also carry added benefits, since “as they have been living in Macau for a long period there will be no complications regarding the pandemic prevention.”

She is also proposing a system to prevent TNRs currently employed in domestic work from swapping employers or moving to a different type of job, aiming to retain the available manpower and mitigate the need to import more of these workers from abroad to address the needs of local families.

When the amendments to the law regarding the hiring of TNRs was discussed and voted upon in the AL plenary, during the final reading on June 23, 2020, both the lawmakers voted in favor.

## COVID-19 VACCINE

# Lawmakers concerned about population awareness

RENATO MARQUES

**LAWMAKERS** Wong Kit Cheng and Leong Sun Iok are concerned about the population's level of awareness regarding Covid-19 vaccines, calling on authorities to strengthen the promotion of vaccination and to withdraw the suggestion that the population will be able to decide which vaccine to take.

The ideas were expressed by the two lawmakers in the period before the agenda at the Legislative Assembly (AL) last Thursday.

In two separate spoken inquiries, the lawmakers called on the government to take the lead and start the vaccination process as soon as possible.

For Wong, residents lack knowledge and

awareness of vaccines, with many concerned about the process of vaccination, the quality, and the effectiveness of the vaccines.

Advocating for the vaccine developed by Chinese state laboratories, Wong said that such a vaccine “has the rate of occurrence of serious adverse reactions of only about two millionths, which demonstrates safety and reliability.”

According to the lawmaker, the general public does not share the same level of confidence and it is necessary for the government to promote and reinforce the population's knowledge and confidence in vaccines before they start to be administered.

This work needs to be done concurrently with

preparations for the vaccination appointment system, which she suggests needs to be able to accommodate online and offline booking systems as well as group bookings, aimed at companies and institutions.

As for promotion, the lawmaker suggests that the government use several means, including internet platforms, the press, radio, and television, to explain to citizens the factors to be taken into account, as well as the vaccination process, to “increase the willingness of the population to take the vaccine.”

In the same inquiry, the lawmaker also urged the authorities to extend the definition of priority groups to include more than just people at high-risk due

to age or previous medical conditions, but also “frontline workers, individuals with high-risk professions and residents who need to travel abroad.”

Journalists, social workers, domestic caregivers and frontline civil servants would be included as the second level of priority.

Meanwhile, Leong urged the government to assume leadership of the process and decide which of the vaccines is more suitable for the people of Macau. According to the lawmaker, the population does not have enough knowledge to decide on its own which vaccine is best and this should be a task for health authorities following the “safety, efficiency, and quality standards.”

## DISCUSSION ON BILL GUARANTEEING WORKERS' RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS VOTED DOWN

A bill presented by the initiative of lawmaker Sulu Sou was voted down from being discussed at the Legislative Assembly (AL) by the vast majority of lawmakers. The bill aims to guarantee workers' rights to participate in professional associations, as well as establish a safety-net system which would prevent employers from dismissing workers based on their participation in labor rights activities. It was finally voted down by 27 out of 31 lawmakers who were in the hemicycle last Thursday.

The initiative only gathered acceptance from the proposer and pro-democracy lawmakers Ng Kuok Cheong, Au Kam San, and José Pereira Coutinho, who all voted in favor. The remaining lawmakers disagreed that such a proposal should have even been raised for discussion in the plenary.

As on previous occasions, several of the lawmakers who voted against the discussion of the bill justified the vote with the “lack of legality” of the bill, due to the fact that it was proposed by a lawmaker, not by the government, and that it was without prior authorization from the Chief Executive (CE).

This was also the understanding of the president of the AL, Kou Hoi In, who rejected the law proposal in the first place, and of the AL's Executive Board, which addressed the first appeal from lawmaker Sou.

Some of the lawmakers also noted that in his Policy Address, the CE had already mentioned the government's intention to propose the establishment of a Trade Union law in Macau this year, which would make it moot to discuss this bill at this point in time. **RM**



# Local property agents paint a grim picture for 2021

RENATO MARQUES

**S**MALL businesses and neighborhood shops closing; housing tenants returning their apartments due to their inability to pay rental fees – these are just some examples of what is occurring in the daily lives of local property agents in Macau as early as January.

According to Leong and Ho, two local property agents with agencies in the Guia Hill district that are dedicated almost exclusively to property rentals in this area of the city, 2021 seems to portend even darker days than 2020.

“Since the year started [2021], I have been receiving requests for contract termination every single day and more than once per day,” Leong told the Times.

“My phone does not stop ringing and 90% of the calls are from either small shop tenants that are closing their shops and want to terminate their [rental] contracts or homeowners asking me to check on some tenants as they are failing to pay their rental fees – some for several months,” she added.

In just the first two weeks of the year, she claims to have lost as much as one-third of all the contracts she has been handling at her agency, a job that she has been doing in Macau for more than 20 years.

When asked about which business sectors and people have been affected by this wave of rent-related issues, she gives some examples. “This one here [showing a contract copy] is from a small shop right in this street in front of my office. It is an IT-related business, they are asking to terminate the contract at the end of this month. This other one is also from a small, family-style business. They just have two or three



people working, they do food distribution [take-away]. They are closing from February 17 and I have many others, all [of the papers in the pile] you see here are people wanting to terminate contracts,” Leong said, gesturing to a stack of contract copies to the side of her desk.

“I believe this year will be much worse than the previous one,” she said. “There were many small businesses that were still holding on throughout last year hoping that things would improve this year, or that they would get some support. But now, they have lost hope. Last year, the government [provided support following the initial impact of the Covid-19 crisis] by giving people some financial help. But this year, apparently there is nothing and people are getting desperate.”

With Leong's help, the Times also reached out to another property agent operating a few blocks away, surnamed Ho. Ho confirmed having similar issues to Leong, adding that aside from commercial rental problems, there is a growing problem regarding housing.

“In my agency, I am experiencing several issues related to housing

rentals, mostly involving people working in security and cleaning companies that are coming to me to [reclaim] their apartments because they say they cannot afford the rental fee,” Ho said, adding that they claim their salaries have been reduced to 30 or 40% of the contracted amount.

“I believe them, as they seem to be very desperate and some of them have inclusively presented written documents [declarations] from the companies acknowledging the fact,” Ho said. She noted that such individuals were “moving in” with other work colleagues, remarking that “maybe from three previous apartments they are all moving to just one.”

Just as with Leong, Ho also claims to have received many complaints from landlords demanding the payment of outstanding rental fees since late November last year.

“Sometimes when we go to these houses and we cannot find anyone. There are a lot of personal belongings left behind and we cannot confirm if the tenants are out of Macau and cannot return or if they just moved to another place. We do not even know what to

do with their belongings like clothes, furniture, kitchen appliances, and others,” said Ho. “Sometimes the owners [of the apartments] put them up for sale in an attempt to get back

some of the lost rental fees but we know that this [practice] is not even legal without the consent of the tenants. It is a very confusing situation for everyone,” the agent concluded.

## CCAC INITIATES INVESTIGATION INTO FALLING TILES IN ECONOMIC HOUSING

The Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) has instigated an investigation into some departments, including the Housing Bureau and the Infrastructure Development Office, over the falling tiles at Edificio do Lago and Ip Heng Building in Seac Pai Van, the CCAC's commissioner Chan Tsz King said on January 22. The CCAC is now collecting data from the relevant departments. Given that the matter is of significant public interest, the CCAC will conduct an in-depth probe and report the results to the public as soon as possible, Chan said.

## INFLATION RATE FALLS SLIGHTLY BY 0.81%

The inflation rate for 2020 was 0.81%, down 1.94 percentage points from 2.75% in 2019, according to data released by the Statistics and Census Service. The year-on-year decrease in Composite Price Index in December 2020 was attributed to lower charges for package tours, telecommunications services and electricity, as well as reduced prices of gasoline, clothing and fresh pork. Among the various categories of goods and services, the price indices of Communication, Clothing & Footwear and Recreation & Culture fell by 13.39%, 8% and 7.59% year-on-year respectively, whereas the indices of Health and Household Furnishings & Services increased by 2.46% and 2.02%, respectively.

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GAMING

# DIGITAL YUAN MAY BENEFIT MASS AND PREMIUM-MASS MARKET: BERNSTEIN

HONEY TSANG

**T**HE brokerage Sanford C. Bernstein believes that the digital yuan, if actualized in casino chip transactions, may be a boon for Macau's mass and premium-mass market in the long term, given that it offers more convenience for cross-border money transfers, according to a report published on January 22.

The analysts from Bernstein commented that the digital yuan, also known as the digital RMB, can serve two different objectives for Macau's casino industry.

One of the key roles of the digital RMB on gaming tables would be to "allow greater [Chinese] government scrutiny and control over money flows," Sanford C. Bernstein's analysts stated.

However, it could also act as an incentive for China's bettors who are engaged in the mass



and premium-mass play, as "it would also allow easier money transfer, [and] eliminate the need to use intermediaries (like junkets, underground banks or pawnshops). [...] Mass and premium-mass play could surely benefit due to ease of money flow," the analysts said.

Having said that, the brokerage added that "there could be a negative impact on casinos" if a daily limit is imposed on each foreign exchange transaction via digital RMB.

In Macau, most bets in casino

nos have been denominated in Hong Kong dollars.

This requires gamblers from China to first arrange currency exchanges to HKD using means such as ATMs with foreign exchange services or licensed currency exchange outlets.

Bernstein's projection came after the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) refuted the claims in a Bloomberg report from December 2020 that the DICJ had been in discussions with the

city's gaming operators regarding the possible introduction of the digital yuan.

Digital yuan is the central bank digital currency (CBDC) initiative — intended as a replacement for physical cash — that has been pursued by the central government since 2014, yet the details were only revealed in 2019.

By far, China has rolled out a string of digital yuan pilot schemes in some cities. One prominent scheme was launched in the southern city of Shenzhen in October 2020, when the central bank, People's Bank of China, gave 50,000 consumers selected in a lottery RMB200 each to spend in selected stores.

"Eventually digital transactions will be the norm and cash as we know it will be a historical relic. But this will be an evolutionary development that will likely take many years," the brokerage stated.

## CITY'S HIGHEST AWARD GIVEN TO CHUI SAI ON, ZHONG NANSHAN

**T**HE Decoration of Honour – Grand Lotus award was given to former Chief Executive Chui Sai On, and Zhong Nanshan, the Chinese pulmonologist who has been leading China's National Health Commission expert panel in investigating the Covid-19 outbreak.

On Friday, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng presented awards to 34 individuals and organisations in recognition of either their achievements, outstanding contributions or distinguished service to Macau.

The list of recommendations for the 2020 Decorations, Medals and Certificates of Merit Awards Ceremony of the SAR is based on recommendations from the Committee of Nomination of Medals and Honorary Titles.

The Medal for Distinguished Service – Medal for Bravery has been given to bureaus that are part of the region's Covid-19 response efforts, such as the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention of the Health Bureau, the Department of Respiratory Medicine at Conde S. Januário Hospital of the Health Bureau and the Tourism Crisis Management Office.

The teams who assisted with the return of Macau residents stranded in Hubei Province via a chartered flight, the return of local residents stranded on the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan and the team sent to Africa for anti-pandemic support work were awarded the Honorary Title – Merit. **LV**

AD

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**Subjunctive**  
**並非**  
**虛擬**  
**Não**  
**Conjuntivo**

姚風  
Yao Feng

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE 21ST ANNIVERSARY OF MACAU HANDOVER TO CHINA  
慶祝澳門回歸祖國二十一周年  
POR OCASIÃO DA CELEBRAÇÃO DO 21º ANIVERSÁRIO DA R.A.E.M.

Duration of Exhibition  
23.12.2020 - 21.02.2021

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Opens every day, from 12:00pm to 08:00pm  
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ADVERTORIAL

AP PHOTO



# US reaffirms Taiwan support after China sends warplanes

**T**HE U.S. has reaffirmed support for Taiwan following China's dispatch of warplanes near the island in an apparent attempt to intimidate its democratic government and test American resolve.

The State Department on Saturday said it "notes with concern the pattern of ongoing (China's) attempts to intimidate its neighbors, including Taiwan."

"We urge Beijing to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure against Taiwan and instead engage in meaningful dialogue with Taiwan's democratically elected representatives," spokesperson Ned Price said in the statement.

Washington will continue to deepen ties with Taiwan and ensure its defense from Chinese threats, while supporting a peaceful resolution of issues between the sides, the statement said.

There was no immediate Chinese response yesterday.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said China on Saturday sent eight bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons and four fighter jets into airspace just southwest of the island, part of a long-standing pattern of Chinese incursions aimed at pressuring the government of President Tsai Ing-wen into caving to Beijing's demand that she recognize Taiwan as a part of Chinese territory.

The latest Chinese overflight came on the heels of President Joe Biden's inauguration, emphasizing the island's enduring position in the panoply of divisive issues between the sides that also include human rights, trade disputes and, most recently, questions about China's initial response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden's administration has shown little sign of reducing pressure on China over such issues, although it is seen as favoring a return to more civil dialogue. In another sign of support for

Taiwan, the island's de-facto ambassador to Washington, Hsiao Bi-khim, was an invited guest at Biden's inauguration.

And in a final swipe at China, the Trump administration's outgoing U.N. ambassador tweeted that it's time for the world to oppose China's efforts to exclude and isolate Taiwan, drawing sharp criticism from Beijing.

Ambassador Kelly Craft accompanied the tweet with a photo of herself in the U.N. General Assembly Hall where the island is banned. She carried a handbag with a stuffed Taiwan bear sticking out of the top, a gift from Taiwan's representative in New York, Ambassador James Lee.

Taiwan and China separated amid civil war in 1949 and China says it is determined to bring the island under its control by force if necessary. The U.S. switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979, but is legally required to ensure Taiwan can defend itself and the self-governing democratic island enjoys strong bipartisan support in Washington.

Tsai has sought to bolster the island's defenses with the purchase of billions of dollars in U.S. weapons, including upgraded F-16 fighter jets, armed drones, rocket systems and Harpoon missiles capable of hitting both ships and land targets. She has also boosted support for Taiwan's indigenous arms industry, including launching a program to build new submarines to counter China's ever-growing naval capabilities.

China's increased threats come as economic and political enticements bear little fruit, leading it to stage war games and dispatch fighter jets and reconnaissance planes on an almost daily basis toward the island of 24 million people, which lies 160 kilometers off China's southeast coast across the Taiwan Strait. **AP**

## SANDS CHINA NEWS

### Sands China and Community Groups Assemble 40,000 Hygiene Kits for Clean the World

#### Sands China's 7th straight year of participation

Around 200 Volunteers from Sands China Ltd. and local community groups recently worked together at The Venetian® Macao to build 40,000 hygiene kits for Clean the World, an international social enterprise that provides hygiene supplies essential for good health to populations in need around the globe, helping prevent the spread of disease.

Sands China's hygiene kit build helps Clean the World distribute emergency response hygiene kits to assist with on-the-ground, immediate needs in times of crisis and disaster. In 2013, Sands China was the first integrated operator to launch such an event in Macao. Including this year's event, the company and its community partners have assembled a total of 280,000 kits over the years.

Around 200 volunteers met at Cotai Expo Dec. 4 to assemble this year's 40,000 hygiene kits. About 150 of them were Sands China team members, including Sands Cares Ambassadors, and another 50 or so volunteers came from three local associations: the Macau Association for the Mentally Handicapped, the Macau Autism Association and Fuhong Society of Macau.

The kits will benefit global charity Children International, who will deliver them to families in need in the Philippines, providing hygiene supplies that are essential in times of crisis.

Each completed hygiene kit contains soap that is collected from hotels at Sands China's integrated resorts, and recycled through Clean the World's soap sterilization and re-manufacturing process. The kits also contain face towels donated by Linyi Standard Textile Trading Co., Ltd., dental kit sets donated by Ming Fai Enterprise International Co., Ltd., a toothbrush, and toothpaste – all of which are placed into a non-woven bag.

And to ensure safety in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sands China implemented additional hygiene precautions during the entire packing process for this year's event, including measures such as doing temperature checks and supplying hand sanitizers and disposable gloves.

Sands China's support of Clean the World is part of Sands Cares, the global corporate citizenship programme of parent company Las Vegas Sands Corp.





AP PHOTO



## RUSSIA

# 3,000 arrested at protests demanding Navalny's release

DARIA LITVINOVA  
& JIM HEINTZ, MOSCOW

**R**USSIAN police arrested more than 3,000 people Saturday in nationwide protests demanding the release of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the Kremlin's most prominent foe, according to a group that counts political detentions.

The protests in scores of cities in temperatures as low as -50 degrees Celsius highlighted how Navalny has built influence far beyond the political and cultural centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

In Moscow, an estimated 15,000 demonstrators gathered in and around Pushkin Square in the city center, where clashes with police broke out and demonstrators were roughly dragged off by helmeted riot officers to police buses and detention trucks. Some were beaten with batons.

Navalny's wife Yulia was among those arrested.

Police eventually pushed demonstrators out of the square. Thousands then regrouped along a wide boulevard about a kilometer away, many of them throwing snowballs at the police before dis-

persing.

Some later went to protest near the jail where Navalny is held. Police made an undetermined number of arrests there.

The protests stretched across Russia's vast territory, from the island city of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk north of Japan and the eastern Siberian city of Yakutsk, where temperatures plunged to -50 degrees Celsius, to Russia's more populous European cities. Navalny and his anti-corruption campaign have built an extensive network of support despite official government repression and being routinely ignored by state media.

"The situation is getting worse and worse, it's total lawlessness," said Andrei Gorkyov, a protester in Moscow. "And if we stay silent, it will go on forever."

The OVD-Info group, which monitors political arrests, said at least 1,167 people were detained in Moscow and more than 460 at another large demonstration in St. Petersburg.

Overall, it said 3,068 people had been arrested in some 90 cities, revising the count downward from its earlier report of 3,445. The group did not give an explanation for its re-

vision. Russian police did not provide arrest figures.

Undeterred, Navalny's supporters called for protests again next weekend.

Navalny was arrested on Jan. 17 when he returned to Moscow from Germany, where he had spent five months recovering from a severe nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin and which Russian authorities deny. Authorities say his stay in Germany violated terms of a suspended sentence in a 2014 criminal conviction, while Navalny says the conviction was for made-up charges.

The 44-year-old activist is well known nationally for his reports on the corruption that has flourished under President Vladimir Putin's government.

His wide support puts the Kremlin in a strategic bind — officials are apparently unwilling to back down by letting him go free, but keeping him in custody risks more protests and criticism from the West.

In a statement, the U.S. State Department condemned "the use of harsh tactics against protesters and journalists this weekend in cities throughout Russia" and called

on Russian authorities to immediately release Navalny and all those detained at protests.

Navalny faces a court hearing in early February to determine whether his sentence in the criminal case for fraud and money-laundering — which Navalny says was politically motivated — is converted to 3 1/2 years behind bars.

Moscow police on Thursday arrested three top Navalny associates, two of whom were later jailed for periods of nine and 10 days.

Navalny fell into a coma while aboard a domestic flight from Siberia to Moscow on Aug. 20. He was transferred from a hospital in Siberia to a Berlin hospital two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to the Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

Russian authorities insisted that the doctors who treated Navalny in Siberia before he was airlifted to Germany found no traces of poison and have challenged German officials to provide proof of his poisoning. Russia refused to open a full-fledged criminal inquiry, citing a lack of evidence that Navalny was poisoned.

Last month, Navalny released the recording of a phone call he said he made to a man he described as an alleged member of a group of officers of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly poisoned him in August and then tried to cover it up. The FSB dismissed the recording as fake.

## this day in history

### 1999 OLYMPIC OFFICIALS FACE BRIBERY CHARGES



Six members of the International Olympic Committee face expulsion following an inquiry into a corruption scandal which has deeply shaken the Olympic movement.

The six were identified at the end of an investigation by the IOC into allegations of corruption during the awarding of the 2002 Winter Games to Salt Lake City, in Utah.

In all, the investigation named 13 IOC officials who were alleged to have taken cash or services in return for helping Salt Lake City win the right to host the Olympics.

Three have already resigned, and six have been suspended ahead of a formal decision by the IOC in March on whether or not to expel them.

Three more are facing further investigation, while another is likely to be reprimanded.

The IOC President, Juan Antonio Samaranch, said he was "profoundly saddened" at the conduct of the individuals concerned.

"These members have done great harm to the Olympic ideal," he told a news conference.

The report also recommended radical changes in the way cities are chosen to stage the summer and winter games.

They include the setting up of a special committee of just eight elected IOC members to choose Olympic venues. The rest would be banned from official visits, or even entertaining guests from bidding cities.

The scandal broke last month, when a senior IOC member, Marc Hodler, alleged that a number of countries were resorting to bribery in their bids to stage the Olympic Games.

Salt Lake City is reported to have paid up to \$800,000 in cash and favours.

They included direct payments to IOC officials, as well as funding medical expenses, internships and university scholarships for relatives.

It has also emerged that one of the organisers of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games offered tens of thousands of dollars to IOC members the night before the vote on who would host the Games, although it is believed the offers were not accepted.

Those claims are being investigated, as are allegations of bribery in the decision to award the Japanese town of Nagano the Winter Games in 1998.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

One more IOC official resigned before the formal meeting in March. There, the IOC voted to uphold the recommendation to expel the remaining five.

The total spent by the Salt Lake Organising Committee (SLOC) in gifts to visiting IOC members was later revealed as over \$1m.

Similar gift-giving well in excess of levels recommended by the IOC was later admitted by Nagano, Japan, which hosted the 1998 Winter Games.

Officials in Atlanta, site of the 1996 Games, also admitted some misconduct.

At a meeting in December 1999, the IOC voted to ban expenses-paid visits to cities bidding for the Olympics.

It stopped short of the recommendation to reduce drastically the number of members who could vote on where a Games is held.

Instead, it introduced a new elected system for choosing IOC delegates, and set up an ethics committee to watch specifically for signs of corruption.

Juan Antonio Samaranch retired after serving his full term, in 2001. He was succeeded by Jacques Rogge, of Belgium.



YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You are in a high cycle where travel, education, and creative endeavors are concerned. New romantic partners will evolve through group endeavors; however, the association may not be likely to last.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Kick your shoes off and relax. Digestive disorders will be a result of family squabbles. Money problems will get worse if your partner hasn't been playing by the rules.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Too much talk will lead to disputes. Complete those hobbies you started a long time ago. Use discretion in your dealings and refrain from making verbal promises of any kind.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Look into some form of physical recreation. Don't promise to deliver the goods if you aren't positive that you can meet the deadline. Stress and pressure at home may have worn you ragged.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Get friends to help you with the preparations. Traffic will be busier than you anticipated, so try to get a head start if you have made plans to travel. You can invest in profitable ventures.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You will be able to talk to your lover about future goals and perhaps make plans for the two of you to take a vacation. Deception may cause disputes you can do without. Plan a day of enjoyment with them.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You need activity. Don't let your family put demands on you. You may find your self in a romantic situation. Get thinking about prolonging longevity.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

If you haven't planned a vacation, then at least try to get away for the weekend. Opportunities to get ahead are evident. Invite people home to discuss your plans for group fundraising events and outings.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

A female colleague may cause problems for you. You will find that uncertain individuals will want to draw you into joint ventures. You may want to talk to your boss about your future goals.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Extend an invitation to clients you enjoy spending time with. Secret affairs may be tempting, but keep in mind that they will damage your reputation if you decide to indulge.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You can expect to have a passionate time if you go out with someone you are romantically interested in. Spend time with friends or family. Any attractions toward clients will be one sided.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You must be careful not to ignore the needs of the youngsters in your family. Avoid friction with your mate. You are best not to say too much to colleagues.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Low-pH substance; 5- Links org.; 8- Worthless person; 12- Raced; 13- Ages; 15- Boxer's fare; 16- Streetcar; 17- Fidelity; 18- And \_\_\_ goes; 19- Unfit; 22- \_\_\_-Cat; 23- Nipper's co.; 24- \_\_\_ dancing is popular with cowboys!; 26- Disinclined; 29- Anew; 31- Before, of yore; 32- Conger catcher; 34- Group character; 36- Race parts; 38- Scorch; 40- Fit to be tried; 41- Get the better of; 43- \_\_\_ Mio; 45- Fido's appointment; 46- Still; 48- Took home; 50- Bushy hairstyle; 51- Mongrel dog; 52- Hide-hair connector; 54- Handed down; 61- Hip bones; 63- Wear down, physically or emotionally; 64- The last Mrs. Chaplin; 65- In the neighborhood; 66- Stormed; 67- Nabokov novel; 68- Bang-up; 69- Ed.'s pile; 70- Actress Ward;

DOWN 1- Aleutian island; 2- Maize; 3- Oil-rich nation; 4- Reserved; 5- Gilpin of "Fraser"; 6- Flub; 7- Against; 8- KLM rival; 9- Narrow escape; 10- \_\_\_ arms (angry); 11- Marquand sleuth; 13- Map books; 14- Ledge; 20- Area of 4840 square yards; 21- Desperately urgent; 25- Takes home; 26- Sports stadium; 27- Person who doesn't eat meat; 28- Prufrock's creator; 29- About 1% of the atmosphere; 30- Sharpened; 31- "Evil Woman" band; 33- Naval rank, briefly; 35- Movie backdrop; 37- Board on water; 39- Voted into a seat; 42- Chipper; 44- Sewing case; 47- More tender; 49- Soldiers; 52- Actress Foch; 53- Muffin topper; 55- Composer Khachaturian; 56- Canines; 57- Bad time in the Senate; 58- Zilch; 59- Indigo; 60- Actress Turner; 62- Just the Way You \_\_\_;

Friday's solution

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

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**

Macau, NAPE Apartment with Uninterrupted Views  
HK\$13,888,000 1,862 ft² 4 3

**FOR RENT**

Nova Park, Taipa Spacious Apartment with Balcony  
\$14,500/mth 1,148 ft² 2 2

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

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

**PROPERTY LIST**

[Macau] Duplex apartment 2 1 1  
1,100 ft² \$4,940,000 (ref: 20116003)

[Macau] One Central Stylish 2 2 2  
1,349 ft² \$14,839,000 (ref: 19096004)

[Taipa] Manhattan spacious 3 2 2  
1,720 ft² \$19,300/mth (ref: n/a)

[Cotai] One Oasis high ceiling 3 2 2  
2,100 ft² \$30,000/mth (ref: 20111002)

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## Property of the Week



Macau, NAPE 4 Bedroom Apartment with Uninterrupted Views

HK\$13,888,000 1,862 ft<sup>2</sup> 4 3

SCAN ME

What a fabulous property this is with uninterrupted views over the water to Taipa, with the Statue of Kun lam directly in front of the apartment. Renovated many years ago this apartment could definitely do with an update although not essential. Large living dining area with good size balcony. Separate modern kitchen with a view with a separate utility room. Four bedrooms, three with a view, two with en suite and a separate bathroom for the other two bedrooms. The owner owns a car park space and will consider selling separately for the right price. Viewing can be arranged anytime as the apartment is currently vacant.

Viewing by appointment. Find out more on [www.jmlproperty.com](http://www.jmlproperty.com)

LEARN MORE

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

2 bedroom apartment,  
In Historical Centre

\$3,900,000

840 ft<sup>2</sup>

2 1



SCAN ME

## Property Hotlist



Macau, ZAPE

Stylish Two Bedroom Apartment

\$7,600,000

720 ft<sup>2</sup>

2 1



SCAN ME



Nova Park, Taipa

Spacious Apartment with Balcony

\$14,500/mth

1,148 ft<sup>2</sup>

2 2



SCAN ME

Studio Apartment, Taipa  
with Spacious Balcony

\$9,000/mth

1



SCAN ME

## More Listings

## For Sale

- [Macau] Duplex apartment 2 1 1,100 ft<sup>2</sup> \$4,940,000 (ref: 20116003)  
[Taipa] Chun Fok apartment 2 2 834 ft<sup>2</sup> \$8,998,000 (ref: 20036002)  
[Macau] One Central Stylish 2 2 1,349 ft<sup>2</sup> \$14,839,000 (ref: 19096004)  
[Taipa] Manhattan D unit 4 2 2,305 ft<sup>2</sup> \$15,980,000 (ref: n/a)  
[Taipa] Ocean Garden 4 3 3,500 ft<sup>2</sup> \$24,000,000 (ref: 20036001)

## For Rent

- [Coloane] Houston Court 1 1 824 ft<sup>2</sup> \$10,500/mth (ref: 20091001)  
[Taipa] Macau Riviera 2 2 866 ft<sup>2</sup> \$15,000/mth (ref: 20111001)  
[Taipa] Manhattan spacious 3 2 1,720 ft<sup>2</sup> \$19,300/mth (ref: n/a)  
[Macau] One Central 2 2 1,269 ft<sup>2</sup> \$25,000/mth (ref: n/a)  
[Cotai] One Oasis high ceiling 3 2 2,100 ft<sup>2</sup> \$30,000/mth (ref: 20111002)

## Recent Movements

Rented

Studio, Taipa Village

Rented

Manhattan apartment,  
luxury residence

SOLD



## JML Events



Cradle of Hope



Caritas Macau

Macau Bats Junior  
Rugby Team

Macau Golf Masters

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# Diamond trade is roaring back thanks to stuck-at-home shoppers

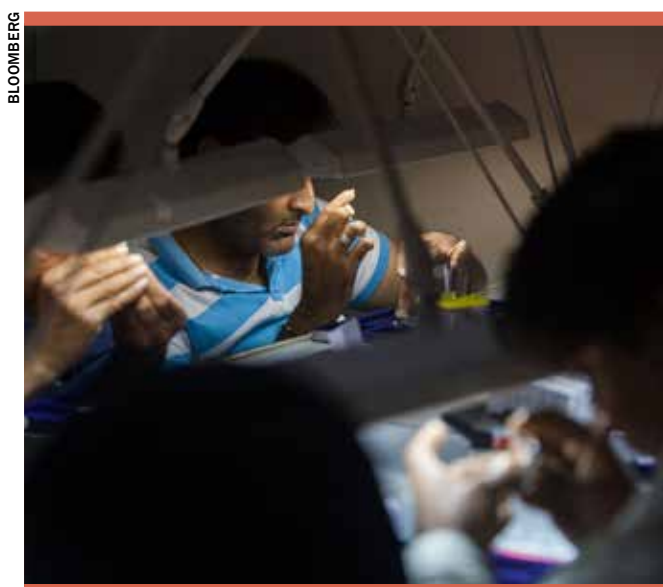
THOMAS BIESHEUVEL  
& YULIYA FEDORINOVA

**T**HE global diamond trade spent years in the doldrums, only to be crippled by the pandemic just as things started looking up. Now, at last, business is booming again.

Factories in the industry's "engine room" - the Indian city of Sura - are so desperate to boost production that the most-skilled cutters and polishers are being headhunted with offers of 50% pay hikes and perks like free food and housing. Miner De Beers is poised for its biggest rough-diamond sale in three years, even after raising prices, and rival Alrosa PJSC said this week it expects the recovery will keep going for some time.

The boom is being driven by bumper holiday jewelry sales, particularly in the vital U.S. and Chinese markets. For years, diamonds faced growing competition from travel as a form of luxury spending. Now, with vacations on hold due to lockdowns and other restrictions, consumers are putting their disposable income into online purchases.

"People have not only learned to work remotely, but also buy online, inclu-



ding diamonds," Alrosa Chief of Sales Evgeny Agureev said in an interview. "Money was previously spent on trips or on dinners at expensive restaurants, but now part of this demand has gone to diamonds. Online sales almost doubled last year to about 20% of the total."

The sales boost is feeding through to surging demand for polished diamonds, at a time when stocks held by factories and traders had shrunk dramatically following the initial Covid-19 lockdowns.

But for an industry long familiar with dramatic booms and busts, it's unclear whether the rebound will take hold, or represents only a temporary respite. Some industry participants

are also concerned that the market is running too hot, risking a slump later in the year.

Annual diamond jewelry demand had been stagnant at about \$80 billion for the past five years and the sector's middlemen were struggling to turn a profit. As global vaccines roll out and other luxury purchases become viable again, there's a risk that the industry finds itself facing the same old challenges as before.

For now, money is pouring in. Signet Jewelers Ltd. reported a 7.8% jump in holiday sales in North America, by far the industry's biggest market. The jeweler's online sales surged in the period. It was a similar story in China, the second-biggest market,

where Chow Tai Fook reported an 18% rise in quarterly sales.

India, where about 90% of diamonds are cut or polished, imported almost \$2 billion in rough diamonds last month as cutters and polishers raced to meet the increased demand and restock their inventories.

De Beers and Alrosa have both responded by raising prices, seeking to recover some of the ground they lost last year when demand collapsed.

But while De Beers implemented an increase of about 5% in its first sale of the year last week, customers are still buying. The sale hasn't yet been finalized, but the miner was on course for its biggest rough-diamond auction in three years - at about \$600 million - according to people familiar with the situation.

Still, the first sales of the year are the traditionally the busiest, when the industry's middlemen rush to restock. If sales slow later in the year, prices could come under pressure again.

The risks of a short-lived revival are compounded by the billions of dollars of rough diamond stocks held by the two big miners. So far, they've resisted the temptation to start offloading the inventories. **BLOOMBERG**

# WeChat-owner Tencent seeks USD6b loan after deals

JACQUELINE POH  
& APPLE LAM

**T**ENCENT Holdings Ltd., the creator of the messaging platform WeChat, is in talks with banks for a USD6 billion loan, according to people familiar with the matter.

That would be the biggest dollar loan syndicated in Asia for a Chinese firm since 2019, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. It would also mark a flurry of potential debt financings by tech giants after people familiar said earlier this month that rival Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. was looking to sell up to \$8 billion of bonds.

Under the terms being discussed, Tencent's five-year deal would pay an interest margin of 80 basis points over Libor and offer all-in pricing of 85 basis points, the people said, asking not to be identified as they aren't

authorized to speak publicly. The proceeds are for general corporate purposes, they added. For more details click here.

Tencent has in recent years spent billions of dollars buying stakes in promising startups, extending its reach in areas from social media to grocery delivery. It agreed last month to buy an additional 10% of Universal Music Group. Other people familiar with the matter also said Friday that Tencent has gotten a EU1.3 billion (\$1.6 billion) loan for that deal.

In addition, the company is locked in a fierce battle for users and advertisers against nemesis ByteDance Ltd., which runs TikTok. The WeChat operator is also pushing its gaming portfolios internationally, with hits like Call of Duty Mobile.

A representative with Tencent declined to comment. **BLOOMBERG**



## CORPORATE BITS

### MGM holds seminar on mainland's consumption habits



MGM has collaborated with the University of Macau (UM) to hold the "MGM Talent Development Series Seminar - Chinese Consumer Behavior: Challenges and Trends," attracting 200 participants.

Advised by the Economic Affairs Department of Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macau SAR, the talk also provided information for the city's tourism industry on capturing

emerging opportunities as mainland residents resume visiting Macau.

With a focus on consumer research in mainland China and Macau, the latter being centered around integrated resorts, participants were taught the differences in consumer behavior and habits between the two areas, the gaming operator said in a statement.

The firm added that the information would help "optimize strategies in brand positioning, tailor-made service, advertising and promotional activities, which will enhance the sustainable development of Macau's integrated resorts."

### 'Three Monks' play performed at Broadway Theatre



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) recently supported the Macao Association of Chinese Culture and Arts Development in organizing a performance of "Three Monks" in the Broadway Theatre at

Broadway Macau by serving as the venue and technical support sponsor.

To nurture the arts and cultural appreciation in local youth, GEG held a sharing session following the premiere.

"Three Monks" was performed by the China National Theatre for Children (CNTC) and for the premiere performance in Macau, GEG invited students from the Macao Conservatory and the Drama Society of the University of Macau, and troupes that had previously performed at the Broadway Theatre to watch the show.

During the sharing session, Feng Li, president of the CNTC, together with the director and actors, held a discussion with the attending teachers and students.



## OPINION

### World Views

Suresh Dhaniyala, Clarkson University, The Conversation



## HOW TO STAY SAFE WITH A FAST-SPREADING NEW CORONAVIRUS VARIANT ON THE LOOSE

A fast-spreading variant of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has been found in at least 22 U.S. states, and people are wondering: How do I protect myself now?

We saw what the new variant, known as B.1.1.7, can do as it spread quickly through southeastern England in December, causing case numbers to spike and triggering stricter lockdown measures.

The new variant has been estimated to be 50% more easily transmitted than common variants, though it appears to affect people's health in the same way. The increased transmissibility is believed to arise from a change in the virus's spike protein that can allow the virus to more easily enter cells. These and other studies on the new variant were released before peer review to share their findings quickly.

Additionally, there is some evidence that patients infected with the new B.1.1.7 variant may have a higher viral load. That means they may expel more virus-containing particles when they breathe, talk or sneeze.

As professors who study fluid dynamics and aerosols, we investigate how airborne particles carrying viruses spread. There is still a lot that scientists and doctors don't know about the coronavirus and its mutations, but there are some clear strategies people can use to protect themselves.

Airborne particles are still the biggest problem

The SARS-CoV-2 variants are believed to spread primarily through the air rather than on surfaces.

When someone with the coronavirus in their respiratory tract coughs, talks, sings or even just breathes, infectious respiratory droplets can be expelled into the air. These droplets are tiny, predominantly in the range of 1-100 micrometers. For comparison, a human hair is about 70 micrometers in diameter.

The larger droplets fall to the ground quickly, rarely traveling farther than 6 feet from the source. The bigger problem for disease transmission is the tiniest droplets — those less than 10 micrometers in diameter — which can remain suspended in the air as aerosols for hours at a time.

With people possibly having more virus in their bodies and the virus being more infectious, everyone should take extra care and precautions. Wearing face masks and social distancing are essential.

Spaces and activities that were previously deemed "safe," such as some indoor work environments, may present an elevated infection risk as the variant spreads.

The concentration of aerosol particles is usually highest right next to the individual emitting the particles and decreases with distance from the source. However, in indoor environments, aerosol concentration levels can quickly build up, similar to how cigarette smoke accumulates within enclosed spaces. This is particularly problematic in spaces that have poor ventilation.

With the new variant, aerosol concentration levels that might not have previously posed a risk could now lead to infection.

Limiting the size of gatherings helps reduce the potential for exposure. Controlling indoor environments in other ways can also be a highly effective strategy for reducing risk. This includes increasing ventilation rates to bring in fresh air and filtering existing air to dilute aerosol concentrations.

On a personal level, it is helpful to pay attention to the types of interactions that are taking place. For example, many individuals shouting can create a higher risk than one individual speaking. In all cases, it's important to minimize the amount of time spent indoors with others.

The CDC has warned that B.1.1.7 could become the dominant SARS-CoV-2 variant in the U.S. by March. Other fast-spreading variants have also been found in Brazil and South Africa. Increased vigilance and complying with health guidelines should continue to be of highest priority.

[Abridged]

## CHINA LAW EMPOWERS COAST GUARD TO USE FORCE AMID DISPUTES

China has authorized its coast guard to fire on foreign vessels and destroy structures on features it claims, potentially raising the possibility of clashes with regional maritime rivals.

The Coast Guard Law passed on Friday empowers the force to "take all necessary measures, including the use of weapons, when national sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction are being illegally infringed upon by foreign organizations or individuals at sea."

The law also authorizes the coast guard to demolish other countries' structures built on reefs and islands claimed by Chi-

na and to seize or order foreign vessels illegally entering China's territorial waters to leave.

China's coast guard is the most powerful force of its kind in the region and is already active in the vicinity of uninhabited East China Sea islands controlled by Japan but claimed by Beijing, as well as in the South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety. Those activities have brought the coast guard into frequent contact with air and sea forces from Japan, its chief ally the U.S., and other claimants to territory in the South China Sea, including Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines.

THE BUZZ

## RUSSIA WELCOMES US PROPOSAL TO EXTEND NUCLEAR TREATY

THE Kremlin on Friday welcomed U.S. President Joe Biden's proposal to extend the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between the two countries, which is set to expire in less than two weeks.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said that Russia stands for extending the pact and is waiting to see the details of the U.S. proposal.

The White House said that Biden has proposed to Russia a five-year extension of the New START treaty.

"We can only welcome political will to extend the document," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "But all will depend on the details of the proposal."

The treaty, signed in 2010 by President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers, and envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance. It expires on Feb. 5.

Russia has long proposed to prolong the pact without any conditions or changes, but former President Donald Trump's administration waited until last year to start talks and made the extension contingent on a set of demands. The talks stalled, and months of bargaining have failed to narrow differences.

"Certain conditions for the extension have been put forward, and some of them have been absolutely unacceptable for us, so let's see first what the U.S. is offering," Peskov said.

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Russian ambassador at the international organizations in Vienna, also hailed Biden's proposal as an "encouraging step."

"The extension will give the two sides more time to consider possible additional measures aimed at strengthening strategic sta-



bility and global security," he tweeted.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the U.S. decision and Russia's reiteration. He encouraged both countries "to work quickly to complete the necessary procedure for the New START's extension before the Feb. 5 expiration and move as soon as possible to negotiations on new arms control measures," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

"A five-year extension would not only maintain verifiable caps on the world's two largest nuclear arsenals but will also provide time to negotiate new nuclear arms control agreements to grapple with our increasingly complex international environment," Dujarric said.

Biden indicated during the campaign that he favored the preservation of the New START treaty, which was negotiated during his tenure as U.S. vice president.

Despite the extension proposal, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden remains committed to holding Russia "to account for its reckless and adversarial actions," such as its alleged involvement in the Solar Winds hacking event, 2020 election interference, the chemical poisoning of oppo-

sition figure Alexei Navalny and the widely reported allegations that Russia may have offered bounties to the Taliban to kill American soldiers in Afghanistan.

After both Moscow and Washington withdrew from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019, New START is the only remaining nuclear arms control deal between the two countries.

Arms control advocates have strongly called for New START's preservation, warning that its lapse would remove any checks on U.S. and Russian nuclear forces.

Last week, Russia also declared that it would follow the U.S. to pull out of the Open Skies Treaty allowing surveillance flights over military facilities to help build trust and transparency between Russia and the West.

While Russia always offered to extend New START for five years — a possibility envisaged by the pact — Trump asserted that it put the U.S. at a disadvantage and initially insisted that China be added to the treaty, an idea that Beijing flatly rejected. Trump's administration then proposed to extend New START for just one year and also sought to expand it to include limits on battlefield nuclear weapons. AP

**New Zealand** has reported its first coronavirus case outside of a quarantine facility in more than two months, a 56-year-old woman who recently returned from Europe. Like other returning travelers, she spent 14 days in quarantine and twice tested negative before being returning home. She later developed symptoms and tested positive.

**Yemen's** warring sides yesterday resumed United Nations-backed negotiations over a prisoner swap, the world body said, more than three months after they completed the war's largest exchange. The talks in the Jordanian capital Amman between representatives of the internationally recognized government and the Houthi rebels, came less than a week after the U.S. designation of the Iranian-backed rebels as a terrorist group went into effect.

**Turkey** Armed pirates attacked a Turkish cargo ship off the West African coast, kidnapping 15 sailors and killing one of them, officials said yesterday as Turkey sought to recover the captured crew. The Liberian-flagged M/V Mozart was sailing from Lagos, Nigeria, to Cape Town in South Africa when it was attacked 185 kilometers northwest of the island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe.



**Argentina's** abortion law went into force yesterday despite opposition from some conservative and church groups. Argentina became the largest nation in Latin America to legalize elective abortion after its Senate passed a law guaranteeing the procedure up to the 14th week of pregnancy and beyond that in cases of rape or when a woman's health is at risk.

**Britain** is expanding a coronavirus vaccination program that has seen almost 6 million people get the first of two doses — even as the country's death toll in the pandemic approaches 100,000. Health Secretary Matt Hancock said yesterday that three-quarters of the U.K.'s over-80s have received a vaccine shot. He said three-quarters of nursing home residents have also had their first jab.