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CTMA 40th ANNIVERSARY

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China's government criticized U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday for urging the World Health Organization to invite Taiwan, the island democracy claimed by Beijing as part of its territory, to participate in a meeting this month. Blinken's statement Friday adds to a similar joint appeal by foreign ministers of the Group of Seven major economies this month in London. That irked the Communist Beijing government, which insists Taiwan has no right to conduct foreign relations or join global bodies.



South Korea's leader said yesterday he'll use his upcoming summit with President Joe Biden to push to restart diplomacy with North Korea, saying that the U.S. has opted for a diplomatic, phased approach to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis. The White House recently said officials completed a review of North Korea policy and suggested the Biden administration would seek a middle ground between Donald Trump's "grand bargain" and Barack Obama's "strategic patience" approaches.



Australia A judge yesterday rejected a challenge to a temporary Covid-19 ban on citizens returning from India. The government imposed the Indian travel ban on April 30 to relieve pressure on quarantine facilities for returned international travelers. The ban will be lifted on Friday when a government-chartered plane is expected to repatriate 150 of the 9,000 Australians in India who want to come home.

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Public consultation on gaming law to be launched in H2, DICJ confirms

HONEY TSANG

THE government is laying the groundwork for the renewal bidding process of gaming concessions, as the public consultation over the proposed amendments to gaming legislation will commence in the second half of this year, Adriano Marques Ho, director of the Gaming Inspection, and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) confirmed.

In an earlier query, lawmaker Ho Ion Sang questioned DICJ over whether the the bureau's authorities would consider incorporating a new gaming law to better regulate corporate social responsibilities and non-gaming efforts of Macau's casino operators. The move, he explained, is to ensure the economic benefits received by the casinos can trickle down to local society.

In response, director of DICJ, Ho, stated in a written reply that the SAR government will evaluate the feasibility of this suggestion after listening to public opinions

from all walks of life through the upcoming consultation sessions.

He urged casino conglomerates to forge a closer partnership with local small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs), to source the products of SMEs, and allow these businesses to set up premises in the casino properties.

The objective of such a request is to generate interlinked, mutual economic benefits for both casino operators and SMEs. The head of DICJ said the casinos should take the leading role to steer local SMEs towards a growth trajectory.

The DICJ has been monitoring the data provided by casino operators to ensure they have tied in with SMEs as suggested.

Macau's six gaming concessions and sub-concessions are due on June 26, 2022.

Last year, Macau's Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng made clear in his 2021 Policy Address that the endeavor to amend the current gaming law is one of the nine legislations he is stringing to uplift



under his tenure. At the time, Ho promised that he would employ a public consultation to make the most appropriate modifications to the city's gaming law.

The anticipated public consultation was originally scheduled to take place last year but was postponed to the second half of 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The long-overdue consultation raises some thorny questions in society, with many questioning if there will be enough time for the government to analyze public suggestions and compose a

summary report as well as amend the relevant law by the end of this year.

Lawmaker Ho Ion Sang also said he remains doubtful as to whether the draft legislation can be submitted to the Legislative Assembly this year.

GAMING

May Golden Week GGR to reach up to 60%, JP Morgan restates

HONEY TSANG

THE daily run-rate of gross gaming revenue (GGR) for the May Golden Week from May 1 to 5 is projected to reach a "strong" MOP630 million per day, standing at around 60% of 2019 Golden Week's levels which reached up to MOP1.1 billion, according to the latest forecast released yesterday by JP Morgan.

The brokerage's prognosis of Golden Week GGR in May remarkably outperformed its earlier forecast, published days ago on May 6, of just 40% to 50% of 2019 levels.



However, analysts DS Kim, Derek Choi, and Livy Lyu acknowledged their estimation for GGR during the five-day May Day holiday may seem too ambitious to other brokerages and is "well above the highest expectation in the market."

In the seasonal lull from May 6 to 9, the daily run rate of GGR is expected to slow down and hover at around MOP340

million. Despite that, "this also seems meaningfully better than recent non-holiday run-rates of MOP270-280 million per day in March and April," said JP Morgan.

By segment, the GGR volumes generated by the mass and VIP market are expected to return to 70% and 25% of 2019 Golden Week levels, respectively.

With the GGR growing rapidly against a mild recovery rate of tourist arrivals across the holiday, which amounted to only around 25% of pre-pandemic levels, JP Morgan said, "This reflects a strong rebound in the premium mass segment and extended length-of-stay, which in turn should alleviate market concerns on potential spill-over from VIP on premium mass."

On the other hand, the demand among customers in the low-end base mass-market stays was suppressed due to a ban on the issuance of group tour visas by the Chinese government, and continual border closure between Hong Kong and Macau.

"But we're hearing from local travel agencies that package or group tours to Macau might resume soon, which – if it happens – would be a significant boon for a mass recovery," the brokerage said.

The GGR for the whole month of May is expected to tip MOP10 billion, representing 40% of 2019 levels. The growth rate is expected to further pick up in peak travel season in July and August and reach as high as MOP11 billion to MOP12 billion, or 50% of 2019 levels.

The GGR in June may continue to stay sluggish, as June is habitually the lowest season or month of the year, JP Morgan stated.

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TWO MORE VACCINATION POINTS TO COME INTO SERVICE

ANTHONY LAM

It is expected that the city will soon have two more Covid-19 vaccination points; one at the University Hospital and another at the Macau Forum, Dr Tai Wah Hou, Coordinator of the Health Bureau's (SSM) Vaccination Operation, announced at yesterday's weekly press conference.

The first vaccination point is at the University Hospital, located at the Macau University of Science and Technology, which will come into operation on May 17. It will accommodate local residents, non-resident workers and students, with a daily quota of 150 jabs of the Sinopharm inactivated vaccine. Bookings will be taken from 10 a.m. on May 14.

Tai also announced that the SSM is considering to establish a major community vaccination point to cater to more people in a more convenient manner.

This point, which will be located at the Macau Forum, will provide a daily quota of 2,000 injections.

Although an exact date for the commencement was not announced, Tai stressed that the preparation of the station is now "in swift progress." The authority will strive for it to open as early as possible. The service schedule of the future vaccination point will depend on public demand.

Not entirely happy with the local vaccination rate, the SSM has been trying to push inoculation. It

MACAU PHOTO AGENCY



has mentioned several times that the government is in search of ways to encourage more people to take the jab.

Yesterday, the SSM announced one of its first steps to do so. Following an outreach vaccination operation at local higher education institutions, the SSM is now looking to offer waivers on nucleic acid test for certain groups who have received both doses.

The first group who would be exempted from having to obtain a test are participants in festive, leisure and cultural and entertainment events. The second group would be participants at group dining events with more than 400 attendees.

An extra condition to the wai-

ver is that the jabs must be taken two weeks prior to the events.

However, the authority did not address safety concerns that may possibly come with the waiver as reports of infection after complete inoculation have been published in various places, with the nearest one being in neighboring Hong Kong.

LATEST CASE OF AEFI STILL HOSPITALIZED

The SSM also announced at the press conference that the patient in the latest case of Adverse Event Following Immunization (AEFI) is still at the government hospital for treatment.

He was in stable condition without symptoms of blood clots.

The 62-year-old local man

was diagnosed with idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura on April 30 at the government hospital. The illness is a hematological condition distinguished by the drop of platelet in the body.

The SSM pointed out that the cause of the condition is most of the time, unclear.

Similar to previous AEFIs, the SSM stressed that there is no evidence connecting the illness to the Covid-19 vaccine or vaccination.

On February 23 and March 25, the patient received two separate doses of the Sinopharm inactivated vaccine. On April 21, he developed oral mucosal bleeding and red dots all over his body.

He sought medical assistance on the mainland before being taken by the government hospital in Macau.

The case is now being analyzed by the cross-disciplinary task force for Covid-19 vaccination.

With all previous events categorized by the SSM as AEFIs, Tai admitted that no individual has fallen within the coverage of the insurance purchased for the sake of the vaccination campaign.

Some previous AEFIs' connection with the vaccine was identified as "uncertain" by the authority. When asked if the task force was working effectively, Tai explained that "uncertain" is a type of conclusion, meaning that the more scientific evidence is required to determine any causality.

HALF OF REHABILITATED PRISONERS EMPLOYED

57 of 120 rehabilitated prisoners have been hired by inclusive employers in the last year, as part of an initiative coined "Love Employers" by the government. The government has established a cross-departmental task force to help with the initiative. Under the assistance of the task force – comprising the prison and the Social Welfare Bureau – interested employers can conduct job interviews with prisoners prior to their release to ensure that they can start working immediately. In addition, the task force provides correctional and reintegration support for prisoners.

GOV'T EXPECTS TO WITHDRAW FROM RENTED OFFICE SPACE BY 2024

The government is gradually relocating its premises from private office spaces to government-owned office buildings. For example, parts of the Court of First Instance have been relocated to a dedicated building besides Nam Van Lake. The Public Prosecutions Office has also been moved to its own building. The 11-story new building opposite the Artyzen Grand Lapa Hotel will host some government branches, too. The Qingmao Building will also have 11 floors for government offices. At this rate of relocation, the government expects to move out entirely from private offices by 2024.

Mobile payment transactions on the rise

The number of transactions conducted via local mobile payment platforms grew by 40.9% from the previous quarter to 34.7 million in the first quarter of this year, according to data provided by the Monetary Authority of Macao.

The transaction value reached MOP3.1 billion, up 31.5% from the last three months of 2020. The average amount per transaction was MOP88.2.

At end-March 2021, the number of mobile payment terminals and QR code signs totalled 76.7 thousand, a rise of 9.1% quarter-to-quarter.

In terms of personal credit cards issued by local banks, the total number of personal credit cards stood at 1,476,265 at end-March, a decrease of 1.2% from the previous quarter but an increase of 2.0% from a year ago.

The total number of debit cards issued by banks in Macau reached 1,799,924, representing a growth of 0.2% over the previous quarter or 9.5% year-on-year.

At end-March, the total credit card credit limit granted by banks in Macau reached MOP43.7 billion, up 0.1% from end-December

2020. Credit card receivables amounted to MOP2.5 billion. Of this figure, the rollover amount totalled MOP801.7 million, representing 32.7% of credit card receivables.

For the first quarter of 2021, the credit card turnover totalled MOP5.5 billion, a drop of 3.1% quarter-to-quarter but a rise of 19.2% year-on-year.

The cash advance turnover was MOP171.3 million, occupying 3.1% of total credit card turnover. The number of credit card transactions reached 7 million, up 1.4% from the previous quarter. LV

GOV'T LAUNCHES MEASURES TO WAIVE TOURISM TAX

The SAR Government is launching measures to reduce or exempt a range of taxes and extend the coverage of tourism tax exemption, which is expected to benefit over 370 tourism service establishments and involve about 379 million patacas in the budget. The measure aims to revive the economy and propel Macau's travel trade towards revitalization, according to a statement issued by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MTGO).

Besides the categories of establishments listed for tax incentive in the Budget Proposal for the Fiscal Year 2021, the coverage of tourism tax exemption will be expanded to include tourism service establishments such as hotels, night clubs, bars, saunas, health clubs, massage parlours, karaoke lounges and



so forth.

According to the provisions of the articles on tourism tax exemption in the Budget Proposal for the Fiscal Year 2021, as amended by Law No. 3/2021, the establishments concerned will be exempt from the tourism tax levied at 5% on their services provided, effective from May 11, 2021 until December 31, 2021.

If tourism service establishments levy tourism tax on consumers unlawfully within the period of tax exemption, upon discovery, it is mandatory for the establishments to be taxed in accord and be subject to fine. With the steady rise in visitor arrivals this year, MGTO said that it is dedicated to the supervision of licensed establishments. LV

MGM PLEDGES TO MAKE MACAU A 'CULTURAL DESTINATION' WITH NEW PROJECT

HONEY TSANG

MGM China Holdings Limited (MGM) launched a visionary art project titled "MGM Lion IP (Intellectual Property)," — a collection of artistic tourism offerings across multiple genres. The project is expected to catapult Macau to become a premier "cultural city destination," Pansy Ho, co-chairperson and executive director of MGM unveiled via a videoed speech yesterday.

The opening and landmark performance of "MGM Lion IP" will be the "MGM Awakening Lion," a play adapted from the award-winning Chinese dance drama "Awakening Lion," presented by the Guangzhou Song and Dance Theatre (GSDT).

The dance drama, featuring a plethora of Chinese traditional cultures, including lion dance, Southern Fist (Nanquan), dance performance, folk cultures, is slated to debut in MGM Theater at MGM Cotai in July of this year. This will be the first residency performance outside mainland China for the troupe.

At yesterday's launch ceremony, Ho stated that the dance drama, with its heavy focus on traditional lion dance, is intrinsically symbolic of MGM, whose logo includes a lion.

The main intention



behind bringing the show to Macau is to "pass on the Lingnan heritage," and "deepen the exchanges of cultural tourism in the Greater Bay Area (GBA)," Ho added.

In an exclusive interview with the Times, Shi Qianjin, artistic and chief director of "MGM Awakening Lion" and president of the GSDT echoed Ho's remarks, saying that "art is the potent and a more resonant platform to communicate Chinese traditional cultural values to today's young audiences."

Shi had incorporated some modern and cinematic elements into the show, with modifications made to plot, music, costume, and to other performing components so as to make the drama more "compact, thrilling" to appeal to a younger demographic.

He voiced that he regards Macau, positioned as a leisure destination with a har-

monious blend of Chinese and Western cultures, as a great gateway for the show and its embedded Chinese cultural elements to attract more global attention and following.

Catarina Lio, vice president of Brand Marketing of MGM said that the group's resolution in pulling together a large-scale dance drama at this time also manifests its confidence in Macau's tourism prospects.

Lio reaffirmed her faith in Macau's tourism rebound and is eyeing a more bullish arrival figure and occupancy rate in the coming summer holiday.

When asked about whether the "MGM Lion IP" proposition would be conducive in helping MGM secure the renewal of a gaming concession, Lio said, "MGM has long been committed to advancing Macau's cultural development and economic

diversification. It is MGM's responsibility to keep toiling to provide enriched art offerings, regardless of the links between the efforts and the matter of gaming license renewal."

She told the Times that "MGM Lion IP" will be an "ongoing development." From now to next year, MGM will set other art projects into motion. One of them will be a collaboration with a known designer brand in China to co-host a quasi-fashion show event.

"We will also deepen partnerships with local artists, such as illustrators, and local souvenir brands to conceive more diversified art offerings," she said.

The dance drama — truncated to 70 minutes from its original version of two hours, will be put on stage for four rounds, starting from July and running until February next year.



CRIME

WOMAN LOSES OVER HKD5 MILLION IN INVESTMENT TRAP

A local woman fell victim to a suspected investment scam and lost HKD5.35 million, the Judiciary Police (PJ) disclosed yesterday at its regular press briefing.

The victim, who is an office worker, is in her 20s.

According to the PJ, in February this year, the woman met a man on the internet, and they communicated through WeChat and Whatsapp instant messaging apps.

The man successfully tried to convince her to make investments in supposed gold futures, with the claim that the investment would see a lucrative return.

In order to make the investment, the man told the woman to download a mobile app called "Metatrader5".

In March, she made her first investment. She subsequently made intermittent bank transfers to bank accounts in mainland China and in Hong Kong.

As of end of last month, she had invested 900,000 Chinese yuan and HKD4.28 million in the platform.

Afterwards, she attempted to withdraw the funds but could not. The male "cyber friend", meanwhile, vanished. **AL**

GBA

GUANGZHOU OFFICE OF B&R LAWYERS ASSOCIATION OPENS DOORS

THE Guangzhou office of the Belt and Road International Lawyers Association (BRILA) was put into use Saturday, the Guangzhou Lawyers Association has announced.

With a mission of accelerating the development of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area, BRILA will serve as a platform for lawyers and legal organizations in countries and regions along the Belt and Road, provide high-quality and efficient legal support, improve the regional economic and trade rules, and promote the practice of rule of law in different countries. He Youhan, deputy director of the justice bureau of Guangzhou, said the city has been vigorously developing the foreign-related legal service industry and has paid great attention to cultivating high-end talent in the field. According to the government plan, by 2025, the number of law firms in Guangzhou carrying out foreign-related business will hopefully reach 300, with more than 2,500 lawyers able to handle foreign-related cases. **MDT/XINHUA**

FORGES

MPI to host higher education forum in November

THE Macao Polytechnic Institute (MPI) is set to host the 11th conference of FORGES (Forum of Higher Education Management in Portuguese-speaking Countries and Regions), under the theme, "Cooperation in Higher Education in Portuguese-speaking Countries and Regions in the face of Global Challenges."

In partnership with the Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal, the conference will take place between Novem-

ber 22 and 26 virtually and physically.

Throughout the week, with the objective of helping to reinforce Macau's role as a Sino-Lusophone cooperation platform, and improving awareness of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau among higher education institutions in Lusophone countries and regions, there will be three-hour sessions online each day. If public health conditions are met, the face-to-face component

will take place at the Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal, in a format closer to the traditional conferences. The possibility of remote participation in all sessions will be ensured through digital platforms, according to a statement issued by MPI.

The Central Government's 2018 announcement of the "Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area," defined a strategy directed at creating

an International Center for Technological Innovation in the region by attracting international talent and increasing links between the academic world and the modern industrial system. "This strategy includes many references to Portuguese-speaking countries, which opens up new opportunities for academic cooperation that fully benefit from Macau's role as a Sino-Lusophone platform, in the perspective of innovation and internationalization, answering today's global challenges," MPI said.

This is the second time that MPI has hosted the FORGES conference, having welcomed the first conference in 2012. **LV**

ANTHONY LAM

Gov't turns down June 4 exhibition application

LAWMAKER Au Kam San announced yesterday on his social media page that his group's application to use public open-air venues to host the annual June 4 exhibition had been turned down by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM).

Au is also the head of the Macau Democratic Development Union, which organized all of the city's previous editions of June 4 commemorative events.

To justify its decision, the IAM explained that other entities applied for the rights to use all nine open spaces prior to Au's application. As such, "the IAM cannot provide the concerned venues for your use," the IAM wrote in the reply, signed by a department head.

Yesterday, Au posted two pictures on his social media page. One displayed the application letter sent to the IAM. It indicated that the duration of this year's exhibition will be from today to June 8, taking place at various open spaces across the city. The other picture showed the reply from the IAM.

The reply letter from the government indicated that the lawmaker has the right to file an administrative appeal to the bureau. When asked if this will be the next step, Au said no.

He further explained that the application was not an announce-



ment of civil assembly but an application of venue use. "The IAM has the right to not allow [the use of venues]," Au told the Times.

If Au decides to file a judicial appeal, he will need to hire a lawyer to do so, which he said would be "costly and time-consuming."

However, the lawmaker stressed that the decision of the bureau will not affect the group's intention to host this year's June 4 vigil to commemorate the anni-

versary of the Tiananmen Square incident, implying that the group will file an announcement of civil assembly with the Public Security Police Force. By law, the law-enforcement entity has no authority to ban events of such nature.

"For the time being, I see no reason why the authority will not allow us to hold the vigil," Au pointed out.

When questioned if the IAM could make better arrangements and allow two events to be held at one venue, Au pointed out that the current "one venue, one event" policy is a bureaucratic practice. "The IAM has been doing so," he added, but stressed that he disagrees with this practice.

Reemerging social advocate Scott Chiang Meng Hin described the IAM's justification as a "lazy excuse." He accused the IAM, with this refusal, of "considering the public as brainless."

"The government, being an administrator [of public venues], should help make things happen," Chiang said. "But now they're helping to make things not happen."

The advocate worried that the government is abusing this "new normal" to expand its authority without limit.

The exhibition saw its edition last year suspended midway on tour by the IAM, citing Covid-19 pandemic control – more precisely to prevent crowd gathering – as the reason.

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GOV'T TO DRAW 'SEPARATION LINE' ON PEAK OF MOUNT EVEREST

CHINA will draw a "separation line" atop Mount Everest to prevent the coronavirus from being spread by climbers ascending Nepal's side of the mountain, Chinese state media reported yesterday.

A team of Tibetan mountaineering guides will set up the separation line at the peak before climbers attempt to reach the summit from the Chinese side, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

It was not clear what the separation line would be made of. The climbers ascending the north side of the mountain from China will be prohibited from crossing the line or coming into contact with anyone or any objects on the south, or Nepalese, side, it said.

Nepal's government and mountaineering officials did not immediately comment on the separation line.

Both countries suspended the climbing season on the world's highest mountain last year due to the pandemic. Nepal has issued permits allowing 408 foreigners to attempt climbs this year as it tries



to boost tourism revenue.

China has issued permits to 38 people to climb on Mount Everest this year. Xinhua said 21 Chinese climbers were approved to attempt to reach the summit from the northern slope. A separate group of 17 climbers has also received permits to hike on the northern slope.

While China has mostly curbed domestic transmission of the virus, Nepal is experiencing a sur-

ging outbreak with record numbers of new infections and deaths in recent days. Most major cities and towns are under lockdown and all domestic and international flights are grounded.

Officials in Nepal have refused to speak about any Everest outbreak. One climber, a Norwegian, told The Associated Press last month he had developed COVID-19 and has since left the country after getting better. AP

GOV'T DEFENDS HANDLING OF ROCKET THAT FELL TO EARTH

CHINA's government defended its handling of a rocket booster that burned up over the Indian Ocean and said yesterday it was unfairly being held to different standards than the U.S. and other space programs.

The administrator of the American space agency and others accused Beijing of acting recklessly by allowing its rocket to fall to Earth seemingly uncontrolled Sunday after carrying a space station into orbit.

The Chinese space agency said most of the 30-meter-long main stage of the Long March 5B rocket burned up above the Maldives.

"China has been closely tracking its trajectory and issued statements on the re-entry situation in advance," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said. "There has been no report of harm on the ground. China also shares the results of re-entry predictions through international cooperation mechanisms."

The rocket carried the main section of the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, space station into orbit on April 29. China

plans 10 more launches to complete construction of the station.

Booster rockets usually fall back to Earth soon after takeoff. China's space agency hasn't said why the Long March was sent temporarily into orbit.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson accused China in a statement of "failing to meet responsible standards" in handling space debris.

Hua, the Chinese spokesperson, complained that Beijing was being treated unfairly. She pointed to the reaction to debris from a rocket launched by U.S. aerospace company SpaceX that fell to Earth in Washington and on the Oregon coast in March.

"American media used romantic rhetoric like 'shooting stars lighting up the night sky,'" she said. "But when it comes to the Chinese side, it's a completely different approach."

"We are willing to work with other countries including the United States to strengthen cooperation in the use of outer space, but we also oppose double standards on this issue," Hua said. AP

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China's much-hyped digital yuan fails to impress early users

AS China moves closer to rolling out the world's first major sovereign digital currency, speculation over the global implications has reached a fever pitch.

Historian Niall Ferguson is calling the digital yuan a "potentially fatal challenge" to decades of American financial hegemony. Franklin Templeton's Michael Hasenstab says it could undermine the dollar's role as the world's reserve currency. Joe Biden's White House is studying the potential threat to U.S. interests.

Yet talk to people who've actually used the digital yuan in China, and you're more likely to get a different response: shrugs of indifference.

In Shenzhen, the high-tech metropolis that just extended China's largest digital yuan trial, participants interviewed by Bloomberg showed little interest in switching from mobile payment systems run by Ant Group Co. and Tencent Holdings Ltd. that have already replaced cash in much of the country. Some balked at the possibility a digital yuan might give authorities easier access to real-time data on their financial lives.

"I'm not at all excited," said Patricia Chen, a 36-year-old who works in the telecom industry and was one of the more than 500,000 people in Shenzhen eligible to take part in the trial.

While none of the seven participants who spoke to Bloomberg professed insight into the digital yuan's future role in global foreign exchange markets, their lukewarm response underscores the challenge facing President Xi Jinping's government as it lays the groundwork for adoption at home and abroad.

Even if authorities ultimately convince - or compel - citizens to embrace the digital yuan, it's far from clear they can do the same with international consumers and businesses already wary of China's capital controls, Communist Party-dominated legal system and state surveillance apparatus.

Those are just some of the concerns that have capped the yuan's share of global payments at around 3%, well below levels commensurate with China's contribution to world trade and economic output. A digital version of the currency is unlikely to boost its share by much more than 1 percentage point, according to Zennon Kapron, managing director of Singapore-based consulting firm Kapronasia.

"The global impact will be very small" barring structural changes to China's economy and financial system, said Kapron, author of "Chomping at the Bitcoin: The Past, Present and Future of Bitcoin in China."

Many China watchers suspect Xi has high hopes for interna-

tional use of the digital yuan as he tries to lessen his country's reliance on the U.S.-led global financial system. But so far at least, Chinese policy makers have given mixed signals about their ambitions in public.

Zhu Jun, head of the central bank's international department, said in an article last month that China faces an "important window" to promote global use of yuan as U.S.-China decoupling threatens to spread to finance from trade, technology and investment. She said China "should take advantage of the early progress" in the digital yuan's development to explore potential areas for internationalization.

Meanwhile, People's Bank of China Deputy Governor Li Bo told the Boao forum last month that the digital yuan, also known as the e-CNY, is aimed at domestic use and isn't meant to replace the dollar.

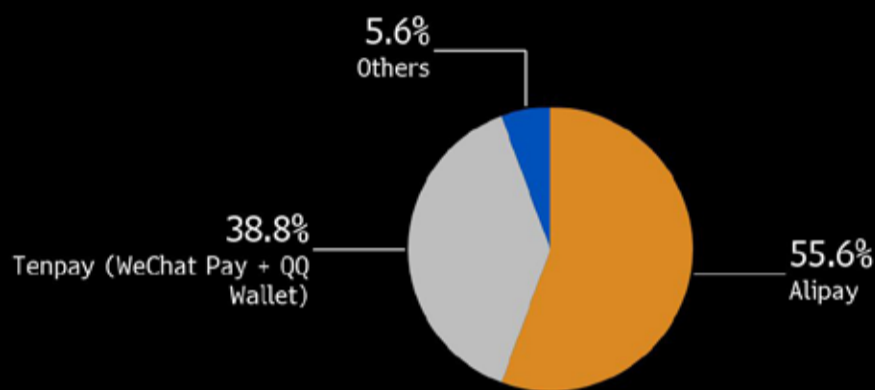
The project was started in 2014 by then-PBOC chief Zhou Xiaochuan, a longtime proponent of creating a new international reserve currency as an alternate to the dollar. Zhou saw the e-CNY as one way to fend off potential threats from digital currencies like Bitcoin or Facebook's Diem (formerly called Libra). Chinese regulators, who banned cryptocurrency exchanges in 2017, have also said the digital yuan will help combat money laundering and increase financial inclusion.

Other use cases are more controversial. The reams of data produced by digital yuan transactions could give China's central bank valuable real-time insights into the world's second-largest economy; they might also be used by security services to monitor political dissidents or international businesses that compete with state-owned Chinese enterprises.

Many China watchers suspect Xi has high hopes for international use of the digital yuan as he tries to lessen his country's reliance on the U.S.-led global financial system

A programmable version of the currency allowing for expiration dates on stimulus payments could encourage spending during economic downturns - or enable regulators to instantly turn off the e-wallet of anyone who runs afoul of Beijing. While global adoption of e-CNY could make cross-border payments cheaper and faster, it might also help the Communist Party weaken the impact of international sanctions. The PBOC has so far offered few details about how the e-CNY might be used overseas, other than to say it's conducting cross-border tests

Payment Giants Ant Group and Tencent dominate China's mobile payment market



Source: iResearch
Note: data as of second quarter of 2020

Bloomberg

ght be able to trace every payment, she said. In a country where compliance with tax laws is often patchy, some merchants may also be wary of their transactions flowing directly into a government database.

The PBOC has tried to quell those concerns by making the digital yuan free to use for merchants - which currently pay service fees of around 0.6% for transactions on Alipay and WePay - and by pledging that most payments will remain anonymous.

The central bank won't directly know the identity of users, though the government would be able to get that information from financial institutions in cases of suspected illegal activity, Mu Changchun, director of the central bank's Digital Currency Research Institute, said in March.

If the digital yuan fails to gain traction over the long term, China's government might turn to coercion, according to Kapron. It has already started taking steps to assert more control over the data gathered by financial and tech companies including Ant and Tencent. "At the end of the day, I think it's going to have to be the government saying: 'You have to use this,'" Kapron said.

Even if policy makers don't go that far, they may ask merchants and Internet platform operators to add the digital yuan to their suite of payment options, according to Francis Chan, a senior analyst with Bloomberg Intelligence. Ant-backed MYbank was listed as an option on the e-CNY app as of Monday, though it was unclear if users could link their Alipay wallets. Tencent-backed WeBank was also listed as an option but was grayed out and unavailable.

Chan and fellow BI analyst Sharnie Wong predict the digital yuan will be in use nationwide before the Beijing Olympics in 2022 and comprise 9% of China's domestic digital payments by 2025. That's no small change, but still a long way from challenging the dominance of Alipay and WePay, which are estimated to have a combined market share of more than 90%.

Persuading the world to embrace the digital yuan will be even harder. "The e-CNY addresses just one layer of it, the payment infrastructure part," said Michael Ho, principal of financial services at Oliver Wyman. "But just tacking on this one layer will not solve the entire puzzle." **BLOOMBERG**

with Hong Kong's de-facto central bank.

The domestic trial that began in Shenzhen last month was by far China's most ambitious to date. Participants who downloaded the government's e-wallet app on their phones and linked it to their bank accounts could transfer as much as 10,000 yuan (\$1,548) into e-CNY at a one-for-one rate. Similar to Ant's Alipay and Tencent's WeChat Pay, transfers using digital yuan take place almost instantly via QR code. They can also be conducted with near-field communication technology in the absence of an internet connection.

Using the digital yuan was easy enough for Vera Lin, a 25-year-old who works at a financial company in Shenzhen. At the same time, she said, incentives for making a permanent shift to e-CNY are lacking given China's existing digital payment options are reliable and work seamlessly with other app-based services from social media to e-commerce platforms.

Even discounts of as much as 10% from merchants participating in the digital yuan trial weren't enough to win Lin over. Platforms operated by companies like Ant routinely offer discounts on everything from ride-hailing services to grocery delivery.

Privacy concerns were among the turnoffs for Jan Chen, a 33-year-old civil servant. It's "a little scary" that authorities mi-

Violence spreads on day Israel marks control of Jerusalem

ALISA ODENHEIMER

PALESTINIANS clashed with Israeli police on a volatile hilltop shrine in Jerusalem yesterday, as weeks of violence threatened to spiral on the day Israel celebrates its control over the contested holy city.

Palestinians hurled rocks, other heavy objects and firecrackers from the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, which is Islam's third-holiest site and the location of Judaism's biblical temple. Israeli police stormed the mount, firing stun grenades and rubber bullets. The Associated Press, citing Palestinian medics, reported that 50 Palestinians were hospitalized.

Spillover violence persisted from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, where militants launched rockets and flaming balloons into southern Israel, setting fires but causing no injuries.

The potential for escalation is high because yesterday Israel celebrates Jerusalem Day, marking its capture of the city's eastern sector from Jordan in the 1967 Middle East war. The day is traditionally a fraught one as a parade by Jewish nationalists cuts



through the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, in a display of Israeli hegemony that Palestinians deplore.

Israeli officials have allowed the parade to go ahead, but in an effort to de-escalate tensions, police have barred Jewish visitors from the hilltop compound where yesterday's violence broke out. The site -- the most contested piece of land in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- is known to Jews as Temple Mount and to Muslims as Haram-as-Sharif, or Noble Sanctuary.

Israel's Army Radio reported that several dozen Jews tried to force their

way onto the mount.

The holy city has been seething with its worst unrest in years since the beginning of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan more than three weeks ago. Israeli restrictions on gathering at a traditional Ramadan meeting place outside the Old City touched off the tensions, but after they were lifted, protests were rekindled by the threatened evictions of Palestinians from longtime homes in the eastern sector of the city.

Palestinians claim east Jerusalem as the capital of their longed-for state.

On Sunday, U.S. Natio-

nal Security Adviser Jake Sullivan spoke by phone with his Israeli counterpart to express "serious concerns" about the "violent confrontations." He also reiterated U.S. concerns about the potential evictions.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a statement voicing similar sentiments, and the Arab League has scheduled a meeting on Tuesday to discuss the situation.

The violence is exploding at a time when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rivals are trying to piece together a government after the fourth election in two years.

"We would like to see things calm down and go back to normalcy," Bank of Israel Governor Amir Yaron said in an interview with Bloomberg TV.

While Israel's economy is equipped to deal with the coronavirus crisis in the short run, "a new government, a stable government, is needed to deal with the many economic issues Israel has faced even before going into the crisis," such as the need for infrastructure investments and less red tape, he said. **BLOOMBERG**

US TRASHES UNWANTED GEAR IN AFGHANISTAN, SELLS AS SCRAP

KATHY GANNON, BAGRAM

The twisted remains of several all-terrain vehicles leaned precariously inside Baba Mir's sprawling scrapyards, alongside smashed shards that were once generators, tank tracks that have been dismantled into chunks of metal, and mountains of tents reduced to sliced up fabric.

It's all U.S. military equipment. The Americans are dismantling their portion of nearby Bagram Air Base, their largest remaining outpost in Afghanistan, and anything that they are not taking home or giving to the Afghan military, they destroy as completely as possible.

They do so as a security measure, to ensure equipment doesn't fall into militant hands. But to Mir



and the dozens of other scrap sellers around Bagram, it's an infuriating waste.

"What they are doing is a betrayal of Afghans. They should leave," said Mir. "Like they have destroyed this vehicle, they have destroyed us."

As the last few thousand U.S. and NATO troops head out the door, ending their own 20-year war in Afghanistan, they are deep into a massive logistical undertaking, packing up bases around the country. They leave behind an Afghan popu-

lation where many are deeply frustrated and angry. They feel abandoned to a legacy they blame at least in part on the Americans — a deeply corrupt U.S.-backed government and growing instability that could burst into brutal new phase of civil war.

The bitterness of the scrapyards owners is only a small part of that, and it's somewhat self-interested: they're angry in part because they could have profited more selling intact equipment. But it's been a common theme for the past two traumatic and destructive decades where actions the U.S. touted as necessary or beneficial only disillusioned Afghans who felt the repercussions. **AP**

this day in history

1985 FANS KILLED IN BRADFORD STADIUM FIRE



At least 52 people are known to have died and many are missing after fire engulfed the Bradford City football stadium.

Hundreds of people are in hospital suffering from burns. Most of the dead are children or elderly people crushed in the rush to escape the inferno.

Only one of the victims has been identified so far. He was former club chairman Samuel Firth, aged 86, who died in hospital from burns.

The tragedy has sent shockwaves around the world. The Queen, the Pope, the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and church leaders have sent messages of condolence to a city in mourning.

The match began in an atmosphere of celebration as Bradford City, who had just been promoted to the second division, were about to play Lincoln City watched by more than 11,000 fans.

Just before kick-off Bradford City captain Peter Jackson was presented with the Third Division Championship trophy.

Five minutes before half time at 3.40pm a small fire was noticed three rows from the back of G block in the Valley Parade ground and fire-fighting equipment was requested.

Within minutes flames were visible and police started to evacuate people in the stand.

But the blaze spread very rapidly - within four minutes the whole of the roof and the wooden stands below were on fire and police struggled to save those who were too stunned or weak to escape.

One survivor spoke of the horror that he witnessed. "It spread like a flash," said 46-year-old Bradford City fan Geoffrey Mitchell. "I've never seen anything like it. The smoke was choking. You could hardly breathe."

"There was panic as fans stampeded to an exit which was padlocked. Two or three burly men put their weight against it and smashed the gate open. Otherwise I would not have been able to get out."

There is still no clue as to the cause of the fire.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The antiquated stand at Valley Parade eventually claimed the lives of 56 supporters and about 265 were injured. It was the worst fire disaster in the history of British football history.

The death toll might have been higher had it not been for the courage of police officers and 22 spectators later presented with bravery awards.

The cause of the fire is thought to have been the accidental dropping of a match or a cigarette stubbed out in a polystyrene cup and the resulting fire was fuelled by rubbish underneath the wooden stand.

An inquiry chaired by Sir Oliver Popplewell published its final report in 1986. Its recommendations resulted in new legislation governing safety at sports grounds across the UK. A Bradford Disaster Appeal Fund raised £3.5m for the victims and their families.

On Saturday 11 May 2002, the 17th anniversary of the disaster, a memorial with the names of those who lost their lives was dedicated at the new entrance to the redeveloped Sunwin stand.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Aren't you curious to know what that is? Give them some but not all of your time. Make it clear that you have boundaries that you have no intention of crossing for them, at least not yet.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Call a spade a spade. People will respect your honesty and give you more responsibility because of it. If someone is bragging a bit too much, tell them not to be so pompous.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Whether or not you have a good day totally depends on your attitude this morning. If you're feeling up for a challenge, then you're going to be well pleased with how the day unfolds.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Be wary of extravagant gifts from co-workers or casual acquaintances. They could be giving you something with the expectation that they'll be getting something in return.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 It will be surprisingly simple to do, and it will give you one more achievement to celebrate. Ask around and you'll find out that a few of your friends have something to celebrate too!

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Your growing confidence is helping you impress all the right people now, but too much action might cause you to get overwhelmed all over again. Do yourself a favor and scale back on your plans for the day.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 When it comes to making new friends, you're going to be absolutely unstoppable today. Everyone wants to be on your team, and they won't be shy about letting you know it!

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 Your ego is growing, and that is nothing but a good thing! Now might be the right time to take that risk that has intimidated you for so long. You may finally have the faith in yourself that you need to prevail.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 That grouchy person who tries to steal your parking space, the overbearing boss who spends more time breathing down your neck than doing their own job, the roommate who never cleans up their messes.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 They'll be flattered by the attention, which will encourage them to keep on going with this lifestyle renovation. Don't be afraid to let someone know you're proud of them.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 This day could unfold in some unpredictable directions, but not knowing exactly what's going to happen next might be a very good thing for you right now.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 Someone you care deeply about has been living in a bit of a fantasyland lately, and it's going to be up to you to give them the reality check they need. It's never fun to burst someone's bubble...

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	14	26	clear
Harbin	8	13	moderate rain
Tianjin	16	25	clear
Urumqi	17	32	clear
Xi'an	13	27	clear
Lhasa	6	19	cloudy
Chengdu	16	28	cloudy
Chongqing	17	27	cloudy
Kunming	15	26	cloudy
Nanjing	16	27	cloudy
Shanghai	20	28	overcast
Wuhan	16	28	overcast
Hangzhou	20	31	cloudy
Taipei	22	27	cloudy
Guangzhou	23	31	thundershower
Hong Kong	24	31	clear
WORLD			
Moscow	5	13	drizzle
Frankfurt	5	8	drizzle
Paris	5	11	drizzle
London	3	11	clear
New York	8	20	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1-Relocate; 5-Green _____ is the place to be; 10-Minister to; 14-Auricular; 15-Currency unit in Nigeria; 16-Iridescent gemstone; 17-Black-and-white cookie; 18-Tendency; 19-Introduction to physics?; 20-Overthrow; 22-Femme fatale; 23-Bread spread; 24-Type of guard; 26-Of first importance; 29-Indolent; 33-Change a song; 34-Grind together; 35-Wedding page word; 36-Apple product; 37-Anger; 38-Env. notation; 39-Excavate; 40-Atremble; 41-Song part; 42-Perpetuate; 44-Recumbent; 45-Exude slowly; 46-Droops; 48-Relative by marriage; 51-State of USA; 55-Incursion; 56-Sleep disorder; 58-Holly; 59-Calf-length skirt; 60-Fabric of jeans; 61-Royal Indian; 62-Drug-yielding plant; 63-Home of the Black Bears; 64-Finishes;

DOWN: 1-Disposition; 2-Other, in Oaxaca; 3-Scene; 4-Pertaining to the management of public wealth; 5-Architectural piers; 6-Monte ____; 7-Monetary unit of Cambodia; 8-Directional suffix; 9-Down; 10-Arrival; 11-Parrot; 12-Appraise, charge per unit; 13-Gusto; 21-Bend; 22-[Oh, well]; 24-Stony gray; 25-Silence; 26-Self-respect; 27-Pardon; 28-Picture; 29-Reptile; 30-Opening; 31-Take hold; 32-Therefore; 34-Feed on grass; 37-Virtuoso; 38-County in SW Scotland; 40-Chilly powder?; 41-Annika Sorenstam's org.; 43-Band aide; 46-Loose coil of yarn; 47-1836 siege site; 48-"The Joy of Cooking" author Rombauer; 49-Arrest; 50-Italian resort; 51-____ account (never); 52-Pearl Buck heroine; 53-Repair; 54-Line of symmetry; 56-Bustle; 57-RPM part;

Yesterday's solution

N	A	P	A	A	R	E	C	A	M	O	L	E
O	L	E	G	P	O	L	A	R	O	W	E	S
R	I	E	N	S	C	E	N	E	S	S	S	
S	E	T	O	S	E	C	O	N	D	E	N	S
E	N	E	M	Y	S	T	E	A	D	Y		
E	R	I	C	A	E	S	O	P				
O	P	E	N	C	A	B	S	D	E	N	E	
A	L	L	S	R	U	S	H	A	I	R		
T	O	M	T	O	M	S	H	E	O	G	L	E
S	T	E	I	N								
T	I	T	A	N	I	U	M	S	E	R	T	A
A	N	O	N	G	N	A	R	L	A	R	G	O
U	G	L	I									
T	A	L	C									
T	R	I	E	D								
E	Y	R	E									

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Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	
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AD



MEITUAN SINKS AFTER CEO DELETES POSTING SEEN CRITICAL OF BEIJING

JEANNY YU & ISHIKA MOOKERJEE

MEITUAN'S stock plunged to a seven-month low after the Chinese e-commerce company's billionaire chief executive officer shared and then deleted a poem on social media that some interpreted as a veiled criticism of Beijing.

The food delivery giant fell as much as 9.8% in Hong Kong and last traded down 7.6%, erasing about \$18 billion. Wang Xing posted a classical poem about book burning by the emperor during the Qin dynasty on social media platform Fanfou.com, according to the Hong Kong Economic Times. He deleted it on Sunday and issued a clarification that he used the poem in reference to the company's competitors, according to a Meituan spokesperson, who

declined to comment further.

Investors are jittery after business figures who appeared to criticize the government have faced consequences. Wang's rival Jack Ma angered Beijing in October last year by blasting regulators publicly over what he considered to be an antiquated approach to oversight. That speech was followed swiftly by tightened rules over consumer lending, the scuppering of Ant Group Co.'s record \$35 billion initial public offering as well as an antitrust probe into Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.

"To a certain extent, one can interpret the poem posted by Wang Xing as similar to Jack Ma's criticism of the banking regulators," said Kerry Goh, chief investment officer at Kamet Capital Partners Pte. "This is not a good time to be too vocal!"

China's technology sector

has come under intense regulatory scrutiny in recent months amid concern the largest firms have grown too powerful. That's weighed on the shares, with the Hang Seng Tech Index tumbling almost 30% from its February high. The antitrust watchdog has launched an investigation into suspected monopolistic practices by Meituan, including forced exclusivity arrangements.

Meituan reported a net loss for the final quarter of 2020, which prompted the three global credit-rating agencies to downgrade their outlooks. The firm raised \$10 billion selling shares and convertible bonds in Hong Kong last month, after burning through cash trying to expand its business.

"What the CEO posted is a very famous anti-establishment poem, which shows that he might be under a lot of pres-

sure from the ongoing investigations," said Hao Hong, head of research at Bocom International in Hong Kong.

The following is Wang's clarification:

"A poem from the Tang dynasty inspired me a lot lately: the Qin dynasty was afraid of scholars but Liu Bang and Xiang Yu, whose uprising overthrew the Qin regime, didn't have much education. This has reminded me that the most dangerous competitors are often not those expected. Alibaba has been focusing on JD.com these years, only to see Pinduoduo exceed it in user numbers. Similarly, Ele.me looks to be the biggest rival of Meituan's delivery business, but what could really cause a shock to the industry may be some companies and business models that haven't come under our radar." **BLOOMBERG**

China to extend financial relief for SMEs

CHINA will extend financial relief measures for small and micro businesses, the Ministry of Finance said in a statement.

Provinces and regions will be encouraged to lower loan guarantee costs for these enterprises, including by cutting the guarantee rate to 1.5% or below, the ministry said in the statement posted on its website on Saturday. The extension will run from this year to 2023, it said, extending the previous plan that was in place from 2018 until 2020.

The central government will continue to use its special fund for small and micro business development to support regions that expand the amount they provide in financing guarantees and lower rates for small and micro businesses. The policy will focus on support for the mid-west regions of the country, it said. **BLOOMBERG**

CORPORATE BITS

MGM co-celebrates Mother's Day with senior citizens from nursing homes



MGM joined hands with Caritas Macau on Mother's Day to send love and care to local senior citizens, where the company arranged an inte-

grated resort hotel tour for seniors from the Lar de Cuidados "Sol Nascente" da Areia Preta, a nursing home under Caritas Macau.

A group of over 30, including 16 seniors from the center and their family members, visited MGM Macau and toured around the property accompanied by Golden Lion Volunteer Team members.

The volunteers also prepared some interactive games for the visiting seniors and had lunch with them at Rossio. At the end of the tour, each of the senior citizens received a mini bouquet of carnation as a token of appreciation from MGM, drawing an end to the tour.

Artyzen Grand Lapa to launch events to mark rebranding



To mark Grand Lapa Macau's rebranding to "Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau," Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau recently announced that it will be celebrating its new hotel brand with a collection of new experiences created for families and couples beginning this summer. A series of inaugural even-

ts under the new brand are planned to take place this June to welcome all guests to play a part in the rebranding journey and to celebrate "Boa Vida - the good things in life!"

"We look forward to welcoming our guests in this artistic enclave where we celebrate

the beauty of Macau's tradition, its unique Sino-Portuguese heritage and most importantly the hospitality of the Macanese community," said Peter Wynne, senior vice president of Artyzen Hospitality Group.

The Family Package will offer a mom and child special spa treatment, a kids' arts and crafts session and kids amenities package, among others. The Couples Package will offer wine and dine special at Café Bela Vista, Wine Tasting by Artyzen, UNESCO Guided Walk, art gallery tour, and special offers on spa and wellness programs.

Details will be announced in June.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

AP PHOTO



Serena Williams returning after 'very intense' training

FORGET all that speculation about Serena Williams considering retirement after her emotional hand-to-heart gesture upon her Australian Open exit three months ago.

While Williams has not played since losing to Naomi Osaka in the Melbourne semifinals in Fe-

bruary, she has been practicing "very intensely" on clay courts and is ready to "start fresh" in her pursuit of Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam titles.

Preparing to return at this week's Italian Open to gear up for Roland Garros later this month, Williams yesterday detailed her recent training regimen.

There was a block of time on clay courts back home in the United States followed by 2½ weeks on the red dirt at the French academy run by her coach, Patrick Mouratoglou.

"So we had an intense several weeks of training — very intense," Williams said. "I feel good. ... I'm going to have some good matches

here hopefully, and then I will be at another Grand Slam, which always makes me excited. So I think either way I'll be ready."

The 39-year-old Williams, who only needs one more Grand Slam title to match Court's record, added that her fans shouldn't read too much into the lack of tennis information she shares

on social media.

"I don't do a lot of sport content, so I do feel like people are wondering if I'm playing, and I have to say I always am, you just don't see it," she said. "I don't show what I do. I don't always show my cards."

Williams, a four-time champion in Rome, will face either French Open semifinalist Nadia Podoroska or German qualifier Laura Siegemund in her opening match at the Foro Italico. She's in the same quarter of the draw as Osaka and has a first-round bye.

"It's good to start fresh but it's also hard to start fresh," Williams said.

Williams was also asked if she will play at the Tokyo Olympics if coronavirus protocols mean she can't bring her 3-year-old daughter into Japan.

"I haven't spent 24 hours without her, so that kind of answers the question itself," Williams said. "We're best friends."

"I haven't really thought much about Tokyo, because it was supposed to be last year and now it's this year, and then there is this pandemic and there is so much to think about," she added. "Then there is the Grand Slams. It's just a lot. So I have really been taking it one day at a time to a fault, and I definitely need to figure out my next moves." **AP**

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OPINION

World Views

Daniel Moss, MDT/Bloomberg



SOUTHEAST ASIA'S ECONOMIES LOOK MORE SUBMERGED THAN EMERGING

Times are tough when you're wrestling with Covid-19, recession — and a rapidly recovering America. The U.S. offers superior rates of growth, a prospect once considered outlandish, and a bullish prognosis on vaccinations. Emerging economies in Southeast Asia are naked. They should also be afraid. The U.S. economy is roaring back from 2020's debacle. Unlike Donald Trump's foundering response to the health and economic crises, Joe Biden is being likened to the second coming of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Federal Reserve is credited with staving off a global financial collapse. Once, emerging markets were more enticing, with a galloping pace of growth to offset shortcomings in skills, health and corporate governance. Now, they've lost their head of steam. This shift has major implications for how countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam manage the next few years. Sub-par growth with little inflation would normally be a recipe for a fresh reduction in interest rates and a dramatic increase in government spending. Yet monetary policy appears stubbornly on hold after significant easing last year. The U.S. comeback creates a problem. With the Fed likely to deliberate over coming months on how and when to withdraw stimulus, emerging markets risk being left exposed to capital flight should they move in the opposite direction. It's one thing to keep alongside the Fed; you're likely to pay little price. It's quite another to head the other way and effectively try fighting it. The U.S. is expected to hit more than 7% growth this year, the best result since 1984. Yet Indonesia's economy, the largest in Southeast Asia, contracted more than anticipated in the first quarter, with gross domestic product declining 0.7% from a year earlier, the fourth consecutive dip. That's an improvement from a 2.2% slide in the previous period, but this would-be, V-shaped ascent is moving at a snail's pace. The Bank of Thailand warned that the current wave of infections jeopardizes its forecast for revival. The projection at risk is a pretty modest one, at 3% growth this year. Malaysia's central bank has raised the alarm as well. Reinstating lockdowns in key regions means that prospects are "tilted to the downside." Malaysian GDP shrank 3.4% in the fourth quarter from a year earlier; economists project a small contraction in January-to-March figures to be released this week.

It's hard to see these nations regaining their confident footing without a dramatically ramped-up pace of vaccinations. Deutsche Bank AG reckons that 70% of a given population being protected from infection, either through vaccination or recovery from illness, is an important threshold. Some developed economies are rapidly getting shots to people, such as the U.S. and U.K. But Japan has begun slowly. In Southeast Asia, Singapore is making decent progress while the rest of the region trails behind. The pandemic could finally bury whatever hopes remained that emerging Southeast Asia could finally regain the go-go growth enjoyed before the financial crisis of the late 1990s. The region's Tiger Economies have since been overshadowed by China's rise and learned to live with growth rates beating the developed world, but never quite reaching their former peak. Covid-19 looks likely to call that bluff for what it's become — stagnation. Prolonged delays in vaccination are especially bad news for Thailand, which depends heavily on tourism. People have to feel assured going there, and the government must be comfortable admitting folks in sufficient numbers to make a difference. For Vietnam, tightly controlled borders and restrictions on activity are a reminder that there's more to vitality than being a trade-war winner. Governments face calls to extend support for hard-hit industries, and there's a big risk of proliferating zombie firms. "Inability to achieve population immunity may come at the cost of restraining growth in these economies for many years," wrote Michael Spencer, Deutsche Bank's chief economist for Asia, on April 28. Maybe America is the newest Tiger.

GERMAN CATHOLICS TO BLESS GAY UNIONS DESPITE VATICAN BAN

THE BUZZ

Germany's powerful Catholic progressives are openly defying a recent Holy See pronouncement that priests cannot bless same-sex unions by offering such blessings at services in about 100 different churches all over the country this week.

The blessings at open worship services are the latest pushback from German Catholics against a document released in March by the Vatican's orthodoxy office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which said Catholic clergy cannot bless same-sex unions because God "cannot bless sin."

The document pleased conservatives and disheartened advo-

cates for LGBTQ Catholics around the globe. But the response has been particularly acute in Germany, where the German church has been at the forefront of opening discussion on hot-button issues such as the church's teaching on homosexuality as part of a formal process of debate and reform.

The dozens of church services celebrating blessings of gay unions are the latest escalation in tensions between conservatives and progressives that have already sparked alarm, primarily from the right, that part of the German church might be heading into schism.

REVERSING TRUMP, US RESTORES TRANSGENDER HEALTH PROTECTIONS

RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR

THE U.S. will protect gay and transgender people against sex discrimination in health care, the Biden administration announced yesterday, reversing a Trump-era policy that sought to narrow the scope of legal rights in sensitive situations involving medical care.

The action by the Department of Health and Human Services affirms that federal laws forbidding sex discrimination in health care also protect gay and transgender people. The Trump administration had defined "sex" to mean gender assigned at birth, thereby excluding transgender people from the law's umbrella of protection.

"Fear of discrimination can lead individuals to forgo care, which can have serious negative health consequences," said HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra. "Everyone — including LGBTQ people — should be able to access health care, free from discrimination or interference, period."

Becerra said in a statement the Biden administration policy will bring HHS into line with a landmark 6-3 Supreme Court decision last year in a workplace discrimination case, which established that federal laws against sex discrimination on the job also protect gay and transgender people.

Despite that ruling, the Trump administration proceeded to try to narrow the legal protections against health care discrimination, issuing rules that narrowly defined "sex" as biological gender. A federal judge had blocked those rules from taking effect, although Trump administration officials argued that as a legal matter health care discrimination was a separate issue from the employment case the Supreme Court decided.

Monday's action means that the HHS Office for Civil Rights will again investigate complaints of sex discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender



identity. Hospitals, clinics and other medical providers can face government sanctions for violations of the law.

The Biden administration action essentially restores the policy established during the Obama years. The Affordable Care Act included a prohibition on sex discrimination in health care but did not include the term "gender identity." The Obama administration interpreted the law as shielding gay and transgender people as well. It relied on a broad understanding of sex shaped by a person's inner sense of being male, female, neither or a combination.

Behind the dispute over rights for transgender people in particular is a medically recognized condition called "gender dysphoria" — discomfort or distress caused by a discrepancy between the gender that a person identifies as and the gender assigned at birth. Consequences can include severe depression. Treatment can range from gender confirmation surgery and hormones to people changing their outward appearance by adopting a different hairstyle or clothing.

Under the Obama-era rule, a hospital could be required to perform gender-transition procedures such as hysterectomies if the facility provided that kind of treatment for other medical conditions.

LGBTQ groups say explicit protections are needed for people seeking gender transition treatment, and even for transgender people who need care for illnesses such as diabetes or heart problems.

More than 1.5 million Americans identify as transgender, according to the Williams Institute, a think tank focusing on LGBT policy at the UCLA School of Law. A bigger number — 4.5% of the population — identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, according to Gallup.

Professional groups like the American Medical Association, along with civil rights organizations, have supported health care protections for gay and transgender people, while social and religious conservatives sought to narrow their scope.

HHS is a traditional battleground for conflicts over social issues. During the Trump administration the department clearly bent to the will of conservatives. Other Trump policies applauded by the right restricted abortion referrals and broadened employers' ability to opt out of providing birth control to women workers covered by their health plans. Under President Joe Biden, the policy pendulum is swinging back in the opposite direction, as officials unwind the actions taken in the Trump years. **MDT/AP**

Emirates A fire erupted yesterday at Kuwait's largest oil field, injuring two workers, the country's state-run news agency reported. The injured workers were in stable condition and receiving treatment at a nearby hospital, according to the state-run KUNA news agency, citing Qusai al-Amer, the Kuwait Oil Company spokesman.



Libya At least five people, including a woman and a child, drowned when a boat carrying at least 45 Europe-bound migrants capsized off Libya, a U.N. migration official said yesterday. The wreck was the latest disaster in the Mediterranean Sea involving migrants seeking a better life in Europe. Fishermen rescued 40 migrants and returned them to the shore.



Israeli police firing tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets clashed with stone-throwing Palestinians at a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site yesterday, the latest in a series of confrontations that threatened to push the contested city toward wider conflict. More than a dozen tear gas canisters and stun grenades landed in the Al-Aqsa mosque, located in a compound sacred to both Jews and Muslims.



Greece Primary and junior high schools reopened for in-person classes in Greece yesterday for the first time in months, as the country continues to ease coronavirus-related restrictions, despite daily infections and deaths remaining stubbornly high. Courts also restarted many of their activities, with civil courts reopening to all cases and criminal courts now hearing cases involving defendants already in custody and any cases reaching the statute of limitations by the end of next year.