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**MUST OPENS TRAINING PROGRAMME ON US CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS SPECIFICALLY FOR GREATER BAY AREA**

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**LAWMAKERS QUESTIONED AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION GOVERNING THE ACQUISITION OF GOODS AND SERVICES BY THE GOVERNMENT**

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**Japan** announced yesterday that it is extending a coronavirus state of emergency in Tokyo and nine other areas through March 7. Under the state of emergency, the government has issued non-binding requests for people to avoid crowds and eating out in groups, and for restaurants and bars to close by 8 p.m.. More on p11



**Iranian** state TV aired the launch of the country's newest satellite-carrying rocket, which it said was able to reach a height of 500 kilometers. The footage of the solid-liquid-fueled rocket showed the launch taking place during daytime in a desert environment. The rocket did not launch a satellite into orbit.

**Pakistan** A speeding bus overturned on a highway in southern Pakistan yesterday, killing at least 14 passengers and injuring 11, police said. The accident took place in the town of Uthal in the Sindh province, local police official Sharif Ahmed said. The accident apparently happened when the driver lost control of the bus on account of speeding, though authorities are still investigating.

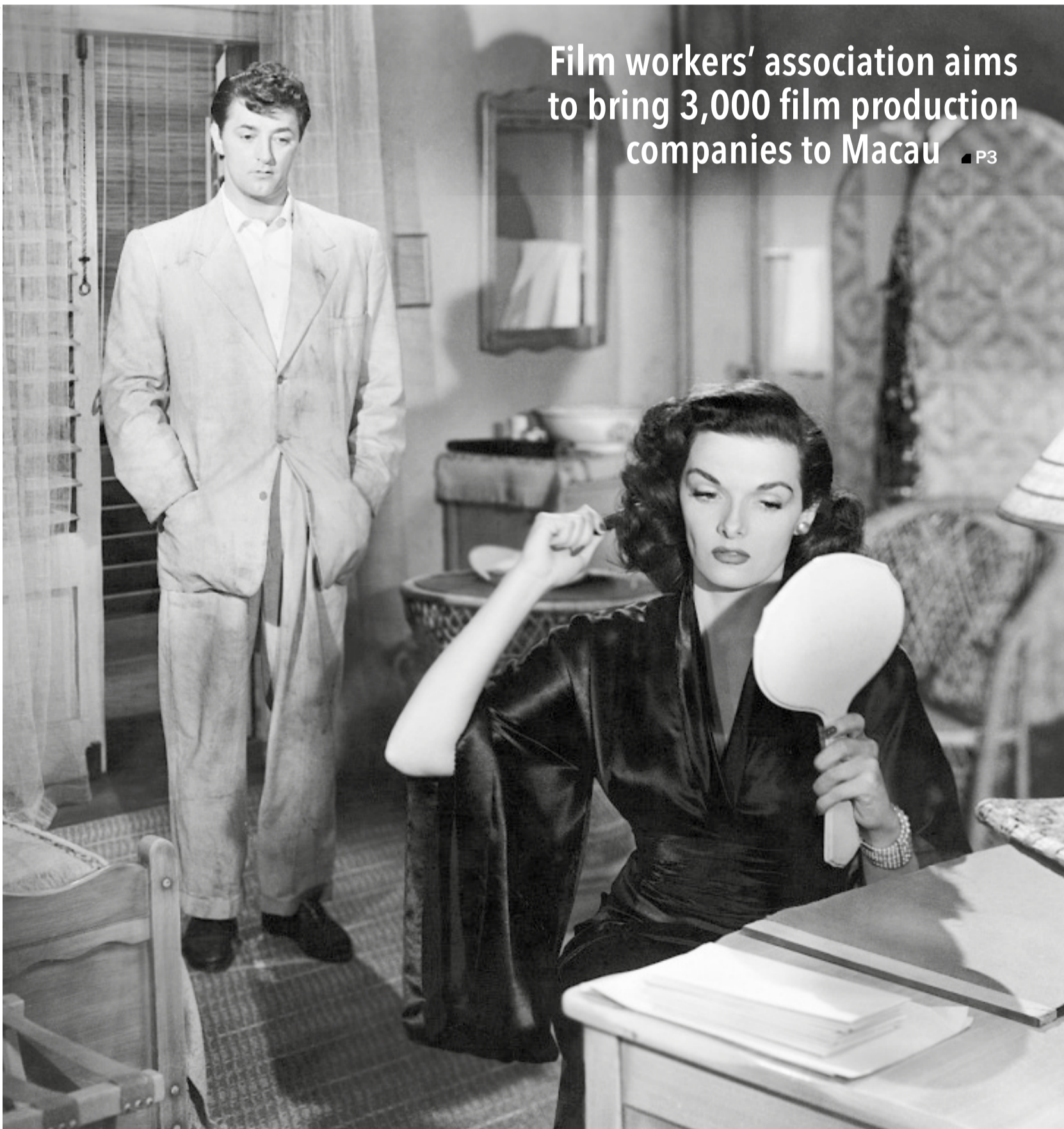


**Afghanistan** Separate explosions, set off by sticky bombs attached to cars, killed at least two people in the Afghan capital yesterday, including a prominent cleric who headed an Islamist nonprofit organization. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani denounced the cleric's death as a "terrorist attack on the dignity and bright future of Afghanistan." No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks.

More on backpage

# MOLLYWOOD, BABY!

A SCENE FROM "MACAO" (1962)



Film workers' association aims to bring 3,000 film production companies to Macau P3

## ACADEMIC SLAMS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNTING SYSTEM

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# MUST TO LAUNCH TRAINING COURSE FOR USCPA CERTIFICATION

JULIE ZHU

**M**ACAU University of Science and Technology (MUST) is slated to launch a training programme this March for the American Certified Public Accountant (USCPA) certification exam, according to a statement released by the university.

The programme will be under MUST's School of Liberal Arts and is designated specifically for individuals from the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The course consists of four subjects including Financial Accounting & Report; Regulation; Auditing; and Business Environment and Concepts.

The course is suitable for students majoring in accounting and accountants who are in junior-level or above.



Eligible applicants from Hong Kong, Macau and other GBA cities should also have sufficient English proficiency; basic accounting knowledge or be experienced in accounting and finance related works.

According to the MUST statement, mainland China has presented a demand for nearly 300,000

USCPA in 2019.

By opening this programme, MUST hopes to empower Macau's talented human resources for the city's "long-term prosperity."

USCPA is a professional accountant qualification certificate awarded by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AIC-

PA), the national professional organization of Certified Public Accountants in the United States.

## ACADEMIC COMMITTEE APPLAUDS DEVELOPMENTS OF MUST LAB

In a recent online meeting, experts from China's State Key La-

boratory academic committee applauded the development and achievements of the State Key Laboratory of Quality Research in Chinese Medicines of MUST. As of now, the lab is comprised of 454 people, with one of them a Nobel Prize winner. The research team of the lab has published 249 Science Citation Index papers, obtained nine patents and garnered 14 awards.

The lab has also played a key role in the fight against Covid-19, undertaking 14 projects, sponsored by the SAR government and Chinese governments to identify efficient Traditional Chinese Medicine treatments to cure coronavirus. It also invented an air disinfectant and nasal protective agent that are effective in preventing an individual from contracting Covid-19.

During the online meeting, members of the academic committee voiced their opinions and suggestions to the MUST State Key Laboratory.

The committee members encouraged the researchers of the lab to continue to be innovative in Chinese medicine research.

# MALAYSIA REQUESTS INTERPOL TO ISSUE RED NOTICE AGAINST 'BROKEN TOOTH'

**N**OTORIOUS triad boss, Wan Kuok-koi, more commonly known by the pseudonym "Broken Tooth", is currently wanted by the Malaysian Police, according to the country's media outlets.

Malaysian law-enforcement entity has reportedly submitted an application to Interpol for the issuance of a global Red Notice against Wan.

The operation was prompted by Wan's alleged commercial malpractice. The Malaysian Police received a report about the case in September, 2020, before listing Wan as a wanted person on October 16.

It has been reported that the notable Macau individual failed to transfer shares of Malaysian company Inix Technologies Bhd, which were worth 6

million Malaysian ringgit (about MOP11.8 million), to a third-party bank account within an agreed period.

He is also suspected of manipulating the stock prices of the Malaysian company. In August last year, Wan was appointed chairman of Inix, a post from which he resigned within four months.

The Malaysian media also reported that Wan is now in Malaysia.

Interpol's Red Notice is the highest tier of warrant within the constitution of the international entity. Each issuance has a validity of five years but the notice can be renewed an unlimited number of times, meaning that the validity is in fact infinite.

Last December, The U.S. imposed a sanction on Wan for the alle-

ged illegal activities he engaged in to piggyback off China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The U.S. Treasury Department charged Wan, the former leader of the notorious mainland mob the 14K Triad, with the offence of using business and other activities to try to "paper over illegal criminal activities," by framing his actions in terms of China's BRI.

Under the sanctions, all assets possessed by Wan in the U.S. will be frozen. American citizens and U.S.-tied companies will be banned from being involved in any business with him.

The U.S. misattributed him as being a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Wan declared in a video statement following the allegation. **AL**

## MEDIA

# HO IAT SENG PRAISES ENGLISH, PORTUGUESE PRESS WORK DURING PANDEMIC

**C**HIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng expressed "heartfelt" gratitude yesterday for the role of the local press in the English and Portuguese languages during the pandemic for reflecting the concerns and opinions of the public.

"Throughout the pandemic, the Portuguese- and English-language media have reflected the views and aspirations of the public and provided us with sincere comments and suggestions - enabling the government to better serve the public and respond to the needs of society. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for your effort," Ho said in a speech delivered at the usual spring lunch with the sector's editors and publishers.

Ho also said that during the health crisis, the English and Portuguese media demonstrated the crucial nature of their role in maintaining communication between overseas Macau residents, foreign-language commu-



nities, and the government, thereby "enabling people in these communities to understand the government's policies and measures."

With the languages and culture as a bridge, said Ho, "media reporting in Portuguese and English leverage their functions to link communities, enhance mutual understanding between Macau and the world, and promote harmony and inclusion in society. They are, in fact, the key

witnesses and contributors to Macau's multiculturalism."

The Chief Executive left journalists with guarantees of better working conditions, namely in terms of access to public information. The lunch was also attended by the five policy secretaries, CE's chief of office and the GCS director.

Using a metaphorical language, Ho ended his speech with a wish: "The pandemic will be eventually over, and a new spring will finally come." **PC**

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# Mollywood aims to bring 3,000 film production companies to town

JULIE ZHU

**M**OLLYWOOD'S film workers' association has ventured their plans to bring over 3,000 film and television production companies to Macau and the Greater Bay Area by 2025, according to a report by RMZXB, an online media publication under the leadership of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

The association intends to attract nearly 50,000 youths to work in Mollywood in order to create a series of "excellent film and television products."

Within the next five years, Mollywood plans to train and upskill 1,000 Macau youths to become highly skilled industry workers who are well regarded on a global basis within the film and television field.

Last October, the Mollywood film workers association was established in Macau. The association has nearly 200 members, including the president Wang Haige,



who is also the chairman of the Huading Awards of mainland China, and the executive chairman Wang Zhonglei, who is also the CEO of mainland's Huayi Brothers Media Co., Ltd.

During a seminar recently organized in Macau, Mollywood published a report about the SAR's film and television industry. In the report, Mollywood urged the government to open a "green channel" for Macau's film and television industry.

Mollywood wants the Macau government to establish a "film and television quality migrant" scheme. It envisages that this would be a quota-based entrant scheme that seeks to attract highly talented personnel to settle in Macau and enhance Macau's competitiveness in film and television production.

According to the RMZXB report, member of the Cultural Industry Fund, Wong Keng Chao, said that the film and television industry re-

presents 0.6% of Macau's revenue in 2020.

During the launch in June 2020, organizers noted, "Mollywood will be built into another cultural industry cluster with the output value of hundreds of billions of dollars in the future for the diversified development of Macau."

Similar to Hollywood and Bollywood, the organizers claim that Mollywood will be another "world-class film, music, fashion production and communication hub." It will also become an experimental base for combining technology, film and television.

The film project aims to promote the coordinated cooperation and joint development of China's film and television production services.

In addition, it will establish a "film and television base cooperation certification" mechanism worldwide, which will form the basis of a standardized service system to connect and integrate film and television production, consultation and coordination services.

## CONCERT GOUGER ACCUSED OF SCAM INVOLVING HKD150,000

A local man is facing charges after he misrepresented himself to be a concert ticket gouger to obtain HKD150,000 from one of his friends. The suspect, surnamed Kuok, persuaded his friend to join him in buying the tickets and steeply increasing the price for resale. Kuok's friend claimed that he gave him HKD150,000. Kuok denied the accusation.

## CENSUS BUREAU TO HIRE 2,600 TEMPORARY WORKERS

The Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) is hiring over 2,600 temporary workers for its next decennial censuses. According to a statement from the bureau, these temporary workers will facilitate the bureau's data gathering efforts. Interested residents who are over 18 years old as of July 1 2021, speak fluent Cantonese, and have a secondary school degree or higher, can apply for the job before February 18.

AD

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### WAGE OF LOCAL CONSTRUCTION WORKERS DOWN 2% IN Q4 2020

The average daily wage of construction workers dropped by 0.6% quarter-to-quarter to MOP739 in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2020. The daily salary for local and non-resident construction workers was MOP939 and MOP620 in Q4 2020, down 2.0% and up 0.3% respectively. In 2020, the average wage index of construction workers fell by 1.2% year-on-year in real terms, while that of local construction workers contracted 3.5%. The price index of construction materials for residential buildings advanced by 1.4% year-on-year in 2020.

### RESIDENTIAL HOUSING TRANSACTIONS UP FIVE IN FIRST-HALF OF JANUARY

The number of the residential housing transactions in Macau totaled 215 in the first half of January 2021, up by five from the second half of December 2020, according to the latest data provided by the Financial Services Bureau (DSF). The average residential property price amounted to MOP102,705 per square meter in saleable areas.

# ACADEMIC SLAMS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNTING SYSTEM

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE disparity in figures for domestic violence cases in Macau recorded by different entities is confusing and a waste of resources, according to Cecilia Ho, local academic who speaks out against the crime.

The Judiciary Police (PJ) released the crime figures for last year this week, highlighting a general fall in the number of criminal investigations. Amongst them, 116 cases involved family members, equating to an 8.4% increase compared with 2019.

However, only 11 cases were classified as domestic violence, amounting to a one-third drop compared with the previous year. Meanwhile, 70 cases were categorized as physical assault. The authority does not rule out the possibility of increased time at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic as causing intensified "domestic conflicts."

In the meantime, the Women and Children Affairs Committee has previously attributed a fall in domestic violence records to the government's effort to provide timely support and preventative services.



However, in an interview with local online media Macau Concealers, Ho, who is also part of a group monitoring the implementation of the domestic violence law, hinted that it is a numbers game.

She explained that different government entities have differing figures on the same type of assault. For example, according to the data from the Social Welfare Bureau's (IAS) Domestic Violence Central Counting System, 18 out of 1,380 reported cases were categorized as domestic violence cases in the first half of 2020.

The bureau is the chief authority to handle such assaults.

However, the IAS figures did

not match those from the PJ.

Ho pointed out that the discrepancy is because each public entity – including the police, the IAS and the court – has its own interpretation on the definition of domestic violence.

She accused the government of trying to create an illusion that the scenario in Macau is less severe than in reality by presenting lower figures.

She added that the effectiveness of a law is measured by the achievement of the legislation's goal, rather than in the number of prosecutions.

Pointing out a loophole in the law, she revealed that many domestic violence cases have been

miscategorized as domestic conflicts, because the law-enforcement entities naturally focus on the violence reported within each incident, omitting possible previous occurrences that were not reported and the overall context of the incident.

Indeed, a criterion for domestic violence is physical, mental or sexual abuse happening between family members. While cross-referencing the Penal Code, abuse is defined as repeated harm, or, should one single instance of harm be concerned, a severe and violent incident.

The domestic violence legislation has gone through a long process of debate as certain family welfare groups wanted to categorize it as "semi-public crime" late last year, in which a lawsuit can only be initiated by the victim, meaning the public authorities cannot prosecute in such an instance.

The justification of such groups was that lawsuits would harm "domestic harmony", while Ho and her supporters opposed this by pointing out that it is the occurrence of violence itself that harms domestic harmony.

AD

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# Lawmakers trigger alarm on acquisition of goods and services bill

RENATO MARQUES

**S**EVERAL lawmakers raised questions regarding the amendments to legislation governing the acquisition of goods and services by the government in discussion at the plenary session at the Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday.

The lawmakers expressed concern over the fact that the proposed amendment only changes the ceiling amount for which acquisitions from government departments and services need to pass through written contracts and public tender by raising the ceiling six-fold.

The Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, justified the amendment as a response to a need to update the existing regulations that date from the mid-1980s. The current laws, according to the Secretary, are severely outdated due to the increase in the value of the goods as well as materials, manpower, and services in general.

Lawmakers also expressed surprise that the amendment proposed by the government does not prompt any deeper changes in the system that has, on many occasions, been dubbed as inefficient due to the many loopholes that contribute to the waste of public money and lack of control over the spending by public services.

Lawmaker Leong Sun Iok was the first to raise such concerns, noting that the government's public consultation on the matter back in 2018 gave rise to a series of recommendations that should have been addressed in the amendment.

"We were not expecting a change that can be used as a mechanism to jeopardize justice and fair competition. [However] we were expecting the government to introduce changes on the law to prevent acts of corruption and collusion," Leong said.

Leong also questioned Secretary Lei's explanation in his justification note that this law revision will occur in two different phases.

Following on Leong's questions, Ella Lei added that the government needs to explain its decision to raise all the ceilings by six-fold, querying, "From where did this multiplier originate? The government needs to explain why [it opted for] six-fold and not more or less. How was this calculation made?"

As with Leong, Lei also noted that the public consultation raised issues such as a lack of transparency in the system and lack of criteria in the evaluation of the propo-



sal, among others – problems that the government seems to have ignored.

"I think we need a complete [revamp of the] system to increase the transparency and also find ways to classify the candidates. We also need to improve the disciplinary system. [The proposed amendment] seems to be the easy way [to approach the problem] by just updating the amounts [from which acquisitions need to pass through a strict process]," Lei said. Lei further added, "I think we are losing an opportunity to update the system and increase the transparency and the procedures at large."

Similar issues were raised by lawmakers Agnes Lam, Ip Sio Kai, Mak Soi Kun, Sulu Sou, José Pereira Coutinho, Ng Kuok Cheong, and Au Kam San. Mak was the only lawmaker to express the view that the six-fold increase seemed insufficient when taking into account the general price hike over the past 30 years. According to his calculations, the prices of goods and services have risen by at least ten-fold or possibly more.

In the reply, Lei explained that the government has a regime to scrutinize the process before and after and that all government departments must issue mid-term reports on their spending.

The Secretary noted that the six-fold multiplier was decided upon after a "comprehensive consideration" of the gross domestic product as well as variation in the price of products and services between the late 1980s and up to the present (among other factors), concluding, "After this weighing, we understood that this is most adequate raise."

The director of the Financial

Services Bureau, Stephen Iong, explained that the six-fold multiplier would reduce, by about 80%, the need to establish complex processes for the acquisition of goods and services, facilitating the process, and contributing towards a quicker and more effective performance of the public services.

Lawmakers Ng and Au expressed more concerns after the government's reply, noting frequent problems of people breaching the law on acquisition of goods and services on a daily basis, and that the inspection mechanism has already proven to be inefficient.

"The reply of the Secretary is more worrying," said Au, adding, "From the trial of former Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Ao Man Long [who was sentenced for corruption and money laundering], we got to know many sche-

mes that were often used to avoid these inspections and scrutiny. We need a complete amendment to the law. This [amendment] is going to create new loopholes for people to breach the law."

In the voting that followed the debate, the bill was passed in its first reading with 25 votes in favor, four against (Sulu Sou, Pereira Coutinho, Ng Kuok Cheong, and Au Kam San) and two abstaining (Leong Sun Iok and Ella Lei). However, several other lawmakers called for a better clarification from the government during the analysis that will follow at the AL Standing Committee.

## SECOND PHASE NEXT YEAR

After insistence from many lawmakers, the Secretary finally announced that the second phase of amendments to the laws that

regulate public acquisitions will come as early as next year.

Lei justified the need to delay "more profound changes" with ongoing economic activities that can be negatively influenced by this change, as well the need to dedicate more time to consider the matter.

He also noted the need to understand how the local rules link with other similar international regulations.

"We expect the second phase to be presented next year. This amendment is to accelerate the process," he said, hinting that the fact that this legislative term will end later this year also contributes to the separation of the amendments into two sections to allow the first one to still be approved and enter into force within the current term.

## PROPOSAL TO DEBATE 'PENHA HILL' VOTED DOWN

**A** proposal by lawmaker Sulu Sou to discuss the preservation and protection of the Penha Hill landscape, as well as the visual corridors to the coastline, was voted down by a significant majority of lawmakers at the Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday.

The proposal comes following the government's decision to build two government buildings in the Nam Van Lake Zones C and D, which, according to the lawmaker, will affect the landscape and the visibility for the Penha Hill and the Our lady of Penha chapel, which is a UNESCO protected heritage site.

The proposal for a debate only gathered five votes in favor: Sou, José Pereira Coutinho, Ng Kuok Cheong, Au Kam San, and Agnes Lam.

Agreeing with the proposal, Coutinho addressed the plenary to say that the fact the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) re-

cently launched a consultation on the final drafts of the buildings is proof that some government departments do not take into account the wishes of the population and therefore abuse their power and authority so as to make decisions according to what they want. He further claimed that he did not understand the roles of DSSOPT and Cultural Affairs Bureau in this process.

Voicing a contrary opinion were lawmakers Wu Chou Kit and Iau Teng Pio, who noted that the government has already fulfilled all the legal requirements of the projects and that both public and professional opinions were taken into account and even led to changes in the projects, namely a reduction in the total height of the buildings.

Wu added that the matter had already been broadly and sufficiently discussed at the Urban Planning Committee and a consensus had already been reached. **RM**

# SURVEY REVEALS STUDENTS' POOR NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

JULIE ZHU

**SOME** secondary school students in Macau do not get adequate exercise and overindulge in sugary beverages, according to a survey recently conducted by the General Association of Chinese Students-Macau and the Macau Youth Research Association.

Designed to collect information about Macau secondary school students' daily habits, the survey was answered by 1,135 students, 1,055 of whom returned valid questionnaires to the associations.

The survey focused on two areas: nutrition and physical activity.

Approximately half of the students said that they eat breakfast six or seven days per week, a quarter said that they eat breakfast four to five days per week, while the rest said that they have less than three breakfasts per week.

Nearly 70% of the respondents eat snacks one to four times per week, whereas one tenth of students claimed to never snack.

In regard to beverage consump-



tion, 40% reported consuming sugary beverages (including soda water, coffee, juice, energy drinks) more than four times a week, while 10% report no consumption of these drinks within a week.

The survey identified that the secondary school students do not partake in physical activity inside or outside of school. The respondents explained that they are too busy with schoolwork, don't have time, lack a companion with whom to exercise, or simply don't want to exercise.

Results demonstrated that 35% of the respondents regarded physical education classes in school to be too short.

On a weekly basis, 30% of the students never exercise outside of the

school curriculum.

Only one in 10 respondents go to bed before 10 p.m., while 32% of respondents go to bed after midnight. Only 20% of students sleep more than eight hours a day.

Given that electronic devices are increasingly integrated within our lives – especially in this region, where the local education authority continues to promote using online sources for school teaching and learning – the results found that 45% of respondents are engaged with electronic devices for more than four hours a day during school hours.

Outside of school, 30% students use electronic devices for non-school related activities for a further four hours.

# FUND-RAISER PARTNERSHIP OF ALBERGUE, CARITAS HELPS CANCER PATIENTS

HONEY TSANG

**ALBERGUE** SCM has again partnered with Caritas Macau to set up a wishing well to raise funds from February 1 to March 14 to offer succor to local cancer patients.

All the funds raised are purely for charitable purposes and will be given to Caritas Macau, which will distribute the money to cancer patients in need, Carlos Marreiros, president of Albergue SCM, told the Times yesterday.

"We want to convey a message that every person can do good things to help those in need, even with limited resources," Marreiros stressed.

This year's event is intended to commemorate World Cancer Day tomorrow, February 4, and raise public awareness of cancer across the SAR.

From 2015, Albergue SCM has transformed the well perched on its patio into a wishing well every Lunar New Year — meaning locals and visitors

can make New Year wishes and drop a coin or two as a donation into the wishing well.

In 2020, the wishing well raised around MOP15,000 — which was a smaller amount than previous years, according to the Albergue SCM representative.

The decrease was mainly attributed to the impact of coronavirus, "as the event held during the last Lunar New Year coincided with the Covid-19 outbreak," the representative explained.

When asked whether the funds raised would be evenly distributed to cancer patients, the representative said the distribution method would be at the discretion of Caritas.

"Caritas will evaluate the situation of each and every cancer case they have had contact with, and determine the best approach to support them. It could be evenly handed out or awarded to those in most need," the representative added.

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**C**HINESE police have arrested more than 80 suspected members of a criminal group that was manufacturing and selling fake Covid-19 vaccines, including to other countries.

Police in Beijing and in Jiangsu and Shandong provinces broke up the group led by a suspect surnamed Kong that was producing the fake vaccines, which consisted of a simple saline solution, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

The vaccines were sold in China and to other countries, although it was unclear which ones. The group had been active since last September, according to state media.

"China has already reported the situation to the relevant countries," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing yesterday.

"The Chinese government highly values vaccine safety and will continue to take efforts to strictly prosecute any counterfeits, fake sales and illegal business, and other related actions that involve vaccines," Wang said. "At the same time, China will strengthen our law enforcement cooperation with

# Police arrest suspects in fake Covid-19 vaccine ring



the relevant countries, to earnestly prevent the spread of this type of illegal and criminal action." He did not offer further details.

China has a long history of vaccine scandals resulting from

manufacturing issues as well as business practices. In 2016, police arrested two people who were in charge of a ring that sold millions of improperly stored vaccines across the country.

In response to recent scandals, China reformed vaccine safety regulations and increased criminal penalties for those caught making counterfeits.

Domestically, many Chinese

citizens did not trust homegrown vaccines and surveys previously showed that trust in vaccines fell after scandals like the one in 2016. However, since the pandemic has struck, confidence has been high. A total of 74% of respondents in a recent survey published in Chinese business magazine Caixin said they would take a COVID-19 vaccine if it was available.

China has at least seven Covid-19 vaccines in the last stage of clinical trials, and has one that has been approved for domestic use, made by state-owned Sinopharm.

Chinese vaccine makers have seized the opportunity provided by the pandemic to go global, with Sinopharm and other Chinese companies making deals or donating their vaccines in at least 27 countries around the world.

Domestically, China has given more than 24 million doses of its homegrown vaccine candidates, as part of a mass vaccination campaign. It has so far refrained from giving the vaccine to the most elderly, instead targeting key groups such as medical workers and workers who work in food-related industries, as well as adults between the ages of 18 and 59. **MDT/AP**

## COVID-19

### WHO TEAM VISITS ANIMAL DISEASE CENTER IN WUHAN

**W**ORLD Health Organization experts visited an animal disease center in the Chinese city of Wuhan yesterday as part of their investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic.

Team member Peter Daszak told reporters later they had "excellent facilities, very informative meeting," and he tweeted the team met with staff in charge of the health of livestock in Hubei province, toured laboratories and had an "in-depth" discussion along with questions and answers.

Further details of the visit were not announced.

The team members were wearing full protective gear during yesterday's visit, a further indication of the work China has put into preparations for the WHO visit to Wuhan, where the first COVID-19 illnesses emerged in late 2019.

Outside their hotel and in public spaces, the experts have consistently worn masks and professional or business casual attire, but it's not clear if they have worn full-body protective suits at the research institutes, hospitals and markets they've visited previously.

Intense negotiations



preceded the WHO visit to Wuhan since China has maintained strict controls on access to information about the virus, possibly to avoid blame for alleged missteps in its early response to the outbreak.

But on Monday, WHO officials in Geneva pushed back against suggestions the team of experts from 10 countries was not getting enough access or data.

WHO's COVID-19 technical lead Maria Van Kerkhove said the team has plans to visit the Wuhan Institute of Virology, considered among the major sources of information about the virus' origins. Dr. Michael Ryan, WHO's emergencies chief, said the agency was continuing to ask for more data and said anyone with information about how the pandemic started should share it with the organization.

The data the team assembles will add to what is expected to be a years-long quest for answers involving taking animal samples, genetic analysis and epidemiological studies.

China has largely stopped domestic transmission of the virus through sometimes draconian measures, including strict testing and electronic surveillance. Mask wearing in public is standard and lockdowns are routinely imposed on communities and even entire cities where cases are detected.

Schools have gone online and travel has been drastically cut during this month's Lunar New Year holiday, with the government offering incentives for people to stay put in the cities rather than return to their home towns for family gatherings. **MDT/AP**

## REN QUANNIU

### BEIJING STRIPS LICENSE FROM SECOND LAWYER FOR HK ACTIVISTS

**A** second Chinese lawyer who represented a Hong Kong pro-democracy activist was stripped of his license yesterday as Beijing attempts to crush opposition to its tighter control over the territory.

Ren Quanniu, who represented one of 12 Hong Kong activists who tried to flee to Taiwan, said he had his license revoked by the Henan Provincial Justice Department.

Ten of the 12 activists caught at sea in August were sentenced by a Shenzhen court in December to prison terms ranging from seven months to three years for crossing the border illegally and organizing the crossings. The two other activists are minors.

Thousands of Hong Kong residents have fled the territory since Beijing's imposition of a tough new security law that some say is destroying the territory's Western-style civil liberties. Since the law was introduced in response to anti-government protests that began in 2019,



Lawyer Ren Quanniu (left) stands with his attorney Bao Longjun outside the Henan provincial Justice Department's office in Zhengzhou

dozens of pro-democracy activists have been arrested or detained.

The Henan Judicial Department held a hearing on the license revocation on Friday in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital, according to other lawyers who turned up to support Ren. They were not allowed into the hearing.

Ren is the second lawyer to have his license stripped by the authorities for handling

the activists' case. Two weeks ago, judicial officials in Sichuan took away the license of Lu Siwei, another lawyer on the case.

Ren was told that comments he made in court in a case in 2018 defending Falun Gong practitioners had caused a "negative impact on society," according to a notice from the Henan Justice Department that he showed to The Associated Press. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Myanmar's military stand guard at a checkpoint manned with an armored vehicles blocking a road leading to the parliament building yesterday

ANALYSIS

# Myanmar, Russia pose early tests for Biden's foreign policy

MATTHEW LEE,  
WASHINGTON

A military coup in Myanmar and a mass crackdown on dissidents in Russia are presenting early tests for the Biden administration as it tries to reestablish American primacy as a worldwide pro-democracy leader.

Having taken office with a pledge to restore ironclad U.S. support for human rights, freedom of speech and political openness, President Joe Biden is being confronted with two serious challenges in two disparate parts of the world that had either been neglected or the subject of inconsistent messaging during the Trump era.

After investing decades of time, energy and money into promoting democracy in both Myanmar and Russia, the U.S. now faces challenges in each that could affect the global balance of power, with the Myanmar turmoil potentially strengthening China's hand.

And, while neither situation can be directly tied to domestic political uncertainty in the United States, experts believe foreign governments might be taking cues from the vestiges of America's perceived rudderlessness in the final months of President Donald Trump's term.

"It is not always about us," said Dan Fried, a former senior U.S. diplomat for Europe. "Each has its own dynamic, but they certainly take cues from us. What links the two is that during the campaign, the Biden team talked about support for democracy being a North Star — a guiding point for democracy."

Biden's aides have rejected suggestions that the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol fueled by Trump will hurt U.S. influence in the long run. But they have acknowledged it as a factor as Biden tries to reassert American moral leadership after four years of Trump's perceived diffidence.

"The United States remains a country in the world that is looked to for ... leadership, and it's going to take some time, but he's certainly committed to doing that," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said of Biden yesterday [Macau time].

She spoke after Biden released a statement saying he would be looking at reimposing sanctions on Myanmar, also known as Burma, that had been lifted after the country's partial return to democracy during the Obama administration.

"The United States removed sanctions on Burma over the past decade based on progress toward democracy,"

Biden said. "The reversal of that progress will necessitate an immediate review of our sanction laws and authorities, followed by appropriate action. The United States will stand up for democracy wherever it is under attack."

In Myanmar, the army took control of the government after a brief experiment with limited democracy, detaining former opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and giving China an even bigger potential opening into a neighboring country where the West had exerted great effort to blunt Beijing's significant influence.

"This is a setback for Myanmar and for democratic governance across Asia," said Danny Russel, a former assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, who is now vice president for International Security and Diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute. "It's part of an unfortunate slide toward authoritarianism and it's quite worrying. It sets an appalling example for other countries."

"It's certainly an early crisis for the Biden administration, and it's really crystalized the contrast between its support for democracy and the Chinese support for authoritarianism," he said.

Tensions in Myanmar have been building for some time but have been largely

under the radar of a Washington preoccupied with the coronavirus after decades of public and private pressure on Yangon to institute democratic reforms.

In Russia, despite Trump's political machinations, the situation has been at a slow boil for some years after attempts to draw Moscow into the democratic fold beginning with the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union. Confronting the Russians will be more difficult.

There, President Vladimir Putin is using an iron fist to try to quell demonstrations in support of opposition figure Alexei Navalny, flying in the face of warnings from Washington and Europe.

"It's a challenge for Biden, but they're not challenging him directly," said Fried, who is now with the Atlantic Council. He said that sanctions might not be effective in the long run but that they will get attention. "They could do more," he said. "It would be appropriate, and it would send a message to Russian society that the Americans aren't stupid, that they know what's going on."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in an interview aired yesterday that new sanctions against Russia are being considered, not only for the Navalny crackdown but also for a major cyberattack, election interference and purported bounties offered to the Taliban for targeting American troops in Afghanistan.

"We're looking into all of these things," Blinken told NBC News. "All of them are under review. And depending on the findings of those reviews, we will take steps to stand up for our interests and stand against Russian aggressive actions." AP

## this day in history

### 1959 BUDDY HOLLY KILLED IN AIR CRASH



Three young rock 'n' roll stars have been killed in a plane crash in the United States.

Buddy Holly, 22, Jiles P Richardson - known as the Big Bopper - 28, and Ritchie Valens, 17, died in a crash shortly after take-off from Clear Lake, Iowa at 0100 local time.

The pilot of the single-engined Beechcraft Bonanza plane was also killed.

Early reports from the scene suggest the aircraft spun out of control during a light snowstorm.

Only the pilot's body was found inside the wreckage as the performers were thrown clear on impact.

Holly hired the plane after heating problems developed on his tourbus.

All three were travelling to Moorhead, Minnesota, the next venue in their Winter Dance Party Tour

Holly had set up the gruelling schedule of concerts - covering 24 cities in three weeks - to make money after the break-up of his band, The Crickets, last year.

Born Charles Hardin Holley - changed to Holly after a misspelling on a contract - he had several hit records, including a number one, in the US and UK with That'll be the Day in 1957.

A singer and guitarist, he was inspired by Elvis Presley after seeing him at an early concert in his home town of Lubbock, Texas.

With Presley serving in the Army, some critics expected Holly to take over his crown.

Richard Valenzuela was the first Mexican American to break into mainstream music, after being discovered by record producer Bob Keane, who changed his name to Ritchie Valens.

He had made three albums and achieved a number two chart position in the US with his composition Donna - about his girlfriend - in 1958.

His rock 'n' roll re-working of the traditional Mexican song La Bamba - on the B-side of Donna - has also received acclaim.

The Big Bopper had been a record-breaking radio DJ - with a 122-hour marathon stint - and reached number six in the American charts with his record Chantilly Lace.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Buddy Holly and, to a lesser extent, Ritchie Valens became musical legends.

Don McLean immortalised the tragedy with his 1972 hit American Pie.

Holly is often described as the most influential of the early rock 'n' roll musicians, and has been cited as such by John Lennon and Paul McCartney of the Beatles.

His producer Norman Petty released demo tracks Holly recorded before his death.

Various re-workings and compilation albums have appeared in the years since.

Holly was commemorated in the musical Buddy which opened in London in 1986.

Mexican American group Los Lobos achieved a hit with La Bamba when they collaborated on the 1987 film of the same name, a biography of Ritchie Valens.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19

If you're asked to help out with a big group event, it would be in your best interests to lend a hand, even if you don't think you have the time to take on anything new.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20

If you have problems you should be able to tell them to your friends. But you're totally wrong if you think that if you have problems you should give them to your friends to solve.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21

Your travel plans might be just about set in stone, but resist the urge today to finalize reservations and book tickets. There is a slight chance that things could change, and you need to stay flexible.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22

More than ever, your visions of the future are important to foster, whether that happens through daydreaming, what-if conversations with friends, or just simple hoping.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Quite a few opinionated people are going to be in your day, and they aren't going to keep quiet about their opinions. The good news is that you know how to handle them with grace.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22

One of your closest friends may be starting a new venture, and they might need your support more than ever. You're only too willing to give it, until you learn more about why they're doing it.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You're doing an excellent job of not letting fear guide your life! You know how to act in a way that will get you closer to what you want. Keep that focus today when outside voices start telling you to beware.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21

If you're in the midst of developing a new relationship, be very careful not to get too wrapped up in the other person's life right now. You don't want to negatively affect your sense of independence.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21

An awful lot can be communicated nonverbally, so let your eyes and body do all the talking today. Instead of tossing off a flirty comment, why not just give 'em a wink?

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Everyone around you will be shocked by some unexpected news, but not you! You sensed it all along thanks to your extremely strong intuitive powers, which are stronger than ever right now.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You'll probably spend most of today with adults, but it's going to feel like you're trapped inside of a day care center! You can expect a lot of petty behavior from surprising people.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20

It's easy to make sure you have a fun day. All you have to do it start a new project! The universe is sending you strong, clear energy that will give you the spark you need to start a new fire.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

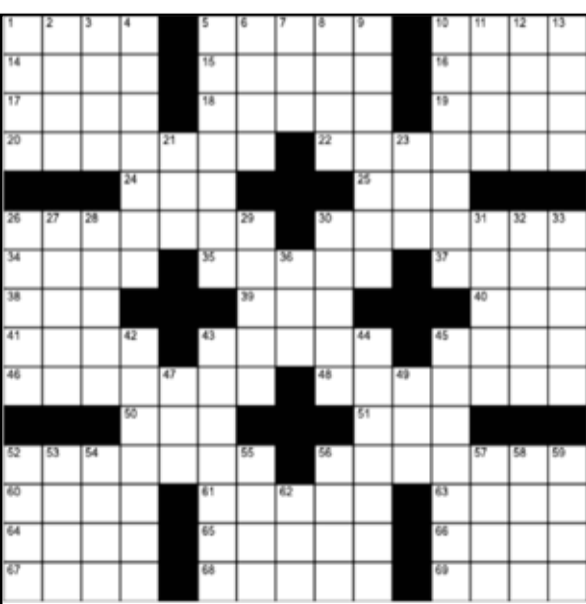
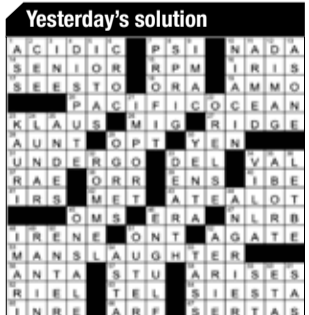
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-19	-6	clear
Harbin	-28	-20	cloudy
Tianjin	-16	-8	clear
Urumqi	-24	-16	clear
Xi'an	-10	-3	overcast
Lhasa	-3	12	clear
Chengdu	0	3	overcast
Chongqing	5	8	drizzle
Kunming	7	19	overcast
Nanjing	-8	-4	cloudy
Shanghai	-6	3	overcast
Wuhan	-4	2	clear
Hangzhou	-4	4	overcast
Taipei	9	15	drizzle
Guangzhou	7	15	overcast
Hong Kong	13	18	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-5	-4	flurry
Frankfurt	-1	4	sleet
Paris	0	3	sleet
London	0	5	sleet
New York	0	7	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Worthless person; 5- Last Greek letter; 10- Jutting rock; 14- Snake dancers; 15- Member of a motorcycle gang; 16- Shelter for honeybees; 17- Redolence; 18- Hound's trail; 19- Like \_\_\_ of bricks; 20- Cure-all; 22- Illness; 24- EMT's skill; 25- Great Lakes canals; 26- Greek pastry; 30- Glut; 34- A shivering fit - often a precursor to malaria; 35- Incite; 37- Greek portico; 38- Container cover; 39- Battery size; 40- Cabinet dept.; 41- "The Time Machine" race; 43- Impudent (slang); 45- Smell \_\_\_; 46- Official sitting; 48- Language of European Jews; 50- Assn.; 51- Ambient music pioneer; 52- To recover; 56- Clear and shrill; 60- Scope; 61- Gave a hoot; 63- Uh-uh; 64- Hue; 65- Love, Italian-style; 66- Util. bill; 67- Chip in; 68- Tied; 69- Unpleasantly moist;

DOWN: 1- Hit the mall; 2- Conclusion; 3- Atop; 4- Extraordinary occurrence; 5- Notice; 6- Flaky mineral; 7- Barely manage, with "out"; 8- Actress Rowlands; 9- Craftsperson; 10- Agile goat antelope; 11- Ceremonial act; 12- River in central England; 13- Lady's man; 21- Tax pro; 23- Parking place; 26- Bundles; 27- Nimble; 28- Praise; 29- Another time; 30- Lathered up; 31- Maker of Pong; 32- Roman garments; 33- Soil; 36- Breach; 42- Set apart; 43- Reasonable; 44- Ceded; 45- Decked out; 47- 401(k) alternative; 49- It's in the genes; 52- Pro follower; 53- "\_\_\_ Brockovich"; 54- 1/100 of a monetary unit; 55- One of the Three Bears; 56- Part of a bird's beak; 57- Kansas city; 58- Candid; 59- Bottle part; 62- Fabled bird;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

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



<p><b>FOR SALE</b></p> <p><b>Lakeview Tower</b> Lovely apartment, Central Macau HK\$11,000,000 1,344 ft<sup>2</sup> 3 2 2</p>	<p><b>FOR RENT</b></p> <p><b>Split Level Commercial Space</b>, Taipa Village \$42,000/mth 2,000 ft<sup>2</sup></p>	<p><b>Rain Dance Property</b> "We dance until it's SOLD!"</p> <p><b>Apartment in the Historical Centre</b> HK\$3,900,000 840 ft<sup>2</sup> 2 1 1</p>	<p><b>PROPERTY LIST</b></p> <p>[Taipa] <i>Buckingham</i> 2 2 2 1,439 ft<sup>2</sup> \$11,770,000 (ref: 19045004)</p> <p>[Taipa] <i>Manhattan D unit</i> 4 2 2 2,305 ft<sup>2</sup> \$15,980,000 (ref: n/a)</p> <p>[Taipa] <i>Designer 2 bedroom</i> 2 1 1 900 ft<sup>2</sup> \$11,500/mth (ref: 20121001)</p> <p>[Taipa] <i>One Central balcony</i> 3 1 4 2,332 ft<sup>2</sup> \$29,800/mth (ref: 20101001)</p>
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# ALIBABA OFFERS FEW ANSWERS AS CRACKDOWN UNCERTAINTY PERSISTS

**A**LIBABA Group Holding Ltd. offered investors few clues into how the regulatory crackdown on Jack Ma's tech empire will impact its future growth after reporting a stronger-than-expected 37% increase in quarterly sales.

The e-commerce giant has established a special taskforce to conduct internal reviews and is actively communicating with antitrust regulators on complying with their requirements as investigations continue, Alibaba said yesterday. It's also unable to make a complete assessment of how the ongoing "rectification" of affiliate Ant Group Co. will affect its business, according to the statement.

The stronger-than-expected earnings may be overshadowed by an ongoing antitrust probe that has already wiped more than \$130 billion off the e-commerce giant's value since its October record. Uncertainty began in November when regulators first torpedoed Ant Group's record initial public offering, then launched their investigation into the online retailer. Alibaba's stock has dropped 13% since Ant's aborted debut, the worst performance on Hong Kong's benchmark Hang Seng Index. The shares in New York were little changed in pre-market trading.

"Ant Group's business prospects and IPO plans are subject to substantial uncertainties," Alibaba Chief Executive Officer Daniel Zhang said on a conference call yesterday. "We will further update the market when the investigation is concluded."

Alibaba's shares recouped some of their losses after Ma re-

BLOOMBERG



surfaced in public during a live-streamed video conference last month, in an apparent signal that worst-case scenarios - such as a government-led takeover or break-up of his companies - are probably now off the table. Few expect Beijing to entirely back off its campaign to more tightly regulate Ant, Alibaba and the rest of China's high-tech giants. But the stock's partial recovery suggests investors are beginning to price out the risk of a crackdown that would put the country's richest entrepreneurs and most innovative companies in serious jeopardy.

Zhang spent a substantial portion of Alibaba's earnings call

talking about the company's "social responsibility" in elevating small merchants and driving rural consumption, two of Xi Jinping's priorities as Beijing tries to lift the countryside from poverty.

Two of Alibaba's largest and fastest-growing divisions made it into the black during the holiday quarter - an important milestone for the company. Its cloud business reported its first ever positive adjusted earnings before interest, tax and amortization, while revenue for the segment rose 50%, driven by customers in the internet, retail and public sectors. Cainiao, its logistics unit, was also operating cash flow positive, the company said.

Annual active consumers grew to 779 million in the December quarter, driving a 38% increase in its core commerce business. Alibaba booked \$75 billion of sales over its annual Singles' Day promotions last November, easily beating its 2019 haul after the company began promotions early and added additional services to the count for the first time. The increased spending came even as overall retail sales fell 3.9% last year, with consumption lagging industrial activity in the broader economic recovery.

But investors are questioning whether Alibaba can sustain that growth as Beijing steps up oversight of Chinese tech giants, particularly in online commerce. Ma's

firm, once the standard-bearer for China's fast-rising private firms and booming internet sphere, now faces penalties of as much as 10% of its revenue or some \$7.8 billion if it's found to have violated rules against practices like forced exclusive arrangements with merchants known as "Pick One of Two," predatory pricing or algorithms favoring new users.

Any regulations requiring Alibaba to implement a full halt to forced-exclusivity policies may hit Tmall's sales by close to a tenth in 2021, before sales return to 18-20% annual growth in 2022 and beyond, according to San Francisco-based Octahedron Capital Management LP. As of now, less than 10% of the top-selling brands are exclusive, they estimated. While Alibaba has exclusive flagship stores with some merchants, in most cases they can sell the same goods on other platforms, Zhang said.

The regulations may also hamper its ability to fend off rivals from JD.com Inc. to Pinduoduo Inc., whose 730 million annual consumers are closing in on Alibaba's user base. Meanwhile, short-video platforms like ByteDance Ltd. and Tencent-backed Kuaishou Technology are also tapping livestreaming as a sales outlet to wrest a larger e-commerce share. Beijing-based ByteDance revealed its Singles' Day takings for the first time in 2020, with Douyin, the Chinese version of global sensation TikTok, booking 18.7 billion yuan in gross merchandise value.

Ant contributed 4.8 billion yuan to Alibaba's profit in the quarter, indicating that the company earned 14.5 billion yuan in the three months ended September - before its \$35 billion IPO was scuttled - as its earnings lag one quarter behind Alibaba. As part of the crackdown, Ant has been told to "rectify" its lending, insurance and wealth management services. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

## CORPORATE BITS

### CCILC visits IPIM to discuss ways to strengthen cooperation with lusophone countries



A delegation of the Portugal-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCILC) recently visited the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) to discuss and exchange ideas on bolstering cooperation between Macau and Portuguese-speaking countries.

The delegation was led by Bernie Leong, president of Board of Directors of the Macao Delegation of CCILC, and greeted by Lau Wai Meng, president of IPIM Executive Committee.

During the meeting, IPIM vowed to step up efforts to

cultivate more business opportunities between Macau and Portuguese-speaking countries, which is also a vision stipulated in the Policy Address 2021.

The efforts include generating more online and offline business promotional projects, promoting products from Portuguese-speaking countries, and upholding Macau's positioning as a Sino-Portuguese platform through social media platforms. It will also launch an online investment manual for the Greater Bay Area cities and major Portuguese-speaking cities worldwide.

During the exchange, Leong thanked IPIM's long-term support towards CCILC over the years.

### Sands presents Valentine's Day treats



For couples seeking a relaxing and reinvigoration session together, spa treatments are available at The Venetian Macao's V Retreat, The Parisian Macao's Le SPA'tique and Conrad Macao's Bodhi

Spa until the end of February.

On February 14, Valentine's Day set menus featuring seasonal ingredients are available at Sands China's signature restaurants including

The Parisian Macao, The Londoner Macao and Sands Macao.

Dynasty 8 at The Londoner Macao has a six-course Valentine's Day set menu with appetizer combo of marinated cherry tomatoes with creamy walnut filling, sea whelks in wasabi dressing and honey-glazed barbecued Iberian pork, as cited in a statement.

Meanwhile, Sands Macao's Copa Steakhouse is offering a "Tender Hearts Romance 2021" six-course special Valentine's Day set dinner, starting with a welcome drink of Italian sparkling wine and amuse bouche of fresh abalone with roast pineapple salsa.

FOOTBALL

# FIFA pledges taking no health risks in World Cup qualifiers

GRAHAM DUNBAR, GENEVA

**W**ITH 3,000 soccer players due to travel internationally for World Cup qualifying games next month, FIFA President Gianni Infantino said yesterday [Macau time] all will conform to health rules in the coronavirus pandemic.

"We will certainly not take any risk for the health of anyone when we play football," Infantino said in a World Health Organization news conference.

Delays in the 2022 World Cup qualifying program in most continents led FIFA last year to create new games dates next January. They will help make up the backlog in an increasingly tight schedule with broadcasting rights already sold.

In Asia, 40 national teams are due on March 25 to resume qualifying groups that last played in November 2019.

A total of 135 teams are due to play World Cup qualifiers next month, and 48 more have preliminary games for the 2022 African Cup of Nations.

"We will see where we can play, in what conditions," the FIFA leader said, pledging to "do it by adhering to a clear health protocol."

"We can see and we have been hearing earlier today from Dr. Tedros again that the situation is evolving week by week, day by day," Infantino said, sitting beside WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Many of the players who return home for national duty play for clubs in Europe, including in England which is experiencing an ag-

AP PHOTO



gressive new variant of COVID-19.

FIFA eased its rules last year that require clubs to release players to national teams. Exemptions were offered if players had to travel to countries imposing mandatory quarantine or self-isolation for at least five days upon arrival or their return.

Asked if FIFA expected stadiums to be full when the World Cup opens in Qatar in November 2022, Infantino said: "Yes. We must have this."

"COVID will be defeated by then," he said, at a briefing on FIFA's latest work with WHO.

FIFA will use the six-team Club World Cup starting on Thursday in Qatar to promote messages on health safety and fair distribution of vaccines.

Infantino, who is a member of the International Olympic Committee, repeated the Olympic body's view ahead of the Tokyo Games opening in July that athletes should not get inoculations before key workers.

"We don't consider football players as a priority group in this respect," he said. AP

## EUROPEAN FANS UNITE TO OPPOSE ELITE SUPER LEAGUE PLAN

A UEFA-recognized soccer fan group united supporters across the continent yesterday to oppose plans by some wealthy clubs for a Super League.

A statement from Football Supporters Europe denounced "an unpopular, illegitimate and dangerous scheme in the eyes of the overwhelming majority of fans" and was signed by about 100 national and team groups, including from the clubs pushing hardest for the project.

"The reasoning behind a closed breakaway league is simple: it allows big clubs to succeed off the pitch even when they fail on it. It is anti-competitive by design," said the FSE, which UEFA consults with and describes as "one of its key stakeholders."

Real Madrid, Barcelona, Liverpool and Manchester United have been linked to the latest version of a competition that would include 15 permanent members in a 20-team competition kicking off in the 2022-23 season. They would still play in domestic leagues on weekends.

It would give member clubs at least 18 Super League games compared to a guaranteed six games in the current Champions League format.

"We do not want or need more European games," the fans said. "And we are tired of paying for the fantasy of ever-increasing wages, transfer fees, and profits, as well as the financial mismanagement of some."

Debts at Madrid and Barcelona have been revealed to have soared higher to hundreds of millions of dollars during the coronavirus pandemic.

Details of the latest Super League proposal leaked last month as UEFA works with the European Club Association and European Leagues group to finalize reforms of continental club competitions for 2024.

Ongoing secretive talks between a few elite clubs and potential Super League financiers led FIFA and the six continental governing bodies, including UEFA, to warn against the project last

month.

Players who take part in a Super League would be banned from representing their national teams at the World Cup and other continental championships for national teams.

UEFA has led talks about its own competitions against a backdrop of clubs' increasingly dire warnings of their collective loss of expected revenue running to billions of dollars because of the pandemic.

The Super League plan envisions earning 4 billion euros (\$4.8 billion) annually from broadcasters and sponsors, shared among 20 clubs though weighted toward a few.

In comparison, UEFA's expected revenue this season is about 3.2 billion euros (\$3.9 billion) for the Champions League and Europa League, which feature 80 teams.

"While reform is needed," the fans said, "it should not come in the shape of an ultimatum from wealthy clubs seeking to benefit from an unprecedented public health crisis." AP

TOKYO 2021

# Japan extends emergency amid vaccine, Olympic uncertainty

**J**APAN announced yesterday that it is extending a coronavirus state of emergency in Tokyo and nine other areas through March 7.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's announcement of the one-month extension comes amid growing uncertainty over the national rollout of vaccines and the hosting of the Tokyo Olympics this summer.

Under the state of emergency, the government has issued non-binding re-

quests for people to avoid crowds and eating out in groups, and for restaurants and bars to close by 8 p.m.

New cases have declined in Tokyo and nationwide since early January, but experts say hospitals remain flooded with serious cases and that preventive measures should remain in place.

Japan has had about 400,000 coronavirus cases, including 5,800 deaths.

"We still need to keep a close watch on the si-

tuation," health minister Norihisa Tamura said yesterday. About 80% of the cases in Japan are in the 10 prefectures under the emergency, he said.

The emergency will end Sunday as earlier planned in one prefecture, Tochigi north of Tokyo, where the situation has improved. It will remain in place in Tokyo and its neighbors Saitama, Chiba and Kanagawa, as well as in Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo and Fukuoka in the west and Aichi and

Gifu in central Japan.

In addition to the request for bars and restaurants to close early, employers were asked to arrange for more of their staff to work from home. Additionally, the government will expand testing, officials said.

Unlike Japan's first emergency in April and May last year, schools, gyms, theaters and shops remain open, although some stores are voluntarily closing early. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



**OPINION**

**World Views**

Marcus Ashworth, Bloomberg



**IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON FROM THE REDDIT TRADE**

It's been an exciting distraction while everyone is working from home but the actual ability of the Reddit mob to move markets, become a systemic risk or justify the absurd amount of column inches wasted on them (to which I am about to add) is about to fizzle out.

The power of the social-media crowd to really take on the system is wildly overstated, a point emphasized by JPMorgan Chase & Co. analysts. It's a blip compared to what the world went through in March last year, as market volatility indicates.

The real issue here is the extraordinary amount of stimulus pumped in by central banks and governments to counteract the economic effects of the pandemic: It has to go somewhere, no matter how undeserving. Small wonder that it feeds through into asset prices in sometimes barely controllable ways. While the regulatory authorities play Whac-A-Mole on the GameStop phenomenon, it's notable that the U.S. Federal Reserve has barely lifted an eyebrow. Their focus is on the bigger economic picture, not a localized dumpster fire.

Nonetheless, any investor short any stocks has had all the warnings they need and the Securities and Exchange Commission has moved swiftly. With Robinhood Markets Inc. — a leading platform for retail stock traders — able to raise \$3.4 billion swiftly to sort out its collateral issues, the system is working.

Some hedge funds have lost money but none has gone out of business (yet). More important, we haven't seen any clearing-house distress. Yes it's been a bumpy ride, but with valuations overstretched anyway it's no bad thing that "value at risk" — the assessment of how much risk is in a portfolio when all positions are netted out — has been dialed down as a result of the last few days' gyrations. Hedge funds haven't only been cutting their short exposure, they've been curbing their long risk as well, so leverage as a whole has been reduced.

Not even 2% of the \$43 trillion U.S. equity market is accounted for by short sales, and I'd wager it has reduced substantially after a healthy shakeout of squeezable shorts from hedge funds caught napping. Volatility rose in U.S. stock markets but that hasn't been mirrored elsewhere. Currencies, bonds and European equities are all relatively becalmed. Jim Reid, Deutsche Bank AG's macro strategist, says just three of the 43 asset classes he monitors moved more than 5% last month, the least since November 2019.

U.S. small-cap stocks are much easier to access and are more retail-driven than most other international equity markets but so far the Reddit phenomenon hasn't travelled well. Despite some fears about a squeeze on silver, this doesn't really bear much scrutiny. Sustaining gains over \$30 a troy ounce seems to be a struggle, as my Bloomberg colleagues David Fickling and Eddie van der Walt have written. A margin raise by the CME, the world's largest exchange, seems to have ended the party.

Several investment banks and hedge funds were already bullish on silver, with analysts from Goldman Sachs Group Inc. calling it their "preferred precious metal." But that favorable outlook is due largely to an earlier expected end to the pandemic and massive stimulus contributing to a weaker dollar (which tends to benefit commodities), rather than any discernable short base that can be squeezed. The Reddit crowd shouldn't be in the frame for this and it seems other hedge funds may be riding on retail coattails. The excitement appears to be fading as the biggest hullabaloo this week is some favored crypto plays unwinding, including Dogecoin.

The financial system is far from perfect, which is why short-selling hedge funds have proliferated as a necessary disinfectant. But stability isn't in danger — unless you think, like me, that trillions of dollars of quantitative easing are the real risk out there.

**EURO ECONOMY SHRANK AT END OF 2020 UNDER PANDEMIC'S WEIGHT**

THE BUZZ

The European economy shrank by a smaller than expected 0.7% in the last three months of 2020 as businesses in France and Germany weathered a renewed round of anti-COVID-19 lockdowns somewhat better than expected.

That consolation in official figures released yesterday couldn't erase a gloomier outlook for this year, as the 19 countries that use the euro are expected to lag China and the U.S. in bouncing back from the worst of the pandemic.

For the year, the eurozone shrank 6.8%, according to the

EU statistics agency. The figure underscores a rollercoaster year of freakish economic data, with a plunge of 11.7% in the second quarter, the biggest since statistics started in 1995, followed by a rebound of 12.4% in the third quarter in late summer.

The winter wave has meant new restrictions on travel, business and activity, but companies in some sectors such as manufacturing have been better able to adjust than services businesses such as hotels and restaurants.

**TOP CHINESE DIPLOMAT URGES CLOSER TIES WITH US UNDER BIDEN**

CHINA'S top foreign policy adviser is urging closer ties with the U.S. under the Biden administration, while saying Washington must "effectively respect China's position and concerns on the Taiwan issue."

The head of the ruling Communist Party's office on foreign affairs, Yang Jiechi, said the sides will have their differences but should not allow them to derail relations.

In remarks yesterday to the influential U.S. National Committee on United States-China Relations, Yang continued the positive tone China is taking toward the new U.S. administration following heightened tensions under former President Donald Trump. Ties sunk to a new low over differences on trade, human rights and Taiwan, the self-governing democracy that China claims as its own territory and threatens to bring under its control by military force.

"China and the United States are two large countries with different histories, cultures and systems, and thus have differences on some issues. It is crucial to properly control them and not allow them to interfere



Chinese Politburo Member Yang Jiechi speaks during a news conference at the State Department in Washington, in November 2019

with the overall development of bilateral relations," Yang said in the videotaped conversation.

The U.S. should fulfill its commitments to Beijing "abide by the one-China principle, and effectively respect China's position and concerns on the Taiwan issue," Yang said.

The positive tone fuels perceptions that China's leaders are hoping for a fresh start in relations and a more civil discourse with Washington, even while deep divisions remain.

The U.S. is pressing China over trade, allegations of intellectual property theft

and policies toward Tibet, Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. China resents U.S. support for Taiwan along with the U.S. military presence in the South China Sea and what it sees as a broad-based U.S. campaign to restrain its growth.

Biden's nominee for United Nations ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, last week called China "a strategic adversary" that threatens the world and expressed regret for a speech she gave in 2019 that praised China's initiatives in Africa and made no mention of its human rights abuses. MDT/AP



Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny faced a court hearing yesterday that could end with him being sent to prison for years and fuel more protests against the Kremlin. Russia's penitentiary service alleges that Navalny violated the probation conditions of his suspended sentence from a 2014 money laundering conviction that he has rejected as politically motivated. It has asked the Simonovsky District Court in Moscow to turn his 3 1/2-year suspended sentence into one that he must serve in prison.



US President Joe Biden threatened new sanctions on Myanmar after its military staged a coup and arrested the civilian leaders of its government, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Biden assailed the country's army for the coup, calling it a "direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and rule of law." The coup in Myanmar, also known as Burma, has also been roundly condemned internationally. More on p8

Turkey In an unexpected comment, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke of the need to draft a new and "civilian" constitution for Turkey. During a televised speech following a Cabinet meeting, Erdogan recalled that the country's last two constitutions were drafted following military coups, and contained "indelible" traces of the "military tutelage."



Australia An out-of-control wildfire burning northeast of the west coast city of Perth has destroyed at least 56 homes and was threatening more yesterday, with many residents across the region told it is too late to leave.

**THE DECISIVE MOMENT**

Xinhua/Huang Xiaobang



Farming fields. Villagers work at a field in Baipeng Town of Liujiang District, Liuzhou, south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, yesterday.