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GRAFT BUSTER DENOUNCES SEVERAL CASES OF CORRUPTION IN WHICH BRIBERY WAS USED TO SECURE EMPLOYMENT, RENEWAL OF CONTRACTS OR PROMOTIONS

TAIWANESE AUTHORITY REBUTS MACAU NEWSPAPER'S SCARCITY CLAIM

MACAU REGISTERED A 21% SURGE IN THE NUMBER OF CRIMINAL CASES YEAR-ON-YEAR TOTALING OVER 2,900 IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2021



China yesterday issued its second protest in as many days over United States naval activity in the region, drawing an unusually sharp response from the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet, which accused Beijing of attempting to assert illegitimate maritime rights at the expense of its neighbors. A statement from the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Southern Theater Command said the guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur "illegally" intruded into its territorial waters surrounding the Paracel island group in the South China Sea yesterday. [More on p8](#)



Israel unleashed another wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip yesterday, killing at least one Palestinian and wounding several, and Hamas fired more rockets, even as expectations rose that a cease-fire could be coming. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pushed back against calls from the U.S. to wind down the Gaza offensive, appearing determined to inflict maximum damage on Hamas in a war that could help save his political career. Still, officials close to the negotiations say they expect a truce to be announced in the next 24 hours.

Pakistan A speeding bus overturned on a highway in southern Pakistan yesterday, killing at least 13 passengers and injuring 29 others, police said. The bus was traveling from the port city of Karachi to Peshawar in the northwest when the accident took place in the district of Sukkur in southern Sindh province. The accident happened apparently due to the driver's negligence.

More on backpage



ROOM FOR CAPSULE HOTELS

Capsule hotels will enrich tourism elements and choices of hospitality in the city, an industry leader told the Times



CONSUMPTION SUBSIDY TO ROLL OUT FROM MONDAY



CHINA, IN GLOBAL CAMPAIGN, VACCINATES ITS PEOPLE IN THAILAND

TRAVEL INDUSTRY COUNCIL SEES ROOM FOR CAPSULE HOTEL

ANTHONY LAM

THE addition of capsule accommodations will enrich tourism elements and choices of accommodation in Macau, Andy Wu Keng Kuong, chairman of the Travel Industry Council of Macau, told the Times in an exclusive interview.

A Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly has concluded its discussion on new legislation intended to govern matters related to tourism accommodations. Some opinions have been taken by the executive branch while others have not.

The bill will be sent to the parliament's plenary for debate and voting. Historically speaking, a bill handed in by the executive branch normally will pass.

In the bill there is a section proposing to allow the future establishment and licensing of capsule hotel. Also known as youth hostels in some cases, this type of accommodation is rented per bed space, instead of per room as in traditional or star-rated hotel accommodations.

Likely to be a reality after this legislative term, the concept has Wu's support. Considering the success that the concept enjoyed in other tourism destinations, Wu thinks it worthy of exploring in Macau. Moreover,

ALEC FAVALE



he thinks it is about choice and safety.

"It will provide wider choice," Wu said. "Furthermore, with a law regulating the practice, there will be greater protection for tourists. It will [allow for the banning of] illegal hostels."

Illegal hostels are part of a scene in certain areas in the city – often around casinos. They are rented for a low price and usually a long period.

Another factor Wu admired is that the low price of the accommodation will help lengthen each tourist's period of stay.

Discussing the concept of youth hostels, he thinks it will enhance Macau's positioning as a cultural tourism destination.

Taking similar facilities in Tokyo and Taipei as reference, youth hostels mostly cater to students or recent graduates who want to travel with a relatively tight budget.

Wu agrees that these tourists are usually more attracted to or interested in Macau's cultural landscape, such as the Cultural Heritage.

"Youth hostels will also help bring tourists into the community," Wu added.

He thinks youth hostels may be appealing to younger tourists if they provide appropriate facilities. "If there is fast WIFI and other supporting facilities, youths will choose to stay in these hostels," Wu expects.

Most tourism products in Macau currently target a wealthier cohort of tourists, such as high-end shopping malls and Michelin-starred restaurants. When asked whether capsule accommodations, or youth hostels, will create strong competition for the gambling concessionaires, Wu said it was unlikely. He foresees that this type of accommodation will be a minority in the field.

After all, it is investors' call whether or not this type of accommodation become a reality in the city. "Comparatively small hostels see weaker competitiveness against large hotels and resorts," Wu explained. "I believe they will do their calculations."

RITZ-CARLTON, MACAU GETS TRIPADVISOR AWARD

THE Ritz-Carlton, Macau was recently rated and awarded the Tripadvisor's Travelers' Choice Awards, ranking 14th among 25 other hotels worldwide.

The five-star hotel is the only hotel in the Greater Bay Area included on the list.

Set within the Galaxy Macau complex, the hotel features all suite accommodations with: "city views and elegant décor, four dining venues including the Michelin-starred Lai Heen and access to luxury shopping, a 10-screen theater and a family-friendly waterpark."

A night at The Ritz-Carlton Macau starts from RMB2,500, according to the rate available on Tripadvisor last night. "We are committed to offering an environment that aligns with expert protocols for working to defeat Covid-19," the hotel noted, as seen on Tripadvisor.

Hotel Colline de France in Gramado, Brazil ranked the first place, followed by The Omnia in Zermatt, Switzerland and Sani Dunes in Sani, Greece. Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Kedewtan, Indonesia ranked sixth place. LV

MP CHARGES PARENTS FOR ABANDONING INFANT

THE Public Prosecutions Office (MP) has detained the parents who left a baby alone at their residence, following reports it had received on the case.

According to police investigation, the parents left the house independently following a dispute, leaving the five-month old baby there alone.

The incident was discovered by a security guard at the building when he noticed something amiss and went to the residence to investigate. Subsequently, he called the police for assistance. After the preliminary investigation, the MP charged the baby's parents for the crime of deliberate abandonment and is seeking a prison sentence of one to five years under the terms of article 135 of the Penal Code. LV

Consumption subsidy to roll out from Monday

FUNDS for the consumption subsidy will be deposited into registrants' mobile payment accounts or available for consumption card top-up from as early as Monday.

Residents who registered yesterday or earlier and whose registration has been verified by the government will receive their funds from Monday.

There will be a MOP5,000 activation fund and a MOP3,000 discount fund. They can be

used together from June 1 for purchases of certain goods and services.

When registrants receive the transfer of funds to their mobile payment accounts, they will receive a notification either as a text or a prompt message.

Residents registering from today will see their verification results in the form of text message.

Should their registrations be verified, they will get the funds and the verification notice simulta-

neously.

Extra verification at mobile payment service providers is needed for persons registering on behalf of other residents.

Consumption cards can be topped up at more than 170 service points across the city.

From 9 a.m., May 7 to 6 p.m., May 18, more than 350,000 residents have registered for the subsidy; among them, 150,000 chose mobile payment and the rest the consumption card. AL

ANTHONY LAM



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Taiwanese authority rebuts Macau newspaper's scarcity claim

THE Mainland Affairs Council of the Taiwanese government has issued a statement firmly denying the accusations made by a "specific media" outlet that Macau students are facing privation and difficulties in Taiwan.

According to the council, the unnamed media organization reported that Macau students studying in Taiwan are "faced with academic and living difficulties, feeling confused and helpless in a challenging scenario."

In the statement, the council blames the media organization for "purposefully distorting and exaggerating in its report on the situation, causing confusion [among the public] and excessive worries among students and parents."

"It apparently has ulterior motives," the council added in the statement.

To clarify, the council stressed that the Taiwanese government has been concerned with the rights of Macau and Hong Kong students in Taiwan to safety, health

BLOOMBERG



and pursuit of their studies. It explained that lectures have already moved online, lessening the effect on the right to study.

During its communications with student support groups, the council was not aware of any

shortage or difficulties faced by students. Some of these groups even supported the council, affirming that resources in Taiwan are sufficient.

On the other hand, the council has reminded students to be vi-

gilant against both infection and against rumor. They should also avoid crowded places and unnecessary movement.

The SAR government recently sought assistance from the Taiwan government to help

the "several thousand Macau residents studying in Taiwan" amid the worsening pandemic situation on the island. The government's plea for help was delivered on May 17 to Taiwan authorities via a letter sent by the Macao Economic and Cultural Office in Taiwan. As stated in the letter, the worsening epidemic condition in Taiwan "had caused anxiety and perplexed the several thousand Macau residents studying in Taiwan, as well as their parents." The Macau government is calling on Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council to "pay close attention to ensure Macau residents' demands were dealt with properly and to protect their rights while in the Taiwan region."

Recently, the Macao and Taiwan Youth Exchange Promotion Association said that more than 500 Macau students currently in Taiwan have expressed their intention to take a unified flight to return to Macau. These notices are mainly sent from graduating university students who want to return to Macau to pursue their careers, along with some graduate students.

In an effort to better control the current wave of infections, Taiwan has closed its borders to foreigners and transit passenger. Only Taiwanese citizens and legal residents will be allowed to enter the region. **AL**

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GP MUSEUM TO OPEN IN JUNE

The Macao Grand Prix Museum will officially open in June. From today, admission tickets can be purchased online 30 days in advance and up to one day before the visit. The museum provides complimentary public guided tours in Cantonese, Mandarin, Portuguese and English. Each guided tour lasts about 45 minutes. The Museum is closed on Tuesdays, and normal opening hours will be from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., except for June 1 when they will be from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH GRANT OPEN

The Academic Research Grant application is open from now until May 3, the Cultural Affairs Bureau has announced in a statement. Offered annually, the grant aims to encourage original academic research on the culture of Macau and on the cultural exchange between Macau, mainland China and other countries. Local or overseas holders of doctorate degrees with proven academic research experience and local or overseas researchers with sufficient research experience and recognized academic accomplishments are eligible to apply for the grant.

GCS CLARIFIES LAUNCH OF PUBLIC TENDER FOR MAGAZINE

The Government Information Bureau (GCS) has stated that public tenders were conducted from 2005 to 2009 for the production of the government's magazine titled "Macao," after the corruption watchdog accused the bureau of failing to conduct a public tender for the operation of the magazine.

In a statement issued yesterday, GCS announced that in February 2020, on the advice of the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC), the bureau has this year opened separate public tenders for the production of each language version, with the aim of sourcing service providers from the private sector.

Information regarding each of the tender processes for the license to produce any or all of the three versions of "Macao"

11 CASES OF FORGED INVESTMENT RESIDENCY APPLICATIONS: CCAC

LYNZY VALLES

The corruption watchdog has revealed that a businessman is suspected of forging documents to support applications for permanent residency under the Investment Residency category.

According to the Commission against Corruption (CCAC), at least 11 Investment Residency applications were submitted to the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute.

The applicants all used shares in a company controlled by the businessman for investment, and submitted false documents to meet the conditions of the program.

CCAC's investigation shows that the businessman, together with his subordinates and business partners, submitted false employee information to various government departments to misrepresent the company's size and operating conditions.

The person involved in the case is suspected of committing the crime of forging documents and has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP).

As cited in a TDM Radio report, the CCAC confirmed that this occurrence was during the tenure of the former president of IPIM, Jackson Chang.

Chang was convicted last year of leaking confidential information concerning IPIM's criteria



in granting residence permits to investors or skilled professionals to another defendant.

The MP has previously lodged an appeal against the sentence acquitting Chang of bribery charges. Despite him being exculpated from serious charges, in October 2020, the Court of First Instance (TJB) sentenced Chang to two years behind bars. The move by the MP is intended to appeal against the TJB rulings, seeking to see the former president sentenced to more than two years.

MORE CASES OF EMPLOYMENT CORRUPTION DUE TO PANDEMIC

The Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) has handled several cases of corruption in the private sector in which active or passive bribery was used to secure employment, renewal of contracts or promotions.

The watchdog noted an increase in corruption cases related to hiring last year, adding that these cases mainly occurred in gaming, security and construction companies, according to its 2020 annual report submitted to the Chief Executive.

The suspects included local and mainland Chinese workers, as well as non-resident workers from other Southeast Asian countries. In addition, of the 18 cases referred to the Public Prosecutions Office, eight involved fraud over public funds or document forgery related to fraud.

In 2020, the CCAC received a total of 479 complaints and reports. Together with the cases investigated by

the Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Ombudsman Bureau and those filed for investigation by judicial bodies later referred to CCAC, there were a total of 491 cases.

Of these, 105 cases were referred to the Anti-Corruption Bureau for follow-up and 282 cases were referred to the Ombudsman Bureau, the corruption watchdog noted.

100 cases failed to meet the conditions for being filed for investigation and were thus archived directly - either due to a lack of clarity about the facts, or to inadequate information. Also, four cases were referred to other departments, as they substantially fell within their jurisdictions.

The CCAC pointed out that the proportion of anonymous complaints and reports received last year was less than that in the past, accounting for only 34% of all complaints and reports, down more than 20% compared to 54.6% in 2019. LV

CRIME

SUSPECT IN COTAI RESORT MURDER APPREHENDED IN MAINLAND CHINA

A man suspected of committing a murder that took place early this month in a hotel room at a Cotai resort has just been arrested in Hubei Province, China, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced.

Aged 40, the male suspect will not be handed over to Macau and will face court hearings on the mainland.

The victim, a mainland woman in her 50s, operated an illegal currency exchange in Macau.

Although the report was received on May 7, the PJ discovered that the killing may have occurred four days earlier. At about 10:30 p.m. on May 3, the suspect and



the victim entered the hotel room together. Forty minutes later, the suspect left the room for the casino.

The police obtained evidence that the victim carried HKD250,000 to Macau. This fact led the police to believe that the

suspect robbed the victim in the room and killed her with the cord of a bathrobe.

The room was booked under the suspect's name.

After playing at the casino, the suspect left for mainland China. Before

his departure, he told the front desk that no cleaning service was needed. He also extended the booking online.

The murder was uncovered when the housekeeping agent entered to clean the room on May 7. AL

Surge in digital scams, personal offenses raise crime rate in Q1

HONEY TSANG

MACAU registered a 20.8% surge in the number of criminal cases year-on-year, totaling 2,914, in the first quarter (Q1) of 2021, according to a quarterly crime report released yesterday by Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak.

The surge was mainly driven by a 297.5% increase in digital offenses and a 46.7% increase in offenses against persons to various degrees.

In Q1, the city's police launched a crackdown on digital crime, with the police investigating 322 alleged offences, up 241 from 81 cases in the same period last year.

Of all categories of digital crime, credit card fraud saw the most severe rise to a total of 264 cases, up 208 cases year-on-year. This was accompanied by an increase of 31 cases in hacking activities.

In a separate summary report, Wong linked the sharp surge in digital crimes in the first quarter with "increasingly digitalized con-



sumption behavior and lifestyle" adopted by the public during the pandemic.

"The [public's] time spent online has increased. However, [their] inadequate awareness of digital safety and inactions to implement internet safety measures had resulted in the sharp increase in relevant crimes," he stated.

In Macau, digital crimes are categorized as "other crime types" — which manifested the fastest

rate of increase (121.5%) in case numbers of the five major crime types in Q1. Offenses in luring, assisting, offering shelter to and employing illegal immigrants are also grouped under this umbrella term. This category registered a 108.9% increase, year-on-year.

In offenses against persons — the crime type which saw the second-largest rise in cases in Q1 (46.7%) — common assaults accounted for the majority, with 320

cases out of 594. It showed a 27% increase compared to Q1 last year.

Common assaults have been one of the most common transgressions seen in society. These violations mostly occurred in public areas and were incited by every-day disputes, family disputes, drunkenness, emotional entanglements, and so on, Wong said.

However, the public's movements were restricted to a certain

degree in the first quarter last year, at the time of the initial outbreak of Covid-19 in Macau. By contrast, in Q1 most mandatory social distancing measures have been lifted, which may possibly have led to a rise in relevant cases in the last quarter, Wong explained.

Apart from common assaults, cases of criminal intimidation increased 80.8% year-on-year to 47. Cases of insult, child sexual assault and rape increased seven, three, and two, respectively.

In Q1, Macau saw a total of 18 cases of juvenile delinquency, an increase of 80%, or eight cases, year-on-year. 38 minors were involved, up 24 from the same period last year.

Overall, the city's overall crime rate was partially offset by the decline in cases of property violations (-1.2%) and offenses disrupting social life (-7.4%).

The crime statistics concerning gaming activities is considered "not representative" owing to the sharp decline in visitor arrivals. As a result, the crime report does not include a summarized evaluation of the impact of Macau's casino industry on public security.

In order to comply with social distancing measures, the Secretary for Security stated that he would not hold any press conference for the release of the crime statistics, which will be published online instead.

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HONEY TSANG

THE community vaccination service at Macao Forum began operations yesterday (May 20), recording over 130 registrations as of 8 a.m.

The idea of designating Macao Forum as a new inoculation point for the Sinopharm inactivated vaccine was first floated by Tai Wah Hou, coordinator of the Health Bureau's Covid-19 vaccination operation at a Covid-19 media conference on May 11.

Dr. Liang Sung Wen, coordinator of Macao Forum vaccination station, told TDM yesterday that 136 locals had registered for inoculation at the venue as of 8 a.m. yesterday, a number in line with the government's expectations.

On the first day in operation, there were five doctors and seven nurses responsible for vaccinations. Over 30 people received their injections within the first hour, during which one or two individuals failed to meet the blood pressure requirement and were refused their injections by the doctors.

In a separate video released by the government,

COVID-19

INOCULATION AT MACAO FORUM KICKS OFF

Liang reassured the public that Sinopharm inactivated vaccines will be delivered to Macao Forum daily to "ensure the quality of the dose."

"We have a dedicated freezer to store the vaccines at Macao Forum. The unused doses will be sent back to the hospital at the end of the same day," he added.

In response to some complaints about the long waiting time at the venue, he said that it took some time for the staff to become accustomed to the system and procedures on the first day of operation.

Macao Forum has a daily capacity of around 2,000 doses of Sinopharm inactivated vaccine, and is designed to cater to individuals aged 18 or above.

The registration for inoculation at Macao Forum was launched on May 18. In the trial phase, the center will open for 8 hours daily



UPDATED HEALTH CODE SYSTEM LAUNCHES TODAY

AN updated version of the health code system will launch today following the amendment that certain individuals who have completed both vaccinations will be exempted from both the regular and the special swab test. From today, the health code will show detailed vaccination records. This measure was announced on

Monday by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center in a bid to encourage local residents to take the Covid-19 vaccine. From today, the health code page will also display the number of people who have been vaccinated. The effective date of the vaccine will be displayed at the bottom of the page after receiving both doses, or 14 days after receiving

the second dose. The public can also view their vaccination records, including: vaccination location, vaccine type, manufacturer, batch number and vaccination date. As of 4 p.m. yesterday, a total of 140,121 residents have booked to take the Covid-19 jab, while 88,771 have been vaccinated. 51,618 residents have received both doses.

SEAC PAI VAN LIGHT RAIL CONSTRUCTION DELAYED DUE TO TENDER CANCELATION

HONEY TSANG

THE SAR government has decided to revoke the tender for the construction of the Seac Pai Van Line of the Light Rapid Transit due to an obvious discrepancy in budget and time frame between the tender proposals and official requirements.

This bodes ill for the project as the start of construction is likely to face impediments for some time.

The Infrastructure Development Office (GDI) announced the decision in a statement published yesterday morning (May 20).

"After analysis, it is believed that the bidding amount and construction period proposed by the tenderers are obviously low, and are not in line with the timetable for the installation of driving system, as stipulated in the tender document," the GDI stated in the release.



It is believed that such a significant discrepancy will cause "serious overspend and overtime."

"Considering public interests and the extremely unreasonable proposed construction period, the SAR government decided to cancel this tender and will re-invite the tender for the project within a short period of time."

The government started to invite tenders for the construction of Seac Pai Van Line in July last year and had received a total of 10 submissions.

According to the statement, the GDI has set the works to optimize the station's design into motion, with a view to effective cost-control and use of space at the station.

18 OLD BUILDINGS BENEFITTING FROM MACAO WATER'S SUBSIDY PROGRAM

AS of early May, Macao Water Supply Company Limited (Macao Water) has approved 18 cases to receive subsidies under its Repair of Service Connections to Low-rise Buildings program.

Five of the approved cases have already been completed, the firm told TDM.

The program was launched by Macao Water on April 1 with an aggregate fund of MOP10 million. It aims to provide subsidies to owners residing in old buildings in Macao to repair their outdated water facilities.

In each case, Macao Water will bear 80% of the total maintenance cost, with the remaining 20% to be shared by the apartment owners or occupants. The funding will be capped at MOP50,000 in each case.

Eligibility for the scheme will be limited to flat owners on the lower floors (seventh or lower) of buildings older than 20 years which have suffered cracking, leaks, or



severe corrosion of their water supply facilities.

The Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) stated that the Program of Macao Water complements the DSAMA's Water Safety Plan for Buildings, which was launched in September 2018 and is intended to encourage local building owners to conduct regular check-ups and maintenance of their water piping systems.

In April, Chan Hou Wo,

director of the Department of Planning and Development at the DSAMA told the public that the authorities have finished drafting amendments to Water Supply and Sewerage regulations.

The proposed changes include a higher standard for local water to be deemed drinkable and clean, and a lower acceptable limit for heavy metals in water, among other measures. **HT**

COVID-19

China, in global campaign, vaccinates its people in Thailand

FU TING, BANGKOK

CHINESE citizens living in Thailand began being vaccinated yesterday as part of China's global campaign to inoculate its nationals living and working abroad.

China recently donated 500,000 vaccine doses, and Thailand agreed in turn to inoculate Chinese nationals as it slowly rolls out shots for its own citizens to contain a coronavirus surge that has sickened tens of thousands in the past two months.

Yang Xin, minister counsellor at the Chinese Embassy, said Beijing's "Spring Sprout" program would benefit tens of thousands of Chinese in the country. An estimated 150,000 Chinese citizens live in Thailand.

China has so far supplied millions of vaccine doses to the country, most of which Thailand purchased.

The Thai government has said it will vaccinate Thais before inoculating most other foreigners, regardless of risk factors or age.

Just over 2% of Thailand's 70 million people have received a first vaccine dose and about 1% have received a second. The government hopes to inoculate 70% of its people by the end of



the year, but has been criticized for taking too long to start vaccinating.

China's official People's Daily newspaper says more than 500,000 Chinese citizens in more than 120 countries have benefited from the "Spring Sprout" vaccine program since it was launched in March.

In downtown Bangkok, a Chinese volunteer with a white mask, transparent shield and blue gloves stood in front of a red banner reading "Spring

Sprout Action" flanked by the flags of China and Thailand at a vaccination center.

A dozen people waited to get a cursory medical check as nurses, accompanied by a translator, gave Chinese-made Sinovac shots in another room.

"I am happy and proud to be able to get a vaccine on day 1 organized by my government," said Zhang Xiaohong, 40, who runs a logistics company in Thailand. He said he believes the Chinese government cares

about its people.

Qin Qing, a 39-year-old real estate broker in Bangkok, said she was a bit nervous before getting the shot and felt slightly dizzy afterward.

"I am grateful for my country and the embassy, and people who help to make it happen, from airline staff who fly the vaccines here to Thai medical workers," she said.

Thailand had largely contained coronavirus cases last year by closing its borders, enforcing mandatory quarantines and actively tracing contacts of those found to be infected. The measures devastated its lucrative tourism industry but kept the pandemic at bay, for the most part, until early April.

Then a surge that began in high-end nightspots in central Bangkok spread rapidly as people were allowed to travel during a mid-April national holiday.

Yesterday, health authorities reported 2,636 new cases and 25 deaths for a total of 119,585 infections and 703 deaths since the pandemic began. Of that number, 90,722 confirmed cases and 609 deaths have been recorded since April 1.

A partial lockdown in recent weeks has made limited headway in containing outbreaks, especially in Bangkok and in

prisons.

The capital has been hit especially hard, with thousands of cases surfacing in slums, crowded low-income housing and camps housing construction workers.

Thailand has a population of about 70 million. More than 2.5 million are from neighboring countries, including Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Many are employed on construction sites and in factories.

Chinese nationals are the most numerous foreigners living in Thailand who are not from neighboring countries. They are the only foreigners being vaccinated under the "Spring Sprout" campaign.

Natapanu Nopakun, deputy Foreign Ministry spokesman, said there are around 1.3 million legal migrant workers in Bangkok and its vicinity and more than 1 million illegal ones across the country. The Labor Ministry intends to inoculate them as well because their high mobility is a risk factor in curbing infections.

Another 200,000 foreigners — from Australia, Japan, Europe, the United States and elsewhere — are mostly professionals and retirees. For now, they can only obtain COVID-19 shots by traveling overseas and would face lengthy, expensive quarantines on their return.

Groups representing Americans living in Thailand sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week asking the government to supply some of the millions of unused vaccine doses available in the U.S. to inoculate American citizens in Thailand. **MDT/AP**

Beijing says providing vaccines to almost 40 African states

CHINA said yesterday it is providing COVID-19 vaccines to nearly 40 African countries, describing its actions as purely altruistic in an apparent intensification of what has been described as "vaccine diplomacy."

The vaccines were donated or sold at "favorable prices," Foreign Ministry official Wu Peng told reporters.

Wu compared China's outreach to the actions of "some countries that have said they have to wait for their own people to finish the vaccination before they could supply the vaccines to foreign countries," in an apparent dig

at the United States.

"We believe that it is, of course, necessary to ensure that the Chinese people get vaccinated as soon as possible, but for other countries in need, we also try our best to provide vaccine help," said Wu, who is director of the ministry's Africa department.

While the U.S. has been accused by some of hoarding vaccines, President Joe Biden on Monday pledged to share an additional 20 million vaccine doses in the coming six weeks, bringing the total U.S. commitment to 80 million. The Biden administration hasn't said

which countries will receive them.

The doses will come from existing U.S. production of Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine stocks. The administration previously committed to share about 60 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine by the end of June.

The U.N. Security Council called on Wednesday for accelerated availability of COVID-19 vaccines for Africa, expressing concern that the continent has only received about 2% of all vaccines administered globally.

A presidential statement approved by all 15

members at a council meeting on African issues reiterated the need for "equitable access" to quality, affordable COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines.

China's vaccine diplomacy has been a surprising success: It has pledged roughly half a billion doses of its vaccines to more than 45 countries, according to an Associated Press tally.

With just four of China's many vaccine makers claiming they are able to produce at least 2.6 billion doses this year, a large part of the world's population will end up inoculated not with the



Director of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Africa Department, Wu Peng

fancy Western vaccines boasting headline-grabbing efficacy rates, but with China's humble, traditionally made shots.

Egypt will start locally producing China's Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine in June, with Sinovac enabling the Egyptian side to obtain the expertise and technical assistance

to produce the vaccine, giving the license to manufacture and pack the vaccine in Egypt.

"Aid alone cannot solve Africa's vaccine issues. We must support local manufacturing of vaccines in Africa, even though this is difficult due to (low) levels of industrialization," Wu said. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Beijing, Washington argue over naval activity in disputed waters

CHINA yesterday issued its second protest in as many days over United States naval activity in the region, drawing an unusually sharp response from the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet, which accused Beijing of attempting to assert illegitimate maritime rights at the expense of its neighbors.

A statement from the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Southern Theater Command said the guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur "illegally" intruded into its territorial waters surrounding the Paracel island group in the South China Sea yesterday. It said Chinese forces mobilized to track and monitor the ship and "warned and expelled it."

The Paracels are also claimed by Vietnam.

China accused the U.S. of increasing regional security risks, "misunderstandings, misjudgments, and accidents at sea." It called the ship's maneuvers "unprofessional and irresponsible," saying Chinese forces were determined to defend the country's sovereign claims while maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea.



U.S. Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur conducts routine operations in the Taiwan Strait this week

The U.S. refuses to recognize China's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea and regularly conducts what it calls freedom of navigation operations to assert its right to sail in international waters.

In its lengthy response, the 7th fleet said the operation "upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging the unlawful restrictions on innocent passage."

"The PLA's statement about this mission is false. USS Curtis Wilbur was

not 'expelled' from any nation's territory," the statement said. "USS Curtis Wilbur conducted this FONOP (freedom of navigation operation) in accordance with international law and then continued on to conduct normal operations in international waters."

It said that China's statement asserts its "excessive and illegitimate maritime claims at the expense of the Southeast Asian neighbors in the South China Sea."

China on Wednesday issued a complaint over the

Wilbur's passage through the Taiwan Strait, also calling it a provocation that undermined peace and stability in the region.

While the strait is in international waters, China claims self-governing Taiwan as its own territory and regards the U.S. Navy's presence near the island as providing support for its independence-leaning democratically elected government.

Along with building the world's largest navy and coast guard by numbers of vessels, China has fortified its island holdings in the strategically vital South China Sea and created new island outposts by piling sand cement on coral reefs and topping them with airstrips and other infrastructure.

It has ignored rival territorial claims by its smaller neighbors, including the Philippines and Vietnam, as well as an international arbitral ruling that declared most of China's claims in the South China Sea invalid.

An emboldened China faced with the scaling up of U.S. military operations in the area has increasingly raised concerns about a possible clash or confrontation, whether intended or not. **MDT/AP**

like Ethiopia, Mozambique and Burkina Faso last year, and ongoing wars in places like Congo, Syria and Afghanistan. It also noted intense cyclone seasons in the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and long rainy seasons in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, saying such weather woes uprooted millions.

Overall, the highest number of internally displaced people last year was in China, which faces floods regularly and authorities encourage or require internal displacement to get out of the way of rising waters, followed by the Philippines and Bangladesh. More than 5 million people in China were forced into internal displacement last year. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1991 BOMB KILLS INDIA'S FORMER LEADER RAJIV GANDHI



Rajiv Gandhi, the 46-year-old former Indian prime minister, has been assassinated.

He was campaigning for the Congress Party on the second day of voting in the world's largest democratic election when a powerful bomb, hidden in a basket of flowers, exploded killing him instantly.

At least 14 other people were also killed in the attack in the town of Sriperumbudur, about 30 miles from Madras, the capital of the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

No-one has admitted carrying out the murder but it is being blamed on Mr Gandhi's arch enemies, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a violent guerrilla group fighting for a separate homeland for Tamils on the island of Sri Lanka.

Rajiv Gandhi's death has shocked the world and marks the end of the Nehru dynasty that had led India for all but five years since independence from Britain.

After his brother Sanjay was killed in an air crash in 1980, he gave up his job as an airline pilot and was elected to Sanjay's parliamentary seat.

He became prime minister after his mother, Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards in 1984.

Often seen as a reluctant leader, he and his Congress Party won a record majority later that year.

He encouraged foreign investment, a freer economy and rejuvenated his own party, ridding it of his mother's unelected cronies.

After he lost the election in 1989, Rajiv Gandhi resigned.

This time, the Congress Party was expected to win the largest number of parliamentary seats - but not overall control - against the Hindu BJP Party and the Janata Dal, now split into two parties.

The campaign has been marred by sectarian violence between Hindus and Muslims in what has proved to be the most violent election in Indian history. Two hundred people have already been killed.

Courtesy BBC News

War, climate displaced tens of millions in 2020: Study

A key group that monitors internal displacement is reporting yesterday that violence and disasters — often caused or worsened by the impact of climate change — forced people to relocate within their countries more than 40 million times last year, the highest such tally in over a decade.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, in its latest annual global report, says a record 55 million people were living away from their homes but within their countries at the end of last year, as storms and floods, as well as both

protracted and new conflicts, drove up the figures that have been growing for more than a decade. Sometimes people have moved two or three times.

The Geneva-based center, which is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said the number of internally displaced was more than twice that of refugees — those who flee to another country — at the end of last year. The group cautioned that the figures were likely a "significant underestimate" because COVID-19 travel restrictions impeded the collection of data.

"It's shocking that someone was forced to flee their home inside their own country every single second last year," said NRC secretary-general Jan Egeland. "We are failing to protect the world's most vulnerable people from conflict and disasters."

Of those displaced at the end of the year, some 48 million people had fled conflict and violence and 7 million had escaped from disasters, the group said.

The center pointed to escalating violence and wider activity from extremist groups in countries

IN CONTEXT

It later emerged that a female Tamil Tiger (LTTE) suicide bomber had assassinated Rajiv Gandhi.

In 1987 Mr Gandhi, then prime minister, had sent Indian peacekeeping forces to Sri Lanka in a disastrous attempt to impose peace in the country. The move proved unpopular both at home and abroad and his troops pulled out in 1990.

A year after Mr Gandhi's death, the Tamil Tigers were outlawed in India.

PV Narasimha Rao, succeeded Gandhi as Congress leader and became India's prime minister later that year. After a number of bribery scandals, the party was heavily defeated in the 1996 elections. But its popularity was revived in 1998 by Mr Gandhi's Italian-born widow Sonia who took over as leader and returned the party to power in the 2004 elections.

She refused to become prime minister herself, however, and the job went to former finance minister Manmohan Singh.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
The efficient Virgo moon pushes you to focus on incomplete tasks and projects, yet her dizzying opposition to sleepy Neptune makes it hard to stay out of fantasy land.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
The illuminating sun's square to visionary Jupiter highlights this story today. Elsewhere, the creatively fertile Virgo moon's opposition with spacey Neptune makes an ideal day for dreaming, not doing.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
This shift heralds the start of your own personal new year, and helps you focus in the weeks ahead on getting to know yourself in an entirely new light. Don't be afraid to ask for what you want...

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
What self-sabotaging patterns need letting go of, so that you can continue to expand? Elsewhere, the storytelling Virgo moon's opposition with Neptune creates an inspired, if not fantastical, mindset.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
The realistic Virgo moon urges you to get productive, but her dance with dreamy Neptune can make it easy to overextend yourself - in both your finances and willingness to help others.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
The moon's presence in your sign turns your attention inward towards unexpressed feelings, but her rendezvous with Neptune may create cloudy illusions around intimacy.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
The work you do is beginning to change in some fashion, Libra. The universe has big plans for this realm, but you need to make sure you're solid in the vision you want to bring to life.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
The life-giving sun's square with visionary Jupiter can make it easy to go overboard with any indulgences. Enjoy yourself but beware of over-extending financially!

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
This energy can make for confused, idealistic, or deceptive thoughts concerning relationship matters. Refrain from making major commitments - in business or romantic partnerships.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
The illuminating sun's square with dream-big Jupiter today reminds you to stay optimistic and make room for new opportunities that boost your self-expression.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
It's okay to hang back today, Aquarius. You're not likely to be in the mood for any light, frivolous socializing - as the pensive Virgo moon makes you feel withdrawn and turns up your need for intimacy.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Today's skies find the illuminating sun in a difficult conversation with Jupiter, which can potentially reveal any unhealed emotional content concerning your home or family environment.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	15	31	cloudy
Harbin	14	30	clear
Tianjin	15	21	rain
Urumqi	16	24	rain
Xi'an	20	26	cloudy
Lhasa	15	27	sunny
Chengdu	23	27	rain
Chongqing	25	31	rain
Kunming	18	23	rain
Nanjing	14	19	overcast
Shanghai	27	37	cloudy
Wuhan	17	23	rain
Hangzhou	13	30	cloudy
Taipei	14	23	overcast
Guangzhou	10	24	cloudy
Hong Kong	17	28	clear
WORLD			
Moscow	17	31	clear
Frankfurt	8	14	rain
Paris	8	15	rain
London	7	16	cloudy
New York	14	24	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- To Live and Die ___; 5- Discharged; 10- Jamaican exports; 14- It's got you covered; 15- French school; 16- Greek god of love; 17- Starting; 18- Conger catcher; 19- Helper; 20- Indian soldier in British service; 22- All together; 24- Engrossed; 27- Emilia's husband; 28- Female servant; 32- Russian revolutionary leader; 35- ___-Aztec languages; 36- Razor sharpener; 38- Band's sample tapes; 40- Back; 42- Artist Rousseau; 44- Go out with; 45- Lake in the Sierra Nevada; 47- Pry; 49- Lux, neighbor; 50- Former Russian rulers; 52- Predate; 54- Paint unskillfully; 56- Strong wind; 57- Embassy; 60- Trail; 64- Opposed to; 65- Start of a saying on forgiveness; 68- Dies ___; 69- Emptiness; 70- Form of oxygen; 71- Kill; 72- Church recess; 73- Of the kidneys; 74- Seemingly forever;

DOWN: 1- Nest eggs, briefly; 2- Centrepiece of the human face; 3- Coil; 4- To meet the expense of; 5- Sum charged; 6- Hot diamonds; 7- It may be landed; 8- 1985 Kate Nelligan film; 9- Pertaining to the skin; 10- Argued; 11- "Trinity" author; 12- Method; 13- Dallas-to-Houston dir.; 21- Edible roots; 23- Got older; 25- Course; 26- Wearies; 28- Injury; 29- Bothered; 30- ___ Ark; 31- Italian lady; 33- Icon; 34- Well-known; 37- Tine; 39- Shrivelled, without moisture; 41- Where to find a seasonal fruit stand?; 43- Bit; 46- Historical periods; 48- Skin; 51- Potential mate; 53- Cherry red; 55- Alcoholic drink; 57- Queue before Q; 58- How sweet ___; 59- Dodge model; 61- Woody's son; 62- James of "The Godfather"; 63- Lock openers; 64- Humphrey's costar in "The Barefoot Contessa"; 66- Genetic messenger; 67- Fam. member;

Wednesday's solution

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

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
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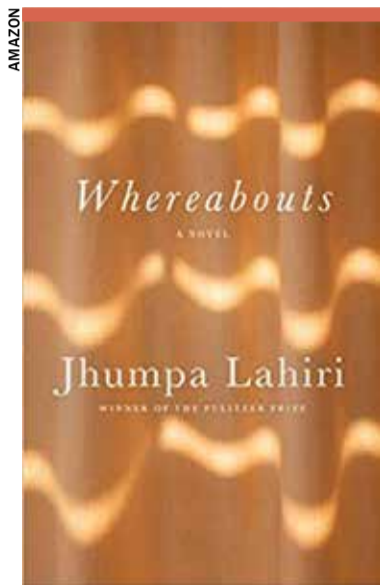
AD

BOOK IT

JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NEW NOVEL IS VERY NOVEL

PULITZER Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri is back with what is sure to be one of the more unique "novels" of the year.

Readers can debate in book clubs whether it's a novel in the traditional sense, but it sure is novel in the original sense. Written in Italian and then translated by the author into English, "Whereabouts" features an anonymous first-person narrator who reveals tiny slices of her life in the course of 46 very short chapters with names like "At the Station" and "On My Couch" and "In My Head." Readers will be challenged to piece together a plot, but we do learn that she's a single professor somewhere in Italy, her father died when she was just a teen, and by the end she's pondering a change of scenery from the place in which she is so thoroughly immersed throughout the book.



"Whereabouts," by Jhumpa Lahiri (Alfred A. Knopf)

Beyond that, there's not much action in the story, which focuses instead on observations of every day life, both in the various spaces the narrator inhabits and her inner monologue. She has a writer's eye for detail, capturing a garden painted onto the walls of a museum: "The

trees, with their thin branches, seem to bend as if from the soft breeze that courses through the landscape. This semblance of a breeze is what makes the painted nature tremble..." She's also keenly self-aware: "Solitude: It's become my trade... And yet it plagues me, it weighs on me in spite of my knowing it so well."

Each chapter floats by quickly, and this reader had trouble making it coalesce into a satisfying whole. Still, the prose is sparse and lyrical and the journey is enjoyable, wandering through an anonymous life, seeing things through one person's eyes.

Some literary critics will love this novel novel even as some readers scratch their heads. Kudos to Lahiri for stretching the form and creating something that feels fresh. **ROB MERRILL, MDT/AP**

tTUNES

SNAPPIER, TIGHTER ROYAL BLOOD ROCK ON 'TYPHOONS'

MOST rock duos are based around the guitar-and-drums concept — think The White Stripes or The Black Keys. Now imagine taking away the guitar.

That's Royal Blood, a band of just two Englishmen that rocks like any other band but just without the axe. They simply don't need it and their third full-length album, "Typhoons," questions why we are all in love with six strings anyway.

With tracks like "Boilermaker" — with production help from Josh Homme of Queens of the Stone Age — "Trouble's Coming" and the awesome title song, Royal Blood trend toward a snappier, more danceable groove but they kick up a fuss.

Singer, keyboardist and bassist Mike Kerr puts the bass front and center, often fuzzed-out and doing a solo. Drummer Ben Thatcher attacks his kit like a ja-



Royal Blood, "Typhoons" (Warner Records)

ckhammer operator. This is stripped-down garage rock blessed with massive hooks.

The band emerged in 2014 with its energetic self-titled debut that had a dirtier, messier feel and became a hit in Britain, even being nominated for a

Mercury Prize. Kerr and Thatcher cleaned and refined their sound with their sophomore release, "How Did We Get So Dark?"

The new album is even tighter and more focused, a neater distillation of Royal Blood.

One curious footnote is the final song. After 10 head-banging tunes, the album ends with Kerr abandoning his bass and singing the gentle, Coldplay-ish "All We Have Is Now" on piano. "All we have is now/So just let it go," he sings. Could this signal a future new path? Whatever it means, this is a band to watch. **MARK KENNEDY, MDT/AP**

AD

合夥人 PARTNERS:

- 官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha °
- 山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues °
- 馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata °
- 趙魯 Zhao Lu °
- 馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques

大律師 ASSOCIATES:

- 高文軒 Adelino Correia °
- 羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues *
- 白秀蘭 Susana Batalha
- 馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
- 陶義德 António Isóo de Azeredo
- 白穎怡 Iclília Berenguel
- 冼玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves
- 薛明恩 Maria Antónia Giestas
- 飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira °
- 杜力信 Nelson de Azevedo
- 馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins
- 宋哲言 João Gonçalves Assunção
- 巴慧雅 Vera Bastos
- 莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura
- 安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos
- 歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo
- 陳芷喬 Joana Chan
- 顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan
- 諾瑪莉 Maria Noras
- 康靜雅 Viviana Hong
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法律專家 JURISTS:

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- 羅嘉慧 Emily Lo
- 陳子健 Chan Chi Kin



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TASTE OF EDESIA

Vibrant Mixology Series

IRENE SAM, MDT

THIS week, **Ritz-Carlton Macau** teams up with Andrew Ho, Founder and Co-owner of the award-winning bar, Hope & Sesame, and Uno Wang, Head Bartender of Evening Standard Bar, in Guangzhou for an exclusive two nights' pop-up cocktail journey at the hotel's bar and lounge and café, a one-of-a-kind vibrant mixology series, with master class, duo experience dinner, and cocktail evening sessions.

Hope & Sesame opened in March 2016, is the first 'speakeasy' bar in Guangzhou. Tucked away behind a traditional Cantonese café in the quaint neighbourhood, the bar delivers hospitable service accompanied with delicious cocktails & nightly live jazz music. From the exploration of different lesser known ingredients to various infusion and distillations techniques, as well as micro

seasonal sourcing, guests will discover a wide repertoire of techniques that perfects their beverage experience. The collaboration between Hope & Sesame and **The Ritz-Carlton Bar and Lounge** comes as no surprise, as The Ritz-Carlton Bar and Lounge was the first ever bar in Macau to be recognised on the prestigious Asia's 50 Best Bars list in 2018, while Hope & Sesame, which has been named on the list since 2019 and ranked 15th on the latest listing of 2021.

The Evening Standard bar focuses on gin exploration experience with gin-based cocktails, which The Ritz-Carlton Bar & Lounge also specialises in. The three parties share similar philosophies in cocktail crafting, as well as passion for good entertainment, guarantee to deliver drinks that speak of adventure and wonder and to lead cocktail enthusiasts to unsurpassed cocktail journey.

On May 21 and 22, an exclusive master class featu-

res a unique cocktail creation and a specialty canapé trio, as well as tips and tricks from passionate award winning insiders, Andrew Ho and Uno Wang, solely on May 22, and Duo Experience on both days will be kicked off with masterful creation and canapés at The Ritz-Carlton Bar & Lounge on the 51st floor, followed by 5-course French menu at The Ritz-Carlton Café. Last but not the least, Cocktail Evening dazzles with breath-taking views and jazz performance on both nights to craft unique memories at The Ritz-Carlton Bar & Lounge. Also available over the two days are two exceptional a-la-carte cocktail menus curated by Andrew Ho and Uno Wang. The three sessions are only open to 20 guests per session, and The Ritz-Carlton, Macau has offered three packages for discerning guests who wants to guarantee their spot for the ultimate exuberant experience.



Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



THE ST. PETERSBURG 1200M TURF 2021-05-22|Sat|14:00

DAWSON from Pat Lee's yard is down to a winnable grade, he has shown signs that he is back to his ready-to-fire condition in his morning workouts. **Dawson** narrowly missed into the money on a number of occasions this term, but this time with the engagement of L.Corrales, jockey Corrales can capitalize his strong barrier firing gate skills on **Dawson** to get into a good tactical position in fighting out for the first three down at the winning post. Looking at his rating and his races replays again and again; I am confident that there is very good chance that **Dawson** could do well in a small field race on Saturday, hopefully he can come in the winning stall for Mr. Li's connection. Dawson is my NAP on Saturday's MJC meeting.

Race 1 Horse no. 5 Dawson Win & Place bets



OPINION

World Views

Faye Flam, MDT/Bloomberg



BLOOD CLOTS AREN'T THE ONLY VACCINE SIDE EFFECTS WORTH STUDYING

One can hardly blame people for being worried about the new Covid-19 vaccines when there are so many anecdotal reports of weird side effects — including women experiencing disturbing changes in their menstrual cycles.

Reports of early and unusually heavy periods or other irregularities were becoming so common earlier this spring that University of Illinois anthropologist Kate Clancy started collecting them. People may wonder, rightly, why this isn't being studied in a more systematic way. If something this unexpected can happen, then what else?

The original clinical trials were set up to get the minimum information needed to win emergency use approval, and follow-up study has been less than systematic. Yet getting a handle on these disturbing side effects wouldn't be that hard. Several doctors I talked to mentioned there's a self-reporting system called V-Safe, but they'd like to see something bigger and more systematic, where people tracked all sorts of physical changes in real time, including these peculiar menstrual irregularities.

There's ample evidence that sex differences matter in responses to the vaccine and need more study. Women are more likely to report mild or moderate side effects, and much more likely to suffer the severe ones.

Twenty-two of the 28 people who suffered blood clots possibly associated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine were women. Women also make up nearly all of the small number who had a severe allergic reaction — anaphylaxis — following injection with other vaccines. Women are also much more likely to suffer severe, extensive rashes after getting the Covid-19 vaccine — another uncommon but troubling side effect.

As I learned researching this column on Covid vaccination during pregnancy, women and men often react differently to infectious agents and vaccines because women's immune systems are adapted to protect a fetus from infection but also not to attack the foreign cells that make up the fetus.

It's not surprising that sex hormones and the immune system can influence each other, says Johns Hopkins University immunologist Sabra Klein. She said she's submitted a proposal to the National Institutes of Health to study the menstrual problems. I asked her whether there's any understanding of whether the other side effects are more common only in women of reproductive age, or across all age groups. She said that hasn't been studied yet, but should be.

All the women who had blood clots following the Johnson & Johnson shot were between 18 and 48. Doctors are still discussing whether women of reproductive age should be advised to avoid it in favor of the other approved vaccines, but nobody, she says, is doing studies on the question.

Some people have tried to dismiss the blood clot problem by noting that birth control pills are also associated with blood clot risk. But neither problem should be dismissed. More work should be done to prevent women from getting blood clots associated with birth control pills too.

Right now, the main source of public information on vaccine side effects is a website called the Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS).

The right reason to be confident in vaccines is that they provide impressive protection against a deadly virus... The wrong reason would be blind trust of public health officials or Big Pharma.

The public is worried because these vaccines are new. But new doesn't have to mean poorly understood. Because these shots are being distributed to so many millions of people, it's possible to collect huge amounts of safety and side effect data, as well as data identifying when and why a few people still get infected after vaccination.

That data will be useful as the world is likely to continue to update vaccines, and they are likely to be the most important part of the fight against this pandemic long into the future. Public trust is critical, but the CDC, the doctors and public health experts and could do more to earn it.

[Abridged]

EUROPEAN UNION DECLARES VACCINATION CAMPAIGN A SUCCESS

THE BUZZ

A top European Union official is declaring the bloc's COVID-19 vaccination drive a success after its much-criticized slow start.

Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the EU's executive Commission, proclaimed in comments broadcast yesterday that "we are the only region in the world that has managed both to supply our own population and to share fairly with others." She touted the EU's role as the world's leading exporter of vaccines.

Von der Leyen told an event organized by Germany's WDR public television that, by the end of this week, 260 million doses of

vaccine will have been delivered in Europe. She acknowledged that countries such as the U.S. and U.K. were faster to start with, but said "that has been put into perspective over time."

She said: "Yes, there was a lot of criticism of the European Union at the beginning. What counts in the end is that the European Union reliably delivers vaccines to its 450 million citizens day by day, and that we can say we got there together as a community. Measured by that, our European vaccination campaign is a success."

CHINA DELAYS MISSION WHILE NASA CONGRATULATES ON MARS IMAGES

CHINA postponed a supply mission to its new space station yesterday for unspecified technical reasons, while photos sent back from Mars by its newly arrived rover earned plaudits from NASA despite only sporadic contacts between the Chinese and American space programs.

The Tianzhou-2 cargo spacecraft was to have been launched early yesterday. China Manned Space announced the delay on its website but didn't say when the rescheduled launch would occur.

It would be the first mission to the main Tianhe space station module that was launched on April 29. A total of 11 launches are planned by the end of next year to deliver the station's other two modules, various components and supplies and a three-person crew.

The launch of Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, was considered a success although China was criticized for allowing the uncontrolled reentry to Earth of part of the rocket that carried it into space. Usually, discarded rocket stages reenter the atmosphere soon after liftoff, normally over water, and don't go into orbit.

NASA Administrator Sen. Bill Nelson said at the time that China had failed to meet responsible standards regarding space debris.

China's space program has suffered relatively few setbacks since it first put an astronaut into orbit in 2003, although the space station launch was delayed by the failure of an earlier version of the massive Long March 5B rocket.

Earlier this month, China also landed a probe, Tianwen-1, and its accompanying rover, Zhurong, on



Mars and has begun sending back pictures from the surface of the red planet.

In a message posted to the NASA website, Nelson congratulated the China National Space Administration on receiving those first images.

"The United States and the world look forward to the discoveries Zhurong will make to advance humanity's knowledge of the Red Planet."

SEN. BILL NELSON
 NASA

"As the international scientific community of robotic explorers on Mars grows, the United States and the world look forward to the discoveries Zhurong will make to advance humanity's knowledge of the Red Planet. I look forward to future international discoveries, which will help inform and develop the capabilities needed to land human boots on Mars," Nelson said.

The pictures were taken by Zhurong from atop its

landing platform. Since setting down on Saturday, the rover has been conducting diagnostic tests and will shortly descend its ramp to begin a search for signs of frozen water.

The United States is the only other country to have successfully landed and operated a spacecraft on Mars — nine times, beginning with the twin Vikings in 1976 and, most recently, with the Perseverance rover in February.

China also recently brought back lunar samples, the first by any country's space program since the 1970s, and also landed a probe and rover on the moon's less explored far side.

China earlier launched two smaller experimental space stations. It has been excluded from the International Space Station largely at the insistence of the United States, which is wary of the secrecy surrounding the Chinese space program and its close military links. Congressional approval is also required for any cooperation between NASA and the CNSA. MDT/AP

UN's top human rights body yesterday it will hold a special session next week to address "the grave human rights situation" in Palestinian areas of Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem. The Human Rights Council will convene the May 27 meeting following a request presented by Pakistan, as coordinator of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation.

US The Biden administration is leading a campaign against Russian attempts to assert authority over Arctic shipping and reintroduce a military dimension to discussions over international activity in the area. As Russia assumed the rotating chairmanship of the Arctic Council yesterday, the U.S. rallied other members to oppose Moscow's plans set maritime rules in the Northern Sea Route, which runs from Norway to Alaska, and its desire to resume high-level military talks within the eight-nation bloc.



Greece A large wildfire gutted and damaged dozens of homes and prompted evacuations yesterday as it tore through rugged forest terrain. No injuries were reported. Fire department officials said 17 water-dropping planes and three helicopters were involved to try to contain the blaze about 70 kilometers west of Athens that started outside the resort town of Loutraki. Smoke from the fire reached Athens, affecting visibility.



Britain plans to bring the national rail network back under government control, reversing one of the most controversial elements of the privatization drive carried out by the Conservative governments of the 1980s and '90s. Under plans announced yesterday, the government will create a new entity known as Great British Railways that will own all railroad infrastructure, set most fares and schedules, collect ticket revenue and run a single ticketing website.