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"THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

MAY DAY: POLICE AUTHORITIES
ARE EXPECTING TO SEE
RECORD-BREAKING TOURIST
ARRIVALS THIS UPCOMING HOLIDAY

ANTI-SMOKING GROUP
SUPPORTS TOBACCO
TAX INCREASE

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NEED TO BALANCE HONG KONG TRAVEL
BUBBLE WITHOUT JEOPARDIZING CHINA-
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Chinese state media say two children were killed and 16 other people were injured by a knife-wielding attacker at a kindergarten in a southern city. The Xinhua News Agency said the attack occurred in a township outside Beiliu, a city in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. It said a suspect has been arrested and an investigation is underway.



South Korea began administering fast-track COVID-19 vaccines yesterday to athletes, coaches and others expected to attend the Tokyo Olympics. The Korean Sport and Olympic Committee said the first group of about 100 people received the first doses at a state-run hospital in Seoul at the start of the country's prioritized vaccination program for its Olympic delegation.



Myanmar government forces launched airstrikes against ethnic minority guerrillas in two areas of the country, local reports said. Fighting has been raging daily in northern Myanmar in territory controlled by the Kachin Independence Organization, representing the Kachin minority, and in the east by the Karen National Union, representing the Karen.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said yesterday that Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots failed to make headway in informal talks on the future of their divided island nation, but talks will continue and "I do not give up." The United Nations chief invested his political capital in overseeing three days of talks in Geneva aimed at re-igniting dormant negotiations to reunify Cyprus.

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ANTI-SMOKING GROUP SUPPORTS TOBACCO TAX INCREASE

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU should raise its tobacco tax to 75% of the retail price for each pack of cigarettes, Brenda Chan, executive director of the Smoke-free and Healthy Life Association of Macau (SHLAM), has said.

Chan made the comment in an exclusive interview with the Times regarding the government's proposal of further raising the tobacco tax in Macau. The group's head noted that the current tax level is 60% of the retail price of each pack of cigarettes.

The Health Bureau recently conducted a review on the implementation of the current version of the counter-smoking law. It identified several areas that the authority found concerning, such as the importation and use of e-cigarettes.

In order to combat these problems, the authority recommends that the importation of e-cigarettes be banned, so as to further restrain the popularity of the product. An increase of the tobacco tax has also been proposed to achieve proximity to the level proposed by the WHO.

When questioned about the

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group's reaction to the suggestion, Chan said that they are happy about the proposal. "We have been advocating for the tax increase," she added.

Justifying the group's position, the group representative listed two major reasons. Firstly, she said, the tax level is recommended by the WHO, which has deemed this as "the most effective way to discourage smoking," according to Chan.

There is data to support this claim. Chan said that, according to the WHO, raising the tobacco tax to 75% is effective in discouraging 8% from the low-income group, including young people, to smoke. On an overall scale, it can decrease smoking by 4%.

The second reason why the

group is in support of the tax hike is that Macau last raised its tobacco tax in 2015. Combining the two factors, the group find it justifiable to raise the tax within a foreseeable future.

In addition, she briefly mentioned that the tobacco tax level in Macau is lower than that of other regions, such as Hong Kong and Singapore.

As to how much the tax should be, Chan referred to the WHO-recommended level. She said that a balance needs to be achieved between the economy and health problems caused by cigarette smoking.

She added that the government has been working in a gradual manner.

However, when questioned as

to whether she agreed that a tax hike may lead to layoffs within, or economic impacts upon, the tobacco agency sector, her answer was in the negative, but she noted that it is more about caring for people on an emotional level.

Nonetheless, a tax hike may not be as effective to discourage smoking as the WHO claims, according to an article by Dr. Stanton A. Glantz titled "Tobacco taxes are NOT the most effective tobacco control policy (as actually implemented)" from 2014 suggests. The article was posted on the website of the Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education of the University of California San Francisco.

Chan provided alternative ways the group has been using to discourage smoking. For instance, they would start with a "family appeal," stressing the importance of a family in its entirety and thus supporting a non-smoking approach.

The group would also stress hazards caused by second-hand smoke on co-living family members, especially younger ones.

"Older smokers do care more about their grandchildren," Chan admitted.

FISHING SUSPENSION IMPOSED FROM TOMORROW

The summer fishing moratorium in the South China Sea will commence on May 1. According to the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA), 120 fishing boats were in Macau yesterday. In addition, the DSAMA will reinstate the celebratory event during the fishing break from June to July this year. The authorities had already consulted with the Health Bureau (SSM) on the safety measures when hosting the event.

GOV'T OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOLS REOPEN FROM LABOR DAY

Four outdoor swimming pools managed by the Sports Bureau will reopen from May 1 to October 31. There will be three sessions on each operating day, covering the morning, afternoon and evening. Each session will have a quota. Bookings can be made from 8:30 a.m. on April 30 from the bureau's website, and can be made for sessions up to two days in advance. Each eligible user can only make and use one booking each day.

SANDWICH CLASS HOUSING

60% agree with the definition, consultation results show

RENATO MARQUES

OVER 60% of the public agrees with the first option for the definition of the "sandwich class," proposed by the government, officials have claimed in the final report of the public consultation on the "Housing Plan for the Sandwich Class."

According to the results, members of the public favor the definition that places under this "social classification" residents with in-

comes that exceed the ceiling stipulated for the economic rental housing applications but, at the same time, allows candidates placed at the bottom of the waiting list for low-cost acquisition housing to be considered.

This is in consideration of the fact that, in addition to partially easing the demand for public housing, it also provides an extra option for some low-cost housing candidates.

During the consul-

tation period, the government received over 28,000 submissions that were compiled as 2,307 opinions on the topic.

According to the procedure, the opinions collected will now be taken into account to refine and finalize the details of the proposal for the legal regime that will regulate the supply of this new type of housing.

In a statement on the topic, the government added that they will integrate the results from the study to carry out "a pru-

dent assessment, seeking to balance the interests of the different sectors of society, as well as ensure the healthy and stable development of the real estate market."

For the time being, there is no timetable for the presentation of the bill that will regulate the procedure but, as the Chief Executive, Ho Iat Seng, previously mentioned, this is a project that will take some time and it will not happen before the last quarter of this year.

IC 'HIGHLY CONCERNED' OVER ALLEGED STAFF BREACH

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is highly concerned with the allegations against one of its staff members on violating the duty of confidentiality, the bureau remarked in a statement.

In addition, it stressed that it would fully comply with the investigation of the judiciary. The suspect, aged 36 years and surnamed Lou, started working at the IC in 2011 and worked, prior to his arrest, as senior technician.

On March 12, the Judiciary Police (PJ) received a report from the IC about the suspicion over the bureau's staff member handing internal

materials, which should have been kept confidential, to a Chinese media organization.

Moreover, the staff member even posted the materials to the website of the Chief Executive's Office.

After initial investigation, the PJ requested the suspect's presence at the police station. During further investigations, the police unearthed a file in Lou's personal computer. The file was identical to the materials Lou had provided to the Chinese press.

The police noted that the date of setting up the file was earlier than that of the case. AL

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Budget for LRT East Line not yet ready: Rosário

ANTHONY LAM

ALTHOUGH the preliminary design of the Light Rapid Transit's (LRT) East Line has been announced, the budget is still difficult to determine, Raimundo do Rosário, Secretary for Transport and Public Works, said yesterday after sitting in a parliamentary committee meeting.

He was asked to make a forecast on the budget needed for the construction of the LRT line. He stressed that it will be the first time Macau builds an underground railway. Given the lack of precedents, it is difficult to foresee the budget.

"If anyone has the guts to draw a budget, it will be a little irresponsible," Rosário explained.

The senior official added that a preliminary study is needed to determine the budget, before stressing



that the government is striving to open a bid for the project by the end of this year.

Earlier, the Infrastructure Development Office has awarded the tender for

preliminary design service of the project to the China Railway Major Bridge Reconnaissance & Design Institute Co. Ltd.'s Macau subsidiary. The price tag was more than MOP89 million.

On the price, Rosário said it was difficult to determine its worthiness. He used garment shopping as an example to illustrate that each shopper has their own gauge.

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MAY DAY

POLICE TO SEE POSSIBLE RECORD-BREAKING TOURIST ARRIVALS

BORDER checkpoints are ready for the forecasted record-breaking counts of tourist arrival – a 20% hike from the daily record since last year – Ng Kam Wa, commander-in-chief of the Public Security Police Force said yesterday.

The chief was asked about the security force's preparation for the upcoming long holidays starting from May 1, which will amount to five days in mainland China. Ng remarked that the daily peaks of tourist arrival and border-crossing counts were 36,500 on April 18 and 382,000 on April 16.

As per the estimate made by the police, there will be a 20% increase based on the announced figures.

During the same occasion, Secretary for Se-

curity, Wong Sio Chak, disclosed that the introduction of smart policing was progressing smoothly.

He highlighted this year as the implementation year of the initiative and remarked that smart policing has been put to use in the recent "Crystal Fish" tropical cyclone drill.

The senior official offered as an example that progress of the evacuation conducted during the drill was shared on a platform to which all participating bureaus had access. This was part of the smart policing implementation.

He did not rule out using the initiative in the upcoming typhoon season.

The next two years, he added, will see the consolidation of the initiative. AL

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2021 BUDGET AMENDMENT APPROVED AMID CRITICISM

RENATO MARQUES

REQUESTED to be addressed by the Legislative Assembly (AL) as an urgent matter, the amendment to the 2021 Budget Law has been unanimously approved by the lawmakers during yesterday's plenary session.

Although finally all lawmakers voted in favor of the amendments, the matter resulted in an unexpectedly long debate with several lawmakers taking this opportunity to criticize the government, and especially Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, for several aspects included in the bill.

Lawmaker Sulu Sou took the opportunity to criticize the government for not listening to lawmakers' opinion before launching the third round of the economic stimulus, which is accountable for part of the now approved amendments.

Sou also showed disapproval with the methods used by Lei, accusing him of calling the discussion on the budget law amendments at the very last minute of the deadline of April 29 which was mentioned to the public. According to Sou, the government had



Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong (center)

already expressed its intentions to amend the bill since March.

For Sou, the government's timing aimed at the fast approval of the bill without leaving much time for debate or scrutiny from the AL.

Lawmaker Leong Sun Iok also took the opportunity to call, once again, for Lei's attention on the problems faced by residents in a situation of being laid off and the drastic decline of income for many families.

In reply, Lei tried to ease the problem noting that the measures included in the budget amendment will have

immediate effect in relieving the pressure from the families while it is expected that the economy can start to effectively recover from this weekend, the Secretary said, expressing hopes that the Golden Week from May 1 will be the "turning page" for the return of a high number of visitors to Macau.

Lawmaker Au Kam San also expressed concerns regarding other items included in the budget amendment, namely the one related to the payment of the construction works on the new Hengqin Border Post, saying, "Why is this included in this special

amendment? This is a normal project that had been already budgeted, why is it included now in a bill to be discussed as a matter of urgency?" Au asked. In a confusing reply, the director of the Financial Services Bureau, Iong Kong Leong, only explained that the money refers to the last installment on the project that needs to be paid by the Macau government.

The amendment adds some 9.112 billion patacas from the fiscal reserves to the economic support plan as well as reinforces about 483 million patacas on the budget of the Macao Foundation.

LAWMAKERS' AGENDA

WORKERS IN LAYOFF:

Lawmaker Lei Chan U thinks that there are ways for the government to know how many workers are currently in a situation of being laid off. Following the statements made by the Chief Executive early this month, who said at the Legislative Assembly that the government had no way to know how many workers were in a situation of being laid off, Lei said a survey done by the Macao Federation of Trade Unions concluded that 56% of the respondents noted that in the last three months, their companies adopted layoff measures between eight to 15 days per month. The lawmaker also added that the evolution of the underemployment rate increased from 0.4% before the Covid-19 pandemic to 5.4% during the pandemic and is currently at 4.5%, which shows about 17,000 people being in a situation of underemployment, that is, in a layoff, unpaid or half-paid holidays.

EMPLOYERS ABUSING LABOR LAW:

Lawmaker Ella Lei says that existing flaws in the labor law have led to several abuse cases from employers. One such case is MASTV where several workers have been waiting for several years for the payment of arrears salaries. The lawmaker noted that although the workers have turned to the Labour Affairs Bureau and presented a formal complaint on the case, the case cannot be solved. According to Lei, part of the problem has to do with the law which allows the late payment of the unpaid salaries. The fine employers are liable to is waived off immediately even before the case reaches the courts. The lawmaker calls on the government to revise the norm so as to put pressure on employers.

PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN ELECTIONS:

Lawmaker José Pereira Coutinho has expressed disagreement with "verbal warnings" which he says have been occurring, namely on Macau Security Force (FSM) disallowing the members of the FSM to support the constitution of candidacy lists for the Legislative Assembly elections taking place in September. According to the lawmaker, some chiefs of these forces have been ordering members not to participate in the elections or any election-related activities, claiming the duties of impartiality and neutrality. Coutinho calls for a written memorandum to explain to all civil servants if they can support candidates or list and participate in campaign activities.

Au Kam San cites Mao Zedong to complain about lack of civil rights

RENATO MARQUES

RENATO MARQUES



LAWMAKER Au Kam San made use of a quote from the former Chinese Communist Party Chairman and founder Mao Zedong to express dissatisfaction with the current governance style that, according to Au, is disrespecting the Macau Basic Law.

"Be written on paper does not mean to be a reality," said Au, citing Mao, during a spoken inquiry presented in the period before the agenda of yesterday's plenary session at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

"People in Macau should feel this [the difference between what is the rule and what is the practice] heavily," Au

added, explaining that although the Basic Law notes the progressive development of the political system in Macau, Au thinks that in reality, what has been happening is a regression.

"The elections of the municipal assemblies are over, and in the AL

elections, although they still exist, only 14 seats are directly elected by the residents of Macau, one vote per person, less than half of the 33. It can only be said that this type of right to elect and to be elected is somewhat paralyzed. In choosing the Chief

Executive, a decisive moment for Macau, the residents' right to vote and to be elected has been completely removed," the lawmaker said, noting that other rights such as the freedom of expression, press freedom, freedom of association, reunion, protest

and demonstration as well as the freedom to organize and participate in trade union associations and strikes, which are also enshrined in the Basic Law, are being jeopardized.

Addressing particularly the situation of press freedom and mentioning the recent case of the Teledifuso de Macau, Au added, "The most serious thing is that government cannot keep up with the opinions and expectations of the population through the press. Its governance is like a blind man riding a blind horse, without realizing that he is close to falling into deep water at midnight."

For Au, the media is the fourth power, possessing the duties of inspecting the actions of the government, as well as providing the government with feedback from the society on citizens' hopes and ambitions.

MELCO Resorts & Entertainment sees supporting local Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as an integral part of the company's business strategy. The Melco approach aims to identify and implement opportunities to enhance the sustainable economic prosperity of local suppliers and SMEs.

Established in 2017, the Melco SME Academy aims to enhance local SME prosperity and help local businesses succeed. It is designed to help SMEs become better equipped in the face of challenge and to seize opportunities through an array of training and business development initiatives on diverse topics as occupational safety and health (OSH), ISO and other international standards, sustainability, ethics and food safety and hygiene.

Over the past six months, a dozen workshops have been hosted at the Melco SME Academy to provide training to approximately 180 representatives from local SMEs of various industries. Experts from relevant fields were invited to the workshops to share the latest news and information with attendees, enabling SMEs with enhanced competitiveness through knowledge, to overcome current challenges and seize forthcoming opportunities. Mr. Pato Kuan of Global Ka Ming International Enterprise Company Limited, a local supplier who recently participated in a Melco SME Academy training workshop, said: "I was glad to join the sustainability training provided by Melco with my two business partners. As a local SME supplier in Macau, it's important that we stay up to date with trends in international sustainable development as we make efforts to improve our corporate social responsibilities. The course was colorfully taught by two lecturers, and we've benefited a lot from the course contents. Thanks again to Melco for providing this valuable platform for mutual learning and communication."

Sustainable development and corporate social responsibility have become key development indicators in the global business community. Melco considers the promotion of sustainable development to supply chain partners as one of the com-

Melco SME Academy contributes to the sustainable development of local enterprises



pany's most important corporate responsibilities and provides regular sustainability and ethics training to local SMEs. Aside from introducing Melco's sustainable development strategy "Above & Beyond", experts also share the latest news and related information on international standards and regulations to promote the importance of sustainable development for the continued growth of SMEs and industries, allowing SMEs to better plan for long-term development and enhance competitiveness.

The content of the ethics training introduces Melco's code of business conduct, and colleagues from the Melco supply chain department also share details of the company's fast track payment initiative – Express Payment Scheme – where all eligible local SME vendors are paid within 14 days of receipt of deliverables. The aim of the scheme is to provide full support

to ease local SME cash flow pressures and to work closely with local SMEs in overcoming the challenges and difficulties of these unprecedented times.

Recognizing the significance of meeting international food safety standards to ensure the wellbeing of guests as well as the sustainable development and success of food suppliers, the Melco SME Academy also provides food safety and hygiene workshops to local SMEs. Contents include information on food hazards, the latest industry-related news on the novel coronavirus, food traceability and best practices, as well as regulations and international standards to help improve food safety.

Sustainable procurement is also key to the sustainable prosperity and development of local enterprises and related industries. As such, Melco has hosted related workshops and invited external speakers from



organizations such as the Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Center (CPTTM) to share knowledge with local suppliers. Contents include the environmental impact and reusability of products and services, the role of SMEs in a sustainable supply chain, consumer sustainability awareness and changing consumption habits. The

events wrap up with a business matching session, where representatives from Melco's supply chain department and participants have a chance for further discussions on sustainable procurement products and solutions and to promote potential collaboration opportunities.

Ms. Augusta Vargas-Prada, Melco's Vice President of Supply Chain, said, "Melco has long been committed to working together with local SMEs for the sustainable and diversified development of Macau. We understand the current economic environment poses many challenges for SMEs, and so the workshops and initiatives available at the Melco SME Academy aim to provide local SMEs with additional technical knowledge – helping them become better equipped for forthcoming opportunities."



GAMING

MGM CHINA'S GGR AT 40% PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

HONEY TSANG

THE gross gaming revenue (GGR) raked in by MGM China Holdings Limited in the first quarter (Q1) of 2021 recovered to around 40% of pre-pandemic levels, or tally in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2019 — surpassing the market recovery pace at 33%, according to the group's latest financial report released yesterday.

The group's market-wide GGR in Q1 2021 climbed by 8% from the preceding quarter, which was attributed to the strong performance seen in its premium mass segment, the group said.

From a yearly perspective, even though the GGR figure in the first quarter dropped by 22% compared to the same period last year — it represented an encouraging augmentation from a year-on-year fall-off of 70% in the previous quarter.

"It is evident that our strength in premium mass is positioning us well as the market gradually turns the corner," as stated in the release.

In Q1, the improved GGR had given a huge impetus to help the group turn around, driving its total revenue to surge by 9% and hit HKD2.3 billion, equiva-

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lent to USD296 million.

During the same period, the adjusted property earnings before interest, taxation, depreciation, amortization (EBITDA) of MGM China posted a positive value of HKD84 million — a sharp uptick from the negative HKD123 million in the same reporting period last year.

Among the group's two properties in Macau, MGM Macau on the peninsula was the most

rewarding in Q1, with its revenue growing 17% year-on-year to HKD1.3 billion, and its adjusted EBITDA up 398% to HKD170 million.

In comparison, MGM Cotai located at the Cotai Strip posted revenue of HKD981 million in Q1 2021 — down modestly from HKD984 million in Q1 2020 — and a negative adjusted EBITDA of HKD86 million.

Both properties saw year-on-

-year increases in mass-market revenue, yet downturns in the VIP sector.

The main floor table games drop of MGM Macau and MGM Cotai celebrated with a 36.9% and 30.4% advancement to HKD4.67 billion and HKD3.43 billion, respectively.

On the contrary, the VIP table games turnover declined by 34.2% and 26.0% for MGM Macau and MGM Cotai.

"MGM China is confident in Macau's longer-term growth prospects and will continue to invest in strengthening our market position," Hubert Wang, president & chief operating officer of MGM China stated in the memo.

FULL OCCUPANCY EXPECTED DURING MAY DAY HOLIDAY

During the earnings call yesterday, Wang said the demand for the May Day Holiday from May 1 to 5 is "actually pretty strong" and he is expecting an "almost full occupancy."

"It's also very important to point out that the demand from our high-end customers remains strong from premium mass to in-house VIP. A lot of our suite products and villas are already overbooked," he added.

The leader is also anticipating a greater momentum in recovery in the coming months, enabled by the rising vaccination rate and the possible resumption of e-visa applications.

NEW SUITES AT MGM COTAI TO LAUNCH THIS SUMMER

IN yesterday's release, Hubert Wang unveiled that the construction of the additional suites in the South Tower of MGM Cotai is slated to open this summer. The new attraction, estimated to cost around HKD677 million, is intended to strengthen the group's foothold in the premium mass market, MGM China stated earlier. To stay competitive and drive vis-

itation, Wang also disclosed that the group is about to launch some themed property attractions. "We will continue our effort and strategy in diversification, along with our meaningful entertainment assets and niche in art and culture. We are committed to helping Macau to develop into a world's tourism destination," said Wang.

GAMING

Melco posted narrowed net loss in Q1

HONEY TSANG

MELCO Resorts & Entertainment Limited registered a narrowed net loss in the first quarter (Q1) of 2021, improving from a net loss of USD364 million in Q1 2020 to USD232.9 million in Q1 this year, according to the financial report released on April 28.

Despite economic fallout and travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, "our integrated resorts experienced a moderate recovery in business levels during the first quarter," Lawrence Ho, the group's chairman and chief executive officer, stated in the report.

Meanwhile, the group generated a positive adjusted property earnings before interest, taxation, depreciation, amortization (EBITDA) of USD30.1 million in Q1, down 60% from USD75.3 million in the first quarter of 2020.

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In addition, the operating revenues for Q1 2021 totaled USD0.52 billion, down 36% year-over-year. The yearly slump was predominantly ascribed to "a year-over-year decline in inbound tourism in the first quarter of 2021."

According to a report by GGRAsia, Sanford C. Bernstein Ltd released a statement on the same day, commenting that the group's recovering business from Q1 2020 to April was bolstered

by "premium mass and premium direct."

The conglomerate operated several entities in Macau, including City of Dreams, Studio City, Altira Macau and Mocha Clubs.

Its iconic property City of Dreams posted USD40 million in adjusted EBITDA in Q1, down from USD61.0 million in the same period last year. The decline was associated with "softer performance in the rolling chip segment," which was

yet partially offset by lower operating costs due to lower business volumes and cost containment efforts.

For Studio City, the adjusted EBITDA narrowed from negative USD9.4 million in Q1 2020 to negative USD5.2 million last quarter, due to lower operating costs.

Altira Macau reported a negative adjusted EBITDA of USD29.6 million in Q1 2021, compared to a negative adjusted EBITDA of USD9.1 million in Q1 2020. The decline was caused by "softer performance in the rolling chip and mass market table games segments."

Despite being hamstrung by Covid-19, Ho stated that the construction on the expansion of Studio City is still ongoing. Upon completion, it will offer 900 additional luxury hotel rooms and suites, massive indoor and outdoor water parks, a cineplex, fine-dining restaurants and an exhibition space.

Meanwhile, the expanded water park at Studio City Phase 1 is slated to open on May 22, he confirmed.

The group is running gaming businesses not only in Macau, but also in Manila, the Philippines and the Republic of Cyprus.

LAWRENCE HO CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT HK-MACAU TRAVEL BUBBLE

DURING the earnings call made on April 28, Lawrence Ho stated that a travel bubble between Hong Kong and Macau "would be great," but suggested for the Macau government to strike a perfect balance without jeopardizing the prized quarantine-free status shared between China and Macau. Visitors from Hong Kong had contributed around 20% to 25% of the group's business in Macau, during pre-pandemic — a figure similar

to Southern China. However, he warned that China has all along been "the most important market for Macau." "China has a zero-tolerance policy with regards to Covid-19 cases. So I think Macau would have to balance the Hong Kong travel corridor with not jeopardizing what they have with China right now," Ho added. In Ho's opinion, Hong Kong has already kept Covid-19 in check.

DEMOGRAPHICS**POPULATION GREW IN 2020 AFTER REPORT OF DECLINE**

CHINA'S population grew last year, the government said yesterday, following a news report a once-a-decade census might have found a decline, possibly adding to downward pressure on economic growth.

The National Bureau of Statistics gave no population figure, which it said would be reported later. But its unusual decision to comment on the report by The Financial Times reflected the political sensitivity of the issue.

The Financial Times reported people familiar with the 2020 census said it was expected to show the population, which rose above 1.4 billion in 2019, declined for the first time since the ruling Communist Party took power in 1949.

Chinese leaders have tried to restrain population growth since 1980. The total has long been expected to peak in coming decades and decline in line with trends in other Asian countries. But an outright fall so early would increase challenges for leaders who are trying to shore up economic growth and raise incomes.

"According to our understanding, in 2020, China's population continued to grow," the NBS said on its website. MDT/AP

DIPLOMACY**Biden says China must 'play by the same rules', Beijing pushed back at comments**

PRESIDENT Joe Biden spent most of his speech to Congress yesterday [Macau time] focused on America's domestic priorities, from taxes to health care. But sprinkled throughout were references to China, underscoring just how much he's focused on the world's second-biggest economy.

"We're in competition with China and other countries to win the 21st Century," Biden said. President Xi Jinping, Biden added, is "deadly earnest" about China "becoming the most significant, consequential nation in the world."

Biden reiterated previous comments that he believes the U.S. and China can find areas of cooperation - he cited countering climate change as an example - and that conflict isn't inevitable. But he vowed that the U.S. will stand its ground when it thinks U.S. or global interests are at stake.

"I also told President

BLOOMBERG



Xi that we will maintain a strong military presence in the Indo-Pacific just as we do with NATO in Europe – not to start a conflict but to prevent one," Biden said. "America won't back away from our commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms and to our alliances."

But the comments on China focused largely on economic competition. Biden said China and other nations "are

closing in fast" on the U.S. now that America spends only 1% of gross domestic product on research and development. And he insisted that China must "play by the same rules" as other major economies, a reference he indicated extends to everything from trade to currency, industrial policy and the investment needed to combat climate change.

"There's no reason the blades for wind turbines can't be

built in Pittsburgh instead of Beijing," Biden said.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin pushed back at some of Biden's comments in a regular press briefing yesterday in Beijing.

"Forcing other countries to accept one's own democratic system and holding the banner of democracy to give orders to the whole world is blasphemy and manipulation of democratic values, which will only create division, hurt relations and undermine stability," he said.

Criticizing Beijing is an area in which Biden is likely to win bipartisan support. In his first 100 days in office, Biden has repeatedly said a rising China is the preeminent challenge the U.S. faces overseas. As a result, he's sought to reorient the U.S. focus away from the Middle East and Afghanistan, where he repeated his vow to withdraw the remaining U.S. troops by Sept. 11. MDT/BLOOMBERG

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SPACE

China launches main part of its first permanent space station

AP PHOTO



SAM MCNEIL, BEIJING

CHINA yesterday launched the main module of its first permanent space station that will host astronauts long term, the latest success for a program that has realized a number of its growing ambitions in recent years.

The Tianhe, or "Heavenly Harmony," module blasted into space atop a Long March 5B rocket from the Wenchang Launch Center on the southern island province of Hainan, marking another major advance for the country's space exploration.

The launch begins the first of 11 missions necessary to complete, supply and crew the station by the end of next year.

China's space program has also recently brought back the first new lunar samples in more than 40 years and expects to land a probe and rover on the surface of Mars later next month.

Minutes after the launch, the fairing opened to expose the Tianhe atop the core stage of the rocket, with the characters for "China Maned Space" emblazoned on its exterior. Soon after, it separated from the rocket, which will orbit for about a week before falling to Earth, and minutes after that, opened its solar arrays to provide a steady energy source.

The space program is a source of huge national pride, and Premier Li Keqiang

and other top civilian and military leaders watched the launch live from the control center in Beijing. A message of congratulations from state leader and head of the ruling Communist Party Xi Jinping was also read to staff at the Wenchang Launch Center.

The launch furthers the "three-step" strategy of building up China's manned space program and marks "an important leading project for constructing a powerful country in science and technology and aerospace," Xi's message said.

The core module is the section of the station where astronauts will live for up to six months at a time. Another 10 launches will send up two more modules where crews will conduct experiments, four cargo supply shipments and four missions with crews.

At least 12 astronauts are training to fly to and live in the station, including veterans of previous flights, newcomers and women, with the first crewed mission, Shenzhou-12, expected to be launched by June.

When completed by late 2022, the T-shaped Chinese Space Station is expected to weigh about 66 tons, considerably smaller than the International Space Station, which launched its first module in 1998 and will weigh about 450 tons when completed.

Tianhe will have a docking port and will also be able to connect with a

powerful Chinese space satellite. Theoretically, it could be expanded to as many as six modules. The station is designed to operate for at least 10 years.

Tianhe is about the size of the American Skylab space station of the 1970s and the former Soviet/Russian Mir, which operated for more than 14 years after launching in 1986.

The core module will provide living space for as many as six astronauts during crew changeovers, while its other two modules, Wentian, or "Quest for the Heavens," and Mengtian, or "Dreaming of the Heavens," will provide room for conducting scientific experiments including in medicine and the properties of the outer space environment.

China began working on a space station project in 1992, just as its space ambitions were taking shape. The need to go it alone became more urgent after it was excluded from the International Space Station largely due to U.S. objections over the Chinese program's secretive nature and close military ties.

After years of successful rocket and commercial satellite launches, China put its first astronaut into space in October 2003, becoming only the third country to independently do so after the former Soviet Union and the United States.

Along with more crewed missions, China launched a pair of experimental, single-

-module space stations — Tiangong-1, which means "Heavenly Palace-1," and its successor, Tiangong-2. The first burned up after contact was lost and its orbit decayed, while the second was successfully taken out of orbit in 2018.

The Tiangong-2 crew stayed aboard for 33 days.

While NASA must get permission from a reluctant Congress to engage in contact with the Chinese space program, other countries have been far less reluctant. European nations and the United Nations are expected to cooperate on experiments to be done on the completed Chinese station.

The launch comes as China is also forging ahead with crewless missions, particularly in lunar exploration, and it has landed a rover on the little-explored far side of the moon. In December, its Chang'e 5 probe returned lunar rocks to Earth for the first time since the U.S. missions of the 1970s.

Meanwhile, a Chinese probe carrying a rover is due to set down on Mars sometime around the middle of next month, making China only the second country to successfully accomplish that after the U.S.

The Tianwen-1 space probe has been orbiting the red planet since February while collecting data. Its Zhurong rover will be looking for evidence of life.

Another Chinese program aims to collect soil from an asteroid, a key focus of Japan's space program.

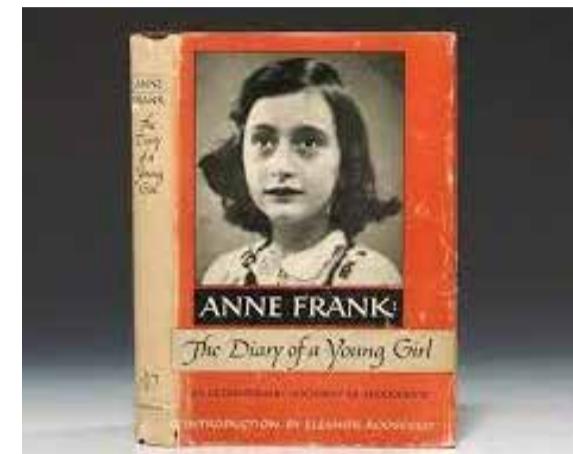
China plans another mission in 2024 to bring back lunar samples and has said it wants to land people on the moon and possibly build a scientific base there. No timeline has been proposed for such projects. A highly secretive space plane is also reportedly under development.

China has proceeded in a more measured, cautious manner than the U.S. and Soviet Union during the height of the space race.

One recent setback came when a Long March 5 rocket failed in 2017 during development of the Long March 5B variant used to put Tianhe into orbit, but that caused only a brief delay. MDT/AP

this day in history

1952 ANNE FRANK PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH



The moving diary of Anne Frank, a Jewish victim of the Holocaust, is now available in British book shops entitled *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

The book was first published in Dutch in 1947 under the title *Het Achterhuis* (*The Secret House*) by her father Otto Frank, who survived the concentration camps.

It is a lively and at the same time disturbing account of a teenager living in hiding with seven others in fear of their lives in occupied Holland.

Anne died just before her 16th birthday in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945.

Her father survived and returned to Amsterdam where he, his family and friends had been in hiding for two years before the Nazis found them.

There, his Dutch friends gave him papers left behind after the Gestapo raid. Among them was his daughter's diary.

It was some days before he could bring himself to read it and when he did he was astonished to find out about a side of his daughter he never knew - someone who was wise beyond her years and had a deep faith in humanity in spite of her suffering.

Her entry for 12 July 1944, three weeks before her arrest, read: "I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us ... I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up into the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquillity will return once more."

The Franks had moved to Holland from Nazi Germany in 1933. In July 1942, after the Germans had occupied the country, the Franks and four other Jewish people went into hiding in an annex of a house in central Amsterdam.

That year, Anne, who had an ambition to be a writer, was given a red and white check diary for her 13th birthday and immediately started writing about her experiences.

The annex was raided by the Gestapo on the 4 August 1944 after a tip-off from a Dutch informer and the eight occupants sent to Westerbork, a transit camp in Holland, and then on to Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

Anne died weeks before the liberation of Bergen-Belsen as did her mother, Edith, and sister, Margot.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Anne Frank became a symbol of Jewish suffering under the Nazis.

Her diary, later entitled *The Diary of Anne Frank*, was translated into 50 languages and became one of the most popular books in the world.

It was made into a play in 1956 that won the Pulitzer Prize and into a film three years later.

An unexpurgated edition was published in English in 1995 revealing both Anne's awakening sexuality and her criticism of some of the adults in hiding with her.

The apartment in Amsterdam where the family hid, Number 263 Prinsengracht, is now the Anne Frank museum.

YOUR STARS**ARIES**

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Take a break; you can finally mend any disputes on the home front. Travel will be enjoyable but could be expensive. Arguments with children or friends may leave you steaming.

**TAURUS**

Apr. 20-May. 20

If boredom has set in, find new and unique directions that offer interesting friendships. Try not to let relatives or friends cause any friction with your mate. This may not be the time to lend or borrow.

**GEMINI**

May. 21-Jun. 21

Opportunities to travel will develop through peers. Don't let your partner get you going. You are best to travel or attend lectures or seminars. A little rest will do wonders.

**CANCER**

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Let go of the past in order to progress. You must not let fellow workers take advantage of your fine talents. Money can be made if you use your ingenuity.

**LEO**

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Set a limit, or you'll wind up on a tight budget. Uncertainties about your personal life are probable. But control your emotions, spending based on your feeling could leave you with an empty wallet.

**VIRGO**

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You may upset someone you live with if you don't consult with them. You can make the most headway if you put in some overtime. Put financial speculation on the back burner for now.

**LIBRA**

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Stick to travel or do things in conjunction with groups. Try to enlist the support of your coworkers first. Be prudent and don't be led down the garden path.

**SCORPIO**

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Hold your temper and refrain from doing anything that might cause injury. Problems with skin, bones, or teeth may mess up your schedule. Your boss may be pushy.

**SAGITTARIUS**

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You may find yourself in the limelight for the wrong reasons. Get down to business and do the work yourself. You may want to put your creative thinking cap on.

**CAPRICORN**

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You may find it difficult to communicate. The existing problems must be dealt with one way or another. Be careful not to hurt the ones you love.

**AQUARIUS**

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You may have difficulties with someone who lives with you. You're best not to get involved in joint financial ventures. Empty promises are evident.

PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Deception and confusion regarding your status in society is likely. Curb the impulse to make lavish purchases and maybe spend some time with good friends.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**SUDOKU****EASY**

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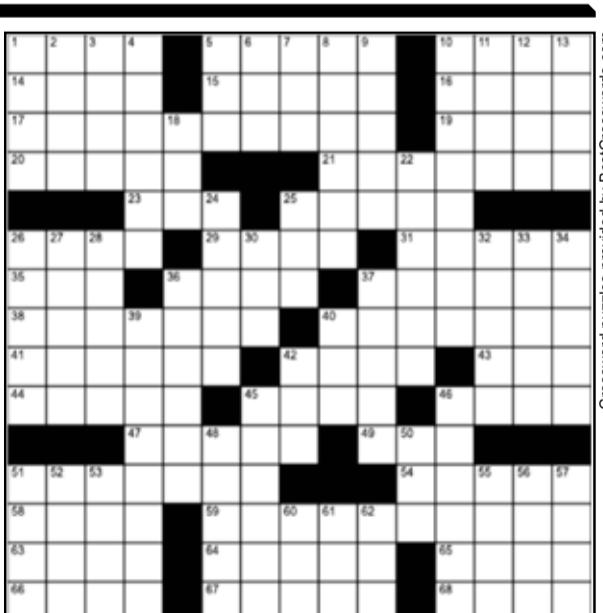
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CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Dept. of Labor division; 5- Ingenuous; 10- Room in a casa; 14- Somewhat; 15- Broadcasting; 16- Take ___ from me; 17- Farmer; 19- Zilch; 20- Pending; 21- Summons; 23- Heavens; 25- Fold; 26- Low-lying area; 29- Cork's place; 31- Brittle; 35- "Aladdin" monkey; 36- Go back, in a way; 37- Tiny bed; 38- Sweet pepper; 40- Student who withdraws; 41- Potemkin setting; 42- Chief; 43- D-Day craft; 44- Oscar de la ___; 45- Identical; 46- Pale; 47- Long arm; 49- Highly respectful way of addressing a man; 51- Foot lever; 54- Everglades bird; 58- Acquire through merit; 59- During the recent past; 63- Areeal problem; 64- Blessed ___; 65- Emit coherent light; 66- Web locale; 67- Reposes; 68- ___ Tu"; 1974 hit;

DOWN: 1- Honolulu's island; 2- Ollie's partner; 3- Mature male European red deer; 4- Counsel; 5- Figs.; 6- As a female, you could be queen or worker; 7- Cartesian conclusion; 8- Practical, as a plan; 9- Journalist Pyle; 10- Golfhazard; 11- Yours, in Tours; 12- Waterfall; 13- Take down ___; 18- North American deer; 22- Brand of polyester fiber; 24- Gossipmonger; 25- All for; 26- Visible exhalation; 27- Remain; 28- Light unit; 30- Promising words; 32- Graven images; 33- Partly melted snow; 34- Small-minded; 36- Unstated; 37- Weeps; 39- Keep at a distance; 40- Grand Coulee, for one; 42- Fannie ___; 45- Record holder; 46- Sock pattern; 48- Pilot; 50- Occupational suffix; 51- Actress Harper; 52- Wife of a rajah; 53- Quod ___ demonstrandum; 55- The back end of something; 56- Smooth sailing; 57- Very, in Versailles; 60- Paris possessive; 61- Big bang cause; 62- Aliens, briefly;

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AD



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DRIVE IN

SEYFRIED LENDS GROUNDING PRESENCE TO CAMPY THRILLER

JOCELYN NOVECK, MDT/AP

HOLLYWOOD thrillers in which sophisticated, attractive city folk move to creaky old country homes and experience scary things are a dime a dozen. Less common is when those Hollywood thrillers are based on the theology of 18th-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg.

But here we are — a Swedenborgian thriller — and thus it's not a bad idea to read up a bit on the man, by which we mean to Google him, before diving into "Things Heard & Seen," a well-cast and often entertaining but campy and sometimes obvious thriller starring Amanda Seyfried and James Norton.

What you'll learn is that Swedenborg believed (among other things) that death was just a continuation of life — and that people lived on, in the spiritual world, past the expiration of their physical body. For the film's purposes, we'll boil it down for you: Ghosts!

AP PHOTO



Amanda Seyfried in a scene from "Things Heard And Seen"

In fact the film, based on the novel "All Things Cease to Appear" by Elizabeth Brundage, begins with a Swedenborg quote: "Things that are in heaven are more real than things that are in the world."

Flashback to the spring before, in a Manhattan apartment. George and wife Catherine (Seyfried) are celebrating the fourth birthday of their daughter, Franny. George — handsome and chiseled, with the kind of tousled hair that looks breezy but you know he works on it — has an announcement to make: Not only has he completed his Ph.D in art history, but he's found a

rine (Seyfried) are celebrating the fourth birthday of their daughter, Franny. George — handsome and chiseled, with the kind of tousled hair that looks breezy but you know he works on it — has an announcement to make: Not only has he completed his Ph.D in art history, but he's found a

teaching job upstate. "Oh, at Bard?" asks a (snobby) friend. No, he replies, at a place called Saginaw.

Nobody is impressed, but Catherine, despite having no desire to leave her coveted job as an art restorer, feels the need to support her husband. For one thing, she tells a friend, they need the money — his wealthy parents have finally cut him off. The friend warns Catherine she's giving up a lot to go live in a place filled with "rich horsey weekenders and full-time rednecks."

But move they do, to beautiful Hudson Valley (writer-directors Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini draw out both the charm and the isolation of the place) and their chosen town, which is ominously called ... Chosen. (Certain things are unabashedly telegraphed in this film. Then again, sometimes they're red herrings. Maybe? Why is Catherine bulimic, for example?)

The house George has found, on an old dairy farm, is

huge and creaky and needs work, but Catherine launches into the job. Soon, however, it becomes clear the family is not entirely alone. As happens in haunted house movies, there are strange noises and strange voices and dodgy electricity. There are also historical hints sprinkled throughout the home, suggesting past trauma.

What's most interesting, though, is not all the sometimes ridiculous plot twists and hints of dark motives and impending doom. It's the relationship between Catherine and George, who may not know each other as well as they thought. Well ... they definitely don't. Seyfried in particular is a grounding presence and a wonderfully empathetic performer. As for Norton, he does a nice job keeping us wondering (for a bit) whether he's simply a good-looking social striver with designs on more than his talent deserves, or something worse. Also, this British heartthrob nails the American academic vibe.

"Things Heard & Seen," a Netflix release, is unrated by the Motion Picture Association of America. Running time: 119 minutes. ★★★★

AD

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TASTE OF EDESIA

Delightful season at Ritz-Carlton

IRENE SAM, MDT

LAI HEEN and Ritz-Carlton Bar are some of the places discerning diners enjoy frequenting, and during spring, these establishments all feature seasonal menus that are visually enticing and unique in Macau.

Spring is the best time to savour the freshest Longjing of the year. Lai Heen's tea sommelier selected premium pre-Qingming Longjing tea from Hangzhou West Lake, which has a mellow flavour, to craft the Chinese Tea Culture Tasting Lunch Experience. The 6-course lunch menu spotlights meticulously crafted dishes that compliment the curated teas such as steamed pork and shrimp dumpling with quail egg, Double-boiled pork shank soup with pear and Chinese herbs, and steamed fried rice with shrimp and roasted goose wrapped in lotus leaf.

The season also signals the return of Ritz-Carlton Bar's afternoon tea session. The Spring Blossom Afternoon Tea Set is presented in a classic three-tiered stand adorned with nature-evoking touches, featuring savoury favourites of wild mushroom vol-au-vent and foie gras torchon with raspberry gelee and kataifi, along with buttery scones. Guests are invited to refine their personal afternoon tea experience with choices of sweet canapés options including lychee and Damask rose finger, rhubarb terrine, angel white chocolate with strawberry cream cheese, and framboise meringue with spiced sable. In addition to a delicious slice of cake or tart from the guéridon trolley, guests can unwind and let themselves be transported to a meadow with the abundance of flowers and vibrant treats.



Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



THE COIMBATORE 1050M SAND

2021-04-30 | Fri | 19:05

I am very optimistic on **Danish Star**'s chance to win this 1050M sand race. Although the odds will be short this time but again he's going to be in the money and hopefully to get one better with jockey F. Henrique to fight out a strong finish this Friday evening. **Danish Star** has been knocking around at the winning stall; however, luck plays big part in the sport of kings as always. Looking at his previous races especially the sand track race, everything points him being a very good sand galloper; there is lots to like about his turn of foot at the straight, his track work in the morning is also good coming into this race. He draws barrier six which is a good hold for H. Henrique to get good cover from the starting gate and fire at the straight. I am confident that **Danish Star** will run a big race for his connection this evening.

Race 1 | Horse no. 3 Danish Star Win and Place bets



OPINION

World Views

Julie Pace, MDT/AP



BIDEN PITCHES BIG GOVERNMENT AS ANTIDOTE TO CRISES

Forty years ago, a newly elected American president declared government the source of many of the nation's problems, reshaping the parameters of U.S. politics for decades to come. [Yesterday], President Joe Biden unabashedly embraced government as the solution.

In an address to a joint session of Congress and the nation, Biden offered up government as both an organizing principle for the nation's democracy and an engine for economic growth and social well-being. He issued a pointed rejoinder to the fiscal philosophy espoused by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, arguing that "trickle-down economics has never worked," and offered in its place an eye-popping \$4 trillion in new government spending to bolster infrastructure and remake a social safety net that buckled for many Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have to prove democracy still works, that our government still works and can deliver for our people," Biden declared.

One hundred days into his presidency, Biden is riding a wave of early momentum after securing passage of a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief fund and surging coronavirus vaccine supplies across the country. But his ability to enact the next phases of his domestic agenda is deeply uncertain given his narrow majorities in Congress, near-universal opposition thus far from Republicans and wariness from some moderate Democrats.

Yet Biden, to the surprise of some lawmakers in both parties, has not responded to those political realities by curtailing or moderating his asks of Congress. While he made overtures to Republicans in his address, particularly for partnership on infrastructure spending, he also made clear that he was willing to press forward without them, confident that a once-in-a-generation influx of government spending will yield results he can sell to the public in next year's midterm elections and perhaps in the 2024 campaign, if he seeks a second term.

Biden's posture has been cheered by many Democrats who are eager to move past the political constructs erected during the Reagan era, which left the party caught between arguing for more investments for lower- and middle-class Americans and wary of being branded as tax-and-spend liberals.

As he sought reelection in 1996, Democratic President Bill Clinton stated in his own address to Congress that the "era of big government is over," though he also said Americans should not be "left to fend for themselves." The next Democratic president, Barack Obama, muscled through his signature health care law and a stimulus plan to pull the economy out of recession, but faced fierce political blowback that cost him his congressional majorities and quickly curtailed many of his other domestic policy ambitions.

But the Democratic Party as a whole has grown more comfortable in recent years with more liberal policies, pushed along in part by a younger, more diverse array of politicians who argue that persistent inequality, particularly for minorities, requires broader overhauls of the nation's domestic policies. The inequities exposed by the pandemic, with Black and Hispanic Americans disproportionately impacted both by the COVID-19 virus and the economic fallout, hastened those arguments.

And while Biden — a white, 78-year-old career politician with a moderate record — may not have been the first choice of his party's left flank, his closing arguments of the 2020 campaign evoked the ideals of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's expansive progressive agenda and the notion of what government can accomplish in a crisis.

He harkened back to Roosevelt again [yesterday], recalling that in another era where the nation's democracy was tested, "Roosevelt reminded us, in America: We do our part."

Biden's advisers say his decades of Washington experience — he was a young senator during Reagan's presidency and went on to serve as Obama's vice president — have cemented his belief that this is another such moment in history that cries out for the type of federal government interventions that may not have been palatable for his most recent predecessors.

[Abridged]

PHILIPPINES EXTENDS VIRUS LOCKDOWN TO MID-MAY

The Philippines is extending an already monthlong lockdown by two weeks as the country's worst coronavirus infection spike starts to ease but remains alarming.

President Rodrigo Duterte said in televised remarks yesterday night that the second-most restrictive lockdown level will now run through May 14 in metropolitan Manila and four nearby provinces, a region of more than 25 million people.

Mayors, however, cut a nine-hour night curfew in metropolitan Manila to six hours to help battered businesses.

Duterte is warning mayors and village chiefs that they face jail if they don't prevent gatherings and other events that violate the pandemic restrictions.

Confirmed coronavirus infections in the Philippines soared past 1 million Monday, with deaths now at more than 17,000, the second highest in Southeast Asia.

AP PHOTO



CHINA SAYS US INCREASING MILITARY ACTIVITY DIRECTED AT IT

ACTIVITY by U.S. military ships and surveillance planes directed at China has increased significantly under President Joe Biden's administration, a spokesperson for the Chinese Defense Ministry said yesterday.

As an example, Wu Qian said the Navy destroyer USS Mustin recently conducted close-in observation of the Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning and its battle group.

That had "seriously interfered with the Chinese side's training activities and seriously threatened the safety of navigation and personnel on the both sides," Wu said. The ship was warned to leave and a formal protest was filed with the U.S., he said.

Activity by U.S. military ships was up 20% and by planes 40% in Chinese-claimed areas since Biden took office in January over the same period last year, Wu said.

"The U.S. frequently dispatches ships and planes to operate in seas and airspace near China, promoting regional militarization and threatening regional peace and stability," Wu said at a monthly briefing held virtually.

China routinely objects to the U.S. military presence in the South China Sea, which it claims almost in its entirety, as well as the pas-

sage of Navy ships through the Taiwan Strait.

The country recently marked the 20th anniversary of the collision between a U.S. surveillance plane and a Chinese navy fighter near the Chinese island province of Hainan that resulted in the Chinese pilot's death. He was called a hero who sacrificed himself for the defense of the motherland. The U.S. says its plane was in international airspace and the accident was the result of reckless flying by the Chinese side.

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WU QIAN
DEFENSE MINISTRY

Wu also blasted moves to beef up monitoring of Chinese aircraft movements by Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy claimed by China as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary.

Efforts by Taiwan's government to stave off what China refers to as inevitable unification are like "a mantis trying to stop a chariot," Wu said.

The U.S. maintains only unofficial relations with

Taiwan in deference to Beijing, but provides the island with defensive weapons and is legally bound to treat threats to it as matters of "grave concern." Increased activity by the Chinese military around Taiwan has been raising concern about the possibility of a conflict.

In an interview with Britain's Sky News, Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu reiterated recent warnings that the military threat from China is growing through "misinformation campaigns, hybrid warfare, and ... grey zone activities."

"And all these seem to be preparing for their final military assault against Taiwan," Wu told Sky.

"This is our country, this is our people and this is our way of life. We will defend ourselves to the very end," Wu said.

Biden did not address such military threats in his address to Congress, instead emphasizing that China and others were "closing in fast" in economic and technological terms.

"We're in a competition with China and other countries to win the 21st century," Biden said.

That drew a harsh response from China's Foreign Ministry, reflecting how hopes for an improvement in the tone, if not the substance, of relations under Biden have born little fruit. MDT/AP

THE BUZZ

EU lawmakers said yesterday that Covid-19 certificates aimed at facilitating travel across the European Union should be enough to move freely this summer, a position likely to clash with member states' prerogatives in their upcoming negotiations. EU legislators said in their negotiating position on the European Commission's proposal that EU governments should not impose quarantines, tests or self-isolation measures on certificate holders.



Russia A top ally of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said yesterday that the network of the politician's offices in Russia is being closed. The Moscow prosecutor's office petitioned a court this month to declare both the regional offices and Navalny's anti-corruption organization as extremist groups, a label that would outlaw their activities, expose members and supporters to lengthy prison terms, and pose a major challenge for Navalny's embattled team.



Spain The bodies of 24 sub-Saharan migrants, among them two minors, who are believed to have died of thirst and hunger as they tried to cross from the west coast of Africa to the Canary Islands, were brought to land by Spain's Maritime Rescue Service. Their wooden boat was first spotted by a Spanish Air Force plane drifting in the Atlantic Ocean some 490 kilometers from the island of El Hierro on Monday. Only three people on board survived.

HOLIDAY TIMES

Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Wednesday May 5. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times.