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MACAU WILL HOST ITS FIRST-EVER INTERNATIONAL 10KM RUNNING COMPETITION IN MARCH: THE SPORTS BUREAU TOLD THE TIMES

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BOC CLOSSES 2020 WITH 3% REVENUE GROWTH, WHILE BNU DROPS BY 42%

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EXTRA OPTIONS FOR THE WEEK-LONG HOLIDAY: SOME GOOD STUFF IN BOOKS, MUSIC AND FILM WHILE STAYCATIONING IN COTAI OR STAYING HOME

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AP PHOTO



Myanmar Large crowds demonstrating against the military takeover in Myanmar again defied a ban on protests yesterday, even after security forces ratcheted up the use of force against them and raided the headquarters of the political party of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Witnesses estimated that tens of thousands of protesters, if not more, turned out in Yangon and Mandalay, the country's biggest cities.

Pakistan In a landmark ruling, the top court yesterday commuted the death sentences of two mentally ill prisoners who have spent decades on death row, the first such ruling in this conservative Muslim-majority nation. The decision by the Supreme Court was quickly hailed by Justice Project Pakistan, a rights group that has fought an extensive, years-long legal battle for the two inmates.

AP PHOTO



Afghanistan A chain of bomb explosions targeting Kabul police yesterday killed a district police chief and his bodyguard, and also wounded five people, officials said. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blasts, which were all caused by so-called sticky bombs, explosive devices attached to vehicles that are remotely detonated or set off by timers.

Sri Lanka will begin giving permission for Muslims who die of COVID-19 to be buried, the prime minister said yesterday, following an outcry over a previous ban. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa gave the assurance in response to a question from a lawmaker in Parliament. Sri Lanka has required the cremation of all people who die from COVID-19, saying the virus in human remains could contaminate underground water.

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MILD AMBITION



EVA BUCHO

MGTO expects 20,000 visitors a day in CNY and strives for an ambitious target of 6-10 million tourist arrivals the whole year

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2021 ARRIVALS

MGTO strives for an ambitious target of 6 to 10 million tourists

HONEY TSANG

THE Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is set to aim for five strategic focuses to accelerate the city's tourism recovery, shooting for a target of 6 to 10 million tourist arrivals in the year of 2021, director of MGTO Helena de Senna Fernandes said in the annual media briefing yesterday.

Fernandes regards the goal as a huge feat, as "it warrants [strong promotional] efforts [by MGTO]," especially when considering the daily tourist arrival averages around 10,000 in January 2021.

She acknowledged that it is "hard" to forecast the yearly arrival for 2021 and MGTO has to be more prudent about this year's projection, given the fickle nature of Covid-19 — as reflected in daily arrivals climbing to peaks in Christmas and New Year holidays last year but dropping since January 2021 due to fresh outbreaks in mainland China.

"We are hoping that visitor arrivals pick up following the Chinese New Year (CNY), and also after [a significant num-



ber of people receive] vaccination," Fernandes remarked.

In yesterday's briefing, directors of MGTO spelled out the achievements of the organization in 2020, as well as its strategic planning for 2021.

In the year of 2020, overall visitor arrivals amounted to 5.9 million in 2020, down a who-

pping 85% year-on-year due to the pandemic, Ricky Hoi, deputy director of MGTO said as he gave the annual statistics in the briefing.

Fernandes further broke down the tally, saying: "The 3 million [of the annual number of 5.9 million were] generated from January 2020. Simply

put, in the following 11 months last year, we [...] only received around 2 million or so arrivals, which is a very low figure."

Of all tourists, almost all, or 96.7%, hailed from the Greater China markets, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, and the Taiwan region. For international source markets, Korea continued to be the top, contributing more than 44,000 visitors in 2020, followed by 32,000 from the Philippines.

Total visitor expenditure from January to September 2020 totaled USD5.15 billion — USD3.7 billion from gaming revenue and USD1.4 billion from other industries. The aggregate represented an 83.2% drop from the same period last year.

THE FIVE STRATEGIC FOCUSES

In order to draw 6 to 10 million tourist arrivals in 2021, chiefs of MGTO vowed to work hard on the five specific strategies.

Firstly, MGTO will bolster the "tourism +" cross-sector integration, to create a stronger synergy between Macau's tourism industry and MICE, culture, e-commerce and sports industries.

"In partnership, the tourism

industry can act as an engine to help accelerate the development of other industries," Fernandes said, adding that the collaboration will extend to other novel industries as well.

The second focus will centre on Macao Grand Prix Museum, with its trial operation expected to open in the first quarter of 2021 and create novel travel experiences to entice holidaymakers.

The museum cannot open at full gear as the current quarantine regulations make it impossible for the specialized technician to come from Hong Kong to Macau to carry out the weekly maintenance work, Fernandes explained.

The other three strategies will involve launching various promotions to drive visitation, optimizing tourism planning and policy, and enhancing government service to accelerate the development of tourism industry.

The government budget rationed for MGTO's daily operation totals MOP370.7 million, down just 1% from last year.

Meanwhile, the Investment and Administrative Development Expenses (PIDDA) for MGTO will be at nearly MOP42 million, down 74% from last year — the majority of which was allocated for the construction of the Grand Prix Museum last year, which has already been completed. The tourism fund is budgeted at 979.3 million, down 19% year-over-year, due to the reduced tourism profit.

Fernandes forecasts up to 20,000 daily visitor arrivals this CNY

HONEY TSANG

DIRECTOR of the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Helena de Senna Fernandes has admitted that she is not so hopeful of a high tourist arrival during the Spring Festival, expecting that it will only reach a daily number of 16,000 to 20,000 during the period.

Fernandes announced the arrival projection for Chinese New Year (CNY) yesterday in an annual media briefing held by MGTO at

the Macau Science Center.

"It is a low possibility that the overall tourism arrival will exceed 200,000 during the week of CNY holiday [from February 11 to 17]. We are expecting it to stand around or over 100,000," Fernandes acknowledged.

The already-cautious forecast for this year's CNY visitor arrival — once realized — will represent a significant drop from last year's tally.

In 2020, the city registered 261,069 tourist ar-

rivals during the seven-day Spring Festival from January 24 to 30, down a significant 78.3% from 1,201,912 in the corresponding period of 2019. The drop is mainly driven by the impact of the pandemic.

The pessimistic outlook for this year's CNY is built upon an anticipated lowered travel intention into Macau — which has been cooled by the recent Covid-19 outbreaks in China and the travel advisories issued by China's municipal governments advising their

residents to avoid unnecessary travel during the festival to minimize contagion risk.

"We are hoping that visitor arrivals pick up following the Chinese New Year (CNY), and also after [a significant number of people receive] vaccination," Fernandes added.

Regarding the occupancy rate, Fernandes said the MGTO had just compiled the data from local accommodations and estimated the overall rate to be around 30%.

"The number for the three-star to five-star hotels fares better, with some of them passing the 30% point," she added.

She also addressed the media regarding the fact that the MGTO had noticed a drop in tourist arrivals recently before the Spring festival, speculating that most visitors are indisposed to visit Macau in the current period and spend the festival in a quarantine facility.

Despite Fernandes's not-so-promising forecast, some chiefs of Macau's ca-

sino conglomerates earlier expressed their high expectation about their businesses during the forthcoming CNY.

President of Sands China Ltd Wilfred Wong believes there will still be a good number of tourists visiting Macau from Guangdong Province for the festival, whilst Wynn Macau Ltd president and executive director Ian Coughlan said he is anticipating the CNY occupancy rate to be on par with that of Golden Week in October last year.

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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Advertisement advertising@macaudailytimes.com

For subscription and general issues:

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LOWEST RAINFALL IN 60 YEARS RECORDED

The Pearl River Water Conservancy Commission of the Ministry of Water Resources has pointed out that, since November 2020, the rainfall in the Pearl River Basin has continued to be low, more than 80% less than the same period of last year, which is the least rainfall recorded in the same period in the past 60 years. A large-scale meteorological drought has been observed in the basin. Zhuhai, Zhongshan and other major water intakes will be affected by the salt tides phenomenon. The commission is taking all measures to secure Macau's water supply.

POLICE CARRY OUT SPECIAL WINTER CRIME PREVENTION ACTION

The Judiciary Police (PJ), together with the United Police Service, recently carried out a special "crime prevention winter action," having intercepted 117 people consisting of 104 men and 13 women. None of the intercepted individuals were suspected of crimes. The department scrambled a unit of 35 crime investigators to take action around the premises of the central district of Macau peninsula, north district of Macau peninsula, and S. Lourenço area.

15 APPLIED FOR DISABILITY INCOME SUBSIDY

In January, 15 local residents applied for the disability subsidy, according to a statement released by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL). On November 1, the administrative regulation of the income subsidy program for workers with a disability came into effect. The 15 applicants work as guards, cleaners, and in the manufacturing industry, cosmetic industry and food supply industry. Every year in January, April, July and October, applicants can apply for the subsidy for the previous quarter.

CAEAL BIDS FOR SAFER AND CHEAPER LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

RENATO MARQUES

THE Electoral Affairs Commission for the Legislative Assembly Election (CAEAL) is aiming for safer and cheaper elections this year, the president of the CAEAL, Tong Hio Fong, told the media yesterday after the first meeting of the commission to plan for the elections that will take place later this year.

For Tong, the biggest challenge of this year's elections for the Legislative Assembly (AL) is related to the Covid-19 pandemic and its evolution over time. On this topic, the president said that CAEAL is preparing, in collaboration with the health authorities, suitable contingency plans, taking into account different scenarios.

"We had a meeting with the Health Bureau to exchange opinions on the matter and to hear their opinions. [For the time being] if the situation of the pandemic remains stable, we will just continue to enforce the same prevention and control measures that are already in force, such as the [requirement] for the use of facemasks, body temperature checks, and use of hand sanitizer," Tong said.

The same official also noted that, for the time being, it is difficult to predict the development of the pandemic and what the situation will be like in the second half of the year, which is when the election campaign and voting day will take place.

ELECTIONS BUDGET SEES 8.5% CUT

Another of the concerns of the CAEAL this year is the containment of expenses as much as possible, following the indication of the Chief Executive (CE).



In June last year, Ho Iat Seng has ordered the local government to cut expenditure this year. The 2021 budget cut is the consequence of the impact of Covid-19.

Therefore, Tong has announced that the general budget for the 2021 AL Elections will suffer a cut of about 8.5% to a total of MOP50.8 million.

"We want to save as much as possible and so we tried to cut on all unnecessary tasks as well as in equipment and resources. In this area, we are focusing on refurbishing equipment [acquired for the previous elections in 2017] that we can reuse so we don't need to buy a new one," the president said, explaining that among such equipment are computers and other electronic devices that are still in a condition to be reused, noting that the budget cut was essentially done through this reuse of equipment.

CAMPAIGN WITH LESS NOISE AND MORE SAFETY

An election campaign with added safety and that is more environmentally friendly is part of the goals of CAEAL for this year.

As the president revealed yesterday, the commission has met with both the Environmental Protection Bureau and the Transport Bureau to hear their opinions on road and traffic safety as well as excessive noise and other pollution caused by campaigns.

"In the meetings [with the two bureaus] we have discussed issues, namely those that occurred in previous elections and related with the vehicles used in the campaign. Our main point concerning environmental protection is related to noise pollution, as well as the safety of the equipment installed in the vehicles. We know that candidates usually install large speakers and other sound equipment in the vehicles and we do not want them to jeo-

pardize the safety of other users of the road as well as disturb the population with excessive noise," Tong remarked.

JOINT FORCES FOR 'CLEAN' ELECTIONS

Regarding illegal acts and unlawful actions during the campaign or on the election day, the CAEAL said that it will continue to count on the support of the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) as well as the police forces to ensure that no illegality or unlawful acts take place unpunished.

Refusing to comment on recent cases of former candidates, which were sentenced in connection to the election campaign of 2017, Tong said that the cooperation of the CCAC and police forces has been positively contributing to the fairness of elections, adding that the CCAC is currently studying the topic of the candidates or lists that offer meals to voters on election day.

MACAU TO HOST FIRST-EVER 10K RUNNING EVENT NEXT MONTH

RENATO MARQUES

MACAU will host its first-ever international 10km (10K) running competition in March, the Times learned from the Sports Bureau (ID).

This will be the first time that Macau hosts this kind of athletics event.

According to ID, more details on this competition will be only revealed at the end of this month, when the event will be officially presented.

The 10K run is a long-distance road running competition over a distance of 10 ki-

lometers. It is one of the most famous and common types of road running events, alongside the shorter 5K distance run and the longer half-marathon and marathon.

Although the long-distance road running events are very popular in Macau, with the region organizing the half and full marathon events for the last four decades, shorter distance international events have never been held before.

An Olympic distance since 1912 (for men) and 1988 (for women), the 10K has always been regarded as one of the

most interesting long-run events to watch.

According to the World Athletics, formerly known as the International Amateur Athletic Federation, the currently standing World Record of the distance is, in the male section, held by Uganda's Joshua Cheptegei with 26:11.0, which broke the previous record in October 2020. In the female section, the record holder is the Ethiopian Almaz Ayana with the best time of 29:17.4, a record that has stood since the Olympics of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2016.

APPROVED SME CREDIT LIMIT DOWN 46%

THE credit of newly-approved small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) fell in the second half of 2020. The outstanding balance of SME loans rose year-on-year while the share of SME loans to major industries remained stable.

According to statistics released by the Monetary Authority of Macao, new SME credit limit approved by Macau banks totalled MOP8.2 billion in the

second half of 2020, down 46.5% from the first half of 2020, or 4.2% from the same period of 2019.

As at end-2020, the outstanding balance of SME loans decreased 1.7% from end-June 2020 but rose 1.3% from a year earlier to MOP87.3 billion. Compared to the last survey period, outstanding SME loans to "information technology" and "construction and public works" entities

increased at respective rates of 7.1% and 2.9%, whereas those to "restaurants, hotels and similar," "transport, warehouse and communications" and "wholesale and retail trade" dropped 5.8%, 4.4% and 2.5% respectively.

By 2020, the outstanding balance of delinquent SME loans grew 113.1% from six months ago or 193.8% from the preceding year to MOP486.5 million. LV

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Covid-19 hinders CNY spending

HONEY TSANG

THE weeks prior to the Chinese New Year (CNY), which are usually a spending spree period for local shops to generate extra revenue, will be affected by the ongoing pandemic, with business greatly hamstrung, especially small-and-medium enterprises.

Mr. Leung, the owner of a Macau ginseng and dried seafood shop established in 1995, told the Times yesterday that revenue for this year's Spring Festival had dropped around 50%, as compared to last year's CNY.

"The drop was predominantly driven by the decreased number of our mainland clients," said Leung, adding that 60% of the shop's customers were local residents, whilst the remaining 40% were mainland tourists.

According to a report published earlier by TDM, some locals have cut down the budget for their traditional grocery shopping for this year's CNY, owing to the financial uncertainties brought about by the pandemic.

In addition, some shop owners said they are mounting their last promotions during the Chinese New Year and would shut down their businesses afterward, as they have already been crippled by the pandemic.

However, in Leung's case, he noticed local customers have not scaled down their budgets, but rather, bought in smaller quantities than in previous years.

Leung speculated that most of them decided not to return to their hometowns in China during this year's festival. Hence, they no longer need to buy dried seafood in bulk, to serve as CNY gifts for their relatives back home.



MACAU PHOTO AGENCY

MACAU LEGEND CASINOS ALLEGEDLY FORCES STAFF TO ACCEPT VOUCHERS AS SALARY



HONEY TSANG

MACAU Legend Development Ltd's casinos are allegedly forcing some casino staff to accept consumption vouchers as a substitute for their yearly bonus, or else be subject to demotion, according to the New Macau Gaming Staff Rights Association.

Cloe Chao, the president of the association, said that the casinos' management informed the affected staff that the firms will buy back the delivered vouchers in cash — albeit 40% less than the original value — if the staff insist upon not receiving the vouchers.

There are currently 91 employees from Legend Palace

Casino and some 40 staff from Landmark Casino affected, Chao confirmed. She was told that some staff at the group's third casino, Babylon Casino, have also been treated in this way.

According to Chao, the casinos delivered the first allowance valued at MOP17,000, as agreed, to the staff on February 5. However, the second allowance worth over MOP20,000, which was originally scheduled to be delivered in cash in July 2021, was also distributed on the same day in the form of cash vouchers.

"We believe the mishap is a decision made by the management of these casinos, but not the SJM group itself, considering that the licensee already

awarded [the first] allowance in cash to its employees working for its main casinos," Chao said.

The association has been the agent representing and advocating for the labour rights of the concerned staff. On Tuesday, the alliance delivered a petition letter regarding the presumptively unlawful move to Wong Chi Hong, the director of the Labour Affairs Bureau, following the first complaint filed with the Bureau on February 5.

According to the release published by the association, the vouchers can only be redeemed in Macau Fisherman's Wharf, Legend Palace Hotel, Harbourview Hotel and Rocks Hotel, and will expire by the end of December this year.

BANKING

BOC CLOSES 2020 WITH 3% REVENUE GROWTH, BNU DROPS 42%

RENATO MARQUES

THE Bank of China-Macau (BOC) recorded a profit last year of MOP5.6 billion, an official financial report published yesterday at the Official Gazette shows.

The result represents a 3% growth year-on-year when compared to 2019.

Concurrently, the other currency-issuing bank — Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU) has reported profits amounting to MOP420.3 million in 2020, a result that represents a significant drop of 41.7% when compared with 2019, when the bank closed the year with profits of MOP721.9 million.

In 2019, the branch of the Chinese state-owned bank

reported the highest net profit amount among the banks operating in Macau, followed by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) and Tai Fung Bank.

In 2020, the ICBC group has reported profits of MOP3.08 billion, slightly less than in 2019 when the result was MOP3.07 billion.

As for the third-highest profiler, Tai Fung Bank also marginally increased its profits last year by scoring just 0.5% more than in 2019 to a total of MOP2.19 billion.

Such results continue to keep the ranking of the highest profiler banking institutions in Macau unchanged from 2019, which in 2020 continued to be led by BOC, followed by ICBC and Tai Fung.



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PANDA PAVILION FREE DURING SPRING FESTIVAL HOLIDAY

The Macau Giant Panda Pavilion and Cute Animal Zone of the Flora Garden will be free of charge during the upcoming Spring Festival Holiday. Between February 12 and February 21, the panda pavilion will be open. The Cute Animal Zone of the Flora Garden will be open between February 12 and February 14 from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m..

MACAO MUSEUM UPDATES WEBSITE

The Macao Museum launched a new version of its official website with more interactive elements, including a virtual exhibition space and a 720-degree display of selected collections, according to a statement released by the Cultural Affairs Bureau. The new website also contains information on approximately 300 collections, enabling visitors to instantly share information on valuable collections and further enhancing the promotion of electronic access to cultural and museum resources. The museum is currently holding a special exhibition, "Memory of the Past – Exhibition of the Macao Museum Postcards Collection."

MORAIS DRAINAGE PROJECT'S FIRST PHASE COMPLETED

The Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) has completed the first phase of drainage works on Avenida de Venceslau de Morais. DSSOPT plans to expand the existing public drainage network around the area by installing rainwater and wastewater collectors, repaving roadways and sidewalks, installing metal railings, and repairing damaged sections of pavement. The second phase of the work is expected to start after the Lunar New Year.

FOUR COMMIT CRIME AGAIN WHILE AWAITING DEPORTATION

JULIE ZHU

FOUR individuals waiting to be deported to their home country are facing added charges after engaging in a street brawl that involved 12 people in total, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) reported during the joint police press conference yesterday.

All 12 people are Vietnamese nationals, four of whom are pending deportation. The police department apprehended eight of the brawl participants, including one woman, aged between 25 and 34 years old.

Among them, four were holding a valid blue-card and working in Macau providing cleaning services, maintenance services, and massage services, while the legal status of the other four is being investigated by a temporary identity recognizance issued by the immigration authority.

According to PJ, the 12 people are responsible for a brawl that took place on the night of January 21 near Bairro Iao Hon, located in the northern district of Macau pe-



ninsula.

Police officers were unable to catch the group of people on-site because, by the time they arrived on the scene, the culprits were already gone.

CCTV surveillance feeds recorded the brawl, in which prohibited weapons (knives), iron hoses and umbrellas were used.

On the same night, at 10:30 p.m., patrol officers apprehen-

ded one of the men, according to whom the brawl involved two separate groups of Vietnamese nationals, one group consisting of seven members and the other five.

The two groups were negotiating a dispute before they started fighting.

Based on the first apprehended man's information, the police authority was then able to trace down seven other indivi-

duals from different locations on February 2, February 6 and February 8.

The police also found that one of the captured men was in possession of prohibited drugs (MDMA) and the suspect said that he had purchased the drugs from a stranger at a disco located at Zona de Aterros do Porto Exterior with each tablet of MDMA costing him 200 patacas.

PSP submitted the information to the prosecution authority and proposed to charge seven of the arrested individuals with illicit possession of prohibited weapons. One of the seven has also been charged with possession of prohibited drugs.

PSP also seized one 79-centimeter long knife at the brawl site. The bureau is still investigating the whereabouts of the remaining four individuals.

The police authority is still organizing the deportation process of four of the men, who were convicted of the charges of illicitly sheltering others, assault and the distribution of drugs.

FIRE SAFETY LAW

NURSING HOMES REQUIRED TO BE EQUIPPED WITH FIRE CONTROL ROOM

NURSING homes must be equipped with a fire control room, according to the recently approved fire safety law.

Recently, the Second Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly (AL) had another meeting to discuss the

fire safety law which lawmakers approved in November last year.

Members of the Second Standing Committee asked about the number of buildings which currently do not have fire control rooms and will need to have one, according to

the law.

The bill proposes that even low-rise and mid-rise buildings used as nursing homes for the elderly or as tutoring schools must set up a fire control room.

Some members of the Second Standing Committee expressed worries that some nursing homes are located on the ground floor and may not have the conditions to set up a fire control room.

According to Chan Chak Mo, chairman of the Second Standing Committee, the government is currently considering exempting ground floor properties from the requirement to have a fire control room.

Macau currently has approximately 70 companies qualified to install fire protection systems and to provide maintenance services to such facilities. JZ

SOUTH EXTENSION PROJECT OF AIRPORT TO BE COMPLETED IN Q4

THE entirety of the South Extension Building project at Macau International Airport (MIA) is estimated to be completed in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2021, the Macau International Airport Co. Ltd. (CAM) said in a statement yesterday.

The construction works on the main structure of the South Extension Building has been recently completed, bringing the work completion progress to more than 40%. Except for the external structure, the constructions of facade system and interior partition, and installation of pipework, ductwork as well as MEP equipment have been ongoing accordingly.

The three-storey South Extension Building with

a total area of over 18,000 square metres will comprise of an immigration hall, departure lounge, commercial area, offices, prayer room, entertainment room and conference rooms.


Three additional boarding bridges will also be provided, therefore, a total of eight boarding bridges will be in operation upon completion of the project to satisfy the future passenger volume.

As the project will be completed in Q4, the annual passenger handling capacity of MIA will be expected to increase significantly from 7.8 million to 10 million.

Back in 2018, the company has announced plans to launch the project in early 2019. LV



AD

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Date of Application	PK to SK (Children entering kindergarten for the first time)	Please contact our admissions team via admission@tis.edu.mo or call +853 2853 3700
Date of Interview/ Admission Exam	PK - Grade 11	PK group interviews: March 13, 2021, 9:00am - 12noon JK- Gr 3 group interviews: March 8 - 26, 2021 Gr 1 - 6 mock class (compulsory): March 6, 2021, 9:30 - 11:30 am Gr 1 - 3 admission interviews: March 8 - 26, 2021 Gr 4 - 6 admission exam: March 13, 2021, 1:00 - 4:00 pm Gr 7 - 11 admission exam: March 6, 2021, 1:00 - 4:00 pm
Open House	PK to Grade 12	February 27, 2021, 9:30am - 12noon
	Main Lobby	Registration 9:30 - 9:45 am
	Black Box Theatre (Rm 3480)	Information Session (PK-Gr 12) 9:45-10:15 am Displays & Campus Visits 10:15 am - 12:00 noon
Results Notification		April 9, 2021 via email and SMS
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500,000 – 999,999	22,500 – 45,000
1,000,000 – 2,999,999	50,000 – 150,000
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Recovery points to Lunar New Year boost for gold demand

CHINA'S economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic may offer some solace to gold bulls, with expectations building that jewelry demand will rebound following last year's wipe out.

Jewelry retailers on the mainland have reported strong sales in recent months, while concerns over infection have pushed some consumers online. It's a turn around from last year's Lunar New Year period, when surging virus cases forced stores to shorten business hours and manage time off for employees, and consumers reined in spending.

The shaky start to 2020 saw demand in the world's biggest gold consumer tumble 35% to the lowest annual total since 2009, despite a rebound in the final three quarters. China's Lunar New Year holiday, a traditionally auspicious time to buy gold, kicks off today.

Optimism about new year sales has improved considerably, said Nikos Kavalis, managing director at consultancy Metals Focus. He's confident sales "will be higher year on year, given the low base in 2020 due to the pandemic."

Still, consumption is unlikely to have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Demand may be about 30% lower than the same period in 2018 and 2019 due to the re-emergence of the virus in some provinces, said Haywood Cheung, president of the Chinese Gold & Silver Exchange in Hong Kong.

Parts of northern China recently imposed lockdowns to curb coronavirus outbreaks and the government has taken steps to discourage millions of people from making their annual trips to their hometowns. That's likely to distort some of the traditional spending at this time of year.

"The Spring Festival is generally the peak season for gold jewelry sales, mainly because people want to bring gifts when visiting relatives and friends," said Jason Yu, managing director at Kantar Worldpanel Greater China, a data and consulting company. "However, due to the sporadic virus outbreaks this year, consumers will significantly reduce their outings."

A stronger New Year period may also point to a more positive annual outlook. China's demand may expand this year as policy makers have positioned domestic consumption as a priority, said Roland Wang, the World Gold Council's managing director for China. That likely bodes well for gold demand, especially jewelry, he said.

Retailer Luk Fook Holdings International Ltd. saw year-on-year same store sales growth of 11% at self-operated shops for its gold products in the quarter ended Dec. 31. It saw a similar rise in its licensed shops, which account for about 96% of total shops on the mainland. E-commerce business sales growth jumped 53%. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

EXPLAINER

What the WHO coronavirus experts learned in Wuhan

A World Health Organization team left China yesterday after gaining some new insights into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic that has now killed more than 2.3 million people worldwide — but with the major questions still unanswered.

The visit was politically sensitive for China — which is concerned about any allegations it didn't handle the initial outbreak properly — and has been closely watched around the world.

Team member Peter Daszak sounded an upbeat note on arriving at the airport at the end of the four-week trip to the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the first COVID-19 cases were detected in December 2019.

"We have clear leads on what the next steps should be," he said. "We know a lot more after the work that's been done."

The team's major conclusions seemed to confirm what most researchers had already surmised about the virus. The visit was never expected to definitively pinpoint the origin of the pandemic — an undertaking that, based on others, could take years.

Here's a look at the theories the team explored during their visit:

THE BATS

The mission to Wuhan did not change a major theory about where the virus came from. Scientists think bats are the most likely carriers, and that they passed it on to another animal, which passed it on to humans. While there are other possibilities — a bat could have infected a human directly, for instance — the path through a second animal remains the most likely scenario, according to the WHO team and its Chinese counterparts. The question is what animal and where.

THE MARKET

The Huanan Seafood Market, which had a cluster of cases at the start of the outbreak, has long been suggested as a possible place humans first became infected. The market dealt mainly in frozen seafood but also sold domesticated wildlife. That included rabbits, which are known to be susceptible to the virus, and bamboo rats and ferret badgers, which are suspected of being susceptible. At the WHO mission's closing news conference Tuesday, one team member said some of these animals have been traced to farms or traders in regions that are home to bats that carry the virus that is the closest known relative of the



Thea Fischer of the WHO team arrives at the VIP terminal of the airport to leave at the end of the mission in Wuhan

one that causes COVID-19.

That finding could put renewed focus on the market. Chinese health officials have downplayed the market's role, noting that only surfaces at the market tested positive for the virus, not any of the animal products. A Chinese official said Tuesday that it appears there were cases elsewhere in Wuhan around the same time as the market cluster, so it remains possible the transfer of the virus from animals to humans happened elsewhere.

THE LAB

The conclusion of the Chinese and international experts was that it is extremely unlikely the virus leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a lab with an extensive collection of virus samples. Former U.S. President Donald Trump and officials in his administration were among those who floated that possibility — prompting angry denials from China. And most experts have long been skeptical of it.

In making its determination, the team said that such leaks are extremely rare and there's no evidence the virus existed in that lab or any lab anywhere in the world when the pandemic began. It also reviewed safety protocols at the institute, leading the team to conclude "it was very unlikely that anything could escape from such a pla-

ce," WHO team leader Peter Ben Embarek said.

THE COLD CHAIN

The joint investigation left open the possibility that the virus could have been spread to humans through frozen food products, a bit of a surprise as foreign experts have generally played down the risk.

It's a theory that has been widely promoted by Chinese officials, who have detected the virus on imported frozen food packaging and seized on that to suggest the virus could have come to China from abroad.

WHO team member Marion Koopmans noted that it still wouldn't answer the question of where the virus came from originally. "Its not the cold chain by itself, that cannot be," she said at the airport. "The virus has to come from somewhere."

THE DATA

The mission has been dogged by questions about how much freedom China would give the researchers to visit the places and talk to the people they wanted to. In the end, they appeared satisfied with the arrangements, at least in their public comments. Team member Thea Koelsen Fischer said she did not get to see raw data and had to rely on an analysis of the data that was presented to her. But she said that would be true in most countries. **MDT/AP**



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AP PHOTO



Acting Sergeant at Arms Timothy Blodgett (right) leads Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., the lead Democratic House impeachment manager, and other impeachment managers, walk through the Rotunda to the Senate for the second impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump

USA

What to Watch: Democrats to argue Trump alone incited mob

MARY CLARE JALONICK,
WASHINGTON

HOUSE Democrats will begin two days of arguments in Donald Trump's second impeachment trial, trying to convince skeptical Republicans that the former president alone was responsible for inciting his mob of supporters who broke into the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 and interrupted the presidential electoral count.

The arguments today [Macau time] from the nine Democratic impeachment managers for the House, which impeached Trump last month, will come a day after the Senate voted to move ahead with the trial even though Republicans and Trump's lawyers argued that it was unconstitutional because Trump had already left office. All Democrats and six Republicans disagreed, arguing that there is legal precedent for the trial and that there should be no exceptions for impeachable behavior in a president's last months in office.

While Democrats won yesterday's vote, it also signaled that they will not likely have the votes for an eventual conviction, since they would need a minimum of 17 Republicans to vote with them. Democrats say they know they are arguing the case

uphill, but they are holding out hope that they will convert more Republicans by the final vote.

What to watch as the Democrats prosecute their case for "incitement of insurrection":

DEVASTATING CASE AGAINST TRUMP

The Democrats are trying to take advantage of senators' own experiences, tapping into their emotions as they describe in detail — and show on video — what happened as the mob broke through police barriers, injured law enforcement officers, ransacked the Capitol and hunted for lawmakers. Democratic aides working on the impeachment team said that they think they have a "devastating" case against the former president, and that they will prosecute it like a criminal trial.

Yesterday [Macau time], as they argued that the trial was constitutional, they strayed from their arcane arguments about historic precedent and the Federalist Papers to show a video that took senators through a visceral, graphic timeline of Jan. 6, starting with Trump's speech to supporters in which he told them to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat. It juxtaposed Trump's words with what was happening inside and outside the building as supporters

broke in, showing violence and jeers aimed at police and lawmakers. The carnage led to five deaths.

Similar video evidence is expected today, as they begin arguments on the merits of the case — including some that hasn't been seen before, according to the aides, who requested anonymity to discuss the managers' plans.

TRUMP'S TEAM GETS A REDO

Trump's lawyers had a bad day yesterday, as Trump fumed at their performance and GOP senators leaving the trial criticized their arguments as "random," "disorganized" and "perplexing." Trump felt that the team, especially lead lawyer Bruce Castor, came off badly on television and looked weak compared to the Democratic prosecutors, according to a person who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

On Friday, they will get another chance, starting what is likely to be two days of arguments that last into the weekend. They plan to argue that Trump did not incite the violence, that rioters acted of their own accord and that the former president is protected by freedom of speech.

While the Democrats have appealed to the senators' emotions, Trump's lawyers have tried to tap into raw par-

tisan anger. David Schoen, who spoke after Castor, criticized statements from Democrats that he said were also inciting violence, and told the chamber that the Democratic prosecutors are fueled by a "hatred" of Trump and fear that they will lose power.

REPUBLICANS TO WATCH

Six Republican senators voted with Democrats not to dismiss the trial on constitutional grounds. Those senators so far appear the most likely to vote to convict Trump.

The six senators, most of whom have harshly criticized the president's behavior, are Susan Collins of Maine, Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania and Bill Cassidy of Louisiana.

Cassidy was the only one who did not side with Democrats in a similar vote two weeks ago. He said after the vote that he thought Democrats had a better argument and that Trump's team had done a "terrible" job. He said he will watch the additional arguments as an impartial juror and then decide whether to convict.

Ohio Sen. Rob Portman, who voted to dismiss the trial, is retiring in 2022 and has also said he has an open mind about conviction. **AP**

this day in history

1987 Mrs PAYNE IS NO BROTHEL MADAM



Party planner Cynthia Payne has been acquitted of nine charges of controlling prostitutes at her home in south west London.

The courtroom burst into applause after decision of the jury - of eight men and four women - was announced after just over five hours of deliberation.

Mrs Payne, 53, said: "This is a victory for common sense. But I have to admit all this has put me off having parties for a bit."

Mrs Payne first hit the headlines in 1978 when police raided her home to find a sex party in full swing, attended by middle-aged and elderly men exchanging luncheon vouchers for sexual entertainment.

After a trial in 1980 she was sentenced to 18 months which was then reduced to six months and a fine on appeal.

This time she ended up in court after holding an "end of film" party following the production of the movie Personal Services, starring Julie Walters.

Author of a book about Mrs Payne's life, Paul Bailey, described her as "a chirpy little Cockney woman going round telling people to behave themselves."

After the 13-day trial she sent Judge Brian Pryor QC a copy of the book, An English Madam, with the inscription: "I hope this book will broaden your rather sheltered life".

During proceedings at the Inner London Crown Court Judge Pryor told the court: "You must be sure that the particular woman was acting as a prostitute and that that particular girl's movements were influenced one way or another by Mrs Payne."

He ordered defence costs - in a trial costing £117,000 - to be paid from central funds and Mrs Payne's £5,000 legal aid costs to be reimbursed.

The prosecution said Mrs Payne provided facilities for prostitutes in her home in Ambleside Avenue, Streatham including, food, drink, condoms and bedrooms.

Mrs Payne emerged from the court beaming with smiles as she was mobbed by a crowd of 100 media and well-wishers.

Conservative MP Geoffrey Dickens said: "It seems astounding that all this public money should be poured into bringing these charges."

Police said they would not be reviewing their policy over the prosecution of brothel madams.

Cynthia Payne is due to face further charges of brothel keeping at magistrates' court.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

After the trial Cynthia Payne wrote a book called 'Entertaining at Home', with useful tips for hosting parties and dealing with the police.

That same year her life was dramatised in two British films - Personal Services and Wish You Were Here.

Determined to change the UK's sex laws, Mrs Payne stood as a candidate for parliament in the 1988 Kensington by-election.

She completed a sell-out three week season at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1992.

Since then she has worked successfully as an after-dinner speaker and won the 'Ideal Dinner Guest Award' on the BBC's Good Food Show.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Getting your blood pumping will serve as a great outlet for all the energy that you don't know what to do with. Getting active with your body also encourages you to get active in your brain.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
 Sophisticated language can be a veil hiding what you truly mean but are too afraid to say. But fancy talk can also be a tool to help folks understand what exactly it is that you mean at a high level.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
 Being by yourself isn't going to be your idea of fun right now. The solo life is fun and rewarding at times, but not now. Today, you want action, lots of people, and definitely lots of noise.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 New inventions and "just so crazy it could work" ideas could enter your mind throughout the day, sparking your attitude and making you feel empowered. Suddenly, the world is full of opportunity and inspiration!

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 You've won them over for now, but that doesn't mean you're the leader in this partnership. They have some amazing things to teach you, so realizing that the two of you are equals is very important.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 When you look in your wallet, do you see neatly organized currency and credit cards, or do you see a mishmash of scraps of paper, crumpled up bills, and random phone numbers?

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Romantic goals could be blown away when you overhear a comment that forces you to reevaluate everything you thought you wanted in a partner.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 You are to be commended for trying to see things from all different angles and having empathy for the motivations of unpopular people, but right now these behaviors are throwing important things out of balance.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 You may think you know best right now (because you usually do), but you don't. Defer to the directions and advice of people who have more experience in the current situation.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Everybody's facing in the same positive direction again. You could be surrounded by a lot more goodwill today than you have been of late. It'll help the day go by quickly and joyfully.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 You clean your kitchen when it gets messy; you clean your car when the back seat gets cluttered, and you should clean your mind when it gets filled with a bunch of negative things.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Some people try to distract themselves from problems at home by immersing themselves in work or school. But that tactic is a poor one since it only delays the inevitable.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-3	12	cloudy
Harbin	-17	2	cloudy
Tianjin	1	16	cloudy
Urumqi	-10	-5	clear
Xi'an	0	14	cloudy
Lhasa	-3	9	cloudy
Chengdu	11	16	overcast
Chongqing	9	18	cloudy
Kunming	5	17	clear
Nanjing	8	12	drizzle
Shanghai	9	12	drizzle
Wuhan	7	17	cloudy
Hangzhou	9	11	drizzle
Taipei	17	19	moderate rain
Guangzhou	13	21	cloudy
Hong Kong	15	22	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-16	-11	cloudy
Frankfurt	-9	-6	flurry
Paris	-5	-2	clear
London	-9	-2	clear
New York	-3	0	sleet

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- One of the Baldwins; 5- Stern; 10- Sulk; 14- ___ contendere; 15- Scoundrel; 16- Bushy hairstyle; 17- Depilatory brand; 18- Boiling; 19- Latvian capital; 20- Muscat native; 22- Done again and again; 24- Business letter abbr.; 27- Fast fliers; 28- Cure-alls; 32- Nabisco's ___ Wafers; 36- Bass, e.g.; 37- Old French expression meaning "goodbye"; 39- Shed ___; 40- Emulates Eminem; 42- Rub out or remove from memory; 44- Cleveland's lake; 45- Pile; 47- Silvery fish; 49- Meal crumb; 50- Conger catcher; 51- Christmas season; 53- Riviera resort; 56- Fleshy fruit; 57- Particular time; 61- Destiny; 65- Rise sharply, as a bird would; 66- Former Russian rulers; 69- Ersatz; 70- ___ but known...; 71- Duck with soft down; 72- Pile; 73- Likewise; 74- Catches; 75- Edible roots;

DOWN: 1- ___ Domini; 2- Rich soil; 3- Charles Lamb's nom de plume; 4- Eye membrane; 5- Hindu title; 6- Rocky hilltop; 7- Lab gel; 8- Old stringed instruments; 9- Hangs on to; 10- Sponger; 11- Think nothing ___; 12- Impulse to act; 13- Tailless amphibian; 21- Quechua speaker; 23- Gas burner or Sicilian volcano; 25- Sign over; 26- Dens; 28- Analyze a sentence; 29- Having wings; 30- Sherpa's home; 31- Sordid; 33- Vive ___; 34- Landed proprietor of Scotland; 35- Aggregate of qualities that make good character; 38- Deplete; 41- Synopsis; 43- Paris pronoun; 46- Actor Kristofferson; 48- Durable wood; 52- Of inferior quality; 54- Quotes; 55- Red fluorescent dye; 57- Dept. of Labor division; 58- Wyoming resource; 59- Heels; 60- Zip; 62- Earthbound bird; 63- Yes, ___!; 64- Rock blasters; 67- Rule, for short; 68- Grads-to-be;

Yesterday's solution

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

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

DRIVE IN

'LITTLE FISH' IS A PANDEMIC-ERA, SCI-FI LOVE STORY

JOCELYN NOVECK, MDT/AP

THE year is 2021. A frightened, angry crowd lines up outside a medical center, desperate for a cure for a terrible virus. "He pushed in front!" someone shouts.

Talk about timing. When he began making "Little Fish," an intimate and affecting romance in a sci-fi setting, director Chad Hartigan had no idea the world would be coping with a real pandemic in the real 2021. Watching this fictional society begin to fray in panic feels just a tad too close for comfort.

Perhaps it's for the best, then, that "Little Fish," starring the very appealing duo of Olivia Cooke and Jack O'Connell, is a sci-fi romance that doesn't spend too much time on the "sci."

Yes, this virus - NIA, or Neuroin-

flammatory Affliction - terrifyingly causes its victims to lose their memories, sometimes suddenly and sometimes slowly, with no relation to age, gender or anything else. But the focus here is on the role that memory plays in a relationship. Obviously, the memories we create together are crucial building blocks. But if they disappear, does the love remain? And what does that look like? Without a past, can we have a present, not to mention a future?

We begin on a windswept beach in the Seattle area. A young woman, Emma, sits alone, crying. A friendly dog runs up for a cuddle, soon followed by its owner, Jude. He's surprised by her charming northern England accent. They smile.

The clever script by Mattson Tomlin flips around in time over the couple's yearlong relationship.



Looks familiar? Jack O'Connell as Jude (left) and Olivia Cooke as Emma in a scene from Chad Hartigan's "Little Fish"

There's no question we're rooting for both of these charismatic characters.

Soon they're a couple, building memories together like that time they painted their walls yellow — Emma's favorite color — and had a rambunctious paint fight. But remember — these memories come to us just as they're getting lost. And so we wonder: Whose memories are we seeing, anyway? His, hers, or no one's?

The first scary reports seem far away from everyday life. There's a fisherman who forgot how to operate his boat, so he jumped into

the water to swim home. People suddenly forget how to drive cars. Most seriously, pilots lose the ability to fly, midair.

And then, Jude. At first it's the little details -- he shows up hours late to a job taking wedding pictures. He forgets arguments he and Emma just had. One day Emma sees that he's labeled the back of a photo: "Emma, wife." It's a desperate race against time to find a cure, or a treatment. Cooke's slow-burn panic is heartbreaking to watch.

The film has strong echoes of the 2004 classic "Eternal Sunshi-

ne of the Spotless Mind," where the same question arose: What remains when memories disappear? On top of this, "Little Fish" asks, how much are we allowed to mourn when the grief is not unique to us?

Or, in a line from Emma that surely couldn't be more timely in the real 2021: "When your disaster is everyone's disaster, how do you grieve?"

"Little Fish," an IFC Films release, is unrated by the Motion Picture Association of America. Running time: 101 minutes. ★★☆☆

AD

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



TASTE OF EDESIA

A festive celebration

IRENE SAM, MDT

YEAR of the Ox is finally here and everyone is looking for a unique way to celebrate with family and friends. To do so without spending an arm and a leg does not mean compromising the quality of goods and services, and one of the best deals available out there right now has to be the “Celebrate at Sheraton” hotel package at Sheraton Grand Macao.

It is truly amazing that the package allows guests to redeem the cost of their room at dining, bar and spa outlets during their stay. Only priced at HKD1,888, the room comes with credits to the same value to be spent at Feast,

Yum Cha, Shine Spa, in-room dining, **The Manor** and The St. Regis Bar at The St. Regis Macao.

Specialising in classic Cantonese family style cooking, Yum Cha is offering a special Lavish New Year Set Menu as well as a-la-carte Chinese New Year Specials. The set menu includes prosperity “lo hei” with salmon sashimi, double-boiled quail soup with matsutake mushroom, braised pork trotter with dried mushroom, sea moss and dried oyster. Chinese New Year Specials include crispy Cantonese fried chicken, steamed Boston lobster with house made yellow bean sauce and steamed star garoupa served Thai style.

Chinese New Year is synonymous with family reunion and

there’s no better way to come together with friends or relatives to share a delicious, hearty Poon Choi. Yum Cha’s Fortune Poon Choi features nearly 20 ingredients, including whole South African abalone, Japanese sea cucumber, fish maw, and dried oysters.

For a more casual celebration, Feast International Buffet has an expansive range of Chinese New Year Special dishes for both lunch and dinner. Highlights include traditional festive Chinese style roast suckling pig with steamed gua bao and the famous Sichuan mala hotpot. Symbolising wealth and prosperity, try steamed turbot fish, stir-fried Alaskan crab leg, and braised sea cucumber and abalone.



BOOK IT

PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS REVEALS PRIVATE LIFE DETAILS

PRIYANKA Chopra Jonas’s memoir, “Unfinished,” is a moving story of her rise to fame — and of her life before anybody knew her name.

Chopra Jonas never intended to become the internationally renowned entertainer and public figure she is today. Before she was an actor, producer, and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, she was the daughter of two doctors, dreaming of becoming an aeronautical engineer. Growing up in India, her life as we know it began accidentally, when her brother convinced a 17-year-old Chopra Jonas to enter the Miss India competition, hoping it would get her out of the house so he could have her bedroom.



“Unfinished,” by Priyanka Chopra Jonas (Ballantine)

Little did her family know, this effort would catapult Chopra Jonas to stardom and transform her into an international phenomenon. “Unfinished” is Chopra Jonas’ deeply open and honest account of her experien-

ce navigating life in the public eye, as well as the extreme hard work and dedication she put into her career.

But “Unfinished” is also about the pieces of her life the public doesn’t see. It is her story of growing up on two continents, spending time in both India and the United States.

Chopra Jonas’ writing is open, engaging, and full of energy. She writes, it seems, to connect. The experience feels intimate, like Chopra Jonas is exchanging stories with a friend over coffee. Her stories are exceedingly personal, and despite being an international movie star, many of them even feel relatable. **MDT/AP**

ITUNES

CNCO GIVES FANS A SWANKY ‘DÉJÀ VU’ ON COVERS ALBUM

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and a covers album is the most earnest form of vocal flexing. What better way to prove you’re not a run-of-the-mill boy band than go for those hard to hit notes in those hard to forget songs?

“Déjà Vu,” the third album from Latin American sensation CNCO, takes on the challenge of reimagining some of the greatest Spanish hits from the ‘80s up to the early 2000s with aplomb and a little aid from that contemporary reggaeton bassline.

The quintet take 13 romance songs that made hearts and ears swoon be-



CNCO, “Déjà Vu” (Sony Music Latin)

fore they learned how to speak and they make them sing. While a compilation album of those original hits would make for a nostalgic, monster romance playlist, this album weaves a love story in catchy modern rhythms more suitable for the dance floor.

Enrique Iglesias’ “Hero” gets the least obvious makeover, keeping on the acoustic guitar but adding a richness of ranges to the vocals. The piano from Ricky Martin’s “El Amor de Mi Vida” is replaced with a Latin rhythm and traces of guitar in a modest but catchy tune; Sin Bandera’s “Entra en Mi Vida”

gets a similar makeover. The album beckons you on, one seduction at a time. It may have been love some time ago, but the reggaeton-adjacent beats lead on with lust, and CNCO re-ignite a different kind of magic within these nostalgic songs. **MDT/AP**

OPINION

World Views

Tara Lachapelle, MDT/Bloomberg



FOX NEWS FOLLOWS THE MONEY AWAY FROM TRUMP

Fox News, calling itself a “center-right” network, is distancing from Donald Trump and effectively reminding investors that its political coverage and on-air roster are more profit strategy than ethos and will be adapted when needed.

The network caters to an audience that is “firmly center-right, and we don’t pivot or change that,” CEO Lachlan Murdoch said on Fox Corp.’s earnings call yesterday [Macau time]. “We don’t need to go further right, we don’t believe America is further right. And we’re obviously not going to pivot left.”

It was an interesting choice of words considering that this does sound a little bit like a pivot. Most would say Fox News’s popular opinion shows had moved further right in both the runup to and wake of the November U.S. presidential election, as its top personalities at times echoed former President Trump’s spurious claims of widespread voter fraud that stoked an angry uprising among his supporters. Fox is now trying to fight off a defamation lawsuit filed last week by Smartmatic Corp., a provider of voting equipment that’s seeking \$2.7 billion in damages from Fox News, along with its commentators Lou Dobbs, Jeanine Pirro and Maria Bartiromo, as well as two attorneys close to Trump — Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell. Notably, Dobbs, one of Trump’s staunchest allies and host of Fox Business Network’s most-watched program, just had his namesake show unceremoniously canceled.

For a time, embracing Trump was the most lucrative move. Now, it’s not. That’s the cold, business point of view that drives investors — even some who don’t personally agree with Fox’s programming. Ever since Trump turned on Fox, other tinier outlets such as Newsmax TV and One American News Network have used it as a ploy to lure Fox fans. Fox News’s ratings are down 23% this year, according to Nielsen data compiled by Bloomberg Intelligence. But that’s the short game.

To remain the dominant cable-news network, Fox needs to disentangle its brand from Trump and find a new message. And Americans generally seem to be craving something a bit tamer.

However it pivots, Fox’s profits are well insulated from fickleness among viewers and the shift from cable TV to streaming services, as I noted in December. That’s because of multi-year affiliate deals Fox has secured with pay-TV providers that lock in a substantial portion of its earnings. Fox News and Business generate only 30% of their money from advertising — a market prone to fluctuations during macroeconomic events such as a pandemic — with the rest coming from affiliate fees, according to research firm MoffettNathanson LLC. That’s a more favorable split than other more ad-dependent network operators such as ViacomCBS Inc. and Discovery Inc.

Advertiser demand did drive an 8% increase in total company revenue to \$4.1 billion for the latest quarter, but Fox’s power lies in the need for every distributor to carry its channels. “The pricing power of our affiliate revenue remains relatively untapped,” Murdoch said. “We think we can continue to drive pricing for Fox News well ahead of any sort of volume declines in subscriber numbers.”

Even so, shares of Fox were down 4% at noon New York time — perhaps partly a misinterpretation of the headlines summarizing Murdoch’s earnings call remarks. It might sound as if, despite lower TV ratings, the network is stubbornly clinging to a center-right political messaging. What investors are forgetting is that Fox News wasn’t there to begin with.

HONG KONG TO REOPEN VENUES, RELAX DISTANCING RULES AS CASES DROP

THE BUZZ

Hong Kong will allow restaurant dining-in services until 10 p.m. and relax other social-distancing rules after the Chinese New Year, as the city tries to move past a winter wave that’s throttled the economy.

The city will permit four people per dining table, doubling from the current limit of two, starting from Feb. 18, if the virus remains contained over the Lunar New Year, officials said at a briefing yesterday. Venues ranging from indoor and outdoor sports centers, beauty parlors, theme parks and cinemas will also be allowed to reopen.

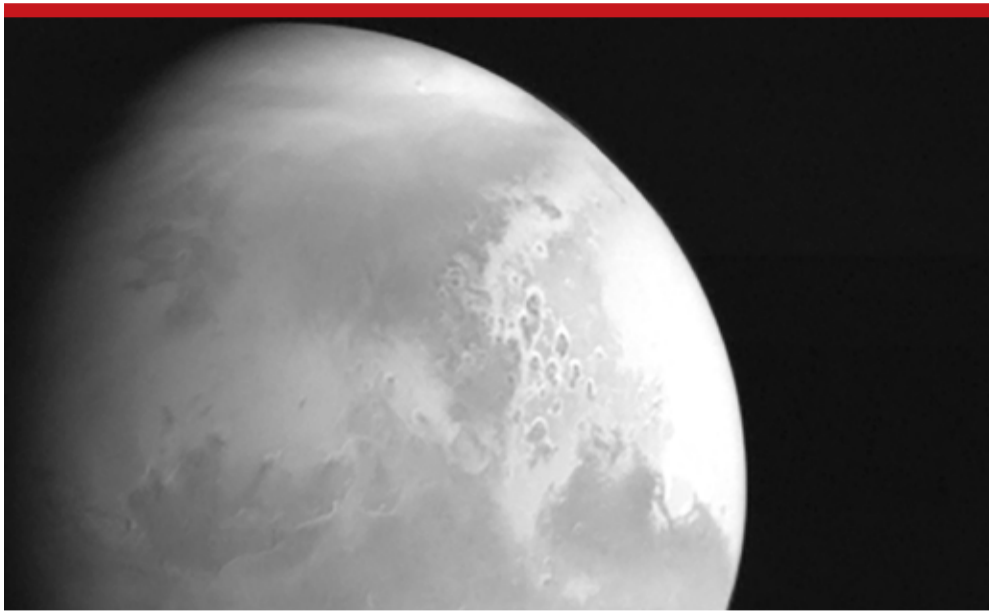
“We are cautiously positive on the epidemic,” Food and Heal-

th Secretary Sophia Chan said. “If Hong Kong residents continue to observe social-distancing rules, following this trend, we hope we can resume normal life after Lunar New Year.”

Hong Kong will require staff virus tests if businesses want to reopen. The government is also discussing relaxing the public gathering rule to four people as well, from the current limit of two, according to Chan.

The Asian financial hub has seen cases fading to a few dozens in the past week, after Hong Kong deployed compulsory testing and neighborhood lockdowns in an attempt to achieve zero cases in the community.

AP PHOTO



An undated image of Mars is captured by China’s Tianwen-1 Mars probe from a distance of 2.2 million kilometers

CHINESE SPACECRAFT NEARING MARS, WORLD’S SECOND IN TWO DAYS

SAM MCNEIL, BEIJING

A Chinese spacecraft appears poised to enter orbit around Mars, one day after an orbiter from the United Arab Emirates did so and about a week ahead of an American attempt to put down another spacecraft on the surface of the red planet.

Chinese authorities, always cautious about possible failure, have not announced a planned arrival time. The official Xinhua News Agency reported last week that the spacecraft was expected to slow down around yesterday before entering orbit and preparing for a Mars landing.

The challenging attempt to touch down on Mars isn’t expected for about three months. If all goes as planned, China would become only the second nation to do so successfully.

Named Tianwen-1, the Chinese orbiter-rover combo needs to fire its engines to slow enough to be captured by Mars’ gravity after a 470-million kilometer journey that took more than six months. It would circle and map Mars until the rover separates and attempts to land in May to look for wa-

ter underground and signs of ancient life.

Its name, the title of an ancient poem, means “Quest for Heavenly Truth.”

Landing a spacecraft on Martian soil is notoriously difficult, and China’s attempt will involve a parachute, back-firing rockets and airbags. Its proposed landing site is inside the massive, rock-strewn, Utopia Planitia, where the U.S. Viking 2 lander touched down in 1976.

Its name, the title of an ancient poem, means ‘Quest for Heavenly Truth’

The solar-powered rover — about the size of a golf cart — is expected to operate for about three months, and the orbiter for two years.

Only the U.S. has successfully touched down on Mars — eight times beginning with the two Viking missions. A lander and rover are in operation today.

A U.S. rover called Perseverance is aiming for a Feb. 18 touchdown on Mars to also search for signs of ancient microscopic life and to collect rocks for return to Earth in the next decade.

The latest three Mars missions were all launched in July to take advantage of the planet’s close alignment with Earth that occurs only every two years. The UAE’s orbiter called Amal, Arabic for Hope, began circling the red planet on Tuesday to gather detailed data on Mars’ atmosphere.

Six others were already operating around Mars: three U.S., two European and one Indian.

Plenty didn’t make it. Smashed Russian and European spacecraft litter the Martian landscape along with a failed U.S. lander. About a dozen orbiters missed the mark.

Tianwen-1 is China’s second attempt to send a spacecraft to Mars. In 2011, a Chinese orbiter that was part of a Russian mission didn’t make it out of Earth’s orbit.

China’s secretive, military-linked space program has progressed considerably since then. In December, its Chang’e 5 mission was the first to bring lunar rocks to Earth since the 1970s. China was also the first country to land a spacecraft on the little-explored far side of the moon in 2019. AP

AP PHOTO



France’s government wants to set the age of sexual consent at 15 and make it easier to punish long-ago child sexual abuse, amid growing public pressure and a wave of online testimonies about rape and other sexual violence by parents and authority figures. Calling such treatment of children “intolerable,” the justice ministry said in a statement that “the government is determined to act quickly to implement the changes that our society expects.”

AP PHOTO



Netherlands Dutch beer brewer Heineken said yesterday it plans to cut 8,000 staff, nearly 10% of its global workforce, as part of a cost-cutting reorganization after a pandemic-dominated year that saw it sink to a net loss of 204 million euros. Revenue fell nearly 17% to 23.8 billion euros.

AP PHOTO



South Africa’s health minister says the country will begin administering the unapproved Johnson & Johnson vaccine to its front-line health workers next week. The workers will be monitored to see what protection the J&J shot provides from COVID-19, particularly against the variant dominant in the country.

HOLIDAY TIMES

Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Thursday February 18. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times.