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14 May 2021

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**THE MACAO HUMAN RESOURCES ASSOCIATION SURVEY SUGGESTS GOVERNMENT TAILORMADE FUTURE VOCATIONAL TRAININGS**

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**GALAXY RECORDS NET REVENUE OF HKD5.1 BILLION IN Q1**

P2

**CHINA ISN'T REPLACING VICE PREMIER LIU HE AS THE TOP ECONOMIC ENVOY TO THE US, THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE SAID DENYING MEDIA REPORT**

P7

AP PHOTO



**China's** commerce ministry yesterday welcomed the removal of Xiaomi Corp. from a U.S. government blacklist, a day after the U.S. reversed a ban on U.S. investments in the smartphone maker that was imposed under former President Donald Trump. "China has always believed that removing sanctions and restrictions and stopping suppression of Chinese companies will benefit China, the United States, and the world," Gao Feng, spokesperson for China's Ministry of Commerce, said at a news briefing.

**Maldives** Former President Mohamed Nasheed, who was critically wounded in an explosion, was released from the hospital yesterday and flown to Germany for further treatment, his family and the hospital said. Nasheed, 53, was wounded in the blast last week that authorities blamed on Muslim extremists. Two of his bodyguards and two apparent bystanders were also wounded by what police say was a homemade explosive device containing ball bearings attached to a motorbike parked near the ex-president's car.

AP PHOTO



**Australia's** largest telecommunications company Telstra was fined 50 million Australian dollar yesterday for unconscionable conduct in selling remote Indigenous customers mobile phone contracts that they did not understand and could not afford. The fine ordered by a Federal Court judge is the second largest ever imposed under Australian consumer law.

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**MACAU'S PROSPERITY INDEX STILL AT UNSATISFACTORY LEVEL**

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**SUNCITY GROUP BACKS OFF FROM IR PROJECT IN JAPAN DUE TO PANDEMIC**

P3



GAMING

# GALAXY Q1 EBITDA TRIPLES YEAR-ON-YEAR, PLEDGES CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN TOWN

LYNZY VALLES

**G**ALAXY Entertainment Group (GEG) recorded an adjusted EBITDA of HKD859 million in the first quarter, more than triple year-on-year, as the SAR has seen a gradual increase in visitor arrivals translating into increased revenue.

However, the recent earnings is down 15% quarter-on-quarter.

According to the gaming operator, its gradual pandemic recovery is continuously supported by its cost control.

In a statement signed by GEG chairman Lui Che-woo, the executive noted that although the Adjusted EBITDA in Q1 was less than Adjusted EBITDA in Q4 2020, "We are pleased with the outcome given that Q4 2020 included a one-off HKD100 million COVID-19 insurance claim."

In Q1, the group recorded a net revenue of HKD5.1 billion, up 1% year-on-year and flat quarter-on-quarter. The latest twelve months Adjusted EBITDA of HKD(444) million was down 104% year-on-year and up 57%



quarter-on-quarter.

Galaxy Macau is the primary contributor to group revenue and earnings. In Q1, Galaxy Macau's net revenue was HKD3.4 billion, down 3% year-on-year and up 3% quarter-on-quarter. The adjusted

EBITDA was HKD764 million, up 132% year-on-year and up 4% quarter-on-quarter.

"Our balance sheet continues to remain healthy with HKD42.4 billion in cash and liquid investments, as at the end of Q1 and

HKD33.6 billion of net cash. Total debt was HKD8.8 billion," GEG chairman stated.

"Going forward in the medium to longer term, we remain confident in the future of Macau. We have seen signs of early recovery

post- the reinstatement of the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) in late September 2020, and it may take a few more quarters for business volumes to ramp up. However, we do acknowledge the ongoing difficulties associated with Covid-19 and potential future flare ups of Covid-19 could have a material adverse impact on our financial performance," he added.

Currently, GEG is recording progress on its Cotai Phases 3 and 4 with a "strong focus on non-gaming." However, it acknowledged that timelines may be impacted.

The Phase 4 represents an investment of over MOP13 billion and is expected to take about three years to complete.

Phase 3 was originally expected to conclude last year – however, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the project was postponed to mid-2021, with the opening expected to occur in the second half of 2021.

Further, the gaming operator also restated that it targets to open an exclusive all-suite tower, Raffles at Galaxy Macau, in the later part of 2021 or early 2022.

## QUARANTINE IMPOSED FOR ARRIVALS FROM TAIWAN

From midnight today, travelers and residents who have been to Taiwan in the past 14 days prior to entering the city will have to undergo a 14 day quarantine measure and an additional seven days of self-health management, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center has announced in a statement. During this period, these individuals' Macau health codes will turn yellow. All persons with yellow and red health codes are not allowed to enter hotels, shopping malls, government departments, medical institutions and other public entities. In addition, a certificate of negative nucleic acid results must be held when boarding, which has been shortened from the current seven days to 72 hours.

## DSAL MONITORS SUICIDE ATTEMPT CASE IN LABOR DISPUTE

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) received a report yesterday from the police services regarding a suicide attempt. The report concerns an individual who tried to jump from one of the facilities of the construction site of the University of Macau, allegedly due to labor conflicts. DSAL said in a statement that it has already established close communication and followed the case continuously with the police authorities. At present, the individual is in a safe place.

# Crown set to start gambling at Sydney casino within months

**C**ROWN Resorts Ltd. is on course to start gaming operations at its USD1.7 billion Sydney resort within months after the company's current overhaul won support from the regulator.

Philip Crawford, head of the casino watchdog in New South Wales state, said yesterday he was confident gambling could get underway well before the end of October. Crown was found unfit in February to operate the casino after a scathing regulatory report revealed the company facilitated money laundering at its other resorts for years.

Crown was making "significant progress" in addressing the concerns laid

out in the report, Crawford, who is chairman of the New South Wales Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority, said Thursday. "It's coming together and it's probably a bit sooner than I thought."

Crawford's assessment is a vote of confidence in Crown Chairman Helen Coonan's plan to renew the casino operator's board, improve governance and tighten anti-criminal controls. His suggested time frame also reduces the risk for a range of bidders including Blackstone Group Inc. that are currently circling Crown.

Crown shares fell 0.4% to AUD12.75 at the close in Sydney. Blackstone has bid

AUD12.35 a share in cash for the firm, while rival Australian casino operator this week proposed an all-stock merger that it said ultimately values Crown at AUD14 a share.

An independent monitor will report to the regulator on Crown's structural changes, focusing on corporate governance, anti-money laundering measures and culture, the said Thursday. The regulator will decide on Crown's suitability to operate the casino after the report, it said.

In a statement yesterday, Crown said it has closed its overseas offices and plans to run its international VIP-gaming operations from Australia.

A report on Crown for the regulator in February by former Judge Patricia Bergin was among the most damning assessments of any Australian corporation. She recommended a comprehensive overhaul of the company, including removing certain managers and directors, before gambling operations could get start in Sydney.

Crown has agreed to make all gaming in its casinos cashless, using card technology linked to both identity and a recognized financial institution, the regulator said.

Macau gaming operator had foregone its entire 9.99% stake in Crown Resorts Ltd. last April 2020. The group sold the shares to American private equity firm Blackstone for AUD551.5 million, 37.3% less than the price it bought the shares for in May in 2019. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

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# As Hong Kong revs up testing digital RMB, Macau still in preparatory stage

HONEY TSANG

**H**ONG Kong and China are in discussions to further expand the scope of cross-border technical testing of the digital yuan, also known as digital RMB, following its first phase, according to a report published yesterday by Bloomberg.

In an e-mailed reply to Bloomberg, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) unveiled that it and the Digital Currency Institute of the People's Bank of China (PBOC), along with a bank designated by the mainland authority and merchants, had teamed up to carry out the testing of digital RMB.

"We have tested the use of the related app, system connectivity and certain use cases such as cross-boundary purchases," HKMA said.

In the coming testing phase, HKMA will explore opportunities to augment the use of digital yuan for cross-border transactions, and said it is already "discussing and collaborating with the PBOC" on the effort.

According to the latest report published by international management consulting firm Oliver Wyman, the digital RMB in Hong Kong may usher in an era of a

BLOOMBERG



quicker, cheaper cross-border payment and clearing processes.

Citing Oliver Wyman, Bloomberg estimates that the total costs related to cross-border payments in Hong Kong are \$20 billion to \$40 billion annually, or up to 11% of the city's gross domestic product in 2020.

"In the near-term, we expect little change given the market structure and PBOC's focus on consumer sectors. But in the longer term we expect change to accelerate, especially in areas such as Greater Bay Area (GBA) – which is already a hot-bed of innovation – and increasing in-

tegration with on-and-offshore markets. Here we expect payment infrastructure integration to start, beginning with retail but quickly moving into B2B," the report stated.

The collaborative venture between HKMA and China's central bank for cross-border testing of digital RMB was first announced by Wang Xin, director of the Research Bureau of the People's Bank of China (PBC) in April at a press conference in Beijing.

## MACAU LAGGING BEHIND

When stacked against its counterpart, it seems Macau has

fallen behind on the implementation of the digital yuan.

On April 13, Macau's Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng unveiled that the Macau SAR government and the PBOC had begun examining the feasibility of bringing digital yuan into Macau. However, he did not specify a timeframe for its roll-out.

Ho stressed that the government already has plans in place to amend relevant legislation to better regulate the issuance of digital legal tender.

The use of digital yuan in Macau, Ho stressed, is intended to more effectively combat money-

-related unlawful acts, such as money laundering, tax evasion and the financing of terrorism.

Florence Lei, assistant professor of the Faculty of Business and Law at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) said in an earlier finance-themed sharing session that the utilization of digital yuan will propel the whole Greater Bay Area into an era of more robust financial integration.

She explained that whenever there is a change from traditional payments to digital payments, the velocity of money flow increases, resulting in more transactions processed at any given time.

Some in Macau fret that the use of patacas may eventually be replaced by digital yuan after its enactment. However, Lei rebutted the belief, clarifying that digital yuan – to be exact – is just a form of payment.

The most important factor for whether patacas would be replaced by digital yuan is how people undertake the transactions.

She also confirmed that the digital yuan is unlikely to cause inflation. "From an economic perspective, money is liquidity. Digital currency is still creating liquidity. We're not creating wealth. We are talking about the form of payment."

## GAMING

# Suncity backs off from IR project in Japan due to pandemic

HONEY TSANG

**S**UNCITY Group has backed off from competing for the development of an integrated resort (IR) in Wakayama, Japan, according to an announcement published on May 12 by the group's Japanese branch.

As mentioned in the statement, chief executive officer and director of Suncity Group Alvin Chau attributed the withdrawal to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Owing to the continual spread of the Covid-19, a large number of global companies are expected to continue to

endure a long period of operation uncertainties," Chau said.

"In addition, the time it takes for the IR applications to be finalized is longer than expected. As a business operator, we decided to make a hard decision [to withdraw the project] after careful consideration," he stressed.

The announcement came amidst the recent surge of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Japan. On May 12, the same day Suncity confirmed to retract from the IR development, Japan registered 7,056 new cases, with daily record highs recorded in seven prefectures,

including Hokkaido, Fukushima, Gifu, Aichi, Hiroshima, Fukuoka and Kagoshima.

The aggravating pandemic situation in Japan has further put the launching of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, scheduled to take place from July 23 to August 8, into doubt.

According to a recent survey conducted by the conservative Yomiuri Shimbun from May 7 to 9, close to 60% of people in Japan want the Olympic Games to be scrapped.

In another poll conducted by TBS News, 65% of local respondents also want the Olympic

Games to be suspended or cancelled.

Suncity was one of only two applicants for the IR project in Wakayama prefecture. Their withdrawal means that there is only one competitor left – Clairvest Neem Ventures (Tokyo), a subsidiary of the investment firm The Clairvest Group based in Canada.

Earlier, Wakayama prefecture stated that it would announce the winning candidate for the IR project by the end of April. However, no decision has been made yet. A selection committee of nine experts was put together to identify the preferred operator.

## DIVERSELY-INCORPORATED ASSOCIATION TO FOSTER MACAU-ZHUHAI TALENT

**T**HE Macau-Zhuhai Talent Development and Promotion Association has recently been inaugurated. It aims to contribute to the economic and social development of the two cities to help raise their national profile.

The association has been incorporated with higher education institutions, research entities, professional groups and companies.

Local business icon Liu Chak Wan is the founding president of the association.

Liu highlighted the government's developmental directions of Big Health, modern financial services and cutting-edge technology as Macau's solution for economic diversification. As all of these directions are talent-oriented, the association will spare no effort

in nurturing professionals.

Meanwhile, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Jeong U, said at the inauguration ceremony that Macau and Zhuhai will have even closer ties in six key aspects, such as partaking of resources, co-establishment of collaborative platforms and co-organizing of activities.

She added that the input from non-governmental sectors will be beneficial to the progress of the collaborations and to diversification of communication channels, while serving the two cities more effectively.

Co-president of the association, Tang Tao, announced that there are more than 6,000 Macau-invested companies registered in Zhuhai, which have gathered a significant number of domestic and foreign talents. **AL**



# CITY'S PROSPERITY INDEX STILL AT UNSATISFACTORY LEVEL

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE city has obtained a slightly worrying prosperity forecast as the Macao Economic Association gave the Macau's economy 3.5 to 3.7 points in the period from May to July, based on considerations over the uncertainty on the Covid-19 pandemic, the political atmosphere and policies.

Taking into account announced economic data, the association gave the city a Prosperity Index of 3.5 points. The index for April is expected to be unchanged. Although the index is still within the unsatisfactory tier, the city has seen no relapse of Covid-19 infections so far, more tourist arrivals and improvements in several other economic benchmarks. Meanwhile, the daily gross gaming revenue (GGR) data in the first four months of the year have recorded a rising trajectory.

On April 28, the Asian Development Bank released its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) forecast on Asia of this year, which amounted to 7.4%. It stressed that



the Chinese economy will see strong revival.

Domestically, mainland China has seen stable recovery in the tourism industry, with more people touring around the country, packing popular tourist attractions. Mainland authorities recorded tourism income of 1.1 billion Chinese yuan during the May 1 holidays, equating to 77% of pre-Covid era.

Macau, on the other hand, has recorded over the same period an average hotel occupancy rate of 83%, which is near the level in year 2019. The daily gambling income of MOP630 million also equated to about 60% in the same period in 2019.

The association forecasted the city's economy to further revive, especially with the boosts expected

from June to December brought along by the government's third round of consumption stimulus.

It was pointed out by the association that certain resort operators have announced voluntary resignation programs, implying conservative outlook in the industry. It may further push up the city's unemployment and underemployment rates.

## ANOTHER BATCH OF 64 SMEs GRADUATE FROM SANDS ACADEMY

**A** total of 64 local small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) suppliers graduated from the Sands Procurement Academy Wednesday, breaking the record as Sands China's largest class to date.

Since the founding of the academy in 2017, nearly 300 suppliers have enrolled in the program and over 280 have graduated, including Wednesday's group.

Graduating suppliers receive a certificate and are given preferential procurement opportunities under otherwise equal circumstances.

"Sands China is so pleased to see the continued interest in the Sands Procurement Academy – an invaluable free resource for local SMEs," said Charlie Cai, vice-president of Procurement and Supply Chain for Venetian Macau Limited. "Among this group of graduates, some were

exhibitors in last year's Sands Shopping Carnival, some are already our vendors, and others enrolled in the academy through our official website."

The Sands Procurement Academy is co-organised with the Macao Chamber of Commerce and the Macau Productivity and Technology Centre (CPTTM), and shares business knowledge and skills to further the development of local SME suppliers.

The aim of the program is to help participants gain experience and capability for working with large-scale international corporations.

Sands China has held open enrolment in the academy to all local SMEs in Macau since last year, providing opportunities for a wider scope of SMEs to benefit from the skills and knowledge offered by the Sands Procurement Academy's professionals. **LV**

# Survey suggests gov't tailor-made future vocational trainings

**T**HE Macao Human Resources Association suggested to the government, in a survey released yesterday, that future vocational training programs should anticipate the business sector's development trends, so as to foster relevant talents for local small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The group discovered that – although 82% of interviewed SMEs did not dismiss any employee during the survey period of March 2020 and February 2021 in the hopes of a prompt catch-up upon economic revival – only 1.2% of interviewed SMEs offer training allowance to their employees.

A total of 1,215 questionnaires were distributed or used in face-to-face or phone interviews, of which 1,192 were valid. The for-



mer manner of interview accounted for 87.5% of the total sample, while the latter was 12.5%.

The high proportion of companies not dismissing employees was attributed to the government's two rounds of consumption stimulus conducted last year. The survey found out that 7% of the interviewed SMEs

even needed to add extra workers.

In terms of changes to salary, nearly 20% of respondents experienced change, with 8.1% having their salary cut. Slightly more than 10%, however, saw increase. A worrying 38% of responding SMEs have seen reduction ranging between 20% and 50% of their pay, and

17% between 9% and 12%.

The association is worried that if the economic downturn continues, a new wave of dismissals will happen.

Man Choi, project manager of the survey, noted that it is unlikely this year will see big waves of full-time employment. In contrast, employment will focus on hiring freelancers or part-time employees.

Certain companies have converted employees originally hired as full-time to part-time under consent between the two parties.

Choi stressed that the practice should not be interpreted as exploitation because these employees have the freedom to take more than one part-time job. They may not necessarily earn less than having a full-time job. **AL**

## ELECTIONS 2021

### TWO OUT OF FOUR NOMINATED LISTS WITHDRAW

**T**HE Electoral Affairs Committee (CAEAL) has announced that two nominated lists have withdrawn from the upcoming Legislative Assembly Election, which will be held on September 12 this year.

The two groups are the Gaming Concessionaire Employees New Power and the Macau Common Home Alliance, both directly translated from Chinese by the Times due to the absence of official translations.

President of the CAEAL, Justice Tong Hio Fong, noted that the two withdrawals were voluntary, which is permitted by the law. He stressed that the decision had no relation with the CAEAL.

Tong added that the gaming concessionaire employee list has had its eligibility confirmed by the CAEAL.

The list, nominated by 400 voters, was submitted in early April. When interviewed back then, the representative said they were concerned with the possible effects on industry employees and other walks of life brought by the renewal of gambling concessions, which will happen next year.

The other list, meanwhile, garnered nominations from 500 voters. The list was concerned with quality of employment and vertical mobility, among other issues. **AL**



# New café and workshop to be expected in Grand Prix Museum

HONEY TSANG

**T**HE brand-new Macao Grand Prix Museum, overhauled to be six times larger than its previous version, achieved a “satisfactory” visitation, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said. The museum is set to be installed with new components: a coffee shop and family-friendly workshops.

The four-story Grand Prix Museum commenced its trial operation in March — initially open to the travel trade, operations were extended to the public on public holidays in April. It is open to the public every day in May. So far, the museum has already registered upwards of 6,000 visitations.

The museum's operation will be in full swing in June, during which the MGTO will



ramp up the quota for daily visitors. Fernandes is anticipating the average daily visitation for the museum in June to hit 1,100, double the current tally during the trial period.

She also disclosed that a new café is on its horizon. In January, the MGTO invited tenders to bid for café operation at the museum. The tender offer is likely to be

awarded soon and the café put into operation six months later, she hinted.

Another new component to be expected in the museum in the second half of this year is the family-friendly workshops, educational activities targeting parents and their children.

The expanded museum has a total floor area of around 16,000 square meters,

which can accommodate a “reasonable” visitor flow of 568 persons in a two-hour window, and 2,272 daily, deputy director of the MGTO Ricky Hoi said earlier.

But to comply with the social distancing guidelines of the Health Bureau, the upper visitation limits for each window and each day will be halved, for the time being, Hoi stressed.

## IAM AWAITS HEAVY RAIN TO TEST CAPACITY OF NEW DRAINAGE PUMP

**A** member of the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has declared that a major heavy rainfall and an astronomical tide combined are needed to test the capacity of the to-be-completed water pumping facility in Inner Harbor.

Mak Kim Meng, member of the IAM's Municipal Affairs Management Council, disclosed at a community seminar that the facility was nearly ready. The construction is expected to conclude at the end of this month.

The construction of the pumping station has cost the city MOP110 million.

Mak also disclosed that the new facility has gone through some unrehearsed simulations already. Two rainy days about

two weeks ago generated sufficient water to trigger the operation of the pumps. Results were satisfactory, as no flood was recorded in the Inner Harbor District.

Vice president of the IAM management council Lo Chi Kin added that astronomical tides during the previous month brought floods to the area. “But after the testing of the facility, the conditions luckily did not reoccur,” Lo said. He added that a major rain and tide combined are required to test the capacity of the facility.

However, he explained that in the event of seawater rising due to a major typhoon the facility will not be able to help as “no pump is capable of drying the sea.” **AL**

## MGTO LURES JIANGSU TRAVELERS WITH MICE AND MACANESE CUISINES

HONEY TSANG

**T**HE Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is tapping into the great possibilities offered by meetings, incentives, conferencing & exhibitions (MICE) and gastronomy tourism to build closer affiliation with the travel fraternity in Jiangsu Province.

Director of the MGTO Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes delivered the above commitment yesterday at a MICE-themed seminar in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, jointly organized by the MGTO and the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM). It was part of MGTO's strategic roadshow “Macao Week in Jiangsu.”

The seminar was intended to showcase Macau's “Tourism+MICE” endeavors and the status of Macau as a “safe city destination” during the pandemic. It was also designed to ignite more collaboration opportunities between the two places to forge more diverse tourism offerings and ex-



tend source markets.

In his opening speech, Lau Wai Meng, president of IPIM, underscored that the MICE synergy between the two places is expected to be vigorous, considering Jiangsu as an economic powerhouse in the Yangtze River Delta and Macau as a key tourism city in the Great Bay Area (GBA).

At the session, the participants unveiled a series of in-depth Macau tours will be launched in mid-May, such as personalized and themed tours for mainland travelers to immerse into the city's distinguished cultures and

“Tourism+” offerings.

Alongside MICE, the MGTO has also been trumpeting the city's gastronomy to lure Jiangsu travellers.

That same day, Macau's authorities inaugurated the 14-day Macau Gastronomy Festival at Jiangsu — a gastronomic promotion co-hosted by the MGTO, Jinling Hotel Nanjing, and Macau Cuisine Association dedicated to highlighting the tourism prospects of Macanese cuisine.

During the festival, residents in Jiangsu Province can enjoy a total of 33 signature Macanese dishes at Jinling Hotel Nanjing.



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A woman in a white lab coat holding a medical device, with a monitor in the background.

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# ON EID, XINJIANG IMAMS DEFEND CHINA AGAINST US CRITICISM

KEN MORITSUGU,  
BEIJING

**M**USLIM leaders from the Xinjiang region rejected Western allegations that China is suppressing religious freedom, speaking at a reception yesterday for foreign diplomats and media at the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

The event was the latest in a series of moves by the Chinese government to counter accusations of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. It came a day after human rights groups and Western nations met and demanded unfettered access for U.N. human rights experts to the region and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned China for "crimes against humanity and genocide against Muslim Uyghurs" during the release of an annual report on international religious freedom.

AP PHOTO



Abdureqip Tomurniyaz, who heads the association and the school for Islamic studies in Xinjiang, speaks during a government reception held for the Eid al-Fitr festival in Beijing yesterday

The Uyghurs are a mostly Muslim ethnic group in Xinjiang, a remote northwest region where China has been accused of mass incar-

cerations, forced labor and forced sterilization in recent years as it imposed a strict security regime after a series of militant attacks.

Echoing the government line, the president of the Xinjiang Islamic Association said China had eradicated the breeding ground for extremism by improving livelihoods, teaching people about the law and setting up vocational training and education centers. Foreign analysts say the centers are part of a detention system that has locked up an estimated 1 million people or more over time.

Abdureqip Tomurniyaz, who heads the association and the school for Islamic studies in Xinjiang, accused anti-China forces in the U.S. and other Western nations of spreading rumors and lies.

"They want to sabotage Xinjiang's harmony and stability, contain China's rise and alienate relations between China and Islamic countries," he said.

He also said the U.S. is turning a blind eye to its own human rights violations, citing the U.S. involvement in conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries

and anti-Muslim discrimination at home.

Religious leaders from five mosques spoke at the 90-minute presentation, three in person and two by video. They all described prayers and feasting for Eid al-Fitr and rejected criticism of China's religious policies. Videos showed men praying inside mosques and people dancing in squares outside.

Mamat Juma, the imam of the historic Id Kah mosque in the city of Kashgar, said all ethnic groups in Xinjiang support the steps taken to combat terrorism. He said people are grateful to the ruling Communist Party for restoring stability and promoting economic growth.

At a daily briefing yesterday afternoon, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said Wednesday's meeting was based on "lies and political bias," and accused participating nations of ignoring their own histories of prejudice and racism.

"The conference was full of monstrous lies and disinformation, and was another clumsy performance and outright political farce by the United States and a

few other countries that have no bottom lines," Hua said.

Hua said China was not denying unfettered access to Xinjiang for the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights because it had anything to hide, but because of the likelihood that any resulting reports would be distorted.

"I would like to ask that if someone falsely accuses and frames you with lies and then brutally and unreasonably demands you open your door unconditionally and allow them to go to your home and rummage through your closet, will you allow? This is not about facts, but about sovereignty and dignity," Hua said.

"China welcomes all unbiased people from all countries to visit Xinjiang but is firmly opposed to so-called investigations that are based on rumors and lies and presumption of guilt," Hua said.

Ahead of the meeting, China's U.N. Mission sent notes to many of the U.N.'s 193 member nations urging them not to participate in the "anti-China event." And China's U.N. ambassador, Zhang Jun, sent text messages to the 15 Western co-sponsors of the meeting expressing shock at their support and urging them to "think twice" and withdraw it.

Zhang warned that if they didn't, it would be "harmful to our relationship and cooperation."

At the meeting, British U.N. Ambassador Barbara Woodward called the situation in Xinjiang "one of the worst human rights crises of our time."

"The evidence, from a growing number of credible sources — including satellite imagery, survivor testimony and publicly available Chinese government documents — is of grave concern," said Woodward, who previously was the U.K. ambassador in China. "The evidence points to a program of repression of specific ethnic groups. Expressions of religion have been criminalized and Uyghur language and culture are discriminated against systematically and at scale." **MDT/AP**

AD

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FALUN GONG

## US SANCTIONS CHINESE OFFICIAL AS IT DECRIES RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

**T**HE Biden administration announced sanctions on a Chinese official over human rights violations, including the arbitrary detention of a Falun Gong practitioner, as it decried the country's persecution of religious groups from Tibet to Xinjiang.

The State Department slapped visa restrictions on Yu Hui, a former official in the Chengdu region, as well as his family, over persecution of the sect, which Beijing considers a cult. The designation was announced yesterday [Macau time], just as the department released its annual report on the state of religious freedom around the world.

The report detailed what the U.S. said were widespread abuses in China's Xinjiang region, which a U.S. official said had been turned into an "open-air prison" designed to persecute Uyghurs and other minority Muslims.

"It is absolutely clear what horrors are taking place in

Xinjiang," said Daniel Nadel, the senior official in the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom. "We see quite clearly what it is - what it is an effort to erase a people, a history, a culture."

China pushes back against criticism of its policies in Xinjiang as interference in domestic affairs. Beijing says it is fighting terrorism while providing economic opportunities to adults and education to children in the western region.

"The so-called report ignores facts and is full of ideological bias," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said in a regular press briefing yesterday in Beijing. "It slanders China's religious policies and spreads false information on issues involving Xinjiang."

The nation's people enjoy full freedom of religious beliefs, she said, adding China opposed the U.S. applying sanctions to its nationals. **MDT/AD**

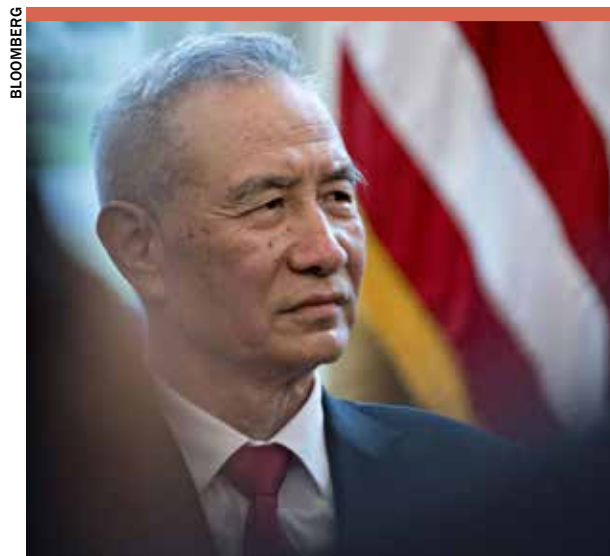
LIU HE

## Beijing denies report economic envoy to US might be replaced

**C**HINA isn't considering replacing Vice Premier Liu He as the top economic envoy to the U.S., the Ministry of Commerce said yesterday, denying a media report that the change was under consideration in Beijing.

Liu was the chief negotiator for the "phase one" trade deal signed with the U.S. in January 2020 and is a close associate of President Xi Jinping. The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday that the Chinese government was considering replacing him with Vice Premier Hu Chunhua, citing unidentified officials.

"The report is not



Vice Premier Liu He

true," Commerce Ministry spokesman Gao Feng told reporters at a news briefing yesterday in Beijing.

Hu, 58, is a member

of Communist Party's Politburo and the vice premier overseeing agriculture, commerce, trade and also poverty reduction, which is a signature

campaign of Xi. He began his political career as a party Youth League official in Tibet in the early 1980s, and became one of China's youngest provincial leaders when he was appointed Hebei governor in 2008. He later worked as party chief of Inner Mongolia and Guangdong before becoming vice premier in 2018.

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai said last week that she expected to talk to China's top trade negotiators "soon," without giving any details. Lower-level officials from the two sides spoke recently to discuss the trade deal, according to the Wall Street Journal report. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

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AP PHOTO



Muslim perform Eid al-Fitr prayer marking the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan on a street in Bekasi, West Java, yesterday

## MUSLIMS

# Virus, Mideast turmoil stifle Eid al-Fitr celebrations

NINIEK KARMINI,  
JAKARTA

**M**USLIMS celebrated Eid al-Fitr in a subdued mood for a second year yesterday as the COVID-19 pandemic again forced mosque closings and family separations on the holiday marking the end of Ramadan.

In the embattled Gaza Strip, the call to prayer echoed over pulverized buildings and heaps of rubble as Israeli warplanes continued to pound the territory in the worst outbreak of violence since the 2014 war.

Hamas, the Islamic militant group ruling Gaza, urged the faithful to mark communal prayers inside their homes or the nearest mosques and avoid being out in the open.

"It is all airstrikes, destruction and devastation," said Hassan Abu Shaaban, who tried to lighten the mood by passing out chocolates to passersby.

Worshippers wearing masks joined communal prayers in the streets of Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. The world's most populous Muslim-majority nation allowed mosque prayers in low-risk areas, but mosques in areas where there was more risk of the virus spreading closed their doors, including Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia.

Indonesians and Malaysians were banned for a second year from traveling to visit relatives in the traditional Eid homecoming.

In Bangladesh, however, tens of thousands of people were leaving the capital, Dhaka, to join their families back in their villages for Eid

celebrations despite a nationwide lockdown and road checkpoints. Experts fear a surge in cases in a country grappling with a shortage of vaccines and fear of Indian variants of the coronavirus spreading.

"I understand that we all miss our relatives at times like this, especially in the momentum of Eid," Indonesian President Joko Widodo said in televised remarks. "But let's prioritize safety together by not going back to our hometowns."

Despite the similar ban a year ago, the number of daily cases in Indonesia had picked up by 37% three weeks after the holiday. Similar patterns followed other holidays in the country that has counted 1.7 million infections and more than 47,600 fatalities from COVID-19.

While police set up highway checkpoints and domestic flights and other modes of transportation were suspended, anxiety lingers that people will defy the prohibition. Television reports showed city dwellers hiding on disguised trucks or fishing boats and officers at roadblocks being overwhelmed by desperate motorists.

"We followed the government decision that banned us visiting my parents for Eid last year, it's enough! Nothing can stop me now," said factory worker Askari Anam, who used alleys and shortcuts to avoid being stopped from visiting his hometown.

"Of course I'm worried," he said when asked about possibly contracting the virus. "But I leave it to God."

Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin expressed concern of a virus spike and feared people would travel despite the ban.

In the southern Philippines, coronavirus outbreaks and new fighting between government forces and Muslim insurgents in one province prevented people from holding large public prayers. Instead, most hunkered down in their homes, while in Maguindanao province, many families displaced by recent fighting marked the holiday in evacuation camps.

In Malaysia, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin unexpectedly announced another nationwide lockdown from Wednesday until June 7 to curb a spike in cases. Inter-state travel and all social activities are banned, which means that like in Indonesia, Muslims cannot visit each other or family graves.

Muhyiddin acknowledged that many are angry with the lockdown but defended the need for drastic measures, saying hospitals have almost reached their capacity.

Malaysia reported 4,765 cases on Wednesday, pushing its tally to 453,222, nearly fourfold from the start of the year. Deaths also rose to 1,761.

"Is this government tyrannical? But I am not a tyrant," Muhyiddin said, "Imagine if you have guests over, then the virus will spread. ... If the guest visits 10 homes, then 10 families will be infected with COVID-19 and in the end as soon as (Eid) ends, the number of positive cases in the country could jump to tens of thousands daily."

Egyptians marked the holiday with group prayers outside, after the government imposed new restrictions on public gatherings. Hundreds prayed shoulder-to-shoulder in the courtyard of an historic Cairo mosque, almost

all wearing masks. Group prayers were banned last year due to the pandemic.

"It is a feeling of happiness that we were missing," said Ahmed Saeed, one worshipper. "We hope corona ends and we always gather together."

The Egyptian government is trying to minimize a third wave of infections, with daily reported new cases surpassing 1,000 in the past two weeks. Last week, it ordered a 9 p.m. curfew for restaurants, shops, cafes and social clubs and closed the country's public beaches and parks for the duration of the Eid.

Believers in Turkey were able to attend communal prayers in mosques, however. Hundreds prayed in Istanbul's iconic Hagia Sophia, the sixth-century Byzantine cathedral which was reconverted into a mosque last summer.

At the end of April, the Turkish government imposed its strictest lockdown yet, until May 17, ordering people to stay home, but mosques have been open, citing strict adherence to rules to fight infections.

In Bosnia, the number of people allowed inside the mosques was limited and strict hygiene measures were in place. Older people were advised to stay at home.

Hadis Bajric, a resident of Sarajevo, Bosnia's capital, acknowledged that this Eid would be different to some in the past. "We have to be responsible, considering all these epidemiologic restrictions," he said.

"Eid is the crown of our belief, of everything that we did throughout the year, all that positive energy from the month of Ramadan." **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1955 COMMUNIST STATES SIGN WARSAW PACT



The Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc allies have signed a security pact in the Polish capital, Warsaw, after a three-day conference.

Announcements in Warsaw and Moscow said the Soviet Prime Minister, Marshal Nikolai Aleksandrovich Bulganin, and leaders of seven other countries approved the draft of a new mutual aid agreement called the Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance.

It is designed, among other things, to ensure close integration of military, economic and cultural policy between eight Communist nations.

Signatories to the treaty - the USSR, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania - have agreed to unify their forces under one command although at this stage it is not known who will take this post.

Yugoslavia, the only European Communist state not included in the pact, was expelled in 1948 from Cominform, the Communist information agency for refusing to acknowledge Soviet supremacy.

The treaty, signed at the Warsaw Palace, comes in the wake of news that West Germany has been accepted by western nations into Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) following talks earlier this month in Paris.

In a speech at the beginning of the Warsaw talks, Marshal Bulganin warned that the USA, Britain and France were turning West Germany into "the principal hotbed of the danger of war in Europe" by allowing it to re-arm.

He said allowing West Germany into Nato was "the major obstacle" to reunification of Germany.

Existing bilateral agreements between nations of the Eastern Bloc, he stated, were no longer sufficient to ensure their security and this Warsaw Pact would supersede all of those.

He added that Nato was also encouraging countries in the Near and Middle East to form military blocs to plan attacks on the Soviet Union and its allies.

In his concluding speech today, Marshal Bulganin emphasised the pact was inspired by the Leninist principle of peaceful co-existence between democratic nations and said they wanted to abide by the United Nations Charter.

However the Times newspaper editorial today points out that unifying the armies of all eight countries will also allow the USSR to base its own troops in member states and "would certainly help to keep the satellites in order".

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Warsaw Pact countries placed their forces under the command of Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Koniev.

The Warsaw Pact did allow the USSR to suppress nationalist rebellions. Its troops crushed uprisings in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 which prompted Albania to withdraw from the pact later that year.

The democratic revolutions of 1989 in eastern Europe heralded the end of the Warsaw Pact and the Cold War between east and west.

East Germany withdrew in 1990 and on July 1 1991 at a final summit meeting of Warsaw Pact leaders in Prague, Czechoslovakia, it was declared "non-existent".



YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

It's hard to locate your mind under Friday's cosmic landscape, Aries. The moon glides through thoughtful Gemini, pulling you into a variety of unfinished conversations and mental loops.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Today's skies make it hard to concentrate on reality, Taurus. The moon meanders through playful Gemini, encouraging you to find productive outlets to pour your focus.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Luna's reality-dissolving square to Neptune makes it an ideal day to pamper yourself and lean into leisure. Later, the moon's entrance into Cancer highlights your current financial state.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

As a Cancer, you need ample time tucked away in the safety of your shell. Let yourself remain unbothered by social demands today, as the moon roams through thoughtful Gemini.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Cosmic landscape is chock full of escapist energy. The moon glides through socially adept Gemini all day, turning your attention towards group matters and the demands of your long-term goals.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Don't sweat it if you feel like your goals are out of reach today, Virgo. Rather than harp on yourself for not being where you want to be, step back and regroup what you can.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You're likely to be dreaming of an escape and there's no harm in making plans that help achieve that. Later on, the moon's entrance into Cancer points your focus towards career and reputation concerns.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Luna's square to sleepy Neptune can prompt escapist fantasies and creative inspiration. Later, the moon's entrance into Cancer helps you digest your findings from a more grounded place.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Luna's dizzying square to reality-dissolving Neptune may stir up some feelings from the deep that need to be shared. Later, the moon's entrance into Cancer calls for intimate conversations that aim to heal.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

The hyperactive Gemini moon encourages you to devote energy towards productive efforts on the job front, yet Luna's square with disorienting Neptune can make it hard to remain focused.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

It's okay to drift through today's dreamy cosmic landscape. You're in the mood for pleasure over productivity, and it's fine to depart from practical things to devote time to your creative personal projects.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Luna's square with disorienting Neptune can prompt unexpected emotional releases and help show you where your boundaries need help. Later, sweet Cancer helps lift you out of any funk and heats up your sex life.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

2		8			6			
9	3						1	
8		3	5					
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MEDIUM

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HARD

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	9	7						
		5						
			8	3				
7	1							
5								

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

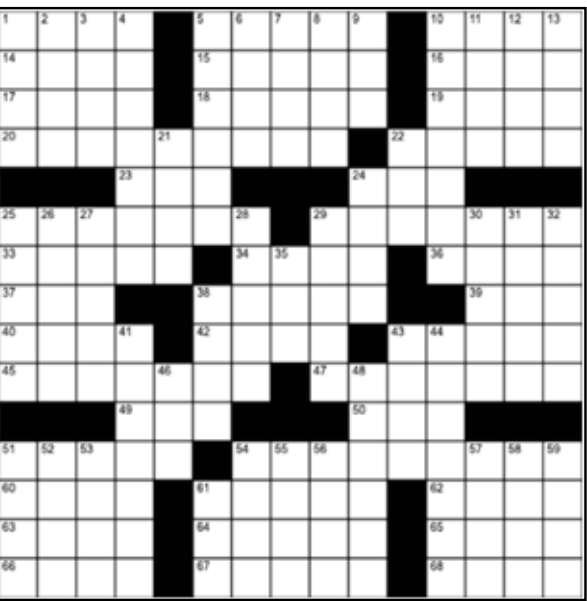
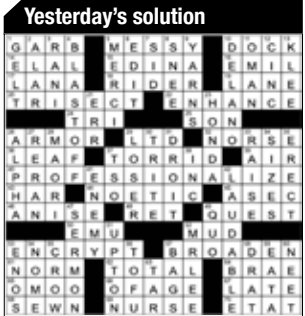
WORLD

Moscow	5	13	drizzle
Frankfurt	5	8	drizzle
Paris	5	11	drizzle
London	3	11	clear
New York	8	20	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Quickly, quickly; 5- Stable compartment; 10- Charles Lamb's nom de plume; 14- Free from contamination; 15- Off-limits; 16- Require; 17- Lend of tennis; 18- Arm joint; 19- Shipping deduction; 20- Form of Aramaic; 22- Femme fatale; 23- Cover; 24- And so on: Abbr.; 25- Sleep; 29- High ruler; 33- Country singer Tucker; 34- Barbershop request; 36- Delhi wrap; 37- Liturgical vestment; 38- Role for Valerie; 39- Cinco de Mayo, e.g.; 40- Bluey-green color; 42- Helper; 43- Descendant; 45- Unpredictable; 47- Later edition; 49- Glob of gum; 50- Contend; 51- Distributed cards; 54- A share granted; 60- Spillane's "\_\_\_ Jury"; 61- Bubbling; 62- Home solo; 63- Scottish refusals; 64- Israeli desert region; 65- Strong taste; 66- Material charity; 67- Farm layers; 68- French summers;

DOWN: 1- Neat as \_\_\_; 2- Capital of Fiji; 3- Bedouin; 4- Punishment; 5- Stable; 6- Story, often rooted in folklore; 7- "Dancing Queen" group; 8- Crazy as a \_\_\_; 9- Base; 10- Leads on; 11- Regan's dad; 12- Able was \_\_\_; 13- Yemeni port; 21- \_\_\_ yellow ribbon; 22- The racer's edge; 24- Austen novel; 25- Condition; 26- More healthy; 27- Open, as a gate; 28- Body of values; 29- Duck with soft down; 30- Spokes; 31- The Hunter; 32- Cheerful; 35- Slender bar; 38- Incursion; 41- Licentious; 43- Rotisserie part; 44- Incinerate; 46- Make lace; 48- Develop gradually; 51- Actress Merrill; 52- Catchall abbr.; 53- Excuse me; 54- Busy as \_\_\_; 55- Expensive seating area; 56- Falsehoods; 57- Quod \_\_\_ demonstrandum; 58- Mudville complement; 59- License plates; 61- Film director Lee;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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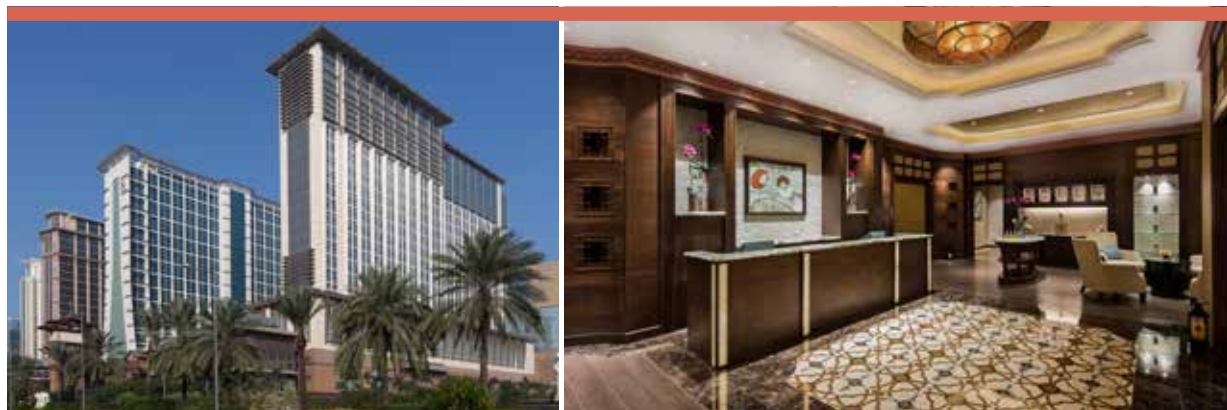
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## TASTE OF EDESIA

# Time to shine

IRENE SAM, MDT

FOR those looking to incorporate wellness into their lifestyles, the new “A Spa Day with Friends” offer is now available at **Shine Spa by Sheraton**. This attractive package includes a 60-minute spa treatment followed with a healthy and

nourishing plant-based wellness meal set for four guests.

The package allows spa guests to treat themselves to the Elemental Herbology approach to skin health and wellness that blends Eastern and Western traditions and is inspired by the five elements of Feng Shui—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water – activating natural in-

gredients to boost vital energy and rebalance the core essence.

After selecting their preferred Elemental Herbology treatment that is personalised to each customer, guests can choose to have their massage in private or together with friends. After the treatment, a “Wellness Set” menu is served in the relaxation zone. The choice of two menus feature delicious healthy dishes including butternut squash soup, pear and gorgonzola cheese green salad or whole-wheat pasta puttanesca, and a fresh fruit platter.

## Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



### THE TAEJON (SAND) 1350 METRES

2021-05-15|Sat|16:20

I’LL take a chance on a sand galloper from the in-form W.H Tse’s yard. W.H. Tse’s yard albeit having only a handful of horses, some of these are useful gallopers that can win races for the trainer. I can see he is working hard to get his horses into good racing condition to race. **Shooting To Pins** is one of them who is looking good in his morning work and he may turn things around on Saturday to salute. Looking at his last race he ran strong after getting off from the barrier gate and faded at the straight, and that was the 1510 metres sand race, but this time his trainer get him back into 1350 metres sand; checking at his last race official report his jock has this to say “he left flat footed and failed to finish its race off as expected, he may be suited to races over a shorter distance”. This Saturday his trainer enter him in a shorter distance race which he won before and with a good draw and a strong jockey, **Shooting To Pins** is my best bet of the day.

Race 5 | Horse no. 3 Shooting To Pins Win & Place bets



## F&B

### CELEBRATION IN STYLE

COGNAC and good food are meant to be enjoyed with good friends, which will take the sensory experience to the next level. Hennessy has collaborated with six esteemed restaurants in Macau to present “Best Savoured Together,” which accentuates the chemistry between Hennessy, the eclectic flavours of food and the bonding atmosphere.

Hennessy’s “Best Savoured Together” utterly spice up the joy in every unique moment including meeting with long-lost old friends, celebrating milestones in life, or appreciating every little blessings in life with the perfect match of Hennessy cognac and appetising dishes. Diners can fully immerse themselves into the diverse flavours of Hennessy cognac at six famous restaurants during the two-month “Best Savoured Together” with exclusive redemptions of Hennessy V.S.O.P and X.O dining privileges via WeChat. Diners can also enjoy a complementary glass of Hennessy V.S.O.P by presenting the V.S.O.P voucher with consumption at the designated restaurants. IS

#### SIX EXCLUSIVE MACAU RESTAURANTS TO ENJOY HENNESSY’S “BEST SAVOURED TOGETHER”:

- The Mandarin Oriental, Macau
- Pearl Dragon
- Estabelecimento De Comidas Teng Hou
- Estabelecimento De China Famous People
- Vinotopia
- Ying





AP PHOTO



Kelvin Harrison Jr. (left) and Nasir "Nas" Jones in a scene from "Monster"

## DRIVE IN

# A Black teen on trial in Netflix drama 'Monster'

LINDSEY BAHR, MDT/AP  
FILM WRITER

**M**ONSTER, a courtroom drama starring Kelvin Harrison Jr., Jeffrey Wright, Jennifer Hudson and Jennifer Ehle that's premiering Friday on Netflix isn't actually new at all.

Yes, it's adapted from an acclaimed book by the trailblazing author Walter Dean Myers about a Black teen who is in prison for the possible murder of a Harlem drugstore owner. It premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January of 2018 and has been sitting on various shelves since. It was acquired by one company, re-titled and planned for a fall 2019 release. But that didn't pan out and then late last year Netflix swept in and took it.

It's not a huge problem for the film itself, which is a solid debut even if it can be a little dull and too sleek at times. But it does feel ever so slightly dated and disconnected from the protests and movements of the past year and knowing the context helps explain why.

Harrison Jr. plays Steve Harmon, a well-off Harlem teenager who's been accused of being involved in a bodega robbery that ended in the owner's murder. He's on the security footage and the others involved have also said he was there. We see flashbacks to the days leading up to the incident, letting us know about his nice, untroubled life where he splits time between a prestigious high school where he studies film and at his beautiful home with his supportive parents (Hudson and Wright) interspersed with his real-time imprisonment and trial.

It's the first feature from director Anthony Mandler, a prolific and influential celebrity photographer, commercial

and music video director, who has worked with everyone from Nike to Beyonce. Mandler makes "Monster" look beautiful, perhaps too beautiful at times, employing glossy commercial ready techniques that will certainly rub some the wrong way. There's no doubt that he knows how to compose a shot and make a great-looking film.

Where "Monster" stumbles is in its pacing. The book was adapted for the screen by Colen C. Wiley, Janece Shaffer and Radha Blank (whose 2020 Sundance film "The Forty-Year-Old Version" made it to Netflix before this).

"Monster" is a commentary on the prejudgments that society makes about Black teenagers accused of crimes. Even Steve's lawyer (Ehle) has limited hope that they'll win. The jury, we're consistently told, is unconvinced too, and may have already made up their minds against him. But as an audience member, there's never that conflict -- you never have any doubt that you're rooting for Steve even as the ambiguity is teased out. Harrison Jr. can't help but be empathetic — he is superb in the role and masterfully conveys fear and deep anguish in the sometimes-tedious trial scenes. Between "Luce," "Waves" and this, it's a wonder why he isn't a bigger star.

Despite some shortcomings though, "Monster" remains a worthy watch if just for Harrison's performance. And hopefully Mandler will get another shot at a film soon, as well, and that this time it won't sit on a shelf for three years.

"Monster," a Netflix release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "language throughout, some violence and bloody images." Running time: 98 minutes. ★★★★★



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OPINION

World Views

Lionel Laurent, MDT/Bloomberg



ELON MUSK CONVENIENTLY IGNORED BITCOIN'S INCONVENIENT TRUTH

When electric carmaker Tesla Inc. said in February it would buy \$1.5 billion worth of Bitcoin and start accepting it as payment, billionaire boss Elon Musk had little to say about the cryptocurrency's wasteful energy consumption — despite the obvious inconsistency with his firm's green credentials.

And when fellow Bitcoin bulls Jack Dorsey and Cathie Wood last month backed a report claiming that combining cryptocurrency mining and renewable-energy projects could be good for the environment, Musk praised the paper as "true," even though its optimistic and overconfident assumptions smacked of greenwashing.

Sowhileit'sanencouragingdevelopmenttoseeMusk's latest tweet acknowledging Bitcoin's inconvenient truth, namely that energy-inefficient mining algorithms by some measures consume more power than entire countries, the speed of his overnight conversion is a little discombobulating. Not least for the crypto fans hanging on Musk's every word, who were stung by the \$365 billion or so wiped off the market's value following Musk's decision to halt support for Bitcoin payments.

Taking the tweet at face value — which is dangerous with a Pied Piper character like Musk — suggests that the alternative energy facts being pumped into the room by Bitcoiners weren't gaining traction.

Cheap and abundant power is essential to crypto miners, with coal accounting for an estimated 38% of their supply, according to the Cambridge Center for Alternative Finance. Estimates of the Bitcoin network's total energy consumption vary widely but run from 20-80 terawatt hours in 2019 to more than 100 this year. Despite the efforts of celebrity backers such as Dorsey and Wood in pushing narratives about renewable mining, the laser-eye crowd never came close to debunking energy concerns.

Musk's move may also indicate that Teslas weren't flying off the shelves as a result of accepting Bitcoin payment. Another inconvenient truth about Bitcoin is that its huge price swings and artificially limited supply make it much better as a tool for speculative hoarding than for buying things — which can be a taxable event. In late March a Tesla representative told CoinDesk it wasn't clear if any cars had been paid for with the cryptocurrency. The company later disclosed it had netted \$101 million in income from selling about 10% of its own Bitcoin holdings.

Tesla's U-turn also suggests that the hype around the company's Bitcoin support may not have been worth the questions and doubts from institutional investors who are increasingly paying attention to environmental, social and governance factors. "Can sustainability investors consider owning companies associated with crypto?" UBS economist Paul Donovan wondered in February. Musk has made the question a little easier to answer, even if he says Tesla will still keep its own Bitcoin pile.

Perhaps it isn't a coincidence that this is happening amid a broader shift in financial markets. Inflation fears and bond yields are rising and eating into optimistic moonshot investments. The tech-heavy Nasdaq stock index is down this week; shares of Wood's ARK and Tesla have fallen sharply. Bitcoin is still above \$50,000, but after an 8% fall in three days it's hardly behaving like an unbeatable inflation hedge.

Musk has left just enough gas in the tank to avoid abandoning his crypto disciples completely. By leaving the door open to using tokens that are less wasteful than Bitcoin, he's hedging his bets on the future of money — and reserved the right to keep trolling the internet as a result. On Tuesday he asked his followers whether Tesla should accept satirical Bitcoin spin-off Dogecoin, shortly after calling it a "hustle" on Saturday Night Live. Ethereum, meanwhile, aims to move away from a mining model based on computational "work" toward one powered by existing coin "stakes." Alternative models are out there.

Still, the more Musk blends payment U-turns, social-media memes and stand-up comedy, the harder it will be to detect where the future of money ends and the "hustle" begins. Which might be the whole point.

MILLIONS LOSE POWER AFTER TAIWAN POWER PLANT FAILURE

An equipment failure caused an outage at a power plant in southern Taiwan yesterday, triggering rolling blackouts across the island affecting millions of people.

The outage in Kaohsiung trapped at least one person in an elevator and disrupted a daily briefing being given by government officials on the island's pandemic situation.

Taipower, the government-run electric company, launched the rolling blackouts at 3 p.m. and said emergency repairs were underway. The outages affected 8.46 million households, Taipower said.

In Yilan county, one person was trapped in an elevator, the government-backed Central News Agency said. In Hsinchu, 150,000 households lost power. In the southern city of Tainan, 14 districts were affected.

President Tsai Ing-wen issued a statement saying that "everyone can rest assured" and that the government was handling the situation.

She said an investigation would be conducted into the cause of the outage.

AP PHOTO



ONE SWISS, ONE AMERICAN DIE ON EVEREST IN YEAR'S FIRST FATALITIES

BINAJ GURUBACHARYA, KATHMANDU

A Swiss climber and an American have died on Mount Everest in the season's first casualties on the world's highest mountain, expedition organizers said yesterday.

The Swiss climber, Abdul Waraich, 41, reached the peak before having difficulties, said Chhang Dawa of the expedition organizer, Seven Summit Treks in Nepal.

"Abdul successfully reached the summit but began experiencing issues during his descent," he said. "We sent two additional Sherpas with oxygen and food. Unfortunately, the Sherpas couldn't save him."

U.S. national Puwei Liu, 55, also died at the highest

camp on the mountain at South Col. He had reached the climbing feature named the Hillary Step, located between South Col and the summit, but had to return because of snow blindness and exhaustion.

With the help of support team members and additional oxygen, he was brought back to the camp at South Col but died on Wednesday evening, the organizers said.

No other details were given on the dead climbers and when their bodies would be brought down. Bad weather conditions have forced climbers to descend to lower altitudes for now.

Carrying bodies down the icy and slippery slopes from the highest altitudes is a difficult task that takes

lots of time, requires several Sherpa workers and is generally very costly.

Nepal and China both canceled climbing seasons last year on the 8,849-meter-high mountain, which is divided between them. China is allowing only Chinese climbers on the north side of the mountain this year.

Nepal allowed foreigners to return this year and the government issued permits to 408 climbers to attempt to scale the peak during the popular spring climbing season.

The month of May usually has the best weather for climbing Everest. Scores reached the summit this week and more are expected to make their attempts later this month once the weather improves. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



**Israel** An Egyptian delegation is in Tel Aviv for talks with Israeli officials as part of efforts to negotiate a cease-fire in the escalating conflict with Gaza, Egyptian intelligence officials said yesterday. The two officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to brief the media. The same delegation met with Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip first, they said, and crossed into Israel by land. Egypt has played a mediating role in the past between the sides.

AP PHOTO



**Greece** Europe's top human rights body has expressed "deep concern" at persistent allegations that Greek authorities have on several occasions illegally forced back migrants trying to clandestinely enter from neighboring Turkey. In a letter to government officials in Athens, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović also voiced dismay that Greece's reaction has been so far to "simply dismiss (the) allegations" despite "the overwhelming body of evidence that has been presented in recent years."

**Vatican** Pope Francis met yesterday with Argentine President Alberto Fernandez, months after Argentina legalized abortion despite a personal appeal from the pontiff and opposition from the Catholic Church. In a break with usual practice, the Vatican communique about Fernandez's visit omitted any reference to issues discussed between the president and pope.

**UK** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has confirmed that an independent public inquiry into the handling of the coronavirus pandemic will start hearing evidence next year. Johnson told lawmakers that the inquiry will have wide-ranging statutory powers and that the government has a responsibility to learn lessons from the pandemic after more than 127,500 died as a result of the coronavirus, Europe's highest death toll.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

AP Photo/Lee Jin-man



Buddhists wearing face masks, carry lanterns to celebrate for the upcoming birthday of Buddha on May 19, while maintaining social distancing at the Jogye temple in Seoul, South Korea.