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CTM 40th ANNIVERSARY

CHINA'S LEAD ON DOMESTIC TOURISM IS GAINING TRACTION WHICH IS GRADUALLY NORMALIZING TOURISM IN ASIA PACIFIC: FITCH RATINGS

P3

SECRETARY WONG SIO CHAK SAYS EQUAL RIGHTS ARE NOT ABSOLUTE FOR NON-RESIDENT WORKERS

P4

MACAU AIRPORT SUFFERED OPERATIONAL LOSSES LAST YEAR DUE TO COVID-19 BRINGING GLOBAL TOURISM TO A STANDSTILL

P2



Japan A forest fire broke out in a rural area north of Tokyo yesterday, near another blaze burning for a fourth day. One man suffered burns and was hospitalized, and firefighters have been deployed. Another fire has been raging in nearby Ashikaga in Tochigi prefecture, where 207 households have been asked to evacuate.

Indonesia An illegal gold mine in Indonesia's Sulawesi island collapsed on nearly two dozen people working inside, killing six and leaving another worker missing, officials said yesterday. The mine in Central Sulawesi province's Parigi Moutong district collapsed due to unstable soil, said Andrias Hendrik Johannes, who heads the local search and rescue agency. Rescuers were able to pull 15 people from the debris and recover the bodies of four women and two men.



India Millions of people have joined a 45-day Hindu bathing festival in the northern city of Prayagraj, where devotees take a dip at Sangam, the sacred confluence of several rivers. There, they bathe on certain days considered to be auspicious in the belief that they will be cleansed of all sins. Rows and rows of colorful tents, in which the devotees stay, line the sprawling festival site. Millions of Hindus travel every year to the event.

India Rival neighbors Pakistan and India have pledged to stop firing weapons across the border in disputed Kashmir, promising to adhere to a 2003 accord that has been largely ignored, officials from both sides said yesterday. If indeed implemented, the move would be a major step in defusing tensions in the highly militarized Himalayan region, and open a possibility for broader detente between the two nuclear-armed powers.

More on backpage

CHINA CLAIMS END OF EXTREME POVERTY

P7



GOV'T BACKTRACKS, BANS ELDERLY FROM RECEIVING INACTIVATED VACCINE

P2



MUST ESTABLISHES NEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

P3

COVID-19

GOV'T BACKTRACKS, BANS ELDERLY FROM RECEIVING SINO-VAC JABS

HONEY TSANG

THE SAR government has reversed its previous decision and is now barring all locals aged 60 or over from receiving the originally-promised shots of the inactivated vaccine developed by China's state-owned pharmaceutical company Sinopharm Group.

Ever since the vaccination rollout commenced on Monday of this week, on February 22, some elderly people aged over 60 found themselves being rejected by staff at inoculation stations from getting the jabs they had registered for via the official system, according to a report by TDM.

On February 24, the government released a statement, stating that the government will no longer accept registrations for inactivated vaccines by senior citizens aged 60 or above.

The new regulation was handed down to ensure the vaccination scheme can proceed in the future after taking into account that some of the elderly who have registered may fail to meet the two prerequisites for receiving the inactivated vaccines, which include being at high-risk from Covid-19 and being physically fit. They were turned away by medical staff at vaccination sites, as stated in the official release.

The other mRNA-based vaccine, which is about to arrive, was developed by German drug manufacturer BioNTech and proxied by Fosun



Pharma, and is "suitable for people aged 60 or above."

"Those of this age range [aged over 60], who are inclined to get vaccinated in the near future, are recommended to register for mRNA vaccination," according to the statement.

As of 9 p.m. on February 24, Macau saw successful vaccine registration by 25,462 locals, whilst another 9,284 have already had their jabs. The outcome so far falls within the government's expectations, the statement said.

Around 100,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine is expected to arrive in Macau in late February, with vaccinations slated to commence in March. Dr. Alvis Lo, medical director of the Conde de São Januário Hospital, said in a media briefing earlier.

The details regarding its rollout will be announced in due course, he said.

According to a dedicated official website on Covid-19, the inactivated vaccine has a prevention efficacy of around 80%, whilst the mRNA vaccine is over 90% effective.

Ma, founder of Alibaba Group, and David Yu Feng, founder of Target Media.

"As chairman of one of the leading [brokerages] in Hong Kong, Dr. Stanley has a proven track record in the investment business and as a member of the YunFeng Capital. He brings with him great access to key businesses in mainland China and opens opportunities for further synergistic collaborations with ASEAN," said Datuk Kamarudin Meranun, executive chairman of AirAsia Group.

Airport maintains cash levels despite global tourism standstill

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU International Airport (MIA) suffered operational losses last year due to the pandemic bringing global tourism to a standstill. However, the chairman of the Board of Directors of Macau International Airport Company (CAM), Ma Iao Hang, pledged that the airport had adhered to "prudent cash flow," and was able to maintain cash levels to meet current business conditions.

Speaking during CAM's Media Spring Lunch yesterday, the top executive said that the company "continues to fulfill its commitment to shareholders from the internal resources accumulated [over] past years" despite the significant decline in the airport's revenue last year.

Ma also recalled that two rounds of relief measures were distributed to the aviation industry to tide it over during the difficult times.

Due to global travel restrictions and the city's strict border entry rules, the local airport had inflows of only 1.17 million passengers in 2020 – a staggering decrease of 88% year-on-year.

Aircraft movements stood at 16,962, which represents a yearly decline of 78%.

"MIA has worked closely

with airlines to actively introduce 'freighter' business and increase the density and destinations of freighter service to make up for the impact of the lacking belly cabin resources on cargo capacity as far as possible," Ma recalled.

MIA had a cargo volume of 33,346 tons, representing a year-on-year decrease of 21%, while full cargo flights in the market increased from 24% in 2019 to 71% in 2020.

Airports Council International predicted that global aviation passenger traffic is expected to record a 2.4% annual growth rate over the next five years, but that the recovery may not be balanced. Therefore, for Ma, MIA will continue to take advantage of the Greater Bay Area environment.

For now, the infrastructure project of the second terminal building of the airport has entered the design and build stage, while the main structure for the southern extension of the passenger terminal building is expected to have works completed by the end of the year.

The expansions will allow the airport to handle 10 million passengers.

In 2019, the airport received a total of over 9.6 million passengers.

AVIATION

HONG KONG POKER PLAYER RAISES HIS HOLD ON AIRASIA

LYNZY VALLES

AIRASIA Group Berhad has announced that Hong Kong poker player Stanley Choi Chiu Fai has joined the company as a substantial shareholder via his wholly-owned entity Positive Boom Ltd.

In a statement issued by the low-cost carrier yester-

day, Choi was said to have acquired 167.1 million AirAsia shares in the first tranche of the private placement, raising his stake in the group to 332.5 million shares, equating to an 8.96% stake.

Choi is the chairman of Head & Shoulders Financial Group, as well as the chairman and executive

director of International Entertainment Corporation (IEC).

He is also the only co-founding member from Hong Kong for YunFeng Capital - a private equity fund started in 2010 by a group of successful entrepreneurs and influential industry leaders. It was named after co-founder Jack

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MUST establishes new research center for cross-strait relations

STAFF REPORTER

MACAU University of Science and Technology (MUST) has established a new research center dedicated to exploring topics and studies related to cross-strait relations between Macau and Taiwan.

Yesterday, the university held an inauguration ceremony to mark the opening of the center.

The new center is aimed at coordinating Macau local researchers with overseas scholars to study "cross-strait relations" and "Macau-Taiwan relations" in addition to "Macau's special function in the new era of the cross-strait relations."

The center is a subdivision under the leadership of the Institute for Social and Cultural Research (ISCR) of MUST.

"Our mission is to promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations," Wu Kan, director of the new center told the media on the sidelines of the ceremony.

The center will organize symposiums and seminars about cross-strait relations, and will also publish journals and documents about related topics.



COURTESY MUST

"We want to make the center an international-class research base," said the director.

According to Wu, in the foreseeable future, the department plans to set up several research bases covering topics from history to law.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Yan Zhichan, deputy

director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macau, believes that the establishment of this new center will boost the research power of Macau in matters of cross-strait relations.

"The establishment of the center will help strengthen Macau's research power in the field

of cross-strait relations, promoting non-governmental and academic exchanges between Macau and Taiwan and between the two sides. The center will help Macau to function as the window, bridge, a link and a platform between the two sides," said Yan. "[The center] will have positive effect on the telling

of the story of the success of the One Country, Two Systems [principle in Macau]."

During the inauguration ceremony, Li Peng, dean of the Faculty of Taiwan Research of Xiamen University, one of mainland China's top universities, gave a speech on cross-strait relations.

In Li's opinion, 2020 was the year where cross-strait relations were at their "severest" point since 1979.

"Official communications between the two sides were paused, the external environment of the Taiwan issue has never deteriorated more, the U.S. countermeasures against mainland China, civilian communications were significantly impacted," he said.

"Covid-19 cut off the communication between the two sides, public opinion was against each other in the era of new media, and Taiwan and the U.S. 'tainted' the story of Hong Kong incident, making people in Taiwan change their views on mainland China," added Li.

Forecasting the development of the cross-strait relationship in 2021, the scholar said that "the situation [in Taiwan] does not have conditions for major positive changes; China-U.S. relations will take a long time to reconcile, and there are uncertainties in the two sides in regards to resuming communication, given the pandemic situation and politics."

FITCH RATINGS

China's lead on domestic travel gradually normalizing APAC tourism

LYNZY VALLES

DOMESTIC tourism led by China is gaining traction, as the containment of the pandemic sets the stage for the gradual normalization of domestic activity in parts of the Asia Pacific region (APAC), according to a report issued by Fitch Ratings.

In the report from the American credit rating agency on "1Q2021 Update: Coronavirus Impact on APAC Tourism," the group acknowledged that some of APAC's most tourism-dependent economies, including the Maldives and Macau, have eased quarantine requirements for tourists with Covid-19 test certificates.

This move has led to a mild recovery in tourist arrivals for the fourth quarter of 2020.

During the last three months of 2020, the SAR has seen a slight increase in tourist arrivals, particularly in December, when the city welcomed a total of 659,407 visitors – up 3.6% when compared to November.

The majority of these visitors (606,884) hailed from mainland China.

"Arrivals in the Maldives have come predominantly from Russia, India and the U.K., while arrivals from China – its largest source market in 2019 – remain sluggish," the report stated.

In China, meanwhile, domestic air travel has nearly recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

A webinar hosted by PR Newswire in September stated that the tourism industry in mainland China has returned to about 90% of pre-Covid-19 levels, according to tourism experts.

One indicator of this recovery is the daily number of domestic flights across China.

Other countries in the APAC region have also seen signs of recovery in domestic flights.

Meanwhile, the number of visitor arrivals during Chinese New Year did not meet the expectations of Macau's tourism bureau, which predicted the city would receive 16,000 to 20,000 visitors per day.

The SAR only welcomed an average of 12,945 arrivals per day, disappointing the sector.

"In the months ahead, we expect more governments to try to resume international travel via two-way 'travel bubbles', including those that were suspended due to the recent resurgence in the virus (i.e. Singapore-Hong Kong and

Australia-New Zealand)," the group said.

"However, a broader and more sustained resumption of international tourism flows in APAC will likely only materialise beyond 2021."



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SMG FORECASTS WEATHER TO COOL OVER WEEKEND

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) has forecast that the temperature over this coming weekend will fall due to a northeasterly monsoon, which will intensify the northerly winds in Macau, with occasional gusts. It is expected that the temperature will reach a low of 16 degrees Celsius. The temperature will rise again early next week, bringing warmer weather, the bureau forecasts. Meanwhile, intermittent rainfall should be expected today.

AIR MACAU TO FULLY RESUME QINGDAO FLIGHTS NEXT WEEK

Air Macau will completely resume flights between Macau and Qingdao next Wednesday, following the route's suspension in October. The route was partially reopened in early February. Starting Wednesday, flights will be operated every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Air Macau hopes to increase the frequency to four flights per week. Passengers must be in possession of a negative Covid-19 test result or Health Codes bearing the results. Centralized quarantine is unnecessary under the current conditions.

LOCAL CHEF BLACKMAILED AFTER NUDE VIDEO CALL

A local male chef was blackmailed for money after he was threatened with a recording of his nude video call with a woman. He refused to succumb to the threats and reported the case to the Judiciary Police. At 2 a.m., February 24, the man in his 20s came across a woman online before engaging in a nude video call that lasted for five minutes. Later, an apparent accomplice of the woman blackmailed the man for RMB2,880.

WONG SAYS 'EQUAL RIGHTS ARE NOT ABSOLUTE' FOR MIGRANTS

ANTHONY LAM

THE Secretary for Security said that "equal rights are not absolute for migrant workers," citing the Article 43 of the Basic Law, which also confirms the Public Security Police Force's (PSP) argument that non-resident workers (TNR) do not have freedom of political assembly in public places.

"This type of limitations [and] reservations [...] regarding the rights of non-residents is nothing new", said Wong Sio Chak in a reply to TDM Radio.

According to the official, these migrant workers do not enjoy the same absolute rights as local residents do.

The comments were given following the alleged gathering of several Myanmar citizens expressing support for Aung San Suu Kyi, the recently deposed State Counsellor of Myanmar.

TNRs have no legal protection when conducting political assemblies, but they can make their voices heard through other legal channels, the PSP has previously stated.

However, pursuant to Article 43 of the Basic Law, individuals other than Macau residents in the Ma-



cau Special Administrative Region can legally enjoy the rights and freedom contained in this chapter.

Referring to Chapter 3, the basic rights and obligations of residents are stipulated therein.

The legal standing of the Basic Law is above all local legislations. According to a brief explana-

tion of the Basic Law written by vice-president of the Macau Basic Law Promotion Association, Ieong Wan Chong, the provisions on freedom of speech, association and protest should be applied to all people in Macau.

Lawyer Vitor Tang pointed out to the Times that the Basic Law was promulgated in 1999, six

years after the protest law, hinting that an older law should not override a newer one.

It was reported earlier by Chinese media outlet Macau Concealers that the PSP had arrested two migrant workers for staging a protest at Rotunda do Carlos de Maia. The police authority has denied these allegations.

Earlier this week, the PSP disclosed to the radio station that a Burmese national had submitted a declaration of assembly to the PSP, which they retracted after four days without explanation. The location of the assembly was the roundabout.

The PSP said that on Sunday, February 21, there was an assembly at Rotunda do Carlos de Maia. Police considered the event an assembly, so it conducted a regular ID check.

The roundabout is a meeting place for migrant workers, especially those working as domestic helpers, to gather on their holidays. Normally they have weekly holidays on Sundays.

PSP stressed that that under law 2/93/M, the right to assembly and protest only applies to Macau residents. "Non-residents are not entitled to these rights."

2020 STATISTICS

Crime down 29%, cybercrime surges 97%

THE number of cybercrimes grew by 96.7% year-on-year, reaching a total of 531 cases in 2020, statistics released by the Secretariat for Security revealed yesterday.

Among them, the number of cases involving credit card online consumption increased the most, with an increase of 251.3%.

"In recent years, non-contact consumption methods have been widely used by people. Criminals took the opportunity to establish fake websites pretending to be post-sales services and disseminating Trojan horse software to steal users' personal information and commit crimes," the report stated.

The total number of criminal investigations saw a year-on-year drop of 29.1%, down to a total of 10,057 cases from 14,178 cases in 2019.

Overall, crime has "continued to decline and the security situation continued to

remain stable and good."

Violent crimes in 2020 decreased by nearly 64% year-on-year compared to the same period in 2019. Cases involving serious violent crimes such as kidnapping, homicide and serious assault maintained a low incidence.

In terms of imprisonment, arson, fraud, loan usury, theft, and robbery, the numbers all decreased significantly, with drops ranging from 20% to 90%.

In addition, the number of drug trafficking cases continued to exhibit a downward trend, with a year-on-year decrease of more than 40%.

Affected by the pandemic, drug cartels have begun to use waterways or the post to traffic drugs.

The police and customs authority in Macau "attaches great importance to this situation and maintains close cooperation and intelligence exchange with the relevant

mainland authorities," the report added.

In 2020, the number of sexual crimes, including rape and sexual harassment, dropped significantly, but the number of cases of sexual assault against children increased.

A total of 118 cases of domestic violence were investigated in 2020, and a total of 11 cases were ultimately referred to the prosecution authority. The majority of the victims were women.

The overall number of fraud cases decreased. Among them, online dating fraud cases dropped by 17.3% year-on-year. However, cases on fraudsters using social networks or dating apps to lure victims to invest has increased significantly, with a year-on-year increase of 135%.

In 2020, the total number of taxi violations prosecuted by the police dropped by more than 90% year-on-year. JZ

FUHONG URGES GOV'T TO LAUNCH MORE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR THE DISABLED

HONEY TSANG

GIVEN the difficulty of securing a job in Macau for disabled people, local non-profit the Fuhong Society is urging the SAR government to offer more employment support for disabled people, in a bid to help them integrate better into the community.

"Under the sagging economy and a climbing unemployment rate, this disadvantaged group will be easily forced out [from the job market]," Chau Wai I, director of the Fuhong Society of Macau, told TDM.

Currently, only some big enterprises and casino operators have policies about hiring disabled people. Those working in small-and-

-medium enterprises (SMEs) may be fired easily, owing to the current economic environment, Chau added.

In order to encourage disabled citizens to enter the job market, the Social Security Fund rolled out the Employment Incentive Program for Disability Pension Beneficiaries in 2018.

The program ushered in grace measures enabling working trials for beneficiaries of the disability pension. This allows them to have up to two periods of trial work in a year, with each period lasting 90 days.

As of the end of 2020, a total of 267 people had signed up for the program, with 148 of them, or 55.4% of all participants, securing employment.

WHOLE PERSON DEVELOPMENT

Melco develops local talent through scholarships for colleagues

As part of Melco Resorts & Entertainment's commitment to developing local talent, its Whole Person Development strategy supports colleagues with an array of training and talent nurturing opportunities. Learning initiatives include the Melco-funded Melco YOU-niversity Degree Program and those taught at the in-house Melco Learning Academy, such as the Back-to-School General Education Program and Foundation Acceleration Program.

In addition, Melco Scholarships were launched in 2010 to support employees and their immediate family members. Since then, 70 Melco Scholarships have been granted to support local talent development – providing opportunities for educational, professional and personal growth.

The Melco Scholarship program provides awards of financial assistance to support undergraduate education. Melco is the only company to offer full 4-year degree program scholarships to families, and currently offers a total of 6 scholarships each year. Applications are judged by representatives from local Macau universities and Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), and categories include being able to study at universities in Mainland China, Greater China and other International institutions.

With the belief that sustainable and effective development must include generalist experience, Melco Scholarship recipients are also be granted the opportunity to participate in the Company's Special Internship Program, which provides an opportunity for recipients to obtain practical work exposure through well-rounded learning experiences. Each Scholarship recipient is offered a work placement of between 2 to 3 weeks within the area of their studies or interests, with the internship taking place at Melco's Macau properties under the close guidance of a departmental mentor/manager.



The Company also aims to instill hope in colleagues facing immense challenges that would otherwise prevent them from achieving relevant qualifications and maximizing their full potential. To see them through such tough times, Melco provides the Hope Scholarships for relevant academic programs. Financial assistance is granted to employees or their family members who have experienced hardship or misfortune. For example, the unfortunate passing of a parent or employee may result in limited family income, meaning a child is unable to continue with their tertiary studies. Melco may consider this as a special Hope Scholarship opportunity and support with students' tuition fees.

Krystal Cheang, Melco Scholarship recipient and daughter of City of Dreams Table Games' Pit Supervisor Tracy Chan, studied for a Journalism degree at Sun Yat-sen University and took part in Melco's Special Internship Program. Krystal said, "During my internship at Mel-

co's Internal Communications department, I had the opportunity to join and assist at many events, including its Years of Service Celebration for colleagues and the Best Mom Award press conference. I also got to help with internal career interviews, for example, and it was a pleasure to be able to visit each of Melco's Macau properties. I learnt a lot from my team and other colleagues," Krystal continued, "including the importance of teamwork and mutual understanding. This work experience has definitely increased my enthusiasm for working in related fields after this internship."

Katerina Zeng, daughter of Rosita Li, Administrative Assistant at Melco's Supply Chain department and who also received the Melco Scholarship, added, "The internship has been a great opportunity for me to learn more about my personal career goals and interests while developing the required knowledge and skills for success. It provides a different perspective



and a context for academic learning, as well as an opportunity to put theory into practice. It helps me work on a whole range of employment skills, from the ability to adapt, to gaining a better understanding of workplace culture, time management and teamwork. It also offers me the opportunity to develop my professional network. I was able to observe how social media team professionals work together to gain a more comprehensive understanding of marketing. This was a truly invaluable experience for me as a student preparing to join the company."

Fellow Melco Scholarship recipient, daughter of Wong Cheang, Table Games Dealer at Altira and student of Singapore Institute of Management's Finance degree, Elaine Cheang, said, "It is a great honor to receive the scholarship and to have the opportunity to intern at Melco's finance department

for three weeks. I had the chance to intern with the accounts payable, non-gaming audit and casino control teams." Elaine explained, "before interning at the Melco financial department, my knowledge of finance was limited to the textbook, and I was not so sure about the substantive work of a financial staff. This internship experience enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the finance department. I believe this experience will be helpful for my future. Thank you to Melco for offering me this scholarship and great internship opportunity. It has been a truly helpful and unforgettable experience."



GAMING

GALAXY EBITDA UP 207% IN Q4 2020, EXEC SANGUINE ABOUT 2021

HONEY TSANG

GALAXY Entertainment Group's (GEG) adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) loss of HKD0.9 billion in the third quarter (Q3) of 2020 was successfully turned around into a positive value of HKD1.0 billion in Q4 2020, up 207% quarter-on-quarter, the group revealed in its latest financial report for 2020 yesterday.

The reassuring advancement was predominantly driven by GEG's "continuing cost control" and its "increased visitation," thus ensuring "increased revenue," Lui Che Woo, chairman of GEG, stated both in the financial statement and during the group's webcast press briefing yesterday.

Lui's son, Francis Lui Yiu Tun, vice-chairman of GEG, also attended yesterday's online conference. He stated that "the worst had passed last year," and that he was sanguine about Macau's tourism and gaming sectors in 2021.

"I have observed a high travel intention [to go to] Macau among Hong Kong people. They are attracted by close proximity between the two cities, [Macau's]

BLOOMBERG



good infrastructure and [Macau's] forthcoming new tourism offerings in 2021," Francis Lui told the press.

He is convinced that the tourism market will make a "comeback" this year, provided that the pandemic is kept in check and the vaccination scheme pans out.

PUSHING FORWARD WITH EXPANSION PROJECTS

According to the financial report, GEG will continue to push forward with Phase 3 and 4 expansion projects despite their construction being hin-

dered by Covid-19.

Both resort projects will be tilted heavily towards the premium mass market and family holidaymakers.

The Phase 3 project will open progressively in second half of 2021. Meanwhile, construction of Phase 4 has already commenced and it will also be opened gradually in the coming two to three years, Francis Lui disclosed.

The board of directors also confirmed their resolve to develop in Hengqin and explore opportunities beyond it within the Greater Bay Area.

BANKING ON PREMIUM MASS IN THE ERA OF NEW NORMAL

Regarding the gaming business, Francis Lui acknowledged that China's new gambling law will "undoubtedly undermine the VIP sector." The law, which will come into force on March 1, criminalizes anyone who organizes gambling trips or activities for mainland citizens to participate in gambling outside of the country or border.

"The premium mass sector will take on a leading role [in driving GEG's gaming revenues], and we will strenuously promote the sector," the vice-chairman said. He

believes the increasingly-mature premium mass market will help prop up the future development of Macau's casino industry.

OVERALL RESULTS AND VISION

The group's EBITDA recorded a negative value of HKD1 billion in 2020, compared with a positive value of HKD16.5 billion in 2019.

Among GEG's three flagship properties in the city, Galaxy Macau and StarWorld Macau both posted a positive adjusted EBITDA in Q4 of HKD0.7 billion and HKD0.2 billion, up 193% and 167% quarter-on-quarter, respectively.

Broadway Macau, meanwhile, recorded an adjusted EBITDA loss of HKD28 million. Despite the loss, this represents a noticeable improvement from its EBITDA loss of HKD37 million in Q3 2020.

Considering the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic, the chairman declared that GEG had decided to suspend dividends at this time.

Chairman Lui said the GEG will resume dividend delivery in the second half of 2021, but this would require a boost provided by the government allowing entry for more travelers into Macau.

Francis Lui is pinning his hopes on a quarantine-free travel bubble between China, Hong Kong and Macau, which would offer a much-needed fillip to the city's economy.

GEG released its yearly performance report just two days after SJM announced its annual results on February 23.

RETAIL SALES STOOD AT MOP45.19B IN 2020

The retail trade continued to see an upturn in the fourth quarter of 2020, with the value of retail sales surging by 102.5% quarter-to-quarter to MOP18.16 billion, according to data from the Statistics and Census Service. After removing the effect of price changes, the sales volume index leapt by 109.8% quarter-to-quarter. For the whole year of 2020, total value of retail sales decreased by 41.5% year-on-year to MOP45.19 billion.

IAM TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S FACILITIES AT GUIA, RESERVATÓRIO PARK

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAE) is set to improve the children's playground facilities at Guia Municipal Park and Reservatório Park. The IAE will also look into the actual demand for the facility in the community to decide whether to create adventure facilities for children aged over 13 years old, said the president of the IAM Administration Council, José Maria da Fonseca Tavares.

Taipa residents petition to CE about building safety

ANTHONY LAM

RESIDENTS of the Treasure Garden residential estate in Taipa have submitted a petition to the Chief Executive in the hopes of him ordering officials to manage the noise coming from pile drivers at a construction site opposite their estate.

The construction site, according to representatives of the petitioning residents, started construction in January this year. Pile drivers have been used since then, they added.

The residents protested that the pile drivers have caused severe impact on their daily lives. The strong vibrations caused by the machines have caused fear among the elderly and children residents, they said.

More than 10 residents in the estate have reported cracks on their walls and floors since the commencement of operation of the machinery. Many residents reported feelings of severe vibrations in their apartments during the operations of the machines.

With that said, they fear that the buildings' structures may be affected by the vibrations. They also fear that should the structures be impacted or should residents be injured if parts of the walls fall, who is to take the blame.

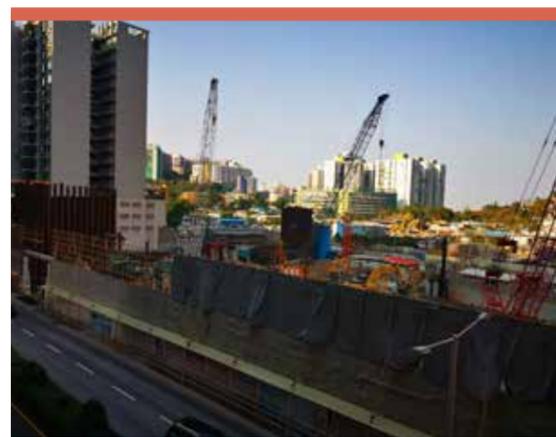
On the other hand, the construction site is adjacent to a gas station. The residents worry that the vibrations may damage the underground pipes of the station. They said if that happens, the consequences will be severe.

It was stressed that the residents are extremely worried about the current situation and any possible future consequences. The residents' representatives, meanwhile, requested the constructor of the project to opt for other machinery in order to avoid unwanted outcome.

Furthermore, a resident pointed out that the pile drivers used by the constructor were outdated. They questioned why the government allowed the constructor to not use a newer version.

Prior to this petition to the government head, the residents have also petitioned to the concerned government entity.

On February 8, the petitioning residents, ac-



companied by lawmaker Pereira Coutinho, had a meeting with the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau, alongside the constructor of the project.

The lawmaker disclosed that the constructor had taken measures to lower the noise and the vibrations. However, the lawmaker said, stronger vibrations were reported by residents after the meeting. Some residents even reported more severe cracks in their apartments. They fear that the damage will become more obvious and

irreversible.

Coutinho cited Sin Fong Building, which collapsed years ago, as an example to urge the government to attend to noise and building structure problems with seriousness. He asked the government head to instruct the authorities to follow up the conditions, especially in coordinating the change of pile drivers to a newer version.

He also asked Ho to instruct his team to help with building inspections, so as to avoid irreversible consequences.

China celebrates official end of extreme poverty, lauds Xi

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

THE ruling Communist Party is celebrating the official end of extreme poverty in China with a propaganda campaign that praises President Xi Jinping's role, part of efforts to cement his image as a history-making leader who is reclaiming his country's rightful place as a global power.

The propaganda apparatus has been linking national successes to Xi, including fighting the coronavirus, China's rise as a technology creator and December's successful lunar mission to bring back moon rocks.

The party announced in November, with little fanfare, that China no longer had anyone in extreme poverty. That was down from an official estimate of almost 99 million living on annual incomes of less than 2,300 yuan (\$355) per person a decade ago.

The full-scale propaganda campaign launched this month has filled state-controlled newspapers and airwaves with reports on the anti-poverty milestone and Xi's personal role in it.

They credit Xi with launching an initiative shortly after taking power in 2012 that enabled China to beat by a decade the 2030 target set by the World Bank for eliminating extreme poverty. A report by the party newspaper People's Daily this week on the "historic leap" refers to Xi by his full name and title as party leader 121 times.

"General Secretary Xi Jinping has stood at the strategic height of building a well-off society in an



all-around way and realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," the newspaper said.

The event gives the ruling party a political trophy ahead of this year's celebration of the 100th anniversary of its 1921 founding. It comes at a time when China's economy is growing again following the coronavirus while the United States, Europe and other areas are still struggling with outbreaks.

The party said it reached the milestone despite having to take the unprecedented step of shutting down most of China's economy in early 2020 to fight the coronavirus.

Yesterday, Xi cited anti-poverty work as a sign of the effectiveness of the ruling party's system.

"We have finished the arduous task of eradicating absolute poverty and created a miracle that

shall go down in history," Xi said at a ceremony honoring people who worked on the initiative.

"We have finished the arduous task of eradicating absolute poverty and created a miracle that shall go down in history."

XI JINPING

Xi presented medals, certificates and plaques to ten individuals and ten groups honored as anti-poverty "role models."

He acknowledged the "material foundation" built up over four decades of market-style reforms that have transformed China into the world's second-largest economy and a middle-income society but mentioned no other officials or earlier leaders by name.

The event gives Xi, who has amassed more personal power than any leader since Mao Zedong, communist China's founder, a new opportunity to assert his historical importance.

Abroad, Xi is pursuing an assertive foreign policy that has increased China's diplomatic influence but roiled relations with its neighbors and with the United States and Europe.

The poverty milestone gives Xi ammunition to shore up power that some foreign analysts suggested was eroded by the coronavirus outbreak that began in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Anti-poverty campaigns also are aimed at narrowing the politically volatile gulf between an elite who have profited most from economic reform and the poor majority.

Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, and then-Premier Wen Jiabao started

that process by stepping up spending on rural schools and health care to spread prosperity from the thriving, export-powered east coast.

China's official definition of extreme poverty is an income per person of 11 yuan (\$1.70) per day. That is lower than the World Bank's standard of \$1.90, but the National Bureau of Statistics says that due to differences in rural living costs, the Chinese standard is slightly higher.

In some areas, low-income ethnic minority communities have been moved out of remote valleys into newly built towns. In others, officials went door to door signing up poor families for job training, grants to start businesses and other aid.

Nearly 10 million people moved into new homes and those of 27 million more have been renovated, according to Xi. He said the government has spent a total of 1.6 trillion yuan (\$250 billion).

Average income per person among the "rural underprivileged" rose from 2,982 yuan (\$356) in 2015 to 10,740 yuan (\$1,665) last year, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Some experts suggest China might be less successful than it claims because Beijing is still using standards for the poorest countries long after graduating to middle-income status. The World Bank's middle-income poverty standard is income of \$5.50 per person per day.

In a report in January for the Brookings Institution, former World Bank expert Indermit Gill argued China is almost as well off as the United States was in 1960 when it became a high-income country. But Gill said that based on the U.S. income standard from that era, as many as 90% of China's people would be considered poor.

"If our numbers are correct, China is years — if not decades — behind schedule," Gill wrote. **MDT/AP**

Beijing says Biden bid to shift US supply chains unrealistic

CHINA dismissed efforts to shift U.S. supply chains toward alternative sources as unrealistic, hitting back hours after President Joe Biden signed an order to review how America buys strategic goods.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian made the remarks yesterday in response to a question about the order, which will cover chips along with large-capacity batteries, pharmaceuticals and critical minerals and strategic materials like rare earths. Zhao said such measures "will not help solve domestic problems" and only



harm global trade.

"China believes that artificial efforts to shift these chains and to decouple

is not realistic," Zhao told a regular news briefing in Beijing. "We hope the U.S. will earnestly respect

market laws and free trade rules and uphold the safety and reliability and stability of global supply chains."

Biden acknowledged Wednesday that the problem wouldn't be solved immediately. The issue has taken on urgency with a global chip shortage that's threatening to harm U.S. growth just as Biden seeks to rebuild an economy battered by the coronavirus. Some automakers are cutting workers' hours due to the shortfall and unions are raising alarm about the prospect of layoffs.

While the U.S. gets much of its semiconduc-

tor supplies from allies like Taiwan and South Korea, Biden's executive order seeks to end the country's reliance on China and other adversaries. The order doesn't directly call out China or any one country. Still, White House officials said an over-reliance on Beijing and other adversaries was a key risk that must be addressed.

Biden's review could lead to financial incentives, tariffs or changes in procurement policies, among other options, said one of the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The administration plans

to consider ways to encourage production of key items in the U.S. or work with allies to manufacture the items, the official added.

Biden's order directs industry-specific reviews focused on defense, public health and biological preparedness, information-communications technology, transportation, energy and food production. Those assessments, to be completed within one year, will be modeled after reviews the Defense Department uses to regularly evaluate the U.S. defense industrial base. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

AP PHOTO



USA

Amid Covid-19 pandemic, flu has disappeared

FEBRUARY is usually the peak of flu season, with doctors' offices and hospitals packed with suffering patients. But not this year.

Flu has virtually disappeared from the U.S., with reports coming in at far lower levels than anything seen in decades.

Experts say that measures put in place to fend off the coronavirus — mask wearing, social distancing and virtual schooling — were a big factor in preventing a "twindemic" of flu and COVID-19. A push to get more people vaccinated against flu probably helped, too, as did fewer people traveling, they say.

Another possible explanation: The coronavirus has essentially muscled aside flu and other bugs that are more common in the fall and winter. Scientists don't fully understand the mechanism behind that, but it would be consistent with patterns seen when certain flu strains predominate over others, said Dr. Arnold Monto, a flu expert at the University of Michigan.

Nationally, "this is the lowest flu season we've had on record," according to a surveillance system that is about 25 years old, said Lynnette Brammer of the U.S.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hospitals say the usual steady stream of flu-stricken patients never materialized.

At Maine Medical Center in Portland, the state's largest hospital, "I have seen zero documented flu cases this winter," said Dr. Nate Mick, the head of the emergency department.

Ditto in Oregon's capital city, where the outpatient respiratory clinics affiliated with Salem Hospital have not seen any confirmed flu cases.

"It's beautiful," said the health system's Dr. Michelle Rasmussen.

The numbers are astonishing considering flu has long been the nation's biggest infectious disease threat. In recent years, it has been blamed for 600,000 to 800,000 annual hospitalizations and 50,000 to 60,000 deaths.

Across the globe, flu activity has been at very low levels in China, Europe and elsewhere in the Northern Hemisphere. And that follows reports of little flu in South Africa, Australia and other countries during the Southern Hemisphere's winter months of May through August.

The story of course has been different with coronavirus, which has killed more than 500,000 people in the United States. COVID-19 cases and deaths reached new heights in December and January, before beginning a recent decline.

The coronavirus has essentially muscled aside flu and other bugs that are more common in the fall and winter

Flu-related hospitalizations, however, are a small fraction of where they would stand during even a very mild season, said Brammer, who oversees the CDC's tracking of the virus.

Flu death data for the whole U.S. population is hard to compile quickly, but CDC officials keep a running count of deaths of children. One pediatric flu death has been reported so far this season, compared with 92 reported at the same point in last year's flu season.

"Many parents will tell you that this year their kids

have been as healthy as they've ever been, because they're not swimming in the germ pool at school or day care the same way they were in prior years," Mick said.

Some doctors say they have even stopped sending specimens for testing, because they don't think flu is present. Nevertheless, many labs are using a CDC-developed "multiplex test" that checks specimens for both the coronavirus and flu, Brammer said.

More than 190 million flu vaccine doses were distributed this season, but the number of infections is so low that it's difficult for CDC to do its annual calculation of how well the vaccine is working, Brammer said. There's simply not enough data, she said.

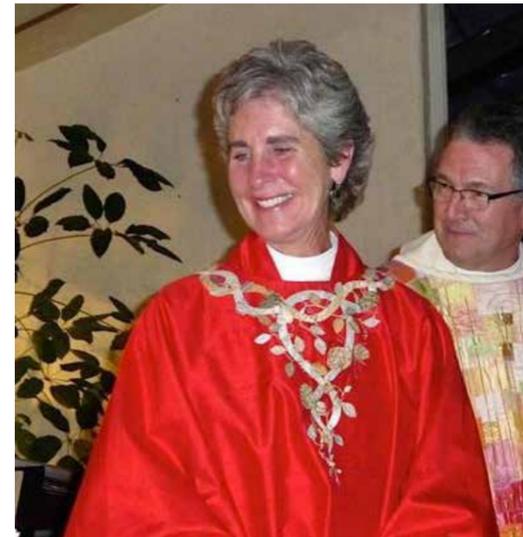
That also is challenging the planning of next season's flu vaccine. Such work usually starts with checking which flu strains are circulating around the world and predicting which of them will likely predominate in the year ahead.

"But there's not a lot of (flu) viruses to look at," Brammer said. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1987 SYNOD SAYS 'YES' TO WOMEN PRIESTS



The Church of England's General Synod has voted by a huge majority to clear the way for the ordination of women priests.

The Church of England has been debating the issue for 10 years and the final go-ahead is still some years away.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie, supported the yes vote but was careful to point out the Church would study an inquiry to be carried out by a committee of bishops before it reached a final decision.

He also said those who warned the issue would cause a split the Church were suffering from "premature panic".

The Bishop of London, Dr Graham Leonard, who is against the move retracted earlier threats to leave or divide the Church.

But talk of a split in the Church dominated the debate today in the Synod.

The Government Junior Agriculture Minister John Gummer, a lay member, said: "It would no longer be the church into which I was born, which I love and in which I pray to die.

"That is not a threat, it's a statement."

Sister Carol, a nun from Worcestershire, told those present women had a right to become priests.

She said: "Am I called to walk tall in society and to walk small in the Church?"

A spokesperson for the Movement for the Ordination of Women said members would be "absolutely delighted" by the vote.

The synod is divided into three houses - bishops, clergy and laymen. Overall 317 (68%) voted for and 145 against.

Only the House of Clergy had less than the significant two-thirds majority. The final vote will require a two-thirds majority in all three houses.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The synod voted in favour again in 1992 and the first woman priest was ordained in Bristol on 12 March 1994.

The issue threatened to hamper efforts to forge closer links with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches and caused prominent Conservative politicians Ann Widdecombe and John Gummer to defect to the Catholic Church.

By April 1998 there were more than 1,700 women priests. But a survey carried out by the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union in six out of 44 dioceses found that many complained of bullying and even sexual harassment from male colleagues.

The Church of England set up a working party in 2000 to consider the licensing of women bishops. The general synod will vote on the issue in summer 2005. Anglican churches in the USA have had women bishops since 1989.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
There are so many different types of communication to choose from, so why not choose one that's a little bit out of the ordinary today? It will get you noticed by people with good taste and vision.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
While you wait, distract yourself with fun adventures with friends. Do some mindless activities and soak up the latest news about what other people are doing.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
Make it clear that you are not available, either because you're already taken or you're just not interested. The truth is the best solution even if it seems like leading them on will feed your ego.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
You're quite right to stand up for what you believe in, but today you should try to understand that not every one of your opinions requires such a rigid posture.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You can't worry about coming off as having a big ego right now. Show your pride. Let people think what they want to think. It's not going to affect your mood. Be proud of what you have done.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
It just goes to show that life always has surprises that keep you on your toes. Community involvement could give you a bigger sense of purpose, so consider moving into a volunteer situation.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
If you're shopping today, try to stop off at a flea market, vintage clothing shop, or antiques store. There's an undiscovered gem waiting to be found, and you're in just the right place to discover it today.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
It might send your life in a new direction. Show them you have what it takes, but try not to come on too strong. Lead with your personality and just be yourself.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
More than ever before, you may notice the fabric of the community around you and your place in it. Everyone around you has an effect on your day, and this could be either a good thing or a bad thing.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
It's been a long time since you've been tested to this extent, and you could really use the exercise. It's nice to have a long period of calm, but you need to push yourself every once in a while.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
You might need to read a few pages before you get a good idea of how breathtakingly attractive someone truly is. Don't miss the opportunity to get to know this person better.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
It takes time for some people to come out of their shell and join the group activities, so don't try to force things. If you can give them the space and time they need to get comfortable, you'll win them over.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

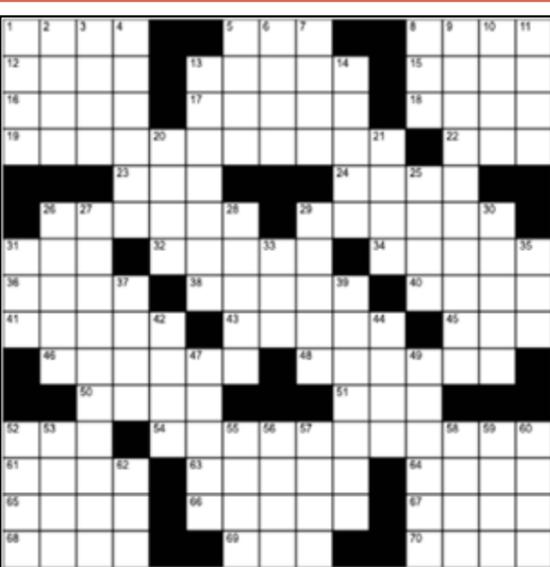
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-3	11	clear
Harbin	-17	-2	clear
Tianjin	0	12	clear
Urumqi	-12	-8	cloudy
Xi'an	2	11	cloudy
Lhasa	0	16	clear
Chengdu	10	15	overcast
Chongqing	12	16	overcast
Kunming	10	22	clear
Nanjing	7	8	moderate rain
Shanghai	9	12	drizzle
Wuhan	4	8	drizzle
Hangzhou	9	11	drizzle
Taipei	17	20	drizzle
Guangzhou	16	22	drizzle to moderate rain
Hong Kong	20	25	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	2	4	sleet
Frankfurt	5	12	cloudy
Paris	8	16	drizzle
London	2	11	clear
New York	0	8	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Hit the mall; 5- Craze; 8- Hankering; 12- Shelter for honeybees; 13- Blast from the past; 15- Baht spender; 16- ___ and terminator; 17- Bit of wisdom; 18- Hawk; 19- Showing affection; 22- ___ Grande; 23- Singer Janis; 24- Linguist Chomsky; 26- Keep possession of; 29- Tissue in the cavities of bones; 31- Increase, with "up"; 32- Garden figure; 34- Go-aheads; 36- Burrows and Vigoda; 38- Circumference; 40- To ___ (perfectly); 41- Continental cash; 43- Direct; 45- Copy; 46- Capital of New South Wales; 48- Of delicate beauty; 50- Hold on!; 51- Water tester; 52- Powdery residue; 54- Inconsiderate; 61- Folk singer Joan; 63- Pineapple fiber; 64- Split; 65- Goes wrong; 66- Gaiety; 67- Leaf with Sanscrit writing?; 68- ___ yellow ribbon...; 69- Peer Gynt's mother; 70- Takes home;

DOWN: 1- Demonstrate; 2- Informal greeting; 3- Above, finished; 4- Allow; 5- Type of market; 6- Hebrew month; 7- Gossip; 8- T.G.I.F. part; 9- Temperature control device; 10- Colombian city; 11- Hawaiian city; 13- Employment vacancy; 14- Actress Verdugo; 20- Dutch name of The Hague; 21- Small boat; 25- Neck of the woods; 26- Picture puzzle; 27- In all places; 28- Rip-roaring; 29- Doled (out); 30- Lachrymose; 31- Actress Charlotte; 33- Mohawk-sporting actor; 35- Visit; 37- Pop; 39- Low shrub; 42- Bad mood; 44- Public disturbance; 47- Body of values; 49- Wrestling hold; 52- Assist, often in a criminal act; 53- Dress often worn by Hindu women; 55- Dept. of Labor division; 56- Salt Lake City hoopsters; 57- Elation; 58- Paris pronoun; 59- Riverbank component; 60- RR stops; 62- Eva's half-sister?;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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"We dance until it's SOLD!"

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

PROPERTY LIST

- [Macau] Stylish apartment ZAPE 2 1/2 1 1/2
720 ft² \$7,600,000 (ref: n/a)
- [Coloane] Hellene Gardens 1 3 1/2 2 1/2
1,663 ft² \$7,900,000 (ref: n/a)
- [Taipa] Manhattan 3 1/2 2 1/2
1,626 ft² \$18,500/mth (ref: 20031001)
- [Taipa] Manhattan spacious 3 1/2 2 1/2
1,720 ft² \$18,800/mth (ref: n/a)

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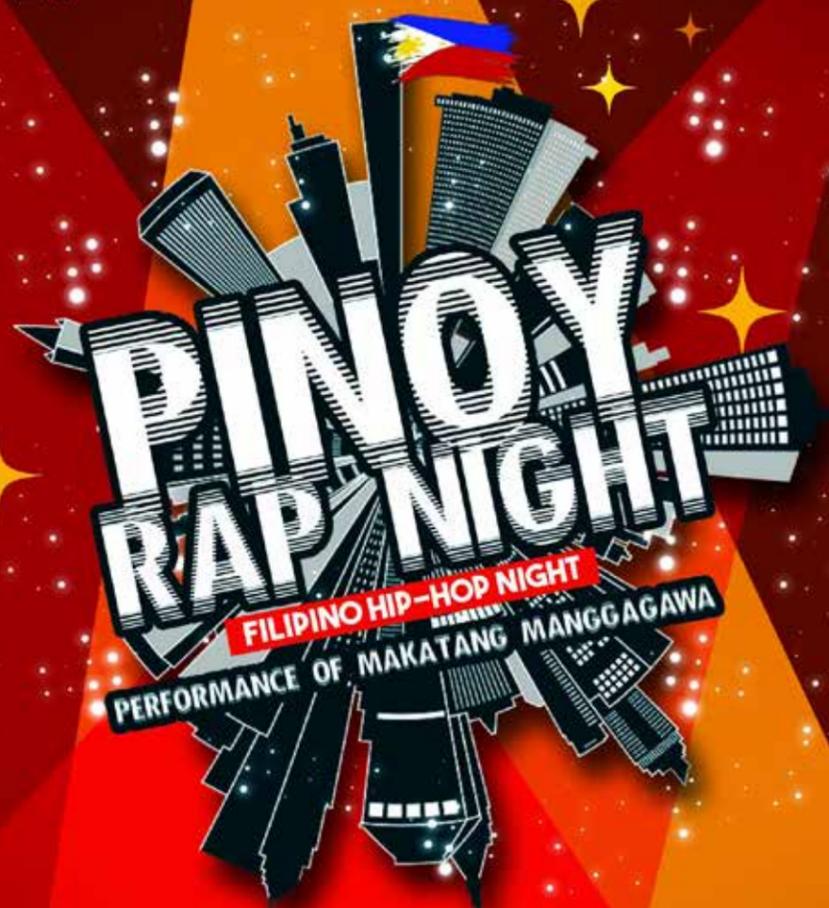
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TASTE OF EDISIA

Culinary magic at Ying

IRENE SAM, MDT

CANTONESE cuisine is known to be refined and delicate and it often takes a chef decades to become a master in delivering exquisite dim sum or simple dishes that require precision when it comes to heat control or execution on the numerous cooking methods that are available.

At Altira Macau's signature Cantonese restaurant, **Ying**, the menu is characterised by authentic traditional Cantonese dishes perfected over hundreds of years, while offering an array of choices that embodies a modern interpretation of Cantonese cuisine presented in a beautiful space.

At first glance, Ying's rich design is loaded with innovative visual elements and materials that continuously stimulate interest. Traditional Chinese art and design are used throughout, harmonised with the subtle use of colour, materials and lighting

to provide a contemporary feel.

A color palette of Chinese reds and golds is offset by panels of dark ebony with striking grain, and the chocolate and maroon upholstery of custom-made pieces of furniture. Beaded curtains, hand-carved glass panels and silk screens cleverly compartmentalise the dining area to offer a more intimate dining experience. An ornately carved wooden column and art installations provide further talking points throughout the interior.

Inside the kitchen, Chef de cuisine Darren Cheung works his magic. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Chef Cheung started his career in the professional kitchen at a young age. Over the course of the past 15 years he has worked in several Chinese restaurants in Hong Kong, Beijing and Macau, including the acclaimed Lei Garden, and the award-winning Fortune Room, the member-only Cantonese fine dining outlet of the Hong Kong Jockey Club's Beijing Clubhouse.

Before taking up the new

role at Ying in mid-2020, Chef Cheung has already been part of the culinary team of Melco since late 2018, as he oversaw the kitchen production, menu design and ingredient selection as chef de cuisine of the renowned three-Michelin-starred Jade Dragon at City of Dreams. "The first time I came to Ying I immediately felt in love with the view and I am very determined to excel with the team to provide a stunning experience to all who come," he says.

Indeed, Chef Cheung's creations are more than "stunning." Stewed sliced fish maw and pomelo skin in abalone sauce reflects his knowledge on the more traditional cooking methods, while Flambé Kagoshima Wagyu beef cube with scallions presents a visually enticing and playful manner to interact with diners. Lastly, Chef Cheung's tossed noodles with scallions and ginger in XO chili sauce, with its umami punch blended in perfectly with the eggy flavours of fresh noodles, is just to die for.



Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



THE PROVIDENCE 1510 METRES SAND

2020-02-26|Fri|21:25

There is a very good chance that Peter Leyshan's yard would end his dry spell this evening. A chance will be taken on his charge Ares Spear in race 5 in today's sand meeting. It could well be his first winner in the year of the Ox. **Ares Spear** is a very consistent sand performer; looking closely at his morning preps that he is very full of himself and ready to fire. All his best sand performance were over 1350 metres, his last outing 1350 metres sand was in my opinion far too short for him. This time he draws barrier two and with F. Henrique in helping him to fight for a strong finish, he should get his way across. We all want to see Peter Leyshan smile his way to the winner's enclosure this Friday evening.

Race 5 | Horse no. 7 Ares Spear | Win & Place bets



OPINION

World Views

Faye Flam, MDT/Bloomberg



**STOP WORRYING ABOUT
 EXTREMELY UNLIKELY
 COVID RISKS**

The USDA has now announced that there's "no credible evidence" that people can get Covid-19 from touching packages in the grocery store. At first blush, this sounds like a breakthrough — but there was no evidence of this in the spring of 2020 either.

Throughout the pandemic, there's been a tendency to play up unlikely risks, and not to talk enough about uncertainty and probabilities.

The risk of getting Covid-19 from groceries or mail or monkey bars was always a guess. Yes, there was an eye-popping lab experiment last spring that showed that parts of viral RNA — but not necessarily live virus — could persist for a few days on some surfaces. Yet the public was advised to scrub and sterilize everything, even though there was never evidence that groceries posed more than a tiny risk compared to crowded living or working conditions.

Vaccine messaging is now playing up post-vaccination risks, with health authorities saying vaccinated people will have to continue take exactly the same precautions. As Times columnist David Leonhardt found, many people took that recommendation so seriously that they're questioning the point of getting the shots, or are refusing them.

In fact, having a dinner party with a few vaccinated friends would be reasonable, says Babak Javid, an infectious disease doctor at UCSE. Could someone transmit the disease — maybe? "I think the risks of that are so remotely low," he says. He would go if invited.

It's true that even 95% vaccine efficacy means a few people might still get the disease post-vaccination — and some might get a silent case and give it to someone else — but the vaccine is proving close to 100% effective at preventing the most severe and deadly cases. And as more people get vaccinated, incidence of the disease should plunge even lower. The risks will plunge with it.

Why not lay that all out on the table and propose a short period of stringent post-vaccine precautions, to be eased when all the most vulnerable people are vaccinated? With 500,000 people dead, we shouldn't be focusing on extremely unlikely risks when larger ones loom.

Javid was one of the very first proponents of masking, fighting for it back when it was unpopular with other public health.

He says the biggest positive impact of outdoor mask mandates is that it might encourage people to mask up indoors. If that's the reason, I think officials should be explicit about that so people don't actually believe their neighbors could infect them from across the street.

Adding to the confusion is the way cumulative cases have gotten muddled with current infection rates. People I know have been frightened by the New York Times reporting that 1 in 8 people in my home state of Rhode Island have been infected. You have to read carefully to see the numbers refer to people who've tested positive from the beginning of the pandemic — the vast majority of whom would no longer be infectious today.

That may in part explain why I keep hearing educated people try to tell me that once people contract the disease, they will always be carriers. That's true for untreated HIV, but SARS-CoV-2 can be cleared, like flu — which people don't pass on after they've recovered. The risk of getting Covid-19 in a given region is related to the percent of people who are actively infectious — a condition that lasts only a few days. But such useful numbers are drowned out by more dramatic sounding ones.

Scientists and journalists may feel magnifying small risks is erring on the side of caution. But if freaking people out about small things is distracting from the risks that have led to most of the 500,000 deaths, then perhaps true caution would instead dictate erring as little as possible.

[Abridged]

China yesterday denied subjecting U.S. diplomats to COVID-19 anal tests following reports from Washington that some of its personnel were being made to undergo the procedure.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters at a daily briefing that "China has never asked U.S. diplomats in China to go through anal swab tests."

A U.S. State Department spokesperson said Washington was "committed to guaranteeing the safety and security of American diplomats and their families while preserving their dignity, consistent with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations as well as

other relevant diplomatic law provisions."

The Washington Post reported last week that some U.S. personnel had told the department they had been subjected to the anal tests.

The procedure has been applied in China because it is reportedly more accurate than nasal or mouth swabs.

China has not reported a new local case of COVID-19 in more than a week, but has maintained strict testing, especially for people arriving from abroad. Diplomats and other foreigners with special status are exempted from a ban on most foreigners entering the country.

**CHINESE RIDE-SHARING
 GIANT DIDI PLANS
 ENTRY INTO EUROPE**

CHINESE ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing Technology Co. plans to make its debut in Western Europe, people familiar with the matter said, as the company seeks new growth markets ahead of a long-awaited initial public offering.

Beijing-based Didi is considering rolling out ride-sharing services in markets that could include the U.K, France and Germany by the first half of this year, according to two people briefed on the plan. The company has already set up a team dedicated to the European market and is hiring locally, another person said.

Shares in rival Uber Technologies Inc. slumped 3.7% in U.S. trading on Wednesday, while Berlin-based Delivery Hero SE sank 3.9%. Didi is turning to new geographies as its momentum starts to slow in China, where it has a dominant market share after ousting Uber in 2016.

The SoftBank Group Corp.-backed company now operates in 13 countries outside its home base, mostly in Latin America. In August, it began offering car-hailing services in Russia, marking its first direct foray into Europe, and it's already an investor in Estonia-based Bolt Technology OU, the continent's main rival to Uber. Didi would also be compe-



ting against apps like Gett Inc., Ola and BlaBlaCar.

In Europe, Didi would face a fast-changing regulatory landscape for tech companies and the gig economy. Last week the U.K.'s highest court ruled Uber must treat its drivers as "workers," entitling them to vacation pay, rest breaks and minimum wage while using the app, a judgment which could have wider repercussions. European countries are also working on taxes aimed at tech platforms, and the continent imposes strict data privacy rules in the shape of the General Data Protection Regulation.

"Aggressive expansion outside of its domestic market sounds like a bad idea for Didi," Bloomberg Intelligence senior analyst Vey-Sern Ling said. "It does not have clear competitive advantages against established incumbents, and it may have to navigate through regulations in different jurisdictions. Initial efforts

to acquire users may result in higher operating losses."

As part of the rollout, Didi is also considering additional offerings including food delivery and errand services, depending on local market demand. The plans are aimed at boosting the value of the firm, already one of the world's largest startups, ahead of a possible IPO, the people added, who asked to not be identified discussing private deliberations.

The company didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Didi is also eyeing foreign markets as Chinese regulators step up scrutiny of the country's tech giants. Xi Jinping's government has unveiled anti-monopoly regulations targeting internet companies while the Beijing-based industry group China Taxi Industry Association in December called on the antitrust regulator to investigate Didi's takeover of Uber's China business. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

Australia's law forcing Google and Facebook to pay for news is ready to take effect, though the laws' architect said it will take time for the digital giants to strike media deals. The Parliament yesterday passed the final amendments to the so-called News Media Bargaining Code agreed between Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg. In return for the changes, Facebook agreed to lift a ban on Australians accessing and sharing news.



Hungary Doctors began administering a COVID-19 vaccine developed in China, making the country the first European Union nation to use a Chinese jab as officials aim to bolster trust in its safety and effectiveness. General practitioners around the Central European country were instructed to administer the shots, developed by Chinese state-owned company Sinopharm, to elderly patients.



Israel A secretive Israeli nuclear facility at the center of the nation's undeclared atomic weapons program is undergoing what appears to be its biggest construction project in decades, satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press show. A dig about the size of a soccer field and likely several stories deep now sits just meters from the aging reactor at the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center near the city of Dimona.

US President Joe Biden signed an executive order intended to boost manufacturing jobs by strengthening U.S. supply chains for advanced batteries, pharmaceuticals, critical minerals and semiconductors. The United States has become increasingly reliant on imports of these goods — a potential national security and economic risk that the Biden administration hopes to address with the planned 100-day review and the possibility of increased domestic production. *More on p7*

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

AP Photo/Vincent Thian



Sea lions. Divers perform an underwater lion dance at the KLCC Aquaria during Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.