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THE GOVERNMENT'S REVENUE IN THE FIRST QUARTER STOOD AT MOP12.76 BILLION, FAR LESS THAN THE MOP20.70 BILLION RECORDED LAST YEAR

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DENIS MURREL SHOWCASES ARTWORKS AT REALTY AGENCY

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AUTHORITIES HAVE DETAINED THREE PEOPLE SUSPECTED OF MONEY LAUNDERING AMOUNTING TO HKD8.67 MILLION WITH LINKS TO AUSTRALIA

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JUST IN TIME

AP PHOTO



North Korea Mask-wearing people danced in a plaza or climbed a Pyongyang hill yesterday to mark the 109th birthday of the country's founder amid pandemic fears and economic woes. April 15, called "The Day of the Sun" in North Korea, is the most important public holiday. No major events like a military parade were expected this year as North Korea typically stages them for anniversaries that end in zero and five.

AP PHOTO



India's two largest cities imposed stringent restrictions on movement and one planned to use hotels and banquet halls to treat coronavirus patients as new infections in the country shot past 200,000 yesterday amid a devastating surge that is straining a fragile health system. New Delhi announced stay-at-home orders for the weekend, though essential workers will be able to move about if they have a pass from local authorities. Restaurants, malls, gyms and spas will be shut down.

AP PHOTO



Australia will complete its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in September in line with the United States and other allies, the prime minister said yesterday. Australia's contribution to the NATO-led mission had once exceeded 15,000 personnel, but only 80 remain. "In line with the United States and other allies and partners, the last remaining Australian troops will depart Afghanistan in September," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said.

More on backpage



The National Security Education Exhibition rolled out at an 'opportune time' with Ho Iat Seng pledging to double down on strengthening national security, while Wong Sio Chak hints at plans to enhance legislation

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DENIS MURRELL SHOWCASES ARTWORKS AT REALTY AGENCY

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU-BASED artist Denis Murrell showcased his artworks in his first commercial exhibition at realty agency Ambiente's main office.

The exhibition was part of a series called Art@Ambiente. As explained by the firm's managing director, Suzanne Watkinson, this move highlights and consolidates the firm's position as its client's lifestyle solution.

Although she admitted that realty operations are the firm's "bread and butter", it is crucial to stress that it is not all about leasing and buying. There are other ways in which a realty firm should show its colors.

Murrell, an Australian native who moved to Macau in 1989, has gained an enthusiastic following of students, friends, art collectors and general admirers of his art since his move to Macau. His paintings have been exhibited in Macau and overseas and can be found in many public and private collections. The techniques of his particular style of painting make use of acrylic and other water-based pigments, Chinese ink and all types of absorbent tissue.

Describing the exhibition, he said it was unique: since previously, he only held exhibitions with schools and museums, among others. Doing a session at a commercial entity is a first for him.

In the city's artistic landscape, "there has been a lot of training going on since the handover," he recalled. He pointed out that there are a lot of programs and institutions training young artists, but the city's small size has left them lesser chances of holding larger-scale exhibitions.

Furthermore, artists in Macau are usually part-timers, meaning that they have to do art on the side of their regular or main working hours. "Even me, I do some part-time teaching," Murrell admitted.

Moreover, even when students have the energy or dedication to continue painting



at home, they may not have enough space. They may need to take into account the feelings of family members, or the responsibility of taking care of children.

He stressed that there is no such thing as a "weekend painter" if an individual wants to be an artist. "The wheels get rusty," Murrell said, com-

menting on the issue. "You need to keep it up [to] get good work out of it."

Macau has the resources to train good artists, he concluded, but the problem is that there is not enough space for creating and exhibiting arts. In that case, he said, "[artists] won't improve or develop."

Murrell won the first prize

for Western painting in the Second Macau Biennial Art Exhibition in 1995. In November 2012, the Macau Museum of Art held an exhibition of over 20 works that Murrell had donated over the years to the museum's collection, as well as those that had come into the museum's possession in other ways.

COVID-19 NO PREGNANT WOMEN TAKING VACCINE IN MACAU: SSM

HONEY TSANG

DIRECTOR of the Health Bureau (SSM) Alvis Lo confirmed yesterday that no pregnant women have received Covid-19 vaccines in Macau.

Lo's remarks came after an announcement from Hong Kong's Department of Health on April 14 reporting two cases of miscarriages after receiving BioNTech vaccines.

As of now, there is no scientific evidence to prove that receiving the Covid-19 vaccine will heighten the risk of miscarriage, Lo said, adding that every medical event has a certain probability of occurring.

He said that the Covid-19 vaccines have been proven to have no adverse impacts on animal foetuses; however, data is still lacking regarding any potential impact on the human fetus.

"We have to be objective; to consider and analyze any medical events, including miscarriages, after inoculations," he said.

Different countries and cities have different guidelines as to whether pregnant women should receive the vaccinations or not. For relatively high-risk places, pregnant women are usually suggested to take the jabs, he added.

"However, considering the [stable] pandemic situation in Macau, we do not include pregnant women within our target vaccination groups, and do not provide inoculation for them for safety purposes," Lo stressed.

If a pregnancy is discovered after receiving the first dose of vaccine, Lo said that while no special medical treatment is needed, it was suggested that the individuals do not proceed with the second dose.

Currently, the SSM prohibits pregnant women in Macau from receiving Covid-19 vaccines.

Lo calls on residents to pay more heed to their health status prior to vaccination.

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COVID-19 GOV'T SUSPENDS IMPORT OF ASTRAZENECA VACCINES

HONEY TSANG

THE SAR government has suspended the import of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccines from the manufacturer, which were originally slated to arrive in Macau in the third quarter of 2021, director of the Health Bureau (SSM) Alvis Lo revealed yesterday.

The government's decision came after a series of cases were reported in other countries, in which patients were diagnosed with a rare yet serious blood-clotting disorder after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccination.

"Currently, Macau has a sufficient amount of vaccines to provide inoculations for the city's residents. As a result, the city does not have a pressing need to bring in AstraZeneca vaccines at this stage" Lo told the press after the opening ceremony of the National Security Education Exhibition yesterday.

Lo said the SAR government requested to suspend plans to import the AstraZeneca vaccine. The manufacturer, British-Swedish pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca, had also agreed with the postponement.

According to the most up-to-date advice by the World Health Organization (WHO), taking the AstraZeneca vaccine is still considered to hold more benefits than potential risks, and the WHO still advises in favor of its continued use, Lo said.

In spite of that, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the European drug regulator, announced earlier this month that there is a possible link between the AstraZeneca vaccine and blood clots.

As of now, many countries have suspended the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine, including Iceland, Norway, France, and Germany.

On Wednesday, Denmark became the first country to decide to discontinue administering the AstraZeneca vaccine permanently.

According to SSM's dedicated website, the replication-defective adenovirus vector vaccine developed by AstraZeneca has 70% efficacy.



National Security Education Exhibition comes at a good time: CE

HONEY TSANG

THE SAR government unveiled the fourth National Security Education Exhibition yesterday. It serves as a platform to bolster public awareness of national security and promote the notion of patriotism in Macau, Chief Executive (CE) Ho Iat Seng stated in the opening ceremony.

In Ho's opening speech, he stressed that the exhibition has been rolled out at an opportune time, as 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. It is also the first year of the 14th Five-Year Plan, which was approved at the National People's Congress during the annual Two Sessions in March and sets out the nation's major economic and political goals for 2021-2025.

"[The exhibition] was launched at a right moment to give the public a summary of the nation and Macau's extraordinary journey in safeguarding national security over the past year; to recap the obligations for [achieving] a comprehensive concept of national security; and to showcase the country and Macau's new developments and plans in response to changes in internal and external environments," Ho said.

Fu Ziyang, director of Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macau SAR, stressed that the world is currently facing unprecedented changes in this century. They include a fiercer rivalry between superpowers, intensified moves by the US and some Western countries to hinder China's development, and so on.

When faced with the challenges raised by the pandemic and changes in internal and external environments, Ho pledged to continue to double down on strengthening national security.

To this end, the government will continue to optimize the legal system and mechanisms for better enforcing and defending national security.

The authorities will also ensure that the principle of "patriots governing Macau" is fully implemented, and



"resolutely oppose any external forces interfering with Macau's affairs", Ho emphasized.

Improving education on the constitution and basic law within the schooling system is also high on the agenda. Ho said it is imperative to the overall national security and Macau's development to instill the significance of the "One country, two systems" principle into local youths.

In 2015, the Standing

Committee of the 12th National People's Congress approved the National Security Law of the People's Republic of China, and timed the annual National Security Education Day on April 15.

The National Security Education Exhibition, located at the China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform Complex, will open to the public in Macau from yesterday afternoon to May 16.

Hong Kong's government also held a symposium yesterday to commemorate the nation's sixth National Security Education Day. It was the first National Security Education Day after the National Security Law took effect in Hong Kong last year.

Hong Kong's chief executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor yesterday also reaffirmed her commitment to safeguarding national security for the nation and Hong Kong.

WONG SIO CHAK: PLANS AFOOT TO ENHANCE SAR'S SECURITY

HONEY TSANG

HONG Kong's electoral reform is an "enlightenment" and a "learning opportunity" for the Macau SAR government, which is set to elevate legislation to better defend national security, Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak disclosed yesterday.

"We are evaluating [the possibility as to] whether some abnormal events would arise from the revised electoral system of Hong Kong and whether these events would have any negative impacts on Macau," Wong addressed the press following the opening ceremony of the National Security Education Exhibition yesterday.

To achieve this, the government will continue to garner and analyze intelligence, and prepare for a well-thought-out deployment of the police force.

Earlier in March, the National People's Congress (NPC), China's top legislature, passed a resolution to overhaul Hong Kong's electoral system to ensure the city is administered by patriots only.

Wong pointed out that the reform to Hong Kong's electoral system is a forceful and effective move to clamp down on social unrest

and other problems which cropped up after the introduction of the Extradition Bill by the Hong Kong government in 2019.

These problems, Wong stressed, were direct attacks on the national security and Hong Kong's social order.

Safeguarding national security necessitates a wide-ranging plan involving various efforts, Wong said. The foremost focus now is to protect public health during the pandemic. The next focal point will be stepping up efforts to oppose foreign threats from external forces.

"The external threats [risking the nation's safety] are still considered severe when considering many countries have been targeting China lately," Wong said. He added that Macau, as a part of China, also bears the responsibility to safeguard national security.

Wong unveiled that a series of legislative undertakings, designed to complement Macau's National Security Law passed in 2009 and ensure better protection of the nation's security, are now afoot.

They include draft or proposed bills relating to immigration control, fire safety, the regulation of hazardous items, anti-terrorism measures, and more.

CRIME

POLICE UNCOVER HKD8.7M MONEY LAUNDERING SCHEME

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL police have detained three people suspected of money laundering with links to Australia, the Judiciary Police (PJ) revealed yesterday in a special press conference.

According to the PJ spokesperson, investigation of the case started back in 2017 when the Financial Intelligence Office (GIF) delivered two reports about suspicious banking transactions to the Public Prosecutions Office.

At the time, the GIF noted that in September 2017, two companies in Macau had received large sums of money from another two companies based in Australia, totaling HKD8,670,000 – a suspicious amount given the bank accounts from these companies had been idle for a long period.

After some time, the banking institutions in Macau that re-

ceived the sums were asked by counterparties in Australia to return the funds on the grounds that they had been stolen as part of a computer hacking scam. The hackers had illegally accessed the companies' accounts and stolen the sums, transferring them to the accounts in Macau.

After investigating, the PJ discovered that once the funds were deposited in the Macau accounts, the money was quickly withdrawn through seven bank cheques by six different people.

The PJ has also been able to identify the main suspect in the case – a male resident from Hong Kong. The suspect had traveled to Macau on several occasions to find people to pass the funds through different bank accounts to hide the operation and avoid raising the suspicions of the authorities.

The man was identified as a

friend of all three suspects who are now detained. The detained suspects include the partners of the companies in Macau purported to trade artwork and a local woman who was a staff member of a casino VIP room.

One of the partners was a male resident brought in from the mainland alongside a local man.

On April 14, the three suspects were brought into the PJ headquarters for questioning.

All three suspects confessed to helping the man from Hong Kong – currently on the run – to move the money using their bank accounts or by recruiting other friends to participate in the scheme.

While the two males admitted to receiving compensation of HKD30,000 for providing assistance, the woman denied that she had received any reward for her involvement. She reported that she had participated because the



main suspect was a reputable patron at the VIP room and had given her many tips in the past.

The other Macau resident, who is an owner of one of the companies involved in the scheme, is also at large. The PJ is currently looking for his whereabouts.

The spokesperson also added that the PJ has requested cooperation from the Hong Kong authorities to locate the main suspect in the case, and to trace the proceeds of the money laundering scheme. Currently, the PJ only knows that

the full amount has already been transferred out of Macau.

For the time being, the three suspects are all being accused of money laundering. The male resident of Macau in police custody, along with the other local who is at large, are also being accused of document forgery. Both signed a document delivered to the banking institution in which they claimed that the money received in the company bank account was in relation to the acquisition of artwork.

Man arrested for pimping in local hotel

RENATO MARQUES

A man from the mainland has been detained by the police for the crime of exploitation of prostitution, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) revealed.

On Tuesday (April 13), a hotel security staff spotted the man suspiciously escorting a young woman to a room in a hotel located in the islands district, and reported the incident, the PSP spokesperson said during the routine joint police forces press conference.

According to the same spokesperson, the room was booked in the name of a third man who has not yet been found by authorities and is also being considered as a suspect in the case.

Questioned by the police, the man admitted to engaging in this activity in Macau since the beginning of this month. He said that he learned of the job through a friend on the mainland. His friend had told him that he could earn large sums



of money by providing transport and facilitating meetings between young women from the mainland and prostitution clients in Macau.

The man also had the job of ensuring the safety of the prostitutes and assisting if any problem or dispute were to arise between the women and the clients.

According to information collected during the questioning of a 20-year-old woman also detained in the operation, she would receive the sum of HKD1,500 for each meeting with a client, which would be shared equally between her and the men who operated the scheme.

The woman told the police that all the meetings with clients would be arranged by the men and only after all arrangements were concluded would she be escorted to the room for sex with the clients.

She did not disclose to the police how many meetings she has had with clients or how much money she had earned from this activity.

The PSP is still searching for the whereabouts of at least one other suspect: the man under whose name the hotel room was booked and used for the activity.

While prostitution is not itself illegal in Macau, for any person other

than the prostitute to profit from their activity is punishable by law, including any acts that facilitate or help such activity.

In most cases, the prostitutes are also targeted with crimes related to illegal work since Macau's law does not permit tourist visa holders to work in Macau.

In a separate case, a man from Tanzania was apprehended by the PSP for wandering on a plot of fenced private land at Calçada do Tronco Velho in the city center.

When intercepted by the PSP officers at around 4:30 a.m. on April 8, the man could not explain what he was doing there or even how he came to enter the premises.

Taken to the public hospital, the man tested positive for a methamphetamine drug known commonly as "ice."

Questioned by the PSP, he admitted to having consumed drugs that he bought last month at an entertainment venue in the NAPE area for 300 patacas.

He remains in Macau as a tourist, having received valid temporary authorization from the immigration department while awaiting repatriation.



ILLEGAL SMOKING OCCURS MOSTLY IN RESTAURANTS

A total of 654 charges were registered during the first quarter due to breach of tobacco regulations, the majority of which related to smoking in prohibited places. Most violations occurred in restaurant establishments.

From January 1 to March 31, the Health Bureau (SSM) said that 67,230 inspections were carried out on establishments, amounting to an average of 747 inspections per day. This is an increase of 40,828 establishments compared to the same period last year.

Of the 654 registered charges, 646 applied to smokers who broke the law. Six cases involved selling tobacco products that did not comply with labeling requirements, and two cases related to selling tobacco products that are visible

to customers. Regarding the demographics of the offenders, 408 fines were imposed on local residents (63.2%), 191 fines were given to tourists (29.6%) and 47 of the offenses were committed by non-resident workers (7.3%).

The category of illegal establishments with the most prosecutions was restaurants, accounting for 19.7% of the total charges.

SSM has reiterated that establishments that are still placing tobacco products in clear view of customers may be fined up to a maximum of 200,000 patacas.

This comes after the authority received complaints of violations of the tobacco control legislation governing the sale of tobacco products. LV

ECONOMY

Gov't general revenue drops by 38% in Q1, led by gaming plunge

RENATO MARQUES

THE government's general account revenue has recorded a drop of 38.36% in the first quarter (Q1) when compared year-on-year, the report on Budgetary Execution Data published by the Financial Services Bureau revealed.

According to the report, the government revenue until the end of March was 12.76 billion patacas, far less than the 20.70 billion patacas recorded last year.

Contributing significantly to the plunge was the lower revenue obtained from the gaming sector that, in 2020, had amounted to 18.48 billion patacas during Q1. This year, the revenue from gaming amounted to 9.17 billion patacas, registering a drop of 50.39%.

Expenditure also grew signifi-

Category	2021	2020
Revenue	12,760,000,000	20,700,000,000
Current revenue	9,170,000,000	18,480,000,000
Capital revenue	3,590,000,000	2,220,000,000
Total revenue	12,760,000,000	20,700,000,000
Expenditure	14,000,000,000	10,000,000,000
Total expenditure	14,000,000,000	10,000,000,000

cantly this year. In particular, expenditure on the government's Investment and Development Expenditure Plan (PIDDA) increased from 868.50 million patacas in 2020 Q1 to a staggering 2.72 billion patacas in

2021. This over three-fold increase in expenditure contributed to an execution rate of 14.7%. In the same period last year, the PIDDA execution rate was only 7.2%.

The total government expendi-

ture reached 17.94 billion patacas in the first three months of this year.

In a positive development, the government central account had a positive balance of 8.32 billion patacas at the end of Q1, almost 58.5% more than in 2020, when the balance was 4.87 billion patacas.

Yesterday, a release published by Fitch Ratings noted that the international rating agency revised Macau's credit rating outlook to "stable" from "negative," affirming its credit ratings (long-term foreign and local currency issuer default ratings) at "AA."

This positive revision was based on the expected recovery of the local economy as well as the government's cautious fiscal management that has provided buffers to mitigate the unprecedented shock from the pandemic and uphold macroeconomic stability.

NEW HENGQIN HOTLINE HANDLES CONSUMER ISSUES FOR MACAU RESIDENTS

The Consumer Association of the Hengqin New District of Zhuhai City has launched a new hotline to provide free-of-charge legal advice for Macau residents who have consumer rights issues in relation to purchases in mainland China. The hotline was opened in consideration of the differences in laws and regulations between Macau SAR and mainland China. Macau residents can also follow the association's WeChat public platform for legal advice on consumer rights issues.

GOV'T EXPECTS PUBLIC AUTONOMOUS FUND DATABASE TO BE READY IN JUNE

The Public Assets Supervision Planning Office has disclosed that the availability of public autonomous funds subsidy has room for improvement. As such, it is now in the process of establishing a database for such funds. The public can view basic information and data on subsidy issuance of funds on the platform. A consultation with autonomous funds is in progress for the purpose of inaugurating the database. The platform is expected to be publicized in June.

SSM CALLS FOR A RECALL OF ANTIDEPRESSANT BATCH

According to a notification from a local drug importer, an antidepressant drug produced by Canadian Apotex Inc with a batch number of RF0410 was recalled. The recall affects 10mg Apo-Amitriptyline tablets. The manufacturer found that its drug ingredients contained impurities that exceeded the allowable threshold. According to the information provided by the importer, the affected batches of drugs have been supplied to two private clinics in Macau.

MUST holds its largest art exhibition yet

AN art and design exhibition opened yesterday at the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) to showcase the works created by the institution's prospective graduates in art or design programs.

The exhibition showcases 213 items or sets of work by the MUST's 264 prospective graduates this academic year, covering both undergraduate and graduate levels. The exhibition will be held until April 22, and entry is free-of-charge.

Works are shown in two separate venues within one single building – the MUST's Academic Complex "R". The



auditorium on the ground floor is home to works in the fields of landscape, interior, product and visual design completed by undergraduate students. It also houses

works by graduate students. Works by graduate students in the fine arts program are displayed in the gallery on the sixth floor. These works vary in genre

and size, and include collaged paintings and self-standing sculptures on show, among others.

The MUST highlighted that this is the largest graduation exhibition in the 21 years of the institution's history.

After viewing the works shown on the ground floor, veteran local painter Lai Ieng, president of the Macau Art Master Association and a guest of honor at the opening, made a connection between arts, design and technology.

"Technology has apparently made art and design easier but with more possi-

bilities [for new styles]," Lai told the Times. "Previously, when we needed to make models for our design projects, it took much more work and time."

He pointed out that many sample designs can now be made using 3D printers, freeing the designer's hands for further intellectual work.

Describing this year's exhibition, professor Lin Zhi Jun, vice president of the MUST, said that, although the Covid-19 pandemic has changed what is deemed "normal", many of these changes have inspired innovation in many aspects of art and design. **AL**

PEREIRA COUTINHO STEPS DOWN FROM PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY COUNCIL



LAWMAKER José Pereira Coutinho has resigned from his post as adviser to the Portuguese Communities to which he was elected in 2015, according to several media reports.

Since 2003, the local lawmaker has held the position of Councilor in the Portuguese Community Council.

A notice published by

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Portugal stated that the request for resignation took place on February 2 this year.

Coutinho declined to clarify the reason behind his resignation.

Recently, Portuguese newspaper Ponto Final reported that the representatives from the Portuguese Community Council for mainland China, Macau

and Hong Kong have sent a letter to Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng to thank the government for the support given to the work of the council's regional chapter.

However, Coutinho later claimed that he had not signed the letter.

The Council of Portuguese Communities for mainland China, Macau and Hong Kong has José Pereira Coutinho, Rita Santos, Armando de Jesus, Gilberto Camacho (as alternate member) and Lídia Lourenço (also as alternate member). **AL**

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



XI VOWS TO HOLD 'SAFE, SIMPLE, SPLENDID' OLYMPICS

CHINESE President Xi Jinping pledged to hold a successful Winter Olympics next year in Beijing, responding to challenges the event faces from the coronavirus pandemic.

"With the active support and participation of all parties, we're confident about overcoming the impact of the pandemic and hosting a simple, safe and splendid Olympics," Xi told a gathering of ambassadors in Beijing that was covered by state television Wednesday evening.

Xi's government will need to provide assurances about Covid-19 protection measures after the U.S. and others criticized a World Health Organization report in March on the origins of the coronavirus, calling it incomplete and faulting data and access provided to its authors by China.

Despite insistence from Interna-

tional Olympic Committee officials that sports and politics are separate, the Olympics have been enmeshed in complicated developments in world affairs and controversies for decades.

Foreign diplomats in China have been debating whether to boycott the Olympics and discussed the possibility that top dignitaries stay away, while athletes compete and sponsors participate. Given the importance of China to the global economy and the sensitivity Beijing has toward hosting the global sports spectacle, most doubted there would be an outright boycott.

The Beijing Winter Olympics start about six months after Tokyo hosts the virus-delayed Summer Games, where measures including a ban on overseas spectators have been put in place to prevent it from becoming a superspreader event. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

KARI LINDBERG,
IAIN MARLOW & CHLOE LO

HONG KONG

HONG KONG marked its first National Security Education Day since last year's imposition of sweeping national security legislation by Beijing, as the government ramps up efforts to overhaul the school system and instill patriotism in the city's populace following the protests of 2019.

Schools across the city were mandated to hold events including singing the Chinese national anthem and raising flags. In addition, giant billboards promoting the event have been plastered across the city, while the police held an open day where they displayed professional drills, anti-terrorism exercises and displayed armored vehicles.

While mainland China has celebrated such a day since 2016, this is the first time the semi-autonomous financial hub is marking the occasion. The city's government is required, under the national security law that was drafted in Beijing and forced on the city with no meaningful local debate, to "promote national security education in schools and universities."

As the city prepared to mark the occasion, China's state media also published several articles about citizens who had alle-

Schools devote a

dly compromised national security. These include a Shanghai real estate tycoon who allegedly financed "anti-China" activists in Hong Kong, a mainland student who became supportive of the city's protests and a migrant worker who allegedly photographed a military port in the southern city of Shantou for foreign spies.

'DEEP SEA SECURITY'

The day began with a formal ceremony featuring top officials of the Hong Kong government. Also in attendance were Zheng Yan-xiong, head of the secretive agency China created to implement the controversial security law that was condemned by major Western governments, and Major General Chen Daoxiang, head of the People's Liberation Army garrison in the city.

In a speech, Luo Huining, Beijing's top official in Hong Kong, said, "Any attempt by foreign countries and external forces to flagrantly interfere in the affairs of Hong Kong, and to exploit Hong Kong as a pawn will be met with impactful countermeasures."



Schools held a number of events, including what the government called a national security themed bulletin board design competition at a primary school.

"To support the theme and objectives of the National Security

AD

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歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo
陳芷喬 Joana Chan
顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan
諾瑪莉 Maria Noras
康靜雅 Viviana Hong
梁淑嵐 Ana Leon

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黃瀚賢 Frederico Vong
張偉鴻 Cheong Wai Hong
李莉 Lei Lei
陳健雄 Eurico Chan
吳霆鋒 Ng Teng Fong

法律專家 JURISTS:

羅成軒 José J. Rodrigues
潘卡莉 Candice Pun
斐彥德 Gonçalo Figueiredo
羅嘉慧 Emily Lo
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day to China's national security



Education Day, the school has arranged flags to be raised," one local secondary school said in an email to parents that was seen by Bloomberg. "In addition, there is a set of displays near the school office with details on National Security and

some Q&A posted for information." Hong Kong students also took part in what a government press release called "Together We Safeguard Our Nation and Homeland - Community Mosaic Wall," where students put stickers with "smiling

faces" onto a display board - reminiscent of the Lennon Walls which protesters built around the city during the 2019 protests exhibiting protest slogans and artwork.

appear entirely. Four activists led a small protest in the city's Wan Chai neighborhood, according to local broadcaster RTHK.

"Any attempt by foreign countries and external forces to flagrantly interfere in the affairs of Hong Kong, and to exploit Hong Kong as a pawn will be met with impactful countermeasures."

LUO HUINING
BEIJING'S TOP OFFICIAL IN HONG KONG

Bookmarks distributed to students days before the event list a host of topics linked to national security, including "polar security," "deep sea security" and "ecological security."

There were limited public displays of opposition in a city where social-distancing restrictions and the national security law have made once raucous protests almost disa-

'BLACK HANDS'

The city has identified education, along with media and the judiciary, as key sectors that need to be brought to heel, after students played a key role in the city's protest movement. Beijing has urged Hong Kong to eliminate the alleged "black hands" influencing its schools, intimating that foreign forces have helped foment societal unrest.

International schools seem to

be exempt from participating in National Security Education Day. According to the South China Morning Post, the English Schools Foundation, which operates a group of international schools in Hong Kong, told parents in February that it would still have autonomy over its curriculum.

However, the city's Education Bureau stressed that international schools still need to prevent "teaching or other school activities" that breach the security law, as well as ensure students "acquire a correct and objective understanding and apprehension of the concept of national security and the National Security Law."

The government's website promoting national security day has only been made available in Chinese.

Representatives of multiple of the city's international schools didn't immediately respond to requests for comment about how they would handle the day's events.

Hong Kong told schools in February to start using a more patriotic curriculum and advised teachers to report breaches of the national security law. Children starting from around kindergarten age will be taught to memorize offenses under the law, including subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign powers. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

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ANALYSIS

US troop pullout will leave behind an uncertain Afghanistan

KATHY GANNON,
ISLAMABAD

THE Biden administration's surprise announcement of an unconditional troop withdrawal from Afghanistan by Sept. 11 appears to strip the Taliban and the Afghan government of considerable leverage and could ramp up pressure on them to reach a peace deal.

The Taliban and Afghan government can no longer hold the U.S. hostage — the Taliban with escalating violence and the Afghan president with dragging his feet on a power-sharing deal with the insurgents that doesn't include him as president — because Washington made it clear that U.S. troops are leaving, no matter what.

Still, there are growing fears that Afghanistan will collapse into worsening chaos, brutal civil war, or even a takeover by the Taliban once the Americans are gone — opening a new chapter in the constant war that has lasted for decades.

Already, violence and seemingly random attacks on civilians have surged since the Trump administration reached a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 that had committed Washington to withdraw by May 1. More than 1,700 civilians were killed or wounded in attacks the first three months of this year, up 23% from the same period last year, according to

the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

On Wednesday, the Biden administration set a new timetable. It said it would begin pulling out its remaining 3,500 troops on May 1 and complete the pullout at the latest by Sept. 11 — the 20th anniversary of the al-Qaida terror attack on the U.S. that had triggered the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan. NATO announced it would follow the same timetable for withdrawing nearly 10,000 troops.

In leaving, Washington has calculated that it can manage its chief security interest — ensuring Afghanistan doesn't become a base for terror attacks on the United States — from a distance.

Still, it is hoping to leave a country with a chance at peace. The U.S. is pressing the Taliban and the Afghan government to reach a peace agreement during an April 24-May 4 conference in Turkey.

At the moment, it's not even sure the Taliban will attend.

In response to the new withdrawal timeline, the Taliban said they won't attend any conference on Afghanistan's future while foreign forces are still in the country. A spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahed, said that if the original May 1 deadline is not met, "problems will be compounded." Still, he did not explicitly threaten a resumption of Taliban attacks on U.S.

troops.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken upped the pressure with a phone call Wednesday to Pakistan's powerful Army Chief of Staff Javed Qamar Bajwa, presumably seeking help in getting the Taliban to the Turkey conference.

With their leadership headquartered in Pakistan, the Taliban ignore Islamabad at their own peril. Until now Pakistan has been key to getting the insurgent militia to earlier rounds of talks.

The Pakistani army said afterwards that Pakistan was behind an "Afghan-owned and Afghan-led" peace process, a seeming nod to the upcoming Turkey conference. It also said the two discussed "further enhanced" relations between their countries — perhaps a sign Blinken tied future U.S.-Pakistani relations on Islamabad's help.

The Taliban control around half of Afghanistan. But they also have much to lose if they walk away from the peace process, particularly a chance at international recognition. The group has been courting world powers since 2013 when they set up their political office in the Qatari capital Doha.

The U.S. has warned that the Taliban won't get that recognition if they are not part of a new government. The Turkey conference, jointly convened by the United Nations, lends international su-

pport to that warning.

The bet is that the Taliban won't want to rule as a pariah, as they did from 1996 until their overthrow by the U.S.-led coalition in 2001. They had no money to feed their people, unemployment was rampant and drought and poverty devastated farmers. Their only source of income in the final years was from al-Qaida and its wealthy Saudi leader at the time, Osama bin Laden.

"If the Taliban wants recognition, if they want international support [...] that can't happen" if they press war further, Blinken said on Meet The Press on Sunday. "We'll see how the parties calculate their interest."

Torek Farhadi, a former Afghan government adviser, said he doesn't expect the insurgents to attend in Turkey.

Instead, he said, they are likely to negotiate with local leaders around Afghanistan and wait for the Americans to leave, further weakening and isolating President Ashraf Ghani. The Taliban have refused to even sit across the table from him.

Responding to the U.S. strategy shift, Ghani pledged to pursue peace, without elaborating. He tweeted late Wednesday that he had spoken with President Biden and "we will work with our U.S. partners to ensure a smooth transition."

Previously, Ghani had floated an alternative peace plan that calls for him to head an interim government until fresh elections can be held. Rejected by the Taliban, it's seen by his political opponents as an attempt to cling to power.

Ghani's government has been denounced for runaway corruption and divisive politics. He has embraced warlords he once shunned, like Uzbek powerhouse Rashid Dostum, accused of war crimes.

The many warlords who hold sway in Kabul have amassed considerable wealth in the last 20 years and boast loyal militias with well-equipped arsenals. Most Afghans say the U.S. and NATO troop presence has kept feuding warlords apart and fear that without it the country will collapse back into the brutal infighting that raged from 1992-1996, giving rise to the Taliban.

The previous Trump deal with the Taliban had imposed conditions. The big one was that the Taliban break with their longtime ally, al-Qaida, and stand against other militants before U.S. troops would withdraw. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1964 'GREAT TRAIN ROBBERS' GET 300 YEARS



Some of the longest sentences in British criminal history have been imposed on men involved in the so-called "Great Train Robbery".

Sentences totalling 307 years were passed on 12 men who stole £2.6m in used bank notes after holding up the night mail train travelling from Glasgow to London last August.

The judge at Buckinghamshire Assizes in Aylesbury, Mr Justice Edmund Davies, said it would be "positively evil" if he showed leniency.

The robbery was the biggest-ever carried out in Britain.

The scale and style of the theft led to comparisons with rail robberies of the Wild West and the hunt for the perpetrators captured the public imagination.

But the judge said the robbers' crime had in no way been "romantic" and was obviously motivated by greed.

The attack on train driver Jack Mills was proof of their violent tendencies, he added.

"Anybody who has seen that nerve-shattered engine driver can have no doubt of the terrifying effect on law-abiding citizens of a concerted assault by armed robbers," the judge said.

Seven of the defendants - Ronald Biggs, Charles Wilson, Douglas Goody, Thomas Wisbey, Robert Welch, James Hussey and Roy James - were jailed for 30 years each.

Four were sent to prison for terms of between 20 and 25 years.

Another defendant, solicitor John Wheeler, 41, was sent to prison for three years.

Wheeler obtained the robbers hide-out - Leatherslade Farm in Bedfordshire.

Judge Davies said Wheeler had no knowledge of the robbery until after it had been committed but should then have informed the police.

"I realise the consequences of your conviction are disastrous, professionally and personally," the judge told Wheeler.

Three men involved in the robbery are still at large including the man said to be the ringleader, Bruce Reynolds

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

All the three remaining gang members were eventually caught.

In 1969 the robbery's mastermind, Bruce Reynolds, was sentenced to 10 years in jail.

In the meantime two gang members had made dramatic escapes from prison.

One of them, Charlie Wilson, was recaptured in Canada in 1968.

The other, Ronnie Biggs, was free for nearly 40 years before he returned voluntarily to Britain from Brazil.

An impoverished Biggs, 71, came back to the UK in 2001 to receive free medical treatment after having suffered a series of strokes.

He was immediately taken to a top-security prison to serve the remaining 28 years of his sentence.

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Your ruling planet, self-motivated Mars, locks into a supportive alignment with dream-big Jupiter. This pairing creates ample energy, confidence, and faith in your abilities.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Friday's cosmic landscape is packed with action, Taurus. You're in the mood to get down to business and accomplish things... and the universe has your back.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You're hard to miss under Friday's skies, Gemini. You've got the energy and motivation to make yourself shine in a public setting, as go-getter Mars aligns with capable Jupiter.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Self-motivated Mars forms a positive connection with visionary Jupiter, helping you handle any intimate, psychological issues with a fearless approach.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Something deep within your core needs a change, Leo. In order for you to follow through with your newly emerging visions, you have to embrace an element of release.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Remember to go at your own pace and prioritize your mental health's wellbeing. Go-getter Mars locks into a supportive connection with visionary Jupiter...

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
It's hard to sit still under Friday's buzzing cosmic landscape, Libra. Follow your impulse to break out of routine; the thoughtful Gemini moon implores you to find a fresh perspective.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
As a Scorpio, you look to the courageous planet Mars for guidance. Today's skies find Mars in an uplifted, confident place - as it reaches out to big-picture Jupiter.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
This pairing of planets makes it easy for you to be direct and aim for forward movement in your most important one on ones. The sun's square to shadowy Pluto may stir up unacknowledged tensions.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Friday's cosmic landscape is chock full of action, Capricorn. On the one hand, a sense of confidence and capability imbues itself into the day - as energetic Mars aligns with big-picture Jupiter.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Several stories seem to reach their apex under Friday's skies, Aquarius. It's hard to focus on any laborious tasks, as the Gemini moon pushes you to explore creative outlets instead.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
This pairing is great for dealing with issues or blockages; just make sure you're not giving more than you can handle. Elsewhere, the sun's squabble with Pluto can stir up shadows around your confidence.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

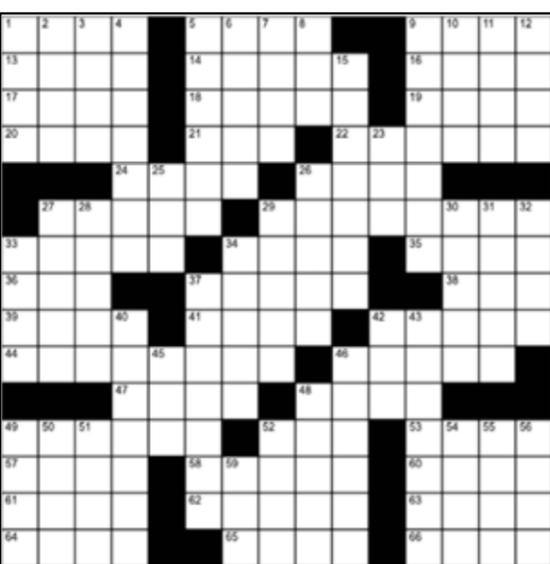
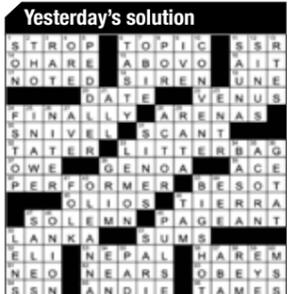
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	10	23	sandy
Harbin	0	15	cloudy
Tianjin	12	24	shower
Urumqi	6	19	clear
Xi'an	8	22	cloudy
Lhasa	2	15	overcast
Chengdu	11	20	overcast
Chongqing	17	21	overcast
Kunming	13	27	clear
Nanjing	11	20	cloudy
Shanghai	12	17	overcast
Wuhan	13	23	cloudy
Hangzhou	12	19	overcast
Taipei	19	22	drizzle
Guangzhou	22	27	thundershower
Hong Kong	22	27	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	6	20	overcast
Frankfurt	-1	6	clear
Paris	2	9	clear
London	1	9	clear
New York	10	18	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Lowdown; 5- Course list?; 9- High cards; 13- Editor Wintour; 14- Uneven; 16- Tabula ___; 17- Eye drop; 18- Cooperative race; 19- Streetcar; 20- Mandlikova of tennis; 21- Friendly introduction?; 22- Relax; 24- River sediment; 26- "Dancing Queen" quartet; 27- D. ebum, a tropical tree; 29- Weariless; 33- Vends; 34- Kind of wrestling; 35- Grandson of Adam; 36- French vineyard; 37- Relative by marriage; 38- Posed; 39- Yorkshire river; 41- Political cartoonist Thomas; 42- Urges; 44- State in the central United States; 46- Clogs, e.g.; 47- Confirmation, e.g.; 48- Shootout; 49- Closing number; 52- Road guide; 53- Garage sale sign; 57- Yeah, right; 58- Love deeply; 60- Got on; 61- Delhi wrap; 62- More urgent; 63- Brainchild; 64- Plastic clog; 65- Novi Sad native; 66- Flat sound;

DOWN: 1- Course; 2- Draft classification; 3- Son of Judah; 4- Umbrella; 5- Just; 6- Construct; 7- ___ contendere; 8- Dos Passos trilogy; 9- Gallery event; 10- Attention; 11- Son of Isaac and Rebekah; 12- Coarsely ground corn; 15- It may be penciled in; 23- Actor Vigoda; 25- Officeholders; 26- Draw a bead on; 27- Strange and mysterious; 28- Brief advertisement; 29- Oklahoma city; 30- Result; 31- Flies high; 32- Fast fliers; 33- Scrutinize; 34- Reptile; 37- As an alternative; 40- Unpredictable; 42- Yonder yacht; 43- North Star; 45- Afflict; 46- Majestic; 48- Challenger; 49- Money-related; Abbr.; 50- Girder type; 51- Roman emperor; 52- Additional; 54- Lays down the lawn; 55- Mid-month time; 56- Wet septet; 59- Bad-mouth;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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- 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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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

DRIVE IN

SEXY ROM-COM LOSES STEAM BETWEEN FRIDAY AND 'MONDAY'

JOCELYN NOVECK,
MDT/AP NATIONAL WRITER

AP PHOTO



Sebastian Stan (left) and Denise Gough in a scene from "Monday"

MONDAY. Ugh. The very word emits a chill. Monday means back to school, or work. Nose to the grindstone. Party's over.

Friday, meanwhile, is the opposite vibe. What's great about Friday is that, unlike Saturday and certainly Sunday, it signals the beginning of fun. Friday means you have lots of time — Monday's a mere twinkle in the distance.

Now there's an entire movie, "Monday," by writer-director Argyris Papadimitropoulos, based on this concept. The story of an intoxicating love affair slowly inching toward some sort of reckoning with reality, "Monday" should really be called "Mostly Friday," because most of what we see transpires in that phase: the beginning of a relationship, when we willfully ignore any warning signals.

"Monday" takes some patience. It's arresting at times, and beautiful, even seductive, mainly due to the chemistry between its leads, Sebastian Stan and Denise Gough, who spend a lot of time,

well, having sex. (Stan recently promoted the movie by teasing a shot of his nude backside on Instagram. This will not hurt the film's chances.)

Speaking of intoxicating, our setting is Greece. In the summer. This is where we meet thirtysomething American immigration lawyer Chloe (Gough, an Irish actress better known for her accomplished stage work), who's spending one last night on the

Athens club scene before returning stateside. Chloe is nursing a bad breakup; it's time to go home and start a new job.

But then she meets Mickey, also American, a DJ and jingle writer who's been living in Athens for years. Mickey is charismatic and charming — a man-boy who's clearly gotten by on these assets for a long time. They meet on the dance floor and are kissing within seconds.

The next morning, they wake up stark naked on the beach. The cops take them down to the station. In handcuffs, they introduce themselves to each other by name for the first time. Ah, young(ish) love.

The cops let them go, and Mickey gives Chloe a lift home. It would all end here, except she lost her bag, with her keys. She ends up traveling to a dreamy island with him for a party. And soon,

they're hooked.

If it's a bit hard to believe a woman like Chloe — smart, with a meaningful career — would drop everything (and halfway through security!), well, we're willing to suspend disbelief. After all, it IS Friday. In fact that first chapter is called "Friday," as is the next, and the next, and the next.

And these two can't keep their hands off each other. But fissures slowly appear. An old friend of Mickey's comes to visit and tells him, "You're only happy when you're failing." Mickey's ex, meeting Chloe, calls him "a baby." This concerns her, but the magnetic field of their attraction is apparently too intense to escape.

At the same time, there's a worrying undercurrent that maybe it's not all about chemistry — maybe these two are using each other for reasons they'd prefer not to acknowledge. One of them actually verbalizes this, but it's pretty far into the game,

"Monday" has an artsy, improvised feel, but also falls prey to some pretty standard rom-com tropes.

As the relationship goes, so goes the film.

"Monday," an IFC Films release, has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America "for sexual content, nudity/graphic nudity, drug use, and pervasive language." Running time: 116 minutes. ★★☆☆

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TASTE OF EDESIA

A Southeast Asian feast

IRENE SAM, MDT

SOUTHEAST Asia is a paradise for foodies. This season, **Urban Kitchen** at JW Marriott Hotel Macau offers enticing cuisines from Southeast Asia, cuisines from Thailand in April, Singapore and Malaysia in May, and the Philippines and Vietnam in June.

Experiencing Thai food culture is a highlight for everyone visiting Thailand. Traditional rituals, vibrant colours and fresh spices are also a part of the country's gastronomic scene, which ranges from busy street stalls to sophisticated restaurants. This April, "Amazing Thailand" food fanfare is available at Urban Kitchen. Leng saap mountain pork is the most popular dish from the Train Night Market Ratchada. With stacks of tender pork ribs and spine, well balanced with chilli and cilantro in pork bro-

th, it is just simply amazing to enjoy. Other signature dishes include the classic Tom Yum Goong (spicy prawn soup), Thai crab salad with creamy coconut lime dressing, pad Thai noodles, and the all-time favourite, coconut sticky rice with mango.

Sharing similar features, guests will be imaginarily transported to Singapore and Malaysia in May. Be prepared for some spicy and savoury dishes such as Sambal Lobster, of which the sambal is a spicy, chilli-based sauce that is used extensively in Malaysian and Singaporean cooking. This appetising dish is served in a sizzling claypot with garlic and aromatic condiments. A complete peppery-all-the-way culinary excursion cannot go without the hearty and succulent Bak Kut Teh (pork ribs soup) and the quintessential pepper crab, as well as the authentic Kapitan chicken curry.

For some pleasantly zes-

ty and fragrant dishes, guests could explore a variety of choices from the Philippines and Vietnam cuisines selected for June. Food in the Philippines is well-known for its unique combination of sweet and sour flavours, while Vietnamese food is a harmonious combination of five basic sensory tastes: spicy, sour, sweet, salty, and bitter. Embark on a fragrant journey for the palate with the signature of the month: pork belly roll (known as "Lechon de Leche" in the Philippines). Its melt-in-the-mouth texture pairs perfectly with the crispy roasted skin, with exotic flavour enhanced by aromatic spices like lemongrass, green onions, garlic and chilli. Butter and garlic shrimp is another must try signature. Seafood Kare Kare (mixed seafood in peanut butter) is a Filipino version of bouillabaisse, guaranteed to have everyone's taste buds bouncing.

Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



THE PALERMO 1200 METRES TURF

2021-04-18|Sun|15:10

MARQUILA from Stanley Chin's yard is my idea of an outsider's chance in this Sunday's MJC meeting. Watched his first MJC race in March as well as his morning track work closely; that race was a 1350 metres sand race **Marquila** led strongly starting from the barrier gate and weakened at the straight. That race gave me the feeling that it was very much like a test run for him in MJC, and looking at his prep in the morning at the track, I reckoned he will show his true colours in this coming Sunday's turf race. This race is 1200 turf not on sand. His barrier draw in the four hold is also favourable for him to get strong lead position right from the starting gate. **Marquila** is an underdog in this small field of eight runners. He is my NAP on Sunday.

Race 3 Horse no. 5 Marquila Win and Place bets



OPINION

World Views

Andrea Felsted, MDT/Bloomberg



THE WORLD'S BIGGEST LUXURY GROUP LOOKS READY FOR A GREAT YEAR

Some good news for the luxury industry: There's no sign of all that revenge spending running out of steam.

Despite pandemic restrictions still gripping many parts of the world, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE reported remarkable performance late Tuesday. The world's biggest luxury goods group said sales rose 32% in the three months to March 31, compared with 2020. It's a signal that demand for monogrammed accessories and designer sneakers, which proved resilient during the pandemic, is holding up, even when wealthy consumers have more choice about where to spend their money.

This quarter's results were always going to look impressive, especially on a year-over-year basis, given the disruption from the outbreak of Covid a year ago and the inclusion of Tiffany's sales starting in early January. But the company has even surpassed performance seen in the first quarter of 2019 — long before the pandemic. Organic sales, which exclude currency movements and acquisitions, were up 8%, and fashion and leather goods expanded by 37%.

LVMH's growth has continued to be driven by China, where consumers are spending more at home instead of abroad. But the U.S. was also a significant contributor, with shoppers benefiting from the latest round of Covid stimulus checks.

Once again it was the mega-brands — Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior — that led the way. But even stragglers like Marc Jacobs got a boost from U.S. online shopping.

The sustained level of demand bodes well for the other leading high-end names, such as Kering SA's Gucci and Cie Financière Richemont's Cartier, as well as those that were struggling before the pandemic. Burberry Group Plc, which is in the midst of a turnaround plan, last month said profits would be ahead of expectations after stronger sales in its fourth quarter to the end of March. It's little wonder, then, that luxury shares, and LVMH's in particular, have increased since the start of this year.

And yet, there are challenges ahead. People were able to save money from not traveling and eating out, and they funneled that extra cash into buying handbags and watches. As vaccine programs increase and markets such as the U.S. open up again, shoppers will finally be able to spend elsewhere. But this may be more of an issue in 2022, if the recovery in international travel, which is probably the biggest competitor to high-end spending, continues to be slow.

The major houses appear poised to tackle whatever lies ahead. Even as consumers start spending on other things, Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior should still be able to capture sales from the army of new fans they amassed over the last year. And LVMH will also have the benefit of now owning Tiffany. Giving the jeweler some true sparkle will take years, not quarters, the French group said. But, if it is as successful as the company's rejuvenation of Bulgari, that should mean promising improvements ahead.

The focus on Tiffany could be good news for rival Kering too. LVMH said it was devoting all its resources to integrating the jeweler rather than looking for other deals. That leaves some room for Kering, which has reportedly been eyeing an approach for Cartier-owner Richemont.

Even without any M&A fireworks, this year could be another vintage one for the bling behemoths.

OFFICIALS SAY OLYMPIC CANCELLATION, NO FANS STILL AN OPTION

THE BUZZ

Two officials in Japan's ruling LDP party yesterday said changes could be coming to the Tokyo Olympics. One suggested they still could be canceled, and the other said even if they proceed, it might be without any fans.

Toshihiro Nikai, the No. 2 and secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, suggested the cancellation only a day after Tokyo reached the 100-days-to-go mark on Wednesday.

He made his comments in a show recorded by Japan's TBS TV. "If it seems impossible to go on with the games, they must be

definitely canceled," Nikai said. "If there is a surge in infections because of the Olympics, there will be no meaning to having the Olympics."

Asked if a cancellation was still an option, Nikai said: "Of course."

But he also added: "It is important for Japan to have a successful Olympics. It is a big opportunity. I want to make it a success. We will have many issues to resolve and prepare, and it is important to take care of them one by one."

AP PHOTO



ROYAL FAMILY

FUNERAL OFFERS CHANCE FOR WILLIAM, HARRY TO RECONCILE

SYLVIA HUI, LONDON

WHEN Prince Philip's funeral takes place tomorrow, it will be more than a focal point for national mourning. Many will also be watching for any signs of reconciliation between Prince Harry and the royal family, especially with his elder brother Prince William.

It will be the first time that Harry comes face-to-face with the royal family since he and his wife Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, stepped away from royal duties last March and moved to California with their young son, Archie.

While that departure caused a huge rift in the monarchy, family relations took a further dive last month when Harry and Meghan gave a candid interview with U.S. talk show host Oprah Winfrey. Among other revelations, Harry confirmed rumors that he and his brother had been growing apart, saying "the relationship is 'space' at the moment" — though he added that "time heals all things, hopefully."

Harry also told Winfrey that his father, heir to the throne Prince Charles, was not accepting his calls for a time.

And the couple threw a bombshell by revealing that an unnamed member of the royal family had expressed concern about "how dark" their child's skin color might be due to Meghan's

biracial heritage. Days after the explosive racism accusations were aired, William shot back, telling reporters that his was "very much not a racist family."

In spite of the tensions, tomorrow's funeral will almost certainly remind the brothers of their shared grief at another royal funeral more than two decades ago — when, as young boys, both walked behind their mother Princess Diana's coffin in 1997.

Tomorrow, Harry, 36, and William, 38, are both expected to join other senior royals and walk behind their grandfather's coffin, as the funeral procession makes its way through Windsor Castle.

Many observers believe that Philip's funeral will provide an ideal opportunity for "The Firm" to show a united front to the world and for the royal brothers to smooth over tensions. Philip, who had been married to Queen Elizabeth II for more than seven decades, died last week at 99.

"They shared emotion. They share grief at the present time because of the death of their grandfather," former Prime Minister John Major, who was appointed the princes' guardian after Diana's death, told the BBC this week. "I hope very much that it is possible to mend any rifts that may exist."

Penny Junor, another royal biographer, thinks the damage done by the Winfrey interview — especially

the racism accusations, which she called "unforgivable" — would be very difficult to come back from.

"[Harry] was disrespectful to his father. He talked about a private matter on a global stage. There's a lot to sort out," Junor said. Both of the brothers are "very stubborn people," she added, and "William will have been really hurt and angry at his brother for the interview."

Harry arrived in the U.K. on Monday and is in quarantine, but he can attend the funeral in line with government rules that make exceptions for such occasions. Meghan, who is pregnant with their second child, was advised by her doctor not to make the long trip, officials said.

The brothers have had contrasting roles and personalities from birth, though in recent years those differences have increasingly come to the fore.

As the younger brother to a future king — the so-called "spare" to the heir — Harry had far fewer responsibilities and a reputation as the party prince before serving in the army and settling down in his 30s.

Yet his place in the monarchy became further diminished with the birth of William's three children, who bumped him down to sixth in line to the throne.

It was clear from at least 2019 that Harry wanted a break from the constraints of the monarchy to craft his own narrative. MDT/AP

Iraq A powerful explosion rocked a market in east Baghdad yesterday, killing one person and injuring 12 others, according to Iraq's military. The cause of the blast in the city's Sadr City area, in the Habibiya neighborhood, was not immediately known. It sent a cloud of black smoke above the area.

Saudi Arabia A university near the country's border with Yemen caught fire yesterday after the kingdom's air defenses intercepted a barrage of ballistic missiles and bomb-laden drones. The interception scattered debris on Jizan University's campus, which caused a fire that has been contained. No one was killed, and there were no immediate reports of injuries.

Beirut The Lebanese judge leading the investigation into last year's massive blast at Beirut's port yesterday ordered the release of six people, including security officers, who had been detained for months. It was not immediately clear what triggered the release of the men.

AP PHOTO



Russia A top associate of imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny was convicted of trespassing yesterday and handed a suspended sentence of one year community service after she tried to doorstep an alleged security operative believed to be involved in Navalny's poisoning with a Soviet-era nerve agent. A court in Moscow found Lyubov Sobol guilty of forcing her way into the apartment of a relative of the alleged operative.

AP PHOTO



Ukraine's top diplomat asked yesterday for stronger Western backing, saying "words of support aren't enough" amid escalating tensions in the country's east and a Russian troop buildup across the border. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, speaking after talks with his counterparts from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, asked the Baltic nations to reach out to other European Union and NATO members about offering "practical assistance" to Kyiv.