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NEW RESIDENCE PERMIT CARDS OF NON-RESIDENT WORKERS NOW FEATURE A QR CODE FOR REAL-TIME CHECK OF THEIR EMPLOYMENT STATUS P2

ASSOCIATION: CROWD GATHERING IS NOT PART OF THE AGENDA OF CHINESE RELIGIOUS EVENTS P3

EXCO APPROVES GRANTS TOTALING MOP40.8 MILLION FOR MACAU STUDENTS PURSUING EDUCATION IN GUANGDONG PROVINCE P4

China's market regulator said that it fined a dozen companies, including games company Tencent Holdings and Chinese search engine firm Baidu Inc., for not disclosing past deals as authorities step up anti-monopoly scrutiny in the internet sector. The companies, which included other firms such as ride-hailing company Didi Mobility and Softbank, were fined 500,000 yuan.

China The CEO of Ant Group, the world's biggest financial technology company, has resigned from the company due to personal reasons. Ant Group thanked Simon Hu for his contributions to the business. He had served as CEO since 2019. The company named Eric Jing as its new CEO, effective immediately.



Japan will not take part in China's offer — accepted by the International Olympic Committee — to provide vaccines for “participants” in the postponed Tokyo Games and next year's Beijing Winter Games. Olympic Minister Tamayo Marukawa said that Japan had not been consulted by the IOC about the Chinese vaccines, and that Japanese athletes would not take them because they have not been approved for use in Japan.



India Four states bordering Myanmar have stepped up measures to prevent refugees from entering India through a porous border following last month's military coup. India's Home Ministry asked the states to deal with such people strictly on a case-to-case basis on humanitarian grounds. The directive cautioned that the four states were not authorized to accord refugee status to anyone entering India from Myanmar, as India is not a signatory to the U.N. Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol.

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TICKET TO MAINLAND



China is easing visa rules for foreigners inoculated with Chinese-made vaccine and has also opened its doors to foreign local residents P3



UNEMPLOYED LOCAL CONSTRUCTION WORKERS FLOCKED TO PROTEST AT DSAL P2

**HK ELECTORAL REFORM
BEIJING
HITS BACK
AT UK, US
CRITICISM** P7

UNEMPLOYED LOCAL CONSTRUCTION WORKERS PROTEST AT DSAL

HONEY TSANG

A meeting with the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), convened by lawmaker José Maria Pereira Coutinho and several local unemployed construction workers to discuss the far-reaching unemployment situation faced by over 500 local construction workers, erupted into a demonstration, resulting in protesters flocking onto the road and disrupting traffic.

Over a hundred jobless construction workers gathered at the DSAL in the morning on March 12. Most of them complained loudly about the unfair situation in which they were allegedly dismissed without just cause or forced out by foreign workers.

After the meeting concluded, some emotional demonstrators rushed onto the road in front of the DSAL, intending to block traffic. Some even tried to break through a police cordon which was drawn to confine demonstrators to facilitate the flow of traffic.

During the meeting with the DSAL last Friday, lawmaker Coutinho, as stated in his social media platform, urged the authorities to conduct an in-depth investigation to probe into the situation of "serious unemployment among local construction workers."

He also called on the DSAL to establish a regulation which requires local construction firms to be transparent about the number of local and non-local employees. "Such a serious unemploy-



A screenshot of demonstrators blocking the road and trying to enter DSAL

ment situation is going to reverberate across the community, affecting not only individuals but also many households in Macau," Coutinho warned.

The meeting for unemployed local construction workers, held with the DSAL last Friday, was one of several others.

On March 10, a group of lawmakers, including Ella Lei, Leong Sun Iok, Lam Lon Wai and Lei Chan U, delivered a petition letter to the DSAL, urging it to safeguard and prioritize the employment entitlements of local construction workers.

It is said that some local construction painters and other professions in the industry have been laid off lately due to the completion of projects, a relevant construction firm claimed. However, the firm was found to have been employing foreign workers.

Given that the government has allocated a large sum of MOP18.5

billion for public construction projects in 2021, securing a job in the construction industry "should not be a problem" for local residents, Lei Chan U had stated earlier.

Lei suggested the government formulate regulations to require the selected company to hire a certain proportion of local workers to protect local employment rights.

The number of unemployed construction workers in Macau has been climbing. As of March 12, there were 465 locals who had applied for a construction-related job through DSAL, according to a release published after the protest.

As of the end of January, the total number of local employees in Macau was 175,778, down 17,720 year-on-year. The DSAL vows to continue enhancing the mechanism for limiting the number non-resident workers, according to the official statement.

PSP DETAINS THREE AFTER PROTEST

The Public Security Police Force (PSP) detained three people following the protests, two of which were released shortly afterwards. The police say that the third detainee disturbed the public order, "resisted and reacted violently, injuring police officers." The case will be forwarded to the Public Prosecution Office.

HEAD OF CONSTRUCTION GROUP ASKS WORKERS TO PREPARE FOR POSSIBLE OPENINGS

WORKERS should prepare themselves for future job openings in the construction industry, Cheong Man Fun, director-general of the Macao Construction Industry General Union, has recently been quoted saying.

He reminded jobseekers in the industry to get themselves prepared for job interviews and training, among other procedures, in order to improve their odds of securing a job. He also remarked that even if the government has plans for public construction projects, time is needed for them to be rolled out, so jobseekers should be patient for the time being.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic started, the Labour Affairs Bureau has conducted a job matching

program for the industry. On the program's effectiveness, Cheong explained that it is difficult to pinpoint any problems. In contrast, he hopes that both the government and jobseekers will work together to resolve any problems.

He added that local construction workers are mostly skilled at non-structural elements of the work, which suggests that new-build construction projects may create a skills mismatch.

Information so far released by the government state quite a number of infrastructure projects are in progress, such as the fourth Macau-Taipa bridge, the Island Hospital Complex, the Elderly housing and the New Headquarters of the Public Security Police Force. **AL**

New blue cards to feature real-time validity

LYNZY VALLES

RESIDENCE permit cards of non-resident workers, colloquially known as blue cards, will now allow authorities to conduct a real-time check on the permit's expiry date via the QR code on the card, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) indicated.

Figures from authorities show that some 40,000

non-resident workers saw their employment contracts terminated before the expiry of their authorization to remain in Macau as the expiry date shown on the card does not precisely show their actual labor situation.

According to the PSP, they have removed the date from the new design of the card and have replaced it with a QR code.

The information will also include the marital status of the blue card holder and their travel document information.

"The launch of the Non-resident Worker's Card will make it more convenient and efficient for both the employers and non-resident workers. It will also facilitate our cooperation with the government in promoting the develop-

ment of e-government services," the PSP said in a statement.

At present, there are about 170,000 non-resident workers in the region. As the old non-resident worker's card remains valid until the authorization to stay expires, it is expected that it will take two years to replace all the cards.

The changes took effect yesterday.



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China eases visa rules for foreigners who get Sinopharm jobs

NON-RESIDENT workers (TNRs) can apply for a visa to enter mainland China on the condition that they are vaccinated with the Sinopharm inactivated virus vaccine, according to Rádio Macau,

The implication is that those who have been inoculated with the mRNA vaccine will not be able to apply.

Reports claim that the easing of visa entry requirements would be announced this week.

The TNRs' inoculation status will be revealed on their Macau Health Code following the platform's latest update.

As cited in a Bloomberg report, visa application requirements for foreigners seeking to enter the mainland from Hong Kong will be eased if they have been inoculated with Sinopharm vaccines.

The new rule will take effect today to resume "people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries in an orderly manner," according to a government announcement Friday.

Foreigners visiting the mainland for work will face less paperwork in visa applications if they are able to show they have received vaccines produced in China. With the vaccine certificates, these travelers will also be able to skip the requirement for a Covid-19 test or fill out a travel declaration form.

The change comes as China has been promoting its home-



-grown shots globally amid competition from western vaccines. It recently entered a deal with the International Olympic Committee

to provide shots made in China for athletes attending the Tokyo Olympics in July and Winter Olympics in Beijing next year.

Visa applicants will experience a similar application process and requirements which were in place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

For example, an applicant may apply for work, business or visitation visas, in order to enter mainland China to commence or resume work and production; or apply for a visa for reunion, foster care, or visiting relatives. In some cases, applicants' family members may also apply at the same time.

Meanwhile, APEC Travel Card bearers can apply for the M visa free of charge provided that they possess an invitation from a mainland entity.

Information on application procedures and documents required can be obtained from the office's website. **AL/ LV**

RESUMPTION OF CHINESE VISA FOR FOREIGN LOCAL RESIDENTS

FOLLOWING suspension of visas for about a year, Macau residents without Chinese nationality will be able to apply for Chinese visas from today, the Portuguese public broadcaster, Rádio Macau, reported.

The public broadcaster cited a press release by the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the SAR.

As quoted, the office stated that visa applications from all Macau residents of non-Chinese nationality, including permanent and non-permanent residents, may be submitted. Unlike the F visa issuance of a couple of weeks ago, applications can now be

made for all types of Chinese visa.

Vaccination will not be required for foreign residents who wish to apply for Chinese visas if they have stayed in the SAR for two consecutive months prior to the application date.

Local foreign residents' applications will be reviewed if they present their Macau ID – either permanent or non-permanent.

The People's Republic of China has about a dozen types of visa applications. For example, the L visa is issued to tourists. The M visa is issued to applicants for commercial and trade purposes. While applying for the visa, applicants should disclose their travel purpose and opt for the most suitable type of visa. **AL**

GROUP FORESEES CHINESE RELIGIOUS EVENTS TO REMAIN SMALL

CROWD gathering is not part of the agenda of Chinese religious events this year, Ip Tat, president of Macau Temple Festival Cultural Promotion Association, said at the sidelines of a religious event yesterday.

Normally, Chinese religious events, such as the Feast of God Tou Tei (God of the Earth) which was celebrated yesterday, consists of deity-worshipping rituals, feast gathering and Cantonese Opera performances, with the latter two sections attracting a considerable

number of participants, usually the elderly.

Although the dates of many religious events have been announced, Ip stressed they will follow the government's Covid-19 pandemic containment initiatives and the events will be held with minimal public participation. For instance, gathering for the feast and opera performances will be canceled.

Yesterday, the Feast of God Tou Tei was celebrated in all of the city's temples or shrines which has deity, with one of

them being the Patane Tou Tei Temple, the oldest of its kind in Macau.

Wong Wa Keong, director-general of the Associação de Piedade e de Beneficência Patane, Tu-Tei-Mio, said that this year the association followed the pandemic containment measures, but the rituals were held at a larger scale compared to last year.

The Feast of God Tou Tei applied to enter the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2019. Ip expects the result to be announced soon. **AL**

CITY'S FIRST PUMP TRACK TO OPEN FOR TRIAL TOMORROW



THE city's first pump track at Flora Park will open to the public for a trial run tomorrow, following the reopening of the children's cycling, scooter field and plant maze area on the site.

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) indicated that bicycles or balance bikes used must meet the requirements of the venue - the diameter of the wheels must be between 12 and 22 inches, and the bicycles must be equipped with a rear brake system or a front and rear brake system.

Users will need to queue on-site and enter the field in groups, with each group having no more than 15 people. Same-group users should utilize the track in an orderly manner within the duration of each session which is tentatively set at 15 minutes, after which the next group of users will enter the venue.

The track is open for users aged between 3 and 12 years.

The cycling track is equipped with a circular curved wall and slopes. **LV**

9 IMMUNIZATION INCIDENTS REPORTED WITHIN 24 HOURS

Between 4 p.m. on March 12 and 4 p.m. on March 13, nine adverse events following immunization (AEFI) for the Covid-19 vaccine have been recorded by the Health Bureau, with all of them reported to be mild responses. A total of 62 AEFIs, including one severe case, has been recorded since the roll-out of the vaccines. As of 4 p.m. yesterday, 28,767 individuals have been inoculated. Travelers from Taiwan will automatically get the green Macau Health Code after their 14-day hotel quarantine, provided they have passed the required nucleic acid tests.

IPM HOLDS EMPLOYMENT FAIR FOR GRADUATING STUDENTS

More than 70 local and Greater Bay Area entities participated at the Macau Polytechnic Institute (IPM) career fair last week, held both online and offline. The event attracted more than 1,500 participants. About a dozen talks, by both public and private entities, were held to better equip participants for the employment market. English résumé writing and job interview workshops were also held.

APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR 2021 SCRIPTS IN FOCUS

Applications for the "2021 Scripts in Focus - Film Scriptwriting Advanced Programme" are now open until April 20. Winning projects will be awarded with a prize of MOP60,000. Co-organized by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, two representative projects will be selected from each of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau. The two winning projects to be awarded a prize will be selected from among these six projects. The competition aims to promote film production through the cultivation of filmmaking talent.

PRESS ASSOCIATION DEcriES IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESS FREEDOM OVER BROADCASTER'S POLICY

LYNZY VALLES

THE Macau Portuguese and English Press Association (AIPIM) has expressed solidarity with Portuguese and English journalists following the alleged implementation of new editorial guidelines for the public broadcasters' newsroom, which if not followed, journalists may be dismissed with just cause.

The latest editorial guidelines stressed that news coverage should promote patriotism, respect and love for the motherland and Macau.

As cited in the statement, the press association expressed its concerns about one of the guidelines, which details that TDM staff are not allowed to "relay information or opinions contrary to the policies of the Central Government of the PRC" and have to support the measures adopted by the SAR.

The AIPIM defended its position towards the statement, noting that such guidelines are not in line with the provisions of paragraph 2 of Article 4 of the Macau Press Law, regarding freedom of the press citing "it is free [to have] the discussion and criticism of social, political and religious doctrines, policies and actions of the governing bodies of the Territory [Region] and of the public administration, as well as the behaviour of its agents."

Journalists from TDM's English and Portuguese's department were called to a meeting on March 10 to be informed of the new guide-



lines from TDM's executive board. The guidelines were forwarded to about 40 department employees.

In a report issued by Portuguese paper *Tribuna*, the journalists were informed that failure to comply with the rules established for the journalists would result in dismissal with just cause – a statement which AIPIM decried.

"AIPIM expresses grave concern about the seriousness of the implications of some aspects mentioned in the [...] meeting with regards to the free exercise of journalism and the conditions of journalists to carry out their activity with professionalism and dignity," the press association wrote.

"These indications generate a climate of uncertainty and fear, which has a very negative impact on the journalists' work," it added.

A nine-point set of guidelines were read out to the journalists who attended. The guidelines also noted that "TDM supports the fundamental principle that the Hong Kong SAR is go-

governed by patriots." This is also a principle proclaimed by Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office chief Xia Bao-long last month.

Following the meeting, some 20 journalists signed a petition demanding a meeting with TDM's executive board to request clarification on the guidelines as it was deemed vague.

The AIPIM statement came following TDM's statement on Friday that it has not made an overhaul to its current news editing policy, although it did not refer to the controversy.

"[TDM has] not changed its current policy on news coverage," said the broadcaster in a statement in Chinese.

"As a public broadcaster, TDM will continue to fulfill its social responsibility in the media and adhere to the principle of patriotism and love for Macau. Regarding online speculation and rumours, TDM reserves the right to pursue relevant responsibilities in accordance with the law," the public broadcaster stated.

conducted by SSM, the individual has had a history of hyperlipidemia, smoking, and a family history of coronary heart disease.

Besides, the conducted coronary angiography indicated that the patient has displayed chronic disease in his coronary arteries, which suggested that the

The AIPIM stated that it considers TDM's clarification to be of paramount importance in order to guarantee the full exercise of the journalism profession.

The association also highlights the words of the Chief Executive in regards to guaranteeing freedom of the press, which was reassured in recent meetings with representatives of the media, concluding that such freedom is enshrined in the Basic Law as one of the fundamental rights and duties of residents.

The guidelines were disseminated by the director of the Portuguese channel João Francisco Pinto and adjunct-director Gilberto Lopes during TDM's March 10 meeting. Both their contracts of appointment have been recently renewed for just six months instead of the usual one-year period.

Portugal's journalists union, *Sindicato dos Jornalistas*, came out in support of the AIPIM and TDM journalists with a statement quoted by *Lusa News Agency* over the weekend.

REGULATION TO FOSTER EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE WITH GUANGDONG PROVINCE TAKES EFFECT

HONEY TSANG

THE Executive Council (ExCo) has completed the discussions on two draft administrative regulations, which stipulate the particulars in the "Allowance for Macau's students enrolled in schools in Guangdong Province" and "Medical Professional Committee."

Grants for Macau students to pursue education in Guangdong Province also took effect on March 13.

The regulation is intended to foster educational exchange between Macau and Guangdong Province.

The applicants deemed eligible to receive the allowance for the 2020/2021 school year must hold a Macau ID card and be still enrolled in pre-school, elementary school, junior high school, and high school education in Guangdong Province on March 31, 2021.

There are two types of subsidies, namely for tuition and school supplies. Local students who received any free education in Macau or tuition subsidy in the 2020/2021 school year cannot apply.

The tuition allowance per student is capped at MOP8,000 for pre-schools and MOP6,000 for elementary schools, junior high and high schools. The final amount will be determined by the relevant education administration departments in the region.

The amount of school supply allowance per student will range from MOP1,150 to MOP1,700.

The whole scheme is expected to cost MOP40.8 million in total and will benefit 6,200 local youths in the current academic year.

MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL COMMITTEE TO HAVE 23 MEMBERS

The forthcoming Medical Professional Committee, as detailed in another draft administrative regulation, will comprise a total of 23 members hailing from the public and private sectors. They will be appointed with a three-year renewable tenure by the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Ao Ieong U.

"The law does not stipulate the share between public and private [medical practitioners for the committee], but we will consider the [nomination] list submitted by various professional bodies," Secretary-general of the Committee Leong Pui San told the *Times* when asked about the ratio of members from the public to the private sectors within the committee.

The committee operate under two concurrent modes of both plenary meetings and select committees.

There will be 16 select committees; 15 select committees are responsible for handling the medical professional accreditation and one for disciplinary matters. The fifteen committees are designed to handle medical accreditation, formulate medical practice regulations and guidelines, and organize internships and training activities, while the latter will handle disciplinary procedures for medical practitioners and offer suggestions regarding work ethics.

The draft regulation came into effect on March 13. The establishment of the committee is in accordance with Article 7 of Law No. 18/2020 Medical Professional Accreditation and Registration System — which is slated to take effect on October 1, 2021.

SERIOUS ADVERSE EFFECT EXPERIENCED BY ELDERLY NOT LINKED TO MRNA VACCINE

THE Health Bureau (SSM) confirmed that symptoms of acute coronary syndrome in a 67-year-old man following the mRNA vaccination is not linked to the vaccine itself.

The incident, SSM reaffirmed, is just "coincidental." The concerned male was diagnosed with acute co-

ronary syndrome and was hospitalized on March 10.

It was reported that the man did not instantly display any symptoms after being inoculated with the mRNA vaccine on March 10. The vaccine is developed by German drug manufacturer BioNTech.

According to the analysis

conducted by SSM, the individual has had a history of hyperlipidemia, smoking, and a family history of coronary heart disease.

Besides, the conducted coronary angiography indicated that the patient has displayed chronic disease in his coronary arteries, which suggested that the

man had suffered illness for a long time before the vaccination.

The patient reported pain in his left chest after exercise. From a clinical perspective, the case involves several risk factors which led to the acute coronary syndrome, SSM confirmed. **HT**

Gov't commits to cultivating local filmmaking industry

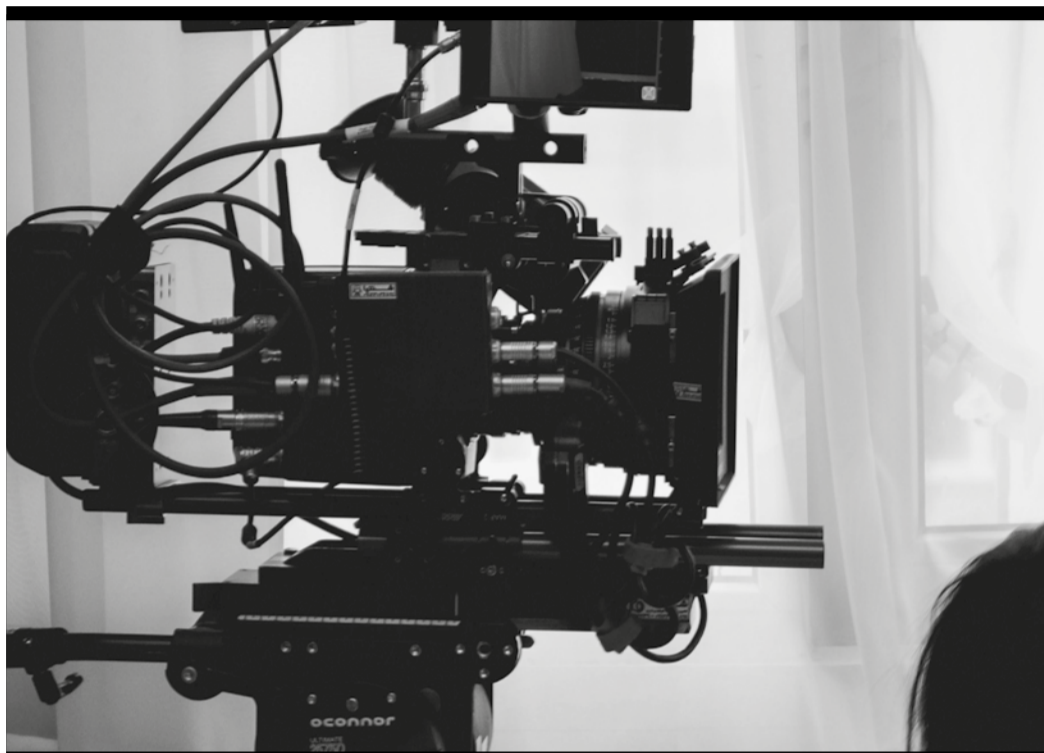
HONEY TSANG

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will continue to beef up efforts on driving the growth of Macau's film industry and encouraging local talents engaging in the filmmaking sector.

Over the past decade, the IC has rolled out a series of schemes dedicated to cultivating and giving financial and technical support to the city's budding filmmaking enthusiasts. They include the "Local View Power" founded in 2007 as well as the "Support Programme for the Production of Feature Films" and the "Funding Scheme on Culture & Arts Study" — both established in 2013.

Mok Ian Ian, the Director of the IC, told TDM in an earlier interview that these schemes have generated constructive outcomes when it comes to fostering the Macau's film industry.

"There is no fast track in [cultivating] the cultural industry. We had put conti-



nuous efforts into it to grow the sector bit by bit," Mok stated.

The IC is now laying the groundwork for two other schemes, one of which is designed to offer support for local filmmaking professionals to refine some mo-

vie plots, while the other is designed to take viewers on a visual tour to explore the city's locations that were filmed before.

The IC opened the fourth round of Support Programme for the Production of Feature Films from October

to November last year and singled out eight entries for a second review. The final beneficiary will be granted funding up to MOP2,000,000 and professional advice from veteran film professionals on how to produce and market a winning feature film.

PSP URGED TO STEP UP EFFORTS ON INVESTIGATION ASSAULT CASES AGAINST ANIMALS

HONEY TSANG

THE New Macau Association (AMN), together with several animal rights associations, convened a meeting with the Public Security Police Force (PSP) earlier to address the city's surging cases of cruelty against animals.

The vice-president of AMN and lawmaker Sou Ka Hou stressed that even with the existence of the Animal Protection Law — which criminalizes any treatment of animals involving "cruel, violent or torturous" means and has been in effect since September 2016 — there has been still no progress regarding the investigation into the city's many cases of poisoning, collision with vehicles and slaughtering of animals.

The AMN urges the police force to beef up their efforts to deter and preclude any further violent treatments imposed upon the animals.

In response to this, the PSP stated that a dedicated investigative team was established to probe into the city's animal maltreatment cases.

The passage of the Animal Protection Law also signifies a progressive advancement in safeguarding animal rights in Macau, the PSP added.

As of now, PSP received a total of 32 cases involving animal deaths in 2021. Among them, two files have been opened for investigation.

PSP also pledges to strengthen the communication with the public on the relevant information in the future.

AD

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U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken with President Joe Biden in the background

ANALYSIS

CHINA, NORTH KOREA LOOM AS BLINKEN, AUSTIN HEAD TO ASIA

MATTHEW LEE, WASHINGTON

THREATS from China and North Korea will loom large over the Biden administration's first Cabinet-level trip abroad, part of a larger effort to bolster U.S. influence and calm concerns about America's role in Asia.

A senior administration said yesterday [Macau time] that U.S. officials have tried to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels since last month, but have yet to receive a response, making consultations with the reclusive country's neighbors, Japan, South Korea and China, all the more critical.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are heading to Japan and South Korea for four days of talks starting today as the administration seeks to shore up partnerships with the two key regional treaty allies. Blinken and Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, will then meet with senior Chinese officials in Anchorage, Alaska.

Their first official overseas visits are intended to restore what Biden hopes will be a calming and even-keeled approach to ties with Tokyo and Seoul after four years of transactional and often temperamental relations under the previous president, Donald Trump. He had upended diplomatic norms by meeting not once, but three times, with North Korean

leader Kim Jong Un.

In addition to their official talks, Blinken and Austin plan virtual meetings with journalists, civil-society members and others. After reassuring their counterparts of U.S. commitments to Japanese and South Korean security, they plan to focus their talks on cooperating to confront an increasingly assertive China, the nuclear challenge from North Korea and the coronavirus pandemic.

In his first months in office, Biden has already signaled his desire to return the Asia-Pacific — or Indo-Pacific, as has become more common in officialese — to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In keeping with his broader “America is back” diplomatic theme, Biden has pledged to keep stability in the region at the core of his international initiatives.

This weekend, Biden participated in a virtual summit with the leaders of India, Japan and Australia. “A free and open Indo-Pacific is essential,” Biden told his fellow members of the so-called Quad. “The United States is committed to working with you, our partners and all of our allies in the region to achieve stability.”

As part of that effort and “to reduce the risks of escalation,” the senior official said efforts had been made to connect with

the North Koreans since mid-February, including through what is known as the “New York channel.” To date, the official said, “we have not received any response from Pyongyang.” The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive diplomatic outreach.

“Diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy.”

SUNG KIM
US DIPLOMAT FOR ASIA

As the administration plots its strategy, the official said it would continue to consult with the Japanese and South Koreans, as well as with the Chinese, and had also reached out to numerous former U.S. officials involved in North Korea policy, including from the Trump presidency.

Biden's meeting with the Quad came less than a week after U.S. and South Korean negotiators overcame years of contentious discussions under Trump to reach a tentative deal on paying for the American troop presence in South Korea. That agreement, along with a similar one for Japan, will be front and center in Blinken and Austin's meetings.

As he had done with allies in Europe, Trump threatened to reduce security cooperation un-

less host countries paid more, sparking fears of troop withdrawals at a time of particular uncertainty as China boosts efforts to dominate the region and North Korea's nuclear weapons remain a major source of angst.

“Diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy, and we are working to strengthen America's relationships with our allies as well as the relationships among them,” said Sung Kim, a career diplomat who is the top U.S. diplomat for Asia. He served in the Philippines and Indonesia during the Trump administration and was also previously the special envoy for North Korea.

Yet, for all of Biden's suggestions that he will reverse Trump's overt hostility to China, he has yet to countermand a single one of his predecessor's policies. He has, in fact, reaffirmed several of them, including maintaining sanctions in response to human rights situation in western Xinjiang and Hong Kong and restating a Trump-era decision to reject outright nearly all of China's maritime claims in the South China Sea.

And, many of China's policies that the U.S. finds objectionable — including its crackdown in Hong Kong, stepped up rhetoric against Taiwan and actions in the South China Sea — began during the Obama administration. The previous Democratic adminis-

tration took office promising a “pivot to Asia” after a period of what many saw as American neglect for the region during George W. Bush's presidency, which was consumed by the onset of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In fact, although some obvious circumstances have changed since 2009, Blinken and Austin's trip mirrors in many ways the initial overseas journey of President Barack Obama's first secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, when she traveled to Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and then China in a bid to re-assert U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific. Obama's engagement with China, however, did not produce the desired results, and the North Korean threat grew.

Although China is not on Blinken's itinerary, after wrapping up the stop in Seoul, he will fly back to Washington via Anchorage, Alaska, where he and Sullivan, will meet senior Chinese officials. Austin, meanwhile, will fly from Seoul to New Delhi, where he'll meet top Indian leaders.

Still, the administration is convinced that its domestic efforts to revitalize the U.S. economy and step up the fight against COVID-19 have put it in a better position both to blunt Chinese ambitions directly and leverage its partnerships to do the same.

“After the work of the past 50 days, Secretary Blinken and I will enter the meeting with senior Chinese representatives from a position of strength,” Sullivan said.

How that strength will play with rivals like China and North Korea, let alone allies like Japan and South Korea, remains to be seen. **MDT/AP**

Beijing hits back at US criticism of Hong Kong election change

KEN MORITSUGU
& ZEN SOO, BEIJING

A Chinese official hit back at U.S. criticism of planned election law changes in Hong Kong, noting the chaos surrounding the recent American presidential election.

Semi-autonomous Hong Kong is an internal Chinese issue that no foreign country has the right to interfere in, said Zhang Xiaoming, deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council.

"I don't know that after the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, how the U.S. has such moral capital to point fingers at the election institutions of Hong Kong," he said.

A statement from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned what it called China's "continuing assault on democratic institutions in Hong Kong." It followed Thursday's approval by China's legislature of a plan to increase Beijing's control of how Hong Kong's legislature is chosen.

The changes would give a largely pro-Beijing Election Committee the responsibility of nominating all members of Hong Kong's legislature and directly electing some lawmakers to ensure that Hong Kong is administered by "patriots" and exclude "anti-China" forces from holding key roles in governance.



Zhang Xiaoming, deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office: "The opposition, especially the pan-democrats, also have patriots"

The 1,500-member Election Committee will pick the territory's chief executive and an unspecified "relatively large" number of its 90-seat legislature. The revision has prompted concern that the proportion of directly elected lawmakers will be reduced.

Pro-government groups, including political organization Friends of Hong Kong, set up stalls across the city to collect signatures in a show of support for the changes. Nearly 200,000 residents have signed so far, according to the website signforhk2021.com.

"These actions deny Hong Kongers a voice in its own governance by limiting political participation, reducing democratic representation, and stifling political debate," Blinken said.

Zhang likened the changes to Hong Kong's electoral system as a "minimally invasive surgery" that will restore health to

the city's "democratic system."

"The distinctive features of minimally invasive surgery are small wounds, deep penetration, and quicker recovery," he said, adding that Hong Kong residents will be able to live and work more peacefully as a result.

Zhang also said that the electoral changes are not aimed at excluding Hong Kong's pro-democracy camp from the governance structure as anti-China forces cannot be equated with the opposition.

"The opposition, especially the pan-democrats, also have patriots, and they can still stand for election and be elected according to law in the future," he said.

Zhang's comments come even as 47 pro-democracy activists and former legislators were charged in court for subversion last week for their involvement in an unofficial primary election that authorities

say was part of a plot to paralyze the Hong Kong government.

Most of Hong Kong's prominent pro-democracy advocates are currently in jail or in self-exile. Of the 47, only five have received bail.

On Friday, 21 activists who were denied bail last week appeared in court for a bail review.

The court rejected 11 bail applications, including those from former lawmakers Claudia Mo and Leung Kwok-hung. The remaining 10 defendants withdrew their application. They will remain in custody.

For former lawmaker Emily Lau, a member of Hong Kong's Democratic Party, Zhang's words provide little reassurance that any semblance of democracy can still be maintained.

"I consider myself a patriot," said Lau. "But our worry is that many people from my party, and from the pro-democracy camp may be excluded."

She said that even after lawmakers are elected, there is still continuous vetting throughout their service, since they can still be stripped of their seats if they're found to be insufficiently patriotic.

"I don't know what their definition of patriotism is, and that is the worrying thing," she said. "Once this (electoral system) is set up, you will lose the confidence of the people, and that's bad for any government." MDT/AP

jurisdiction or right of 'supervision' over Hong Kong after the handover, and it has no so-called 'obligations' to Hong Kong citizens. No foreign country or organization has the right to take the Joint Declaration as an excuse to interfere in Hong Kong affairs, which are China's internal affairs," the spokesperson said.

China strongly opposes any external interference, said the spokesperson, adding that Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China.

"China has the will, determination and capability to safeguard its national sovereignty, security and development interests. We urge the relevant countries and groups, including the UK, to immediately stop interfering in Hong Kong affairs, which are China's internal affairs," said the spokesperson. MDT/XINHUA

OPINION

China Daily

Xinhua Editors

CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON BRINGS NATIONWIDE MEDICS BACK TO WUHAN

Over a year ago, Fang Yafang made a decision to go to Wuhan where the country's first cluster of COVID-19 cases was reported. The 27-year-old nurse from Xiamen, east China's Fujian Province, battled against the virus there for 52 days, taking care of the severe patients.

It seems like *deja vu*, Fang said as she once again captured the first bud of spring in the city this year as it sees its annual cherry blossoms season starting from early March.

"When I first arrived in Wuhan last February, the city was nearly empty, with few on the streets but batches of medical teams from time to time," Fang recalled. "After over a year, Wuhan has returned to the bustle and hustle of city life."

Fang is among thousands of medical workers across China who had assisted Wuhan with the fight against the epidemic in 2020 and returned to the city this year with their family members to enjoy the stunning full bloom beauty, at the invitation of Wuhan.

According to official figures, the epidemic in Wuhan had been gradually brought under control with the assistance of more than 42,000 medical workers across China, and the city has reported no new local cases since May 18, 2020.

Wuhan University, one of the best places in the city to feast the eyes of cherry blossom admirers, announced it would offer free exclusive tours and performances for them and their relatives from Saturday to Sunday.

The events will continue for the next three years during the cherry blossom season, said Wu Ping, vice president of the university, at the Saturday welcoming ceremony that kicks off the two-day event.

According to Wu, some 1,500 students and teachers of the university have volunteered to help by giving guided tours, taking photos and providing water throughout the season.

"I was deeply moved as plenty of pedestrians stopped and waved at us on our way to Wuhan University on a bus that took us there," said Wei Lijuan, deputy director of the nursing department of a hospital in Yangquan, Shanxi Province.

"No city is more deserving of the scenery full of life and energy than Wuhan," said Wei.

Wang Yang from Hunan Province, among the first medical workers who rushed to help set up a major makeshift hospital in Wuhan, said the revisit reflected him of the tough battle a year ago along with his colleagues.

"It was such a rewarding experience for us to stand united with Wuhan, especially when we see the vitality of Wuhan today," Wang said, holding high a flag printed with the name of his hospital during the Saturday visit.

He added that it could also be enlightening for the children, so he took his child with him.

Apart from Wuhan University, all A-level scenic spots across Wuhan offer free entry to medical workers who had helped in the anti-epidemic fight.

"Spring has indeed arrived in Wuhan, and it breathes hope and renewal to people living here," said Wei, wearing a memorial badge as a gift from Wuhan University dedicated to anti-epidemic heroes like herself.

China voices firm opposition to UK, G7 statements over Hong Kong

THE Chinese government expresses its strong condemnation of and firm opposition to "groundless slanders at China" and blatant interference in China's internal affairs by some politicians, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Britain said over the weekend.

Responding to a statement by British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and another joint statement by the Group of Seven foreign ministers and the High Representative of the European Union, both on issues related to Hong Kong, the spokesperson said that the authority of China's National People's Congress's decision

to improve the electoral system of Hong Kong "brooks no challenge."

"This decision was made by China's highest organ of state power," said the spokesperson, adding that it is in line with the provisions of the Constitution of China and the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, conforms to universal practice, and constitutes a necessary step to uphold and improve the mechanisms of "one country, two systems."

Improving the electoral system in Hong Kong and implementing the principle of "patriots governing Hong

Kong" will promote the sound development of the democratic system in Hong Kong, better safeguard the rights, interests and freedoms of Hong Kong citizens, and ensure the steady and sustained practice of "one country, two systems," said the spokesperson.

The so-called "China breaches the Sino-British Joint Declaration" is a non-issue, the spokesperson said, adding that the core content of the Joint Declaration is to ensure China resumes exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong and its historical mission was completed at the handover.

"The UK has no sovereignty,



Still recovering, Japan marks 10 years since tsunami hit

MARI YAMAGUCHI,
TOKYO

JAPAN fell quiet at 2:46 p.m. last week Thursday to mark the minute that an earthquake began 10 years ago, setting off a tsunami and nuclear crisis that devastated the country's northeast coast in a disaster that one survivor said he fears people are beginning to forget.

Carrying bouquets of flowers, many walked to the seaside or visited graves to pray for relatives and friends washed away by the water. Emperor Naruhito and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga were among those observing a moment of silence at a memorial in Tokyo. Dignitaries and representatives of the survivors spoke — but most watched the ceremony online or on television because of restrictions to slow the coronavirus pandemic.

The magnitude-9.0 quake that struck on March 11, 2011 — one of the strongest on record — triggered a wall of water that swept far inland, destroying towns and causing meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The days following the quake were terrifying for many in Japan and farther afield, as hydrogen explosions released radiation

into the air and technicians worked furiously to try to cool the plant's nuclear fuel by pumping in seawater. There were concerns and confusion about the extent of meltdowns, and how far radiation might travel, including fears that Tokyo and even the U.S. west coast were at risk. Officials said they were not, but panicked shoppers as far away as China and Russia scrambled to stock up on goods they thought would protect them.

More than 18,000 people died, mostly in the tsunami, and nearly half a million people were displaced. The government recognizes another 3,700 — mostly from Fukushima prefecture — who died of causes linked to the disaster, such as stress.

Ten years on, more than 40,000 people are still unable to return home, and areas near the wrecked plant are still off-limits due to contamination from the initial radiation fallout. Many in Japan have said that the country's intense focus on physically rebuilding has at times ignored other healing that needed to be done.

"Reconstruction in disaster-hit areas has moved forward significantly, but recovery of the survivors' hearts is not making as

much progress as we wish," Makoto Saito, a teacher at an elementary school in Minamisoma who lost his 5-year-old son Shota in the tsunami, said in a speech at the Tokyo ceremony.

The government has said this is the last year it will organize a national commemoration for the disaster. Saito, representing Fukushima survivors, said that he is afraid memories are fading outside the disaster zone and he is committed to preventing that from happening by continuing to recount the lessons from the disaster and telling the stories of his son.

Naruhito said "my heart aches" when he thinks of those who have struggled to adapt to drastic changes to their lives because of the triple disaster, including the loss of loved ones, jobs and whole communities.

"I also consider it important to heal emotional scars and watch over the mental and physical health of those afflicted, including the elderly and children," he said. He stressed that it's important for people to stand by them and help reconstruct their lives "without leaving even a single soul behind in this difficult situation."

In Tokyo's posh shopping district of Ginza, pedestrians stopped to observe

the moment of silence as in previous anniversaries. But a memorial concert at the nearby Hibiyu park, which has drawn many people in past years, was held online this year due to the pandemic and attracted only a small audience. Some anti-nuclear groups also held a protest in Tokyo.

Beyond Tokyo, many marked the day by raising awareness for disaster prevention. In Kyoto, authorities conducted emergency drills.

Roads, train lines, houses and other key infrastructure have mostly been rebuilt in the disaster-hit region at the cost of more than 30 trillion yen (\$280 billion). But no-go zones remain in parts of Fukushima, where shops and houses were abandoned and cordoned off and massive amounts of radioactive waste from decontamination pile up. Swaths of empty land remain in coastal towns farther north in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, which were already seeing people move away before the disaster and have seen that trend accelerate.

In Otsuchi town in Iwate prefecture, where the tsunami destroyed the town hall, killing about 40 employees, families in dark suits gathered on a piece of empty land where the building used to stand. In Ishinomaki, Miyagi prefecture, dozens of residents prayed at a cenotaph carrying the names of more than 3,000 victims.

In Rikuzentakata, another Iwate city where a tsunami as high as 17 meters (56 feet) killed more than 1,700 residents, dozens of police officials wearing orange life vests combed the coastline in search of remains of those who have not been found — an effort that is still repeated in many towns every month. The remains of a woman found in February were returned to her family on Tuesday.

No deaths have been confirmed directly from the radiation, but Fukushima has fallen behind in the recovery efforts, with pieces of land totaling 33,000 hectares in seven towns near the nuclear plant still classified as no-go zones. Securing the nuclear fuel, dismantling the reactors and decontaminating the plant is an unprecedented challenge, with some questioning after 10 years of work whether it can be done. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1990 OBSERVER JOURNALIST EXECUTED IN IRAQ



Britain has strongly condemned the Iraqi authorities over the execution of The Observer journalist Farzad Bazoft in Baghdad.

Mr Bazoft - who came to live in Britain from Iran in the 1980s - was convicted by the Iraqis of spying four days ago. He was hanged at dawn after a last minute appeal for clemency from the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, failed.

In the Commons this afternoon, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said Britain's ambassador to Iraq was being recalled and all visits to the country have been suspended.

But Mr Hurd stopped short of cutting off diplomatic relations with Iraq. He said it was important to keep dialogue alive with the Iraqis for the sake of the 2,000 Britons living in Iraq, including Mr Bazoft's alleged accomplice, British nurse Daphne Parish.

Mr Bazoft and Mrs Parish were arrested last September after visiting a top secret military installation south of Baghdad.

The Observer journalist was investigating reports of an explosion at the plant, which had reportedly left hundreds dead. He asked Mrs Parish to give him a lift in her car.

He was convicted of spying and sentenced to death by a revolutionary court. Mrs Parish was jailed for 15 years.

The British Consul General in Baghdad, Robin Kealy, was Mr Bazoft's last visitor before his execution.

He said: "He was looking hollow-eyed and subdued, not surprisingly. He passed on a last written message and a number of oral messages to friends and colleagues... He repeated that he had been a journalist going after a scoop."

The Iraqi ambassador in France said British appeals for clemency fell on deaf ears because officials used "threatening terms and blackmail".

Prayers for Mr Bazoft were said today at the offices of The Observer in London. Later staff gathered outside the Iraqi embassy to register their silent protest.

The daughter of Mrs Parish, Michelle de Vries, has supported the government's decision to keep diplomatic channels open. She hopes to be able to secure the early release of her mother.

She said: "It is far too early to know what implications today's events will have on my mother. All I can do is hope and pray she receives the clemency not afforded to poor Mr Bazoft."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Mrs Thatcher called the execution of Mr Bazoft "an act of barbarism".

The European Parliament also condemned the execution but stopped short of cutting diplomatic and trade relations. The UN Secretary General expressed his deep regret. But Britain was not prepared to cut diplomatic ties and trade between Britain and Iraq continued.

Many British firms were benefiting from the reconstruction work taking place in Iraq following the war with Iran.

Daphne Parish was released on 16 July 1990.

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, starting the Gulf War.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

You may want to make changes in your home environment. Don't let siblings put pressure on you. Don't let your family put demands on you. Your outgoing nature will win hearts.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

You can work in conjunction with those in the know in order to get to the bottom of any pending issue. You should be raising your self esteem and confidence in order to promote your work.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

False information is likely if you listen to idle chatter or gossip. Your emotional partner may make you angry today. Be ready to explain your actions. Rely on yourself and you will look good to superiors.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You will be able to dazzle others with your obvious charm and your outgoing nature. Communication will be your strong point and you should be able to persuade others to see things your way.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You must be careful not to trust just anyone. Knowledge can be acquired if you listen. You can be sure that any dealing with large institutions should go well.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You may have a problem with someone you live with if you don't include them in your gathering. Loss or theft may occur if you are careless with your belongings. Your partner may be somewhat irritable today.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Real estate investments could be to your advantage. You will not be pleased with family members who try to put demands on you when you don't have the time. There might be a problem with an insurance policy.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You just hate waste, and when someone else costs you dearly you see red. Don't agree to make any of those cosmetic alterations you've been considering.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You need to take a break with the ones you love. Talk to someone with experience about budgets or consolidating debts. You should focus on moneymaking matters and stay away from emotional disputes.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Don't promise to deliver the goods if you aren't positive that you can meet the deadline. This is not the day to visit relatives. You might find added popularity with those around you today.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Put your time and energy into home improvement. You need to get out and challenge yourself. Don't let your stubborn nature get the better of you.

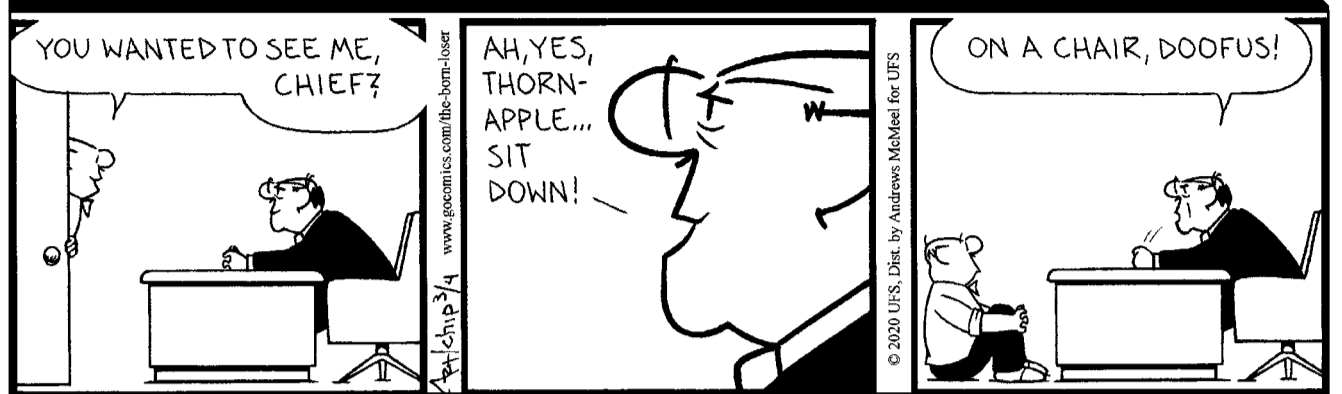


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You will also encounter individuals who can help you further your goals. Don't promise to deliver the goods if you aren't positive that you can meet the deadline.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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	2	4					1	
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4		9			2			
	6		3				8	
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	8			6			2	
			1	6				

MEDIUM

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	3	5						7

HARD

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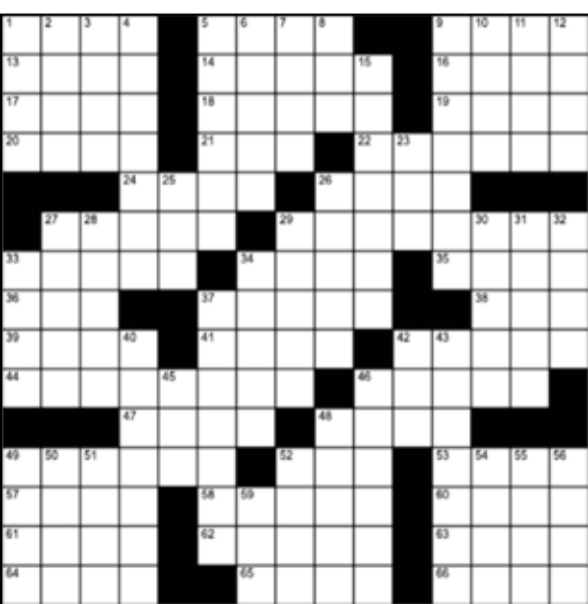
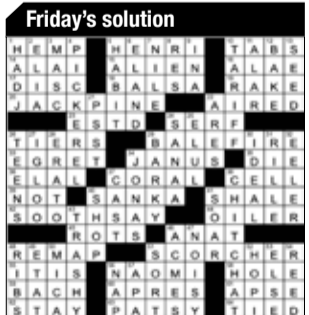
WEATHER

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

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Umpire's call; 5- Bill; 9- Long objects used to row a boat; 13- Norwegian saint; 14- Wing it; 16- Peter Fonda title role; 17- Knowledge; 18- Woody vine; 19- I did it!; 20- Antlered animal; 21- Mil. officers; 22- Surprisingly; 24- Nephew of Abel; 26- Marine shade; 27- Intoxicate; 29- Fifth day of the week; 33- Sums owing; 34- Canadian tribe; 35- Parting word; 36- UN agency; 37- Defraud; 38- St. Louis grider; 39- Leaf with Sanscrit writing?; 41- Attention; 42- Oglers; 44- Not a direct hit; 46- Painter Rousseau; 47- Denomination; 48- Not of the cloth; 49- Bassett or Lansbury; 52- Accelerate; 53- One of two equal parts; 57- Advance; 58- Model Campbell; 60- Seed cover; 61- Think tank product; 62- Composer Bruckner; 63- Zip; 64- Bluey-green color; 65- Zingy taste; 66- Recipe amt.

DOWN 1- Realtor's sign; 2- Lotion ingredient; 3- Payment for travel; 4- Himalayan peak; 5- Round of voting; 6- Prepares for publication; 7- Dear, dear!; 8- Relatives; 9- Survive longer; 10- Winglike parts; 11- Cincinnati club; 12- Mariners can sail on seven of these; 15- Feast; 23- Town; 25- Figs; 26- In the future; 27- Pretty girl; 28- Deadly virus; 29- Forest makeup; 30- Challenger; 31- Maker of Pong; 32- Edible roots; 33- "My Heart Will Go On" singer; 34- Thorax; 37- Mexican-American girl; 40- Collection of weaponry; 42- Circle of flowers; 43- Bewitch; 45- Voice of Bugs; 46- Owning; 48- Yellowish citrus fruit; 49- Hit the ground; 50- Network point; 51- Mother of the Titans; 52- Church code; 54- Graceful horse; 55- Covers; 56- Flutter; 59- Hill dweller;



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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Property of the Week



Top Floor Flat- Hellene Gardens
HK\$7,900,000 1,663 ft² 3 2 1



This lovely holiday home has only had one owner who has recently decided to put this flat on the market. The kitchen has been opened up into the living area to make a lovely bright open space great for entertaining.

The apartment is in excellent condition and ready to move into. The lift lobby outside the flat has been modernised, and the flat come with one parking space on the ground floor of the parking lot not far from the lift.

Viewing by appointment. Find out more on www.jmlproperty.com



Rain Dance Property "We dance until it's RENTED!"



Manhattan E Unit, Taipa
\$17,500/mth
1,626 ft²
3 2



Property Hotlist



Unique Ground Floor Loft
Central Macau
\$9,990,000
2,200 ft²
2 2



Wonderful layout, Nova Taipa
\$17,000/mth
2,530 ft²
4 3



Chong Fok, Taipa
\$10,900/mth
640 ft²
2 1



More Listings

For Sale

- [Taipa] Superb Studio 1 1 650 ft² **\$3,780,000** (ref: 20076001)
- [Taipa] Buckingham high floor 2 2 1,439 ft² **\$11,770,000** (ref: 19045004)
- [Coloane] Large 3/4 bedroom 2 3 2 2,530 ft² **\$12,980,000** (ref: 19096000)
- [Taipa] Manhattan D unit 4 2 2,305 ft² **\$17,980,000** (ref: 18075558)
- [Taipa] Private House 3 3 4,266 ft² **\$32,000,000** (ref: n/a)

For Rent

- [Macau] One Central 2 2 1,269 ft² **\$18,500/mth** (ref: n/a)
- [Taipa] Manhattan spacious 3 2 1,720 ft² **\$18,800/mth** (ref: n/a)
- [Cotai] One Oasis high ceiling 3 2 2,100 ft² **\$30,000/mth** (ref: 20111002)
- [Macau] Retail Shop, Barra area 1,968 ft² **\$48,000/mth** (ref: n/a)
- [Taipa] Commercial office- BCM building 4,100 ft² **\$85,000/mth** (ref: 21011001)

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Studio apartment, Taipa



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RUGBY | SIX NATIONS

England topples France to redeem woeful title defense

ENGLAND redeemed a woeful Six Nations title defense by beating trophy favorite France 23-20 thanks to a dramatic Maro Itoje try in an empty Twickenham yesterday [Macau time].

England was heading to a third defeat in four matches until the 76th minute. A lineout drive from 10 meters out reached the tryline and Itoje dived over from a ruck. Referee Andrew Brace decided no try, believing Itoje was held up by flanker Cameron Woki and Teddy Thomas. But after a video review which showed the ball brushing the grass, Brace changed his mind.

Itoje smiled among his congratulating teammates, a match-winner again after coming into the game heavily criticized for being the poster boy of the indiscipline that has undone England's campaign.

France's Grand Slam bid was over, but it was still in title contention with home matches remaining against title rivals Wales, which is unbeaten, and Scotland, which has one loss. But Wales



England's Maro Itoje (center) scores a try during the Six Nations rugby union match between England and France at Twickenham Stadium

can win the championship next weekend in Paris with a draw.

"This is the type of match that makes you grow," France captain Charles Ollivon said. "Last year in [the] Scotland [defeat] we didn't take any points and today we've taken one [losing bonus point]."

Doubts about France's form after a month out of action were dispelled within 66 seconds by a try to star scrumhalf Antoine Dupont.

But England's response was to finally come out of its shell with its

best performance since the 2019 Rugby World Cup. The attack fired up, came at pace, and England kept its composure to not concede a penalty until the 24th minute.

Winger Anthony Watson marked his 50th cap with a try and England led 13-7 after a couple of Owen Farrell penalties.

France retook the lead with a brilliant first-phase try to wing Damian Penaud to finish a luminous first half 17-13 ahead.

The second half was cagey as

France struggled to get out of its half while the stubborn English conceded errors. An exchange of penalties to the 54th minute maintained the tension as France looked set to win a Six Nations match at Twickenham for the first time since 2005.

Even after Itoje's try, France had a final fling to England's 22 only for the surge to die when Dupont knocked on behind a ruck.

England coach Eddie Jones said of France: "They haven't had

a game for a while and they were fresh. We had to be with them at halftime — that was our big job.

"We thought we would get them in the second half and we did."

France made a sensational start when a Thomas chip was collected by Dupont for a try.

The surprises continued as England coolly strung 18 phases together until flanker Mark Wilson was held up between the posts by center Gael Fickou. Another nine phases later, center Henry Slade sliced up the middle and George Ford's vision gave Watson his try.

A second Farrell penalty had England up 13-7 and back threatening the French tryline. But Dupont forced a knock-on by opposite Ben Youngs to relieve.

The last 10 minutes were the Mathieu Jalibert show. Picked ahead of the fit-again Romain Ntamack, the playmaker slotted a penalty and was involved in three try chances. Only one came off but it was brilliant.

Fickou grabbed a long lineout throw on the England 22, Jalibert looped around, drew the defense and lobbed to Penaud to score untouched. Jalibert's second sideline conversion made it 17-13 which they couldn't add to before halftime.

The second half didn't live up to the first as errors mounted.

They can't afford to back off against Wales next weekend. **MDT/AP**

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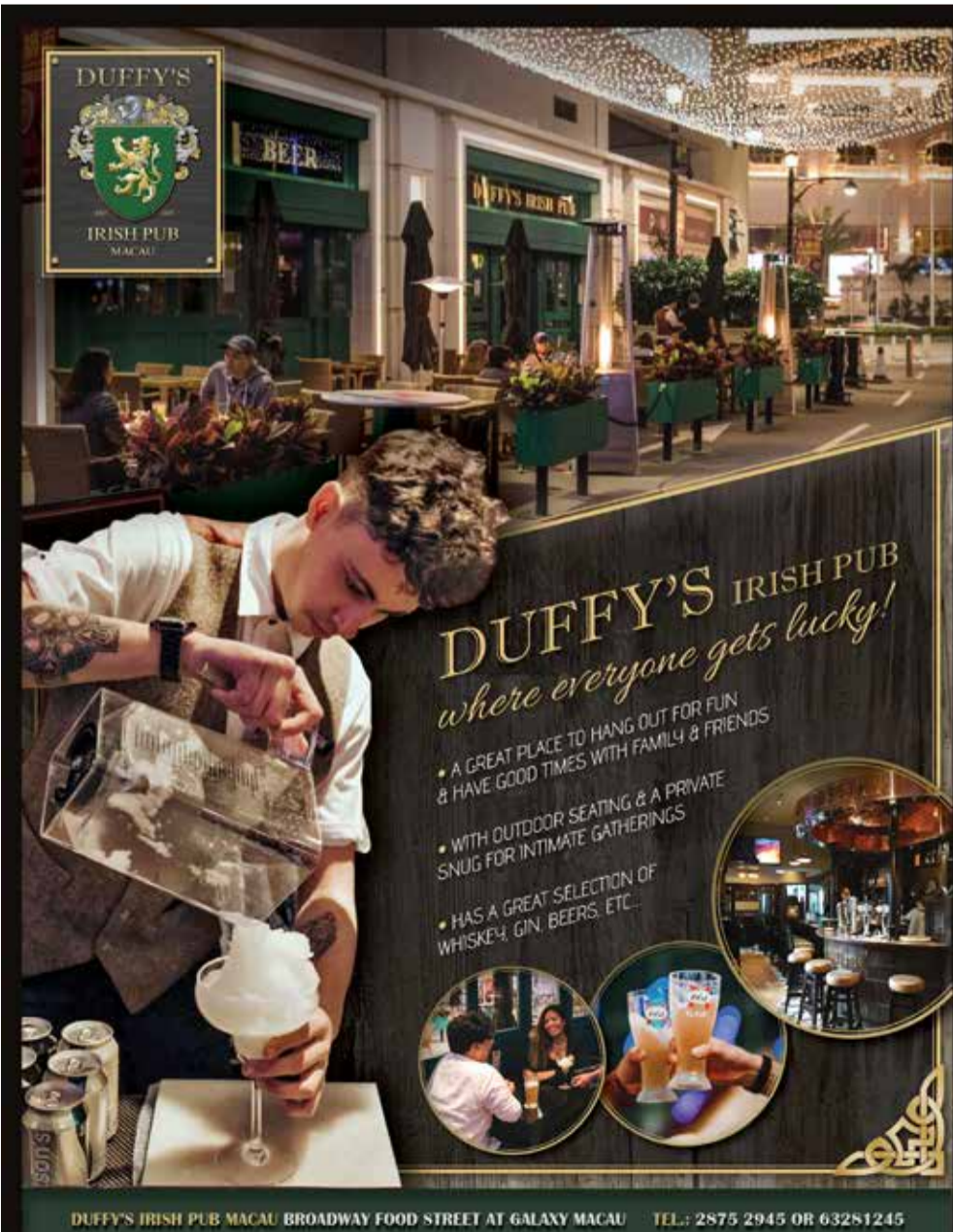
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OPINION

World Views

Andreas Kluth, MDT/Bloomberg



SHOULD I STOP TALKING NOW? WHY WE'RE SO BAD AT CONVERSATION

I've always felt that Jean-Paul Sartre narrowly missed the target. Hell is not necessarily other people. More precisely, hell is small talk.

There: I've outed myself again as an introvert and curmudgeon. But I'm hardly the only one to find that gabfests can be hard work — and more specifically, that they tend to drone on too long. Now science has backed me up. Only 1.59% of conversations end when both sides want them to, according to a new study. On average, people perceive that their chats are too long, or too short, by half the duration of the exchange. Why?

Previous research has concentrated instead on why humans are so surprisingly 'good' at talking to each other. As one study provocatively asked: "Why is conversation so easy?" To a computer, monologue would be far more feasible than dialogue. Humans, by contrast, appear to have evolved for conversation.

The cognitive prerequisite for conversing is the ability to take rapid turns, within intervals of only about 200 milliseconds, which is far less time than it takes to form and utter words. Scientists call this skill "duetting." It came long before language in evolutionary history. That's why primates and other species, including song birds, can also interact in modes resembling chitchat.

Once language came on top of duetting, however, human evolution went into overdrive. Robin Dunbar, an evolutionary psychologist, thinks that verbal conversation is really a turbo-charged form of grooming — you know, picking each other's fur and such. In particular, it allows gossip. That in turn lets humans form, maintain and navigate much larger social groups than other primates can.

And yet, we manifestly keep running into problems in our conversations. That drew the interest of Adam Mastroianni, a PhD student in psychology at Harvard University, and his co-authors Daniel Gilbert, Gus Cooney and Timothy Wilson. Their research confirms that we don't know how to end conversations at the right time. And they ruminate on why that might be.

They ran two studies of 932 dialogues in total. In one, participants answered questions about a talk they'd just had with a friend or relative; in the other, people came into the lab to chat with strangers and then reported back.

Remarkably, the results were almost the same in both studies: The banterers grossly misjudged when their partners wanted to end the chat. And they misinterpreted the other side's signals just as much when they were talking to mom or hubby as when parlaying with people they'd never met.

This is puzzling. After all, one purpose of conversation is to bond by cooperating. Why can't we also agree on when to shut up?

Mastroianni and his colleagues conclude that it's because we're deliberately misleading — or, if you prefer, being dishonest. If the point of conversation, as Dunbar said, is to build social cohesion, that even makes sense. We get nervous about causing social ruptures by offending someone, either because we've engaged them too long or cut them off. So we garble our signals.

I asked Mastroianni how pandemic lockdowns and Zoom have affected our conversations. They've made our problems worse, he told me. One reason is that "cues are even more muted when we're not in person." Another, he added, is that "an easy way for people to end a conversation is to claim to have somewhere else to be, and that claim is awfully dubious these days."

For my part, I'm glad science finally confirms that conversation isn't 'my' problem, but 'our' problem. And I'm more optimistic about the role of Zoom. After all, every new technology also provides new excuses. It's shocking, in this day and age, how unstable some of our internet connections are, wouldn't you agree?

Transportation minister Kazuyoshi Akaba says Japan will tighten border controls and limit the number of entrants to up to 2,000 per day to guard against the more contagious variants of the coronavirus.

Japan has confirmed 345 cases of the more contagious new variants, mostly the kind first found in Britain, the health ministry said over the weekend.

The health authorities have found the cases of the new variants to have quadrupled over the past month. They said the

cases have been found in about half of Japan's 47 prefectures but need to be closely watched and precautions should be increased.

Tokyo and its three neighboring prefectures are under a non-binding state of emergency since Jan. 7. The measure, which was to end on March 7 in those areas, has been extended for two weeks as the infections have not slowed enough.

Japan had about 444,300 cases and 8,451 deaths as of Thursday, the health ministry said.



AP PHOTO

CHINA AIMS TO VACCINATE 70-80% OF POPULATION BY MID-2022

CHINA is aiming to vaccinate 70-80% of its population by mid-2022, the head of the country's Center for Disease Control said this weekend.

With four approved vaccines, China will vaccinate 900 million to 1 billion people, Gao Fu, the CDC head, said in an interview with Chinese state media broadcaster CGTN. "We hope that China can take the lead in achieving herd immunity in the world," he said.

Herd immunity occurs when enough of the population has immunity, either from vaccination or past infection, to stop the uncontrolled spread of an infectious disease like COVID-19.

China had administered 52.5 million vaccine doses through the end of February. It has been slower in its vaccination campaign than many other countries, including the U.S., government health experts have acknowledged. China has committed roughly 10 times more doses abroad than it has distributed at home.

Although emergency vaccinations have been underway in China since at least last summer, the country has been slow to announce whether it had

any plans to achieve herd immunity.

China currently has 17 COVID-19 vaccine candidates for clinical trials.

It has approved four domestically made vaccines: two from state-owned Sinopharm, one from Sinovac, and another from CanSino. None of the four vaccines have publicly released their final stage trial data, Associated Press has reported.

"We hope that China can take the lead in achieving herd immunity in the world."

GAO FU
 CDC HEAD

China announced last week that it would waive a COVID-19 test and health form requirement for foreigners applying for visas to the mainland from Hong Kong if they have been vaccinated with a Chinese-made vaccine.

According to Global Times, the facilitation applies only to applicants who have been inoculated with COVID-19 vaccines produced in China, either having received two doses of Chinese-made vaccines with the stipulated gap in

between, or having received a single-dose Chinese-made vaccine at least 14 days prior to the application, and obtained the vaccination certificate, the office noted.

Proof of a negative COVID-19 nucleic acid test result and the Health and Travel Record Declaration Form for Visa Application are no longer required, according to the notice.

Aside from a vaccination certificate, non-Chinese nationals just have to provide the same amount of paperwork as they would before the pandemic, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' office in Hong Kong said. It also expanded the group of people who were eligible to apply for an emergency humanitarian visit, so that those who want to visit relatives may also apply.

All other applicants had to follow existing visa procedures.

This past week, China's Foreign Ministry launched an international travel health certificate that includes a COVID-19 test and serum antibody results, as well as vaccination and other health information. It is unclear how it will be implemented. **MDT/AGENCIES**



AP PHOTO

Sri Lanka announced plans to ban the wearing of burqas and said it would close more than 1,000 Islamic schools known as madrassas, citing national security. Minister of Public Security Sarath Weerasekara said he signed a paper seeking the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers to ban burqas — outer garments that cover the body and face worn by some Muslim women.



AP PHOTO

Russia Police in Moscow detained about 200 people participating in a forum of independent members of municipal councils, an action that came amid a multi-pronged crackdown on dissent by Russian authorities. Police showed up at the gathering shortly after it opened at a Moscow hotel, saying all those present would be detained for taking part in an event organized by an "undesirable" organization.

Afghanistan's interior minister said that Afghan security forces can hold their ground even if U.S. troops withdraw, challenging a warning from the United States predicting a withdrawal would yield quick territorial gains to the Taliban. Masoud Andarabi's comments in an interview were the first government reaction to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's warning issued in a sharply worded letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.



AP PHOTO

Kazakhstan A plane operated by state security agency crashed in the Central Asian country, killing four crew members and injuring two others, officials said. The ex-Soviet country's Emergencies Ministry said the two survivors were hospitalized. The ministry said the plane crashed while trying to land at the airport of Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty.