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SIMPLE PAY: THE NEW PAYMENT APP INTRODUCED BY THE MONETARY AUTHORITY OF MACAO WILL START ITS FIRST PHASE OF TRIAL ON MONDAY

ACADEMICS PREDICT ECONOMY WILL REBOUND, ALBEIT SLOWLY THIS YEAR

CHINA ANNOUNCED A PLAN TO PROVIDE 10 MILLION CORONAVIRUS VACCINE DOSES TO DEVELOPING NATIONS THROUGH THE GLOBAL COVAX INITIATIVE

AP PHOTO



China World Health Organization investigators yesterday visited a research center in the Chinese city of Wuhan that has been the subject of speculation about the origins of the coronavirus, with one member saying they'd intended to meet key staff and press them on critical issues. The WHO team's visit to the Wuhan Institute of Virology was a highlight of their mission to gather data and search for clues as to where the virus originated and how it spread. *More on p6*

South Korean sailors from a tanker seized in the Persian Gulf by Iranian troops last month are free to leave the country on humanitarian grounds. Iran maintains the tanker and its 20-member crew and captain were stopped because of the vessel's "environmental pollution," a claim rejected by the vessel's owner.

India About 200 supporters of farmers scuffled with police after being blocked from marching to an area for protests near the Parliament building in the Indian capital. The protesters demanded the repeal of new agriculture reform laws. The police barricaded the road and some protesters tried to push their way through, but were blocked by a heavy police presence.

AP PHOTO



Myanmar Police have charged deposed national leader Aung San Suu Kyi with having several illegally imported walkie-talkies in her home, legally allowing her to be held until Feb. 15. Party officials say she has not been moved from her residence, where she was being held under house arrest. The charges against Suu Kyi appear to carry a maximum sentence of two years in prison. *More on p6,7*

More on backpage

WAITING AT THE DOOR

Hong Kong mulls on reopening borders to Macau when Covid-19 cases subside to low double or single digits

THE GATE REVAMP CONCLUDED BY APRIL: GOV'T, SCULPTOR

In an exclusive interview with the Times, sculptor João Charters de Almeida said that he had been in contact with the public works department to make sure the originality of the 'Gate of Understanding' is not altered

RENATO MARQUES



**LIO CHI CHONG
SWORN IN AS DICJ
DEPUTY DIRECTOR**

Yesterday, Lio Chi Chong took the oath to serve as the deputy director of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ). Lio joined the civil service in 1999 and served in the Judiciary Police, the Energy Sector Development Office, and in the Office for Personal Data Protection. Lio has a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Macau and a master's degree in law from the Sun Yat-sen University.

**FISHING BOAT
CATCHES FIRE**

A fire broke out yesterday in a fishing vessel at around 6:30 p.m. at the Inner Harbor. Due to the strong winds, the fire spread out to the surrounding boats. Netizens were quick to capture the incident where huge plumes of smoke could be seen. Several authorities joined forces to help put out the fire. There were no reports of casualties.

**YOUNG GAMBLING
ADDICTS TEND TO
SEEK HELP ONLINE**

Problem gamblers aged between 25 and 35 years old tend to seek help online. The Charitable Association of Sheng Kung Hui's (Macau) problem gambling division received over 18,000 requests for help during its six years of operation. Approximately 70% of requests were submitted by the gamblers themselves. The rest of the requests were submitted by family members. Over 40% of family members felt stressed due to their relative's gambling habits.

**HERBAL PHARMACIES
MAY BE ALLOWED TO
SELL OTC MEDICINE**

The recently approved law on herbal medicine states that pharmacies can sell over the counter (OTC) herbal medicine. The First Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly says that the government plans to permit herbal pharmacies to sell some safe and low-risk OTC medicines so that all kinds of pharmacies are treated with equity and fairness.

SIMPLE PAY

FIRST TRIAL PHASE TO BEGIN ON FEB. 8

JULIE ZHU

SIMPLE Pay, a new form of payment introduced by the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM), will allow customers to use their mobile phones to scan businesses' QR codes to pay for a service or product.

On February 8, AMCM will initiate a pilot period for the first stage of the scheme, the authority announced in a press conference yesterday.

Businesses will scan the QR code which customers present on their phone to collect payments.

Supposing the first stage goes well, AMCM will initiate a second stage where customers will be able to scan retailers' QR codes.

As of yesterday, the city has approximately 70,000 POS systems utilized for QR code payments.

Simple Pay aims to integrate all types of e-payment into one system, allowing businesses to accept all existing payment methods using a terminal or QR code.

Currently, local shops without Simple Pay will typically have multiple POS terminals, each for a different e-payment app, causing merchants inconvenience.

QR code payments can be processed by the business by scanning



a QR code on the customer's phone. A customer can also use their smartphone to scan a business' QR code to pay.

While both of the aforementioned payment methods are commonly used in mainland China for example, most of Macau's businesses, such as supermarkets, will only accept the first method and scan their customers' QR codes.

With Simple Pay's arrival, both kinds of payment may become more common in Macau.

Once a retailer upgrades their

POS system to Simple Pay, the retailer will only need one POS terminal to receive e-payments. This means that some of the POS terminals currently being used may not be needed anymore.

Regarding the potential waste of POS terminals, AMCM says that financial organizations will help retailers recycle the unneeded POS systems and distribute these devices to other retailers.

Simple Pay is compatible with local and overseas e-payment methods.

In 2020, Macau logged over 65.49 million internet payment transactions, involving a total of 6.33 billion patacas.

Simple Pay integrates eight internet payment including Alipay, BOC Pay, UePay, LusoPay, and MPay.

Bank of China (Macau), Macau Pass, Banco Tai Fung, UsPay and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (Macau) are the five financial organizations providing the Simple Pay POS system and the Simple Pay QR code.

Hong Kong mulls on reopening cross-border travel when Covid-19 cases subside

LYNZY VALLES

THE Hong Kong SAR is considering to reopen its borders to Macau and mainland China if the number of Covid-19 confirmed cases in its region decreases to low double-digit or single digit numbers.

As cited in a report issued by the Hong Kong Economic Times, the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Frank Chen, disclosed that if the fourth wave of the pandemic outbreak eases, a possible customs clearance arrangement between its neighboring regions could materialize.

According to Chen, the HKSAR has been in dialogues with Macau and



mainland authorities on such customs clearance arrangements.

The availability of Covid-19 jabs will also play significant part in the facilitation of the travel bubble.

Its Chief Executive Carrie Lam has announced that

the Fosun Pharma-BioNTech vaccine they have procured is slated to arrive by the end of this month and the inoculation will begin immediately.

Hong Kong is still locking down several residential buildings blocks to deter

the spread of the virus. Residents in these residential buildings are required to be tested for Covid-19 or be fined HKD5,000.

On Tuesday, 25 new cases were reported, taking the total tally to 10,511.

In late September, the

Hong Kong government was getting ready to reopen cross-border travel between the mainland and Macau – a move that has long been postponed due to the third wave of coronavirus infections in the city.

However, the plan came to a standstill due to the fourth wave of the virus.

Since then, the discussion of a travel bubble between Hong Kong, Macau and the mainland has been halted as the HKSAR has further extended its restrictions in response to detecting a new cluster of Covid-19 cases.

The travel bubble has long been planned but was initially stalled over "technical issues."

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RENATO MARQUES

MORE than four years after it officially closed, the "Gate of Understanding" (Porta do Entendimento), a monument erected in the 1990s in the Sai Van area to symbolize Luso-Chinese relations, is finally going to finish its extensive renovation work, the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) informed the Times.

In a reply to an inquiry on the topic, the DSSOPT said that the conclusion of the construction work is expected in the second quarter of this year.

Initially scheduled to be completed at the end of last year, the DSSOPT justified the delay in the construction using to the "situation of the pneumonia outbreak of the new type of coronavirus."

According to the DSSOPT, after the conclusion of the renovations, the monument "will be handed over to the competent entities for further procedures."

The 40-meter-tall monument created by the Portuguese sculptor João Charters de Almeida was completed in 1993 and closed for safety reasons at the start of 2017 after parts of the structure deteriorated to the point where they were falling off.

The revamp of the monument started in the second quarter of 2019 and had an expected duration of 515 working days. The construction work was tendered to the consortium comprising of Companhia de Construção e Engenharia Lei Fung, Limitada and Sociedade de Construção e Engenharia - Grupo de Construção De Xangai - SCG (Macau), Limitada for a total of 38.8 million patacas.

The extensive renovations included work to support the platform and the connecting dock, the replacement of the granite cladding and fixing the pillars that supported the sloped connecting dock, the DSSOPT said, noting the findings from previous inspections of the monument.

Other work included the replacement of the hooks that held the walls, and demolishing and rebuilding the whole connecting bridge dock between land and the monument so that the original structural design and the exterior appearance could be kept the same.

'Gate of Understanding' revamp to conclude during Q2

A MATTER OF ETHICS

In an interview with the Times, the artist said that he had been in contact with the DSSOPT to clarify some aspects of the renovations so that the originality of the art piece is not lost or altered.

"They have been contacting me and asking questions and I replied. [Here from a distance] I cannot see what exactly is being done but I need to believe in the professional ethics of people," Charters de Almeida said. "People must understand that everything that is authorial work belongs to the author and cannot be changed."

The sculptor noted that this is particularly important for this work, as it has a "strong impact in emotional terms because at the end of the day, this is an [art] piece that symbolically intends to open the door and place a door between the East and the West and has an inherent political intention of cordiality and good relations." He also remarked that those that accept working on a piece like this should have strong ethics in their approach.

"I need to trust that the restoration is being done well and respecting the ethics and my intellectual property, but there are absolutely no guarantees on this," he concluded.

BRINGING THE MONUMENT 'CLOSER' TO THE CITY

In April 2017, Charters de Almeida told the newspaper Hoje Macau that he had some regrets about the lack of use of the monument over the last few years, noting that the lack of visitation is related to the difficulties in accessing the monument, which is somewhat "disconnected" from the city.

"If there are no people to visit, it is because there is no access. That should be up to the government and whoever makes these kinds of decisions [to solve]. I feel sorry [about the state of the monument] because it is a public

RENATO MARQUES



work, it was made for public space, and it has an absolutely contemporary symbolism: understanding! That is what we need because nobody seems to want to find understanding [consensus] nowadays," the artist said.

Charters de Almeida told the Times yesterday that the lack of visitors to the monument was always the case and this occurred due to the lack of maintenance of the space.

"If the access is not maintained and the monument itself is not maintained it becomes unattractive for the visitors, and on the other hand, it becomes an attractive place for other people with dubious intentions who find some shadow [shelter] in it for some not-so-good activities," said the artist. "But this was not always the case. In the past, it was a very nice place where we could find people in the morning doing Tai Chi and many people would visit it and take photos, etc.," he added.

Although the timing of the re-

vamp was not clearly explained by the government, the aims seem to be somewhat aligned to the concerns expressed by the artist.

The government is also simultaneously creating the so-called South Peninsula Coastal Corridor, a project that was revived and presented during Chief Executive (CE) Ho Iat Seng's first Policy Address in 2020.

The project promises to revamp the whole coastal area from the Macau Science Center to Barra.

With work on the project starting May 15, 2020, the first phase was expected to last 208 working days and finish within 2020.

The government announced that it would be investing 60 million patacas into this project.

The Municipal Affairs Bureau's (IAM) division which was in charge of these works issued a statement shortly after last year's Policy Address. They said that the ongoing construction work for the first phase of the project between the Macau Science Center and

the Statue of Goddess Kun Iam in NAPE was in response to calls from the community for more recreational and leisure areas to be built in the coastal areas.

"IAM will build, in a phased manner, a green corridor on the south bank of Macau, connecting the Macau Science Center to [the Statue of] Goddess Kun Iam and Barra, providing a diversified coastal leisure space and building a healthy city for the people of Macau," the statement says.

During the first phase, the project spans an area of 15,000 square meters from the science center to the Statue of Goddess Kun Iam.

Preparations to build a cycling path and leisure area linking this area to Barra has begun during the first phase, and will subsequently be built in the second phase.

This new path, where the works are ongoing, will also be the first and closest link to the renovated monument of the Gate of Understanding, connecting it to the Barra area and potentially restoring the original life to the monument.



Professor, sculptor João Charters de Almeida

GOV'T PARTNERS WITH MAINLAND TO ENHANCE WATER QUALITY

The Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) revealed that the SAR government is now teaming up with mainland parties to embark on cross-border river enhancement works, in a bid to uplift the water environments and water quality around Macau. In a written reply, the director of the DSPA Raymond Tam Vai Man said the DSPA has regularly monitored the surrounding water quality, inspected the coast and drainage outlets, and cleared away garbage in and around the waters every day.

ZHUHAI ANTICIPATES FULL-SCALE COOPERATION WITH MACAU

Mayor of Zhuhai, Yao Yisheng, said that the city will begin its coordination efforts with Macau. Yao's comment came during the ninth National People's Congress of Zhuhai city. According to Yao, Zhuhai government intends to initiate the construction process of the high-speed railway section between Guangzhou and Zhuhai this year. This particular high-speed train has been planned so as to seamlessly link to the future immigration building, next to the current Border Gate.

EXPERTS CALL FOR MANDATORY COUNSELING TO PREVENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

HONEY TSANG

SOME local experts are advising the SAR government to impose mandatory counseling for perpetrators of domestic violence to prevent recurrences, as stressed during yesterday's TDM radio program Macau Forum.

Experts from the city's community associations came together for the program to discuss the outcomes of the Law on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence — which criminalizes any act of domestic violence and allows police authorities to investigate without the victim's consent — ever since its passage in October 2016.

Lai Choi In, the director of the Good Shepherd Center, stated that the occupancy rate at the center has climbed since the law came into effect. Most occupants are women



who have been physically and psychologically abused and have endured domestic violence for years. In some severe cases, children and elderly family members living in the same household have also been injured caused by abusers.

Lai found that most victims were reluctant to report the cases due to

the threat of retaliation or threats to other family members from the abusers. They only seek help when the abuse begins to pose a danger to their lives.

"There is rarely any compulsory counseling service provided for the abusers at the moment," Lai pointed out. "In this case, it [the law] has

been of low efficiency [in acting as a deterrent to abusers]."

Domestic violence may even occur during the time between the filing of the case and the court hearing.

Kuan Peng Fa, chief of the Family Protection Unit at the Social Welfare Bureau, said that following the establishment of the law, the bureau has engaged in cross-departmental collaborations with other public departments in an effort to combat family violence.

During the program, Kuan Sok Leng, general secretary of YMCA Macau, voiced her concerns regarding the mental health of children living in abusive households. She pointed out that some cities have already classified witnessing domestic violence as a type of psychological abuse.

Kuan also noted that the number of male victims of domestic violence has been rising over these two years.

Ho Wing Yin, a lecturer at the Macao Polytechnic Institute, urged the legal aid practitioners to provide sufficient legal information to victims to make them aware of their rights and facilitate litigation.

CRIME

PJ seizes liquid cocaine with a street value of MOP24 million

JULIE ZHU

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) seized eight bottles of liquid cocaine, amounting to approximately 7.47 liters and with an approximate street value of 24.66 million patacas, the PJ reported yesterday.

This was the first time the PJ had detected liquid cocaine in bottles of alcohol. The police department arrested the two smugglers responsible for importing

and distributing the bottles of cocaine in Macau. The two suspects are a 39-year-old Macau resident surnamed Cheang, and a 19-year-old Hong Kong resident surnamed Lau.

According to the PJ, they solved this case based on police intelligence shared by the Hong Kong police department, which informed the Macau police authority that there was a chance that some drugs had been shipped from

South America to Macau through Hong Kong.

On the afternoon of January 29, Cheang collected a package from a postal site located in the central district. He was immediately intercepted by the police authority. During the arrest, police officers seized two bottles of rum which later tested positive for cocaine. The two bottles have a volume of 2,980 milliliters and have an estimated street value of 9.83 million patacas.

Cheang confessed to the police officers that he had been offered 2,000 to 3,000 patacas to collect the drugs and deliver them to a designated location.

However, Cheang refused to tell the PJ about who was behind the drug smuggling.

In another case, six bottles of liquid cocaine disguised as wine were shipped from Europe, through Hong Kong, to Macau. Lau was responsible for collecting the package in Macau and in order to do so, he specifically came to Macau and underwent hotel quarantine.

Upon finishing quarantine on February 2, Lau sprinted to the shipping company's location to col-

lect his package. The six bottles of liquid cocaine had a total volume of 4,495 milliliters and value of 14.8 million patacas in the black market.

The PJ officers caught Lau while he was collecting the package. Like Cheang, Lau confessed to the crime and said he was offered HKD40,000 to pick up the package, but refused to reveal the identity of those who orchestrated the smuggling activity.

The PJ believes that these two cases were orchestrated by the same criminal group. The department is continuing its investigation into the source of the drugs and the whereabouts of those behind the operation.

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Academics predict economy will rebound, albeit slowly



Dr. Samuel Tong, president of the Macau Institute of Management

ANTHONY LAM,
HONEY TSANG

FOLLOWING the last economic trough in the second quarter of 2020, the economic outlook for this year should be cautiously optimistic, Dr. Samuel Tong, president of the Macau Institute of Management, said yesterday.

On the sidelines of an event celebrating young entrepreneurship, Tong revealed his forecast for the city's economic performance this year.

He cited several factors, namely the fluctuating conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic in the region, as well as the effectiveness and popularity of the Covid-19 vaccine, to support his view. "Our arch pillar of the tourism and service industry is highly reliant on the improvement of the pandemic," Tong explained.

On the other hand, investments have been flat since

the large casinos are gradually concluding their investments. "Let's stay tuned to see if there will be potential regional cooperative projects after the 'Two Meetings,'" Tong remarked.

"Two Meetings" is a term used to refer to the annual sessions of the two political bodies of the People's Republic of China, namely the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

In addition, he forecasts that local consumption will not drop drastically unless the unemployment rate falls further. Nonetheless, he reminds the city to be vigilant about further business closures.

Meanwhile, Tong said that the upcoming Lunar New Year will be a key indicator for the path of the city's economic recovery.

The speed of the recovery will largely depend on several factors, including the Co-

vid-19 situation in mainland China and Hong Kong, and how big of a positive impact the Macau-Henqin collaboration scheme and Greater Bay Area (GBA) development will have on investment projects in Macau.

The academic also stated that if the unemployment rate of local residents is maintained at 3 to 4%, it would not have an adverse effect on local consumption. However, society should keep an eye out for a possible wave of business shutdowns in the future, he pointed out.

There have been no new investment projects in the city lately. The market is anticipating that the development of the Macau-Henqin collaboration and GBA will foster new investments in Macau and drive the city's economy. Liu Benli, the chairperson of the Macau Economic Association, projects that the city's economy will recover slowly in the first quarter of this year. However, he said small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the tourism industry are still under heavy pressure and suggested the government to roll out support measures to save SMEs from shutting down.

Young entrepreneur incubation center collaborates further with MGM

ANTHONY LAM

CONSIDERING the "pleasant partnership" the Macao Young Entrepreneur Incubation Centre (MYEIC) has with MGM China, the "MGM x MYEIC Young Entrepreneur Nurturing Program" is likely to continue, center chairman José Chui Sai Peng said yesterday.

The program is a joint initiative operated by the entrepreneurial hub and the gambling concessionaire, where the latter offers business training and workshops to companies registered with the former.

Not only does the resort operator buy products and services directly from the participating companies, it also refers these companies to its other vendors.

"The program has widened our horizons on how creative local youths are," Chui remarked.



"We need to invest time and training [in them], while aligning their mindset with demand-supply matching."

He stressed that this process takes time further develop, so he expects the program to continue.

"In the meantime, there will be emerging entrepreneurs and companies, so I believe the demand [for the program] shall remain," Chui added.

Yesterday, the two en-

LOCAL ENTERPRISE UPGRADES VENDING MACHINES

VENDING machines are employing smart technologies to further streamline automatic sales, Lap Chan, founder of mbox Macau said on the sidelines of an event at MGM Macau yesterday.

Boasting that his machines would be the first of their kind in Macau, Chan was asked by the Times about the differences between conventional vending machines and his versions.

Chan explained that each of his machines is connected to the Inter-

net, which allows the owners or the operators to monitor sales and stock in real time.

For example, he said, conventional vending machines require workers to check stocks every now and then, leaving the possibility of consumers not being able to get their preferred products.

In contrast, smart vending machines will allow the operator to save human resources for other parts of the business and restock once a particular product sells out.

ties held a recognition ceremony to highlight 10 excellent young enterprises that MGM China has partnered with.

Over its two years of operation so far, the program has covered eight business facets, from marketing and IT, to customer relations and food-and-beverage standards.

Hubert Wang, president and chief operating officer of MGM, stressed that the resort operator's commencement with the 10 enterprises is the embodiment of the program's ethos to "nurture." He added that the

company will invest more into helping young entrepreneurs move forward.

Meanwhile, Simon Leong, executive director of Purchasing of MGM China, highlighted that the company sees software research and development as an emerging industry because it has to source most operational e-platforms from outside of Macau.

He expects the gaming operator will hold additional business matching sessions to highlight more local products or service providers.

At the same time, at the end of each business period operators will have data on which products are most popular thanks to big data.

"We are the first company to unify all e-payment gateways on one machine," Chan revealed. "[We sell] not only drinks - our partners are selling facemasks and even frozen meat in our machines."

In addition, the company is collaborating with Macau tea brand Tealosophy to sell Japanese matcha drinks in some of the machines. **AL**

Coup a further complication for tricky

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
BANGKOK

BEFORE Monday's coup in Myanmar, the country's relations with China already were complicated by Chinese investments in its infrastructure and the Myanmar military's campaigns along their shared border.

The coup deposed national leader Aung San Suu Kyi a little over a year after Chinese President Xi Jinping made a show of support to her with the first visit by a head of state from Beijing to Myanmar since 2001 and 33 agreements on a wide range of issues.

The military's commander in chief, Min Aung Hliang, has taken charge of the new government under a one-year state of emergency.

Even if China played no role at all in ousting Suu Kyi, Beijing is likely to gain still greater sway over the country, analysts say. That's especially likely if the U.S. and other Western governments impose sanctions to try to punish the regime.

At a briefing on the situation at the United Nations Security Council yesterday [Macau time], the U.N. envoy for Myanmar condemned the coup and urged the council to support democracy in the country. But it was unclear if the council would issue a statement calling for restoration of de-

mocracy and release of all those detained by the military because the U.N. missions of China and Russia said they had to send it to their capitals for review.

Beijing's initial reaction to the coup was measured.

On Monday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said China was studying the situation, describing Myanmar as a "friendly neighbor." He urged Myanmar to properly handle the situation according to its laws and constitution and "maintain political and social stability."

China has invested billions of dollars in Myanmar mines, oil and gas pipelines and other infrastructure and is its biggest trading partner. But while China's ruling Communist Party tends to favor fellow authoritarian regimes, it has had a fractious history with Myanmar's military, sometimes related to its campaigns against ethnic Chinese minority groups and the drug trade along their long, mountainous border.

It was partly a backlash against China's growing dominance of Myanmar's economy a decade ago that led the previous junta to shift toward democratic reforms and the civilian government that enabled Suu Kyi to join Parliament and become the nation's de facto leader, even as the military retained ultimate power.

Suu Kyi has shifted closer to

Beijing in the past few years as she defended the military against condemnation of atrocities against Myanmar's Rohingya minority. That may have deepened military leaders' distrust, especially after their party suffered a resounding loss in recent elections.

"It was always a risk that the military would step in to try and shore up their power," Champa Patel, director of the Asia-Pacific Program at Chatham House in London said in an emailed statement. "Their insecurity has deepened as (Suu Kyi) consolidated her power within the country and deepened ties with countries such as China."

The coup came just three weeks after a visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who met with Suu Kyi and also military officials in the capital, Naypyitaw. The visit was seen in part as an endorsement of the victory of Suu Kyi's party in the November election and partly as a signal Beijing would like to see faster progress on projects agreed to a year earlier.

Some have speculated that Beijing might have given a covert nod to the generals.

But while the coup may lead Myanmar's leaders to lean more heavily on support from China, supplier of most of their weapons and one of the country's biggest sources of foreign investment,

AP PHOTO



Friends: Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Myanmar State Counsellor Aung Mye Thaw.

researcher Zhao Gancheng at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, says it was an unwelcome disruption.

"As a neighboring country, I can't see anything good for China, given that all of China's in-

vestments and infrastructure construction need a stable environment," Zhao said. "China is concerned about this development," he said.

Regardless of what internal politics, antagonisms and perso-

COVID-19

WHO team visits Wuhan virus lab at center of speculation

EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA,
WUHAN

WORLD Health Organization investigators yesterday visited a research center in the Chinese city of Wuhan that has been the subject of speculation about the origins of the coronavirus, with one member saying they'd intended to meet key staff and press them on critical issues.

The WHO team's visit to the Wuhan Institute of Virology was a highlight of their mission to gather data and search for clues as to where the virus originated and how it spread.

"We're looking forward to meeting with all the key people here and asking all the important questions that need to be asked," zoologist and team member Peter Daszak said, according to footage run by

Japanese broadcaster TBS.

Reporters followed the team to the high security facility, but as with past visits, there was little direct access to team members, who have given scant details of their discussions and visits thus far. Uniformed and plainclothes security guards stood watch along the facility's gated front entrance, but there was no sign of the protective suits team members had donned Tuesday during a visit to an animal disease research center. It wasn't clear what protective gear was worn inside the institute.

The team left after around three hours without speaking to waiting journalists.

At a daily briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the experts also

held talks Wednesday with experts from Huazhong Agricultural University.

"It should be noted that virus traceability is a complex scientific issue, and we need to provide sufficient space for experts to conduct scientific research," Wang said. "China will continue to cooperate with WHO in an open, transparent and responsible manner, and make its contribution to better prevent future risks and protect the lives and health of people in all countries."

Following two weeks in quarantine, the WHO team that includes experts in veterinary medicine, virology, food safety and epidemiology from 10 nations has over the past six days visited hospitals, research institutes and a traditional wet market linked to many of the first cases. Their visit

followed months of negotiations as China seeks to retain tight control over information about the outbreak and the investigation into its origins, in what some have seen as an attempt to avoid blame for any missteps in its early response.

One of China's top virus research labs, the Wuhan Institute of Virology built an archive of genetic information about bat coronaviruses after the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. That has led to unproven allegations that it may have a link to the original outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan in late 2019.

China has strongly denied that possibility and has promoted also unproven theories that the virus may have originated elsewhere or even been

brought into the country from overseas with imports of frozen seafood tainted with the virus, a notion roundly rejected by international scientists and agencies.

The institute's deputy director is Shi Zhengli, a virologist who worked with Daszak to track down the origins of SARS that originated in China and led to the 2003 outbreak. She has published widely in academic journals and worked to debunk theories espoused by the former Trump administration and other American officials that the virus is either a bioweapon or a "lab leak" from the institute.

Confirmation of the origins of the virus is likely to take years. Pinning down an outbreak's animal reservoir typically requires exhaustive research, inclu-

ding 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 first clusters of COVID-19 were detected in Wuhan in late 2019, eventually prompting the government to put the city of 11 million under a strict 76-day lockdown. China has since reported more than 89,000 cases and 4,600 deaths, with new cases largely concentrated in its northeast and local lockdowns and travel restrictions being imposed to contain the outbreaks.

New cases of local transmission continue to fall with just 15 reported yesterday as Chinese heed government calls not to travel for the Lunar New Year holiday later this month. **MDT/AP**

Myanmar-China ties



Aung San Suu Kyi at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, in April 2019

construction and the depth of Chinese involvement in businesses ranging from casinos, factories and property development to pipelines and ports.

Last week, the Chinese consortium leading a deep-water port project in Kyaukphyu, on the northwestern coast, began seeking bids for environmental assessments of the project. An anchor of Beijing's "Belt and Road Initiative" to build infrastructure across much of Asia linking its economy to the rest of the world, it will give China coveted overland access to the Bay of Bengal.

China has massive commitments to projects in mining, hydropower and other construction, part of the \$21.5 billion it has pledged in investment in Myanmar. Suu Kyi's government had been slowly moving ahead on such projects, some of which face strong local opposition.

"China has strategic, vested interests in keeping Myanmar as stable as they possibly can," said Chris Ankerson, a professor at the NYU School of Professional Studies Center for Global Affairs. "It works to China's advantage to

be seen as someone who has to be consulted."

After nearly a decade of reforms and gradual opening of Myanmar's long-isolated economy, U.S. and other Western businesses have made only tentative investments, usually with local or other Asian partners.

Western governments that already have imposed sanctions against Min Aung Hliang and other top military leaders and businesses over human rights abuses therefore have relatively scant leverage in persuading Myanmar's leaders to restore civilian rule.

Even if China played no role at all in ousting Suu Kyi, Beijing is likely to gain still greater sway over the country, analysts say

The military may have decided, ultimately, that the cost of defying Western public opinion by staging a coup was outweighed by its own domestic considerations — namely a determination to push Suu Kyi aside, Ankerson said.

In the past, the military has at times sought to counter growing Chinese influence over the economy, showing "a more independent streak that sought to balan-

ce against Chinese influence," said Patel of Chatham House.

But the generals control big chunks of Myanmar's economy and will likely maneuver to maximize what they can gain through dealings with their Chinese partners.

Min Aung Hliang is a major investor in Myanmar Economic Holdings PLC, a conglomerate set up by the military in 1990 that has major joint projects with Chinese corporations, including the Letpadaung copper mine.

"China will have greater leverage to pull Myanmar further into the orbit of its own plans for economic development," said John G. Dale, a professor at George Mason University in Virginia.

And Japan, Singapore and other countries that are more heavily invested in Myanmar are likely to balk at harsh measures against the newly established military regime, say Gregory B. Poling and

Simon Tran Hudes of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

"And the largest foreign player in Myanmar's economy, China, will be all too happy to recalibrate its engagement to recognize the new facts on the ground. That will likely soften the blow of any U.S. sanctions, which Min Aung Hliang has doubtless already anticipated and dismissed," they said in a report. AP

nal ambitions might have driven Min Aung Hliang and other military leaders to seize power, China

is bound to continue to expand its influence in Myanmar given the huge projects already under

COVID-19

Beijing to send 10 million coronavirus vaccine doses abroad

CHINA yesterday announced a plan to provide 10 million coronavirus vaccine doses to developing nations through the global COVAX initiative as part of its ambitious diplomatic and business efforts to distribute Chinese vaccines around the world.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China is responding to a request from the World Health Organization as developing countries seek to fill shortages predicted to run through March. He did not offer details on which vaccine China was providing to COVAX, or whether it was a donation.

China has already shipped large numbers of doses of its own vaccines, mainly to developing countries. It has pursued deals or donations with more than 30 nations far exceeding the 10 million doses it is providing to COVAX. In Turkey alone, Chinese company Sinovac Biotech Ltd. has stru-



ck a deal to sell 50 million doses.

Its global efforts are seen by many as an attempt to boost China's reputation as it seeks to repair its image after the first cases of the coronavirus were detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019. Earlier on during the pandemic, China donated face masks and protective gear to countries around the world as part of a diplomatic push. It has called the virus a mutual challenge

facing humanity and even suggested it may have been brought from outside the country.

It agreed to join COVAX, coordinated by the World Health Organization and GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, last October, notably when the U.S. under then President Donald Trump had declined to join.

COVAX seeks to ensure that low- and middle-income countries have enough vaccines as wealthy nations have snapped up a large

part of the billions of upcoming doses from mostly Western vaccine makers.

"We hope countries in the international community with the capability will swing into action, support COVAX through practical actions, support the work of the World Health Organization, assist developing countries in obtaining vaccines in a timely manner and contribute to ... conquering the pandemic at an early date," Wang said a daily briefing.

WHO is in the process of approving Chinese vaccines for emergency use, he added.

So far, COVAX has secured only a fraction of the 2 billion doses it hoped to buy in 2021. Pfizer last month committed to supply up to 40 million doses of its COVID-19 vaccine this year through COVAX. The facility also has 150 million doses of the vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

Two Chinese companies, state-owned Sinopharm and Sinovac, have been behind a large part of the effort to take Chinese vaccines abroad, which has largely happened outside the COVAX framework. Both companies' vaccines are inactivated, relying on a traditional technology of growing and killing a live virus. The virus is then purified before it is given as an injection.

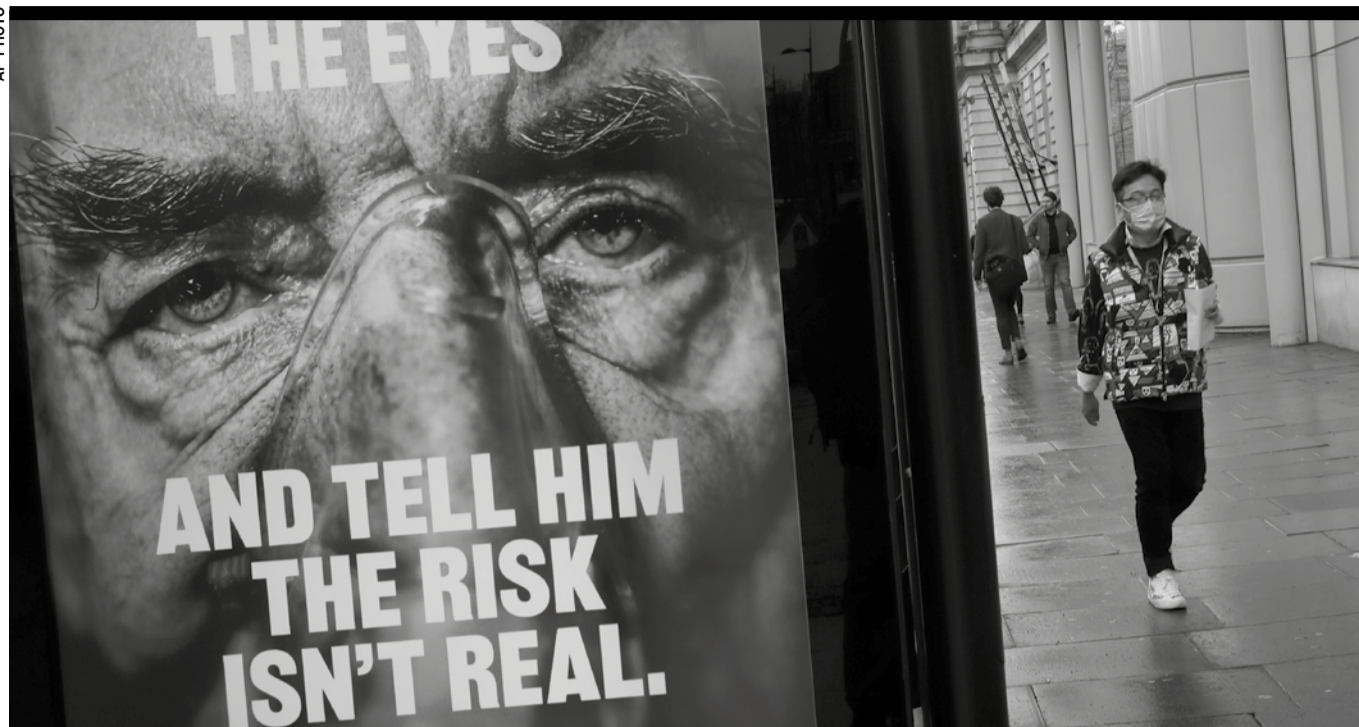
The inactivated vaccines appear to be less effective

than more modern mRNA vaccines. However, they are easier to transport than Pfizer's mRNA vaccine, which requires ultracold storage, a challenge for many lower-income countries.

Only one of the vaccines, made by Sinopharm, has been approved for general use within China. Both, however, have won either emergency or broader approvals in other countries, and are actively being used in mass vaccination campaigns from the United Arab Emirates to Indonesia.

The vaccines have been criticized for a lack of transparency in data from the final stage of clinical trials. Sinopharm said its vaccine is 79.3% effective. Sinovac's shot in particular has raised concerns after it initially announced an efficacy rate of 78% at protecting against symptomatic illness, but after counting mild cases announced that effectiveness is just over 50%, based on its trial in Brazil. AP

AP PHOTO



London in lockdown: the city financial district this week

this day in history

**1968 MORE KENYAN ASIANS
FLEE TO BRITAIN**



Another 96 Indians and Pakistanis from Kenya have arrived in Britain today, the latest in a growing exodus of Kenyan Asians fleeing from laws which prevent them making a living.

The party included nine children under two, and all flew in on cut-price one-way tickets costing about £60 - less than half the normal single fare.

Omar Sharmar, an Indian who was forced to close his haulage business in Mombasa when the government refused to grant him a licence, estimates he has lost £2,000.

"Only Kenyan citizens are being allowed work permits," he said. "I was forced to sell my fleet of lorries and come to Britain to look for a new life."

An airline official in Nairobi estimated that the charter flights had taken between 1,200 and 1,500 Kenyan Asians in to Britain.

"We did find some difficulty filling the planes until last week," he said.

"But in the last two or three days that attitude has changed, and there doesn't seem to be any difficulty at all now. At the present rate I think this will continue for at least a year, if not more."

Immigration laws in Kenya are becoming increasingly draconian. Foreigners can only hold a job until a Kenyan national can be found to replace them: and more and more cities, including Nairobi, are demanding that the government bans non-Kenyans from owning a shop or trading in municipal markets.

If the Kenyan government caves in to such demands, the result is likely to be chaos, as most shops are owned by foreigners, and not enough citizens have the capital or knowledge to run small businesses.

Already, the tens of thousands of Asians, who have until now dominated commerce, industry and most key jobs in the country, are finding their lives made impossible.

Although most turned down the chance to take Kenyan nationality when it was offered to them, more than 100,000 did take up the chance to get British passports.

They are now arriving at the rate of more than 1,000 a month to start a new life in the UK, a country which most have never seen.

Courtesy BBC News

UK

Health chief says new study vindicates delaying second virus vaccine shot

DANICA KIRKA & JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

B RITAIN'S health chief said yesterday that a new study suggesting that a single dose of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine provides a high level of protection for 12 weeks supports the government's strategy of delaying the second shot so it can protect more people quickly with a first dose.

Britain's decision has been criticized as risky by other European countries, but Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the study "backs the strategy that we've taken and it shows the world that the Oxford vaccine works effectively."

Hancock's comments came after Oxford University released a study showing the vaccine cut transmission of the virus by two-thirds and prevented severe disease.

Mene Pangalos, executive vice president of biopharmaceuticals research and development at AstraZeneca, said no patients experienced severe disease or hospitalization three weeks after receiving a first dose, and that efficacy appeared to increase up to 12 weeks after the initial shot.

"Our data suggest you

want to be as close to the 12 weeks as you can" for the second dose, he told a news conference.

The study has not been peer-reviewed yet and does not address the efficacy of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the other one currently in use in the U.K. Pfizer recommends that its shots be given 21 days apart and has not endorsed the U.K. government's decision to lengthen the time between doses.

But the Oxford research was greeted with excitement by U.K. officials under pressure to justify their decision to delay the second dose.

"That reduction in transmission, as well as the fact there is no hospitalizations, the combination of that is very good news. And it categorically supports the strategy we've been taking on having a 12-week gap between the doses," Hancock told Sky News.

Some countries, including France, have authorized the AstraZeneca vaccine only for use in people under 65, saying there is not enough evidence to say whether it works in older adults. Belgium has authorized it only

for people 55 and under.

Yet one of the lead researchers on the Oxford vaccine project, Dr. Andrew Pollard, said "we expect it to be highly effective in older adults" and said more data should be available in the next few weeks.

Britain has Europe's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, with more than 108,000 deaths, and is in its third national lockdown as authorities try to contain a new, more transmissible virus variant first identified in southeast England.

Pfizer recommends that its shots be given 21 days apart and has not endorsed the UK government's decision

Other variants are also a concern. Public health officials in England are going door to door, trying to test all adults in eight targeted communities in an attempt to stop a new strain first identified in South Africa from spreading further.

So far 105 cases of the variant have been identified in the U.K., 11 of them in people with no links to overseas travel. Scientists say there's

no evidence the South African variant is more serious than the original virus but it may be more contagious. There are also concerns that current vaccines may be less effective against that variant because it contains a mutation of the virus' characteristic spike protein that existing vaccines target.

That is a worry as the U.K. races to vaccinate its own population against the virus. Almost 10 million people have received the first of their two shots, including the bulk of people over 80 and those in nursing homes.

Pollard said Oxford scientists believe the AstraZeneca vaccine will continue to offer protection against new variants of COVID-19, although they are still waiting for data on that.

He said even if the virus adapts "that doesn't mean that we won't still have protection against severe disease."

"If we do need to update the vaccines, then it is actually a relatively straightforward process. It only takes a matter of months, rather than the huge efforts that everyone went through last year to get the very large-scale trials run," he told the BBC. **MDT/AP**

IN CONTEXT

The mass immigration of thousands of Kenyan Asians caused a major crisis for the UK government of Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

The Home Secretary, James Callaghan, rushed through new legislation aimed specifically at curbing the flow of immigrants from East Africa.

The 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act introduced a requirement to demonstrate a "close connection" with the UK.

There were deep cabinet splits over the legislation: cabinet papers have since quoted the then Commonwealth Secretary, George Thomson, saying that "to pass such legislation would be wrong in principle, clearly discrimination on the grounds of colour, and contrary to everything we stand for."



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FOOTBALL

Man United beats Southampton by landslide, ties biggest EPL win

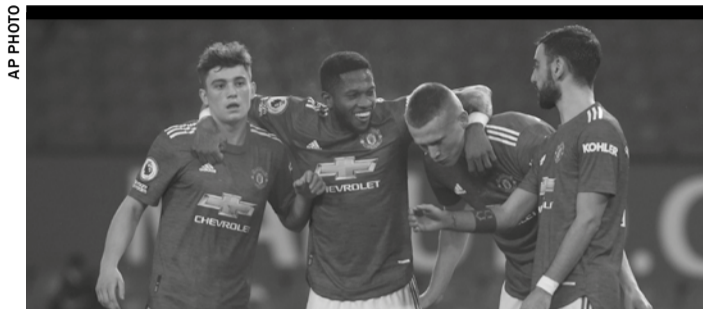
MAN U 9, SOUTHAMPTON 0

MANCHESTER United beat nine-man Southampton 9-0 yesterday [Macau time] to tie the biggest margin of victory in a Premier League match.

It came 15 months after Southampton lost by the same score line at home to Leicester, for the heaviest-ever home defeat.

Southampton had 19-year-old midfielder Alexandre Jankewitz sent off after 82 seconds and was trailing 6-0 when Jan Bednarek also received a red card for a foul on Anthony Martial in the penalty area in the 86th.

United scored three more



Manchester United's Scott McTominay, second right, celebrates with teammates after scoring his side's sixth goal

late goals and matched its biggest-ever win in the Premier League, having also beaten Ipswich 9-0 in 1995.

"What can I say? It is horrible," Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl said. "But we stood up after the first 9-0 and we have to do that again.

"I said at the time we do

not need it again, but when we have it again you have to take it."

United moved level on points with first-place Manchester City, behind only on goal difference.

Aaron Wan-Bissaka, Marcus Rashford and Edinson Cavani added to the own-goal by Bednarek as Uni-

ted went into halftime 4-0 ahead. Martial replaced Cavani for the second half and scored twice, with Scott McTominay, Bruno Fernandes and Daniel James also netting.

"It's easy to take your foot off the gas but we didn't want to do that," Rashford said. "We went out in the second half the same as the first.

"The first half set the tone for us but it's about keeping a positive attitude and keep scoring goals."

United's goal difference is now +19, only five less than City's.

One more goal would have tied United's club record, a 10-0 victory over Anderlecht in the European Cup in 1956. **MDT/AP**

FOOTBALL

ATLÉTICO FORWARD JOÃO FÉLIX TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

PORTUGAL forward João Félix has tested positive for the coronavirus, Atlético Madrid said yesterday.

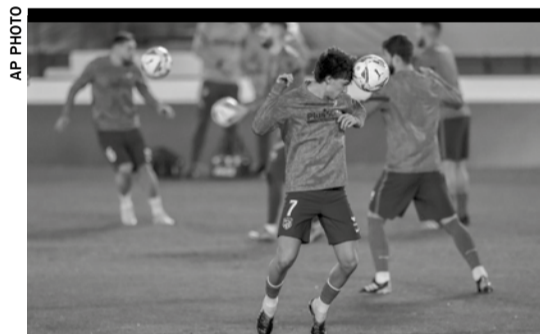
The club said the 21-year-old player is in isolation at home and is following the recommendations of local health authorities as well as the Spanish league's COVID-19 protocol.

Atlético did not give any other de-

tails about his health condition.

The team has a 10-point lead over Barcelona and Real Madrid with a game in hand in the Spanish league.

Atlético's next league match is against Celta Vigo at home on Monday. It hosts Chelsea in the first leg of the round of 16 of the Champions League on Feb. 23. **MDT/AP**



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OPINION

Our Desk

Honey Tsang



THE FALLOUT FROM ILL-PLANNED INFRASTRUCTURE

Several weeks ago, I took my first ride on the Macau Light Rail Transit (LRT), heading from The Londoner Macao to Old Taipa Village for lunch.

I opted for the LRT as there was no bus station nearby and I was not in a rush, so taking a taxi was excluded from the options. As I arrived in Macau in October 2020, I still consider myself new to this city and am disposed to check out places I had not been before — LRT was among them.

I ended up walking 15 minutes to East Asian Games Station. Once I popped in, it reminded me of the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) back home in Hong Kong.

But what struck me most was that I was the only passenger on the platform, along with some birds perched on power wires. Against the backdrop of ritzy hotels in the distance, the terminal looked deserted.

Despite that, it was a pleasant ride — the sleek train, manufactured by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, exuded an inexplicable sense of comfort, probably because it reminded me of my travels in Japan.

I am not the only one who regards the Taipa Line as unfrequented. In January, Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo Arrais do Rosário acknowledged in the Legislative Assembly (AL) that the investment in the LRT was hefty, with a lengthy construction time.

The Covid-19 pandemic has only added to the problem, dragging passenger numbers down to "bleak" levels, resulting in "zero" social benefit. The daily passenger volume on the Taipa route plunged from 30,000 pre-pandemic to just 1,600 to 17,000, Rosário added.

As many know, there are reasons behind the under-use. Though the MOP11 billion Taipa Line — spanning 9.3 kilometers, with 11 stations covering residential areas and three major sea, land and airports in Taipa — some stations remain a long walking distance from key attractions. If you are in a hurry, the LRT is surely not your first commuting choice.

Secondly, the upcoming extension of the Taipa Line to Macau Peninsula, the Taipa-Barra section, is still under construction. This has been delayed due to Covid-19 and is slated to for completion in January 2023. This means that Macau still has two more years to go before it can offer the long-overdue cross-island transportation route.

It is surprising to me that the LRT appears so ill-planned and incomplete, even though the government started mapping out the routes in 2003, nearly two decades ago.

The Macau-Taipa route, the nodes most-needed to help thin out the city's inter-island traffic which is a nuisance to residents, has faced severe delays due to disputes regarding route planning.

A special report published in 2015 by the Commission of Audit stated that the construction of the LRT was delayed by 883 days.

The rash planning and long suspensions have come at the expense of not just public money and convenience, but also the prospect of Macau.

Pandemic aside, if the Macau-Taipa route was already in use it could expedite human and tourist flows between the two islands and uplift Macau's overall economy.

It seems paradoxical to me that Macau has positioned itself as a world-class center of tourism and leisure, but still falls short of having a kitted-out urban rail transit system to help people get around the city.

To me, the Taipa Line is a leisurely ride that serves well in its goal of in beautifying the city and helping Taipa residents move around the island. But it will still be meretricious until it connects to the other half of Macau.

The public consultation about another cross-island route, the LRT East Line which will have six stations running from the Border Gate to Taipa, was completed in November 2020. However, it did not outline any budget or schedule for construction. If the Taipa Line is something to go by, the East Line is likely not to turn up in the coming years as well.

CHINA NOT CONVINCED BY CANADA'S WU-TANG CLAN EXPLANATION

A ruckus brought by China over Canadian T-shirts bearing an altered logo of the New York hip-hop group Wu-Tang clan continued yesterday, with China's Foreign Ministry saying it didn't buy Canada's explanation that the shirts were not an insult linked to the coronavirus.

Canada's Foreign Ministry said this week that the shirts using the "W" logo of the Wu-Tang Clan but with the group's name replaced with "Wuhan" was not intended as a slight. It apo-

logized for any misunderstanding.

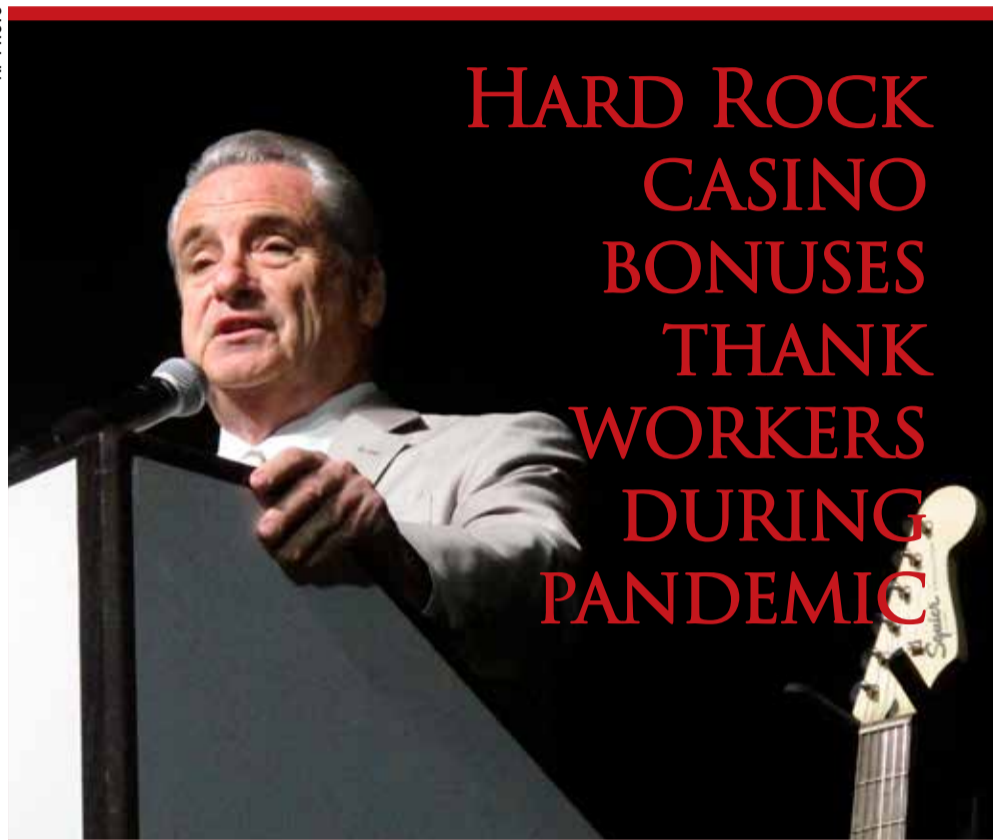
The Chinese-made T-shirts were reportedly ordered last summer by someone at the Canadian Embassy in Beijing.

Chinese critics say the "W" is actually a bat and the shirt is meant to imply a connection between the animals and the virus outbreak in the city of Wuhan, playing on a stereotype about the Chinese taste for eating exotic species.

THE BUZZ



AP PHOTO



Jim Allen, CEO of Hard Rock International, speaks during an employee meeting at the Hard Rock casino in Atlantic City last month

HARD ROCK CASINO BONUSES THANK WORKERS DURING PANDEMIC

HARD Rock International is handing out cash bonuses to its workers in several states, including New Jersey and Florida, to thank them for their efforts, including persevering during the coronavirus pandemic.

The global casino, entertainment and hospitality company based in Davie, Florida, is among numerous U.S. companies that have handed out cash bonuses or increased pay for workers during the pandemic.

Other casino companies, including six operating in Macau, announced employee bonuses last month: Sands China, MGM China; Wynn Macau; Melco Resorts and Entertainment, SJM Holdings and Galaxy Entertainment Group.

Hard Rock's chair and CEO, Jim Allen, said yesterday [Macau time] the company is giving out bonuses in other areas besides Atlantic City and Florida, but would not say where, or indicate what percentage of the company's worldwide workforce is receiving the payments.

The bonuses are intended to thank workers for providing good customer service. But they also are

an acknowledgement of the extra challenge posed by the pandemic.

"It is important not to forget the job they are doing during these difficult times," Allen said. "These are clearly challenging times, and this is a way of showing our appreciation."

In Atlantic City, the

Other casino companies, including six operating in Macau, announced employee bonuses last month

bonuses will exceed \$1 million, split among 2,184 workers: 1,822 hourly workers will get \$250 apiece; 197 supervisors or salaried workers each will get \$500, and 165 managers will get \$1,000 each.

"I'm delighted," said Simei Yu, a server at a restaurant at the Hard Rock who has been with the company since the casino opened in 2018. "We take a lot of precautions. It definitely takes more time: more handwashing, more sanitization of everything. But we do it."

Hard Rock also gave out bonuses last January totaling \$2 million to nearly 2,900 workers in Atlantic

City, before the pandemic took hold. Those payments were a reward for helping the company come within 10% of meeting its business targets for the year.

In 2020, the company did not come close to meeting its targets, like virtually every other casino company. Atlantic City's casinos were closed for 3 1/2 months, and continue to operate at only 25% of capacity under state-imposed restrictions.

But in the months it was able to operate, Hard Rock did well, according to its Atlantic City president, Joe Lupo. Its combined table games and slot machine revenue in the fourth quarter of 2020 was up 12.5% to \$83.3 million. The other eight Atlantic City casinos were collectively down nearly 30% in this category.

Companies in a wide range of other industries also gave out bonuses or raises last year to thank employees for continuing to work during the pandemic.

They include Amazon; Walmart; Best Buy; Target; Home Depot; Hormel Foods; and J.M. Smucker. MDT/AP

Pakistani police yesterday raided a suspected hideout of an outlawed separatist group in eastern Punjab province, triggering a shootout that killed three insurgents, authorities said. Officers also seized a cache of weapons allegedly belonging to terrorists from the outlawed Baluchistan Republican Army. The group is known for targeting Pakistani troops, police and gas pipelines in southwestern Baluchistan province.

AP PHOTO



German military medical team is heading to Portugal to help it deal with a spike in coronavirus cases. The team of 26 doctors and nurses was flying to Portugal yesterday from Wunstorf, in northern Germany. Dr. Ulrich Baumgaertner, the head of the military's medical service, said the team will help at a civilian hospital in Lisbon.

AP PHOTO



Australia Microsoft said yesterday it supports Australia's plans to make the biggest digital platforms pay for news and would help small businesses transfer their advertising to Bing if Google quits the country. Microsoft has been positioning itself to increase market share for its search engine Bing after a Google executive told a Senate hearing last month that it would likely make its search engine unavailable in Australia.

Poland's government has adopted a plan to speed up the coal-reliant nation's transformation to clean and nuclear energy. The Cabinet passed a resolution that calls for Poland to obtain 23% of its energy from renewable sources by 2030, compared to some 13% now. The plan foresees an increase in wind energy, especially from farms on the Baltic Sea, and the opening of Poland's first nuclear power plant in 2033.