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CTM 40th ANNIVERSARY

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WONG SIO CHAK SAID THE SECURITY AUTHORITY HAS ALREADY TAKEN MEASURES TO PREVENT ILLEGAL BROWSING OF IMMIGRATION RECORDS P4

China National Nuclear Corp. said its first nuclear power unit that uses Hualong One, a third-generation nuclear reactor, has started commercial operations. The reactor, located in the city of Fuqing city in China's southeastern Fujian province, was designed to have a 60-year lifespan, with its core equipment domestically produced.



Indian farmers taking part in more than two months of protest against new agriculture laws began a daylong hunger strike Saturday, as they sought to reaffirm the peaceful nature of their movement following recent violent clashes with police. Farmer leaders said the hunger strike was timed to coincide with the death anniversary of Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi.



India A “very low intensity” device exploded near the Israeli Embassy in the Indian capital, but there were no injuries and little damage, police said. New Delhi police said the only damage was to the windows of three cars parked nearby, which were shattered by the blast. Police cordoned off the area and were investigating.



Vietnam's Communist Party yesterday reelected Nguyen Phu Trong to be its chief. His selection makes him the nation's de facto leader for a third five-year term. The vote at the 13th National Party Congress in Hanoi took place a day earlier than planned, as the meeting, was being shortened to lessen the threat from a coronavirus outbreak.

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HONG KONG EXODUS

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REGENCY ART HOTEL BECOMES OPTIONAL QUARANTINE HOTEL

The status of Regency Art Hotel will switch from a designated medical observation hotel to an optional medical observation hotel from today. Optional medical observation hotels serve non-residents and Macau residents at their own cost. The price for the quarantine period will be determined by the hotels according to different room types. Optional quarantine hotels also include Lisboaeta Macao and Sheraton Grand Macao.

PETROL LEAK FROM CRASHED SHIP CLEARED

At noon on Saturday, two ships collided in the waters off the coast of NAPE, with one leaking petrol as it was sinking. Upon arriving at the scene, the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) alerted ships near the route to prevent further collisions. When the petrol leak was spotted, the DSAMA team initiated a clean-up mission and managed to get the situation under control. The government's statement did not mention the involvement of the Environmental Protection Bureau.

LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION FILES FORMAL COMPLAINT AGAINST 'EASKLAW'

RENATO MARQUES

THE Macau Lawyers Association (AAM) has finally filed a criminal complaint with the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) against online legal advisory platform "eAskLaw", the association informed in a statement published last Friday.

The note stated the filing was made against those who created the online portal for the crime of usurpation of functions, according to the local rulebook for lawyers.

The AAM considers the operation of the platform to be illegal since online legal advice is not linked to a registered lawyer or law firm in Macau.

The complaint comes following an investigation launched in November last year by the AAM into the platform.

At the time, the president of the AAM, Jorge Neto Valente, said that the investigation was aimed at verifying if the legal services provided by the platform comply with the rules of the profession, following complaints to the association from several legal professionals in Macau.



According to information provided by their website, "eAskLaw" allows qualified Macau lawyers to directly provide people with written advice on their legal queries by ensuring that all the lawyers registered on the platform possess verified legal qualifications and the right to practice law in Macau.

"eAskLaw" states that it has access to 16 law practitioners from several legal areas and that it accepts inquiries in Chinese and English.

In November, Neto Valente noted that online legal services are

common in many countries and regions, such as Portugal, Brazil, and Hong Kong. It was necessary to launch the assessment to ensure that the services provided by the platform were within the provisions for the profession in Macau.

The AAM also said that it discovered the platform's representatives and lawyers had made contact with and aimed to recruit more legal consultants for the service, something which the association notes may result in disciplinary procedures.

A previous report from TDM Radio said that the platform was owned by a company named the Professional Alliance of the Greater Bay, and that Kathy Wong Wai Pan was a major shareholder. Wong is a certified public accountant, president of the Taxation Association of Macau, and Council Member of Macao Society of Registered Auditors, among other positions on several professional-related associations.

As of last night, the website and the social media page of the platform is inaccessible.

WE CORRECT

We have received a request from the president of AIPIM, José Carlos Matias, to clarify what he deems to be a misleading citation in the article titled "AIPIM backs decision of public broadcaster on contest participation rules," published on page 4 of our January 29 edition. "In the lead paragraph I am quoted, in an indirect citation, as saying something that I never said or implied. Neither was I asked about the overall rules regarding the submission of stories to journalism award contests nor about the specific content of the company's memoranda, other than the decision to keep the monetary awards," Matias said in an email sent yesterday to MDT. The indirect quotation which states that AIPIM "backs up the decision" results from an interpretation of his statement in our reporting, and not from a statement attributable to the current president of the Portuguese and English press association. Matias also noted, "I was asked to

comment specifically on a decision by TDM's Executive Committee to keep the monetary awards earned by journalists in journalism awards contests. My only reply - a written one in my [capacity] as president of AIPIM's Board of Directors - is the one which is accurately and wholly transcribed in the second paragraph. The quotation reads: 'Generally speaking it is suitable and desirable that the authors and those involved in the production of the awarded works receive the respective awards as a way to create an additional incentive for the whole team and further highlight the achievement.' To conclude, he said, "All in all, AIPIM holds the view that the authors and the professionals involved in the production of the awarded works should receive and keep the prizes (symbolic and monetary) earned in those contests. We approach this matter from an ethical and professional perspective." For the misinterpretation in our reporting, we stand corrected.

GOV'T PLEDGES TO SAFEGUARD PRESS FREEDOM

THE Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng pledged that the government would continue to ensure freedom of the press and support development of the news media.

In his speech at a lunch reception with Chinese-language local news organisations on Friday, Ho praised news organisations for demonstrating - especially during the beginning of the Covid-19 alert - "courage and commitment in fulfilling their social responsibility, in order continuously to provide the public with timely and accurate information on the pandemic."

"Such effort had helped the government effectively to deliver and implement its disease prevention policies and measures," said the top official.

Ho also remarked that the government would follow its strategy of preventing imported cases and a rebound of the epidemic, leading to create favourable conditions for "restoring normal so-



cial and economic order," and ensuring the forthcoming Legislative Assembly election proceeded smoothly.

Further, he pledged that the government will continue carrying out its governance functions in strict accordance with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the Basic Law, to protect freedom of the press and support development of the news media.

"I hope that the Chinese-lan-

guage media will continue upholding their tradition of loyalty to our country and to Macau, hold fast to the correct approach and integrity, fulfill the monitoring and guiding functions of their editorials, objectively report on society and people's lives," he concluded.

He then stressed that the overall economic and social development remained stable, and that the government had maintained steady progress over the course of the administration. LV

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Occupancy rate to reach 40-60% during CNY, hotel industry forecasts

HONEY TSANG

MACAU'S hotel industry is anticipating to reach an occupancy rate of around 40% to 60% during the forthcoming Spring Festival — more or less the same as last Christmas, Macau Hotel Association's President Wong Suk Yan told TDM earlier.

Despite travel advisories issued by China's municipal governments urging their residents to avoid unnecessary travel during the Lunar New Year, Wong has been cautiously optimistic about hotel performance over the festive period.

Domestic travelers and holidaymakers from Guangdong province are expected to be the two main source markets for the hotel sector during the holiday, said Wong. She is hoping for an improvement in the occupancy rate around this period.

Chairman of the Macau Tourist Guide Association, Wu Wai Fong, told the Times that she believes travellers from the Greater Bay Area (GBA) to be

MACAU PHOTO AGENCY



the least affected by the official travel entreaty and that they will still travel to Macau during the festival this month.

"The region's close proximity to Macau offers extra reassurance for them to visit the city. Even if there is a sudden lockdown, the GBA tourists can return to their hometowns in Guangdong province from Macau in a short period," Wu explained.

Given the worsening Covid-19 situation in China, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is expecting lower tourist arrivals in Macau during the Spring Festival com-

pared to the Christmas period last year, MGTO director Maria

Helena de Senna Fernandes said in a media briefing last week.

Even in the face of unfavorable conditions, Fernandes is still projecting the occupancy rate to stand at around 70% to 80%. She expects it to be buoyed by attractive packages launched by local hotels.

According to the MGTO's data, on average Macau registered a daily visitor numbers of 24,503 and an overall occupancy rate of 69.4% in the Christmas period from December 23 to 27.

RESERVATIONS FOR FAMILY REUNION DINNERS ALMOST FULLY BOOKED

MACAU'S food and beverage (F&B) industry has confirmed that restaurant reservations for family reunion dinners on the eve of Chinese New Year (CNY) have almost reached full capacity, Fong Kin Fu, vice-chairman of the United Association of Food and Beverage Merchants of Macau, told TDM earlier. Some local restaurateurs decided

to operate their businesses during CNY to align with the travel advisory issued by the government which urges residents and foreign workers to avoid unnecessary travel during the holiday. The F&B industry has also noticed that most reservations, involving CNY banquets organized by companies, were already canceled.

APPLICATION FOR DSAL VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS STARTS TODAY

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) will open applications for another round of sponsored vocational training programs starting today. The program is dedicated to upskilling local employees and will collect applications from today until February 5. MOP5,000 will be granted to each employer who enlists one employee in the program following the completion of the training. Another program, which involves a subsidy of MOP6,656 for each participant, is designed to provide training and job-matching services to locals and will accept applications from February 18 to 24.

15 INVESTMENT PROJECTS IN HENGQIN KICK OFF

The signing ceremony for 15 key investment projects for the Hengqin integration area took place recently in Zhuhai. The 15 investment projects have a combined value of RMB26 billion. They cover a range of industries like medicine, warehousing logistics and more. The ventures were created by the mainland and Macau corporations.

GAMING INDUSTRY TAKES UP GREATEST SHARE OF OVERALL EMPLOYMENT

HONEY TSANG

MACAU saw an increase in employment from October to December 2020, with the general unemployment rate declining by 0.2 percentage points from the previous period of September to November to 2.7%.

Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of local residents also dropped by 0.2 percentage points to 3.8% in the last three months of 2020, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC).

Total employment was 388,800 and the number of employed residents totalled 281,500, up by 2,600 and 3,200 respectively from the previous period. The number of the unemployed individuals de-

creased by 600 to 11,000.

Despite the decrease in unemployment, the city's gaming and junket sector still saw a drop of 0.7% in its labor force during the latest survey period, with a total of around 76,300 employees.

By far, the gaming industry took up the greatest share of the city's overall employment in October-December 2020. It was followed by 45,500 and 35,900 workers in the wholesale and retail trade, and construction industries respectively. These two industries bucked the trend and demonstrated an uptick of 4.4% and 2.1% in employment respectively.

Overall, the city's general unemployment rate and the unemployment rate of local residents stood at 2.7% and

3.8% respectively in the fourth quarter of 2020, down 0.2 and 0.3 percentage points from the third quarter of last year.

The city's gaming industry has been suppressed by the double whammy of Covid-19 and the stringent regulations on overseas gambling activities imposed by the Chinese government.

This blow to the gaming sector is also validated by the number of licensed junket promoters in the city which fell 10.5% to 85 in January 2021, according to figure released last week by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ).

This year marks the eighth consecutive year the city has seen a yearly decline in the number of licensed junkets.

SANDS' NEW CEO OUTLINES PLANS FOR LIFE AFTER ADELSON

ROBERT Goldstein, the new chief executive officer of Las Vegas Sands Corp., sees a number of potential growth opportunities for the casino giant - from Macau to online gambling.

"I think you'll hear some things from us, hopefully over the next 12 months," Goldstein said last week on a call with investors.

Goldstein succeeded company founder Sheldon Adelson, who died two weeks ago. The 65-year-old plans to continue investing in resort projects already in the works in Singapore and Macau, where the company's remodeled Londoner hotel opens on February 8.

The executive, who has worked at Sands for 26 years, expects that renewal of the company's Macau concession, which expires next year, to involve some commitment by the company to invest more in the region. Sands has already spent USD15 billion on its

four casinos and other projects.

Goldstein said he had just returned from two days in Texas, where the company could be interested in building a casino if legislators legalize such gambling. He also reiterated his longstanding goal of building in New York City. If either of those opportunities come up, "we would jump in with both feet, if it was the right structure," he said.

Sands executives said they are still pursuing a potential sale of the company's resorts in Las Vegas, if they can get an attractive price.

ONLINE GAMBLING

Goldstein said he'd had conversations with Adelson prior to his passing about a potential investment in online betting, something the company founder had long opposed on moral grounds. Sands is the only major U.S. casino operator not pur-

suing what has been the fastest-growing part of the gambling industry.

"Sheldon, he never questioned the viability" of online betting, Goldstein said. "He questioned the ability to police it properly. We are going to explore it."

The company, which is tops in market value among casino operators, reported a steep drop in sales and ongoing losses for the fourth quarter, reflecting the continuing impact of the coronavirus on leisure businesses all over the world.

Grant Chum, chief operating officer of the company's Chinese subsidiary, saw signs of high rollers returning to the region in the past quarter, including strong sales in Sands' luxury retail stores. Mass-market customer traffic remains weak, he said.

"There is just not sufficient visitation to power all segments of the business," Chum said. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

SECURITY

WONG: PREVENTATIVE MEASURES TAKEN ON ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION RECORD BROWSING

JULIE ZHU

SECRETARY for Security Wong Sio Chak affirmed that the authority has already taken some measures to prevent abuses of power and illegal browsing of immigration records in the police system from reoccurring.

During the Legislative Assembly's (AL) plenary meeting, lawmaker Sulu Sou raised questions regarding the issues which were recently exposed by the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC). The lawmaker requested that the security authority answer as to whether the Judiciary Police (PJ) and the Public Security Police Force (PSP) had ever proactively initiated internal protocols to try to detect the illegal browsing of immigration records in the police system.

In response to Sou's question, Wong revealed that three of the 17 arrested officers were from PJ and 14 were from PSP. The security authority has already dismissed 15 of them and some of the former police officers are serving time in prison.

"Now, the computer [used for requesting immigration records] is solely stored in one room. And only a few people have access to this computer. Inside the room, there are CCTV surveillance cameras," said Wong.

According to the Secretary, every police officer has their own account for using the police computer system. PJ provides one account which is shared among several agents and is used for requesting immigration records.

"Only several agents from the information support department of PJ have access to the shared ac-



count. It is possible to trace who runs searches in the system," said the official.

The director of the PJ is currently responsible for overseeing record requests and is entitled to investigate illegal use of the system.

Late last year, the CCAC revealed that a PJ officer was suspected of accessing the immigration records of two people a number of times in 2019 for personal interest and without authorization from his superior.

MAK RAISES CONCERNS ON WATER LEAKS

The local government is studying the establishment of rules requiring homeowners to open their doors to authorities to identify water leaks.

During the plenary meeting, lawmaker Mak Soi Kun expressed his concerns over the prolonged

water leaks issue. Mak advocated that the government consider outsourcing research on the law to other professional law firms to expedite the regulation establishment process.

In his opinion, identifying water leaks does not necessarily mean the government authority should have to enter people's houses to locate the origin of the problem.

"You don't have to enter the houses. There are professional companies and technologies that are able to identify the origin of water leaks without entering the houses [where leaks might start]," said Mak. "People are in a gravely miserable situation."

Director of the Office for Secretary for Administration and Justice Lam Chi Long admitted that lawsuits and arbitrations appeared to be incapable of solving water leak disputes.

According to statistics revealed by Lam, between 2009 and 2020, the local government logged 20,199 water leak cases, of which approximately 17,400 were dealt with.

Other cases remain unsolved mostly because homeowners refused to cooperate with the government authority.

"Most of the uncooperative homeowners' houses have illegal engineering works. That is why these homeowners won't open the door," said Lam.

Seven lawmakers, including Mak, raised concerns regarding this topic during Friday's meeting.

According to Macau's law, severe leaks can be dealt with using the law that pertains to public sanitation.

"However, most of the cases are not so serious that they impact public sanitation. But there

are leaks that are mild but indeed disturbing and we want to solve these problems as well," said Lam.

DSSOPT HAS NO PLANS TO MAKE MANDATED RECYCLING GUIDE

The Macau SAR government has no intention to amend laws to prescribe a mandated recycling guide, according to Raimundo Arrais do Rosário, the Secretary for Transport and Public Works.

"The government has no intention to amend the law this year to prescribe a mandated classified recycling guide for trash," said Rosário. "We will do it through publicity towards the public."

Lawmakers Chui Sai Peng and Angela Leong were the two lawmakers who brought the topic up. Including Chui and Leong, six legislators expressed concerns about Macau's environment and recycling specifically.

Domestic waste management, electronic equipment recycling, and single-use materials are among the most asked-about topics.

Despite having no plans for mandated recycling guidelines, the public works authority intends to implement specific management protocols for the city's over 9,000 convoy systems which consist of elevators, escalators, and moving walkways.

According to Rosário, within this year, the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) will have a new department for electrical and mechanical services.

DSSOPT is said to be transferring some of its current civil servants and will hire some new workers to form the department.

Transport chief acknowledges LRT's ineffectiveness

RENATO MARQUES

THE operation of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) in Macau has not created any positive impact on society yet acknowledged the Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo Arrais do Rosário, at the Legislative Assembly (AL) on Friday.

"The LRT is having zero effectiveness for society," the Secretary said. He also acknowledged that the number of passengers transported had dropped from around 30,000 during

the first months of operation to just around 1,600 per month.

"Recently, the number of passengers has dropped to 1,600 or 1,700 per month. I also don't know exactly why," he said, adding that he has been following the matter closely.

Replying to lawmakers' inquiries on several topics related to his secretariat at the AL, Rosário noted that the LRT represents a major structural investment which takes time to fully implement and to pay off.

Noting the additional di-

fficulties the Covid-19 pandemic created for the development of the project, the Secretary admitted to not having a clear explanation for the drastic reduction in the number of users, though the timing matches with the end of the trial operation period and when fees for trips began to be enforced.

Despite the lack of use, Rosário said that the LRT expansion plan will not stop and is making progress with the connections to Seac Pai Van, Hengqin, and the Peninsula at Barra

Terminal Station.

The Secretary believes that once the LRT links are broader, it will be able to serve more people on a daily basis and will become a more attractive method of transportation.

He also announced that, as planned in the Policy Address for 2021, the government will develop work which aims to build the East Line which will ultimately connect the Pac On area in Taipa to the Border Gate, passing through the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Port.



MACAU PHOTO AGENCY

Survey: Poverty from disability is a scenario that exists in the city

ANTHONY LAM

A research project on children in poverty commissioned by the Caritas Macau shows that around 47% of impoverished children are from single-parent families.

The study received completed questionnaires from 146 children in July 2020, and conducted focus groups with 41 other children and their parents. The research team studied children aged 2 to 12 from three types of disadvantaged families: subsidized families, low-income families, and families using food support.

About a quarter of the sample were families that had newly immigrated. Over 2% of all the families had arrived in Macau less than a year and a half ago. Families with members that hold Mainland China Exit and Entry Permits made up 11% of the sample.

In a press conference held last week, Dr Chan Kam Tong, an associate professor of Social Work and Social Administration



at Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC), stressed that poverty from disability is a scenario that exists in Macau. The study found out that less than one-fifth of the families had physically disabled family members.

About 60% of the children possessed the ability to regulate their emotions, while about 27% did not. Nearly 30% of the children showed a tendency towards Internet addiction.

The study also discovered that 10% of parents had habits

such as alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling addictions and criminal records.

The research team suggested the government establish more policies to safeguard children's health. The education and social welfare sectors should expand their efforts to promote children's emotional health and support should also be provided to disadvantaged families.

Meanwhile, the academic reminded parents that they are the most impactful examples for their children's development and behavior.

Speaking on the sidelines of the conference, Chan hinted that domestic or parental violence may be absorbed mentally by children and repeated.

"Some children use relatively violent methods to sort out problems. Their parents use similar methods on them," Chan said. "There is a possibility that the children will resort to violence at school when they are faced with conflicts with schoolmates."

He added that the verbal and non-verbal behaviors of parents directly affects their children.

TEENAGER DIES AFTER JUMPING FROM BEDROOM WINDOW

A 14-year-old girl was pronounced dead in hospital after jumping from the window of her bedroom on Friday morning, the Judiciary Police announced.

The incident prompted the government to establish a cross-departmental taskforce in the attempt to contain the situation. The taskforce involves the Education and Youth Development Bureau, the Health Bureau, the Social Welfare Bureau, the Life Hope Hotline, as well as several education associations.

After their first plenary, the taskforce has pledged to reduce student anxiety through several methods, in addition to reviewing guidelines on teaching and curricula.

The taskforce also pledged to improve tools for teaching staff on counseling, crisis management, communication, emotional management and stress relief.

A new measure will allow schools to make special arrangements for students at potential or explicit risk.

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) encourages residents to be aware of their psychological and emotional state as well as that of their relatives and friends. Residents can call the Caritas Life Hope Hotline (28525777) or the IAS counseling hotline (28261126) for further assistance.

MUNICIPAL MARKET LAW

Street vending may possibly move to indoor facilities

JULIE ZHU

STREET vending may disappear in the foreseeable future as the government considers new regulations aimed at leading street vendors to do business inside municipal markets.

The government revealed its aforementioned plans to the First Standing Committee during a discussion last week regarding the recently passed law on municipal market management.

Though the municipal market law does not concern street vending, lawmakers still raised questions about the topic.

Ho Ion Sang, chairman of the committee, cited the government and explained that, in the future, street vendors may pay slightly higher fees to the government for vending merchandise inside a municipal market.

"This year's license fee for



street vending is waived. In the future, however, street vendors may pay a bit more after entering a building because the municipal market provides security services, cleaning services, and air conditioning. The increased amount will not be too much. How much it will be, the government will disclose to the committee in the next meeting," Ho said.

Currently, there are 18 street

vending locations in the city in addition to nine municipal markets that accommodate over 1,000 stalls.

Under law No. 319/2016, vendors selling general merchandise, such as crafts and related products, are required to pay an annual license fee ranging from 1,000 patacas to 1,600 patacas depending on the space occupied. This fee may go up to 2,000 to 2,600 patacas

if vendors need the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) to provide equipment for the stalls. Craftsmen, used item recyclers, and other vendors pay 350 patacas. All the aforementioned fees are discounted 60% for vendors at Taipa and Coloane.

License fees for mobile and immobile vendors vary. The most expensive immobile vending spot is at Ha Sa Beach, costing 3,000 patacas. The annual license fee for movable vendors is 5,000 patacas.

In 2018, the government conducted a public consultation on an amendment of regulations regarding street vending.

Ho said that the government currently has no timetable regarding setting up the new street vending regulations.

At present, the local government intends to continue implementing current street vending rules and regulations before new guidelines are prescribed.

The First Standing Committee has also demanded that the government explain the municipal market CCTV surveillance camera plan, license fees and rents for each stalls, and provide statistics on the ages of the operators of municipal market stalls.

EDMUND HO RECEIVES ROTARY CLUB, HEARS WORK REPORT

THE Rotary Club of Macau was recently received by former Chief Executive Edmund Ho Hau Wah to discuss past and future work, the group announced in a statement.

Ho is also the incumbent vice-chairman of the national-level Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

João Francisco Pinto, the president of the Rotary Club of Macau, started by expressing his gratitude to Ho, an honorary member of the club, for his long-time support. Pinto reported on the projects and activities the club has been engaged with since he took the office of the president last year, especially in response to Covid-19, including maternal and child care services and psychological counselling for residents.

In return, Ho acknowledged the contributions of the Rotary Club of Macau to the development of local social services over the years. Ho pointed out that the Rotary Club of Macau should continue with its long historical tradition of supporting Macau's social welfare in the areas of health, community, youth, and professional development. **AL**

CINDY had a comfortable lifestyle in Hong Kong: she owned several properties with her husband, they had a good business going. But last year she made up her mind to leave it all behind and move her family to Britain, and not even a global pandemic was going to sway her decision.

"To uproot ourselves like this is definitely not easy. But things got uglier last year, the government was really driving us away," said the businesswoman and mother of two young children who didn't give her family name because she feared repercussions for speaking out against the Chinese government. "Everything we value - freedom of speech, fair elections, liberties - has been eroded. It's no longer the Hong Kong we knew, it's no longer somewhere we can call home."

Cindy, who landed in London last week, is one of thousands of Hong Kongers fleeing their hometown since Beijing imposed a draconian national security law on the territory last summer.

HONG KONG

THOUSANDS FLEE FOR UK, FEARING CHINA CRACKDOWN



Hong Kong protesters waving a UK flag in July 2019

dened its stance on Hong Kong after massive anti-government protests in 2019 turned violent and plunged the city into a months-long crisis. Since the security law's enactment, dozens of pro-democracy activists have been arrested, and the movement's young leaders have either been jailed or fled abroad.

Because the new law broadly defined acts of subversion, secession, foreign collusion and terrorism, many in Hong Kong fear that expressing any form of political opposition - even posting messages on social media - could land them in trouble.

"I think if you knew when to shut up, you'll be OK staying in Hong Kong," said 39-year-old Fan, who also recently arrived in London. Like Cindy, he didn't want to provide his full name. "But I don't want to do that. I can complain about the queen if I wanted to - I can say anything here."

Fan, an animator, had sold his flat in Hong Kong and plans to slowly build a new life in Britain - a country he had never even visited before. He won't be alone in starting from scratch.

"This is a really unique emigration wave - some people haven't had time to actually visit the country they're relocating to. Many have no experience of living abroad," said Miriam Lo, who runs Excelsior UK, a relocation agency. "And because of the pandemic, they couldn't even come over to view a home before deciding to buy."

The British government estimates there are 2.9 million BNO status holders eligible to move to the U.K., with a further 2.3 million eligible dependants. The U.K. introduced BNO passports in the 1980s for people who were a "British dependent territories citizen by connection with Hong Kong." Until recently, the passports had limited benefits because they did not confer nationality or the right to live and work in Britain.

Cindy, the businesswoman, was still recovering from jetlag, but she's upbeat about her future.

"We want to bring Hong Kong's energy, our resources and our finances here," she said. "The move is for our kids, sure. But we want to build a whole new life here for ourselves too." **AP**

Some are leaving because they fear punishment for supporting pro-democracy protests. But many others, like her, say China's encroachment on their way of life and civil liberties has become unbearable, and they want to seek a better future for their children abroad. Most say they don't plan to ever go back.

Many firmed up their exit plans after Britain announced in July that it would open a special immigration pathway for up to 5 million eligible Hong Kongers to live, work and eventually settle in the U.K.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said this week the offer shows Britain is honoring its "profound ties of history" with Hong Kong, a former colony that reverted to Chinese rule in 1997 on the understanding that it would retain its Western-style freedoms and much of its political autonomy not seen on mainland China.

Applications for the British National Overseas visa officially open yesterday, though many like Cindy have already arrived on British soil to get a head start. Eligible Hong Kongers can currently come to the U.K. for six months, but from

yesterday they can apply for the right to live and work in the country for five years. After that, they can apply for settled status and then British citizenship.

Britain's government said some 7,000 people with British National Overseas (BNO) status have arrived since July. It estimates that over 300,000 people will take up the offer of extended residency rights in the next five years.

Cindy said she wanted to leave as soon as possible because she feared Beijing would soon move to halt the exodus.

"The Chinese government said it hasn't ruled out harsher tactics," she said. "I think they could lash out if tens of thousands of young professionals start leaving, because that would surely upset Hong Kong's economy and they wouldn't like that at all."

Beijing said last week it will no longer recognize the BNO passport as a travel document or form of identification, and criticized Britain's citizenship offer as a move that "seriously infringed" on China's sovereignty. It was unclear what effect the announcement would have because many Hong Kongers carry multiple passports.

Beijing drastically har-

AD

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COVID-19

WHO teams visit Wuhan food market in search of virus clues

A World Health Organization team looking into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic yesterday visited a market known to be the food distribution center for the Chinese city of Wuhan during the 76-day lockdown last year.

The team members were seen walking through sections of the Baishazhou market — one of the largest wet markets in Wuhan — surrounded by a large entourage of Chinese officials and representatives.

The members, with expertise in veterinarian, virology, food safety and epidemiology, have so far visited two hospitals at the center of the early outbreak — Wuhan Jinyintan Hospital and the Hubei Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine Hospital.



WHO team members leave yesterday for a third day of field visit in Wuhan

On Saturday, they also visited a museum exhibition dedicated to the early history of COVID-19.

The Geneva-based WHO said on Twitter last week that the team plans to visit hos-

pitals and markets like the Huanan Seafood Market, which was linked to many of the first cases. They also listed the Wuhan Institute of Virology and laboratories at facilities including the Wuhan

Center for Disease Control.

The mission has become politically charged, as China seeks to avoid blame for alleged missteps in its early response to the outbreak.

A single visit by scientists is unlikely to confirm the virus's origins. Pinning down an outbreak's animal reservoir is typically an exhaustive endeavor that takes years of research including taking animal samples, genetic analysis and epidemiological studies.

One possibility is that a wildlife poacher might have passed the virus to traders who carried it to Wuhan. The Chinese government has promoted theories, with little evidence, that the outbreak might have started with imports of frozen seafood tainted with the virus, a notion roundly rejected by international scientists and agencies. AP

PMI

MANUFACTURING, SERVICES SECTORS WEAKEN IN JANUARY

AN official indicator of China's manufacturing activity weakened for a second consecutive month in January, following outbreaks of domestic COVID-19 cases that affected the operations of some industries.

The purchasing managers' index, or PMI, for China's manufacturing sector fell to 51.3 in January, down 0.6 percentage points from December, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics yesterday.

Readings above 50 indicate expansion of the manufacturing industry, while a reading below it reflects a contraction.

China has seen new

virus clusters across the country, particularly in the north, and restrictions have been tightened to curb the spread.

NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe said that locally transmitted coronavirus cases had affected the operations of certain industries, and that January is typically an off-season for factories due to the Lunar New Year holidays.

Separately, the indicators for China's service industry also dipped in January amid the local outbreaks.

The PMI for China's non-manufacturing sector came in at 52.4 in January, down from 55.7 in December, according to NBS. MDT/AP

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Robert Schumann: Symphony No. 1 in B flat major, Op. 38 "Spring"
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AP PHOTO



WALL STREET UNDER ATTACK

For GameStop day traders, the moment they've dreamed about

THEY'VE endured a financial crisis. Two deep recessions. Mounds of student debt. Stagnant pay. Costly health care. Dim job prospects.

They've seen the uber-rich grow richer while a pandemic threw tens of millions of people out of work and left many more isolated and vulnerable at home.

Now, they feel, it's payback time.

Nearly a decade after the Occupy protest movement left Wall Street more or less unscathed, the citadel of financial might faces a new assault.

Day traders, mobilized on a subreddit page, have poured about all the money they can find into the stocks of a struggling video game retailer called GameStop and a few other beaten-down companies. Their buying has swollen those companies' share prices beyond anyone's imagination — and, not coincidentally, inflicted huge losses on the hedge funds of the super-rich, who had placed bets that the stocks would drop.

Their strategy, of course, is freighted with risk. The prices of the stocks they've bought are now multiples above any level justified by revenue, earnings or future prospects. The danger is that at any time, the stocks could collapse.

Maybe so. But as one Reddit user wrote Friday, asserting that hedge fund financiers would drink Champagne as they looked down upon

Occupy Wall Street protesters in 2011: "I'd rather lose it all than give them what they need to destroy me [...] I'll burn it all down just to spite them."

Their rage and hell-bent drive to pick on powerful Wall Street financiers have sent shivers through ordinary investors and heightened fears about the fragility of the markets in general after a prolonged period of stock gains fueled by ultra-low interest rates. Those fears just caused the S&P 500 index to suffer its worst week of losses since October.

GameStop shares? They rocketed nearly 70% on Friday. Over the past three weeks, they've delivered a stupefying 1,600% gain.

"They figured out how to play the way Wall Street has been playing for a long time," said Robert Thompson, who has long tracked cultural trends as director of Syracuse University's Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture. "I'm amazed it didn't happen earlier."

Feeding the frenzy have been young traders like 27-year-old Zach Weir, who this week bought five shares of GameStop.

"I'm a college student, so that's basically a month's rent for me," said Weir, who is pursuing a master's degree in marketing.

He did it, he said, because he believes in the cause: Protecting a cherished game store, where he would hang out as a teenager on Friday nights, from financial tycoons who want the com-

pany to fail.

And if he loses his investment?

"If my account goes to zero, it goes to zero," Weir said. "At this point, it's not about the money. I think this is bigger than the money now"

Frustration and rage over widening financial inequities in the American economy have been mounting for years. The richest 1% of Americans collected about 19% of pre-tax income in 2019, up from less than 11% four decades earlier, according to the World Inequality Database, run by Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, economists at the University of California, Berkeley, along with other researchers.

New York University economist Edward Wolff has found that the richest 10% of Americans own roughly 85% of stock wealth, a share that has grown steadily over time.

The financial crisis that ignited the Great Recession of 2007-2009 intensified resentment toward the bankers who had financed the dodgy loans behind the catastrophe and had ignored the obvious risks, only to receive bailouts from taxpayers and largely escape accountability. Rising outrage fueled the Occupy movement, in which protesters took over New York's Zuccotti Park and other public spaces and demanded far-reaching financial reforms that mainly didn't happen.

The coronavirus inflicted further pain, flattening the economy and causing more

than 20 million Americans to lose jobs. This week, a report from the anti-poverty group Oxfam found that the world's 10 richest men have swollen their collective wealth by \$500 billion since the pandemic erupted in March. In the meantime, nearly 10 million people who lost jobs to the pandemic remain unemployed.

The stock market, the chosen target of the Reddit day traders, has long stood as America's premier symbol of entrenched wealth. But technology, including forums like Reddit, has made it ever easier, faster and simpler for the aggrieved to mobilize, swap information and collectively plot strategy. And e-trading apps, notably Robinhood, allow amateur traders to buy commission-free stocks with one click.

They spotted a vulnerability in the market: The so-called short squeeze.

When hedge funds and other investors want to bet that a stock price will fall, they arrange a short sale: They borrow shares of, say, GameStop. Then they sell those borrowed shares, planning to buy back the stock later at a lower price and pocket the gain.

But shorting can backfire disastrously if the stock surges instead of falling. Then the short sellers can be forced to bail out of their bets by buying the target stock. Their buying, in turn, can send the stock price ever higher and makes things even worse for the short sellers in an intensifying feedback loop. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1984 HALFPENNY COIN TO MEET ITS MAKER

Britain's least-loved currency, the halfpenny coin, is leaving the nation's purses after 13 years of almost universal unpopularity.

The Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, made the announcement in a written Commons answer. He said the Royal Mint would stop making the tiny coin at the end of the month, and it would cease to be legal tender in 1984.

Banks are to send unused stocks back to the Royal Mint to be melted down.

The halfpenny coin's fate was sealed when it became more expensive to make than its face value.

Until Christmas, the Treasury had argued that the halfpenny was an important factor in the fight against inflation, but now even this defence has been dropped.

Even so, the government fears that retailers will round up any items currently priced with an odd halfpence at the end.

If this happens in all cases, it will have a significant effect on the retail price index.

But supermarkets were quick to reassure customers. Sir John Sainsbury, the chairman of the Sainsbury's supermarket chain, said that though some prices would rise, many more would be rounded down.

"We'll probably have to put the prices up somewhere else," he said, "so shopping basket prices overall will be about the same."

More uncertain will be the fate of the best-known prices ending in that odd half-penny.

Second class stamps - currently 12½p - will probably go up to 13p by the end of the year, while the dog licence is likely to change for the first time in years from 37½p to 38p.

The charity Age Concern believes these small rises will have a disproportionate effect on those who can least afford them.

"For pensioners on a small budget especially those buying small quantities, even a halfpence counts," said Sally Greengross, the charity's deputy director.

"This can only mean further cuts in their living standards."

Elsewhere, though, the demise of the halfpenny goes unmourned. Anthony Beaumont-Dark, Conservative MP for Birmingham Selly Oak, whose question in the Commons prompted the Chancellor to sound the coin's death knell, was happy to see it go.

"Most people don't even bother to pick them up when they drop them," he said. "They are glad to be rid of them."

Courtesy BBC News



IN CONTEXT

There were 2.5bn halfpennies, worth £12.5m, still in circulation when the announcement was made, mostly languishing in collecting jars or behind sofas.

Charities were quick to realise they could cash in on the windfall, and launched national campaigns to encourage people to hand over their unwanted halfpennies.

The halfpenny coin was the last denomination to be withdrawn, although coins have been redesigned and new denominations, like the two-pound coin, introduced. However, Britain is now debating whether to give up all denominations in favour of the Euro.

So far the government has held back, although 12 other European countries replaced their own currencies with the Euro on 1 January 2002.



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4 2



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\$11,000/mth
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3 2



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- [Taipa] Jade Garden family home 4 3 3,180 ft² **\$18,000,000** (ref: 19126002)

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- [Taipa] Designer apartment 2 1 900 ft² **\$11,500/mth** (ref: 20121001)
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AP PHOTO



FOOTBALL

In India's northeast, Nagas take pride in soccer

YIRMIYAN ARTHUR,
SHANGSHAK

WHEN someone asked the captain of independent India's first national

soccer team why they all played barefoot at the London Olympics in 1948, he is said to have answered: "We play football in India. Whereas you play bootball."

The captain of the team, Talmieren Ao, was a Naga, a group

native to India's northeastern frontier where most people trace their roots to Myanmar or China. Decades later, his words still ring true.

In Naga villages, children playing soccer barefoot is a com-

mon sight. Sometimes balls are made from pig bladders or rag-stuffed pomelos. And when the matches are played, the entire village turns up to show support. Parents carry infants on their shoulders. Young boys make bonfires to keep spectators warm.

The story is no different in Shangshak, home to the Tangkhul Nagas, where two neighboring villages played a match this weekend.

The match was just a friendly — neither village has a formal soccer club — and rather than soccer drills most of the home

team's players spent their morning helping paint a fellow villager's house, a common practice in a community where the culture of helping neighbors remains deeply ingrained.

Before the match most of the players helped paint a house in the host village, a common practice in the community where the culture of helping hands remains deeply ingrained.

In India, cricket is the only sport that matters. Like Bollywood, it is one of the few things that knits together a disparate nation of nearly 1.4 billion. But the fervor for soccer is felt deeply in India's northeastern states.

The region with a little over 3% of India's population is home to almost one-fifth of the national soccer team.

In a largely Hindu country, most Nagas are Christians. They're ethnically distinct from most of India, and for decades, Naga insurgent groups have been waging a fight for independence.

Most Naga villages are perched on mountaintops, originally built long ago to spot approaching enemies when the region was little more than a forest. But on nearly every hilltop, a soccer pitch springs to life.

"We learn to play the game from the time we start walking," said A.S. Ngayaomi, 20, who was a substitute in the match. **AP**

AD

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total/ 總課時:
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OPINION

World Views

Lionel Laurent, MDT/Bloomberg



VACCINE TRADE WARS HAVE JUST ONE WINNER: COVID-19

Vaccine nationalism is escalating in a world where Covid-19 is everywhere, yet the life-saving medicines needed to fight it are scarce. The temptation to hoard doses is rising, but that would prolong the pandemic by driving an even bigger wedge between leaders and laggards. Without a focus on increasing supply and sharing doses across borders, the virus will be with us longer than we fear.

If tempers are running hot, it's because supplies are running low. The European Union, furious at a drastic cut in expected deliveries from AstraZeneca Plc, is introducing export curbs to prevent vaccines leaving its territory if it feels drugmakers aren't living up to their commitments. "This is a race against the clock," said EU Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis. "We cannot lose time because of vaccines not being delivered on schedule." There will be exceptions for some neighboring and low-income countries.

In theory, as a quid-pro-quo, there's nothing inherently wrong with the idea that doses bought with taxpayer money should be defended tooth and nail for the benefit of those same taxpayers. The U.S. government, for example, has so-called "march-in" rights to take over drug patents if it feels manufacturers aren't producing enough. Given the cumulative Covid-19 death toll in the EU is now at more than 462,800, and with swathes of the continent under lockdown, there may be a moral as well as a contractual case to intervene.

In practice, though, these kinds of decisions have messy, global life-and-death ramifications in a pandemic. Seizing doses at the factory destined for elsewhere means depriving others of life-saving medicines. It makes tit-for-tat reprisals more likely, as seen last year in fights over masks and ventilators.

Already Canada has had to reassure its population that EU curbs won't hit supplies. The U.K., fearing disruption to its own deliveries, has warned the EU that it expects its own contracts to be honored — or, in the words of the Daily Mail, "No, EU Can't Have Our Jabs." What if India, producer of half the world's vaccine supply, started to slap on its own curbs?

A focus on contractual terms is likely to backfire. The published terms of AstraZeneca's deal with the EU show the firm did indeed promise to make its "best efforts" to hit its supply targets, but the idea that this is a question to be settled by lawyers misses the point. Some countries pre-ordered their vaccines before the EU, paid a premium and even helped fund the product's development.

Consider the case of Valneva, a biotech company based in France, which has agreed to supply the U.K. with 60 million doses of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate for 470 million euros (\$570 million). It's also received investment to expand production at its plant in Scotland. Valneva's chief financial officer, David Lawrence, tells me that negotiations are still ongoing with the EU. Curbs wouldn't speed up deliveries — working with the U.K. would.

We are barely months into a global vaccination campaign that is set to stretch until late 2022 in China and India and into 2023 for more than 85 poor countries. Governments have an obvious responsibility to their own citizens, but that will need to be balanced with the epidemiological risks of leaving swathes of the planet unvaccinated for longer, especially with new strains emerging all the time.

Given the U.S.'s welcome commitment to Covax, a 92-nation collaboration to ensure more equitable distribution of vaccines, it's time the rich world set the example and worked out how best to share its own supply. Is it better to vaccinate the most vulnerable people in a neighboring country before the least vulnerable in one's own? Contracts won't tell us. Cooperation will.

South Korea says it will maintain elevated social distancing measures for at least two more weeks as health officials raise concerns about a possible surge in coronavirus infections surrounding February's Lunar New Year holidays.

Vice Health Minister Kang Do-tae yesterday pleaded with people to stay home during the holidays as he announced the government decision to extend a clampdown on private social gatherings of five or more people through the end of the holiday on Feb. 14.

The government will also maintain restrictions on indoor

dining in the Seoul metropolitan area for another two weeks, requiring restaurants to provide only deliveries and take out after 9 p.m.

Kang said officials are also concerned about how the toughened social distancing rules are hurting business owners and that they could possibly decide to ease some restrictions after monitoring the spread of the virus for another week.

South Korea reported another new 355 cases yesterday, bringing the national caseload since the pandemic began to 78,205, including 1,420 deaths.

VENICE HAS PEOPLE IN MASKS BUT NO CARNIVAL FUN

ANTONIO CALANNI & ANDREA ROSA, VENICE

IN another year, masks would be a sign of the gaiety in Venice, an accessory worn for games and parties as big crowds parade about to show off their frivolous, fanciful costumes, especially ones with decorative face coverings.

The Italian canal city's Carnival festivities should have started Saturday, but the COVID-19 pandemic has made its annual appointment for more than two weeks of merry-making impossible.

Last year, with fears over the new coronavirus mounting, authorities abruptly shut down the Venice Carnival on its third day, just before Italy became the first country in the West to face a outbreak.

Back then, a "surge" meant crowds squeezing through Venice's maze of car-less streets, intent on meeting up in the vast St. Mark's Square. The day that Carnival shuttered to a stop last year, the confirmed coronavirus cases in all of Italy numbered only 133.

Now Italy has logged more than 2.5 million confirmed virus cases, including more than 88,000 deaths but not including thousands who



died without being tested. A "surge" has taken on a different, more ominous context. Masks are worn now to protect, not amuse.

Gondolas and other vessels are moored instead of preparing for Carnival's popular boat parade in the lagoon. Alleys are eerily empty. Venetians and the city's few visitors must be masked in public places, indoors and out, under a nationwide mandate.

Italy's current infection-control restrictions do not allow traveling between regions. Foreign tourism, especially from the United States, dried up in the last year as governments imposed bans on international travel for nonessential purposes. Even if Carnival had been held, relatively few people would have made it to Venice.

The Carnival's appeal is rooted back centuries, when, for a brief stretch in the run-up to Lent, the Catholic period of penitence that begins on Ash Wednesday, ordinary Venetians would strut about masks, taking on temporary new identities, and for a few days become indistinguishable from members of the proud maritime city's ruling class.

During Carnival, the mask served to "to protect, to reveal, and also to guarantee anonymity," says Gualtiero Dall'Osto, who owns Tragomico, an artisan's shop making artistic masks. "Now, paradoxically, we are not able to experience the mask in this way, and we are forced to wear these (sanitary) masks that in some way block the liberation, the freedom, of our so-called senses." AP



Myanmar's military denied its chief was threatening to stage a coup over complaints of election fraud, saying the media had misinterpreted his words. Political tension in the Southeast Asian nation soared this past week after a spokesman for the military, which had ruled Myanmar for five decades, said a coup could not be ruled out if its complaints of widespread fraud in November's election were ignored.



Bangladesh's government sent a fourth group of Rohingya Muslim refugees to an island in the Bay of Bengal, ignoring calls from human rights groups for a halt to the move. The 1,466 Rohingya who had been living in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar were sent to Bhasan Char, an island specifically developed to accommodate 100,000 of the 1 million Rohingya who have fled from neighboring Myanmar.



Russia Thousands of people took to the streets yesterday across Russia's vast expanse to demand the release of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, keeping up the nationwide protests that have rattled the Kremlin. Over 1,600 were detained by police, according to a monitoring group. Russian authorities mounted a massive effort to stem the tide of demonstrations after tens of thousands rallied across the country.

Portugal will be seeking medical assistance from Austria and Germany as it struggles with a surge in coronavirus cases. Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said yesterday that the Alpine nation will receive intensive care patients from Portugal, without specifying a number. The German military plans to send medical aid and doctors to Portugal in the coming days.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

AP Photo/Czarek Sokolowski



Poles. Poles took to the streets of Warsaw, Gdansk and other cities for a third night of protests last week, after a near-total abortion ban took effect that gives Poland one of the most restrictive laws in Europe.