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THE THIRD BATCH OF 29,250 DOSES OF BIONTECH VACCINES ARRIVED IN MACAU AFTER BEING TRANSPORTED FROM GERMANY VIA HONG KONG

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FRESH GRADUATES STRUGGLE WITH JOB SEARCH DESPITE WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT LOW SALARY OFFERS

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CHINA'S AIR FORCE SENT 25 FIGHTERS AND BOMBERS OVER THE STRAIT ESCALATING MILITARY PRESSURE ON TAIPEI AS IT BOOSTS TIES WITH THE US

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Japan and Germany agreed in security talks yesterday to expand their military cooperation as the two nations shared concern about China's increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. At the so-called "two-plus-two" talks held online, the Japanese and German foreign ministers and defense ministers agreed to step up their cooperation in defense and military equipment and technology transfers based on their intelligence sharing pact signed in March.



Japan's government announced yesterday it would start releasing treated radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean in two years. It's a move that's fiercely opposed by fishermen, residents and Japan's neighbors. The decision, long speculated at but delayed for years because of safety worries and protests, came during a meeting of Cabinet ministers who endorsed the ocean release as the best option.



Pakistan Two demonstrators and a policeman were killed yesterday in violent clashes between Islamists and police in Pakistan, hours after authorities arrested the head of an Islamist party in the eastern city of Lahore, a senior official and local media reported. The policeman was killed in overnight clashes with the supporters of Saad Rizvi, the head of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan who was arrested on Monday, a senior police officer Ghulam Mohammad Dogar said.

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THE AL ACCORDING TO HO

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TOURISM
BOOKING DATA SHOWS RAPIDLY GROWING TOURIST DEMAND

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TOURISM

BOOKING DATA SUBSTANTIATES RAPIDLY GROWING TOURIST DEMAND

HONEY TSANG

BOOKING data released by Trip.com, the largest online travel agency in China, yesterday provided compelling evidence of China's rapidly growing tourism demand for travel to Macau during the forthcoming Labor Day holiday, also known as the May Day holiday or May Golden Week, from May 1 to 5.

As of April 8, the total number of bookings for Macau travel products during the May Day holiday through the Trip.com platform had risen by 20% compared to 2019, the group disclosed in a statement.

"The continuing rise in popularity among mainland Chinese travelers for destinations such as Macau further evidences the vast amount of pent-up travel demand that exists," Trip.com explained.

In addition, the search volume for flights in and out of Macau climbed by over 140% from [April], the group said.

A sharply rising demand for excursions in Macau also prompted the cost of air tickets to surge "rapidly" too. Accord-



ding to Trip.com, the average economy class fare in and out of Macau "increased by over 50%" from prices listed in early April.

According to a statement released by the market intelligence for the aviation and travel industry, CAPA, on April 12, Air Macau is planning to increase its route frequencies to Shanghai and Beijing ahead of the May Day holiday in order to capture the growing tourist demand.

The demand for accommodation in Macau has seen a sharp uptick as well. The num-

ber of bookings for Macau hotels through Ctrip, a platform within Trip.com Group, is double that of the same period in 2019.

Furthermore, the room price of high-end hotels increased "significantly" by around 30% from that of the Ching Ming Festival holiday in early April.

Currently, Macau is still the only city destination where mainland holidaymakers are not required to observe a 14-day mandatory quarantine period upon arrival and upon their return to China.

When there are still some weeks before the arrival of May Golden Week, Trip.com's optimistic statistics are heralding an accelerated rebound in Macau's tourism industry.

Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said earlier that she is anticipating an increase in tourist numbers in the coming Golden Week. However, this will be predicated on a stable pandemic situation in China, she added.

Apart from the MGTO, the international investment bank, JP Morgan, is also anticipating Macau's gross gaming revenue (GGR) to ramp up during the May holiday, partly due to a continuously improving travel desire and the release of pent-up travel demand among mainland tourists.

"We expect GGR to keep improving sequentially in April (MOP8.4-9.0 billion) and May (MOP11 billion), with the pace of recovery ramping-up from the May Golden Week, and to further accelerate into the second half with more re-opening and travel easing," the bank stated earlier.

CE: UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE OFF THE NEGOTIATION TABLE

A proposal from the Chief Executive (CE) to promote adjustments to Macau's political system is not currently part of discussions with the central government, Ho Iat Seng said yesterday at the Legislative Assembly.

Ho's position was stated in replies to inquiries from pro-democracy lawmakers Sulu Sou and Au Kam San, who raised the matter during yesterday's plenary session.

"About the political development [of Macau], currently I do not have this plan of presenting such a proposal to the central government because they already mentioned that Macau needs to be governed by patriots and so, for the time being, we cannot start this work [of developing the political system]," the CE said in reply to Sou, adding, "It's not me [who] can decide on this matter. We need to reach a consensus in society and only after that we can initiate that work."

Later in the evening, and as his last words before closing the session, Ho said in a reply to Au, "We need to do a retrospective and have a conjunctural view. During this legislative session [it] is not possible to conclude this work. Next year, I will think [further] about this matter," the CE concluded. **RM**

COVID-19

Third batch of mRNA vaccines arrived, gov't to conduct 'detailed' test

LYNZY VALLES

THE third batch of 29,250 doses of BioNTech vaccines arrived in Macau yesterday after being transported from Germany via Hong Kong, according to a statement issued by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre.

Upon the vaccines' arrival, the Health Bureau will conduct a "detailed test," and only start to use the batch after it is qualified.

According to the center, medical staff will strictly follow procedures to con-

duct a detailed inspection before each vial of vaccine is used to ensure that there are no abnormalities.

Last month, the health authority suspended inoculation using such vaccines due to packaging defects which are likely to have been caused by environmental factors across the course of the delivery process from Germany to Macau.

The remaining 90,000 doses of the first batch of mRNA vaccines will continue to be stored until the manufacturer makes a final

investigation report. The second and third batches of 48,750 doses of mRNA vaccines will be valid until August this year.

In order to reduce the waste caused by the expiration of vaccines, the authorities have negotiated with manufacturers to import them into Macau in multiple phases and small quantities. In addition, a total of about 4,000 doses from the second and third batch of mRNA vaccines have been used so far, and no problems have been found at this stage, the center said.

The three vaccination stations for the mRNA vaccine can provide 900 inoculations per day.

As of 4 p.m. yesterday, a total of 123,655 people had made appointments for the vaccination. Among them, a total of 71,196 people have been vaccinated, of which 46,732 people have received the first dose of vaccine, and 24,464 have received two doses of vaccination.

The center continuously calls on residents to receive Covid-19 jabs in an attempt to reach herd immunity.



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Economic support, unemployment, and housing top priorities in CE inquiry

RENATO MARQUES

MEASURES to support the economy during the pandemic, solutions to the growing unemployment among locals, and housing were three of the main topics chosen by the lawmakers in a Legislative Assembly (AL) during yesterday's session solely dedicated to asking the Chief Executive (CE), Ho Iat Seng, about issues related to the policy address for this year.

Lawmakers wanted the CE to explain how the third round of the economic stimulus measures, and namely the electronic consumption measures presented on Monday, will produce the expected effects and not just raise the inflation rate.

Replying to lawmaker Ho Ion Sang, the CE noted that the measure is not new and so the government has already gathered enough experience from last year's first two rounds to be confident that it will not cause any complications.

"Last year, when we presented a similar stimulus measure, the Consumer Price Index registered an increase [of just] 0.8%. We believe in the honesty of the establishments in Macau but still, the [economic] services will inspect [them] and we also [will have an] inspection done by the population," Ho said, noting that the measures announced on Monday by the Secretary for Economy and Finance have the potential to solve the pressures faced by citizens and, at the same time, support the local economy, namely, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Noting the two options given for the collection of the government support – consumption cards or through mobile payment applications – the CE urged citizens to choose the latter, noting its use can generate a wider range of benefits.

"Last year, when we launched the consumption cards, there were no payment platforms but now, we have eight platforms that people can use. This 5.9 billion [patacas] will be used in Macau independently of the person being not in Macau, [so] the money will stay in Macau," the CE said in a reply to lawmaker Sulu Sou, adding, "In a few days we will have more details [regarding] the benefits, and I hope the population can use their mobile phone to use these platforms, as the benefits will be [greater]." Ho also pointed out that the consumption card is a technology that does not support other functions and uses and so "it cannot provide the special dis-



counts that the platforms will provide." As a result, he urged the citizens to use the app option to be able to yield both the government benefits and the ones granted by the platform companies.

According to the CE, these extra benefits result from negotiations between the government and the companies.

Addressing the effectiveness of the stimulus measures that have until now been presented by the government, he added, "For the time being, the leverage rate has already reached 21.82%. This shows that there was a growth in consumption in Macau."

AL DEBATE ON STIMULUS WOULD BE 'USELESS'

Replying to an inquiry by lawmaker Sou, who accused the government of failing in the presentation of the measures of the third round of stimulus by not hearing the opinions of the AL, the CE remarked that the AL is not a consultative body of the government and that a debate on such a matter would not produce any effective result. It would not help the government to make decisions while contributing to the delay in the implementation of the measures, the CE said.

"The policies of the government do not need to be always presented to the AL [prior]. We

have the predominance of the executive power and we need to submit [the policies] for the approval of the AL to obtain funds [to implement them]. If the government is wrong, the AL can inspect the government's work, but to do a consultation at the AL would be [to consider] the AL as a decision body [from the government] which is not part of [ALs] competencies."

Ho established a hierarchy of powers in which the government comes first, followed by society. The AL would come third in the process of certifying the decision and allowing the application of the measures.

"If we need a debate or not, well, you can have a debate, but do we [government] need to wait for that debate to pursue our work? I don't think so! It's not [for] me to control or decide what is or not debated in the AL, that's a competence from AL but the legislative and the executive bodies are completely independent," the CE said, adding, "You can debate, but what is the result of that debate? It's to stall the work."

Emphasizing society's opinions, Ho said, "If society does not agree [with our plan], we stop, rethink and change the plan. I think this is the best method. Can the 33 lawmakers really represent the whole population? I think we col-

lected a lot of opinions to improve the method [without resorting to the lawmakers]."

The CE also took the opportunity to accuse Sou of, by himself, trying to be "an opposition camp" to all the measures of the government. "That logic is wrong. Each lawmaker should vote according to [his or her] analysis and not as an opposition camp," he concluded.

HOUSING IS GOV'T PRIORITY, AFTER PANDEMIC CONTROL

Finding solutions for the housing problems in Macau is the government's main task directly after pandemic prevention and control, the CE said in reply to an inquiry from lawmaker Ella Lei on the government's plans for public housing.

In the reply, Ho also noted that there is a lot of work to progress housing that is depending on the Urban Master Plan and the detailed plans that will come in sequence.

On the topic, the CE said that the government aims, from this year, to start offering tenders for the upcoming economic rental housing units to be built in Zone A of the new landfill sites.

Ho said that the goal is to build as many as 28,000 units at a rate of 4,000 to 5,000 a year.

In the meantime, he said that is

one of the government's tasks: to consider the need for additional housing units of this kind.

For the CE, the number should be enough, as he expects that that priority will change for the economic acquisition units, as well as the new type of public housing dedicated to the so-called "sandwich class."

Ho also admitted that the Wai Long project is still being reconsidered to determine whether such a project will or will not move towards construction:

"We need to see that we are in a different situation from the previous government [which decided to build public housing at Wai Long]. At the time, the government [of Chui Sai On] [did not have] enough land plots. But now we have enough land, so we need to consider also the environment of housing for our residents. So, we are considering building those 4,000 units in another place so the residents can have a more comfortable environment."

The CE also noted that 70% of the population is currently living in housing units from the private sector and that the government cannot ignore the fact that the proliferation of too many public housing developments will make the value of the private market drop, harming those that acquired them.

Satellite casino allegedly used ploy to coerce staff to resign

HONEY TSANG

IT has been alleged that Casino Rio, a satellite casino under the Galaxy Entertainment Group, willfully put a group of long-serving local employees into a tight corner at work, intending to pressure them into resigning, the New Macau Gaming Staff Rights Association stated yesterday.

The strong-arm tactic the casino allegedly exploited was to relocate the employees, most over the age of 40 and having served over a decade at the surveillance department at Casino Rio, to two casinos at Star World Hotel and Galaxy Hotel without offering any training to help them acclimatize to new working procedures.

Yesterday afternoon, Cloe Chao, the president of the Association, together with some individuals involved in this tactic, delivered a petition letter to the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and urged the authority to address the problem.

Chao regarded the move by Casino Rio as "unacceptable," and suspected that its underlying intention was to pressure the staff to resign so that they could shirk the obligation to outlaying employees' severance payments before the re-



Mr. Vu, one of the employees forced to relocate to StarWorld casino in August 2020

newal of casino license.

A total of 12 employees were transposed to new posts without choice. Among them, 11 resigned, Mr. Vu, one of the employees forced to relocate to StarWorld casino in August 2020.

"We were forced to work in much bigger and more skill-demanding casinos without being given any proper training. But whenever we made a mistake, we received a warning letter from the management, who stressed that we would be dismissed after receiving three warnings," Vu said while addressing the press yesterday.

Putting the staff in tough working environments without giving them any coaching and showing them no mercy on their mistakes is no different from putting them in the hot seat, Vu said.

Staff at the surveillance department are responsible for monitoring areas at casinos to catch any illegal acts carried out by guests or others.

Compared to Casino Rio, which only has several surveillance systems, each casino at Star World Hotel or Galaxy Hotel has more than 20 surveillance systems and larger floor areas — which were completely new to the relocated

employees, requiring time for Vu and his former colleagues to memorize and learn.

The total amount of the severance payment the casino is obliged to pay a long-serving staff member before the renewal of the casino license is estimated to be around MOP250,000, Vu said.

Since 2019, the 12 concerned staff, all Macau residents, were relocated in batches to other casinos. No bluecard holders were involved. It is said that the casino is planning to relocate another batch from the surveillance department this coming September, Vu said.

The casino surveillance department is a comparatively small team with fewer staff. By targeting them, the casino would receive the least complaints, Chao believed.

Macau's satellite casinos, despite being under the name of casino licensees, are individual entities with independent operation. Considering the period of renewal for casino licenses is approaching, the association expressed concerns that other satellite casinos may turn to similar ploys to coerce their staff to resign.

Vu disclosed to the Times that he resigned in September last year.

NUMBER OF MENTAL HELP-SEEKERS AT RECORD HIGHS

THE number of locals seeking medical help has "surged" in 2021 due to ongoing worries caused by the pandemic, according to the Women's General Association of Macau.

On the sidelines of an event yesterday, Lao Chan Fon, director of Psychology at the Psychotherapy Center of the association, told the media that the number of people seeking help from the association's dedicated mental health treatment center has increased by 1.8 to 1.9 times this year.

As of January 2021, the monthly tally of new help-seekers averaged around 100 or even higher — which broke the record since the center's establishment in 2012, Lao said, adding that he was "shocked" by such a large figure.

Over the past six months, the majority of the individuals seeking help from the center have been local youths. Lao said the teenagers' awareness of seeking help has been increasing.

Of all cases received by the association, 90% of help-seekers have emotional problems to various degrees, and another 60% were troubled by interpersonal relationships. HT

GALAXY CINEMAS REBRANDED, 'UA' APPELLATION DROPPED

THE former UA Galaxy Cinemas at Galaxy Macau integrated resort has recently been rebranded as "Galaxy Cinemas."

The rebranding comes after the cinema chain UA Cinema went under in Hong Kong in March.

The shutdown of the 36-year-old brand in Hong Kong was ascribed to the economic fallout caused by the pandemic. The company announced earlier that it had applied for voluntary liquidation.

Galaxy Macau announced that its cinema at Macau would continue in its normal operation.

On its official website, the entity has already been renamed to "Galaxy Cinemas," with the appellation "UA" being removed.

The formerly-titled UA Galaxy Cinemas was opened by the Galaxy Entertainment Group (Group) on December 15, 2011. HT



MACAO ART FESTIVAL

Contemporary photography exhibition opens Friday



THE exhibition "A Room with a View - Baptiste Rabichon Photography Exhibition," is set to open this Friday at Tap Seac Gallery at 6:30 p.m. as part of the 31st Macao Art Festival (MAF).

Organized by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the exhibition will display photographic works by French contemporary photographer Baptiste Rabichon.

This exhibition features 41 pieces and sets of of contemporary photographic

works across five series: Albums, Dad's Shirts, Lodhi Gardens Trees, Balconies, and Manhattan Drawings. The works by Rabichon present a "realistic yet hallucinatory and amazing context through his artistic technique that combines both conventional and innovative elements and mixes analogue photography, digital images, and projection of everyday objects," IC said in a statement.

Rabichon studied at several French art

schools and graduated from Le Fresnoy - Studio National des Arts Contemporains in 2017. After graduation, Rabichon stood out across a number of international exhibitions with his unique works. He won the BMW Residency in 2017 and the Moly-Sabata/Salon de Montrouge prize in 2018 respectively, and was selected as a resident artist of the Cité Internationale des Arts in 2019 and 2020.

"A Room with a View - Baptiste Rabichon Photography Exhibition" will be open until June 27.

IC said it will strictly follow the relevant anti-epidemic guidelines from health authorities and implement appropriate measures for cultural activities. LV

EMPLOYMENT

Fresh graduates facing tougher time in finding jobs

LYNZY VALLES

NEW graduates are now facing an even tougher time in seeking employment compared to last year, despite the positive projection for the city's current economy and the large number of positions available at university job fairs.

The latest official statistics show that the unemployment rate of local residents stood at 3.9% for the period December 2020 to February 2021, a rise of 0.2% points from the previous period of November 2020 to January 2021.

Meanwhile, university career fairs show that there are over 1,000 job and internship vacancies from different companies. It was estimated that 9,000 local university students graduated last year, of which 51% graduated from Macau universities, while the remainder were enrolled in schools in other regions or countries.

Managing director of TalentGroup Asia, Alan Chan, told the Times, "We are seeing new graduates facing even tougher time in finding jobs compared to last year."

"I think the sentiment is that the economy will improve starting this summer but not to the extent like it was 2018 all



over again," he added.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said that the Macau SAR's economy is expected to record a staggering growth of 61.2% year-on-year in 2021, after last year's economy fell 56.3% due to the pandemic outbreak.

For now, recruitment agencies are eyeing the pre-opening phase of The Grand Lisboa Palace and Lisboaeta, as the two are now starting to ramp up their recruitment campaign, which will help with the labor market.

However, the enterprises, according to Chan, are currently focusing on hiring experienced employees.

"We are expecting

them to start [entry-level] positions hiring as they get closer to the openings," he said.

Last year, the Macau Human Resources Association said it believes that university students set to graduate will have a lower starting monthly salary than those in previous years given local companies' cautiousness with recruitment, as many corporations are considering the effect of the pandemic on their operations. The association's data shows that university graduates' starting salaries were between 15,000 and 16,000 patacas in 2019. However, the group estimated that first-time job seekers in 2020 may be

new graduates willing to accept a salary of around 10,000 to 11,000 patacas just to get into large company. The absolute minimum was 12,000 patacas a few years back."

Despite fresh graduates willing to accept lower salaries this year, the recruitment company said that there are still a large portion of graduates from last year who are being employed on a part-time basis.

"Established companies are looking into switching to more part-time hiring because it will provide flexible for their business needs and they only pay as business spikes. Aside from the cost factor, it is also easier to find part time workers in this economy compared to before Covid-19," said Chan.

offered monthly salaries of 10,000 patacas or even less.

Chan voiced similar sentiments. "We see some

NEW DEPARTMENT INSPECTING LIFTS TO OPEN IN H2

The Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau is set to establish a new dedicated department to inspect and ensure the safety of over 9,000 elevators, escalators and automatic walking systems in the second half of 2021, said Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo Arrais do Rosário on the sidelines of an event yesterday. Rosário said the authorities would soon conduct public consultation about the details of the department and its establishment before enacting the new department in legislation.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SUPPORTS REVISED E-VOUCHER SCHEME

The President of Macao Chamber of Commerce (ACM) Ma lao Lai declared his support for the government's revised e-voucher scheme announced yesterday. He said the revised scheme is a testament to the government's willingness to listen to public opinion. He believes the new program offers greater convenience to local consumers and will be conducive to stimulating domestic spending and revitalizing the city's economy.

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

PHILIPPINES SUMMONS CHINESE AMBASSADOR OVER REEF DISPUTE

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

THE Philippine government summoned the Chinese ambassador to press its demand for Chinese vessels to immediately leave a reef claimed by Manila in the South China Sea and said their presence was stoking tensions, officials said yesterday.

The escalating feud between Manila and Beijing started after more than 200 Chinese vessels suspected by Philippine authorities to be operated by militias were spotted early last month at Whitsun Reef. The Philippine government demanded the vessels leave then deployed coast guard and patrol vessels to the area but China said it owns the reef and the Chinese vessels were sheltering from rough seas.

After summoning Ambassador Huang Xilian on Monday, Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Elizabeth Buensuceso expressed to him Manila's "displeasure over the illegal lingering presence of Chinese vessels around Julian Felipe Reef," the foreign affairs department said in a statement, using the Philippine name for Whitsun Reef in the most hotly disputed Spratlys region of the busy waterway.



AP PHOTO

"The continuing presence of Chinese vessels around the reef is a source of regional tension," Buensuceso said.

She reiterated to Huang that the reef, which lies about 175 nautical miles west of the Philippine

province of Palawan, is within an internationally recognized offshore zone where Manila has the exclusive right to exploit fisheries, oil, gas and other resources.

She also cited a 2016 ruling in an international arbitration case

the Philippines brought against China that invalidated Beijing's vast claims on historical grounds to virtually all of the South China Sea under a 1982 U.N. maritime treaty.

The Philippine military has

said aerial surveillance showed some of the Chinese vessels have left the reef but more than 40 remained moored in the area in late March. It debunked China's claim that the vessels were sheltering from rough seas saying the weather has been fine around the reef.

The United States has said it would stand by the Philippines amid the standoff. The Department of National Defense in Manila said last week that the Philippines could seek the help of the U.S., with which it has a mutual defense treaty, to protect its interests in the South China Sea.

The Philippines' high-profile protests against China over Whitsun has unfolded amid the cozier relations President Rodrigo Duterte nurtured with China after taking office in mid-2016. Duterte has been repeatedly criticized for not immediately demanding Chinese compliance with the 2016 arbitration ruling and taking a stronger stand against China's actions in the disputed waters.

The Spratly chain of islands, islets and atolls are claimed entirely or partly by China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei. China has turned seven disputed reefs into missile-protected island bases in recent years, ratcheting up tensions in what has long been feared as a potential flashpoint in Asia. **MDT/AP**

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STRAIT TENSIONS

China sends 25 warplanes near Taiwan in biggest drill this year

CHINA'S air force sent 25 fighters and bombers over the Taiwan Strait, escalating military pressure on the government in Taipei as it boosts ties with the U.S.

Beijing deployed 14 J-16 and four J-10 fighters, four H-6K bombers, two Y-8 anti-sub warfare planes and one KJ-500 early warning aircraft into the southwest section of Taiwan's air defense identification zone Monday, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said in a statement.

The sortie was the largest China has sent toward Taiwan this year. The ministry said Taiwan's air force responded by sending patrol aircraft to the area and tracking the Chinese planes with missile defense systems.

Chinese military activity has steadily picked up around democratically ruled Taiwan in recent months. The Chinese Defense Ministry said last week that the Liaoning aircraft carrier had carried out exercises near Taiwan recently and the navy is planning more drills. The People's Liberation Army also said that it monitored the USS John S. McCain destroyer as it sailed through the Taiwan Strait.

Washington and Beijing have been issuing warnings to each other regarding Taiwan since President Joe



BLOOMBERG

Biden took office in January, adding to tensions that increased steadily during the Trump administration. On Sunday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said China should avoid encroaching on Taiwan, adding Beijing was fomenting tensions in the strait with "aggressive actions."

The State Department said in January that Washington had a "rock solid" commitment to Taipei

after China flew more than a dozen military aircraft, including the H-6K bombers, over the strait. The bombers are believed to be capable of carrying land-attack cruise missiles.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi used an annual press briefing last month to warn the Biden administration to be careful in its dealings with Taipei. Wang said the U.S. should stop "crossing lines and playing

with fire," adding there was "no room for compromise or concessions" in Beijing's claim to sovereignty over Taiwan.

The U.S. on Friday restored rules governing officials' contacts with Taiwan that were lifted near the end of the Trump administration, a step intended to help return some semblance of order to ties between Washington and Taipei. China claims Taiwan as its own territory, but it has governed itself since 1949.

The State Department didn't detail ways in which the guidelines will be loosened. But two people familiar with the move said that U.S. officials would be allowed to host Taiwanese officials at U.S. federal buildings and meet Taiwanese counterparts at its government offices.

The latest guidance "underscores Taiwan is a vibrant

democracy and an important security and economic partner that is also a force for good in the international community," spokesman Ned Price said.

Late last month Washington and Taipei agreed to boost cooperation between their coast guards amid efforts by China to deploy its coast guard and civilian fishing fleets to assert territorial claims.

That move came after the U.S. voiced concern over the presence of more than 200 Chinese fishing vessels near a disputed reef in the South China Sea. China has said the ships were only sheltering from the wind.

The U.S. is carrying out "strategic planning" with its Australian ally to consider potential joint responses to a war over Taiwan, Michael Goldman, the U.S.'s top diplomat in Canberra has said.

"We're committed as allies to working together - not only in making our militaries interoperable and functioning well together, but also in strategic planning," Goldman, the U.S. Embassy's chargé d'affaires, said in an a podcast released April 1. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

TAIPEI LAUNCHES SHIPBUILDING PROGRAM AMID CHINA THREATS

TAIWAN launched an amphibious transport ship yesterday that's the first from its new naval shipbuilding program begun as China escalates its threats to use military force to annex the island it claims is its territory.

President Tsai Ing-wen presided over the launching ceremony at a shipyard in the southern port city of Kaohsiung for the first in the series of ships intended as a defense against any Chinese invasion.

The ship is "designed

and built in accordance with the needs of national defense combat training," Tsai said.

She also called the launch of the new line of 10,000-ton amphibious transport ships an "important milestone for the national shipbuilding in our country."

Taiwan has been boosting its domestic military industries, including building ships and submarines, and is upgrading facilities on the Pratas Islands in the South China Sea that are also claimed by China.

Along with the main island of Taiwan, the government controls territory close to China, including the Kinmen, Matsu and Pescadore island groups that need constant replenishment.

In a pattern of advertising its threats to claim Taiwan by force if necessary, China sent 25 warplanes into Taiwan's southern aerial space on Monday, the Defense Ministry said. It also recently staged naval exercises with its Liaoning aircraft carrier near Taiwan recently. **MDT/AP**

HOLIDAY RENTAL HOUSES

Lugar das Letras Casa de Gouvães

The houses are set in the heart of the World Heritage Site of the Douro Valley and its famous winery landscape where the worlds Ports are produced. Both restored relics overlooking the Rio Douro, these eight rooms houses have been blessed with gorgeous wooden floors, plush queen beds and marble baths; the best have dazzling river views. But it is the welcome that makes this place stand out from the crowd.

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AP PHOTO



RELIGION

Muslims open Ramadan with social distanced prayers, vaccines

NINIEK KARMINI,
JAKARTA

MUSLIMS began marking Ramadan with communal prayers yesterday in a socially distanced contrast to the empty mosques of a year ago when Islam's holiest month coincided with the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 cases are spiking in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, but vaccines are being administered and the government is loosening restrictions. Mosques were allowed to open for Ramadan prayers with strict health protocols in place, and with malls and cafes open, passers-by could again see curtains shielding the sight of food from people fasting.

Neighboring Muslim-majority Malaysia also eased its restrictions, including last year's ban on "taraweeh" nighttime prayers and allowing popular open-air bazaars selling food, drinks and clothes to open.

Indonesia's Religious Affairs Minister Yaquut Cholil Qoumas announced in a televised address Monday evening that the new Ramadan moon had been spotted. The holy month is marked by intense prayer,

dawn-to-dusk fasting and nightly feasts.

Last year, authorities shuttered all mosques and clerics issued a fatwa, or edict, urging Muslims to pray at home over the holy month rather than congregate in crowded spaces and risk spreading the virus.

Muslims this year are expecting a virus resurgence but all mosques will be continuing to adhere to social distancing and other precautions, which will significantly reduce crowds, said Nasaruddin Umar, imam of Jakarta's Istiqlal grand mosque.

"I miss everything of Ramadan already," Umar said, "The heart of faithful Muslims is tied to the mosque... the longing for Ramadan lovers has finally been relieved today although the pandemic has not yet ended."

In the capital, Jakarta, authorities disinfected 317 mosques on Sunday in preparation for Ramadan, said Jakarta Gov. Anies Baswedan. Social distancing markers have been installed and soap and hand sanitizers have been prepared.

The government also will allow people to hold "iftar" gatherings during Ramadan in restaurants, malls and cafes, which can serve customers up to 50% of their capacity and follow strict

health guidelines.

Iftar occurs at sunset, the time Muslims break their fast and usually the prime time for people to have dinner together with friends and family members before the night prayer.

"Easing restrictions is like a breath of fresh air for us who are tired by this COVID-19 outbreak," said Anna Mardiyastuti, a resident in Jakarta. "Yes, they should act to stop the virus, but not block the door to worship or to change our tradition of Ramadan entirely," she said.

In Malaysia, Wan Noradriana Balqis, 21, welcomed the return of community prayers in mosques but said she will avoid Ramadan bazaars that are often packed with people.

"I don't think it's a good idea to reopen the bazaars. The rules are there but many people don't follow them," the database administrative officer said.

Malaysia's coronavirus cases have more than tripled since January to more than 362,000, with daily increases exceeding 1,000. Indonesia is the worst-hit country in Southeast Asia with over 1.5 million infections as of Monday and more than 42,600 deaths.

Indonesia will maintain its vaccine rollout through

Ramadan as officials tried to ease worries over the Islamic teaching that Muslims should refrain "from anything entering the body" between sunrise and sunset.

Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body said Muslims eligible for vaccinations are not only allowed but "required" to get them during Ramadan.

Although Muslims abstain from all food and drink in daylight hours during Ramadan, the vaccine enters muscle rather than the bloodstream and is not nutrition, so it does not invalidate fasting, said Asrorun Niam Sholeh, the head of fatwas for the Indonesian Ulema Council.

"If we carry on taking our vaccines, we can ensure that next Ramadan we do return to some normality," Sholeh said.

Some vaccine sites in Jakarta are extending their opening hours so Muslims can come after they have broken their fast.

Indonesia plans to vaccinate two-thirds of its population of about 270 million people — or just over 180 million people by the end of next year. The current priorities are health care workers, elderly and other at-risk populations, and the two-dose vaccine will be free for all Indonesians. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1968 BERLIN STUDENT UNREST WORSENS



A massive student rally in West Berlin has ended in violent clashes between police and protesters.

Students blocked the city's main thoroughfare, the Kurfurstendamm, in protest at the shooting last week of one of their leaders, Rudi Dutschke.

Mr Dutschke was shot three times outside the offices of the German Socialist Students Federation (SDS).

He is still seriously ill in hospital.

Students chanted Mr Dutschke's name interspersed with shouts of "Murderer Springer" - a reference to millionaire publisher Axel Springer.

Students blame Mr Springer's papers for inflaming public opinion against them and say the man who shot Mr Dutschke was influenced by views expressed in a Springer publication.

Since the attack on Mr Dutschke students have been attempting to hinder distribution of Springer papers which include the mass circulation tabloid Bild Zeitung.

As huge traffic backlogs built up around the Kurfurstendamm police used water cannon and officers on horseback to disperse the protesters.

More than 180 people were arrested.

Peter Brandt, son of the West German foreign minister, Willy Brandt, was among those detained.

Later there were clashes outside three police barracks where marchers had gathered in anticipation of the release of some of those arrested.

Student dissent has been growing for some time in West Germany with the SDS organising sit-ins and non-violent demonstrations.

However, more aggressive action has been taken since the death in June last year of student Benno Ohnesorg.

He was shot by a police officer during a demonstration against the visit of the Shah of Iran to Berlin.

The SDS is part of the Extra-parliamentary Opposition group set up in 1966.

It consists of student associations, trades unions, writers and other who believe there is currently no effective parliamentary opposition to the ruling Social Democrats.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Student leader Rudi Dutschke survived being shot but his injuries contributed to his death in 1979.

In 1969 the man who shot him, carpenter Joseph Bachman, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.

He committed suicide while in prison.

The Berlin student unrest mirrored protests by young people around the world in the late 1960s.

In the US, young people demonstrated against the Vietnam war while in Paris students rioted over the "bourgeois" university system and the "police state".

However, by the early 1970s the German student movement was fractured and had lost much of its impetus and influence.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Don't ruffle the feathers of those you care about most. Avoid friends or acquaintances who drink too much. Minor fevers or infections will develop if you're over-stressed.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Be cautious not to get involved in office chatter that will cause problems for others. You can't win and they won't listen. False information from someone trying to start problems is likely.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Invite friends over. Sudden good fortune will help you cover your debts. Coworkers may not be giving you all the pertinent information.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Try to slow down, and take another look. Expect to have problems with the ones you love. Beware of someone who is trying to make you look bad.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Stick to travel or do things in conjunction with groups. Be courteous if you wish to avoid major delays. Don't be too confident that coworkers are on your side.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Deception regarding joint finances or investments will cause upsets between family members. Your emotional partner will push all the right buttons today. You have the ability to motivate others.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Use your high energy and dynamic approach to win favors from superiors. Keep your ears open, especially to those who care about you. Avoid scandals of any sort.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

The great outdoors will allow you to teach youngsters some of the things you learned when growing up. You need to look into ways to change your self-image.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You should be getting into self-improvement projects. Try to have patience and refrain from being judgmental. Consider selling your homemade crafts at the flea market.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Be creative in your efforts. Catch up on any correspondence you've neglected. You will find travel and lectures most stimulating. You must steer clear of overindulgent individuals.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Your family needs to spend some time with you, too. Deception is likely. Try to keep to yourself; work diligently on domestic chores and responsibilities.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Your passionate nature may make you jealous if your mate has been too busy to take care of your needs. Don't let your partner start any arguments. Passion should be redirected positively.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

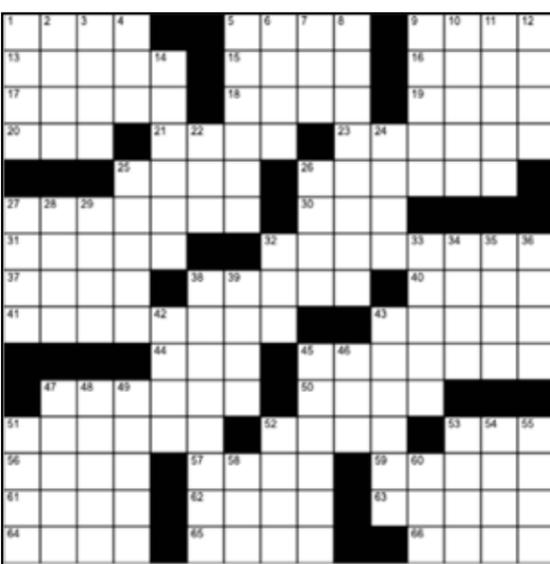
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	10	18	cloudy
Harbin	0	15	clear
Tianjin	12	17	cloudy
Urumqi	0	9	clear
Xi'an	10	12	drizzle
Lhasa	5	18	cloudy
Chengdu	14	18	overcast
Chongqing	18	22	drizzle
Kunming	15	26	cloudy
Nanjing	14	18	overcast
Shanghai	14	20	drizzle
Wuhan	12	15	drizzle
Hangzhou	16	22	drizzle to moderate rain
Taipei	21	26	cloudy
Guangzhou	24	30	cloudy
Hong Kong	25	30	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	3	7	drizzle
Frankfurt	7	22	clear
Paris	9	20	clear
London	6	20	clear
New York	8	15	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Annika Sorenstam's org.; 5- Aggregate; 9- Author ___ Christian Andersen; 13- Ancient region of Asia Minor; 15- Kon-Tiki Museum site; 16- Very much; 17- Picture border; 18- It's over your head; 19- Intestinal sections; 20- Asian holiday; 21- Flub; 23- Captivating; 25- Mariners can sail on seven of these; 26- Exist in great numbers; 27- Capital of New Mexico; 30- Summer shade; 31- Extra-terrestrial being; 32- Chosen; 37- Long luxuriant hair; 38- The Hilton, e.g.; 40- Mandlikova of tennis; 41- Ancient musical instrument; 43- Mr. ___ (handyman); 44- White linen vestment, usually worn by priests; 45- Self-destruction; 47- Vagrants; 50- Confer; 51- Drive forward; 52- Monk's hood; 53- Begley and Wynn; 56- Emilia's husband; 57- Actress Raines; 59- Result; 61- Boot attachment; 62- Chair; 63- Race official; 64- I'd hate to break up ___; 65- Lacking; 66- Hotbed;

DOWN 1- Hoist; 2- Go (over) carefully; 3- Little biter; 4- Goal, intention; 5- Sullenly ill-humored; 6- From; 7- ___-pitch softball; 8- Form of baseball; 9- Japanese three-line verse; 10- Exhausted; 11- Very much; 12- All-male; 14- Mediterranean arm; 22- Idiot; 24- Tops; 25- Alloy of iron and carbon; 26- To ___ (perfectly); 27- Coarsely ground corn; 28- Melodramatic cry; 29- Actress Foch; 32- Hog's home; 33- Young bird; 34- Cab; 35- Oklahoma city; 36- Go out with; 38- Vulnerable; 39- Eyes, poetically; 42- Domesticated; 43- Boneless slice of meat; 45- Summer ermines; 46- Motor City gp.; 47- Snares; 48- Scoundrel; 49- To the left, at sea; 51- Galileo's birthplace; 52- Extended family unit; 53- Salinger girl; 54- Membership fees; 55- Spanish muralist; 58- Actress Thompson; 60- Diarist Anais;



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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AD

TECHNOLOGY

CHINA WARNS 34 FIRMS TO CURB EXCESS IN ANTITRUST REVIEW

ZHEPING HUANG

CHINA ordered 34 internet corporations yesterday to rectify their anti-competitive practices within the next month, signaling that Beijing's scrutiny of its most powerful firms hasn't ended with the conclusion of a probe into Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.

Shares in Tencent Holdings Ltd. and Meituan extended losses after the State Administration for Market Regulation issued a stern statement emphasizing it will continue to eradicate abuses of information and market dominance among other violations. Also summoned to an ad-hoc meeting with the watchdog yesterday were industry leaders including TikTok owner ByteDance Ltd., search giant Baidu Inc. and JD.com Inc.

Regulators warned internet companies to "heed Alibaba's example," reaffirming their intent to abolish forced exclusivity among other practices. The meeting - organized jointly with the cyberspace and tax regulators - came days after Beijing wrapped up a four-month probe into Alibaba by slapping a record \$2.8 billion fine on the e-commerce giant for abuse of market dominance.



The penalty was less severe than many feared and lifted a cloud of uncertainty hanging over founder Jack Ma's internet empire. It also came after the Chinese central bank ordered an overhaul of his Ant Group Co. fintech titan.

Alibaba's shares have gained 7% since the start of the week, but its fellow Chinese internet giants have gyrated while investors digest the rapid-fire announcements and concerns grow that Beijing's scrutiny will extend beyond Alibaba. Yesterday, Tencent gave up early gains to finish down slightly while Meituan, video service Kuaishou Techno-

logy and JD all slid more than 3% in Hong Kong.

"The base line of policies cannot be crossed, the red line of laws cannot be touched," the market watchdog said in the statement.

The investigation into Alibaba was one of the opening salvos in a campaign seemingly designed to curb the power of China's internet leaders, which kicked off after Ma infamously rebuked "pawn shop" lenders, regulators who don't get the internet, and the "old men" of the global banking community. Those comments set in motion an unprecedented regulatory offensive,

including scuttling Ant's \$35 billion initial public offering.

The 34 firms summoned yesterday must now undergo complete rectification after conducting internal checks and inspections over the next month, and make a pledge to society to obey rules and laws, the antitrust watchdog said in its statement. Regulators will organize follow-up inspections and companies that continue to engage in abuses like forced exclusivity - a practice that "flagrantly trampled and destroyed" market order - will be dealt with severely. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

ECONOMY

CHINA'S MARCH EXPORTS RISE 30.6% AS GLOBAL DEMAND REVIVES

CHINA'S exports rose 30.6% over a year ago in March as global consumer demand strengthened and traders watched for signs of what President Joe Biden might do about reviving tariff war talks with Beijing.

Exports rose to \$241.1 billion, decelerating from the dramatic 60.6% rebound in the first two months of 2021, customs data showed Tuesday. Imports rose 38.1% over a year ago to \$227.3 billion in a sign of reviving Chinese activity.

That is a "positive signal that global economic and trade activities are recovering and market confidence increasing," a spokesman for the customs bureau, Li Kuiwen, said at a news conference. Li warned, however, that "the world economic situation still is complicated and severe."

China's exporters have benefited from the relatively early reopening of its economy while some other governments are re-imposing anti-virus curbs that limit business and trade.

Exports to the United States jumped 53.6% in March to \$38.7 billion despite tariff hikes still in place on Chinese goods in a trade war launched by former President Donald Trump over Beijing's technology ambitions.

Imports of U.S. goods, also still under Chinese

retaliatory duties, soared 74.7% to \$17.3 billion.

Beijing promised to buy more American soybeans, natural gas and other exports while the two sides postponed more tariff hikes. Most penalties on each other's goods stayed in place.

China fell behind on meeting its purchase commitments but started to catch up as demand rebounded.

China's global trade surplus narrowed by 30.6% in March from a year earlier to \$13.8 billion.

The politically volatile surplus with the United States rose 39% to \$21.4 billion.

Chinese trade figures look especially dramatic compared with early 2020, when the ruling Communist Party shut factories to fight the virus and trade plunged.

For the first three months of 2021, exports jumped 49% over a year earlier to \$710 billion. Imports rose 28% to \$593.6 billion

The ruling party set an economic growth target of "over 6%" this year, which should help propel demand for foreign oil, iron ore, food, consumer goods and other imports.

Exports to the 27-nation European union were \$36.6 billion while imports of European goods were \$27.5 billion. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Melco co-organizes program on women's mental wellness



The Women's General Association of Macau and Melco Resorts & Entertainment co-organized an inauguration ceremony for the "Feel Better - Women's Personal Development and Support Program" followed by a mental wellness seminar yesterday.

The program aims to provide citizens with a range of psychological counseling and assistance through various emotional wellness support services.

Akiko Takahashi, executive vice president and chief of staff to chairman and CEO

of Melco Resorts & Entertainment, said, "Melco has collaborated with the Women's General Association of Macau for many years. [...] Abundant social resources are also of huge importance. We believe that the program will provide a professional platform of communications to help the community feel better.

"Since the company's inception, Melco has focused on initiatives for women and furthering gender equality at all levels to support diversity and inclusion. [...] We strive to continue developing targeted initiatives to help all members of the community live well and feel better," the executive added.

The Ritz-Carlton launches springtime offers



The Ritz-Carlton Macau is offering seasonal menus at Lai Heen, The Ritz-Carlton Bar & Lounge and The Ritz-Carlton Café, as well as a spa treatment at The Ritz-Carlton Spa.

Lai Heen's tea sommelier selected only the premium

Pre-Qingming Longjing Tea from Hangzhou West Lake, which features "unique aromatic sense and mellow flavor," to craft the "Chinese Tea Culture Tasting Lunch Experience."

At the Ritz-Carlton Bar & Lounge, the "Spring Blossom

Afternoon Tea Set" is presented in a classic three-tiered stan featuring savory favorites of Wild Mushroom Vol-Au-Ventand Foie Gras Torchon with Raspberry Gelee and Kataifi, along with buttery scones.

The Ritz-Carlton Café, meanwhile, is offering 'Eat Fresh' Spring Delights Degustation Menu, available on weekdays throughout the month of April

The hotel's spa is presenting a "Spring Rejuvenation" journey with an aromatherapy full body hot stone massage, followed by cooling jade stones to soothe the stressed muscles and release tension.

STEPHEN WADE, TOKYO

OLYMPICS

Torch runs through empty park in Osaka as cases rise

THE torch relay for the Tokyo Olympics ran through a mostly empty Osaka city park yesterday, showing the risks of trying to hold the postponed games during a pandemic.

It came on the same day that the government said new coronavirus cases in Osaka hit 1,099, a single-day record for Japan's second largest metropolitan area.

The torch relay began three weeks ago in northeastern Japan, attempting to navigate around the pandemic with a total of 10,000 runners crisscrossing the country and bound for the opening ceremony on July 23 in Tokyo.

Osaka, which announced plans last week to take the relay off city streets and bar the public, became the first detour since the relay began. Organizers warned beforehand there may be more.

Wednesday's second leg in Osaka — the day the Tokyo countdown clock hits 100 day to go — will be in the same park under the same closed-doors conditions.

New COVID-19 cases are rising across Japan, where fewer than 1% of residents have been vaccinated in very slow rollout.

Japan has attributed about 9,500 deaths to COVID-19, far fewer than many countries but hi-

AP PHOTO



Former Olympian Aya Terakawa participates as an Olympic torch relay runner in Osaka

gher than most neighbors in Asia.

Osaka, Tokyo and other parts of Japan have declared "quasi-emergency" conditions until early May

with bars and restaurants being asked to close by 8 p.m.

Many runners arrived in Osaka's Expo '70 Commemorative

Park by bus and ran short legs carrying the torch alongside metal barriers or in empty park space.

They were accompanied by

security officials who jogged or walked alongside, and followed by an "escort" or "promotional" vehicle festooned with logos of major Olympic sponsors Coca-Cola and Toyota.

After the postponement a year ago, organizers talked of doing away with the relay to save money. That idea never gained traction, largely because it's promoted by some of the IOC's largest sponsors.

The top sponsors paid the International Olympic Committee \$1 billion in the last full Olympic cycle (2013-2016). That number could double when the next cycle is completed with the postponed Tokyo Games.

A poll conducted Saturday and Monday by Japanese news agency Kyodo showed 13.2% want the relay to continue until the opening ceremony. Another 49.3% said the relay should be canceled in areas with severe outbreaks, and 35.9% said it should be called off entirely.

Opposition to holding the Olympics in a pandemic is also strong in Japan with up to 80% saying the games should be canceled or postponed.

The Olympics and Paralympics are expected to draw 15,400 athletes and tens of thousands of officials, judges, media and broadcasters. Fans from abroad have been banned. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

Our Desk

Renato Marques, MDT



MACAU'S (NEW) LOW STANDARDS

In a region that survives almost exclusively on tourism and the service sector, we should expect that its service standards would be of a so-called "world-class level."

In reality, the attempt to transform this ancient trading port into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, the word "class" seems to have been forgotten somewhere along the way.

If it is true that in the early part of the process of gaming liberalization, Macau developed exponentially and significantly expanded its offerings of five-star hotels, renowned restaurants, and other services for tourists, much of which also benefited locals, it is also true that the enforcement of rules and standards has faded and, to me, far faster than expected.

Probably the best example of what I am saying can be found in the multimillion-dollar hotel units from the Peninsula to Cotai, where the service prices and brand tags seem to belie the service standard.

If in the past we kept blaming the high number of visitors for the rushed, careless and (sometimes) even rude service provided by these places, the current situation seems to have removed that flimsy explanation to reveal the truth behind such service.

One would have thought that with the Covid-19 pandemic and border restrictions imposed on the tourists that caused Macau to, at least somewhat, return to its old days, the service provided by the hospitality industry would improve as they now, more than ever, need to cater to all those who continue to choose to spend their money across these premises.

In reality, that is exactly the opposite of what is happening. The unimpressive standards are plummeting to something that I have decided to call the "new low."

"There is nothing worse than bad customer service," someone once said, trying to explain that even inexpensiveness does not justify poor quality. This comment suggests that many people do not mind paying a little extra for a better experience, especially when they are on holidays, or trying to relax away from everyday stress.

A couple of months ago, the director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, Helena de Sena Fernandes, noted multiple times that the figures expected for tourism recovery this year are not so optimistic, so the secret of recovery would be in "taking good care of those that will come" to ensure the image of Macau is not just a "safe place to travel to" but also a quality destination.

The current level of service shows that such ideas have not yet reached the management of highly-renowned brands in Macau. Instead, these places seem to be much more concerned with making patacas to fill the hole of last year's bad results than to look ahead to the future.

The norm now seems to be to dismiss as many staff as possible to reduce "expenses" and hire low-cost workers - the more desperate, the less qualified and experienced, the better. This way, the salary offered to these new workers can be as low as hiring a domestic helper from the mainland, according to some of our lawmakers.

When confronted with this, the government looks away and tells residents, especially those dismissed from these multinational corporations, to stop being "picky" when applying for new jobs.

In the meantime, those same companies continue calling for an easing of the restrictions that regulate the recruiting of unqualified non-resident workers to fill the posts left by the many dismissed workers.

The standards for recruitment have become so low that now, for some people, astoundingly, holding a Macau ID card and speaking four languages has become a handicap.

More sports events are being moved to avoid clashing with Prince Philip's funeral, with a Premier League match between Wolverhampton and Sheffield United pushed to Saturday evening.

The match will now start at 8:15 p.m. local time (19:15 GMT) rather than 3 p.m. when Philip's funeral service is due to start at Windsor Castle.

Saturday's other Premier League game, between Newcastle and West Ham, will kick off at 12:30 p.m. as

planned.

The English Football League and Premiership Rugby are also moving start times.

The England and Wales Cricket Board said all nine county championship matches will pause for an hour and 20 minutes during the royal ceremonial funeral at St. George's Chapel.

Philip, Queen Elizabeth II's husband of 73 years who was also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, died Friday at 99.



HONG KONG'S LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS TO TAKE PLACE IN DECEMBER

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

HONG Kong leader Carrie Lam said yesterday that the semiautonomous Chinese territory's legislative elections will take place in December, more than a year after they were postponed by authorities citing public health risks from the coronavirus pandemic.

Lam also said that laws will be amended so that inciting voters not to vote or to cast blank or invalid votes will be made illegal, although voters themselves are free to boycott voting or cast votes as they wish.

"When a person willfully obstructs or prevents any person from voting at an election, we will consider it corrupt conduct," said Lam.

Lam said that the elections will take place on Dec. 19. The elections were initially slated to be held last September.

Lam was speaking a day ahead of the first reading of draft amendments to various laws in the city's legislature, to accommodate Beijing's planned changes to the city's electoral system.

Beijing in March announced changes to Hong Kong's electoral system, expanding the number of seats in the legislature while reducing



the number of directly-elected seats from 35 to 20.

The move is part of a two-phase effort to rein in political protest and opposition in Hong Kong, which is part of China but has had a more liberal political system as a former British colony. China imposed a national security law on Hong Kong last year and is following up this year with a revamp of the electoral process.

The crackdown comes in the wake of months of pro-democracy protests in 2019 that brought hundreds of thousands to the streets and turned violent as the government resisted the movement's demands.

In the current 70-member legislature, voters elect half the members and the other half are chosen by constituencies representing various professions and interest groups. Many of the constituencies lean pro-Bei-

jing, ensuring that wing a majority in the legislature.

The new body will have 20 elected members, 30 chosen by the constituencies and 40 by an Election Committee which also chooses the city's leader.

The committee, which will be expanded from 1,200 to 1,500 members, is dominated by supporters of the central government in Beijing.

A new, separate body will also be set up to review the qualifications of candidates for office in Hong Kong to ensure that the city is governed by "patriots," in the language of the central government.

Elections for the Election Committee, which will choose the city's leader and 40 lawmakers, will be held on Sept. 19. Elections for the chief executive will take place on March 27, 2022, Lam said yesterday. MDT/AP

Afghanistan A makeshift coal mine collapsed yesterday in northern Afghanistan, burying five miners and leaving four more missing, a provincial security official said. Jawed Basharat, a spokesman for the provincial police chief in northern Baghlan province said a rescue team is at the site in Nahrin district.

Belgium NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed the Western military alliance's "unwavering" support for Ukraine and warned Moscow yesterday not to push its troop buildup along Russia's border with the neighboring country. "NATO stands with Ukraine," Stoltenberg said during a news conference with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, calling the Russian movements "unjustified, unexplained and deeply concerning."



Austria's health minister announced his resignation yesterday, saying that he couldn't continue in the grueling job of helping lead the country's coronavirus response because of persistent personal health problems caused by overwork. Rudolf Anschober, 60, had been health minister since January 2020. Wolfgang Mueckstein, a Vienna-based doctor, was named as Anschober's successor.



UK began offering coronavirus vaccinations to anyone over 45 yesterday after hitting its target of giving at least one dose to everyone over 50 by the middle of April. Despite the good news, Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that the U.K. would inevitably see "more hospitalization and deaths" as it emerges from lockdown. On Monday non-essential shops, hairdressers, gyms, restaurant patios and beer gardens reopened in England.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Jean-Christophe Bott/AP



When horses fly. A Super Puma helicopter of the Swiss Air Force carries three horses at once during an exercise in Saignelegier, Switzerland. The goal is to provide transportation and rapid evacuation of injured horses to a veterinary medical facility.